

Australians at War Film Archive

Yvonne Edwards - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 2nd July 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2153>

Tape 1

00:37 **Well, Mrs Edwards, thank you very much for being involved in the archive project. The first thing I'd like you to do if you can is just give a very brief precis of the main points in your life?**

My life, you mean from my youth or?

Yeah, so starting from when you were born?

I see.

01:00 Well I was, don't quite know how to start. I hadn't expected this. I was born nearly eighty-eight years ago and my father was a manager, a works manager, and we lived in Rosebery. I went to Gardiners Road Public School with my brother,

01:30 who was two years older than I, and at age twelve I was able to go into Sydney Girls' High School. And I finished my education there and did a secretarial course, and my first job was with a local

02:00 factory, a local Lustroid Lacquers factory, as stenographer and secretary. And my mother escorted me to my interview and I attained the position and I was there for a couple of years, very pleasantly.

02:30 I used to go home for lunch and one day when I was going home for lunch I saw an ambulance pulling away from my house and my mother had had a coronary and I didn't ever see her again. She died. My father was devastated.

03:00 They had always been very much in love and he was quite devastated, but determined that it wouldn't affect my situation as regards the house or anything like that. So we had a retinue of housekeepers from then on, which

03:30 was quite strange because my father was only forty-five and a very handsome and attractive man, and the temptation was there for some of these ladies. But, fortunately, after about three or four years he met

04:00 a young woman, Beth Atherton. She was one of the Athertons from Atherton in Queensland, actually, and they used to play golf together, and because Beth lived in Manly she would often stay at weekend at our place and she and I became very close friends. She was only about seven years older than I was and

04:30 it was great. Then they decided to get married, which was terrific for my father. My brother at this time was in Malaya. He was running a tin mine, managing a tin mine up there in north Malaya and he'd gone up there at about age twenty-one, I think.

05:00 And when I was twenty-one I decided that I would try and apply for a job outside Sydney so that my father and Beth could have some time to themselves. Beth, to her chagrin, immediately became pregnant and

05:30 I had been given a dog who was a great nuisance, a lovely red setter but quite silly and used to pull the clothes off the clothesline, was spectacularly fond of yellow, and this was very hard on Beth, so I decided to

06:00 give him away. And it was a man on 2GB radio at the time - I've forgotten his name - but he used to arrange for pets to have good homes and I rang him. He was able to contact an elderly lady down the south coast who had plenty of room and apparently wanted a loving dog like mine

06:30 so I took him, I arranged for him to go down. And the morning I took him into the railway station to put him on the train I saw an advertisement for a secretary/stenographer in a large country town, and the interview was to be I think at Rawson Place near Sydney Railway Station,

07:00 Central Railway Station, so I thought, "I'll have a look at that." So after I had sent the dog away - it was

rather sad but I knew he was going to be all right – I went across to this place and was surprised to walk up past two flights of stairs with young women standing on them, one on each step, and I wondered what they were doing there until I

- 07:30 came to the door that I was to have this interview and I walked in and there was a man inside who was talking to a young woman and I just sat down and waited. And after a little while the phone rang, so he didn't make any attempt to answer it and I said to him, "Would you like me to answer that?" and he said, "Yes please." So I answered the phone and the girl's voice said,
- 08:00 "I just rang to see if the position was filled," and I said, "Just a moment, please." So I said to the fellow, "This is an inquiry about the position being filled," and he said, "Tell her, 'Yes'." So I said to this girl, "I'm sorry, yes it has been filled." So when he'd finished the interview I went over to the table and I said to him, "Look, I came about this position so if it's filled I won't waste your time," and he said,
- 08:30 "Sit down." I was on the train next morning for Canberra and was put straight into the information desk and the telephone and there was a millionaires', what was called a millionaires' shipload of people came in from America – I think it was the Lurlene but I'm not quite sure about that –
- 09:00 and they left the ship in Sydney and came across by train, stopping at the Hotel Canberra for the night before going on to Melbourne. Well when I got down into the office the lounge was absolutely full of these Americans, all full of questions and they kept firing them at me.
- 09:30 "How far above sea level is Canberra? Where's Parliament House?" All sorts of questions like this. I had no answer for because I just didn't know anything about Canberra but some of the waiters – I'll have to call them waiters. I can't think what else they would be, ushers or waiters – would go to the telephone and say to me, "Can I help?" and I'd ask them
- 10:00 a question and they'd tell me, until one fellow, when I asked him, "How high above sea level is Canberra?" He said to me, "Eighteen hundred feet and allow eighteen inches for the tide." So I just turned around quickly and said this, but anyhow I got through the day and I quite enjoyed my stay in Canberra
- 10:30 until it got very cold. And Canberra was mostly full of members of parliament and public servants, who were all very interesting, and I met some particularly interesting people but gave it away after some months and went home. After that it was suggested to me that I
- 11:00 apply for a position with Qantas Empire Airways. No, not Qantas Empire Airways, the Shell Company, who were in the same building as Qantas Empire Airways, so I went for this appointment and was interviewed by a very nice man who said to me, "You don't want this job. It's only a
- 11:30 typist's job," and sent me away. When I got home there'd already been a phone call for me from Shell Company. I rang this man back and he said, "I've arranged an interview with you at Qantas Empire Airways." He said, "They're looking for someone with your ability." So I went into Qantas Empire Airways and
- 12:00 attained a secretarial position on Sir Hudson Fish's staff, where I stayed for several years and enjoyed it very much. And then I took a week's holiday down in Bowral and my brother, who was on leave from Malaya at that time,
- 12:30 didn't like the idea of me going down on my own, so he came down in the train with me. And at lunchtime we were, Reg Edwards was brought to our table and
- 13:00 he wasn't too happy about this because he thought we were lovers, but he had been in Melbourne and he'd driven up and was driving back to Sydney and he stopped off in Canberra at the hotel where he was quite well known just for the night. He stayed a week
- 13:30 and drove me back to Sydney afterwards and pointed out that he was a very busy man and not to expect to hear from him. He rang me six times on that first day and wanted me to go to the circus on that night.
- 14:00 I had made an arrangement for fun with three or four other girls in the office to have our fortunes told by a Miss Curling Friend in Kings Cross, and this was going to cost us two and sixpence and she would provide us with a cup of tea.
- 14:30 So I was... She told me some amazing things which I took no notice of whatsoever, sort of thing that I would marry a man whose name started with R and I immediately thought of my good friend Ray. I thought, "Surely not!" you know, that I would be amongst dark people within three months
- 15:00 and all sorts of strange things. She was able to, she said a lot of things that later came true but I'd disregarded them. Anyhow Reg and I went to the circus of course and saw quite a bit of each other until about two months later Reg was approached
- 15:30 by two men who came out from England to ask him to, from the British Ministry, to ask him to go to Singapore, India, Burma, China and Japan to check out what was going on in these places. He heard them out and then said,

- 16:00 "What about my wife?" Absolute shock horror on the part of the men who had investigated him, a forty-year-old unmarried man, and so they went into a huddle and then said to him, "Your wife will be able to follow you in three months' time." Well we didn't really
- 16:30 take much notice of this but I thought it was, well we both thought it was important for Reg to go. He'd been very disappointed to miss out on being accepted by the navy because of a defect in his left eye which he hadn't been aware of. But while he was getting all his papers
- 17:00 organised, he had mine done too, my passport and inoculations and all that sort of thing, and a couple of days before he was due to go I received a cable from Singapore offering me a secretarial job,
- 17:30 saying, "Adequate salary," which amused me very much. But I had to arrange my own transport, so for the next three or four days before Reg went away, was due to go away, we saw KLM [Dutch airline] and Qantas, who were the
- 18:00 only two airlines operating at the time on that route, but there was no hope of me getting a seat because they were offloading quite top brass. On the Friday my passport came through and on the Saturday at midday Noel Jones, who was the traffic manager of Qantas,
- 18:30 rang me and said, "Would you like to go with Reg tomorrow?" and I said, "Don't tease me now," and he said, "Yes, you can, because I was holding a seat for a fellow coming over from New Zealand on the Tasman Empire Airways and," he said, "I've just had word that the plane's not going to make it. So," he said, "you can have the seat and by the time they find you on board you'll be over
- 19:00 Surabaya." So I said, "No, you'll get into terrible trouble," and he said, "No I won't. I've just had my call up for the air force. I'm leaving at twelve o'clock." So I swallowed this of course and threw some totally unsuitable clothes into a suitcase, said goodbye to my Dad by telephone and was over at
- 19:30 Rose Bay flying boat base at about five o'clock I think it was in the morning, and was absolutely staggered to be greeted by Sir Hudson Fish, a few other top brass and a presentation of a book from the staff of Qantas, which they had all signed and
- 20:00 I realised that it had all been a cooked-up story, but I was very happy. And so we set off in the flying boat and the flight to Singapore for me and Reg, but particularly for me, was absolutely marvellous because I knew the crew and they used to take me up into the flight deck,
- 20:30 all sorts of things, nice little things. But we stopped at, our first stop was Townsville and we got in about four o'clock in the afternoon I think. We were able to walk around the town and have dinner and then dance for a few hours
- 21:00 before going back to the flying boat about five o'clock in the morning, and wherever we stopped for fuel stops where there'd only be two or three men in attendance, one of them would always say, "G'day Reg," which meant that he was very well known everywhere. And the flight to Singapore was
- 21:30 great, really great, and we were met of course and taken to a hotel called, I've just forgotten for the moment. It'll come back to me what that hotel was called.

Mrs Edwards I might just interrupt you there and just we might talk about Singapore in detail a bit later and...

Right.

What I might do is just

- 22:00 **go back and ask you a few questions about your childhood and growing up, and I just wanted to ask you about your mother and father and their background.**

I don't think... We were a very close loving family but I really don't have a lot to tell you. I understand that

- 22:30 the marriage wasn't approved by my mother's parents, and my father's parents we were very close to but we didn't, my mother's parents, my mother used... They lived in North Sydney and my mother used
- 23:00 to visit them about once a fortnight on a Tuesday if I remember, and sometimes she would take me over. They were very nice but they weren't interested in my father, who was an absolutely wonderful man, wonderful, clever, artist and pianist and everything. He was just wonderful. And we had a very happy childhood,
- 23:30 just my brother and I. I think we were children who just accepted the, I can't think of the word, the fact that our parents, we did as we were told. We had wonderful camping trips down the south coast, always down the south coast and
- 24:00 I remember one particular trip we had at a place called Wattamolla, which is practically just around the corner now, but on this particular trip we did one of Dad's clerks drove my mother and me down in our car and Dad had another car which was an old White car.

- 24:30 They're mostly trucks but this was a car and very old, and he took the dog and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, alive of course, and everything to see us through the fortnight we were going to spend there because there was no such thing as a shop or anybody and there was no-one else staying there. We had the camping
- 25:00 ground to ourselves. But we had to leave even the old car way up top and scramble down with all our baggage and while we were there, the thing I remember greatly about that was that Dad forgot to take a razor, which upset him terribly but we thought it was rather fun.
- 25:30 And while we were there there was a bushfire and my father had to go back up the hill to move the car, but before he went he tied ropes around my brother and me - I think I was about seven and he was about nine - and put us in the
- 26:00 water with my mother sitting on the edge of the water holding the ropes in her hand, and he told her that if the fire came over she was to go into the water too. Anyhow it didn't. The wind changed. We just thought it was great fun of course. We had no idea what our parents were going through. And the wind changed and it didn't come
- 26:30 down. And eventually Dad came back and we were safe but we had these lovely camping holidays. I realise now that places we went to, which seemed to be miles and a hundred miles away, were just around the corner. It's just amazing. Garie Beach was another one. But we really had great fun with our camping holidays and I remember
- 27:00 these very vividly. They made up a very large part of our lives. I realise, I have realised for some time but I didn't know a lot about my parents' lives. I've felt now that as my mother died when I was only seventeen that this was probably the reason to a
- 27:30 large extent. And they were very taken up with each other Mum and Dad, we usen't to have family talks. When Dad came home from his office they used to 'repair to the bedroom' I think is the expression and I presume he told her what had happened during the day.
- 28:00 But it was a very happy childhood, very happy childhood. And also we had a lot of, we always had lots of country cousins staying with us. There was one large family up the north coast near Port Macquarie, that's right. Their father had sawmills up there and there were eight children, and as time went on
- 28:30 in my childhood every one of those children came down and stayed with us and a lot of them got jobs in Sydney. One of them who stayed the longest time and became the closest to us was Marjory, who became Margo, and in latter years became the Countess
- 29:00 of, gosh, anyhow I'll think of that in a minute. She was a very beautiful girl and she became a correspondent on the Sydney paper, the Sun, and she used to write fashion news.
- 29:30 She was probably one of the first women who did this sort of thing and then she went to England and wrote what was called Ticket from Paris and married this lovely guy, this earl, whose name I'll remember soon. And
- 30:00 when Reg and I went to England in 1972 for our middle son's wedding, we saw a lot of Margo and Pip and she was still very prominent in fashion in England and France.
- 30:30 **What job did you father do when you were growing up?**
- He was manager of the Waterloo Fire Brick Company. He was also a, actually I s'pose, no he wasn't a co-founder but he was a, what's the word, a director of hygienic containers. His close friend George Hartman was
- 31:00 put in charge of hygienic containers by the founder of it, who was Miss Hill, who used to have chocolate shops alongside the theatres, the Sydney theatres, and she put George Hartman in charge of hygienic containers,
- 31:30 which company made paper plates. They brought the paper plates into being and Dad was very active in that but his background job was Waterloo Fire Brick Company. When he was in his early seventies
- 32:00 he had, something happened to him, I suppose it was what we now call a stroke, and my stepmother called the ambulance but he insisted on walking out to the ambulance himself. He was a very proud man.
- 32:30 And he walked out to the ambulance and I remember there were neighbours, you know, were attracted by the ambulance and he waved happily to them. And he was operated on but he died the next day, which was very sad. My stepmother is still alive. She's wonderful. She's just turned ninety-five, actually, and we talk every day. Unfortunately
- 33:00 she lives at Burwood, which since I gave up driving I don't see her as much as I used to. Yes?

You mentioned that your mother's family were not too keen on the marriage?

No.

Do you know why that was?

I never knew the story, no. I was never told. And as my mother

- 33:30 died when I was seventeen I certainly wasn't going to ask my father. I don't think it occurred to me, to be quite frank with you. And when I went to Canberra I had a letter from my maternal grandmother, who totally misunderstood
- 34:00 my leaving home and thought I had left because of Dad's marriage and that I wasn't, I had this wicked stepmother, which was totally untrue, totally untrue. And I was absolutely shocked. It never occurred to me that anyone could possibly think this, so I wrote back to her as lovingly as I felt and told her the situation
- 34:30 and said I didn't know how long I would be in Canberra but I would see her when I came home. Unfortunately I never did see her again. I can't remember why. I honestly can't remember why. It's a sad part in my family history but I didn't see her again.

What do you remember of your family home where you grew up?

- 35:00 It was just a house in Rosebery, just a house. The first one I lived in until I was three was a double-storey large house and it's quite likely my father didn't own it, I just don't know, which was quite close to the brickyards and opposite the racecourse, was it called Victoria Park
- 35:30 Racecourse in, it would probably have been Zetland, probably be in Zetland, and it was two storey with a, I don't know what you call it, on top. You could go upstairs, attic?

Attic?

No, it wasn't an attic. It was outside with a verandah where you could watch the horses, you see.

- 36:00 But at this time, which would have been at a time, it was getting up close to the '20s and there were a lot of people out of work, particularly in Waterloo and Zetland, and the men, the homeless men used to come into the brick kilns at night and huddle around
- 36:30 the kilns to keep warm. And my father used to go over practically every night with a huge pot of soup but also with a big stick and feed them and then hustle them - my mother used to make this big pot of soup, of course - and hustle them out of the kilns, but the result of that
- 37:00 I feel was why he was never robbed. We were never robbed in a place where robbery became pretty rampant in those days but we never had any trouble. He was very well known on the road and I always remember on one occasion, and he used to come home for lunch. This is when I was a small child. He came home and
- 37:30 Rothschild Avenue, Rosebery, was where we lived and the road was cobblestones and sand on each side of the road, and I think Dad was the only person in the street who had a car and he used to just come down the road and swing into the gates without, never looking behind him. And on this particular day he didn't
- 38:00 realise there was a young man very hard on his heels riding a pushbike and as he swung around to come in the gate this fellow hit the car, went over the top and landed in the sand on the other side, took off his hat and said, "Hello Mr Todd." And this was the sort of atmosphere that was always around my father, my clever,
- 38:30 wonderful father, yes. And my mother was very strong and very loving and we backed onto a, there was a paddock at the back of our place and she used to see us off to school each morning through a gate in the back fence, and I always remember one morning,
- 39:00 these were days where there was a lot of fighting amongst the schoolboys and my brother had fought his way right through school until there was one boy that he kept away from. And I remember vividly this morning mother kissing us and sending us off through the back gate when all of a sudden my brother, Lorne, pulled back
- 39:30 and mother said to him, "What's the matter?" and he said, "There's Jacky Harper." He said, "I'll just wait till he goes." And my mother said, "You will go straight out there and say, 'Hello Jacky,'" which my brother did and there was never any problem. They never had to fight. They just became more or less friends and it takes me back to the
- 40:00 first fight he had. I was absolutely horrified. They used to fight on a corner block close to the school and I went home crying and my mother said, "Where's your brother?" and I said, "He's fighting," and she said, "You go straight back and hold his schoolbag until he's finished and then come home with him," which I did. So from then on through
- 40:30 all his fights I stood there holding his schoolbag. I was the victor's young sister. Silly isn't it, but yes. They were good days but I'll always be sorry that I didn't have more of my mother and terribly glad to

have had Beth all these years because she has
41:00 been wonderful and she still is, yes.

Tape 2

00:33 **Mrs Edwards, you mentioned that there'd been lots of robberies in the area, can you tell me about that time?**

Not really because I was very young. I'm talking over eighty years ago. But not only was it,
01:00 it was a district for robberies too. It was quite a poor... It was a very industrial area and Dad always liked to live near his work. It was a very industrial area and there were a lot of people out of work and I can't really give you any details. I do know, no I really can't give you any details except that
01:30 it wasn't a good area. We never had any trouble because my father was so highly respected and, I think, liked, so we never had any trouble at all.

What did you do for fun in the area as a girl?

I was always one of the boys because I was always surrounded by my brother's friends. I had one particular girlfriend I remember but
02:00 we had a lot of spears and arrows that I think must have come from New Guinea and I can remember photographs of us playing with these, but we played a lot of cricket and we were always on the go. We used to go over to the sandhills and play in the sandhills. I remember one afternoon coming home without my shoes and being sent back and having to
02:30 find them in the sand. But no, we had a lot of fun but it was just outdoors, all the time outdoors. There were plenty of paddocks around and plenty of cricket, places to play cricket and that sort of thing. We played cards a lot in the house. I can't even remember the names of the games we used to play but we used to play probably kids' games, you know.
03:00 And I had a good friend whose father was the manager of Mark Foy's, I suppose you could call it a factory. And they lived in a house attached to this factory and she and I used to have a lot of fun there. We had the same music teacher and
03:30 if it rained heavily I used to have to put a board across the gutter so that Miss Nell Hartman could go into her house. Well my friend, who had a very naughty streak to her, used to remove this board on week days, so Miss Hartman used to walk round in the pouring rain to my place and give me a double piano lesson.
04:00 Yes, and also often on Sundays all the men who were either owners or managers of the local factories and places of business around used to get together on Sunday mornings and have some drinks
04:30 and sometimes they would take my brother and me. My father would take my brother and me to these factories and let us loose and I'm afraid we weren't very good. We used to have great fun but we didn't do anything seriously bad, but I think we did a bit of mucking up with, of things that were left around, but that was our youth.

05:00 **Were your parents disciplinarians?**

Not at all. I think we were expected to do as we were told - and we did. But the only thing I remember, and it just hurts me to this day, that if something bad, something did go wrong and one of us misbehaved
05:30 my mother used to say, "Wait till your father comes home," which I think was the thing in those early days. So poor Dad would come home after a heavy day at the office and have to give us a bit of a whack on the backside, which never hurt very much but at least he'd done what he was told to do, what was expected of him, yes.

06:00 But no, we had a very happy life.

Did you have a radio in the house?

Yes, we had radios. My father played piano beautifully and this was one of the sad things after my mother died. He used to play piano in the dark, which was quite heartrending to hear, to listen to, but
06:30 yes we had radios. I think we had, I can't remember what they were called now, the early radios. I've forgotten what they were called.

Crystal sets?

Yes, that sort of thing.

What sort of things would you listen to on the radio?

07:00 You're really taking me back a very long way. I think they used to have shows like, I can't remember. I really can't remember. I think they had plays but I'm not sure. I remember early in my marriage I used to listen to the Sunday night plays,

07:30 like when I say early in my marriage, probably when I was alone while Reg was away but I'm sorry, I really can't remember.

That's okay.

No, there was so much music in the house with my father and my practising of course. I did quite a few exams with the conservatorium,

08:00 which were a bit of a pity I felt because I'd have done much better just to have, I'd have enjoyed piano playing much more if I hadn't had to do these exams.

Can you tell me about the school you went to?

I can tell you more about Sydney Girls' High I think than I can about

08:30 my early school days. What I do remember about my early school days was that each year they had a fancy dress ball and my father used to make these magnificent old-time, way back period dresses all in paper.

09:00 They were very beautiful. I should be able to put my hands on photographs. I didn't think of that. Even the wig he would curl, do all the white curls from paper and after winning first prize three years in a row I'm afraid they stopped having fancy dress

09:30 balls, which I didn't connect with at the time but in latter years of course I realised what had happened. I kept taking off these first prizes. They were just wonderful costumes that he made. He could do everything. He was wonderful.

Sounds like he was very creative and artistic?

Absolutely, but never did it for money, never. Lots of men have

10:00 given him credit for their future success but Dad never ever sold anything or did anything that brought him money. He was just a happy man, a creative, happy man.

Where would he do these drawings and things? In the house?

Yes.

10:30 They were great huge pictures. My favourite, which I think is in one of those little snaps you just took off the table, my favourite was one he did of the men returning from the Scottish wars and the main

11:00 figure in the picture was of the son of the lord of the manor coming home wounded on his horse and his mother just standing alongside the horse in her long black velvet dress with the lace collar. It's a beautiful picture and yes, my stepmother

11:30 has that in her unit at the moment, has had it always in the unit. But most of his painting was done very early in our youth and he stopped doing it, actually. I don't know why, probably busy with other things. But he used to potter in his workshop and my mother used to go down and sit on a

12:00 stool and talk to him. I can remember the coldest nights when she was down there. They were so close. It was just wonderful their love story, wonderful, yes.

Were they religious people?

No. My brother and I tried out all the local churches, except the Catholic one. We weren't allowed to go to the Catholic one but we tried out all the other churches and

12:30 no, we weren't religious. We used to go to Sunday school. We were Presbyterian actually from my father's family. My father's father was a Presbyterian from County Cork in Ireland, which may not mean anything to you but it was a totally Catholic community. And he came out fairly early in the piece and we used to go to the

13:00 Orangemen's picnic. We called him Karkar and I never knew what that meant or where it came from but we always called him Karkar. He died when I was about twelve. I can remember he died on the day that I sat for my High School exam, for entry to high school, and I saw my father going out to the car with a bowler hat in his hand. I'd never seen a bowler hat before

13:30 and when he saw me he kind of tried to push it behind him and I said to him, "Where are you going with that hat?" and he said, "I've got a big day today." And I found out later it was my grandfather's funeral, that he didn't want to tell me because it might upset me for my exams. Very sensitive people they were, yes.

What was the Orangemen's picnic?

I don't know.

14:00 I've forgotten. But I have a photograph of us at the Orangemen's picnic when we were very small. I can't remember anything about it and if I didn't have the photograph, cause Dad was a mad keen photographer too, and there's a photograph in my album with my grandfather and my brother and I at the Orangemen's picnic. But I can't remember

14:30 what it was, sorry.

That's all right.

It's a long time ago.

I know, you said that you weren't allowed to try out the Catholic churches, can you tell me about the division between protestants and Catholics at the time?

No, I don't, I wasn't told anything about it. I just, it wasn't important. It just wasn't important There was certainly never any talk about it at all.

15:00 It was just that, I don't know whether we knew automatically that we shouldn't go to the Catholic church or whether we were told, I just don't remember. But I found, I haven't been going to church for some years and I think it was halfway through last year I had a sudden desire to go

15:30 to church, and I had a lot of friends who go to the Church of England in Mosman. I lived in Mosman before I came here and I found that it just wasn't for me. It was just the Presbyterian church was much more intimate as I remember it and my children were baptised Presbyterian, so we did all that sort of thing.

16:00 And I've been to lots of weddings of course over the years but it was a much more friendly attitude. The Church of England was very high church and when they did certain things like walking up to the altar I realised that I was an intruder. I felt like an intruder. I can't explain it. It just wasn't anything that I knew anything about, really. That's the answer.

16:30 I knew nothing about it but I had satisfied my feeling that I needed to go to church and it's like now I keep saying, "I don't want to live past ninety," but I know jolly well when I hit ninety I'll say, "I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it." These things come to you and you, I don't know. I just don't know. I can't explain.

17:00 Can we talk about going to Sydney Girls' and what sort of exams you had to sit to do that?

Well I did the languages course, French, Latin, English, maths 1 and 2. I don't know whether we called them maths 1 and 2 then but it was, I think it was maths and geometry. No, I didn't do geometry, that's right. I just did maths, science

17:30 which was called elementary science. And I enjoyed the languages very, very much, very much. I had a little Latin teacher who was quite vitriolic but I really enjoyed the subject very much and I did well at it. I did well at French. My maths was horrendous. I just never,

18:00 never understood it. And algebra, that's right. We did algebra, which was absolutely a closed book to me, and it's unkind of me to say this but our maths teacher was a very keen mathematician

18:30 but she was only interested in the girls who really loved their maths like she did, and I think the rest of us hangers-on were rather ignored cause I just didn't get anywhere with maths. I can't remember whether I passed. I don't think I did, but anyway. But French and English and all those subjects I really loved. We didn't even do history.

19:00 It wasn't included in my program, sadly. I'm sorry I didn't have the opportunity to do history instead of elementary science but these things are just handed out to you and you accept. It was a great time of acceptance. You did as you were told, not, I don't mean that in a hard way but it was suggested to you and you accepted.

19:30 Was your academic performance important to your father?

No I don't think so, no. I think he'd have been very happy if I'd topped the school or done something like that but no, I don't think so. No he was more interested in us being happy and

20:00 yes I think that's it. But I enjoyed Sydney Girls' High. I didn't do terribly well but yes. You remember some little happenings that were a bit mortifying, but...

Can you tell me about that?

Well my mother

20:30 used to... The most mortifying thing, I think, was my mother used to make all my tunics. She was a very

good seamstress and made all our clothes, hers and mine, and I was hauled out of assembly because my tunic was too short. You asked. You've got it. And also

21:00 strangely at one of our speech days, this Miss Hill whom I was telling you had the sweet shops and who was the founder really of hygienic containers, she became Mrs John Garlick and I think he was Minister for Roads or something like that. And Mrs John Garlick was a friend of my mother's and father's

21:30 and she was asked to come to the school to hand out the prizes on speech day, and on the day of speech day I was sent for. If I remember rightly I think it was the physical culture teacher. I don't know why it was her. And as soon as I walked in she said to me, "Oh, you won't do."

22:00 And I didn't know what she was talking about, but what it was was she was going to ask me to present the bouquet or whatever to Mrs Garlick, whom I didn't know was going to be our guest at that time, but when I walked in I had short sleeves in my white dress. My mother refused to put me in a long-sleeved

22:30 white dress, you know, "Don't worry about it," so, and of course she was absolutely mortified when she heard the story that I had missed out on handing the prize to her friend Mrs Garlick because I wasn't dressed correctly. I'm sure all these little stories are quite, you know, not at all interesting but they come back to you.

23:00 **No, we love these little stories.**

Do you?

Yeah. Why do you think she didn't want you to have long sleeves?

Just wasn't, I don't know. Perhaps I had a short-sleeved white dress and she wasn't going to make me one with long sleeves, probably a very simple answer. but I know that I very quickly was given, made a long-sleeved white dress after that

23:30 but I was never asked again. I was only in first year at the time. I was only about twelve or something, yes.

Can you describe what the uniform looked like for Sydney Girls' back then?

Yes. I could show you photographs, actually, if you were interested. It was a tunic style with pleats and brown and a white shirt with a brown and yellow striped tie. We had to wear gloves and as we walked out the door

24:00 after school we had to present our hands to show that we were wearing gloves, and there were many a time that two of us would have one hand in our pocket just to show we only had one, we'd shared one pair of gloves between the two of us. Our hats were white panamas, quite large, with a brown band with the school

24:30 badge, yellow outstanding, on the front, 'Girls who wear the brown and yellow'. Yes, it was a top school. It was the top public school and very difficult to get into, so that I was very lucky to be a pupil of Sydney Girls' High.

What was that song you were singing?

'Girls who wear the brown and yellow fall in line beside each fellow...' I don't think I can go any

25:00 further than that. I don't know whether it's still the song they sing. That was our school song, yes.

Do you remember the principal at the time?

Yes, very well, very well indeed. Wish I could remember her name. But she was very displeased with my results one year, was in second year when I met boys and

25:30 she was very displeased with my results and then I came good and she sent for me to congratulate me. I didn't know why she sent for me and I was really, trepidation, but I remember going into her office. Miss Campbell her name was and we used to call her Floss, so I presume her name was Florence, Floss Campbell. And I was

26:00 quite concerned. I was really quite worried about why she wanted to see me and I stepped into her office and it was a highly polished floor with a mat on it and I stepped on the mat and went shooting across the floor and practically landed across her desk. But yes, she wanted to tell me that she was pleased to see that I had pulled up my socks

26:30 but I didn't, I lost the whole point of the interview because of my precipitate slide across the floor.

Why do you think you hadn't performed well in that year?

It was the year that I met boys. I think that's the answer. I can't think of anything else but I just

27:00 lost a bit of interest in my schoolwork and didn't apply myself diligently as we were supposed to, and that was second year and it was a very important year, of course.

How would you meet boys? What sort of contact would you have with them?

Well, my brother. I had a brother and he and I were quite close, but also

27:30 I started, that's right. I started going to the Christian Science Church for some reason or other. My close girlfriend went there with her parents, so I started going to the Christian Science Church and this is where I met a young fellow and we used to have sheepish eyes at each other for a while. I don't think I was ever allowed to go out with him. It never occurred to go out with him but

28:00 I think the families used to see each other. I can't quite remember. I remember his name but I don't quite remember what the contact was except that I was a bit fluttery. I think I was at the age at that stage where you suddenly realise there's another sex.

What sort of activities were there at the Christian Science Church?

Activities?

What did you do there?

28:30 It was just like a church. I can't remember anything in particular, can't even remember what sort of service it was, whether I approved of it or not but I didn't go for very long, but I remember I used to wear a full-length white organdie frock with full-length sleeves - this was on a Sunday morning - and a hat. I used to look a charm, I thought.

29:00 Yes.

Did your mother make all your clothes?

Yes she did, and I'd never done any sewing at all. After she died, when she died, and afterwards I taught myself to sew and I made my clothes for a long, long time.

How old were you when your mother died?

29:30 Seventeen, yes. There's a lot of things I didn't know and actually never found out but it hit Dad very hard, yes, but fortunately Beth came along and actually saved his sanity really cause he was drinking and yes.

How long after

30:00 **your mother died did he meet Beth?**

I think about four or five years, probably four years I think, yes. She was his salvation. She was wonderful. She still is.

How much younger than your father was she?

Well she was twenty-eight and he was forty-five when my mother died, so he was forty-eight, twenty years, and they had three daughters

30:30 after that. I have three half-sisters whom I'm very fond of, very close to, yes, Jane, Anne and Susan, and they all inherited his artistic strain. Susan, the youngest one, is an art teacher down in Cootamundra.

Mrs Edwards, I just want to go back to your

31:00 **schooling for a little while. How did you get from the home in Rosebery to Sydney Girls'?**

Tram. A tram was brought to, I can't remember at what stage but in my early years they put in a tram to what they called Zetland and it stopped at the top of our street, and Park Davis's big factory was on one side and

31:30 Sweet Acres, which was Stedman Henderson's, on the other side. And this was the terminus where the tram stopped and I would take that tram to Cleveland Street and then I would change trams and get another one up to Cleveland Street to Sydney Girls' High, which was at the other end really of Cleveland Street more or less.

What sort of ambitions did you have

32:00 **when you were a teenager at school?**

Nothing particularly. I was, no I didn't have strong ambitions. I was busy having a good time and I always did have a good time, yes.

Did you want to travel, did you want to get married?

No, nothing, no. I had no inclinations in either way because

32:30 we weren't travelling. Young people weren't travelling in those days and I certainly never thought of getting married. I had a lot of fun between then and when I did get married because I'd only known Reg

three months before we were married, three months I think it was, about three months, March to August. Four months is it? I can't remember,

33:00 yes.

How old were you when you left school?

Seventeen, yes.

Did you complete your final exams?

No. I opted out in fifth year. I wasn't doing terribly well and I opted out in fifth year and went to business college. I think it was Miss Hale's business college

33:30 and I left there before Miss Hale felt I was ready to go. She said, "You'll be back. You'll be back," but...

Can you tell me about Miss Hale's business college, where it was and what you learned?

Where was it? I feel as if it was somewhere near Oxford Street in the city, in the middle of the city, somewhere near old Mark Foy's, where Mark Foy's

34:00 used to be. I could be wrong but that's my feeling and what did I do there? Shorthand, typing. I don't think we did anything else except that, shorthand and typing. It was probably a five day a week. I've forgotten. Yes, I think that's all we did there, can't really remember.

34:30 I didn't exactly excel but I excelled at every job I went into. And I went into a couple of jobs I didn't enjoy and I wanted to get out and I didn't know how to get out. But no, I was very lucky in my positions, just seemed to fall on my feet,

35:00 you know, where I wanted to.

This must have been the mid '30s?

Yes. It would have been about '36 or '37 when I went to Qantas because war broke out in '39 and yes.

35:30 **Were there lots of women working when you went to business college?**

I think so. I really didn't know much about the world outside because... I think so. I really don't know. Course all the shops were full of women. There'd be a man probably in charge of the floor, what'd they call them? Floor walkers, I think. But no, there'd be plenty of women working and plenty of women

36:00 doing big jobs but not getting a lot of, I realise now not getting a lot of credit for it. And at Qantas, for instance, although I didn't expect to be going away with Reg for some time, as soon as I married I had to leave Qantas because

36:30 married girls didn't stay on in their jobs. I don't know whether there was a rule about it. I think it was expected that you didn't stay on in your job and I can't remember being very upset about it or anything like that but thinking back, if I hadn't gone to Singapore with Reg it would have been nice to stay on at Qantas.

37:00 They were very good to me, very, very good.

What was the first job you had once you left business college?

The one I was telling you about that my mother took me to, round the corner at Lustroid Lacquers Proprietary Limited and there was, the man, the secretary there was a little Scotsman called Mr Bakey and he was very sweet, and the owner of it was Bill Crossing, who the Crossing family are

37:30 very well known, and he was a charming man and yes, Lustroid Lacquers.

And what did they make?

Lacquers, little, you know, paints but they called them lacquer, probably different to paint. I don't know whether they made paint but they were always lacquers and they had them in either little tins or great big tins, yes.

So can you describe what your day-to-day duties were there?

38:00 Mostly on the switchboard, making cups of tea morning and afternoon and I always used to spill the milk. Can't remember whether I did any, I must have done some bookwork but I just can't remember. I know that I acquired a little office of my own, so I must have been doing something that was useful

38:30 and I wasn't on the switchboard then, but I really can't remember. I must have done the books or sending out the accounts. I just honestly can't remember what I did.

That's all right. Do you remember what the switchboard looked like?

Yes. I can remember, I can't particularly

- 39:00 remember that one but I worked for doctors after when my children were of an age that I felt I could take a job, really because I wanted to, and the switchboards were like square boxes on a wall and you plugged, they had little plugs you pulled out and, what were, they earphones?
- 39:30 We didn't put them over our ears. I can't remember, didn't put them over our ears I don't think cause that'd be something extra, wouldn't it? I can't remember how we listened to them but I remember pulling out the plugs and pulling them out and saying, "There's a call for you, Mr Crossing, Mr So-and-so," plug it in. Then he'd say, "Thank you," and you'd plug it into his
- 40:00 switch. I can't remember how we did the earphones, just gone right out of my mind. But later in life when I went back to doing part-time work for my own interest I worked for quite a few doctors around the North Shore. We were living in
- 40:30 Turramurra after the, or during the war we were able to rent this pretty old house in Kissing Point Road, Turramurra. It was a big house and we had nearly two acres of ground, beautiful garden, absolutely lovely. But the house was built up in a corner because,
- 41:00 and at the bottom of a very steep hill, because it was the closest to get to the station. You used to walk, when it was built early in the century there were no cars of course and the house was right up near the front fence although we had all this acreage behind us and on the side and this big steep hill to walk up.
- 41:30 I remember when the children were babies it was very hard work pushing a pram up the hill with one baby and one toddler, but it was much harder coming back because you did it like this, yes, but we were young.

Tape 3

- 00:32 **Mrs Edwards, I just wanted to ask you a bit more about your work that you did. After you had your first job, how soon after did you take the job up in Canberra?**

I went to Canberra when I was twenty-

- 01:00 one and I was at Lustroid for a couple of years. I'm just trying to think what I did in between Lustroid and Canberra and why I left Lustroid. I just can't remember. What did I do? I don't think I, I don't know whether I stayed at Lustroid until I went to Canberra

- 01:30 actually. I don't think I did but I honestly can't remember. It was nothing that stands out in my mind. Don't think I, no I think I would have stayed at Lustroid until I went to Canberra.

What was Canberra like in those days?

Well what I knew of Canberra was great because, as I said, it was mostly members of parliament

- 02:00 and public servants. Of course my dear old Dad when he discovered I was going to Canberra immediately rang his friend who was a Member there and asked him to keep his eye on me, which wasn't so good because it was Dan Mulcahy, who was a very nice man. I don't think he ever opened his mouth in Canberra, but an old man

- 02:30 who kept such a diligent eye on me that all the young men around the place thought I was his fancy lady, yes, and I used to go up to Parliament House and sit in while they had parliament sometimes at night and kept the boys away for quite a while but I became very friendly with

- 03:00 the newspaper men. I keep thinking of them as war correspondents, but they weren't war correspondents then. Journalists, they were all such very nice people and I had a large group of friends amongst them. They used to come backwards and forwards, yes, and I had friends

- 03:30 amongst the local young men and young women there but I don't remember a lot about it because I retained all these journalist friends because they were either, they were mostly based in Sydney or Melbourne. They were moving around all the time. And one friend in particular we became very good friends, and I know that

- 04:00 if I was doing something else and Ted rang me to say he was in town I'd just drop the other situation and join him. But he was about thirty-six or more I think and he was interviewing, in his capacity as a journalist, when war broke out, the Minister for

- 04:30 War, whose name I forget now, and he said, "Can older men get into the..." Don't know what they would have called it, but the flying scheme where all of young men went to Bradfield Park and learnt to fly. And this fellow said, "Oh, anybody could." So Ted said, "Well, what about me?"

- 05:00 And he was a bit taken aback but he said, "Oh yes, you can go." And Ted went in at age thirty-six amongst these nineteen and twenty-year-olds. He was greatly liked of course but they all called him

Uncle and he became an L, leading airman.

05:30 I've forgotten what they're called now. And he did the course and I remember him telling me he, I think he was one of the very few who had a car. He was coming out the gates when he was stopped by someone waiting at the gates hoping for a lift to come back to Sydney, and in the course of the journey they found that they

06:00 were both coming to see the same girl and yes. But unfortunately they were both killed, sadly, sadly, sadly. Lost a lot of good friends. But fortunately my husband had a most amazing life as a cameraman and he survived and

06:30 he always said that he was able to cope, it was easier for him to cope because he was older. And I think he could have been right. I don't know but he had a shocking time in war, you know, walking out of Burma. I think it took him nineteen days and he had picked up a bit of transport

07:00 on the way but he still walked the nineteen days, and he was quite out of contact and we'd get little snippets in the paper and on the Sunday I had read in the paper that the oil fields at Yaynangyoung had blown up just as war correspondent Reg Edwards and another one, whom they named, walked in and that was the end of the story, you see. And I didn't know what

07:30 had happened or if anything had happened to him and then the next item I saw was about the war correspondent who'd got out, last correspondents out of Burma. Where was Reg? There's no mention of him. But he walked back and I don't think I've told you about his friend Wally Crab, have I?

08:00 **Not yet but we might talk about him a bit later. I might just ask you what you remember about war breaking out, of it being declared?**

Well it affected me personally because I had just had a little bit of a tantrum at Qantas and had resigned. I was leaving,

08:30 you see, and it rather knocked back the man I was working for under Sir Hudson Fish, who was about to be married and so he said to me, "Well could you wait till Saturday week because I'm getting married and I'll be on holidays," so I agreed that I would.

09:00 But before he was married war broke out and he said to me, "I'd really like you to stay." So I agreed to stay, you see. So I stayed there until I met Reg and we were married. That was my memory of war breaking out because this was 1939 and it was over the other side of the world

09:30 at that stage. But I don't remember a lot about it really. My memories are much more vivid afterwards when we were affected by it, going to Singapore and really getting involved in it, bombings every day, yes, but no I'm sorry. I can't tell you anything particular about war breaking out. We were all

10:00 horrified but it was a long way away and I think we might have looked, I might have looked at it like that. It was a long way away.

When you were in Canberra and you were friends with journalists there, was there much discussion among young people about politics or about what was happening overseas in that lead-up time?

Not with

10:30 me, no, not with me. They used to sign off when their day's work was done and we had a lot of fun. No, I'm just trying to think if there was something. I remember once being taken to interview someone and I had to do the shorthand but I can't remember who it was. I'm sorry. This was back in Sydney but

11:00 no, they didn't talk about their work once they were out of the place. One very dear friend, Ray Mailey, an AAP [Australian Associated Press] man who came up to Singapore and married, brought his fiancée up and we became very close friends,

11:30 Ray Mailey, wait till I think. Don't think there was anything in particular to tell you. He just came into my mind because in later years he collapsed in Parliament House and died but I can't remember.

12:00 They went to America. No, I can't remember anything else. But I just know that Ray would only have to have a couple of drinks and he would collapse on the floor. There were many a time in Singapore when they used to cart him up to our floor to sleep it off. And it wasn't that he was a great drinker, it was just that he couldn't take it. And he, this is how he

12:30 ended, which was quite a fitting end to his life, although he was quite young, a very handsome man and yes. I think it was when the Duchess of, not the Duchess of Gloucester. One of the duchesses was out here on a visit.

What kind of work were you doing in Canberra? Could you just explain where you were working?

At the Hotel Canberra? Yes, I was on the switchboard and

13:00 I was available to guests for shorthand and typing but I was mainly busy on the desk and on the telephone and it was very active. It was go, go, go all the time. It was the biggest hotel in Canberra and was the centre of activity really

13:30 outside Parliament House. But yes. That's what I did. That's my usual work but mainly with the tourists. A lot of tourists used to come in and mostly on the telephone I should think.

Did you live in the hotel?

Yes. We had lovely bedrooms in the hotel,

14:00 yes.

And how did the job at Qantas come about?

I thought I told you that. No? Well a friend suggested I go into Shell House for an interview. They were looking for stenographers and the man who interviewed me,

14:30 after talking to him, he said, "Look, you don't want this job. It's only a typist's job and I wouldn't suggest you come here." The strange thing is that before I went in to have this interview with this man a woman who was probably in charge of the

15:00 stenographers suggested I go to the bathroom and wipe off some of my lipstick, which really quite shattered me. I was very surprised. I hadn't thought that I ever wore a lot of lipstick but that was the way it was, you see. And he was very sweet this man and he said to me, "You don't want this job," but before I got home he had rung the house

15:30 and asked, we had a housekeeper, asked for me to ring him back and when I rang him he said that he had made an appointment for me with Qantas, who were in the same building and who were dependent of course on Shell Company to a large extent, that they were looking

16:00 for a secretary. And I can't remember whether he made the appointment or whether I did but I definitely got that job without any effort on my part, no effort at all. They just took me in because I'd been recommended by Shell Company. I had no feelings otherwise than that

16:30 but I enjoyed Qantas very much and they were very good to me as I said to you, very good to me after, yes, very good to me indeed.

What kind of company was Qantas like at that time?

It was much smaller of course and we all knew each other and this was in the city office. We all knew each other very well I think.

17:00 It was very nice. I think the secretarial section was slightly apart from the accounts section, not for any other reason but that we did different work, different sort of work but I always remember when I was walking up the corridor one day and Captain PJ

17:30 Taylor or PQ Taylor was coming the other way and I nearly passed out. I was so thrilled to see him because he'd just done that... You may not know, but they were crossing the Tasman going from Sydney to New Zealand when something went wrong with the plane and he walked out onto the wings. That's right, they ran out of fuel and he walked out on the

18:00 wings, I think I'm right, I could be wrong, with a suitcase full of fuel or something full of fuel and walked back in! This is while it's in flight over the Tasman Sea! And to see Captain Taylor just absolutely thrilled me to the core. But there were a lot of people like that, Lester Brain, all those people. They were wonderful people and all the

18:30 crews of course I got to know fairly well cause I used to do their, what did they call them, flight chart? No, not flight chart. I don't know. I've forgotten what they were called but no, it was very, very, really exciting working for Qantas. The only thing wrong was that every now and then some of my

19:00 journalist friends would come in to interview Lester Brain or Hudson Fish and then they'd see me having lunch with them in where they had lunch, you know. It's all a bit confusing but they never questioned me. They never asked me, you know, did I, well talk about it, but

19:30 they never did. It was quite different.

What kind of person was Hudson Fish?

He was a darling. He was an absolute darling, lovely, lovely man, very gentle and unassuming and first time I met him he was on his way down to the toilet in his braces and pants, had his coat on. No, he was a

20:00 lovely man and I got to know him very well, really after I came back from Singapore cause he used to ring me up and I remember when I came back to Sydney I had masses of verbal messages cause we couldn't carry anything with us. I had masses of verbal messages for Qantas wives and also for

- 20:30 the personnel, you know, Hudson Fish, and so I rang him and we had long talks and some time later, I can't remember what the lapse of time was, he rang me to tell me that the crew that I had seen at Broome had been shot up by the Japanese. Now Sydney didn't know that the Japanese came around to Broome
- 21:00 I'm sure and they'd all been shot up in Broome. We had another captain, another flying boat was shot up over Darwin and the captain was injured but he survived. No it was a very, very bad time. In the meantime of course my brother was a prisoner of war.
- 21:30 He had, when they heard how close the Japanese were, one of the captains in his volunteer group had asked him to drive him into Singapore and check out what the situation was and they never returned. And a lot of the other boys, when they realised that they weren't coming back, they got away,
- 22:00 which was great, which was terrific. But my brother was captured and he was a prisoner of war for three and a half years. He returned totally emaciated but alive, and Reg was able to go out and meet him on the ship and let him know, you know, all was well at home and that his girl had waited for him, which was good,
- 22:30 and they married. But yes, very trying times for a lot of people. So many of the young fellows that I knew from Qantas and other places just never returned.

23:00 It's a long time ago.

When did your brother join up and...?

He belonged to what they called the Malayan Volunteers. See he lived in Taiping, which was five hundred miles up Malaysia, and he, it was a kind of a voluntary group and we flew up to Taiping to

23:30 stay with him for a couple of days and he gave us the most gorgeous little MG car, which we drove home in, drove back to Singapore in and after, I don't know whether I've told you this but after they saw me off, without telling me, he and Reg just drove out to the harbour and dropped the MG into the water

24:00 so the Japanese wouldn't get it, yeah. Did I tell you that before? Yes, I'm going back on my story.

So your brother was based in Malaysia working for a tin mine when the war broke out?

Yes, he was running a tin mine. He'd been there for a couple of years, about three or four years, yes, at least and yes. He lost everything of course, everything personal.

24:30 Didn't lose his life but certainly affected his life and he really never really recovered. But they eventually, he went back to Malaysia when he married and then they came back to Australia and they lived in Pymble. We were living in Turramurra. They lived in Pymble. Reg was playing bowls at the Pymble Golf Club and

25:00 apart from other times that we met, he always used to call in on Lorne, particularly in the latter times when he became ill, and have a drink with him on Saturday night. As a matter of fact one Saturday night he was driving home after having had a drink with Lorne and he was pulled up by a policeman and it was before any blowing

25:30 into bags or anything [breathalysers], but the fellow questioned Reg on something. I think he questioned him something about his driving, I can't remember, and then he apparently got a whiff of his breath and asked him to step out of the car and said to him, "I'm taking you to the police station. You've been drinking. You're under the influence." That's right, "You're under the influence." So Reg said, "Well look, I only live up the

26:00 road. Can I just drive up and tell my wife?" He said, "Certainly not, certainly not." He said, "I'll park your car here and we'll go straight to the police station." So he took him up to Hornsby Police Station and Reg rang me, perfectly sober of course, and he said, "I've been arrested. I've been booked for driving and I've been arrested, but," he said, "we've got to wait here until

26:30 the inspector comes in." This fellow brought him to the, but he couldn't charge him. He just had to let his inspector know, who was at a party in the eastern suburbs, and they had to wait for him to come in and when he eventually, so I thought this was very amusing actually, which was probably quite the wrong way to view it but I knew he wasn't drunk. And all the boys were out and I knew where

27:00 my eldest son was, at the pictures, and I thought, "Wouldn't it be great to have a sign put up on the screen, "Tony, please come home. Your father has been arrested." Fortunately I didn't do that, but Reg rang me again later in the evening. He said, "I'm coming home," and I said, "What's happened, what have they done?" He said, "Nothing, I've got a certificate saying I wasn't

27:30 under the influence." And this poor traffic, this policeman had to drive him home, drive him down to pick up his car. But I've still got that little piece of paper.

Where did your brother spend time as a POW [Prisoner of War]?

Blakang Mati, which was off Singapore. He fortunately wasn't sent to Burma, Blakang

28:00 Mati, and he was very useful because he spoke the language of the natives, so that he was often, well I don't know how often but he was sometimes allowed to take somebody out in a truck and question the natives with the result that quite often he was able to capitalise on this with food. They'd

28:30 give him food to bring back to the camp. But he was so emaciated, it was dreadful.

You were at Qantas when war broke out, what kind of impact did the war have on the kind of flying and work that Qantas was doing?

I wasn't really, I don't, if I was aware I don't remember that it made any great difference because I had

29:00 nothing to do with the passengers. That was quite different, so that I didn't know what passengers were flying, if the pleasure travellers stopped and the flying boats were always full of military. I wouldn't know of military and air force people. I just know that when we went

29:30 we couldn't get a seat. I couldn't get a seat. Reg's was all fixed up. But of course I eventually did get one but a lot of that either passed over my head or I wasn't aware of it. Mine was all secretarial work and I know that there was a lot of correspondence between Sydney and Singapore, which I used to do

30:00 for Sir Hudson Fish.

What kind of correspondence was that?

Probably just making, they may have been making arrangements, different arrangements because the situation had changed. But you see

30:30 war didn't, war in, connecting Singapore didn't break out till after I was married and went to Singapore. That was on the 15th of February in 1942. Well we were in Singapore in August, arrived in Singapore in, but as soon as we arrived in Singapore we were very quickly made aware of the situation by our friends who were correspondents, war

31:00 correspondents and journalists, on what was likely to happen. They knew that it was imminent but it actually happened on the 7th of December 1941.

Well what were they saying even in August before Pearl Harbour about the situation in Asia?

I don't think I could answer that question. It's too general.

31:30 It was just conversation. Life went on. We had blackouts and all that sort of thing. I can remember very vividly that we carried on with our normal outside activities, which we were afterwards teased, not teased but it was kind of looked upon as being

32:00 not giving enough attention to the state of the world. But life goes on and as time went on by the end of the year I was one of the few women there with the opportunity to have people in the unit. We had a lovely, a very, very nice what we called a flat, what would now be called a unit, I suppose, and

32:30 all the, lots of the men used to come in night after night for drinks and for food, extra bits, nibbles and things. Shopping became very difficult. I remember on one occasion, cause as soon as, after the 7th of December as soon as the

33:00 sirens went the shops would all shut and everything would shut down. And I can remember on one occasion where I really needed to get food and I went out and got a taxi, cause Reg did a lot of filming from our unit, from our balconies. We were seven floors up and it was a wonderful position. He'd often be up filming and thinking, "This is a huge shot," when he'd suddenly realise how close the Zeros were.

33:30 And we had a little what we called a cubbyhole under the stairs that we used to hide because we felt... See the Cathay was one of the very few, I think it was the first high-rise building, not quite sure about that, but I think it was, in Singapore, and we knew that there was very little chance that the Japanese would destroy it - they'd use it as a headquarters. And on this

34:00 occasion I just had to get out and get some food and I got a taxi and we hadn't been going for more than five minutes when the sirens went, and my taxi driver just went absolutely haywire and he's rolling about looking at me and rolling about in the driver's seat and I said, "Don't stop, keep going." So he kept going all right but he took me out to his, I think we called it, I don't know what we called it, but where his people

34:30 were and jumped out of the taxi and I got out too and huddled down on the ground and I was amongst a lot of natives, and when I say natives I mean Malays, Indians, Chinese, none of whom worried me at all. But I got a bit tired of being the only white person there because they were all

35:00 kind of interested in me and looking at me. And I got up and started to walk back to town and I remember how empty the centre of town was. But Geoff Moore, our friend, saw me and grabbed me and then grabbed a car that had been abandoned and with the keys left in it and

35:30 he drove me home. And I didn't get any shopping done. But at Christmas, on Christmas Eve we'd

- arranged a dinner party for twelve, including ourselves, and we had a very beautiful large
- 36:00 tablecloth and dinner napkins, very heavily embroidered and a beautiful thing, but it hadn't come back. The laundryman hadn't come back with it on this morning of Christmas morning and we'd been, I think we'd been dancing downstairs the night before and Ray had collapsed on the floor and he'd slept the rest of the night at our place, you see.
- 36:30 Betty, his wife, the idea was to get Ray out without Betty knowing, you see, which they did, but Betty woke to it and came up looking for him and was very cross and drove herself home, left him there. And in the morning of course Ray was very penitent and Reg was very cross,
- 37:00 and I was very upset because the table linen hadn't arrived and I didn't know what I was going to do if it didn't and there'd been a lot of bombing and a lot of people killed and Ray was saying, "But you will drive me home, Reg, won't you? You will drive me home?" So anyhow we decided we'd
- 37:30 drop Ray off near his hotel and go looking for our tablecloth but before he went he said to me, "What can I take? She'll be cross with me. What can I take?" So I had a great bunch of flowers all ready for this dinner party we were going to have in a vase. I just pulled them out and gave them to him. I said, "Give her these." So anyhow we dropped Ray off
- 38:00 and like he was such a dear man. He said to Reg, "Aren't you going to come in with me?" and Reg said, "No, certainly not." And so off he went with his bunch of flowers and Reg and I went looking for the tablecloth. And there was a place where, a huge area, I don't know how we knew where it was, huge area where miles and miles of
- 38:30 tablecloths and all the laundry was hanging on the lines where all the laundrymen had just put it out, so we walked up and down these lines and we actually found our tablecloth and our twelve double damask dinner napkins. Our laundryman had been killed, which was very sad, but it was sad for me because I had to spend practically the rest of the day in this little cubbyhole ironing
- 39:00 the tablecloth and the dinner napkins and it was so hot, it was just unbelievable. And in the middle of it of course, middle of the afternoon, Ray and Betty come swanning in and Betty's full of the joy of spring. She said, "You should have seen the beautiful bunch of flowers he brought me," but that was it. Anyhow then the next thing that happened about six o'clock,
- 39:30 Geoff, with whom we were sharing this unit in the Cathay, said, "By the way, I've asked Jack..." I'll think of his name in a minute, "...Jack to come along. He wasn't going anywhere tonight." I was horrified, a young bride with twelve of everything and thirteen guests. I mean what do you do? Doesn't matter of course but it does when you've
- 40:00 only been married a few months and I thought, "Oh, my goodness me," so anyhow Jack arrived and it was a good dinner party. It all went very well except that after I, that's right. The cook put the ice cream on top of the stove and I see it oozing up the hall towards me. And after dinner
- 40:30 when we left the table I poured the twelve cups of coffee and then quietly went to bed and in a little while I heard a little rustle in the bedroom and I said, "Is that you Reg?" He said, "Yes." I said, "What are you doing?" and he said, "What do you think? I'm coming into bed." We never heard, the party went on. We never heard a word from anyone. No-one ever said a word about it but that was the sort of thing that people in a way they don't actually
- 41:00 misunderstand but they don't, they can't understand how we could be so gay at this time but it was an outlet. And that young man Jack was the one who really probably saved my life because I think I've told you about him getting me out of Singapore and it was Jack who got me out of Singapore and
- 41:30 then picked me up in Surabaya where we, Surabaya just closed down. I thought we were only going to stop there for a minute, I was allowed, you know, for lunch. I was allowed out of Singapore with twenty-five Singapore dollars, which were worth two and eleven pence each. That was all the money I had and I thought I was on my way home to Sydney but I was dropped off. We were all dropped off in Surabaya and I was asked where I wanted to go, and of course the only place I
- 42:00 could think of was...

Tape 4

- 00:32 **Mrs Edwards, before we go on and talk more about Singapore, for the benefit of someone who doesn't know about your husband, I just wanted you to give us a background to his work and who he was before you went to Singapore?**
- I wish I could have access to the back of that picture because I could give you his whole story. It's all on the back of his picture.
- 01:00 But he worked with, when I met Reg he was working for Film Craft, a film laboratory in Camperdown,

but he had been brought up from Melbourne by Film Craft for this job.

- 01:30 Prior to that he'd done various trips into Central Australia for the MacRobertson Group and he did the filming and Wally Crab did the writing, so that
- 02:00 when Reg was asked to go to Burma he, neither of us were particularly impressed by the English after Singapore and he was British Ministry of course, so that he'd be reporting to a British man and he found to his delight that he was
- 02:30 reporting to his old mate Wally Crab, who had been in England when First World War broke out and he was about sixteen and he'd applied to join up but he'd been put on hold, and at age forty-one I think he was in a very big job in Melbourne. He was approached by the British to
- 03:00 present himself for a medical check-up, which he sailed through with flying colours and was off to England. But this was before I met Reg. I didn't know anything about this, so that Reg and Wally did their filming at night stark naked cause it was so awfully hot,
- 03:30 and when they left Burma, Wally took the high road and Reg another route and when Reg got to India Wally was in hospital but he was okay, and he'd brought all the money out from the ministry in Burma and handed it over to John Galvin, who was an Australian, head of the Australian group and
- 04:00 all Galvin said to him was, "You bloody fool Wally," bringing the money back. You ask me things that I really can't answer without looking at the...

Do you want to have a quick look at that?

Could that be done?

Yeah, that's all right. Mrs Edwards, I believe that your husband had worked on an experimental talkie featuring

- 04:30 **the late Billy Hughes?**

Yes. He made the first experimental talkie, which was a political speech by the late William Morris Hughes.

So what was your husband's actual job, what did he do?

He was a cinematographer

- 05:00 for Birtells and Hershaws, who were very well known film people in Melbourne before he came to Sydney.

What were your impressions of him when you first met him?

I thought he was very, very nice, very nice indeed. I liked him very much straight away. He had a wonderful sense

- 05:30 of humour and I always remember on that first night when we were having dinner my brother, who was an extremely good golfer, had arranged to hit off the next morning with a young man who was a champion around the Orange district and when Reg heard that he was playing golf early in the morning he said to him, "Oh,

- 06:00 I'd like to join you. May I?" and Lorne said, "Yes of course," and my heart sank cause I had the feeling that Reg wouldn't be a good golfer. And these two boys were extremely good, so he turned to me and said, "Will you come and watch us hit off?" and I said, "Yes, of course." So we went down and Lorne hit his first ball with a,

- 06:30 and it rolled to within about two inches of the hole and then the other young man hit his, which also rolled within about two inches of the hole, and Reg started to laugh and he hit his and it kind of drifted along the fairway about fifty yards. But he was different to any other man I had

- 07:00 ever met. He was very kind and I suppose he was gentle and thoughtful and I liked him very much.

What sort of a wedding did you have during the war?

A very wartime wedding, just in street clothes, and we were married at the Presbyterian Church in Chalmers Street

- 07:30 and just had my father and my stepmother, and my bridesmaid of course was my brother's fiancée, and then we just went home and had a few drinks. Reg's best man was, I've forgotten his name now but he came from the central coast.

- 08:00 Reg used to spend a lot of time on the central coast with Jack Davey, who was a very well known broadcaster in Sydney at the time, and they used to go up to this fellow's place who had a guesthouse there and he and Reg became very good friends and he was Reg's best man, but I'm sorry I've forgotten his name.

That's all right. You said it was a

08:30 **wartime wedding?**

Very wartime.

Can you explain what that meant?

Well it was just quiet and I suppose there was some very big weddings in wartime but we just didn't need anything like that or want anything like that and...

09:00 **Was it hard to get material for wedding dresses and things at the time?**

I don't remember. I really don't remember, sorry, cause it wasn't, see it wasn't war out here. It really wasn't war out here. Fellows were going away to the war but it was only after I came back that we started being rationed for things like napkins and

09:30 materials.

Can you tell me about how Reg got to go to Singapore? What was... When was he first told about the work he was going to do in Singapore and what was he?

I thought I told you that about the two men coming out from England looking for him. They knew his reputation

10:00 and they came out for him from the British Ministry of Information.

And what was he told about what his role was going to be, exactly?

That he was to go through Singapore, India, Burma and I think China, China and Japan, yes, and film undercover, just assess the

10:30 situation because obviously, and particularly coming out from England, these men knew what was going to happen or what was imminent.

Can you tell me about your first impressions of Singapore once you immediately arrived?

Well I knew a little of the type of place Malaya and Singapore

11:00 were because my brother had lived there for some years. He wasn't expecting us. It wasn't till we arrived in Singapore that I rang him and said, "I'm here." But my first impressions, it was very colourful and quite exciting. I went straight to work and there was one thing,

11:30 I think the first, after I think it was very early, only a couple of days after we arrived we were invited to a luncheon by two Chinese brothers, Chinese, I think they were Chinese. Yes, Chinese brothers. One was called Run Run Shaw and the other one, his brother, was called

12:00 Run Nee Shaw and these men were absolute billionaires. They just owned practically all the cinemas and well lots of cinemas and probably many other things all over Asia and they invited us to lunch, so I wore my little cotton dress that I'd run up, you know.

12:30 We were picked up of course by limousine and one of the men from the house, who had the most, the biggest diamond ring on his hand I have ever seen and he had it across the back of the seat and I can remember Reg saying, "Pipe the rock." Anyhow when we got there I was a little bit overcome. There were about fifty other

13:00 guests and we ate outside in the heat at a very long table and the women were all beautifully dressed and their hair beautifully coiffed. Is that the word? Coiffed, coiffured, whatever. They were very nice but I felt, I couldn't use chopsticks and I've never used them to this day, but Reg was way down the other

13:30 end of the table being feted and expertly handling his chopsticks and I'm afraid I didn't greatly enjoy the day because I was hot and uncomfortable and felt as if I'd been thrown into something without any information given to me about what it was about.

14:00 I was in bed for three days with sunburn, apart from not being able to use chopsticks, and we never saw those men again and I can only think, I don't think Reg and I discussed it. If we did I've forgotten. I can only think they just, you know, easing, trying to find out what was going on. They were incredibly

14:30 rich men, wealthy men, and as I say never saw them again, so why we were invited I don't know. I think they were just checking out to see if this guy was going to be any trouble to them.

Were all of the guests Malays?

No, I can't remember any Malays actually. There probably were but I just can't remember. Most of them were film people and their wives

15:00 and there probably were but I'm afraid I've forgotten. I just, it's all a horrible blur to me. I felt like a

little girl and the sunburn obliterated any other feelings I had. I was in a lot of pain.

How prepared were you for the climate and the heat and the tropics?

Not at all. I only had, I had less than twenty-four hours' notice. Not at all and of course I

15:30 burn and freckle and I didn't have time to get any clothes organised, but I quickly got some clothes made up there of course but it didn't matter. I survived and I realised that I was in a very, I was regarded as being in a very good position because I was a

16:00 married lady with a place to entertain people. Many of the young women that I worked with, and there were only, I think there were only two others, they were living in hotels or guesthouses of some kind. I think there were two or three of them, can't remember.

Can you describe what your home looked like?

16:30 What, the unit? Yes. You mean from outside or inside?

Outside and inside.

Well it was a very large building with a restaurant on the bottom and a ballroom and all these units and offices and all sorts of things, and it was an empty space in the middle that rather reminded me of

17:00 Shell House as a matter of fact because Shell House was like that. The units were all built around it and we had, we shared a two-bedroom unit with Geoffrey, huge dining-lounge room. We each had a bathroom, of course. The kitchen was the cook's domain, and lovely verandahs outside. I have a couple

17:30 of photographs there you might like to have a look at, just off the verandahs, but it was very attractive. I can't remember what it cost because that had nothing to do with me. Reg handled all that and I probably did know at the time but I've forgotten. And Geoff was running cold stores,

18:00 which was the big stores of all the food places, and actually he had signed on as a steward with Qantas, which surprised me when he first signed on, which was before I met Reg, because he'd had amazing jobs all over the world

18:30 in New York and England and everywhere and I just couldn't imagine why he was interested in taking this quite lowly job really. Anyhow he did a couple of flights and then he signed off sick in Singapore but he applied, when these units were being built, he applied for a two-bedroom unit but because he was a single man he was put on hold,

19:00 and then he approached, I didn't know he was, I didn't hear anything except that he'd signed off in Singapore and I didn't really know him very well at that time, but he approached us when we were still in the... We'd been there about a month I think still in the hotel and told us about this unit and asked

19:30 would we like to share it, so as our office was in the building anyway and it sounded like a good idea we jumped at the chance and never regretted it, and it was great because we were able to do a lot of entertaining which we could never have done if we'd lived in a hotel.

What sort of other people lived in the building?

20:00 **Were they British or...?**

Yes, some of them were British. The ones that worked in our group who lived in the hotel were British but we really had no, didn't really have any contact with them. I have no idea. I think it's like, would be the same living in Sydney in a large block of units. I don't think you get to, once you shut your door you don't get to know. But

20:30 there was one English family who worked in the ministry who lived opposite us, so we used to exchange hellos but we never became really friendly with them.

I guess what I'm asking is did you live in an area or a part of Singapore where there were British people or colonials or...?

Well we didn't get to meet

21:00 them a great deal because we were totally involved with what was going on as regards the imminent war, and no, I don't think we got, I don't think we made any friends outside the units as far as I can remember. We used to occasionally be introduced to people but it wasn't very long before the women started going home.

21:30 You see we were only there a couple of months from August to December before we were bombed repeatedly.

You mentioned that, you know, that Japan entered the war in December and you got to Singapore in August and Reg is already doing this undercover work, how?

Well as soon as we got to Singapore all the

22:00 correspondents we knew that we met there were very quick to tell us what was about to happen. They knew that it was going to happen.

What were they telling you?

Just that Japan was preparing for war and that it was only a matter of time, and Churchill had had to let

22:30 this part of the world go, you know. He had plenty on his hands in England and he had to, he couldn't support Singapore at all.

How safe did you feel when you heard that?

I don't think I ever thought about it. I was with Reg and I don't think I ever thought about it. I probably did but I don't think I did. I don't remember ever being scared. I was

23:00 just angry that, in that episode in the taxi, angry that I couldn't get the food I needed for us to eat. No, I can't remember being scared at all. You're suddenly aware, "Oh, this isn't a good place to be," but I can't remember being scared, no. We just carried on our lives. Reg was snooping around all the time

23:30 with his camera. He did a lot of, after the Japanese, you know, the planes kept coming over. He did a lot of filming from off our balconies. It was a very good vantage point and, as I've said to you, he'd suddenly, thinking he was getting a fabulous picture, he suddenly realised the plane was practically on top of him and he'd dart inside into the little

24:00 cupboard under the stairs.

So prior to Japan bombing Pearl Harbour and when you'd been told about Japan and the threat from these correspondents, did you contemplate the idea of Singapore being invaded?

Yes, of course. And we were. It took a couple of months for them

24:30 to declare but goodness knows, they were coming down the... We thought, the British thought that they would approach us from the sea but what they did was they came down from Burma on bicycles right down to Singapore. My brother was just ahead of them, about five hundred miles down. I don't know where they came from, probably

25:00 Burma I s'pose. I don't know.

So when you first got to Singapore, can you explain what the work was that you were doing?

Secretarial work between men of very responsible jobs, like men who were running airlines and men who were running armies

25:30 and politics, all this sort of thing. I don't quite know how to answer that question but it was all about what was happening, what was likely to happen and a lot of what I took down I didn't understand because I didn't know the people they were talking about. But it was all about the situation, as the situation

26:00 in Britain, and how it was likely to affect us. What else can I say? Just what was happening and what was likely to happen and who was at the bottom of it but I certainly didn't keep any notes.

What were your day-to-day tasks?

Well I was in an office all

26:30 day. I was a private secretary taking shorthand, no machines in those days.

Do you remember the day that Japan bombed Pearl Harbour?

Very well. They bombed Pearl Harbour the same time as they bombed Singapore, exactly the same day,

27:00 7th of December '41, remember it very well. It was the day I told Reg he was about to be a father and he wasn't nearly as excited about it as I was. We were up at a place called The Gap where we used to go for drinks on a Sunday night. We were with Betty and Ray Mailey and yes.

Can you describe what The Gap was and...?

The Gap was,

27:30 wasn't a nightclub but it was an open air, don't know what you'd call it. There was no dancing or anything but I s'pose you'd call it a nightclub. I know we used to drink outside cause all the photographs I've got are of us sitting outside.

28:00 But The Gap was the name of the district, the area, and we always referred to it as The Gap. I don't know why.

Were you there when the bombing started?

Yes, I've been telling you about.

No, were you at The Gap?

At The Gap? No, sorry. No it started after we were home during the night, about Sunday night, Monday morning.

28:30 **Can you describe what you heard and what you saw?**

We didn't see anything because we had all blackouts, but we heard the bombing and it was in the centre of Singapore. A lot of people were killed.

Can you, I'm just trying to get a sense of what it's

29:00 **like to be in a city that's being bombed. Can you describe the noise and how you know that the city's being bombed?**

There's no question that you wouldn't know because the noise is just incredible, just fantastic. It's just bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb, you know, and flashes in the sky. No, it was dreadful, terrible. And all planes flying overhead.

29:30 The Zero, they used to fly Zeros and they could fly much higher than any of our planes could.

Was there, what level of panic or concern was there amongst you and your husband and your friends?

No panic at all. The panic was in the city streets and the people who worked in the streets and had businesses and natives and

30:00 people like that who had to be in the streets. There was no panic where we were concerned. We just had to, it had happened and we just now had to stick to the rules.

And what were the rules?

Well I say the rules likely, we just had to make sure that we were always under blackout, that our windows were

30:30 always blacked out. But really you would appreciate the fact that a lot of our life was spent inside the Cathay building. We worked there, we lived there, and once the bombing started we weren't walking around the streets looking in the shop windows, you know. It was all gone. It was all over.

31:00 **Did you believe that you would be evacuated or did you think that the British would hold up their defences?**

Well I realised that it would be a good thing for me to get out. The plans were already being made by Christmas probably for the office to

31:30 move to India, and as I was pregnant Reg just absolutely vetoed the idea of me going to India because I was to go with him to all these places he was to go to, we were to travel together. But that was all crossed out and the plan then was to get me

32:00 home as soon as possible. I didn't really think I'd have much trouble except being on the end of the waiting list. I thought I'd probably be able to get out with Qantas but Qantas, the flying boats just weren't coming in. They were landing on the water and dispersing whoever had been flying with them

32:30 or what had to come into the city and then they'd fly out again. I was able to ring them and they told me what the situation was but I wasn't panicking. I think when you're very young that, you know, everything's going to be all right. I had tremendous faith in Reg, naturally, and

33:00 no, I didn't panic. I think I realised afterwards that Reg was far more worried than I was but he was a man who kept things to himself and all the time or for a long time he was working hard trying to get me out, you see, without letting me know. But, as I say, Jack organised it by the end of January,

33:30 but we didn't know that I was going to get caught up in Surabaya, and when I was reporting to the police every day at Surabaya... And I'd been playing cards with some of the Qantas crew one particular night when we had a raid and we always got under the beds under these circumstances, and

34:00 afterwards I went up to the office to see if there was any news of Reg because everybody else was coming in and no-one had any news of Reg at all and this was nearly a fortnight after I'd left Singapore, and when I went up to the office I ran into Jack, who'd got me out, and he absolutely dropped. He said, "I thought you were home a couple of weeks ago," and I said, "I can't get out, Jack," and he said straight away, "Be out at the airport

34:30 at midnight and I'll fly you home. Don't tell anybody." I had to tell Sir George, of course, for whom I was working.

Just going back to Singapore before we talk about Surabaya, how close to you was the bomb

damage do you think?

Five minutes away. They definitely left the Cathay alone

35:00 but we were only about five minutes out of town, I mean by car of course, it was the only way you could travel but no, it was right in the middle of Singapore and we were in Singapore.

Were you prepared for the bombing beforehand in terms of the blackouts and air-raid drills?

We didn't have any air-raid drills. We must have been supplied

35:30 with blackout curtains. I can't remember but we must have been supplied with those. I just can't remember where we got them from. We had air-raid wardens coming around and making sure that your curtains were all up but no, I can't remember how that happened, sorry.

That's all right. Once the bombing started, how frequent was it and when did it happen?

36:00 It went on continuously day and night, mostly daytime actually, mostly daytime. It just went on continuously.

Could you see much activity of troops, were you aware that there were lots of...?

No, we didn't see any troops. The first soldiers we saw was when my brother walked into

36:30 the unit having, as I told you, walked down Malaya. And he had a lot of his friends. They'd walked down together so that our bath was always full of happy hungry very grateful soldiers. But yes, we were bombed repeatedly.

So if we can talk

37:00 **about your evacuation and can you tell me exactly, I know your friend Jack helped you with that but can you tell me exactly what happened and the day you were evacuated in as much detail as you can remember?**

Have to look at my notes for that I'm afraid, but Jack just came into the unit and said he'd arranged for me to get out in half an hour and so I just

37:30 had time to throw some clothes into a bag and Lorne and Reg took me out to the plane. It's all pretty vague in my mind now. And we sat on the floor to get out and flew to Batavia and it was after when

38:00 I was asked where I wanted to go the only place I'd ever heard of in Batavia was the Desarnders [?] Hotel, so I said, "The Desarnders," thinking I was going to be picked up there and taken on, but I wasn't because at that stage Batavia just closed down, or Surabaya, Batavia closed down completely.

When you left the unit and you were going to the plane, what did it look like on the streets?

Can't remember, sorry,

38:30 can't remember, can't even remember going out to the aerodrome, no.

Was it a big plane?

Yes I should think so. I just don't remember really. It was big enough but no it would have been just one of the land planes that flew. It was a KLM

39:00 plane of course, a Dutch plane. Yes, it'd be the plane on the, Jack organised it for me, it would be on the usual route probably from Sydney to Holland or somewhere, yes. It was a KLM plane, yes.

What were your feelings? You were pregnant and you were leaving your husband behind in Singapore, what were your feelings about that?

39:30 I don't think I can tell you that. I'm sorry. I just can't tell you that. You're in a kind of a blank mind. You don't know what's going to happen but you always hope for the best and I can't remember I'm sorry. I hated leaving them both, my husband and my brother, but I always felt that we'd catch up with each other soon.

40:00 I just didn't know what was going to happen, so I didn't try and work it out or if I did I honestly cannot remember. I can't remember any feelings of panic or anything like that. I hated leaving them but I can't remember being terribly agitated about it. I just can't remember

40:30 and I s'pose I thought that he would join me as soon as he could. I don't think you really try and figure out what's going to happen, didn't occur to me I don't think at that stage that my brother would be captured, although there was always a chance that the whole three of us would have been captured. You just don't think of these things. There's no future to it.

41:00 But I was very lucky. I was very, very lucky because I seemed to be picked up by friends everywhere. I just seemed to, I never had any really bad luck, you know. Reg suffered a lot. He had a dreadful trip from Singapore down to Batavia but he eventually arrived at the hotel and of course he had no idea

what had... He thought I was home, same as Jack did, but Reg thought I was home and when he got to the Desarnders, of course, he, there was...

Tape 5

00:31 **Mrs Edwards before lunch we were talking about Singapore and what it was like living there during the bombings, could I just ask you to explain what the building looked like that you lived in and worked in, what facilities there were there?**

Well there was everything there for a good life really. It was just an ordinary square

01:00 building. I don't know, I haven't got a photograph of it from the outside. I've got a couple of photographs of me on our balcony looking out but it was just a plain building as far as I remember, but we were on the seventh floor and it went up higher than that. It probably went up to the tenth. And I can't remember, I think we just walked into an ordinary open

01:30 part, but there was a terrific restaurant and a ballroom and I think that's about all I investigated as far as I can remember but the rest were what we now call units. We used to call them flats I think and it was built in a square because there was a space right down

02:00 the middle, cause I remember one night Geoff didn't have his key and to my horror told us the next morning that he'd climbed over this to get in, which is frightening. But I keep thinking, every time I think of it today I keep thinking of Shell House where I was at Qantas and the building was the same. It was empty in the middle. It was built around a big

02:30 square. We had our offices. I think it was on the same floor that we lived on. We lived on the seventh floor. There were balconies all around the outside of course and I'm trying to remember how many staff we had in my section of the office where I did my

03:00 typing and I just can't remember. I can remember a couple of young Indian men but I really can't remember. I don't think there was any other white woman in the office but no I'm very vague about that I'm afraid but it was,

03:30 my memories of Singapore are very good because I was very happy in my own marriage and it wasn't till afterwards that the horror of it all really hits you. The main horror of course was my brother being captured, yes. But life in Singapore was good and I think this caused quite a lot of

04:00 discussion outside that, you know, how we just kept on having a good time when really I think it's what you do if you have the opportunity when you're under stress, and we must have been under stress.

The ballroom, were there dances at all?

Yes, we could dance every night and you'd just go down and have a meal and dance if you wanted

04:30 to. We had most of our meals in the unit but yes. It was very pleasant. People used to, wasn't just for the people that lived there. People used to come in all the time. It was always very, it was a good atmosphere. I think we were pretty involved with ourselves but there were,

05:00 I'm just trying to think what they were called, used to be places where you could go and the men would buy dances from the, I think they called them taxi girls, and we went out there one night early in the piece. We probably went a couple of times but I remember this night vividly because we hadn't been there long and went with another friend, an Australian,

05:30 Hugh McGuinness in the business, and after we'd been dancing for a while Reg, my husband, said to me, "I'd love to dance with one of those girls," so I said, "Whatever you like." I was a bit surprised but, "Whatever you like." I think he wanted to find out if she was really human, you know. Well of course we totally wrecked it because Hugh McGuinness said to me

06:00 straight away, "We'll dance behind him," you see, so we danced right behind them. The girl could see us but we were always, Reg always had his back to us and it was a very wrong thing to do from point of view, you know, he was trying it out, trying to find out what it was all about. And when the dance was over Hugh said very innocently, "What did you think?" and Reg said, "I don't know. It was just like dancing

06:30 with a chair or something. There was no animation." I don't know whether I ever told him. I don't think I did. I felt a bit ashamed of the whole thing cause I knew what he was doing and I thought it was a bit unfair but I don't think I told him. I don't remember. Gosh, funny things you do.

Who were the taxi girls, what were they?

They were the girls who were paid. You paid them to dance with you,

07:00 yes. They were probably, I could be talking out of turn but they may have been prostitutes. I don't know.

I really don't know. But they were employed by the people who ran the dance place and what the cut was I wouldn't know, and I have no idea what the cost was to Reg. I don't think I

07:30 ever asked him, perhaps I did and I've forgotten but yes it was, I should have let him have his fun, shouldn't I? I wasn't cross about it or anything. It was just that Hugh he suggested this. I'd have been quite happy to have stood on the sideline and watched his animation and expression because he really was a very charming man. But

08:00 these things happen, you know, and you don't get second chances do you?

What nationality were the taxi girls?

I couldn't really answer you that mainly because I don't remember. It could have been a mixture, probably Malayan or Chinese, Single-ese [Singaporean]. I really don't know.

08:30 I don't remember, sorry, but I would think they'd be a mixture, yes, but yes I spoil Reg's fun I'm afraid. Hugh's still alive. He's in a nursing home but he had a rather wicked sense of humour, yes.

09:00 He was in China too but it's funny looking back now. I haven't really looked back like this for such a long time until you started asking me about it and it's interesting, very interesting. But the interesting thing about the prisoners of war like my brother, he never, never mentioned it. When I say he never

09:30 mentioned it, he never talked about it except to tell a funny story. And that often happens with men who go to war or they used to, doesn't happen now. The men are opening up now but it used to happen. They just didn't talk about it, too hurtful. But I don't think Reg and I talked a lot about it.

10:00 Now and then we'd catch each other's eye at a party or something and remember something but he went back, after the war he went back to travelling in the train to Lindfield but it was always said that Reg was responsible for moving the film division to Lindfield cause it was close to home,

10:30 cause before that it used to be at Burwood and have to travel to Burwood by train of course. It was better than driving.

Can you tell me much about the kind of work he was doing in Singapore, like what he was actually photographing when he was there?

Well I knew. We knew what was going, he was just photographing what we could see was happening really. I never saw reports or anything like that

11:00 but we didn't talk about it much, no, cause he operated quite a lot from the unit and I remember this time I was telling you about when walking back and Geoff rescuing me. When he got me home Reg hadn't missed me, hadn't worried about me at all. He'd been too busy filming, his mind set on the job I'm afraid.

11:30 But it was good that we were under, kind of working close like that, particularly as we lost the next couple of years, although the letters were just fantastic and we never lost a letter. They were all numbered. All our letters were numbered, or Reg's were and mine were too, yes, that's right. I never lost one of Reg's letters and I've given them all to the boys and

12:00 his diaries. They've got them all and it's good. It's really good that I was able to do that. He didn't keep my letters, of course, but I remember on one occasion him telling me that he'd jumped into a foxhole when there was a raid up in New Guinea and he'd just picked up a letter from me and he opened it in the foxhole and was reading it

12:30 and there was a fellow in there with him and this fellow said to him, "Who'd you get the letter from?" and he said, "Yvonne, my wife." And this fellow said, "Yvonne, Yvonne who?" and he said, "Yvonne Edwards, but she was Yvonne Todd." And it was Wepp, a dear friend. Do you know the name Wepp, the artist? You're too young. Wepp was a very outstanding artist

13:00 at that time and he was a war correspondent of course, yes. Bill Pigeon his name was but this was the crowd that I was moving with before I met Reg and it was so funny for them both to be in the same hole. Bill Pigeon, I don't know whether he's still alive or not. I haven't heard anything of him for many years, yes,

13:30 but this happened quite a few times. We'd run into friends of the other one because to a certain extent we'd mixed in the same groups really. I knew a lot of journalists whom Reg met later. He hadn't known them when I knew them but he met them later, yes. I was reading

14:00 a story trying to leave things fixed in my mind and I came across one particular item there where on the 15th or the 16th of February 1942 when I was at home in Sydney, Tilly Shelton Smith, who was with Women's Weekly, came out and interviewed me and photographed me and

14:30 it wasn't till the next day that... She didn't tell me Singapore had fallen. I didn't know till the next day. I knew it was imminent but I didn't know it had gone, yes. It was a photograph of me looking very thin. I was very thin when I came home despite my stuffing myself in the Desarnders, but yes.

We might just ask

15:00 **you to tell that story of getting out of Singapore again. You started telling it before and I think we got as far as Surabaya?**

Didn't I get past Surabaya?

No, we might just talk about what happened once you got to Surabaya?

Well in Surabaya, as I say, it was shut down, just couldn't get out and so I was stuck there in this magnificent hotel,

15:30 wonderful accommodation, fantastic four and five course meals. No-one asking me did I have any money but reporting to a very nice young policeman every day. He was very nice and very kind to me and when, can't remember. I was there just under a fortnight I think and

16:00 there were at least two crews from Qantas caught up there. They couldn't move. There was just no way of moving. But people from Singapore were coming in all the time. They were coming in on submarines and canoes and all sorts of things and this night, and we used to sometimes play cards at night, I used to with the

16:30 Qantas fellows and I think it was Captain Russell Cap. No it wasn't Captain... It was Hussy, Captain Hussy, used to take me to the pictures and this sort of thing. It was always, it was very friendly. They were probably on tenterhooks all the time and much more aware of what was going on than I was. But people were just pouring in. I don't, did I tell you

17:00 when my boss came in and I met him in the driveway?

No, can you tell us about that?

Yes, I can't even think of his name for the moment. I have mentioned it but it's gone out of my mind again. I was going out to report to the police and he was coming in and he just put his arms around me and I felt his whole weight just sag on me and he said,

17:30 and we were all called Mrs Edwards, you know. It was, "Mrs Edwards, I don't know where my wife is," and I said, "She's in the library, Sir George." This is the sort of thing that could happen, you know. And they had, before Singapore they'd both been in Nanking and they had to flee Nanking. What's his name? Anyway, yes, that was the

18:00 sort of thing. Then anyway I went up to the office to see if there was any news of Reg and ran point blank into Jack, who'd got me out of Singapore and he was in the hotel for twenty minutes and he just propped when he saw me. He said, "I thought you were home long ago." I said, "I can't get out, Jack."

18:30 And he said, without hesitation he said, "Be out at the airport at midnight and I'll fly you home, but don't tell anybody." It was just like that. And I had to tell Sir George of course because I mean if I just disappeared I thought people would miss me, and also I was always hoping Reg would come in and so I got a taxi and I was out at the airport, but while

19:00 I was hurriedly packing to get away one of the men from the office came to my door and asked me would I take a letter down, and without thought I put it in my pocket. I didn't even think about it. Well when I got out to the airport this was found on me and I was very lucky to get away. If it hadn't been for the young policeman being on duty that night who looked at me with such hurt eyes, you know,

19:30 but he spoke up for me. They confiscated the letter. I couldn't tell you who it was to. I couldn't even tell you even when he gave it to me I don't think I knew who it was. It's just things you do because you're not thinking and...

So who confiscated the letter?

At the airport, the police. I was very lucky to get away. They wanted to confiscate me. No, I was very lucky to get away.

Which police force was

20:00 **it?**

Well it would be the Netherlands police, Dutch police, but it was this young Dutch policeman who spoke up for me and I got out. But we flew then, I was the only passenger and the plane was just laden down with fuel, and we flew from there straight to Broome

20:30 and when we got to Broome there were two, there were about four or five officers, Qantas officers, whom I knew quite well. There were two captains I remember and a couple of flying officers and they were checking out Broome as an alternate because Darwin was in terrible trouble and it had been bombed,

21:00 and the sea was just ablaze with enemy and our aircraft and one of the flying boats came down there that I knew the captain and he survived. He was injured but he survived. And the people of Broome

- were very kind. I stayed there for a couple of days and they were very kind. They just took me in. I can't
- 21:30 remember where I stayed but in somebody's house, you know. This is not because I was distressed or anything. I just don't remember. And Jack arranged for me to fly home and I think it was from Charleville that I rang Dad, who didn't have a clue. No-one in Australia, or at least except those who were in the line of fire, the people of Australia just hadn't been told.
- 22:00 They thought it was best for them not to know and he didn't have a clue, and but he was thrilled that I was coming home. When I got to Mascot aerodrome there was a limousine came in and it came right up close to where the aeroplane stopped
- 22:30 and we all went to the window to have a look because we were very interested in the fact that the driver of the car was a girl in uniform. We hadn't seen this, so the girls had just gone into uniform and she got out of the car and went to the back, opened the back door and out steps my dear old Dad, you see, and I raced into his arms. But I was pulled off by the police and yes, only because, you know,
- 23:00 contact. And so I went home and I spent that day with the family of course, just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk and with my stepmother and my father. They were my family and they had one little girl. They might have had, no they only had one little girl, Jane. And
- 23:30 I had masses of verbal messages mainly for Hudson Fish but a lot for the wives. You couldn't write anything down and so I spent the next day passing these on by telephone. And then I don't know what the lapse of time was but a short while after that Hudson Fish rang me to tell me that
- 24:00 the plane, the seaplane, the flying boat had been shot up in Broome. The Japanese had come there. See we didn't know that. And then there was the time of the submarines that came in Sydney Harbour. You've heard that story? Yes. A lot of people fled their beautiful shore homes and
- 24:30 got out of the way. But that was the night Dad tried to entice me into his air-raid shelter and I didn't want to get out of my warm bed. I think I went. I hope I went, poor old darling but yes. He was an air-raid warden but yes. He always called me Ducks,
- 25:00 yes.
- So where was your father's home at this stage?**
- In Rosebery. They stayed in Rosebery, yes. He was still working at his job. His daytime job was at the Waterloo Fire Brick Company and yes. He lost his licence. That's right. That's why he was in this car. His licence had been taken away from him because, oh dear.
- 25:30 He came across a policeman who didn't accept his bribe apparently, wonderful man. Never ever in all his life did I ever hear him complain about any, perhaps he wasn't able to confess to any bodily ills but I never heard any. I mean even, he was a very happy drunk when he did get with the boys. I remember one night
- 26:00 we were going into the, I've forgotten the names of the places now where they had these what we called balls in those days but it was the golf club ball and I was going with a new fellow and my brother was taking a girl and Dad was, Dad's arrangement with Beth, my stepmother,
- 26:30 who lived at Manly, was that he would pick her up at the wharf and we had this, at this stage we had this wonderful, lovely housekeeper we called Grundy. Her name was Grundyman and she was a delightful lady who had, I don't quite know what happened to her marriage but she
- 27:00 had obviously been in a very comfortable position and something must have happened. He was a racing man, owned horses, and I don't know how Dad found her but she really was a lovely lady. And Dad was out at the Bonny Doon golf links on this Saturday
- 27:30 afternoon that we were all going to the ball that night and he was late coming home and he'd been on the liquor, you see, and he was such a happy drunk and Grundy and I were worried about Beth standing on the Circular Quay waiting for him, and I was only thinking about my new man who was picking
- 28:00 me up. But we had to dress him and I'll never forget it. When we took his shoes off, took a shoe off his foot would go like that and he'd laugh, you know. He'd laugh, but sadly, and of course he got over this inebriation and it was... He never, ever misbehaved. He was always a perfect gentleman and
- 28:30 during the night, everything went all right. Apparently he picked up Beth and I got picked up and Lorne picked up his lass and Grundy was going to the ball. That's what it was. Grundy was going to the ball too because she was involved with the golf links, and Dad asked Grundy for a dance and they danced and when the dance was over
- 29:00 he just leaned over and kissed her lightly on the cheek and the next morning she came to me and she said, "I'll have to leave, Von," and I said, you know, I was shocked. I said, "Grundy, why?" and she said, "Oh," she said, "your father kissed me last night and I can't have that. I couldn't be seen doing that." Thinking about it right now it may have had something to do with,

- 29:30 she may not have been divorced. I don't know. So we lost our lovely Grundy, yes, very sad. I don't know whether Dad knew why. I certainly didn't tell him. But she left and she was just wonderful for me. It was just like having another mother in the... And after that I can't remember what we did about housekeepers. We'd had
- 30:00 quite a bevy of housekeepers who behaved in various ways. I won't go into that but I will say this that one we had, who wasn't at all a nice person, I don't know how she came to be our housekeeper, how she came to be chosen, but she was the only one that
- 30:30 Dad apparently had to sack and it was about a week later that I found a diamond ring was missing, which had been my mother's engagement ring and I didn't wear it. It was always, I had a glass ornament, kind of a perfume bottle I s'pose, on my dressing table which had a nice sharp peak and I used to put the, I kept the ring on top of it and one day I discovered it was gone
- 31:00 and I was quite sure that Grundy had taken it. Not Grundy, sorry, not Grundy, this other woman had taken it but I never told Dad. Why hurt him?

Mrs Edwards, can you remember how you heard that Singapore had fallen?

Yes. We had radio. We had newspapers, yes,

- 31:30 just like that, radio I suppose.

What were your feelings seeing that your husband?

Where was Reg? No, that's right. I knew he'd got to Surabaya because I'd heard from him, but he then had to go by ship to India and I don't think he'd arrived there but he did eventually and was sent straight to Burma, yes.

- 32:00 Yes, it would have been radio I should think, radio, because, as I said, it happened the day that I was interviewed. See they knew. They knew Singapore had fallen. But Tilly decided, she was a friend and she decided not to tell me.

What was your emotion on hearing that it had fallen?

I was deeply concerned for my brother cause we didn't have any idea. See I was getting,

- 32:30 I was in contact with Reg by mail but there was no news of my brother at all. I don't think I'd heard then about him driving this officer into town to check out the situation and not going back again. I don't think I'd heard that. I just don't remember but my father, it hit my father very badly,
- 33:00 very hard, and yes fortunately he survived. Dad was there when Lorne came back but that was the hardest part of the war. I was more, I suppose really my brother was much, well he was, much more worrying situation than my husband.

- 33:30 God knows what Reg went through, oh dear, yes.

I might just ask you about when you were in Singapore with Reg and watching him work, what kind of equipment did he have to work with?

Just a camera, probably a couple of cameras but they'd belong to the department. They wouldn't be his personal property.

What kind of cameras?

I can't remember.

Do you know roughly what they looked like

- 34:00 **or...?**

Well I've got photographs. Where's the big one?

We'll have a look later.

Yes and he's using, well this is in China I think those photographs were taken with the camera but you'll see it, yes.

Where would he send, do you know where he sent the film to once he'd taken these?

Well when he was in with the British Ministry they would have gone back to headquarters

- 34:30 probably in London. I really don't know, he and yes that's right. The negatives would, the film would, you know, and when he was in the Pacific they used to come down to Lindfield to the office there because I very vividly remember
- 35:00 him telling me, because they used to... I'm going to forget the name of this, stupid of me. I'll have to ask you this off air, I think. They used to send them down in a little piece of equipment that men used when they went to bed and always, cause they

35:30 were airtight and watertight, you know, just was marvellous, and when he went to the Lindfield studio on one occasion when he was down one girl was very huffy and she said to him, "I think it's disgusting that you send those things down," and he just looked at her and he said, "I'm surprised you knew what they were."

36:00 That's right, you know the name. I've just thought of the name.

They sent them down in condoms?

Condoms, yes, sent them down in. They were perfect for the job because they were the right size, or they could become the right size and airtight. Yes, condoms they used to use, oh dear, but yes.

So when he was sent to Burma, who was he sent by?

36:30 **Was that still with the British?**

The British Ministry, yes. All that work up there in that area was British. See he resigned from, he was in Chungking when he resigned because he didn't want to go to Yalta, was a great, would have been a wonderful thing to do

37:00 for Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, but he knew that if he went to Yalta he would then be sent back to England, report back to England and heaven knows when he'd get home and he wanted to see his baby boy, yes. But he was very lucky to be able to resign, really. If he'd been a soldier he wouldn't have been able

37:30 to, but yes, and then they greeted him with open arms of course when he got back to Australia and he saw it right through right to the very end.

He then started working for the Australian...?

Well he'd been, when he came back to Australia the Australian

38:00 film division that he was working for as a photographer, well then he came back and he became studio manager I think. He did quite a few stories afterwards. I remember one terrific one that I went with him up into the gulf. We were away for about three months. That's another story. I mustn't digress. And it was fantastic,

38:30 yes. He filmed all, it was when the CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation] were fishing by scientific means. They knew when the fish came in, you know. It was all very exciting.

So with your husband heading off to Burma, whereabouts were you living at this stage?

Well I was with my father and my stepmother in Rosebery. See they stayed in Rosebery cause Dad was still at the

39:00 office at the Waterloo Fire Brick Company and Beth was apparently agreeable to stay there, and no I lived with them and I had a funny experience. Reg had given me one of those studio portraits where they're kind of looking at you with a deadpan and I had it up on the wall in my bedroom, and

39:30 after Tony was born I used to say, "Goodnight to Daddy," you know, like young mothers do, and the time that he was out of contact on the Burma show I was very concerned. That was the most concerning part of the whole war for me as regards Reg,

40:00 and I went in, took the baby in one night and said, "Say goodnight to Daddy," and the photograph smiled at me and I turned my head away and looked back again and there it was grinning at me. I couldn't believe it, you know, has to be imagination but the next morning, the very next morning his whole story was in the Sydney Morning Herald,

40:30 extraordinary! I told you about going to Miss Curling Friend when I first met Reg. Well during this time that he was in Burma, that he was out of contact, Beth, my stepmother, said to me, "Why don't you go back and see Miss Curling Friend?" cause I was pretty agitated, so for fun I did, not for fun but well I s'pose it was

41:00 in a way, of interest. It was before Tony was born and I think it was still two and sixpence and a cup of tea. We'd drink the tea and then she'd read your teacup. She was spot on. She told me exactly where Reg was. When it came to my brother, whom she referred to as L, L for Lorne, "It's just all dark, just all dark."

41:30 You know, "He's a prisoner of war." And we'd had news by then that he was on the, he was alive. He was on the prisoner of war list. And she talked about Tony my son and how wonderful he was going to be, which he was, always has been, and various things. She was right all the time. She told me exactly where Reg was. She was an extraordinary, extraordinary woman. What are these

42:00 powers?

Tape 6

00:32 **Mrs Edwards, I just wanted to ask you another couple of questions about Singapore.**

Yes, sure.

When the air raids were on, what did you and Reg do for shelter?

Well we felt we were quite safe if we were in our unit, which we usually were, or I usually was. We felt quite safe because, as I said to you, they made no attempt to attack it and probably Reg pointed it out first

01:00 that it was obvious they would overrun Singapore. They would keep it for their headquarters. It was the building. And we used, at least I used the little cubbyhole under the stairs and I can't remember being very agitated about it all

01:30 and probably because of that, that feeling that it would survive. The only time I really got agitated was this time I was out in the taxi and I was more angry than anything else that I had been foiled. I think possibly I may have got a bit worried when I started asking Qantas could they take me out but I don't remember it as being a big thing.

02:00 It just seemed the obvious thing to do, "Can you get me out?" because it was obvious I wasn't going to go on with Reg but he didn't, he wasn't telling his office, you know. I just got out with my baby under my belt and he went on, and I could never have gone with him and there'd be no point in me going to India and waiting for him to come back -

02:30 better for me to be at home.

You had seen or been directly on the front line and been part of the Japanese advance through Malaya, once you got back to Sydney, how had Sydney or Australia changed, were Australians aware of the threat, do you think?

Well I think when the

03:00 Japanese came into the harbour, yes, definitely. There was a lot of talk about it but we didn't ever have planes flying over Australia, to my knowledge. They did up in the north of course and they got a lot closer than we were ever told about but no, we just used to read the newspapers about what was going on.

03:30 And we had restrictions. We had rations. I think things like butter, bacon was rationed. We used to have to have little tickets for those. Course when Reg came home on leave in his uniform he could just walk in and get anything but we just, I think we had our jobs to do

04:00 and we just carried on. I wasn't involved in anything outside my family until the boys got a bit older and then we started a scout group and they used to meet under our house. We used to go on bottle drives and bag drives and brick drives and we eventually built them a clubhouse down at the bottom, no, our first

04:30 scout clubhouse was given to us by one of the managers of one of the companies on Botany Road, a very well known company whose name I've forgotten for the moment. Brian Massey Green, who was a father of one of the scouts, and they gave us the men's restroom.

05:00 They probably built a new one and they gave them the room where the men used to, the staff used to have their lunch. So they cut it in halves and brought it all the way up from Alexandria right up the Pacific Highway, down Kissing Point Road and it became our scout hall for a while until we built them another one, yes, things like this. We were very busy with the kids and I got very involved

05:30 in family life, and also we had a good bunch of friends and we did a lot of entertaining, mostly barbecuing. We had a lot of, we had chickens and ducks, a gander that played a very large part in our family life. She used to take the chickens for a walk down Kissing Point Road, which would upset the cars coming up very much. I'm digressing again.

That's okay.

06:00 **I just wanted to confirm when you had your first child had you heard from Reg at that stage?**

Yes. He was in Chungking by then. We were in constant touch. Well, you know, as constant as possible. But I was very lucky to have Tony because I, don't know whether I should say this,

06:30 but I had what was called a placenta previa, which meant all the afterbirth came away first and this was about a month before he was expected and I had booked into a more or less local little hospital. I was going to have my baby with ribbons in my hair and this sort of thing but instead of that I was told, you know, "Forget about the baby,"

07:00 and was shot out to Paddington Hospital by ambulance, where nobody wanted me cause they were so

busy, and I can remember a little old lady nurse getting my particulars, you know, they weren't expecting me, and I can remember her saying, "And where's your husband, dear?" "In China."

07:30 A bit of silence and she said, "We'll come back to that question," and about five minutes later she'd throw it in again, "Oh I forgot to ask you, where's your husband, dear?" "In China." Nobody was in China except Reg, you know, and...

So she didn't believe you?

Not really. She thought, no she didn't really I suppose or she thought I was wandering or something

08:00 because I was really very ill but unaware that I was ill. I felt totally empty. I can remember it all quite vividly but the next morning, I must have slept a long time for when I woke up I heard someone on the telephone saying, "Send all those students up," you see. And didn't connect it with myself at

08:30 all but I was surrounded by young students. I think they were all young men, actually, but when I woke up about three o'clock in the afternoon there was no-one in the room I was in except for one woman who was waiting to have her baby, and she saw I was

09:00 awake and she came over and spoke to me. She said, "How are you feeling?" and I said, "I'm okay." And we talked a little bit and then she said to me, "Aren't you going to ask about your baby?" and I said, "Have I got a baby?" you know. Oh dear, and I had a baby but I didn't see him. And my stepmother Beth came over to see me that afternoon,

09:30 it was a Saturday and had to get about three trams I think, change about three times, and when she got to the hospital they wouldn't let her in. They wouldn't let her see me, just wouldn't let her see me cause she wasn't my mother, dear girl. Anyhow, they probably thought she was putting on an act because she was so much younger than they would have expected, so she went back home again and then Dad came in and I can remember

10:00 him saying, "Are you all right, Ducks? Are you all right?" and I said, "I'm hungry." I hadn't had anything to eat. No-one had come near me. And he went down to the kitchen and rustled up a couple of boiled eggs for me. But I didn't see my baby for four or five days but I had masses... I was able to feed not only my baby but about three or four other babies, until one morning,

10:30 no, a couple of mornings after he was born that I couldn't get any information about him. I'd ask nurses and they'd say, "I'll find out," and I'd never see them again. And then one morning I was on a long verandah, right down the end of it, and a woman came to the door right up there and she called out, "Which is Mrs Edwards?" and I said, "I am," and she said, "Yours is the first baby we've saved that way

11:00 in over two and half years. We're very proud of you," and off she went - never saw her again. That was what it was like in those days. I mean it's, in its way it's just as bad now cause they're shifting the girls out after a day. I was in hospital for three weeks. And not for myself but I don't think, I think I was all right, can't remember but after

11:30 about four or five days suddenly a scraggy looking nurse, I can just see her, spectacles on the end of her nose and her hair everywhere, she came again to the other end of the room with the baby in her arms and she said, "Who's Mrs Edwards?" and I said, "I am." "Oh, got a baby for you," she said. Well I just burst into tears. What else would you do? But he really came good. He really fought.

12:00 He fought his way out and he just kept fighting. He was wonderful and been a very satisfactory son. I was very lucky.

How had they managed to save him in this remarkable way?

I wasn't there. I was asleep. Apparently, I really don't know, just perhaps it happens quite a lot. I don't know but this is what she said and I give all the credit to the baby.

12:30 I think he was fighting to come out cause he'd progressed magnificently, but of course we couldn't send a cable to Reg saying what a terrible time I had, so my stepmother and I concocted this cable. I had no idea what size the baby was. They didn't tell me

13:00 and I hadn't seen him when I sent this cable and we'd sent it, "Beautiful..." I think we gave him seven pounds or something. We thought that was a fair average weight, "Beautiful seven pound baby son, looks just like you." And I hadn't seen him, yes. However, he thrived, survived and thrived and has been very satisfactory ever since, very

13:30 satisfactory. They all are in their different ways. But no, it's extraordinary going through all this stuff that I haven't talked, shouldn't talk should I?

Mrs Edwards, can you, I think we touched on it earlier but can you tell me about when you first heard from Reg when you were back in Sydney

14:00 **and what he told you?**

No, I don't think I can. I think he just sent me a cable saying he'd arrived at the Desarnders. No, I really

have, I really can't remember

- 14:30 but I got a lot of letters and messages downed by flight crews, not just Qantas but KLM too. They were wonderful and fellows coming in who had been up there and had various ways of getting out. They kept in touch with me. My boss who had Qantas,
- 15:00 one of my bosses, started ringing me up and taking me to lunch and I was getting bigger and bigger and bigger. It was winter time and I had this big coat that buttoned all the way down the front and the last time Ivan rang Beth said to him, "I'm afraid she's in hospital. She's just had a baby." He was totally surprised. He didn't realise I was pregnant,
- 15:30 not having any children of his own. But no, Qantas was very kind and very good and always there offering help if I needed it. But we had, Reg and I had amazingly good contact considering where he was. It was quite amazing.

So what happened to him after Burma and once Burma had fallen?

Well he

- 16:00 walked back to India. He walked. He got little short lifts occasionally but he actually walked seventeen days back to India. And his friend Wally, they'd separated and gone different ways, was in hospital when they got back. But Reg was apparently all right although he had a bad time halfway back. He passed out on
- 16:30 an ant bed, which must have been dreadful, but he survived. He was very strong, very wiry type, strong, you know. And yes, so he had a terrific, really dreadful journey back to India on foot but he made it
- 17:00 and I've got masses of photographs that he took, mostly personal ones, you know, not war ones because all that stuff went back to the ministry. But I've got boxes of photographs out there I haven't even got into yet. But it's, no, it's extraordinary
- 17:30 going back over it after all these years. It's very nice. Nice isn't the word, but it's good to have it all come out again, I think. As I said, I have done a couple of talks and I did one here last week that was that one. One of my friends, an ex correspondent, war correspondent, typed it up
- 18:00 for me and he's put on the front 'This is Your Life' but that was just his way of doing it, which was very nice. But I found when I gave the talk here last week I had to read it. I've never done that before. I'd always been able to say it but I knew, I just, like now, words just stop me, stop you in your tracks, names, and of course in this story
- 18:30 I mentioned quite a lot of prices of things and bits of news about the war and the latter part of the war, or war as Reg was experiencing it as it was happening, when it turned and it started to come our way but I can't remember that. I'd have to look in the book, yes.

What happened to Reg

19:00 after he got to India?

Well he reported to his office, which was in Delhi, and was sent to Burma. And this is where he met up with his old friend Wally and they carried on there and, as I say, they used to process the films at night in the heat, stark naked, and then they separated and

- 19:30 Wally, they went different ways. And I think I was saying that Wally handed over all the money and Galvin said, "You bloody fool, Wally." But after the war was over we saw a lot of Wally. Although he was in a top job with Holdens in Melbourne, he used to come up to Sydney quite a bit and we saw quite a lot of Wally. He's got
- 20:00 two very clever sons, Chris Wallace Crabb who's a poet and Robin Wallace Crabb who's an artist and they're very, very clever and lovely, lovely young men. They first came to us when they were, they'd just finished university and they came to us and stayed with us in Turrumurra.

How did you receive

20:30 news that your brother had been taken prisoner of war?

And that he was alive, don't think I can remember. It's probably written there but I don't think I can remember how that happened. Perhaps they may have

- 21:00 contacted his fiancée, who was in the women's air force. I just, I'm sorry I can't remember. I don't think it was in the newspapers. No, it wasn't in the newspapers. No I can't remember I'm sorry.

That's okay. You mentioned that once you were back in

- 21:30 **Sydney, you know, rationing was in place, what was it like to have a baby during the war and dealing with rationing?**

Well so many of my friends had babies and we used to, a lot of them used to come and spend a night at my place and bring their babies and we'd kind of sit on the floor while the babies did strange things with each other. Had a very big sunroom at Turrumurra which was wonderful

22:00 for kids, and of course as they got older there was always the lovely walks down across the creek and over through the bush. The boys, so different now, the boys used to be able to go out in holidays, school holidays, about eight o'clock in the morning and they wouldn't come back till three or four o'clock in the afternoon and it never worried me. I was a bit worried when I found the swimming

22:30 hole where they'd learnt to swim. It gave me a shock. But no, they used to go out. They had a batch of boy friends in the street and they all used to go out. I remember three of them I think coming in surprising me. The bathroom was near the back door and the back steps and I used to love having a long

23:00 hot bath. I'd stay in the bath for ages and I had a cat that used to like to sit on the edge of the bath and dip his tail in the water and we used to have, it was just one of those little times that you enjoy being on your own. And I remember coming out of the bathroom to be met by three boys standing at the back door

23:30 looking for my boys, eyes wide open, you know. I just grabbed a towel and said, "The boys are in the bush." I won't tell you what they told my sons! You can imagine.

So once you'd had your first child did you go back to your family home?

No, I stayed at Turrumurra and I had quite a traumatic time because

24:00 the people who owned it, I was renting it you remember, the husband was badly wounded in Crete and had been invalided back home. He was a captain I think and sadly, oh this was when, when was this? Don't know whether it was towards the end of the war or

24:30 yes, was during the war anyhow. Sadly their only child, a son who was in the air force, was killed and I don't know what sort of a relationship the husband and wife had beforehand but she was living alone in the house and it was through a friend who was connected to her in some way, I think her husband's cousin or something

25:00 asked her, I was looking for somewhere to live you see and she asked her would she let the house to me. I think she must have been talking about letting it. Anyhow she agreed to, on condition that she could come and work in her garden on Wednesday afternoons. She was working for the local chemist. Beautiful garden, absolutely beautiful garden

25:30 and a huge garden, so she used to do this and she was a very sad little woman. She was so sad that she worried me. I couldn't make a friend of her. I used to offer her a cup of tea but she never had it. I think she carried one with her and had it down in the garden. But her husband, they were estranged by this time, and her

26:00 husband apparently heard, he might have known that she was working at the chemist shop and kind of, you know, connecting it with the house they lived in, he started coming to the house looking for her and he'd suddenly appear at the back door, frighten the life out of me and all the time his eyes were looking around to see if she was in the house, and

26:30 so if I ever saw him coming or had any indication that he was coming I'd quickly shut all the doors and shut myself in my bedroom. He never touched me or anything like that but he, it was just a frightening experience. And then he started standing in the garden watching the house, thinking that I wouldn't be able to see him I s'pose because there were lots of trees

27:00 and went down an incline like this and a creek and then up the other side, and I used to look out the kitchen window and there he'd be standing. Callow would be standing up, right up the backyard. And of course I'd get down like this and sneak back to bed, until one weekend Reg's friend Merv Callow

27:30 came back from the war and he was horrified to find that my radio wasn't working, so he and his wife Mary came up to spend the weekend. They lived in Beverley Hill. It was Callow's brother, that's right. That's how I got the house. It was Callow's brother who owned it and they came up to spend the weekend,

28:00 and it wasn't till the Monday I think it was that my next door neighbour, who was quite a long way away because there was a block that was all garden and then her house, told me that he'd stood in this part of the garden all night watching the house. I don't know whether he knew his brother was there or what. I just don't know but

28:30 he stood there until three or four o'clock in the morning and then turned around and went away. But Mr Grey, the man, my neighbour, sat at his window all night waiting for him in case he made a move, so I was very well protected. I just hadn't known anything about that.

How were you receiving money at this stage?

Well, let me

29:00 think. I was getting it coming into the bank. I think Reg must have had his money directed to my bank account, certainly when I was in Rosebery when I was with my father and you see we didn't go to live in Turrumurra until he'd come back from the British Ministry and was now with the Australian Department of Information

29:30 and he was coming home about every three months or so. I just don't remember but the money was probably being paid into the bank up there.

Was Reg well paid for the work he did?

Well we were happy. I don't remember. In Singapore we were lavishly paid, and not only lavishly paid but paid in cash and we used to get,

30:00 once a month, we used to get this huge amount of cash which we'd throw into the middle of the bed and play cards for. Got an awful lot of money, or we thought it was a lot of money at that stage.

Were they British pounds?

I think it'd have been Malayan money, be paid in Malaya. No, it would be Malayan money, yes,

30:30 Malayan money.

Do you remember the arrival of American troops in Sydney?

Very well. Fortunately I was tied up with having a baby, so that I wasn't involved in the American side of things but they came in before, did they come in before I met Reg? No, they couldn't have. It was our soldiers. I used to work

31:00 at the railway canteen on Monday nights, just cups of tea and drinks for soldiers. It was always packed out and I always used to go into Qantas next morning wearing dark glasses, not that I ever went out with any of them but it was just one of those things and until my boss, one of my bosses

31:30 asked me would I please stop going to the canteen on Monday night. He was fully aware of what was making me so tired, so black eyed. But what was that question you asked me about that?

I was just asking you about what you remember about how Sydney changed when the American troops arrived?

Yes, well that of course would be after I came home, yes, and I can remember a couple of nights

32:00 Dad brought home several American servicemen, and Beth, for dinner. I can't remember anything in particular about them. I wasn't going to parties at that stage, which, as I said to you, was probably a very good thing but...

What sort of impression do you think the American troops had on Sydney girls?

32:30 Sadly their clothes and they were always very smartly dressed. They always had plenty of money and they made a very big impression on girls with the result, as you probably know, that many, many, many were married, married them quickly and went to America, often to find that the situation was quite

33:00 different. Reg's impression of the American servicemen was that they were dirty. They didn't look after themselves on the job. They were grubby in the camps but they were very smartly dressed and had this American accent which appealed to a lot of girls and

33:30 yes, we lost a lot of girls and it's interesting that during the Vietnam War... I'm digressing again. Is that okay?

That's okay.

During the Vietnam War one Saturday night, Tony was about twenty-one or so I think because the boys were all driving and on this Saturday night they were all out. We had three cars

34:00 and they were all out. One of them had my car and another one had Reg's car and the third one has his own, of course, and I had a ring from the city, from a fellow who introduced himself as down from Malaya, a friend of my brother's. I've forgotten his name for the moment. And

34:30 he said he had a bottle of brandy. I was a brandy drinker. I still am. He had a bottle of brandy for me and a bottle of whisky I think for Reg from my brother and could we come into town and have a drink with them? I think it was after dinner time or something. I just can't remember. I know that he didn't invite us for dinner, so it was just to

35:00 go in and have a drink. Well I mean the suggestion absolutely appalled me. I couldn't have imagined anything worse than - he was staying at Kings Cross - couldn't imagine anything worse than going to Kings Cross on a Saturday night, although I was very appreciative of the call. But I was, after mentioning it to Reg, I was able to tell him we had no transport,

- 35:30 that the boys were all out with the cars but I said, "Where are you staying?" and he said, I've forgotten, it's on the mountains. It used to be a lovely hotel that I'd been to several times but it became an air force base and I've just forgotten the name of it for the moment
- 36:00 and he was there, that he'd flown in that morning and he was staying there and I immediately thought, "He must be a pilot. He must have flown in, a pilot," so I said to him, "Look," after again conferring with Reg, "what about if we come up tomorrow and pick you up, bring you back here for lunch?"
- 36:30 And he said, "That sounds wonderful, but," he said, "I have a friend with me." And I said, "That's okay. If you'd like to come we'd love to have him." So that was all arranged and so having organised the lunch, I mean I'm amazed at how clever I was, all these people we used to entertain and I could run up lunch for
- 37:00 seven or so and then go off up the mountains to pick up these two young men and we drove up. All the boys were home I remember and we drove up and, I wish I could remember the name of that place. It's just on the fringe of the mountains.
- The Hydro Majestic?**
- No before, no it wasn't a hotel. No, it wasn't the Hydro. I knew the Hydro very well but it was before you get to
- 37:30 the Hydro. Anyway it'll probably come to me. And of course Reg immediately cornered Rob in, who was my brother's friend, and talked to him, which meant that I was talking to this very tall young American he turned out to be. He was only about twenty-five I think and I said, made the usual
- 38:00 inane comments and I said to him, "Have you been in Australia before?" and he said, "No." "Do you have friends in Australia?" Well he said, "I do have a friend but I don't know where she lives, and," he said, "I'd like to contact her but I don't know where she lives," and he told me her name, which once again alludes me, but it was a very well known name of a very wealthy
- 38:30 property family and I laughed, you know, I couldn't help it. I laughed. I said, "Well actually I do know the name but I'm afraid I can't get you in touch with this young woman." So that was forgotten and they came home. This was on the Sunday, that's right. They came home. We had lunch and the boys just peppered them with questions. They were just fascinated by these two fellows. And we were due up at Mount Cola, which
- 39:00 wasn't far from Turramurra, to very close friend's whose boy, her son, had been caught up in the draft and was going to Vietnam, and so I rang Fordie and Bill and told them we had two friends and I said, "One of them, an American, has just come back from Vietnam," and they of course,
- 39:30 they're lovely, lovely people, said straight away, "Bring them up." So we went up and I think Larry was able to talk to their boy quite a lot about what had happened in Vietnam. He wasn't a soldier. He was, forgotten what they called them but they used to put things on the base of ships to blow them up.
- 40:00 I've forgotten what they called them. Anyhow that was very successful and we then took them down to the Seven Two Nine Club, which was a, three names, do you know them? Seven, Channel Seven, Channel Two and Channel Nine at North Sydney. We used to, we had belonged there for a long time. It was very nice, very pleasant club. We took them down there for dinner
- 40:30 and of course asked them would they like to stay the night, which they did of course, and Reg and the boys were all cleared out first thing in the morning and I drove them back up to their, no, that's right. Monday morning I said to them, "Is there anything you'd like to do before you go back?" and Larry said, "I'd really like some civilian clothes." He said, "I'm going down to Melbourne
- 41:00 and I'm a bit sick of the uniform. I'd like to get out of this uniform." So Farmers was operating at Pymble at that stage and I took him down to Farmers. I certainly wasn't going to take him into the city, took them down to Farmers. Well if you could have seen how the men, I think of them as
- 41:30 floor walkers but I suppose they were in charge of their section, they just, I thought they made absolute fools of themselves over Larry because Larry was American and Americans had come to save us, you know, and the other young man and I had a cup of coffee while Larry was feted and...

Tape 7

- 00:32 **Mrs Edwards, I just might ask you if you could tell me a bit about your husband's journey through Burma to India, what do you know of what he went through during that trip?**
- I could show you in the photographs. I've got masses of photographs but he walked, carrying most of his gear I think. I don't know whether he had
- 01:00 bearers with him but occasionally he'd pick up a bit of transport somewhere into the next bit, but the

main thing was walking. He was ill as I said to you at one stage unfortunately on an ant bed but I don't think

01:30 I can really tell you much about it. Every minute of it would be recorded in his diaries but I don't think he went into any details with me. Most of it is explained in photographs I got back. Natives used to go to sleep on the rails of ships. You'd see them

02:00 with their feet up one end and their arms and they'd be sound asleep on the rail of a ship. But I don't think I can tell you anything in particular about that trip except that it was very hard, and the excitement of knowing he'd survived it was just wonderful. I don't think I can tell you anything about that.

02:30 He first of all got a car. He thought he was going to get out by car because the fellow had abandoned this car and because something had gone wrong with it and Reg got it into shape but it only lasted about twenty miles or something and he had to leave it there. No, I really can't tell you anything except

03:00 that it was very, very hard, very hard indeed.

When you came back to Australia and after the fall of Singapore, how long was it before you saw Reg?

Two and half years, just a moment till I work out how old Tony was. I was just pregnant and so we take the nine months, yes, about

03:30 over two years, probably close to two and a half years.

So had you expected it to be that long when you left Singapore?

Didn't have any idea what was going to happen and didn't try and work it out, just didn't know, had no idea. Sounds strange to say that now but no, I didn't try to work it out. It all happened so hurriedly my

04:00 getting out. No I just had no idea. There were times when I got very hungry for him. As I say, he gave me this book and asked me to keep it for him and I did. That's how I can produce all this stuff that I've talked about and I poured out quite a lot of my frustration

04:30 in that, which he read when he came back.

So what, sorry again, what book was that that he gave you to look after?

It was just an ordinary exercise book to, I remember just in the top he'd written, "Keep it for me, darling," and I think he put the date on it and I did and the minute he got home I stopped writing. I didn't write anything about his being in

05:00 the Pacific, didn't mention it. I just stopped. I started off writing it in pencil cause I don't think we had biros, pretty sure we didn't have biros. I can remember when the boys went to school one of the boys and I think it was Tim, used to refer to one of his teachers as 'Biro' and I said to him one day, "Why do you call him Biro?" and he said, "Because his head comes to a bald point."

05:30 But I don't... And the beginnings of the book the pencil has faded. I have to really try and work it out and I've written over it in ink on some of them but a lot of the words I just can't make out at all. But I used to tell him what I, in the book I would tell him what I read in the papers and so on.

06:00 But yes, we had very long and good correspondence. We just kept writing the whole time and, as I say, the extraordinary thing was none of my letters to him were ever lost and he used to laugh. He'd say, or so-and-so would say to me, "Did you get my letter, Reg?" and he'd say, "No."

06:30 "That's a pity. I wrote to you," the fellows of course, yes, funny but...

So that the two years that you were in Australia, where was he? He went from Singapore and where did he go from there?

Well he got down to the hotel that I had just left in Surabaya. He had a most arduous trip down in a little native boat

07:00 and having to hide under, beside the shore, under the trees when they heard Japanese planes overhead. And he was very sick when he got to Surabaya. And I've forgotten how soon after I left that he got there, but of course as soon as he got there there were masses of people only too happy to tell him I was okay, that I'd got away and I'd be home by now,

07:30 which of course, well I was I s'pose eventually, yes. There was a funny incident at, where was it? One of the places we stopped in Australia and it must have been where we stopped the night on the way home because

08:00 that would be the only place where we'd get out of the plane, and all the bags of passengers were put under the wings and when they started the engines up on the plane all the bags were just thrown away and burst open and all the contents all came out, not our bags, but passengers' bags.

08:30 I remember watching four bottles of whisky tumble across the tarmac and none of them broke. But we were picking up things like underclothes and socks and all sorts of things and digging some of them out of the dirt. It was very dry like it is now.

So once he got to Surabaya, where did he go from there?

Well he stayed there till he was feeling better and then he

09:00 went by sea up to India to where the office was. I don't know whether they all went together. They probably did because there were a mass of them in the Desarnders by that time. And Delhi was headquarters and it was from Delhi that he was sent to Burma, got his orders to go to Burma, was where he met Wally and,

09:30 as I say, he had to walk out of Burma ahead of the Japanese and it was after that that he was sent to Chungking, so apparently they didn't go to, the Japanese didn't go to China because there was no talk of Japanese in China at all and he was in Chungking I don't know how long. I've forgotten.

10:00 I don't think I've ever worked it out how long he was there but that's where he was when Tony was born and he was able to get out I think about six months later and come home. Came home by boat with masses of gifts for relatives of servicemen, so he had to borrow a

10:30 huge box, so much so that when he got to Perth I suppose they would have stopped, they didn't make any attempt, customs didn't make any attempt to go through them, all these little parcels but he brought me back some lovely stuff and the extraordinary thing was, although Singapore fell in February, on the 15th of February, it was two months after that, some time in April,

11:00 all our luggage arrived by sea from Singapore, didn't lose anything, amazing, absolutely amazing, don't know how it happened but it happened. Course the unit we were living in was all furnished and beautifully furnished and none of that had anything to do with us but it's a strange thing. Reg had a collection

11:30 of books that he had collected very carefully and he took them with him and a lot of the correspondence coming in. They would often say to him, "Reg, mind if I read this?" and pull it out. Reg said, "You can stay here and read it. You're not taking it out of the building." Now the book that was given to me by Qantas when I left and which I was very proud of, stupidly

12:00 loaned it to someone, never got it back. Extraordinary, isn't it? Should have learnt my lesson from my careful husband. I think he'd lived in, he used to live in a boarding house at Darling Point when I met him, called Meta Com I think it was called, quite a well known one, and he had a little yacht moored there and

12:30 everything had to be in its place. Oh dear, he was so tidy but I beat it out of him. Gosh, funny isn't it?

What do you remember of that reunion when he managed to get home?

He rang me from Melbourne.

13:00 I don't know whether I've said this before but he rang me from Melbourne. He was on the ship and I was so excited I said, "You'll be home tomorrow then?" He said, "Oh no, it'll take the ship five days to come around the coast," and I said, "Ooh." Anyhow he went back to the ship and it was on fire, so he rang me back. He said, "I'll be home tomorrow by train,"

13:30 and he came in at Central Station and I met him there. I left Tony at home with Beth and I met him there and we went up to, gosh, a hotel opposite, the Australia. I used to go to the Australia a lot in the early, before I met Reg actually, but there was a hotel and I've forgotten the name of it now,

14:00 just somewhere there in Pitt Street. It was only about nine o'clock in the morning and we went up into the lounge and Reg sat with his arm right around my shoulders you see and there was a girl, a young woman on the floor who was obviously in charge of the, what do you call it?

Maitre de?

14:30 No, she was just, was just a drinking lounge and there were no, we were the only ones sitting there but she was talking to two American servicemen and we were sitting there talking and I can't remember any kissing. I mean it would have been on the station but we were just sitting very close together with his arm around me and looking into each other's faces and talking as one does

15:00 and after a while this young woman came over and she said, "Excuse me, sir. It's not very nice you sitting there with your arm around the young lady's shoulders." Reg looked at her, he said, "This is no young lady. This is my wife." That's true. "This is no young lady." I thought, "Oh well." Funny isn't it, so funny, yeah.

15:30 **Did he talk to you much about what he'd been through in those couple of years?**

What, afterwards or...?

When he came home did he talk much about his work?

I think so, yes. I think so but he used to in his

- 16:00 letters he was a prolific writer and he typed everything, and anything outside the war situation he always told me but no, we used to talk a lot. We had wonderful friends, mostly after the war as time went on, and friends, we all got older, you know. A lot of our, at least four
- 16:30 of our friends became judges in Sydney. They'd been lawyers and my closest male friend right through my years and through our marriage was Max Glashene, who was a solicitor, and he had a very bad impediment and when we moved to
- 17:00 Turramurra they were living down... He was married. We were married around about the same time and they were living down here somewhere I think and when I said to him, "When are you coming up to Turramurra?" There was hesitation for a long time. He said, "That's the other end of the world." But he used to ring up and talk and he couldn't get the words out
- 17:30 for a minute and I'd say, "Hello Max," you know, if there was a silence. He was a lovely guy and then he rang me one day and he said, "We're moving." I said, "Are you? Where are you going?" He said, "You won't believe it. Turramurra." So we were able to carry on that wonderful friendship until he died. He died just before Reg did, sadly.

So when Reg came home that's when you moved to Turramurra, is that right?

Yes. No,

- 18:00 we, I don't know. I don't think we stayed long with Beth and Dad. That's right. Edna, who was my brother's fiancée, Edna's mother ran a block of units, I s'pose it was in the middle of Kings Cross, and she offered us
- 18:30 a unit. I don't remember much about it. I don't think we were there very long in the block. Well it was a wonderful opportunity except that Tony was a bit of a crier who used to, he'd sleep madly all night and do all the right things in the morning but his main contribution was he cried all the afternoon and there were a lot of
- 19:00 what would you call them, not part-time workers, but workers who worked at odd times, living in this place, and Mrs Turnbull spoke to me about, you know, Tony was... Her other tenants were being concerned about little Tony's crying and it was then talking to this friend Mary Callow that she
- 19:30 did this business of contacting her sister-in-law, whom she hadn't spoken to for many years, and asking her would she consider letting us have the house. And it was at this time, I remember now, it was at this time that Reg went down with malaria. It was the only time he ever had it
- 20:00 but he had it very badly and his face was like a skull and it was in the unit at Kings Cross that this happened, and I took his temperature and never having taken anybody's temperature before I wasn't as excited at how high it was until, as I should have been, but there was a nurse living in the house and
- 20:30 she was absolutely horrified but anyhow, but Reg couldn't get into any hospital. They couldn't, nobody would take him.

Why was that?

Something to do with him, he wasn't attached to, no. When was this? This is when he came back, wasn't it? We had paid up all our hospital

- 21:00 fees the whole time. I think it was a shilling a week I think. Reg's secretary had looked after this for us from Film Craft and it had something to do with, I think it was because he didn't have a doctor of his own and I know that we couldn't find a doctor who would look after him, but he survived. But when we moved to Turramurra
- 21:30 he went in the removalist truck and he was quite sick for a while but he recovered and he never had malaria again, which was quite wonderful. He'd picked it up in Australia up in Queensland somewhere up there and he never had it again.

So once you moved to Turramurra that's when he started work with the Australian Department of Information?

Yes.

- 22:00 I don't know, yes, it would have been. I don't think he'd got involved, you know, been able to get into the, been accepted I mean beforehand. I think that probably was after that.

And what was his role there for the rest of the war?

Exactly the same as it had been, war photographer, yes.

22:30 He had quite a lot of medals and things, you know. There's a letter there from MacArthur thanking him for his good work, etc., etc., but...

What did he think of MacArthur?

Well

23:00 I don't, sounds as if we're putting everybody down but he wasn't very keen about the Americans. I remember he once when, I've forgotten where he was. Where was he? Point of the story really. No, I can't tell you the story because I can't tell you where he, can't remember where he was

23:30 but an American plane was taking quite a few correspondents up to a forward place and after they'd been going for some time the fellow who was sitting next to Reg near the window said to him, "I think the sun should be on the other side of the plane," and Reg leaned

24:00 over and had a look and he said, "I think you're right." And not long after that they landed and the door was opened and they were greeted by the same big black servicemen who'd seen them off and he said, "What you all doing back here?" and then the name of the place

24:30 and I've forgotten it. It's terrible but it's quite a story I thought. Another story was that I had a friend who was a brother of a very good friend of mine and he had been in the navy. He came out with

25:00 very full honours, but he'd gone in as a young cadet and during Singapore days he would have only been about twenty. He was a bit younger than I was, so he'd have only been about twenty-one, twenty-two and they were near, no they weren't near Singapore. Yes they were. They were near Singapore when, the

25:30 story's a bit hard to tell. Let me start again. I met a man at a house where I'd been invited for dinner and my hostess was a bit, she felt as if she needed a bit of support. She had her partner

26:00 and she knew that the lady, the wife of this other couple, would buttonhole her in the kitchen and she needed someone to kind of keep the conversation flowing. But when I met this man I found him very interesting. He was an Englishman who had come out with his, I don't know, I think he came out with his wife

26:30 to Australia to live here and had been in the navy and he told me a story. We had a lot of talk about Singapore because he'd been in Singapore but in his ship when things blew up, and he was blown out of his ship and was in the water when he was picked up by just a small craft

27:00 but later, no, he was picked up by a ship and dropped off in an island which he didn't tell me the name of but it was just a little more or less deserted island where there were only a few other people waiting there, waiting for some help to get them off, you see. But this ship that dropped him off said, "There'll be a ship along, just

27:30 wait. Someone will come along but I can't take you any further." Anyhow after a couple of days, he was telling me this story and he said, "All of a sudden around the corner comes the little Hobart and we were picked up and looked after in sickbay and dropped off in Colombo." Well I was very excited because my friend

28:00 I was, the naval man, had been in the Hobart. That had been his ship and I was still very much in contact with him and I said to this fellow, you know, talked to him about, I can't remember his name now, isn't it dreadful. Talked about him and he was very excited about it. But we didn't say, "I'll put

28:30 you in touch with him," or anything like that but I couldn't wait to get home and ring, Darryl, that's his name, Darryl Bertram, very nice man, and I rang Darryl and told him and he was very, very thrilled about it. And a couple of days went by. We didn't make any arrangements to get them together but I knew that they would get together in some way and

29:00 then Darryl had a date with some of his family which he didn't turn up for and I spoke to his sister about it, who was a good friend of mine, and she said, "Well no, I haven't seen Darryl for a couple of days." And then the next day she rang me and Darryl had been found collapsed in his unit. There was water coming out from under his

29:30 door and they rang Nita cause they thought she'd have a key, which she did, and she went over and Darryl had collapsed and he was put into hospital. So I didn't ring this man. I wrote him a letter and told him about it, didn't ask him to do anything but just told him. Well he couldn't wait to get out there. He was out there like a shot at the hospital

30:00 but Darryl was very sick and they really weren't able to have the relationship that they hoped to. He went and saw him a couple more times but Darryl died, yes, but it's strange, you know. I'm a talker as you may have noticed and I find that it pays such dividends, it really does, and I've been trying to

30:30 get some of the ladies here to tell their story, not their life story but little incidents but I don't know. It's very rarely that they agree to. Nancy Bird told her story to you people a couple of weeks ago, I understand, yes. She's an interesting girl, isn't she, fascinating.

What do you remember of when the war finished, when you heard about the end of the war?

31:00 Well great excitement of course but all we wanted was for my brother to come home. I didn't go into any of the celebrations cause we were living up in, you know, it was almost country in those days, Turramurra. I don't remember much about it except that we were so thrilled and what it meant to us was that perhaps Lorne would come home, which he did.

Was Reg at home with you when the war finished?

31:30 I honestly can't remember. I shouldn't think so. I really don't know. I think he'd have been still in the Pacific but I really don't know. I can't remember. It wasn't a great big amazing celebration

32:00 of being together in my life. I obviously would have been thrilled to bits but I really can't remember. I'm sorry about that. I should. I think my only thought was, "Please let Lorne come home. Let him be well."

How long did it take for him to come home?

Some months, about three months I think, two months perhaps, two to three months, yes

Had you had

32:30 **any news from him at all during that time?**

Not directly no, not directly. I got news that he had been captured, that he was alive, he was a prisoner of war and from this same source I heard how it was that he was captured. No, I don't really remember. I can remember all the excitement on the radio and in the

33:00 papers and the fellow down, I met that fellow. Remember that story they show of the fellow dancing in the street, yeah. He became a, what did he become? I don't think he became a judge but he was certainly a big time, not a solicitor. What's the next one up?

Barrister?

Barrister, yes. He became a barrister, yes. I didn't know till quite a long time afterwards that it was

33:30 him but he admitted it actually, yes. He admitted it. It's amazing.

Having lived through the attack on Singapore and the evacuation, looking back now, what does it mean to you to having experienced such a historical momentous occasion, what does it mean in your life to have experienced that?

Well it's

34:00 a very, it provided a most interesting part of my life for me and I survived it and my loved ones survived it but it looks very much as if it's all going to happen again and this saddens me very much. I think our Prime Minister is doing a very good job and I heartily

34:30 support him in whatever he thinks cause he's had such an amazing practically life long history of being in government. I don't care for Bush at all. I think he's just a dummy. I really do. I heard this morning, I don't know why I heard it but when I first woke up they were

35:00 talking about, "He never reads." He doesn't read! Can you imagine a man not reading anything? Doesn't make sense to me. But no, I think his father was a very good president but I think his father is behind him all the time telling him what to do. I shouldn't say that, should I? And I'm not sure about the English Prime Minister, just not sure. Can't make up my

35:30 mind about him.

What do you think Australia learnt or how do you think Australia changed from its involvement in the Second World War?

We had a lot of migrants coming out to Australia and it was a very good thing for them and for us. It saddens me to think of how long so many of those men lived here without

36:00 their wives but I think that was a wonderful thing and they were very good men and lots of good things happened. Another friend of ours was responsible for the Adaminaby dam, dead of course, and no I think it was good. But I think mostly

36:30 as a young mother I was too wrapped up in my own life to think too much about it except that, "Thank God that's over. Let's get on with things." But when the Vietnam War came about my youngest son, Martin, was in the group who could have been called

37:00 up and I said to him, "Martin, you're working and you're at university at night. You could get out of it." And he said, "Mum, if I'm called up, I'll go." I was petrified. And a friend and I, we entered all the marches. We marched all over Sydney in protest against the Vietnam War and fortunately Martin wasn't picked up but he could have been, and

- 37:30 he's gone on to do wonderful things and have a lovely family. And I think war changes people, not necessarily people like Reg who are in a different section of the war. They saw all the suffering but they could move out of it and go onto something else. But I think the soldiers, when we were coming down
- 38:00 from the gulf country, which was the end of the '60s I think, we were recommended to a small hotel off the road, Urunga I think it was, a place called Urunga, and it was a Friday night and this was in the late '60s and
- 38:30 we drove round to it thinking, "This is a nice quiet little hotel," which we had been told. And the place was absolutely jumping and trucks and cars and all sorts of transport was filling up street after street, all people at this hotel, which was the only building at that time that was visible to us,
- 39:00 and it was dark. It was quite into the night-time, was after dinner, that's right. Anyhow Reg said to me, "Look, you stay in the car and I'll just go in and check it out," so he went in and went up to the bar and said to the fellow behind the bar, "I'll just have a beer, thanks." And this fellow poured his beer and then said to him,
- 39:30 "The last time I saw you was on the beach at Balikpapan." Now you see the soldiers would see one man or they'd notice a different man, and he'd remembered Reg all those years. Of course we got the best room in the house but it's funny. It just keeps coming back, reminders of it all.
- 40:00 **Mrs Edwards, thank you very much for being involved in the archive project. It was a pleasure to hear your story.**

Well thank you very much for being so understanding.

INTERVIEW ENDS