Australians at War Film Archive

Norma Smith - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Norma, I'd like to start by just asking you a little bit about your parents and where they were from?**

My parents were cane farmers in Home Hill. And my mother was originally from Gordonvale

01:00 and my father was from Ayr. And they went on a cane farm when the land was thrown open for farming so they were pretty early in that happening. My father was here in about 1900 in Brandon. Because Brandon was the main town

01:30 of this area at that time. But I think they came to Ayr because they could get water better here than in Brandon.

Was it from the big water repository under the ground?

Yes there is underground water supply here.

What do you know about what was involved with opening up the area for farming?

Not too much, only what my mother told me

02:00 that when they had a ballot for the blocks and when my father's name came out they all clapped, so they must have been happy to see him get it.

You mean it was like a lottery there?

Well you put in for it, but you know, but then they had to draw the names because there were so many people wanted a cane farm. And he must have been one of the lucky ones to get,

02:30 to draw the ballot.

And were your parents married at that time?

Oh no, no they weren't. My father was on the farm with his brothers and his mother and father. His father was an engineer and he built the one of the very earliest sugar mills, or he put the machinery together in the Seaforth mill

03:00 out at Seaforth. It is no longer operating it was too costly to take the cane down there and they shifted it closer into town. And Kalamia Mill bought a lot of the stuff. He also put the machinery together in a mill in Mackay, but I don't, I do know the name of it but I just can't recall it at the moment.

03:30 **So your family has a really long involvement in the sugar cane industry, right back to your father's father?**

Yes, hmm, hmm.

So this is the world that you were born into. You grew up on a sugar cane farm?

I grew up on a sugar cane farm yes.

Can you describe what life was like growing up on a sugar cane farm?

Oh it was wonderful really. We had so much freedom. We would wander for miles to play with other kids, we were mates with

04:00 all the children that lived on farms around us. We'd wander for miles and we'd go swimming in the lagoons and as long as we'd turn up for our meals everything was all right. But they don't have that freedom today.

When you say we did you have brothers and sisters?

I had an older sister and two younger brothers. There were four of us in the family. But I am the only one left. Everyone else is gone.

04:30 **And the four of you were all friends were you?**

Oh yes, but my sister was more. She liked upstairs with my mother and you know, I was more of a rascal; I used to like playing with the boys, go fishing or catching birds or whatever we did. We would wander around and amuse ourselves.

05:00 **How do you catch a bird?**

Well one way, we used to get a long stick and we would get a hair from the horse's tail and we would attach, make a little noose out of it and attached it to the end of this long stick. And we'd wait until the bird got in a tree and we'd be there manoeuvre this sort of snare over its head and we'd pull it and we'd get it.

You actually caught birds that way?

Yes.

05:30 **That's amazing.**

Well, yes we'd catch them and we'd bring them home and we'd make a little cage for them with a box and a fine wire netting. It's amazing after a couple of days they always got out, my father didn't like animals caged. He used to lift the corner and the birds would disappear. So although we still did it,

06:00 we didn't wake up for a long time that it was him doing it, we thought the birds did it.

What sort of birds would they be?

Little finches, bloods, they weren't anything large we didn't try to catch anything big. But bloods, they had this beautiful red on their chests, bloods were like the best.

06:30 They were the prettiest. And of course we had shanghais and we'd go shooting birds and we always used to think we'd see the feathers fly, I don't think we ever hit anything but we'd always reckon we saw the feathers fly, so we come pretty close.

What is a shanghai?

Oh it is a forked stick and you had elastic, not elastic, but rubber bands attached

07:00 to each V of the stick and you'd make a pouch out of mainly out of an old shoe tongue and attach that and you'd sort of bang and you'd shoot the birds. But I don't think we ever shot any birds, but we thought we did.

You were a real tomboy weren't you?

I was climbing trees; I wasn't much into this 'playing ladies' business

07:30 but my sister liked that so we used to play and have tea parties under the mango trees and we used to try and dress the boys. My littlest brother we used to try and dress him up in babies' clothes and put him in the pram, he came into it for a couple of times and then he objected. He just ripped it all off and he said, "I am not going to do this any more." And so that was the end of that.

08:00 But we had dolls, big celluloid dolls and one Christmas I was given this doll and it had this composition head, you know made of cardboard. I was told don't ever put this doll in water. You mustn't put this doll in water. All right, that was all right, I remembered this for a couple of days. Next thing I had to give the baby a bath, I put in the tub,

08:30 went off and played some where else. And came back and the baby had just disintegrated. So you learn your lesson to do as you're told.

Life's cheap on the farm?

Yes, well we'd didn't take any amusing, we amused ourselves. You know we had no TV or anything, but we did have a gramophone.

Tell me about that?

09:00 Oh it was a wind-up gramophone; a little portable it was. And we used to get a record occasionally, because it cost too much. And when we'd get it we'd play it to death and we'd play it, put it on, listen to it, wait, put it on again. I think we used to play it all day the same record. So

What sort of music would you

09:30 **have?**

Well it was cowboy songs, like 'Home on the Range' and 'Tiptoe through the Tulips' and what did my

father have, he had some better ones. But I don't recall what they were now. Oh 'Three Little Maids', do you know that one?

Oh the Gershwin one? 'Three little maids from school…'

Yes that one. Yes.

10:00 He had that one. We liked it; you know we really liked it. And later on of course my sister wanted to learn the piano so they bought a pianola from an auctioneer and it had to come across the river on the truck. And on the way it got bogged but eventually it arrived all right. And my sister could play by ear,

10:30 she could hear something and then she could just go to the piano and pick out the tune and play it but not me, I was hopeless. And we learnt music from the convent the nuns taught us and we had to play these duets. There was a long stool that we both sat on

11:00 and she'd be have hers all perfect I'd always be making mistakes. And she'd pull my hair and then I'd pull hers and then someone would land on the floor. And you know we, oh it was hopeless me learning but I got good marks in it. But I was not a natural musician at all. I still like it but I couldn't do it, but she could.

11:30 **What sort of things were you naturally good at when you were a young girl?**

Reading that was my biggest, my favourite thing to read. If I got a book, that was it, I'd sit at the table and I'd read the labels off the jam tins just for something to read. But.

What did you love about reading?

I love learning new things, you know, hearing about what was going on. I remember

12:00 when I was a little child, my father had a deck chair and he was sitting in that reading the paper and I was sitting on his knee and I looked at the paper and I said, "and the" and I hadn't even been to school at that stage. And he couldn't believe that I could read a few words. But he didn't know my sister

12:30 she used to get me to play school. She was the teacher and I was the pupil and she had the stick. And she tried to drum things into me and if I got it wrong, I'd get a whack.

That is so cute.

He thought I was a genius but he didn't know I was well

13:00 coached.

What sort of man was your dad?

He was very quiet, he didn't drink or anything like that. Mostly work, you know, I remember looking out our kitchen window and looking at him. Going up and down the paddock, we had these big draught horses and they pulled the ploughs and he had to walk and the horses pulled the plough

13:30 but he had to guide it of course. And he'd be up and down all day in the dust and I thought to myself, "Gee they have got to work hard." And when he came home for lunch, he'd lie down on the cement floor to get in the breeze and I'd go and that's when I'd try and talk to him. And my mother used to say, "Don't worry your father, he's had to work so hard, let him have a rest." So a lot of the things he could have told me

14:00 I didn't hear because I was told not to bother him. But they did have to work very hard in those days.

Can you describe the farm for me and what the land was like out there? What your house was like?

Our house was a high blocked house and it had a verandah all round. And underneath it was done in with corrugated iron and a cement floor inside and we

14:30 had push-out windows made of corrugated iron, it was very dark down there. That was supposed to be the dining room and there was a detached kitchen at the back. Because they had to have that in case of fire, if anything caught fire, well the kitchen would go but the house would be safe. Because they used to put big logs of wood in the firebox of the stove and if you weren't watching them they could fall out

15:00 and you'd soon get a fire. And later on they moved the kitchen over to another place and that became quarters for anyone that was working for us. They lived in that kitchen. And we got a kitchen and dining room and bathroom and everything put upstairs. But before that the bathroom was just a

15:30 corrugated iron structure under the tank stand at the back. And the frogs would get in there. And of course the toilet was just a thunderbox, you know some distance from the house.

That must have been an adventure as a little kid, going out to the thunderbox.

Yes, you had to go with a hurricane light at night, in case you stepped on a snake.

16:00 But the boys used to be beggars; they were always teasing us you know. We'd go into the toilet and it had a door at the back so that they could take the pan out to empty it. And they used to watch and see us go in there and they'd get a frog and they'd open the door and throw it in. Terrors.

16:30 I still hate frogs, I can't stand frogs.

And what was the land like? Can you describe the countryside around?

Well it was sandy soil and we had three gullies running through the place. And there was a nice lagoon close to the house but it was muddy it wasn't good for swimming in. But it was very pretty, because it had

17:00 water lilies growing in it and it had tea trees along the bank and it was lovely to walk down there of a winter's morning you know with the frost on the grass and it was really pretty. I used to often walk down and have a look at that. And then there was another gully further over and another gully further over and so it was you know, it was about a hundred and something acres. But it wouldn't do now, it wouldn't support a family now, a farm that size, you'd have to have a much bigger

17:30 farm. But the people who bought it off us, they filled in the gullies. But I was a bit worried what would happen when the Burdekin River flooded. Because before it flooded while we were there and it did come up underneath the house but just a little bit. But once they filled that gully in it came up a lot higher, that was after we left of course.

18:00 **So how close was the Burdekin to your house?**

A mile and half I suppose. Like our farm was there and then there was another farm and then there was the river. So it wasn't that far away. But the Burdekin, everyone worried about the Burdekin, because if it rained a lot, they'd say, "How's the river?" Ringing up the neighbours

18:30 up river, "How's the river, is it rising, or what is it doing?" The river sort of ruled our life a little bit in the wet season.

Can you tell me a little bit about the wet season? I am boy from the south so I haven't really experienced a wet season but what is it like?

Rain and rain and rain and once here, the year we got married there was sixty inches in a week. So that is a lot of water.

19:00 Isn't it? But yes, there were some lovely lagoons. The lagoon at the farm across from ours, it was a lovely lagoon, it was deep and it was beautiful clear water, and we'd go there and swim. And we couldn't swim that well but we could swim, dog paddle. And

19:30 I couldn't swim right across the lagoon because it was too far, I wasn't able to go that far. But if you went about half way, and you'd feel around with your feet. You'd be able to stand on the branch of a tree because you couldn't see it, but it was down there somewhere. So you used to go half way, stand on the tree, and swim back, have a rest and swim back. But we used to have a lot of fun at that lagoon,

20:00 with the other kids, the Berrymans and the Fergusons and us. And we'd go down and we'd say to Joan Ferguson, "Go and get some eggs Joan." And so she would go and raid the fowl house and bring down some eggs and we'd boil the Billy up, at the edge of the lagoon, and have a picnic. And yes it was good fun, we were all good friends, a lot of them are dead now of course.

20:30 **It sounds like you had a very strong sense of community amongst the other children that were nearby and your parents being able to call people further up the river about the?**

Oh yes, you knew everybody in town. But now you don't know anybody but then you sort of knew who everybody was. We had no worries about wandering around, there were no people that would worry you, we were quite safe.

21:00 I don't think I would like to let a child a wander around today. But then it seemed to be no worries. Even though there were snakes. One day we were coming home from school I think it was. And we saw this, well we thought it was a snake lying there.

21:30 So we decided we'd kill it. But anyway we killed it, we got home, we must have brought it home to show our father. And didn't he get angry, it was a blue tongue lizard and we were in the gun for killing a harmless blue tongue lizard. But we thought we had done a marvellous thing to kill this snake.

22:00 Another day we were going to school I was very small. Or first of all when we first went to school, my sister had a horse, but I didn't, I didn't have one. But anyway, they used to get the girl at the next farm, she used to come down to our place and she'd put me on the back, and I'd double bank with her to school.

22:30 I was terribly frightened that I was going to fall off. And the horse would go from this side to the other. And she ended up she put me in front of her. That was a lot better, and I didn't have this movement. But anyway we got sick of this going on the horses. Because the Stockdale kids used to when we were coming home, they used to hide in the grass and as she went by they'd pelt stones at her.

23:00 Just for fun and fancy, not because they didn't like us, this was just a game. And of course it was a broken down old racehorse and it would go home flat out and she'd be clinging on to its neck for dear life. But anyway we said, we weren't going on the horses any more. We'd sooner walk with the Berryman kids, they walked to school, and it was about three miles. So

23:30 we'd walk from our place up to their place pick them up and the lot of us would go off together. One day we decided, I think my sister must have organised this, because I was too little, I didn't come at organising anything at that stage. And she, "We won't go school, we'll play the wag." So we got to the corner and we crawled into the grass underneath the cocky apple tree.

24:00 And we were sitting there talking away and about ten minutes after we decided we'll eat our lunch, and so we are eating our lunch and along came Jackie Day, (who was a relation to the Berrymans) on the bike. And he said to Betty Berryman, "Come on Bet, you've got to go to school." We'd been discovered,

24:30 and the next thing my father came along on the bike, and he said, "Right you two start running." So we had to run all the way to school, and I was so upset when I got there, I remember I raced straight into the classroom with my hat and bag still on. And the teacher said, "All right Norma, just go out and take your hat off and put your port, [bag] down and it will be okay."

25:00 But we never played the wag any more that was it. Because we didn't realise that Mrs Berryman used to keep an eye out for us and she'd be watching us from her window to see that we were on the road. And you know we played the wag.

Going to school on horseback sounds amazing?

Hmm.

It beats the school bus.

Oh no there were no school buses, no not then. The horses were hard to catch in the

25:30 afternoons. You'd take a crust of bread with you to school, so when you wanted to catch the horse, you'd take the bread down and call him and he'd, Lonely, he'd come and we'd catch him. But some of them were devils, they didn't want to be caught, they wanted to stop in that paddock. Because there was a horse paddock next to the school. So the big boys used to come and they used catch the horses for us.

26:00 So that we could go home.

How many horses would there be in the paddock?

Oh quite a few I suppose. The outlying kids that was the only transport that they had. See we didn't seem to have bikes then. Bikes came in a bit afterwards.

Would they be saddled up or would you ride them bareback?

26:30 We must have had saddles I think. Yes the boys used to catch em and put the bridle and saddle on I think. Don't know, not sure about that, can't think.

What other sorts of animals did you have out at the farm?

We had jersey cows and…

Are they good for milk?

Lovely, they don't give the same quantity as some of the others but it is very rich and has got a lot of lovely cream

27:00 from the jerseys. And we had fowls, the fowl house, the big draught horses in the stables. We used to help feed them sometimes, feed these draughthorses. And we'd have to carry a big kerosene tin full of feed. And they had stalls each side and these big draught horses were in them. And we'd carry

27:30 the feed down. And as used to go down, they'd snap at you over the top of the stall. They wanted to get the feed. We used to do that, not all the time, but we did used to help a bit, do a little bit.

Sounds like you were a bit scared of the horses?

Well they were pretty big you know. Draughthorses, yes

28:00 I didn't go to close to them.

Are draughthorses like the big Clydesdales?

Yes a bit like that them.

Because they had to be big and strong to pull ploughs.

28:30 Yes to pull the ploughs, and the scarifier and the roller that rolled the dirt. Yes it was a pretty much, a lot of work went into planting cane. Because I think it all had to be done three times, you know ploughed, rolled and ploughed and rolled, and ploughed and rolled, and then scarified and then you

plant it with the planter. So the plants, the sugarcane, would be cut into lengths about so big and they'd drop them down the shoot. Because the horse pulled that too, pulled the planter, there was nothing mechanical, you'd have to just drop them,

29:00 each by hand down that chute, too. I have helped with that a bit, not much though.

What is a scarifier?

It made the drill for the planter to come along and that's when you drop the plants in to the drill. And we had a big old steam engine that

29:30 pumped the water to irrigate the cane. And we were one of the first to use irrigation because my grandfather was an engineer and he knew he could do it. He knew how to do all this. And I remember one of the other women, said to my mother, "It's all right for you down river farmers, you have got the water."

30:00 Because they didn't really realise then I don't think that they could bore down underneath and get water too, if they used the pumps to get it. But we had this great big old, it was like the engine, like the boiler of a steam train and it had a big fire underneath it. And it produced the steam which drove the engine that pumped the water. And

30:30 my Uncle Harry had the ticket to drive it. You had to have a ticket to drive it because the steam was dangerous I suppose. And we used to have to take his smoko [morning tea] down to him when we were little. Walk from the farm down to the engine sheds. It was a long way, a fair way down. And we'd take it down and as soon as we'd get there he used to let off the steam. Well that was so he could have his smoko. And we thought

31:00 he was deliberately doing it to get rid of us because we thought he didn't want us there. So we used to run like heck, we were frightened of that steam, we didn't like it. But it used to pump the water up into a fluming that came along and the water went into a fairly deep hole at that end of it. And then drains ran off that to take the water to the cane, they were earthen drains they weren't,

31:30 we didn't have any pipes or anything like that. It was just all earth and that and we used to like to swim in that if we could, it wasn't too bad.

And was I right in understanding that you said that you didn't actually plant seeds that you planted little lengths of plants.

Lengths of sugar cane about a foot long and they have got eyes on them if you notice and that's where the shoots come from,

32:00 the eyes of the cane.

And they naturally grow roots do they?

They grow roots, yes once you water them; you have to water them too. The watering was a pretty hard job for the men, because they had to walk all around the paddock too. Well they used to put many drills in at a time, they'd drill through the bank of the drain and they'd irrigate

32:30 so many drills at a time. And then they'd have to watch until it came to the other end and when it got to the other end, they could close them off and set another number of drills and that is how they used to do the watering. And sometimes the water would break the bank and you would get water everywhere and they'd be frantically shovelling sand and mud to try and patch it up.

33:00 Because it was pretty hard work.

So there was always work to be done and new ideas to be tried?

I think they used the same things for a good while and then we got a tractor. And my father bought this tractor; instead of having the horses he was going to have this tractor. And it was an Oliver Hart Parr

33:30 and it had direct steering or something on it and you had to stand up to work it, you couldn't sit down. And he'd be trying frantically pulling it pulling the wheel to turn it. That was about in 1923 I think or they said when the tractor arrived on the farm, my sister said, "Well there's the tractor,

34:00 but where is the guarantee?" She thought the guarantee was another implement.

Because she heard it as a tractor and a guarantee?

And she said, "There is going to be a tractor and it had a guarantee." And she said, "There's the tractor but where is the guarantee?" Oh dear.

So because your dad, particularly because his dad was an engineer, he was quite progressive

34:30 **in trying new things?**

Yes he was. He'd learnt sugar boiling too as well in his youth. He went to Mackay I think to learn sugar boiling.

What is that, sugar boiling?

That is when they boil the sugar to find out what CCS [Commercial Cane Sugar content] is, that is how they pay them on the CCS of the cane or something.

That is the sugar content?

35:00 Yes the cane sugar content, I don't know too much about it. Because as I say we didn't get to talk to him very much because we were told not to bother him because he was too busy and he was tired when he came home.

Why do you think you weren't given more chores around the farm, and more of this doing the farm?

We didn't, we didn't have to do anything. I think he didn't think girls should do that work.

35:30 **Would you have liked to have?**

I don't think so, I would sooner have played. What kid wouldn't? I don't think I would have been any good with the horses. I wasn't very brave with them. But and the boys were too young. And then there was a big drought, we had a big drought on the place, yes.

Tell me more about the drought?

36:00 Well I remember the ground all cracked like a jigsaw puzzle. And everyone was dying for rain you know, but clouds would come up and it looked like it was going to rain and nothing came. And a lot of people left the farms through that drought, they just

36:30 couldn't carry on.

Do you remember the period that that was?

I think it was in the 1930s some time around that.

Did the lagoons dry up?

Yep, the lagoons dried up and it was awful. As farming, farming is better now because they have got the underground water and

37:00 better than it was, a lot easier, they don't have to work so hard. They have got all these, something for this and something for that didn't have that in those days.

Do you remember you parents being really worried during the drought?

Well I remember them waiting for the rain, looking at the sky,

37:30 everyone was waiting; it was a real drought.

How does something like that affect the community more broadly? Do you remember it sort of having a real impact on everyone at school and the other families around?

No I don't, I wouldn't have been really old enough to realise what was going on. We did have a polio epidemic.

38:00 But we weren't allowed to go to school. We had to stop home and do correspondence lessons; I remember that happening one time.

With your mum teaching?

Oh no, I don't think she taught anything, but I think we just had to read what it said on that paper and do what it told us to do and then send it back, that's how that went on. But she didn't do any teaching.

What was polio?

38:30 Infantile paralysis. You know people used to keep, it was a very infectious disease and that was the best way to try and stop it was to keep the children at home, away from, not at school so we all stopped home. I don't know how, it didn't last that long until we got the all clear to go back to school again. But

39:00 I did like school, I really enjoyed school, but I was good at it. I suppose if I hadn't been good at it I mightn't have liked it.

Do you remember the child who had polio?

No I don't know who they were. No but it was I think it was more state wide. I don't think it was just Home Hill, there was an

39:30 epidemic around and I don't know if every school did it, but I know we did have to.

And the child would actually be paralysed would they?

Yes, well they either have a paralysed leg or a paralysed arm or something. But I just can't think who did have it, now

Was there anything that you could do to treat it?

Sister [Elizabeth] Kenny used to massage them and she was pretty good with her treatment,

40:00 but I don't think anything else; doctors didn't have a cure for it there was nothing. But now of course you can get immunised, they immunise them these days.

Who was Sister Kenny?

Well she was in I think Townsville, I think Sister Kenny was. She used to massage them and put them in warm baths and she exercised the limbs.

40:30 She saved a lot of children I think from being really paralysed.

Was she a nurse or a nun?

No she must have been a nursing, a nursing person, I just know her name, I didn't know her personally. But I know that she was regarded as the expert on infantile paralysis, she was the one who fixed them up, so.

Tape 2

00:34 **Norma, I liked to ask you now about harvest season and about burning the cane. What do you remember about that?**

Yes they used to, the cutters would come out and they'd cut a break in cane, they would only harvest so much they wouldn't take the whole paddock at once, they'd cut a break. And push the cane this way and that way out of the rode and then

01:00 they had to wait till the wind was right. Because if the wind was going towards the rest of the paddock well it would burn the whole paddock up. So you couldn't get your crop. So they'd burn back that much and then the next day they'd come out and they would cut the burnt cane. They burn the cane because of weil's disease, the rats used to get

01:30 in the cane and then they'd catch this weil's disease, so by burning the cane they'd destroy the rats, they'd catch it if the rats had urinated on the cane and they'd scratch themselves on the cane and they would catch the complaint that way. But by burning it that solved all that. The cane cutters

02:00 used to come out on their push bikes and they would bring their smoko in the sugar bag and they would have the top of it tied with a rope and a rope tied to the other end and slung over their shoulder. And they would cycle out from Home Hill. And they would do their cutting.

So as a group they would travel around the various farms would they?

No you had your own cutters; like a certain amount cut our farm, like they cut our farm,

02:30 they cut our cane and they used to get, they used to sit down in the stables, there was plenty of room down there, they'd all sit down there together and come up and get a billy of hot water for their tea and they would have their rest down there and then they would start again after, and it was pretty hard work.

Can you describe it for me, what sort of work they did, how they actually cut the cane?

03:00 They had a cane knife, you know.

What was that like, what was the knife like?

It had a handle about that long and then it had a blade about that long with a hook on the end, that pulled it in and cut the trash off, if there was any trash left on it. And then they would just hold the stick and cut the base of it and they would throw it out and they would throw them into bundles. Because cane just grows in sort of

03:30 bundles, it is not just one stick of cane comes up. There are about so many, like a cluster. So they'd put that in the bundle, and then afterwards they would have to pick that bundle up and put it onto to the cane truck. The cane truck would be on the truck wagon, the truck wagon was a great big monstrous thing with big wheels and so many draught horses would pull that. And they would pull that

04:00 into the paddock. And they would load up and then they would tighten it up, tighten the cane down with a chain. And then they would take it to the siding. It was a locomotive that used to come along and pick the trucks up. But at that siding, they used to back it into this place and they would have

04:30 two little rails I suppose that would go at the back and then they push it back onto the line. And then

you know there would be so many trucks everyday that the loco had to pick up from our siding. And then the loco would go down and pick up all the other trucks and then it would go further and pick up the rest

05:00 and take them to the mill and that is how that went. You had a piece of paper on your truck to say what number the truck was. And that number was allocated to you. And that would be when that was crushed. They would know what CCS your cane had and that is how, you got, if you had good CCS, you got good payment and

05:30 so, that's how it worked I think. But somebody got a bit smart once and they switched the numbers on the truck because they weren't getting good CCS and we were. And however, I don't know how they did it but it was done and anyway when my father saw what CCS he was getting he knew it wasn't right. Because he

06:00 used to test his own cane at home and he had means, he knew how to do it. And anyway someone got the sack out of that. It was a bit smart.

And can you describe for me what it was like when the cane was being burnt the look and the smell and that sort of thing?

Oh it is really a wonderful sight, something you should see while you are here really.

Do they still do it?

Oh yes.

06:30 **I thought they stopped doing it.**

Cane fires are burning cane all the time. There are tours that you can take in the Burdekin, they take you out and show you a cane fire. But if you are smart enough, you can see where the smoke is coming from and go and look at it yourself.

Describe it for me as a kid, what it was like to watch and smell?

We weren't really allowed to go down too close to it. Because they were frightened, some men got burnt in them you know.

07:00 They tripped and fell and the fire went over them and that was it, they got trapped or they were going down the middle of a paddock and the wind changed or something. No these men, there was quite a lot of people that got burnt to death in them. You have to be very careful in what you did.

Could you describe the smell?

07:30 No I don't know about that. But there was a sugary smell about the cane when you got close to it, sugary smell, can you imagine that a sugary smell, it is hard to tell. It was sticky to when you grabbed it.

08:00 Because the cane harvester today, I think some of them cut them green. But there are still cane fires because you can see by the black snow you know on the ground, there are still cane fires.

Just explain what black snow is?

It's the trash, when it burns it goes up into the air, it is a huge fire, it is a wonderful spectacle to watch

08:30 and the trash floats over and then floats down and you get little bits about so big, everywhere, all over the place. And even though you swept yesterday, you come back and there is the same thing there the next day, just as bad. Housewives used to whinge about it but it was their living, you couldn't whinge about it, it was your living, so.

09:00 **Tell me a little bit about what your mum's role was in the farm and as a housewife some of the challenges she may have faced in keeping the house hold running?**

She used to make our bread at the beginning. She had little bottles of yeast up on the shelf. It would be fermenting to make the bread. And we had a delivery man that used to come out from Coutts once a week,

09:30 take the order, and the next day they'd deliver the goods. And the same with the butcher, he would deliver too. You could get your meat delivered. But we had an ice chest, only an ice chest. How did we get ice, I don't know? Must have had to go for the ice? Anyhow

10:00 the ice didn't used to last that long and plenty of times the meat was a bit green around the edges and they used to soak it in a bit of vinegar. And they cooked it just the same they didn't worry about a little bit of green on it, that didn't matter. It didn't seem to make us sick, we survived, and we had a bit of corned beef for the rest of the week. But it was just plain cooking, no fancy things you know.

10:30 **You mentioned that you had a big fire, a wood fire stove?**

Wood fired stove, yes, it's a wooden stove and it had rings on the top that you could lift out if you

wanted to put the pot closer to the fire and if you only wanted to simmer you could put your pots to the side and they would simmer there for hours.

11:00 And it had a grate underneath, the firebox had a grate and the wood would go in the top and the ashes would fall down into the ash tray. And you had to empty that ash tray every day and you had to keep that all clean so that it would draw, the chimney had to be kept clean and the top of the underneath of the oven had to be kept clean.

11:30 And you had to polish it with this black lead I think it was, to make it look good, not that that did any good. And some of the wood you used, depending on what you ordered, if you ordered just some, just a quick fire, you could use pine and some wood was better than others for cooking cakes, you had to know which hardwood I suppose would be for the cakes and the

12:00 other. They had to get their own wood, they used to just go down the gully and pick up whatever was lying around, dead branches here and there and bring it home and cut it up. I have cut plenty of wood in my time. If there was none, because there was never any wood when you wanted it, you had to cut your own or do with out, so I could do that.

12:30 **And did the water pump system bring water up to your house? Did you have water on tap?**

Yes we had water up into the…. when we got the kitchen upstairs we had water up there. But before that we didn't, we had a hand pump that you could pump your water with, and of course we had the shower underneath the tank stand as I told you.

You actually had a shower?

13:00 A shower underneath the tank stand, underneath the tank stand, it was done in with galvanised iron and a cement floor and that was our bath. But imagine in the winter it was too cold. So we used to get one of the galvanised iron wash tubs and bring it up stairs into the kitchen, or this is when we did have it upstairs. And put it in front of the fire. And we used to have

13:30 a bath in the tub, first in got the clean water.

And I can imagine with you kids it would have ended up pretty grotty by the end?

Oh we were dreadfully dirty. Clothes didn't mean a thing, we didn't care how ragged or whatever you were, as long as you had a good time that is all that mattered.

What sort of clothes did you have?

14:00 Oh just ordinary, I don't know really.

Would you make them?

Oh my mother was a sewer, she could sew, and she used to make most of our things. I can remember her sitting at night sewing away with the pedal, pedalling the machine, and making our things. We used to get some things from TC Burnie's down in Brisbane. They'd send a catalogue and you'd pick out what you wanted

14:30 and maybe the winter coats and things like that. And the winter pyjamas we'd order them from TC Burnie and they would come up COD [Cash on Delivery]. And often you didn't like the colour you got, you might want a blue and they might send you a purple or something like that or green. But you had to have it because they wouldn't send it back. I suppose they could have sent it back but they never did.

15:00 But even if you didn't like it that was what you had to have. But we didn't get many clothes, but we got a new dress to go the show and we used to get a new dress at Christmas. And that was it, but there would be our house clothes but we, I don't know what we had, just plain things you know. Nothing grand.

15:30 **Washing must have been quite a job for your mum with six of you to look after?**

Yes you only had a copper boiler and you had a fire underneath the copper and you had to cut the Sunlight soap up into little slivers to put in with the water and then you would put the sheets in first and then boil them up and when they were done, you'd lift them out into the drainer

16:00 and you had a saucepan, a bucket underneath that to catch any hot water that fell out and then you would put that water back into the copper of course. And then you would go on to the next things the colours and end up with the work clothes last. But they had galvanised tubs to wash them in, galvanised tubs to wash them in. Big galvanised tubs on a bench underneath

16:30 the house. And one was for washing and one was for rinsing and the other one was the blue. You put them through the blue water and then you would have a basin of starch and then anything that had to be starched, you'd starch it in the….. if you made the starch too thick everything was stiff as a board but no it was pretty hard work.

17:00 And cooking for the lot of us, you know, she was busy.

Did you girls have to start helping with things like the washing and the cooking as you got a bit older?

Well we had to do it because my mother got sick and then we had to do our share then. I remember the first time I did it. I put a pair of red shorts in with the white sheets, we had pink sheets, we had pink everything for a long time.

17:30 **The boys would have thought you did that on purpose. That's for the frog.**

Oh dear.

What happened to your mum what illness did she have?

Oh her nerves went. I think the worry, the drought and it was you know a depression, a real depression on at that stage. I don't think that helped.

18:00 So then we had to, my father decided she had to go to hospital so my father decided that we had better go to our relatives. And I was sent to Gordonvale, my grandparents or first of all the three of us went up to my aunty – she had a farm at Mena Creek up north. And I was there for a little while. And I was in scholarship class then so they decided that I had to go to

18:30 a bigger school. So they sent me up to Grandma and Granddad to stop with them in Gordonvale. And that is where I sat for my scholarship and the boys stopped with Aunty Meta. And after I finished scholarship I came home and then I went to the Ayr High School and I had to ride my bike from the farm into the railway station,

19:00 I had to be there by five to eight in the morning. And got the rail motor to Ayr and that was the station that was just down here. And then we had to walk with our ports full of books up to the high school. When we finished school, we had to walk back down to the station and sit there till the rail motor came at about five to five in the afternoon; it used to come home back from Townsville. And sometimes we would do our homework like dutiful little kids,

19:30 or young people I suppose. And other times we decided that we were hungry so we would go up to the railway reserve and they had a lot of chinky apple trees growing up there. And we would fill our hats up with chinky apples and then come back to station and eat them. And we did that quite a lot. Because they weren't always on all the time. They were

20:00 sour, sweetie sour things, chinky apples.

Before I ask you about your latter schooling. Can I ask you about your primary school when you used to ride off to?

On the horse?

What was it? Can you describe the school for me?

It was high blocked, high blocked, narrow sort of steps going up to it. And we had

20:30 forms, we sat on these forms, long desks in front with the ink well in the little hole. And I had to go to school earlier I went to school for the last few weeks of the school year to get me used to school. I went with my sister and I'd be sitting with her. And I

21:00 didn't know anything about what they did. And anyway when school was over. They used to say, you had to get up and forms back and one on each end would put the form back and I didn't know anything about getting up and shifting the form. Olive was a bit cross with me because I didn't know about that, how was I supposed to know I hadn't been before?

21:30 **Did you ever write on slates?**

Yes we always wrote on slates. And we had these little matchboxes with a sponge or a rag, mostly a rag. And you are supposed to wet that rag or change that rag all the time. And you'd forget of course and by the end of that week, that rag was pretty pongy I can tell you, after a week's use. But no we had slates and slate pencils to start with and then we had ink

22:00 and, you had to be more careful with that. You had plenty of blobs but.

And you said that you enjoyed the reading; did you pick up writing quite well as well?

Oh yes I didn't have any bother. I liked school. I used to be glad when the school started again, to see the other kids

22:30 and enjoyed it. I like to learn things, learn new things; I was interested I suppose that helped.

You had mathematics, I imagine?

Yes I was good at maths, English, geography, history,

Do you remember what sort of history you would do in primary school?

Oh in primary school, not a great lot.

23:00 **Was there much taught about England and the empire?**

Oh yes, I think we knew all about that, we used to read about the, what was it, I forget now, but they had reading books you know, with different stories in them.

Was that

23:30 **an important part of schooling, was knowing about the mother country and the Empire?**

Oh yes, when we went to school, we used to have to be on parade, we would line up in all our classes, we would line up in our whole group. And our headmaster would be on the verandah and he would say, "Good morning, boys and girls."

24:00 and we would say, "Good morning Mr Pestorius." And then he would give us a little talk about something or other and whatever he wanted to tell us all. And then the teachers would sort of call the roll I think, I am not sure, I think they called the roll then. And then the next we had to salute the flag, I don't know whether we had to sing 'God Save the King' or you know I am not sure. But anyway the next thing we had an about turn

24:30 we had to salute the flag and then we were able to march off to our class. And that went on everyday, saluting the flag, one two three.

Give us a demonstration, one two three.

One two three. Oh yes, and Anzac Day of course, we always marched on Anzac Day, the school, the kids,

25:00 and I was very proud to march on Anzac Day because my father had lost two of his brothers in the First World War and I thought I was marching for them. And

That would have been an important day for him as well then?

Yes, but he never talked about it, he never talked about them, we should have asked him more. But I believe that one of them was killed at the Somme in France and his name is on the big

25:30 war memorial there. Because my nephew's son has just been over there to visit. And Peter said to him, "Allan, if you get to France, try to get to the Somme and see if you can find my great uncle's name on the memorial." Well he found George's name on the memorial there and he said it was absolutely

26:00 magnificent, he said, the whole thing, he was so pleased with it, couldn't stop talking about it. So it impressed him, so well kept.

And your dad didn't fight?

No he didn't go, the two younger boys went and he didn't go. I suppose someone had to run the farm, to keep the rest of them, otherwise they would have all starved.

26:30 So.

So was cane farming a protected industry?

That didn't come into it in those days – if they wanted to go, they just went. That wasn't….. in the Second World War there were a lot of protected industries, but in the First World War I don't think so, if they wanted to go, they just went, in their droves you know that and killed in droves too.

27:00 **And was there any sort of religious education as part of your schooling?**

Oh yes, we had religious instruction and we also had drill. We also had to go out and we exercised, we used to march, we used to, but they called it drill anyway. But that was to

27:30 keep us all fit.

Didn't sound like you needed it with your lifestyle?

I didn't need it no, the last thing I needed was more exercise. But I got it anyway.

Did you play sport?

We played a bit of tennis that was about all.

So what sort of games would you play in the playground then?

Oh hopscotch and

28:00 tiggy.

What is tiggy?

Oh you run and you tap them and then they are it and they have got to chase you, you know. Hide and seek, things like that. There was a swimming pool at the Home Hill school later on. And we all had to learn to swim, so that was a good thing they got going the swimming pool.

28:30 I liked that.

What denomination was the religious teaching?

Oh well, it wasn't Catholic, it was another, and Catholics, I don't think you had to go, others were Anglican or

29:00 whatever.

Were your parents religious?

My grandparents were pretty religious. My grandmother was and all of her children used to like to go to church and they were good church people. I don't think my father worried too much about it; I don't think he ever went to church. But I don't think they went to church

29:30 but we were sent to church every Sunday; we had to go to Sunday School. It was bad enough we had to go on Saturday morning to learn theory at the convent, because through the week we would go for our music lessons after school and then on Saturday morning we had to go in and do this darn theory and then on Sunday they used to send us to Sunday School. Well I reckoned it wasn't fair, because we never got a day off

30:00 at all. But anyway we used to ride our bikes we had bicycles by then, by that time. Ride our bicycles into Sunday School. And one Christmas we got little parasols, Olive got a pink one and I got a blue one. Could you just imagine two kids riding to Sunday School with their parasols up? It must have been a funny sight. I don't think we persevered with that for too long.

30:30 We couldn't be bothered with them, I suppose it was hot and they might have thought that we needed them. We used to have threepence to put on the plate or sixpence to put on the plate. And one smart one, I don't know who it was; decided it was too much,

31:00 they were kids, and they said, "Only put threepence on." So we gave only sixpence and took threepence change and they'd spend the rest at Mrs Bloom's lolly shop on the way home on lollies [candies].

What sort of lollies did you have?

Musk sticks and you got eucalyptus leaves and aniseed balls and lot of things were just ten a penny.

31:30 You get a whole bag of lollies for threepence. Because we never got any money, the only money we ever had of our own was if we went to town on Saturday night, we'd get threepence to spend. And the only other way we'd make any money was go chasing cane beetles. And we'd go at night with a carbide light

32:00 and we'd put that underneath the fig tree and the beetles would swarm down to the light and the kids would all pick them up and put them in kerosene tin. And the cane pest board used to pay you so much for a kerosene tin full of beetles. So we were all keen to make this money so we used to do that. Another thing we could get so much if we got a bandicoot scalp they were the little pests

32:30 that used to eat the cane, destroy the cane. So if we could catch them we'd get a bit of money for them too. But that was the only extra money we could make. Because living out there you just didn't have a chance to do anything else because you were too far away you know, if you were in town you might have got a little job somewhere doing something, but out in the bush you don't.

33:00 **Did you have any Aboriginal kids at your school?**

I don't remember any Aboriginal kids at the school, could have been but there wasn't any in my class, no.

What about the South Sea Islanders, we have heard there are quite a few up this way that were able to work on the cane?

I don't even remember them, no, I don't think so. Not in those early days anyway. But I don't think they

33:30 sent their kids to school, in the early days, the dark people. I think they just kept them home, I don't think they went to school a lot of them. I think over here more so they went to school, yes, they went to school a bit, but I don't remember.

What about the Italians?

When the Italians came that was later of course.

Was that a bit later? When you were a bit older?

Yes, I was a bit older.

34:00 They imported the Italians to work on the farms.

Were they warmly received?

Oh they were good workers. They are really wonderful farmers, they know more about farming then anybody I would say. Because they were used to it, that's what they did over there. And they are good workers. But my sister married an Italian boy

34:30 and somebody remarked, "What did Joe Freeman think about his daughter marrying a dago?" And of course my father was not that way inclined at all, he treated people as they were, the good people were good people and that's all there was to it. There was no nationality as far as he was concerned. But people did have that attitude,

35:00 that you don't mix with another race. But that's wasn't my father's idea.

While you were up at Meena Creek, do you remember Paronella Park up there?

Oh yes, I have been there.

Well it must have been the very early stages of it being built?

Oh wait a minute. I remember

35:30 Paronella Park but from a later time.

Okay, oh it wasn't when you were up there visiting, because I think.

When we were at Meena Creek, we used to visit the neighbours and how we got there they would go on this little trolley that the railway workers used to use call a push and pull

36:00 and you'd sit on it and pull the lever. And we'd use that to go the neighbouring farms, that was the thing I remember about that.

And do you remember the waterfalls next to what would have been the old highway there running through? Where Paronella Park is now?

No, I don't remember much about that.

Were there

36:30 **any that was a Spaniard band, José, who used to play**

At Paronella.

Was there any Spanish up near around Ayr?

If there were some here but I didn't know them. No.

What about the Chinese, were there many Chinese about here?

Yes, Chinese had shops there.

37:00 But we really didn't know them.

What about farming out near your farm? Were there any out there?

On our farm in the early days, there were some Chinese people camped in tents; they were on the far side of the farm. And they had these tents there and they lived in these tents. And they grew vegetables on the edge of

37:30 Ferguson's Lagoon. They had terraced the bank of the lagoon and they had all these vegetables growing there and they used to water them from the water from the lagoon. And when I was a little kid I can just remember this. That this Chinaman came to the back door, the back steps he was, right down at the back steps. And

38:00 he had these vegetables in the basket and I called out to my mother that he was here, and she said, "Quick go and hide." She didn't want him to see us children because she had heard that the Chinese liked children. I don't know what she thought the Chinese were going to do to the children, whether they were going to eat them or what, but she had this idea, to get us out of the road, she didn't want him to see us.

38:30 That might have been sort of a throw back from when she was a little girl; her older sister was taken from her bed by a black fellow up in Gordonvale. She was asleep in bed and this black fellow came and lifted her out of bed and was going to make off with her, well she must have screamed

39:00 because he dropped her and didn't take her. I think this might have been, my mother might have been thinking, that the Chinese might do the same might take us. My father used to say, "Don't be silly, they'd drop them at the first lamp post, they wouldn't want them."

Talk too much.

Yes.

39:30 **You said was your mum, even before your mum got sick. Was she quite anxious, was she an anxious sort of person?**

No I don't think, I didn't notice. But she got a goitre, a big goitre; I think that had a lot to do with her breakdown.

What is a goitre?

They get a big lump here in their throat from the thyroid gland, big, right in the front. But Doctor Halberstatter

40:00 operated on her and fixed that up so.

Was the doctor your doctor?

No he was in Townsville that doctor but that wasn't until years later, that was years later.

What became of the Chinese people who came for water?

I don't know they just disappeared off the scene. Dorrie Hansen told me that they had a whole lot of things in bottles,

40:30 she said weird and wonderful things. I don't know what they had, they must have been catching fish I suppose and preserving them, that was about what it was I think. But who they were and where they came from, I have no idea. But there was a lot of Chinese working at the sugar mills, and whether they knew my Grandfather

41:00 from the mill, I don't know, that could have been the connection, that could have been so.

Norma, we are right at the end of the tape so.

Tape 3

00:34 **Norma, I was just wondering if you could tell me a few more details about the depression and how you it impacted on the town of Home Hill? What did you have drifters coming through at all?**

Yes we had people carrying their swags. I remember one man came out to the farm and he must have been looking for a job I suppose.

01:00 But he was sick, and my father let him camp in the stables, we had a room where we kept the feed for the horses it was raised up above the ground, and he let him sleep down there. And we had to take his meals down to him, my mother would tell us to take it down, "But don't stop there, come straight back." So we used to just take it and drop it and come straight back, we didn't talk to him, so.

01:30 My mother was a bit anxious about this strange man being there, because she didn't know him, and my father would be out in the paddock all day. She said, "I wish he'd tell him to go, I can't tell him to go, because he is sick." Apparently in the end he got better and away he went.

What did he look like, was he scruffy, or?

Oh I just don't remember I was very young, I was about seven year old, I can't really remember.

02:00 I can just remember him lying down with his swag there and we would just go and we wouldn't waste any time because we were told not to.

Was there a lot of swagman in the areas?

Well we really wouldn't know that because we were you know out in the bush. We only knew. You'd go to town on a Saturday night, but you didn't see the town in between unless you had to go and

02:30 call at the butcher shop to pick up the meat. They sometimes used to leave the meat out on a table out the side of the butcher shop; all wrapped up with your name on the parcel and the kids used to come on their bike and pick their parcel of meat up and take the meat home. And that was only to the butcher shop, that wasn't to the main street.

Did you have to worry about food shortages at all,

03:00 **in your family or was it a bit better for people on the land, because you were producing things?**

No we never had any luxuries. It was a living, you know we had a telephone, first of all we got a Model T Ford with the big high backseat, then we got a Model A Ford

03:30 and those were our cars.

Do you remember the first car you saw?

Yes, I remember the old Model T Ford. One day my father took us down to see what remained of the Seaforth Mill, way out at Seaforth. We went in the old Model T, it was a rough ride on the hard old seats.

04:00 The Model A was better.

Why were the seats hard, what were they made of?

I don't know they were just hard and high, we seemed to be sitting up like Jackie in the backseat. But I didn't learn to drive. My mother didn't even drive. We weren't encouraged, the car belonged to my father, it was his car.

And did any of you have to wash it?

04:30 Oh no, you didn't wash the car, you didn't waste the water, oh no.

Now how old were you when you left school?

I suppose I would have been fifteen. I must have been young to start, but I skipped a grade, I must have been about fifteen or so, nearly onto

05:00 sixteen when I left school.

What year did you do?

I went from, I did the junior year, you did the scholarship when you were about thirteen years old and then you would have two years of secondary school and that is as far as I went. Then I got a job.

What was your first job?

I came over here to Ayr and I was working for a motor

05:30 dealer and he had a garage and he used to sell cars and that. And I kept the books for him, Mr Secco, he was just there, it is no longer there the shop, the old place. He was an Italian man, he was a good boss.

How did you get this job? Was it word of mouth or how did you get a job?

You must have had to apply for it I think. Anyway, I got it.

06:00 When they sold the farm then, the family went to Townsville, I went with them and I went back to school in Townsville for a while and then I got a job at Home Hill at Graham Brothers the accountants, and I used to write up the books for the cane farmers and I did a bit of stenography, you know, taking down the letters in shorthand and typing them out for the boss. But

06:30 that wasn't my main job, he had another girl who mainly did that but he used to get me to do a few letters just to keep my hand in with shorthand.

So where did you learn those skills?

At the high school here.

So in those days there was a fairly strong secretarial component to your education?

Well you either took

07:00 commercial course or the general course. Well I took the commercial because I thought I would like to work in a office, so that is what I did.

Why did your parents end up selling the farm? What was the decision behind that?

For my mother's health; she wasn't really well still. And I think my father wasn't well himself by then either, not really well,

07:30 so he decided that we would go and live in Townsville and it would give the boys a better opportunity to get work, so that is why they went to Townsville in the first place. And we just rented because he wouldn't buy a house, because he thought if we were bombed we would lose our house.

08:00 You know so we didn't buy a house then, so we rented an old place in Hooper Street, and then we lived there through the war and then later on he bought a home still in Hooper Street, be just down the road, a new home and we had a nice view of Rose Bay and a view of the ocean.

So can you just set the scene for me

08:30 **and just describe for me where you were and how you heard about World War Two breaking**

out?

I just don't know about that, because we didn't have any wireless, he wouldn't have it. Because he had visited one of his friends and they had one and he said, "The static would drive you mad." He couldn't put up with that. So he used to just get the paper ever day and I suppose,

09:00 we read it in the paper I guess. And yes that would be it.

Do you remember your family's reaction or just the reaction in general?

No I just know that once the war broke out that everybody that was able bodied around the place were volunteering to go to war and people

09:30 were leaving in droves, the young people, the young men that is and very soon there weren't too many young men around they were all gone.

Would you be in Townsville at this point when you heard that war had broken out or would that be before your family sold the farm?

No I think I might have been in Home Hill I think I might have been back in Home Hill by then. I think I might have been working at Graham Brothers I

10:00 must have been.

But your family had already sold the farm?

Yes, yes.

Were your brothers old enough to be joining up?

No they were too young. But my oldest brother he put in to join the navy but he was killed unfortunately, before his call up papers came. He never did get into it.

10:30 **What happened to him?**

Well he and his mates were wandering around the town common, which they did, they used to take their pea rifles or what ever they had, and go out on the common and looking for, you know they were bush kids, you know, and they found this object out there in the bush and they

11:00 took it into the army camp. They didn't know what it was; they took it into the army camp close by and showed it to a soldier there. And they said, "We found this, what is it?" And he said, "Oh it is harmless. You can do what you like with it, nothing to worry about, so you can have it." So they brought it home and they were

11:30 all down the back yard underneath the tree and Tom had the hammer and he was hammering it, to try and get it open and it was a Daisy Cutter [bomb] and there was this terrible explosion and of course he was killed instantly and one of his mates, the boy Hooper, he was so severely injured, well he died on his way to hospital or

12:00 after he got to hospital. And another boy lost his eye and another boy got cut on the arm and my father happened to be in the backyard but he wasn't down anywhere near them and a piece of it came and knocked his eye out too so he was taken to hospital. I was upstairs inside the house sewing at the machine and this terrific explosion

12:30 and I raced out and went straight down to Tom and I could see that he was gone and then the boy Hooper, I got him and I sat him down on our back verandah and he said, "Tell my mother." And of course he died. The neighbours rang the ambulance and took

13:00 them to hospital, took them away. And later on the detectives came around, they wanted someone to identify who was who. And I had to go to the morgue with them. And they said, "Who is this?" And I said, "That is my brother." And they brought me home and then they had an inquest of course.

13:30 But I don't think any one was ever blamed because out of all that camp how could they pick out one soldier, they wouldn't have been able to pick him, I don't think they would have been able to pick him. All of them were in hospital, my father was in hospital, my mother was practically prostrate and anyway, we managed, but it was pretty hard.

That is a lot of responsibility

14:00 **and a terrible thing as a young girl to have to go down and deal with something like that in your own home?**

Yes it was terrible. But the army were very good to me, they gave me time off and I think they sent me over to Magnetic Island for Rest & Recreation and they had a place over there. But what could you do, you just had to keep going,

14:30 you couldn't drop out, you just had to keep going. I thought it was the darkest day of my life, I wondered why the sun could shine, how could it shine, but it took a long time to get over that, I don't

think you ever get over that.

Did you harbour a lot of anger towards

15:00 **the army?**

No I didn't; I classed it as an accident. I suppose that man he didn't know, but he shouldn't have given the advice if he didn't know what it was. Because they did take it there. But how can you, nothing is going to bring them back, doesn't matter what you do.

15:30 I don't know, there was never any compensation, nobody sued or nothing like that happened. Because what money, what is a life worth, no money could pay for his life. All the money in the world wouldn't pay for him, because he was a lovely boy, he was my favourite out of the whole family.

16:00 He had a lovely sense of humour, always playing tricks on you, you know.

What was his name?

Tom.

Did it bring you family closer together or was it something that you couldn't talk about or deal with?

I

16:30 don't know if it made any difference because I always thought a lot of my family. I didn't like being separated from them; I loved to be close to them. But I think it knocked the heart out of my father and Tom was the eldest son you know, he was named after his father and he thought a terrible lot of Tom, you know it must have broken his heart really.

17:00 But you, we had to go on you couldn't just give in.

It must have been difficult for your father having lost two brothers in World War One and then to lose his own son in an accident in the family backyard basically.

Well the funny thing is on the farm, he would never buy the boys a gun, they are too dangerous, they might end up shooting one another. So he would never let them have a gun and

17:30 other people we knew they had Pea rifles and things like that, but he would never allow it. It seemed so strange that something like that would happen to his son, when he was so careful about that sort of thing. But

So it sounds like at this point you had already volunteered.

Oh yes.

Can you just go back

18:00 **to where were you working?**

I was working for Graham Brothers – this is the accountants in Home Hill – and the paper had come out and listed all the casualties on the front page and there were boys I worked with and knew and danced with and you'd see them missing in action, wounded in action and all this sort of thing. They were, it was awful. And

18:30 the papers came out and they were urging the girls to join up in one of the services because they wanted to release a man to go to the front line because they were so short of men. So I thought, "Well someone's got to do something, we will have to do something." Because we were losing everywhere, Singapore had gone, and Darwin had been bombed and

19:00 you know a lot of our ships had been sunk by the Japanese, and they seemed to be getting closer and closer to us and we were here in the north. And I thought, "Well someone has to go and do something." So I decided that I would join the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]. And then they did say at the bottom, if they didn't get enough volunteers, that Manpower was going to shove you into any job that suited

19:30 them. They might put you in the land army or anywhere, and you mightn't want to do that. So I thought, "I'd volunteer and go where I wanted to go." So that is what I did.

Why did you choose the army?

Well, because we are army people, like my father's brothers were in the army, and my mother's two brothers were in the army as well.

20:00 **Did you have a lot of, did you and your girlfriends talk about how you would make a contribution?**

No I went on my own, nobody went with me. I volunteered and then they said I had to go up to the area office in Townsville to be sworn in. So I went up there and saw Major Hearne, he was the officer, at the

area office.

20:30 And anyway, after examination and so forth he said, to me, “Well you’re in the army now.” And I remember a big grin came over my face, and I walked out of there and I don’t think my feet hit the footpath and I was walking about six inches above it, I was so excited that I was going into the army.

What was it that excited

21:00 **you?**

I don’t know, I just thought, “Oh I am in the army and it is going to be really adventurous.” And I had to go to Brisbane.

Can I just ask first did you have to ask your parents’ permission to join up?

Oh yes, I had to tell them that I was going to do it. But they didn’t object, they must have known, everybody knew that we had to do something, someone had to do something, and the more that did it the better I suppose.

21:30 **I am not quite getting a sense of what news you were getting and why it felt so urgent to you. Can you just sort of describe it a bit more detail in regards to how the war was going and how that was impacting on you on how that was impacting on you and the general kind of feeling of helplessness that people had?**

I think it was Singapore

22:00 and losing all of those troops and you know that was awful and then they bombed Darwin, they seemed to be unstoppable, they were just coming, swoop, swoop, swarming. I thought they would be here next, be here, they’d take us, if we were not careful. And that’s what made me join up.

Had you heard about the Brisbane Line?

Well, they say it wasn’t there

22:30 but I think it was all right, I think we were expendable.

Was there a feeling in the north, that people knew that and that they weren’t going to give up.

I don’t know if that was so, but we didn’t have any defences really much up here. There wasn’t much, to stop them,

23:00 if they wanted to come.

Did you have air-raid shelters and things like?

We dug an air shelter at home. Tom put some boards in to keep the sand from falling in. But I don’t think anyone ever used it. And they had to put black out curtains on the house, to stop the lights and Townsville was a very, very busy place, there were troops everywhere. Well first of all I went

23:30 to Brisbane and I worked at AWAS Headquarters in Brisbane that is where I was posted to and I was a private and you know I didn’t like this being called Freeman all time, they didn’t call you by your Christian name they just said, “Freeman, do this, Freeman do that.” And I thought, “Oh this is awful, I hate that.” And that was one thing I didn’t like and I didn’t’ like the

24:00 business of having to have your hair kept above the collar, you weren’t allowed to have long hair and long hair was the fashion and all the glamour girls had long hair. And we were there with our short cuts and this came as a bit of a shock, because I had had such a free and easy childhood and life and I more or less did what I liked I think. But that was bit of a shock and then of course

24:30 I got pretty homesick too. And when the bombs dropped on Townsville, and I thought, “Oh what is going to happen up there, I think I am going to have to get up there, because I think I can do better up there, then I am doing down here.” Because I was the lowest of the low, I was a general dogsbody.

What were you doing?

I wasn’t using any of my skills hardly at all, I wasn’t using any, I was a stenographer. I was sweeping out and dusting all the

25:00 tables and offices, and making the morning and afternoon tea and running the messages. And I thought, “Oh good heavens I am doing nothing, this in not a war effort.” So I thought I would put in a transfer to go North, and then that was when I was posted to Townsville.

Before we sort of move up there to Townsville, can I just sort of get you so slowly talk me through a bit of joining up? How did you get from Townsville to Brisbane?

By train.

And who was on that train? Only women or?

25:30 Oh no, no it was just general people.

What did you take with you?

I had no winter clothes; I had two very thin dresses for the summer up here and a cardigan. And I went to Brisbane and it was the coldest winter I think I have ever felt. And I was frozen and there were no uniforms, there was….

26:00 I couldn't get a uniform in the beginning. So I had to wear these civilian clothes into work, on the tram. I don't know whether they had a barracks there or whether there was no room in the barracks, I don't know, but I was billeted in a private house with two other AWAS, out at Kedron, and we had to walk to the tram stop and go by tram to Victoria Barracks

26:30 and then just walk in. That is where the AWAS Headquarters was at the time. And it was freezing I froze I tell you. But didn't I welcome that great coat when I got it; I thought it was the best thing I ever had.

Tell me about getting your uniform that must have been exciting?

Oh it was lovely and the first thing I did was go and get my photo taken. And of course I was not used to it. You know how you are not familiar with the uniform,

27:00 and you can see it on the photo I am not really at home in that uniform yet but I had to get the photograph to send it home.

Why weren't you at home, what did it feel like?

Oh just strange, I don't know, they are either to big or too small, I think the cuffs [sleeves] are about up to here, but I got a better one later.

So besides the great coat, did you have another uniform?

Oh you had a serge jacket and a serge

27:30 skirt, it was belted, we had khaki shirt and a khaki tie and khaki stockings and flat heeled shoes, which we thought were terrible. But they are the most comfortable shoes that I have ever worn in my life, they were beautiful and soft. I don't know what we whinged about. But we thought we should have a heel of course, girls.

Did girls try and make themselves still be

28:00 **feminine? Like even though they were wearing the uniform?**

Oh yes. We didn't try to ape the men, we wanted to be girls, we didn't want to be men, we wanted to be just be girls. And they encouraged us to be girls. And I was issued with these pair of brown leather gloves to the wrist. And the major said to me, "And don't go anywhere with out your gloves,

28:30 a lady should always have her gloves with her." And so I carried those gloves everywhere I went, and I don't know how I didn't lose them, but I didn't lose them all through the war I still had those gloves.

Were you allowed to wear make-up?

Oh yes, we could use our make-up.

Were stockings a scarcity, I mean how many were you issued with, how many pairs?

Oh two or three pairs,

29:00 they were this horrible khaki colour and thick. Not nylons, they weren't nylons, but the worse of all was the underwear. Oh my God, the underwear, why it was awful. The bloomers come down to about here, half way down your leg. And then you used to wear satin scanties and satin petticoats and we had, oh it

29:30 was awful, I remember it.

Was it a bra or a corset?

Oh no we were issued with bras and singlets and we had singlets and we had these pants and stockings and we did look all right on the surface. But the girls all called them romance busters and they said, "Why didn't you wear your own, if you didn't like them."

30:00 But I thought, "Well, because they weren't part of the uniform if you had the wrong pants on you weren't in uniform, were you?" Oh no, you had to have the right pants, even if you didn't like them.

What colour were your underclothes?

Khaki, yes, khaki.

Talk me through the first couple of weeks of training, like what was it like? You arrive there, you don't anybody, I guess, what happens?

Well, the biggest shock was the breakfast; I think it was the lumpy porridge

30:30 and then they gave us this army biscuit. Talk about a dog biscuit, no way in the world could you chew it. You needed a sledge hammer to break it to start with. And you used to just gnaw on the edge of it and have a cup of tea. That was the army biscuits and porridge, I don't know. And they used to make us do exercises to get us fit and

31:00 we did do route marches we did a good bit of that. Marching, they taught us to march and they taught us to salute and they taught us the ways of the army and what you had to do and…

What were the ways of the army?

Well if you saw an officer you had to salute so you were taught to salute. And if you were in the room and an officer came in you had to stand up and

31:30 that was etiquette and you had to do that. And you weren't allowed to; the girls weren't allowed to go out with any of the officers, that was forbidden.

Was it hard to teach women to march?

I suppose it might have been. But we'd had it at school. I had known all about marching from school days, so marching wasn't any big deal with me. But we were tired by the end of the day.

32:00 They exercised us but they got us fit, because you thought that you were fit. Because I used to ride the bike to work three miles, and three miles home and then Saturday night used dance all night. And you thought you were fit, but you found out that you had muscles that you didn't know you had.

So what were all the extra exercises that you would do?

I just don't remember now. But they were, we did have extra exercises. And of course we had to have

32:30 our inoculations and your arm all swelled up very sore.

What were they inoculating against?

Oh I don't know really know what they were, but they were called tab and tet, what they were for I don't know. But we had to have them anyway, it was vaccination.

Any fainting spells from people?

33:00 Not that I know of. I didn't worry about the needles but the sore arm did, it took a while to come right too. It gets very sore, but then it heals up and it's okay.

Did you have a general medical that you had to undergo?

Not really. I think it was more or less a superficial thing. And I think they were desperate.

33:30 They might have just been checked your heart and your blood pressure and looked in your mouth and that was about it. They had no other.

Who were your instructors?

I can't remember.

Were they woman or men?

Don't know, lots of things are gone. It's been a long time.

So were there any female officers or?

At AWAS Headquarters

34:00 they were all female officers. There was Major Maloney, Captain Skov, Lieutenant Heartshorn, Sergeant Jones, Sergeant Woollie and me, Private Freeman. But Sergeant Woollie was the first AWAS to join in Queensland. She was a nice looking girl and they had photo in the Courier Mail. She was very attractive

34:30 and this used to help recruiting of course. But she was a nice girl, a good girl. And Captain Skov and her, they were good hard workers.

So you could get promoted? How did that work?

You couldn't put in for it, somebody had to nominate you, somebody had to promote you, but I didn't get anything down there. It was when I got to Townsville and I worked for, I was still a private for

35:00 quite a while then. And then I was… Brigadier North made me a lance corporal.

We won't go to Townsville just yet, we will stay in Brisbane for a while. So you initial time of getting settled and getting your uniform and so forth. And then where did you go from Brisbane to start doing the work that you were doing there, the

I was at AWAS Headquarters.

35:30 **So was that not in Victoria Barracks?**

Yes that was in Victoria Barracks at the time.

Right, okay, so what was the quarters like where you stayed?

Well I didn't get into any army quarters; I was in a private home because there was no room. They had no accommodation, so no accommodation and no uniforms.

Did you ever see and go where the girls were sleeping? Like could you describe it?

I don't know if they were built even, because that was

36:00 the 9th of July 1942, that was the very beginning and they mightn't have had them. They might have just, you see if some of the girls were in searchlights, they'd have to be in tents at the site, you know.

Did you have a particular ambition to go into a certain area; I know that you had skills as a stenographer. Did you have ambition to be in signals or anything like that?

No I was happy enough to just be a stenographer.

36:30 But I wasn't very happy with not using my skills down there, I thought, I am just going backwards here.

How long did you sort of stick it out, before you put your hand up and said you wanted to go?

Eight months. And then I thought, "Enough's enough. I am going home.

37:00 I am going to Townsville."

What was the procedure to try and get a transfer?

You had to put in an application to be posted to Townsville and luckily enough I got it.

Was that because they were short of people with your skills up there, or what?

They seemed to have quite a few girls up there that could do it. But they accepted me so that was all right.

And so when you went back to Townsville, where were you staying there?

There was no room in the barracks. The barracks was next door to army headquarters,

37:30 but there was still no room in the barracks. And they said, "Would you be prepared to stay at home and we'd give your parents a subsistence allowance and you'd stay at home and be able to work every day?" And I said, "That would suit me, I'll do that." And that was all right for the beginning because I had my own bedroom and everything. And then my sister's husband got posted Townsville and they arrived on the scene and I had to give up my bedroom. I was sleeping in the combined lounge, dining room, on a bed

38:00 sort of like there. I couldn't go to bed until everyone had gone to bed. So it was, we were crowed out of course, then, but anyway, you put up with these things, because it is war time and you didn't worry about it.

So what was a typical day for you in Townsville working as a stenographer? Tell me you get up in morning what time do you go to work? What was a typical day?

38:30 What time did we start; I think it might have been nine. But anyway it was an eight hour day till five o'clock in the afternoon. And I was in the typing pool to start with and I typed for censorship, intelligence, I think for the port controller,

39:00 I typed for the medical officer, I typed for the legal officer, anyone who wanted a letter typed, I had to do it if they wanted a typist.

How many girls would there be in the typing pool in Townsville?

There were quite a few girls there, they were all young, there were no really old people there, they were all pretty young.

We will just stop there, we are right on the end of our tape, we will just switch the tape over.

Tape 4

00:34 **I was just wondering people don't really use typewriters very much these day, what kinds of, what models were you using. Can you describe them to me?**

Well probably an Underwood I suppose, but it was very heavy you had to push you know, you couldn't do that with the electric ones now, you had to bang every letter.

01:00 Real old style ones.

Did you have to type at a certain speed or anything like that?

Oh there was no examination for that. But you were expected to do your work of course but we had to clean those typewriters and we had to re-ink the ribbons because everything was in short supply and we had to watch that we didn't use too much carbon paper

01:30 to do the copies and we had to be very careful that way with everything.

How did you re-ink the ribbons?

Oh I don't know, it was a dirty job, I don't remember how you did it, I forget now, but we did have to do that and we had to look after our own typewriter.

Did you get, they were very hard to use obvious, did you get cramps?

I did I got lumps on the back of my wrists

02:00 both of my wrists, and they sent me to the MO [Medical Officer] and he gave me a week at Magnetic Island. That was RSI [Repetitive Strain Injury] I'd be suing them if I had it today. But no that was nothing you just put up with it.

So how much would you work load be each day? Were you constantly flat out?

Oh yes you were typing all day. You would go and take your notes down, what ever was required

02:30 and then you'd go to your type writer and type your letters out and then take them back to the officer and he would sign them and then you would have to take them up to despatch to get them sent off. So that was how that went.

So the letters would come to you? Would they come in shorthand from would somebody have dictated them to, what?

The officer would speak and I would take it down in short hand and then I had to go and

03:00 type it from my own notes, in a little stenographers note book.

I imagine some of the information that you were taking down would have been quite sensitive?

Well it wasn't as exciting as you might think. There was a lot of repetitive stuff. Units would be wanting to get away and some of their sergeants or someone important to them was

03:30 stuck in the staging camp and they wanted to know where he was and to expedite his return and this sort of thing. And we used to have to write back and tell them, where he was, we found him there, and we are sending him on, a lot of that went on. And that was mostly that I can remember. And the censorship wasn't anything really terrible.

What do you mean, what is an example?

Oh some fellow called old Bill

04:00 I think they called him. Oh I suppose you'd call it pornographic stuff through the mail, but nothing dreadful about that. I really don't remember a lot of the letters, because we were taught, never to talk about our work, but not even amongst ourselves, because

04:30 the walls had eyes and loose lips sink ships, so don't talk. So the best way not to talk was when you were finished for the day, chop it off and forget about it, you'd bury that and start again the next day. And you did the same thing day after day, you didn't want to know, you didn't want to remember, it wasn't safe to remember anything,

05:00 really. So you deliberately blanked it out, what ever it was but there wasn't anything as I say until I had to type that letter for the Z Force [Special Unit. Known as the Services Reconnaissance Department] officer that was the one that I did remember because I couldn't forget it.

How, can you set the scene for

05:30 **when did this happen, like what year and what month, what was happening when you had to type this letter, and how did someone come to you and say I want you to type this letter?**

Well I was in there, the staff captain was there and I was here and Brigadiers North's office was straight in front of me. And I typed for the two of them. And one day someone came down from intelligence to say

06:00 that, "You are wanted, you have got to stay behind after everyone else has gone home, and you have got take this letter, and bring you note pad, pencil and typewriter up to the intelligence officer's office." But

before that had happened, I was busy typing away and I

06:30 heard this sound of marching feet and I thought, “What’s that?” But anyway they just wheeled in the door, wheeled straight into the colonel’s office, I am supposed to stop everyone at the door and ask them who they are and what they want. But they just ignored me, they just wheeled in. And these Provosts [Military Police] and this army officer, Captain Carey, in between them, under arrest,

07:00 no hat, with a silly looking look on his face and they were in Colonel’s North’s office. And then the next thing the Colonel dismisses the Provosts and then Captain Carey left, I don’t know where he went, but he went. And this was when I got the message that I was wanted to stay behind and do the letter.

07:30 So after everyone had gone, except the duty office and the girl in the despatch room, she was there. And nobody else the place was like a morgue because it is usually full of people with people wandering around everywhere. But anyway I went up and there was a strange officer there in jungle greens and I didn’t know him.

08:00 And I asked him, well first of all he asked me about my loyalty, and I said, “Well yes.” And he asked me, “If I would be prepared to keep a secret.” And he questioned my loyalty, and I said, “Yes, well look my boyfriend is up in New Guinea.” (Which is my husband). And I said, “The sooner the war is over the better I will like it.”

08:30 You know, he said, “What you are about to hear could make a difference to the ending of the war.” I said, “Okay.” And then I asked him what his name was, because we have to put the initials, say if it was Captain Miles, it was WNM [Captain Miles’s initials] and then a stroke and NEF [Norma’s initials], so that meant Captain Miles had dictated the letter and I had typed it. So we had to do that,

09:00 that is army procedure. But anyway, I asked him what his name was, I wanted his initials, he said, “What do you want to know for?” And he wouldn’t tell me. And I thought, “Hmm.” And I said, “Well I have got to have initials to put on the letter, to authenticate it.” So he reluctantly gave me his initials and do you what I can’t remember what they were. I just put them down you know.

09:30 Then he started to talk about what had happened?

What did he tell you?

That these ten men had left their base in Cairns and came down by train and they asked the engine driver to stop at the Black River Bridge, north of Townsville, to let them off and when they got off there it was midnight and they had these

10:00 folboats with them and they intended to paddle them down the river to the coast and then paddle them across to Magnetic Island. But of course there wasn’t enough water in the river, it was just a string of holes or else the tide was out or whatever. Anyway, there wasn’t enough water to paddle them, so they paddled them a bit, and then they carried them a bit and then they paddled a bit. And I think it was about six o’clock

10:30 in the afternoon by the time they got to the coast. And they had to stop there until they could get across to Magnetic Island with out any one seeing them. This was the object no one to see them. And anyway they got to Magnetic Island by early the next morning and they went into hiding at Magnetic Island and they set up their camp there and they watched the shipping into Townsville harbour

11:00 and watched where the ships went and so they were going to mount a raid on the shipping and nobody knew that they were coming and it was a complete surprise, so if they were discovered they would be treated as the enemy and they could have shot them. The aim was to get into that harbour undetected and put these

11:30 Limpet mines on these ships under the water line. So they set off and they got in, they watched where the Port was mined, they watched where the ships went and they found there way in all right and they mined so many ships in the harbour and then they went down the Creek and they had there breakfast down underneath one of the bridges in

12:00 Townsville and then they dispersed. And people were going to work, people took no notice of them, and the next morning about ten o’clock as they unloaded the ships, the mines became visible as the weight got out of the ships, the ships came up in the water and they could see all these things, all these mines attached to their ships.

12:30 Because then it was hell to pay. And Colonel North was getting a few angry phone calls from ships officers about the devices. They didn’t know where they came from you know anyway. So then the intelligence

13:00 must have got word of it and the word came through to arrest Sam Carey and that’s when Sam Carey was brought with the Provosts to Brigadier North’s office. And this was the letter that I had to type for this officer to tell him that the raid had been a complete success and they had managed to get in, put the mines on and everything and he went on

13:30 to tell General Blamey who the letter was to, what his future plans for the unit was and then he said he

was going to mount a raid on Singapore Harbour. I am writing taking this down in shorthand you know and the hairs on the back of my head stood up, because I thought, “Oh

14:00 God, this is dangerous, this is. They will never get away with this.” Anyway I just didn’t let him know what I, thought, “Oh goodness.” So I finished typing the letter and he signed it and I had to take it up to despatch to send it, but there were no copies.

14:30 Like there were no copies because nobody else could read this letter it was very top secret.

So you still did put carbon between the paper and made copies of the…?

He wanted, the officer wanted so many copies of this, so I took this original letter up and he told me how to fold it so she couldn’t see what it was about, just the headline, saying Operation Scorpion.

15:00 And she said, “I can’t accept it.” And I said, “There is an officer out there who says, you must accept it, it has got to go.” And she said, “I have got to have copies for the files.” I said, “Well it is top secret, you will just have to write in the book, copies taken by officer concerned.” And finally she did agree to send it,

15:30 but for a minute there, I thought, “What am I going to do?” Because by the time I got back he had gone. So I had nobody out there to say, to back me up at all. But before that he told me, she couldn’t see it. I folded it and put it in the envelope and she put sealing wax on it and a stamp on it and then she put it to a, he told me it had to go into a locked bag

16:00 doesn’t go with the ordinary mail. And so the letter was gone then.

Who was it being sent to?

General Blamey, the General Officer Commanding of the Australian Army. And anyhow I had to come back down and he told me I had to burn the carbon paper and I had to burn my shorthand notes everything must be destroyed

16:30 and I must never speak to anyone about it; I was to say nothing, so.

Were they very intimidating when they were saying this?

Oh he impressed it on me, but of course we were taught, we had to be very secretive about anything that we did, we weren’t allowed to speak about anything, it really wasn’t anything new, but I knew that, he did say, that the lives of a whole lot of men

17:00 depended on my saying nothing, but I realised that too. Once you tell somebody it is no longer a secret, is it? So I knew that I couldn’t say anything to anybody. I think he arranged for a staff car to take me home because it was dark by the time I’d finished and they picked me up in the morning to take me into work.

17:30 And anyway when I, it must have been the next day, my brother came home with a story about all the ships in the Townsville harbour had mines on them, and I was absolutely horrified that he knew about it, how did he know about it. I said, “Oh that is rubbish.” And I said, “If it was anything

18:00 we would have heard about that at army headquarters.” I said, “We would have known, we knew nothing about it.” I said, “Someone is making it up.” I said, “Or it could be a practical joke.” Because it wasn’t long after the 1st of April, because of April Fools Day. I said, “It could be a pay back for something done on April Fools Day. And Tom said, “But that was a couple of weeks ago.” Yes I know it was possible. I said,

18:30 “Yes I know but it is possible.” But I said, “Don’t worry.” He was worried about it, I said, “Don’t worry about it.” I said, “I wouldn’t have worried about it.” I said, “If it was anything important we would have known all about it.” And I just had typed this letter, but I couldn’t tell him because I was sworn to secrecy and I wasn’t game to say a word even to my parents. And they said, “Why were you so late.” And I said, “I had to type some statistical returns and they had to be done.” Nothing more

19:00 boring than typing statistical returns so nobody questioned that. I thought that was a pretty good one to figure that one out quick and lively. And when I went to work the next morning, and of course the girls in the barracks next door they could see right through and they could see me typing away and they got really curious and they shouldn’t have but they did and they bailed me up the next morning. “What were you doing here so late,

19:30 yesterday afternoon, after everyone had gone home?” Oh I said, “I had to type some statistical returns and they had to be done. I said, “Just a whole lot of figures.” I said, “I don’t know anything about it. I said, “Just a whole lot of figures.” So anyway, that seemed to satisfy them, I don’t know if they believed me but they had to accept it because that was all they were going to get so it was the start of keeping of the big secret.

20:00 **Was it exciting to have a little secret that you were keeping?**

Oh it was, I was excited about knowing about what they were going to do. I was worried about the men, I thought to myself, “Gee this is dangerous, I don’t know whether they will pull this off, I don’t know, it

sounds like something out of Boys Own Annual to me. And they might do it, with the element of surprise." Because you see there was nothing on paper, nothing and

20:30 I think the letter, the copies of the letter to different other people. And I think one was to the British and I guess they were big VIPs [Very Important Persons] whoever they went to. And I think one might have been to the Americans, I am not sure who the others were to. But he took them himself, he was going to hand deliver

21:00 them himself. So I think he was going to these places, make them aware, the top man aware and that they were going to be out there and if they wanted help, that they would be able to call for help from any of these other people. That's what I think was the idea of these copies. And I think there was a note on them,

21:30 when you read this letter to destroy it.

When you had to destroy the copies of the carbon and everything in your notes. Did somebody watch you do that?

No, they didn't, the only part of it was, when I went out to the duty officer, I said, "Do you have any matches?" And he said, "No I don't smoke." And I went up to the sergeant up in despatch, "Have you got any matches?" "No I haven't got any matches." I didn't smoke, I had no matches either.

22:00 So I had to go into the barracks next door and borrow a box of matches to come back and burn everything. So then I had to take the matches back of course.

Where did you burn them?

In the sink, at the back verandah of the flat. They were, the headquarters used to be flats, old flats. There was the bottom and the top storey and they even had something underneath. But it was in the sink on the back landing that I burnt everything.

22:30 **It sounds like a girls own adventure?**

It was but I tell you for a while I was riding home at night, looking over my shoulder thinking, "I hope nobody attacks me, I hope nobody." And I thought to myself, I really did have to take myself in hand because I thought to myself, "You are such a silly thing. That officer is not going to talk about it; General Blamey is not going to talk about it,

23:00 and there is no way your going to talk about it, so how does anyone else know?" And I thought, "Oh well your fairly safe I think?" I did keep looking over my shoulder for a while. But then I used to, when I said me prayers at night, I used to say, "God bless my mother and father and family, aunties and uncles and so forth and God bless Z Force." Z Special Unit they were called, they weren't called Z Force.

23:30 But in the hope that they would all come back safely. But of course I never heard, I never heard anything about them. And I couldn't ask anyone about them because if I had asked anyone I would have had to tell them. And I was sworn to secrecy, so I couldn't. And then after the war, the book called the heroes came in the Sunday mail in a serial form and it described the whole thing.

24:00 And I thought, "I am so happy to think." Well first of all the newspapers came out to say, so many months afterwards that all the shipping had been destroyed in Singapore Harbour." And I thought, "Gee they did it, they got away with it, they did." And I felt like shouting it from the house tops, "Oh wasn't it

24:30 wonderful." But I couldn't say a word I just had to keep quite. And anyway, I never heard anything and it wasn't until the book came out, that I realised that they did get away with it. They got away with it but I had nothing more to do with that unit from then on. But one Saturday morning I was here in bed

25:00 and I heard on the wireless that the Z Special Unit were going to have a dedication to a cairn that was built outside the Maritime Museum in Townsville commemorating the raid on the Townsville Harbour. It was early in the morning I heard this. And I got up and I said to Henry, "I have got to go to Townsville today, we have got to go, they are having this dedication to the cairn in memory

25:30 of the Z Force raid, I have got to go. And he said, "What do you want to be there for?" And I said, "Well I had a lot to do with that." And anyway, so Henry didn't know, well he didn't know until the serial came out in the paper and I told him what I had to do. He knew then, it was in the paper, thousands of people had read it, it was no secret

26:00 any longer. And anyway he said to me, "Why do you want to go?" And he didn't want to go because we had our racehorses and he was having a day off that Saturday we weren't going to a race or anything. And he was relishing having a day off. And here's him wanting to drive me, because I couldn't drive then, I could drive but I couldn't drive to Townsville. And he had to drive to Townsville. And anyway a

26:30 big fight ended up and he said, "You don't even know where the maritime museum is, you don't even know where you are going?" And I thought, World War Three is going to break out any minute and anyway, we did make it, we got there. And I met Captain Carey and he was an old man by then, you know a real old man and he was such a good looking fellow. I said to him, "You used to be good looking then. " And I thought,

27:00 “Oh boy your foot’s in your mouth again.” And anyway he laughed he thought that was funny and he introduced me to the other men there. Gee I am glad they were on our side, they were a pretty rough looking crew, they were rugged. And as I am going down the line and this man said to me, “I don’t want to shake your hand, I want to kiss you.” And he put his arms around me and kissed me in front of everybody.

27:30 And I was embarrassed. Though actually, there is only one name on that cairn that went on the Singapore raid, that is Lieutenant Page. And he went on the first raid and he came back and when they were going to do the second raid he volunteered to do that too. And of course

28:00 they were all captured and court martialled by the Japanese and the verdict was to be beheaded by Samurai sword and they were all beheaded. And they said that was supposed to be an honourable death for heroes according to the Japanese and that is how they finished.

28:30 But that was only one of them whose name is on that cairn, so I didn’t meet him because he was already dead by the time that they did the dedication. It was fifty years after the raid, so it must have been 93 or something like that. Fifty years after it happened.

29:00 **Can I just ask before you typed that letter? Did you know anything about Z Special Forces, the Z Special Unit?**

I had seen they were calling for people to volunteer to join that unit but I didn’t know what it was about, but I did know the name of the unit but I didn’t know anything about them at all, so. It was an, I suppose it was an honour to be picked to type that letter.

29:30 And then again it might have been because I wasn’t living in the barracks and I wouldn’t be talking amongst the other girls perhaps I don’t know, but perhaps because I did type for Brigadier North, or Colonel North he was then, I also typed for intelligence so they may have said for me to go, I don’t know.

What kind of man was Colonel North?

He was very much a man that

30:00 kept to himself. He was sort of austere. He wasn’t a man to talk to you or anything like that but he wasn’t, he was very strict but he was very fair and in fact he asked me if I would like to go and work for his solicitors, Roberts, Leu and North after the war.

30:30 But I thought, “Oh no, I will still think I am in the army.” It will be, “Yes Sir, no Sir, I don’t know Sir.” And I thought, “I would rather have a bit more freedom than that.” You had to know your place.

And tell me about typing letters for intelligence? Was there secrecy attached to that as well?

Oh some would. But as I said you didn’t, you didn’t remember,

31:00 I mean I couldn’t remember any contents of those letters and especially because you trained yourself to forget. In fact when I went up to that dedication to the cairn. I couldn’t remember the details of what had happened, I just couldn’t remember, I just couldn’t, I knew it had happened, and I had remembered that Captain Carey was there. But all the details I just couldn’t recall.

31:30 And one day I was looking through a scrapbook on Z Force, I used to cut out everything that I used to see about them and put it in this book. And why was I so worried about those men, why was I so worried about them and I started to think. And all of a sudden it came to me, the whole thing that had happened because

32:00 when I met those men in Townsville, they were trying to find that letter and they could never find that letter, they couldn’t find it, there was no trace of it anywhere. Because they couldn’t commit anything to paper because once it was there someone could read it aye. So it had to be, it was so top secret, there were no copies, no paper, and I was so worried about the men. And they are up there and I thought, “They are up there and there is nothing

32:30 on paper about them, nothing.” And they are up there and they might forget about them and they might be up there behind enemy lines trying to get out and I was really worried over them.

Were you worried at the time, did it ever occur to you when you had to burn that stuff, that it (UNCLEAR) something.

33:00 I was worried for myself a bit, because I was a bit frightened and then I thought, “How can you be so silly you know because you’re not going to tell and they are not going to tell.” And the men I understand that went on the Krait, because they were the men of the Krait, Krite or whatever they call it. They were at sea, before he told them that they were heading for Singapore, so they didn’t know where they were going.

33:30 I think they were originally told they were going to go to Rabaul, but whether that was just camouflage and they were thinking they were going to Rabaul, and they wasn’t going to go there anyway. But had they gone to Rabaul well he would have showed his hand wouldn’t he? And they would have been

waiting for him.

34:00 And I think that's why the second raid didn't succeed because once they got in there once, they would have doubled security and that's why it didn't succeed.

Did you think about the men a lot when you know after typing up the letter did you imagine scenarios, or who they might be?

Yes and as I said, I used to add them to the end of my

34:30 prayers ever night. Because everyone prayed I don't care who you were, you always prayed for the boys overseas and because he was overseas and other cousins and that were in the army, friends were in the army, you prayed for everybody. I don't think, I can't class myself as being really religious but

35:00 I think we all prayed then in wartime.

After having had such an exciting experience having typed that letter did it change the way you went to work, and how you felt about things, or were things a little bit dull after that, after having had so much of a rush from the excitement?

Oh we were young and we didn't think

35:30 anything much about anything much, our main pleasure was going to the dances on Saturday night and we'd talk about the dances and the boys we met and the latest songs and all this sort of thing. You know I was nineteen years old, you don't, and you are just a young girl.

You said before you had chopped it off, you chopped the day off.

Hmm.

What was it with

36:00 **the things that you did to just leave things behind?**

That was how you trained yourself, don't think about it, just don't think about it, because if you don't think about it, you won't talk about it.

So was it the dances and things like that?

That's what saved us I think, that and because we could go and relax, we relaxed at the dances, we loved the dances and the music and the latest songs and things like that, that was what we liked.

Where did you go dancing in Townsville?

36:30 The place we used to go to the Town Hall first and then we went to the Toc H [Talbot house] and we liked that better and all the Australian boys went there. And we liked them best.

The Toc H? Is that short for something?

I don't know, but that was the name of the place. I think it might have been run by the Anglican Church I am not sure but someone run it. And there was a woman who just played the piano and somebody else

37:00 on the saxophone. The music wasn't anything marvellous but it was the company. So that was our main recreation going to the dances.

Tell me about the atmosphere there, like were they mostly girls in the services, I mean which men were they? Were there Americans there, can you just talking me through who went and what the atmosphere was?

It was mainly Australian boys,

37:30 there was the navy and the air force and the solider a lot of soldiers and us girls and other people and it was just a dance you know.

Did you meet Henry at one of those dances?

I knew him before the war. I met him, we were sort of, we'd go to the show together and we'd meet at dances and things like that. But we weren't committed in any way. I liked him and he liked me

38:00 I suppose but we didn't get engaged or married or anything like because the war was on and we didn't know if any of us were going to survive it or what. But I was too young of course because I was a young nineteen, I wasn't an old nineteen. I was even thinking about settling down.

What did you wear to the dances?

38:30 Your uniform, you couldn't wear anything else. You couldn't go out with out your uniform on. You couldn't leave home. You could wear your civilian clothes at home but you couldn't go out in them, but you could wear civilian clothes if you went on leave, you were allowed to wear your civilian clothes, but all the other time you headed out with khaki on. And by the time when the end of the

39:00 war came we were pretty tired of the sight of khaki. Because girls like pretty clothes and I didn't do to badly for clothes I used to spend all my coupons for clothes and he used to send me his too and I used to spend all his too. He wouldn't use them up in New Guinea.

We are right on the end of that tape Norma so we will just stop there.

Tape 5

00:33 **Okay great, Norma, when you were down in Victoria Barracks you mentioned the bombing of Townsville? What do you know of the bombing of Townsville?**

Oh they dropped bombs out near Oonoonba, a plane came over and dropped some bombs out near the experimental station. It didn't do anything at all it just knocked

01:00 a few coconut palm tops off or something, no damage. Actually Henry my husband was at the staging camp when those bombs were dropped and he was on guard at the gate so he couldn't go and have a look to see what had happened, he had to stay at his post.

And I thought it was interesting that you said that Townsville got bombed and so you wanted to move up there and you were going to transfer to get closer?

01:30 Well my family was there and I was worried about them, I was more worried about..... if I was there maybe I could help them. But I couldn't help them if I was in Brisbane, could I? And they meant a lot to me. But of course I thought, well the war effort, I don't know what I thought I would have to do up there, maybe I was going to throw a few grenades around or, but not really I don't think that entered my head.

02:00 **And was your family coping with having moved to the big smoke so to speak?**

They seemed to take it in their stride, in fact I think my father was fairly sensible because when the bombs dropped in Townsville, the neighbours wanted to take off, load up everything in a big truck they had and they wanted to go bush. And my father said to them, "There is no good going out to the bush, because you will have to come into town to get supplies,

02:30 you'd can't just live off the land out there; you will have to come back in. And you'd be safer in the city than what you would be out there because if someone spotted you out there, they could just shoot you and that would be the end of it. You are better to stop." So he convinced them to stop not go bush but a lot of people left Townsville, they were panicked, and they left their homes and they sold them for a song. In fact a woman that lived across from us, she did pretty well out of the

03:00 war. She took in washing for the Americans, I don't know what she charged them, it must have been a fair bit. But anyway she ended up buying a couple of houses up there in Townsville. She did all right out of the war really. But a lot of people did leave and of course a lot of properties were requisitioned for the army and they just told them, they would have to move out and they would have to go into a flat or anywhere they could find.

03:30 And the army took over their property.

Can you think of any other examples of people being entrepreneurial and making a bit of money out of the war effort?

Well you heard about all the black market. But you wouldn't dare bring anything home to our place, because we would get into big trouble if we ever brought anything home that didn't belong that we shouldn't have had. And if anyone gave me anything for a souvenir you were told to give it straight

04:00 back. Because it wasn't yours and you weren't to have it. So he was pretty strict that way, he didn't believe in this black market stuff.

Your dad was?

Hmm, very strict, you couldn't have it. He wouldn't let you take it, accept anything.

And did he get work in the Townsville area?

No he just semi retired and he used to go up and help at the butcher shop and the butcher would give him a bit of meat to take home.

04:30 And that sort of thing, but he didn't really work up there.

Do you think it was hard for him to living such a busy and hard working lifestyle to something more slow?

I don't think his health was up to it. Doing hard work any more so that's why it was better for him just to do that.

What was wrong with his health?

I don’t know but he just, oh he wasn’t really fit anyway I know that.

05:00 By the time he finished at the farm, it was too much for him. He’d be walking along and then he’d just keel over. So probably heart or something or circulation I don’t know. They don’t tell you those things when you are young. But he lived for a good many years, he was in his eighties when he died, so he didn’t do too badly.

What about your mum’s health had that improved?

Yes to a certain extent but she was never

05:30 really good till. Well after the war he had a stroke my father did and then she took over looking after him and nursing him. And she did a wonderful job, she really came into her own when she had to take charge and look after him. So really I suppose that

06:00 was a horrible way to have to get better but anyway, she did.

Must have been incredibly hard for her because of course today depression and anxiety problems are really well known. They are at the forefront of medical speak and there is treatment but at the time it must have been?

Very hard, because they didn’t know much about it you know. And you just had to

06:30 I think get better yourself, because there is no way, anyone in the world could do it for you. That’s why I think maybe the responsibility and the extra that she had to do, probably did her more good than anything. I know it’s a hard thing to say, isn’t it?

Yes I think it makes quite a bit of sense, you probably find that in today,

07:00 **forget about themselves?**

Yes forget about themselves and think about somebody else for a change you know.

Were they treating her with medication, did they have anything like that?

I don’t think so, I don’t think, there was not that I knew of that she was on any tablets or anything, I don’t think so.

And what about more common illness during the war? I imagine medicines were quite difficult to get, there would have been a shortage. Were there home remedies and those sort of things that came to the fore?

07:30 We didn’t seem to get sick, we must have been healthy. So no I don’t think we seemed to get sick much. Might be a bit off colour one day but you would be right the next day. A cold well you’d put up with it till it went. I know that if you got a cold I think you had to put a couple of drops of kerosene on a teaspoon of sugar and take that and that was supposed to stop a

08:00 cold. I don’t know I don’t think it did a thing, but that’s what you had to have, horrible things, castor oil.

Tell me about the castor oil?

Oh castor oil, they’d give you a regular dose of that, I don’t know if it was once a week or once a fortnight or whatever, and awful.

The army gave you that?

Oh not the army, no, no, no.

Your mum?

Yes, at home, like when we were kids,

08:30 more or less, not when I was grown up we never had it then. We didn’t need it anyway.

Now you were living in Townsville with your parents and you said that your sister and her husband moved in as well?

Hmm.

This was the Italian?

Hmm. But he was in camp out at he was actually out in camp at Pallarenda. He was a cook in the army then he went up to New Guinea and

09:00 then she went back to their house in Home Hill with their little boy, they had a little son, he was spoilt terribly, he was a nice little fellow, nice little boy.

Did you know if her husband had any sort of prejudice to him being Italian given that we were fighting them for some time in the war?

That never entered our heads, no he was just one of us, you know,

09:30 we didn't ever think about that.

Not from you, but you mentioned earlier that people were like 'marrying the dago' and that sort of thing, and particularly when I guess we were fighting them it must have been difficult for him in a small town?

I don't think so, he was in the army I suppose that was good enough, I mean that was good enough he was fighting for us, he didn't have to fight for us, so you've got to respect them haven't you? Don't you think so?

Yes I certainly do. I was just wondering because

10:00 **a lot of Italians were put into camps and stuff?**

Yes.

And Germans put into camps?

Yes.

Do you know if much of that went on amongst the cane growing areas?

I think up in Ingham, there were a lot of bad things done up there. People would dob someone in [inform on them] for something and they weren't guilty of it at all and they were sent off to camp and they shouldn't have been, there was a lot of that that went on. For their own gain of course and then people would want to get the

10:30 farm for a song and all this sort of thing. I believe that this did go on a bit up in Ingham because there was a lot of Italians up in Ingham. But I never heard of anything like that down here. But because I wasn't here I was in Townsville so I wouldn't hear I suppose.

I imagine people would have got more paranoid or concerned about you know sort of inside or

11:00 **fifth columnist or you know the enemy from within as the Japanese got closer and there were events like that actual events of the bombing of Townsville?**

Yes, I suppose they would have, but it never sort of came into our home, we never ever felt any of it. But I think that anyone, if you knew people, you knew they were good. You didn't have to worry about them.

11:30 There were mostly good people around. I suppose you wouldn't know, would you, that is the truth you wouldn't know but we trusted them anyway.

Did you hear anything about the bombing of Darwin?

Well my uncle was up there when Darwin was bombed. And he had to lie in the gutter and put his hands over his head when the bombs fell.

12:00 And he had to come back from Darwin through the inland route you know through Alice Springs and down to Melbourne and up the coast again by train and he arrived at our house with his swag and his blue cattle dog, Uncle Harry had arrived from Darwin. He stayed with us for a while; I think he had a bed on the verandah. And when he was ready, because he was a drover,

12:30 on cattle stations you know, he was pretty good at cattle work and he was in pretty big demand there was plenty of work for him, when ever a job came up, out he'd go to this cattle station and he'd be there, and then he'd been gone, he'd come in occasionally when he could, in between jobs. But they weren't allowed to talk about the bombing in Darwin.

13:00 They kept that all very, very quiet and I remember him speaking to my father very confidentially about how bad it was. But we were never told, us kids, we didn't know about, I suppose he didn't want to frighten us, but it was pretty bad.

And you found out from your dad in years following did you?

No, I

13:30 think I read it in the books before anybody else told me anything about it. You know after, you didn't get, you didn't go back over things with them, you didn't talk war, once the war was finished, "Good, finished, get on with my life." You wouldn't rehash anything that happened. But I have always been interested, I have read a book on Darwin and the Darwin raids and that and I have read plenty of that stuff, so I know then

14:00 that it was pretty bad. But I can remember him talking about it, telling my father about it. He didn't tell us, we weren't told.

Did you hear about the midget submarines in Sydney?

Oh yes we heard about them. That wasn't too good either, was it?

No that is a long way south of Townsville isn't it?

But I always thought that we might have been the target in Townsville because we were so close

14:30 to Port Moresby and they didn't have far to come to get here. But then again what was there really to capture, I suppose they might have been better off to get into the bigger cities, where there was something there you know. I don't know.

Given that Townsville was so close to Port Moresby, it really was the major staging camp wasn't it for launching all the Australian forces?

Oh yes, there were troops everywhere.

Can you describe Townsville for me at that time when you went up?

Oh it was a very busy

15:00 place. You'd go to town of a Saturday night and the streets were packed with people, you could hardly move. And you didn't like to go in on your own; you always liked to have somebody with you, as long as somebody was with you, you felt safe. Because I remember two of us girls were walking along in our uniforms and two Americans came up and one grabbed her and one grabbed me by the arm and they tried to get us to go with them. And I stamped my

15:30 foot, and I said, "I am not going anywhere you." I said, "I don't know you from a bar of soap. I am not going, get going." Anyway we wouldn't go with them; I don't what they were after, whether they just wanted a couple of girls or what I don't know, they didn't get them. But they'd try anything; it was worth a try I suppose in their idea.

Was it entertaining for you having all these virile young man trying to court you?

Oh well I suppose

16:00 we never missed a dance. When the dances were on we danced all night of course and that was lovely because we loved to dance. And they were all nice boys and half the time they would say, "Can I see you home?" And it was nice to have someone to take you home because going home at night it was a bit, a bit scary I suppose, and you'd go on the bus and they'd drop you off at the bus stop and then you had to walk down the street and around the corner to get to the house.

16:30 It was a bit dark to be wandering around in the middle of the night. So if they said, "Could I see you home?" You generally said, "Yes." Because somebody could see you to the gate, but they couldn't linger for very long because they had to catch the bus on the return trip or else they had to walk all the way into town, so it was more or less see you home and good night and away they'd go. But you might invite them for Sunday afternoon

17:00 to go and walk on the beach or something like that. So you repaid them in another way, you know, you had them out to your home, we had a lot of people come to our house, everyone sort of called. Anyone that was home on leave, or relations or you now, different boys we'd met and different boys my brothers had met and we had a lot of people.

17:30 We used to have singsongs around the piano and my sister would play for them and we'd sing.

You wouldn't jump on there and pull her hair?

Oh no I didn't get on, I let her do it. She was better than me.

I am just remembering when you were kids, pulling each other's hair and slapping each other out?

Oh no I didn't compete at all, I let her do it. We had a pianola, it was a pianola, you could just put a roll on you know and peddle,

18:00 and you got the music and if she wasn't there, well you still had music. I didn't play it; I didn't bother to carry on with it.

What sort of, what were the songs, what did everybody sing along to?

I do, I have written them down somewhere.

Would your parents sing as well?

No they didn't, they used to just

18:30 sit about. But no, it was interesting, it was nice, a nice evening and then they'd make a cup of tea. I remember Tom and Reggie brought these two Americans boys from the camp, they used to go down to the camp and they bought these two fellows home. They used to go down there and watch them gamble and the kids thought that was great, watching them gamble for the money.

19:00 Anyway they said to them, "Have you got a sister?" "Oh yes, we have got a sister." "Oh we'd like to meet her." And so they brought them home. They were terribly nice chaps, really nice boys, could have been

married for all I know. I never took any notice, but anyway, then sometimes they'd bring coffee, they bought coffee one time,

19:30 I'll make the coffee and so I made it on milk and I thought to myself afterwards, "I bet they hated that coffee." As much as you must have hated that tea I made, but no, the Americans I don't think they drink coffee like that. But we liked it made with milk, so I made it to suit myself of course; I never asked them how they wanted it. But I often thought afterwards they had brought us the coffee but I don't know whether they enjoyed it much.

20:00 **You said earlier that you weren't in any way committed to Henry?**

No not at the beginning of the war. He came home on leave; he was away over twelve months up in New Guinea, with out any leave in the mud and the slush and the whatnot. And he came home like a little wizened, like a Chinaman, he looked yellow and he had malaria and he looked terrible.

20:30 Anyway during that leave we did buy an engagement ring, he said, "Just keep it and we will announce it after the war." Well that's what we did.

So it would have been 1943 that he came back from New Guinea?

Might have been 1944 I would think, it might have been 1943.

Oh he went up after Milne Bay didn't he?

Yes, just after Milne Bay he was there for a couple of weeks. They were still using

21:00 the anti aircraft guns and that and when he landed he didn't know whether he was getting bombed or what it was the guns going off he wasn't too sure. But the actual battle had finished there.

I mean where I was going with that question was really, there was any young men that did tempt you at some point?

Oh there were a few. I wrote to a lot of people because everyone used to ask you to write

21:30 to them. We'd meet them at the dance. And they'd say, "Would you write to me?" And "Oh yes right." You write to me I'll write back, it was no skin off my nose, I'd write them a letter. But when I think about the letters that I wrote, there was nothing in them. How the devil they looked forward to a letter from me I don't know, but anyway I did write to them. But that all fizzled out because I wasn't really interested, not really

22:00 romantically, I liked them, they were nice lads, they were really good boys, but I think I liked him better and that was it.

Do you remember conversations, having a gravis or a weight to them, because I mean a lot of the boys that you would have been meeting were jumping on a ship to go off to war and…?

They never ever told us,

22:30 all we knew, how we knew they had gone, we would go to the dance and there would be nobody there, there would be just a hand full of men. Everyone one else had disappeared so we knew then they must have gone.

I mean they knew that they were going off to war and they didn't know what could happen this could be their last time with the young ladies you know have a good time so?

I don't think they were told until the last minute and they weren't given leave, I suppose, that would be what they would do, they wouldn't given them a leave pass, they couldn't go unless they went

23:00 AWL [Absent Without Leave] . And then next thing they would do would be put them on a ship and away they'd go. And that's how we sort of knew that they had gone and the dance would be a flop of course. Because there would be no one there we knew, our dancing partners were all gone. And so we kept going back in the hopes that we might meet somebody else to dance with. The next time there'd be somebody else new there and we'd dance with them

23:30 and get to know them and the next thing they'd be gone and that's how it went.

Did any of them talk to you about being scared about what they were facing or what was coming up?

No never, didn't talk about the war really. We weren't allowed to talk about it and I'm pretty sure they weren't allowed to talk about it either. And we weren't allowed to keep diaries. You weren't, in Townsville that was forward area and they would not allow you

24:00 to keep a diary and they impressed it on us, you must never keep diaries that was out. So how all these people come with their war stories in their diaries and they were in the front line and up over in the Islands I don't know, but they had diaries, but we couldn't keep them and we were in Townsville, amazing isn't it? I suppose it's jolly good that they did keep them because we got the stories of what happened.

24:30 But Henry said they couldn't keep diaries not where he was and he is amazed too, when he reads all these war books. How the devil did they do it? They had to have diaries didn't they? Whether they had them in code I don't know? An ordinary person wouldn't know code would they? They'd have to write them down.

You mentioned the Americans that you'd meet at the dances and offered to take you home.

25:00 Hmm.

What were your impressions of them as a people?

Oh they were nice lads but I never did think they were as hard and tough as our boys. I thought our own boys, they seemed to be like college boys as if they weren't, they didn't seem to have been front line troops. They might not have been either because they were in Townsville, I suppose they might not have been front line troops, they might have been. I know one of them was in the weather station, he was a nice young fellow.

25:30 And I did meet one of them that was on the landing ships infantry [LSI], one fellow was on that. He looked more like the marine sort of type. But they didn't talk about what they were doing, you didn't talk about it.

So you weren't the sort of girl to go for the fancy uniform and the big wallet?

No, there was just something about

26:00 our boys that I liked better, I don't know why. I just thought they were more sincere, you know the others were, they'd spin you a good yarn, but you are not that silly. They were nice boys, a lot of nice boys, you met a terrible lot of nice people from all the services, and you know they were all good. Luckily I didn't meet any bad people, wasn't I lucky, you know you could have.

26:30 **Did any of your friends from growing up or girls from the AWAS marry Americans?**

Yes one girl did, I have got a photo of her here. She went over to America she married an American boy. I think she is still alive too.

27:00 But it was a big risk they took to go over there not knowing what they were going to and I think a lot of them got very big disappointments they all looked so smart in their uniforms, but they might have been hillbillies when they got there. You don't know, do you, it was a big risk to go over there. I never wanted to leave this country I thought this is my country I want to stop here, this was my country, not America.

27:30 **Did you ever meet any British or Dutch soldiers or servicemen?**

I don't think so. Mainly our own services like the army, the navy, the air force and a few Americans and that's about all but.

From your experiences what would you say was the differences between the navy,

28:00 **and the air force and the army boys? Was there a kind of personality type or the sort of fellow that would fit into those different forces?**

Well, I think the air force always thought they were a bit smart, a little bit better than anybody else; they thought they were a bit above everybody else. But they were nice boys too because when Henry had two of his friends, his best friend was killed, he was a pilot and his plane crashed in

28:30 New Guinea, he was killed. Actually they said that he did get ashore from the plane and he was beheaded. So the natives must have betrayed them. So and then the other brother his plane crashed too. And he was killed, so that was two of them, out of that family that were lost, and that was Henry's best mate

29:00 Jackie Newman.

Do you recall any friends that you were associating with either in the AWAS or family friends that did lose people and how they were notified?

No I don't know, I no, I couldn't tell you. I remember hearing about Jack Newman, Henry was

29:30 up at the, up in the Islands and I had to write to him and tell him what had happened, because it was his best mate and I suppose he wouldn't have known. And I don't know whether he knew from anyone else but I did write and tell him.

That must have been a difficult letter to write?

Yes it was terrible. Because the boys' mother had been wonderfully good to my husband,

30:00 she more or less classed him as one of them and he was sort of brought up with them. Not brought up with them, he lived here but they lived just across the back and he was there more times then he was home. So they were really good mates from youngsters, so it was hard for him to learn that up there. But you had to tell him, I had to tell him because he would come home expecting that he was still alive

and he wasn't.

30:30 **Did you associate with any of the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] girls or the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service]?**

No we didn't, we seemed to stick with our own. All us headquarter girls we seemed to be all friends, you know, we'd go to the dances together a few of them. I am still friends with them, one of them in particular, she is still alive a lot of them are gone already; a lot of them have died.

31:00 **How many AWAS girls do you think there were at Headquarters?**

There might have been about ten or so. There wasn't a terrible lot, but there were a few stenographers and some clerks and the girls in despatch, there was a

31:30 couple up there.

Can you describe the Headquarters to me?

I have got a photograph of it. It was a set of flats and steps up each side, and at the top of those, steps. That was where the Staff Captain A's office was. And he was there and I was there and Brigadier, or Colonel North, he was there,

32:00 straight in front of me. And then there were the steps going up the side of the building to the second storey and that was where the censorship and the intelligence, all that crowd were, they were there. And then there were steps up the other side and that was to the despatch and that was where they had all the letters and done all filing and everything like that and in the middle of the building

32:30 at the back, there was Captain Suthers, I forget what he was he was there. The legal officer he was underneath, he had an office underneath and the medical officer, Colonel Scholes, he had an office underneath to where I was, underneath there. So we were pretty well packed in but they all fitted in. But we got on really well together; we had no arguments with anybody or anything.

33:00 They had some, they used to make their own fun, they had some funny sayings and they would go the rounds and they'd make up, they'd hear this one, I suppose you know this one, "Who dat dere? When I say who dat dere?" (that is suppose to be an American Negro on guard duty, that is what he said), "Who dat dere?" And so this is what they'd go around saying

33:30 you'd walk up to someone and you'd say it to them and then someone else would go and say it to somebody else. Another thing that went the rounds was, the answer to everything was: "I'll never die wondering." So whatever they asked you, "I'll never die wondering." I forget now, 'Foo's here' or something like that; we copied that off the 9th Division of course. But we made our

34:00 own fun.

Norma was it anything like modern day officers. You girls would have been standing around gossiping and spreading rumours? Was there a lot of that going on?

There was if the colonel wasn't in. One day I am there, Captain Miles he didn't worry about them, he used to let them have their head, and he didn't care. He was a good officer but he didn't really stamp on them, and Colonel North was in there.

34:30 And they were out in the office just next door and they were laughing and carrying on and yakking and carrying on. In the end he got sick of it and got up and he opened the door that lead straight into where they were and he said, "Silence." You could have heard a pin drop. And in the meantime, he could see me and I have got me hand back and trying to point but

35:00 nobody would look and I am trying to tell them to shut up, he is there. Because if he was in everybody behaved themselves, when he was there, everything was strict. But they'd all laugh and carry on out the back, they didn't care. But not while he was there.

Do you remember any of the furphies or rumours that went around?

Oh we didn't take any notice of any of that.

Oh come on?

No I don't remember anything

35:30 upsetting us. We were there so we'd know if it was true or not, wouldn't we, so why should we believe anyone else?

Were there any big scandals? I know you weren't meant to fraternise with the officers but I find it hard to believe that none of the young ladies ended up with some of the officers at various times?

Yes well one girl, she was in despatch, she married a lieutenant, you are not supposed to go out with them,

36:00 you are not allowed to fraternise with them at all. How that happened I will never know but anyway, no we weren't allowed to fraternise we didn't want them anyway. They were old, they must have been about thirty five or over. Who wanted those old blokes, we wanted the twenty-five year olds, twenty year olds, we didn't want them anyway. But later on they had an officers' ball put on for the officers.

36:30 Well lo and behold they asked us girls to go to the ball to dance with them. We thought, "Not good enough to go out with, not good enough to dance with, we won't go." Anyway we relented and we went and of course I didn't have a ball dress I had a faded old blue taffeta dress,

37:00 it was like a petticoat style then with the big circular skirt, so I bought a whole lot of mosquito net and I died it blue and I got a pattern and I made myself a ball gown out of blue mosquito net and I went to the ball in that. Because everything was coupons and I am not going to waste my good coupons on a ball dress to go with them. But anyway I went to the ball I didn't think much of it. But it was

37:30 all right, not as good as the dance.

Was it a bit of a scandal when that lady married the officer? Or was it just accepted?

She was a sergeant. No there was no trouble about it. I don't know whether she married before the war ended or it might have been just after the war ended. But she did marry him they got married those pair. She was a nice

38:00 looking girl.

Now what was Colonel North's responsibility?

Well he was the CO [Commanding Officer] of of 1 Australia L of C Sub Area. He was the commanding officer and everyone was under him. He was later promoted to Brigadier but I mean you never called him Colonel North, you

38:30 always called him 'Sir'. You never call them by their name, it was always just 'Sir'. To us in our group, when we talked about him, we always called him Colonel North, even though he was Brigadier North and we still we were so used to calling him Colonel North we kept calling him Colonel North and we still call him Colonel North, although he is dead of course but he was a brigadier.

And when were you promoted from lance corporal to corporal?

In Townsville.

39:00 I was there a while before I got the first stripe and then he gave me the second stripe and I hadn't sewed it on and he took me to task. He said, "Where is that other stripe, you'd better sew that on?" So I had to make it my business to sew it on.

Why did you get it?

Oh I don't know. I suppose he just gave me that because I worked hard and I thought the harder I worked the sooner the war would finish. Isn't that silly.

39:30 But that is why I got these ganglions or whatever you call them on the wrist but.

Was there an increasing responsibility with your extra stripe?

No, just the same, did the same job. You see when I first went there, I couldn't get promoted because in one establishment they were only allowed so many sergeants, some many corporals and so many WOs [Warrant Officers] and the amount was all allotted

40:00 so you couldn't get promotion unless someone left. You had to wait until someone had gone before they could promote you. You could have got promotion if you left there and went somewhere else. But I didn't want to leave Townsville.

And was there a little bit more money involved. Not much, but I didn't have any responsibility, they may as well have not given it me,

40:30 because I did the same work the same thing, so really there was no advantage to them, a little bit more money that was all for me.

So it didn't mean much to you to get the recognition important to you?

Oh yes I was pleased to see I got it. You couldn't say you weren't happy, I was, but, I didn't have any more responsibility or anything like that, nothing like that attached to it.

41:00 **We are right on the end of that tape Norma, so we will...**

Tape 6

00:34 **Now you have a theory about who dictated the letter the special letter you did relating to the Z Forces. Who was that do you think?**

Well I think it was Ivan Lyon, he was the CO of Z Special Unit and he said in the letter that he had personally discussed

01:00 the raid on Singapore Harbour with General Blamey, him personally. And in the book it said that Captain Carey and Ivan Lyon had discussed it with General Blamey and it wasn't Captain Carey that was dictating the letter. So it had to be to Ivan Lyon and I have been told by

01:30 a man that was trying to trace the letter in Townsville that Ian Lyon was in Townsville at that time, so it all adds up.

I just wanted to ask you earlier we spoke about Captain Carey being marched in,

Hmm.

And then he was sent away, wasn't he? What do you think was happening there? It was a bit…?

Well I think he must have produced a letter from General Blamey

02:00 to say to give this officer all the assistance he requires and that would have been it no more. Because I don't think he ever told Colonel North anything about it because after the war, my son was living in Brisbane and we went down there and Colonel North had a unit on the same floor

02:30 as what Jack had, my son had. And they were friendly, they got to know each other, he said that I used to work for him in the army days and everything. And we visited them one night for tea and I said, "Do you remember the raid on the Townsville Harbour when that officer when Captain Carey came in under arrest and that?"

03:00 And he said he couldn't remember it. But whether he was too old then, because he would have been a lot older or whether he just didn't sort of recollect it I don't know, I didn't pursue it. Because you know, if he doesn't remember, he doesn't remember.

03:30 **Just moving on to your memories of Townsville now, can you paint a vivid description of what it was like?**

Before the war it was a sleepy coastal town with palm trees in the main street. You know just a tropical look about it. But it was hot and wet in the wet season and hot and dry and dusty

04:00 in the dry season. A lot of Americans didn't know what they had struck when they got there, with the heat, they couldn't stand the heat. I heard that one of the COs of the Americans ordered a whole lot of ice for his bath, to have a bath in this cold water. He must have hated the heat. It was hot and dusty and

04:30 there weren't many amenities there. And in the beginning we were very, very short of water because all the troops coming in they just couldn't keep up the water supply to the lot of them. And you would go in to have a shower and you'd soap yourself all over and the water would go off. So you ended up taking a bucket of water in with you, in case it went off, you could at least wash the soap

05:00 off you. They must have come to some way to fix that, they must have duplicated the water [supply] or something, I don't know how they did it. And some of the troops were sent to the Tablelands, so that would relieve pressure on the water in Townsville but there was definitely a lot of trouble there for a while with the water supply.

05:30 **What about electricity were there cuts because of needing more power for the army or anything like that?**

No I don't remember that happening very much.

Were there blackouts at night?

Oh yes, there'd be no street lights on or anything like that. All the houses we had the blackout curtains on. But once the fighting moved away further away from us. They were allowed to take that down

06:00 and things got more normal again. But in the beginning it was strict.

Also another thing I wanted to ask you about, you know how you were a bit of a tom boy when you were young. Can you tell me about when you started to grow up and you got more into fashion and obviously becoming a, debutantes were very big in your day, weren't they?

Oh yes.

Can you talk about your début?

Yes I made my début

06:30 probably at about sixteen I think, pretty young. And he wasn't my partner but I knew him at the time but I wouldn't ask him to be my partner. I don't know whether I was too shy or what? But my sister

asked her boyfriend to ask his mate would he take me. So he partnered me to the ball but I wasn't interested in him, he wasn't a boyfriend of mine.

07:00 He was just my partner for the night. But I wasn't terribly interested in it but the young girls had to do that in those days. You all made your début, dressed up and that was your night out. You were launched as the saying goes.

What was it about? What was the cultural significance?

I think it was to sort of more or less say

07:30 that you were no longer a child and going into adult society. I think that was more what it was really.

Was it something that your parents were involved with too?

Oh yes, everyone made their début all the mothers, got their girls dressed up as nice as they could. I think it was to find a husband if the truth be known, I don't know. But I think it was to make money for the

08:00 church really, that was the Church of England Ball. They had Masonic Balls, they had Highland Balls and then they had the Church of England Ball and the Catholic Ball and whatever.

Now tell me about the dress that you wore and the preparations that went into what you would wear? Was it something that you and your mum were both excited about

08:30 **or involved in?**

I picked a spotted tulle dress, I have got the photo there I will show it to you. That was nice and with puffed sleeves and sweetheart neckline I think full skirt, I thought it was all right.

Shoes and handbag, tell me about them?

Oh I had a

09:00 little pearl, I had a little handbag made of little pearls, you know, and sequins, not sequins, bugle beads, long beads, and that made the handbag, little things. And I think I got silver shoes

09:30 and I think long gloves if I remember, yes long gloves.

What was the shoe fashion like back then in terms of the look of the shoe?

I don't remember, it's in the photo, no I just don't remember much it was a long time ago.

Were you and your friends obsessed with fashion at all?

Oh yes, you had to get dressed up for the local show.

10:00 You all wore your best dress, you were a fashion plate and you wanted to look better than the next one. You were poring over these designs what you wanted to wear to the show. And get the dressmaker to make it for you and you know dress to look as good as you could.

How difficult was it to find fabric?

Oh it wasn't hard to find material. You could get…

10:30 There were good shops, good shops to go to.

And what about women's magazines? Is that where you got your inspirations from?

I think so, I think we got them from different magazines that we'd look in and see something that we liked. And we'd say what we liked, the sleeves of that and maybe the neckline of that and skirt of something else.

What were the magazines that you and your girlfriends would have been reading?

I think probably Women's Weekly and

11:00 something like that. I can't, we didn't have that much time to be reading them. It was only when you had to find a style you would have to look for something then. But I wasn't a great one for that sort of stuff for the gossip and movies. I wasn't much

11:30 interested in that sort of thing.

What about actually going to the cinema was there particular movie stars or starlets that you really liked and wanted to maybe emulate or something like that?

Oh no they were, they were all good actors the people that acted on the stage. We got obsessed with Shirley Temple for a while you know and how pretty she was and the curls and so forth and

12:00 Norma Shearer and Bette Davies and Joan Crawford and Clark Gable of course, he was a handsome

bloke and William Powell and who else I forget now.

Tell me about Australian stories on the big screen how important or how popular was Australian cinema?

12:30 Oh I don't think there was much of it then. Because I remember when I was really small we didn't get taken to the pictures of a Saturday night because it cost too much money but we would go to town. Take us all to town and my father and mother would stand in the middle of the street talking to all the other people. They'd all congregate in the middle of the street, not on the footpath, in the middle of the street.

13:00 And us kids used to run wild and play bedlam and hide and seek and goodness knows what. And one night they took us to the pictures this night. And the serials are on and I am only little and I am standing up there looking goggled eyed at the screen. And this train is coming along

13:30 and this girl is tied to the railway line and I am singing out, "Get up, get up, the train is going to get you." And my mother is saying, "Keep quite, keep quite, it is only imagination, it is not true." I don't think they took us any more much after that. And I can remember saying, "Get up, get up." I suppose there was more than me did it.

14:00 **What about the circus and things like that?**

Oh yes.

Did you ever see that as a kid?

Oh yes, we'd go to the circus if the circus came we always went to see that. We enjoyed that we thought that was lovely.

Who were these circus people in those days and what sort of animals did they have. Were they foreign people or were they Australians do you know?

I think it was Sorlies, George Sorlies, whose circus was it?

14:30 No I didn't really take that much notice. They were good, they had these animals they had tigers and I went to put my hand into pat one and my father grabbed my hand and pulled it away. Silly thought it was a pussy cat I think. But yes.

Did the have freaks at all?

They had some little midgets. And they had the girls on the back of the horses

15:00 and they had the trapeze acts and the clowns were good too we really enjoyed, we loved the circus. Wirth's Circus that's what it was, Wirth's Circus.

Any bearded lady or…?

Oh I don't know about that? No that would be the show. You'd see that at the sideshows, but I didn't go into see any of them.

How often would the circus come to town?

Only once a year, once a year.

15:30 One circus went up to Gordonvale and they went broke up there and they were there and they had no money. Grandfather took some camp pie wire and some tobacco and something else there to sort of make them feel a little bit more comfortable you know. And the next thing they all arrived at Grandma's house

16:00 and we are all standing on the verandah and they are performing on the lawn for us, because he helped them. But I don't know what circus that was but it did happen.

And would they have had vehicles or would they have been horse and carts and…?

Oh they'd come up by the railway, the rail.

With the animals?

Hmm in the cages,

16:30 they had the animals in the cages on the train, circus train, they had a circus train that came. No they didn't come overland.

Were there any really big animals like elephants or?

There were elephants; they had elephants there and everything, the whole lot yes.

Gosh. Just back on the fashion stuff, were there any particular, what can you tell me about

17:00 **makeup or perfume in those days. Were there particular colours, shades of lipstick that every girl wore or perfumes that you wore?**

Oh we liked Evening in Paris or Apple Blossom perfume they were to nice ones. And California Poppy hair oil. I suppose to keep your hair a little bit in order, and Charmosan face powder and Pond's face cream. But we'd just go to the chemist and say we wanted some face powder and

17:30 some lipstick and some makeup you know. And he would tell us what colour would suit us and we used to just buy that, whatever he told us, we took and that was it, that was what you got, you didn't change around, you just kept to that, because he told you it suited you, so. He was pretty good too.

So you believed a man to tell you what you should be wearing?

Oh yes, he must have been instructed on how to, which colour suited which

18:00 complexions by the cosmetic people I suppose, so he must have known. But that seemed to be all right.

And did your dad ever say to you, "You are not leaving the house in that!" or "You have got to much make-up on!"

No I never got into trouble with that, no.

How did you learn how to put on make-up as a young girl? Who taught you?

I suppose you just followed what your sister did and did the same.

18:30 **What about hairstyles, before you had to get it all chopped of to join the army? How did you wear your hair?**

Oh just parted on the side and pulled back a bit. Just straight but I had a bit of a wave in my hair so I didn't. I did get a perm, [a permanent wave] I always got my hair permed once the hair perming came in because everybody had to have their hair permed unless it was

19:00 terribly curly, you didn't have to have it then. But mine wasn't terribly curly it had a kink in it that's about all. So you had to go and get your hair waved. And they had this great big machine with wires and all this, and you were hooked up to it with all these wires on your head, rolled up, your hair all rolled up with all these wire things on it. It's a wonder we didn't get electrocuted ay? I kept thinking about that. Then they got the easier home perms and things like that, that made it a lot easier.

19:30 **I was just wondering if you could, you had a bit of a crush on Henry but you didn't really know him. When, how did you two finally get up the courage to talk to each and meet properly?**

Oh we used to go to the dances, we used to dance, and he'd take me home. We used to go to the balls together before he went to the war, but we didn't get engaged because he said,

20:00 he was going off to war. He said, "You never know whether I am going to come back or not, it is silly to think that far ahead." And I thought so too, well I wasn't really ready for any commitment and we just left it go until he came back from the war and then we did buy the ring then. But we didn't really officially announce it until later.

Do you remember when he told you that he was joining?

20:30 Well he wanted to join up right from the beginning he wanted to go and his father wouldn't give his consent, he wouldn't agree to him going. So in the end, his call up notice came, and he said, "Well righto I am right now, I can go, you can't stop me." So he went and he was in the 11th Field Company I was telling you about

21:00 and they reckoned that they did as much as the 9th Division ever did and yet the 9th Division used to lord it over them and think they were the best thing since sliced bread and these were just militia choccos [chocolate soldiers] they used to call them. And they all decided that they weren't going to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], they were doing the same work anyway where they were and they weren't going to join.

21:30 [General] MacArthur was talking about sending them to the Philippines, he wanted them to go to the Philippines, but they couldn't send them to the Philippines because they weren't AIF. So Henry joined the AIF to volunteer to go the Philippines that is what they thought but of course they didn't get sent, they decided that they wouldn't send them so, that was it. But he did a lot of things during the war -

22:00 as much as anyone else.

You said about choccos, why did they call them choccos and why was that a bit of a slur was it?

Well they called them chocolate soldiers, this is what they were suppose to be, had no guts, they had it as hard and tough as anybody really and dangerous, very dangerous.

Did that make you angry when you heard people saying that?

22:30 Yes it did, I used to think it was not fair, I knew that he was in a dangerous place and there were a lot of dangerous things because they were building the roads and the bridges to the front lines. Well they were right there, that was what they were doing, that was their job, so they must have been pretty good

if MacArthur wanted them.

Cause he was a sapper [engineer] right?

He was a sapper.

Did you ever speak to MacArthur?

Yes I had to get,

23:00 Brigadier North, Colonel North or whatever, he used to say, “Corporal get me so and so.” And this day it was, “Get me General MacArthur on the phone.” So I had to ring up the exchange and ask for General MacArthur and he got on the line and I said, “General MacArthur?” He said, “Speaking.” And I said, “Brigadier North’s office calling. I will put him on.” And that

23:30 was my conversation with General MacArthur so I did get to speak to him. Although I don’t think he was too popular with the Australian soldiers he denigrated them a bit but that wasn’t fair. He took credit for a lot of things that the Australian boys did and he took the credit for the Americans and it wasn’t right but anyway it is water under the bridge I suppose.

24:00 **Were there any other sort of well know famous people that came in through the office that you got to see or meet or?**

Oh yes, you don’t really know who, what their position is, you just ask them who they are and say, “Colonel so and so is here Sir, it is all right, do you want to, can you see him now?” And he would say, “Yes send him in.” But you didn’t know really what he was doing you know, you didn’t

24:30 really have any idea of what he was doing. He’d just give you the name and you’d repeat the name and the Colonel knew that I didn’t know who they were. But there were two Mr Smiths and I think they both had the same initial. And one of them used to swear like a trooper and the other one used to go to church he was religious, so it was a bit hard when they used to come at different times,

25:00 you didn’t know which Mr Smith you have got to say was there.

What about when Henry was in New Guinea did you send him letters or food parcels or anything like that?

Oh yes I wrote to him every week, I never missed, a couple of times a week I’d write to him or sometimes every day if I felt like it. And I used to cook, buy these

25:30 tins, they used to sell these tins and make fruit cakes in them and then you’d wrap them up in calico and sew them all together and then address them to him and post them off. And I used to make biscuits and put them in these tins, of course all the boys used to share in the tent they’d all share and they all reckoned that I was a good cook, so I was

26:00 happy. We made a lot of, the stuff that didn’t use butter, because the butter was rationed and a lot of things had to be made with dripping and you’d just put a bit of lemon essence in with the dripping and you know you really couldn’t taste that much difference between, a bit I suppose, it worked, but you couldn’t use it in a sponge cake of course. But you didn’t send sponge cake, you sent biscuits

26:30 and fruit cakes so. And we only had a wood stove at home in Townsville in that house we’d didn’t have an electric stove or anything it was hit or miss with the cooking, you had to be careful.

Did he write to you letters?

Oh yes, he wrote to me all the time too. Not that he could say much, but I couldn’t say much either.

27:00 Because the letters would be censored the officer, he’d have to sign that he read it and Captain Miles was always having a lend of me, he used to say, “Oh sapper, this the boyfriend sapper? And what does he do?” I said, “He is a sapper with the 11th Field Company.” And he said, “Oh he is emptying the sanitary pans and things like that, that is what he does.” I said,

27:30 “He is not.” I used to bite every time; I knew that he was building roads and bridges to the front line that is what he is doing. And he used to like to tease me.

Did you tease back?

Oh no, you wouldn’t dare they had us really bluffed they were the officers and we were the, we were way down there, they were way up there somewhere.

28:00 But no they had us in our place, well and truly.

You talked about when you were first were in the Brisbane and you were just cleaning up and you didn’t feel very useful. Did you feel useful in Townsville?

Yes I felt like I was at least doing a job, I was releasing a man to go to the front. That’s what I thought, but down there I didn’t feel as if I was, although I suppose recruiting and everything was just as important to get the

28:30 girls in. But I didn't feel like they were using my talents to the best ability you know, I didn't think I was, I thought I could be of better use, so I think I did the right thing by going to Townsville.

Tell me about recruiting the posters that you would have seen. What kind of image was being projected to try and. I mean obviously a lot of woman wanted to help anyway, but there must have been a sort of angle that they were appealing to?

Yes well they'd say,

29:00 "Your country needs you." You know that was one of the, "The country needs you." There might have been a photo of a girl in an AWAS uniform or photo of the different ones, you know the AWAS, the WAAAF [Women's' Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and the AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] and whatever. And then they'd go into the spiel about wanting the girls to enlist so they could release a man for the front line.

These girls on the posters did they look glamorous?

29:30 Oh yes, of course they picked the prettiest ones to put on the posters, they were all good looking, lovely, very nice. I wasn't on them.

I am sure that you were very glamorous anyhow.

No, no I wasn't, I was just very ordinary. But anyway.

You spoke about going to Magnetic Island a couple of times to convalesce.

Hmm.

30:00 **What was it there, was it a home, and was it a hospital? Could you just describe that for me?**

I think it was like a hostel or something like that. We used to go and there'd be a few girls there. A few AWAS there and you know, from different other units or different other places you'd be all over there having a rest. And it was beautiful, it was absolutely magical, Magnetic Island was a really magical place it was so peaceful,

30:30 if you didn't get well there, you'd never get well anywhere. It was the most beautiful place that I think I have ever been on. But they have spoiled it a bit now. They have got too many people, they have ruined it a bit as far as I am concerned. And they are going to get more because they are going to put more units up.

Who would take care of you?

Oh it must have been the people who ran the place I suppose.

Were they nuns or nurses or what?

I don't really know who was in charge there, but I remember being there,

31:00 and how nice it was and we'd go and lie on the beach and sun bake and swim and it was really good.

Did you get better food there?

I don't know that it was any different. It was all plain food anyway, wherever you went.

And how long would you be given in terms of your time off to rest there?

Oh well you might have got a week,

31:30 sent over there for a week or something like that. I am not sure now, it wasn't just a day or two it was maybe a week or two weeks. I don't think it was two, it was more like one.

What was the transport like getting to Magnetic Island in those days?

Oh you had to go on the ferry. They had a ferry so you went over there on that.

Big ferry? Or how long was, was it a big journey to get there?

No it was fairly close to Townsville

32:00 you know. You could see it from Townsville, it was good. It could get rough but it wasn't ever rough while I was on it.

The ganglions that you had? Was there a treatment that you received for that?

Just rest.

They just went away?

They went away, yes, it was that old typewriter and having to bang those keys down I'm sure, but at it all day, mind you, I mean it is a long time,

32:30 every day, all day, it is different if you are in an office and maybe you'd be doing something else in between times but there you were at it eight hours a day, well really.

I have just got a note here that you moved to a place called Kissing Point?

Yes.

Where was that?

Yes, that was a army property. The army had a property at Kissing Point and

33:00 they had this old house on it and we moved back to this old house. It was, I didn't like it there, I was too isolated, I was on a little room on the end of the verandah. I saw nobody all day, I just found it too lonely, I didn't like it there.

Who's we? Who moved there?

The whole army headquarters

33:30 moved there. We got out of the flat; I suppose the lease must have been up on the flat or whatever. So they had to move I guess, that would be what it was. They might have taken it for so long or they might have taken it to the end of the war perhaps. And we were close to the end of the war when we went there I think. And

34:00 anyway we were there.

And so was your workload slowing down at that point?

Yes, there wasn't as much to do. And anyway, the day the war ended, I'd been to a dance and this American boy had picked me up, or whether I had met him there, I'm not sure, anyway he wasn't feeling very well so he decided to drive me home and he drove me home

34:30 and did he drive me home or no he went on the bus, his bus and I went home too and I have no sooner got home and got into bed and I am asleep and I hear this knocking on the front door and I hear voices and he said, "Hey Norma." Sam's voice I can hear it, "The war's over,

35:00 you can't sleep now, you got to come out and celebrate." So I got out of bed in a flash and I got dressed in the same clothes I had on before and away we went and oh the whole town was going absolutely mad, you know. Everyone was dancing and you know, it was wonderful.

What were they doing?

Oh they were doing the,

35:30 you know how they, the hokey pokey or whatever it was and big long alligator lines of people dancing and pinching the hat off the policeman and generally mucking up as much as they could. Everybody was excited, very, very excited. But we came home and we found out that it wasn't really over, we had celebrated one day too early, they hadn't actually signed it, it must have been signed on the Sunday,

36:00 I think the next day. But anyway, we went to work as usual on Monday to report for work and we get there and the officers told us, "You girls are in charge today." And they all went off to celebrate in Flinders Street. And they left us in charge of army headquarters and we were so sour because we didn't want to be there, we wanted to be in town celebrating

36:30 with everybody else. But of course we had already celebrated one day too early but anyway, we were in charge and one of them had a camera there, she was going to go to town and take a lot of photos, you know, of what was going on. Because she couldn't go and she was wild and she said, "Let's take our photos." So the girls sat on the front steps of the old building and

37:00 I was the photographer and I am saying to them, "Now pull a real sour face, let them know we are not happy, we are really disappointed about us having to stop here." So they are all pulling a face, and I am pulling a face to tell em what I want them to look like. And Bonny couldn't help laughing she was laughing at me, but anyway the others were pulling sour faces, the other two, and that is the record of the day, after the day war was finished.

37:30 **Well just stop right there. I was just wondering you were saying people were dancing and doing the hokey pokey, what is the hokey pokey?**

Oh some kind of dance, "You put your left foot in, you put your left foot out…", sort of thing. You how when they are forming alligators you know hanging onto the one in front and weaving in and out amongst the crowd and throwing their legs and dancing, oh no, it was.

What about mischief and

38:00 **driving the wrong way up streets and?**

Well we did, we went up the wrong street, because Sam didn't know Townsville streets and the police pulled us up and said, "You can't go this way because it is a one way street." But he didn't say anything, he didn't get into trouble and we just backed back and went the way we should have gone. But I

remember that, wasn't everybody happy.

Do you remember hearing about

38:30 **the bombs being dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki?**

Yes.

The atomic bomb, did you know what that was?

Oh yes we knew, I think that was on the newsreels. I think we saw it or we heard about it. But I couldn't say I was sorry because there was so many of our boys still up in the islands and they were still in very big danger. I mean he would never have come home if that bomb hadn't been dropped, he would never have made it.

39:00 So he was extremely lucky to get home. So you can't say that you are sorry that, I couldn't say that I was sorry that they dropped it, I am sorry I can't say it, because they did treat our boys something dreadfully, the way they were treated in Changi and all those other places.

And what are your feelings about using atomic weapons in another war?

I think now they shouldn't have been invented,

39:30 I think now because they are a terrible thing and getting into the wrong hands it could end the world but see that's how you change. But Germany was going to, it was just about ready to make one, so we were just lucky that we got in first really.

40:00 **Well just stop there that is good, we are just on the end of the tape.**

Tape 7

00:31 **I would like to talk to you now about your personal life once the hostilities drew to a close. How long was it until you were discharged?**

In October 1945, the war had finished in August and I got out [in October]. And I asked for a discharge because my mother wasn't really well and I thought I would go home and help her but that

01:00 that didn't really work out, two women in the house. And she said, "You'd be better off to get your job back." So I went down to Graham Brothers in Home Hill and got my job back that I had before the war.

That was doing accountancy?

Yes writing up the books for the farmers and the tax. But I didn't have to work out the tax but I had to write up the cash books.

Was it at all difficult for you to you know give the job you'd had in the army.

01:30 **Was it difficult to go back to civilian life?**

No I was pleased. The war had lasted a long time since 1942 to 1945 that's a long time you know. And I was sort of pleased to get back into civilian life, it was a bit different I suppose. No one to discipline you any more, you'd do what you like, the freedom

02:00 was nice.

How about being back in Home Hill was it difficult to go back to such a quiet life style after all the energy of Townsville?

No I liked the country, I liked the country life, I liked the people. And I liked my bosses there and they were all good and the accountant was a really nice fellow and the boss was good. I got on good with them.

02:30 And what was more, you could talk with them, but with the officers you couldn't, you were not supposed to fraternise with them, only if they spoke to you you'd speak back you didn't initiate the conversation, I didn't anyway because they were so far above you.

Was it lonely to be back in Home Hill without your family there?

No because I had my friends, girlfriends

03:00 that I liked and I quite enjoyed being back with my friends again and getting back into civilian life. And then the next thing of course he came home, we got married.

How long after the war was it until Henry came home?

I just forget when he got home. It might have been about the

03:30 same time as me because we had not too much difference in the number of days we served. I don't know whether he got home before or after me I am not sure now.

So I guess there would have been a period of quite a few months there back in Home Hill, as people started to come back from the war and slowly returning?

Yes, because a lot of people left for good they never came back because a lot of people were killed.

04:00 **And what about the sugar industry just after the war did it take a while to sort of get back on its feet?**

Well they still grew the cane all through the war because people could get an exemption from military service to go and cut the cane because they didn't have enough cane cutters. So although they joined the army they allowed them so much time to come back and cut the cane

04:30 but then they had to go back into the army. So the cane still got cut but I think it probably went a lot better once the men were back, the younger men, because a lot of the older men had to do all the work when the young men went and some of them, it really took a lot, it really was the end of them, because they had to work so hard and they hadn't been used to doing it you know.

05:00 **Do you think in a way the war was good for the industry in terms of training up the young men and giving them discipline and focus. Do you think they came back as better hard workers?**

I think the army did everybody a lot of good really, the discipline was wonderful, they really should have it all the time, they should have compulsory training for all the young people. Because

05:30 they should all be prepared, they were never prepared before and it made it so much harder for them.

Is it in that post-war period that the cane toads were introduced?

Well after I think. That was the biggest make they ever made, cane toads.

06:00 **Do you remember that starting to become an epidemic or starting to become a problem?**

Oh well they'd be here. We didn't have a water supply, we had windmills and we had a tank where the pump was and if anything went wrong with the pump there'd be about twenty cane toads down there in the well. But you don't see them so much now, I think the birds have

06:30 learnt how to kill them. Before they used to kill them, they'd be poisoned but I think they have learnt how to kill them now, they can tip them over and just take the bits they want and leave the rest. It's awful isn't it? I don't like cane toads and I don't like frogs anyway, but they are still a frog, some kind of frog, horrible frog.

Tell me about Henry coming home and how you

07:00 **two moved your relationship forward?**

Oh he came home to a lot of hardship because his father had a breakdown too. And he had to go south for treatment and because both boys went to war and then he wouldn't be getting letters from them and he'd panic and you know things weren't too good here in the beginning. But anyway that sort of stopped us getting married straight away, so we waited for a while but then we decided we would get married.

07:30 And anyway I came here to look after him and I sort of cooked for him. But he never really, he was all right but he still had bad nerves he was affected by it. But he didn't do anything wrong or anything like that, but he still had nerves.

Was that a bit of taboo topic at the time?

What nerves?

Yes.

08:00 I don't think people wanted to talk about it at the time.

I imagine that it would have been quite widespread given the trauma and anxiety of the war?

Yes, I think it was a lot worse than what people think because I think that as they get older too the veterans are suffering more from stress than what they should be, they shouldn't have that stress. He suffers from stress that is why he wouldn't agree to have his story

08:30 told, he didn't want to do it. He wouldn't even talk to you out there, but he said, "Don't you bring it up." He said, "Don't you tell them my story." I said, "I won't say a word." But anyway.

Was there an effective repatriation scheme to help the fellows like Henry?

Oh well he just come back and got a job straight away as a carpenter and they were in short supply,

09:00 so he soon got a job, a job was no trouble to him. He got some deferred pay which we didn't spend, we

kept that and he kept his and I kept mine, we didn't spend that because we thought we might build our own house. But then we really couldn't, we couldn't leave his father the way he was; we had to look after him. So we just looked after him until he died. And Jack was about ten

09:30 I suppose when he died. So I suppose we had been ten or eleven years looking after him. He was no bother really, he just suffered from nerves, he didn't want to do anything, he didn't want to attend to anything, he didn't want to eat, that was the biggest thing. We'd have a big row getting him to eat meals, three times a day, but he

10:00 did eat them in the end.

It must have been a very difficult role for you to take on?

Yes it was hard, well I had Jack my son, and he was a joy to us, we got a lot of pleasure and fun out of him.

Tell me about giving birth to your first child?

Oh it was pretty awful, I thought it was anyway. But you get so thrilled

10:30 when you see the baby. You think isn't it marvellous you can't believe it you know that you have this beautiful child. And I never had any more so I was lucky to have the one, wasn't I?

Did you have him in the local hospital up here?

Yes.

And you were living in this house?

Yes Henry was born

11:00 in this house, Henry was born in the bed there. The bedroom, the bed was there, and it had big green curtain to separate this room from that. And the boys had a bedroom, but that was where the bed was. But he was born in this house. So on his birth certificate, it says where born, near Methodist Church,

11:30 I keep saying to him, "You were dropped on the ground and ended up at the church." Yes actually that is on his birth certificate.

That's amazing.

I suppose who ever went up to register his birth; they had forgotten the name of the street. That would have been one of the aunties I suppose that went up, it wouldn't have been his father, it would have been one of the aunties or someone that helped,

12:00 I don't know. Yes this house was built in about 1914 so that must make it ninety years old, a fair while, a fair age.

And what was it like to I mean take on the caring role, looking after an old man, and a little baby. After sort of being out there and in the workforce?

I was a bit hard, but I was I

12:30 kept fairly busy I used to do the books. Well first of all Henry worked for an employer, then later on he took on business for himself and I used to do the books for him and that. And if he was short of a hand, I'd go and give him a hand, sometimes. I'd be under a house helping him re-block and I have helped him paint and helped him put sheeting on the outside and the only thing I didn't like was having to get up on a roof because I didn't like to be up there, I was frightened

13:00 I'd fall down. But I did help him quite a lot. I was the general dogsbody I suppose. But enjoyed it, I had a happy life.

Those tomboy skills came back to the fore?

Yes it did, it was good, I reckon anyone can do anything if they try hard enough. Anybody, there is no limit to what you can do if you try.

13:30 **Let me ask you about that, because World War 2 is often recognised as the turning point for women. The beginning of that sort of new wave of feminism and new opportunities for women. Did you have a sense at that time during the war that you were part of a pioneering period for women?**

No I didn't, I just thought I was doing my job that I could do and I could do it well, and I thought well I am doing a good job here.

14:00 But I didn't think that, but after the war I didn't want to go into business or go back to work, I was quite happy, all I wanted to do was be his wife and have his family and start what I called my life. Because I thought that was what my life would be after the war, to be a housewife with a family. And that was my ambition; I didn't want to do anything else. In fact during the war

14:30 we were never; we were all very feminine girls. We weren't trained with guns and stuff like that. You know we were just treated as girls, they always treated us as girls and they treated us with respect, which was good.

Many women took on jobs that they wouldn't have been able to do before the war? And had new opportunities and?

15:00 Well maybe they went on for further opportunities, but I didn't want to be the head of an office or the anything grand like that. I was just quite content to when the war was over we were going to get married. And we were going to start our life together. And he never encouraged me to work and he didn't want me to work he didn't want me to go out. And I said, "Well I could go out and earn some money and help us get

15:30 rich better than we are?" "No way, women don't work, that is the man's job to provide." Oh he wouldn't hear of it, I could have easily done something but he wouldn't hear of it, so I didn't do it.

So what do you think the major changes to society were over the period of the war were?

It was a great leveller as far as that went.

16:00 **Leveller between who?**

Some people thought that they were God's gift to everybody but during the war they got no better treatment then the others, they had to live on the same ration coupons. They had to do exactly what the other people had to do. I think it was a great leveller. And I mean some of those boys might have come from the humblest homes and yet they won VCs [Victoria Crosses] and they did

16:30 a wonderful job for the country so you know, in that respect the war was a great leveller, I think it was.

So how was life on a day to day basis different after the war do you think? Then it was at the beginning?

Oh I didn't notice much difference really in my life, except I was living in town. And we had electricity

17:00 and I very soon bought an electric stove on the never, never [hire purchase]. Four shillings a week to pay it off. And then the next thing I bought, when I'd pay one thing off, I'd buy another. I bought a refrigerator so much a week for that and that was great. Because the old ice box, oh dear.

Was there a lot of technological change after the war?

17:30 Well I think the Americans brought a whole lot of…. they brought the fork lifts and all that sort of stuff. A lot of mechanical stuff that we had never even heard of, they had it all. So we got up with the rest of the world. Because here we had never seen things like that, never, well can you imagine living with, we were still living with wood stoves and ice boxes up here in the

18:00 tropics. I mean over there they had them for God knows how many years, but we didn't have them here.

So you noticed a lot of appliances, kitchen appliances?

Yes, everything that came out, I wanted to get it. I got a mix master. I didn't get everything; I got the thing that I thought that would help me. Because I liked to cook so a mix master was good to have and I have still got it. And I think I just wrecked it.

18:30 The other day we had our ex service woman's luncheon and I made some cakes for it. And I put it on and the next thing smoke was coming out so I turned it off and I thought, "I think that has had it." And I haven't touched it since. But it is the original mix master.

That is a pretty appropriate death for it? In amongst the cooking for the local woman?

The AWAS reunion, the Townsville crowd come down here and they have luncheon with us. And then once a year we go up there

19:00 and we get luncheon with them at the RSL [Returned Services League] Club. So they were coming down and I thought, "Oh Bonny's coming." This is my friend. "I'd better make some nice cakes for her." And then I saw this smoke coming out and I thought, "Oh God! What have I done?"

What do you think the major changes were of you over the period of the war?

Oh I don't know, I grew up a bit I suppose.

19:30 Yes. When you see a lot of sadness you go through a lot. But then everybody else did, there were families, you look at the Newman family, two boys, two lovely boys, very clever boys, both pilots and then the other boy, he went out actually looking for them and he went.

20:00 And that wrecked three of their family you might as well say. I think the war touched everybody.

Did it give you a greater appreciation of life do you think?

Oh I think so. Oh you were so happy, I was so happy that we both survived it you know really. By the

time the war ended we were pretty weary,

20:30 pretty weary of it, it seemed to drag on and on and on. But we were winning in the end but it didn't seem to get to the resolution.

Did you see any major changes in Henry? For the better or the worse.

Not a lot I don't suppose.

21:00 He has always been a lot of fun you know. But he liked to go out and meet the boys you know on a Saturday night and I didn't like getting left at home with the baby much. He just wanted to go and meet his mates well that was the main bone of contention with us.

21:30 But otherwise everything else was fine. We'd go to the library and get the books and once I have got a book I am pretty right, the house could blow away and I wouldn't care, I had the book. And then he used to go up and meet his mates and talk to them, and then he'd come home that was it.

So that love of reading and learning that has continued on through your life?

Yes I always loved reading,

22:00 I love to get a book that tells me something. I am not into the romances, I don't mind mysteries I like them too but they have got to be well written. If they are not well written I don't want them.

What were the best of times for Norma Smith during the war?

22:30 I don't know. I think the nicest times were when we went to the dances and we danced with the boys and had a lot of fun. That was the best of it. The rest was work all the time. And you know when I had to write that letter that was a bit scary; it wasn't really what you call the best day. Sometimes I wished I never had to write

23:00 it, why did they pick me, why didn't they pick somebody else, and then I thought oh well you should be honoured I suppose. But it did make me a little bit frightened.

What were you scared of?

Some of those Japanese might hear about it and come and stab me. How they were going to hear about it, I don't know, I wasn't going to tell and the other two weren't going to tell, so, I don't know how they were ever going to find out.

23:30 But I was always a bit frightened and I was a bit frightened that I might unconsciously say something. And this was what worried me more than anything that I might say something, that I might let out that I knew something, you know and it made me careful of what I said, I had to take care of what I said, before then I would say anything, first thing that came into my head, I'd say it, but after

24:00 that, think first. So that is what, that is the effect that it had on me really. It changed my life a little bit I think, but that didn't hurt me, really, a bit of discipline, self discipline.

That is really interesting isn't it, that one moment?

Hmm, yes, I don't think that Z Force, or that Z Special Unit

24:30 has got any record of that happening, because there was nothing on paper anywhere, so they really don't know that that happened. But they do know about the raid because they were the ones that did it. But anyway after all that when I met the men. And anyway, they wanted me to go up the next day to Townsville and

25:00 meet the men again. And I said, "But I just saw them yesterday, I met them all yesterday." "Oh we'd like you to come up again." And I knew that he wouldn't go because I was flat out getting him to go once and he'd never go the second day. And because we had racehorses at the time and he was flat out all the time, he was very busy. To have him take me up there was a real concession. So I said, "I am sorry I can't get up there today, I just can't do it."

25:30 Anyway when he went back to where he lived, Tasmania I think it was. He [Captain Carey] sent me a bouquet of flowers through Interflora so I got this beautiful bouquet from him and I have got the card there to thank me for what I did. And he also wrote me a letter afterwards; I got a letter from him.

26:00 But it wasn't anything to do with the war.

What were the worst times for you?

Well where we lived, it was near Garbutt, the planes would take off from the airport at Garbutt and then they'd go out on the bombing raids. And they seemed as if they passed directly over our house and we had one of these open dressers

26:30 with the plates sitting up you know on end and the cups on cup hooks. And when they used to go over and the place used to shake and all this crockery on the kitchen dresser would shake from the

movements of the planes I suppose, I don't know and the whole house used to shake. And I used to hear them go over and I'd try and count

27:00 them and how many went. And I'd say, "I'll stay awake and count them when they come back." But I never ever made it, by the time they came back I was always asleep. So I never ever found out whether they all came back or not. I couldn't stay awake. I still used to be frightened that one would fall and hit us, because they would be loaded with bombs you know.

27:30 Well I think the really worst day was when I lost my brother, that was the worst day, but that was towards the end of the war. And that was in 1945.

How do you cope in that situation? You know today you'd have counselling and that sort of thing? How does your family move on from that?

You just had to, because you could do nothing else, we had to get ourselves together

28:00 and do the best we could I suppose. But you never do forget. I am eighty one now and I can still remember it as if it was yesterday and it is how many years back, it is just as vivid. And writing that letter is just as vivid too. Those are two things that

28:30 stick in my mind. But.

Your father obviously always had that very, very permanent reminder?

Yes.

When he lost his eye?

Well after he lost his eye he wasn't any good driving the car, he'd go too close to things. He ended up giving the car to my brother in law, my sister they got the car, so we didn't have a car any more. But it was too dangerous

29:00 because he might have hit somebody. And he knew too that he wasn't as good as he should have been.

What is the most valuable lesson that you learnt from that period?

Well I think probably the discipline; the hardest lesson to learn is to do as you are told.

29:30 You know, because in the army you have got to do as they tell you. That was hard to learn that. But it did you good. It was a good thing really, every person should go through a period of military training. I think it would stop a lot of this drug taking and petrol sniffing and whatever else they have. I think they would be so blooming busy that they wouldn't have time to think about it.

30:00 They should introduce it again and then the country would be semi prepared even if it wasn't fully prepared.

So how do you feel about the way the AWAS are perceived in public memory in media representations?

Oh of course you know that they, I suppose in some

30:30 areas people thought we were just there for the officers benefit and so forth and that was never the case. Because you weren't allowed to fraternise with them at all. Because that just wiped that argument out. But I think it was jealousy on some people's part because they have got to say something. But I didn't, they were all nice girls

31:00 and they came from good homes and nice people, they were really nice people in the services where I was anyway they were real good; there were no rough ones there.

Can you tell me about the importance of having associations and keeping in touch with each other after the war? Was that an important thing for you?

I joined it when they first started off and

31:30 then I thought, they were going up and having lunch together and they'd have a raffle. And I thought, this is not doing much for me. Because I didn't serve with any of them, they were all strangers, they had been in the services, and I dropped off from going there for a while. And then I did some work for the church because I felt that Grandma and my mother were good church people,

32:00 always did good stuff for their church. And I thought I should do some to, it was my turn to do my bit. So I did work for them. And then later on I went back to one of them [the meetings], they kept asking me to go back to the meetings, so I did end up going back. But now we are getting too old, we are all too old to cope with the jobs of

32:30 president, secretary, treasurer and all this sort of caper and organising all these annual dinners and whatever. We are all getting too old for it, I don't think it will last much longer, I think it will end up maybe a lunch together and that will be it. But they are all in their eighties now. But we enjoy each others' company when we do have lunch

33:00 together. Not that I ever served with any of them, I didn't. One of the girls that goes up there, she was in that unit that listened into wireless messages and had to take them all down and she was in that. And she tells us a lot of different things that happened in that unit.

33:30 Some of them were land army; they didn't recognise the land army for a good while. But they recognised them at last. Because well actually they did a good job too because we all had to be fed. And because they took the place of men in the field in terrible conditions in some parts of it. So they were recognised at last.

And how important is Anzac Day to you and how do you feel about the woman's services recognition

34:00 **within the context of Anzac Day?**

Well just recently they erected a flag pole, down in, did you see it down in Anzac Park there is a flag pole dedicated to all ex servicewomen, they have dedicated it to the women, which is lovely. And on Anzac Day the girl who was in this, she was listening in to the Japanese

34:30 code, she had to learn Japanese, there were different codes she had to learn and she had to take down what they said, and then they just passed it on, they never interpreted, they just took it down. But she lays the wreath on Anzac Day but she makes me go out with her. I have got to walk out with her, so we both go out together and put the wreath on Anzac Day. We have done that for the last three or four years I suppose,

35:00 maybe more.

So what does the day mean to you?

Well it gets sadder as the years go by and I look at all the names on the cenotaph down there and I think, "I used to dance with him, he was one of my partners and I used to know him, I worked with him," and so on. So it does get a bit sad. It is a sacred place,

35:30 I think, down at the park, it is a beautiful old park, but I keep thinking it is really a sacred place to me. My two uncles' names are on that cenotaph down there. And Henry's uncle he was wounded in Gallipoli and he got the Military Cross and he was killed at Villers-Bretonneux

36:00 and he was given the, he was decorated; he got two decorations during the First World War so his name is on the plaque down there too. And up at the Anzac Club they have got a big wooden noticeboard with all the names of the fallen on it. And it's a club now where everyone can join. And some people were objecting

36:30 because this board was up there with these soldiers' names on it and they wanted them to move it, they didn't want it there, in the dining room, it is in the dining room, where people go and eat their meals. And they said, "It shouldn't be there." I said, "They wouldn't have the club if it wasn't for those men, they should be jolly thankful, that they are there." I said, "They move that over my dead body." So that's how I thought about that.

37:00 But anyway.

And Norma why was it important for you to talk to us today?

Well it's, I wanted this Z Special Unit, to have a record in their records of that letter. Because for a start they really some of them thought I made it up.

37:30 I mean what they heck would I want to make something up like that for, what would it gain me nothing. I thought, I got angry, I wouldn't talk to them, I wouldn't even be bothered. Then one day as I said, I was trying to remember, I thought, "Why the devil was I so worried about this Z Special Unit, why was I so worried about these men?" And I really stopped and I really thought hard and then I could remember

38:00 it just as it happened. But before that it was buried so far underneath everything else that I just couldn't really remember exactly what had happened. I knew that from the minute that I had to do it, to exactly everything that I did. And now they believe me, this man in Townsville, Raoul Guides, I don't know what he has got to do with it.

38:30 But he said to me, "Why don't you write it down?" So I wrote it down and I sent it to him and he wanted to know if I had any more stories like that and I said, "No, that is the one and only good story."

And just finally you have got an amazing amount of energy what do you think the next couple of years is going to bring for you?

I hope it brings me a nice rocking chair with a

39:00 good supply of books that I can sit in my rocking chair and rock away and read, that's what I hope. I am not looking to move mountains or do anything else. I think I have done everything that I have got to do I don't think there is anything else left. Don't you think I have had enough excitement in my life? I think so.

39:30 **Best of luck Norma, thank you very for speaking to us.**

Okay.

INTERVIEW ENDS