Australians at War Film Archive

Marjorie Ford (Marj) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:31 My name is Marjorie Catherine Ford, I was born Armstrong and I was born in Newcastle on Tyne in England, the northeast of England. My father had been in the Royal Navy during the First World War. He was a chief petty officer, engine room artificer on a minesweeper, Celandine. My grandmother was an invalid and my mother had to live at home to look after her.

01:00 It was through a relative of my mother's in Australia that we came out here. He came over doing a family tree. My grandmother's maiden name was Studdey and I'm telling you this because it's an unusual name and maybe you may come across somebody with that name and he came to visit my grandmother because she was a Studdey and they were related to the Studdeys. After the First World War of course my father

01:30 didn't have any work and he suggested that Dad might like to emigrate out to Australia. I didn't know until much later on after my father died and I was going through his things and I read this letter and he was waiting for the birth of my sister to make up his mind. He did and those days, we weren't ten pound or twenty pound migrants, my father worked his passage out here. He was

02:00 a very independent man and he came out on a new cargo vessel doing the work he'd done in the navy. He paid off when he got to Australia. This relative of my mother's had a job waiting for him but he got his own job with the state electricity commission as it was then and went to Yallourn. He'd been there I suppose about twelve months and he sent for my mother and my sister and I. I was four, my sister had her second birthday

02:30 on the boat coming out. My mother thought we'd be down in steerage because they didn't have much, fifty three pounds, I've still got the manifest for us to come out here it was then and she got better accommodation because of Dad being an ex-serviceman. She'd been advised to come round the cape, because of the small children we came that way. That's how I came to be out in Australia. My father was working at Yallourn.

03:00 I went to school at Yallourn and I left at fourteen because the Depression was starting. My father was transferred to Ballarat the SEC [Sustainable Energy Centre] had just taken over the private electricity company here and the man they sent up as manager from Yallourn had asked for my father to be foreman of his workshop. We had trams here in those days and my father was foreman for the trams.

03:30 That would be about 1935, '34, '35. Jobs were hard to get. I worked in a couple of shops here to begin with and we were on short time. The woman next door to my mother said, "They're putting girls on at Lucas's why don't you take Marjorie down to Lucas's?" and in those days you had no choice. I didn't want to go to Lucas's to work but my mother took me down there and I got a job and there I worked.

04:00 When you stop to think about it we were pushed and shoved around a bit. I was apprentice to a machinist. We used to make a whole garment in those days and it was a prestigious firm Lucas's, anybody looking at this will know what I mean when I say that. This woman came up to me this day and she said, "Would you stand up" and I stood up and she measured me and I said to my boss, "What's that for?" and she said, "I don't know." I was the SW [medium size] model then

04:30 until I had words with the forelady and went back after Christmas. The war had started by this. The WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], they were just starting. First off they were mostly taking girls that lived in the city it seemed to be to us who were in the country they wanted girls who could live out to begin with and the mustering they were taking to begin with, secretarial and that sort of thing. Anyway the forelady

05:00 said to me, "Go home 'til I send for you." So I went home and I said to my mother, "I'm not going back." I went down to Morleys which was an English firm that was here at the time and I was only there a short while and I decided I wanted to go in the air force, wanted to join up. My girlfriend and I we thought, the army was just starting, the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] were just starting and we thought we'd be different to everybody else was going in to the air force, we'd go in to the army.

Down we trotted and no,

05:30 they only wanted girls who could live out, city girls then and they advised us to go and join the air force. My boss tried to hold back my call up which he did for a couple of months and finally the recruiting officer he got fed up and said everybody that joins up, he takes them away, he won't let them go but he said, "I'll get you in." So I decided well I'll go in the air force. We had no ties with the air force.

06:00 The navy was just beginning and I've always been very sorry that I hadn't waited just that little bit longer with having a naval father I'd have liked to have been in the navy but anyway I ended up in the air force. I was lucky, I had a number nine number which meant a lot later on. Whenever you were posted anywhere, "What's your number?", "96202", you were all right if you had a nine number and that's how I came to be in the air force.

06:30 Not in the mustering I wanted to be in either. Things fall in different ways. I was a trained machinist and that's what you had to be to go in the fabric section which was a high grouping and I went down to Russell Street was where we went then was police headquarters and it was the recruiting place for the air force. Did an aptitude test, went in for an interview

07:00 with the WAAAF officer and her first words to me were, "You're a fine big girl" which didn't go down very well. She said, "We haven't any vacancies for fabric workers, what about a drill instructor?" and I said, "No, I don't know anything about that, I don't want to be a drill instructor." Prior to that we had a women's voluntary service corps here in Ballarat down at the drill hall and we wore a brown skirt and a khaki blouse and cap

07:30 and they did a bit of Morse code which I was no good at. So it was no use me going anywhere where I had to do Morse code and drill which I did know what drilling was but I didn't want to do that.

You're giving us really good detail which we're really glad to hear but we'll have to make it a bit more succinct just for your career and the first war.

Right, well anyway to make a long story short they shoved me in with two sergeants who talked me into

08:00 going in as a drill instructor. I got in in two weeks. I said, "Oh well, all right." I met my sister. She was already in the air force. She worked in an office and got in quicker than me and she said, "How did you get on?" and I said, "I'm going to be a drill instructor" and she said, "Oh no you're not going to do that." Anyway go in, do your rookies and re-muster. So I was called

08:30 up within the two weeks back up to Russell Street. Down to Somers we went. That was the initial training school for air crew. There were about thirty two, between thirty two and thirty six WAAAF and about three hundred fellas in that intake. Down we went by train to Frankston and by bus to Somers. I did my rookies and fronted up to the WAAAF officer and she said, "Yes ACW [Aircraftswoman]." I said, "I've come to re-muster"

09:00 and she said, "You've got to do your drill instructor's course." It was the first one at Somers so I thought, "Oh well, I'll do that." Did my drill instructor's course and I was called up to the office. We had a RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] sergeant that took us through our drill for the drill instructors. He didn't want to do it first but he found that the women were easier to work

09:30 with than the men. He said, "What are you doing here?" and I said, "I don't know but I'd asked to re-muster in after I'd done my rookies so I thought it might be to do with that." The WAAAF officer was a society lady from Sydney. I won't say her name now, I will if you want me to. She said, "You now Armstrong, I'm going to keep you back. I feel you're like me, you haven't got enough confidence."

10:00 I was furious. She said, "Don't worry, you passed but I feel that if you repeat your course you'll have more confidence." I said, "Well where have you failed me?" she said, "One minute lecture." Well you know, it was a blow to your ego and it was soul destroying. I had to go out on the parade ground.

10:30 I wasn't the only but I had passed. There were a couple of others who had failed and we had to go out with the new flight and watch our old flight pass out. I could have wrung that woman's neck. I didn't have to take a note or do anything, repeat my second course, I was just a spare NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] as far as they were concerned. They were short at Somers. Being tall I was made squadron marker for the WAAAF.

11:00 Which was the envy of a lot of people because you had to run out on the parade ground first. I did my course and I went back up and I come up to re-muster and she said, "No you can't, you're a corporal now" and she called me over to her quarters and she said, "The postings are through corporal. Did you want to know where you're going?" I said, "Yes please." She said, "Ballarat" I said, "What?" and I said, "I didn't join up madam

11:30 to fight the war in Ballarat." Anyway, to Ballarat I came and I met my husband here, we were married here. I was married in uniform, the padre married us at the Church of England cathedral where my parents sang in the choir.

Fantastic detail but for the introduction you're making it in to a conclusion as well. We're almost there.

12:00 Anyway from here I was posted here, not a training station for WAAAF and I was a drill instructor. There were three of us here, three WAAAF DI's [Drill Instructors]. I worked in the hospital medical section as a clerk med. The doctor wanted me to re-muster to a clerk med and they promptly shifted me to the padre's office. Then they decided that the WAAAF had to do an advanced physical and recreational training course.

12:30 Up until then we did the same PT [Physical Training] as the men which wasn't very beneficial for the WAAAF because we had to do push ups and all the exercises that men do and as you know women's anatomy and physiology is totally different to that of a male. Girls were having internal troubles and things like that. So we were going to make it voluntary and nobody volunteered to go and do it. Down we went, down to WAAAF depot the two of us to do this advanced physical and recreational training

13:00 course. We had to do in two weeks what it took a national fitness instructor six months to do. We had to do anatomy and physiology and all this sort of thing, sports. From there I was posted to number 2 OTU [Operational Training Unit] Mildura which was station for fighter pilots, Spitfires, Kittyhawks, Boomerangs all that sort of thing. Two PTI's [Physical Training Instructors] on the one station.

13:30 From there I was sent over to Port Pirie. There was a couple of stations there and I can never remember which one it was I was sent to but I was over there for a fortnight, back to Mildura and the WAAAF officer in charge of DI's came up. All war time ranks were temporary and she said was I a temporary rank or acting. Acting meant you were only on while you were on that station. I said temporary

14:00 so I was promptly posted. From there I was posted to Shepparton. While I was at Shepparton I got word that my husband was coming home. He was up in the islands, he was with 75 Squadron and he'd been having trouble, he'd had ulcers on his right eye and they wouldn't heal. They'd taken him off at Port Moresby but he was having trouble. When he came back he was a corporal,

14:30 I'll tell you later how he got his corporal stripe on active service and I was a sergeant. His first words to me were when I went out to the Concord Military Hospital was, "Where did you get those bloody awful stripes?" and he applied to get me out. We went down to his brothers at Bulli which is on the South coast of New South Wales

15:00 and he wouldn't travel with me in my uniform I had to leave my uniform at his brothers in Sydney. He wouldn't be seen with me with my sergeant's stripes. From there I really didn't want to get out. I'd been recommended to do an under officers course which is equivalent to a warrant officer. I had asked for a posting to New South Wales because my husband had come from New South Wales and I changed my home address to there so I'd get, we used to get two

15:30 free rail warrants a year and we were advised change your address and you could go there. The WAAAF officer said to me, this little WAAAF officer who was in charge of the DI's she said, "No, you've got a very good character reference, you play up now and you won't get posted. We'll know why you're doing it." So I was very sad when I was posted to Bradfield Park when I discharged which is on the North Shore in New South Wales,

16:00 Sydney and I felt very sad when I walked out of that station. I didn't really want to go but in those days were different to now. The girls would just tell you where to go now. We started it for them but we were the beginning not the end unfortunately. With a deal of resentment you did what your husband wanted you to do.

16:30 My husband was posted to a radar unit down on the far south coast of New South Wales, a place called Mogo, it's out of Moruya, it's set in the bush. There was a little weekend cottage there that we had. From where we were, it was just through a fence was this radar unit but you couldn't see it, it was so well camouflaged by the trees. I was petrified while I was there because

17:00 the boys told us they used to pick up the Jap subs of a night surfacing to recharge their batteries. My husband found these home made fishing spears under this hut, this little cabin that we stayed in and he decided that it would be good to go spear fishing of a night with a Coleman lamp. He's had me hanging on to this Coleman lamp running round, I was petrified. I could see little yellow faces everywhere. You'd

17:30 hear the planes going over. Anyway I was there for about six months I suppose then I went up to Bulli and I was living with his sister for a while until he got out of the air force. He was stationed at Bradfield Park, he come back and he was a medical orderly and a very good one. We eventually had a block of land down on Bulli Beach. Everybody

18:00 said 'You're mad'. Fifty pound we got this block of ground for. There were very few houses down on the beach then. We were there from about 1948 'til my father died in 1958. My husband he'd done a rehabilitation course and the war had affected him greatly, he was a different person

18:30 when he came back from the war, totally different person. It's hard to say, you can't leave them and drink affected him. He was all right to begin with but then he was in business with two Englishman, one was a veteran from Dunkirk who'd been taken prisoner at Dunkirk and they were good drinkers and my husband didn't really have a head for alcohol

19:00 and the reason we were leaving was because he lost his license. We thought we'd go to Adelaide, make a clean break, get away. I think he knew himself he should get away from these. They were good

tradesman and good mates but he was just couldn't leave the grog [alcohol] alone. Anyway we came here first to get my mother settled in to the house after my father died but she couldn't ever

19:30 live alone. We couldn't leave her. I've got a brother and a sister but my sister lived down at Gippsland and she and her husband were in business there and my brother he's a good deal younger than me, he's twelve years younger than me. He was working in a bank in Melbourne. He had married and had two little children. My husband, he got into as much trouble here, unfortunate soul.

20:00 He's got two medals for bravery, a silver and a bronze for saving people from the surf but this drink problem. I went to work, I worked at Myers here for about twelve years. I managed the wool department at Myers here.

This is after the war?

This is after the war. I did work at Bulli. When he did this rehabilitation course because he worked in the coal mine before and

20:30 he didn't want to go back, especially with his eyes you see. He did have an outside job but he didn't like it. They had these rehabilitation courses and he did these aptitude tests and painting and decorating was one of the courses that they advised him to take which he did. But he got to the stage where he couldn't work for other people. He was a very good medical orderly, very good. An American officer

21:00 wanted him to get a citation for what he'd done up there but you can't in war time. There's so many people did so many brave things you can't, they don't issue medals out like sweets sort of thing. He said would I go to work and there was a high class sportswear firm that opened a little place at Bulli so I went there and I worked there for a while 'til we built our house. Then I left, he wanted me to leave and then he got,

21:30 having trouble getting money from his clients and would I go back to work so I went back to work. Then our son came along and then of course I didn't work when Alan was little. I stayed home with Alan. My husband's drinking got worse and as I say he was losing his license so we decided to leave. Anyway we came here to Ballarat and he got into the same sort of trouble again and would I go back to work

22:00 so I went to work. I got part time work at Myers then it was full time and I was given the wool department. I was in there one day and my boss said to me, I was on holidays and he said, "Don't be surprised if you get a call over the PA [public address system], Mr. Smith wants to see you. He wants to offer you the manager of the wool department." So I was there for about twelve years

22:30 and Alan went in to the air force and I thought things were starting to get hard you know for young people getting jobs and I thought, "Well I'll leave work." My boss had left and the two bosses I'd had had left and the boss I had wasn't very nice to work with and I thought, "I don't have to be doing this now, I'll give it away." Anyway I did for a while and then I went to work

23:00 part time at Target and as I say things were getting bad for young ones. We got a six per cent wage rise and did time and motion studies and the young ones, they were giving them short time on the registers and I said to my husband, "I've worked long enough. I don't have to work now." You're only taking a job from a young person. Before the war when you got married you left, there wasn't a job for you if you were married.

23:30 So there was always something coming along for young people which doesn't exist today unfortunately. With hindsight you can see why these things were so. And of course our wages as juniors were small.

That's a fairly good introduction. What we will do now is go back to your early childhood days and start

24:00 **jogging your mind about details. You're welcome to give us as much detail as you like, I won't be intervening in that regard unless you go way off the track and I have to grab your hand and pull you back.**

Pull me back because I am inclined to wander.

Like your husband I'll have to pull you back in line. Okay.

Anyway you can edit all that. I know that.

24:30 **Luckily everyone knows I'm joking.**

No I'm serious I know you can edit it, it's better to have too much than not enough.

Everything gets put in as is, there's no editing. It's an archive so anyone who wants to utilize any aspect of it can.

Oh no, I'm not going to get political with you.

Doesn't matter, you don't have to worry about it. Okay so you were born in 1924.

1920.

25:00 **Okay can you tell us about your early childhood?**

Well I don't remember much about England. I always said I wanted to go back I think probably because my mother had never gone to work, she'd always been at home with her mother and I should have imagined it was a bit of bother with my mother leaving home which affects a child three to four years old. I had an aunt who spoilt me

25:30 because I was the eldest grandchild on my mother's side of the family. I can remember getting on the train at Newcastle. I can see figures, I can't see faces and I know I had a pillow, a big white pillow and a doll. I can remember walking along a street in London with an iron railing, where it was I wouldn't have a clue. The boat we came out on was the SS Belkarna [?]

26:00 and I think it was its last trip out. I think it was going to scrap or sold to Japan or something. We went out to it on a tender and I can remember running around that tender looking for my daddy. It came alongside the black hull of a boat and it had a red line on it. Do you know for years if I slept close to a wall, turned my face to a wall

26:30 I could see this black shape coming up and the red line. I was terrified. I gave my mother a terrible time on that boat, I was a bitch of a child. I was the first child born to my mother and father after the First World War and they do say that that first child who gets all the nerves from and my mother had had that flu that had taken people off and my father he had

27:00 worked in an engine room on a minesweeper which is below the water line, picked up one fellow about three times. His brother who I can only remember as a tall male shape he was in the permanent army and he got the military medal my uncle and he drove an ammunition wagon. He said he couldn't work below the water line like my father and my father said he couldn't do what his brother did.

27:30 Anyway I can remember I had a skipping rope on board this boat and a girl wanted a loan of my skipping rope and she'd lend me her doll if I leant her the skipping rope. She leant me the doll and I wouldn't give her the skipping rope. We had at the table like piano stools, the old fashioned piano stools that

28:00 spun round and round and there was a man sitting at the same table as us and he used to say to me, "If I was your father I'd throw you overboard." He used to tell me my father would be waiting for me with a strap which is a cruel thing to do to a child because when we landed in Melbourne the first thing I did was run behind my mother when I saw my father. I can remember doing that. Of course we had,

28:30 my sister and I had this broad Geordie [Newcastle] accent. We went to these relatives of my mothers for lunch, for a meal anyway and they were a bit posh I think. They seemed to be a bit posh to me and my sister said, "I like taties" [potatoes]. I can remember my sister, did she want anymore potatoes.

29:00 We went to Yallourn to live and I can remember my father saying by the year 2000 that wouldn't be there anymore. We lived in solid brick houses there. Two houses we had there and there's nothing there now. There's a very rich coal deposit, brown coal deposit there. I went to school there.

How big was the town population wise?

Well I've got a book on Yallourn here I can look it up.

29:30 **No.**

I can tell you later on. I was fourteen or fifteen when I left there and population wasn't…

It wouldn't have been big.

No it was a government, it had a big general store. Later on I think they did allow private enterprise in but until we left before the war there was no private enterprise there was just this, they sold groceries and although outside tradesmen could come in,

30:00 businesses could come in. My first job was at the Yallourn store because the fellow that managed the confectionary, fruit and vegetables and things, he used to have his meals at our place. Came for a fortnight and stayed for about seven years because my mother was a good cook. At that stage Yallourn was surrounded by bush, beautiful bush really. I hated it

30:30 because one year the bush fires were so bad, it was a Sunday and I can remember going to Sunday school and the sky was brown. This Jack McCormack he was the fellow that had his meals at our place, he was in the voluntary fire brigade and I remember him coming in with his face all black with soot and things and I can remember that night when you put the lights on they were green and the sky was red. I was terrified because somebody was saying it was the end of the world. These things

31:00 live with you. In the bush we used to, I learnt to swim in the LaTrobe River. They had this bend in the river and it was a lovely spot, ferns and all the rest of it. We used to go through the bush. They took us from school to learn to swim. We used to go through the bush and we'd see snakes. It'd be about 1934 I think it was,

31:30 somewhere round that area there was very heavy rain and the open cut mine was flooded and the LaTrobe River was flooded. We had a clubhouse and as I say this swimming pool had been in a bend of

the river, you couldn't see upstream and you couldn't see downstream. Upstream was a pumping station and downstream was the weir and after that flood the ground was chopped off almost at the steps of the clubhouse that we had there and you could see the pumping station and you could see the weir.

32:00 Cut a whole lot off the river. Anyway it was shortly after, a lot of people were brought to work in the town to clean up the mess and I got this job in the store. I left school. As I say I've got this brother twelve years younger than me and jobs would have been hard to get. Anyway Jack McCormack offered me this job and Mum let me leave school to take this job.

32:30 My father was never out of work as far as the Depression went we didn't suffer like some people. Dad's money was small I suppose, he was a leading hand then but he was never out of work.

So how did the Depression affect your family?

Well it didn't really because you see my father had a job and he and another fellow had gone into business with a bus. They took the men backwards and forwards

33:00 to work and they used to take the footballers and the cricketers around. Not buses as we know them now. They were around the bus, not crossways like now. We used to go, we went camping at Lakes Entrance and we were in the bus. What Dad did, he let the table down in of a time and he and Mum that was their bed and Olive and I slept on the side seats and I bawled my eyes out the first

33:30 night we were there. You wouldn't know Lakes Entrance now. We were in a paddock and I could hear a gramophone playing and I started to bawl my eyes out because everybody had a house to live in but us. My sister lives at Lakes Entrance now, it's a funny thing isn't it? It seemed to be, when you look back we were only here four years and the war broke out.

34:00 I can remember Chamberlain [Prime Minister of England, Neville Chamberlain] with his bits of paper, photos in the newspapers, peace in our time. I can remember the declaration of war. For about twelve months you didn't seem to know there was any war on here. A lot of fellas joined up especially I think it was the 6th Division, I could be proved wrong. I think the 6th Division was made up out of

34:30 men that had been out of work for a long time. That'd be better because to me now it seems we were no longer here than the war broke out.

Before the Second World War broke out you said that you had some direct relatives who had distinguished themselves in combat in the First World War.

35:00 No I didn't, this relative of my mothers had come over, he was doing a family tree. Now you can cut this off if you like, I'll tell you why. I told you the name was Studdey, my mother was related to these motorbike people, BSA [Birmingham Small Arms, British motorbike manufacturer] is it or one of those.

35:30 Anyway, Finlay brothers and I think they were all connected with this family and the reason they were here in the first place was this Mr. Daly had wanted to marry his dead wife's sister and at that time in England you couldn't marry your dead wife's sister or your dead husband's brother. If you happen to be an Anglican I've got an old prayer book and it's in there and so they came out to Australia and this Daly one of them

36:00 was a wool classer and one of them was a permanent secretary in Canberra. One was a surgeon and I think he ended up pretty high in the air force this Daly because he was classed as surgeon to the king, it was a title that they got with so much study that they'd done. One was in munitions and that was the one, Frank Daly, he was the one who'd come over to England in the first place and they rather a brainy

36:30 family. Old Charles Daly went and got his bachelors degree, went through the university with his sons. He wrote an Australian history book. They were the reason we were here. He suggested it to my father. They didn't have, my parents had no relatives in Australia. I've often thought since it must have been very hard for my mother and

37:00 she's got one child saying she'd like to go back to England. There were quite a few people from Newcastle on Tyne did come to Yallourn, people my mother had known when she was young and that but you don't stop to think do you 'til you get older what it must have been like.

Were both your parents Anglican?

Yes.

How important was Empire?

Yes

37:30 it was very important. They're going on now about the schools raising the flag well we had a flat and every Monday morning that flag was raised, "I honour the king, my country." We did all the things they're trying to get the kids to do now. We had the Empire was, there's no loyalty to your country today. There's no loyalty

38:00 to anything today that I can see, not even to a football club. We used to take this oath of a Monday

morning and the flag would be raised. As far as I can remember the flag was raised every day at school and it never flew after sunset. They'd take it down at the end of the school day and we did a certain amount of physical instruction. They'd line you up.

38:30 If it was cold, there was a fireplace in the class room, big class rooms and if it was very cold you'd stand and do, "This is the way we shake our hands, shake our hands on a cold and frosty morning", do things like this. We used to play hopscotch and skipping in the winter. The girls had a long rope, one had it round her waist and they turned it like that and you'd run in and skip, play hopscotch, two or three different sorts of hopscotch, basketball

39:00 and we did a lot of other games like over and under with a ball. You know, we'd have a sports day and the last one with the ball would run, see who could win. All these things that they don't do today. They're trying to get them to do all this physical culture. We had an exam twice a year and the last exam of the year

39:30 was towards the end of the school year. If you didn't pass you didn't go up. Today you go up whether you pass or not and now they wonder why kids can't read or write or spell or speak. I don't know how some of them get to university because it was totally different. The boys got the cuts with a strap. We had one school teacher, they had the one school

40:00 at Yallourn to start off with then as the town grew and the children got older they built a new primary school and the school that we were in was made in to what they called a higher elementary which was more than a state school and didn't go, went to what was called the intermediate in those days. You'd do your merit, your intermediate and your leaving and then matriculation.

40:30 **We'll have to stop there because we've run out of tape.**

Tape 2

00:31 **What can you tell us about the Depression?**

Well I was only about nine or ten at that time and you know it sort of, I realize now how naïve we were. A nine or ten year old now can teach me a thing or two. I know that people we knew left Yallourn

01:00 and some people I do know that one man in Melbourne that my people had known in England, he lost his house and his wife died. I remember he did come to Yallourn and he did get a job at Yallourn and he was a real broad Tyne sider and he liked a nice strong cup of tea. If you made him a weak cup of tea, "Dishwater honey" sort of thing. I can remember

01:30 my sister having to wear clothes that passed down from me. Because I grew quickly, must quicker apparently than she did and I can remember her complaining because she had to and I used to hate to get anything new because my mother would say "You shouldn't be misbehaving, you shouldn't do this because you've just got a new dress or you've just got a new pair of shoes" or something. We never went hungry

02:00 because Dad was never out of work. As I was saying he and this other fellow had this bus that they took the men to and from work and took the football teams away and the cricket teams away. Of course I suppose looking back on it it was like a village community at Yallourn. The St. John's Church was the first hall

02:30 that was built in Yallourn and it was the picture theatre, the concert hall, the ballroom and the church. They had a stage one end and a chancel the other. When it wasn't church the blue curtains were drawn and the seats were turned around, bench type seats were turned around and then they'd be changed around for the pictures on Saturday night and then they'd be turned around and changed for the church on Sunday morning.

03:00 I learnt to dance at Sunday school socials. The minister's wife we had was very good. She used to give us if you were in the Bible study class you got a birthday party when it was your birthday at the vicarage and things like that. It was sort of a government town so that anybody that was there wasn't really out of work because you couldn't stay there if you were out of work really.

03:30 By the time we were leaving there in 1934, '35 they were starting then to settle people outside of Yallourn because they said that Yallourn wouldn't be there after 2000 because of the coal deposit that was under there. And yet they allowed the Catholic Church was built opposite where we lived. First of all they built a hall and then they built this ornate church and you wondered why they let them do that

04:00 when they knew full well that the place was coming down. You see they had the open cut mine there and they had the brickette factory and they brought families from Germany. They were German machinery. When you lived in a place like that the Depression didn't really hit you. I was lucky. We were very lucky.

04:30 Then my father, it would be about 1934, ’35 they bought the state electricity took over, it was a private electricity thing here in Ballarat apparently and I know they bought my mother and father came up here to see whether they’d like it here and could get accommodation and one thing and another. That was

05:00 still the Depression, jobs were hard to get as I say. When we first came here my sister was still going to school, she went to the School of Mines and did a business course at the School of Mines. You could go there like she would be about, I’d be fourteen, fifteen and she’d be twelve, thirteen, you could go to the School of Mines then. It had a very good name, the School of Mines at Ballarat. If you got a diploma

05:30 from here you were pretty assured of a job. The school got her a job in an office when she did finish school. I got a job at a shop in Bridge Street, they were having a sale and I was there for three weeks and then I was out of work. Then my mother’s trailing me all over the place. You can imagine kids today if Mum said, “I’m going to take you out and get you a job” sort of thing.

06:00 Then I worked at another big store that was in Bridge Street as it was then which was the hub of Ballarat. The village up here just about killed it. Then we were put on short time. I was put in the work room to help with the alterations, I got a job in the show room then I had to work part time helping the girls. Then those days you know much fairer than nowadays, they put you on short time. You didn’t lose

06:30 your job but you went on short time. Anyway the woman next door to us said to Mum, “I believe they’re putting girls on at Lucas’s. They’ve got a very good name, they can get a job anywhere a Lucas girl.” I didn’t want to go to Lucas’s to work but my mother trotted me down to Lucas’s and I got a job there. I started off at seven and six a week setting in sleeves ‘til I was apprenticed to a machinist.

07:00 They used to make lingerie and those days if you paid fifty-nine and eleven, you wouldn’t know what that was would you, that was nearly three pound, nearly six dollars and that was considered an expensive dress. Lucas’s, they wove their own material. When you worked there as I said to you before

07:30 this woman came up to me one day and she said, “Would you mind standing up please” and I stood up and she whipped a tape measure around me, nobody told you anything. I said to my boss, “What was that for?” and she said, “I don’t know” and then I was told I was to be their SW model. During the changes in the season you’d be busy for a while where all the sample girls worked until the orders came in and if

08:00 you were on the manufacturing side they’d put you on week on week off and I was lucky because I was the SW model if they were busy on the sample end I had to stay there because they fitted the dresses on me. They’d make a line for Myers or David Jones or Grace Brothers and have their own labels and things like that.

When you say SW model what does that mean?

Well any ladies watching would know, that’s a medium sized

08:30 person. I was tall and slimmer than was needed. Now they go in eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, sixteen getting towards the American sizing, pretty universal now they don’t do this SSW and extra SSW. They go in the numerical sizes now. I could buy a piece of material there for a couple of shillings and borrow one of their

09:00 patterns and I could make a dress for two shillings. Take it home, cut it out and take it back on Monday, the company knew. As a matter of fact it was the Lucas girls not in my time but after the First World War that were instrumental in building the Avenue of Honour, the Arch of Victory here in Ballarat. If you have a look at the inscriptions on the Arch of Victory up the top end of Sturge Street

09:30 and it was through the Lucas girls. The woman that founded that she was a widow, Eleanor Lucas. They were very fussy about who they employed. If you got a reputation, out you went and it was a factory.

Just one thing during the Depression did you go without food?

No. This is what I was saying, I never went without because my father was never out of work

10:00 but I had to do a job I didn’t want to do. I didn’t want to go and work in a factory. I got my tram ticket was two shillings a week and my father said to me, “Now you’ve got to learn that not all your wages is yours, that you pay your way. You’ve got to give your mother two shillings.” I had to give my mother two shillings, buy my weekly tram ticket which was two shillings

10:30 and the rest was mine. As I say, I could make a dress for two shillings. Not everybody could do that and I can remember my mother was horrified because I paid nineteen and eleven which was a penny off a pound for a pair of shoes or a hat. You wore a hat. You’d go out on a Friday night the shops were open and you’d go down the street on a Friday night and you’d wear a hat,

11:00 bag and gloves we used to say. It wasn’t ‘til the war came and Saturday nights you’d go to a dance and you wore a long frock and the boys wore a suit. They served a supper, sandwiches and tea and young married people went. You could go to a dance for two shillings.

11:30 **What were those dances like?**

Good. The city hall as we called it then, they'd gone back to the town hall they used to have an old time dance there. That was when I was about sixteen, seventeen, I was allowed to go to that dance. They'd have entrance prizes and you used to do the dances, all the old time dances there. I think my parents thought I wouldn't get into any mischief because older people went to those dances. The theatres were full.

12:00 You could go to the pictures for a shilling and you didn't have television, you had your radio. You didn't look to do it towards just before the war or in the beginning of the war. They used to have a dance at the Masonic hall and a dance at St. Pats [Saint Patricks] which was over the road from one another, two shillings. You could get a pass out of one and go over to the Masonic and "Oh it's not much here" get a pass out and go over to St. Pats

12:30 and see what the talent was like at St Pats. Things were, it's all very well you earn very big money but you pay very big prices for everything. Pubs shuts at six o'clock not that that stopped the fellas drinking. They'd hide the booze [alcohol] in the shrubs around the dance hall or something like that until they got caught. As I say the trams, they'd be hanging off the trams.

13:00 You'd walk. Every Sunday if you had a boyfriend, I used to go with a boy over the road from our place, we used to go for a walk around the lake on a Sunday. In the summer come a Sunday these big furniture buses'd come up from Melbourne they'd put seats in them and they'd have picnics up here. They had a maze up here. The band would play. I lived just down Howitt Street

13:30 and we'd walk. We'd walk around to the gardens, you wouldn't think of catching the tram around to the gardens. We had a bus that ran down Howitt Street. We'd catch the bus or the tram to work or you rode a bike if you had a bike. I was just speaking to my brother on the phone the other day and I was saying I can remember when I was working at Lucas's riding a bike down to Lucas's in the winter and I'd have two pairs of gloves on,

14:00 a cotton pair and a pair of woolen ones with big gauntlet things and the tires would be crushing the ice on the road. You won't see that today. You see even when we went to school after Sunday school you'd go for a walk in the bush, you were allowed to pick the wildflowers then. You'd come home with a bunch of gum tips or something. All the things you're not allowed to do today. Although

14:30 as I say, my husband, he felt the Depression more than me. For years he didn't have shoes to wear to school. Boys would come to school, I can remember boys in my class at school they lived on the edges of Yallourn these camps they set up in the scrub sort of thing and I'm sure their father used to put a basin on their heads and cut around and I can remember these boys and they'd have their lunch wrapped in newspaper.

15:00 Isn't it funny the things that you suddenly you remember. I thought how awful that was because I lived within walking distance of the school and we used to have a hot midday meal. That was our main meal, hot midday meal and a lighter meal for tea. As I say I was very fortunate. I had to wear my clothes 'til I'd positively outgrew

15:30 them and I used to save up the dockets from the store and when you got a certain amount you got two shillings and I'd buy these rayon stockings and turn them inside out and have to cut the fringe off the thing at the back so they looked as though they weren't the cheap stockings. That was my greatest suffering. As I say I was very, very fortunate.

16:00 My mother took me for this job at Lucas's and as it turned out after the war I went to get this job at this high class sportswear firm.

We'll get to that a bit later.

But I wanted to say about this job at Lucas, the boss came down from Sydney because I said I was a Lucas girl. Before that I'd left Lucas's, the boss had told me to go home 'til she sent for me which was the next day and I'd got another job then because the war was on and I could get

16:30 another job and when I wanted to join up my boss at Morleys wouldn't give me a reference because he was holding up our call ups and I went to Lucas's and I thought, "Oh God I've got to see Miss Reeth." Anyway, she said, "Why didn't you come back when I sent for you?" She said, "We're very proud of our girls that are going in the services." What was I saying before then, now I've lost track of what I was saying.

17:00 **Just on the Depression and so on. At the time did you recognize the hardships that others were going through?**

No. Well I suppose you did in a sense because you would see, you could buy a dress for two and six at Coles, two shillings and you'd see people in those dresses. I suppose my mother suffered more than

17:30 we did. Mum went without so that we could have if you know what I mean. I don't remember my mother getting very many new clothes. I remember there were a lot of things we couldn't do just because we can't afford it and that was all and you didn't argue the toss about it. You just couldn't afford it. I grew up with the theory

18:00 that if you couldn't pay for it, you didn't buy it. I don't have a purse full of credit cards. I've got one key card on my savings account. If I can't afford it then I don't get it. I don't look for it. I think you'll notice that with a lot of older people that you speak to that if they can't afford it they don't get it.

18:30 I have a philosophy and I suppose it's one that I grew up with that you can only wear one piece of clothing at a time, you can only sleep in one bed at a time or sit on one chair at a time. You don't throw money on something just because Mrs. Next Door's got it. I couldn't care less what Mrs. Next Door's got because my mother never ever bothered what Mrs. Next Door. It was

19:00 the way I was brought up and I just thought that everybody lived the way we did. Growing up in a country town for a good eleven years, you wouldn't be in that town if you didn't have a job, well it was a government job really wasn't it, state electricity commission. If you didn't work there you didn't live there.

19:30 Anybody that lived in a place like that wasn't terribly, as I say we had to wear our clothes 'til they were worn out because my parents didn't have anybody there that they could fall back on. I hate to think of how they must have worried. We weren't aware of it. You haven't got a soul, you've got friends but they're not family are they and the

20:00 ones that my mother had in Melbourne weren't close family sort of thing. As it turned out and I didn't know, you don't think to ask, a lot of things I wished I'd asked my mother and father, turned out when I was living at Bulli they came up for a holiday and my father had a cousin in Queensland, in Brisbane. I don't know how long they lived there and one of his old school mates had married one of these people.

20:30 As a matter of fact one of their sons used to write to me at the beginning of the war and he died a prisoner of war in Singapore. I've still got a letter somewhere here, it must have been caught in rain or water or something and it's hard to read about the planes, in the trenches and the Jap planes going over.

21:00 It just seemed to be as I say I can remember, things sort of start to pick up after 1939.

During the 1930's and the Depression how hard was it to get money from a bank, a loan or credit?

I wouldn't have a clue. It would have been no use me a young female going to the bank.

21:30 They wouldn't lend a woman. It's only comparatively recently they'll lend money to a woman. Because you could have children. If you had a child you had to leave work. If you got married you had to leave work. There was a lot of young people during the Depression couldn't get married because the man wasn't earning enough

22:00 and only the father got the dole. They had to do work for the dole. At Bulli I know my husband told me the beach wall along Bulli Beach was built by the fellas on the dole. If he could talk to you he could tell you

22:30 a better story about the Depression than me because he got a job, he came from Bulli which is a coal mining town and he went for weeks every day up to that mine to get a job and if you didn't turn up, "We'll take you, you and you" sort of thing. I knew nothing of that. Nothing at all of that.

23:00 Sometimes I'll have fried bread and an egg for breakfast, I like fried bread and an egg. Sometimes Mum would give us fried bread which is a good north country standard, fried bread but you offer my husband fried bread and he's likely to throw it at you because of what he went through through the Depression.

This work for the dole that you were talking about,

23:30 **what activities did they have to do, you mentioned building, was it a lot of hard labour?**

They did parks, they'd clean up parks and gardens and things like that. They did along the beachfront at Bulli. They wanted to bring this in a few years ago and the unions kicked up. Really I approve of them, it's not political,

24:00 I think if they work for the dole it's not as soul destroying as just being handed the money. You have a certain pride in at least you've done something for that money. We're getting generations that are growing up that the government should help us do this and the government should pay for this, the government should pay for us to have our children minded while we go to work.

24:30 As I say when I started work at Lucas's I got seven and six a week which is seventy five cents in today's money. It's laughable but everything was in line with it. My tram ticket was two shillings a week,that was for five or six days, your working week two trips a day. You wouldn't get that today.

25:00 A box of matches would be a penny. I can remember when my husband first finished his rehab course and he came out on six pound a week and we thought we were made because of the small wage he was getting while he was doing his rehabilitation course. Our house, we got, not a war services loan,

25:30 it was a special loan for ex-servicemen. I'll tell you a bit about our services fund later on, I won't say

anything about that now.

Just on the work for the dole a last question on that, when these guys were building paths and bridges and so on, how did the community look upon them?

Well they were doing work, it was a job, they were lucky.

26:00 They might only get a couple of weeks work every now and then, it would be spread out but you or I, the children, the teenage children, we didn't get the dole. I would be about fifteen when we came here and I wasn't working but I got nothing. There was no Austudy [government assistance to study] to go back to school. You left school at fourteen.

Why was that?

26:30 That was the age that you could leave. You couldn't leave under fourteen. You could get a job, they talked about a youth wage and that got knocked on the head. Nobody is going to pay you a wage higher than you can possibly earn. That really came in in about 1975

27:00 when I was working at Target and we got this six per cent wage rise and they immediately did a time and study thing on the checkouts and those checkout girls were immediately put on short time and others were put off because they had to pay a sixteen year old an eighteen year old's wage. I wasn't in the union when I was at Myers because I was a manageress and

27:30 I didn't have to be and they frowned upon it but I had to be at Target and of course immediately you get a big wage rise with a union, up go your union fees. If you complained you were told, "Well we just got you this big rise." I said to the union rep, "Who asked you to do it? People are losing their jobs over it" which they were. They kicked up and they said. You learnt,

28:00 when I went to Lucas's first of all I set in sleeves and then we learnt to make a whole garment and for the first two weeks I was on a machine all I did was sew on scraps of material learning to sew straight. I was apprenticed to a girl, not a signed apprentice but you were classed and I would pin the pleats in for her, do the easy things

28:30 until you gradually worked up and your pay went up. I think when I went in to the air force my pay was three pounds something a week which was considered not a bad wage then. Being a female your money was always so much smaller than a male and still is.

Just on a different tack there for a second,

29:00 **how did you meet your husband?**

Well I was sent to the station sick quarters. See, every station had a station sick quarters because if you got, I was in it with laryngitis and gastroenteritis. They couldn't leave you in a hut, they had to have somewhere to put you and he was a medical orderly. Anyway I was on orderly WAAAF

29:30 this night and I was friends with some of the girls who worked at the hospital and this Beth Cambridge she said, we had a couple of bikes in the WAAAFery and she said, "Put your armband in your pocket we'll go for a ride on the bikes." So I did, out we go, out the main gate down the road, out here it was, out on to Learmonth Road and we got halfway up where the camp was and she said, "Oh blow this we're not going to ride

30:00 all the way back we'll put the bikes over the fence and ride up this big Yankee [American] runway", the Americans had been here for a while and they'd been camped opposite the air force, not while I was in the air force, this was before and they'd built this big runway to take these big bombers which never eventuated here. So here we are riding up this runway with the guards running after us, "What's your name?" and we told them anything but our real name.

30:30 Anyway Beth said to me, "C'mon, we'll go up to the hospital and make a cup of tea" they had this little kitchen, you could make a cup of tea. Anyway I was standing there in this tiny little kitchen and something grabbed my ankle and barked like a dog and I turned round and here's this tall lanky fella with a white thing on in his overalls. I said, "You stupid fool" and that's how I met my husband.

31:00 I thought he was a patient because he had his arm in plaster you see, he'd broken a little bone in his wrist. They picked it up on a dental x-ray. They didn't get it with anything else and it was too late. I thought he was a patient but he wasn't. Anyway they sent me to work in the hospital and he used to drive me mad. He'd run me down the passageway and come in and I'd be sitting doing something and he'd say

31:30 "I'm going in to Ballarat in the ambulance is there anything I can get you? Can I bring you back some ham?" "No I don't want anything."

Why was he barking like a dog?

He just grabbed my ankle and barked like a dog just to give me a fright. You know what you fellas are like. He thought he was being funny.

32:00 **This is after war had been declared?**

Oh yes, this is we were stationed out here at number one WAGs [wireless air gunner].

All right we'll go back a bit in time then and we'll catch back up to your husband and exploits. What did you know about the rise of Hitler in Europe say '35, '36 and what was going on?

Yes well you were aware of that because there'd be big headlines in the paper. I can remember

32:30 Churchill [Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England] especially agitating about it and I can remember it was rather horrifying what they did to Czechoslovakia and places like that, let him get away with. There was a certain element in the British parliament and I would probably say here too that,

33:00 I don't really know much about the politics here but I can remember reading about these people and I can remember he went over there, "peace in our time" I said his name before but now I can't think of it, Chamberlain. He went over and signed the paper and I can remember photos of them signing papers with Russia and

33:30 all of this and for the first few months of the war you hardly knew it was on. We got a brown out [cut down in lighting] here, they gradually got a brown out here. At first we didn't have any rationing and then they did but it was nothing to what they had over in the UK [United Kingdom] or anywhere like that. The reason I was married in uniform was because of rationing. We got very few coupons. We didn't need them you see because we were

34:00 issued with our uniforms.

Can you just quickly explain a brown out for the camera?

A brown out, they put lamps in the streets, the streetlights weren't like they are today and we didn't have black out curtains or anything at our windows. I didn't strike that 'til I went in the air force and I was down at Somers and we had shutters that they put across 'til the lights went out and then the WAAF officer would come up and open the windows, open these

34:30 shutters and you'd freeze to bloody death. The lighting was cut down. Down Howitt Street they had the lamp was over the road and it only lit where that was. It wasn't a complete black out like they would have in England, only if you happened to even really on the

35:00 coast, well as I say my husband had me hopping round the rocks at Mogo with a Coleman lamp and the Japs [Japanese] were charging their batteries out to sea.

When war was declared what did you think it had to do with yourself as an individual?

To begin with I was a little bit scared because you didn't really know, you'd heard stories about the First World War and the trenches and things like that.

35:30 Apprehensive more than scared. Then of course you're young and to be quite honest there seemed to be more girls in Ballarat than fellas and you'd go to a dance and the fellas would walk along deciding who they'd condescend to ask for a dance sort of thing, you know and all of a sudden the town was crowded with blokes. All your birthdays had come at once. A local boy would come to ask you for a dance and you could tell him to

36:00 go. They had a convalescent depot out at what was the mental hospital which is non existent now and up at Victoria Park I think they were too but they mainly had wards behind the mental hospital. Then the air force came and they were in the show grounds to begin with and then they went out to where the airport is now. That was number one wireless air gunners school.

36:30 Then the Americans came. I can remember the first lot were billeted in the homes. We didn't have any in our home, my father was on the docks ready to get home leave when the Yanks came in to the First World War and the English servicemen had to unpack and go back on their boats and they got the home leave. My father wasn't going to have any Americans

37:00 in his house with two girls. I can remember a girlfriend lived diagonally across the road and I'd been at her place and they marched these fellas up the road, two here, one there and I said, "Oh I've got to go home" and I can remember running across the road and I can remember these guys saying, "Mmm, a woman." Of course the dances were marvelous those days. Terrific.

37:30 **How innocent were those dances?**

Well they started at eight o'clock and finished at twelve. We lived on the corner of Howitt and Dowling Street just down this road a bit, down here. The last tram I could catch home was at half past eleven. It would be a depot tram because the depot was round near the gardens you see

38:00 and unless you had somebody to walk you home, no taxis, you didn't think of a taxi, you walked home. When you lived as far out as I lived fellas weren't too keen on walking you home. We walked home, several of us. I can't believe how innocent we were. I just can't believe it. Before the war

38:30 a band would play, the Scots band would play on a Tuesday round at New Point and there'd be about

half a dozen of us or more boys and girls and we'd go round there and the boys would be picking flowers over the fence and we'd think they were being horribly brave picking these flowers over the fences or you'd walk down on the path near the lake and frighten couples out of the grass sort of thing. If I'd have said

39:00 I was going to go and live with my boyfriend I think my father would have cut my legs from under me. You just didn't think of, well there weren't such things as, I suppose there were flats in those days but you stayed home 'til you married or you went away to work. You paid your mother board. I know I got up to paying my mother a pound a week, my sister too. I remember

39:30 a friend of my mothers, an English woman she said "Isn't it terrible the girls have just started paying you a pound and now they're in the air force." I can remember just before I went in the air force they had a queen competition in Ballarat raising funds for some war [(UNCLEAR)] and right up Victoria Street up probably somewhere near where you were staying

40:00 right up near the beginning of the town, St. Aloysius church and they were holding dances on a Sunday night. Now I loved dancing and I'd go dancing every night and we were holding because of all the troops and that in the town they had a lot of dances. It was somewhere for the services to go and I can remember going to this dance and my father was absolutely horrified. He said, "You've got six nights in a week to dance, do you have to dance on a Sunday."

40:30 I can remember walking from St. Aloysius home, not on my own, a bunch of us would walk home together, boys and girls from right up Victoria Street all the way to Howitt Street. We'd walk up the middle of the road because there wasn't any traffic singing all the war time songs and God only knows what.

We'll just have to stop there.

Tape 3

00:34 **Even though the dances you say they were innocent at the time but you also mentioned that the guys had alcohol outside and so on so it wasn't completely innocent was it?**

No, but you had an MC, a Master of Ceremonies and you could leave your coats in a coat room and often he'd be walking around with his pockets full of girl's purses, you wouldn't leave your money purse in the dressing room because it might walk.

01:00 If a fella was too inebriated they'd be turned out. If a girl refused a fella a dance and she didn't have a good excuse and if he complained to the MC that he'd asked you for a dance and you'd got up with somebody else unless you can prove you'd booked the dance with somebody else he could make you sit down. I know it sounds far fetched

01:30 and I don't remember anybody ever doing it but you were aware that unless you were prepared to sit that dance out or you could say "Well I did have this dance booked with somebody else" but just because unless the fellow was objectionable they didn't make but they had an MC who controlled the dance. And you had a live band. Bill Atkinson

02:00 and his dance band and they were beaut. When the Americans came they usually had a band with them and they had a swing section and I can remember I think it was 147th Field Artillery had this swing band and it used to sit in with Bill Atkinson's band. We heard songs we'd never heard before, "Honeysuckle Rose" and "Rose of San Antonio" and all these. I think of the Everley Brothers, there was an Everley Brothers later on and there was

02:30 an Everley, whichever way it was, one of those fellas was here. He used to sing sometimes with the band. As I say the town was crowded, the taxis were virtually nil because of the petrol unless they had some other means. My girlfriend and I had a couple of, they weren't boyfriends they were friends

03:00 out here and they had this old car and it ran on kerosene and it had no brakes. They had to put the brakes on a block before they got to our place. I wouldn't get in the car now. Half the floor boards went. We were going out to Creswick to swim one day, had to go up this hill

03:30 and we all had to pile out while the car cooled down. To get out to Creswick, just down here. I think more sin came to the city with the Americans than anything else.

When you were at the dances and so on and you were

04:00 **in a way forced to dance with guys and if you didn't you had to sit down how did the women feel about that?**

Well it didn't, as I say I never saw it happen but we were told that unless you had a good excuse. We were so pleased when all these fellas came after being treated like a mob of cattle and girls today I don't blame some of them for their attitudes.

04:30 If they'd been in our place they'd have felt the same thing. It's not very pleasant. The boys would all stand down one end of the hall some of them reading the Sporting Globe, that was a paper, the paper boys used to sing out, "Herald and Globe" on the street corners you see. They come along. My husband, he was an arrogant blasted bugger. They had dances over the surf club and he'd say, "I'd like to dance with that girl" and I'd say, "Well go and dance with her", "No, if she can't dance with me

05:00 when I ask her, I won't dance with her", "Suit yourself." As I say when the war came there was that many fellas here really it didn't matter because there was more fellas at the dance than there were girls. I do know there was one night I was there and I was in uniform and I was dancing with this American and he said to me "Had I ever

05:30 heard of Al Capone? [American mobster]." Muggins said, "You ever hear about Ned Kelly? [Australian bushranger]" I said, "He's my grandfather." "Small time sister, small time." Before I knew it I had RAAF SPs [security police] and Yankee military police with all their accoutrements hanging from them around me with this fella, see. Serve me right, I was being smart.

06:00 I'm no relation to Ned Kelly. He came up to me a couple of weeks later I was at the dance and he came up and asked me for a dance and he said, "Are you too frightened to dance with me?" So I had a dance with him but I never danced with him again. He was being silly and I was being just as silly. If you could have seen the Yankee military police, they had everything but the

06:30 kitchen sink hanging on them.

How did that make women feel about the choices they had? Did they have choices before the war?

Not as much as they had during the war. We thought all our birthdays had come at once to go to the dance and see all these fellas. I know because I was dancing with this American and he kept, we were used to dancing, really dancing and he was doing this slow smooch round,

07:00 he'd put his face up against me and I'd say "Don't" and I got sick of it and the dance would stop and he'd stand beside me and as soon as the music would start he'd be off again and I'd say, "Go and ask so and so to dance with you" and he said, "I still want to dance with you honey." I saw an Australian fella I knew and I said, "Dance with me." Just to get rid of this fella. Actually speaking I suppose

07:30 it doesn't sound very nice but you thought, "Now you can have a taste of your own medicine." Suddenly you were worth dancing with, none of this by the time they'd walked up and down the line all the girls had gone. Then again a lot of our local boys were in the forces, a lot of them.

08:00 The girl that had been my boss at Lucas's, her husband was taken at Rabaul. She'd left Lucas's and gone on to trams. A lot of them took jobs like that instead of going in the services, went on a tram and she didn't dance. She said to me, "If you see a fella with a 2/22nd colour patch will you ask them do they know what happened to George" because quite a few of them got out and they were

08:30 in the convalescent depot here. I was at St Pats this night and I was in uniform and the funny thing when you're in uniform you don't mind asking people things. I said to these fellas, "Are you 2/22nd?" and they said, "Yes" and I said, "Can you tell me did you know George Cheney" and they said, "Yes" and I said, "Could you tell me what happened to him?"

09:00 They said, "What do you want to know for?" I said, "His wife was my boss" and I told them she was on the Sturdge Street west tram and she didn't dance, her name and her number. I said you'd be on her tram I should imagine and if you see her and you know anything would you tell her. They said he would have got away only he took sick. There was several of them took sick and the padre stayed behind with them. He said they'd be prisoners

09:30 of war now. No I wasn't in the air force then that was before I was in the air force but I used to go to dances a lot and you could ask a serviceman questions if you were in uniform yourself. No I wasn't, I remember now.

How did she take that news?

I don't know because I didn't see her very often. That would have been in 1942

10:00 because I went in to the air force in July '42. I know when I got married in '43 she came to see me, I was stationed here then, my parents lived here and she bought me a wedding present and she said all she had from George was one card and he went down on that

10:30 Japanese ship you know that the Yanks torpedoed going to Japan, they didn't know there were prisoners of war on board. They used to put a casualty list in the paper every day. That's what annoys me with these people walking up and down the street objecting and I think of these boys with their names missing in action believed killed. You think

11:00 what did they die for? It sickens you in a way. I was never so disgusted as a matter of fact my godson and I told his mother too, my godson went to New Zealand to live to get out of doing national service and going to Vietnam. Yet his father had been a fighter pilot.

11:30 She encouraged him. You know a lot of those fellas they volunteered to go and I can remember and you can cut this out if you don't want to put it in when they put the national servicemen in to the permanent forces and they were sending them to Vietnam they were interviewing this officer on 3LO [radio station] it was then. He said they were put in the permanent forces and the reason they were done

12:00 as the war got on round about the Kokoda Trail and they called them up and they were called chokos [chocolate soldiers] and that was a very derogatory title to have, "Oh he's only a bloody choko." He said they didn't want that happening again, that they were part of the permanent forces which I thought was rather, was a better way than being called a choko.

12:30 They had no choice those boys. As a matter of fact a fella that worked with my husband he'd been called up as a choko but he joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. He hadn't had a rifle in his hand 'til he got to New Guinea. This is what I say,

13:00 it's better to do national service and have some knowledge and not need it than not do it and need it because a lot of our boys, when you consider my son he was in the air force and he went in telecommunications and he did Morse and things and it took him a couple of years to do what they had to do in months.

13:30 I get very bitter about it sometimes when I think. Have you seen the POW [Prisoner of War] memorial here, up at the gardens?

Not yet.

When I'd been to some meeting and I was getting a lift from one of the girls and they said we'd drive past and go and have a look

14:00 and we went and had a look, my daughter in law it was and she found a cousin's name of hers there. What else do you want to know?

Many things to know. With Ballarat itself after war was declared how long was it before the war actually came to this town?

14:30 When it first started fellas were lining up to join up as I say 6th divvy [division] and all that. Ballarat has its own battalion too here you know, the 8th Battalion. I think it's got a different title to that now. It was known as 'Ballarat's Own' and the ranger barracks are still down there where Big W [supermarket] is. They tried to get a hold of that and they classed it as heritage,

15:00 drill hall, it's been there for a long time. Drill hall it was known as and then the ranger barracks. For the first twelve months it was like it was everywhere else. You were at war but it didn't seem to hit in. The fellas were going in to the services but they hadn't got to the stage of getting overseas in the early part of the war because there was some training they had to do. They took over

15:30 the show grounds and Ascot Vale and different places and they built camps like out here. They were in the show grounds until they went out here and this even after the war was school of radio for a long time until they took it down to Laverton. It seemed to take a while to get going,

16:00 'phony war' they called it.

Did it seem far away?

Yes it did. My parents offered to take my cousin be sent over here but the parents wouldn't let her come and my mother used to send them parcels and things over there. We used to read the papers avidly and get letters from England. As the war

16:30 got on, I know my cousin, she ended up in the ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Services] one of my cousins and telling me about seeing the planes going over. She could never stand Dad's Army [British television comedy series]. I said, "It's a marvelous show" and she said, "It's an insult." Her father was in Dad's Army and she said making fun of them, they did a lot of good work. Of course then to us it was amusing but I suppose if you'd have been over there

17:00 then and things the way they were you wouldn't think it was funny would you but I loved Dad's Army I thought it was hilarious but my cousin, she hated it. Where they were too, Newcastle, the Tyne River has quite a few bends in it and they were bombing the wrong places,

17:30 North and South Shield and Sunderland. They thought it was Newcastle you see because the shipyards and that were right up the river up near where I was born actually. I was born within sight of the Tyne so I'm a real Tynesider. Dad worked for Armstrong Whitworth which unfortunately was no relation to us. It was shipyards then. It must have been terrible.

18:00 When you go over there and you see how close the houses are to each other, one bomb would take out streets. This is perhaps getting away from what I should say but this is what annoys me, they say that England let Australia down as far as Singapore went. Well you've only got to go over there and see how close those houses were they were on their own

18:30 and how could they do anything. It makes us sound like grumpy teenagers. "My mum and dad, they're

going to spend my inheritance" sort of thing. Had they given in things would have been a lot different I think. When you go over there and see how close it is and

19:00 you talk to some people that can't stand the sound of a siren because every night it was there and they were down in the shelters. We were very lucky and we had no idea honestly how close those Japs were to the north of this country. We had no idea of this line

19:30 that they were prepared for them to come down to. I don't ever remember anybody saying anything about that. After the war you heard about it. I can remember going in to a jewelers with my mother when the young fellas joined up from Dad's workshop they used to give them a watch and my dad was the foreman there and Mum used to go in and get these watches at the Marks the jewelers which was down the street and I can remember being with my mother

20:00 this day and this little fella saying, "Oh the Japs would love a big girl like you." It was one of the Ballarat nurses killed on Bangka Island. She'd been engaged to my mother's GP [General Practitioner]. He had a bad car accident and he died. She became an army nurse, Beth Cuthbertson and she was one of the ones that was shot on Bangka island.

20:30 **Was there much activity in Ballarat before Japan entered the war?**

They were very loyal minded in Ballarat. The Red Cross was very active. I remember getting wool and knitting a scarf or socks or something. It's always been a place where very civic minded. I don't know how civic minded it is today but

21:00 there's a lot going in Ballarat. They do work hard for charities and things. They had a comforts fund and they had a place down near the station where the troops could get a meal cheap. My father invented a chip machine for them yet I went in there in uniform, well I was with my husband, my fiancé then and with a couple of others from the air force,

21:30 a couple of girls and they didn't want to serve us girls. Some Americans were there and they said, "You don't serve those girls, you don't serve us."

Why didn't they want to serve you?

They didn't want the women there, we service women. There wasn't the accommodation to begin with for women that there were for men. There was the Tok H [Tokemata Hotel] and places like that. I can remember the first weekend

22:00 that I had leave my sister, she was out but she worked at Victoria Barracks so she was in private accommodation and she had the measles or something. There was some reason I couldn't go and stay at this house, these people, they were very good to me these people too and they had two, Olive and another girl with them. The other girl they were friends of her family. They told us to go to this information centre and we went this other

22:30 girl and I and they gave us an address to go to and the man and his young son were very nice to this other girl and the woman was terrible. She didn't want women.

What was your husband like before he joined up?

He was very bright, fun loving man. This was before he went away. I didn't know him 'til he was in the air force.

23:00 He was a fun loving man, he was a very popular man. He was the youngest in his family and he came from a broken home. He thought I had a wonderful home, my home life was wonderful compared to what he had and because he had a bad time through the Depression and everything. He was

23:30 a different fella when he came back. I doubt, if I hadn't married him before he went away. His home had broken up, his mother had died when he was about sixteen and he was working underground and the boss came and said, "Ford you've got to go home, there's trouble" and he didn't tell him what and he ran

24:00 all the way home to be taken in to the room where his dead mother was lying. He was the youngest in the family and very close to his mother and I think that had a profound affect on him not that he ever spoke about it very much, he didn't. The eldest brother lived in Sydney and he was about fourteen years older than him, Skeeter his nickname is,

24:30 Percy and his sister those two were the eldest in the family and then there was eight years between Dean and Tom and Tom was in the air force and he was away. He was married anyway Tom and there was Ernie and Percy and they were the two youngest ones. They lived with their sister for a while and they boarded with different people for a while.

25:00 He never had anything very settled. He was in the surf club. He was a good foot runner and he was a good surfer too. He lived at the surf club but when he came back he was a totally different person all together. He'd had all this trouble with his eyes and people had said to me because to begin with it was only towards the end of the war that they allowed

25:30 a medical orderly to carry arms. The doctors would go flip if anybody took a rifle in to a station sick quarters. There were racks outside they had to put their rifles if they were going in from sick parade or anything. If for any reason they were there with a rifle it had to stay out on this rack. They used to have big red crosses painted on the ceiling and medical orderlies weren't supposed to carry firearms. He saw some awful things when he was on

26:00 ambulance duty on the strip. He carried a wounded pilot on his shoulders out of a plane that's on fire and ammunition going off. A Yankee bomber crashed and they were all dead and the bombers were still alive and the Americans took the blister off and he got in, he was on duty on the ambulance and he had to cut the leg off a dead man so they could move others.

26:30 The Yanks were handing him utensils to do it with and that's when he got his corporal stripes. The American officer said to his medical officer, "That man should have a citation." Well they can't do it. I was at Shepparton at the time. They called me Henry because my name then was Ford and all of us sergeants, there were only two or three WAAAF sergeants but I sort of had a roving commission, I was like a warrant officer disciplinary for the WAAAF.

27:00 I didn't have anybody to train. I was 2IC [Second in Command] to the WAAAF officer. All the sergeants we used to get together to have morning and afternoon tea and I got this letter and I said, "Oh, he's a corporal, gee" and they said, "Well he's done something Henry" because one of them said, "You don't get promotion when you're on

27:30 active service, you get it when you come home." As I say he was a man who could talk about it not like my brother-in-law who was to Tobruk, wounded at Tobruk, had a bullet go right through him and you never hear him say much about it at all. The war, it did affect him in a way in that he used to go out a lot of a night time. He wasn't like Skeeter, he never took to drink

28:00 or anything but with Skeeter he was easily led. He'd say "So and so made me do this" and I'd say, "You can always say no", "You can't say no" he'd tell you, "Yes you can."

Was he an emotional person before he went?

28:30 Well to be quite honest with you I didn't know him all that well when I married him, you know, war time. He didn't seem to be. I was too young to notice too I suppose. Losing your mother when you're sixteen and the home had broken up and he hadn't had the influence of his father sort of thing.

29:00 I didn't think he was jealous until, well one night, not even then I just laughed about it. We just got engaged and my parents were away on holiday and we'd had a meal down the street and

29:30 we were walking up, it was up near St Andrews cathedral and the American marines had just come from Guadalcanal and we were both in uniform of course and we were walking down the street and he said, "They're talking about you", I said, "Just ignore them" and as we got past he said, "Mmm, she's a corporal too" and he turned around, "What the bloody hell has it got to do with you?" and I'm dragging him up the street because he's got his right arm in plaster.

30:00 I didn't take any notice of that. It's only been not so many years ago. I dabbled a lot when I came back here to live in amateur theatre I was in national theatre and I played Aunty Ella in Oklahoma and Brigadoon and things and the first time I was in Oklahoma he took Alan and a little mate

30:30 to a matinee down at Her Majesty's Theatre here and they were sitting up in the gallery and I could see them because you can, it's amazing what you can see from the stage. If you've ever seen a stage production of Oklahoma the curtain goes back and Aunt Ella's by herself and Curly's off stage singing "Oh What a Beautiful Morning" and I saw him get up and walk out and he went over to Craig's Hotel over the road and promptly got drunk.

31:00 He was telling somebody about me being in Oklahoma, how good I was as Aunt Ella and I said, "How would you know, you've never seen me play Aunt Ella" He said, "What do you mean?" and I said, "You got up and walked out" and he said, "Have you ever thought I might have been jealous?." I used to direct plays down at National Theatre and I used to try and get him to come down and paint the sets, get interested in that way but he wouldn't come. I don't know why.

31:30 He didn't have a bad singing voice either, he could have been in the chorus. He could have gone for a part but you couldn't tell him what to do, nobody could direct him. I took up bowls and he took up bowls, he had one lesson with our coach at the bowling club and he knew more than Ted. Just one of those men that couldn't be told anything. He felt inferior.

32:00 He could very rarely say he was sorry for anything but his whole family was like that, his sisters would never apologise to anybody.

Was that even the case before the war?

I don't know. His sister was a good deal older than him and he had a nephew who was only about seven years younger than him. Dean always used to say he'd been

32:30 very jealous of Dick. I don't know but see I didn't know him in his growing up years. I didn't know him

when they had to go to school and their mother couldn't afford a pair of shoes for them. You don't know what effect that has on people, do you, what people might say. Those days his mother had left his father and

33:00 I won't go in to their family history, it wasn't very pleasant not that their father ill-used them or anything. It was just a very unhappy household. His brother, Ern.

Just quickly when you say unhappy to you mean abusive?

Verbally, I would say, not physically, verbally.

33:30 I don't know because I really wasn't there and I only know what I was told. I know his father worked in the mine and they had relatives who ran a mine, was boss of a mine and he reckoned that old Tommy Ford was one of the best miners that he had and he had an accident in the mine where his hand was injured and he had this bread and eggs cart, he went around. He'd done some cement work

34:00 at the house and Skeeter had said, "Can I put the cart away Dad" and he backed the cart over the cement. He shot up the pepper tree. His mother finally come out, "You can come down now son, your father's gone to bed." I don't know whether his father ever gave him a back hander [hit] or not, I sometimes think it mightn't have done him any harm if he had. He'd had an argument with his mother and where they lived was this

34:30 little slab house, it was down a bit and the railway line ran in front of their place. Anyways he took off up the railway line, up the mountain and the fettlers took him in and they put him on a train home in the early hours of the morning and it stopped in front of his place. His mother said to him, "Is that you Percy?" and he said, "Yes" and she said, "I thought so, chickens always come home to roost." I said, "I know where the chicken would have roosted

35:00 if you'd have been mine."

What nationality was his background?

Irish, German, which they denied. During the war Ernie said, "There's no German in us" but there is as a matter of fact. They came from Frankfurt on the main on his mother's side.

35:30 He's got the books from the place up in New South Wales were one of the early gold miners and their name was De Anthas so it's one of those places that it's been French and it's been German sort of thing. Their name was De Anthas. They dropped the De when they came out here. The original one that

36:00 came out here was going to be taken in to the German Army, this is according to his sister and he came out here to get out of the way of the Germany Army. Up near Sofala, what's the name of the place, we went there once when we were going for a holiday and it was like a trip to the wild west.

36:30 It really was. The road and the split rails and things, this gravel road and we're bouncing round, we had our tyres set for bitumen and we were bouncing around on gravel. God it was awful. Skeeter spoke to the woman in the post office there. It was something Hill. It'll come to me sooner or later. His mother was born there. They were gold mining people.

37:00 On his father's side I think it was Charlesworth and they owned big cotton mills in Ireland and the whole lot's in Chancery and there's that many of them it's not worth. Their granny, she'd been their grandma, she was originally Ford and then he died. He drove a coach, Skeeter's grandfather on his father's side. Somebody said it was a Cobb and Co coach, I don't know whether it was or not.

37:30 In the early days he drove a coach. He must have died fairly young and she married again this Mr Sheether and had umpteen kids to him. It would have cost too much, you know everything was in Chancery and you couldn't go. They got the arrogance of both the Germans and the French. How can I explain it?

38:00 His brother Ern, he was mayor of Wollongong and he was the first Lord Mayor of Wollongong. The Queen came to visit and they gave him the Lord Mayor whatever you call it. I can never understand how he got to be Lord Mayor. Nothing against Ern, he was a very fine gentleman but his background and one thing, I think actually he was a fall guy myself,

38:30 he had nothing to do with what had gone on before or what went on after. Six foot two, tall, fine looking, straight, arrogance. A little bit taller than my husband. Skeeter was very sick, he'd been drinking a lot and not eating and he'd had this very bad nose bleed. He ended up down in

39:00 hospital in Melbourne but before that I let his brothers know and I thought I'd better let his brother's know because he was very ill. Ern came down and said, "Serves him right, it's his own fault", this that and the other. I was working at the time, working at Myers, they were very good to me giving me time off to go and visit Skeeter. Anyway he went to see the doctor that was dealing with him and I came home

39:30 from work and he in to me. He said, "He's a lot sicker than you led us to believe." I said, "I didn't even have to let you know." We had words, Ern and I. So we go down to the hospital and Ern's stalking across the road, proud as punch and I said to Elsie, "What's wrong with him?" and she said, "You answered

him back" and I said, "Tough."

Before your husband went to war was he a violent man or verbally abusive?

40:00 No. He wasn't violent really. He got very abusive in drink and he'd threaten you and he had my mother just about in hysterics I had to give her a heart tablet and he had my son in tears. I said to him if he didn't stop I would ring the police.

40:30 "You haven't got the bloody guts" he said so what do I do, I rang the police. They said would I charge him and I said, if I had to and they came and they took him away and I said I'd be down in the morning. Because normally, sober he wasn't like, drunk he was a different man all together. You wouldn't know it was the same person.

41:00 Anyway they sent him home, told him to come home and apologise.

Was that the same even before the war that drunk he was a different person?

No, he'd have a few beers with the boys and he'd be silly as the rest of the rabbits, he didn't drink that much before the war. They all used to go to the Plough Inn occasionally but he was on shift work and he was never drunk when he was with me. He was on shift work in the hospital.

41:30 **We'll just have to stop there because that's the end of that tape.**

Tape 4

00:37 **What I want to establish is when you joined up what were your motivations in joining up?**

I just wanted to be in the services, that's all. We were different in those days. If Britain was at war, we were at war, not like today.

01:00 As soon as the war broke out you had fellas lining up to enlist here, there and everywhere. I'd have to have a look at my WAAAF history to tell you exactly when they started but I joined in 1942. I'd have been in before I was only my boss held my call up back. It was an English firm, Morleys and their big factory in England had been heavily bombed.

01:30 We took over a big order for what they called the Far East which was over here. I did eventually get in. The recruiting officer, he was fed up with Mr. Lynch at Morleys. He'd be long dead now, that man. Because anybody who joined up especially the fellas, see it was a protected industry, it was clothing and you had a lot of trouble getting out of a protected industry,

02:00 same as mining and farming and things like that you see. As I told you before I wanted to go in as a fabric worker, I was a trained machinist which you had to be, supposed to be and that was a higher rating because you folded the parachutes too. I got my papers, it must have been about the beginning of July '42 and I went down

02:30 and did my aptitude. You went down to Russell Street headquarters, had a medical and an aptitude test and then an interview. I went in, called in to this interview with this WAAAF officer and she said why did I want to be a fabric worker and I said I was a machinist and that's what I wanted to do. She said I was a fine big girl which annoyed me no end.

03:00 She tried to talk me in, she said, "I don't know when you'll get in as a fabric worker, we've got more of those than we want but we do want drill instructors." Funny because I never had a squad of rookies ever. Anyway a RAAF officer came in and he said the same thing, "Fine big girl." I wasn't big, tall, that's what he meant.

03:30 Anyway they ended up, they sent me off to a partitioned area with two sergeants and these two sergeants went through all the mustering that they had and finally got, I wish I'd taken telegraphists now, too late now isn't it? They got down to mess woman and I said, "If that's all you've got to offer I'll go and join the army." He said "Don't do that please. Tell you what, I'll tell you how to get in. I guarantee you'll be in in a fortnight." He said "Go in as a DI,

04:00 do your rookies and remuster." He said, "I promise you you'll be in in a fortnight." I believed him and I met my sister afterwards and she was already in the air force my sister. She was at Victoria Barracks and she lived out. She said, "How'd you get on" and I told her and she said, "Not a DI?" and I said, "No, no I'm not stopping as a drill instructor." She gave a funny laugh and

04:30 I thought, "Hello." Anyway I did get my call up within the fortnight which I was very happy about and my father was very pleased too. My sister she was two years younger than me and my mother didn't want my father to sign her papers but he did. He was very proud of the two of us but I'd just turned twenty one so he didn't have to sign my papers. Then you were twenty one not eighteen. I got my call up and I went in on the 19th of July,

05:00 1942. We went down once again to Russell Street headquarters, the thirty odd WAAAF and the three hundred odd fellas that were going on. They pricked our ear lobes to get a drop of blood for our blood grouping. The fellas were going down like flies on the floor. They marched us to the station, to Flinders Street station.

05:30 We were off to Somers and that was number one ITS [Initial Training School] for air crew. That's where anybody that wanted to be air crew went and did their rookies. They got chosen, selected for whatever air crew, gunner, pilot, navigator, observer of course they all wanted to be pilots but that's where they did their initial training and that's mostly foot slogging

06:00 round the parade ground and you do that to teach you an automatic response to any given order. That's why you learn to drill because your life or the life of your person next to you could depend on how you react to that order. A lot of people I don't think know why they give them all this drill and you learnt air force law and administration and what have you. So did my rookies, very pleased with myself, very proud of myself

06:30 in uniform, I loved it. I thought, "Gee this is good." They took us in to an empty tin hut and in the middle of the floor was a bale of straw which had already been got at and the beds were like cyclone fencing. I'll show you a photo after of what they were like. Then you were marched down to the equipment store where you were issued with your blankets and a pillow,

07:00 three blankets we had, four and a kit bag and you had your air force number. You think you'll never remember it and you never forget it, ever. I can tell you my husband's number, my sister's number and mine. 96202 is my number.

What were the others?

65966 was Percy's.

VX [Enlistment number prefix]?

No, he was a medical orderly and my

07:30 sister's was 95692. She went in in the May, she was in a couple of months before me. So I did my rookies. They take you to the stores and issue you with all your clothes, your shoes, shoes half a size larger than you took and that was because with all your marching you go down in your shoes. We had shoes like men's shoes, lace up shoes, lyle stockings, thick stockings,

08:00 navy underwear, khaki underwear because you wore khaki in the summer time. That photo that you took was our summer uniform which was a drabs we called them, khaki drill. We were issued with what they called jeans which was an overall. Ours had a collar and they buttoned down the front like a combination thing and

08:30 digressing a little bit, our quarters were a fenced off area of what had been RAAF quarters. The ablution hut had a row of basins down the middle and a row of shower stalls, no curtains, nothing and the toilets, they at least gave us a bit of hessian hanging down instead of the door, they were like the men's. Just partitioned off a

09:00 part of the men's quarters. You weren't allowed to make your bed before sundown. You know there were some girls there talking about how things were before the war with clothes and that and there were a couple of girls there and every night they used to lay their kit out on the bed. They'd never seen so many clothes in their life, so many pairs of pants and well they didn't issue you with pyjamas

09:30 and things like that but they'd never had so many clothes. It was a really eye opener. We were all in the one hut and you slept with one with their head to the wall and one with their head to the aisle so you weren't breathing on everybody. They took us, marched us down to the stores and we were issued with this big hessian bag which was our palliasse. They said too much was worse than not enough, that's why ours was raided because we raided the next one a fortnight later, we

10:00 didn't have enough straw in our palliasses. They showed us what we had to do, we had to fold it in three and you had to fold your blankets in a certain way. Some blankets sat there and you had to have the blue stripe going round the blanket, the pillow sat on the top and your hat's on the top of that. You wonder what it struck you when you first went in. We were marched up to the mess and the WAAAF ate in a hut on their own. There was about say

10:30 three, half a dozen huts and we ate in a hut on our own and we went through the feed line one WAAAF, one RAAF. The fellas are all giving you the eye and you're giving them the eye to see what talent's around too, you know, not that you could do anything. They just slung this food at you from under a wire thing. We were supposed to have a fresh egg three times a week. We'd get a beautiful fresh egg

11:00 but it'd be congealed in fat. We always said that the best fed pigs in Australia were around Somers because the food, they'd just gone on to army rations. The air force used to have their own rations and the army kicked up a bit I think and they put us on army rations. The bread used to come in every two or three days and they used to store it in a room. You never got fresh bread and you got they had these aluminium basins on the table and you'd get golden syrup and that'd get down

11:30 and then they'd put marmalade on the top of that and that'd get down. As I say, food there wasn't bad except that it was always cold. As far as the WAAAF were concerned the days we didn't get an egg we got the little packets of watchamacallit. Midway through the morning a farmer used to come round with his little cart

12:00 and horse and that and we used to buy milk from him, a little carton of milk. You could get anything you wanted. Well you couldn't eat, we were too fussy, we were too well fed at home I think was the whole trouble, some of us. Instead of having the meal at the mess you'd go and buy biscuits or a tin of condensed milk at the canteen. Cigarettes.

Did you smoke?

Yes. Not 'til I went in the air force I didn't smoke

12:30 and they were about half the price. People couldn't get them outside. Everybody smoked. You look at any old documentary and when anybody's wounded or anything like that the first thing they do is stick a cigarette in their mouth. Everybody smoked. I think I used to carry a packet of cigarettes in my jeans pocket for about a fortnight. Smoke these

13:00 cigarettes. Anyway I went down to re-muster. When you did your rookies you had a lecture after breakfast. You never marched on a meal, you always had a lecture after a meal. This is where I say you had to learn air force law and administration and all different things about the services. They even gave us

13:30 sex education.

Sex education? Really? Such as?

It was most embarrassing because the day we had to go for this lecture it had been a wet day and our intake was in this hut

14:00 and it was a nursing sister or a doctor. It was a nursing sister gave us this lecture and she had an illustration of a man's genitals on the board and what happened, a flight of air men pull up right alongside the windows. It wouldn't faze the girls today but it

14:30 embarrassed us greatly. You should have heard them. The ones that pulled up near the window could see. Anyway I'm not lying that is the truth.

Was this like a giant penis drawn on the blackboard?

It was just an ordinary illustration. Somebody had done it.

15:00 One of the medical section had done it in case we didn't know. Well I suppose we were far more innocent than they are today. I tell you a ten year old could teach me things even now I reckon. I'll never forget that because it was a day like today and this flight of air men pulled up outside these windows.

15:30 They've probably all bitten the dust [died] by now and don't remember.

What sort of things did they talk about?

They just displayed the man's genitals and they spoke about VD [Venereal Disease]. They didn't teach you anything about preventative measures or anything because at that stage if a girl got VD she was dishonorably discharged whereas with a male they'd put him

16:00 in Ascot Vale, the VD section of Ascot Vale and he got treatment but while he was having treatment his pay was stopped. My husband was at the VD clinic as a male orderly, not as a patient when he did his medical orderly course. They all had to do a course in VD because they issued the men with condoms. You could go to the medical section

16:30 and there was always a male medical orderly on duty and any fella that thought he'd been in any peril could go see the medical orderly when he come back to the camp of a night but they had nothing like that for the girls. If a girl got pregnant she was tossed out too. The WAAAF officer, the woman that was in charge of all the WAAAF, she soon got that fixed. The girls had to have treatment and they weren't discharged.

17:00 Why make fish of one and flesh of another? You never used to hear much about the girls getting in any, they frightened us that much with this damn lectured they gave us that you sort of, I don't know. A lot of people thought that we had all these sexual advantages in camp and we didn't because there was always a corporal or a sergeant on duty

17:30 and you had to be in at 23:59 which is a minute to midnight. We only got leave on a Wednesday night and at Fridays we stood down at three o'clock and you had to be back at 23:59 on the Saturday and once a month you got a Sunday off. That applied to WAAAF sergeants. The RAAF sergeants could go out every night of the week if they wanted to but not

18:00 us we had just the same as the girls, Wednesday and the weekend. Anyway the first week we were in

camp we were marched, we were told we were going to the hospital to get our injections, I think three needles we got, a vaccination and I can't remember tet toxin [?], you know. The WAAAF officer

18:30 said to us if any girl made or kicked up a fuss nobody would get weekend leave and we all went through and nobody was game to make a noise and the fellas came behind and going down like flies, fainting. My sister and I we were lucky. See when we came out from England we had to be vaccinated even though we were little children. I've still got two marks on my arm there where our vaccination and

19:00 about a fortnight after you got your vaccination they came round for an inspection and all I got and all my sister got too was just a tiny little blister because the vaccine was still good that we had done in 1924 and this was 1942. So we didn't have to be done again. Only one or two girls fainted on parade. You'd go on parade every morning and

19:30 it seemed to effect the fellas more than the girls, the effect of the vaccination. You'd see them, they'd go, "Look, look" and go round in a circle and the next thing they'd be flat out on the ground. You get a nasty scar on your arm. We weren't asked, "Did we want it?" you just had it. Which really got to me, these people with their

20:00 anthrax, easy way out of the services they didn't say, "If you don't get vaccinated, you're out", you just got vaccinated and that was it. You gradually moved up as flights moved out, you moved up. They had a canteen and the rookies, when you were doing your month to five weeks rookies if you were a rookie you were marched to the canteen and you were marched back at nine o'clock and

20:30 the others could stay, staff and that could stay 'til ten, the fellas could stay 'til ten. Whenever there was a flight of fellas passing out we used to have a dance. They'd get an orchestra there and as they were leaving the hall we all used to sing, "Now is the Hour" to them as they passed out. It was very moving that. Then we were marched back to our…

21:00 You had to do station duties, you'd be assigned to the kitchen some days or what they called emu [parade], picking up papers and things like that, that was when you did your rookies. Right so I did my rookies and paddled down to the WAAAF officer. "Yes ACW" and I said "I've come to re-muster." "Oh no" she said, "You've got to do your drill instructors course first." I was on the first drill instructors course at

21:30 Somers and I'd been what they called senior air woman of our rookie flight. We did have a corporal but they always had a senior air woman because she was in the hut with the girls you see. I was senior air woman of our DI flight which meant I had to take meal parades like the other corporals, I wasn't a corporal but I had to be on the food line, take the rookies

22:00 for dinner. Talking about the meals, they'd been that bad and the orderly officer would come through, "Orderly officer, any complaints." This day this big wig [highly ranked person] came through he had gold rings up to his elbows nearly and on his hat with the orderly officer, "Orderly officer any complaints?" and one of the girls said, "Yes." Every third day our food was curried, they reckoned the food, the meat

22:30 was going off and we couldn't eat the food. You always had the runs diarrhea] at the weekend. They reckoned that they put bromide in the food for the fellas. Whether they did or not I don't know but it had the effect of giving the girls the runs, whatever was in the food. We had stale bread and she spoke about these aluminium things and all we got was this treacle or golden syrup or marmalade.

23:00 The orderly officer, he could have cut her throat. They asked questions then and we all said yes. Well they would know by the food that was going in these pig tins. You'd go out, you always carried your own knife, fork and spoon and you'd have to scrape your stuff in to a bin and wash your plate and wash your utensils and they'd know by the food that was being thrown out you couldn't eat the stuff, it was repulsive.

23:30 So the girls said they weren't going up for tea this night. This was before I ever left Somers. We went up this night and I was on the food line and I was getting a mouth full of cheek from one of the girls and I put her in her place because I didn't want to be doing this. Anyway up I went and we had roast pork, fresh bread and apple jelly.

24:00 We went back to the hut, half the girls from my flight hadn't gone up. "What did you have?", "Roast pork", "You didn't" and we said, "We did. Fresh bread, apple jelly" They grabbed their knife and fork and went up and you know what they got, stew. If they'd been in the first lot they'd have got this. Anyway I did my drill and

24:30 that was quite interesting. We had to do unarmed defence. We had to learn how to fall first because you see it's an element of surprise. You'll never match a man with the physical strength but you learn which joints only move one way. Because before

25:00 our PT, this was before I did my advanced P&RT [Physical and Regimental Training] course we had to do the same PT as the men, push ups and all this sort of thing which wasn't good for the girls and of course some girls had troubles, internal troubles and we were taught we weren't allowed to lift above a certain weight, you pushed and you had to make sure if you were lifting a heavy weight you bent your knees. They even taught us how to kill

25:30 really, they taught you how to come behind a sentry and break his neck.

Were you good at that? Thought you might break my neck later.

No I wouldn't but I tell you what I put my husband flat on his back on the lawn one night, "Ha ha, you'll never throw me" and it is an element of surprise and I just grabbed his thumb and I bent his thumb back and put my arm behind and my leg behind his knee and down he went.

He must have been stunned?

26:00 No, he wasn't expecting it see. The WAAAF officer that taught us this, she came in, she was only a tiny little thing, the one that was in charge, it was the men that taught us really but she was the one in charge and she came in with this big RAAF PT instructor and she was talking to us and then she turned round and just flipped him over on his back. He wasn't expecting it. He would have fallen. He wasn't very pleased about it either.

26:30 She just wanted to prove that it was the element of surprise because she said you teach your girls that whatever they do, whatever they can think of always remember God gave you two knees and two elbows and never hesitate to use them and don't kick, run. You learnt if they put their arms around you, put your arm over there

27:00 because your elbow will only go one way. How to pull somebody down like this if they came at your face and up with your knee. You can see can't you that I mean that's what we taught them. We had to teach them all these different holds that you did. Walk along and put your arm over theirs or put your hand over theirs and hold their hand

27:30 and get your leg behind their knee. There were ways but it had to be an element of surprise because there is no way known physically that a woman will throw a man if he's prepared, if he's ready for it because you're not strong enough, you haven't got the physical power to do it but you can do it if you take them by surprise and you know where to either bring your knee up into their crotch or under their chin,

28:00 pull them down and bring your knee up under their chin or give them a good elbow in the belly. If you have a daughter, teach her that.

She might start belting me, I'd better be careful.

Anyway first of all you had to learn how to fall and as soon as you felt pressure, the pressure of the hold you had to bang the carpet, the rubber mat that you were on because

28:30 they would apply the pressure until you did and you could really hurt somebody with things like that. Anyway we did our written paper and everything. We had to do a one minute lecture and that's very hard, a one minute lecture. You had to learn, every morning they did a parade state, it's a sheet of who's on the base, who's on the camp, who's in hospital, who's away

29:00 and it's all got to tally up this way and that way, it's all got to tally. Anyway we did this and you had to write an essay and you had to do your drill, we had to learn how to give drill orders because a sloppy order gets a sloppy response. They put you in a big square in the parade ground. We all lost our voices at one stage or another during this and you'd learn to give an order.

29:30 I'm still told I'm speak some times as though I'm on a parade ground, I can if I want to. If you say to somebody, "Oh, right turn" that's the sort of response you get, a sloppy response but if you say, "Right turn" you're off. That's why you drill so you have an automatic response to that given order. One of the girls we had was working in the office doing her

30:00 station duties and she saw the list of who passed and she come back and she said, "Armstrong you've passed well" and I thought, "Good, I'm on my way." Anyway there was about three or four of us called up to the office. We had an interview with this WAAAF officer and I went in and she said,

30:30 "You know Armstrong I've been worried about you. I think you're a bit like me." She was a society girl that had come straight in as an officer, they soon found out their mistake with that and they made them go through the drill instructors course and she said, "I think you're like me, you haven't got enough confidence. You've passed well but I'm keeping you back."

31:00 Well, that really rocks you. I said to her, "Where have you failed me?" and she said "Nowhere really. Your one minute lecture." I thought, "My God" and she said, "You won't have to take any notes" and I was in charge of the next DI flight. I had to do the night duty too with

31:30 the other corporals and I was still an ACW. I came out and of course the sergeant was there and he said, "What are you doing here?" this was when I was waiting to go in and see her. I said, "I don't know. I have asked for a re-muster, whether it's that." He said, "I don't think so." He was disgusted when he first got these WAAAF to teach drill to, he thought the other fellas would sling off at him but

32:00 he pretty soon saw, he was very proud of us. The girls pick up the drill very quickly, they've got a better

sense of rhythm than men and a better coordination, quicker, young ones especially. Little kiddies, you'll see a little girl will be better coordinated than a little boy. It doesn't go all through life but there's just stages in life where the development is different between male

32:30 and female. You see the girls took pleasure in their drill. We caught on quickly which was our left foot and which was our right and things like that. Anyway she made us go out on the parade ground with our new flight and watch our old flight pass out. I can't tell you what effect that has on you, it was dreadful and I believe they'd remembered my sister working in the orderly room because

33:00 she went in as a clerk you see and she did all her station duties in there and the station adjutant and different ones had wanted this WAAAF officer to let me go and she wouldn't. She'd got this bee in her bonnet [angry] that I wasn't. Anyway I didn't have to take a note. She used to get me to carry her books back to her office. "Yes madam, no madam" and if I saluted her

33:30 my hand nearly fell of my wrist sort of thing. She called me in for an interview and she said, "You know I've been worried about you. I don't know whether I did the right thing in keeping you back." She said, "What do you think?" and I said, "You did it madam." It's a wonder she didn't have me up for insolence but she didn't. I said, "Anyway I want to re-muster. I don't want to be a drill instructor" and she said, "Well you can't, you're a corporal now."

34:00 She called me over to her hut a couple of nights later and she said, "The postings are through. Armstrong I want you to know you're going to 1WAGS at Ballarat." I said, "Madam I didn't join the air force to fight the war in Ballarat." I was really put out. Then I came up here and there were three of us here and not a flight to drill. First of all

34:30 we worked on the identification for the fellas, issuing their identification cards because we weren't supposed to talk about what we learnt from their records, you just had to write their descriptions on their cards and that. I was sent to the medical orderly room to work and Percy of course was there and used to drive me mad running me up and down the corridor. I told you how I met him, I was

35:00 on orderly WAAAF and this other WAAAF friend of mine she was a nursing orderly and we had two bikes in the WAAAFery and she said, "Come on, put your band in your pocket and we'll go for a ride on the bikes." Off we went, we came right out the camp and out this big side road and there was a big

35:30 landing strip, the Americans had been here. They'd been in tents, I wasn't out there then when they were there, just before I went in they'd long gone when I got out there but they'd been in the paddocks opposite and they'd built this big strip for big bombers which never ever came here. Anyway we got to where this, reached this fence and Beth said, "Oh I've had this." She was a plump girl and said

36:00 we'll put the bikes over the fence and we put the bikes over the fence riding up the run way with guards chasing after us left, right and centre. This is how I met my husband. I've already said this, do you want me to repeat it?

Yes you can do that, it's fine.

Anyway she said, "We'll go for a cup of tea." They had station sick quarters where you went if you had the flu or bronchitis because you couldn't stay in the hut. The only ones

36:30 could leave their beds made up were officers and sergeants, warrant officers. You had to fold your blankets every morning. Anyway we went in, she's making this cup of tea and this hand grabbed my ankle and there was a bark like a dog. I turned and I said, "You stupid fool." He was this sulky looking idiot in his overalls with a big plaster on his arm and a white coat on.

37:00 Sometimes they used to get the patients that were walking around, letting them do a few things and I thought he was a patient. I said to Beth Cambridge, "Who's that idiot?" "That's Percy Ford." Well when I went to work in the orderly room he'd come in, "I'm going in to town in the ambulance, is there anything I can bring you back, would you like some ham?" "I don't want anything."

37:30 Talking about the fellas falling over, they'd go through for their injections and you had to sort of slip an arm out of your sleeve and they'd come in and they'd say any of the WAAAF around, stay away. I mean what could you see, the fella only took his arm out of his sleeve for goodness sake. Anyway Skeeter's there with the MO [Medical Officer] helping give the injections and the doctor said to him,

38:00 "Watch him Ford, watch him." There was this fella, they'd get about three from him and he'd always faint. We had another fellow there, he'd been an orderly in a mental hospital and you know he would never walk through a door without he'd put his head through first and look both ways. Anyway the medical officer wanted me to re-muster as a clerk med

38:30 and I put in an application and what did they do, they shifted me to the padre's office. It was a Methodist padre and I'm an Anglican. Anyway after I got married this padre said to me, he was on leave, he said, "Why didn't you wait for me to come back and marry you" and I said, "You're not my padre sir." Just after we were married,

39:00 Skeeter was posted to Darwin and you see his mother had died and the family well I don't think he knew exactly where his father was at the time. He knew he was in Wollongong somewhere and he wanted to be married, his brother was married six months before us, the brother next to him and I think

Skeeter wanted to have somebody of his own to feel as though he had an anchor I suppose of sorts.

39:30 It's different in war time. You take what you can in a lot of war time marriages and the funny thing is a lot of them have lasted a lot better than these lots today that go and live together for two years before they get married and as soon as they get married they break up. I think about three or four months was all because he was posted. Well they decided that they'd operate on his arm, take his bone out of his wrist just after

40:00 we were married because I've got telegrams somewhere and one of them says, "This plaster's for life Perc." The padre married us and we had a WAAAF guard of honour. Anyway while he was down in Heidelberg Hospital they changed his posting from Darwin to the islands. Do you want me to keep going?

No we'll have to stop actually, we've run out of tape.

Tape 5

00:31 Then they brought in this course, they hadn't had a mustering for a PTI with the WAAAF. They did for the men but they didn't for the WAAAF. They decided that they would, well here were we, three drill instructors up here at a non-training station. It was a training station for the wireless air gunners, they did their wireless out here you see and what would you want with three drill instructors.

01:00 You had staff. The only time you drilled them was to get them ready for a march down the street. I suppose to gee up the local citizens, the army and the air force marching down the street. They decided that we would be posted down to do this advanced physical and recreational training course because of the girls having to do the PT that the men were doing and this was in

01:30 1943. I went in it was the 4th of July when I went down to the WAAAF depot because I can remember the WAAAF officer remarking that it was the American Independence Day, it was a Saturday. That was in 1943. She had been on my first DI course and she was older than the rest of us and she was an English women and she'd been a phys ed [physical education] in a girls school and they had her in charge of

02:00 this course for the WAAAF. Here I struck about three that were on my original course and she was about to give us three, four a bit of a time of it. She said, 'Oh Armstrong", when she saw me, "Your name's not here." I said, "It's Ford, madam." We were lectured by the medical staff, by doctors and nurses. We had to do anatomy and physiology. We had to learn to do the sequence of exercises,

02:30 the warm up things and cool down things. There's a sequence that you give the exercises in. We had to play hockey, we had to play basketball. We learnt how to stand. It paid off. I can bend down, it doesn't bother me, my only trouble is this ulcerated foot. We didn't want to do it in the first place and where we did it was down at the

03:00 medical hospital, down in new buildings they said they were getting them ready for the fellas coming back from the war. They were these two story buildings and at each end was what would be padded cells eventually. They had us there and we had to do this course. While we were there they decided that all NCOs would do this drill course and my sister, she was then a corporal and she asked her officer

03:30 not to send her down while I was there. She didn't want to be there while I was there because they used to sling off at us DI's until they came and had to do it themselves. I know one of the girls that had been on my other course with me, she twisted an ankle playing hockey and I had to go with her to the station sick quarters and there's this squad of NCO's marching down the road and this NCO's trying to

04:00 get them back. As I was saying, they taught you how to give orders because if you give a sloppy order you get a sloppy response. This corporal saying, "Squad, squad" and the squad's marching down the road and Bobby said to me, "I'll get the bugger's back", "Squad! About turn!" and around they come and back. Then I was posted and she told us,

04:30 she told the lot of us that she'd marked us as low as she could in our practical work but she couldn't in your written work. She told us straight she tried her utmost to fail us. Mind you I don't think we were very nice to her when she was on our drill instructor's course. You know what young people are like. We thought she was a stuffy old bird, she was too. Anyway,

05:00 they ended up, there was a girl on our course who was a phys ed, she'd gone through the university and this WAAAF officer she had a habit if you sprained an ankle or you had to go on sick parade she'd down grade you. I know because I sprained my ankle and they said, "Don't go on sick parade" and I didn't and it was just fortunate that she picked me to walk this back

05:30 Bobby back to the medical officer and she said to me, "What's wrong with your foot?" I told her and she said, "Get an elastoplast bandage and come down to sick quarters and I'll bind it for you" which I did. I bought one outside and I'd been to phone my sister one night, I had my shower and I had these suede boots, slipper things on and you could see this bandage, this elastoplast bandage and who should stop

me on the way back

06:00 to the WAAAFery than this officer. She was talking to me and she looked down and she said, “What’s wrong with your foot?” and I said, “I strained my ankle” and she said, “You didn’t go on sick parade” and I said, “No because you would have failed me if I had.” She said, “Oh” and passed it off. Anyway she gave this Francis a terrible time because she was probably more highly qualified

06:30 than she was. We had to give a lecture, as I was saying that WAAAF officer failed me on my DI course at Somers, she failed me on the one minute lecture and going backwards to that when I did our second exam and it came time for, my name was Armstrong and I should have been first on the list because of the A but I wasn’t. Everybody had given

07:00 their lecture bar me and she was sitting at the end of the hut with her cap turned upside down and she had the cards in and you pick a card out of the hat. There was one card in the hat and the RAAF sergeant was standing at the door and I looked at her and I looked at the card and I looked at him. He said, “Pick it up” and I picked it up and it was this parade states. I thought, “You bitch” and I went up and I just started

07:30 to say, “I’m about to lecture you on the parade state” and she said, “That’ll do” and I got ten for those few words. She kept, there was another girl on that second course of mine she was going to go for a commission but she had to do this course first and she did the same thing to her as she did to me. She said, “She’s not going to get away with that” and she went up to her and said, “You’re doing to me what you did to Armstrong” but she still had to do it.

08:00 Anyway you strike some queer people. Then I struck this other officer. I wasn’t the only one, there was three others with me that she tried to fail. From there I got posted to Shepparton and by that time I wanted to come back to Ballarat because there were things going on here and I wanted to be here. They’d ask you for preferential posting and then they’d post you hundreds of miles in the opposite direction to where you said.

08:30 I was posted then to, you sound like a letter don’t you when you say I’m posted, put stamps on you, cart all your gear with you. That’s why with reunions with the air force it’s difficult because often you traveled alone, you didn’t travel in a squadron or a flight, not like the army with their regiments. Anyway I was posted to Mildura and that was

09:00 an operating training unit for fighter pilots. That was very interesting because the pilots we had there, the instructors were men on a rest period, they’d been on active service. You’ve heard of Killer Caldwell I suppose have you? Well he was there when I was there. He was a marvelous man, very gentlemanly and he hated the WAAAFs saluting him. Rose and I, that girl in the photo, we used to salute him and he used to get

09:30 that mad because if there’s two of you walking along together the senior one is always on the right because they salute. So what we’d do is I’d fall back a step or two from Rose, Rose was senior to me and Rose’d salute him and he’d have to salute Rose and then he’d have to salute me. You didn’t salute without a hat on of course. You’re not saluting the person, you’re saluting the uniform

10:00 and what it stands for. Anyway they asked me had I ever done any work on the stage. I said Sunday school concerts and things like that and I loved it too. That photo that’s out there, they’re shocking photos but we had this panic night, it was Monday night, we didn’t have a gymnasium at Mildura at this stage, this is early 1943

10:30 no, getting back to about September ‘43 when I went there and before they built the gymnasium we used to have it in an empty mess hut and we had hessian curtains. I was a corporal when I went there. It was a corporal whose place I took and she

11:00 would never spend a night in, she was in charge of the hut with the mess women and she would never spend any time with those girls and they had a broom to sweep their hut out with about half a dozen hairs in it. She used to hang around with the sergeants. They’d wanted her back, the WAAAF officer, I’ll tell you about that too in a minute. I don’t know what it was about me, something peculiar I suppose. I was put in the hut with her

11:30 and I was supposed to sleep at the door, my bed was supposed to be just in the door. No DI has ever slept at the door in this hut and no bloody DI is ever going to sleep at the door of this hut. I said, “I don’t care where I sleep as long as I’ve got a bed to sleep in.” My bed was halfway up the hut. So one night one of the girls that slept near the door, her boyfriend had come back to the camp drunk and he’d come in to the WAAAFery

12:00 and put the light on and woke her up and I didn’t know a thing about it. I was dead to the world asleep. The WAAAF officer had me up and she said what was I doing sleeping halfway up the hut and I said they said no DI was ever going to sleep near the door and I said, “Anyway madam they could put my bed across the door and walk over me and I wouldn’t know.” “You will move your bed to the end of the thing.” I said to the girls,

12:30 “Well I’m sorry girls but you know” I’ve still got the piece of paper. The Red Cross used to come one night a week, we used to go and help them, they used to come and do hamburgers and things, we used

to help every so often and I was on with Rose and I hadn't got my sergeant's stripe at this stage and they said to Rose, "Don't let her come back." I should have had it out to show you

13:00 this thing and they had on my locker a piece of paper, DI's hangout and they had a basin under my bed with soft drink in it to look like pee. When I got my sergeant's stripes they said to Rosie, "Get her to go to the canteen with you" and when I'd come back they'd made sergeant's stripes out of Modess pads [sanitary napkin] and stuck them on the door,

13:30 DI's corner. I've still got that notice too. They used to have a lot of accidents at Mildura. The men were bored you see, some of them were highly trained men. We had two RAAF sergeants there at this stage and they'd been through a lot in England before they came here and they had to do this refresher course and they were disgusted.

14:00 They'd flown more hours than our fellas had seen. One of them said to me when he flew over the channel, they had to fly low. He used to fly spitfires and he said he used to sing to keep his attention because they're a bit nose heavy and the water would draw you. I used to eat in the airman's mess there and I got my sergeant's stripe. What I was going to say was the only place

14:30 where there was baths was in the WAAAFery and there was a couple of what we called ablution blocks, showers, and at the end of each one of these there was two baths if anybody wanted a bath and a couple of the planes that had crashed, the farmers had put the parachutes over the pilot's body and we had to go and stand because it was where the latrines and the showers were, we had to go in with them

15:00 to wash these parachutes and there'd be hair and flesh stuck to these parachutes. They'd wash it off and they'd send them, they would never be used again. We saw two collide in mid air one day but nobody was hurt with that. The parachute section were always out looking to see because their names would be in the parachute, they wanted to make sure the parachutes opened. They closed the

15:30 bar at midday because these fellas were drinking instead of eating because they were bored. Their instructors as I say were pilots on a rest. It was good, I liked it at Mildura. We had our mail censored there. We used to get a green envelope once a month and here am I sending a green envelope once a month to my husband

16:00 who was on active service. Anyway one night the phone went, Rose and I, the adjutant said we had to eat in the sergeant's mess, we were sergeants and the airmen said we weren't going to eat in their mess. They could refuse to have you in their mess too, same as the officer's couldn't just walk in to the sergeant's mess and they used to love to get in to the sergeant's mess because it was more relaxed. Anyway I got this phone call,

16:30 had I been up for a flip as they called it and I said , "No." I was in the concert party and this officer was in the concert part, he used to be in the smutty sketches with me and he said, "Get a couple of the girls and come down to the strip and we'll take you up." I think there were three of us, four of us and we went down and they had Wirraways there too as well

17:00 as the fighter planes. He said, "We'll take you over the WAAAFery and let you see what we can see." Anyway away we go and I was petrified at first and he said, "No, just lean, go with the plane." Anyway we're coming down and he said, "Where's whatever his name was", and I looked behind and I said, "Oh he's coming down" and he said, "Is he down yet?" and I said "No, he's gone up again, can't we go up again?"

17:30 He said, "No, we're down now" is all he said. We got down and the girl that was with him, we were laughing and joking, he was about to land and he found his wheels weren't down so he had to go back up again see. We're laughing and joking about this and we get back up to the WAAAFery and this girl's telling her friends about it and she had to race over, she brought her heart up. Every time we said about the wheel's not coming down for a week she bought her heart up.

18:00 When we were out here for the WAAAF birthday they said we could go up. They had what they call flying classrooms. You could see the pilot, I don't know who the pilot was but he had the saint drawn on the back of his jacket. They issued us with a parachute that hooked on to the front of you and you harness it and when we got in the plane, "Throw them down the back girls" and I thought, "I'm not throwing it, my parachute's coming with me, it's not going down the back"

18:30 and all the fellas are going "Oh it's been nice knowing you girls, step out with your right foot when you've got to step out." They decided they'd do this three act play, Ian Hay's 'The Middle Watch' and I go the lead in that and I got posted again. Before that I was sent over to Port Pirie for a fortnight.

We'll just stop there and I've got a few questions about everything you've just said.

19:00 **With the pilots and so on what was your actual role on the base at that time?**

Well Rose and I were supposed to do PT. She was senior to me and she would be the acting WOD [Warrant Officer Discipline] and she was a typist and she could type. I wasn't a typist and I couldn't type. I used to do the PT. When we did our PT we were told it didn't matter what the man's rank was, that

19:30 a RAAF person couldn't give us a PT table for the WAAAF, that was what we were trained for. No extra money or anything but those of us who qualified as PTI's that's what we were supposed to be. We just had to make sure that at Mildura in the instrument section the sergeant in charge of that section he got WAAAF posted there and he didn't want them there. He said, "I don't want any bloody women in my section"

20:00 and the WAAAF officer said to Rose and I, "Just keep an eye on him. See that he's not unfair to the girls, that he treats the girls fairly." I went there one day and said, "How are you getting on with the girls?" and he said, "Bloody marvelous. I wished I'd had them before." Much more patient and their hands were finer than the fellas. It was fine instrument work. They had one girl who wanted to be a mechanic

20:30 and she did get an award this girl. Blessed if I can think of her name now. She used to be allowed to wear red socks because they used to put her to do work in the nose of the planes. Especially the spitfires are fairly fine. I've got a little model, it's a pencil sharpener that I won at a raffle at the RAAFer, lovely little plane the Spitfire. Because her feet'd be hanging out and they'd know to keep the language down, that she was there.

21:00 Got on all right. The ones that were at Mildura, that's the only time that I really had anything much to do with the pilots. Most of the ones, not most but several of the ones that were in the concert party were pilots and they were instructors you see. They'd do so many missions and then they'd send them down south

21:30 for more or less a rest period down here. They even had a Tiger Moth and they'd get fed up and they'd go up and they'd be doing circuits round the base and you'd think the Tiger Moth was the leaving but the Tiger Moth was the tail end plane and the Spitfires they used to have mock battles with the Kittyhawks and the Boomerangs.

22:00 The Spitfire, I really loved that little plane, it was a beautiful plane. It could go straight up like that and straight down like that. My husband was with a Kittyhawk squadron, he was with 75 Squadron and he thought they were, I thought they were a bit ugly. We had to do air craft recognition and the first plane we learnt to recognise was a Spitfire with its elliptical wings. I'll always remember that, with its elliptical wings. It was a beautiful little plane.

You said earlier that there were lots of accidents.

22:30 There were.

On a daily basis how many would there be?

Oh now you ask me I couldn't tell you. There were not only from Mildura, we were not that far from Deniliquin and they had the Beaufighters there, the whispering death and I think they used to have crashes. When they finished their course they'd come over and they'd have an exercise

23:00 with the fighter pilots. They'd finish about the same time and they'd come over and they'd shoot up the station. I can remember they warned me about them and I was doing a hut inspection, we had to go round and do a hut inspection every day and it was this plane. They used to fly that low you could see the aircrew in it, you could see the pilot and that in it. Flying down on the parade ground. I think it was

23:30 another time one had crashed in to a lake and there was an awful smell around the guard house. The morgue was behind the guard house. They'd got this body out of the lake and they had him there. It was just that I think perhaps some of the pilots were new to these high powered machines. There wasn't one a day or anything like that but there were too many for them to be ignored and

24:00 Wing Commander Garrett closed the bar. I don't know whether he closed the bar in the officer's mess, I presume he did but he closed the bar of the sergeant's mess. Then Rose and I were allowed in the bar see. That was the first time but we had to have a man to take us in to the bar, ground, not air crew because the grog was barred for air crew.

So how many accidents

24:30 **would you have known or heard about or seen yourself?**

I saw these two planes crash in mid air. That was a peculiar thing because it all happened so slowly. We just waited and the little parachutes came down. There was that one, there was the one in the morgue. I'd only be guessing, it'd be about one a month I suppose. I really

25:00 wouldn't know. You might get two and then you wouldn't get any. The pilots, mates of the fella that had gone in they'd all go on a bender [big drinking spree] and then when they sobered up they'd all go up and do rolls and god only knows what. Like getting on a horse after you've fallen off. I can remember one accident and the sergeant was good mates of these sergeants and this one

25:30 he was as full as an egg and he was saying, "Oh poor old Fransansico" I can't think what his name was but that was what he was calling him, Fransansico. You'd always know who in the flight had been friends with them because they'd get pie eyed but they'd all go up again. I can remember before I went in to the air force meeting, I was having a holiday in Melbourne, my girlfriend and I and

26:00 we met these pilots from Point Cook. They were having a lot of accidents at Point Cook at this time too because they took off over the sea and a lot of them were going in the sea. You see they had to learn quickly and they were young and you'd have nineteen year olds flying bombers. They'd be going over Germany in a Lancaster.

26:30 They didn't seem to be that young to us because we were all the same age but see it was all air crew at Somers and that's where you met them in the first place. They all wanted to be pilots. Everyone wanted to be a pilot and they'd be that disappointed when they were classified as a navigator or an observer. Most important or wireless air gunners, of course the wireless air gunners had to use the wireless and a gun. After they finished here

27:00 they used to go to Evans Head and do the gunnery.

How did the base react when there was an accidental death?

Just somebody had bought it. Unless you were really like as I say they were close mates and then they. You'd be sorry for them but you'd say, "Do you know so and so bought it." See there wasn't a day go by during the

27:30 war that there wasn't a casualty list in the paper. My mother used to send cuttings out of the paper from fellas that we knew because some of us we were friendly with a lot of the fellas, we used to take them home for a meal. It wasn't a romance. My mother was a good cook and my father had been a sailor during the First World War, been a service man

28:00 and a couple of them there they used to love to come to my place because my mother was a good cook. She'd make a fruit cake or something like that for them and things like that. I know one fella I was very friendly with and he was an awfully nice fella and the night of their pass out here they got full and he said, "I'll come and see you" and his mate

28:30 brought him to the house and he was really pie-eyed and he said, "I can't promise you anything. I'll come back to you Marg in a matchbox." "Oh it's cold" he said and he got up and walked off, he was full. He did. He was a nice fella, Joe and he died. He was a wireless air gunner. You see

29:00 their training had to be so intense and they had to squash into a much shorter time. I can't understand why people are so against national service training. Really you are better to be trained and have the knowledge and not need it than to need it and not have it. The discipline is good for you.

29:30 See I don't know the discipline doesn't seem to be in the services what it was although I see they're tossing out those soldiers that killed the kittens. They said the RSPCA [Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] egged them on, went for that to get them tossed out.

When there was a pilot's death would there be a ceremony on the base?

No.

Just a private funeral?

Yes.

And the WAAAF girls how did they react

30:00 **to firstly the pilots and them being around and so on, what was happening on the base itself?**

Well remarkable as it seems they didn't seem to be so involved with air men. We were allowed a photo on a locker, one photo and you'd go round doing inspections and you'd see

30:30 soldier's photos and sailor's photos and American's photos and there were very few of us on the stations I was on, I can't quote for every station, you did see some their men had bought it over in Europe, they'd gone in over Europe. But you see they're more like brothers to you.

31:00 You'd see them go out in their uniforms all spick and span, blue orchids and everything but we'd see them being hunted round the parade ground in their overalls and didn't know which was their left foot from their right foot. You sort of unless you were emotionally involved they didn't hold any fascination for you. It was like your brother. That's what I felt.

31:30 It was, I don't now. It's a bit hard to explain. You'd see a name in a casualty list and you'd feel sad, "Oh gee, he was a nice fella" something like that. When you were in the services it was a fact. The boys didn't like dancing with us in our uniform, they said it was like dancing with your mate. That's what it was more like, was mates.

32:00 The civilian girls hated our guts, especially at Mildura but little did they know. We'd see them in tears at the station seeing one flight off and then up at the Casseloma seeing what was in the new flight. Familiarity breeds contempt I suppose, I don't mean that in a nasty way. You know what it's like, people you work with and you're doing the same work, very rarely

32:30 there's any deep emotional attachment to your work mates is there like that.

Well sometimes there is.

Sometimes, I will grant you. There were girls that were broken hearted and I know they used to try and get, see the telegrams went round around about six o'clock at night so that there was somebody home with them when they brought the news

33:00 that they were missing or they were killed. I do know that I'd go sometimes three weeks, especially when Skeeter's eyes were bad and I wouldn't get a letter and I'd see a telegram boy coming towards me and my heart would sink. If he gave me a telegram, you know, I wouldn't want to open it, I was frightened of what I'd see. When I got my promotion I got telegrams from my family

33:30 congratulating me on that and if you hadn't heard from somebody who was away on active service then you do but I know with the civilian women they tried to go round of an evening with these telegrams so there was somebody home with them. I was fortunate, I wasn't ever a recipient of one of those telegrams. It would be an awful shock to you I should imagine.

Did you comfort anyone who was a recipient of those telegrams?

Not 'til after the war did I ever meet anybody

34:00 that had a telegram.

Really?

No as I say there was some people would have brothers would go, they'd have two or three brothers. Apart from Joe, he was the closest to me. There was another fella I knew, he was more friends than anything else.

34:30 A funny thing, I'd heard that he'd been killed, he was an older person, he used to dance a lot with me and I used to think, I suppose he was all of twenty seven or something and I thought he was really ancient. The girls used to say, "Here comes the bird, tweet tweet." This was before I went in the air force. He had a civil pilot's license and he

35:00 was sent out here as a wireless air gunner much to his disgust and he managed to get a re-muster and he did get to be a pilot. I did hear that he was killed but I only met him a couple of times after, when I was in the air force. Must have rung home or done something anyway I did meet him in Melbourne and I saluted him. I was in uniform and he was really cross with me

35:30 because I saluted him. Skeeter got this book from the library about the air force and here was quite an article on him. He'd been in this big bombing raid Rabaul. They'd gone in after an air raid and he was shot down, he and his crew were shot down. That's how

36:00 I found out what happened to him.

Is it funny to say with so much death around during the war and you see friends and so on and it's part of life that it can lose its value?

Yes, that's just it. Not a day without a casualty list in the paper.

36:30 It's difficult to explain. Nature seems to take over. I don't know, you think it's not going to happen to me. You know it's just there and it was there for so long. There was a good deal of, we were sheltered a good deal by censorship which I think is a good idea

37:00 because I don't like this idea of people ratting on other people through the internet and things like that. I think it's terrible. I mean all right they know what they did with those prisoners in Iraq and they should be punished but that shouldn't come out until after it's all over. It doesn't do anybody any good. As long as it's dealt with eventually which a lot of these atrocities during World War II

37:30 were dealt with. Some weren't, some got away with things but so much is going on and it's happening to so many people that it's almost as though you become numb to it. "Oh yes, look, so and so." There were quite a few boys from Ballarat who were taken prisoner of war in Singapore and we didn't know what had happened to them 'til the war ended.

38:00 It hits you more now when you go and see that memorial, isn't it funny?

Than at the time?

Than at the time. I went there with my daughter in law. She was up here for the last RAAF meeting. She's been an ex-air force, she's done her twenty years and my son did twenty six and a half years. She came with me

38:30 to the RAAF meeting and I had to go to the low vision clinic up here because of this macular degeneration I've got. We had a little time to fill in and oh it was freezing cold, wind coming off the lake and her name was Ripper before she married my son and we saw a couple of Rippers. It's an unusual name and she's going to find out about

39:00 she thought they were, she was sure there was at least one she knew the initials that was related to her.

It’s when you look but that’s all prisoners of war, not just World War II but there’s so many from World War II. That’s what strikes you because it’s your generation. I get very hostile now when I hear people denigrate any of the World War II people.

39:30 My husband, he was an alcoholic in the end and a couple of the fellas at the bowling club slung off at him one night and I really hit the roof [got angry] because you’ve got to live through things to know. He could tell me what he went through, he could talk about it and all the rest of it and just recently

40:00 our, it’s supposed to be an amalgamation, it’s really a take over of our bowling club, another club’s taken over and now we’ve got the what I call the ‘me’ generation coming through, those of you who’ve had nothing to put up with, you’ve had an easy ride really. I voted against this amalgamation because I felt that it would be a take over because that club I belong to was formed by

40:30 servicemen from the First World War for the fellas coming back from the Second World War for recreation and something for them to do. This fella made a very derogatory remark about the old bastards that are gone now, buggers he said, not bastards, I beg your pardon. I was at the meeting and I said, “I’m an ex-service woman and I resent that remark” and I did, I resented it bitterly because

41:00 they’re the men who served their country. Some of these you’d put a uniform on them and they’d mess themselves. You can’t criticize a man for what his war service has done to him because you’ve got to do what they did and be in the position they were in. I was looking for my husband’s two medals while you were gone to lunch, I couldn’t find them, I think Alan might have taken them down to his place or he might have put them away.

41:30 My husband’s got two medals from the Royal Shipwreck Relief Society from Sydney for saving men from the sea. He nearly drowned himself with one, it’s a silver medal.

We’ll just have to stop there because we’re right at the end of the tape.

Tape 6

00:30 **Earlier, you were talking before about the deaths in training.**

As I was saying the instructors were pilots on a rest. Killer Caldwell who was one of the fighter aces here, one of the tall poppies they tried to shoot down. Not physically shoot down but morally shoot down, they reckoned he did different things which I don’t believe.

01:00 They were experienced pilots and of course young men and they were in powerful machines for those days and they had to learn things quickly. They had to do in months what might take a couple of years to do ordinarily. As I said to Miles [Interviewer] you had nineteen years olds piloting Lancaster bombers.

01:30 You wouldn’t have it today. You’ve got to have a university degree to pilot a plane today. They wasted so much. They wasted lives, they wasted food. As I say there was a shortage of drill instructors and there was three of them out here and

02:00 no rookies to train. One night it was summer and we went in for tea and they had this leg ham, beautiful ham that they put out on the tables God only knows how long before we went in for a meal and it was fly blown, you couldn’t eat it. The food that got flung in to pig tins, best fed pigs in the world were in Australia, I’m sure. They were certainly the best fed pigs

02:30 at Somers. You’d go through the kitchens and the smell, they’d have these big coppers that they’d cook stews and things in. My husband had a mate who was called up, he was what they used to call a choko and he did join the AIF but he was on the Kokoda Trail

03:00 and he hadn’t had a rifle in his hand ‘til he got over to New Guinea. How can you expect people to? It’s a horrible waste.

You felt like it was a production line? Everything was mass produced.

Yes. No thought given. I was put in as a drill instructress because they said they were short yet I was never,

03:30 ever on a station that had rookies. I did PT. When I went to Shepparton I was the first sergeant drill instructress they had at Shepparton and I did the PT there and I was what you call the WAAAF warrant officer, I wasn’t a warrant officer but on every station there was a WOD, that was a warrant officer disciplinary,

04:00 they were in charge of the discipline on the station. I was 2IC to the WAAAF. But I never drilled a flight and as I say I took PT. I wasn’t terribly good at it myself but I did it. When my son, he didn’t know what he wanted to do and I took him down to a careers advisor here and he gave him an aptitude test and I was talking to him and I

04:30 happened to say what I'd done and he said that would have come out in my aptitude test, that I was a leader. I don't think I was a leader. But when I was at Shepparton, they were very hard on the girls. There used to be buses going to a dance at Tokemata and they wouldn't let the girls go on this bus. All the fellas could go but the girls

05:00 couldn't go. That was recruit training for ground staff there. I was working in the adjutant's office. What I was doing there I don't know, I just seemed to be bored to tears all day there. I said to him about the girls wanting to know could they go to this dance and I said the powers that be here said they can't go and he said, "Will you go with them?" and I said, "Yes" and he said, "Well they can go."

05:30 **Just a few more questions on Mildura. You also did see some parachute jumps as well.**

Yes.

Were there accidents in that?

No they weren't hurt. One fella landed in a tree and he got a bit of a nick across his nose but no. It was peculiar, it all happened in very slow motion and they just sort of clipped, I don't know what they clipped, whether it was wings or what but I know all the parachute section

06:00 came out, they were very anxious to see that the parachutes opened because they had to fold them you see. But once the parachute had been used especially like I was saying to Miles the only place on the station where there were baths was in the WAAAFery and a couple of times when the planes had crashed the farmers had got to them and they'd taken the parachute and covered the pilot with the parachute and it had hair and flesh

06:30 and blood on it and they had to be washed and they would never be used again, those parachutes.

Why's that?

Well it was probably a week or more after the accident happened that it got washed and everything was stuck to it and there would be blood stains that you couldn't get out because there weren't the detergents in those days and they had to make sure that the material was first class. It was silk.

07:00 You couldn't have anything that would weaken the fabric in a parachute. I can remember one of the sergeants, I had to go with him in to the WAAAFery because it was in what we called the ablution area where the showers and toilets and that were in case any of the girls came in and I had to stand there while they washed them and the sergeant said to me, "This parachute won't be used again." It

07:30 would be sent to disposals, they'd sell the silk material.

So who packed the parachutes?

See there was fabric on some of the planes. That was what I had wanted to do. You had to be a trained machinist to do this work which I was and I didn't get to do. They'd air the parachutes. You'd go on to a station in the parachute section and there'd be like big chimney sort of thing where they'd

08:00 hang the parachutes and they had these very long tables where they folded them. I've never seen one fully folded either. I've seen them working on them but I've never seen them actually folded. There was a real art to it. I was a bit glad when I saw these planes coming down you know the Mildura, that was when I saw the two parachutes and I thought, "Gee I can imagine how they'd feel what if one of the parachutes didn't open and you'd folded it."

08:30 You'd feel awful wouldn't you? I don't know, I didn't hear of that happening very often. I do know, it wasn't every day that there was a crash but it was too often for them to be acceptable. I don't know if it was always, as I said to Miles, we weren't that far from Deniliquin where they had the Beaufighters, the whispering death

09:00 and they were very quiet planes, they were on top of you before you knew they were there and their courses used to finish about the same time as the fighter pilots, Kittyhawks, Spitfires, Boomerangs and one Tiger Moth they had.

Can you tell us what Mildura was like at that time? Were there Americans around?

Not at Mildura.

09:30 Our mail was censored from Mildura. We got a green envelope once a month which was not censored on the base. Everybody who wrote a letter like the WAAAF rack hut, we had a box in the WAAAF rack hut and it was either Rose's job or mine every day to empty that box and take it down to the WAAAF officer. We didn't censor the letters, she did. You had to leave your envelopes open.

10:00 **Was there a lot of military activity in Mildura?**

Well I couldn't understand it because the planes were flying all over the sky all day, that anybody with any knowledge of planes would know that they were Spitfires and Kittyhawks and what have you but I don't know why. I do know that our WAAAF officer, I really don't know.

10:30 Our WAAAF officer was a coding officer and when she went in to her office the door was locked and you

could only talk to her through a little thing in from our office and through the corridor and that when she stood down at night a RAAF officer took over. So what came through there I don't know. My sister was at Victoria Barracks and she was a secretary to a wing commander there and they ended up at Albert Park and she had to take a note of secrecy

11:00 and I still don't know what she did apart from secretarial work. My son was in telecommunications and he had to take a note of secrecy. I know he learnt Morse code and I know he learnt how to use a computer. I've got his photo over there, he's being presented with some award just before he got out of the air force and his wife was a clerk in the orderly room and when she got engaged

11:30 to Alan they did a security search on her. She had a higher security rating than the orderly room sergeant because of Alan's mustering. That's all I know, he was with telecommunications and I don't ask him and he doesn't tell me. Nor do I ask my sister. I know they did coding at Victoria Barracks where she was but what she did, I

12:00 know she was secretary to a wing commander but what he did I don't know. He wrote a book, I know that and she typed some of it for him. I would assume there are still sections of the services where you take a note of secrecy and if you are the type of person that should have those jobs, you never talk about them. Nobody knows what you do and that's the best way for it to be,

12:30 for you and for your country because there are some things that are better not knowing. I've got no time for these people that enter these services and then open their mouths. They do their friends, they do their workmates a great disservice, they could even risk their lives. You don't know.

What do you mean opening their mouths, what specifically?

You've got

13:00 that fella that's standing for parliament now. He was with ANO [Office of National Assessments] or whatever they call it. They process the intelligence that they get and he opened his mouth and said they didn't have this and they didn't have that and they didn't have the other thing and this didn't go through there. It mightn't have gone through him and they mightn't have wanted him to know anyway.

13:30 I can't see it anyway so it doesn't matter.

Did you find Mildura a pleasant experience?

I liked it there.

Compared to Somers?

Yes, I liked it there. It was alive. There was an air of excitement there.

14:00 We had this concert party and then they built the gymnasium and we used to have bigger concerts than before and there was a civilian woman used to come in and play the piano. She's got a tweed suit on in that photo out there. The Red Cross used to come out and serve hamburgers a couple of nights a week. I liked it. I was there

14:30 over the summer period, over the grape picking period and the fellas used to go out after stand down and pick grapes. They used to bring us in big bags of beautiful sultanas. They were lovely. I liked it there. There was perhaps it was because of the personnel that were there. They'd all been on active service. I knew and I don't know how I knew, it's puzzled me ever since,

15:00 but I knew my husband was in 75 Squadron and how in the hell I knew. I can't remember anybody telling me but I can remember some of the pilots when they got posted they'd come and say, "We've been posted to 74 Squadron or 75" You know, fighter squadrons and 75 was a Kittyhawk squadron and I can remember these pilots coming in and saying, "Guess what Marj, we're posted to 75 Squadron. We're going to tell your husband all about the smutty jokes you're in the concert party."

15:30 **What sort of smutty jokes?**

Well one of the officers had worked with a big company and he had these big blue books. There used to be a variety theatre was in Melbourne and it was in Sydney, the Tivoli. Well they had show girls. It was variety they'd do dancing, they had these showgirls with feathers in their hair and

16:00 God only knows what and they used to have these skits, little sketches and they were usually a bit smutty. Not by today's standard I might tell you. I hadn't heard of some of the words that are around today, I wouldn't know they existed. These were scripts from Tivoli shows you see. That one where we're holding up a pair of pants or something

16:30 and something about I think they're blind or something, I forget what it was but they'd give you the tag line and you had to ad lib the rest, leading up to this. I know there was one night we had some big wigs visiting there and we had the Anglican padre, he was a bonza [good] bloke, he'd been up, he was an Englishman and he'd served quite a bit up at Port Moresby. He was a real good guy this Padre Sands.

17:00 He'd ring you up and say, "Have you had a letter from your old man?", "No", "Come up and have a cup of tea, somebody sent me a fruit cake" and he had nice fine china and he'd make you a cup of tea and

give you a piece of cake and the WAAAF officer would ring up and say, “Is my Sergeant Ford up there?” “Yes she is, I’m her padre and I’m giving her a cup of tea.” Anyway the Wing Commander Garrett said, “I hope the show’s not too blue [risqué] tonight padre.”

17:30 He said, “Oh no sir, it’ll be all right tonight.” And everything was, some sketch and I was in a bath and they had a table and they had a galvanized bath on this table and I was in the bath and I had my bathers on and I had the straps tied around here and I had one knee up in the air and I had them saying to me, had I anything on in the bath or not.

18:00 Anyway the CO used to sit in the front and he was worse than the troops. He was going to stop the, because I said to this officer that was in charge of the concert party, “What’s he talking about?” I said, “The one with all the brass on, he was as bad as the CO. They’re just about standing up to see if I had anything on in the bath.” When I say smutty sketches. By today’s standards

18:30 you probably wouldn’t even laugh at them if I can remember them.

Can you give us a description of one of those sketches?

Bring me that photo of me holding the pants.

I remember seeing that.

Well whatever that was, I know the one in the bath was something to do with I thought the fella coming in was blind you see and he wasn’t. That’s all I can remember

19:00 about that one. It’s sixty years ago dear boy, that’s a long time ago.

And smutty sketches have changed since then hasn’t it?

You would have been run out of town if you put on some of the things that they put on now. Haven’t you ever seen any of the old variety shows on the TV [television]? No, you wouldn’t. I tell you what,

19:30 it’s similar to the stuff that Graham Kennedy [Australian television personality] would have put on. Have you seen reruns of Graham Kennedy’s shows In Melbourne Tonight? That sort of thing. My drains are blocked up. Perfectly innocent by today’s standards.

So when you first entered the army it would have been probably the first time you came across people who swore?

Yes. My father never swore in front of us.

20:00 As a matter of fact it was after I got out of the air force and I was living with Skeeter’s sister. Her husband, he’d been in the 6th divvy and they’d separated more or less anyway they got back together after the war and poor Johnny, every second word Johnny said was bloody. It used to fascinate me. Bloody would come in between all these words.

20:30 I hadn’t heard any of the swear words you hear today. I’ll tell you this, it’s got nothing to do with my air force service but to tell you just how dumb I was. I remember hearing this joke and it wasn’t when I was in the air force, it was before I was in the air force and it was something about who farted but I smelled it. It was years before I knew what that

21:00 meant. I’d laugh when they said it, everybody else laughed so I laughed. I thought, “That’s not funny.”

What did you do in your spare time at Mildura, how would you socialise there?

Well you’d go to the pictures. It was very hot and we were in these unlined tin huts. You couldn’t wash your hair there because you’d turn the tap on

21:30 and it’d come out red. The water was red. You’d have to go to a hair dresser to get your hair washed. We used to go in to this theatre. It’s non-existent now years ago and I said to Skeeter, “Where’s the Ozone?” We used to go to this theatre called the Ozone and it was air conditioned. It was bliss to walk in to that theatre. You’d walk in and then when you walked out it was like walking in to an oven. They used to have dances at a place, a couple of places they used to have dances

22:00 on a Friday night. See we couldn’t go out through the week, we were only out on Wednesday nights and Friday nights and Saturday nights. We used to have the concerts at the camp on Monday night and the Red Cross canteen would be there another night of the week and you’d be out on Wednesday night. It was that damn hot you didn’t know what

22:30 to do with yourself half the time. I know when Christmas came we had a party at the sergeant’s mess. All the officers wanted invitations. You’re suddenly very popular with all the officers, “Can I get an invitation to your Christmas dinner.” I sent Skeeter the menu, he was up in the islands and he didn’t think it was funny. I thought it was hilarious but he didn’t think it was funny. Because he was only an LAC [leading aircraftsmen] then.

23:00 I don’t know. These days you’ve got television, you’ve got computers, you’ve got DVDs and God only knows what. I’m into these audio books now because I can’t see to read. We used to listen to,

23:30 there used to be plays on the radio. You used your imagination. You kids don't know what an imagination is. You don't. You watch somebody else's imagination. Especially Sunday nights there'd be a play on the radio. Everybody would sit there and listen to it in silence. You'd see all that action and you'd see the way you saw it, you wouldn't see the way I saw it or the way Miles saw it, you'd see

24:00 it the way you saw it in your own mind. You learned to use your imagination. We didn't have to be amused every hour of the day and night like you not. What would you do if you didn't have all these fancy gadgets?

I don't watch TV.

I don't watch it much either.

I never listen to the radio.

You don't listen to the radio?

Almost never. I might read the newspapers every few days.

Do you read a book?

24:30 **Yes, plenty of books.**

At least you read a book and you are using your imagination. You're seeing a thing as you see it. How often do you read a book and you think, "Oh gee, that was a bonza book" and somebody puts it on film and it's all together different and you're disappointed aren't you?

Yes, clearly.

Because it's somebody else imagination, it's not as you saw it.

Your point stands. There's a lot of people who are addicted to computer games, TV.

25:00 **Then again doesn't it bring about a different segment of the imagination?**

Well you didn't have it so you didn't miss it. You don't miss what you've never had. You asked me what would we do? We'd find amusement sitting around talking perhaps amongst ourselves. And you'd do your laundry, do your washing and you'd be in the laundry ironing

25:30 and other girls would be there and you'd be yapping [talking] away to them. There was more conversation in those days I suppose. You didn't miss it because you didn't have it. If you went to the pictures, you went to the theatre. I don't watch much TV. I've got to be just about on top of the TV to see it to begin with and I do have these audio books that I find are quite good except they're chopped to pieces a bit although some of them are good.

26:00 I read a lot too. I love reading, that's what I miss. I don't know, there always seemed to be something to do. Go and visit a friend in the station sick quarters. I've been in there with laryngitis and I'd been in the station sick quarters with

26:30 gastroenteritis that I had when I was at Mildura. I got ticked off by the MO because it was so hot in that bed and instead of eating I'd go up to the mess and have a cup of milk. It was the worst thing I could do. The girls refused to give me any more tablets to stop it and they said I had to go on sick parade and when he said to me, "What have you been eating?" and I said, "I have a glass of milk, cup of milk" he hit the roof, worst thing you could possibly have and the first thing

27:00 he gave me was a dirty great dose of salts. Since then I don't have milk in my tea or anything because I used to get this gastro at the change of the seasons. While I was at Mildura I was attached over at Port Pirie for two weeks and the CO over there wanted me to stay but I didn't want to stay because I was going to be in this play, this Middle Watch that I was telling Miles about.

27:30 I got posted anyway.

At this time what did you know about the war?

Only what you heard in the newspapers or over the radio.

What was that?

Very little when it was all boiled down. I know more about it now than I knew then.

Were you there in Mildura 1943 or '44?

I was at Mildura in '43.

So what was your understanding of what was happening outside Australia, was it going bad or was it going good?

28:00 Well.

What was your general impression?

Now you've got me thinking. You were just involved. You had to go by what the papers said, what the news said that you were doing good, that things were going well or you've had this set back here. I know it was bad when Singapore fell and all these prisoners were taken.

28:30 There was one high ranking Australian officer got away. He ended up in disgrace, most of the others stayed with their men. He said he got away to tell them what was going on but the powers that be I think had their doubts about it. They had, it seemed to me and I suppose to others of my generation

29:00 that the people in charge were real old, they were World War I people. They were like your mother and father, real old. Anybody that was twenty seven was real old. I can remember after I got out of the air force and I was working at Bulli and these girls I walked to work with and they were going to a dance and they said, "I hope this fella isn't there, he pesters us to dance and he's old." I said

29:30 "Old? How old?" and one of the girls said, "He's real old, he's twenty seven."

I must be really old, I'm twenty seven.

Yeah I went home to Skeeter, he was twenty eight, and I went to him, "You poor old man." He said, "What are you talking about?" and I said, "Nola says this fella at the dance he's real old and he pesters them and he's twenty seven. You're twenty-eight. You've got one foot in the grave and the other one on a banana skin." So you see it all depends

30:00 on your age and how you see it. These people that were in charge of things seemed real ancient to us. We thought silly old buggers don't know what they're doing until Montgomery came along. He seemed to have his head screwed on the right way. There was a hell of a lot of mistakes made and it used to annoy me

30:30 the Yanks in two World Wars they bled England dry. They sat on the fence for a couple of years and they came here and I can remember being at the Masonic one night and this American marine, he wanted me to let him have a button off my uniform. We had black bakelite buttons on our uniforms because it was war time

31:00 you see, didn't have anything bright, brassy or bright. He wanted me to either give or sell him one of the little buttons on my uniform. Our uniforms were men's, we had men's jackets buttoned up the way men. It even had the little eyelet where the clip for your bayonet went. And men's shirts, men's ties, men's shoes just about they were. He wanted this button

31:30 and I said, "No" and he said, "After the war you'll all be under the stars and stripes" and I said, "That's what you think." He said, "We're here to save you" and I said, "Where were you when you were needed?" I have always personally maintained that had [General Douglas] MacArthur had his land mass further south he'd have gone there and not here because he

32:00 made sure that our Aussie soldiers got the dirty mopping up jobs while they tried to get the glory.

And they paid for it.

They paid for it. As a matter of fact I don't know whether it's still on show at the Canberra War Museum but there was one stage where he sent an order to one of his generals up in New Guinea to stand and fight. They couldn't seem to

32:30 move without their ice cream factories and what have you. A friend of mine, her husband had been in the army, he'd been in a flame throwing unit and he had little time for them in action. He said they'd pour a huge number in on a small beach head and their casualties were horrendous because they poured so many people in on the one thing and he was with this flame throwing unit and they'd

33:00 go in fewer men, spread out, not the target that they were. They just seemed to, there were a lot of casualties shot down and done things to by the Yanks. Look what they did in Afghanistan to that Canadian plane. I've been out with a couple of them and I remember them saying they'd shoot first and ask questions after.

33:30 They've got a different way of training to our fellas and the British Army. Our fellas are trained I think more along the British Army lines, especially our SAS [Special Air Service]. They don't know when to keep their mouths shot in my honest opinion. But people think they saved us.

34:00 I don't think they saved us. I think they came here to save themselves myself because they didn't give ours soldiers a fair go. I didn't feel and that was at the time.

You don't think?

No, I didn't feel so.

A lot of the girls basically started running after the Americans.

Well, look, you've got to realize they were a different sort of person to anything we'd ever come across.

34:30 They'd come, like the ones I went out with were being billeted next door to us, and they'd come to take

you out and they'd bring you flowers or chocolates. They'd walk down the street and hold your hand. You would never have got an Australian fella to bring you a bunch of flowers. He'd sooner be dead than walk up to your door with a bunch of flowers in his hand. I don't know about now.

35:00 **It's probably still the same, maybe a little bit better.**

He'd buy you a box of chocolates at the pictures and eat most of them himself. I didn't have much time because I went in the air force and I didn't have a great deal to do with them. I did go out with one or two and they did treat you like a lady I've got to say. Different to the

35:30 off hand treatment that you'd had. Whether they were sincere or not I gravely doubt but after being treated like a second class citizen, you felt a bit special. They were different. Some of them were too different. As I say I didn't have a lot of time to get mixed up with them because I went in to the air force and then I was married while I was in the air force. I danced with them

36:00 at the dances and I used to get annoyed with them when they said they'd saved us and you know. They were different and you've got to realise for the first time in an Australian male's life he didn't have all his own way and he didn't like it. They came back from the Middle East where there was

36:30 one soldier I used to dance with told me every time he had leave he spent the leave in a brothel.

He told you this?

Yes. It was just a fella I used to dance with. He'd say, "You know, the brothels in Cairo." There was a terrible flight here at Flinders Street railway station when the Australian troops got back and the Australian girls of course didn't want anything to do with them, did they, no. They had American boyfriends

37:00 by then who treated them greatly different to the way they treated their girlfriends. Here they were fighting because they thought the Yanks were off with their women and what had they been doing over in the Middle East I ask you.

Do you think most of them were frequenting brothels in the Middle East?

No, I don't think a lot of them were and I don't think he was either. I think he was just big noting himself to a degree, just showing off.

37:30 **I'm surprised he'd speak so openly to women about going to a brothel at that time.**

You've got to realize the Australian male, well I don't know what a young Australian male is like now, I don't have a lot to do with them. I've got my son but he's fifty one. No, they show off. They ruin more

38:00 reputations than enough by wishful thinking and saying they'd done what they wished they'd done. You've only got to hear some of the men talk in a bar. You know, "Town bike [promiscuous], her." Well if she was, how did they know?

38:30 There was a bad fight up in Brisbane.

The Brisbane riots?

Up in Brisbane with the Yanks and the Australian troops when they came back.

What about the black soldiers that came, the black American soldiers?

No I never heard anything. I was rather sorry for them.

39:00 They got a lot of dirty jobs to do. Our men that were up in the islands with them could tell you that. They got carting bodies around and all the dirty jobs to do. I can remember this fella that was billeted next door to our place that I went out with a bit he was from Louisiana, Freeport Louisiana, the deep South. They were very derogatory about the coloured person and I said, "That's terrible" and

39:30 he said he'd had a black nanny or mammy or whatever when he was young. I said, "They're as good as any white man." He was very put out about me saying but I'd never met any because there weren't a lot of them here.

Where was he from this man?

Louisiana.

Not surprising.

You know, from the deep South. They gave those Negroes a terrible time.

40:00 As I say, I was out of Ballarat for quite a while because I was in the air force you see but there could have been Negroes in Ballarat but I don't recall seeing them. I wouldn't say there weren't, there possibly was. You'd hear about girls marrying some of these Americans and having a child and the child being black.

40:30 Because the African blacks don't breed out. You're likely to get a throwback anytime, they can look

white.

Some of those Americans looked fair skinned and have black blood?

Yes. I think things are a lot more tolerant now because the colour of your skin doesn't matter two hoots.

Tape 7

00:31 **So tell us a bit about Port Pirie.**

Well I spent, Rose's people, Rose came from Adelaide, my friend the one you've got the photo of and I stayed the first night with her people and I got the train up to Port Pirry. They had a few air force stations over there, Parafield and mainly elementary

01:00 flying schools and things like that. They used to tow these droves [drogues] I think they called them, they were some gunnery or navigational thing and I was sent there for a fortnight. When I got there the train stopped and it was in the middle of the main street and I'm still sitting there and people are moving and a girl said to me, "Are you going out to the air force sergeant?" and I said, "Yes" and she said, "You get off the train here" and I said, "In the main street?"

01:30 The station was in with the shops in the main street. I don't know whether it still is. As I say I was only there for a fortnight and then I was back to Mildura. The WAAAF officer who was in charge of the DIs she came up and she said was my posting there acting or temporary. All wartime ranks were temporary and you could get an acting rank but if you were acting you were only a sergeant or whatever your rank was while you were

02:00 on that particular station. I said it was temporary and she said you'd have been shifted long before this because there was two of us there you see. As it turned out Rose was going to leave. Rose was married, she was married to an officer in the Australian Army and she was pregnant, she was going to get out and I wanted to stay there because I wanted to be in this play you see. Anyway I was sent to Shepparton.

02:30 **It seems every time you want to do something or be something or be somewhere you went exactly the other way.**

Yes that happened. It happened to everybody. As I say they'd ask you, you did a course and they'd say, "Now where would you like to be sent? What's your first, second, third preference" and you'd get sent a hundred miles away from your third preference. The only thing is I wanted a posting up to New South Wales because

03:00 my husband came from New South Wales, he joined the air force in New South Wales and when I got married I changed my address to his brother's place because it meant I got two free rail warrants a year. I said to this WAAAF officer and she said no, that I was highly regarded, my record was good, that the WAAAF officer at Mildura, she'd wanted this corporal back that had gone on the same DI PT course as me

03:30 and when she didn't get her back she rang up about me and she was told that I was of good character. I suppose that's a compliment. And she said if you start to play up now we'll know why and you still won't get posted out of the state, out of the area at least. This was number one, nearly all the stations here were number one except Mildura was number two OTU [Operational Training Unit] but the prefix number 1 ITS [Initial Training School] and what have you.

04:00 So both Rose and I, there again we were both PTIs. It was weird. At Mildura, well when I went to Shepparton I was the only one there. The WAAAF officer that was there at the time she said she'd never had a sergeant DI and she didn't want one but anyway she was stuck with me.

04:30 They were very kind to me there. I had my sergeant's stripe by then, I got that when I was at Mildura. There was about three or four of us. I can't remember just exactly how many WAAAF sergeants were at Shepparton but we weren't allowed to eat in the sergeant's mess. The meals were shocking there too. I thought, "Blow it I've had to become a member of the sergeant's mess

05:00 and pay my mess fees the same as the men." I said to the president of the sergeant's mess why couldn't we eat in the sergeant's mess. No, they wouldn't have us. Anyway they sent me to work with I think it was the adjutant or the administrator's office and he said, "How are you liking it here sergeant?" and I said, "It's all right sir" and I said about eating in the sergeant's mess.

05:30 I said you're not wanted in the airmen's mess, they look down on you in the airmen's mess and shouldn't be there and there because it was just there it was ground staff, there were no planes or anything, we were in the show grounds there. The sergeants and the warrant officers were allowed to bring their civilian friends in to the mess of a Saturday afternoon. Anyway I was in his office this day and the orderly room sergeant who was president of the

06:00 sergeant's mess came in and he said to him, "Why can't the WAAAF sergeants go in the mess." "Well,

we've never had them in the mess sir", blah blah blah and he said, "Well I suggest you let them go in the mess." So he said, "Oh well they can come in on Saturday afternoon and see how they behave themselves" and walked out. I said, "See how we behave ourselves. The nerve of the man."

06:30 Anyway we went in to the sergeant's mess and here's all their friends having cheap grog and bets on the races and God only knows what. We didn't stay very long, we weren't made very welcome. He said to me, "How did you go?" I said, "We don't want to go in the anteroom" they called it, "it's the meals. Heavens above sir we haven't got the same leave as the men." Anyway

07:00 he said, "Something will be done about it" and he had more words with the president of the sergeant's mess and they had a meeting and they decided that if they wouldn't let us come and have our meals in the sergeant's mess they would stop them taking their civilian friends in on the Saturday afternoon. So we were allowed to go in the mess for our meals but we went in the side door, we didn't go through the ante room. We used to go down there

07:30 and have our meals. We would never go, we would always go together and sit at a table together.

During those times when because you are a woman or because you were in the WAAAF you weren't allowed into this bar, you're not allowed in to this place how did that make you feel?

Rotten. You'd have thought we were prostitutes with some people. Not the fellas on the station, I'm not talking about those. They seemed

08:00 to have a certain respect for the girls because as I say, like family. I know when I was at Mildura I was going on leave I wasn't stopping off at Ballarat I was going up to Bulli and we weren't allowed in the air conditioned part of the Mildura express while we were on leave, we had to go in these extra carriages that they put on. They were the old

08:30 carriages that had one long seat, an aisle and a short seat. We got on at Mildura so we grabbed a long seat if you could get a long seat and I had one seat and there was a young airman on the other seat. We were all stretched out along the seats. The train stopped on the way down and these people walking through the train and there was

09:00 an older woman and there was a young couple I think. I pretended to be asleep and they were walking through the train and they stopped when they got to me. They knew it was a woman because my hat was up on the rack and this woman said, "She's not having that seat to herself." You always carted one of your grey blankets with you if you were traveling over night. She started to shake my foot and everything

09:30 and I didn't take any notice, I just pretended I was dead to the world asleep and she abused me. She walked on and muttered something, probably officer's blanket, I don't know, that's a groundsheet or something I don't know what she said. When the train got moving I sat up and I lit a cigarette and the young airman opposite said to me, "Sergeant I was scared stiff you were going to wake up and let her have half that seat. If you'd have sat up I'd have clocked her."

10:00 Not a word to him, she knew that was a fella there, not a word to him. We stopped at the Ballarat railway station for breakfast and it was freezing cold. I put my great coat on and of course in the air force you had stripes on both sleeves, it was a hell of a plaster and here am I with a navy blue great coat, a man's great coat and the fella that was with and this girl was standing near the door beside us

10:30 and the young fella turned round and said, "Yes and she's a sergeant." The civilians didn't want to know you. When I was at Somers I couldn't stay with my sister because she had the measles. I was on weekend leave and we were in Melbourne, several of us. This other lass and I they told us to go to this information centre and we'd get accommodation and they got accommodation for us at this

11:00 house. The man and his young son were very nice to us but the woman wasn't. She said she didn't want WAAAF, she wanted the men. I made sure I wrote a nice thank you letter for having us. We were only there the night and had breakfast there. There was no accommodation, not much to begin with for the girls. The boys had the Tok H and the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]. The Women's Weekly [magazine] opened a place at David Jones I think it was in Sydney for the WAAAF. They had a

11:30 whole floor for service women, not WAAAF. The canteen services fund, they opened a place for the girls but to begin with there were very few places made available to ex-service women. The Minister for Air didn't want us. You can read it in that book. He didn't want us on the same station as the men and this WAAAF officer insisted that we were, we were part of the service.

12:00 Nobody bothered to tell us we were part of the permanent services. We were enrolled first and nobody told us that all we had to do was hand back our uniforms. Then we had to enlist or get out. We all enlisted. I think there was only one or two out here didn't. We only got, we didn't get the same pay as the men and we didn't have the same

12:30 leave rights as the men. If you were on staff. As a sergeant I could only go out the same nights as the girls went out. You just put up with it I suppose. That was it. There's not much you can do in war time to kick up a fuss. When it's a conflagration like the Second World War was. There were other people a lot worse off than we were.

Did it make you and the other WAAAF angry?

Made me determined.

13:00 When I was at Shepparton. Rose and I got abused at Mildura. One of the sergeants was posted on active service and he abused Rose and I, if we hadn't been there, he wouldn't have been going away. It was at Shepparton, our quarters were little prefab huts

13:30 and the WAAAF officer and I, we had little huts to ourselves and the other girls were about four to a hut. This girl came running in to my hut one night and one of the men had been posted and he'd chased her round the kitchen with a knife. She said, "What are you going to do sergeant?" and I said, "I'll go down to the service police but I have to go to the WAAAF officer first." I went in to her

14:00 hut and she said, "What are you going to do?" and I said, "I'll have to go down to the service police." She said "Don't go on your own" and they used to have a guard go round of a night when we were at Shepparton in the show grounds because there was only about that much space between the fence and some of the huts. I waited 'til he came around and I told him and he marched me down to the SP getting shiaked from any sergeants I bumped into on the way down. They reckoned I was being

14:30 run in. They got the fella and I was down there about a week later and the sergeant said to me, "Do you know who this is Henry?", I said, "No, I wouldn't have a clue" and he said, "The fella that chased the girl with a knife" and he let go with a mouthful of abuse and he said, "I'll bloody well get you" and I said, "You and whose army?" and the sergeant he on to him. We got a deal of resentment from the civilian women. Why, I do not know.

15:00 You'd go to the dances and if you were in uniform there'd be snide remarks passed about you. Well you always knew a service woman because her hair was short. Your hair had to be an inch above your collar. I don't know what it was. I liked being in the air force, I liked it very much. I've always regretted

15:30 getting out when I did. I regret letting my husband influence me out. He claimed me out and in those days, well, you know. I was very sad when I walked out of those gates at Bradfield Park because it was a wonderful experience and it's done me a lot of good in a lot of ways. It's made me very determined

16:00 in a lot of ways. I've been in theatre and I've loved it. It's taught me to mix with people and to speak. It doesn't bother me speaking, I can speak in public if I have to. I was president of our bowling club for a little while, for two years. I've got a lot to thank the services for and I'm never sorry. I suppose for that reason I find it,

16:30 I know it's a generational thing but I find it difficult to understand why people don't want to do any service. It teaches you a lot. It teaches you a certain tolerance because you've got to mix with all sorts. These girls in my hut when I was doing my rookies used to put all their kit out on their bed. They'd never had so much clothes

17:00 in all their lives before. That taught me a lesson. I thought, "Here am I turning my nose up at these navy blue pants and things that they've issued me with and here are these girls that have never had so many pairs of pants or anything in their lives before." Come in with a little cotton dress on in the middle of winter and it was freezing down at Somers in the middle of winter. They thought they were home and hosed with all these clothes they got issued with.

17:30 Knowledge is a very light weight to carry. As I've said repeatedly, you're better to have the knowledge and not need it than not to have it and need it.

Would you have wanted, well often you said you went where you didn't want to go, where did you actually want to go?

Well you never wanted to go where you were sent, let's put it that way. I didn't want to come to Ballarat and then when I got to Ballarat I wanted to come back and they sent me to Mildura.

18:00 Then when I liked it at Mildura I got posted away from Mildura. I don't know Miles, I think it's just you always want what you haven't got. Distant fields are always greenest. I like wherever I went when I got there.

Would you have wanted to be closer to the front line?

There was never any, the WAAAF, I didn't know until after the war was over

18:30 but I think at the end of the war they might have sent some WAAAF depending on their mustering perhaps to parts of New Guinea that were safe. We were never sent away, they said we wouldn't be. You'd be posted to Rockhampton, telegraphists and that would be posted to places like but you signed up to go wherever they sent you. When you enlisted you took an oath of allegiance to king and country

19:00 as it was then and we were all very proud of our countries. This is what gets me today. England went to war and I don't think England asked Australia to say they were going to war but the empire immediately hopped in behind the old country. I think

19:30 it was basically because it was an Anglo [Anglo-Saxon] society mostly here. We never had as many,

we've got more Asians here now than we know what to do with. It was more, not because I'm English born, don't think that, it's not because of that, I've spent more of my life here.

20:00 We were all British subjects until after the war. Now when I was going to England and this happened to one of the fellas he was on the 'Seven Thirty Report' [current affairs television show] and he pretty soon got his Australian passport. I could have had two passports, I could have had an Australian passport and an English passport. I didn't know when I was going back in 1980 when the cheap fares came in, I'll be honest, they were five hundred dollars and you had to book in advance.

20:30 It cost me six hundred dollars. You had to pay your insurance when they first came in the planes promptly filled to capacity and I thought, "Now what do I do about a passport?" and this was 1980 and Jim Short was our local member and I rang up his secretary and I asked her what would I do. And he was an imported politician that one and she said to me, "Did you vote Liberal at the last election?" and

21:00 I thought, "Well it's got nothing to do with you what I voted" and I said, "Forget it. I'll get a British passport." "Oh" she said, "If you have any trouble Mr. Short will help you" I said, "I won't have any trouble, I was born there and my parents were born there." I got my British passport for twice the time, half the price of my daughter in law and my sister went a couple of years later or so and by then the law had, after I had to get

21:30 a visa to come back in to this country. I didn't have to pay for that then. They were putting out the, in August I think they put out the budget then anyway they changed it towards the end of the year that you had to pay twenty dollars for this return visa. A fella that used to be, he was in the RAAF and he's in hospital now, he has been our local mayor of Ballarat and he'd been in the air force and he'd served in England and he said

22:00 to me, "You know Marj what upsets me. When I go to England I've got to go in with the foreigners." He said, "You're lucky to have a British passport" and I said, "Do you know what upsets me Jack. When I come back to Australia I've got to come in with the foreigners." He said, "Do you?" and I said, "Yes."

These days.

They changed the laws and I had dual citizenship but if

22:30 I wanted an Australian passport now I'm not sure what it would cost me but I'd have to swear an affidavit. I've served in the forces here. This happened to a fellow, he went to renew his Australian passport and they wouldn't renew it and he went on the 'Seven Thirty Report' and the British consul said, "Come and see us we'll give you one straight away" and pretty soon the Australian Government gave him his Australian passport. During the war

23:00 I don't know if it happened anywhere else but I know my mother was livid. As I say, my sister went in in May and I went in in July and both times a police man came to the door to find out, "Is Marjorie Catharine Armstrong your daughter?" "Yes" my mother said and did I have any communistic tendencies?

Was that a regular event in those days?

Apparently. My mother hit the roof.

23:30 Like it was war time and at that time I don't know what the situation was with Russia but wanted to know were we loyal citizens. When my son went in because of the mustering he was going in as and because it was peace time he had to have I think it was three written referees and three others besides

24:00 and a local policeman we knew told us that he had to check on Alan's referees because of the mustering he was going in for, being in telecommunications. You don't exactly know what's going on in your own country sometimes do you.

At that time with the question about communistic tendencies, did you?

I wouldn't have known what a communist was. I knew they were around but

24:30 I wasn't politically minded or interested. My mother was livid to think her daughters were going in to serve their country and they were being queried about their loyalty. It was different then. I can remember Churchill declared war, not Churchill, Chamberlain, England declared war on Poland, they gave them to that if they didn't cease within a certain time that they'd be

25:00 and Australia went to war, well most of the Empire did and in books I've read since, no, I'd better not say it.

No, it's okay.

They said that the Americans had a lot to do with the break up of the Empire, the Commonwealth now because they wanted to be number one

25:30 and really some of the countries where England was did have, they were in the British Empire, they were a damn sight better off than they are now. Really they were. When you look at what some of the people are like, that Idi Amin [Ugandan dictator] and all these horrible people that are in power. Not

that we've always done the right thing either but you know what I mean.

26:00 I remember writing to the local member of parliament once here, Mick Young, he'd misbehaved something about teddy bears or something or other. He'd been tipped out of cabinet and he was back in, he made a fool of himself, it was a dreadful question time. I usually watch it when it's on and it was disgusting. You had to be sorry for poor Mick because he'd been out and this that and the other.

26:30 I wrote to John Mildren and I said I thought the level of debate in the parliament was a disgrace and he said he wanted to see me. I said, you know if that had been my son he'd have been court-martialed, he'd have been dishonorably discharged. I said "These people they come here, they're escaping oppression and they know what they're coming to, they know our background, they know

27:00 what we're all about, they know we've got the Union Jack on our flag, our origins and all the rest of it and they no sooner get here than they want to change things." He said "But they're Australian citizens" and I said "They could swear on a stack of Bibles as far as I'm concerned but you cannot change the natural loyalty that's born in to you to the country you're born to

27:30 nor can you." I said, "If you were to ask me what my nationality was I'd tell you" and he said "What would you tell me" and I said, "I would tell you I was English and I've been here since I was four" but I don't like people say, I've got a loyalty to Australia too. When I've been over to England a couple of times, if they slung off about the Aussies I got real frilly about them slinging off about the Aussies the way I do about them when they sling off about the Pommies [British]. I've got a split loyalty but

28:00 there's no sense of loyalty anymore to me. Perhaps I'm wrong.

Just to change tack a bit and cover a few because we're running out of tape very fast. These days women can serve in the front lines and are getting closer and closer to real action we've even got women today in the front lines today in Iraq.

I don't like it and I'll tell you why I don't like it. They're a heavy responsibility to the man in action

28:30 because we all know, it's no use pussy footing around it that rape is the first thing that comes in to an enemies mind where there's women concerned and these women are more of a liability than an asset because they'll make men risk their lives where it's totally unnecessary. I think you've got to be a bit realistic. There's equal opportunity and there's equal opportunity. There are some things

29:00 for men and there are some things for women. I don't like being treated like a second class citizen by any male but by the same token I don't see why any male should risk his life for me to satisfy my ego to be in the front line because you are a liability to them. Not only that now like that woman prison officer over in Iraq that had that fellow on

29:30 a dog's lead. They made that girl do that. She shouldn't be subject to that sort of thing by her own people either. But I think there are places. The nurses, sure they do and they're very brave those women. The Japanese would never recognize them as prisoners of war, they shoved them in camps with the civilian women. They all kept silent about Vivian Bullwinkel because

30:00 had they known that she'd escaped that Bangka Island massacre they'd have killed her. Even the men prisoners knew about her but nobody spoke about it when she finally got into the camp with the women. Women have done brave things but there's places for men and there's places for women and the front line I think is asking the men to risk far too much. They risk enough as it is in the frontline without having the responsibility of a female because

30:30 you never know how a female can react. I do know, I can remember during the Spanish Civil War they reckoned that the women were worse than the men and they do say the female of the species is more deadly than the male in some respects but the front line isn't the place for women, no. You're asking too much of the men. You're putting an awful onus on them

31:00 because after the war when Russia went in to Berlin and I happened to know some of this is true because I happen to know a girl who was born in Germany just after when her parents got away and she was named after a servant that her parents had because when the Russians came in the girl's mother and her older sisters hid in a cellar

31:30 and the Russian soldiers raped that girl and she didn't let on where her mistress was. They named this girl after her. Our own men are just as bad. It's no use saying, it's just an aftermath of war I feel. You can imagine women were raped in front of the German men and what could they do?

32:00 It must have been soul destroying. They must have felt so helpless.

You've often said that there should do national service and so on so in this day and age where women can be sent to the front line and so on, what national service should they be doing?

Support. There's plenty of things. They had a thing

32:30 on TV and the women had to do all the rifle drill and everything that the men did which was absolutely ridiculous and you had this corporal walking around saying, "Close your eyes, close your eyes." It was

ridiculous the way they were talking to them. They were getting the fellas to dob them in, the girls to do things and the fellas would dob them in. You've got support staff, there's the nursing staff for instance

33:00 and you've got others that can work behind the lines. VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment], they do good work and there's office work and logistics and things like that but actual combat I don't think that's the place for a woman. Not that I, I mean if she wants to be there, that's up to her but I do think as I said to you it's putting too much an onus on the male troops. They've got enough to do

33:30 to think about themselves and their mate on either side of them without having to worry about some stupid woman having hysterics because a man's having it off with her.

Do you think women should be able to fly fighter jets in the air force?

No, I don't think it's in a woman's make up to fly those. I know they ferried them across the seas during the war but I don't think,

34:00 I don't want to denigrate my own sex and they're very brave in lots of ways but I don't think they've got the physical strength, the muscular strength to handle planes like that. I really don't. I hate to say it but it's probably easier for a man to kill than a woman.

34:30 A woman is a natural born nurturer isn't she? She gives birth to children and nurtures them and I think it's going against nature. I'm not saying they can't do it, they can and I suppose certain women would relish in it but I don't think, I think there's jobs for men and there's job for women and I think they're there to support one another.

35:00 I'm not saying that the man's any braver or anything else or better than the woman and I'm not saying that the woman's any braver or better than the men but I think they've each got a job to do and you support one another. It's easier for a man to protect the women that are not in the front line than to have to worry about another solider coming and grabbing the woman and humiliating her in front of her own troops.

35:30 I think the girls are mad, I really do. We had a fella lived down the back he did a PE [Physical Education] course and he was very interested to learn that I'd been a PE instructor and I said to him that the reason it was done was because women's anatomy and physiology is totally different to that of a man. All your organs are inside and men are not.

36:00 They're developing muscles that they're never going to need, that are going to be a bother to them. I don't think they stopped to think. Nobody stops to explain to them. Childbirth comes in stages and there's one stage when one lot of muscles does the work and another stage when another lot of muscles. You're developing abdominal muscles that are male, what would you want those for?

Do you think

36:30 **a female can be as good a soldier as a male soldier?**

Yes. Given certain circumstances, yes I do. As I say during the Spanish War they said that the women were far fiercer than the men. A woman, she's like any female animal, will fight to protect her young and those close to her. I don't doubt that the women are equally as brave as the men.

37:00 I'm not doubting their nerve or anything like that. I just think that if she has to fight, yes, I don't think it does any harm to teach her how to shoot. My daughter in law was a top gun in the clay targets in the air force. I don't think it does any harm to know what to do but not in to combat

37:30 and I think they're extremely foolish to put these women on ships and submarines. I think the women are getting all they ask for, serves them right. If they want to be in those confined male quarters they've got to realize that the male psyche is different to the female. You put yourself in that position. It's not a place for women.

Do you think

38:00 **it's inevitable that a ship full of guys and say three women on board, the result is inevitable?**

Something will happen and then the woman will get snitchy because the fella dumps her or won't do what she wants so she'll dob him in.

Or even worse in cases like rape?

Yes, you'll get a fella and he gets a few beers in himself and you've got a female trim little sailor flitting around probably going from the showers to her quarters and what's he going to do?

38:30 **In some ways in those cases do you think women are, not sure if this is the right word, do you think they're naïve to what men are really like and what they want?**

Look, today they want to be like the fellas. They think because

39:00 the fellas can do this that they can do it and some of them can take it and some of them can't take it. We

got abused we were support services, we were put in jobs that women could do to release the men and we got abused by the men because we were there and it freed them

39:30 to go and fight. Well what's going to happen perhaps if the woman is a good fighter they'll run off and leave her. You don't know. I don't think the frontline and I don't think a handful of women on a ship or on a submarine, I think they're asking for trouble and I think the powers that be are asking for trouble to put them there. They're in

40:00 close confinement and something's going to give, human nature says something's going to give and somebody's going to get their knickers in their twist and a girls either going to be vilely treated or she's going to be spiteful and dob a fella in that hasn't done anything wrong.

Just on those thoughts, do you think what you just said goes even more just in social community outside the armed forces?

Yes.

40:30 I think the girls are fools today. They'll go and live with a fella, he'll buy her an engagement ring and she'll think she's home and hosed. I had a young lass living next door to me and she had a little girl and she would dearly love to have got engaged and it was his child and I said, "Tell him he either comes across or you go home." "Oh I can't" she said

41:00 "he's got problems" and I said, "Well get out." I think they're very foolish. They're letting men give up on their responsibilities. I have a niece and she was living with this fella and she came to me, she wanted a pair of shoes and I said well ask so and so for the money for a pair of shoes. She said, "I can't do that" and I said, "You're good enough to go to bed with, you're good enough to buy a pair of shoes. They won't buy the book if they can get it from the library."

41:30 I think the girls are being very foolish. They're letting the fellas get away with too much.

We'll just have to stop there because we're way out of tape.

Tape 8

00:32 **Can you just round up what you were?**

Well I was out just before the war ended. I can remember listening to, they broadcast the landing at Normandy. Just all this gunfire, you couldn't see anything. I was staying with my sister in law up at Bulli, New South Wales and I can remember hearing it, they put it over the air. The war in Europe finished before the war in Japan as you well know.

01:00 It wasn't that terribly long after that they dropped the atomic bombs and the war was over. It was strange for a little while because the rationing continued for a little while, cigarettes were hard to get and sugar. There was really no need. It was pitiful really, the rationing we had. The reason I was married in uniform,

01:30 my father said to me, "Now Marjorie" because we were supplied with our clothes we didn't have to buy anything and you didn't have to pay any board and actually I was only getting about five pound something a fortnight as a sergeant which is about ten dollars of your money. It just sort of, it was strange for a little while. You still had to have coupons

02:00 for some clothing. My father said to me, "Now you can't expect your mother and I" and my brother was a little boy about ten or eleven "to give up our coupons for a wedding dress" which I'll wear once. They were hard to get during the war and he said, "It'd please me and it'd please your grandmother" who was his mother who was still alive in England at the time "if you were to be married in your uniform" which I was.

02:30 You've got the photo, you've got the guard of honour and the padre married us and even the organist was looking for us to give us our money back. My sister was married twelve months later and she borrowed a wedding frock and she was married in Melbourne and I was pressing her veil and I said to my father, "and there's my wedding dress hanging up on the wall", it was my uniform jacket and Dad said to me, "Marjorie anybody can be married in a borrowed wedding frock

03:00 but no everybody can be married in the king's uniform" which made me feel very proud at the time. It just seemed strange and fellas were coming home from the war and they were different men to the ones that went away. Unless you had to live with a returned serviceman you didn't know. Not all of them were affected that much

03:30 but a lot of them were and it took a while after the war for things to come out. The euphoria of getting over the war, you'd been over the war and coming home and all the rest of it and then it was quite pleasant for a while and people were building homes and you could get a cheap home loan and all the rest of it. Then I think it suddenly dawned on a lot of people that

04:00 here they were married with commitments and their youth was gone. This is what vexes me about these people that carry on now. These people willingly gave up their youth and you don't see things that they see and do things that they did, that you'd have to do, you'd have to kill somebody else to save your own life. If it was you getting shot or them, you're going to

04:30 shoot them, aren't you and you don't know what effect that has on people later on in life. I can remember my brother in law saying, he didn't go to the war, he had some bone disease when he was young and he couldn't straighten his arm straight out. He was a brainy fella, Skeeter's, the brother next to him. He worked at the steel works and they wouldn't take him because he couldn't straighten his arm. Now you see people getting TPIs [Totally Permanent Incapacitation Pension], one fella I know he lost a hand

05:00 in an accident when he was a kid and he worked as a civilian with the army and he's got a TPI and there was my brother in law couldn't get in the forces. He said they were finding out that the men who served in the Pacific were having worse nerve problems than the men who served in Europe. Well the climate for one thing was totally different to what any white man was used to whereas it was more or less familiar to them

05:30 in Europe even if you'd come from here. Perhaps the winters would be a bit colder but the language was the same and you were fighting a different enemy. You were fighting an enemy you couldn't see some of the time and a very vicious enemy. Because they didn't treat their own any better than they treated the prisoners of war I believe. I always feel that

06:00 a Jap is a Jap and leopards don't change their spots. I don't know, I could be wrong but I think a lot of the prisoners of war of the Germans unless they were continually trying to escape which they felt was their duty weren't treated not as viciously the prisoners of war because they upheld the Geneva Convention to a degree. A fella that

06:30 my husband was in partnership with, he was taken at Dunkirk so he was a prisoner of war for most of the war in Germany. He tried to get away at times but he said it was hard for an ordinary soldier to escape but it was easier for the officers, quite a few did get out because they got helped through Red Cross parcels, compasses and buttons and things.

07:00 They did have forced marches and things like that but I don't think you've got these little yellow men who despised the white man for surrendering because they felt death was preferable to surrender. They carried their comfort women around with them and they didn't care whose women they took to be what they called their comfort women. Different race and a

07:30 different religion. They weren't doing I suppose anything wrong by their morals but they were offensive to us. Anyway this is what Ernie said, they were finding out that the nerve problems with returned servicemen from the Pacific were gradually getting worse than the ones from Europe. As I say my brother in law was wounded at Tobruk, he had a bullet go right through him. Same thing saved his life that saved his father's life in the First World War,

08:00 a wallet with an unbreakable mirror and a photo of my sister, it was Cliff's mother that saved his father during the First World War. Same month it happened too, May or June I think it was. They sent his father home but Cliff stayed on. He went all through El Alamein and those places with Montgomery. He's a Tobruk rat.

Do you think that the real challenge to your husband came after the war?

Yes.

Not the war, it was really the war that made him

08:30 **who he was and the challenges were greater?**

Yes, I do.

Can you give us an idea.

He was a happy go lucky soul before he went away. Of course he, I told you he's got these two medals from the Royal Shipwreck and Humane Society for saving people from the sea. I begged him not to go in the sea for the one that he got the silver medal for because it was a tremendous sea and he couldn't get the fellow on to his surf ski, the boat

09:00 had overturned, the [HMAS] Bombo it was and it had a load of blue metal on it. They hadn't battened down the hatches and the cargo had shifted in the heavy seas and it upended. They only knew about it because one of the fellas managed to get ashore. The baker thought he was a drunk. They spotted this fellow off the end of the reef and my husband was one of the first permanent beach inspectors on Bulli beach. They rang up, they couldn't get him,

09:30 he was along the beach and they rang the house for him and I went and got him. I said to him, "Don't go out" because the sea, you've got no idea what the sea was like and he said, "I have to." He got to the little bay in front of our place, we lived around from the other beach and in a corner of the beach there was a bit of a lull and he managed to get out on the surf ski. One of the surf club boys, a couple of them

tried to get out with a reel and line and they couldn't get out and another surf club further up the coast

10:00 lost a life saving boat, one of their boats and he got to the fellow but he couldn't get him on the ski. He said, "Hang on." The fellow had a belt on, a life belt on. This huge wave came. We're all standing on the beach watching this and this huge wave came and the ski went one way and Skeeter went the other way and he knew the fellow would come in, he'd be all right because he was getting close enough in that the waves

10:30 would wash him in you see. One of the fellas was saying, "He's gone, he's gone." It was a real dumper and fortunately he was a trained life saver and he got his feet on the sand, pushed himself up and got out of the thing. It had only been a few weeks before that that they'd come and got him to dive in a stagnant dam up the side of the mountain at Bulli. It's not a mountain, it's an escarpment really

11:00 and they thought this fella had committed suicide and they come and got Skeeter to dive for him and he's sitting behind the bushes laughing at them. He'd ended up with pleurisy and he had all these cold sores round his mouth. He'd do that sort of thing and he wouldn't talk about that. He got his corporal's stripes which is not a big promotion these days but it was done on active service and in those days in war time you didn't get any promotion

11:30 unless you got home. People got medals but they can't give medals to everybody that does something brave. He'd got one of their fighter pilots out of a Kittyhawk that had crashed. He's running through the kunai grass with him on his back and the bullets are going, the ammunition's live in the plane and he had this fella bleeding on his back. He said he brought his heart up when he got him to the hospital. He'd do this

12:00 sort of thing then, see, he couldn't drink. He couldn't tolerate drink. You see some men they can have a skinful and you wouldn't know it, they're not too bad but Skeeter he was what you call a two pot screamer [got drunk easily]. He'd have a couple of pots and you blinked your eyes the wrong way and he'd be off on a tangent, "I'm bloody going home." Wouldn't care who you were, could have been the King of England, could have been anybody.

12:30 He was easily led I would say. If you flattered him he was easily led. He was a very brave man and he was a good provider. I never wanted for anything. I did work to help him out with his business and one thing and another but he never belted me around or anything. I was verbally abused but

13:00 I married him, I hadn't known him long when I married him and I took him for better or worse and you can't walk out on people, I don't feel. My father had said to me I'd taken him for better or for worse and his brothers used to say to me, "For Christ's sake don't leave him, he'll end up in the gutter" which he would have. I ticked them off down at the bowling club because he'd be very generous with his money.

13:30 God only knows what he lent or gave away when he was full. You know what people, some bar flies are like, they're sponges aren't they some of them. He'd gone down it was the holiday weekend in March and it was terrible weather. He'd gone down to the bowling club and they hadn't bowled and he'd had a few drinks and he called in to another bowling club on the way home, he was in this silver circle. He wasn't really drunk when he got home but he was well on the way.

14:00 He brought me in a cup of tea in the morning and then he sung out to me and I thought he was singing out to me to drink my tea, I'd gone to sleep but he'd had a rupture of his aorta artery and I got him on to the bed and I said, "I'll get the ambulance", "No you won't" and I said, "Yes I will" and he couldn't see me. I said, "That's it" and I got the ambulance and they were marvelous and Ballarat Base

14:30 Hospital were marvelous. I said to them had he been at one of the clubs and he'd collapsed he'd have bled to death because they'd have said he was drunk. I said to them down at the bowling club, "If you want to feed him beer you handle it when he collapses or he's picked up by the police because I know what you'd have said. He could have collapsed in the bar here

15:00 and you'd have said the bastard's drunk" and they said, "No we wouldn't" and I said, "Yes, you would." He wouldn't say no to them. He said to me once, "You can't say no" and I said, "Yes you can" because just after the war we had a New Years' Eve party at his brothers place at the beach and kegs were hard to get and they got this keg of awful beer. I don't like beer, I don't like the taste of it.

15:30 They kept saying to me, "Have another beer" "I don't want a beer." I said to this friend of his, "You pour me another beer and I'll tip it out on the grass" "Oh you wouldn't do that" and I said, "Yes I would." He filled my glass and I upturned it on the grass. Nobody ever insisted I have a beer ever after that. See there are some people who can say no and some people who can't. He'd get to the stage he wouldn't care what he drank.

16:00 He was kindness itself, he'd do anything for anybody. He really was. A fella next door collapsed on his back steps, he was only fifty one and Mary sang out to Skeeter and Skeeter went in there and he died a couple of days, he'd had a stroke and Skeeter he was very good with anything like, he'd have been a very good male nurse or a paramedic. He was a very good medical orderly,

16:30 a very good one. The matron at Bulli Hospital had wanted him to work at the hospital and he said he was sick of taking orders from women because he'd worked in the operating theatre of Bradfield Park for nine months. He was a good man but he was a silly man. Now he's with dementia and doesn't know

us. It's a shame but he's

17:00 being well looked after.

So you think he suffered from PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], what is known now as post traumatic stress disorder?

Yes I do.

Severe?

Probably more than I thought because he could always talk about his war time experiences but since all this has happened. He'd had that many operations that he was getting this post operative dementia with the anesthetics.

17:30 I've often wondered whether talking about it kept it too alive in his mind. I don't know. As I say after this Bombo had gone down he went all up around the rocks, up around Stanwell Park with the chief engineer's sons

18:00 and they said they would never forget him because wherever they wanted to go he'd gone. If one of them had fallen and slipped on the rocks they couldn't have dragged the other above high water mark. You don't get those medals for nothing. He's the only one left in his family now. They've all died young. He's eighty three. He's lived longer. I said to him once, "You've been repaid

18:30 for the two lives you saved" His life's been saved a couple of times by the medical profession. It's a shame to see him now but I'm glad I stayed with him. It's been unpleasant sometimes and I think you'll find that most women who are married to ex-servicemen would tell you the same thing. You look in the paper and you'll see a lot of golden weddings now.

19:00 They're war time marriages.

Certainly the last of that.

I think you'll find you despise yourself for putting up with it and you'd despise yourself if you walked away from it. Used to worry me his brothers saying "Don't leave him he'd end up in the gutter" because the fellas he'd drank with would take his money and take the drinks he bought for them

19:30 and then they'd sneer at him.

Did you have any children?

I've got one son.

How did this affect him?

He doesn't drink, well he'll have a social drink.

But I mean his father's post traumatic stress disorder, not just in the drinking but in other behaviours.

Well I'll say this, I can say this because Alan knows, we adopted Alan.

20:00 My blood group is A negative and my husband was O positive and those days they could do nothing. You'd miscarry. Nowadays they can do something about the blood but then they can't but he was a very good father to Alan. My sister had two sons to her husband and she said Skeeter was far better with Alan than her husband was with his two boys. Take Alan anywhere,

20:30 even as a baby he'd take the pram and walk along the beach while I got the tea if Alan was playing up as a baby. He was very good. Taught him to drive, taught him to shoot. Wouldn't matter how drunk he was on Saturday if he'd promised Alan he'd take him out on Sunday they'd go out on Sunday, rabbiting or. Been a very good father to Alan, I've got to say that. Very patient with him as

21:00 a little fella. Now when we go and see him he doesn't know me, I don't know whether he doesn't know me or he doesn't want to know me. He seems to remember men and he'll always ask, "Where's Alan, how's Alan?" Carmel, Alan's wife he thought was his niece. It's a strange thing that. One of the

21:30 women at the bowling club her sister in law has just gone in to this dementia care unit where Percy is and she said, "I saw Percy the other day." I said to him, "Hello Perc" and he said, "Hello" and she said, "You don't know me" and she said her name and he said, "I know George", that's her husband. He always, we were there about two months ago I went and I had to

22:00 take him some clothes, he needed some more clothes and they'd broken his electric razor and I think he only knew me because they told him I was going there.

Do you think that it takes a special type of woman, wife to marry a serviceman?

No. When it's war time you don't think. His mother was dead.

22:30 His mother died when he was sixteen and the home had split up before that. There was only he and his, he did have an older brother and sister but this brother that was the mayor of Wollongong later. They were closer in age. There was Dave and Vean and there was only about twelve months between those two and then there was about eight years between Vean and Tom, Tom's

23:00 dead and about four years between Tom and Ern and about twenty two months between Skeeter and Ern. He was the youngest. I think he wanted to get married before he was posted to active service, to the islands. We were engaged and he wanted to be married. His brother had been married six months before on the twenty sixth of September and we were married the twenty sixth of February the next year and I think he wanted somebody of his own

23:30 to come back to. It's hard to say, when it's war time you grab what you can when you can. We were in love and young and you think life's going to go on forever and nothing's going to change. Had I not married him before he went away I wouldn't have married him when he came home. He was sent home because of his eyes, he had these corneal ulcers

24:00 and they wouldn't heal. They'd taken some off up at Port Moresby and they sent him home and he was at Concord Military Hospital and I went in uniform because you didn't feel as foolish asking your way, in uniform anybody would know you, and his first words to me were, "Where did you get those bloody awful stripes?." We were sitting in the hospital grounds and an army ambulance went past with some soldiers in the back, "Pull your rank on him

24:30 sergeant" and things were getting very sticky I'll tell you. We went down to stay with his brother Ern down at Bulli on the south coast and he wouldn't travel with me in my uniform, I had to leave it at his brother's in Sydney. I think I had about a week's leave, it's a bit hard to tell now it's that long ago and he disappeared for a day go up to Sydney. A couple of times he had to report back to the hospital. He'd applied for me to get out and I thought, "I don't want to get out now."

25:00 **You must have obviously been quite upset when he spoke to you like that?**

I was. He brought some bits and pieces back with him and he'd pass them round, show other people before he'd show them to me. He said he knew he was doing it and he couldn't stop it. He knew he was being awful. He was rude to his brother and he knew but he just couldn't stop himself.

25:30 I really thought "You're a fool getting out." I could have been a warrant officer and I was recommended to the course and all the rest of it. He was posted down to this radar unit that you couldn't see in the bush. The worst place really for a man with war nerves to be sent in a way. It was isolated. He was the medical orderly, he was the doctor down there. Anyway

26:00 his eyes weren't getting any better and they posted him up to Bradfield Park in Sydney. That's where he was when the war ended.

Can I ask you how did the war impact on you personally up 'til now?

It's an experience I'm glad I had, I'm glad I was in the services. You couldn't escape the war anyhow, it was there

26:30 whether you wanted it there or not, it was there and I'm glad I was in the services. I was proud to wear the uniform. I'm still proud to have worn the uniform and I've got to say I've been well looked after for my service I gave to my country. I've got these ulcers on my foot and Veterans Affairs have recognized that and I had to have the cataracts taken off my eyes. Well now I've got this

27:00 macular degeneration and nobody knows what causes that. Colleen McCulloch the authoress has got it. It's something that's becoming very prevalent. These lamps you can see, that lamp, I've had to hand in my driver's license, I'm not allowed to drive because cars were coming at me through a mist. I can see you sitting there, I can't

27:30 see you full on clearly. I can see everything sideways to me. I was driving to a meeting with the Air Force Association, I was going round the lake. The consultant that did my eyes told me this would happen, I've often wondered when I had this big bowel operation and I had this blood infection and went in to toxic shock and I nearly died, it was a little lady doctor saved my life.

28:00 Nobody will tell me and I suppose they don't know anyway whether that's had anything to do with my eyes because I hadn't long had the cataracts done on my eyes when this happened. Anyway it was coming on me gradually it seemed to be a bit misty and you'd screw your eyes up and blink and it would clear. Anyway I was driving to a meeting this day when Skeeter went in to hospital my son and my wife insisted I get another car.

28:30 I had a Toyota Corolla and it was 1975 model and they insisted I get a lighter car, one with power steering that was easier for me to handle and I got this little Daihatsu Sirion, it was a demonstration model. Anyway I'm tootling round the lake and, "Oh my God, I can't see." I could see the light coloured cars but a dark colour would all of a sudden loom. I thought,

29:00 "What if I strike a cyclist or something, somebody in dark clothes" I went to my optometrist, I made an appointment and he said, "What have you come for" and I told him and he looked at my eyes and he started quoting numbers and things to me and I said, "Are you trying to tell me I mustn't drive?"

What about as far as memory is concerned?

On no, it doesn't.

I'm relating to a different question here, a different tangent,

29:30 **Would you say that the war or your memories of the war are the strongest memories you hold now?**

No. I've had a few days to think about this since that lass, what was her name rang me, was it Elizabeth?

Could have been Wendy Truelove.

I forget the name of the girl who rang me, I did catch her name. I thought one of the girls said Liz.

30:00 **Oh Liz Butler.**

One rang me and asked me would I do it, that somebody had dropped out and would I do it? Then I started to think about things and talking to you two today I've thought about things I haven't thought about for a long time. I haven't had any reason to think about. Occasionally in a conversation something will come back to you. Like I said to Miles

30:30 about the stupidity of the bus pulling up at Somers at pitch black night and bright light coming on and the orderly officer saying, "Halt who goes there, friend or foe." As if you're going to say foe.

But as a whole, not just as a service person but life during war time, everything to do with the war in that regard, not just as a service person?

No, it hasn't effected.

31:00 Well I didn't see active service. Anything that I put up with was niggly, was something that didn't suit me and I've had too much to worry about since. I've had far too much, Skeeter with his drinking and he's lost his license several times. Then he's had these operations and then with this dementia

31:30 and he would never sign a power of attorney.

But what did the war give you?

What did the war give me?

Yeah your experience, your life during that time.

Well it's given me a lot of confidence. I've been on the stage and I love being on the stage. I've been in musicals and plays and I've directed plays with National Theatre, things I wouldn't ever have done before. I wouldn't have done those before.

32:00 That WAAAF officer that said I didn't have enough confidence she probably was right, she probably did me a service much as I hate her guts for doing it to me but she probably saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. Like with our bowling club we've just had an amalgamation, well it's more of a take over than an amalgamation and I said my piece more than the men said

32:30 because it was formed by ex-service personnel from the First World War for men coming back from the Second World War and I didn't like the things that were being done and said and I said so. I felt I had a right to say so. I felt that I had done service gave me the right to say so because at one stage you had to be, they wouldn't have the women and when they had the women you had to be an ex-service woman or related to an ex-serviceman to belong to the bloody club in the first place.

33:00 **Did you dream about your life during the war ever?**

No.

Did your husband have bad dreams?

When he first came back he did and then when this dementia was coming on he'd been in hospital and he'd had this post operative dementia and I'd hear him in the night time and he'd say to me,

33:30 "There were people in the house last night" and I said, "No there weren't", "Yes there were" and they were going to do this and they're going to do that. He'd started to talk about the war and then he'd say he did this and he did that and somebody's name would come up and "Oh yeah, I knew them" and he didn't know them, he wasn't ever anywhere near them. He was associating with anything, it used to horrify me sometimes, somebody would come and he'd be talking about things and

34:00 I'd think, "Oh Skeeter that didn't happen at all." You knew because he'd never talked about it before. They were people you knew damn well he didn't know. He might have met casually and "Oh I knew him well" and all this sort of thing. I finally got through to him that he was having these dreams and finally he said to me, "If you're awake in the night will you wake me up if I'm talking, if I'm dreaming." When he first came back from the islands he did but then he seemed to settle down

34:30 and really for a long time you wouldn't have said that it really bothered him. It was more of his drinking. Whether that was the root cause of it it's hard to say. It's all very well that you've got twenty-twenty vision, haven't we?

Another thing is that you were at the forefront of change for women in the workforce, in society. A lot of things

35:00 **took place after World War II. Would you see yourself in any way as being a feminist at all?**

Not really but I think that my generation was the start of it for the younger women today. I do think that had I had a daughter I would have influenced her in different ways to the way I was. I was taught to have my husband's tea on the table immediately he came home from work,

35:30 that's what my mother did. I didn't always do it but then I went out to work. He asked me to go out to work and then he objected because I was working and things weren't being done. I was the generation that was the start of that and I'd say that we brought our daughters to be more independent and they brought their daughters up to be more independent still but I think they're going too far now.

Why's that?

36:00 Because I think they're trying to be too much like the men. For too many years we were, you weren't aware of being down trodden now my mother if my father was going out to the Masonic lodge or somewhere Mum would have all his clothes out for him and she'd clean his shoes. I never cleaned Skeeter's shoes. She'd have his shoes cleaned and when he came home from work his tea had to be ready.

36:30 Dad didn't want it because I know Mum was sick in hospital once and I came down here to look after him and I was running around, I'd been down to the hospital and I was late getting his tea on and he said, "Marjorie, look, I don't want your mother to do that. I'd just as soon have this old lounge chair in the kitchen." In the house in Howitt Street, we had a fuel stove and he'd like to sit in that chair and have a spell for five or ten minutes but no, his tea had to be on the table and Dad's word was law as far as my mother was concerned and yet

37:00 Dad was a very softly spoken man. I can honestly say I never heard them have an argument. They may have but I never heard them have an argument. I've heard my mother say, "Your father makes me sick", he wouldn't argue with her but I have never heard him have a blazing row like I've had with Skeeter. We'd call one another names and things like that. Don't think that I was a meek little chicken and took everything he said because he got as good as he sent. Like he

37:30 told me one night I didn't have the guts to ring the police and I did. You had to.

Are you glad that there has been such significant change at the same token?

Yes I am. I'm pleased although I think they made rods for their own backs some of the girls today. They want to start where we finished. You can see I've got a humble little house here but

38:00 it suits me. Nowadays they've got have a two storey house and they've got to have a car and they've got a wallet full of credit cards and they go to work, put their children in to care and they're paying half their wages to have their children cared for. And you fellas expect them to work. Well my husband expected me to work too to help him out but nowadays you fellas think.

38:30 See before the war if you got married you left work. They just wouldn't employ married women. It wasn't until the war that they employed married women. Then as soon as the war ended, the women worked in munitions and worked on farms and did things that you would never have dreamt women would do. Then as soon as the war was over and the fellas were coming back, heave the women out, the men had to have the jobs. I do think it's a shame that they can't see

39:00 their way clear to be at home with their children when they're little. My son was about eight when I went to work but by then we were here with my mother and I went to work part time to get out of the house too. There was somebody home when Alan got home from school. I think it's a shame that women have got to work, they've made rods for their own backs.

39:30 They wanted the equality with men and they've taken something from men I think. They've taken a lot of the provider instinct from men perhaps that they've got to give up certain things if they want a family. Everybody's got to do that if they want anything bad enough and nature says you bring on the next generation then something's got to give.

In your time you were telling me that when the Americans came they were buying flowers, chocolates and very gentlemanly in their conduct.

40:00 **Australian men you said that they didn't do that, but would they open doors for ladies and things like that?**

Not very often. Sometimes.

Old habits died hard.

Would have died of shock if they did.

Unfortunately we've run out of time so you've only got about a minute left so is there anything you'd like to say for the historic record that you may not have told us today?

Just that I'm very pleased

40:30 that I did serve. Pleased and proud. That's all. And loyal to my countries, two of them, England and Australia. I think they're the backbone. I'm grateful to the parents I had who taught me moral ethics and you make a commitment, you stay by it.

41:00 I don't think you do any good by walking out on a commitment as I said to you before you end up with the same when it comes to the stage where there's nobody left, is there. I'm glad I stood by my husband through thick and thin. Some of it's been pleasant, we've had a lot of fun. We've had a lot of misery too but I'm glad I stood by him now that he's where he is. Sad that he doesn't know me but

41:30 just as well perhaps.

I'm afraid we're now in the seconds so thanks Marjorie you've been wonderful. Great to hear your story and thank you very much.

That's okay. Hope I haven't talked too much.

INTERVIEW ENDS