

Australians at War Film Archive

Phyllis Smith (Phyl) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 30th May 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/246>

Tape 1

00:37 **Phyllis, I would like to start by asking you where you were born and brought up?**

I was born in Westminster Road, Gladesville, opposite to where I am now. And I've lived here all my life except for the four years in the army, or nearly four years.

01:00 **Tell me a bit about your parents?**

Well, they were very good parents, wonderful. And I had a really happy home life. We had the three girls in the family, fortunately no boys. And my father worked - first he was chief steward on the boats and then my mother didn't want him away at sea all the time, so he went to Cockatoo

01:30 Island and worked there. And my mother just stayed home, in those days not many women did work and just looked after us and everybody else around the place. And when I was a child it was depression time, I was about seven I suppose. And those times were really hard but everybody around here really helped each other.

02:00 There were no houses on this side of the street as I said it was very rural. And anybody that had hard times, my parents always stored their furniture for them and helped with meals and was generally very community minded that way. And we just grew up a very close family. All my mother's people and my father's family,

02:30 both families really got on well together, so we had quite a happy time with grandparents and aunts and cousins and what's left of us.

Were your grandparents local too?

No, they were all from Balmain, both families. Both my grandparents, I didn't know them, no not grandparents, grandfathers, grandmothers I had, yes. They died before I was born, the grandfathers.

03:00 **Tell me about where you went to school?**

I went to school at Gladesville Public School and from there I went to Riverside Girls School. And it was domestic science in those days and then when I left there I went to a commercial college for shorthand and typing.

So what were your aims going into the [college]?

03:30 I really wanted to be a hairdresser but my father said, "No, there's two hairdressers in Gladesville already, you'd never make a living. But I had to go to the city for office work, but no, I did office work. I worked at the Daily Telegraph and then at the Woolworth's office before going into the army.

Tell me what you were doing at the Daily Telegraph?

In the presses engraving section, just measuring up

04:00 all the plates and costing them.

And were you satisfied?

Yes, I rather liked that. But then I had girlfriends who worked at Woolworth's office and we were only a small section at the Telegraph, so I just went to Woolworth's and worked on the national bookkeeping machine. I left there to go into the army.

04:30 I was there about three years

Was that Woolworth's near Town Hall?

No, in 80 Market Street in those days. All pulled down now, it's Centrepoint now.

Tell me, where were you when war broke out?

Actually, I think it was on a Friday and that was a big thing in Gladesville, Friday night, all the young people, we used to call it going up the road.

05:00 And everyone went up there and met of a Friday night and you just moved from little groups to each group, and we all chatted and had rather a, you know a really very nice night altogether. Then of course, you'd all walk home in a group and that was that. Yes, I was walking past one of my friend's homes, they lived on the main road, and we stopped and listened to

05:30 Mr. Menzies. And we thought, "How terrible, you know." And off we went. And of course in no time everybody started to join up and that was it.

So tell me again, you were walking down the road and what?

Yeah, we were going up to Gladesville, it was like a social night up there and as we stopped we went to speak to these people who lived on the main road, and the radio was on and Mr. Menzies

06:00 announced it. I think it was a Friday night.

And what was your reaction to that such news?

Well, I think I was only eighteen or something and I thought, "Oh, how terrible, what a dreadful thing." But of course, it hadn't started to affect us until later.

So did it change your life in any way at that point?

Yes, not right at that

06:30 point, but soon after. Once all the boys started to enlist, I mean the dances fell to bits and whereas we'd had a very good social life, we all went to the beach together, we all went to dances and picnics. And one by one the boys joined up and that was it. And then one by one the girls all joined up, of our group.

Were the boys all keen to join straight away?

Yes,

07:00 yeah. Well, they were always in, that was towards the end of '39, so yeah, by '40 the majority, '40 and '41, they were all mostly gone.

And when did you think that you should join up in some capacity?

Well, the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] were formed in August '41. And

07:30 I went down. My girlfriend and I both went down on the first day to Martin Place and we joined up. And of course we both came home that night, she was from the Woolworth's office also and we came home and I said, "Oh, stew for tea, I'd better get used to this." And nobody took any notice and I said it a couple of times and my father said, "What's all this talk about stew?" And I said, "I joined the army today." "Oh my God", he said. He really

08:00 went off at me, and I had to go down the next day and take my papers out. When I got into the office the next morning my girlfriend said, "How did you get on?" And I said, "I've got to go down and take them out." She said, "So have I." So then it was nearly eighteen months before they'd let me go.

So your father, was he angry?

I don't know whether he was angry or what, but he, I think being three girls, we'd been pretty sheltered all our life as far as,

08:30 you know, worldly things sort of thing. He probably thought, oh the army, that's not the place for girls, not then. After I heard him say to my mothers, "Well if she's that keen to go, we'd better let her." But it was nearly eighteen months.

What was your mother's reaction?

Well, I don't think she wanted me to go because we were all a sooky lot, sort of thing.

09:00 But she didn't say much. And once he made up his mind, he just said, "Well if she wants to go that much, let her go." But by then I think, you know the war was well and truly on because that was early '43. He knew how important it was, I think for everyone to go.

So after you had to take your papers back you went?

I just, yeah well I hadn't left Woolworth's. We'd just

09:30 made our papers out, put them in and then we had to cancel them.

How did you feel about having to do that?

Very cranky, very cranky. Really disappointed.

And how do you go about pulling your papers out?

I think we just went down and saw the people that we'd put them in the day before too. I can't quite remember what the routine was there. I think it was

10:00 down in Martin Place, I'm sure it was.

Was that easy to do?

Oh yes, yeah. Oh yes, it was only the next day. It was probably all still there. We had to go down at lunch time, in our lunch hour.

And what about leading up to that, like between war being declared and the AWAS being formed, were you wanting to participate or were you thinking about?

Oh yes,

10:30 we'd all sort of joined VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment] and things like that. And it was God, knitting socks and scarves and we were very patriotic really. But no, I was really truly disappointed. But then I think after all, that was good, I wouldn't have got searchlights if I'd gone in that early. They were needed when I went in and I had such a wonderful group of friends that I think now,

11:00 it's all for the best.

When did you join VAD?

Oh goodness, I don't know, probably in maybe '41 or something like that. You just went to classes, I think it was in the Red Cross house, somewhere like that, somewhere round about Jamison Street or somewhere. We just used to go of a night after the office.

And how frequent was that?

I think it was only once

11:30 a week. You learnt to do bandages and you know, just first aid sort of thing. But I didn't want to go into the medical part when I joined up. I always wanted to go in just the army.

Why was that?

I don't know. I could have gone to the air force or the navy, but I just wanted to go to the army.

And was there any reason why you preferred that service?

No, not really, no. Oh, maybe because a lot of the boys,

12:00 all the boys I knew were in the army. I don't know whether that was it or not, but my girlfriend and I just wanted the army.

When you were growing up before the war, was there much awareness of the European political situation?

No, not really, not to us, no.

So did you hear much about Hitler before the war?

Only when he started, yes. Like with Poland and

12:30 with all that sort of thing but no, nothing before. It was all the First [World] War, it was all Gallipoli, we learned at school.

Was the First World War still a big part of society?

Yes, yeah. You had Anzac Day and the schools always had, at the local theatre you had an Anzac Day service

13:00 and each suburb usually had an Anzac Day march. And if you were in the Red Cross or Junior Red Cross, you know, little girls from the primary school usually marched with them and thought the men were so wonderful.

Did you know anybody who had been through the First World War?

Yes, my uncle had been. And I had another uncle that was killed.

13:30 One came home and one didn't. But I never ever knew them, of course. I knew the one that come home, but not the one that was killed.

Were they spoken of in the family?

Oh yes, oh yes. We're still very - the one that came home, I was with his family yesterday. My cousin, we have a cousin's day, all very close still.

Can you tell me a bit about his war

14:00 **service, did you know much about it at the time?**

Just that he was in the engineers and that's all I know. And the other one, the one that was killed, he was only killed very close to the Armistice, a sniper got him. I think it was only a matter of a week or two before peace.

What were the feelings about Germany between the wars?

14:30 Well, no I think it sort of, as far as, well see I don't know about the other children but we were really too young, we just thought, oh, the Germans were the baddies. But then after that we thought they made wonderful things and dolls and all that sort of thing, that they were very clever. But no, I don't think there was, not like the Japanese now

15:00 you know, we did have real horrors after this war, after the Second [World] War we were very strong minded against the Japanese. But as I said, I wasn't even born when the First [World] War was on or finished, so I knew nothing.

I was just wondering whether there was any sort of lingering?

There weren't many migrants, came.

I don't mean against German

15:30 **people in particular, I mean were there strong feelings in the community that Germany was still a threat, still an enemy?**

Well, as a child I wouldn't have realised that I don't think, I don't think so, no. Never ever heard, even later.

Tell me then about your father relenting, allowing you to join up?

It was just, first night,

16:00 "No, no you mustn't go". And then I sort of sulked and carried on for a long while, pretended. I had hunger strikes and things like that, and used to eat my head off at work. "No, I don't want any tea, if I can't go in the army, I don't want to do anything". And then I was in the hallway one night and my mother and father were in the lounge room and they evidently, I didn't hear the first part, but they must have been talking about it

16:30 and I just heard him say, "Well, if she's that keen to go, we'd better let her." And of course, I run in and gave them all a big hug and thank you. And the next day, down I was with my papers in again. Then it took a couple of months I think, to come through. Because everybody was joined up by then.

So how did it work?

Well, you just put your papers in then you received a letter

17:00 to come and have a medical and then the next thing, you were given a date to come in and that was it. The first day we went to Moore Park Guild Hall, I think it was, yeah. And you had another medical. And my two friends I went with, we'd gone through school together and worked together, everything. One was sent home with chilblains, sent back and one was sent back with

17:30 tinea. So I had to go in on my own, they came in later.

Were you on at your father all that time to join?

Oh yeah, drove them mad.

What sort of things would you say?

I'd just say, "I don't want to do anything, if I can't go in the army, I don't want to do anything." But of course I did, I went to dances and everything else that was on. We had a really good social life in

18:00 those days, there was dances everywhere. I don't know about now sort of thing, but dancing was a big thing then, ballroom dancing. You went everywhere, you even went to balls in the city. You know - no cars - you went in the train all dressed up in your evening gear. And every Sunday you'd go to the beach, in the winter you'd do picnics. We had a very busy time.

So

18:30 **tell me when you joined up, that was in '43, was it?**

Mmm '43, actually, last week was the anniversary. May '43, I went in.

So this was after Japan was in the war at this stage?

Oh yes.

And do you remember the first news that Japan had entered the war?

Yes. Well, Pearl Harbour of course started it all.

19:00 Then we had the midget subs in the harbour. That was a Sunday night I remember that, standing in the back yard, my father and I, we could hear boom. You know, this boom, boom going. And then it was just really a worry and sad, very sad then because my brother in-law, he wasn't my brother in-law then but my husband's

19:30 brother, he was caught in it in Changi, he went to Changi. And so many of the local boys, and you didn't hear anything from them or about them, you know. There'd be the casualty lists in the paper, missing or wounded or presumed dead. Then maybe they'd turn up. Oh it was a long time, and the families would get a little

20:00 card to say they were a prisoner of war. But you never ever thought of the atrocities that were happening to them. It was really a very sad, sad time.

Did the entry to Japan into the war have any effect on your determination to enlist?

Oh no, I just wanted to go right from, well they would have been in, when did they come in?

December '41.

20:30 '41, yeah '41. Yes, oh no, well that's when the AWAS were formed. We weren't formed till August '41. It was once they were formed, that's when I was keen to go. I don't know why, I was really patriotic, I thought I was going to win the war.

What were your expectations of AWAS?

I loved it, I really did.

I mean before you?

Before I

21:00 went in? I had no idea, no idea whatsoever. In fact when we went into rookies you know it was quite strict, you made your bed and you had an eleven inch turn over of your sheet at the top and they'd come around with a ruler, and if that wasn't eleven inches, your bed got stripped. You had to do it all again. And I thought, my God, what a waste of time. I joined the army to win the war, not to make a bed with an eleven

21:30 inch turn over. But no, we were really keen to really do something good.

So when you got the letter to report, where did you go to?

To Moore Park Barracks, I think Moore Park Drill Hall. But I'm not sure now whether there was one time we went to barracks, Victoria Barracks. But I know

22:00 a couple of times we went and had a medical to make sure everything was all right and interview and then your final day you went to Moore Park Drill Hall. Then from there you went up to barracks, I think we had lunch there or at the showground or somewhere, in the horse stalls or somewhere you know, provision was taken over for a mess hut. And then we went by probably train

22:30 to Ingleburn and the trucks met us there and took us to the camp.

What sort of training did you undergo at camp?

At Rookies? Just lectures and drill. A bit of marching, mostly lectures, what was expected. Then you did three weeks' rookies and then you went to a holding company and that

23:00 depended on what you were suited to, how long you stayed there or where you were needed. I think we had two weeks in rookies, then a whole big group of us went to searchlights. We went to Kapooka, went by train one night at eleven o'clock, eleven o'clock at night we left. And arrived at Kapooka early hours, just at dawn sort of thing. Sat there

23:30 on the little siding, it was. It was just great mad wild paddocks, and we just all sat by there waiting for the trucks to pick us up.

Where is Kapooka?

Out of Wagga. Then we got there and the whole day started, we had to put our tents up, fill our palliasses, much to the humour of the men. They were saying, "Watch the straw, there's all snakes in

24:00 there." And we eventually got our bedding and our palliasses filled with straw. And you had three to a tent and settled in there, which was very different to the life we had all lived.

How long were you there?

We were there from July till November. We did a double up because it was a

24:30 training regiment, it's where you learned all your aircraft identification. And all your lectures on how to use the lamp. We usually did three months but we were due to move back to Sydney, to Georges Heights, so it wasn't worth sending us off and bringing another lot down, it wouldn't have been a full three months, I don't think. So we stayed on for nearly

25:00 the six months, and we did a double lot of training.

Well, what does a double lot of training mean?

Well I mean that you were just at Kapooka instead of three months, we were there from I think 1st July to sometime in November. And you just, as I said, learned all your aircraft identification. You did guard of a night, you went out on locations. You just learned how to

25:30 live if you were at a battery.

Were you trained in arms?

Oh yes. Yeah, we had 303s and we didn't actually use Bren guns but we learned how to pull them down and put them together again. But we, oh yeah, everyone had a 303 rifle with a little clip of bullets in your pocket. That was for when you

26:00 were on guard, and then you handed your bullets in. You did two hours' guard every night.

What was your familiarity with guns up till this point?

Nothing. Never touched one. But we used to do rifle drill and drill every morning with them. Learned to slope arms and present arms and all the rest of that.

Was

26:30 **aircraft identification easy for you?**

No, not at the start because we had no idea. The first time a DC3 [Douglas] flew over nobody knew what it was. So I thought, I'll have a go, I know Wirraways are down here. And I said, "A Wirraway." And of course the sergeant threw his arms up in disgust. It was a DC-3. There were not that many down there, there were Mitchells

27:00 and Avro Ansons and DC-3s and the old Wirraways.

I'll ask you more about training in a minute but for now could you tell me what happened after your six months?

We came back to Georges Heights. We arrived at Belmore first, at the drill hall there. And then we went to Georges Heights and that

27:30 was still classed as a training regiment over there. And then eventually we went to, just our own batteries, they were all around. I went to one to what is now Lane Cove National Park that was 62. There was others, we did one at Bankstown, we went to Ramsgate, we went all around. Ramsgate was very heavy

28:00 because all night you had to take post, as they called it. Jump out of bed, the bell would go, every plane that went over you had to jump out of bed, get out and put the beam up and identify it. Sometimes, it would be every hour of the night, sort of thing. And besides that, you did two hours guard. You had about eighteen girls, eighteen, twenty girls on a station. We did our own cooking,

28:30 we did our own maintenance on the equipment, we did everything, we didn't have any of the men. The rations, our rations came out every day by truck and that was it.

Who was in charge?

We had a bombardier in charge, that's equal to a corporal, two stripes.

Were your commanders' male or female?

We had, it was all female at the stations. But

29:00 the sergeants from headquarters or an officer would come out every so often.

And where were you living when you were posted to these?

Oh we lived on the, you either took over a house, just in an ordinary street, it all depends where, if it had a big empty block of land beside it you'd set up your station there. Sometimes it was tents, sometimes it was just

29:30 the long huts built especially for army, the ablutions outside.

And were you allowed much contact with your family?

Not training regiment, you only got leave from, I think it was six o'clock in the morning till six at night.

Close to it.

30:00 We used to work it that you did the last guard, so that meant at six o'clock you could buzz off quick and lively, but you had to be back, I think it was four o'clock, maybe four o'clock in the afternoon to set up the station. You had two hours' stand down during the day, but you only got about ten hours' day leave a week. But once you went out of the training regiment, you

30:30 got your overnight leave. You were never allowed overnight leave in the training regiment. So we had bad luck, we had six months' regiment.

So tell me about the stations you were on, they were all in Sydney, were they?

Yes, yeah. The first one we went to was Lane Cove National

31:00 Park, just by the weir there, we go back there now and have our picnic day usually. Then we, after that I don't know in what order. We went to Bankstown, which was quite rural in those days too, lots of empty land. I think, maybe where Roselands is now somewhere like that, we had a station.

31:30 And Ramsgate and Maroubra. All around, you know, all around the coast there. Oatley, quite a few. There maybe, like say for each battery, you'd have about maybe four or five different sites. But you'd have about eighteen girls on each one.

And what was

32:00 **the main duties as a signalist?**

It was to identify any aircraft around that came around, you know Sydney. Every time there was a plane, you had to put to beam up and identify it. You had your radar and your command post and you'd plot from one, plot the track they went until they were out of sight, or unidentified or identified.

32:30 **And how long were you doing this work for?**

Searchlights? They disbanded at the end of maybe early '45. And then I went to folding parachutes at different places and I had

33:00 my friends that I'd joined up with had gone to North Ryde Vehicle Park, so I put in a transfer to go there. And I went to the vehicle park then for another eighteen months or whatever. The war ended in '45 and I stayed in till October '46. It was a duration

33:30 of twelve months after. So if you didn't get out by 1st October '46, you had to sign on for another two years. Well, in February we were married, so I just wanted to start a family and be a mum, be a housewife or whatever.

Where did you meet your husband?

Oh God. We were only about seventeen, at Katoomba

34:00 on holidays. At a guest house, an old guest house up there where everyone used to go to. And we were both seventeen I think, first holiday. Then I didn't see him for about twelve months, and we'd all arranged to go back the next year. So I couldn't go but my girlfriend went, I couldn't get off from the office, so she went and told him where I was, I was in Woolworth's

34:30 office then. And he arrived on the doorstep, and then not long after that, he went overseas, he was in the army. And we just wrote.

Were there any thoughts of marriage before he went away?

No, no, no, no. Oh no, we were too young.

So when did you decide

35:00 **to get married?**

When he came back. Well, the war was over and when the war ended, he was an armourer in I think he was up in Queensland by then and he'd come home from New Guinea. And my old OC [Officer Commanding] was a wonderful old man, lovely, well we think he was old by then, he seemed to us. And he said, "Why don't you claim Bill, bring him down?"

35:30 So he got him down to our unit and that was it, we got married then. By then we were twenty two, twenty three when I got married.

Tell me a bit about the transfer from the signals?

No, searchlights we were.

Searchlights I'm sorry, and the sort of work you were doing in a bit more detail.

36:00 Well, to the vehicle park? I was just doing, you know clerical work. They had different groups, there was

a workshop and there was the transport and the tool shed, all those different ones. I was in the orderly room for a while and then I went to the train and wharf crew and sort of just ran their rosters

36:30 and things. That was interesting.

Was that, did you miss doing the searchlights at all?

Oh yeah, yeah. It was a different life altogether. You know, searchlights were a bit rough and tumble sort of thing. It was really hard but everyone was really close. I went to North Ryde and I thought, oh my God,

37:00 they've all got bed spreads and curtains. We had tents, you know. And we were drilled to perfection because it was artillery. When to North Ryde and it was right turn, left turn. And nobody knew what they were doing. First day my arm shot up marching, and I thought, oh my goodness, what am I doing? We were taught to march with your arms right out and your thumb down and precision, everything was precision.

37:30 And of course at North Ryde, they strolled along. And I thought, oh well I've got to do that too. But yeah, it was sort of rather strange at first. I thought, oh God, what are they all doing, you know. Because we were pretty strict. When officers and NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] beefed it out, all the drill. Whereas the girls at North Ryde, they just, they'd

38:00 never been trained, they just took the parade and that was it.

You were stationed very close to home then?

Yeah, yeah. Well the two girls I joined up with were local you see, we'd gone to school together. And they were getting leave every night and we thought, "Isn't this wonderful?" But no, I did miss searchlights. I was really almost sorry that I ever transferred. But it meant just going, well

38:30 searchlights broke up and that was it, there was nothing left.

Why did searchlights break up before?

Well, they weren't needed and the war was finishing, it was nearly finished. So they weren't needed. And I don't know whether it was out dated or what, but they just finished.

Tape 2

00:31 **Before, we go back into the details of the searchlights, I'd like to know all about Gladesville when you were growing up.**

Well Gladesville was lovely, everybody knew each other especially around here, around this street and the couple of streets off it. It was like the old Sullivans.

01:00 The kids all played in each other's house, you never had to I mean, my grandchildren now, you ring and say "Is it all right for the children to come and play?" I mean, we just used to go over the back fence or over the side fence. We all roamed down the bottom of the street, here was the old creek, big creek, where even the adult swam in it. It was huge, Buffalo Creek.

01:30 And well, there was no money then, it was Depression days. But I mean, you did hikes and you well, as I say all summer you were down the creek. You'd go up through the back of the bush up into (UNCLEAR) Cemetery was the big deal, go up and tidy up the old graves and then you'd wander off somewhere else. You went down to, you walked all the way to Fairy Land that was

02:00 a big pleasure park over towards where the Crematorium is now, at the back of that. Or you went right to Fuller's Bridge as it was called, which is now Lane Cove National Park. There was just always so much to do but it was only doing it, nothing cost anything. Or other than that, you went visiting families,

02:30 you know, relations. I had an aunt lived at Manly and I had an aunt lived at Clovelly, well you spent your holidays going to them. And that was another, they were all adventures. You'd go horse riding and it sounds funny, but Manly you went horse riding up the back sort of thing. I think it's Wakehurst Parkway now or something. And

03:00 my grandmother lived at Balmain, I went there. You had so many places to go and do, but everybody wanted each other. Because none of the mothers ever went to work and everybody had children, so we all mingled in well together and we still do. Here we are at this age and we're still in contact with each other, those that are left. And they'd

03:30 come and stay at our place, which Gladesville as I said, was like the country. They thought the creek was wonderful and all the hikes. But I don't know other than that.

What was the traffic like back then?

Oh nothing, nothing. I think in this street there would have been, there was one man with a car and two in the next street. But oh no,

04:00 everything was the baker, the milkman, everybody was horse and cart, the clothes prop man, the rabbit, my mother never had to go and shop because everybody came, took the orders and delivered it back, which was wonderful, I think it would have been great. And what else was there, no you just played in each other's place. Didn't seem to be any

04:30 worries of anything. Never any intruders or you know, if you walk around the streets as children in summer nights, we'd all play vigoro and rounders out in the street, and everybody would put in their penny and the big boys, as we called them would go up and buy a watermelon or something and we'd sit and that was the big deal then. We used to have, opposite wasn't

05:00 a park then, it was the tip and cracker night, you worked all day down the bush. In those days you could chop down a few little saplings and drag them back up the street and we'd build a big bonfire over there. Everybody would come out to that, the mothers and fathers and you have a little party after it, cook potatoes in the ashes and things like that. But everybody seemed to

05:30 join in. And everybody minded each other.

Were you aware of much hardship?

No not really, no. I think my mother was, you know my father was out of work for a long while. They used to get odd days, and my mother seemed to be very good at managing, was a good cook and she not only fed us but there was a single lady, old lady next

06:00 door to us and on the other side as well and my mother would dish up our tea and I'd have to run in next door with a meal to them. I don't know how she did it, but she did.

How did your father react to being put out of work?

Oh, he hated it yes, hated it. He did whatever any odd days that came anywhere. And at that time he worked at a

06:30 timber yard in Annandale, and the day they went back to work, I think they used to call them the scabs or something, they burnt it down. So that's when he went to Cockatoo then.

So who burned it down?

I can't quite understand, I think they used to call them the scabs, evidently they were the ones, who I don't know,

07:00 they were on strike for a long while you see, and whether these were men that worked and shouldn't have, we were a bit scared when the men actually went back to work, they burned it down, and that was the end of that. Langdon's, it was called. So he went to Cockatoo.

What was he doing there?

He did clerical work there, I think. He was doing painting and docking for a while because he was,

07:30 I think, treasurer or something for a while and then later he had a little shed, he used to do all the what would you call it bookkeeping and stores, you know, checking the stores and things. He was there until he died. He died on his birthday, sixty four, he was ready to retire.

What were your main interests when you were growing up?

08:00 Going to dancing, just danced. What else, dances, picnics.

Where did you go dancing?

Well, there was always the weekly one at the local big Jordan Hall. And we went to Leichhardt Albert Palais, and there was Petersham Town Hall, there was the Trocadero. There was just dances everywhere. We used to go four nights a week.

08:30 Then I was supposed to have two nights at home.

And what sort of dancing was it?

Just ballroom, very popular you know, and they had big bands. It wasn't recorded music or anything. There was a big place called army days, when we'd have leave we used to go to one called Surry Hills, that was huge. It was towards

09:00 up around the university somewhere. And Paddington Town Hall, we'd have big unit balls there. But no, dancing I would say was the main thing. And for sport, tennis I played. So no, you were always busy, didn't have any spare time, you couldn't fit everything in usually.

How important was the Empire?

09:30 Oh yeah, really we were all very patriotic, very. And as I say, you know for some reason it was always

England, you looked on England as the Empire. Well, that was what we were taught you know, we were just a little bit of the Empire sort of thing.

And when war broke out,

10:00 **was there a sense that Australia was at war?**

Oh yes, yes. Oh, the boys enlisted very quickly and there were all different drives. You know, the community used to give their old saucepans and different things like that. You know, they'd have an aluminium drive or war bonds in Martin Place, practically everyday there'd be like a big concert set up for war bonds. All the

10:30 different stars would do it. Then there were different canteens for the service people, all the stars would do the waitressing there and entertain. It was such a social time you know, everybody used every minute, if you had leave that was it. Before I went in and after you know, you fitted in everything you could.

11:00 **Tell me, why did you want to be a hairdresser?**

I don't know, just wanted to be. But that was my father, he wouldn't take a risk. He said, "There's two hairdressers in Gladesville, you'd never make a living." And I thought well that's strange you know, if I've got to do office work, there's not much office work in Gladesville either. But you sort of went along and did as your parents advised you in those days.

11:30 You know, now you'd say, "I'm off, I'll go and get an apprenticeship myself." But you didn't.

Were you disappointed?

Oh yeah. Still would have liked to have been. Luckily my daughter did. I didn't influence her at all. When she was leaving, I said, "What do you want to do?" And she said, "I'd like to do hairdressing." And I thought, here we go again. But yes, she did it and went right through.

But you

12:00 **followed your own mind with joining the AWAS?**

Oh yeah, I stuck to that, oh yeah. I was learning by then.

Did you feel that was more important?

Oh, it was very important, yeah really. It was, you know, you felt good and we did relieve men to go. You know, we'd take over a men's camp, battery, and you knew you were relieving somebody to go.

12:30 I never regretted it.

So tell me about some of the boys that you knew that joined up?

Well, they were all, well we all had much the same interest. Some went to the air force, some went into the navy, some went to the army, some stayed privates all their lives, some were pilots. You know, there were the brilliant ones.

13:00 And one boy that lived in the next street, we used to go dancing, he ended up a Justice. He's still around. Luckily most of them came back. There were a few that didn't, a few that were caught in Changi, they died.

What do you think were their motivations

13:30 **in joining up so quickly?**

Well, I think it was just a part of being patriotic, being masculine you know, if one was going then if he was going, I was going sort of thing, I think they thought. Or they'd all go off together and say, "We're all going to join up together." Yeah, it was quick, a close knit community in those days. If any strangers were around you knew they were from somewhere

14:00 else. You went around in big groups. They had what they called younger sets and there might be fifty in it. I mean, they'd taper down. Others would have twenty, thirty, ten, it all depends, you know. But usually every Sunday morning up at Gladesville, a certain tram and we used to go by tram to the Quay and then the boat across to Manly

14:30 and then the tram to Harbord, everybody went to Freshwater Beach. That was sort of our local beach. Now and then, you might go somewhere else, but not very often. And you always sat in a certain spot on the beach, so as they arrived they all came and sat with us. A lot of the lifesavers were from Gladesville, belonged to Freshwater. See,

15:00 we had nothing here, we had local baths but once you were about fourteen you didn't go, you didn't go to the baths.

So how local was local?

Local was Gladesville. Gladesville was big as far as Ryde or Drummoyne or Hunters Hill, there was nothing much at those suburbs.

15:30 And that was the radius, they came, they would come to the local dance. Everywhere had a movie theatre but they didn't all have dances. There was one at Drummoyne, what is now the RSL [Returned and Services League] there, it was called The Cairo. And I think our local dance once a month, the

16:00 Caledonian and the Scottish Society had the hall, so we used to have to go to Drummoyne for that, for our dance. But everyone went.

So was Gladesville connected by houses to other suburbs or was there paddocks separating the suburbs? How built up was it?

Oh, there was a lot of spare land because now in this street there was a dairy at the bottom, down at the bottom

16:30 of the street plus a poultry farm. In Ryde Road here, there was another dairy. Towards, do you know Dennison and Putney way? There were two, three dairies now there, quite a few dairies, big on dairies. And then I think that the

17:00 green belt came in.

We were talking about Gladesville and how built up it was.

Yeah, about all the dairies and the this and the that. Yeah there was, as I said, Chinaman's garden up Buffalo Road, that's now the bus depot.

17:30 But there was a dairy at Putney, a dairy in Tennyson Road, there were bakeries. What else? No factories, there were no factories then anywhere.

Did you travel outside of Sydney before the war?

No. Katoomba and the Entrance were our

18:00 holiday haunts. You didn't seem to go past there, you just went in the train, carried your suitcase and off you went. Sent your mother a telegram when you got there, that you'd got there safely. Send me a telegram as soon as you get there, she'd say. But no, we didn't. When we went to Wagga to Kapooka, we thought, oh my God, this is the end of the world, half way to Melbourne. But we've done a lot of travel since then though.

18:30 But at the time it must have seemed like an enormous?

You didn't go much out of your own district because you didn't have cars, there was no cars. You'd have to go if you went into the Trocadero by tram, everything was by tram. To go to Leichhardt, the Albert, there was a big dance hall there, the big Albert Palais they called it in Petersham Town Hall, you had to get two trams to go there. Well that

19:00 was a bit of a killer.

So was there a sense of living in the city or was it?

No, just a real suburban. No. People used to say, "Oh Gladesville, God." But really, it was not further, I don't think it was any further from the city than Bondi was by tram in those days.

You told me about your father's

19:30 reaction to your enlistment or intention to enlist, what was his reaction to the war breaking out?

Well I don't know, I shouldn't have imagined he'd be too pleased about it. The only thing, they had a heavy work load, he worked at Cockatoo and they were doing all the boats. I remember he used to have to work so much over time. One time it would have been wonderful but they

20:00 worked, sometimes all day six days a week, seven days a week sometimes if there was a boat ready to be launched and things. But oh no, well he was too old.

So what did he do during the war years?

He just worked at Cockatoo. I don't know actually what they did you know, I don't know.

20:30 I just knew he worked at Cockatoo and that was it. I don't think girls were that interested in that sort of thing then.

Tell me then about getting back to joining the AWAS and I'm just interested in your first day.

Oh first day, yes. Well, we got to Ingleburn and the huts I think there were about

21:00 six huts in a row and you were billeted alphabetically, I was in the end one, I was W. And you just went

in and dumped your things on the first bed you came to. And you sort of everything was a bit strange you know, there were twenty two girls in a hut. And the ablutions were the same. I don't know why,

21:30 whether it was to break us in or something. I think we were all pretty coddled sort of thing. When you went into the ablutions for the first time, you thought, oh good grief, no doors on anything. There was no doors on the showers, no doors on the toilet even, I thought oh my God, isn't this dreadful? But I think that was just to get you broken in a bit. But you formed your little, your friends,

22:00 went into sort of little cliques. And then the next day you were sort of issued with your uniforms and you just went to lectures. And after the first day at meals, they called it the mess hall, wherever you were sitting, they said, "Now you keep that seat for the rest of the course." So everything was regimented,

22:30 you learned to stick to it.

What did you take with you?

What did I?

What did you pack?

Oh, they gave you instructions. We had to take our dressing gown, our pyjamas, dressing gown, toilet gear and you took, you had to take sand shoes for gym or PT [physical training]

23:00 they called it. Well, you wore your civvy cloths in. One by one, if you were sort of standard size and they had the supplies, you got your full uniform. Sometimes you'd get half a uniform. See you just sort of wore, for the next few days, whatever you either had or were issued with. You had three weeks' rookies then you were given leave,

23:30 the weekend I think, before it finished. But you'd all swap, you were all the same size mostly in those days, we were all pretty little. And somebody would be going on leave, the country girls didn't but the city girls got leave, I think, you'd give somebody a shirt or you'd wear somebody's jacket. They'd dress you up anyhow, between yourselves. You'd say, "Who's got a jacket, who's got a skirt?" And you'd come home all dressed up in your uniform for your first leave.

24:00 But by the time you'd finished rookies, you had your full gear.

Did you take any personal items?

No, the only thing you were allowed, you were allowed one photo. And you had a little shelf above your bed and you were allowed one photo, nothing else.

What was your photo?

One of my boyfriends.

And who was he?

Not telling you.

24:30 **Tell me about your uniform then?**

Khaki. You got a working dress, which we called a giggle dress, it was cotton buttoned through and a belt. You got your dress uniform, which was I think we got

25:00 two shirts I think, two or three shirts, collars, separate collars in those days. I think you supplied your own studs. And a tie, one jacket, one skirt, stockings. You got as far as underwear, you got singlets and panties, you had to supply your own bras and slips and

25:30 your own nightwear. I think you got two dollars, no two pound it would have been, two pound five or something a year to buy those things, they weren't supplied. Then when we got to searchlights we were issued with boots, slacks and bomber jackets and slouch hats, that's all.

26:00 Oh, a greatcoat, you had a greatcoat.

Was the uniform you were issued with, was it a good fit, was it comfortable?

Yeah. Yeah, I was pretty, I weighed down to seven stone ten in those days, tiny.

And you said sometimes that they weren't issued all in one piece.

No.

What was your?

Yeah, I got, I'm not sure if I came home in my full uniform or somebody else's half of it.

26:30 I'm not sure now, can't remember. I know we all, somebody didn't have a jacket and somebody didn't have a skirt and we'd swap around. Anyone that wasn't going on leave, you'd wear theirs.

What were the training instructors like?

Oh very officious, very officious. You know if a girl is a bit domineering or something they'd seem to get stripes.

27:00 I wasn't luckily because a lot of them stayed in the training regiment. If you were sort of, you know, could take command and all that, you got one stripe to start which meant nothing in your pay book. Once you got two stripes you got a rise in your money, three stripes and so on. Some of them, some of the officers

27:30 were very well, they were a lot older than us, I suppose that's why we thought they were a bit strict and that. And they were mostly Red Cross or Girl Guide leaders, they were picked for that. They were used to taking command. There were a few nice ones but we all thought they were a bit creepy.

What did they do that was creepy?

I don't know.

28:00 They didn't seem to have any sense of humour. No, they were just, well I suppose, you get all those young girls in together, there was twenty two in a hut and I think there were six huts each intake, well that's a lot of young girls too, you couldn't be light and free and easy with them, you have to I suppose stand on ceremony all the time.

Did they shout?

Some did,

28:30 yes, some worse.

Were they?

They were very fair, you know, I mean, well I never did anything that I got into trouble. You sort of, if you were wise and you knew your limit you never got into trouble, it was just maybe a few wild ones but not many. No, all pretty good.

And what was the discipline like there?

Well,

29:00 as long as you knew what you could do and couldn't do. You know, you couldn't go out when you wanted to, you had to have a leave pass. And if you were allocated your duties, whatever time that started you had to start it and you finished whatever time you finished. You couldn't stroll into meal times at any time. I mean everything was by clock, a

29:30 whistle in rookies.

And was there any problems with discipline?

Oh, I think a few girls used to, oh yes you got a red line in your pay book if you went what we called lack wily, if you went AWL [absent without leave]. But they were pretty good really. Now and then they shot off, their boyfriends would come home on leave, that was the main thing. You could apply for leave

30:00 or if your parents or anyone was ill, you could apply for compassionate leave. Sometimes it was granted, sometimes it wasn't, it all depends on whether, I suppose, you were needed or I mean, we had one girl in searchlights, her father died three times and she got away with it each time. The first time I petted her and you know, consoled her and all the rest of it. And the next time she got another grant of leave. He was in the air force

30:30 and he was killed again. And the next time, we were all quite awake up by this time. But you didn't strike it that much. And there weren't many roughies either. You know, people would say, "Oh, I bet you all had a good time in the army." But we were really very green. We all laugh now and say we'd like a week back now and know what we know.

What was the morale like?

Pretty good.

31:00 There were a few that said "I'll be glad when I get out". But I didn't hear it that much, very seldom. The only time most of them went on leave their boyfriends had come back from overseas and the boyfriends I think, would egg them on you know, come on, come on. A few of them were married. But no, it was pretty good.

Was your boyfriend overseas at this time?

Yeah Bill,

31:30 my husband now.

Now you mentioned the pay, tell me how much were you paid?

You were paid three and eight pence, three shillings and eight pence a day till you were twenty one. When you were twenty one I think it went to four and four pence.

32:00 And then you did different grades. You went to five shillings for some, six shillings, six and six, it all depends on what you did.

And how did that compare with the pay in Woolworth's?

Well it was quite good because I mean, that was it. You were supplied with your clothing, your medical, your

32:30 dental, your accommodation, clothes, everything, you know. You had, I think we paid a penny, one penny in the trams. If you went on leave you got a rail pass to go for the country people. I think we got two days a month leave, I think.

33:00 It's all getting a bit faded now. But the country girls had to accumulate theirs and they could get theirs every twelve months. But they would get a rail pass to go home to the country towns. No, it was quite good. And also you know, in camp someone would say, "We're going to so and so, who's got any money?" More or less, we all pooled. And I found out one of my

33:30 closest girlfriends she was a country girl, never had any money. And I'd think, oh well she'd just buy a lot of them, we used to buy food out and if we were out we'd buy food and bring it back, it was a bit monotonous the old camp food. And she'd say, "How much money have we got?" And of course I was all right, I was city and I came home for leave, so that didn't cost me anything. And one day we were talking in closed

34:00 camp night, they were all talking about their allotments and she had all her money into an allotment. I think she was taking one or two shillings a day and the rest. And I thought, God, this is a bit much. She was banking it all and I was paying for everywhere we went. So I made my allotment up to what she had, so we were equal then. But that was the only little disappointment I had there.

34:30 You worked it out, you know if everyone was fair, you all pooled in, but if someone wanted to be smart, well you were awake up to them.

So overall, it was a little less pay than Woolworth's but you had extra benefits?

Probably. I don't know. I honestly didn't even think to worry about it I don't think.

How did you go about getting paid?

35:00 Well it was pay day. Every fortnight, I think we were paid. And you lined up with your pay book or your pay book was collected and it was all filled in, then you just signed it and they paid you the money. You had medical parades, you had pay parades, all sorts of parades.

Oh yeah, the other thing I wanted to ask just at the early days, the medicals

35:30 **that you were doing and how thorough were the entry medicals?**

Oh, just a routine medical, you know, ear, nose, throat. Your urine to see you probably wouldn't have had diabetes or kidney trouble. Other than that your foot inspection, hair inspection, hearing that was it. You got all your needles

36:00 every time they were due. Needle parade and that was always on when you were going on leave. You lined up to go on needle parade and then you'd go on leave. You'd dance all night in at Wagga in a big hall, and everyone would be shoving their shoulder out of the way.

What sort of shots were they for?

Well you got tetanus, what were they

36:30 tet one, tet two, goodness knows what they were all, I've got a pay book there somewhere still. But every so often, it was probably every twelve months, you got your needles, you got your small pox vaccination when you first went in, you got that in rookies.

Some people are terrified of needles.

Well the girl in front of me,

37:00 she was a little blonde girl and they put the needle into her and she went straight down to the floor, and all I could see, she had these big blue eyes but all you could see was the whites. She passed out. The small pox did make you sick, I think it was the ninth day you got a reaction, you were really sick.

In what way were you sick?

Oh just really, really sick. I think you had a fever and it come up in a

37:30 scab on your arm. Yet the second one, so many years after, I think after three years you got another one, that didn't seem to have any reaction.

So I'm wondering how difficult it was to actually get into the AWAS?

Well you had to do a medical and intelligence and what else, you did

38:00 the written test as well as the medicals.

And what were they?

There was, what do they call it some sort of, can't think of the word. Some sort of a test. I think just to see what you were suited to anyhow. Like searchlights, we were supposed to be mechanically minded. So you did all these little puzzles

38:30 and quizzes and filled in papers and drew blocks and put things together. And you were sent off then to whatever unit they thought you should go to.

Did you know that when you had the test in front of you?

No, no. You all went in an intake. And each intake did the test.

Do you remember some of the other sorts of questions?

39:00 I don't remember any of the questions at all.

And when did they tell you the results? Did they tell you the results of the test?

No, I think you just got a letter to say when you were to go in.

And how soon after going in did you know you were in searchlights?

When you were at this holding company. You went from rookies, it was all out at Ingleburn

39:30 in another section. And you went there and you just did daily lectures and things, waiting, just waiting really for a posting. And then they'd say, "We've got a posting for so and so." And you'd all form up and they'd call your name out and off you'd go, say goodbye to whoever you'd made friends with unless they got it too. But luckily

40:00 quite a few of us went together.

Tape 3

00:33 **Phyllis, now tell me about the train trip to Wagga?**

The train trip. Well, we all got into Central and by the time all the family, everybody came to see us all off. And we piled on the train about eleven o'clock at night, it was the old dog boxes in those days, so you picked your little group and you all got in.

01:00 And I suppose we snoozed off in the night. And eventually as I said, we got to, I don't know where it was, and it was time for breakfast. We all piled out to this huge big tent. So that was our first army meal on that trip. And I don't know what we had, but we had this big meal and back on the train and off to Kapooka.

01:30 **What was the farewell like with your family?**

Oh, we thought we were going to war. All very, my mother was of course, teary deary and my friends were there and my Dad. It was just a big thing. My friend had come up from Wollongong to see me off. She had to wait until two o'clock in the morning then to get the, I think it was the paper train or the milk train or whatever, home.

02:00 **Were there uncles and aunts?**

No, no just my immediate family and the ones from Wollongong. But there was so much movement. You know, every night there were troops going everywhere. The railway was just packed with service personnel, the ones that were going.

And what were your first impressions of Wagga?

Well, it was 1st July and it was freezing

02:30 down there, absolutely. It was huge, just miles and miles, acres of paddock and it was all tents. And as I said, we filled our palliasses and put our tents up. The men sort of you know, gave us instructions what to do, the sergeants. You had groups, I think there were about four sergeants to a group.

03:00 And it was so cold eventually Brigadier Veal was in charge. And we used to go to bed with everything we could put on. I think we had three blankets, and eventually much to our pleasure he ordered four blankets for everybody. Well you doubled one and put it under you, laid on that and then you had the others on top plus your dressing gown plus your overcoat, your greatcoat

- 03:30 and you wore your socks. You had those blue jeans but they were not like jeans, single, they were all in one, you wore of a day. So we all sent home for a pair of flannelette pyjamas. There were no long johns, I don't think much around. We didn't get to long johns anyhow. Some were issued with them but we used to wear pyjamas under our jeans.
- 04:00 And lo and behold if you were caught with a little bit showing at the bottom, the officer would come along every morning on parade and wack his stick around your leg. And say, "Gunner, are these the pyjamas you wear to bed?" We'd say, "No sir, they're special ones for the..." But they were always trying to take a rise out of us. But it was so cold down there. And we welcomed every morning,
- 04:30 some mornings they'd say, "Greatcoats to be worn on parade." And you'd think, thank God for that. You know, it's freezing down there.
- How many of you went down on the train?**
- Oh goodness, how many?
- Just a rough figure, was it a lot of people?**
- I'm just trying to think how many were in a troop. Yes, there would be, yeah
- 05:00 there might have been about, I'm trying to think how many tents, two rows of tents, there'd probably be about fifty girls go down just in our group. There were others there when we got there. And as you arrived at Kapooka you just added a tent, another row of tents at the back. We had barb wire all around us.
- Were there male servicemen down there?**
- 05:30 Oh yeah. Kapooka was a huge engineering camp, whereas we were just down in one little corner of it.
- Behind barbed wire?**
- Yeah, we had barbed wire around us, yeah. We found a little way to sneak out. That's when we'd been there a long time. We used to sneak out of a Saturday night if we didn't have leave, and we used to call it the (UNCLEAR) Road, it was at the back. And
- 06:00 I think we had five sergeants in our group and there'd be five girls and five sergeants and off we'd sneak out, cook crumpets. All very innocent, it was. Make a little fire and just laugh and talk. And then we'd have to get back in. Of course we couldn't get back in the gateway, it was an opening to it, it was all gravel. And our female officer, her tent was right at the entrance. So lo and behold if you got caught
- 06:30 doing that. So we had a little bit snipped out down the back somewhere and used to put a blanket down and crawl out.
- So you went with the sergeants?**
- Yes five, there'd be five girls. We used to do it every so often. But nobody drank, nobody smoked, you know but as I say it was all, innocent.
- So**
- 07:00 **tell me then about the actual training that you were doing?**
- Well the training was pretty solid. You were up at six o'clock, the whistle went. And you were supposed to be dressed. The whistle went and then another one went and you were supposed to be dressed. But of course half the time we'd put our jeans over our pyjamas and struggle out and roll your pyjamas up or put your greatcoat on. And of course half
- 07:30 way across the parade ground your pyjama leg would fall down, well they you'd cop it. But other than that, you'd go out and just answer your name and back again. Then you made your bed, had your shower, went to breakfast at eight o'clock. Then came back and I suppose probably nine o'clock you'd form up. You always had your rifle because you did rifle drill and just marching all morning.
- 08:00 They were mad on it because as I said before, it was artillery. And you drilled all day and we were absolute precision, our marching because every time they'd have a parade they'd have us doing this big one coming over the hill and everyone would stand and look. Then you'd have lunch. Then afternoon you'd have a lecture. You'd service
- 08:30 the equipment, clean the equipment. It was always whatever was routine.
- What was the food like?**
- Pretty terrible really because our sergeant cook, we found out later had a restaurant in Wagga and he used to pinch all the good stuff. No, the meals were shocking. Anyhow, he got caught eventually, they brought the catering crew in
- 09:00 and that was very good, quite good. But no, it was really bad food, terrible.

What was on the menu?

Well it was always, well breakfast was always scrambled eggs and things, which was egg powder. We used to, we weren't supposed to but you had the big fires, the dixie things, the boilers out for washing your mess gear up in. Well, we used to hop out and make

09:30 toast there. And every so often there'd be a blitz on that, no more toast to be made, you know. So your lunch would be soup. There were hot meals, the food was good but it was the way it was cooked. I mean, the soup, I lived on soup and baked potatoes I think. But you had to watch the soup, there was always weevils. But that's only because we had bad cooks I think, really because when the catering course came in and took over,

10:00 it was really quite good. But you stopped at morning tea and had cocoa and a full meal at night. It was adequate food but it was just the way it was cooked, terrible. And what I hated, we had what they call dixies, they were an oblong pan with a long handle, everything got into the corners. And every

10:30 so often we'd all sneak off and buy an enamel plate. And then there'd be a blitz on that, no more plates to be used, you've got to use issue. So we used to go back to these dreadful dixie things. Two fitted on top of each other, you had one for desert and one for your meal. But no, like other camps the food was very good.

11:00 Okay. Now, how did you find the drill? Was that easy to handle?

Well, we were all young and fit, yeah. We only ever had one experience, our instructor, she forgot it was rifle drill, you had to carry them at the trail, she went all morning and didn't change arms. And of course, you weren't allowed to say, "Hey, we haven't

11:30 changed arms." Well, you weren't allowed to say anything. So we all were going to kill her, we thought we'd kill her when we broke up. But you did, your arm felt it was out of its socket by that time because they were heavy. That was the only experience, other than that no, it was quite good, you just marched and marched.

What was it like learning how to shoot?

Yeah, that was a good experience too. Well, we nearly knocked our shoulders off

12:00 to start. Yeah, you didn't go too often but you all had to do it.

And did you enjoy the rifle training?

Yeah. And like you were a number, you had a number for each section of the light or the generator set, and you'd be tested for that. You'd be out in the

12:30 paddocks and look for the spotters. You'd all have to give you know, yell out, "Signals." If you had a good loud voice, you were a spotter. And number one was the bombardier in charge and two and three were spotters and four, the searchlight had a long arm on it, four did that and five did the lamp,

13:00 lit the lamp, and the six, seven and eight did radar and the nine did the generator set. So you all stuck to that, you did the same thing all the time once you were allocated a number.

Was that just the training or?

Oh well, wherever you went, yeah. If you were trained in that you more or less did the same.

All the way through your service?

Mmm.

13:30 Which allocation did you get?

I had a five and nine. Five lit the lamp and nine did the generator set but you could do either. If you were a nine you could do a five or if you were a five you could do nine.

Was that your mechanical mind?

Must have been.

Tell me what it involved, learning how to do the lamp and the generator?

14:00 Well lamp was very scientific really because if you didn't get you know, the line spot on you'd burn what they called the carbon, and that was disaster, that was a charge sheet. So you had to really learn. I don't think I could do it now. And the generator set, you were in charge of that, you did all the maintenance on it, the oil, the this,

14:30 the that. Used to have to crank it by hand.

What sort of training did that involve?

Oh, well you just did that, you just put time in on it until you learned it.

How long did it take to achieve?

Oh, not long, not long, you know, with the generator set as long as you could crank it. You had to just watch if you let go of one of them, I think it was a Ruston Hornsby or something used to kick back a bit, you had to keep out of the

15:00 way.

And were you trained on the other functions?

No, not once you did your testing. No, I never did spotting or you know, what else yeah, you'd get down the command post a bit yes, you did have to know some of them because of a night when you were on guard, there was two on guards for the lights and two on at the roving, one at the gate and

15:30 roving of a night. You'd have to identify, you'd go down under the ground, you had a little dugout room sort of thing where you used to plot. You'd have to do that or you'd listen in on the radar, the radar was up on outside it, up top. You'd listen in, hear all the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s crowing when there was no planes around. It was funny, that.

16:00 Tell me again how you came to be selected for five and nine?

I don't know. Probably didn't have a loud enough voice for a spotter, don't know.

And how soon after arriving in Wagga?

Oh, straight away. We used to go out and they'd sit you in a group and the sergeant would sit in the middle and he'd say, "Right, yell target scene."

16:30 There was target scene and douse was eleven and eight. Target scene right, target scene left, up down, on target, all that business. And beef that out so they'd hear you. I evidently didn't have a loud enough for that.

Did you know what the various functions were at this point?

No, I think we started out very soon when we got there.

17:00 I think we might have all had a little go at different things. But once you were picked for something, you stuck to it.

You did do some training in aircraft recognition?

Oh yeah, oh everyone did that. Oh yes, yeah.

Tell me about learning how to recognise aircraft?

Well, you learnt by the nose, by the tail, by the, you know any markings, the shape. They all

17:30 had something different. You had diagrams and you had models and then you'd have visual tests where they'd say, "What's that, what's that?", you know. And then when you're out they'd say, "What's that?", you know.

So what form did these lessons take?

Oh, just either written or vocal. You know, they'd ask

18:00 if they put up models and just spot, you, you, you, what was that.

Did you go into classrooms?

Oh yeah, oh yes. You had big lecture rooms.

Were these under canvas?

They were a solid building. Usually a corrugated iron weather board sort of thing, wooden structure. I think in those days they were all mostly corrugated iron.

Who

18:30 **was teaching you?**

Probably a sergeant or an officer.

Were these male or females?

Male. Yeah, all the officers and the NCOs, we had NCO females, but all the troop leaders were male.

And what was their attitude towards the women?

They laugh now and say, "God, didn't we give you hell?" You know,

19:00 we hang our head in shame now. Some of them would beef it out, especially drill, you know they'd roar

and yell. Our sergeant major, he was an absolute, he was like a mechanical soldier and he'd scream at us on parade, "The girl in back row, leave that fly there." We'd think, "Who's got a fly on their nose?" You'd sit petrified wondering who the

19:30 hell had a fly on their nose. And of course, now he used to laugh after and say, "There was no bloody fly there." But he'd march you know, he was absolutely mechanical, he was a permanent army [man] before the war. And he was the one that ended up after the war a real old softy. But he was quite an odd bod, really. He came and stayed

20:00 here one weekend - this is many years after the army. And he had that bedroom there, and when he went he had all the bed clothes folded up on the end, squared like you did in the army. And then he said, "Phyll, I've left you a little present in the lounge room." And I said, "Albert, you shouldn't have done that." And I went on like the silly little old one telling him "He shouldn't have left me a present". When I come in, I tell you what,

20:30 he's lucky I didn't kill him. That nest of tables, he pulled one of the out and there was dust on it and he'd written, "Rub me". Some silly sort of message on it. But that was him.

So was it a nerve wracking environment to come in to?

What?

The training camps.

Oh no, it was just different, you know. God, the ablutions were galvanised iron,

21:00 a row of showers, this much at the top and bottom open, you used to freeze down there. And if you weren't in quick and lively the hot water would go off. I had a nice time one time, there was one bath and I must have been off duty that day or something, and I thought, I'll go up and have my shower before the girls come in.

21:30 And I went up and the door was open and I thought, "Oh, the whole place was empty." And I thought, "I'll have a bath." And I was lying luxuriating in the bath and the next thing, I hear a knock on the door, "Will you be long?" And I said, "No, not long." It was only madam but there was her and the VAD sergeant were the only ones to use it, it was theirs. And it wasn't until I got out and looked on the door because the door had been pushed aside,

22:00 it had "Officers only" on it. So I had a lovely bath, the one and only. But she'd have killed me if she'd known. She must have thought I was the sergeant.

So there was no repercussions?

No, she did know. She must have thought I was the - there was only her and the other one, used it. That was the only narrow escape I ever had there.

Tell me then, I

22:30 **just want to ask you a couple more questions about learning aircraft recognition. You say you actually went out spotting planes that flew over? So how did that work?**

Well, you just sat in a group out in the paddock and see we had Uranquinty and Forest Hill, both air force stations. Well, they were flying around all day, so as they fly around he'd say, "You, what's that? You, what's that?" And that was

23:00 how we learnt.

Right, so you just waited for whatever activity they were doing?

That was the outside ones but other than that you had lectures with you know, the screen and all the designs of the plane and what to look for. You know, a Mitchell bomber had the big tail plane with the things either end. Everyone was different, something

23:30 different that you could identify it with.

How many types of plane did you have to learn?

Oh, we're going back sixty years. I don't know, quite a few. Well, there wasn't as many as now and they were slower and easier to identify than now, I should imagine. There wouldn't have been as many.

24:00 There was DC3s and Mitchell Bombers and Beauforts and the little Wirraways and little Tiger Moths and, you know, they look like little toy planes now. When you think, the big bombers that we thought were big, they're just like big cumbersome things hurtling along now if you see them.

Did it extend to recognising enemy aircraft?

Oh yeah,

24:30 yeah. And if they couldn't identify, you know only once when we were out at Ramsgate we got one, it was a Dutch Villa [?]. We couldn't identify him and we wouldn't let him go, we kept the beam on him the

whole time, the poor devil. And eventually, I can't remember how we got notice who he was.

25:00 He just had to fly round and round, he couldn't get out of the beam, he must have been blinded by the time he was finished.

So did you learn features of enemy aircraft?

Oh yes, you had to learn those. All aircraft, yeah.

Did the air bases ever do flights especially for your training?

25:30 Uranquinty might have, yeah, I think so. Yeah, I think Uranquinty did, yeah. Not very often, I don't think. And the main thing, we had a big concert, searchlights put on a big concert and we went to Uranquinty and we went to Forest Hill.

Did you learn the sounds of

26:00 **different aircraft at this point?**

Yeah, you picked them by sound. And you had to identify how high they were, like you went down into your command post or you'd scream out, "Target seen." And the spotters would be in swivel chairs that laid back, and they'd swivel around that, they'd say, "Target seen, target seen right or target seen left", or wherever it was. And

26:30 they'd keep saying, "Target seen right, target seen right, target seen right." And then number five would put the beam up. You'd have to work to where it was or your instrument and get it up. And they'd sing out, "Exposed." Then you press the thing and the light would go onto it. Hopefully, you'd be on target and then you'd scream out then, "On target." And that was it.

27:00 (UNCLEAR)

How did you learn how to estimate heights?

I don't know. We always seemed to say, "Two thousand." Because that's what they were. They weren't high, they were mostly all training planes. But when you got up into the city it was different. Well, you just sort of view where two thousand was from your training,

27:30 because that's what they mostly flew at. But then you think, well he's a bit higher. And if you got into cloud or that you'd just say, "Target lost." And they'd scream out and they'd say, "Douse." That meant we would cut it off.

Did you ever see any training accidents down there?

No, no, luckily.

Because we've heard from other people that there's quite a lot of casualties

28:00 **down that way.**

No, we didn't really.

Did you have much contact with the air bases?

No, not really. No, we'd do the command post from one of ours to the next one to the next one, just following that.

What opportunities for relaxation was there up at Kapooka?

28:30 Well, Saturday afternoon you got leave and Sunday, but not always. Saturday afternoon you went in and you went to the dance Saturday night. There was a huge big barn of a place they had. It was all service personnel, air force and army. And of course then, you had to run to get the train home, there was only one train back of a night.

29:00 And then if you went in Sunday, there was really only unless you made a picnic, you had football, Victorian. What was it? Aussie Rules is it or something. And we'd all just go in there, go in to have lunch, if you got away before lunch. Once every, I think it was once every six weeks you were allowed to stay at the Country Women's Hostel overnight.

29:30 That was not too often.

What was that like in there?

Lovely. Very nice. Everything was lovely. Feminine bedrooms and the food was good, the old ladies waited on you.

It must have been quite a treat?

It was, it was lovely, yeah. But you were lucky to get that because it all depends how many put in for it. It wasn't to be less than once every six weeks. Then the only hotel

30:00 because none of us drank in those days, the only hotel they were allowed in was Corody's, there were a few others but you were allowed in Corody's. One of the girls said, "Come in, my father's coming." So we all trooped in to meet Dad, and Dad insisted we have a drink and we didn't know what to order. So one of the girls said, "I've had a Crème de Cao." So we all had a Crème de Cao.

30:30 That was our introduction to it.

Was that the first time you'd tasted alcohol?

Yeah, Dad insisted we have a drink. I suppose he thought, well you're all in the army, you're probably into it. But of all drinks, a Crème de Cao. Never forget that one.

Well you may as well start at the top I guess.

That's right.

So how did

31:00 **Wagga compared to Gladesville?**

No, Gladesville was pretty good because Gladesville as I said, was the centre for the shopping centre and entertainment more so than Ryde, Putney, Drummoyne, Hunters Hill. Wagga was a real country town, just the one street, the shops. And we always all went to the one café, everybody went to the one café. Don't

31:30 ask me the name of it now. We had one of our girls, she was a Victorian, and she was a character. She had a bag of civvy cloths with her and she'd throw this bag over the, get it out of camp somehow and she'd change. And she used to interview all the Americans, that was her big deal. She'd go to interview each

32:00 table and pretend she was a journalist and interview them all. She ended up marrying a Baron or something from some other country. But yeah, she was our bright light.

What was she doing that for?

I don't know, just for the heck of it.

Was it like a prank?

Yeah. She had a note book and a pen and she'd go round and interview them all.

What were the locals like?

32:30 Well you didn't have any contact with them really because as I say, we'd get off the train and we'd go to the café, have lunch, go to the football. Or the Saturday night you'd come in and just go to the dance. You never ever, actually you didn't see any.

So who were you doing all this with?

Just all your friends, you'd all go together. There was a leave train we went in and that was it.

33:00 **So roughly, how many of you would go off together in a group?**

Oh well, depending on the day, I suppose if you wanted to go and watch the football or if you just said, you know, "Do you want to come, do you want to come, do you want to come?" Everyone, maybe anything from four to ten sort of thing probably.

So generally you were moving about together

33:30 **in a?**

Oh yeah, oh yeah, you wouldn't do anything on your own. Well we were in twos, there was always more than that.

Were you warned against travelling on your own?

But there was no worry in those days, no. Well you all went in on the leave train from the little siding out at Kapooka, it wasn't really a station, it was just a siding and that went into Wagga station. You got off and that was all there was. The same coming home, come out of the dance

34:00 and you'd run up to the train and it wasn't far away. But no, there was no trouble in those days. You know, anyone could walk up beside you if you were in the city, you know I've had soldiers stop and ask you the time or this. Just once, I only ever struck I was going back to the back of Wynyard for the bus for North Ryde and it was an Australian soldier, he stopped me and he said,

34:30 "You got a match, you got a match?" And I just said, "Sorry dig, I don't smoke." Ahh, he said, "You've been out with the Yanks." And he started to abuse me because I don't know. But he was drunk. He wanted a cigarette or a match for his cigarette or something. But no, you never ever had any trouble.

How about the Americans?

I never ever went out with them, really. Only because we were too clannish, our mob,

35:00 I thought, well I'm not going to fall for him and go and live in America. I didn't want to leave home. No, but my closest girlfriend, she married an American. She only went back on Friday, last Friday. She married an American sailor and she lived for about twenty three years in America, then they came here for

35:30 another twenty or so years. And she wanted her boys to have the beach and grow up in Australia. She had five children, there are twin boys in that. And now she does six months, her and her husband, they've got some family here, they do six months America, six months here. That was a good marriage. Some of the local girls, they were stationed down locally here,

36:00 the Americans, at Tennyson, some of the girls married them. Some were good marriages, some busted.

Was there a lot of Americans in Wagga?

Yes. Marines.

So was there much mixing of the troops?

Not really, no. I don't know whether some of the girls did.

36:30 My girlfriend, one of the girls in my tent, she was engaged to an American but he wasn't down there. But she used to talk to them when we'd go over to the canteen at lunch time. I just wasn't interested, I didn't want to go out with them. I had my own boyfriends anyhow. I didn't want to get involved.

Do you have any general impressions about the Americans?

No, it was nothing,

37:00 it's just that I didn't want to get involved, so I thought the best thing, don't go out with them. You know, it was really an emotional time, you loved everybody. You know, everybody was coming and going and you'd think, oh my God, they might go and get killed. And no, I didn't want to go out with them.

I'm not talking about the emotional sort of involvement with the Americans,

37:30 **just a general impression. Were they different from Australian people?**

I don't know, they seemed to be very generous, you know. We used to, what was it, they were over paid, over sexed and over something else, over here, they used to say. But as I say, I never ever went out with anyone, so I don't know. But the girls that did go out, they seemed to be sent flowers and they called it candy and it seemed to be the big

38:00 but what they were like in civilian life, I don't know. But they were quite glamorous compared to our poor fellow's uniforms, they were terrible.

What was the difference?

Oh, the shape, the dress, the material, everything. They were lovely, all their uniforms. They were like our officers. Our fellows just had the old rough,

38:30 heavy material. If they looked after them, they looked all right but they were nothing like the Americans. They all had their caps and their sunglasses and that seemed to be the big thing.

Tape 4

00:32 **I would just like to ask about the bit you were just saying, about the letters and how important it was?**

Well, you know, the joke was people would say some girls had never met the boys, there'd be comfort funds, comfort parcels sent and there'd be a letter in who it was from and they'd start corresponding. And

01:00 then we'd say, "Oh, you're having romance by mail." And this was quite common. The first people who lived next door, that's how they met. She came from Orange and her husband got a comfort's fund parcel on this bed that she'd put a note in. And it ended up, when he come home they had a courtship and

01:30 married. And you know, a really good marriage. And he often laughs, "Oh, I got my wife out of a parcel." But yes, so many of them started off pen friends and then they'd all write. But as I say, if you had a big group, everybody wrote to each other then when they'd come home, naturally they'd go out together and they'd all think they were in love

02:00 with each other and then they'd go away and then the next one would come home and it was the same, you'd go on and on. But there was a lot of good marriages out of it and a lot of disasters.

So the girls would be writing letters to a lot of different?

Oh yes, you wrote to, well you wrote to all your friends sort of thing. As I say, it all depends on the group. A lot of them before, that went away, and others.

02:30 I never wrote to anyone I didn't know. But we had quite a good group before army days and you know, everyone looked forward to letters. Mail parade was the only popular parade, really. Every day, there'd be a mail parade and if you didn't get a letter you'd be down in the dumps.

Right, so when was the mail parade?

We used to have ours

03:00 about lunch time. I suppose whenever the mail arrived. But that was regular, that was Kapooka. I don't really remember North Ryde.

So at Kapooka, what do you do when a mail?

You'd all go to the one spot and they'd have the pile of letters and they'd just call out whatever name and pass them [out].

So were you lined up, or how did it work?

Just stand in a group. Mail parade was on so everybody flocked.

03:30 You'd just stand in a big group.

So it was fairly informal?

Oh, it was informal, oh yes very informal, but very popular.

Did you read each other's letters?

Some. Yeah, all depends how close you were and you'd read funny bits out and photos, a lot of photos were exchanged.

Who were you writing to when you were at Kapooka?

Who

04:00 was I? Oh my goodness. There was air force and army fellows, didn't have any navy friends. All my friends went into either air force or army. And your family. Well my mother, if I didn't write every day, there was something wrong. It was a bit of a chore at times you know, you really didn't have a lot of time. But you'd try and spread them out. Every time you'd

04:30 knock off doing something, you'd sit down and write a letter.

What sort of things would you write about?

Oh, just what you couldn't write too much of what you were doing, otherwise they'd chop it out, couldn't mention any specific things. But you'd, oh well, you answer firstly what was in their letters and talk about that. They'd want to know something about somebody and you'd talk about that. We had little codes for different things.

05:00 You know, "Saw Charlie last week." Well that meant you were at such and such a place. And things like that. We always knew where the boys in the Middle East, when they went to the Middle East, we all had a code of things, of names. And they'd say, "I saw so and so last week, or I'm with so and so now." And you'd know where they were. So that was never cut out.

Was that

05:30 **worked out in advance?**

We did, oh yes, before they'd go away, we'd make up a list.

Can you tell me about those plans?

Well you'd hear, you'd know from the news all the different places where the battlement was going on, so like for Tobruk you might write Jo, or for Libya you might write Jack or this or that. You just had a name that wouldn't give any information

06:00 to anybody except yourselves. And that's how we always knew where they were.

So when did you?

When you'd write your letters, "I'm glad to hear that you've seen so and so", or you'd just mention whatever the name was. You know, you couldn't say Tobruk or whatever the name was, you'd just say, "Jo."

Did you work out the code

06:30 **individually with one person?**

Yes, oh yes. Not everyone had the same. I don't know if anyone else you know, how many others did it, but I know people did. But that wasn't giving any secret away to anybody, and the censors didn't cut it out.

Did you have different codes for different people you were writing to?

No, it was only one lot. There were a couple of the

07:00 local boys altogether, they seemed to go right through together, they were in the one unit. And they used to write to a few of us, well between us we'd all know where they were.

So where were they?

In the Middle East. Tobruk, you know, Palestine, Libya, Crete, Greece all that sort of thing.

When you were at Kapooka,

07:30 **was there any other means of communicating with your family?**

Yes. If you went into Wagga, you could ring, phones in Wagga. But there was always such a line up it was a matter of stand for an hour or more because as I said, there was the air force at Forest Hill and Uranquinty. And Kapooka was a huge camp, hundreds and hundreds of engineers there. Searchlights was only one little

08:00 corner, we had a little spot. We were the outsiders.

Did you feel like outsiders?

Oh no, no. It was just where we were, the rest, as I said, were engineers. And there was a hospital there and there were VADs, AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service].

Were the town's people welcoming to the troops?

I think so, but you really didn't

08:30 see them unless they were in the shops, because we only had, like Saturday afternoon and Sunday, so in those days I don't think people went out and walked around the streets too much. There weren't any tourist places there.

You've told me a bit about drill, aircraft, some of the arms training, what other sorts of training was going on?

09:00 What, military or just physical?

Well anything.

Well, like you'd have physical training, everyday a little bit. No, just aircraft identification, equipment, things like that. Just anything to do with searchlights.

What was the physical training?

Just exercises.

Was there gymnasiums?

09:30 No, no you just did it outside. You did route marches, if you want to call that exercise. And sometimes the band would go with you and that was good, that was like a little bit of a trip out. I mean, to get out of the camp was quite good, you know, you thought, this is great.

How far was a route march?

Miles. A couple of miles, a few miles, whatever. I think whatever

10:00 the instructor was up to, whatever he fancied. It's a long time ago.

Tell me, what aspects of the camp life at Kapooka you didn't like.

Getting up in the morning, it was freezing. There was nothing really much

10:30 there, every so often they had a dance, but as for disliking anything there, it was just a bit severe there sort of thing, would be the word. There was nothing to do. You know, when you finished work you either wrote letters or there was a recreation hut, you might go up and sit up there and have a talk. There was a piano

11:00 if anyone wanted to play. But you mostly just stayed in your tent and you had your bed to sit on or lay on and chat. Sometimes the next tent either side might come in. But there was nothing to do, nothing.

Was boredom a problem?

No, we were just so tired from the day, I think. And as soon as it got dark, you only had a hurricane lamp if you were

11:30 lucky. If you didn't keep it cleaned you got it confiscated and someone else copped it. So if you were running late and you hadn't cleaned your lamp you used to have to hide it in your old kit bag, anywhere. But they were few and far between, quite a lot of them didn't, so once it was dark it's all they could do, either go up the rec [recreation] hut, which was in the compound or go to bed.

12:00 No, there was nothing at Kapooka really for nightlife.

Did you feel homesick when you were there?

No, luckily I didn't. Some of the girls did. They'd get a letter, all depends on what their family would write, sometimes they'd be in tears. One of my tent mates, whose mother was a bit heavy going and used to give her all the worries. Well she had a lot of worries: her husband was overseas

12:30 and she had a retarded daughter, so the letter used to be and my poor friend was always in tears every letter she got. It was only like that.

How far away were the girls coming from?

Oh they came from South Australia, Western Australia, all over Queensland, we had a mixture of them all.

13:00 Victorians, yeah came from everywhere.

How about the ages of the girls?

Well, they were from eighteen to, I think it started off, eighteen to thirty five and then they increased it to forty, I think. We had a few oldies, not many. The majority I would say were twenty to twenty five.

13:30 And then there'd be a few of each from then on.

So how old was an oldie?

Well to us, I suppose an oldie was anything after twenty five.

Were the girls a mixture of economic backgrounds?

A mixture, yeah, yeah. Some had joined up purely to get away from home. They'd

14:00 say, "God, I'm so glad to get away from their home." And others just wanted to join up.

And how well did everyone fit in together?

Yeah, really good, yeah. You seemed to form your little cliques you know, your little groups. But there weren't too many people say, "I bet there were some roughies." But there were very few roughies really, that I ever struck, I don't know about other units,

14:30 but we seemed to have always a very good crowd.

Were there any?

Who, roughies? Yeah, we had one she, well she used to, if she got out, she'd get stuck into the grog and we'd have to sneak her in. But other than that no, I think she was about the only one. She'd get outside, call out, "Let me in, let me in".

15:00 And we'd pull her in through the window or somewhere, whatever. Though when I was with her, I never, that was what I heard later. And I did rookies and Kapooka with her and I didn't have any incidents where she was. But then with searchlights you got sent to different batteries, they kept inter changing everybody, and they said,

15:30 "Oh, old Molly, we used to pull her through the window, she'd be drunk." But I don't know whether they exaggerate or what. They were pretty good.

Tell me about that climate, the wartime climate, you were talking about where everybody loved each other?

Well, you did. You wrote letters and everyone was on their best behaviour when they came home from overseas and on leave and they'd want to live every minute. You used to

16:00 go to these wonderful restaurants and you'd go down to Princes and Romano's, they were the huge beautiful nightclubs in the city. The Australia Hotel. But they were fantastic, you know. And Roses, they were the ones. And then the next grade down was the Dungowan, you went to all these wonderful places. They were all

16:30 oh, especially Romano's, it was famous, famous. And Princes, all the society went there. But then you

had your other canteens, service clubs, things. Oh, you went and you danced and you dined and you went out and everyone loved each other. Not like now,

17:00 as far as I know there wasn't too much sex around, I think everybody tried but then nobody, everybody said, "No", as far as I knew. And of course, that was the era we were brought up in, no, no, no. No free love in those days.

Can I ask, was there any sex education?

Very little, no, not really. My whole sex education from my mother was "You just

17:30 don't do it, that was it. Your father will kill the fellow", she said. I don't know what he'd have done with me.

Sorry, what was that?

Your father would kill the fellow. But I said, I don't know what he'd do with me if I had have.

What about the army?

The sex education in the army? No, not really. You had hygiene lessons.

Tell me about that?

18:00 That was just about bathing and not getting any, there was no sex, so there'd be no disease. I never ever knew of any of the girls that - there was blue light depots in every town - that was for the men. But I don't think there was ever anything for the girls to go to, but I don't think the girls seemed to,

18:30 well nobody, if they did, they wouldn't admit it. They wouldn't say, "Oh yes, I've been playing up", as they called it in those days.

What's a blue light depot?

That was for the fellows. They could go there and get their whatsanames there. We called them the French Letters, you know, what do they call them now? Condoms, yeah,

19:00 couldn't think of the word. Yeah, they were supplied with condoms and evidently I don't know whether they had examinations that could tell if they had a disease or anything. It was just an ordinary building, and they had one in Wagga that we used to go past and have a little giggle, they used to call them blue lights, there was a blue light outside the door. And my girlfriends tells me, I don't know whether but she does all

19:30 the stories, God, if you'd interviewed her. They're all in her head, she makes half of them up, she reckons her and one of the other girls went in and it had a sign outside, "All servicemen welcome, all service personnel welcome", and she went in and asked "If there was a dance on there?" But I think she imagined it.

Were they set up by the army?

I don't know, I suppose so. I don't know, I never went into

20:00 one. Yeah, I suppose they would be. See it was an offence too, it was self-inflicted, they lost their pay and anything else. They were examined every fortnight, the men. The girls never, we never ever knew that parade.

So what did the hygiene lessons involved?

Just your bodily

20:30 hygiene, you know, your cleanliness and nothing else, I should imagine. Can't think of anything else.

And the sex education side of it was just unspoken?

No. Girls didn't do it, I think, according to them.

Well, was that an unspoken assumption?

Well, when I think now, yes I don't know. But if anyone did, you didn't hear of it.

21:00 We were all mostly from, well you know, just the same type of home, would have been drilled into us, you just didn't do it until you're married, and that's it. And you wouldn't have dared. Some did, I suppose.

You didn't know of anyone that got into trouble?

Yes, one of our searchlight girls did and I didn't know her personally, but she

21:30 was engaged to a fellow, he was in New Guinea. But evidently, I don't know what happened, whether it was him or I think it was somebody else, she got pregnant and she just put the 303 on the mess table and blew herself up, killed herself. That's how, you know that's how strong it was in those days, to be

pregnant was the last, last straw.

22:00 I don't know how you'd have told your parents and all this. You know, girls were sent away to the country and all sorts of things, babies adopted out and all this. It was really dreadful when you think of it, terrible. Yes, she just pulled the trigger on herself. Luckily, she wasn't in our location, but she was in our battery.

22:30 **Did you know her?**

No, I didn't know her. See, you had about five different stations in a battery, and they'd be eighteen, twenty girls on each one, but you didn't know everybody. So yeah, that's the only one I know of.

When you were in Wagga, just going back to Wagga, and you're talking about the dances, there must have been a lot more men than women there?

23:00 Yeah, I suppose there were, but there were a lot of girls down there. See, there were air force girls as well. There were two air force stations and the army. Well, even the engineers see, there were a lot of girls in engineers, they were all in the offices. And there was the AAMWS, the nurses. I don't know, I guess there might have been. We just all went to the dance and danced. I suppose we didn't

23:30 worry to see who didn't have partners. They were very popular, a huge big place.

When you went out to a dance when you were on leave, what did you wear?

You had to wear uniform. You weren't allowed out of uniform. A couple of odd times we snuck out, but that would be if you were home on leave. But oh no, strictly uniform.

24:00 Girls even got married in it, a lot of them. See, you'd have coupons for material you could beg borrow or steal a wedding frock you didn't have enough coupons to buy the material or the dress. So a lot of girls got married in their uniform and just carried either a bible or with one little flower on it or a little tiny posy.

24:30 **So at the dances everyone would know what unit everyone was in?**

Oh yeah. You had your colour patch on. Army all wore a colour patch, different one.

Was the uniform a source of pride?

Oh yeah, yep, mostly. Everybody really looked after their uniform. Your favourite pastime was polishing your shoes. You sit on you know, if you were on what they called closed camp night,

25:00 you'd just all sit in a group and talk and polish, polish, polish your shoes.

What's a closed camp night?

That was when you weren't allowed out, no leave that night.

For what reasons were they?

Oh, nothing. You just only had leave on certain nights, you didn't have leave every night. But the nights, a lot of nights, the in camp nights, they'd have their own dance or a movie on. But no, you weren't allowed out every night.

25:30 So you'd sit and polish your shoes, burn the polish and wet it and polish. They used to look like glass. The first thing you'd do too, when you went to the city into town, up in Kings Street, I can't remember the name of the place, Rigney's or something. You'd had a chair, a shoeshine, we all used to go and you loved your shoes shiny. We'd all go and have a shoe shine, I think it was sixpence.

26:00 **So tell me about, I just want to ask a bit more about that atmosphere. Everyone was so determined to live it up in this wartime situation. Why do you think that was?**

Well maybe because you were restricted to when you could go out. And then see, when the boys would come home on leave, they have either fourteen days or sometimes if they'd been away a long time, thirty days' leave. Well they weren't going to sit home and do nothing.

26:30 You know, everybody was dance mad. There was so much it didn't matter what it was on, all the different clubs and everything. There were no RSLs or football clubs like there are now. The RSL clubs were strictly just the old boys to go up and sit and have a drink, play cards or something. That didn't come till after the war, you know to open it as a social club.

27:00 But there were no football clubs or rugby league clubs. So they just wanted to, well everyone was young and they just wanted to live it. Especially the boys that were going overseas all the time because they didn't know whether they'd be back.

Was that on everybody's minds?

Oh yeah. Oh, you said goodbye and that was it, you didn't know whether they were going to be back or not. Oh yes.

Was that something that was a worry

27:30 **to you?**

Oh yeah, it was a dreadful feeling. Saying goodbye you know, to a twenty one year old fellow who may be never going to come back.

How long was Bill away before you saw him again?

About eighteen months.

And had you heard much from him?

Oh yeah. There'd be times when he was forward scout,

28:00 times when he couldn't write. It all depends on where they were stationed. Mail was pretty good, but sometimes you'd go weeks and not get anything, then you might get a bundle together and things like that. Yeah, we lived on letters.

You clearly loved dancing, I've got that strong impression. Did you like music in general?

I liked music, yeah.

28:30 **What was some of your favourite music?**

Well, we used to have the top ten in those days. Oh, you know, Alexander, it all depends, "Alexander's Rag Time Band" and "Deep Velvet". And you sort of waited for a change, how long something would be on top. And "In the Mood" was the big one for the dancing.

29:00 And "Star Dust" if you wanted a slow one and they sort of stayed forever, all the old, you got all the new wartime songs but you didn't get many. Everything was connected to wartime, all the new songs. About going away and coming home and think of me while you're away and all this sort of thing. It was all very sentimental really. It was you know, the saddest time of your life but it was the best social

29:30 time of your life.

So it was a funny contrast?

It was, yeah.

Did it strike you as odd at the time?

Oh yeah. You'd be all sad and upset one minute and then the next minute you'd be madly rushing somewhere. Or then you'd hear, every night the casualty list came out in the paper, and you used to grab it to read it. Who was missing, who was wounded, who was killed you know, who was prisoner of war.

30:00 And you'd think oh, terrible.

Was there much detail in the papers about the overseas war?

Oh yeah, all the time. That's all you know, the front pages were day by day. But see, there was no television of course, so you didn't get anything like what was happening on the spot like you do now with telly.

Did you read the papers

30:30 **when you were in training camp?**

We didn't have any radio, any papers. Only when you went to Wagga on the Saturday or a Sunday, you could get a paper. But we had no communication at all in camp. Didn't know what was going on until you got a paper on the weekend.

Was that frustrating, not to know?

I don't think so, I don't know. See, when you're young and you're busy, you're thinking

31:00 about it all the time, you're in contact with all those around you, but no, see a lot of things I read, things years after that, and I thought, God I didn't know that was on.

So when you're on leave, was getting a paper a big thing to do?

Oh yeah. And you weren't supposed to post letters, you were only supposed to post them through camp, but you snuck one, so the censor didn't get it, see all your

31:30 mail was censored in camp.

So the censorship was?

Your own officers did it, yes. Or sometimes we'd go over to the hospital to the matron there if our officer was busy. So she knew everything you were doing, writing about. You couldn't let your hair down and

say what you really wanted because you knew old madam was going to read it. And she knew us all.

But you could otherwise if you?

Yeah, or you got

32:00 someone else to post your letter. You'd have one stuck in your pocket and snuck it in at the post office in Wagga. You got a little bit smart later, so you knew a few little things you could do.

So tell me again, you'd want to get news so you'd go and get a paper?

Yeah. You didn't have any electricity, we were in tents,

32:30 no electricity. I don't think, there were no transistors then. The only radio you could have had if you could have gotten one, would have been the old crystal radio, that's way back.

I'm interested in how you felt about the progress of the war?

Oh you just lived

33:00 for, you know how much longer can it go? You know, if only it would end, if only it would end. You couldn't believe it when all of a sudden it did end.

Did you ever feel worried about the outcome of the war?

Oh yeah, yeah. You didn't hear I mean, Darwin copped it, but we didn't hear much about Darwin at all, not till later when it was all over. When the war was

33:30 over in fact. There were a lot of things they wouldn't let out for the morale of the people. But we were in our own world, sort of thing.

Did you ever worry that you might lose the war?

No, I don't think so, no. I think we always thought ours were the best.

What were your feelings about Hitler?

Oh God, you hated him, you know.

34:00 How could anyone be such a monster? You know, especially when you started to hear about the Jews and the Holocaust, all that business. You know, I was in Jerusalem, and you couldn't believe the skulls, the photos that are there, you know. It must have been hell on earth. Terrible that anybody could think up the things.

34:30 Same with the Japanese, how could they think up the things they did. Dreadful.

When did you first hear about the Japanese atrocities?

Well, you didn't hear about them until, more or less it was over and the boys came home. Actually, there were a few that did escape, there were two local

35:00 fellows escaped, but that was right at the start. So they didn't you know, nothing had happened then. But no, I've read all the different books on it.

You mean two locals from Gladesville?

Jimmy Johnson and George Furness, they both escaped.

From where?

From Singapore. See, they were on their honour, sort

35:30 of thing, not to escape, well the command was - no escape. But a few of them did. And it was very hush, hush when they got home, they weren't allowed to talk to anyone. They got out more or less the same time as Bennett, you know, General Bennett. But oh no, dreadful.

Did you see them after they came back?

George Furness, I did because the people at the back of us, the lady there, her brother and I used to go to their

36:00 house. Jim was my age and he was an older man, I mean he must have been near forty, the other one, the young one, I don't think I ever saw him.

Did they tell you anything about what?

No, they were bound over, they were clamped as soon as they got here, they weren't to reveal anything at all.

And they stuck by that?

- Oh yes.
- 36:30 They would have been in dire trouble if they had have [talked].
- I'm just wondering because you did have codes and that to get around some censorships, I was wondering there was no way they could?**
- I don't know, no I don't know. See all of a sudden Singapore went, boom.
- How did you hear about that?**
- Oh well, we just thought, what a disaster, you know. Everything was disaster
- 37:00 that you read, it affected you in every way. All you could think of was all these young men, gone. Or you didn't know what had happened.
- Was there a sense that Australia was directly threatened?**
- Oh yes. Well, once we had the subs in, you could have bought Bellevue Hill for nothing, houses in Bellevue
- 37:30 Hill. That's where they started to fire it. But then they sunk the you know, they killed all the young men on the [HMS] Kuttabul, actually it's the anniversary today. I think it's today. But yeah, and you thought if they could get in there, they could get in anywhere. You would know where.
- Was some of these news events frightening?**
- 38:00 Yeah, well as I said, all the years in the army, see I hardly saw a paper really. But you'd hear bits. Someone would say, "So and so's fell, somewhere else has fallen." You know, they seemed to be having good goes at times and then we'd get on top again and things like that. Or the boys would come home and tell you their different stories. But as for newspapers
- 38:30 and wirelesses, we didn't have any. We were in the army but we didn't know anything.
- Was that frustrating?**
- Well, I don't know whether we even thought about it that much at the time you know, as long as we were getting bits of news, I suppose we were quite satisfied. You seemed to know what was going on but you didn't know a lot of details.
- 39:00 **You must have been quite conscious of the fact that you were involved in searchlights, the possibility of enemy bombing raids?**
- Oh yeah, but you were well trained and we really thought, yeah, we'll be all right, we could do it. Hopefully, we could have. Well, everyone knew their job,
- 39:30 they wouldn't have panicked.
- Do you feel you were well trained for your job?**
- Oh yes, yeah. Yeah, you were well trained. Because that's all you did, that and march.
- And by the end of the training were you impatient to get to your post?**
- Oh yeah. See where you were going, you could go anywhere from the first group I was with, they went to Townsville, but a few of us got
- 40:00 left behind, we were sent somewhere else. Can't think where now, which one of the places. But I was sorry I missed out on that one. But from Townsville to, one of my girlfriends went to Rottnest Island, she was the only one, they wanted one replacement over there. And they came and woke her in the middle of the night and said, "Hey Cathy, you want to go to Rottnest?" So she went off to that.
- 40:30 But the rest of us only did all of New South Wales.

Tape 5

- 00:32 **I just wanted to ask you a few questions about areas that we've already covered, and then I'll move on to the move from Kapooka, but there are just a few areas of interest that occurred to me as you guys were talking. First one, I wanted to ask you about was what you recall of the aluminium drives, and if you could tell me a bit more about what that involved?**
- Well, not much, I just knew they were on because by then I think I would have been in the army when they started all that.
- 01:00 People put out any old saucepans and different things like that and they were all collected. That's all I know about it really. Had heard about them. But as I said, we were sort of away and sheltered from all

that was going on really.

And what about the war bonds concerts that you talked about, what was the purpose of those?

Well, they were to get people to buy war bonds. You had to, you know finance the,

01:30 well the war things. Martin Place they were and all the well known singers. And they'd be down there, mainly at lunch time, had a stage set up. And we'd all go down at lunch time, from the office, and have a listen. Then they'd have a big old spruke about buying war bonds and off we'd go again. But they were good.

And they'd be selling them at stalls or things like that would they?

I'm not sure whether you had to get them from the bank

02:00 or where. As I say, we'd have to go back to the office, we didn't sort of, we weren't buying them, we were too young.

And you mentioned that there were movies, theatres in each of the sort of major?

Oh, every suburb.

Every suburb? Was going to the cinema quite a social outing at that point?

Oh yes. Oh, people had seats booked from week to week. You know permanent seats. I was never much of a movie going, I was a dancing girl.

02:30 But, yeah, both my sisters, my aunt owned a theatre, and both my sisters were usherettes. But no, I didn't want to get into that. But no, every suburb, some suburbs had two.

Do you remember any of the very large movies at that time, very popular movies around that time?

Yeah. "Gone with the Wind" would have been the biggest, I should imagine. And all the Shirley Temple ones, all the Clark Gables

03:00 and the Errol Flynn. I'm trying to think of the names of them, but oh yeah, there was many, many theatres in the city. All gone now. Well, there's the Hoyts Centre now, but there used to be just individual ones, you know, practically every street.

And did they used to show news reels before films?

Yes and two features. Two movies. And they were continuous,

03:30 so if you were running late and you went in at the middle of the movie, you could stay on and see the first half and the rest of it. You'd see the last of it first and then you'd catch up or you could sit right through it.

And were the news reels a major way of finding out about what was going on overseas?

Yeah, that's so, yeah. Yes, they were all war scenes. All the war correspondents, they were away

04:00 with the troops and they'd Cinesound all those and they'd send them all back.

And were there news reels about Hitler and that sort of thing in the lead up before war, about overseas events?

I don't remember anything before the war really. You know, I mean we weren't in it, so I can't really remember back. That would have been, I would have been about sixteen or so, when that was all

04:30 going on in Europe. I wasn't really interested, probably in overseas. We didn't know that much about other countries really, we knew their names but that was it, nothing that was going on. We were a bit remote here.

I was also interested in the Chinaman's gardens that were in your local area. Do you recall if they experienced any prejudices or trouble once Japan had entered the war?

Oh well, they were gone by

05:00 then, yeah. But no, no, they were just here. From this block of land down to the end of the street, this was all Chinamen's gardens. But no, they were very friendly, my Dad used to do their books for them. And one of them was going back to China to die, he'd been here for years. And he came over to our house and got my father to dress him in his suit the night before. He slept

05:30 in it because he wanted to go home to China with a tie on, a suit and a tie. So my father said, "Come in the morning." No, no, he didn't want to wait. He used to call my Dad Mr. Fled, his nickname. His name was Harold but they used to call him friends used to call him Fred. "No Mr. Fled", he said, "I'm going home to die, I want my collar and tie on." But no, it was good. We used to come over

06:00 and sort of just play around the gardens and they had big wells all through. And on hot days we'd all

paddle around in them. They used to walk down into with their stick and two baskets, a basket on either end, wash their veggies. But it was a good place to cool off in the summer.

And do you recall any German Australians in the local area?

No. There were very few. There were a few Italians, had the green grocer shops

06:30 and maybe the boot maker but no, there were very few. I mean, when we were children if someone we thought, oh he's from another country if you'd hear them speak. We'd walk behind them just to listen, you know, thought they were something. No, there weren't many. There may have been in some suburbs but it wasn't in Gladesville.

And did the Italians experience any troubles once they were in the war against us?

No. There was one

07:00 there was, I don't know whether there was two or three green grocers in Gladesville, and one of them, one lot, they seemed to be younger men. I remember they called them the black shirt gang. Well they were interned for some [time] that group. And the other families, I think they took the old father in first but let them go. Let him go.

I was wondering if you could

07:30 **take your mind back sixty years today, sorry sixty one years today, to the night when the midget submarines did come in. What do you recall about that night?**

Actually, my father and I were in the backyard, we heard this boom boom noise. And we just stood there and listened. And then I think it come over the radio or the next morning, I'm not sure which, that they'd been in the harbour and

08:00 the Kuttabul was attacked and Bellevue Hill, over that way. As I was saying, you could have bought Bellevue Hill for nothing, they all flew from there.

Do you recall people's reactions to Japan entering the war?

Oh yes. Just, well all our boys came back from the Middle East to go to, they'd been in the Middle East a lot of them and they were just also

08:30 sent to - yeah no, it was very devastating, terrible.

Did that increase your concern about the defence of Australia rather than just the war, but Australia's immediate security?

Oh yeah, yes. Somebody at the door, I could see the shadow, would it be anyone for you? Bill.

Were you aware, did Sydney have searchlights

09:00 **operating before that incident?**

Yes, yeah, oh yes.

And would you often see the searchlights above?

Yeah. They were all around the harbour. Over at Georges Heights, South Head, where else on the harbour, that was it.

And did you have any particular interest in that job or that was once you'd entered and were given the opportunity?

No, no. No, we just

09:30 they had this, I can't think of the right word, not intelligence test. Aptitude. Yeah, aptitude test. And evidently you were allocated to what showed up in that. But we were supposed to be mechanically minded.

Do you have any idea where that come from, did you have an interest in that sort of thing as a young [girl?]?

No, but we had to do tests. You know, you had things to arrange and

10:00 blocks and drawings to put together, and what point went to what point and all this sort of thing. Well I can presume, I can remember doing those.

Had you taken an interest in, I guess building or putting things the way engines worked or anything like that before that point?

No. No. I like doing things now with my hands but not then. I hadn't even thought about it.

10:30 **When you were on your training down at Kapooka and you learned to use the rifles, did you have any real sense that you may have to use the rifles?**

Well, we sort of hoped not, you know. We were there to relieve the men to go away really, that was the idea of the women's services. Not to go in to action but to relieve the men, so that they could go. See, all those stations were manned by men.

11:00 Well I think there was about, if I'm right, about thirty four thousand AWAS went in, then there were the navy and the air force as well.

Did you have thoughts at the time when you were training, that you may in fact have to use the guns?

No, I think we felt pretty safe. But I never thought about that we would be sent away. Well, we weren't, we didn't sign, not that we wouldn't have signed up for that but I mean that was the law, we weren't supposed to go away.

11:30 It was only to relieve men.

I guess in a similar sort of idea, once you were on the searchlights, was it an ever present thought that you may be called upon, was there ever any period of relaxation where you felt that it was unlikely that you were going to be needed, or were you very much alert to the fact that it could happen at any time?

Oh well, we were there to identify anything that came over that shouldn't be around, yeah. But we never worried

12:00 about you know, that we would be attacked or anything. It was just there for security, safe keeping.

So once you did leave Kapooka, where were you sent to?

When we left there? We came up to Georges Heights.

Did you join the 62nd or the 52nd?

No. I was in the 52nd first. And a

12:30 few of us were left behind because the training regiment wasn't moving and they evidently wanted so many there, I think. And when we came up, that's when we were allocated because Georges Heights was classed as the ongoing from the Kapooka training regiment. And then we were sent to 62.

And at George Heights, what was the set up there?

13:00 It was more or less a headquarters. It was like a holding company.

Just for searchlights?

I think so, yes. I don't remember anyone else being there.

And was it completely occupied by AWAS?

Oh, there were men there too. Like in the headquarters, the officers and the NCOs and maybe the clerical staff.

And so was it from Georges Heights that the rest

13:30 **of the satellites like Lane Cove and Ramsgate and those places, they'd be coordinated from Georges Heights?**

Yes, yeah. See, all around there was 62. Then if you went to Wollongong, that was 63. See each one had a number.

Was the whole of Sydney 62?

Yeah, I think so, yeah. Yeah, I think Wollongong, I

14:00 think, I'm sure Wollongong was 63. And Newcastle was 61.

And how many of you came up from Kapooka out of that course to the holding camp?

There would be a few hundred. The whole camp moved, like all searchlights moved. It was a big engineering camp really, we were just down in one corner. But we vacated that completely.

And at Georges Heights,

14:30 **was that completely under canvas?**

No, no, no. Very old, very old buildings there.

Were tents set up for your accommodation?

No, no. We had just big long huts, dormitories or whatever. That was a well established old place.

And would the girls then be sent out on a day to day basis to various locations? Or how long

would you be posted to a particular location?

Oh no. Well you might be there months

15:00 and then sometimes maybe two or three might be sent to another one, you know. Maybe two or three from Lane Cove would go to Eastwood or to Maroubra or Oatley, they were all over. But mostly the eighteen would go together from, but you didn't stay more than - you might be months, five, six months at one place and then we all went to Ramsgate

15:30 because the men went overseas from Ramsgate. And we took over when they left, so we all, the complete crew went.

So were there quite a few personnel waiting around at Georges Heights who didn't have anywhere in particular to go?

I don't think so, no.

How long did you remain there?

Oh, we were only there a matter of days, yeah not long at all.

And where were you sent first, what was your first battery?

To Lane Cove National Park. It was called Fuller's Bridge then.

16:00 **And can you describe the set up there, what they had in place?**

Yeah. We had, there was a mess hut, they were mostly galvanised iron. I think there was one set of sleeping quarters, much the same building. And the rest were tents.

And how many personnel would have been located there at any one time?

Oh only about eighteen, twenty. Sometimes you had a couple of spares.

16:30 There was about eighteen in a crew, that would be two crews.

And so was there only one searchlight set up at each location, or were there multiple positions?

No, you had two, they were different. One was the old English Elsie and the other was the Sperry. There were two different types. One I'll show you the photos after.

17:00 One was a smaller one and one was a big one. The bigger one you had to get inside, stand up in it to clean it.

Had you received training in both of those?

Yes. Yeah, you did all that at training camp.

And were they the only two lamps that were used in Sydney?

I think so. They're the only two that I know of.

So when the eighteen of you went out there, did you replace another crews, was there a hand over period?

Oh yes, there would have been a hand over. They'd have gone somewhere else.

17:30 They might I was going to say, they might have gone to Townsville, but one crew did go to Townsville but I'm not sure where they went from.

And do you know what sort of reasons would motivate HQ [Headquarters] to move units away? Or why would the people who had been replaced who?

I don't know. I don't know why they did that. But you'd all evidently meet up every so often, you know. A couple had move to here and a couple had moved to there, and

18:00 the ones that had gone first, you'd meet up with them again. There wasn't any reason. I think maybe if somebody got sick or left or you know got discharged or something, they'd call on whoever had a couple of surplus I suppose.

So you may be sent out as an individual or as two or three but generally you were moved around in a group of eighteen?

Yes. Eighteen to twenty, I'm not quite sure, yeah. I think that would be it.

18:30 **Could you tell me what your first impressions were of Lane Cove, the facilities there?**

Oh, I just laughed because when we were teenagers we used to hike down there. The was big hiking, you know have a barbeque and hike back. And I thought, goodness me, here we are.

And was the accommodation quite good?

Oh, we had tents, yeah. I liked the tents. We only had three to a tent. If you had the big
19:00 American bell tent, you had five. The Australian tent was three.

And were you quite close to the girls that you got moved with at that point?

Oh yeah. It was quite upsetting sometimes, you know when someone would go off, you'd say, "Oh, see you later." But you'd often meet up with them again.

Were the girls that you joined up with still with you at this point? Your two friends that you went down and signed

19:30 **up with?**

Two of them were, yeah. And we tented together. One was my cousin's niece, that's how I met up with them because the two girls I actually joined up with, they were sent home with foot problems the first day. Usually it would be who you were sitting next, you'd start to chat and then if you got the same posting.

20:00 No, we were all pretty close. Still are.

And I think you mentioned before, it was a bombardier that oversaw Lane Cove?

Yeah. A bombardier was equal to a corporal. No, we had a sergeant at Lane Cove.

One sergeant in charge of approximately twenty girls?

Yeah. Well no, we had two sergeants down there and you'd have a couple of bombardiers and that was, it all depends on how

20:30 big the station was.

And could you tell me about a typical day, what do you do during the daytime? Obviously, the searchlights weren't out then, but could you walk me through an average day at Lane Cove?

Well you got up of a morning. You did drill, drill, drill. That's what I was saying before, it was artillery, so you drilled all morning, mostly. Then in the afternoon, you'd do your maintenance and then

21:00 you had two hours' stand down during the afternoon, from two till four, I think it was. And then you'd go out and, we used to say, set up station for the night. And you worked till ten o'clock. And then two girls would be on guard and two would be on the lights. There'd be two roving pickets and two

21:30 just to identify planes and things.

By pickets, do you mean they were roaming the facility?

Two roamed around the enclosure and the equipment. The other two were there to light the beam up if it was needed.

And were you armed with 303s?

Yeah, yes. We had our little clip of bullets in our pocket, I don't know if we would have got them in in time. A couple, there were a few incidents.

22:00 You'd have people sneaking around because of petrol rationing, they were always trying to get the petrol out of the gen [generator] set. So you'd have to threaten them, they usually took off.

Can you recount any particular incidents that you experienced?

Yes. Well our sergeant, we had to call her and they were air force fellows actually, came down from the air force base trying to pinch our petrol.

22:30 And she told them where to go. But they thought they'd be smart and they didn't, so she just lifted her rifle, but she fired up into the air. You never saw two take off so fast in all your life, they didn't think she'd do it. But oh yeah, you always had them after the petrol, that was the trouble. And our old RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], he would sneak around and if you dared

23:00 because when the ration trucks would go into town, we'd get them to buy us these packets of crumpets, 'cause you had a fire at night and we'd toast these crumpets. And of course, you put your rifle down and if you moved away or anything and left it, he'd sneak or often sneak around. That was the end, if he'd pinch the bolt out of your rifle,

23:30 and you knew he'd been. So that was a very grave offence.

So the RSM was permanently on site as well?

Oh, he wasn't supposed to be I don't think but that's what he used to do.

And was it, you described it as an enclosure, was it a wire fence?

That one wasn't. See, you used to go out on what they call location. The only one that was (UNCLEAR) enclosed was the training regiment at Kapooka because they were very,

24:00 there were hundreds of men there and the American marines. And as I said, we were just down in the little end pocket of the, there was acres and acres of it. So they thought, I don't know whether it was to keep us in or the men out or vice versa. But that was enclosed with barbed wire. But no, the others were, you'd be out in the bush somewhere, farm houses, they'd take over the acreage and the farm

24:30 house and you'd have your tents out there. People would still work their property but the army would take a section of it.

Was that a farm house at Lane Cove?

No. There was a little stone cottage, it's still there actually. And it was quite a coincidence because one of our girls' great, great grandfather or something had built it. But no, we didn't have any.

25:00 But you had your guards, you had a guard on, the girls did the guard, so you couldn't sneak out.

And which of the lights were you assigned to first?

I don't know, we had both of them at the same time, I couldn't tell you which one I went to first.

Would you rotate between them in alternate shifts?

No, I don't think so, no.

Which one were you primarily?

Well, I think at

25:30 Ramsgate big

At Lane Cove.

At Lane Cove. We used to have to go out over across the little bridge, there was a creek there, and it was all set up. I think there's a private zoo there now.

Was it the old English light? You said there were two different types.

I think we had both. I don't know which one I would have used, you know I think they were both used. Yeah, we

26:00 used to have about eighteen, twenty girls, see, well that would be two crews.

Were both lights manned though every night?

Oh yes, they would be. Oh yes, everyone worked, every night because everyone got two hours, you worked till ten o'clock and you got that two hours in the day off, in the afternoon.

Could you describe the light that you were working on at Lane Cove?

It was, well the two lights, one was a big one, as

26:30 I said, you had to get in it and stand up in it to clean it.

Can you just describe it for me?

There's a photo over there. There's a photo over there. Well, just a huge big circular, I suppose it would have nearly been six foot around. And you got in there and cleaned the glass and that was it.

Was that your job as the number five, as the lamp person?

27:00 Probably yeah, probably would have been.

And what was the lamp made up of, what were the various components of the lamp itself?

Oh, I don't know. All I know is, there was a carbon you lit. But I mean, I could tell.

How would you light it, what was the lighting method?

You had to stand on the side of it.

27:30 There was an arc, you had to make an arc. And I can't even remember what we pressed now, to ignite it. Dreadful. That's sixty years ago.

What do you mean, make an arc?

To expose the light.

Between two bits of metal?

Yes, and if they weren't right it would melt the carbon

28:00 and that was a big disaster because it was ruined.

Is that quite an extensive repair job?

Oh yeah, that was big, yeah. I remember somebody did it at Ramsgate, everybody that had been on duty that night had to fill in papers and there was quite a to do about it.

And that resulted from not putting the bits of metal in the exact right position?

Yes.

28:30 From what I remember, the carbon was a big long thing and you dropped it in, put it in somewhere. But as I say, that's sixty years ago. Don't ask me to do it now.

I'd just like to get an idea of the procedure you went through to start up the light. Do you recall, was it the generator that had to be started first?

Oh yes, you'd have the generator.

What sort of generator was it?

We had a Ruston Hornsby and a Gardiner.

29:00 They seemed to be the two. You had to crank them.

And as number nine, that was your responsibility as well?

Mmm.

How would you crank it up?

By hand, and you had to watch that it didn't hit back on you. Like the old motorcar you know, crank it up. One of them, I think there was one later, we used to press a button. That one, we always had to crank it.

29:30 **What does hitting back on you mean?**

Well, if you didn't do it right and you let go, it'd spin and wack you on the chest. One girl got knocked out with it. You had to get out of its way because they were a pretty big gen set.

How tall was it?

Off the ground. A big long big thing.

So about four foot?

Oh no, more. They'd be taller than, I think they were taller than,

30:00 well I was five foot two, I think it was taller than me.

And approximate length, maybe ten foot?

Oh yeah, it wouldn't be ten maybe, I don't know. Just big.

And how long would you have to crank it up for?

Until the engine kicked over. It all depends. You know, you see the old cars, if they're cold

30:30 or something and they don't kick over. Have you ever seen them? Haven't you ever seen them crank a car? Oh, one time you always started a car in the front, you know right in the front where the bumper bar was and they had a long metal thing, it was about that long and then a handle and you put it in the hole then you turned it and turned it and turned it and away it would go. They were hard to do.

So on your generator, how long was the?

Oh, a big one.

31:00 So big.

And was it quite difficult to turn over?

Oh yeah, they weren't easy, that's what I said, if you let go at the wrong time it'd spin and one girl got knocked in the chest and sent flying. They'd knock you over, it would knock you over.

So you'd need two hands on there?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. It was quite a job.

And after a period of time the generator would start?

Yeah. It was like,

31:30 you know in your car, you press the button and it won't go and you keep doing it and doing it and all of a sudden, bang, she's off.

And once she was started, what was the next step in terms of powering the light?

Oh well, you had the cord evidently, that went through.

Did that have to be hooked up or was that permanently connected to the generator?

Oh, you're asking the wrong questions, I'm going back too far. I

32:00 suppose it was left down, I don't know. It would have been probably left connected. Got a couple of photos there, I'll see if it's connected.

And did the light itself have to be switched on or did it go on automatically?

Oh yeah, oh no, you had to engage, yeah.

So would the generator only be cranked once a plane was?

Oh yes, until you turned it off, you know it'd go

32:30 all the time.

You wouldn't leave it running all night?

Oh no, it's when you were finished, you'd turn it off.

On each spot, or would you crank it up and leave it running all night?

Oh no, you wouldn't leave it running all night, oh no. No, when you were finished you turned it off and that was it, till the next time.

So say you were on watch and you heard a plane coming, would the generator?

Oh in that case, up till ten o'clock it would be left on, yeah.

33:00 But no, it wouldn't be left on all night.

But you'd probably run it from the four till ten period, is that right?

Probably, yeah.

And in the case of an early morning you'd hear a plane over, there's two of you on watch, would one run down and get the generator cranking?

Must have because we'd always expose onto it, onto the plane. You had to, that was part of it because you had a

33:30 little command post underground and one would plot and then you'd have to plot to the next station, what direction it was going, and you'd plot away. And then you'd say, "Target out of sight." They'd take over then.

The command post was underground? Was it a concrete bunker?

I don't think so, I think it was just made of sand

34:00 bags. Don't think it would have been concrete.

And what was in there in the command post?

Oh I don't know, I remember we had a little desk and a phone, I think that would have been whatever was the connection to get to the next location. Probably only a phone.

So on your evening shift, between four and ten pm, number nine and five were interchangeable positions, you'd

34:30 **be both searchlight?**

Oh no, you had one on each.

One on each?

Oh yeah. Oh no, you couldn't, you didn't run to two at once. You were either a five or a nine at the time.

So you had number one was a spotter, is that right?

Number one was the DC, they called her, that was Detachment Commander. She'd be the bombardier or the sergeant, and then two and three were spotters, four was the handle because after

35:00 searchlight there was instead of automatic you could use a control to, you know turn the light around. Four was on the handle, five was to light it, six, seven and eight were command posts, the radar and command posts, nine was the generator.

The spotters then, were they, actually they could move

35:30 **the light by hand?**

No, not the spotters, the spotters had a collapsible chair, like a director's chair but it laid back and it was on a swivel and you could lay there and you know, you could swivel it around and you'd go all around and you'd be following the plane and giving the direction.

So the person on the handle couldn't actually see the plane, they were receiving directions from the spotters?

Yes. They

36:00 used to move the, they had to go around. But the spotters didn't touch it, it was only number four did that.

And they'd presumably be hearing the plane initially before you got the lamp onto it, they would hear it and would they give a particular direction like east or west?

Oh yeah, they'd sing out, "Target seen." And then they'd say, "Target seen right or left",

36:30 wherever it was. And they'd keep giving the direction then, which way it would go. Once it was out of sight they'd say, "Target lost." And then they'd sing out, "Douse." That meant turn the light off.

And did they have seniority between the two spotters?

Oh no.

They just randomly?

Yeah.

And would they call a particular angle, would they say maybe like, sixty degrees?

No, they'd just say, "Target seen right."

37:00 And they'd go right, right, up, up, down, down wherever. If it went up, the plane went up, they'd say, "Up target up or down."

And the NCO who was in command, number one position, they just oversaw everything?

Yeah.

And number five, when they say, "Light the lamp", what do you do?

They'd say, "Expose."

Expose the lamp?

Just, "Expose."

Expose?

37:30 **What do you do?**

I'm just trying to think whether we pressed a button or we pulled a lever, I don't know, I can't remember. Dreadful.

And numbers six, seven and eight are all down in the command post?

Well sometimes no one would be down there and the other two, it was the old contraption, you know something else came in later

38:00 for identification. It was like a big, two boxes on a big thing and you had your earphones on and you listened in.

It was a form of radar?

Yeah, yeah. It was the basic one that they had first. I can't remember what they called it.

And that was assisting the spotters, was it?

That was assisting down in the command post. They'd relay that down into the command post, and then she'd plot that onto the next location.

38:30 **They were out in the open air?**

Mmm, they were.

And they had headsets and a basic screen, a CRT [cathode ray tube] screen or something?

Well, they were like a big box on a rod thing, yeah.

And downstairs, who was number eight, down in the command post, they were plotting on a map?

They would plot, yeah, to the next location,

39:00 whatever it was at whatever height, and whatever direction.

And they would call in, they would call into the next?

To the next one.

Would they also call into a central command, an air authority?

(UNCLEAR) did that but I can't remember searchlights doing it. The guns used to. They were down, there was a big one down in Macquarie Street, under the Domain there, it was underground.

39:30 But I don't think we did.

Tape 6

00:31 **Okay, we've just sort of run through how all your different positions interacted, and on an average shift between four and ten pm, would you fire up the light as a practice, as a rehearsal even if there weren't any planes?**

I suppose, oh, yes, we would have, yes. But we always had plenty of planes. Ramsgate especially, you were in line with Mascot,

01:00 you were [going] all night long there. Fuller's Bridge, Lane Cove National Park wasn't so bad, but some of the stations were really heavy. And you had to jump out of bed, every one. You're tin hat, your boots and your rifle and run.

How heavy was the air cover over Sydney at that time, was there every night quite a bit of air traffic?

01:30 Well, it wasn't enemy. Yeah, oh yes. Not as much as like the domestic and overseas, there was none of that. Hardly anyone used planes for that sort of travel. But there was plenty of air force and things like that.

So there weren't commercial flights and that sort of thing, it was all air force?

Very few. You know, if someone went on an aeroplane it was a life experience.

Where were

02:00 **the significant bases then, obviously Richmond and Mascot they were flying out of?**

Yeah, and there was Schofields, what's the one up near Windsor? There's a big base up there.

Not Richmond?

No, not Richmond. It might be Schofields. I think there was another one, a different one because that's where most of our girls ended up, when searchlights finished they ended up there folding parachutes.

02:30 Yeah, it might be Schofields. Of course Newcastle had a lot. There was Uranquinty and there was, I can't remember Bradfield Park. Quite a lot around.

03:00 And they had to practice night flying and all that sort of thing. Always coming and going from somewhere.

And was there a particular procedure or phone calls that had to be made should you identify an enemy craft?

Yes, oh yes. Whoever was down in the command post would get that.

And who would they contact?

Well,

03:30 as far as I know, they just moved on from one location to the other, I don't know if the last one would do it. I can't remember ever phoning anybody except you'd plot to the next one. There probably was but see, I wasn't down on the command post. Oh, maybe once or twice, you know a couple of times. And I

know I have plotted down there but that wasn't my job, I would have only been relieving somebody.

04:00 **Did you have to do that, would you be called in?**

No. I mean maybe. If I'd been up on guard and the girl wanted to go to the loo or somewhere you know, she'd say, "Come down while I race off." But that wasn't, you know I wasn't an eight, six, seven or eight. You couldn't swap around yourself, but in that case, just to relieve someone for a couple of minutes would have been all right

04:30 but you couldn't do it for a whole shift.

What would you do during your shift as a number five once you actually lit the lamp?

Oh well, you wouldn't be only a five at night. You'd be either a roving one or on the gate, you know at the opening. And then if anything was needed your one would take over, run and do it.

You wouldn't actually be at the light

05:00 **itself?**

Oh no, you'd have your roving pickets going around making sure nobody else was there. But as I said, you had your guards, two on, to walk around and two probably to the lights or whatever popped up sort of thing. You were there ready, but you didn't just stand by it and not move, sort of thing.

If a plane is heard, someone hears

05:30 **a plane, what happens then?**

Well, there was a bell, you'd ring a bell. But we'd go into the quarters, sleeping quarters, and that's when we'd say, "Hop out, grab your overcoat, your boots and tin hat and your rifle and out." Half the time, you'd be getting out and they'd be coming back, false alarm, false alarm, sometimes.

And how far was it from the sleeping quarters to the lights?

06:00 **At Lane Cove I'm thinking, specifically?**

At Lane Cove. Well, this would be the sleeping quarters and it would include the street and the part and maybe a quarter of the way across the park. There was a little bridge and you'd run across that and the equipment was set up there.

And the very first job sorry, with number one position, the bombardier, would they order the generator person to fire up

06:30 **the generator?**

No. You just do your job, you just ran straight to whatever your spot was. Oh no, no order like that. You knew, each one knew where to go. That's why you didn't do anybody else's, otherwise you'd be getting mixed up. Where do I go? You knew which one you had to go to.

And approximately how long would it take from arriving at the lamp to having it fired up and locked onto a plane?

Oh, a

07:00 few minutes sort of thing. See because the girls that were out on guard, they would have started it. It might be already lit by the time you get out there. And only a couple of times we ever had anyone in the light. One was a Dutchman lost. Well he kept going round and round until somebody identifies him or he can get word to somewhere. And others just would fly through, you'd

07:30 identify them as whatever, one of our planes. We never had any enemy planes over.

What occurred with the lost Dutchman?

We don't know, he got off course somewhere. And that's when we were at Ramsgate because that was all the water was there, he must have got himself lost somehow. We got the poor fellow in the beam and they'd just say, "Unidentified plane." We kept him for quite a while.

08:00 **Which enemy aircraft had you learnt to identify?**

Only Jap. Well, the Middle East was, they wouldn't have been coming from Europe. But no, only the Japanese.

Do you recall what those planes were?

Oh, we probably knew the others but I mean, they wouldn't have been very, oh yeah, Zeros and what was the other one? A Zero and

08:30 no, I can't remember the others of the Japs. But they never came over.

How did you feel when you'd locked onto an unidentified plane?

We felt sorry for him.

You weren't concerned?

No, not a, well at the start we were "I've got an unidentified plane", you know. But it wasn't too long before we knew, but we kept him for a while. Gave him a,

09:00 I can't really remember whether he got through to somebody or we got through to somebody. But that's what we heard, he was a Dutchman, Indonesian plane or Dutch, whatever.

I'm sorry to go back over this, I just don't have it quite clear in my head, the difference between the four pm to ten pm shift, and the rest of the night. Were you saying that between four and ten

09:30 **there's still only the two roaming guards?**

No. You were all on duty till ten o'clock. You set up station at six o'clock, I think. You set up station. Four or six o'clock. Probably in winter, well you would have set up earlier. We had two hours stand down from two till four, then you had your dinner. Then we mightn't have started till

10:00 eight and you worked till ten. That was the two hours you had off, they were the two hours at night you worked. It's coming back. From eight till ten, everybody worked.

Everyone was on the light?

Yes. But from eight o'clock there would be two girls on the opening. But the guard started, there were four on guard all night, but not the same ones. You did two hours. And

10:30 the first four would be on from eight till ten and then ten till twelve and so on. So they were the lucky ones because you would have been working in any case. So that's how it worked, you did two hours. But you were on what they called on post, called on post, every time a plane went over, you had to hop out of bed and run. So it was in the end they'd all

11:00 be asleep in bed plotting away happily in their sleep. They'd be talking away all night, it was bedlam. Ramsgate was shocking, only because it was in line with Mascot.

People would be talking in their sleep?

The girls would, yeah. Well, we were so tired you know, we worked all damn day and we had two hours off in the afternoon and then back on, you were on post all night. Not all the stations were like that, but that one was.

11:30 **Must have been pretty funny to hear these girls calling out.**

Oh, sometimes someone would come and wake you up, "Righto, your turn for guard." And you'd get up and you'd be half way out and think, I've just done it. They'd looked at the roster wrong. Instead of going forward, or they'd looked at the night before or something. See you moved up each night, you didn't always do that same guard. I've done mine and you'd fall back in. We were like zombies at that station.

12:00 **Was it difficult to stay awake, or on guard duty?**

Oh once you were up, it was that damn cold. Well, it was right through the night, it all depends what shift you had. Especially you know, if you had twelve till two or two to four sort of thing. The best one, if you were a city girl, if you got one day a week off, we'd put in for the four till six

12:30 guard, which meant that as soon as you finished guard you weren't supposed to leave till eight o'clock, but we'd get her to give us our leave pass or leave it out for us. Because my Dad used to go to work, at a quarter past six in the morning you used to leave here. And we'd walk to Rockdale Station, get the train to city and home by tram and I'd just get home as he was leaving. I only saw him for five minutes every so often. But

13:00 that was a good shift if you were going on leave. So you got away at six o'clock in the morning instead of having to wait till eight.

Was he quite proud of the work you were doing once you were in there?

Yeah, he was, yeah. I've got a letter still that he wrote. One I kept, one of many. Or from my grandmother, it was either from my grandmother or my father saying how proud he was.

But their

13:30 **initial fears were obviously concern when you originally tried to join the army, but when they saw how hard you were working, they were quite proud?**

Oh yeah, yeah. My mother came out to Ramsgate once, my mother and aunt and here I was, I'd been cleaning

14:00 the gens [generators] that night, you know grease and dirt. I was always very thin, very small and I put on weight down at Kapooka, and she said, "Oh look at your shoulders, oh look at you." They didn't like losing their baby girl I don't think.

Was there a sense that you were moving into areas or you had opportunities that they hadn't as women?

14:30 Oh I don't think they would have thought of that, I don't know, probably, I don't know. I have no idea.

That's not something you ever talked about with them?

No. No. See, we were young too and we had in our mind what we wanted to do I think. You know, when you think back. I didn't ask, "Could I join the army or I'd like to join the army." We just snuck down and did it and then copped it.

Did you have a sense when you'd

15:00 **finished school that your options were quite limited as a woman in terms of what you could do?**

Well, they were. Remember, I said I wanted to be a hairdresser. My father said, "There's two hairdressers in Gladesville, you'd never make a living." I don't think he thought anywhere else existed, you know. I had to go to the city to do office work, so why couldn't I go and do hairdressing.

Did you ever think about doing something outside what you were allowed, you basically had office work or hairdressing or nursing?

15:30 No, I only ever wanted to do hairdressing. And then I applied, when you got out of the army, you could do a rehabilitation course. Well, I was married then, and you could put in for whatever course you wanted, and I said, "Hairdressing." And she said, "Oh, you're married, there's not many vacancies for hairdressing, why don't you leave it for the single girls?" I thought, well I'm doomed never to get to be a hairdresser,

16:00 which I did, you know. We were too submissive in those days, that was the thing.

And yet there you were in the army covered in grease with a rifle walking around at night by yourself.

That's right. You wouldn't stand up to them and say, I should have said, "Well I'm divorced or I'm separated." You know something like that to get what I wanted. But you didn't, you more or less went along, so I think I took a dress making course, which was good later, but

16:30 it wasn't what I wanted to do.

Did you feel empowered or independent when you were in the army, walking around with a 303 under your arm at the searchlight?

I don't think so. No, I think we just felt quite normal. We were in the army because we wanted to. I mean, everyone was a volunteer, there was nobody conscripted. So

17:00 I don't know why the ones who did get a grudge on it, you know why they ever joined. But some didn't like the community living, some didn't like taking orders. But you surely knew that before you went in. You had to comply with what it was.

How did you feel about having to go back to the way things were before the war, once it was all over?

It was really a bit strange.

17:30 People who hadn't been, even now the girls, we often laugh and we say, "God, if you sit in a bus next to an ex-service woman, in five seconds, somehow you're speaking to each other." You might never have known them but you can sit next to them in the bus. Somebody else, fall down, they wouldn't open their mouth. I don't know what it was, whether we were just a certain type.

18:00 But, no, I thought people were rather, a lot of people were rather petty when you come out. I thought, oh God, fancy worrying about that, you know. Well, just do it. Somebody asked you to do something, do it. And everybody had hurt feelings about something and I thought it was rather a bit strange.

What do you mean, can you explain that more? People

18:30 **had hurt feelings about?**

About just ordinary, everyday things, you know. They'd have gripes and they didn't want to share and they didn't want to do this and they would just carry on about something they had to do, that they didn't think was fair, and all this business.

This is the AWAS you're talking about?

Oh no, no, this is out. You were saying, how did we find it, after?. This was people who hadn't been in the services. I don't think they knew how to share or do as they were,

19:00 not asked, told. I don't know, I think it made a difference that way. You know, you sort of accepted things and did things instead of fighting things, you did it.

Do you feel then that some sort of service or National Service would be a valuable thing for the people of today?

Yeah, if it was long enough, I think it would be good. I don't think, see when

19:30 war first started here, they used to have three months. The boys all went in, they were all eighteen and they all had a ball, you know, they loved it most of them. But that didn't teach them anything, three months didn't and I don't know how it would go into careers that would be the thing. Well what age, you do two years, say compulsory training. You've got to learn to live together and you've got to

20:00 make do with what you've got. You know, we lived out of a kit bag, no matter what you owned it was in that kit bag and it couldn't be anywhere else. Imagine, you know young girls now. But anything we had, if you got a tin of biscuits, it would have to go in your kit bag with your shoes and in with the possums. The possums got in at night into your tent. You know, we used to get parcels

20:30 sent to us, cakes and things. Unless they were in a tin with a tight lid, those possums got in.

Did you ever sense at the time that you were part of a major social change forming, that things were changing, you were getting new opportunities and you had new roles in society?

Oh yes, yeah. I think it was a wonderful experience, you know really. I'm just going by my friends that didn't go in.

21:00 You know, they'd have the horrors if they had to go and have a shower with somebody else, "Oh I couldn't do that". But I mean, what do you do? We're all the same, have a shower. You don't stand and gawk at each other.

How long were you uncomfortable with those things?

Oh, just the first day. I thought, oh my goodness. I can hear my mother say, "Wouldn't you think she'd turn her back?" I walked into the ablutions the first morning and there was this beautiful girl

21:30 drying herself. And I said, "Why don't you turn around?" But how stupid really, but that's when you're nineteen, twenty or whatever.

So your experience did break down a lot of your inhibitions and preconceptions?

Oh yeah, I've got no inhibitions, no I've got no inhibitions at all, yeah.

And that stood you in good stead for later years?

I think it does, yeah. I think it does. I mean, we all laugh

22:00 and carry on, you know, about the funny situations but I think it bonds you together too, really. You share everything.

Did you at any point feel that you personally would have liked to, or women in general could have been taking on more of a role in the services than you were given?

No, because we knew what we were allowed to

22:30 do and where to serve. You know, you weren't allowed to serve out of Australia. And you joined up for the duration and twelve months after and there it was, and you went where you were sent. It wasn't like you go in and say, "Well, I want to be a so and so." And if they said, "Oh no, you've got to go to so and so." You couldn't say, "Well I'm going home", you just had to do it. You sort of learned that way to

23:00 do as you're told and accept things.

Although I understand you wouldn't go in and say that, but did you feel there was more room at that point for women to be used more effectively?

No, because they were used in every aspect of it, really. You know, they were in everything. Some of the girls had wonderful postings. You know, I would have loved to have got Tennant

23:30 Creek and Darwin and all the rest of it but you had no chance. Sometimes you could apply but it depends how much they wanted you in where you were. You couldn't buck the system.

How long did you stay at Lane Cove?

Goodness knows. I know we went there on a New Year's Eve. We arrived there New Year's Eve.

24:00 I know we were there summer because we could swim there. Don't remember being there in the winter. I don't know. It's too long ago. You know, there was too many moves. So you see, you should jot things

down.

Do you recall

24:30 **if you went back to Georges Heights or did you go to Bankstown straight away?**

No. I don't know what order we went. Bankstown, Ramsgate, Fullers, Lane Cove National Park, Chatswood. Chatswood was the headquarters for all that.

Chatswood was the headquarters for Georges Heights as well?

For Lane Cove. No, no. Georges Heights was, I think the headquarters.

25:00 **Could you describe the facilities at Chatswood?**

Oh Chatswood was just a drill hall. A couple of the drivers, the men, they had tents there, out the back, in the back yard of the drill hall. And what they call a BOR [Battery Operations Room], that was the big plotting table, that's where it would have all gone back to, there. Yeah, that's right.

25:30 **And phone calls were coming in from the lights?**

Yeah, probably they would have gone back to BOR, yes. I'd forgotten all about that. Also in the back yard, just a bit tin shed and a huge big plotting table. And there was one sergeant, a male in charge of that, the rest were all girls.

And your accommodation there was inside or were you in tents as well?

No,

26:00 only the men, a few of the drivers, they lived up at headquarters in tents, and we were all down at Fuller's Bridge.

You never actually stayed?

No.

Okay. What about at Bankstown?

We just had a big corrugated iron hut there, army hut, you know, a long one.

And what sort of lights did they have there?

Well they would have had both, everywhere had both.

And

26:30 **what were your opportunities for recreation or taking your mind off things at Bankstown?**

Well, you were only allocated your leave, one day a week, and usually just took off and into the city. Or else I always came home for the day, went back. Or my mother would meet me in town and we'd go to a movie or something. It all depends how much leave you had.

But during the week you didn't have very much spare

27:00 **time at all?**

No, no. You only had that two hours' stand down of a day. Well, then you either did your washing or washed your hair or washed your, maybe if there was local shops you might go up. See, on locations like that, when there were only the eighteen or twenty of us, about once a week we'd all throw in a shilling and instead of army food, whoever was cook for the, see we did our own cooking.

27:30 So you'd have two cooks on, we'd all throw in a shilling. And at stand down you'd go up to the local shopping centre and just buy whatever you wanted, you know we'd come home and whoever was on the cook that night would cook it and we'd think it was a banquet.

Can you tell me about the rations that you had to cook with?

Rations? Oh sorry, I thought you said the Russians.

28:00 I was going to say we didn't have any Russians. The rations, they were quite good. And it was good cooking on location because often you have some of the country girls, some of the country girls could not cook, but others were quite good. So we'd sort of make pastries and scones and anyone could cook, you know. We'd say, "Can we make so and so with you?" But the rations were delivered every day and as I say, now and then we'd all throw in something and

28:30 go and buy what we wanted and cook it that night.

What did the daily rations consist of?

Oh well, you always had your cereals for breakfast and eggs or whatever and there was always milk, bread, apply jelly, dreadful apple jelly, never want to look at that again. That was about the only jam you

ever got. I suppose we had,

29:00 I don't know, hot lunch and you'd have a hot dinner. No, the rations were quite good. It depended on the cook you know, you have a roast or they'd make a stew, whatever was sent out, you cooked it. You had no choice, you couldn't order anything.

And there were permanent cooking facilities at Lane Cove?

It would be like a house you know, the cookhouse. You'd have the mess and some

29:30 places would have the, well they were always a big fuel stove, you never had gas or electricity because they were all out, you know, just put up, so there was always a fuel stove put in. So you just cooked on that.

And you mentioned maintenance as well, what sort of maintenance activities would you have to be performing on a daily basis?

Well, maintenance was on your gen set and things like that. But also around your quarters.

30:00 Every morning you had to scrub your own little patch of floorboards if you were in a hut or you had floorboards in your tent, you had to do those every morning. Then there'd be a roster for someone to do the latrines, someone to do what else was there, oh the drains, we just had to do the

30:30 whole place. If the toilet was filled, it all depends where you were. Well, you dug a hole and you emptied it. And then some of them would stand around and say, "Oh God, I couldn't do that." And then we'd say, "No, but you can help fill it, can't you?" You had to make a joke of what was unpleasant, you made a joke, otherwise you would've been grizzling. But it was just like being in a house, had your equipment to look after

31:00 plus your house. We made little gardens.

Humour was an important way of coping with the situation?

What was that?

Humour.

Humour. Oh yeah. Oh, yes, you made a joke of things, otherwise it might have got you down, some of them, you know the same old routine every day. You know, what fun would there be clearing out the drains, grease traps and things. You know, we took over from the men and oh God it was dreadful.

31:30 They hadn't touched, the men were terrible, they wouldn't do any maintenance, I don't think.

Was boredom ever a big problem, the routine?

No, never. Well, you always had so much company, you know. You know the thing is, if you wanted to go and have a read or write a letter you'd have to beat somebody off with a stick, sort of thing, go away I want to be quiet for a while. You know, you had hundreds of people around you sometimes.

32:00 It wasn't only your own tent or your own hut. If there was a big camp like North Ryde, you had four sleeping huts, well you had twenty two girls in each one, there was always somebody wandering in and out and around about, come to see each other, you know at leisure time. And you had a big rec hut. Oh, you did a bit of craftwork, you know you did a bit of anything, everything.

32:30 Go up there of a night and we'd all sit and knit and North Ryde was a push over, it was wonderful, like a holiday camp.

At any point did you begin to question the value of what you were doing, the fact that you hadn't actually identified any enemy aircraft, towards the end was there ever any time when you questioned the value of your job?

Oh, no. Because we'd taken over from men.

33:00 Searchlights actually relieved the men. A lot of units did, but there was still a lot of men in different camps, B Class, in with bad feet, they'd been accepted but they weren't good for overseas service. But searchlights, we just completely relieved, whatever station we took over, we took over from men. So we were quite happy about that, that was what we'd joined for. Joined

33:30 and let a man go.

Was there ever any negative feeling from women who weren't in the services?

Oh, they'd just say, "Oh no, that's not for me, no one's going to tell me what to do", and all this silly business.

There was never any stigma attached to girls who were in the service or not in the service?

Oh I don't think so, no because you kept your civilian friends as well. Or I did.

34:00 **Were most girls involved at some level, whether in the VAD or Red Cross or the services?**

Oh no, no, only if they really wanted to. When I'd be home on leave I'd usually call into Woolworth's office, well we'd all have a chat and, "Goodbye." And I'd think, I'm glad you're here and I'm where I am. You know, they were cooped up in the big office and

34:30 I'd rather do what I was doing.

Woolworth's were quite supportive of your decision?

Yeah, they were very good. The men that went in the first year or two, they made their wages up, yeah. The difference between the army pay and their pay. But by the time I went in they had to cut it out because everybody was going in. But

35:00 they always sent us every so often, I don't know how often, maybe every three months or so, they would send you a ten shilling canteen order, they called them. It was worth ten shillings anyhow, and you could cash it at the canteen and buy whatever you wanted with it. The Woolworth's staff got that. No, they were quite good.

And they saved the opportunity for you to return to your job?

Oh yeah, yeah. Well, I think when I went in I was

35:30 getting three pound five a week for working on the book keeping machine, and I don't know whether it was twelve months, two years, whatever - say two years. Half way through, I was in the office one day and the old accountant come over and said, "Oh, can you get out of the army, come back?" And he said, "We're desperate." He said, "Twenty pound a week." I nearly fainted, you know because they'd had all those rises. But twenty pound a week, I was getting three pound five you know, two years before.

36:00 I wouldn't have, I didn't want to. I never went back to work once I got out. But I thought, wow.

I want to jump back, we were talking about the maintenance and you mentioned maintenance of the generator. What was the specific maintenance you had to do on the generator?

You had to check it every day to see that your

36:30 oil was right and your petrol was right and your, I can't think now whether we put water in or not, I suppose we did, I don't know, forgotten bits of it. And polish it all up and you know, everything had to be polished, didn't matter what, it had to be polished.

Were you taught how the systems worked at all?

Oh yeah.

Did you enjoy learning about those aspects?

Yeah, I didn't mind it. You sort of just went along to lectures and

37:00 things, it was quite good.

Were there any occasions when you'd have to do repair work?

No, I don't think so, no. It all went nicely. See, you didn't stay in the one place long enough really, I suppose. And luckily they were all in good order when you went there. Well, they had to be in good order because you had to put the lights up every night. They never broke down.

37:30 **And did your interest or skills in the way those systems worked extend into your civilian life?**

Oh, when I used to drive, I don't drive now, yeah, a couple of times I'd put the bonnet up and give it a wack here or there and off it would go. But don't ask me now, well every thing's different in them now. They're all automatic. But yeah you did, you learned a lot

38:00 of little things along the way. You know, imagine the woman next door cleaning the grease trap out, she wouldn't, or burying a toilet. I wouldn't have either before army days, but you think, well it's got to be done, get on with it.

So what about when you returned - it was quite a conventional life after that of being a mother and wife?

A wife before the mother.

38:30 **Very important, I realise, sorry. Were you ever frustrated at not being able to explore these new areas that opened up to you?**

Oh well you did, they came in very handy. If we'd have a blocked drain, I'd sort of, Bill, he was travelling, he'd be away sometimes, I'd get under the house and clear it and put the pipe together and that. But yeah, I've done a lot of those things.

Did that give you the confidence to attempt those sort of things?

Yeah, it just sort of

39:00 came natural, I thought, oh yeah, get under there and do that. And I used to be a bit impulsive you know, if I wanted to put a picture up, I'd wack a nail in the wall and then I learned I mustn't do that, I'd get the drill and do it properly.

Did that cause any undue stress for poor Bill?

That's why I used to do it properly, or I'd get him to do it. I was a bit erratic at first, I'd wack a nail in here, there and everywhere.

39:30 **And were your friends that didn't go into the services, were they impressed by your attempts or your exploration of things?**

Oh, they just used to laugh and say, "I wouldn't dare do that." I probably wouldn't have either. But when I think, you learn you've got to do a thing, well you do it. You know with the sand bag emplacements, we filled all our sand bags and built the emplacements.

40:00 I've never heard of an office girl doing that.

Tape 7

00:31 **Phyllis, I'd like to ask you about what we were just talking about off camera, which was the campaign to allow women into the services. Speaking to other people, I understand that there was a push to the government and some demonstrations and rallies to allow women into the services, did you know about them at the time?**

No I didn't, I don't think I did, no. I must have heard something about

01:00 that it was granted, otherwise I wouldn't have gone down to join it.

But you heard that there was quite a large rally?

No, I didn't know about the rally at all. Probably would have been there if I did. But no, I didn't know that there was going to be anything like that.

There was quite a bit of excitement that then followed on once you heard the news?

Yeah, yes. I think the air force were the first

01:30 to do it, yeah, they were accepted first. I don't know whether the navy was before or after us, but I know we were August '41.

And I think you said before they were mobbed in the days after it was granted?

Oh yes, yeah. And they went to Killara, I don't know whether it was a big old school or an old

02:00 home at Killara, the first lot, the recruits went into that. They arrived and the place had never been cleaned and you know, evidently it had been empty for some time, and they all had to get in and scrub it and do drains and all sorts, so that would have been as big a shock for them, it was. A big shock for us too, what we did because we'd never done it before. But I sort of read a paper on the first weeks of Killara, they didn't have uniforms, they didn't have anything

02:30 properly much. But they got in and cleaned it all up.

Before you actually joined the service, what was your attitude to the difference services, to air force, navy, army, did you make a distinction between them?

Well most of the boys I knew were in the army, a couple were in the air force, all the local boys around. And you just thought, isn't that wonderful, they're all in to it.

03:00 But I hadn't even thought about the women, you know, the women's army. But the minute it was mentioned, I thought, that's for me, I'll do it.

Was there a stereotype of the sort of boy that joined the air force versus, you know were there different types that you identified?

There weren't different types, I'd say more like personalities. Well the pilots especially, not the ground crew, the pilots

03:30 had to have a very good education and they were more the gentler type sort of thing, that went into the air force. Because they had the name of Blue Orchids, they were Blue Orchids, because they seemed to all have their little moustache and when they were off duty they'd have their cravats and things like this. We'd all have a giggle about the air force. But

04:00 no, there were a lot of very educated, highly educated men went into the army, same as the navy. But they usually became officers more or less straight away. It depended on your background and your education a lot, and I suppose your personality too, to be an officer. Some won them in the field but the majority went, like the women mostly went in from

04:30 Guides and Red Cross leaders.

Did a lot of the VAD girls that you had been doing your course with, did they go across to join the services?

I don't know them personally because there was only another girl and I used to go. And once a week, you didn't really get to know them. You just sort of sat like in a room with rows of chairs, sort of thing, and rolled bandages and things. But some of the army girls, yeah,

05:00 there was the WANS [Women's Australian National Service] before us too, they went from the VADs and the WANS, they were sort of volunteer organisations, women's organisations. So they were allotted in the first lot to go in.

You mentioned a bit of an educational distinction between the pilots and everybody else. Was there any sort of class distinctions that you noticed between the

05:30 **services with the women? Would the more upper class woman go to a certain service, or a more working class in a certain service?**

Well, I think it depended a lot maybe more on education than class. What they had were, their brains they went for.

What did the girls with more brains go for?

Well they got jobs as well, they went in as mostly as officers

06:00 straight away. They'd be selected and they'd go to officer's training school. You wouldn't see any of the rough and ready average ones. They'd be mostly private school or guide leaders or Red Cross groups that started off. They were all the original officers. A few later made it, you know as the years went on became it through their work,

06:30 but the leaders were picked. They'd had the experience as guide groups and Red Cross groups and things. And one of my friends, she was in intelligence and she had a wonderful job. It was all the germ warfare and things like that, you know there were really some very select jobs that you never ever knew of really, until you know, years after everyone's been writing

07:00 books. And you read them and think, "Oh God, that's the one so and so was in, you know." Yeah, no, if you were just like most of us, average, you just got allocated to where you were suited.

Amongst your unit that you were working the searchlights with, were the women all from fairly similar socio economic backgrounds or educational backgrounds?

Yes, yeah. A lot of country girls

07:30 too. And as I said, they came from South Australia to Queensland and Victoria, everywhere. Yeah, they were a good mixed group. But we didn't sort of have any rough nuts or cuckoos, crazy ones. Some of them you'd think, God how did she ever get in the army? Because you had to do your test. But some of them were a bit, in other units I've seen, a little bit hopeless.

08:00 But they seemed to sort you out.

Were there any surprisingly well educated or upper class women amongst them?

Oh yeah, yeah. When we were at North Ryde, I was with Helen Morris. I used to feel sorry for her, she was so shy, Lady Cutler, you know she married Sir Roden Cutler. I used to say, "Come on Helen, you know." She was a real loner, lovely, quiet, how she ever went in the army, I'll never know. She was just so quiet and reserved.

08:30 And I used to think, oh God, poor [thing] she's on her own.

Did you ever ask her why she did join the army?

No.

Did the girls ever discuss their discussions or was it just kind of accepted?

Oh yes. But well, she was a corporal and she was over in the control officer. She was in our hut, but she was at the end. If you were a corporal, they partitioned the last six foot,

09:00 you know, made a little room of it. We had twenty two to a hut but the end bit, the wall went up, and of course we always used to, they got initiated, short sheeted and all that sort of thing. But no, she never joined in much and always very friendly at work and that, but she didn't seem to join in anything. Who else did we have? We had Pat McKell, we're still friends. Her father was Governor

- 09:30 and Governor General. And we were all very close, still are. And who else? Jack Lang's niece was at North Ryde. Yeah, quite a few scattered through. Di Smallpage [?], her father and brothers, they're all high class doctors. Yeah, you got a mixture.
- 10:00 **And was there a bond between the services with the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service]?**
- Oh yeah, yeah. We didn't have any of this, oh you're a WRAN, you know.
- Did you mix with the WAAAF girls much down at Wagga?**
- No. Well, they were nowhere near us. See, they were like one suburb, we were another. They were at Uranquinty and Forest Hill but no, the only time you saw them was if you passed them in the street or they were at the dance on Saturday night. Never
- 10:30 ever, no you never.
- There was one other area I wanted to ask you about, which was the volunteer air observers corps. I think they were called, Air Observation Corps. Did you have any dealings with them at all?**
- No.
- I only ask, I think they were a voluntary group far less formal than the army who were also doing**
- 11:00 **air identification, plane identification.**
- They'd have probably gone into the air force.
- I was wondering about the service support that the girls offered each other in terms of dealing with their husbands or boyfriends or fathers being away, was that an important support network?**
- Oh yeah. We really did bond very closely. Not everybody, but
- 11:30 you know, your own little groups, yeah. You went through all the happy times and the sad times and you know, the girls would get letters or notice that their boyfriend had been killed, or missing, or prisoner of war. Or their father or their brother, or someone would lose a leg. Oh yeah, everybody was you know, like, you'd only have small groups, you wouldn't have dozens all together, but you did make your own little cliques and
- 12:00 you did, you shared the good and the bad sort of thing. We used to say, "What's yours is mine and what's mine yours", sort of thing. It wasn't like you did, you either shared or you were out of it. You know, you'd have been lonely. You had to be close together because you worked together, you lived together, you ate together you usually went out together. You were
- 12:30 so involved with each other, you knew everything that happened.
- How would the information arrive of someone's loved one being killed?**
- Well, there'd be just tears, tears, tears.
- How would the information arrive?**
- Usually by telegram.
- And they'd actually come out to the locations?**
- Well, it all depends where the post office was. And
- 13:00 they would send everything down, the telegram or if it was a big one it would probably go through the headquarters and you know, you'd be called up to the orderly room. The officer would have to tell them. Or if it was just family, like the family had notified them, well they'd ring through to say, and they'd get compassionate leave then, sort of thing. Oh no, it was hard on them because they'd only get whatever
- 13:30 leave was really necessary. They couldn't come home for a couple of weeks or something like that to console unless it was very tragic, they'd get compassionate leave.
- I guess it was something everyone could relate to in some way?**
- Oh yeah. Well there was just so many, everybody had somebody away, yeah you did. And others, you'd call them,
- 14:00 'Dear John' letters, the girls would write and tell the boys they had somebody else and vice versa.
- Were the girls concerned about infidelities of their men overseas, was that something that you talked about?**
- Oh yeah, it did happen a lot. And it was strange because they might be married here or engaged but

they went to like one of the girls in our office, she wasn't in the army with me, but she was engaged to one of the heads of Woolworth's and he went off

14:30 to England and he got a girl pregnant there. So she was the one that suffered. He married the girl in England. But yeah, that did happen quite a lot. One would get pregnant and their boyfriends would be away and they'd get girls pregnant in other countries or other states and marriages as well. That would be all the drama there.

15:00 **These topics were quite taboo at the time.**

Sex?

Oh you know, getting pregnant out of marriage and infidelities.

Oh God, well with your family, yeah. With your families, that was the worse thing there could be. I don't think we were all so good, we were all too scared.

But amongst the girls you talked about it quite openly, those sort of issues?

Not really, no.

15:30 Very few, no very seldom I think, even if they did, they didn't want women to know about it, unless they got pregnant. There was only one girl in our hut, that's still married, they were the ideal couple, absolutely adored each other. But she was the baby of our hut, she was only eighteen and

16:00 they were both in camp together. But they were, they absolutely idolised each other, the next thing, bang, we were all at their wedding. But she was preggie, she was the only one, the only one I knew from North Ryde. No, it wasn't common.

And were relationships between men and women within the army quite taboo? Was that something that was?

Oh no, no. You weren't allowed

16:30 to be married and be in the one unit. Bill and I were at the end but that was our major's doing. I claimed Bill, can you imagine? He came back from New Guinea and they were stuck up in Queensland and the major said, "Get him down." So that was good there. But there were different sections, he was at Marrickville and I was in the city then. So that was

17:00 all right. But we were living out then, we were living home. But oh no, everyone had boyfriends, girlfriends in camp. The married men were the worst, they seemed to pick on the nice young ones.

So there were romances within camps that were kept secretive?

Oh yeah. Well you didn't have to keep them secret, only if they were married, I think. A lot of the girls got caught up with married fellows,

17:30 which was a bit sad because most of them, they went back to their wives. And the girls were left.

And were many of your boyfriends worried about or did they express their concern about the Americans?

Oh yes, hated them. All the Australian boys hated the Americans.

And did they used to say that to you and to the girls?

Yeah, don't like those Yanks, don't go out with those Yanks.

A bit paranoid about it?

Yeah.

18:00 There used to be quite a few fights in the city, they'd clash.

You didn't know that Bill was up in New Guinea?

Oh yeah, oh yes.

You knew that that's where he was going?

Mmm, yeah, oh yeah.

How did you deal with the anxiety or concern?

Probably had another boyfriend while he was away. No,

18:30 we just used to write, we just wrote. Well you accepted, you knew they were in the service, they were going away mostly, unless they were medically unfit. There was a hundred to one chances they'd be going. So I don't know, everyone just seemed, as I said there was romance by mail.

Where did he end up serving, which campaign?

In the 7th [Division].

In which area of New Guinea?

19:00 Tell you in a second, I'm blank. Nadzab, all up at Nadzab and Koitaki. I'm trying to think of all the names, Nadzab, Koitaki, the Ramu Valley. It's all come back, you get these damn blocks now, it's old age.

Was he able to, or did he talk about his experiences when he returned?

Not much,

19:30 no. Now, he'll say a few things. But you know, I'm still hearing things now. But no, didn't for years and years. You'd hear little bits, funny bits what happened. But no.

Did you talk much about your experiences?

Only if the girls were around. You know, someone would say, "Hey what about so and so, or do you remember so and so?" That used to go on a lot, not so much now when we have our reunions and things. See, we're all eighty

20:00 now, eighty upwards.

Did you talk to your family much about the sort of work you were doing?

No, not really. I think they just knew searchlight was something that was up in the air. At North Ryde, you were either a driver or, you know office work.

Can you tell me about the day you heard of victory in Europe?

Yes.

20:30 Wonderful. Well everything was winding up sort of thing. Oh Europe, I'm talking about the Pacific. Yeah Europe, oh yeah. It didn't affect us as much as the Japan one. But everyone was happy and the boys, most of the boys were home by then. Well they'd come home and gone to New Guinea, that's where we wanted them home from.

21:00 But there wasn't that much, there wasn't a big celebration for Europe here like there was when Japan finished. You know, the city went mad.

Tell me about that day.

Well we'd finished at North Ryde also and I'd gone into a place, a unit called APO [Army Post Office] in Sussex Street, right down near China Town it was. And

21:30 we were just waiting every day, it was all in the air sort of thing. Anyhow, when it was all over we were right. Everyone took off down to Martin Place and I rang Bill. I think Bill was home that day, he was off for some reason. Anyhow, I was supposed to meet him at one o'clock or somewhere, somewhere in the city. And we went around, everybody was celebrating and we ended up going to his sisters at Bondi.

22:00 But everyone was going mad, they were throwing paper, paper was coming down from all the buildings and Martin Place, you couldn't move in.

What was happening in Martin Place?

Oh just everyone was dancing and going mad you know, and doing their own thing.

Was there music?

Oh there was music, there was everything, yep. Yeah, all just impromptu, everything just happened, nothing was organised. But the streets

22:30 were full of torn up paper, all from the different office blocks above, it all come fluttering down. It was such a wonderful feeling. And it was a funny feeling, you thought, oh my God it's over, what are we going to do?

Did it feel as though it had been worth all the loss and sacrifice?

Oh God, no. No, so many young men you knew, you

23:00 know, it was dreadful to think they were never going to come home. Oh no, luckily I only had, I think I only had one male cousin, he was an officer in the army. But he was, I don't know where he was, Darwin, I think because he knew Japanese, so he

23:30 had a top job interpreting and things like that. So he didn't really go overseas, but he was all right, but most families lost somebody, and it was really sad for everyone. And everyone was so happy and screaming and enjoying it and then the others were breaking their hearts because theirs had gone, you

know. It was really terrible when you think, you know we were only twenty two then,

24:00 to think that twenty three or whatever, no, twenty three. It was terrible to think that all those lives were lost. And boys were coming home and one of the local boys, we were just over the road, and they'd all call into our place on their way home. And the boy at the back of us, we met him coming across the paddock, my mother and I, well it was a few days after. He was coming

24:30 home, and we had to tell him his mother had died. In a sense, it was heartbreak for them coming home too. It was just terrible times. Happy times and sad times.

So VJ [Victory in Japan] day was a?

Yeah, it was a real mixture. So emotional. Everybody was kissing everybody and loving, everybody was cuddling everybody. And they were whooping and jumping around. They were all on truck flying up and down George Street and Pitt Street.

25:00 You know, if there was a truck there, everyone got on it and away they went. It was just a free for all, it was lovely.

Did you have any plans at that stage for the future, any immediate plans?

No, not really, no, I don't think so, no. We decided soon

25:30 after, well we were married, that was August wasn't it, that [the war] finished? Bill was home then and I'd claimed him at our unit. We got married in the February, the next February, six months after. So I thought it was time to get married, I'd known him for seven years.

What sort of work were you doing then in the immediate post war period? You were down at China Town you say?

26:00 That was still army days.

Yes, I realise that. What was the nature of the work?

It was actually a unit that was attached to the British Army and it was a supply place. All the clothing, and they even had fridges and things, but mainly clothing. And it was for the Indian Army, the English Army in India. It was Australian Provision Office,

26:30 APO. APO and in brackets was EG, Eastern Group. So it was just shirts and socks. I was on the switch there. But that was quite handy. We lived home, we were living at home then, just went in daily.

And it was still quite busy, there was a lot of work to be done in those immediate post war years?

Oh yeah. We stayed in till October. If you didn't

27:00 get out by 1st October, you had to sign on for another two years. Well, I wanted to start a family and Bill had his job waiting for him, so we both stayed in till the last day, October 1st.

And you said you were working on the switch, is that a skill you just picked up once you went to the APO [Australian Provision Office]?

No,

27:30 I had been on the switch at the telegraph office when I was there, but you know, quite a few years before that. No, it was all right.

Taking incoming calls and rerouting them to a particular section?

Yep. Liked the switch, it was good.

Was that under signals department as opposed to artillery?

No, it was just that

28:00 unit. That was the headquarters of that unit, they were at Marrickville and where else they had a few branches. Trying to think where else, Marrickville, somewhere else, a couple of places.

Can you tell me about your last day, 1st October?

That was yeah, I was really sad to leave, I tell you. Had to go to Burwood to be

28:30 discharged. Everyone went, all the girls went there. It was a big old home, and you went there. And I felt really strange when I come home, that was it, take your uniform off and not put it on again, you know. It was nearly four years we were in, and I thought, oh this is funny. I've still got mine packed away. Yeah, it was really strange. You found your own way there,

29:00 you didn't go in mass because a lot of them, most of them were out by then. I was always sorry, actually, I didn't stay in. I could have got pregnant and been discharged later. That was the first thing you were

out for. Yeah, it was just a very strange day.

Did you go with Bill?

No. Oh no, I think he had to go to Marrickville. The girls went to Burwood,

29:30 a place there. So I went and you signed off and you kept your uniform. All the girls dyed theirs or their skirts. But no, we didn't have to hand anything in. Kept our whole uniform, our greatcoat and off you went with it, you didn't go back.

Who did you go out with to Burwood?

I just went on my own, yeah. Because

30:00 in at Sussex street there weren't many girls there, and the other two stayed on. There were three in our section, four in our section, I think one was already out and the other one stayed on, can't think what the other one did. It wasn't that I wanted out but I thought, I may as well get out now. I wanted as I say, to start a family. So you just

30:30 toddled off on your own. It wasn't like if you were maybe if you were in camp and it all finished one day, you would have all gone by the truck load sort of thing, or piled in a truck and gone. Yeah, once I came home I didn't have to get up the next morning. Funny feeling. You missed it.

Did you sense a kind of lack of purpose in those weeks after?

No, I just felt a bit lost. I thought you know, what am I going to do?

31:00 Wish I hadn't come out now.

Have you thought about that much in the years since or how your life might have been different if you'd stayed in?

Oh, it wouldn't have been that much different because we were married by then. So it was only a matter of time that I'd have, well it all finished the next year. I think the last ones to come out were in '47, the ones who stayed on, finished

31:30 in '47. So that was October '46, so I didn't miss too much of it.

And what did Bill go and do after he was discharged?

He went back to National Cash Registers. He'd worked there before and they'd kept his job for him.

Did he manage to settle down quite comfortably?

Oh yeah we did. We didn't have any

32:00 dramas sort of thing. It was just that I missed the girls. And we bought a little house on this block of land, a little temporary house was here and we lived in that for four years and we sold it, sold the house, someone came and took the house. And we built.

Did any of your friends or friends husbands struggle to settle back down to normal life

32:30 **after?**

Oh yeah. Some were divorced, quite a few of them divorced really. And they say, "My God, what did I do, what did I marry that bloke for?", and all this sort of thing. Now some of them have been married twice, three times. Yeah, some of them I don't think ever settled down, a couple of them. But most of them did.

Was that a direct result of the war do you think?

I don't think so, no. It was just their personalities.

33:00 Because they were a little bit like that always. Liked to do their own thing, didn't like to be tied down. It was a different life altogether, the army, as long as you obeyed by the rules, well you were just like a robot, you know you had everything done for you and things like. You had no worries.

Did your wartime experiences

33:30 **change you?**

I don't know. I'm different to my sisters. I think they did, it may have. I don't know whether I would have, you know I like to do things all the time. Don't know.

What were the major changes you saw in Australian society after the war?

Well,

34:00 I mean, we were just so laid back and so free and easy. I mean, you had no problems, no worries. I don't know whether a lot of them are over emphasised now but I mean, we could walk home if you'd been in

the city to the movies, just a girl's night or something, you just got off the tram and you strolled home down the street. And this was the tip and the other one was a tip. It was all paddocks and you

34:30 never ever thought that anybody that walked up, you either knew them or they'd just say, "Good evening, do you mind if I walk along with you?" And they might go to another street. But you never had any worries of being harmed or touched or anything. I mean, you never locked your houses. You went out and left the windows up and the back door just closed. I don't think we had a key at home in our house.

35:00 **Are you saying that changed after the war?**

Yes.

Was it a loss of innocence?

Yeah. I don't know what happened because I'm not blaming the migrants but there seemed to be whole suburbs sprung up and they all seemed to be the worst people there, and you never heard, there was the occasional robbery, I suppose when I was a child. But maybe the kids more so than robbers.

35:30 But it was really different. And I think it's just continued you know. I think the pyjama girls, was the only murder we ever heard of, you never heard of murders. Whether they were all kept quiet or not, you know in the underworld. And not many robberies and no bashings. If there was a bashing someone would say, "Oh my God, I saw them put the boot in." Well that

36:00 was taboo, if they booted anybody. But I mean now, they slash each other to bits every day.

What was it about that wartime experience that caused such a change?

I think it was just people saw the brutal side of life and it was the survival of the fittest. You know, it just changed everybody's outlook on life I think. Not everybody but a lot of people, you know we used to say, "Where have all these dreadful

36:30 people come from, there's whole new suburbs of them going up? And they had so many problems, so where did they come from?" And it wasn't migrants, they were Aussies to start with and then I think the migrants came and taught everyone how they had to live. Most of them, it was the survival of the fittest, wasn't it, in their countries?

37:00 We just changed. We got too many people I think. Too modern, too everything. Everything got too clever. Before, people worked together. You know when I was a child, if a man wanted to put up a fence, everybody, the neighbours came and did it. And then with the war, war years, there was so much overtime and everything, and you'd hear them say, "No, he's doing all that overtime, let him put it up himself."

37:30 You noticed that sort of thing creeping in. Or they've got two jobs or they're doing this or that, let them do it themselves. Whereas everybody got in and had, what they called a working bee and did it together. You know, the wife put on lunch and the husband put on either a keg, it all depended on how big the job was, and they'd do it all together. But you never hear, you never see anyone do that now.

Did you have a proudest moment

38:00 **in the war?**

In the war. Yeah, I think when I did my march past in the city. Look at me. Yeah, it was a lovely feeling to walk through the city and it was one of the war bond rallies or something like that, and you usually did your march past at Ingleburn. And just our group just happened to be that date and

38:30 I suppose they wanted to make it like a parade, and our group copped that. It was lovely.

You said before, I'm just going to check it, oh that you and the girls would like a week back in the service now that we know what we know.

Yeah.

What would you do with that week?

Mischief, I think. I don't know if we'd know what to do. What would we do?

39:00 I don't know.

What do you mean by it, why would you want just a week?

Well, we really did, the majority apply by the rules. You know, we did everything, I think we were smart enough to do everything by the rules because otherwise you got confined to barracks or you got pay deducted, you got a red line in your pay book, which was, you know a bad thing.

39:30 And I think we could have had quite a few things up our sleeve that we could have done and got out of doing things. Now we just laugh. Some of the girls did. Now the air force girls, they were really cute, they used to duck down to Melbourne for morning tea from Sydney on the planes. Well of course, we didn't have that advantage. Now and then we did sneak off in the truck somewhere if we

40:00 were going to a dance, someone would say, "There's a truck coming, we've got a truck." We'd all pile on that. But we used to think that was fantastic, fancy flying down to Melbourne to have morning tea and back.

So you'd like to do it again but with a little bit more fun, a little less seriousness?

Well, we might have too much experience now, yeah. No, we often say that. The fellows do too. They said, "Oh what about a week back and we all know what we know now."

40:30 It's not only my thought, you know, they all say that now. The funny things we did.

INTERVIEW ENDS