

Australians at War Film Archive

Elsie Passmore (Phyl) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/26>

Tape 1

00:40 **Good afternoon Els... Sorry, I was going to call you Elsie that's because we know you as Elsie but you prefer Phyllis do you?**

Yes I don't get called Elsie because when I was christened my mother liked Phyllis and my fathers only and my mother was named Elsie and she was the

01:00 apple of my father's eye you know and then his only sister was Elsie and Mum said she's not gonna be called Elsie. It'll be our Elsie, your Elsie, big Elsie and little Elsie so he went and when he registered my name he didn't think Phyllis Elsie Hill went smoothly so he called me Elsie Phyllis Hill and then I've never being called Elsie only later years for business reasons or hospitals

01:30 or something like that. I could just not think who it is and not answer other than that, yes its Phyllis or Phyl. Phyl mainly.

When you were in the army what did the other nurses call you?

Well when we first went in as VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment] we were enlisted VADs, a lot did VAD work in the hospitals

02:00 but they weren't enlisted into the army well into 1941. They enlisted VAs from St John Ambulance and the Red Cross and you had to have so many hours training in hospitals and then they enlisted us. We had to go through the normal channels and have our examination medical examination at Victoria Barracks

02:30 and pass everything and then we were aides, we were nurses aides actually to start with and that's how we came to be called enlisted VAs there's just that much difference because people thought you were there just doing and you weren't in the army and we were

I'd like to come back with that sorry for cutting you off but

03:00 **perhaps first of all to get so that I can get a picture of your life as a young child you could tell me a little bit about where you were born?**

Oh yes, well I was the eldest of the family I have 2 sisters and a brother and I was the eldest and I was born in 102 Fredrick Street, Ashfield the house is still there and we were all born at home and we grew up there or I lived

03:30 there of course until I went into the army and we had a very very wonderful young life. We used to go to the Church of England at Ashfield. There we had a Girls Guild and a Boys Club and we used to put on concerts and put on Gilberts and Sullivans and all this sort of thing have dances and have luncheons and dinners

04:00 and every first Saturday in the month we used to walk from Ashfield to Dulwich Hill Masonic Hall because there were no buses and we'd dance all night and then all walk home. There would nearly be 10 or 15 of us, no cars so we used to do all that then I used to do everything a young person does, swimming, ice skating, roller skating

04:30 whatever; our home was open house, they used to call it "the do drop in" it was always open for everybody and the crowds used to come, the boys used to come, we used to go to football on a Saturday afternoon in the winter and cricket in the summer and they'd say, "Where will we go tonight? Oh let's go to a show, oh

05:00 no, lets go back to Hills." well that was our place and so all those days they used to call it the ham and beef shop, but the delicatessens these days, they used to go and buy sausages and potatoes and onions and a couple of loaves of bread and butter there would be as many as 20; 15 to 20 or more and our dining room was quite a big.... well it wasn't the dining room,

05:30 our sitting room was quite a big room so you had lino those days with a carpet on them and my father used to play the piano, he was a great pianist and as we were in our teenage years these boys and the girls used to come to our place and they'd say, "Oh well go there of a Saturday night." they used to spend nearly every Saturday night 5 to 12 my father used to say, "Righto, five to twelve." and they'd know

06:00 they'd have to go, but we had a lovely time like that but when the war broke out practically every boy that we used to have at our place and that they all sent photos of themselves and gave them to Mum. Mum was like another mother to them too and then

What did your mother and father do?

Well, Mum was in the middle of 13 children....

06:30 no 12 children. Mum was in the middle and she had to leave school at 12 she only had a couple of years schooling because other fam... the younger ones were coming on and then she had to help look after them and my grandfather had the idea that girls didn't need an education it was the boys, they had to have an education but the girls didn't really need one, their job was to stay home and look after the others.

07:00 Well then Mum went into what they call service, service in those days was really a housekeeper, she went to Windsor, relatives had a big business there and she used to go there and that and then later on she was housemaid more or less to a nursing sister in Burwood

07:30 in Chartesby Road Burwood and that's where she was when she got married.

What about your father - what did he do?

My father was a clerk on the wharves at Woolloomooloo oh booking in this that and the other and then a friend, our next door neighbours were in at Arnotts at Homebush

08:00 and Mr Logan got Dad a a job as a dispatch clerk at Arnotts and then he was only there.... oh he was there a few years, quite a few years but he died very young but that's where he was working then, as a dispatch clerk but he had a rather good education Dad.

08:30 His aunt was a school mistress in Geelong and they lived up in Sydney here the others, and when my father's mother whom I never even knew when she was having another babe or anything this Aunt, Aunt Lizzie, she took

09:00 Dad down there and Elsie his sister and she went to Church of England Grammar School and he went to the Geelong Grammar School and he could play the piano and he was quite a knowledgeable sort of man you know and that was it

And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

I have two sisters and one brother the brothers the baby of the family I'm twelve and a half years older than him.

09:30 **How did you all get on?**

Oh wonderfully still do we've got a wonderful family cause Mum cause Dad died when Mum was only married was it 20 years when Dad died 19 yeah 20 years when Dad died and she bought us all well we were grown up then we I was the eldest of course I was just on 20

10:00 when Dad died but the others were younger but 2 of us were working but the other 2 were still at school the younger sister and my little brother and so Mum used to be Mum lived to 97 so we used to have Christmas's at Mums place in Ashfield there and oh yes

10:30 we'd have Christmas all there and we were all very very close and we've remained the same ever since

And were you sad when your father died?

I was 20.

Were you sad. Did you miss him?

Oh yes yes he was one of those men, Mum was only little, Mum she was just barely five foot and Dad was 6 foot, yeah they used to call them

11:00 Long Bay and Little Coogee but Dad used to put his arm up you know and Mum used to be able to walk underneath but Mum was one of those very understanding gentle kind people, Dad was more knowledgeable than Mum in that it didn't matter what you asked Dad he either knew or he'd go and find out for you

11:30 and we found that a great help you know we'd ask Dad something and he'd say, "Oh I'm not too sure." so off he'd go and find out for us now I've found out about so and so and so and so and you know that sort of thing

And when did you leave school?

At 15 I got my intermediate now that was a sad that was a sad time for me because I loved school

12:00 and I got to the third year, had passed my intermediate and I wanted to go on. In those day it was into 5th year which was the leaving certificate because I wanted to do nursing and you had to have your leaving certificate to do nursing and it was during the depression and me being the eldest and only 2 of us working Dad was

12:30 only getting about 3 days a week work because there wasn't enough and a supplement I had I got me a job at WC Penfolds in the printing business. Well I think I cried for about 3 months every night because I wanted to go on but I couldn't and then I worked with Penfolds for about 3 well it was exactly 3 years and then I went

13:00 away up the country for a couple of months and then I came back and then I worked at Nestles at Abbotsford, the chocolate people, and then I was there until I went in the army and then I went back there after I came out of the army

What jobs, what tasks did you have to do at Nestles?

At Nestles. Well I was working in the factories making the choc, not you know wrapping the chocolates and I became a forewoman

13:30 and then I was in St John Ambulance and because I was in St John Ambulance and had a few certificates the matron, cause it was a big big concern we had a matron and if there was an accident or anything or if she wanted a day off or anything I went down into the first aid room, and then Nestles brought in a scheme whereby if you saved your

14:00 milk labels and your chocolate labels and different things, the coffee and milk and condensed milk and all those, if you saved those and you got so many points and they used to send them in post them in and we had a row about 5 girls in a row counting each letter. Well I was in charge of the gift department and we had 3 men working in the gift department

14:30 and then each parcel had to be wrapped, sent to the people who'd sent in the tokens and when the war broke out that's what I was doing, I was in charge of the gifts and the army took all our pillowslips and tea towels and they confiscated cutlery and all that so that had to close down, they wanted them for the services you see

15:00 but then I went into the army soon after that and that was it; and then when I came out I went back but I worked in the purchasing department then, typist and telephonist, you mention it I was there.

So you went to work at 15 years old. What about your other siblings your other brothers and sisters?

Well Jean that's the next one

15:30 I'm 16 months older. She was a dressmak... very high class dressmaker and she used to work in Maginley and Carpenter which was on the corner of Pitt and Campbell Street, very big place you know, high class dressmaker she was, and then Eileen.... the next one she left she didn't even go for intermediate because somebody offered her a job in the office

16:00 in the city so she took it and she was barely 15 she was 14 I think, but she became a very good secretary, she did secretarial work all her life

And when you were working sorry - Where did you work first of all?

WC Penfolds the printers

Penfolds yes, sorry, were you helping your mother with or the family with

16:30 **money?**

Well that's what I had to do that's why I had to go to work, because we weren't getting enough money because it was a very very sad time, very sad time, I don't mean for me but for the country, it was pitiful do you want to hear about that or not?

Tell me about that yes

Well earlier about the

17:00 1928s it started and gradually the country went down and down there was no work and eventually they brought in work for the dole but that wasn't even enough to keep a person, and banks closed and no jobs, no food, little

17:30 humpies sprung up all along the coast and all along the harbour shores; anywhere alongside a river, little humpies made of wood or galvanised iron and they lived and there was one place they used to call Happy Valley and that was just people who had nothing and people were starving and men used to walk

from here to Bathurst and more

18:00 and they used to hump their bluey as they used to call it which was their blanket rolled into a long like that, on their backs and a billy can and perhaps a little bag with just a few things on it. Many of them were bare footed because they couldn't afford shoes, the boys never went to school with shoes on, there was no shoes for the girls or the boys.

18:30 Mostly some of the girls I think were a little bit better off than the boys because the boys didn't mind going without shoes but everybody got hand-me-downs clothing and in those days flour and sugar used to come in calico bags so what the mothers used to do was bleach them, unbleached calico, bleach them and make kids' clothes out of them or make kids'

19:00 underpants or anything like that, it would be a coat or anything like that, it wouldn't be discarded it'd be unpicked and something, trousers made for the boys or something like that, but that was right up until it started to improve, by about '34 it was just coming back, but we still felt it and we had queues and all this sort of thing.

19:30 And money was.... people didn't have money, we were fortunate we had relatives and Emu Plains and they used to grow a lot of veg and others at Castlereagh and they used to send us a lot of vegetables and fruit and that sort of thing, we were very fortunate in that way and they even used to send a sheep sometime for our meat, they used to send it by train

20:00 and Dad used to have to walk to Croydon station and carry it home and you know that sort of thing

What about ration cards or coupons? Did you have coupons?

No we didn't have coupons 'til the war years, no you didn't have that, you just went and bought what you could - a pennyworth of broken biscuits, oh that was wonderful and if you got 6 penneth of broken biscuits oh that was

20:30 wonderful. We used to get a penneth of chips and it was a piece of newspaper rolled into a cone shape and they used to shove the chips in there and that was a penneth of chips and things like that you know, that you can't really realise unless you saw it or heard of it and no fridges of course you used to have to start with,

21:00 before the ice chests came in we used to have meat safes which used to hang and would be made of gauze with a door on it hanging up and it had a tray underneath and they had pieces of material dripping into like, into the tray to soak up the water to keep the meat or keep the butter firmer or that's how

21:30 we started and then we got a a ice chest and I s'pose you know what the ice chest was yeah, and from there we proceeded and got a a fridge you know but that's that's how we used to do it

Did you have any family members who were involved in the First World War?

Yes, my mother's younger brother was there

22:00 yeah that was the only one that I had was Mum's brother Frank; they lived at Emu Plains but yes that's the only one we had.

Did he return from the World War?

Yes yes I can barely remember him I've got photos of him of course but he came back

22:30 gassed and mustard gas and TB [Tuberculosis] and he only lived for about 5 years after the war, the TB and mustard gas chewed his lungs up and all the rest of it. It was very sad to see him, I can still see him now, he used to be propped up and you know and I was only a kid then a young kid

You've got a very clear memory of those days?

23:00 I've have a wonderfully clear memory of because I don't know why but I have. I've got a very clear memory, in fact I'm writing my memoirs out there and anything they want to know they come to me and say, "Oh ask Phyl, Phyl'll know." I don't always know the answer but no, I have very clear memories of all my life

What can you tell me about ,

23:30 **you mentioned what you what were doing when the war broke out do you remember the day that you got the news that the Second World War started?**

Oh yes yes I certainly do. I was St Johns Ambulance you see and word on September the 3rd I think wasn't it anyway, yes the thing was earlier

24:00 Chamberlain 1938, Mr Chamberlain the Prime Minister, he went to Germany because there were rumours that Germany was ready for war you see so Mr Chamberlain went over to Germany and Hitler assured him that there would be peace in our time that was 19 not sure the end of '37 or the beginning of

- 24:30 '38 somewhere about... and by '39 he had proceeded to take Europe and that was to make his Germany the fatherland. England was the motherland but he was going to make that.... oh yes we can remember it very well and in the meantime you see being in St John Ambulance too we I joined
- 25:00 that back again in 1937, and there was always that little feeling that probably there might be a war and of course it did eventuate. We even had drill, we had used to have competitions with other people you know like other first aiders the red cross
- 25:30 and others. I belonged to Ashfield Nursing Corps of St John's Ambulance where we used to hold big competitions out on Parramatta Park, Sydney Town Hall and all these places one section against another section see, which was the best ones. Anyway we won a couple of times and I was that proud you know, great big cup, won
- 26:00 the competition against so many other first aiders you had a little team of 3 or 4 whichever and you'd all be lined up with all the different teams and they'd say, "Oh you know got a broken leg or broken arm or what do you do.... or you're unconscious and all the rest." and that sort of thing you were given a paper and you had to proceed then as how you would treat them
- 26:30 so they used to call it the flora cup and I was the first one to win it for Ashfield and I was very proud then. No I've always been interested in the nursing and that that's what I wanted to do

And why did you enlist in the army?

Well I was in St John's Ambulance as I'm saying but we had to do weekend work in the hospitals

- 27:00 and from 1937 I spent nearly every weekend of my life in the hospitals learning the run of the hospital. I worked at Western Suburbs and Children's Benevolent one at Summer Hill, South Sydney Hospital, Sydney Hospital and Prince Henry Hospital and
- 27:30 we used to.... Wednesday nights my sister and I used to go into Sydney hospital into casualty we did everything like that and you know, and we'd had a lot of experience, well by that time they decided to take women into.... this is '41 they decided to take women into the army and that's when I
- 28:00 joined up then.

When did you enlist?

1941 but I didn't get called up until 1942 because the draft that was that I was to go into there was a draft to go back to go to the Middle East to relieve the girls in the middle east and the Japs came into the war and at that

- 28:30 time because these girls didn't have a way they had enough nursing orderlies they didn't want anymore until the hospitals came back and they offered me a job to take charge of the laundry and I said, "Not on your sweet life!" I said, "No way, not in the laundry." it wasn't what I wanted I thought I'd done too much nursing to go to
- 29:00 somebody who hadn't done as much and even the doctor in charge said, "Yes I agree." he said, "No just hang on a little bit longer." well I didn't go in 'til 42 then....

And what happened after you enlisted?

Well my name was down you see but I wasn't called up until '42 and

- 29:30 that was when the hospitals start coming back from the Middle East there was the 2/11th, 2/12th and all that, well the 2/11th came back to Warwick and there wasn't enough nursing staff so they sent 54 girls from Sydney on the train, we didn't know, we weren't told where we going but we were going
- 30:00 north and we all thought oh we're going you know, we're going up to New Guinea to look after the soldiers; we were bit of Florence Nightingales you know and we thought, "Oh well that'll be it." and we had to get down to Central Station one night at 8 o'clock, we had to line up. All we could take was our little handbag and a rug that's all we were allowed to take
- 30:30 the rest was put in the car, the luggage car you see, and it was the box train I don't know whether you know the box trains yeah, well they go from one side of the train to the other and hold 10 people. Well we all sat in there, the 54 of us all squashed into these little things and the train stopped and it stopped and it went and it stopped; it took us hours to get there
- 31:00 and hours and we still didn't know where we were going and we eventually stopped at Warwick railway station and the 2/11th had just arrived back from the Middle East and they took over Scots College which is about two mile out from the township

Where is Warwick?

It's past Stanthorpe over on the

- 31:30 Darling Downs

In Queensland?

Mmm, I...

In Queensland?

In Queensland yes on the Darling Downs and its oh 60 or 78 k's or something like that I don't know I couldn't tell you the exact amount from Toowoomba but its inland on the Darling, beautiful country and here we took over the college and they transported us from the

32:00 train to the college in ambulances, a fleet of ambulances yeah, all we women, I've got some photos there and all we women all piled up we had never met one another, we had never known one another and this is how we started to meet. I met one girl and she and I she used to belong to our crowd and I hadn't seen much of her we knew her very.... like she was one of our crowd and as we'd

32:30 grown up she was a dental nurse and she went one way and we didn't see much of each other and she was the only person I knew out of the 54 and some of them didn't even know that. Most of them had never ever been away from home. I had been to Queensland once because you travelled if you went interstate you were a travelled person wonderful, anyway I had been because I had a friend

33:00 at Tweed heads but that was beside the point and so that went on then we got up to there and classrooms were turned into dormitories or some of them were dormitories and there was one turned into a ward, a couple of classrooms joined together turned into the first ward we had there and the rest

33:30 were tents.

And how long did you stay at Warwick altogether?

I was there till '44, the middle of '44 and then I went up to the tablelands

What happened when you went up to the tablelands?

Oh well first of all the 2/11th they came and there was a Sydney officer in charge, it was George Demming

34:00 his name was Dr George Demming and he was in charge, he was the CO [Commanding Officer] but it was a South Australian and Western Australian unit mostly, most of the staff were from there and when they were going down to New Guinea they were going to take the VAs but they didn't take any, they only took the trained

34:30 sisters with them and then the 2/12th came back from Sollum and they took over from the 2/11th so we were with the 2/12th then they went to New Guinea and left us behind again, we were all along the draft to go and that's when we were sent to the 2/2nds some of us few of us were sent up to the 2/2nds on the Tablelands.

Ok I'm getting a little bit lost there with the...

Well am I talking too much.

35:30 **No just the different battalions I'm glad you can remember them all, gosh you're amazing.**

Oh well each each hospital had an AGH, Australian General Hospital, and it started from one and started from one and every hospital military hospital had a number well if it was a AGH, Australian General Hospital,

36:00 but they were all numbered you see and this is where I'm confusing you, 2/11th, 2/12th, 2/2nd yeah.

So you've gone to the Atherton Tablelands:

I went up to the Ather... yeah

And so how long did you spend at Atherton?

Oh I was only about

36:30 16 months there because the war finished. We were already packed to go to New Guinea and they had closed the hospital down because most of the boys had left the Atherton tablelands cause there were thousands up there that was the staging camp, and they'd nearly all gone to New Guinea by this time and so they had closed the hospital down

37:00 and we were to go over to relieve for the hospital at Lae and so the CO [Commanding Officer] thought it would be a good idea seeing that we were going in the tropics that we did a tropical course you know, so Trinity Beach in those days, that's out of Cairns, the next beach round from Cairns, was all country and there was one house on it and that was the training, the jungle

37:30 training for the men on the beach. They had a contraption of wire and rope and that about as high as a deck of a ship and the boys used to have to climb up that and jump in the water at high tide but we

didn't have to do that but most of us learnt how to climb over the top of course we didn't have to but we did, but

38:00 we had jungle training for 2 weeks.

And what do you remember where you were when the war finished?

Oh yes up in the Atherton Tablelands I've got a story there. Mother kept all my letters and this letter of Mum's has been printed many many times in various places of just what we did and how we reacted

38:30 and that. I wrote to Mum that next day you see and that letters.... I've got the copy of it there.

Yes, I'd like to come back and talk a bit later about that letter; at the moment I'm just trying to get a picture of where where you went so after you were at the Atherton Tablelands for about 16 months?

Yes and then they pulled the hospital

39:00 down ready to go to New Guinea and there were ships coming up the reef there but there were subs, Japanese subs every time we went. Anyway there was a ship on the way up and we were to go to Cairns and then embark in Cairns and then this particular night....

Tape 2

00:30 **So I'd just like to pick up where we were when the tape finished, you were just about to tell me when the war finished and the hospital was closed down at Atherton - tell me about what happened when the hospital closed down and what you did next?**

Well after we'd done our jungle training which we thought was absolu... we were so fit, we climbed, went through the jungle and did route marching and

01:00 got a gorgeous song about it we made up, and then when we got back to camp we were ready to leave the war finished. Well we lived in tents as I'm saying there were 3 of us in one parti... our tent and we'd just gone to bed and there was a terrible din coming from a unit, a transport unit about

01:30 oh, quarter of a mile away, you could hear them echoing across, you know this is at Atherton at Rocky Creek out of Atherton near Tolga. Anyway we thought ah ah, a beano night for the men, they're all shot they're all drunk or something, there was shouting going on and then the next thing there was people running around the hospital, the tents, the hospital

02:00 itself had gone but we were still in our tents and that, we were still living there you see and they were saying, "War's over! War's over!" and we said, "Oh no!" so with that the three of us hopped out of bed in our pyjamas, put our slippers on, great coats and they said, "You've got to go round to the mess, the CO's coming to tell us about the war's over, the wars over!" well there were people running everywhere so

02:30 we got over round to our mess and the CO and couple of the other officers said, "Well the war is over we'll all have a drink, a round." so everybody, we non drinkers still drank, had a drink, cheering and whistling, oh well the boys did the whistling but cheering and everything so then the CO said, "Who's going to come to the

03:00 officers' mess, to the Sergeants' mess, well those days there was the ORs [Other Ranks], there was the sergeants and there was the officers you see, all different messes, so we went to the Sergeants' mess, so we lacongged [conga line]there all along around the hospital grounds we lacongged around with the CO in the front you know and then we went into the sergeants' mess.

03:30 Well they were in all sorts of dress array, some had pyjamas and some just had great coats on, well we presumed they just had great coats on because about 50 women all you know, with lacongering into their mess and of course there was more shouting and clapping and singing and all the rest of it and then a few of the sergeants went for their lives

04:00 when we arrived and then they came back dressed so we all thought well all they had on was a great coat but anyway that was only our supposition you know, so anyway then after that they said, "Oh well, we're going to the Officers mess now." the sergeant said, so off we went to the officers' mess and more shouting and singing and that and then they said, "Oh we're going back to the AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] mess so we went back.

04:30 There were patients, a few patients that...there was another hospital took over just for a small.... and there were patients there, they were in all ways of dress, they were only in pyjamas and we were there and then the boys went and got the drums and somebody got the bugles and goodness knows whatnot and the din was on, anyway there was one there was the Matron, she was a....

05:00 when it was all the war was over and all the shouting and the singing out and the clapping was going on

she said, "Oh go back to bed, don't be so stupid." she said, "Nothing to get excited about." so we thought, "Ooh, we'll get her out of bed and put her under the cold shower." and then we thought, "Oh we'd better not, we'd only come off second best the next day." but anyway this went on until

05:30 we went to bed at 3 o'clock and we got in the three of us and we started talking and then dozed off but there were people wandering around everywhere shouting and clapping and then the boys built a great big bonfire and that and the fire engines got going and all that sort of thing and then the next morning we had to have a parade and 7 o'clock you'd never seen so many blurry eyed people in your

06:00 life, but that's how we spent it really excited, really thrilled and then as we talked it over we thought, "Well isn't that wonderful that it has come there'll be no more fighting there'll be no more young lives lost or anything like that." that was the serious part of it as we talked we thought, "Well yes it's wonderful." you know, but anyway that's how we spent that night.

06:30 **So what happened when you got news of your next posting?**

Well they said right we're going down to Darling in Victoria and taking over the.... it was, I think it was a hospital school or something or rather down there down Victoria, out of Melbourne there Darling, and it was

07:00 freezing cold, that was in October we went down there and that was to nurse POWs [Prisoners of War] coming back from the concentration camps and that and so that was to be our job which was their job and then they said that there was going to be an occupation force sent to Japan anybody wanted to volunteer;

07:30 so quite a lot volunteered and fortunately there was only four from our unit because they came from all over Australia to go to Japan with the occupation forces and I was one of the four that was chosen so that's how I came to go to Japan then, and that was in January and then in January they went on leave

08:00 and we left in March to go over to Japan

How did you travel to Japan?

By the hospital ship Manunda that went from number six Darling Harbour prior to that we had premeds and war needles and all new clothing

08:30 and we were at Burwood up near Woodstock there you know, and that's where we had to.... we were there for oh, several weeks having our medications and our new uniforms from a Kew store and all our briefing and we even had a march down Burwood with a band and then a farewell speech down in Burwood park about

09:00 how we had to live up to what we were chosen for blah blah blah.... to be proper nurses and to look after and do the right thing, oh you know this sort of thing, but that's what we had there and then on what was it the 9th of March it was, and we left Darling Harbour

This is in 1946?

Yeah 1946,

09:30 left Darling Harbour on the hospital ship Manunda and this is where you were always meeting you get to know so many people in your group where you're working and then you change and then you get another lot to, you know, but what it was, everybody was like a big family we were all away from home,

10:00 there was nobody near their homes and we were always stuck out in paddocks, this is my experience I was never in.... well it was a big hospital but I was never in a stationed hospital like Concord or anywhere like that, I was always in these big general hospitals and we were all away from home, they're from Western Australia and everywhere you see, not just Sydney girls but everywhere and

10:30 you sort of you confided with them and they confided with you, "Mail time." they'd say. "Oh there's a letter from your boyfriend or here's a letter from your mother." we knew one another's families although we'd never met one another's families and they knew about our friends and they became our family and I would say they we were as close if not closer than than most families are still.

11:00 **I'd really like to come back and talk more about your mateship and comradeship but just take me to back to travelling to Japan, I believe you were going to Kure in Japan which is near Hiroshima what did you see when you first got there?**

Well when we took 16 days to go there and then we disembarked with the band playing Waltzing Matilda, British

11:30 band on the pontoon, and then we had to go on a ship, a boat, oh what would you call it? A little junk sort of a thing across Kure Harbour to Etajima and that was the Japanese Naval Academy and the British Commonwealth. General Northcott was the head of the British and the Americans they had

12:00 the northern part of Japan, they had they were up around Tokyo and that sort of thing, we didn't have much to do with the Americans because we were in our zone and they were in their zone and so that's how that came about, but we just took over the Naval Academy there and Hiroshima was only the next

bay around and

12:30 of course we all wanted to get to Hiroshima

Why?

Well we'd heard about the bomb dropping, about how dreadful it was and to see what devastation there was and that sort of thing, that's one of the things we had we wanted to do, to go and see Hiroshima, anyway we did; we went on many, many times went there but you have no

13:00 idea, just the devastation, it was the most horrific thing that anybody could ever think of because there wasn't one building left standing that wasn't reinforced concrete and they became just shells and for a six mile radius there was just nothing. I've got a lot of photos there to show you, there was nothing, there wasn't even a

13:30 tree or a lamppost left and there wasn't a building, there wasn't a house and what was worse there were very few people that escaped it and when they did, some of them did, oh it was pitiful to see them; they were burnt beyond recognition some of them, and see nobody'd known what the atomic bomb would do it was the first time

14:00 an atomic bomb had been used in war and if a lot of people think well it shouldn't have been done, it shouldn't have been done, we have a different idea because we realise the dreadful things the Japanese had done to our prisoners of war and that sort of thing and the Japanese were definitely close to Australia you know, and

14:30 that sort of thing, and the dreadful things that they had done and they were ready to take Australia when the war ended and the only thing that ended the war was the atomic bomb they couldn't cope with that no wonder but yeah a 6 mile radius of just debris.

Who were you nursing at Kure?

Who was I nursing?

Yeah, who were your patients?

Oh well there were 10,000 Australian men

15:00 sent over so they had to have an Australian hospital. There was a British hospital and an Indian hospital.... see it's a British Commonwealth and we they had sent 10,000 Australian men as peacekeepers to destroy all their ammunitions and that they had burrows through into the hills full of ammunition and they used to blow, the men

15:30 worked very hard, you think, oh yeah they went to Japan you know, nothing to it, but there were quite a few killed because they had to demolish the all their war things and even in Kure there was a.... there were docks at Kure, there was a whole, big, dry dock full of little

16:00 Japanese submarines, but the one man used to get in and commit suicide, hari kiri you know, well they all had to be destroyed and they had to be stripped of all of their military and we took over their Naval Academy which was quite good you know, that's the one time I did live in it was in there but we had that pretty

16:30 rough too to start with.

Were the kind of injuries worse at Kure than in Australia - the kind of injuries?

Oh no no no no, there was only more medical there was quite a few accidents you know, travelling accidents but it was more medical because there was so much cholera and staphylitis

17:00 all these terrible things, TBs, and we had more of that type of thing because there weren't wounded men or anything you know that we had to look after.

So those kind of diseases were because the after effect of the bomb being dropped is that what you're saying?

No no no no, not really, perhaps we

17:30 had a break out of mumps, we had a breakout of measles, we had an outbreak of chicken pox and then there'd be others, perhaps ulcers or ulcered tummies or something like that or an accident where they break their leg or something like that or a slight operation like appendix or something like that appendicitis you know, the appendix or something like that, it wasn't

18:00 heavy nursing like it was during the war because we were over there in the peacekeeping we were all A1 people the boys were, we were, we all had to be A1 medically.

Did you nurse any Japanese people?

Any Japanese people we went to quite a lot of Japanese things, we went to Japanese homes but we didn't really....

- 18:30 we went to a lot of everything that was on in Japanese festivals and all that sort of thing, went to like little tea parties and that sort of thing in some of the homes and that, but we had so much to do ourselves that we didn't really get into the Japanese life except that we each two of us had one Japanese girl between us who was our house girl and we'd never been so well looked after, they used to wash our hair for us and brush our hair and give us a massage and we never had to do any washing or ironing or anything like that and they used to do all our uniforms and there was a YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] run by the New Zealanders over in
- 19:00 Kure and we only had one day a week off and we used to go over in the boat and spend our day there and of course we were in great demand because there were to start with only 80 Australian women there and 10,000 Aussies you know but we had a wonderful time in that respect but there was a.... the men were,
- 20:00 we didn't trust the men, they were very arrogant, most arrogant, but they.... well this was another thing we were afraid of too how would they treat us how would they but nobody was ever molested or anything like that because I think the bomb frightened them so much that they thought you know oh no I s'pose we'd better....

20:30 What else would you like about that, anything?

How long were you at Kure?

Etajima I was there 16 months when we left we had to sign up for 18 months, but my mother became very ill and I went home on leave that's another long

21:00 story too.

So you returned to Australia in '47?

June '47

And your mother was sick?

Yes

Would you like to tell me about that story?

Yes, well a message came through from Victoria Barracks, the Doctor who Mum was seeing thought she had cancer, she'd had a lot of haemorrhages and oh, she was very ill

21:30 and they were going to operate and they didn't know whether it would be successful or not and they thought I should have been home being the eldest and everything, so they went down the Doctor, we got in touch with Victoria Barracks and they sent a telegram over to say that I was to return immediately so I didn't do the 18 months most

22:00 of them did and a lot did more, but that's why I didn't do it and then.... Iwakuni. that's the airbase there, they didn't have any flights coming home and eventually they said this was on the Wednesday, and on the Friday morning they said to be ready at 4 o'clock there'd be a launch to pick us up take us to Iwakuni and we'd be flying

22:30 home the next day but that's another long funny story that one.

Tell me about that one.

You want to know? Well the next morning we flew out from Iwakuni and we went to, I dear I went to say it then, oh dear isn't that dreadful? All the Yanks were.... wait a minute I'll think of it; anyway we went there for lunch

23:00 **because it was a DC-3 and we had an English crew who were coming home to Australia for leave they had never flown a DC-3 before and they had never been to Australia so of course with that, the seats are down the sides of the plane, nice hard wooden seats you know and we had 16 on the plane**

23:30 **but they wouldn't take two girls, we had to have three so two of my friends said you know, they were asked would they? They didn't do there 18 months either, but would they like to come home? Well one girl from Western Australia, Joan Freeman, her mother was ill so she said yes, she'd go and then my other friend had never been in a plane before and she said, well hardly any body had**

24:00 **anyway in those days, and so the three of us went there and after that on the way out we hit a tropical storm and the plane rocked and jumped and round the circles, like round the clouds and the great clouds going up and we went round them and that and rocked and dropped and up and that and each bit of bolt of**

24:30 **lightning looked as though it was hitting the plane you know, so we when we had to go the next course there was no facilities, no eating, no toilets or anything so we had to stop every so**

often for pit stops you see, which we did we and going when we hit this storm I got air sick, really air sick

25:00 **and they had forgotten to put the bags in and so all they had was a big map of Japan and that's how I said goodbye to Japan anyway, for lunch.**

Did you throw up onto some map of Japan?

That was my farewell to Japan

Sorry, that's just very funny

So anyway then we had lunch there. Well I didn't have any lunch because I was just too ill

25:30 you know, I can't I can hardly remember what we did there I was so... and then we went on then to Clark Field and that's in Manila, Clark Field there, well that was funny, we landed in Clark Field and we had to stay the night there because the planes were so slow

26:00 then and this plane, DC-3, had seen service in the islands and then it went to Japan and they were sending it home to scrap you see, and the English crew who had never been to Australia they wouldn't travel at night because they didn't know exactly what you see, so therefore we had to have

26:30 stops every morning tea, dinner, lunch etc so we got to Clark Field and the one of the Yank sarges 'cause there were only Yanks there and the American Sergeant had his board and his pen and he says, "I dunno what I'm gonna do with you gals, we've never had Australian gals here before, as a matter a fact we haven't got any woman here." so he said,

27:00 "You'll just have to.... I don't know whata I'm gonna do with you where am I gonna sleep you I don't know!" so the next thing he said, "Ahh got it!" so here's the three of us, all we were allowed was our little suitcase and our little hand purse, that's all we were allowed to take, everything else had to be left in Japan and packed and sent home by ship you see, so we had our little change of

27:30 clothes in it so we walked with him chatting away you know and we came to a long wooden building with a verandah right along and doors coming off it like that and he walked us along there and a stairway as we walked along the Japs, oh the Japs what am I talking about? The Yanks were sticking their heads out, "Oh jeez!" you know, and giving us whistles and that and he said,

28:00 he took us up to the last room upstairs and he said, "Listen here, if I were you," he said, "When you go the bathroom," he said, "All go together." he said, "Because there's only one bathroom there and the men have never seen Australian girls before." so we slept the night there. Oh then we had dinner at the officers' mess there and they gave us a dollar to spend, we wanted to change some money out of our

28:30 pay to buy something at the P&C because the Americans have wonderful P&Cs [shops for military personnel] you know that you could buy all sorts of things, so they gave us a dollar, we went there all we could buy was the handkerchief. I've still got the handkerchief, its gone yellow its not worth anything, but had we kept our little money American money, it would have been quite a valuable piece but of course we didn't know those days.

29:00 Anyway the next morning we started.... so the next day we got to Morotai and there we were in little huts in Morotai, we were at the sergeants' air force base there and we had dinner there and we went to a show and oh we had a swim in the Pacific for the first time for over 18 months you know,

29:30 and back on the Pacific Ocean so wonderful, so we had a swim and we had a nice little hut, nice bedding and everything it was lovely and so we were off again the next morning and we got about a hundred miles out of Darwin we were flying at 13,000 feet which wasn't very high because it was an old plane see, so

30:00 we got about a hundred mile, no land in sight and there's only two engines on the DC-3 and the first engine went "whoop whoop whoop whoop whoop" and cut we just dropped down to 9000 feet oh.... and of course then we had to put our Mae Wests [lifejackets] on and goodness knows what and then the next thing "whoop whoop whoop whoop" and the second engine went we had none

30:30 so we thought, "Oh this is it." we had our exit the ladies out first and swim for your life and the Captain said, "I think we'll be right." he said, "We won't dive, we'll flop." he said. "It might give us a chance all to get out." so we all had our Mae Wests on and they did a jettison a whole lot of stuff you know

31:00 and then all of a sudden one engine: "whop whop whop" and it started but it was down to 3000 feet then which is only, in a plane its only very low and he said....well we were all singing Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer and he said, "Well I think we might be able to float into Darwin." and luckily it was the most beautiful calm windy day and

31:30 he said if it had been a rough day we'd a been... that'd been it.

What's a Mae West?

Oh don't you know what a Mae West? Well Mae West, you know of Mae West, she had a big boosy [bosom] you know, well a Mae West was a safety helmet a safety what's'isname that you put over, you

went round you here like that to keep you afloat you see it had to

- 32:00 be blown up and then you put this sort of vest onto strapped it all on and that was a Mae West that's what they.... I didn't realise you wouldn't know what a Mae West was. Anyway we did float and the next thing there was that much excitement everybody's looking out, "Land land!" there was Darwin and we got to the airport at Darwin, the airstrip
- 32:30 and as we hit the ground that one engine cut out and we bounced and we rocked along the tarmac and they thought we were going to crash on the tarmac so we were all you know hanging onto one another and thinking well this is it we've missed the sea but we might hit the land you know but anyway all of a sudden it stopped with a jerk and we were all thrown everywhere,
- 33:00 none of us got hurt but you know we were all hanging on sort of thing so then we went to the barracks at Darwin for the night and they had to work all night on the plane and we were to leave at 4 o'clock the next morning to come across to Cloncurry and they couldn't....
- 33:30 Joan this is the one from Western Australia she left at 4 o'clock but we didn't leave til 8 o'clock in the morning and the next stop was Cloncurry so we stopped at Cloncurry, oh we had lunch there at Cloncurry 'cause we had food, lovely food Australian food, our food was shocking all the time we were there, absolutely dreadful food and course back on Aussie starting at
- 34:00 Darwin and then Cloncurry we were taken by taxis from there into a Greek cafe in Cloncurry that was our lunch break stop you see, and then we went on then to Charleville. By this time it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon and the men didn't want the.... what's is names didn't want to fly but when we got to Charleville
- 34:30 the same thing happened as soon as we touched ground the motors cut out and we bounced and we rocked and goodness know what again and we three girls plus the officers were billeted in the hotel there at Charleville; Charleville Hotel the best one in the town you see, but the others had to be billeted all round the place. Well that night was
- 35:00 the most lovely. We had a lovely bath and then the dinner was roast lamb, I've never forgotten it - roast lamb and apple pie and oh we thought that was wond... we hadn't tasted that for over 18 or 15 months or so nothing like that you se, so that was great so the next morning they said, "You'll all have to be ready because they've worked on
- 35:30 the plane all night and once they start the engines going they won't be able to turn them off so we've got taxis all lined up that as soon as we get the motors going you'll all be taken to the airstrip by taxis." so then it came 12 o'clock and the dinner gong went and we thought, "Oh you beaut where going to have a steak or something today." you know and then
- 36:00 they said, "All personnel please... the taxis' waiting." so we didn't have any lunch and we got out to the airport and they had the two motors going by this time and then they ... on Schofield then and then the same thing happened again as soon we hit the ground the motors cut out and that was our trip.

Were you worried during that

36:30 **trip?**

Oh of course we were, of course we were, wouldn't you be? My word we thought, well we accepted it, we thought this is it definitely it, when you've only got two engines and they've both cut out.... oh yes we were quite certain, told one another how we loved each other and you know we'd all be together and don't forget to swim away from the plane, swim as hard as you can away from the plane

37:00 and the men had to follow and the crew were going to be the last off this was all arranged you see, oh yes of course we were afraid, we didn't panic but we all felt it, we thought well our times up we've had it.

Were you confident that you knew what to do?

Oh yes, we were pretty well trained in doing things that we'd never done before

37:30 and taking orders and knowing exactly what to do. See when you're nursing and that sort of thing the doctors and that, they're in charge and they tell you what to do and you've gotta be right on the ball and you must be there and you must do your things at the right time and all that sort of thing I mean that was something that was instilled in us that you had to use your own nous a little bit you know, and also

38:00 take orders and know what's being told to you you know, so that's it.

Did you - so where did you land?

Schofield that's just near Richmond

And how did you get from Richmond back to....?

The air force put a bus on and took us home well Jess lived at Wollongong so we took her to the railway

and they took me home to Ashfield.

38:30 **And did you go and visit your mother straight away?**

Oh yes she didn't know I was coming home they didn't tell her and she was in the Masonic hospital at Ashfield and I went straight over I just dropped my things in I only had a bag and that sort of thing and went straight over to see Mum, well she cried, we hugged and you know it was.... she was so thrilled that I was home.

And she

39:00 **was OK?**

Yes when they operated they found it was a ruptured ulcer and she didn't have the cancer, well she lived then until '97 she only died in 1980 so she went on living but that was my trip home. That's a really amazing story I know that we're coming to the end of the tape so we might just have a little break.

Tape 3

00:34 **Ok Phyllis, when you last were talking to us you mentioned that you'd just arrived back in Australia your mother had met you arrived home and....?**

No no, I went to.... my mother was in hospital she didn't meet me.

Oh sorry, ok you've come back home you got back in touch with your mother?

Yeah well as soon as I got home I just dropped my bags and went straight up to the hospital to see my

01:00 Mum.

You'd been away in Japan for 16 months is that right? What sort of reunion was it?

Mum

With your mother?

Oh well she cried and I cried and we hugged each other and she could believe I was home and you know in all that time I was in the army I only had three leaves at home, I only went home three times in all those

01:30 years because I was always right away from home up you know up in the sticks and away there and you only got leave whenever they could give it to you or whenever they think oh yes you haven't had leave for a while you can go but you'd go 12 months and never be home.

Did that make for a hard time?

It did at first yes, well we used to

02:00 be sometimes.... we always had a lot of mixed feelings and sometimes you had your good days and your bad days and as I say your friendships, you confessed to your friends whether you know if you had a down day or if you were jolly and had a good day and we'd all join in and that sort of thing you know and we'd talk about the patients and talk about this that and the other and we got to

02:30 know one another very well we still do, we're still friends with most of them you know, most of them have gone now though, but we still kept up that friendship.

Tell me about a good day.

'Bout the good days?

Yeah or a typical good day, what would that be like?

Well now, say for example when we first had the boys down from New Guinea they

03:00 put up the tents at the hospital and they brought all these I've got photos out there, they brought all these boys down to Brisbane put them on what they call the hospital train it was a a hospital carriages made into wards and they brought them out to the hospital and then on a siding you know there's only one line where the hospital was that was going out to Yam

03:30 Gam and Killarney in the Downs and it was only a single line. Well the hospital ship used to come there and you'd get oh hundreds a few hundred or so more, well we'd all be on duty then and you'd have to work and they were terribly mutilated some of them it was really sad ,boys 18, 19 and the amputations

04:00 and oh the shrapnel wounds and oh, and some of the wounds were really really bad you know, they'd turned septic and all these sort of things and then you'd be working like mad all night we used to

- work....the shift was 8 hours a day 6 days a week that was your normal shift; well it was nothing to work up
- 04:30 to 16 or 17 hours in the day and because each shift couldn't finish what they had to do before the next shift came and we were overlapping one another's shifts like that and then you'd see all these boys and some of them a lot of them too were mentally upset and deranged and then you had to try and help them
- 05:00 and pacify them and then you'd be looking after them, some of them died but a lot didn't of course but terribly terribly ill that needed a lot of care and they were down days when you think oh my goodness you know, poor things and that sort a thing and you'd go back together and you'd say, "Oh yeah you ought to see this fellow or that fellow, oh it was terrible
- 05:30 today." and that sort of thing and you were very down and then you thought, "Well that's not what I'm here for, I'm here to look after them." you know and you'd sort a thing and then we'd you'd say oh well we'll go up to them today and we'll brighten them up and on our broken shift we'd go into the wards and we'd go in and talk with them because we had not much else to do because we were out in the bush you know, but we
- 06:00 wanted to do it and we'd go in and we'd walk around and talk to them, we used to write letters for them and first thing they did was roll cigarettes. I had to roll.... never had a cigarette in my mouth and I never knew how to roll a cigarette and those days the first thing they did was to give the boys cigarettes, well mostly they used to give them a tin tobacco and the papers, well I
- 06:30 started and I wrapped but half of it fell on the floor and of course the boys used to say, "Oh that's precious that's precious!" you know and so one of the fellows got a piece of wood about that long and put a scoop in it so that I could put the paper in that and lick, well some of them then couldn't hold it some of them their arms or they were to sick or something so I used to have to light it
- 07:00 for them and I coughed and I spluttered and you know that sort of thing but I had to do it somebody had to do it, and I had to, oh well if you were there and then you'd hold it for them and they'd take a puff you know like that and they were the sort of down things. But then the up things, we used to go there and we used to laugh and we used to talk and like at Christmas time there six o'clock in the
- 07:30 morning they had carol singing, one of the sisters organised it got a photo of that too, all of the sisters organised it and those off duty went round from ward to ward singing carols and that sort a thing well the boys that were up a bit that could walk, went out into the bush and got Australian mistletoe they hung it at the entrance to
- 08:00 the ward and woe betide you if you didn't missed it you know, and then the fellows that were in traction it'd be on their pillows and they'd say, "Oh hey nurse, will you fix my pillows?" and of course you'd go over to fix their pillows next there'd be two arms around you they'd be giving you a hug and you were underneath the mistletoe well we we just used to make fun of it you
- 08:30 know, and then we used to take the boys down to the river, we were on the banks of the Condamine River and we used to take a little walk down to the road; they weren't allowed go on their own and when you were off you used to take them down there and then we used to often sit down there and catch yabbies with a bent pin and a piece of string and a bit of raw meat on the end
- 09:00 and one time there we had a kerosene tin full of yabbies and by this time it was still tent wards but they had put up a a wooden building between the two ends of the ward with the.... had a stove in it and the doctors' room and the sisters' room and the ablutions you know the showers and that in there.
- 09:30 Well they had a kerosene tin full of yabbies so those days there was no sliced of bread it was before sliced bread, we used to cut as much as 10 and 12 loaves of bread a day with the knife, we all had calluses on our hands and that and the boys loved that so they had this tin of kerosene tin of yabbies still alive
- 10:00 and with salt water and they put those on the stove and the poor little things used to hop out of the kerosene tin, those square 4 gallon kerosene tins onto the stove, they'd pick 'em up put 'em back in until they turned red; I couldn't eat them but the boys had fresh bread and butter and yabbies and they're the sort of things you used to do.
- 10:30 The people in Warwick were marvellous you know to us and that they used to invite us to their homes and we used to go there on our day off and out on the farms and that sort of thing and pitch hay and that sort of thing, but they were our days, we were happy and bright and you know everything was right and then sometimes you'd think, "Oh gee I wish I
- 11:00 was at home. I wonder what they're doing at home?" and somebody'd say, "Oh well I bet they're doing so and so and so and so." and then the conversation would get round to all sorts of things but that's what we used to do and we used to put on little impromptu... in the rooms there in the dormitory where some of them were, we used to put on little impromptu concerts and the two girls had to sing the same songs every time we put on these concerts it's
- 11:30 just how we spent our time dancing and....

It sounds like you had an amazing variety of experiences and

Oh we did.

And good times?

Oh I think I was more fortunate than most of them for the simple reason that everything I was in was a new adventure where most of them had to work in the big hospitals be it Melbourne, Sydney like Concord or

12:00 somewhere like that and some of them never got away from that but I was never in a place like that I was always out in the bush that's why I think I was more fortunate than some of them.

We'll certainly come back and talk more about those times so - they sound or you tell them in great detail - it's wonderful but you would have obviously or when you came back to Australia

When I came back to Australia

You were discharged on your arrival back here

12:30 **or much longer after that?**

Did I what?

When were you discharged?

Ah, Marrickville yes I was discharged soon after

Soon after?

Yeah and it was a very very strange feeling for I'd been away for 5 years, just over 5 years I'd been away from home and only returned home like

13:00 about three times in that time we got a months leave but we only came home about three times in that 5 years that I came with the family. Well in the meantime, the 5 years, my young sister had grown up a bit more and young brother he you know just finished school and that sort of thing and the only real contact you had with your family was

13:30 through the letters, through mail, you didn't have personal contact with them if you know what I mean, you didn't have facial contact, you just had to have letters or photos or something like that and you'd think, "Oh yeah, I wish I was home." you know and that sort of thing, well when you did or when I did get home I found it so suburban

14:00 that I was at a loss more or less because for 5 years I'd been living in the bush in tents most of the time except in Japan I lived in tents, so therefore I was used to tent life I was used to all my different friends and the routine in life you were told what to do when to go and what to wear.

And you missed that?

Yeah you missed

14:30 it, you were a bit...you missed it and you thought, "Oh gee what will I wear or what will I do?" to yourself you know you'd think oh yeah I'd better do so and so today because your life is planned out for you more or less for that time that you would go on duty and such and such a time you'd come off you'd wear this you only ever wore the same things

15:00 to get into something different and I felt very hemmed in like in Frederick Street in Ashfield there, it's a terribly busy place now but it was even busier, like its a main street and being suburban the houses seemed to be hemming me in and you felt all hemmed in, it was a funny feeling that you were used to open spaces and trees and

15:30 you know, and that sort of thing yeah, I found it very, very difficult for quite a few or quite a long while there to readjust you had to readjust your whole life.

Did you find yourself back in a job?

Oh yes yes I went back to Nestles they came and I went back into the.... I was in the purchasing department of Nestles at Abbotsford

16:00 oh yes I had no trouble getting back to a job you know.

Was it the same job that you'd left?

It wasn't the same job no, the other job I had was in charge of the gift shop where they used to send in labels and the people used to send in labels so many points for a coffee and milk or

16:30 so many per points for condensed milk and so many points for a chocolate wrapper and then according to how many they sent in we had gifts and they could state what they wanted, well it might have been a couple of pillow slips or it might have been cutlery or tea towels or table cloth or those sort of things

that you could repost.

Did you still feel suited to that sort

17:00 **of a job?**

Did I do what?

Did you still feel that you were suited to that sort of a job?

Suited?

mm

Oh yes I got on quite well with it yeah, they wouldn't have given it to me had they thought that and when I came back they hadn't thought that I could do it they wouldn't put me in the purchasing department I was the only girl in the purchasing department with three men you know, that was purchasing and what they purchased at

17:30 Nestles was terrific you know because of all the ingredients and that sort of thing.

And you said you were living back at Ashfield at this time back in the family home?

Yes.

What was family life like?

Family.... oh good. Oh we sort of picked up it took a bit of while for us to for them to accept me and me to

18:00 accept them because they were leading a different life to what I had led and what I was leading and 5 years before and they'd all grown up 5 years older and they went different ways but as far as the family goes we went on where we left off more or less but then I had so many outside friends and they had made outside

18:30 friends, work friends and we went our different ways a bit that way, but in the home we were just the same.

Did you want to return to nursing when you arrived home?

No. I got married instead. A lot of the girls did but Nestles had a big welcome home in December for

19:00 the employees that had come home you know, it was a dance down at a hall down at Leichhardt, a lodge hall and the men and that in the meantime when the war first started they made me secretary of a comforts fund, they had two representatives from each department which ended up about twelve

19:30 of them and they elected me as secretary of that, well I used to write all the letters and type them up and we used to send them, comforts funds and that, and I used to get lots of letters back to me because I was the secretary you see, and so I did all that sort of thing and they knew what I did and I think they.... and when I came back they called in to see me to see

20:00 if I'd go back there, back to Nestles, back in the office there of the purchasing department so that's what I did.

If you missed the army service or the...?

Oh yes you missed it, missed it terribly. Well you can imagine, five solid years being told what to do and where to go and what to wear and respect your seniors you know sort a thing yes sir,

20:30 no sir.

Was it the nursing that you missed or something else?

It was the what?

Did you miss the nursing itself or was there something else that you missed?

Oh yes, well I looked after my Mum and yes you did miss that and you often you know, quite a lot of them did do there you know, afterwards they went back in but no I met my husband again at this dance

21:00 and he took me out the next Friday night and that was the end of it I got married after that

You said you met your husband again, did you know him before?

Well I didn't really know..... I knew who he was, I had seen him but they had over 600 went from Nestles to the war you know and I was the first woman to go of the crowd but you got to know a lot of

21:30 people you didn't know them personally very well 'cause there'd be about a 1000 people there you see unless you came in contact with them and I knew who he was and then I used to get a letter it used to be from Frank's sister, "Dear Miss Hill, My brother Frank has received a parcel of such and such a thing

from the Nestles would you please thank them all."

22:00 anyway she always said, well little did I ever know Miss Hill was going to be my sister-in-law but then we started going out and then got married yeah and had the kids you know so that kept me going and then I've been involved in all sorts of things.

Were you still looking after your mother at the time of your marriage?

No, well she was picking up by then and I had the other two sisters at home and my brother and

22:30 so I more or less was only home a couple of years before I left again

And you soon started your own family?

My own family yes yes, a daughter and 3 boys

Did any of your family follow in your steps in the service?

My daughter has been in the army reserves now for 27 years, she's an officer in the army and

23:00 she's still in the army reserves but she works at Concord Hospital she's a pathologist there and that's one of her things, she does a bit of everything everywhere.

So she's a part of the army nursing corps?

She was, she's not now, she was in the nursing corps but now she's in charge of

23:30 cadets, the school cadets but she's still there.

Were you proud to see her go into the nursing service?

Does she what?

Sorry.... were you proud to see her go into the nursing service?

Well yes, well she's the pathologist, when she was at school she wanted to be a school teacher she went to Burwood Girls High and she wanted to be a school teacher and they said she had the wrong temperament that

24:00 she was too soft, that they would walk all over her, the high school kid,s oh they said she would make a very good junior school teacher but that's not what she wanted, she wanted to be a high school teacher of science and geology and a few things like that you know she had picked out and we saw a few counsellors and they all said the same thing she didn't have the right

24:30 temperament for a high school so they suggested doing pathology and I said that's what I'd like, and I said I knew a fellow she could have got into some of these medical places you know, make the pills and all the rest of it you know, and they said, "Oh no she can do something better than that."

25:00 so they suggested that she do pathology so that's how she started.

Are you involved with any associations based on your army service?

Oh goodness wherever I go I usually get something to do you know, I was in the AAMWS I'm still in that after the war when they started up the AAMWS association I was in that

25:30 and I play indoor bowls and at the school I was always at the little school down the bottom here where the kids went I was President there I always seem to get something given to me to do you know and then I was always in P&C [Parents and Citizens Association] at the schools and worked in the canteens and that sort of thing and then when my husband

26:00 died I started doing daycare that's 22 years ago and I'm still doing it looking after oldies and it's run by Canterbury Hurlstone Park RSL [Returned and Services League]and Ashfield RSL and Ashfield's dropped out, now I'ts run by Canterbury Hurlstone Park and we get people from the nursing homes and give them a

26:30 day you know we have the church hall at St John's Ashfield and I do that

Do you use your old army nursing skills taking care of these old ladies?

No you don't have to really they've got to bring carers now but you go around and cheer like now I don't do any hard work they reckon I'm not well enough to do hard work now

27:00 my job is to go around and talk to them and laugh with them and help give them exercises and that sort of thing so I still do that give them morning tea and lunch

Was that one of the more satisfying parts of your job in the army being a comforter providing support?

Well I don't know whether I was or not but that's how I grew. I don't know whether I just grew into it I didn't have to do

27:30 much in that line we didn't have any problems except when my father died very young but we didn't never have any problems that we had to overcome, my biggest disappointment was when I had to leave school and other than that that was one of my biggest disappointments but you've got to go on and do what you got to do and that's it and that's what I've always done you know they used to call me

28:00 Dr. Passmore all the neighbours and that used to do that you know but anyway that was just a joke.

We might go back now to your very earliest service times before you you said you were a VAD in the mid 30's mid 1930's?

'37 I started, I got my first aid in 1934 and I was on the

28:30 St John's Ambulance books because I got my first aid certificate there, my friend was working in a chemist shop and she had to have a first aid certificate so I went along with her and got a first aid certificate but I didn't follow it up I didn't do any more and then 1937 when Europe was the war was all

29:00 talked about and could be and would Germany go and would they start the war and all the rest of it there was all that feeling and St John Ambulance came to me and asked me would I go back into the ambulance and then Ashfield had a nursing division and I was in Ashfield nursing division and that's how I started back into the nursing that I wanted to do.

And it was in 1941

29:30 **I believe that the VADs were taken into**

1941 yes-

Into the army?

and I went for my medical in 1941 and passed and they'd had enough nursing orderlies I could have gone and worked in a..... taken charge of a laundry because I had been a forewoman and I'd been in charge of a section and they said that's exactly what they wanted and there was a Dr. McKay from Auburn

30:00 of we had to have this and a Dr McVitee from the Red Cross and Dr McKay, I said, "No, I didn't want to do that." I said, "They could find somebody'd who hadn't done as much first aid and nursing as I had done." and Dr McKay said, "Yes." and they said, "Well we won't be taking any more nurses on until the hospitals arrive back from the Middle East." and I said, "Well if I'm

30:30 not nursing I don't want to go." and they said one of them said, "Oh well if you did you'd go where you were told..."so Dr McKay said, "No, I think you're right." well we were the first group there were 54 of us were the first group taken in in 1942 because that's when the hospitals were coming back from the Middle East

And at this time you were in the AAMWS service?

31:00 Yes no no, we're VAs in '42 the end of '42 we were made AAMWS there was no AAMWS it was enlisted Vas, we were enlisted Vas.

At the time that you did become an AAMWS service member was there any particular training you had to go through?

No different to what we were doing we only change our names and our

31:30 uniform, we had nice blue uniforms and tails and that but when the AAMWS had been formed and they didn't want they.... though that well it was a silly name voluntary aids we were no longer voluntary aids we were in the

32:00 army so they had to change our names somewhere so they put us into the army into the khaki and the army and that sort of thing we were in the army but we had a different name and

Can you tell me more about the uniform you were given?

Oh yes well now I've got uniforms packed in there, the VA uniforms, oh God don't talk about it we had good shoes, bench good shoes and we had thick grey stockings

32:30 or nurse cotton they used to call it, very thick stockings and we had blue a pretty blue, nice coloured blue frock, oh we'll have to get it out for Monday and show you, a blue frock with a red pocket, little pocket with a red cross on it and we had our epaulets first of all it had

33:00 VAD Australia and then when we were put in for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] to go overseas or anywhere you know where they like to send us we wore Australias on our epaulets on our what's itsname, it was buttoned right down and then we had a three quarter veil that came round like this and tied on the back and the red cross on the front that was our signet, the red cross.

And when you were given the

33:30 **khaki uniform of the army proper?**

Well that.... we were very disheartened when we got into this dull khaki, we got khaki stockings, khaki underpants, khaki our under.... we weren't given much, oh our singlets we were and our panties and well we used to call them PCs but I won't tell you about

Oh please do, I don't know what you...?

34:00 You might think I'm awful

Oh promise I won't.

Anyway I'll tell you after, anyway we used to call them PCs or DDs because they were stamped with a great big DD all our underclothes and that with a big DD and an arrow in the middle, defence department

34:30 because they found with a lot of the underclothing that they had bought and made for the troops was being black marketed so they all got stamped with DDs, so our DDs they were our DDs, and then we had a blue cardigans these are our working uniforms, had blue cardigans and blue capes I've got all these sort of things here and

35:00 that's half that rubbish in there and I've got quite a few uniforms there, I'm a keeper of uniforms you see, and then we had to change our colour then, we had nice very tailor made navy blue suits for winter, navy blue felt hat etc et,c then we had to change to the khaki which they were either too big or too small

35:30 too tight or too loose you just got whatever you they could get from the Q [Quartermaster] store and half the time it never ever fitted you, our shoes were alright I always didn't think shoes had much trouble with those but then we had this khaki wasn't tailor made if you were fat you got a fat one if you were thin you got a thinner one made you know well they were all in stock you got them from stock and

36:00 whereas our blues were all tailor made overcoat and tailor made so we hated going into khaki.

What would you do with an ill fitting uniform?

What do what?

If your uniform didn't fit properly what would you do with it?

Oh you just had to leave you just had to wear it if it was too big it was just too bad they didn't have anything in the Q store you'd have to wear it until they did have something to fit you the right size or wear your old one

36:30 until it dropped of you oh yeah they had different sizes but not to suit the different figures you know but anyway we got by, you put your belt on and pulled it in if it was too big and that sort of thing

Considering you were now a part of the army was there any drill or any.... you said there wasn't any training as such but was there any

37:00 **military practice?**

Oh there was a training after we'd been in the army when it was changed over to the AAMWS they brought it in, everybody had to do a rookies' school, everybody had to do a school and because we'd been in the army for so long and we'd never done a school you know never, we because we were taken in on

37:30 account of what we could do and we'd been learning all the time you know because we did exactly the same as the Sisters they treated us like except one or two of course but they treated us just the same we did exactly with them you know and did the things like that so we learnt a lot and then they wanted to send us to a rookies' school well they decided then that we'd been in too long some of our crowd so they sent us to an NCO [Non Commissioned Officers]

38:00 school in Yeerongpilly and I was there one day and I fell over well we were doing PE [Physical Education] and I put my foot in a cow hole and sat on my wrist and broke it and I never ever did a school so they said to me, "Well you've never done a school you'll never get a rise never get a you know never get a stripe." because I had never completed a school so I never did a school in my life

And did that turn out to be true?

38:30 Did I what?

Did you never get the stripe?

No oh no, because I'd never done a school they told me that but I didn't care it was the only difference would be was the bit of money extra only a few pence extra you know that didn't.... I s'pose the prestige of it I s'pose, but in your work or anything like that didn't make any difference not different at all

39:00 in fact I think I did I was lucky I did some of the things I did do you know, seen I didn't have a stripe no,

it didn't make any difference at all but they got duties they had to check us in and out and all the rest of it you know, and things like that, we didn't have to do anything like that but I was unfortunate, I was the only one that didn't do the school and I was the only one that didn't of our original crowd I mean,

39:30 and I was the only one that didn't get a stripe.

So you worked with other Nurses of different ranks, other Nurses you were working with they had different ranks to you then?

Oh they're supposed to have yeah, s'posed there was a corporal so and so or a sergeant so and so you were that or a private so and so, I was a private but I did just the same it didn't make any difference to your work it was in

40:00 your job, didn't make any difference whether you were a sergeant or just like the private you did worked exactly the same. If they wanted a bit of extra or a bit of something a sergeant could do it or corporal could do it or something like that away from there or a corporal might be in charge of a

40:30 night to see everybody's home in bed and that sort of thing you got those sort of duties but in the wards themselves it didn't make one iota of difference

Tape 4

00:32 **Ok Phyllis can you tell me what new things you learnt when you were brought into the AAMWS service?**

What I learnt?

What new things did they teach you?

The AAMWS when you went into the army do you mean? Well they taught us the.... we worked in the wards with the sisters, we were their offsideers and we did everything the sisters did we did all the injections we did everything that sisters

01:00 did, dressings and all the rest of it in fact sometimes one stage there on night duty I had a whole ward to myself I was the only one on the ward and Wilma Blair who was the other friend she was in the next ward we had 40 patients and I was the only one on but there was asSister and then there was another

01:30 ward and the sister was in charge of the three wards and if you wanted anything there, sometimes there was an orderly with you other times there wasn't and there was no sister on and you had the charge of the whole night ward you were on the ward the whole night on your own stuck out in the middle. Oh the first time anyway that's how it was

02:00 and they'd taught us everything but when the first night duty I did was pretty early you know and it was right down the back of the paddock and the last ward and they hadn't built the ablutions and that then 'cause we only had dirt floors and you know we had just a trestle table and that was the sisters' ward.. and we

02:30 sat in there and the sister said to me, she was Sister Phillips from Western Australia, she said, "Phyl, Phyl." and I said, "Yes?" she said, "There's somebody walking around our tent." I said, "Yeah I think there is." and she said, and we were stuck right down the bottom with sick patients in there you know in the ward, she said, "Oh I wonder why?" you know so were sitting there trembling and of course this was my first night

03:00 duty ever sort a thing and were sitting there shaking and trembling and then the next thing the ropes of the tent moved and the tent rocked and she said, "Oh my goodness what is it?" you know, with that a cow came around and stuck its head in the front and went "Moo..." at us that was my first experience but that's it you see, we did exactly the same as the sisters did.

You mentioned before that you did

03:30 **inoculations like the Sisters did?**

Oh yes.

Did you ever have to practice doing these...?

Did I have to what?

Practice doing the inoculations?

Oh we didn't do... the doctors did that, no we didn't do inoculations the sisters didn't either they gave penicillin there I learnt to give.... 'cause penicillin came out and we used to give penicillin needles and the preop [Pre-operation] needles and intravenous needles and all those sort of things had

04:00 to learn all that but the inoculations was done by the Doctors.

So you'd perform injections?

Perform the which?

Perform the injections into patients?

Yeah yeah.

How would you, how would you practice that?

Well I s'pose we had oranges and we had to inject our needle into the oranges several times this was one of our lectures you see was to

04:30 inject into an orange after we'd done that a few times and got the hang of when to press and how to press you had to know the difference between an intramuscular injections and an intravenous injection you see, you had to know different sorts of thing so then we had a partner and we all had to inject our partner, oh that was funny, well it wasn't funny it was drastic.

05:00 I had a an Emily Jeans who was a real country girl and she had real tough sunburnt skin and anyway I couldn't get the needle into her arm so the sister said, "Oh." she said, "You've had enough practice." she said, "Oh surely you can do it by this." I said, "I can't. I can't get it in." so she said, "You do this."

05:30 and she went like that and the needle broke in her arm well she got it in and then they had to get the doctor down to get the needle out but that was a bit drastic that.

What were you injecting into the people's arms?

Saline, just pure saline salt water nothing that'll hurt anybody but we just had to have a practice on each other.

06:00 **How many times did you practice?**

Oh we didn't do a lot on each other not on the practice after we did the oranges and we gave a couple and we were passed that we could do it, no we didn't have to keep doing that.

How did you get experienced in knowing the difference between an intramuscular and intravenous injection?

Oh well you learn that the intravenous you find where there's a vein sort of

06:30 thing, intramuscular you go straight in now a U is an intramuscular thing it goes straight in anywhere where there's a bit of muscle that's the intramuscular one, the other one goes in gently its a smaller needle and it just goes like that you know

Was there - doing an intramuscular injection would you pick a particular part of the body to inject?

Usually the tops of the legs or the bottom. I've got a lovely photo

07:00 there of a fellow with his bottom in the air and it wasn't me, I took the photo and her like giving him the injection his in .. arms like this and she's over the top of him

Would a soldier be put into a private....?

Oh they got used to us, oh yeah no, they just treated us the same as they did the Sisters they got to know you that we could do the same

07:30 things and we did that's another thing that we were very fortunate with from what I've spoken with other people in some of the bigger hospitals like the big base hospitals and that they never ever got to do the things that we did because they had more staff and we were always short of staff so therefore we all had to pull our weight and do the same things.

Was

08:00 **there any ever service that you provided or some part of your job that you found embarrassing?**

Yes men that couldn't look after themselves and you had to wash them and there of course we were all young then you know and I wasn't so bad because I had done a fair bit in the hospital but it was most embarrassing some of the things you had to

08:30 do with the men you know but then you got that way that you were nursing and that doesn't make any difference that's why there's male nurses in the nursing now I used to say it was always a woman's job but the male nursing are well in the fore now and it's no different from a man nursing a woman than what a woman is nursing a man but that doesn't enter your

09:00 head after a while whether you're a man or whether you're a woman and sort a thing but at the

beginning yes it is embarrassing.

Was it embarrassing for the soldiers as well?

Yes when they knew you you know, you hadn't done those sort of things before like giving them a bottle and all this sort a thing and washing, wiping their bottoms for them and that sort a thing that they couldn't do themselves they were the most embarrassing I think.

What did giving them a bottle

09:30 **involve?**

Urine, to pass their urine and their course the bulb and the entrance and handle and they put their penis in that and well sometimes they couldn't do that so you had to do it and that was embarrassing but in the end you became I wouldn't say real blasé

10:00 but you came and think well that's my duty, that's the job I'm doing and it doesn't make any difference and that's how it happens you know, you've just got to take that into consideration that you.... well that's what you're there for and that's what you've got to do.

How did you reassure the soldiers that that's all you were doing, just your job?

How did I what?

How did you reassure them that you were just doing your job?

Oh they knew by your... oh

10:30 the way you went around things you just said, "Oh come on." like the first penicillin needle I gave the sister said to this patient, "Oh well Phyl's going to give it." "Oh." he said, "Oh no." and she said, "Oh Phyl's given dozens haven't you Phyl?" and I said, "Yeah course I have." and it was my first one you see and the sister said, "Now that wasn't so bad was it?" and he said, "Oh no." so

11:00 that went off alright and then it got to the stage it was either the sister or you did it

Were there ever any times when the work was a bit squeamish? Did you find it...?

Oh gosh yes, ooh terrible yeah, oh yes, particularly when in those early days.... oh yes the smell of some of the rotting

11:30 flesh you know that the boys had been on the Kokoda track and been carried by the fuzzy wuzzies or brought into the hospitals and they'd get treated and dressed and brought home back here well some of them were gangrene and some of them had to have amputations and all that sort of thing, oh yes very ghastly at times,

12:00 one time up there that was very ghastly it was up in the tablelands and it was a training area for all the troops going to New Guinea up on the tablelands Atherton and different units and the 2/5th I don't know whether I should say it or not because it was never made, I better not say which one it was perhaps which unit it was.

Well without mentioning the units?

Yeah without mentioning the

12:30 unit I will, I know the units and I know who had made the mistake and all but anyway I was on night duty up on the tablelands at this particular night time and they called me in just around dinner time and they said, "Quick c'mon we need your help." you know in the ward, I was in the acute surgical ward and anyway

13:00 what it was there was quite a few deaths some dreadful casualties, one of the infantry units there'd been out on manoeuvre and the 25 pounder, the big big guns they were practising letting these big guns off in front of the

13:30 infantry so that they're making a way this is a practice that they were doing that which made way for the infantry to follow you see, anyway it was the last round of the day and just on mess time and the infantry were all lined up having their dinner they all

14:00 lined up you know there little bits and pieces sat down there was no room or anything and it was the last round and with the 25 pounders there are different distance bombs they're about that big you know, the whatisnames, big things like that there like there's the short the middle and the

14:30 other, well anyway the sergeant who's on the guns has to check what the corporal the box that the corporal brings up to put into the guns and it was the last round and this sergeant didn't check and he brought up the wrong box and they fired into the mess parade, oh there were quite a lot killed and goodness knows whatnot you know, dreadful injuries and

15:00 that sort of thing, so just a sort of accident it was never made very public that, never ever, but I know

because I was in the.... in fact some of my friends didn't even know about it but I happened to be in the ward and I happened to know who the sergeant was that didn't check, I knew him and I knew the field regiment that were

15:30 firing it and we had all these casualties out from there so yeah no you know it was pretty nasty.

What sort of injuries did you have to treat?

Oh well, one fellow had all his stomach hanging out and that and a sergeant from South Australia he had he had his leg all squashed and smashed and he

16:00 was a amputee we had to amputate his leg, amputated arms, great shrapnel wounds that sort of thing.

Did you ever attend on any amputations?

Oh no, I didn't see them operate on it no no, I looked after them after the amputations no, but no I didn't work in the theatre I did see a few post mortems though

16:30 that was ghastly.

Were these soldiers killed from this incident or...?

Well first one I saw the sister said we had to see three, I only saw two and that was enough, it was a young fellow, a young soldier who came in with appendicitis and because of his religious beliefs he wouldn't have a blood transfusion and he wouldn't have the operation

17:00 because it was against their religion so anyway they sent for his.... he was a Queenslander, Brisbane, young fellow, so they sent for the.... this was at Warwick when I first went in and it was the first lot of patients I had to nurse he was one of them and they sent for his young wife and she said no that was against their religion so then he

17:30 got so bad that the appendix burst and they said to her, "Well he's going to die if he doesn't have that operation he'll probably die anyway." and they said the only chance we might be able to save him so anyway she gave permission by this time he was right away you know anyway it was unsuccessful because the

18:00 septicaemia had gone through his body and he went oh the colour of that wall, mustard yellowy white and he was swollen up like this and that and the sister said to me when he died she said, well of course we were terribly upset about that too one of our first patients in the army dying you know, and that was the first ward that was open and anyway

18:30 she said, "Seeing you've been nursing him," she said, "I think it would be a good idea for you to go and see the post-mortem." it was too ghastly to talk about really it was a dreadful thing

You don't feel you could talk about it or describe any part of it?

Well I don't know whether people know want to know it, he was so swollen with poison that when they went to open him all this poison,

19:00 all this pus and everything went all over the place and the smell of it was terrible and that was my worst memory of anything like that you know and I can still smell it to this day and I can still see it and the other one I saw was a young, well they were all young blokes those days in the army, but he was found dead and they thought

19:30 he'd had a heart attack and he was sitting up against a fence with his knees bent and they sent me up to see this post mortem and they had to break every bone in his body to stretch him out because you know it had all set in that he was all like this and then they had to break his knees and that was an awful thing

20:00 but they're the only two I had to do or had to see that's what I say you did as you were told.

You said that when you were a young girl you dreamt of becoming a nurse, did you ever dream that you would have to do these things?

Oh yes and no I s'pose, you have mixed feelings you get lots of mixed feelings you know you think oh at times you used to say

20:30 like when we arrived at Warwick the fellows that had come back from the Middle East and that as we got out of the ambulance to be like from the train they were all calling out, "You'll be sorry you'll be sorry." and by gee there were times when we were sorry too you know you'd think oh why am I doing why oh no I don't think I can take this any longer you were being long hours and not getting any sleep and

21:00 you think oh you know, you do all these horrible dirty things you think oh no I can't and then you'd think well what am I here for, its exactly why I'm here and then you'd just make light of it.

Some of the things you've done I can't even begin to picture how at the end of the day or at

the end of a shift if you've had to do any distasteful things like that

21:30 **what would you do when you got back to your barracks?**

Oh you'd probably go back and go, "Ohh." "Oh why, what's wrong?" "Ooh gee, so and so today ooh had dreadful day." and you know blah blah blah and they'd say, "Never mind, it'll be better tomorrow." and you'd cheer one another up and then you'd realise you'd just think you'd realise well aren't I a bit of a whinger myself you know,

22:00 you think how sick they are and how they need you and here you are just.... well this is how I found it I don't know about everybody else but this.... I am speaking as me and my close friends because you do make closer friends with some than others we never had any disagreement with any of the crowd or any of the staff or anything like that but there's always,

22:30 you pick your own closer friends if you know what I mean and you'd get one if one was down well you'd get them up and if you were down they'd get you up and smiling and laughing again and that sort of thing.

How many close friends did you have at Warwick?

Oh goodness oh goodness there's one at North Rocks I still see her and one down at one at Narrabeen I still see

23:00 her and oh there's three, four from Warwick three, four, oh one's just recently died oh about only about seven or eight that I kept close friendship right up to now, right up to today

Did you share accommodation there?

Oh yes we were all in dormitories you either had four in a tent

23:30 or those in the dormitories you shared with about five or six or seven others.

Were you in a tent?

Mm?

Were you in a tent?

I was in tent most of the time.

Was there any separation between sleeping areas or were you all housed together?

Well those in that were in the dormitories this is Warwick I'm speaking of because it was different up in the tablelands it was

24:00 all tents everybody was in tents but some of them were in the building but it wasn't big enough for everybody so the overflow lived in the tents outside the building and that's what I did on the lawns there.

Was there any privacy?

No, that was one of our biggest things in the world was lack of privacy, none of us had ever had like lack of privacy like you

24:30 shared a shower, well we'd never done anything like and there was nothing nothing private you could be a bit private with your own friends but other than that, oh no you had that's another thing you had to learn was to.... and you had to learn to share everything you got, you shared this is why I think my life was different to

25:00 a lot of the others because I was always in that environment where others weren't and the whole of my army life I was in that type of environment but not many people, not many of them didn't that hadn't served in the big hospitals very few of us everybody practically all had to do this hard work and

25:30 drills and all that sort of thing, well I didn't have any of that I was a bushie you know out in the sticks which made it very.... lightened your burden a lot because there was no they weren't as strict with you as they were in the cities and that you got away with a lot more and the respect that you.... like we used to nick out at night time to the dance we used to go after work when it got dark

26:00 we used to nick out and go across the paddocks and go to the dance and go come back and you got caught a few times and got told off but that was about all you know and lots and lots of things like that life wasn't as regulated as it is in the bigger places.

26:30 **What were these dances? I'm curious who was holding the dance?**

Oh well Warwick was a wonderful place they had the Q's hut that was the Catholic one, they had the Zenith, that was the Church of England one and then there was the local people and they were always inviting you into the homes

27:00 and the dances and 'cause there were a lot of troops at Warwick also more troops than what there were

girls of course, and you got invited out to their different parties and that sort of thing and oh the first one we got invited to before we really started work a place called Yam Yam they asked could they send some

27:30 girls out there you know some VAs out there they were having a country dance so we got in a 5 ton truck and away we went. When we got there there was an old bloke playing the squeeze box you know and then we got welcomed and there was fifteen of us and we were to be back in camp by 11:30 see, that was so you were really regulated you see and

28:00 the one in charge with us she was in charge we didn't have in those days we didn't have ranks or anything but fifteen of us went to this dance, well we had to get up on the stage some young kid with a flag singing No Man's Land you know,

28:30 and all these army songs they were First World War and then they had this dance and the local farm boys that were there but there weren't nearly enough men because they were all nearly all women you see and then they gave us, they made a wonderful speech, "Thank God for the red cross." because we all had red crosses you see, "Thank God for the red cross." said the old bloke and then they all clapped and then they sang

29:00 to us and then they put the barn dance on and we danced with ourselves, like with ourselves because there was an overflow of women you know and then it came nearly 11 or after 11 o'clock and Dot, this one in charge said, "Look I think we'd better get moving we gotta be back by 11:30." "Oh you can't go yet we haven't had supper!"

29:30 and she said, "Oh but we must." "No no you got to wait for supper." so they had to put the supper on early half past eleven at night and they had the most wonderful home cooked supper from the country people, sponge cakes and scones and you mention it, beautiful things, this great big supper you know we had anyway eventually we didn't get home until midnight and we got into trouble about that it was after

30:00 midnight yes, so that was our first thing but other than that yeah you had to make your own fun.

What would you do to make your own fun?

Oh we used to, well sometimes we used to play cards sometimes we'd just sit and talk and laugh and talk about different things and our main thing was, "Oh wouldn't you love

30:30 to be back home now, what about it? Oh Coles' ice cream cakes and ice cream sauce do you remember those? Oh see you don't know what you're missing." Well Coles' was one of the big group of restaurants in Sydney they had them all over the place and one of their outstanding things was big sponge cake, big square of

31:00 sponge cake with layer of ice cream in the middle and then ice cream over the top of that and caramel sauce and wherever you went it was, "Oh wait 'til we get back there wouldn't you." and you know you'd laugh at these sort of things and that was it, Coles' ice cream cake and that was with everybody and now even at our AAMWS that's one of the sweets we very often have and they'll say, "Oh

31:30 goodo Coles ice cream cake and caramel sauce!" but those sort a things, we used to put little impromptu concerts in between ourselves, act the ninny and have a sing song or something like that and one of the sisters she was always organising a concert and we'd all have to do a bit you know and that sort of thing.

What sort of songs would you sing?

Oh the

32:00 songs, Vera Lynn songs and all these army songs, Hang Out Your Washing on the Siegfried Line and A Lovely Bunch of Coconuts, oh a lot of the army songs and I've still got some song books with these old songs in them and we'd all have song books and they'd say, "Oh what about this one?" then somebody would start off and we'd all sing that and then there'd be shrieks of laughter

32:30 and you know those sorts of things you had to do that because we were right away from everything.

Were you a bit of a songstress?

Oh I used to belt it out but I wasn't a good singer no, flat as a pancake but nobody takes any notice of that when you're all in the same boat, we had some very good singers and there were two there well they used to sing in unison there, you know the

33:00 duet and Bless This House it didn't matter what was on they had to sing Bless This House and there was another couple that used to sing She'll Be Coming Around The Mountain When She Comes and they had to do that and everybody had to do something and all this sort of thing.

I recognise some of the songs you mentioned before but the one about the Washing on the Siegfried Line?

Hang out out the washing on the Siegfried line

It doesn't ring any bells..... can you?

33:30 Well the Siegfried line was near France and there was a line there to stop the Germans coming through and that's what they were doing they were going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried line, it was a line of barbed wire and rocks and that sort of thing to try and stop the advancement of the Germans coming this is in Europe, France you see. [The Siegfried Line was indeed on the Franco/Dutch-German border, but was constructed by the Germans to defend against French/Allied attack. Mrs Passmore confuses it with the Maginot Line, which was the one constructed by the French to defend against German attacks].

Do you know any more of the song?

Oh I know a lot of them,

34:00 I'm not, don't ask me to sing them I've got one song there I'll let you read on Monday, it's the one we composed when we did our training at Rocky Creek I told you we did our jungle training at Rocky or at Trinity Beach and we made up a song because it was really a

34:30 real jungle training course, we did only two weeks of it but still everybody had to learn to swim, 6 o'clock in the morning we were up on the beach doing PE and you stood outside and dixed for your meals and you had that slapped into you know, and that sort of a real jungle it was and then we had to walk through the.... it was jungly then, it was semi jungle you know, Cairns out of Cairns there, and you used to go up

35:00 the mountain there and you had to walk; every hour you had to stop for at least 10 minutes to have a rest you know and then you'd start off again we used to wade through the rivers up to our waist I don't know of any other crowd that ever did that we were just.... this is why I'm lucky I've had all these experiences that other people are not fortunate enough to have

35:30 Was this song about your training.... there are special AAMWS song?

AAMWS not really ours, one of them of course is the Old Grey Mares They Ain't What They Used To Be that's what we often sing now Nursey was our main one you know that one don't you?

No I don't

Oh wish I could sing.

Can you even just recite the words for me?

Nursey

\n[Verse follows]\n

36:00 Come over here and hold my hand\n

Nursey there's something I can't understand\n (this is not the right tune) Round my heart I've got a funny pain\n oh oh oh its coming on again\n Nursey come over here and hold my hand.\n

oh I forgot the next word, oh that's silly something oh,

36:30 you'll have to forgive me for that one the girls if they ever saw it they'd say, "Fancy you missing out on that!"

\n[Verse follows]\nNursey come over here I'm awful shy\n oh when I look at you my heart goes goo goo\n Nursey Nursey I'm getting worse what are you going to do?\n

that's our theme song and the other one was the old grey mares they ain't what they used to be.

When would you sing that song?

Oh we used to sing it at

37:00 our reunions and all that sort of thing but in the army we used to, they used to have a radio and they used to play all those sorts of songs and you know that sort of thing.

You told me earlier that you'd share things amongst yourselves?

Oh yes you shared everything like I used to get a lot of parcels from Nestles chocolates

37:30 and coffee and milk and all sorts of things, sometimes they'd give you a canteen sheet you could go to a canteen but we didn't have a canteen so they used to send us that, the family was always sending me cake, big fruit cake or biscuits and posted you know

38:00 and whatever you got you shared we'd have a beano [a party] you know if I got a parcel today oh you beaut you know we'll have a good night we'll have a bit of a party tonight and then somebody else would get a parcel and Christmas time we were well looked after you know with the family and different ones that's the sort a thing we shared, you shared your

38:30 good times, your bad times, you shared your foods and if you wanted something of mine you'd say, "Can I can I have a go at that?" or, "Can I have that?" and you'd say, "Course you can." you know, you shared, you learnt to share with one another this is what we found

I guess you must have been away for more than one Christmas?

I was away every Christmas

Can you describe one for me?

39:00 Well now which one will I tell you? Ooh there's a couple of good ones. Well the first one was at Warwick and one of the teachers.... what am I talking about... at the school I was going to say, it was the school but one of the head sisters she's the one I said used to organise parties and....

39:30 not parties but sing songs and things like that and these little concerts and that, she had a portable organ and there was one there she was a Sally, a Salvation Army, she was a sister, Sister Farthing, and she and a few of the other sisters and the VAs I was on night duty at the time I was on night duty every

40:00 Christmas I was in the army, but anyway that was beside the point, but this first one at 6 o'clock in the morning they went around Warwick singing carols with the.... I've got a photo out there of it singing carols and then I think I told you, did I tell you about the mistletoe? I told you about that yeah, and then

40:30 we had to go and give the patients their Christmas dinner and then we had a Christmas dinner when we had our Christmas dinner we were all off duty they, the orderlies and the sisters took our place in the wards and then the officers waited on us, looked after us, and that's how we used to do it, we looked after the patients and the officers served us you know

41:00 very demeaning I s'pose it would be for them but that's how it happened.

Enjoyable I'm sure?

Oh it was we had lots of laughs and fun.

Tape 5

00:32 **Morning Phyllis**

Good Morning

I'd like to ask you about the time you enlisted and may have been heading towards the Middle East?

Yes well I was in St John Ambulance I think as I've already said, from 1937 and by this time the Japanese had come into the war [Dec. 1941] and they were sending

01:00 **more women over to the Middle East and I course very much thought I would love to be in the forefront, you know women weren't there very much beforehand and as I said before we had a little bit of Florence Nightingale in us and I went down to Victoria Barracks in November '41**

01:30 **and by that time the Japanese had not come into the war and I was on the draft to go to probably well it was sending more as troops, more women VAs over there to relieve the girls already there went over in October and so I had my medical and then that was in November**

02:00 **and then of course in December the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour so then the Japanese were in the war so they didn't send any more troops overseas they brought them back to Australia well in the meantime the army had enough nurses to fill all their needs and I could've, I was asked would I start up a laundry**

02:30 **at Concord Hospital they were starting up a building a laundry there and I would've been in charge of the laundry and the girls that and sort of thing because I had been a forewoman and being in charge of different things and they thought I'd be ideal for that but I didn't want that I felt as though I had too much nursing experience to**

03:00 **go into a laundry where somebody with the same experience as me perhaps but hadn't done all that nursing they could do it because my heart wouldn't be in it. They said well we can't take you in until the troops come back from the Middle East and set up hospital here so then they didn't take any more nurses in that's VA nurses they didn't take any more**

03:30 **nurses in until June and we were in the first group then after the war started to be taken into the army.**

Had you mentally prepared yourself for going to the Middle East?

Have I what?

Did you mentally prepare yourself?

Oh yes, my word you've got to be, you've got to mentally work out your own destiny and your own life and that was what I wanted was the nursing, so I had to wait 'til

04:00 June then to be called up.

Was it a disappointment not to go?

Oh yes of course it was, everybody wanted to go to the front you know very.... not that we felt we were very brave or anything but we thought we could do a lot and that was something we all wanted to do.

Did your attitude change at all when you were held back until the troops arrived?

04:30 No because they assured me that when they took more nurses in I still continued on with St John Ambulance and I used to help the matron the where I worked if she wanted a day or any accidents because it was a big place Nestles, or if there were any accidents she'd send for Phyl and send for the doctor or the ambulance or if she wanted a couple of days off well I used to do the first aid in the room so I

05:00 continued on and I continued on going to the hospitals and just the same knowing when they did have an intake I would go in as a nurse well that's all I ever did nursing, but a lot of the AAMWS they.... some of them were telephonists and dental nurses and office work

05:30 and batmen and all the mess hands and all that sort of thing but I wanted the nursing and I had a lot of experience so that's how they took me in.

If you had a preference at the time would you have gone to the Middle East to support the war in Europe or...?

Oh of course, oh yes that's you know that was one of the things that wasn't why you joined up don't get me wrong,

06:00 but you had in war time, you young people wouldn't understand the feeling all the boys where practically that I worked with, they were all in the army and our little group that we used to go around together with they were all in the army we had photos of them and writing to them and I was the secretary of the comforts fund at Nestles and I used to

06:30 hand write letter after letter, some of the fellows didn't even have anybody much to talk you know, write to them and they used to write to me because I was the secretary and would I write personally to them so I was forever writing with personal letters from this one to that one and all that sort of thing and yes, the nursing was in it you know we thought we could help we could do something

07:00 and that was our feeling not the mere fact you might get away to the Middle East or anything like that we knew we all couldn't go but it was just something we hoped we would do but they only sent about 200 I think it was in the first place and of course as I say when the Japs came into the war they brought them all back.

From your

07:30 **nursing background and your nursing point of view did you see one war - the war in Europe or the war in the Pacific as more important than the other?**

Yes the Pacific, I mean Europe's a long way away from us and it was OK all the European countries had to be released from the German Army that was just sweeping across Europe and they

08:00 were going to conquer England as you probably know, but we were part of the British Empire so therefore we were over there to help them but when it came to the Japanese they were on our doorstep and which they nearly did take us but only for the Americans we would've...

Did Empire matter to you?

Did what matter?

Empire -

08:30 **did it matter to you?**

Oh yes, my word you know, bit of a royalist and where my ancestors came from and oh yes, my word you know, bit of a royalist and where my ancestors came from oh yes, I'd still fly the flag.

Would you say the Japanese posed more of an immediate threat to Australia?

Oh yes it was well known they were going to sweep right down from Japan through the islands through the

09:00 Pacific isles down to Australia and this is why they sent so many of our troops to New Guinea and I had a relative who was in the Z Force [Z Special Force - or more correctly, Services Reconnaissance

Department (SRD)], which was in forward reconnaissance sort of thing they did and there's a wonderful story about him,

09:30 the Japanese were on Manus Island and then they were on New Ireland and this cousin of mine he was in the Z force and his job was to go up and see how far they got in the Japanese lines and the natives used to, some of them used to look after them and that

10:00 but many times they nearly lost their lives and that was something close and then of course they came, they bombed Darwin and then they dropped shells on Bondi, the Eastern Suburbs and then they had those two subs in the Sydney Harbour that was all very real it was so very very close and there seemed no way of stopping the Japanese and then of course

10:30 the Americans, when they bombed Pearl Harbor and then they came to our aid as well and with the two lots of troops the Australians and the Americans we beat them the only thing that beat them really was the atomic bomb that finished everything.

Given the chance would you have gone up to somewhere like New Guinea to be on that front line?

Oh yes, well

11:00 I was three times on the draft to go and each time they left me, well left the AAMWS behind and the third time was after the 2/2nd and we were on the way to go we were all packed and the ship was on the way up the coast to pick us up at Cairns and then the war finished so that finished that.

11:30 The army then called for volunteers to go to Japan with the occupation forces, oh they had lots and lots of volunteers, thousand I believe and there was only 50 of us, went 52 of us went and they were taken from different parts of Australia, all over Australia and I was

12:00 fortunate enough in our group there were only four of us chosen there was quite a lot had their names down but I was fortunate enough to go there.

Were you in Sydney at any time of the shelling or sub attacks?

Ah... '42 I think that was when they.... early '42 was when I think it was when

12:30 I think it was when they shelled the Eastern Suburbs, we had a very strict brown out, black out, all our windows were blacked out and even the cracks in the doors were blacked out and the cars were browned out they had to have brown over their lights and you weren't allowed light a cigarette or anything like that in the street

13:00 Can you explain more to me about the difference between a brown out and a black out?

Yes well a black out is complete black, out no light whatsoever, a brown out is when the light is lessened if they wanted to travel at night they had.... and if there was any disturbance or anything their lights had to go out but in your home they had wardens

13:30 walking around checking to see there was no light coming under the door way or cracks in the like under your windows were all blacked out and you were in complete.... we had the electricity on in the inside but if you were going out you were supposed to turn all the lights out and then go out and whoever is left inside could turn them on again but

14:00 it was very, very strict

How did these restrictions affect the hospital where you worked?

The black out? Well it didn't really because it was out in the middle of the country it was well and truly inland, it wasn't on the coast and we didn't have any electricity anyway, we had no electricity we had kerosene lamps and

14:30 torches at night and there was no water laid on you used to carry buckets of water from a tap way back in the paddock, two buckets of water and we had what they called the donkey and this donkey was a cylinder that you had to keep filling up and put wood underneath to heat it and there was no showers or toilets for the

15:00 patients or anything and you had to use bed pans and that and they all had to be done and the only way the patients could be washed would be with a basin, we had a basin with a bucket of cold water and a bucket of hot water and another bucket to put the spoils in after they'd had their wash and a tooth bowl and all the

15:30 boys had to wash in bed like, or wash on their bed in the ward until later on when we got an ablution block built in between our set of tents but up until then there was no, and there was only the tents were just up on the floor, on the ground, no flooring or anything like that and when it rained the rain used to

16:00 sweep through the wards because it was ground level on the ground you see and they used to dig trenches, but with the heavy rains that wasn't enough and so we used to nurse at night in rain coats, rain bonnets or the sou'westers they used to call them and gum boots and all the beds had to be pushed

away from where the tents joined because the water used to come in

16:30 and everything had to be picked up off the ground you know their boots and all that sort of thing that was beside them because there was no place to put them and their kits bags had their clothing in it and that was put on the ground underneath their bed with their boots, well when it rained we used to have to rush and pick all those up and put them on the beds and then move the beds away from the

17:00 joining of the tents, it was very hard work.

It does sound like it.

Oh very hard, people couldn't read or couldn't think about it you know, no electricity, no water laid on or anything like that, very very primitive

It sounds very trying conditions. How did the staff cope with that, what were they like?

Well when we first arrived

17:30 there we joined the 2/11th AGH [Australian General Hospital] which had escaped from Greece and Crete they were Greece and Crete and they escaped from there and they came and they put up their tents in the middle of the paddocks you see where we were at Scots College there and that part they had lights

18:00 in the school itself but that didn't house the patients and we in the tents living in the tents, we only had kerosene lamps and we were at the stage when we arrived the boys back from the Middle East said, "You'll be sorry." and by jove at times we were sorry but we cheered one another up and that's

18:30 a funny thing when I used to write home and I used to tell people things, we never said anything about how we felt because we didn't want to worry our family we might, how we might put a little bit love to be home or love to see you or something like that but on our down days we kept it to ourselves and thought of all the funny things and that's something you do, you put the

19:00 horrid things and the things that are really bad and that, you put that at the back of your mind and people think, oh you just had a real good holiday you know, I know because I was told that I had a wonderful holiday because I always used to write about the things we did that were funny and nice and that sort of thing but never anything of the other so people often got the wrong impression that we were just there for the holiday you know but it wasn't it was

19:30 hard work.

Would you try and correct them?

I beg your pardon/

Did you try and correct their impressions?

Oh we tried too yes, but they'd just.... I don't think they.... well they couldn't realise it and we were over a mile away from Warwick itself we had no facilities we didn't even have a chair to sit on there was no

20:00 chair there was no recreation room and our dining room was a side verandah a little bit wider than this and longer of course around the side of the house the side of the school with a trestle table and stools and until about middle the end of '43 we

20:30 never ever had a chair to sit on, we used to sit out on the lawn in front, sit on our beds, we wrote, we were tired, we had a rest on our beds if we wanted to sit down we sat on our beds we wrote letters, we sat on our beds everything, our bed was our lounge chair, our table and everything, everything was written on your knee you know, and we used to go out in the sunshine

21:00 when the sun was out and sit on the lawn and write but things were very very grim.

What was your opinion of the staff you worked with?

Well we got on wonderfully I've got some photos there of the sisters and that the sisters were overworked you see, there weren't very many of them and the sisters that with the 2/11th partic.... oh no, they're all the same, all

21:30 these big hospitals out in the bush there all away from home as well and the 2/11th were mainly South Australians and Western Australians and they were glad of our company and we were glad of their company, they taught us a lot, they taught as much as ever they could teach us and we were all very very friendly and

22:00 there was never any dissensions anywhere, a couple of dive bombers as they used call them sisters there, a couple of those that used to make things a bit unpleasant for some people but that was only one or two odd ones, but the rest were just part of us you know, were just one big family.

And did you have much contact with the doctors or surgeons?

Oh yes,

- 22:30 not socially we didn't mix so much socially but we were for.... this example Dr. Bradfield, the Harbour Bridge Bradfield, his son was the Medical Officer in the ward I was working he was a captain, no he was a major, Major Bradfield and he was a Queenslander and every
- 23:00 Saturday Dr. Bradfield of the Harbour Bridge fame he used to come and visit his son this is what they were.... they came back from Colombo, this is the 2/12th now, AGH, and he was telling us that we mixed socially there as I say just giving morning and afternoons teas and that sort of thing that's the only way we mixed socially
- 23:30 unless we had a bit of a dance or we had a bit of a concert, well everybody could go to that and he was telling us then that was in 1943, that he had a plan to build a tunnel through the mountains up in North Queensland to take water out across the range like through the other side of the the range and
- 24:00 the government said couldn't possibly be done you couldn't put a tunnel through the middle of a mountain. Well as you know the Snowy River was done and then I only heard just like I heard it on the radio, must be 12 months or so ago but now they are considering the plan of Dr Bradfield to catch the monsoonal rains to take through but they haven't got the money now to put the tunnel through
- 24:30 so that the sort of thing and another thing, how we mixed with the doctors was up in the Atherton Tablelands we had a lot of the boys who had come back from New Guinea, the young ones and there was a young lad came in with suspected appendix... appendicitis you see and he had this dreadful pain in the side but the doctors couldn't find anything wrong with him and
- 25:00 so then he started to bark like a dog every time you went near him he'd bark like a dog, so the two doctors and the sister and myself were called in the office and they said, "What do you think about him?" and I said, "Oh I think he's genuine I think he's gone troppo." we all said that and this doctor from South Australia, Dr Bonner said, "Well I don't think he is. I think he's putting it on." he said, "We're gonna prove it." so they brought him into the
- 25:30 office there, the doctors' office and every time we spoke to this fellow or the doctor spoke to him, there was a Dr. Lowenthau, he was the head of our ward at that time, and this Dr. Bonner, and Dr. Bonner when he barked the boy barked, Dr Bonner barked and the fellow got down on all fours and started crawling around so did the doctor
- 26:00 and he looked him straight in the eye and said, "OK doctor you win." and he was sent back to his unit, he didn't want to go back to New Guinea but he was only young he was only about 19 and he'd been up there and back and he was going back again, they were sending him back again but we had mixed very, you know very very well.

Were there many cases of men who had suffered in battle came back and you could see...?

Oh yes quite a lot.

- 26:30 Course by that time New Guinea we got, but from the Middle East we didn't get so many, we got a lot of medical cases or odd operations and that sort of thing, this is down in the south, down at Warwick up in the north at Atherton Tablelands we got a lot but mostly it was medical things
- 27:00 like malaria or pneumonia or measles or something like that you know just minor things, and then we had a fellowma VC [Victoria Cross] winner, Richard Kelliher, and he came down with scrub typhus and cerebral malaria and he was very very ill and we nursed him,
- 27:30 got him better you know, we had a pretty good high, we hardly every lost anybody you know it wasn't too bad that part.

Did you take a certain pride in treating these very well known patients?

Did I what?

When you treated someone like Kelleher, like a very well known patient

Oh yes.

Was it special?

Yes up in the Atherton Tablelands, General Morshead

- 28:00 had both toe nails off, it doesn't sound much but it's very very painful to have both big toe nails ripped off you see, and he was in the officers' tents but he had a tent to himself and he was the nicest man you could meet and a
- 28:30 couple of times there he thought he'd like the pillows taken from under the feet and the cradles moved, we did that and his feet were too painful so we had to put them back on again you know, and when he got a bit better walking around and all you know he was just the same as any of the other fellows and we always used to have our mail censored
- 29:00 and to see we didn't put anything that the enemy might find out about and even if you sent a parcel or

anything you had to get an officer to censor that it was ok and they had to sign it and he used to sit in his tent there and some of the boys and that in their pyjamas would go and see the General, they didn't

- 29:30 know he was a general, we had one young fellow and he had a parcel to send home to his people so he came back and he said, "Oh I might find a nice office round down there." and he censored and he said and when I said, "Where I'd been?" he said, "That's where I been, I been there." and he said we talked about it and he said, "I enjoyed your little chat, will you come back again?" and we said, "That's the general.
- 30:00 "Oh." he said, "Don't be silly he wasn't a general." we said, "Oh yes he was." well he got the jitters then, he thought oh gee you know but every morning the general used to go and while he was there he used to walk through the wards and talk to all the soldiers and that and then other time we nursed this is a Warwick now I'm propping from one to another.

That's alright.

You asked me about people

- 30:30 Thats alright. And Dr. Bradfield's ward as I was telling you we had used to get quite a few boys coming back that had come back from the Middle East I was in the medical ward then I used to do a lot of surgical but I was in medical and they had some had ulcers and some had malaria etc etc you see and then we had about the one time we had about seven or eight
- 31:00 Italian POWs and the only difference between them and our boys was they had the same Red Cross pyjamas and jackets, ah bed gowns the same as the our boys and when these boys found that they were working on a farm they were prisoners some of them said, "I'm not working alongside, I'm not going to be alongside a prisoner of war no way."
- 31:30 and these Italian prisoners of war were absolutely marvellous and then the boys came back from the Middle East and we had a lot of the second..., the 6th Division boys came in and we used to have to ask any of the boys that were admitted did they mind being alongside a P there was no, they weren't confined in any way well they were served just the same as our boys they were treated
- 32:00 exactly the same and you had to say we used to have to say, "Do you mind being alongside a POW?" oh yes and some said no, and when these 6th boys came back, 6th Divvi [division] boys we asked them and they said, "No, we're the ones that captured them." and they became the greatest of friends the boys that captured these Italians, the POWS who were working
- 32:30 on these farms and talking about how they were treated they had to have special sleeping and living accommodation, they had to have special meals they had to be given so much a week for put away for that before when they they all got sent home after the war and they used to say, "We come back, we come back. We like Australia."
- 33:00 and my next door neighbour's an Italian and she said that's right, a lot of those POWs did come back, we never heard whether they came back but we were nursing those yes.

Were there any other prisoners you treated?

No, not where we were, you see there was Cowra and various places that they were confined to the Japanese were,

- 33:30 but these were Italian prisoners taken in the desert over in the Middle East and brought out here to Australia as prisoners but they were treated very very well.

At which hospital was this that the Italians were brought to?

The Italian hospital

The, which hospital were the Italians brought?

The 2/12th AGH

Did you ever have any contact or treating the American soldiers?

No only

- 34:00 one when we first went to Warwick one fellow, a Corporal Rosenblum went over the side of Cunningham's Gap in his jeep and we were the closest hospital and we hadn't even opened then, they just made makeshift in one of the school classrooms and he was our first patient and when he was well enough to be transported back to
- 34:30 Brisbane to the American base, but amazingly everybody had a lot to do with Americans but we didn't, we never ever saw Americans even and I don't think I spoke to any more than about three Americans the whole time, we just didn't see them 'cause we were out in the bush you know and not near where they were.

Had you heard a lot about the Americans?

Oh yes, they liked the girls and

35:00 they weren't the only ones who liked the girls, our boys liked the girls too, but oh yes and sometimes they used to clash, the Aussies and the Americans would clash because I think a lot of them thought the Americans were taking their women you know, which some did admittedly but I had very very little to do with the Americans never ever saw them oh I'm

35:30 telling a fib because when I went to Tokyo visit to Tokyo I spoke to a lot of Americans then but other than that I didn't nurse them or didn't even come into contact with them.

Well when you were still nursing at Warwick or Atherton Tablelands, did you ever have a hospital visit from any high commanding officers?

Ooh yes my word,

36:00 we had General Blamey and General Morshead and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and oh that was funny the Duke and Duchess of Glouces... when they were up this was up in the Tablelands and they had the band playing and we all had to make a guard of honour all dressed up and polished in our uniforms you know along the side of the road for the Duke to walk the Duke and Duchess

36:30 to walk up and the band played and they start playing a waltz well we nearly got nearly choked because here he is walking up the road and they're playing a waltz you know, but anyway that was beside the point and then he he just visited, actually I didn't get to meet him but we saw him but he I've got photos out there of the Duke there

37:00 and that was quite good you know there was one poor fellow he'd come back from the islands and he was mentally deranged you see and everywhere you went he used to wander around the hospital grounds around the different wards and tents and he'd say, "You know who I am?" and they'd say, "No I don't." they're all in pyjamas.

37:30 "No I don't know." "I am the Duke of Gloucester." and our Medical Officer our head you know the hospital, he'd go around and he'd say, "Salute me I am the head of this hospital I am the head of this hospital I am the head of all this here I am the Duke of Gloucester." anyway the poor old, well he wasn't old he was only young, they had to send him back to Sydney or I don't know where he went now or back to Sydney or the

38:00 state he came from and of course he was quite a mental case

What sort of treatment would a patient like that receive at your hospital?

Well they weren't.... I never worked in the psychiatric ward but they weren't restricted in their movements around and what their exact treatment was I don't know because I only worked in surgical and

38:30 medical wards.

Getting back to visitors to your hospitals, were there any politicians' visits to your hospitals?

No not to my knowledge

And when you did receive these visitors, did you ever meet any of the people calling on you?

Oh no only those few you know well we were only just little bits little

39:00 fish in a big sea you know and it was only the big ones oh General Northcott I met a few generals on the way. General Northcott was the head of the British Commonwealth in Japan [British Commonwealth Occupation Force - BCOF] - well his his wife wasn't a well woman and his daughter Marjory was his partner you see and she lives up in up in the north coast there now, she and her husband.

39:30 She married a man from there and we had leave, we were along way from Tokyo and we had leave in Tokyo and we had afternoon tea with Marjory Northcott and Sir John Northcott you know and we had afternoon tea in Tokyo with them there were only seven of us, no six of us and Joan Gordon

40:00 Bennett oh you've heard of Gordon Bennett well she was with us she was with us then when we went to Tokyo I was the first Australian girl in Tokyo I mean nursing some of the Marjory Northcott and a couple of the secretaries had been there but we were in the first group to go there so I met him and then when I was one night

Sorry Phyllis

40:30 **is this in Japan?**

Yes this is Japan.

We're going to talk about Japan very shortly; I'd really love to get into your experience there but we're coming to the end of the tape so we might pause there

Tape 6

- 00:32 **Ok Phyllis can you tell me about at the end of the war you were based I believe in the Atherton Tablelands?**
- Oh yes in the meantime we had closed down the hospital I would say it would be a couple of months before the end of the war because we were packed, everything had to be packed to take to New Guinea
- 01:00 and we had our extra needles and we had our Atebrin and all the things for the tropics and then we had 2 weeks what would I call it, for the jungle training, we women, and we were going to be the best jungle trained nurses that ever left Australia but anyway
- 01:30 the war came, the peace came and therefore we missed out there. Well did you want to know, I think I told you about what we did when the war finished did I?
- You can repeat it again that's fine.**
- Can I? Oh well when the war finished it was on the night you know, we were got into our tent
- 02:00 'cause we all live in tents and there were three of us in our tent and about a quarter a mile away was the unit called the transport unit. Well Thursdays and odd days was beer day and of course they used to drink and be merry, anyway this particular night we just got into bed and there was this din and we thought, "Oh oh,
- 02:30 the transport boys are having a beano it's a drunk night tonight." and then somebody started running around the unit around our tents and saying, "The war's over, the war's over!" and so we thought, "Oh, what war's over?" so we popped on our gum boots and greatcoats over our pyjamas and then off we went down into the lines into the mess and
- 03:00 11 o'clock the CO and another officer came and told us that the war had finished so then he said, and they shouted a sherry around, most of us didn't even drink but we still had a sherry and then they said, "Who would like to go to the sergeants' mess?" cause you had your own mess you see, and the AAMWS mess,
- 03:30 the sisters' mess, the officers' mess, the sergeants' mess, so we said, "Oh we would." so we larconged all around the tents down into the sergeants mess and in the meantime some of the patients had heard the news too so they joined us and we went into the officers' mess there, I mean the sergeants' mess and there were a couple of fellows there just in greatcoats, well we
- 04:00 don't think they had much on underneath because when they had about 50 women with the commanding officer and all invading them they went for their lives, they came back oh a little while after well dressed so we only just guessed what they only had the greatcoats on because the officers suggested that, they said, "Righto, we're going to the officers' mess now." so off we went again
- 04:30 shouting and singing and laughing and then we went round to the officers' mess and the same thing we just had a drink there just one glass, one little glass ,and away we went again and then we went back to our mess we had a nice big one, big mess there, concrete floor but that was alright and when we got back there the boys
- 05:00 went and got their drums and one came with a squeeze box and another one came with a uke [ukulele] and away they went and we danced 'til we went to bed at 3 o'clock in the morning and there were still people wandering around, the boys got as much rubbish as they could and built a great big bonfire, the fire engines came around, I didn't get on the fire engines
- 05:30 but some of them did, hop on the fire engines around the tents and you know and there was a Matron when we started to shout and sing and all the rest and she said, "For goodness sake be quiet!" she said, "That's nothing." so we were nearly going to pick her up and put her under a cold shower and we thought oh no we'd better not because we'd only come off
- 06:00 second best , she was the matron of another little hospital that took over from our main hospital and then a few weeks after that we were sent down to Bacchus Marsh, well all our tents were all packed and everything so the last night we had to sleep where we could and we all had canvas stretchers that was our
- 06:30 bedding, little canvas stretchers with the legs, set of 3 legs that crossed like that with a bar through and you could pull it all to pieces and put it in a bag and we had to carry those, so the last night there some slept in the mess a whole lot of us slept out under the stars on our little mattress, oh wasn't a mattress, little stretchers and it was
- 07:00 the most glorious night, a real tropical night and we saw the moon come up and go down and then we were there for daybreak and then we folded up our tents, our beds and put those in our bag and our main kit bags and that we didn't have to carry they were put on the train and so we went down to Bacchus Marsh by train.

And was it at Bacchus Marsh that you

07:30 **volunteered for BCOF?**

Oh no, we volunteered long before we went down there as soon as the war was over they called for volunteers because they knew they were going to send a peacekeeping force there. No we had but it wasn't until we were down there that we were told whether we were selected or not.

What prompted you to volunteer?

What what?

What motivated you to volunteer for BCOF?

Well I wasn't

08:00 particularly keen to start with I thought no, I've been in long enough I'll go home and a few of my friends said, "Oh come on, wouldn't it be great if we all got that, went away together?" and so I said, "Oh no I don't think..." "Oh come on it would be wonderful if we all went together." but out of all my friends the group of them there was one woman

08:30 another, myself, we two were chosen and none of the others were and I was the one that wasn't very keen on going because I was a bit wary of the Japs and I didn't have much faith in them because I knew a lot of POWS in you know, in the Japanese camps, and I thought no, not going to Japan so I put my name down and I thought I

09:00 wouldn't have a hope in the world of being chosen with all these names but I was, so there was only four from our unit went but then they brought them in from all over Australia of course and the only one was the Northern Territory we didn't have anybody from Northern Territory but New South Wales had the biggest list and that's another thing I kept, got a list of all the

09:30 names, I keep all those sort of things of all the people that went and what state they came from that and we kept in touch with a lot of them lot of them have died a very very lot of them have died and all getting older of course and but that's how we got away.

Before you left for Japan, can you tell me what your impressions of the Japanese were?

10:00 Yes my word, I was bitter, very bitter because some of the boys that I knew were POWs and we had some of our friends killed and it came out about all the different atrocities that the Japanese had inflicted on the building of Thailand railways and another

10:30 girl ,another lass I knew well, we'd known all our lives, another Ashfield girl and she wasn't in the forces but she was married by proxy to a Dutchman in Java which meant they got married over the phone and then she went to Java just before the Japs got down to Java and she was a POW and that was somebody close to me that was a POW and then all the

11:00 sisters that were murdered and slaughtered and you know that that affected us too and then the Centaur was up the, don't know whether you've heard of that the hospital ship was up the coast near Townsville near yeah round just past Townsville, and the sub sunk the whole lot and there was only one sister saved, a Sister Savage and a very few of the crew were saved

11:30 and they bombed a hospital ship and so we were very very bitter, very bitter

Given that, I can't grasp how you could have prepared yourself for what you were going to do?

Well you've got to be as I said before, you forget.... you don't forget but you put it at the back of your mind all the bad things

12:00 and think of the good things and think of the things that you can do to help somebody else, we were trained you know so well in the nursing and that, that we knew we could help somebody and there the sort of things it gives you a different aspect in life and a different way of thinking of things and

12:30 that's where when you get out of the army or so you find it very hard to assimilate again with like the families and that.

Did you know who it was that you would be looking after, what you were going to be doing?

Oh yes they sent 10,000 Australians over, some from some from the islands, Mariti and places like that

13:00 some of the air force and some of the forces and they sent those to Japan for the occupation of Japan and they had to have 10,000 Australians so therefore we had to have an Australian hospital. Oh yes, we knew we were going to go to the hospital but we knew why we were going we were going to nurse Australians.

What did your family think of you going?

Oh Mum didn't like it,

13:30 no she didn't, oh cause she knew all these boys that our friends and she knew a few of them that had

been killed by the Japanese particularly a few of them were killed in the Middle East by the Germans but most of them were.... oh and some were POWs of the Germans and they were all very close to us you know that we'd known from when we

14:00 were kids sort of thing in our lives and of course Mum was one of those people who a great loyalist of course and we had, we used to call it the art gallery, she had photos of all I don't know how many fellows as they were going away they would come and say goodbye to Mum and leave a photo you know, so that's that's we had all those and they used to write a lot of them used to

14:30 write to my Mum or used to write to the family but oh we had other letters and that.

Did you take things like photos with you?

Take the which?

Did you take photographs with you when you went away?

Photos oh yeah, well we weren't supposed to take, well we could, we could take photos before the war was finished but they weren't to be anything that you know,

15:00 that would affect the safety of the unit, we couldn't take anything like that but when we went to Japan it was a free for all you know, I've got bags of it in sections.

Did you take any from home with you when you left?

Oh the family ones, oh yes and then you put them beside you, particularly Mum you know, because my father had died years before,

15:30 but oh yes, always had something like that and then you'd think, "Oh gee I wish I was at home, wonder how Mum is, is she alright and oh wouldn't it be lovely to get back go down to Coles and have an ice cream cake and caramel sauce?" and all these sort of things but then you knew you had a job to do so you had to do it

Was there still censorship of your mail?

16:00 Not when the war finished no, there was no censorship then, we could write what we liked so I wrote quite a lot about that Mum kept all my letters for 6 nearly over just over 5 years she kept all my letters so it's like reading a book sometimes I've got them all in dates you know.

Did you leave from Sydney on your trip?

Yes we

16:30 had our needles and that up in Burwood, up Burwood road there and we were there, we got all our tropical gear and our winter gear, got lovely long johns and there's some funny photos of you can imagine with long johns you know, I haven't got that one but its been printed and all in the Woman's Weekly and that

17:00 we had a parade down Burwood road down to Burwood park and there were all the high ranking dignitaries telling us we were the cream of Australian womanhood and we had to live up to it and make sure that we did this that and the other and you know a real pep talk and then they fared us farewell the first Australian women to go on a peacekeeping force blah blah blah

17:30 so there were sisters too and we AAMWS but then we were had got our different needles and all that sort of thing and we were then taken by double decker buses down to Darling Harbour 12 o'clock and sail on the hospital ship Manunda

When you

18:00 **heard speeches from those dignitaries you mentioned, did you feel you were expected to go to Japan and almost put the Japanese in their place, show them that they'd lost the war?**

We didn't know what too expect we didn't know how we were going, as we were going through the heads under the bridge there and through the heads most of us got a bit seasick even before we got outside the heads

18:30 and we were very sorry for ourselves and we thought wonder knowing what the Japanese had been doing to all the women, would we be treated the same or wouldn't we, would we or wouldn't we, were we doing the right thing you had that doubt as to, and you had the feeling that you might be treated the same as they treated the other women during the war years but they didn't treat us

19:00 like that at all the men were very arrogant and the women were lovely they were starving when we got there we had 16 days on the water and we never got off the ship in the 16 days we called in at Langemak Bay for extra water and refurbishing and that sort of thing for the ship but they didn't have enough there for us so we had to

19:30 go around to Finschhafen. Well the Americans had never seen Australian girls and we weren't allowed

off the ship and we were all hanging over the side, there were Negroes, there were officers, there were people they came there were no women and at Finschhafen they were all Americans and they came in jeeps, they came on pushbikes, they came everywhere and they kept

20:00 throwing up cartons of cigarettes most of us didn't even smoke and then half of the stuff went down between the, that didn't reach you know, went down below between the ship and the wharf and pineapples, bananas, chocolates, everything they could throw up to us they wanted to come on board you see and no way and we spent one night there and

20:30 they wanted us to go to a party but we weren't allowed off the ship.

Did anyone leave the ship?

No, they even had pickets on the side of the ship to make sure none of the Yanks would try to climb up or we tried to climb down but we sailed the next morning and then we went through the tropics we struck tropical storms and the ship rolled and

21:00 goodness, you thought of going over a few times it was so rough and you'd go on the deck, if you stood on the deck you'd be over near the rails in one minute and the next minute you'd be up against the wall you used to rock that much and up and down you know, I was only sick the first day but after that I was alright and then we had to go through a minefield

21:30 the last day of our trip on the ship there we had to stop outside Japan and outside Japan itself because we had to wait for a guide to come take us, a pilot in a you know a pilot ship, to guide us through the mines and I believe we went round and round in circles all night

22:00 because there were still mines, well see it was just barely six months after the war finished and there were still all the mines hadn't been cleared away so that was another risk that we had that we could easily hit a mine and go but we didn't.

And what were all these risks doing to your doubts that you already had?

What doubts

Were they making your doubts grow?

Well of course you were just

22:30 prepared for it oh well if that happens it happens nothing you can do about it, it's fate, if it's your turn to go you go irrespective of what happens and we knew that and tried not to let it get us down, it never got us down, we were only young you know and we could overcome all those sort of things.

How would you overcome them

23:00 **while you were on the board the ship?**

On board the ships well that got very, very, very boring but they had deck games and there was just nothing to do most of the time, they played bingo a couple of times and they had a horse racing thing that you wound up and then we had a fancy dress ball that was the best, that was the best of the lot well because we had to be dressed in uniform at all time

23:30 fully dressed we were under the Geneva Convention and you had to be fully dressed with your dog tags on and everything like that in case you were hit or case you went down or anything else but this night we were allowed to get into fancy dress, well you've never seen anything like it the thing you, oh

24:00 the ingenuity of it, nothing on board you had to do whatever you had, some went as sheiks with sheets wrapped around them and some of the boys went as nursing sisters or AAMWS and oh all sorts of things, and somebody went as Salome and got a whole lot of mosquito nets wrapped around her and and I went as a Indian

24:30 Chief, the fellow, one of the fellows in the crew made me a little a chopper you know what do you call it?

A tomahawk?

Yeah a little, thanks, a little tomahawk out of just wood he just cut it out you know and I got us some sugar bags sort of thing there was always lots of bags because lots of things came in bags in those days and I got them from

25:00 down there and I frayed it out into rows and I sewed it onto the top here and it was about that wide and I covered that like that and down the side of my tropical pants I had a frill down there well I couldn't have a head piece so I got some paper and cut out feathers and stuck them on a piece of material

25:30 and stapled them on we did actually and I coloured each one differently with mercurochrome for red and yellow was for something else we went down to the dispensary you see and I coloured the feathers that way and I went around yayayay you know but it was a fun night that was the brightest thing of the way except when we went across the equator of course

26:00 those that had never been across the equator King Neptune comes you know, don't you know this story?

Oh once when you go across the equator there's always a ceremony on the Northern Hemisphere then you see after you cross the equator, well to celebrate that there was always a big do on you know and all that sort of thing a fun day,

26:30 well when we got to the equator it was our fun day and we that hadn't been you know, across the equator before which very few had those days and we just had our swimming costumes on and they had a big pool a big canvas pool that was the swimming what's'isname and the men and the

27:00 the staff had pyjamas on and were all dressed up and all funny old King Neptune with old bags all frayed out for what's'isname and then they brought each one up to the King King Neptune and he had something accused you of something and you say not guilty no such thing

27:30 and then there'd be one of them with a towel wrapped up, one of the officers with a towel wrapped up would give you a belt you know, with a wrap they either gave you a dose of Atebrin which is the most bitter, terrible stuff they'd give you a drink of Atebrin and you had to drink it or another one was you had to push a beer top along the deck with your nose and all this sort of thing

28:00 and then you were dunked and then another one they used to shave you, they used to put soap all over your face like that with a big wooden thing like that you know girls and all used to get all this and there were several things like that you used to do and then you were dipped into the this big swimming pool as we called it, it was only a big canvas thing in the

28:30 end we dragged all the others, the men in with us because we weren't gonna to go in alone and then they got dumped and then the crew, a lot of the crew and those that had already been up there they were killing themselves laughing so we put the hose on them, I mean it was just fun, it was just a break on the way over.

How many men were on board as well as you women?

I don't know really the exact number there weren't

29:00 many on not many on the hospital ship most of them were going to hospital be orderlies or do something in the hospitals most of those that went over with us there weren't I s'pose there'd be no more than about 50 or 60

Were there any separation of the men from the women on board?

Oh yes oh my goodness never mind on board, always you had the sisters' lines you had the officers'

29:30 lines, you had the AAMWS lines and you had the men's lines and nobody ever stepped over those imaginary lines you know if you were over in somebody else's you know you were in trouble like when we were up in the Tablelands we were in our tents and there was supposed to be a stripper in the

30:00 sisters' quarters and they were just round from us like that we were here like this and the sisters were here like that and so they had to put pickets on all night well there's one fellow he was the mortician and he was put on cause he didn't always have anything to do the mortician and he was a funny little man, real funny oh there's lots and lots of stories about him;

30:30 his whole life was his domain, his whole domain was his mortuary you see, well anyway he's put on the guard duty and he came to our tent we didn't know who it was and he shined the torch around the tent and Cath who one of our friends she had a hunk of wood there

31:00 to hit the prowler, so she picked it up ready to hit him he said, "Cath, Cath its only me." and she said, "Well don't do that again." but yes oh no it was oh no you were always segregated and you daren't, you could not go into another mess unless you had permission or were invited

And so these same rules applied on the ship?

Yes exactly. We were in one deck

31:30 we had like hospital beds well they were cradles and they had a two pieces either end like that of iron like that and then they were hooked on to this these beds with the sides up or hooked onto these two either end and it used to sway with the boat you know you'd have to climb in and like that but that's what we had, I don't know what the men had because we were never in their quarters

32:00 And so where did you arrive in Japan?

When did I

Sorry where what Port did you pull into?

That was Port Kure which is in the inland sea its a beautiful trip along the inland sea because there's thousands of islands some of them only very small not big much bigger than this room or some of them were much bigger than that but they were

32:30 uninhabited because there's nothing they could do with them and they all had these pine trees, the pine trees were we've got the eucalypts, they had the pine and we got to Kure with the pilot who brought us

that morning and when we arrived at the dock the band was playing Waltzing Matilda and goodness knows whatnot and then we had to

33:00 file off the ship, off the Manunda, a walk along the little pier a bit and then there was an old funny looking boat that took few at a time over to Etajima which is across Kure Harbour I believe now they've got a bridge that goes across there now so I've heard and to Etajima where Etajima itself was the Japanese Academy island and we took over the Japanese

33:30 academy and turned that into a hospital

That was the naval academy?

Naval Academy.

And this was on the mainland of Japan itself?

No it's in the island in the Kure Harbour

Oh sorry Kure is on the main island?

Oh Kure, yes it's down south I can show you on a map you know it's down the southern part and the Americans were up round Tokyo area

34:00 but the British were down around the dock yards and that and when we got off too we saw all these dockyards there and dozens and dozens of the little submarines that they used to you know, one man and they'd blow themselves up or kill themselves

34:30 and that was their job well they had all these little subs like the ones that entered Sydney Harbour well they were all in dock there well we had to destroy all those.

How did they go about doing that?

Well they just blew them up

In the water?

No they were in the dry dock just blew them up and the mines and that

35:00 they had mine sweepers making sure that mines weren't of any danger and then a lot of the ammunition dumps were like rabbit burrows in the mountains because it's very mountainous in Japan near the water is usually fairly flat and then it rises very quick to a peak

35:30 and then it goes down again but part of, a good part of Japan with all their millions they cannot use and so therefore that's what the boys had to do and then they had to demobilize them and they had to destroy all their ammunition there were a lot of lives lost when things went wrong you know and blew up

36:00 and that sort of thing there are quite a few buried over there over in Japan, it was a very dangerous job and one time there we were at a dance over in Kure with one of the units there and the boys were all sent for and there was a terrific cross the Harbour just near us was this terrific bang and somebody had blown up the ammunition area

36:30 **When they weren't meant to?**

No no. There it was one of those things that we don't know nobody knows who blew it up but they had to go into all these caves caves like holes and bring out the ammunition and take it and blow it up or pull it to pieces or you know dismantle anything anything like that

And can you

37:00 **tell me about the Naval Academy itself what sort of a place it was to live and work at?**

Oh it was a beautiful place the academy, it was in a province all its own and the people on that island were never allowed off the island because it was all hush hush you see it's a big Naval Academy and they had never left the island they were never allowed off the island and nobody was ever allowed onto the island

37:30 except those with permission. Well the compound itself had some very lovely buildings, one was a museum and in the museum they had one of the Russian planes that they'd shot down years when they were fighting the Russians years ago and then that was turned into our.... well we had dances, we had concerts, and all that in that

38:00 particular place, lovely pillars and then all the General Northcott and all these offiders and that they had special buildings and that lovely looking buildings, but the hosp.... the barracks themselves was a three 3 story E shaped building

38:30 with a great long frontage one side was along the water and along the front along wide across the front

and there was a centrepiece which made two courtyards like made a big E and we had to turn that into a hospital which we did and things were very rough there when we got there too because the river Mitta was to

39:00 bring up our supplies and there was a strike on the wharves and the river Mitta didn't get there and so we could only have food that some of the others could give us we were hungry for days and days we got one slice of bread here and you watched everybody to see if they were going to eat their last crust even and we also

39:30 had no fresh milk you know it was all tin milk and there was no other food and we had tea and one of the units gave us a stew one day and we thought oh that's beaut you were lucky, well one of them got six pieces of meat in it and that was our ration of the day and until the river Mitta came of course a lot went back to

40:00 Australia saying how destitute we were for food and eventually of course when the river Mitta did get here we were right but we never ever saw a fresh piece of meat the whole time we were there except a couple of times we did a nasty thing we were very friendly with the transport boys.

Sorry Phyllis this sounds like another great story of yours, we're coming to the end of the tape

40:30 **so we might pause there and well take it up again when we resume.**

You still want to hear it though

Oh absolutely.

Tape 7

00:30 **Had to convert the barracks of the Japanese barracks into a viable hospital as I said it was in an E shape and the first floor was for the kitchen and the mess and the office and all that sort of thing the second floor was the hospital and the top floor the third floor**

01:00 **were our quarters the sisters and the staff quarters all round this E and when we got there we had a, all we had was a stretcher, a bed, we did have a bed and a stretcher with a mattress on it and eventually we got a steel cabinet each**

01:30 **and we were in a row of about five and you're dividing from the next group was, alternatively a bed was put behind a steel wardrobe so that there was a wardrobe and a bed from there and vice a versa so that way there was about 1-2-3-4-5..... about 6 or 7**

02:00 **in a group with only dividing by this you see, and it walked around it, on the outside there was no verandah but right round the inside was oh about a verandah almost as wide as this room it would be practically as wide as this room right round the building all around this E**

02:30 **well right round the top of the E was the ablutions there was the toilets and the showers so we had to go and have the showers and this was another thing that we had not been used to as much the showers, had eight showers up in the roof down no divisions or anything like that**

03:00 **and we all had to strip off and shower there well that was and then that was a great delight for the Japanese because they had no door on it it was just an arch way and then one Jap would see some of the girls in there and he'd go ahahahaha and then there'd be as many as half a dozen or more Japs all running up and looking at us and giggling and pointing at one another for they had never ever....**

03:30 **these weren't the soldiers or anything like that they were the people on the island as I said they had never seen any European in their lives and there was red heads and brown heads and blonds and fair skin not yellow, not black haired and yellow and they used to go yap yap yap and they'd call their mates and we'd say, "Get get!" you know but they just still call a few more**

04:00 **to look at us all under the showers, well of course we were mad about that and then the next archway were the toilets and the men's urinals were up against the wall and the toilets were like a baby's cradle set in the floor there just like a baby's cradle and it had a top rounded top on it like that which we used to call a splash, well we used to have to**

04:30 **squat because there was no seating and we used to have to squat over these toilets and the Japanese, the workers and that because they were the only ones working, employed like there to help do the hospital up and they used to come and use the urinals and then giggle at us because we were squatting, well**

05:00 **we got so embarrassed we got so mad and embarrassed they eventually put up a blanket anyway in the centre of the E was a great big periscope not a periscope you know oh isn't that silly oh the word won't come out you know the big searchlight not the searchlight, the thing**

yeah, the search thing

- 05:30 **and can't think of the word offhand and it's getting there, anyway when we found out that there were what the boys used to do was have this whatisname focused on our lines on our toilets and on our whatisname because there was no doorway, we thought it was the Japs but it wasn't, it was some of our boys but anyway**
- 06:00 **they eventually gave us like our ordinary toilets seats and individual well a couple of individual showers and that sort of thing but at that time there was just nothing not a thing we had not one stitch of furniture or and then during that time that we had nothing except our stretchers and our**
- 06:30 **steel cabinets they had a rat infestation of course there was so much there was a lot of water rats and that and they used to come they used to have rat catchers and they used to of a night time we had mosquito nets because of the mosquitoes a lot of mosquitoes and diseases and cholera and goodness knows what**
- 07:00 **and these rats used to jump onto our steel trunks up on to the top of the steel cabinets up on to the top of our nets all squealing and chasing one another oh it was dreadful ,and they set traps and one of the women said, "Well I'll fix them." and she got a piece of wood, a put a lump of cheese on it and a bucket of water**
- 07:30 **and the next thing you'd hear splash splash you know and be another rat or one of the traps would go bang bang and that well we had a pretty bad time with that you know but that was our....**

So just going back to the showers, did you have to make lots of complaints before the situation changed?

Yes we did several times

- 08:00 **Phyllis, I'd like to just go back to your relationship with the Japanese men, you were describing some difficulties that you had in terms of them looking at you while you were showering and going to the toilet, did you ever experience or did any of the other girls experience any difficulties with the Japanese men?**

Well none of us had ever had anything experienced anything like that we were

- 08:30 young and innocent most of us you know and we were all terribly terribly embarrassed with it the whole lot and because I mean to shower with five or six or more people including the Japanese who we disliked standing there chuckling, pointing at us,
- 09:00 laughing at the red hairs and the blonds and all the rest of it and the same hygienically they'd come and use the urinals while we were squatting because there was no barrier there. No, we found it very embarrassing and very maddening but they couldn't do anything about it at first, they told the Japs about it you know,
- 09:30 but they couldn't do much about it until they put a blanket up then eventually they put doors on the archway which gave us a bit of privacy

And how did you find out that your own men were spying on you?

Well it was very strange somehow we used to have, we were the only women you see, the Australian women in Japan at this time there were no other Australian

- 10:00 it was before the men's wives and that went over, we were the only Australians in Japan and we had 10,000 Australian troops within the area in Kure and around that area that we had lots of invitations out always, we had led a very lovely social life which we never ever
- 10:30 had not to the extent of this and this fellow said something about, "Oh you got doors on your showers and that." and we said, "Yeah, how did you know?" and then he told us and oh did we rouse, anyway we took it as a, you know we thought it was the Japanese that had
- 11:00 done it but it wasn't, it was our boys but I mean OK that was got over that easy enough.

You mentioned earlier that when you got to Japan to the Naval Academy the supplies were very in short demand and you didn't have many supplies how did you get on in terms of your own personal hygiene you know like women's things and....?

- 11:30 **Well this was another most embarrassing things you had to go get in a corner in front of one another and there was just nowhere to go until later though later on but they had to start from scratch they had Japanese engineers and Japanese labour from the island and**
- 12:00 **we had a house girl one between two of us who really spoiled us and they were lovely but they were starving, they were very, very hungry people and eventually when things started to arrive our parcels and all that sort of thing we used to share it with the Japanese, our girls you know,**

I'd get chocolates from Nestles and

- 12:30 **chocolates and milk and all that but soap, they didn't have any soap, they had no sugar, they had no meat well we couldn't give them meat because we only had frozen meat we couldn't give them meat, but we helped them out with our little parcels, we used to say "presentos" and then they'd come with a presento for us. I've got a few things there in the cabinet there**
- 13:00 **and it might be a little hand made doll and I've got a very, I believe its a very valuable early painting and she said when she gave it to me she said, "Oh it tells you all about it on a sheet." you know and when the house girl gave it to me she said, "Good good old well." that's**
- 13:30 **60 years or not quite 60, 50 odd years ago it was old old then they could speak very little English and we used to we were having Japanese lessons to learn the Jap we had three girls who were interpreters and then we were all learning Japanese and then we had Professor Carter from the University of Tokyo teaching us**
- 14:00 **but he was teaching us pure Japanese but these spoke a different dialects like all the different areas provinces had different dialects and some of the things basic words were all right but other things they didn't know what we were talking about it was easier to do all the hand signs you know and bit of broken English and we had a little bit of broken**
- 14:30 **Japanese and between us we used to get along like that, like when they were putting the, oh by the way we didn't have any hot showers either and by the time they made in each divi. Each big room dormitory this was turned into wards in our sleep and that they had to put a kitchen in a little kitchen in with water hot and cold so one day**
- 15:00 **we, another friend and I, saw this Japanese fellow and we knew he was the engineer and here we are we saying, "Ayou mizu. "Ayou" is hot, "Mizu" is water see, ayou mizu, and he said, "Madam, the hot water will be turned on at 9am on Friday." and here we are going**
- 15:30 **with all this and he spoke beautiful English so that was another oh look there's so many funny stories I could go on forever I think, but the nursing itself wasn't as heavy and we did have the Japanese staff to do the cleaning and the washing up of the dishes and all that, all we had to do was nurse and nothing else**
- 16:00 **you know and it wasn't very heavy except we did get some very serious cases there was some, there was an outbreak of chicken pox and they were grown men were very very ill with it and a couple had one or two had caught cholera and then cephalitis broke out and we lost a couple with cephalitis but that was a dreadful thing because they were terribly**
- 16:30 **ill and it'd affect their brain and I met one of the fellows whom I nursed at Haberfield after I came back, I met him there but he was a bright young fellow and he was like mentally retarded, partially mentally retarded through this encephalitis so we all had encephalitis needles and we were always been jabbed**
- 17:00 **for cholera or anything like we were always getting jabs for something because you had to be so very careful because we were not allowed to eat anything that had been grown in the ground because it was manured by human excreta and a lot of them well they could of passed on some of their germs through the soil**
- 17:30 **through the.... oh you've never seen turnips and carrots like them, I've never seen them as big and the strawberries, you ought to see the strawberries, but of course we weren't allowed to eat those and it was a long time before I could eat a.... any of us could eat a strawberry cream cake because we had this thought of how they had been fertilised, but the Japanese, the farmers,**
- 18:00 **oh when I say farmers they've only got a little plot each and it was either drawn by an oxen if they were a bit wealthy otherwise they pulled this little cart along little flat wooden whatisname with big wooden wheels and on it were bamboo containers big round containers tied onto this and then they on Thursdays was their**
- 18:30 **honey cart day,j we used to call it the honey cart and the streets were no wider than this room and only wide enough for a jeep because there's no other traffic no cars or anything only ours and that and the roads used to wind and very narrow and if we'd gone out in the car on our day off or something up into the mountains and that well you'd get a row**
- 19:00 **oh great stream of these honey carts and they used to go to round to some of the homes had big concrete pits just cause there's no verandahs or anything all the houses opened onto the road and there'd big concrete pit and a they had a bamboo scoop with a long handle and used to scoop out this and put in their honey cart well the odour,**
- 19:30 **oh you have idea, no we can still smell it, of all these honey carts and we all called them one after the other and the roads being so narrow they used to pull over to the side so we could squeeze past well we could only squeeze past so slowly for that group and then you'd hit another group so you tried not to go on Thursday used to be the main day**

What did you think of the landscape?

20:00 I beg your pardon

What did you think of the landscape?

Oh beautiful, absolutely beautiful it's very.... no beaches really. one or two little beaches but everywhere you look it's water and it's only a little bit even when you go inland it's only very narrow, its not as wide as New South Wales before you come to their mountain and then there rice paddocks,

20:30 their paddy fields there, the most interesting they're built on different levels up the side of the mountain and that sort of thing and when they get so far up they can't go any higher and then it's mountainous then and then it's nearly all pine trees and maple trees and in autumn it's absolutely beautiful,

21:00 the different colour of the pine trees, ah not the pine trees, the maples and that and then that's in the winter and in autumn in the summer, it was cherry blossom and peony roses and all that sort and we used to gather that and try and decorate the wards up a bit you know, brighten them up

And how many times did you get around to Hiroshima Bay?

To go where?

To Hiroshima?

21:30 Mirojima?

Hiroshima?

Oh sorry oh I could.... Countless, we were only a bay away.

What did you go there for?

Well everybody wanted to see what happened with the bomb when the atomic bomb dropped everybody was interested in that, nobody knew the repercussions from it because a bomb had never been dropped before

22:00 a hydrogen bomb had never been dropped before, and nuclear you see, and that finished the war,

Did you go there just because you wanted to have a look or was there another reason that you went there?

No, Hiroshima was very much in the news, everywhere had news reels because we didn't have TV in those days, but they had news reels and in the

22:30 papers and all about the bomb dropping on Hiroshima and everybody wanted to go and see what it was all, like well when we did go there wasn't one tree nor one lamp post or one building standing it was just rubble and the photos show that too there wasn't one thing standing except the reinforced concrete and that

23:00 withstood the heat of the blast but the glass just melted like water and you see from down the side of the building all molten glass and of course we went looking for souvenirs too and one time we went there looking for souvenirs, I've got a couple in there and found them found a couple of little dishes and that and it was all thick with molten glass that had been in the ruins and as we were you know,

23:30 looking around and that one of the women said, the other girl that was with me she said, "Oooh look at this." and there was charred human bones in amongst the rubble that we came across, well that put us very much in the cold feeling, made us realise even closer still just how devastating the bomb was I'd hate to see it happen again but still its different

24:00 sort of bombing this time.

And how many times did you go back to Hiroshima?

I couldn't count

No?

We used to go down to Iwakuni and go down to Miyajima which was their holy island and you had to go through Hiroshima to get the boat to go across to Miyajima

24:30 so regularly we went and there was nothing in Hiroshima until quite a while in one of the burnt out buildings the Salvation Army fellow captain from one of the units there, the 67th battalion, he with some of his men built this

25:00 oh got the, filled in the holes and then the walls and that sort of thing and formed a little rest place and you could have two scones and a cup of tea for a threepence, we had to pay for it, threepence, the boys from his unit used to make hot scones everyday and we could call in there and have that and he used to have a ping pong table and a

25:30 writing table with a big notice over the top: "Write home to Mum!" and you could have a little rest there he had a couple of easy chairs in there and you could have a little rest and go on your way which was wonderful

And when you went to Hiroshima looking for souvenirs, did you meet any other Japanese people on those occasions?

Oh only in the townships and no, no our main visitations and mixing with the

26:00 Japanese was on our own island the only other time we used to go on trips and if we didn't know our way well one day we went on a trip and we didn't know our way so you found a post office or police station and you went and asked and half the time they couldn't speak English and you couldn't speak Japanese we got lost a few times in the little

26:30 windy street well this particular time as I said we were very very against the men, we disliked the men because oh they were very arrogant, but they didn't molest us or we weren't afraid of them but we disliked them you see and one of the fellows said, "Oh I'd love to push one of these into a paddy field." anyway we'd been up the mountains and were coming down

27:00 and as I told you how narrow the road was and so they had to give way to us and toot toot tooted and the fellow on the bike and he was on a pushbike the Japanese was on a pushbike and instead of pulling over to the left and we went to pass him and he pulled over in front of the

27:30 jeep and we knocked him flying off his bike and we became airborne and the whole jeep flew through the air and flat into the paddy fields, the stinky muddy paddy field and here we are, four of us, there were two, another lass and I, and you always had to have the equal amount of males with you you know, you never went anywhere on your own and so the men

28:00 very gallantly, because we were all you know easy going those days and we were much thinner than we are now and they quite bravely they did a Walter Raleigh act, they walked through the mud and carried us up onto there and then we couldn't get the jeep out you see so the men had to stay and guard the jeep and four of us went in the second jeep,

28:30 went back to the base and then they had to send a crane out to lift the jeep out of the paddy field but this fellow that was saying he would love to push one in he said, "Wouldn't that rock you?" he said, "Here's me wanting to push them in there," he said, "And what happens, they push me in!" yeah but that was just a little by play.

29:00 Did you have any boyfriends in Japan?

Oh yes you had plenty of boyfriends, yeah well I had a couple of special ones and we used to hold dances in our mess and we had Horry Dargie's concert party was up there, the Kangaroo Concert party was up there for entertainment, and then they brought up three Tivoli girls

29:30 and then we had Stella Wilson and quite a few noted ones, people used to go up there and entertain us and anyway we used to have, our mess was open, people used to be able to come to us and then we had invitations out to the New Zealanders and the British and there was always parties and anybody that was off

30:00 duty and was invited to these parties you more or less had to go still in uniform, collar and tie no dress ups, eventually we were allowed wear evening frocks for some of our dos but all most times was in uniform oh no, we were very well looked after and the Tivoli girls not many of us liked them, they had the

30:30 feathers and wriggled and kicked you see and one day oh years afterwards I was in the optometrist not the optometrist but the specialist in Burwood for my eyes and this fellow was looking at me and I looked at him and we looked at one another and he came over and he said, "I know this is an old spiel but I think I know you." and I said, "Yes I've been thinking the same." anyway we went through

31:00 "I went here and yes I was there and I went there and yes I was there...." and then I said, "You didn't go to Japan did you?" and he said, "Yes I was with Horry Dargie's concert party." well we used to entertain whoever we invited they couldn't just pop in anybody, they had to come across the Harbour because we were isolated on the island

31:30 and we used to entertain them you know and he said, "Do you remember the Tivoli girls?" I said, "Yes." I said, "Oh they were a waste of the tax payers money I think." he said, "Why did you know Betty the Blonde?" I said, "Yeah course I did." he said, "I married her." so I had to swallow big and say, "Oh well I was talking about their act you know." but that shows you how you can get caught up

32:00 And tell me about your special man that you had in Japan?

Well he was from Arthur Murray's dancing, he was an instructor out there and he was in the unit just not far from the hospital and he was one that we used to be quite friendly with and he was my dancing partner and we used to dance and

- 32:30 dance and dance because there was always dances somewhere you know, and then we used to go out on the boat but as I say you never went alone with anybody you were just a real good companion and I went out with him quite a bit when I first got home and then I met my husband, I didn't see him again until a few years ago I bumped into him.
- 33:00 But oh then there were various ones, various groups that we got very friendly with, there was the Royal Welsh ... and the Cameron Highlanders and we were invited to all those and go out on the boats to water-ski oh we had a really good time like that and all we had to do was nurse you see and on the whole it wasn't very heavy.
- 33:30 **And did you at the time know any Nurses that got married during the war time?**
- Oh yes yes I've got few there, I've got some invitations there, a few of the sisters and quite few of the AAMWS they all married over there they married Australians
- In Japan?**
- In Japan yeah and the matron put on the reception you know we were invited to the little chapel and
- 34:00 they the bride's frock was because you had beautiful materials there, lovely materials, silks and that and they had that and they used to use mosquito nets for veils you know, cut up a mosquito net for a veil and no they were very, no they were quite lovely weddings over there.
- You were nursing in Australia and Japanese men who'd often been away**
- 34:30 **at war without women for a long time, did you find that your patients used to flirt a bit?**
- Oh some yeah, oh most of them used to, they had an exaggerated opinion of us because they hadn't seen any nurses much you know and hadn't seen any we were the little blue angels because we had this blue frock and they used to call us oh there's quite a few verses I've got somewhere around written
- 35:00 that different ones had written about the little blue cross nurses and that sort of thing some of them got a bit too amorous but you knew how to handle them.
- What did you do?**
- Just told them very politely off you know, one fellow I did smack his face, but I didn't that's something I really hate I don't really, I think that's very demeaning to smack
- 35:30 anybody's face but I did him, he got the message.
- What did he say to you to make you do that?**
- Oh I don't know, he became very amorous and all this sort of thing you know, tried to tried to get me to go a bit further than what I wanted to go, oh yes that happened a lot because we were there only contacts most
- 36:00 of the boys at Warwick and that were boys, they were away from home they'd been up the islands where there weren't any women and of course they and most of the ones at Warwick in the early days were all younger, they were all the boys that were 18 and 19, well we were in our early 20's and therefore we were much older than them you know, but no we had plenty of outings
- 36:30 and at Warwick they had a hut that was the catholic one and then they had the zenith and that was the Church of England one, and then they had the salvos, they all had put dances on and dinners for us and we could go in there, go in anytime and have a cup of tea or coffee or anything like that and lots of the
- 37:00 civilians around, we went to their homes we were invited to their homes out on the Darling Downs there and we went out hay making and used to go regularly to a Mr. and Mrs. Brown and have a fellow used to pick us up, a Mr. Anderson used to pick us up and take us out and then there was another fam... oh there were several families and then at the back
- 37:30 of the hospital grounds across the paddock there's the Byrnes who had horses so we only used to get one day a week off and then we used to go horse riding there was no where much to do to go unless you went into town or you were taken somewhere so you had to find your own way and find if you didn't have it teed up you know you had to find your own way and make your own enjoyment
- 38:00 horse riding or go down the river and we went on a few moonlight picnics down the river you know, steak picnics as we used to call them, barbecues in other words and we used to have to fill in your own day but when we were busy we went for about 6 or 7 weeks from working 12 to 14/15
- 38:30 hours a day for seven weeks without a day off that was our busy time you didn't get a day off and you don't get it made up to you you don't say oh well I know and we didn't get any overtime or anything like that you just worked until you it was time you know, you could leave for the next lot to get on cause every day
- 39:00 none of us could get through our all we had to do in our time, so we kept on and then the next lot they

came and gave us a hand well they wouldn't get through all they had to do you know in the next shift so that's how it used to one used to overlap the other like that that was when it was really busy.

What's the strangest thing that you ever had to do?

Strangest

39:30 worst or best well there were a couple of thing I think I said about the post-mortem was the worst thing I ever had to do to go to one of those, two of those, I really hated that and really I there were three or four of us went had to you know I didn't faint but some of the others did I was terribly mmph

40:00 you know and I thought, "Oh no." but I didn't go right off if they fainted that just layed on the ground cause it was in a tent and they just they just stayed where they were, they didn't knock off to see to them.

Tape 8

00:36 **Do you think there is anything that we've left out of your time in Japan?**

Anything left out?

Yeah of your time in Japan?

In what way do you mean?

Well you've actually just described, do you think your story about meeting the general is the strongest memory you have of Japan?

01:00 Oh I don't know, we just took it in our stride sort of thing it was a wonderful experience to be in another country for 18 well I was only there for 15 months but we had to sign on for 18 months and cause my mother was ill and we just took life as it came and enjoyed what we wanted to and what we had to enjoy and work what we had to work.

01:30 We didn't have very many catastrophes we had a real decent earthquake and that was a heart in the mouth thing, that was a terrible thing the earthquake, it was a very big earthquake, it was 6.5 in the Richter Scale and everything rocked and everything you know, and we were down at a place called Bepu that's down in south island off Shikoku there and we

02:00 were there on a week's holiday and it was near Christmas time and we'd been to see the hot springs in Bepu there's hot sulphur springs with all the steam and sulphur going up you know and it was snowing and one of the girls from Western Australia said, "Oh, you can understand..." she spoke in a drawl, "You can understand earthquakes here." she said, "Here it is freezing cold, snowing and these hot springs!"

02:30 well that was the morning we had the earthquake and there wasn't any damage done to any of the troops but there was village after village wiped out and then they had to send medical teams to the various villages and the other one was when the typhoon came and we had to button everything down and everything that would fall we had to put on the floor

03:00 and the signal was we all had to run to our stations you know into the wards or wherever and the signal was there was a big old cannon in the grounds and if that cannon went off that was the signal to get down to the wards or wherever you had to go and lie on your stomach, get down and anyway

03:30 bang it went the place rocked and all that got broken was the windows, the rocking was the windows but the typhoon past nearly a mile away and that was another time the villages were wiped out and nothing happened to our crowd it was just phenomenal you know that that should happen but we had earthquakes and all that sort of thing

And who was your

04:00 **best mate in Japan?**

Oh well there was Doris Champion, she went away with us in Warwick when we went to Warwick and she's the only one I went right through my army life with, she was a cook, Doris Champion, and then she did a course through the army and she became the dietician and she was the dietician

04:30 at the 2/2nd AGH and then she went to Japan as the dietician and then she came back and worked in the Prince Alfred, dietician King George, and then the old people at place for the dying at Petersham it was she worked there and then she had a heart attack and died very young and then I had

05:00 very close friends now from Japan we were all fairly close but a couple a bit closer, my very close friend who married a fellow from there over in Japan we knew and she was married in Leeton I was the bridesmaid because he came from Western Australia and he had didn't know a soul at the wedding except me anyway and down at Leeton and then of course

05:30 she went over to Western Australia to live and she's still over there but she's getting old too.

Were there any women apart from Doris that went through with you the whole time?

Only one this is this Doris Champion she's the only one that went right through that I went and then she went back but she didn't come back 'til 1952

06:00 she came home on leave and went back she wasn't married she never married but she was the dietician.

And where did you meet Doris?

Where'd I met her when we were sent to Warwick from Sydney like we when we were called up we were all called up at the same time as 54 of us I think it is and we had these we had to

06:30 go up to Warwick in these old trains and we sort of got to know one another and she was very handy because she was a cook at the time in the sisters' mess and if we wanted, this is at Warwick, if we wanted a little bit of steak or a piece of bread you know a few slices of bread for our picnic all we had to do was ask Champ you know and then that's what we

07:00 and then we just stayed friends and then we went up the tablelands and then all the same as exactly but she was the only one that I went right through with and then some of the others the Warwick ones I've still got friends I'm still very friendly with them and then the Jap girls as we called them there's not many of them in Sydney now there's only I think there's only about about 6 or

07:30 7 of us if there's that left well there nearly all a lot of them interstate but even the Sydney girls are nearly all died

And what do you mean when you say the Jap girls?

Oh well we were called the Jap girls because we went to Japan you see and were called the Jap girls that's a bit of distinction the Jap girls

08:00 **And you were, when you enlisted you were a volunteer VA when did you become a private can you...?**

Yes September 1942 we were taken into the army as enlisted VAs we were put into the army this is where the confusion comes a lot of people because they didn't change our

08:30 names they only we were enlisted VAs you see we were in the army but a lot of the others other services said oh yes but you were only voluntary aides you weren't in the army but we were in the army and when they decided that it was a bit ridiculous calling us voluntary aides when we were already in the army so the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] we were put in the

09:00 same grouping as the AWAS except we were AAMWS we were in the same sort of uniform and everything else like that but we had a red cross on ours and we had Australia's because we were AIF and that that was just the difference and it was like we just you had to volunteer and the AIF was well none of the other units had

09:30 none of the other services had AIF it was only the army medical army for the women that had the NFX number you'd get an X number if you mean that was your in the AIF well that was they could send you anywhere they wanted to and you couldn't refuse because you volunteer and you were in the AIF that's the Australian forces you see and

10:00 we had to sign on for at least 12-18 months after the cessation of war.

And were you, did you associate or were you friendly with any of the AWAS?

We didn't have very much, we didn't ever come in contact with any hardly, we had a couple became ambulance drivers but we seldom ever came across them because we

10:30 as I was telling you were right out in the middle of the sticks in both places and although there were AWAS at Tolga and up in the tablelands and there were AWAS in Warwick we had no not much connection with them at all we were stuck out there on our own and so that's how we lived together

Did any of the either doctors or trained nurses give you a hard time because you were St John's Ambulance?

11:00 Not because we were St John's ambulance no, because we were as more strict sisters who you know no not.... we were VAs you know one of the sisters used to say, "VA Hill right down the ward." and you know VA

11:30 and she sort of resented us we thought yet when we were leaving oh she hugged me and thanked me for all I'd done with her and all the rest of it and yet she was real real stuffy old thing there was another one they used to call the 'Dive Bomber' she used to have everybody crying she they couldn't take her you know so they stuck me down there and luckily I got on well with her

12:00 because when she went for me I just argued with her and I didn't let her upset me you know cause I

always had the feeling that ok nothings going to upset me I can get over it.

Were there anytimes when you felt your St John's Ambulance training disagreed with a nurse's opinion?

No it was the biggest help

12:30 as a matter of fact we were wonderfully adept at bandaging and all that and the sisters used to say, "Oh you can bandage better than us you know the bandages." and then we did courses, we did gas mask courses, we did cooking invalid, cooking classes and what we'd learnt in the hospitals oh no it was a great advantage

13:00 well when we went in you couldn't have got in if we hadn't been in the red cross VAs or the St John Ambulance and we were very very highly trained in the St John Ambulance used to go out on parades you know with ... bag and picnics and all that union picnics and whatever St John Ambulance used to be

13:30 usually a couple of men or and myself or something like that oh no we had wonderful training

And did any of the doctors ever question your training?

No they treated us as a like one time when the when this is how this happened one time they had this drop short in the middle of a the

14:00 what do you call anyway the big guns the field regiments with their big oh there about this long they had three different sizes or three different distances and their job was to fire over the top of the infantry the foot sloggers over the top of those to clear

14:30 the way for them to go you see and they were having manoeuvres up in the Tablelands there and the sergeant didn't check the last, it was the last one and the sergeant didn't check the box that the corporal had brought up and the mess parade was down here the infantry were down here and they were up in the mountain, well instead of it going over them it dropped into that

15:00 you see so I was in the acute surgical and I was on night duty as it happened at that time and they called me in early and I felt sorry for the sister there was a major - very high surgeon you know and we had all these patients, we had about 40, 80 patients we had these patients

15:30 and then we had another set behind when they got well enough to put behind that didn't need much nursing you moved them from the main wards out you see and they had all these stretchers with all these dreadful cases on and that and this poor sister was only relieving and this doctor said, "Now where can we put, which patients can we move out?" and she was flabbergasted because she didn't know any of them when you're relieving you just

16:00 come there for the night you know and so he said, "Get somebody else who knows something." anyway they sent for me and he snatched the board from her and he said, "You take it we might get a bit of sense." well the poor sister was crying because he... but it wasn't her fault she didn't know but see I knew every patient and he... oh no we used to get on well with

16:30 they used to talk to us the same as they did the sisters

You mentioned that you did some jungle training, two weeks of jungle training, can you describe your jungle training?

Oh yes yes, I went up there in last November to see Trinity Beach well now it's a real holiday resort

17:00 but when during the war years it was all jungle then at the end of Trinity Beach is a mountain oh not a giant mountain but it is mountainous and it was jungle and there wasn't any houses and you used to go route marching used to march all day singing along you know march

17:30 and then we had to climb up this mountain through the semi jungle and every hour you had to have 10 minutes break and one day there we were half way up the mountain and we were all flat out like this and the Major Pedler, he's a South Australian, he said to the girls he said, "Nobody move, don't move don't move." so we didn't move we were all lying

18:00 on the grass flat out you know and with that a big snake crawled under my friend that was alongside of me crawled under her neck around her neck like that and of course she jumped up and squealed and so did we all and it just went down and got away but he said, "I told you not to move." and she said, "Well what would you do if a snake crawled under your neck and down." so that was one thing we did and then on the

18:30 beach was a deck about as high oh about that it would be made of ropes and that that the boys had to climb up and jump into when high tide they had to wait for high tide and jump in with their packs in as high as a deck of a ship we didn't have to do it but we climbed over it of course we had to do we didn't have to do it but we did and

19:00 every morning we had a swim in the surf at 6 o'clock in the morning we were up doing physical jerks on the beach and then a dip into the ocean and then back up for breakfast well our quarters was an old wooden building very old old Queensland one with about half a dozen steps up and raised up and when

you went inside there was a sort of a vestibule

19:30 and off that vestibule were all little rooms with numbers on it over each door so some of them said oh that was an old pub and someone said no it wasn't it was a brothel so we made up a song about the whole of our time there was about eight verses to it and it was some to Lily Marlene and one of them is:

\n[Verse follows]\n Living in a brothel numerals on the wall,\n

20:00 Funny things have happened but never this before,\n

Now that the 2 bar 2 are in it is no more a house of sin,\n The 2 bar 2 commandos preparing for the War.\n

So don't think of the singing but I mean it all goes when you go when a few times now when our reunions we got up and sung it our words

\n[Verse follows]\n And then one day, another day Friday,\n we went marching

20:30 took a short cut home,\n

waded through a river where crocodiles ever roam,\n if you think our shoes were wet,\n you are quite wrong they were around our neck,\n but our DDs are ruined preparing for the War.\n

Well our DDs were bloomers and Milanese bloomers with a big D Defence Department and arrow on them and we waded through the river up to our waist you see

21:00 so our DDs got ruined oh but there's its quite it's really funny you know it's and of course we often sing it well sometimes sing it there's a few of us left that were up there

Were you wearing skirts?

Would I what

Were you wearing skirts when you were doing this?

Shorts?

Yeah.

No you had jungle pants on, had long pants because there were leeches everywhere and then we had boots

21:30 and then we had whatisnames around the legs no oh no.

Hat?

Oh yes you never went anywhere without your hats and tie oh yes, oh no in the jungle there was no tie we had a safari jacket that was a coarse sort of khaki material

22:00 drill material, and a big hat I've got a hat in there it's moth eaten, it's not mine but it was given to me, I'm a keeper of uniforms you see, and they had big brimmed hats the tropical hats and safari jackets yes

And what other songs did you sing when you were traipsing up the mountains?

Oh she'll be coming around the mountains when she comes

22:30 when she comes you know oh and every oh We'll hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line and A Lovely Bunch of Coconuts and some of Vera Lyn's songs

How does the Siegfried line one go?

The which one?

The Siegfried line one?

Oh I can't sing oh well it goes I've got to think of the words so I thought of it afterwards when I was thinking about

23:00 \n[Verse follows]\n We're going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line\n

Have you any dirty washing mother dear\n

oh now I can't think of the last bit something about oh no can't, its gone for the minute, if I'd thought of it I'd have checked up on the, it comes back

Have you any dirty washing mother dear\n

something about no I

23:30 can't sing it now because it's just gone, old age.

Did you or were you ever aware of this thing called the Brisbane Line?

The which line?

The Brisbane Line?

No I don't know anything about the Brisbane Line.

You know about it?

Oh I've heard of it but I couldn't say anything about it for detail no not that it affected us in anyway

24:00 or anything like that but I really don't know enough about that to speak on it it didn't enter into our area well I think we were in the area sort of thing because its you know there line was to come so far down you know and that but I couldn't give you any details sort of one of those things I probably did know but I've forgotten seeing it didn't

24:30 really affect us as what we were doing I s'pose.

You mentioned the other day that you had difficulty adjusting to life when the war was over or when you returned from Japan what do you think was the most difficult aspect of readjusting?

Well I think one of them most was traffic and houses close together

25:00 you felt very very hemmed in well I did, I mean I think others that were in the city and that probably didn't feel this way I'm only speaking how I felt and I know my friends that were with me felt the same we were used to paddocks and used to big open spaces for five years and then you come home and then all the houses are close together and there's traffic everywhere the only traffic we used to get was our own army traffic

25:30 there was no through roads through any of the hospitals none of them had any through roads and you sort of had that free feeling, used to go horse riding at Warwick and up in the Atherton Tablelands we were miles out from everything just in the bush and you sort of had got used to that feeling and you got used to the people you around you and with whom you worked and they were

26:00 very close and when you went home you found there was a little difference with a lot of the others you know that weren't in the services because they had a different life and the things we'd missed out on the five years was just something they did well we had to think oh what are we going to wear today or I'll have to get something else or what'll I do today I'll have to get a

26:30 bus today its all that sort of thing you had to reassess yourself and work on it and because it was a strange feeling I don't know whether I can describe it but that's how you felt, hemmed in, and had to get to know people again they'd grown five years of that you know, it's like if you went away for five years and you came back

27:00 and you met some of your friends or you hadn't seen for five years you'd have a different feeling you know, well we had to readjust to that sort of life

Did you feel that people wouldn't understand your experience?

I don't think anybody could ever understand the experience they didn't have, it's

27:30 incomprehensible to people who you know who haven't had that experience and some people just get a bit bored with it and they you know and they you don't bother talking about it much only in times like this or it or I know some people are interested well then we can waffle on but other than that you don't you know.

Did you ever have

28:00 **any bad dreams when you got back to Sydney?**

Not really no I had some sleepless nights because of readjusting you know readjusting in a small room never been in a small room in five years except when I went home on leave and no I don't think I had because I didn't have many really bad dream bad

28:30 experiences except those just few very ill patients and you did your best to get them right again and that sort of thing but not so many traumatic things and nothing very very traumatic and as I say they're the sort of things you push at the back of your memory bank well most of us do we do more laughing than we do anything else

29:00 we don't talk much about the bad times its remember this remember that you know that sort of thing

And did you talk much about your experiences with your husband?

No, yes and no he wouldn't talk about his army life at all, he wouldn't talk about it at all hardly, now and again he'd say a few things and then sometimes

30:00 oh yeah he used to ask me about different things and I used to talk to him about it like sometimes I'd

say, oh would you do so and so Frank listen here you're not in Japan now with your house girl you know that was all said in fun but that's that sort of thing but no he didn't know well in fact the whole family doesn't know half this half of these stories things crop up and, "Mum

30:30 don't forget to tell them about this." "Mum did you tell them about so and so?" and the family are very interested that's why I'd love a copy of this it's giving the whole lot more or less.

And what was his service record, what what service was he in?

He was the 2nd field regiment, he was over in the Middle East in Cairo, and then he went to Syria and then he came back

31:00 and then he went to the Atherton Tablelands in this time I didn't have anything to do with him I just had seen him, he came home on leave before I went in the army, he came home on leave from the Middle East and he came and thanked me for all the things we'd sent and that was as much as I knew of him. I knew I've known him like by sight before we went away but just knew who he was don't think

31:30 I ever spoke to him before that and then he came back and then he went up the Tablelands and then he went up to New Guinea after that I had longer in the army that he did but of course he went over to the Middle East and everywhere yes so.

You didn't ever nurse him as a patient?

Didn't nurse him no no only when he got sick here I did yeah, fourteen years he had it

32:00 yes it was a long long time and that little sister that came was the one that used to come regularly in the later days.

And how did you meet him?

Well I worked at Nestles at Abbotsford and the management put on a dance dinner dance at the lodge hall in Parramatta Road Leichhardt

32:30 rooms or something, it's a hall I don't think it's there now somewhere near Norton Street there, only on the opposite side of the road somewhere down there and they put on this dinner dance for all the returned people plus quite a few of their staff you know at Nestles and he was there and I was there and we

33:00 sort of met up with each other and he invited me out and that was it.

Nestles have been quite a loyal company to you

Yes yes

How long did you work with them after the war?

I didn't work with him after the war, he left Nestles and he worked at Dryglo Towels down here

But you stayed with Nestles?

I stayed with Nestles yeah,

How long for?

Oh

33:30 just until before I was married oh three years, just on three years and then I knew I was getting married and I left there and then I went to work at Gladstone Hughes in the office down here because I was here and I got married when I was working at Gladstone Hughes that was on the corner of William Street

34:00 just down the road there and because I knew I was coming here to live because we bought this from Frank's aunty and so I got a job down there until I got pregnant and then I just you know, didn't gave it away

How do you think that your army days changed you?

34:30 Changed me.... I was inclined to be a little bit shy although St John's Ambulance brought me out a lot but I was shy of anybody higher in authority like that manager used to often send for me in meeting or in the grounds or in the he'd come into the office

35:00 or something into my office or something like that well I always got a bit jittery I used to think oh he's the manager you know the big big boss, I used to feel as though I stammered a bit you know and then I did this hospital training the St John Ambulance hospital training then I got to the stage where I could look anybody in the eye more or less and then when I started nursing

35:30 I thought oh well with a pair of pyjamas and a dressing gown on they've got no pips, no stripes, they're just the same as everybody else and I felt that was a thing I thought well after all they're only human they're only us, so I could stand up to anybody well I can I go I still go to different things you know and I

can

36:00 go I don't get all this jittery business that's one thing and I think it taught me to appreciate what you can do for somebody else you've got to do something for somebody else all the time so therefore I think it taught you taught me more to I didn't have to consider much at home, Mum was great you know and my father died young but

36:30 I was the head of the family more, or I was the senior of the family, and I don't know that I was inconsiderate because we had a very close family but it gave you different feeling of if you can do something for somebody do it and that's what I've done I've done that all my life now different things you know and I think it taught you to be more tolerant

37:00 you had to be you couldn't lose your temper, ever lose your temper I never ever did but you know things that you would be annoyed about or something well you couldn't let it get to you and I think its made me more placid, they always tell me I'm very placid and I never row with people or anything like that

37:30 and I have many many friends and it teaches you how to mix with other people and friends it's all due to the army and the training and what you've done.

Well thank you so much for speaking with us we're coming to the end of our tape and our time

Thank you

Is there any last thing you'd like to say either about the AAMWS or about?

About what?

About your time as a nurse

38:00 **during the war?**

I think we've covered it pretty well I think I've think I've mentioned how at times we were very upset and sad all that and we relied on one another to cheer one another up we'd say oh never mind there's always tomorrow you look him straight in the eye and don't let him get you down or something like that we'd all say this to one another and then we'd say funny things and we all learnt to cope I feel I can

38:30 cope with anything I feel and I have all my life been able to cope and I think that is one of the big things plus do what you can while you can and that's about it I think we've covered everything.

I think that's a very good note to end on.

Thank you very much.

Thank you so much Phyllis.