

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Mary Robinson (Mary) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 30th May 2003**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/368>

### Tape 1

00:43 **Morning Mary.**

Good morning.

**I'd like to start the interview today by finding out where and when you were born?**

I was born in Forbes, New South Wales on the 7th of the 12th 1926.

01:00 **And did your family stay in Forbes?**

Yes, they were out on a sheep station. My Dad was working on the sheep station and my Mum was cooking for the shearers.

**Do you have siblings?**

Yes, at that time I had one sister. Now I've got four sisters.

**Where was your family from originally?**

They came from Wales. My Dad was in the British Navy during the First World War.

01:30 Then he came to Australia on his voyages and thought it was a good place to live because if he stayed in England all he had to look forward to was the coal mines. And he didn't look forward to that, so they migrated out here with my sister who was two years old.

**And where did you go to school?**

I went to school at Horsley Park when I was four years old. They needed one extra child out there

02:00 to get a teacher, and we went to school in an old cottage on the homestead grounds until the school was born in 1934, I think it was. So we went for quite a while to this old cottage.

**Did you say it was on the grounds of your own property?**

No. It was Horsley Homestead. They've got a big homestead out at Horsley and it had a lot of property. And this was

02:30 on the property. And we were allowed to have the school there and the teacher lived in the cottage.

**And how long did you stay at Forbes?**

I think I was...I had to be around four years old I think before we came because I had my other sister before we left there and she was two years behind me.

03:00 **What age were you when you left school?**

Fourteen.

**Did you leave to find work?**

No, at that stage unless you were going onto higher education you left at fourteen. And the war was starting and my Dad was joining the air force, so he

03:30 moved us from the farm into Wentworthville. And I went to Parramatta school for six months I think and then I left. I had a job and then I joined the Land Army.

**Your home at Wentworthville, was it on a property?**

No, it was just one of the cottages there. Two of my sisters still live in Wentworthville.

04:00 **What did your father do when you moved to Wentworthville?**

He was in the air force then. He joined the air force.

**In what role?**

A mechanical inspector. He was actually on board the aeroplane that flew under the harbour bridge. He was one of the crew on that. It was very naughty but they did it.

04:30 **Do you recall much of the Depression?**

I can remember us getting dole parcels with stuff in for Mum to make us clothes. I know my Dad was working on the road building roads, and I know it was very hard. But I can't remember much more. Nobody seemed to have money in those days, so you didn't seem to stand out.

05:00 Everybody was in the same boat.

**What was life like on the property?**

At home? It was great. I loved it. I worked with my Dad out in the paddocks all the time. It was good.

**How would you help him?**

Anyway, he told me to do it. If he was doing the rotary hoeing amongst the grapes he'd say, "Go ahead and hold the tendrils back," so that's

05:30 what you did. You did whatever he told you.

**Did you enjoy that life?**

Yes, out in the open.

**How different was it when you moved to Wentworthville?**

Well I didn't like that very much. I used to get out the window at two o'clock in the morning and get on my push bike and ride back out to our place and stay there for the weekend

06:00 by myself, until they sold the place and I couldn't do it anymore. But I didn't want to leave at all.

**How close were you to shops and centres and...?**

We had no shops. There was one place at the post office where the mail used to go to and it had a few things in there. But we actually had no shops.

06:30 We would go to Fairfield to get any food. We used to go once a month or something and get food. And get stuff we couldn't do ourselves. We used to make our own butter and things like that.

**So you were self sufficient to some degree?**

Yes, mostly. There were just a few things.

**How else did the land provide for you?**

Well we had the crops that

07:00 went away. We even grew mushrooms in a shed and they would go away and Dad would get the money for that. We grew tomatoes and pumpkins and things like that. Potatoes. Things that you need yourself. And if we didn't have them somebody else would. Someone in the area had them.

**How rare a commodity was meat?**

Oh we did alright with meat.

07:30 We used to go rabbiting and catch rabbits. Sometimes they would kill a calf or something like that.

**I've never been rabbiting. Can you tell me how you did it?**

I can tell you how I did it. I took my dog with me and we used to chase the rabbit into a hollow log and I'd get a long stick and put the dog down that end and I'd be up this end and I'd poke the stick down and when it came out the

08:00 dog would grab it. I'd take it off the dog and we'd go home. Once the rabbit was still alive. I had to wring its neck like I had seen Dad do. I used to screw the neck round and round and round and round and when I stopped the neck would go whir..... and it shook its head and looked at me, so then I had to take it home alive. I found out I couldn't do that.

08:30 Poor little rabbit.

**You were never tempted to keep any as a pet?**

No. We only ate them.

**I've heard stories of rabbit pelts being a valuable item.**

Pellets?

**No pelts?**

Yes, well they used to have a piece of wire like a hoop and they'd stick it on it and stick it out to dry and you could use those. People had coats

09:00 out of rabbit fur. It was good.

**It sounds as though you learnt fairly early to care for yourself?**

I was very independent. That's the way we were brought up to be independent.

**How else would you describe yourself as a young girl?**

A bit of a tearaway. Up the trees all the time.

09:30 Mum reckoned that there were flags out of my knickers all over the trees. I kept leaving pieces of material everywhere. I never fell out of a tree or anything, but I was always up them. Like most country kids. We used to walk for miles and miles.

**Was school a walk?**

Yes, we had two miles to walk to school.

10:00 **In shoes?**

In shoes? Yes. Which we took off when we got to a creek crossing and had to go across, so we'd take our shoes off. Yes, my mother always made sure we had good shoes on our feet.

**Had you ever heard any stories of your father's time in the navy?**

10:30 No. I can't remember anyway.

**And were there other relatives who had served in the First World War?**

I don't really know because we didn't know any of our other relatives because they were all over in Wales. Later on my mother's brother and family came out. They were out here then. Then later on one of my Mum's sister's came out.

11:00 My Dad was a twin and his brother had died, so he had no siblings. I used to write to his father, and that's the only contact I had with him.

**Did you feel...was there any connection to the mother country?**

Yes.

11:30 Only because of through my Mum and Dad you know. Because they were Welsh and they would tell us things and talk about it, and then when my uncle and aunty came out, they were Welsh too, so we had them to talk to.

**Occasions like Empire Day, were they of significance to you?**

I can remember as children, it used to be a big thing.

12:00 We would be taken by bus, the whole school into Fairfield and it was a big thing. But these days it's nothing.

**And what of Anzac Day?**

The same sort of thing. Empire Day was good though. It's not quite the same out there as it is now though. Because that war had been gone and the next one hadn't come.

12:30 So it was that time in between.

**What of that time as the war was approaching? You were still at school?**

Yes.

**Did you have an awareness of that approaching conflict?**

Not too much because we didn't get a newspaper. We had no radio, no television. No way of knowing very much what was going on.

13:00 For a long time we just had hurricane lights and things like that you know. Kerosene lamps, we never had the electricity on for a long time. When we got the water on that was a big thing. We had tanks until then.

**Just how big a change is that?**

When from? When I was young to now? It's amazing.

- 13:30 My kids can't understand why I can't grasp all this stuff. I tell them, I've been putting stuff into my mind since 1926 and I can't take any more of this stuff. It's easy for you guys.

**I'm wondering, you said that you enjoyed being out on the property and perhaps more so than**

- 14:00 **when you were at Wentworthville. I'm curious as to what other effects moving into a closer community had upon you.**

One thing it had was that we had other children close to us and we were able to make friends. I made a friend with the girl up the road and we have been friends ever since until she died in April this year. So that made a big difference. There were a lot more people around.

- 14:30 A lot more friends. A big change.

**Had you felt isolated at all?**

Not really. It was what I grew up with, so I really didn't know anything else.

**It sounds like it might have been a very big change then?**

Yes.

**Did you take to that change?**

- 15:00 Not at first I didn't but gradually I had to, you had to. When Mum and Dad sold the place I had nowhere to go then so I had to stay home. I used to ride down the Western highway, through Wallgrove Camp in the early hours of the morning. "She's gone again" - they'd say.

**Well now I'm wondering what**

- 15:30 **you do recall of the beginning of the war. The day the war began or was announced at least in Australia. What are your memories of that?**

Not too much actually. Being that we had no way of hearing too much out there, by word of mouth from people who might have heard things. But I know my Dad wanted to go and do his bit.

- 16:00 So he moved us all off the property because he didn't want to leave just women on their own out there. That's about it, I think.

**Was that a sentiment you understood?**

No, I didn't want to leave there at the time for any reason. The others might not have felt the same but that's how I felt. I didn't want to leave.

- 16:30 But as it turned out it was probably a good thing.

**And although the war was European based at that time, was there an impact on you?**

I don't think there was much of an impact at first. We were too far away from it, except the men were joining up and going.

- 17:00 It made an impact that way but at first because it was so far away, it just didn't seem real at first. We couldn't quite understand it you know.

**Were there people you knew personally who left for the war?**

Yes, the boys we grew up with out there, they joined up.

- 17:30 Young boys. Then we met a lot more. When we moved into Wentworthville, we met a lot more from there. They're the ones I remember more because I was older then.

**When you turned 14 and finished school, what were you looking forward to?**

- 18:00 I don't rightly know. I know I wanted to get back on the land as fast as I could and when the Land Army came up I thought, whoopee! And I nagged at my mother and I nagged and nagged for quite a long while, and in the end she said, "For God sake! Go!"

- 18:30 That's what she said to me. So I did.

**That of course was a couple of years later after you had finished your schooling?**

Yes.

**What did you do in the meantime?**

I worked. First Mum put me in a shop in Parramatta which I didn't like. Sewing things. And then I joined my sister in Sydney in an underwear factory. She was making underwear.

19:00 And we went down to join the Land Army from there and my girlfriend who was 8 months younger than me, was only still 14. They had one girl too many, so they looked at her and thought she looked a bit thin and young and asked her "Would she stand out to the next intake?" So I said "Well if she's standing out, I'm standing down too". And my

19:30 sister said "And I'm standing down too". So that was alright. So we did. But my friend and I kept going to the Land Army headquarters all the time until the eventually sent both of us away.

**So this had been something you built up to for some time?**

Yes. By that time she was 15 and I had turned 16 by that time. I was only 15 when we first went.

20:00 **Before I start asking you why exactly, I'm wondering how close you were to your sisters?**

Yes, I was close to my sisters.

**To any one in particular?**

The youngest one. She was only born when... I'd tell her "I left home when she was born". She was born...she was only young, so I didn't get as close to her as the others.

20:30 But the others, we were very close.

**And what other friendships had you developed by this time?**

I still write to my friend that I had at primary school out at Horsley Park. She lives up at Cooranbong now. I'm still in contact with her. And I've sort of lost touch mostly with the young ones from Wentworthville. They've gone their own ways.

21:00 Seeing, I don't live there anymore.

**What effects could you see around you that the war was having?**

Well it split families up didn't it, because the men all joined up. Some weren't. Some never came home. It made a big impact on the families.

21:30 The young men were gone.

**Were any losses of young men close enough to your circle that you were aware of it?**

No. No most of the ones that I knew came back again. Except the boy who lived over the road from us. He was in the air force and disappeared in his plane -

22:00 I remember that. So he didn't come back but most of the others did.

**And your father was working with the air force at the time. How long would he be away?**

He was at Richmond and that's why we were at Wentworthville because it was on the same train line, so when he got leave he didn't have far to get home.

22:30 I'm not sure how often he came home because I wasn't there. I was gone myself.

**Now I'm dying to ask, why this compulsion to join the Land Army from such an early age?**

Because I was brought up on the land and I think it was just born into me. That was what I loved doing and that's what I knew. So I knew I wouldn't have any problems.

23:00 Besides there were enough girls in our house already, so they wouldn't miss one.

**You didn't think you'd miss home?**

No. No. It was like an adventure, wasn't it?

23:30 **A lot of people say that about the early impression of the war, and their reasons for getting involved. Is that all there was for you?**

Oh no, no. You knew the country was going to need food and if all the men were gone, who was going to do it. So you knew they needed food. So apart from being an adventure it was

24:00 something that had to be done by somebody.

**That's a very sensible and committed outlook for a 14 or 15 year old girl.**

You grow up very quickly in the country.

**Had that message of the need to pitch in for the country been thrust upon you?**

It was in the news and on the radio and things like that.

24:30 **Were other services ever an option for you?**

No, I just wanted to get back on the land. They took you younger than the other services did too. I would have had to wait, wouldn't I?

25:00 **Would you describe yourself as patient?**

Patient? I'm pretty patient these days. Whether I was in those day...I probably wanted things to happen then and now. I have plenty of patience today though.

**What visions did you have of what you could contribute when you were going to join the Land Army?**

Because I had been getting crops off for my

25:30 Dad, I knew exactly what had to be done. So it wasn't a problem. I knew what I was getting in to. It was something I knew I could do.

**How much did wartime rationing and austerity affect your family?**

I know I used to get prunes for Mum for the baby when I

26:00 was in Griffith. I used to get prunes and get them home to her. You couldn't get those. But other than that I really don't know too much because as I said I was in the army and I don't know.

**What about your time before the Land Army?**

Yes, we seemed to be able to get food there. Whether Mum had problems, I can't remember. I can't remember much

26:30 about that part of it.

**When you finally did come to join the Land Army, were you accepted straight away?**

Yes, apart from that time I told you when we had to wait for that year. I could have got in but I wouldn't go without my friend, so I waited for her to get a bit older.

**And how old were you when you did join?**

I was 16

27:00 by the time I went away. It was still on their books that I was 16 and she was 15.

**Had anyone else joined with you?**

No, it was just the two of us at the time.

**Was there a minimum age for Land Army girls?**

I think they would take you at 16, but there were a few who got in at 15 I think.

27:30 They didn't know if we put our ages up.

**Whose idea was that?**

Ours. The two of us. My girlfriend had four brothers at home. Her father was in the army. Her eldest brother was the air force and the next one was the army. She was the next in line and she had to go somewhere and do something, didn't she?

28:00 **It does sound like you were madly or keenly rushing into...**

Keenly is the word.

**Or keenly rushing into the service. Why did you want to leave home and what you knew?**

What I knew? I really didn't leave what I knew. What I knew what back on the farm.

28:30 The house in Wentworthville was just a house, and it didn't hold anything for me. What I loved was back on the farm, and I was sort of going back to that. In my mind anyway.

**You've mentioned your mother's reaction to your joining...**

She got fed up with me nagging.

**Did she express any**

29:00 **remorse at your leaving?**

No, she still had four others.

**What of them, how did they take it?**

A year after we had been in there my eldest sister joined too. She came into the Land Army then. But

Mum still had three others. Plenty.

**Did your father give you any reaction?**

No. He didn't worry.

29:30 He knew I'd be all right.

**Was there any advice?**

None that I can remember. Not that I can remember.

**Where had you actually signed up for the Land Army?**

In Martin Place in Sydney. They had an office there. The time between when we

30:00 first signed up and when we actually went, we had had our medicals. They used to send us down to a big building that was down near Central [Station]...we used to call it the egg building. It was a funny shaped building. I think it's where the swimming pool is now. It was on that property there. They had us marching round and round this building. I don't know what for. We were going to go digging and things like that. But they did that with us in that period

30:30 before we went. I don't know why we were marching but we were.

**By the time you were called up into the service proper, I believe it was 1942, and by this time the Japanese had entered the war.**

Yes, I think they had.

31:00 I was away when they came into Sydney Harbour. Yes, I think the Japs had come in then.

**What of earlier when Singapore fell and Darwin was bombed, did that make a mark on you?**

No, not really because it's not like today when you've got television and you've got radio. We didn't have much contact with the outside world at all.

31:30 Only our group. It's hard for you to realise, isn't it? We didn't have any of that.

**I'm just wondering how distant you felt the war was?**

Well it seemed to be a long way away until they came into the harbour. And we didn't sort of know about that straight away either.

32:00 It took a while to filter through. But it made people sit up and take notice I think and realise that it wasn't that far away after all.

**Were you issued with a uniform when you signed up?**

No. We went down on a Friday afternoon again, and they said "Right, you two can go on Sunday. Here's a list of things to get", so we had

32:30 to go out and get it. Everything we would need, we went and bought and then went home again. They issued us with nothing. We had been in there for about a year I think before they started to issue us with stuff. Very slow getting anything to the girls.

**How quickly after enlisting was it**

33:00 **that you did actually leave?**

Well that day that we went down was Friday and we left on the Sunday. So that was very quick. And seeing there was no Saturday shopping in those days, Saturday morning we had to run around like mad things to get them before the shops shut. But we had already joined a year before officially.

33:30 So we were just waiting until she got old enough to go. She was 15 by then.

**It sounds like a bit of a rushed departure.**

Yes it was.

**Was there time to say goodbye?**

Yes, I said goodbye. Nobody came to see us off, only one of my boyfriends; he came to see us off. And the Daily Telegraph was at

34:00 railway station in Sydney and they took photos and I've got a photo of the train, the carriage we were on. They took a photo of us and my friend who was there went and got it from the Daily Telegraph. But it was very quick once they said "You go!"

**So there was a boyfriend you were leaving behind?**

Yes. He joined the merchant navy.

34:30 **And was he the only one to leave behind?**

Listen, I was only 16.

**I only asked because you said one of your boyfriends. Nothing enough to keep you from leaving?**

No. We had lots of friends.

35:00 Nobody special.

**The train you said that you were on, where had it taken you?**

It took us to a place called Maimuru, which wasn't really a station it was just a siding and the farmers were waiting at the siding. They had been putting girls off the train all the way along the line, but we were sent to Maimuru,

35:30 and there was about six of us I think who went to that farmer. I think there was about six. He had three big prune orchards, so we were picking prunes...which you don't pick; you crawl around on the ground picking them up off the ground. You have to wait until they hit the ground before you can harvest them.

**Were you aware of**

36:00 **where you were going to be sent?**

No, we didn't know until we were given the orders right...who we were to go to.

**And what of your friend who joined with you, were you able to...?**

We were together all the time. One wouldn't go without the other. If they took one, they took us both.

**What did you know of the rules and regulations governing the Land Army?**

36:30 We didn't know anything at that time. We were put in an old house on a property that was empty. We had a matron with us and she was supposed to look after us and cook the meals, so when we came in at night the meals would be ready. After we had been there for a little while she decided she could earn extra money if she went out and worked picking prunes too,

37:00 so when we came home the meal wasn't ready was it, she was out working in the field which she wasn't supposed to do.

**How long did you stay on this property?**

We stayed there until the crop was done and I can't remember how long that was. We had four orchards.

37:30 I know it was... We went to Griffith from there and in the winter time we were recalled back to the same man. He wanted two girls to prune the trees for the winter. And he went down to Sydney and he requested that my friend and I go back there. And they said, "No" and that we were in Griffith and he said, "Oh well, if I

38:00 can't have them I don't want any." So they recalled us and we went back to him and we lived in his house because there was just the two of us. So he and his family, we were very good friends. We used to write to them and he and his wife came down to my friend's wedding. They've gone now but we stayed in touch with those people.

38:30 **And what of the property that you were working on in Griffith?**

We worked on lots there. We were doing all sorts of things. First we were at Beelbangera which is out of Griffith and then in Mirool House in Griffith itself, and then we were sent out to Hanwood from there. So we were in three camps in the MIA [Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area]. We did lots of jobs. Lots of different things.

39:00 The farmer we worked for out at Hanwood, he taught us to drive the tractors and then to drive the three ton truck and both of us got our licences in Griffith to drive this three ton truck.

**That's fairly impressive?**

Yes, very good. We thought it was good. It was good for him too

39:30 because he had fallen and hurt his leg and he couldn't drive, so we had to drive him everywhere then, wherever he wanted to go.

**When you say you were in camps, am I to believe that that's a Land Army...?**

Camp. A shed. They were tin sheds. No windows. They just had a sheet of tin that you could push out with a stick to hold it out to get the air through.



- 40:00 The cows used to stick their heads through at times. We had a stretcher with a straw palliasse on it, which is like a bag full of straw and sometimes there would be scotch thistles amongst the straw and when you laid on that you got up quickly and search amongst the straw to get rid of it. The people would keep sticking the legs under and when you got in the bed would collapse.
- 40:30 Naughty girls.
- I presume you were with a greater number of Land Army girls here than at the other property?**
- Yes. There were at least four rooms in each hut, there might have been more, and there would have been four girls in each room. So there... I think it was four. So there would be about 16 girls to a hut. One bathroom on the end, which had a
- 41:00 bucket shower which you pulled up... pulled it down to fill it with hot water and then you pulled it up again and hooked it on a nail, and then pulled the chain to have a shower, which sounds funny today.

## Tape 2

- 00:37 **Mary, you were telling us about being in Griffith for some time on a few different properties and returning to the original one you worked on at the request of the farmer, how long were you based there, or was that your final...?**
- 01:00 Do you mean at Maimuru? No, after we finished the orchards we were sent back to Griffith again. We actually left Beelbanger camp to go back to Maimuru and then when we came back we were in Mirool House and then from there we were sent out to (UNCLEAR) camp at Hanwood. We were the first intake into that camp. It was just to get us out closer to where we were working instead of travelling back and forward.
- 01:30 We took our bicycles out. We could ride our bicycles in and out before that.
- How different was this new camp?**
- It was brand new. No one else had been in it. It wasn't as nice as Mirool House because that was a big old guest house and it had corridors and bathrooms.
- 02:00 This was entirely different. These were just tin sheds. Big sheds, but they were still sheds, and the toilets were in another shed way over there somewhere, which was pretty cold in the night time when the frost was thick.
- Being moved into a new holding**
- 02:30 **area, a new camp specifically for you, were you feeling you were being looked after by Land Army?**
- We still had a matron there but this one cooked and she was quite a good matron. So all the camps had a matron in charge of them to do the cooking and just be there for the girls in case there were any problems.
- 03:00 **And what work were you doing here?**
- I'm just trying to think. The first person we were sent to had apple orchards. So we were picking the apples from there and packing them and things like that. I can't remember what the second one did, but the third one was the man who taught us to drive the tractor and the truck. He
- 03:30 had grapes and melons and different things like that. I remember once there was a rockmelon ripening and the first of the season and we had been watching it. So as soon as it was ripe my girlfriend and I ate it. The farmer came and said, "Do you know what happened to that rockmelon up there? I've been watching that rockmelon." We looked at each other and laughed. He knew we had already had it. So he missed out.
- 04:00 **Were you allowed to eat or take some produce?**
- We were allowed to, yes. So long as we kept working we could do anything. We used to eat the fruit and we could take it home with us. If you wanted fruit back at camp you could take it back with you. We had plenty of fruit in those days.
- How many opportunities were you given to come back home?**
- 04:30 Not very often. I came back once for a cousin's wedding I think it was. We could get leave every so often but it was once every six months or something like that. Didn't come home very often.
- 05:00 **Where was your final posting?**

I was at Hanwood camp when peace was declared. They just packed us up and said, "Thanks girls, goodbye." That was it.

**What did you do?**

Came home. Came home to annoy my mother again.

**05:30 Was it a very quick ending to your Land Army career?**

Yes, it was. Once...and I don't know why that happened because they should have kept us there until at least the men could come back in. We were sent to Sydney to do a census. There was a census being taken and they needed people in a hurry, so they had

**06:00** a big building in Harrington Street in Sydney and a lot of us Land Army girls were put in there to help decode the census. So we did that still in uniform we were. We were actually in there when peace was declared because I remember we went down to Martin Place and joined the crowd. We just dropped pens and went down there and joined them

**06:30** when peace was declared. It was a wonderful place to be when peace was declared, in Martin Place.

**So you had actually been taken off the land prior to the end of the war to help with...?**

Yes to help with the census business, yes.

**How did you make that decision to leave the property?**

Well I think we were told to go, that was it.

**07:00** We had been sent there. We were sent there to help out. They probably needed a lot of people in a hurry, so they just got them from everywhere because there were a lot of people in there doing it.

**Is that something you continued with after?**

No, no. That was just to do that, that was all.

**07:30** Nothing else for them. It was just that one thing.

**What else do you recall of that day when peace was declared?**

I can remember we all put our pens down and left. We went down to Martin Place and joined the crowd down there. My friend and I ended up on the back of an army truck out at some army camp. The guys pulled us on board and I said to her, "How are we going to get home from here?"

**08:00** We got home somehow. I don't remember how we got home but we got home. It was like everybody had gone crazy. Everybody was so excited. It was a wonderful day.

**How did you find out about the news?**

Somebody must have had a radio or something because it came through while we were all working. I don't know what happened to the census after that because everybody dropped their pens and ran.

**08:30 When were you actually discharged from the Land Army service?**

It was some time after that. I hadn't thought to look at any papers to find out, so it was after that day. They didn't send us back up so we were demobbed [demobilised] down in Sydney.

**09:00 Were you required to return any of your...?**

Yes, yes. We weren't allowed to keep anything. They took everything back even the blankets and things. Everything went back. You had to return everything. The only thing I managed to keep was the badge off my hat. I took that off and kept that and I've got that.

**09:30 Where were you being housed when you were brought back to Sydney?**

I think we were at our own homes. I think we were at our own homes when we did that.

**What was the reception like when you got back home?**

Just the same I think. There was this new person there that I didn't see much of. A new baby Mum had had.

**10:00** I left the day she was born. She was probably about three by then. So she was so far behind the rest of us that everything revolved around her as it does with little people.

**I imagine it was somewhat different to your new experience of being**

**10:30 housed with other Land Army girls?**

Yes but it wasn't that much different. There were still a lot of girls around. You still had to do everything for yourself so it didn't make much difference. It was just that there weren't quite as many rules and

regulations.

**What else did you notice that was different?**

11:00 Well there were a lot of people around, whereas being out on the farms there weren't many people around there. I don't know, you just sort of adapt and get back into whatever you have to do. You just adapt and get on with your life.

**Were there difficulties in resuming that life?**

11:30 The hardest part was being indoors. It was very difficult. I felt claustrophobic because you were in little offices or something like that and it was too hard to take. It was hard finding a job you could settle into because everything was indoors. That was the hard part.

**What work did you do?**

I tried several things.

12:00 I got a job machining, making clothes but that was on the top of the building and it was in the middle of summer. It was very hot and you were in this little room and it wasn't good. Half a day I think we stayed there. Half a day - that was it. It was enough. Then where did I end up? Then we went to another place.

12:30 Can't remember where we went, actually. I can remember that place because it was so hot. I think then I went to Bonds out at Wentworthville. It used to be up the hill from where we lived. I used to walk up there and that was in the packing room. That was a big open place where you could pack all the

13:00 cotton and stuff, and that was all right because you weren't closed in so much. I think that's where we were. We stayed there because it was near where we lived too. We didn't have to travel. We could walk there.

**When you say we, is this you and your friend still?**

Yes, yes. We're still together.

**What was her name?**

She was Joy Sinclair at the time.

13:30 **And did you continue to work together?**

Yes, we stayed there and worked there. I got married and I had my eldest daughter before she got married. I can't remember how old she was, but I can remember having her sitting on my knee at her wedding, so she must have been nine months or something like that.

14:00 She died in April this year my friend.

**How did you meet your husband?**

I met him because my youngest sister got married and I was the chief bridesmaid. My other sister had us two and her husband had his two brothers, and his eldest brother was the best man, and that's who I married.

14:30 I met him at my sister's wedding. So we married brothers.

**How soon after that did you marry?**

Oh, a good while. Probably a year and a half or something like that.

**Had you formed any relationships during your Land Army time?**

15:00 With the opposite sex, do you mean? With those people? Yes, we had friends. The two of us, we had friends who were friends. We did everything together.

**Everything?**

Yes. Everything. No, we used to go with some local boys in Griffith. Local boys in Young when we were there and we were friendly with.

15:30 We needed somebody in Young because it was a long way out from Young to Maimuru and they had a motor bike and car so we were right, we could get in.

**Were any of these friendships, any that you kept in touch with?**

No. One of the ones from Griffith I still know today. He was my

16:00 friend but he was my girlfriend's boyfriend. He lives in Dubbo now. He ended up marrying a Land Army girl who was in camp with us. So we still visit them and keep in touch with those two. A lot of the boys in Griffith married Land Army girls. One of them has died just recently but I still keep in touch with them, and with his wife now because she

16:30 was a Land Army girl. There weren't many older people in these places but there were people our age. We used to sing that song, "They're either too young or too old". You probably don't know that song, do you?

**How's it go?**

"They're either too young or too old".

17:00 Something about, "They're either too bold or too brassy green. The best are in the army and the rest will never harm you." Something like that. That was a song out then. And that was true. They were either too young or too old because they were all at the war.

17:30 **You mentioned earlier that you did know or know of some boys who went off to war and did come back. Were you aware of their return?**

My girlfriend's two elder brothers. One was air force and one was army. I knew them, and then a lot of the boys...we sort of had groups and we used to go walking and different picnics and things. A lot of those had joined up.

18:00 Most of them seemed to come home ok.

**Had your husband served?**

Yes. He was in the air force. He was in the Flying Catalinas and he was up in New Guinea. He got malaria while he was up there. Air force. My Dad was air force.

18:30 **Had your husband been discharged by the time you had met him?**

Yes. Yes, he had.

**He was working then?**

Yes, he would have been working.

**What did he do?**

He worked at Bankstown Aerodrome. He worked at Qantas [Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services] I think in Sydney. I think he was working in there when I first met him as a mechanic on the planes and things like that.

19:00 I know when he left there, he went to Bankstown and worked at Bankstown on the planes as well. Later on he joined the Water Board and he was still in the Water Board when he retired as a mechanical inspector.

**And what of your father after the war?**

19:30 I'm just trying to think. He was Water Board. He had been on the Water Board before he joined up and they kept the job open for him, and he was an inspector on the Water Board. So he finished his time out on the Water Board.

**Where were you living once you had gotten married?**

20:00 When we first married we bought a block of ground and it cost us a 100 pound, for the block of ground in Merrylands. We were building bit by bit. Building the house on it as we could afford it. But then I ended up having twins, so I had three babies under two years old, and it was just too hard in the garage. We were living in the garage.

20:30 We didn't have electricity and we didn't have water laid on. It was really difficult. So we decided we couldn't keep going like that, so he applied for a service loan and we got this place. We came here, so we could take the children to the beach because it was very difficult trying to take three little ones. One shop in Merrylands asked me "To take the twin pram out of the shop because it

21:00 took up too much room". I think I said, "Yes, I'll take it out and I'll never come back." It was hard with three little ones trying to get anywhere. One time I took them on a bus. I had to put the little older one on the bus and sit her on a seat and then lift one in and ask somebody to hold it while I went back in and got the other one, but then I had to go back and fold

21:30 the pram, and then when we got to where we wanted to get off, we had to repeat that. It was just holding the buses up too long. So we only ever did it once. So if I couldn't walk there, I didn't go. Pushing the three of them in the pram with nappies and everything for a day out. Merrylands to Wentworthville was cross country. I don't know how long it took me but it took me a long time. And then we had to come back at the end

22:00 after I had visited my Mum. It was a long day. A long walk.

**It sounds as though life after the war was still a little hard?**

Oh yes, it was hard. Very hard.

**How common was that?**

That was the common thing then. People were putting up garages on blocks and living in them, or living in tin sheds somewhere.

22:30 Nobody had anything. It was really hard after the war.

**How did this make you feel about your war time service?**

It didn't worry me. It was just how things were in those days. You just accepted things.

23:00 And most people were in the same boat. It wasn't that you were the only one like that. Everybody was like it. Men didn't have anything when they came back.

**You mentioned your friend Joy who you had gone right through your Land Army time with. Were there any other girls you have stayed in touch with?**

I stayed in touch with quite a few of them but

23:30 she was the closest. Like we were very close. No, there's still one in Batlow I write to. One in Griffith. One in Dubbo I write to. And we keep in touch... occasionally we have a reunion back in Griffith or a reunion down in Batlow or something like that. Then we all get together, the ones who are still here. And it's nice to see them again.

24:00 **As well as the Land Army, there were other women services that were new at that time as well, did you have occasion to be in contact with them?**

No. Where we were situated out in the bush they weren't around. They weren't around at all.

**How aware were you of their work**

24:30 **and their contribution?**

I didn't know what they did but if the war had kept on longer my girlfriend and I were going to go and try the navy next, but we didn't because we didn't get to that stage. We thought when she got a bit older we'd go and join the navy. We had had three years in the Land Army, so we thought we'd go and try the navy if the war had kept going. But it never happened.

25:00 **Once the war ended was there a camaraderie between the women's services?**

No. No, they didn't like the Land Army for some reason. Some were all right but some of them didn't. And that's all I'll say on that.

**What about later or nowadays even?**

They're better now.

25:30 They accept us more now.

**And what of between the Land Army girls. How close were relations?**

Oh, we were very close. In the camps... we didn't mix with the ones who were in Leeton or anything but the ones who were in your own camp,

26:00 you did. If you moved to a different camp...I was in Beelbangera and Mirool House and Hanwood which is still the Griffith area you know. Different camps, so you knew three different lots of girls.

**Have you marched in Anzac Days?**

Yes, every year since we've been allowed.

26:30 **When were you first allowed?**

Not too long ago. It's not too long ago. How long ago would it have been? I must know this one from the others. I can't remember how many years we've marched. There's nothing around to tell me either.

**Was it sometime after the war though?**

It's only a few years ago.

27:00 Exactly how many, I can't tell. If it's half a dozen I'll be lucky. Something like that.

**That's a long time to wait to march.**

Yes, it certainly was. Not that we weren't trying... fighting to be allowed to. But they wouldn't let us.

27:30 **I imagine that length of time probably drew the Land Army closer?**

Closer, yes. Especially the ones who met in Sydney. I mean there used to be quite a lot but now people have died and moved so there's not such a big group there now. This year I think we only had about

28:00 24 or something. When we first marched there was quite a lot, but now there's less. Now some of them ride in the jeep. They can't march that far. So we're all getting old.

**Do you see grandchildren of Land Army girls marching now?**

This year

28:30 we had a girl come with her grandmother's medal and her grandmother had died, so she put her medal on and she marched with us. And we had the twin daughters of another one of our girls with us this year. My granddaughters would march. That little one that's there in the photo, she would march.

**Would you like her to?**

29:00 Oh I reckon if you can't march, it would be nice for them to march if they want to. I think they were the only ones who marched with us this year. Those two. Did you see the march this year?

**I might have seen you there.**

29:30 You would have because everybody rang up and said.

**What does it mean to you to march?**

It's wonderful. It's just wonderful to get some recognition because we did work hard, and we did keep the food coming. We did all sorts of jobs.

30:00 So it's nice to get recognition. And the people in the streets are lovely. They all cheer and sing out, "Good on you girls." So they know what we did.

**What recognition did you receive straight after the war?**

None. Just "Give us back all the stuff we've given you" and goodbye.

30:30 That was it.

**How aware were people then of what you had done?**

Well I know that the ones at home would have realised. They wouldn't have had any food. So I think over the years when we've been getting a bit of information out about us, people have come to understand

31:00 more. Most people just go into a shop and if there's a tomato there they don't worry about where it's come from, or how it got there.

**Perhaps not anymore. But I imagine at the time...**

Well there was a lot of rationing during the war time and they couldn't get certain things, so they would have realised then.

31:30 **How proud were you at the time to be doing that work?**

I don't know about proud. I just loved that work, and I knew it was for a good cause, and I was proud to be a Land Army girl. I'm still proud I was a Land Army girl.

32:00 **More so now?**

Yes, I think as you get older, things mean more to you. Yeah, I think that's about it. You realise more as you get older.

32:30 **What does it mean now for you to have been a Land Army girl?**

I've got a lot of nice friends out of it. And we did a good job and we've got a lot of nice people in the country who we're still friendly with. So that's good.

**Have you been back to visit the places you worked at?**

Yes. I've been back to Maimuru.

33:00 The farmer we worked for, they ended up selling up and moving to Junee I think. I think they went to Junee I think. I've lost touch now. But they had a son Jack and I've lost touch with him over the years. And the people in Griffith that we worked for, they'd be gone now but I know the farmer who taught us to

33:30 drive the tractor and everything, well he got killed. The tractor tipped over and landed on top of him with him on it, so he was killed that way. So you lose touch with people then.

**Did you lose touch with the land itself?**

The little plot I've got here is the only one I play around with.

34:00 I'm still a country girl by heart though, but it's lovely living here just the same. I've got the beach over there.

**Were you ever tempted after the war to move back out to the land?**

I don't think so. We missed it, we really missed it.

34:30 But there are other things in your life. Kids came along and there are other things and you went different ways. It was a different atmosphere because the boys were coming home. It was exciting when they were all coming home too. The ones who were ok, that was good. They had a lot of problems that they

35:00 needed help with. You just have to get on with your life regardless of what happens.

**What things about the Land Army did you miss?**

First there was the comradeship because we were all there together. It was like one big happy family.

35:30 Just being out in the open I think. Working out in the open is much better than working inside four walls.

**You've spoken of how growing up on the land**

36:00 **developed a love for the land and working on the land. Looking back in hindsight, do you think you were prepared for what you had to do in the Land Army?**

I think I had a pretty good idea, but there was still a lot of things we did that I hadn't already done that I knew nothing about. I had to learn just the same as the others. I

36:30 had to learn how to do things. And most of the farmers were very good and explained things to you. My friend and I were even given big shot guns and we had to walk around shooting bullet into the air to frighten the birds off the trees. So for a couple of 15 and 16 year olds when you think about it now, it was pretty good. I had never used a gun before.

37:00 **I was just wondering what things you were used to in your early life that you missed, or the things that had changed?**

What sort of things do you mean?

37:30 **When you moved from the land towards the city?**

Well we left the farm completely then and we were just in a little house with a little yard, whereas we could just leave our house and we could just walk and walk all day long. You couldn't do that in the built up area, not where we lived. I know when they were laying the pipe

38:00 down. I remember we got inside these big pipes and we must have run those pipes for miles and miles and when we came out we didn't know where we were, so we had to run back again to find our way home again. You couldn't do that now, could you? We used to go across the road from our place. There was a big dairy.

38:30 They had lots of cattle there and we'd be there doing all sorts of things at the dairy. When I look at the distances we walked now I think, gee how did we walk that far? We used to be gone all day. So it's different when you're out in the bush and you've got all this room you can move around in and you come into a suburb and that's your plot and you're supposed to

39:00 stay in that area. It's very difficult. But you get used to everything.

**How close to Forbes was your property?**

It was 40 miles. I think I heard Mum say she had to go in a horse and cart to the hospital to have me.

39:30 So she had to go about a week before because there was only a horse and cart to get her there, before I was born. When she knew it was about a week to the date the doctor had given her, then they took her into the hospital. She did that twice because my second sister was born in the same place.

**I hope the doctor's**

40:00 **prediction was accurate.**

She didn't tell me that, but it was a long way in a horse and cart.

**I'm trying to get a picture of what your surrounds were like?**

Where out in the bush in those days? I don't remember too much but we had photos of this little house with a veranda, with me

40:30 on the veranda. There must have been a creek somewhere not far away because my cousins came to

visit and my eldest sister and I and our two cousins we went down to creek and there was a sandy beach on the river. So Mum had bought us these new shoes. So we wouldn't lose them, we dug a hole in the beach and buried the shoes and to this day that's where they still are because we couldn't find them.

41:00 **What did Mum think?**

I would hate to tell you. We weren't very popular - let's put it that way.

**Fair enough too.**

Dad and uncle had shovels on the beach and dug holes everywhere and couldn't find them.

## Tape 3

00:32 **Well Mary, can you tell us a little bit about your mother and how she was so hard on you?**

She wasn't hard on us, she just made us stand on our own two feet and look after ourselves. She just made us very self reliant as we grew up.

**And how did she do that?**

You're a devil, aren't you?

01:00 Well one instance. She made me enrol myself at Parramatta Domestic Science School. I had to get on the train - we weren't used to trains - and get off at Parramatta. I said, "How am I going to know where the school is Mum?" And she said, "Just follow the other kids." When I got off the train at Parramatta there were kids going in all directions to different schools.

01:30 So I had to go around and ask everybody which school they were going to and then follow. I eventually got there and enrolled myself.

**And how would you describe your mother?**

My mother. Well she made us very self reliant. She didn't do things for us, we had to do things for ourselves as soon as we were able.

02:00 We had to look after one another and the family. She had a bad heart. She had a leaky valve in her heart which stopped her doing a lot of things. Eventually, she died with the heart. She dropped dead in Sydney one day, she went to Sydney.

02:30 We had to find out the hard way that she dropped dead in Sydney.

**How did you find out?**

Policeman. And she had a lady with her at that time. I think they were in town to go to the RSL [Returned and Services League] Congress. My father had died 8 months earlier than that, and she had just started to get back into

03:00 things.

**When you were growing up in a household of sisters, how did you get on with each other?**

Well mostly, we got on fine because there was nobody else, just us. And mostly, we were very good. We did everything together. We went walking.

03:30 We found our... what was that bush called? It's a cactus bush and it has a fruit on it. Prickly pear. So we decided we'd eat these but we got all the prickles in our lips and our tongue and we came home... the three of us came home with our tongue hanging out.

04:00 They were full of prickles and my father spent hours with the tweezers pulling prickles out of everybody's tongues. So we used to find things to get into. But we were pretty good friends because we had nobody else there.

**You've mentioned that you were a bit of a tomboy and you used to help your father. How would you help your Dad?**

04:30 If he had the rotary hoe and he was going along, we would run along in front and pull the grape tendrils back, so they didn't get cut off by the machine. We used to have to pick the gherkins and Dad gave us a match box, and all through the six week holidays we would go morning and afternoon and we had to pick them the size of the matchbox. If they got bigger than that then they

05:00 weren't gherkins anymore, they were cucumbers and we would get less money for them. We had a big barrel full of brine that we would put them into and then Holbrook's would come out with a truck and take them away. So our school holidays would be spent picking gherkins. We used to have to pick peas



and Dad had passionfruit growing. Whatever there was to be done.

05:30 **What else did you have on the farm?**

You have different crops at different times of the year. So we had different crops going. I can remember the passionfruit because we got into a lot of trouble with it. We came out in a lot of sores and Mum took us to the doctor and he said "We were getting too much acid", and he asked

06:00 her "What was growing on the farm?", and she said, "We've got passionfruit." And he said, "Well they've got a lot of acid in them." He said, "They must be getting too much," and she said, "Oh no, I only give them so much." But my Dad started to follow us then and he found we had... my youngest sister, we saw him coming, so we ran and we had our knickers full of passionfruit because your knickers had

06:30 elastic and all of us had them full of passionfruit and then we would take them down to the next door's farm and sit in this little area and eat them. And he said "There was a mound of shells about this high there and she had 60 in her knickers", so I don't know what us older ones had in ours. So we were eating them. So we used to get into a bit of mischief.

07:00 **Can you describe the feeling of being out in the open spaces?**

No, it's just free. You feel free when you're out in the open like that. It's not closed in at all. We were brought up that way.

07:30 When I was only little and we were still on the sheep station, the man who owned the station gave my oldest sister a sheep for her, and he didn't give me one, he only gave her one, and she wouldn't let me near it. So one day, I disappeared and they had all the farm hands out searching for me. They found me

08:00 coming back home with a lamb in my arms, and I was saying, "I got me a butter Mum, I got me a butter." So they wouldn't give me one, so I went out and followed the sheep and until she dropped the lamb and then I took the lamb. I got my own lamb and I must have been two years old. So I got my own.

**You were telling us earlier on that when your family moved**

08:30 **to Wentworthville, you would still ride your bike back to Horsley Park. Why did you want to get back?**

I didn't want to leave to start with. I didn't want to leave. I carried on a treat, but they still buddled me in and took me and I didn't want to be there. I just wanted to get back out there. That was probably

09:00 ...I mean all my life I had been there and it was all I could remember and I didn't want to leave there.

**Can you tell me about your bike ride from Wentworthville to Horsley Park?**

Well it was pretty dark. I used to go down the Great Western Highway and through Wallgrove Army Camp and then out to our property which was the second last property before it turned into another suburb

09:30 out there, so it was right on the edge of Horsley. But once it was... when Dad sold the place I didn't have the house to go back to, so I couldn't go anymore.

**You were still very young at this stage, what did you know of Wallgrove Army Camp?**

I just knew that the soldiers were there and I knew that the horses were there.

10:00 I knew there were light horses in there. But apart from that I didn't know much about it at all. I knew they were there training.

**Were you ever close to horses?**

I didn't have a horse but I loved horses. The people over the road had horses and cattle and that, so we used to

10:30 play around with them.

**It sounds like you had a very practical upbringing and enjoyed getting out and doing things. What skills do you think you took from your childhood into the Land Army?**

11:00 I don't know about skills, but I knew how to do a lot of farm work and things. I was self reliant, very self reliant from the way I was brought up, but I actually had to learn a lot when I was in the Land Army, as did most of the girls.

**What do you think was the most challenging?**

11:30 **thing that you had to learn?**

I think perhaps driving the tractor and making sure you didn't run over the top of the plants. You could go near them but not on top of them. That was a bit of a challenge to start with. And up in Griffith they had channels everywhere and just these little makeshift bridges over them. I remember once driving

- 12:00 the tractor across one of those channels when a dust storm came. And in those days the dust storms were horrific and you couldn't even see the bridge I was trying to drive across. That was a bit scary but I managed to make it ok. Then got off and sat down beside it until it passed. Those dust storms used to roll in across the hay plains. All you could do was sit down, put your head down and pull something up over your
- 12:30 head until it had gone.
- And when you first got on the tractor...?**
- It was a big tractor! Tulip, I used to call it.
- Why did you call it Tulip?**
- 13:00 That was my tractor and my tractor was Tulip. My girlfriend... I forget what she called hers, but we gave them names. Only hers had rubber tyres and mine had big iron cleats, which ploughed into the ground as you went along. We used to have tractor races along the road and she would always win because she had rubber tyres.
- How do you drive a tractor?**
- 13:30 The same way you drive a car, only it's a bit easier.
- I imagine... I'm just wondering... perhaps you hadn't driven a vehicle up to this point?**
- No. This farmer taught us to drive the tractors and the car, and a truck,
- 14:00 a three ton truck. We used to have to load it up with the stuff, drive it into Griffith into the produce place, back it against this big conveyor belt and then lift the stuff off onto the conveyor belt into the co-op, so it could go. And when we'd come in and the guys working there would see a girl at the wheel, they would all stop working and watch to see how close to the belt you were going to get.
- 14:30 It was very nerve racking knowing they were all watching.
- Yes because of course it's the blokes driving the tractors?**
- That's right. But all the young ones were at war and it was only the older men there.
- 15:00 **And how did the men react?**
- They were quite friendly and quite good. I didn't have anybody who wasn't nice to me. Some of the girls might have but we were always lucky and had somebody who was nice. We never had any problems.
- Even though they were still checking your driving skills out?**
- They were the ones who were working
- 15:30 in the co-op in town. I was lucky though it came in right against it, so I was lucky there. I breathed a sigh of relief.
- How did you get your tractor licence?**
- I didn't have a tractor licence but I got my driving licence in Griffith. It was a very good place to get your
- 16:00 licence. There were no hills in Griffith, so you didn't have to do a hill start. Very good place to get your licence. No hill starts. And the policeman took you in those days. A policeman went with you. He was alright though. He told me when I went to get the permit that "I had green eyes" and the next time I went he said "Blue". And I said "I had green eyes last
- 16:30 time". He said, "Well I must have been in a catty mood that day." He put blue down the next time.
- What type of car did you learn in?**
- It wasn't a car. It was a three ton truck. It was a truck.
- 17:00 **And when you say a policeman took you, what type of test did he get you to do?**
- Everything except hill starts because there were no hills. I had to pass all the others.
- Was it difficult driving a three ton truck?**
- Well it was all I knew. I hadn't driven anything else, only the tractor. I hadn't
- 17:30 driven a car, so I didn't know any different. But we had been driving the truck around the farm all the time, so the farmer said "We should go get our licences", so we did.
- Often on a farm there are accidents that happen. You've already told us about one today. I'm wondering if**

18:00 **you encountered any accidents?**

No, no. I didn't, no. I know there were accidents happening but we didn't have any. We could have though because when we were picking the apricots out of the tree we had a wagon with a horse and we used

18:30 to drive the horse under the tree and pick from a scaffolding thing on the back of that. If the horse saw a nice piece of grass over there, it would just go and leave you stranded half way up a tree and hanging. So we could have easily fallen, but we managed always to get out of it without any problems.

**Where would you park your tractor at night?**

19:00 At the farmer's house. He had sheds where he kept his tractors and things.

**You've just told us this morning that you were posted to three different camps, Maimuru, Griffith and then Hanwood...**

And Beelbanger.

19:30 Maimuru wasn't around Griffith, that's out near Young. There was Beelbanger, Griffith and Hanwood. Beelbanger was the first one I went to at Griffith.

**Beelbanger was the name of the camp?**

Yes. That's where it is, Beelbanger, the suburb of Beelbanger.

20:00 **At Maimuru, you mentioned you were picking prunes, can you describe the produce on the other two properties?**

The other two properties? Which?

**Beelbanger and Hanwood?**

Oh Beelbanger and Hanwood. Oh, that was in the Murrumbidgee irrigation area and that was all sorts of different jobs. We were working on tomatoes.

20:30 Anything that was growing. On one place, we had grapes that we had to do. That was funny. When it was raining and we were picking the grapes, we really didn't want to be out there, so we got a bobby pin and tickled the inside of our noses and it made us sneeze and all these girls were sneezing all over the place and the farmer said, "You had better come in, you're all catching cold."

21:00 I remember doing that. We worked for a few farmers from Hanwood Camp and we worked for a few different farmers from Beelbanger camp. We'd pick the crops on one farm and then we were put on another. Wherever you were needed you were sent. We didn't just stay with the same person all the time.

21:30 You would get the crop off one and then you'd go to another one who needed you. So we worked on lots of different things.

**And this is essentially seasonal work?**

Yes, different seasons. And then when the winter came you had to prune the grape vines. So you had a lot of prunings to do in the winter and make sure there were no weeds growing.

22:00 **Which crop did you find the most difficult to harvest?**

Prunes, because you crawl around the floor and pick them up off the ground. It was 106 degrees for a week running when we were up there in Maimuru, and we were crawling around the ground. The prunes lying in the sun would get cooked and your fingers would go

22:30 into them and you'd get scolded when you were picking them up and they had been lying there all day. That was hard. You had to shake the trees and shake them onto the ground and then pick them up off the ground. That's when they were ripe and ready. I think today they've got nets that they put out under the tree and that catches them, and they don't pick them off the ground anymore.

23:00 We used to pick up spiders and everything.

**How tall is a prune tree?**

Quite tall. It can be quite tall. They're actually plum trees. What we had was one called Roget or something like that, and Darl. There were two different types of trees. But they're actually a plum.

23:30 A special type of plum that they, use.

**And how would you get the prunes down if they didn't fall off when you shook the trees?**

If they didn't fall off this time, they weren't ready enough and the next time we came we would get the ones we missed the first time. But they did fall. The ones that weren't already on the ground, we would

just shake and they would come down.

24:00 That's how they know I suppose that they're ready to be taken in. We used to have them spread out in great big drying racks. The sun used to dry them but today they do it by machinery. Same as the apricots. They would all be spread out on trays and sun dried.

24:30 **At Maimuru, I understand you were living in an old house?**

Yes. We had a veranda along the front and six of us took our beds out on the veranda and we slept out there because it was so hot in the little rooms. The front road ran past just a few feet away and we used to wave to everybody who went past.

25:00 **You mentioned earlier on that when you were getting ready to leave Sydney to your first posting, you had to run around and buy things.**

Buy our equipment, yes.

**What was on your list of essential items?**

Well, boots. Overalls and shirts, working shirts

25:30 and things like that. I can't remember but I think we took plates and a cup and a mug or something like that with us. There was a lot of stuff to take with us. Later on it was all issued but in the very beginning we had to buy our own.

26:00 **And when you were issued what were you issued with?**

Bib and brace overalls and boots and shirts. And I think they even gave us a hat then. Before we had to buy all that ourselves. And much later on we were given a dress uniform.

26:30 But we didn't get that to start with.

**What colour was the bib and brace?**

Khaki. Same as the summer uniform...when they gave us the dress uniform, that was khaki, and so was the other one but it was in woollen stuff for the winter.

27:00 **And how did you feel being part of the army?**

How did I feel? I don't remember feeling anything. I was just happy that they were supplying us with clothing instead of having to buy our own. It was stronger too than

27:30 the stuff we bought. It was sort of a twilly stuff, which was much stronger than what we had bought to start with.

**What made you feel part of the army?**

What made me feel part of it? Well there was a group of us, wasn't there? There was a lot of us there. We were together.

28:00 So we just felt like we were all doing something to help the war effort which made you feel good, that you were doing something instead of just a bystander.

**The Land Army uniform was a very practical kind of uniform...**

The working one, yes. It had to

28:30 be, didn't it?

**When would you wear the regular dress uniform?**

The dress uniform? If we were going out or if we were going home. We had bucket showers there which you would pull up. We'd just wash all the dirt off us and put them on then to go out. Then people knew who you were

29:00 around the town. That you weren't just somebody visiting the town that day. You were one of the girls. And the people were very nice to us. They knew what we were doing.

**Yes I've heard quite a lot of stories of people's generosity**

29:30 **to the service members.**

Yes. There was a lady who lived near the Hanwood camp who played the piano and she used to have a lot of us in there and she'd play and we'd all sing with a few of the locals around and we'd all have a singsong. She used to take us in and look after us like she was our mother. She was good. She had daughters the same age as us. She would open her house up and have us all in there.

30:00 That was lovely. There were a few people like that in the area who would take you in.

**What songs did you sing?**

Oh the war time songs in those days. Old songs.

**What was your favourite?**

I can't remember what we sang but we'd sing everything that she had on the

30:30 music stand. I can't remember what we sang but we sang them whatever they were.

**When you were in the field or wherever you were picking, was music used during the day?**

What sort of music? You mean singing? Oh sometimes we'd sing songs as we were going.

31:00 But not often. We were just head down and tail up and that was it. Most of the time, unless you were climbing the ladder with a bag around your neck to fill it with oranges or something.

**I've seen pictures of some of those ladders which were used.**

31:30 **They were really quite tall.**

Yes, and rickety a lot of them, especially if you had the horse and wagon underneath them and they took off when you were half way up a tree and leave you stranded. We had lots of fun though.

**What sort of fun did you have?**

Oh when you're young everything's fun, isn't it?

32:00 Nothing's serious. It's all fun. We made everything into fun. I think that's what got us through a lot of things. Because nobody seemed to get home sick or anything like that. We were having a ball.

**Did you have any**

32:30 **...I'll start again. What personal items did you take with you?**

I can't remember taking any. I probably would have had some little things but I can't remember them. I wouldn't have taken photos and that because when you're travelling,

33:00 you didn't take much because you could have lost them anyway.

**You mentioned your sister joined up about a year after you did. How did you stay in touch with her?**

When she joined up she was sent to Griffith and into another camp in Griffith. Not the ones I was in. She went out there.

33:30 I had got a letter or... I knew she was coming into Griffith and she would be at Mirool House. We rode our bikes in from Hanwood and I walked through the whole place calling out her name and she heard me calling out, so she came out. Later on she was sent out to Hanwood where I was.

34:00 **And how was it working with your sister at this time?**

Well I actually never worked with her. I never worked on the same farm with her at all.

**So she was just visiting at Hanwood?**

No. She was sent to Hanwood but she was on a different farm. We were all on different farms. A farmer would come and say "He wanted two girls or three girls" or how many girls he needed for the job and

34:30 we would go there. I'm not sure which farms she went to but she didn't come to any I was on.

**How would you know which farm you were going to in the morning?**

We were mostly sent to this farm until the job was done or until that job was done, or until he didn't want you and then you went elsewhere

35:00 where you were needed. We stayed with this man that taught us to drive the tractors, we were with him for quite a long while. He had a bad accident on his leg and we had to drive him everywhere. He couldn't drive himself. So wherever he wanted to go, we drove him as well as doing the work on the farm.

35:30 You just stayed there. If you were picking tomatoes you stayed there until the crop was finished, then you went to another one. If you were picking peas you'd stay there until that was finished. After a couple of crops, you would pick the whole pea vine. You would just get it all up and put it on the back of the truck. It was a huge thing and we'd ride on the top of this right down the street nearly hitting the trees as we went down. They'd take it down and put it in a place

36:00 and they'd take the peas off the vine, then open the pod and take the peas out. Amazing machines that was doing this. Throwing the vines to one side and take the peas. That's when they were finished. Just

on finished with not many left on them. A lot of things we saw which we wouldn't have known about otherwise.

36:30 **And the farmer in Griffith who had had a bad accident. I was wondering if he had any sons?**

No, he had daughters. I think there were three little girls when we were there. He had little girls. He's the one who got killed on a tractor. The tractor rolled on him later.

37:00 **How did he react to having women on his property?**

I don't think it fazed him at all. I think he was very good. He trusted us with his big gun. I mean 15 year olds given a big gun and they hadn't had one before. He used to tell us "Not to point it at one another though, even in fun. We weren't to do that. It could be loaded and it could have gone off."

37:30 He was very strict about that.

**Most people often get a lesson handling guns. It sounds like this was the first time you handled a gun.**

Yes. A big thing like that it was.

38:00 **What type of lesson did you get?**

He showed us how to load it. How to take the thing out again, and the bolt on it. He made sure that we knew not to point it at anybody even in fun. He hammered that really hard home that we weren't to do that. Just to fire it up in

38:30 the air to get rid of the Starlings from eating the fruit. So that's what we did. We knew how to unload the cartridge out of it to make sure that it wasn't left loaded.

**It's a very big responsibility for a young teenager.**

39:00 Yes, it was.

**What do you think really helped your confidence?**

I think the way I had been brought up. I was brought up to stand on my own two feet and do things for myself, so I think the way we were brought up, we just took those things in our stride because that's what we had been brought up to be like.

39:30 Do things for yourself. If you want something work for it and get it. Don't wait for it to be handed to you on a plate. Which I think has stood me in good stead over the years.

**Why's that?**

If I've got any problems I handle them myself. I don't worry

40:00 other people with them, until they might come and say, "Why didn't you ask for help!"

**Yes, it's a good quality to have sometimes.**

Sometimes you can be too independent.

## Tape 4

00:35 **We were just talking earlier about why you felt so confident on the land. I'm wondering why did you all feel like tomboys growing up?**

Why did we feel like we were tomboys?

**Why were you called tomboys?**

I don't know, but I was always called a tomboy. Probably because of the trees and things I climbed. The

01:00 things I did, walking along the tops of fences and things. I was always up something. I think that was why but I was always called a tomboy. I certainly wasn't a young lady.

**What did you do that make you not a lady?**

I used to get into quite a lot of mischief. But then I think all kids do.

01:30 I'd be over the dairy with the cattle. I used to do things like that. My sister used to stay in and help Mum with things in the house but I was always outside in the paddock with my Dad. She worked in the house, I worked out the house. She's a good cook and I'm not.

- 02:00 **But I know you're a very good gardener.**
- That's right and I love that.
- You mentioned earlier that there was some rivalry between Griffith and Leeton.**
- It's just fun, it's just fun.
- 02:30 It's nothing serious. Peggy was at Leeton and Jean was in Griffith. There was a few of them in Leeton and a lot of us had been to Griffith you see.
- Can you tell me whether that rivalry was in existence at the time during the war, or has it grown post war?**
- I don't think it's
- 03:00 real rivalry. It was just a bit of fun we had. I don't know because I didn't really know the people who were at Leeton. We knew they were there. It was just a matter of where you got sent. There were girls all over the place. Some were on their own out on sheep stations, some in groups. It was nicer to be in a group rather than on your own.
- 03:30 Leeton, we never went to Leeton from Griffith. I didn't. Some of them may have had some way of getting to Leeton, but it was far enough away.
- And you mentioned that at Maimuru you were staying in an old house but when you went to Griffith,**
- 04:00 **where were you living?**
- Well at first we were in Mirool House which is an old boarding house type of place. And then we were sent out to Beelbangera and that was just a great big shed, and it was a shed with a water tank outside. The beds were just in lines all along this place there. That wasn't a very good place. When we went to Hanwood
- 04:30 they built them especially for us. While they were still sheds, they had four bedrooms in each shed with a bathroom at the end. There were a couple of steps to get up into it, so that was good, but at Beelbangera you were right on the ground. I don't know what that had been, some old shed or something. I don't know what it was.
- What was Mirool House like?**
- 05:00 It was like a big old boarding house. There were corridors everywhere and big... actually it's the RSL Club now. It's on the same ground there. But they had laundries in the yards for the... I suppose all the workers who would come to work on the properties in those days would have boarded in there while they were working there. They had a laundry and it had a steam tub
- 05:30 with pipes around the tub and you boiled your stuff in the tub. You don't see that today. A big laundry, a big kitchen. It was a really big place with corridors going everywhere. It was built right round with a space in the middle. So that was a boarding house, so that was fine there. They had all the rooms with all the beds in.
- 06:00 **Each camp had a matron attached to it?**
- Yes that's right.
- What was your relationship like to each of your different matrons?**
- The one at Maimuru was just that she was in charge but I didn't get close to her at all. She was a different sort of lady.
- 06:30 The one in Griffith was a very strict person. The one out at Hanwood was a motherly type of person, and she was quite nice. I can remember she came out to tell us it was time to come in when our boyfriends had brought us home. I knew that my girlfriend's boyfriend wanted to kiss her goodnight, so I got the matron and waltzed her around the
- 07:00 yard, so she wouldn't see what was going on. And she said to me, "I know what you're doing!" But it let them have their little kiss goodnight without her saying anything. She was a real motherly type person. We used to put prickles and mice and all sorts of things into the beds.
- 07:30 Always playing tricks on one another.
- And what type of trick was played on you?**
- They used to put the legs of your bed under so that they weren't falling down but as soon as you got on them the legs would collapse and you'd end up on the floor. You used to hear 'crash'.
- 08:00 We put mice in the matron's bed once.
- How did she react to that?**

Well after she stopped squealing she was alright. She didn't know who did it, so we were all kept in. She had no idea.

08:30 The whole camp was all kept in.

**What was the worst punishment that you could receive?**

I think that was probably about the worst. You had your leave cut, so you weren't allowed to leave camp and go out. That would be about the worst thing. They couldn't dock your pay.

09:00 They couldn't do that.

**How much were you being paid?**

Three pounds five shillings and we were paying twenty five shillings board. I don't know what that is in today's money. That was pounds. So we had to pay board out of that.

09:30 **Who did you pay the board too?**

To the matron. So we didn't live free. We had to all pay.

**That board probably covered the cost of your food?**

Yes, I suppose.

**And what duties were you responsible for?**

10:00 Well we had to clean our own rooms. We had to keep them tidy and keep them clean. We had to make our own beds and look after our own things. We had to do our washing. We had to do everything for ourselves, washing and ironing and stuff. So it would probably have been for food that board.

**And how did you get paid?**

Did the farmer pay us or where did we get it?

10:30 That's just disappeared. I can't remember how we got it. I have a feeling the farmer might have paid us. But don't quote me on that because I'm not sure how we got it. I think they must have because we were working for different farmers.

**And what did you do with your pay?**

What I didn't use for having a hair cut or

11:00 going to the pictures or something, I just left in the bank. And by the time the war was over, I had saved a magnificent sum of 50 pound, which I put towards our block of ground in Merrylands later on.

11:30 **You mentioned earlier that you would go round with a couple of boys. Where would you meet the boys?**

Where did I meet them? Well... I don't know but we used to meet them. Maybe they were hanging around the camps sometimes. They would only be boys around my age because the others had joined up.

12:00 We didn't have any trouble meeting them. They were there. And they used to go and visit their people to, the local people. Some of them who lived close to the camp, you'd get to know them quite well. The ones who lived around the camp area. You'd get to know the whole family.

12:30 We've had lots of trips back. We call it Back of Griffith, or Back to Hanwood, and we still see some of the people that we knew then that are still around.

**Where did these boys come from?**

They would have been local boys who lived locally.

**When you say locally,**

13:00 **do you mean in the towns or on farms?**

Off the farms. I didn't know many of the town boys but I knew a lot on the farms. We were probably working with some of them side by side some of the time.

**What would you do for entertainment?**

They used to have an

13:30 open air picture show at that time. The Aborigines had to sit down the front and we had to sit up the back part. I remember that much. They had another picture show with a roof later on and they wouldn't still have that other one. What was the question you asked me?



## **Entertainment?**

Oh entertainment. Well we'd go to the pictures. I don't know what we used to do.

14:00 What did we do? Oh we used to have parties in people's houses. Like that lady who had the piano and we'd all sing around. We used to go on trips on the truck down to Darlington Point on the Murrumbidgee River for a swim in the river down there. That used to be a good time. It was quite a way, about 20 miles or something. That would be a day out on this big truck we used to drive.

14:30 I don't know, we always had plenty to do. We visited people's houses. I can't remember ever going to any dances or anything. Oh one I can remember. There was a dance, a fancy dress dance in Griffith where we all got dressed up and we went in there.

15:00 But the girls who were billeted in Mirool House all the time, they would have gone to more dances because they were in there. I think we had...we didn't have many buses which came out to Hanwood from Griffith. There would be one go out and one come back and that would probably be a couple of times a day. If you got out you wouldn't have any way of getting back again.

15:30 Besides that we were tired from working all day. We never went anywhere during the week, it would only be on the weekend that we'd go out. Lights out was nine o'clock I think.

## **What type of trouble could you get into?**

I suppose if you wanted to, you could find trouble. You can always

16:00 find trouble, can't you? We actually didn't get into any troubles.

## **Do you know of any girls who did get into trouble?**

Yes I know of a couple but I don't know the circumstances. I heard rumours, so I wouldn't want to repeat any of that. But myself I didn't... in my group, there was nothing like that. You did hear

16:30 on the grapevine certain things.

## **What would you hear on the grapevine?**

That a couple had been in trouble doing this or doing that. Getting themselves into trouble.

## **Social attitudes were very strict at the time.**

Yes, very strict. Certainly a lot different today.

17:00 **And I understand it was very frowned upon if girls fell pregnant accidentally.**

Yes it didn't happened to too many but the few it did happen to, it was scandalous. There weren't many men around either. The boys were all gone.

17:30 All the boys were gone and the others were young. There might have been somebody there who wasn't suitable for army or something like that. They didn't want them. So there weren't too many men around - let's put it that way at that age. But somebody would always find one.

## **At this stage you're still a teenager?**

Yes.

## **And you know how teenagers can get into all sorts of mischief?**

Yes,

18:00 quite well. And that I'm not saying any more about.

## **Well I'm just wondering what you would do to really blow off steam?**

I don't know if I ever blew off steam as you put it. We just had fun - that's all.

18:30 There really wasn't much you could get into at Hanwood. If it had been in Griffith it might have been a different matter. You would have had more to do in there than out. Like you didn't have the same chance to get into trouble. Some people managed to get into trouble wherever they were, but we didn't.

19:00 **What about church services?**

No. When we were at Maimuru, they had one church in Maimuru and one Sunday it would be Church of England and one Sunday it would be Catholic and so on for the month. You would only have one service a month. We went...

19:30 I went when it was Church of England because that's mine. I absolutely refused to go to the others because they weren't my religion. And the matron wrote a letter to my mother to tell her that "I wouldn't go to church" and she wrote back and told her "I was old enough to make my own decisions". So that was the end of that. So then I wasn't worried anymore and the matron didn't try and make me

go to them.

20:00 But because I wouldn't do it, she wouldn't let me go out on a Saturday night either. And because I wouldn't do it, she curtailed my time off. But I still wouldn't go because they weren't my religion. I went to my own. I wasn't going to go to the others. But the others all went with her because I don't think they wanted to say that, but I did. And if she had asked, she would probably have

20:30 found somebody in there who would have gone on their day. But that was the only time we had trouble with that. The other camps nobody ever mentioned about going to church or anything. It was just that first one up there.

**That was at Maimuru?**

Yes. And that matron, when she went out to work to earn extra money as well, that one.

21:00 She used to wear corsets and she hung... she used to take them off. She was hot out in the paddock and she would hang them in one of the prune trees and then she couldn't find them at the end of the day. And she said - this farmer's son Jack, he was a real country boy, "Jack, if you find a pair of corsets hanging in the tree they're mine." And he went bright red. Poor Jack. And we searched that orchard and we couldn't find the darn things, so

21:30 I don't know what happened to them. I don't know if she found them later or not. That's the sort of things she'd do. She'd take them off and hang them in a tree. Well to us that was funny. But we could get fun out of something like that.

22:00 **You just mentioned you were Church of England and you were able to go to services at Maimuru. How much of a part of your life did religion play?**

In those days? Not a big part, just that you went to church on a Sunday. I still go to church on a Sunday.

22:30 And I clean the brass and silver down at the church, in the church group. And I've been there for years. I go to the church and do patchwork every Friday. I'd be there today if I wasn't here. We've just finished making a quilt for the Sunday school superintendent, so I do belong to the church down here.

23:00 And you get support there if you need it.

**What type of support is the church able to provide you?**

Well you lose your husband or something like that, they're all very supportive. At the moment we've got a different minister now. Like ministers move every so often and we've got a different

23:30 minister there now. But the one that was there when I lost my husband, he was very supportive, and when one of my twins had a little girl who was born two months early at 2 pound 4 ounces, the minister went up into the hospital and baptised the baby in case she didn't make it. He's gone now. He's actually died himself since then.

24:00 But they're supportive. Like if you need help, they'll give it to you. And if you're in trouble you can go to them for anything else.

**As a young teenager up at Maimuru, were you ever in trouble and needed to go to the church for help?**

24:30 No. I didn't have any problems. For us it was just one holiday sort of thing. I mean we were working hard. We used to have this big bottle of liniment which we would use. Every night you'd lay down and somebody would do you and you would have it rubbed into your back because crawling around the ground all day, picking prunes off the ground was very hard on our backs.

25:00 One day my friend and I had an argument which we didn't have very often. So we worked flat out trying to beat one another, and we picked so much stuff that they called us the Gun Pickers. We were the youngest there and we had picked so much, but it was only because we were trying to beat one other. And we were up and down the rows like...whish wish wish, like grease lightening, and they called us the Gun Pickers.

25:30 We never ever told them we had had a fight. We were just trying to beat one another that's all. We both ended up with exactly the same. She was laughing about that just before she died about being called the Gun Pickers and why.

**What was it about that relationship that helped you**

26:00 **at the time?**

With my friend? Well we were just good friends, really good friends. Where one was, so was the other one. If you wanted one you had to take both all the time you know. She lived two doors away. She only had brothers, she had no sisters. So to have another girl to her was great, and I thought her brothers were great because I only had sisters. I would have given my sisters

26:30 and took her brothers. Something different for me. No, we were really good friends.

**What did you fight about?**

Not much. I can't remember what we fought about that day. It would have been something stupid. I can't even remember what it was about and she doesn't remember what it was about either. So it was obviously just a little thing, like kids do.

- 27:00 But it was enough to win us the title. And that man wanted us back too. He only wanted us two back. We must have thought we were alright to come down to Sydney especially to ask for us by name. That didn't happen much in those days. And they recalled us too, which is amazing.

**When was that?**

- 27:30 Well we were in Griffith and he came down. He wanted us to prune, to help him with the pruning. He rang up and they said "No, he couldn't have us because we were up at Griffith". So he came down to Sydney from Young himself, to the office, asked for us by name again. They said, "No, we'll send you a couple of others," and he said, "If I can't have those two, I don't want anybody."
- 28:00 So they called us back and sent us up there. So we were good workers. Probably he liked us.

**And how did you react to that?**

Well we were used to going wherever we were told, so when they told us "To go home and go up to Young again", that's what we did. You did

- 28:30 what you were told in those days. Wherever they wanted you. And when we found we were going back to his place, we thought that's strange. We didn't find out until later until we were told he had come to Sydney.

**So from Griffith you came back to Sydney for a day's leave or something?**

We came

- 29:00 back and went up to Maimuru again. See we were living in his house this time when we went back. The two of us had our beds there and he probably... and probably that's why he wanted us two. We got close to them while we were picking. They were a nice family.
- 29:30 They had one son and they had the local school teacher who taught at the local school and was boarding at their house. That woman, the son eventually married. So that was all that was in the place, so there was room for us two in there. But being young, we used to spy on those two and take them off afterwards. We had our own entertainment.
- 30:00 Did you ever do anything like that? You're not going to say, are you?

**How did you keep up with news events and news of the war?**

We didn't know too much, not when we were out at places like that. That was nine miles out of Young. We had

- 30:30 no way, only with their motorbikes or even getting into Young. The boys down the road further, one of them had a motorbike and he had a side car on it. So he could take the four of us. One was a pillion passenger and two in the thing. It was nine miles into Young from there.

**It sounds quite exciting going on a pillion passenger motorbike ride.**

Yes, it was exciting. We had to realise too that when we were trying to talk to one another with one in the side car and one behind the driver, that whatever they said we could hear out over the thing and they were killing themselves laughing about something we said.

- 31:30 They burst out laughing, so we realised they could hear what we were saying. So we had to be careful.

**After the war, I'll just jump forward a little bit, you married**

**an air force man who'd been to New Guinea. I understand he was affected by his wartime service?**

Yes, he never wanted to talk about it. I think his best mate was shot dead beside him. I know that much but what else happened, I don't know because he would never like to talk about it.

**How did that effect you?**

Well I just sort of...well that's in the past. This is the future, get on with your life you know. And if he didn't want to talk about it, I wasn't about to try and make him talk about it.

**He was... I think you said he caught malaria.**

Yes. One time he had malaria and he fell in the streets in Sydney with the malaria and people just walked past him thinking he was drunk but he was having a malaria attack. Everybody just walked straight past him. That happened to a lot of the boys.

33:30 So it must have been hard for them.

**The other way we've heard about how men suffered, was to have nightmares.**

He didn't seem to have any nightmares when I was married to him, but whether he had it before I don't know.

34:00 **And yourself, when you were young and working in the Land Army, you've mentioned that you used liniment oil to rub into yourself, what type of injuries or illnesses did you have?**

It was because being bent over all day picking prunes off the ground hurt your backs, especially in the very beginning.

34:30 You did get used to it and then it was alright. But at the very beginning it was hard. People would be lying on the beds and other people would be rubbing it in to get them into the next day. It was hard on your back that job.

**And what about your hands?**

Well we did have gloves for some of the

35:00 work. I remember when we were pruning up at Maimuru, which was winter time and it was cold. You would hang your washing on the line and you'd go to get it and it would be like stiff cardboard with frost. We used to wear men's socks on our hands, two and three pairs to try and...just so we could use the secateurs because it was so cold. We wore long johns underneath our overalls and things like that to

35:30 keep warm. It was very cold working in the winter. We carried a bucket around with a fire in it with holes cut in the side of the bucket like a kerosene tin. We used to go and warm our hands over the fire, put our gloves back on and go back to the pruning again. You would get so stiff, you couldn't work. Too cold.

36:00 Very cold in the winter working outside like that.

**What other types of protection would you use?**

From the cold?

**From the weather.**

From the weather. If it was raining we had raingear to put on, but that's about all.

36:30 We had a jacket to put over your jumpers and things. You couldn't put on too much because you still had to be able to move your arms. Some jobs you'd get warm from doing it but others, more slower jobs, you didn't get warm from that because you were only using your hands. We had trestles

37:00 on a horse and dray to prune the tops of the trees. You would climb up the trestle on the dray and the horse would move off and leave you hanging in the trees. Then it was a bit of a worry, but apart from those sorts of things everything seemed to go all right. There didn't seem to be many accidents. There would be an accident now and again.

37:30 **How would you get down?**

Climb down. Climb down. You know what comes up comes down! We had to try and keep them pruned to keep them down a bit. If they hadn't been pruned for a couple of years they could be quite big trees.

38:00 **Would you ever fall down out of a tree?**

No, I never fell but somebody would have I'm sure. I was used to trees.

**That's right, you had the knickers in the trees.**

That's right. Flags.

**How on earth did your knickers**

38:30 **end up in the trees?**

Don't ask me. My mother said "There were little bits of material all over the place. Bits of them, not the whole thing. Bits ripped out of them. Probably got caught on a branch or something.

**So ...**

39:00 **What was the strangest thing you were ever called upon to do?**

I don't think I had any strange things. I can't remember any strange things. They were all just the normal things.

39:30 No, I don't think I had any strange things. I think I just had the normal type of farming.

## Tape 5

00:32 **Mary, I'd like to talk about the conditions at the first camp you were at, at Maimuru?**

That was an old house with a couple of bedrooms. It had a nice big front veranda because that's where we all put our beds out there when it was too hot. I can't remember much out about that house. I've got a photo of it.

01:00 It was just like a square box like they used to be in those days.

**Were you housed with the family or separately?**

No, not the first time. The second time we were in the family home when there was only the two of us. The first time we were in that cottage.

**How many were there of you at first?**

I think there was six of us from memory. I have somewhere got the names of the people and I think there was about six.

01:30 **Did all six of you get along?**

Yes, yes. Yes we did.

**How would the group of you pass spare time together?**

We didn't have much spare time. We would only have breakfast and be working. When you came back and by the time you had your bath and were rubbed with the liniment and everything, everyone was tired and would go to bed. There was nothing to do in the night time.

02:00 So you just went to bed. You needed to get your energy for the next day. So there was nothing to really do of a night time.

**Tell me about an average day's work?**

Picking prunes, crawling around the day, all day. That was an average day's work. We would have a break for morning tea and then a break for dinner

02:30 and afternoon tea and then we'd be home.

**Who would supply all those break meals?**

The matron would see that we had those.

**Was she quartered with you?**

Yes. She made sure we didn't get into any trouble.

**Successfully?**

Yes. There weren't really any other houses around us.

03:00 **How did she seem to you or appear to you at first or in your earliest days working there?**

She was ok. She was doing her job until she went working out in the paddock and then things got a big slack because she was working as well as doing the meals and everything. Things were a bit slack then. Sometimes,

03:30 we'd come home and there'd be no dinner ready or anything because she had only just got in before us or something like that. But otherwise, it wasn't bad.

**Who had spelt out what rules you were meant to operate under?**

I think the rules were written up there. I don't know who would have done. It probably would have come from head office I'd say. Or else the matron would have

04:00 been told. We were given our rules but I don't know where they would have come from.

**What particular regulation perhaps stuck out to you as perhaps quite foreign to your experience?**

There wasn't anything outlandish or anything. It was just up at a certain time, breakfast at a certain time. More regimented than it would probably be in your own place. That's about all.

04:30 Things happened at certain times.

**How regularly did you keep to those set times?**

We had to. We had to keep to them. We had to get to work at a certain time. If you weren't there you missed out, so you kept to the rules.

**Was that something that was easy?**

It was easy then because we were working

05:00 on the property and the house was... like they were on the same property more or less. So you just had to come down to the house and have it and then back to work again. There was no... just time to eat and back again.

**What would happen if certain rules and regulations weren't adhered to?**

I don't know because I don't think anybody

05:30 didn't do the things. So I never found out. I didn't go to church when she told me to go, so she took away my Saturday outing.

**What happened on that occasion?**

I wouldn't go to the church service that didn't belong to me. It wasn't Church of England and I wouldn't go to the others.

**And were there any other repercussions from that?**

No.

06:00 I was getting ready to go somewhere and she said to me, "You're grounded". She waited until I was just about ready to go before she told me.

**Was it then that you then went to all the services?**

No, I didn't. I only went to mine.

**What happened to change her mind?**

Well she knew I wouldn't go to that one, and she knew she couldn't

06:30 force me because it wasn't my religion. She just had to wear it I suppose.

**Was there anything in the list of rules pertaining to discipline or punishments?**

There might have been something in the rules about discipline, but they couldn't make people go to church. I mean that's different, isn't it?

07:00 **What about any spare time you might have had in the evening or even the weekend...?**

I don't think we had much of an evening because by the time we had our meal and everybody had had a bath and we had washed up and things like that... we might write letters or read and then you'd go to bed because you would be tired. You worked during the day.

**Were you organised into cleaning shifts or anything like that?**

I can't remember.

07:30 But we would have had to clear the table and do things like that but I can't remember much about that.

**How did you take to duties like that?**

Well we were use to doing it. We were used to doing our own at home. There was no difference, but in each camp we had our own things that we carried with us. Your cups and your plates and things, so you would wash your own and be responsible for your own gear.

08:00 **Where would you keep your own items?**

We had a little bag with a drawstring on the top of it and you'd keep them in your bag.

**Were they issued to you?**

They were later on when we got into the other camps, but not in the beginning. We took them with us when we first went.

**Did you have any space for your own**

08:30 **toiletries or anything of that sort?**

We would have space, yes. We would have had it if we wanted things like that.

**Can you describe to me how your quarters were spaced out?**

I can't remember from Maimuru, but at Hanwood we had boxes... you know, you stand a box on its end. We didn't have much room for things like that.

09:00 We had four girls in this little room with four stretchers, so that didn't leave much room in there. You had something to hang your clothes in and that was about all.

**Would there be any partitioning between your beds?**

No. It was just a room with four beds in it.

**Were these conditions comfortable?**

It was all right so long as you didn't have a Scotch Thistle in your hay.

09:30 Then it wasn't very comfortable.

**Were you ever at a single camp or property during changes of seasons, changes of weather?**

My friend and I were the only two when we went back to Maimuru the second time. We lived in the farmer's house that time.

10:00 We were the only two there and we were treated like members of the family because there was just two of us.

**Before then though it sounds like you had to fend for yourselves and look after yourselves?**

Oh yes, we had to but the matron was there to do the cooking and get the meals and everything.

**How much did variations in weather and climate effect you?**

10:30 You had to put a lot more clothes on in the winter time to keep warm. Other than that... that's all. I mean the work still had to be done no matter what the weather was like. At Hanwood we had this bucket, which we carried around with a fire in it to thaw our hands out, so we could keep them working... it was so cold.

**You mentioned having to take trips out**

11:00 **to a separate toilet block, or perhaps it was a shower block during the night in the cold which wasn't particularly...**

Oh that was at Hanwood. The toilets were quite a way from the sheds where we were living. They were right away up the paddock and you had to go across there.

**Was that a similar case with showers?**

11:30 No, the showers were in the buildings we were in. The bathrooms were on the end but the toilets were over there.

**When would you take the time to shower?**

Well there was about 16 of us in a hut. We used to line up, "I'm next, I'm next," as soon as we got home filthy. We'd get into the shower straight away.

12:00 "I'm next, that's my turn, I'm next." So the first one in would be the first into the shower. You had to get the hot water and put it into this bucket, pull it up with this chain and then hook the chain securely, otherwise it would come down and hit you on the head. And that was all you had. The water that was in that bucket was your shower. So that was the shower. We had a galvanised

12:30 bath at Hanwood that was at the side too, so people could have a bath if they wanted to.

**How often would that happen?**

Whenever you felt like one I suppose. I mean if you could get the water into it then you could have a bath. Water wasn't laid on to it, and only cold water.

**How long would hot water last?**

Well I can't quite remember where it came from or how

13:00 long it would last, but it was enough for all of us. Every hut had its own and there was only 16 girls in each hut.

**Were the showers themselves separated from the sleeping area?**

Yes it was like a bathroom at the end of the sleeping area.

**Closed off with a door?**

Yes it had a door.

**Would you all**

13:30 **leave and let one person occupy the bathroom at one time?**

They would have been lucky. No, there would have been two or three fighting to clean their teeth and queuing up to get in the same water the one was in, or have a shower. There was always something going on, especially in the morning when we were hurrying to get to work on time.

**How much privacy do you think that afforded you?**

None.

14:00 Not much privacy. It would have been the same for you if you were in the army. You wouldn't get much privacy.

**How would that affect someone if they were a little bit more modest?**

You lost your modesty very quickly. That's for sure.

**How did it affect you?**

It didn't worry me. I just got in and did what I had to do and

14:30 then made room for someone else. I had already come from a family where there were four of us waiting to get in and out. But for someone who had been an only child, it would have been quite hard I imagine.

**Don't take it personally,**

15:00 **were you bossy at all?**

Yes. I think I'm still a bit bossy, and you told me I was cheeky and I was still cheeky then.

**Who would take control of these times at the end of work? I imagine if it was left up to everybody it could get a little hectic. Like you say**

15:30 **with half a dozen or more girls going for the shower first.**

I would be bringing them home in the truck and I would say, "The truck's going and if you're not on, tough." So they'd make sure they were there.

**How many others could drive the truck?**

Only my friend and I. We were the only two that got our licences there. We also had a stallion

16:00 he gave us. A different farmer gave us a horse and a cart and the horse was a stallion, which was fine until he saw a lady horse and then he went up on his back legs and came right down on my toe, and he was really hard to control that one. He was real flighty. We used to take him home and let him out in the paddock where the camp was, and then catch him the next morning and take all the girls back to the farm.

16:30 But the car was better, it didn't rear up.

**I imagine in the end they both did what you told them to do. What of the other girls... would they listen to you?**

Oh sometimes, sometimes they wouldn't. I mean they were all older than me.

**Well how**

17:00 **were you looked upon then?**

I don't know. I didn't ask them.

**No one ever volunteered any opinions?**

No.

**Was there a level of politeness and manners maintained?**

Oh yes. Yes. They don't go around talking like men do. We were pretty good.

17:30 There would be just an occasional one who would be a bit hard to take, but most you could get on with quite well.

**And in the case that perhaps you didn't?**

Well you didn't mix with them if you didn't. You just didn't bother with them if you didn't get on with them. You just kept your distance.

**Could that be difficult...?**

Could be.

**...if you were...?**



Could be

18:00 if you were in the same room or something and I think it would have been impossible then. If you were in different huts or something then you could do it all right. You don't have to be friends with everybody.

**I imagine still it would certainly help for working long hours, staying in a confined area over a period of time.**

There were very few people. I can't even think of any that I was

18:30 not friendly with.

**On any occasions were girls removed from an area and perhaps sent to a different farm?**

I don't think so. None of the camps I was in. There was one girl that the matron in Griffith told us to watch. But apart from that...

19:00 you know. And she was a bit...what would you say, a bit brassy. She wasn't really very nice. But we knew, we had been told to watch her and so we just kept her distance, and didn't get too friendly with her.

**What could you do if you found you weren't getting along with someone?**

The only thing you

19:30 could do if it was causing a lot of problems was to ask to be transferred to a different camp because there were a few different camps around the area, or even into a different hut where you wouldn't have been so close.

**You mentioned just before about the language and how it wasn't how the men talked. You also said that**

20:00 **there weren't many older men around.**

My age, there were. It was the ones a bit older than me. They went from 18, the men.

**Were you in contact with boys your age or even younger?**

I was in contact with boys my age, yes.

**How did they treat the Land Army girls?**

They had a ball.

20:30 I was like a smorgasbord to them. They had the pick of the bunch. These farm boys and all of a sudden all these girls arrived.

**Were they not too young to fraternise with?**

They would have been 16, 17.

21:00 Somewhere around there. Some of the farm boys didn't go into the army because they were needed on the farms, so there could have been older ones there as well.

**I was just curious about how much male language you would hear around you?**

Not a heap of it, no.

21:30 **You were doing work that once upon a time would have been considered men's work.**

That's for sure.

**Was there ever an element of, do you think, male like behaviour or language that crept into your existence?**

There would have been a couple of girls who were a bit butchy.

22:00 But that would have only been one or two in the whole group. It wasn't a lot.

**What of the younger boys who were working on the farms as well? Were they still trying to assert their roles?**

Oh well it would depend. If they were the farmer's sons, then he would

22:30 have some authority because it was his property. But if it was just another one working the same as you were then they wouldn't. Unless they had been made foreman or something like that. We're in charge and then they'd try and throw their weight around a bit.

**And would that sometimes happen?**

Yes, possibly it did. I never had any problem with it but possibly some of the girls would have.

23:00 **And you mentioned earlier that one farmer in your experience was very grateful to have you working there. The gentlemen I think from Maimuru. The one who asked especially for...**

Especially for us, yes.

**Was that generally what you found in all the camps and farms you worked on?**

They were always very nice. Most

23:30 of the ones. I mean the man who taught us to drive the truck and the tractor and things like, he was really good with the girls. He had a family of five young children himself, and he was excellent with people. He treated us all very well. I think the biggest problem was that if we had a woman boss then she would be harder on us than the men were.

24:00 **In what way?**

Oh just the whole way she approached you I think. Just different. Some of the women could be really hard.

**Had you ever experienced resentment of your presence on the farms?**

No, no.

24:30 We were there to help, so why would they resent us?

**How often could you leave the farm and say visit a nearby town?**

I think we only went into towns on a weekend. Maybe sometimes, if they had a way of getting there some of them could go on a Wednesday night. But it was more or less the

25:00 weekend. If we wanted to do anything, we'd do it around the camp area.

**On visits to town would you be required to wear any form of uniform?**

Well it was a long time before we got a uniform. But once we got it, we had to wear it, but we didn't for a long while. We were just wearing our own clothes for a long while.

25:30 **Would you say you were still known as Land Army girls?**

They would have known who you were. In a country place everybody would have known everybody.

**Was that a good thing?**

It never worried me.

**Did you feel any special regard from the townspeople towards you?**

Well the people I had contact with,

26:00 I did. And the people that you worked for. We got a lot of help and compassion and that from them.

**Compassion in what sense?**

Well, they'd take you into their homes, play pianos for you to sing around and things like that. They would take you in and make you feel at home you know.

26:30 Things like that.

**I imagine from what you've told us that you did feel at home on the land. Were there times though that you were missing home and feeling lonely?**

Well I never felt lonely because I always had my girlfriend with me. We were always together.

27:00 So I kind of still had home with me, and I think because we were together it saved us feeling lonely a lot of times.

**But you perhaps saw it in other girls?**

Oh some of them got very homesick, really homesick. Some of them were really bad.

27:30 **How would they go about alleviating that?**

Oh I suppose it would be just talking to the other girls and having them try and cheer them up. Or the matron may have spoken to them. I don't know what happened. But we used to all rally around one another if there was a problem.

**If you saw someone feeling...?**

You'd go and ask them

28:00 "What was wrong?', and you'd talk to them. You'd put your arm around them and say, "Don't worry, we're here."

**I would imagine that would be a great comfort?**

Yeah, well it's nice to know you've got friends, isn't it?

**And when you're all in the same slog together?**

The same, yeah. Usually you were so tired when you came home that you didn't have much time to think anyway.

28:30 You had your tea, your bath and off to bed and fall asleep. So long as someone hadn't turned the legs of your bed under, so you would fall.

**Well even disregarding the pranks played upon each other, would those conditions or the loneliness ever force someone**

29:00 **to leave or give up sometimes?**

Yes there were... I can't remember who they were or what happened, but there were some sent home. They just couldn't cope. I can remember a couple going. It was just too much for them. Some people were the only children in the family. They'd had their Mum and Dad waiting on them hand, foot and finger, and doting on everything they did, and then they were

29:30 thrown into something like this. They couldn't cope with this.

**What differences could you see between yourselves and them?**

The fact that I was brought up with a group to start with. We were taught to stand on our own two feet right from the word go, and look after yourself. I think that made a difference.

30:00 **How did you look upon people who found it hard?**

I felt sorry for them, that's all. I couldn't understand it because I wasn't like that. One girl had been a ballerina. She stayed for quite a while, but she found it very difficult. She had been an only daughter I think and she had been a ballerina and she comes out to try and work on the land. I mean

30:30 a big difference, isn't it?

**What efforts were made to try and make her feel more at home?**

I don't know because I wasn't in the same camp as her to start with. She did eventually come out to us. She was a good friend. She joined up with my sister actually.

31:00 But she went off on leave and we never saw her again. I never heard from her again, so I don't know to this day what happened to her. I bet she went home and married her boyfriend who she was pining for and that was the end of that because she never did come back to camp. But people like that, who were only children, it was hard on them.

31:30 **You had quite a different upbringing as you say to that instance. Would you use your experiences and your upbringing that was perhaps more suited to life on the land to comfort or to try and encourage the others?**

In which way?

32:00 **Well you were raised in a family of five daughters, I'm just wondering if you almost tried to...?**

Mother them?

**No, not mother them. No, replicate that where you were almost a sister to them.**

Well I always had my friend with me too, so if there was anything wrong we would talk to each other, and people who were on their own wouldn't have had that

32:30 to fall back on, so they would have needed someone else to help them, wouldn't they?

**Would you be happy to do that for someone else?**

Yes, yes. If I saw anybody in need. I used to gather up all the strays.

**Just like the little lamb.**

33:00 **You're sounding like the shepherd of the flock.**

Well you're making it sound that way.

**How was it then, if it wasn't like that?**

I don't know. We each had sort of groups, which you mixed with. If you were working on this farm and there were half a dozen people working there too, then you got close because they were all working together. Then there would be another group which would be working somewhere else.

33:30 Then you had groups which were in a room with you, like four in a room. So you had little groups.

**On occasions though I imagine that little group would perhaps not be enough, or ...?**

Oh no, in the whole... I mean at Hanwood where I'm talking about now, you had 16 in a hut, so that hut would be quite friendly.

34:00 Friendlier than the ones next door because you wouldn't know them as well. You were with these others all the time. You knew each other but some you'd know better than the others. In smaller camps they probably had different arrangements.

**During your time at Maimuru you talked about a couple of lads who took you for a ride on their motorbike.**

That's right. They lived down the road.

34:30 **Again, I'm assuming they didn't do this favour for any of the other girls?**

No, they were just our friends.

**How did you make friends with them?**

I can't really remember now. I remember his name but I can't really remember how. I remember his father was a twin and my father was a twin.

35:00 I said, "I'm not marrying you because I'll end up having twins if I end up marrying you." And what did I have - twins. It shows you shouldn't talk too soon, should you?

**I bet he was heart broken too?**

He probably doesn't know.

**If you ever did get the chance to strike a friendship with a boy, would you have much time to**

35:30 **develop that friendship?**

No, you didn't have much time unless you sneaked time. You didn't have much time during the week. It would only be on the weekend, Sundays particularly.

**Sneak time?**

Yes, sneak time. Don't tell me you've never sneaked time.

**Maybe not in the same way you snuck time.**

36:00 **That makes it sound like it was almost a regular thing.**

It wasn't regular. Occasionally. When we knocked off of an afternoon and had our baths and that. If there was time between that and your meal time, and people lived close to the camp, you could go and see them. But once you had your meal, it wasn't very long before you had to be back in bed

36:30 and get ready for the next day.

**Was sneak time generally a boy time?**

Or a house time with his family or something like that. We could find lots of things to get up to in that time. There were channels you could fish, fish for yabbies.

37:00 You sort of make your own fun.

**Well I imagine you had to be very inventive to try and amuse yourselves with your free time, and that might be one way, what other ways?**

What other ways? I really can't speak for other people about what they

37:30 got up to. I would go and visit people that lived near that I knew. You'd go for a walk or something like that. If you were lucky you could get on your bike and go into Griffith, which wasn't too far anyway and get back in time. We never seemed to be bored, so we must have filled

38:00 our time in pretty well.

**I'm curious about... while I'm sure matron might have understood, sneak time wasn't probably part of regulations...?**

But it would have been your time though, it would have been your time. You would have been home from work and the next thing would have been meal times, so you would have a

38:30 little leeway between those things.

**What if the fancy took you to take some sneak time while dishes were being washed or things were being tidied?**

Well you would have to do your own first. Your own work. You were responsible for your own dishes.

39:00 **I'm guessing boys could be a distraction. I was wondering if they ever distracted you from duties?**

No, they're not that big a distraction. Not that big a distraction. Just a change - that's all from talking to girls all the time.

**Could that get a little monotonous?**

What - talking to girls all the time?

39:30 I suppose it could for some but as I say I was with them all the time.

**And what of Joy?**

Joy, my good friend Joy?

**Was she having someone to sneak some time with?**

Only if I was sneaking with her. We went everywhere together.

40:00 True.

**I don't doubt it. I'm just wondering, given the... perhaps not the abundance of boys that it might have made things difficult?**

No, actually the boy that Joy used to go with in those days now lives in Dubbo. He is actually married to a Land Army girl - we knew her in camp.

40:30 And when Joy went with him I went with his friend. So that was alright you see. It was the four of us. I said to him not long ago. I got up to his place... you're not to put this on... oh that's on now, I'd better not tell it. I went up to his place and stayed with them and in the early hours of the morning when I was awake, I would get out of bed and go and get into bed with him and his wife, and we'd lie in bed and talk. I said to him one day,

41:00 "Why did you go with Joy and this other boy with me? Just curious." He said, "Because the boy I used to go with...he would have broken my arm if I had tried to butt in on you." So I found out after all these years why. I had wondered about it for years.

41:30 So now I know.

## Tape 6

00:35 **Mary, could you tell me why the Land Army was so necessary?**

Because the boys had all gone to war to fight the war and there was no one left except the old people to run the farms and they had to get the food out. They needed someone to do the work.

01:00 **What kind of information or even propaganda were you aware of at the time about the Land Army?**

Well there were things like that poster outside there. They were up everywhere saying, "We need you, join the Land Army," and I thought that's for me. So that's what we did.

**So you were aware**

01:30 **of the advertising?**

Oh it was everywhere. It was everywhere in those days.

**And how did you first find out about the Land Army?**

Well it must have been up somewhere that I read about it or saw a poster somewhere. It could have even been over the radio. I can't quite remember. But I knew where to go, so I would have had to

02:00 heard or seen it somewhere to know where to go.

**And you've described yourself as being a very independent, self reliant, practical sort of person. The Land Army would have given you more independence.**

02:30 **How did you feel when the war came to an end and maybe you were facing a loss of that independence?**

I don't think I really lost that independence. By that time you had been doing your own thing for so long, it would have been very hard to lose it, except

03:00 this time, I didn't have someone telling me where to go and what to do. You could do it yourself.

**In what way can you tell me that you still kept your independence?**

I can't think of anywhere I didn't.

03:30 I just came back home and settled into the home structure again and got a job, but you were still your own independent self you know.

**How many different types of jobs did you have before you got married?**

Before I got married or after the Land Army?

**Both.**

04:00 One job I had after the Land Army.

**You were married after the Land Army though. What did you know of other services? I'm interested because earlier you said you wanted to join the navy.**

We thought about

04:30 joining the navy. When my friend turned 18, we were thinking of trying the navy. Whether we would have done it or not when she turned 18, I don't know. But we didn't know anything about the other services at all. I think we just thought we'd get on a ship if we joined the navy and go off somewhere.

05:00 **What were you looking for?**

I don't think we were actually... probably adventure if anything.

**When did you start dancing?**

This dancing I'm doing now? My husband and I used to ballroom dance.

05:30 We did that for quite a long time until he got too sick. It would have been after the children were off our hands. So it would have been after that when they had grown up and flown the coop and we just had ourselves. So that's when that would have happened. What's my son? 42 or something.

06:00 My husband's been gone twelve and a half years, so it would have been about ten years before that.

**I'm wondering if you have any recollections of dancing during the wartime?**

I'm just trying to think, to remember where I used to go to learn to dance, but I just can't remember where it was. It must have been after I think.

06:30 I would have been too young to do it before. When we were kids out at Horsley Park we had a big hall out on the flat, which is where they built the community hall, and everything happened on the flat, and every so often a blind band used to come out from wherever they lived.

07:00 We'd have a dance and they'd play. There were three of them. My Mum and Dad used to dance there then, so I remember the dancing from then. But myself, I didn't do it until much later.

**What about dresses. You've mentioned that you were a bit of a tearaway**

07:30 **and then in the Land Army you were mostly in overalls.**

We were most of the time yes.

**When would you get a new dress?**

We didn't get dresses in those days. We had a uniform. Not often when we were young would we get a new dress. I can remember when the dole parcel came in, there'd be material

08:00 and Mum would make clothes and dresses for us. I used to get into trouble because I used to rip all mine up trees and things. I was always in trouble. So I was probably kept in trousers more than dresses. I sort of didn't worry much about clothes in those days. Nobody had any.

08:30 **When your overalls or uniform would wear out, what would you do?**

When?

**When your overalls in the Land Army?**

We'd just put a form in for some new ones and they'd send them new overalls. We were allowed to have so many pairs for so long. I can't remember exactly how many.

09:00 I'm sure they would have found overalls to go to work in pretty quick. I think they gave us two pair at a time.

**What type of repairs could you do on your clothes?**

Not much because there wasn't any machines. It would all be hand done. We could put patches and things on but without a machine, it's pretty hard to do those things.

09:30 You could sew up seams if they came undone that wouldn't be so bad, but if you actually ripped a hole in them...I can't say I can remember ever having that problem.

**On your overalls would you wear a patch or a badge to say you were part of the Land Army?**

No, no.

10:00 Some girls might have put one on but we weren't issued with them. I've got photos here somewhere with the overalls on us.

**I just mentioned and you also confirmed that there were posters and things**

10:30 **around town about the Land Army, and it was being presented in a very...**

Glamour sort of way, yes. Is that what you were going to say?

**Yes, I was.**

And that's how it was presented too. It didn't show your dirty hands and dirty knees.

11:00 **Do you think, or how do you think you were affected by that image? And then the reality might have been a bit different.**

Well I think it would have been for some people, but because I knew, it didn't affect me. I knew. So I was lucky in that way.

11:30 **What type of surprises did you have? Or was your experience exactly what you expected?**

I had no surprises. I can't remember having any, so I don't think I would have. It was just a big adventure in those days because you didn't know where you were going or who you'd be with. It was just something different all the time. I was quite nice. We made lots of nice friends.

12:00 It was really a nice time. I'm glad I did it.

**How do you think your time with the Women's Land Army changed you?**

It probably made me a bit more self reliant than what I was, which it would have done to most people. You make your own decisions and you're responsible for what happens to you

12:30 because you make your own decisions. You can't blame anyone else but yourself. That's about it I think.

**I'd like to hear more about your friend Joy. Why did you love Joy so much?**

We were just close friends.

13:00 We did everything together. We complimented each other I suppose. We were really great friends.

**What was it in her that attracted you to her?**

I don't know, just the whole of her I think. Just the person you know. We were very good friends. We seemed to know what the other one was thinking too.

13:30 We would just have to look at one another and we'd either both burst out laughing or crying just by looking. It was just something there. Some sort of bond between us. It was really great.

**And was Joy interested in Church of England?**

Yes, she was Church of England, yes.

14:00 **You mentioned that you shared most things with Joy, including the boys. What things didn't you share with her?**

I don't think there was anything we didn't share.

14:30 Not in those days. We shared everything in those days. No, I don't think there was anything. I can't think.

**How would you describe her?**

My best friend. I have lots of friends but she was so close.

15:00 There was a special bond between us I think. Both madcaps.

**What's a madcap?**

Sallywag.

15:30 **You keep mentioning that you're a bit of a scallywag.**

I think I've said before today. Or a larrikin, whatever you like to call it.

**Well I imagine a larrikin to be someone who's a bit outrageous.**

16:00 No, we weren't outrageous.

**Well you mentioned you had tractor races.**

We did. And we used to drive the truck real fast over the hump in the road to see the ones in the back go whoosh when we went over it. We used to do things like that to them, so that's a bit of a scallywag.

16:30 **You've talked a little bit about the matrons and the different matrons that you had. What was your general impression of the general running of the Land Army?**

Some of the people ran it like they were in the civil army.

17:00 The were really snotty with you and really unbending, and there were others who were more human, and they were the nicest ones. They were the ones you could talk to about anything, but these others were the sort of people you wouldn't take your problems to them because they wouldn't have

17:30 understood. There were a couple of those I came in contact with, the unbending ones. Most of them were motherly types of ladies, which was good.

**And in the army and other military services, as you know there's usually a hierarchy and a chain of command. Were you aware of the chain of command in the**

18:00 **Land Army?**

We only had the matron in the camps. That was all we had out at Maimuru because there was one lot working on this farm and they'd have the matron and there would be another lot with their matrons. When we were in Griffith there was the head one in Mirool House in Griffith itself. The one in that area even though there were matrons

18:30 at all the different camps around. The one in Mirool House was a real military type person. If you were sitting there and you weren't sitting up straight she would come and knee you in the back and pull your shoulders back and make you sit up straight on the chair. She'd go right along the table and do that to everybody if they were sitting at the table properly. But the others weren't like that.

19:00 **From what you've told us today it sounds like you weren't particularly attracted to the military aspect of the Land Army at all. When would you feel perhaps at odds with being in the Land Army?**

I don't think I would have felt at odds with it at all. I enjoyed the experience.

19:30 I'd do it again if it came again today and they'd take somebody my age. I'd volunteer. No, I wouldn't be able to work like we did in those days.

**What aspect of serving your country were you aware of?**

20:00 We just wanted to do our bit to help. There wasn't much we could do, so we felt by getting the food out that would be a big help because people all over the country had to eat and they couldn't go without food. And the boys of an eligible age had all joined up, which left the old men and the really young. And in most of the those areas

20:30 they were badly in need. The girls were taken in at the CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation] and on sheep stations. All over the place, the cotton fields. Wherever they were needed they were sent. There was a train load of our girls sent from here over to South Australia to harvest over there.

21:00 **It certainly was a very different time and you're also spoken of rations and I think having coupons?**

Yes we had coupons. We had identity cards. I've still got my identity card. We all had identity cards. Mine's got enrolled member of

21:30 AWLA [Australian Women's Land Army] on it, which they put on when I joined up. Nobody has identity cards today, do they?



**I've also heard that you needed a pass to travel interstate, and around the country side, but that probably wouldn't have affected you?**

22:00 No. It wouldn't have affected us because we were just put on the train and I don't know who paid it. We were just put on that train. I can't even remember if we had tickets. I don't think we did because usually when we were being sent somewhere, there was a lot of us, not just one or two. If you came home on leave we must have had tickets.

22:30 **And how did rations affect you?**

It didn't affect us very much at all because we were out in the country and food wasn't short there. I remember getting prunes to bring home to Mum for my baby sister because she couldn't get them in Sydney. But I could get plenty in the country.

23:00 **What other types of food could you bring home?**

We used to bring fruit home, but apart from that and the prunes, I can't remember ever taking anything else home. I never came home that often.

**On the odd occasion that you did come home,**

23:30 **Sydney was probably experiencing a blackout. How did that affect your family?**

I think the windows were all covered in the night time but apart from that I can't remember. We had blackout curtains and things. But apart from that... every house would have been blackened out with their black out curtains.

24:00 **What about on farms in the country?**

It didn't make any difference out there.

**In times of severity and hardship as the war was, there's often things you**

24:30 **can't get which maybe later become very plentiful. What types of things do you relish now that you couldn't get then?**

You're talking about food wise, are you?

**Anything.**

I can't think of anything. I can't think of anything.

25:00 **You've spoken a little bit about being a tomboy and I'm aware I keep coming back to it but I would like to explore that a little bit more. What type of limitations did you feel as a woman doing a very physical hard job?**

25:30 I don't think there were any limitations. If you could do it, you did it. If you couldn't, you would ask for help. Maybe two of you would do it. I don't think there were any limitations.

**And in that sense did you regard yourself as equal to the blokes?**

26:00 I never think about it. I really didn't think about it. If there was a job to be done then you did it, and if you couldn't do, then you'd ask one of the others to help, and the two of you would do it. I didn't even think about it.

**What type of job would require two people?**

Probably if you were sawing wood

26:30 on a cross cut saw. You would have one on each end. Something like that. It would be easier with two people. Or if you had a horse and one was driving the horse and the other was working the harrows or something. That might need two people to help. One to control the horse and one to control the ploughs. Usually the boys do that with one person.

27:00 The men used to do the both at the same time, but we would need two people if needed be.

**Can you tell me a bit more about ploughing fields? What were they being ploughed for?**

The only ploughing that I did was pulling the thing behind the tractor.

27:30 I didn't have a horse there. And they would be getting ready to plant rockmelons or tomatoes or crops like that. And when each crop finished that would either be ploughed in or what was there dug in and a new crop would be put in. Whatever the seasonal crop was going in.

28:00 **You've told us a little bit about the relationships and friendships amongst the girls in the Land Army, when would there be moments of jealousy between you do you think?**

I don't know. We never had any jealousy.

- 28:30 I don't really know. It was a group of girls on a farm. You were all doing the same job together, and got the job done. That's how it was. I never struck any jealousy.
- 29:00 **When you were sick. I imagine you must have had the odd day when you were sick, how were you paid?**
- I've actually got in there, a pay thing in there. We were paid three pound a week and there was one there with two pound fifteen. And they will have written beside it
- 29:30 sick for half a day or something. And that will answer your question. You were docked if you weren't there. No work, no pay.
- That's a fairly major disincentive to take**
- 30:00 **a sick day.**
- To take one unnecessarily. Yes.
- But still you must have needed the odd day off?**
- I can't remember just taking a day off for a day off. There was one entry against my name when I was sick with a cold or something or other.
- 30:30 But we were getting three pound a week. That's what we were getting then. Seems stupid now, doesn't it? It would be six dollars now or something like that.
- Times are very different now.**
- Aren't they? Certainly are.
- 31:00 **One of the things that is different now is that I've grown up with PMT [Pre-menstrual Tension] and the term PMT. But I'm wondering amongst the girls how did you manage with those kinds of things?**
- You just got on the best way you could. There was nothing else for it. It was difficult though because
- 31:30 some places didn't even have toilets to go to, you had to squat down in the grass. And some had a couple of posts with hessian, which you might well have not had there because you could see straight through it. But it was very basic in that regard.
- I've also heard stories from other women in other services about**
- 32:00 **lack of toiletries like sanitary napkins and things like that. Did you ever experience shortages like that?**
- We only had the napkins that you used yourself, you washed yourself. We didn't have the modern things like they've got today. It was harder. You had to carry them around with you. If you put a new one on you carried the dirty ones around with you and
- 32:30 washed them at the end of the day and got them ready for the next day. So it was hard. They've got very modern stuff today.
- Well sometimes modern means disposal rather than reusable.**
- It's disposal today, isn't it? So that was hard.
- 33:00 At that time of the month it was hard. But we all managed somehow or other.
- I imagine it would have been very difficult. How do you think that contributed to your sense of stoicism?**
- I wouldn't know.
- 33:30 I know it was very difficult. I know someone would go with you sometimes and just stand in front of you, kind of you know. But that was very hard that was. It was alright where you had conveniences but where you were out in the paddocks without anything like that, that was hard.
- 34:00 **I understand this is a personal question, but did you suffer pain or discomfort?**
- No, I don't think so. Just normal. Some people had a very rough time but I didn't myself.
- You were very lucky.**
- Yes. For sure.
- 34:30 **You have talked a lot about Joy today, but I'm wondering, who were your role models do you think?**

I doubt if I had any. I don't think I had a role model.

35:00 **Well perhaps I could ask the question a different way. Who did you look up to?**

I couldn't say that because I just don't know. No, I don't think I looked up to anybody. Just went on my own little

35:30 merry way. Whatever that was. I don't think we thought about role models in those days.

**That's very true, but usually in a social group though particularly in a group like the Women's Land Army,**

36:00 **perhaps sometimes... I mean even growing up and going to school there's often somebody in the class you really want to be like.**

No, there wasn't anybody like that. I might have turned out different otherwise.

**What do you mean?**

I mightn't have been quite so cheeky.

36:30 I don't think there were any role models.

**Yes, you keep saying you're cheeky.**

That's because everybody keeps telling me.

**So how did you**

37:00 **cope and manage with the discipline of the army?**

You just learned to keep your mouth shut.

**How was that possible for a cheeky girl?**

Very hard, and they'd say, "Take that look off your face." I wouldn't say it but my face must have showed what I was thinking.

37:30 **How would you deal with authority in general?**

You just take it - that's all. You mightn't agree with it but you'd just let it go. If they dished out punishment you'd just do it. I used to say when they would say "You can't do this", I would say "Well I didn't want to do anyway".

38:00 That's how I used to handle that. I never let anybody see that I really wanted to do it. I would just say "I didn't want to do it anyway". I wouldn't give them the satisfaction of thinking they had got on top of me.

**And can you recall an instance like that?**

I can recall saying that many times. "I don't want to do it anyway".

38:30 I won't say why.

**Can you tell us the story without naming anybody?**

No. No.

**So Mary in your experience of the discipline, did you experience any acts of**

39:00 **kindness that stick in your memory?**

There would have been plenty but there's none that I can specifically think of at the moment. Probably after you've gone things will come back. No, I can't really think of anything off hand. But there would have been plenty of them because people were very kind.

39:30 Because we were all in the same boat too, people used to help one another. No, I can't think of anything. I know that people around the camps were nice to the girls too. Would do nice things for them. Invite them into their homes and give them a meal or something.

40:00 Even though we had a cook at the camp, it was different to be taken into somebody's home. But no, apart from that I can't think of anything. Too much water's flowed under the bridge.

**And when did you need your friend Joy to be kind to you?**

Well we were always kind to one another

40:30 except when we had an argument. But it would only last five minutes. We were just there for one another all the time, which made it a lot easier than being by yourself. Somebody with you, who knew you so well.

**And who you could trust.**

41:00 Yes. That was a big thing.

**And what did you trust Joy with?**

I trusted her with anything and everything. She would never have broken a confidence. She was a good friend.

## Tape 7

00:34 **Mary, I'd like to talk to you about the training you had on the tractor. Firstly, can I ask who instigated this whole procedure?**

The farmer. Mr Chadney was his name. He did. He taught us by standing on the running board beside us and telling us

01:00 what to do.

**What were his reasons for training you?**

To save him work, so he wouldn't have to do it all.

**Did you ever feel like you were slave labour?**

No, no. He was a very nice person.

01:30 **For what other reasons were you given these skills? Or what did you put these skills to?**

For working on his farm. I mean he could be doing something else while he was ploughing the fields, couldn't he? Going up and down up and down up and down all day on the tractor. Unless it was muddy, then it

02:00 was rough. The thing would get caught in the dirt and it would lift the front wheels up and if you didn't put the clutch in and drop it down to the ground, it could turn over. So you had to be careful there.

**What would get caught in the dirt?**

The shear things at the back, the ploughs would go deep if it was a bit wet and muddy. You could tip over.

**What were you ploughing for?**

Whatever he was planting

02:30 at the time. It could have been rockmelons, tomatoes, whatever he was putting in at that time.

**You say it was just driving up and down and back. Isn't it the case that what you're using the tractor for needs to be different for different planting?**

Oh no, all we had to do was keep our eye on a tree at that end, and aim for the tree and then you'd have a straight line.

03:00 Once you got the first straight line in, the others would be just coming back and forwards in the wheels of the other one, until you finished.

**What sort of size was the tractor?**

Mine was a big one. Joy had a Farmer something. Mine was a big one with big iron wheels on it. It was fairly big.

03:30 I don't know what size you would call it but it was a big one.

**How would you get onto it?**

Climb up. It had things to put feet on. Haven't you been on a tractor?

**I have but I don't know of one that big. I was just wondering if the task was difficult at all?**

04:00 It probably was a bit difficult but you get used to it. When you get familiar with things they become easier.

**Did it take you long for you to become familiar with the tractor?**

Not too long. Not too long. We were quick learners in those days.

**Was he a good teacher?**

Yep.

04:30 **Did he have a family on the farm with him?**

Yes. He had five young children I think.

**And were they all American?**

Yes, they all had that American twang. The wife did, the children weren't, but the wife was.

**How did you all get along?**

Fine. He was good to us, so we did our work well for him. He treated us right.

05:00 I think he liked us too.

**This family and I imagine also the one at Maimuru, families you got to know fairly well. What could you tell of their lives on the land?**

05:30 I don't know if I could tell you anything about their lives. She seemed happy and contented with their lot. I'm not sure how long... I think the Chadneys had been there a long time. We seemed to get on very well with most of the people we worked for. There was another family out at Hanwood called the Creef's.

06:00 We got on really well with them too. That was on an apple orchard. We were really friendly with them as well. So we just seemed to get on well with the country people.

**What were the roles of the women on these farms?**

Well most of the Australian ones, the wives and mothers looked after the houses and

06:30 the man did the work outside. But the Italians, the woman was out in the field and doing the housework. So they did all the work as well. They were expected by their husbands to get out in the field and work. But not the Australians and the other people, they didn't do that. The wife would go out and help if she was needed.

07:00 But mostly they had plenty to do in the house, especially with five young children.

**I imagine that set you apart from them on the farm, in terms of your roles. You played a very different part in the workings of the farm.**

Yes, we were farm labourers.

07:30 **Did that do anything to alter the relations with the farm?**

The people we worked for for any length of time, when there wasn't a whole crowd of us, we were really friendly with and we got on very well with.

**How personally then did you see the work you were performing, in**

08:00 **view of the women who were still doing the traditional women's roles on the land? And yet you performing what in some cases were traditionally men's roles? How did you look upon the work you were doing in that sense?**

We just knew that the work had to be done. That was all. The men weren't there. We were just sort of filling in for them until they came back. Just filling in and getting the food out.

08:30 I don't know what they would have done for food if they hadn't put the women on the land.

**I find it interesting that you say you felt you were filling in. Did you feel that you were in a way taking over?**

No. We felt like that we were there until our boys came home again, and they

09:00 would begin where they left off. That's how I felt. And that things would go back to normal again.

**I'm jumping ahead somewhat. Is that how it turned out?**

Yes. Mostly, yes. A lot of the boys went back to the bush and to their families and picked up the reins again.

09:30 And things got easier because they got different types of things to work the soils. They're better now than what they had in those days. More mechanised now, isn't it? Everything's more mechanised now than what it was.

**Was the idea of what you were doing, as**

10:00 **almost bringing women's work into line with the status of men's work? Was that impression ever something you felt?**

No. No. Besides even if you worked alongside the man, he would have got paid more than what you would have got paid. Men's rates were different to women's rates.

10:30 Even if you were both doing the same job. That's how things were.

**How would that make you feel spending a day labouring in the paddock?**

Well that's what we grew up with, so it didn't worry you because that's just how things were until people started to fight for equality

11:00 later on.

**Well later on then did you look back at your work and think perhaps you were undervalued?**

No, it was gone. It had happened and it was gone. So it didn't worry you afterwards. We were happy in those days with what we had.

**Is it the case do you think that**

11:30 **people are now difficult to satisfy in their aspirations?**

I'm not too sure about people today but they certainly get paid a lot more for the same sort of work than what we were paid for a day. So it's just the way the world is today, isn't it? Things have changed.

12:00 **Well even that time was a time of change.**

The start of change I think, when things started to change after the war because then you couldn't push the women back to where they were before.

**And why was that?**

Because they had all been out doing these sorts of things and sticking up for themselves.

**And was that right?**

Too right. Too right.

12:30 **As you've mentioned before social attitudes at the time were indicative of the time.**

Yes, that's what they were.

**And yet, you're right, changes were taking place and were starting. Were attitudes changing at the same time?**

With some people. Some people still thought the man's

13:00 word was law. And he ruled his family with an iron fist, but that was getting less and less as time went on. I only knew one man like that.

**Do I have to ask?**

13:30 Well it wasn't my father.

**Well I presume that even on some properties or at least in the community in which you worked, some of those attitudes might have been slow to change? These new roles?**

I think it was probably harder for the older people,

14:00 who were used to that way of life, whereas the younger people, they took it in their stride. But once you let them out of the pack they wouldn't go back. It made a big difference - that war - to how women were treated.

**What would you see as the**

14:30 **most significant and most lasting impact?**

I'm not sure about that. You see the young girls today can take on any job. In our days there were jobs for the boys and jobs for the girls. And never the twain shall meet. It's different now, isn't it? Very different.

15:00 You wouldn't be sitting here in those days. You would be doing the whole thing completely.

**Well, I've got you to thank that I don't have to.**

Yes, thank you.

15:30 **If attitudes were slower to change in people in the communities around you, did you also find it amongst some of the other girls with which you worked?**

- 16:00 I don't think I can answer that. We were all the same when we were in the Land Army. We were just working and we did what we were told to do. But just at the same time there were changes going on and you knew it. I can't answer that anymore.
- 16:30 **What if you knew about those changes and were aware of them, would you talk of them?**
- I don't think it was something that you were really aware of, what was happening. But you sort of... you weren't really aware of it until later and then you suddenly realised things were never going to be the same as they were before the war.
- 17:00 **Well some of the promotional material that you've shown us and that we've talked about, promoting the whole notion of women accomplishing and successfully handling the work on the land, you've said that you were quite aware of that. And while perhaps not**
- 17:30 **exactly reflecting what the work was like...you said it was maybe a little more glamorous than how you might have felt. Did you still connect with the bright young image?**
- You mean the poster thing? Connect with it? No, I didn't even think about that.
- 18:00 I just thought that they needed people to work the farms and I knew that's where I wanted to go back to the farms. That was all I was worried about. Go to the farm, do what I liked doing and it helped the country at the same time. Get the food out.
- The figure in the poster that we've seen. She certainly looks hard working.**
- 18:30 **At the same time she has her rosy glossy lipstick. Her hair looks nicely and neatly in place. How easy was it to maintain femininity?**
- That was when you came home and had a bath and put your lipstick on. You had to wash the dirt off but then it was alright. You could get back into your glamour rags and pretend you were back where you came from.
- 19:00 But you couldn't do it when you were in your dirty overalls with dirt all over you. Some people probably had a lot of trouble with that. I know one of our girls had a great shock. I don't think she even realised that fruit grew on trees. I think she thought they came in boxes. So she had a rude awakening. But we had fruit trees
- 19:30 at home, so we knew it grew on trees.
- Had there been nothing of the work you performed that caught you out or that was new to you?**
- Oh there was a lot of it new to us. Parsnips. I had never had anything to do with parsnips before.
- 20:00 They gave us rashes all over our arms. The leaves of the parsnip put rashes all over our arms. I didn't know that before. We learnt that. We had to wear something long to cover over our arms to keep the rash off. That was one thing I didn't know about. But most of the other things... my Dad grew grapes. He grew passionfruit and he had had fruit trees. He put in
- 20:30 gherkins and things, so I used to know all that sort of stuff.
- How often would you correspond with home?**
- I used to write... I don't know how often, but I did write a lot. I kept writing. I used to write to my Dad who was away in the air force. I would write to him and then write home to Mum.
- 21:00 So I kept in touch. We did get leave occasionally. When we changed from one place to another, from Young to Griffith we'd go home and then go to headquarters and they'd give you a new posting. So you could go home in the middle of the two different areas.
- 21:30 You'd go down there and then they'd send you somewhere else when you finished one job.
- Were you allowed to accumulate leave if you didn't take any?**
- No. No, I don't think so. We didn't often take leave. Just when a job was finished you might be able to go somewhere, if you weren't wanted somewhere else.
- 22:00 We were probably allowed, I can't remember, but we were probably allowed a week every six months or something. So you would be able to go then if you wanted to. I can't remember what it was. I didn't get home for my sister's wedding. I couldn't get leave for it.
- 22:30 So I must not have been able to get leave then because I just couldn't get home.
- Could she accept that that was the case?**
- She had to, didn't she?

**Could you accept it?**

Well I had to do the same. I mean you weren't allowed to go, so you weren't allowed to go. That was it. You just couldn't get leave at the time.

23:00 Actually from memory she got married in December, which is a time when a lot of the crops are coming on and that. So it probably was a busy time.

**We've had stories of people going AWOL [Absent Without Leave] to get married or to take honeymoons after marriage. Had you ever considered...?**

23:30 Going AWOL? No. I never considered it. I had no reason to go.

**Was censorship something you had to concern yourself with?**

No. My letters were only going within Australia. Had

24:00 they being going out of Australia they might have been, but mine were only in Australia.

**I would imagine from the times that I've been away from home, that when you receive mail it's something you look forward to, is that the case?**

Yes, very much so.

24:30 It just kept you in touch.

**Beside letters, what sort of things would you receive?**

Only letters. When we came home my auntie who lived up the road used to make Welsh cakes and give me a big box full to take back with me. But apart from that... she would give me those when I came home.

25:00 She made good Welsh cakes.

**What was the opinion of the rest of the girls?**

They liked them too. Anything like that they liked.

**And it was the case that things like that would be shared around?**

Yes.

25:30 **On the point that you mentioned earlier about being able to change when you finished your day's work, and slipping into your glad rags...**

Clean clothes.

**Which I imagine is something of a transformation in itself. If you were**

26:00 **heading off for the weekend in town, perhaps a local boy might be meeting you somewhere?**

We never went for a weekend.

**Perhaps an afternoon then.**

A few hours.

**How possible was it to make that transformation. To leave behind work on the land and become a young girl again?**

26:30 That would have been quite easy. It would have been quite easy. So long as you had your lipstick and something clean to put on.

**What of your calloused fingers?**

They didn't actually get too calloused, actually. I never had any calluses. In the winter we wore the gloves for most jobs that we could to

27:00 keep the cold off your hands.

**Do you think the boys you frequented with admired you?**

I don't know whether they did or not. I must ask them and find out. They could have done, I don't know. It's not something we discussed.

27:30 **Well as I was saying, in leaving the work behind what sort of things would you do and discuss, if not about your work?**

When we were in the army do you mean? Anything that was topical of the day, I suppose. Young people talk about all sorts of things. I can't remember what we used to talk about.



28:00 I can't remember what I talked about yesterday. Not 60 odd years ago.

**Do you have any pleasant recollections of time in towns?**

Well we went to Griffith a fair bit because I was somewhere in and around that area

28:30 for quite a bit. We didn't go into Young that often, only when we could get a ride in on the motorbike, and that wasn't often. No, I can't even remember what you asked me. What did you ask me?

**If there was a most memorable**

29:00 **time you had?**

No, I can't remember anything that stands out. Everything was fun in those days.

**Was there any most memorable boy?**

No, just each place you went you had a new one you see.

29:30 If you could find one. They were acquaintances.

**You've mentioned that you would sometimes associate with the families on the properties, and would have singalongs,**

30:00 **were there favourite war time songs?**

They would have been all the songs that were raging around then... "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and all those sorts of things. You wouldn't know them, but they had all these war songs, and they would have been things like that. All the old songs. If you ever go to an army reunion and listen to the old songs, those would be the sorts of things we would have been singing.

30:30 **How vivid are the songs? Do they remain with you?**

I would know them if someone mentioned the name. I can't think of them off the top of my head at the moment.

**The one you mentioned before...**

"Keep the home fires burning".

**That sounds like a very...?**

"While our hearts are yearning.

31:00 **Was it a real war time, round the piano...**

While the boys are far away, they dream of home. There's a silver lining through the dark clouds shining. Turn the good side inside out... or something or other, until the boys come home." It was something like that it was. It was just songs like that, you know, to keep your spirits up.

**Was there a Land Army song?**

31:30 Yes, we have a few songs that we sing. "The Land Army is Happy. The Land Army is Free. The Land Army are happy when they're out upon a spree. We never quarrel and we never disagree. The motto of the Land Army is come and have a drink with me." We nearly dropped dead when the matron said, "Come and have a drink with me."

32:00 **How common was it that you would go and have a drink?**

Mine would have been a soft drink. I still don't drink.

**What of all your fellow girls?**

Oh no. Some of them like a little wine or something like that. I've never acquired a taste for it.

**Could it be consumed while you were at a camp?**

No, I don't think

32:30 we were allowed liquor in the camp. I'm sure we weren't.

**What about the occasions when you were actually housed with the family on the property? I'm assuming you were perhaps sharing meals with the family?**

We didn't get offered a drink. It would have been lemonade or something like that if we were. Home made lemonade at that. In those days, you used to have a ginger

33:00 beer plant and you made your own ginger beer.

**Would the farmer or the man of the land enjoy a drink after the day?**

He probably would but I wasn't really with him at the end of the day to find that out. Up in Griffith they would probably have wine because there was a lot of wine.

- 33:30 And I suppose there would be other places they could make different fruit wines if they wanted to. But it's not something I can remember ever coming in contact with. I know there was plenty of wine at Griffith. It was everywhere.

**I understand you were at one of the Griffith properties, picking or harvesting grapes. Is that correct?**

Yes. We picked a lot of grapes.

- 34:00 **Can you describe that work for me?**

Well we used to have secateurs and you'd be going along with the secateurs and if you weren't careful you'd snip your fingers. There used to be big Huntsman spiders hiding in the leaves and you'd hear screams all around the place when the girls got a Huntsman spider instead of a bunch of grapes. Then we used to fill up the boxes and leave them and the tractor would pick up the boxes and take them to the winery.

- 34:30 Put them on trucks and take them to the wineries up in Griffith. That was pretty hard work. And then at the end of the year, we had to prune the vines for the next year's crop.

**You never sampled any of the wine?**

No, I just don't like the taste. I'd rather eat them as grapes.

- 35:00 **Was that fruit something you were allowed to eat?**

We could eat it when we went along. I mean you're pretty busy with your hands, holding, cutting, holding, cutting to be able to put anything in your mouth. But they were there and you could have them during your breaks. All those grapes were going to the wineries, so they were wine grapes.

**In what would you collect them as you were picking them?**

What did we collect them in?

- 35:30 It must have been boxes of some sort because they used to just pick them up and put them on. Probably trays. The tractor has two arms which goes out and under and lifts them up, so it might have been a tray thing that they were on. They used to use those sorts of things.

- 36:00 **You weren't actually...?**

I wasn't working the tractor there. I was just picking the grapes there.

**And would you ever have to haul any barrels or baskets over your shoulder or back?**

We had... when we were doing apples and oranges; we had a big bag which we used around here, down there and around in front of us and boy was it heavy when it was full of fruit. It used to have a flap, which you would undo and the fruit would fall out the bottom.

- 36:30 You had to climb up the trestles and fill that up with the fruit and then down again and tip it into something until the tree was stripped of its fruit. Or the apples or whatever it was. But we could eat as much as we liked while we were there. We used to take it home with us.

- 37:00 **Were you a fruit lover before you started this work?**

Yes, I've always loved fruit.

**And working with all this fruit on the land didn't...?**

It didn't make any difference. I still love fruit.

**Although the work I imagine on the whole was pretty**

- 37:30 **arduous, did you have a fondness for any part of it?**

A fondness? I can't say I was in love with it, but it had to be done, and that's what we were there for, to do it. It didn't actually worry me. Whatever we did didn't worry me, I just did it.

- 38:00 **Could you have fun in any of the work you would be doing?**

We used to make fun in lots of ways. Even if it was just throwing a bad grape at somebody, or something like that. And when you looked to see who threw it, everybody would be very busy working. We used to have a good time because you could chat while you were doing it. You could chat while

- 38:30 you were working.

**Are there memories of your work or different locations that you worked in that are more cherished than others?**

The one I disliked the most was going back to Young the second time, in the winter time.

39:00 **Mary, what was your favourite aspect of your work?**

I liked it when I was driving the tractors and the trucks, that was good fun and I liked doing that. I didn't mind any of the work,

39:30 actually. I didn't like parsnips. The rest was ok.

**What was it that made it all so acceptable for you?**

Well that's what we went there for. We were there to do that job, and nobody pushed us into it. We went at our own free will, so

40:00 you knew it wasn't going to be a picnic. And I enjoyed the company of all the other girls when we were in camp.

**It sounds like satisfaction with what you're doing is quite important to you? And that was the case with what you did?**

Otherwise the food would have

40:30 rotted on the ground because no one was there to pick it. Then the farmers would have gone broke and nobody would have had any food.

## Tape 8

00:33 **I'd like to just pick up on what you were talking about regarding your love of the country. What does it mean for you to feel the soil in your hand?**

It gives you a satisfaction to plant something and watch it grow and then come

01:00 up into flowers or fruit. You get a lot of satisfaction out of that. It's like having a baby.

**You've talked about the type of labour you were doing and how you did it. Can you describe the type of countryside you were in?**

Griffith

01:30 has got all these channels for water from the Murrumbidgee River all around the farms. It is very flat. As I said there's no hills out there to get your hill starts on. So it's very flat in Griffith. In Maimuru, it was different sort of countryside. It was undulating you know. Up and down.

02:00 That was the main difference between the two of them. One was a flat place and the other one wasn't. It had hills everywhere.

**And how green was it?**

Well because in Griffith because it had crops growing, it was green at some time in the year, and then when

02:30 the crops were gone, it wasn't again. When the vines lose their leaves then they're brown. So the countryside changes in colour whichever the season in. No matter where you are that happens, doesn't it? Summer, autumn, winter and spring. In the spring, the new growth comes and in winter it's gone. It's just the cycle.

03:00 **Earlier on today you showed us your Land Army blazer which was green. Why is your blazer green?**

Our badge, Land Army badge has got green around it with the yellow and that on it, so we chose it to go with our badge. The green colour.

03:30 **And why was green chosen?**

Because the grass is green. The trees are green. There's a lot of green in the countryside. So it just seemed a natural colour to choose. The gold is for sun. So it just seemed the colours we should have.

04:00 **They do seem very appropriate colours.**

Yes, well that was what was on the posters and that, the green and gold.

**Moving forward to the end of the war and**

04:30 **I'm wondering, you've talked a bit about how you made such good friends in the Land Army,**

**particularly Joy. Why is it then so important for you to keep up those friendships?**

Well I just think it's nice to keep in touch with the people you knew when you were young. We share a lot of memories together and it's just nice for us all

05:00 to keep together. I hope we can do it for as long as we can.

**What do you think are your proudest moments of your service days?**

I think it was nice when we were given our uniforms and we actually had a uniform. We felt proud to wear that, when we got that.

05:30 We had been so long without one. Once they gave us one that made us very proud. And when they gave us the medal, that made me feel very proud. Because we had to fight for that as well.

**You mentioned earlier on in the day that you had to pay for your own things to begin with. What type of compensation or reimbursement did you receive?**

06:00 None. We got nothing.

**Other people in different services to yours have occasionally felt that they were forgotten or overlooked,**

06:30 **I'm wondering if that applied to the Women's Land Army immediately post war?**

We were overlooked. I don't think we were, we were overlooked. We had to fight, and our President Peggy has been fighting hard with her husband. They've been fighting for us for years. It's only through this lobbying,

07:00 and Ses knew where to lobby, that we got anything at all.

**What has the Women's Land Army been looking for?**

Just recognition. Some recognition. We had to fight to be able to march on Anzac Day.

07:30 As far as they were concerned... they called us the Land Army but we weren't an army, so we had to fight. It was in our name, that's what we had on our badges. We had the crown on the top of our badge. There's a crown. So we were fighting under the crown. We weren't taking guns but we had shovels and

08:00 things. We were doing the job just as well that way. But we do get more recognition today but we had to fight long years to get it.

**I've heard that there are some that felt that the Women's Land Army should have been named a fourth service.**

08:30 It would have been... now which one... it was to be gazetted in the Prime Minister's, or whatever he was, I can't think off hand, but he died just before he was to put it through. It was to go through as a fourth service. If he hadn't died then we wouldn't have had all this trouble. I just can't remember his name. That's what happened.

09:00 **How has the relationships been between the Women's Land Army and other women's services?**

Mostly ok. Mostly ok.

**Can you elaborate on that?**

I could,

09:30 but I won't. I could but I won't.

**Ok Mary, just taking up your post war story. What attracted you to Frank?**

What attracted me to him? He was just a very nice person.

10:00 He was taller than me, which in my way was quite good. I just liked his whole personality. He was a good dancer. He played the piano. He was very nice.

**Frank was in the air force and**

10:30 **probably still in uniform when you met him?**

No, I don't think he was. No, I think he was out by then.

**Well if I could just rewind a little bit then. Before you met Frank...you were discharged immediately after the war?**

11:00 Yes.

**And then returned and took up some work?**

Yes.

**Different jobs. You mentioned earlier that you didn't feel like you suffered a loss of independence after the war, how did you find going into marriage and raising a family?**

How do you mean, how did I find it?

11:30 I didn't expect the babies to come along quite as quickly, but they did. It was just something else you had to work at like you had been working at different things. And this was a different phase of your life. We were both working together to try and get our home together.

12:00 We found that too difficult, so this one was already built and we got this with the help of a war service loan. We had three under two years old at that stage when we came here.

**When you began a family, I imagine you stopped paid work yourself?**

12:30 Yes, when you got married your job was gone, that was it. You didn't take the job anymore. That was for a single person who needed the money more than you. Your husband had to keep you then. Married women lost their jobs once they were married. That's changed but that's how it was.

**Was that the case for you?**

Yes.

13:00 **What paid work were you doing when you were married?**

I was a packer up in Bonds in the packing room up there.

**Did you... after you had your children did you ever return to paid work?**

Yes, I worked down in Cronulla High School

13:30 after I had got the children off my hands. Actually, my son was down at the high school by then and the girls were working and doing things like that. I worked in the kitchen down there in the Domestic Science Department for five years. That was enough money to finish paying for our house. We paid the house off with that money.

14:00 **You talked a little bit earlier on today about adjusting to life after the Land Army days. What do you think was the most difficult thing?**

I just think

14:30 that because you were indoors all the time, where we had been used to being outdoors all the time, and suddenly we were enclosed all the time, that was the biggest hurdle to get over. One job Joy and I went to, we stayed half a day because we couldn't stand being closed in like that. We only stayed half a

15:00 day. We got into trouble when we got home because we had given up the job. We just couldn't cope being inside like that. We had to get used to it again. It's funny, isn't it?

**You were in the Land Army for about 3 years, so you joined up when you were 16?**

15:30 **What age were you when you left the Land Army?**

I joined it actually when I was 16, the Land Army. Joy hadn't turned 18 when the war finished, so I was probably getting around to 19 or something. But we were waiting for her to turn 18 to make us eligible to join something else if we wanted to, and then we were going to think about what we were going to

16:00 do when we both joined 18. So I must have been getting towards 19. I must have been around 19 or somewhere around there. I can't remember. When did the war finished?

**1945.**

What month?

**September.**

Well my birthday was in December so I was still 18

16:30 **Still a teenager.**

According to us, we weren't.

**According to you what were you?**

We were women by then!

**What do you think is perhaps**

17:00 **your saddest moment from that time?**

Well there's been a lot of sad times because I've lost a lot of family and friends. There's been a lot of sad times. They were all sad times. Once they die, you can't talk to them anymore.

17:30 Or see them anymore.

**How reluctant were you to leave the land and come back to the city?**

I don't think I was reluctant. I think we'd gone and done what we wanted to do. We worked for the thing. The war was over. There was no need for us anymore because when the boys came home

18:00 they had to have jobs to go to, so they would have taken our jobs anyway, and you just accepted the fact that you just had to get on with your life in civvie street.

**You've mentioned that you didn't get much news of the war when you were on the land, but you did return to Sydney just before war's end. What type of**

18:30 **knowledge did you have of the enemy that we were fighting?**

Well we would have only have picked up what we could read in the papers. We didn't think much of the Japanese in those days because they did things that weren't very nice. You

19:00 wouldn't hold any of it against them today, whatever in those days because it's different times, isn't it? Different people.

**And even though you were a young girl do you think you had an understanding of it being a necessary war?**

Well yes, because I think if they hadn't gone to war the

19:30 Japanese would have invaded here at that time, and that would have been that and that would have been far worse, wouldn't it?

**In a sense, even though your role was non-combatant you still helped Australia win the war.**

Well we did what we could.

20:00 We couldn't go and carry the guns or anything like that, but we could feed them. That's what we did, and I think everybody did a job and I think everybody did the job to the best of their ability and for a lot of us it worked out, didn't it?

**What type of changes do you think you could see in Australia**

20:30 **after the war?**

Well it took a while before there were many changes. It was good to see all the boys come home safe and sound back here where they belonged. And then there was a lot more freedom for women after the war, subtle little changes but they were certainly changes nevertheless.

21:00 Today, you're just about equal.

**What men friends or relatives were you expecting to come home from the war?**

I don't think I had any men friends or relatives that I can think of that didn't come home.

21:30 Any of the boys that lived around the streets, they all seemed to come back. The boy across the road who was married with a young baby, he didn't. He was in the air force and I think his plane was shot down. I don't think he ever saw his baby. And he's really the only one I can think of who lived near us who didn't come back. But I know there were hundreds of others.

22:00 **Yes, in a way that's very lucky.**

We only had one auntie and uncle out here and they only had one son who was too young. The others were girls. In the two families there was just this one poor little boy.

22:30 And all our other relatives were still over in Wales.

**You have several grandchildren of your own now.**

Five beautiful grandchildren.

**After having lived through a world war yourself, what type of advice would you pass onto your grandchildren**

23:00 **about war?**

I don't think I'd try and pass on any advice to them. I think the children today are much wiser than we

were at the same age. They probably wouldn't even ask me for advice. They're all very confident themselves, the children.

23:30 They grow up now with the television and the videos and the computers and they're well in touch with everything today, aren't they?

**But that doesn't necessarily mean that people are wiser.**

But they've got more information at their fingertips, haven't they? And they probably know how to use it.

24:00 **What would you like to have remembered about the Women's Land Army?**

I just like it to be remembered that we stepped in when needed and did the job to the best of our ability and fed the nation.

24:30 And I'm happy now we've got a medal. At least we've got some recognition.

**And how do you hope that legacy will be passed on?**

Perhaps they won't need it in the future. The way the world's going perhaps they won't need a Land Army probably in the future.

25:00 I don't know how we could pass it on. Do their best for their country I suppose. It's a great country.

25:30 **You mentioned some of the changes that you saw in Australia. How do you think people in general were affected after the war?**

I don't know how they were affected, but I know they were

26:00 happy to get their sons and husband's home in one piece after. And I think most people just pulled up their socks and got stuck into rebuilding everything again. You can't carry those things with you. You have to pass by and put them into the background, but don't forget.

26:30 A lot of the people who are here today weren't here in those days. I just hope they all fight for Australia if the time comes and they're needed -

27:00 that's all. It's a good country to live in, isn't it?

**As you just told us you were still very young at the war's end. Did you have a sense of optimism and looking forward to the future?**

Yes, I was looking forward to the future. I still had my whole life

27:30 ahead of me. I was hoping for better things than what had passed.

**And during the war and the threat of Australia being invaded, Darwin was bombed and even Sydney was bombed. What type of threat did you feel from**

28:00 **Australia being invaded?**

I think out in the bush where I was it was a bit far away from the places that were attacked and by the time we knew about it, it would have been quite a while afterwards. And I think we were all shocked by what had happened.

28:30 But by that time we knew they hadn't invaded, ...what had happened?

**Can you recollect a time ever of feeling fearful?**

No, I don't think I was ever fearful. Perhaps if I had known at the time that my future husband

29:00 was up there fighting up there, I might have been, but I didn't know that at the time. And there was none of my relatives or family fighting in the war, it wasn't like my father was fighting somewhere. He was in Richmond, so he was quite safe there in Richmond. And he was ground staff.

29:30 I actually never had anybody actually in the war fighting in the armed services.

**And in hindsight, do you now wish you had talked to Frank a bit more about his wartime experiences?**

Yes I do because it might have helped him get over that if I could have made him

30:00 talk about it. So it's one of those things, if you do, you might push too hard, and if you don't you haven't tried so... I know his best friend was shot beside him in the plane and killed on one trip and I think that affected him greatly. He didn't want to talk about it.

30:30 I didn't push.

**And why do you think perhaps your days in the Women's Land Army are some of your strongest memories?**

31:00 I suppose because of the time of life it was. I was 15 when I first went down to join the Land Army. On my thing, it's got the date I joined when I was 15 years old. You're young and impressionable at that age, that's why it made quite an impression on me.

31:30 And it was something different. Something you hadn't done before in your life. It was totally different going away like that.

**Is there anything in closing today that you'd like to say?**

32:00 No, just that I'm glad I joined the Land Army and if it was on again I'd do the same thing again. We had a great time even though we were doing a job that had to be done. We had a lot of companionship and I enjoyed the life in the Land Army.

**Well thank you for speaking with us today.**

32:30 Thank you.