

Australians at War Film Archive

Sheila Van Emden - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 26th May 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/369>

Tape 1

00:39 **Could we start off by asking you a bit about your early life, where you were born and brought up?**

Well I was born... actually I was born in Paddington in Sydney because my mum came to Sydney to have me. We lived at Erigolia,

01:00 a little town on the way to Hay near Rankin Springs. One train line went through there. I'm not sure whether the train line was there when we first went to live there or not. But it was in a big property, which had been broken up into soldier settlements and the soldiers had to fence their properties and get their first crop in within 12 months.

01:30 **You were talking about the family in Erigolia.**

Well, we were a family of 12. Ten girls and two boys. We lived there very happily, very sparsely. The nearest town was Griffith or Leeton and that was about 80 miles away along dirt roads,

02:00 so it was a good day's trip. But we were able to get fresh fruit and vegies in Griffith or Leeton and it was a family outing when we went there. We learned to do everything on the farm. We could all milk, ride horses and my oldest sisters were all very good cooks, which was needed badly at shearing time when the shearers came in.

02:30 They did all the cooking. We were just a very good community. Everybody knew everybody else. They built a little town and built a hall where we used to have lots of dances and everything. Flower shows and whatever. If you had water... most people sunk a dam, or dug a dam, but then sunk bores to get water. When we first went there to live there was no water. There was a farm nearby,

03:00 one of the first fellows to go out there and he had a dam and we used to cart the water on a furphy. You've probably heard of a furphy. And that was our drinking water, bathing water and everything. Anyway, we grew up there and when the war came my father went back into the army. He had been in the militia [Citizens Military Force] all the way through,

03:30 so he went back into the army. And my brother turned 18 and my eldest brother and my sister older than me used to always be together, because the other girls were all older. So when he decided to join up my sister said...I said, "What are we going to do?" And she said, "Well I'm going to join the land army." She had been in the WANS before which was the Women's Australian National Service.

04:00 So I said, "Well, I will too." But I was only fifteen and a half and I had just finished school, finished the intermediate [certificate]. We came to Sydney to join and they said "They would take her but not me because I was too young". So she said "Well, I won't go either". So they said, "Well seeing you're sisters and you're from the country, we'll take her." So they kept us in Sydney and they had a camp at Wahroonga, it was a paddock. The

04:30 land army was run by the girl guides and we had both been in the girl guides as well. We had to go to this camp for 2 or 3 days. It was the first time I had been over the Harbour Bridge by train because we had to catch the train over there. What we had to do was the same as we had done in guiding. We had to put up tents, build latrines, make slit trenches to cook our food and just normal

05:00 kind of learning what you would do if you were going to camp. When we finished that my mum... I went back home. My mum was staying at Yanco at the time because I had a sister living there. My sister stayed in Sydney with another sister and she was sent to Griffith and I was sent a letter to report to Leeton. So even though we were sisters and they didn't want me to go, they never

05:30 sent us to the same place. While we were in Sydney there were a group of girls and we were on Central Station and there was a group of young soldiers there and at that time was when they were calling up what they were calling the Chocos. Boys who had just turned 18 but hadn't enlisted, they were called up anyway. We kind of met them and went to a dance

- 06:00 and they went their way. They said "Write to us" and we kept writing and they were the boys who went up to the Kokoda Track. They had hardly any training. So they went off to do what they were doing and we went off into the land army. Now, at Leeton we lived in the dormitories, which was a big building which had been used regularly for seasonal fruit pickers for the canneries. They had big canneries there
- 06:30 and packing sheds, so they used these dormitories for the girls who came from all around. They lived there while they worked. Mostly picking or in the canneries. I'm not sure just which way it was. But we were in camp there and we had a matron and two sub matrons and our matron looked after everything for us. What they did,
- 07:00 the farmers would say how many girls they wanted to work on their properties and the matron had to work these out on a sheet. It was more or less run a bit like the girl guides because we were called patrols and they would have a patrol leader and take half a dozen girls to another farm. They had an old bus and a utility, and if we had to go a long way we would go in the bus or utility. But lots of girls had bikes and they could ride to where
- 07:30 they had to go. The first place that I went to it was a piggery out at Yanco. There were only two of us sent out there because this farmer had prized pigs. His son had gone to the Middle East two years before that. This was in 1942. It was 1941 when we first went into the land army, but this was 1942 and the girl who came with me had been a
- 08:00 Veterinary Science student at Sydney Uni [University], so I was lucky that she... I knew about pigs because my dad had pigs but she knew all the important things about pigs. The styes were terrible. He had beautiful styes but they were all filthy and messy and I remember he was a great big man with big bushy eyebrows and I remember when we got off the bus he stood and looked at us thinking what are these two kids going to do?
- 08:30 But he was very good. He showed us what he wanted doing and he also had a citrus orchard and the styes were kind of mixed up with that. We had to clean the styes out and separate the pigs. There were sows who were going to have litters of pigs, little pigs and that was all interesting. Lindsay was very good. She was the lass who was the science student and when it was time for them to
- 09:00 be neutered I suppose, he taught us how to castrate the pigs, the little male pigs. When we had the pigs going alright and he needed something to be done out in the orchard, we'd go out and irrigate or prune. They'd prune the inside of the citrus trees to keep them a nice shape. Then picking. We stayed there... We probably mightn't have gone there everyday. We did at the beginning to get
- 09:30 it all cleaned up. If you were needed somewhere else then they'd send you somewhere else. So we had a variety of different jobs to do. Another place we were pruning apricot trees. This was the beginning of the winter, so there was a lot of pruning to be done. Other farmers who had paddocks which they hadn't been using, which they probably had for grazing had them all ploughed up and planted with vegetables.
- 10:00 Mostly it was carrots and onions and spinach because that could all be canned then and sent over to the troops. We had to supply the food for our own nation as well as the nearby islands, and the troops, and of course we had all the American troops here too that needed extra food. So it was nothing to go out to a farm and see this great big long paddock with rows and rows of carrots, or rows and rows of onions.
- 10:30 The carrots were planted in seeds in rows and we'd have to weed them. So you'd be on your hands and knees with a little thing like a spoon pulling the weed out and hoping not to chop any carrots up. The onions, they made long furrows and they gave us bundles of little onions and you'd go along and plant them and then tread on them and push them in. So in the meantime there'd be grapes, pruning the grapes. There
- 11:00 was a lot of pruning at that time because there were peach and apricot orchards and grapes. So we'd do this pruning. And some of them would need spraying, so spraying had to be done. Then as the seasons went on it was time for picking the citrus fruit before any of the other fruit. They were lovely big trees at Leeton. We had to get up these great big ladders picking the fruit.
- 11:30 There would always be a scream from somebody who grabbed an orange and there would be a great big spider on it. The big spiders used to hang on the fruit, mostly on the sunny side. But if you didn't see them you'd just grab it and there would be a spider. I wasn't frightened of spiders but a lot of the city girls were. The girls that were there were mostly city girls. I think there were about five of us who came from the country.
- 12:00 We kind of knew what to do. A lot of them were good horse riders. All the farming implements in those days were horse driven, so you'd be out with a team of horses. One horse on a single furrow plough or if it was bigger machinery then you might have a team of about four. It was interesting work. The city girls worked just as hard as what we did. They
- 12:30 kept up and they were there to do a job and that was it. But the camp, we used to have to get up in the morning and have breakfast and the patrol leader would make sure she had lunch for her patrol that day. So we had to make sandwiches to take out for our lunch. We learned later on if you took...we had Arnott's biscuit tins to take our sandwiches in. Quite often it was just bread and jam.

- 13:00 We found it was good to make sure our lunch tin was put up high or at lunch time it would be full of ants. But a lot of farmers' wives would come out and bring us a billy of tea at morning tea time. Some of them would cook scones or cakes. They always brought us a billy of tea for our lunch. Latrines were a bit of a problem because you were out in those paddocks, so the farmer would drive in four poles and
- 13:30 put some hessian around it. But the hessian didn't cover your feet or your head; you just sat there with your private parts showing. There was a lot of things that people had to learn to do. At weekends we'd have picnics and of course the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] boys were over at Narrandera and they'd come over to Leeton for their weekends. I can remember the cannery manager
- 14:00 came down to our camp and wanted to know if they could have half a dozen girls to go up for dinner one Saturday night because this family were entertaining half a dozen RAAF boys. So I was lucky. I was often chosen for those outings because they wanted the younger girls not the older girls. They were lovely times. A lot of people did put on a lot of entertainment for us. There was a dance hall there but
- 14:30 we didn't have anyone to dance with unless the RAAF came over on the weekends. The girls used to have a favourite song, "They're Either Too Young or Too Old" because there were only the younger men who were there, because most of the younger fellows, even though they were on farms...I think...well one family... I know where I had my 16th birthday on a farm out at Yanco, the eldest boy had just turned 18
- 15:00 and went into the air force and the next boy was the same age as me. We all became very friendly and on my birthday, there were about 16 of us I think out there, and she came down at lunchtime with a birthday cake. Different little things like that. One farm we worked on and it was raining all the time and we wanted to stop working but we had to keep working. But we didn't even see that
- 15:30 farmer's wife. She didn't come down and bring us tea or anything. I mean that was only one out of ... but mostly they were very generous. There were times when we would have to go to where they were harvesting and they'd be making haystacks and we'd go and help stack the hay and collecting all the hay and making the haystacks.
- 16:00 We'd have fun there because you could get up on the haystacks and slide off so long as you didn't get splinters from the hay, which you did sometimes. At weekend we had to collect firewood because everything was fuel stoves. So we'd make a picnic out of that. We'd get a bus and we'd all go out somewhere in the bush and collect the firewood and have a picnic. We'd cook our meals in the slit trenches.
- 16:30 Quite often if we were having a day like that, we used to invite any of the RAAF boys and get them to come because they could cart the wood around for us. We'd bring the wood back and we'd just have a train... where the wood was tipped, we'd just have a train and pass it along and take it into the kitchen where it had to go. We just made our own fun. They had a swimming pool at Leeton and we used to
- 17:00 go swimming. But often in the hot weather when it was very hot and we were working, lots of the farms had canals and we would swim in the canals. If it was very hot you would just swim in your overalls because you would dry off very quickly after you came out. Well that was a problem. When we first went in we all had WANS [Women's Australian National Service] uniforms because most of us had been in the WANS and the girls that hadn't been in the WANS
- 17:30 that joined the land army bought WANS uniforms and I think they could be bought from a place called Peeps, they were tailors. They were nice uniforms but we had to pay for those ourselves. We had to pay our fare to go to where we had to work. I can't remember exactly what our pay was but I kind of think it was about two pounds a week, which is now... what would that be?
- 18:00 Not very much anyway. We also had to pay for our board, it was called our board. We weren't paid by the government, we were paid by the farmers. And this was one of the reasons why they said "We couldn't be the fifth women's service", we were never classed as a service. We did everything else though. We weren't allowed out of camp at certain times. You had to stick to rules and regulations. We did march. We always attended the
- 18:30 Anzac services in any country town we were in, and we marched in a sort of a way. We had learned to march when we were in the WANS. They used to have marching things you know. Real service marching. We found that it was... the dormitories had a mess on one side and then it had... the dormitories were on the other side
- 19:00 and you walked through and it was a big hall. That was where the local people used to have a lot of their special dances. They did have a dance hall right up in the town of Leeton and that was called the Cabaret and they had dances there on a Saturday night. But for any special functions they used to use this dormitory and they were having a Diggers' Ball while we were there, with debutantes, and they asked some of the girls "If they would like to be debs?"
- 19:30 I said "I would like to be", and my mother then must have been with my sister at Yanco because she said she would make my frock. To get... we couldn't get white material and one of the shops in Leeton had a big bolt of pale blue, so all the debs [Debutants] had pale blue uniforms and we had air force boys for our partners. The show was on at this time and I was riding in the show and I got my ankle caught between the horse and a post, so I couldn't make my debut so one of the other girls wore my frock.

- 20:00 My frock was there. And that was the last Diggers' Ball they had in Leeton. They didn't have any more until the end of the war. So later on, I'll tell you about that later on I suppose... but we had... We used to have swimming carnivals. We used to have hockey matches and play hockey
- 20:30 against the locals girls down in the show ground. On one occasion the air force said they would play against us in hockey. I don't know how it happened but there were a few Americans too and a few army fellows. There might have been a camp not far out from there that had a few army fellows. So we played hockey against the air force, the army and the Americans.
- 21:00 Another time we were working on the farm out at Yanco where the train goes through Yanco to go to Hay. There was a big troop train going through to Hay and it was all Americans and a lot of them were on open carriages and when they saw the girls - there was a big group of girls working in the paddock - they tooted the train and they stopped the train. We were able to go over to them and they gave us cigarettes and chocolates,
- 21:30 no nylon stockings but plenty of cigarettes and chocolates and chewing gum. They always had chewing gum. Other than that we didn't see any... I don't think we saw any other Americans. When you came down on leave sometimes you'd meet them. I stayed there until I think, about January, New
- 22:00 Year's day I think. That's right, at Christmas time the air force invited us over for Christmas dinner, but it was very hot weather, and I was on a farm then picking apricots. In those days when you picked stone fruit you went through the trees and you only picked what was ripe enough to be picked. Then you'd go back through the ones the next day until you finished all the fruit. The fruit was always beautiful then because it was picked at the right time.
- 22:30 Christmas Day, we had to go back so the farmer said "If you come out in the morning and pick as much as you can in the morning, then you can go". Girls who were on other farms, they were taken over. The air force sent over tenders to pick the girls up and then sent one over to pick up the girls who were picking the fruit. By the time we got over there the lunch had almost finished but they had kept lunch for us. When we walked in they were having an ice cream fight.
- 23:00 Ice cream was being thrown everywhere and we got it all over our uniforms, because we still only had the blue uniforms, but the RAAF at that stage, in the summer time had gone into their khaki.
- So what year was this? Christmas...?**
- '42. Because I left there just after Christmas '42 and went to Batlow, went from Sydney to Batlow and my friend that I had at Leeton
- 23:30 we both went together. We came down to Sydney and then went to Batlow. In the room that I slept in at Leeton there were four girls. Esme came from...well they all came from Sydney. Two of those girls later on, one joined the army and one joined the 'AAMWS [AAMWS - Australian Army Medical Women's Service],
- 24:00 so quite often they would change over. But they were all lovely girls and we all got on well together. Two ladies that we had at Leeton during those times were already war widows. Their husbands had been killed overseas. One of them was a country girl. We had a mixture of people. We had hairdressers and stenographers. They just came...
- 24:30 ...and dancers. Girls who had been working at the Tivoli. So if we put on a concert they were always there to instruct us what to do. But it was a mixture of everybody, and it didn't matter where you came from because once you were there you were all kind of on the same level. The older ones helped the younger ones. I got a lot of instruction from a lot of the girls because I was I suppose classed as a bushwhacker and
- 25:00 didn't know a lot of the things that they knew. It was just helpful and just like a big family. But the work was very hard. I can remember one frosty morning. See it was very hot in the summer time and it was freezing cold in the winter time. On those plains the wind would blow and almost go through you it was so cold. And of course planting all these things, carrots had to be dug in the winter time,
- 25:30 and the ground would be freezing and we'd have great big piles of carrots and sometimes the mud stuck on them and you'd have to get all the mud off. That was pretty cold. But I remember one morning we were picking spinach. The frost was all over it. It was like ice. Gumboots were very hard to get. We had coupons the same as civilian people. We didn't get any service coupons.
- 26:00 The girls bought most of their... most of the shops in Leeton, all the men's pyjamas were bought by the girls because they were warm and they used fewer coupons than what the ladies' pyjamas were. The same with the overalls. We used to buy the men's overalls. They were fewer coupons than the slacks and things like that. Anyway slacks were no good for working in.
- 26:30 One morning we were out on the spinach and it was freezing cold, and you're kind of walking between rows of spinach and your legs were getting wet. And I just passed out and the next thing I knew I was sitting in the kitchen and Mrs Browning... and they had asparagus growing... well she was probably cooking asparagus, and she gave me this bowl of asparagus to eat. They were really very caring and they often said that if they hadn't had the girls there,

- 27:00 they wouldn't have had the crops that they had. This also happened at Batlow when we went to Batlow. We arrived up there in the mountains. It was summer time when we went there, so it wasn't too bad. But they had taken over the old RSL [Returned and Services League] hall and it was just like a big tin shed and they only had shutters that opened up for the windows and I don't think they had any doors on it. They put all of our stretchers in there and
- 27:30 we had palliasses which we filled with straw. The cows used to wander in at night and you'd wake up and there would be a cow trying to pull the straw out of your palliasse. Another place I went to for a little while was further out, and we had to sleep above the stables. We only had nails to hang our uniforms on, and the uniforms had covered buttons. They were covered buttons. We all had leather gloves
- 28:00 and rats used to come and eat the covered buttons because I suppose you would be touching them with fingers out of our gloves. We stayed there... I think we might have been there for two weeks, and we complained about it because you could smell all the horses up in the top. So we were shifted from there. Then they took over... When we were in the RSL, the scouts hall was up the street and around the corner. They took over the scouts' hall and that's where they used to cook our meals.
- 28:30 So we would have to get up of a morning, get dressed, wash in cold water... the lavatories were out the back. We didn't have a bathroom; all we had was a big tin bath. The bath would either be in the middle of the hut or you would take it outside and get half way under it and have a bath in the tin bath. But we had to get up and run around to the scouts' hall to have our breakfast and cut our lunches to take them
- 29:00 off, and then have tea there again at night. I recall one night they had a bivouac come through from Cowra, the soldiers were learning to drive. Because to get to Batlow in those days it was a very, very narrow mountain road and very steep. These fellows had come out there to practise driving over mountain rocky roads. We were working and we could see this bivouac, all these trucks coming through
- 29:30 and we were all hurrying to get through our work to get home. I don't think they came back there anymore because once we had our tea we went down and invited them over and said "We're going to have a dance in the scouts' hall". So instead of them being there at night and doing what they went there for, they spent the night dancing with us. We had a couple of girls who could play the piano and there were always little things like that happening.
- 30:00 They took...after a while they took an old boarding house at Batlow, Thrulle [?] House it was called, so we shifted out. There were always new girls who would come in and go to the scouts' hall and the ones who had been there for a while went up to the old boarding house. They just had beds in every room, and it had a kitchen out the back. We weren't supposed to go out at night but every so often, we'd go out.
- 30:30 There wasn't anything to do but you'd just go out and walk around and do silly things. There was a billiard hall down there where a lot of gentlemen used to go and play billiards at night. I remember three or four of us all got dressed up. We painted stuff on our face and just did silly things like poking our face in the door and through the windows. Anyway, whoever was there reported us
- 31:00 and we were told then we had CB [Confined to Barracks] for a couple of weeks, and we had to do... The punishment there was chopping the firewood for the stove, because we all had to take that in turn anyway. If you had been naughty you got extra time on the wood heap. Batlow was a lovely town and the people there used to have lots of house parties, and we got invited to their house parties. And
- 31:30 there again most of the young fellows were away. They had to keep a certain amount of boys at home. The farm I went to first of all, Charlie Bushell, an old German fellow, and he was very hard on the girls. He had a packing shed and it was always freezing in the packing shed. You'd go out and do the picking and then come in and do the packing. We complained that he didn't have any heating for us.
- 32:00 No hot water to warm our hands because your hands would freeze after packing a few cases of fruit. And the fellow opposite him, I don't know how he knew, but two of the girls who were working for him, one of them, her boyfriend had just come back from overseas, so she left to get married, and I went to work for him, Reg Cornby. He was just completely different.
- 32:30 So I stayed working there. Most of the time I worked there. It was about two miles out of town, so we used to just walk out every morning and then walk back again. Mrs Cornby in the winter time used to take us into the kitchen and give us a mug of hot soup, and if it was really cold he wouldn't have us out pruning. We would do as much as we could and he had a big shed out the back with a dirt floor and it would be nice warm dirt.
- 33:00 We would go in there and make packing cases. He taught us how to make the packing cases and you'd be in there hammering away making the packing cases. He had a few sheep in a back paddock and when it snowed we would have to go out and roll snow balls. You'd make snow balls, roll them along and then lay the feed for the sheep. It was very hilly country. He had a paddock which he hadn't used and he was told he had to put that under cultivation.
- 33:30 It had to be cleared. I've got pictures of us. His son was the same age as me. His other son was away in the army and his daughter was in the air force, and we had to root out these great big gum trees. We had two horses with chains on them. We had to dig around the roots and then chain the chains to them

and get the horses to pull them out. There were a lot of rocks all over the paddock

- 34:00 because it was on the side of the hill. Some of the rocks were big and they had to be blasted, so we had to run down on this street and make sure no traffic passed while we blasted the stones and then we had to pick up all the stones. Because the hill was so steep we had to walk the horse sideways all the time, backwards and forwards and collect all the rocks. So we cleared all of that and ploughed it and planted potatoes. By this stage I was getting ready to turn
- 34:30 eighteen. When we had finished planting the potatoes, I was called into headquarters, Thrulle [?] House was where the matron lived, and she said "We want you to go on the staff because we're opening a new camp". They were opening a camp out at... well still in Batlow but out in one of the other directions, called Frisco Camp, and the CCC [Civil Constructional Corps] had been there and built it.
- 35:00 They were all big tin huts and it was on the side of a hill so... you had to get up into them and they were very cold because the wind would come up underneath them. Myself and Nancy Stewart had come from Batlow when she joined the land army, and she was back there, so there were three of us, Doris Pitty... Doris McArthur and Nancy and I and we went out there and opened this new camp and most of the girls who came there came from Newcastle and apparently
- 35:30 Man Power had done a sweep and they used to go around to all the homes... I don't know, the factories and everywhere, and the streets they used to say and pick up girls who weren't doing war work and say, "Well you can go to the land army." So we had all these new girls came. We had one girl, we christened her Veronica Lake [a Hollywood film star]. Do you know of Veronica Lake? She had long blond hair and the first morning we saw her come out of her hut...
- 36:00 ...the latrines were out there so you had to come out to go to the latrines whether it was snow or mud or what. We saw her come out of there and she had on a pink satin gown with slippers. But we christened her and every morning we'd say "Here comes Veronica". But she went and worked and she worked very well. There were a few girls who came down there who had illnesses which they shouldn't have had and they shouldn't have been sent there. So they had to be sent back home.
- 36:30 I was the sub matron, and Nancy, and Doris was our matron. We had to... Being on the staff like that we had to do the cooking. So you had to supply the meals and you had to do all the bookwork and work out who was going to what farm. And chop the wood. We had to do the chopping there; I don't know why we had to do it. But that was our job, chopping the firewood. While I was there was when I
- 37:00 turned 18, and I thought... I had always thought I would like to join the air force, and when we were at Leeton the boys use to fly over in the Tiger Moths, and if they knew where we were working they would drop us boxes of chocolates. So we got to know quite a lot of the boys. That was in EFTS [Elementary Flying Training School] where they learned on the Tigers. I came down... I was sent really from Batlow
- 37:30 back to Leeton and when I got on the train to come down there were a few of the girls there that I knew and they said "Don't go to Leeton, come to Sydney with us, come and have a couple of days in Sydney". I mean you could do that even though you weren't supposed to. But I only had a ticket to go from Batlow to Leeton. So they talked me into staying on the train and we got to Sydney and one of the girl's boyfriends who was in the army who had come to meet her, and
- 38:00 he had bought a platform ticket. I don't know why but he had bought a platform ticket, so I had to use the platform ticket to get off the platform. He could use his leave pass. I went into headquarters, land army headquarters and said "I've decided I want to join the air force". The other girl who was with me at Leeton and at Batlow, she had turned 18 before me and she went into the Amwas [AAMWS]. And Hazel was older than us anyway and she joined
- 38:30 the army. They said, "No, you can't. We need you as much as the air force and you're supposed to be at Leeton, so you had better get ready, pack up and go". And as I came down stairs the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] recruiting was under the land army recruiting. I hadn't realised that. So I thought well I'll just go in a see, so I went and an ACW [Aircraftswoman] came to the counter and [said] what do I want? And I said, "I want to join the air force." Of course, being in uniform she said
- 39:00 "I had better get madam". So she went and got a WAAAF officer. I told her the story and she said, "Well what do you want to do?" And I said... We used to mix with a lot of the girls. At Batlow we used to go over to Wagga for the weekends and we mixed with a lot of the service girls over there. The army girls and the air force girls, and they told me "They were taking technical girls". So I said to this WAAAF officer, "I've heard
- 39:30 they're wanting technical musterings, and ..." I only had intermediate, I didn't have a leaving [certificate], but I could drive. I didn't have a licence but I could drive. I could do that before I even went into the land army. She said, "What have you done?" I said, "I've worked on a tractor and things like that." So she said, "Fill in the papers and we'll see what happens." I did and within about two weeks I had my call up to go into the air force.

00:33 **Ok Sheila, we left off the last tape when you just got your call from the air force. So could you tell me, this was 1943 we're in now?**

No, it was early 1944, because I turned 18 in 1944.

So tell me what happened? Where were you when you got the call?

I was staying - that's another story really -

- 01:00 I was staying at my sisters... four of my older sisters... Can I tell you this? Four of my older sisters, my dad had brought them to the city to work, because there was nothing for them to do on the farm. Some of my older sisters had married and another two had been sent down to do training at different things because they had only been used to farm work. My dad walked the city with them trying to get them a job.
- 01:30 My dad would never ever buy Federal Matches or Kraft Cheese because they were two Catholic firms who wouldn't take people who weren't Catholic. So they ended up getting a job at the woollen mills and dad bought an old house in Marrickville where they lived. They could walk to work from there and if ever we were in Sydney we could kind of go there. So while I was waiting
- 02:00 for this changeover, I was staying there and that's where I got my call up, from Marrickville. I had been... A couple of my land army friends were down as a matter of fact and we used to go horse riding at Narrabeen. There was a horse riding school out at Narrabeen and I had been horse riding that weekend and I got my call up and I went in. This stayed with me forever while I was in the air force. I had chaffing behind my knees and when I went for my medical and they
- 02:30 asked me what it was, and I told them and they said, "Come back when you haven't got it." So that put my... I think I waited another week or ten days or whatever and then they accepted me. We had our medical and everything, and all the girls who were going in... They weren't all technical girls but a lot were going in to do technical training,
- 03:00 and we were sent to Penrith. They had opened a new RAAF camp at Penrith for WAAAF. It was a WAAAF depot. We went up there. Well that was a mixture of girls. We had two girls who had been Tivoli dancers and girls from every walk of life. We did our Rookies [Rookie Training] there. I think Rookies was about six weeks, and in that time you marched and marched and marched. You marched before breakfast and then you'd have breakfast and then more marching and then PT [Physical Training].
- 03:30 You'd have lessons because we had to learn all the air force rules and regulations; aircraft recognition and lots of different things like that. And learning to live together. We did our Rookies there. We used to march around The Log Cabin, the big hotel motel there on the river bank, and they had a tap out the front
- 04:00 and we'd stop there and have a drink of water on the hot days. I used to always say "When we come back here after the war we're going to go into the Log Cabin because we weren't allowed to go anywhere... at 18 you weren't allowed to go anywhere where there was liquor. Well we did our Rookies there and we used to march right up over the bridge. There's only that one lane bridge there so someone had to go ahead to stop all the traffic while we went across the back again. Very cold
- 04:30 frosty mornings and you could hardly see where you were going because of the fogs that were out at Penrith. When we finished our Rookies and had our passing out we were sent to wherever we were to be trained and the technical girls went down to the Engineer School in Melbourne, in the show grounds at Melbourne. WT [Wireless Telegrapher] girls also went to the showgrounds. There were WT's amongst us and
- 05:00 technical girls and I think most of us were because we had a flight of about 40 I think that were all technical girls and we were put in the Hall of Manufacturers. And the boys used to say "The WAAAFS are in the Hall of Manufacturers". A great big hall like you'd have at the showgrounds and they had partitions across with your little stretchers and one little locker. Out the back was a fuel copper for doing your washing and
- 05:30 the latrines were all out the back. That's where we did our basic training. We learnt how to use all the different tools, files, different files and we were given a square block with a bit of metal and we had to make that into a proper square. That was that part of it. While we were there, there was a group of Indonesians
- 06:00 and they were doing the same training as us. They only did the basic with us where they were making the tools and we weren't happy about that but still they were on our side then I believe. They were like little monkeys. They were funny little black people. That was that part of it. Then we had to do technical drawing, electricity and magnetism, which I didn't understand until I learned the laws.
- 06:30 And maths. And I hated the maths. We went through anyway. Another friend... My best friend in the WAAAF and I used to sit together. And our sergeant used to say, "What are you two working out?" And we could work out the maths and we could pass. Anyway, when it came time for our exams he said "You two can sit together" and we topped the class with our maths.
- 07:00 He said, "Two heads, even like those two heads, two heads are better than one." Electricity and

magnetism - once we learned that I found that good and I loved the technical drawing. I must have liked that and I could do that very well. At the end of those courses... Now there again we marched a lot. Everywhere we went, we had to march. We weren't allowed out at night.

07:30 We had weekend leave now and again because it was a course to get you through in a hurry. There were boys there as well who were training. We had the one big mess where everyone went into the same mess and it's right next to the Melbourne racecourse and we happened to be there when the Melbourne Cup was on. So we had to stand down at lunchtime and go to the Melbourne Cup.

08:00 We had to go through a little hole in the fence. We didn't go around to... So that was my first Melbourne Cup. The sergeant that we had there, our maths sergeant, I was there over Christmas and he invited one girl from each state to go to his place for Christmas lunch. And I happened to be the one from New South Wales. He took us out there and we didn't think... We got out there and he had three little girls, and they had bought us a little purse each and we hadn't taken them

08:30 anything. We could have taken them chocolates because we could get chocolates then, but we didn't think about it. Anyway, we had lunch there and they lived at Brighton so we went down the beach in the afternoon. Melbourne people weren't... you know, didn't really invite us out very much. I had an uncle who lived down there so he used to invite a few of us when we had leave. We used to go out to his place at Box Hill.

09:00 We used to go to the dances. They had different dances. They had... I can't remember the name of it now. But there was one dance hall they had in Melbourne with revolving music, so you had continuous music all night. That's where we saw quite a few Americans, but you didn't have time to kind of get to know them. There was another dance hall too at the Old Mill and we used to go to the

09:30 Exhibition Building and they had seals there. On a Sunday afternoon you'd go there and the seals used to do tricks and clap, and the more you clapped the more tricks they'd did. So that was a good afternoon out. And there was another place we used to go out to, the Balwyn Natural Life... I can't remember the name of it fully. But you'd go into Melbourne and hop on a train and go to a certain station and they'd have

10:00 a covered wagon and you hopped on the covered wagon and they would take us out to this place where they had koalas and... I've been there since because we all had photos taken with the koalas. I've been there since and the fellow said... I took the photo down to show them and put it up because they were having a bit of a display, and he said "That was the year they had their first platypus born there". I didn't remember that but it just happened, that was the same year.

10:30 So there were things that we could do. We didn't have much time off really, but you could find things to do.

How long was the course?

The course was three month. I'm not sure if it was three months or six months, I can't remember now. But once you did that course when you had your exams they would decide then what you could be, either a flight mechanic or rigger or

11:00 an electrician or an armourer. Gee what else? There were about six musterings came out of... I think instruments.

Did you have a preference?

No. No preference and I think armourer and I think instruments were in the higher group. But I was lucky, I got to be a mechanic which was the next group up. And that took us then... where we were getting

11:30 two and six a day before that, that took our pay up to... when we finished the course it was six and eight. So it was good. We were group two.

Can you just clarify something for me? You said it was lucky you became a mechanic. Why was that?

Well I wanted to be a mechanic but it depended on how you passed, and when the ratings came out and they called out what each one was going to be.

12:00 Although I had put in to be an armourer. I had put in to be an armourer I remember because I know when I didn't get it and I became a mechanic, he said, "Just as well you didn't get an armourer, you might have been a bit dangerous." He used to chip us a bit - the sergeant. We had lots of funny experiences. I got sick. When we came ... when we finished that then we had to go onto the aircraft. We had to use all our knowledge then on the aircraft and on the engines.

12:30 And we were working on a Boomerang and it had leaking hydraulic oil and I must have put some on my neck and I got a rash on my neck. I had to go to hospital for a few days. We were all girls on that course. All girls on our basic course and on our flight mix or whatever we were. But when I came out I was with all boys. I used to have some funny experiences then. I had one fellow that I've never forgotten. He was a tall skinny fellow and the boys used to call

- 13:00 him skinny bum. He was Skinny Bum Smith and every lecture we went into he used to put his hand up to go to the toilet. We had one sergeant who was a bit funny and I remember we all got in there and some of the boys used to race ahead and say to the sergeant, "We've got a WAAAF on this flight." They never ever swore in front of us or anything. We no sooner go in there but Skinny Bum put his hand up and I remember the sergeant saying to him, "What are you going to do this
- 13:30 time, Skinny Bum? Stand up or sit down." Everybody laughed, well I laughed. I couldn't believe my eyes. I had never thought about men doing anything else but sitting down. But that always just stuck with me. I suppose it's a bit silly. Other than that I was treated pretty well with the boys. We learned how to... They had aircraft in the
- 14:00 ring of the arena at the showgrounds. That's where they had the aircraft and some in some of the big buildings to pull apart. We had to learn to swing the propellers on the Tiger Moths besides all the mechanical things. And changing the wheels. The Tiger Moth we had there had a drag wheel and that was a funny experience. The sergeant was pulling it to bits and
- 14:30 he said, "While I'm pulling it to bits I'll give each one a different part, and you've got to remember where each one has to go back." And he gave me a little spring and it just fitted on my little finger. So I put it on my little finger and by the time he was ready to put it back together again I couldn't get it off. And here we are all trying to get it off and it wouldn't come and my finger was swelling. They called the ambulance and here I was in the ambulance. I had to go back down to the medical and all they did was pack it in ice to get it off. That was one of the silly things that happened.
- 15:00 Silly things that you did like that.

So were you sent out to an airbase?

After we finished. Yes, we had to do that course and we had to have a passing out and exams for what we had done. The books we had were fantastic. You'd look at the books and the first time you looked at the books and if it was an aircraft engine and there'd be reds and blues and greens running in all directions you know. A real puzzle until you knew what you were doing.

15:30 Were you issued with the books?

Yes, yes. Yes, I kept those books for a long time too and then threw them away. We had a clean up and I threw them out and I've been sorry ever since. A lot of people were because you see they were books that for fellows now who are reconstructing Tigers - it would have been useful. They were really good hard cover books. So when we learned all of that we could pull an

- 16:00 aircraft engine apart and put it back together. Refuelling. We didn't always do the refuelling. Then we had our course and when that was finished I remember we had a passing out dinner in town and I had to go with all the boys, and on the way back... In those days where they kept the sheep was right next door to the showground, and the night we had our dinner in town we were coming
- 16:30 back and the sheep were all across the tram tracks. One of the boys was sick and he had lost his teeth amongst all these sheep. Anyway, he went back the next day and found them. That was just one occasion that I remember. Then we got our postings. They started coming through. The other girls who were ahead of me they all went to Williamtown. They all went together. There was me and girls from other
- 17:00 stations. See they had other places which were engineering schools too, and we were sent to Uranquinty at Wagga, near Wagga. There were 14 of us went to Uranquinty and we went into Major Inspections Hangar and 12 boys went up north as soon as we got there. We were very lucky.
- 17:30 We had a flight sergeant and a corporal who had been over in the Middle East and they hadn't been long back from the Middle East and they were there. They had never seen the girls before and Flight Sergeant Row, he was fantastic. He got us all together and said, "I know you've all just come out of the course..." We had one girl there, she was a 2E, which meant she was a flight mechanic and she had been through that and she went back and did a refresher course and became a Fitter 2E, and he said
- 18:00 "I don't want you to worry about anything, if you don't know anything ask me. I don't want you to guess at anything." I'm here for you, and everything just worked out fine. He was always there with us when we were working anyway. Each plane has a log book and they used to come to us after they had done 200 hours and they had to be completely stripped down.
- 18:30 New rings if they needed them or whatever and put back together again. When the test pilots came into the hangar to take them up they just looked at the WE77 and... you had to sign for each little bit you did in the WE77 and they'd just pick out somebody and say, "I'm taking it out on a test flight, do you want to come with me?" And you had to go, if you said no, then they wouldn't take it.
- 19:00 I did a few of those and I didn't like that very much. The last one I did... I used to... The padre, the Salvation Army Padre had a hut and he used to make milkshakes and you could have your dinner and come out and have a milkshake or an ice cream and things like that and I used to help him there. This was a very hot day and he said to me, "Are you going to have a milkshake?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "I'll put a bit of extra ice cream in." Of course I went up and there was the test pilot

- 19:30 and I said, "Sir, I shouldn't go up I've just had a double milkshake." And he said, "Oh well, you know what happens. If you go up and you're sick, you've got to clean the plane out." And I said, "Yes, but I don't think I should go up." He insisted and I was sick. When we came down and got out of the plane, he said to me, he said, "You had just better go back and I'll clean it up." I thought well, I had warned him.
- 20:00 When you went up on a test flight they did everything. They rolled off the top and dived and you just had to sit there. You couldn't move. Your hat wouldn't fall off and you could bring your knees up when it started and you just couldn't move. I used to wonder how they did it because they were experienced and they had to be very fit. But I didn't relish the test flights really.
- 20:30 It was nice just flying around but when they went through the paces it was pretty desperate I thought. I did that a few times. That's when I got burnt. We had a couple of new boys who had come in and we were refuelling a Wirraway, getting it ready for its test and he took the hose out and I was down the bottom and he was up on the main plane and he took the hose out before he turned it off, and
- 21:00 got it all over me. Luckily the flight sergeant was there and grabbed me and put me under a tap and nearly drowned me. I must have got some in my eyes because I have had a bit of trouble with my eyes since, and he said, "Just as well you had your mouth closed because you would have been suffocated if it had gone down my throat." We had jeans all in one piece and they pulled my jeans off down to my waist and didn't think about my legs
- 21:30 and by the time the ambulance came up and cut it off and that's why I get a lot of dermatitis. I used to get a lot of it on my hands but that seems to... I use cortisones and that stops all of that and on my face. But I still get these jolly cancer things on my legs and I have to have those cut out every so often. But it took me then 20 years to get recognition to get that because they had on my medical
- 22:00 sheet, eczema behind my knee from my medical. So they're pretty strict, but it took me 20 years before I got... first of all they kept on saying "No, no." And I saw a specialist when I had it pretty bad. I used to get ulcers in between all my fingers and around my face, and I saw this fellow down at North Sydney, and he wasn't a Repat [Repatriation] doctor.
- 22:30 He just couldn't believe... They said "I had very dry skin and I had eczema". Well I do apparently have dry skin, fair skin anyway, and he said, "Well we'll see about this." And he said, "Can you get somebody else to act for you?" I had been to all the welfares at the RSL and the Air Force Association. One fellow who acted for me was a light horseman. He said "He had always had the chaffing too but that didn't help repat".
- 23:00 This doctor said, "Well I'll act for you," and if you can get a doctor to act for you it's half the battle. He took them on and he said, "Well you accepted Mrs Van Emden. You knew she had dry skin and you knew she had eczema, you should never have let her do a technical muster where she was going to be with fuel and things." That's how he won the case for me to get treatment, and then from then on I just kept on applying for more and more.
- 23:30 But they were very hard.

And that was 20 years after the war, was it?

Yes, after the war it was that I got that. When I first came out they used to send me to air force doctors. They used to plaster me... when I had the burn, when I was in WAAAF, all they did was put zinc cream on me. They would put zinc cream all over me but I still had to go to work. The first night I had this zinc all over me... we slept with blankets. Our huts were just

- 24:00 long rows of beds and a locker. We only had blankets. We had three blankets. The first night I was in bed the blankets stuck to me, it was terrible. So I complained and they said "They would give me sheets". They brought the sheets down and they were big sheets, unbleached calico which had never been washed. They were just about as bad. Anyway, the girls took them out and put them in the copper and washed them up. It was
- 24:30 summer time, so they dried. The huts... I didn't tell you much about the huts I suppose, even in the land army. They were very cold in the wintertime and very hot in the summer time. They had iron roofs. But in the WAAAF's we had a little pot belly stove in the middle of each hut. In the land army you just got whatever you could get you know. They were good because we could cook food on them.
- 25:00 At Quinty [Uranquinty], it was a lovely station. We had our own pig styes, so we could have pork whenever we wanted too, and the cooks used to just throw out what they didn't want, so we'd go through it and find tomatoes and mushrooms. We used to get buckets of mushrooms and cook up the mushrooms with tomato and onion and we'd have that in our huts at night time. At Quinty we used to get invited to... well we didn't
- 25:30 but the boys used to get invited to dances out at Burrong Creek or The Rock or Holbrook and all those places. Everybody used to have dances for the Comforts Fund and they always invited the boys because there was a shortage of boys wherever they went. We were told that we could go but we had to have an NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] with us, but none of the WAAAF NCO's wanted to go because they had their own mess and they could do what they liked there.

- 26:00 So we used to get our flight sergeant, he was fantastic. We used to say, "Flight, there's a dance on tonight and we can't go. We need an NCO." And he would say, "You want me to go with you, don't you? But you don't dance with me when you get there anyway." But we would talk him into it and he'd go. But see, he was alright because there were plenty of women there his age anyway. They used to give us great big boxes of the food... the food they used to put on, you know at country places. They'd have trifles and they'd have hams and all sorts of things.
- 26:30 They'd give us big boxes of food to take back and the girls would all be waiting for us and we'd all get stuck into all this fancy nice food.

Could I ask, where were you when the war ended?

Quinty.

Can you tell me about hearing about the war's end?

When the war ended, we were at a dance. Before the war ended... the war in Europe had ended,

- 27:00 a lot of fighter pilots came back and they were supposed to be doing refresher courses, but they still had them flying and we had quite a few accidents then because the boys had been used to Spitfires and Typhoons and all these things and of course the Wirraway wouldn't do what they could do. And we noticed a difference in the hangars because in the aircraft there was a lever you could push if you got into trouble
- 27:30 and that would give you more power, and that was called going through the gate. We used to notice with a lot of the planes coming in that they had been through the gate. And then we got a lot of pilots who had been over to Canada to do their training, and they had never gone any further because the war had finished. And they brought them back, and they had them, they were doing a refresher course. I don't know... I think there were some of the boys who had been over in the Middle East
- 28:00 and England who came back. And India, there were a few from India and they went back up to the islands. But some of these other boys that had been to Canada and hadn't been anywhere else, they were there and flying, so we had a lot more flying even when the war finished. In the beginning it was the training. See we lost a lot of boys in training. And if there was an accident everybody had to go on parade and
- 28:30 they'd have the muffled drums and marching and everything. That wasn't very nice, we didn't like that very much. And sometimes if the plane crashed they would bring it in and because we were the technical girls we used to have to go and clean it out. There would be bits of body there. There were parts of it that weren't very nice.

Did you have any responsibility of ascertaining the cause of an accident for

29:00 technical reasons?

No. I think if that happened that would be our NCOs. But I think they used to bring special people in for that. No, they would look at the plane and see if it could be rebuilt or whatever, and I don't think we ever got any into the hangar that I was in that had to be rebuilt. We were just kind of doing the running of the planes that were being used.

- 29:30 Every 2:40 they had to come in and be completely... There were major inspections and minor inspections and daily inspections, and minor inspections. While we were there they had a satellite and sometimes we would have to go out to the satellite. This was when the boys were doing cross country or night flying. They would have to fly off and land
- 30:00 and we were there and we may just do a minor inspection to see if it was alright to take off and come back again. I think the most we would ever do, we'd sleep out there one night. We'd take a bed roll and sleep out there one night. They'd bring us out food for our meals. We used to do that and when the boys were flying... I never ever... They had certain girls who did the night flying, but a few times I was asked to do it
- 30:30 when the boys were doing their first night flights only with instruments. They had to have everything blacked out and all we were doing actually was marking the boys, what time they went and checking when they came back. I did that a few times and I had some interesting times then because the boys
- 31:00 would all be nervous hanging around waiting for their flight. I can always remember, I've remembered it particularly because of my skin. A few of the boys were medical students and they were talking about what they were going to do when they came back, and I can remember one of them saying, "I'm going to be a skin specialist because your patients never die and they never get better." But I don't know if he ever came back or ever did that or not. They used to...
- 31:30 they knew I was from the country and they used to chide me a little bit, and talk about my father having 12 children. How did he have 12 children! Different things they'd say to me. "Can I do this or can I do that?" The medical boys. And I'd say, "Well you're all clever boys but can any of you skin a rabbit?" And they'd just looked at me and that was it. So I had to show them how to skin a rabbit. They were always taking a little shot at you if they could.

- 32:00 But it was good to be there and keep them talking because it was a bit hair raising doing your first night flight. I know when we weren't on duty there they used to fly over our huts. We'd hear them going over and we'd be thinking, there's another one going. You could hear the engines going over and waiting for them to come back. When they passed out they used to have big celebrations and we used to go and
- 32:30 now and again they'd come into the hangar and they'd say, "We're going to have a barbeque tonight, can any of you girls come?" And we'd go and they'd get down to the paddock and they'd light a fire and they could always get plenty of meat and we'd have a barbeque. Sometimes they'd get a bit of grog and we'd just have a night together. But we had to be back by ten o'clock anyway.
- 33:00 **Did they ever talk about the fear of being scrubbed?**
- Oh yes. Yes. There were very... I don't know if they ever talked about it but they were always wistful you know. "I hope we get through," and then you'd hear someone say, "Well, he hasn't got a chance," and you'd know that he did but they'd be saying different things that he did. I remember talking to an instructor, and you would hear the boys saying about him...he swears at you and
- 33:30 this and that, and you'd talk to the instructor and he'd say, "Look, you get them in there and tell them don't do this one thing," and he said, "You'd get half a dozen of them one after the other and they just do exactly what you had told them not to do." It was frustrating for the instructors too. But there was so much for them to learn in such a short time. It was lovely when they had their passing out parades and they got their wings.
- 34:00 Their families came and we all had to go on parade and watch them get their wings. That was always nice and you kind of got to know... You wouldn't get to know a lot of them but you knew a few of them. And of course we had dances. We had dances in the hall once or twice a week. And we would put on concerts and all sorts of things like that to occupy us, and most of the boys joined in. I remember a WAAAF officer saying to us one day. She was talking to us
- 34:30 because we had to have... well when we first did our Rookies we had all the sex education about different things. It was surprising that lots of girls didn't know that they could wash their hair while they had their periods. That was an old grannies tale I suppose and that had to be cleared out of their mind. You can wash your hair, you can bathe.
- Do you know what was behind that belief?**
- Well I think it was probably just some of the girls...
- 35:00 that their mothers had told them that. But it didn't seem to matter really.
- What would they think would happen to them if they did?**
- I don't know what they thought would happen to them. But lots of people thought they couldn't even bath. Of course it was hard having a bath. Where we lived we had one big tin bath and water was very scarce and I can remember the younger ones had their baths first and then the older ones...the older ones who weren't doing much
- 35:30 dirty work would have their bath and then the ones in the middle who were doing all the dirty work were the last ones to have a bath, all in the one bath tub. In the one lot of water. And that happened in the land army too because we were short of water. And we used to have to bath one after the other, that was when we were at the old scouts hall. I can remember Terry who went into the AMWAS, we had a reunion a few years ago and Terry was there and I hadn't seen her for a long while, and one of the older girls was there and she said
- 36:00 "And you two together. The last time I saw you two together you were in the bath with your jumpers on." And we said, "We can't remember that. How can you have a bath with your jumpers on?" We had these khaki issued jumpers. I don't know why she thought that but perhaps we were cold. It was out in the open anyway.
- We're coming towards the end of this tape. I would just like to wrap up this tape by asking you about your memories of VJ [Victory over Japan] day?**
- 36:30 VJ Day? I don't remember if we knew it was coming close or not. But we were having a dance and everybody was dancing and it was announced at the dance and then the dance just went on all night then. Everybody was kissing and dancing and everything. And there was a boy that I knew from Griffith, that I had known from Griffith and he was... he had been to Canada and came back. Terry Gee. And he was
- 37:00 a shy boy and he came to me and said, "Look I've just been sent a couple of tins of peaches. Do you want to come and join me and we'll celebrate eating these peaches?" So I said, "Yes alright." So he went off to get the peaches and we had a blanket or something. We used to call it the prairie; that you were out on the prairie. And we were... It was in August wasn't it, so it must have been a bit cold because we had a blanket and he was sitting on the blanket and we must have had our great coats and we were sitting there eating these peaches and the SP's [military police] came around.
- 37:30 They wanted to know what we were doing. We said, "We're just eating these peaches." We went back to

the dance afterwards, but anyway he said, "You'd better get back to the dance," but he didn't believe we were just eating peaches. The next day we were allowed to go into Wagga. It was a stand down day. They had tenders to take us in. They were supposed to pick us up at a certain time and I don't know if we forgot or what but anyway

- 38:00 we were stuck in Wagga and had to stay the night, a few of us. And the next morning they came in with a tender to pick us up and on the way back everyone was talking about what happened on VJ night and all the celebrations because in Wagga they celebrated a lot more, but we were all in our own unit. But that's what we did. We had the dance and we danced all night and singing and how happy everybody was, you know. This SP was on the bus and he said, "You'll never guess what I saw out
- 38:30 on the prairie last night and they told me they were eating tinned peaches." I didn't let him know that it was me, but he was telling everybody. But it was wonderful that it was all finished. The hangars closed down and I went into the education office then, and we were then doing all the papers for the people getting discharges and what courses they could do. It happened pretty quickly. Flying stopped straight away anyway.
- 39:00 I was there until my discharge came through, then I came to Sydney. But the sad part about it was, see my best friend while I was there came from Perth and in those days you never ever thought that you'd be... I mean, to go down to Melbourne to do the course, it was the first time I had been out of New South Wales, and that was with a lot of people. Going to different places that they had never been to before.
- 39:30 That was the sad part. You see people going to different... We had a lot of Brisbane girls and from different states. And boys. And you were kind of saying goodbye to them thinking you would never see them again. So it was happy but it was sad in that way. They were wondering what they were going to do when they went home. Some already knew what they were going to do and others didn't. It was just very mixed feelings. A lot of people
- 40:00 came to Sydney because they had a big march in Sydney. I don't know why we didn't. I think they just picked out certain people. I don't know if anybody from our unit did or not, but we didn't anyway.

Tape 3

- 00:33 **Now that we've got a very good overview of your career I'd like to go back a bit. Can you tell me a bit about your father's family and how they came to Australia?**
- My father's family? My father's grandfather came to Australia. I'm not sure which year. I think it might
- 01:00 have been 1840. I'm not too sure about that.
- He was Dutch?**
- No, he was Scottish. My father's family. No, it was my father-in-law who was Dutch. They came from Glasgow and apparently she must have been pregnant when they were coming because they stopped in Africa. So whether it took them nine months to get from Glasgow to Africa I don't know.
- 01:30 But they stopped there and they stayed there for 12 months. And I always thought it was Simontown but it's only since we've done this history on grandfather... he went to the Sudan war and it's only since we've done the history on that that we found out that it's another funny little place. And then they came from there, and they must have had a grant or something at Botany Bay, because they lived at Botany. They had two other sons and then grandfather...
- 02:00 I think there were only the three in the family. I can't recall if there were any girls or not. Then when grandfather was... My grandfather was 25 when the Sudan War was on, and he... now since we... we spent a few days out at the War Memorial and got all this news, and he joined up one day and sailed the next day to the Sudan and I... All the councils in those days
- 02:30 used to have bands and he was a bricklayer by trade. He must have played... I always thought he played a big silver thing but anyway when he went to the Sudan he was a side drummer and a stretcher bearer. And looking through the list now that we've got, most of the fellows who went away to the Sudan were Englishmen who had been permanent army fellows. There must have been a few Aussies.
- 03:00 And there had to be people who could care for horses and shoe horses and brassiers, not brassiers, whatever it is. They went to the... The ship that he sailed on - we've got all of this now; the ship they sailed on and where they went and the various... They weren't in very many battles, but they went to different places where the battles were or where they had been.
- 03:30 I think they were only away for six months and then they came back again. But that's where they came from and I can remember my grandfather telling me that they, my great grandfather moved up to The Belenger. There was a timber mill up there because they had all the rosewood. My great grandmother couldn't stand the heat and the meat used to go bad

04:00 and the milk sour. Coming from Scotland I suppose. And she didn't like it, so they moved back to Botany. That's about all that I know of that family except the two uncles. One uncle married and the other didn't and they lived in Parramatta. And Uncle Bob was Coral Master for the Methodist Church in Parramatta. So they lived together. One was married and the other wasn't, but they lived together.

04:30 I don't think the married one had any children, and they had this house in Parramatta. And it was after the Second World War that Uncle Bob was living there on his own. He hadn't married and was very sick and my mum came to Sydney to nurse him. She had been in the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment] and the Red Cross and everything through both wars I suppose, the second one anyway. So that's when they moved to Parramatta to live there with Uncle Bob.

05:00 But I can remember visiting them when we were young, and do you remember C. Aubrey Smith? An actor? He was a British actor and he had that real British accent, and these two uncles were the same. I can't remember my great grandfather but my grandfather did too. Not as much as them because they were young people when they came out from Scotland.

Where was your mother's family from?

My mother's family?

05:30 They were out here earlier than that. They were from Ireland. And we always thought that her great, great, I don't know, grandfather was from New Zealand. But apparently he had been a seaman and he lived in New Zealand or jumped ship in New Zealand and came over to New South Wales and he married Charlotte Kim who was ...

06:00 we were doing the research on this, but you know you get a bit tired of it. We found their wedding certificate where neither of them could write, they had to sign with a cross. She had to get permission to get married. The girl who was helping me said, "Oh you must come back." It was closing time. She said, "You must come back because I think she might have been a prisoner." We've never been back to have a look. And they had 10 children. You wonder how they lived but they lived in Sydney.

06:30 They lost a lot of children too and from then on...going on down through the generations... they were Dalziels, their name was, and John Dalziel was the first one, and it went down to John and all of those fellows married Irish girls and girls who had just come from Ireland. But my dad's ancestors were Scottish. Their name was Ferguson, so we just sort of grew up with the Scottish part.

Can you tell me a bit about your father's service in the First [World] War?

Well I'm not terribly sure. I know he was in France, and I know two of his... no, one of his brothers. There were two uncles killed in France but one was my mother's brother and one was my dad's brother. Their younger brother Harry was young and he joined up and he got as far as England.

07:30 I know Uncle Eric and my dad found out that he was there. I don't know how. But they wrote to somebody in England and told them how old Harry was and said "They didn't mind him coming to the front". Being in England, but they thought he was too young to come to the front. Whoever it was in London wrote back to Australia and checked on his age, and as soon as they found out his age

08:00 they discharged him immediately. They kept him there as an army person until they could get a ship to send him back. Now I know that they...I don't know just exactly where they were. Uncle Eric was the main one who had written this letter and he had written a letter to his mum... they've got all of this you know at the [War] Memorial. We've got the copies of the letters he wrote to them and the letters that were written back to him.

08:30 He had written a letter to his mother which we got from the family saying "They had done this for Harry", like Uncle Eric and Dad had done this for Harry, and told them "Not to worry because they would come back safely anyway". In July 1918 Uncle Eric was killed and my dad came back. But it's amazing when you look through these histories. Now my mum's brother, she only had one brother and he was killed

09:00 too, and they had been notified that he was missing, and it wasn't until the end of the war that one of the fellows from the battalion came back and went to see my grandmother. She was going down to the wharves to meet him all this time and he told them that he had been killed, and when he had been killed. And this set up a big network and they wanted to find out why they had never been notified. The papers that you see,

09:30 you can't believe. They contacted people who had been in his battalion and that knew him. And one of them said "They had been to visit him in hospital in London" and another one said "That he didn't think he had been wounded and sent back to England, that he had been killed in France and that was it". The fellow who thought he had seen him there, said when he went to see him "He couldn't talk because he was bandaged up". But he was told by the hospital staff that it was George Dalziel.

10:00 And all of this is written in their records you know. And when he was killed, I remember my mum saying... They had got his dead meat tickets back and they were all chipped, but he had a little tiny medallion that he had always carried with him and it was sent home. My young sister was given that and she's given that to my daughter now. But you wonder how would they keep little things like that.

10:30 So I'm not quite sure. I know they were all in that French area.

Did you dad talk much about the war when you were a kid?

I think they used to because... I can't remember a lot, but I know that because it was a Soldier Settlement, they kind of had what they called an RSL and they would get together and they used to have dances.

11:00 They built this big hall in Erigolia and they used to have dances and everybody went, and they used to have their meetings. But I don't think he talked about it a lot to our children, like my husband has to our children, to us. I mean we knew all about it and we knew it was dreadful, but I don't think he talked a lot about it at all really.

When you look back do you think he was affected by the war?

11:30 I wouldn't have thought so because I was down near the youngest. See I was the 10th in the family and I know that he was always...well having so many girls, he was very fond of the girls and as far as he was concerned the girls could do nothing wrong. And yet my brother used to get into a lot of strife. My sisters talk about this now. I can remember him getting a hiding once with

12:00 my dad's strap because it was Easter time and the girls had all been given Easter eggs. Ronny, Beryl and I used to go around to the rabbit traps - this is how I could talk to the boys. We used to go around the rabbit traps and collect the rabbits, and you'd put the skins on a wire fence and people would come around collecting the furs. And I can remember this morning Ronnie saying, "We're going around the rabbit traps this morning," but... he used to skin a rabbit and cook it and we'd eat it you know when we were out. But he said "We've got all these Easter eggs".

12:30 And apparently he had taken all the girls' Easter eggs, and I can remember coming back and dad belting him with the strap. I thought too much because we didn't get into trouble at all. And I've heard my sister say that mum had to stop him. I don't think that he was really. I think they all must have been to a certain degree, but they...

13:00 I think everybody was the same. I never heard him talk about it very much. They'd say different things. I can remember when it was Anzac Day and they'd get different ones and they'd get up talking about what they did. But they always made light of it you know. Talking about this joke that you hear over and over now about going along and seeing this hat moving along in the mud and the fellow pulled the hat up and the fellow said, "Come on mate,

13:30 we'll help you out of the mud." And he said, "You've got to get my horse out as well." Things like that you'd hear them say. And I can remember when there was gas, when there were gas attacks, they'd all talk the same, and they'd all talk like we were all in it. And I can remember once they were in a place and a German had been killed outside their tent and he had fallen across the front of the tent.

14:00 And by the next morning he was frozen and they just walked over him. While they were in that spot they, just to walk over this dead body that was frozen. Different things like that. No, they didn't seem to show the effect. Anybody that was gassed... there was a fellow who lived opposite us and he'd been gassed, he used to talk about it a lot. And I think the

14:30 reason that they probably didn't was that there were so many of them together and they were all in the one boat and they were out there running these farms and they had to really work hard. A lot of them got into strife. My dad got into strife. The first farm he was on, he lost. He was down in Sydney getting a loan, trying to fix up another loan and the bailiffs came and just [threw] us all out. And there were only girls then and he shifted us out of our house and put us out on the road which was about two miles from the house.

15:00 And the people in the next place took us in there. They were really hard on them. They wouldn't give them anything. His brother, Uncle George, was the Managing Director of Coopers Engineering, so dad could get a lot of the farm equipment. He had to pay for it but he probably got it cheaper, and everybody around would use it. And I can remember him saying that "If he wanted to use his harvester or something he would have to

15:30 go and get it back and most likely it would be broken down". He'd have to fix before he brought it back. Different things like that. The only time we really heard them talk about the war would have been Anzac Day when they were all together. In that case it was kind of chacking each other you know. I think having a family of girls he probably wouldn't have talked about it as much as

16:00 if there had been boys. I don't know. I don't know.

What was the farm raising?

Wheat mostly, wheat and sheep.

You said you had pigs as well.

Pigs, yes. Well the pigs were probably for our own use. I know that whenever we killed a pig... you'd kill a pig and you'd share it with somebody. You'd kill a beast and they'd kind of share it. I know dad used to kill

- 16:30 the pigs. We had a pully out the back and this was our tin bath that we used to bath in. You'd have to boil the copper and get the bath full of hot water. And saucepan lids and you'd scrape all the hair off. You know how you see pork in the shop and it's got no hair. Well that had to be all scraped off with the hot water. They used to take them to Temora and you'd get a certain amount of bacon. You'd keep the fresh meat and then you'd get a lot of it made into bacon
- 17:00 or whatever. But if they killed a big beast and they'd share that around, and then someone else would kill one the next time. We had a lot of pigs. One of the sows attacked my mum once and ripped her leg open. She had a little fox terrier and it was him that kind of shooed the sow away. I think she had picked up a baby pig because it was injured or something.
- 17:30 Because you never touch the babies if the mother's around. We had turkeys and we had geese and we had fowls, and we had guinea fowls. You could never catch the guinea fowls because they could fly up into the trees. There was always plenty of eggs. And we had cows, milking cows so we had plenty of milk and butter. I know dad used to take a bag of wheat over to Leeton, and the Italians... he didn't drink,
- 18:00 but the Italians always had their wineries and fruit and vegetables. He used to mainly get fruit and vegetables. He might get a bottle of sherry or something, a decanter of sherry. But my dad always had to make the coffee when they had their Diggers' Ball and they had dances and that. He didn't drink but he always had rum, and he used to make the coffee. They would make the coffee in a great big copper, and he used to always put this rum in it, and they used to say that "Bill Fergie's got to make the coffee".
- 18:30 And he didn't drink much coffee. Mum and dad didn't drink much tea or coffee. It was hot chocolate or Milo or just hot milk.

What were some of the things you did to help out on the farm?

Well I didn't do a lot. I did eventually get up to learning to milk, but the older ones did it. As one left off you kind of took their job. We used to mostly go around the rabbit traps and we used to feed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

- 19:00 If a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK was killed then we'd help pluck them and things like that. We learned to ride and we could ride to wherever we wanted to, or drive horses. There wasn't an awful lot...see I was only fifteen and a half. My brother didn't do an awful lot because the older girls had kind of taken over.
- 19:30 There was always... I think we used to go out when it was harvest and probably help fill the wheat bags up and stook the hay time and things like that. I think everybody joined in and did those things. You just did them automatically. And fire wood... we used have... in the morning there had to be a pile of morning wood for the fire. That was all just kindling off the trees. And that was one of the jobs. We used to go around all through the trees and get
- 20:00 a pile of kindling. And that was called getting the morning wood. You know, "Have you got the morning wood in yet?" As I say, we used to go around the rabbit traps. There were rabbit warrens and you'd get a lot of rabbits. I think we used to get about threepence a skin. See everybody wore hats in those days, and they'd come around and buy the... you'd hang them on a fence... you turned them inside out and hang them on a fence until they dried and then they'd come and get them.
- 20:30 And collecting the eggs, and you know things like that. And we had gardens. When we had water, we had gardens. We've got pictures where we had beautiful gardens and the next year we wouldn't have a flower. You wouldn't have any grass or anything. We didn't have much grass at all really but we'd have gardens.

Do you remember being affected by the Depression at all?

No. No. We used to come

- 21:00 down to... My mum used to bring us down to the far west homes and they were at Dewey. Keera House was the name of the place. We used to have a holiday down there and go swimming. On the beach, we've got lots of pictures of us on the beach. And dad used to take us over to the Murrumbidgee River in a big truck. A few of them would get together and everybody would just pile in the trucks and we'd go to the Murrumbidgee at
- 21:30 Darlington Point. We'd have holidays over there. We've got pictures with everybody all swimming. The farming people would all get together. Sometimes we'd go to Lake Agilico [?] because they had fresh water mussels in Lake Agilico [?]. I remember the first time we got fresh water mussels. We used to get those and cook them. There were things you could do. All the girls played
- 22:00 hockey. We had tennis courts. The tennis courts were in the town and there would be a big day and everybody would come into town and play tennis. All the boys played football and the girls played hockey. My dad didn't drink, so he would take the footballers if they were going somewhere else to play because he would get them there safely and back home again. I don't know - there was always something to do.

What was your school like?

It was a

- 22:30 one teacher school, and the teacher's wife taught us sewing. All the classes were in the one room and that was a thing my grandfather came up with. My grandfather used to spend a fair bit of time with us and I can remember he would be working on a machine and he wouldn't be able to get his hand in somewhere and he'd say "Go in there and screw this or pull it off or whatever". Being a bricklayer, he came up
- 23:00 with what we called a shelter shed. He put the foundations up and we had a shelter shed, so we used to play in that quite a lot. We always had a horse yard because we used to ride our horse to school. Sometimes, we had push bikes but you see there were those big bindies and we used to get punctures. We had a spring cart and sometimes we would all go in the spring cart. Calligans lived at (UNCLEAR) I think and they had a big buggy and there were a lot of them too and they used to come to school in this big buggy.
- 23:30 Well I don't know. We played games. We weren't very far from the train line. Because the town was up here and the school was down there and the train line would come through here and we always knew when the train was coming, so we'd all be out the front at the fence when the train came through, because they only came through once a week. I don't know, we just played games.

Do you remember when

- 24:00 **the war started?**

Yes.

Do you remember first hearing about it?

Yes, it didn't worry me very much. I think it worried me because my dad had always been in the 30th Battalion between the wars, which was a Scottish regiment. They used to come to Sydney and used to have shoot meetings out at Long Bay or somewhere out there.

- 24:30 He would come down for different functions, and I just kind of thought this is going to be... it wasn't until my brother turned 18 and that must have been about 1940 I think. I don't know, it was pretty early anyway. And when he was going, it kind of hit us then. And that's when we thought well what are we going to do? Because we had always done everything with him. See I was only fifteen and a half when I went into the land army,
- 25:00 so it didn't register that much. It was something I knew had to be done.

Was there much knowledge of Hitler and what was happening in Europe?

I think there must have. I think there must have been because... it didn't happen much at Leeton but at Batlow there were a few... well the science fellow at Batlow was a German and the nicest person you couldn't wish to meet, but we kind of shunned him you know, which was cruel really.

- 25:30 Him and his wife, they were both lovely people and as I said, the first place I went to work, well he was very hard. He was German, and we thought he was hard because he was German.

How was he was treated?

I don't think he was treated badly by anybody in Batlow. I'm sure Doctor Steebles wasn't because he'd been there before we got there. They were musical and they were educated

- 26:00 people. I think some of the families... Batlow was a little bit of a mountain hick town in a way, and some families were probably against him. But I mean I don't think the old diggers were because they all knew what he was. You see there were a lot of old diggers there. I don't think that was a soldier settlement. I'm not sure if it was. I know it was after the war. They had fellows going out there on soldier settlements.
- 26:30 But I think they might have all been free farmers. Because it was a gold town before in the very early days. A gold rush town Batlow. But it was out there on its own and it had this dreadful road to get into it. It was still a little bit of a mountain hick town you know. They were all very generous and very nice people.

Was the Empire important to you when you were a teenager?

Yes.

- 27:00 Well you see we always had Empire Day and we always had Cracker Night. Even in our country schools I mean we raised the flag every morning and did this. And now people don't bother to do it. The RSL does it. But when ever the National Anthem was played you always put your hand over your heart. And I think country schools sort of kept those things going more than anywhere else. An Empire Day and Cracker Night and the Queen and the King, the old King.
- 27:30 We were all very aware of that and we knew that these fellows were fellows who had been to the war and it was always when it was Anzac Day we knew that that was their day. They had their day. I think that's when we heard most of the stories when they got together. Whether anybody else individually

talked about it, I don't know.

So when did you join the WANS?

- 28:00 Well I would have joined the WANS probably... well I was still in the girl guides and it would have been when I was fifteen I suppose. I don't think I had been in it that long. And it had only just started up. They had a Red Cross out there and my mum had started up the Red Cross out there and I think they had the WANS in it. It really didn't do very much because there weren't a lot of people around there, and there was nowhere for us to do very much.
- 28:30 We just kind of thought we were in the WANS. And we were knew that the WANS were having the land army. So I can't remember whether we might have joined the WANS to go into the land army. I've always felt that I was in the WANS before I went into the land army. But it might have been that we had the uniform and we kind of learnt about it.

Where did you go to join the WANS?

I think we must have gone to Griffith or Leeton. They were the bigger towns

- 29:00 and they would have had them there, and that's probably when we heard about it. I mean, my mum started the Country Women's Association in Erigolia. It was her that... she had always done a bit of nursing. She wasn't a nurse but she had done a bit of nursing. And it was my mum and dad who got the bush nurse to come to Erigolia because there was no doctor or anything. Everybody used to come to my mum if anybody was injured. And they decided
- 29:30 to build a house. Well my grandfather went up for that and one of the other farmers was a builder and they built the cottage which was called the Bush Nurse, and the Bush Nurse used to come to Erigolia. I think it was just one of the mothers who had the girl guides going there. It was just a group, but I think if you wanted to do anything big you went to Leeton or Griffith. Even Rankin Springs was bigger
- 30:00 but they... I think they might have had one there but there might have been that funny bit between Rankin Springs and Erigolia. Rankin Springs was the end of the line and there were a lot more people there. You see in the town of Erigolia there were only a couple of houses, the rest were shops, and they were railway workers. The only other people who lived there were people who worked on the railway, because there was no other, nothing else. There used to be people come through working. Now my dad had fellows,
- 30:30 a big brother arrangement. Country boys who came from England and they'd come to your farm and you'd look after them and feed them, and clothe them and give them money for tobacco and what have you, and dress them. So they were the people who would come and help. And then there was always fellows wandering around looking for jobs.

So when you joined the WANS, what sort of commitment was that? What were you doing with them?

- 31:00 I don't know if we made any commitment or not. It was called the Women's Australian National Service but all we used to do was get together and march, having a bit of marching, and I think we used to do knitting. See there was nothing out there like ambulances to drive. In Sydney they were ambulance drivers and they worked in the huts where they
- 31:30 had Comfort Funds and I think they did a lot of things. They were always air raid wardens and I think they drove cars and probably ambulances.

The knitting you were doing was that for the troops?

The troops, yes. It would be socks or scarves or gloves or what do they call them... balaclavas.

And where would the material come from?

We would just have to get it ourselves. Get it when you were in Leeton or Griffith, knit them up and then they all went to headquarters.

And how many of you were you in the group?

I think there was only about six. Six of us there. Well my older sisters didn't join because they were busy. My dad always said that "His daughters were as good as three men".

- 32:30 They didn't look like that, but they were always there on the farm or else they'd be cooking. There were always things that they would be cooking for. They used to have a lot of things for the Comfort Funds and there were always things that they would be cooking for. But still by then, my three oldest, no... I can remember my third oldest sister got married and
- 33:00 she married a fellow from... now it wasn't Yanco, just over... over near Griffith anyway. And my eldest sister married a fellow from Yenda who was a bullock driver, and he used to come through with the bullock, picking up all the wheat and taking it to the station. Because a lot of it was done by bullocks in those days. They were still using the bullocks. And my other sister,

33:30 her husband's father was a stock and station agent at Rankin Springs. So when she got married she went to live at Rankin Springs. So that was the three eldest ones that were married. And the next eldest one, one of my aunts in Sydney was a dress tailoress, so she lived with her to learn tailoring. And then it was the next three that dad...

34:00 this was after he had had trouble on the farm, and he decided they needed to come to the city and get educated... not educated, but get work.

What was the trouble?

Well, with money. There had been a drought, and this drought was just before the Second World War and the crops weren't as good as they had been and you weren't getting the money. And he had problems because he was buying all this farm

34:30 equipment and lending it around to everybody, and he didn't have the money to pay for them. That's what it was and he was in Sydney at that stage to get another loan or to work it out. And that's when they sent the bailiffs out and put us straight out off the farm. That was it.

Did you get back to the farm?

No, not on to that place, no.

Where did you go then?

Well we went to the farmers next door and they were having trouble, so

35:00 they were being put out, so we just stayed there and my dad worked that place. This was just before the war and that was when he gave up and he said... well it must have been just before that that he brought my other three sisters. At that time he brought my other three sisters down and they got work at the woollen mills, and they worked there until they were married. And they ended up all being forewomen because they were good workers. Not that they were any stronger than any of the others. They were quite slight girls

35:30 really. That's how it went.

So tell me about your transition from the WANS to the land army?

I don't think there was any transition really. I think you were in the WANS... I don't really remember how we joined the land army. I think we must have been in the WANS and they said "The WANS is going to form part of the

36:00 land army". We had the WANS badge and they put a little land army underneath it, and that's when we came down to this camp. We were in the WANS and we wanted to be in the land army part of it, and they said that "I couldn't but she could". So we came down and we went to this camp down at Wahroonga somewhere. In a paddock out at Wahroonga. And a lot of the girls who ended up out at Leeton when I went back there had been on that camp.

36:30 I still see some of them. They had more of an idea where it was but as far as I was concerned it was a paddock that we had to go across the Harbour Bridge to get to. That was it.

Was it the first time you had been away from home for any length of time?

Yes really, on my own. My sister was there with me at this camp but once I went to Leeton, as I said, my mum had taken me back to Yanco because

37:00 I hadn't been told where I was to go. And Beryl must have been told to go to Griffith. I can't remember but I know I was back at Yanco and Beryl must have let me know or the letter came or my sisters who were in the house at Marrickville had sent the letter down. I remember my mum just taking me over to the land army camp.

What was your parent's reaction to your going away?

I don't think that they...I think they were just very

37:30 proud. I don't think they thought anything else. We were just going to do something and that was it. And I suppose when you've got a family that's kind of spread around...and everybody felt the same. I can remember my oldest sister saying, "You're lucky, you're going into the land army". But they were working in the woollen mills and they couldn't go into anything anyway. They've often said since, you two... we got hooked first

38:00 because they needed the job and they were in the woollen mills and there was no way of them getting out of that. We weren't doing anything so we were able to just go away. I think everybody was proud. Beryl and Sheila are going... we had nicknames. She was a bit fat and I was skinny and it was always Fatty and Skinny are going into the land army. That was it. They were all proud. I don't think there was any other feeling.

38:30 **Tell me, do you remember saying goodbye and packing to go? What did you take?**

I don't really because I was already down at Yanco with my mum. My mum had... they had kind of left the farm at Erigolia at that stage. My sister Rose had married Frank and he was a share farmer, and they were living at Yanco.

39:00 My mum had come down there with me and my younger sister and brother. I had a younger sister and brother. We'd all come down because a lot of people were leaving Sydney. So after that she must have gone back to Sydney because she was still in the Red Cross and the VAD's, and she was back in Sydney. So she stayed with my there sisters for a while. Well my younger sister and brother must have gone back.

39:30 But there was a rush. A lot of people were leaving Sydney because of the war. Now this was before the subs came in. They subs didn't come into until 1943 I think.

1942, I think perhaps.

The end of '42.

The subs I think were June '42. Anyway.

Could have been because I don't remember it happening. I remember one of the girls at Batlow when we got there, she said "She had been on the train to

40:00 **Batlow the night the subs came in". She was an only child and she was going to the land army and didn't know what on earth was going to happen next. She left her family at 10 o'clock, I think the train left and the subs had been in and there was all this ruckus going on. I think my mum was back in Sydney then because I know she used to do air raid warden and things like that. Eventually, she used to go to the nursing homes where the soldiers were and she could take my young sister and brother with her.**

40:30 **They were up at Scone and then they were out at Orange, at Bell Trees. Bell Trees was a kind of respite kind of place.**

Tape 4

00:33 **Sheila, I'd like to ask now about your camp at Wahroonga? Can you tell me a bit about your first impressions of coming into that camp?**

Well, Elsie Smith was there and there were other guiders, see there were other girl guides. I can remember going there and thinking we're back at a girl guide camp.

01:00 Now when you say the transition. I can remember, it might have been at that time there was a place behind Central, a big hall. And the WANS used to get there and march and I think I might have gone there a couple of times before we went to this camp at Wahroonga. That's how we knew to go to that camp at Wahroonga. And all the WANS that were there didn't all go into the land army of course.

01:30 They had their choice of what they were going to do. They went out to this camp and I suppose they knew then that they were going to be in the land army. They might have been able to go to the camp and still say they didn't want to. I can't remember exactly. I know it was just a big paddock and we had to put up tents to sleep in. Then we had to do the slit trenches because we had to do the cooking. We had duty, washing up

02:00 the things after the meals. I think we were still kind of learning things that we had learned in the guides. Tying knots and first aid and all the usual things. There was no land work to do out there. But it was probably just getting the girls together. See what happened, and I don't know a lot about this but there had been a big meeting at the Town Hall.

02:30 The women had decided they were going to do their share and they called this big meeting and there were so many people coming that they were all around the Town Hall. And this was when they first started and they were going to have a WANS, Women's Australian National Service. So they had to put them out into different branches and I think each suburb had their each group, but we didn't kind of get the feeling of that.

03:00 We were still in the guides back where we were from, but we had to come down for this camp, and that's when we were lucky that my sisters were at Marrickville. But I think we might have gone into this building at the back of the Town Hall. It wasn't the Queen Victoria building but it was like that. It was a great big building and we used to march up and down, up and down. And from there we went to this camp. And then after the camp, I don't know what the delay was,

03:30 whether it might have been that my mum was going to take me with the younger ones anyway. But my sister didn't. She must have stayed in Sydney because she got the notice to go to Griffith, and I got the notice sent to me out at Yanco, and from Yanco mum took me across to Leeton. I don't know seven or eight miles away, I'm not sure how far.

So how long were you at Wahroonga?

04:00 I think we were only probably there over a weekend. I can't remember exactly.

Was it a big camp?

Yes, there were a lot of people there. And it's amazing that I've talked to girls later on and they say, "Oh, we were there." I didn't realise it. I know one friend now who lives over at Mosman and I talk to her every now and again,

04:30 and she said, "Yes, I was at that camp at Wahroonga." And she would have gone to Leeton. She would have been at Leeton. They were at Leeton when I went. When my mum took me over there these girls had all arrived at Leeton. Of course the secretary now, she was in my room when I was there. And she has said a few times, "I can remember your mother bringing you over. Do you remember that?" And I say, "Well I know she did but I don't

05:00 remember exactly what happened." She must have just took me over and she must have talked to Mrs Pickering who was the matron and arranged it all. But as far as I was concerned I just went from there to Leeton and I was in the land army and that was it.

How was the camp supervised?

We had a matron. Mrs Pickering was our matron. She was supervising and she worked everything with the farmers. The farmers paid her and she paid us, and

05:30 she did all the supervising. She was very good. Then there were only two sub matrons, Ruth Earl and... oh gosh... and they were the cooks. But they kind of supervised as well.

And where were they based?

Well they were in the same place. Mrs Pickering had her room, which was her bedroom and her office. And that was as you came in the main doors.

06:00 I can't remember where Ruth and... Gloria was her name. I don't remember where they slept but they must have been. It was a big long hallway and there were rooms going off that and there were four in each room. So they must have had one of those rooms. That doesn't register with me at all.

Whereabouts was this sorry?

This was at Leeton in the dormitories. It was a big wooden building. It had showers inside I think.

06:30 I think the latrines were all outside. I can't remember that either but I think they were. Because I know because we were the ones who had to clean them. It was our weekend duty that we had to make sure the latrines were cleaned and the showers were cleaned. There must have been a row of wash basins. You know I can't remember a lot of that. But I was there for 12 months.

How many girls were there at Leeton?

07:00 I don't know. I can show you some of the photos but I can't remember the number.

Just a rough idea. It was a fairly large group, was it?

I would have said there were 100, but I don't think there was really a hundred. We still used to do a lot of things like the girl guides. Once a week we had our flag parade and we formed up in a horseshoe like the girl guides. We took our oath or whatever

07:30 we did. "Honour the Queen..." I can't remember now. "Honour thy mother and father, the queen and the flag". I can't remember it. It was a rhyme that we always said with your hand over your heart. So it was still run like a girl guide camp. And as I said when you went out to work you went out as patrols. And I was quite often a patrol leader above girls who were younger than

08:00 me. And that didn't worry them. We were all learning as we went along. The patrol leader though had to get up and make the sandwiches. I wasn't a very good sandwich maker but some of the girls would come and help. Then we'd have breakfast. You had to be dressed and ready for breakfast and then ready for when the bus came or the utility came or you were riding your bike or walking or what.

08:30 You just went off to work and then came back at night. We were always dirty and wanting a shower. We used to mostly put our uniform on after our shower, which is funny. I don't know, I've got pictures of us with our uniforms on after we had our meal. We would have duty and someone would have two basins of water and you'd file past and wash your things and wipe them up and you took your own eating irons with you. Then you brought them down when you had a meal.

09:00 I just can't remember the regulation of it but I know we did that and the pictures show a lot of us in uniform. But that might have been when we were going out. I can't remember that.

Tell me about the uniform?

The uniform was teal blue and it was... the cap was like the foreign legion cap, a little round cap with a

peak in the front. Of course we had the badge on the front. It was WANS with land army

- 09:30 written underneath it. We had a grey shirt and I think our tie was teal blue. Grey stockings and black shoes. There was no regulation shoes because everybody had to buy their own, well everybody had to buy their whole uniform. It was quite a nice uniform really. And you could get a great coat, but they were very light material. I think I must have... I've got a picture of me with a great coat on, so I must have had one.
- 10:00 Then your working uniform, well it wasn't a working uniform. We were really just a speckled mob because everybody just took what they had at home. I still had my riding breeches and riding boots, but I didn't work in those. But I used to often just wear those on the weekend and just have my WANS jacket over them. But to go to work, just any clothes...I remember I had a lovely blue suit I must have got for my
- 10:30 15th birthday and I was working in the jacket of that because it was warm. You just wore whatever you had. Any old pants or trousers. As I say most of the girls went and bought men's overalls. We could get whatever we could get in Leeton. I can remember one place I was at and he was a Scottish fellow, and he kept saying... he told us what to do and he told us "He had to go and kill a foal".
- 11:00 We were looking at each other and we couldn't work it out, why was he going to kill a foal for? But it was a fowl because he was Scottish. Anyway, he went off and did what he did and we did what we did, and he said, "That's very good. You've done a good job." And this Hazel Earnest was funny and said, "Yes of course we did, there's no flies on us." And he said, "No but I can see where there's been one." Because we used to take the men's flies out and just sew them up.
- 11:30 We got on pretty well with the bosses really. They'd tell you what to do if you weren't sure. Pruning was what I hated when you first began, because how ever you pruned was the crop for the next season. Cut the wrong buds. I learned most of my pruning...citrus wasn't too bad because you just got in and you cut off the dead bits on the inside, and you could tell the dead bits,
- 12:00 that was easy. But stone fruit all had to be pruned and you just had to be careful.

Was there any form of training for the work?

No, they farmers trained us. They did have...I don't know when that started. They did have up at Hawkesbury Agriculture College, but I don't think they were training them for farm work. They were training them for the matrons and sub matrons.

- 12:30 I don't know when that happened. I know a lot of the girls that went up there probably hadn't been in the WANS before either. But I know they were up there and they had a dietician training them. And that's what they were being trained for, to come back out to the camps and look after the girls. Mostly the food and the bookwork. The bookwork was all pretty simple. The farmer paid you and you paid the girls and they bought the food. They had to buy all the food.
- 13:00 So that were people who were competent enough to do that.

You were actually quite close to home?

It wasn't far. About 80 miles. Well from Yanco where my sister lived... sometimes I used to go and stay with my sister. Well she moved...her husband, he was a share farmer, they don't own a farm, they work a farm for somebody else and they share. But he

- 13:30 went from there out to Murrumbidgee which was a bit further away. That was on a rice farm and I know I used to like going out there because I loved rice. I used to say to the boys, "I've had beautiful rice. I've had rice and milk and sugar for breakfast and rice and custard for tea." And they said, "You would have made a good POW [Prisoner of War]." I never ever felt homesick which I suppose was because I was used to being with a lot of people.
- 14:00 The girls you know, you were friendly with them straight away more or less.

Tell me about some of the other girls?

Well Ethel O'Sullivan was one of my main friends. She wasn't in my room. I don't how I clubbed up with Ethel. She was the girl who wore my debs [debutantes] frock. She came from Fairfield and her dad had been in the First World War and she came from a big family. Her and Terri.

- 14:30 Terri was my first mate. Terri came from Bondi and she used to write poetry and read books. We would always find Terri with a book, and she could write beautiful poetry. Wrote some lovely poetry. We kind of just went the three of us, and then Ethel went off with somebody else, and she left the land army before me.
- 15:00 I don't know why she left. Whether she had to go home or why she left. Then she was working out at Canberra as a house maid in Government House I suppose. I used to write to her when she was out there. Then she had met a few Americans. Being around where the people were, you could meet Americans. I mean we met a lot of Americans too, but you couldn't spend a lot of time with them. If you were in Sydney, I can remember

- 15:30 a group of us went out with a group of American sailors. See, American sailors were in the Grand Hotel. You wouldn't know where that was. That's up the end of Barrack Street. That was a beautiful big hotel there with Sydney lace all over it. And that used to be the... the RSL there used to be... what did they call it? The same as the American one... Anyway, you could go there any time and they had dances and everything.
- 16:00 David Jones was on the corner and that was an ex-servicewomen's home where you could go and stay, but it was a bit dear, and they weren't real keen on land army going in there. I don't know, I never stayed there but I heard a lot of the girls saying "They weren't treated nicely in there by the other servicewomen". Well I never had that problem. There were three or four other girls who were at Leeton, and they left and they joined the army and they went into the ack ack [Anti Aircraft] and searchlights and
- 16:30 they were at Kapooka when I was at Batlow. So they could get cigarettes and chocolates because we all smoked, and we used to take them apples from Wagga, and they'd give me cigarettes and chocolates. But Wagga had an ex-servicewomen's place where you could come and stay near the park in Wagga. If we had a weekend off in Batlow, there was a fellow there, Aussie Butts, he had a big Buick 8 and he used to fit about 10 of us in and he would drive us
- 17:00 over to Wagga and we'd spend the weekend. And we used to stay at that ex-servicewomen, and we were always treated the same as other ex-service girls. But I've heard a lot of girls say that "They were snubbed by other servicewomen". I never was because it was talking to those girls that I found out that they were going to have technical musterings. What were we talking about, the camps?
- 17:30 At Batlow, at Leeton. I don't know, you kind of got your own group of friends. You were friendly with everybody but you had your own ones. When you got letters you shared it with them and they helped you write letters and you just knew their family and they knew your family. Well the whole four of us in our room, we all got on very well together. Esmay came from Hurstville somewhere
- 18:00 but she ended up marrying a farmer from Leeton and she stayed there and had a family. Judy now lives at West Ryde but I think they were just selling their place because I think her husband's been sick. And Hazel went into the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] and she's now in the Kokoda Rooms over at War Vets. The Ex-Servicewomen Association, we got together and raised a lot of money, and we
- 18:30 built... we were given a bit of land at War Vets and we built units there, but they were only for necessity ex-service women, and the land army wasn't included in that which was a shame because the land army worked for it. They worked for it because they wanted to. Then Hazel had problems. Her husband left and she had problems, and she got into... it's called Friendship Village. There's about eight little units and they're very nice. She was in there
- 19:00 and they found her wandering around one day, she hadn't been taking her medication, so now they've built this new unit out at War Vets and it's called Kokoda and it's beautiful. And she's got one of those rooms. We've been over there to visit her a few times. You know when you had friends like that, they always stayed your friends.

I know you've mentioned them before but describe for me the dormitories.

Well,

- 19:30 it was this big building. It was like an H really. A big building and the causeway went through and then you had the big hall, a very big hall. And then you went from that into another building which was the same shape as where we slept but that was the mess and the kitchens. So it was like a big H with something in the middle. In the dormitories, there were four to a room, square rooms.
- 20:00 I don't remember if we had any wardrobes in there. I think we just used packing cases to put our things in. I don't think there were any wardrobes. We just had four beds to each room and down the end of the passage was where the wash basins and showers were. I'm sure the latrines were out the back because I can remember we had to get them all out and paint them once. We had them out in the back yard. So there was the middle part of it. Now what Mrs Pickering did there, because we were always up very early and
- 20:30 if you worked a long way out then you got home very late. We had a roster and each... it might have been two rooms... got up Sunday morning and made toast and tea and coffee and you just got up and had your toast in your pyjamas. You didn't have to get up early if you weren't going anyway. We just kind have had relaxing days. And I think that might have been on a Sunday.
- 21:00 I think that was only one day and we did that at Batlow too. They had probably been taught that we had this one day of luxury.

So what was the routine on a working day?

On a working day, you got up. Mostly you had your shower before you went to bed because you were dirty anyway.

What time would you get up?

Gosh. It depended on how far out you worked. It depended too on breakfast, what time breakfast

21:30 was on and that was usually done... Well that was the two people doing the breakfast. The one that was the patrol leader had to get over there first and cut the lunches. So you'd get up and get dressed and you'd go over and have your breakfast and get the patrols and then we were off. You just went whichever way you went. It was all mapped out where you were going the night before because Mrs Pickering had this book and she used to write out the patrols and have

22:00 all the names on it. And if you were the patrol leader you just made sure the girls knew where you were going.

How would you travel?

Well we had a bus which used to take us around and they had a utility, a fellow had a utility and he used to take a pile of girls in that. And some had bikes. The ones who worked closer in used their bikes or walked. The place where it had the spinach and I collapsed - that was within walking distance. I don't know, it was

22:30 a few miles I suppose. But you didn't think anything of walking. You'd walk to work and then walk home again. But see sometimes they'd go right out to Stanbridge and that was about, I don't know, to me it would have been about 20 miles out to work. Then you'd work from 7 to 5 I think, so you were up pretty earlier. And the further out you were meant you got back a bit later. So the ones who were home earlier had their

23:00 showers and be ready. And when we were at Batlow, I can't remember what we did while we were in the RSL. I can only remember this tin bath and the wash basins. There was nothing around the scouts hall. That was only for us to eat. But when we were at Thrull [?] House and they had one big room and that was the shower and there were about three or four shower roses, so we were all in together. So you tried to get there early

23:30 because it was run by a donkey and you had to stoke the donkey up to keep the hot water coming. So you'd get in there early to get the hot water and sometimes it would be cold. You could be coming home out of the snow and have a cold shower. Even then you know, I supposed we whinged a bit but we didn't notice it that much. I suppose we were young and fit anyway. A cold shower would warm you up eventually. Or you kidded yourself it did anyway.

24:00 See we had to take our own bedclothes and everything. Nothing like that was issued.

Tell me what you brought with you to Leeton then?

Well I remember... I must have taken bedclothes. And probably we had sheets and pillow cases which you didn't have in the other services. I can't remember exactly what I took because we must have had blankets, because we never thought of sleeping bags in those days. And just any old clothes

24:30 that you had. An old hat and any old clothes that you had that you could work in. Because I can remember I wore this blue jacket until it wore out. I can't remember what I had after that and that was from a good suit that I had. We had shorts or we had overalls, and then we used to buy the overalls and cut them off in the summer time if it was hot. And pyjamas. I know we all bought... I suppose I must have taken

25:00 pyjamas, but they wore out and I know we bought pyjamas down in the shops. It wasn't easy getting things. See gum boots were hard to get. I know they were a lot of coupons and you really needed the gum boots if you were irrigating or... a lot of the work you needed your gum boots. Other than that you just wore any old shoes that you had. It was lucky when the government decided to take over the land army. Now I don't understand about that either. But

25:30 Man Power took over the land army, and I think it might have been in the middle of 1942. But I can't remember getting any khaki things until I got to Batlow. We got a nice khaki jumper and we got lovely khaki overalls. And boots, very nice boots and socks. Before that you supplied all your own. I don't remember us being issued with hats for work, but some

26:00 of the girls said they did. I think we just kept whatever hats we had. And the first thing that I can remember getting there was the great coat and they were beaut. They were like American material. They were very fine wool, heavy but fine wool. Then we got our summer uniforms and they were nice. They were just like a dress that buttoned down the front. We got stockings and we got the dress shoes. And we must have been issued with gloves. I can't remember now.

26:30 I know we used to have gloves when we were in the WANS but then you bought them yourself. Then gradually the winter uniforms came in, the dress uniforms. See we had a brown hat, a brown felt hat and a brown tie. It was very much like the AWAS uniform. And the uniform was khaki but we only had bone buttons, buttons with insignias on them. And we got issued with a badge.

27:00 An Australian Women's Land Army badge with wheat in the middle and writing around it. We must have got the badge fairly early I think. I can't remember. It came in dribs and drabs. I think girls who were joining up then probably got issued with the uniforms as they came out, but the ones who were already there.... they made sure we got the working uniform which was important and it made a lot of difference.

I'm wondering what the discipline was like?

Well

- 27:30 it depended where you were. It depended where you were. We were told that lights out at a certain time and we knew we had to get up in the morning for work. And we knew we had to go and work. We weren't supposed to go out after lights out, but some did. In the hot weather we used to sneak out and go down to the pool, but the pool was locked, so we had to climb over the fence to have a swim.
- 28:00 It was pretty strict you know. Not knowing then what the air force was like, it was fairly strict. But you could break rules and if you did something wrong like we did at Batlow, silly things, and even at Leeton if they found out we had been out, you would have to chop the wood the next day, or you wouldn't be allowed out. If there was an outing you wouldn't be allowed out, but that didn't always work either because
- 28:30 there were ways and means of getting around that. And if you really didn't want to go to work, you just said, "I'm not going to work today and you didn't get paid for it." But they couldn't say. "Well you go," you know. When it rained we didn't get paid and then they decided to let us go over to the cannery because the cannery wasn't far from where we were, and we would go over to the cannery. But the local girls always knew when it was raining
- 29:00 and they used to put us into where the pickles were being made, cutting up onions and things like that all day long. Especially if there was a dance on that night and the air force were coming over and we'd be in making all this stuff and the onions would be through your hair and you couldn't get it out with a shower, you know. Still it was good and we could go over there and that's how we got our money. But I can remember writing to my dad for money. He sent me money and he said, "I just can't figure
- 29:30 out what you're doing with your money," because he was in the army then and he said, "I've got to send money to your mum and your younger sisters and brothers and I think you should be able to look after yourself." He gave me a good lecture on it but he still sent me the money. I don't know why, see we had to buy all our own undies. We had to buy everything.

How much were you being paid?

I can't remember. I'm kind of thinking it was only two pounds a week.

- 30:00 It wasn't a lot because you really were scratching, and now and again we'd go down... See all the Greek restaurants used to be around the country town in those days. They would make beautiful mixed grills and sweets and everything. Rockmelon and ice creams and banana splits and everything like that. And every now again you'd want to splurge and go and have something like that. If you could meet up with an air force boy they might take you in
- 30:30 and... my husband used to be caught for that. He used to say, "You come to town, I'd take you out to dinner," and then you'd go off for a dance with somebody else. He didn't like dancing. Anyway it worked out in the end.

Can you explain how the paying worked? When and where did you receive your pay?

I think we might have been paid every weekend. I can't remember that particularly either. But we had to go into the office to get our pay.

- 31:00 I know we had to sign for it. And two pounds sounds awful, it doesn't sound very much. But I don't think we got any more than that because we had to pay a pound a week for our board. I've tried to discuss this with other girls and a lot of them can't remember either. We had a blue book which had things in it but I can't remember what it had, and I've sent mine out to the War Memorial, so I haven't got it anymore anyway.
- 31:30 I'm sure that a lot of the girls say we were very badly paid, and we were provided with our food. They thought that was enough. But it was still clothing that we had to get. And even when we were issued with our uniforms, they never issued us with underwear like they did in the air force, you got everything.

So who actually paid you your wage?

I don't know how it worked but I think wherever you worked that farmer must have paid per girl

- 32:00 back to the matron and she worked it out. We all got the same pay. It didn't matter where you worked, we all got the same pay. So whatever she got in, she would have had enough to pay everybody the two pound, and then we had to pay back... they might have taken our board out, I can't remember. I can't remember exactly how. But I know we always said "We had to pay our own board". So whether that was out of the pay or not, I just can't recall that.
- 32:30 I don't think it worried me very much. So long as we had enough to have an ice cream soda when we wanted to and to get our clothing. We never kind of went without clothing and I can't remember people borrowing that very much, although I had my own riding breeches and boots and a lot of the girls used to want to borrow them. I can remember one girl once saying, "Well you can wear my uniform" and her uniform was miles too big

33:00 for me, but I still wore it and I could have worn my own. But I think she felt better than if she swapped something you know. But other than that I don't think we borrowed things off each other very much.

Was there a sense of being in the army?

There was really. Everybody thought they were in the army. It shouldn't have been called land army really if they didn't want it to be that way. I heard, and I don't know whether I should say this

33:30 or not but Mrs Lynch was our Head. She was the Head Director and I heard that it had been delegated or whatever that if there was to be a 5th service. All the other higher up officers and whatever in the air force and the army they had to go wherever they were sent. But she wanted to stay around Sydney. This is what someone told me.

34:00 If she had accepted to be this, she would not have stayed around Sydney. I think her husband was something to do with the Commissioner of Police or something, I'm not sure. I didn't go into all that but this is what I heard. I can't really see why that would have stopped them but one of our girls who was pretty high up and knew quite a bit said that she had seen it, that it had been delegated or regulated or something, and that it was to be a 5th service, and then it

34:30 stopped and then the war ended. And we knew that she was high flying all around Sydney you know. You couldn't blame her for it I suppose. I don't know how old she would have been, about 40. She seemed old to us, about 40. And she was having a good time with everybody in the city.

So did the girls take an interest in how the war was progressing?

Yes, yes.

35:00 I mean you did because everybody knew someone who was away.

And tell me how you kept up with the information?

We kept up with the information. We wrote a lot of letters. That was something we did at night time. Everybody wrote letters. Everybody who was going away saying, "Will you write to me while I'm away?" So you wrote to them. You wrote to lots and lots of fellas. And also the papers in those days

35:30 came out regularly with lists of people that were wounded or missing, and the ones that were killed. So you kind of scanned the lists whenever the papers came out, and that was pretty regular. And we saw a lot of it on newsreels. See what you get on television now, we saw a lot of this on newsreels. But you'd only see this when you went to a theatre and it was probably old hat by the time you saw it.

36:00 But you knew what was going on. I mean we never knew where the boys were because they couldn't say where they were. I mean there were secret methods they could use to give you an idea. Everybody you thought was up in New Guinea, wherever they were they were up in New Guinea, except the ones who were over in England and India and those places. I think you scanned the lists that came out for people that you knew.

36:30 If you didn't hear anything from them for a while you'd be anxious. Somebody else they knew would write and tell you they had been wounded or were in hospital or were sick. That was the talk every night. What's happening? That was one of the things we all talked about. We thought we knew what was going on anyway.

Was there a fear of Japanese invasion in those days?

37:00 I don't know whether you'd call it a fear. It depended on where you were. If you were right down south, say in Melbourne or where we were at Quilty, we knew that the Japs were on the Kokoda anyway and you knew they were trying to get into Milne Bay. A lot of that - we'd get more in the air force than what

37:30 you got through the land army. They didn't get anything like that. We'd get it in our DROs [Daily Routine Orders] or something like that - this is happening here and that's happening there. I think we were all aware of it and everybody had their hates of the Japs and the Germans. That's how poor old Doctor Steebles... I mean some of the girls were pretty terrible to him. I suppose you always had a fear.

38:00 You would kind of think when's it going to end and what's going to happen and what are we going to do afterwards? Things are going to be so different. Who's going to come back and who's not? You know there was always that thought in your mind. When the war ended you thought oh fantastic, this is fantastic, but now what are we going to do? We've been looked after all this time. Even land army where it wasn't that strict, you were still

38:30 looked after. See once the government took over, if you were sent anywhere your fare was paid so you didn't have to worry about paying your fare, and if you were sent on leave or sent to a new camp, and when you went on leave once the government took over you got paid when you went on leave. You didn't at the beginning. If you went home or went anywhere you didn't get paid. If you didn't work in those days you didn't get paid, but you still had to live and you still had to find your board.

39:00 **What about rain?**

Well if it rained and you couldn't go out on the farms. Well this was at Batlow and Leeton. Batlow had the packing sheds. You could go into the packing sheds and they had the big potato dehydration plant, and they had the orange juicing part where they were doing the orange juicing. So if it rained, you just automatically went to the packing shed. I don't know how the pay worked out then. And at Leeton you just went over to the canneries

- 39:30 and worked there. So they would have had to pay for the days we were there. I suppose we had to sign on. I don't even remember that. I assume we just went to the packing sheds or canneries and worked, but I suppose we had to sign on to something to say we were there.

Tape 5

- 00:34 **I'd like to ask you Sheila about your impressions of the girls you were amongst when you first joined the land army, their backgrounds?**

Well when I first went into the land army I found the girls were very, very nice and they really wanted to help in the war effort.

- 01:00 Most of them had left very good jobs to go into the land army. They were educated. This is how I feel; they were educated girls and they knew what they were going in for. They were there. They were patriotic and they were coming into the land army because it was work that needed to be done. They fitted in well. They worked well.
- 01:30 There were a few country girls who came in and they knew what to do and they helped the other girls, the city girls. They all mixed very well. It was just a very happy association really. Everybody was there for a job and they got on well. That's it more or less. The discipline wasn't as strict as it could have been.
- 02:00 But it was enough because all these people would have been used to discipline either at school or at work before they came there, so they were used to some type of discipline. They were easy to handle.
- As a country girl what sort of tricks did you teach the city girls?**
- I don't think I taught them any tricks actually.
- 02:30 I could ride a horse and a lot of them could ride horses too. Different things out on the farms. I don't know, I just had control a bit more I suppose about what you should do, ploughing and things like that because I was used to ploughing. With fruit trees I had no experience before, so we were all in the same boat.
- 03:00 But we just kind of... the city girls still looked to me a little bit to see what I was doing, and I would say well I'm learning the same as you. But when I say the girls were educated, I mean I had been to a one teacher school and lots of things that I would say, like "I seen," instead of "I saw," and the girls would pick me up on lots of different... I can't remember them all now.
- 03:30 But they were helpful in that way. They would say "You don't say that Sheila, you say this". That was just the way it was. We were a team and we were there to help everybody else, and not always with your work, but how you lived and different things that you did. The things that you wouldn't do. You know if you were going to see somebody they'd say, "No, you don't go, you wait here. You don't go and meet him somewhere else, you wait until he comes here and picks you up."
- 04:00 Things that they were all educated with that I wouldn't have thought of. I mean they appreciated that I was from the country and the things I might have been able to show them which I didn't realise, but they taught me quite a lot. They really educated me in life more or less. I learned such a lot from them.
- What was the age range?**
- I think they were supposed to be
- 04:30 17, or probably 18. Probably they were supposed to be 18 and up to 25. But I'm sure quite a few girls got in at 17, and I was just lucky that I got in at my age, because I was going with my sister and because I was from the country. They desperately needed girls at that time too. Most of the girls that I can recall
- 05:00 were 18 and there were a lot of them older than that. And they had all had good jobs as hairdressers and things like that. One girl owned her own hairdressing place and, you know, they had good jobs. As I say Lindsay who was working with me, she was a Vet [Veterinary] Science student so she kind of let that go for the wartime. Other girls worked in offices and they were
- 05:30 pretty well educated and knew what they were doing. And I think there were a few girls who came and had worked in factories, and they were lucky enough to be able to get out of the factories because Man Power hadn't come in then. They were able to get out and do something different. They just wanted to do something different.

Man Power would have kept them in the factories, would it?

Yes. Well this is what happened when we were at Batlow at this new camp. They were all girls

06:00 who had been Man Powered. They told them "They had to either go and work in a factory or land army".

So was there a difference between the girls who had been brought in by Man Power to the girls who had volunteered earlier?

I think there was a difference probably in their education standard. There was a difference there.

06:30 I don't think there were too many who had been Man Powered in that were sorry. There might have been a few who didn't like it and they had to go. But there weren't many. Because once they got there, it was somewhere different. I can remember this time that all these girls came from Newcastle. They probably hadn't even been working. See it was kind of still the end of the Depression and

07:00 they were doing something that needed to be done and they were working and mixing with girls. They all fitted in pretty well really. They were different to the first lot of girls I think, but see a lot of those first girls who went in left and joined the services. I mean I didn't do it... I did it because I had had enough of the land army anyway. It was very hard work and I had always wanted to be in the air force.

07:30 A lot of these other girls had qualifications to go into the other services. They had done their bit anyway. They had had a good 12 months or more in the land army. And they knew they were never going to get anywhere. Everybody knew right from the beginning that if you were in the land army you weren't going to get anything when you got out. They were hoping they would but they kind of knew that they wouldn't.

Did that create resentment in any way?

08:00 It's created resentment now. I don't think it did during the war because they were doing a job that had to be done and they were happy with what they were doing. But they resent it now. Lots of them resent it now. They think they did all of that and they didn't even get thanks. Just thanks girls and goodbye. That was all there was. They didn't even help them find jobs afterwards, which was very hard.

08:30 So I don't think there was any resentment until the end came and they knew what was going to happen. Because I've had girls say to me, "You knew what you were in for when you went into the air force," and I just kind of say, "Oh yes." Because I didn't really know. None of them knew exactly what you were going to get afterwards. I knew that I was going to get a uniform supplied and I was going to do work that I hoped that I wanted.

09:00 I knew that I would get paid leave and I knew that you were always scratching in the land army. I thought oh well I've done two and a half years and it was time for a change anyway.

Were there other ways apart from a recruitment change ... were there other differences that you noticed in the land army once Man Power was in charge?

09:30 I don't know whether I could notice once they took it on. I knew that we were getting a lot more people that they were kind of forcing to come in. I think they might have been sure of their pay but I just don't know how that worked. I don't know how that work... whether they still had to work in the canneries and wherever. See, a lot of places when they were out on stations

10:00 well I suppose they found other work to do if they couldn't do the work they were doing. Found other work to do to get paid for it. I have a feeling that Man Power might have come to the party with extra pay for girls who couldn't work because of the weather or something like that you know. But we didn't even get sick pay. If we had to go to the doctor we had to pay the doctor ourselves in those early days. I think something like that might have

10:30 come in, that they could go to the doctor. I don't know because it was still Man Power when I was at Batlow and we had to pay for ourselves. I'm not terribly sure on that. But the big thing was that the uniforms came and they got holiday pay, and they got paid to be shifted from one place to another, which hadn't happened before.

When you were at Leeton

11:00 **were you moved around to a lot of different jobs?**

Yes. You went to whichever farm needed you at the time.

How often would that change?

Well it depended. When we were planting the onions... once we had finished planting the onions we just went to another job when that was done, and the same with the carrots. We worked at weeding the carrots and then we had to leave the carrots to grow

11:30 and then do something else. Then there would be pruning times, or picking something else because the citrus picking would come in. There was always something kind of moving. Or pruning the trees that had been left. So you had to kind of learn to do all of those things. There were a few vineyards out there and the grapes had to be pruned. I never ever picked the grapes so I don't know.

12:00 I know we had to prune them and then we had to spray them. So it just meant that whatever was necessary you just moved onto the next place.

How would you find out what your job would be?

We were told each night for the next day. "You'll be going back there, you'll be going so and so". So you were always well prepared for it.

What sort of jobs did you like the most?

12:30 Gee, at Leeton. I enjoyed picking the fruit at Leeton. I enjoyed working on the piggery because we'd go back there every now and again to make sure the pigs were alright. I don't know. It was just so different. When we were weeding the carrots we all whinged and moaned because you were down on your hands and knees

13:00 all the time weeding these little carrots and hoping not to chop the carrots out instead of the weeds. When we were digging them it was very cold, and they all had to be dug and they had to be put into bags, and it was freezing weather there, it was frosty weather. Sometimes you wouldn't see the sun until lunchtime. It was cold and windy. So we needed to have plenty of scarves, and they were extra things you had to buy when that weather was on.

13:30 I don't know, picking the oranges. I went to oranges on quite a few places. I remember the place where I had my birthday, we were growing vegetables out there, so it was all just different. Then there were the rice farms. You could go there at harvest times. I can't think that I had any that were favourites. You know it was just nice. When I went to Batlow

14:00 I went to...well I only went to Charlie Bushell's and then I went to Reg Cronby's, and I stayed there for the full time and did whatever he needed doing. See there was pruning and spraying. The fruit trees all had to be pruned and then sprayed with the terrible sulphur stuff and you had to wear masks, and then if it rained we used to go into his big shed and make packing cases. When we cleared the block to plant the potatoes, it

14:30 was raining one day and we went into the shed and the potatoes all had to be cut where the eyes were and put in some kind of sulphury stuff so they wouldn't go bad. So on one property you could find enough to keep you going. It would be seasonal. You'd do one and then move onto the next one. So it just depended I think. They seemed to do that at Batlow. Once you got onto a farm you stayed there.

15:00 Yet there must have been girls moved around because a lot of new girls came. When they were at Frisco, this new camp, that was right up on the hill and everywhere they went from there they had to walk. They might have to walk 2 or 3 miles to where they were going.

Were you ever accommodated on the farms?

Yes. I never was, but there were times when the girls

15:30 were accommodated. At Oberon the girls were accommodated. I never had any experience of it but I remember two girls saying that "They used to come in but before they could have tea they had to sit down and have grace. They weren't allowed to have their letters until after dinner was over. They'd be sitting there and they'd be dying to get their letters. They had to be washed and dressed and have dinner and have grace and then after that they could

16:00 get to their letters and go to their rooms." It just depended I think, but I can remember the girls saying that and they didn't like it very much.

You told me before about the boys who went off to Kokoda. Did you hear from them?

Yes, we kept in touch with them for quite a while until they came back. That was it then. I don't even know where they went from Kokoda. Well the two that I

16:30 kind of...we wrote...there was a crew of us and we wrote to them, but one in particular that I wrote to, we kind of thought it was serious young love, and then when he came back I had somebody else. He must have had a girlfriend before I think because it didn't seem to take him long to get another girlfriend. But we still kind of stayed friends, but I don't think he was badly injured or anything.

17:00 Except mentally. I mean they went through hell up there. It was strange because you'd meet a lot of people and you'd keep in touch with them. I was looking through my pictures yesterday and these boys that we met in Wagga... we must have been there for the weekend, so we must have spent the whole weekend with them. One, he was at Kapooka, this fella I was with, there was a group of us, and we'd been

17:30 writing, and the next thing I got a lovely letter from his mother with a picture of him and his brother in uniform. I was looking at the back of the picture yesterday and I think what a shame because we weren't really serious and he must have told his mother something, and she sent me a picture. And I can't even remember his name now. I've often thought I'd love to send the picture back because it was of him and his young brother both in their uniforms. And it was lovely what she had written on it.

18:00 I can't remember his name now... "Has asked me to send you this photo,"... and there was this photo of

him and his name. I've got the photo in there. I suppose some people attach more things to others. I mean, you wouldn't see people for that long. We used to go over to Wagga and we were over there when the marines came back from Guadalcanal and they had had a terrible time, and they weren't allowed into Wagga.

- 18:30 They put them on the other side of the river, and none of the service girls... this was when I was still in the land army, none of the girls were allowed to mix with them. Because they were marines and engineers they built a big pontoon and they had their own band, and they built this big pontoon that could come right across the river. And they had a little walkway, although we went across the bridge, and they invited us over and they had their own band. Civilian girls could go.
- 19:00 But none of the service girls could go, but we could go over and we used to dance. We were only there for a weekend. It might have been the Friday night we met them and then we had the Saturday and all they wanted to do... the two that we kind of linked up with, all they wanted to do was to see the sheeps, they hadn't seen any sheeps. So we used to go horse riding and there was a riding school there, so we took them out riding out to where the paddocks were. They were only young kids. They were not much older than me.
- 19:30 They were only there for a while and then they went back up and took Guadalcanal. We kept in touch for a while. I've written to the marine corps over there just to find out if he ever went back home, but I never got a reply. Sad really, isn't it? And there's no memorial in Wagga for those boys who were there. I don't know, they might have only been there for 3 or 4 months, because I think we only saw them that once when we were over there.
- 20:00 But they've got memorials all round the park for everybody else. I've written to the Council down there to say "There should be some sort of memorial to say they were there, because they were the 1st Division of the Marine Corps, and they just ignore it".

What were the relations like between the Australians and the Americans?

Well they used to have fights, but I don't think... well the air force and the army used to have fights. There was one stage when the army wasn't allowed in town when the air force was in.

- 20:30 So you know, what's the difference? And as I say the Yanks weren't allowed to come across the river. They were mostly young fellas who had probably been through Boot Camp in American and sent to Guadalcanal, because they were only young. I don't know. If you were with an American and an Australian serviceman saw you, they would give you a sneer. But that didn't worry me anyway.
- 21:00 We were always not on our own. There were always a couple of us. I can remember one night we were in town and we must have been to the Women's Weekly Club for something and we came out... we used to always go to the Trocadero, they would have dances every night and service people could go. And we came out and there was this American standing by the GPO [General Post Office] and he had his eye all bandaged up. One of the girls said, "Look at the poor Yank over there on his own. Why don't we go and ask him to come to the dance?"
- 21:30 So we talked about it and over we go and asked him. We still keep in touch with him, and he says, "I can always remember you asking me to come to a dance." I said, "Well that wasn't me." So we took him to the dance and he had a good time. But the Yanks didn't really... the fellas who jitterbugged were great, but others - all they did was just stand and kind of sway around. He had an injury in his eye and he was down here recuperating. Well we only ever saw him the once
- 22:00 but we've kept in touch and he and his wife have been over here to visit and we've been to visit them. Most of them just wanted company and he was just standing there. The sailors, we met a few of the sailors because they used to be up in the Grand United Hotel. What did they call it, the Stage Door Canteen, which is where the Combined Services is now. They've got a plaque on the wall to say
- 22:30 that. We'd meet them in there and you'd dance with them and they'd go home and we'd go home. I think we ended up meeting two of them the next day and we went to Luna Park. That was a place that everybody went too, Luna Park. They just wanted company and you hear all kinds of stories about them but we didn't have any bother. They're only two that... well Al
- 23:00 Ridge... but just one night at a dance that was. And Richard Pervisky. See a lot of them had foreign names, and he was... I've forgotten where he came from now, he was in the marines. But you've only got to look at the photos. We had a photo taken together and he was only a kid you know. That's all they wanted to see... the sheeps. They had a lot of funny ideas. They didn't know where they
- 23:30 were. They didn't have a clue where they were. Wouldn't have even known where Australia was, and here they were in the middle of it. I didn't have any problems with them. We often met up with them because they could certainly jitterbug. If you went to a dance and jitterbugged, they could teach you anything. But they were the younger ones too.

24:00 Were the girls fond of the Americans?

I don't know. I know a lot of girls who would say they would never go out with an American. I would say, "Well did you ever have the chance?" I don't know. If you went out with an American, it was kind of talked about. If you went out with a lot I think. Well as I say my girlfriend who was with me at Leeton,

she must have known a lot of Americans around Canberra. She got engaged to one, and

- 24:30 then met another one and broke it off with him and ended up marrying the other one and went back to America. But he was no good anyway, she should have stayed with the first one. These things could happen. But she went back to America and had ten children and he was a real drunkard. So how can you tell? I mean in short times how could you tell?

What were some of the bad things that people used to say about Americans?

- 25:00 Well they used to say, "Over here, over sexed and over paid". They were over paid. They got a lot more pay than our fellows. But they were generous. I can remember when Terri and I were at Batlow and we came to Sydney. I don't know why, she lived at Bondi and I didn't stay with her, but we were both broke. And you could walk along the street and see signs in the windows. Now we did this a few times. There was a little milk bar at the end of
- 25:30 Wynyard and we just went in there and said about the sign in the window, "Can we have a job?" He saw we were in uniform and grabbed us because they didn't have to do anything with Man Power. We just put a uniform on and take our tie off and I was reaming pineapple because we had been doing that at Batlow anyway, making orange juice and pineapple juice. I don't know what nationality he was, whether he was Greek or what, but he was very generous, and we got our pay
- 26:00 at the end of the day and off we went. At lunchtime he provided lunch for us and afternoon teatime there was a Sponge Land across from him and he would send us over to buy a sponge each for afternoon tea. And the Yanks used to come in there all the time. We used to make dates with the Yanks there, those who wanted to take you out. And when they wanted a milkshake they always wanted double ice cream. Double ice cream in their milkshakes. But you know they were nice, and we went out with them a few times.
- 26:30 They'd take you out to dinner and that was it. You didn't have time to make a long association with them. So that might have been different but I don't know. I can only talk of how I found them.

So you found that some Australian servicemen didn't like the girls going with the Americans?

Well they used to kind of... no they didn't. "You've been out with the Yanks!" But whether that was a saying, that everybody was saying, "Oh you like the Yanks?" And I'd say, "Yes, I like the Yanks."

- 27:00 So that was it. They used to say that the Yanks had all the girls because they had plenty of money, and if they had money they spent it too. You always went somewhere nice for dinner and if... Now with these boys sometimes we'd make a date and they'd always turn up with a posie which the Aussies never thought of. They'd buy you boxes of chocolates and
- 27:30 things like that you know. It was nice.

Was there a sort of glamour about the Americans?

Oh yes. Their uniforms were nice. Our Aussie uniforms were dreadful. The army ones were worse than the air force ones, and they didn't fit them any better. And they were rough, rough serge. Well some of the air force ones were pretty rough serge too. I had a uniform that was all hairy. But the Yanks had

- 28:00 nice uniforms, and I don't know whether they used to always put their things in to be dry cleaned but they were always pressed up nicely. They looked nice. And it was always "Ma'am," and they helped you into the seat and whatever. They had manners, which we had never been used to anyway. And it was nice now and again to have that.
- 28:30 We had a lot of ... during the Vietnam War we were a host family for the boys. We had a lot of the boys come out here and they're just the same. They're very polite. "Yes Ma'am" and "Sir" to Jack. They would just love to come and have tea and sit around with the girls. Our eldest daughter went out with a couple of them. Our middle daughter at that stage had her own boyfriend. She used to bring them home. She worked at the Taxation Department and they'd ring
- 29:00 up and say, "Can you have a boy tonight or a couple of nights?" And if they could tell them where to meet Kathy at the Taxation Department then she'd bring them home. A few times she said to me, "I don't mind bringing the boys home. They're very nice but I wish they wouldn't talk so loud." Everybody on the train coming home always sat in the same carriage, and everybody used to see her coming home with all these different Americans.
- 29:30 She was the one who never went out with them anyway.

Tell me about some of the friendships you formed with some of the Australian pilots at Narrandera?

Narrandera, yes. Well a few of those I was very fond of and kept friendships with them. Luckily, three in particular that I used to write to and they all came back. But they used to write letters and

- 30:00 they were sad over there. They were treated well. I can remember one of the boys saying they were sent on so many sorties and they'd been sent up to Scotland on a holiday and somebody who owned the big car manufacturers over in England or Scotland had paid for them to stay at this first class hotel.

There they were, they were only sergeant pilots and there they were sitting around in this hotel being treated like Kings.

- 30:30 They were very generous with them. They never told you very much. All they could say was that "They were a bit lonely and what they were going to do and how much they were looking forward to coming back".

What influence do you think they had on you wanting to join the air force?

I think they had a bit, not particularly the boys, but being there and having the Tiger Moths flying over all the time.

- 31:00 You'd think, gee I'd like to have something to do with that. Just the different noises that those aeroplanes made and you'd see them coming over on a sunny day and they'd be jumping through the clouds. I never ever thought that I would be a pilot or anything, but I kind of thought I would like to be working on the aircraft. I think that had a bit to do with it. And my husband, I met him

- 31:30 while he was at Narrandera. I didn't particularly want to be in the air force because he was in the air force because when we went to Batlow he used to come to Batlow anyway. I don't know. When we got our postings, not that you ever got where you wanted with your postings, but they did ask "Where would you like to go?", and he was at Forrest Hill then and I thought I don't think I want to go on the same base, so I put in for Quinty and I was lucky I got Quinty.

- 32:00 That was close enough and we could still kind of see each other and sometimes we'd go over to Forrest Hill and play hockey with the girls. There were a lot of sporting things that you did together. If they had a social night on they'd invite us over, or they would come over to Quinty.

So when were you first in touch with some of the pilots? Was that when you were at Leeton?

Leeton, yes.

And tell me how you would meet, under what circumstances?

- 32:30 Well I don't know exactly. There was a cabaret, a dance hall and we'd go up there. And there was the Hydro Hotel up there which was a very nice hotel. I didn't drink in those days but a lot of the other girls did and they'd say, "We're going to Hyrdo." There's a lot of boys staying up at the Hydro, we're going up to the Hydro for a drink. And you'd be in the lounge and you'd kind of meet them. They'd say "What are you doing tomorrow? Do you want to go for a picnic or whatever?"

- 33:00 Or we might say, "The land army's having a day out, do you want to come with us?" You'd just kind of meet like that, or you might even be in a restaurant and they'd be sitting there and there would be seats and they'd say come and sit there, and that would just be the start of it. It just kind of happened.

Was there a lot of romances?

Yes there were. There were a few.

- 33:30 Two of these at different times I thought were very nice. And we'd write but nothing was kind of said, but you were writing as boyfriend and girlfriend. But it just kind of fizzled out and you would meet someone else. But there were a few romances and some of the girls did end up marrying some of the boys who did serve there. I don't know whether they were

- 34:00 pilots all of them. See there were a lot of ground staff there too. The trainee pilots used to get a lot more attention than the ground staff. These dinner parties we used to go to, they were all only air crew. The local people if they were having boys for dinner, they would only invite the air crew.

Why was that?

I don't know. I think it was a bit of a stigma, you know? I don't know really.

- 34:30 I mean they were air crew. They probably thought they were better educated than the ground staff. I don't know why really or whether it was just that they wanted the pilots. I mean they wouldn't have been pilots there. They were still only trainees, and they were only doing... it was an EFTS, so they were only doing ordinary training because after they left there they went to what they were going to be, fighters or bombers. But then they were only just learning to fly on Tiger Moths. But it just seemed to be a thing.

- 35:00 Even if you went to the church, it always seemed to be... if anyone was invited back to supper afterwards, it would be air crew. And I think perhaps because they're air crew and they know they're going to go away. The ground staff didn't know if they would ever go away. I mean so many ground staff didn't go away.

So it was a sort of pity for the pilots in a way?

Yes.

- 35:30 I think we all knew if they were going to be pilots then they were going to go into it. Into the thick part of it you know, and I think people thought of that a bit more. And they were, generally a better educated

group of fellas. They had to have their leaving in the beginning. In the early days they had to have their leaving to get into it anyway.

- 36:00 So a lot of them were GPS [Greater Public School] boys. Well I used to notice this when I was night flying and they used to chip me about different things. I used to give it all back to them, but they enjoyed it, they would enjoy just having someone to talk to. They used to be a jittery when they were doing their first night flight with only instruments. Not being able to see anything.

How would you sort of help them?

- 36:30 Oh just talk generally. Just talk about general things. They always wanted to know about your family and about their family. Asking if they had any girlfriends and yes and no. You'd find out about that. Just to keep them active I think. They used to ask me about what I had done in the land army. They knew I was in the land army and so they were always interested in that.

- 37:00 They knew that I knew boys from Narrandera. This was when I was at Quinty. Just so long as you could talk to them about anything just to save them having the jitters I think.

Would they confess they were nervous to you?

Well you didn't kind of talk to them one to one, it would have been a group. Probably the last one to go up, he might have been there and he might kind of say,

- 37:30 "I hope I do alright. I'm a bit anxious." They would kind of go that far. You could tell, they all were. They would have a list and come and say, "Who's next?" And, "Can't he go before me?", and something like that. And I'd say, "No, this is how flight's put it down." "Can't you shift it?" And you'd know then they were a bit jittery. And another would say, "No, you're not going to take my place," and they'd kind of go on like this.

- 38:00 So they were all a little bit on tenterhooks. You could understand it. It was their first flight. Even cross countries sometimes they'd be a bit jittery. Because if they hadn't done their...what do you call it? If they hadn't stuck to their maps and knew just where they were going, some of them used to get lost, and

- 38:30 they'd follow the train lines, but it would depend on where they were going. Because where we were at Quinty, The Rock was the next suburb and it had a great big rock and they used that a lot for their... oh what do you call it? I can't think of the name.

Bearings?

Yes, but it's something they learn. Like sailors with their ships. They have to know their... I can't think of the word.

They used that land formation to set their course?

- 39:00 Yes, set their bearings. See they had a pretty strict navigation. If they knew their navigation they could take it by the sun or at night time... well they couldn't, when they were first night flying because they couldn't see the stars. But they had to learn a lot of that. How to navigate by the stars and the sun and wind.

- 39:30 And things like that. So it was a pretty stiff course they had to do. They could be a bit anxious going off at night. The only thing they'd see when they were going off at night time like that, they might pass over a few farm houses, but they'd be looking back for their base where the flares were.

Tape 6

- 00:40 **Sheila, I just wanted to start with talking about the importance of community service within your family. It seemed like there was quite a tradition of serving the country, fighting for the country. Was that strongly instilled into you as children?**

I suppose so. I think when you grow up with something happening like that.

- 01:00 I don't ever remember knowing that my grandfather was in the Sudan War until I went into the land army. Dad, I knew had been in it, and his brothers and my mum's brother. And my mum had always been... or when we were out on the Soldier Settlement, she started up the Bush Nurse and she was the one who started up the Country Women's Association. I think they had a Red Cross out there.

- 01:30 And the guides. And once you had been in the girl guides or the scouts or something you kind of follow on. That's just how it all worked.

Can you tell me about your experiences in the girl guides? What sort of activities was that focused on?

It starts off... well a lot of physical education, a lot of ball games. You just learn the guide's law,

02:00 that you're loyal to everybody. You want to help everybody and be loyal to everybody. You learn first aide, hiking and bush craft. Everything really. What can I say? Camping, we used to go camping quite a lot. Make a camp and cook over fires and put up tents. Oh dear.

02:30 And you do a lot of community work, collecting for the Red Cross or something like that. They usually come to the guides and want to do this. And visiting nursing homes. Just a full community spirit that you get from being in the guides. A guide is loyal. A guide is... Gosh, I can't remember it. A guide obeys her parents and elderly

03:00 people. You know, it's just community spirit. And you learn how to look after yourself. I think it's a bit of general upbringing.

Can I ask you in terms of the community, on the Soldier Settlement, how many were living on the settlement?

Oh dear. I don't think I can answer that because it spread out to a fairly big area, and it was a bit before Erigolia and a bit further up

03:30 to Rankin Springs. No, I'll be guessing. Probably be about 20 or 30. But they weren't very big blocks. It had been a big station before hand and they just chopped the station up and the people who were on the settlement had to kind of fence it and you kind of worked it out. You got a diagram of where you were and just go from there.

04:00 And were they granted the ownership of the land?

No, they weren't actually. I'm not real sure about this either, but I know you had to be in there and you had to have a fence... part of your paddock fenced off anyway within the first 12 months and I think you were given a grant but that had to be paid back. And as you needed things you could borrow money from the bank...

04:30 I think it worked through the bank. I don't think it worked through Veterans' Affairs in those days. When you got your crops in you just paid it back, so you were always in debt really. And I don't know... I don't think it was until after the Second World War that most of the fellows that actually had those grants actually got them paid off. Because it was the beginning of a drought then and things were looking bad. Then the war came, and of course the weather

05:00 was better, they got good crops in and everything they had, the wool and wheat and everything was all in need, so they picked up. And most of the people I would say owned their farms more after the Second World War because it had been pretty hard up until then. There had been good crops but if you had a good crop then you would go out and buy a new truck or something and that put you back into debt again.

05:30 Were there a few families who were in similar positions... who did lose their farms prior to the war? Was that quite common?

It was fairly common. I think in our area there was only... well, the ones that we knew, I think there were only three. They mostly were the ones who kind of helped the others more I think. This is what my dad used to say. You help them and you don't get repaid.

06:00 So you take the responsibility for that.

How did losing the farm affect your father?

Well he was very cross about it, I can remember that. I don't think it affected him that much. He just kind of went on and picked up where he left off on the other property and then he left that.

06:30 When the war came he went back into the army and just kind of carried on from there. And they did have... They had built a business right in the little town because it was only a little tiny town and they were able to sell that. He just kind of carried on from there.

What did he return to do in the army?

He was in ordnance. I think that's what they did to all the older fellas, just gave them easy jobs.

07:00 But as far as he was concerned the army was his baby. They used to buy the supply and buy the food, and he was always chasing up better markets. I think he worked himself into a frazzle with that. He had a nervous breakdown at one stage. He would always go to one place and if they couldn't do it he would go to another place. He was pretty well known for that.

07:30 Something that he had learned probably from the First World War and through being in his own business, that you could always bargain and get something better.

So he was responsible for the supplies for an ordinance factory or...?

Well ordinance... part way through. See, the air force always supplied their own, did all their own buying but I think the army took over the whole lot, so the ordinance then would buy

08:00 for the three services, and they did all the supplying and the buying. It was a pretty big job.

Do you recall whether any of the soldiers on the Soldier Settlement? I guess I'm interested in their response to the outbreak of war?

I think they all thought that this was going to happen and it was never going to happen again. The Great War was supposed to be a war to end all wars.

08:30 And I would imagine, I can imagine they would feel a bit depressed about it. Most of them had sons that were old enough at this time to go again. I don't know if anybody ever said this, but I feel that they did feel this way about it and kind of got together and made sure they had Comfort Funds and everything to kind of support all the boys who were going away.

09:00 Well they would have noticed too if they had sons who were helping them. They were going to be without them. So I think that would have been the feeling.

Do you recall any of the soldiers being pleased or enjoying the opportunity to go back to that lifestyle?

I

09:30 know my father did, but apparently he had been in the militia all the way through and I think to go back in, and at that stage when he was losing what he didn't want to lose, it would have been a relief for him, and he did get a lot of enjoyment out of it. But I know that he worked very hard and he did have a couple of breakdowns and it was because he was going too heavily at it. I think they enjoyed

10:00 being back together with men because they always enjoyed any function that was held in that area. When they got together they all enjoyed being together. And I think that's the thing that kind of stays with them. It's company and similar knowledge. This can only be my impression but I've noticed this in country towns when I was in the land army and it would be Anzac Day coming up

10:30 or something. They'd all get together and they'd talk about things they had done before and their wartime experiences. It was just the togetherness I think that they hang on to.

You could relate to that yourself, could you in the years following your service?

Yes. You could feel... I mean, when peace came and it was exciting and we had won and it was over and we knew everybody was coming home, that you kind of felt...

11:00 I mean I was lucky because I came from a fairly big family, and most of my sisters were getting married off by then and you kind of felt that you were going to miss out on all that company. So this is why different associations were formed, like with the land army, very quickly afterwards, so we could all get together. The same with the Air Force Association and I think you kind of need that companionship. You

11:30 miss it.

When your brother enlisted do you know who he joined? What field he joined?

My brother had come to the city to go to school. One of my father's uncles was an electrical engineer and this is what they thought he would be. But being with 10 girls he could cook as well as any of the girls, so he came to Sydney and he went to Newtown High School at

12:00 the time because that wasn't far from Marrickville where my sisters lived. I think he might have started... I don't think he started his Junior [Certificate] but he was talking about it, and he just decided he didn't want to do that. He happened to be at Marrickville one day and a pastry cook had a sign in the window for a pastry cook, so that's where he went. He was doing that and making bread and doing everything like that,

12:30 and that's when he enlisted in the army and of course having that experience he went in as a cook. He didn't have much say. If you had something going and they wanted you then that's where you went if you wanted to or not. But he enjoyed that, and he was a piper. He used to play the pipes. When he went to camp anywhere, instead of having a bugle he used the pipes. He said "He had a great collection of boots".

13:00 **Did he remain in Australia?**

Yes, he didn't go out of Australia. He went to Darwin and that was as far up north as he went.

Do you recall your mother being concerned about him when he decided to enlist?

I don't think so. I don't think she was. But I think she was very pleased when she knew that he was only going as far as Darwin, because she felt it very badly when her brother was killed during the First World War.

13:30 I think we were all relieved and we thought at least he's not going overseas. We didn't know then that Darwin was going to be bombed either. We kind of felt... he was our big brother and that was it. We thought he was safer there.

Did he ever talk about his experiences in Darwin, the bombing?

A little bit. I only ever saw him a couple of times because I

14:00 didn't get leave when he got leave. And then after the war he got married and he married a Tamworth girl and went to live in Tamworth. So we didn't really have a lot of time to discuss what was what. We used to write letters and he used to write me lots of letters and he wasn't very pleased with a lot of the things. He didn't like them being attacked and he used to talk about the rotten Japs and things. But not a lot really.

14:30 I suppose there's not a lot you can say in letters anyway because it would get chopped about if you said too much.

So were you aware of how much it had been covered up, until after the war, the bombings at Darwin?

Oh yes, well it was covered up quite a lot.

But you weren't able to find that out from your brother until after the war just how bad it had been?

At Batlow, I think I was at Batlow when Darwin was bombed.

15:00 And he was there. I don't remember him saying much about it really. And being a cook, he wouldn't have been in the front line anyway. He was at Adelaide River. So they kind of wouldn't get the same experience as the fellows out at the front line. I mean even though they came in that far and there was the bombing and everything, it wasn't the same. It wouldn't be the same as being in the front line.

And during the war, your mother was a VAD?

15:30 Yes.

Do you know much about where she was serving?

Well I know she was in Sydney a lot and used to go around the various hospitals. There was a hospital out at Kensington I think. I didn't know a lot about the city in those days, but there was a hospital there and it was before Concord [Hospital] was built and I think they had a lot of fellows out there who had lost limbs. I can remember her talking about boys who had been out there

16:00 and helping dressing them who had lost limbs. And then she later on went to the convalescent hospitals, and there was one at Orange and one at... these were two big ones, and there was one at Scone. They were big old country homes. Dunkerylee [?]. Do you know Dunkerylee [?]?... I think it's a big golf course now and a big golf club. A stately home. And they took over those.

16:30 I know she was at both of those places and if she was in Sydney then they would go around to the hospitals in Sydney. But they used to do dressings when the nurses were busy, they would do dressings. And they would sit and talk to the boys and perhaps write letters for them and anything else that they needed.

She did well to be doing that job on top of mothering for 12. It's amazing.

17:00 **I want to ask you about your reaction to Japan entering the war. You must have been enlisted then but hadn't gone to Leeton, is that right? Early December 1941.**

I can't remember thinking anything about when Japan came into the war. I think the first thing that I remember about it was when the little subs came into the Harbour. But that would have been much later. Although I knew that boys were going up...

17:30 There was one particular division that a friend of ours was in and he'd been over in the Middle East and came back and he had been sent up somewhere. And I knew a lot of the boys who had been in the 30th Battalion changed over and it was called the 2/30th Battalion. I knew they had been sent to Singapore and that was before the Japs had taken Singapore. Not many of them survived. They were the ones who

18:00 went to the... you know where the two island meet, that's where they met the full force of the Japanese down there. And not very many of them survived. That was a very sad time particularly because we used to... Millers Point was where the 30th Battalion used to have all their functions and they used to have a lot of highland dancing and things like that. Even as kids if dad came down for a special time, we'd come with him and you'd meet a

18:30 lot of the young people then. I mean they were a lot younger than me, but we got to know them, and to know that when the war started they were the ones who were sent up to Singapore. Singapore was supposed to be the place where nobody would go past, but it didn't happen that way.

Do you recall how people responded to Singapore falling? Was there any sense of panic at that time?

Yes, a lot. I don't know about panic,

19:00 but there was a sense of a deep loss when it happened. And it wasn't only the ones on Singapore but it was the ships and everything that had gone up there and trying to bring all the nurses back again, and the dreadful things that happened with the fall of Singapore. I just thought it was dreadful. I think that's when everybody started to hate the Japs. I mean nobody knew what they were going to do. I mean Pearl Harbour was bad enough

19:30 but when they started doing this to our people we realised just how bad they were. And it was pretty horrific.

Did it make you question your faith in the British Empire?

Well they blamed the British for all of that. I don't think that sank into us. Probably the older people it did. I mean we were still British as far as I was concerned.

20:00 The Queen now was at the same age as me and I had always kind of linked myself up. She was in the guides and I kind of always linked myself up with the Queen. I always had a great respect for her, and I suppose for the whole Royal Family. But we were always brought up to respect the Royal Family and everything that went with the Commonwealth. As far as we were concerned our Commonwealth was the world you know. And today the USA's

20:30 the world. I don't think we ever kind of said it that way but we were British and that was it.

Did you have a personal feeling about Australia's focus onto America? Around that time John Curtin, the Prime Minister coming out and emphasising the need for that relationship with the Americans and I guess moving away from the British for the time being. Did you have a personal ...?

I think our reaction was we needed somebody.

21:00 So many of our people had gone over to Great Britain and they were over there spending all their time over there and now we were in danger. I just can remember thinking, thank goodness for the Yanks, you know? They were coming when we needed them. But I don't think I went into the political part of it. That was above me.

I just want to move to Leeton now.

21:30 **Can you describe the cannery for me? What the set up was there?**

It was a very big cannery. They mostly did the tinned fruit. The pears, and apricots and peaches were their speciality. And the fruit was always beautiful because it was picked when it should have been picked. I don't know whether you know now but the fruit you get in the cans now, it's half green, even when it's been canned. It was a very big cannery

22:00 and it might have been during the war when it went into meat and vegetables and pickles and things. But really it was just a cannery for the stone fruit before that. I mean we knew of it before that. It had been there for a long time and we knew all the beautiful stone fruit came from there. But just thinking back it probably was just this meat and vegetables and pickles and things they were

22:30 canning to send up north anyway. But it was a big affair.

Do you know whether it was expanded to cope with the demand, the actual machinery?

I think it must have been because they would have needed something different wouldn't they, to do the pickles and...I don't know if it was just pickles. All I can remember was lots of onions. We had to peel the onions and there were great crates of onions.

23:00 But when I think back I think that would have been for those meat and vegetable things. Meat, stewed meat that they canned to send overseas. And it would have had to be expanded because they were still doing all their stone fruits.

So in the cannery what were the different jobs that the girls could do?

Well

23:30 if you were in the stone fruit there would have been grading. You had to grade the fruit because different fruit went into different sections. Some that were not quite ripe or some that were over ripe would be put aside. I don't know if I ever worked in the cannery part. I can only remember this part where we had miles and miles of onions. I know when we first went up there they took

24:00 us through the cannery to show us what was being done there. And I remember seeing all the big trails of cans and big boilers where they boiled them and whatever they did to them. Pressurise them, but I didn't take that much interest really. And all the labels because the tins had to be labelled. Different labels for different tins. I think at that stage they were only doing Letona Fruits.

24:30 But later on they started doing them for other packing houses and they would have different labels for different lots of fruit. Whether the fruit came from different places or not, I'm not sure about that, but

that could have been. It wasn't until we really went to work there that we saw this other part of it. I don't recall when we went through there but it could have been... They would have started on them I suppose as soon as they were needed.

25:00 **Could you similarly describe for me the food dehydration plant?**

I didn't work there either but I used to go in there and they had huge big trays. The potatoes were sliced and I don't know if the girls sliced them or not. But they had these huge big trays and it was always steaming and wet and hot, and they were working in gum boots. There was water all around the floors.

25:30 Once they were put on the trays they went into the dehydration plants and came out dehydrated and then they were put into cans I think. I'm not sure whether they were canned or not. I didn't work in that part because I think that was a part that was started up... I think that was only started up at the beginning of the war. The part that I did work in was a separate part. See they made apple cider there too because the main part of it was a packing house for pears.

26:00 Well this was another building they kind of put on the end of it and that's why Doctor Steebles was there. He was the Science doctor and they had all the rigmarole they had to do for all this dehydrating and different things. I worked in the packing shed for a while. We were packing the fruit. Sometimes you would be on the grader and sometimes you'd be down packing. And then other times I went in and they were doing orange juice.

26:30 And they had great big reams and we'd ream all these oranges and that juice had to go into cans. And there were little tablets we put in them. We never knew what they were but each tin had to have so many and then they were sealed and they were sent up north. So I don't know whether the tablet was a preservative or something they needed to send up to the men for their malaria or what. But I didn't work in the dehydration

27:00 plant. A lot of our girls did work there and they worked there full time. They never went into the orchards which was a shame because they were inside and it was shift work. It was kept going 24 hours a day, so one shift would go on and another shift would go off. Whereas in the packing house you finished at half past five, and then it was finished until the next day. And the orange juice too. But the dehydration plant just kept going all the time.

27:30 **The cannery and the packing plant, was that privately owned or was that owned by the government, do you know?**

The Batlow Packing Co-op was the name of it, so I would say it was a co-op amongst all the farmers. I think that's how it was. I remember being out there one day and a couple of big army generals came with Americans.

28:00 So they brought the Americans down to have a look all over to see what was being done. I don't know if they were interested mainly in the dehydration or the orange juice or what, but it wasn't so much the packing sheds, although they would have got plenty of apples. I know when we were picking apples, when we were picking oranges, if they were to be exported, you didn't pick them, you had to cut them. You had to cut and leave a little bit of the pip behind. And that was to make them last longer.

28:30 So there were a lot of different things like that you had to learn, or you'd be told what we're picking today is for export and we knew how to pick them. The dehydration plant was kind of built as a separate... it wasn't joined onto the packing house. It was just across the road.

I think it was quite a new technology development

29:00 **I think, the dehydration of food.**

Yes, I don't know whether the Americans knew about it and they started it off or what. I know Dr Steebles was there and he was the one who did all the running of the dehydration. And there was something else we were canning. I can't remember what it was and whether it was to do with that. But it was all scientific.

When you say he was running it, was he in charge of the girls?

He was in charge, yes.

29:30 Well, he was in charge of how it was worked, how it was done. I don't think he was actually in charge of the girls because they had floor walkers or whatever going around telling the girls what to do and when to start and when to finish what they were doing. But he was the one... I'd say it was his baby. He was always there.

30:00 **Do you know what his background was?**

No, I don't really. I know... All that we knew was that he was a very clever scientist, so it must have been something to do with food processing.

You mentioned earlier that some of the girls treated him quite badly. Can you give us a bit more detail about that?

Well, if he told them to do something and they didn't think it needed doing,

30:30 they'd say to him, "We don't have to take notice of you, you're a Hun or a German," or something, you know? That didn't happen very often. But it happened with some of the girls who might have had boyfriends over there. There were a few times that it did happen I know. We all knew about it. We kind of agreed with them but we didn't go as far as doing the same thing.

31:00 But it would mainly be the girls who were working under him. You know, you don't have to tell me what to do. So it was more or less like that. But he was highly respected in the area. He and his wife were both beautiful singers and they were both musicians and they were popular at any functions. But I know some of the girls wouldn't go to some of the functions if he was going to be there. It just depended on how

31:30 they felt themselves. But it mostly would have been people who had somebody over there.

I'm also interested in the way that people you knew reacted to the Italian wine growers.

I don't think I can say anything about that at Leeton. Well my father was quite happy with the Italians and the Italians were greatly accepted

32:00 at Leeton before the war. I don't know whether any of them were interned or not because there were a lot of Italians interned. I don't know if they were or not. I didn't kind of follow up on that. But I know there would be people that would say the same thing. People who just wanted to have a gripe about something. With all the POW's who were over here as well... See there were a lot of Italians POW's over here.

32:30 Well they were working at Yanco when we were working, and we were told that we weren't to mix with the Italians. You'd hear them all out in the paddocks singing. They all had beautiful voices. And they all had maroon suits, so you always knew when they were Italian because they had these maroon suits. We didn't have any trouble with them. But there were lots of other places where the girls were and they were working with them. They weren't supposed to be but they were.

33:00 There was a bit of romance there too you know. When people are lonely and they're stuck together I suppose right out in the Never Never. We used to often come across them and they were always polite to us and we didn't think anything of it.

You would come across them working in the fields?

No, no. We might be leaving or they'd be going or something like that. You'd pass them.

33:30 No, we were just told that "We weren't to... no fraternising". I don't think we were ever told "We had to ignore them or anything". But you didn't go out of your way to fraternise with them.

And yet even in that climate some romance developed you feel?

Yes. Oh yes. There would always be someone who would kind of fall for someone. And it was funny because when the war ended they were

34:00 all supposed to go back. Some of them married country girls because their families used to take them in. I think I've seen on TV where a lot of them kind of hid, but they were found out in the end and they had to go back, but they came back again. I mean there were a lot of them here. But I didn't know until just recently that there were Italians in the POW camp at...

34:30 not Cookwell, Cowra. I thought they were all Japanese. I've been out to Cowra recently and there's a very, very good show in one of the places there, and it shows there was Turks, Italians and Japanese all in the same camp. But it was only the Japanese who tried to break out.

Which was the camp that was closest to you in Leeton

35:00 **where the Italian POW's were being kept?**

There was an experimental farm at Yanco and there were a lot of them working there. They weren't working on any of the individual farms. We were working at Marchant's, the railway line ran through to Hay. His property was here and the experimental farm was on the next property. We could see them over there and hear them singing and hear them talking. That was about as close as I got to them there.

35:30 It wasn't that far really.

Do you know what sort of techniques they were experimenting with at all? What made it an experimental farm?

Well it was experimental on growing things, plants, different plants and...

36:00 No, the experimental farm was experimenting with different crops of wheat and rice. Because that was a rice area out there. And probably sheep. I'd say it was just experimenting with... And they also had to grow vegetables. They had to grow lots of vegetables the same as we were. So they had big plots of vegetables that they would be growing to be canned. See spinach...

- 36:30 they canned a lot of spinach. So they were put to work and they liked working. A lot of them were farm people anyway. But that was the closest camp to where I was. I know when they had the outbreak at Cowra there were a lot of the girls at Gooloogong, and some were at Cowra. And even where we were at Wagga,
- 37:00 they didn't know how far the Japs had gone and we never ever had rifle drill until the outbreak at Cowra, and then of course we had to have rifle drill, but we didn't have a rifle range. In the RAAF we had a bombing and gunnery range but no rifle range, so we had to go to Kapooka, the army base and learn to use the 303s. It was only the technical girls I think because we were around the hangars. We didn't enjoy that very much.
- 37:30 Our flight sergeants said that "We shouldn't have been sent to the army because they didn't teach us properly, because we all got bruised shoulders". We didn't tell him but we used to get modest pads and pack them on our shoulders. We were doing this and he said, "What are you doing that for?" and we said, "We've been getting sore shoulders." And he said, "So and so army characters, why should they be teaching our girls? We should be teaching them."
- 38:00 But that only went on until they captured the fellows and we didn't have to do anymore. But it kind of ricocheted everywhere. I know with the land army girls they had to stay in closed camp. Nobody was allowed to go out on their own. It was like that until they knew where everybody was. The story was that the Japs didn't know where they were. They just thought there was a hill and if they got over that hill then they were back to the ocean, not realising that they still had
- 38:30 a few hundred miles to go. That wasn't very nice. We were a bit upset there because the young soldiers that were killed, they buried them there and then they put the Japanese further over. We thought they should have been put further out than that. It's now been made into a National Japanese Cemetery, which we thought was a bit strange too. They could have put them somewhere else we thought.

Tape 7

- 00:32 **Sheila, I'd like to talk about the matrons and exactly how they fitted in with the land army. Was that a rank?**
- Well it was a rank because there was the field officer who was the top one. There was field officer 1, field officer 2, and field officer 3, but we were given that name. I was a field officer 3 when I went to be on the staff.
- 01:00 But we didn't get any... we got stripes like sergeant's stripes. But nobody took much notice of it. It still meant you were in the cookhouse and looking after the girls. If the girls wanted to complain about anything then they came to us. Doris Macarthur was our Field Officer. Well she was a Field Officer 1 because the head field officer was right in town in Batlow.
- 01:30 They didn't have any of those ranks while we were in the WANS. It was just matrons and sub matrons. So it wasn't until the government took over and this is how it worked out. So probably the government was paying us because you couldn't expect the farmer to pay us. I don't know how that worked out. I don't know how it worked out when it was WANS because if the farmers were putting in a certain amount, these people still had to be paid. I don't know how that worked out.
- 02:00 But I know once the government took over we had this ranking: officer, field officer. But that's all we had to do. We had to make sure the girls... We'd inspect the huts to make sure they were keeping their huts tidy and making sure they were in bed at a certain time, what they were doing, and as well we had to do the meals. We had to have the stuff all prepared for them to cut their lunches in the morning.
- 02:30 And we had to chop the wood for the stove. That's all that it was really.
- So before you were on the staff, girls generally were just one mass, there wasn't any ratings?**
- No, no. When we were at Leeton and we kind of first started off and you were put in charge of a patrol, you were kind of called the patrol leader for that day and you took them out. But
- 03:00 there was no ranking. You didn't have to tell them what to do or anything. You just kind of went and made sure they were in your group and if they were on a bus, you would make sure they all got off and the bus was at a certain place where they were. You looked after the lunch. But no, there was nobody who had any more say over anyone.
- What sort of circumstances would lead to you being put onto the staff?**
- I think
- 03:30 only because I had been in so long, and they wanted more staff because they were opening a new camp, and they just looked around and picked out a few who had been there the longest. I had been in that one place for a long while and they might have got the idea that I was a bit sick of it because it was very hard work. Well it was very hard work that last time when we had to clear that paddock. The big tree

stumps and rocks and everything that we had to clear out,

04:00 and plough and plant the potatoes. I guess I probably had a whinge. I don't remember, but they would have known anyway and they needed new people for the new camp, so they just picked out the ones who had been there the longest.

Did that involve a pay rise at all?

Oh dear, I don't remember. I think it might have. I don't know. I think we would have been paid by the government by then.

04:30 I never ever figured out where the pay came from. So long as I got it, that was all I cared. We could if we liked, we could go anywhere we wanted and come home anytime we wanted, so we had that above the other girls. That was the only thing with it. You didn't have anyone to control you, although Doris was supposed to be controlling us. But she didn't.

05:00 She didn't have much control over us anyway. I was the same age as her. But she had been through the... you know I told you they had been through the place up at Richmond, the Agriculture College. A number of girls went through this Agriculture College under a dietician and they were taught cooking and how to give the girls healthy food. So Doris had that much

05:30 over us. So possibly she would have got more pay and I don't remember whether we did or not. Nancy and I, because Nancy and I came straight from the land to that. No, I can't recall. But she would tell us what they were having for a meal that night and we were the ones who had to do the preparing. Which was a bit haphazard. But the girls enjoyed it. They ate it anyway.

You said you could come and go as you pleased,

06:00 **was that... Could you take a day or two here or there? Or would you have to apply for leave?**

Oh no. No. I mean there were no hours that we had to be in at night you know. At that time I had a friend who had just come out of the air force. He had been in a crash and he'd been sent to Batlow. He was an engineer... you know, they have the flying engineers in the aircraft and he was sent to Batlow to work

06:30 in the packing sheds as mechanic more or less. His family lived at Mount Adrah which wasn't far, it was out near Wagga. So he was sent to somewhere close to home. If I wanted to go out with him, I could go out with him and come home whenever I wanted to. He had a car and the girls used to say, "Are you going out tonight?", and if they went with me that was ok, they could go with me.

07:00 Sometimes we'd go down to Tumut and go to a dance or something like that because there wouldn't be anything in Batlow. So that was one thing that you had and you could do. Doris used to say, "You were in a bit late last night but you're up early this morning". So she couldn't do anything about that. I suppose if we were really outlandish she could have, but she didn't complain.

Did you enjoy that increase in responsibility?

07:30 I did and I didn't. Because the girls that I had known before they would kind of mix with me, but the new girls that came and the girls in this camp, they kind of looked up to me because they didn't know me before and as far as they were concerned I was one of the officers there. You know, sometimes they'd talk to you and sometimes they wouldn't. Not that they... they didn't want to talk to me when they could talk

08:00 to someone else. And sometimes it could be a bit lonely, although it wasn't because Nancy and I were there together. But you kind of missed the companionship of a lot of girls because you had to kind of just stick to the ones you were with and the ones you had known for a long time that were there. So that was another one of the deciding factors because I did go and ask "If I could go back on the land?", and they said "No".

08:30 So I decided I wanted to go back to Leeton. I had always asked "If I could go back?", because I liked Leeton. But they always said, "No, you're wanted here." But at this stage they gave me a posting back to Leeton.

09:00 **We were talking about your increased responsibility as a Field Officer, 3rd Grade.**

That's when I... I really wasn't keen. I had asked to go back on the land and they said "I couldn't, but they would give me a posting back to Leeton". And that's what I was supposed to do the time... I was turning 18, and I was on my way back to Leeton and the girls who were on the train with me

09:30 when we got to Cootamundra said, "Don't go back, come to Sydney with us," so I did. And that was when I left the land army.

Can I ask, during that short time when you did have that increased responsibility, did it also involve a caring aspect of looking after the girls if they had any emotional problems or had lost a boyfriend or husband?

Yes, it did really. But we didn't have any special training for that. You just had to use

10:00 your common sense and mostly if anything like that happened you weren't... there were other girls there also, so it was kind of everybody was in together. But it did, and it even made a difference in the town. You had been there all that time and they knew we were a field officer and they treated you a bit differently.

How would they treat you differently?

10:30 **How would that manifest itself?**

When there were certain functions on and girls were going... see there were a lot of camps, a lot of camps around Batlow at that time, and there would be girls coming in from different camps. There would be house parties and they'd mostly ask us too, but a lot of girls used to say, "Do the staff have to come? Can't it just be the girls?" And of course, the people who were doing it, would just do what ever the girls wished.

11:00 I don't know. The girls who didn't know us from other camps would think, we don't want you around. We want to have a good time. I don't know what they were going to do because there were no men there. It was all just girls. They just kind of felt they didn't want the discipline there I think. But it did make a bit of a difference.

11:30 **And in terms of the girls who lost brothers or fathers or husbands, was there compassionate leave extended to them?**

Yes. They could go home if they wanted too. There was a local doctor used to come up from Tumut, and if they wanted to talk to somebody better than us, that could be arranged. And the ministers in the district were very good.

12:00 Old H.V. Smith... there were two or three fellas there who were First World War Diggers, and they were like... we called them "Land Army Fathers". They were fantastic, and they were always there to be called upon. You know, if we needed someone, a fatherly figure to talk to the girls. They were all very helpful. And we had a Bush Nurse there, and she was always helpful. But quite often if this did happen and they had a family,

12:30 they went home. So you just left it to them.

I wanted to ask you about the way the farmer's wives responded to you. The way you were treated by them.

Mostly, it might have been because I was younger, I don't know. I never had any problem and most of the girls didn't have any problem. I've heard girls say that they

13:00 did have problems. That their farmer's wives were jealous, and some farmers would have the girls to come out there and they'd have the girls in there doing housework. So they just had to report back to headquarters that they were doing housework and they'd be shifted. They weren't there for that. And that sometimes didn't make the farmer's wives too happy. I don't know, if you happened to be working on a farm and the farmer's

13:30 wife was having a baby, you'd go and help anyway. Nobody knew about it and so long as you were happy about it, and the farmer was happy that you were doing what she wanted. I didn't have any problems with that so I can't say, but I know I have heard that some of the wives were a bit jealous because the girls were with the farmers all the time. That might have been with older girls, I don't know.

14:00 **And in terms of the activities that you were meant to be doing, was that laid out in the original legislation? How did you get a view of what you were supposed to be doing and what you weren't supposed to be doing?**

Well we knew that we weren't to do housework. I don't think there was anything really laid down specifically

14:30 because you went out there and the farmer more or less laid down what he wanted us to do. If he wanted us to do something around the house, which he thought we shouldn't do, we'd tell him, "Well we're not here to do this. Have you got any farm work?" And then again if you were working on a place and something happened at a farm house, they had a water breakdown or something, he might say "Can you come and help me do this?", well you did that.

15:00 But mostly we were there to be out on the farms. And the main thing was... the big thing was vegetable growing. I mean we helped with all the seasonal things. You see, plenty of the girls were out on stations where they were out looking after sheep and cattle and that's all they did. They didn't see any vegetables. So there were all different callings. But they mostly knew what they were to do.

15:30 And now and again you'd get a farmer who would probably try and pull something in but it was up to yourself if you wanted to do it, and if you didn't want to do it, you just let them know.

How open do you feel that system was to exploitation by the farmers? Did you feel that any of them were taking advantage of the situation?

No, I didn't think so... any that I worked for. Some wanted you to work a bit longer and a bit harder.

16:00 But it had to be done, so you did it if you could do it. As I said before we found Mr Bushell was a bit hard but I think he used to kind of start earlier and knock off later, and be on our backs all the time. We were mostly picking and packing there. He had his own little packing shed. Other girls went there after me and they were quite satisfied.

16:30 But I was just glad to go to Mr Cronby's.

I'm also interested in the prevalence of the farmers or farm hands where the girls went to work who harassed the girls. Was there much talk of that or was there anything in place to deal with such problems?

No, sometimes you'd get a farmer who would come down and crack

17:00 jokes and he might put over a couple of dirty jokes and something, and you'd tell him you weren't interested. And that would be enough. When I worked at Cronby's, Eric Cronby was about the same age as me, the son, and we worked well together. And he used to laugh and joke and sometimes he would put his arm around you and give you a peck but I would treat that as a bit of a joke. He was a bit of a joker as a matter of fact.

17:30 And he knew that. He was just good hearted and we worked well together. His father often worked with us. I didn't have any problems anywhere like that. I think there was one of the places I worked at Leeton there was one of the sons who was about the same age as me, well where I had my birthday too. I can't remember his name now, but he was always very good

18:00 with the girls and there was never ever any trouble or anything with him.

Were there any reporting systems or anything in place for that to occur? Was that something when you joined up you were warned about at all?

I don't remember. I don't remember being warned about it. I think we used to have talks. When we were at Leeton we had this big hall and we'd often

18:30 get together and the matron would ask us "Whether there was anything we wanted to report that we didn't think that we should be doing, the hours and what was going on?" So we could talk openly about what was happening. I don't think there were any reports. If there were she would deal with them. There might be just minor things, so she could deal with those. There was no problem. But

19:00 that was very good because we did have those chances to talk up and discuss what we were doing and what was going on.

Did many of the girls I guess regret their decisions to join up? Did any of them find themselves out there doing... having more of the romantic idea of what they might be doing?

I can tell you different things. I can remember Jean Scott saying... She was an only child, going out there and she could imagine herself dancing through the apple orchards picking

19:30 apples, and she got a shock when she got there and found out how hard the work was. Because if you were picking, you had to cart a ladder around and the ladder's very pretty heavy and they were like this and you had to cart them around and get them in the right spot. If you didn't get them in the right spot and you got half way up it would fall. But I think they all settled down. They all realised once they got there, it was what had to be done, and they soon learned. See the farmers were good. They

20:00 knew what they needed doing and if they explained to you what had to be done and how it had to be done and stayed with you, which most of them would. I mean that's what they were there for anyway. It just went along. I think there might have been a few girls... quite a few of them would be homesick, and you kind of all had to get together to stop them from being homesick. But I think you know, on the whole they all stuck it out

20:30 pretty well. There weren't too many who went back. You see there would always be boyfriends coming back from overseas and they'd want leave immediately. That sometimes caused a problem because we didn't have very many trains coming in. Leeton didn't either. I think they only got two trains a week, and Batlow had one, one coming in and one coming out. And I know another lass...Val and I were the two first

21:00 girls to get paid leave and that didn't come through until a Saturday night and the train had gone on the Saturday morning. And all the girls said, "Oh gee, you're going to miss out on..." I forget when the next train was coming... "You're going to miss out on some of your leave," because it had to be taken then. So they all got together and got this fellow, Aussie Butts with his taxi and took us over to Wagga. So we caught the train at midnight on Sunday in Wagga, so we didn't miss out on any of our leave.

21:30 That would happen. Everybody would be there for you. But why that would have happened we don't know. The news came through on Saturday afternoon. I think telegrams used to come in those days and it would depend on the telegram boy delivering them. The train had gone Saturday at lunch time. The train went and we got this message in the afternoon. But we soon got over that.

Do you recall any of the girls deserting?

22:00 **Taking off, disappearing?**

I don't recall it but I think there were times when some of the girls did. They just thought they had had enough or they had a boyfriend somewhere else. See they could have been at another place where they had got in with the family and had a boyfriend and then they had been sent to go somewhere else. I think there were times that that did happen, but I didn't know about that.

22:30 I only heard about it.

How difficult was it to quit the land army? Instead of deserting, was it quite straight forward to be removed?

I don't think it was difficult. I mean they tried to talk you into not leaving. They did their best to try and talk you out of it, and if you were with a farmer they'd try and get him to talk you out of it. I mean they tried to talk me not into leaving at that stage. But they couldn't do anything about it.

23:00 But if you did leave you either had to go into another service or into Man Power. You were still under Man Power. That's how we used to get away with it if we were in town. If we were a bit broke and we saw a coffee lounge or something, we'd go in and spend a day in the coffee lounge making sandwiches, toasted ham sandwiches were popular in those days. We'd get our money and off we'd go at night. They were glad to see us because they didn't have to do anything with Man Power.

23:30 And we just got out money. I can't remember what we got but it was money. That's all we wanted. I don't know if there were many people who did that. There were three of us who used to do it occasionally. Well at that stage there was no base in Sydney and my friend then came from Perth, so she had no chance of getting home to Perth. So we worked it out alright.

What sort of arguments did they put forward to you when they were trying to convince you not to leave?

24:00 It was always, "The boys are overseas and they're not complaining. You're back home, at least you're back home, you shouldn't be complaining. We've got to feed the boys overseas, and we've got to feed the people on the islands surrounding and overseas". And this was the whole thing, we were necessary. "And you're letting everybody down if you leave". So that was spiel I got and I think that was the spiel everybody got you know.

24:30 "Don't go. If you feel you should be doing something else..." I don't know. But once you had worked and you knew all the routine then they wanted you to stay because you had to train somebody else anyway. But there was no way that they could say that you couldn't go.

Do you think that guilt about doing your bit for the boys being overseas

25:00 **was a really key factor amongst the girls?**

Oh yes, yes. Because sometimes it would be bad weather and we'd have cold showers for days on end, and the food wasn't the best and we were kind of all sick of it, and we'd all get together. Mari Smith was fantastic. She was one of our matrons and she'd come in and kind of talk straight to you. "What's the matter with you crowd? What do you think? Do you want to be over in Japan or

25:30 up in the islands? They're all up there. They've got no complaints. They've got nobody to listen to them. It's time you all pulled your socks up and got out there." She just talked straight, and that was enough. And we'd think oh well. Because she was great, Mari. She'd take us out on walks and sleep out over night through the mountains. She'd been a bush walker before she went in, so she knew everything. And she was a good one to talk to

26:00 the girls and preach to them what to do. So it always worked.

When your morale was quite low what could you do to lift your spirits? Was there someone or something you could do to lift your spirits?

Well I don't know. Only with your friends who were around you. You know, you always knew if someone was having a weep. You'd find out

26:30 if they had had a letter they didn't like or something. I don't think there was ever anybody who couldn't go to someone or it was noticed and somebody would go to her. No, it was pretty good. It was like a family really. Most people knew all about each other's families. When you were in a closed camp anyway, you knew all about each other's families and what was going on. Silly things that we use to do.

27:00 I used to henna my hair because I had dark hair and I wanted red hair. And henna hair in those days was done with a henna powder. It was a beautiful colour. And a few of the other girls said to me, one of the girls at Leeton used to do it and I used to envy her so when I got to Batlow I did mine and a few other girls wanted to do it. One of the girls was almost blond and she wanted to do, it right or wrong. And we said, "No, your hair colour will come out orange." So it was done right or wrong and we did it, and it did

27:30 look terrible and then she got a telegram to say her boyfriend was coming home. So we went down... we had to go down with her. We were allowed to go down with her to be at the wedding, and here she was

with this dreadful curly orange hair. Funny things like that happened. You couldn't do much about stripping it out or we couldn't anyway. So you just put up with it.

Was henna quite a luxury at that point? Is that something you got through coupons?

No.

28:00 It was henna powder and we used to just get it from the chemist and mix it up with hot water, it had a lovely smell like a gingery kind of smell. The chemist told us that "If we put pennies in with it, we would get a richer colour". So we would have this big pot of henna with hot water and stir all the pennies through it. Then we'd put it on. You'd put it on and leave it on and have towel wrapped around your head and sit there in misery. So it's no different to what the kids do

28:30 with their spiky hairs and all the dyes and everything... except this was natural and it was very good for your hair. This is why the chemist used to sell it to us. It was good for your hair. I can't remember whether it was expensive or not, or whether he might have even given it to us, because the chemist in Batlow was very good. His name was Bell Chambers and somebody christened him Tinker Bell. He was good.

I imagine things like

29:00 **make up and beauty products must have been very spartan at the point. Would they occasionally come in or be sent to the girls, or would the girls pick them up from the chemist, and would it be a bit of a pick me up?**

Mostly, we used to use Ponds Cream because Zinc was too... I don't know, but we always put plenty of cream on our face. Or we did anyway, the group I was with. We always put plenty of cream on our face to go out

29:30 into the sun. I think the only thing I ever bought was lipstick. We probably used to wait until we got to Sydney to get the lipstick. It was always Paul Duvall. There were about four of us and we always used Paul Duvall. It's not even heard of anymore but it was a nice lipstick. And we used to get Mitchen Lavender perfume, just little tiny bottles. I never used anything else.

30:00 Some of the girls when they came they brought all their eye shadows and stuff like that, but that wasn't used very often. When you went to work in the morning you'd put on your cream and probably a bit of lipstick or just plaster more on your face... in the summertime anyway.

Were things like dances and opportunities to get dressed up and be beautiful I guess...? Were they particularly important

30:30 **given the lack of lady-like opportunities?**

We used to have lots of dances and I think they used to have a three piece band, a pianist, a trumpet or something and... not a guitar but something else. Mostly three piece. The music was very good and every now and again there would be a band come up from Tumut or Gundagai if they were having a big thing for a Comforts Fund thing.

31:00 Because people would come from miles around to go to the dances. But we only had uniforms to dress up in, so after you had been there for a few years... you didn't take any of your good clothes anyway. We used to just dress up in our uniforms. Now and again somebody would get a dress from somewhere. One of the girls who used to teach dancing, she had the ways of making things and she'd get bits of material and make things up.

31:30 When we put on concerts she used to do all of our dancing and we'd practice night after night if we were doing hula dances or tap dancing or singsongs and that. We used to put on quite a few concerts. Everybody would come, and it was good fun.

You've mentioned that the atmosphere was quite conducive to romance

32:00 **in terms of the war time atmosphere, the spontaneity of people getting together.**

Well I can name three or four girls that I knew very well who had just started writing to fellas. There would be one fella up there saying, "I've got a mate, have you got somebody who can write to him?" And three and four ended up marrying the same boys who they had been writing to like that. And they

32:30 kind of... lots of us would write. There would be half a dozen of us and we'd say "Well we'll write... how many are you writing to? I'll do two, I'll do three." And it was just letters. Just so they got letters, and I think with a lot of these they kind of build up, and the girls would get a little bit more friendly and talk about families and things like that, and what are you going to do after the war? I know at least

33:00 four who married just through writing letters. When they came home, they got together. So it did happen.

How difficult were those long distance relationships? Was it difficult for the girls to...?

Well you were always waiting for the replies. And sometimes, two of us would write to the same fella

- 33:30 and you'd get a letter and the other one wouldn't get a letter and we'd kind of discuss them or we'd read the letters. I don't know, but romances did flourish. It's funny, I was thinking about this the other night of one particular friend, she was a real mousy little girl, and she started writing to this fellow and they had a really big romance and I thought what's going to happen when they meet? We didn't know what he looked like
- 34:00 but when we met him, he was her type anyway. They married and had three children and they've both just passed away in the last year or so. So you just can't tell. But Sadie would get a letter... "Oh I've got a letter from Brian! I have to read my letter from Brian." That's just how it went on and it just started from nothing. So you just couldn't tell.
- 34:30 **Were the girls concerned about infidelities of the men overseas? Is that something that was discussed amongst the girls?**
- I don't think so. Well it would only be the air force fellows who were in England anyway. Anyone up in the islands, there was no chance of that anyway. I don't know. I think there might have been break-ups that could have happened.
- 35:00 People who were overseas and in that position. I think I did know of a couple who just broke up because they had met someone else over there. I suppose you could consider that the same as when the Americans were here. Look how many Australian girls they married and took back. That was the same thing and these could have been girls who had boyfriends up in the islands or anywhere, you wouldn't know.
- 35:30 A change of heart could happen so quickly. That was it.
- That was just part of the atmosphere of the day, was it?**
- Yes. You just kept on writing and hoping. If it happened you thought, oh well. If you were young enough... You see a lot of the girls, the older girls, could have even been engaged to boys when they went away.
- 36:00 So that was sad when they broke up an engagement. You know that was different to just a relationship. I know that that did happen and a lot of other girls who had boys who were away that they were engaged to and that got killed, and some they weren't even engaged to that didn't come back. This is why there's such a lot of single women in that age bracket.
- 36:30 There were so many men who just didn't come back, and the ones who were really true, they just didn't bother with anybody else. And we've quite a few like that in the land army and in the WAAAF. That was it, their romance had died and... I think the ones who were broken off, I don't know about that, but I know girls who had lost boyfriends, never bothered with anybody else. And they didn't have the chance either.
- 37:00 I think that was the main thing, or one of the reasons. They didn't have the chance to make up with new people because there weren't any extra men around. Although you'd think there would be with all the girls who went over with the Americans. But I don't know, but I know it happened. I know quite a few girls who never married. They're the ones who are finding it hard now because they've just got nobody,
- 37:30 and they're not getting anything through Veterans' Affairs, particularly the service women. Well land army too, I know quite a few of them, but they've given up hoping but the service women feel that Veterans' Affairs might come to the party and help. But it hasn't happened and I don't think it will happen now.
- Can you tell me about meeting your husband?**
- Well I was at Leeton
- 38:00 and he was at Narrandera and I just can't remember the first time. He probably does. He reckons I pinched his hat but I don't remember that. We started going out together but it was just on and off, you know. Because quite often you'd make it, you'd say "You were going out" and you'd wait because I was always told "You weren't to go and meet anywhere". The older girls would say "You have to wait until he comes down here".
- 38:30 But the air force coming over, if they didn't know anyone they would always come down to the dorm and they'd be milling around waiting to see if there were any girls who weren't going anywhere. And this happened to me a few times and so I thought, oh blow I'm not waiting any longer. And that happened once and I met him up the street later on. He called me a few names. He'd been drinking anyway. I said, "Well you've been drinking while I've been sitting waiting." But we were kind of on and off on and off for a long while.
- 39:00 Then when I went to... no, he left Narrandera then and I think he might have gone to Temora or somewhere else. Anyway, we kind of wrote but I knew he was writing to other girls as well, and of course one of them would come and say, "I've just had a letter from Van, have you?" And she'd say, "Do you want to read it?" And I'd say, "No." Then when I went to Batlow he was at Wagga, so they used to come over to Batlow,
- 39:30 and I was going with this other fellow, not seriously but I had been to meet his parents. They had a

station just out of Mount Aidra. But that was just a bit cool too, you know.

Tape 8

00:32 **Sheila, you've just been telling me that you had been seeing your husband, your future husband a little bit, but you had also been seeing a fellow who went off to Kokoda and you had met his parents.**

He was an engineer in the air force and he'd been put out medically unfit. He was working in the packing sheds as a mechanic looking after things.

01:00 But that got a bit cool and it must have been when I was getting ready to turn 18, but Van... We just knew my husband as Van and he used to come over. And the girls used to say, "Van's coming over. We'll go to the dance tonight." But he didn't like dancing very much. And everybody would want to dance. Anyway, it would get to the stage and he would come over and say, "I'm not going dancing tonight, I want to go to the pictures." And I would say, "No, I don't want to go to the pictures." So he would go to the pictures with some of the other girls and I'd go to the dance.

01:30 That kind of went on and then he went up north up to New Guinea, up to Milne Bay and that was when I decided I was going to join the air force, and this fellow I had been going with said, "Well if you join the air force then that's it, we'll break it up." So I thought well you're not going to tell me what to do, so that was it. So then when I went and joined the air force and I was down in Melbourne,

02:00 and I knew Van was still up there and we were still writing, and it was kind of on again off again. We weren't allowed to have much leave when we were on course and I was in lessons one day and a runner came down... "ACW Ferguson, you're wanted in Madam's office." And they always threatened us that if we didn't pass our course we'd end up in the cookhouse. We didn't want to go into the cookhouse. Not that there's anything against the cooks but we didn't want to do that.

02:30 When we had gone for technical we wanted to do technical. So I had to go up to Madam's office and I said to the runner, "Does she look angry, what's happened? Have I done anything wrong?" He just didn't know. I said, "Well did she look happy or unhappy?" He didn't know. So anyway, when I got in there she said to me, "Have you got a boyfriend up in New Guinea?" And I thought, oh heavens, a boyfriend! Because we considered they were all boyfriends

03:00 if we were writing to them. I just said, "Yes," and she said, "Well he's here and he wants to see you." And it was Van. He had just come back from New Guinea and he had come all the way down from Melbourne. I don't know why because he knew we weren't supposed to have leave but he kind of had the cheek to go and ask "If we could have leave and could I go out that night?" So she said "Yes, I could". It must have been the Friday night because it was getting near the weekend and it was the weekend we had off, so we could go out. So he stayed for the weekend.

03:30 He took me into town and we had dinner. We had Chinese. I don't think I had had Chinese before that because they were all Greek restaurants out in the country. He booked to go to theatre and of all things it was "Jack the Ripper" and I didn't like pictures anyway, but to see this terrible thing. He took me around to his hotel and it was a funny little hotel. We went to go in the lift to go up to his room because he had something he wanted to give me.

04:00 Anyway they came rushing over, no servicewomen allowed to go up to the men's rooms and they made us look silly with all the people there, and who should be there but his dentist from Maroubra. He lived at Maroubra. He came over and said, "Oh yes, Van Emden taking servicewomen up to your room." Anyway they said, "You can't go up," so he went up and all it was was a photo. That photo. He had it taken when he got back from New Guinea. So we went and saw "Jack the Ripper" and he took me back to camp and of course he wasn't allowed to go down

04:30 to where we were. It was all dark and it was terrible. He said, "Can I kiss you goodnight?" And I said, "No." And that more or less was the start. So he was there that weekend and we got a group together and we had a picnic at Fairy Land or something. We kind of more or less started going together a bit more seriously from then. It just went on. He was at Wagga. He was at Forrest Hill when I was at Quinty,

05:00 and we used to work seven days a week, and at the end of three weeks they'd give us three days off and we could go to Sydney. So we used to hop on the train. We'd get the train coming through from Melbourne at about seven o'clock that night and be in Sydney by the morning. So we would sleep all the way down and then have the whole wild weekend and back again.

05:30 He didn't come then but that's when we probably would have met some of the Americans. That's when we had a bit of time in town. When there were functions on at Forrest Hill, well we'd go over. I was in the Christian Endeavour at our camp because we used to have functions. It was something to do and it was very nice. We'd have nights when we'd get together with the Christian Endeavour over at Wagga,

06:00 but he didn't belong to that. He wasn't in that. So I got a message in to say we were coming over, so he said, "Well, I'll go tonight," and it was the day I had been burnt and I had all this white zinc all over me,

so I couldn't go. And he's never forgiven me because he went to this Christian Endeavour thing and he said it was terrible. People were getting up and saying, "I used to belt my mother until I saw the light." So he had to put up with that all night. But he was very dependable.

06:30 Sometimes we would have flights going out and we would have a day leave when we could go to Wagga. We couldn't go until the last plane came in and they would come in a bit late and we'd have to wait until the last plane was put away and everything. But the tender would be gone but he had a motorbike... they had a club. He was a corporal then and they had their club and I knew I could get him on the phone. So I would ring him up and say "We can't get to town.

07:00 Can you come and get us?", and he'd come over on this funny little motorbike and take off us. And we had tight skirts so we had to pull our skirts right up around our knees and we'd say to him, "Let us off before we get to town." But of course he didn't. He drove right up the main street with all the airmen and soldiers, and with us with out... We'd have to put our hats in between us, and we didn't have girdles in those days. You just had garters for your stockings.

07:30 But he was dependable. If we got stuck he would always come and pick us up and take us into Wagga for a meal. I don't know. It just started from there and I knew he was dependable. You couldn't always depend on aircrew. Aircrew fellows were here today and gone tomorrow. This is why I can say they were always thought of a bit more of by the public. Well you didn't know when they were going over and you didn't know when they were coming back.

08:00 I mean you didn't know with any of them but there was much more risk with aircrew, and they used to like to have drinking parties a lot. So there you are. That was that.

I was wondering if you noticed that as there was an increase in the responsibilities and opportunities you were getting as young women, or the fact you were moving into new areas that hadn't really been the domain of women before? Were the women also taking more control and having more of a say

08:30 **in their relationships with the guys? More demanding?**

I don't know about demanding. I think I was a bit demanding because I always knew he was dependable. I don't think I was with anyone else. We always knew what we wanted to do, and we tried to do it, and talk them into doing what we wanted to do.

09:00 We were certainly taking over more at functions. Even during the war when there were concert parties and things, you'd have to talk the boys into coming into them. Some of them wanted to, some of them were singers and could act and that, but the girls would more or less run everything. And get everything going. Sports wise, the girls were all pretty good.

09:30 They'd play hockey against the boys and we'd win. Just playing ordinary sports days... you had a sports day at least once a week, and just playing tunnel ball and things like that. I think the girls were always more enthusiastic than what the boys were. I don't know. I think we felt we had kind of made our mark and were doing things

10:00 that girls hadn't done before. And I think even just leaving home and going away, this was a thing that a lot of girls noticed, that they left home and joined up and their mothers didn't want to know them anymore. They joined the service and that wasn't the right thing to do. But the boys were heroes but the girls were not wanted. That happened to a few girls. "You're running our name down by going into the service". Because a lot of people thought that.

10:30 A lot of people thought that service girls... a lot of single girls didn't like to think that the girls were in camp with their boyfriends, and they made up all sorts of nasty things that they used to say. That didn't bother us, we knew what we were doing. I mean we got health talks and sex talks and everything. I remember one of our WAAAF officers saying that she was talking to the CO [Commanding Officer] and he said "I hope your girls know all about the birds and bees". And she said, "They do,

11:00 don't worry, they've got it up here." And he said, "I don't care where your girls have got it, my boys will find it." This was the way the boys felt. He said, "We've got all these virile young men here and your girls down there, you just make sure they know what's going on." And it was the way they felt. That the girls could do what they wanted to do. This was the way the people talked but it wasn't like that. We were given great respect from the boys really.

11:30 Now and again there was... One girl went out with this fellow and she said to us when she came back, "Next time if you go out with this fellow wear your great coat back to front." And funny things like that they used to say you know. Well you just didn't go out with him because that was enough warning. But no, I don't know I found that anywhere, I worked with the boys, they were... they treated us more

12:00 or less as one of them, but they wouldn't swear in front of us. No, they were good. If we needed any help they would help us. Well I didn't have any problem in the land army either. I can remember when this did happen and we did go into the hangar and one of the girls was crying later on and one of the boys had said to her, "If you hadn't have come in,

12:30 we wouldn't have had to go up north." And he upset her and she was a girl who would be upset anyway. We just said, "Don't take any notice of him." He didn't want to go, and we said, "Wait until he comes

back", and when he came back, "Oh yes, he'll be returned and he'll be a real hero." He's returned. But he didn't think about how he upset her before he went. But that only happened every blue moon.

13:00 **How much of a sense did you have that you were part of a permanent change for women? Did you have a sense that you were part of a really permanent shift?**

No, I don't think we thought about that. I think that all came up later. We were just there to do the job and to take the place of the boys... most of the boys wanted to go away. They didn't have a choice

13:30 of course. We were there to replace what they did when they went away. It wasn't only technical girls but in the offices and everywhere. There were girls who were doing the weather and the electricians, armourers, the girls looking after all the guns. It just made it easier. Some of the recruiting things that were put out, you'd see

14:00 an AWA[S] ... one particularly nice one and an AWA[S] sitting at a desk doing clerical work and a soldier standing there with his gun saying, "Thank you for doing this, now I can go up north?" All this recruiting thing was put out. No, most of them just accepted us I think. And I never felt we were breaking into some new. I knew we were by being technical because they used to always say to us,

14:30 "Girls are now mechanics." But I think that was starting to happen anyway. I know, as I say, working with my grandfather on the property and he'd say, "Come over here. I can't get this out. Put your hand in and get it." I didn't know then that he was a Sudan War veteran. It wasn't until he was in hospital when I first went into the land army and I went into see him.

15:00 When he saw me in uniform he said to me, "You can have my medals," and I've still got his medals. But my brother was to have them really but he died very soon after the war from injuries that he had, so they came to me. And that's why I've wanted to find out more about it because I would never have known. He never talked about it and I don't remember my dad ever talking about it.

15:30 So that's just something that you learn. I think the women have done a lot since the war because they broke out, and they had all been used to being at home. And I think that was a bad thing. This happened to a lot of girls, that their parents didn't want them. And I've spoken to women now and they say, "You were lucky you were in the services, I wanted to join, but my boyfriend told me he would break it

16:00 off if I joined. And my parents wouldn't let me join and wouldn't sign the papers." I just say, "Oh well, my parents didn't mind," so that was that. You know, it's sad really. Perhaps they were doing jobs they should have been doing anyway, but they weren't given a choice.

When you went to Penrith for your initial training, how many of the girls were ...

16:30 **an approximate sort of percentage...? How many of the girls were coming straight out of civvie street or coming from either the land army or some similar sort of service?**

No, I think they were all girls who were coming straight from civvie street, and that's where we had two girls who were Tivoli girls too. And they became WT operators. That's wireless telegraphy you know. And we had a mixture of girls...

17:00 some girls... I know one of my friends worked in a fruit shop. Well there were three of us together. My other friend, she was doing commercial art, and the three of us just kind of clicked together and always went places together. When I became a mechanic, they were both riggers and they were in the course that went to Williamstown, so I kind of missed out on them there.

17:30 I made new friends when I went to the other camp. See mostly you were posted singularly and you weren't posted with anyone else. That was hard, but because they all went through together, they were all posted together. You would kind of walk into a strange hut of about 30 girls, don't know any of them and they were all different musterings. We always had two corporals at each end or two sergeants at each end.

18:00 See it was very strict. You had to be in by a certain time and you had to be by a certain time, and if they didn't report that you were in, then they were in strife too, so it ricocheted along. But you soon got to know people, and one of the girls in that hut at that time was a rigger and she was in the same hangar as I was. Riggers did airframe and mechanics did the

18:30 engines. And she came from Perth and we became friends and we stayed friends right to the end.

So when you went to Penrith and were doing your early training, and I guess in your early days in Melbourne as well, did you have a leadership role amongst the girls?

No, no. My best friend, the girl who was the commercial artist,

19:00 she was tall and she was nice looking and she spoke well. She was... even when we were on Rookies, she was always picked out. If the NCO was going somewhere she would always be called out to take the flight somewhere else. And the same happened down at Ascot Vale. They weren't all the same girls. Well there were two tall girls, and Pat was the one who just looked most impressive, and she was always the one

- 19:30 who kind of took responsibility for the flight. And you didn't do anything. If she said, "You all stay here," you did, because she was that kind of person. She was a nice person and she could say it nicely and you didn't do anything you weren't supposed to do. Well I'm still friendly with her, and she went right through and then after the war she went back to do her commercial art out at Darlinghurst at that stage.
- 20:00 She was doing dressmaking and we were both out there together, and I think I had just got engaged when they were starting up to take the peace time girls back in. Her boyfriend had shot through or something, I can't remember. She came to me one day and she said, "They're taking girls back in the air force, are you going to come with me and we'll join again?" I thought that I wouldn't get back in again because I had my burns and everything, and I had just got engaged, and I said, "I don't think
- 20:30 I will." "Well," she said, "I'm going to go in and say I'll only go in if I do an officers' course," which she did and she ended up being the CO of all the northern area, up in Queensland. She's still a lovely person. It didn't change her. But I think people did kind of get leadership. I was happy just to go along. There were other girls who could take charge more. I knew what I had to do
- 21:00 and used to just go along that way.

Was there a sense at the time amongst the women that you were being judged beyond just your ability? You said she was a very attractive girl. In terms of being given responsibility within the service did you have a sense of that at time, that you were being judged on things other than your ability?

Well it's strange but some girls just couldn't march, and it didn't matter how much they

- 21:30 tried and they'd be broken hearted because they just couldn't march. They'd end up getting through, passing out in the passing out parade, but they just couldn't march and everywhere you went you had to march. So they kind of... everybody knew that they were kind of left footed or something. She's left footed. Other people who were clever at other things, you kind of knew who they were.
- 22:00 And others who just went along and would be in anything. I think you did kind of get classed that way, amongst yourselves. I think the reason Pat was picked out was because she was tall and straight. The other girl who was tall, she used to stoop, and she had a squeaky voice where Pat had a nice voice and I think that the NCO's went through and they would pick the tallest girl anyway to be in charge of the group, and she was just the one
- 22:30 that had everything that she needed. But there must have been other groups where they didn't have a particularly tall girl, and so they would just pick the best and make their own judgements. And I think they did look for that, somebody who did look like they had a bit of leadership.

Were there any aspects of your early training either at Penrith or Melbourne that you really struggled with? That just didn't come naturally?

I hated maths and that was on course.

- 23:00 No, I don't think so. I enjoyed it all and kind of just sailed along and kept up with the crowd. I was hoping all the time when I was doing my basic course at the Engineering School that I would become a mechanic. I wanted to become a mechanic or an armourer. Most things...
- 23:30 Maths was my downfall. And just as it happened, it was Pat who was with me. I could remember the formulas and I was dreadful at multiplying or subtraction. But we kind of passed out together and we didn't use it at any other time anyway. There was no time when being a mechanic that you had to have maths to know whether this ring will fit that
- 24:00 or whatever you know. It was just one of the things that you had to pass out with. No, I don't think so. You had physical culture quite a lot. I just seemed to go along. I enjoyed the marching, and of course marching was to bring you up to a physical standard and obedience. You knew that if you were told to stop, you stopped immediately and you know. That was the thing
- 24:30 in the air force, you had to obey everything. I know when I got burnt I used to have to go down to the sick bay a couple of times a day and get this zinc stuff scraped off and put new stuff on. And we always had to wear our hat with a chin strap, our fur felts in the summer time. When I was down at the doctor I said to him, "I'm having trouble putting my chin strap on," and he said, "Well don't put it on, I'll give you a chit
- 25:00 to say you didn't have to wear your hat." Well all around the base there were certain saluting orders and you had to salute, so you had to have your hat on. And when I was coming back a WAAAF officer was coming along and I thought well I don't have my hat on and I don't have to salute, so I just smiled at her and she called me back. She said, "You didn't have your hat on. You didn't salute." And I said, "No, I've got a chit to say I don't have to wear my hat." But I didn't pick the chit up.
- 25:30 It was given to me but I had left it there. So that was that and she said, "Well come and see me when you stand down." I went and saw her and I was going home, they were letting me go home the next day, and that night I had to scrub the rec room out on my hands and knees. And I went home and this was after everything else, I went home...Well I went to Sydney and my dad happened to be there at the time.

And he said, "How are you going and how did this happen?" And I said, "Well, I've decided I don't

- 26:00 like the air force, I'm not going back any more." And he said, "You're not in the land army now, you know." Because he knew I had to go back. I fought it for a while but I went back anyway. I knew that I had too, but that's just how I felt. I just felt that she was unreasonable. And they weren't usually, but now and again you'd find one that stuck to everything like that you know. And that made you feel a bit dissatisfied at times. It was mostly the WAAAF officers.
- 26:30 The men officers... Well, we had WOs [Warrant Officers] that were funny. They were a bit rude and we had lots of complaints about the one we had there. He used to put the girls at the end of the flight so he could march behind us and pinch us on the bottom. So we said something to our flight sergeant and he said, "Well I'll talk to him." And then he said, "No, report him to the engineering officer."
- 27:00 He was nice, the engineering officer. We used to call him Daddy Nan, and we just went before him and told him what had happened and he said, "You just don't think about it anymore, I'll deal with that." Anyway, he was sent to another section. He was told to stop and sent to another section. So this is the thing that we've noticed in peacetime. They reckon that girls are getting mistreated in the services, and I feel... I don't know,
- 27:30 I feel in the generation now, the boys don't seem to have respect for the girls like they used too. I don't know if that's with everybody or not. But if we had problems... We had another fellow who used to kind of always say silly things and always... "These women can't do this," and so forth. And one of the girls bought a cheap bottle of perfume and we were all around one day and he was giving forth,
- 28:00 and she bumped against him and spilt the perfume all over him. We didn't have any trouble with him anymore. He had to go around all day with this strong perfume on. So the boys didn't do any work. They all ragged him about it. We didn't have any trouble with him anymore. But on the whole everything kind of went along quite smoothly. You worked hard and that was it.

You mentioned you dad's comment about you're not in the land army anymore.

- 28:30 **Did you notice a noticeable increase in the seriousness of your commitment?**

Oh yes. You knew that once you signed that was it. I must have known that but I just kind of felt that I had had enough. I had had enough with all this anyway and then the bad treatment. Well it wasn't bad treatment but it wasn't good treatment. You were still sleeping with blankets and everything and the old sheets they gave me.

- 29:00 I still had to go to work. And I know that I should have but it just seemed a bit hard. I don't know. It just made me feel a bit unhappy, and then for this to top it off when I was kind of getting ready to go on leave the next day. Probably she was right because I should have made sure I had the note with me. I couldn't blame anyone else.
- 29:30 But it's just the way dad said, "You're not in the land army." Well he knew that I had got from the land army into the air force. I don't know if he was surprised that I had done that on my own and I had transferred over. Well I hadn't transferred over really. Once I got my call up I just had to take everything back to the land army. I didn't take my uniform back, I kept that. But teaspoons you know, and plates and things like that which they'd never use again anyway.

- 30:00 Just kind of silly things and they kept writing to me to bring them back. So that was that.

Did you get a sense that the female officers in general in the WAAAF had something to prove? That they needed to prove themselves?

I don't know really. I don't think I noticed that. We had lots

- 30:30 of NCOs. We didn't have a lot of officers. We had our CO. We didn't have a lot of WAAAF officers there, but we had a lot of NCOs. And we kind of had to respect them the same. They could give you orders and tell you not to do this, or don't go there or what have you, and you didn't do it. I don't know. I don't think
- 31:00 so. I think also that we kind of felt that we didn't have to take notice of a lot of those girls because even though they had the authority, they weren't the same level as what we were. We were Group 2 once we did our technical and a lot of them... it went right down to Group 6. We knew we had to take notice of them and we felt that we're as good as you or better anyway even though we haven't got any stripes.
- 31:30 It didn't worry us.

What was your return of service? When you sign on to the air force was it a commitment to the end of the war?

It was. We signed up to go anywhere we were sent. Overseas as well. And for the duration of the war and 12 months after. This is what they complain about now, the servicewomen, because we signed up to go anywhere. But because we weren't sent anywhere... because there were no WAAAFs sent overseas.

- 32:00 I think there were some dieticians sent up to... see the RAAF nursing service, they were RAAF, they

weren't WAAAF and they went overseas. But no WAAAF officially went overseas and this was a rule by Air Board. They just said "The girls weren't to be sent overseas". But they were up in Darwin and they were up in Townville and they were in Cairns which were war zones at times but they're not considered to have had any

32:30 war... outside war service. The girls coming across from Tasmania to Victoria, if they came across by ship they were considered to be overseas because there were submarines in that area. I thought that girls going from Fremantle to Rottne were the same but I was reading a thing lately and it said no. But I know one of the girls at our WAAAF branch,

33:00 she's got a Gold Card and that was explained that when she joined up she had come from Tassie to Victoria by boat when there were subs in the area, so it was actually a war zone. I don't know if there's many but she tells us that she's got hers. But that was the whole thing. We did sign up to do any of that, but... I mean so did a lot of the men who didn't go away.

33:30 They had no say. Just funny things you know.

So was it widely expected by most of the girls that once the war was over, so to would be their careers?

No, girls who were WTs, they got good jobs. Girls who say were podiatrists. See all these musterings

34:00 were in, and lots of different musterings that they had they could continue that on.

Did they know that when they signed up? That there was this opportunity?

I don't think so. But it was just... I don't think the air force did this for them, but if they came out of the air force and they were WTs and people were looking for employees. And there were more women WTs then men because a lot of the girls took over the place of a lot of the men WTs. Whereas we took over from the men as

34:30 mechanics, but when the fellas came back people took the men mechanics. Although two of my friends were fabric workers and they got jobs after the war as fabric workers. One girl was working out at Mascot and then they went to New Zealand and then when they started the Snowy [River] Scheme. Because they had fabric planes out there, she worked out there. And she stayed out there. She still lives out at Talbingo. Different musterings you could still kind of... but they just weren't interested

35:00 in mechanics and I think riggers. But a lot of other musterings were able to continue with what they had been taught. And typists who couldn't type before they went in. They could get jobs.

At the time was there any movement or pressure within the women's service to be kept on post war?

I don't think so. A lot of girls did stay on

35:30 because they were working discharging others and some of the jobs they were doing they needed them to stay on. I think the last girls didn't get out until the end of '46 or '47. So they had the preference to stay on if they were happy to stay on. I don't think there was any push for them to keep the air force going. Like the men were asked if they wanted to re-enlist.

36:00 But I don't think... no, I don't think there was anything like that for the women. And it wasn't until 1950 I think that they decided they'd take them back into the air force. But they were going back in as clerks and WTs and things like that. They didn't take any in the technical musterings. I don't think they still do. They have them on radar. See girls who were in radar they could stay. They found work after the war

36:30 at different airfields and things like that. There were a lot of musterings that they could carry on with. We were just unlucky.

Were you unhappy at the time about not being able to stay on?

No, not really. I was quite happy to come out. I had put in for a rehab course. I wanted to be a podiatrist but I had very bad hands and they said "No". So I said "I'll be a dressmaker".

37:00 I could sew anyway, and I wanted to do something. But I had to wait for 12 months to do that, and my young sister was working at David Jones and I didn't know where I was going to work. They didn't find you a job. She happened to tell her boss that I was looking for a job, and he was a World War One Digger and he said, "Tell her to come in and we'll have a talk." So I went in there and I worked in the Mail Order Department. That was nice. I liked that.

37:30 He said, "Can you take orders?" And I said, "Yes sir, I can take orders." So he said, "When you go to the buyers,"... we had to go around to the buyers... we'd get country orders and they'd have a pink dress and they'd want gloves to go with it, and he said, "When you go to the buyers you knock on the door, and if a buyer's got a salesman in there, you just excuse yourself and you speak to the buyer. Because it's more important. We want to sell our stuff and the travellers are there to sell their stuff, and the buyer must see you." Well the other girl that was there was a bit shy

38:00 and she used to 'knock knock' on the door and she wouldn't go in. So I just did that and he said, "That's

what we need. You take Alma down and show Alma.” I worked there for 12 months and when my rehab came up, I left.

Did you find any prejudice either positive or negative towards your time in the WAAAAF from that employer at David Jones

38:30 **or other people where you were seeking work?**

No, not really. I don't think most people were interested whether you were or not. I don't know if I tried for anywhere else, but my young sister was working there and she said, "I'm sure they're looking for someone," and she happened to mention it to him and I kind of went there straight away. And the girls there... a few of the girls said, "You're always

39:00 in a rush," and I kind of slowed down a bit. We all got on well and we used to go out together and that was that. Alma had apparently never been taken down and told what to do. But she was a shy girl anyway.

Tape 9

00:33 **I'd like to now jump to your period at Quinty, and I was wondering if you could describe your first impressions of the Wirraways?**

Well to me they looked very big. At Ascot Vale, we had a Boomerang. I don't think we had any Wirraways there. We had Tiger Moths.

01:00 But I mostly worked on the Boomerang and the Tigers. I just looked at them and they looked so huge. They were pretty big planes compared to the little ones they fly around in now. No, I thought they were great and I was happy to go there and work on them.

Can you explain their main features?

01:30 Well they were a radial engine. A wasp engine. I always thought it was a twin row wasp, but my husband always reckoned it was a single row wasp. I don't know why that stuck in my brain that they were twin rows. What else is there? I don't know what else to explain. They were two seaters, the pilot and the instructor.

02:00 I don't know what else kind of stuck me. They were just a nice looking plane. They were nice to work on. When I first went into the hangars I was doing fuel tanks. They started me off on fuel tanks. And the fuel tank was fairly big and it was made of some kind of fibrey stuff that if a bullet went into it, it wouldn't leak straight away. We had to learn to patch those.

02:30 We had to take the fuel gauge off. The fuel gauge had to be unscrewed. They had special locking things to lock the fuel gauge on. We took those off and then the instrument makers came and took them away and made sure they were right and when they were right they brought them back to us. In the meantime we learned how to plug these holes. I don't know how they put the holes in.

03:00 Then I went from there to doing the control rods, which is where I said they pushed them through the gate. Well we had to take them off and then we had to take them and weld them and then put them back on. And my husband argues with that too that they did that. Then we went onto the engines and it was great working on them and pulling the pistons out and testing the rings to make sure

03:30 they were alright. They had to be dismantled after they had done 240 hours, and clean them all up and make sure they were alright. You had callipers to measure them all with and test the compression, and get them all back together again. That was more or less it.

Is that what you referred to as a major inspection?

Yes.

Every 240 flight hours?

04:00 Yes.

Were the engines themselves quite straightforward for aeronautical engines at that point?

I think so. They could do aerobatics with them and they could do anything with them. So they were. I don't know. I can't remember what the engine on the Boomerang was now. I think it may have been a radial or it might have been an inline one. I'm not sure. I can't remember. That's where my books would come in handy.

04:30 But I know these were radial, and they were good. Once we had worked on them and we had refuelled them we'd take them out and run them up. We'd take them over to... They had a big spot where you could run them up and hide a lot of the noise. And once they were right we'd just let them know and they were ready for a test flight and out they went and a new one came in.

- 05:00 Because they were turning over all the time because they were flying every day, except if it was a very foggy day in the winter time then the flying would slow down a bit. They just always seemed to be coming in and going out. You know, it's funny. You're just doing it and you're not thinking much about what you're doing. And that's it. We all had our own tool box. When you got there you did a tool box which had
- 05:30 all the tools in it, and you had your own tools. And made sure you had them. When you finished at night you made sure all your tools were there. That was another thing too, to make sure there were no tools left in the aircraft. There were a few standard things like that, that you had to do for safety.
- How conscious were you on a daily basis that the pilot's life could very well be in your hands?**
- 06:00 **Was that a burden or a responsibility that was consciously in your head?**
- Well it was a responsibility but we knew that we knew our work and we knew that we had this good flight sergeant who, if we had any doubts at all, he would take a lot of the burden away. He was always there, and the corporal. They were always there. They were always watching what we were doing. I don't know. I think it just came as
- 06:30 second nature. We knew that it had to be done. And we had this other lass who was a 2E. Nothing got past her. She'd say, "Well you do this and I'll do this," and she'd be watching all the time. I don't know. It was your job and you just kind of did it. If you had any problems at all there was always someone to go to. I don't remember feeling that
- 07:00 when the test pilot came in that I had anything to worry about because I knew the other girls were as good as I was and that we had all done the right thing. It was all down in the WE77 [?] anyway and he had that to see what had been done. No, it's funny I didn't feel... I felt we were good at what we were doing, and
- 07:30 that was it. We were there to do it and we'd work 7 days a week and they were all getting out. And we didn't expect any more or any less. We had our days off, our half days off when we had our PT and games and things like that. That was your work. No problem.
- You said that when you went into the air force, you said you had a feeling you'd like to be a mechanic or an armourer.**
- 08:00 **How much did the realities of the job match up with your expectations?**
- Well I didn't actually know what an armourer would do. I knew it was to do with guns, and I know what other armourers had done because we had armourers there. But I just felt that I wanted to work, that I would like to work on aircraft engines, and I think the whole thing was, when I went into the air force, if I couldn't have been in technical I would have been in an office
- 08:30 or something like that. So I would have preferred to be in the land army. So I had to make sure I worked hard to keep outside. That was my main aim I think. I wanted to work on aircraft.
- You said that the procedures became second nature, but actually working with the engines and the tools was that quite natural for you?**
- Yes. We had all the tools and we knew what they were for.
- 09:00 See they were all the same engines so one would go out and another one would come in and you'd know what to look for if anything was wrong. And you knew you had to do all your measuring and testing. It just flowed I suppose. And working together, if you noticed something different you'd say to one of the other girls you were working with, or if we weren't sure we'd call the sergeant over. You know, it just went naturally. We were just a good working team.
- 09:30 It just kind of went through.
- What do you think it was in your life that gave you your interest in the mechanics?**
- My father had a couple of trucks. My Mum had an old Rugby and she used to drive that everywhere. And they had an L-car and then they had a truck. And as I said, grandfather used to come up sometimes and he'd be working
- 10:00 on things. And I can remember toddling around with him quite a bit. And as I was older he'd show you what he was doing. So I don't know. Whether that made me think, I know when I went into the air force and I wanted to do technical musterings, and she said "What experience I had?" I said, "I can drive." I think she might have asked if I could drive and I thought I don't know what that's got to do with it.
- 10:30 And I said "I have worked on tractors and these things," and she said, "Oh well." I didn't have my leaving and that was the education part of it. So she said, "Oh well we need technical girls, so if you're interested we'll give you a try." And that's what made me feel I had to do it. You know, I had to get through. And I didn't realise what we had to do. I didn't realise that we had to do maths and electricity and magnetism and
- 11:00 they were the two things that I wasn't too keen on until I got to know the electricity and magnetism and

that kind of came easy. But in our basic training we had to make a spanner and we had to shape this block and a lot of other things we had to do. We used to make a few foreign orders like earrings out of sixpences and brooches out of pennies and things like that. And that was training more or less.

11:30 We never stopped training but it was teaching you how to do different things.

We discussed the major inspection which was after 240 flight hours. What were the daily inspections that were required?

The dailies were checking over... when we were out on the satellite we used to just check over that they had enough fuel to get back to where they were going.

12:00 Just check that everything was running alright from the pilots view because there wasn't much that we could see. That's more or less all there was. Were you having any trouble? Could it start alright? And things like that. It was just a daily inspection just to make sure they could get back to where they had come from. We had fuel tanks out there because sometimes they would get a bit lost getting there and use more fuel than what they thought they would.

12:30 But they went on at the base. See, we had different hangars too. We had hangars that did dailies and they would have been for the boys who were just doing circuits and bumps and just going around, and they call them in after each one had done what he had to do. I didn't know much about what the others did because once we got into our hangar we were busy there.

13:00 The only time I ever walked over to where they were was when I walked over to do the night flying because the night flying was past all these other hangars. It's funny to think you were on a unit like that and you didn't know what went on on the other side. I used to go over to the fabric workers sometimes because they used to get lovely cold milk. They had to drink so much milk a day because they were working with the dope, and if you knew someone in there, you'd go over on a hot day and get a nice

13:30 drink of cold milk. And I used to watch them, and the parachute girls who were folding... now their girls had got jobs after the war too, folding parachutes. They could go to different little airfields and get jobs.

So was your hangar principally focused on major inspections?

Major inspections, yes. So each hangar had various jobs that it did. Unless you had a cause to go to them, then you didn't really have time.

14:00 In cold weather sometimes they would take us out of the hangar and we'd run right around and we might run past the other hangars to warm up. There was no heating there with all the fuel around. You'd kind of run past the hangar and have a look in. You knew what the sequence was but you didn't really know an awful lot... well, I didn't anyway. I don't think the other girls did either.

14:30 **Your professional contact with pilots was nearly all with test pilots, was it? The ones who flew the planes first after a major inspection?**

Yes. But we didn't have an awful lot of contact with them. They would come in and they'd have a look at the WE77 and just look around and see who was there and pick out whoever they wanted to go with them. And you'd have a bit of a talk while you were going over to the plane about different things that we were doing.

15:00 Someone said they were better than the others. They'd say, "Oh, you'll enjoy this flight." They'd say... just talking you know.

Why would you be taken? Would they need a second person or...?

Well they would have to take a person who worked on that plane.

Why?

I don't know why. Probably if you said, "No, I'm not going on it", they'd think well what have you done wrong? I don't know why. But that was their choice. When they came in they just picked a person who had worked

15:30 on the plane. And you couldn't refuse them. If you refused then they could refuse to take the plane up. I think that's what it was. It was just a thing that always happened I think. They might have done it more because we were girls. Whether they took just as many boys? But they just wanted someone who had worked on the plane. You'd get remarks. They'd call back and ask you "How you were going?" and sometimes you couldn't even talk.

16:00 **Walk us through your first flight?**

Well we walked over and got into the plane. Got strapped in, because we had parachutes. And pull the thing forward. He'd tell me what to do. The stick's there but you don't touch it normally, and just taking off. It was a bit of a thrill taking off. You'd go up and it was a nice day and he'd fly around a little bit and he'd say, "I'm going to put it through

16:30 its paces". And before I could ask what to expect the first time, he went straight up to a loop and a loop

off the top, roll off the top and oh dear. I thought I was going to die because you can't move anything. And then when they do the tight spins, the same thing happened. And I can remember thinking to myself, well I hope he knows what he's doing. It was so bad that you'd wonder how they would pull out you know.

17:00 And this was the thing that used to happen with a lot of the new pilots. The boys learning. It was something that affected them and this is why they had to keep themselves very fit. It was quite good, and I think he probably said to me, "We've finished now, do you want to have a little look around?" "Oh yes." So we flew around and then came down. And they always had some comment to make. "I'm a good pilot, you'll enjoy this.

17:30 Did you feel that landing?" "No, not really." And he said, "As light as a maiden's kiss." This certain test pilot, whenever he landed he would always say, "As light as a maiden's kiss." And I just said to him, "I suppose you know, sir."

Were those flights an enjoyable thing for you overall?

I didn't really enjoy them. I enjoyed part of them. If I was alright,

18:00 I would still get a bit funny in the head. So I don't know... I get seasick so I don't know whether it was something with me or not. And the time I was sick, it was a hot day and it was after, I had this milkshake. But that was the only time I did get sick. Now, I can enjoy a flight now and it doesn't worry me going up or coming down in a normal plane. But when I look at these little tiny planes that they fly now, the ordinary ones they fly around in, they just look

18:30 so small. I know our eldest daughter was learning to fly in Bankstown and she said, "Come over and I'll take you for a flight." She said "She could only take one" and I said, "Well I don't particularly want to go." And I looked over and I saw the plane and I said, "Are you going up in that tiny little thing?" It looked so tiny up against a Wirraway. And this is something that did strike me when I went into the hangar... this big Wirraway, bit yellow... because they were all yellow, orange. No, I don't think I would enjoy little

19:00 planes.

I was wondering how the accidents that occurred during training affected the morale of the personnel there?

I don't know whether they affected our morale, but they made us all very sad. And of course mostly the parents would come to the base. They'd have this special service and everybody had to go. I don't know if everybody had to go, but all the technical

19:30 people had to go on parade, and they had the muffled drums and it would take so long for them to march around with the muffled drums. And it could quite often be somebody we didn't know because there were a lot of boys going through. And if it was somebody you knew, well it was worse. A lot of the boys were buried in Wagga. Some parents took them home but a lot were buried in Wagga. We never went to the full funeral but the other boys did.

20:00 It was sad. Everybody talked about it that night and it was always something we thought shouldn't have happened. I don't think it affected our morale but it was just very sad and disappointing. And we just hoped that it didn't happen again, but it did.

Was there any particular rituals or things that people would do to mark

20:30 **the occasion, unofficially, other than the parade or ceremony?**

If it did happen most of the boys then had to go straight up... that were in that flight or were in training at the time. They all had to go up. It meant extra flying time for everybody. Some of them would be a bit upset and we used to worry. Are they going to be alright

21:00 flying so soon after this? But they always did. I don't think there were any accidents in flights just after that.

That was the point though, was it, to get them back in the saddle so to speak?

Yes. Get them back up in the air.

Were any of those accidents during your time there ever linked to mechanical problems?

I don't think so. I don't think so.

21:30 I think they were just something that the student did wrong. Just accidental. I don't think there were any... because they used to go right through them. They had... I don't know who they were but a group would come and go right through the plane after there had been an accident to see what was... We never heard what they found. If it had been a mechanical fault I think we would have heard. And we never heard what the mistake would have been

22:00 that a student made. That was kept... I think the aircrew all knew that. But they may not have even told them. I don't know. But we would have if it was mechanical. But we didn't hear anything. So that was

good.

Did you develop a sense of ownership over the planes you worked on, an attachment at all?

Not really.

22:30 It's funny. I felt like that with the Boomerang when I was doing my course. I used to... I don't know, I just liked the Boomerang. It was the shape of it I think. It used to remind me of a great big bullfrog, you know? No, we knew all the numbers that we had worked on. There were a lot of aircraft you might not have worked on. Every aircraft when they came in, because there were some they might not have used as much and they wouldn't come in for a major so often.

23:00 You knew all the numbers and you saw them when you went over. You knew they were aircraft which you had worked on. But I don't remember ever attaching myself to any particular one. You always had some pride of achievement when you knew that the inspection was done and it was ready to go out. That's another one done, but that's as far as I felt and I think the other girls were the same.

23:30 We had done our job and that was it.

Did you feel a greater attachment to the male ground crew as opposed to the male aircrew?

Well we spent most time with the ground crew, and we worked with the ground crew. So as far as we were concerned they were our mates, our equals. The aircrew, you looked up to a little bit more.

24:00 We didn't get to know them as well. I mean, we'd see them at dances but they didn't always come to the dances. They'd be studying. We used to have prairie parties where the boys would come because they could get all the food and whatever they wanted, and you'd have a bit of an attachment with them. You might go out with one on one course, but there wouldn't be that much time that you could go out with them anyway because we'd be working or they'd be flying. Sometimes, you'd

24:30 see different ones in town and they say "Come in and have a drink or a coffee", nobody had cups of coffee in those days, it was either a milk shake or a drink. They'd mix with us. Some girls who did form attachments. There was one girl who was engaged to one of the fellows. I think he might have been an instructor. See the instructors... A fellow who passed through his course and did well,

25:00 he wouldn't get away. He'd be pulled back as an instructor. This is the thing they're battling over now. Some of the fellows who stayed back in Australia as instructors don't get the benefits the returned fellows get. I mean they took a risk every time they went up. I mean there were instructors who were killed with their pupils. But they don't get any recognition any more than any of the ground staff who didn't go away. So there's a lot of odd things.

Did you notice an arrogance or superiority

25:30 **of the aircrew over the male ground staff? Was there a noticeable distinction there?**

Well the only time that we'd see them together much would have been at the dances and quite often you wouldn't know which was which, because if they didn't have their hats on you didn't know unless you knew them personally. No, I don't think so really. I think there was a difference, ground staff and aircrew.

26:00 Probably... no, I don't know. Most of them were nice fellas and they knew they had... See, I don't know if it's five or seven ground staff to keep one pilot in the air, and they must have realised that. See they had to know a lot of technical stuff too, the pilots, so they had a big job. Well I didn't notice it. Quinty was a very nice station. It was called Bar 20

26:30 because we were out in the bush, and our CO was Wing Commander Kernot, and in summer time we all wore fur felt hats, and we were known as Kernot's Cowgirls because we had our drab uniforms. It was a joke, Bar 20. "Who's going to visit Bar 20?" You'd hear them in town, "Oh there's a do on at Bar 20." And it was like that, and they were... there was a togetherness really. And I don't know if that was at other bases.

27:00 You never heard the ground staff saying... oh they might say the "Kotex boys," they called them because they had the white Kotex in their hats. I don't think so. If you went to a dance then you just danced with whoever asked you to dance.

Can I ask you about your accident when you were burnt by the fuel, was that a significant mistake on behalf of the other person or was that a problem with the safety...?

27:30 No. It was a mistake and the poor boy got into a lot of strife over it. But he was only new and I don't think anything... He was put on the mat about it and had a good talk about it, but I don't think anything happened. It was something that could happen, which shouldn't have happened and we were just lucky when our flight sergeant happened to be there when

28:00 it did happen. It could have been a lot worse and then he probably would have been in trouble.

I just want to use this opportunity to leap quickly back to the land army and the prevalence of injuries... doing such physical manual labour. Were injuries a problem?

There were. Well I had pleurisy at one stage because it was terribly cold. That's just an injury because I was cold. But there were girls that were injured but they were just taken to the ordinary doctor

28:30 and I don't know what happened if they had to stay at home from work. I don't know about their pay. And I don't know... I can't recall having to pay the doctor, but I feel that we did have to pay when we visited the doctor. The doctor used to come from (UNCLEAR) up to Batlow and he was only there on certain days, so if you got sick on other days you saw the nurse or you just went to bed and the matron looked after you.

29:00 There were no real serious accidents that I can recall.

Were there any serious safety concerns with farm machinery or in the cannery or dehydration plant?

I think there was always somebody there looking out. There were signs up for everything. See in the packing sheds it used to get freezing cold and we had these great big 44 gallon drums full

29:30 with hot coals, and we could go up to them and warm our hands or your feet. And there could have been a danger with them. But I don't think I remember anybody falling against them or anything. It was pretty hot once you got near them. On the things where you did the... god, I can't think of the name, where all the apples and things came down and you had to shift them into different

30:00 sizes and you had to pick out the things, that could be dangerous. But I think they just had signs up and we were aware of it. I can't remember anybody getting hurt there. Some girls had bad backs because once you packed a case of apples, they were heavy and then you had to lift them onto another trolley thing that took them away. It was very heavy work. But I can't remember anybody, you'd just get a crook back and

30:30 go and see the doctor and get something to rub on it and that was it.

Back at Uranquinty, what were the major down sides of life there? What were the things that affected your morale or you really didn't enjoy?

When you look back on it, it's so far away and it's hard to remember.

Was boredom an issue out there?

31:00 No, no. Well we had a rec [recreation] hut that had everything it in, but you had your own hut and everybody knew you were in your own hut. The showers and the toilets. The toilets had no doors on them and the showers had no doors on them and you just had a little bit of metal half way. But I think we always had plenty of hot water. We had old coppers that we had to boil all of our clothes in.

31:30 And the old ironing board and you had to do everything like that. There was a laundry fellow who came around but I think the only people who used the laundry were the men. They were too lazy to wash their shirts and we had to wash our own. We had three collars for each shirt and I think we had two shirts and you could change your collar three times on one shirt. They were attached collar. And we knew the method of how to stiffen them and get them all nice and shiny. So it was only our shirts and our collars

32:00 that we had to iron in the winter time. In summer time we had the drabs and we could do the same because we could starch them and get them all shiny. We used to rub plenty of Sunlight soap on them. See probably, people were used to doing that before we went there. Everybody did their washing in coppers. There weren't that many washing machines around. You know, it wasn't unusual. We probably whinged about it and complained about it

32:30 but everybody just did it. So I can't remember anything down. If we worked back, if we worked on a weekend and everybody else was on leave we used to have to eat in the airmen's mess and we didn't like that very much. Where they were served you had to walk to another mess and if it was summer time and if you had cold meat and salad, by the time you got to the mess the meat was blown. And we used to sit in there and we'd see the airmen just push the

33:00 maggots off. And we used to try and sit... to sit somewhere where we didn't have to watch this. And we'd go without the meat. There were things like that but you'd kind of learn to just take that. I don't know how they fixed it. See in the WAAAF we had our servery and it was all flyscreened. But still they used to get things in there.

Victory over Japan occurs and flying is ceased

33:30 **immediately. How did you feel about having your trade or your job end so abruptly?**

Well it was sad. It was sad getting your tool kit because you had to take it back and to think you'll never have that again. We printed our names on them and a lot of our tools we used to engrave them. It was sad. I think everybody felt it was sad. And people were getting postings coming through as soon as that.

34:00 You'd go down to the huts and the huts would be half empty and people were going. And you'd wonder

if you would ever see them again. When that finished... I don't think it happened as quickly as that, but having to take your tool kit back and knowing you weren't going into the hangar anymore... I went to the Education Office which was not far away from that hangar, so I still had to come to that area. And he had piles and piles of fantastic photos. They were all being thrown out and he said,

34:30 "You can take whatever you like of these." I did take a lot of them and a lot of them were pictures of over in England when the German planes used to come down and land. I've given them around to a lot of museums and they would have just been thrown out. So that was an interest for me, coming to there and working there. The people coming through and getting forms to know what they could put in for when they were discharged.

35:00 That part seemed to be alright and we weren't working such long hours, but as the postings came through you'd go back to the hut and there'd be someone missing. You wouldn't have time to say goodbye, so that was sad.

Did you have any immediate plans of what you might like to do with your future?

Not really. I thought well... My parents at that stage... my sisters who had been living at Marrickville some of them were married and my parents were kind of there

35:30 on and off, and my young sister was there at this stage because she was working at David Jones. So I was able to go there to live, so I didn't have to go straight back. And as I say my mum and dad came to Parramatta when my Great Uncle was sick. I got this job pretty quickly in at David Jones. They were nice girls there, and I had also joined the Land Army

36:00 Association and I joined the RAAF Association but they didn't have a WAAAF Branch at that stage. The WAAAF weren't important. They called it WAAAF Wing. When the WAAAF did get together and say they were going to have... it was called WAAAF Wing because they didn't think we were good enough to have a branch. But later on the WAAAF Wing got so big we were bigger than a lot of the others, so they made us a branch.

Did you have a sense in that post-war period of losing a lot of the

36:30 **victories you had gained as women or the freedoms? Did you have a sense that that was being taken back?**

I don't think I felt that way. Once I got my job I felt satisfied, and I knew I was going to get my rehab. I had applied for that and I knew that was coming up in about 12 months time, and I just felt... it felt lonely because as I said most of my sisters who had been at home had married and

37:00 I got home and the house was kind of empty and all the other people were gone. There were a few around Sydney that I kind of kept in touch with. So going to David Jones was actually a good thing because I made new friends there, and that kind of filled in.

Did you feel in that immediate post-war period that the contribution of the WAAAF and the land army was

37:30 **appreciated by the general public? Did they have a recognition of how much you had contributed?**

I don't think so. We didn't have that feeling. The land army particularly didn't have that feeling.

What about from the government? Did you feel that the government had appreciated that effort?

Well there was nothing to show really that they had. I mean we were getting rehab so that was something.

38:00 When we came out of the air force you were given enough money to go and buy a suit and shoes and things like that, which didn't happen in the land army. So you felt that you were taken care of. And you were given the opportunity to have a rehabilitation course. So I felt that I was satisfied with that because I was lucky enough to have that part of it. But that part didn't seem to worry me

38:30 that much. It worried me that it was a bit lonely.

Did the war change you? Did your war experience change you?

Well how can you tell? I don't know. I don't know really. I think that I felt... I felt there should have been more recognition. You kind of walked down the street and you were just the same as everybody else.

39:00 There was nothing that anybody could do about it really. I mean I could walk down the street and say, "I've been in the air force, I've been away for nearly four years," and now I'm just back in civvie street. I think sometimes you'd feel that. If you were on your own, but if you were with other people it didn't matter.

What were the main lessons you learnt from your war experience?

Well I learned to

- 39:30 give and take. To take orders and to think of yourself as being somebody, but I think I felt that always, right from when I was a little kid somehow. I can't think of anything else that it kind of proved or showed. We were a group and everybody was the same. And I think it was great because I still had friends in the
- 40:00 land army. There were a lot of land army people in Sydney that I knew and there were a lot of air force people in Sydney that I knew. I was lucky I had both. While there was someone you could ring... Well you couldn't ring up many people in that time, but you would kind of get together. There would be a group going to a theatre or somewhere like that. "Are you coming with us? We're going to see..." So you were still kind of in a group. We used to have picnics and go
- 40:30 horse riding. So you kind of kept on with those friends more than you did your new friends. Although I found the new friends at David Jones were very good friends. There you are.