

Australians at War Film Archive

Elva Batt - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 6th May 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/37>

Tape 1

00:39 **All right so on that note remembering we're just dealing with the details now tell us a little about your childhood where did you grow up and where did your parents live?**

Well I was born in Marrickville a suburb of Sydney on the 14th September 1920 and I was the only child of James Bakey and Lottie Bakey and we lived in Marrickville 'til I was about 11 and then we moved to Bronte

01:00 so from Bronte I went to Waverley Public School and then to Sydney Girls High School for 3 years then I went to Stotts Business College for almost a year and learnt shorthand and typing and bookkeeping and jobs were very hard to get then because even though the Depression was over there was still too many people for the workforce so I sat for an exam for the public service and out of 150 who sat only 50 were appointed and I was lucky enough to among those first

01:30 50, so then I worked in the Public Trust Office from 16 to 21 and that was when I joined up at the age of 21 so I spent 4 years and 8 months in the women's services and about 3 months after I came out, Barry and I were married. We moved to Greenacre we had 2 children, Jan whose 54 now and Colin who's 50 and we lived at Greenacre for 53 years

02:00 before moving to the retirement village. Post war I didn't go to work it was normal for public servants to have to resign once they got married and so I reared the children but when they were at high school I decided to go back firstly doing temporary work or part-time work and I enjoyed that so then I was asked to stay on at a solicitors' office I enjoyed doing legal work so I was a

02:30 Legal Secretary for quite a few years working in the city but when a opportunity came to work for a firm of solicitors in Bankstown I took that because travelling to and from town was very tiring and I worked for this firm for 14 years but instead of being a Legal Secretary I found they expected me to handle my own matters so I became a Managing Law Clerk dealing mainly with probate matters and conveyancing matters

03:00 and when I was 60 Barry and I decided it was time we both retired not knowing how many years might lie ahead of us and so for 20 nearly 23 years we've been retired and enjoyed every minute of it so we took on voluntary work after we retired and worked for the Royal Blind Society for quite a number of years and became interested in a Geranium Society and got involved as president or editor of the journal and we

03:30 have enjoyed been together and doing things together and luckily our children are very supportive of us so we've been very fortunate and we've got 4 grandchildren now, one boy and 3 girls.

Oh right that's fantastic. Can we just go back to the war service and give us the details of where you were during the war and what you were doing in those 4 - 5 years?

Right well first of all I joined up we were known as Voluntary Aids even

04:00 though we were part of the army there were only 800 women recruited at that stage and we had to be 21 years old we had to hold Home Nursing and First Aid certificates and have done practical work in a hospital we had to have 2 character references from our commandant at the unit and our priest or minister and we had to pass a medical examination so I was posted to the 113th Australian General Hospital at Concord

04:30 where I worked in the orderly room later on we our unit names were changed to Australian Army Medical Women's Service mainly because to be called Voluntary Aids was a misnomer we were being paid by the army we had army pay books and army numbers and Voluntary Aids were still working in a voluntary capacity so to bring us in line with the Australian Women's Army Service the AWAS our uniform was changed from

05:00 blue to khaki which we hated and we were given rank prior to that we'd all been we'd always been called Miss or Mrs but now we became "Private so and so" or depending on the job that we were doing

we might be a sergeant or a lieutenant and

What rank did you hold when they did that?

Well I became a sergeant because I'd been working in a at the orderly room with 3 men we were all doing similar jobs and they were all sergeants so it was amazing the difference when I had

05:30 to ring up other army officers like the District Records Office so instead of saying "it's Miss Baker here", "it's Sergeant Baker here" and I got a lot more attention so and it was an increase in pay too so

What did you, what did you call yourselves when they changed the name to the Australian the Australian Army Medical Women's Service, did you always use that full name or did you have a nickname?

No no we became AAMWS

AAMWS?

Yes which is a hard word to say really and

06:00 **It's not a real word at all**

Not a real word no but I don't know what else they could have called us and so then I later went to officers' training school and became a lieutenant and I was transferred to the Australian Army Amenities Service where I was looking after the needs of women there'd always been an amenities service for the men which mainly dealt with sporting things like men were

06:30 playing cricket and football and so on but there'd been nothing organised for the Women's Services so this was a new appointment there were several of us appointed and I was sent to Perth for the first 9 months and you more or less felt your way through as to what you were going to do but it was a matter of supply women in the services with more things to make their barracks seem more home like more irons for them to keep their uniforms pressed

07:00 more electric jugs cabinets beside their bed just beside tables really but instead of keeping their possessions in a cardboard box they could put them in this cabinet and instead of a grey blanket on their bed they could have a cotton bedspread and also it was a matter of organising tennis matches and swimming carnivals but I can go into more details about that later

We'll deal with that later

Yeah sure

When did you leave Perth what year was it then?

That would have been

07:30 1944 and I was posted to the Northern Territory first to Adelaide River and later to Darwin but my whole area covered from Alice Springs to Darwin and East to Mt Isa so that was a huge area to cover.

Must have been a big change to suddenly arrive in the Northern Territory?

It certainly was yes in more ways than one and finally when the war was over I came back to Melbourne to the headquarters of Army Amenities and

08:00 was involved in the winding down of all the things that we were doing and so I was discharged as a captain by that time I'd been promoted again and in June 1946 I was discharged from the army

Ok that's perfect that exactly what we wanted so now I have a very good idea of were everything went in order and I'm just going to go back and ask about things in detail now and you can talk for what seems like a really long time but we've got 2

08:30 **days remember so you can talk about things in great detail**

In detail right.

Firstly I think we'll just go right back to the beginning and talk about your childhood to begin with in Marrickville until you were 11, what was that like? Do you have many memories of Marrickville?

Yes my grandmother lived with us until I was 5

09:00 and we had a park nearby we used to go the swings and buy a penny ice-cream to eat in the park of course there was no television in those days and it was in the very early days of radio and my father had a set that had to be tuned with a whisker and he'd you'd put headphones on to listen to it he was always saying "shh shh" while he listened and my grandmother most irate one day said

09:30 "shh be damned!" so she wasn't in too enamoured of this wireless that had just been introduced so for entertainment we played gramophone records and I was a great reader I loved reading and I was never very interested in playing with dolls but I had a scooter which was good I enjoyed that and I had quite a few friends from there and we always walked to school it was a long way but our parents after taking us

the first few days allowed us to

- 10:00 walk together to school and home again today children seem to be picked up by their mothers in cars from school maybe there's more danger today but we were never worried about that when I was young.

Who lived in your house? Your grandparents were there as well?

No no only my grandmother and she died when I was 5 but my mother and father my father was a public servant and he worked in the Treasury Department he was always very keen about

- 10:30 work for the Masons and for the Ancient Order of Foresters he was secretary of that and they used to have socials we'd go along and have a social which involved dancing a bit and the local town hall and you made your own entertainment really.

Do you remember the house you lived in Marrickville?

Oh yes I remember it well my father was a keen gardener and he enjoyed gardening so much that when I wanted a dog

- 11:00 I couldn't have one because he was frightened the dog was going to dig up the garden and instead he bought me a tortoise which I hated so I didn't mind a bit when the tortoise finally escaped and we had a fern house there with lots of lovely ferns and he was sentimental he planted a white azalea and a pink azalea because my mother had carried white azaleas in her wedding bouquet and her bridesmaid had had pink azaleas so he was very keen about gardening and

- 11:30 my mother was a real homebody she sewed and cooked and she was the one who disciplined me my father never laid a hand on me and nor did my mother really but she used to say "I'll punish you if you do that" and I'd say "well don't hit me" I'd rather do anything rather than be hit and so she'd say "all right no comics" you know comics were great for kids those days and you looked forward to getting your weekly comic so that was the greatest punishment

- 12:00 that could have been meted out to me not to get my comic that week.

What sort of comics did you read?

Well a lot of English comics actually my grandmother came out from England and always kept in touch with her sister who used to send out the English papers so we had Pip, Squeak and Wilfred and I can't remember all the other comics that we had but I know I loved them

Was Marrickville a nice suburb

- 12:30 **in those days?**

Yes it was a working class suburb and opposite our house were the Australian Woollen Mills so that every morning a big hooter would go off about 25 past 7 and there were a lot of British migrants living in the area and they worked in the mills and they would be scurrying to work to be there at half past 7 and then I think the hooter went off again at about 5 o'clock when they knocked off work there was not a great deal of transport if you wanted to go into the city you had to catch a tram

- 13:00 or it was a long walk from where we lived to Sydenham station to go into to town by train so you did most of your shopping locally and all the tradesmen delivered the grocer the butcher, fish man would come round every Friday calling out "fisho" and the clothes prop man would come round calling "clothes prop" so that you didn't need a car nobody or very few people had a car in those days

- 13:30 so it was a simple life.

What sort of things did the clothes prop man sell?

Oh clothes props you don't know about those well instead of a Hills Hoist in those days you had 2 upright beams with wire stretched between them or rope between them and washing was hung on that and the prop was a long piece of sapling with a fork in the top and so the fork was pushed into the wires the lines

- 14:00 and pushed up so that made the washing higher and I remember one time the clothes prop broke and my mothers washing came down in and got soiled and she had to do it all over again and of course there were no washing machines then we had a copper and every Monday morning she would light the fire under the copper after filling it with water and boil up the clothes and you had a copper stick which you prodded the clothes and then after they'd boiled for a certain amount of

- 14:30 time all the whites went in first like the sheets and the pillow slips and the towels she had to get the clothes prop not the clothes prop the oh what am I saying?

The copper stick?

Copper stick that's right lift it from the copper into tubs and it would be rinsed in cold water and then it would go again into another tub where there was blue added to the water Rickets Blue* and their motto was "Out of the blue comes the whitest wash"

15:00 so then having been rinsed in that water she had a ringer and all the clothes had to be put through the ringer and then into a clothes basket and while she was doing that the coloureds would be put into the copper and boiled up and then that was the same process and all the time she had to keep the fire stoked underneath the copper to keep the water boiling so then of course everything had to be carried out to the line and it was quite an exhausting day I should imagine.

Was that one day a week?

15:30 One day a week yes.

Was it always the same day?

Very much a routine in those days Monday was always washing day and there was sometimes competition among the neighbours to see who could get their washing out on the line first.

Everybody in the area did their washing on Monday?

Yes yes that was the day, Tuesday was usually ironing day and then you had a day for cleaning and a day for cooking or a day for visitors to come so it was very much routine and the meals were very much routine I can remember

16:00 we always had a baked dinner roast lamb on Sundays and baked vegetables and then through the week you'd know that even though we weren't Catholics but we'd always have fish on Friday and you just had that routine with nothing to alter it

What was your favourite food as a child?

Oh I suppose it was a baked dinner always had been and cutlets my mother didn't cook stews very much my father didn't like those

16:30 we had eggs and bacon always plenty of food even through the Depression years we never went hungry and brown bread and honey was a great favourite of mine

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

No no my mother had a stillborn baby when I was 10 and that was a great tragedy in her life so no I was the only child.

When you moved to Bronte was it a big change in your lifestyle?

17:00 Yes it was my mother hadn't been well after this stillborn baby was born and she and I went out for a holiday there during the Christmas school holidays so she could recover and when the house next door to where we were staying became empty she said to my father "I'd love to move to Bronte" so we'd owned the house at Marrickville and so they rented that and moved into this house at Bronte which they rented and it was quite a large house

17:30 and my mother decided she'd like to have people come and stay either for Bed & Breakfast or for holidays so a lot of country people came and stayed with us and that was quite fun meeting fresh people and we were very close to the beach, Bronte was the sophisticated spot it is now with restaurants and so on and we could just run down a sand hill and we were right in Bronte Park so we went swimming a lot I belonged to the local swimming club

18:00 and my father used to go swimming right through summer and winter every morning and no matter how cold it was so it was a big change in lifestyle.

Were there many houses in Bronte around the beach at that stage?

Oh yes and a lot of flats but there weren't many plots of land not built on so houses were yes they were built all around Bronte but not the

18:30 multi-storey buildings that they've got there now.

What street did you live in?

Pacific Street, 34 Pacific Street Bronte.

Is it still there?

Yes but its been added to.

Did you have a view of the ocean?

Yes from the front we had a very nice front veranda and from there you could see the ocean.

And did you spend much time at the beach?

Oh yes a lot of time and on hot nights we would go down to the beach and walk along the promenade

19:00 sometimes even go for a dip in what they called the "Bogie Hole" there which was sort of a rock pool and on Sunday afternoons my mum and dad always went and sat on a hill overlooking the park and

some of my friends and I would walk around from Bronte to Bondi, there's a cliff walk right around there and in winter we'd do that because in summer we'd be on the beach and there was a rotunda along the promenade and a

19:30 band would come and play every Sunday afternoon there and then there were missionaries who would come into the park for the children and they had a piano accordion and an artist who would draw pictures illustrating Bible stories and we'd sing when I was younger we would sing all these songs that they had with all the illustrations or with gestures to illustrate the songs.

Do you remember any of those songs?

Do you want me to sing it?

I'd love you to it would be great

"Wide wide

20:00 as the ocean high as the heavens above, deep deep as the deepest sea is my saviour's love, hallelujah I though so unworthy still am a child of his care, for his word teaches me that his love reaches me everywhere".

So you remember that song from - how old were you at that stage?

Oh about

20:30 12 or 13.

And how often would you sing those?

Oh often on a Sunday afternoon I did go to a Presbyterian Church at Charing Cross which was a tram ride from Bronte and I went to Sunday School in the mornings but then you'd go down to this mission on Sunday afternoons.

Was your family particularly religious?

No my mother and father very rarely went to church my mother used to say

21:00 "oh you'll represent us at church" so I became quite religious really and taught Sunday School afterwards and became a member of the Presbyterian Church and took communion there so that was only until I was 21 I found once I joined the army I was exposed to other views and philosophies so I really changed from being a strict Presbyterian.

21:30 **That must have, we'll definitely talk about that sort of awakening later on, sticking with your childhood a little bit now, when you first moved to Bronte you said your mother was unwell after the birth of the stillborn child, did you take on more responsibilities around the house at that stage?**

No no I didn't I don't think I really understood that she needed help in that way but I feel that she started life a fresh there

22:00 when we lived at Marrickville she would always be bumping into friends to sympathise with her over her loss so out at Bronte nobody knew about that and so she made a fresh start in life and that helped her a lot.

Tell us a little bit more about your mother, did she grow up in Sydney?

Yes she was born in Leichhardt her parents had come out from England about 1880 and she had a happy childhood she was one of a large family her mother had had 8 children altogether

22:30 although only 4 survived she was a person who enjoyed singing and dancing a very outgoing person she had been a tailoress when she left school at 14 she was put to a firm that taught her how to make men's trousers and men's coats and that was what she did most of her life and she always made all my clothes

23:00 and she'd put pockets in my dresses which were like men's pockets because that was what she was used to doing

Did she have any brothers who fought in the First World War?

Yes her younger brother Bill went away in the First World War and he was away about 4 years so that was the only relative who was connected with the First World War

Your father didn't join?

No no I don't know why my father didn't join up he wasn't a very strong man he was very tall

23:30 and very thin and I think maybe his health whether he would have passed a medical or not I don't know but I never asked him about that.

He was a public servant?

That's right yes.

It might have been a protected occupation?

It could have could have been yes.

It certainly was in the Second World War

It certainly was and I was very fortunate that I was able to join up when I did because after that they didn't allow any more women to join up from the public service they had to do the men's jobs.

Did you ever talk to your

24:00 **Uncle Bill did he ever did you have much to do with him?**

No no oh I was very fond of him and saw him a lot and his daughter Nancy was the same or just about a year or two younger than me so we were quite good friends but he didn't refer to the war at all and I think he named his daughter Nancy after a place in France where he'd been.

Yeah I think there is a place in France called that.

Yeah

Was there much

24:30 **fuss about Anzac Day in those days?**

I don't remember any fuss about it at all I have no recollection of Anzac Day until after the Second World War I never went to watch a procession.

What about Empire Day?

Oh yes that was a big deal particularly from Dulwich Hill School it was you'd march to the local cinema and sing patriotic songs about England Ireland Scotland Wales

25:00 and the local Member of Parliament made speeches and everybody waved flags and we had the rest of the day off so that was very big.

Did you feel British?

Oh yes I don't think my grandmother ever felt anything else other than British and she instilled great loyalty to Britain in our family and I think her sons were named after her brothers so they had English names like William and George

25:30 and so yes it was very British background.

When you moved to Bronte did you have a wireless?

Yes yes we did and we also had a gramophone and I can remember when we'd do the washing and wiping up we'd put a record we had an ice chest no refrigerator and the gramophone sat on top of the ice chest and you'd put a record on and wind up the gramophone and do the washing and wiping up

26:00 to the sound of music

Did you have any favourite radio programmes or anything you listened to on the radio?

I can't remember any oh yes on Sunday nights there was the Lux Radio Theatre and they always put on excellent plays so I always remember listening to those

What about the cinema, did you go to the cinema much?

Oh yes particularly as a teenager there were 2 cinemas at Bondi Junction

26:30 the Star and the Regal and Saturday night was always the night to go to the movies particularly when you had a boyfriend and you had the choice of programmes of course with the 2 and you had a long programme and there was always a B class movie oh the news movie tone news would come on first and often a Mickey Mouse type thing cartoons or a travelogue and then there'd be the B film

27:00 then interval then there'd be the main film so that it went from oh half past seven I think 'till about 11 o'clock at night and there'd be such a crowd to come home on Saturday night the trams would be waiting outside the theatre and everyone would pile out of the theatre and onto the trams to go home.

How old were you before you were allowed to go to the movies?

Oh I suppose I could have gone when I was young I wouldn't go to the Saturday afternoon matinees because

27:30 they were so noisy and they used to have cowboys films on which didn't interest me at all so I suppose I was 14 something like that before I went to the movies.

Did you start to have boyfriends at that stage?

No not until I was about 17 but what had been a good family entertainment particularly at the end of the Depression years and this would have been when I was about 12 they had community singing at the Bronte Theatre which was known locally as the "Bronte Bug House" you would go along on

28:00 Friday nights to these community singing programmes run by a fellow called Les Ship and they would have the words of the songs up on the screen with a little ball that danced along over the top of the words so you knew to sing them in time to the music and they would have some entertainment comedians and singers and Stella Lamont who is the mother of Tony Lamond I think you would know about in films and in television now

28:30 she was one of the entertainers she and her husband Joe Lamond.

Do you remember any particular shows that you went to any particular entertainment?

Mainly those I think they were only sixpence to get in a thruppence for children and we'd walk home from the theatre so it was very cheap entertainment and a lot of people of course couldn't afford anything more than that and it was a way of cheering people up there were a lot of people still living in

29:00 Happy Valley which was out at La Perouse in sort of huts made of whatever they could scrounge and those times were really tough for people and when they couldn't afford other entertainment the community singing was a happy evening

How obvious was the Depression around where you lived?

It didn't affect us terribly although my father took a 1/3 cut in salary but being a public servant he was in a permanent

29:30 job but it did mean that so many men were out of work you would often have men coming to the door with a little suitcase in which they would have perhaps needles and thread or Kemper balls or just small household items and they would ask you to buy something from them well my mother would if she could but often she would say "oh I can't afford anything" or "I don't need anything but I'll give you a sandwich instead" and they were often very

30:00 glad to be given something to eat and a cup of tea because they'd probably started off without any breakfast.

Are there any other examples of hardship that you remember seeing in those days?

Children just went without a lot of things a lot went barefooted of course and you didn't have the toys the children get today you were very lucky if you just got a small

30:30 stocking at Christmas time and maybe for your birthday just some other small gift but not the expensive toys you went without those and you had hand-me-down garments children who with older brothers or sisters rarely had a new garment they were patched and handed down and recycled.

Was there a train at Bronte in those days?

No only a tram we lived right at the end of the tram line so you walk just down the

31:00 street and caught the tram at the depot.

So you basically to get around you would catch a tram almost everywhere?

That's right yes.

Did your father ever have a motor car?

No never owned a motor car

Not until after the...?

Never had one no no.

Did your parents continue to live at Bronte after you left to go to war?

Yes yes they did they lived there until or my father continued to live there after my mother died and then he remarried and his second wife lived there with him

31:30 and so Bronte had a lot of happy memories for me and that was where Barry and I originally met at Bronte.

How old were you then? Was this after the war?

No we met one another in a casual sort of a way we used to go to the same parties and we played tennis in the same group and we see one another on the beach but only as friends but he just lived not far away at Bronte so when war broke out and I

32:00 joined up he also joined the army and so we didn't see one another very often then but do you want to hear the story of how we met or later?

Oh we'll tell it later I think in detail, but it wasn't until after the war that you got together, is that right?

No that's right yeah.

While were still talking about Bronte though, I'm very interested in the beach in those days, was it as popular as it is today for Australians to go down to the beach?

Oh yes very popular there were the cubby houses there still there now people had picnics and

32:30 you went to there early in the morning to try and get a cubby house close to the beach and Bronte was always a very safe beach because of the Bogie Hole the children could swim there and there were baths run by a family called Bond and they kept those baths scrupulously clean and I used to race there in the swimming club not that I was a terribly good swimmer but it was the thing to do to join the club and race on Saturday mornings breaststroke

33:00 and freestyle and diving and it really was a popular spot with families

Were there baths for men and women or were they the same?

Next to the Bogie Hole was another rock pool which joined the baths and that was called the Men's Bogie and the men had that to themselves in the mornings so that was exclusively for the men but after that it was Mixed Bogie

Were there certain rules

33:30 **of proprietary and etiquette that there aren't today?**

No I don't think so costumes were very modest compared to today of course

What did you wear to go swimming?

A full bathing costume no bikinis then of course and your bathing costume had a skirt on it it covered you all and the men some of the men particularly the lifesavers wore full length costumes when they were on parade that was a big thing at the

34:00 beach then they would have competitions I think they still do among all the various life saving clubs with the march past and rescues and events with the rowing surf boats and so the men wore these full length costumes then well then later on they began to wear just half costumes, trunks.

What were they made from?

Wool which was a bit clammy

34:30 when it got wet but no they were quite good you didn't think about modern styles of costumes so much.

Were there ever any embarrassing episodes of the woollen costume that was...?

No but when I was younger when we still lived at Marrickville we used to go swimming to a place Elkginton Park Baths in Leichhardt and that was where I first learnt to swim and they were very muddy sort of baths

35:00 but my mother used to wear a top with sleeves that came down to here and the top came to here and then underneath were pants that she wore that came to here and always a cap on her head and so I don't know that they were embarrassing but they were not easy to get in and out of

Did those fashions change during the war when clothing rationing came into force?

I don't think clothing rationing had very much to do with it I think it was just a

35:30 matter of fashion clothing was affected by rationing but I don't know that it stretched to bathing costumes but 2 piece bathing costumes appeared during the war.

And do you think that was to do with the changing ideas of modesty?

Modesty yes certainly yes it was still very modest you were completely covered but no I don't think that it had very much

36:00 to do with rationing at all.

You had a fairly secluded and comfortable childhood being an only child?

Yes I did.

What were your main contacts with people outside your family?

Through the church mainly we had a group for girls at the church and for boys the girls were called "Covenanters" and the boys "The Order of the Burning Bush" and we met on Friday nights separately and had all sorts of

- 36:30 physical culture and we would have exercises and then sometimes we would have parties the boys would bring soft drinks and the girls would take the supper in one of the homes of the members and always on holidays we had picnics or hikes hiking was very popular we'd take the train to Audley at National Royal National Park and hike through the National Park
- 37:00 and we were not supposed to dance, Presbyterians and Methodists didn't approve of ballroom dancing I don't know why it was considered sinful but I was still allowed to learn ballroom dancing and got a lot of fun out of that.

Do you think during the period of your teenage years - did you read the news very much or listen to the news or watch newsreels?

- 37:30 You watched newsreels when you went to the cinema that was your and also in town there was the State Theatre that showed newsreels exclusively non stop you could go in when you liked and come out when you liked and that was your biggest source of news I think I don't remember being particularly interested in reading the news but I suppose we always got a newspaper.

Do you think you were aware of what was happening in Europe in the lead up to the war?

Yes in the last stages

- 38:00 there but I know it was a shock when the war actually broke out.

Lets talk about that for a while, where were you when the war broke out?

I was I'd gone to business college after work I was doing shorthand and typing speed classes and I remember coming out and seeing the posters on the news 'cause you had an evening newspaper as well as a morning one and saw the poster "War Is Declared" and that was a big shock and

- 38:30 you started to think "well how is it going to affect me?" you couldn't realise at first that Australia was going to be involved you'd seen what was happening in Europe or read about it but it always seemed so far away

Course there wouldn't have been any assumption that women would have taken any part in this war?

Only women nurses fully trained nurses and that was the thing that I think women felt

- 39:00 discriminated against because I know the government thought it was being protective of us but all we were allowed to do for the first few years was voluntary work which was important but when you saw the boys that you worked with in the office joining up and going overseas going to Canada to the air training corps or going to England or going off to the Middle East in the army you could feel a bit envious you didn't think about the danger, you just thought about the excitement

- 39:30 and of course young people didn't travel overseas in those days so that was a tremendous thing to happen in their lives that they were going overseas and women just felt we were supposed to be at home and there's nothing exciting happening in our lives.

Did you get the urge to go overseas yourself?

Well this was expected when I first joined up we were anticipating that we would be sent overseas and

- 40:00 more than 200 women VAs actually did the first group of 20 went to Sollum to work in a hospital there they sailed on the Wanganella and then later 200 went to the Middle East sailing on the Queen Mary and there were a number about 15 who were on board the hospital ship the Dutch pronunciation is Oranje or it was often called the "U-rang-gee" and they working as nurses or helping the nurses

- 40:30 on board that ship so that was a very coveted position

When did you first join up?

Soon after I turned 21 I was 19 when the war broke out and we weren't eligible to enlist until we were 21 it wasn't until 1941 that the government decided that it was going to need more support in hospitals the nursing sisters were eligible to join up

- 41:00 and women doctors right from the start but of course it wasn't sufficient and the for the work staff that they needed in hospitals and there were wards men but they did need more women so very reluctantly the government said "well we'll allow 800 women to be recruited from St Johns Ambulance brigade and from voluntary aid detachments" and they were to work in hospitals on the understanding that they weren't to

- 41:30 take the jobs of men away from them but it was soon found that of course the women were indispensable and it finished up as I say with 8 and a half thousand AAMWS working in hospitals with all sorts of jobs

Tape 2

00:34 **When you were growing up in your teenage years what did you dream of to be when you left school?**

I don't know that I thought about it very much our parents or my parents always wanted me to be in a safe job because with the results of the Depression they saw so much unemployment and when I decided to do a shorthand typing course my mother was very keen to either get into the public service or the

01:00 water board or an insurance company something that was safe but I didn't ever dream of being a doctor or anything like that, perhaps a teacher I might have thought I would like to be but after being in high school for 3 years I decided I wasn't going to stay on it was 5 years 'till the Leaving Certificate and then a couple of years to go to Teachers' College and I think I'd had enough of study by then.

Were you aware

01:30 **of the politics in Australia by this time?**

I don't think young people were particularly concerned about politics I never remember having political discussions or my parents didn't belong to a political party so it just didn't arise.

If you cast your mind back to that time when you've become an adolescent it was a time full of concerns what was your main concern for your own life then?

02:00 I don't really remember the concerns about life I think we had quite a happy life I had 2 girlfriends who went to Sydney Girls High with me and we were more concerned with learning ballroom dancing and reading we discussed books endlessly and always had Georgette Heyer and the books we were talking about we all read the same books and then discussed them we went swimming we played tennis,

02:30 life was pretty carefree really so I don't think I had any fears of the future.

What was the first book you ever read?

Anne of Green Gables was among the first there was a series all about Anne, Anne of Avonlea, Anne of the Island by LM Montgomery and they were very popular.

What was your favourite?

Oh Anne of Green Gables I think they've since made movies of it and that was quite a favourite you'd read it

03:00 and re-read it

You were learning ballroom dancing?

Yes yes we were not old enough to be allowed to go to dances at this stage but a local teacher started up ballroom class at Bronte and so Barbara and Mavis and I went to that every Friday night and we learnt the quickstep, the jazz waltz, the slow foxtrot and then some old time dancing like the Pride of Erin and

03:30 those things we became so expert at this I think our teacher was using us to coach some of the male dancers who went along but that was a great topic of conversation it lasted us from one Friday night to the other as to who was going to be at the class and how did he dance and what was exciting about that person.

Did you have any particular crushes on any of your partners?

Oh I suppose I did but I don't remember much about them,

04:00 there were so many of us and it was a fairly crowded room and they didn't walk us home we all were very independent and walked ourselves home.

At the time had you been outside of Sydney?

No not up 'til I was about 14 or 15 and my mother would take me and her friend would take her son and we'd go to the Blue Mountains to stay at one of the

04:30 guest houses there and the Blue Mountains was as far as you went for a holiday in those days or Woy Woy but we didn't go to Woy Woy and so the guest houses were good particularly in the school holidays they'd have all sort of entertainment for adolescents always had a fancy dress party and there was always tennis and walks to the local Echo Point or Leura Cascades or things like that and

05:00 comparatively cheap accommodation and you'd go up in the train to Katoomba and then the bus would meet you and take you to the particular guest house where you were staying and of course my mother and my friends mother would do the things that they wanted to do leaving us teenagers to do our own thing

Did you know much about the rest of Australia?

Oh yes I studied geography at school so you learnt a lot through geography and

- 05:30 Australian history at high school so that was as far as that went, it wasn't practical hands on we didn't go on excursions young people these days seem to go off on a lot of excursions but the school didn't take us even at high school we didn't go out on excursions

What did you learn of the Aboriginal population of Australia?

Very little we didn't have any contact with them at all and so I

- 06:00 suppose I didn't think about them.

Did you have any contact with any foreigners any people from other countries except England?

Yes at High School we had 2 girls from other countries in our year there was Helmi Pusep who came from Latvia or Estonia and there was another girl who came from Poland and that was quite unusual for someone of foreign nationality to be among your friends

- 06:30 and this girl was her Polish name was Ginya but she changed it to Gertie Ingdyk and we always said "oh why did you change Ginya to a horrible name like Gertie?" but that was interesting because she was Jewish and in a group at high school we had a Roman Catholic, a Church of England a Jewish girl I was Presbyterian and there was a Methodist and we all in our lunch hour discussed our religions which was very good we became

- 07:00 very tolerant of one another's religions and that was what I think is in favour of public schools, that you're not just all one religion segregated from the rest of the community and you'd become much more tolerant of other peoples religions.

When did you first think about - was there a time when you really thought you - the moment when you decided to join up was it a decision you took by yourself?

Yes I don't think

- 07:30 my parents were in favour of it but I said "well I'm 21 and I'm free to join up" and with all the rest of the people in my group particularly all the young men that I knew joining up you just felt you were going to be left out if you didn't and there was a certain patriotic feeling to think that oh you were going to be part of this but by this time of course the war had been going for 2 years and everybody was doing something to help, my father was an

- 08:00 air raid warden and my mother worked hard raising funds for the Red Cross working in a opportunity shop and at fêtes and so on and so I felt that I just had to be in it

What about your other friends?

Yes well the 2 of my closest friends joined up almost at the same time as I did and they were posted out to 113 AGH [Australian General Hospital] as well so

- 08:30 it was a big step in our lives we didn't know how long the war was going to last but I think we looked on it as an adventure and it would have been very boring if I'd been stuck in the Public Trust Office for all the remaining years of the war.

Did you know of the threat from the Japanese the growing?

Oh yes we were aware of that and I think the war with Germany had seemed so far away but of course

- 09:00 after the bombing of Pearl Harbour it seemed to come very close so yes definitely that was a factor in us wanting to do something for Australia.

Can you describe a little about some of the how daily life changed in Sydney around at that time?

Yes there were blackouts or brownouts all the houses had to have

- 09:30 blackout curtains on them and my father as an air raid warden had to go around in the evenings checking to see that no chink of light was showing and if it was you had to knock at that person's door and say "you're showing lights there" particularly along the beach fronts because at Bronte they thought "oh there could be submarines" and it did turn out that submarines did come into Sydney Harbour and so that was important and what was the silliest thing they took the names off all the railway stations

- 10:00 so the enemy if they landed wouldn't know where they were but it was very confusing for everybody else if you were trying to find your way in the brownout and the buses' headlights were all were partly covered so that was very dim and the cars a lot of them changed over to using gas and they would have big sort of balloon-like affairs on the roof of the car and that was because

- 10:30 petrol was very scarce and they were running on this hot gas I don't quite know how it worked but that was a wartime measure and of course rationing was introduced and tea, sugar, butter, meat, and clothing were all rationed and everybody got a ration book and when you went to the grocers you took your ration book with you and when you bought your tea and sugar, he cut out those coupons and went
- 11:00 to the butcher he cut out those coupon for your meat and once you'd used those coupons up for the week or the month well you just had to make do with fish or rabbit or we didn't eat pasta in those days and clothing was difficult I didn't notice it so much because the army was providing my uniform but for people who were in civilian clothing they had to watch those clothing coupons and so there were a lot of recycled clothes in those days.
- 11:30 **Before you joined up around 1940-41 did you have a car?**
- No we never ever owned a car and in fact until I was 40 that was in 1960 we'd never owned a car my husband and I so the petrol rationing I didn't mention that petrol rationing didn't affect us
- So this changes virtually over night the introduction of all these measures?**
- Oh no gradually
- 12:00 I think I think the blackouts came fairly quickly because they were very conscious of the fact that Sydney could be attacked and so it was darkened and the streets were very dark it was hard finding your way around if you were in the city or anywhere like that
- Before you joined up did you continue your normal life were you still going to ballroom dancing classes and...?**
- No not to classes in those days then we'd gone past the classes
- 12:30 we were allowed to go to real dances and so yes we still went ballroom dancing and there were fewer boys around of course to dance with because so many of them had joined up my 21st birthday party was held at a place called the Trocadero in George Street in Sydney which was a very popular dance place it was Jim Davidson and his orchestra that played there and it wasn't a big we had a table at this
- 13:00 Trocadero and because we didn't have enough young men to invite to the party we got in touch with air force headquarters and said if there were 2 young air force boys in on leave in Sydney with nowhere to go would they like to come to the party which they did and so they came along and danced with us and joined in the party.
- Who were there who were they?**
- Oh I don't remember who they were but my mum and dad were there and my girlfriends and I think there were about 20 of us
- 13:30 all in the party but as I say men were quite scarce then because so many of them were away overseas or in uniform and in camps everywhere so it was good to be able to get these 2 spare men to dance with.
- You were obviously an eligible young woman at this time - what was your criteria what's a good characteristic in a man?**
- Well I had a very nice boyfriend from the time I was 17 till the time I was 19 he lived opposite
- 14:00 me at Bronte and we used to go to the pictures every Saturday night together and he was very keen about music he played the guitar and the ukulele which was quite popular then taught me to play the ukulele he had a nice singing voice and so we spent a lot of time together but the criteria oh someone who was gentle and loving
- 14:30 and caring they didn't have to be particularly handsome or no worries about how highly they were educated as long as they were people that you could get along easily with, he was a very good tennis player and was a bit disappointed that I wasn't so good but we'd been swimming together of course at the beach and like everyone else we didn't have very much money so a lot of our entertainment was free to go to the beach or just go for
- 15:00 walks.
- You said up to 19, what happened after that time?**
- Oh I think we outgrew one another he was 2 years older than I was and I wasn't prepared to settle down at 19 and I think we just discovered that well what had been a very nice romance just finished and it was rather funny of course he used to play these gramophone records and the strains would drift across the street and
- 15:30 one was "let us be sweethearts over again you know how much I care" but after awhile when I wouldn't make up with him he started playing "so if you think no one can finish yours and when you're gone that I'll have the blues oh yes take another guess" so I think that was the end of that.
- Did he go on to join the army?**

Yes he did and by great coincidence he had

16:00 joined the army and I lost touch with him but I was coming home on leave on the Saturday afternoon and got onto a tram for Bronte and the same compartment as his parents and I said "oh hello where are you going?" and they said where going to Laurie's wedding and I said "oh who's he marrying?" and he was marrying a girl who was not the same religion as he was and his mother was most upset she didn't always approve of me but at least I was the same

16:30 religion so that was a great coincidence.

Can you talk a little bit about the day you went in to join up?

Yes we had to go for a medical examination at Victoria Barracks and this was quite a strict examination and of course we were all keen to be made A1 physically because that meant you could be sent overseas

17:00 and to my great distress the doctor said I was B class because I'd had severe acne as a teenager on my face and on my shoulders and although it had cleared up by the time I was 21 she said I if I went to the Middle East where skin diseases were rife I would have a very great chance of getting some sort of skin disease so I went home and cried and said to my mother "I'm only B class" it seemed a great

17:30 indignity but it meant that I was still in the army anyway and it wouldn't have made very much difference because only 200 girls got away to the Middle East and after that they weren't sending anymore the war had shifted to the Pacific and by the time the war was in New Guinea I went for another medical examination and amazingly I was A class by this time even though I think in New Guinea you would have picked up all sorts of

18:00 diseases and although I never got to New Guinea at least I was A class.

18:06 ** PROBLEM WITH LIGHTING BUT CAMERA STILL ROLLING**

18:30 ** PROBLEM WITH LIGHTING BUT CAMERA STILL ROLLING**

19:00 ** PROBLEM WITH LIGHTING BUT CAMERA STILL ROLLING**

19:22 **Can you just explain about how in a bit more detail about the medical, was it...?**

Well I don't remember having had an x-ray but we certainly had to give a sample of

19:30 urine and they weren't prepared for women to do that and we were given a tube which would have been very suitable for a man but very difficult for a woman I suppose our eyesight was examined our ears our chest our heart so that was about all that I can remember of it our height and weight taken but no internal examination

What was your first encounter with army

20:00 **discipline and the enrolment procedure?**

Well if I can talk a little bit about how we were kitted out with our uniforms is that appropriate at this time the army wasn't ready to provide our uniforms because the quartermasters' store had provided all army uniforms except these VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] ones and so we were given an order of 20 pounds to go to Farmers which was a big department store in Sydney and

20:30 be kitted out with the uniforms we needed now 20 pounds \$40 doesn't sound very much today but when you put it in perspective I was earning 4 pounds a week so 20 pounds was the equivalent of 5 weeks wages which in today's terms would be perhaps \$2,500 and of course stenographers were earning \$500 a week so that provided us with blue uniforms and veils grey lisle stockings, black lace up low heeled

21:00 shoes, a navy blue coat and skirt with a white shirt and a navy blue tie and a felt hat and an overcoat, a cardigan and a cape and we had to pack all those in a suitcase and take ourselves off to, well in my case to Concord, on public transport and there I was what they called "taken on the staff" and interviewed by the Colonel, the Commanding Officer

21:30 of the unit and he said "what were you best at in civilian life?" and I said "shorthand and typing Sir" and he said "I'll make you a filing clerk" so I thought that was a bit ridiculous but anyway then they put me to this office job in the orderly room in which all the files were kept so my first encounter with real discipline was one of my jobs was to go back about 7 o'clock in the evenings to

22:00 give the mail to the Dona* he was the dispatched rider who came to collect the mail at that time and we were never supposed to walk outside our quarters without our veil on and this night or evening I had been doing my washing or ironing and suddenly I realised it was 7 o'clock and the Dona was coming and I dashed up to the orderly room to give him the mail and just then the Matron and one of her other nurses came along and spotted me without

22:30 the veil, "Miss Bakey come into my office", Miss Bakey went in trembling stood to attention "no sister would go outside her quarters without wearing her veil don't let it happen again", "no Matron" so I was

severely disciplined there.

At this time were you getting news of the war in Europe?

Oh yes

23:00 yes radio broadcasts of course and newspapers and a lot went round by word of mouth you'd say "oh did you hear what happened?" and so on and a lot of the women who had relatives overseas of course they were very concerned with the news as to whether their loved ones were in danger so yes news was very very important then.

Did you have any friends whose husbands were serving overseas at the time?

No most of my friends weren't married but some of the

23:30 girls I was working with had husbands overseas and in fact when I was in Perth I was rooming with a woman whose husband was a prisoner of war of the Japanese and it was a big day for her when a letter arrived from him she couldn't bear to open it in front of anybody else she'd go to her room and open it in private and I'm sure she had a weep over that but that was the closest I came to women who were whose husbands were involved.

We'll come back

24:00 **I think to that story we might just stay with wartime Sydney at the moment and did you get any training?**

Did I have any training?

Yeah with the army?

Oh yes when I became a sergeant I had to go to NCO school that's Non Commissioned Officer school at Ingleburn and that lasted for 3 weeks and instead of at Concord I had shared a room with one woman and we were in a block of

24:30 rooms but out at Ingleburn we were in a army hut with about 20 of us in a hut and grey blankets on our beds and it was a run across the open grass to the latrines and the showers and these had been quarters that had been used by men and of course men weren't too fussed whether they had a door on the latrines or showers and some of these didn't and we felt weren't very private so

25:00 they eventually put doors on those and we had to do a lot of drill there we were supposed to learn out to take orders and give orders so that you went on route marches and you did drill, open ranks march and all this sort of thing so that was quite an experience and then we had lectures on army organisation, army routine, the different ranks

25:30 because up until this time while we were VAs we didn't have to salute anybody but once we became AAMWS and privates of course we had to know who to salute and when to salute and how to salute so that was a learning curve we had meals there that were very different from the meals we'd had at the hospital cooked in big soyers they were called and dished out to

26:00 us at long tables so that was quite different to what we'd been used to and then when we went home on leave for the weekend the last train that we could catch back to Ingleburn to be in by midnight there was always a great rush to get on the buses to go out to the camp and we'd race up the steps for Ingleburn station to get onto the bus because if you missed that bus you were going to be AWL [Absent Without Leave].

26:30 **Were your instructors men?**

Yes oh there were some women among them the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] had a school of instruction there but mainly it was men that we had and they didn't spare us at all we were given no special privileges because we were women.

The army I can imagine was not particularly geared up to accept women at the time?

No no it wasn't and this is what I say they had to make changes at the training quarters

27:00 to accommodate us but it with so many women then coming into the AWAS they were also being trained at Ingleburn so it was a very busy time there but I think as far as those of the AAMWS who were nursing a lot of it was irrelevant they really needed those who were coming in you see as VAs we had had home nursing and first aid training but the girls then when

27:30 the AAMWS were introduced were only 18 they dropped the age from 21 to 18 and these girls had had no training in hospital work at all so it would have made a lot more sense if they had had that training instead of how to do a route march.

It must have been a you were coming at quite an accelerated it's a big change in your life I could imagine and but might come back to it but I was just wondering

28:00 **did you feel I guess what you call now is sexual harassment from...?**

No I don't think so you might have got a few wolf whistles but I don't remember being sexually harassed at all.

Can we just sort of place this on the time line this is sort of late '40, 1941 isn't it?

Yes.

Singapore hadn't fallen is that right?

No Singapore fell

Fell in early '42 in February?

February yes.

So your

28:30 **most of your focus is still on the on Europe and the Middle East?**

Yes yes

Ok sorry it was just a - what did you know of the AAMWS when you joined up?

Well there were no such thing as AAMWS when I joined up you see we only joined up as VAs and we were mainly to be nursing orderlies and ward orderlies and but then the need was so

29:00 great for other people other ranks to do there were x-ray technicians, dental nurses, switchboard operators, clerks, typists, workers in the laundry and general duties which meant to you were acting as a waitress to wait on the officers' mess and the sisters' mess and to clean their quarters so those general duties jobs were not terribly

29:30 popular and you were changed around you did so many months on those duties and then you were allowed to change over to office work or hospital work and of course it was all shift work in the wards the girls were working 8 hour shifts I didn't do any work in the wards at all but those who were on night duty they had to sleep in separate quarters so they weren't disturbed by those who were on day duty so their lives were changed a lot and

30:00 a lot of them were very keen about nursing and eventually after the war was over they went into nursing full time although sadly all the work that they'd done during those years that they were working in hospitals didn't count towards their nursing training which I thought was quite unfair and they had to start off from year 1 as though they were rookies, but it depended on the sister who was in charge of the ward how much you were allowed to do as a VA.

30:30 You might just be given the very menial jobs of making the beds or handing out the orange juice or something like that or if a sister saw you were particularly keen she would be encouraging you to take patients' temperatures or give them bed baths or all sorts of taking their pulse for instance those things you really needed to know if you were going to be of assistance to the nurses.

Did you -

31:00 **when was - did you encounter wounded coming back from the Middle East?**

Yes yes hospital trains would come down from Queensland and pull into Rhodes Station which was the nearest station to Concord Hospital and the hospital would be notified that a convoy was coming and all the ambulances would be lined up and it wouldn't matter if it was 11 o'clock at night all those of us who were free to go went to where the ambulances were coming and the patients were being

31:30 discharged and they would have on them their name and their rank and what was wrong with them and they would have to be dispatched to the appropriate wards and so you would work alongside the ambulance drivers and the nurses in seeing that those men were properly labelled and dispatched to the correct wards.

You remember the first time you encountered wounded soldiers coming off the train?

No I don't remember that so much

32:00 but I do remember the first time I had to deal with someone who died in the hospital one of the jobs for the orderly room sergeant who was on duty there was to notify the Districts Records Office of the death of any soldier in the hospital and I was taken down to the mortuary and they pulled open the doors and pulled out a body on the slab and that wasn't a very nice experience and so then I had to ring up

32:30 the District Records Office and notify them of this soldier's death, of his name and his rank and his army number and I was in tears and I can remember I think he was an older man on the other end of the line and he said "don't get upset girly you've just got to take this all time" so you just had to cope with that

What had he died of?

Oh I wouldn't have known that I didn't enter into it but no that was my first

33:00 brush with a soldier's death and the last actually it didn't happen again somebody else must have been on duty when others died there was a pathology section and the pathologist there would sometimes hold post-mortems and I was invited to go and watch a post-mortem but I didn't have the stomach to do that I wouldn't have made a good nurse it was just as well I worked in the office

Did you get to know

33:30 **any of the wounded soldiers at the time?**

Yes the husband of a friend of our family was in hospital there and I used to go and visit him they were always very glad of visitors because he was from the country and so his family couldn't visit him very often and he went along chatted and maybe took them for a walk if they were able to walk around on the boardwalks around the hospital or you might even take the patients to the

34:00 entertainment we had very good entertainment at the hospital concert parties would come out and entertain the patients mainly but the staff could squeeze into the hall as well and enjoy the entertainment the dancers from the Tivoli came out with a fellow Bob Dwyer organised this and I think Jack Davey a comedian well known on radio in those days came out and I can remember a well known

34:30 concert pianist called Isador Goodman came out and played the piano for us and just when he was playing an air raid siren sounded and he stopped and said "that siren needs to be tuned" and then he went on playing again so yes there were those contacts with the patients.

What were most of the injuries?

One ward had a lot of men with broken legs who had been despatch riders and they were forever coming off their motor

35:00 bikes and breaking their legs, there was a malaria ward of course once the war had shifted to New Guinea a lot of soldiers came back from malaria and a lot had tinea or dermatitis the khaki uniforms that the men had worn in the Middle East were dyed green so that they wouldn't be conspicuous in the jungle but unfortunately the dye that they used came out into their sweat and they sweated in the

35:30 jungle as you can imagine and this caused this terrible dermatitis and so they were confined to hospital for that and oh there were all the usual sorts of illnesses those who had to have their appendix out or their tonsils out there were various wards in the hospital for various complaints and one of the big wards that we had there was for men who had been badly burned and injured

36:00 in aircraft accidents and they were in a ward called a the facio-auxillary ward where their faces were to be built up again by special surgical procedures and they were in there for the long term and sometimes they had to have their faces and a lot of their heads covered in a plaster cast so that was quite sad to see them walking around but the surgeons were doing very good jobs in rehabilitating these men.

36:30 **Did you ever get to know or go around and see those men?**

No I didn't, when you were at the hospital you were busy working most of your time and then when you got leave you went home on leave so you weren't terribly connected to the patients.

Yeah that's a good story about the dye by the way I'm sure Chris or I will revisit that when

37:00 **we get later perhaps when we get into the story but how long were you out in Concord?**

For 2 years 1941 to 1943.

Where were you when you found out that Singapore had fallen?

I suppose I was at Concord I don't have a great recollection of that but the most exciting thing I remember was the night that the submarines came into Sydney Harbour

37:30 and I'd been home to Bronte on leave and hadn't been in bed very long when the air raid sirens went and we all had to get out of bed and go into slit trenches and it had been raining and the slit trenches were deep in water so we crouched in those in the mud until the all clear went off again but it seemed like ages before it happened and then we didn't really know why the air raid sirens had sounded whether it was an air raid or what

38:00 was happening and it wasn't until the next morning that we heard on the radio that the submarines had shelled Sydney and so I was very anxious for my parents being in Bronte so I got onto the phone as soon as I could to see if they were ok and they were luckily it was a time when the war really came very close to home.

38:24 End of tape

00:34 **When you were working at Concord was this the first time you had been involved in nursing?**

Yes well I wasn't really involved in nursing there because it was just an office job to me

You mentioned before though that to join up you needed to have a certain nursing qualification?

That's right.

How did you get that?

Oh we attended classes with a couple of my friends we joined the Waverley detachment of Voluntary Aids and

01:00 it in the evenings we used to go and have lectures by doctors and demonstrations by ambulance men on bandaging and we had to study home nursing and first aid and sit for exams in that and then do advanced home nursing, first aid

At this time this was in addition to your job in the public service?

Oh yes this was purely a hobby really

Can you tell us a little bit about that job in the public service?

Yes

01:30 I always enjoyed shorthand and typing very much and so I went into that job knowing that that was really what I wanted to do then and we had a good group at the public trust office with a social group and we used to go over to Luna Park once every now and again and go on the roads and have a dance over there and we had a musical group that put on some entertainment and some plays and by coincidence I worked

02:00 for a young clerk who was in the office there and he was a member of the Sydney University Regiment and he joined up quite early in the piece and came in to kiss all the girls goodbye and looking splendid in his uniform and we knew him as Arthur Cutler but we didn't know that he was to become famous as Sir Roden Cutler VC [Victoria Cross] in time to come, they were good crowd in the office and we

02:30 worked hard because the first year you were employed you only got one weeks holiday the second year two weeks and after that 3 weeks holiday and if you were You could sit for exams I sat for what was called a permanency exam in which I had to do higher rates of shorthand and typing and English and maths and so I became permanent which was good when I joined up because I was paying superannuation and so the public service paid

03:00 my share as well as their share of the superannuation while I was in the army and then I sat for another exam which was called the grade 116 exam which was again higher speeds of shorthand and typing and things liked confused manuscript and pacey writing so in those 5 years I worked there I advanced in seniority.

What sort of documents were you taking down what department were you with?

The Public Trust Office deals with

03:30 deceased estates so that you were taking dictation from the clerk who was handling that particular matter writing letters to various bank or insurance companies places where the deceased person had had deposits in the bank or insurance policies and so on or if they had property there was a section a conveyancing branch so that the property the deceased person had owned was transferred to the next of kin

04:00 or there was a section in the office that made wills and so they had to be typed very accurately you weren't supposed to make any typing mistakes when you were typing a will.

Was there a certain level to which women could not proceed past in the public service in those days?

I don't remember it I think if I'd gone on passing grade exams there was a grade 119 after that that I could have past and certainly then when war broke out and men were joining up

04:30 women were not allowed to enlist from the public service after a certain time so they would have advanced to quite senior jobs during the war years but whether that would have happened if there hadn't been a war I don't know.

Do you remember in the pre-war period there been any women in superior positions from you?

Yes there was a woman called Olga Sherney who was in charge of one of the sections of the Public Trust Office and she was in quite a senior position

05:00 and also the woman who was in charge of all the female staff of the section she was a senior so it did happen but not many women were actually handling the matters and interviewing the clients or taking instructions from the clients.

Were those women in high positions were they married women?

No you had to resign from the public service when you married, the same with teaching there were no married teachers in the schools in those days

05:30 how they would manage without married teachers today I don't know.

So just getting this straight in my own head you either had an ambition to work or an ambition to get married there was no idea of both?

Not in public service no maybe in private practice there was but no you were expected to stay home and look after your husband and rear your children.

And that was very much how you were brought up?

Oh yes very few of the girls that I knew

06:00 went onto university and had careers in professional life, most of us either became office workers, nurses, shop assistants, that was the type of limit to your ambitions.

What about in the AAMWS was there a, many married women in there as well?

Not so many but there were some and I know of one married woman who was working at Concord and her husband was in the Middle East

06:30 and when he came home on leave she applied for leave, compassionate leave to be with him and I think he had say 2 weeks leave and she was only granted one so she took 2 weeks she was AWL for a week and when she came back she was confined to barracks for several weeks but she didn't care because by that time her husband had sailed for New Guinea and she had no point in going outside the hospital anyway.

Was there a distinction do you remember between the married women and the single women?

07:00 Oh no no no distinction no.

You mentioned that she was confined to barracks was that the harshest punishment that was available to you at the time?

Yes that's right she had to go on a charge sheet as a matter of routine and appear before the colonel who probably reprimanded her but he would have understood I'm sure why she'd done it but being confined to barracks wasn't, I don't think

07:30 they could have done anything else to you.

Tell us a little bit about the barracks, the whole time you were at Concord you were living in the same barracks?

Yes well it was a part of the hospital complex and we had to have a leave pass if we wanted to go outside we were entitled to 36 hour leave pass and 2 leave passes to 10 o'clock at night but you had to apply for those and have your leave pass with you because if you were picked up by the

08:00 military police when you were on leave you had to show that leave pass and if you didn't have one you were considered AWL, Absent Without Leave, I hate the American style of saying "AWOL" which means "with out" is 2 words which it isn't so if you were AWL you could be put on a charge so I was mainly on leave from midday on Saturday which was 1200 hours to 2359 which was a minute to midnight

08:30 on Sunday evening but I was always back in barracks before then and the 2 leave passes that you had to 10 o'clock at night during the week Most of us didn't use that because you were busy doing washing and ironing or writing letters or catching up with friends and it was hardly worthwhile going outside the hospital for just a couple of hours.

Did you ever have any close calls with getting back to late?

Only one New Year's Eve when we went to Kings

09:00 Cross to a nightclub there a whole group of us and we weren't back very much after leave when we should have been but the guards turned a blind eye to that.

What were the conditions like in barracks, what were your rooms like?

Well for us they were quite comfortable. I shared a room with one other woman and we were in a block of I think there were probably about 20 rooms in a block going down both sides and at the end of the block was the

09:30 ablutions, the showers and the toilets and the laundry block and they were provided with no washing machines, you had to do all your washing by hand but laundry tubs and an ironing board and an iron and that took up a lot of time washing your uniforms doing them by hand and I'd never washing anything in my life my mother had always done all my washing and being a spoilt only child, my father had always polished all my shoes so I had to learn to do these things

- 10:00 for myself and by and the time you rinsed your uniforms washed them and rinsed them and squeezed them dry and then you had to starch them now there was a Reckett's starch which was lumps of starch like this and had to put in a basin and mix it to a paste with cold water and then add boiling water and pour that on and stir it quickly so you finished up with this gooey mass and depending on how stiffly you wanted it how stiff your uniform and your veil would be because they
- 10:30 had to be starched too so by the time you'd done all that your hands were almost in blisters so your uniform was hung out the next day you brought those in and ironed them so that took up quite a bit of time and your shoes had to be polished everyday.
- Were you ever out of uniform?**
- Only when I went home on leave.
- But you were allowed to be out of uniform when you went home?**
- Oh we were not supposed to be but if you were going down the beach obviously
- 11:00 you didn't wear your uniform then.
- So when you had to do your washing how much did you have to wash?**
- Well you would have a clean uniform as far as the office workers were concerned it would last a couple of days I think if you were working in a ward you might have had to change your uniform more often so you would have a couple of uniforms to wash plus your underwear and your pyjamas and your stockings so that would take up quite a bit of time
- All of that was provided by the**
- 11:30 **army?**
- Yes yes oh your underwear wasn't provided then when I first joined up later on when we became AAMWS some of your underwear was provided not your bras but they provided these very common sense pants which were commonly known as "PKs - Passion Killers" so but all the rest we supplied ourselves.
- What did Passion Killers look like?**
- Elastic around the waist and down here and elastic around the legs,
- 12:00 most uninspiring for romance.
- How did that differ from your normal underwear if you don't mind me asking?**
- No no well it would have been daintier and not so big
- I think I've heard that nickname before.**
- You probably have.
- Something similar and I think some of the men were talking about something similar to that, did you have any other nicknames for things in camp or people?**
- 12:30 Well VAs were sometimes called "Virgins" and "Doubtfuls" and the AWAS stood for "Always Willing After Sunset" but I don't say that's all true.
- Was there much rivalry between you and the AWAS?**
- We didn't have a lot in common and I think we always felt that we had been the first ones into uniform and that gave us a certain edge
- 13:00 **Did they have nicknames for you?**
- Oh probably probably you have to ask an AWAS.
- That would have been slightly more complicated**
- You'd have to get a lot of things to start with AAMWS wouldn't you?
- What was the general reputation of the women's services at this time?**
- I think on the whole we were treated with respect I had never had anything but respect and particularly nurses on the
- 13:30 whole did engender that respect. Patients were always very courteous to us and I never had any cause for complaint maybe in some of the other services they did find that but I never experienced it.
- Did you get respect from men outside the camp when you went out in your uniform?**
- Yes oh yes I think everyone

14:00 respected women in uniform or in our uniform certainly and the red cross on our uniform set us apart in many ways we were supposedly protected under the Geneva Convention from any harm from the enemy that was in theory.

You mentioned seeing Roden Cutler in your office and how nice he looked in his uniform, were you attracted to men in uniform?

Oh yes I think there was a

14:30 certain fascination there and the boys in the air force were very attractive too they called them "Blue Orchids" and they really looked very well, sailors I don't their uniform was so attractive.

Do you think in reverse that the men were attracted to the women in uniform?

No no I don't think that made any difference and particularly when the American troops arrived here they really didn't they were not

15:00 interested in women in uniform at all they liked the feminine ones that they could bring an orchid too.

Just to clarify the time on that when was the first time that Australians saw significant American troops arriving where were you at the time when you first remember?

Oh I was at Concord hospital and I know they took over a lot of Sydney's nightlife they enjoyed the nightclubs and the hotels and of course they had the money to do that

15:30 where our troops didn't and their uniforms were very much smarter than the Australian uniforms and I think there was a certain attraction of them being different the accent and so on. I didn't go out with any Americans actually so I can't speak from experience but I know there was a big influence particularly on the civilian women as I say they just weren't so interested in women in uniform.

Do you remember making a conscious decision not to

16:00 **go out with any American servicemen?**

I don't think I had the opportunity.

Did any of your colleagues in camp have a relationship with the Americans?

Yes I know some of the girls did meet them for drinks at the Hotel Australia and went to nightclubs with them.

At this time did you have a boyfriend?

No no steady boyfriend, it was playing the field, you went out with various ones and I think inside we all felt

16:30 unable to make a commitment because you didn't know what the future was going to hold. I suppose some people did but I felt just live for today and go out with this one and that but not get any real attachment to them.

Do you think that "live for today" attitude contributed to a slackening of moral standards?

I suppose it could of I don't know that it did, moral standards

17:00 were very different then I just don't think it did.

What was the general moral background to most of the women in your camp?

Well I think most of us had been brought up very strictly, no sex before marriage and if we became pregnant without being married our parents

17:30 thought it was an absolute disgrace so that had a big influence on us plus the fact we knew very little about contraception, I can remember in the army having a lecture by a doctor on health and she was asked about contraception and she said "my advice is to have a long glass of cold water and when I'm asked 'before or after?' I say 'instead of'" and so that was the

18:00 sum total of my sex education in the army so with lack of opportunity in many cases or lack of contraceptive knowledge, I think the majority of the girls would have been too scared of becoming pregnant to have had sexual relationships.

Do remember at any time other time of your life maybe before you went into the army being given any other sex education?

No my mother would wouldn't have told me I think she was too shy I think she expected me to sort of

18:30 pick it up by osmosis from other women.

Did the other women talk about that?

Oh yes we did naturally it's only natural to do that but I think we were all pretty much of the same

feeling that we were too scared.

If you wanted to use contraception what sort of contraception was available at the time you didn't know of any or did?

No I think we thought it was up to a man to take care of that but I didn't know of any form of

19:00 contraception, the Catholics of course depended on the Rhythm Method but I believe that wasn't so safe anyway

You were Presbyterian was that was there much sort of a difference between your moral standards and those of the religions?

I never questioned it I don't think it entered into it really.

When you did have leave what was a common

19:30 **weekend if you say left camp, take us back if you can remember basically what you did if you left camp at midday on a Saturday what did you do? Take us through a weekend?**

All right sometimes we were lucky enough to get a ride in an ambulance from the hospital that was going into the city so when the ambulance stopped in the city and the driver got out to open the doors people gathered around to see who the patients were and very healthy looking VAs stepped out of the ambulance, otherwise we had to take a bus

20:00 from the hospital to Strathfield station and then a train from Strathfield to Central and then a tram from Central to Bronte so that took quite a time to get home and then it was spending time with your mum and dad or catching up with some of your friends who weren't in the army or Sunday morning we'd probably go to church to see some of my old friends from there Sunday afternoon if it was summer we'd be down the beach or

20:30 walks around the place and then after an early tea on Sunday evening I'd leave home perhaps 7 o'clock to get back the hospital by about half past 9 and when you got to Strathfield going home you'd probably find other people going back to hospital on the same train and you'd all be waiting for a taxi so the driver would put 5 of us in a taxi at a shilling each, 10 cents and take us back to the hospital

What were you getting paid at this time?

Oh 4 shillings so

21:00 that would be 40 cents a daily which would be 10 cents less a day than the men were paid.

And that was more money than you had in public service or less?

Oh it was less money but you had less to spend it on because all your uniforms were provided your hospital medical dental expenses were provided a lot of your entertainment and I think our fares on public transport I think we either had free transport or

21:30 very little to pay for that so basically the only things you had to spend money on were makeup or haircuts or replacing your underwear.

Did you go shopping on those weekends of leave?

No there was really nothing much to shop for, you might go to a dance on the Saturday night there were a lot of dances for service men or women the Woman's Weekly club ran a dance on Saturday nights and

22:00 then later on the British ex-servicemen ran dances in Hyde Park in a pavilion there so that was a good way of spending Saturday night but there wasn't a great deal to spend money on.

There must have been a lot of British servicemen in Sydney as well?

Yes there were and when I became a lieutenant and I came home on leave from Perth I would have been debarred from going to these servicemen dances so I took

22:30 my pips off and went with my friends and danced with all the other servicemen there and had great fun particularly if they grumbled about the officers

Were the British servicemen seen as a bit different as well or were they pretty much the same as the Australians?

Oh pretty much their accents were different but they were happy-go-lucky most of them.

At this time, would have been a bit later on when you came back

23:00 **from on leave, were there men who were on leave from New Guinea? Was that when most of the men were coming from?**

Yes you could tell those who'd been in New Guinea because they were yellow with the Atebrin that they'd taken as an anti-malaria caution so you would see them perhaps and particularly at the hospital of course you would see them there.

So up until the middle of 1942

23:30 **were the men in Australian about to embarked or were they coming back on leave from the Middle East or did you know?**

No they didn't get leave from the Middle East it was too far for them to come back it would have only been the wounded or the very ill who were brought back on the hospital ship the Oranje so no you didn't so those men until they were brought back and were ready to be sent to New Guinea.

So the influx of servicemen basically coincided with the campaigns

24:00 **directly to our north?**

Yes.

Was that a tense time in Australia do you remember?

Yes it was much more so than the beginning of the war because you did feel that the war had become very close to Australia and with Darwin having been bombed and Broome it was an atmosphere where you felt that the Japanese could invade, there was more preparation more digging slit trenches

24:30 and generally a feeling of tension about it.

How much information did you get about what to do in case of invasion or in case of a bombing?

Oh we were all told that we had to get into slit trenches and those who were working in the wards if their patients couldn't be moved into a slit trench they had to arrange for them to be put under the bed where they would be safest, we were issued with gas masks I must say

25:00 or otherwise called respirators and we were supposed to carry those with us when we went on leave but I don't think we ever felt we were going to need them.

Did you help dig slit trenches yourself?

No.

Who was in charge of that?

Oh I suppose then men were I imagine that there were council workers for individuals, my father dug a slit trench in my home and some corrugated iron on top of it

25:30 but the slit trenches around the hospital were just open trenches but I imagine it was sort of council workers or someone like that who dug them.

You mentioned before the air raids the air raid sirens that went off when submarines came into Sydney Harbour, were there other occasions which you found you got to those slit trenches?

No no that was the only time but they would test the air raid sirens from time to time but mostly we ignored that because we knew they were testing.

So that

26:00 **one occasion must have been quite different then?**

Oh it was yes.

Can you take us back to that day and tell us a bit more detail about what happened?

Well it had been an ordinary sort of a day as far as I was concerned and as I say I was at home on leave at Bronte and then when I got back to camp it must have been perhaps half past 9 and I simply got into bed and put out the light and it didn't seem very much longer after that that the air raid siren went and we thought "oh bother is it just a

26:30 trial run but we'd better do it" and so it was quite cool I remember putting on my overcoat and going outside where they had these slit trenches and hopping into those I'm not sure if there were duckboards along the bottom of the trenches but I know they were very wet and muddy and we crouched in there expecting to see planes going overhead but there were a lot of search lights going overhead you could see the beams of those up in the sky

27:00 but I didn't hear the sounds of planes, so we stayed there for what seemed like quite a long time before the all clear went and then we clambered out which wasn't as easy as getting in and went back to our quarters and washed the mud off and went back to bed.

How deep were these trenches?

Oh they would have been 3 feet deep I think, chest height as far as I was concerned

So you had to crouch below the level of the ground?

That's right.

27:30 **Was there anything in them and provisions in them?**

No no nothing in them.

And were you under the supervision of an officer at this time?

I suppose the woman who was in charge of us would have come round to see that everything was all right, I can't remember that happening but we were all very glad to get out of them when the all clear went.

And was that the one occasion which the entire hospital was evacuated into them as well?

28:00 Yes.

And there were stories of patients under beds at this stage?

Yes.

Did you hear any of those stories?

No not really it was just probably a bit of a struggle the patients who were in traction you know if they had broken legs suspended there was nothing they could do about it they just had to lie there and hope for the best.

Were you actually frightened or...?

Oh a funny sort of a feeling you were wondering what's going to happen I suppose there's a certain element of fear but I can't say

28:30 I was terrified.

Very interesting time I guess in Sydney afterwards must have really shaken?

Well it was interesting to hear what had happened and that the Kuttabul had been sunk in the Harbour.

What was the news in the next day or so?

Oh well it would have been headlines you know "Jap submarines shelled Sydney" and of course it was very interesting to think that they could have sneaked into Sydney Harbour because there was a boom net across from North Head to

29:00 South Head and it was only that it had been opened apparently for a liner to go out and the submarines which came from a mother ship a big submarine off the coast and sneaked into the Harbour at that opportune moment.

Do you think for a lot of people in Sydney that was the day in which it hit home the seriousness of what's going on?

Oh I'm sure yes except for those perhaps who had loved ones killed in the Middle East the war would have been brought home to them by that

29:30 but the nearness of it was certainly brought home to us by that shelling.

Was there any change to routine or security immediately after that attack?

We always were conscious that we didn't have to talk about shipping movements "careless lips cost ships" or some slogan to that effect and so you didn't talk about convoys or that you knew people were

30:00 going away and so there was a very hush hush feeling about any troops movements and I'm sure they made sure the blackouts were particularly good for that time I don't remember any other

Was your father still an air-raid warden at the time?

Yes oh yes right through the war.

Did he ever tell you where he was on the night of the...?

Yes he was around the local streets and I think he had a tin hat

30:30 and a band on his arm which said ARW [Air Raid Warden] I s'pose it was ARP [Air Raid Precautions] for giving him the authority to do that and they used to have classes to instruct them just what to do and to be courteous about going to peoples homes but to be firm that they had to have their blackouts in place.

Your parents were still in Bronte at this time?

Yes.

Were there ever any plans to evacuate the coast? Did they ever think about moving?

No I don't think so, barbed wire

31:00 was put all along the beaches and I think there was just a sort of opening in the barbed wire fence so if you wanted to swim you could go through that opening but that could be closed in the event of likelihood of an invasion and it was long after the war was finished that all the barbed wire was taken up and it was very rusty by this time but no they didn't think of evacuating but I know of a lot of children

31:30 whose parents sent them up to the Blue Mountains to go to school and to live there because they were afraid of what might happen to Sydney.

The barbed wire along the beaches must have really changed the lifestyle in Bronte?

Oh it did yes oh the beach looked horrible.

Did you still sneak out through the wire and go swimming when you had leave?

Oh yes yes you wouldn't let that stop you and you could still get in the baths, the barbed wire didn't go around the baths

Can you describe that atmosphere in the beach during those war time days?

32:00 You were always anxious to know what was happening to all your friends, a lot of the boys that you knew had been posted away to other places and so if you bumped into their girlfriend or someone their parents you were always anxious to enquire after them to see what had happened to them and didn't always know where they were because in the Middle East letters particularly were censored so you didn't know their movements but no no I don't think we were too worried about people coming ashore at Bronte.

32:30 **Were there still the same sort of celebrations there were in peacetime for birthdays and Christmas and...?**

We tried to yeah we tried to do the same things particularly as a lot of us were having our 21st birthdays which was quite an important occasion and weddings went on just the same but I think they were on a smaller scale and with rationing of a lot of things of course the wedding breakfast or celebratory feasts would have been on a small scale.

Did you go to any weddings during that

33:00 **period?**

No the main wedding I went to was in Darwin which was quite interesting an AWAS officer and a fellow who was working the local radio station he was in the army fell in love and decided to get married up there and the general strength of his staff came to the occasion, he gave the bride away and there was no white ribbon so the hospital gave them bandages instead of white ribbon for the car

33:30 and the dental section made her a wedding ring out of dental gold and she wore a frock that her parents sent her from Adelaide and I was her bridesmaid, I think I borrowed a frock to wear and one of the AWAS there had been a florist and she made Mary a lovely bouquet of pink frangipani which grew very freely in Darwin and carried a sheaf of purple bougainvillea

34:00 and we were married well, she was married in a little Church of England that still stands there now although I believe they built a bigger church around it and it was a very happy occasion but then she had to come south I think they had a few days together on the general launch ... together and then she and I came south.

Sounds very much like everyone pitched in to an extent they didn't during peacetime?

Yes yes.

Do you remember those

34:30 **days during the war as being particularly special in that respect?**

Yes you made very very close friendships friendships that have endured to today and we've got 400 women in our ex-AAMWS Association that are so supportive of one another, particularly if one woman's husband dies those who'd been in the same position are very supportive of her and we all keep in touch with those who are sick or need

35:00 help in any way and it's a great encouragement to see so many, we recently had an Anzac day luncheon at the Marriott Hotel in Sydney and we had 66 ladies and all of us would have been 80 or even one was 95 and one was 92 who came along to that luncheon and you find so many things to talk about.

During that time and partly because of the tension of possible invasion

35:30 **were there ever any fights or the opposite occur ever?**

No the only fights I remember occurring were between Australian and American servicemen where there was a lot of rivalry particularly in Perth because Fremantle became a big base for submarines and

American warships and when a convoy of Australian soldiers and New Zealand soldiers

36:00 were there they had to give the Americans leave on one day and the Australians and New Zealanders on an alternate day because when they were both on the streets of Perth and Fremantle together so many fights broke out so that was a big clash.

Were they fighting over women?

I don't think so, I think there was just something that sparked one another off and I believe in Brisbane there were a lot of fights as well, no I think

36:30 there was just some sort of tension between the 2 services maybe the Australians thought the Americans were "over here and oversexed" as the saying was.

Did that animosity between the Australian soldiers and the American soldiers translate to the women who went out with them?

Yes I think some of the Australian soldiers would have been a bit scornful of women who went out with American soldiers possibly because the Americans had more money

37:00 to spend on the women and of course a lot of Australian women married American servicemen and were very disillusioned when they got to America to find that the tales they'd been told were not true.

Amongst the nurses in the AAMWS themselves was there ever any sort of patriotic disdain of women dating American soldiers?

I think sometimes we thought they were just in for a good time

37:30 which they were and you can't blame them, Come in Spinner - have you read that book or seen that movie?

I've seen a bit of the movie.

That is very true of what happened in those days.

Those women in Come in Spinner were working weren't in the services though were they?

No no that's right.

Did you have a lot of friends who weren't in the services?

No not so many, some who had married didn't join up but my 2 closest friends joined up

38:00 with me and the others, well I saw occasionally but you didn't seem to have so much in common and because your leave was on at different times and a short like in 36 hours you don't get round to visiting many people so it was mostly confined to letters or telephone conversations.

Did you know much about the manpower organisation or the push to recruit women?

I've got a poster there that I can show you among the

38:30 memorabilia which was used to recruit women and that became very important because manpower was very scarce and women were learning to do men's jobs whether they were bus drivers or delivering the bread or whatever jobs they were doing they were replacing men

How did that impress you as a young woman to see women driving the buses and...?

Oh I thought it was great because

39:00 women had been very restricted in what they could do up until then women worked in munitions factories on very difficult home tasks it was really good to see that they were capable of doing it and doing it well.

Did that kind of responsibility translate to more freedom for instance to move around on your own?

Oh it must have must have done yes if you were doing a what was considered to

39:30 be a man's job I think you had the privileges of the breadwinner then.

You were in the army essentially you were doing a man's job can you think of any examples where you were able to do something you weren't able to do before?

Yes I had a lot more confidence in myself that I had to even as a sergeant give orders and learn to take orders but it boosted your self-confidence to think that you had that

40:00 rank and to be in a responsible position particularly as an officer.

Was there any such thing as organised feminism in those days?

No not organised anyway we always say that we service women with the start of the liberal movement

of feminism.

Did you ever come into contact with that after the war?

Not a great deal in fact after the war

40:30 there was a bit of a reversion because women who'd been doing men's jobs often had to give them up to allow the men to come back into their jobs which I suppose was only fair but it was a great disappointment for women then to think that they couldn't carry on as they had been needed in wartime and now they were just pushed into the background again.

We'll deal with that later I think it's very interesting.

Tape 4

00:36 **Just want to talk a little bit about general organisation of the AAMWS, what was the highest ranking women?**

Major was the highest rank or no lieutenant colonel she was Major Lieutenant Colonel May Douglas and she was in charge of AAMWS throughout Australia

01:00 and overseas so that was the highest rank that she attained there would have only been a few majors a few captains and quite a few lieutenants.

All these ranks must have been created at the time because there was no chance of evolving this, so what was she in previous life?

She had been a very strong mover in the Girls Guides I don't know what her other qualifications were but then she joined the AWAS

01:30 and I think organisation was her strong point she was a very powerful woman and she lived till a few years ago and very outstanding personality so she was very keen that all the AAMWS should have everything that was right for them you know women had to fight a bit for our privileges you might as well say because it didn't come easy in the army and

02:00 we could have been overlooked to great extent.

Did you know her personally at the time?

Yes oh well I met her as a lieutenant I met her several times and then later after the war I met her many times because she used to come across from Adelaide to any special occasions we had here in Sydney.

Did you were you in charge of any men at the time?

No I was never in charge of any men.

Did you ever have see instances where women were outranking men?

02:30 Oh yes yes one of my friends was a lieutenant in the ordinances section of the army and she certainly would have outranked men in that section.

You were a sergeant you would outranked corporal or private?

Yes but I never had any control over corporals or privates not men, girls I would have, it didn't work that way I suppose if I had wanted to show my authority I might have done

03:00 but that didn't arise.

If there was a private wounded soldier you would have outranked?

Oh yes yeah he would have been rather embarrassed I suppose and the men didn't really know what to call us you know whether to call us "ma'am" or "sergeant" or just what they mainly didn't call us anything.

Did they salute you?

Well they had to when I was an officer but they we both tried to avoid it,

03:30 I think we probably looked the other way across the street because I didn't particularly wanted to be saluted and I don't think the Australian soldier is very strong on discipline so he probably didn't want to salute either.

Were there any instances where you had to pull rank?

No I don't think so I can't remember any.

04:00 **Did you feel that you were breaking new ground and sort of forging a new path for women in**

Australia?

Oh yes yes because when I joined up we never thought of experience in authority like that we were simply there to do a job, I don't think any of us thought we were going to take on non commissioned or commissioned office status

- 04:30 so that was something new you were breaking new ground there yes the army nursing sisters always had rank they were automatically lieutenants or the matrons were captains or majors but as far as the VAs or AAMWS were concerned we hadn't thought about rank.

Were you did you become quite proud of your role in the AAMWS at the time?

Yes I was it separated you a little bit from your friends though

- 05:00 who hadn't attained that rank because if you had to give orders on parade you felt you were giving them to the girls who were your friends and it was a bit hard to distance yourself from them. I think it would have been a good idea to have moved you to a different unit where you didn't know anybody rather than go from the girls where you'd all been girls together and then suddenly you were different or you where in charge of them.

Did you want to stay as a sergeant were you happy to stay as a sergeant?

- 05:30 I was happy to stay as a sergeant yes I don't know why I was chosen for promotion maybe there were spaces available I know I'd done well with NCO school I got a distinguished pass there and so maybe that had something to do with being chosen to go to Officers' training school so I went to Officers' training school with one of the other sergeants a girl called Gwen Lewis and we went to RAK
- 06:00 where the training school was in a lovely old home down there although we were sleeping in tents out in the grounds and we had 5 weeks intensive training there but the silly point about that was physiotherapists were also in the course and they were like army nursing sisters they would have automatically become lieutenants anyway and there was no idea it of them ever training soldiers or giving orders for drill or that sort of thing they were purely to be
- 06:30 physiotherapists in hospitals and I think the army did some silly things sometimes to make them spend 5 weeks going through a course that didn't really matter, they were going to do a job in hospitals anyway but this was quite an experience and we had a very strict sergeant who'd been at Duntroon Military College and I don't think he was too keen about women in the army and he drilled us quite mercilessly
- 07:00 and it was supposed to be lights out at 10 o'clock and if we went on talking after that he would really raise his voice and say "quiet!" so we obeyed.

Can you how did the NCO training can you talk about that?

Well I think I talked about that before that was at Ingleburn

Sorry officer training...?

The Officers' training school yes that was one step up

- 07:30 that was learning a lot more about army organisation about how to recognise all the army ranks which got quite complicated when you get up to brigadier and brigadier general that type of thing we went out on a bivouac in very cold weather out of Melbourne and we were sleeping in tents and one of the majors of AWAS came to see us and she had been a girl guide and so a lot of
- 08:00 girl guides did very well former girl guides did very well in the army because they had been trained to live in tents and go on bivouacs and her instructions were for us to dig a hip hole and by no means underestimate the size of your hip so we accordingly dug ourselves a hip hole to lie in and it teemed raining in the night and we had to get up and dig a trench around the outside of our tent and tighten up the ropes so that we
- 08:30 weren't flooded out and our meals were being cooked in a big open sort of pot about this high and we had metal containers for our food and you lined up with your metal containers and had stew or whatever put in but it was hailing, so hail was coming into our food at the same time we had these army overcoats on with the collars turned up trying to keep warm, I remember coming back
- 09:00 with a very sore neck chafed from the collar of the greatcoat and we had to learn map reading so we did this map reading to take us out on a certain course and then we'd have to find our way back by doing back calculations or something like that to get ourselves back to camp so that was a bit hectic doing that.

This was the first time you'd ever left Sydney?

It was yes I'd never been out of NSW [New South Wales]

- 09:30 so but I when I rang my mother to tell her I was going to Melbourne she was aghast so I said "cheer up Mum, I might have been going to New Guinea" because I had been on a draft to go to the 2/6th AGH as a sergeant to New Guinea.

Ships were leaving for...?

Ships were leaving yes and I was pulled off that draft to go to Officers' training school so that was some conciliation to her that it was Melbourne and not New Guinea.

Did you make a choice, did you decide to...?

No no no you don't make

10:00 too many choices when you're in the army, your destiny is in the hands of those higher up so they were the ones who sent me there.

Do you remember seeing ... ships going out the Harbour, troop ships?

I think I saw some of them sailing past Bronte my cousin who'd been in the naval reserve as a signalman was called up the day after war broke out and sent down to Melbourne for intensive training in Signals

10:30 and he was on one of the ships that left with the convoy the first convoy to go to the Middle East and he wasn't back in Australia for years and years because he was transferred from ship to ship but I'm sure I saw that convoy of ships sailing past across Bronte Bay, Nelson Bay.

Can you tell us about the train trip down from Sydney to Melbourne or how did you travel?

By troop train which wasn't terribly comfortable because there were never enough seats

11:00 to go round and of course you had to change trains at Albury in those days there was no line directly through so yes that was quite an experience but it was worse going to or coming back from Western Australia or coming back from Darwin, it was a much longer experience do you want me to talk about that now?

Maybe we'll come back to that I'm just wondering your just leaving Sydney for the first time, that must have been exciting?

Yes it was it was and Gwen this other lass

11:30 who was a sergeant she and I were quite excited at the prospect and we were the only ones in navy blue VA uniforms all the other girls were AWAS and they were in khaki uniforms and so when we were on parade these navy blue uniforms showed up every little spot or every fleck of cotton so they were always busy brushing us down so we'd be immaculate on parade.

And what did you think of Melbourne?

12:00 We didn't see too much of it actually I loved all the old homes around Toorak but I found it quite cold at that time of the year, I was just trying to think what time of the year it was that I was down there but I know it was quite cold and I had friends of friends who were in Melbourne and they invited me to go to their home so I saw a little bit that way but I didn't see too much

12:30 of it though to form an impression.

Were you homesick?

Yes I s'pose I was.

Was Melbourne also under a similar situation to Sydney?

Oh yes exactly the same and it was quite an experience to go down and met mix with these girls from other units previously I'd only mixed with VA/AAMWS but now of course I was mixing with AWAS and these physiotherapists and so

13:00 we were seeing things from their point of view too they were from all different sections of the army signallers and so on so you heard about their experiences.

What were they training you up to deploy you elsewhere was there any other plan?

Oh yes that's right we would go back to our units we would then be posted to other units to be in charge there so it was

13:30 yes an advancement for those who were skilled in their own particular lines like signallers for instance

What how was the war proceeding for Australia at this time, what was the feeling?

Ah 1943 I don't think we expected it would be dragging on for so long nobody ever imagined it would last for 6 years and I think it just had

14:00 become part of a way of life now and we didn't know how much longer it would go on.

Rationing still was in force?

Oh yes rationing was in force until well after the end of the war I remember when I came home from leave from Perth and Darwin I was able to get petrol ration coupons from the leave and I gave them to a very grateful uncle who had to restrict his driving around a lot because of petrol rationing and you

14:30 were conscious of the fact that you didn't have ration coupons if you went home on leave with your mum and dad so that you were eating their meat or drinking their tea with sugar in it and you weren't getting any extra rations

Were you writing to anyone overseas at the time or getting letters from overseas?

I did write to Roden Cutler when he was wounded I think most of us did to say how sorry we were to know that he

15:00 had been wounded but there was no-one else overseas that I wrote to, not until Barry went, Barry went to war and I wrote to him.

When did you know Barry at the time when you went to...?

Yes Barry and I went back to our teenage years and he'd been going out with a girl for a couple of years and I knew her very well but I would see him around Bronte beach or we played tennis sometimes in the same club

15:30 we never went out together and when he and his girlfriend broke up our mothers were quite friendly and apparently his mother said to him "why don't you take that nice Elva Bakey out?" and he said "I wouldn't take her out if she was the last woman on earth" so he's come to eat his words since then but what happened I think he saw my photo in the Woman's Weekly and I was at a

16:00 convalescent home recovering from an appendix operation and he was sitting in an army hut a salvation army hut in Puckapunyal and picked up the Woman's Weekly and saw my photo and thought "oh I'll write to Elva" so from then on we wrote to one another and when I was in Melbourne to do this school he came down to Melbourne one night and we went out together and that was the only time I saw him during the war years and so he was posted eventually to Bougainville after a long time because they

16:30 weren't sending tanks outside Australia at that stage and in the meantime his parents had moved to Melbourne and so when he got his discharged he was discharged in Melbourne and by that time I had been posted to Melbourne and so I was the only girl that he knew there and we started going out together and I always say that I was the first white woman he saw when he came back from Bougainville so one thing led to another and we've spent 57 years together.

How did you end up in the Woman's Weekly?

This Berida Red Cross home had been furnished by the interior decorator for the Australian Woman's Weekly and we were the first batch of patients to go there and so the Woman's Weekly sent a photographer and reporter down to see how we were enjoying the amenities and so I've still got the Woman's Weekly there although its pretty tattered

17:30 and so there was a full page of our photographs.

Where was that?

It was called Berida Red Cross Convalescent Home in Bowral and so it was a very nice home and beautifully furnished and so the Woman's Weekly wrote it up.

So this was before you went to Melbourne?

Yes yes this was in 1942 I think

Well what was wrong with you?

Oh I had my appendix out, the rule was

18:00 at the hospital or I suppose in any army you either had to be on duty or on sick parade and I woke up this morning with what I thought was a bilittic [?] attack and I said "oh I don't want to go on sick parade because I will be over it shortly" and my officer said "you've got to go on sick parade" and luckily she did because when the doctor started prodding around he found it was appendicitis and it became so urgent that they operated on me that afternoon and before

18:30 my parents even knew they got my friends to ring my mother after it was all over and say "Elva's had her appendix out".

Was that a common operation in those days?

I didn't know of any others who'd had their appendix out but it was an operation they took quite seriously, I think today patients are discharged a couple of days after they have their appendix out and I was in hospital for 10 days and at this convalescent home for about 2 weeks I think

19:00 so it was considered quite serious then.

How long were you in Melbourne for?

5 weeks it was long enough.

And where did you go after Melbourne?

I came back to Concord and it took a while for confirmation of the fact that I'd been appointed a temporary lieutenant and then a confirmed lieutenant so then it was after that

- 19:30 I transferred over to the Australian Army Amenities Unit this was just a bit of a co-incidence really I had .. routine orders that they were forming this new unit for women officers to work exclusively with the army women's services in the same way as they had had men working in amenities for sporting things for soldiers.
- 20:00 Bert Oldfield the cricketer was a Major in army amenities being a great cricketer of course he could organise all the sporting equipment and the matches because in the war you're not fighting all the time there's a great deal of time spent in hanging around the camp or with leisure and men become very bored and women and they need some entertainment of some kind so they would have football matches and cricket matches and so on and
- 20:30 all this equipment was bought with the proceeds the profits from the army canteens fund you know you could buy all the things you needed, sweets or cigarettes or whatever at army canteen so they used that profit to buy these necessities necessities I suppose but the army wouldn't have provided otherwise so they decided to do the same thing for the woman's services, the motto was "make your barracks
- 21:00 smell home" which was a bit of an exaggeration I think a lot of girls were living under pretty tough conditions particularly those on anti-aircraft ack-ack and search lodge stations where they were living in tents and didn't have very much comfort at all so this was the idea that we would spend some of this money that amenities had on improving the conditions under which they were living and the money could
- 21:30 buy extra irons for them to press their uniforms or electric jugs for them to make a cup of tea or a bedside chest instead of just a box to put the belongings in and a cotton bedspread to go over the grey blanket that was on their bed and even in big barracks you ate at mess tables which were long tables but wooden tops so we provided what was called table bays it was like a
- 22:00 plastic material but came in very bright colours blue red green yellow and so this was laid on tops of the tables and it was very easy to wipe down and it looked very much nicer than a plain board to eat off.

This was different to the amenities the men got?

This was different to the amenities the men got but the sporting things were the same, one of my jobs was to organise sporting fixtures basketball matches and tennis matches and swimming carnivals

- 22:30 we had a wonderful swimming carnival in Perth on the Swan River and the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] helped me with this and we publicised it through all the different camps around the Perth area some were as far away as 500 miles and these girls practiced swimming in a dam it was the best they could do to get any water and they finished up winning the carnival actually
- 23:00 so this was in old fashion type baths on the Swan River but we had races for breaststroke and freestyle and backstroke and diving and relay races and all that sort of thing with some prizes that amenities awarded I think a cup you swam for your unit not your individual fame so I think they got a cup to take back to the unit for winning the swimming carnival.

Had you requested to be transferred to the amenities unit?

Yeah I applied for I applied for

- 23:30 the job and so I was interviewed on very slender qualifications I got the job but there were a few of us I think one from Brisbane and in the same time they were also appointing army education Officers and a couple of my friends who'd been school teachers who were in the VA/AAMWS got jobs with army education which was very worthwhile they prepared people often
- 24:00 for civilian life afterwards and help with their education that they could pick it up where they left off before they joined up.

Did you have to also organise dances for the troops?

No I didn't organise dances what I did have to organise while I was in the Northern Territory there were army concert parties of professionals who had joined up and you probably wouldn't know now but there

- 24:30 was Rex Dawe "Wacker" Dawe he was called and he had a series on television called "yes what?" but he was a very good organiser and he had comedians who were so good and there was always a female impersonator that you often couldn't pick for a woman but they had members of the band and so on and they would travel through different army areas but my job was to draw up an itinerary for them
- 25:00 so that they played so many nights in Alice Springs and off to Tennant Springs playing a night there and

a night in Katherine and then so many nights in Darwin and that was interesting to meet with them and see what went on behind the scenes so that was a good section.

When did you move from Concord at this time?

Well I was transferred from Concord then to Perth

25:30 via Melbourne I had to go amenities headquarters in Melbourne for a bit of instruction as to what I was to do and then I flew from Melbourne to Perth and of course it was a new posting nobody really knew what was expected of you you had to just make it up as you went along and there were 2 army amenities officers there in charge of men's affairs well I was caught up in the same

26:00 it was at the WACA, the Western Australian Cricket Ground we were in a pavilion there and the trotting ground was opposite so there was a notice of a lack of staff when the trots were on going across to that so I just had to organise from there whether I would be able to visit different units there were a lot of girls working on ack-ack and search light stations around the outskirts of Perth and then

26:30 some in the country areas so I would have to organise transport and go and visit their camps and see what they needed.

Was it the first time in an aircraft for you when you flew from?

Yes it was and I was horribly airsick.

What sort of aeroplane was it do you know?

Oh don't ask me it was a very big plane but I was miserable all the way there I was met there by a couple of fellow officers who took one look at me and took me back to where I was to

27:00 stay and put me straight to bed.

Was it a military aircraft?

No I don't think it was don't think it was there was a group unit in the army called Movement Control and some how or rather a friend of mine wangled it that I got this seat on the aircraft normally I would have gone across by troop train and I think I would have preferred to have gone on the troop train but they thought they were doing me a great favour to get me across there in

27:30 much shorter time but they didn't know I was going to be so airsick.

Did your mum and dad come see you off?

Yes they came down to Central station to see me off to Melbourne you know they it was a big parting for them but I think they were proud of me and all the women who had servicemen or servicewomen in the family had a badge and on that badge was a bar

28:00 and a star on the bar for each relative they had in the services and so I know my mother wore her badge with one star on it very proudly and probably told all the Red Cross ladies what her daughter was doing.

I can imagine Central station must have been a real scene during the Second World War with all the troops coming and going, can you describe...?

Yes well it was a sea of uniforms of course and there were ladies working in the canteens there who would be providing tea

28:30 and sandwiches and there be luggage everywhere because you always had your army kit bag in fact only recently when before we moved here we came across Barry's army kit bag and mine and your name and your number was stencilled on the outside of this brown bag had a rope around the top of the handle and all your stuff was stowed in there so you didn't have an ordinary suitcase and you lumped that over your shoulder as you went along and then great confusion

29:00 there was a with troop trains there was an officer in charge of troop trains and he had to check that your name was on that list of people who were travelling on the train so he would walk up and down the train and check everything out so you were a lotted a seat in some cases but in other cases I don't particularly the WAK* they would put down their overcoats and sleep on the floor of the train or up in the luggage racks.

29:30 **Were you given privilege seats over in front of the men?**

Coming back on Perth we certainly were privileged because we were in carriages admittedly very tightly packed carriages but the men were in cattle trucks and they were not sprung and the doors were closed on them and it was completely dark in these cattle trucks and they would have to travel there for hours before there was a stop for meals

30:00 when the doors were opened and you hopped out into the desert in some cases and the cooks on the train had been preparing meals in these big soyers and so you all lined up with your eating utensils and your tins to put your stew in and sit down on the sand there were a few aboriginals who gather round us then and tried to sell spears and so on but I don't think there were any takers

30:30 but the men certainly were disadvantaged on those troops trains.

You were quite innocent at this stage you were heading off on a big journey and leaving your life behind did you feel equipped to take this journey on?

No not in some respects it was going right across to

31:00 the other side of Australia to go to Perth and I didn't know anyone there and as an idea of my innocence some of my luggage and travelled along behind me and I had to go to a certain street in Perth I've forgotten the name of it but it was where the railway office terminal was to pick up the luggage and I was enquiring from passers by how I found my way to this particular street and I wondered why they were

31:30 giving me strange looks and it was only afterwards that I found out that was the street where all the brothels were so that was a wake up to me because I don't think I'd known brothels existed up to that time it was a different life altogether and we were fortunate with office status I lived in what had been a private hotel the Rex Hotel in Hay Street the main street of Perth the Rex Hotel so that was very comfortable I just shared

32:00 a room with another woman officer there and all our meals were provided there and I rattled off on a Perth tram if you've ever known anything about Perth trams rattletraps out to the WACA everyday to do my job and then back to the rex hotel at night

What did you pack when you left to go on a trip?

Oh well you packed khaki uniforms because by this time I had to give up all my blue

32:30 uniforms so you packed those your underwear you didn't have room to do a lot of things, I had a new uniform made for me by a tailor in Perth because the ones the army provided were very ill fitting and so it was the common thing for you to have a tailored made uniform that fitted you for special occasions and you felt much smarter in that.

33:00 I don't know really know what else I packed a certain number of books I s'pose I've never travelled without books.

Do you remember what books you bought with you?

No I don't and they were probably wartime books too which were very poor paper paper was in very short supply so there were paperback books but they were not long lasting you swapped them around.

What were you doing out at the WACA?

33:30 I had a army girl and I were working with me and we would draw up a routine of what army camps I was going to visit and when and let them know that I would be coming and then when I visited them we'd have to organise a car to take me there and I would see what requirements they needed in conjunction with the officer who was in charge of that camp

34:00 so when I went back to the WACA I would have to put in a requisition from the triplicate for the things that they needed so when those came to hand I would have to see that they would be delivered to the unit they would be putting in requests for different things or with the organisation of the swimming carnival I had to send out notices to all the different units around the places to where the carnival would be held and when

34:30 and what events would take place so they could all arrange to be there some of them must have stayed overnight in Perth because they'd travelled quite a distance to come there and I would have had to arrange some catering for the meal that they would have while they were at the carnival we also had some little groups that went out to entertain in the different camps so that took a bit of organising when they were to go to the camps but these

35:00 were just amateurs not the professional groups and then they had an army professional group called the Waratahs and they put on a big concert in Perth and so I had to arrange for people to go and attend that concert and with tennis matches and basketball matches you were busy organising those things.

Did you deal with women in other services?

No only the army so it was AAMWS and

35:30 AWAS and to a smaller extent the army nursing sisters cause there weren't so many of those but they had needs too so if we could get them perhaps a sewing machine if they were say in Mt Isa they were very isolated and if you had mending repairs to do or wanted to do your own make your own things the sewing machine was just like gold so that was a popular thing to ask for.

You were

36:00 **dealing with a lot of needs?**

Yes.

What was the most common need expressed by that you were asked to fill?

I think mainly irons or jugs they were in great demand the army might have supplied one or two but you know when people are using irons all the time and different people using them they tend to fall into disrepair and not easily replaced and so they were very popular.

Do you think the army was more accustomed to having women

36:30 **integrated into the service at this time?**

I don't know that they'd made any special provisions for them I think all the senior officers like Lieutenant Colonel May Douglas I think they had to fight the higher ups for what they felt the women should have, it was a different set up really and the army wasn't used to well for instance sanitary napkins that was something that the army had to supply that

37:00 they'd never had to oh I suppose for the nursing sisters but on a large scale they were needed and I think they thought we could manage with far less than they wanted to supply.

And that was your job?

No that wasn't my job that was an ordinance officer's job no that wasn't an amenity that was a necessity.

We might

37:30 **wind up...**

And I'm getting a bit hoarse.

So can you just repeat that?

In NSW the most senior officer was Major Joyce Snowing who'd been very active in Voluntary Aid Detachments before the war and her husband was a prisoner of war for the Japanese as it turned out but she was a fighter for what she wanted for her VAs and

38:00 the deputy director of medical services commonly known as DDMS was always being harangued by Major Snowing for things that she wanted for her VAs so at last in in exasperation he said "Major Snowing you think all your ducklings are swans" so from then on we adopted as our symbol a little swan and I can show you a photo of a stained glass window in the chapel at Concord hospital

38:30 where there is a girl in a VA uniform with a little swan in the corner and now all of us AAMWS wear a little swan, I'll put it on for your later.

Tape 5

00:35 **Lets begin as I said where going to stick to the chronology we started yesterday but we'll go a bit further into things when you left Concord you left a plane to Perth?**

I went to Melbourne for training

So you caught a train from Melbourne to Perth?

Yes

Apart from that small period of time in Melbourne where you were training?

01:00 **Perth was the first time you'd been outside your home city, did you find was that a big change in your life at the time?**

Yes and the strange thing was having lived in Bronte I was used to seeing the sun coming up from the ocean and to sit on Cottesloe Beach and watch the sun set into the ocean seemed very strange, the people of Perth were very friendly and of course it was a much smaller city than it is now I think the tallest building was about 3 storeys

01:30 high and there was no bridge over the Swan River and so you had to go a long way around to get to where I was working at the WACA but it was really a pleasant experience.

Apart from the sun setting and rising in a different place was there any noticeable differences over in the west that it changed from Sydney?

Oh life was a slower pace there I thought people didn't rush around the way they did in Sydney there was quite an emphasis on

02:00 service life there because it was a big depot for the navy the American navy and there was still men there from the tank regiments who were waiting to be sent overseas and didn't get there but ack-ack and search light stations were manned by girls living in tents around the coast line and there were a lot

of girls working in signals stations there so that was a good position to

02:30 be in to start off with well my job as I said I'd not done this before and I had to feel my way to see just what would be done or what could be done.

Those women involved in manning the ack-ack station and search light jobs were they AWAS or...?

They were AWAS yes and they were living under difficult conditions and some of them had to go on guard duty take it in turns to be on guard duty at night and they carried a .303 rifle

03:00 but they weren't allowed to have ammunition which was so stupid and on one occasion some American sailors approached the camp and the girl on guard said "stop" and they said "honey we know that gun's not loaded" so they didn't come to any harm but just the same it was common knowledge that they were defenceless really.

Did they ever get training how to use rifles?

I don't know I wasn't involved in the AWAS to that extent but I should think

03:30 they would have had some training but its no use training people and then not giving them bullets.

In the amenities job you were doing was for the AWAS and the AAMWS?

And the AAMWS yes

Did you have any opportunity to meet any of those girls that were working on the search lights and the ack-ack?

Oh yes yes I visited the camps and they were badly in need of some sort of amenities because as I say conditions were quite primitive for them and the soil around Perth is very very sandy so that often their tents

04:00 were pitched in these very sandy locations.

Had they been doing that job since the start of the war?

Well not since the start of the war because AWAS were not enlisted until 1941 so that would have been 1941 when they would have been posted there.

What was happening before that, was there no defences?

I suppose men were doing it and I think there were a lot of older men who were joining up but for home service,

04:30 they weren't eligible to go overseas and so they could man the defences at home.

The barracks that those women were in were they similar to the barracks that you used in Concord Hospital?

No the hospital situation was very different indeed it was built with a idea of being permanent and all the accommodation is still there today but all these army barracks were temporary just for the war years

05:00 **What's a temporary barrack look like?**

They were long sheds with about 20 beds in them, timber floors very small windows not glass windows but wooden ones that you just sort of put a stick in and propped them open as part of the wall came out the lighting would have been just bare

05:30 globes and stretcher beds so it wasn't meant to last

Did you attempt to make those quarters more liveable?

Yes we did we had a contractor who made these bedside chests for the girls to keep their belongings in and we were also able to get cotton bedspreads that they could able to put on their beds and get irons and jugs and I don't think they were using sewing machines because they wouldn't have had a place to use them in the tents

06:00 but they were the main things that we supplied.

Did they have a communal living area as well?

They would have had communal showers and latrine and probably a recreation hut I really can't remember that.

As an officer yourself you were barracked somewhere else?

Yes I was living in a private hotel that had been taken over by the army in Hay Street it was called the Rex Hotel and

06:30 that was quite comfortable accommodation.

Who else was in that private hotel?

Oh officers from the AWAS mainly I think there were a couple of RAMS from the navy officers who were there but it was mainly AWAS.

Were there just women?

Only women yes.

Was that a rule a stern rule of the hotel?

Yes oh a man could come and call for you to take you out but he wasn't invited into the lounge or any other parts of the hotel.

07:00 **How strictly was that policed?**

Oh I think it was policed quite strictly they certainly weren't allowed into the bedrooms.

You never saw any men in the corridors after dark?

Never.

What else about Perth was different to Sydney it was on a very similar war footing obviously?

There were a lot of older men in uniform there because most of the younger men had gone either to the Middle East

07:30 or over to the eastern states for training and I found there was a certain resentment in Perth about the eastern states and one fellow was talking to me and he said "oh he went off to the east" and I thought he was talking about the Middle East where the fighting was but you would have thought it was a world apart to be in Sydney of course it is a thousand miles between the two but it just seemed as though the people in Perth had a different attitude towards

08:00 the eastern states.

I think they've still got that attitude today.

Have they?

Because I think Western Australia wanted to separate at one stage, did you ever get a chance to travel outside the city and see anything else of the state?

Oh yes I went Kalgoorlie and to a couple of country places I can't remember all there Meridan, Meridan was a place outside of Perth

And what was your mission out there?

Oh well to

08:30 what conditions the girls were working under and to see what they needed whether they needed sporting equipment and so on.

In Meridan in Kalgoorlie there was obviously AWAS working there as well?

I don't know that there were AWAS working in Kalgoorlie there were certainly nurses working there but it wasn't a big place for the AWAS to be a lot of them had more on the coastal strip

Do you remember Kalgoorlie when you went there?

Yes the wide streets

09:00 and pubs everywhere I couldn't count the number of pubs that were there and a statue to who was it Padding who discovered the gold.

Were the mines and things operating as usual in the wartime?

Oh I think they were yes I didn't get to them of course the miners were very superstitious when I later visited Mount Isa they wouldn't allow a woman to go down below levels to the

09:30 lower levels because they thought that was bad luck.

Did you develop a close community of friends in Perth or were you pretty much on your own?

No no the people I lived with at the hotel, we were quite close and there were a few other women officers who came from Sydney and they got to know some of the men who had been posted over there from Sydney so at Christmas time we all got together and had an eastern states

10:00 Christmas day.

Did you feel a similar eastern states solidarity because this feeling with the west?

I suppose we did in a way or it was just fun to make it a special occasion.

What did you do on Christmas day?

I don't really know we just had the usual Christmas dinner I suppose and I remember being very hot in Perth hadn't realised how hot Perth could be and everybody would always say "oh

- 10:30 wait for the Fremantle doctor" which was a cool breeze like we get a southerly in Sydney the breeze that came up from Fremantle from the ocean was very pleasant and I had an opportunity to go across to Rottnest Island which is off the coast of Perth and they had ack-ack and search lights units on that island so that was an experience.

What was the weather generally like in Perth at that time?

Oh hot and dry usually.

- 11:00 **Apart from this afternoon breeze it was quite uncomfortable?**

Well it was more of a dry heat, Sydney is very humid but I think Perth's heat is dryer which I think makes it a bit more bearable.

Did you get much chance to have leave similar to you did in Sydney?

Oh no not a lot of leave so that when I was duty finished my turn of duty there I was there for 9 months I had 3 weeks leave accumulated so I could come back to Sydney and spend 3 weeks at home

- 11:30 before I went to Darwin.

So did you do anything of a recreational nature in Perth?

Oh yes played tennis, went swimming.

Tell us about the swimming carnival you organized?

It was a bit ambitious I suppose for someone who'd never organised a swimming carnival before and I did rely on a lot on the help of the YWCA people who helped me draw up a program of what the events would be,

- 12:00 freestyle backstroke breaststroke relay races and diving contests so that they were awarded points for their unit they were swimming not for themselves but for their unit and it the affair lasted nearly all day and so there would have been had to have been refreshments provided at lunchtime for all the people there and accommodation arranged for those who'd come from the country to join but it was

- 12:30 well worthwhile it was very well received and it was a competitive attitude among the girls and a break for those who were many miles away from Perth to get into Perth and swim in the river.

You swam in the river?

Yes the Swan River oh but the carnival the swimming carnival wasn't in the ocean no in old baths timber baths on the Swan River.

Was swimming a popular pastime for the girls out there?

Oh it was very popular and the

- 13:00 YWCA took over an old hotel at Cottesloe and you could go there when you were on leave at stay there quite cheaply provided you made your own beds and served yourself when meals were on and that was a good break.

The beach and the water out there a similar culture to that which you'd experienced in Sydney?

Yes it was fewer people but very similar

There are lots of sharks off the coast of Perth are there not?

I didn't see any.

There were no shark attacks during the war?

- 13:30 Not that I remember.

After Perth you moved to Darwin I think?

Yes I came up I went home on leave for 3 weeks and then I was transferred via Melbourne and Adelaide and Alice Springs to Darwin so that was quite a long trip on troop trains we had to change trains at Albury and change trains at Melbourne and when we were approaching Adelaide

- 14:00 the officer in charge of the troop train came along to see where I was headed and when I said I had to go to Adelaide River actually it was before we went to Darwin and had to catch the Ghan from Adelaide

he said "oh you just missed it" this train pulled into Adelaide a couple of hours after the Ghan left for Alice Springs and there was only one train a week and so I was put into AWAS barracks in Adelaide but given a leave pass for a week and I could wander around

- 14:30 and explore the city during that week and then the following week we caught the Ghan which took about 3 days to get to Alice Springs in those days it was much slower I can't believe how quick it is now and that was a pleasant trip very interesting.

It must have been quite amazing for a young girl who hadn't experienced much of the world to suddenly be on trains in Adelaide and Perth and Melbourne?

Yes it was hard to believe and meeting different people

- 15:00 because the Ghan wasn't a troop train it was carrying troops but not per se a troop train and so you were meeting miners from who were going back they were working Zircon mines there and people from different walks of life

Did your view of the world change markedly in this period?

Oh it must have done I'm sure my outlook was broadened considerably and to be able to meet with people of all

- 15:30 backgrounds it was a very good experience.

Do you remember any specific things that you might have seen or done for the first time that you never imagined doing before you left to join the army?

Oh I suppose travelling was the thing that I never imagined that I would do and particularly plane travelling that was something that I had not dreamed of doing and just in general meeting with so many different people.

- 16:00 **You mentioned the Zircon miners they sound like very interesting people were there any other interesting groups of people you were exposed to on those train trips?**

Not that I can remember really.

When you have your week leave in Adelaide was that again similar to Melbourne and Sydney and Perth?

Adelaide was a lovely city they call it the "city of churches" and its so well layed out because it was a planned city not like Sydney that just grew up along the bullock tracks so

- 16:30 it was very easy to find your way around and I went to Glenelg to see the beach there and just all the different highlights around Adelaide but I found it a quiet city.

Was it as affected by the war as other major ports?

No I don't think so I think they felt they were too far away from the war there.

And how did that feeling sort of manifest itself?

I don't think there were the restrictions from memory there were not the restrictions

- 17:00 on blackouts and all that sort of thing that they had in Sydney.

Were there blackouts in Melbourne?

I believe there were yes I don't know why Adelaide didn't.

Just that much further away?

Yeah.

I guess there's not air raids.

Oh no they wouldn't have had air raids they were all confined to north of Australia from Broome to Darwin to the northern part of Queensland.

Were there air raid drills when you were in Perth?

- 17:30 I don't remember.

I guess the threat wasn't anywhere near

Yes we could have had them but I just don't remember ever doing that and I certainly don't remember slit trenches there.

Tell us about the Ghan.

Oh it was a very comfortable train quite luxurious actually and very nice meals served there and they had a bread roll and the butter came in a little dish with some ice underneath so it would keep the butter firm and I had

- 18:00 a sleeper and I think there were two of us women in the sleeping compartment but everything was very comfortable and the further north you went the drier it became and the scenery was a bit monotonous in some ways but for a first experience going to towards central Australia that was very interesting.
- How did those trains work I mean the Ghan's obviously even at the time quite a luxury passenger train during the war, did**
- 18:30 **the army just commandeered it or did you buy tickets or?**
- Well the army arranged all that there was this unit called Movement Control and the joke was it was all movement and scarcely any control but they arranged all these things I didn't have to worry about it I just presented my name was on the list and I got on but I don't think they conveyed a lot of troops on those trains because most of the big movements of troops would have been by truck they would have gone in big vehicles.
- 19:00 **What kind of truck?**
- Oh would it be a 3 ton truck but with a semi-trailer on the back of it so the troops wouldn't have had the luxury of travelling by Ghan.
- Did the road run along the rail line?**
- I don't remember.
- Did you ever see those troops moving in trucks like that?**
- Oh not until I got past Alice Springs.
- And the train line**
- 19:30 **stops at Adelaide?**
- No the train line stopped at Alice Springs.
- How did you get from Alice Springs north?**
- In a plane with an Australian crew but they were bringing back a plane load of American servicemen who'd been on leave in Adelaide and they had been drinking and I would have been the only woman in the plane and so the Australian crew were quite concerned about me and took me up and I sat up with the crew in the front of the plane, there was a spare seat there
- 20:00 so to fly to Darwin I had their company.
- Was that a typical attitude when you were in the situation that included both American and Australian troops?**
- Yes the Australians were very protective of us.
- Was there more to it than that?**
- No no more to it than that but I don't think it would have been a very comfortable experience to I've got no idea how many Americans were in this plane but it would have been 60 or 80 or something like that to have been the only woman and if they had been drinking
- 20:30 I think that perhaps would have made their conduct rather more rowdy.
- You didn't see any of this rowdy conduct during the plane?**
- No no it was only when I was going to get on the plane and the pilot came along and he said "oh I think you'd better sit up the front with us".
- You told me yesterday that you didn't go out with any Americans during the war but did you meet any?**
- Yes actually I met a very nice American officer in Darwin he was in some sort of secret service that he couldn't
- 21:00 talk about very much but he did say that he'd gone by submarine back to the Philippines and this sounds rather strange but with a load of matches and they were put on shore and on the matchbox was an imprint of MacArthur with "I will return" on it and so that was the signal for the Philippine people to take heart and think they hadn't been abandoned and MacArthur was coming back to the Philippines. Now whether that was true or not I don't know
- 21:30 because some fellows you know stretched the truth a bit but he suddenly disappeared he could go off on any sort of mission but he couldn't say where he was going.
- He was based in Darwin?**
- He was based in Darwin yes.

Did he give you a box of those matches?

No no no he really wasn't supposed to tell me about it that was part of the hush hush

Probably was true it sounds silly enough to be true doesn't it?

22:00 Yes.

What else was going on in Darwin when you arrived there?

Well when I first arrived in Darwin the AWAS was stationed at Adelaide River which was 70 miles south of Darwin so I was met by a staff car and conveyed down to Adelaide River because the AWAS had been there I arrived in September but the AWAS had been there since February of that year that was in 1944 and they thought it was too dangerous to have a lot of the units in Darwin in case there were any more bombings

22:30 so they had set up these barracks and they were fairly comfortable but the trouble was it was the dry season it hadn't rained for about 6 months and the dust was terrible, they called it bull dust and the minute you stepped out of your quarters even if you polished your shoes they were covered with a film of dust and the engineers had laid pipes from the Adelaide River to bring water to the barracks but the pipes were on top of the

23:00 ground so during the day the water heated up it was so heated that if you came home from work you couldn't have a shower right away you had to wait to perhaps 8 or 9 o'clock at night for the water to cool down and it had been treated with some sort of chemicals for drinking purposes and when they poured a cup of tea it was purpose in colour and the taste was terrible so I didn't drink any tea or very little water for that matter we could buy lolly what they called lolly water which was.

23:30 soft drink and there were soft drink factories throughout the Territory to supply the troops with lolly water.

What was the landscape around Adelaide River like?

Pretty stark the down by the river there was more lush growth but it was just the Australian outback with a few Australian trees no grass at all at that stage but after the wet of course the grass grew like mad.

24:00 Adelaide River we were not allowed to swim there, some fellows did and one was actually attacked by a crocodile and luckily he was pulled free by his mates but he had a very bad leg because the crocodiles teeth carried some infection and his leg became infected but there were springs there called Berri Springs which were very clean and very pleasant to swim you still felt a little bit cautious as to whether a crocodile had come over land to Berri

24:30 Springs and you didn't want to be the first one to dive in but that was a very nice setting and there was a lot more luxurious growth around the Springs area.

Was there a local aboriginal population?

Yes there were aboriginal girls who worked for the army I don't know under what circumstances they were enlisted but they were given AWAS uniforms and they used to do the cleaning and a lot of the jobs around the barracks and we were always taught that we couldn't

25:00 call them "boongs" or you know you had to be respectful of them they were very shy but very nice girls bit giggly you know and so when I went on to meet the officer who was in charge of amenities there I think I mentioned previously that often the men were former sporting identities like Bert Oldfield well this man was Gerald Patterson who had been a very good tennis player and had played Davis

25:30 Cup for Australia pre-war so he was in his element with all the sporting activities for the men there but I don't think he quite knew what to do with me in this role, so after a week or so he arranged that I should be provided with a panel van which was a mobile cinema van the army amenities had these mobile vans that went around and took films to the troops and they could get into small units and show

26:00 films in the open air and so he arranged for me to have on of those and a male driver and a lady from the YWCA who wanted to go back to Alice Springs she came along with me and so off we went to stay at inspect all the different places between Adelaide River and Alice Springs where women were stationed so there were several general hospitals big hospitals down the track.

26:30 One was at Katherine one was at Tennant Creek and then there were what they called camp hospitals which were small sort of emergency type hospitals at Laramar [?] and Mataranka and I'm not sure where any of the others were and so we called at these places to see what they needed and finished up in Alice Springs, oh before we got to Alice Springs that's right we branched off because Mt Isa

27:00 even though that was in Queensland that came into my territory and that was a small hospital and in need of a lot of things there were no AAMWS working there but there were army sisters and they needed a sewing machine more than anything else so we were able to arrange to get that for them but it was a long way I didn't drive in those days I couldn't drive but there were long stretches of road where it wouldn't have mattered so to relieve the driver Geoff I stayed behind the wheel and put my

foot on the

27:30 accelerator and just steered and that was all you needed to do on these long stretches.

Who was Geoff?

Geoff was an army private who was the driver of the vehicle so when we arrived at these different places he would go off to the men's quarters and spend the night there and they YWCA rep and I would be put up in the women's quarters in the hospital

Was he fighting age or was he a bit older?

28:00 No he would have only been in his 20s I think a very quiet lad and a bit embarrassed I think to think that he had this job to do but that was army you had did what you were told but no he was a good driver and it took us about a fortnight to do all this trip.

All the hospitals you mentioned the camp hospitals and major hospitals in town were they all at this stage dealing with wounded men?

Oh yes but often sick men

28:30 and men who needed operations they would do a lot of tonsillectomies they were also treating the aboriginal and the civilian people there were no civilians north of Pine Creek, Darwin was evacuated and all the civilians had to go to Pine Creek or further south than that so even though they were only hospitals they wouldn't send away civilians or aboriginals and they would treat them there

So

29:00 **there were no civilians at all in Darwin?**

No completely all service people.

How long had that been the case?

Oh I think since Darwin had been bombed and it was rather strange then because it meant you never saw a child or baby or a woman in a civilian dress it was everybody was in uniform.

It would seem like another planet?

It would it was so luckily after a couple of months

29:30 at Adelaide River all the barracks and the girls who were stationed there were moved up to Darwin it was considered safe and there were big barracks there called Larrakia and my office place where army amenities was a few miles south of Darwin so you went by car or utility every day to work but the water was so lovely the drinking water there was a dam,

30:00 Manton, with a dam which had fresh water because in the wet of course it would accumulate a lot of water and it was so nice to be able to have fresh water to drink and when ships came into the Harbour to take on water you would be told that between certain hours of the day water would be cut off while they filled their tanks but no that was a big advantage and Darwin was a much more pleasant place than Adelaide River.

So without

30:30 **a civilian population was everything that a city usually has still operating but for just the people still in uniform?**

Well there were no shops you used your army canteens or maybe the air force would have had canteens all your uniforms and everything were provided by whatever service you were in the only civilian men were called the AWC [Allied Works Council] and I was trying to think what that stood for whether it was Australian Works Council or something like that

31:00 and they looked after the roads and the general maintenance of the area so everything else was service provided.

Just judging on the normal balance of the population during wartime the civilians would have been mainly women so having them moved out you would have been the only women in Darwin?

Yes and that was a wonderful feeling after being south where men were quite scarce because they were most of the eligible men were away fighting anyway

31:30 now we found that there was about 1 woman to everything 10,000 men and you were very much in demand so I can remember going out to parties and dances 13 nights in a row on the 14 night I said "that's enough I can't go out again tonight" and if you went to a dance you didn't dance a whole dance with one partner they tapped one man would tap your partner on the shoulder and you changed partners and danced with him for a while.

32:00 **It sounds like fun.**

Yeah it was and it was all in good spirits actually the other ranks always had to go out in groups of I think 6 but they trusted us officers so we didn't have to go out in groups we could go out individually to a function but mostly a several of us would go to the same function.

Was there downside to that ratio of men to women?

Yes in some

32:30 ways it was too much of a good thing really but you felt sorry for the men and a lot of them there were quite a few RAF [Royal Air Force] boys there who were flying spitfires and they were very lonely so far away from home anxious to get home particularly when the war in Europe ended and they felt they no longer needed to be involved in a war so yes you felt sorry for them because they were lonely and they were looking for

33:00 female company and we were happy to entertain with dances and socials and so on picnics.

Was that a common aspect of the men that you went out with in Darwin that they were lonely?

Oh yes I'm sure they were probably many of them were married but that didn't particularly matter as far as I was concerned there were no romances involved

33:30 because I felt it was a very an atmosphere where you couldn't count on anything you know tropical moon romantic nights and all that sort of thing you could easily be swept of your feet but maybe my head always ruled my heart and I thought this is only temporary and I couldn't get too involved.

That atmosphere must have added to the tension in a way these men would have been quite desperate

34:00 **in some respects they were inactive service they were back in Darwin.**

Yes I think they were bored more than anything else nothing was happening the war had shifted to the Pacific Islands and there obviously wasn't going to be any more action in Darwin but they were just kept there I suppose in case there was still East Timor was still occupied by the Japanese so they fairly close but it was used mainly as a base

34:30 the Flying Bats there were stationed you could see them down on the Harbour and they would take off and they could fly very low and they could avoid enemy air ack-ack because they went so low and they could plant mines and bombs around enemy areas I don't exactly know where they went to because nobody talked about what they were doing

35:00 but we would see the planes go off and then see them come back and land on the Harbour.

So there were these Catalinas crews, these Flying Bat crew?

Catalinas that's right.

And there were men Darwin Garrison if you'd like what other troops were in town?

A lot of navy actually the Harbour was full of sunken vessels from when Darwin was bombed which was very sad to see but there was a big naval detachment there for miles and all sorts of craft

35:30 there were a lot of air force although they were down the track a bit mainly at Batchelor they used to joke they were safe because they were 17 miles behind the AWAS and there were men from other countries there were Canadians there and British who were with the Z special unit and they had very special privileges because whatever they were doing was very hush hush and they came to Captain Love who was then my officer after Gerald Patterson went

36:00 south, and they showed him a letter which said he was to supply them with anything they asked for from our amenities store and no questions were asked and they didn't have to account for anything and when a concert party came up because there could be perhaps 40 men in a concert party but in a Z special camp I think the limit was about 10 outsiders who were allowed into the camp so that

36:30 we had to make up a small concert party to go into their camp to entertain them but that's how secret it all was and they had a flash on their arms like a Z that was their colour patch Z special unit.

That would be quite romantic and dashing these men?

Oh they were yes and I think they wore berets which looked very dashing and they were made up of men from different services, different army services like British and Australian I don't know what else

37:00 so it was quite a mixture of different people and different backgrounds.

You mentioned the ships the wrecked ships in the Harbour was there any other evidence of the devastation of the bombing a couple of years earlier?

Oh yes the homes that had been bombed had not been restored of course and there were just no signs of civilisation really ... bombed out homes.

How widespread was that devastation?

- 37:30 Oh it went a few miles to the south of Darwin there had been some sort of bombing right to the interior but not too far down but people fled from Darwin just leaving everything behind them.
- Was the civilian section of the city a bit like a ghost town?**
- It was yes.
- Did you ever go in there for any reason?**
- Oh well we were part of it really with these Larrakia Barracks that was part of the set up of the
- 38:00 city and the navy headquarters were in the old Government House that hadn't been hit and so they made that their headquarters but all the rest were air force or navy or army establishments just like wartime setups.
- What were the worst damaged parts of the city?**
- I think the Harbour was among the worst and around the foreshores
- 38:30 ships were bombed and caught on fire and there was a hospital ship the Manunda there in port and that was bombed even though it was clearly marked with red cross and I think one of the nursing sisters was killed on that and some were injured and all the crew of the Manunda were brought back and came to Concord hospital until they could be allocated to units elsewhere
- Were you at Concord at the time?**
- At the time yes yeah.
- Did you**
- 39:00 **meet any of the crew members of that ship?**
- Oh yes yes they worked in the wards there so they took over the jobs to help relieve the shortage of staff that was there.
- So when you went to Darwin you actually saw the wreck of this ship?**
- Yes yes.
- It must have been quite moving to see the wreck**
- Yes yes you hadn't believe it that so many ships could have been wrecked though a lot of them lying on their sides with some of the hull sticking out of the water so any craft that were in the Harbour had to be very
- 39:30 careful that they navigated around the wrecks and of course the tides were very great in Darwin too they went out such a long way and then came in again with a rush.
- There was obviously no attempt to move the ships?**
- No
- Had there been any attempt in the last years to rebuild things that had been bombed out?**
- No I think the wharf
- 40:40 might have been rebuilt but I don't think any of the other things had been rebuilt.
- There was no need.**
- Probably not the navy must have had a wharf for their ships to come into I just don't remember that.
- That wasn't at the main harbour you were describing before?**
- No.

Tape 6

- 00:35 **Elva, Darwin's a pretty hot sort of place how were the conditions there for yourself and the...?**
- Oh they were pretty trying really no air conditioning in those days and I was fortunate enough to share a house that had been on the site that was built up on stilts and we had louvers to about waist high and you could open those louvers to let a
- 01:00 breeze through that came off the Harbour so that was pleasant but of course you always had to remember in the wet the rain came down in torrents about 5 o'clock every afternoon so if you left the louvers open, your house would be flooded. The humidity was shocking nearly all of us suffered from

prickly heat and you had about 4 showers a day showers of course had no hot water in them they were warm enough without

01:30 having heating and so you would have a shower in the morning one at lunchtime one when you came home from work and one when you went to bed to try and wash all the sweat off you just sweated so much but that was hard to take.

Did you go swimming?

Oh yes we went swimming although there are certain times of the year when you can't go swimming in the ocean because they had all these jelly blubbers or Portuguese Men-of-War and it was quite dangerous to go in the ocean and also I found

02:00 the way the tide went out so far you would walk and walk and walk and the water would still only be up to your knees and even the water the ocean was quite warm so that wasn't very refreshing but the most refreshing was to go to Berri Springs and swim there.

Did you ever go out to East Point?

Yes I suppose so is that where all the Poinciana trees were there were beautiful brilliant Poinciana trees in an avenue.

Also big artillery in placement?

Big artillery placement there yes.

02:30 **Were there women serving there?**

Oh there would have been women serving there yes mainly there were ack-ack and search light girls and signals most of the girls were involved in signals or in stores like in the ordinance depots supplying stores to all the different units.

And Darwin was a big stepping off point for a lot of air and supply base?

It was yes.

What sort of different nationalities or different aircrews

03:00 **were coming through?**

Well there were Americans I think they were flying Liberators and I know that the English RAF pilots were flying Spitfires I don't know too much about the other aircraft but there was lots of air movement flying in and out of Darwin all the time.

What was your main job when you were there?

Well supplying all the amenities that the girls needed and particularly sporting equipment because they had

03:30 basketball matches and hockey matches and amenities even supplied swimsuits and sandshoes as well as the other sporting equipment and they were instrumental in having a booklet printed prior to Christmas so the girls could send home one of these booklets to their families which told about life mainly in Adelaide River and included photos so that was quite a boost for the girls to be

04:00 able to get a copy of that and send that home and then of course entertainment was the biggest thing that I was involved in because there was so much boredom among the troops that entertainment was really appreciated and apart from amenities supplying the mobile cinema units these fellows travelled around and put up their screen and their projectors in the open air and you knew when it was film night and you went along with a box

04:30 or something to sit on and even though in the wet I always remember watching the film "The Song of Bernadette" in teeming rain you had your felt hat on which had quite a big brim and a rain cape but the only dry spot was the bit I was sitting on because it teemed you could hardly see the screen I don't know why we went on sitting there but the main entertainment were those that people made for themselves and at Adelaide River there'd been a YMCA fellow who

05:00 had formed a choir and at Adelaide River they the volunteers had built a chapel which was also used as a recreation hut and it was built mainly of bamboo with not a stained glass window I think there was a painted glass window it was called St George's Chapel and the choir used to meet there and for church parades you were either roman catholic RC, C of E [Church of England], or OPD

05:30 which stood for Other Protestant Denominations, they all lumped together if you were Jewish I don't know what happened about that but sometimes if you were going out on a picnic and the C of E church parade was on earlier than any of the others you went along to that church parade so you could go off on the picnic but it was compulsory to go on church parade unless you were on duty so this choir that Lou formed was instrumental when we went to Darwin and Christmas Eve

06:00 going around to a lot of the different units singing Christmas carols and then we got on board a launch and went out onto the Harbour and went around one of the navy ships that was anchored in the

Harbour and sailors faces appeared over the deck they couldn't believe they could hear women singing on Darwin Harbour so that was an unusual experience and then another choir master was a

- 06:30 flight lieutenant with the air force Alan Bellhouse and he formed a choir in Darwin which was very good and we put on quite a number of programs and we also had some Canadians on the program they called themselves the Maple Leaf Quartet and there was an Australian air force fellow Russell King who played the flute beautifully so we could work up quite an ambitious program and
- 07:00 they were always very well attended these were mainly undercover in the old Star theatre and Wonelly [?] theatre they were still there despite the bombing so they were taken over for these evenings of entertainment and then there was a fellow called John Fitza who had been with J C Williamson the operating people and he had a lovely tenor voice and he wrote a light
- 07:30 opera in 2 acts called "Song of the Danube" and he took the leading role but some of our girls had very nice voices too and they were able to take the leading and supplementary roles in that plus there was a band made up of men from all the different forces there and we girls formed a ballet and the can-can was the most popular dance that you could possibly imagine and so into this
- 08:00 story of song of the Danube they were able to drag some entertainment that involved us doing the can-can and a navy fellow who was very good at being Carmen Miranda dressed up with all the you know fruit and vegetable on the head and the like you very much and so that was well received they put 5 performances on various on various nights and different places around Darwin and people flocked to see those things and another big production
- 08:30 it was called "Blue Horizon" and it was produced by 2 army amenities fellows Dudley Simpson and Alan Cairns and their particular job had been to go into an army unit and find talent there was always some hidden talent maybe good singers or actors or maybe somebody who could whistle or be a comedian and they would go in with scripts and musical numbers and Dudley could play
- 09:00 the piano and Alan had been a radio announcer and they would organise these fellows to make up their own group and put on a concert for their fellow troops and it was interesting that Dudley Simpson went on to be a composer and I took the children to the performance of The Nutcracker ballet in Sydney years later and Dudley was conducting the orchestra in Her Majesty's Theatre
- 09:30 and he subsequently went to England and wrote a lot of the music for the original series of Dr Who so I was interested to follow his career. Alan I lost track of him I think he went back to Newcastle and went back into radio but they were the main movers and shakers to put on this very ambitious production called "Blue Horizon" and the girls of course were the ballet girls and the singers and the navy fellows were
- 10:00 very inventive as far as making the costumes I had table bays which was coloured brightly like a shiny plastic in blue and green and red and yellow and some of these costumes they made the tops were in this shiny plastic which looked like satin and then they used mosquito nets for these frilly flouncy skirts but the only service that had white mosquito nets were the
- 10:30 navy the air force and the army had green mosquito nets so somehow or rather we acquired white mosquito nets from the navy and these fellows had sewing machines and they made these frocks and some other artistic fellows did all the scenery for the shows and we had dance routines an orchestra that played quite well singers, one of the singers was
- 11:00 an American called Mack Morgan who had been with the metropolitan opera in New York.

What was he doing in Darwin?

I don't know

He was with the American..?

He was with the American forces and so I've got no idea what his job was with the American forces but his voice was beautiful and then there was a violinist from the Sydney Symphony orchestra his name eludes me at the moment but he played first violin in the orchestra

- 11:30 and he was with army amenities and so he contributed some items on the violin it was just a wonderful show but that was mainly outdoors and troops came from miles around they stood on the backs of trucks and stood on boxes we had a few seats provided down the front but people didn't care how long they stood to watch this show.

What was song of the Danube about?

- 12:00 It was set in Europe in it involved 2 British airman who'd been shot down and were trying to escape the Nazis and a countess from this mythical European country was sheltering them and there was the bad Nazi who was trying to catch them so that was the main theme they got away of course.

With the girl.

With the girl,

12:30 yes there was the pretty little maid and some comedy songs as well as serious but most of the songs were based on Strauss, Strauss' music

And some of the female parts were played by men?

No no they had girls in all the female parts I have photos that I can show you.

Blue Horizon what was the theme of Blue Horizon?

Mainly like a revue

13:00 and one of the settings was "I left my heart at the stage hall canteen" and another one was "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas" and then some of the sort of short plays that they put on how women play cards or there was one

How do women play cards?

They talk where men don't, another one was based on something that was on the radio

13:30 I can't think of the name of it but all these characters and he's sharpening his knife and he's saying "whist you don't play whist with a knife, Pansy" now I wish I could think more about it perhaps when we change tapes I might be able to look at the program and tell you more about it.

So there were a lot of talented people were they mainly from the amenities service?

Oh no most of them weren't in the amenities service only these Alan and Dudley and me

14:00 were from the amenities service but I trained the ballets now I hadn't had much experience with ballets with dancing but when I was at Concord hospital there was a talent quest and some of us girls decided we'd go in this talent quest with a ballet to the tune of "There'll be bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover" and one of the patients had been a dancing teacher but he had his leg in plaster and he was on crutches so with difficulty

14:30 he taught us this dance routine so from then on I got hooked on dancing and so when we were in Darwin I managed to coach these girls in different dance routines they were pretty simple but they went over quite well.

And you were also in the chorus singing?

No not singing singing wasn't my forte.

What about in the...?

Ballets

In the Danube in The Song of the Danube?

Yeah no I was only in the ballet in that I was one of the can-can

15:00 girls.

Can you remember any of the songs from that?

"I give my heart..."

Can you give us...?

"I give my heart just for one man", I couldn't sing it

Any other songs you remember?

No some of them from Blue Horizons I remember better they had Waltzing "Waltzing high in the clouds,

15:30 only you and I in the clouds", and of course "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas" that's very well known, "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas".

Bit ironic up in Darwin.

It was yes.

You've got people at this stage of the war the war was relatively far away?

Well the war in Europe was over

16:00 by May of 1945 and then in September of course peace was September peace was declared in the Pacific but you couldn't immediately go home.

I'm thinking more of the mass you had a large fairly a lot of people how many troops or how many military personnel would be in Darwin around this time?

Oh I couldn't tell you but there were a lot and still up and down the track no there must have been thousands still there all anxious to get

16:30 home all "brownd off" as the expression went.

I guess too in the absence it's a question I put delicately do you think there was any homosexuality in the army?

I'm sure there was in the navy I'm not so sure about the army and frankly I didn't know much about homosexuality

17:00 because when we came back to Melbourne I was in a restaurant there with Barry and a group of the fellows who'd been connected with this Blue Horizons were in the restaurant too and they said "Oh Elva" and Barry was very embarrassed because he said "oh they're homosexuals" I said "I didn't know that" but they I just thought they were very talented as far as sewing and painting as far as that was concerned so

17:30 it hadn't occurred to me.

So you think a lot of these chaps were?

Quite possibly yes I don't know about the army fellows that was something I wouldn't have recognised I think today you know a lot more about it and maybe see it where you wouldn't have recognised it before.

What about within the AWAS?

I only knew of one lesbian couple and they were separated

18:00 then one was sent to one unit and one to the other but that's the only one I knew of there could have been others.

Were they separated because they were?

Yes what happened was one of them became a sergeant and sergeants had separate quarters and she didn't want to go to separate quarters she wanted to stay with her partner where they'd shared a room and that was how it was discovered and so one of them was transferred to another unit.

How were they discovered?

I suppose

18:30 they were discovered in bed together I don't know but because she was so adamant that she would not move to the sergeants' quarters I think those higher up and perhaps a bit more worldly suspected that this was the case and raided the room.

So generally especially the ... matter would not be talked about or tolerated?

I don't know it's just so long ago I just can't remember whether that was tolerated or what had

19:00 happened it's beyond my ken.

Yeah there must have been a lot of also you know you must have broken a few hearts?

Oh yes they mended, there was nothing very serious about things I think most of us were realistic enough to know that while the war was on most things were in a state of flux you couldn't feel that you making plans for the future when you didn't know

19:30 what your future was going to be and a lot of people that you meet wouldn't have been congenial in civilian life I don't think it was just a false sort of atmosphere, there were some romances of course and there were some broken hearts but the majority of them were not too serious.

Any of the women that you would have to deal with in the amenities service accidentally

20:00 **fall pregnant?**

Not anyone in the amenities service I knew of one girl in Darwin who became pregnant and she had to be sent south and they were very unfairly treated I think they were dishonourably discharged and the man wasn't punished in any at all so that was very unfair.

Did you talk about that at the time?

I think we all agreed it was jolly bad luck that this had happened and the man

20:30 involved in this particular case was a lot older that she was and I'm sure he was the one who persuaded her but she was young and innocent and I think that she was just very unlucky that this happened.

Did that relationship maintained after the war?

I suspect he was already married I don't know but she just disappeared.

But she was dishonourably discharged by the army?

Dishonourably by the army yes.

What was her position?

21:00 She was a private and it was a crime as far as the army was concerned that you became pregnant but it was no crime for a man to impregnate a girl its a double standard isn't it?

Totally.

Yes

You wouldn't get away with it these days.

Well you did 60 years ago.

21:30 **Did that sort of hypocrisy anger you at the time?**

Yes it did it was so unfair for her family to have to take her back under that cloud as it were and it was just something that would have happened on the spur of the moment I imagine because there wouldn't have been many opportunities for them to cohabit in Darwin as I said,

22:00 you were supposed to go out in groups of 6 - safety in numbers - but I suppose this was one time when they were able to get together maybe more I don't know no I was annoyed about it but there's nothing you can do there the rules of the army that's it.

So really you were controlled by men?

Yes by male rules yeah the not the feeling about it

22:30 today that there would have been if someone got pregnant I mean its so common today and girls are able to keep their baby and get a pension and live their own lives but then you either had a backyard abortion or you went into a Salvation Army home or a home run by the nuns and worked there until your baby was born and then it was adopted.

Did you know this girl personally?

I knew her slightly not close relationship.

23:00 **Were there any other options apart from having the baby for her at that time?**

Well that would have been decided when she came south you see all the army did was send her south and discharge her well then it was up to her and her family to decide what they were going to do

... taken matters into her own hands in Darwin..?

Oh I don't think she could have had an abortion in Darwin and of course there was no way that she could have gone into a Salvation Army until she went south and was discharged.

23:30 **Is that where they sent girls?**

The Salvation Army were very caring of those girls and the nuns were too although I believe that in both cases they had to work very hard scrubbing floors and doing washing and all that sort of thing in these homes and made to feel that they were in disgrace and but it was the only way they could take their baby to full term but they often didn't see their baby after it was born,

24:00 there was a lot of people willing to adopt illegitimate babies and so that was the easiest way out as far as the girl was concerned.

I know the men especially on overseas services were given contraceptives were the women also counselled in such matters and codes of conduct?

No no way at all no way you were just supposed to know that you had to behave yourself and be pure.

24:30 **It wasn't written down...?**

It wasn't written down but it was implied that you were all virgins and that was what you were going to stay.

A few more things, were you just staying in Darwin or were you travelling around?

Once I did that trip in the mobile cinema panel van that was the only time I went down by road the next time I went down by

25:00 air, and then called in at a few places where planes would take me, like Tennant Creek. And then I had another hop from Tennant Creek to Katherine, then another one back to Darwin. It was so vast an area to cover, that mostly all the action centred around Darwin. You could do something to help the people in the other places, but only by sending them things, not actually organising them into things. I couldn't have gone down to Alice Springs and organised a concert party down there.

25:30 But we had an exchange. They sent a team up to play basketball when the girls were at Adelaide River, and then the Adelaide River girls later went down to Alice Springs to play basketball. But it involved days and days of travelling.

Did you visit Alice Springs and spend any time there?

On the way back I was there, for quite a while. We didn't have any baths in the quarters in Darwin, and the

26:00 quarters in Alice Springs, they had baths. So you'd hear someone say "Ah, first bath I've had for twelve months." We were only supposed to stay twelve months in the Territory, so I think my stay was closer to fourteen months, that depended on another woman who was a Western Australian, coming up to take my place. The war was over, but you still had to do the winding down of things, so when Molly King arrived, I was free to go south. I came down in a convoy ...

26:30 I could have flown home, and I would have been home in two days. I could have got a plane from Darwin to Brisbane, and another one from Brisbane to Sydney, but I was such a bad air traveller, I said "No, I'll take the long way home." So we went in convoy, a truckload of girls, and among a convoy of men also going south. And we'd stage overnight at different camps along the way, down to Alice Springs. Then when ...

27:00 I don't know whether it was the Ghan, or what train we got on at Alice Springs then to go to Adelaide. But I stayed with friends overnight in Adelaide, and then to Melbourne, and then to Sydney. And when I arrived home, my father said "Your hair's got much darker." I said "It hasn't been washed for about ten days" travelling on all these ...

I'm just curious. Was the road from Darwin to Alice Springs, was it all dirt at the time?

No, I think they'd laid the bitumen, they'd laid the bitumen, yes.

Who actually built that bitumen road?

27:30 The servicemen yes.

The Americans?

No not the Americans the Australians.

I thought the Americans were heavily involved in the building of the Stuart Highway?

Well I can't say I can't say oh we did go a little way on a train when we left Darwin we went to Pine Creek and there was a little funny little train called a Leaping Cleaner and that took us a short distance of the way before we got on the tracks but no I can't

28:00 tell you who built the roads.

When you were in Darwin was there much contact with the aboriginal people?

Oh again they worked for us we had AWAS officers and they ironed our uniform for us and I'm sure they were paid but we always gave them cigarettes as a sort of a tip I suppose and then we had a funny sort of latrine service there, there were 2 adjoining seats and when you used one

28:30 there was a box of twigs and you put a handful of twigs over what you'd done and an aboriginal would come the next morning and light that fire I suppose he poured kerosene or something on it to get it going and so that day you had to use the one where the fire hadn't been lit so you didn't want to rush in and suddenly sit on the one where the fire had been lit in a hurry but the other choice of latrines mainly all down the track were these huge pit latrines with seats over

29:00 the top of them but I always had a horrible feeling that it was going to open up and I was going down into this pit

It was interesting the aboriginal people working for the army.

For the army yes and there was a crowd called the Water Transport Company that men were on ack-ack and search light stations around the different arms of Darwin Harbour and the Water Transport Company had to take the water and supplies and so there were

29:30 aboriginals working with the transport people on the boats and a couple of us went one day on one of these trips the boat dragged behind it towed behind it a big tank full of fresh water and when we dropped anchor and they started to supply the troops on the land we said to one of the aboriginal crew "are there any sharks here?" and he said "no no sharks" so we hopped overboard and were having a very pleasant swim around and the men on

30:00 the land were waving like this to us and we thought "oh you know they're not used to women" and were waving back and one came paddling out on a makeshift canoe and he said "we caught a 12 foot crocodile here the other day" so I've never swam so fast in my life back to that boat to get on board we were just lucky.

Oh yeah Darwin Harbour's full of crocodiles.

Yes yes.

I wouldn't even go swimming there.

Well the aboriginal told the truth he said there were no sharks we didn't ask if there were

30:30 crocodiles I suppose the crocodiles kept the sharks away.

Yeah were there any plans for evacuation was it if there was an invasion?

I don't know of any didn't know of any.

You didn't have any drill?

No I think it was pretty routine what was happening there.

Who was the senior female officer at the time in Darwin?

A captain from Western Australia I can't think of her name but she was the senior officer in charge of the barracks most

31:00 of us full lieutenants there were AAMWS at a hospital but we didn't see a great deal of them they were at Berrima and that was some distance away so I think the officer in charge of them was also a captain, but my most moving experience in Darwin was when they were bringing prisoners of war home who'd been prisoners of the Japanese after Singapore was freed and they

31:30 originally decided to bring them in home by air but this was a mistake because when they landed in Darwin they were taken to Berrima hospital and we were standing beside the road to watch them go by in trucks and they were just gaunt skeletons, it was so sad to see these men and then the army decided that it was going to be too much of a shock for the relatives to see the men in this condition and too much of a shock for the men to adjust so quickly coming back to

32:00 not to civilian life but life among their families and so it was decided that they would be evacuated by a slow boat and we went to the wharf when one of these ships arrived and some of the men were well enough to come ashore but they were staggered to see women in army uniforms because when they were taken prisoner the only women in uniform had been the army nurses and they didn't know what to make of us or what to call of us

32:30 and we decided that for those who were not well enough to come ashore we'd take a small concert party on board the ship so we had a fellow with a piano accordion and a couple of girls with nice singing voices and we went on board the ship where the fellows were lying in bed in wards and started to play and sing and we wondered why they weren't joining in and then one of them called out "play 'Roll out the barrel'" and then another one said "play 'Kiss me goodnight sergeant major'"

33:00 and we played those and they sang and joined in and what we hadn't realised was that we were singing the latest songs that had been written during the 3 years that they had been prisoner and of course they'd never heard them so they weren't able to sing with us.

Was that very sad?

It was sad yes you realised more than ever just what a gap out of their lives these 3 years had been when they were completely out of touch with everything.

Did you talk to any of them?

Oh yes we talked to them,

33:30 they were so happy to be given clean pyjamas or clean toothbrushes or tucked up in a clean bed they were very happy to be going home of course.

The decision to keep them there and I guess fatten them up and make them acceptable.

Yes that's right.

Was that what they wanted?

I don't suppose they had much choice but probably they realised that this was the wisest thing to do cause I don't think

34:00 they really wanted their family to see them in that emaciated condition, I don't think their families would have recognised them frankly and so perhaps 14 days of the sea voyage would have put a few pounds on them anyway.

Where had those particular POWs come from?

Changi prison a lot of them yes a group of AAMWS went to Singapore and with a ship and went ashore and worked in the hospital there

34:30 in Singapore looking after the men there before they were evacuated.

How many how long were you there looking after the POWS?

Oh this was only a day or two I wasn't looking after them we were just providing entertainment for them and they were the ones who came ashore all dressed out in the new uniforms the ones in sick bay of course were in pyjamas but these others had been supplied with a nice clean uniform

- 35:00 and they were just happy to catch up on all the things that had happened in those 3 years they wanted to know you what had been happening.

What towards the end of your time there what was your role were you still doing the same job?

Still doing the same job organising the itineraries for the professional army concert parties that were coming up

- 35:30 they were groups of one particular group of about 40 came through and I had to work out their itinerary how many nights they would play in Alice Springs and then to give them a day or two to move on to Tennant Creek and set up there again and again in Katherine and how many nights they would be in Darwin but they were real professionals and they had a female impersonator that you wouldn't have told was a man very funny comedians,

- 36:00 they came back to Sydney I used to see one there on the stage and he was just as funny as he'd been in the army but you'd flock for miles around to go and watch these performances and sit on a box often in great discomfort but that didn't matter the entertainment was great.

The army actually recruited professional entertainers?

Yes yes that's right well it was part of amenities job to do that and they were very welcomed.

- 36:30 **Can you tell us about Gracie Fields' visit to Darwin?**

Yes that was quite unexpected she arrived by air and so I think she went onto a platform somewhere and everybody gathered around to hear her sing and she was so natural and she sang a couple of her favourite songs and I'm just trying to remember actually what the songs were

- 37:00 but she was a very down to earth person I felt for all her fame it was a breath of fresh air that she came and sang to the troops so yeah I can't tell you more than that it was hardly worth mentioning was it.

Oh no it was very well worth mentioning.

Tape 7

- 00:35 **All right Elva tell us we were just talking about when the cameras were off about the costuming again on the shows you did what was the biggest thing you lacked on the costumes?**

Oh dancing shoes we only had our brown lace up low-heeled army shoes so try as we would we couldn't camouflage those very well except we tried to put big floppy bows on the laces to cover them up

- 01:00 but they were rather heavy to dance in.

They don't look very dainty ...

No they were not dainty but there was no other way to get shoes.

In Darwin at the time were there many other things that were completely difficult to get?

Fresh food most of the food we had was tinned tinned meat tinned vegetables tinned butter which was awfully greasy dehydrated

- 01:30 potatoes it depended on the cook some cooks could rehydrate them beautifully but others were just a yellow mush and they were horrible so occasionally we could arrange for some fresh fruit to be brought up by truck from Alice Springs, you were paying for that yourself so that was a real treat to get that but unfortunately one time we left our fruit out on the table and our windows open and a possum came in and ate the fruit

- 02:00 but the result of all this tinned food was that most of us suffered from boils so it was very painful to have boils on your legs and I even had a boil in my ear and that was very painful so I think it was just lack of fresh fruit and vegetables that caused that.

Were there any other medical problems that were common amongst the girls up there?

Yes from swimming you could get what they called "tropical ear" which was an infection

- 02:30 from the water in your ear and so your ear had to be stuffed with a lot of stuff impregnated and you

were deaf for a while from it.

Did you suffer from tropical ear?

Well I thought it was tropical ear when the specialist or the doctor looked in my ear and said "oh no its a boil" so I didn't have tropical ear but it was just as bad.

03:00 **I want to talk a little bit more about the POWs that you were dealing with in Darwin because I think that must have been a very interesting experience during the war during the time in Sydney and then later on elsewhere in Australia, where you were was there much talk of prisoners of war?**

Well in Perth I shared a room with a lady whose husband was a prisoner of war of the Japanese and she was under a lot of stress and

03:30 rarely got a letter from him and when one arrived I remember she grabbed it from the table where our mail was put and went straight up to our room and said "leave me alone" and she would have read this and probably cried over the letter because it was very rarely that she heard from her husband so whether he returned or not I don't know because I'd come back to the eastern states by then,

04:00 it was very sad to see her distress over this.

Were the stories that have now become history about the cruelty and the treatment in those prisoner of war camps was any of that information leaking out at the time?

No I don't think so I don't think we could believe they could be treated so badly other Australians had been taken prisoner of war by the Italians and by the Germans and they certainly followed

04:30 the Geneva Convention to a great extent as to the way prisoners of war should be treated but the Japanese had no idea of following that and it was only afterwards when the men returned home that we realised the horror of them having to build railways and work in mines and the dreadful conditions under which they suffered and so many lives lost a third of the 8th Battalion was lost during that time.

Did you talk to

05:00 **those men at all about their experiences?**

I don't think they wanted to talk about their experiences they were more interested in asking us the questions and I think we were a bit reluctant to ask them about what had happened so I don't remember hearing their experiences but we were trying to keep the conversation white and bright and not remind them of what had happened.

What kind of information did they want from you?

They wanted to know how long women had been in the army,

05:30 what rank they held, what jobs they held how things were back at home how civilians were getting on they wanted to know about rationing they hadn't know about that and just general questions about how things were going in Australia they were hungry for any information at all anything you could talk about.

Were there ever any instances amongst those men where it seemed that

06:00 **they couldn't cope with being home?**

Well if there were I didn't see it the ones I saw of course we saw the ones who were well enough to come ashore and the ones who were well enough to sit up in bed there might have been others who were mentally affected and we didn't see them.

They would have been among the first to have starting coming back into Darwin when the war ended

Yes yes they would have yes.

How long was it before other troops started to appear?

06:30 I only remember this one ship coming in perhaps there were others that came in and other people went down to meet that ship but there was only one particular ship that I remember going to see.

And what was the reception for it?

Oh everybody was overjoyed to see them I think a lot of us were allowed to take leave to go down and welcome them because it was a big a red-letter day for us to see them coming home

07:00 and so anybody who could be spared from duty went to the wharves to see them.

Did you know where that ship was arriving from?

We knew it was coming from Singapore yes.

And there were prisoners of war coming on board that ship as well?

This was the ship

This was the ship where the prisoners of war?

Yes.

And there were no other ships that you remember seeing?

No there could have been but I only remember that particular one.

Where you mentioned the end of the war so I think we'll just go back and talk about those

07:30 **days do remember the day that you heard about the bombing in Japan?**

The dropping of the atom bomb yes it was a very sombre experience I think that to think so many were killed but we were all so terribly relieved that the war was coming to an end cause it had gone on for 6 years and that had seemed a long long time.

Do you remember how you got the news of that event?

There was a newspaper

08:00 printed the Army Times in Darwin but I suspect that I'd probably heard it on the radio or somebody who'd heard it on the radio would have told me because there was a radio station run by army amenities in Darwin called 5DR and that would have broadcast the news as soon as it came to hand.

Obviously big news was it met with happiness or anxiousness or?

Relief I would say

08:30 was the main thing relief that the war was finally coming to an end and very happy.

A few weeks a couple of weeks after that when the surrender came through do you remember that day as well?

Yes oh yes that was a very important day and talked about a lot and a lot of excitement and a lot of us wondering how long it would be before we went home.

What happened in Darwin that day can you talk a little bit about the celebrations that went on?

09:00 Well I think we probably all had a beer or two beer was rationed to 2 bottles a week so you couldn't save up much beer to celebrate but I'd say anybody who had any alcoholic drinks at all at that time would have opened them up and celebrated that way.

There were stories I've heard of men firing into the air and dancing in the street does any of that sound like what happened in Darwin?

No I don't remember that happening

09:30 it could have but I think it was fairly low key actually.

How much longer did you have to stay in Darwin after the surrender?

I came south in November so if the war finished in September I was there for 2 months afterwards.

And most of the AAMWS and other army women came back at the same time?

No only gradually because

10:00 things still had to be taken care of there still would have been army signals going backwards and forwards from Melbourne to Darwin for instance and then a force was going across to Timor and so that had to be backed up all the army equipment had to gradually be returned to depots and brought south so it was a fairly slow process.

10:30 **Did you get discharged from the army soon after that?**

No I had another 3 weeks leave in Sydney and then I was posted to Melbourne to the amenities headquarters and that was when I was promoted to temporary captain and was involved in the winding down of everything seeing the flyers brought back all of the irons or jugs or sewing machines or whatever they had to all

11:00 be returned and I don't know how they were disposed of but apparently I talked a lot about it when I was in Darwin and another member of staff there had been a prisoner of war in Germany and he would say "when I was in Germany" and we only found out later that we were the butt of jokes of saying "when I was in Darwin" "when I was in Germany" but that was our most recent experience mainly and what filled our minds.

You must have had a lot of stories to

11:30 **tell?**

Oh yes and people were interested in hearing about it but I suppose it got pretty boring if you told too many stories about it.

When you had those 3 weeks leave in Sydney was that the first time you'd seen your parents in a long time?

Oh in 14 months because I'd had 3 weeks leave in between Perth and Darwin so no I hadn't seen them for 14 months and it's always a bit strange to catch up again

12:00 from where you'd left off and visit one of my friends who married and had a baby while I was away and she seemed completely changed so there were those things that were different about coming back.

You must have been a completely different young woman?

Yes when I was finally discharged which was in June and went home to live that took quite a bit of adjustment because prior

12:30 to the war I'd never smoked or drank alcohol and while I didn't do any to great extent I knew my parents would disapprove terribly so as far as I was concerned no more cigarettes or no more beer and living back with your parents when you'd been used to more or less independent life I know the army told us what to do but you more or less made your own pleasures and so to become a daughter again

13:00 at 25, 26, that was a bit difficult and another big adjustment of course was getting to wear civilian clothing for all that time, I'd been wearing low heeled lace up sensible army shoes and to wear high heeled shoes again was just so difficult and I'd worn a felt hat a khaki felt hat and when I was going to be married and buying an outfit

13:30 for what was then in those days a going away outfit and buying a hat with veils and flowers on it it was just too silly very feminine but you hadn't been used to looking feminine all the years in your uniform.

We'll talk about your marriage in a moment because that would have been happening you had met Barry by this stage and you would this was happening at the same time but just talk about that adjustment coming home again,

14:00 **I know a lot of men coming back from overseas found it very difficult to adjust do you think you had a similar experience coming back from Darwin?**

Yes I believe so I was used to going out a lot with different men from the different services navy army air force and I think I was different from what my parents had expected me to be because some of the fellows I'd known there came and

14:30 took me out even though by this time I was engaged to Barry I still went out with a couple of the fellows that I'd known in the services and I don't know that it shocked them but surprised them perhaps it was as though there'd been five years almost 5 years in my life when we lost contact with one another.

You and your parents or you and all your friends or...?

Yes well some of my friends who weren't in the army and me and my parents to a great extent.

15:00 **Did they ever comment one way or the other about how you had changed in this period?**

I suppose they would have they must have noticed the difference but I don't remember what their attitude was they were always very loving but they probably thought their little girl had changed into a woman which she had.

Your experience wasn't unique there were thousands of women who'd had a similar experience in Australia.

That's right?

Do you think women in general were finding it difficult in the immediate

15:30 **post war period?**

Yes well we those of us who went back to our jobs when I hadn't done any shorthand and typing for over 4 years it just seemed strange to be sitting behind a typewriter again and becoming a public servant and keeping 9 to 5 hours there weren't many there were only 2 other girls from the office who had joined up they joined the Land

16:00 Women's Navy [Women's Land Army?] and so they came back too but you felt you didn't have very much in common with the other women who remained behind in the office

How long did it take you before you were able to get back into the normal expected duties of a woman in peacetime?

Oh I would say it would take about a year at least to settle down again you felt a bit restless having had all this moving around from state to state

16:30 it just seemed tame to be home again.

You spoke before about feeling a little bit of anger at the hypocrisy and different treatment meted out to the women and men in the army, did you feel a similar kind of frustration or anger at the hypocrisy of the post war situation women who had had this responsibility suddenly being denied it?

Yes I think it was a let down as far as they were concerned

17:00 and naturally they couldn't be expected to hold down jobs that were left open for men who also coming back from the services but it did mean that they were demoted to a great extent to from they had been doing and it just didn't seem fair but there was nothing that could be done about it we felt.

Did any women try and keep their jobs that you know of?

Probably there were

17:30 but women who'd been in senior positions in the army had perhaps have changed their jobs when they came back I don't think if I hadn't been getting married I wouldn't have stayed in the public service I think I would have gone out into private enterprise because I just felt the public service was too stifling.

You yesterday we mentioned that you didn't have grand

18:00 **ambitions to go on in the public service did you always have ambitions to get married?**

No I don't think so I think I could have followed a career path successfully I think and it didn't particularly worry me if I hadn't married.

Were the women in your office in a similar situation?

Most of them were unmarried there were a lot of spinsters around in those days particularly because

18:30 a lot of the fellows they would have married or had married just didn't come back.

Did rules still apply that married women had to leave the public service?

I'm not sure about that I know I had to so I think it was probably still the rule.

Just talk about your wedding then or actually moving back to the whole beginning of that story - you spoke briefly

19:00 **yesterday about how Barry saw your photo in the Woman's Weekly can you just explain that through again in detail we'll go into it where were you at the time?**

I was convalescing in a Red Cross convalescent home called Berida in Bowral NSW and the woman's weekly interior decorator had done all the decorations of this Red Cross home and so they came down with a photographer and a reporter so they could give it publicity in the Woman's Weekly

19:30 and took a page of photographs of us reclining on lounges doing folk dancing playing checkers and so on and Barry happened to be in a Salvation Army hut in Puckapunyal and for want of anything better to read I suppose he picked up a Woman's Weekly and read it and saw my name there and thought "oh I'll write to Elva" and so we started correspondence and when I went to Melbourne to do officers' training school he was able to

20:00 come down to Melbourne and we had a night out together but that was the only time I saw him for the rest of the war so we just corresponded on and off nothing regular and when we were both in like I was in Darwin and he was in Bougainville we didn't have many letters going between us but he'd given me a photo of himself in which he looked very dashing with a little moustache and his ... beret on and I had that on my desk in my office in Darwin and

20:30 if I wanted to dissuade someone I thought was getting a bit serious I'd say "oh that's the boy back home" so that was sufficient excuse little knowing of what the outcome would be so while Barry was away his parents were moved to Melbourne his father's job took him to Melbourne and so instead of being discharged in Sydney he took his discharge in Melbourne, he was an only child and by

21:00 that time I'd been posted to Melbourne and I'd seen his parents a few times because I'd known them at Bronte and I'd visited them before Barry got his discharge so when he came home we started going out together but he was in civilian clothes and I was still in uniform so it was quite the reverse because in most cases it was men who were in the uniform and the girls who were in civilian clothes and I was stationed at a place called Campbell and after we'd been out together

21:30 he would bring me back to the camp and kiss me goodnight in front of the sergeant the guard on duty and I'd go into camp and he'd go home to his mum and dad so we decided to become engaged and this would have been about January and eventually I was sent back to Sydney and discharged in June and we decided we'd get married in October and live in Sydney because neither of us knew anybody in Melbourne and his parents

22:00 were living in a very nice apartment but there would have been no room for us and housing was very scarce very hard to get and my parents had quite a big home and they said we could share it with them so we took advantage of that and back at Bronte of course Barry had a lot of his old mates there I had all my friends there so it only made sense to live there so that was what we did so on the 12th October 1946 we were married.

Was it

22:30 **how you imagined it?**

Getting married I suppose so I had the formal wedding gown and the big veil and a big bouquet and people gave me horseshoes I think I had about 3 satin ribbon covered horseshoes hanging from my arm it was all very exciting we had a nice wedding reception with lots of relatives and family there and a honeymoon at Jervis Bay

23:00 so that was all the normal things that you did in those days.

It was a civilian wedding there was no

Oh no we were married in the Presbyterian Church.

I mean not religious but there was no army contingent there?

Oh no there was no crossed swords or anything like that.

Did you you must have a lot of friends from the forces?

Not so many really they were friends from my pre-army days mainly there and mainly

23:30 relatives and Barry's friends.

But it's very strange because we talked yesterday about how strong those bonds were I guess at the end of the war they all sort of dissipated when everybody left to go back to their own lives?

Yes that's right for awhile they did and we were too busy getting on with our own lives and then eventually rearing families to keep in touch with many people and it was only in about 1960 something that our ex-AAMWS association

24:00 was formed and I imagine other ex-servicewomen associations were formed and by that time we could all attend functions or get together for meetings that these associations have now proved very strong ties and we have as far as the AAMWS concerned 3 luncheons a year one on Anzac Day, a reunion in September and then a Christmas luncheon at the end of November and seeing people again that you had known

24:30 over those years it is a very strong tie.

In the immediate post war period when you got married and your life changed again it sort of changed back in a way to being a Sydney girl and going back to Bronte, did the war seem a bit like did Darwin and the war seem a bit like a dream?

It seemed like another life completely and of course I couldn't cook because for almost 5 years all my meals had been prepared for me so I had to go to

25:00 the gas company and have cooking lessons so I could at least serve up some meals to Barry.

How did you get on?

I couldn't make a sponge the sponge cake was very flat and he always says I couldn't boil water but I learnt.

In your parents house were you pretty much self sufficient as a married couple?

Yes we had a bedroom which the led off to

25:30 what had been part of the front veranda that was closed in and that was our sitting room which we furnished quite comfortably with a lounge and a couple of chairs and some bookshelves and we course shared the bathroom and kitchen with my parents but that worked out quite well, Barry got on quite well with my parents so that was good so for 3 years we lived with them.

The war soon as you said became to seemed like a different world,

26:00 **were there other reminders of it in Sydney for a while afterwards?**

Well one reminder Barry had was that he had an attack of malaria he'd had one when he was living with his parents in Melbourne but that hadn't realised it was malaria they thought it was a bad attack of flu and soon after our first baby was born Barry came down with this attack and I got an army or a repatriation doctor to come and see him and he was sure it was malaria but he took a blood sample as well

26:30 because Barry had been on Atebrin all the time he was in Bougainville and that suppressed the malaria but now of course it was making itself felt and so fortunately they had discovered a drug that if you took it twice a week for 6 months it cleansed your body of the malarial germ or whatever and he's never had another attack so that was the result.

What about other reminders of the war, obviously rationing was still in force for a long time?

Oh yes when

27:00 we got married I had to produce my wedding certificate to the rationing people and I think I got 30 coupons to enable me to buy bed linen or towels and pillow slips and that sort of thing so that was in force for quite some time afterwards.

Were there other inconveniences in the city any that you can think of?

It gradually got back I suppose they put the names back on the stations and the blackouts were no longer necessary

27:30 it was just slowly but people got back to normal life it didn't happen all at once.

Did you ever see any more women in uniform?

Today?

In that period did they just disappear off the streets completely?

No they were around for a while because like everything else now for instance the hospitals they couldn't just suddenly say to all the army nurses and all the AAMWS "oh you can go home now", there were still patients coming in to be cared

28:00 for so our AAMWS were still caring for patients right up until 1951 so plus those who went to Japan with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force so it was a very slow winding down process particularly as far as hospitals were concerned.

Did you have friends who went to Japan?

Yes one of my closest friends went and I've got to know other women since who were there

28:30 but they thought that was a big adventure they had to volunteer to go and conditions were not so good because food was very scarce in Japan and they were not allowed to eat any of the Japanese food, they had to rely on ... supplies that were brought from Australia and often they were slow on coming through and so they did it tough and it was very cold at times in Japan.

29:00 My friend Mavis experienced an earthquake at the hospital nobody was injured but a lot of broken glass around and a lot of fright from the earthquake.

Did you receive letters from her when she was in Japan?

Yes I did and a photo when she went skiing in the hills outside they were stationed at Iwo Jima and when she was on leave they were able to go skiing.

29:30 **Did you receiving those letters get an urge to go overseas still yourself?**

No I think I'd had long enough in the army I think I was rather glad to be out of uniform and settling down.

Looking back after the war at your experience in the army were you glad the way things had turned out?

Yes and one of the unexpected benefits was I discovered classical music while I was in the army, do you think that's a strange bit of

30:00 **Its a strange thing to discover while you're in the army I think**

Yes well out family had enjoyed light musical comedy "The Merry Widow" and Gilbert and Sullivan but I'd never been exposed to classical music until one night at Concord hospital they had a group for appreciation of music and I can remember the first symphony I'd ever heard was the Saisafrog [?] and I just fell in love with that and so from then on one of the patients had been

30:30 playing the oboe in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and he took me to a concert there and took me backstage afterwards and introduced me to a lot of the players and so then in Darwin particularly in army education and musical appreciation nights I remember one air force fellow absolutely aghast because I'd never heard of eiderkliener music couldn't believe it so from then on that was the start of a life long love affair

31:00 with classical music.

Were there any other things that you picked up in the army that you've still got with you now?

The bonds of friendship were very very important it doesn't have to have been someone who was in the

same service but any servicewomen you feel has a lot in common and if you see someone on the bus with their little badge on you get to talking to them right away and find out how much you

31:30 do enjoy talking about your wartime experiences.

What about the confidence and self-assurance that comes with being an officer and giving orders to people below you, did that stick around?

Yeah that stuck around although I didn't have much use for it.

Did it upset Barry when you got married?

He laughs about it because he was a corporal and he says there was a well-known song then "I've got my Captain working for me now" and so that was his theme song.

Did it upset you

32:00 **that you had no use for it?**

I don't think it worried me particularly and I think it stood me in good stead in more recent years because since I've become President of the AAMWS I've had to take control of meetings and stand up and make speeches and one year two years ago in Martin Place I gave an address at a special ceremony to do with the 8th Division of remembrance of the fall of Singapore and I don't think I would have had the confidence

32:30 to do that otherwise.

Even though in such a long intervening period it never left you.

I don't think so.

What about the international relations that were made during the war I mean you didn't have a lot to do personally with the Americans but do you have a feeling for say the Americans or the British or even the Japanese that has stayed with you since that time?

I think I felt a lot of hatred for the Japanese particularly after they

33:00 sunk the hospital ship Centaur it was hospital ship in every sense covered by the Geneva Convention it was lit, there were red crosses clearly visible and yet it was shelled and so many people died in that shelling, doctors and nurses and ambulance men that were going to New Guinea and it was so tragic

33:30 that their lives were lost so unnecessarily that I thought what a hateful type of people you couldn't lump all the Japanese people together but they should be so cruel as to sink that hospital ship.

Was that a hatred that has...?

Oh it's waned now you can't stay hating people and of course the generation now of Japanese people you can't hold them to blame for what happened

34:00 60 years ago but I think if I'd had a relative who'd had been a prisoner of war I would have found it very hard to be forgiving.

What about for the other Allied countries do you still feel the bond to Britain that you felt when you were growing up?

No I don't think so I think Australia's come of age since then and while I have respect for my grandparents I don't think the British monarchy is terribly relevant today you know sing "God save the

34:30 Queen" as a hymn and I've been through the stage of singing "God save the King" as a child but I don't think that's important in Australia now.

That's a fairly liberal view obviously its shared by a lot of Australians not the majority but obviously a lot of Australians, do you think your views have become more liberal as you've gotten older?

Yes I would have voted for Australia to become a republic, I saw that there was no future in us under a monarchy really and I was disappointed

35:00 at the outcome so I've tried to keep abreast of the times I think what's the use of living in the past and if my children and my grandchildren are going to continue to live here in Australia I want Australia independent of other countries and I don't like the way John Howard is following neatly in President Bush's footsteps, I feel we've got to be a strong country in our own right.

What about your

35:30 **views of war having experienced the war yourself?**

I think its a terrible thing I always hoped that there would be no more wars that that would be "the war to end all wars" and its a great sadness that there have been so many wars since and so many civil wars you know in Ireland and in Africa so much war still, starvation and hunger nothing good comes out of

the war I don't think.

36:00 **You mentioned, actually you didn't mention this on camera, did you go back to church when you came back from the war?**

For a little while but I had become interested in other philosophies while I was in the army I can remember reading a philosopher a Chinese philosopher Linu Tang on his ideas and I felt I was open to other religions or other philosophies

36:30 that I had to find a path for myself my own beliefs and while I still think Christianity has very good ideals I don't think its the only way of life.

And yet in many ways you went back into you got married in a church you went back into very similar lifestyle that you'd led before the war not personally but women had led before the war?

Yes but I just didn't have

37:00 the conviction that I had before that being a Christian was the only way to live. I feel so many other faiths have strong views and they must think that their right in their opinions we can't all be right but what do they say many paths run heaven.

I just want to ask this one more time I know I've asked the question a few times but its very hard for someone my generation to imagine being given that much freedom and responsibility and then in a sense

37:30 **having it taken away or allowing it to be taken away, did anyone fight against that?**

What could we do? We there was no alternative but to either go back to the jobs we had before the war or find another job, some of the AAMWS took up nursing, a couple of my friends went overseas to take jobs there but there really wasn't very much we could do about

38:00 we couldn't demand that we be given equivalent jobs or equivalent responsibility it was still a man's world to a great extent and if you got married in many cases the housewife was just the housewife, the man was the breadwinner so you accepted that.

Obviously in the decades that followed the feminist movement took off to quite an extent, I think you said yesterday that you felt a little bit of a precursor to that move - is that a role that you

38:30 **accept proudly?**

Oh yes I think women stepped into situations that they had no idea that they could do these things before the war and know they discovered that they were equal with men in the ability, I know as far as Concord hospital was concerned a lot of the staff there were sent up to the Islands and replaced by women and at first each hospital has what they call an establishment which allows you to have so many people of so many ranks and so

39:00 for a while there they used 7 AAMWS to replace 5 men but then when the manpower position became worse they replaced 1 for 1 so 1 woman was doing the same job as 1 man was doing at the hospital, now what could be more equal than that?

It's true I don't think there's any doubt that women could do the job, did you surprise yourself?

Yes I think so I think we've

39:30 found that this was a new opening a new life for us and we could do the things whether it was driving ambulances a lot of the girls in the AWAS they drove big vehicles and they had to do all the maintenance on them and probably before that they'd never learnt to drive a car let alone get under the bonnet so yes they were things that women discovered they could do and do well.

40:00 **Did they discover that fairly quickly do you think?**

Well they had to there were no men available to drive these vehicles and so while they weren't able to drive tanks for instance they were driving staff cars ambulances 3 tonne trucks and the same with the air force, the girls in the air force were driving big vehicles and doing jobs that were only open to men before that.

40:30 **Were you proud of the role you had in Australia winning the war?**

I certainly am, wouldn't miss it for quids.

Looking back on it do you think it was a happy time for you?

Oh yes and you tend to forget the times when you weren't so happy perhaps in some situations but on the whole it was a wonderful experience I don't regret it one bit.

Tape 8

00:32 **Had you talked a great deal about the war either with your husband or about his war experiences about your own?**

I talk to Barry quite a lot about his war experiences and my own so we have a lot in common in that way I can't imagine marrying a man who hadn't been in the services it would have been very strange.

Do you think the fact that you had been in the services gives you an interesting

01:00 **perspective that other women married women might not have in the ability to talk about the war with their husbands?**

Yes I think so we've had common experiences to a great extent and I think that forms a bond that if I hadn't been in the services at all I wouldn't have understood a lot of the things that he might have told me.

You said that you generally tend to remember the good times over the bad is that reflected in what you talk about

01:30 **as well?**

Oh yes and you talk about the funny things that happened and avoid the tragedies and to a great extent he had a tank blown up in front of him and saw some of his mates killed in that but he doesn't dwell on that.

And was he at all affected by those kind of experiences?

He wasn't wounded in any way so apart from malaria he had a war that wasn't filled with danger,

02:00 oh well I suppose there was certain danger there but they were more protected in the tanks than if they'd been in the infantry for instance.

I imagine that kind of experience really sticks with you though?

Oh probably yes.

Did he ever have any nightmares about it or anything of that sort?

No I don't think so Barry had a very strong Christian faith and I think that helps him through situations like that.

Has that ever been an issue between you?

No he

02:30 respects my ideas and I respect his and there's no quarrel about that.

What about yourself was there any one thing that happened to you in the war that you will never forget?

I suppose that experience with the prisoners of war coming home was the most outstanding thing that I could never forget.

Had that to a certain extent haunted you in the post war period?

No I don't think so,

03:00 but it's made me understand when I see these men on television in the different series that they've had and read books like "Weary" Dunlop's books, it given me a much greater insight into what they looked like how they appeared when they came home.

Do you think that you could have survived that situation yourself, I mean you were on the roll to go to New Guinea at one stage?

That's right yes

03:30 do you mean if I was a prisoner of war could I have survived? That's a very neat question, depends a lot on your stability your health in general you'd like to think you could survive but whether I could have I don't know.

I guess what I'm getting at there is the differences between men and women, do you think there's a reason that men were called on to make war and women weren't?

I think men are more warlike

04:00 that women I think if women had their way there'd be no wars and the women who've often suffered the most because they've stayed home to care for families and had all the worries of wondering what's happening to their loved ones and then having to carry on either knowing that they've died or particularly in the case of prisoners of war cope with that man when he's come home with all his

nightmares and traumas and that hasn't been an easy thing

04:30 for them to do so no I don't think women would if women were in power in the world I don't think there would be wars.

I know you talk to your husband and you were both involved in the war, did you ever talk to your children at length about the war?

When they were asked questions about it and were interested I think as they grew up they were more interested and I think perhaps with studies at school they asked me about it then but they didn't sit down and discuss it in detail.

05:00 I think they absorbed quite a bit.

Do you think the role of the all the nurses, all the women in the services have been sufficiently recognised since the war finished?

Yes I think so. I would never march on Anzac Day in the early days after the war because I felt it was the men's day and women were not to be involved and then quite some 15 years ago I suppose I thought "no, women played just as big a role, I'm going to march on Anzac day" and so I have ever since.

And what motivated that change?

Only the fact that I thought women had not been sufficiently recognised in the role that they played and that they should be and the way to advertise it if you like publicise it was to march on Anzac Day.

05:30 **Are you proud of the Anzac tradition do you see yourself as part of that?**

Yes I think so it was a

06:00 terrible experience and I say only Australians could make a victory out of defeat and celebrate a defeat but I think it has become an important day and to see the crowds that now line the streets so enthusiastic about it that they must feel that these were the people who liberate or saved Australian from being overrun by the Japanese because it could have happened if we hadn't had strong forces here

06:30 to fight for Australia I'm sure the Japanese would have overrun.

I think that's the point where I'm going to stop asking questions but I'm going to ask a couple of completely unrelated ones now, have you ever seen Roden Cutler, did you ever see Roden Cutler when he came back from the war?

Yes I was in the city still in the army and he was still in his uniform and he became engaged to an AAMWS officer whom I knew so as they were come towards me I was sort of saying "hello

07:00 Helen" and we always called him "Arthur" Cutler this "Roden" was a bit new to me and they both said "oh do you both know Elva" and they were quite surprised about it and then I saw him later on in life he was the guest at one of my son's speech days when he was at high school and I spoke to him then and he said "you're a lot thinner than you used to be" and then another time at the Garrison Church

07:30 where I was at a service and he was there in a official capacity and I spoke to him again then but he remembered me but of course he'd moved onto a much higher plane by that time.

I think his political experience made him quite famous after the war but he was one of Australia's war heroes, do you think after he came back from the war he knew that?

I don't think he looked to be a hero but I think all these positions that he was offered was then in recognition

08:00 of what he had done and he has been an excellent ambassador for Australia and to have been the longest serving governor of New South Wales was quite a tribute to his ability to do that, he was very highly thought of and he told a joke about himself the last time I saw him he was at Concord Hospital for the opening of the nurses' museum there and he said "you know I was recently in hospital

08:30 and I was talking to a nurse a young Australian nurse" and she said to him "you've got a lot of initials after your name haven't you" and he said "yes do you know what VC stands for?" and she said "yes Viet Cong", she'd never heard of the Victoria Cross and to me he could joke about it but to me that was very sad that there is now a generation that doesn't know what that's the highest award for bravery

09:00 and it's lost.

Do you take much stock in awards and medals yourself?

No sometimes I think there very well deserved I don't know if all these Order of Australia ones are so typical but no I think some of our AAMWS actually were mentioned in dispatches and a couple got the British Empire Medal so I was very proud that they were recognised but

09:30 I don't think you look for anything ...

Another question going right back to Darwin and the mobile cinema - I didn't get to ask this at the time, what kind of films were you showing in the mobile cinema?

The most recent movies of the day as I say "Song of Bernadette" and probably would have been Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire all the movies that were on the movies in the cities they would be sent up by air to these mobile cinemas.

Did you

10:00 **operate the projector?**

No no they had a couple of men who did that and they still march on Anzac Day, you might see a group of them and they've got their banner with a film or light coming out from the projection room so watch out for it if you're watching an Anzac March.

10:30 **I was you obviously had a great deal of empathy with the women you were working with and that that generation of women, did you ever think of your the women in Japan did they ever cross your mind and what they must have been going through?**

No I don't think I did you looked on the Japanese as the enemy and I don't think I would have thought of the women suffering, it didn't occur to me.

11:00 **I was just wondering and I haven't got any other questions I think as Chris was saying that if there's any final thing you want?**

The final statement.

Yes

I had great hopes of the League of Nations when I was young that that was going to end World Wars, I had faith in the United Nations that that would mean the end of world war and neither

11:30 of those organisations have been able to stop war, now what is going to stop war? I don't know but my message to future generations is that it is futile and anything you can do to prevent war, do it.

That's wonderful.