Australians at War Film Archive

Betty Mountbatten (Betty) - Transcript of interview

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http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/3

Tape 1

00:43 **Betty could you give us a quick summary of your life and career?**

Well I was born on 24 May 1924 in Mosman and we lived for a little while with my grandmother and then we built a house at Chatswood a small house and I lived there while I was a child until I was 13 and then we moved to Dover Heights in Sydney and from there I joined the army.

And to continue just to give us some milestones of your life after you joined the army, you do not have to go into detail at this stage on the army.

I went to Bathurst at

01:30 104th Australian General Hospital first and I was a Nursing Orderly Grade Three and I worked there for nearly 12 months and then a few of us were sent to a rookie school which was a bit of a shock, doing a lot of route marching. My friend and I used to bag a bath each to get out of route marching for part of the day, it was a wonder we did not shrink and

02:00 then we went back to Bathurst and I became quite ill and I lost my hearing in one ear through a ear infection I did not lose it entirely but nearly and later on I was sent to Concord Hospital I was hospitalised at Bathurst at first and then I went to Concord I was there for a few months and put into a holding company when I finished that and then from a holding company I went to Goulburn

02:30 which was a hospital that holds 90% of psychiatric cases and the rest were skin patients and after I left Goulburn I ended up Concord 113th AGH in 1945.

After you finished at Concord what did you do after that?

Well my mother was

03:00 widowed by then so I got a compassionate transfer from Goulburn to Sydney so I decided to, my last words with my father embraced the suggestion that I should go to Russell Roberts because he was a friend of his to learn a bit about photographic colouring which I decided to do under post-war reconstruction, I did that for three years, it did not require three years to be taught how to do it at all. I learnt from one of the famous photographers Jean Casner, her father was a famous photographer and she taught me the basics of photographic colouring. I contracted scarlet fever unfortunately when I was 24 so I had to give that up for a while and they did not keep my job

04:00 so I went back to stenography and I have literally been a stenographer until I did a librarianship course when I was 52 and it took me a long time I did it at home by correspondence because I needed to look after my mother and I worked as a librarian after that for a short while before I retired.

Thank you for that. Could you tell us

04:30 **when and where you were born?**

Mosman, NSW. My mother was 19 when I was born and my father was 23 and they were both very young and romantic and they decided they wanted me to be born in a very nice place. There was a nice old home, my grandmother was a midwife actually and she was present at my birth.

05:00 **Did you have any sisters or brothers?**

No. My mother had another child when I was about 10 but it survived for two days, it was a little girl, I was an only child for most of my life.

What can you tell us about your parents. Could you describe them as personalities?

Yes. My mother was quite an emotional manipulator but my father was a very logical person. He was trained lawyer and

05:30 if they happened to be going up in a lift together my mother would say, “There were 50 people in the lift” and Dad would say, “You know there were not 50 people in the lift there could have been 10”. He always brought her down to size.

Amd that summed up their personalities, does it?

Yes. I think so.

Do you have any specific memories of the depression era?

Yes. I do because I know that my mother and father would have

06:00 lost their home if it hadn’t been for a moratorium because he was a student for a long time with a the law firm. Women did not work in those days at all. My mother made all my clothes and she made all her own clothes and she did all the cooking and housework but she did not do any other outside work and they had to depend on my father’s wage.

06:30 He didn’t do his legal course through the University. He did it by being Articled to a firm of solicitors.

Did the financial situation improve after awhile?

Oh it did gradually in the 1930s. Mind you my parents were living up to every penny he earned they didn’t have any money when he left.

Were you aware of other outward and visible signs of the depression as they affected other people?

07:00 Oh yes I was because there were a lot of people suffering. Particularly after the war I noticed a lot of old soldiers from the First World War they had no repatriation at all and a lot of them just had to be hawkers canvassing. I remember a man coming to the door one day, he had a notice around his neck to say that he had been gassed in France and when he tried to

07:30 speak to me all that came out was this terrible rasping sound. It was pretty dreadful, we used to see a lot of Chinese people with the baskets on a pole and bring around vegetables and things like that. All the local shopkeepers served us with whatever we wanted you did not have to go to supermarkets or anything like that. Money was very tight and

08:00 a lot of people had to depend on welfare, or some kind of welfare. It wasn’t the social service there is today of course.

You mentioned all the local shopkeepers, do you mean they were prepared to extend credit?

Ah yes a lot of them were. People used to save coupons and things to buy things, little things like tea towels, they’d save all these coupons.

08:30 **Just moving back to your parents, you were saying that your mother could be fairly material at times. Was it a happy marriage?**

On and off. When I was about 13 they separated for a little while. My mother was the second youngest of six children. She had in turn a very manipulative mother who was a nurse

09:00 at two hospitals. She didn’t really have time to spend much time with the children at home and she separated from her husband, so it wasn’t really, I think my mother was deprived of a great deal of love.

When your parents separated, what happened to you?

I stayed with my mother and my father had a little flat in Potts Point or something,

09:30 but not for very long, it wasn’t for very long at all.

Did that have a bit of an impact on you at the time?

Oh it did. I was very fond of my father particularly because he used to treat me as an adult, talk to me about politics and all sorts of things. I enjoyed that.

So you clearly missed your father?

Oh, I did terribly. He was only 44 when he died.

So for how long were your parents separated?

A matter of a few months, not long.

10:00 I was in boarding school, I went to Ascham my last school. I was a boarder there for about three months. They had been going to New Zealand but that did not come about.

That had been planned.

Yes.

How old were you when your father died?

I was 21. He died three days after my 21st birthday. He managed to, he actually rang my Commanding Officer to see if I could get

10:30 to Victory in Europe Day, in Sydney for my birthday. He was a great friend of Major General Maguire, who he knew by the nickname of “Fat” Maguire. He was the Director General of Medical Services and he asked Major Irwin if I could have the two days, and he said, “It’s not up to me, it’s up to the colonel”. I did not know until the last minute if I could get the leave or not.

11:00 He wasn’t well at my birthday party. He died three days after that.

What were the Victory in Europe days?

Well when the fighting in Europe ceased we were all given two days leave to celebrate that. That was in May 1945.

And your father was trying to get more leave for you?

No, not more leave just those two days, only those two days.

But why would have it been that you were not going to get those days?

11:30 It was just up to the vagaries of the commanders and how the hospital was situated employment-wise, whether we had enough people to look after people.

Were there any other specific memories you have of your life as a child, I mean did you have much to do with the neighbours and other children round about the neighbourhood?

12:00 Oh yes I had a lot to do with the children. There were about six brothers who lived next door to me and the littlest one used to play with me. He eventually became a Catholic priest. His brothers used to tease him terribly because I used to have him wheeling my dolls pram. Itt didn’t go down with his brothers at all. We were great friends. I used to, I loved concerts.

12:30 We used to go to these entertainment things and re-enactment them afterwards. We had an open back veranda and we use to use it as a stage and my mother used to bring out lemonade and things, we had a great time really, we made our own fun. I mean children today have a lot of entertainment by comparison.

When you say you used to go to entertainments, what sort of entertainments were these?

They were concerts I suppose,

13:00 pantomimes, really. Mother Goose and Red Riding Hood and things like that. And then when films were pretty much in their infancy we used to go to films and re-enact those afterwards too.

Do you remember any particular films that made an impact?

When I got a bit older towards 12, 11 and 12, I used to re-enact Nelson Eddie and Jeanette McDonald.

13:30 **Were you a singer?**

I fancied I could sing a little bit, but never that wonderful.

Who played Nelson Eddie?

I think a girl who lived next door to me I am not sure. Very smitten with Nelson Eddie. No I look at him now as very ordinary. He couldn’t act for nuts, but.

It was a convention of the time I think?

That was. We did not have much to choose from then.

14:00 **Now you have mentioned the war veteran coming around with the sign around his neck. What other aspects were there of World War I which were influential in your life when you growing up?**

Well my father enlisted in World War I, but he was only 18 as the war ended and he didn’t go away and he probably wouldn’t have been taken away because he suffered from asthma badly but he had a friend a New Zealander who was on Gallipoli when he was sixteen,

14:30 he was greatly influenced by him. Dad used to take me every year on Anzac Day to the Domain. That’s where they used to hold the big service then and I can remember singing Kipling’s processional. It is a very solemn song, with a distinct meter. I have forgotten who the composer was now, but I did know. I used to stand with him.

15:00 **I have seen newsreel of that actually, it is quite dramatic.**

Oh it’s very dramatic.

With the Domain filled with people and its quiet there, the mood comes through even today.

It does. It does really. Particularly then because a lot of those men were so injured, many of them were blinded and maimed and they had nothing. Today I mean they meet the ships and give them counselling and they give them all sorts of medical benefits, but they had nothing, those men.

15:30 **So many of the World War generation were literally forgotten?**

Oh absolutely. And afterwards people did not want to make much of it. Even after the war and my small experience of it you felt as if you just wanted to get back into oblivion and live your life.

That was the mood after World War II, was it?

After World War II yes… World War I and II.

16:00 **So that the influence of wanting to forget about things after World War I was that influence still there in the 1940's?**

It was. Very much, very much. I do not know whether you have ever read anything about Gallipoli, but the generals, even Winston Churchill had a part to play in that. They just had no idea what they were doing really. A couple

16:30 of the generals were very good, and were able to manage the battalions of soldiers but half of them just died for nothing.

You mentioned the Gallipoli veteran who had an influence on your father. What kind of influence was that?

He was a New Zealander too, my father was a New Zealander and they sort of stuck together. I think he was intensely patriotic, but so was my father.

17:00 New Zealanders were in those days, not so much now but they were.

Patriotic as New Zealanders?

Yes.

Was it also a patriotism for the Empire

Yes. Very much, very much.

What did the Empire mean to your household?

Well it meant a banding together of countries that had the same objective I suppose. Really, and the same Government in a sense, we had the same Queen the same King at that stage.

17:30 **So at that stage do you consider that we were predominantly British?**

Absolutely. Yes.

Where did Australian nationality come into it?

I think from the bushman, mainly, because a lot of bushmen around about Cowra and places like that, they were good horsemen, and a lot of them had been, the very early ones had been to South Africa as a bush contingent.

But within the cities and certainly

18:00 **among the people you knew and your family did you consider yourselves more as Australians or more as Britishers?**

People talked about going home to Britain in those days and I went in 1951 to England on a ship and I felt I was going home and it was something to see all these old buildings which you had read about and heard about and the places you have heard about.

18:30 **Can you tell us a bit about your schooling?**

The first little school I went to wasn't far from home because I don't think my parents trusted me on my own and I just had to walk there. It was a little school called Rowans, a little private school where we did pretty much what we liked in a sense because I didn't learnt anything about maths, I do not have a slightest clue about maths,

19:00 but I loved English and History and Geography and things like that. We were encouraged to, I had to sing the part of Annie Laurie once in a school presentation and I started to learn ballet dancing there too.

Did you ever consider pursuing a career as either a singer or a ballet dancer?

I loved ballet, I really did. I used to be dancing, we had a gramophone, I put this gramophone on

19:30 and I would be dancing around the room and I still do. I love it. I love the music the ballet music.

So to this day you put ballet music on and dance around the room?

Yes, well try when nobody is watching.

At that time as a child and a teenager if you saw yourself as a career person what kind of career did you have in mind?

Well I didn't really have very much in mind actually.

20:00 I did not know what I would be doing, after I left school because for women… my father did not consider a tertiary career at that stage because he did not think I had the brains I think but I was given the choice of nursing or

20:30 secretarial school and I went to secretarial school which I hated because we had to sit in front of a typewriter with a metal case over the keys that you couldn't…you had to learn how to use the keyboard. With shorthand we were given political Hansards and I can write honourable member very well to this day.

How did the metal case work? I mean was it literally touching the keys?

Well it was nailed on, fixed on so you could not possibly lift it up.

But your fingers were able to get underneath the

21:00 **case and feel the keys?**

Yes. You put your fingers but you had no idea what your fingers were doing except by feel. You had to learn how to use the keyboard. A good way of learning to type really.

You were a good typist by the time you finished this?

No not really. I do not think I ever liked it. I probably would have been much better off with nursing because I found when I started to work in the army hospitals I really liked it.

21:30 **Looking in the context of the time when you left school were there many opportunities for women in terms of employment?**

No not really.

What were those opportunities?

No unless you did very well at school and could go to university, which cost a lot of money in those days there were very few scholarships. Not much incentive really. I think a lot of people in my situation went to secretarial school.

22:00 There you could go and join an office.

Did women or young women at that time have any role models in terms of professional women?

I didn't have any particular one I don't think I was keen about film stars and opera singers and people like that.

What was the general path for women at that time? Was it only

22:30 The average married woman didn't go to work. 90% of them didn't go to work. There were a few that worked. I think unless they… even if your circumstances weren't very good it wasn't considered that you should go to work, you were there to look after your home and children.

Now just moving back to high school, you mentioned a boarding school. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

23:00 The boarding school I was at very briefly and in the very early morning we were not allowed to speak before a certain time so we learnt deaf and dumb language. Oh we used to speak from about five o'clock onwards and we had to lie on the bare boards to straighten our backs every evening before we had dinner and we used to have to play tunnel ball

23:30 out on the tennis courts in the very early of the morning and I hate getting up to do this. In the winter it was very cold and I was never a runner because they used to say to me, "Mounty, hurry up. Don't drop the ball". Nobody wanted me on their team if I was playing tunnel ball or anything like that.

How early in the morning were you getting up?

About seven o'clock I suppose. I call that early. It might have been a bit earlier, I can't remember now.

24:00 **What was the Boarding School?**

That was Ascham. It was the last school I went to. I didn't particularly like Ascham because I found that I came from an average middle class background I suppose, my parents were not wealthy and I found that there was a lot of emphasis on social activity and my first day there one girl said to me, "How many

maids have you

24:30 got?". I said, "Maids? We don't have any maids, my mother does the housework".

Where were you when you heard that war had broken out?

We were living at Dover Heights I can remember very vividly sitting on a bed with my mother and father while we listened to this radio message from Robert Menzies. And there is in my folder there a message that he sent to schoolchildren in a school magazine

25:00 if you would like to look at that later.

No that's alright, we will take a look at that later. Do you recall the impact on you and your family of the Menzies speech?

Yes. We did not know what was in the future

25:30 but in those days there was a terrific loyalty to Britain and we felt that we had heard a lot about the German invasion of Poland and hadn't heard much about the Jewish situation but we did get a great influx of Jews during the war that had got out of concentration camps and things like that and we got to know. Because we did not have television. We had radio

26:00 and a lot of the newspapers were restricted in what they could say and tell us. Different influx of media altogether.

People have said that there was a bit of a phoney war until the Japanese came into the war. Was that your impression?

No. No not really because the Germans were fighting in North Africa They had been fighting in France, France had fallen,

26:30 the French Government had a Vichy government which had collaborated with the Germans and which let them in virtually.

So what were your main sources of your information?

Newspapers, I suppose and we used to go to newsreels they had a lot of newsreels then. People filming overseas and I suppose that's the only news we got of various battles, really. Photographs.

27:00 **Do you recall going to the newsreel theatres?**

Yes, often.

Were they crowded?

Yes, very.

So the newsreel theatres actually did very good business during World War II?

Yes, they did. I suppose it was probably a little bit like television today. You get the same, I mean look at this present Iraq war. It's classed as entertainment more or less.

Well it was also a chance obviously for people

27:30 **try and get a sense of what their loved ones were going through if people had gone overseas?**

Yes. You got an idea of the background of what it was like, particularly of Britain during the blitz because that was terrible. I thought even when I was watching the bombing of the American buildings recently the September 11th now; they had that sort of bombing nearly every day in London for weeks and weeks and weeks. At one stage we thought of bringing

28:00 a child out here from London as an evacuee but it didn't eventuate.

Was that a scheme that was operating at the time?

Yes there was.

Did you know of other families that did that?

No I did not know of anybody in particular but I had an aunt that had relatives in England and we were told of a child that might be able to come out through that.

So did the war change your own plans for the future?

Yes. A lot really because I lost my father a short while before and on the basis of the last conversation I had with him I decided to do photographic colouring but it probably would have been a lot better for me to go straight back to stenography because that was something I had actually been trained at and

29:00 I did have to give that up, the colouring up eventually to go back to shorthand and typing.

Was your father's death in any way related to the war.

No, not at all. No. He had… I suppose in some ways it was because he had a lot of added responsibility as he was looking after a friend's practice in Goulburn and when I was in hospital there he used to come up and see me and bring the dog with him. I had a German Shepherd dog

29:30 and he had a lot of extra work to do and it was hard to get staff. I remember one of the boys in the office was killed in Greece. It hit home fairly much.

So there was a lot of pressure on your father at this time?

There was at the time, yes. He wasn't really well and he had these severe attacks of asthma and they used to treat it in those days with injections of adrenaline

30:00 which he gave himself, which weakens the heart.

Well that can't have helped at all.

No it doesn't. Not at all.

How did you get involved in nursing?

I went to a Voluntary Aid Detachment before I was able to join up. I was able to join that when I was 17 and I used to walk from Roseville to Lindfield

30:30 to lectures. They sent me down, the detachment sent me down to Lindfield Air Force Base. I worked until I got called up.

A lot of people won't know what a Voluntary Aid Detachment was. Could you explain for us what that is?

Well we were all trained at these lectures I learnt a lot about home nursing and first aid and we use to have

31:00 first aid classes. We'd tie bandages and turn them around and all that sort of thing.. But we learnt how to treat casualties and how to feed people properly, low diet.

Why did you decide to do this course?

Well, actually my father's secretary, her name was Pam Gregg, and she became a VAD before

31:30 I did and that gave me a little bit of a role model and I decided that was the sort of war work that I wanted to do.

Could you tell me more specifically what the VAD as an organisation was?

It was organised by the Red Cross and it was run by a joint central council who governed all the activities and we were sent, my detachment sent me down to Lindfield for instance

32:00 and then when I moved to the Eastern Suburbs I was sent to the Lady Wakehurst Red Cross Convalescent Home and if we intended to join the army, and I voiced my idea of doing this we were sent to a general hospital then for training but I was sent to King George V hospital for mothers and babies which my father thought was hilarious. "What are you going to be be sent to look after babies for when

32:30 you are going to an army hospital". Anyhow I think the Government in their wisdom thought we might be dealing with displaced people at some time, evacuees of some sort. There I was but I would have been, all I did was stuff pillows with straw, and take temperatures, carbolised beds which means that you sanitised them completely after each person has been in them and we used to carry the mothers into their babies at feeding time

33:00 and have morning afternoon tea with the sisters in the labour ward who used to tell us horrifying stories of what went on. None of us wanted to have any children after that. But I remember one day standing on the steps of the hospital and a woman came in ready for the labour wards. I went one way and Hilda went the other way, we didn't have any trouble with that. I would not have had enough experience anyway to deal with it anyway.

33:30 **You were hearing horrifying stories of what went wrong?**

I suppose so. I suppose they felt they had a couple of green horns there and they'd really impress them how dreadful it was.

You referred to carbolising a bed. How did you do that?

Oh, with a very strong detergent like… what was that brown stuff we used to use? It was very strong and had a terrible smell You washed the bed

34:00 all over and dry it, even the springs everything.

So it was a totally disinfected bed?

So there would be no contact of any disease whatsoever.

Obviously dated from a period of rampant contagion.

Actually, I've got a picture of one of my friends in the book, the book that I wrote and she is standing in front of an ambulance and it really looks like the Boer War days. It is a funny old ambulance with a horse-drawn.

34:30 But when you look back at hospitals now we had very inadequate equipment.

Do you think that you preferred to work in King George Hospital? Was that Boer War standard or was it up to the standard of the day?

Oh no. In it's time it was a very modern hospital, it was a brand new hospital. But going up to the bush we had two main wards

35:00 that were built for the purpose but the rest were all converted army huts and they just had a dressing room and a pan room and the sister's office and beds. That's all.

So at what age did you enlist?

18. You couldn't enlist before you were 18 but because I had that time as a VAD I had a certain amount of hospital experience that helped.

35:30 **Can you recall the circumstances of your enlistment?**

I can't recall very much about it except that I went to see Major Snelling who was our NSW Commander. She wasn't a major at that stage, she was a captain I think, but I'd told her that I'd done a secretarial course and would there be any possibility of me going into one of the army hospital administration offices and she said, "No my dear you are needed in the wards".

36:00 I came out as if I was carrying a lamp. When I got home my father said, "How did you get on? Don't tell me I spent all that money in training you as a secretary and you are going to work in the wards". But I enjoyed that I really did and I felt I was doing something because most of those men, great great privilege to look after them.

36:30 **This is throughout the war?**

Yes right through, three and a half years.

What made it a special privilege?

I think the injuries I saw and the type of person they were really, because the average Australian bloke will suffer a hell of a lot before he complains really.

You obviously still feel quite deep about this?

I do, yes.

37:00 **Can you explain a little more why it was such a privilege and why these people had such special qualities?**

I think probably growing up as I did with the background of the First World War I had some conception of what happens during a war and it's not very pretty most of it. And your dealing with emotions

37:30 there. I had looked after a boy at Concord who was blinded at Balikpapan. He had a hand grenade, a Jap hand grenade, he stepped off a landing barge and he had a Jap hand grenade thrown in his face. His face was alive with shrapnel. There wasn't a part of his face that wasn't shrapnel coming out of. He was only 18, he hadn't been trained for anything. He was a truck driver I think before he started to join the army

38:00 and he really had no future. He was learning Braille and he was learning to type. I got a letter in my folder.

You got a letter from him in Braille have you?

Yeah, written on a Braille typewriter.

What can you recall of him in hospital?

I can remember first when he came in, his…they use to, anyone with a severe eye injury they would put them flat on the bed

38:30 with a couple of sandbags by the head so they couldn't move. The shrapnel did eventually start to come out of his face and he had a lot of examination by eye specialists and he did feel at one stage that he could experience a little bit of light but that was just imagination I think. But he accepted the fact after awhile. There was never any recrimination against the Japs for what had

39:00 happened to him. He didn't say, "What about my life now. How am I going to…". It just didn't enter the

scene at all. He was remarkable really, I think. He was just a very young man.

What do you think were the qualities that he had as a person that helped him to get through this?

Well I think that he probably didn't seem

39:30 to dwell on what was happening to him or what had happened to him and getting on with the typewriter. My friend and I used to take him out, we used to take him out on day leave which helped a bit. We were told they wanted to rehabilitate them strongly so that they could have some resilience and we were told not to let people sympathise with them or say, "What's happened to you?" and just treat them as a normal person.

40:00 He learnt to eat properly on his own and all that sort of thing which is very necessary and he did get a guide dog a few years later.

Tape 2

00:31 **I believe one of your neighbours built an air raid shelter?**

Yes they did and it was full of tinned food of some kind or other, I didn't ever go down, I didn't have time to go, I was never there actually to go down into it but I think my mother might have gone down one day to see what was in it

01:00 but apart from that it wasn't really used.

Nobody used it?

No, not that I know of. Except for that one night I don't know whether they did because I wasn't in Sydney then.

What could you tell us about this one night?

A shell came over and it struck a building in Bondi I think. I can't remember exactly where it was now but there was a lot

01:30 of consternation. Also I was at home when the Japanese submarines came into the harbour. I'd an inoculation against smallpox. I had a very sore arm with a very angry looking sore on it. I was feeling very sorry for myself. My father came in and said, "You better get up. I think the Japs are coming". I said, " I don't care". I just wanted to lie there in the warmth it was winter time it was May and

02:00 we heard the air raid warnings and Dad was putting up a lot of blackout paper, or it had been put up but he was adjusting it. We didn't know we could hear, we were fairly close to Bradfield Air Force Base so we could hear all the planes going up. Didn't know what was going on.

When you say you could hear the air raid wardens

I think they sounded an air raid siren not sure. Usually, we had a

02:30 German Shepherd dog and he was lying under the dining room table with me and he could sense an air raid siren before it started. He used to put up his head and roar.

Once it started he would roar or even before it started he would roar?

He would, he would he would. He'd carry on until the siren finished. He used to walk to me with lectures at Lindfield.

03:00 **Just to get it clear when the Japanese submarine raid on Sydney Harbour occurred you were at home or you were at Lindfield?**

I was at home still. I was still doing Voluntary Aid work down at Lindfield at that stage.

You went down to Lindfield during the day.

Yes.

The shelling you recalled

That was later on it was a bit later one.

What were the circumstances of the shelling?

The shelling came from a Japanese

03:30 ship outside the harbour and it came over Dover Heights and landed somewhere at the base I don't quite know where it was but near Bondi I think. I am not absolutely certain about its whereabouts.

What did you know of the Japanese raids on Sydney Harbour?

Only that night we knew there was something

04:00 happening and I read afterwards, I have given a little account of that in my chapter on the Oranje hospital ship. They were 3 little subs let off the deck of the mother sub and there was a net across Chowder Bay if they escaped . They nearly got a big American war ship and they sank the Kanimbla [probably means the Kuttabul] a little ferry boat

04:30 **So what was the mood in Sydney after this raid?**

We felt the war had come to our doorstep of course. Because we didn't, when Darwin was bombed of instance we didn't get any news at all. The Government kept it as quiet as they possibly could. We had no idea what was going on up north.

Were there any fears prompted either by what you did know or didn't know about the bombing of Darwin?

Well, there were really

05:00 because they did in the beginning when Darwin was first defended it wasn't defended until Edmund Herring came back from the middle east, he was a wonderful General. And he helped to get, they had a great base of vehicles and equipment in Alice Springs which they were able to let up to Darwin

05:30 with the help of the Americans. The Americans really helped us. That road was on the map for 90 days, more than 90 days…60 years I think it was on the map and then it was built in actually 90 days with the help of the Americans, and they were able to ferry all this ammunition trucks and stuff up to Darwin. When the defence started, when the Japs bombed they practically obliterated Darwin. Yhey bombed

06:00 it many times it wasn't just once and they bombed as far as Katherine in the Northern Territory. We had a hospital there, 101st AGH that was bombed.

What impact on the fears of Sydneysiders did the Japanese submarine raid have?

Well they realised the war was a lot closer because in the beginning we had only heard about Europe

06:30 and what was happening there but eventually with the collapse of Singapore and the 8th Division it was a lot closer. Very much closer.

What did you hear about the fall of Singapore?

Some of it on newsreel, some of it in the papers, but not really terribly factual. We didn't realise quite how grim it was I suppose.

07:00 **So the fall of Singapore did not have as much impact as the raid on Sydney?**

I think the fall of Singapore did have a great impact really but I think we realised that our shores were not in defensive by the time the subs came in. Because they were so small. Have you ever seen

07:30 them down in the war memorial [Australian War Memorial]? They were very tiny.

Moving onto your training as a nurse once you enlisted could you take us through what the training actually involved?

We learnt things like testing urine and how to take temperatures properly, and ask all the relevant questions. We learnt how to give enemas, we learnt to give injections. All the things that the Army Nursing

08:00 Service they were wonderful people in most cases as I remember them and they were a great help to us. They withstood all our mistakes and blunders and things and they really helped us along because it helped them because they were free to do the office work There were fewer of them than there were of us, and there were only 8,000 of us. When you think of the WAAAF or the

08:30 AWAS there were 24,000 of them. They got a lot more recognition than we did too.

You felt that you should have received a lot more recognition?

Well I don't know that we should have received a lot more but it just felt that they have always, even in civil life they have always been a much further greater force than we were.

Numerically?

Yes.

08:55 numerically. Our girls

09:00 the girls that went to the Middle East went in 1941and they were there for over 12 months and came back and they nursed in the Atherton Tablelands and they nursed in Nambour, the Middle East but most of our girls went to the Pacific Islands in 1943. 300 of them went in one go and they lived in tented

hospitals in the main

09:30 and they had to be very great improvisers with what they worked with and what they did. We were expected to do a lot really.

Your service underwent a name change at one point?

Yes. We were very unhappy about that and we were told, we wore pale blue caesarean uniforms with a red cross on the pocket

10:00 and a little white collar. It was very nice and we wore little white veils. We used to starch so much that they stood out like wings on either side and you didn't dare sit down once you'd starched your uniform because that would be crushed. Terrible.

Could you talk us through what the original name was and what the new name was?

Originally in the army we were Voluntary Aid Nurses, you know, VAD nurses. I did have an army

10:30 number, a regimental number. I had an ordinary one to begin with and then I joined the Australian Imperial Forces when I was 19 and that is part of the 2nd AIF. If you see I've got a photograph of myself in my navy uniform, there is a little patch of grey around the colour patch and that means the 2nd AIF. Very few other women in the forces apart from us

11:00 and the army nurses ever wore that grey.

You are obviously very proud of that?

I'm very proud of it.

The new name was what,? Could you describe what the new name was?

It was called the Army Medical Women's Service and it caused a lot of trouble, I don't know why the Government thought up that long title. I think somehow or rather they could have kept us on as

11:30 army VAs apart from the civilian VAs denoting some kind of difference somehow. But we were put into khaki uniforms that were exactly the same as the AWAS except we had a red cross on one sleeve. Nobody knew who we were. And a lot of people who had been trained in medical professions objected because it sounded as if we were qualified medicos

12:08 of some kind either physiotherapists or doctors or student doctors or something.

In what year did that change occur?

1942, December 1942 I was told I couldn't wear my navy uniform on leave anymore, but I used to wear it. I thought, "I don't care if a provo [Military Police] catches up with me. I am going to wear it", but nobody ever did.

So for how long did you continue to wear it?

I wore it right until the end of the war, when I could. I hated

12:30 my khaki uniform. I was little and we had to accept whatever the Q Store gave you with some alteration, they would alter them a little bit but everything was too big for me, even the shoes.

Why had the previous uniform been a navy uniform?

Well it always was I suppose even from the First World War, I don't know. Some VAs wore white,

13:00 completely white uniforms when they first started off in the 1930s but gradually it changed to pale blue. And we felt actually for the boys in the war they'd been through any kind of trauma in a battle it was nice to see these pale blue uniforms. They looked bright and cheerful whereas khaki doesn't look,

13:30 and they all had been wearing khaki all the time, it is nothing, and the uniforms didn't fit as well.

For the purposes of this interview would you prefer to be continued to be referred to as a VA?

Yes

VA is an extension of VAD basically?

Yes, Voluntary Aid Detachment, the whole.

So your enlistment basically was continuing on from your VA?

I enlisted as a VA and I was addressed in my letters

14:00 where ever I was in the hospital I was addressed as VA.

But VA implies voluntary.

Voluntary Aid. I suppose that was incongruous really of what we were doing in a sense. I think there could have been some way when they could have disassociated us with the other army Service because we were never, nobody knew, even today. I know one lass who joined one RSL and they said to her, "What service did you

14:30 belong to?" and she said, "The Australian Army Medical Women's", "Who are they?" they said or just if you gave the initials they had no idea what you were.

Obviously after enlistment you were being paid though

Yes we received four shillings a day to begin with, depending on your grading. For my grading, I received four shillings a day.

And how many gradings were there? Could you talk us through what the gradings were?

No. I can't remember off hand,

15:00 but I can tell you from my book.

Approximately how many grades were there?

About four I think. There would be a Ward Orderly, and a Nursing Orderly, the various grades of Clerks and things like that too. There would be people working in the office in the hospital.

15:30 There were others who trained to be x-ray people and a lot of girls became proficient enough to help in the theatre all the time.

Looking further at your training, were you given much training in regards to army camp life?

Not a great deal to begin with. We used to have parades at the hospital. Colonel Ross had been a General Practitioner and he had absolutely, he

16:00 hadn't received any army training whatsoever and when he became colonel the Matron sewed his tabs on upside down and we were all standing there. You had to stand strictly to attention and particularly in Bathurst in the heat it was very uncomfortable because the flies crawl all over your face and you can't brush them away. You just had to stand there and go shoo, all the time. It was great amusement because

16:30 you could see that even we knew that his tabs were upside down. It is comforting to be an underling to see an overling being humiliated a little bit.

Did the tabs ever go the right way up?

Yes, they did eventually Matron realised. She was a marvellous person. She was so approachable that when I left Bathurst we had

17:00 no idea where we were going we thought we might be going to New Guinea. We went to Ingleburn. I was able to go into her room, she was asleep and say goodbye to her and she said, "I want you to get out of the army now and go and do your nursing training and come back, the war will still be on". She saw me 12 months later and she said, "You're a naughty girl", but she was Matron of a hospital ship

17:30 Manunda after she left Bathurst.

Was she injured in the Manunda attack?

No. The Manunda, oh the Manunda was bombed but not severely enough to injure the staff.

What was the Matron's name?

Matron Staton, Lucy Staton. But we had one sister up at Bathurst, called Maree Moston who went down with the Centaur. Always remember her she was only 25 when that happened.

18:00 **Did you know her well?**

Quite well yes, we got to know, we were a fairly small community up there and we got to know everybody fairly well.

What impact on you did her loss create?

Well it just made us aware that one of our own kind was missing, that she had been killed. I don't know of any other Voluntary Aids or AAMWS that were killed. People died in accidents and things but not as a result

18:30 of, one girl in the Middle East died of meningitis before she landed. Nothing really drastic.

Why did the Matron want you to do go and have your nursing training?

She was keen to train us all actually. She sent us from ward to ward, didn't matter what the illness was in the ward and each had a turn in the theatre. I didn't get my turn in there unfortunately because I moved on. It was very good we learnt to do things professionally, as we were.

19:00 We were probably by the end of the war the equivalent of first year nurses I would say.

Just leading on from that could you make a distinction of actually and the standard nurse?

No there probably wouldn't have been at that stage although the nursing profession didn't want to admit us to their circles at all. They started a training school down in Victoria

19:30 with the intention of training you right through to the end and using two years of army training was to be taken off because we had lectures all the time we were given lectures.

Was that the school they started at Healesville?

Darly, At Darly in Victoria.

Oh Darly. Now just looking at Bathurst, was that the first time you had actually left home?

Yes.

How was that feeling?

20:00 I went up in the train with my parents to Bathurst, I was an only child of course, and by the time we got very close to Bathurst they were both looking a bit edgy and Dad said to mother, "I think you had better tell her" and she said, "No you tell her" and I sat there thinking, "What are they going to tell me?" I thought, so I sensed they were both looking uncomfortable so

20:30 I said, "I'm alright. Nothing to worry about". There I was going into an embarkation camp where the 8th Division actually started off from, training camp eight miles square, a pretty big camp and they suddenly thought, "There's their little darling going up to an army camp full of men". I was absolutely as green as grass, I didn't know anything about anything.

21:00 **So what did they actually tell you?**

They didn't tell me anything. We had lectures on venereal disease and all sorts of things and a greater part in the beginning, but I gradually learnt how things happen, but I had no idea at that stage. Everything just went over my head. I remember Pixie and I going up to a picture theatre up on the hill, we used to go up in the winter in our

21:30 great coats and our pyjamas rolled up and they had this very garish sort of woman on the screen. Very rude cheeks and lips, and a caption underneath, very blonde hair, 'Give the glad eye the go by', and Pixie looks at me and said, "What's a glad eye Mount?" I said, "I don't know".

22:00 It is amazing because the nursing services were pretty well respected and I was never harassed. Nothing ever happened to me.

Glad eye is not a term I have heard before. Could you tell me what a glad eye is?

Well an enticement I suppose. There were camp followers we were aware that there were camp followers because these women who used to come where there was a big camp, particularly on pay nights. Bathurst was a riot on pay nights.

22:30 Also if they were on embarkation leave and they were due to go away in the next week they did not know what was before him. The Royal Hotel up there I can still see it, the troops all around the town, hundreds of them. The camp followers would go where there were real big camps.

Can you describe

23:00 **to us what a camp follower was?**

A camp follower would be a prostitute of a kinds I suppose. We knew these women were up to no good but we didn't quite know what they were up to but we knew they were up to no good.

In a town like Bathurst before embarkation, how many of these women would there be?

I have no idea really, quite a few I should think and they go from place to place.

This warning on screen, 'give the glad eye the go by'

23:30 **was this…**

They sent them to depots where they could get treatment and that was the idea of letting them know where they could get help if they needed it. 'Cause we did have wards where there were troops with VD. I didn't actually serve in one of those wards but they did have them, particularly in the First World War it was more of a problem than it was then.

24:00 but it still was a problem as it is with drugs and things today they pretty well got it.

So the soldiers were basically informed there were places they could go for VD treatment?

Yes. That's why we had the VD lectures, but unfortunately they didn't give us enough ground work to absorb the lectures.

Were there any lectures that you received on

24:30 **being a woman which was obviously a gender minority in a place like Bathurst?**

No, not really no. No sort of counselling or anything like that. I didn't ever encounter a counsellor, not like they do today. They've only have to bat an eyelid and a counsellor comes running and chats them up

I wasn't thinking in this case so much of a counsellor as someone giving a commonsense talk or a bit of a pep talk.

25:00 I suppose we did probably. Probably maybe I wasn't listening.,I don't know I suppose we must have had some commonsense talk precluding that lecture on VD, I don't know, I cannot remember that really.

So while you were in Bathurst did you have much contact with home?

By telephone, when I could get to a telephone and letters and leave

25:30 now and again. Particularly in February 1943. In 1942 it was a particularly bad year it was a terrible year war wise everything went wrong and it was generally very tight, and leave was only given if they could spare us. Depending on the number of troops we had in the hospital, I suppose.

26:00 **Once you went to Ingleburn what sort of training did you have?**

Well that was similar to an AWAS training I suppose. We had to do we had to identify ranks, I thought it was a terrible waste of time, I would have rather been looking after the men because I thought that was more like war work than running around this camp. As I said Pixie and I used to go and beg a bath to get out of route marching. I've got little legs

26:30 and I never was a marcher, ever. As a matter of fact we were marched, and we had a very big fat AWAS Sergeant and she marched us to the picture show one day and my friend fell out she wasn't feeling very well so I ran back to see how she was. This women said, "Get back into line". You know, I wasn't used to this sort of treatment. We were all ladies as far as I was concerned.

27:00 Anyhow, I got back into line and when we got to the pictures she singled me out and she slapped me very soundly on the bottom. And all the troops were going…I couldn't remember what the picture was, I cried all the way through it.

When she slapped you soundly on the bottom. Did she say anything?

No, not a word . She was an AWAS Sergeant she was entitled to slap me on the bottom.

27:30 **Why had she slapped you?**

Because I had fallen out of line I left the march.

You have referred in passing to begging a bath, could you be a bit more specific?

Because… it was February, and it was very, Ingleburn was very, well it was in those days, a mass of huts and dust not much shade. I didn't see

28:00 the point in wasting the Government's money or time or anything going on these route marches. What was the purpose? We weren't marching to war or anything, it just seemed to be purposeless to me. We used to go, but gradually the water got colder and colder and you had to get out of course because it was stone cold.

So wherever possible you would go and have a bath and avoid marching?

Yes. They didn't know where we were,

28:30 they didn't think of looking in the bath. Sometimes they would have a pile of mattresses at the end of the hut. Great pile of them stacked one on top of each other, and if you got behind that you wouldn't see me. And another time Pixie and I were late, she came back, she was a country girl, she came from Bathurst actually. She came home to Dover Heights with me

29:00 and the connections during the war were not all that good. To get from Dover Heights back to Liverpool and then to Ingleburn was quite a journey and we were back late so late so we were put on defaulters parade for being late and our punishment was to scrape green camouflage paint, which was very thick off the windows. We each had a window in a hut with a knife, that is all we were given to scrape it off with. So it took hours.

29:30 But that was childish. I just felt that wasn't a real war effort to me.

Just one moment…

I've digressed there a bit, sorry.

Did you make any friends with the soldiers at this point?

The soldiers, no really I didn't have any great romance or anything because in the main

30:00 wherever we were, particularly at Bathurst as I said it was an embarkation camp, they trained and they just moved. If they were in the 8th Division they went to Malaya and then most of them were in Britain for over three years. You didn't really get to know people very well.

Were you able to meet any of them socially even quite often?

Yes we had dances if

30:30 you could call them dances. They're wearing hob nail boots. It's a bit difficult to dance properly in them. I wasn't a very good dancer anyway I tended to flit off like a ballet.

I guess it would be pretty painful if you were stomped on by a hob nail boot.

Yes. Very.

It would have been quite an impediment.

It was only if you were off duty, that's the thing.

31:00 We had picnics and things like that, it was a dead give away if you had been to a picnic say with one of the soldiers down on the banks of the river. We used to call it the Donga because you came back with all these Bathurst burrs or whatever you took down there.

So there would be a bit of ragging going on there?

Yes.

What can you tell us about the hospital at Bathurst?

31:30 In the hospital there were two main wards; one was medical and one was surgical. My friend Pixie and I, her name was Patricia actually but she was always called Pixie, and I was in the medical ward and she was in the surgical ward and we at about sometime during the night we had to cook a supper for the sisters and the orderlies, and neither of us had a clue about cooking. And we had fuel stoves and we used to put chops and chips

32:00 and tomatoes mainly on the top of the stove, smoke everywhere, great clouds of smoke. We had no idea what to give them for sweets or anything like that. It's a wonder they survived. We would each do our rounds and I had in my ward, I had an orderly. He was a roustabout really and

32:30 he used to wear the most awful Bombay bloomers. Have you ever seen those shorts that sort of hung and they were very long? He took a great fancy to me and he had some of his toes amputated. They had gone gangrenous somehow and he had them in a bottle of formalin and if I approached his bed he used to produce this bottle. I have forgotten what his name was now, but used to buy me torch batteries.

33:00 **Producing the toes sounds quite an enticement actually.**

I don't know. All the weirdos fell for me.

What, so the hospital itself was not a base hospital?

Yes it was.

It was a base hospital, what was it?

It was more in the line of a casualty base hospital somehow it

33:30 wasn't in the sense of Concord or Heidelberg or any of those big places like that because the wards were just manufactured from ordinary army huts. They had really very little amenities and when I was in the Ear, Nose and Throat ward I had to right across a field to get to this ward and in the winter in Bathurst it is pretty horrific. I had to carry water

34:00 from the ablution block which I suppose was maybe 200 yards from the huts themselves and I would have to heat this water and I had 19 patients to wash with that water so that is when I got my bad ear complaint because it was so cold . We were only allowed to wear a cardigan with our uniform. You couldn't work in a Greatcoat or anything like that..

34:30 **How many trips on average would you have to make per day?**

Depending what your shift was I suppose. Perhaps once or twice a day.

How would you heat the water?

We had primus stoves. Have you ever encountered a primus stove? I wouldn't recommend it. For instance the sisters sterilising the instruments if she was doing dressings it was a big metal container with all the instruments

35:00 in it and you would have to heat up the water and sterilise the instruments then because it had been

blackened by this primus stove we would have to clean the whole thing again. It was very primitive when you consider what happens today. We had practically no equipment. I suppose even some of the trained sisters found it difficult because they weren't in a normal hospital situation.

35:30 **Could you describe for me or could you list out and maybe give some description of the equipment you did have?**

Well, the pan rooms had to be seen to be believed, they were pretty rustic. I remember when I first went, this is quite amusing actually, when I first went down to the air force Base at Lindfield one of the girls had just joined the detachment came to me and she said,

36:00 "Do you know where I can find a lemonade bottle?", and I said, "What do you want a lemondade bottle for?" and she said, "One of the boys has asked me for a bottle" and I said, "Don't take him a lemondade bottle please". You don't know what a bottle is? It's a urinal for a man. We just called them a bottle.

36:30 **What sort of other equipment was there available? You said it was a fairly primitive lot of equipment.**

We had all sorts of dressings I suppose and medications would be available at that time. I remember at Goulburn we used a drug called Paraldehyde, which had a very pungent smell, I can still smell it now.

37:00 You used to give it to patients to get them to sleep comfortably, but all those cupboards were locked of course. You had to lock and unlock them all the time. Dressings and bedclothes and toilet receptacles. I suppose they would be normal things to use in a sense

37:30 but primitive by today's standards.

And in Bathurst itself did you do any further training?

No. We were just trained as well as the Matron could and the Sisters would give us lectures when we were off duty.

Did you do any training in the use gas masks and tear gas?

Yes. I would have been dead before I got mine on, absolutely.

38:00 We had to go through tear gas chambers and things like that and we were supposed to actually carry these masks with us all the time but I know of some girls who took their laundry home in their gas masks container to look as if they were carrying their gas masks. There did not seem to be much danger of being gassed here.

Why would you have been dead by the time you got yours on?

38:30 I was too slow. It was too hard to manipulate the thing on your face. And you were walking around and there was tear gas, there were 10 of you to a room.

Was it a room into which tear gas

It was a special room in the camp.

Did you stagger out with eyes streaming?

I can't remember, I staggered out, I can remember that. That's about all I can remember.

39:00 I was glad to get out of there. Sometimes we would be doing gas drill and they would be doing a sort of battle practice on the hill, over the other hill and suddenly you would hear all these shots and you'd think, "My God I'm about to be gassed".

Tape 3

00:31 **Betty we were talking before when having a cup of tea about how big a learning curve it must have been for you to be a young girl and arriving in Bathurst and…**

Oh it was because I had just left school virtually. I did the secretarial course with a whole lot of other girls, no mixed company or anything like that. I didn't have any brothers. I had a few male cousins but I

01:00 wasn't into going out with boyfriends or anything at that stage. I lived a pretty sheltered life on the whole.

So was it a big shock to you to learn about things like venereal disease and camp followers?

Yes it was but strangely enough it was all part of a learning experience to me really because I liked learning things and I suppose I absorbed

01:30 a different life because other people around me were doing the same thing. We were all pretty much in

the same boat and despite maybe differences in upbringing and homes and things we were pretty much at one with one another.

You mentioned a girlfriend that you had Pixie. Was she your best friend?

02:00 Yes. She was

Would you talk to her about..?

We would talk about a lot of things together. She was a very attractive girl. She had lovely, very dark hair, very dark wavy hair, very attractive, which I was always trying to set for some odd reason.. My mother had a passion for setting my hair so I felt that I had to set her hair and she used to say Mounty, "I won't have that" and she'd run off.

02:30 I had a bit of an obsession I suppose.

So would you confide in each other and talk about things that were happening?

Yes we were great friends really and we have been. It's her birthday today so I will ring her up later.

I am wondering if you could actually describe, you mentioned briefly what Bathurst was like at the time,

03:00 **but if you could go into a bit more detail about what Bathurst was like?**

It was a pastoral property that had been lent or maybe leased to the government. It was a huge property, lovely land really. There wasn't a drought at that time, the green hills lovely land and had been grazing sheep there and suddenly built all

03:30 these army huts, masses of them all over the place. They were scattered according to I suppose a unit of training. The troops would be placed in one lot of huts and we were quartered up near the hill and we used to see the troops when they were coming down. A lot of men when they first went into the army during the war didn't really know what they were being trained for or

04:00 why and there was a great absence of proper equipment. They didn't have proper tanks. They used to be training in trucks and things like that and we used to see them. They had these wooden frames situated down on the flat and they used top run down the hill, they had straw figures attached to these frames and they used to run down the hill with bayonets fixed making war cries

04:30 and we were standing at our quarters looking out thinking, "What's going on out there?" They were training with old guns to begin with, I think if people had known generally what going on they would have been very wary.

What was your living quarters like?

We had corrugated iron huts on stilts

05:00 with quite a bit space underneath, but the walls did not go up to the ceiling, up to the roof, they went I suppose about a foot at least or more of fresh air rolling in all the way around the hut and they had a tin roof. They were very hot in summer and very cold in winter. No heating or anything. We had one grey blanket maybe two at a pinch.

05:30 I had an earthenware bowls gin bottle that was a very good hot water bottle. It used to keep the water hot till morning because rubber was hard to get then because the rubber plantations in Malaya had ceased work there was no rubber coming from anywhere unless they had supplies of water bottles. It was pretty hard to keep warm

06:00 **How many other women did you share the hut with?**

I shared with one other person mostly.

Was that with Pixie?

No she shared with a girl called Nita Hobson. I've got a picture of her there sitting on a step, who eventually went to Woomera Rocket Range. Some of the girls went there from 1949 to 1951.

Did you get on well with your roommate?

Yes, I can't remember who my room mate was, I thought Lala Stocks shared with me

06:30 for a while but she said she didn't. I can't remember who it was that shared with me the first time. We did move around a little bit. I moved to another ward and I can remember I shared with a country girl then and it was so cold we were about 200 – 300 yards from the ablution block and there was one bath with a chip heater and whoever cut the wood cut green wood

07:00 so you couldn't really light it properly to have a real bath. We had a few showers. I can't remember whether there was piped hot water or not but we used to have to put a list on the front of the ablution door, whose turn it was to go in there because they couldn't take too many people at one time. We wrote

to the colonel saying we needed the space between the walls and the roof

07:30 filled in and he was more concerned about us putting our feet in the tinea powder. You had to put your feet in the tinea powder, it didn't matter if you died of pneumonia.

Just before you were talking about the gas mask drills that you had to do, the training. Can you walk us through exactly what was involved

08:00 **in doing gas mask training?**

I can barely remember now it was such a long time ago and I haven't done it since. You had to make sure the gas mask was clean inside and then put it on and then put your tin hat on top of that. It wasn't a thing I took to doing quickly at all because you had

08:30 to think about it a little bit to get it on properly. Not that I put it on very often. We only did it really when we went into a gas chamber and that wasn't very often.

So was there ever a time when there was a siren when you had to…?

No. Not that I can remember. There was never, I don't think there was a time when… I can't remember where the nearest airfield was

09:00 to Bathurst. There might have been some near Orange. I'm not too sure now but it wasn't anywhere very near. There weren't any planes. Bathurst has an airport now but I am not sure whether they had an airport then because during the war all the names were taken off the stations. You didn't know where you were in Sydney because they took all the station names down.

Why did they do that?

I think because once

09:30 the subs came in they didn't want the Japs to know where they were. Another thing they did to stop the Japs invading was to move all the cattle from the north, from the very north, and they took them all the way through central Australia over to the eastern coast because they didn't want them to have any food and any crops that were on the way were destroyed

10:00 They wouldn't have anything to eat. Their planes weren't good enough to carry too many bombs at a time and they were short of petrol so they wouldn't have been able to come too far south I don't think.

At this point was this before the Japanese submarines had come in?

10:30 They came in 1942. This would have been about 1943 I think.

Was there a real fear of Japanese invasion?

Yes there was. One of the main fears was that the Americans were thought to have taken Rabaul as a base, but they didn't. The Japanese decided… they did think of, and I am sure they thought of invading Australia

11:00 because they wanted that base at Rabaul and they came down with a vast armada and in 1942, in February 1942 they sent a small group of army men were sent there, one battalion they were all about 18, 19. They had practically no equipment and this vast Japanese armada came down and occupied Rabaul and they massacred all those men.

11:30 The Government at the time wrote to Washington and said that unless the Americans could help us, those men would be, have to be, lose their freedom virtually. They would have to be casualties to freedom. They had nothing and a lot of them were massacred on the plantation. I'm sorry, I'm digressing there.

12:00 **Getting back to Bathurst to the hospital there, was there a great sense of mateship amongst all the nurses?**

Yes there was. We didn't get a great deal of news in the camp. We didn't have papers, and didn't have a radio. We had to depend on whatever was told to us. We knew that things were pretty desperate in 1942. Nobody knew

12:30 what the outcome was. We didn't know where we would end up. I joined the AIF when I was 19 but we didn't know whether we would be sent overseas or where we would be in the end.

Did you talk about your fears with your mates, your friends at the hospital?

Not so much really. I think we were all had to work about 13 hours a day.

13:00 We were all so tired all we wanted to do was to go to bed and have a sleep. We were always hungry.

What food were you fed?

A lot of starch. A lot of potatoes and things like that. When we did mess duties we would have to peel

hundreds of potatoes for the men. We all had a turn at

13:30 doing that.

So what would be a typical breakfast?

Now that's difficult to remember. I think we had porridge, I'm not sure. My very first meal in the mess, the first time I sat down to actually eat anything somebody said to me, "Take your foot off the butter" and I thought, "I haven't got my foot on the butter. What is she talking about?", but she was telling me to pass the

14:00 butter quickly please. I heard a lot of expressions I had never heard before.

So you would normally have porridge for breakfast. What would you normally have for a main meal?

Or toast and marmalade or toast and jam of some kind. They used to have on the table prunes at one end and cheese on the other. One object defeating the other to a great extent.

14:30 **What would be a typical main meal that you would have?**

They used to make a lot of stews and things like that because they had this great big metal containers that cooked. army cooking has to be seen to be believed really. When I was at Ingleburn for instance we had a lot of meals out in the open and the flies would all be swarming around. A lot of things that are

15:00 easy to feed people en masse.

So you just mentioned mess duty, kitchen duty.

We all had to do. It was very equal in lots of ways, we all had a turn at something. I had to work in the Sister's mess for awhile for instance at Bathurst. And when they had a formal mess they all sat there with their

15:30 stiffly starched veils and they had very stiff white collars with a silver broach in the front and then they had a red cape over a grey uniform, and all sitting around a formal mess. When somebody hands them the wine decanter you are not supposed to put it on the table. The first night I did this, I suddenly was aware that all these eyes were looking at me. The first thing I did was plonk the bottle on the table.

16:00 They do a loyal toast, it's a formal thing.

Who do they toast?

The Queen. And they don't put it down until they've finished and each one has a glass and then they toast to the Queen.

So you made a bit of a faux par?

Yes. When you have about a dozen eyes staring at you.

Was there was a bit of, I don't know if

16:30 **competition between the VAs and the Sisters?**

A little bit. I remember we had a Sister called Sister Riree and she happened to be a General's daughter and one day I was sweeping the porch of the entrance, it must have been the main kitchen or dining room, I can't remember what it was now, I was sweeping the front of this and she said to me,

17:00 "Nurse. That' not the way to sweep" and she grabbed the broom off me and she started sweeping and I thought, "I don't care. She can finish sweeping as far as I was concerned". She came from the old school where you had to be taught to do everything properly.

I believe there was another Sister that had a certain way that she wanted you to do things like you mentioned before

17:30 **the bathing and doing…**

Yes. She used to, I was in the casualty ward on night duty and I had 40 bed patients. I didn't have time to really do a lot of preliminary things and I was bunding away. I don't know how far I had got through the ward but I had finished about seven o'clock in the morning I suppose

18:00 and she came to me and said, "Nurse, you have to sponge in circular movements". I thought, "What does she mean?" She picked up the sponge, the washer rather , and put it in the water straight, you know at four o'clock in the morning you imagine you are lying in bed and just woken up, full of water and soap and just let it fall on his chest.

18:30 You would nearly leap out of bed after that. Then she started just doing all these circular movements around the chest. I thought, "I'll never get through this ward if I had to do that all the time". She used to sit and watch me from the office. Every move I made. She was an older women. She had been in the Middle East I suppose she thought.

Was this the same nurse, ah

19:00 **sister that made you go looking for the blanket room. Could you tell us that story?**

Yes. I had arrived the night before at Concord and because it was an entirely different kettle of fish to being in the country because we had to be very innovative. We had to carry a lantern around for instance and all that sort of thing on night duty but there we had torches

19:30 and things. Well I did have a torch at Bathurst too on the side but she sent me off. I had prepared the bed putting ablanket over a hot water bottle as we did in the bush because we didn't have blanket rooms. It warmed the blankets sufficiently. This patient who was coming in had Malaria, they shiver and they get very dizzy and it is very distressing to watch actually.

20:00 They shake all over and their teeth start chattering very demonstrative. She said to me, she just dismantled the whole bed and said, "Go and get a blanket from the blanket room, a hot blanket room" and I had no idea. I'm going down the corridor, "Where is the blanket room?" I thought, " By the time I get back the

20:30 poor guy will be in a terrible state", it was so cold. It seemed to be very impractical. At least he would have some semblance of warmth the way I had done it. However, you can't argue. You just have to put up with it. In the end she decided I was too little. If I had to turn a patient over for instance I had to climb on the bed to turn them over because we used to wash one side and then the other side.

21:00 Cover them with a blanket on one side and then turn them over and wash the other side.

I guess that must have been quite eye-opening for you to sponge bath a grown man at your age?

I suppose it was really. Somehow or other I don't know. I have spoken to a lot of medical people about this really because you lose any sense of personality in a way because

21:30 it is just a patient and somebody you are looking after. You lose any sense of gender or anything really with them after a while because you are so concerned with what you are doing. For instance, giving an enema is quite embarrassing but you learn to do it without having any feeling of self-consciousness to a great extent.

22:00 **So you actually had to give enemas did you?**

Enemas and things like that.

What was involved in that?

A bowel flush-out, water..They don't do it that way now. A can was filled with water and the water was pumped into the body and it caused the bowel movement.

Where were you sent after Bathurst?

I went to,

22:30 from Bathurst I was ill and I was sent to 113th AGH for treatment and I was there for a couple of months I think. Then I went to a holding company at Ingleburn while they decided what to do with me.

You got ill while you were at Bathurst. Can you tell us what happened?

Yes. I was working in the Ear, Nose and Throat ward strangely enough at the time and we had

23:00 a Russian doctor, Protopopanoff [Protopopov?] his name was. He was a very nice man. Actually I rang him when I applied for a disability pension but he had a stroke. I spoke to his son, but he said he couldn't help me, but anyhow that's besides the point. Because I had to carry water to the ward to wash people, it was in the middle of winter

23:30 it was, August in Bathurst is very cold, and to begin with our quarters I had to walk across a whole field to get to work. If we had running water it would have been wonderful, but we didn't . We had to heat the water up and then wash them . The whole impact of the winter, I s'pose I probably may have had a bit of a weakness in those years, I don't know.

24:00 I suddenly lost my hearing completely. I was very dizzy and deaf. They had me at Bathurst in hospital for a while and then they sent me down to Concord and had my sinuses washed out and things. But it has always left me a bit deaf and I've got probably a bit worse over the last few years.

How long were you ill and

24:30 **at Bathurst for?**

I was probably ill for about three months actually and then they sent me to a convalescent home at Leura called The Ritz. I don't know whether you've ever been to The Ritz and I lived in a little room up in the attic for a little while. And then they sent me to I think I went back to Ingleburn and from there I

went to Goulburn.

Was the Convalescent Home specific?

Full of ex-servicewomen,

25:00 all sorts of services.

Servicewomen or men and women?

No, all women.

Was it pretty ritzy?

It wasn't really. No it was just a big old home with funny little rooms at the top. Nice grounds though, lovely grounds.

So you recovered there?

Yes. I got better there. Actually when I got home,

25:30 they discharged me from hospital and I wasn't quite well and I went home. I was given leave and I went home but I collapsed when I got home and I happened to go to school with a girl whose father was an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist and my father rang him. And the army, there was a big tussle then. The army said, "Your daughter doesn't belong to you she belongs to the army?. I had to be taken away from home by an army

26:00 ambulance and taken back to Concord.

How did your parents feel about that? Being told that?

They didn't understand it or like it but it had to be. I was there at the time when Mrs Roosevelt came to visit. I saw her out of the window.

Could you describe that experience, what happened with Mrs Roosevelt?

Yes well I was

26:30 near a window. Concord had a lot of windows, very dismantled now to what it used to be. But it had very rounded sort of windows. I just happened to be looking, I had a bed near the window, and I just happened to be looking out and somebody said, "There's Mrs Roosevelt". So we all looked through the window and saw her get out of the car. She had a little hat, cap type hat with a little brim thing.

27:00 Very American looking, you know very jazzy looking uniform with red crosses all over it.

What was she doing there?

She was just visiting. She had been taken around the establishment I suppose. Because she was a member of the Red Cross I would think.

What do you recall of the Goulburn hospital?

Goulburn hospital was built in 1850

27:30 by the Surveyor-General. It was a very old building and it had prior to the army taking over it had been a mental hospital but what I saw there horrified me and it still horrifies me today. I just don't know what medical treatment, ah mental treatment is like today but it must have absolutely horrific in the early 1900s and

28:00 before that because they had rows of open toilets. You had absolutely no privacy, just rows of them set. The walls were all set around a courtyard completely enclosed so they couldn'tt get out at all and some of what they call the refractory wards.,There would probably be about six I suppose in a row and they had doors that would be very thick two to three inches

28:30 thick and just at the top of that would be a little porthole that you could move back and forth. They had no, because a lot of the patients were schizophrenic, we had a colonel up there A. J. M. Sinclair who did some,he was the medical researcher and he wrote a paper in the Australian Journal in 1944 about the psychiatric aspects of a war

29:00 and some of the patients, when malaria was treated at first patients were always given quinine but they found there were more patients incapacitated by malaria than were wounded soldiers. It's very debilitating and they had no cure for it. They lost so many troops in battles because of malaria so they felt they had to do something

29:30 about it. He had been in the Middle East and he did this research and they developed Atebrin which was much more successful but it did leave some psychiatric, have some psychiatric aftershock in a way and they had to be careful.

30:00 If they gave them more than 0.6 grams over a long period they developed these psychiatric symptoms mainly because they weren't given, the tablets weren't given to them by authorised medical people. They were often just given to them by Company Commanders and sometimes the troops would throw them away because they had a very bitter taste and they were bright yellow. I remember I used to put some, if I had been giving a person Atebrin

30:30 I'd put them in my pocket and you would find your pocket was bright yellow after awhile and the skin went very yellow. They suffered a lot in New Guinea, particularly in the two New Guinea campaigns they were very battle stressed with from hand to hand fighting a little bit like the First World War in the trenches

31:00 up there because they couldn't see the Japs. It was pretty difficult and they'd be very stressed. Once they had too much Atebrin they would get delusional and they ended up being schizophrenics most of them.

What would be the treatment for

The had Cortisol which is like insulin and I remember one of the sisters used

31:30 to lie them all face down on the bed, leave their bottoms bare and she would draw the serum up into the needle and she'd go ping ping ping, ping right down to the last bottom. It was very effective because it was very quick. But we had to be sure, a lot of them we had to stop them going into Goulburn because they weren't supposed to eat before they had the treatment. It didn't have a good affect

32:00 s you had to watch them. They were issued horrible old blue uniforms. I mean there was only two sizes so if you were in between the sizes nothing fitted you. The pants would come way below their ankles. Just didn't fit them at all and they used to give the skin patients long white socks because if they found they got into Goulburn by chance through the wall or something… there was a hole

32:30 in every hospital wall that I ever went to that you could get through and they could distinguish who was patients with scrub typhus and things like that, in the skin ward. They had to watch the ones that were psychiatric. They had shock treatment, electric shock treatment too and they'd give them the required

33:00 current of shock and then they were covered with a canvas sheet. I remember seeing a few of them on one long stretcher thing, just leave their heads bare because they become convulsive coming out of the shock and they could hurt themselves,you know throw their arms around and things like that. I used to make pots and pots of glucose, huge big pots of the stuff, it was raw glucose was terrible to taste. It

33:30 wasn't just like tasting sugar and water it was horrible. If they didn't gain consciousness quickly enough they gave them an injections of Dextro to bring them round. It was pretty drastic and then the male orderlies used to dress them and they gave them a huge meal but 90% of the cases they were there mostly for three months

34:00 and most of them did get better. I remember seeing a navy fellow who had been torpedoed somewhere or other and he hadn't spoken for six months and he spoke.

Why did you make the glucose?

Well that's to help, glucose is a great energy sustainer and it helped to bring them back into consciousness.

34:30 **Were you ever present during the electric shock therapy?**

No I didn't see the actual, but they used to put, I've seen the equipment with the headphones and it's almost like a little radio they have that give's them the shock. But I didn't actually help to administer that. Mostly the Sisters did that work. But I helped to bring them around afterwards.

35:00 **When you were…**

And I didn'tactually give the Cortisol needles either because that was considered to be, oh you had to be very careful of course, the Sisters had to know what they were doing.

While you were working at Goulburn, did you witness distress in the patients?

Yes, a lot. I remember once seeing a fellow in one of the refractory cells and

35:30 he'd somehow, we had to watch them that they didn't take knives away from the dining, you know when they were eating. They didn't have to have dining rooms of the type you think of You couldn't leave them with anything sharp at all because they would cut themselves. But I did see one fellow once. I went into this ward,

36:00 into this cell and he had a photograph of his wife sitting on the side locker and there was blood in a cross right across the photograph. He had some sort of delusional thing about his wife. We had to really watch them very carefully. They couldn't have sheets for instance in the refractory cells because they could strangle themselves or hang themselves somehow.

36:30 **Were there any successful suicides?**

When we did they were literally almost dragging the river because people that had got out somehow, and they…, I don't know that they actually, I can't recall any actual drownings, but they did look for people dregging the river sometime. It was a very old building and unless they really

37:00 watched them very well they could escape.

What effect did this have on you seeing all this?

It had a lot of effect really at the time because it is very dramatic. The thing really and you've got to be careful not to let the drama overtake your thinking.

37:30 You have got to realise giving people treatment for some good to bring them to the stage of being normal again but some of the people with anxiety neurosis for instance, they were helped a lot by occupational therapy and lot of them just didn't want to go back to battle. They were discharged afterwards.

38:00 **Did you make any friendships, have any friendships with the patients?**

No, not there really. Some of the girls did and I think some actually married the patients afterwards, but I didn't . I didn't really get to know anybody terribly well while I was there.

38:30 But I did a lot of, at one stage I had to do night duty and day duty in the same week; two days of day duty then one day… didn't quite know whether I was alive or dead. The quarters I lived in, I didn't live in the general AAMWS quarters I lived in an old mental ward and I slept in a cell when I was on night duty. So I suppose that has a bit of influence on you.

39:00 **Could you describe your room?**

I remember one room I was in, it was painted bright blue and it had this big refractory door, but it wasn't ever locked of course and we used to have, and for the patients in the previous mental hospital they had observation rooms in the middle of a ward that you could see into completely so you could monitor the behaviour of a patient and they had

39:30 communal showers which I found very difficult to get used to. It was the way the old place was designed so that they could watch mental patients.

Tape 4

00:32 **Betty this was obviously a very difficult time for you.**

It was. Actually I used to write letters home from Stalag 114.

What does that mean?

Well Stalag was name from the German prison camps. I don't know what stalag means actually, but it was a wonder my, our letters were all censored. If

01:00 you said anything sensitive it just got cut out.

So you were referring to?

The discipline there really. At one stage we had an AAMWS Commander, when we arrived the very evening we arrived right about five o'clock in the evening and she had us all stand out in the courtyard and she addressed us as troops and we all looked at one another, "Troops we are now".

01:30 She was, I think she had some sort of psychological problem. She had a limp in one leg. I don't quite know what was with her at all, but she was very difficult. At one stage Pixie's, not long after we had been there, her sister Barbara was there too and there brother aged 13 was accidentally shot. Their father had been in the First World War and he had a lot of old First World War ammunition

02:00 and one gun was loaded and the boy didn't realise this and he shot himself in the head and before his mother could get him, they sent him down to Sydney in an ambulance. The boy, he died on the hospital table in Sydney. He was only 13 but they were given a compassionate transfer back to Bathurst where they actually lived and I went to say goodbye to her and this woman wouldn't let me get up and say

02:30 goodbye. I said, "I don't know when I will see her again. I don't know how long the war is going on, I don't know where she will be sent, I don't know where I'll be sent, Can't I just say goodbye to her?" and she said, "No. You go back to sleep. You've got to go on night duty tonight". That was that.

What else did this, was she a Matron?

No, she was an army officer an AAMWS officer.

What else would she do?

Various things

03:00 like that. Officialdom. You were a soldier you weren't a human being you couldn't be treated like a human being.

So how did you cope on a day-to-day basis with this discipline and also seeing what you were seeing in the patients in the wards?

Well I don't know. I have always had a lot of faith in God

03:30 and I think that sustained me more than anything. We had a very nice padre up there. He used to drive us into Goulburn and we learnt to make bread, for instance. Went to a bread making class and learnt how to make those little twists on the top and things like that. He had all sorts of classes and he used to go around the wards. He was a very nice man. That was an Anglican padre.

04:00 **Where did you learn to make bread?**

In Goulburn they took us into a bakery, in Goulburn.

Who went along to the bread making classes?

Just a few of us, whoever happened to be off duty at the time, if they were taking a class… we had other classes too.

Do you still make bread?

No. Never, I was never much of a cook. We had to cook as I said on night duty.

04:30 Once I remember one of the girls who had been in New Guinea had heard that the Americans put, I think they used to put white of egg in their coffee up in New Guinea so I came into the day room and there was this poached egg sitting up on top of this large pot of coffee.

So what was that again, a poached egg?

05:00 A poached egg, because she had just broke it into the coffee, she didn't mix it or anything she just broke it into the coffee.

Did you drink it?

I didn't drink it. I don't know who drank it but somebody did eventually.

Were you close with any of your fellow VAs at Goulburn? Did you have close friendships?

Yes I did with one particular girl

05:30 but she eventually went down to, she was a very good nurse actually and she was sent down to Darly Training School. I lost track of her for a while but when she was, they were going to let us train as nurses with two years off, but they decided the Nurses Association of NSW, I've got quite a lot about this in my book, every other state agreed and in England they agreed and trained

06:00 VAs to a state of being first year nurses, or second year nurses but NSW just wouldn't agree at all. They just wouldn't let us in.

How did that make you feel?

We felt we had wasted our time. When you had done a certain, and if you wanted to do nursing it would have been a great incentive. They badly needed nurses. There were articles in the newspapers about the shortage of nurses

06:30 because a lot of them had joined the army. But they were frightened that we might get more pay and more consideration.

They have never been very good at paying nurses have they?

No.

So tell me more about your friend. What was her name?

Margaret Love. She decided to do without the backing of the Nurses Registration Board, she decided she would do mental nursing afterwards because she had

07:00 a certain amount of experience at Goulburn. She did it for a little while then she got married and then she was bringing up children she just did a little bit of training and then she worked as a ward nurse for quite a long while.

I believe as part of your coping with the things that you seeing with the patients that you were dealing with in the ward that you used to

07:30 **sing a special tune, a special song? Was it the "Rose of No Man's Land"?**

Yes. I suppose while I was at school I had a friend whose father had been to the First World War and they had a pianola and they had all the old First World War songs on it and one was the “Rose of No Man’s Land”. I had this vision of myself as the rose in no man’s land.

08:00 **Did you used to sing that with your girlfriends?**

No. Not so much that song particularly but we used to sing, “Don’t spit on the ceiling, don’t spit on the floor, spit through the window that’s what its for”. Or, “She went to heaven and flip, flop she flied”. Ditties like that.

Are there any other ditties?

“Roll out the

08:30 Barrel”.

How did that go?

“Roll out the barrel, we’ll have a barrel of fun”. That was a very popular song during the war and “Don’t Fence me In”.

I’ve heard “Roll out the Barrel” before but how does the chorus go of the “Rose of No Mans Land go”?

I can’t remember now. It has the words of a Red Cross and I’m the rose of no man’s land in it, but I can’t remember now. It was such a long time ago it was even when I was a child.

Can you explain to me why you visualised yourself as the rose?

I suppose, I don’t know. I did remember seeing a film about Edith Cavell who was quite a famous British nurse during the First

09:00 World War and she was actually shot by the Germans. Very heroic.

And you liked that?

Well, one can dream.

Can we talk a bit more about the other women that you worked with? What was your opinion of the other women you worked with?

Pretty high in most cases

10:00 except for that one Sister who sent me off for the blanket. Most of the Sisters I found to work with, very helpful and they taught us a lot it relieved them from the work they had to do and it made it more interesting for us to learn something. But the other girls I worked with, we all fitted in pretty well.

10:30 Pixie and I were great friends and we worked one ward each on night duty and we would have to cook the meal for the patients and sometimes when, the boys were great teasers especially when you first started off trying to take temperatures they would start counting, one two, three, four and you’re looking at a second hand watch, and they used to say to me, “Where did you get that second hand watch? Is that a Japanese watch Nurse?”

11:00 All that sort of thing and we had to ask them about bowel movements and that was a bit embarrassing to start off with but you get used to it. They were pretty good on the whole. I remember one fellow at Concord when I was there he was what they called “go act willy” go AWOL and he would just leave a note on his bed “Gone to Gowings”.

11:30 **So did you ever find out where the men would be sneaking out of the hole?**

There was a hole in fence. I remember coming home because I used to go to Rose Bay after my father died to see my mother come back to Concord, it was quite a trip by train and bus. One night we got the taxi to take us and we didn’t realise that one of the senior sisters was sitting in the dark in the back of this taxi,

12:00 I got in the front I think and we asked to be let out at the hole in the fence, but she didn’t say anything, fortunately. There was always, everywhere, there was a hole in the fence somewhere. Go through it and you were AWOL. I have never really been totally AWOL, but tempted.

So what would you do? You mentioned you did a bit of bread baking in your time off, what else would

12:30 **you do in your spare time?**

We used to go, if we lived near out of Kenmore we used to go into Bathurst. Pixie lived in Bathurst and I used to go to her home a lot. I remember once we decided to make ginger beer and we put 10 times too much tartaric acid in it and guess what happened? We buried it in the garden and it blew up.

13:00 **Oh dear. No ginger beer for you that night.**

We didn't try that again.

When you were at Goulburn, what did you do in your spare time there?

We used to go, they had quite a decent picture show there and we used to go and we had to leave almost right on the end of the film to get the bus

13:30 back to Kenmore it was about eight miles out of Goulburn. We used to have lovely chicken dinners, at a place called, what was it called… something Inn. I can still remember the chicken dinners there, they were marvellous. There was a lot of, the Graziers Association was centred there and Dad had a friend, Ray Bladwell, he and his wife

14:00 used to ask me to their home quite often so that was good. I went to a normal home aprapo of Canberra or the hospital. My father was managing another practice up there to help this man out because he became a member of the Intelligence service. He had quite an important job and when Dad came up I used to go in and see him and have a meal together.

14:30 **Getting back to the hospital at Goulburn and the patients, you mentioned one patient that put a blood cross on his wife's photograph. Can you tell me about him and his story?**

Well I don't really know his story as such but he'd had some sort of psychosis and he'd got hold of a knife or

15:00 maybe the orderly didn't shave him he shaved himself I don't know, but he cut himself and squeezed the blood out and formed a cross on his wife's photograph. A very distressed mind would do that. It was amazing really, after three months they were quite normal afterwards.

15:30 I don't know how they fared later on, because any sort of mental, and even today there is a great stigma about mental treatment. They are not really looked after as they should be.

Can you remember any other patients and any other incidents from the hospital?

No except that we had a dance

16:00 at one stage and we decided to brighten everybody up a bit. We all sent home for our evening frocks. It was a really gala night and all these funny old patients came with their hob nail boots and danced with us. I had a friend Heather Findlay who had a dress that her sister sent up to her and the whole top was made of sequins and the skirt was made of parchment satin and he came up to her and said, "You look

16:30 just like an electric light bulb". They enjoyed it. We used to take them for picnics down by the river if they were well enough to do that.

Would they ever talk about their experience of the war?

Not that I can recall really. I don't suppose I ever questioned them

I believe that it was discouraged to actually talk about

17:00 **what they went through.**

No, not really in those days. It is a funny thing, people had to be quite stoic. I said with the prisoners of war they were'nt allowed to mention what happened to them. I don't know I suppose it is a sort of a feeling that you are letting the side down a bit, if you wallow too much in what is happening or what has happened.

Were there any cases of

17:30 **men who would relive the horrors of the front line?**

We had a Philippino soldier there, I don't know where he came from or how he became to be there, but we were told to watch him because he had been hiding all sorts of implements in his pillow slip and

18:00 they found knives at one stage. And he could have done either himself or somebody else quite a bit of harm. We had a German POW who wouldn't go to sleep unless he had an injection of Morphine. We used to fill the syringe with water, give him a good dose of water and off he went to sleep.

18:30 **I am wondering from what I have heard is that a lot of men actually dream about the war?**

Yes they do.

Could you describe some of that?

Well, some of them on night duty, that's why we used to give them Paraldehyde to help them sleep. They needed something.

19:00 A lot of things to forget. That fellow in the navy he'd been torpedoed, he was probably swimming around in oil for hours and hours and hours you know. In the fighting in New Guinea they didn't sleep half the time because the Japs were in… they had a lot of experience in China the Japanese and all through Malaya they were

19:30 very crafty fighters and they were able to move very silently and swiftly. Some of them they came across I don't know whether you have heard this at all, they came across camps of them, camps that they had left and they found the bones of the soldiers there that they had eaten because they weren't getting food from Japan.

20:00 Supplies of food.

I believe that the hospital was located for patients with skin conditions?

Yes. I didn't actually work in the skin wards but I did happen to see somebody that had scrub typhus one day. It's a little, it does happen in the north of Queensland too, scrub typhus but more particularly in New Guinea, and it's a little worm that gets under the skin and gradually

20:30 eats the skin off until it is like a piece of raw meat. They can't be washed, they have to be bathed with some sort of medical oil to keep them going. It is a thing that affects their circulation eventually. I've got a friend, the sister of this girl, Pixie that I know, her husband died of a heart conditions that was brought on by scrub typhus. It is a circulatory

21:00 cessation in the end caused by these things. It is a terrible disease.

What other skin diseases were there?

Scabies and all sorts of dermatology, a lot of people lost their hair in the tropics. The heat, very hot and they had

21:30 to wear a lot of protective clothing for malaria that was very hot to wear. You can imagine being covered in gaiters and boots and pants and jacket and long sleeves. The only bit they had free was their hands.

I have heard of scabies, but I don't actually know how it affects you physically?

It is an infectious disease. It comes from lack of

22:00 hygiene really.

Could you describe to me what it actually is? How it manifests itself physically?

I didn't actually work in the Scabies ward but it is a sore, it's a rash that happens.

How was that treated from what you heard?

I don't really know. I think they had various kinds of antiseptics and keep them as clean as possible and kept

22:30 them away from any contact with other people becuase it's very infectious.

Okay, I'm just going to look at my notes. Did any of the patients in the mental ward have visitors?

Yes they did. People used to come and see them mainly on the weekend. We didn't encourage visitors much during the week as far as I can remember.

23:00 But they used to come and we used to let them out in the care of people if they were okay enough to go out.

Was that important to their recovery process do you think?

Yes it would. Actual contact with people and anybody they had known prior to their war experience would be because the intensity of creeping through the jungle

23:30 90% of the time in wet clothing and if you had malaria... eating bully beef. The Americans were reasonably well fed. They would fly to Townsville to get ice cream for instance if they wanted it. Our troops didn't have that luxury.

You talked a bit before about the electric shock therapy, and although you didn't actually

24:00 **see the treatment given, you must have seen the difference from when they went in. Can you describe that?**

Yes absolutely. It took awhile from after they'd had the shock treatment and until they actually regained consciousness and had the glucose and all the things they needed. And the big meal helped very much to bring them round. But gradually after

24:30 a program of this treatment they became more mentally alert and put on weight most of them put on weight because they were all pretty thin when they came back from New Guinea.

Can you tell me what electric shock therapy is actually supposed to do?

I don't really know. I wasn't trained to actually give any of these treatments or really know too much about it. I was mainly

25:00 there to look after them after they had it. It is certainly a current of electricity. You can imagine if you put your hand on something it gives you a shock, It does something to you doesn't it? I suppose it helps to restore the normal function of your brain if it has been

25:30 deadened to some extent or if it was delusional. It would help to decrease the delusionals. They were very delusional. I mean that fellow who put the blood on his wife's photograph , obviously suffering some kind of delusion. One funny thing that happened I remember once, a fellow took off without a stitch of clothing on and ran right through the hospital.

26:00 All the orderlies were trying to grab him and put him back under lock and key. Wasn't aware of what he was doing of course.

It sounded even though there were a lot of distressing things that you saw that some of the patients maintained their sense of humour?

Yes they did, absolutely. I remember once,

26:30 a lot of the girls had a great skill in cooking, and I didn't have any truck for cooking at all before I went into the army. I had no idea how to cook anything and in some of the wards some of them were very proud of their cakes and scones and things. They used to say to me, "What are we having for afternoon tea nurse?" and I would say, "Biscuits". I was shamed eventually into trying to make scones. One day I was told to have this dry mixture and mix the

27:00 butter in with it and the sugar and everything and pour the milk in, not too much, but quickly, but not too much and trying to do all this I ran out of milk. I kept running from ward to ward saying, "Please give me some more milk. I've got to make these scones". Anyhow, when they turned out they were a cross between, what were they… they were nothing like scones they were as hard as rocks. We had these little window things

27:30 we used to push up, "What's for afternoon tea nurse?" I smothered them with golden syrup and hoped for the best. Gradually I managed to make a decent scone from that.

What was the reaction to the scones?

Good, on no, they liked them. I spose they felt they were nearer home if we did a bit of home cooking.

So they didn't mind the

It was a bit of a pain to me but I gradually

28:00 learnt.

How important was your own sense of humour?

Yes, it meant a lot really. I think you had to have a sense of humour to live under those conditions and work under those conditions. It was such a grim old place. Nothing had been done to it for many years and before

28:30 the army moved in it wasn't adjusted to being a good mental hospital. I remember the recovery room where they were after they had shock treatment, it was just a bare room with nothing in it. Then they were taken out. I think they had their meal in the open as far as I can remember, under some sort of shelter but in the open.

Did you feel

29:00 **when you first started at Goulburn, did you feel with your training that you were prepared to cope with this?**

Not really but we were given nursing lectures as well as lectures on psychology and all that sort of thing. Only basic lectures I imagine now, I can't imagine that they were very intense but they did help. I think a lot helped with your attitude of your own mental well-being.

29:30 I think a lot of people who are not…or too taken down by the spectacle of all this, they just went down. I don't know because I was young I was more resilient probably. I don't know.

30:00 **You mentioned the dance that was held for the patients. Can you describe that whole evening? What took place and where was it held for instance?**

We had a band and we were all as dressed up as we had been for years and we all walked, I remember walking through the hospital grounds through a series of all these old

30:30 buildings in our evening dresses. I can't remember what period of year it was, it can't have been too cold. It was nice to get dressed up for a change.

Where was the actual dance held?

We had one sort of, I suppose acted as a church, assembly hall, entertainment hall, everything. That's

where we held it.

Can you tell me a bit about the band?

31:00 No I can't remember anything about the band, it was just a band as far as I know.

Was it a big band, four piece band?

Probably about a four piece I think. I don't think it would been any bigger. I don't think they'd had got anything else from Goulburn.

Was there special food put on this particular night?

I can't remember anything about the food either. I just remember

31:30 all getting dressed up for a change and the general reception we got from this and it did cheer them up. To see people that looked like civilians again.

What were your living quarters at this time?

We had a place called Buna House obviously

32:00 christened after the New Guinea campaign, where most of the girls lived. We lived in this old ward, it was ward 24 . I went back to Goulburn for a reunion some time ago and tried to find ward 24, but it's all changed. A lot of it has been pulled down now. We had two Corporals both called Mary and in the winter they used to have a lovely fire going for us when we came off duty and a hot cup of coffee or

32:30 cocoa mainly I think, that was nice. I slept in a dormitory for awhile, they were just old wards that were converted into dormitories. We used to have a lot of trouble with possums in the roof because pretty old building and they used to come down for food. We would get one person, or two people

33:00 at either end of the dormitory with a blanket and try and grab them. Have you ever lived in a house where there is a possum walking up on top? If you are trying to sleep during the day you could maybe hear this thumping going on up there, it was a bit much. We used to catch them in the blanket and take them out in the adjoining bush

33:30 and let them off again. We did have a girl up there who turned out to be a kleptomaniac. I came off night duty I think one day and I found a whole collection of perfume bottles and brushes, brooches and all sorts of things in my bed that she had hidden. I don't know whether this was the result of being in a psychiatric hospital

34:00 or whether she was like that before she came or what but eventually they found a whole suitcase of things and amongst them one of girls had started making a hunting scene in tapestry and she was half way through this hunting scene and it disappeared, it just vanished. So why she would take half a hunting scene I wouldn't know. She was discharged.

Did you actually catch her taking something?

No I didn't but I found all these things in my bed and I thought,

34:30 "Where did all these things come from? What's happened?"

She had left them on your bed?

No she just left them in the bed. She pulled the bed up and dumped all.She must have found the dormitory completely empty. I remember at one stage somebody, the quarters weren't very clean and we were all confined to barracks for a week, because somebody had been untidy.

35:00 And the rumour went around, "All the AAMWS have got dirty drawers".

What was the long-term effect on you working with the patients?

I felt I would like to know more in a way about how to treat these people and make them better.

35:30 It's a sad experience. I don't know whether you have experienced anybody with any mental problems. It is very sad. It seems to be a long standing thing. I know with my own mother, she was actually addicted to alcohol and it's something that covers many years off them and you would like to see some end to it.

36:00 **Did you feel at times a bit helpless with helping the patients?**

Yes because I didn't have enough knowledge obviously. A little like being in the dark because you don't know enough, you try to help them with encouraging words and things like that but I mean they do need the medication that they have.

36:30 Nowadays medicine has advanced so much. People are learning much more about how to treat these people.

Tape 5

00:30 **Betty we referred earlier in the interview to you having had a smallpox vaccination. Could you tell us a bit more about why you had a smallpox vaccination?**

Smallpox was really, they were very frightened of smallpox and cholera in the East. I didn't have anything for cholera at that stage we did later on we had paratyphoid and all those other things

01:00 but because I was going down to Lindfield airforce base, our Commandant thought that a lot of the men just come back from the east that there might be smallpox hovering around and it would be a precaution to have it. I had to have another one later on in the army. The first one I had a very bad reaction.

And what was that reaction?

It was

01:30 my forearm was very sore, very swollen, very red and it formed a very ugly sore. It was a repulsive looking sore and I was really quite sick. You get what they call cowpox with it if you have a bad reaction. But that means it has taken on very well and you will be safe from smallpox.

Cowpox was all part of evolving the vaccine originally for smallpox.

Yes.

02:00 **You had a story which you partly told us about taking temperatures at Bathurst. But there was also a part of that story which involved thermometers into certain cups. Could you tell us that story?**

Yes, well I was very nervous when I first started off in the wards and you were conscious of these grown men. They were all teasing me all the time and

02:30 if you went out for a second to do something, if it was afternoon tea time or morning tea time they weren't above putting the thermometer in a hot cup of tea. When you came back whoever's temperature you were taking had a raging, raging temperature and you think, "Oh". I sort of woke up to this after while and I didn't let it phase me but for a little while it was bit traumatic

03:00 **When you were initially alarmed at the high temperatures what did you do?**

Well I took it again of course, and when I took it again it was normal.

I believe there was a special procedure involved in learning to do injections?

Yes we used to practice on oranges.

03:30 You drew the fluid up from the orange and you could see how much you were getting into the, can't think what you call it at the moment.

So in other words you put the injection into the orange?

Yes, yes.

Could you describe the process of what you did then?

How far you need to put the needle in and how far you need to fill it up. It is a good indication really and you had to find

04:00 the right place on the arm or buttocks or bottom is a good place, it's fairly tough.

Did you have any patients who were phobic about injections?

No I didn't actually. I didn't come across anybody but there were a few people around that did.

That did have a problem with that?

Yes.

I believe that in Goulburn the skin patients were distinguished from the others

04:30 **in terms of what they wore. Could you tell us about that?**

Yes. They had long white socks because the psychiatric patients were on special medication they had to be careful of them and there was a hole in the fence that people could get through to get into Goulburn and we didn't know whether they probably didn't have permission to go into Goulburn half the time. If they needed to be

05:00 injected for shock treatment or something like that they had to be rounded up. Provos were pretty busy in Goulburn.

You have referred to Lieutenant Sinclair and his findings about malaria vaccinations and Atebrin and so forth. He wrote an article in 1944, what were the findings of that particular article?

Well the findings of that

05:30 particular article really confirmed the fact that there were more casualties from malaria than there ever were from battle wounds. And it was very debilitating and they found that quinine didn't help to lessen the number of people who were getting malaria. They had got these Atebrin tablets

06:00 that they had tested and they found they were very satisfactory except for when they gave them an overdose. And the dose was really 0.6 grams and if they gave them beyond the 0.6 grams in excess, for a number of weeks for instance that had a psychotic effect. In relation

06:30 to the quota of people who had malaria and battle wounds to get malaria down it was worth having them than the psychiatric cases.

I believe Lieutenant Colonel Sinclair also wrote about the role of psychiatry in Army Medical Services. What were his findings?

It did have a big role because as in the First World War when men were in the trenches they suffered from shell shock and it was very severe shell shock

07:00 and they didn't really get much help for it at all. But the boys, particularly in New Guinea because the fighting was... in North Africa for instance I think it was probably a lot more ordered and a lot more planned than it was in New Guinea. They had to continually fight these Japanese who had been fighting in China for a long time and they were very used to tropical conditions.

07:30 They could camouflage themselves and make themselves look like trees or anything. You had to counter that by not having any sleep virtually. They used to just lie in the jungle often sopping wet and covered in mud or whatever and no food. They didn't stop to eat.

It has

08:00 **obviously had its impact on the mental health of the men?**

Oh it did. Yes. You can imagine if you don't have any sleep for some time you feel pretty rattled over a long period of time not having any sleep.

What were some of the occupational therapy techniques used in the men in Goulburn?

The occupational therapists used to get them to make things. Do anything that might interest

08:30 them in a way, but they taught them various techniques of occupational therapy. That helped those with anxiety neurosis. I talk about anxiety neurosis usually myself now. I think I've anxiety neurosis. Perhaps a lesser, wasn't as severe as the other conditions that were really

09:00 schizophrenic mianly because they were very delusional and paranoid. Some of them were quite dangerous because the men that were put in the refractory cells. The refractory cells were bare walls virtually with one very thick door with a little moveable peep hole that you could look into and they didn't have any bedding because it was feared they might strangle themselves or harm themselves in some way.

09:30 They did have a blanket, I think a blanket is harder to tie a knot in than a sheet. I didn't actually go into a ward without a male orderly, into a refractory cell, without a male orderly because I am only little and could have been flattened pretty quickly.

Did any of the patients ever try to attack you?

No.

10:00 But I remember one patient I went to once and he had, it was a fellow who'd spent a long time in New Guinea and he thought anybody that was short and dark was a Jap so I was a sitting target. I used to say to the orderly, "I'll be with you don't worry". Or I'd take in a meal or something like that I wouldn't do anything very much.

10:30 **How would he react to you when he saw you?**

My reaction was that he was just delusional and he would get over it.

What kind of actions or words would he use to indicate to you that he thought you were a Japanese?

I can't remember except perhaps just to cry out. Something like that. It was always sort of a split second activity because the orderly would get

11:00 me out if there was any sign of trouble. It was the first time I ever saw a straitjacket.

He was confined in a straitjacket?

Yes. The arms are sort of folded inside this jacket thing so they can't move.

In both World War I and World War II the concept of shell shock became widely known?

11:30 **What do you define as shell shock?**

Well the thing with shell shock...Well in the First World War was going over the top of a trench and facing the enemy fire constantly and the fact that they were fighting, particularly in New Guinea it was hand to hand fighting. The closeness of battle.

12:00 **Betty, could you define the symptoms of shell shock as you know them?**

12:30 Being under constant bombardment for a long time at close quarters and combined with fear and anxiety, and horror probably.

13:00 It's a mixture of reactions to, guns sound very loud. A lot of people lost their hearing completely and all that sort of thing. It's a sensory thing mostly.

As far as you were concerned as a nurse, what were the symptoms you could see in the ward of shell shock?

13:30 The delusion and the withdrawal really. This one sailor that I saw up at Goulburn he'd been torpedoed and I don't know long he had been at sea before he was picked up but he just lost his speech. He just couldn't speak for about six months he couldn't speak. So gradually with shock treatment

14:00 he was brought out of that.

Did you ever feel that shock treatment did more harm than good?

I didn't know enough about it frankly because I wasn't a trained sister. We were only trained to a certain level as VAs and the Sisters did the main treatment. They carried out the shock treatment with the head phones and the instrument that gave

14:30 the current of electricity and the Cortisol. We were helping to cater for the after effects of the electric shock and the Cortisol.

Shock treatment in the movies for instance doesn't have a very good image.

Oh no it doesn't.

It is usually seen as fairly brutal.

Barbaric.

15:00 It is barbaric really. I mean you imagine having head phones and having a certain amount of current of electricity pass through your body and naturally you shake all over, of course. I mean you would if you stuck your finger in a power point you would get the same effect. It is pretty rough. At that time psychiatry wasn'tt that advanced, and it did bring results.

15:30 **So you could see improvements in a number of patients?**

Yes. I could. Because they were fed well after each treatment they were given a very big meal and they were fed well and looked after in so much as they had occupational therapy and they sent concert parties to them and given a lot to read and all sorts of recreational things

16:00 to help them.

As far you could see it was returning them to be normal people.

Yes. It was. You can imagine, I've heard of people who've spent, imagine spending a couple of years, even three years or some boys spent nearly six years in the war and they went from North Africa to New Guinea. It's a long time.

16:30 They weren't fighting all that time. But it is a long time.

For a number of people it left the legacy of at least disturbance.

Yes. It is very hard to forget and in some case I don't think they could possibly blot out. You see a lot of mutilated bodies with legs and arms off. People

17:00 being mutilated all over their body and sick otherwise. They get very sick with malaria for instance. It recurs, a lot of people still get malaria after years and year and years, they still get it.

Apart from the blind man you have referred to were there other patients who had been quite severely injured especially with facial injuries which in themselves

17:30 **were disfiguring?**

Yes there were. Actually I met a fellow who, all my contacts were ships that passed in the night, but this fellow I met in a café in Goulburn and he'd spent two years after Alamein having his face reconstructed at Concord. He had a skin graft from his thigh

18:00 to his face and he had to lie for a very long time while that graft took on. He showed me a picture of his face before and afterwards. He had this, all you could tell, the only way you could tell that he had that operation, he had a little white line along the base of his throat. His name was John Lesley by the way.

18:30 He asked me if he could contact me later on but when you work in a hospital nobody answers the phone and if they answer it at all they don't know where you are and they don't know where you can be contacted or something, so I didn't see him again.

You described the thin line across the throat. Was it clear that the operation had been a success?

Yes it had been definitely, yes. A very

19:00 clever surgeon at Concord called Ken Starr. He did amazing, really amazing things. I worked with a Major Hertzberg who was an eye specialist and I saw once that he performed a goitre an athymic goitre. The man's eyes were literally standing out on sticks. They were way out here somewhere and he

19:30 took the whole forehead back and put the eyes back into place. You wouldn't have know anything had happened. The man recovered, it took a while for him to recover of course.

What had happened to the man to bring on this condition in the first place?

I think he had blown up somewhere I don't really know the actual cause of his goitre.

Was he able to retain normal sight?

20:00 Yes.

You were saying that Dr Starr performed some quite extraordinary operations apart from the man whose facial reconstruction had happened. Can you remember some of the other instances?

No, I can't recall any just at the moment but there were a lot. In North Africa they had a fellow, but this happened in Heidelberg it didn't happen in

20:30 Concord.

In Heidelberg Hospital in Melbourne, yeah. Were there concerts for patients?

Yes. They had oncert parties all the time.

Would you describe those for us?

Some were good and some were terrible. They had a lot of female impersonators and they were painful, absolutely painful to watch but the good ones were good and there were a lot of people descended on

21:00 television eventually when it came out.

Were these part of the touring entertainment troops provided by the army?

It was an entertainment unit. Actually they marched behind us and Smokey Dawson was one of those on Anzac Day.

I think it was called the 1st Army Amenities Unit

Yes Armies Amenities. They went all over the battlefields. Especially up in the Northern Territory

21:30 and places like that but they did come out to the hospitals.

So the female impersonators were miming to records or they were using their own voices?

Oh no. They were talking, walking miracles.

What made them terrible?

They were just amateurs. They were just terrible.

Were they unconvincing women?

Very unconvincing women most of them.

22:00 There is a picture in there of a book in there I have "Mates and Memories" of the men in a POW camp and they always wore things like Cleopatra.

It left an impression.

That was their imagination of what a woman was supposed to look like I suppose.

At a certain point you applied for a compassionate transfer to be near your mother.

22:30 **Could you describe the circumstances behind that?**

I had two days to celebrate Victory in Europe. The war in Europe ended in May 1945 and we were allowed two days early in May 1945 and I applied for the two days and my Commandant Captain Lynn Erwin, she'd been stationed in the Middle

23:00 East and she was pretty intolerant of anybody who was a bit younger. My father rang her because he didn't think I was going to get the two days and he hadn't been at all well. He had a very bad attack of asthma in April and he was using about six or seven cylinders of oxygen a day he was using a lot of oxygen. Anyhow he

23:30 was discharged from the hospital and when my birthday was coming up he wanted very much to give me a little party and I asked him not to do anything about it, I'd just apply for the leave but anxiety got the better of him and he rang Captain Erwin and she said, "It is not up to me it is up to the Commander of the hospital".

24:00 Dad had a great friend he was Major General McGuire he was his Grand Master at the Sydney Lodge, the main lodge in Sydney, so he said, "Would it be all right if I asked "Fat" McGuire?" That was his nickname and she said, "No that would not do at all", but anyhow I got the two days.

24:30 I went down to Sydney and I had a very small party at "Romanos" and my father went down to the New Zealand Club because he was a member there and gathered up three New Zealand airmen to supplement the male partners for the dance and they came and one of them was a fellow I wrote to for quite a while, John Thompson, after the war

25:00 and he said to me at the time, "You're just 21 and I am 31". I thought to myself, "You poor old thing. Imagine being 31". Which I couldn't. You can't envisage when you are 21. My father died three days after that. I'd gone back to Goulburn and then I got leave to go home.

Your father was able to hold the party for you?

Yes, he came

25:30 but he wasn't well at all.

I believe that when your father died you applied for a compassionate transfer to be near your mother?

Yes I did because

26:00 I knew she wouldn't be able to cope at all. She couldn't even sign a cheque, she didn't know how to do anything. like way at all, then I thought that, "If I can maybe get to Concord I would be closer to home".

What process did you go through to apply for that transfer?

I had to apply and just wait.

How long did you wait?

Until July.

26:30 It wasn't very long three months.

Three months after your father died. Didn't you also apply to go to Bougainville.

Yes I did. While I was at Goulburn I applied, actually my father wasn't too badly off then. That was in January or February 1945 and I was told that anybody who had over two years service at that stage could apply for overseas service.

27:00 I joined the AIF when I was 19 so I was part of an expeditionary force but I wasn't 21 at that stage, I was only 20 and I would have been 21 in May, but I wasn't accepted.

Why were you specifically interest in Bougainville?

I wasn't particularly interested in Bougainville itself but that was where the 2/1st

27:30 was going and we went with a particular unit. The 2/9th went to Morotai, a lot of people went from Goulburn with the 2/9th, but the 2/1st was going at that stage and I would have been attached to that hospital.

Bringing us up to your move to Concord, can you describe Concord as you found it?

Concord was built in 1940, not all of it. There

28:00 were ramp wards there. It was part of the Edith Walker complex that was leased from the government and they built this multi-storey building that was the latest thing at that stage, it was very modern and I forget how many storeys high, but it was quite a big building, a very big building.

What was the purpose of the Concord Repat?

Well they were going to keep it after the war

28:30 to house returned soldiers mainly in the beginning and gradually it evolved into being a community hospital.

What was its initial purpose? Was its initial purpose was it to treat men who had just come back from the front or was there also

For anybody really who had any army connection because I was there myself for a few weeks.

Were there World War I soldiers

29:00 **there as well?**

Could have been a small percentage but they were mainly at the hospital at Randwick.

With Concord had there been any previous

It was designed to be a training hospital really after the war and it was a training hospital but they did not have us training in it.

So very modern, very flash?

Well equipped at the time.

29:30 **Well equipped. Where were you living at the time?**

We were living in quarters built on a makeshift basis because they were going to be pulled down eventually. They were fibro I think and two to a room. We had a long way to walk. The first ward I was in was an orthopaedic ward right down at the end of the ramp. There was three miles of ramps.

30:00 You had to start off early to get to work on time.

Would the ramps extend from the main multi-storey buildings to the individual wards?

Almnost. There was a space between the main building, sort of walk ways to connect the two buildings but they're not specifically connected.

A lot of those World War II-era buildings

30:30 **are still there actually behind the Concord Hospital.**

Yes they are.

You worked initially I think you said in the orthopaedic ward? Can you describe for us what the purpose of the orthopaedic ward was?

To restore limbs that had been broken or blown off or whatever and they used these Balkan frames, B-A-L-K-A-N frames. They strung the limb up to where the physician

31:00 wanted it to heal. They don't have things like that now, I don't know quite what they do with limbs these days but they very formidable to look at anyway.

That would include a number of patients in traction I presume?

Yes, that's right.

What was the morale of the ward like?

The morale was pretty good in most places because they,

31:30 in my book I have mentioned a fellow that had some problem of one leg. He had leg amputated and then a fellow came in next to his bed who'd been blinded, so he stopped whingeing. He didn't whinge very much but he stopped whingeing permanently after that. They were all pretty well bonded

32:00 together. Very supportive of one another. In the Middle East when they were in the midst of battle for instance, they used to go from the ones that were slightly better, take all the messages and get any medication that was needed. Very thoughtful and caring of one another.

So the fact that they had had a shared experience obviously helped?

Yes, it would.

32:30 **Did staff have various means to foster that morale?**

Yes, we all got to that stage. There was a fellow at Concord when I was there who used to put a note on his bed, who went AWOL, 'Gone to Gowings'. All that sort of thing. When I was at Bathurst coming through the ward on night duty, I was so tired all I wanted to do was go to bed and go to sleep and I would hear, "Hey"

33:00 I would think, "What do they want now" and I would go back and he would say "Little hen when when when will you lay me an egg for my tea?".

Could you repeat that please?

No.

Could you repeat it please, I didn't get all those words?

"Hey little hen when when when will you lay me an egg for my tea". He would start off with the hey, and I was unsuspecting before I had heard it before, after I had heard it for awhile I was really cranky,

33:30 I couldn't bear it.

What, you took it as a personal affront did you?

No it was just I was so tired, I didn't want to have to go back and do anything else.

How important was humour in these wards?

Very important, very important. It was an absolute necessity I'd say. If you didn't have a sense of humour I don't know how you could have lived in the army at all, ever.

34:00 **Was there a shared humour between the patients and the staff?**

Yes.

Can you give any further examples of that?

There was a lot of teasing that went on. I can't think of anything right at this moment. There were a lot of instances I probably

34:30 recall something.

Looking at the average stay of patient in the orthopaedic ward, how long would a patient?

Possibly six weeks or eight weeks or something like that. It takes awhile for a bone to heal and especially if they had had amputation or anything like that. They had to get a special limb made and be able to walk in it.

Would they

35:00 **then be moved onto other parts of the hospital?**

Possibly to maybe a Convalescent Hospital, there were a few like the Ritz at Leura and Lady Wakehurst Red Cross Home and there was one at Gordon on the north shore line. They were scattered around all over the place really and they had qualified physiotherapists and people who would help them.

There was also one up and still is at Turramurra?

Yes.

35:30 That is Lady Davidson. That is not run entirely by Veterans Affairs now, it's partly privatised I think.

That had a strong World War I connection.

Yes, it does.

Were there any outstanding doctors in the orthopaedic ward that you worked with?

36:00 I can't recall any names just at the moment. We didn't have any. I mean a doctor, even a service doctor is far removed from a nursing orderly, you don't have much.

So what were your duties as a nursing orderly.

As a nursing orderly I had to help with the diets,

36:30 and help with the toilet requirements of the patients, and wash them, do some dressings if needs be. It depended on the sister in charge of the ward really because that is who allocated your duties. It really depended on them.

Did you often feel at that time that you wanted to do some more

37:00 **nursing?**

Yes I did towards the end of the war, I would have like to have but I couldn't leave at that stage you had

to live away from home to train, and I couldn't have done that at the time.

How long after your started work in the orthopaedic ward did you move to the eye ward?

That's a bit hazy after 60 years.

37:30 Quite awhile I think, I am trying to recall the actual time but I can't. The Eye Ward was the last one I was in that I can recall.

A matter of months, a year or so?

I was only there from

38:00 July to December, so just a matter of months.

So this was July to December 194-

1945.

1945, right.

Had I stayed in the army I might have gone to Japan which would have been interesting.

To work with BCOF?

The occupation forces.

British Commonwealth Occupational Forces, yes.

38:30 **Were there any outstanding doctors in the eye ward that you worked with?**

Yes, Captain Hertzberg. He did not have any bedside manner whatsoever. I remember him once saying to me I was walking along the corridor and he called out to me on his way shooting through "Get me the bloody ophthalmoscope". One of the sisters got into terrible trouble one day,

39:00 this was a nursing sister. She was in the dressing room and she was talking to an eye patient who was standing outside the dressing room and he came by, eyes blazing, "How dare you have my patient outside the dressing room. Could have caught any possible infection". Poor woman, there was little me just a Private and she is a captain or something and

39:30 really being told off, didn't mince matters at all. The men used to call him Shicklegrover because Hertzberg has a German sounding name. I don't know if he was aware of that or not. A very clever man, he was the one that did the ophthalmic goitre.

Tape 6

00:31 **So Betty you talked a bit before about your 21st birthday party. Could you go into more detail about what took place that night?**

I came down on leave I think the day before, I can't quite remember but I think I did and my father had booked a table at "Romanos", it was one of the places in those days "Princes of Romanos",

01:00 and he used to go there occasionally to lunch and I had a few of my closest friends. It wasn't always, it's not easy during war time to get people who were on leave to come. Some were people we just roped in like the men from the New Zealand Club to come and they were three officers and they'd been all

01:30 through the Battle of Britain covered in white wings and things and one of my friends Margaret Love from Goulburn, Pixie wasn't there because she was still up at Bathurst and I can't remember exactly who else was there but I had a happy night although I was anxious about my father because I could see that he wasn't well

02:00 We had a happy time as you can have in war time really. Supplies were hard to get and all that sort of thing. It was a very nice atmosphere.

You mentioned there was a bit of dancing that night.

A bit of dancing. I danced with John Thompson who was a New Zealand flying officer and he

02:30 was becoming quite philosophical while he was dancing with me and he said, "I'm 31 and you are just 21". I didn't say anything to him I just smiled sweetly to him and I thought, "You poor old thing, fancy being 31". Incredible age. There were other people there who just happened to have leave at the same time.

03:00 **You kept in contact with John didn't you?**

Yes I kept in contact with John. He wrote and asked me for a photograph and he wanted my mother and I to go to New Zealand for a holiday. Then suddenly, I wrote to him for quite a while I didn't have the opportunity for us both to go to New Zealand at that time and I was doing a course through postwar reconstruction anyway

03:30 so I couldn't leave it. I continued writing to him until I got a letter that had been all over New Zealand and it had been to the dead letter office and heavily stamped with return to sender. I didn't know what happened to him. I donn't know whether he got married or whether he, he was crop dusting after the war, which is a

04:00 pretty dangerous occupation and they fly very low and he came from Otago in the South Island which is heavily timbered and very mountainous so I don't know.. I didn't know any of his relatives to write and ask if anything had happened to him. So I just don't know. It was one of those things.

I guess a lot of people lost contact with each other?

Yes. Difficult. We moved around.

04:30 I have moved around a lot in my life time and we moved from , we had quite a large flat at Bellevue Hill, we had lived in the house at Dover Heights at that time and that was sold, we moved to a flat at Bellevue Hill and then eventually moved back to the little house we had at Chatswood. Possibly even in the moves I might have lost contact.

Was John someone that you would have regarded

05:00 **as a boyfriend?**

Well I suppose I did in a sense because I used to write to him and he wanted me to go to New Zealand but apart form that I don't know. He was never a steady boyfriend or anything like that. Too far apart.

About three days after your 21st birthday your father passed away didn't he?

Yes, he had a massive attack of asthma.

05:30 He was taken to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. I was called, my mother rang me and I was asked to go, I got leave to go down to Sydney and went to the hospital and I was there when he actually passed on. I went to see him and he looked very grey and ill and I felt his pulse and I couldn't feel it so I spoke to the Duty Sister and asked her to come and have a look at him

06:00 and she said, "He's gone", so that was that.

What was that like for you?

Oh very distressing, because I was very close to my father and I missed him terribly when he had gone but these things happen in your life and you've got to cope with it.

That

06:30 **was when you got compassionate leave to go to Concord?**

When I got back to Goulburn I knew that my mother, our next door neighbours were very kind to us. Mr Horace Wright was the executor of my father's will and he was very kind to me that night and we slept in their home, my mother and I because they felt it would be too traumatic to go back to our own home

07:00 and they looked after us for that day. Then I had to go back to Goulburn. I applied for leave when I got back, not only leave but I applied for a transfer to another unit. And that takes awhile, army things take awhile to process but it didn't take that long, about three months before I was posted

07:30 to Concord Hospital, which was the main base hospital in Sydney.

What were the reasons for you to make this transfer, have this transfer back to Concord. Why did you want to?

Mainly because my mother emotionally, quite emotionally was unable to cope. I was needed at home.

08:00 Goulburn was just too far away and I couldn't drive at that stage and we had an old Wolseley car, it wasn't old then but look at it being old now, and I had to go backwards and forwards and depending on leave too, it wouldn't have been a regular thing, so I felt the only way to cope was to go back home

08:30 **What was happening in the war at this point?**

The war at this point was very uncertain because they hadn't, I was trying to remember when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, but until that happened there was no guarantee, and 1945 there was a lot happening really because there were a few landings.

09:00 The hospital at Bougainville was there and there was fighting in Borneo, there was fighting in, still fighting in Rabaul. They had to recapture Rabaul, the Japanese had occupied Rabaul. There was still a lot of fighting going on in New Guinea. It was still pretty uncertain then although the war in Europe had

ended

09:30 that was good because we were able to get more help from the rest of the world, particularly America. When Edmund Herring, the General came back from the Middle East he opened up a road that had been on the drawing board for 60 years and the Americans fixed it in 60 days because they had the equipment. We didn't have the equipment to surface the roads

10:00 properly. They had to carry very heavy transports. There was a big transport company in Alice Springs that moved up to the Northern Territory, without that we couldn't have defended, stopped the Japanese from coming in. They did think the Japanese would come down the Roper River from Cape York. And we had hospitals near there, 101 AGH was at

10:30 Katherine.

You mentioned before that your mother had a bit of a problem with alcohol?

Yes she did but I think that was probably introduced into her life by a neighbour who was much older and a lot more sophisticated. She had married a man from the First World War, he was a very nice man actually, he had fought in France, but he

11:00 had no children and she was a very proud housewife and she had her housework finished about an hour after she got up in the morning. She had nothing much to do all day and she didn't work so she used to ask my mother to come in and have a glass of sherry with her during the morning, not a cup of tea, but a glass of sherry.

11:30 **You were talking about your mother's problem with alcohol?**

Yes. I think that started probably then because it was a bit unusual for a suburban housewife to be drinking sherry early in the morning, well it was in those days. I don't know whether she,

12:00 I can't remember how old she would have been then, not very old, because she was only 17, I think I said 19 a little while ago, but she was 17 when she was married. It is much too young. She said to me once she never felt she had any girlhood in a sense. With an older person who is more sophisticated and quite sure of themselves it is very difficult

12:30 for a person to withstand the persuasion.

At this point you are obviously having a lot of hardship in your own family with your mother's alcohol problem and your father's death. Was it hard to relate to what was going on with the rest of the world with the war?

13:00 No. I don't know the war sort of occupied our external life to a certain extent not to our family life so much. I don't know because it had been going so long, I was 15 when the war started and six years into that you sort of wonder if it is ever going to end if ever.

13:30 It was a tremendous relief, although it was a very sad for me because my father had passed on before that actually happened and it was the only life I had known for six years. You just wonder. You were in limbo to a certain extent because you didn't know what was going to happen to you in the future. The future seemed quite unreal compared to the past.

14:00 **I am interested to know, just moving back to the Concord eye ward that you were working in, I'm interested to know what kind of eye injuries you helped the patients with.**

I didn't really go into the diagnosis very much of what happened to each person. I knew what happened to Ron because I became a friend of his but

14:30 there were all sorts of wounds to the eyes and facial features that were included. The eyes were included in their injuries. My job was mainly, the sisters did the main dressings and I used to put the eye drops in so that Major Hertzberg could examine the eyes. The pupils

15:00 would be dilated by the time I put the drops in.

Could you describe some of the injuries that you saw?

The only one I can really remember in any depth was Ron Gordon because he had a lot of shrapnel coming through his whole face, it was a mass of shrapnel.

I might get you to talk a bit more about Ron.

15:30 **I know we talked a bit about him yesterday but I would like to know a bit more about the story in particular what does a face full of shrapnel look like because I have never see that before?**

His hair had been shaved off as far as I remember and there were like little pin points of metal protruding from his face, all over his face. You can imagine he actually had this hand grenade thrown full on to his face.

16:00 It would take while for all the stuff to, it was gradually coming out of the skin. I didn't see him after he

left the hospital. I don't know how long that took, but it took awhile. He did say to me once that he felt he could see a little light, but I think that was probably imagination. I don't think he ever regained his sight.

16:30 Very good medical attention while he was there and a lot of rehabilitation.

Did he have any other injuries?

Not that I know of, that was the main problem. I don't know whether he had any associated problems because of that. He would have been sent onto other medical treatment I imagine if he had.

How did you come to be friends?

17:00 Mainly because I was assigned to look after him, which I did and I got to talk to him a bit. My friend Heather Findlay and I used to take him on excursions to Manly and places like that, but we were told to be very careful not to give him loads of sympathy because they wanted him to

17:30 be self-reliant and independent as much as he could be and they were going to train him. He was learning Braille, which is quite difficult I believe to learn. He used to type on a Braille typewriter because you've got to be able to communicate if you can't see people, you've got,be able to communicate somehow.

How long was he in the

18:00 **hospital for?**

As far as I can remember probably about three months.

You mentioned that you weren't allowed to give much sympathy to the patients. Were you encouraged or was it discouraged for you to fraternise with the patients?

It wasn't that were weren't actually encouraged

18:30 to fraternise with patients. I remember once a patient was talking to one of the girls in the day room and what we called the day room was the kitchen really, but we had lifts that opened two doors at a time, and you could be working away in the kitchen and all of a sudden you find a lift full of people staring at you. It was a bit trying. The place had to be tidy all the time of course but

19:00 apart from that one of the girls had a patient in there talking to her and the word was sent around that the Matron, she was a very severe woman. She used to wear her veil covering her whole face practically, very stiffly starched all over and she came into this day room suddenly. They got wind of the fact that she was coming in, and she was come to the day room, so this lass put him in the broom cupboard,

19:30 this fellow she was talking to. The first thing she did was open the broom cupboard door of course. She said, "What are you doing there?". The nurse in question had a big lecture. "You are not supposed to have patients in the day room. You are not supposed to have patients in there".

Did that sort of thing happen often?

Well, I suppose it did quite often because a lot of the girls married patients.

20:00 I've got a friend that I march with on Anzac Day and he tells everybody that they met in bed. It all sounds very wicked, but it wasn't.

What was your relationship like with Ron after he left hospital? Did you maintain contact?

He wrote to me, he was very proud of being able to write on a typewriter, to write on a typewriter apart

20:30 from writing without sighting what you are writing is wonderful really. I was relieved from the last letter I received from him the fact that he was beginning to get onto his feet and he was starting up a business with his brother. I felt that it would have been wrong of me to have kept up the friendship because he could have read more into it than there was.

21:00 I admired him certainly and I was anxious to see that he was able to make a way in life with this disability but it is a very difficult question really you don't know whether you might hurt somebody or if they might misinterpret your interest in them, it is very difficult.

Did you get the sense that he perhaps wanted

21:30 **more serious relationship?**

Well the last letter I received he said he was still a bachelor. I gathered from that he would have liked to have me contact him again. With my mother, that was always a problem with any boyfriends I had because she was not at all self-reliant. It's a difficult thing really.

22:00 You just had to have a bit of social life of some kind but not a romance really.

I imagine that must have been quite difficult for you with having your work at the hospital and also having to look after your mother as well?

It was yes at that time. It took me you can imagine from Concord to Dover Heights, it's not a straightforward journey and

22:30 often I wouldn't come off duty until maybe six at night. I used to get transport home and maybe I wouldn't get home until about one o'clock in the morning. In those days it wasn't dangerous to travel at night, it is now but it wasn't then.

How would you get home?

I would have to get to the city and then get a bus

23:00 to Dover Heights and coming back I would have to get a train to Strathfield then another bus or a taxi. If I was very late I would just get a taxi and go through the hole in the fence.

So potentially some days it would take you five hours to get home?

It could yes. I felt I had to do it, because my mother, she didn't realise how long it took me.

23:30 I don't know whether I ever told her but she wouldn't have realise. It was the only way I could do it really unless I got weekend leave or something like that, a couple of days.

Did you at any point ever resent your mother for?

I have from time to time. I've felt that and I sometimes did

24:00 question her motivation but when you are an only child and there is nobody else, I had a lot of cousins but they were not interested in looking after my mother. Somehow you just get on with it. It is not a case of being heroic or anything it is the only alternative you have.

Getting back to Concord Hospital again I believe that there was some Italian POWs?

24:30 Yes. They were really funny. I remember getting once, they used to make me presents. They would go down to occupational therapy and one of them made me, he had a jar that he covered in multi-coloured strands of wool, and wound them round and round the jar sort of diagonally. It was quite cleverly done, with a fringe of this stuff at the bottom. I didn't know what it was meant to be.

25:00 I didn't know whether it was meant to be a flower vase or some sort of storage vase or what and they spoke very little English. Somebody talk me to say bonjourno and I used to go into the ward in the morning and say, "Bonjourno boys" and they used to say, "Bonjourno", great palaver going on. There was one man in the ward who I had to measure his water works. He had this business attached,

25:30 catheter attached to him and it ended up in a great big jar called a Winchester jar, a huge jar and unfortunately I couldn't watch it all day but when I was on duty the period I was on so if it happened to be when I was out of the ward when it got full, they would never tell me it was nearly full, it used to flow over quite a lot and I used to call him "cascara"

26:00 He didn't know what cascara was of course, but he had a name that sounded a bit like that and I used to say Mr Cascara you have got to tell me when that winchester jar is full. It makes an awful mess.

Is that cascara as in cascading over is that what the joke was?

I didn't mean that so much, but his name sounded like cascara but he didn't know what cascara did to you.

26:30 They were very affable, they were quite easy to get along with an obviously were glad that the war was over and they knew they would eventually be repatriated. There was no problem there. They used to get them to work cleaning the corridors, and they used to do one square. The linoleum or whatever the floor covering was

27:00 was in squares and they used to do one square at a time. It wasn't a very enthusiastic operation but they did it, they cleaned it anyway.

Do you think they were deliberately going slow?

I think so. I don't think any of them were very energetic. I don't know what sort of soldiers they were. I think they had probably been conscripted in reality.

I guess being prisoners of war

27:30 **they were probably**

I think they were glad, actually when they were in North Africa when they surrendered to the army at Alamein they were only too happy to get out of it.

Why were they in the hospital?

Various ailments. They could have influenza, or anything. I don't know. I don't think they had specific war wounds or anything. I think they were just illnesses they would have probably got anyway.

28:00 **I believe you mentioned before there were Japanese POWs?**

Yes, there were two. One was a Korean, They weren't full blooded Japs. One was a Korean and one was a Formosan. The guard standing outside the room was from Liverpool camp and he told me that they were the worst because they emphatically denied being Japanese and they were far

28:30 more treacherous than the real Japs because they'd pretend they had nothing to do with fighting us and they had just been conned into it. From what I've read, particularly in the book I've got called "Mates and Memories" particularly the Korean guards were the worst, they were very very cruel. I didn't enjoy going into that room.

29:00 I asked the guard to come in with me everytime. I had to take their meals in. I didn't give them any medication or look after them as a nurse. I just used to take their food in which I didn't enjoy. They were very sullen and weren't cooperative at all.

Were you afraid of them?

A little bit, yes. They had no weaponry so they couldn't have really done anything to me but the thought, I mean you had heard,

29:30 we didn't hear a great deal, we didn't hear anything really about the treatment of the prisoners of war until the end of the war, right till the end and we didn't really know what was happening.

Where did that fear come from then, if you hadn't really known what they had done to prisoners?

I think it was just the prowess

30:00 of the Japanese army and the way they swept through China and Malaya and they were conquerors.

How did they relate to you when you took them their meals?

They just stared at me. They didn't have any emotional response at all.

I believe that some of the Australian soldiers in the hospital at the time

30:30 **didn't want them in the hospital?**

Yes, well they had just come back. They had been repatriated from Morotai. They kept the POWs on Morotai or Labuan when they were first freed, when they took them to these islands to fatten them up and help them overcome the traumas of being prisoners for so long. When they came back they

31:00 still looked very thin and their general expression was like a person who had been tormented really. They weren't well. They resented the fact that these Japanese prisoners were being fed and housed and watered to a certain extent, they felt they should have been back in a POW camp being looked after there.

31:30 **Did the Australians want the Japanese removed from the hospital? I read in your memoir that the Australian soldiers who were patients in the hospital actually wanted**

Yes, they were at the same time.

What did they say?

It was a bad, I think the hospital administration were at fault there. I don't think they should have put them, I mean they were just, there was a passageway between the main ward and the room they were in so it was fairly close and I think that was a wrong thing to do. It was like rubbing salt into the wound really.

What did the Australians say?

The hospital administration decided they would take them out straight away , take them back to Liverpool. They could be guarded

32:30 properly.

So the Australians make demands?

Yes they did.

What did they actually ask the administration for?

They actually said that they had to be removed within 24 hours or they wouldn't answer to the consequences. I don't know what they could have done actually because they were being guarded, not heavily guarded, but they were being guarded.

Could you understand the Australians?

33:00 I could understand them because they, I don't know, when you read some of the books that have been written about the experiences of prisoners of war, they were so degrading and so inhumane it's just incomprehensible to imagine that anybody could do, what they did to another person.

33:30 **What did you think about the atomic bomb when it first went off in Hiroshima.**

It is hard to know what to think about that actually because the thing was that the war could have gone on for at least another 12 months I think probably and to stop,

34:00 it was dreadful they had to kill people, a whole Japanese city, Hiroshima and other places in the processes and the atomic bomb, and it certainly started off a lot of the ethic questions about atomic bombs and the manufacture and all that sort of thing. It was wrong in lots and lots of ways but they just didn't know how it would end and how much longer

34:30 it would go on and how many more lives would be slaughtered. That's the thing. The Japanese certainly when they started to bomb Australia one of the things that stopped them was the fact that they didn't have enough petrol to fly their planes too far and they had to drop bombs to drop the load to enable them to fly back with the petrol they had, for the gas they had.

35:00 Food was another problem. The Japanese when they were in the islands, particularly in Borneo they were very short of food. They did grow a few things but that hampered them a lot. There were a lot of factors really.

Where were you when the war ended?

At Concord, yes.

35:30 **Could you describe to me what happened?**

The day war ended I remember walking through Martin Place wich was absolutely crammed with people all dancing and men were throwing up their hats and people were yelling and screaming. I felt very sad because I hadn't long lost my father and you just wondered what

36:00 the future was going to bring. It was a day of great rejoicing and a day of sadness. The people that died and the people who were wounded and all that sort of thin. You wonder how everybody is going to face the future.

Did you join in the celebrations?

No I didn't actually. I was going home.

36:30 I think I was going home, I don't think I was going to meet anybody. I just walked through the crowd and went on my way. But I did note what was going on of course and we were very relieved that all those years of uncertainty had gone.

What was the mood like in the hospital the next day?

In the wards everybody was cheering and chatting and

37:00 rules and regulations went by the board. To heck with this, sort of thing.

Were there any celebrations in the hospital?

Little individual ones really, a bit of a celebration in the wards. I don't think I was working that day because I was on leave I went through to the city. Generally after that I felt

37:30 glad I'd decided to get out of the army. This was in August, it was three months before I left the army but you begin to feel, I felt that I wasn't of any use any more. If I wasn't helping people it wasn't, I could have actually if my father had lived, I might have gone to Japan.

38:00 I didn't see much sense in carrying on.

It doesn't sound like you felt particularly optimistic when the war ended.

No I didn't really because I didn't know what I'd do. I applied to do, because the last conversation I had with my father he wanted me to do photographic colouring. I don't think he had much faith in my tertiary ability

38:30 and he thought I had done quite well at art at school and he thought that that would be a suitable job for little Bett. I decided that I would do that and they had me out at the showground pouring buckets of water into more buckets of water, I was never any good at maths so I don't know what that proved. How it proved I could do

39:00 photographic colouring I don't know. But I started to do that, that occupied me really.

Did you miss nursing when you started that?

I did miss, I missed the activity in the hospital and I missed the comradeship, particularly because I was

an only child and I was just at home with mum and a few friends that I met.

39:30 That's what you miss really and you feel in a way out of a family, in a sense. It is quite an enveloping sort of feeling. Because I still have all those friends that I met then and if they are available we meet on Anzac Day. Pixie doesn't ever come up on Anzac Day but

40:00 I phone her quite a bit and she does come up to Sydney occasionally. Others I see a lot of the time and a lot on the telephone. I've got one friend who lives at Camden, she's partially blind now and I don't see her in person so much but we talk a lot on the telephone. Very caring.

Tape 7

00:33 **We were just having a chat about your father encouraging you to become a colourist at the end of the war. Can you describe that job?**

Yes. Once I applied to do it and they said I could be trained in photographic colouring and retouching, they didn't ever teach me retouching, I don't know why but they didn't. I learnt the colouring bit fairly well

01:00 and I worked first of all at a firm called Russell Roberts. They were a commercial photographic company and they employed people like Reg Perrier, for instance, who is quite a famous photographer and Ray Leighton and there was another man who had just got out of the air force and I can remember

01:30 they did an add for Helena Rubinstein, which was a girl topless in a bath, a wooden bath that was drawn around her eventually but she was photographed, Frank Pasco that was his name and he had bright red hair and a very fair complexion. He was bright red while he was doing all this photographing of this girl and there was a little hole

02:00 between the wall of the studio where he was photographing and part of the complex, the whole photographic complex and we were all having a peep through the peep hole and he was stumbling over cords and all sorts of things having a terrible time because he knew what was going on in the background. But they did a lot of work for David Jones. I worked with a lass called Margot O'Donnell who was quite a famous photographer too

02:30 and she was the head colourist. My job at that stage was to colour. We had some ads for the Sanitarium health food shop in Hunter Street. We had almost floor to ceiling things of people drinking orange juice and goodies of all kinds and we used a dye to do this and we used ammonia as the medium

03:00 and you can imagine with ammonia, you sit in your little cubicle for awhile and then all of a sudden your head lifts off and you've to rush out. It was quite interesting though because I actually saw what I had done sitting in Hunter Street at one stage. I wasn't really getting a comprehensive training there in everything so

03:30 they sent me then to Danes Studio, which was more of a portrait studio more traditional. It wasn't as exciting as Russell Roberts by any means but we had to sit in a little room so that we had to have the windows shut because we couldn't let any soot in, if the soot got onto the oil colour it would smear the portrait or whatever we were doing.

04:00 **Can you describe what you actually used for tools?**

We didn't use brushes we used traditional oil colours. We used a butcher's skewer which you sharpened to a point and pure cotton wool, cotton wool was quite expensive then it still is, and had to wind it around the tip of the skewer and you dip

04:30 this in the colour you had mixed for whatever colour of the person you were doing. I started off with babies. I was only trusted with babies to begin with then I graduated to wedding bouquets and weddings. We used to scrape out the folds in the material with a razor blade to accentuate the whiteness of the fold.

05:00 We had a very funny man in the dark room who had a sign above the dark room which said, "Abandon Hope all Ye who Enter Here". I had to work on Saturday mornings and I had to make the tea sometimes and we used alum in photography and

05:30 I put alum in the tea instead of sugar, it was pretty bitter. I wasn't asked to make the tea for a long while after that.

What is alum?

It is a chemical and it looks very like sugar, it has very fine grains.

Is it poisonous?

I put it in the tea. Yes it is slightly poisonous. I didn't kill anybody fortunately.

Trying to give a message to your boss?

06:00 It was a very old building we had a pulley lift, you had to pull a rope to pull the lift up. Quite an experience. Unfortunately I contracted scarlet fever and they didn't keep my job for me. I went back to typing and shorthand. Very boring after that.

What are the symptoms of scarlet fever?

We had been to visit some friends,

06:30 actually the people that we to lived next door to that I told you earlier about with the occurrence with my mother. They lived at Roseville, this is long after my father died, went to visit them and I had a rash and they actually had a doctor visiting them but for ethical reasons he wouldn't look at me. They called a doctor in an and he said, "Stand up", and I was pink

07:00 all. That's why they called it scarlet fever and I had a terribly sore throat. He said, "You've got scarlet fever. You'll have to go out to the coast hospital". I was in a ward full of little children out there. It was quite cheery.

Why did they put you in a ward full of children?

It was an infectious ward and I was the only adult with scarlet fever. Because I was a

07:30 in a ward full of children I wasn't allowed to have a button that I could claim the nurses attention with it. Because of that they used to leave the toilet receptacles in the middle of the floor and I badly wanted to use one of these and I had to get out of bed to collect it myself. I could hear the nurses and the young doctors talking in the day room

08:00 but I couldn't make them hear me and I went to pick up one of these pans myself and I found I couldn't walk. I just had to get back into bed. Eventually I used a Bushells tea jar. I told the sister when she came in the morning, but I got rheumatic fever because of that. I don't know what their policy is now whether they put adults in a ward with children

08:30 but it is not a good idea.

How long were you in hospital for?

It was about nine weeks I think. We lived up three flights of stairs in a flat at Bellevue Hill. I wasn't allowed to go down the stairs for three months because I had a murmur in my heart then. It has been all right since.

While you were in hospital what happened to your mother?

09:00 She had to be on her own, there was no other, I mean I was in hospital she couldn't. She used to come out to see me near Long Bay actually, the coast hospital is way out in the middle of nowhere. It takes awhile to get transport out there.

It was quite a long time before you started to feel better?

Well it was a long time because they had to

09:30 make sure I hadn't any bad effects on my heart.

When you were better to go back to work, did you want to return back to photo colouring?

Well I didn't, I did try tentatively to get, I did get another job with a man called, that was after I went to England I think. I went to England not long after that

10:00 in 1951 and I stayed in England for two years and then I came home and then I did work for another photographer called Leonard Cunningham then. I had to work sometimes on Saturday morning. We used to photograph a lot of small children and we had a man called Mr Butterworth. He was like something out of Dickens, he was a funny man. He had no idea about children and one day

10:30 I was going around the floor with this little pussy cat saying, "Here comes the little pussy cat, here it comes, here it comes" and I got the kid the state that it was quite a wide smile and Mr Butterworth went up to him face to face right in his face and said, "Boo", immediately there was a great flood of tears. The shock and the fright he wet his pants, so I had to dry his pants in front of the radiator. They had a lot of

11:00 Greek weddings and things like that too, hundreds of people hundreds standing on chairs all over the place.

Just to go back to your initial photo colouring jobs. What was Russell Roberts like as a person?

Russell Roberts, Russ was a very nice man. He used to row for Shore and he had a back problem because of rowing he rowed for years and

11:30 he was a very artistic man. He did some wonderful photography. It was, Danes was a portrait studio and it was just portraits of people. I did try to do and I've got inside a little miniature photograph of my Grandmother that I started to stipple with very tiny dots of paint in the background.

12:00 But it's quite interesting.

Did you paint many of your own photographs?

I did a couple, yes. I don't whether I've got any here now. That one was hand, it wasn't coloured by me but somebody else at Russell Roberts. That is hand coloured.

What was Reg Perrier like?

Reg Perrier was a very nice man. His father was Mons Perrier, one of the earlier photographers in Sydney, he was quite famous really.

12:30 Reg when he left Russell Roberts he did a lot of documentaries. He knew Damian Parer and I am trying to think of another man who was well known. But there were a band of people who were very good photographers. I learnt colouring before I actually started the course. I went to Jean Casneau and her

13:00 father was quite a famous photographer. I learnt more from her than I had in three years under postwar reconstruction. I think Dane Studios really kept me going as long as they could because they almost free labour. I got £2 a week and I used to give £1 to my mother. I didn't have much money.

Can you explain to me what you mean by postwar reconstruction?

Postwar Reconstruction

13:30 was an organisation to rehabilitate ex-service people and one of my friends did a matriculation and then she did a course in physiotherapy at Sydney University and I wished I had done something, but because of the sentiment attached to my father I decided to do this photographic colouring. I could have done the same thing really but it would have been easier

14:00 to go to University than it would have been to a hospital nursing, because I would have had to live in at the hospital. There was another man Hinder, can't think what his Christian name was now. He was a very good artist, because they used a lot of artwork

14:30 like that Helena Rubinstein ad, you know they drew things around them. It was very interesting, it probably would have been more interesting if I had stayed there but I wasn't getting the retouching training and they had other women like Margot O'Donnell who were more professional than I.

Was the photographic colouring training that you did part of the postwar reconstruction?

15:00 Yes it was but I probably would have been better to have gone back to do another stenographic course career-wise, because eventually I went, the last job I had was at P&O and I was in the passenger department. I was there for 10 years, but they retired me early.

Did you find

15:30 **that your war time experience gave you more opportunities when the war finished?**

No not really because I had been nursing for over three years and I didn't continue that and I had to relearn typing and shorthand and with photographic colouring

16:00 I knew that it wouldn't lead to very much because the industry didn't have an award and it meant that whatever the photographer paid you that was what he paid you, you didn't have any redress. They just put me off when I had scarlet fever so I didn't keep my job so those sort of things were pretty rife in that industry.

16:30 **You mentioned that you went to England.**

Yes I went to the UK in 19- , I sensed that I would have to look after my mother. My mother was very involved with her mother at that stage. At 83 she was very self willed and she got knocked down by a bus so Mum had to spend a lot of time with her at that stage. I thought if I don't, I had the opportunity, other friends of mine were going overseas

17:00 and I thought that if I didn't get away while I was still young enough and she was still young enough in a way to cope, although she had a problem, I would be pinned down for the rest of my life so I spent two years in the UK and then I came back and had to knuckle down. It was very interesting I enjoyed it.

What was postwar England like?

Postwar England was still in 1951, still

17:30 pretty battered and worn. I went to see St Paul's Cathedral for instance. It was very badly bombed around about the altar and parts of the east end of London and places like Coventry in the midlands. I stayed with some people in Birmingham, Birmingham got quite badly bombed. There was a lot of bombing,

18:00 there was a lot of air raids in that part of England and the rationing was still. I used to buy one egg and eat it on Saturday. We lived on things like black pudding. I had never struck black pudding before, it is ghastly stuff.

What is black pudding made out of?

Offal. And it's offal too. We

18:30 were fairly poor. We couldn't afford to have the gas fire on full range and we used to put a Vulcan heater on but the kerosene smelt terrible. Once the landlady would let us have a bath if we put 6d. in the geyser each time and the bathroom was situated so that this thing was over the bath and it only gave you a certain amount of water

19:00 from the money you put into it and there was a bare window above and you could see the bus people, the top storey of the bus going by as you were trying, I used to have a shower in the bath because it didn't take so much water. Eventually we had a very large sink in the kitchen. It was more like an industrial sink and I could get in this thing and my friend Jean threatened to photograph me seated in this thing

19:30 because she thought it was so extraordinary, there I was in the kitchen having a bath. A lot of people in England did that.

What kind of work did you do there in England?

Partly I worked for a firm in South Kensington doing photographic colouring and they were very good to me actually and part of the time I spent typing or doing shorthand, so I combined the two.

20:00 **It must have been a bit of relief to have some time away from home?**

Oh it was really. It's amazing, I don't know whether you have ever sailed by ship at all, but it's the most amazing feeling. Once you get on a ship you feel as if you have left all your worries behind, it is really quite strange everything seems to fall off your shoulders. I went on a little ship

20:30 on the Shaw Saville line called the Arawa, it emanated from New Zealand and there just over 100 passengers but unfortunately because there was a wharf strike we couldn't go to Durban. I would have liked to have seen Durban but we spent two days in Cape Town and a day in the Canary Islands on the way up. We passed St Helena where Napoleon lived for a little while. It was quite interesting.

21:00 **What was the ship?**

The Arawa. I have still got little ships wheel with Arawa written across it.

Did you travel to England on your own?

Yes I did. But we had a young country boy staying with us at the time and when I got on the ship he introduced himself to all the cabins nearby and he said to them all, "You've got to look after little Bett".

21:30 I met a few girls that I wrote to for quite a long while afterwards.

So the time came for you to leave England?

Yes I came home. Actually I had a letter from a very dear friend who said that they thought because of Mum I should come home as soon as I could. Unfortunately I had to come home before the coronation. I was quite upset about that. I remember listening to it

22:00 on the radio with tears streaming down my cheeks. I saw it all on newsreel and everything anyway. Another friend of mine who didn't see very much she stayed all day in the Mall, she sat in one particular spot on the curb and the horse guards came and parked their horses there. All she saw was a horse's rump.

22:30 Some people didn't see it even though they were there.

So your mother had started to deteriorate?

Yes she was. She had, being the youngest sister she had two sisters and two brothers, no three brothers that's right, and they all had families and she was on her own, she was the only widow, so she was designated

23:00 to look after her mother mainly. She wasn't a person who could take responsibility I think. My grandmother was a very self-willed sort of person. She wanted a bit of help probably.

When you arrived back in Sydney, did you notice any changes?

Yes, a lot of changes really.

23:30 Sydney was very dirty compared to London at that time but I believe now that London has deteriorated a lot and it is probably dirtier than Sydney. It seemed to me at that time and it was very difficult to get

used to another transport system again and all those sorts of things. I had got used to being independent to a certain extent.

What were the differences between war time

24:00 **Sydney and postwar Sydney?**

A lot of differences really. We didn't have rationing any more and there was no blackout. Never did have a really intense blackout in Sydney, it was more of a brown out, it was. I didn't ever feel threatened walking through that. There were a couple of murders here in there probably in Brisbane I think and in Melbourne

24:30 but not so much in Sydney. Nobody threatened you or anything, it didn't worry me at all. There was a difference because there was the threat of war hanging over you all the time but once the war ended there was no threat at all.

You actually wrote the story

25:00 **of the VADs. Why did you decide to do this?**

I felt we were always the underdog and we still are. There were 24,000 AWAS and about the same number of WAAAF. And the WRANS were the senior service although they were small in numbers, they weren't big in numbers but mainly the WAAAFs started in 1941

25:30 the AWAS started a little while after that I think, not long after. But they're pretty much, and they were written up in government, the WAAAF were written up in governemt Hansard and parliament at the time as been an auxiliary to the air force at that stage. The WAAAF didn't go overseas at all because they were mainly

26:00 a lot of them were maintenance women for the aircraft and all that sort of thing. They did a very good job and so did the AWAS. They manned gunning stations and things like that to relieve the men to go over. Always, and because they changed the uniform from blue to khaki nobody knew who we were or what we were or what we did. I have tried to clear that up to a certain extent.

26:30 And just recently about 12 months ago, I got some letters from the Archives Office that proves that the change from VAD to AAMWS, they changed the whole uniform. Their argument was because of the dyes and it was too expensive to dye

27:00 all our, there were only 8,000 of us. The WAAAF wore blue, the Australian Army Nursing Service wore grey they were fewer than we were actually, but they wore their own colour, so I don't know what the argument was. All we had to distinguish us from the AWAS was a red cross, we had nothing else. So nobody knew what we were

27:30 or what we did or were we working in hospitals. The medical services generally, even the MOs, as if we were some sort of adjunct to civilian forces or something. They didn't sort of realise of what we were doing or where we were going. The AANS went to England, some VAs went to England, VAs went to the Middle East.

28:00 Medicos went all over the world, all over Middle East and some went to Italy and places like that if they were in the air force, they went to Italy but it just was a case of non-recognition. That was why I wrote it, to try to clear up a few things. Unfortunately I published it

28:30 myself so it is a different matter to getting a… I tried Allen and Unwin and I went to see a man called Mr Iremonger and he really lived up to his name. He was watching his watch the whole time I was there. He just saw this old lady with a series of manuscripts and he had "Girls of Grit" in front of him written by the land army people and he said, "Now there is a story."

29:00 I said, "That is all hearsay. There is no research done in it at all. The land army were part of the manpower directorate. They were never in the army ever and they didn't have any restrictions related to service women at all". He looked at me but he didn't want to look at my manuscript. It is very difficult

29:30 because people realise if you are writing a service thing you are not going to make a lot of money out of it. It is very hard to get a publisher.

It sounds like there is a lot of competition between the AAMWS and the AWAS.

Yes. There was. I can't understand why in a way because we had a completely different function. Some of the AWAS came to us as ambulance drivers and I've got a few friends who are AWAS, we are not enemies or anything

30:00 but it is funny, we just feel if we have been pushed under the mat somehow.

Did you become a member of any Veteran Associations?

I belong to the AAMWS Association. I didn't actually go to anything for about 25 years because I had a particular friend who said, "No Mounty. I'm not going to any of those things

30:30 they will be talking about washing machines, babies nappies and food". I didn't want to go on my own so I didn't go and then I went with Margaret Love who was at Goulburn with me she said it was the 25th anniversary, she said, "Mounty you have got to come to that" and I have been going ever since.

Just out of interest where did you get your nickname Mounty?

31:00 Because of my name. Nobody was going to say Mountbatten in full

Who gave you that name?

Pixie probably in the beginning. You always got nicknames.

I believe there is a story with the brooch you are wearing today?

This little brooch is a swan and sometime during the war I think it must have been

31:30 1943 or '44, Major Snelling who was our NSW Commander was asked by the military hierarchy if she would, they put the girls in the laundries and she thought, "This is too much, I am not going to have my girls working in the laundries of all things, laundries", so she said to the General, I don't know who he was but she said to him, "I am not going to have my girls working in laundries" and he said, "No the trouble with you Major Snelling is that all

32:00 your geese are swans". So one year we had all these swans given to us. I think a lot of people think I barrack for the footballers.

You also were discussing before that some of the girls decided to go into laundry units so that they could get overseas.

Yes well they were told that if they joined the laundry, because they wanted to get as many people in the laundry units

32:30 as possible that it would be an incentive to going overseas, but they didn't get overseas. Finally they said it was too hot to work the steam machines. It probably would have been too in the tropics. So they didn't go which was a source of great annoyance.

Tell me what do you think of the current conflict that has been happening in Iraq?

33:00 I have got divided opinion about that in a way, I feel because of what happened in Germany with Hitler and Mussolini and the various dictators being they got away with a lot and Hitler if he had been stopped sooner when Neville Chamberlain went over to

33:30 form a peace treaty with him, if he had been stopped sooner the war wouldn't have taken six years. We had a lot of unnecessary killing and imprisonment and torture because it went on for so long. I felt if it could have been as it was ended quickly and they got rid of Saddam Hussein. I know they are going to have a lot of problems with

34:00 it. It is going to be divided Muslim tribes and all sorts of things. I don't think we here fully understand the implications of all that. It has its fors and against I guess.

How important has it been for you to maintain contact with

34:30 **your friends from the war through the AAMWS Association?**

A lot of us came from different backgrounds, some of us came from more or less the same background but because it was a very, particularly in 1942, it was a terribly uncertain time and we were all flung together and we just got on.

35:00 I think I formed an instant friendship with Pix and we have remained friends for 60 years. I hear from them all and we had a reunion last year up at Bathurst and we have had reunion for about three years running now because we realise that the tide is going out and it's important because it is amazing. We just take off the years where we left off.

35:30 **What do you do at your reunions?**

Talk.

We are just in the middle of talking about the reunions and what you get up to at the reunions?

We had a very big one a while ago down at Canberra because they installed a memorial to the Women's

36:00 Services. I don't know whether you have seen it, it is a platform of almost bathroom tiles in various colours. The artist has got a very aesthetic conception by the artist. It looks like a skating board with a moat in the middle. It's got a sort of crevice

36:30 right in the middle, it is supposed to separate the past from the present. You have to stand on it with your back to the nearest wall to read the inscription. We saw this on a very wet windy day which didn't help but it cost a lot of money and it is down in a valley where nobody can see it.

37:00 I mean they wouldn't know what it was. They'd think it was a bathroom floor being constructed ahead of the rest of a building. If they had supplied a bed in a hospital with a plaque on it, it would have been fine that would have been enough.

Betty we are almost coming to the end of the interview.

37:30 **I was just wondering if you had anything else that you wanted to say at this point?**

On Anzac Day all of us are grateful to realise that people recognise what was done during the war and previous wars, in all the wars that Australian's have been involved in

38:00 but it is heartening to see we had little children come up to us and shake our hand. It brings tears to your eyes, it does really.

Is there anything else that you

Quite overwhelming actually and you feel unworthy to a certain extent of it, but I am very proud to have nursed those

38:30 boys because some of them suffered incalculable traumas during their service. I am very proud of that.

I bet they are very grateful for what you did for them, what you and the girls did for them.

I think we will leave it there, Graham and I would like to thank you

39:00 **for your time and for sharing your story with us. It has been a real privilege hearing what you did, thank you very much Betty.**

Thank you, I didn't do anything spectacular.

You did, thank you.