

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Anna Schofield (Nan) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 6th June 2003**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/439>

### Tape 1

00:34 **Okay Anna it's very nice to have you with us today. I want to start with the first part of the interview if you wish, if you if you could explain to me where you were born and where you grew up?**

Yes I was born in the north of Ireland in a little village called Ballinderry

01:00 and came to Australia when I was 11.

**Eleven?**

I was one of a family of six, the youngest one, who are all deceased now. I'm the last one left and I was educated in Melbourne.

**So both your parents were Irish?**

Yes both Scottish Irish.

**Scottish Irish?**

01:30 Yes

**And what about their religious background?**

Religious?

**Yes.**

Yes I was brought up as a very, very strict Presbyterian.

**I see.**

We weren't allowed to read story books on Sunday we were only allowed to read religious stories and certainly we weren't allowed to play any games. Tennis or anything was quite unheard of.

**I see. Did you have much contact**

02:00 **with Catholics?**

Yes many of our friends in the village were Roman Catholics but we didn't... there was no animosity between the two religions.

**Right. When you went to school did you shift from Ireland to Liverpool in England?**

The last year I had in Liverpool which I hated.

02:30 I didn't like Liverpool at all.

**Why's that?**

It always seemed to be dirty and of course I was young and I was away from the family which probably made a lot of difference and I got mumps when I was over there too which didn't help.

**You got mumps?**

Mumps.

**I see. Your father, your parents what did they do for a living?**

He was what they

03:00 called a gentleman farmer which meant that he didn't rely on the land for his income and of course my

mother was a house wife.

**House wife yes, okay. Whose decision was it, basically, to come to Australia?**

After the First World War my two eldest brothers came to Australia and

03:30 Mother decided we'd join them. I don't I don't know why. The decision was made when I was in England.

**Did you have any relatives in Australia during that period?**

Yes yes.

**Oh you did?**

Yes had an uncle who was a Presbyterian minister at Berwick.

**I see. Who out of your family participated in the First World**

04:00 **War?**

None of them.

**None of them?**

No

**That's interesting.**

No none of them.

**Your father was not inclined in any way?**

No. My father died in 1915.

**He died in 1915 and how did he die?**

I'm not quite sure. I know he was an asthmatic but I'm not quite sure what caused his death.

**Okay. Right that must have**

04:30 **very badly affected you. So you were three years old at the time was it?**

Yes.

**I see so you were very young. Did your mother remarry after?**

No no.

**No I see.**

She brought up her family of six on her own.

**How did she manage this bringing up six children?**

I really don't know. She just coped which I had to do

05:00 later too.

**So the others, I take it, would have been a lot older, they would have been working to support the family?**

Yes.

**Yes. So your family background... you would have been struggling in England financially, your family, after your father passed away?**

I didn't. I wasn't ever told that we struggled and I remember they were very, very

05:30 pleased with the amount we got for the when the farm was sold. But it was a lovely big two storey house with a gate house where old Mr and Mrs Carmichael lived and when my father drove us home from church old Mr Carmichael would run out and open the gates. Of course it was a

06:00 jig. A jig? No we called it a trap I think. A pony and trap.

**When you came to Australia you were 11 years old?**

Yes just before my 11th birthday.

**Do you have any memory of that?**

Oh yes. Yes. I've been back twice and I remembered all about it and where everything was around

06:30 the farm.

**So who out of your family came to Australia? Was it all your siblings?**

Yes

**Everyone came?**

Yes

**I see. Now where did you settle first?**

Well we really settled in East Malvern. We went to stay first up at Beaconsfield with our relatives until we bought the house in East Malvern and then we lived there.

07:00 **What took place after coming to East Malvern? Where did you attend school?**

Yes. I went to PLC.

**PLC?**

Yes.

**What's that, I'm sorry?**

Presbyterian Ladies' College.

**Oh I see right okay.**

In East Melbourne.

**In East Melbourne?**

Yes.

**Was that a private or a public school?**

Well a private school but I think

07:30 they call Scotch College, I think they call them public schools do they? But they are private schools.

**Okay. And what was that like? Did you...**

I loved it.

**How far did you progress in your years?**

I did matric [matriculation].

**Okay. During the 1920s and '30s, especially the '30s, did your family have any problems with the**

08:00 **Depression?**

Oh I think so. Yes. I think my second brother because he was married with two children and I think he had quite a few problems because he lived in Sydney then but the rest didn't. My eldest sister taught at Glamorgan which was a private school in Toorak and has now

08:30 been taken over by Geelong Grammar and she was there for about 40 years as a teacher.

**Forty years? That's a long time isn't it? So tell us about your school, your schooling days? What are your fondest memories of it?**

Sport.

**Sport?**

Yes

**What sort of sport did you play?**

Oh I was in the basketball team and we just participated in every

09:00 thing. but I loved I loved PLC. I still go back there at every reunion. They call us the 60 years plus because it's over 60 years since we've left.

**What was East Malvern like at the time, or living in Malvern at the time during the '30s?**

Oh much quieter than at present.

09:30 It wasn't nearly so busy.

**Was it more of a middle-class area?**

Yes.

**In the 1930s?**

It's always been middle to upper class, it's always been....

**Okay. Did you have any issues with or rather I should say encounters with sustenance workers during the Depression?**

Yes certainly. A man used to come round

10:00 with trays selling shoe laces and oh there were always people coming to the door trying to sell little bits of this and that.

**And how did your mother react to this?**

Oh well she helped them when she could, if she could.

**Was there a general feeling of,**

10:30 **or general understanding. of the hardships people were facing during that time?**

Yes definitely.

**Were people closer together or were there more divisions as a result of the Depression?**

No I think they were closer.

**How did your mum help out? You said that she, if they came to the door...**

Well she'd buy anything that, you know, little bits and pieces that they were selling. And my cousin who was an

11:00 orchardist up at Beaconsfield at that time had to bring his own apples round to sell from door to door.

**Did you know any sustenance workers?**

No.

**None personally?**

No

**You had known none. Were there any in Malvern at the time, like you used see who lived there?**

I don't think living there.

**Yes. Where would these people come from, these sustenance workers?**

11:30 I really don't know.

**Now I take it you travelled around Melbourne often. Did you go to other suburbs like the northern suburbs?**

Well not nearly so much because you see cars had just started to come. We didn't have a car and there wasn't nearly so much movement as there is now.

12:00 **So you used to walk most of the time?**

Yes, yes well I had to get the train and then a tram to school, you see, because my school PLC at that stage was in East Melbourne.

**I see. What did you know about previous wars before?**

12:30 **Before the Second World War?**

Not a lot I don't think. Of course we always commemorated the end of the war ,Armistice Day, very much more than we do now. And also the Queen's birthday of course that was always a holiday on the 24th of May.

13:00 **How much did you now about the Boer War for instance?**

Well not a lot because soldiers don't talk much about it. I remember this Beaconsfield cousin he was wounded quite once very badly in the Somme and he came to stay with us in Northern Ireland and

13:30 he was putting his puttees on. Do you know what puttees are?

**No.**

They were like khaki bandages which they....

**Oh yes, sorry, around the legs. Yes that's right.**

And he started his from the bottom I think it was because he was infantry and I had an uncle who was cavalry and he rolled his from the top and of course I was very adamant that he was making a mistake.

14:00 I was only three at the time and I said, "You're putting them on the wrong way."

**You can remember from three years old?**

Well I don't know if I remember it. Well I remember the family talking about it.

**Did you did you say you had an uncle in the cavalry?**

A cousin. Yeah an uncle in the cavalry. Yes an uncle from Liverpool.

**Well, so what was his name?**

John English Bolton.

**Right. So he served in the First World**

14:30 **War?**

Yes.

**I see. Did you have any uncles who served in the war?**

No I don't think so.

**Did he survive the war?**

Yes.

**He did?**

Yes they both survived. The one from Clay from Beaconsfield he was badly wounded twice and each time he had leave he'd come and stay with us but they both survived.

15:00 **How was World War I looked at in England from your memory? Can you remember meeting any veterans?**

No

**World War I veterans when you were living in England?**

I don't remember meeting any.

**No.**

No.

**Only those incidences you've just told me?**

No. No I don't remember. But we all had that awful post-war flu when so

15:30 many died.

**The influenza. Spanish influenza?**

Yes

**Yes**

And of course being a village each time someone died, the village church bell would toll and we'd be lying in bed listening to the bell tolling all the time. But my mother nursed us all through that.

**Coming from England to Australia, you must have come across the divisions between Catholics and Protestants in Australia**

16:00 **in Melbourne? Did you ever....**

No we've never had that problem, not ever.

**You never saw any of that or experienced any...**

No. not any of it. My brother was in the Volunteer Reserve when there was an uprising after the First World War but oh they used to have a wonderful time. They'd have to go out each night and

16:30 if there was any traffic they'd be on ponies and traps, they'd have to go through the thing and see, you know, they didn't have any ammunition. But there was no, we didn't have any problem with the uprisings but in that area....

**What do you know about the uprising? Are you talking about the Irish uprising in Belfast?**

Yes yes.

**Yes. In 1915 was it? Or**

17:00 **after the war?**

Oh no post-war.

**Post-war?**

Be probably nineteen I suppose.

**What did you know about that uprising. That was with John [means Michael] Collins wasn't it?**

Oh yes. Well I didn't know a lot about it except that we all had to have Union Jacks flying out through our windows and they had to be unfurled. I had had a couple of old aunts

17:30 who lived in a bigger city called Lisburn and they had to see that the flag was always unfurled and hadn't caught in the wind.

**Was this in that small town you lived in?**

No. Yes we had to have the Union Jack too.

**I see. Why do you have to put the Union Jack out? Just to be identified?**

Yes I

18:00 suppose the opposition didn't, I suppose the IRA [Irish Republican Army] I don't know if they were called IRA then. .I don't really know

**Do you know what the rebellion was about?**

Well it was supposed to be a religious thing but as far as we were concerned a lot of our friends were Roman Catholics and it didn't make any difference.

**Yes.**

I think in these things there's always the

18:30 few who go overboard aren't there?

**So what did you know about or what did you come to learn about Australia when you came here? Did you know about the conscription debate for instance in the First World War?**

Yes we knew there was conscription.

**Right. Now England had conscription?**

Yes.

**But Australia didn't?**

Oh didn't

19:00 they? Well I didn't know that.

**You weren't aware of that?**

No

**So you don't recall any such instances where you saw division between Catholics and Protestants in Melbourne?**

No no.

**You don't?**

Nope.

**Okay. Did you have Catholic friends here?**

Not a lot in Australia but I do now. I've got two sons-in-law who are Roman Catholics.

19:30 **And what about the Empire? What did the Empire mean to you?**

Oh everything. Everything. It was just we belonged to the Empire and...

**What is the Empire? Can you tell us what it is?**

Well it's...

**To you that is?**

Well it was the whole of the domains that England

20:00 ruled and on the maps they were all in red and there was so much red in those days. Well were all very patriotic in those days.

**Do you still feel the same way today?**

Yes.

**About the Empire?**

Yes, very much so.

**And you also believed in the monarchy as well?**

Yes. I'm a monarchist. Definitely.

20:30 **Why did you like the monarchy at the time?**

Well we were brought up in that way and it's always worked very well hasn't it? No problems like there are here at the moment. Even when the Governor-General was sent from England, was appointed an Englishman

21:00 there weren't any problems then but there seem to be now.

**What did you know about the Anzac tradition?**

Well we didn't when we came out. We didn't really know about it.

**You didn't know much about it when you came here?**

No.

**What did you learn in PLC about ANZACS [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps]?**

21:30 **Did you ever study history?**

Yes certainly.

**What did they teach you in the history classes? What sort of history was it?**

Oh very, very different from what they learn now. We had to learn all the big rulers of England and the years they ruled from so and so to, so and so. You had to know all those off by heart and

22:00 know all Napoleon's battles and well, very different.

**You knew a lot of those things?**

Mmmm.

**So with Anzac what sort of things did they teach you about the First World War and ANZAC, Australia's role?**

I don't remember much about that at all. It was

**What do you remember of Anzac at all during the '30s?**

22:30 No I don't

**And '20s?**

I don't even remember Anzac Day in those days.

**Right.**

I don't think that was drilled into us at all.

**You never went for an Anzac Day march to view?**

No no, no. I don't remember them even having them but I suppose they did.

23:00 But it wasn't the big affair that it is now.

**Did you find that when you came to Australia and you got acclimatised, accustomed to the culture here did you find a great deal of difference between here and Britain?**

Well I didn't personally. I think my family did, the older members.

**How did your mum cope**

23:30 **with the change?**

Oh she coped very well. It was my elder sister who was the most home sick but the first morning my mother, when she woke, her nephew said to her, "Aunty did you sleep well last night?" And she said, "Oh yes except for that big mosquito." And he said, "Mosquito? Didn't know," and she said, "Yes I've got it," and it was big blowfly.

24:00 But before we left Ireland they told us the birds didn't sing in Australia and all those sort of rumours went round.

**Well what are the other rumours they told you in Ireland about Australia?**

Well we expected to see kangaroos hopping all round the place and you know, that sort of thing.

**How did people see Australia there? Did they see it as a nice place to go to?**

Yes. But it was

24:30 a huge undertaking to take for anyone to go to Australia. I mean it was it was a major movement. See it took us six weeks on the sea to get here which looking back now seems incredible doesn't it?

**Yes.**

25:00 **How did you come to Australia by sea? Which route did you take, where did you stop over?**

Round by Africa. I remember them showing me Table Mountain for the first time.

**So that was Cape Town?**

Mmmm

**Where was the next port?**

Oh well, I would think

25:30 Australia. I don't think...

**Okay so just two ports of call?**

I don't think...I remember by the Canary Islands it was terribly rough. At the Bay of Biscay everybody was seasick.

**You got seasick as well?**

Mmm. Very.

**Where they really big waves you were experiencing?**

Yes I was of course only, well not quite, 11 and I dashed out of the dining room once to be sick

26:00 and this steward said to mother, "Oh you'd better go, she might be blown overboard." But it was a good thing the move from Ireland. I mean we've got friends over there now. They seem to be stuck in a rut

26:30 but they travelled to the south of Ireland and they think it's a huge undertaking.

**To the south of Ireland?**

And it's such a little place.

**Yes. How did your brothers when they came to Australia, how did they view Anzac?**

I haven't any...

**Any of them join the militia here?**

27:00 No. The youngest one was in the Second World War.

**In the Second World War? But before that did they join any militias around?**

Don't think so.

**What made you interested in nursing?**

I'd always wanted to be a nurse because I had two older great aunts in Ireland and I thought they were wonderful and that's all

27:30 I ever wanted to do.

**You had two great aunts did you say?**

Yes

**Who were nurses?**



Yes.

**All right. Clearly they were involved in the First World War?**

I don't, I don't think so. No I don't think so but they used to nurse around the district.

**Tell us more about your great aunts, how you came to know them?**

Well they lived in Lisburn and I

28:00 used to go in and stay with them each weekend because I went to dancing classes so I got to know them very well. But they were very stately old ladies in long dresses down to their ankles.

**Did you have any family members, whether they be distance family or close for that matter,**

28:30 **that were actually nuns or...?**

No.

**Or in the priesthood?**

No.

**Nothing?**

No.

**How did you view nuns, coming from a strict religious background?**

Well as I say we were never anti Roman Catholics. Not ever.

29:00 I mean they had their religion and we had ours and that was that. One of my sisters was a bit inclined to be a bit anti-Roman Catholic. I think possibly when she came here Archbishop Mannix was the archbishop and I don't think he went down with everyone very well.

**You didn't like him either?**

Oh

29:30 well I was too young and it didn't really worry me. I'm only quoting from what I heard round the family.

**So with your involvement in nursing, can you walk us through your first**

30:00 **experience ?**

Yes. I put my name down on the reserve list at the Alfred Hospital and mother wasn't very keen for me to be a nurse. So when the letter came she didn't tell me it was there because they wouldn't take me till I was over 18 and then eventually she showed it to me and of course I was excited. And

30:30 there was no Preliminary Training School. We reported on the morning when we started and were just sent to the ward and that was that. I was sent to the men's surgical and my mother was horrified but actually they, well, a surgical ward, surgical nursing was always what I liked best

31:00 and we worked very hard in those days. We went on at six o'clock. We were woken at half past five. The night sister knocked on our door saying, "Five thirty, nurse," and we'd be up and on duty by six. And you either worked right through till three o'clock or you had three hours off and then

31:30 worked till eight o'clock at night. And then after two months you were put on night duty where we worked 12 weeks without a night off which was dreadful. We went on duty at eight and we worked through till six in the morning. One night a week we had a late pass till I think it was half past ten. I'm not quite sure now.

32:00 And then after those 12 weeks we got a day off for each week we'd worked which was absolute heaven. But it was hard work in those days because we didn't just do nursing you know. We did cleaning and all that sort

32:30 of thing and then eventually I was sent to the theatre when I'm about 18 months and I was terrified. I used to hide out in the day room and the sister used to say to one of the nurses, "Tell nurse she's to come in." And then after I'd been there about a week she said to me, "My goodness you've improved,"

33:00 and of course from that time on it was all theatre work as far as I was concerned. And during my third year I was put on theatre night duty where we went on at half past five and if there weren't any patients we cleaned all the theatres except one. We kept one ready for use if there were any accidents

33:30 and after we'd cleaned the three theatres we could go off to bed. But of course if there were accidents sometimes we worked right through till eight o'clock in the morning. But I loved it and then when I finished matron asked me to go back

34:00 to do my staff year and put me into the theatre.

**Now what year are we talking here?**

We're talking 1935.

**Thirty-five?**

And Matron Wilson, who was our matron, then she advised us all to put our names down on the army

34:30 Reserve because Sister Hannah who was in charge of the theatre I went to had gone to England for two years and she came back saying that war was inevitable. So Miss Wilson said, "Put your names down on the reserve list," and when Jean Hannah went to England I said, "Whose taking over here?" And she said, "You are." And I said, "Oh

35:00 I couldn't possibly." I'd only done eight months staff nursing but in those days of course you just did as you were told. But I loved it. So I was in charge of the theatre then for some time and then I decided to go to Sydney for a while where I did theatre work at Chatswood

35:30 Hospital.

**Chatswood yes?**

Yes., came back here and nursed at Vimy House for a short time until I was called up and then after I was called up Sister Vaisey, who had been my sister when I first started theatre work,

36:00 rang me and said, "Would you like to take over Sir Allan Newton's job as his special nurse?" She said, "I've been called up." And I said, "Well I have too," but I was glad I had. So then there was all the excitement of getting our uniforms and before we embarked we were taken up to the

36:30 drill hall at A'Beckett Street and a sergeant major showed us how to march and swing our arms and then we marched through Melbourne. I was posted to the 2/1st Casualty Clearing Station and we marched through Melbourne with the nurses from the

37:00 2nd General Hospital and the physiotherapists. We got a great reception because we were the first women to go from Victoria. Streets were all lined and there was cheering. It was very exciting.

**How many women all up?**

I beg your pardon?

**How many women in this unit?**

Eight of us.

**Eight?**

Yes and then before we left Sir Winston

37:30 Dugan, who was the Governor, he gave us a reception at Government House which is now Stonnington. And eventually we were told to, I think someone came round and collected our cabin trunks and our kitbags

38:00 and stretchers and put them on board ship and we collected it in the nurses' sitting room at the Alfred Hospital at night and we were taken by taxi down to the ship. That was April 1940.

**Where were you the day war was declared?**

I was at

38:30 home. I can...

**Do you remember that day well?**

Yes I do. I remember we were sitting listening to the radio. Yes. But I mean we weren't upset about going overseas. As far as we were concerned it was a great big adventure.

**Did any idea of the magnitude of the**

39:00 **war enter your head?**

No.

**Not by...**

Well they all said it would be over in a few months.

**Okay. Is that what your mother thought though?**

Oh yes everybody thought it wouldn't last long.

**So your mother didn't think it might be a repetition of the First World War?**

No I don't think it ever occurred to anyone. You see Italy hadn't joined in then, nor Japan. It was entirely Germany.

39:30 **What did you know about Hitler?**

Oh well nothing to his advantage. We were had all the horror stories and of course it was I was going to say it was on television but it wasn't because we didn't have television, but there were always photographs of him you know, "Heil Hitler,"

40:00 standing making speeches.

**Did you think he was doing a lot of good for Germany before the war started?**

No no. No-one thought that.

**You didn't? When did you start to hear his name?**

I couldn't remember that. Sometime during '39 I suppose. I mean not a long time before.

**In the mid '30s did you start hearing his name?**

Yes

40:30 I would think so.

**You used to read the newspapers did you?**

Yes.

**Okay. You were you an avid reader?**

Very much so.

**I see. Okay.**

My cross word puzzle doing.

**Well on that note we should change the tape.**

## Tape 2

00:30 **Yes before, we were talking about the lead up towards the war and your involvement as a nurse and you said you were transferred to Sydney in preparations. You were one of the first people who were leaving?**

No we weren't transferred to Sydney

**Was it you were trans... Did I get it wrong there?**

No, no, I nursed in Sydney before I was called up.

**Right Okay can you tell us**

01:00 **how you came to the call up and being deployed?**

Well they just wrote a letter to say that we were called up and that I was to go to the 2/1st Casualty Clearing Station. None of us had a clue what the 2/1st Casualty Clearing Station was. I mean we knew nothing about the army.

01:30 But they had all good surgical nurses in the CCS [Casualty Clearing Station], as it's called, because we were the first women nearest the front line.

**You're the first women nearest the front line?**

Mmmm.

**Were you next to a Regimental Aid Post?**

02:00 No. The casualties go into the Regimental Aid Post and then they go to the Field Ambulance which are medical men only, no women, and then they come to us.

**The Casualty Clearing Station?**

Yes

**What happens at the Casualty Clearing Station?**

Well we assess them, and the walking wounded we send

02:30 straight on down to the Base Hospital. The more seriously wounded we kept, operated on if necessary and then sent them down when they were well enough to travel because it was a long trip.

**You said you were involved**

03:00 **in a march. It was in Melbourne I take it?**

Yes.

**Before you left?**

That was just for publicity sake as far as the public was concerned I think. That's all. We assembled up at the top of Swanson Street and I can't remember how far we marched but the crowds gave us a wonderful reception.

**How many people came to this**

03:30 **procession?**

You mean spectators?

**Yes spectators.**

Oh the streets were lined, all cheering and going on and some of them yelling, "Good on you girls." They still do that at the Anzac Day march although we're past the name of girls by now.

**How did you feel being there?**

04:00 Oh it was all excitement as far as we were concerned.

**Any particular memories of that day?**

Well yes, we were met by relatives and boyfriends and people and taken to the Australian [Hotel]. We didn't know what we were

04:30 allowed to do, whether we were allowed to have a drink or what we were supposed to do in those days but we soon found out.

**How did your mother react to you becoming a nurse? Was she for or against?**

Oh she was quite happy about me being a nurse but she wasn't very happy about me going overseas.

**Well what did she say about you going overseas?**

Well she didn't have any say in the matter.

05:00 **Were you always a strong minded individual?**

Yes.

**When you were going towards the front and involved in the CCS was it a sense of duty towards the Empire, is that what you felt?**

05:30 Oh yes, very much so.

**So did you feel like you were fighting for Australia or were you fighting for the Empire?**

The Empire.

**The Empire. Did Australia really matter to you at that time?**

Oh yes, very much so and you see most of our patients were Australians. We did get a few Indians. We got a few French, we got

06:00 quite a number of British. Well, we got Italians too but mostly Australian because you see we'd follow the battles from one place to another.

**Did your training equip you for what you were about to see?**

Yes, yes.

**You think so?**

Certainly.

06:30 **What sort of person does it take to work in a Casualty Clearing Station as far as a woman is concerned?**

As far as?

**A woman is concerned? Out of the nurses, what sort of personality does a nurse need to have to work in such an environment effectively?**

Well I don't know about the personality but your training makes you

07:00 not quite get quite so emotional. Although we did, quite, you know when people we knew came through. we did get quite upset and, you know, hearing of men we'd travelled over with who had been killed it was upsetting in that way. And to see the men so badly

07:30 wounded. Two particular lads stand out in my mind and we thought one was going to die and he had an oxygen mask on and he asked for a cigarette and we thought, "Oh I don't know" But the surgeon said, "Oh yes let him have a cigarette." I mean what did it matter? But he recovered. But they didn't ever complain. I don't remember

08:00 ever one of them complaining.

**Can you walk us through the course of events from....**

Course of events?

**Yes from your departure in Melbourne by ship where did you stop? Which areas did you stop at?**

Yes well, we stopped in...we embarked

08:30 on this particular night

**What ship was it by the way?**

Her Majesty's troop ship Neoralia which had been built by the Indian company in 1912. No mod cons [modern conveniences] of course and then the troops came on, mostly the 2/6th Battalion.

09:00 a few signallers, they came on the next day and then we took off and anchored in the side Heads overnight and then next morning off we went. And it was so windy and so rough and everybody was seasick and we travelled as far as

09:30 Fremantle where we picked up....we must have picked up the South Australians on the way but I can't remember where and then we got to Fremantle and one of our surgeons was a Fremantle man who had done his medical course here and was a resident at the Alfred when I was there and he took us

10:00 out to his house and entertained us for the day and we picked up another ship then and there were five ships in the convoy, five troop ships and we were escorted by the big Ramillies the British war ship and a couple of cruisers and off we went. But of course the Neoralia was coal burning

10:30 and she had to re-coal in Fremantle so the noise went on all night with this thing. However eventually we got into warmer water, got into Colombo and yes the Neoralia had to re-coal again and the people in Colombo were marvellous.

11:00 There was an English man and his wife took charge of us and took us up to Kandy and entertained us and off we went again and into the Red Sea and up the Suez to Port Suez. Is it Port Suez up the

11:30 top, where of course we coaled again. But at the way up at El Kantara all the troops disembarked but they took the eight of us to Port Said, what for I wouldn't know, and we were absolutely black when we got off the ship with coal dust so we hired a room at a hotel and cleaned ourselves up. We didn't stay a night

12:00 and then we had to catch a train and go back to El Kantara and cross the desert to Gaza where 2/1st AGH [Australian General Hospital] was already installed and we were put into tents with earthen floors and the

12:30 2/1st entertained us with drinks that night. So we opened up a hospital for infectious diseases there but before any were admitted we packed up again and we moved further along Gaza Ridge, excuse me, where they had ....I don't know where

13:00 these huts were built but there were huts built at various portions along the ridge and we went to a place called Castina where we opened up a hospital for minor accidents and that sort of thing. Sandfly fever and appendectomies and things and then from

13:30 Castina, I can't remember how long we were there. It's written up there we went to a place called Deerseny, which was another hut, and we were there for sometime nursing the same type of patient. And from there we went to Egypt

14:00 by train to a place called Amiriya which was west of Alexandria out in the desert and it wasn't desert of sand, there they were all little pebbles and the wind blew the pebbles on our legs. Our legs were all covered

- 14:30 with abrasions from them and things were pretty grim there, the set up. We were in tents which were dug in and camouflaged. You know they'd throw dirt over them so that the enemy aircraft won't be able to see them so easily. You know the white tents show up in the desert and we were dug right down
- 15:00 half way down. I suppose that was for camouflage but then one night there was a terrific rain storm which they don't normally have there and we were floating in water of course. But we had a hut, an ablution hut a long way away from us. We had quite a walk to it
- 15:30 and the toilet facilities were just four sticks with canvas round them. There again we nursed the same type of patients, minor accidents, appendix. A lot of the boys had very sore arms from the cholera injections and things and then we got our
- 16:00 move up to Mersa Matruh which was a ghastly train journey. We left at six o'clock in the morning, had lunch at Alamein, sandwiches about three inches thick and tea which they made by boiling water on the motor of
- 16:30 the engine. They boiled the water on the engine and made us a cup of tea which was quite good and off we went again up to Matruh where we arrived about midnight, New Year's Eve it was, and out to the barracks. They kept us a meal, I think I've got an idea it was steak and potatoes. I can't remember but it
- 17:00 was freezing. It was absolutely freezing and cold so we slept in the barracks and with all our clothes on we were still cold and then British Command hopped in and they said, no we would be sent back. They weren't they wouldn't be responsible for eight women so close to the front line.
- 17:30 However we said, no we wanted to stay and the surgeons backed us up and said they needed us. So they said, "Oh well all right." So long as we lived underground.

**So how far from the front line were you?**

I couldn't really even hazard a guess. I could probably show it to you on a

- 18:00 map but I couldn't guess. I mean we didn't hear the ammunition or anything

**You never heard the fighting where you were?**

No, no.

**Okay.**

So we went down to this dug out. It had been built originally by the British but had been occupied by the Italians before they had been driven back and it was full of bugs and they used to pop onto our collars and

- 18:30 they came out from the walls 25 feet underneath. But from there we had to cross a mine field where there was suspicions, you know, of something going on and they warned us not to pick up anything, especially biros, because they set these booby traps you know that might go off in your hand. And up at five o'clock the next
- 19:00 morning to get the theatre set up and the wards for the casualties which started arriving about midday in convoys of ambulances from the Battle of Bardia. That was the first battle that the Australians were involved in.

**Bardia? And you were involved in the CCS there?**

Yes. Yes the casualties came down to

- 19:30 us

**Okay**

And when they came they had a card in their uniform pocket saying what had been done at the Field Ambulance you know to give us an idea as what was happening. And there was one boy who came down he was a Sergeant Ben Meredith whom we knew. Actually there's a Meredith College out at La Trobe

- 20:00 called after him. He was the dean out there. And I said to one of the girls, "Oh young Ben has come through but he's lucky, he's just got gunshot wounds," right arm and leg, and when I turned the blankets down he had had his arm amputated up at the Field Ambulance. But those were the things that were upsetting. We had another patient who
- 20:30 was later... I suppose I shouldn't mention his name should I?

**Well it's up to you. You can mention it.**

Joe Gullet, who was later Speaker of the House up in Canberra.

**Joe Gullet? He was in the infantry wasn't he? A major?**

No he wasn't at that stage. He wasn't commissioned at that stage. He was a sergeant.

**Right. Was his father a politician?**

Yes Sir Henry Gullet.

**Yes. Yes.**

And he was killed in a car accident

21:00 In a plane accident. Did you remember that?

**I can't remember that though.**

Yes well he was killed and they gave Joe leave. Well Joe had his face all peppered with shrapnel and I spent ages getting these jagged things out but some of them were so deep that he had to go to the theatre. But the patients, you know, that you knew really

21:30 affected you more than the ones you didn't know although they were all such marvellous patients, uncomplaining.

**Now before we move further onto your nursing service in the CCS I'd like to track back to your stop in Ceylon in the convoy and now for the trip, the actual journey from Australia to**

22:00 **Ceylon, how long did it take?**

I don't remember that but it took three weeks to get to the Middle East.

**Three weeks to get to the Middle East? The whole journey?**

Yes

**From Australia to the Middle East?**

Yes, yes from Fremantle

**Okay. What did you know of Ceylon before you went there?**

Well I'd heard of Kandy but that's all I knew. That's all I knew of it.

**Have you read any books about the East?**

22:30 **Like India?**

No

**About the British Raj?**

Oh yes, yes I have. Yes I was always interested in them too.

**What sort of books do you remember, any particular books?**

Oh I can't remember now. My memory's not as good as it used to be.

**What about Kipling, did you like Kipling's works?**

Oh, loved Kipling.

**You did?**

Oh I remember the one about the rains came. Do you remember? Longfield, was some name

23:00 like that, wrote that one.

**Yes**

That's many, many years ago.

**What about Deeds That Won the Empire, have you read that book?**

What?

**Deeds That Won the Empire.**

No.

**You haven't?**

No.

**You must have heard of Jim Corbett, the Great White Hunter of India?**

No.

**You haven't?**

Sorry, I haven't.

**Jim Corbett. Okay. So when you came to Ceylon**

23:30 **were your impression accurate of what you thought it may be like, or were they better or if not worse?**

No certainly, certainly not worse I don't think at that stage. See we were young. I don't think we ever thought, ever had any impression as to what it was going to look like. I remember the betel nut things. They

24:00 chew betel nuts don't they?

**That's right yes. So you remember that?**

I remember that.

**How long did you get leave in Ceylon for?**

Oh only a few hours.

**A few hours?**

Yes. Only while this stupid old coaling went along. There was one other ship that had to coal too. The De Niro had to coal.

**So you were entertained by an English planter?**

Yes.

**Do you remember his name?**

I don't remember his name

24:30 I'm sorry and I didn't put it in my diary. I got so much out of that diary. Before I left Australia there were three of us left from Malvern and Mrs Raggetti who was the, this is backtracking, who was the mayoress she gave us an afternoon party for the three first nurses to leave Malvern. And

25:00 she presented each of us with a diary. Huge bouquet of flowers and a wallet with the Stonnington emblem on it. Otherwise I probably wouldn't have kept a diary because most of the girls didn't bother. But someone from the Alfred told me the other day that if the girls ever, ever loose that diary... but of course there are things in it

25:30 that I wouldn't publish. But after we left Colombo we also had more escort. We had a French ship called the Saffron. The destroyer I think it was and she sailed all through the convoy. You could see the

26:00 Strathaird I think it was ahead and then two other ships and then the poor old Neuralia and the De Niro always at the back, the two dirty old coal burning ones, and she sailed through the convoy and our band played the Marsellaise so badly we hoped that the French crew hadn't heard it because it was so badly played. But

26:30 there were all these sort of.... Oh the other thing too we had Anzac Day on board the ship and we dressed the ship and the Ramillies I think it was sailed all through saluting each ship and playing Land of Hope and Glory and God Save the Queen and Waltzing Matilda. Oh it was

27:00 all very impressive. We were all we were stuck up on the bough with the padres.

**Did you meet any Dutch soldiers?**

Dutch?

**Yes?**

No.

**None?**

No I can't remember any at any time.

**What was it like being with so many men? There were a lot of troops I understand**

27:30 **who were with that convoy?**

Well yes, a tremendous number.

**What division was this by the way? Was this...**

The 2nd



**What Australian division? Was it the 6th Division?**

The 2/6th. Yes the 6th Divvy [Division].

**The 6th Division. Australian AIF [Australian Imperial Force].**

Yes, yes

**Yes.**

And you see mostly 2/6th Battalion, 2nd AGH, 2/1st CCS, a few

28:00 signallers and of course a few, oh goodness, what do they call them? The people who supply...

**I'm sorry say again?**

The people who supply the troops with clothes and things. Service Corps, a service corps, but that's about all. But there's one very funny story because the ships were inspected,

28:30 the ship was inspected each morning by the captain of the ship, the medical officer on duty and someone else. Around they went round the ship to see that it was perfectly clean each morning. And they got up on deck one day and one big Irishman who'd had spent ages getting the place clean and somebody rushed up going to vomit, one

29:00 of the troops, and he held out his hands for it and he said, "No you don't. Not on my clean ship." We're all roared laughing. He was prepared to accept it in hand but he wasn't going to let it dirty the ship. But we were given a space up on deck to sleep because it was so hot and there was no air con [air conditioning] and that was all right but about half past four in the morning the lascar boys, the

29:30 lascar seamen would come along saying, "Washie decks. Washie decks," with their hoses so we had to pack up and go back to the cabins.

**Was it a good journey you had on the ship?**

Yes. a very good journey. We attended lectures by some of the First World War people.

**Sorry you attended... sorry?**

Some of the First World War

30:00 officers gave us lectures about what was to happen.

**Oh I see, lectures.**

And we learnt, you know, the formation of an army and we learnt what to do. You know we had no idea when the Last Post was played that you stood to attention no matter what you were doing and we also went down to the medical part and gave lectures to the orderlies and gave them a bit of basic

30:30 nursing because a lot of them hadn't done any at all, and that really paid off because they were marvellous. And there was always someone sick down there to be looked after especially with these reactions from the cholera and tetanus.

31:00 **So from the lectures you had been given what were your expectations of the Middle East and North Africa?**

Well we'd only been told about the heat. We were never told it would be cold. And of course that awful Khamsin the desert wind

31:30 it was just soul destroying.

**What's this?**

The Khamsin K-H-A-M-S-I-N. It's the desert wind that blows up. When were in Mersa Matruh and when we had a big evacuation of patients we had to wear goggles otherwise our eyes would have been ruined. These little pebbles and

32:00 dust and sand it was just blinding. Well it was sand in Matruh. There were pebbles at Amiriya.

**Where's Amiriya, in Palestine?**

No no Egypt. It's...

**Egypt?**

Yes. West of Alexandria. I can't remember how far west.

**Not far from El Alamein?**

No not far but a train journey, half a train

32:30 journey. We started at six o'clock and we had lunch at Alamein. But the Egyptian Railways aren't built for comfort either. No darling.

**Nice warm train.**

Yes.

**So when you got of at Port Suez what was your impression of**

33:00 **Egypt? Can you tell us about that please?**

Well, very hot there. Very hot and of course we couldn't think of anything but getting cleaned up, we were so dirty. And we were all intrigued with the, you know, the men who do these tricks with snakes and things. We couldn't take our eyes off them.

**Did you see that in...?**

Gully-gully men. They called them gully-gully men

33:30 didn't they?

**I'm not sure actually.**

Yes I think they say, I think that's there expression. Gully-gully and the snake comes out.

**And they're playing the flute?**

Yes.

**You must have been fairly astonished seeing that?**

Well we were. We were intrigued but there again you see we didn't know what was expected of us.

**Yes.**

I remember two of us were standing watching these Gully-gully men and

34:00 Matron Sage, who went over as a matron of the 2/2nd, she was on the other side of the road and we could see her watching us to see that we were all right.

**Did you see any of that in Colombo by any chance or Ceylon?**

Don't remember seeing any of that. No I don't remember.

**What were the people in**

34:30 **Egypt like compared to the people in Ceylon from your very brief encounters in Ceylon?**

I don't think much of the people in Egypt.

**No? Why's that? You weren't too fond of them?**

No.

**Any particular reasons why?**

No, and we were warned too that there were a lot of Fifth Columnists. Do you know what a Fifth Columnist is? No?

35:00 Spies. And that there were a lot of spies and I mean you couldn't...we were warned not to talk to anybody in case you said something. Not that we knew really what was going on, we didn't, but it (UNCLEAR) was. We used to say before we had a move that they always seemed

35:30 to know first. And Palestine was very interesting, you know the poor little donkeys loaded with the these loads of stuff and then on our days off we'd go down to Jerusalem and we saw a tremendous amount of Jerusalem and Bethlehem and down to the

36:00 Dead Sea. The troops used to like being photographed. You know you can't sink in the Dead Sea. Did you know that? The salinity is so high and they used to like sitting on the water with a beer bottle in their hands and be photographed to send home. They thought that was great fun.

**You went to the Red Sea?**

The Dead Sea.

**The Dead Sea, sorry? Right.**

**And we cost crossed the**

36:30 **Allenby Bridge. One side of the Allenby Bridge, the one in Palestine, had a British sentry and a Union Jack and the other side had an Arab sentry and an Arab flag.**

### **In Palestine?**

Yes on the Allenby Bridge. I don't know when it was built, oh it must have been after the First World War cause there was a General Allenby there.

### **Oh right that must have been a border?**

37:00 Mmmm. And another interesting thing, this was on the Mount of Olives, the Kaiser had built this big chalet type castle type of thing and called it Kaiserine and he meant to rule the world from there after the First World War.

### **Now which country was this?**

37:30 Palestine. Mount of Olives. But there, because his little wishes didn't materialise, but it was called the Kaiserine, still called the Kaiserine, and it was taken over by the British hospital, by the British army for a hospital and some friends of ours from Australia who were in Britain when war broke out joined up with the British nurses

38:00 and they were nursing up there. So we were able to pop up and see them and then the Church of England in Jerusalem put a hostel out for us and we could go and stay down there and, you know, sight see. But we did the stations

38:30 of the cross and we saw Calvary and Garden of Gethsemane and...

### **Just like the Holy Land you'd already been reading about?**

Yes, yes which was very, very because it's all very commercialised you know. You have to pay to go here and all these huge...

### **Even then?**

Oh yes, oh yes then. And all these

39:00 huge churches that we went into. But the streets are so narrow in Jerusalem and you know they'd have a donkey with a big pile of thing and there really wasn't room to pass. But it was an interesting, very very interesting place.

### **And you went to Syria as well?**

Oh yes but before that when we came back from Matruh we went back to Gaza. We seemed to stage there occasionally and then we went to Nazareth and we opened a hospital in a monastery called the Terra Sanctum and we lived in the pension next door

40:00 and we received casualties from the Syrian campaign.

### **Which was already in progress when you arrived or had finished?**

Oh no, no it in progress.

### **It was in progress?**

You know a lot of badly wounded people, we were terribly busy there. We didn't have enough beds. We had to nurse men on stretchers which didn't help the old back much and

40:30 the monastery bells rang, of course, all hours of the day and night which was very hard when you'd been on night duty and you were trying to sleep. And while we were there one of the priests in the monastery was arrested. He was a spy. But we were able to swim in the Sea of Galilee and it was an interesting place too.

### **We**

41:00 **might have to change the tape I'm afraid.**

## **Tape 3**

00:33 **Thank you. Nazareth. Now you said that there was a Casualty Clearance Station in Syria. Now...**

Well before we went to Syria. I thought there was something I was going to tell you about that. Oh no just about the tremendous number of

01:00 casualties. You see we were fighting the Vichy French in Syria not the Germans, well they were Germans too but mostly Vichy French.

### **There were Germans in Syria?**

I think so.

**What sort of Germans are we talking about, German troops?**

Yes.

**I see.**

But they were mostly Vichy French and one day we got a Vichy French spy

01:30 in. I was on night duty and he had an Aussie armed guard so I made the armed guard nice and comfortable with blankets and a radiator and cups of coffee and he said it was the best job he'd ever had in the army. And then eventually we moved to Syria.

02:00 Do you want me to go on?

**Absolutely.**

To a place called Asfaria which was I think about 12-miles out of Beirut on the road to Damascus where we opened a hospital in an asylum. The asylum was run by a Dr Miller

02:30 and they were awfully good to us, English people, and they entertained us for afternoon tea and let us use the swimming pool because it was a very, very hot day. The patients were mostly suffering from oh, medical complaints.

03:00 Ulcers and that sort of thing, and the ones with ulcers on their legs, they discovered it was the diphtheria

**Diphtheria?**

The germ yes, in the ulcers. But we were very, very busy and some of the boys didn't bring their eating utensils with them and we'd have to feed one lot and then wash their utensils and

03:30 feed the next lot. At one stage the latrines got blocked up and the orderlies got in a flap. So Jean Hannah who was in charge of us got her gloves on and got the hoses and she fixed it. So after that she used to always look after the latrines. Not really the work that a

04:00 sister in charge should do, but the orderlies then I think we all went up in their expectations I think they thought, "Oh well I think they'll do anything." While we were there we had a patient Major Hackett, John Hackett from the British army, and I was on duty in the officers' ward at the time and he asked me if

04:30 I'd like to go down to Beirut to see an exchange of prisoners. They were sending a shipload of Vichy French back to France in exchange for a shipload of British prisoners held in France going back to Britain. So he took me down to Beirut Harbour and the ship was going all lighted

05:00 up because normally all ships are blacked out during the war. And then the band started to play the Marsellaise and I didn't know what to do because the French being our enemy, all those French, but I looked across and Major Hackett was saluting so I pulled myself up to attention and did the right thing. But it was quite interesting.

05:30 I also at that stage got the Governor-General's son in, Lord Carey's son, and he was later killed.

**His son was killed?**

He was their only child and they were absolutely devastated. He was with a British rifle brigade but the Careys were absolutely wonderful to me when

06:00 I came back to Australia so he must have been satisfied with his nursing. They had me visit them in Government House in Adelaide and then matron told them when I got malaria and Lady Carey said, "Oh she's got to come and convalesce with us." Well they were at Admiralty House so I went up and stayed with them at Admiralty House.

06:30 I had a room with wardrobes all the way round and I possessed one uniform and two blouses but I enjoyed it. It was wonderful. And they were so, so informal. Sometimes we had our evening meal sitting round the fire and one day she said, "These horrible old parsnips, I hate them." And I said, "Oh, I always loved parsnips."

07:00 So she just got it off her plate and put it onto mine with her knife. You know there was no fuss and business about that.

**You liked that informality?**

Oh yes. I do very much so, and while I was there the Centaur, the hospital ship Centaur.

**Yes?**

...was there so I had some friends on the Centaur. So one day she

07:30 said to me, "Look I'm awfully sorry I'll have to leave you on your own I'm absolutely booked out." And I said, "Oh that's all right. I'll go down to the Centaur." So I went down. Well this friend was on duty, Margaret Adams, but she said, "Can you meet me tomorrow?" So we had lunch the next day and of course the Centaur went on its last voyage.

**It was sunk.**

08:00 Yes. The CO [Commanding Officer] was a Colonel Clem Manson who'd been a resident at the Alfred when I was there and then there was Margaret Adams but she'd trained at the Children's [Royal Children's Hospital] and Eileen Oliver had trained with me at the Alfred there at the time.

08:30 But I'd always hoped that they went down quickly but that wasn't the case apparently.

**How were they sunk? By a submarine?**

Yes.

**A German submarine?**

No Japanese.

**Where was this?**

Up near the Barrier Reef off, not Caloundra, north of Caloundra at half past

09:00 four one morning and she was lighted up. You see the hospital ships were allowed to be lighted because they had red crosses on the funnel, red crosses everywhere, and I saw someone advertised on the television the other day and he said the screaming was dreadful because the sharks were there, the place was full of sharks. I'd always hoped that,

09:30 you know, she'd gone down and that was that but I don't think it was a rapid death for a lot of them. There was only one sister trained left survived. A Sister Savage. They gave her the George Cross. But one man I heard interviewed, he said, "I didn't have time to put

10:00 my pants on," and she said, "Well this is a nice time to be to think about modesty," because she was on a raft with a whole lot of soldiers. But it was a shocking thing. However ...

**How did you react when you heard the news of that?**

It was just

10:30 horrifying. I don't think the Australian people of my age have got over it yet.

**You've thought about it many times after the war as well?**

Mmmm. I belong to the Centaur Association and we've got the plaques,

11:00 memorial plaques. It's not Caloundra. Where is it? Can't remember. So that was that. Well when we came back oh we left Colombo. Colombo

11:30 Harbour was absolutely chock-a-block full of troop ships and several had already left and we were really all bound for Burma then but then you see the Japanese took Burma and that's where people like 'Weary' Dunlop, they had all left Colombo and they

12:00 were all interned and spent the rest of the war as POWs [prisoners of war] so we were just a bit lucky. Eventually we left. We didn't even have an escort. We didn't not like going over. Well Churchill was furious with the...

**You didn't have an escort?**

No and Churchill was furious with the Australian Government for recalling

12:30 us and he said he couldn't afford any of his navy which I suppose was true. But we were on a beautiful ship called the Andes and we just pulled away from the rest. She did about 500 miles a day and we were then told we were going back to Australia. They don't tell you these things earlier

13:00 in case you're talking and some spy hears you. So we were off loaded in Adelaide and billeted with various families who were absolutely marvellous to us. You know it must have been awful for them having two nurses stuck in but of course the army wouldn't let us rest long.

13:30 They gave us few days leave and then we were seconded to the hospital at Colonel Light Gardens and eventually after some weeks we were brought back to Melbourne and given 10 days leave and then sent to

14:00 Heidelberg Hospital where I was very sick one day.

**You were very sick?**

Had a roaring temperature.

**From what?**

Well the doctors there were all old retired people and he said, "Have you got a sore throat?" and I said no. He said, "Oh yes you have. It's red." So I used to sit up

14:30 gargling my throat, but of course it was quite the wrong diagnosis because I got malaria after. I had an attack of malaria. From Heidelberg we went up to Ipswich where we opened a hospital in the Showgrounds at Ipswich.

15:00 We were there for a while for a while and then the men of the CCS went to New Guinea but they didn't send us and we were attached to the, I think it was the 170th AGH at Toowoomba, where we there was patients from the Kokoda Trail including my fiancé.

15:30 **So you had got engaged before the war?**

No. No, no. I met him on the ship going over.

**Right. But you didn't get engaged during the war did you?**

Yes. Yes. I got married during the war.

**Oh right. Is this...?**

When he recovered from malaria we came back to Melbourne. He got a few days' leave and so did I and we came down and we were married 1943.

**Now how did you meet? You married in 1943?**

16:00 **Which unit was he in and what was his name?**

Well Vic Schofield. He ended up as a lieutenant colonel. When I first met him he was a lieutenant and then he became captain and then major and so on. He was originally infantry with the 2/6th Battalion and then they put him

16:30 into intelligence and he was in Intelligence with the 17th Brigade and then in the islands he went over the Kokoda Trail. He was the intelligence officer with the 2 Australian Corps and he stayed with them until

17:00 he finished in the war. He was still in the army reserve up till when he died, up till when he was sick, which was only when he was 36. So that's it.

**I'm going to go back to**

17:30 **your time in Syria and Palestine and Egypt. Now the campaign against Syria was happening. I understand that was the first campaign, wasn't it, in Syria?**

Yes.

**And then they...**

The only one as far as I know.

**First campaign that is for the Australian troops?**

Oh, no. No.

**Palestine?**

18:00 Bardia was the first. Bardia and Egypt was the first Australian battle.

**Right. Didn't they have to take Palestine from, or Lebanon from the French?**

Yes but that was after Bardia.

**That was after Bardia was it?**

Oh yes. Bardia was the first.

**Okay Now in the Battle of Bardia, now you would have been fairly close to the front line?**

Well yes. You asked me

18:30 how far. Well I couldn't even hazard a guess but you see the British army didn't want us there.

**That's right you said that.**

They said they didn't want to be responsible for six women as close as that.

**Could you hear the battle?**

No no. But while we were there, there was a British ship the Huntley sunk out in the bay

19:00 and when the survivors were in the water they machine gunned them and they eventually got to shore and spent the night in a cave before they were found. So they were really sick when they came to us. We operated on their captain but he died the next day. Oh

19:30 and while we were up in Mersa Matruh we had a concert. It wasn't very high standard either, it was given by Australian men, French, Italian prisoners of war. locals, anything, but quite amusing and attended by all those people too.

20:00 And we used to have a film, films quite frequently. Oh I didn't mention the padres. They did a marvellous job. We had a Presbyterian, an Anglican, a Roman Catholic and a Salvation Army attached to us and sometimes when we were terribly

20:30 busy they would be called upon to give an anaesthetic even and they used to... all letters had to be censored.

**Including yours ?**

No we were allowed to censor our own because we were officers. We were lieutenants but the padres used to censor the letters.

**You were a sister lieutenant weren't you?**

Mmmm.

**That's an official rank?**

And Jean Hannah

21:00 was a captain but Jean Hannah finished up a lieutenant colonel and when she came back, then she went as matron to the Alfred.

**I see. Now in the Battle of Bardia also were there a lot of casualties you had to care for then?**

Yes yes. They used to come, the

21:30 ambulances came down in convoys. We were terribly busy. We used to work 16 or 18 hours a day.

**Goodness. That's a long day.**

Mmm.

**You must have been absolutely exhausted.**

Yes we were but I mean then you see there'd be...Remember before we went away Faye McClure who was a leading Melbourne surgeon, the leading Melbourne surgeon at the Alfred said to me, well he

22:00 said, "You know the war didn't get you down a bit." Well I don't think it ever really did get us down. Oh and the other thing, the mail. Now when there was a battle in the offing the mail was all held up for security reasons and then when it was released we'd get all these dozens of letters and tins with cakes

22:30 in them and things. But we had our fun because when we weren't busy we had morning teas and afternoon teas in the tents and we used to have the officers over on Sunday afternoon, for afternoon teas and that sort of thing and then occasionally we'd have a formal mess for some reason

23:00 or other. If someone was being transferred we'd generally have a formal mess. Mainly they were surgeons and physicians and sisters.

**Did you ever treat any Italian wounded?**

Just the odd one but while we were at Matruh there was a whole Italian hospital next to us being looked after by

23:30 their own medicos and you know, we had beds for our sick but they were on the floor. We felt really sorry for them and they were badly wounded. I don't think they wanted to work. I was with Vic when he was interviewing

24:00 some of them down in the POW camp somewhere down the line. I can't remember where we were. East of east of Matruh somewhere.

**What went through your mind?**

Pardon?

**With all this, all the killing that was going on**

24:30 **and the people who were getting injured and you're seeing this working with these people,**

**what was going through your mind about the war?**

Well we got we got terribly depressed you know. When we first went over it was only Germany and then the Italians came in and then the Japanese came in. I remember it. Norm Smith, our senior surgeon... you see we didn't

- 25:00 have radios or anything. We had to rely on what information we got and Norm came in and said, "Oh girls there's really a war on now. Japan have bombed Pearl Harbour." You know and that's just how we heard about that.

**Did you ever get a chance**

- 25:30 **to talk with Italian prisoners?**

I wouldn't have been able to. I don't even.... Oh at one stage when we first came down from Matruh we were all packed, we were in Alexandria and we were all packed up ready to go to Greece. Actually some of our luggage was already on board but Greece fell so we didn't have to, we didn't get there.

- 26:00 But the Greek people apparently were marvellous to the Australians and of course a lot of our friends were prisoners, taken prisoner in Greece and Crete.

**Did you know any of them personally?**

Pardon?

**Did you know any of them personally?**

Mmmm, a lot of them and you know we saw them after the war and but they're nearly all dead now

- 26:30 unfortunately. But the day they came back from Greece we were up all night wondering who had come, who had got out and who hadn't.

**What was it like to be in Libya, when you were**

- 27:00 **in the CCS there compared to that of Syria?**

I'm sorry I didn't. What did you say first? What was it that...

**Your experience in Libya and Syria, the differences? What were the differences in your experience of being a nurse?**

Well ,well mostly it was hot in Libya. Occasionally we got one of those freezing cold nights like the day we arrived at

- 27:30 Matruh but in Syria of course we had snow. We were all dressed, we went to church parade with gum boots on and dressed up in army issue coats, the men's army issue coats because they were warmer than ours. But in the summer time in Syria, of course, it was hot too. But it was

- 28:00 beautiful country in Syria, just lovely up in the mountains. We were halfway up Hells, this little place called Astry but it was very pretty but it was depressing to see the mental patients. See it was a mental hospital and they were down, like, bear pits. Oh it was awful.

**They were in pits?**

Yes they...

**Who was running it?**

- 28:30 The British were running it, this Captain Doctor Mellow and his wife.

**What was he like as a person?**

He was, they were awfully nice both of them. Very good to us. Oh and we were robbed while we were there too. We lived in a little brick building at the entrance to the asylum

- 29:00 and one day I got up and I said and, we all smoked of course, and I said, "Oh that Dash Melville. She's been over and taken my cigarettes."

**You smoked as well?**

Oh yes, a lot.

**Really?**

All of us did. Except Hannah and Dory didn't ever smoke and then I started to look round my clock had gone. My watch had gone. Oh we were completely cleaned out. We didn't ever

- 29:30 hear whether it was local or an Australian that did it, and our all our letters and things were strewn over the place outside and I had, he was then Colonel Woodward he was later Sir Eric Woodward, Governor of NSW. He was a patient and



30:00 when I went on duty and told him, he was horrified to think that eight women had been there had been left there. So we had an armed guard outside all the time after that. Just another experience.

**Did you smoke before the war?**

Yes.

**You did?**

Heavily.

**Heavily?**

But during the war we mostly rolled our own would you believe.

30:30 **So women were smoking in the 1930s**

Oh yes.

**Was that common?**

Yes very. Very very, common.

**How old were you when the war started?**

Twenty-five I suppose.

**Oh okay**

Oh yes everybody smoked at the Alfred. We used to buy a

31:00 packet of cigarettes for one and threepence. That would be what, 15 cents wouldn't it? Because we got so little you see. The first year we got nine shillings a week. That's 90 cents isn't it?

**Something like that.**

Yes. And then when you were third year you got 15 shillings a week.

**So when did you start smoking? How old were you when you started?**

31:30 Oh I don't know. Just when I was training I started smoking.

**Now that's a big part of the army culture, the military culture, smoking?**

Yes. Nearly everybody smoked. All the men smoked. But you see on the ship going over, of course you see it's blacked out and you go through one door off the deck and you close that door and then you go through another door so that the light doesn't get out. And

32:00 smoking on deck was prohibited because apparently a lighted match or a cigarette can be seen for miles across the sea and if there was a submarine it would put the whole convoy in peril. There was one stage where there was a submarine but whether it was the enemy or not....But

32:30 we all had life boat drill, gas masks, and at one time when we left Colombo we all had to wear our water bottles and something else. Wouldn't have been... Oh our life jackets, and you wore them all the time because they explained to us if you were

33:00 shipwrecked you wouldn't expect someone else to share theirs with you. And we had gas mask drill over in Amiriya and the officer who was giving it to us said we had to get our gas masks on in a certain few seconds time. So he said, "Right

33:30 have you got that clear?" Yes certainly we knew how to do it so he said, "Well right, we'll have a repeat performance," and then he let off some gas and of course we were miles too slow and our eyes were streaming and we were coughing and spluttering, but there was a lot of laughter from the spectators.

34:00 Just one of those things.

**With your experiences in Syria, you said you had to treat a large amount of casualties. I understand in the Syrian campaign almost 3,500 people, Allied soldiers, were killed in that campaign so it's a very high death rate.**

It was very high. There was

34:30 a unit called the 2/2nd Pioneers and they were absolutely cut to ribbons but we got them in Nazareth you see. We weren't in Syria for the campaign. They brought them from Syria to Nazareth. It was after the campaign was over that we moved into Syria.

**Oh I see. So that 2/2nd**

35:00 **Pioneer Battalion was badly mauled?**

Badly cut, but there was one big room at the monastery, we called it the concert, and I'll show you photos. In it they're just lying on stretchers and in the corridors. We had them lying everywhere.

**How did you handle all this stress?**

35:30 **It's a lot to take in for any person.**

Oh you just did. I suppose it was your training because you see there was a lot of stress at the Alfred. I can remember once at the Alfred when I was on theatre night duty there were no helmets for motor bike riders and we got a whole mob of them in one night and we

36:00 operated all night. See, you just sort of took it in your stride. It was your job and you just got on with it.

**Did any of the nurses find it difficult to do their work?**

Occasionally.

**How would they react when that happened?**

I don't

36:30 think any of them would have joined the army. But a couple of them, a couple of them got out. Decided they couldn't do it.

**When was this when they were overseas?**

At the Alfred. No at the Alfred.

**What about when they were overseas in Libya?**

No No Grace Wilson would have been careful whom she picked. She would have known who they were. See

37:00 the reports were given in each ward you go to and when I was in charge of the theatre I had to pass in a report on each girl who came through as to whether she was dumb or not.

**To put it bluntly. So selection was very**

37:30 **specific?**

Yes very. My regimental number was VX-266 which is very low. I mean Vic's was, Vic's was low and he was VX-45104 and he joined up right as soon as war was declared. But we were all in the

38:00 two or three hundreds. I don't know how they allotted them, I can't imagine, but the man who was best man at our wedding he was VX-13.

**So can you tell us more about your nursing colleagues. Were there**

38:30 **any cases of LMF, Lack of Moral Fibre, as they used to say in those days?**

Mmm.

**There were?**

Mmm.

**With the nurses?**

No no.

**What about with other soldiers have you come across it?**

Well you called them SIWs.

**SIWs?**

I W. Self Inflicted Wounds.

**Oh right.**

I remember one who before Bardia

39:00 was supposed to have fallen into a trench and hurt his ankle. Well it mightn't have been self inflicted but that was the rumour that got round. But only I think only about two or three the whole time.

**You only came across two or three did you say? Oh Okay.**

If three.

**What were the other**

39:30 **ones?**

I don't remember. I don't remember.

**Did you come across people who had gone mad? Gone troppo as the saying goes?**

No.

**Never?**

We didn't.

**What sort of psychological problems did you encounter with soldiers after their wounds or battles or whatever?**

None.

**None?**

None. All they wanted was to...

40:00 they were so glad to be in a place to sleep, to have some trained nurses looking after them that they were just so grateful it was embarrassing..

**Do you want to cut the tape there?**

## Tape 4

00:30 **Can you tell me a little bit about your unit, the 2/1st Casualty Clearing Station, is that what you were posted to?**

Yes

**Okay. Now you were a part of the AIF?**

Yes.

**Right. Okay Could you tell us more about this unit?**

Well we had, the CO was a colonel.

01:00 He changed occasionally. It was Colonel Norris originally and then it was Andy McLaren and then it was Colonel Adey. I can't go beyond that. And then we had so many surgeons. There was Orm Smith who was the senior surgeon. Boon Somerset, Bob Officer,

01:30 Hubert Smith, Doug Stevens, whose now a professor, he's the only one alive and I see him quite often and he's at the Children's Hospital. He's a paediatrician actually now. And then Newport Dwight, who was the physician.

02:00 Oh and Frank Fenner, who was a post physician. He's a professor now up in Canberra and he has two very very prestigious awards. One was the Copley Medal. He was only the second Australian to win it the other was Sir Macfarlane Burnett. I wrote to him and

02:30 congratulated him and he was always very interested in malaria and used to run round chasing Anopheles mosquitoes. So Orm Smith had labelled him Noffy and we always called him Noffy and when I wrote to him in Canberra I wrote, "Dear Noffy," and he wrote back and said it was years since he'd been called that. We had a

03:00 dentist Captain Williams. We had a radiologist Major Crisp. Reg Crisp. The four padres. Oh well and Captain Rain who was service corps, you know they supply

03:30 units and things, and then apart from that they were just orderlies. I think there was only about 130 altogether. It was a small unit and, as I said before, sometimes, well, quite often the dentist had to give an anaesthetic, quite often the padres had to help and they used to help us in the ward you know, folding sheets, doing anything. They were marvellous. They didn't

04:00 mind what they did. I think that's it.

**So how big was the unit all up? How many people?**

One hundred and thirty I think.

**A hundred and thirty? So about a company size? Mostly women?**

No, eight women.

**Only eight women? Oh I thought there was more women than that.**

No just eight women. Eight of us, that's all.

04:30 And we carried our own bandages and sterile dressings and things with us but the instruments at Mersa Matruh had to be boiled up on primus stoves. and we travelled truck and train

05:00 from one place to the next. Plaster we'd carry with us to and all the medicines and anaesthetics and things. I can't think of anything else there, but we were a very happy little unit.

05:30 Very happy.

**So you the eight girls stuck together of course very closely?**

Yes. Well you lived together, especially down in the dug out you see because there was no bathroom down there and the Red Cross got us little canvas baths about that square and about that depth and of course water was very much rationed. We had about that much

06:00 water in the bottom and we'd bath in that and then wash our underclothes in the water we'd bathed in. And we had, I think it was a 500 gallon tank at the entrance to the dugout and it was filled up every so often by the Coldstream Guards.

**The Coldstream Guards?**

Mmmm. And we had a generator down there too

06:30 and the last one in had to switch it off but of course sometimes it broke out and we were in pitch black. But our cook cooked down there. We had a kitchen down there. I'll show you the photos.

**Did you ever come across German POWs? Did you have to treat German soldiers in north Africa?**

No no.

07:00 We didn't. I don't think we ever had them.

**What about Syria?**

No I don't think we got any Germans from Syria either. But we certainly got the... we didn't get all the... Well the only Vichy French I remember was the one spy. I suppose they had their own hospital. And we got a lot of Indians.

07:30 **Who were injured?**

Mmm. Lots of Indians.

**Where was this in Syria?**

No up Mersa Matruh. Amiriya and Mersa Matruh. There was an Indian hospital, I think it was the Number 13, I've forgotten right next to us and their officers used to come over. There was a Major Shariff and a Captain Dat. D-A-T. Is that a common name?

08:00 **Probably. Amongst a billion people maybe.**

And they used to come and, you know, have afternoon tea with us. They were awfully nice. But it used to surprise us because the Indian patients who wore turbans, they used to change their turban at night but they didn't ever let us see, we didn't ever see them do it. Must

08:30 be a very private ritual.

**You must have been curious though?**

Oh no but we just thought afterwards, you know, we'd never seen it happen. We got a fair number of English wounded.

**You treated English wounded as well?**

Mmmm

**Same with the Australians?**

Mmmm

**Why did they partition**

09:00 **Clearance Stations on ethnic groups? You had the Indian Clearance Station next to you why's that? Why not treat all of them? You said that the Indians had their own Clearance Station?**

No they had a hospital.

**Oh they had their own hospital?**

They had a hospital right next to us.

**So right so sorry I think I mistook that. So the Indians also come through your Clearance Station but then they'll go to their own hospital?**

Well we'd occasionally get them I think.

09:30 You know it was a case of getting the badly wounded down as soon as possible. I don't think they worried ...

**Oh okay**

...what the nationality was.

**Can you give me some sort of like idea how a Clearance Station worked during a period of a battle? So how would a battle work? So you had the battle and**

10:00 **then well from which part of the battle were most of the casualties brought in?**

Well as I said the battle, the casualties go to the RAP, the Regimental Aid Post. Then they go to the Field Ambulance and then they come to us. Now we assess them when they get to us. They don't, they're not assessed at the Field Ambulance. They all come down, any wounded,

10:30 they're assessed at the CCS, the walking wounded are put straight into ambulances or trains or what have you and sent down to the Australian Hospital at El Kantara because we haven't got room for all of them. The sick ones we keep and as I said before operate on

11:00 if necessary and keep until they're well enough to move. It was a long journey down from Mersa Matruh to El Kantara.

**So I would assume that a lot of soldiers would have died from the RAP to the Field Ambulance to the Clearance Station?**

Oh we had a lot die with us too.

**I'm sorry, a lot ?**

We had a lot died with us too.

**Really? How did how did you handle death like that on such a constant basis?**

Well we didn't have,

11:30 that didn't come under the females duties. I don't know what happened there.

**And what sort of wounds did you have to treat generally? I mean they could be everything?**

Amputations, head wounds, chest wounds, anything.

**And which ones were the worst sort of**

12:00 **wounds that you had come across?**

Probably head and chest.

**Why. what condition were these soldiers in when you were treating them? Head and chest wounds, say, for instance?**

Oh well some of them were very, very sick.

**So they were they were awake?**

Sometimes, sometimes not. Sometimes they were unconscious. I remember

12:30 this one lad who was so very sick and we didn't think he had a chance but he made it. But then you got the ones who didn't.

**Did they ever talk to you, the ones who were going to die?**

Mmmm. But that was mostly the padres.

**The padres would be next to them? What happens when you have like literally hundreds of men who are**

13:00 **wounded and severe losses. You had dozens and dozens of men who are going to die and you don't have enough people to look after them. What happens?**

Well we did. You see a ward of 150...

**Yes.**

...would be nursed by one sister and orderlies and you just had to kept keep running.

**So you've got**

13:30 **150 people in a ward?**

That's right.

**You've got one sister and how many orderlies?**

Oh about five or six orderlies.

**And that's it?**

But the orderlies were good. And of course you've always got the doctors and the surgeons to call on if anything, if anyone collapses.

**Now if you're in a situation when you've got something like that, tell me if this is an exaggeration, but can you find sometimes**

14:00 **50 maybe 60 people who are very severely injured?**

Mmm.

**And potentially could die...**

Yes.

**...as a result of severe wounds and blood loss. How would you deal with such a situation?**

Well you just have to deal with them and the point was too, you see, that in those days there was no blood bank. We all had what we called meat ticket identification disks round our neck and

14:30 it had...it didn't have your name on it. It had your regimental number and your blood group and if someone needed a transfusion you'd have to tear around and find someone with the same blood group who was willing to give a pint or so of blood. A blood transfusion was quite a big operation in those days.

**It was a very complicated procedure?**

Mmm.

15:00 Now gas gangrene was absolutely rife in the First World War. That partly was because they had so many horses involved, you see it's that's how the germs spread. We only had one. We only saw one the whole time one

**Gas gangrene?**

Gas gangrene. And he had his

15:30 leg amputated and we had a couple of tourniquets at the end of the bed in case the gas gangrene went further you see. Which would mean a big haemorrhage and we were all having morning tea one day and the orderly came in and said to the surgeon, "Excuse me, sir, but Mr So and so's having a bit of a bleed." And of course we all tore around and he was

16:00 taken back to the theatre and a bit more taken off. And the other thing, while we were in Syria antibiotics were first introduced.

**First introduced?**

Which was the old M and B which was the first of the sulphur drugs. Penicillin didn't appear for years later and when a patient was

16:30 M and B, on M and Bs, we were told not to give them eggs or onions, why nobody knew, which was an awful trial because onions were used a lot to make bully beef palatable. But anyway...

**Speaking of which was your diet was it bully beef as well?**

Yes. Yes.

**You had to eat just what the soldiers**

17:00 **ate?**

Yes.

**Okay**

Yes. We had our own cook. He didn't do a bad job.

**How? Sorry go on.**

While we were in Syria each morning there was a quinine tablet put on everybody's plate. He used to do that. So in no time all our ears were tingling. It gives you tinnitus. But two of our staff got malaria up there and of course I apparently got it too and I

17:30 wasn't diagnosed.

**This was in Syria? Okay so malaria was also prevalent in Syria?**

Yes, very.

**Okay. I wasn't sure about that one. Oh. Okay.**

Yeah that's where Noffy used to chase the anopheles mosquitoes.

**Can I ask you more of a personal question? With your experiences in north Africa, the Middle East, Syria etcetera, etcetera**

18:00 **when you see people dying in a clearance station which you would have so many on so many occasions, you must have come across very young chaps, you know, who were 18?**

That's right.

**Maybe you know 19? What sort of mind set were they in before they died? Did any of them ever**

18:30 **scream out for their mothers?**

No.

**Anything like that?**

No.

**No?**

No. They all took what was coming to them.

**Did they die in great agony many of them?**

Well we always had morphine there. I think the surgeons would probably have made sure they didn't.

19:00 **Did you ever break down and cry seeing all this?**

Yes I cried when Ben Meredith came through and of course the others all thought it was Vic who had come through and I said no it was Ben. When I saw his amputated arm, and then he was on the convalescent boat in Alexandria for a while and he took two of us out to a

19:30 film and dinner or something and before we went he said good night to me he said, "Can you undo my shirt button?" He had only one hand and he couldn't undo his shirt button and we pumiced his fingers because he had nicotine...you wouldn't know about that would you? We used to get nicotine fingers and we used pumice to get it off.

20:00 But the point there was too, I think too during your training you see you're brought up to cope with death. You see when we were training we used to have to lay the patients out. They've stopped that now but that was part of our duty.

20:30 Terrible job. Before I went away my brother Bill was living in Sydney and met two relatives. We knew who they were, we'd met them before. We'd thought they were about 32nd cousins and they said, "Oh she must look up Kathleen Bar Barnes from

21:00 Western Australia." So we got in touch and we got photographed together and we used to laugh and call each other cousin and things. We had no idea who we were. Well about five years ago I went up to the dedication of the Nurses War Memorial in Canberra and there were two people photographing each other and I said to them, "Would you like a photograph of the two of you together?" Because Elizabeth can take

21:30 it. I couldn't with me shaky hands. So they said yes. I said where do you come from? And this woman said, "Oh I live in Canberra now but I'm from Western Australia." And I said, "Would you have known Kathleen Barnes?" And she said, "I'm her sister." And she said, "You're not!" I said, "Yes I am." Wasn't it extraordinary? And we were quite closely related because our grandmothers were

22:00 sisters. Her grandmother was Sarah Sherlock and mine was Elizabeth Sherlock or something, some Sherlock name. But unfortunately Kathleen had died two years before so I couldn't renew that.

22:30 **Can you pause for a minute please? So with the nurses now how did you handle this tremendous stress that you had to cope with? I mean this is extraordinary a lot of stress. Where was your outlets? How would you get it out of your**

23:00 **system?**

You just didn't let it worry you.

**How?**

You just worked furiously. You were so tired that you passed out at night and that was it

**Did you dream about these things? Did you...**

No.

**No?**

No.

**Is that because you had you could share this with your other work colleagues?**

Yes we talked about things, of course, very much so.

**So what would you talk about? Walk us through a**

23:30 **situation where you'd talk.**

Oh well you'd say, "Oh we have a patient and it was so and so," and you know you'd always give any relevant details. And of course you, see being so few women with a lot of men you were always being asked out to dinner and to dances and things. When were in Alexandria it was,

24:00 oh the dancing there was amazing. And...

**Tell me about it. Tell me about the dancing in Alexandria.**

Well they had marvellous clubs there and wonderful hotels. We went to Shepherd's. Have you heard of Shepherd's Hotel? Oh it's the big one in Alexandria. And if I went out with Vic to something like that you'd see half a dozen

24:30 other couples who you knew. I've got a photo of there, of Han and me in Jerusalem. But there was a club especially for the Ors, the other ranks and not the officers and we were walking down the street and they said, "Oh come and have a photo taken." So we were photographed with these Australians.

25:00 I think they'd all had a few drinks too, but some of the troops got up to a lot of mischief too.

**Like what? Come on for the record?**

I don't know. We were kept in the dark with that.

**Oh surely you must have come across some incidents?**

25:30 No I don't think so, no.

**What stories did you hear about the troops for instance? Like in the interaction with other women whether they be indigenous native women of those countries or the other nurses?**

Definitely, definitely.

**So they were promiscuous you would say?**

Mmmm and then of course there was always the problem of VD [venereal disease].

26:00 **Okay.**

But there again it was right out of our sphere. We had nothing whatsoever with that. The medicos protected us in that way.

**Okay. So you all didn't have to deal with VD, any sort of treatment like that?**

No.

**Okay. So you said you were asked out quite regularly by other soldiers by virtue of the ratio of women to men there as well.**

26:30 **Well how did the other nurses cultivate their relationships whether they be casual or permanent?**

Oh some of them permanent, some of them casual.

**Were there frequently many casual liaisons with other soldiers? Was that a regular sort of feature of relationships?**

Mmmm. Mmmm

**Yes. How, yes go on sorry.**

Well I don't know. Sister Joseph she married a



- 27:00 fellow from the navy. I don't know how that came about. I married Vic. Lindsay married a doctor and went to live in Western Australia. No I really don't know, but we had our good times over there.
- 27:30 **Did any nurses, were any of the nurses that you were with get up to mischief?**
- No. We didn't have time. No none of them. While we were in Alexandria waiting to go to Greece before Greece fell we were billeted at a lovely hotel by courtesy of the British army. I
- 28:00 think they paid for it. It was when my first my romance first started and I used to get these enormous bunches of flowers everyday. But oh, and that's right, Vic was at another hotel called the Cecile round at the waterfront and I was going round to meet him round there and the air raid siren went
- 28:30 and I thought, "What'll I do? I don't want to get into somewhere with natives," so I just ran on. But there was one nasty accident. The matron of the 2/4th AGH, Gladys Thomas, and two other girls, one sang beautifully, went to give help to give a
- 29:00 concert somewhere and they were crossing the Suez, they were crossing the Suez Canal at El Kantara. They were in an army vehicle and the siren went off and I think it probably would've been better if the driver hadn't. He tried to rush across and they had an accident and they were both killed. Those were the two nurses who were killed while they were there.
- 29:30 Well then it was Jean Hannah who took over the 2/4th later.
- With your encounters with the local populations of Libya and Egypt can you tell us more about, for instance, Egypt?**
- 30:00 Yes.
- What were your thoughts about the people there?**
- Well I don't know how it came about but we did occasionally have some social encounter with them because I remember them giving us those little cups of very strong coffee which you had to drink apparently.
- Egyptian coffee?**
- Yes. Very, very
- 30:30 strong and bitter and awful but we had to drink it. But then in Nazareth, you see the nuns up there used to do beautiful lace work and we got quite friendly with them because we used to buy lace doilies and things to send home. Oh and there was in
- 31:00 Jerusalem... I'm not going to remember her name. Margaret Hutchinson who went to my church here gave me a friend of hers, the name of a friend of hers who was a doctor and ran a clinic in the old city in Jerusalem and I was to look her up. So we went and had a meal with her.
- 31:30 She had been there for years and years and now I can't remember her name. Well you know, you didn't get much apart from that as a social life with the locals. Very little actually.
- Did you see how the locals interacted amongst themselves? The locals how did they interact amongst themselves did you observe that? Like say for instance in Palestine did you see how Jews and Arabs interacted**
- 32:00 **with each other?**
- Well there was no animosity as far as we were concerned, as far as we could see. I don't think they get on very well but at least they don't now but it wasn't obvious.
- So they lived side by side in relative harmony?**
- Mmmm. Seemed to.
- 32:30 When we were at Gaza that was a dirty little town and we used to see, didn't have much to do with them, but we used to go down on days off on the Mediterranean and spend a day at the beach and swim which was quite good. But there was nothing much at all. I'm amazed when I see Gaza now on
- 33:00 television because there was nothing much there at all in those days. Oh and we wanted to go down to Beersheba once
- Beersheba yes?**
- Because the Australians were very much involved with the big battle there during the First World War and they said, no, we couldn't go. It wasn't safe. However eventually they let us go under our own guard.
- 33:30 **Why wasn't it safe?**

They didn't trust them down there. I don't know why. I suppose the aftermath of the First World War. But we went, about four of us went down under armed guard and had a look round the place but there again it was just like any other little town. Bit grubby.

34:00 **What sorry?**

Grubby.

**Grubby. So going to Beersheba was...how did you feel about the place? The Australian Light Horse were there?**

Oh we'd had lectures on it and we were just interested. Oh and the we went to the dawn service in Gaza I think on Anzac Day

34:30 and oh those cemeteries are so beautifully kept. They're just magnificent, and the names on the tombstones and then there would be a few with Known Only Unto God. Apparently they were so smashed up that they were not recognisable.

35:00 **Are you okay?**

Pardon?

**Are you okay?**

Yes quite okay.

**Yes? So were there any other experiences you had in Syria for instance with the local population?**

No

35:30 The time we went to... when Colonel Norris took us to the cedars of Lebanon we passed lots of little villages and all these grubby little children used to give us the V-sign.

**They used to give you the V-sign?**

Yeah Churchill started it. V for Victory. Haven't you heard of that?

36:00 **Grubby little children?**

Yes. I think there's a photograph there of some of them. But the cedars of Lebanon, there are only about four cedars left now. I suppose they've cut them down for kindling or something but it was a very hazardous trip there. Up there

36:30 it's very mountainous and I was sitting on this side of the car and all I could see was nothing down there and of course the native drivers just put their foot on the accelerator and go, go, go. I was terrified. I kept leaning over so I wouldn't see the drop. But we got there and back.

37:00 **In Syria, I saw some photos of other people in Syria there and you said there was a lot of snow there and you had to wear men's clothing I understand?**

Well we, yes, we wore army issue coats, all khaki, those old army coats and gum boots.

**Right and you were you were treating people**

37:30 **in clearance stations in that weather?**

Mmmm. Yes.

**What was it like to treat people in such cold weather? In snow?**

I don't remember. I don't think we had any heating as far as I can remember and they were those hard marble floors and that was the trouble in Nazareth too. Those floors played havoc with our feet.

38:00 **Did you say hard marble floors?**

Yes.

**Okay then.**

Oh well marble like material. And in Syria the natives used to come round selling walnuts to the patients and, he's now a general. Actually I think he's still alive. His name was Bell and he was a colonel at that stage and

38:30 I was a major I think and his nickname of course was Ding. He was always known as Ding Bell and I'd have the ward looking nice and clean and he'd get the walnuts and those big army boots and there'd be walnut shells all over the place. He was a nice fellow Ding Bell. He led the march here a few years ago. I rang him and

39:00 said hello to him.

**Did you make a lot of close friends with people from the Middle East?**

Oh yes, yes. If you meet anyone who's been to the war, it doesn't matter what rank you immediately click.

**Did you find it difficult to associate with other with people who weren't**

39:30 **in the war, involved in it?**

No

**You know civilians for instance?**

Well you don't have much to do with them because you see we went to live in Geelong and of course nearly all our friends had had war experience. A lot of those

40:00 Geelong boys had been prisoners of war and they were taken in Greece. Lindsay Hassett was one. You know the cricketer? Do you remember Lindsay Hassett? No? Before your time.

**No. Don't think I did.**

He was captain of the Australian team. He was he was a private

40:30 and when I was taken first to be introduced to the relatives in Geelong, he'd a great sense of humour. He was only little and every time Vic pulled out a cigarette he'd jump to his feet and he...of course they'd been friends. They'd grown up together... and he said, "Oh Sir let me light it for you." He was always up to some mischief, Lindsay.

41:00 **Well we've run out of tape unfortunately.**

## Tape 5

00:31 **Recording. Thank you. Thanks Nan. I'd just like to ask you about your training at the Alfred. If you could tell me what sort of training and what sort of things did you learn there?**

Well as I said before there was no preliminary training school. We were shot straight into the wards and

01:00 as a junior you were to a certain extent treated as a junior. Mostly you spent your days sweeping the wards or cleaning bed pans or generally cleaning up and you were at everyone's beck and call. The only job that you did was to accompanying the patients to the theatre and stay with them till they were

01:30 anaesthetised. That was the first two months, then it was night duty which you did the same, oh no sweeping of course, but you answered calls and that sort of thing. There were three people on night duty. The nurse in charge, second in charge and then the junior and that lasted for 12 weeks

02:00 during which time you didn't have a night off. You worked every night but at the end of 12 weeks you got a day off for each week. By that time you were walking round like a zombie and then you were transferred to another ward and then probably as a second junior then you didn't have quite such

02:30 lowly tasks. I did women's medical. You were transferred from ward to ward and eventually did your second year in night duty when you weren't quite so lowly either. You did dressings and.

03:00 you weren't allowed to give out drugs in those days but you looked after patients more. Into second year, oh we got nine, we got nine shillings a week for that first week First...

**First year?**

...year and then we progressed to 12 shillings a week for the second which was really wealthy for us in those days.

**Did you have any theoretical lessons Nan?**

Oh yes you had lectures and when you were on night duty you had to get up for lectures in the middle of your sleep or come back on your days off. They don't have to do that now.

**Who would give these lectures?**

We had a surgeon Mr Hembrow and we had Dr

04:00 Euan Downey, he gave us our medical ones. Then eventually you got to third year where you're really important. You did dressings and gave out drugs but, oh yes, you gave injections too in third year and it was in the third year that you go to the

04:30 theatre. Having been to women's surgical, men's surgical, women's medical, men's medical and the children's. I didn't like nursing children. They...

**Didn't you?**

No they upset me.

**Yes.**

So then after that it was theatre which I was terrified of at first

05:00 and I used to hide out there. But when you're a junior in theatre you made innumerable glasses of iced coffee which was in a long glass. The people involved in the theatre, the surgeons and the sisters would drink through a straw so as not to dirty their hands and have to scrub again and then eventually I took my first case

05:30 which was an appendix and I got through that all right and then I seemed to settle down and loved theatre work.

**What did you like about theatre work?**

Just everything. We had to sterilise all our own dressings and everything in those days. They don't do that now,

06:00 and we used to patch the rubber gloves. When I told that to a doctor recently she said, "They didn't use them did they?" I said, "Yes they did." I said, "The staff nurse if she had an afternoon off used to sit there and patch the rubber gloves." And I don't think the risk of infection is any higher than it is at

06:30 present.

**They didn't have the latex gloves that they have today?**

No.

**No.**

To patch them you'd get an old rubber glove and pull a little bit out and cut it and that would leave you with a little round patch which you'd stick on. Oh I've patched thousands of gloves, and we'd sterilise things like syringes and, of course, they weren't disposable either ,

07:00 and needles. None of them had that. We had to sterilise all that ourselves

**How did you sterilise syringes?**

Well the instruments of course were put into the autoclave and so were the dressings and I can't remember what we soaked the others in. Can't remember. We had these huge big trays with needles, all different sizes,

07:30 and that was the sister in charge's job to look after that.

**Look after all those, right. Do you recall having any tutors who you particularly liked or particularly admired?**

No. We only had one tutor and she just gave us basic nursing. Before she put us into the ward she showed us how to make a bed and how to sponge patients

08:00 and that was that. We had to learn all the rest.

**On the job?**

There's a funny story about a sister who later became the chief nursing sister at the Alfred. She was from Victoria. She started in Ward 3 too and in the sterilising room on the top shelf they had a row of old fashioned copper hot water bottles

08:30 and every Sunday which was visiting day the junior had to get those down clean then and put them back again. And when she was junior one of the seniors came out and said, "Look hurry up. Danny so and so and so and so want bottles." And she thought now, "What's a bottle?" See we weren't introduced to bed pans or urinals and she looked around and she saw these and she thought bottle.

09:00 So she started filling them with hot water and of course they all leaked. So the senior came back and she said, "What are you doing? Those men are desperate." And she said, "I'm trying to fill them." And she said, "Don't be stupid. They want them empty." And then she told her. But we had a good old laugh about it. I've often wondered what happened to those copper hot water bottles. I'll bet you've never seen one? I've never seen one before. They were big things like that with

09:30 a stopper in the top.

**What sort of beds were you working with?**

I beg your pardon?

**What sort of beds were you working with? Were they the ones with the backs that would move up and down or...?**

Oh no.

**Nothing like that in those days?**

No, oh no. Just plain

**Plain beds?**

Hospital beds. Yes

**With the side you know how some hospital beds have the rail?**

Yes well they didn't have the sides attached. If you had any patient who needed a side you had to

10:00 send a porter down to get you sides which you had to put in fit in and they weren't mechanically worked.

**Yes. What was nursing like in those days as far as ...**

Hard, hard work.

**...technology goes? Was there much technology involved?**

Yes yes. There was a lot of technology too and we had to do a course in materia medica too. But I don't ever

10:30 remember the drug cupboard being locked. Don't ever remember it. We always had our drugs checked before we gave them but we had no drug problems in those days.

**Did you have a wide variety of drugs to use?**

Yes probably. Not as wide as...

**As these days?**

These days. And of course there were no antibiotics

11:00 at all and the men's medical ward was always very heavy nursing because it was nursing entirely that got them better. And they used to use, oh, well mustard plasters for their chests and anticongestion called poultices for the

11:30 old sick pneumonias but they, Ward 6, was very heavy.

**Very heavy ward?**

Yes the men were awfully sick.

**What was the most common illnesses in those days? This was in Melbourne. What were the most common illnesses in Melbourne?**

Probably hearts. Heart failure and pneumonia. A lot of

12:00 pneumonia. You see there were no antibiotics.

**This in the '30s?.**

And children you'd get with mastoids. I don't think they see many mastoids now because they give them antibiotics before it gets to that stage. A lot of appendectomies and hernias and that sort. oh and of course the odd broken legs. They

12:30 were all put up in splits and they were in hospitals for weeks and weeks and weeks. Now they pin them and you're out in a few days.

**That's amazing. They didn't have plasters in those days?**

Yes they had plaster too. They used to put them in plaster and then put them up in slings and they were horrible beds to make with the slings up in the air.

13:00 **Did you ever do, did you ever do work in maternity wards at all?**

No I didn't do Matt. I don't ever recall.

**Never delivered a baby?**

No.

**No. Did you ever want to do that sort of nursing?**

No. I preferred to go, most people do it after they've done their general training, I preferred to go back to the theatre.

13:30 **Speaking of looking after children, did you ever have to care for any children during the war? Like in the Middle East?**

No.

**They were all adults?**

Mmmm. Entirely.

**Yes.**

Yes and mostly men too. Just the odd trained nurse who got sick.

**And you never had to look after any local civilians who may have got hurt?**

No.

**No. So all soldiers?**

Yes.

14:00 **I suppose they had separate hospitals for civilians?**

I expect so.

**Yes Okay. I believe once you completed training you went to Sydney, Nan.**

Yes.

**To work?**

No. After I'd been in the theatre I went to Sydney.

**After you'd been to theatre? Yes and whereabouts in Sydney did you go?**

Chatswood Hospital. I think it was Chatswood General. Quite a big hospital

14:30 and I did theatre work there too.

**Why did you go to Sydney?**

Oh I just wanted a change and I had friends in Sydney and a brother. No reason in particular.

**And was it a challenging environment to work, a challenging work environment at Chatswood?**

No, no.

**You'd already done that sort of work?**

Oh

15:00 much simpler than the Alfred. Much.

**The Alfred was harder?**

Well the theatre work was hard because Mr Trumble had just started doing his cerebral tumours and you know they used to last for six hours or seven hours. And you see he didn't have his own theatre in those days and he was always holding up

15:30 the next surgeon to come in. So occasionally he used to go to matron and say, "Could I go back on Sunday?" And she'd ring for me and I'd go down and she said, "Look I'm awfully sorry but..." I said, "Look it doesn't worry me." Sunday was my day off and I didn't get paid for it or anything. I just went back for him because he had to have

16:00 someone who knew the ropes.

**Did you feel was there any doctors that you worked with at that time who you looked up to in a big way?**

Oh yes. Mr Trumble was marvellous. So was Fay McClure and Malcolm Quick. Oh a lot of them. And Jim Buchanan, the gynaecologist. We all called them sir, of course. They were always sir to us but

16:30 now they call them by their Christian names. How things have changed. But of course they were all honorary in those days. They weren't paid.

**Yes. They weren't paid?**

No all the work was honorary.

**And surgeons used to be called mister didn't they?**

Yes you still...

**Rather than doctor?**

They're still called mister.

**They're still called mister?**

Surgeons are still mister. But

17:00 now of course they've got to pay them I suppose which accounts for the hospitals being in such a bad way financially.

**It must cost them a lot to pay top name surgeons. Yes**

Yes of course it would.

**Did you know any women doctors Nan?**

No occasionally we got one in if there was a private patient who came into

17:30 Russell House but they weren't very plentiful in those days.

**Did you ever fancy being a doctor yourself?**

Yes, I did think of it but the opportunity didn't arrive.

**There weren't many women doctors around in those days?**

No there weren't really.

18:00 No, not very many.

**During your time in the services as a nurse do you recall any doctors you didn't particularly get on very well with or you didn't have a very high opinion of? Were there any?**

Mmmm. There was one particularly, I won't mention his name, but he used to throw

18:30 instruments round the floor and get very excited. We used to dread his days.

**Hey?**

We used to dread him coming.

**Did he get cranky?**

Mmmm.

**How did he express himself?**

Oh you know there was always something wrong with the catheter, something

19:00 wrong. He always blamed everyone else but himself. But Jim Buchanan he used to sing Scottish songs while he was operating or hymns. He was marvellous to work with, didn't get into a flap or anything. Neither did Mr Trumble. I think he was

**Trumble?**

He eventually operated on my husband.

**I've heard the name Trumble.**

Oh there's a Trumble

19:30 Unit at the Alfred.

**Was it a high pressure job being a surgeon do you think?**

Yes. Oh very much so. Yes. And being an anaesthetist too. Of course you see the anaesthetics have changed so much because in my day it was nearly all what they called open ether. They'd put a mask on their face and

20:00 dripped ether onto it and then of course when they went back to the ward you had to cope with vomiting as well as pain. But now with these injections it's so much easier. They did use gas occasionally in my day but not often. It was mostly open ether.

**So it was a very different time and different treatments in a lot of ways?**

Oh yes

20:30 completely.

**What was what the most common illness in the Middle East or the most common problem?**

Apart from wounds?

**Apart from wounds yes.**

Probably malaria. Yes I would think possibly or just plain what

21:00 they called Gyppo [Egyptian] Tummy. Diarrhoea and vomiting. That was prevalent because they'd go out and eat food somewhere else. not very hygienically cooked.

**Did any of your Nurses get sick?**

Yes well we had two

21:30 in Syria with malaria with BT malaria. Which was benign torsion malaria. The other was malignant torsion but we didn't have any at all in the Middle East - they only got that up at Kokoda.

**Did you ever get sick?**

Yes I got malaria too.

**Did you?**

Mmmm. But I wasn't

22:00 diagnosed. As I said I had to sit and gargle my throat because the old doctor said I'd a sore throat. I thought no I didn't. He just it hadn't occurred to him that it might be malaria. It hadn't occurred to me either. But then when I went to Queensland my spleen all blew up because I hadn't been treated and in those days it was three weeks

22:30 treatment because they had quinine, Atebrin and Plasmaquin. so many days on each.

**Why, didn't you get treated for your malaria?**

Not early in the piece.

**Not early?**

I did in Queensland because this other treatment hadn't come in.

**So what happened in Queensland? Did you get a recurrence of it ?**

No

23:00 no. I got a recurrence, yes I got it when I was at Ipswich and then that's when my spleen blew up but after my treatment I didn't have it again.

**Was that quite serious when your spleen blew up?**

Oh yes, you have to be treated. Not death or anything like that.

**And that was an aftermath**

23:30 **after effect of the malaria?**

Yes.

**Yes. I wanted to ask you Nan about the mental patients you looked after and I wanted to ask you what sort of symptoms did they present?**

Oh I don't think we looked after any mental patients at any time.

**Wasn't there a hospital for mental**

24:00 **patients. Oh you didn't actually work there though?**

No. Oh down at the Alfred we had a place called The Cottage right at the back.

**Oh no I actually mean in the Middle East.**

No

**There was?**

No. We took over a mental hospital.

**Oh that's what it was, yes?**

But we didn't look after those patients. They were all locals down in these bear pit things.

**Sure. You were saying at the Alfred there was...?**



24:30 Yes they had what they called The Cottage out the back. I did a night duty there and they had three cells and sometimes one night I had trouble with one of them but I rang the sister in charge, Sister Schaefer. She was only a little thing like that and she fixed it. She fixed them.

**And I know Sergei [interviewer] asked you earlier, I was interesting in finding**

25:00 **a bit more about... I know he asked you whether you encountered many men with psychological problems ...**

No.

**Many soldiers? Did you ever encounter men who'd experienced shell shock or...?**

No.

**No?**

No. Not ever.

**Really? Were they maybe sent to different hospitals or...?**

I don't remember ever hearing

25:30 of any. You used to hear about them in the First World War but I didn't hear I don't remember. Were there any in the Second?

**I believe so yes. We spoke to a nurse yesterday who encountered men who'd experienced heavy fire and bombing and were quite shaky you know.**

Well that would, well that would be after when they returned to Australia, was it?

**Oh I think this was when she was in the Middle East as well.**

26:00 No well they must have gone straight to the Base Hospitals.

**Sure yes. So most men you looked after it was more physical problems?**

All, all physical.

**Yes. Did you ever encounter men who were depressed?**

No.

**No?**

No they were all inclined to be a very cheery lot. With

26:30 really Australian personalities. Full of fun, always telling jokes.

**Do any patients you nursed stand out in particular, that were particularly memorable?**

Yes a few of them do. There was one boy who came back from Bardia

27:00 and I mentioned him before who was so very sick but he recovered and then of course there were the odd ones that we knew.

**Did you encounter any difficult patients?**

No no. They were all...

**They were all good?**

Quite happy and didn't complain. Uncomplaining.

27:30 **I wanted to find out more about, Nan, what you would do in your time off in the Middle East, like recreational activities.**

Oh it was really good. When we were at Gaza we could go down to the Mediterranean and spend a whole day on the beach. We were all lovely and brown there. Of course if we had a few days off we'd get to

28:00 Jerusalem some way or another. The same at Mersa Matruh. We didn't have much time off there but we swam in Cleopatra's pool. She was supposed to have been swimming in that particular pool and there were always invitations for dinner and dances and everything.

**Do you remember any dances in particular that you**

28:30 **attended?**

No. No there were so many. When we were on leave in Alexandria after Matruh... Oh goodness, my diary is just amazing. It's, "Got home late 4:45am." I won't, didn't tell my children that. "Home 4:30,"

and how I stood up to it I wouldn't know because we weren't working and we were in a hotel so we could

29:00 relax the next day

**Stay out late yes. Where?**

And in Jerusalem of course we saw all the sights there.

**Where would you go if you stayed out very late? Was that going to a dance maybe or...?**

Yes, yes and there were clubs and the hotels all had bands.

**Live music?**

Yes

29:30 always. Oh yes. I don't think they had the other type in those days. I think it was all live.

**What sort of music did they have?**

Oh the popular songs. Begin the Beguine. Did you hear know that one?

**Which one?**

Begin the Beguine.

**Oh yes yes.**

And of course all the war songs. You know, Roll out the Barrel and

30:00 **Auld Lang Syne?**

Wish Me Luck As You Kiss Me Goodbye. Actually they played that as we left Fremantle and we were all a bit tearful.

**That's a classic that one isn't it?**

Yes well Gracie Fields was around in those days you see and also

**Gracie Fields, was she Australian?**

Oh no.

**American?**

Yes.

30:30 **That's right. Who else?**

Well who was the other? Vera Lynn.

**Oh yes.**

Vera Lynn was the popular one. Lili Marlene, actually Lili Marlene was a German song and they turned it down and the Allies took it up and it was very popular.

**I know that song. Yes yes**

Yes it's good

**It's a good song.**

I've got it on a record.

**Have you?**

An old 78

31:00 record.

**Have you? Yes. Bob Hope.**

Yes not much Bob Hope. Wee bit perhaps prior to Bob Hope. I suppose he was there.

**I think he even visited troops during World War II.**

Yes. I don't know if it was if it was Middle East it might have been.

**No more in the islands I think. Yes**

Yes I think it was.

**The Pacific.**

31:30 There was one actor who was shot down and killed. Now who was that?

**Actor?**

Somewhere near Gibraltar? No I can't remember I can't remember.

**I don't know.**

A well known one.

**Were there picture theatres?**

Yes

**Where you were staying?**

Yes most places. When we moved

32:00 up to Deerseny apparently the night before we arrived the CO had all the boys together and warned them that they were just to mind their language because they'd come out with odd things and you know not very good language too and he said, "There are eight women coming so just be careful what you say."

**What sort of**

32:30 **films would be would be shown?**

Well we I saw Casablanca there for the first time and The Lady Vanishes. I went with the padre to see that.

**Yes, yes.**

Padre Forest took me to see The Lady Vanishes which was much better in black and white. They spoilt it when they did it in colour.

**Who was in that?**

33:00 Well know British actors and actresses but I can't remember.

**And of course we might just pause there Nan. And did you remember seeing, Nan, any war films during the war? Films about war?**

33:30 Oh the big one about America and oh about North and South America.

**Gone with the Wind?**

Yes

**Oh yes you mentioned this.**

I was in Haifa when I saw that.

**Yes?**

Yes.

**Did you like it?**

Yes I liked it, enjoyed it.

**Was it important for you to have these times off and have recreational time**

34:00 **to yourself?**

Oh yes, you'd have to. You couldn't work at that pace continuously.

**So it was good to get your mind off work and...**

Yes everything

**the war and what else did you do for recreation?**

Well I didn't play golf but

34:30 Jean Hannah and a friend of hers Pat Owen and Vic and I had day in Alex [Alexandria] once and they played golf I walked round with them and oh it was a marvellous day just for recreation. And then another day four of us. Han and I and two others. it's in my diary that there were four of us but I can't remember who they were. We got a launch and went out onto

35:00 the Mediterranean and we weren't allowed to take photos for security reasons but we saw submarines going out and destroyers and cruisers, all big battleships.

**Wow.**

But it was it was worth the trip but we weren't allowed to photograph anything.

**Did you take any photographs?**

Not of that.

**Or during your**

35:30 **time in the Middle East?**

Oh yes. There're pages of them there.

**So was that in a way a bit of a hobby for you too?**

Yes.

**Yes**

It was.

**Was it important for you to take photographs as far as....**

Well no we just...

**Keeping track?**

Yes we just wanted to keep track of

36:00 what had happened and what we were doing.

**Did you ever write a diary?**

Yes I kept my diary. I told Serge that before I went away that the lady mayoress in Geelong in Melbourne, Malvern, had an afternoon tea party for the three first sisters to go from Malvern

36:30 and she presented us with a diary which was marvellous because I think only two of the eight of us had diaries and the others hadn't bothered. And it's been marvellous to go back on things.

**Did you write in it everyday?**

Mostly. Sometimes I'd have to check up with the other one and say, "What did we do on so and so or such

37:00 and such a day?"

**During your time in the Middle East, what knowledge of what was going on in the war elsewhere did you have?**

None. None at all. As I said before you know Orm Smith came in and said, "Oh girls there's a war on. Pearl Harbour's been bombed." You see we didn't get any of that.

37:30 But our relatives in Australia used to send us these long lists of casualties because over there we didn't know who had been killed most of the time. And they'd cut it out and each day there was a long list of casualties in the Melbourne press and they'd post those over to us and we'd say, "Goodness me. So and so's been killed," and

38:00 that was how we found out about that. Which sounds silly when we were over there but there was no way we could hear.

**That must have been hard because you didn't know for a long time the status of...**

Well no, no. Though occasionally while we were at Bardia especially, some of the boys came back and said, "Oh so and so was killed and someone else was killed."

**So you'd hear word of mouth,**

38:30 **by word of mouth?**

Yes occasionally.

**Yes**

But not often. There were a lot you missed out on and when Greece was evacuated you know we were all, we stayed up all night, our ears flapping to hear who'd got out and who was taken.

**Did you have access to English news or, you know, newspapers or...?**

No no.

**Australian or English newspapers?**

Not at all

39:00 no.

**Or radio?**

No. No radios.

**So you would have felt sort of quite isolated in a way?**

Well....

**Culturally you know?**

Yes yes.

**What did you read when you had time off? Did you have books with you?**

Well I carried a book of Rupert Brooke's poems

39:30 around with me which was crazy all through the Middle East but I always loved his poems and I loved poetry. But no we didn't get much reading at all. We were too tired when we got off. No I think the Comforts Fund supplied books and things and I know Ben Meredith wrote and said oh it was

40:00 wonderful in the Base Hospital. We were each given a bottle of Australian beer and cigarettes and toothpaste and things. What did you know about the [Australian] Comforts Fund?

**I've heard of it yes.**

Well they had they called it the Comforts Fund and all these women, you know, who were left behind, older women, worked like mad. Knitted

40:30 scarves, knitted balaclavas, socks and worked to raise money to send toothpaste and soap and things over to the boys in the army.

**Fantastic. And it came to you as well?**

I don't think so. I don't think we got any but I suppose it was there. I suppose we could've taken it if we'd a wanted it. And the

41:00 Red Cross was marvellous in that work too. There was a Red Cross representative over there all the time. I think his name was Mr Palmer but I'm not sure.

**We might just pause there.**

## Tape 6

00:30 **Now who in the Middle East, Nan, who was your... did you have a best mate? Like a best friend? One of the other nurses or?**

Yes we were all very close but originally Una Melville and I used to stick together because we were both Alfred trainees about the same time. There were

01:00 three other Alfred trainees but they were older but she and I used to stick together a lot but then as we got to know the others well, we were just a close knit family.

**Were you all of similar age?**

Well I was the youngest and then the one next to me was about eight months older than I am and

01:30 the others were all a bit older. But Jean Hannah of course she was ten years older and I think Dorey Vines was about eight years older.

**And you all were quite a cohesive bunch? You all got on quite well?**

Oh very, very well.

**Yes?**

I had parties here for Hannah's 90th birthday and Dorey's 90th birthday and we had a whole lot of the unit here

02:00 but there are so few left.

**When was the last time you caught up with some of them?**

That I caught up with them?

**Yes caught up with them?**

Christ. The Anzac Day before last. This Anzac Day I think the president's gone a bit vague too and nothing was done about it. But we always had a reunion up till then.

02:30 **The president, which president? Of the RSL [Returned and Services League]?**

President of the CCS Association. Our own association. He was an orderly and a nice lad but he was vague the time before and there were only about 12 or 15 of us there. There are very few left.

**So really you made life long friends with**

03:00 **those woman?**

Oh yes. Definitely.

**Did you meet up sort of after the war pretty much straight away after the war?**

All the time.

**All the time?**

Yes all the time. Yes the army friends were very important. They still are, what, the ones that are left.

**Strong camaraderie?**

There are only two of us left. The one who's

03:30 next to me in age, she's left too.

**Did you know of Sister Vivian Bullwinkel?**

Yes.

**Did you ever meet her?**

Yes I saw her up at the dedication of the Nurses War Memorial in Canberra where I met these relatives of mine. She was at that.

04:00 And Betty Jeffrey, of course, I'd known she'd trained with me. Although she was a lot older she was junior to me cause she was older when she started. But she grew up in East Malvern. I knew Betty very well.

**She wrote a book didn't she?**

Yes. Called...

**White Coolies?**

White Coolies.

**Yes.**

It was filmed, well most of it was. The film was called....

04:30 **Paradise Road?**

Paradise Lost was it?

**Oh Road.**

Paradise Road. Yes.

**Yes that's right and that was based on that book?**

Yes.

**I didn't know that.**

Oh yes. Bruce Beresford ran a special session of it at some little theatre in Bourke Street for her to see. And I said to her, "What was it like Betty?" And she said when I saw those girls jumping overboard those

05:00 nurses she said, "I don't remember any more." She said, "I had a complete black out." However he gave her a video of it. But that must have been shocking. When their ship was bombed. I asked her a few things about the film. I said, "Did you really eat snails?" And she said, "No we didn't." And then

05:30 that part about the Japanese wanting the girls to go and serve them and they'd get all this food and she said, "No it didn't happen in our camp."

**Where was her camp?**

Oh various places. They moved them from one place to another but she said it was awful in the sea because she was on a raft

06:00 with Matron Pasckie and several other girls and there was Betty and one other. I can't remember which one and she was a big strong girl, much stronger and bigger than I am, and they had to take turns getting off to swim and the raft would move in with the tide and then the tide would come and take them right back out again

06:30 you see. And this happened so many times and at last she said, "Look I'm going to swim for it." And Matron Pasckie said, "Yes so am I." And there were a couple of others or more than a couple, three or four I guess, more than that I think. There were 14 weren't there? But at any rate then Pasckie was never seen again, she just disappeared and the people on the raft were never seen again. It went

07:00 out to sea. But Betty made it and was in the water for 36 hours because they'd get so near the shore at Bunker Island and then the tide would take them back again.

**Thirty-six hours?**

Mmmm. She said she was water logged when she got out, and then they had to tramp through the mud in the mangrove swamps and eventually

07:30 gave themselves up.

**They had a very tough time didn't they?**

Oh shocking. Shocking. There was another Alfred girl Billy Freeman she was with them. I said to Bet, "What happened to Billy?" And she said the night before they were relieved she was sick and Betty was on duty and she couldn't sleep and any rate she died.

08:00 But I used to go and see Betty when she was in the flat down here.

**She lived nearby?**

Yes, yes not far. Not within walking distance but I used to drive in those days.

**Did you ever talk to Sister Bullwinkel about her**

08:30 **experiences?**

No. Not about her experiences. I really only met her up at Canberra that time.

**She had quite an experience too didn't she?**

Oh shocking. Yes that's where they were all shot. Dreadful.

09:00 **Are there any nurses or doctors in the war that you particularly admired or looked up to? Like almost like mentors for you?**

Almost...?

**Almost like mentors, became a mentor? Anyone?**

No, no, not really. They all did the most wonderful job. You know they'd operate till they were nearly dead on their feet.

09:30 **Excuse me. Did you ever treat high ranking officers or top brass?**

Often.

**Yes?**

Yes I told Serge about Colonel Woodward who was later Governor of

10:00 NSW and then the Governor-General's son, we had him. Captain, the Honourable Patrick Horwoven, I looked after him. But he was in British Army.

**What was**

10:30 **your opinion of women in the air force. army and navy? Like the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service]? Did you come across many of those women?**

No. Not at all. Post war I did. They go to Anzac House too. One of them died a short time ago. Oh no I think she was

11:00 army. I knew a few of them from the Alfred.

**Did you know any nurses from the Alfred who joined the WAAAF or did they....?**

No. Not the WAAAFs. No some joined the navy and some, I think some joined the air force but I

11:30 I don't know which ones those were.

**What did you think about or what do you think about the idea of women fighting on the front line?**

I couldn't have imagined it ever happening in our day. They must be very brave to do it.

12:00 I can't imagine it ever happening in our day.

**I believe it didn't happen in your day but it happens now. I think there's women...**

Yes it does happen now.

**...who are on the front line - not on the front line but in overseas action**

Yes.

**now. Do you think that's a good thing or what do you think about that?**

Well I suppose, I suppose it's a very good thing. I mean after

12:30 all it swells the ranks. Of course you get these terribly brave people. Look at that girl Wake, Nancy Wake. Have you read her book?

**I've seen the television series yes.**

But the book's better than the TV series. And Odette, did you see Odette? She was a spy dropped in

13:00 into Germany behind the lines.

**French woman?**

Yes yes and a relative of Winston Churchill. And they gave her a dreadful time. She couldn't walk because to make her talk they'd pulled her toenails out. But that book was marvellous, so I suppose there are women. I don't think I would

13:30 ever have volunteered.

**It's interesting some men we've interviewed have said that they don't think the front line is a place for women. It's because, you know, the women are the ones that have the babies and....**

Well there's that way of looking at it and the other way is that if they are there it would mean the men

14:00 were under an obligation to protect them perhaps. I don't know.

**It's an interesting issue though isn't it?**

It is interesting. I don't know why they do it. If it's for excitement or whether a

14:30 military career really appeals to them. But as I say I can't imagine myself there, me doing it.

**Now I'd like to ask you Nan if you could describe to me how you met your husband to be.**

15:00 **If you could tell me walk me through that episode.**

Well it was very simple because we sat at the same table. At mess in the Neuralia there was a sister deposited round. Of course there were only eight of us so some of the tables didn't have a sister. Jean Hannah being in charge, she sat at the captain's table and with the CO of the

15:30 army up there and we were all at various places and I was at a table with five lieutenants and he was beside me. But you know we weren't friendly till later, till afterwards.

**till after the diner you mean?**

No till after we got over to the Middle East.

16:00 **So you met him at dinner here in Melbourne?**

On the way over on the ship.

**On the boat that's right. On the ship.**

On the old Neuralia.

**So when you were having dinner with him, was there any...**

No, no



**....sort of, romantic inclinations?**

No we just used to laugh and you know he played, they played jokes, tricks on me. If I was late to dinner they'd put a,

16:30 the seats lifted up, and they'd put a whole lot of walnuts underneath the bit that lifted up and you know, it was just...

**Mucking around?**

Yes.

**Could you tell that he was... did he flirt with you then?**

No, no, we were just very good friends.

**Just friends?**

Very good friends. But it was only

17:00 one other one that who kept in touch with us and he just died about three years ago. Fellow called Ab Grey. He was a friend of ours all through the war and well he was taken prisoner in Greece.

**So after you met Vic**

17:30 **on the ship did you go your separate ways then or...?**

Yes but you see they all hungered for female company and we used to have a lot of people that we'd only just met would come and look us up just to have a woman to talk to.

18:00 And he he probably did that. But then when it got a bit serious he was up in Damascus and I was down near Beirut and of course there was no contact at all.

**So when did it get serious? At what stage was that?**

I think probably just before Bardia.

18:30 **So you went out on a few dates?**

Yes.

**Yes. So at that stage you were working in the hospital in Bardia?**

I was working in the hospital at Amiriya.

**Amiriya? And what was he doing?**

Well I don't know. Well eventually they moved up to Matruh before us and he used to get a lift down to see me from there and then

19:00 they moved up outside Bardia and we moved up to Matruh. And then it was after Bardia that we were billeted in very nice hotel, the name of it's gone, in Alexandria and he was in the Cecile around the corner so that's when it

19:30 really got serious.

**So did he sort of wine and dine you and bring you flowers?**

Oh yes I got flowers about every day when I was in the hotel. And then he went off to Greece but he got out when Greece fell.

20:00 **When he went to Greece did you keep in contact via letter?**

No I didn't last as long as that. They weren't there for any length of time.

**Okay.**

The Germans just kept pouring down and...

**Where did he go after that?**

Probably Syria.

**Syria?**

20:30 Yes I would think so. He went to a couple of officers' training schools too before his promotion came up.

**Oh okay.**

Oh I used to see him in Nazareth. I don't know where he was when we were in Nazareth. But I know he was in Damascus when we were in Syria because he

- 21:00 came down to see me once and had trouble getting back and was nearly AWL [Absent Without Leave].
- Nearly got in trouble? Yes. Did he talk to you much about his experiences on the front?**
- No. They never they never talked about any of it. Only thing that I ever heard was when he had some friends there and I used to listen in.
- 21:30 **After the war or during?**
- After.
- Yes.**
- After.
- So afterwards so he never really told you anything about it?**
- No no.
- Did you ask?**
- Probably not. But when we were engaged I gave him a watch and he knew exactly which stump he'd left it on, on the
- 22:00 Kokoda Trail. He remembered he was going to hop into this stream to go for a wash and he went without the watch so I don't know who got that.
- And it was gone? Because he went from Australia or he went from the Middle East ?**
- He went to New Guinea
- To Australia to New Guinea?**
- Yes.
- Yes. What division was he with?**
- With the 7th
- 22:30 at that stage. He was with the 6th originally.
- Yes**
- But he was in the whole of the New Guinea campaign.
- Was he? He saw quite a lot of service by the sounds of it?**
- Yes.
- I'll just have a look at my notes Nan.**
- 23:00 **While you were in the Middle East how did you celebrate Christmas and birthdays?**
- Oh we all we always had a Christmas party with turkey and the whole works and when we had a formal mess we always had wine and passed the
- 23:30 port. That's another thing we had to learn how to pass the port. None of us knew. You don't touch it with your left hand. You reach with your right hand to the person. You probably know that but we didn't, we didn't know that. But there are all sorts of those little stories and the formal messes were really quite formal to start with.
- 24:00 The CO would be at the top of the table and you know the littlies down at the bottom behind the pepper and salt.
- Where did you have these Christmas lunches or dinners?**
- Oh just wherever we happened to be. There're a few photos of them. And then we used to leave our patients hopefully
- 24:30 with an orderly and go down and serve the men their Christmas dinner. I mean the men belonging to the unit. But we always had turkey and plum pudding. We didn't eat badly over there at all. A bit monotonous.
- What was your typical meal?**
- Pardon?
- What was your typical meal?**
- 25:00 **For dinner? Oh some kind of stew made out of bully beef and vegetables. When we arrived up at Mersa Matruh at 12 o'clock New Year's Eve we went straight out to the barracks and they**

**had steak and potatoes for us. The steak was pretty tough but it was edible and then the next morning we lined up**

25:30 **with a tin plate and a tin mug. That was our first taste of real army life. We lined up with the men at half past five in the morning for breakfast which I've got in my diary, " Bread and butter and greasy bacon."**

**Nice. Did you have access to eggs?**

Yes that was one thing we could

26:00 get eggs. But you had to be careful. We didn't eat much in the way of greens, you know lettuce and that sort of thing because it was a bit of a risk. And we all got this awful Gyppo Tummy.

**Sort of stomachache?**

Vomiting, diarrhoea

**Yes.**

But that was prevalent.

**What about tea and milk**

26:30 **and things like that?**

Yes, we always had tea and milk.

**So you could make it?**

The family used to send over condensed milk in tins and we'd have that in coffee in our tents.

**And tea would they send over?**

Yes I can't...

**Or they had tea there?**

I suppose we did have tea so I suppose we got it from someone.

**And you had rations? So you were rationed food were you?**

27:00 No.

**No?**

No we weren't. Rationed water in the desert.

**Rationed water?**

Yes. Very much so.

**Really?**

Mmmm.

**Really. There was a shortage?**

Well it all had to be brought in by tank. Five hundred gallon tanks and the Coldstream Guards used to fill ours up.

**What about Christmas**

27:30 **cake and pudding, how did you...?**

Yes well the family always sent those. There were special soldiers' tins. You baked it in that tin and it had a lid to fit on and they used to send those over to us. They were good.

**Well some people I think sent them in muslin bags too didn't they?**

Well they normally....

**Muslin?**

They sewed them, oh well, they used to sew these

28:00 tins in calico and put the address in calico instead of paper that would've come off.

**Yes.**

That's the way they got them to us. And an old ex-patient of mine here from Vimy House used to send me, well he had an order at...oh goodness I can't remember the tobacconist in Melbourne...a well known tobacconist and I used to get cigarettes

28:30 every month from him.

**Wow.**

You know everybody, everyone was so kind to us.

**Did you have much any access to alcohol?**

Yes, yes we had a wet canteen. Yes I was treasurer of ours. That's right.

**Yes?**

They all had to buy it.

29:00 What they drank or what they entertained their guests on they had to pay for.

**Were you much of a drinker ?**

No.

**No?**

None of us were really very much.

**Just the odd glass?**

Well I'd been brought up as a very strict Presbyterian where you don't ever have alcohol in the house

29:30 and it was Colonel Woodward took me up to Damascus once when he was a patient to choose some brocade. They made lovely brocade up there to send home to his wife and he said, "What'll you have to drink?" And I thought, "Oh goodness, what'll I order?" Because I didn't know anything about drink.

30:00 And I'd heard Orm Smith had said the only drink to have was whisky. So I said, "I'll have whisky" not knowing even what it tasted like. And he said, "What, at ten o'clock in the morning?" Which put me in my place.

**Did you know it was alcoholic, quite strong?**

I knew it was alcoholic but I'd know idea what whisky was. We didn't ever have alcohol at our

30:30 house when we were young.

**Do you recall any of your birthdays over there? Did you have...**

Yes we usually...

**A couple of birthdays?**

We usually celebrated them somewhere or another if it was just morning tea in the tent with a few friends. We didn't go in for presents or anything, we just had a get together.

31:00 **Did you buy many things like souvenirs from local markets and things like that?**

Yes, yes and I sent some home with a lad who was being repatriated. I've forgotten what for and I sent them home with the address but he didn't bother delivering them. He just kept them. Oh I haven't

31:30 got much except lace. We bought a lot of lace doilies and things in Nazareth. The nuns made them there but I sent a fez home and it didn't ever arrive.

**A fez? That's the...?**

Hat.

**A hat. Yes that's right. What about fabric, did you ever buy fabric?**

The only thing to buy was...

**Lace?**

brocade. And I had

32:00 a dressing gown. I gave it to one of the grandchildren, I can't remember who it was. We had it made up. You could get things made up in a day or so over there.

**What clothes did you wear? Obviously you had a nursing uniform but when you weren't nursing when you were off duty?**

Uniform.

**Did you have civilian clothes you could wear?**

No no. No, no. No civilian clothes.

**You wore uniform all the time?**

Mmmm. All

32:30 uniform.

**How many uniforms did you personally have?**

Well we went away with one outdoor uniform and I think it was six indoor uniforms and then a couple of silk ones for formal mess. They were the ones we...

**Silk ones?**

...dressed in.

**Yes okay. So you had a few?**

But they were all made on the

33:00 same lines. You know military lines with applets and oh yes because when we were in Matruh we washed our underclothes in our bath water but our uniforms, and of course, we wore a veil you know which was ridiculous in the desert.

**Veils?**

Don't you remember the nurses' veils?

**Yes, yes.**

33:30 Our veils and our uniforms were sent right down to Alexandria to be laundered.

**Really? So they were specially laundered?**

Well there was no way we could do them.

**Couldn't wash hand wash them?**

No, no ironing or anything and nowhere to hang them at any rate.

**And the army paid for that I assume?**

Mmmm.

**Yes Was there quite an emphasis on**

34:00 **you and your fellow nurses maintaining a good appearance?**

Oh yes.

**Yes?**

Very much so.

**So grooming was very important?**

Yes, very. And when we went away we were given little handbags like that which were useless because you needed something that would hold money, your handkerchief and a sanitary towel.

34:30 So the rumour went round over there that we were allowed to get bigger ones, still brown, so we each got one then Miss Wilson arrived over and she was furious, furious that we'd all bought these without official permission. However Han explained to her how useless they were and so she calmed down.

35:00 **Were these like leather purses like brown leather?**

Yes like brown leather handbags but square. You know not tizzy ones. Very plain.

**Yes. Did you get a bit tired of wearing the uniform all the time?**

No it was very easy to wear.

**Yes? You never hankered after wearing a pretty dress?**

No. Oh when we got back to Melbourne if we went to along Darling

35:30 Street to what's the other place, in Little Collins Street? We'd get into an evening dress for a change.

**Yes?**

But that didn't happen often.

**I suppose having a uniform makes life much easier cause you don't have to decide what to wear?**

Oh much easier. And they were good uniforms and...

**Yes**

...always looked neat.

**Yes.**

36:00 **And what sort of shoes did you wear?**

Flat brown lace ups.

**Did they have good cushioned support?**

Oh no I don't remember that. They were comfortable. They had to be because you wore them all the time. Our feet played up in Nazareth on those hard floors. Actually I had one foot

36:30 operated on, Bob operated on it for me, so I was in bed for days.

**Really? What was wrong with your foot Nan?**

Oh I got an infection underneath.

**This is over in Nazareth?**

In Nazareth yes.

**From standing on...?**

It wasn't, it wasn't serious.

**Was that from standing up the whole time?**

Just wear and tear I think.

37:00 **I know because I know for nurses now footwear is very important. I mean I know they stress the importance of footwear because it is such an on your feet job.**

Well we always wore flat shoes, flat lace up shoes always.

**Just plain? Yes. Did you get sore feet? You must have.**

Pardon?

**You must have got sore feet?**

No. Not well at

37:30 Nazareth is the only time that I could complain about that because our footwear was comfortable.

**Just one pair of shoes for each girl or did you have a couple?**

A couple I think. I know, yes, because it must a been because I know some of the shoes were stolen when we were robbed at Asfaria.

38:00 **Really? I wonder who robbed them. Some locals or...?**

Well it wasn't ever discovered whether it was an Australian or whether it was or whether it was a local. But we were all asleep in there when it happened. But of course in those days, I wouldn't sleep through it now, but in those days you sleep so heavily.

**So you obviously didn't have any trouble sleeping in those days?**

No none at all.

38:30 **Did you ever get bad backs?**

I didn't. A lot of people do, a lot of people still suffer from their backs.

**Nursing staff yes?**

It was difficult in Nazareth when they were on stretchers and on the floor, that was hell trying to nurse them down there and do dressings when they were on the floor.

39:00 **You would've had to what, go down on your knees?**

Oh no bend over I think.

**Quite low stretchers were they?**

Oh yes right, right down.

**Right to the floor?**

Right down to the bottom.

**Gee that would've been hard.**

Mmmm.

**I'm just having a look to see what. We might just.**

## Tape 7

00:30 **Thank you. I was interested to know generally what your living conditions were like in the Middle East, Nan?**

Well when we were in tents it was three to a tent and we each had our own stretchers.

01:00 Along the Gaza Ridge we were in huts and I think it was two to a hut but I can't remember. It could have been three. We were quite comfortable. I can't complain about it. In Syria we were in a brick building so it was no problem there and we all had our stretchers.

**Did the tents have floors**

01:30 **at all?**

Pardon?

**Did the tents have floors?**

Oh no, no.

**It was on the ground?**

Just the ground. Yes.

**Yes.**

But then we got flooded out at Amiriya and, you know, the cabin trunks were swimming when we got up in the morning.

**I was going to ask you about that. There was a terrific storm apparently?**

Yes a rain storm which is most unusual. And, oh the water was about that depth in the bottom of the,,

02:00 **Were you a bit scared?**

No. We were just annoyed that everything had to be dried.

**Torrential rain?**

Yes.

**And the rain came into the tent?**

Yes, well it ran down, you see, because they were all dug in so there was nothing to stop it just going into the great big hole with us in it.

**So they didn't dig trenches around the tents?**

02:30 **You know how some...**

No, no

**....in some cases they used to dig trenches so that it would catch the water?**

No. And in the dugout, you see, it was actually built for a hospital and it had hooks along the walls where the stretchers could be hooked on but, of course, we didn't use those. We just had our beds sticking in this direction

03:00 and that direction. But it was quite warm down there.

**Now when you say...**

And we had a vent for air.

**When you say a dugout, was this like almost like a cave?**

Oh, we were right down 20 feet. Twenty-five feet underground. I'll show you the photograph afterwards.

**Really? Twenty-five feet?**

Yea the British Army wouldn't let us stay unless we, wouldn't

03:30 let the women stay unless we lived down there. And he cooked, a Charlie cooked our meals down there.

**Who was Charlie?**

Charlie was our batman. Our cook really.

**Batman yes? Was he an Australian Army man?**

Australian. Australian.

**Did he take good care of you?**

Oh, yes he tried too.

04:00 **Was he a....**

He wasn't bad. But you see it was very communal living because we had these two little canvas baths and I mean you just had to bath irrespective of who... There were never any men there. Occasionally they came down but I mean when we were bathing but. Oh and after we relaxed a bit after

04:30 things got quieter after Matruh and one night Bob Officer rode his motor bike down into it and woke us all up, just as a joke.

**He was one of the doctors?**

The surgeon yes.

**So you say it was 25-feet under ground. How did you access it? Was there, like a ramp?**

A big long ramp.

**Wow.**

Huge long ramp

05:00 with the water tank at the top and the generator at the top.

**That's amazing.**

And I can't remember what the toilet facilities were. Isn't that silly? I cannot and I haven't got anything about it. No, I don't remember.

**Was it... I think you mentioned the toilet was quite primitive? Was it a plank of wood or...?**

No, that that was at Amiriya.

05:30 **Amiriya, okay.**

Yes. I can't remember at Matruh. I suppose we had a proper toilet down there if it was built for a....

**You must have.**

If it was built for a ...

**Hospital?**

Hospital. They would have I suppose.

**So was it just one big room that all you nurses were in?**

Yes well you went down the ramp and you went into an open place, as far as I can remember only about the width

06:00 of this room, and then you went ...that was our mess. We had a table along the wall and I think the cooking facilities were over here somewhere and then it narrowed a little bit and then it opened out further down and that's where we all slept.

**So it was sort of like a largish room?**

Yes.

**Yes. How many of you are all sleeping in the same area?**

Eight, eight of us.

06:30 **All eight yes?**

Yes, there was only the one area.

**Was it ventilated adequately?**



Well it must have been. The only thing that ever worried us were the bed bugs. They came out from the cracks in the wall. But we got used to those too. You get used to anything.

**What were they like?**

Black, horrible

07:00 and they'd land on your collar.

**Like cockroaches?**

No, not as big. I remember once too at Amiriya where the we had metal corrugated iron showers, I've got a photo there, and one day I went in and there was this huge big green frog in the corner.

07:30 An enormous thing.

**Any other encounters with wildlife in the Middle East?**

No. We all had a ride on a camel of course but one's enough. You don't want a second one.

**The novelty wears off?**

Yes. We got out to see the Pyramids

08:00 too. I didn't mention that before.

**Yes.**

It's amazing, you know, how they built those by hand. They had no machinery or anything.

**Isn't it amazing?**

Way out in the desert there. Absolutely amazing.

**Did you climb them?**

No.

**Were they bigger than you thought they'd be?**

Yes, much.

**You'd seen photos?**

08:30 Yes. I think that's where we had our camel ride.

**Apparently they're quite beautiful, the Pyramids?**

Yes, they all have a funny smell. But then I think all the East does out there.

**What sort of smell?**

09:00 Musty perhaps.

**Incense? Did you...**

Pardon?

**Did they burn incense in those days?**

Don't remember seeing any. Oh I think they did in some of the big cathedrals in Jerusalem. Of course there were some where we

09:30 we had to take our shoes off.

**The holy places?**

The holy places. But we went into so many that I can't remember. And then we went to a church service at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church which is just out of Jerusalem and we got a great welcome there and feted when we went out there.

10:00 **Did places like Jerusalem and places like that have a strong sense of holiness?**

Yes. Yes. And of course the Wailing Wall was just...Have you heard of the Wailing Wall?

**I have yes.**

It was just...

**Yesterday.**

10:30 ...amazing to see the Jews put their little notes in and they were so devout about it all.

**What did they use the wall for?**

They wrote little notes. I don't know whether they were prayers or whether they were for

11:00 relatives deceased, and they'd stick them in the cracks.

**It was like a ritual?**

Yes. But the very devout Jewish people, you know, they had long robes and had their heads covered all the time and beards. But of course the Australians have beards now too don't they?

11:30 But Bethlehem where Christ was supposed to be born, it's a little door about that height that you have to crawl in but you see it's all commercialised. You have to pay so much to walk in.

**What is it like,**

12:00 **a building?**

Yes it's a building with this tiny little door that you crawl through.

**Like a manger?**

Yes.

**Was it authentic do you think?**

Well it's supposed to be. You could only take their word for it. And the Garden of Eden was. Well they've got a church down there and apart from

12:30 that it's just ground with olive trees, that's all. And I don't know what your religion is but Vic and I and a girl called Solsey and Andy McLean did that

13:00 trip and the boys bought us each a rosary. Well Solsey had hers blessed by the priest but I didn't. But I've lost it which is maddening because having two Roman Catholic sons-in-law, they would have been most interested. They were made out of olive seeds.

**Beautiful rosaries?**

13:30 I haven't got any idea where it went to.

**Were you particularly religious person or are you, Nan, a particularly religious person?**

Still am.

**Yes.**

I still go to church. I'm probably not as religious as my parents were. I mean we used to walk three

14:00 miles in the snow in Ireland to Sunday school. We'd have Sunday school and then we'd have church which lasted about two hours and then we'd be driven home. And we didn't do anything on Sundays at all.

**It was a holy day?**

Mmmm. Oh some of the old people used to keep their canaries

14:30 covered all day Sunday so they wouldn't sing and some of them didn't wash their dishes on Sunday. Can you imagine what Monday would have been like? We weren't quite as bad as that but we didn't use playing cards and, you see, afterwards mother used to love playing cards out here. She used to love playing 500.

**Did you think much about**

15:00 **God in the Middle East?**

About...?

**About God?**

Yes. We always went to church parade. And on board ship too.

**Did you pray over there?**

Yes.

15:30 I don't go to church very often now because I can't sit through it. But our minister here has a little service for the oldies on a Wednesday which lasts only half an

16:00 hour and we can manage that.

**That's good.**

I don't like old age.

**You don't like old age?**

No.

**What don't you like about it?**

Well I hated giving up my car. That was the worse thing that ever happened to me and oh you lose your hearing you lose your everything.

16:30 Your memory, your balance. However, can't do much about it.

**Do you think you get wiser as you get older?**

You get more tolerant. That's what I tell my family when I hear them raving about something. But I don't know if you get

17:00 wiser.

**Do you think about things more when you're older?**

Yes. Get a different outlook on life. You know what's important and what isn't.

**That's a good thing isn't it?**

Mmmm.

17:30 **Do you have strong memories of the war? Do you think back to that time very much?**

Oh yes often, often. And often I pick my diary up just to go through it to see what I was doing on such and such a date.

18:00 **Okay I'm just having a look at my notes Nan. Won't be a tick. You say you prayed during the war. What would you pray about? What sort of things would you pray about?**

18:30 Your family and the general situation.

**Did you have any idea how long you would have been over there?**

Yes. We left in April 1940

19:00 and we came back oh about two years. Yes, almost two years I think.

**When you were there did you have much of a sense of how long you were supposed to be there? Do you know what I mean?**

No. We always kept thinking the war was going to finish

19:30 and we were all longing to get back at that stage.

**You got homesick?**

Very, very homesick especially when we got our letters from home.

**Who did you correspond with?**

Oh my family and my friends over here.

20:00 **Your mum?**

Oh yes, yes certainly. Oh no it was great when the mail arrived. It was wonderful.

**Did it arrive regularly enough?**

No, well that was the point you see because when there was a battle they'd hold it all up

20:30 until the battle was over. Then there'd be a deluge.

**Did you share your letters with your fellow nurses?**

Oh yes.

**Share the news and...?**

Their news yes.

**How often would you write, Nan?**

Oh about every week if possible.

- 21:00 But there were always so many people to write to you know. But I know one friend well the mother of a friend, apparently I'd put in my letter that I'd been down to Jerusalem to have my hair cut and she thought that was terribly funny. She thought, "Well I wonder if she's gone down to Bethlehem to have it set." You know, it just it didn't strike us as funny but it
- 21:30 struck her as most amusing that you'd go to Jerusalem. But after all Jerusalem was only...
- Down the road ?**
- But the place where we did have a lot of fun was at Tel Aviv. There was a club at Tel Aviv.
- Yes.**
- And we used to go swimming there. We'd go to the club where we could eat and swim at the same time which was really good.
- 22:00 **Fantastic. You'd have a bit of exercise?**
- Yes
- And then a nice dinner?**
- Yes. It was a nice spot.
- Was Tel Aviv quite a big town in those days?**
- Yes but I don't....Looks enormous now but it was still big then.
- Yes.**
- I had my watch stolen you see when we had the big robbery and Vic brought me a new watch in Tel Aviv. I mean they had
- 22:30 all sorts of shops there but nothing very big. But funnily enough Singer showed sewing machine notices everywhere all through the Middle East.
- Wow.**
- Do you remember the old Singer notices?
- I do yes Singers were Australian weren't they?**
- I thought they were English.
- Australian or English? Maybe they were English?**
- Yes I think they were. But you know in funny little out of the way Arab
- 23:00 villages you'd see Singer sewing machine.
- Obscure. Yes. So you said that you had a batman looking after you? Did he look after you sort of throughout the whole Middle East period?**
- Yes.
- So he came with you the whole time?**
- Charlie was with us all the time.
- Yes. What was Charlie like?**
- Well he
- 23:30 older. I mean he wouldn't have been fighting material. I don't think, no he hadn't been to the First World War but he was an older man.
- What, sort of in his 40s or 50s?**
- Yes. And he cooked our meals. That's about all he did. We made our own beds, did our own washing.
- 24:00 **And what would he do when he wasn't cooking your meals, what would he do? Did he have other people to look after too?**
- No, no he entirely belonged to us.
- So he could run errands for you and...?**
- Yes. He well I suppose he wasn't the best of cooks but he wasn't too
- 24:30 bad.

**Not the best?**

Oh well didn't have much imagination. It was generally....

**Same thing?**

bully beef and onions.

**So he'd go shopping for food and bring it back and cook it up?**

Yes, yes.

**Did he have much access to good food?**

25:00 **Like did he have access to the local markets and food markets?**

Well no not much, no.

**Where would the food items come from?**

No they'd be army supplied.

**Army issue?**

They'd be army supplied

**Oh okay.**

No he wouldn't have to get them.

25:30 And when we had to stock up the bar you know two of us would have to go down to some army headquarters to collect it.

**Oh because you were in charge of the bar yes?**

Mmmm. Imagine me who knew nothing about it.

26:00 But we each had to take a job so that was...

**What sort of alcohol did you have access to?**

We had wine, I suppose there was Australian beer. I can't remember a great deal. We certainly had wine and port at official mess when the CO was there.

26:30 **So sometimes I believe you worked 18 hours straight on some shifts?**

Yes but then you see we'd have, when we weren't doing anything we'd have nothing to do but that was when, you know, after the battles.

**So sometimes you'd have stretches where**

27:00 **for days at a time you just didn't do anything?**

Yes.

**Yes?**

Yes. Especially when we were holed up in Alex at the hotels. That was a great holiday because we had good food there too and our time was our own.

**I believe there was**

27:30 **the issue of identifying blood types with the men when they came in. How did you identify their blood types?**

Well they all had it on their on their ID [identification] disk. It was commonly called your meat ticket. I don't know why. And they all had their blood group printed on it and their religion.

28:00 That's all it had. It didn't have what unit they belonged to or anything because if they were taken prisoner it would've given away too much.

**So when did you actually return to Australia, Nan?**

I can tell you over there but I can't just remember what the date was.

**1942?**

It was '43 when we came back yes.

**Was it '43?**

Yeah '43 we came back.

**Okay and why did you come back at that particular time?**

Because the Prime Minister who was it? Curtin? No Caldwell, which one was it...insisted that the 6th Division come back

29:00 because the Japanese were getting so close and I think he had quite a row with Winston Churchill about it.

**So he withdrew the 6th Division from the Middle East?**

There were a few left behind. I don't know whether they were 7th Divvy or who they were but the whole of the 6th came back.

**And that included the nurses?**

29:30 Yes well we were 6th Divvy.

**So what did you do when you came back?**

Well we were billeted in Adelaide and of course they wouldn't let us just live and do nothing so they sent us to the Repat [Repatriation] Hospital there and then they said there wasn't any transport to bring us over to Melbourne and then eventually they got some

30:00 transport. And we came back and we had 10 days leave. Our CO had given us a fortnight but the principal matron said it was far too much. Ten days was enough. And then we were sent out to Heidelberg to work until we went north to Queensland.

**So what did you do during that 10 days leave in Melbourne? How did you spend that?**

30:30 Oh I just spent it with the family, that's all we wanted to do.

**Was it lovely to reunite with your family?**

Oh marvellous. Because we rang to say we were leaving Adelaide, the family were down at Spencer Street at seven o'clock or eight o'clock whatever time the overland comes in and of course they took

31:00 us away right round by Geelong and we didn't get in till about two o'clock. And as a cousin said, "That'll...

**Two o'clock in the afternoon?**

"That'll teach you to meet troop trains." Because they pushed us all onto sidings and things on the way.

**Took ages?**

It was a shocking journey. But we got here.

**And was your family waiting for you at the station?**

Yes. Everybody burst into tears.

31:30 **Who was there waiting for you, do you remember?**

My mother and one sister.

**Was it quite an emotional homecoming?**

Yes very, very.

**So your**

32:00 **mother must have been very relieved to see you in one piece?**

Yes. Oh no it was great. I can't remember how we were notified then when we were to go and open the hospital at Ipswich. I don't know whether it was by word of

32:30 mouth or whether they wrote to us, I can't for the life of me think how they got us all together again, although we were all in the same group. We were all out at Heidelberg.

**Do you remember going out and socialising during that leave period?**

Mmmm

**Yes? Do you remember what you did?**

Yes I remember once

33:00 Vic and I were, goodness I can't remember the place in Little Collins Street.

**Gibby's? Not that coffee shop? No**

No, no.

**Little Collins?**

For dancing and oh it's gone.

**So Vic was back in Melbourne at this time?**

Yes for some part of the time.

**Oh cause he came back with the 6th Division**

33:30 **as well?**

Yes.

**So that must have been wonderful?**

Yes he was in Colombo Harbour when we were in Colombo Harbour because he used to get a little boat and come and see us.

**Oh okay.**

Oh and that's another quite interesting thing. While we were in Colombo Harbour first of all we were on the Strathavon and we got as far as

34:00 Colombo and then the Andes didn't have any sisters on so there were a few of us chosen to go to the Andes. So we had to go down the rope ladder and then across in a little boat and then up the rope ladder into the Andes. The Andes was the most beautiful ship and she was sunk by the Japanese.

**Later in the war?**

34:30 **What sort of ship was the Andes? A liner?**

Oh yes.

**Big liner?**

Big, big one.

**Yes. And that's what you came back to Australia?**

Yes.

**Was Vic on that ship also?**

Oh no, no. I can't remember what ship he was on. He was on a troop ship of some sort. But we'd arranged...we didn't know where we were going in Australia and we said we'd leave a message at

35:00 the Australia Hotel at whichever city it was. Well it turned out to be Adelaide. C'mon. Big one. Big one. Big. C'mon.

**Okay we've stopped there.**

## Tape 8

00:30 **Thank you Nan. I'm wanting to ask you about your time at Heidelberg. Once you'd got back from the Middle East you'd had a bit of time off. Now this is 1943 and you went to Heidelberg. What did you do there?**

Just staff work.

01:00 Actually I think I specialised a man with tetanus there at one stage. Yes I did. But we weren't there for very long.

**How long do you think? A few weeks?**

Yes a few weeks. But it was while I was there that I got an attack of malaria and they treated me for laryngitis

01:30 and actually the other girls went ahead of two of us because there were two of us sick, but we caught up with them at Ipswich.

**Is it around this time you got married, Nan?**

No that was before Kokoda. We got married after Kokoda. We got married in the February.

**What year did you get married?**

02:00 Forty-three.

**Forty-three?**

Yes we came back in '42 from the Middle East. We got married in '43 and in February '43 and Elizabeth was born in December '43. So I was kicked out of the army.

**So you came back in '40...**

Came back in '42.

**Two. You had that leave time and you went to**

02:30 **Heidelberg. Where did you go after Heidelberg?**

Ipswich.

**Ipswich?**

Yes we opened a hospital there and then we went to Toowoomba and that's where we got a lot of the Kokoda people including Vic. And I was in a surgical ward which I was always put in and Bob Officer put him in there although he should've been

03:00 in a medical one which was a school right at the other side of Toowoomba called Downlands and when the CO did a round the next morning he said, "Oh a medical. What's he in here for?" And I had to confess.

**So Vic was at that hospital yes?**

Yes. And then when he recovered

03:30 we came down and got married.

**Now what was Vic suffering from there?**

Malaria.

**Did he have it quite badly?**

Pardon?

**Did he have a quite a bad case of it?**

Yes. Well they were all very yellow too because all the troops were put on Atebrin which is a yellow drug in New Guinea and they all came back looking yellow.

04:00 But...

**Did you ever take Atebrin yourself?**

Only when I was diagnosed with malaria. The course was so many days of Quinine so many days Atebrin and then so many days palanquin I think it was called.

**Now the hospital in Ipswich, you were actually setting that hospital up were you?**

04:30 Yes, we set that up.

**Yes. And who were your expected patients?**

No. no war casualties. Just general illness amongst troops.

**Now were there training camps nearby Ipswich?**

Well there were troops all dotted all over Queensland at the time.

**Why Ipswich in particular?**

Well I suppose it was the best available

05:00 and the best available position. I mean they took over two schools in Toowoomba but we were in the Showgrounds at Ipswich which was quite good. And you see, Jean Hannah she had opened up a hospital at Redbank which is between Brisbane and Ipswich. I can't remember what they took over whether it

05:30 was a school or what it was.

**Who were you nursing with in Ipswich Nan? Were you with still with the same group of nurses you were with in the Middle East?**

Yes, yes.

**All eight of you?**

The same nurses and the same medical staff. It was our whole unit there.



**The whole unit. Yes. What were the conditions like, the living conditions like there?**

Oh they were quite all right. We were quite comfortable there.

06:00 We were in huts and good food and within walking distance of the town. We had no complaints about Ipswich at all.

**Much of a social life there or?**

No. Oh a little bit. A little bit yes but not a lot.

**How long were you there, do you know?**

No I don't

06:30 remember.

**A few weeks or few months?**

Yes few months I would think.

**Yes. Where did Vic go after that? He'd gone up to New Guinea?**

He had already gone to New Guinea. He'd already gone

**And he came back sick? He was sent home because he was sick?**

Yes, yes but he completed the he completed the Kokoda Trail. He got right over

**The campaign?**

A lot of them only got half

07:00 way but he made the distance.

**What state was he in when he came back?**

Well he was very yellow and very thin but he bounced back.

**What were his spirits like?**

Oh great getting away from the Japanese.

07:30 **So what you went from Ipswich to Toowoomba did you say?**

Yes.

**And Toowoomba is where Vic...**

Yes.

**...turned up?**

Yes.

**Were you expecting him to come home or to come back to Australia?**

Oh well we knew. No he just came in a convoy like everyone else and Bob Officer happened to be the doctor on duty who was assessing them. And he said, "Oh you

08:00 can go to..." forgotten where we were. We lived in a girls' school called Lenny. And Downlands was the name of the medical section, which was a long way away. I can't remember what we were living in what we were nursing but it was the surgical part.

**And what were the sort of...I guess malaria was the most common**

08:30 **condition you were treating?**

Yes. No we had amputations too. We had one doctor had his arm amputated and he didn't know what he was going to do with his life with one arm. So he talked to our radiologist and of course he could've managed radiology with one arm. And I saw him

09:00 later in Geelong.

**He was a doctor?**

Yes

**And he got injured?**

Yes

**What a bomb blast or?**

Mmm.

**He was on the front line?**

Mmm. He was probably Field Ambulance because I know they did bomb the Field Ambulance and it had its red crosses. Did you see that at any stage on television? He was probably Field

09:30 Ambulance. I don't know.

**Gee they would have had a very difficult job.**

Pardon?

**They must have had a very strenuous job those men.**

Very. But I got a surprise when he came to visit me. And I said, "What are you doing in Geelong?" And his sons were down at school there.

**Cause you ended up living in Geelong did you?**

Yes I lived there for 25

10:00 years.

**So in Toowoomba what sort of a town was Toowoomba in those days?**

Oh a lovely town.

**Yes?**

But in the mountains you know were sometimes covered in mist and those awful veils we wore. We'd go on duty with them beautifully starched and by the time we go to the hospital they'd be dangling down.

10:30 **All the moisture?**

Yes. Well you were half the time you were up in the clouds. But we did have quite a good social life there because there was an army headquarters close by. And they used to turn on dos every so often.

**And how long was Vic in your care for Nan?**

Oh I don't know. I suppose a couple

11:00 of weeks.

**Was he sent off again after that?**

When we came back from our honeymoon, yes. Oh yes, he went back again.

**So you got married in Queensland?**

No, came down to here.

**Melbourne?**

We were married round the corner here and then he went back and he was in all that island campaign

11:30 up there until the war finished.

**When you got you came down to Melbourne to get married was that a leave period for both of you ?**

Well yes. Well, he got he had convalescent leave so I applied for leave and they gave it to me.

**Once you got married did you go**

12:00 **back, and when he left again did you go back up to Queensland again?**

Went back to the hospital.

**And kept working there till fell pregnant?**

Mmmm. Which was very soon after I got back.

**And what happened then once you were pregnant?**

Well they kicked you out of the army in those days. And ...

12:30 **Were you upset?**

Then he didn't see Elizabeth till she was...Oh no he saw her when she was a baby. That's right. He must have got leave in that December then because he came to see me in hospital.

**Where did you give birth in Melbourne?**

Yes at Margaret Coles which is no longer there. And then he went

13:00 back and he didn't see her then until she was two or three.

**What was it like leaving the army finally after all that time?**

Oh well I mean I had Elizabeth to play with so I was quite happy.

**Was there a sense of**

13:30 **sort of nostalgia or sadness to say goodbye to all your nursing mates?**

Yes, yes but we always kept in touch no matter where we were. Always. They'd come down to Geelong frequently and I'd come up to Melbourne and ...

**Did you have a big farewell party?**

No. Oh, yes they turned on a formal

14:00 mess for me at the hospital. Presented me with a silver water jug.

**A...?**

Silver water jug.

**Lovely.**

But I didn't know the girls up there very well at all because apart from our few they were all Queensland trained.

**But you were**

14:30 **still with your original eight? The original eight?**

Oh yes. Yes we were still all there.

**So when you came back to Melbourne as a pregnant woman who supported you through your pregnancy?**

Oh I just lived with either one of my sisters or mother. Or with Vic's people. I was here there and everywhere.

**You were sort of billeted**

15:00 **around the place?**

Yes. Yes.

**So you had plenty of family to look after you?**

Yes plenty. I had no problems there.

**That's good. And your first birth was all right, not a long labour?**

Oh yes. No. No and then Mr McClure Fay McClure who was the senior surgeon came to see me when I was up at Margaret Coles and he said,

15:30 "Can I take the baby?" And I said, "Yes of course you can." And he took Elizabeth all round the hospital to show everybody. They wouldn't allow it now I suppose.

**And when did Vic finally see his new daughter?**

Well he saw her. I was in hospital and he got leave and he came down. He saw her when she was young tiny.

**Oh okay.**

But then she was

16:00 toddling when he saw her next time I think.

**Oh so he was able to get leave for the birth?**

Yes, yes

**Oh okay. Was it was it sort of hard to not have Vic around those first few months looking after the baby?**

No because I had the family. I'd plenty of family.

16:30 But you never knew, you know, when you might get a telegram saying, "The army regrets..." as Margaret Allen's mother did when the Centaur was sunk. She looked at it and said, "Oh this has come to the wrong house." She couldn't believe it. It was a shocking thing.

**So you always sort of prepared yourself for that? Or it was in the back of your mind?**

Well it was always

17:00 in the back of your mind that that could happen.

**Did you worry about that sort of thing that much or?**

No., didn't really worry but you thought about it. It was always a possibility. And then Vic got an MBE and

17:30 my mother in law was in hospital, had her gall bladder out, and I'd specialised her for a few first few days. Mr McClure did it of course. He came in and he started dancing with me around the room at Hamilton Russell House. He was

18:00 a marvellous surgeon.

**So do you recall that peace was declared? Do you remember that day?**

Yes I do. The day that peace was declared in England I was in Geelong and a friend down there said, "C'mon, we've got to go and buy a flag"

18:30 and we dashed into the... she drove into Geelong and we bought a flag to put up. Yes it was great excitement. Strangely enough I can't remember it when Japan was defeated what I was doing there.

**What were the main emotions you were feeling do you think?**

Oh just

19:00 relief. But then you see he didn't get home till, oh for about four months. He wasn't mobilised till about four months later. He got back on the day before Caulfield Cup Day. I can't really remember when Japan were beaten but it was a few...

19:30 **August I think it was announced?**

August. was it?

**August '45 yes.**

Well it was two months which I suppose wasn't bad.

**Do you recall his homecoming?**

Oh yes excitement, but intense. And then of course we had to find a house and you see accommodation was so short.

20:00 It was so scarce so we lived in a flat for a short time. And then I was up in Melbourne with Elizabeth and he rang up and said, "I've paid a deposit on a house." And this house had just come up for sale and it had a beautiful view overlooking the Barwyn right on the top of the hill.

**Beautiful. In Geelong yes**

20:30 **So you moved down there?**

Yes.

**What work did Vic go into Nan?**

He was manager of the Returned Soldiers' Woollen Mill. His father was managing director. It's defunct now too.

**Wool Mill. So it produced wool?**

21:00 Produced material.

**Or treated? Treated wool and...**

Yes and made material.

**Made material yes. And that was located in Geelong was it?**

Yes.

**Yes. Is it still...?**

It was started. No it's gone now.

**Defunct? Yes.**

It was started after the First World War. That's why it was called the Soldiers', the RS&L is Returned Soldiers' Mill.

**Why was it called that? Did it mean it employed returned**

21:30 **soldiers?**

Well I think yes.

**Yes.**

Like the Great Ocean Road that was built.

**Yeah.**

That was to employ returned soldiers. Did you know that?

**Yes. Yes. I think it was also built during the Depression wasn't it, the Great Ocean Road?**

Yes, I think, I think...

**During the '30s?**

You're right. I'm wrong.

22:00 **So what was it like living down in Geelong?**

Oh it was great, I loved it. I've still got a lot of friends down there and go down for luncheons and things and they all came up for my 90th birthday.

**And did you go on to have many more children?**

I had six altogether.

**Six, altogether yes?**

22:30 Which wasn't bad because we were only married 19 years.

**Vic passed away. When did he pass away, Nan?**

In 1961 and I still had five. I had two at Geelong Grammar

23:00 and three at the Hermitage. Elizabeth had started her nursing. I think she had done about a year and a half. But we got there.

**So you had your hands full?**

I did.

**Did you return to nursing at all or...?**

Yes for a while after I came up here. Oh no for a little

23:30 while after Vic died in Geelong, yes and then when I came up here I did a bit of nursing. And then Elizabeth started the nurses agency so I helped her for a while.

**Did any of your other daughters or sons do nursing?**

Yes yes. Two daughters did nursing. One's still nursing down in Geelong.

24:00 **Do you think nursing was in your blood?**

I'm sure it is. I've got nieces who are nurses. I've got a grand daughter who is a nurse. I don't know it. And there are oh several nieces who are nurses actually and a couple of Vic's cousins are nurses.

24:30 **Did Vic ever talk to you about his war experiences after the war?**

No.

**No?**

Anything I learnt was just through hearing him talk to the some of the, all the boys who came round.

**Did he ever dream about it?**

I don't think so. I wouldn't know.

25:00 **Did you think much about the war after the war ended?**

No. I didn't have time really. I was pretty busy for those...

**Had your hands full?**

For those few years.

**How do you think your war experience Nan affected you as a person?**

That's a hard

25:30 one. Perhaps it made me more tolerant than I used to be. And easier to get on with. But I don't think it affected me in any other way. Gave me a lot of friends, very

26:00 special friends.

**Did it give you more faith do you think?**

No. No I don't think so.

**Why do you say that?**

26:30 Well you think the war is over and you think that's it and you think well that's the end of it and then another one breaks out. You get Vietnam and you get Korea and you get Iraq. And they just go on and that won't be the end either. There'll be more after that no doubt. There was a lot of

27:00 talk about us not taking any part in Iraq but John Howard had no alternative than to back America. We'd be under Japanese rule now if it hadn't been for the Americans. Mind you they weren't popular when they were here. They were most unpopular.

**Really?**

Oh very. Well they broke up an awful lot of marriages.

27:30 And they were always inclined to be bombastic and...

**Did you know any marriages that broke up because of Americans?**

No. No-one personally no. They said always said,

28:00 can't remember how the saying went. That they were overdone, they were overpaid, they were

**It was over...**

Over paid

**Over paid ,Over dressed.**

Over sexed.

**Over sexed and over here.**

And over here that's right.

**Or something like that.**

Yes. And you see they had so much money and the availability of

28:30 silk stockings, they could get round any woman for those cause you couldn't buy silk stockings. We didn't have a lot to do them, only at one stage when I went back from sick leave whoever met me in Brisbane said, "Oh the Americans are coming for mess tonight," and I said, "Oh no." He said, "Now don't say that."

29:00 But that that's the only time I remember ever having anything to do with them.

**So do you think perhaps your war experiences led to a lessening of faith in humans do you think?**

Wee bit. Wee bit.

29:30 **But do you still believe? You've still got a faith?**

Yes. I still have. I suppose because I was bought up so strictly.

30:00 **Are you glad that you had those experiences?**

Oh Very, very. I couldn't imagine what my life would have been like without it because I was kept in a little cocoon and didn't ever get out much at all. Oh the best thing I ever did was

30:30 train as a nurse.

**You think it helped mature you as a person?**

Oh certainly did. Even one of the ex patients at in Ward 3 said, "You were the greenest thing I ever saw

when you first started." He said, "Your uniforms looked as though they didn't fit you." He was a nice boy. He died later.

31:00 He had, forgotten what it's called now. It was very debilitating disease. He had been in and out of hospital for years and the last time he came in I was in charge of the theatre and they brought him in for his last operation. But he used to laugh

31:30 about that.

**What did you think happens to people when they die?**

Nothing. Dust to dust.

**You don't believe in an afterlife?**

No. I should I suppose. But I was brought up with this

32:00 idea that your soul went to heaven. I remember when I was a child I used to imagine heaven as a whole lot of little shelves with things like cabbages sitting on them. Did you ever think that? No. Well I

**I used to think of clouds**

Did you? Well I always imagined these shelves with hundreds and hundreds of little cabbages all sitting round in rows which were our souls. Because no one had

32:30 ever told me what a soul was. No I'm afraid I don't.

**Maybe that's what happens.**

Might be. Might be.

**Is there anything else you'd like to share with us Nan before we finish up?**

I don't think so.

**For the record?**

I think I think

33:00 we've gone into everything very thoroughly.

**Yes?**

I think so, Sue [interviewer].

**Okay Well thank you very much for letting us talk to you today.**

Thank you.

**It was great.**