

Australians at War Film Archive

Margaret Lory - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:31 **All righty, as I said the first part of the interview is just to get a view of your life in ten or fifteen minutes, and to do that we just talk a bit about where you were born and where you grew up. I believe you're a country girl are you?**

Yes I was very much a country girl.

Whereabouts were you born?

I was born in an old homestead, Maneau homestead.

01:00 Bareena was the district but then Maneau township was formed, named after the old property, and I was born there on the 18th of December 1919.

Whereabouts did you go to primary school?

Oh I went to so many primary schools.

Why did you move around so much?

01:30 Well when my youngest brother was born my Mother had decided she would go to a private hospital [which] had opened in Murtoa, which in those days was a long drive and very few cars and help. And she went to have a bit of comfort for the fourth baby and she developed septicaemia and died,

02:00 and that was the biggest tragedy of all time of course.

That's dreadful.

What was your question about why?

Why you moved around so much? Your Dad had to move you around so much to look after you did he?

Well I remember my cases were packed to go off to boarding school, because the Depression was beginning. It hadn't really developed; it was beginning to be felt, I remember looking at those cases, off to boarding school, and then some people arrived

02:30 a couple and said that they would love to; I didn't know them, but they would take me. Their little boy would have been the same age as I but he had died, still-born or something. When that raging 'flu was one, do you remember they had the night? And all the doctors had left the hospital and so this lady had a tragedy with her little boy. And she decided that

03:00 they; but they were going to be paid for it, they needed the money. And so all of a sudden I was switched from going to boarding school to being with them for a wee while. But before that, my Mother had been dead about a year then and I had been switched around. Went to Nine Mile Tank school in the Mallee, which was quite an adventure.

03:30 **How big was that school?**

Well I think there would be very few children there, I can't remember clearly, but there weren't very many. And we used to ride our little pony to school. I had been used to having my own horse and being independent, but we had to get on the wee Shetland pony and trot off. And I thought that was very bad, with this jogging along to school. But it was quite fun going through the Mallee scrub and all the growth. And I still go through the Mallee and I

04:00 can recognise the different plants and shrubs and what have you. So that was Nine Mile Tank and from there I went to quite a number of schools.

It's a world away now.

Yeah.

What about leaving, how old were you when you left high school?

I was very young, not very old at all. I was fourteen, fifteen.

So fourteen or fifteen; was that the Intermediate certificate or leaving certificate?

04:30 Oh we did 'Merit' didn't we? Merit certificate.

And did you have ambitions to be anything in particular?

Oh I always longed to be a nurse, all I wanted to be was a nurse. Even when I had to make my own bed and change the pillowcases I'd put a pillowcase on my head and run around, I was running a big hospital you know.

Did you put a red cross on it?

05:00 I guess I did all kinds of things. I just wanted to go nursing. But later on I went home, well the Depression was very bad then I suppose and these people, well I don't know. I just left and went home to live with my Father and my three brothers. I had applied to go nursing, I had written away. And back home there was a letter saying that I would need shoes, I would need

05:30 uniforms, a watch, I've forgotten all of the other requirements. Anyway I said to my Father, "I've sent away to go nursing", well he didn't like that at all. Because, no I said to him I would need some money to go away nursing, and that wasn't right at all. Not having his daughter, he just jumped up and

06:00 down and said, "No, you stay here, you stay here until you are twenty-one. Then you can do what you like, in the meantime no daughter of mine is going nursing."

So it wasn't the money he just didn't want you to go away and do nursing?

No he really, so whether nursing was frowned upon those days I don't know. But that's the end of that story, and I'd have gone if I had had the money, I'd have taken off but I didn't have the money so.

So did you stay until you were twenty-one?

Yes.

06:30 **And what, how old were you when you decided to join the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]?**

Oh how old would I have been when the war started? Nineteen. Well war had been declared and how old?

Well you said you were nineteen when the war started and twenty-one when you were allowed to leave home?

Oh well I was looking for something to,

07:00 I was going. And then there came news that the women's army was being formed, I was watching for outlets I suppose, I probably didn't realise myself. And then when I was, it'd be twenty-two wouldn't it, I was in town with my younger brother and we were on the corner on Dandenong Road and along came this army car,

07:30 and I looked and I wondered. And my brother said, "That's something you..." I said, "Do you think I could drive one of those army cars?" Because there used to be driving. And my brother said, "You could do that." So I said, "Okay", so I went off and enlisted.

Just like that?

Simple as that.

Is your brother enlisted?

Oh I did have one brother; my baby brother that was with me on the corner;

08:00 he was too young to go. But I had an older brother and then the second one was James, and he was named after an uncle who had been killed in the First World War, and he joined up very early in the piece.

Do you know where he went off to fight?

Oh Tobruk and El Alamein, all through there. He received a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal].

Did he?

An award. Yes,

08:30 he did stand out in the army.

Where did they send you when you joined up to train?

Oh we went to Glamorgan and we lived in Pentor. Just down the road from Glamorgan; Glamorgan was the training school. The old Geelong junior boys school. And we were there,

09:00 what else?

And where did you receive your first posting? From Glamorgan?

Oh then I went off to do our driving, I enlisted as a driver. You needed a licence for two years to become a driver in the army. But you still had to do the training, the mechanical and that side of it.

09:30 And we were trained, we had D&M school (driving and maintenance) and we were taught to be self sufficient with our cars, we had to do all of the running repairs. Get down the grease pits and service our cars, they were very strict about the maintenance side of it.

Interesting that you became a driver, because you could also ride horses did they know about that?

I don't know. I guess not.

10:00 **Did you have to tell them the skills you had when you joined the army? Did they ask you if you had any special abilities?**

Oh I guess I just went in to be a driver, and they were short of drivers, very few girls, I was in the third driving and maintenance school. So I don't think I gave them a preference.

Had you been driving on the farm?

10:30 Oh well if you lived in the country you naturally drove. People say to me, "How old were you when you learnt to drive?" Well you just drove every possible opportunity, my brothers had their own vehicles, my father had a car, so there was no shortage of... And driving, you go around the paddocks when you are very tiny and of course you want to get behind the wheel don't you?

Absolutely.

Yeah and away you go.

So you're in Melbourne in Victoria, what did you drive?

11:00 Oh we drove do you mean?

Trucks, cars motorbikes?

Well we had to have our, the driving and maintenance school, which is Fairfield Park down on the Fairfield Swimming and Rowing club.

Oh it's beautiful down there isn't it?

Oh it is, they really did have idyllic places. And the training course was,

11:30 I think there were two men supervising us. And they were most helpful and always there. We'd spend half the day working on the cars, the mechanical side. And then the other half we used to go driving with the big trucks around the Yarra Valley, load of girls in the back and away we'd go. And then after we had been driving a week or two we would come

12:00 into the city. And we had to have licences, I've got the licences I had.

So two years training you say? Before you knew how to drive?

No two, yes you had to have that experience, two years. They were so short of drivers I think they were trying to get us out quickly onto the driving scene.

Did your unit have a name?

12:30 Oh not, well that was the Fairfield Swimming and Rowing club driving and maintenance one there. And then from there we went to, down here to an engineers and artillery depot. Just down here at Batman Avenue. That was my first unit. Then I went onto army inspection, no I didn't, do you want them all? I went to George Street,

13:00 the engineers unit there in Batman Avenue was Victorian Lines of Communication: VIC LC. And then it became redundant, it was all swallowed up with other, I suppose headquarters from the barracks, they became the main headquarters for all the different units

13:30 up here. Instead of having separate little units they all became incorporated under barracks' control. And that was great experience in Batman Avenue with the engineers, I loved it, we did all kinds of things. We did our shooting, these were the early days. We went through the gas tanks, you know, we really weren't, we had to do exactly as the men did.

14:00 **Was there a lot of physical training as well?**

Not once we go into the - no all the marching and things was done in our rookie training. Oh we did dark duty and all kind of things in the cars, used to go around in the blackout.

And you had those little covers with slits over the drivers?

Just wee ones with half slit yeah.

14:30 **I wonder that you could see anything?**

I wonder now too, but we used to go on the tram tracks you see and drive. There weren't that many trams in that hour of the morning or night. That was the main way we guarded ourselves I think. Oh we used to go to Caulfield Race Course and from there right out to the showgrounds, and in between there we'd be doing all of the - we had our armed escort.

All the time would you?

No only at night, going around all of the guard posts,

15:00 all the prisoners. The prisoners were out in Caulfield Race course, and they were a nasty little bunch. Anyone that they thought was not faithful to the cause would be thrown into Caulfield Race Course and they had to be looked after, and if there was any rain they were not to get wet. So of course in a storm they would let down their tents and be out in the rain and we have to drag the officers

15:30 out and the guards and be there, well most of them, the permanent soldiers they had to put the tents up, they wouldn't put their tents up and all this sort of rot was going. That was at Caulfield Race course. But when we went around the docks that was fascinating because all of the ships came with the soldiers coming and going, to and fro. And we'd be asked in for - we were allowed to get out

16:00 of our cars then and go in and have a coffee or cocoa or something. They'd always be pleased to make us this great mug of cocoa which I didn't really want but we drank it. And we'd know all of the shipping times when they came in, and even, from when they left overseas they'd have all that was planned out months and months ahead. Of course we were sworn to secrecy but once you got out it

16:30 didn't enter your head to talk about all that, we used to hear lots of things, but once you got out of your car it didn't enter your head to even think about them. So it wasn't hard to forget it. If this is making sense.

Well I have a lot of questions but I'll come back to them. I'll just move on a little bit with you if that is all right?

Yeah but that was an experience. Then we went from there to George Street in Fitzroy

17:00 and had our garage in Smith Street. But that was only when the unit was breaking up.

About how many women were in your unit together?

Oh when we went to Batman Avenue I had a friend Joan Olley, and she was another country girl, and we remained friends for life. She died last year, but we were always great friends. And there were two older girls there,

17:30 but Joan and I - there were only four.

Only four of you?

Yes, but Joan and I that went together, you know we were the team.

Tight-knit little group?

Yes it was but we left there and went to army inspection staff. They were in Exhibition Street.

What were the army inspection staff?

Inspectors. Mainly

18:00 civilians, oh there were quite a few in uniform but they were mainly directing the civilians.

Interesting that they were civilians?

Oh army inspection staff, they were I'd say ninety percent civilians. They went around inspecting the factories and they did everything from coffins to boots. You know all the uniform, every single thing that the army bought, the big machinery

18:30 and everything, had to be inspected and okay before it ever left the works to go to the army.

Interesting, so they worked separate to the army but part of the government?

Yes, and we drove them. And they were all very nice people.

Were the public servants of some kind or another or did they come from somewhere else?

I think they'd come out of the factories wouldn't they? Somebody who knew that work from A to Z,

19:00 knew how the thing should be run and knew if there were any mistakes, or knew where to look for the mistakes I guess. Don't you?

Would have been a very particular job in the war I'm sure?

Oh yes they took great part in it.

Great responsibility.

And from there I went to, I drove the brigadier general of munitions in there, out of Maribyrnong, Brigadier Coffee; I was his personal driver.

For how long were you his personal driver?

Not very long at all because he said one day, "Driver

19:30 are you happy in this?" Oh I used to get up early and leave the Toorak Mansions (that was our abode); I'd have to have my car at the barracks, not in the barracks, I'd have to go and pick it up, and go over to pick him up early every morning about seven thirty to get out to Maribyrnong to be ready on the spot to start.

20:00 And so I really enjoyed it; another lass was a driver too, we took it turns, I think it was week about or fortnight about. Just to have a break and go to the country on long drives with other people. But I really liked it because if you weren't driving him you were on call for someone else important. And then he said one day, "Driver are you happy in this position? Are you happy in your job?" And I said, "No sir I am not."

20:30 And he nearly got out of the car. He sat up and whistled, and he said, "Now why?" And I said, "Because I joined the army and I wanted to go to Queensland, I wanted to go somewhere, I didn't want to stay in Melbourne for so long." And he said, "Well we'll see about that, why don't you put in an application to go?" Because we had an army inspection staff in all the cities.

21:00 And they were quite well run in most places. And he said, "If you want to go put in an application and I'll see that you get there." And I said, "I do so." "I beg your pardon?" I said, "I put in an application every Monday morning." And he said, "Well why don't I get those applications?" And I said, "Well I don't know, but I do." And he went and said, "Well let me know what is going on, I'm going to investigate this,

21:30 because everything single that goes on has to go right through the chain up to me, I have to see it." So that's how I got to Queensland.

Well you had an in with the big guy.

Otherwise I would have been left in Melbourne I think with all of my friends.

So there you go, how about that.

So there you go.

Whole lot of influence.

No two other girls had gone, two other drivers. And I was very put out that I hadn't been sent too,

22:00 so there you go.

But the result was?

I got to Queensland. And yes, it was great.

I'll bet Brisbane was just a hive of activity at that point. Is that where you went, to Brisbane?

Yes went to Brisbane, and lived in barracks. Lived out in Chermside, lived in our tents. We really were in the army up there. Until we got flooded out in our tents and had to go to, oh we all went in double decker bunks in

22:30 tin sheds sort of thing. And then that wasn't right so eventually we were in the; Brisbane, I have to think what city I'm in. Brisbane Boys Grammar School, we were out in the yard there for a long time in tin bungalow things. And then we were put into

23:00 dormitories and that really was ideal. Army living.

And was it very similar work that you were doing up there?

I was driving. Yes we still drove the inspectors around, but they had a different type of inspection up there too.

In what way was it different?

Oh they had the water transport boys up there, it was more,

23:30 that time seemed to be more, I know we were on the Brisbane river but we were near Surfers' [Paradise] where they were doing a lot of training for the boys who were overseas; the jungle training boys. And they had the armoured divisions up there. It was a different type of military set up for training and things.

Yes I'll bet your environment was completely different?

Yes and I really enjoyed that because you really felt like you were doing something.

24:00 **And such a cosmopolitan part of the world at that time too, Brisbane, there were so many internationals?**

Oh it was filled to overflowing. All the different countries, not only the Americans. When I was in Melbourne General MacArthur was in Melbourne: that was his headquarters. Then he moved from Melbourne to Brisbane.

Was he following you?

No I was following him. Not really, but they were in Melbourne, that's when they had to evacuate Guadalcanal and all of those

24:30 places. They were Melbourne, they all came to Melbourne in the beginning. No use saying do you remember because -

No that's fine because I've got a little bit of background on that.

His headquarters were in Eleventh Hotel in Brisbane and Mr MacArthur was there. And I think they had some AWAS staff, clerical staff working with them. And I think that was the beginning - I'm wondering off track now.

That's all right.

25:00 The army began to stir the girls for Australian women to be going; the American women were landing in Brisbane and coming there.

That's interesting, did you meet any of the American female soldiers?

No there was a real division. We were well and truly in barracks; I don't know where they were but they just went, it was a different sort of lifestyle for the Americans all

25:30 together to the Australian boys.

Which again,

We're deteriorating aren't we?

No, not at all. What happens when we ask about these life parts you want to stop and talk about everything because it all sounds so interesting, but we're very good at coming back and asking again. About how long, you don't need to be accurate, but about how long did you spend in Brisbane and what year? Was it '42?

I was in Melbourne in

26:00 '42. I was in Melbourne quite a while. I was getting restless, because my brother was back from overseas and then he was off [to] New Guinea and you know. How long was I in Brisbane; the end of '43 I think. That'd be a good twelve, then I went to New Guinea. No, I'm a bit out of

26:30 sync aren't I?

That's all right.

When did we go to New Guinea? '45 the war ended didn't it? And we were in training, I was in Brisbane quite [a] while wasn't I, I think.

The question was more for where did they send you after Brisbane?

Well that's when I went to New Guinea. And they weren't really taking drivers, because there was nowhere to drive up there. Jungle and no roads,

27:00 and it was rather dangerous too for women. Well they were looking after us then, now I know they all get out and go. But those days we were but, very much under control I think. We had to know our place.

Right, I'm sure they never let you forget either?

That's right. So there you go.

So in New Guinea,

I'll tell you how long I was in Brisbane in a minute.

27:30 **That's all right.**

It'd be a good eighteen months wouldn't I?

Yeah that's sounds about right.

Fifteen months.

Pretty good place to be for a young woman in Brisbane at that time I suspect with so much going on?

Oh we were well sheltered and very much under control. Oh it was exciting to even be out driving. You know where the traffic lights in the street are, there'd still be policemen in the centre, even with the traffic lights. Trying to take advantage of any, keep the traffic moving.

28:00 Of course we all got to know the young policemen, that was always nice to have a wave but that's as far as it went. Some would pop into the garage for coffee. But there was nothing. And we were well under control, to have leave, all the theatres were full, everything was full. Overflowing with -

It was quite a spot Brisbane then, I don't think it has ever been as exciting again.

No.

28:30 And the river, the river through the city, that was a cutting off point for lots of the troops, they were given leave over the river, so that cut a lot out.

They left them on the north side did they?

Yeah. And then when we went out, but the only way you could leave was to go to - they had the Brisbane Technical School in South Brisbane, and it, oh they had

29:00 marvellous courses there. They had cooking, and all kinds of things, floristry. And then we decided, we did our cooking course and that was a success because that way you could have a leave pass. We didn't have any official time for drivers to finish, you know how you have the hours. We were finished when the inspection staff were finished their work. So there'd be time to go and have dinner

29:30 in between starting the course at the tech [technical school]. So we decided we'd do [a] course, and that way we could get out of barracks and we could go out for dinner. If you're meeting friends you could always have a nice dinner with them and then go onto the cooking class or whatever the session was. So we filled out evenings, and it was a great life, it was nice to go out to dinner, because there was loads of opportunities to go out with people

30:00 for dinner but it was all invitations. So we would go to our classes. And that's the way we got out of camp so much.

Very clever.

And that's how I got to New Guinea. Because in New Guinea they only wanted very trained, efficient staff; there was no one sent there, we had to pass tests to go. So we'd been doing oh secretarial and office training, and we really

30:30 enjoyed it, you know the typing and, oh I can't think of that,

Shorthand?

Yeah a little bit of shorthand. So that's how we got to New Guinea, because we really accomplished driving and clerical. Had we not done those courses we wouldn't have been in the division group.

Were you part of the Australian General Transport Company or were you separate to that?

What was that?

It was

31:00 **a company formed filled with drivers but evidently for the men. That's just John [interviewer] telling me there is ten minutes left. So you weren't part of the, it was called the AGT [Australian General Transport], you weren't part of that?**

Was it the army?

It was the army, there were men in it from Victoria and from Sydney, New South Wales I mean. And from Queensland and so on, but you were quite separate from that I'd say?

I think so.

Okay so going to New Guinea must have been a bit of a broadening experience I am sure?

31:30 **What boat did you sail on?**

Well partly why we did the secretarial course we felt the war was, you know, there would be an end to it. And we just wanted something to go out and be accomplished, other than driving, we didn't think there'd be any opening for the drivers. That is why we did this training.

Well you were right obviously.

And at the same time we all wanted to go nursing, and we had applied; you could get

32:00 a release from the army at this stage to go nursing because they were so short of nurses. The men were away overseas and all the women were being occupied and the nursing staff was low. So we put in our applications to go to that and didn't get a reply. And then the major of the driving came out and said, "What about you two girls, would you be interested in going to New Guinea?"

32:30 He said, "I've got the letter here from barracks and they've asked me to see if I have got any girls who would"; you didn't have to go to New Guinea unless you wanted to. So we said, "Yes, we certainly would" (we hadn't had a reply from the matron of Sydney Hospital). And we said we couldn't think of anything better, by this time, to get out of Brisbane and go somewhere else. So that's how we got there. And then we received a letter from the matron of the hospital, after

33:00 we had been chosen, to say that she hadn't replied to our letter because there was a shortage of everything; her forms she had applied for them but there was such a shortage of paper she hadn't received the forms. And she thought it was better to write one letter and send the form than to waste all of the paper I suppose writing. And that's how we missed out on going nursing. It was sad.

Technical error.

It was sad. So there you go, that's how we got to New Guinea.

33:30 **And in New Guinea were you doing administrative work and secretarial work there or were you driving as well?**

Oh no. We were the only two drivers that were chosen to go in the corps to New Guinea. My friend Sally Fendleson and myself.

Were you based just in Port Moresby or did you travel a lot?

No we didn't go to Port Moresby, we went to Lae.

Oh okay. And was that where you spent the rest of your time during the war? Were you there when the war ended?

Yes.

34:00 Japan, September wasn't it? The we didn't come home until the next year because you don't just walk out of it of course, there's a big clean up and a wind-up; a lot of work to be done. One lot went home but I was in the second lot to come home.

When did you get back to Australia?

I don't know, isn't that dreadful? Was it March or May?

But it was quite a long

34:30 **time after the war finished?**

Yes the war had long finished.

Wow, six months up there after it had all finished, that must have been an interesting and unusual time?

Yes although by that time you were wanting to come home. Because everyone was going and you're still sitting there, there was lots of work to do and you knew you couldn't just go. And then I went back to my army inspection driving, back here in Melbourne,

35:00 to get my discharge, whilst I was waiting for my discharge.

And your discharge, was that a long time after the war finished?

Not that long. I think it was June, July, August. It would be in the old pay book though wouldn't it?

All righty, so some time in 1946. And just to finish off this tape, there is about five minutes left on this tape. Can you tell me a little bit about what you did after you were demobbed [demobilised]?

35:30 Yes, we decided we would have a holiday and go to the Blue Mountains, or Sydney. So we had our holiday in the Blue Mountains which was very lovely. And visited my friends. We had friends in all the cities by this time. Because in Melbourne you only had Victorians see? But in these other places they had a mixture, it was great.

36:00 So we had our holiday in the Blue Mountains, and we were looking through the Sydney Morning Herald

and we thought, "This Sydney is great". It really was a lovely city too, you could find your way around it easily. And there was a notice in the paper that said, 'Ex-servicemen required'. So we thought that's us. It was the Sydney Morning Herald they were advertising, it was men's pay, it was good.

36:30 So we went in and applied to the Sydney Morning Herald, the two of us together. Sally my friend and Mr James I think was the personnel officer and he said, "I'm almost tempted to give you girls these positions; these are only for men you know". And we said, "Oh well we thought we'd have a go", we were ex-service personnel. And said, "Oh well I've got a good mind", but he said, "You wouldn't stay here." I said, "Yes I will, I'll stay a year." And he said, "In that case you can have a position." So we were two of the first

37:00 girls to be employed in a [newspaper]. They did have their cadet reporters, female cadets, but we worked for the staff for men.

They had some female cadets then did they?

At the Sydney Morning Herald? Yes, but not office personnel. So we went in and that was great, we got this good pay.

They gave you the men's pay did they?

37:30 Yes. And they gave us - because we didn't have any clothes or anything. Went looking for luscious undies and all this sort of thing. So that was great and I stayed there for twelve months.

Typing, secretarial?

No I didn't type so much; I was more or less on the counters. My friend Sally did a lot, I escaped. But I didn't do so much typing in New Guinea either, I had a typist or there was a typist there.

Interesting, you were a bit of a fire-brander, women forging ahead in

38:00 **typically male areas.**

Yes.

Fantastic.

38:09 **End of tape.**

Tape 2

00:31 **Okeydokes, Maneau you said you were born, whereabouts is that?**

Well do you know Donald, and do you know Stawell? It's in the Wimmera, southern Wimmera.

Is that wheat country?

Well there is a lot of grazing. It is wheat country now,

01:00 because wheat became money in 1960. Wheat was money, gold. And of course they all reverted. But in those days it was grazing.

I didn't know that; that's interesting.

Wheat and oats.

What kind of farm did you grow up on, was your father a big grazier, cattle?

No not so many cattle, although later on in years everyone ran the cattle

01:30 too because cattle became money. But those days well you did have your own cows naturally, well you'd have four cows but that would be the lot for milking for the homestead and for anyone who was working in the cottage. Four cows would be sufficient I think. And then of course

02:00 wheat harvest, that was busy and very big. And sheep shearing, that was colossal, so we must have had more sheep.

So shearers largely. Sheep farmers?

Yes. But, well, mixed farming I suppose you'd call it. And those days I suppose you didn't have as much mixed farming.

And look I don't want to,

And of course horses they had to have galore; no tractors

02:30 The tractors and all that came later.

Can you recall when machinery did start arriving on the farm? Were you there when the first tractor started up?

I don't remember that so there must have been one. But I don't think the big expensive heavy machinery came in until the end of '30, about the beginning of the war. It was beginning to come then.

So while you were growing up the cows were

03:00 **milked by hand and the sheep were shorn by hand?**

Oh you'd have a little portable electric - well when did they come in?

Can you recall any of the shearers using electric shears?

Not when I was very young but I wouldn't be allowed in the shearing shed then see? Later on they had their little portable machinery. Shears for the sheep and all that type of thing.

Now I don't want to dwell on the fact that your mother died, and we're very sorry about that.

03:30 **But we're talking around it I suppose.**

Well lots of mothers did those days.

Can you recall that incident of your little brother being born and not surviving?

Oh my brother survived.

Oh he survived?

Oh yes my brother did. But that was all very bleary really, my mother's death was.

And your father, what kind of a fellow was he?

04:00 Oh I think my mother dying; that was the end of his world for a while. And we had always had lovely homesteads and a lovely home and he sold up the property we were on. We had been in the Maneau homestead which apparently my mother loved. It was only a

04:30 slab homestead, it was the old original one. And from there we went to a lovely homestead: Avon Plains it was called. Near Rich Avon, all of these funny names. And then the Depression must have been starting because for some reason he didn't keep that Avon Plains property. We left there and went back to the Maneau

05:00 one. So I think the Depression was coming and he gave away just to concentrate on one property I think. And then when my mother died he just sold the homestead and bought another property. He sold everything, every single thing. And then he went to this new property for sale and it was closer to the Maneau township. Called Dundonald. And that had

05:30 a beautiful woolshed, you were talking about shearers - made me think of it. He went there to live.

Were you riding horses as a very young girl?

Oh yes when I was younger. And then when I went to live with these Mr and Mrs Ramsey, I refused to call them uncle or aunty or anyone. They were always, I must have been a horror I think, she'd have liked me to call her Aunty and I wouldn't.

06:00 I must have been a bit defiant about that. She was very good to me but very, very strict. And I didn't have horses or any pets or anything there. Scarcely a doll as a matter of fact. They were just, she was very, very religious and you mustn't have worldly things. Someone at a show gave me a cupie [doll] on a stick. Oh they used to have beautiful cupies at the shows and I used to love them. So I came home with this mauve purple cupie and I hung it on my dressing table

06:30 and I had to give that away to some poor child who didn't have a toy.

Oh.

So that's how strict they were. Apart from that, back to horses and things, no I didn't have any pets there but occasionally I'd get a holiday at home with my father and whoever was running the place then.

No there is no doubt that the Depression caused people to do things that they wouldn't have otherwise done if they could have helped it.

07:00 **Before you left to go to the Ramseys', what was life like at home? You were very little but did you have to do a lot of chores around the house?**

Oh no, it was magical. When my Mother was alive and especially when we were at this rich Avon homestead; that was really idyllic and lovely. There was a garden slope down to the river and there was a concrete swimming [pool], not like they have now.

07:30 A lovely swimming pool by the river, and all the bamboo and a little - what do you call these little garden sheds? Not garden sheds, they've got a name.

Gazebo?

Yeah, gazebo down this side of the garden and [a] lavender path. It was very nice, really lovely.

It sounds idyllic.

It was. And my grandfather ran a palomino stud: horses. And then when he died my father had had a few

08:00 I suppose to make the property decorative, I don't know. But I can remember the horses and there'd be a little creamy foal, that's how I remember it I suppose. And I suppose being an only girl I suppose I was really pampered and spoilt. Back to Maneau was lovely, back to the old homestead, I think everyone felt at home again. And there was always a pretty garden around it.

Were there, what would you call it,

08:30 **were there people there working inside the house as well?**

Oh yes there was always help in the houses. Suzy Chinner I don't know where she came from. That was part of the scene, and that had cottages. Every farm had a cottage, well not any, any reasonable sized property. I think they took a pride in having their married couples and the lady would come down in the homestead and do the work.

09:00 And there would probably be a girl helping in the kitchen who did the cooking. There was often a boy doing the chores around the garden, around the home. Take the scraps out you know and feed the fowls and milk the cows. There was always someone for those jobs because you could employ people. And people in the little towns, they relied on that, coming out to get jobs on the farm.

No doubt.

But it was run that way I think.

09:30 **And what about schooling? Did they govern you at home early on or did they send you off to school?**

No they had lots of schools. And you'd all - all the children were from farms, no townships, most of the schools when you were out in the country. Ride a horse.

You said you had to ride a Shetland to school?

Oh that was in the Mallee, that was when I was moving around. That was at Nine Mile Tank.

10:00 **Well this is an obvious question but why is it called Nine Mile Tank?**

I suppose there was so many miles to a tank do you think? I've often wondered that. The water was scarce those days wasn't it? Especially in the Mallee. And I often wondered did they, I've read the stories of it but no-one was ever interested. Trying to recall it? Were they going there for their water?

Sounds like it doesn't it?

And then there were other schools with a different, 'so many mile' tank.

10:30 So it must have been. That wouldn't be hard to check up on because I have read about [why] they received those names, I just can't recall. Might have been nine miles from the biggest town. But there was nothing there except this wee school. I couldn't tell you the school teacher's name.

Was there just the one school teacher?

Yeah that's all they used to have in those tiny schools.

11:00 **I always wondered when they have a one teacher school, does the teacher set a lesson for the older kids and then another lesson for the younger kids and another lesson and so on, or do you all have to do the lessons together?**

I don't know. Some of the lessons you'd do together. I can remember at Rich Avon they went and robbed a bee hive so of course the whole school was out at that. The teacher liked bees and all of this type of thing. There must have been a

11:30 few communities mustn't there?

I guess.

They were very happy little schools though.

Did you do much singing in school? Did you have much opportunity for that or was it basic, the three R's?

Oh no I think it was very pleasant. I'm not sure because I can't remember much of it. But I remember they were very happy days and I was so little. I was going to school when I was about four I suppose, just to go to school.

12:00 Begged to go; it was such a happy place.

Do you recall what you would take to school for lunch for instance? It might be an odd question but I'm wondering how you managed that.

Oh I don't know. I suppose the cook would have to make the sandwiches wouldn't she? They were always luscious and nice. We didn't take the extra sweets and things they do now. It was just mainly you get your sandwiches. They were quite exciting,

12:30 it was quite a thrill to have your lunch. Little wee cases they would be in, your lunch boxes. We were quite proud of our - they were more like little suitcases those days. They weren't all the plastics and all the other.

No.

And all the tasty little things in it. And they used to make lots of biscuits and cakes and just laid on, wasn't it in those days? You wouldn't remember. Plenty of eggs and butter and milk and all of the luscious things that made rich cakes.

13:00 **And can you recall if you had to say the 'yes thank you'?**

Oh yes every Monday morning. Oh yes and the flag and we meant it too. Hand over your heart. That went right on, that went on for years right up until the war wasn't it?

I think it went on even longer. I'm sure we used to do marching at school.

Oh yes you'd march around the flagpole.

Can you remember what you used to say as

13:30 **part of the oath on Mondays?**

I was trying to recall while I was talking to you and I strayed a bit. Oh I remember: "To do my duty to King and country" was it? Or God? Oh God first wasn't it?

Probably, it's hard to tell with the Royal family but I'm sure they put themselves after God.

Oh yes I'm sure they were put there. I can nearly recite it, I'll tell you later.

Okay, that's interesting. So when you were growing up, you say that you know you meant it

14:00 **so were you a British subject as far as you were concerned or were you an Australian citizen?**

Oh British. The lady I lived with she was Welsh. Oh yes. And the baby Princesses and the Duke and Duchess of York came out. I could tell you all of that history if I really concentrated.

Definitely British then. So Mrs Ramsey was she a Welsh woman?

Yes.

14:30 **Tell me a little bit about that. That must have been very, very unusual for you?**

Her parents were Welsh.

So how old were you when your dad said that he was going to send you off to boarding school?

I suppose I would be about seven.

Gosh you were so little. And then suddenly you were in the hands of the Ramseys and away from your family?

Yes.

Did they live in town?

Oh they had the, something, model farm of the Wimmera.

15:00 Everything in its place and a place for everything.

No other little kids there?

No. Her baby had died - I used to hear about that, which was very tragic - when that dreadful 'flu raged.

After the First World War, the pandemic?

Yes. The doctors and everyone, the whole staff fled the hospital. And she was just unfortunate that she was in hospital at that time and you couldn't leave could you in that condition.

15:30 **So the doctors fled the hospital?**

Yeah. In Stawell they did, she had to go to Stawell. So it was very tragic and very sad. Imagine.

Very lonely by the sounds of it?

Yeah. I think so.

The model farm, did that mean that they were doing reasonably during the Depression or they?

Just that they had the beautiful stable. Oh I suppose the Depression wrecked them;

16:00 you see they had put all their money into the property and then there would be nothing coming off it. And then the Horry Chris set in, this dreadful weed. Oh I was told how far underground the roots went and then you could shoot it and kill it and then it would spring up somewhere else. I remember hearing the whole history of Horry Chris, over and over. And that's destroyed a lot of their wheat farming. They were solely wheat farmers. Out at Rupanyup, between

16:30 Rupanyup and Mattara. And I remember one, the money was very scarce, very difficult. So that's why they had me I suppose; help pay the expenses.

Gosh yes.

And they were very strict, and she was very old worldy and very strict about your clothes and your dressing.

When you say they were very religious, what kind of religion were they?

Oh she was -

17:00 one was Methodist and one was Presbyterian, but I suppose they were the only churches in the town, weren't they?

So one didn't dance and one didn't sing?

I don't think either of them did. Very, very strict.

Were you allowed home on weekends to see your family?

I don't think; my Father didn't want us I'm quite sure. Well no it wasn't that. How would you travel, how would you get there, you see?

Well how far away was this model farm from your place?

Well Rupanyup was fifteen miles,

17:30 about seventeen miles I would say. I hope I'm right.

From Mallee? Seventeen miles and you would only be able to travel on horse I suppose?

Oh no, my Father would have a car. The Ramseys had a car but only very rarely did it come out of its garage. But my Father he loved his vehicles and his travelling.

Because you learnt to drive as a young girl? How old were you when you learnt to drive?

I really don't remember. But I'd

18:00 be in my teens, I did go home to my Father and brothers. And I used to come and go for holidays, but my Grandmother moved out and lived with him on the property for a while when he left; set up on the new place. It was rather a lovely property really that he bought up; after my Mother died he sold up and he bought this one. This one come up on the market near Maneau. And

18:30 my Grandmother, and we had a lady looking after my little brother, they lived on the property for a while, possibly that was to establish him in the new home. And then they returned back to their home. It's all garbled isn't it?

Don't worry about it.

And when my baby brother was old enough he was sent home... two of my brothers. See we were all farmed out coming and going around the country.

19:00 **Such was the time?**

It was. Well one parent families these days, well there were one parent families those days weren't there? Very much so.

So can you recall the effects of the Depression and how you noticed it affecting people?

Oh with the Ramseys they were very, very strict but when I went home it was a different way of life.

But could you tell that things were bad? How did you see it

19:30 **manifest on farms? Were there lots of people wandering around asking for food?**

Oh the property that the Ramseys had was very small. Very close to Rupanyup, it was a ten mile, I'm back in miles.

That's okay that's what it was.

It was ten miles from Rupanyup to Mattara and they were on the main Mattara road. Within walking distance from the road. And you would get lots of people knocking on the door there. Just wanting sandwiches or just any food. They'd chop your wood, they'd come and ask if

20:00 there was anything you wanted done about the place. Which Mrs Ramsey was always terrified, and she used to say, "Now you go to the phone and you get the chair and if I call to you, you ring the phone and call for help, the police or something." So that used to be my job when these - some of them did look tough and rough too. And near the

20:30 town I suppose if they had had any money they'd be coming from the hotel wouldn't they? And they'd come with their swags and they'd ask; I suppose it was because you were so near the road this would happen. But nothing ever happened. But they were always willing to chop the wood or gather the eggs. Anything, they'd say any job, any sticks to pick up for morning wood, just give them some food. Most of them wanted to do something for what they received.

21:00 I think they were a bit shattered, there was very rarely jobs for them. But I think they hoped for a job to go thistle-cutting; job for a little while.

And,

I can remember that but not much more.

And when you left school did you stay at the Ramseys working on the farm?

No, no.

What did you do?

I went home. Went home to my - we had

21:30 married couples on the property, and they would come down and do the work in the kitchen, oh the lady would: Betty Robson.

Did you have girlfriends around?

No, they were nearly all, no. I did in Rupanyup, I had the doctor's daughter Leslie Carpet, we were great friends. But when I went home nearly all of the neighbours had sons. There were no daughters.

22:00 Oh there was two down the road but they were a wee bit older.

So hardly any women around you for you to talk to?

No, not when I was growing up. No. But I was very happy with my three boys around.

How does a fairly isolated young girl teach herself the things that women need to know? How did you figure that out for yourself, all the things that women need to know when they are growing up?

22:30 Well I suppose there were women coming in the house, and when I was a bit older I used to manage a lot of the things myself. But when I was growing up, there'd be different ones would come. Like the lady in the cottage, she'd come down and I suppose she'd cook the midday meal.

Would they be able to offer you advice?

Oh yes very chatty.

23:00 And I was well educated before I left Mrs Ramsey's.

So they all looked out for you did they?

Yes, and the lady across the road, Mrs Mule, I used to go and see her every Wednesday afternoon I think. Have a cup of tea. And then come back.

Were you invited to do the equivalent of a debutante or a coming out?

Oh I think no, that came later I think. I'm sure it did,

23:30 there wasn't any of that going on. See they had to travel, and that took a lot of petrol, and a lot of them didn't have very good cars.

No I guess going from the Depression to the war there was never much of anything for that time?

No, no.

So where were you when the war broke out, can you recall?

Yes I recall it very clearly. It was a Sunday evening. I hear some people saying it was a Sunday morning, but it wasn't, it was Sunday evening.

24:00 And we were sitting around listening to the radio, and on came Prime Minister Menzies' voice, you could tell it anywhere. And so telling us in this very sombre tone that we were now at war. So there you go. Third of the ninth, '39.

Third of the ninth, '39. What did war mean to you when you heard those words?

24:30 Well you could feel in the air it was coming. The week before the war I remember we were on the direct flight path from Melbourne to Adelaide and I remember one night my father going out and planes were going over and he said, "You know I'm sure this is something to do with the war; I'm sure there's activity of the planes", you could hear there was activity in those days and they weren't that high. And he said, "I'm sure there is going to be a war declared very soon."

25:00 **So did you have a comprehension of what was going on in Europe? Did you know much about England and Germany?**

Oh yes my father loved reading and listening. He loved studying and reading. He always had time for that, the other men could work the property but he always had time for his reading. And yes it was always discussed.

So what did he read; newspapers weren't common or easy to get your hands on

25:30 **in that part of the world I imagine?**

Well believe it or not, there was a lass out of Horton, I think her name was something Gregory or something. And she was trying to earn a living and she got herself a little car, or a utility or something, and she set it up as a little travelling library. And she'd come around all of the properties and call in. I

26:00 can't remember how often she'd call but very frequently. And she'd have these library books, and you paid so much to her. So in a way you were kept up with the world. And he had the other books he wanted, and what to read. He loved Charles Dickens; he had all these rows of books.

And what about the wireless [radio]?

Oh the funny little wireless.

Did you listen to more than just the news, did you listen to the radio serials or?

Oh what was it? Bomber Betty. Was it?

26:30 Nine o'clock.

Bomber Betty, Blue Gills I think was another one.

Yes that was midday. I think Bomber Betty was nine in the morning. Oh you just couldn't miss them. They were so, they just kept you up to date and you were with it, you just didn't want to miss them. Or was that because we were so stranded and so out of the way, I don't know.

No they were very popular as far as I have heard, radio plays. What about music, were you a fan of music?

I think I should

27:00 have been; I would have liked to have been. I know I can always remember my mother with her music, she wanted an organ not a piano. I had an extension from the wireless through the wall from the sitting room into the kitchen. So I must have wanted it around me all of the time.

When did you decide you that you would be a soldier? When you heard the news that war had broken out or was it afterwards?

27:30 Oh we didn't know there was opportunities for women then to go. But I had a brother who had been in the armoured car at Horsham and they had been away training. But he didn't go to the war, he and my brother by that time were share-farming. And this is when I remember the wheat being grown, you see they were growing wheat. My father had mainly sheep.

28:00 So they had this harvest to get off, they had the harvest to harvest and then they wouldn't have time to, they'd be thinking about the war but then my second brother, I suppose it would be January of '40, came in one day and said he was going in to

28:30 enlist. Going to town. He wanted to go in the air force. And it was a big jolt, we knew it would come but... Anyway he went down and applied to join the air force and they asked him his occupation and he said, "Wheat farming and grazing". And they said, "We don't want you here, you can go home." They

must have been getting enough men those days enlisting.

Restricted occupations.

And they said, "You can go home and work your property."

29:00 But he didn't do that he went to the Melbourne town hall and enlisted in the army.

He showed them.

That's what he thought, not really. And then, so that left my eldest brother to do the farming. Naturally being the older one he knew more about the business management and the running of it.

Quite traditional also for the second brother to go off to fight.

It was, that was the scene.

Which means it probably wasn't much fun being born second in those days.

29:30 I had an uncle in the First World War and he was James too see? So a bit of a tradition wasn't it?

Poor old James died in the First World War didn't he?

Yes.

And how old were you? You wouldn't have even been born.

No I wasn't. James my brother was. And when he was born the midwife said to my Mother,

30:00 "What are you naming the baby?" And she said, "Oh (whatever the name was)", and my Grandmother had the new baby and she was carrying him out of the room and said, "James, that's who he should be: James." Harold and Mum said, "Of course". That's how he got the name.

Do you know how your Uncle James died in the war? Was he in France in the trenches?

No he was at Gallipoli wasn't he?

Was he at Gallipoli, was he?

I'm sure he was. Yeah. That's in 1917, no it's a bit out. I know it was Gallipoli.

30:30 **Yeah that sounds right. So you had a bit of the reality of war within the family?**

Oh yes and when you visited Grandam there was of course the large portrait. They all had those large portraits in those days didn't they? They hung on the wall. His medals were there.

So your brother joined up, how did your father respond to your brother joining up and leaving the farm?

Oh I think he was just accepting of it.

And you wanted to be a nurse?

31:00 Oh yes.

Did you want to be a nurse straight away when you heard about the war or was it before that that you wanted to be a nurse?

Oh no, it had been most of my days. And of course when the war broke out, I thought, "Oh I can be a nurse and go away". But it didn't work out that way.

So tell me about that, you said to your father that you'd like to be a nurse and go away and it wasn't the money that stopped him from saying yes, he just didn't want you to leave?

Oh no I wasn't allowed.

31:30 **It's interesting because he let you go off and live with the Ramseys all of those years, and now he wouldn't let you go off again. Was he just very strict?**

Oh I think he was very selfish.

That's all right.

We'll just pass on.

Okay so tell me a little bit about how you got to join the army because you must have come down from the country to the city to see that truck?

Oh we used to -

32:00 where's my two, older brothers. No we'd come to town occasionally, more often.

And you said that you were on the lookout for opportunities, do you recall seeing ads in the

newspapers or in magazines?

I think I possibly read, I always see the piece in the Argus [newspaper] where it said about this Women's Service was forming, an army,

32:30 what would you call it? Women's army.

Women's army.

And I think I followed, I really think I followed everything about it. Because we were ahead of the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and the navy.

The RAN [Royal Australian Navy], yep.

Yeah I think I sort of had my eye on it all the time. Perhaps unconsciously.

Can you recall what the advertisement offered or promised anyone who joined up?

33:00 No I can't but I can almost visualise where I read about this women's army corps service.

Did it say that it would send you to camps? Did it suggest that you would go overseas and fight?

No, no.

And what did you imagine you would do, did you see yourself standing up with a rifle in a uniform? Or did you imagine that you would be cooking for lots of men?

No, no. I was going to drive a car.

You already knew that.

33:30 I think so.

I mean for me it seems glamorous in a way but I'm sure it wasn't always glamorous, but it's very striking, the idea of being able to join up and drive important military personnel around.

No it wasn't that, no. We really had to look after our cars. We had to be mechanics,

Oh I'm so chuffed that they made you learn to be mechanics because the female gender hasn't been particularly

34:00 **good with things under the bonnet.**

We had to have all these licences, do it the same as the men did. The trucks, and the various jeeps and you name it. I probably have it in here somewhere. We did it and we had to understand, don't forget the motors were very simple then.

Still,

We did it

34:30 **I think if you can get into a dock and sort it out then you're well ahead of the rest. Tell me where you joined up then and the process that you went through. Did you have to have your father's permission for example or your older brother's?**

No I didn't need anyone's permission. No. I knew what I wanted to do I think.

So where was the office?

Oh and Father had married again.

35:00 **Before you left home?**

Yes.

Oh sorry, so he married before you left home?

Well I enlisted in '42 didn't I? Anyway he had married again. And I really felt that I was better, I really was looking for somewhere to go, an outlet. But my step-mother was a very lovely person so that's okay.

That's good.

She lived there,

35:30 so it was time to go.

And where was the office where you enlisted?

I knew you asked me, and I was trying to think. It was a little, just up the top of town. Oh Swanson Street, her name was Major Deesie I think.

So it was a female major there

36:00 **when you enlisted?**

Yeah, yeah. On her own, sitting up in this little tram sheddy sort of place.

Was that the first female soldier you had ever clapped eyes on?

Yes.

What was that like, how did she strike you?

Well she made quite an impression, she was far more serious and overbearing than I thought, you know, expected. But that was very good because you were going to be in the army. And she was the only officer

36:30 I ever met who was like that.

Is that right?

Oh she was quite nice, but she really pulled her rank. And I suppose that was the way to be too when you were going into the position.

I guess so.

But she was very firm, oh yes.

And did she give you a bit of scrutiny, like why did a young girl like you want to be part of the army and so on?

On no, not really. She

37:00 was quite nice, but you really did feel her presence. As I said she is the only one who ever, all the others were, they were above reproach, they set a pattern and standard and that Sybil Irving I think she was really outstanding.

37:30 **Now when a lot of the men signed up it was a bit of a cattle call, you know they were put through the mill, sent out for a medical and you know, name patch on etc, very little personal involvement. Was it like that with the women, where you were given a form and stamped, and sent off to get checked out?**

Well I didn't feel it was, I can remember going up for a medical, but I was quite impressed. I thought it was - no, I felt was nothing like that.

What happened

38:00 **then, did they give you a form to fill in?**

I can't remember.

That's okay, we'll skip then.

But they checked out my teeth and they checked us all over and everyone was very pleasant.

And were you excited was it sort of a fun thing to be doing or were you apprehensive?

Oh no it was very serious, I wasn't filled with trepidation but you were made to feel like it was quite serious.

38:30 There was nothing anything like that, flippant.

And at [that] point nobody knew how long the war was going to go on, it would have looked very serious at the time you joined up. So did they give you some idea of how long you should expect to be part of the Australian army?

Oh yes you were going to be there I suppose until you were too old. Those days if you married you were out I suppose.

So they didn't say, "Lory" or "Anderson" - was your name Anderson?

Yes.

They didn't say, "Anderson, you'll be in

39:00 **this army for three years so you better get used to it"?**

Oh no, no, no. I didn't have any of that at all.

And did you get your uniform straight away?

Well after we had applied, we didn't go in straight away, we went home and we were called up. And

then I said to a cousin of mine (met her one day in town for lunch), "I've joined the army", and she said, "Wait for me I'm coming too".

39:30 So you must have been able to postpone the date from when applied, must have been some time period granted to us.

You might have got some choice in two months or three months or?

Yeah the date. So I waited a wee while for Eila otherwise I'd have been a bit earlier. But that's how it went on.

Okay.

39:50 **End of tape**

Tape 3

00:16 **You are now officially a member of the AWAS and I would like to know a bit about where they sent you and how they sent you there for your training?**

You mean to Glamorgan?

Yes.

Oh we just found our way there I think.

Was there a passing out parade to go out to Glamorgan? Did they put on any event for you to send you away or was it

01:00 **understated?**

I think it was always - I met Eila down at Flinders Street corner, and then we just caught the tram and went to Glamorgan, I'm sure.

Sure, what kind of accommodation did they put you under?

In Pentor. It was a lovely old home. Oh it was just divine, the garden was full of all the

01:30 scent things that come out in July and I can still remember the evenings there; it was just beautiful, the settings and the surroundings and the ascetics.

And were you all in dormitory beds?

Yes they had very large rooms and there was beds all around. That was for our training.

And what was your daily routine?

At Glamorgan?

02:00 **And it doesn't have to be in pinpoint accuracy, but did they take you through initiation?**

Oh we had wonderful lectures. Marching, drill, we went out and drilled in some of the streets in Toorak. We were very quiet because it was wartime and there was traffic. And I thoroughly enjoyed it actually.

When you had to drill around the streets did you have to carry a pack of any description?

02:30 No, no. We just marched.

Okay, I'm always fascinated because shoes in the 1940's were not as comfortable as they are now?

Oh they'd slip and slide. We had the wedgies and I had a nice smart pair of those on. And you could scarcely stand, sliding and slipping around.

They would have been slightly heeled wouldn't they?

Yes they were. You didn't have to have these wedgie things, but they were new and awfully smart. And I can remember

03:00 when the parade, forward march, it was a battle. Had I had the normal army shoes I would have plodded off. But we didn't, we weren't issued with them then, we did that in our civvies [civilian clothing].

How disciplined with you were they when you did your drill? Was it all ice front and no smiling?

Oh yes we all entered into it, everyone there was trying I think.

03:30 We were well lectured and well drilled in it before we went out to the drill and we had a, I can't remember the man's name giving us the drill, but he meant business, he'd be a -

They wanted to straighten you out didn't they?

Yeah it was good. The men were drilling us and running us those days because it was early days.

Marching around

04:00 **the streets of Toorak did you get a lot of on lookers and spectators?**

No, no.

And from Toorak I think you said you went down to Geelong, down to the barracks near Geelong was that right?

No, no.

I'm sorry where did they send you after Glamorgan, I thought they sent you out on a training?

To the Yarra: the Fairfield Swimming and Rowing Club.

Oh right for your mechanical training?

We went straight from Glamorgan to that.

04:30 Went straight in.

That was my confusion, I thought you were sent out of town for a bit, but that wasn't the case you were always in town.

When we finished our rookies' training we had to have somewhere to live, and they were taking over hostels and homes to put the girls in, and I went down, oh just out here to Toorak Mansions,

05:00 189 Toorak Road, and I was the first one in, they had only opened up that morning. So I was fortunate I had somewhere to go without being pushed out to barracks further out. And I walked in, and the nicest YWCA [Young Men's Christian Association] ladies were running it, and they said, "Well you're first in the door you can have the pick of the rooms". I meant to bring some photo's of Toorak Mansions because there were lots and lots of these little tiny rooms. So I went up and I had my first choice

05:30 and I thought, "Oh!" - it was wonderful.

What were

Then we went off to our transport training.

Okay. When they gave you the lectures at Glamorgan can you recall what they were about?

I have all my own books, they are all at home in the country in storage. I have got every one.

That's okay.

Because they were so clear and so - they really were worth keeping and looking at.

Were the general health and wellbeing?

06:00 Oh yes we had special doctors in lecturing us on the health side of it, cleanliness, hygiene. Right from the word go. You know, it was thoroughly done, and you really took notice and decided to abide by the rules; it was great.

Was there any history involved in that, did they give you any instruction as to why the war was happening and the background to that or was it really much more personal than that?

06:30 Oh no they didn't go into that so much, not in the rooky school.

And you said you had male and female officers in the rooky school?

No male officers in the PT [physical training], the exercises we had the men doing that.

And female officers along the way?

Yes the female officers would go marching with us, we'd be in formation, oh we took a pride in it. In the

07:00 forming ranks, and filing and drilling, and then lining up for the march. And the female officers would march along the side of us and watch us all and keep their eye on us. We didn't want to disobey but we all had to get along and do what we were told or we were called to attention. But that was all accepted and it was great.

Tell me about meeting the other girls, that must have been quite a unique experience. I mean rolling up and being in the army with a

07:30 **bunch of other women?**

Oh it all fell into place, I didn't find it hard at all.

Easy to make friends?

Oh I think so. Actually the first night I was there, somebody asked me, was I nervous the first night? How did I accept it? And I said, "Well I marched into Pentor and decided to go to bed very early I suppose";

08:00 I'd be very weary after travelling all of those distances to get there. And in comes the officer on duty and she says, "Is there a Margaret Anderson here?" So here I was and she was an Aloe Miller and she was an officer; she had been down and done her training, and she was looking for me because she lived in the next district. And she was interested to see [me].

08:30 **You both from Western Victoria?**

From the Wimmera. And she made herself known, she knew everybody I knew and I knew everyone she knew. But that was great, and then from then on it was always great to see her about. She would say, "hello" and I had no need to feel lonely, she was just gorgeous.

I think that must have been the beginning of your associations with senior ranking officers?

It was all charm.

Tell me then

09:00 **about becoming a driver, I'd like to know how it came about. Were they calling for volunteers, whether you got to put your name down and recommended yourself as a driver? How did it come about that you became a driver?**

When I applied you had forms to fill out that you take with you. And I don't know whether there was anything on that about becoming a driver. You had to have two years

09:30 experience, that's all I can remember. I suppose when she was interviewing and I was so keen. I really felt that I was going into the army to be a driver, it hadn't entered my head that I could be doing anything else.

Very interesting because that's exactly how it worked out.

And so when I was, I was looking forward to it you know. So I suppose I was so eager and I was so keen and, I suppose I'd asked would I be able to be a driver, I don't know.

10:00 I was just going to be a driver.

What vehicle did they train you on?

Oh we had chevys and dodges. Fords. And oh we didn't actually doing the driving of the staff car driving there. We drove trucks and heavy, if we had two years experience we didn't need to do the, so much of the rules.

And your two years experience did that come

10:30 **directly from life on the farm?**

Yes but then you'd travel. No before, I remember. Before I joined I went and took a course from a driving school, because if I was going to drive in the city see I would need to know all of the rules and regulations, so I went and did this course from the driving school, and that was a great help I'm sure.

Now I'm going to sound patronising here I'm sure

11:00 **but would been one of few women who elected to go and do a driving course?**

I only did it because I was a country girl and I wanted to be up to date with the city driving.

Yes I'm curious, and I don't know whether I am just falling prey to my own clichés but I'm wondering if many women went about doing that at a time when money was scarce, whether many women became drivers voluntarily. But that's interesting, so they must have known that when you went into the army that you had done this course.

Oh yes I had that down.

11:30 But I really enjoyed it because it does give you more confidence,

I'll bet it does.

When you come to the city, I mean if you're a country driver. I still think I would go and do a course with a driver school if I was let loose in the city. Even nowadays.

I'm wondering how to get you to tell me how much traffic there was then. How could you compare for example the traffic wandering around the streets of Melbourne in 1942 to now?

Are we talking?

12:00 Well during war time, peak hour, the city could be quite congested even then.

Were there still horses wandering around then?

I really don't think so. The police horses used to go by around the town. You'd be looking out and it was such a pleasure to see them. And they'd be around the streets here, but they didn't interfere

12:30 with the traffic.

But no night carts or milk carts or anything with horses?

Yes you had to watch out for the horses because they would be in control of the street, they wouldn't be used to the traffic at night. They knew their round by heart didn't they, the horses.

So you trained on Chevies and Dodges and,

Fords.

And Fords; big side boards?

Running boards?

Running boards.

13:00 Oh yes they all had running boards those days.

They're quite gorgeous those cars, I'm sure they weren't considered gorgeous then, but definitely in retrospect they were just magnificent. Was there a sort of a time that you can recall you were sitting behind the wheel and driving through the streets of Melbourne and thought you know, "This is my life and this is what I do"? Was there a sense of coming of age at any stage as a soldier?

No I don't think so. Because

13:30 I think being a woman you knew the war would end. No I don't think so.

So they were fairly simple engines; were they fairly simple to drive or were they complicated to drive?

Oh no you get the feel of them, you could spin them, to reverse park or to drive you could spin them as simple as anything. I think they were simpler really.

I'm sure they were simpler.

Yeah.

14:00 **Fixing your car, what sort of instruction did they give you for that, and how effective was your training? Could you really get a dead dog to start?**

Oh well you had to because it was your car and your job. And there was a form filled in if you couldn't, something thirteen I think it was called, to say that you needed a mechanic to come

14:30 adjust your car. But you had to be pretty sure that you couldn't do it yourself. But the motors were so simple. I think we had a hundred questions to learn, a clutch, engaging and disengaging, the power from the transmission at the will of the driver and it went on and on and on. And daily maintenance was POWLET, 'petrol oil water...';

15:00 it was initials.

Can you do that again, that daily maintenance was POWLET?

Yeah POWLET: Power, Oil, Water, Lights, Ignition, Tyres. And that was your daily one. You had to fill up your car every night with petrol; rain, hail or shine you had to go down to Sturt Street and have the car filled ready for the next morning. And you had to check that oil gauge whether you knew it was full of oil or not, it was great.

15:30 **How old were the cars when you got your hands on them?**

I don't know.

Were they reasonably, -

Reasonably late, I'm sure of it.

So the chances of them having engine trouble wasn't too high anyway?

Yeah your distributors and that used to block very easily. And you learnt that you picked up a hunk of brick and give it a crack, if there was a bit of sludge and that in the fuel. It was mainly that type of thing. And your spark plugs and things and you had to,

16:00 **File them down?**

Switch them over, it was all so simple when you think about it now, but we thought we were really -

Still -

We had to know to change our tyres, you had to change a tyre in so many minutes, that was part of the exam. That's hard work.

Did you have to get in under the car and change oil?

Well most of the places had grease pits, you went down underneath and lighting it up and standing up.

16:30 **Greasing the nipples under the car, I always found that unusual.**

And wiping them off and cleaned. Because they would always come along and inspect it and wipe it and any grease came off you were in trouble. So you really had to be fussy and pedantic and make sure things were right.

Did they give you special uniforms for your mechanic's work?

Yes, yes. Overalls and old hats. Oh yes they were great, we liked getting into those and we liked getting in and

17:00 getting greasy.

It's been my experience that if a woman shows interest in a traditional male area, men are either very helpful, or a little bit suspicious and mildly patronising but quite genuinely enthusiastic that you are taking an interest. So how did the male soldiers, how did they appreciate your efforts?

Well over at Batman Avenue they were really helpful

17:30 and they would probably do more than they should for you. And then when we got to the army inspection staff the men had the garage in Exhibition [Street] and the women had the garage in Longstaff, and we were an entirely complete section. The women ran it and we did all of our work. Oh we had an old man, I suppose he was from the

18:00 First World War, he would guard us in at night and show us into our parkings. He was the only man in the place but he was just more or less an odd job man around the place. Keys on the shuttle. And when they were new there was just a ledge behind the steering wheel you know all of your instruments and so, I can still hear him telling you, we used to call him Pa or something, "Just go in"; you'd have to be able to reverse in just

18:30 your right amount of space perfectly. Shouting at you, but they were all very nice people. We didn't mix with them to have them patronising us really.

You were talking earlier about the black shield that they put over the headlights of cars with little slits?

Yes they were painted.

Oh they were painted on were they, is that how?

I'm sure they were.

They painted them black?

I'm sure yeah because you didn't need them in the day so they could do that.

19:00 **So did you do much night driving?**

Only when I was at Batman Avenue, when I went out, that was their job to go around testing all of the spots that were danger spots, if there was going to be any turmoil or trouble.

What did that consist of: danger spots? What turmoil or trouble would they imagine for Melbourne?

Oh I suppose they'd think there could be a bombing or there could be some shooting or something.

19:30 Because we'd drive the captain of the guard, they were down in the artillery section. We were engineers down, it's gone now hasn't it, just gone recently. We were the engineers down this way and they had some cottages down there. So when we were on night duty you were on with the ones in the cottage. We used to have an electric stove, we used to leave it on half the night because it was the only way to get a hot drink before you went out. Until we got reported.

20:00 And they'd have the guard inspector, an officer, he'd be in front with you and then you'd have an armed escort in the back. A couple in the back with guns. They really did expect trouble, especially around the docks; that was a bad area those days.

What was going on down at the docks? I've read of all the strikes and so on.

It was just a danger area I think. You wouldn't know when you were driving your car through but they were on the lookout for all sorts, anything. I think

20:30 people were just a bit hostile weren't they.

Was it dangerous for you because you were a soldier or because you were female or because the area itself was?

No it wasn't because we were female, it was because of the area, they wouldn't know with the car if it were [a] female driving it or a man. But they did have their own guards in the back.

How would you be sent to work, what would be the structure of your work?

21:00 **Would they simply requisition a car to take such a person to somewhere else and they would call on the AWAS and you would be sent up or?**

No we had a garage over there and we had a transport officer. And you had your work tickets, your daily work tickets.

So you turn up and that would be your brief for the day?

Some days. Other days if you're only on short trips you would run in and hand your work ticket back. It had to be signed the time you left, and it had to be signed the moment you returned by a

21:30 senior person. And if you had your daily work ticket, well you had all your jobs to do on that. And in our glove boxes, say you were going out to Broadmeadows or somewhere right through the city, they would tell you the quickest way to get there, the streets and that. I still wish I had one because they were very, very good. Go out through Petrie and take a shortcuts, dodge the busy streets and

22:00 just to be quick.

Were they army issue or?

Yes they were in your glove box.

That's interesting; army-issued road maps and so on, road directories.

And they were a great help because you knew almost every street on them and it saved a lot of effort and thought and worry.

Were you a confident driver?

I think I must have been. Didn't worry, you just took a pride in it. We were better drivers than the men, the women. Especially when we were in opposition, we get in opposition to

22:30 the men, they weren't opposition but they were there, but the women didn't have the accidents the men had. Not that they had bad accidents, but we didn't even have the knocks and the scrapes. My only scrap was when the General Grant tank hit me down Spencer Street.

What happened there?

Nothing.

General Grant tank? That's a particular kind of tank is it?

Oh yes they were huge,

23:00 very early tank. They were new I think, running down Spencer Street in the five o'clock traffic, which was very thick and heavy. And here was this thundering thing bounding along. And the officer I was driving said, "Pull over, go slowly, I want to have a look, get closer." Of course there's these great bounds on it. Next thing I knew there was this great

23:30 screech and my running board was gone. But that was all right.

Oh the tank hit the car?

Yes. No just bounds.

Hit by a tank in the middle of Spencer Street.

But yes that's my only scrape I ever had.

Now there would be no bodily danger but it would be pretty close wouldn't it if you've got a big tank coming straight past your window?

No we were running side by side.

Did the tank know that he had hit you?

Yes he knew very well, he knew he shouldn't be in Spencer Street

24:00 at five o'clock too.

Does seem a bit extreme.

Yes he had no right to be down there. They were young and carefree and taking a shortcut through from where he was going I suppose.

So what would the procedure be if you had such an accident, did you have to go and report it?

Oh yes you had all these forms to fill out, but I was fortunate I had an officer and he stepped out and took charge. And the young officer was there

24:30 and they exchanged names and that was about all. Then the young officer asked me if I would have dinner with him. And I said, "Yes I would", and that's all that ever happened. He just said, "I'll take the driver to dinner, I am so sorry. Will you have company?" Averetti's was an underground place opposite The Australian. So I went back and I went out to dinner and that was the end of that.

A brief moment of glamour amidst the,

No, he was very sorry that he had hit me.

25:00 **I bet.**

But he wasn't in any trouble because it was part of driving wasn't it, part of the five hour crush.

Tell me a bit about the relationship between the driver and the person with whom they're driving, are you allowed to speak to them?

Oh yes, you're in charge of the car, complete control that was up to you. They couldn't give you instructions, they would tell you where they were going.

25:30 And they would usually be in the back seat, if you were in the car with one person, if they were regulars they would often be in the front seat with you. But if it was someone of higher rank, some of the cars have little tables across the back of the front seat, and sometimes they would lift the table and they would have to make notes on it or something, as they were travelling,

26:00 which was good. Because then you could just go and they were busy. But they were very, very nice, just pleasantries.

So they wouldn't ask you too many questions? Or was there any discussion, I wonder whether as a driver whether you were privy to conversations that were considered [confidential]?

Yeah if you were driving and you had three or four, you weren't allowed more than one in the, sometimes if you didn't have gearsticks

26:30 you could have two in the front, but usually only one in the front. And three in the back. But yes they'd have their discussions but see you were under - you just didn't repeat it or you just didn't discuss it.

Could you repeat and discuss it now? I'm hinting very hard at some of the goss. [gossip] you must have heard?

Oh I can't really recall it. But I know when we were down at the docks and looking at the timetables of the ships you'd never dream of discussing it, never. It just wouldn't enter your head.

27:00 **But you would be privy to information of troops leaving and movements?**

Yeah if you wanted to you could go and look at all the wall, it used to shock me a bit but it was interesting. I used to wander over and look at the wall and I loved to know the names of the ships, the Queen Mary and the others. And they would be due here, and then they would go back. And they had the date they would go back.

Could you see that they were due to travel to New Guinea or they were going to Bougainville?

Yes. If you wanted to.

27:30 But it wouldn't enter your head to, otherwise you wouldn't be in there, wouldn't be asked in for coffee or anything. But it was there.

What about other procedural information did you ever pick up and of the lingo that the senior officers were discussing between themselves? Did you have any idea what they knew about the Japanese situation or whether they had any thoughts about what they would do in the event of an invasion?

28:00 I don't think so, but if you did, you'd just be so busy with what you had to do and get there on time, it'd be just -

Sure.

Otherwise you wouldn't have had that job.

You would have lost it quick smart?

Yeah if you wanted your job you just got on with it.

They say discretion is the better part of valour. What about, was it always very above board and professional,

28:30 **and you'll be indulging my romantic hopelessness, did it ever get, were there ever opportunities where men would flirt with you or ask you out apart from this driver?**

Not during wartime no.

It was always very serious, was it, all the time?

No they wouldn't. They took too, I think they were too proud of their position. The only nice thing they would do is sometimes say, "I'll open

29:00 the door for you and you get in". Just little things like that. But never - but then they had to be pretty sure of the driver too. They wouldn't dare, because you could go and report them and they'd be - No there was none of that, not with me anyway.

Back at the base what sort of conversations went on between you and the other women about your work? Could you discuss your work for example?

29:30 Oh you could if you wanted to.

Could you say I drove old Brigadier Coffee was it?

Oh no, he was mine. He was quite nice, no you wouldn't be bothered discussing it because you'd be on a different time slot to the other girls. You'd be up and out to take him to work early in the morning, and you'd take him home when he finished at night, whereas the other girls would be all in and finished. And you wouldn't be on parade in the garage,

30:00 they go on parade morning and night. You weren't in that because you were out on a different thing all together.

Socialising after work, did you get to go to many of the shows in Melbourne, or enjoy any of Melbourne's night life at all while you were working?

Oh well Melbourne was different. Yes, when we living at Toorak Mansions you were free. You know that was a hostel that was a different scene altogether to being in camp.

What was the social life like in Melbourne back then for a

30:30 **young woman?**

Well we had to get up pretty early so you had to choose it pretty carefully. But there were lovely shows on, lovely live shows. And see you'd do the rounds, you'd see every one that was on. But we didn't go very far because you had to be up early, and you had to do your laundry and your chores and fly around.

Did you want for anything during that period of time? Melbourne was starting to be hit with rations, not as severe as elsewhere obviously but...?

31:00 Well we just accepted it.

So was there anything that you wanted to get your hands on but couldn't?

No not really because that was your job. And we were in uniform and you were not supposed to go out in cities at all.

Ever?

Well in Brisbane you weren't, when we were in barracks. You just didn't, we used to have a few civvies we'd change to occasionally but it wasn't worth the effort.

31:30 Getting out of camp, you couldn't look after your clothes anyway, you could only look after your uniforms and take your pride in them

What about your love life at this stage; are there any men on the scene?

Well there was always one.

Who was that?

Oh that was my husband. Before I married him you know he was always the main one.

So you met him before you went overseas then?

Oh yes. Yeah.

Tell me about that, where did you meet and how did you meet?

32:00 Well they had a property in the Wallaloo, just a slightly different district, very close. And they had properties over the back of our paddocks. And used to drive to and fro a lot and there'd always be a wave.

So you met as kids?

Oh no not until I was in my teens.

Oh okay.

When I went back to Maneau.

What did he make of you joining the army and being a driver?

32:30 Well I suppose he didn't have much say because he was - his father had suffered a heart attack before the war, not long before the war. '38 I think, but I really didn't know his father, so that was in the late '30's. And then that meant that he had a property, and a mother and two sisters.

33:00 And that wasn't easy those days, so he didn't have a hope of going to the war really. He just wasn't in a position where he could go was he?

So did the two of you write regularly when you were in Melbourne?

Well not so much in Melbourne because you'd be able to get home, you used to get leave to get on a train and go home. And then when I was

33:30 away, oh not all the time. I got just enough. Because we didn't get much time to write letters anyway.

And did the other girls you were working with have a long term relationship or were they all single?

They were all single.

The reason I'm asking is whether you had a different experience to them being engaged or spoken for?

Oh no we'd all be in a group

34:00 and do things together.

Did that mean you could still go dancing with another man if they asked or go out for lunch or something?

Oh I'd go out to lunches and dinner, my word. That's why we had the school down in South Brisbane,

I'm going to ask -

Because you'd always have a dinner you see and then go onto your studies.

I'm going to ask about Brisbane but before we get there I just want to ask a bit about going to Caulfield Race Course

34:30 **where they were training all the men and so on, it was an early staging camp there. You said that there was?**

No they were mainly prisoners at Caulfield.

At Caulfield Race Course, that was a prison for Australian soldiers?

Well anyone I think. Army, personnel, prisoners of war or,

(UNCLEAR)

Yeah yeah.

Can you recall for example how large that would be or how many men they might have? You might not know but -

35:00 No I really didn't know. We went there in the dead of night, sometimes it would be ten thirty at night sometimes it would be two in the morning. They never knew what time, that's why we lived in the cottages, you never knew what time you'd get a call. It could be six o'clock in the morning and you'd get a whole night's sleep, it could be any time.

And why would they have been at such odd hours, the calls?

Because they wouldn't know what time they would be calling,

35:30 they'd have to keep the guards on alert. All night doing their job. Oh they just loved doing their surprise

attacks, they'd do it around the docks. So everyone didn't know what hour to expect the inspection I suppose.

I see so it was to spring the inspection on people?

Yeah all the time. It was never the same time. Zooming in for the Alfred.

That's loud isn't it? Wow.

36:00 **Okay and just one other last question before we head off to Brisbane, the inspectors that you worked for, can you give me an idea of the men or women who were part of the inspection team and whether you were part of the inspection? Did you go along with them or did you wait in the car outside?**

Oh yeah well they liked to include you, they liked to say, "Come". But you'd probably only be allowed once or twice

36:30 to come in. Well not allowed, but you didn't want to be in other times, you'd been in and saw what was interesting. Or they'd say, "There is something going on here would you care to see it?" You'd go in and maybe you'd be asked for a cup of tea. Sometimes the owner of the business would rush out and say, "Come in come in." If you were driving to Ballarat or something it was great, they were very always, "Come in driver, bring your driver in".

37:00 **What are some of the inspections that you went on that were of some interest to you?**

Well the one in Brisbane, the coffins, oh I just can't think of the name of the crowd. I just thought, "Oh I can't go in, I'm not going in." You know how you're just young and you think, "I'm not going to take that in". Well that was, the person I was driving said, "You must come in,

37:30 It's so interesting. Especially with the Americans; you must come." Well that was, it was an interest because they had all of these satin little pillows there was nothing ghastly about it at all, this was for the American soldiers. And the coffins were padded in satin, I was an expert in coffins at the time. But I'm not so much now, you put it out of your mind. But that was fascinating; I found it was anyway.

These were military coffins for American soldiers?

Yes.

I'm stunned that they were lined with satin and so on.

They were.

38:00 **I really am.**

Well I was too. And it was worth going in and seeing it. Oh and then the tannery. They were interesting, everywhere we went was different. And every single thing provided for the army had to be inspected and have a stamp.

Just before this place finishes, you went to tanneries, you went to coffin-making places, can you give me a little bit more of a list?

38:30 Well you'd do all of the uniforms, every single thing. I suppose all of their cooking utensils and their boots. And just name it everything.

Did you go inside the prison at Caulfield?

Oh I had to drive, my officer would walk, he would go with his armed escorts. Yes you had to drive in and tent would be there and you would be here.

Were you a little bit apprehensive?

No no I was,

39:00 interested to see what went on.

Did you see what went on in there?

Yes they were mostly harmless. But they were out big-noting, the ones with the tents down and stuffing around and the poor old guards would be working to get the tent erected because they weren't allowed to get the prisoner wet you see. Oh it was crazy. No I used to enjoy the side play. I didn't enjoy it; I was interested in the side play. Especially on a stormy night in the middle of the storm you'd get this call and you'd have to go.

39:30 **Midnight inspections and so on?**

Yeah. It sounds frivolous but that was only just [the] sideline of it all.

Do you think that the general public were aware that Australian soldiers were being put in Australian prisons for various things? Most of it was for just going AWOL [Absent without

leave].

Deserting.

They call it deserting but it was usually just trying to get a day off or something.

No they weren't aware they were there I am sure of it. And what went on at the showgrounds I don't know. Except I used to get a gun

40:00 nearly in my neck driving in the gate asking for the password of the night.

What they'd stick the gun in and say - ?

I think yes. I didn't appreciate that very much but it was harmless, it was interesting wasn't it?

We have to change tapes.

40:17 **End of tape**

Tape 4

00:31 **Ok tell me how it came about, and I know you mentioned it on the first tape, but tell me again how you got to Brisbane, it was thanks to General Coffee wasn't it? Brigadier General Coffee?**

Oh yes yes. And after that there was a taboo on, no other drivers were allowed to leave the unit, so I escaped.

Well, just before that, for the Brigadier

01:00 **to speak with you, was that uncommon?**

Well I think we, I was his personal driver.

Was it weeks or months that you drove for him?

I didn't drive for him for so long because I got a transfer to Brisbane. I suppose it would be three months or so but that was very short those days.

I suppose but that's quite a personal, so what I was suggesting was that three months driving

01:30 **the Brigadier,**

It might have been more.

But you can become very familiar with one another I'm sure. And whilst you might not talk much in the car...

I mean there was always a lot of respect but there's always very pleasant talk. You know they just wouldn't get in the car and say, "Move along driver". It would be, "Oh good morning driver" and you know, "How are you?", passing pleasantries and it was quite nice.

02:00 **So would you swap information about your families, how your children were doing?**

Yeah, there was a bad drought on, it was a shocking drought in '45-'46, or it might have been earlier, '44-'47. And sheep were a shilling a head and all this kind of thing, and I think Brigadier Coffee had a farming background, his parents. Maybe

02:30 he didn't, he'd been in London and through all the military schools. But he was very interested in the Wimmera and up through there, and the name Coffee is renowned through, oh north of where I was, Nhill and up that way. And I don't know if that formed an easy talk point. But no it was very pleasant.

And how did it come about that he asked you if you were happy or not? Was there something leading up to that?

03:00 No it was such a lovely day and he came over here from England, and he was trying to get his pregnant wife back. And I think she had to come back from America and it was quite a task too, she was in the States and he was in a flat down St Kilda Road he had all ready. And we were discussing the wife coming and everybody being all happy,

03:30 and I don't know what it was. He just said to me, "Well are you happy?" Out of all this war talk, it was just chatter. But he didn't expect a reply, I was supposed to say, "Oh yes I like my job."

And actually you said that MacArthur was in Melbourne, he had his HQ [headquarters] down here?

It was either Scots and Menzies wasn't it?

Did you ever lay eyes on him?

In Melbourne? I don't know if I laid eyes on him in Melbourne but in Brisbane

04:00 they were frequently seen. Mr MacArthur was always out on the streets and around a hamburger bus that used to be down near George Street. Renowned for its hamburgers. And she had a little boy, four I think he was,

Did she take him with her?

Yes you'd see them around. Because Brisbane is more homely than Melbourne isn't it?

It's not a big place.

No it's good.

So you got your posting to Brisbane. Were your girlfriends jealous?

Oh I don't

04:30 think so, I think they were - no they didn't want to go. No, my very best, Joan Olley - I've mentioned her before, we went through the driving school and we were still together at Batman Avenue. And then we went to Fitzroy and then we went to army inspection and we were still together - no she had no desire, not the slightest, to go.

And what about your boyfriend, what did he say to you when you said, "I'm off"?

05:00 I don't think I asked him; don't forget that was four years before I was - that was, no, nothing to do with him. I probably did but it was all right.

Okay so you were sort of spoken for but it wasn't serious?

Well there was no one else in the district was there? No other girls.

You were safe.

Oh no it was quite, I don't know, I don't think he would

05:30 hear about it.

So you were in the army in Chermside; you say you really felt like you were in the army you were in tents, and you were treated -

We weren't near the men's camp. Now the girls and the men are together; then it wasn't, they were entirely separate camps. [We were] on the edge of the men's camp.

Brisbane was a lot more exposed and vulnerable than quiet little Melbourne during the war; there was evidence of real threat up there. Did you ever

06:00 **have pause for concern about your own safety when you got to Brisbane?**

No, no. And we just accepted, even if there had of been a bomb go off I don't think we would have felt it. Wouldn't have been - well you just accepted it was war-time.

And were your officers any different in Brisbane than they had been in Melbourne; was there a different kind of officer?

Oh it was an entirely different set-up in Chermside. Oh we were - oh you mean in

06:30 the barracks or - ?

Yeah in the barracks.

Well we really didn't see them very much. And I mentioned earlier there were two women a wee bit older than what Joan and I were that were driving; well one of those went on to become an officer and she was one of those in charge of the

07:00 Church of England Grammar School that we were moving to. So she was no worry, she used to hide every time she saw me I think.

How did you get up there, did you drive up or catch a train?

Oh no, troop trains, because petrol was short you didn't drive very far personally in those days.

Troop train; lots of other women on board?

Not going up, no.

Who was on board on the trip on the way up?

Just a mixed group of fellows, soldiers.

07:30 **Card games on the train all the way up?**

No it was very quiet. I think I might have had an American sitting next to me, I don't know it could have been Dutch or anything I don't know. But no everyone was very quiet, especially with a woman in the carriage.

Gosh okay. Tell me a little bit about life in Brisbane then. Were you doing similar jobs? I know you went

08:00 **to the tech. [technical] school for a while and so on.**

That was just to get leave from camp.

What did you hear about when you got to Brisbane? It was a small place really; did you hear lots of rumours or what was going on there or what the Americans were like or what the Japanese were up to?

Well actually people think that because the Americans were there that you saw them a lot and mixed with them but they seemed to keep a lot to themselves. I know there were Americans in the streets,

08:30 but when you are in it you don't see what people are thinking and seeing on the outside. To us it was all hectic and busy. As I said, there were traffic police in with the lights, and keeping order. And the military police were everywhere, especially the American military police, and they were very strict. But it didn't really enter, we had our own transport and

09:00 we knew exactly what we had to do to get back to the camp. And we weren't allowed to run loose either. All the leave passes were dated for a certain - ; we were under strict - ; they really, you know, enforced the rules with us. We had to conform, put it that way.

I have no doubt. The work you're doing is a little bit autonomous in that you don't have to be in a group to do what you had to do.

09:30 **But you say they were very strict, so how did they monitor your activity and your travel? What, did they make you travel 'in twos' everywhere you went?**

Oh that was more New Guinea. But you wouldn't go out on your own really. You wouldn't have an opportunity to either. We were in dormitories and there was a whole group of us, just off hand I couldn't say how many; six, eight? There'd be at least two dozen

10:00 in that dormitory, just there wasn't much space because there was so many people to fit in. And we all became great friends the people in the dormitories, even if you weren't working with them. Drivers in that section, but the rest of it would be in all other occupations of the army.

What other specialisations were the women involved in?

Well there was all the clerical and all the secretaries, wasn't it mainly?

10:30 I guess that's about all, I don't know.

And something I haven't asked you about was your pay. Did you get extra pay for being a driver?

Yes, you went in and for your first month or so, rookie school and then you were on a specialist pay. But I don't know how much it was, whether it was seven shillings or five shillings.

Soldiers were getting five bob a day.

Ordinary soldiers but did the girls, the women get that?

11:00 **Well I was hoping you might remember.**

Well I've got a pay book here somewhere.

We can look it up at lunch time, it'd be interesting to see what the rates of pay were.

But if you were a driver you went in on specialist rate of pay because drivers didn't really get promotion, you stayed stationary and so you got the specialist pay. I had an idea that it was seven but I don't know if that's right or not.

Did you keep up driving for people of influential rank in Brisbane? Did you have any favourites there?

Oh no, no.

11:30 It wasn't like that at all. And there wasn't many here in Melbourne either, they were all inspectors, it just so happened that Brigadier Coffee wanted a personal driver and several applied, and another lass, Doris Major (she was a well known tennis player those days), and I were chosen so that was great.

You said the inspectors were a little bit different in Brisbane than they were in Melbourne, how did they differ?

- Oh they were free and easy,
- 12:00 they always included you to go into everything and they would always chat to you more. It was a different atmosphere all together.
- Did they chat just about incidentals or did they chat about specifics?**
- Oh they'd be so wanting to tell you all the - what are these lovely Queensland nuts? We used to just call them Queensland nuts those days, and one of them had a farm growing that, and there used to be bags of those nuts.
- Macadamia?**
- 12:30 Yes, they were new.
- You've got to hit them with a tank to open them though.**
- That was all part of it and we'd be interested in his farming and he'd be talking about it; it was just carefree.
- What sort of food did they give you?**
- In barracks? I can't remember. We used to get our own lunch and we'd be out for dinner every time we had an opportunity. And breakfast I suppose was just, I don't know, I guess they were tasty
- 13:00 and wholesome.
- So you weren't getting thrown the shocking kind of powdered egg mixture?**
- No we didn't have much of the powdered, although powdered egg went with the army breakfast, although you would get a bit of a variety that way. And lots of baked beans,
- Lots of baked beans.**
- But we liked them.
- Did you ever have to do any other tasks as a soldier?**
- No not if you were in barracks, not if you were working..
- Did you call yourself a soldier?**
- 13:30 **Or did that seem -**
- No we were AWAS.
- So you were AWAS, you weren't soldiers?**
- No we were AWAS.
- What about mixing with the other women in the services. Was there any kind of competition between the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and the AWAS and the AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] and so on?**
- Oh only friendly rivalry. In Toorak Mansions it was all mixed service women in there. And then one of my best friends was a WAAAF, and
- 14:00 she's still friends but she gets on your nerves a wee bit. There is a bit of something between it.
- Because there was definitely a difference between any of the boys in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] too,**
- Well yes I think that carried through a bit. And she; they thought they were smarter than the army. And we were sure we were smarter than they were with our uniforms. But they came later you see. Oh there was a little bit but we were all best friends underneath it all.
- 14:30 **Now this wasn't always the case, but certainly on a number of occasions, for example, nurses would meet doctors, the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] women would meet navy officers, girls of the WAAAF would meet flyers; what kind of a fellow did a woman in the AWAS look out for?**
- Well I don't know, some of them just had other ranks. Depends how well they knew them I suppose.
- 15:00 I suppose the officers had more money.
- Was that subject of discussion among the women, that despite the fact that you were there fighting a war that it wouldn't be a bad idea to do a bit of husband-hunting at the same time?**
- No not really because most of them had boyfriends away, that's why they joined. No they weren't husband-hunting. Well not the ones I knew anyway.
- Did you know any girls who received letters saying that their boyfriends**

15:30 **or fiancés had been killed?**

Well that came in New Guinea, after the Japanese surrender; then later after that the word came through to our colonel, in charge of the barracks up there, in charge of all of us, that she had a list of the ones under her control; of the girls that their brothers or - it was very well done. I don't know how the army kept track of us all but they did.

16:00 And some of the girls in New Guinea were there because they had a husband [who was] a prisoner of war. Or some were engaged; they were more involved with their friends in the forces. So the night that the colonel, Colonel Spencer Margaret Spencer, received the word of this list she was out around the huts. She was a person we

16:30 admired. But she came and broke the news to the girls because we were all waiting to hear. And there was one or two, their husbands had died. There were a couple I suppose in New Guinea with husbands, but they were there. Then she broke the news, and then she went around. And then she came around the huts and she called, and during the night she was up seeing they were right. And then it wasn't until later that we heard that her own husband

17:00 had been reported missing, had been killed. And she just got up and she went around those girls, she was just admirable. So that's where I was when the war ended and that's where I was when the news came through about them.

So until then you hadn't been able to find out, well not yourself personally, but it wasn't a practice for women to receive that information earlier did they, they needed

17:30 **to wait for the surrender to find out who was in the POW [prisoner of war] camps?**

Well the didn't know did they? Sad. Colonel Spencer's husband had been a POW for a long time, and that's why she was appointed to our controller. I suppose they'd have guessed he'd have died. But they really didn't know.

How did you support your girlfriends or was it a practice to say as little as possible?

Oh no they were all very loving. Very

18:00 kind and thoughtful to them, you'd do everything you could to make life easy for them But then most of them were on their way home, I think they sent most of them home.

Was it all right for them to sit down and have a big cry? Or were they expected to just keep it to themselves?

Oh no you shared things, it was very sharing. There was no nastiness or anything with most girls at any time.

So they were allowed to show their

18:30 **emotions?**

If they wanted to, if they felt like it.

Feel the grief.

Yes and if they were, well Colonel Spencer would always be there.

And what about your brother, did you spend much time worrying about him while he was overseas?

Oh well, I wasn't very happy. I was very proud of him but I didn't worry much until, he did get badly shot up and badly wounded.

19:00 And he got his DCM. And you just wished he would come home, you used to feel like that.

Where was he shot up?

I don't know whether it was Tobruk or El Alamein now, but there is a book out and I believe he was mentioned in that. I must try to get this book. But he didn't say much about it ever, he was always very withdrawn. It altered his personality completely.

19:30 After he got out of the army, he was just shattered I think with what had gone on. He said, "You know they say you can't dig holes in rocks but I'll tell you what we made indentations on those rocks." It was just incredible, they had nothing except this bit of rock that was their space. So that's about all, I didn't hear, I never ever heard much about it. But just that he'd - I don't know.

Pretty tough.

Well it altered him a lot.

20:00 **Did you think that your service altered you at all?**

It only gave me more independence and more -

I can believe it.

Yes. It did.

Back to Brisbane again, let's talk about something a bit lighter. I'm sure there was lots of energy devoted to keeping the troops entertained while they were in Brisbane; it would have been an important part of morale.

20:30 **Did you get to go to many of the concerts that were put on for soldiers?**

No, not when I was in Brisbane. We were up early, and Queensland I think they were opening their offices there [earlier] than nine o'clock and we'd be up and out to work, well we'd be around dropping our officers off by seven thirty. I think things must have opened a lot earlier.

It is a lot hotter up there.

Yes. And then by the

21:00 time you went out and if you were going to your classes and what not, you had to be up at the crack of dawn.

So you're saying there wasn't much chance to go and see anything?

In Brisbane to go to shows? Oh yes we used to try to but if we were catching the last train home, supposing it went at twenty past ten, the last train would be ten thirty, they weren't late, they weren't midnight ones. So if you were

21:30 in a theatre - they had lovely shows in theatres and things - you'd have to get up and rush out. There'd be an exit from the theatre; you'd know who was going to be on the last train because they'd all get up and run. So you had to be down at the town hall to catch the Lutwyche tram, and you couldn't afford to miss because the Lutwyche tram had to connect with an army transport to carry you out to your trucks to Chermside. So we used to go to

22:00 the shows but we'd always have to rush out.

What about alcohol? Did you drink then at all?

Oh in New Guinea we had a ration and that sort of thing, but it was up to you. Oh when you're driving, - oh I'm sitting forward again, tell me.

That's okay.

We were allowed two drinks, do you know Brisbane? Petrie Bight?

I know Brisbane but I don't know Petrie Bight.

Right in top of Anne and Adelaide [streets],

22:30 right on the water. We were up right in that curve and then opposite us was the old National Hotel so if anyone wanted to take us to lunch we were right next door. And if we did go we were allowed two glasses and no more, you were just not allowed to get in a car if you had had more than two glasses.

And it's still the same today.

Yeah it is isn't it? I hadn't thought of that.

So did you have an occasional drink is what I am asking?

Oh yes, you had to up there, you had to be in it.

23:00 But not necessarily, you were very restricted the amount you could drink. But it was nice to have a drink.

What about smoking were you a smoker?

Not very much, I would have been only it made me too ill.

Did you get a ration?

Yes you got a ration and you had to appear with cigarettes in your hand to get the ration. Because if you didn't smoke you didn't get a ration you see, they divided it up amongst the others. So I used to float around with a cigarette,

23:30 and have to puff it or you'd have your ration cut out. Because of course they were handy to give out as presents or send overseas to my brother or that type of thing.

Did you do any trading on cigarettes or anything else?

No we didn't, we didn't have time.

And -

The men may have; we didn't.

What about make-up and jewellery, was that strictly prohibited in the army?

Oh, no jewellery. Well your watch; yes two pieces of jewellery, possibly

24:00 a watch and a ring. And make-up, yes you could use your make-up but it had to be very conservative, or they liked it to be very conservative, and no one had the time. By the time you put your lipstick on in the morning and put something it was time to be in that vehicle and off to work.

Did you get to see much of the surrounds of Brisbane?

I don't think you could buy decent make-up then, I'm sure you couldn't.

That's okay, did you get to see,

24:30 **I don't know if make-up was rationed, but I would expect that it would be? I mean really the things that go into making make-up would have been better used.**

In New Guinea we had very little.

Well all of the oils and petroleum and all of the other hideous stuff.

Well I had it, but it was there but I think it was pretty, you didn't get much choice or anything. Anyway it was nice to have some on, it was quite feminine wasn't it?

Well given that we're talking about that, that's quite interesting, hair styles

25:00 **of the day took a fair bit of work to get them looking the way the movies would have us believe they looked, so what was the hair requirement?**

An inch above the collar. I've got a photo of myself in New Guinea with my haircut. And it was pretty hard to get time to get a perm or anything. And I think we were younger, and I don't think we were worried so much because your hair would always have a natural kink or something when you're younger.

25:30 Oh we took a pride in our hairdo's but there was no time for it. With the uniforms I think it was quite smart to have it an inch above. Although we could roll it, let it grow and roll it.

In a victory roll, is that what they were called?

Yes you could have rolls yes. There you go.

Did you get to see much of the surrounds of

26:00 **Brisbane and down south: Southport and Surfers' and so on?**

Yes we had weekends off then.

It wasn't called Surfers' Paradise then was it?

Yes it was, Surfers' was Surfers', I'm sure, I'm positive.

Because I thought it was called that because a surfer discovered it. And I couldn't imagine anyone pre-1940 wandering around on a surf board. That's interesting, Surfers' Paradise.

I'm sure it was. Surfers' Paradise Hotel was the only thing there.

26:30 **Oh look it probably was I'll have to look that up.**

What was the one next to it? It's an S too.

Southport?

Yes Southport and Surfers''. Yes Southport was always separate. I'm sure Surfers was always a big hotel, not that big, not compared with nowadays.

Now it has some of the best beaches south of Brisbane. Did you get a chance to get some leave and go swimming at any time?

We used to drive down there a bit, but that was only business, duty.

27:00 And occasionally, I think we had one or two weekends we went down and stayed. But you could always go out on the roads and hitch those days, I know it sounds disgusting but that's what you did.

I don't think it sounds disgusting. It's still a fine tradition today occurring around those parts.

Do you?

Oh yeah. Hitchhikers still there.

But you could always do it, you weren't supposed to when you were in the army and you weren't supposed to do those things.

27:30 But there was always a ride. But not very often, just to say you'd been to Surfers' that was the main thing.

Did the army give you a kind of code of practice that you had to follow when you were out of hours or off base?

Definitely, in Brisbane especially.

So was it written down or was it drummed into you in training?

Oh you just knew, you were told in training. Yeah.

So whilst you might get time off you were still in the army twenty-four hours a day?

28:00 Well when you were in barracks you didn't have anything else to wear but your uniform and when you were in uniform you were a soldier. You know you were service women and you had to maintain it. And you did, people did. You didn't ever see sloppy service girls. Really.

I'm sure. Apart from the Americans you also said there were a lot of Dutch in town.

Oh there were all sorts.

Could you tell the difference really I mean apart from the uniforms?

Oh we didn't see much of them

28:30 we were all too busy.

I'm sure.

But they were all there and we knew, you'd know that that was whoever it was.

And what about the situation with Japan at the time, were you still receiving information about what was going on? Because things were getting quite disturbing while you were up in Brisbane, not very far away?

Well yes they were sailing around weren't they? They were coming in the Coral Sea

29:00 and that. We learnt to, especially if you were in barracks with girls from Townsville, they had a different story altogether to what was in the papers.

Well tell me what the difference was.

Oh well they'd say that, "There are no Japanese planes over Townsville", and they'd come home on leave or something and they'd say - they had such mixed migrants, didn't they around Townsville?

29:30 Different nationalities especially and some of them were very anti-British and anti-Australian. And they'd light up their cane fields. And they said you could just tell one of the cane fields would go up and then the others, and there'd be this special track, and the Japanese planes would come over and they'd follow those, they'd say they'd lead the way in every time. And little tales you'd hear like that, that were interesting.

That's interesting to know.

30:00 **And did these people not get interned or did you not find out as much from the girls?**

Oh well they try to inter them but they'd have to have reasons and there were so many of them up there. It was a different scene around Townsville too.

That's interesting. So the newspapers were saying there were no Japanese in Townsville?

That's right.

There were no Japanese in New Guinea even.

But I found their tales most interesting.

30:30 **South Brisbane Tech., you said you went off to do secretarial and so on. You wanted to be a nurse earlier on and you tried again so did you not think to go off and do some extra biology classes or physics or chemistry?**

Oh we didn't think we'd need that. We thought we'd get all that when we went nursing. It was the last thing we thought of. We thought if we went nursing we'd apply ourselves. And I think we had a feeling if we did well with our secretarial studies we'd get on well with those too.

31:00 But I don't know if they were offering that at the Brisbane Tech. at the time, otherwise we'd have

thought about it wouldn't we?

Oh probably. So you'd finish your days driving, you'd go and have a quick bite to eat somewhere and you'd head off to tech.; how often a week would you go, was it every night?

It wasn't every night, I don't know how many times, at least twice a week.

31:30 **Oh who was teaching, were they civilians or military?**

Civilians, it wasn't an army.

Wasn't army? Did you need to get army permission to go and do the course?

Oh yes but they were only too willing, they liked that, encouraged it.

And did they pay for that?

Yes. Well we didn't pay so I guess they - I don't know who paid for it.

Probably the government.

Yeah but that was all encouraged, anything for learning. But

32:00 they had different ones. H.D. Black he used to go around giving lectures or tutorials or whatever they call them nowadays. And we were encouraged to go to all that type of thing. You know we learnt about the government, I'm sure it was all helpful.

Now you tell me that you were very busy and you tell me that you were semi-spoken for but I find that very hard to believe that a group of young women out on the town don't attract soldiers like flies?

32:30 Yes but they were all fly-by-nights too don't forget. They weren't staying.

Oh I'm sure.

And coming from Victoria, when Victorians were passing through, there were quite a number of young men in the district had enlisted and they would say, "Oh well Margaret Anderson is at Petrie Bight and she is at so and so (the address)".

33:00 And they were all in camp, and what did they call it when they were passing through waiting for their troop trains?

Staging camp?

Yeah they were all in these staging camps, and sometimes, you know when they get them tropical downpours and there was no way the troop trains could get over the flooded rivers. So these boys would be stranded there for a week or two, and they'd give them some money and they'd think, "Oh well we'll call at the garage", and I'd come

33:30 in from duty. And Sally Fendleson was there and Eila, the lass I joined up with, was there and they all had their friends calling in. And we went out for dinners, but they weren't love affairs.

Oh no I'm not suggesting that they are.

That was quite frequent, there was Frank Newall down the road from

34:00 where I lived, in staging camp. They were no more a love affair than a fly to the moon. But we'd always go out to dinner and they would bring friends with them. I quite enjoyed it, and they would bring news from what was happening in Victoria. There was quite a bit of that going on.

Now you couldn't really talk about the war when you were out socialising because everybody had various things that they had to keep secret or to themselves?

But if they had returned from overseas or returned from somewhere they'd

34:30 say a little bit, we'd have a chat.

So they'd tell you what life was like in the Middle East if they had been?

Oh no, they'd tell you about other people. And this Frank Newall would have news; he was another local boy. And they'd say, "Poor old Keith, he was a dispatch rider and they'd just have to get this message through, just have to. So [they'd] call out, wouldn't be able to nominate someone; they'd have to call for volunteers,

35:00 because they're sending them out to their death see. And every time dear old Keith would land up, 'I'll do it, I'll get there'. So he'd get on his motor-bike and they'd all be in the desert looking out waiting for Keith to come back. They'd say, 'Poor old Keith, he's had it this time.' And then," they said, "lo and behold, way on the horizon they'd see the motorbike coming and bursts of smoke and Keith had arrived, he was back." And this type of thing they'd chat on about.

35:30 Which was always nice and entertaining to hear.

From some of the reading I have done there was some suggestion that Australian civilians did not appreciate the war for what it was for a long time and perhaps until after the HMAS Sydney was sunk. Do you think that you knew what the war was really on about overseas? Did you have a vague idea or an innocent idea of it?

36:00 Well it wasn't, when did Singapore come into it with [Lieutenant General] Bennett

Early '42.

Well all of those things made an impression, they really did and Pearl Harbour. Yes, no I really think they were.

So you really didn't have any delusions about what was happening to the men when they were sent overseas?

No, no I don't think so. I did worry about my brother because sometimes he was in hospital and was not well and had been shot up and had had a hand grenade in the back, and it was only his shovel that had saved him.

36:30 And he had scars from where they had burst on the shovel. And oh, you know all this type of thing. Well yes you did think about it.

It's pretty horrific stuff.

Yes it was, especially with; he was in the 9th Division D Company 2/24 and they were in the news quite a lot.

They were very famous.

Then you wouldn't hear for a long while and you'd think, "Oh my" but you did realise it.

37:00 **What was your impetus to go to New Guinea, you said earlier on you had been pushing for something and looking for something?**

Well the nursing; I had this obsession. So when we found that you could get out of the army to go nursing, I thought, "This is a big moment". So anyway when we didn't get a reply I thought, "Oh, well"; we quite

37:30 enjoyed our driving, but I don't know.

You wanted something else?

Well you had a feeling that you should be getting on, the war would end, just get on and do something. We were beginning to realise that there was going to be an end to it.

At that stage you knew that?

Yes.

So did you spend much time being concerned about a Japanese invasion? Were you scared of the Japanese actually invading Australia?

Not really, no, because we had heard that

38:00 when they were - you know the battle where the Japs turned around, we were shown occasional films of some of these battles because we were in the army.

Can you recall which ones you saw?

Oh I wouldn't know, when I do try people just don't listen to it. When I say I saw films and they just didn't want to hear it.

Did you see films for instance of Coral Sea?

I'm sure we did.

38:30 Just shots of the odd ship in it. I'm sure we did.

And when you were in Brisbane did you receive any word of what happened in New Guinea on the Kokoda track?

Oh well everyone was informed of that weren't they?

So the press was very forward about that.

Yeah, I'm sure. If you look for it you'll hear it I think. I could be wrong but I am pretty sure.

And your ambition to be a nurse,

39:00 Because my brother came back from the Middle East and then he had very little leave and then he was

off to New Guinea, you remember they put the 9th Division in because the others weren't winning the war, and they were winning so naturally I was following.

Yes the 9th played its part in there as well.

And I met him in Brisbane one time and he looked so shrunken and so ill, yes I was aware.

39:25 End of tape

Tape 5

00:30 **I don't know if Stella [interviewer] touched on this before but I'll ask you about it anyway. You didn't join up until '42 so you would have experienced a year or two of rationing, did that really affect you living on a farm?**

Oh I don't know you had your eggs and your butter, I don't know what else was rationed. Sugar, sugar was rationed but you would still be able to buy your large bags of sugar.

01:00 **What about clothes, because young girls like to be able to buy clothes?**

Well fortunately I went into the army and I don't think it really hit until '42, had it in clothing?

No, it wasn't until the end of '41 I think, around that time.

Yeah because I don't remember, until I got out of the army. And then I was waiting to get married, and stayed in Sydney for a year as I said, because we didn't have any clothes, see we had to earn money or something to get some nice - we

01:30 only wanted decent stuff.

Of course.

Not that, we really did. And then when I was about, just before I was married of course I wanted to go shopping and do lots of things and that was when the rationing, the rationing was still in so it was quite a while. So that was very hard. But then perhaps some people were not using

02:00 their ration cards so that was good.

Would you swap them for something else?

I didn't have anything to swap with. They just, well when they heard I was to be married and I had, well they were all coupons, every single thing, so this lady gave me her card.

How were you able to get together enough cards to get a wedding dress, that would be quite expensive I'd say?

I don't know I really don't.

So rationing,

02:30 But I did get what I wanted.

Well that's good, because rationing was in for quite a few years after the war wasn't it?

Must have been because that was '48 I think when I was married. Yes it was. And then after that it suddenly lifted, not too soon though, it was quite a while.

Can you remember when it did lift did everyone rush out and buy two tonnes of sugar?

I don't think they rushed anywhere, I think they were just pleased

03:00 to be able to go along and buy what they want to when they wanted to.

What sort of things, you said when you came out of the army everything was still rationed. Were there particular things that were very hard to get a hold of, were certain foods or certain items of clothing or certain things hard to find or hard to get?

Not that I can remember. I think we were just going to work and we were flatting,

03:30 we would be so pleased to get away from army rations wouldn't we? But we'd make do. It wasn't hard to make do, not when you're young and you're not fussed and you haven't got a family or commitments; I don't think it was hard.

You were having too much fun to worry about it.

Yeah, well it wasn't the biggest of your worries was it?

No, what were army rations like, what were you eating when you were in the army?

Well when we were in Queensland of course

04:00 we had our midday meals out. And we'd just run, even a pineapple or something like that. Just to have fruit for lunch, it was such a novelty to have all this fruit that wasn't imported into Melbourne. And we had marvellous mangoes and all sorts of luscious we hadn't even heard of down south. So that was quite a treat in a way. And we had simple

04:30 needs I think. And for breakfast, all I can remember was we had very good breakfasts, well, filling breakfasts. They were probably beans and powdered eggs and powdered milk and powdered potatoes. But it was a little bit more lavish than New Guinea I think, well more changes in it.

What were you on in New Guinea, were you on hard rations there? Bully beef and biscuits and so forth?

We didn't have bully beef and biscuits so much but we had monotonous food.

05:00 And sometimes it was hard to come by because the ships began, as the Japs moved north the ships began bypassing Lae quite a lot. To try and get the needs up and the head of the army served.

So would you be stuck on like sardines for weeks on end?

I can remember someone talking about 'fish, fish, fish' but I don't know. The American ships would

05:30 still call in occasionally I think. And our colonel would go down and ask for some nice fresh potatoes, and we'd get supplies that way. And they were quite liberal I think with what they handed out. So that got us along.

Young ladies these days are obsessed almost to a ridiculous point with what they eat and

06:00 **so forth. What that the case in the army then with you young girls or was it a case of give me everything I can get my hands on because you couldn't get that much?**

No and I don't think they were anorexic either, they were just - well we had to eat what we were served or go without. There were no shops, or anywhere. One night they were giving us a treat and they gave us tinned peaches and cream in a tin.

'Carnation' cream was it?

Yeah and that was a big big treat.

06:30 Well everyone seemed to think it was. That didn't happen very often, so the rations were pretty much the same, they were pretty monotonous. But that was a treat.

Were they the kind of rations that you would lose weight on, or just maintain weight or were you putting on weight in the army?

Oh no you needed to maintain your weight, and even Brisbane was pretty hot to us, coming from down south. It really was.

07:00 The heat was just, even up further north in New Guinea. But no, if we did lose too much weight they had a rest camp at Salamaua, but that's New Guinea we're talking about now. And we'd be sent up there for a week to pick up.

That sounds nice.

Yeah I got a fortnight because I used to work at night

What would you do at the rest camp at Salamaua?

Oh it was just superb, beautiful.

Five star accommodation?

No I think it had been an old guest housie thing.

07:30 There was nothing much on the isthmus except this rest place.

Can you imagine we have just arrived there and you are going to show me through. Imagine we've just pulled up at this rest camp and you are going to show me around, let's go on a little tour of the place and you describe it for me.

08:00 Well there is an old mangled - I suppose it had been a swimming pool or bath or something before the war, that was very primitive. But that was all mangled in there. And then you could go for a walk down to the isthmus: it was narrow where the rest camp was and then there was this block on the end and you could wander through that, little narrow paths. And sometimes there'd be a great big cobweb reaching

08:30 the width of the path and there'd be a bird-eating spider in the middle. So you would detour around

that, especially if you had guests. And you'd go along and interspersed along the way there'd be the Japanese old pill-boxes and that sort of thing. And they were quite interesting, funny little narrow things.

What did they look like?

Oh just slapped together with timber, in amongst, you wouldn't notice them unless you looked for them. And because the Japanese were not very tall. Well not those days; they might be

09:00 now, but those days they were small. Oh they'd be about the height of that.

About three and a half, four foot?

Yeah something like that. And then they had a little bit on top again and they'd walk in there and perhaps where their head would be there would be a bit more shelter, maybe. And maybe it'd just be a rectangle and quite narrow, not too narrow.

09:30 **Would you go in and look around?**

Oh yes it was all horrible, decaying and cobwebby, you didn't go into them, they were just narrow ones situated in the jungle.

And I take it that everyone who had died there had been buried or removed in some way?

Oh yes there was nothing on that end. But the other, the mainland and going off into the ranges and mountains they had a cemetery there, but that was for our troops.

10:00 And the troops further up north. Later they moved it all to Lae and Moresby. The war cemeteries. But at that time there was a war cemetery at Salamaua.

Did you visit that cemetery?

Oh just, yeah. If you were there for a week it wasn't very long to see anything so you'd skirt by it. You didn't go in there really unless you knew somebody

10:30 who'd be buried there or who had died, then you might go looking. But we didn't really, no we didn't go in the cemetery that much.

What did it look like, the war cemetery?

Oh I can't, it had the monuments on it, I'm sure it did. Most of us would go and look for names, there must have been names engraved there, mustn't there? They must have been very busy.

What were the little monuments like?

I can't remember most of them. I just remember it had about this high, and perhaps

11:00 I don't know what was in the centre. It wouldn't be pebbles would it up there? Could be anything. I don't know. I would like to know.

We'll have to check that out for you.

Yeah I did go back after the war, but I went [on a] different trip to that.

When you were walking around at the end of the isthmus and there were the Japanese pill boxes and so on, did you ever spot any souvenirs? Or were there bits of machinery lying around that people would - ?

Oh there were old wrecks. Over, which way would we face?

11:30 Not the way facing Lae, but when you went around the isthmus and around the back and the big bay there were wrecks there.

Ship-wrecks?

Mmm. Of the Japanese ship; I could have told you the names once but not now.

Were you able to go out and have a look at them?

Oh they were right up on the beach, washed up there. You could wander in and have a look if you wanted to, but they were just full of coal and debris.

So, big ships?

Yeah they were.

So would you go in and have a look around or was it not your cup of tea?

Well it'd be pretty messy and pretty wrecky, well

12:00 they were pretty but it would be messy and wrecky and the water would be lapping around it up to a certain height in the morning tide so we didn't go very far, and if you did all you found was all this coal.

So they were freight ships?

Must have been. They did have their names on them. Two or three I could think of but I've forgotten.

So there were quite a few ships there on the beach washed up?

Yeah two or three.

What about wrecked machinery or Japanese

12:30 **bikes or cars?**

No I don't think so, there may have been but the Australians came in after the Japs. It was rather narrow and they'd be possibly cleaning up by then.

Well that would have been a fascinating rest camp during the war because you're away from the war but you're not; there was pill boxes and ships still there.

Oh yes the Japanese had been there.

13:00 **What would you do for fun at that camp; would it just be walks or swimming?**

Yes it was lovely, and a pink frangipani grew on the beach, just on the verge of the beach. Only one frangipani and it was pink. We didn't see many pink frangipanis in those days so of course we thought it was beautiful.

Did you pick one and put it in your hair?

No the natives do, the men did it. If they were looking for a wife they'd wear a flower. I don't know what they'd say if they saw us.

Saw you coming and all shove these things in their hair.

13:30 Oh no it wasn't for us I don't think, but if we had been wearing them I don't know what they would have thought. You could go for lovely walks and see the different trees. These native kinds of tree, like a coconut tree, what do they call the paw paws? All the different names.

Papaya?

Yeah papaya and something with a C. That's there tree and everybody respects it,

14:00 so when you walk through on the narrow tracks, and you find, or even a pineapple in a box you know with a frame around it, we were always told not to touch them, they belonged to someone. Every tree belonged to the person who had found it,, and everyone respected it and you didn't touch the fruit on it. That was in Salamaua.

Well that's a good rule isn't it?

Yeah it was gorgeous. And they had little groups, you know the natives, there were very few natives around in Lae or Salamaua, very few.

14:30 But when we were on our walks sometimes, and one time they were having a dreadful squabble. So someone asked them what they were squabbling about it. And they said somebody had found this tree and they had put all little sharp sticks in the sand and if you walked on them you got a foot full of splinters. And they were having this big argument over who put all these little twigs in. I remember that vividly because they were really cross,

15:00 but they were not to touch the fruit see? They were punished if they did.

Certainly were, a spike in the foot.

Wouldn't it be painful, all in their bare feet.

Did you have occasion to talk to a native there for any reason, were they working at the camp perhaps?

No I don't think they were working at the camp and you didn't have much conversation with them. Very little.

Well let's talk about the camp then, were you sleeping in beds for a change, did you have nice rooms to sleep in?

Oh no

15:30 it was possibly sent over from Lae the furnishings I think.

So were you sleeping on stretchers again?

Yeah we didn't mind, that was our lot. But it was very nice, and the food was good, I suppose it was the same as Lae only a smaller crowd, I can't remember how many girls went but not very many at a time.

- So it was a camp only for girls?**
- Oh yes, oh yes. You weren't allowed to be with the men.
- Of course.**
- Oh no.
- Outrageous.**
- Inferior beings.
- 16:00 **Who?**
- Women.
- Oh I thought you were suggesting men then. We could make an equal argument for both of us.**
- Ok it would now. But that really was quite pleasurable.
- And would you come back from that refreshed and ready to work again?**
- We were saying about the weight, if you were losing weight or getting thin or suffering from the heat, they'd have a week over there. But because I worked such long hours I got a fortnight.
- Excellent.**
- 16:30 That was lovely. I remember it vividly now, it was just delightful.
- Was there a lot of sunbaking going on if it was just the girls?**
- Oh not that much. We used to have to make our own bathers. You know, have scraps of material, our bikini's.
- What in the army you'd make you own?**
- Oh hand-stitch them, yes cut them. Oh we had so much fun making them to go to Salamaua.
- I'll bet you did, tell us about that.**
- I don't know.
- What was yours like can you remember?**
- I had two or three sets.
- 17:00 **Let's hear about them.**
- Well I don't remember where the material came from.
- Can you remember what colour they were?**
- Oh one or two.
- Well tell us.**
- Oh just pretty little pieces of floral, they weren't too hard to cut out and stitch up. Didn't matter how rough the stitching was, they still held together. Just little tops.
- That would have been very exciting I daresay, going to Salamaua?**
- Oh it was and you could run around and be free.
- And what**
- 17:30 **else would you try and make or get together when you knew you were going there? You made bikinis, would you try and get a fancy pair of sunglasses or something?**
- Oh no. There were no shops or nothing. Couldn't buy it.
- You could give some chocolates to an American to get his sun glasses.**
- I didn't see an American in - we saw some American officers, engineers. I love working, I love my engineers. And they would come up into the office because they were stores, you know.
- 18:00 Everything went, it was a bit like army inspection. Anything of machinery or whatever and equipment would go through the Major Hellsham. So the only time we saw the Americans, were the American officers who were coming to pay their respects to our major. Our chief storeman. And they'd be in and chatting to him and around about. And
- 18:30 oh they were very much on business. You know, very superior.

I'm sure they were.

They were.

I just want to make sure we have explored this camp as far as we can.

Which one?

The camp at Salamaua. The image of you guys all making bikinis is quite a good laugh, it's a beautiful image. I wonder where you would have got the material from?

Well, we didn't have bedspreads for our stretchers. And our colonel somehow or other, she must have had them sent up from down south,

19:00 I was going to say but that's Australia isn't it? And then some had parachute silk. Some made their bedspreads out of parachutes, the material. But in our hut, we won the prize for the best hut because we had the two dressmakers in our hut, both Western Australia girls and somehow or other they got some pretty florals.

19:30 If I look hard I think I could still find my army bedspread. It would be packed away in storage in the country. But it really was well made, pretty little dainty design. With flowers, oh it was quite nice.

I think that's a lovely image, all of these women in the army making the place look a little bit better.

And there was, they didn't have a mirror, and so they said, "The best hut, the neatest and best can keep the mirror", so we had this one six foot mirror in our hut,

20:00 held up against one of the partitions, oh it was great.

I bet you had all of the other huts trying to get in?

Oh yes that was the idea, they would come and march through and we'd all pretend they weren't there.

That's great. Did you have any other competitions, best hut, did you have anything else on to keep morale and keep you?

20:30 There was plenty to keep morale up. If you weren't working every second night or three nights a week or something there was plenty of things. I didn't have much time to attend those things but I liked the work I was doing. I preferred that a lot of the times to whatever, you knew exactly where you were going. And you'd be brought home in a car, it was good. But they had notices up in the orderly room and so many girls would be invited, so many girls could go to other units where the men were putting on a -

21:00 but I didn't manage to get to those. But one night there were twenty-two names to go down so that was rushed. And they used to go down to Lae base; Lae base is a bit of an entertainment centre. And they had lots of drama, and Michael Pate, heard of him? Well he was there and quite a few well known actors and actresses came later on had been in that drama group in Lae.

21:30 Well known names, but they were there. And a friend of mine Sally Fendleson, she used to do drama while I worked. And she was,

Sore point?

No. 'Taming of the Shrew' she was Katherine and she went on, when she got out of the army she took a drama course in Sydney to go and do that. So there was lots of entertainment at Lae base. And then we used to have great entertainment in our Gregory Hut.

22:00 **What sort of entertainments would they be?**

Well they had music, they had bands. They had George Wallace Junior, I don't know if you had heard of George Wallace, be pretty old. But that was his son, George Wallace Junior used to come. And Margaret Mead the anthropologist.

What did she used to talk to you about?

Well she used to wander in and out, she'd be living amongst the villagers and doing her anthropology thing. And then when

22:30 oh she'd come wandering into our little settlement and give lectures and have little talks.

Were they good to listen to?

Well I thought they were fantastic.

That'd be great.

Because she was quite middle-aged, well telling us all the habits of, her life amongst these people. She really liked the New Guineans.

She probably went back to them and gave them lectures on you.

I don't know. I don't know what she did. I won't go there

23:00 **Was there any - where won't you go? You said you "won't go there"? What were you going to say?**

I don't know.

Come on.

No she just lived amongst the New Guineans, and oh there was some silly tales, I don't know.

What would people talk?

Studying their habits and they way they lived and the; you know there was the men's hut and the ladies' hut. I've forgotten it all now, until I talked to you, I haven't discussed it with anyone ever since. And their habits, but

23:30 that was what she liked, that was her life. Their foods, so that was her privilege to do what she wanted wasn't it?

Yes indeed. Did she look like a wild woman?

No she just looked like a sedate middle-aged suburban lady. I'm not sure if she was American or not. Is she American?

I don't know.

She wrote lots of books I know. But that was fascinating, that was another interest.

Did they have sport competitions at all?

Not that I know of.

No callisthenics or baton twirling or?

No it was too hot.

24:00 We did plenty of that before we went. Oh we did the jungle, we were pretty good.

Well come on tell us about it.

Well we did all of our jungle training, we marched our six miles a day and we did exercises.

Was this at Canungra?

No this was at Fraser's Paddock. We would have been just as happy at Canungra but this was in Fraser's Paddock at Ashgrove. Have you been there?

24:30 **No I haven't.**

And our whole life was just going to bed getting up exercising, throwing bean bags, I liked the bean bags. All the things to make us alert and bright.

Tell us about the bean bag throwing.

Well I don't remember much about it, except that you had to be pretty quick and alert and when you got down to the end you had to run down the other end. It was great.

What other exercises would you do?

Oh whatever our instructor told us.

25:00 **Lots of, there'd be rope climbing?**

And then we used to go to St Lucy, you know the university? Well it wasn't finished then, being built. And we used to go, everything would stop work then and we used to go over to their great big playing fields and play, what was it? Like cricket, ladies' cricket.

I don't know it.

No it's not heard of now. It was just another name. And bowling,

25:30 so we had some of the leading bowlers you know, oh I just used to drop the bat and run. But that was fun. They had air raid shelters all through this great park, playing field. And of course the grass was this high, grows like that quick and lively. So when you were running down to catch the ball you'd go head first into an air raid shelter. You wouldn't know it was there, it'd all

26:00 be covered with grass. That wasn't very nice.

No snakes in the long grass?

Could have been; we didn't see any.

And you said you went on six hour marches?

Six mile.

Six mile marches sorry, what uniform would you wear up there for that because the army uniform would be quite restricted for marching I would have thought?

Well they did give you outfits for different occasions. I don't know what we would do for that, whether we would still be in our civvies, our shirts and skirts or

26:30 what we had.

Did they give you trousers or like dungarees to wear in the heat up there? Or were you still wearing the jacket and the skirt?

Oh no I'll have to show you some photo's of it later. But no we had our safari suits, you know our safari jackets and our pants and our woollen socks. And boots, we were never out of boots for twelve months, I don't think we took shoes up there.

Woollen socks and boots in the jungle?

The woollen socks for the heat, with the perspiration they were the only things that -

27:00 and I believe they still wore them in Timor.

Same socks?

The woollen socks.

Unwashed after sixty years.

No we were very good. We had plenty of pairs issued. That was only because the pure wool was more comfy, they didn't have synthetics then.

Well wool's better if you are going to be sweating isn't it?

Yes. So we had the boots and the woollen socks and the gaiters and the trousers and the safari jacket. We had our big hats, our Aussie hats

27:30 and berets, same as the East Timor only we had navy blue berets.

Now I've heard sometimes that soldiers, they'd go into town and get a tailor to make them a better uniform, they'd call it their tiddly uniform that 'looked better, felt better, wore better'; did the female soldiers do that too? Would you get another uniform made that was better than the issued one?

28:00 New Guinea was an issue that was completely different. But in Brisbane we had had our hats doctored which we weren't allowed to do.

Tell us about the hat doctoring scandal?

Oh no it wasn't a scandal. The Melbourne girls, we always had to be different, the southern girls. So we'd go to Parks the tailors and we'd have a wider band put around our hat. Oh they were smart, and they'd repress it and do it. And when we'd be on inspection they'd stop and look you up and down and then they would see several other hats the same

28:30 and they'd walk on, they never ever discovered the secret of our hats. They just thought they were Melbourne hats and not Brisbane. But that really smartened us up.

What made a difference about having a wider band on the hat?

Just smarter.

What other little tricks did you get up to uniform wise?

Oh no we liked our uniform, it was only the hats we tampered with I think.

Was it like the army for the men though, you might go in there and get a pair of pants that were swimming on you?

Oh no we weren't allowed out like that.

29:00 If you didn't fit the sizes, they wouldn't issue them. You'd go and have them, there were places that made them specially.

You were very lucky then.

Yeah we were but we all looked smart, we tried to.

I'll bet you did, I'll bet you looked fantastic. Who had the best uniform, army girls, navy girls

or RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] girls?

Well I suppose I was earlier in the piece and

- 29:30 and we had our uniforms first and we didn't even compare them, we didn't bother. Because that was it. But it's just amazing now I've got some WAAAF friends and they thought they - I just look at them, I don't even bother to hear it. But they really think, they were comparing uniforms, but we didn't do that because we were the first there and we didn't have to bother.

You mentioned that earlier that your WAAAF friends had a bit of a snooty attitude,

Look out she'll knock on the door.

- 30:00 **We won't let her in. Was there really much rivalry between the forces?**

Oh I don't think so. There was a bit of just, no I don't think so. We didn't overlap; everyone had a job to do and it was different, you know. You knew exactly where you stood. There was no worrying about what anyone else was doing.

Well here is a more important uniform question then, which of the men's uniforms looked the smartest: the navy, air force or army?

- 30:30 Oh the navy were very smart. The women's navy were very smart. I think the air force really but they were all a different - they weren't meant to be soldiers.

The air force pilots and so forth?

All the air force, but they were different, even the air craftsman. You see they weren't meant to go out and slog it, they were a different type. They were

- 31:00 all a different mould somehow.

Who would the girls go for: the army, the air force, or the navy as a whole? Which had the most dashing reputation?

I don't know. I think I didn't care. I was ahead of them and I'd think, "Oh who bothers?" But you didn't see much of the air force about I don't think.

Probably not in Queensland or where you were in New Guinea.

Oh we didn't see anyone but soldiers in New Guinea.

- 31:30 **Bet those soldiers would look pretty rough after a while too wouldn't they, because they'd be slogging out in the jungle every day and not getting changed and not having a wash,**

Not that we were aware.

They were all pretty smart?

I didn't bother looking at them. They were soldiers. That was their uniform, that was their look, that was it. And the engineers especially, they were all very nice types.

- 32:00 **So is there anything else about the rest camp we should talk about? We've talked about your sleeping quarters, there was the walk through the -**

Jungle, oh there was the isthmus, the end of the isthmus. Oh just that it was totally different to Lae. Oh they would go out fishing at night in their Lakatois [boats], the natives would go out. And they would have their little bunches of leaves

- 32:30 about so big, and they'd light them, something would burn and they'd be waving it over the water, and the fish would come up, that was their bait. And then another one would be there with a spear and spear this beautiful fish.

Wow.

Oh it was just fascinating looking out over this great big bay. Seeing all these glittering lights over it was magical really. With the moon low in the sky, it was unreal. And then they would pull up on the beach and light a fire and cook them. Sometimes we'd go nearby them and see

- 33:00 them there with their fire and the fish. I suppose they had to take some home with them but they looked as though they used to pull up and have a supper or something.

Would you ever be invited to eat with them?

Never, no. We wouldn't have been allowed to mix.

And would camp buy or barter fish of the natives as well?

Well I was just wondering that, but I wonder if we had fish meals, because they were always fishing, and they had their way of throwing detonators and things the Australians.

33:30 You'd think they'd catch plenty of fish wouldn't you? Because the water's so, I thought, "Why didn't we have fish?" But I can't remember.

So would Aussie soldier be around that same place too fishing with dynamite?

Not Salamaua, no, no. Around Lae. No Salamaua was really quite a distance across the water from Lae, but that really was an event.

34:00 **Tell us about your experience with the Australian soldiers fishing then?**

I didn't see it, no I didn't go to these - I went to a few things when I was free but I really wasn't out and about. Everywhere you went you had to have armed

34:30 escorts. So many girls in a group and we'd have to have two armed escorts. About six girls in a group was it? I forgot.

Who would they be protecting you from?

Well I suppose anything could break out couldn't it?

Did you feel safe, particularly in New Guinea or did you feel that you might be constantly under threat from somebody or other?

Oh no not really. On the water; I suppose if we were going to Salamaua and back, all craft had to be off the water by

35:00 six p.m. You were not allowed out after that time, you'd be shot at. But one night I was in a boat, and it ran out of petrol, it really truly did. I can't remember how we got home, but we were all really alarmed, floating around bobbing out there. Not so much that we were out of petrol, but they said they could fire shots at us, that was more the alarm. So they must have got a message out somewhere to come and help us.

35:30 I don't know how on earth we got home. So when we walked in the orderly room we really wondered what was going to happen to us. And they said, "Oh for heaven's sake, we were so worried about you. We've heard everything now; get off, that's the last story, just go to bed."

You know that's the oldest trick in the book isn't it? Running out of petrol.

Yeah that's what they said. "We've heard it all, a boat on the water running out of petrol!"

36:00 So that was fun; it wasn't fun until it was over and then we probably laughed with relief.

So nobody fired any shots?

No, we thought the shots would come from the orderly room, we weren't worried about the water.

In the women's army were there sergeant majors the way there were in - ?

Exactly the same.

And were they tough yelling at you women?

Oh they'd look to. Oh some of the sergeants were the nicest.

36:30 **Seems to be very different.**

And the sergeant majors they always, well that's why they were chosen because they had that air about them and the build. It wasn't because they had much impact, it was just that they looked as though they would have an impact I think. I think that's why they chose them

So you let it just whew, let them,

Well they didn't have anything to get after us for so,

You were never in trouble?

Never had time.

37:00 Getting up and going to work and coming home.

What sort of, were there many girls who got into trouble, and by trouble I don't necessarily mean with men, would they stay out too late?

No they didn't. And the ones in New Guinea, well they wouldn't have been there if they had been ones who wouldn't fall into order.

That's right you had to sit tests and was chosen weren't you?

Well yes the major came and had a letter from the

37:30 barracks asking did he have any girls he'd recommend. So he called us and asked us and we went.

That's must have been quite a thrill to be chosen?

Oh the others didn't want to go.

Oh well kind of a thrill then.

No it was just that we were going and that was it, we were still all friends.

And the tests you had to take they were clerical tests weren't they?

Yes. Had to go and pass all of these tests, with our typing which we were very proud of.

38:00 **How many words per minute?**

Oh I can't remember, if I say twenty-two that's out of my head. How many would you have to do a minute?

I have no idea.

Neither do I.

We'll say twenty-two.

It's a long time, I haven't touched a typewriter since I don't think.

What other sorts of skills would you have to do?

Oh filing, oh just being able to deal with the situation.

Did you have shorthand at that time?

38:30 Yes but don't ask me now.

But you could do it then?

Well we did so much of it, but I didn't ever touch it again.

Dictation and things like that, general verbal skills?

Taking down yes. Just all clerical skills and well you'd be lectured a bit on what to say and how to handle situations. I can't remember now.

Were you doing any driving in New Guinea then?

There were no roads no. And we were

39:00 only two of us chosen to go. I think there was a girl from Western Australia, I'm not sure. Two southerners, Sally and myself; we were both in the one unit. So that made it easy, we stuck together. But there was very few drivers. There was nowhere to go. You were in a centre, I think General Blamey's house was there,

39:30 and the only asphalt road, or bitumen then it was, went from his house, well it wasn't a house, just a building, to the airport. There was a road that went straight from his front door to the airport.

Convenient for him.

Well it had to be didn't it? If he had to get out in a hurry and all the rains in the tropics, that was all in order. And he had his bungalow thing, and he used to come and go.

Well on that note I think -

40:00 **End of tape**

Tape 6

00:31 **When you went to New Guinea, when they said, "Margaret, you're going to New Guinea", what did you pack? Could you take any personal things at all?**

Oh very few, you were allowed two, say a picture and a clock or something. You were allowed two items, pick. And in our hut they had a shelf running the length of the

01:00 our rooms. Anyway in the store they had, they were taking make-up and, just a few personal items but very little because there were no shops whatsoever. And that made it very easy too, not to, you didn't require a lot of things. And then our clothes were all packed,

01:30 our uniforms that we were wearing there, they were all packed and stored in Brisbane until we came

home. We were issued with all of our tropical gear which was the safaris and our pants. I think we had a little cape sort of rain coat. That just folded up to nothing and we just pulled it out when it rained, that had a little pet name.

Can you tell me what that was?

Oh it was a funny name I can't remember. But it was

Go on,

No I can't.

02:00 Some funny pet name. It was very easy though to make a decision because you just couldn't take very much. And then our boots were our only, I think we might have had two pairs of boots, but it was very easy packing because all of your precious things were left behind.

Were you allowed to take any knick-knacks or lucky charms, or any

02:30 **keepsakes or anything like that?**

Well you had your dead meat ticket [identity tag] around your neck the whole time.

Is that what you called it, the dead meat ticket?

Yes it didn't come off. It should be around somewhere I don't know where. And you weren't allowed jewellery, you were allowed two items of jewellery, a ring or a watch or something. But no one wanted it anyway, and especially in Lae it was far too hot to be bothered with any jewellery. But you could [take] your St. Christopher's or lucky

03:00 charms, so long as they didn't show. You'd have them around your neck.

Did you have any lucky charms?

Oh I tried them all out, different ones.

Any recommendations?

Oh no, I think St Christopher's out of date isn't it? Oh we all used to love our St Christopher.

The travellers' saint. Well he looked after you didn't he because you came back.

So there you go.

I just wanted to ask one other thing about Brisbane, I've seen here,

03:30 **were you there at the time or were you aware of the Battle of Brisbane?**

Well we heard all about it, but sometimes when you're in a thing you don't realise it do you. And also they were very protective of us, especially the girls in barracks. If you were in barracks and you were going home at night or you were going to a hostel well you'd see far more but the barracks girls were really, they were very protective toward us.

Did you resent that at times?

No. No we didn't really, we didn't have time.

04:00 By the time you travelled to and fro and you did your laundry and you flew around there wasn't any spare time. And then went to every show in town, there wasn't any spare time.

And while you were in Brisbane and you were aware that you're going to New Guinea, and there is a potential chance that somewhere along the way you might see Japanese soldiers, because you were in New Guinea and there may be some coming through at some time, what had you been told about the Japanese soldiers in terms of what they

04:30 **looked like and what they would do, or what sort of caper they would get up to?**

We had them in New Guinea, they used to cut the grass, you know it would grow so quickly, grow overnight really. And but we were right in the jungle, so there was a work force all of the time cutting the grass and doing some of the chores I suppose. And Japanese prisoners were there quite often doing their work.

05:00 And Australians would be guarding them. But we were just, we had tracks between the two huts, not very wide ones. And perhaps if you came on one along the side you were trained that you just walked past, you completely ignored the fact that they were there. Just pretended you didn't see or hear. And if you did happen to come eye to eye you just continued on just the same.

05:30 So we were so well trained that if any events did arise it didn't matter. And they knew their place because they had guards watching them.

I know you had nothing much to do with them, but did your first sight of them and your first encounters of them live up to what you had been told to expect? I'm asking that question

because some people when they were heading

06:00 **off to war in the South Pacific were told that Japanese were all short and short-sighted and their guns were rubbish and they couldn't see at night and they weren't very strong so they had to ride bicycles, were you told that sort of?**

Not really, or if you did hear it you just - well perhaps there were underprivileged Japanese who were like that. I don't know, but they weren't all like that were they?

No certainly not.

And then I had a brother had been in Japan.

06:30 **Before the war?**

No this was when he came from Tobruk he went over there, had short leave and went up to Japan. Because the Japanese were knocking our men about and they decided they needed men with more experience to go up and fight them.

This is part of the occupation forces?

No this is during the war.

07:00 He talked about the Japanese a bit. No they didn't say they were all short. But we imagined, I think we all took it for granted that they were all short and scruffy. But they weren't really.

Now these POWs that you had on New Guinea, were they always well behaved or did they get up to mischief at all?

Oh not around the barracks, they had guards all around them. Oh I suppose they could, but not where we were concerned, it wouldn't be any of our business if they were.

07:30 But the only time the Japanese came to our notice, that we took any notice of them, we had all of these levered huts, you know with the low louvre out over the garden. Well we made the garden but the louvre would come out, well we'd come home at lunch time, it was, oh so hot in the middle of the day.

08:00 So we'd fling our safaris off and stretch on our stretchers and the mosquito nets would be wound up for the day up top, they were only let out at six o'clock. So we were sprawled out and one of the Australian guards wondered where the Japanese were all missing at lunch times. And he couldn't work this out, so he hid in the bushes somewhere and watched what was going on. And they were down underneath the bottom louvre, they'd go and install themselves there, and we would come home

08:30 at lunch and they were harmless, they couldn't hurt. Imagine if a Japanese did get in a hut with twenty odd girls he wouldn't have got out alive I don't think. So that got reported and they hauled them out and they got in trouble. I suppose they never ever came to barracks again. But that was the only thing.

For a prisoner of war that's a pretty bold thing to be doing isn't it?

Wasn't it ever. They were just fortunate Australians were guarding them and they weren't shot. So there you go that's the only story

09:00 about the Japanese that I know and it was harmless.

You said you had a garden there?

Oh it wasn't a garden it was just a piece of dirt on the edge that we tried to scratch up and grow things in.

Any success?

No the tomato plants grew about this high with, well now they buy those tiny wee thumb nail tomatoes, but that's all we could grow. In the heat they just went, well a few things grew. But not much but we did try.

09:30 **And did you try, I know you made nice bedspreads and made the huts look nice and tried to have a garden, what other things did you do to try and make it homey?**

We didn't have much more time did we? Well we had to keep it all neat and tidy and look nice. There'd be a paw paw tree growing or there'd be something coming up growing.

Could you make a cup of tea in the hut?

No we didn't really. We didn't need to. We had a beer ration for a while

10:00 but we decided it wasn't worth walking down to have our glass of beer so we started saving our bottles. And then we had a party one night and the officers found out; no more beer and no more parties. We had to go down to Q [Quartermasters] store somewhere and drink our beer. I forget how many glasses we were allowed but my friend and I decided that wasn't worth walking for so we didn't go.

Tell us about the party then?

What with all of the bottles of beer?

Yeah.

It was harmless,

10:30 absolutely harmless. But just because our hut had decided that we would save up and have a party, everyone thought it was very wicked, but it wasn't.

So it was just a bunch of girls with a few bottles of beer?

Yeah.

No fellows in there at all?

Oh how would the fellows get in there? They couldn't climb the barbed wire fence. Or whatever it was.

I'll bet they could if they knew.

No they had razor wire all inside.

11:00 Our theme song was don't fence me in. Used to sing that day and night I think. They had guards on the gate they couldn't have got in, no way.

Now you mentioned something earlier and that was something I wanted to come back to, you had a nickname for the plastic Mac. [Macintosh] you would wear?

I know but I can't, would it be 'macky'? I don't know.

But would there be nicknames for other parts of uniform or other things you had army things?

I don't know, I suppose

11:30 we had all kinds of nicknames but I don't know what they'd be.

What about nicknames for the girls?

Oh yes we all had pet names.

What was yours?

Maggie, which I loved.

Any interesting ones for characters and so forth?

Yes Sally was, her name was Edith Heather and she got Sally. And our names still stick to us. To this day.

How did she get Sally from Edith?

12:00 Oh I don't know. There just used to be a song about 'Sally of our Alley', and she really was an outrageous lady. My best friend, but she was full of fun and personality. She's probably singing the song one day in a high pitched soprano voice, which was ghastly. I think that's probably how she got it, she sung the song and it stuck.

And was it a nice song, 'Sally from our Alley'?

I can't remember it. We could find it somewhere I suppose. But it really was one of the tunes of the time.

12:30 **And what other nicknames would the girls have? Were there any funny nicknames or insulting ones?**

Oh they never insulted them. Oh I have to start thinking. Macca, she became matron of the Princess Alexander in Brisbane, she was a Queenslander. And she went on and did her nursing and she became the matron. And my nickname used to be Maggie.

13:00 **Was there much rivalry between the girls from different states? Because I know in the fellows' army if you had a Queenslander unit and some Victorians came there would be a big dust-up.**

Well there wouldn't be a dust-up but Queenslanders would sit up and absorb everything you said. And really, and then after a while they decided they liked us so all was well. But they are a different race, well they were.

What were they like then?

13:30 **What were the differences?**

I loved them. Oh I can pick a Queenslander anywhere still.

What is it about them?

Oh they're - you can pick all the states by the different wording and different little ways. South Australians had a very Britishy accent those days, maybe it's gone now. And the Western Australians were the crows? Who were they?

Crow-eaters?

Yeah well they were different,

14:00 **Sand-groppers.**

Who were the sand-groppers? Yeah they had all these names for them, that's where they got them from I'm sure. But the Queenslanders, they were down to earth. They really were, outspoken and you know exactly where you stand, lots of fun.

Was there any swearing amongst the ladies those days?

I don't think swearing was as popular then as it is now, we had no desire to swear.

14:30 But I was so strictly brought up I wouldn't.

So if you're fixing an engine and you've got a big wrench and it slips off and you burr all of your knuckles you'd be saying, "Oh gosh!", "Oh gee!"?

Yes. More or less. I hate to think.

Were all the girls as nicely spoken as yourself in that respect?

I think most of them, I think swearing wasn't acceptable, I really think, except just the common old silly word here and there.

15:00 You know the old Australian adjective, but apart from that I don't think they bothered much. It wasn't rife the way it is today. Amongst the women.

Ladies were ladies then?

Oh no, sort of.

You're very coy. You mentioned that,

We didn't want to be but that was a fact of life at that time. Your behaviour was conditioned by that era wasn't it?

15:30 **Do you think women were over controlled in those days in that respect?**

Well that was our lot and we knew it.

Did that frustrate you at all?

Well you didn't realise it, because that was the situation of the time. But I notice we tossed it all up very quickly. Began to stand on our own two feet.

I want to talk to you later on when we get to the end of the war, I think that is very interesting.

Yeah but I think it

16:00 made you feel you did belong as well as anybody else. You had a right to say what you thought, I'm sure it brought all of that out in us.

I'm sure it did, actually we may as well talk about that now. Because the war allowed women to get out there and drive trucks and fix engines, which you hadn't had a chance to do before.

And we loved the feeling, especially the heavy trucks, it was great. You'd feel you were in charge and you were in command. We were really proud.

16:30 **Initially when you started driving trucks through the streets of Melbourne would you get funny looks from blokes, as this truck goes by with a woman at the wheel?**

Well I only drove a big truck once and I did a wheelie and went out.

What happened, where did you do this?

In driving school we had to get our licences, same as the men. I just can't quote the different licences we had to get but I've got them all written down somewhere. You had to get that to pass your test. So we used to go out

17:00 along the narrow roads out in the Yarra Valley and out around there. We used to have to turn around on a narrow road in this heavy vehicle and reverse and get around. And after a while we were brought into

the city for experience. So we were driving along, and we had to go down to Spencer Street [in] five o'clock traffic; that seemed to be a favourite for the men drivers taking us down there. And I decided that I had

17:30 been driving all of the afternoon, I suppose I was doing my test, driving us into the city in this traffic, and I decided I had had enough, I wasn't going. And then I did a wheelie around the policeman in the middle who used to stand there and whistle all of these tunes. I did a wheelie around him and then went out. And then my instructor said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm just not going down there, I don't feel like it, I can't go in there." And he said, "Well that's the best thing you can do isn't it? Do a wheelie and come out."

18:00 **So you were a bit headstrong?**

No I wasn't, I just didn't want to go down there. In a great big truck and a busload of girls in the back and taking you down Spencer Street; it just wasn't on. But now I don't think they'd be allowed down there in the traffic, a truck at that hour of night.

No.

Perhaps he was just experimenting how far he could go.

Did it give you great confidence to be learning how to drive a truck and to fix engines and so forth?

18:30 Yeah but I didn't drive any trucks after I did my course. Yeah I was really elated when we got all of these licences, it was terrific. We had little amphibious jeeps that used to be made in Geelong, by Ford I suppose. And the war lane rallies, they used to have to have an event of some kind for the war and they were held down [at] Port Melbourne beach, so we had to go to Geelong and get the amphibious jeeps and come up

19:00 and on the Sunday war lane rally. There were six of us chosen, and we went out in the bay, and drove, there was nothing to taking, to charging, getting off the ground and into the water. It was quite simple really. And we were so proud of ourselves, we really were. No one had ever seen an amphibious jeep before and we were wheeling up and down and then a boy and a father's racing boat I suppose came along and whizzed up and down and caused waves and

19:30 confusion and chaos; nearly everyone's jeep stopped, but we got out.

That would have been great fun to drive those jeeps.

It was. Yeah it made you feel terrific because we had never seen an amphibious jeep before either.

Well I haven't either, can you describe one for me?

Oh haven't you seen one?

I might have done but if you could describe one for me that would be great?

Oh it was just a car with a little, not a yachtie, what would it be?

20:00 Just a built up boat. All steel and four wheels.

How high off the ground are they?

Not very high. You'd hop up in them quite easily hop in and out.

So were they square like a jeep or like a boat shape?

More boat-shaped than like a jeep really. They're big ones now. The amphibians. But these were just the first of the lot.

Were they all girls driving them?

Yeah six of us were chosen.

Fantastic.

Oh it was great.

And this rally, where was it held?

Port Melbourne.

Was there a big crowd?

20:30 Yes they used to turn out badly to see it all.

That would have been great?

Oh it was quite exciting.

You would have been very much the -

Flavour of the month. It was fun, but we just got pride in our doing it I think.

Would you be, as part of the war rally, talking to the general public who were there?

No they'd have loud speakers, and some would be marching. We'd probably lead a march down to the beach and the crowds would be in the city

21:00 streets, lining each side. Yes they used to turn out to see the war lane rallies.

Well talking about, as you said, after the war women changing their lot and deciding that they didn't just want to be quiet and sit in the corner anymore.

Housewives again.

Yeah, well I guess lots of little girls seeing women driving those things that would have planted a seed in their heads then that the future for them wasn't necessarily just being a housewife?

Yeah someone was saying the other day that there were very few women drivers in the army, well we didn't think so, we didn't realise at the time. But then someone

21:30 said, "Well there were very few men too, even the younger men didn't have vehicles of their own." The father would have a car, and then it all came into its own. Some of the mothers would be driving I suppose but when you look back not many of them did have a car, and then the Depression was there and it is amazing to think how it has grown hasn't it?

22:00 **Now amphibious jeeps; you have driven a truck (you didn't do it often); staff cars I take it? What other vehicles did you drive at the time?**

I drove a tank up in Lae.

Did you?

4th Field, but that was only fun.

Well tell us what kind of fun it was, what kind of tank was it?

I did know but I have forgotten the name. We went out to see this 4th Field Regiment and they had all of their rows, the engineers were in charge of it all.

22:30 We went out there and they said, "Hop up and have a drive", and I got in and they said, "Go on, take her off". And all these gears - have you been in a tank? There is rows and rows. So I said, "Well what would you suggest?" And they said, "Pull that one." I did and away we went. I think I had to pull two. So that was my only time in a tank.

How do you steer a tank?

I think it just took me.

23:00 It was only a fun game. But that was the only driving I did up there. But I didn't expect the thing to go I must have just touched the right gear or something and away we went.

Would have been fun?

Oh it was and you couldn't hurt the tank.

You didn't get to fire it?

No. There you go.

So we've added a tank to the list then, were there any other vehicles?

Oh just the cars and utilities. But I mainly drove a utility in Brisbane, a ute.

23:30 Because there was always something to carry and somewhere to go, and you could fit spare parts in the back of a ute.

You did a fair bit of mechanical training?

Yes we had to do that to be a driver.

Was it just basic running repairs or could you actually take an engine to bits and go, "I think it needs that and a new one of these"?

We're supposed to but our cars were so good and so reliable. The

24:00 instructors would do all of these faults. In the mornings, you'd go to get your car and you had to work out [what] was wrong and how to fix it and what to do. And we did it, we really did learn but don't ask me, in the modern cars you couldn't do that.

No modern cars have little computers.

Yes it would be awful.

So were you little greasy monkeys, you've all got greasy hands just like a mechanic?

When it was

24:30 our turn to have a day off yes. We were all in our overalls and our capos and change of clothes and water-proof boots and get into it and do it.

That's great.

I couldn't do it now.

Well I've never learnt to do it so you've got one on me. So you had a car licence and a truck licence, what other kind of licences did you have? Did you do motorbikes?

No didn't think about it. Dispatch riders did that, that's all

25:00 they did.

So there were no female motorbike riders?

No not then, there might be now, I don't know. They wouldn't want dispatch riders now though would they, do it all by -

Email. If you can find a computer you could. There is all sorts of talk in the army, the men are always talking about mateship and loyalty and so forth and I assume there would have been the same level of bonding, mateship in with the girls as well?

Oh yes we were all good friends, we all still meet.

25:30 I think there is a little pamphlet out there on the bench came in the mail today from the Queensland lot. We're all still in touch and we had reunions, go to Perth; Gold Coast was the most popular I think. Sydney used to be very popular but then somehow or other you drop out, you know you get older and go less. Adelaide didn't have

26:00 a reunion. They always considered they were the superior ones.

Did they?

I think so.

Tell us why?

Oh no, they were all very very nice charming girls but I think they always thought they were a bit of a cut above the other states. So that's why I follow Adelaide and its politics and everything very intensely and I think they're still playing; I don't think they've come down to earth yet.

That's a very bold statement. So do you think the bonds between the women

26:30 **were the same as the bonds between the men or do women bring a different tone to friendships like that?**

Oh I think there is quite a lot of bonding, we don't agree on lots and lots of things but if one was in trouble well the other would run all of the way to get there I am sure of it.

Are those wartime bonds the strongest do you think? In terms of friendship?

Yeah I do. I do because even

27:00 the WAAAF down the street - she was air force and I was army - I mean we're still underneath it all the best of friends.

What causes such strong bonds do you think at a time like that?

I don't know. It's a bit of hardship and a bit of being away from home, and thinking no one loves you. And we're all sitting there in camp looking at all these women and thinking, "Well this is my life" and then you all become great mates.

Can you remember the first time you rolled into camp?

27:30 **When you first joined up and there is a bunch of girls you have never seen before and you think, "Oh what is going to happen here"?**

Well there was none of that because if you walked in they'd say, "Hi" and "Come in". There is always one rowdy one, there is always someone who will break the ice amongst every group. Doesn't matter, well one at least, there'd probably be two or three all joining in to back her up.

And was that Sally Fendleson?

Oh that was my friend.

28:00 **The rowdy one?**

Oh yes she was a bit choosy though.

The flip side to that is then, were there any cliques or was there any back-biting at all?

No, no. And if there was there was always someone there to down them and say you know. It would never hold any strength really. I'm sure. Not when you're in camp, not when you're in barracks.

So it was very important that everybody get on so you could work as a unit?

28:30 Yeah well I suppose you all had lots of mutual interests didn't you? Even your work. Things, and that's held you together a lot.

And what were your officers like as a whole?

Oh I can only speak very highly and dearly of our the officers, all the ones I met. They were outstanding women I think. Although I think they were chosen for a special reason weren't they? They were all hand picked by Sybil Irving.

Where did they come from?

29:00 **What fields of endeavour prior to the war?**

Well I've often wondered that and I don't know how she discovered them all. Sybil Irving got on a train and she went everywhere she felt, before the army founded, she went around and hand-picked all of these women.. Well they must have been leading women of their day mustn't they? Ahead of their times.

Yeah and head of Country Women's Association, or

29:30 **things like that.**

Well we'll leave the Country Women's Association out.

Oh right.

I think they must have been.

What I meant by that was in high level organisational positions.

Yeah they must have been.

Wish we could talk about the Country Women's Association now, but we can't.

Oh they were very good people.

You're a devil woman. Now I'm just going back through my notes and checking that there isn't something we have missed.

30:00 **You mentioned you did shooting training as well?**

Yes over at Batman Avenue; the men were having - that was early in the war.

Yes.

And times changed. And we went in the gas tanks; you know they had all these big gas fans going, we all had to go in those and learn how to handle the gas. People just look at me when I say it now but we did.

Well tell us because I'm not sure what the gas tanks were or what they did, tell us what they were?

30:30 You wore gas masks in, you were fitted up and you had to go in there and stay so long in there and learn how to put your gas mask on. And that's all we had to do but you had to stay in that tank for so long.

What sort of gas would they pump in there?

God knows. I used to know but I don't now. If I said it'd just be something plucked out of the air.

Was that a frightening thing to do?

I wouldn't like to be doing it too often, and I often wonder what you do in a gas attack. Because I think it was pretty primitive gear they had for those days.

31:00 **Did you find that you could smell something strange through the gas mask? Did some of it get through?**

Oh well you'd imagine you could. Even if you couldn't you would imagine you could.

Did some people freak out in there?

No because we wouldn't have been in the army if we had have been freakers.

But I'm sure everybody, male or female; you'd find somebody,

The men went in, and my friend Joan Olley and I, there weren't that many girls around to do it. And we did the shooting.

31:30 **Just tell us about the tank before we get there, was it on the back of a truck or in a room or something?**

Yeah I think it was a tank they had fitted up, it was mobile and I think they had it fitted up to train people in case there was a gas attack. And after it had finished with us it would go on to another unit.

And did you just sit on the bench in there or did you have to keep working while it was?

No you'd get in and you'd have to stand up in the tank. Wasn't that large.

32:00 **Would you have your mask on before you went inside?**

Yes they put it on you and then you'd go.

So it wasn't a race to get your mask on before the gas came in? Some sort of test?

No that might have come later if it had got worse. This was just a rev up in case there was a gas attack. But they were really worried very early in the war at one stage.

The Germans would invade?

Well the Germans had invaded, but they were very worried about, well I suppose it would be the Japanese. And the ones in authority knew far more then we were ever

32:30 told or knew. We just did as we were told, asked.

Tell us about your shooting then. What were you shooting with?

Oh only .303's. And they just had sand bags up all around us and we just laid down and were sighting and shooting. I loved it.

Were you a left hander or a right hander?

No I'm a right hander but somehow or other when I shoot I shut the wrong eye, and I hit most things, I don't know how I do it. So I did very well in the

33:00 shooting, and when it was all over they came up, some of the men and they said, "Have you done shooting before? Where did you learn to shoot?" Because they couldn't understand it: lady, well not a lady, an AWAS getting up fairly well in the shooting. And I said, "Well I've only shot a few rabbits I think." Well they roared and they said, "Oh she has only shot a few rabbits!" See I didn't think that was real shooting, you see I thought I was imagining a great. So that was fun.

33:30 **That must have been good to have all these fellows?**

Oh I wasn't great, but it was fun.

That would have been great. And you said also while you were in Melbourne you were billeted for a while in Toorak Mansions?

Yeah just down here, the hostel. It was a private hotel and the army commandeered it I suppose. What did they do? They took over the big homes.

What street was that on?

It was just here in Toorak Road, opposite the (UNCLEAR) is part of it, another shop. It was rather luxurious.

34:00 **I'm sure it was.**

Most of the others said it was a very old guest house, but oh the beautiful stairways and the rooms were tiny; it was a hostel. I meant to get some cutting to show you today but I forget to walk down there and get them. It's still going as a - it's just down the street.

It would have been great fun to -

Mix with everybody and be there and we had the loveliest matron and

34:30 assistant matrons. I suppose you called it an orderly room. And they kept check on, we didn't have leave passes but we did have to move our keys over if we were going out to 'Out', and when we came home we had to put the keys back to 'In', so that they had a check over who was out and who was in. I enjoyed it.

And when you joined the army did you start off as a private?

Well you joined up and I did my rookie's

35:00 course and did my training and then I was a driver.

And are drivers a private rank? Are they a corporal rank?

No. We're drivers; they're specialists. It's a specialist job and then you get that pay. From when you begin, it doesn't [increase], unless you get up to a corporal, but they don't - well if you're a driver you're a driver and that's your job. So you do that and you get the pay. But if you were a corporal you possibly wouldn't be driving as much.

35:30 You'd be doing more saying who took what positions and where you went for the day and organising the tickets and that sort of thing; more clerical than driving.

Did you finish as a driver or did you get an honorary rank as a corporal or something when you were discharged?

No, in New Guinea I was a corporal; I was promoted to corporal. And the next would have been sergeant which wouldn't have been long but the war finished. But that's all right.

36:00 But then I came back to Melbourne, and why I was driving with corporal stripes, I went back driving because they took me on as a driver.

Did you like being a corporal?

Oh I loved being a corporal.

Had a bit of a swagger?

Oh no just did the same thing, just the same job. So there you go.

All right just one more question while we finish up this tape,

36:30 **while you were in training in Melbourne was it easy to notice; was it obvious, rather, that there was a lot less men around, that they had all gone, especially young men?**

Oh I think they seemed to be thronging around. See the munitions were there, everyone had to work and everyone had to have a job. And even if the country

37:00 was scarce of able-bodied men, well I suppose the men were getting scarcer, but then the Americans came and that filled the city up again. And the soldiers marching around in their uniforms while they were training and doing things in all of the different services. Were there Dutch here as well?

I don't know.

I've got this Dutch - I keep thinking of it.

37:30 **Is there a certain tall blond Dutchman you're not telling us about?**

No no they were all in Brisbane.

All right well we'll leave the Dutch alone for just a moment. When you're in Melbourne as well there were less men, are you starting to see women through manpower doing traditional man jobs?

Oh well they had to, if they were called; if they didn't do it, if they weren't working they were called up to go and do it weren't they later on?

38:00 **So were you seeing women driving buses and trams and so forth?**

I suppose there was the beginning of it but not really I don't think. No I wasn't in Melbourne I was gone then when the manpower thing began to hit. That's why the women went to New Guinea, because the manpower was down. They needed, there weren't enough men to keep on filling the positions. And the women did get into the workforce then didn't they? A lot after the war.

38:30 **Well one last Brisbane question before we end up this tape: the 'Brisbane line', had you heard of that?**

Yes, it was the lights. When I left Melbourne, Melbourne was blacked out. You wouldn't dare have a crack or crease or anything in your curtains or light at night. Driving in the blackout, and get up to Brisbane, it was a blaze of lights, because it was the Brisbane, I

39:00 don't know it was a crazy Brisbane line I've ever heard of.

So what was your understanding of what the Brisbane line was?

Well if the Japanese were going to attack, that, through there, they were going to allow, let the top half go wasn't it? They were going to concentrate their forces below there. And above the Brisbane line well,

if they happened to win it

39:30 they were going to be ready below that to attack them. That was my - but that's a long time ago.

Yeah but that's still quite strange isn't it, that's if that's the way they thought that Brisbane was lit up?

It was.

They came into Townsville didn't they?

Yeah they came in there but we were never told they were bombing Townsville. It appears now, if you were in camp with the girls they'd talk, and the Townsville girls used to say they did fly in, they did bomb.

40:00 So that's how anyway I knew it, but apart from that it didn't appear in the papers. I hope I'm right.

Yes I'm sure you were.

40:09 **End of tape**

Tape 7

00:31 **Joan, how did you get to New Guinea from Queensland? I just called you Joan then.**

That's all right she is a far nicer person.

We were talking to a lady called Joan the other day.

Well we went on the Duntroon. From Brisbane did you say?

Up to New Guinea.

Yes on the Duntroon.

That was a troop ship wasn't it?

Yes.

Was it just AWAS on there?

Oh no, only three hundred odd

01:00 AWAS and the rest were men, soldiers.

And this was 1944 when you went to New Guinea?

We were training in the end of '44, but as things were moving so briskly up north we were all ready but we had to wait until we could get - We weren't the flavour of the month with the heads of the army.

Why was that?

To get up there. I don't know, just a new thing with women.

01:30 And well we just went. The ships just kept going up north, loaded with men. They were trying to finish off the war, they were fighting up past Lae by that time. Wewak was just in force going then. And they'd all be heading to Wewak with reinforcements and things. So we

02:00 just had to wait for a ship for a while. And it was a bit into '45 when we got there.

How many people did the Duntroon carry then, was it several thousand?

I can't remember now, I can only remember about the AWAS, there were three hundred and forty odd AWAS on it.

So when you were travelling up to New Guinea did you think there was a chance there still might be some action going on around where you were?

02:30 Oh there was great anxiety. The convoy used to be out at sea and I thought if you had a convoy they'd be all around you and shelter you but they would only come in at night. Out on the horizon, ever so far you'd see a smoke and they'd say, "Oh the convoy's coming in". But you'd never know what ship it was, they were way out, they'd close in at night, at day-time they'd be gone; they swept the seas out ahead of you.

03:00 **Oh I didn't know that.**

No I didn't either it was fascinating.

And so was there much Jap. Sub [submarine] activity still at that time?

They seemed to be concerned that there could be, but there wasn't so I don't know. But they were quite concerned about it.

Well they did sink a number of ships along the east coast didn't they?

So they say.

And I guess most notably the HMAS Centaur out of Brisbane, that hospital ship that was sunk, did you hear about that?

Yeah that was dreadful wasn't it?

03:30 I was in George Street, Fitzroy and one lass was the sister in charge of where we were, and she was meant to be on that and she wasn't so that how I remember it so clearly, she was so upset.

She would have been devastated.

Well [we] all were because of her, that was dreadful.

Well people often get what they call survivor guilt don't they? Where if you are the one survives?

Well she really was,

04:00 that's how I remember it so clearly.

You say you remember that but you didn't hear about the Townsville bombings?

No I was in Brisbane when I heard about those, and there were girls from Townsville in barracks with us and they would come back and tell the tales.

So the army was very selective in what they told the general public?

I'm sure because we were not told that. I'm sure we weren't.

04:30 **Were you told about Darwin being bombed?**

No not the way it was. Now we're hearing so much about it, it's amazing isn't it? No we weren't but we did hear about Pearl Harbour.

Well you would have heard about the Coral Sea Battle too I daresay?

Yes that was well featured.

And Milne Bay and Kokoda?

They were well featured yes.

Okay so you're on the boat, the Duntroon and you finally make it to New Guinea, phew.

05:00 **No action on the convoy, no submarines, so phew. As you're pulling in, did you land at Moresby or did you go right around to Lae?**

We went to Lae.

All right you would have went east then around Milne Bay and up the north I daresay?

Yes.

Past places like Buna, Gona and Sanananda? Did you stop at any of those places?

No, went straight to Lae.

And what did Lae look like when you got there?

Oh it was just shattered. Derelict;

05:30 the Mighty Markham had been down the night before we were to come in.

Is that another ship?

No that's a great river.

Oh right.

The Mighty Markham, it goes three miles out to sea and you put your bucket in and get fresh water, that's the force of the torrent, when it rains it comes down. It rained the night before, so all of the wharves, well there was only one tin can wharf, they

06:00 used to be these petrol drums all wired together, and just planks across that was our -

Like a pontoon?

Yes that was the wharf floating there. But that was all wrecked and so we had to get off and wade in.

Was that fun and adventurous?

No we had to come down

06:30 the ladders off the Duntroon with all of our gear. They had boats underneath us to catch if anyone fell, but of course no one fell. But that was quite an event.

Bit of a rude welcome?

Yes. Getting off and then we had to wade so far into the beach, that was all right but we knew we were in Lae.

I bet you did. Did it look like it might have been a nice little town?

There was no sign of it, none whatsoever. And there was no native village in Lae

07:00 when we were there, they were all gone.

Describe the view as you've walked up the beach, what can you see in front of you?

I don't know if the sand was black there; Malahang Beach further up the sand was black. Black sand which after a while you got quite fond of, you didn't take any notice of it being black, pick it up with all of its colours through. But I think that must have been a dark grotty beach.

07:30 And then we marched through there and there was some Australian soldiers marched up along one side, coming to have a look at us.

Wolf-whistling?

Oh I think they'd like to, I don't know that they did. But I don't know why they were there, I suppose they'd be the working party cleaning up the mess. I don't know, I suppose that's how they got there. So they, I think they just cheered and wished us well. And we went on

08:00 and henceforth went to our barracks.

How far away were they from the wharf? Ten minutes?

Oh yes at least. Yeah it'd be that far.

And when you said Lae had been shattered, did it look then that there had been army buildings that had all been blown up?

No, the first Aust. Army, the Japs had been in that and that was all right. But as for a town, you know

08:30 the natives being there was no sign, they had just all gone. And a bit further up where the township had been there was the great blob of a mountain, and the end of that had been knocked off, and they said there was heaps of Japanese buried in it. Of course we didn't see any sign it had been all blown up and all the soil over it, there

09:00 was no sign of anything else.

Were there any wrecked ships or wrecked equipment?

Not where we were; we were on the Malahang Beach there was only one.

Was that a beach you'd go for a bit of a walk to sometimes?

A drive, yes you could swim in the Malahang. Pretty rough great surf, you'd have to sit down for the surf to go over you, you couldn't do anything, but that was great.

In your little hand-made bikinis again?

Yes yes, you had to hang onto those.

09:30 Hope for the best, that was part of it though wasn't it?

Yes, still part of the fun.

But that was where the black sand was, and then there was a creek running into it too. You could get out of the surf if it was too rough and get into the creek. But after being in that rough sea and then you went into the cold creek it wasn't too good, you'd want to get out pretty quickly.

And was that where you said you saw Australian soldiers fishing with dynamite? Around that area?

10:00 Oh no I can't remember where that was, no not here.

Okay that's fine. So you march up to barracks.

And we were all in our gear.

And you were sopping wet.

Up to our knees.

Was it a bit of a shock then to be in this rough, tough, tropical place?

No no I think it is what we half expected. We had

10:30 great, well lots of speakers and people lecturing us and telling us what it was going to be like.

Really, who were they?

Well our colonel had flown up to Lae to be ahead of us, Margaret Spencer, and she had her staff sergeant with her, Edwards, and they had warned us, they had come and lectured us and told us about the roads around, what was going to be there. We were well prepared for it.

11:00 Just all fitting into place as we went along.

What sort of things had they said? "You must be prepared for this", "You must be prepared for that"?

Oh well they told us the road was Butibum Road, that was the native language. And Butibum Road went along the front and prepared us for the New Guinean talk.

Did you have a few words of pidgin?

Oh yes we got little books on pidgin and translated. We were

11:30 quite, I couldn't do it now but,

Do you remember any words?

Oh just 'liklik number one', that was his little boy, and 'liklik number two', and they only had a few children the New Guineans they didn't go into large families, well they were so proud of the children the few we saw. But anyway we went on the transports and went to the barracks and couldn't believe our eyes there with the great fence around it and razor wire going in and guards on the gates.

12:00 And the orderly room and down we went to our huts. It was all allotted before we arrived, it was just perfect army timing and training.

And was it 'put down your bags and straight to work' or were you given the day off or a couple of days to orient yourselves?

Yes well pretty, everything was arranged and organised and allotted, I can't remember what day it was, we didn't go -

12:30 yeah we'd be almost straight to work, there was no hanging around. I think that's what was so good, there was always something doing. No time to sit down and have regrets, or say, "I don't like this", none of that.

And what were your duties there at Lae, what was your daily routine?

I got up in the morning, bright and early, then we'd take our atebirin pills, we have our corporal in charge of the hut, she'd have the

13:00 atebirin roll to mark the names off. We had been taking our atebirin tablets for quite a while before we went there, we had all of our injections and we were pretty fit and we were used to the atebirin. And then we'd take us every morning, in the hut.

Were you, did it turn you yellow?

Oh I was orange, stayed like that for months. Because you had to take it so

13:30 long after you got back, quite a long time, and of course everyone thought I was permanently yellow. That was silly, anyway we'd have our atebirin tablets, and we'd race to breakfast and get back. By the time we all showered and you had to make your bed and be meticulous; everything had to be perfect, you know everything so.

How did you have to have everything in your hut in the morning before you left?

14:00 Oh you'd have your mosquito net rolled up for the day. Tied up with two pieces hanging down that end and two down this end. All had to be neat and orderly. And at six o'clock each night that had to be all let down and tucked in. So your bed had to be made just so, so that you could tuck your net in. We only had sheets I think, we had one blanket (we didn't need it). We didn't need the sheet when we arrived, we didn't need it for a long time.

14:30 When there'd be a faint tremor we might think it was a cool night and we might put the sheet on. I don't think we ever used the blanket, it was there but we didn't use it. You'd tuck; it was good to tuck things in with.

Did you have a locker that you had to put all the rest of your gear in?

Oh yes we had just a standard cupboard shared with our next bed mate. Which was Sally, we were always together, I wasn't with her in Brisbane she was opposite, but in New Guinea we were always in the same hut.

15:00 And same cupboard, and you shared this cupboard between the two of you. You didn't have that much gear either, it was all the necessities.

Did you have to iron stuff as well?

I can't remember that. I'm sure by the look of our jackets that we didn't do them, I'm sure they must have had a laundry there somewhere. I suppose they'd had people who worked in the laundry, they had all those men and all of those officers that had to be catered for.

15:30 And the officers were always meticulous in their tropical gear. So someone must have done that I don't know, unless the batman did it.

When was it when you were in New Guinea that the earthquake happened, tell us about that?

Oh that must have been, I can't remember if it was before the war finished or after. But I think it must have been after. Because all the foundations in the floor went, can you imagine a big floor flapping around?

16:00 There'd be a date somewhere on record, but I haven't bothered to check it, I haven't really thought much about it until now. But it was one of the heaviest ever measured in Lae, you know with the readings.

Where were you when you first felt its effect?

Oh we were in our hut at night, or possibly eating a little bit of tropical fruit

16:30 or doing something after our meal. And my friend was away at her drama, she did drama as I mentioned before, at Lae base. And there was this all mighty rocking, not rocking but growling under the ground. If you had heard it you would know it was an earthquake - you been in an earthquake? Well you don't need anyone to tell you there is an earthquake coming. And this great enormous rattling and rolling

17:00 came along and it was horrific, so we all ran. Everybody dropped, no need to say, they all dropped and ran out. But Sally was at Lae base and she just couldn't move they had to pick her up and throw her out. Because might have been slightly more severe there. And anyway we were out standing in this rocking, if you stood still, now you're not allowed to say this isn't right because it is.

17:30 If you stood still you know if the ground was up and you stood still you went down with it. If you ran you fell into that hollow, it wasn't nice. And I had a girl with her arms around my neck, nearly choking me clinging on, and beside herself. So that made me pull myself together and survive. And it was just horrific. And the tropical trees, you know with their bendy high trunks?

18:00 They just bend and go with it. Swaying over, you can see why all that tropical stuff is, just goes with nature doesn't it. And then it eventually stopped.

How long did it last?

Well it seemed forever to me but it didn't last very long.

And when it finished was there great devastation, were buildings down and so forth?

No but all of our foundations were, well see they were built for it. See they had tremors

18:30 all day long actually in Lae. You don't take any notice of the little tremors, some would be more severe than others but it is earthquake territory. And there had been a lot of this shaking and getting severe at times so we were used to it, but we didn't expect this great, it was very high on the scale.

Any injuries or deaths?

I don't know whether there were any deaths amongst the natives, the girls were okay.

19:00 **Were you all shook up afterwards, was there an extra ration of beer that day to give you a break?**

No they didn't like the beer, the girls, very much.

They should have had chardonnay shouldn't they?

Whisky. There was a bit of whisky around and if you were lucky you might get a bottle of whisky.

Where would you get the whisky?

I don't know someone might give you a bottle, some of the engineers. I think the officers would get their liquor wouldn't they? I'm sure they'd be able to get that.

They were given one bottle or two a month?

19:30 Yeah something like that. So occasionally we got a bottle, a little reserve.

So the earthquake is over and everyone is okay, it was just back to business was it?

Oh yes, yes. But I'm not sure if the electricity failed or anything like that. But it really was the most severe thing and I swore that I'd never come back to New Guinea, but I did. It was just horrific.

Well on our little trip through your daily routine we got as far as leaving the hut in the morning,

20:00 **with your bed all nicely made and so forth, so what would you do after that?**

Yes and you'd have to get the broom and sweep your part of the hut. Well we'd have to march down I suppose and if there was transport to work we'd get in the trucks and down the road to either First Aust. Army, or Lae base was in another region.

20:30 And then you'd get off and march to your unit. I had lovely; engineers, they had a two storey, the engineers they always had to be a bit better and a bit different. So I was upstairs in this nice office with the major and captain and lieutenant. Another one, he used to stand up over the partition and say what he wanted, it was great.

21:00 **And you said you didn't do much typing at all?**

No, I had all my - but I didn't do much, I did very little, only if there was an emergency and they just had to get something off and the typist wasn't there.

So what would you be doing then? Would it be filing or errand running or?

Yes, I didn't run any errands, I just sat and did what the... Wewak was just over; that was quite a big battle and they had to order all of

21:30 the supplies. Engineers used to work very hard with keeping all of the supplies up and they had to have the ships and all of the river ships, you know they had them named after all of the different rivers. And they were running up and down that coast all of the time, with supplies and gears. And it was up to Major Hellsham and his section to keep the supplies up.

22:00 **As you were in an office there, an operational office; were you privy once again to information about the battle front that most people wouldn't get to see?**

Some of it, not really. Wee bit. But Wewak they had, they worked really hard, they had to have everything ready, all of the supplies. You know for when they landed you had to have it ready to get up and build their accommodation.

22:30 You had to do things, the army fighting the Japs out to get in, they had to be looked after. And they had everything going well, and I arrived just at the end of it. And they had ordered everything from down south, down to the last (UNCLEAR), and they hadn't sent any nails to hammer up all of the buildings.

23:00 Well I heard all about that because I arrived just at the end of the Wewak thing and where were the nails? That was, I had to laugh when you said, "Were you?" But that's what we did.

So who got their butt kicked over the nails?

Oh I don't know, I believe the Australian papers were full of it.

So was that a mistake? They just forgot to tick nails on their ordering form? Or the guy down at the factory said, "Yes" and just forgot to write it down?

I suppose the factory would get blamed and see we'd get blamed see. But that was only, you were asking; that's why I smiled because I thought of the nails.

23:30 Can you imagine it?

What are you going to do, I guess you can't tie them all together?

So anyway I guess they flew them in quick and lively. More nails than they would ever want.

What about -

And then later on they had the forestry section move in and they were getting all the samples of the different timbers. This kept us quite busy, me busy,

24:00 sending it down here somewhere to have it all tested because the theory was because of all the rain in

New Guinea would that timber be good for using for anything? You know they thought it might be too, you know it wouldn't be the right timber to use. And it was quite interesting sending away all the specimens and writing it all up.

Can you remember what sort of trees they were?

No.

That's all right, that's not really an important fact.

I used to, they were taking specimens from all of these great tall

24:30 timbers but I did know the names at one time but I don't think I have discussed it ever since. But that was fascinating and then they asked me to go onto Rabaul with them. Well [I] didn't answer but my general was sitting there and he said, "No she is not going anywhere, she is going home". And I thought, "Well that solves that situation." But they said, "Name your own wages", because they didn't have any girls, any staff and they were going onto Rabaul. But they wanted all these timbers and I have often wondered what happened.

25:00 But I believe the New Guinea timber is quite good.

Yeah there are some excellent timbers on New Guinea.

Isn't it amazing, they were worried about all of this water. That was right into the peace.

So General Blamey had a house at Lae?

Oh I don't think he was there while we were there. And you know I can't remember the one that followed him, it was something with an S.

Savage was it?

You know it could have been, that rings a bell. I did know them all,

25:30 one was the chief engineer lived in the house too.

So you didn't see Blamey at all?

No. Oh yes we did.

Did you have occasion to address him or did he speak to you?

No when he did arrive we were all out, there is a story there. But that isn't quite right, that is the newspaper and they use their own, but yes he was out and we did have a big parade for him.

26:00 In all the heat and marching. He was so late arriving we should have got a message, but anyway he did arrive and he knows we wouldn't be home for Christmas and girls all decided to faint. We'd been out there all morning. I didn't faint. Did you read the story?

No I haven't.

Anyway that's the only time we saw him I think.

So he came all the way to tell you, you wouldn't be home for Christmas?

26:30 Oh he walked up and down; he didn't come to tell us that, no.

Did you have occasion to transport around in any of your transport in Australia or in your work up there any other notable figures? Officers' wives or anybody else that might be coming through?

Oh yes we had Duke of Gloucester and Shriver his aide.

Well tell us about that.

Well I told someone about it recently and they didn't think it was funny.

27:00 Well at the time it was the Duke of Gloucester, and was it Brigadier Shriver his aide? I can't remember. Anyway they were doing a tour of troops to boost morale and to get them going and they were arriving in Lae. And oh it caused havoc, you can imagine all the work it caused. We had to have special apartments for him and he wouldn't use the normal

27:30 latrines as they were called, he had to have his own, private one. And the engineers had a queer sense of humour. And they had been working overtime and doing things, so they thought they would build him his own little house. And they made it, they were so clever apparently, some of these people.

28:00 And they made it so if anyone touched it it would collapse. So they were all sitting back waiting for what happened, and there was a poem made up about it. I wish I had had my things, I have still got the poem, I haven't read the poem in years. And it said, "John Curtin [former Prime Minister of Australia] groaned and died." The whole thing collapsed when the Duke of Gloucester sat on it you see? They were paying him out for not using the ones the troops use and fitting in.

But did they get in trouble for that?

28:30 Oh I don't know, they'd say they hadn't finished or something went wrong. Or they didn't know. But this poem was a clever thing.

Any other notables? Anybody else?

Oh yes we had Gracie Fields.

Tell us about Gracie.

Oh she was gorgeous. She got up and performed. That was at Lae.

What was she singing?

'When the lights go out again all over the world'. She sang everything she knew, oh she was gorgeous.

29:00 And some of the fellows would be clapping and calling out, and she would say, "Oh shut up". She just mixed it with them the whole night, oh she was gorgeous.

Big crowd?

Well all of those who could get there, if you could get leave and go, it was great.

And was it she who sang 'We'll meet again' or was that Vera Lyn?

I think it was Vera Lyn wasn't it? But all those old favourites I can't think of any more. She was just superb, I think she sang every well known song she had ever been singing.

29:30 **Any other greats like that?**

Well they were rolling in, and then I suppose the war finished. But there was some well known ones. But I haven't got my books and papers here. But that must be outstanding for me to remember.

That's okay. Speaking of the war finishing, can you remember hearing about VE Day,

30:00 **Victory in Europe?**

May, that was May. Oh yes I think everybody heaved a sigh of relief didn't they? That was great.

So you would have been?

On the boat going to Lae. About that time that we were on the boat, we were just about at Lae in May.

So the war was pretty much coming to a close then?

Well we knew then it was winding down because it was only the

30:30 Japs to clean out of there. The Japanese that had to be cleared out and they were moving up away.

Was there any celebration for VE Day on your boat?

No I don't think we were on the boat, I think we were supposed to be but I don't think we were, because that was while all the shipping or anything was changing. It created a lot of change in the boating system.

Well were there celebrations where ever you were, was there some celebration that day?

No it was very sombre I think.

31:00 Yes it was, but not as much as the September one.

Well let's talk about then when you are on Lae and you hear about the Japanese surrender, how was that it must have been marvellous?

Oh it was unreal. It really was. In the evening we arrived back and there was all this shouting and they were burning down,

31:30 oh I don't know what they did after that the next day. But that was not in our unit, that was across, the way where the Australians were. And oh it went on nearly all night I think the celebrating and the cheering.

Can you remember when you heard the news? The moment, does that stick in your mind?

I think it must have been when we were, it must have been after work towards evening because that's when all the cheering started and all the flames started going up because

32:00 then Japan had surrendered. So we all stood out in the yard and looked at the sky and hoped and prayed there'd be no more war. We all felt sure that was going to be the end of all wars, we really did. From now there will be peace on earth and the children will be all happy. This is what, you know everyone was thinking. It must have been a beautiful moonlight night I think.

32:30 **Inspired romance in everyone's hearts?**

I guess it did. I'm sure it did, they were all off home.

I don't necessarily mean romance.

I know what you mean.

What other visions of the future were people talking about then? When I get home I'm going to do blah blah or I want to go to uni. [university] or? Was it a time of looking forward then all of a sudden?

Yes I think so. But the main thing was to get home wasn't it? Main thing was to get home.

33:00 But it didn't enter our head that it was going to be hard to forge your way or anything; everything was just going to be wonderful.

Did you hear about the bomb as well before that or at the same time they dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

Yes. I was just thinking, how did I hear that though?

33:30 Because I just felt I wasn't in Lae when I heard about it, I must have been. Have to be wouldn't I? Yes we did hear about that. It was about the American, I'm sure I heard about the American pilot who flew it, that I met them somewhere or something. No I couldn't have if I had been in Lae.

No because they flew from Hawaii.

Must have been a friend of his or something that was telling the story.

34:00 **Can you remember what he said?**

Well I don't know that they really realised they were going to drop this horrific thing. They knew when they went back. Must have been, I might have been hearing amongst the engineer officers also. I just didn't feel I was in Lae at the time. They said they didn't realise they were carrying such a weapon, when they set off. That's all I heard and that they couldn't realise what they had done.

34:30 **Well nobody really outside of the scientist knew.**

We knew, no that's what they said, they just couldn't realise the havoc they caused.

At the time I guess everyone thought it was a good thing anyway?

To end the war, yes it had to be stopped. Bit like Bush's [George Bush, President of United States] antics now, so there you go.

So did you think, "The war's over I'll be on the boat tomorrow and back home"? Did you think you would go home that quickly?

Oh not really because, oh well we all

35:00 thought we would be home by Christmas. We really thought we might be. But then if you were really working in an office and you knew all the work and all of the winding up. And then they let off a bomb dump; when you asked about the bomb I thought I didn't say anything about the bomb.

They blew it up?

Yes.

Who did that?

I don't know. They said, "The dreadful Americans did it, who would know?" The whole lot of the bomb dump went up, all night long. That's what I thought you were asking me about.

35:30 **That's dangerous.**

Yes. The whole of Lae could have gone, we wouldn't have got home then but it didn't go. So it was all right.

And did you see other people go home around you?

Yes some of the men got home for quickly, the ones who had been there a long time. Some of them had been there three years or more, that's why we were sent up there to relieve them to get them home. Because they had been in the overseas battles and they were sent to New Guinea, and they were left

36:00 there because they were doing such a good job. So they weren't all out fighting, there were lots of them in these, you've got to have an office going to keep the war going. Got to work in it and realise what they were doing and why they were doing it.

Yeah that's right.

Get the sense, the feel of it and keep themselves revved up to do it. So we knew then that they would go first, some of them went very quickly too, they had been there quite a while.

36:30 **Was Lae used as a staging post for troops coming home after that?**

I'm not sure. Oh yes, yes they were coming in and they were staging them. You are right, because they couldn't let them go straight home, they had to get them accustomed to the atmosphere or the different way of life before they could meet their rellies and go home.

This is POW's [Prisoners of War]?

Yes they were doing a lot of therapy with them weren't they?

37:00 And they were wandering around towards the end, so yes they were there. But we didn't come in contact with that very much. Except we were walking to and fro to work then, we wouldn't be so guarded, and they'd be there. It was a staging post for them on their way back. They were so shocked and in a dreadful state.

Look like scarecrows?

Well yeah. I didn't see that many of them but I do know that they did leave a lot of them there to

37:30 get ready to come home. And they would be strolling aimlessly around.

Like stunned mullets I guess?

Yeah, I think, yeah.

You didn't get home until August of '46 did you?

No that's when I got my discharge.

When did you get back to Melbourne?

I don't know it would be nearly twelve months afterwards, somewhere about that.

So did you start to think I'm never going to get out of here?

38:00 No I didn't. Well I thought we would, I don't think it was as late as May but anyway whatever it was. The first lot went out, they got off home, but we were left to do the cleaning up and the tidying up. I think we were a much smaller crowd, we were all happy, we all knew we would be going home.

And is that when they asked you to go to Rabaul? The forestry people?

38:30 Yeah that was at the end of that. When they heard we were going back they came and asked me to go with them instead of going home, would I take my discharge there and go, but I didn't.

Were you ever asked or was it possible to be part of the occupation forces in Japan?

No no. This was just discharge and go up there. Because we had been working reasonably closely with these two men that were going

39:00 to open up the timber thing so no.

Well just one last question for this tape then. When did you hear, who told you you were going home? Can you remember? How did you find out?

What, when we were actually going? Oh no, our AWAS officers. Our Colonel Spencer would tell us that.

39:30 **And was that a very exciting time for you?**

Oh yes we were quite pleased. Only my friend Sally went to hospital and had her appendix out and she wouldn't go home with the first lot, she waited for me. So she had to be well enough to come home on the boat. But it was nice to hear we were going. Because she had been convalescing and then she [was] fit and it was nice to go home together.

And did you go to Townsville or Brisbane or Sydney or?

40:00 Oh I don't know. We called in a couple of places down on the way. Don't think it was Townsville though, but I know Queensland quite well.

That's okay.

And then we got to Brisbane and we had a nice parade through the city, I think they must have had trucks for us to get on to take us back out to Fraser's Paddock, but we really were paraded around.

That would have been great.

It was. It was really quite pleasant. Quite a welcome home.

40:30 **And was anyone here to welcome you in Melbourne when you got back?**

We got on a troop train, we went to Sydney from Brisbane. Then we went on a troop train to Melbourne and our lovely Sybil Irving was there and officers, but very few. Scarcely anyone met us at Flinders Street but that was okay. All we wanted to do was get on the tram and get here. I can't remember how we got to where we were going. Where would you go? The army must have put us up somewhere wouldn't they?

41:00 **I'm sure they would have done.**

Unless we caught a country train home to the country, I don't remember isn't it dreadful?

That's all right.

Loaded up with gear.

I'll bet.

41:13 **End of tape**

Tape 8

00:30 **Something I have never seen before. Margaret can we talk a little bit about girls up there who went a little bit 'troppo'? What sort of symptoms would they exhibit?**

Oh they were very strange and apart from one or two we didn't have them in our hut.

01:00 But there is usually something that would trigger them off, they would have something from home, or the boyfriend would break off with them or they'd be breaking with the boyfriend. But something always triggered it, it really did. And why they were so unhappy I don't know but there must have been some cause to it and they decided then that they hated the climate and they hated the work and they didn't like this

01:30 and they didn't like that and nothing suited. And they would just go downhill. And get very oh mentally unstable. One or two, if they were really in a bad way would be sent off home very quickly in a plane. Not many were sent home, but if they were too bad they would go. It was very sad because they just couldn't cope or perhaps they would think they were getting dermatitis and they'd start scratching. You know all this sort of thing, they needed lots

02:00 of sympathy, but there was usually a trigger to it. But they just couldn't cope with the climate really I think.

Would any of them become dangerous to themselves?

Oh I think they might have in the long run, some of them became quite religious, but there was a dreadful strain on them. It was war and all the food and it was pretty rugged living, but you had to make them conquer it. That's why we were there, chosen, because they

02:30 thought that we could cope with anything that came along, but some of them just couldn't. And then they wouldn't get letters from home and they'd go into despair, it was very sad really. But they were very, very kind to them but sometimes we'd think they kept them a wee bit long, but then they would all hope that they would pull out of it but they couldn't.

And would they want to be sent away or would they be complaining about that?

Oh some of them would. But we had one lass in our hut

03:00 and she was a very lovely thing, she really was. I don't know what happened to her and she just said, "Oh Margaret wouldn't come and sit beside me on my bed", and I said, "Right". And she got very sensitive. She said, "Margaret knows I'm queer, Margaret knows I'm strange" and I didn't. I didn't realise there was anything, I'd have gone and sat beside her all night if she wanted me to. And she said, "You didn't come and sit beside me." Well I never ever went and sat beside her on the bed. She was opposite me and we'd talk. Anyway she really

03:30 went downhill. But soon she thought she was in love with an officer, and they were married. They weren't supposed to have anything to do with us, which they didn't really. But you always have someone who gets a crush on someone especially when they were away from home and lonely. It was just a thing in her head and she went down hill in a big heap. And she was on the - well I suppose they couldn't get her out then. Planes were flying madly,

04:00 towards the end of the war. She stayed a bit too long in Lae and then she was on a ship, the Canberra coming back and they put her in a large bunk room downstairs with others and our lovely colonel Margaret Spencer who was always so good, kind and understanding. She called, got Sally and myself in and said, "I've Pats down there with all of these other girls

04:30 around her." And half of them by this time were going quite odd, so we got out just in time didn't we? And they said, "Just watch her because she is talking about suicide and doing things; just watch her, you two." We really liked our colonel and she was quite understanding to us, so she said, "I'm really relying on the two of you to keep your eye on her." So when she was in the cabin at night that was okay, but

05:00 we - she wanted it done very surreptitiously. She said, "I can't be going in to look at her or she'll topple right off. But if anything goes wrong you let me know." But she was okay and they got her home. But they sent her off for treatment, they didn't send her home. Tried to treat her, and that was just awful, they gave her shock treatment and everything else, but anyway. She was just too, I don't know what it was that sent her off,

05:30 there was always something to trigger it. I feel. Even if this love affair with the officer was imagination I mean that triggered. Just silly simple things, it was strange wasn't it? But the men were doing it too. Must be something I don't know. Too much strain and not enough vitamins, not enough food perhaps I hadn't thought about that.

Well the strain and the fact that you are so far away from your loved ones,

06:00 And not getting any letters yeah. So that was the story, there were a few, but they were looked after. Once our colonel got sight of it she really tried to take care of them.

Did you see any girls that you thought, you could tell straight away that she might be one that succumbed to?

Well Pat was the only one in our hut and until she was telling the girls that I wouldn't come and sit beside her, she was really, she was just

06:30 the loveliest thing. We didn't realise, I don't know. But if anyone knew they would immediately go to the colonel and tell them.

And when AMWAS were sent home and were like Pat, in need of treatment where would they go? Would they to Heidelberg Repat. [Repatriation] or?

Well there was something, a place in Queensland wasn't there?

07:00 I've forgotten the name of it. Something with a G I think it was. They popped her in there off the boat, but she should have been sent home I think. I'm not a doctor. And they gave her shock treatment. And I went to Adelaide and saw her after she came home, because we really were great friends, and "Oh!" she said, "The shock treatment was just shocking." Nearly killed her. And then she went home, and anyway she died,

07:30 I don't know what of; whether she suicided or not I couldn't bear to find out. But I was never told either. It was just that she had died. That was very sad but there were only really odd cases of that.

Did the shock treatment change her? Did she come out of that a scarred, a mentally scarred person do you think?

Well I only saw her, had dinner with her and saw her in Adelaide a few times. And I don't know.

08:00 She was very quiet, but very nice when I met her and we talked. I think she got married, I think she married the boyfriend when she got home. But she wasn't well. I don't know, I have a feeling; what finished her I wouldn't say.

Okay.

That was just, I don't know.

08:30 **Perhaps we'll go onto something a little lighter.**

Yeah.

When you came back you were doing army driving again weren't you?

Just for a short time yes.

Was that, was it great to be home, were you full of joie de vivre and?

Well yes it was great because my friend Joan Olley was still in the unit. And all my old friends that I had known a long time and been very close to before, and that was a very happy time. Really was.

09:00 **Were you a bit of a superstar having been to New Guinea and ?**

No no, they didn't want to hear about it.

Didn't they?

No. Joan Olley didn't ever, she has never heard about any of these stories you've heard me tell about New Guinea.

Why ever not?

Well she was in Melbourne and she was busy.

Do you think she was a little bit jealous?

Oh I don't think so, I don't think she could care less. I think I had no right to go, I should have stayed in Melbourne with all of my friends.

Is that what you think?

That's what she told me, no, no that's what she'd say.

09:30 And even my other friends, they aren't interested, they don't want to hear, they think there were shops and towns. They do.

And tearooms.

Yeah.

God Lord, now tell us, did you catch up with your brother and your other family members pretty soon after coming back?

Oh yes. I went home.

How was that?

Oh great,

10:00 Sally my friend came with me. I went home and then there was a phone call to say come and get me, I'm in St Arnott or Stawell or wherever was the nearest train stop. And it didn't matter that petrol was rationing or everything else we had to go and get Sally. So that was great she came home, because she had been so ill in New Guinea, and she came up and we were home for a wee while. And that's when we decided to take off and go for this holiday. I mentioned that we went for a holiday in the Blue Mountains.

10:30 **Well that's a very bold move for two young lasses isn't it?**

What?

Heading off to Sydney by yourselves?

No, no not at all.

What did your beau in the country say when you said, "I'm back from the war, it's nice to see you. I'm heading off to Sydney?"

Well I think he said, "Well I think it's about time we got married isn't it?" And I said, "Oh well maybe."

You were very good at playing hard to get weren't you?

11:00 Well there was a drought on,

Well that was no excuse.

Yes it was, and he was on a property and the sheep were all down in Gippsland. He had a mother and a sister at home. Another sister had married and had two babies, and he was in Gippsland looking after all of these sheep. And he had a letter saying he was nearly at his wits end with his mother and his sister, I burnt it. Some of my daughters found it and read it and I thought that's the end of that letter.

11:30 It just wasn't the time. Because he had to house his mother, he had to get another home for them.

But were you still betrothed, are you still sort of promised to each other at this stage?

Well I wasn't promised to anyone because I was the only girl in the district, and he was the most eligible. And I was always going to marry him, mightn't have known it when I was much younger. And anyway there you go, you asked me, so he just,

12:00 I said I was going to Sydney; "If you want me, come and get me". But he didn't come. So I had to come home.

You had a year in Sydney did you not?

Yes yes. Some more.

That would have been great working for the Sydney Morning Herald?

Oh and it was nice and to be able to go and get to know Sydney and some of the girls could swap from Brisbane to Sydney to drive, but I missed out on that somehow, I like Queensland too much, I stayed there. But we felt we didn't know Sydney.

12:30 It was nice to get around and get to know it.

So I can imagine after a year living in Sydney, working at the Sydney Morning Herald, it would be a nice atmosphere, very cosmopolitan and interesting. What made you hanker to get back to western Victoria, was it the mystery man soon to be your 'one day' husband?

Oh well we knew that one day would come. So I thought, "Well I'll go home and if nothing eventuates, if the mother is still" - we had to have a home to live in

13:00 you just don't get married, not in the country those days because things were pretty tough then. And I thought, "Well I'll go back home seeing I am suppose to be there." And I said so, so he said, "There'll be a wedding" and he found a home for his mother in Stawell; it was a big move for them too to leave their home. But that's what happened in the country properties:

13:30 the son stayed on the home and the parents moved on. Well they still do it really, in the district where we are. So that was the story of that and I was married a month later. So that's romantic for you.

That's very romantic. I did note in the notes though when you spoke to Brett out there you said to your husband, "Well I'm off to England now"?

Well yes. Sally and I were home and if he couldn't make up his mind and if nothing eventuated I was off to England. I was, that's true.

14:00 Because she was longing to go. She had a wonderful life Sally.

What did she do?

Married, she went to work for Eveready. That was new in Sydney at the time, they needed a geologist and they got him out from America, and he did all the manganese mining. They didn't do the mining, he went around and mapped out all of the, all

14:30 the manganese in Australia is. I don't think it has been mined yet. But then anyway she went off, she was a driver-come-aide to Mr Brisbane, the manger of Eveready, and then she and Gill were married and they went off to India and Nepal. They went to Fiji for their honeymoon and they were there for weeks. And then off to India and Nepal. They had a fairytale life and

15:00 then back to America to educate their two children.

Sounds like a great time.

Yes she's quite a lady.

Do you still keep in contact?

Yes she might be out any day.

Oh great.

Yeah so there you go, she comes out quite frequently. And I'm wearing her bracelet for good luck.

Lovely bracelet, what stones are they?

Topaz, golden topaz. But I haven't worn it for years and I just thought I'll wear it to remind me of Sally.

15:30 **So you got married?**

Yes.

I'm not talking about a surprise; I'm surprised he let you go for so long actually. Did you then stop work as a married woman or did you keep working?

I married a quite eligible gentleman; I didn't work. Oh yes I worked in the homestead and I did lots of community work and I loved it, oh yes.

And how did, because we were talking about the changing roles of women post war,

16:00 **how did you feel that having been through the war, having worked in the army you had a lot of skills, how had that changed you as a woman?**

Oh I well I was very unfortunate. I was just fortunate that I had all that background. When my children were quite small my husband threw a heart attack and died. Oh it was worse than that, I was in Melbourne for the day

16:30 and I received word and I went off my head. I went home and after things, I had a property to run, a large four thousand property, merino stud sheep. And when you're young and with children you don't think that is going to happen to you, it's never going to happen. It just happened like that. So I just had - I had learnt to be independent in the army and thank goodness I had because where would I be without it?

17:00 I just had to get up and stand on my feet and fight. So there you go. It was just as well I had my little

fairytale wasn't it? Because I hadn't ever dreamed of, and I had a lovely, I did normal things in the country: I went to Red Cross, I only did the drama in the CWA [Country Women's Association], I did all the blood banks. And oh did all kinds of things, anything in the community I was

17:30 included in and I went. I was regional secretary for the Gradins region of Red Cross. Out nearly every day in my car, and then all that stopped, but I had that for a while. And I had two children, I had my son at Melbourne Grammar and Fiona was at Merton Hall, and then I had this property. I had to stand up and I really had to, it was very difficult being a woman

18:00 amongst all of the men. You just didn't rate.

I'm sure.

But I did it.

Good on you.

For a wee while, then my son went to Marcus Olden and there you go. He came back and then he threw a heart attack and died.

Very sad.

So there you go.

I'm sorry to hear that.

18:30 So the property is a wee bit (UNCLEAR). But thank goodness for lots of thing. But I really think the army was, it helped, it must have helped all of those women who were in it to be independent and on their feet and go. I'm sure it did.

Do you think the fact that there were so many women in the army and in the land army as well, that found out that all these things that men had said, "You can't do that", you could actually do,

19:00 **did that help as a spring-board for the women's movement later on in the '60's and so forth?**

Oh I'm sure it did. But I'm sure those women who were army officers, I'm sure they were working for all that type of thing too. I'm quite sure.

19:25 **INTERVIEW ENDS**