

Australians at War Film Archive

Janet Darling (Pat) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Pat, can we begin with a brief summary of your life and career?**

My life and my career, yes, well I started off as a child on a farm. My father wasn't really a farmer. His father had been the Dean of Sydney and his great grandfather was German of course, so with a name like Gunther it couldn't be anything else

01:00 and he had, after he did some training as a Lutheran he went across to, this is my great grandfather, he went across to Oxford and did his MA [Master of Arts] and DD [Doctor of Divinity], married an Englishwoman and they settled in Mudgee and he was the archdeacon in that district for that length of time. He was also one of the founders of the King's School and his eldest son

01:30 also became an archdeacon. That was my father's father, and, but my father didn't have any leanings towards that at all. He went on the land, not awfully successfully and my mother came from Scottish, an old Scottish family and we just lived the sort of, a farm kids' life in the sense we had our own tennis court, we played tennis, we rode,

02:00 we did different things like that. We had a simple life but certainly not one where there was very much money in any way, and then when I was about 16 or 17 I said I wanted to be a nurse and one of my aunt's had done medicine and she had been a resident at PA, at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and she said, "Well there's only one hospital for you to go to and that's

02:30 the PA, Prince Alfred." which I did when I was 19 and it was very interesting. It was my first contact with living with a lot of people as we did in the nursing homes in those days, and I think I made friends. We all said the same thing; this is years later, that we made friendships that lasted forever because of our close contact with one another.

03:00 When I finished my training I went to the Potts Point private nursing establishment club mainly to try private nursing as a different aspect of nursing to which I'd been accustomed and then, that would've been about '37 or '38 that I was there, and then when war broke out, well we knew war had to

03:30 break out of course because there were two authors who wrote very good books about that. One was John Gunther, an American, and he wrote Inside Europe and the other one was Vincent Sheehan I think, an Englishman, and he wrote Insanity Fair, and they both gave a very good coverage of what the situation was like in Europe and also at that stage we were receiving quite a number of refugees, particularly

04:00 Jewish people, and then war broke out on the 3rd of September 1939. When the, the army started the recruitment for nurses I naturally put my name down to go and I think I missed my first call up because I was in the country on a case at the time the call came through, and then

04:30 in, the 27th of November 1940 I had a call and I went out to the barracks and I was sent out to Tamworth after I got my equipment and I was there for about three weeks, this is over Christmas, and I went on leave then and when I came back from leave I was told I was to go on pre-embarkation leave as I had already been

05:00 allotted, I suppose you'd call it, to a hospital. So, the 10th Australian General Hospital, the 10th Australian, this was with the 8th Division and we embarked on the Queen Mary in Sydney Harbour and the girls, the Queensland nurses were already

05:30 there, and they said that Lady Gowrie, the wife of the then Governor General, had visited the ship the day before and she said she couldn't tell the girls their destination, but that they were the luckiest nurses to leave Australia. Well we sailed from Sydney on the 4th of February 1941. It was a beautiful day and people farewelled the convoy of ships. This was led by the

06:00 very beautiful old ship, the Aquitania and the, well Mary was next and the New Amsterdam and another

one starting with, the Mauritania, and I think there was another one, I'm not absolutely sure. So we picked up troops from the, Melbourne and also our commanding officer of our hospital and the matron, more nurses, then we went to Perth,

- 06:30 Fremantle, where we, some of the patients were put off there. When we got to, when we left Fremantle the other ships lined up and the Queen Mary steamed slowly passed them. All the ships had, fore and aft, bands playing the "Maori's Farewell." When we got to the end of the line
- 07:00 we, the Queen Mary with a tremendous burst of speed turned to the right. We knew then that our destination was Singapore. So we arrived in Singapore on the 18th of February 1941. On the 15th of February 1942 we, I with 31 other army nurses was a prisoner of the Japanese.
- 07:30 But to digress a little, the hospital was sent up to Malacca which was a pleasant little town on the west coast of Malaya and we met many of the British who belonged either to the Colonial Service and some, quite a few of the planters, and it was very interesting meeting the planters because they
- 08:00 took, it was almost like a benign feudal system that they worked on. The, kampong or village nearby was practically supported by the plantation and altogether it was a very pleasant life if you could stand up to the climate. So we had, really it was very, really it was quite pleasant. We were allocated quarters with the British Colonial Service Hospital and the work was not very arduous. Then in, mostly it was like just being a garrison troop. Then we,
- 09:00 on leave we'd go to Singapore or to Kuala Lumpur or up, we also went up to the Hill Station just for a short period. Kuala Lumpur, which was the capital of the Federated Malay States, and Singapore were absolutely flooded with servicemen. There were Australians, there were British, there were the Ghurkhas, there were the Indians and it seemed as though we were well protected but occasionally an older patient would say
- 09:30 it's a wonder, "Well you know Sister, if war does break out we'll be caught like rats in a trap." Anyway sometime in September, no I think, yes September, the 13th Australian General Hospital came over and they didn't have a hospital to go to so some of them were seconded to us. Then in, sometime in, a little later the war ships, the [HMS] Repulse and the [HMS] Prince of Wales came out, but
- 10:00 they didn't have an aircraft carrier and in, on December the 8th our peaceful life came to an end when the Japanese, without declaring war, bombed Singapore, Kota Bahru invaded northern Malaya and bombed the Pearl Harbor, the American naval station there
- 10:30 and on the 12th of December both the Prince of Wales and the Repulse were sunk in the Malacca Straits. When Winston Churchill [British Prime Minister] said, "Truth is the first casualty of war." he really should have added, "And human life the most expendable commodity." By this time the 13th AGH
- 11:00 were allocated a hospital or portion of the asylum in Johor Bahru which is the state just north of Singapore and we in Malacca were too far away from our troops to receive many war wounded so we were moved down to them on, just after Christmas 1941, 1940 sorry.
- 11:30 And we were very busy there because we were receiving quite, you know, train loads of wounded and we had like most people who are sent from one hospital to another, 'cause we were put on, most of us were put on night duty to relieve their own staff and sleep during the
- 12:00 daytime was just about impossible because we had dogfights overhead from the Japanese when the British and Australian Air Force would chase the Japanese after they had bombed Singapore. They'd tried to prevent them getting there anyway. Then in about the middle of January both hospitals were evacuated to Singapore. The 10th AGH to the northern side and
- 12:30 the 13th AGH to the southern side. There, we were extremely busy and the Japanese of course intensified their attack as they came down the peninsula. They had well and truly infiltrated, there was no question of that, this had been done, been well and truly before and that was why they were able to get through
- 13:00 the British and the Australian troops, and we, well, the ward I was in charge of was two concrete tennis courts covered by a huge marquee which wasn't actually the safest place to be and we were supposed on an alert of course, to go to the trenches. Well you can imagine that. It wasn't
- 13:30 just an alert, it was the whole time. I never took any notice of it, I just kept on working and I was always thankful for two things, one was that my voice and my hands remained perfectly steady. My knees used to get a bit wobbly at times but still, and I can remember one day when we were being shelled, when I say we I mean Singapore, they were going over us and every time one went over the patient used to say to me, "Sister, don't worry about that one." 'cause we were all waiting
- 14:00 for the next one, and one of the doctors came down and he said to me, "For goodness sake, Sister, get under the table!" and I said, "There's no way I can get my work done from there." 'cause then he left I think in disgust. There was nothing, no point in talking to me. So then we had, our native servants of course left so we took our meals in the ward with the patients and
- 14:30 the orderlies were absolutely marvellous. You know, you got a train load of wounded in it was amazing, I

was always amazed at the quiet efficiency which they all worked, and remember this, that very often they were working whilst the bombs were falling. The, that was about, this went on until the 11th of February and matron came and she said, "I have been ordered to

- 15:00 send half the nurses out. Those of you who are prepared to stay move to my side." and this we did in a body. This is the 10th AGH, and of course then she had the wretched task of choosing whom to send out and I was amongst the ones who were left behind, and they left on the Empire Star and eventually after a very hazardous trip got
- 15:30 back to Australia. Then on the 12th one of the doctors came to me where I was working and said, "Don't you know the sisters are leaving?" and I said, "Nobody's told me, I'll just say goodbye to the patients." and I can remember his tired exasperated voice saying, "Do you always have to do the right thing?" and I said, "Yes, particularly this time." because we all
- 16:00 knew the Japs were near and I couldn't let them think I'd just disappeared. So we went to the ambulances and of course you don't see anything from an ambulance, particularly an army ambulance. We were taken to the Cathedral, St Andrews, and accounted for where we met the 13th AGH and the 2/4th sisters there. Then from there we were taken to a small
- 16:30 wharf with a small ship standing beside it and it was the Vyner Brooke. It had been the Rajah of Sarawak's private yacht, one of his older ones. So eventually about four o'clock, this would have been about midday by, a bit after midday by then, about four o'clock we went, we left the harbour or tried to, and a naval launch with an
- 17:00 officer standing on the front deck with a revolver in his raised hand shouted to the captain, "Stop and await further sailing orders." Anyway, about 11, we just curled up on the deck and slept there because there was very little under, you know, undercover accommodation and
- 17:30 about eleven o'clock we felt a lighter bump up against the ship and we could hear people pouring in. Where they went I don't know, they must have gone down into the hold. So we set forth some time around about midnight and all next day, the captain, the ship was so tiny, he was able to hide it amongst the mangroves because he had been chased around the island by the Japanese
- 18:00 planes for a whole week or so and had come into Singapore hoping to have a rest. Anyway that was Friday the 13th. On Saturday the 14th we set off again and this poor little ship couldn't make much speed and about ten o'clock three small Japanese planes came along and machine-gunned the decks. Of course, by this time we'd all gone inside
- 18:30 and they holed the life boats on the portside and then about quarter to two we saw a flight of Japanese bombers coming towards us and, so we all went inside again and there were eight of them,
- 19:00 and we had a little two inch gun in the forward deck and that did its best but one of the first bombs that fell got the gun and its crew. Well they could come down quite low. Another bomb went through one of the, I was going to say chimney, a funnel, and of course went through and did a lot of damage to the engine room and the ship almost immediately
- 19:30 lurched to the starboard, and so the order was given to abandon ship and they launched two life boats and Cath Noyce, Win Davis and I had gone into one of the officer's cabins and Cath said to me, "Pat, I'm
- 20:00 bleeding from my left hip, and I didn't have time to look at it." and I said, "No, well let's get you into a boat." So we went down the ladder, and I might add that water was pouring down this ladder too and the women and children were coming down so I put Cath into the boat and looked around and saw women and children coming down and I said to Win Davis who had followed, "Look, we can't stay here, and have to leave it
- 20:30 to the women and children." so I gave my tin hat to Cath in case she needed it to bail water and said, "See you on the beach." We were within, I'm no good at distance, but probably not much further than say Neutral Bay from the shore and naturally you think well, I'll get ashore on this. We all had our life belts on anyway. So then
- 21:00 Cath and I got out of the boat, not Cath and I, Win and I got out of the boat, saying to Win, "See you on the shore." and we found there were dead bodies floating around already 'cause people had jumped overboard and they, life belt had gone up and would've broken their necks as they hit the water and
- 21:30 we found a spar and hung on to it for a long time. We were trying to push it to the shore, and then about four o'clock, the girls whose watches stopped, they all stopped at quarter past 2, so we had that time, around about that, I had a little watch and it kept on going and about four o'clock a raft picked us up and that had Sister Simons on board. She was one of the 13th
- 22:00 AGH and they picked us up and they had one of the burned gunners on board with them and he was in a great deal of pain so I had a vial of morphia in my pocket so I just shook out a handful and gave him, not a handful but you know, half a dozen tablets or so, gave him that to swallow because he was in a great deal of pain and all night long we struggled. No, about five o'clock,
- 22:30 I should go back and say we saw smoke stacks in the distance and we said, "The good old British Navy,

wouldn't let us down." and anyway they anchored near us in, about midnight. It was the Japanese landing fleet. So they set out from, it was quite interesting actually, they set out from the stern of the big ships fully laden with fully armed soldiers

- 23:00 these motor boat things and off they sped to the shore. At about eight o'clock next morning we were still struggling and we were well and truly, we were probably only 200 yards from the shore at this stage and you could see the Japs on the shore and we didn't know which way to try and pull the thing. Anyway they came out on a boat and they were quite kind and gentle and they pulled us ashore, pulled us on board. I was the first one they grabbed and I thought,
- 23:30 "Well I'm not going to be the only one." so immediately turned around to grab Win and they pushed me aside quite gently and pulled the others ashore into the boat, and they took us ashore and they were a medical group and quite kind. They gave us food and they gave us something to drink and about ten o'clock a big bomber came over and they were very excited, "Americano, Americano!" We didn't have a clue but we wouldn't have told them anyway, and
- 24:00 then they took us to a house. There was a dead Indonesian lying nearby, to get some dry clothes to change into, and the little Japanese who was quite a polite little fellow was showing us around and telling us to take what we wanted, we didn't like to take very much, and then he took from the wall
- 24:30 a mirror and showed me myself and I was horrified. My hair was full of black oil. Ships have an amazing amount of oil and my face was purple, my skin, my eyes were scarlet and I sort of went, "How terrible!" and of course he doubled up with mirth which I was relieved at because it was a normal reaction, and one just thought, you know, "Thank goodness they're human." and
- 25:00 they took us to a crude shower room where we managed to change and try and get the oil out of our clothes and things and they took us to a shed adjacent to a pig sty and had a dirt floor, it did have a bench on it so we lay down and rested there, and then they had by this time taken away the British sailor and the Malay wireless operator who were on the
- 25:30 raft with us and we wondered where they were so Win and I had a look around and we found them in a line. The sea is very shallow there and the ships hadn't been able to come in close so there they were in a line with all the others, mostly Japanese hand unloading from this ship. So that was a relief to know that they were still the same. Next day
- 26:00 they walked us to Muntok which took about two hours and at the school there we met up with other sisters and our numbers were then 29. There were 65 of us on the ship, 65 army nurses on the ship and some had been hit, kicked or slapped. Very few had been given
- 26:30 food so we realised how lucky we had been. The men, our men, you know, the civilian internees, they had cooked a meal for us of rice and stewed vegetables and we just lay down on the floor and slept there. That was our first night. Next day they, that was the second night on Banka Island and then next day they marched
- 27:00 us all, men, women and children up to the coolie lines and they were, it was a square of atap [palm frond] huts. Atap is a bit like, anyway they make it from palm fronds. They gave us two meals a day of rice and watery vegetables.
- 27:30 We slept on bali-balis which are a long slab down each side of the huts. The huts were divided into sections. It was all very dirty and horrible and the people who had been landed and been captured before us, there were quite a few doctors and nurses and they had set up an RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and so
- 28:00 those of us who were well enough we worked on the, at the RAP. You did either an afternoon or a morning duty which was quite good, which was very good actually because you met a lot of people and heard a lot of very interesting stories. One of the saddest things of course was when people were asking questions about other friends of theirs whom they knew or
- 28:30 thought had joined different ships and it was said that 28 ships had been bombed and sunk or beached in that small area and nobody would ever know how many bodies lay underneath. This is going to take two days, sorry.

You're doing well, this is fine. Please keep going because it's a very good account.

I'll try and cut it more.

We'll go back and ask further questions later, but

- 29:00 **I think the approach that you're taking is fine so just keep on talking as it is. Normally I would have to ask questions but I don't have to because you're doing such a good job.**

You don't like to. Now, just trying to think. You see, it was, strange enough it was very interesting because we met Air Commodore Modin [?] and he had been stationed at Banka. He was in charge, and

- 29:30 he told us how they had all been lined up, the airfield had been, had deep trenches dug through them so that the enemy planes couldn't land them. So he said there we were all lined up with machine guns

with, in front of us on the other side with Japanese soldiers attending to them and he said, you know, "We looked at one another

30:00 and said, 'well, didn't expect it to end like this,' and said goodbye to this one and goodbye to that one and all the rest of it." and then the Japanese came along and gave them huge shovels, you see, and told them to fill in the trenches which they had to do. He said that their relief was so great they could hardly lift the shovels. Anyway, and another one we met was, what was his name, now isn't it dreadful?

30:30 He later became head of the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation].

Charles Moses?

No, not Charles. He wasn't a prisoner. I don't think Charles was a prisoner. Hank Findlay, yes, and an Englishman who had been managing or possibly owned a plantation in Sumatra were planning to escape

31:00 because the Englishmen said that he knew the Achenese and they were the indigenous people of Sumatra and he said they are a terribly strong people and terrific fighters. He wanted to escape because he was going to, if he could, get them stirred up and form a sort of semi army. Anyway, and Hank Findlay then was quite happy to go with him and Pat Blake who was much skinnier than

31:30 I even, and I was skinny in those days, she and I said, "We'll go with you if you like. We can manage one all by ourselves." and they didn't seem to be very impressed. Anyway I saw Hank Findlay a few days later and he was suffering from dysentery so we knew that he wouldn't be going. We didn't hear any more about the other man. Then one day they lined all the ships' captains up and as you can imagine

32:00 there were a lot of them and the officer in charge said that he wanted anyone with a Master Mariner's Certificate to step forward and of course they stood full square to the wind. Not one of them moved. He had the grace to laugh I must admit, but they had their ways of making people, they had no option. They don't actually threaten to shoot the captain but they are prepared to take out their, sorry.

32:30 **Pat, wasn't there a story where you had to make yourself less attractive to the Japanese?**

Yes, that's quite true but that was not until we were taken back to Palembang and they sent the servicemen off first. When we got to the coolie lines there were 29 of us, then about three days later Betty Jeffrey

33:00 and Iole Harper came in and they had swum into a mangrove area and were rescued by a local fisherman and so they were very distressed. Then about a week later Viv Bullwinkle came in and she had been in the boat, in the life boat that I put Win, not Win, Cath

33:30 into and they had landed on the beach about five o'clock and they lit fires as beacons for us to make our way to because we couldn't get there. Anyway, next day a group of Japanese came and ordered them to stay where they were but the women with small children with the heat, of course they had to find somewhere for their children so they went into a small village and the nurses decided to stay

34:00 with the wounded men. There were quite a few men who had been wounded and were on the boat, and then another Japanese patrol came along and they took the men away and came back wiping their bayonets, ordered the nurses into the sea and Viv Bullwinkle walked into the sea with Cath actually and

34:30 when they got to a certain depth they machine gunned them and of course Viv for a while thought you know, she had to be dead because she'd been shot and when she realised she was alive she came ashore and met a badly wounded English soldier. He was in the Australian Army but he was an Englishman and he had feigned death after the bayoneting and for a while

35:00 the native people supplied them with food but understandably they were terrified of being caught by the Japs, they would be very badly treated by them so she came in and she was able to tell us that there were 21 of the girls who were dead, who'd been shot and she was the only survivor so that made us 32 altogether.

35:30 After we had been in Muntok, I think it was about a fortnight, the servicemen were taken back to Singapore and Sister James, our senior sister, gave a list, an account of what had happened to one of our nurses to Air Commodore Modin, ask him to give it to our CO [Commanding Officer] and ask them to keep quite about it because we were afraid that if that

36:00 became general knowledge then our lives would be in jeopardy too, and this he did. The next lot to leave of course were the civilian men and then the next day we women left and I can remember as we slipped away from, through the straits, all the spars and different things of ships that had been sunk standing out and the

36:30 most beautiful rainbow appeared and we thought, "That's good luck." And we arrived at Palembang on the east coast of Sumatra about five o'clock to find that the men had prepared a meal for us and we were there in a cinema so we just lay down on the floor and slept, and next morning we were, no that's right, next morning we were

37:00 taken by trucks, standing room only of course, through the streets, and some of the local population

jeered at us but mostly they ignored us and, which was the best thing to do, and we were taken to quite nice houses, had no furniture of course. I don't remember being given any

- 37:30 rations at all by the Japs, but local Indonesians living nearby gave us, our house anyway, some, quite a decent little bag of flour and some palm oil so we made ourselves fried scones with that and that's virtually what we lived on. Some of the nurses walking one day were invited into a house which had actually furniture and it had a wireless and they said, "You might like to listen to the news."
- 38:00 and luckily they heard that the nurses who had left the day before us had arrived back in Australia and that was a great relief to us because we didn't know what had happened to them. Then the Japanese had the bright idea that 32 healthy young Australians would be good for prostitutes. So they invited us to a cocktail party. So of course this is when we got
- 38:30 to work, we rubbed ashes into our hair and washed most of it out and into our skin, washed most of it out, and I know when I walked in I heard somebody say, "Who's that?" so I knew I'd done a good job, and one of the sisters of course clumped along in men's boots, we were the most unsightly crew I can tell you. They wanted, they offered us alcohol, but of course we were very prim and proper and said, of course we didn't drink, nurses in Australia didn't drink
- 39:00 alcohol, but we got to work on the, all the savouries and demolished those. After an hour or it may have been two hours, I can't remember, just talking generally, they are very polite and then they said that four had to stay and four of them did stay and they volunteered to stay. So we went back to the house, you know, too scared to go to sleep and completely worried about the others,
- 39:30 and then about 10 minutes, quarter of an hour, it might have been 20 minutes there was a knock on the windows, "It's all right, you can go to sleep. We got rid of them." Of course they were so unattractive, they wouldn't tempt anybody, and then we had in camp a very nice German woman, a Mrs Holbeig, and her husband had been a doctor, he was a doctor in Palembang and he got in touch with the hierarchy of the Japanese Army
- 40:00 and we had no further problems with them until a little bit later on. We were kept in those houses for about a fortnight.

Can I stop you there, Pat because we actually have to change the tape.

Tape 2

- 00:35 **So to continue the story on, you've mentioned that there was no further troubles at this stage from the Japanese when it came to those sort of proposals. Could we continue the story on from there?**
- Yes. We were moved later and just a few days later after the incident, and I should say, yes I've told you that Dr Holbeig got in touch with the
- 01:00 hierarchy and we were moved a few days later to much smaller houses and this time we were behind barbed wire for the first time, and we had 24 people in our house which wouldn't have been any bigger than this unit if it was as big. There were 17 of whom were nurses and
- 01:30 we elected a British Camp Commandant and the Dutch elected a Dutch Camp Commandant and they dealt directly with the Japanese so that we had no need to have any contact with them. The guards of course marched up and down and back and around, such and such, and you were supposed to bow to them as you passed them. There were a few incidents of face slapping but not a lot.
- 02:00 It was in this camp that they started the vocal orchestra which was a great thing to happen in camp, but apart from that they also started a series of talks in the evenings because the moonlight gets very bright and we used to have those and different people gave different talks on
- 02:30 things that had happened in their lives and they were all very interesting and that was good. And we formed a library. People who had books took them along and it was as civilised as you could be in camp. Then the Japanese officer who was in charge was a Captain Miyachi and he was really quite a handsome man and incredibly conceited.
- 03:00 So Mrs. Hinch who was our camp commandant was a person of impeccable manners and perfect tact and she used to flatter his ego and she said that a man of his education, blah blah blah, etcetera, would know that in the western world that the woman bowed her head gently and the man raised his hat and so we were allowed
- 03:03 to do that you see, just a slight bow, and then in this camp also Captain Miyachi called for a meeting of the women because the Japanese badly needed people to staff their hospitals. They needed the people to nurse their sick people. So we went to one of the larger houses which did have
- 04:00 furniture in it and we all went and, because it was well filled up, and Miyachi strode in and placed his

handsome sword across a very nice desk that he sat down in front of and talked about the need they had for people to nurse their sick people, and then he asked for volunteers

- 04:30 to come forward. So we slipped out of the low-silled windows and doors and everything like that and he looked absolutely savage with rage. Nothing he could do about it of course, and Mrs. Gilmour, called Gilly, generally, and Mrs Layland, they were both middle aged women, they went forward to offer their services and he just brushed them aside very rudely. He wasn't
- 05:00 interested in middle aged women, and so later on a group of women did go out. We called them 'the girlfriends' and they went out and obviously supplied the Japs with what they needed. Shortly after that four of the British nurses, two who were army nurses and two who were Colonial Service nurses they
- 05:30 went out and worked in a native hospital for six months and then they were put in gaol for six months, and they were, you know, starved and everything was miserable. We were in this house for probably 18 months and we had very poor rations. We had a ration
- 06:00 committee and Betty Jeffrey was our representative on that, and that would have been one of the hardest jobs of all because hungry people aren't easy to deal with. Later on a native trader with a bullock cart used to come in with extra supplies for people who could afford to buy them and also one of the sisters offered to,
- 06:30 one of the nuns offered to give drawing lessons, so I went along to them and found that I could draw quite nicely and I'll show you the pictures I did later if you haven't seen them, and we made cards from a photograph which would have been about that long and about that deep, and they were quite good to play. I had found a bottle
- 07:00 of black ink which had been thrown out of the window when people were escaping and the nun only gave lessons for about three weeks and she became, she was ill. Well you know, with the cloistered lives they lead it must have been terribly difficult for them.
- 07:30 And to earn money of course we made hats from the straw bags that they used to put the rice in. We made toy kangaroos from a bit of cloth and a bit of dried grass stuffing and sold those. All sorts of things we did, and a Chinese woman asked Pat Blake to mind her little boy in the mornings so that she could, you know, do her household
- 08:00 chores and Pat was paid for that, and she also knitted for him and I also made clothes for him and she wanted a hat made for him. So I had to make a real Akubra-style hat. I couldn't make a coolie hat for him because his father was a very wealthy Englishman and she was a wealthy woman in her own right, anyway, and we did all sorts of things like that to make
- 08:30 money and every now and then we'd have a sale of goods from people who wanted money and had goods for sale and I'd usually put in two small drawings, that they were done on just a, you know how a page has sometimes about that much free. It was a good quality paper and I had splashed out and bought myself a 4B pencil so I was right with that, and then, so we had other
- 09:00 ways of sort of earning money as best we could. We were in that camp for about nearly 18 months and then we used to chop wood and we had this awful wood that was springy and it used to fly up in the air and hit you on the head. I was knocked out with it myself.
- 09:30 Then we had a note, you see a lot of the women had husbands who were in the men's camp and then they could get messages through to them and they got permission to cut the wood for us and this was good because they'd send messages across in the wood to their wives and friends they had in camp. And one of the messages said "Get ready to move.
- 10:00 We are moving soon." So then the Japs gave us probably a day or so to know that we were moving. Well we didn't have much to pack anyway, so it wasn't difficult and we were taken away on a truck again only about a mile or so away to what had been the men's, the old camp, and they had left in a mess saying the Japs can clean this up, but
- 10:30 they put us in it and we cleaned it up and that was just atap huts, and we had bali-balis. A bali-bali is the bench thing that you sleep on and our allotted space was 22 inches, you can imagine. But I was lucky because a Mrs. Austin who was a very nice Australian, she had had a light pine door that she slept on in one of the houses in which she was and she said, "Yes, of course you can have it." so I put
- 11:00 it under the eaves. We had the tables under the eaves where we ate our meals and stools on which to sit, so I used to balance it on stools for the night and sleep out there, which was far better than inside and in this camp the vocal orchestra came into its real
- 11:30 strength there, and they used to, because we weren't allowed to have gatherings at night they used to hide behind the kitchen huts that kept the kitchens. Now the Japs must have heard them but of course they probably appreciated the music anyway, and our food in this camp was just
- 12:00 as bad, if not worse, than the previous camps and it had no running water. We had two wells. One had muddy water which was quite all right for cleansing down the ablutions block and the other one had clear water which possibly was quite pure but none of us was prepared to drink it so we had to go out to

a hydrant which is near the army barracks and probably about a kilometre away. So in the hottest time of the day we'd set off with our buckets on a long trail and go out and get a bucket of water and bring it back into camp,

- 12:30 but before we were allowed to do bring any water back into camp we had to fill the tong. The tong is a square thing about, a bit over a yard high, and they fill it up with water and just throw water over themselves. That's their way of bathing rather than sitting in a bath as we do, and we had to fill the tong of
- 13:00 the house that belonged to the sergeant of the guards. So the correct procedure was to tip your bucket of water in and then spit into it. I could never quite bring myself to spit into it but it was quite nice and frothy by the time we'd got it filled. So then we were allowed to bring water into camp and most of us had by this time got quite large soft drink bottles which we used to put in our buckets and
- 13:30 fill those and bring those in and slip them under our stools where, which was our section, and then fill up the tong, and the tong was at least as wide as this room, but, wider than that section across there, about another foot wider than that, so it carried quite a lot of water and that was all the water we had for the day, and that was, we did that from 1.00
- 14:00 until 3.00 o'clock. That was the hottest part of the day. The men had rolled out the centre of the camp. Their huts were in the square you see, and they had rolled out the centre and they had used it for more or less a playing field and it was like a rock. Anyway, the Japanese to give us something to do, told us to dig it up. So they gave us
- 14:30 chunkels which are huge, 7 foot handled hoes with a very large head so when we raised them up of course they just bounced off the hard soil, and then we eventually got it dug up and we planted it with, they gave us runners from sweet potatoes and we planted those and they were fertilised. There was a certain amount of money given out to the people who did that
- 15:00 job, not the digging but the fertilising and they fertilised it from the cess pool, from the toilet block, and then they grew very well of course, and then we were shocked when we heard that some of the internees were rushing out and getting the potatoes at night. We thought how terrible. Anyway the Japs came in and they cleaned up
- 15:30 the garden, kept all the tubers and left us with the greenery which was very generous of them. Then the camp, we continued doing a lot of the things we had done before. Our health wasn't too bad, , it was bad, but not to the extent it had become later on and we only
- 16:00 had very few deaths in these camps and 'the girlfriends' came back into camp of course and they were quite well dressed and quite healthy looking but the advantage of having them back was of course that they became friendly with the guards and they were able to get black market food in at night, and the four sisters came back, English sisters, and they were very distressed but
- 16:30 they improved greatly once they got amongst friends and realised that they were safe again, and we had one of our best concerts the day after Christmas Day and even the Japs attended that, and they obviously appreciated it, the guards that were on duty, there must have been a couple of extra ones who came in probably hearing about it. Then
- 17:00 sometime towards the latter part of '44 in November, well, we heard before that we were being moved again and we said, "Well it couldn't be worse." I never said that again. We were moved back to Muntok Island and this time we had a shocking trip. The boat seemed to be old,
- 17:30 whatever, and seemed to take much longer and when we arrived at Banka Island it was dark and we saw a Red Cross flag flying, and we thought, "Good, the Red Cross will probably be able to help us." and a very tired English voice said, "Don't put your faith in that, the Swiss Red Cross representative is married to a Japanese." So when we got to the shore, they always
- 18:00 shouted and screamed at us and they always had guns with fixed bayonets on them which is quite against the Geneva Convention and they always just, they didn't threaten us but they shouted and screamed at us. Of course, with the result that the sisters became separated into small groups 'cause we'd always tried to stay together. We then were taken; it was dark of course,
- 18:30 to our next camp there, and it was quite well built. It had a wide perimeter on outside with a fence which would've been about 18 feet high and the space would've been about 18 feet in width between the two, and so the guards were supposed to patrol around that. We had the hospital with us. Actually the hospital had moved back into camp in
- 19:00 our last hut camp in Palembang and they came over with us, and they had quite a lot of wells and they were filled with those round tubes, concrete tubes. Most of them didn't have any water in them so we started water carrying again and it was quite a nice walk actually and you went down to a
- 19:30 pretty little creek and they had made quite a nice fence around it with bamboo. It was really artistically done. So I wouldn't know how many times we walked back and forth with our buckets to get this water. It was down a hill of course. Then we were joined by a considerable number of people of Dutch extraction. We had every, I think every nationality apart from Japanese in

- 20:00 camp, and they brought with them lice, bed bugs and scabies. Scabies is a skin condition, and that soon became rife throughout the camp. Luckily the lice died out. I imagine our blood was such poor quality that they couldn't reproduce 'cause that does happen, and almost immediately, well within three weeks of being there, of course, a very high
- 20:30 percentage of us had malaria and we also had what they call "Banka Fever" which actually was typhus but under those conditions you don't use a word like typhus unnecessarily, because it's rather frightening for people who don't understand, and there were very few of us who were free of that.
- 21:00 But when you had a rigor, you see, the cold time is the worst by far, so we would have to borrow the blankets from the Dutch people who had come in. Well you can imagine, that's how the lice and the bed bugs and the whole lot spread. We then, what else happened? They had built the
- 21:30 roofs really quite high which gave a wide expanse to let fresh air in, but of course with the people in the cold section with the malaria they couldn't stand that, , so the commandants were able to get the Japanese to fill those in with mats, the space, and this work was done by a
- 22:00 Japanese guard who was quite a handsome fellow. He was more European looking than Japanese looking and he was said to be a sadist, he probably did have European blood in him, and considering the way that the Eurasians were treated it's not really surprising that some would turn to brutality. Anyway, his assistant was a delicately pretty,
- 22:30 Yugoslavian nun and they worked quickly and neatly together, precisely together, they worked very well. The next day the nun died. She was 25 years old and I'd been lying back with malaria and typhus and I was terribly upset about it, so one of the rubber trees, there were limbs had fallen down from it and had these beautiful orange autumn tone leaves on
- 23:00 it so I staggered across to that and got quite a bunch of small branches and took them across to the nuns who were running the hospital, and they thanked me so beautifully. I shall never forget how nicely they spoke, and you know, they really appreciated it. It seemed like another world somehow. Then when I went through the wards I saw Mrs. Maddams
- 23:30 and she had been one of those absolutely splendid people in our camp. She was a sort of a tower of strength to people and always cheerful, and she was terribly ill and she sat up to speak to me and I was so shocked by her appearance that I could never remember what she said. Anyway she died the next day and we were told that even the Japs were upset about her death. By this time the internees, this includes
- 24:00 the sisters of course, had to dig the graves and carry out the coffins, and also to make the coffins and they were given roughly sawn timber and they just made an oblong coffin, and as I say it took 20 people. They used to put them on three poles and have six people on each pole and one to lead out and one to stand at the back and just
- 24:30 support the coffin from the back because we were always frightened that somebody would stumble and it would, you know, possibly slide off, the coffin would. We were there till March, that was from November till March and we heard that we were being moved again and
- 25:00 one of the cheerful ones had said, when she knew we were going back to Muntok one of the cheerful ones had said, "Well, we'll be easy to dispose of there. I suppose that's why they're sending us over." but anyway they moved us back in, started in March and we had a shocking trip.
- 25:30 The ship seemed to be worse than ever and we got off at Palembang and got into the most ghastly train and that night Win Davis and I had been asked to be the nurses in the guard's van where there were three very sick women and Dr Smith who travelled with each contingent as they went across, and they
- 26:00 gave us tea in buckets full up to the brim so as the train rattled along of course they slopped over onto the ground, anyway, onto the floor of the carriage. Anyway, thankfully in the morning Win and I were relieved of our nursing duties and we had found quite reasonably comfortable seats to sit in the train,
- 26:30 and rations for the day were a good, great big lump of I imagine, we had decided it had been made from tapioca root, flour and sugar. It had a lot of sugar in it because it was spongy, and you couldn't bite into it but you could lick it and you could suck it and it would eventually, but it was very satisfying because of all the sugar I suppose.
- 27:00 But it was lovely to get into a train and to be travelling along and we had to pull down the blinds whenever we went through a station so that people couldn't see us, but most of the time we had them open and it was just absolutely lovely looking out on to the greenery and the little creeks that snaked along beside. We eventually arrived at Lahat which is towards the western section of the
- 27:30 Sumatra and from there we got onto next, this is next day of course, we got into trucks again, standing room only, and we went to Loebok Linggau to an old what's its name, it had
- 28:00 been, it had been a plantation but the previous owners had wrecked all the machinery and everything

like that and this time the huts were the worst that we had struck so far. All the huts leaked, the floors were dirt, the bali-balis were made of sawn timber but they weren't nailed down. They were just

- 28:30 slices of sawn timber and, I should say in the Muntok camp we went in 714 strong and the next day it was 712 and that was roughly what it was like, and we went into the hut at Loebok Linggau to find
- 29:00 we had the dirt floors again so we searched everything we could find there in the way of bits of sawn timber so that we could put out footwear, such as it was, we used wooden crompers, that's just a bit of wood with a bit of leather across the toe piece, and also something to put our, any rations that we had, they were very generous with their rations. They'd give
- 29:30 you things like course salt, you know, by the pound, and of course, we didn't throw it out. I don't know why, and this, there was quite a nice little creek that ran through the camp and on the other side of the creek was the hospital and the cookhouse, and the Japanese
- 30:00 guard's house was about a couple of hundred yards up from where we crossed it, and of course it was better not to think about what they tossed into the, and that was our only water supply and that was where we bathed, and the hospital there, some of the Australian nurses joined the staff there, but I stayed with the group
- 30:30 that we were with and that was Win Davis, Jess Doyle and Pat Blake and myself because Pat and Win were dysentery sufferers and it was better that we looked after them there than attempted to go down to the hospital. The hospital people actually did get slightly better rations than
- 31:00 than the other people, other internees, and pleas from the camp commandants for better food, for more medicines, etcetera, just fell as usual on to deaf ears. They did give, in the Muntok camp, the last one, they did give some quinine
- 31:30 but one lot that was sent to the hospital had been smashed in an accident so the nuns boiled it all up and sieved and sieved and sieved through gauze to get all the glass particles out of it and used it as a fluid, and, but the food was rice of the worst possible quality. We used to say it was the floor
- 32:00 sweepings and I'm quite sure a lot of it was. It contained grubs and grit and all sorts of unspeakable things. It was just boiled up. We did grow, we tried, it was beautiful soil, we did try to grow some vegetables. We grew some of the hong hang I think they call it. It's like a spinach, but we couldn't grow very much of it, and I grew the most beautiful pumpkin vine
- 32:30 that had the most beautiful flowers on it and every flower was a male flower and one of the English nurses grew one which was exactly the same and one day when I went passed, she had grown it over a big a big stump, one of the days when I walked past I saw her carefully trying to fertilise it with a long thing of grass, and I laughed and she said, "Well something might happen." and something did. She got a horrible looking little black object which was
- 33:00 between the size of a tennis ball and a cricket ball. Anyway, one day when I walked past I noticed it was missing so I said to Mary, "What did it taste like?" She said, "Horrible." so it wasn't, and that was a shocking camp and the death rate continued and as I say, it took so many of us to carry, it took 20 of us and of course if we had three
- 33:33 funerals in a day it was hard to get 60 people, you know, and you certainly couldn't do two lots of carrying, those of us who were well enough. So then the Japs, honestly they said that they were having a concert. They were coming in, obviously they had appreciated the fact that this particular camp had created the vocal orchestra. So
- 34:00 we were very snooty about it and we said, "We need food for the body, not for the soul." So we weren't going until they, and they always shouted and screamed at you, and so we went and of course the first thing as we were walking up was "Poet and Peasant." It's really good, it was amazing so we went up and there they were, an immaculately turned out band and they stood strictly to
- 34:30 attention, even the tenor who was very, very good. The only thing that moved about him was his head and that went up and down, so we sat there and it was a lovely experience. It had a marvellous feeling. For the first time I realised what a pretty area this camp was in which I hadn't before and they had the most beautiful dragonflies and you'd put a finger like
- 35:00 that and one would settle on it. They were absolutely beautiful. What else did they do? By this time they had employed the Indonesian soldiers and they were small people, always polite and smiling and they had their rifle with a fixed bayonet on it and one day Barbara Luftletter, she was one of the Dutch Eurasians,
- 35:33 on the side of the Dutch Eurasians, and she saw a pig in the creek so she rushed up to the first hayho as we called them, first Indonesian soldier and asked him to shoot it and he tapped his rifle and said that he had a rifle but no bullets, and that cheered us up 'cause we said, "Good, they're not game to arm the locals, then the war must be coming to an end."
- 36:00 And then they said, in the usual fashion they used to tip the rations out on to the ground and then after they'd baked in the sun for a while the ration committee was allowed to collect them, you see. This

particular day they said, "You get no rations today." because one of their very senior generals was coming to visit the camp and they wanted him to see how much food we got. So the

- 36:30 next day, another heap was tipped on top of that and the next day the same thing happened. By the time the third steamy hot tropical day, of course there was an unpleasant aroma of rotting vegetables floating through the camp so they said we could collect our rations, so we all lined up with buckets, and they just virtually stuck spades into the heap and tipped them into your bucket, and I went through a whole
- 37:00 bucketful and got about a tablespoon of edible food out of it. Then the children who had fathers in the men's camp were allowed to visit them. This hadn't happened before, and this was quite all right for children who were old enough to remember their older
- 37:30 brothers who on reaching puberty had been sent across to the men's camp, but for some of the little ones, of course, when they saw these big hairy men they just cried. They were terrified of them and one small family said, "Daddy just cried all the time when we told him Mummy was dead." Well you can imagine the despair. The most tragic people, the most pitiful people actually in camp were the women with young children. There was
- 38:00 nothing you could do to help them and, except sort of give them moral support because we got so little food, all of us. They did get a little bit extra for their children and this was arranged by the camp commandants and, so then we had the very important general
- 38:30 did come a day after the extra rations had been kept for him to see and he, actually, we were very amused because he was a fellow who used to come around through the camp just in a boiler suit, nothing to indicate rank or anything like that, and of course he came in with all his medals on and all the rest of it, and his studs. He was a five star general and he just talked to the children
- 39:00 and some of the women as he always had when he'd come in just as a, an ordinary, you know, somebody dressed in a boiler suit. What else can I tell you about that? And then we had letters, we got mail three times. Once when we were in the men's camp and once when we were in our final camp.
- 39:33 And that some of the letters were quite full letters and they talked about demobbing [demobilization] and things like that in Australia and we thought, "What has happened, the war must be over?" but we still didn't quite know until Siki said that he was, Captain Siki by this time. I'm muddling these things up a bit, but Captain Miyachi had been
- 40:00 deposed, this was in our first camp in Palembang and he'd been replaced by Siki and we always called him "Siki the Sadist." and he was going to address, we felt he had to be telling us about peace but we couldn't believe it because we'd never heard him say anything that ever gave us any pleasure.

Pat, we're going to have to

- 40:30 **change our camera roll.**

Tape 3

- 00:01 **There was a film called "Paradise Road?"**

Yes, this is right, yes.

So this is the same vocal orchestra?

Yes, and then the very interesting part about that was that I hadn't told you of course was the fact that with the vocal orchestra there were three Colijn girls who came in. At the beginning of the European war Colijn was the Prime Minister of Holland and these were his grandchildren.

- 00:30 **So Pat, we were just talking, you were just talking then about when, was it "Siki the Sadist" came around and was inspecting and talking to the children in the camp?**

No, no, no. I don't, I have no idea what his name was but he was a five star general.

That was the general, was it?

And he was the one who used to come into the camp every now and then in a boiler suit and talk to the children and some of the women and

- 01:00 it was interesting that they were always very affectionate. They liked the children and they never reprimanded them in any way. See, at one stage we were told we had to refer to them as Nipponese and their country not as Japan but as Nippon, but the little fair haired Dutch boys used to go around saying quite audibly, "Der Jap."

- 01:30 and they never reprimanded them or did anything. I mean, they let them starve to death, but that's

nothing. We only lost I think two children in our camp and I believe some of the camps lost quite a few, but Captain Siki, yes Captain Siki I think Captain Miyachi must've been considered inadequate in

- 02:00 his job and Captain Siki was a member of the Kempetai and they were the equivalent of the German Gestapo and it was a much harsher rule amongst Captain Siki. It used to be quite amusing, when we had concerts even before the vocal orchestra was formed
- 02:30 of course, two guards would attend. One was usually Siki and the other one, we just called him "Ah Fat." He was sergeant of the guards and he was a big fat fellow. Siki enjoyed the classical bits, very much so. "Ah Fat" loved anything to do with a leg show with any of the dancers and things, absolutely typical, but they couldn't understand satire
- 03:00 at all. It was quite amusing because Ena Murray who was Norah Chamber's sister, she had done dancing and she used to do a dance which was very pretty and graceful, and then just for a bit of fun Norah Chambers and another lass, a New Zealander, used to go in and they used to do a skit on the same theme and we thought that was hilarious and very, very funny and they couldn't see anything funny about that at all.
- 03:30 And there were a lot of things that made you realise that you couldn't, the difficulties between the east and the westerners. When we were in camp in Palembang in the first lot of houses, the dogs came to live with us. Well, we had practically no food for ourselves and there was very little we could give them. When the rations came in they were
- 04:00 just tipped from the truck onto the street, and the ration committee had to beat off the dogs, particularly if there was any meat there, they had to beat off the dogs before they could sort the things out, and at one stage the Japanese said that if we took the dogs down to their guard house that they would shoot them, and that was the only sensible thing to do, so a sad trail of people took
- 04:30 about I suppose maybe 20 dogs down and within about 10 minutes quite a few of the dogs struggled back into camp with bayonet wounds. Well of course a lot of women fainted and I don't think there was anybody in camp who wasn't in tears, and then they had to be caught and taken back in and this time they didn't come back and the Japanese couldn't understand
- 05:00 it. They said, "But we tell you about our battles and how many of your men and soldiers we have killed and all you do is laugh." Of course they couldn't understand that we weren't going to admit that we were upset about anything like that, and we have heard of course, rumours always come around about how they would tie a brick around the neck of a dog and then throw them into the pool and then they'd poke it under.
- 05:30 Every time it surfaced, they would poke it under with poles. So you see, how in heaven's name do you get those people and us with our attitude to animals generally? We quite frankly just don't understand one another.

Pat, getting back to the general that used to walk around the camp?

Yes.

- 06:00 **Was it that general that actually announced that the war was over?**

No, no, Siki did that. He was the camp commandant and that was his job.

And what happened?

What happened to him?

No, what happened when the war was over?

Well, I think we just hugged one another and laughed and cried and were quite hysterical with joy. It was such a relief and then the men came over from the men's camp and

- 06:30 they took on the heavy jobs. They did the cooking, they did the carrying out of the coffins because people still continued to die which is very sad and the native people came in with chickens to sell and, you know, dried fish and that sort of thing, and the Japanese actually opened the stores which had held the
- 07:00 Red Cross supplies which had been sent to us and they'd never been delivered, and most of them had deteriorated in quality anyway but a few of them were quite, you know they could be eaten. They weren't necessarily any good, and we were in camp, we were told war actually was, yes, Japan
- 07:30 surrendered on the 15th of August '45. On the 26th of August we were told that the war was over. That was the day Siki made his announcement. I might add that Siki was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment with the War Crimes trials.

So Pat, you were talking about how

- 08:00 **"Siki the Sadist" made the announcement that war was over and that you were obviously very happy about that. Can you continue the story from there?**

Yes. The local population were very interested in buying any clothes we had because obviously they had suffered very considerably, you know, with the embargoes put on things and the difficulties.

- 08:30 They'd obviously had a fairly difficult time the indigenous people under the Japanese reign. Now, we were absolutely amazed that no one was being released from camp. We no longer had to do the tenko, [roll call] but we had to be fed and rations had to be delivered and things like that.
- 09:00 And it was only afterwards that we learned that the Japanese had vigorously denied that they had any army nurses, any Australian Army nurses as prisoners and it was due to the diligence of people like Squadron Leader Madson and one of his pilots, Ken Brown, and I can't think of the other, another
- 09:30 man who was a reporter, they were determined to find out, they knew we were there and they were determined to find us and they landed their plane on the aerodrome at Palembang. They didn't know whether it would have been mined or whether there were any booby traps there or not and there they met an ex-prisoner of war who said,
- 10:00 yes, there are Australian nurses and they are at a camp at Lahat. We were at Loebok Linggau and that was how we were found, and then it was on the 15th of September which was a month after the Japanese had unconditionally surrendered that we Australian nurses and three very sick women
- 10:30 were taken to Singapore. We had to get up at six o'clock in the morning and be taken by truck again but this time we had seats to sit on. We had Australian drivers and they took us to Lahat. From there we caught a, they took us to, yes, I've forgotten, they took us to the, must've been Lahat.
- 11:00 And then we got on a train and from there we went to where the aerodrome was, which it sounds as though it had to be at Palembang, and on the train we had the Japanese and they were very obsequious and trying to be friendly and offering us food and all the rest of it, and most of us I think were too excited to eat anyway.
- 11:30 We got to the aerodrome and there was no sign of a plane and it didn't seem as though it was ever going to come and there were some Japanese on the phone constantly and he kept on saying something that sounded like "banga banga banga." and eventually we saw a plane arriving and it landed and the first person off was major, he was a doctor,
- 12:00 Dr Harry Windsor, and he was the first person to perform a heart exchange operation in Australia, and we of course always travelled in our uniforms in case anyone could see us. When we travelled from camp to camp we'd always travelled in our uniforms, and he looked at us, we were the only standing people,
- 12:30 and he said, "Where are the Australian nurses?" and we laughed and said, "We're here." 'Cause we were dressed as best as we could be, and then following him were two women dressed in safari suits with boots and gaiters and the whole works and pips denoting their rank. One was a senior colonel and was a captain, and the senior one of course was the principal matron of Australia,
- 13:00 of the Australian Army Nursing Service and the junior was a Sister Floyd and she had been with the 10th AGH since January 1942, and matron looked at us. Somebody said, "'But who are you?" and she said, "I'm the mother of all of you and ever since I've had this position I've wanted to find out where,
- 13:30 I was determined to find you." and she said, "Where are the rest of you?" and of course there was silence for a moment then a voice, I don't know whose it was, just said, "They're all dead." so that there were 24 of us at this stage. We lost four sisters in Banka Island in 1945 and we lost four sisters in our camp at Loebok Linggau in 1945
- 14:00 and that reduced our numbers to 24. So that of the 65 who were on the ship, on the Vyner Brooke, 24 of us came home, and of course, when we arrived at Singapore and we were greeted by the Red Cross people with cups of tea and of course by a lot of the war correspondents
- 14:30 and our doctors had been there all day waiting for us and they had been told they had to come back to hospital to have their dinner or whatever and they weren't to stay any longer and they'd left about half an hour before we'd arrived. Then we were taken by ambulance to, or it might have been a bus, I wouldn't know, but we were taken to St Patrick's, the hospital which
- 15:00 the 13th AGH had occupied for their last few days in Singapore and it was very nice because quite a few of the sisters who had been with us in Malaya and gone home in the first lot had asked if they could come back and, you know, to see us and help us recuperate. Anyway we arrived there and
- 15:30 you know, it was all so unbelievable. I shall never forget having a wonderful hot shower. I think it's the best shower I've ever had in my life and you see toothbrushes and toothpaste, much better than a bit of coconut husk and a bit of charcoal, and the nurses who hadn't known us beforehand found us a little bit surprising I think, because we were in such high spirits
- 16:00 because they had been given lectures on the way over, which was fair enough, and they were told that there was a possibility that we would be resentful and uncooperative and sullen and all the rest of it,

but instead of which we were flying high, higher than kites could fly and in terribly high spirits and it was funny when we went

- 16:30 to bed, I can't remember what time, couldn't have been too late, and we were given nice nighties and things like that, wonderful, and about the middle of the night I felt water pouring down through the roof. It was raining and there must have been a hole in the roof somewhere so being a practical person I hopped out of bed and moved, pushed the bed out of the way, out of the way of the rain. Sister was shocked, she said, "Sister, you'll wake the whole ward." I didn't care two hoots who
- 17:00 I woke and somebody, I could hear a sleepy voice saying, "It's raining on Pat." and another one laughed and said, "She should be used to that.." but they couldn't understand that, some of them couldn't, the ones who hadn't known us beforehand, they couldn't understand that attitude that we could be so highly excited, and then there were flowers everywhere. You wouldn't believe the number of flowers. I think they must have stripped every flower in Singapore and you know,
- 17:30 we were given gifts of talcum powder and soap, everything, and whilst we were there Lady Mountbatten came, well both of them came to see us and of course she looked absolutely marvellous as she would do, in a very well tailored uniform and of course he naturally would capture anybody's heart, but they were very, very
- 18:00 charming and our troops came to see us, those who could possibly get away. Our medical officers all came across to see us and of course then we were put on, you know, we were told we weren't to have any visitors for 12 hours or something like that because I think they were worried that we would get exhausted which is a possibility too.
- 18:30 But of course by the time we got there we'd put on quite a lot of weight because for a whole month we had had really quite reasonably good food and then we had very good food at the hospital or it seemed very good to us, and we were given every test under the sun, don't make any mistake about that and we were given,
- 19:00 you know, vaccinations and things like that. There was never a quiet moment it seemed, and we were in hospital I think for about a fortnight. Then we joined the Manunda, and so we had a very nice trip home, it was a very good smooth trip anyway. But everyone, you know, we were all ex-POWs [prisoners of war], men and women and altogether it was very pleasant. We got to Western Australia and you wouldn't remember or know about it but
- 19:30 the strikes had been rife in Australia throughout a lot of the war time. When we got to Fremantle there was a transport strike on so we laughed and said, "Well, we're really home, we're in Australia, there's a strike on." and then that evening we were taken out to Government House where we had, I can't remember whether we had a meal there or not, but anyway it was a very pleasant evening. Next day we were taken out to what they call
- 20:00 the "trots." [horse races] If you know anything about Western Australia you know they love their trots. As we were the guests of the members, we had another very pleasant day and when we got back to our ship, we had a very nice book on the Western Australian wild flowers. Our next port of call was Melbourne and it was rather
- 20:30 sad actually with Western Australia because two of their sisters who were with the 2/4th CCS [Casualty Clearing Station] had both been lost at sea or shot, I've forgotten which, and Sister Hannah who was the only survivor of the 2/4th CCS. There are six people in a casualty clearing station and she was the only survivor so of course she had to see these people, the parents.
- 21:00 Then we got to Melbourne. It was quite incredible actually, the reception we got there. There were cheering crowds and of course the reporters all wanted to interview us and one of the officers had to tell them in rather colourful language what to do with their cameras and there what's its names, so that they could let the people who were actually getting off to stay
- 21:30 and not just those of us who were being taken out to Heidelberg Hospital. Anyway we went out to Heidelberg Hospital through cheering crowds and they threw flowers and boxes of chocolates and everything to us in the buses and we got out there and we, they had a lovely cocktail party. It was absolutely charming and the principal matron was there and the matron of the hospital was there and a lot of the staff so that was very pleasant.
- 22:00 When we got back to the ship, of course, there was a lovely Warrnambool rug on each of our beds for us to have. So then we came up to Sydney, and the reception didn't seem to be quite so enthusiastic. I suppose we were thinning out in numbers. We were taken out to the Thomas Walker home which had been turned into a
- 22:30 women's hospital for the women and there we met up with our families again and I met a little niece who was born whilst I was away and she was beautiful, and it was funny, the atmosphere seemed to be a bit different. We said, "But where are the Queenslanders?" and they said, "They're leaving by train at 12.00 o'clock." but they hadn't told us that
- 23:00 so we hadn't said goodbye to one another which seemed, and they seemed to be really quite surprised that we were upset that we hadn't seen them, but of course the Queenslanders were the same. They

said, we'd been together for so long. Anyway we had a very pleasant morning tea and met the parents of the other, my father and my sister had come with a little girl.

- 23:30 Also a friend of mine, Molly Ramsay, Molly Styles she had been and she'd always sent me, when we were in Malacca she'd always sent me over a bunch of jokes whenever she wrote to me and we'd known one other for years and it was funny, when Dad and Pamela and her little daughter went across to get the car to bring it around to take me back,
- 24:00 Pat Blake's mother, Pat had been, we'd trained together and we'd been in camp in the same group always, and Pat Blake's mother was waiting for her car too so she had her hand tucked into my elbow and as we walked down the very wide steps looking across at the absolutely beautiful garden and across into the Parramatta River she said, ""You know, this is the sort of place I'd love to live in.
- 24:30 It'd be easy to get away from people here, wouldn't it?" and I thought, "I quite agree with her." I didn't tell her that she was here meeting her long-lost daughter again, and then we went home to Pamela's and next day we had a meeting with the principal matron of New South Wales and she was a very different person from the
- 25:00 warm-hearted matron who was our principal matron, and of course we looked quite well by then as you can imagine. This was, would have been about the 17th of October and we'd been well fed and I think the interview with her took about three minutes and she gave us three months leave and said, "I think the sooner you get back to work the better." We were quite happy with the three months leave.
- 25:30 So I went back after three months. I went home and the mayor and a group, I can't remember which group they were, it might have been Red Cross or something, met the train that I was on, and we had morning tea with them and they were very nice, and Dad and one of my brothers drove us home and I spent some time with them and then I went to my sister.
- 26:00 And she had quite a big garden so I pointed out to Meg the different ferns and plants that were edible and she looked at me and she said, "I don't think I'll ask you to do any cooking while you're here." I said, "No, well that suits me." So I spent a very pleasant time with them and then I came back to Sydney and spent a few days in Sydney, went down to Melbourne and then back to Sydney and I went on duty.
- 26:30 And they said where did I want to go, and I said, I didn't mind, and Pat Blake wasn't well enough to go back to work and she was getting married very soon anyway, so I went out to Concord Hospital and I did three weeks to familiarise myself, this is under another sister, with any of the changes, and there hadn't been any great changes. There'd been a few but they weren't hard to follow, then I was put in charge of a surgical ward and Colonel Ken Starr
- 27:30 was the doctor and he was one of the best in Australia. Now when you say an Australian, he or she is one of the best in Australia you are actually saying one of the best in the world. I've worked overseas and I've formed my own opinion about that and it's amazing the brain drain that goes amongst the Australians when they go overseas, and we got on marvellously well. He
- 28:00 was a particularly nice person to work with and I found it very simple. It wasn't really very different from working in a big hospital, I'd worked in PA. You know, there were quite a lot of similarities so I didn't find it at all difficult to adjust, but when I got back to work I thought, "Well, I'm sick of
- 28:30 this business of taking Atebrin." because that was the anti malarial thing that we had to take and of course yellow, I think I was luminous. By night I was so yellow so I immediately, as soon as I got back to Concord and for the three weeks that I was there I knocked off my Atebrin and the next thing I knew I had an attack of malaria, and of course these things always happen on the weekend when they shouldn't and the
- 29:00 young doctor who was very young came down and very excited, "Sister, you've got malaria, but you can't have." and I said, "Honey, I didn't write the Path [pathology] report." "No." he said, "I'll show it to you." and he showed me. It only showed a weak strain, both of MT [Malignant Tertiary] and BT [Benign Tertiary] malaria which I knew I had anyway. So then the galloping major came down. They always call them galloping majors, I never bothered to ask why and he said to me,
- 29:30 "Sister, what makes you think you've got malaria?" and I said, "Well actually I've had quite a lot." and he said you weren't allowed to have a lot of malaria in the army. You were put on a charge sheet apparently because they considered that you weren't taking the right precautions you see. and I said, "Well actually where I was I didn't have any option, I just got malaria, I was a prisoner of war." which he took a bit more seriously then and I said, "I don't
- 30:00 feel that I tolerate quinine properly." and I told him one of the unpleasant experiences I'd had with taking it and the reaction I'd had, and I said, "As for Atebrin, I didn't survive prison camp to come home to look like this." and held out a skinny yellow arm, and he said, "Well, we are trying a new drug out, it's called Paludrine, will you try it?" and I said, I'd try anything, so I went on to Paludrine then
- 30:30 and always made quite sure that I had it on hand if I felt that, so that was that, and then I stayed at Concord [Hospital] for just a bit over a year. I wanted to see how I'd react to work again and quite frankly I quite enjoyed it. They had a very nice tennis court out at Concord and all the patients used to

tell me afterwards, "Sister, you play

- 31:00 a terrible back hand." So, then I went home for a few months because I felt that was the only, the fair thing to do and I was quite happy there, but I knew I had to get on with my nursing again so I went to the Concord. My sister, my Sydney sister, the one who lived in Sydney, she was having a baby so I said, "Well, I'll wait until you've had the baby and stay with you for six weeks or whatever afterwards and I'll
- 31:30 start Obstets." [Obstetrics] which I did at the Crown Street Hospital and I quite enjoyed that and it was interesting. We used to walk down from Crown Street Hospital which is in Surry Hills to the Domain, and a few of us, and just do some study in either the Botanical Gardens or the Domain and then have a meal and get a taxi home. Of course, these days you wouldn't think about walking anywhere around
- 32:00 there, and then I went overseas for about, how long was I overseas? I went over in '48, came back must've been the end of '52, and I did a course in, I did some private nursing but it was mostly hospital work and then because I prefer hospital work in one way because you have your regular hours is one thing and I went to the Brompton Chest Hospital and did a course in TB [Tuberculosis] nursing. There had been a certain amount of TB in our family but very few in my generation, but in the older members and I was always quite interested in it, and
- 33:00 whilst I was there we did a bit of travelling. We had a very good, I think it was about six or eight weeks, in a Humber Super Snipe Shooting Brig, and there were six of us, two New Zealanders, two Queenslanders and two New South Wales people and we travelled freely as much as we could. In those days
- 33:30 food was fairly short and very expensive on the continent but we managed all right. It was amazing the number of people we met hitching. We felt so superior in our great hefty. Well, people said to us, "You'll need something with a fair amount of power." I remember that the, what is it that's going into Switzerland? I've forgotten, the Bremmer Pass, it's very, very steep and I was driving at this stage
- 34:00 and we got up and in those days you had the frontiers and you had to pass through them, hand over your passport and things like that to get through, so I said to the soldier on duty, I said, "When do I come to the Bremmer Pass?" and he said, "But Madam, you have already come up it." Of course it was nothing to an Australian because their roads were so good anyway, but we had a very good trip. Then it was after that that
- 34:30 I did the trip around, it was after that we went to Brompton Hospital and after that I worked in hospitals afterwards. We went to Wales and worked. One of the doctors who had been at Brompton when we were there, he said he was going to take on a position as a superintendent there, would we like to come there, Wales is such a pretty country, which it is. So we went and worked there for about, might've been six months.
- 35:00 Wouldn't have been any more, then came back to London and worked with one of the Westminster Group not very far from Fulham I think it was, so that was very interesting. Then I came back and joined up with the TB section in the public service and then in 1957 I was married and I lived in,
- 35:30 first of all in Port Kembla, which in those days was a very pretty little place. Of course it became too heavily industrialised so we moved up to Mt Keira which is just west of, well we're three miles out of town, but we're about between six and eight hundred feet up, so we had a marvellous view and quite a large garden, and I lived the usual life, you know, you
- 36:00 belong to the Red Cross, you work for Red Cross, you belong to the garden club, you work for that, you play bridge. I think the first question, I think the first question anyone asked me, "Do you play solo?" I said, "No, no, I play bridge." and but of course, they said, "You'll be right, you'll be able to play solo." because solo at that stage was the great rage and then we got onto bridge, and you know, you just lead a quiet pleasant
- 36:30 country-style life. Then after my husband retired we travelled overseas quite a bit, and then when he was diagnosed with an incurable, you know, terminal illness in, yes, '81 I think, '81, no '82 it must've been.
- 37:00 Well they told me, they didn't tell him it was terminal which people don't always realise how hard it is for a doctor to have to tell the patient, and he died. It'll be 20 years in August this year and I stayed on in Wollongong, that was '83. I stayed on until I came up here in '89 so that was that and
- 37:31 you know life, the only thing I've sort of done that contributed to anyone was that we have a nice little school next door so I used to go and help with the reading, and that went on for a few years and I did my usual getting this silly laryngitis thing and, but that cleared up, and then I went back again about four years ago and they put
- 38:00 me on to helping with the ones who needed remedial and I didn't feel that I was competent to do that, but it was very nice and the children were lovely and the teacher in charge was a sweet person and that only lasted a bit over a year because I started again with this silly laryngitis thing that seemed to plague me quite a bit and I haven't done anything useful since so that's about all, so here I am.

That's actually really good timing because

38:30 **we're coming to the end of the tape.**

Tape 4

00:33 **OK Pat, so now we are going to go right back to the beginning again after your fabulous story.**

It is working so you don't have to raise your voice.

OK. So is it all right if I speak at this level?

Yes.

So can you tell us when and where you were born?

I was born the 31st of August 1913 and this is in Casino which is in the Richmond River area.

01:00 It's actually a very pretty area and we lived on a farm about 10 miles out of town and that's the main thing, and I went to the local school there.

And what was that school called?

It was called the Deep Creek Public School.

And Pat, did you have any brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had four brothers and three sisters and

01:30 I was the fourth child. I had two elder brothers and an elder sister, two younger brothers and two younger sisters, and my mother died when she was 53 and I was 20. I'd only just started nursing about five months before she had died, so I continued on and my elder sister who had done her

02:00 training at the Sydney Hospital, she went home and looked after the house and Dad and the boys, and the two little girls went off to boarding school down in Sydney, and then when I finished training I, my sister had married in the meantime, my elder sister, and Pam my younger sister had left school and she was

02:30 quite happy to stay home so I continued with my nursing.

So Pat, can you just tell us very briefly just a little bit about your parents?

I told you just about everything, but I don't want it all to be written in. No.

If you like we can move on. If you'd rather us not talk about your parents that's fine.

I think I would really 'cause you see

03:00 it was really awfully sad. The saddest person of course in my opinion was Mum because she didn't know how to help herself and this, the most difficult thing in the world is to try and help a person who doesn't try to and understand and she always considered being well bred more important than anything in life. Nothing compared, education, a good home or anything like that didn't compare as long as you belonged to that, and that makes her

03:30 seem awfully snobbish which she really wasn't at all. It was sort of being awfully innocent and I think possibly once I grew up I felt possibly more mature than either of my parents which is really pretty an awful thing to do. See, Mum had plenty of wealthy relatives and her slightly built young sons of course used to go off and work as jackaroos,

04:00 and jackaroos are usually just very cheap labour, but they lived for the family if you know what I mean, and, but it wasn't what they would have like to have done had we, you know, if Dad hadn't been so hopeless with money and that was that, but these things I don't really want brought out because I think you just have to, I usually say to people, look, I don't talk about my childhood. They can please themselves what they think.

04:30 **OK. Well let's move on then. Pat, what memories do you have of living through the Depression?**

The Depression. When looking back on it, some of them are quite sad ones because of the men who would drop in to see if they could have a

05:00 bed and a meal for the night, and we used to have attached to the barn, this was anybody who was doing labouring work for us, attached to the barn was a bed, was a room with a bed and chairs and things like that and also a small shower room. Now during the Depression because we couldn't afford to have a labourer but when these sad men sort of would shuffle in

05:30 and promise, you know, just could they have a bed for the night, they were given a meal and taken down

to this room and next day they'd probably come and after breakfast they would chop up a whole lot because the Dole in those days was very different. Apparently you couldn't collect it from the one town. You had to move onto another town or something like that and these sad creatures used to come

- 06:00 fairly regularly but the thing that amused me most when looking back on it was we had a fellow called Paddy and he belonged to quite a nice family in town and he used to come and stay and of course we children, looking back on it now, I think he probably was an alcoholic and was probably being dried out and his people probably said to Dad you know, could
- 06:30 he come and stay at your place, so he always had his meals with us but he always slept in the, in this room and the other thing was that my eldest brother had come down to Sydney to school and that left my eldest sister, my brother and Paddy, and Paddy loved to play cards so Paddy was always my partner 'cause I was about
- 07:00 five at the time, maybe I was six, and we always won. We played Euchre because he passed me cards under the table, and he used to stay, I don't know, it seems like three months but it was possibly more. I wouldn't really know, and that's probably sort of instilled into me a sort of an enjoyment of playing cards, but we had a tennis court
- 07:30 but of course we built it ourselves. The roadmen were supposed to come in and use their what's its name to scrape the top off, but of course Dad forgot to ask them to do it. Used to charge 30 shillings to do it and so we kids chipped it ourselves and we had our own tennis court and I was a horrible child of six and I had to be my elder brother's handicap and I wasn't supposed to
- 08:00 hit anything and I had the heaviest racquet of all and I used to stay at the tent net all the time and of course this horrible little kid darted across and was hitting everything back, so it usually ended up with us, me being, well waiting till my brother was really like that, then I'd set off for home, for the house screaming, "Mum, they're going to hit me, Mum, they're going to hit me!" and they were too if they could catch me, but the dogs, cattle dogs
- 08:30 are marvellous. They used to run in amongst the three children who were chasing me and hold them up until I got safely into the house but no, we had our funny times and things like that but Pappa always was an embarrassment to us. It was a terribly difficult childhood; it wasn't the sort of childhood you could ask people home to and things like that.

Pat, what did the farm that you lived

09:00 **on produce?**

It was mainly dairy and cattle.

And did you help out on the farm?

Very little, very little. I'd occasionally do a little bit of milking or something like that.

Now tell me, did people, did you have any contact with anyone that had participated in World War I?

Well Mother's, one of Mother's

- 09:30 brothers had, yes, and brother-in-law had, and they used to come through every now and then and, but we were rather isolated from the family. One of Mum's sisters, she lived up at Mackay I think it was, it might've been Rockhampton, and he was a barrister, that's right, the fellow she married, and

- 10:00 the others lived down right on the south coast.

So what do you recall of those people that you knew that had been to World War I?

Very little actually, excepting we thought they were frightfully old.

And where were you when war broke out?

1939? I was nursing a doctor's wife

- 10:30 in Dovers, Dover Heights.

And what kind of impact did that have on you at the time?

To a certain extent it was shock, but remember we got a lot of these refugees. We knew quite a lot about how bad things were and also I had read John Gunther's book which

- 11:00 is Inside Europe and Vincent Sheehan, Vincent anyway, the Englishman who wrote Insanity Fair, and his, I preferred his book to John Gunther's, but everyone said that Gunther's book was the better one but I don't really know. So we had a fair idea and it wasn't really a great surprise.

Had you actually met any of the refugees from Europe?

No, not really. No, they tended to

- 11:30 do, which I think would be perfectly normal, to segregate amongst themselves. Quite a lot of them did settle in Rose Bay and Bellevue Hill to the extent that Rose Bay was called "Nose Bay," the Bellevue Hill was called "Belljew Hill." but I think those have died right out, those names, and I mean, with nursing I think you meet so many different people, and see I am of course Church
- 12:00 of England but half, just as many of my friends are Catholic or Jewish. To me it means nothing and one of my great grandfather's, my great grandfather Gunther who was an archdeacon he, one of his best friends was the Catholic, head of the Catholic Church so that we hadn't
- 12:30 been brought up with any feeling of prejudice against any of the other religious groups.

So what was Sydney like at this time?

Well looking back on it when you think of the mad rush everything is now, it was very quiet and peaceful and living in Potts Point as the nurses' club, it was a very nice area.

Could you describe it for me?

- 13:00 Well Darlinghurst Road from William Street down to, to where it trails down into Elizabeth Bay Road, Darlinghurst Road had masses of flower shops, absolutely beautiful ones and possibly one of the best interior decorators
- 13:30 ever to come, ever to live in Sydney and her name was Margaret Jay and she had an absolutely charming little shop there. She looked like a bit of destined for China but everyone said she was a lesbian but I really wouldn't know and they had very nice dress shops and coffee shops, and you'd see quite a few theatricals 'round about.
- 14:00 And it was a very nice area, and St Luke's Hospital where I used to special quite a bit was just a quiet walk down Macleay Street and across over and walk down, I've forgotten the name of the street it was in, just about 50 yards down, which was very nice and also I used to special at St Vincent's and of course you thought nothing of walking up to St Vincent's there and they were always marvellous.
- 14:30 And it had towards the lower end, that's towards Woolloomooloo and Garden Island, they had a private hospital called Gemma. They had a lot of private hospitals then which were run of course by nurses and doctors.

Pat tell me a bit about your training that you did as a nurse?

15:00 What did you, what sort of training did you undergo for your nursing?

Yes. At PA, well first of all you start off as a junior probationer and yes, you do all the simplest of things and you know, you learned to do temperatures and you learned to how to make patients comfortable and

- 15:30 you'd rarely do a dressing in your first year. In the second year, you'd start doing dressings and things and see, when I started which was 1933 it was getting towards the end of the Depression and the wards started opening up. There were a lot of closed wards when I went down and they started opening up which meant that what happened was that those of us
- 16:00 that they thought were a little bit more competent than the average in their year were pushed ahead with the consequence that I found that half way through the third year I was doing fourth year nurse work because you just had to be pushed ahead and the person I followed was Grace Parker. Her sister actually was the matron or sister in charge of the C, who
- 16:30 was taken prisoner in Rabaul. All their group were taken and she was such a nice person and I usually worked with her for a fortnight before I took over and she moved on. You see, she was three months senior to me and they picked out the best in her lot which was probably what I can remember about six of them, and she was the one I followed and, but I had nursed,
- 17:00 I did two terms head nursing in third year and four terms in the fourth year that included night duty.

So your training to be a nurse lasted for four years.

Yes, it was four years. Four solid years too.

Now Pat, why did you decide to become a nurse?

It's very difficult to say. I had a variety of interests and Mother always wanted

- 17:30 me to write. That's all she ever said to me, "Write child, write." but I said to her once, "I don't have the educational background to do it in my opinion." and she said, "You write very well and this is what you should do." And as a teenager I used to send in paragraphs and pars to the old Bulletin [magazine] and they had a few pages, a couple of pages that they called "Aboriginalities"
- 18:00 and it just had to be something about local things. I can't remember much about it now, and also the Sydney Mail which hasn't been in existence for a long time, it was a Fairfax publication and I used to send things into them just to earn a bit of pocket money and that was that.

And did you ...

18:30 Also to join up as a nurse if you didn't have your Intermediate Certificate what you could do was to sit for an exam which gave you the entrance, it was a nurses' entrance exam. It really wasn't very difficult at all.

Because you hadn't actually received your Intermediate Certificate, had you?

No, I hadn't, no, no, no, no.

Was writing something that you would have liked to have pursued?

Writing was something that my mother should have done.

19:00 Because she, you know she really could write quite well, and Dad had been a journalist at one stage in his life and I think if they'd left me alone I might have done it, but it was a way of earning a living and getting a profession behind you which I felt was very important and my sister had taken up nursing at

19:30 the Sydney Hospital.

And what was it that you enjoyed about nursing?

I think people contact. That was a big thing because in the country you tend to be a bit isolated and it is a bit lonely.

So tell me a bit about the wards that you used to work in when you were doing your training?

Well I started off in the children's ward,

20:00 and the first little girl I had to give a [bed] pan to, I didn't have a clue how to do it and of course I gave it to her the wrong way around, and she was a rude little thing and she pushed it around like that, "This is the way you do it, nurse."

How old was she?

She was about eight or nine and she was a very sad little case because she had had a lung abscess and in those days you really couldn't do anything for them, and she was a cheeky little redhead and she was terribly spoilt. Course Sister was

20:30 marvellous with any of the ones that you knew had no hope, she was super with them. I got on quite well with her. You did three months and by the time I'd been there a couple of weeks I think we had a good relationship but I shall never forget offering the pan the wrong way around and I'd never seen a bedpan, and nowadays of course, they have the, well I don't know what they do now, but when they started preliminary training you see they would show all these things and they were

21:00 taught a lot of them, so that was that.

So tell me about your enlistment into the army?

Well that was, I had put my name down with a friend, the first person I met when I went to PA and we were friends right up to the time she died which was about two or three years ago

21:30 and she said, "Let's go along and put our names down." which we did together and then I went out to a case in the country and of course Matron usen't to send a written notice, she'd ring up. I was living at the nursing club and of course I wasn't there so I didn't get that. When I got back to Sydney

22:00 my friend was already in the army and she said, 'Pat, go and see Matron and tell her that you know, we'd put our names down together and we'd like to stay together.' I said, "I don't think I should, I'd be tempting fate, you never know what might happen." I found out though. So I didn't put my name down and I went into the army. I was called up, that would have only been about

22:30 probably about June or something in 1940 I think it would have been, and then I got my next call and I was there to take the telephone call and that was on the 28th of November 1940, and it takes about a week to get all your equipment, you know, suits and things like that and I went up to

23:00 Tamworth and it was quite interesting because the work wasn't awfully hard because the serious cases went to the Tamworth Hospital and see most people are not admitted into the army unless you're physically fit and we, mostly we had people who had a bad reaction to their smallpox injection

23:30 and they wouldn't be really sick. It was different with us. We'd have a bad reaction but you stayed on duty. There's no point in being off duty if you're feeling sick. You're much better off being on duty and I went up and I met, yes, some of the PA girls I'd known and they said, "What's your number?"

24:00 and I said, "ZX70493." and they said, "You're an X." and I said, "What does that mean?" That means that you've already been assigned to a hospital so I still keep, I often wondered if that would have been my number if I'd gone with the 6th AGH which my friend did and, it actually created a little bit of resentment because they were all "Ns." which meant that they had not yet been what's its name,

allotted to a,

24:30 assigned to a hospital, so I was there and the CO was very good. When they give the injection what happens can, what can happen when they have a line of soldiers waiting to go in, the first one faints so they all go down, not necessarily all of them, but quite a few, so what they do when they have something like that they ask, get the nurses to go

25:00 in first to be seen by the patients, by the waiting what's its name that they'd had, you'd come out rubbing your arm, not from smallpox but with the others, and they'd chiacck one another, "There you are you see, she didn't faint, you're not allowed to." and that sort of idiotic thing.

So you would have pretended to have had it, the injection?

We had them, we had to have them, we had them, yes, yes, we had typhoid,

25:30 smallpox, don't ask me, too many, tetanus, and when, so when it came to Christmas leave, who would go on Christmas leave I said, "Well look I don't really mind." so I went on New Year's leave which was 10 days and, which added four days for travelling or a day to get from

26:00 Tamworth to Sydney or a day to get up home and repeat it on the way back and then when I got back they said, "You're going on night duty." so on I went to night duty, start would have been half past eight or eight o'clock. At ten o'clock they said, "You have to go down to Sydney to catch the train at ten o'clock, you've been assigned to the 10th

26:30 AGH." It's all drama you know, so I went and reported to Matron and she said, "You're late, now you'll have to have all these injections and you'll be sick for your pre-embarkation." and then she went through my things to find out that I'd had all my injections and I wasn't going to be sick. All I needed to have was an X-ray, so that was quite good.

27:00 But the girls that hadn't had the injections they said it actually ruined their last leave 'cause you could be very sick with the smallpox one. So that was that. That was, when we went to Malaya I'd had practically no experience apart from working in a camp hospital for three weeks.

27:30 And it's, but it was, you know, it was general nursing.

Pat, can I just ask you what your parents and your family felt about your enlistment in the army?

Well they, if you wanted to go, of course you could go, yes. It was considered the right thing to do, you know, the simplest thing to do and if all your friends were going, well of course you'd want to go. I think all the girls

28:00 in my year who hadn't married as soon as they'd finished, or shortly after they'd finished their training went into the army.

So to what extent did country matter to you?

Yes, it was very important. Remember this, we did, see I had read both those books. Most of my friends had and we knew what was going on. We knew about the, we knew about the German,

28:30 people from Germany, the Jewish people from Germany and I can't remember exactly meeting any of them but we'd hear stories from them and then they'd be true, and this is the thing, you cannot, if you are prepared to ignore oppression, then you're supporting it. This is the situation that's occurred in,

29:00 what do they call it, Iraq, don't they.

To what extent did the Empire matter to you?

Well it seemed to be awfully important. See the British Empire was big and very important in those days. It was the dominant country, but there are lots of, I don't know what the

29:30 Versailles Treaty was but the older people, the ones who had been through the First World War they said it was very unfair to Germany and that would have started a certain amount of resentment with the Germans and then their treatment of the Jewish people was unforgivable but then again, they probably had

30:00 certain reasons for it. You see, you had situations in Germany where some of the good old families who had been really good citizens because of some of the actions by the, I can't give you specific cases, but because of I suppose competition or something from the Jewish they had been reduced to poverty and bitterness does

30:30 spring from that.

So Pat tell me more about your training at Tamworth?

Training at Tamworth, well there really wasn't any training at all. The only training I got when I trotted across to the chemist, you see, because it's always a good idea to the dispensary to know these people

so I walked in all bright-eyed and shiny saying, "Black cats for luck." of course the grin on his face told me

31:00 what they were and I shot out of that place so quickly because you, if you had to have a script sent over you got the runner to do it for you, you didn't do it yourself but I think that when you are ranked as a courteous officer, given the courtesy rank of an officer then the correct procedure is to meet the others too and so, there was nothing to do in the wards. I just said to the main orderly,

31:30 "I'll just take this across to the dispensary." and the "black cats" in case you didn't know, they were condoms, but of course it had never occurred to me. God, I shot out of that place so fast, 'cause the grin on his face told me what they were and he probably said to this fellow chemist, "I caught another of them." but the training, there was nothing there that came into hospital that

32:00 I couldn't really handle, you know that I had to learn about. If you trained at one of the good hospitals, you come up against so many different situations, and if you have the good example of a good sister, it's not difficult.

So Pat, what type of patients were at Tamworth Hospital?

They'd

32:30 come in sometimes with ingrown toenails. You can imagine, you couldn't march for any length of time and that would have to be done, and they'd come in with vaccination reactions and have to have reactions. See typhoid can give you a reaction, anti-typhoid one. The smallpox one, you can be really sick with it, run a temperature. Well there was no facilities in their camps

33:00 to look after them so they were sent to us. Probably, now I can't think of any serious cases. You see, a serious cases were sent to the Tamworth Hospital.

How do you treat an ingrown toenail?

Yes, they have to, well they actually cut the toenail back and then they lift it,

33:30 if you can imagine that, with either cotton wool or gauze and they don't wear a shoe or any pressure on it and clear it up and get them to possibly get a wider shoe fitting so there's no pressure on it.

And at this stage where were you getting your information about the war?

Just

34:00 from the local papers and we had the wireless in those days as we called it, and of course, I suppose, I suppose we heard rumours 'cause there were always rumours going around. One of my brothers was in Tobruk and letters, but they don't tell you much in the letters you know.

34:30 You have to be a bit discreet in what you say in letters.

So you were actually corresponding with your brother who was in Tobruk?

Yes.

And how often would you correspond with each other?

Not all that often, I suppose six weeks or every month or whatever.

OK, and how did you first hear that you would be going abroad?

When I was called back off night duty that I was, that I had to report.

35:00 you know, get the train back. Obviously I was going soon and then when I was given pre-embarkation that confirmed it, so.

Were you excited that you were going?

Yes, very pleased, very pleased, thinking it was marvellous that I was going overseas and hoping that I'd be going to the Middle East and I'd be able to see my brother, but then, then we went to Singapore. As I always say, the month

35:30 we had before war broke out, it was really quite, it was tremendously interesting really because it's a beautiful country and very, very interesting and the people, the Malays themselves were very nice gentle people and very graceful in their movements, and.

So what do you recall

36:00 **about your farewell from Australia?**

Well it was, I s'pose it was quite exciting in a funny sort of way because you know you're going off to a war and it was a beautifully sunny day and there were people lining the foreshores waiving us goodbye because it was quite impressive. They had the beautiful Aquitania, she had four funnels, you had the [Queen] Mary

- 36:30 following her and then I think there was the Mauritania and the New Amsterdam I think, and we did, you know, it was, and of course one was on duty. I can't remember whether I went on night duty straight away. I know I was on night duty when we were, when we had left
- 37:00 Fremantle 'cause the days and nights were so hot and the Queen Mary had been built for the cold Atlantic seas, and it was very much sealed up. Most of the air conditioning had been turned off so the engines would have more power in case they needed to put on extra speed and the patients, they had one room,
- 37:30 lounge room which was for officers only and that was air-conditioned and we had our meals there as well. I shared a double cabin with Cath Noyce and that wasn't air-conditioned but we did have a porthole. They had what they called
- 38:00 the tea rooms and they were wards. The air-conditioning had been turned off from those, so it was terribly hot and we were told that we had, those of us on night duty were told that we had to go up to the decks and just put our head out of the what's its name and you know, breathe in the somewhat cooler air, and the patients used to say, "Take me with you Sister, can't you carry me?"
- 38:30 I said, "If I could, I'd take you with me." and one of the sisters who was such a nice little person, she was frightened of the dark so she took a torch with her the next night and on the stair the sentry's shout nearly made her fall overboard she got such a fright.

What was the mood like aboard the ship?

Good, cheerful. The fellows were glad

- 39:00 at last they were going to see what they thought was some action and they trained them very hard in Malaya and it was quite amusing in the sense that we had several journalists who came and I think a couple from, one from America definitely, and one from,
- 39:30 at least one or two from Australia, and they wrote such glowing accounts of our lifestyles, you know, and living like film stars and all the rest of it that one of the colonels with no malice or forethought of course when Andrea, [radio broadcaster] and you wouldn't remember, you're too young to remember, but she used to speak I think it was from 2GB at 11.00 o'clock each
- 40:00 day and she was an excellent journalist and she was a woman who would've been in her 40s, maybe even in her 50s, and she had been an actress, anyway she came over and

Pat, we're actually going to have to finish there because we've just finished a tape so we'll go back over that story.

Tape 5

00:31 Pat, so can you tell us when and where you enlisted?

Yes. When war broke out most of us who hadn't married, most of the year that I had been, when I was doing my training at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, most of the girls decided to enlist and, but we had to wait until the army was prepared

- 01:00 to, you know, call for recruits and I was nursing then at the nurses' club at Potts Point and I put my name down with a friend with whom I'd trained, and then I went on a country case and I was there for a few weeks and when I got back I found that quite a few of my friends were in uniform and they all said the same thing,
- 01:30 "Go and see Matron and see if you can join." either the 5th or the 6th whichever one they were in, and I said, "I'm a bit superstitious, I thought I'd be tempting fate if I did that." 'cause you know, we knew we'd be going close to if not right into a war zone, so I let it ride and then later on the 27th of November 1940 I was called up by the
- 02:00 Matron and after an interview with her I was sent to Tamworth, this is after I had got my uniforms and things fixed up in Sydney, and I went up to Tamworth and I was there for three weeks. It was quite interesting. It was just sort of an introduction to a camp hospital. We didn't treat any serious cases because they went into the Tamworth, the main Tamworth Hospital, not the army one.
- 02:30 and I arrived up there on the 7th of December and I went on leave on the 28th of December which is 14 days, that's allowing for 10, 4 days travelling time, 10 days leave, 4 days travelling time, and when I got back to Tamworth they said, "You're going on night duty," so I went on night duty at half past 8.00 or whatever time it was, around about that, then at 12.00,
- 03:00 then at about ten o'clock they hauled me off night duty and said, "You're being recalled back to Sydney, you've been assigned to a hospital," so I caught the train at twelve o'clock and got back to Sydney and

went to see the matron and she said that I had been assigned to the 10th Australian General Hospital, and that I had to

03:30 have certain injections and X-rays and all the rest of it. Anyway, when she went through my papers she found that I had had all my injections, I just needed an X-ray, and it was handy having all the injections because the smallpox inoculation made you feel very sick actually, and the other one, the typhoid one, was much the same. Of course we had them all more or less at the one time so

04:00 I had that all off my chest and I just went on leave back home and came back after, after about 10 or 15 days and stayed at the nurses' club until I was called to go to, to be taken down to the ship and it was the Queen Mary. When we got to the Queen Mary those of us who were nurses, we

04:30 met the Queensland nurses who had already boarded and they were in a fever of excitement. They said that Lady Gowrie, the wife of the then Governor General, had visited the ship a couple of days beforehand and said that she couldn't tell them our destination but we were the luckiest nurses to leave Australia. So that sounded very good and very exciting.

Where did you hope to be going to?

05:00 We didn't quite know. I always said Trincomalee because that's a, you know, it's a pretty word, and I know it's a pretty island so and we made up rumours. We did all sorts of stupid things like that. We didn't know where we were going.

And what were conditions like on the Queen Mary?

Very crowded, very crowded. I shared a cabin with a friend of mine, a lass, she'd trained at PA. She was a bit junior to me, and the

05:30 sad part about, to give the ship more power in case she needed it they had cut off the air-conditioning and the Queen Mary was built for the cold North Atlantic seas, not for the, not for the Australian climate, and the patients, we first of all, we steamed out of Sydney with the

06:00 Aquitania leading us out because she was the senior ship and she had four funnels. She was a beautiful-looking ship, and crowds lined the foreshores and waived goodbye, and everyone was in very excited mood, you know, the men as well as the sisters and we went down to Melbourne and there we took on board the matron of our hospital, Matron Paschke,

06:30 and the commanding officer who was an obstetrician and he was our CO. It was amazing how the obstetricians did set to work and join up very early in the piece.

What was your matron like?

Matron Paschke, she was quite a marvellous person actually. She was youngish but she was well into her 30s, but slender, she was nick named

07:00 "Dashing Dot" by everybody because she had tremendous, she had great abilities, she had an excellent personality and she was the right type of person to be a matron, quite a vital sort of person, and we took on more, when we left Sydney naturally we had a lot of soldiers on board and we took on more at Melbourne. Then we got to Fremantle and we

07:30 had to at this stage put, we went, we did duty in the wards they had and I was on night duty.

I'm interested to know how the soldiers treated you on the Queen Mary?

They were lovely actually, they were very sweet. They were, you know it had, there was a very good atmosphere so we sort of all belonged to one another, which was fair

08:00 enough, we all belonged to the same, the same division, and the only place that was air-conditioned actually was the lounge room which was of course reserved for the officers, and we were considered to be officers. We didn't have pips or anything at that stage, but we had a, I've forgotten what the

08:30 word is now, but we were given the courtesy rank of officers. It was only later on in the war that they gave us the real true, you know, we became commissioned officers. Anyway, no, the men were very, very good and when we were leaving Fremantle the other ships, there was the,

09:00 sorry, the Mauritania, the New Amsterdam and the Aquitania and I have a feeling there was another one, but I'm not absolutely sure. They lined up and each ship, this included the Queen Mary, had a band fore and aft playing the "Maori's Farewell" so we steamed slowly and majestically past and waved goodbye and all the rest of it and then when we got....

Can you remember what they were playing?

09:30 The "Maori's Farewell." All the bands were playing that, it was a great favourite at that stage.

That must have been a wonderful experience.

It was, it was a bit moving actually. It was a little bit emotional but we were on a sort of high, and then when it got to the end of the line of the ships it, with a tremendous burst of speed the Queen Mary

turned left, right and of course we knew then that our

- 10:00 destination was Singapore 'cause that would be the only place we could be going to. So, it was a slightly funny feeling being....

Once you realised you were going to go to Singapore, what was your feeling about going there?

Quite exciting because Singapore's always had the sort of glamorous appeal to the people. It's an eastern city and yet it was a British city if you know what I mean.

- 10:30 And it had the same appeal that places like Bali and Hong Kong and Bangkok all have had and probably most of them still have. It was a slightly funny feeling in a way because the escort ships stayed with the other, the big convoy which was going to the Middle East and the slightly strange feeling being on our own with no protection at all, but they said,

- 11:00 "You don't have to worry about that, the Mary's so fast she can, she can out beat, outrace anything, any ship." I used to feel like saying, "Yes, but what if you run straight into them?." but of course one doesn't. And it was terribly hot in the wards. The wards had been their rather nice tearooms and things like that, and it was terribly hot in the wards and we nurses were told we had to go up

- 11:30 to one of the decks every two hours for 10 minutes and poke our heads out for, you know, a section, and take in deep breaths of fresh air and the patients used to say, "Take me with you sister, carry me if you can." and I'd say, "Yes, if I could carry you I would, but I can't."

What type of injuries or sicknesses were you treating on the ship?

- 12:00 Reasonably minor ones at this stage 'cause the really sick ones we put off at Fremantle. When you had seasickness for one thing, you had cases of acute appendicitis, and even cases of stomach ulcers which hadn't been recognised before, but with the stress and strain of you know leaving and these things became evident.

- 12:30 **And I was also wondering if there was any interaction like on a social level with any of the male soldiers?**

With the officers, yes. We were supposed never to go out with anybody below the rank of officer, and I think we all said the same thing. Most of us had brothers who didn't have an officer ranking, and we always all said the same thing, that of course, if my brother came over I'd go out with

- 13:00 him even if was only a corporal or a sergeant, but none of us seemed to have brothers over there, and we steamed into the naval base at Singapore Harbour and it was a beautiful day and it's a beautiful site. It's a lovely way to enter Singapore Harbour. It's a pity now that you just seem to go in by plane and you don't see a thing.

Can you describe

- 13:30 **the landscape as you saw it that day?**

Yes. There were various little islands and quite charming homes on them with red roofs and white walls and lovely green gardens and things like that, and altogether it was a very charming way to enter. I always said Singapore but I was corrected on that and was told that we actually went to the Singapore Naval Base.

- 14:00 And then that was where we disembarked.

And then what happened?

Well, we had, we were taken to a train and we went up to Malacca, which is about a three-hour trip by train to, it's on the west coast of Malaya. It was a charming little town, I think it still is, I haven't been back to it

- 14:30 but it was then, just a charming little town. It had been occupied by the Chinese and then the, and it was a leading, it was a major port in that section. That would've been in, I should've checked it out, probably in the 1300's and then the Portuguese

- 15:00 arrested it from them and they built it up into an even bigger port. The Chinese left behind them what they call the "Straits Chinese" and also a lovely old temple which I believe is still standing, it goes back to their days. Then the Portuguese came and they made into an even more important port.

- 15:30 And they left behind them the tomb of, I think it was Franz Josef, I'd have to look that up to find that, and then the Dutch took it over, and, by which time they, it had declined somewhat as a major port and then the British took it over from the Dutch

- 16:00 in the early 1800s by which time it had lost its importance as a port, and the Dutch by then had made Batavia, which is now Djakarta, and they'd made that their major headquarters in the Indonesian islands and such.

So you'd arrived in Malacca, what were your duties once you arrived?

Well we were

- 16:30 allotted quarters in the hospital which belonged actually to the British Colonial Service so it was just the same as working in a big hospital except, you know, we didn't have many of the conveniences. We had quite a good building and very nice spacious wards. We had one, we had one square, we had one block of
- 17:00 level of four-tier, four-storey block allotted to us and the medical staff and the auxiliary staff lived in tents around the hospital. We lived in one of the wards. We, the nurses, lived in one of the wards, and the patients were, had various things, they'd have knees that
- 17:30 had to have their medial meniscus operations. You'd have appendices and you'd have hernias and various things like that, and patients who had become injured during exercises because they started their routine exercises, route marches through the jungle and all the rest of it and usually after a route march through the jungle we had a few
- 18:00 typhus cases and it's a very serious illness. In those days there was no, there were no drugs with which to treat them and they just had to be treated with complete rest and all the ones we had luckily survived.

So at this point were you treating any wounded, any people, any soldiers wounded in battle?

- 18:30 No, no, no. See, there was no battle. There, we had no, it was like a garrison troop, you know, just ready and prepared if war broke out and they were training very, very strenuously, no question about that
- 19:00 and they were spread out over the rest of Malaya and they were not the, the patients used, used to tell us things, particularly the older NCOs, non commissioned officers, men in their late 20s, possibly in their 30s, and we had on leave we'd visit
- 19:30 Singapore and the place was just full of service people, not only the, not only the Australians, but the British and the Indians and Ghurkhas, and Kuala Lumpur which was the capital of the then Federated Malay States, that also seemed to be full of ex-servicemen and you felt that well, there's a tremendous
- 20:00 number of service people out here, we're well protected, but occasionally one of the older patients would say to you, "Sister, you know, if war does break out we'll be caught like rats in a trap." and I can remember a, one, a solidly built staff sergeant staging at our ward for a few days, he was awaiting transport back to Sydney
- 20:30 because a call had come from Australia for parachutists to be dropped behind lines, and I said to him, "Well that'd be a dangerous job." He said, "Sister, this is a danger spot." They seem to know a lot more about how things were than we did.

Did you feel safe?

Yes, yes. Well even if you thought about it, it was wisest to feel safe. I mean, there was no point in

- 21:00 upsetting yourself about what might happen.

So at what point were you evacuated?

Very late actually, but I'll just tell you a little bit more about, we met a lot of the Colonial Service people, we met quite a lot of the planters and their wives, and it was very interesting 'cause with the planters, the kampong, that's the village that

- 21:30 was near their plantation, that was virtually supported by, by the estate and the estate people own it, etcetera. I mean people are inclined to think that they were badly treated or, but they were not. They were very well looked after. It was a sort of benign
- 22:00 feudal system really and they were, generally speaking very, very nice, and what was the question that you asked after that?

The question was when....

When war broke. Yes, well you see, this, our peaceful lifestyle was, no, wait a minute, I'll tell you a little bit more about that. The Queen Mary,

- 22:30 the two British war ships came out, the Prince of Wales and the Repulse and the optimists said, "Wonderful news." the pessimists said, "What no aircraft carrier with them?" Anyway on the 9th of December, no, 7th of December Japan without declaring war
- 23:00 bombed Singapore and Kota Bahru in northern Malaya, invaded northern Malaya and they had infiltrated very thoroughly well and truly before they did any of these things and our soldiers, the Australians were in the front line, they were the first, the northern most
- 23:30 and it was a matter of tragic retreat and retreat. We were in Malacca and we were too far away from

them to receive the wounded. Instead, and I should say, then in just after Christmas most of us were evacuated to Johor Bahru where the 13th AGH which had arrived in Malaya in September

24:00 1941, where they were stationed and we nursed there and naturally always put the nurses or people coming from another hospital are usually put on to night duty just to save their own, which isn't the wrong idea, it's quite a good idea

24:30 and it used to be terribly busy when we'd get a trainload of visitors, patients come, wounded but I was always amazed at the speed and efficiency of the doctors, nurses and orderlies, the way they handled those cases and as I say, we were terribly busy when they'd arrive, when the trainload arrived, but the worst thing of all was when the trainload didn't arrive.

25:00 We, the patients didn't say very much, but what they did one realised that the Japanese didn't recognise the Geneva Convention at all about taking prisoners and it was tragic to see these beautiful young people coming in badly wounded and having to patch them up but they were all in very good spirits.

What sort of injuries were you

25:30 **treating?**

It was mostly surgical, you know, wounds.

Were there any particular injuries that stay in your mind?

No, no. Broken legs and things like that. They'd have their legs in plaster or one leg in plaster and one up in extension, which means that it's stretched out and up and has weights on it

26:00 and things like that and, but they were always very good and very brave and of course, remember this, when we were in Kuala, not Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru we had flights of planes going over us. They didn't bomb Johor Bahru as far as I know and they, though we had flights of planes going over us quite regularly with was the Japs going down to bomb Singapore, then,

26:30 **What would happen during an air raid scare? Would there be an emergency?**

Well, we were supposed to go into slit trenches. I was on night duty and we were supposed to go into the slit trenches and we all said there was no point in it because you've got to get some sleep somehow and the slit trenches I can assure you were just that, slit trenches, and that soil is very wet anyway so most

27:00 of us just stayed in our beds and you just heard them go over and there was always quite a lot of noise because the ack-ack [anti aircraft] guns were going off and the English planes, the, Allies' planes, the British and the English were chasing them back. First of all they'd come and try and stop them getting into Singapore, then about the middle of January

27:30 the whole hospital was moved to Singapore Island and the 10th Australian AGH went to the northern side to two schools and this, 13th AGH went to the southern side, to St Pat's which was also a school hospital and then it was during that time that the Japanese intensified their attacks. There seemed to be

28:00 an almost a constant barrage of bombing and firing.

What was that like?

Well you were so busy it didn't worry you and you couldn't, I mean you had to remember that you were in charge of the ward and you mustn't show any fear or anything like that. I was lucky in that my voice was steady, was hands were steady, my knees used to get a bit wobbly at times though.

How did the wounded, your patients,

28:30 **react to all this noise?**

Very, very well actually. They were terrific. They, I can remember when we were being shelled. When I say we were being shelled they were actually going over. I was in charge of a ward that was just a huge marquee over two concrete tennis courts. Not the most secure place to be you know, but I, and one of the doctors came down and he said, "For

29:00 heaven's sake, Sister, get under the table." and I said, "There's no way I can do my work while I'm there." Well you can imagine with my long legs sitting under a table. Anyway so he left in some disgust I think so I just went on doing dressings and every time a shell went over the patients used to say, "Don't worry about that one, Sister." but of course we were all waiting for the next one. That went on for quite a while, I can't remember how long and eventually

29:30 the British Headquarters managed to get in touch with the Japs and said, "You're hitting one section of our hospital and killed a patient." and one of the sisters took some orderlies, these were on the section of the hospital that she was in, and she took some orderlies out with her and they carried the other patients inside.

- 30:00 They couldn't do anything about that man who must've been killed, so the Allies managed to get in touch with the Japs and let them know that they were bombing our hospitals so that they, not bombing, shelling our hospitals, so they did cease and that must've been about the 11th of, no, it wasn't that day.
- 30:30 A few days later Matron came to us and she said that she, she called all the nurses together and she said, "I've been ordered to send half the nurses out and I want those of you who are prepared to stay to move to my side." This we did in a body so, she that had the wretched task of deciding whom to send out. So that was all right, we had to, we
- 31:00 really thought we were staying and I was working the next day when one of the doctors came over and said to me, "It's 11.00 o'clock in the morning, don't you know the sisters are leaving?" and I said, "Well no one's told me, of course I don't know, I'll just say goodbye to the patients." and I can remember his tired exasperated voice saying, "Do you always have to do the right thing?" and I said, "'Specially this time." We knew the Japs were close.
- 31:30 Everybody knew that.

So why was it important for you to say goodbye to the patients?

Well, so they'd know that I had gone. If I just disappeared, if they had known that I was there one minute and then that I had just walked out the next minute, it's a matter of personal feelings, you know, and they all said the same thing, I heard them call out, "Well goodbye, good luck Sister." and an

- 32:00 almost inaudible voice as we were, as I was walking away with doctor, with the doctor, and an almost inaudible voice said, "Yes, good luck, she'll need it." 'cause everyone knew how bad things were.

What was that like for you, walking out of the ward?

I've always considered that the worst experience I've ever had in my life, to walk out, and most of the sisters, a lot of the sisters felt the

- 32:30 same, you know. We would've given anything to stay, and you see, the hierarchy in their wisdom had decided to censor all news from the general public. Therefore, a great number of the general public, even we didn't know how bad things were, and the general public knew nothing of the horrors of the fall
- 33:00 of Hong Kong. They did in Australia but they didn't in Singapore. The result was that three evacuee ships that had been sent out by England to take evacuees away, and this applies specially to the civilian population, they were going, leaving Singapore barely a third full with the consequence that with the fall of Singapore
- 33:30 a very high number of youngish women with families, the same as in our camp, they were caught, it was too late by the time they were, but the hierarchy, our Director of Medical Services wanted us sent out at least three weeks earlier than we were because they knew the situation was hopeless and by this time
- 34:00 you see, Hong Kong had fallen and they knew that, of all the murder and rape, everything that went on in Hong Kong but the general populace of Singapore didn't know about that. That was why there was such a mad rush to board anything that was sailing out of Singapore at that stage, and nobody could ever know how many people were lost
- 34:30 in small boats.

So you walked out of the hospital?

Well yes, and we boarded ambulances as well. You don't see out of an ordinary ambulance and you certainly don't see out of an army ambulance, and we were taken to the Church of England Church. I think it was St Andrew's Church, it was a beautiful church actually in Singapore.

- 35:00 There we met up with the 2nd, with the 13th AGH and 2nd CCS girls and there we were accounted for, and then we were taken by bus, no by the ambulance to a wharf. It was only a small wharf and there was quite a smallish ship beside it and that was the Vyner Brooke and that was the one that we boarded. The Vyner Brooke many years
- 35:30 previously had been the Rajah of Sarawak's private yacht and had very few cabins and very little accommodation for people but we piled on to it, there was 65 of us and the group I was with, there were about eight of us, we just curled up on, we just sat down on the forward section of the port decks.

Who were the other passengers?

A lot of

- 36:00 civilians, women and children, mostly women, quite a few men, but mostly predominantly women and the captain of this little ship, he had come into Singapore hoping to have a rest because he'd been chased around the islands by Japanese planes, you know, for days before he got to Singapore Harbour thinking he could have a rest.

- 36:30 He was told to immediately prepare to sail and he had to, you know, refuel the ship and I believe that 90 per cent of the food that was put on board was tossed on by the army and of course a ship like that didn't have the water to supply, to look after so many passengers. We left the harbour.
- 37:00 We probably got on board a bit after twelve, say maybe about one o'clock. We left the harbour about, we didn't, we left the wharf about four o'clock and a naval launch with an officer standing on the forward deck with a pistol in his raised hand came dashing towards us and he shouted to the captain,
- 37:30 "Stop and await further sailing orders!" So we just, I don't think we had anything to eat that night, we just curled up where we were and went off to sleep as best we could. We had our tiny suitcases which we had been carrying on through the wards with us for the last fortnight knowing we could be ordered to leave, and we just curled up on the deck and went to sleep, and about eleven o'clock we heard a lighter [small launch] bump up against our
- 38:00 ship and we could hear people pouring in. We didn't know where they went, they probably went down into the hold, or any space that they could find, and then some time during, some time after midnight, the ship slid out of the harbour.

Sorry Pat, at this time was there a battle going on in Singapore, were there air raids?

Yes, yes.

- 38:30 **Could you paint a picture of what you could see?**

Yes, you could, you could see the bombs dropping, you could see the fires starting up again. Looking back on Singapore it was just so desolate, so sad. There were fires burning, there was smoke, terribly heavy smoke coming from the Shell Oil tanks which the British had naturally set alight so that they wouldn't fall

- 39:00 into enemy hands, and yes, and they were bombing the harbour too, the ships in the harbour, the ones that they could, and the ack-ack guns were going off as best they could, but you, there wasn't anything you could do about it so you didn't take any notice of them, and you were too tired and too sad anyway.

You mentioned that there were other civilian women and children on the boat.

Yes, there were a lot.

- 39:30 **How were the children coping with all this?**

Well as long as they had Mummy with them they were all right, yes.

We might actually leave it there because we've just finished a tape and then we'll come back.

Tape 6

- 00:34 Those sketches I did give you a good idea of the type of camps that we were in, but they're only in the first two camps. After that it was a matter of, I didn't have the physical strength to sit up and do that, and in any case I didn't have the paper or, the pencil had worn out by then.

We'll get some, we'll take photographs of those

- 01:00 **afterwards.**

They give a truer picture.

Yes, we'll take some photographs of those.

It has to be stressed that they're in, see each successive camp was worse than the previous one.

OK, perhaps we could start off with your impression of General Gordon Bennett.

Well the GOC [General Officer Commanding] of course is somebody you have almost no contact with

- 01:30 as a nurse. You see he inspects a hospital and he goes around with the matron and the commanding officer but he I would say was a very complex man and when it came to this idea of the hierarchy, he was one who objected. When our Director of Medical Services wanted us sent out, and I think it would

- 02:00 have possibly been in very early February or even in January, he wouldn't hear of it and you know, we were over there serving like the soldiers and the soldiers weren't being evacuated. That would've been his attitude I think.

And what did you think of him?

Well, a very cold, austere sort of man and

- 02:30 when he flew out, this would have been because he genuinely believed that he was the person who would've known how to fight in the jungle, and this is possibly very true that he would've had good knowledge of that, but he didn't seem to have any feeling for the general humanity and of course, the British
- 03:00 GOC who was the most senior one, that was [General] Percival, he was a very weak character. He looked it and he was, and then the Governor who was Shenton [Sir Shenton] Thomas, I've forgotten the correct name
- 03:30 to start off with, and their attitude was, you know, stiff upper chin, and so the local people had no idea of what went on. They had no idea what went on in, with the fall of Hong Kong and hadn't very much idea of what was going on in Malaya and the consequence was that there were a tremendous number of British
- 04:00 people in internment camps in Indonesia when they were captured who should have left much earlier on those evacuee ships that were sent out. If you think of three bigish ships being sent out and each one going a third full, it was just like one ship going really, and they had a lot to answer for.

So Pat, perhaps now we could move into

- 04:30 **your life in the camps?**

Yes.

And we'll start off with the first camp that you were in. Was that in Muntok?

The very first camp in Muntok, yes.

What were some of the stories of how people came to be in Muntok?

Well they were of course fleeing Singapore, and they got out in any sort of ship they could find. Some of them were

- 05:00 in yachts and some were in launches and things like that, and some of them came in very badly sunburned because they just were exposed to the sea, exposed to the sun, and very hyper sensitive. Their ships had either been bombed and sunk or their ships had been beached in the Malacca Straits. If you look at the map on that you'll see how narrow
- 05:30 the Malacca Straits are and nobody would ever know how many bodies lay at the bottom of the Malacca Straits because they didn't know, you know, there were no lists of the people who boarded on the ships. It was a shocking state of affairs altogether and there is still quite a lot of
- 06:00 bitterness about the situation as it was, and the civilian people, particularly civilian women should have been evacuated much, much earlier.

So you mentioned on Friday the Japanese who were holding you prisoner would,

- 06:30 **that there was pressure from them to, for the women to become...**

Yes, yes.

prostitutes, and I was wondering if you could actually talk about that. What kind of an experience of that sexual pressure that the Japanese put on the women.

Well at that stage it didn't happen in Muntok, but when we got to Palembang we were put in quite nice houses

- 07:00 but they didn't have any furniture. We were not given any food by the Japanese but the local Indonesians gave our household some flour and some oil, palm oil, so we virtually lived on that. Now when we were there they formed a club between our two houses, the 13th
- 07:30 were in one house and we were in another and they had a club and we were to attend the club, so we got to work and did the opposite of making up by rubbing ashes into our hair, rubbing ashes into our skin and face and washing it all out, much of as you can, but to leave it look as though you have a very bad skin and your hair's awful anyway, and one
- 08:00 girl plonked along in men's boots. We wore our uniforms of course to make quite sure that they knew what we were and they had questioned us previously about that, you see, as to what work we could do, and we said there is only job that we could do and that was nursing, and we were assured that there was always work for women. We knew exactly what they meant, and we went into the,
- 08:30 yes, they put on a cocktail party for us, and the Japanese officers, I think there were four of them, they were very neatly dressed, very courteous and they pressed savouries on us, wanted to give us alcohol and we assured them that Australian nurses never drank alcohol so we had soft drink. Luckily they had soft drink which they hadn't spiked.
- 09:00 And we cleaned up the savouries very quickly and I think we were there for about a bit over an hour, maybe it was a bit longer, and they said that four of the nurses had to stay and some of the older nurses

had talked it over and they decided that if they insisted anybody stayed that the four of them would stay. So we went back to our house, we went back to our houses and feeling just too sick with worry to

09:30 know what to do, and we waited and waited and about possibly, I don't think it would've been more than a quarter of an hour there was a knock on the window, "Don't worry, we got rid of them so you can go to sleep now." which we did.

Were there civilian women within,

09:50 **staying in these two houses as well?**

No, no, only the nurses. This particular incident only affected the nurses.

Did the Japanese ever,

10:00 **I mean it sounds like they tried to encourage that behaviour from you. Did they ever forcefully try to....?**

No, they didn't. The funny part about it I think they were trying to make a good impression. I honestly don't know, but we had a very nice German woman, a Mrs Holbeig, who had been in Muntok with us and her husband was a doctor in Palembang and she got a message to him that the Japanese were putting pressure on the Australian

10:30 nurses to become prostitutes and he got in touch with the hierarchy of the Japanese Army and then we had no worry with them at all, but, and from those houses we were moved into much poorer houses behind barbed wire and there were 24 of us in a house which I should say would be no bigger than this, if it was as big, but luckily

11:00 it had tiled floors so it was easy to keep clean, and we were given rice sacks that we filled up with dried grass and we used those for mattresses. Now when we had been in that camp for possibly about two and half to three months, Captain Miyachi, who was really quite a handsome Jap, and incredibly

11:30 conceited, and Mrs. Hinch, we had appointed commandants for both the British and the Dutch and Mrs. Hinch was our commandant. Anyway, Miyachi issued an order that he wanted all the women to attend a meeting at one of the houses, one of the bigger houses. So we went there and he was very pleased to see such

12:00 a big gathering and he talked for quite some time about the need they had for women to work in the hospitals, and he was asking for volunteers and he presented it very well, all the rest of it, and then he said, "Now I'd like that those of you who are prepared to come and work for the Japanese to come to the desk." So with that we

12:30 floated out of the windows because a lot of them have those ceilings, or through doorways. Anyway, and he looked absolutely furious, getting wilder looking every minute, and two of the middle aged women, a Mrs. Gilmour and a Mrs. Leyland, they went across to offer their services you see, and so they were very rudely brushed aside. He was looking for younger women. Now sometime

13:00 afterwards, probably within a week or a fortnight some of the women did go out. You must remember, there was every section of society in this camp that we were in and probably some of them were quite experienced taxi girls or whatever they like to call them, and they did go out and from then on we had no further problems about pressure to work for them.

13:30 **Sorry, can I just clarify because you said that Captain Miyachi wanted women to work in the hospitals, but was he actually asking women to work as prostitutes?**

Well you see, Mrs. Hinch, the camp commandant, and Dr. McDowell, who was the senior doctor and Sister James, who was our senior sister, they asked Miyachi if they could be allowed to examine the premises

14:00 under which the people who left camp would be living, and this was refused. So it was obvious that they just, I think they particularly wanted to, I think they particularly wanted to get a group like the Australian nurses so that they could sort of fling it back into the faces of

14:30 the Australians, so the nurses volunteered, were asked to volunteer, asked to work for the Japanese as Comfort Women I think they called them, and so many of them accepted. I think they wanted something like that; they were very cocky at that stage, very proud of themselves. Well they had advanced so quickly, you know, right through Singapore, down through what had been the Netherlands East Indies.

So Pat, what was the feeling towards those two

15:00 **women that did go off to the hospital?**

No, no, not, there were more than two, there were several women who went off to become, we just called them "girlfriends." and as Gilly said, this is Mrs Gilmour, she said to me, "Don't, you younger ones shouldn't look down on them, they are your protection, and this is the only way to look at it." It was sensible, and also perhaps they weren't living a very different life from what they had been living, say in Singapore.

15:30 **So in a way you were quite grateful that they did volunteer?**

Yes, exactly, yes. And then, we were there for a bit over a year in this camp and then we moved into the men's camp and sometime later

16:00 the girlfriends were moved back into camp. Well as strange as it may seem they were an asset to the camp because they became friendly with the guards which meant that they could get the black market in through at night and get extra food in, and this they sold of course at a great profit but even so, it did mean bringing food into the camp. When you were nursing

16:30 we did, we had all stages, were trained nurses and we were rostered if you know what I mean, and you had your days on duty and if you had to treat somebody who'd been one of the girlfriends, you didn't treat them any differently from anybody else. Just, you know, it seemed pointless. It was their lifestyle, it was their business. As long as we didn't get involved we weren't going to

17:00 worry too much about it.

Did they ever talk about their experiences with you?

Well naturally, well one didn't really have any conversation with them apart from when you were sponging them or something like that you might have a bit of conversation, but you never talked about that. You only might have talked about their life in Singapore or what the situation was here.

Were there ever any signs of brutality towards the girlfriends

17:30 **by the Japanese?**

No, no, not as far as, well there was. One little girl who had gone out, she was 15 when she went out and she was Eurasian and the Eurasians were badly treated by both sides, the British sides and the Asian side, and she had had a baby and this

18:00 is just before they were brought back to us, and she'd had a baby, I s'pose about a bit over a year after going out and they had said to her, the Japs said to her that if she gave them the name of the Japanese who was the father that they would arrange a marriage and everything would be respectable, but she was a streetwise little girl and she wouldn't

18:30 give a nationality, let alone a name. She said, you know, it could be Chinese, it could Japanese, it could be Indonesian or the rest of it. So she was subjected to what they call basinado, which is beating the soles of the feet, the poor little kid, and she was brought back into, into our camp. She had to be brought back by ambulance of course because she couldn't walk, and I was on duty the day she was

19:00 brought back and Dr Smith said would I go and give her a sponge which I did, and I must admit it seemed funny to use scented soap and nice talcum powder and all these things and put her into a pretty nightie, but her poor little feet were quite swollen and I soaked those in what's its name. When I first walked in with the bowl of warm water to give her the sponge she looked at me with fear but of almost like

19:30 hatred and by the time I finished she said so sweetly, "Thank you Sister, I feel really happy now." 'cause I'd sponged her. I didn't treat her any differently from what I would anybody. I mean you can't blame those kids.

Do you know what happened to her child?

Yes, it was a boy, he was sent to Japan or so we heard through,

20:00 a lot of the news would come through with the black market people you see.

So this was while you, this was when you had been moved to the men's camp

Yes, the men's camp.

So just previous to that I believe that the men's camp, the men used to send messages to the women's camp in logs of wood.

Yes.

Could you explain the communication that took place via the wood?

20:30 Well, they were only just small slips of paper slipped in because they had to be very careful that the Japs didn't see it, and I never saw one but they'd be the women who had husbands. Most of the Dutch, a lot of the Dutch women had husbands who were in the camp and some of English women had too, and

21:00 it was very necessary 'cause we had that springy wood which I ended up with a black eye and being knocked out, and being....

Can you explain that story?

Yes, I've written it all down. No well, really and truly it was very springy wood and I, the silly part about it was that the axe head, you'd raise it up see, swing and of course the head would fly off so you'd have to grab yourself around the head, run

21:30 **for cover and yell "Fore!" and as I always said it was, wood chopping was most dangerous and hilarious because it was every third hit. It didn't matter how many little bits and pieces you'd hammer and hammer in with this well as you could with another bit of wood, and this first hit'd be all right, the second hit and the third hit, it happened every time but I wasn't the only one.**

22:00 **There were three of us, three of the sisters were injured. There were quite a few of the civilian women the same, and as I say I ended up with what I called the "black eyed brigade" and it takes at least three weeks for the staining to go and it has every colour in the rainbow in it. I don't know why they call it a black eye, but I sort, I regained consciousness**

22:30 **that day as I was being carried into the house by Win Davis and Mitzie, Sister Mittelheuser, and the first words, they always laugh at me, "Mirror mirror, give me a mirror." Well I knew my face was, been smashed to pieces. I thought yes, they needn't think I'm going to live with a face like this. When they showed it to me I was bleeding from the cheek there and bleeding from here**

23:00 **and this was beginning to swell, you know, it does swell very quickly. So they laid me on the floor and I must've passed out again because the next thing I knew Dr Smith was kneeling beside me and saying, "I'll just put a few stitches in both those cuts." and I thought, "Heavens to Betsy." I don't know what the standard of asepsis is and**

23:30 **you see beneath the cheek here is the antrum, which is a spongy sort of thing, helps with the breathing and I thought I couldn't have the stitches done because if, you could have a deep-seated.... we used to see it occasionally with the facial injuries from patients in motor accidents you see, you'd get a deep seated infection, you'd get osteomyelitis, this is what I**

24:00 **thought in a flash which is an infection in the bone. I mean I had the whole works, didn't I? So I was a bit hysterical naturally after having been knocked out, and I said, "No stitches, no stitches!" So Dr Smith got to her feet and said, "That's all right, well I bloody well won't stitch it!" and stalked off in a huff. So as I say I belonged to the black eyed brigade after that.**

So just to

24:30 **clarify, was it the actual axe head that came off?**

No, it wasn't the axe head, it was a piece of wood I presume. I think the axe head was still on and it was after all these things happened that the men got the permission to send cut wood over to us.

So was it around this time

25:00 **at this particular camp that the vocal orchestra was started?**

Yes, it was. It was started quite early in the piece and Miss. Dryburgh and Mrs. Chambers, Norah Chambers was a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music and she was very talented, and Miss. Dryburgh was the most amazing person. She was the senior missionary, or missionary that had

25:30 **worked, either in just China or Japan, I'm not quite sure which, and she'd also was working in, she was working in Singapore with her group of missionaries when Singapore fell and she was quite an amazing person. She used to play the piano for church services and things like that. She was a great help to the,**

26:00 **they had a school, I've forgotten what it was called now, it was, and Mrs. Hinch's husband was the headmaster, and it was for the girls who weren't sent home to, weren't sent back to Britain for education, a lot of them would have been of mixed breed, of Eurasians and things like that.**

So were you a member of the vocal orchestra?

No, no, no, I don't

26:30 **have a singing voice, so I didn't attempt to, but I loved it, they had, Mrs. Chambers and Miss. Dryburgh could remember the various notes used and Antoinette Colijn who was one of the Dutch girls, she was about 19,**

27:00 **she copied that out very carefully on paper. You see people who had money could buy paper and things like that. People who didn't have money of course couldn't, and she copied out, and she copied out very, I think I'll have to go away and try and cough.**

Sure, OK.

27:30 **So Pat, you were talking about the vocal orchestra.**

Yes.

And you were saying that there was a young Dutch girl that would write out all the parts on pieces of paper.

Yes, exactly.

Could you talk about who was a member of the vocal orchestra and who were the key players?

Well the key players I think would be, would have been Mrs. Chambers and Miss.

- 28:00 Dryburgh because they could correct the slightest diversion from the accuracy better than anybody because they were the most advanced. Both the Colijn girls were quite interesting actually. Their father, their grandfather at that stage, or at least not at that stage
- 28:30 but early in the war in Europe, he had been the Prime Minister of Holland and their father was with an oil company in Java and their mother was away from home working with the Red Cross, and they had quite an interesting experience in my book. My book is here. They never knew right until the end
- 29:00 of the war whether their mother was alive or dead or not. Anyway Arlette, Antoinette and Arlette were both in the choir and they were quite good at music. Now the Australian girls who were in the choir were Flo Trotter as she was then. She had a very nice voice, very pleasant voice
- 29:30 and Mickie Syer who also had a very nice voice, and Betty Jeffrey who know how to, she had quite a good voice and she was quite interested in theatricals and things like that. Those are the three Australians, but mostly they trained them very assiduously. When we were in the houses they
- 30:00 started that, you see, and they were able to practice quite openly there, and in the first lot of houses we were in, in the first permanent lot of houses we were in we were allowed to have gatherings in the evenings and people would give various talks and things like that and it was basically from that that I think the vocal
- 30:30 orchestra started because they realised that they had quite a lot of people who were very interested in music and were prepared to perform, because they asked people to come forward who wanted to be in it and who felt that they could hold a tune and it was quite amazing what they produced and it was absolutely marvellous. We all loved it and it was a great relief from the tedium of the days with
- 31:00 daily routine which consisted always of carrying water for at least two hours day on the hottest part of the day and various things.

What sort of music did they sing?

Mostly classical because both Norah Chambers and Margaret Dryburgh, Margaret Dryburgh had very good qualifications in music too. It's

- 31:30 in the book I've have but I've forgotten which ones they were and she did her training in Edinburgh but mostly classical stuff.

And why was the vocal orchestra important to the morale of the camp?

Because it took us into another world. It's a bit like now if you just go to one of the concerts or, it's a lovely feeling when you walk out, you know, if you go to a really good show or a concert

- 32:00 at the Opera House you walk out more or less floating on air 'cause it's such a lovely experience.

It must have been extraordinary to have this incredible beautiful thing being created in such a....

Well apparently, we were the only camp that had it and we realised how lucky we were. They gave their first public,

- 32:30 complete public, '42, it would've been probably Christmas '43 I think, and you see when we went into the men's camp they weren't, women
- 33:00 weren't allowed to gather in groups so they used to wait till the evening came and they would go behind where the kitchens were and obviously the Jap guards must've heard them but they obviously felt the same about it. It was so lovely they wouldn't stop, they wouldn't stop them and they didn't see them. So, we were tremendously lucky like that, that we had
- 33:30 those people and we had many really very splendid people in camp, make no mistake about that. And as Australian nurses and particularly after the massacre we always had to keep a low profile anyway and particularly when they had tried to pressure us into prostitution. I'm quite sure
- 34:00 they wanted was mainly to be able to say ha ha to the Australians, you see these Australian nurses, we asked them to come out and work for us and they are working as our Comfort Women. They would've loved to be able to have said something like that because at that stage, you see, they were flying high.

You mentioned before that there were some British nurses, Pat.

Yes.

Could you describe, could you tell that story?

Well

- 34:30 when Malaya was under the British control they had a Colonial Service and they had engineers, they had doctors, they had nurses, they had people like that who went out, and they had quite a good status and they generally speaking were very nice girls, but under those circumstances you tend more to sort of
- 35:00 cling to your own group. You do mix with them to a certain extent; you all mix to a certain extent. It's the same, see you have the group of Eurasians and they stayed as a group, you had the Colonial Service women and they tended to stay pretty much in a group, you had the service women, the wives of the men who were in the
- 35:30 services and they tended to stay, and we, we were kept quite busy if you work out from the point of view that in, we had our duties in the men's camp. We took our nursing duty on the roster, which wasn't.... that didn't come up
- 36:00 too often. Every day we had to spend two hours of the day carrying water and that tired you out somewhat. The group I was with we had made cards and we played bridge regularly every day and....

You mentioned before though that there were some British nurses that actually volunteered for one of the hospitals.

Yes, they did and I thought they were very foolish, and I still consider that they were.

- 36:30 **Could you tell us what happened?**

They volunteered to go out and they looked after the natives in one of the native hospitals, and they were allowed the freedom of wandering around the streets and treated with quite a lot of respect. That went on for six months and then they were taken away and put in

- 37:00 gaol under appalling conditions. At one stage, four of them were living in quite a small cell and then at another stage they had two in the cells. They were allowed to go for a walk in the centre of the gaol but always with a guard in attendance and they were starved. They had very little food, they had a shocking time. When we moved to the men's
- 37:30 camp they came back into our camp thankful to be back with the camp 'cause there were quite a few. They were only four, there probably were a dozen at least of English nurses. I'm not quite sure how many there but there would have been at least a dozen. Only four of them went out and in that I considered at that time that they were very foolish and I still consider that they were very foolish. Actually
- 38:00 of those four only two survived the camps.

So was death a common occurrence in the camps?

We had occasional deaths and then in November 1944 we were moved across to Banka Island and that

- 38:30 was when the dying started quite seriously. We moved across and we were joined by a lot of Dutch women and they brought with them lice, bed bugs and scabies which is a skin disease. When we got to this camp we took within three weeks, which is the incubation period for malaria, within three weeks all of us with the exception of one
- 39:00 sister, one of our sisters, we had malaria and with malaria the most wretched period is the icy cold period that you have before you have your rigor so of course they lent us blankets which meant that they lent us bed bugs and lice and the whole rest of it, but the lice died out because they couldn't reproduce obviously, our blood was of such poor quality.
- 39:30 The bed bugs of course stayed with us and so did the scabies until we were released. Quite a few of us couldn't tolerate quinine. I couldn't for one, so, and they also had, we also got what they called "Banka Fever" which is actually typhus, and it's a very
- 40:00 serious disease and so we had the combination of that and rest was the best thing for any of them, so that was all one did.

Actually Pat, we might leave it there because we're at the end of another tape.

Tape 7

- 00:40 **So Pat, we were talking about how often death occurred in the camps.**

Well, when we came in, the first day we were there our numbers were 714, next day they were 712 and that was a fairly good indication of what they were like.

- 01:00 You see, the elderly women, and we had quite a few elderly English women and Dutch of course. The English people some of them had come out from England to get away from the war effects only to be caught up with that. A lot of them survived actually with a sort of stoicism that you didn't expect from people of that age, but the most
- 01:30 tragic in my opinion of course were the women with the young children 'cause there was nothing much you could do about it one way or the other. And the camp commandants were very good because in our first two camps we would have a sale of goods and a person such as myself who didn't have anything extra, I used
- 02:00 to usually do a couple of little drawings and I sold them for 40 cents each and what else, you could make a kangaroo out of a bit of paper, material and stuff it with dried grass and sell that, you'd get 50 cents for that. You were sort of exercising your ingenuity in a situation like that, but to get back to our camp in Muntok,
- 02:30 I became ill very shortly after we got into Muntok, Banka Island in 1944 and so that I didn't know a lot of what went on but apparently the internees had to dig the graves and bury the dead and they made the coffins. Mrs
- 03:00 Norah Chambers came into her own again there, she helped with the making of the coffins and she also burnt into the crosses the names and the date which was placed over the grave, and what else? We always tried to, I know that they always tried to find some flowers
- 03:30 or something to put on the coffin or to bury with the person and the people who, the missionaries, it was usually Miss Dryburgh or Miss Livingston for the Protestants, and the nuns, they conducted the funeral services all very correctly.

So there would be a ceremony?

There was a proper burial service, always.

- 04:00 And in this camp in Muntok, was on Banka Island in 1944 and the beginning of 1945, was really quite dreadful but it had about five wells all lined with concrete cylinders. Very few of them had water and
- 04:30 the only one that had regular water was the kitchen one but even then occasionally we had to be the last to go down and haul up so many buckets of water for them. The huts had been built with only a fairly, not a very tall wall, probably about 9 to 10 feet and then there was a big space before the roof.
- 05:00 Well of course, for the fever-ridden patients it was dreadful because it was far too cold. As I said with malaria the worst sick part is the cold part, so the camp commandants asked the Japanese to fill in the spaces between the roof and the wall which they did and this work was done by a
- 05:30 Japanese who was quite handsome in a European sort of way so he probably did have some European blood and he was supposed to be a sadist, which you can't blame the Eurasians, you know, if he was one for being like that and his assistant was a petite and pretty Yugoslavian nun and they worked quickly and precisely together. I was lying back on the
- 06:00 bali-bali and I watched them and the next day the nun died and I was terribly upset. She was 25 years old, so I staggered out to where some of the rubber trees had fallen limbs and they had lovely autumn toned leaves on them so I went across and struggled across and got a few small branches
- 06:30 and took them across to the nuns in the Charitas Hospital and asked them to put them on or in the grave with her and they thanked me so beautifully with a sort of, it was like, it was almost like from another world.

What did the nun, how did the nun die?

Well, exhaustion. Her heart had just given out, that was all. I don't know how long she'd been in camp because she hadn't been in our previous camps. She was one who had come

- 07:00 in when more Dutch people joined us in that camp.

And Pat, at this stage were all the Australian nurses still alive?

The 24 who survived, the 32 who survived the sinking of the ship and the massacre, yes, they were all alive.

- 07:30 Now in this camp we lost four sisters. The first one was, I think the first one was a Sister Rayment, she was a Tasmanian and a member of the 2/4th CCS and she was just suddenly very ill and died, and the next one was another
- 08:00 13th AGH, another Tasmanian, she just dropped dead while she was talking to somebody. Of course they were so frail, and the next one was a Queenslander 13th AGH and she apologised to the staff, she was

in hospital and she apologised to the staff all the time saying, because she was taking so long to die, and the next one was

08:30 Rene Singleton who had the most superb sense of humour of anybody I've ever known and a wonderful sense of ridiculous and she was such a nice person. She was one of our 10th AGH sisters, and the four died in that camp and then, whether the Japs were afraid of the death rate or not I don't really know, they moved us back

09:00 to Sumatra close towards the western side, the Palembang having been on the east coast virtually. I went just Win and I, Win Davis went with the first lot, and we had a very rough trip. The

09:30 ship seemed to take longer and it was more uncomfortable. I don't remember being given any food for the trip.

Were you still ill with malaria at this point?

Yes, but I used to have the odd day when I was free with it, and also the typhus had burnt itself out at last. Typhus, before they found that Chloromycetin I think it was, would

10:00 help, I think it lasted just a straight six weeks. It just left me with the malaria. Then we had a very rough trip but no one died on our trip. We got to Palembang and we had this shouting, screaming Jap guards with their rifles on their shoulders

10:30 hustling us into the train, and Win and I had to spend a night in the guard's van with three very sick women and Dr. Smith and the only thing they gave us was tea, buckets of tea filled up to the top so that every time the train shook or, the tea slopped over and next morning we were, Win and I were relieved of our duties. We went into

11:00 the train proper and got quite nice seats and they gave us a funny sort of loaf. You could squeeze it, it was spongy, you couldn't bite into it because you couldn't bite it, but by licking it and sucking it, it went down your throat, and I think it was made of tapioca, flour and sugar, and it must have had quite a lot of sugar because it was surprisingly satisfying. That was all the meal we had for the day and it was lovely being in the train and being

11:30 able to look out on green vegetation and ferns and trees and all things like that that we hadn't seen. When we got to the camp, it was a succession of huts. It had been a rubber plantation and the owners or occupants had wrecked all the machinery before they left, so we searched for what we could find in the way of anything we could use,

12:00 little bits of iron to help to make our little stoves and things to cook any extra food we had and all the roofs leaked, the floors were dirt and it was, looking back on it, it was quite a pretty area and it sloped down to the, the main section sloped down to

12:30 the river and the bridge had a sort of hump in it. It went down on the other side, and on the other side was a hospital and a cooking area.

Pat, was there ever a time when you didn't think that you were going to survive the camps?

Yes. Actually in the last camp I wrote a letter to my family

13:00 and it went like this, "Dear family, please don't worry about me. I enlisted of my own free will knowing I could be going into a war zone and we nurses who have been prisoners of the Japs for so long have always been with other women. I have not been raped, bashed or tortured. When I die, if I die it will be due to malaria and

13:30 starvation." and signed "All my love." and that was to be given to my family if any of them got home, but that was in our last.

Was writing that kind of letter a common thing for the women to do?

I think a few others did it, I don't know how many. It's not the sort of thing you talked about, it's sort of something you did privately and said to one of your friends, "Look, if you get home send this up to my father."

14:00 And that was that.

And did anyone ever try to escape from the camps?

Well, where would you escape to? Remember this, they were small people and they have a different coloured skin. We can't, you couldn't pass off, nobody would if they tried to escape. Some of the men did, and of course they were terribly badly treated, and you see, with escape it sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But very often, I think

14:30 this happened in the German ones too, that the, the ones who were still in camp they were punished for it.

Now I'm also wondering about what happened to the children in the camps that were

orphaned?

Yes, well, the nuns looked after a lot of them, they had a flock of them, and the missionaries did too.

15:00 **So they were looked after by other....**

And it took I think seven years for them to find, to find relatives of some of them. See, we had a little boy who was in our very first camp. His father died with the sinking of the Vyner Brooke, his mother survived the sinking but died of pneumonia a few days later and he was a little Jewish boy, and his mother kept

15:30 on calling for 'Mischa, Mischa, Mischa.' so everyone thought it was his name. He was taken back, the missionaries, this is Miss Dryburgh's group and Miss, names just, I've forgotten her name now, I did have it a minute ago, she took him home with her and they couldn't find any trace of any relatives at all

16:00 until eventually they found a relative in Shanghai and he went there and he used to stride through the place, through the camp with a determined expression on his face and we used to laugh and say, you know, "If we're here for 20 years Mischa will own this place." and interestingly enough he went from Shanghai to America and became a millionaire, and when Miss

16:30 Cullen was the one who took him home, she married, and when one of her children was married he went across to Scotland to the wedding, so they'd always kept in touch, but I think it took seven years for them to find relatives and a home for the orphan children. It wasn't so bad, these were mostly people of

17:00 Jewish extraction because you know how they were fleeing Europe and the countries so close to Germany with the hatred that Hitler had for the Jewish people.

Pat, you were also talking a lot before about how you would make certain items and sell them. Would you sell like.... you mentioned a kangaroo that you made once.

Yes.

Would you sell them to other members of the camp?

No, you didn't do that. No, you

17:30 didn't do it like that, you see, you would have a sale of goods and whoever ran that, you see, our camp was well run. We had such splendid people as our camp commandants and they'd be put on a big table and they'd have their sellers and somebody would buy them. You never knew who bought them.

Would that be the local people or....?

No, no, no, no, no.

18:00 People in camp, no, no. We had no contact with local people. They wouldn't let us do that, no.

So can you tell us how you made your kangaroo?

I suppose I just got a pair of scissors and cut the shape and sewed it up, that's about all I can say. See I was lucky that Pat Blake looked after a little boy who was Chinese, well his father was an Englishman, and

18:30 she used to look after him in the mornings and she used to knit for him and the Chinese woman asked me to make clothes for him, so of course I couldn't refuse that, I'd done a little bit of sewing, but not a lot. Anyway she always paid me for that and when I offered her back the cotton and needles and things she would never take them, so I always had a good supply of cotton and things, and

19:00 see we made hats from the mats and things and sold those. You didn't get a lot of profit out of that because it took quite a lot of time.

And what currency were you using?

This was Japanese, yes, yes, that was all that was, that was all that was considered. You see once they'd taken over even the Singapore dollars, the Singapore dollars that we had in our pockets when we

19:30 eventually floated up, we were able to use those, you know, in our very first camp, but we didn't have much because if we'd had our bags, or any of our luggage, we'd have had more, but what you had in your pocket was practically, or we had a money belt with very little.

And you mentioned before that there was a bit of black market in the camp?

Yes.

What items would come

20:00 **in through the black market?**

Food. You see, eggs would come in and sometimes they'd be 50 cents each, sometimes they'd be five

dollars each.

Gosh.

So well, the thing is that the ones who worked with the black market they did, they were under a certain amount of risk.

20:30 Very little I might add, but if they were prepared to do it, and they would be the indigenous people or the Eurasians and naturally they spoke the language.

I'm also wondering about how the women, you women coped with feminine hygiene problems

21:00 **like your monthly periods?**

Yes, well of course on that diet it takes about six months to stop menstruating, and we all had our little tins and I can't remember where we got our bits of towelling or anything like that. We had our tins and we kept them separately and would boil them up on the stove or any little,

21:30 you sort of exercise your ingenuity with those sort of things.

So they were like, you used rags, did you?

Yes.

Yes.

It didn't matter, any sort of rag and you know, if you had a bit of a belt and a couple of safety pins, that made the pads and things and of course

22:00 one's menstrual period decreased all the time. It took about six months and some girls were lucky and stopped earlier.

'Cause you need a certain amount of body fat to menstruate, don't you?

Well, you've got to have certain, your blood has to be a little bit better quality than ours, so that was a great relief. That was probably one

22:30 of the greatest reliefs, a sigh of relief.

So you mentioned on Friday also a concert that the Japanese put on for you, the concert.

Yes, yes, that was quite amazing because it wasn't a very nice camp and they said that they were putting on a concert for us and we were furious because we needed food for the body rather than the soul. You see, all

23:00 requests in all the camps for better food and more medicine they just fell on deaf ears, and so they put on this concert for us. Obviously they had heard of our concert I would say and we were disgusted and said, "We want food for the body and not for the soul." and we weren't going, and then of course the usual

23:30 and they always shout and they scream and a few of us were lying down in a hut that I was in and we had determined not to go and the guard came along screaming and shouting so we thought we'd better go and as we walked up the slight rise to where they were the music from "Poet and Peasant" came floating through the air,

24:00 We said, "This is really good, this is lovely." So we went there and sat. It was actually quite beautiful because they were immaculately attired. The rubber trees were in their full glory with their autumn toned leaves and the grass on the ground was very beautifully green, so altogether visually as well as sound it was quite a

24:30 beautiful experience and the Dutch women of course joined. They played mostly German music, well they were allies, and the Dutch women joined in the singing with the various pieces. They played mostly German music, well they were allies. So that's, it was really quite uplifting. It was

25:00 much the same effect as the, our vocal choir had on us, or our orchestra, vocal orchestra had on us.

Because previous to that the vocal orchestra had put on a Christmas concert, hadn't they?

Yes.

So what happened on the Christmas concert?

That, they held that quite openly and it was good, that

25:30 was beautifully done. It's very difficult to describe it unless you are one of the contestants. Helen Colijn's book is there and she, Antoinette had forgotten about the thing. She had taken all the written, all the copied scores of the various music they'd done, she'd taken them with her when she left and their father

26:00 had died in camp but their mother survived and they went back to Holland and then decided that they'd go to America and live in America in California and when she was going through some of the things years later, this was Antoinette, she found all these scores, so they had these played by I think it was the Pennsylvanian Choir group and they were very impressed by it,

26:30 which so they should've been. It was remarkable.

So that Christmas concert that you had at the camp by the vocal orchestra what actually happened that day? Can you describe what happened?

Well it was just the ordinary routine day and we all tried to look as nice and tidy as we could, which was a little bit difficult after a bit more than three and a half years in prison camp,

27:00 and we just went and sat on the ground in front of them whilst they performed and it was quite remarkable, very uplifting to the spirits.

Was it quite an emotional experience?

Not, yes and no, not terribly so. I think we were so happy to see our friends performing

27:30 and doing such a beautiful job, and the Japs of course came quite openly to it. Well they used to come, they used to come to the, Siki didn't come, I think it was only the guards. Captain Siki was the camp commandant. I can remember one of the concerts we put on when we were in the first lot of houses and a couple of Japs would attend and

28:00 there was "Siki the Sadist" and "Ah Fat." I wouldn't know what his name was but we just called him Ah Fat, he was sergeant of the guard, and it was quite amusing. They had no understanding whatsoever of satire. Ena Murray, who was Norah Chambers' younger sister, danced very nicely and she used to do a dance, you see, and then after that was on Norah Chambers and a New

28:30 Zealander whose name I've forgotten would do a skit on it, you know, and of course we thought it was hilarious and very funny and they didn't understand it at all, and it was quite amusing because "Siki the Sadist" always loved anything classical. "Ah Fat" loved any leg show, he was typical.

Tell me Pat, did your faith in God help you through your time in the camp?

29:00 I don't know. I just always felt so sorry for him. He had to look at his world and what was happening to it. I don't know, I think one sort of, I'm not a particularly religious person. I just think, you see, all the wars we have, let's face it, they're just virtually due to religious differences.

29:30 And I was talking to one of my friends here today and I must remember to ask her who said it. We were talking and I said, of course, I said what I told you, and she said, yes, and somebody and she mentioned the name of a very famous man, they said, he was asked what changes he would make if God gave him complete and absolute power and he

30:00 said the one thing I would ban would be religion. I must ask her who said that.

It's a good one.

Yeah.

So tell me, can you describe the address that General Miyachi gave you at the end of the war?

It was very brief, he was, he was obviously very, well defeat is a very bitter thing, you know, and he was a

30:30 short man and he got up on the table and he just stood there, and I can't remember it excepting that he ended up by saying, "The war is over and now we can all be friends." and we felt like laughing, you know.

How did you react?

I think I laughed and cried both at the same time and a lot of other people did and we hugged one another, we were so thankful it was over at last.

31:00 **Were you angry?**

I wasn't really in a sense that there's no point in it because as horrible and everything as the war is, you can understand how people do stand up against injustices and things like that.

31:30 But I'm not very good on what causes war and things like that because I haven't, no, I don't remember crying or anything like that. Some of them did, they just sat there and cried. We laughed and said, "Aren't you glad, are you sad?" you know, and acted the goat.

Do you hold any animosity towards the Japanese

32:00 **to this day?**

No, it's funny. I hate what they did, but I don't actually hate them. It was quite interesting, some years

ago we had quite a nice garden when I lived at Mt Keira which is just west of Wollongong, about three miles out of Wollongong, and we were also involved with the formation of the Rhododendron Park

- 32:30 down there and Peter Valda whose father owned a beautiful home up at the Blue Mountains, I've forgotten which, they had a lot of rhododendrons and gave us a great deal of help. Peter was head of the biological what's its name at the Sydney University and he rang Col and said he had two Japanese professors from one of the southern islands and they
- 33:00 were very interested in seeing the rhododendron garden which had been formed by just a group of people, it didn't have any governmental help or anything like that, and would Colin take them for a day, he'd send them down by train, and Colin said, yes, and he said to me rather self consciously, "What'll I do about lunch?" I said, "Col, you do the same as you do with
- 33:30 any visitor, particularly from overseas." 'cause there's one thing they like more than anything is to come into an ordinary home. So they came. He picked them up and took them up around the Rhododendron Park and around the Botanical Gardens and back to our place and one was an older man and he hunched himself and he looked quite small.
- 34:00 He reminded me actually a bit of the one that I called the Sadist, the one who had helped with the, but only that he was shorter, but maybe he had lost, it didn't have to be him. Colin told me afterwards, yes, he had been involved in the war and he did know, you know, about women's prison camps. I didn't bother saying to my husband, "Look, don't say anything about me being an ex-POW." because I knew he wouldn't be able to resist it anyway. So, and the other man
- 34:30 was quite tall, not very Japanese looking and quite interesting, and when I went to sit them down naturally I was to put the older man on Col's right, but he determinedly wouldn't understand me and he sat on Col's left. It was only when I was clearing the table up afterwards I realised that if I'd put him on Col's right he would've been facing the window so I would've been able to see his face properly so I often wonder
- 35:00 if he wasn't that same man, but it didn't have to be. The other man spoke to Col and Col spoke to him. He spoke very little or he said he spoke no English. A surprising number of them spoke very good English, but the man who was on my left and was really quite interesting and we talked about a lot of different subjects. And the thing that amused me most of all is the number of people who said to me, "Pat, did you give them
- 35:30 a Japanese meal?" I said, if I were in Japan I wouldn't want an Australian meal, I'd want a Japanese meal, so I said, "I gave them an Australian salad with a few of the trimmings and things." No, it's funny, hate's a funny thing and you see, there's one person you have to live with all your life, and that's yourself so you might as well try and be nice about things, and if you want to go
- 36:00 onto a course of self-destruction, you hate, bitterness and self pity and there you've got the whole works but it is unforgivable the things they did, it's unreal. You see the fellow who published my books, he's written a lot of books on that, of course he's given me every- I can't read them because it's too distressing.

Do you still to this day

- 36:30 **dream about your time in the camps?**

No, I don't. I'm very lucky with my dreams. If I have dreams they're usually rather nice ones and quite interesting, and I think, "What did I wake up for, I wanted to find out what happened?" So I don't have any problems like that although I believe some of the girls had bad dreams.

What about bad memories?

Plenty of bad memories, yes, and unfortunately you think that you can forget them but you can't.

- 37:00 **Is there anything that you experienced that you've never told anyone else before?**

Possibly, I can't remember, it's hard to say. When I wrote my book I tried to be as clear-cut as I could about things but not, not in a way that's sort of self pitying but in a way to give a general aspect, and to point out the fact that

- 37:30 the most tragic, most pitiful cases were the women with small children and then the next lot of course the elderly women, and so, and of course, so that's that. Are you finished yet?

Almost, almost. When you were in the camp how did you deal

- 38:00 **with the absence of people that you loved in your life?**

Well, you thought about them a lot, but you see, we didn't have all that much spare time. In our first camp which was the cottages we had made cards and we could sit on the floor. Once you'd done your chores,

- 38:30 you had to chop wood and you had to do the various things and then you'd have your, your bath, not a bath, but you know, a sponge down, and then apart from water carrying, we used to fill in time playing

bridge which was very good and of course I did quite a bit of sketching and that used to take quite a time and

- 39:00 I enjoyed that because it took me into another world, and it was funny. It was funny, quite often a Mrs. Anderson who was a very charming person would come and sit and talk to me whilst I was, and sometimes we didn't talk, mostly we did, and one day when I was sketching away quietly there I had a feeling I was being watched and I knew it was Mrs. Anderson
- 39:30 because she always sat, you know, fairly close so we could talk. You know how you can feel something that's piercing into your shoulder, or something as if somebody's watching you, so I just kept steadily drawing away. I didn't move and then the person moved away and I made sure that I still kept on until he was well away so then I was able to look, and it was a Japanese soldier and he wasn't one of the squat
- 40:00 ones, knees that seem to go out like that. He was a tall slender boy, young, you could tell by the, and all I thought then was, some poor lonely kid who'd probably rather be back, you know, doing Arts or doing a university course or even finishing school. That was the only thing I thought about because he'd spent quite a lot of time, couldn't,
- 40:30 it was probably only standing towards the end of the picture. I was a little bit worried at the time.

Pat, we've come to the end of another tape.

Thank goodness for that.

That went on for a while, didn't it?

Tape 8

- 00:33 **Pat, when you were in Singapore initially I believe that you felt a little guilty when you compared your experiences in Singapore with the experiences of the nursing sisters in the Middle East? Is that correct?**
- 01:00 I felt before war broke out and I'd have letters from the girls who had been in the Middle East then I did feel a little bit guilty about the fact that life was so easy and so pleasant for us, and there they were working under really quite difficult conditions particularly
- 01:30 the ones who went to Greece and Crete and I knew quite a few of those girls, and the letters I had from them, they didn't stress anything about the difficulties they'd been through at all.
- But you knew of the kinds of difficulties they were probably encountering?**
- Yes. We had quite a lot of news about that because it was in the Australian papers and Dad used to send me the Saturday
- 02:00 Morning Herald regularly and also the Bulletin, so that I had ways of knowing local news.
- So that the information that you had on what was happening elsewhere in the war before you went into captivity actually came from newspapers sent by your father?**
- Yes, yes. Well actually the Straits Times which was the daily paper from Singapore until
- 02:30 war broke out and the hierarchy banned or censored all news of what was happening in the East, that came out daily, the Straits Times, and they gave a certain coverage of what was happening in the Middle East and the war there.
- Do you have any specific**
- 03:00 **memories of Australian soldiers training or on R & R [rest and recreation] or just enjoying recreation in Singapore before the outbreak of the Japanese war?**
- Well of course, the various battalions would invite us out to dinners and this is, you know, officially entertained us, to dinners and dances and things like that and,
- 03:30 but those were just purely sort of social occasions.
- I mean a lot of these men went into captivity later of course. What sort men were they?**
- They were just the usual nice, average person, you know, the same sort of people that you meet here. We virtually were only allowed to associate with the officers. If you had a friend
- 04:00 who was say a corporal or something like that, you could go out with him provided that you had an officer with you.

And when you were in Singapore and Malacca did you have much to do with local people?

Not a lot. We had a certain amount to do with the planters and their wives and the Colonial Service people and their wives and occasionally was

04:30 service people.

And so the planters would be what, of British stock?

Yes, British ones, yes, yes, because Malaya and Singapore were under British rule virtually in those days.

Did they express any views about Singapore's either impregnability or vulnerability?

We never discussed it, you see, this is the thing. It was considered unwise if we ever talked about

05:00 anything to do with the war.

Why was that?

Probably security. They were probably afraid of that, the powers that be. It wasn't a definite rule, it was just an understood thing that you didn't talk about the activities of your unit, and remember that ours was only a hospital unit, it wasn't a working unit but

05:30 we still followed the same rules and the talk was very general, much the same as you would have at a dinner party here.

Do you have any specific memories of Singapore just before the invasion when it was obviously being shelled and bombed and air raided by the Japanese?

Singapore, I think most of us loved Singapore.

06:00 The, despite the fact that the drains were little more than open sewers, and the smell was terrible but it had a lovely relaxed atmosphere and there, we used to stay mostly at Raffles [Hotel] because it had that old world sort of atmosphere which is very nice and it was very relaxed, and you see, you'd meet up with some of the servicemen, some of the either air force or

06:30 army and just have dinners and dances and things like that and go to the various spots and see as much as you could of Singapore Island, and it was fascinating because it was very eastern in those days, it hadn't been westernised at all and it was a pleasant way to spend some leave.

07:00 **Once the Japanese started to attack Singapore were you in the city itself?**

Not, no, not at first because we were still at Malacca. We didn't go to Johor Bahru until just after Christmas and then, you see, leave was just about impossible. You had no leave although I do remember going into the

07:30 city of Singapore, I think this was from Johor Bahru, by ambulance and there was an air raid whilst we were there but you didn't take much notice of it. I know we didn't go in slit trenches or anything like that, but there was an air raid.

So you didn't actually see the city after it had been bombed?

We were more or less, I've

08:00 forgotten what the term is for it, but when we were in Singapore, you went to Singapore in the middle of January then we were confined to barracks, and that's all there was to it, and it was probably all we could do anyway because we worked a straight 12 hour shift on day duty and the night duty sisters worked two six hour shifts, you know, they had to split in two because we were so busy and

08:30 the air raids were pretty constant I can assure you of that because the, Japan was throwing everything they could to conquer the city and there were broken water mains, you know, it was a terrible mess.

You saw some of that, did you?

Yes, we saw when we were waiting on the wharf to go on board, the what's its

09:00 name, and they said that there were dead bodies lying in the street, this is people, you know civilians, because we travelled only in ambulances from the hospital, first to the cathedral and then to the wharf so you wouldn't see anything from that.

Now I've got a question relating to your time at Palembang I think it was,

09:30 **and this was something that I'm not sure that you covered before, and this was the fact that one of the other nurses had access to a radio.**

Yes, this is the first lot of houses we went into. They weren't inside barbed wire or anything like that and you could walk around the streets quite freely but it was suburban, it wasn't citified in any way, no

shops, and these sisters were walking around and they met some of the

10:00 other internees and the other internees said, "Look, we've got a wireless in our house." Obviously their house was furnished, ours wasn't, and they said, "The news will be on soon, would you like to hear it?" So they went in and listened and they heard on the wireless that the ship, the Australian nurses who had left the day before

10:30 us had arrived home safely. They'd had a very hazardous trip but still all we wanted to know was that they were safe. They also said that General Bennett had arrived.

He had arrived back in Australia?

Yes. So that was the news, and that was a great relief to us because, you know, we did wonder what had happened to them.

Is it your own personal view that General Bennett should have stayed in Singapore?

Yes, of course

11:00 Always. You see, to me in a situation like that you know it's going to be difficult, you send out at least five people at different times from different places with the information which you have and 'cause some of them will get through. One or two might get through, maybe only one, but, and you stay with your troops. I mean I know what it felt like when I left

11:30 the ward. I still felt I didn't want to go, and I've always said that was the worst experience in my whole life, because they were such nice kids, they did, you know, they, they were sort of used to having you look after them and you meant a

12:00 lot to them, and they would know that once you left that meant that the Japs were obviously taking over. What happened apparently was that as soon as they got rid of us they took by ambulance all the patients to the Hotel Cathay and they were much safer.

You said it's probably the worst experience you've ever had.

Yes.

12:30 Can you recall some of the things that were going through your mind at that time?

No, just the sort of, the sort of stunned feeling you have. It's complete despair, and this is where you rely on friends of course and Cath Noyce, who was in the massacre, she was the one who had been wounded and whom

13:00 I'd put into the boat, she always had a good sense of humour and she was a good stalwart. We could always laugh about the same things and of course it was she who looked around the what's its name and said, "Look, Pat's not here." I was the last one on board, and you don't, in a situation

13:30 like that you don't try and do anything that will depress people you know. You don't sort of, even if you're feeling terribly upset yourself you're not going to make other people feel miserable because of that. It's far better to put on a good face.

Throughout all the ordeals that you had in the various camps and the difficulties that you personally faced during the war, what do you think sustained you? What do you think got you through all those difficult times in the war?

14:00 I s'pose one's sort of philosophy on life. It's life learning to roll with the punches. You have to say to yourself, "I am myself, I am me, I do certain things, I don't do certain things." and just keep to your regular standards and as for surviving, well I know Dr Smith was very good to me

14:30 because she gave me occasional injections and, but I never complained you see. She'd say, "How are you?" and I always said, "Very well thank you." 'cause honestly that's what you're always taught as a child anyway, and she used to say, "Don't bloody well tell me that, you're the one who's bloody well dying." This is when I'd be nursing people in that hut rather than before they went in, but she did rely

15:00 on me I know for giving her, you know, a say about different people who are sick. So-and-so has to go to hospital and things like that. She relied on me a lot for that.

You just mentioned that she said, "Don't tell me that, you're the one that's dying." What did she mean?

Yes, well because she thought, she considered that I was one amongst those sick, and you see I don't believe in,

15:30 in other words I'd always make out that I was better than I was, whereas I know a lot of people make out that they were worse than they were and she was fairly astute, and she could make out, and I was always thin anyway before I went into camp, and I lost even more weight of course and,

16:00 but I always worked.

Was there a time where you were actually dying? If she said this, it's a fairly strong thing to say.

Yes, yes, there would've been, but you see, she'd pop in an injection, wouldn't she?

What were the injections?

I never bothered asking but they'd have to be the, what we, see now days we use Vitamin B12, and it'd be whatever they had which would've been similar to that, but I never bothered asking.

- 16:30 I never asked her for it and I never whinged, you see, there's one thing she couldn't stand was a whinger. What's the point in whinging, there's nothing they can do about it, so what good do you, because I know one of the nurses who didn't get quite as good treatment and she didn't survive and yet she was much, physically should've been a much stronger person than I.

So of what were you considered to be dying?

Starvation

- 17:00 and malaria and you know, just, this, she said that to me before I ever had malaria anyway. Dear old Smithy, every second word was bloody but it didn't really matter. She was a very sincere and very straightforward person and if I was worried about one of the patients and say, "Look, Mrs so-and-so is very depressed and I can't pull her
- 17:30 out of it, would you have a talk to her?" and she'd say, "What the bloody hell do you think I can do about it if you can't?" I'd say, 'Believe it or not you do actually talk good sound common sense.' which she did too, 'cause she was in the same position as all of us. They had practically no medicines and, or anything to work with so it was very hard on them.

What do you think was the main

- 18:00 **incentive for maintaining your own morale?**

The main thing was to get home and say, "Look, here I am, I'm all right, I haven't been bashed, I haven't been raped, I haven't been tortured." You see, if you were bashed you'd be utterly humiliated, if you were raped you would be suicidal and if you were tortured, well honestly you wouldn't know how you'd react to that until you were, but you knew that, and you

- 18:30 wanted, the main thing was to get home and tell your family that because rumours would go around, you know, that we'd been raped, because the sisters were raped and murdered in Hong Kong and there are plenty of people who'd love to be able to say that sort of thing, so that's that and there's probably quite a few who still believe that we were raped and we never admitted to it or whatever, and I mean that's entirely up to them.

- 19:00 **Was it also the fact that obviously a lot of people were reliant on you to maintain their morale that kept your own morale going?**

Well, this is the thing, and in a sense the fact that you had certain responsibility made your life more interesting because you'd do your rounds in the morning and then

- 19:30 Dr Smith would come up so you'd give her the verbal report, but not go around with her on the rounds because that was better, the patients may feel more relaxed, that they could say things to her that they may not want to say to a younger woman and I always looked a lot younger than I was. I was about 28 and I probably looked about 22, and it was better that they could talk. I
- 20:00 thought that was anyway. We didn't do it sort of formally with the doctor and the nurse doing the round because they may feel happier talking more freely and be able to talk more freely to her. You have to work these things out from, not so much I wouldn't say psychology, but from practical sensible what's its name.

Now, you were referring to Dr Smith, was she with you constantly?

- 20:30 She was in our first camp, you know, when we were collected at Muntok, the first collection yes, but she wasn't working there, the ones who'd arrived before us from the, there was a Dr Castle and he was in the common, I was going to say the Commonwealth, the British
- 21:00 Medical Service, I've forgotten what they call it now, and his sister also had, was Matron there. Now they were both prisoners but they had been on a beached ship so that they were properly dressed and they were able to take off what they could carry. Now he and Dr McKechnin who was an Australian, but had done his
- 21:30 medical studies in Scotland, they ran the RAP that we had on our first camp at Muntok and they were both very nice men, particularly McKechnin, he was the easiest one.

Just getting back to Dr Smith who was obviously quite an important influence in....

Yes, but she looked after the huts if you know what I mean.

- 22:00 Dr McDowell was a senior to her, and she looked after the patients in the hospitals and we also had a German Jewish doctor but she, it was found out afterwards that she had a Ph.D. [doctorate] and wasn't a medical type at all, but she had fled, I don't know whether she had, it was rumoured that she had, had been questioned by the British. It was also rumoured
- 22:30 that she was, you know, they seemed to think, there was a rumour that she had been a spy anyway for the German side, despite the fact she was Jewish and her husband was killed, but I don't know whether he was, I don't know by whom.
- So in the first session that we had you described the homecoming that you had, so that we've talked a bit about**
- 23:00 **coming home and**
- Yes.
- talking to people once you came home. Could we talk a little bit now about your life since the war because we haven't really spoken much about your life**
- No.
- in the intervening years including how you met your husband and marriage and things of that nature.**
- Yes.
- So could you give us a bit of a summary of your life since the war years?**
- OK, well when I first came back they, we were given three months leave and the interview took about three minutes. Not,
- 23:30 there were 13 sisters, 13 New South Wales sisters amongst the 65 who left Singapore on the Vyner Brooke and four of us survived. I never saw the principal matron. She didn't say one word of sympathy. She just said, she gave us three months leave and said, "I think the sooner you get back to work the better." and so
- 24:00 you see there was a lot of jealousy because there was such a fuss was made of us. It wasn't our fault, but still, people were very nice about it, but that was her attitude and I can assure you that was the attitude of a lot of the, you know, that we have done all this work and we were, and they had worked hard, there's no doubt about that, and still, it's funny, I think it was only last year, a little lass I'd trained with, and she'd been in the Middle East,
- 24:30 she said, "Of course I never talk about it." and she said, "What illnesses did you have?" and I said, "Well actually I had malaria." she said, "We all had malaria." and I felt like, I didn't bother saying, "Well I think your reaction to malaria when you weigh 33 kilos or when you have malaria and you weigh 33 kilos and you have a starvation diet is slightly different from the type you'd have. You were properly fed and looked after,
- 25:00 had a proper bed to sleep in." I didn't, I just laughed and I said, "Of course you did."
- So when you had the three months leave did you go on holidays then?**
- I came back and said, she said you know, we could've got out if we'd wanted to, and I said, no, I want to do at least 12 months work and so I was sent to Concord Hospital which is a big hospital and I did three weeks
- 25:30 with another sister so that I could learn if any of the techniques had altered, which they had altered very little, and the main thing was penicillin had come into being and the sulphas were very much improved but when I went back there I knew that I've forgotten
- 26:00 the name, Atebrin, that they were giving us for the malaria, it was only holding it, it wasn't curing it and I'd been on it since when we were flown out on September the 15th, we would've started on the 16th, so I'd been on Atebrin for virtually six months. So as soon as I got there I stopped taking it and three weeks
- 26:30 later I had an attack of malaria and the young, he was wet behind the ears but quite a nice kid, the young doctor, but of course you would get sick over the weekend, and this youngster still wet behind the ears, he said, "Sister, you've got malaria." I said, "Yes, I know I have." and he said, "But you can't have it." and I said, "'Honey, I did not write the path report." He said, "I'll show it to you." and it just showed a weak strain of MT and, which is the worst one, and
- 27:00 BT malaria, so he was very excited. So than the galloping major, why a major is called galloping I don't know, but he came down and said straight out, "What makes you think you've got malaria, Sister?." and I said, "Well actually I've had quite a lot of it." He said, "Look, you weren't allowed to have malaria in the army." and I said, "Well actually where I was I didn't have any option. I was a prisoner of
- 27:30 war." so then he took a bit more interest, and I said to him, "I didn't survive prison camp to come home

and look like this.” and showed a yellow arm. I was practically luminous by night I was so yellow. So we talked for a while and he said, “We’re trying out a new drug, it’s called Paludrine, you take three tablets a week.” So we did, we prepared to do that. Of course we were experimenting with it

28:00 of course, and I said I’d take anything, which I did, and they put me in charge of Ken Starr’s ward, he was a colonel, and he was one of the most brilliant surgeons in Australia. When you say of an Australian, he or she are one of the most brilliant in Australia you are virtually saying he or she is one of the best in the world. There’s never any question of that.

28:30 **Now Pat, you mentioned aspects of this the other day. I’m just wondering if we can talk about, just summarise your life between the war years and now, including how you met your husband and so forth, because we did cover a fair amount of this immediate post war period in detail on Friday.**

No, I won’t detail it at all. I worked with him team for just a bit over a year and then they asked me if I wanted to get out of the army, so I spent a few months at

29:00 home and then I went to Crown Street hospital and did obstets. Then a few months later I went to England and stayed there for, from early in ’48 till the November of ’52. I did a course in TB nursing while I was over there.

29:30 Then I came back and I was working with the TB people, which I quite enjoyed, and then I ran into the man I eventually married. I had met him before when he was married and it was Colin Darling and he lived in Port Kembla. Anyway we kept on meeting again for a few months and then decided to get married, and his kids were,

30:00 his eldest son had his 21st I think the same year that we were married because they had a party in Sydney for him and there were twins, they were, they had their 18th birthday, we were married in May and they had their 18th birthday on the 15th of May and Jill was already doing nursing at the kids’ hospital and there was John who was still at school, he was 12, and

30:30 so we got married and I lived in Port Kembla and you did the usual things that you do. You belong to Red Cross, you do “Meals on Wheels.” you attend luncheons, you know charity luncheons, you lead the same sort of social, easy, relaxed sort of life, played a bit of golf or tennis and things like that, then when he was getting closer to retirement we,

31:00 luckily we got a very nice piece of land up Mt Keira and that’s up above what’s its name, it has a beautiful view so we were able to have a very nice garden. I had belonged to the garden club from its inception which was about, I was married in ’57 you see and I’d been a member of the garden club since its inception in ’59.

31:30 Then our main interest was the garden, and when he retired which must’ve been ’71 we didn’t go overseas straight away, we went overseas about ’75 I think, I can’t remember. Once we’d got our garden established and Colin was sort of involved in the formation of the Illawarra Festival

32:00 and some gardens were asked to be open and they had a garden competition which was judged by Mr, I can’t think of his name, it starts with “g.” but we never went into that but our garden was one of those that was always open in September which meant that we always had to get back by July to get it in order and so that was our first trip overseas and then,

32:30 sort of we were very free to do things like go to Fiji and we went to Bali only once and thought it was our favourite place, and when we went overseas as he always enjoyed sea travel, well I do too, and we went through the Panama which is quite an experience. It was a funny part about it was that we went on the Australis

33:00 and Colin was on board and he said, “You know this ship’s familiar.” He had injured his knee in the army and he was then made a brigade major which meant that he wasn’t actively engaged in the war time thing and one of things he did was to go, be seconded to the American Army to talk about, you know, war against the Japanese because he had been involved in that

33:30 with New Guinea, and when he was on the ship, one of, at one time he was on the ships, and he said, “This ship’s familiar.” and he found out it was the Great Western. They had been on when the Americans had it, and he always tells a funny story, I don’t know whether it was on that ship or not, and he had gone up on deck

34:00 to get fresh air or something and he realised that the ship was circling and circling and circling, so he went up to where the captain is and the captain said, “Well you know actually, I was on one of the Great Lakes.” He said, “That was the only sailing job that I’d ever done.” and here he was in charge of this ship in the Pacific. Anyway and then

34:30 he was diagnosed with cancer and, I can’t remember if it was ’80 or ’81. Well they told me it was terminal, they didn’t tell him. You can’t blame the doctors for not doing it, ’cause they find it very hard to do that and so, at times he was so well. He had to come up for treatment here of course, and, the Prince of Wales,

35:00 and three months before he died he went to a funeral of one of his best friends, and everyone said to him, "Col, I hope you're as well as you look." He said, "I am." he said, "I know I'm right." and then he died. That would've been on the 27th of April, and he died on the 9th of August the same year. So it's amazing how quickly, you know, when it really starts. It was very difficult, so that was that.

35:30 **So you then moved from Mt Keira?**

Yes, I didn't move straight away. I didn't think it was a good idea. We had had to sell the property because we had over an acre that we gardened. We didn't own the whole acre but when you're in an open space like that they like you to keep it clear for fear of bush fires and things like that and also it was a bit isolated to be by yourself so we had a flat which was on the sea

36:00 front.

Throughout all these post-war years were you keeping in touch with fellow nurses?

Yes, yes, yes, with, not only with the ones I'd been POW with but most, a lot of the ex-Prince Alfred girls. See, when I first came up here they said, you know, "We try to have a luncheon every

36:30 year." would I come, and they used to have it in the secondary school's club and then it closed down when the clubs started closing down, and that went on for several years. I didn't come up here until '89, and that went on for quite a long time.

So were you a member of a Services Association?

37:00 Yes, was the Imperial Service Club I was, yes, and that was very nice and then it amalgamated. They say it was amalgamated. Amalgamated? I always say it was, now the word escapes me. Anyway, it wasn't the same, it was amalgamated with the Royal Motor Club, what's that called, what do they call it, the one at the end of

37:30 Macquarie Street?

Yes, that's the Royal Automobile Club, yes.

Amalgamated? They were annihilated by them.

So that was a club. What about an ex-service association? Do you belong to any ex-services?

The Imperial Service Club, yes, it was,

Well that's the club, but what about, is there a former wartime nursing association?

There's a sort of corps, but you see I only had three weeks in the army before I went overseas and

38:00 there is still a little bit of feeling that's funny.

A little bit of feeling? What sort of feeling?

No, no, no, no. My real friends are always just the same, the ones who were in the army, but, and most of them have dropped off the perch by now anyway and, but you know, there's more fuss made over it. See I went up to the what's its name, they had an ex-POW thing

38:30 at the War Memorial and they asked me to come and I said, yes, that I'd come on my own, I'd be all right. No, they said, "Please bring someone with you." I should've taken a niece with me but I thought I should take an ex-army girl so I asked Meg Ewarton. She said, "Pat, I'm just not well enough, I would love to come." So I said, "Well tell me somebody who's been to the Middle East, you know, and has had all this." So

39:00 they gave me the name of the lass. So I rang her and explained. See all the expenses were paid, we only had two nights up there, but I found after a while of course she was telling everyone she was my minder. It was just childish jealousy because they made more fuss over me. I don't want people to make a fuss over me, but this, and I thought, you know, all this pettiness is still here. So I

39:30 don't worry very much. The girls with whom I am friendly with, yes, of course, it's very different.

Pat, we are about to finish our recording session.

Don't tell me.

But I'm just wondering if there are any other things you would like to say or tell us?

I can't think of it at the moment, no. Not really.

Well look on behalf of Rebecca and myself and this project thank you very much

40:00 **for what's been a really excellent interview and its taken us on quite a journey.**

Now, I'll be very interested to see. I just have to stay alive for another couple of years.

Thank you Pat.

Right, OK.

INTERVIEW ENDS