# Australians at War Film Archive

## Mary Paton (Barry) - Transcript of interview

### Date of interview: 13th August 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/764

## Tape 1

00:35 **All right, let's do the Joyce Paton story, this is your life. What, can you give me a little potted history of where you began and how you ended up in the war?**

Well, I lived my childhood on a farm near, about four miles from Strathallan, which consisted of a railway siding, a school,

01:00 a hall and a general store. It was in between Rochester and Echuca. I grew up with loving parents, and I was just a normal child, like everybody else's children were. But it was during the Depression, so nobody had very much but they all helped each other. I rode to school on a horse,

01:30 the four-mile. It was just a little country one-room school. And they were happy days. At night time we all had to wait till the train from Echuca to Melbourne came in to collect the bread and the mail. And that half hour saw a lot of frivolity and we had horse races and all

02:00 sorts of things, until the train came in and then we went home. I brought the cows, which we had a few of, we had about twenty because it was a bit of milk and cream, and it was mainly wheat and sheep. And I brought the cows home, as I came home from school.

02:30 I got home, you changed your clothes and in those days you always had bread and jam or bread and dripping with pepper and salt, a piece of that and a drink, and then you went out and did your chores. And that was the sort of life I lived.

**Sounds lovely. I'm just going to interrupt us for a second. Let's jump forward a little bit to leaving high school**

03:00 **and what happened after that.**

Well, I went to Rochester High School. That was went I had to sort of row a boat across the river, and get out on the highway. But after that, I got on my trip. One brother was married and he joined the air force, and the other brother joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. And eventually, my father found it too much for him to manage the farm on his own. Things were still

03:30 pretty bad as far as the Depression goes, so he decided to sell up. And we shifted to Melbourne when I was sixteen. Then, it was, Melbourne was all sort of 'go, go' with buying bonds for the defence forces and about joining up for your country and all that

04:00 sort of thing. And my father decided he got bored after being on a farm, so he went to the munitions, and I got a job on a telephone exchange. But then, as the war got more serious and they were asking women to join up, the WAAAFs [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] were the first, and then the army in

04:30 1941 had the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]. And so most of us thought well we'd do our bit, we had brothers in the services and we went along to join up. My friend and I, but she was very keen and couldn't get there quick enough, but she was the one that failed the medical and I ended up on my own! Which I was very crooked on, I might add. But,

05:00 from then on I was posted to different places, and we were the first AWAS that went down to a men's camp, down at Mount Martha. And we were told to catch the train at Flinders Street [station] at a certain time, and they herded us into this train, and typical Melbourne weather, it was pouring rain. And we got out at Mornington

05:30 and then were taken by big trucks. No seat belts in those days, just bits of stools and things to sit on. And went down to the Q store [Quartermaster's store] where the two fellas were there, and they didn't look at the size, they as you came along, they just flung out your uniform, here's your jacket, here's your skirt, you know? And so you ended up with all funny sizes,

06:00 and then you sort of, they said, if you didn't have the right size perhaps somebody else had the right size. And eventually we all got something that fitted us more or less.

**I guess that's what you'd call army intelligence!**

Anyway, we were taken then down to the Mount Martha camp and formed up in a line and told which huts to go to,

06:30 and also were handed a piece of hessian, a bag and a bundle of straw, to which we were told to fill the palliasse up, we'd be sleeping on it. And so we went to the huts and got changed and they gave us the rest of the afternoon off to get ready. We were issued with three blankets, no pillows and a palliasse

07:00 and a cupboard beside the bed. Well, we did a four week's course there, mainly of marching and obeying orders. And I don't recall what else we did, but the marching is in my mind, because they used to march us with full gear up and down the hill at Mount Martha. That really sticks

07:30 in my mind.

**Do you recall how heavy your pack was?**

No, I didn't think of it.

**Was it heavy though?**

Yes, and we were also given a kitbag to stick everything in. And then after we did the four weeks' course we went, we were told to report, or I was told to report at half past eight at the Elizabeth Street entrance

08:00 of Flinders Street on the Monday. And when I got there I found there were seven other people there that were to report too. And along came an army truck and picked us up and we climbed in and went over to Coode Island, which was an anti-aircraft battery. And there we spent six weeks I think,

08:30 learning how to operate radar.

**At what stage did they tell you that it was top secret?**

Oh, when we first began.

**Before you were even assigned to radar or…?**

No, when we got there they told us it was top secret.

**Have you any idea what professional or personal traits that you had that put you into radar? Do you think it was random or do you think you had a particular**

09:00 **nous [skill]?**

Well, all I know is for that time of the year we all had a fairly good education. That's all I can say because some of them did their leaving [leaving certificate], some had matric [matriculation] but they'd sort of stayed at school longer than the usual.

**And did you notice if all the other girls that you were sent to the ack-ack [anti-aircraft]**

09:30 **unit with, they all had matric or was it …?**

Well some of them had, a lot of them had their leaving. In those days, some of them did up to year nine but they were all ones that had gone past the age of fourteen at school. Because fourteen was the, you could leave school at fourteen.

**Well it sounds very Mata Hari exciting from this end of the spectrum, so I can't wait to come back and ask you lots of questions. How long did you**

10:00 **stay on Coode Island?**

Oh, it would be six weeks to two months because we had to do a lot of study. And we were allowed to go home at night at that stage. They took us to the Footscray Station: you used to meet at, the truck used to meet us at Footscray every morning. We had to be there by half past eight. And, yes it was about six weeks to two

10:30 months.

**And where were you posted after Coode Island?**

Well, we weren't told where we were posted till we got on the way. I, we were just told that we, on the Friday night, that we'd assemble with all our kit, at quarter past eight, at the Elizabeth Street end of Flinders Street. There was a few men going down there, they'd been on leave of course

11:00 but we were just all put in the carriages with our gear and as we got on we were told we were going to Yallourn.

**That's a fair distance away. Was there any sort of concern that your parents wouldn't know where you were?**

My parents didn't know where I was. But then parents of the day accepted that.

11:30 We were told we wouldn't get leave for six weeks, so all I could tell my parents was that I'd be home in six weeks for leave.

**And, I know we are racing through at the moment but we will come back, how many months did you spend down at Yallourn?**

Oh, about eighteen months, no more, nearly two years.

**So a mini lifetime?**

Mm.

12:00 **And did you stay there until the end of the war?**

No. When it got very bad in New Guinea, they shifted the units. One unit went up to New Guinea, there were two units at Yallourn, one unit went up to New Guinea and other one went to Geraldton. And the men that used to do the radar as well, well they were the ones that went to New Guinea. We weren't allowed, at

12:30 that stage, out of Australia.

**No.**

We came back to Coode Island and did a refresher course. Then we were sent out to Preston Town Hall where the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], the WAAAFs were there, and we did a course of monitoring and recognising planes.

**Okay, that must have been very interesting?**

13:00 And we also, when we were at Yallourn, we were in a man's battalion and we were treated like men. We had to do a guard duty, didn't matter what time of the night, you did guard duty and you did all the things that, around the place, that the men did.

**And were you also treated like men when it came to getting paid?**

No, we got less. One and

13:30 something a day.

**And what about some of the other, well there weren't many perks, but some of the other perks that men got? Occasionally they were given a case of beer or a…?**

Oh, we could go and get, we could get all that if we wanted to.

**So you had equal…**

Yeah, we could go to the canteen and get exactly what they had. All that sort of thing.

**So rations were unilateral by the sounds of things?**

Oh, we didn't have rations. No,

14:00 because the civilians had the rations, we didn't. We could have anything.

**Well that's something good isn't it?**

Yes.

**Well, what happened after Preston then?**

Well then the unit, we got ready to go to Geraldton. But just as we were going to leave, this is where I left the unit because my mother became seriously ill

14:30 and I was kept back.

**Where were they living at the time?**

My parents?

**Mm.**

They were living here in Bentleigh.

**Oh in Bentleigh.**

Yes.

**A lot of generations here then. Well, I'm sorry that that happened. Did that…?**

But I kept in touch. I was bitterly disappointed, I was very cross with the doctor for dragging me out of it because well, by that time I

15:00 had some wonderful friends and perhaps I didn't want to lose my friends.

**No, I can imagine.**

But these things happen, and you can't do much about it.

**Geraldton, forgive my lack of geography, that's Queensland?**

Geraldton is Western Australia.

**Western Australia?**

Yes.

**I really ought to have known that before I got here today. Oh, that really was quite an opportunity missed?**

Yes, Yes but still,

15:30 these things happen and Mum was very ill. It took her six months to get better and I was here in the army for a while and then she wasn't getting any better for a while, so the doctor got me out of the force about nine months before war ceased.

**Okay, so we're looking at about January of forty-five?**

Forty-five, it ceased on the seventeenth of

16:00 August.

**Which is next week. So, you're out of the army? That must have been very strange for you, especially as the war was still going?**

Yes, it was. But then I got a job in the planning department of the DOP [Department of Planning], out at the Department of Aircraft at Fisherman's Bend.

**Oh, okay.**

And I was there till my boyfriend came home and we got married.

16:30 'Cause once we were married you had to leave. So that was that.

**There are so many things I'm looking forward to asking you. It's just such a rich experience. But I will go back to your early life: I especially want to know about riding horses to school and catching boats. Strath-hallan?**

Strathallan.

**Strathallan?**

S-t-r-a-t-h-a-l-l-a-n.

17:00 **So, a little railway siding, a few shops in the main street…**

There was no main street, there was a dirt road that ran along the railway line, and the general store was on the other side. And then there was the railway line and the station mistress's house, and then there was another road than ran down the other side of the railway line and on that side was the

17:30 public hall and the school. It was just a little school.

**And was it, it sounds idyllic, was it idyllic? Or did it really struggle through the Depression?**

It struggled like all little places.

**Strathallan siding, can you tell me then, you said you were farming wheat and sheep and had some cows.**

18:00 **What was the main…..?**

Wheat.

**It was a wheat belt. Does the wheat change colour as it grows? Does the wheat have a sort of hue or a colour to it that changes as it grows? Or is it pretty consistently golden?**

Well, the great saying was, you could see a white WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK ten mile away. It was flat, very flat, and you could always see the heat ripples far away and it was, it had few trees. We lived on the banks of the Campaspe River.

19:00 Our house was built on a blackfella's [aboriginal's] oven.

**A blackfella's oven?**

Yes, where they had the fires, the highest place. And it would be around a big tree.

**Yes, a blackfella's oven, the highest point?**

It's the highest point of land near a river

19:30 where they used to used to sit at night and light their fires. Usually round a big tree, which we had the big tree just outside our house yard. And Dad built it near there and when the Campaspe flooded, we never got flooded. It came up to the house steps but it never came any further.

20:00 So we were rather lucky that way when the river flooded.

**How often would it flood?**

In those days you could get a big flood about every two years. But the railway line and the river, we lived in between the railway line and the river, and we used it get it when it backed out

20:30 at Rochester and it overflowed at the Rochester township. It used to back out and come down our way.

**And you said your Dad built your home. What sort of a property was it?**

Well, it was an Australian home with a veranda around three sides and a fairly big home, weatherboard. Because nobody thought of building brick up there, because weatherboard got hot

21:00 but got cool too, very quickly. And most of them were weatherboard. But it was a fairly big house, rather nice house actually. And he and Mum settled there in 1909.

**Where had they come from to settle there?**

Dad came from Nanneella, which was another little place and Mum lived in Rochester.

**And judging by the timing,**

21:30 **your Dad doesn't sound like he was in the First World War?**

No, he was then producing food, so therefore he was exempt.

**Sure. Did he also make all the furniture inside?**

Oh no, most of our furniture came from, Mum had a few bits of new stuff, but most of it was handed down. And a lot of it had come from overseas where my great

22:00 grandparents had come from.

**Which was where?**

Ireland and Scotland.

**How close to the nearest neighbour did you live?**

Oh, couple of mile.

**And were they neighbours?**

Oh yes, it was a very close community, very close. Because I think in those days you helped your neighbour.

22:30 Like if you had, oh a little bit of something left over or if you were going to kill, we killed our own meat, well you divided it up with your neighbour each side. And if anybody had a spare pumpkin that they'd grown, you gave it to your neighbours: you helped your neighbours the whole time. And it didn't matter whether they were Presbyterian,

23:00 Catholic or Callithumpian, you still helped them. Religion didn't come into it.

**Was there a local priest or padre?**

They all came from Rochester. They used to come out and we had church in the school. The Catholics had it first and then we, they used to come out every Sunday morning. And then we had, in turn, sometimes you'd get a

23:30 Church of England minister, sometimes you'd get a Methodist and so on. Or a Presbyterian, it didn't matter. It was just a Christian religion.

**And what about your place in the family? You had brothers?**

I had two older brothers.

**No sisters?**

No.

**So you were the little darling?**

Yes, I suppose. I was my father's darling. I realised, although he was still very strict.

24:00 **How was he strict? You said it was fairly happy, so –**

Well, oh yes, a very happy household. And I suppose like any child you go as far as you can go, but the tone in his voice told me that that was enough. He never smacked me, but boy, he threatened too many times. But by the tone of the voice I, you know, stopped.

**Did you imagine that he would go through with the smacking if you pushed it?**

I don't know. I wasn't

24:30 game to find out. I used to say to my friends: even the dog obeys him when he gets that tone of voice.

**Was he on the Scottish side or the Irish side?**

Irish.

**And your mother from the Scottish? And what sort of a woman was she?**

She was a lovely woman, she had a lovely voice. She sang in competitions. That's where Dad met her.

25:00 Won a few medals and but then married a farmer. We were invited, I look back now and we were invited out to an awful lot of things because of my mother who could sing. But she worked very hard on the farm, well we all had to because the wives in those days, well they were an extra man if necessary.

25:30 But she was a very nice person, she was very strict. And I was the latecomer in the family and therefore she was very strict with me. And in a way my Dad used to get me off you know, he'd say, "Oh they don't do that Ruby now," you know, "She's all right."

**What's an example of what**

26:00 **they didn't do any more that you could now do?**

Well, she was very strict over how long I stayed out at night. You know, she wanted me home by half past nine and in my day, well, most of us were staying out till midnight. Mind you that was the deadline in those days.

**What age were you when you were given a twelve o'clock curfew?**

Eighteen.

**Oh, okay. Even more than a young lady in those days I suppose, quite an adult.**

Yes well,

26:30 we didn't have the vote or anything. You had to wait until you were twenty-one.

**You said you came a little bit later in the family, what was the age difference?**

There was thirteen years between my eldest brother and myself, and twelve years between my second brother and myself.

**So was that a bit like growing up as an only child in a way?**

In a way, although yes and no. I was an only child

27:00 to a certain extent and my eldest brother was away but my second brother worked on the farm. I sort of had to, well I had a mother and a father who I had to obey, but then my brother used to – well he was an adult too and therefore he used to say – you know, order me around a bit. But I suppose I didn't notice it that much,

27:30 that was me pecking order and that was that.

**And your school that you went to, a little one-room school, one teacher, one principal?**

Yeah, one teacher that's all. And on a Friday a sewing mistress came for half a day in the afternoon. That's all. You didn't have preppies: you went to grade one straight away. And

28:00 right up to the eight grade they went. A lot of them, though, left as soon as they got to the eighth grade. But if you wanted to go on, you did that school and got, I forget what they called it, Mount Certificate or whatever it was. And then I went on and rowed to Rochester High School.

**About how many kids would have been in your primary school?**

The school held

28:30 fifty-two.

**And I'm always interested to know how teachers managed to teach across age groups. Would you in your first year of school be given little bubby's [baby's] work to do while the older kids got separate work?**

Oh yes, all the kids were set and he would probably be taking like grade six or seven but you had your work to do down if you were three or four

29:00 and then he used to do, give something for six or seven and then come back to see how you were going.

**Did you find that distracting?**

Never thought of it that way. None of us did. I suppose we were very innocent in ways we accepted, a lot of things that children wouldn't accept today.

**What about extra-curricular activities?**

Oh we had

29:30 sport, that's all. The boys played footy, the girls played basketball in the winter. And then the girls played rounders or tennis in the summer, and the fellas played cricket. But we did have sport once a week, it was compulsory.

**And evidently you had to go home and do a lot of chores at the end of the day?**

No more than any other child at that time.

**No, but there probably weren't, as there are today, copious numbers of activities**

30:00 **that children really like doing?**

No, No.

**So, no ballet lessons or anything?**

Oh well, most of us came home and as I said, used to have either a piece of bread and dripping and pepper and salt, which we thought was lovely, or a piece of bread and jam. You never got butter and jam, you always got just jam. And you changed your clothes and went outside and then did your chores like feeding the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s,

30:30 helping with the milking, all sorts of things like that, chopping kindling for the fires or all that sort of thing.

**During the Depression did you notice that things were tougher?**

Oh yes, every child knew that it was tough. We used to meet swaggies on the road. Many a time the swaggies used to come to our back door and ask there my Mum,

31:00 "Do you need any wood cut Mrs?" And they'd go and cut the wood, Mum would give them their meal and then they'd sleep in the shed. And she'd have given them a bit of flour and sugar and tea, and they'd be gone before – when we got up in the morning.

**What did you think of the swaggies [itinerant workers]? Were they a little bit scary?**

No.

31:30 No, they were always quite nice, and you could meet them on the road and they'd say, "G'day girlie," or you know, something like that. They were always very pleasant and we didn't have that fear in those days.

**What fears did exist then, illness for example?**

How do you mean?

**Was, living on the land, was there something that you had to make sure was maintained**

32:00 **in fear of say losing something? Losing the land, or fires or floods or…?**

Oh yes, you had a lot of rainwater tanks and we were lucky that we lived beside the river, but the river used to go dry if we had a drought.

**And would that be as regularly as it flooded?**

Oh, it seemed to run in cycles. My father used to say it ran in,

32:30 he thought, seven-year cycles. And when the drought broke you used to get floods because it just poured and poured, and everything was flooded.

**What about, say home medicine? I imagine you would have never gone to the doctor unless it was very serious?**

No, the doctor cost too much, a whole two and six.

**Just comparatively, what would two and six buy you?**

33:00 Oh well, two and six would buy you a fair few groceries.

**So easily a day or so's food?**

Because bread was about four pence a loaf.

**I'm curious you said that. I guess I imagined your mother would have made the bread.**

Well, she used to but not all – they all used to – but not always could they get the yeast from the bakery at Echuca. So she made the

33:30 bread for years, but the yeast was so unreliable that eventually we used to get our bread.

**I'm not all that au fait with yeast, but I assume that you keep a culture of it and keep adding to it or something, but was that not the case?**

No, you buy the yeast, the fresh yeast. You're thinking of the one that you do with potatoes and stick in a bottle and the cork goes up the chimney.

34:00 **I'm not sure. I've used yeast before and it, the fresh yeast…**

Yes the putty-like yeast. Well that's what you make the bread out of, and it used to come through the bakery from Echuca on the train.

**Now did you inherit your mother's talent of singing?**

Not quite, but I did sing, yes.

**And did she encourage you? Did she teach you her songs?**

Yes, yes and

34:30 I have sung at various places but then you come out after the war and get you married and have children and…

**Head down and bum up?**

Yeah.

**What about opportunities for singing? Were there choirs?**

Well, there were more country sort of concerts and get-togethers. That's how the community, and it didn't matter whether it was harvest festival

35:00 for our churches, or something on for the Catholic church, everybody went because well, it was something on.

**I bet, and I bet a lot of important networking happened at those social gatherings.**

Oh yes, and there were a few funny instances too, and of course they all had a dance after. Well, the Presbyterian church used to have a harvest festival

35:30 on the Sunday, and on the Monday night they used to sell all the proceeds, and the proceeds went to the Berry Babies Foundling Home [Berry Street Foundling Home] here in Melbourne. And people would bid for their pumpkins, or bid so much for some bread, or bid you know, flour, wheat and those sort of things. And everybody came, it didn't matter what religion they were

36:00 and then after it was all sold, we used to have a dance.

**That's interesting to hear the Presbyterians did dance, I'm glad to hear that.**

No, it was the Methodists that didn't come. They didn't dance.

**No, cause it could lead to all sorts of things.**

Well, it led to all sorts of things anyhow, but you know.

**What were some of the funny things that you mentioned that happened at these events? Some of the unspeakables?**

Oh, I'll tell you one because I think all that

36:30 family is dead. We had a – she was a very good lady and her husband was wonderful, and she had one son who was brought up very prim and proper but she never let him out of her sight. And, well my brother was in this and a few of the larrikins got around like it was suppertime and they were outside

the hall.

37:00 And they went around the horses and gigs to see everything was all right and low and behold, they found a pot of gasoline in her gig and they left that. They thought no, they wouldn't put it on the seat, it would hurt the dresses. But what they did was unyoke the horse that was tied up to the fence and took the horse round the other side of the fence, put the gig shafts through

37:30 the fence and attached it to the gig again.

**That's really cruel.**

Well, they waited and saw that, they let her, they fixed it all up for her, and didn't let on it was them that did it.

**So evidently she didn't try and take off and clip the fence?**

No, she found out and she didn't know what to do. So they were still there, they hadn't gone home. So, no, they waited

38:00 and in those days, yes, you might play a joke but you always waited to see if the person was all right.

**Well, that's a ripper. We're going to change tapes and keep going.**

# Tape 2

00:39 **High school, and also I'm curious that a little family like yours who survived the Depression had the money to be able to send you through to matric, did you get a scholarship or...?**

No, it didn't cost anything in those days, you just went to school. You had to buy the books and the books weren't that dear, because you didn't have to pay for them all

01:00 at once. And what you had was, you didn't have half a dozen exercises like you do today. One exercise did geography and history. The only book that you had separate was English and maths, but you didn't have all the books. Like you used just your ordinary book till it was full, and then you got another one.

**And so you studied maths, English, geography, history?**

01:30 Oh, just your ordinary subjects, yes.

**And where did you sit your matriculation exam?**

At the town hall in Rochester.

**Well tell me, how big was Rochester then?**

Well, it was an ordinary little country town that you see today. It had, it was growing in population because they put the Waranga channel through to a place called Bamawm, which was only about

02:00 six mile out of Rochester. They had land sold from the big stations. It was divided up into forty-acre lots, and they grew fruit and they had cows. There was fruit and cows they mixed together. The Rochester butter factory was created. Now it is the biggest in the Southern hemisphere.

02:30 It is a much bigger town then when I knew it.

**When you started going to school from Strathallan, did it feel like a big sophisticated city to you?**

No, no, because most of us had gone to Rochester once a fortnight with their parents. That was when the cattle sales were on and sheep sales.

03:00 During the Depression, well most of us our parents, well you got the case of eggs to bargain with the grocer because you didn't have much money. And you took the little bit of cream from the cows into the butter factory, and they gave you so much too. But Rochester, I went through it about six months ago and you wouldn't

03:30 know it. It has grown into a big country town now.

**How many hours from Melbourne is it?**

I guess you'd do it in three hours.

**Oh, okay, so it is quite a distance.**

Yes.

**And were you quite a competent horse lady by that stage?**

Oh yes, everybody learnt to ride a horse before they went to school.

**And what was your horse's name?**

Britannia. It was my brother's horse's name. He used to stick pins in it

04:00 to make it buck therefore, you know, it was a bit aggressive to everybody.

**And what about social life in your early teens?**

Early teens, well I was rather lucky. Although my elder brother didn't take me, he used to go on horseback. He had a girlfriend about four mile away and they used to go together. But it was nothing

04:30 to see people arrive on horseback and everything to every dance within miles of the district. And because my mother and father were either treasurer or president or secretary of most things, I went along too. So I had a rather easy teenage – but I was only there till I was sixteen, and then I came down to Melbourne.

05:00 **I'm just trying to work out the dates, were you in Melbourne when the war broke out?**

Not when war was declared, no. We were still, we heard it I can remember, I came, 'cause my parents had come into Rochester that Thursday, I came from school and met them. I always rode a bike to school on Thursday because they could put the bike on the back of the car, and I'd get a ride home.

05:30 And I remember my mother standing, talking to somebody. We kids hadn't heard it, but it was all a buzz in Rochester that afternoon.

**And when you say it was all a buzz, like as a child without understanding utterly what it meant, did you pick up immediately that it was…?**

Oh yes, we all knew what it meant.

**Right.**

Yes, you know, I think our generation, perhaps

06:00 it was because of the Depression, were very much aware of what went on.

**So what, or who did you know from the First World War?**

Oh I had, Dad's brother was in the First World War.

**Did they come and visit much?**

Oh yes, they came. They lived down in Melbourne, but they used to come up and see us at least once a year.

**What were your impressions of a returned soldier at that point? Did it make sense to you?**

A returned fourteen year old,

06:30 we didn't see many of them, but Uncle Bert was just a cuddly uncle, you know? He was quite a nice man.

**And your brothers being quite a bit older than you, in fact they were probably much too old to even think of enlisting in some ways, were they not?**

No, they were in their thirties, and it was up to forty five.

**That's true. So what were the implications**

07:00 **of hearing that war had broken out?**

Oh everybody was worried and what would happen. Well, I think it was shock because they didn't think that it would occur again. A lot of, see my mother's age and all of them, they could remember the last war and it brought a lot back to them, more so than my generation.

**Did you notice your mother upset about it,**

07:30 **thinking back to what happened to her sons?**

I think both my father and mother were upset about it, because – well, and anybody that had sons I think were upset about it. But it was a sort of a false war for quite some time so people sort of calmed down and things went on as normal.

08:00 **Did you know anything about this fellow, Hitler? Had you heard much about him?**

Only what I read in the paper, because it didn't get through to the country as much as it did to the city. But we didn't hear much: the communications weren't as good as they are today. Some people had radios if they were lucky but a lot of them couldn't afford it.

**Did you have a wireless?**

08:30 We had a wireless. We had no electricity on the farm and we used to work it on a car battery. But you were only allowed to turn it on for the news for Dad and then it was turned off.

**I imagine, yeah I imagine it would be quite precious energy. I realise that you moved from the country to the city before you joined up but I'm also curious to know how the war**

09:00 **started to really impact. Well evidently your Dad had to sell up the farm, that was a major impact.**

Yes, he was, well I was sixteen, so sixteen on, he was sixty going on sixty-one. He found it a bit hard. He'd had a bit of sickness like everybody else had and…

**What sort of sickness?**

He had pneumonia, and he fell out of a tree and

09:30 his leg was never the same. So it got a bit much for him and Mum wasn't that strong, and so he thought it would be best. Also, that wasn't the only reason, we were very poor like lots of other people during the Depression and he said before he got into debt he would sell. And a lot of people,

10:00 our neighbours, they left everything. They put what they could on a spring cart, and closed the door, and walked out and left it. That was how bad it was during the Depression for country folk. Because at one stage I remember my father getting a bill for the bags that he put the wheat in. The wheat didn't bring enough to pay for the bags that it was put in

10:30 and we got a bill.

**How did he manage that sort of stress?**

Well I often look back and wonder, well everybody was struggling in the same boat but they never complained, ever.

**I wonder what he would have made of the profligate credit use of this generation?**

You would have never got past it with him, you had to pay cash.

11:00 You know you never got a bill, but you see when you're farming perhaps your income only comes in once a year and the money you get from there has to last you till the next year. If the bottom falls out of the wheat or the sheep or anything there's no income whatsoever. So if you haven't put anything by, there's nothing. Well people did put by but it went on for so long and

11:30 lots of people just walked off their farm.

**What were you able to take with you when you left the farm?**

Well we sold it up and we had an auction, a sale. And they sold all the bits of implements and everything that we didn't want. And after that, a man bought it for his son. The son was sixteen and this man

12:00 had a little bit of money, and he didn't want his son to go into the air force, so he bought him the farm.

**And what did your Mum and Dad think of your brothers going into the services?**

Well my brothers were old enough to please themselves and that was that. Dad didn't feel it so much when the first one went into the service, because well he was married and had decided to go anyway.

**What was his name?**

12:30 My eldest brother's name was John. Bill my youngest brother: I think Dad did feel it when Bill went. There was nothing you could do, because they were all older and everybody's sons on the farms were going, as well as the ones in the towns.

**Did you have any good friends, any male good friends? You know, I'm not talking about sweethearts**

13:00 **but that you watched go off to war?**

Oh, plenty.

**What did that seem to you? Were you worried for them?**

It seemed to be the right thing to do at the time and you used to ask how they were and the mother or the girlfriend or the wife used to say, well I haven't heard from him for six weeks but as far as I know he's fine. They didn't know whether,

13:30 I look at the people today in the defence forces, I know it's a totally different war but some of the wives, even in this street during the war, in the Second World War, they didn't see their husbands for three or four years. And I often wonder how they grizzle about how they're away for six weeks or six months,

which seems strange to my generation.

**Was there**

14:00 **some intestinal fortitude that has been lost along the way?**

Perhaps. Yes, perhaps because everybody was in it so you just soldiered on as the saying is. The people, the civilians that were home, well they were on rations and they had little groups that knitted balaclavas and socks and goodness knows what.

14:30 Everything was for the war and to get the boys home.

**So do you recall each of your brother's final leave?**

Oh yes. I came home for the second brother. I got compassionate leave. One night I came down and I slept the night at home and I had to go back the next day. Yes, I remember their final leave and I

15:00 remember him saying as he walked out the door, "Mum, don't worry about me. If the bullet's got my name on there's nothing you can do about it."

**Oh, that's a little bit of cold comfort for a mother, I think!**

I will admit we may have had tears in our eyes but we smiled, as he went.

**Did your mother sing at any benefit concerts?**

Oh yes, she sang just locally around here, yes.

15:30 **Can you tell me then about coming to Melbourne then, and the experience of a young country girl? Melbourne wasn't the most sophisticated place in the world, but it was much bigger than where you grew up.**

Yes it was much bigger. Yes, we arrived and Bill had found…houses were very scarce at that stage and we were looking to buy one, but we couldn't buy one so we rented one.

16:00 But the person that had gone out of it had, I'm afraid, left it like some of them do today, and he also bred greyhounds and he kept them in the house, and it was months before we got rid of the fleas.

**Was it in Bentleigh?**

Yes.

**Oh dear, and this area then would have been mainly market gardens?**

Yes, it didn't

16:30 have many shops at all.

**Although I've noticed one or two on Centre Road that were probably here then.**

On the corner where the National Bank is now, Gilpins used to be there. And then if you went down about as far as Coles, that would have been as far as it would have gone then, and it was just bare paddock and market gardens.

**Was the old Hoyts Cinema there then?**

Yes, yes and a few things and

17:00 an old garage and…

**…and a briquette factory?**

…and a briquette factory, they were all here. Of course to me, it was wonderful. You could walk to the shops instead of getting in a gig or riding a horse or bike to go and get something.

**Did that mean that you bought more?**

Oh no, money was still tight, and then it started to boom

17:30 because everybody had a job. All of a sudden everybody got a job. A lot of the first AIF went and joined, so Mum and the kids would have some money but as the war went on, everybody got a job.

**And did your brothers sign over their pay packet to…?**

…to my mother and my eldest to his wife of course.

**Of course. And where were they, your sister in-law?**

In Sydney. My eldest

18:00 brother lived in Sydney. Everybody did the same, everybody was close, everybody worked together. The

young ones didn't seem to, I mean they played funny jokes on people and all, but quite harmless, not something that would hurt anybody. Like if you saw a policeman and he was coming, and

18:30 we used to be out at night, we used to say, "Oh here comes…" you know, and we'd run like mad to get out of his road because he'd say, "Time to get off the street, go on" and we'd go.

**What about your clothing then? You must have been becoming fairly fashion conscious at that point?**

Yes, but there wasn't much in fashions, because you had to have coupons,

19:00 and everything cost much. I mean fashions didn't change. Perhaps they imitated the jackets of the uniforms or a skirt or something. Everybody wore hat and gloves if you went to town, and myself at that stage, I got a job on the exchange in one of the stores in the city. But you always had to have a hat on and gloves on to go to work.

19:30 **But not while you were working?**

No.

**What sort of improvisations did you come up with to fill out your wardrobe?**

Oh you unpicked things, and re-made things and unwound old jumpers and washed the wool and knitted it up again and all this sort of thing to save your coupons.

**You know the op-shops [opportunity] that are everywhere these days, did they exist?**

20:00 No. In those days it would have had a bit of a stigma, oh you haven't got as low as that that you have to go to the op-shops.

**It's only just changing now I think?**

Nowadays, well the kids don't care. They'll go and get it if they see it and take it home and wash it and fix it up and off it goes. It hasn't got the stigma that it had in those days.

**No, I guess things have been re-valued again.**

20:30 **So what about girlfriends? You must have left almost all your friends back in Strathallan.**

Yes I did and it was very hard starting again. But my mother being able to be a singer, the church organist of the Presbyterian Church had gone into the air force and of course they found out Mum could play and sing. And then I joined a youth group and

21:00 I suppose they were about from sixteen to eighteen, but the minute that people got to eighteen they went into the forces, so that was that. But we had old-fashioned Sunday school picnics and all that sort of thing.

**Which church around here did she sing for?**

I went to the Presbyterian church, but it's the Uniting church

21:30 now, nearly opposite Safeway down there now.

**I know that one. Your work at the exchange, can you give me a description of what that is like, as if I am blind and have been in a cave for about twenty-five years?**

You had the piece overhead, and you had to learn all the board. It was an old-fashioned switchboard and you put the plugs in.

22:00 Oh, you got some funny fellas on that too, trying to get hold of their girlfriend when their girlfriend wasn't supposed to get on the phone and all those sort of things. But it was just normal work.

**Whenever you see scenes of women in films at an exchange, one they are terrible gossips but two, they move with such speed.**

Well you have to learn to.

**So, on those boards, to me they just look like RSC [route switch controller]**

22:30 **plugs?**

Yeah, the plugs and you have to know which to plug in to get the number they want, and then you speak into it and tell him or her, and then if he answers you click it up so that you don't hear the conversation.

**What was the,**

23:00 **was it a department store you said, or a shop?**

It was a department store.

**Okay, so the equivalent of say Myers or something?**

Oh no it was, well I don't know if you've heard of it but it was Manton's. There used to be Foy and Gibson's on the corner, and then I think a shoe shop and then Manton's, and then there was a little lane, because we had to go down this little lane and come in the back way. We were only mere mortals and we weren't allowed in the front door.

23:30 **We are talking about in the city?**

Yes.

**What street was it on?**

Bourke Street.

**Okay, Manton's of Bourke Street. Was it where nice ladies shopped?**

Yes, nice ladies shopped there as well as the ordinary customer, and there were a lot of rules and regulations.

**I read, or heard on the radio some time ago, discovery diaries that were kept by sales assistants and**

24:00 **shop girls at Georges in the forties, and they would keep details of each of their customer's needs. So how did you get the job interview?**

Oh, I read it in the paper that they wanted it, and I went in and you were sent up to the top floor, and you just waited and got interviewed and accepted because at that stage the war had just started

24:30 and jobs were fairly easy to get.

**Did you need any special skills or qualifications?**

I had to have a certain education and I did have references from my teacher at school, and one from the minister. It used to be very handy to have one from the minister or the priest.

**Oh, the minister, sorry I thought you meant the state minister. I guess references in those days were all hand**

25:00 **written?**

Yes.

**How would you get copies of them for example? Or would you give a reference and then receive it back from the employer?**

Yes.

**Thank goodness for that! If it was anything like today you would never see them again.**

Never see them again, no.

**What about vocal training, or voice training? Did they give you anything like that to learn to speak properly?**

Oh how to speak, yes, how to speak and speak clearly.

**And how were you instructed to answer the phone?**

Oh, Good morning…

25:30 it used to be, "This is Manton's, good morning, so and so's," and I was so and so, you know. And then they'd say, "Can I speak to Mr so and so?" or, "Can I speak to Mrs so and so?" or, "Could I have the shoe department?" or whatever, you know.

**How quickly did you learn to use the…?**

Very quickly,

26:00 you could do more than one thing at once but it seems a long time ago.

**About how many women would work in the telephone exchange?**

There was four or five.

**Okay, so quite small not like those enormous…**

No, not like the enormous exchanges, no.

**What were the other women like to work with?**

Like everybody else, some were nice, some weren't, and you didn't get on too good with one or another

26:30 but you just had to sort of…it was a small space so you had to learn to get on.

**What about eavesdropping? Did that happen?**

Oh no we wouldn't have been. I don't know what it was but people in those days, if you were told not to, you didn't. I don't know but it could have been the fear of losing the job in those days, I don't know.

**Were your work mates**

27:00 **friends enough to sort of go out with after work?**

No, I didn't go out with any of them. I made friends locally here. Your friends came locally most.

**And your Mum and Dad, your Dad's almost at retirement age at this stage or he would have had to of keep working?**

He went and put his age back and went to the munitions

27:30 and was there till the end of the war.

**I love it when I hear of people putting their age backwards or forwards because of course: you just can't do that any more.**

Well they were grateful to get anybody, but he was very good. Yes, he went and got a job. I think he was sixty-seven and he put it back to sixty-two or three.

28:00 And by the time he was finished, after that he was quite happy to settle down. I think just from having four or five hundred acres and then only having a backyard, that's what he found hard to adjust to.

**I bet he felt quite boxed in. Did you manage to get a good veggie patch in the backyard.**

Yes, he used to grow veggies, well everybody did, they had to.

**I think they'll have to**

28:30 **again one day soon.**

Yes and also all the stuff went to the forces, most of it. It was very dear in those times. For those times it was expensive and there wasn't that much of it in the shops.

**So where was the munitions factory?**

Out at Maribyrnong.

**Yes, over in the west. And did he tell you what he actually did in the factory?**

No.

**So he could have been**

29:00 **laying sheets of metal…?**

Doing anything, I don't know. I know it was a machine he had to look after, but I don't know.

**I know down in Fisherman's Bend they started building Wirraways fairly early on in the piece.**

Yes, that's where I worked when I came out of the army.

**That's probably where I read it then for some reason. I'm getting ahead of myself. Did you work in the actual machinery area or in the office?**

No, I was in the planning

29:30 section of the DOP. Anyhow, I was at Fisherman's Bend and that was where they used to test all the planes.

**Okay, so you're settled in Bentleigh and your Dad's in the factory, I imagine your Mum is taking care of business at home?**

Yes, all the women stayed home, but they

30:00 made ends meet the best way they could and you couldn't get anything much without coupons, so I was saying, you well did a lot of things.

**What about a lot of the women's projects and the welfare work and so on that went on? Did your Mum get involved in any of those?**

There didn't seem to be much of that around in those days.

**So when you knitted things for the boys overseas…?**

You sent it, you joined a group,

30:30 and then you sent it to headquarters in Swanston Street somewhere. I didn't know much about that because by that time I was in the army.

**Well let's get down to tin tacks then, you had a girlfriend that thought it would be good to go in. Who was she and what was her name?**

Irene.

**Where did you meet Irene?**

Well, Irene and I went to the same church

31:00 and youth groups. And she came one day and said, "How about joining up?" At that stage I hadn't thought of it. I had thought of it but then I wondered what my mother would say, whether I would be allowed to. Anyhow, she said, "Will you be in it?" and I said, "Yes, if I can get my parents to sign,"

31:30 because I was eighteen by then, but I still had to have my parents' permission. Not like now at eighteen they don't have to.

**No, well twenty-one was the big day.**

And she said, well if I can get Mum to sign mine, because her father was in the AIF over in Syria. So I went home and I thought my best strategy was to attack Dad. Mum had a few misgivings, but

32:00 my father used to say, "She'll be right, Ruby, she'll be right." And he signed my papers and Irene's mother signed hers and in we went to…must have been Royal Park, that's right, on a certain day. We both went in to separate rooms to have a medical after we had filled out all these bits and pieces. Well, I came out all right

32:30 and as I'm putting my shoes on, she's standing just over there. And all of a sudden it dawned on me there was a fence between her and me, and I said, "What are you doing out there?" She said, "I failed the medical," she said, "I got flat feet!" I said "You stinker!" but anyhow, that's how I got into the

33:00 army.

**Was it too late by then for you to pull out?**

I couldn't have pulled out, I was passed.

**So a medical was enough to push you down that channel?**

Yes.

**You must have felt a bit stupid at that point at what you'd got yourself into?**

I thought, oh well, you don't grizzle, you did it yourself and anyhow it might help my brothers. I might be able to take the place of somebody, you know,

33:30 and he can go off to fight. Well, I said to her…the man said to me, "You won't be seeing your girlfriend for a while." He said, "You can go home now but you have to report tomorrow morning."

**As fast as that?**

And then I was told that I had to report at half past eight on after the weekend to

34:00 Flinders Street Station, and that's when they took us down to Mount Martha. She eventually became manager of one of the Cook Stores. I don't know if you remember, they used to be like another one, Moran and Cato's. Did you ever remember those?

**Not sure about those, no.**

Well, the Cook Stores was in Ormond, and her father used to be

34:30 up high in Cook Stores. They were all men managers in those days: a woman never got that far. But of course when the fellas joined up, she put her name down, so she was manager of Cook Stores in Ormond for the rest of the war.

**So she managed to do something that she wanted.**

Oh yes, she managed to do something and you know she was always very sad about not being able to go in the forces.

35:00 **So what did you make of the men running the organization there, the medicals and the signing-in process? Were they a little ominous to you?**

No, you accepted it. You see they were mainly men doctors and you joined the army so you had to accept. You joined the forces, you accept.

**What did the medical constitute?**

All I can say is from the bottom of your feet to the top of your head

35:30 you got examined, you got examined and that was that.

**Say, "Aah," read this, stick out your tongue…?**

Say, "Aah."

**So, that night going home and Irene is not going to join you and your in another situation where you have to leave everything and change, it was character building by this stage?**

Yes it was but the generation accepted that.

36:00 Really, if you're going to do it, oh well, this is what you have to do.

**So tell me about that night when you go home with your papers?**

My bits and pieces? Oh well, I did meet Irene after, and we went and had a whole new lunch at Coles for two and six.

**Up in the cafeteria?**

Up in the cafeteria, yes. We came home and she was

36:30 very, very disappointed. We called at her place first because she lived just down the street, and her mother said, "How'd you go? Did you get in?" And I said, "Yes," and the other one said, "No," and she turned around and she said, "What was the matter with you?" and Irene said, "I got flat feet, Mum!"

**Poor thing.**

37:00 Yes, she was very disappointed. Then we went up to my parents and I said, "I've got to report on Monday." And she said to Irene, "And where do you have to go?" and she said, "I didn't get in. I've got flat feet!" But anyhow, off we went to our separate jobs but we used to keep in touch.

**So fronting up for that first day, what were your impressions?**

37:30 Well, you didn't know what was ahead of you, but the mood of the country, and of Melbourne, was to do your bit for the forces. So I think that stuck out in my mind more than being apprehensive. You felt that you could handle whatever came along and

38:00 you felt very strange. I suppose a little bit of wondering but the attitude I took is, well you did it yourself, whatever comes along you've got to handle it.

**Can you tell me what month and year this was?**

Nineteen forty-two.

**So the fall of**

38:30 **Singapore has already happened and things in the Pacific are looking very bad?**

Nothing stopped the Japanese until they got to, nearly to Moresby. And although there was Americans there, it was an Australia militia battalion that stopped them. A lot of the parliament were willing

39:00 to let it go as far as Capricorn, to let them in, but it didn't happen.

**The (UNCLEAR) policy you mean? No, it didn't.**

# Tape 3

00:31 **Can you recall what the news of the fall of Singapore was for, what that meant for you?**

Well the fall of Singapore, that happened in forty-one didn't it?

**February forty-two.**

Forty-two. I was in the army at that stage but it was a very depressing time. I suppose we boosted our hopes

01:00 by 'Singapore would never fall' and if they'd done what everybody else thought they'd of done, no it would never fall. I'd been over to Singapore, I've seen the guns in the bay and everything, they wouldn't have had a hope, but of course, they came in the back door. And the Australian Army wanted to fight but the British surrendered, so that was that.

**Yes, that's very contentious isn't it? There's still talk of how much**

01:30 **munitions that the Allies had.**

Yes, they were told to lay down their arms by the British officers and the Australians didn't want to because they reckoned that they could keep them there, the other side of the bridge. They surrendered, the English surrendered and the Australians were under the British officers at that time.

**So you were a soldier at this point and although it might be a bit farfetched to imagine women taking up**

02:00 **arms then, I guess…**

We would have.

**So did you go to bed at night wondering if you would have to pick up a rifle one day and fight?**

Well no, our attitude was if they get too far we'll…because we'd done a course…while we were at Coode Island we had to learn to shoot with the .303s

02:30 because of the guard duty, and we were put through our paces with the guards then.

**What kind of shot were you?**

Well I'd learned to shoot on the farm, so I wasn't a bad shot. There was one person with me, she'd come off a farm too, you know you'd go out with your brothers shooting of an afternoon and you know, laying the bottle up on

03:00 the fence and all that sort of thing. But the attitude of the woman was well, we had a gun, we would shoot.

**By that stage had you a good idea of what the Japanese were like or did the army give you any instruction?**

They didn't, we heard a lot more in the army than outside. But then

03:30 the Japanese had been fighting the Chinese for years before that and the papers used to print how cruel they were to the Chinese. So we knew, most people knew what they were like.

**Do you have a boyfriend at this stage?**

Oh yes, my boyfriend was over in New Guinea. He was the one that was told to put the rifle to the other eye.

04:00 **Was he also left-handed or did he just have a funny right eye?**

No, he had a weak right eye.

**No, there couldn't be that much difference hey?**

But they didn't put him in that, he was a messenger, he rode a motorbike…

**A Don-R [Dispatch rider]?**

A Don-R he was. But then

04:30 he got ill over in New Guinea, and was sent back to Townsville, and when he was sent back again, he wasn't a Don-R any more. His eye was very bad by then, he had got herpes, what they call herpes in his eye, which is a cold sore.

**Do you know very few people have had those? I know that because my mother has had that all her life.**

They're dreadful things, aren't they?

**Terrible. Did he end up with corneal grafts?**

05:00 Well he didn't have a graft. He was discharged eventually because of his eye but at that stage they sent him back and put him in the supply company which took…unloaded the ships with whatever they had to unload. It was very dangerous. The Japanese came over and bombed them at four o'clock every afternoon.

**Where geographically was he when he was doing the supplies?**

05:30 Port Moresby.

**He was still over in New Guinea?**

They sent him back from Townsville, yes.

**Did he get put back from A Class to B Class at that point?**

No, it wasn't till they sent him home again to, well I don't know if he was in the Brisbane hospital or Townsville, I can't remember but the second time they made him B Class.

06:00 He was out of the army with his eye about nine months before the war ended.

**Well that's filled with all sorts of difficulties too, isn't it?**

Yes and well, we lived with the bad eye from then on. You never knew when it was going to flare up, as you understand.

**Yes, it really is very tragic,**

06:30 **very painful and not very well understood.**

No, there was a doctor in Collins Street, we gave the army up…they didn't seem to, they treated him but they didn't seem to get very far, there was a doctor in Collins Street we found out from our GP [General Practitioner]. He was the only one that used to help. He gave him cortisone injections into the eye. It wasn't too bad but you had to…like

07:00 he'd go to bed all right, in the morning he had it, well you had to get on to it straight away.

**And I imagine he had kind of a funny feeling just before he got one too?**

Yes.

**And I imagine stress would bring it on too?**

Well, in the end they told me that no, it had nothing to do with stress, it was just one of those types of germ. It might lie dormant like cold sores do for months and then for no reason, appear.

07:30 **Well it's in the DNA and certain things trigger it.**

Yes.

**It's fascinating though.**

It is fascinating.

**Fortunately no one has inherited…**

They're lucky, aren't they?

**Well, we're fascinated that none of us out of twenty eight offspring…**

But she must have had a cold sore…the last theory that one doctors had was that he must of, because as he said in New Guinea there were a lot of fellas with cold sores,

08:00 and the theory was with one of the doctors was that he must have touched his and somehow wiped his eye and that ended. That's how he got it but I don't know if that was right or not.

**Not sure, but it is infectious. Dear, and he never met a doctor called Keith Galbray?**

No, no, he went to see somebody in Collins Street, and his son is still there. He was a

08:30 European, very hard to understand…Goldberg was his name, Doctor Goldberg. He was the best one we'd ever struck and his son was very good too.

**Now, sorry what was your husband's name?**

Paton, P-a-t-o-n.

**But his first name?**

George.

**George! Where did you meet George?**

I met George at church. I used to sing in the choir. My mother played the organ

09:00 and he was one of a twin. We used to, my friend and I, used to say a twin that isn't a twin. There was something about them: we could see they were a little bit different in their looks. And he used to sit up right near the front and wink at me, and my mother used to go crook at me when I got home for misbehaving.

**Well you didn't do anything.**

No, I used to say he was winking at my girlfriend.

09:30 **Maybe he just had lemon in his eye or something?**

Yeah, maybe he had something in his eye but that's where I met him.

**That's sweet. How long did it take for him to…?**

He plucked up courage after about two months when I came out of the church one night to walk me home.

**Did he like the church or was he just keen on you?**

I had a feeling he was keen on me. Oh no, he was fairly religious

10:00 until he went to war and then he wasn't.

**So it destroyed his faith?**

Yes slightly, yes. He would at Heatherton, where we lived, everybody knew everybody out at Heatherton, and the minister used to say, "Tell George I'll see him next week. It is Good Friday." He'd always go to church Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Christmas Day.

**Well Good Friday was a little bit hard to**

10:30 **put your head down and ignore wasn't it?**

Yes but other than that, no. Mind you, when I went to church he used to come and meet me. And when we lived in Bentleigh, he'd be standing outside on the opposite side of the road when I came out ,and he'd take me and we'd go and have a coffee but he wouldn't come into church.

**Maybe he lost interest in the organization but kept his faith?**

11:00 Oh yes, he had faith, but being in the war seemed to do something to him, like it did to all men.

**Pretty harsh conditions.**

They were never the same when they came home.

**Was he in the army when you met or had he not yet joined?**

No, he had tried to join the army but no he wasn't. He wasn't

11:30 in it until they called everybody up, because they did, at one stage, call every eighteen year old and onwards up.

**So he ended up in a militia unit?**

Yes, in Puckapunyal and his twin brother ended up there too, but they separated them because, well they were very much alike to another person. To me they had two different faces.

**And the other one never interested you at all?**

No,

12:00 different faces, different person.

**So he would have done his basic training there, and probably some further north?**

Up to Townsville and then on, yes.

**What was that like being the girlfriend of a soldier who was leaving? What was that difficult or is that an understatement I just said?**

No, it was difficult to a certain amount, but it is amazing how you get used to people

12:30 having fiancées and boyfriends and husbands, and it being the accepted thing that you waved them goodbye. I mean you tried not to cry while you waved them on the station. I know when my brother went, you know, you'd put a smile on your face. The thing was you don't try to show a tear, give them a smile for them to remember.

13:00 And I think we all tried that. We didn't succeed always but we tried.

**Did you give him anything to take with him? A photo…?**

Oh yes, we had photos of each other. He had my photo and he sent one to me when he was in the unit. That little wee one is the one that I carried through the war of him, that little wee one there.

**What**

13:30 **talk did you have about your future plans before he left?**

Well, we knew that we were going to get married sometime, but we would wait until he came home, that's all. Because he said you know, he mightn't come home and you had to face that, but it was unreal to think he wouldn't come home as far as I was concerned. And I was very lucky, because both my brothers and my husband

14:00 came home, which was unusual but I was a lucky person.

**Did he have any worries about you being a soldier yourself?**

No, it didn't seem to worry him, because he said, well you can't go out of Australia.

**So he thought.**

So he thought but not many of ours did go

14:30 out of Australia. After war had ceased ,they went up to New Guinea and I wasn't in the medical side of it, the…what did you call them? Not the nurses…

**There were some drivers up there.**

Yes, there was drivers went.

**Oh the, what the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment]?**

VADs, they became something else eventually.

**AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] I think?**

AAMWS I think it is, yes?

**And he wasn't worried about you being in the company**

15:00 **of so many men in uniform?**

Well, he said all I can do is trust you and I said I've got to trust you. No he didn't, and all my friends except one did play it straight. When you're in with a battalion, there's a lot of fellas and you used to talk to them but they used to understand that yes, well you had a boyfriend up there, so you know,

15:30 they didn't. And they had friends and girlfriends, and everybody was more or less in the same way. There were a few that mucked up and a few that mucked up with Yanks [Americans] but not many.

**I'll ask you about the Yanks at some stage. They were a major part of a woman's life I suppose during those years. The one that didn't stay true to her fiancée, did she**

16:00 **come to grief later on as a consequence?**

Well, she married her fiancée when he came back. We all knew she was mucking up but he went back and she married the Yank as well, and they eventually caught up with her for bigamy. She made the pages of the old Truth very well, and of course, "Did you know her in the army?" because when you talked

16:30 amongst your friends, but if anybody else asked you, "Oh no, no."

**So you all pretended you didn't know her?**

No, she was a devil. She really was.

**That's another change to today: everybody would have said that they knew her. How did she think she'd get away with something as silly as that?**

We didn't know, because we said to her when she came back and she said, "I got married," and I said, "But you are married." "Oh no I'm not," she said. "I'm not married. I'm just

17:00 married now." I don't know, she couldn't help it I don't think. Give her a fella in uniform and she was there.

**Putty in their hands? Well she doesn't sound very bright.**

No.

**I bet, even though I'm sure there was gossip, I bet you all kept it to a fair minimum.**

Yes we did. We didn't say very much to her at all, we just left it. When you're in a

17:30 tin shed or a barracks and there's twenty four of you, and there's twelve beds on this side, twelve beds on that side and a little cupboard in between, nothing else, you all had to live together and get on, so you learnt. You had to learn.

**Does that mean that you have a very strong internal world, like do you divide that which you can deal with on the outside and**

18:00 **keep…does everything stay kind of locked inside of you, all your thoughts and feeling?**

Some things yes. Some things you never say, well everybody I think had one good friend and that friend and you stuck together. And probably she knew a bit about you as the saying, warts and all, and you did her. But the others you didn't know so much. They were friends and they all had their own

18:30 special friend. But if anything big or from the outside world concerned us, there was twenty-four friends. You know, you closed ranks.

**And who was your special friend?**

She was a lass from Ballarat actually. We went right through together, she went over to Geraldton but she wrote to me. And she wrote to me

19:00 afterwards and then she met, well I knew the soldier she married when he came home, and they went to live in Sydney. I hear from her every Christmas.

**Well let's get down to some details then. They sent you to Mount Martha: they were sending most of the AWASs out to Darley I think?**

And Glenmorgan, yes. We were the first lot that went out there.

**Was it just sort of some stroke**

19:30 **of luck or chance that you ended up in that unit do you think?**

I don't know, of course they have all the forms that you fill in. I thought there was one lot already in Glenmorgan that hadn't had their training finished. This batch was a very big

20:00 batch of AWASs, the biggest they'd had. So I think that's why because of the year, 1942, when they wanted to shift a lot of the men out of the places they were to go up north, they took in a very big batch of girls. I think that's why we had to g,o but we didn't query because you never queried.

20:30 We were the first lot to end up at Mount Martha and I believe the next lot went to Mount Martha too. I've only heard of the two lots going.

**The curious thing about that particularly I suppose, is that every other AWAS unit until then would have had female lieutenants and matrons, so you were really thrown into a most unusual circumstance.**

As Jessie Perkins said, we were thrown in the deep end.

21:00 Yes, I suppose so but it was amazing how quick you adjust.

**Were they tough?**

Yes, especially one warrant officer, he was a frustrated one. He wasn't posted, he was left behind for some reason and I think he was nearing forty-five, but oh boy was he…he was fairly tough.

**I bet he wasn't too pleased about ending up with a bunch of sheilas.**

He wasn't happy about being…a whole lot

21:30 of women. Whereas the ones out on the battalions, they where quite amiable. I think as far as they were concerned we were all men. They just ignored the female bit. No, at Mount Martha they were very, very strict and tough.

**Well give me an idea of say a day in the life of basic training at Mount Martha?**

Well,

22:00 the bugle goes at a quarter to six.

**Male bugler or was there a female bugler?**

Male bugler and you had to get out and be dressed and form in line to have the roll taken. It was pretty hard to do because you did that, and then you came back and then you had till eight o'clock

22:30 which was breakfast time to make your bed and all your chores. So you had to get out of your uniform again and go and have a shower. The showers never had any door on so it didn't matter much.

**How long did that take used to that lack of privacy?**

Well it took some of them a while.

**Because you were all from slightly different backgrounds, I'm sure you country girls wouldn't have had too much trouble**

23:00 **with it.**

No, I didn't have any trouble with it at all because well, brothers are inclined to come in when you have a shower. They want something, they come and get it. A few of the girls couldn't adjust and there was two of them, even when we left camp, they'd wait till everybody else had had a shower in our barracks and then they'd go and have a shower. The couldn't

23:30 adjust to it. And if I remember rightly, they got posted here in Melbourne so they'd be home bods

anyhow. It was men's conditions and you had to get used to them.

**The showers were cold showers?**

No, they weren't too bad, lukewarm, you know.

**Army issue soap?**

Yes, unless you bought your own.

24:00 Army issue everything.

**Were you allowed to bring much with you?**

No, you were allowed to bring a toilet bag and your PJs [pyjamas], nothing much else.

**Photo, diary…?**

You could have one photo on your little chest of drawers that was beside the bed, that's all.

**And did you have a photo of George?**

I had a photo of George, yes.

**And what about things like hairbrushes and make-up? Were they verboten?**

24:30 Well, you were allowed that but that was your – and you brought that in your toilet bag with you.

**And I'm sure you weren't allowed to wear any make-up while you were in…?**

Lipstick.

**Oh you were? Thank God for that because that olive grey was a bit drab wasn't it?**

Khaki ours was to start with but you didn't think of putting it on, because half the time you were doing chores that didn't warrant that sort of thing.

**What did you wear when you were doing chores then?**

25:00 That was after our training and that was when we were down at Yallourn and we were treated to the turns of cleaning out the…what do you call it again? You know, where it is drained through the kitchen and it goes down into the gully trap, well we had to take our turn at everything. We were issued with khaki slacks, a battle jacket and

25:30 a hat: the same as the men's with the sun on the side of it. We were dressed like that.

**You had a slouch hat?**

Yep.

**How about that! For some reason I thought they put you in little…**

Giggle hats?

**Well, they were like tram conductor's hats or…**

No, no, when we went out and on leave we had to be dressed like that, and if I suppose if you

26:00 worked here in the city, that's all you'd wear all the time. But we were out and we had slacks, an open necked khaki shirt, you could wear a v-necked jumper if it was cold, a battle jacket and a slouch hat.

**What about footwear for women?**

Well, you had just ordinary lace-up brown shoes.

**With a heel?**

No, no heel.

26:30 **Flat like mine I suppose?**

Just like that. That's about the height too.

**Well, if you're going to do that many route marches…**

Well yes, but then we went on the battalion: we were issued with the men's lace-up boots. So while we were on the battalion and not going out anywhere, we wore the lace-up boots.

**Were they too big, by and large?**

No, they got your size

27:00 and you got used to the heaviness after a while, you didn't worry about it.

**In those outfits did…this is a hard question to answer but women of the day were used to wearing dresses and skirts most of the time, slacks were still a novelty. Do you think it changed the way a woman moved or saw herself, or do you think there was something about it that made a woman say less**

27:30 **feminine, or less dainty or less the weaker sex?**

No, I don't think so. It was easier. Where we were posted you could never have lived in skirts.

**Well it's a silly thing for any soldier to wear.**

So that's why we were issued them but we were never allowed to wear them outside the barracks, outside the battalion. It was only for inside.

**So, in those early days at Mount**

28:00 **Martha was it, it sounds like it came fairly naturally to you, the business of marching orders…?**

Yes, it did. I didn't have too many problems with it: even my feet on the route march seemed to stand up. A lot of them got a lot of blisters and things but the MO [Medical Officer] treated them and he was very nice.

**What did they teach you at Mount Martha?**

Well mainly discipline and

28:30 a few other things, but mainly discipline, and they used to take us on long marches and put us through drill and all those sorts of things.

**Did you have to do obstacle courses?**

Yes.

**With full kit and pack?**

You always carried your pack.

**And what was in your pack?**

Not very much if you could help it! You know,

29:00 your clothes and everything else because they gave us a little bit of a pack. A lot of them have it now but soldiers at that time only had a kitbag. It was a round sort of a kitbag, just shoved everything in. Well we got one of those and when we were moving we had to have our kitbag. And we were issued with a shoulder strap bag that carried a fair bit in it.

29:30 **Were there any other lectures or instructions that you were given?**

Yes we had…what would you call it? It was made for the men, and we got the men's version and we got it with the men: the sex education bit.

30:00 Two of the girls walked out. One of them who came, I will admit, she'd had a very sheltered life. She came from Toorak and she'd had a very sheltered life. They were talking about babies and things and she said, I said, "You're going to get into trouble," as we walked out because one of the officers asked where private so and so was. None of us knew, you never know.

30:30 And when I met her I said, "You're going to get into trouble," and she said, "My mother and father would never do that." And one of the lasses, she came from Fitzroy and she said, "How do you think you got here?"

**Now I know the times were innocent but that's extremely sheltered, don't you think?**

Yes, I did think so.

**I mean you were a farm girl so you wouldn't have figured it out a long time ago.**

Oh yes, I knew about the birds and bees, yes.

31:00 **That's very funny.**

Some of them were very naive. I felt very sorry for them.

**Oh boy, were they in the deep end though. I imagine hearing the male version of a sex education talk would be pretty full on too?**

It was.

**I mean a totally different MO [modus operandi] in terms of what they were trying to get**

**across.**

Yes, that was one and then we got another one when we went to Yallourn. It was the same type of thing.

31:30 By then, the two that had walked out, they weren't allowed to walk out. They'd got used to a few things, you know.

**Did it teach you anything you didn't know?**

No, it didn't teach me anything I didn't know.

**Did it come with a sense of morality or was it just biology?**

Both I think, because the main aim,

32:00 because we were in the camp, was for none of us to get pregnant. That was the main aim why it was given.

**And did that ever happen?**

No, none of ours got pregnant in our battalion. There were some, like in all services, there were some but none of us in our battalion did.

**Did the men behave in an exemplary fashion all the time?**

Yes,

32:30 they were quite good actually. And the local girls didn't like us very much because when we went to dances there was never an army girl left sitting down. All the fellas used to get the army girls up first and the locals felt a bit put out.

**We were talking about the local girls**

33:00 **having their noses put out of joint.**

Yes they did, they got very snaky actually, but never mind.

**Was this in Mount Martha that you went to dances?**

Well, if it was your time for local leave and there was a dance on, you went to the dances.

**Down at Mount Martha at that time there was quite a lot of activity.**

Yes but we weren't allowed out the whole four weeks we were there.

**So how big was your**

33:30 **barracks there then?**

The ordinary sized army barracks. There was about three big huts, three or four big huts down one side and there was a good many of them because I think there was nearly a hundred in that batch.

**So you just didn't see anything of the area?**

Oh no, only when you walking or route marching but they took you over the hills mainly.

34:00 **I believe anyway that they were doing quite a lot of training for a lot of the services there.**

Yes they were.

**Bivouacking and…? Did you happen to see any planes flying over because I think they were testing there too?**

No, we could hear them, but we didn't see them. They didn't fly over there.

**Did it go by in a kind of a blur, Mount Martha, the training there or did it feel slow?**

Well all it felt was, out of bed,

34:30 rush to the showers, rush to get yourself ready, then tidy up your bed, then stand, be ready for inspection before your breakfast.

**Tell me about an inspection then. Who would lead it?**

The officer of the day with the sergeant or the warrant officer, the two of them. You stood beside your bed, all dressed

35:00 and they walked passed and you had to look straight ahead.

**Did they ever stop and reprimand?**

Oh yes, they'd say…they'd point with a stick, "That's not quite right! That's untidy! Fix it.."

**Were you scared of them?**

No, you just did what you were told and kept out of trouble.

**What about promotion? I know that's fairly early on in the piece but**

35:30 **did any of the women aspire to moving up the ranks?**

None of them that I knew of, they were just sort of picked out eventually. But with the crew that I was, none of us did it. They sent, when we were out at Mount Martha and at Yallourn, they used to send a captain or a lieutenant to be in charge of us but it was from headquarters. She didn't know anything

36:00 about what we were trying to do. She had no idea whatsoever.

**Isn't that funny. Was there any romance about what you were doing? Did any of the girls form crushes on any of the commanding officers?**

Yes, some of the fellas yes. The fellas used to come and talk to us, and if you sat down and talked to a fella, they had you nearly married to him even if he was married. You know, it was just a bit of fun.

**And finally at Mount Martha, the food,**

36:30 **what did they give you?**

Army food.

**What was that?**

Well, it was good wholesome food but anything cooked in a quantity loses its taste and they didn't have much imagination. The chops always looked as if they'd been off a two-toothed that you'd chased around the paddock.

37:00 **A two-toothed being an old beast?**

A two-toothed is a two-toothed sheep, mutton. At breakfast time, you used to get the porridge that you could turn the plate up and down, and then they used to cook you bacon and powdered eggs, which the colour of the powdered eggs could put you off. It used to be revolting.

**What was it, a grey?**

No they were bright

37:30 yellow. Then you could have toast, and the jam they used right through my training was apple jelly, and I never wish to see it again either. We had the ordinary army biscuit which was named the dog biscuit. But that was our breakfast and we had two big meals, morning and night. Of course that was Australian

38:00 conditions at that time. So we had two meals but you couldn't say that…you could say they were boring because it turned up everyday. You could tell which day you were at by the menu you got.

**And it never changed?**

Never changed, no.

# Tape 4

00:38 **At the end of your basic training at Mount Martha did you get any leave?**

Yes, we got one lot of leave when it was finished and we packed up our stuff and came home. That was on the Friday and we were told to assemble at the Elizabeth Street end of Flinders Street again.

**What did you do on that little bit of**

01:00 **leave?**

We went out with our friends we'd formed then. We had been told where we were going. This group had to meet at Flinders Street, and they named off twelve of us and so we went out as a group that weekend.

**Did you see Irene on that weekend?**

Oh yes, I saw her too.

**How was she feeling?**

01:30 Well, she had a lot of responsibility with the coupons and everything. She had a very busy life, but I think she still missed the army a bit when she saw us in uniform. The other mate that I had, well I had one, two, three, four of us used to stick together in the army on the radar. And she came out with us and

I think she would have like to have

02:00 been with us. At that stage you had a feeling…we were army group, they're civilians.

**An unchangeable wedge?**

Unchangeable it was and although, I think today even, a service personnel gets on with a service personnel, no matter army, navy or air force. There's something

02:30 there that's different. Whether you've been under different conditions or what it is, I don't know. There is something there.

**So, you mentioned earlier, they did ask you if you had a preference and of course ignored it in that fabulous fashion of the army.**

03:00 Yes, it was renowned. We used to say in the forces put anything down because you won't get that, you'll get something else.

**I have heard of people putting down what they didn't want and ending up with what they did want.**

Well, that's true.

**What was it about transport that appealed to you?**

Well I was…I liked mechanics, and being much younger than my brothers, I had a lot to do with… because they were always

03:30 fiddling with old cars, old motorbikes. I used to go out…I adored them of course, because they were older than me and I'd sit there with them, and they'd say hand me this wrench or hand me this screwdriver. And I thought, "I'd like to drive, learn how to drive," and mechanics just appealed to me.

04:00 **Well, it wasn't to be your destiny.**

No, no.

**You're at the Elizabeth Street end of Flinders Street and there's the twelve of you and off you go to Coode Island, which obviously wasn't far away?**

It wasn't that far away, no. And they had a bridge from Coode Island across…they made a bridge across there. And the truck met us and we sat on the stools and wobbled and hung on as he went around the corner because he wasn't exactly slow.

04:30 And we were emptied out with all our gear. We had to…nobody helped us with our gear, you always had to do it, it was yours. We stood in the parade ground in a line and then told that we would be taking our gear home that night. Now, it sounded silly to us, but it was silly, because we'd dragged it out there and then we had to take it home because we,

05:00 they didn't have the barracks to billet us in you see.

**What were you looking at there at Coode Island because obviously there's no West Gate Bridge and there's none of the development or the petrochemical…?**

No it was just a plain paddock. You could see out the water, right straight out where the guns pointed.

**That area of Maribyrnong for a long time had a not very good reputation: it was considered quite slummy and so on. What was it like then in the early forties?**

05:30 Well, we were a way out. It isn't far out now but we were thought to be a fair way out. And across the paddock in Sunshine there was another lot of searchlight ladies. They operated the searchlights. and it was a dead flat plain. It was the city on

06:00 one side and a few houses scattered further down. but this part was a dead flat plain. It was the Williamstown Rifle Range that we looked at and it was just bare, just bare.

**No barracks?**

Coode Island, there was some huts there but they didn't have room for us. There were a few men's barracks there, but they didn't have an extra hut for us so they decided to let us go home

06:30 every night.

**And you said you didn't know how these operated, or see them, because you weren't near them but you said they had mounted guns.**

Yes, they had guns, three point fives, the big ones with the shells, they had an anti-aircraft gun. I'm not quite sure whether they had one or two, I think they had two but I'm not sure, it was a long time ago.

**When you saw them or saw where you were**

07:00 **at Coode Island did it…?**

No it didn't sink in, we didn't know. We didn't know what we were doing out here in a man's camp. All the others seemed to be going…some of the friends we had at Mount Martha they were going to Albert Park and 339 Swanston Street and all those places to be clerks.

**Canteen workers and stores?**

Stores and canteen

07:30 and all that, but we didn't have a clue.

**And also, up to that point, despite fears, there was no Japanese presence in Melbourne.**

No, no.

**But looking at those guns, did you begin to wonder?**

Yes, we wondered, but we didn't know then how close they were, really round the bottom of Victoria. But no,

08:00 it was sort of a training, another training ground we put it down to. We didn't know where we'd end up.

**All right well what sort of training did they put you through then?**

Well, we learned radar and we learned how to fire a gun. We learned identification of airplanes, all that. We were there for six weeks.

**We talked a little about the guns earlier so you were probably…**

08:30 **were you given an issue of a gun or just for learning purposes?**

We had an issue of a gun while we were learning to shoot, but then we had to give it back.

**A lot of soldiers say they had a personal relationship with their gun but…?**

No, we didn't have them long enough for that.

**The other eleven women that you were with, were they comfortable loading up and firing and handling…?**

Oh yes, we all learned to all –

09:00 they all seemed to take it in their stride. Some of them made the mistake of not putting it hard enough against their shoulders, so it rebounded and they wondered what had happened but no they soon got into it.

**Does it give you a thick ear if it rebounds?**

No, it gives you a very sore shoulder.

**And the sound of it, did that cause any damage you don't think?**

No, no it didn't.

**And radar, radar basically didn't exist**

09:30 **as far as the population was concerned.**

No, it didn't.

**Can you recall hearing the word and wondering what it meant or could you imagine?**

Well actually they say radar, well the thing that came to my mind, it was something to do with radio. But of course that was different, wasn't it? It wasn't to do with radio.

**Australia apparently was quite good at the advanced use of radar…**

Yes, they were very good.

**They came up with the single tower…**

10:00 Whether it was our atmosphere or not, but it was very clear, very clear.

**Can you walk me through what it was that you operated, and how that worked and some of the lingo in terms of what you made notes about?**

Well, there was the head number one sat just inside the door. Not that she was any better than you but we took it in turns to be number one and number one, she took down all the readings.

10:30 The middle one sat…we all had funny little seats that folded up against the wall and the radar was a

great big panel with all these knobs and switches and all sorts things. And the second girl sat, and it came up from the floor and it was about that big, a cathode ray tube and it was on

11:00 this stand. And on this stand also was a couple of handles, and you sat and you turned the radar when the others…the others would…this side…there was a cathode ray tube there too. All it had was these little things dancing up and down like little peas. And she would be looking at that

11:30 and then thinking that's different, that's moving. And then she'd give a bearing, and this one would turn the bearing to that one and then we'd follow it right along. And the one beside me would tell the readings which she would relay to a predictor-pit.

**Can you say that again? A…?**

12:00 A predictor, to the predictor in a pit. They were all…all the guns and everything were down and you couldn't see them until they put their…you know…

**Their snouts up?**

That'll do! Anyhow, she gave the readings and then they got onto

12:30 another machine, which I can't remember the name of, but it was like a telescope. It had a long piece like that and glass on the end. And you could turn the ends to whichever way you wanted and they'd look through it and get the bearings.

**Like a periscope?**

Like a periscope, but it was on both ends, and as the bearings got closer, then she could

13:00 see it.

**She could visually see what she was…?**

Could visually see what we were taking…came out of the sky and you could see the faint plane. And then she'd be giving the reading to the guns and when it got close enough they'd fire.

**And how often did that happen?**

Well, they used to have practice matches, and all that sort of thing but I don't think we ever, down at Yallourn, fired. We took the readings but they never got close enough. It was sent out from Sale,

13:30 we relayed the readings to Sale.

**So, in Coode Island while you're training, the radar unit was specific for those guns that were mounted at Coode Island. And was that information also relayed anywhere else at the same time, like would it go straight to HQ [Headquarters]?**

No.

**Okay, so it was a contained unit?**

It was a battalion company, an anti-aircraft company and it was only in that.

14:00 **I forgot to ask you your battalion number.**

Thirtieth anti-aircraft battalion…company.

**Which kind of makes you a RAAF unit to some extent, doesn't it? Or am I just speaking out of my hat?**

No, I wouldn't say so myself because if you were where the enemy were we'd be firing at them as well as warning the

14:30 Sale planes to come out at them.

**Okay.**

You see, but we would be firing when they got close enough.

**So, but it was strictly army then?**

It was strictly army, yes.

**I think you've already told me but I'll ask you again, how long did they keep you at Coode Island?**

About six weeks.

**Okay, so it was another six-week course, and was your time spent there entirely working on learning radar and well you also…?**

Yeah, the whole lot, identification of planes etcetera.

**Well, I wanted to ask about that too. How did they**

15:00 **teach that? Was it drawings on the board or…?**

Well, all you had was drawings on the wall. And you had to memorise them, and they'd take you out if any aircraft came and you were supposed to identify it.

**So what were you looking at then, what craft were you looking at?**

Well you were looking at the aircraft and the markings, and how they flew, how they looked side view, how they looked front view.

15:30 And you had to learn all of them.

**Did you begin to detect that they had different sounds to them?**

Oh yes, they had different sounds. The Beaufighter was the – called silent death because you never heard them till after they'd gone.

**How did you learn to detect a Beaufighter then?**

Well, that's what we knew. We had distinctive markings, distinctive

16:00 wing shape, all that sort of thing, you know.

**What other craft then, given that people watching this won't have any idea, Beauforts?**

There was the Beaufighter and the Beaufort bomber. There was the Lockheed Lightning, Spitfires, goodness me I can't remember them all now.

16:30 That's what your age does for you. But it was mainly enemy…we learned our planes but we had a lot of enemy planes too.

**Well I guess if you learned the Allied planes, then you know that you're dealing with the enemy if you can't detect it.**

Yes, yes and the signs on them, you know. Like the Nippons had the round red ring.

**But did they teach you about Zeros and Mitsubishis and…?**

Oh yes, all those to recognise them, yes.

17:00 But they were more important, and then we knew the Beaufort bomber, the Beaufort fighter, the Douglas and all those. I nearly said biscuit bomber then.

**Well, that's what it was…Wirraways probably?**

Wirraways, all those sort. We knew our Australian ones first: they seem to be easier to learn somehow. But actually when you are in the radar, you don't see

17:30 the markings, but that was in the course. We had to learn that, to spot the plane but we weren't spotters. We worked on the electronics and you were in a great big…well it was about that wide and about that length. And it was two great big boxes.

**So, like a container?**

Yes.

**All right, so a couple of metres long?**

Yes, and it was dark inside. You had no light, except the instruments were lit.

18:00 **That was the only illumination in there? The instruments? So they were on twenty-four hours?**

Yes.

**Powered by generators?**

You'd see them going around, the generators, yes.

**The film editors that work in darkened spaces for long periods of time end up kind of, with a bit of tunnel-vision, did that…?**

Never heard of the word in those years.

**So you could walk into this dark space, spend your hours on watch…?**

And then come out, yes.

**How many hours watch was it?**

I think we did four hours

18:30 at a time, then some days we only practised because it was a ‘no day’ as the saying is.

**A “no day”?**

Of course we had other chores as well. Some of us were on kitchen duty and some of us were on guard duty and some of us had to…were on duty in other places cleaning up all the time, all those sort of things.

19:00 **So in those six weeks, there was twelve of you women, so you must have worked in four-hour shifts and the three of you. In that period of time, what sort of enemy activity did you notice?**

Well, it wasn’t that much enemy activity in Melbourne. It was only when we got down to Yallourn and picked up all different signals.

**When you started there, and you’ve told me this before but I’ll get it on camera –**

19:30 **I’m curious to know that what you would say to people when they asked you what you were doing?**

Oh, we used to say, oh we’re on the gun sights and that was it, and they got such a surprise at the answer they never asked any more.

**Did they teach you to operate the ack-ack?**

No, no, we were only on radar.

**Right, and what was your title then, in as much as…?**

Gunner.

20:00 **Okay, so it was obfuscated obviously. You were a gunner.**

A gunner, G-N-R.

**Which is a totally different connotation these days I suppose. Wow, did you think you were a bit special?**

No, we didn’t…the unit didn’t think they were special, no, but we found out there were very few others that knew we existed. And that was quite a surprise to us.

20:30 **What about other AWAS girls, because they would have been busy in canteens and stores and so on, did they assume that’s what you were doing?**

No, we wore a different coloured patch to them but they never really asked. They never asked because they knew…and nobody ever said. Even the ones that worked in the canteen, if you asked them where they were, they wouldn’t tell you.

**So foreign.**

That was just one of the

21:00 rules.

**So, six weeks at Coode Island and then…?**

About nearly two years and Yallourn.

**Okay, and in that time at Coode Island, I imagine things in New Guinea were getting even worse?**

They were getting worse, yes. Until the militia stopped them

21:30 just outside Moresby.

**Did you get any extra information because you were working in radar then?**

No, but you heard rumours sort of but you never said. Like you’d talk amongst yourselves while you were at the unit but if you went out anywhere, you never said.

**Did you at any stage have to sign a Secrets Act or something?**

Mmm.

**Can you tell me about that?**

22:00 **Or is it a secret?**

No, you just had to fill in the form and you had to sign it to say you would not say anything about anything that went on.

**What were the repercussions if you did?**

I think you could have got court-martialled and thrown out of the unit, perhaps have gone to jail.

**Did they not tell you? Did they not say this is what will happen to you if you blab?**

22:30 It just said that you would be court-martialled, well anybody that was in the army, if you were court-martialled you were dead meat.

**It would stay with you for the rest of your life, wouldn't it? At what stage did they ask you to sign the Secrets Act?**

When you went in, when I was at Coode Island.

**Not when you joined up, basic training…?**

No, not while we were basic training. It was when we went to Coode Island, we were told it was something that had never been done before and…

23:00 **What did you make of that then?**

I don't thing we queried it too much because well, you had to understand Melbourne at that time. Everybody knew it was serious, everybody knew that they had to do their best for the country. It was serious and you took it, if you were asked to sign a piece of paper, you just took it in your stride.

23:30 **Now, Douglas MacArthur must have been well set up in his HQ in East Melbourne? Were you aware of that or did it cause any ripples amongst the service…?**

Well it caused a few ripples between the Australian Army, air force and the sailors because, well especially when he gave that speech: no news reporting

24:00 would be reported unless it concerned the Americans, and they could take the credit for it. That really riled the Australians, and of course the government of the day were so desperate because well, nothing was stopping them. The Americans didn't stop them. The militia was

24:30 sent in. They weren't trained very well, but they were sent in to stop them, and Blamey did a marvellous thing but he never got the praise for it. But it was the Australian jockos that stopped them and did a marvellous job.

**Where is your fiancée at this point after you finished your six weeks at Coode Island?**

New Guinea.

**And how often are you able to receive mail?**

Well, you were able to receive mail but

25:00 of course over there, they didn't get much time, and you just waited. The postal service, it had to go…I don't know where it went to be censored but it came in and was censored, and then went to you.

**Were your letters from George well censored? Did you find lots of things cut out?**

They cut a few things out but he learned to write around it, that you got the idea.

25:30 **So what sort of a signal did he use for you? For example, one fellow I know of to told his Mum to give his regards to a lady that lived down the street with a big bougainvillea tree.**

Well, he used to say, "I went to Sorrento the other day." Well that was Townsville.

**Okay.**

And it is not a bad place really, he'd say.

**Which would mean?**

That things were all right there.

26:00 Then the next lot I'd got, he had gone down to Port Campbell, which was a great place for him. They used to go every year. But that meant he was in Port Moresby. And then you'd get an enthusiastic man, I remember one lady, she said, "Have a look at

26:30 this," and she'd pulled it up: well it was full of holes. And then you'd get someone very enthusiastic and you'd get the same thing done to you, you know. It all depends who's censored it.

**Because of the disruption in mail service, did you find that you might send a letter with information and get one back…what I'm saying is did that muck up the continuity of information?**

Oh there's no continuity, you just wished for a letter.

27:00 He might have sent two letters and you'd get the last one first, you see. It didn't matter as long as got mail.

**Finishing up at Coode Island and going to Yallourn, I guess by this stage you've got some idea that you're going to be doing this in a more permanent fashion. You mentioned earlier that they put you on a train and told you where you were going and…?**

They did, they just said we're going down to…

27:30 well, get off at Moe and there will be an army truck to meet you and you are going down towards the coal. They didn't exactly say Yallourn. Like when we went through, none of the stations had names on, so if you hadn't have known anything about the area, you wouldn't have known where you were.

**Was that because of the war?**

Yes.

**In case the enemy arrived, they wouldn't have known where they were?**

Yes, yes, they took all the things,

28:00 all the names off the stations.

**Were they just military trains going through? What would happen to civilian…?**

No, no, civilians trains as well.

**So, a civilian, would they just need to know where they going?**

You'd know where you were.

**That seems so funny in retrospect: I know it's not.**

As I was saying, we had a fella that…it used to amuse us: I think I told…I might have told the other one, he walk along with this

28:30 half light, all up and down and he'd say, "Traff-fal-gar, Traff-fal-gar," and we used to call him 'Traff-fal-gar', because instead of saying 'Trafalgar', that's how he pronounced it. We couldn't get over him. They used to walk up and down the train with their lanterns and tell them where they were, but there were no signs on the stations.

29:00 **Did it travel at night this train or was it a daytime thing?**

Some of them were daytime: some of them were night time. Usually if you were coming home from leave, going back from leave it was in the morning. If you were coming home on leave, it was at night time because they used the train, the ordinary civilian train from Sale,

29:30 it left at the same time as another train because the civilian trains: I think they went through everyday. They may have I don't know. But if it was a troop train, it was the only one allowed to travel at that time. And they used to start at Sale, where the air force was, and then they'd stop at Moe, where we'd been taken to, and then

30:00 it didn't stop at any stations till you got to Caulfield.

**Gee, that'd be nice and swift, wouldn't it?**

Oh well, it still choof, choof, choofed along, you know. Going back, when you were in the morning one, there used to be some civilians on now and then, not many. They civilians weren't allowed to travel that much and the trains used to be booked a lot,

30:30 that it was very hard for them to get a ticket.

**I'm sure. Now, I'm also interested about blackouts at night. The cars all had those little slit covers, so did the trains have…?**

Yes they all…you pulled the blind down and the train was blacked out. The lights were inside but the train was blacked out and there weren't many lights in the carriages. It was very dim, very dim.

31:00 **What treats were you allowed under those circumstances?**

How do you mean treats? Did you mean the concert parties come or…?

**Concert parties, confectionery that other people wouldn't be able to get…?**

Oh we could get everything in the canteen, it wasn't restricted.

**How did they sort of prevent the black market from operating? And yes, there were very many honourable soldiers but I'm sure there were many on the sly.**

31:30 **So they could take things from the army provisions and go and sell them on the black market.**

No, well they didn't. They used to give them to their girlfriends or…I used to save some of mind up and send them in a Willow tin up to New Guinea to my husband, to George. Of course he had things there and I also used to…I didn't smoke and I also sent my tobacco,

32:00 cigarettes up there as well. So he not only smoked mine, he smoked his as well, two of ours.

**Because you would have been given the same brace of cigarettes, which is quite a lot.**

Yes, it is but if they were like, up in the front line, they didn't see any. The only ones they used to see… the Salvos [Salvation Army] were always close behind and he always had a packet of fags for them or he always had something.

**They were amazing the Salvos, weren't they?**

Oh they were amazing, yes.

**Just extraordinary.**

32:30 **In fact, I wanted to ask, the Salvos provided paper for the men to write letters, was it a particular kind?**

It was the red shield, little red shield pieces of paper and an envelope.

**So tell me about arriving in Yallourn, were the barracks quite considerable?**

We went to headquarters first, it was on what used to be the football ground.

33:00 And we did a few weeks there until another team of radar girls came. And they stayed there and they shifted us up to what they called the first coal mine, which was where all those tall chimneys used to be that were knocked out. And we stayed in barracks there and another lot went up to the mine and they used to call it Yallourn North.

33:30 So there were three different places, but they only had radar in one of them, and that's the one we operated.

**Was it identical to the radar you'd been using?**

Oh yes, they were all the same, they were all the same.

**Were they disguised?**

They looked like great big green boxes on a trailer.

**What about the antennas then?**

34:00 They had a flat antenna, you couldn't see the antenna.

**So it wasn't like a tall spire?**

No, it wasn't like they stick them up today, no. It was just like a great big tall box.

**How many, thereabouts, personnel were there in your barracks?**

You mean girls?

**Yeah, well I imagine there were also male officers?**

34:30 Oh yes, there were a good few. At headquarters, there was two barracks of male officers, one, two, three of women. In our barracks, as I said, we had someone from headquarters being in charge of it, be she a corporal or a sergeant. And we also had the VAD as well.

35:00 **Was it a serious place or did people have a spring in their step about what they were doing?**

Yes, we all were busy doing things and we were all quite happy. You had to make your own fun. Everybody took it in turns to have leave, a section of you and as I say, you had the picture theatre and then you had a

35:30 concert place where they used to have concerts, and then there was always a dance somewhere.

**Were you ever allowed to wear civvies to the dances?**

Oh no, no you wore your uniform. Once you got in that uniform you stayed till they kicked you out.

**Did you ever yearn for pink party frocks, fluffy hair?**

No, because at that stage, even the civilian ones, we all took it well…

36:00 we had to pay coupons for it and there was a war on. It was considered a bit…oh how should I put it, a bit extravagant if you had went and got, you know, a nice frock.

**It would be unpatriotic I imagine.**

Yes, yes it was.

# Tape 5

00:31 **Can we talk a bit more about the Depression era, you were talking about using a gun when you were younger, did you shoot for animals?**

Rabbits, because, well we like to keep as much food as we can and also, I never want to eat another rabbit because I think I had them disguised in every imaginable way. Rabbits keep you alive, they haven't got much

01:00 nutritional value, but my mother thought of a lot of different ways to have rabbit.

**What were some of those ways?**

Well, anything from roasted to basting, to stews, to patties to, you name it, it was rabbit. They didn't have the myxomatosis and there were a lot of rabbits. And of course

01:30 also we had a drought as well as floods, and when the drought was on, the rabbits came in. Well, you just shot them and and you ate them. You couldn't keep them as you do today, because we only had an old Coolgardie [Coolgardie safe – early form of refrigerator] so it was 'shoot the rabbit and have it for tea'.

**Did you have other ways of preserving meat?**

We used to corn it. When

02:00 my father killed the bullock, we had half of it and the neighbour had half, and you ate the fresh meat while you could, and then you corned the rest. But it was very nice.

**Did you use rabbit skins for anything?**

No, possum skins. We used to get a permit to kill thirty possums at a time. You got the permit from the police station and you

02:30 skun the possum and pegged it out on the garage shed or something. And when it was dried, and you got forty pelts, you were allowed to take it to the police station and they allowed us three…I'm not quite sure whether it was three or four permits a year, to kill the possums because they did a lot of damage to the wheat and the oats, and all those sort of things. Because we lived on the banks of the

03:00 Campaspe River, we were allowed to. I don't think everybody was allowed to, because they were supposed to be protected.

**Do you know if their furs were used for anything?**

I think a lot of possum skins were used on fur coats and as accessories, on collars or something, or…and I think people, I don't know if they sold them but people used to

03:30 make those rugs, possum skins on one side, and then lined or something. But I don't really know what happened to the pelts, because the police put then on the train into Melbourne and we eventually got paid for them.

**How much would you get for a possum skin?**

I don't know, I can't remember. It was a long time ago and I was only a little tacker at the time.

**Did you set some of the traps yourself?**

04:00 Yes.

**Do you remember how to do it?**

Yes.

**Could you describe it to me because I've got no idea?**

Well, its a sort of a U-shaped thing like that with jaws, well you pressed down on the top with your foot, you opened the jaws and they would lock. It something, there's a little flap that you put over the top. It doesn't take much to move it, and then you just sprinkle a little bit of flour on it.

**And**

04:30 **the flour would attract them?**

Yes, and then you'd go round the traps before you went to bed and then set them again.

**You were talking before about having rabbit a hundred different ways, what other sorts of**

**improvisational things would you have to do during the Depression?**

You kept a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s: you had to keep enough WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s to

05:00 lay the eggs so that you'd get a case of eggs, which is twenty-four dozen, to take to the grocer. Other than that, you always had one or two that you could kill and eat. And then there were fish in the river and you used to do those sort of things. And if you were lucky enough to have a little bit of money left over after you got the groceries, well you did get some meat

05:30 from the butcher, mainly sausages, but it was a welcome relief. Other than that, somehow my mother must have stretched it around, because I never went without food. I think my father and mother may have but I never remember going without food.

**You think they may have, you're not sure?**

I'm sure my mother did but I think, like

06:00 to work on the farm you had to eat so I think she used to… if there wasn't very much she used to not have it herself.

**It seems like you would have learned a lot of skills growing up in the country during the Depression Things that kids don't have today, like trapping and fishing and getting around?**

Well, my son knows a bit about it, because his father used to like to go bush and he went with his father and learned a few things.

06:30 Although his father wasn't brought up in the country, but he had cousins in the country and they used to go up there.

**Getting back to the women's services, before you signed on with your friend, were there any recruitment drives or publicity for those services?**

Oh yes, there were recruitment drives, first for the air force's girls because they were the first ones. But I don't think they were ever as big as the army.

07:00 And then, like there was posters all over the place about joining. They didn't have recruitment drives like they did for the men. But they did have a lot of publications in the paper and a lot of posters to join.

**What was the sort of tag line of it, the line they were trying too push? What did it represent to you?**

I

07:30 can't really remember it, I can see the face of the AWAS, something about joining and everything else but I can't really remember really what it was.

**Do you remember what sort of image it was?**

It was an image of a, you know, a girl like that uniform and she was smiling, beckoning to come to help save Australia and to do the job so men could do their part.

08:00 It was something like that but I can't remember.

**Do you remember what the general attitude towards those women's services were?**

Quite happy, everybody accepted them quite willingly, really. Nobody ever had anything against us, not even the men soldiers.

**I did talk to one girl who was involved with recruiting and she got a little bit of negative response from it.**

Did she get negative response from the people

08:30 going in or from her asking people to join?

**Just from the population at large. She did a few walks, marches rather through the city and got a few nasty comments.**

Oh, that can happen with marches, you can march anywhere and there's always some smart person or something that's got something anti to say but I didn't meet it myself. Surprised perhaps by

09:00 Some, and they didn't know the uniform, and they used to ask you what you were but other than that no, I never got anything like that.

**I was wondering how the pay compared too, to your exchange job. Was it a sacrifice?**

Very, one and nine a day?

**What were you getting in the exchange job?**

Oh I suppose if you got…

09:30 I wasn't the highest paid, a man got about twenty five pound a fortnight. I suppose we got about sixteen or seventeen therefore you'd get about eight or nine pound a week. 'All for a shilling a day' – it was quite true only it was a little bit more than a shilling a day.

**It was a real sacrifice to make in those years.**

10:00 Yes but I suppose, with the publications, the propaganda, Australia was in dire straits. You knew you had to do something, really.

**I was wondering in what other ways the civilian population got involved with the war effort? What did you see in Melbourne at that time?**

Well, I was away from Melbourne but most times like…they always had to contend with food rationing.

10:30 They had coupons as well as food rationing and they had clothing rationing, petrol rationing and most of our food was going to the troops, so they didn't that much food. There wasn't a lot of food that you could buy, vegetables and all that. There were a lot of vegetables went to the troops and things like that. They had it very hard to get meat,

11:00 and they had to pay coupons. Well, you had to pay coupons for everything as well and the coupons were worked out so that you could only buy so much a week anyhow.

**I suppose your parents really had to contend with that too?**

My parents did, I didn't and neither did my brothers, you see so that was that.

**I was wondering how you reacted and how other people reacted**

11:30 **to going into the services and suddenly living with so many people, so many strangers basically?**

Yes, we were all strangers.

**How did you find that experience?**

Different for the first couple of days but after that you got used to it, you had to. I think, although we were only nineteen, eighteen, you accepted things better than any other person would today. Maybe it was at that time, or what it

12:00 was I don't know. But we all seemed to accept it and we might have grizzled and said, "No door on the shower," or something like that and everything. And you'd hear one get up in the morning and they'd say to whoever the other person was, "If you don't stop snoring at night, I'll put a bucket over your head," or something like that, but you forgot about it, you know. You adjusted, I think.

12:30 Although some of them were very naïve, they didn't complain, they just learned to fit in.

**Were the girls from all over Victoria?**

Oh yes, there was another country girl, myself, but there was a lot like…we had some from Toorak in our unit but there was some from Fitzroy and Brunswick, and some from Williamstown,

13:00 some from Frankston. They were all mixed. Then you were put in together and you just got on. That was all there was to it. I can't remember anybody being that upset with anybody. Somebody might shout at somebody because she walked along and the shower's going, so in she went when the other one had gone to the loo, and came back and found that the shower had

13:30 somebody else in it, and she might say something. But other than that, you know, quite easy.

**Was there an element of fun to it as well?**

We made your own fun and yes, there was an element of fun to it. I suppose when you weren't on duty you relaxed and had a bit of fun, that's all. Because if you didn't, I don't know how you'd be.

14:00 **Well, say at Yallourn, how many hours would you work or be on duty and how many off?**

There was three teams and the men did one, that was four…I suppose six hours each or five, or three, or four hours perhaps. Or perhaps when the things disappear, like there was nothing showing up, well we didn't do anything at all, we had a day off. Or when I say a day off we had other duties to do as well.

14:30 **So that's somewhere between four and six hours a day actually on duty? And so what other sorts of duties did you have?**

Guard duty, out in the middle of the scrub at night.

**With a gun?**

With a gun, yes.

**How many of you would there be?**

There'd be two in one place and two in another place, just the same as the men.

**Was that around the clock?**

No, only at night time. Oh yes, at daytime at the entrance there

15:00 was a guard but there was two lots at night time.

**How long were those shifts? The guard duty shifts?**

Well you did ten…no I suppose they were six hours, midnight till six o'clock in the morning. The ones that were on guard duty got the day off to sleep and things the next day.

15:30 **How did you find those guard duties? Were they pretty boring?**

Yes, it got a bit boring. It got very cold some nights, it was very cold and the ones that had the night off and they'd go in to the pictures, they'd…we'd tell them to bring us back a hot pie or something like that, you know, which was very appreciated at two or three o'clock in the morning.

**I was also going to ask you about recreation and going to the pictures and things? Was there a theatre near by?**

There was dances

16:00 and pictures, and concerts. The locals used to put a concert on for us now and then and there used to be touring parties that came and entertained the troops.

**So bands and singers and…?**

Oh, there used to be bands and singers and comedians, and all that sort of thing. They used to hold it…

16:30 the captain used to hold a dance for us every month in the mess hall, and we were all commanded to attend or I don't think you'd have got any there at all, because well, we couldn't be bothered. With hobnail boots and wet mess hall floors, you can imagine what it's like dancing around.

**Were you ordered to dance as well?**

No, we weren't ordered to dance. We had to attend,

17:00 that was the thing.

**Did you like dancing?**

Yes, yes and the locals, they had dances occasionally too.

**So I'm guessing it would have been hard to go to those local dances all together, you could only have a couple off at a time?**

No, you had one…like there would be four of us off and then another four would replace us, four of us off at a time.

**Could you choose who you went with, your mates?**

17:30 Yes, we had one section and we had us four mates and we went off. If you didn't do something right, or some other thing, or your bed wasn't right, the sergeant knew very well. If they could split one of the four up and not let her out and the other three were out, that was punishment, you know all that sort of thing…or get kitchen duty for a week.

**So, lots of**

18:00 **potato peeling and cleaning?**

KP [Kitchen Patrol], yes, you'd peel all the veggies. When you were on KP duty, you started at four o'clock in the afternoon, went through dinner at night, and then breakfast next morning. The cooks did the cooking but you did the dirty work like the cleaning and the washing, and the clearing up.

**I've done my share of that in cafes.**

18:30 Have you? A lot of young ones do that now, don't they, while they're going through uni?

**Would you do a normal shift after you did one of the KP duty?**

No, that was your KP for the day. And then the next day you could be on KP duty for two days. And then sometimes they'd make KP duty…it changed every day, I think it depended how they felt. Then you had to do Yard duty

19:00 as I say, emptying the gully traps and all sorts of things but you didn't complain, you just did it.

**I'm interested about the movies of that period too, what did you see?**

They were Robert Taylor in The Nightingale Sang in Nightingale Square, and a lot of the Road series from Bing Crosby, and

19:30 Clarke Gable with something, you know all the oldies.

**Any good war films?**

No, but if they had…the Yanks did a few, but I'm trying to think of the English actor that…Neville I think it was, he was in it. Yes, they did it of a series of war films. It never really…

20:00 during the war nobody they never…nobody sort of won the war, if you know what I mean. The film was finished on something else. But soon after that, about nineteen forty-four, they did one about Badger, the British pilot ace that lost both his legs and then could fly again. They did it about him. Oh, there was a Mr Chips in…

20:30 I forget who that was but that was an American film. A few things like that and we all went to them. Of course, you've got a lot of Gracie Fields singing and things like that.

**Did you have many newsreels? Did you see newsreels before films back then?**

When we came home we did, like on leave. They used to have a lot of those, they…

21:00 a couple of places in the city downstairs. One was near the Australia, it went for twenty-four hours and it showed you the news the whole time. Then it was very restricted. It wouldn't be like it was today.

**Did you get a sense then that you weren't getting or you weren't hearing everything?**

We knew, you knew they were well censored, but then you must remember it wasn't instant like it is today.

21:30 A lot of it was censored. The civilians didn't hear very much.

**Talking about the movies and dances, and things like that, did people go as groups or sometimes on dates?**

Yes, you went with groups, really, because most of the fellas were overseas. You went in a group and probably talked to somebody else of a group

22:00 and that sort of thing.

**How did men and women get together in those situations? They couldn't really be private or alone, could they?**

No, I suppose not, but it was blackout in Melbourne remember! You couldn't see very much…and there was a lot of them away that had their fiancées or their boyfriends or their girlfriends, and they were away. The majority of people,

22:30 although you might have gone out with somebody, he knew that you had a boyfriend, he had a girlfriend and you know, you didn't take it as a romance. You just took it as well, have a good time while you can. Then good times then weren't the good times that they do today. It was a totally different culture.

**With George being away,**

23:00 **did you find it hard, were you sure that you'd be with him when he came back?**

Yes, he became a different person but you just had to adjust. You couldn't expect him to be away for two or three years and not change in the conditions that they fought. But then again, I know it is a different type of war now…but then again, they were just de-mobbed

23:30 and home, and into work again. They weren't taken and…what do they do to them today, they spend so much?

**Counselling and debriefing?**

Counselling no, well nobody had any counselling. As one bloke said, you just got home to the missus and got to work, and went to work. That's all they did. They never got any counselling.

**How had George changed when he came back?**

24:00 Well, I was thinking as I told Stella, he was a fairly religious man before he went away but when he came home he wasn't. He was a very ill man actually when he came home. He was a lot quieter in lots of ways but then in another way he wasn't.

24:30 He would never say, like all men, they would never say what it was like, even when the kiddies answered and asked. But if they got with their mates, they could talk and talk because they understood each other.

**Did it help that you'd been in the services?**

Oh yes, I think it did. There were some things we could discuss but like, you never ever heard the fellas

25:00 discussing the war. But as I say, they used to meet on Anzac Day and they'd talk till the cows came home. He had changed, he wasn't spontaneously…he wouldn't laugh as much. It took a long while for him to settle in, you know, back to the ordinary, everyday

25:30 grind.

**Did he keep much contact with his war mates outside of Anzac Day?**

He kept in contact with the RSL [Returned and Services League] mates and things like that. Yes, he did.

**Do you think that helped?**

Yes, it does help them, it does help them. They gradually get back but it is a while because in the army you're told

26:00 Everything: or in any of the other services, you're told to do this, that and the other. You don't think for yourself half the time. I suppose with that and then, sort of being in the action it was very hard to get back to your own person that you were, if they ever got back. I was lucky, we were married fifty-two years, and he saw all his grandchildren,

26:30 so that's it.

**So, he came back before the end of the war, did he?**

He was discharged because of his eye nine months before the end of the war. He was discharged in the January, I think and the war ended in August.

**Do you remember getting notice that he was coming home?**

No, you never got notice. No, I was

27:00 walking with my girlfriend across the railway line at Bentleigh. We were going down to catch the bus to go to the beach, it was one very hot day, and as I'm walking along Irene said, "Oh look, I reckon that's George." And this fellas loaded up to the hilt with everything he's got on, his kitbag and everything else and I looked and I said, "Oh, well it is

27:30 one of them," because he was a twin. And Irene said, "Oh, go and see, I'm sure." So, I got halfway across the street and I thought, "No, it isn't, it's Jack, his brother." And then I looked again and I thought, "Yes, it is." And Irene said afterwards I ran a little way and stopped and then I ran a little bit further and stopped, and she said, "I knew every time you stopped, you thought it was the other brother," but it wasn't. It was him: he'd just come home.

28:00 And a lot of them came home unexpectedly. We were never notified. You were notified if they were killed, that's all.

**How long had it been since you'd seem him?**

About two and a half years, but that was nothing. Some of the women hadn't seen their husbands for four years, three years: they didn't come home like they do now.

28:30 It's not short bursts.

**And did some of the girls get notice that their men had been killed?**

Oh yes, you dreaded the knock of the policeman on the door, because that meant a telegram boy, or a policeman knocked on the door, one or the other, but you lived with that. There was a few yes, I knew in Bentleigh that

29:00 lost their loved ones.

**And in your unit, did anyone get that telegram?**

Yes, a couple of them got a telegram. Actually, the girl that I was pals with, her brother was killed and she got compassionate leave to go home to Ballarat for the weekend. You know, people had to accept it and get on with life. There was

29:30 no, you know, counselling in those days. They believed that you just got on with life.

**I suppose that's the benefit of a really close-knit unit as well, that support.**

Close knit family, close-knit unit and you would trust your mate with your life. And I suppose that's why the feeling between ex-service people is totally different to civilians. Don't know what it is but that's it.

**And those friendships are so**

30:00 **enduring too.**

Oh yes they are enduring, very enduring. I know I came home once for the wedding of a friend. I was the only one there in uniform and I felt like a complete stranger because what I'd been doing, they just couldn't understand, they wouldn't imagine. And I just sort of feel, yes they're living and everything.

30:30 but it is immaterial. There are other things more important not living, but little everyday things, oh I couldn't get the colour of my dress, or I couldn't get this or I couldn't get that. It was immaterial to me because to me that didn't worry me. There were more important things to do.

**Did you feel like your horizons had been broadened?**

Well, yes, yes I think that

31:00 they were, well it was just another lot of knowledge in a different weight to be carried. It is just a phase in your life.

**Do you think that changed you, those years?**

Oh, it may have, to a certain extent but then I think anybody that lived through the Depression was changed. And therefore you could

31:30 accept a lot of things and it didn't change you. But yes, it gave me a broader outlook on life and gave me a lesson on how to get along with twelve women in one big shed. Because you had to get on with them because that was your bed there. And I think that you learned those sort of lessons of how to get on with people,

32:00 and you didn't let small things trouble you. It wasn't worth arguing over there were bigger things. Don't know whether I was right or not but that's it.

**Did you find that people were interested at that wedding in what you'd been up to and what your uniform represented?**

No, not really. Yes, our soldiers were fighting and

32:30 yes, so and so's son was in hospital, and they were interested to a certain extent but not really. Some of them said to me, "Oh you're in the army," and one of them said, "What uniform is that?" But other than that, that curiosity, that was about it. I suppose they had enough to think of, of their own little family in war. This was it.

33:00 **Can you tell me more about your contact with the Americans as well? Did you know any personally?**

Yes, I knew a couple of them, they were very nice. The ones that came over first were very nice Americans. They were from the top brass and everything. By the time, before the war ended, they'd got down a bit and I don't

33:30 believe in class, and I'm making it sound class, but they were very nice men, the first lot that came over. And a lot of them were killed. They went into places that were very hard. Yes, they…we used to say, "Over there, over sexed and over paid,"

34:00 we used to say about them.

**Sound like it sums it up pretty much.**

The Australians well, they didn't get the pay the Americans had, and in the civilian population I suppose well, the Yanks did take you out to dinner and gave you a good time. And it was very hard for the Australian boys I think at that stage. If they had a girlfriend

34:30 that would just have been started as a girlfriend ,and she met a Yank, well I mean, there was a few fights at Young and Jackson's [hotel].

**What did the girls generally think of the Americans? Was there any resentment towards them from the men?**

I don't think there was. It was very strong in the AWAS units that you stuck up for the

35:00 Australian soldier. It was them and us, but no they…a lot of them used to …there was an awful lot of the Americans that just wanted company, just to go out and have dinner and have company. There was an awful lot of them. There was a few of the others but they weren't as many. And some of them used to… you'd be standing on the station and they'd come and talk to you,

35:30 and you know, would you like a cup of coffee? There was nothing in it, they just wanted to talk, that's all.

**And you felt that the later Americans were less polite?**

Yes, they were less polite I felt. That was the way I felt. Also, some of them didn't have as much respect for them as the first lot that came over, respect

36:00 for women. But you learned how to look after yourself, as the saying is, and most of them were quite all right.

**Just thinking about your time at Yallourn, you were there for about two years, how was that time broken up? Did you have a period of leave?**

We used to get leave every month when it settled down.

36:30 One lot went one month and one lot went the other. And they used to take us down to Moe, and we'd wait for the train that came from the Sale air force, and it used to get into the city about midnight. And go on leave and of course you were like, the ones that

37:00 worked together, well they got leave together so therefore, you met them the next day somewhere and yes, you were home with your parents sometimes, but at least once a day you went out with the friends that you came down with. Not always at night time, sometimes in the middle of the day but you more or less stuck to yourselves. You came down…the city was teeming with

37:30 all sorts of soldiers, sailors and airmen but they were all in groups that they'd got leave with. We used to go to the Palais, to the dances and then Myers in the basement put up a place for the forces, and you could go there and have a meal, and you could dance and all sorts of things. It was called the Dugout

38:00 because all the windows were boarded up with sandbags, and there was sort of this little hole that you went into and you could go downstairs or into Myers. But it was only a width like that.

**And so how long would that leave be? Two days?**

No, you'd come down Friday night and go back Monday morning. That's all you got.

**Did your mates live close by?**

One lived in Ormond and one lived in Bentleigh, and one lived in Sandringham and one lived in Brighton.

**Was it a case of meeting each other's parents and families and things like that?**

No, no, all my friends met my parents and I met the others' parents, you know occasionally, and you would say hello but that's about as far as you'd get because you were probably going out somewhere.

# Tape 6

00:32 **We were just talking in the break about your parent's attitudes to your new freedom: do you think they treated you differently when you came back in uniform?**

Oh yes, I think they did and you yourself were different, you were more grown up. I had my twenty-first birthday in the army and so, although I went in a teenager, I came back over twenty-one.

01:00 Yes they did, and I think you were more grown up and I suppose they treated you differently, yes. There was no more 'you be home by such and such a time'. They didn't seem to worry about it after that. But I was home, oh, two years before I got married.

**You were saying before though you didn't mention you were going to the Dugout**

01:30 **to your parents, you kept that to yourself.**

No, because there were a few wild brawls there, between the Australians and the Yanks. It was a nice place, there was plenty of dancing, well all you did was dance or go to the pictures. There was more dancing then than there is now.

**It sounds like what everyone did.**

Yes, you either went to a dance on a Saturday night,

02:00 or the pictures, that was the extent of it. There used to be dances here and down at the Dendy and everything. And when we came home after we got married, we used to go to the dances, everybody went to the dance, some to movies but most to the dance.

**A lot of men went AWL [Absent Without Leave], was that the case with the women as well?**

I can't say I knew of any women that went AWL.

02:30 There could have been quite easy because we were isolated to a lot of the others, like the ones that worked in the offices and all that sort of thing. We were isolated from them because we were away in the country. Yes, the men did go AWL sometimes.

**What were your feelings leaving or going back to**

03:00 **barracks after leave? Did that feel like going home after a while?**

Well, it was like going to familiar territory, yes very much so. You had all the ones that you knew and you knew them very, very well. Because that close association made you know them very well and it was, I suppose a bit like family because you felt

03:30 at ease with them.

**One big family of same age sisters?**

All about the same age, yes.

**Were you all pretty much the same ages?**

Most of us were, there was one lady, I think she was twenty-one. The rest of us…she was twenty-one when she went in and we were only…I was nineteen. Most of us were nineteen, perhaps twenty

04:00 but more or less all the same age.

**What was your twenty-first like?**

Just like an ordinary day, and because it was my birthday I got…our table got a bottle of beer each, big deal. At Christmas you all got a bottle of beer on the table.

**You didn't get to go home for Christmas?**

No, no,

04:30 if it happened to be your leave, you were lucky. Just because it was Christmas or Easter, no, nobody got leave just because of that.

**Were you lucky enough to have leave during Christmas?**

No, I didn't get home till after the New Year. I had Christmas in the army, every Christmas in the army. There weren't very many of us allowed Christmas

05:00 leave.

**Would you have a belated day or lunch or something with your parents, a Christmas celebration maybe?**

No, it went by but you didn't seem to worry about it.

**When did you start to get the sense that the war was coming to an end?**

Well, we thought it was the turning point. We didn't expect it so suddenly.

05:30 You felt there was a turning point after England. See England, it was finished nearly four months before us. But you sort of got the feeling that it couldn't go on, that was the feeling. Not that it was going to end: that it couldn't go on, and you just wondered what would happen.

**Did you think that we'd win?**

Yes, I did in the end,

06:00 but you never said we'd win, not until we did. We'd say, oh we hope it would be over soon, but that's all we'd say. Then we thought it was going to be over with the first atom bomb but it wasn't. They had to do it again before it happened. And although it killed a lot of people,

06:30 it saved an awful lot of Australians being killed because they were gradually… We felt that there was something in the wind. Because the rumours were that they were getting all the prisoners of war, they were loading them on the boats to take them to Japan. And also, they were keeping a very close guard of the prisoners up in the

07:00 islands and places like that. It was felt that something was going to happen. Well the Japanese were doing that, they were going to kill all the prisoners in camp before they surrendered but then the bombs helped to not do that and they were luckier, some of them.

**Those bombs were pretty amazing and unusual in retrospect.**

07:30 **Did you know anything about them?**

No, nobody knew. It was a secret. I suppose plenty of the high ups and the people that were doing it, and the fella that flew the bomb but no, we didn't know much about that. We knew that they did have a nuclear bomb – an atom bomb – but we didn't know much about it. It was very, very hush-hush.

**So how was it reported, just a bigger version of another bomb?**

08:00 Actually, I think they called on the Japanese to surrender before they dropped the first one. When they didn't surrender after the first one, they dropped another one and then they surrendered.

**Do you remember hearing about the end of the war?**

Yes, it took me umpteen hours to get home that day, I was in the city.

08:30 And at that time I was working because my mother was better. I was working out at the aircraft factory and worked stopped immediately. Nobody got any sense of work, the bosses were just told to go home. The city was crowded and joyous. It took me…I met my friend and it took us ages to get home. I think we started off at about 12 o'clock and we got home about ten o'clock

09:00 at night.

**Could you describe that scene in the city? What was going on?**

Everybody was so joyful and they were dancing around with each other, and giving everybody a kiss and a hug. It was just pandemonium really. It was just hard to believe. Some of us were crying and others were laughing, and all sorts of things. It was just – traffic stopped and

09:30 you know. We walked most of the way home eventually, I think, and I lived in Tucker Road at that stage, in Bentleigh. We ended up on a tram that came out to Carnegie eventually. That was the one that we got on. I couldn't get to the Flinders Street train, the people were just packed. So we got on this one and then walked from Carnegie to Bentleigh.

10:00 But oh no, it was so joyous, so happy. Everybody was so relieved, it was great. And then the next day there was sort of an unrealistic silence: well it's stopped, now what's happening, now what's going to happen? It was very hard because people didn't know where they were,

10:30 or whether rationing would happen, or whether the troops would come straight home, or whether we'd get the prisoners of war home, there was all sorts of things, you know. But everybody was so happy, smiles everywhere.

**Did you have a personal celebration that night with your family?**

Oh the neighbours, everybody sort of came out and you were out in the streets and the neighbours came in and out. There was cups of

11:00 tea and drinks, and cups of tea and drinks, you know, it just went on and on. Then I felt sorry and so did my mother, we felt sorry because there was some of them that had just got word that their son was killed or something. It must have been very hard. I didn't know where either of my brothers were at that stage because, you know, that didn't come home straight away. From where ever they where

11:30 they had to come home and be demobbed and that sort of thing, and they could only do so many at a time.

**Lots of them had to wait for so long too, to come home.**

Yes, yes they did. Well, they were overseas you see and they had to come home. Well, it took six weeks by ship in those days because there was no airplanes, no passenger planes in those days.

**When did you**

12:00 **get word that your brothers were all right?**

They rang up, they rang up you know and they were all right, yes. "I won't be home for a while." One of them said well I'm going to Sydney now, that was the eldest one. He was let out earlier, he was married but the other one wasn't married at that stage. He rang up… We didn't hear from him for three or four days. He got through eventually because he was in Borneo

12:30 when it stopped. Everybody thought, well now they'll come home, they're safe and they were. The ships were laden with the fellas to get them back because they only had so many, so they just had to wait their turn.

**Was it hard to go back to work for you?**

It was different, yes.

13:00 It was in a way, it seemed to be easier than the life I lived, because all of a sudden you had a mind of your own again, instead of somebody telling me and you obeying them automatically. Mind you, you didn't have to think, you just did it. Whereas it was totally different when you came back.

13:30 A lot of the girls found it restless, they were restless, couldn't settle down. But that happened with the men too for a while, just to settle down was hard, but they didn't have any counselling.

**Did you find it a restless period after the war?**

Yes, you missed the camaraderie, the rest of the women that you were with

14:00 and you were on your own sort of thing. There was still my girlfriend, she was there. We used to go out but it was so different, a different life and you just had to adjust.

**Were you saying that the discipline was a bit relaxed the days after VJ [Victory over Japan] day, or it just felt different or the mood was…?**

No, the mood was different but the discipline, the army

14:30 store went on. But the mood was different: sort of joyful, happy. It was lovely.

**And you were starting to think you said, on your own terms about doing your own thing again?**

Yes, and it was a bit daunting in a way, you know. To have to settle down and George will be home and you know, and if he isn't well, how long will it

15:00 take for him to get well, and all this sort of thing. It was a bit daunting because all of a sudden all the everyday things came back, you see. I'd been away from the everyday, it was a different everyday.

**Was it annoying?**

No, it wasn't. You just sort of had to accept, I suppose. Perhaps I was a

15:30 person who could accept things, I don't know. They just accepted, "Oh well, isn't it great the war's over, and so and so will be home, and I wonder if I can get my old job back," you know. And then of course there was, not in the forces so much, but there were some civilians that didn't want to give…

16:00 **Your last days in the services, how long after the end of the war were you still in the services?**

No, I wasn't. I had to get out because my mother had been ill and I suppose I got out… I was discharged about nine months before the war ended.

**Sorry, I thought the job at Fisherman's Bend was part of that as well.**

Fisherman's Bend was the job I got after the war, after I got out of the services. I was then able to stay in that

16:30 one until I got married, and at that stage no married woman was allowed to work, it didn't matter what place it was. So you left once you were going to get married.

**Can you tell us a bit more about the job at Fisherman's Bend?**

I was in the Planning Department, yes, sending all the different bits of plans here, there and everywhere.

17:00 It was quite a nice job and interesting in lots of ways. They made a lot of Beaufort bombers and fighters after the war.

**Did you miss your unit?**

Yes I did, it was very hard at first. I missed the camaraderie of the

17:30 women I suppose, for a while. At that stage my boyfriend wasn't home and you know, everybody… groups of girls went out together. You didn't take any notice, they all went out together. You still went out and saw the pictures or something. There was no fear of travelling at night or anything like that. You could

18:00 go out and knew you were going to come home.

**Even with things like the blackout murders?**

There was one murder from Royal Park, the 'Pyjama Girl' but no, people sort of…I don't know how to explain it, but you had no fear of going out at night and coming home.

18:30 **The influence of the services years on young women, do you think there some women whose lives changed really dramatically?**

I suppose some of them did, some of them would…it all depends what unit you'd be in. There were drivers and transports well: perhaps they'd have never taken that up if it hadn't been for the war. And then there was all those…before the war, women didn't

19:00 go into clerical things much: well there was a lot of women in those sort of jobs. It broadened the horizons for the women I think. And there were some women who see, that used to work at the munitions, they were that used to going out and working, that they found it hard to come home and let the fella have the job. You see some of the service men

19:30 found it very hard to get a job. I suppose that was when we started not to accept the role of a woman having to stay home all the time: that you could go to work. You see, once upon a time you couldn't go to work. I think that's when it started, that women got out into the workforce.

**Did it cross your mind that if you didn't**

20:00 **get married, you could keep on working?**

No, it didn't. At that stage women were still supposed to get married. I mean there was something wrong with you if you didn't have a boyfriend, definitely something wrong you.

**It is still like that today.**

Oh, is it? I thought it had gone!

**Maybe, a bit less.**

Maybe, a bit less. Oh well my grandchildren, two of my grand daughters gave the fella the heave ho the

20:30 other week, so I mean, they're free and fancy at the moment again. They're only young, but I said to them, "Good grief, how many's this?" you know, "You still going with the same person as you went with last week?" But I thought you know it didn't matter so much now as it was… It was very strong in our day. If you weren't married well, there was something wrong with the woman –

21:00 never the man, but the woman.

**Did you miss working life when you were married?**

No, because my generation accepted that when you got married you had to stay home and have a family, which you did. You never, accept the ones who lost their husbands and people used to feel sorry for them because they realised they had to

21:30 go out to work, but if you had a husband, you had to stay home and that was the accepted thing. In a way I suppose our life, we followed what our parents did. It was more or less mapped out to us.

**Did you feel like you got enough recognition after the war, for what you'd done?**

Never thought of it, I was too busy with three kids.

22:00 **So you didn't really worry yourself with ideas of recognition?**

No, you sort of got involved with your family and you were recognised with your family. I suppose some people felt that they didn't get enough recognition but well, I never thought being recognised. I was just one of the people who did that, I didn't go into it for recognition.

22:30 **But even so, it was such a contribution to Australia and…**

Well, we never looked at it as a great contribution, the women in our unit because well, we didn't go overseas and really the fellas were doing the hard yakka, the dirty work as the saying is. We helped but ours was a minor role but we accepted because you see, we were brought up that way.

23:00 We were brought up…well it was the man's job to go out and work and your job to stay home, and that was that. It was also your job to make the money go round that was given for the house and all that responsibility. And if you had children, well they were your responsibility too. Dad came home at night

23:30 and was a very good Dad because he hadn't growled at you all day, you see. You thought Dad was wonderful when Dad came home. Mum had been with you all day and probably was glad to get rid of you!

**When were your children born?**

One was born forty-seven and another one forty-nine, and another one fifty-three. I got three kids

24:00 and we grew up on a market garden, a poultry farm it was. My husband was out in the open air for his health, and we had to wait to build our own home but we gradually built it bit by bit. You lived in one room and then you finished it: you gradually got it all done.

24:30 You just hope that you…when you gave the man the money for the timber for something that he turned up with it, but he always did. But building materials were very short after the war.

**I've heard that.**

They were very short. Well you see, there wasn't the businesses during the war and the fellas had all gone away and they had to start it all up. And then there was all the fellas coming home and getting married.

25:00 A lot of them lived with their parents. I was very lucky: I didn't live with mine or my husband's.

**That would have been hard to go back to living with your parents after all that independence.**

Well yes it was, but my parents sort of recognised that I was grown up. Like I'd skipped…I'd left when I was a teenager and came back after my twenty-first birthday.

25:30 But there were a lot of families that had to have one room in the parents' house, which made it very hard until they could get a house or get it built.

26:00 **Do you think George thought that you'd changed as well?**

Well, he never said I had, but I could have you see, I could have. I joined the army after he went and I was out of it before he came home. Perhaps I'd have done, I did a bit more adjusting to civilian life

26:30 than…he came home you see, and then we got married and he was adjusting, and he wasn't that well either. But it was just his different attitude to life. When you think about it, they can't go through what they go through and come back the same person. It must affect them somehow. Whether it's

27:00 a different attitude or something that they've got, you don't know.

**It is amazing now you are just expected to slot back into society.**

You know, as the fella said, "You got demobbed [demobilised] and you went home to the missus, the missus and the kids, and got a job and you then were right." Nobody sort of helped you along the way and they didn't… That was how society was in those days.

27:30 **Do you think George would have benefited from counselling or help?**

I think he may have, but they had to work it out themselves. You see, I think all of them would have, anybody would have but they didn't believe it that in those days and that was that, totally different.

**This is a pretty broad question but**

28:00 **how did you think the war changed Australia?**

Well, a lot of things that were accepted as the right thing to do went by the board. There was…and also some of the prisoners of war stayed here, so we had to

28:30 accept them. I think people became broader in their outlook, although there was still the certain British outlook, the British way of doing things that we'd grown up with. But it gradually relaxed to a certain extent and a lot of the old ways went by the board. And then

29:00 when the refugees arrived in boatfuls, that altered the system to an extent, not so much as it's altered now. I think that…it's only an old lady's point of view, but I do think we're coming back. But I think there for a while, we could have lost our identity with a lot of

29:30 this multiculturalism, but we haven't. But I thought at one stage we could have been swallowed up, and our identity, because we were of Anglo-Saxon stock and we did have Christian beliefs. And I don't know, but to my way of thinking, I was taught when I looked at that Australian flag it was our flag. Because up in the corner,

30:00 it's got nothing to do with the Queen: all those stripes are saints from churches. And they're all the saints from… Like the Catholic and the Welsh, and the Scottish and the Church of England and all those, Saint David, Saint Andrew, Saint Patrick: all their crosses make up that flag. That is our heritage because

30:30 we all came from there. My father taught me that that was our flag with our heritage, and the Southern Cross was us. I thought at one stage we were going to lose it all but it doesn't seem so now. Because the third generation of those refugees seem to be in lots of ways, more Australian than I am.

31:00 But Australia did change, mainly because of the people that we took in, the homeless refugees. We had to alter to a certain extent, because it was a different way of doing life. They brought that with them and they gradually mingled. Therefore I think we became a more open country than we were.

31:30 You didn't hear people saying, as you did when the war started, "Oh, they're going home." Going home meant going to England when I was young. But you didn't any more of that, so I think we became more open. And people got out of, "Well this is the way you do it," and not looking at

32:00 something else.

**A lot of people lived in lots of different areas for that period too, so I mean going to Geraldton or not, or going out to different places or going overseas which you wouldn't have otherwise. That would have changed a lot of peoples' perspective on the world I think?**

Well, I think so, yes. I think that they did change and we got broadened. It was a very…well we were still…I don't know whether

32:30 it was because we were so far from anybody, but we were ruled by the old set ways. But when other people came in, it did broaden our outlook. And when flying became that you could fly to places and our young people went over and saw other things, they still thought Australia was the moderate and the most open country. But they saw a different way of life, which broadened their mind.

33:00 That's how I think.

# Tape 7

00:31 **Back to Yallourn, I want to talk about radar and was there any difference in of spotting planes and spotting subs in terms of using that?**

You only at that stage…now I believe they can tell, but at that stage it was very, very new. Radar and a team of British Army was sent out to

01:00 teach our fellas. All you saw on the tube was a little thing like that, in amongst all these other little dancing bits that stayed in one place, all you saw was a peak and if you watched that peak moving but you couldn't tell.

**Can you show us again so that the camera can pick it up? It was a bit low then. Well on the radar tube there's a line and on this line**

01:30 **was a whole lot of little shadows but they didn't move. Little peaks, they didn't move, they stayed in the one spot and danced up and down like radar beams. But every now and then could get one that would peak up there and then the next minute, it would peak up there. And you could see it travelling along, well that's the one you fixed the radar on to see.**

02:00 **And then when you got close enough for the eye to see at the predictor pit, then you could tell what it was. But we could not tell in the radar machines what it was, it was just something moving and something perhaps in the area that shouldn't have been. And that's the only thing you could tell.**

**And again with subs, you wouldn't have even been able to know that much would you? Or was it just…?**

02:30 No, you could see it was moving or you could pick up some funny little thing and sometimes it stayed there. Well sometimes it did move a bit and then you could tell. It was all sent to Sale and they investigated it more.

**So the predictor pit, they wouldn't have been able to…?**

Oh you couldn't, no, it had to come in. The planes had to come a fair way before they could see it. I mean it was a very

03:00 magnified telescopic thing that you looked through, but it had to come in a fair distance before you could tell what it was.

**Was there occasion when you saw something that was…something ridiculous like a bird that got in the wrong line of vision?**

No, the birds didn't show up big enough you see. We used to be pulled out at night some nights because

03:30 there was a scare on, but whether it was a submarine that went by or whether it was an aeroplane, we could never tell. And I can honestly say the scares we had at night, nothing came of them.

**I'll ask you about that a bit more in detail in a minute but what did fly over and what subs did get anywhere near the coast?**

04:00 Well there were a fair few, and of course there's the one that got through the net into Sydney, but they didn't get through the net in a Port Phillip Bay. Sale spotted them or someone spotted them, and I suppose you could say they were chased out of the area.

**Do you know any more about them?**

No, I don't know any more about them,

04:30 because we were further inland you see.

**And as for the planes? You said earlier that it was definitely a Japanese plane you saw flying over, checking out…**

Over Coode Island yes, that's a renowned fact. I think it's come out, two or three years ago it was let out…let it be known, but nobody knew that for years, you may as well say fifty years at least.

05:00 **Do you know if that was the only one?**

No, I wouldn't like to say it was the only one, and I wouldn't like to say there was more. But there was a lot activity around Australia that we could pick up. Unless they came further in where we were, we wouldn't have known what it was and they didn't seem to.

**And on the occasion that it came over Coode Island, did you assume that you would go into action?**

05:30 Well, I think the men did assume that but they weren't allowed.

**So how did that come about, the process of being denied the right to take action?**

Well I think…as far as I can remember, I think the head of the battalion was away on leave, he took leave like everybody else, and it was a junior officer that was in charge and he radioed… He had to get permission.

06:00 And I don't know whether they rang the headquarters in Swanston Street or where they rang, we didn't know, but he wasn't allowed permission because it would frighten the civilians.

**Bloody oath it would have!**

So, whether he did much damage because he was (UNCLEAR) or whether he got back on board the freighter, or where he came from, nobody seemed to know,

06:30 but he appeared. It was let out not so long ago: I think it was fifty years or so before they let that out.

**We were speculating earlier as to where they could have taken off from to get so far south at short range.**

Yes we often thought of that. We thought of that but we didn't know. Then somebody said I presume… could he have been let off a sub but I don't think they could have.

**No, that's a good point because they did have them on some subs but it's hard to believe.**

It is hard to believe,

07:00 but I don't know, but you don't know how advanced they were do you, because Japan did have a lot of advancement in some things.

**And the sub, that was also at Coode Island, was it? That experience?**

The sub…no, that was when we where at Yallourn we heard about that one, round at Queenscliff.

**Oh okay, you heard about that so you weren't on operations at the time.**

No.

**Were you on operations when the Coode Island plane…?**

07:30 No I was down at Yallourn and we didn't do that far round. There was another one: there was a big barracks at Queenscliff.

**How far was the range of your operations at Yallourn?**

Well, we could pick up anything out to sea from Bairnsdale, Sale,

08:00 we could go north so far. I don't know how far the range is, well I might have, but I can't remember it now.

**That's all right. And did you experience any time on guard, when you were on guard, on duty where you actually did see something that you thought…?**

We got two or three frights, yes, they didn't amount to anything but they were the ones that we were dragged out at night to.

**Can you sort of take me through that?**

08:30 Well…

**You were asleep in bed…?**

Sound asleep in bed, and you were awoken with a yell. Everybody is called by their surname and they went to one end of the barracks room where the corporal and that stayed, and she was banged up and then she had to bang…get us up. And you grabbed your greatcoat and your boots…

**Would that just be a matter of banging on the tin outside…?**

Yeah, yelling at them, nobody answered they'd open the door.

09:00 And then she yelled at all of us that she wanted out on the radar, and you sort of came to and said yes, you were awake. And you got your feet into your boots before you were awake I think, and grabbed your great coat over your jammies [pyjamas], and out you went. One night a girl fell down the predictor pit but never mind, she didn't break anything. It is dark, you see, and you more or less

09:30 know your way, but she was just too close, that was it but she was all right.

**Was there no cover over the predictor pit?**

No, oh no.

**There's a difference in occupational health and safety these days!**

No.

**Gaping great manhole sitting there…I'm sorry to laugh at that, it is not funny but it sounds funny.**

We had some funny incidents, yes. Another time we had to scramble

10:00 out. This lass said yes, she was awake, and promptly went back to sleep. There was a great big madhouse out there on the wreck trying to find her when all of a sudden somebody realises she's back in bed. She got into trouble over that.

**Well I was going to ask, if you fall asleep on guard duty, serious punishment isn't it?**

Yes, but you're standing up most of the time or walking around. You don't get a chance to sit on –

10:30 **So in this situation of this women falling back to sleep on duty, when you say she got into trouble would that just be a reprimand or –?**

A reprimand and perhaps she lost her leave or something like that but nothing too bad.

**And it would go on her report I imagine.**

Yes, I guess so.

**Do you have anything written on your file?**

Not that I know of.

**Have you ever seen your file?**

No, I couldn't be bothered. I didn't ask for them, and I didn't think you could see

11:00 them anyhow.

**Probably not for fifty years no, they'd be interesting to see now. When those, what proved to be false alarms occurred, is it in your mind that you might be going into shelters?**

Yes, it gave you a horrible feeling. You think well this is it, what's going to happen?

**Well I guess if you've spent the whole of your training preparing for something. By the time you left the army, nothing had actually happened though?**

11:30 No, not down there and they'd shifted all the radar up north, and into New Guinea and places like that.

**Did they take it away from Sale?**

Well, we left before they did, the unit left before they did. I don't know what happened, perhaps it went with them, perhaps it went to Geraldton, I don't know.

**When you went home to see you parents, would they just simply say…?**

They'd be thrilled to bits

12:00 to see me and they'd say, "How are you?" and we'd say, "Right." But they didn't ask and I didn't say.

**Just incredible. How many years after did you not tell anybody about your experiences in the war?**

After the war was finished, I suppose I didn't worry much about myself being in the war, bringing up a family, having a husband that wasn't very well. I suppose it is only in the

12:30 the last ten to twenty years that I've talked about what were in the army. You meet old friends and I've got a sister in-law that was in the WAAAF, and we'd talk about it occasionally. But you didn't think of talking about it, it was sort of an episode in your life.

**I heard a lady talking on the radio one day about her experiences as a decoder: she received a lot of information from Bletchley Park. She didn't tell anybody about**

13:00 **until she heard a program about Bletchley Park and rang up the radio station. Apparently it took General Cosgrove only recently, to let a lot of people know that it was okay now, that they could talk about that now.**

No we never have talked about it.

**So the document that you signed, did it have a period of time in which you were to keep…?**

Not that I can remember, but you see we never thought about talking about what we'd done. The war was over,

13:30 we were so happy: we got back into our normal lives and normal living. Just after the war, like… Melbourne boomed with the munitions, plenty of money and all that sort of thing and everybody had a

job. But when the war ended, lots of people didn't have a job and it was a case of, not back to the where the Depression was, but it was fairly hard to make a living and everyone was concentrating on that,

14:00 and so glad that the war was over that you didn't think of the other things.

**On to something…Oh yeah no I had a…this is a specific question about KP duty when you were talking to Ianto [interviewer] before, in a lot of movies I've watched, if you do something in the army that doesn't go down very well they give you KP duty as a punishment. When they did that would the person that was supposed to do that KP**

14:30 **duty, get a free afternoon or would they be reassigned?**

They would be there as well, you just had an extra. You didn't get out of much.

**At Yallourn, did you continue with any other training or study?**

No, they kept us up to date with the aeroplanes and you went over and over with the radar, that's all. Because it sort of became automatic what you did.

15:00 **I think you said before there was a fair bit of physical work involved?**

Oh yes.

**Apart from peeling potatoes?**

Apart from peeling potatoes! If you were on KP duty, you had to wash out the mess hut. There was always usually two of you for that. Well that meant buckets and buckets of water and disinfectant, and a great big

15:30 heavy broom. Well you pushed the broom along and cleaned it out, all those sort of things. You also cleaned out the gully traps and everything you know, it all had to be done and it had to pass inspection. And they came and inspected it before you finished.

**Did you become friendly with any of your superior officers?**

One I knew very well yes, but I'd known him before I went in there. He was quite surprised to

16:00 see me. But of course we didn't fraternise, he used to just nod and I always had to salute him.

**Did you talk about that after the war?**

I hadn't seen him. He went to New Guinea and I don't know what happened to him after that.

**And what about the difference between…for example did you have an officer's mess at your barracks?**

Yes that was…we had a sergeant and she ate in the officers'

16:30 mess but she was from Swanston Street. She was there to see that, I think more or less, that our morals were intact but I'm not sure. I might be degrading her by that, but I had a feeling she was… That's what she had to keep an eye on and nothing else!

**Did you ever get invited into the officers' mess?**

Oh no, no, you don't get invited. There's a sergeants' mess and then an officers' mess and nobody goes

17:00 if they shouldn't.

**And what about your mess, was there opportunities to put up posters or make it…?**

Oh no, you wouldn't be allowed.

**Absolutely only army regulation?**

Absolutely nothing. We were in with the fellas, it was all in together. We were in with the ordinary soldiers, the corporal and the private.

**So there must have been a bit of happy fraternising at lunchtime?**

Oh yes, and they used to you know, have a go at us and we'd have a

17:30 go at them. In general it was happy and you know, that's all. And we used to…after half past four when we all used to had to, supposed to go back and have a shower and be clean before the evening meal, we used to be able to talk to them and they'd allow that. And after tea they'd let you talk to them for so long. You weren't allowed to stay for more than, I think it was half an hour. I'm not sure, I might be wrong on that.

18:00 **When you said earlier to Ianto, that some of them took a lot of putting off in terms of men asking you out, and not necessarily the soldiers in the barracks but given that it was a different time, what do you mean by putting them off? Would they continue to ask you out?**

Ask you out, yes.

**That would be quite fun wouldn't it?**

In a way yes, and if you didn't…like

18:30 some of the guys, yes we went. But there was that didn't appeal to us, and some of them were real rats, as we used to say. You know, they'd be always trying something to get you to go out with them.

**And when you say a rat, what does that mean exactly?**

Oh well, perhaps his morals. He had other intentions than just taking you to the pictures.

**So basically sex?**

Mmm.

**What would happen to a girl if she…?**

She was discharged,

19:00 disgracefully discharged.

**So it wasn't seen as her private business at all?**

No, no, no, you disgraced the army.

**I can believe it. And letters, I sure you and George were writing to each other. Did you write to…there was organisations to write letters to soldiers was there not? Did you have time to do that or did you do that?**

Yes, we wrote letters to our boyfriends or… One girl had a husband there. She married him

19:30 on leave, and we wrote letters and we had to hand it in to the orderly room where there was a little post thing and it was collected. Our mail was delivered by the postman and it went to the orderly room and then every, after every lunchtime we had to have another parade. And that was when the mail was handed out,

20:00 if anybody got any, you know.

**And did you lose anyone close to you? I know you said you were lucky and your brothers…**

No, we were very lucky, our family. I kept my two brothers and now I come to think of it, I had a few friends that lost their brothers but none of my relations lost any either. We were a very

20:30 lucky family. Mind you the second brother came home a wreck and he was a wreck nearly all his life.

**He was the AIF or he was the RAAF?**

No, he was in the army.

**Where did he serve?**

He was in the 9th Divvy [Division] Engineers and they first of all, were sent up to finish the road from Alice Springs to Darwin. And

21:00 they ate…the dust was all there, and they had to finish the road. And as Bill said, you ate blue dust, it was in your food, it was all over your hair, it used to cover you, well it was blue asbestos. And then he was the 9th Divvy RAA [Royal Australian Artillery] he was sent into Borneo to try and stop…the Japs when they were retreating, lit the

21:30 oil wells and they were sent in, so of course by the time they'd finished, none of the ones…their lungs had gone. And he wasn't very well but he did come home, and lived strangely. With all the treatment and all the Heidelberg doctors, he lived to seventy-four.

**And was he a bitter man as a consequence?**

He wouldn't have a Japanese thing in the house but other than that,

22:00 no he was all right. But he came home and his wife thought she'd been wonderful because she'd found this dinner set because china was…and she found a whole lot of it in some old shop, and she never thought to look on the bottom and it was Japanese and he dropped the lot and broke them.

**A Noritake set?**

He would not have one thing Japanese, even till the day he died.

**That's interesting because**

22:30 **the situations that he was in, he doesn't sound like he came into really close contact or was**

**you know…**

Oh, he said they…the RAA Engineers, when they were trying to get in there, he said we were up the trees and were watching the Japanese going along, and giving out a signal telling them where they were. I mean he was in the fight and he was sent in round the back

23:00 and he said we got hint of them coming and we climbed the trees. There were six of them out in front and they climbed the trees and watched them as they came by. But he was a wreck but still, he managed to come home and we were lucky to have him

**And your other brother in the RAAF? He served…?**

He was quite all right, he ended up an instructor.

**Was he overseas?**

No, he was in…

23:30 based in Sydney.

**I want to ask you, and if this is difficult let me know, but I want to ask you about the time you mother became ill and you had to leave the army. I'm sure that was a conflict of emotions going on.**

Yes, I was very mad at the doctor. I was absolutely furious and I did it with very bad grace for a while but I got over it, but I did it

24:00 with very bad grace.

**Did you rue that there wasn't a better alternative? Did you think there could be a better alternative than making you leave the army?**

Well, no because I was the only daughter. My brother was married, and his wife had two kids, she lived in Sydney. I had a lot of aunties around but none of them were that willing to look after Mum.

24:30 And the doctor said… Oh she was in hospital for a long time, and then I didn't get out of the army, really out of the army, until she came home. I worked at other places here, but I did it with very bad grace.

**How were you demobbed as a result of that, or how were you discharged?**

Well I just had to go in, and when I got to Royal Park, I'd handed my papers in

25:00 and there was another girl too and we went to…we had to go through the same examination that we had to come in.

**A medical to get out?**

Yes a medical, to see that I hadn't caught VD [venereal disease] or something. Anyhow and then they discharged us, they gave us a full book of coupons and said we're allowed to wear the uniform home but then we must get out of it.

25:30 **Would that be impersonating a member of the military to wear it any longer than that?**

Yes, it would, yes, and there's a charge for that, I forget what it was, long ago now.

**You're allowed to keep it though: you didn't have to return it?**

Oh yes, my great coat was very handy, it was very warm. I got it dyed black. It was one of the warmest things out, and I got the two skirts dyed black too

26:00 and I wore them a lot because nothing else was useful. I remember my husband, he was having trouble growing some feed for the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s that we had. They…it was the other birds were sort of pinching the feed and everything else, so he sat my army hat up on a skeleton, a scare crow.

26:30 **Evidently you weren't decorated or presented with any medals?**

Oh no, no, I was just an ordinary gunner.

**Years afterwards any man that served overseas or in Australia was given a set of medals and so on.**

Oh yes, I had a set of medals.

**When were they presented to you?**

You wrote in to them, wrote in to get them just before the fiftieth… They drew our attention to them before it was that fiftieth anniversary

27:00 that they had. And they advertised in the paper and if so, it would be sent out.

**So did they give you any information when you were discharged as to what your rights were, or what your…what provisions there were going to be for you?**

Nup.

**See you later?**

See you later. Promise you everything, give you nothing!

**Take you nowhere…**

You've heard that one before, I bet.

**I'm afraid so,**

27:30 **and the cheque's in the mail.**

Yeah!

**Your Mum, what was she ill with?**

It was internal injuries really, and she had a lot of stomach troubles. And also she had a hernia here in the bowel, and it burst and there was peritonitis, you know the whole works. And it took her ages to get better.

**Sure, and your Dad,**

28:00 **at this stage, he'd be in his late sixties at this stage?**

Yes, but he worked at the munitions, right till the end he worked in the munitions.

**And so there was no talk of him looking after your Mum because of course, he had to earn a living.**

No, no, no, because he was in an essential war job.

**Of course. Did your girlfriends give you a sending off, a send off?**

Oh no, you didn't do that in the army.

**No chance to say goodbye?**

You say goodbye to them

28:30 and…for a fleeting minute, and then they say, "Come on," and they just take you and that's it.

**When did you hear that they being posted to Geraldton?**

Well, I knew that they were posted to Geraldton, I knew that I was…at that stage I was going too, you see. But then I believe they went over, and it was a long journey by the train right over to Perth, and then up that way you know. But

29:00 they said they were a few mile out of Geraldton, and one of them said, with the flies – that rated first – the Yanks and the sand.

**I wanted to ask abut the Americans too, I mean I've heard a lot about what they were like when they were in Melbourne and so on. And yes, the earlier mobs would have been higher ranking or career soldiers, and so on.**

What is the academy

29:30 over in America, I was trying to…?

**West Point.**

Well they were West Point boys.

**They would have been top brass I imagine, from good families etcetera, etcetera.**

Good families, oh yes, you could tell.

**You probably would have encountered American Negroes for the first time then in Melbourne?**

Yes.

**That must have been…evidently you know Aboriginal Australians were around but this was a completely different set of circumstances.**

No Aboriginal Australians, they were called up

30:00 too. We did see them but they were all right. Some American Negroes were quite, quite gentleman. But the majority of them, I don't know. I used to get a feeling with a lot of them, you know. And then there

was the Americans nurses, and the Americans that worked in the canteens.

**What was that like?**

They were quite nice ladies, and on the corner

30:30 of Elizabeth Street and Flinders Street, that big building was built for a canteen for American and Australian troops. And you could go in there and get a meal: you could go upstairs to showers and everything. And you could also stay there if you didn't want to go home. They were in there mainly, but that were very nice.

31:00 I remember after I was out of uniform, three nurses coming down Flinders Street Station, number six it was, and they were singing happily away, Don't sit under the apple tree, and they were gorgeous. I don't think they really would have done it if they hadn't have been sort of a little bit primed.

**Well, women of course weren't supposed to drink.**

31:30 No, they weren't.

**But they must have…?**

They did!

**Did you have any decent drinking nights?**

No, no as you would know today. We'd have a drink but you always kept sober.

**Sure.**

You see, and it meant that we could go in…my first thoughts of Young…no my brother took me into Young and Jackson's when I was seventeen, and he told the fella I was eighteen, to see Chloe [painting].

32:00 But we could go in there into the lounge and have a drink or two together, with our boyfriends or you know, friends. That happened during the war: they used to let the women of the forces in.

**Young and Jackson's has certainly seen a few changes in its day.**

Oh yes, there's been a few scraps and changes. It is all done up again, you know?

**Yes, it's latest renovations, its very beautiful**

32:30 **but it feels much less traditional obviously, much less what it was originally.**

Yes, I suppose it was. It's always been grubby but now it isn't and they've got Chloe upstairs.

**And the drinks are twice the price.**

Yes, but now they've opened a coffee bar as well.

**Yes, no you can't walk two feet in the city without getting coffee.**

You can't walk two feet down Bentleigh without getting coffee.

33:00 **That's funny!**

Umpteen dozen down there!

**You say there was some scraps, did you witness any of them?**

Oh yes, as we were walking by you could see…occasionally somebody…and it was always an American and an Australian. Yes I saw a few: I've seen a few thrown out including Australians. I wasn't in the hotel but you know, you could be walking by. And of course,

33:30 they had the six o'clock closing then, so they all used to gather round the doors with the drinks, you know.

**The swill?**

The swill.

**Funny old laws. What about what is going on in Melbourne in sort of a more political sense? John Curtin [Prime Minister] died towards the end of the war…**

Yes, yes and were taken up by the other one, I forget his name.

**Chifley.**

Chifley, Ben

34:00 Chifley.

**Were you conscious of any of that?**

Oh yes, the headlines in the paper and everything, they showed us that. But during the war there was no political left or right. It was all together, they all amalgamated and they all did…well the war was the main thing.

**Yes, it's interesting that it take a war for the political factions to…?**

Oh no, they agree when their wages go up.

34:30 **That's right! So were affected by the death of John Curtin?**

Not really. No, I wasn't affected. I sound a cold fish but I'm not affected by any Prime Minister dying unless he was a friend and I'm not likely to get one!

**No, I guess…he was held in high esteem by Australians.**

He was held in high esteem and he

35:00 bucked the system with Churchill and turned our ship around to get the Ninth Divi back, and he did a good job really. And then of course Chif… It mightn't have been Curtin, Chifley might have been the one that turned the 9th Divvy back, could have been Chifley I think now, I might have been wrong about Curtin.

35:30 They were on the way to the Middle East from London, when Chifley turned it round and said, "No, they're wanted here." Well they were wanted because the Japanese were very close.

**Yes, it could have gone a whole other way couldn't it. What about on a more social front? Obviously the war didn't stop everything and there were –**

Oh no, and if you were in uniform, I think you had a better social life than the civilians

36:00 because everybody was… Oh well, the one thing you were always let in free.

**To everything, like pictures?**

Yes.

**Trains?**

You travelled on the train for nothing.

**What about the football?**

No, you were let in free, which was amazing. But everybody was prepared… For anybody in uniform, they did try make it as good as they could for you

36:30 in the social life, and the get-togethers and the dances and everything else, you know. I was very lucky because I was in uniform I think.

**So when you were suddenly out of uniform?**

It's totally different.

**You must have been like going through the looking glass and yet nobody could recognise you any more.**

No, well then jobs were easy to get so

37:00 I got a job out at the aircraft factory in the office, because in those days…because if you and I were to go up for the job, I would get it because I was an ex-service, and they were supposed to employ all the ex-service people. But I did find I was lucky to have my girlfriends

37:30 still and a couple of other lasses that I knew, we still had a fairly good social life by going to the church socials and to the pictures. But I did find I had to learn coupons all of a sudden. I couldn't go willy-nilly and buy another pretty pair of shoes, or I couldn't buy something else. I had to have someone…you were given so many clothing coupons for the year

38:00 and that was it. And I had to adjust to all things that the civilians had been putting up with for years.

**Did you blow your coupons accidentally on something?**

I nearly did and then of course, I had to save some for a wedding dress, and shoes and a going away outfit. The stuff was in the shops, it wasn't that you couldn't get it just that you couldn't get enough coupons if you weren't careful.

# Tape 8

00:33 **I missed also, the business of Preston and I'm struggling to remember what part of your chronology that comes in?**

After I left, after the unit had gone to Geraldton, I went in and we did…myself and another girl and I never found out why she didn't go, but anyhow we went in and did a course

01:00 of that with the WAAAF, and we had to do night duty as well as they did. They traced the planes all over Australia. That was the headquarters there and you could see them moving this, you know, as you saw them on the movers, that's just how they did it.

**With the little shuffles? I love those, I don't know why. So they would stand around the big green base table…**

Yes, they stood around the table and

01:30 you did this. And they did it night…all day, and then you did night shift, which was very boring in lots of places but occasionally you had a bit of a scramble. But you learned all about the aircraft and where they were, and where they should have been, and all that sort of thing. I was there for about a month. And at night…when were on night duty, the Salvos used to

02:00 come in with lovely hot chocolate, and then they used to come down again about four o'clock in the morning with lovely hot chocolate.

**It makes sense to be a Salvo in that respect, everybody loves to see your face.**

Yes, and they were always very good, you know, "Do you want something to chew?" and they'd fish out a lolly or something, it was lovely.

**Were you allowed to do anything on night duty apart from stay alert?**

No, just stay alert.

**Did anyone ever secrete**

02:30 **books or comics or things inside?**

Oh no.

**That would be instant dismissal?**

No, but there'd be a reprimand, a reprimand. You know, it's one thing… Most of the girls were very, very… Well their job, you know, it was important. The ones that I knew in the signals or the aircraft identification, all those things they were,

03:00 you know, very conscious of their job, very conscious of their job.

**Actually before the end of the last tape, we were talking about your having to get used to the coupons factor again and…?**

Oh yes, I saw this gorgeous pair of shoes and I went in and bought them, and I came home and I'm thrilled to bits with them you see. And I'm thinking how nice they look and everything. And Mum said to me,

03:30 "You realise those coupons have got to go your twelve months?" and I said, "What?" She said, "That book, with that page for clothes has got to last you twelve months," so I sort of was pulled up in a hurry.

**Did you take them back?**

No, I kept them, but it was the last big spend up I had. And I remember going to a ball, I went down and got

04:00 yards and yards of fine mosquito netting, and it didn't have coupons. And I paid so much…I had an old taffeta underskirt and my friend did, and Irene and I used to wear the underskirt between us. The only trouble was when we were both out, it was who had it.

**What did you do, flip a coin?**

And we…I made this dress out of mosquito netting

04:30 and it turned out all right. So, see I didn't have to pay coupons for that one, and it looked all right. I tizzied it up with a spray of flowers and well, the sleeves were sort of…you had to have a sleeve in those days you know. But all sorts of things like that we did with no coupons. As I told you before, you unknitted old, unpulled

05:00 old jumpers, washed the wool and knitted it up again.

**Wow, I bet you didn't get a single mosquito bite all night!**

No.

**In terms of coupons, were they broken up in terms of shoes and clothing…?**

There was clothing and there was food. And the meat coupons had meat written on them, and there was butter coupons, like you couldn't swap it over. And general

05:30 coupons for all sorts of things. No matter what you bought, it was couponed.

**But you were saying mosquito netting wasn't, so were there examples of other things?**

No, because you see that…I don't know why, I did know but I can't remember now, mosquito netting wasn't couponed for some reason. So there were a lot of girls and we used to…Irene knew a fella in the air force, she married him actually,

06:00 and he got us a piece of old parachute for us and we made underwear out of that, and gee they lasted a long time.

**What about the business of silk stockings and how every woman needed silk stockings?**

No, you didn't, well there were no…well there was silk stockings but it cost too many coupons, so you used to rub some stuff on your legs and wear that. It didn't look too bad as long as you put it on

06:30 all right. Some people even tried to draw the line up the back of the leg for the seam: the stockings had a seam up the back.

**Yes, I'm always curious about that. It's a bit like wearing a wig, as soon as someone gets close enough they'll realise it's not the real deal.**

Yes, but if you bought the stockings, the stockings in those days had a seam up the back, even the nylons that the Americans bought, so you were supposed to put a seam down

07:00 the back. But I never attempted to, I thought well I'll get it crooked anyhow.

**It just struck me as an odd thing to do.**

Yes.

**I appreciated why: I just thought people would go, "Oh they've just got a line down the back of their legs." But then again, perhaps people didn't get as close as they do these days.**

Oh yes, you could see some.

**Did you start to notice dancing start to change as a consequence of much more American influence in the movies?**

Yes, it did change,

07:30 even when I was in the army it did change. They had both but then they had what they called the jitterbug, and we all did that.

**Were you much chop at that?**

I seemed to get along all right and fellas asked me to dance with them, so I must have been all right!

**And what about songs, did you notice music begin to change?**

Yes, a little bit although the old faithful sort of

08:00 American, no, sort of war songs was sung right through like We'll meet again and all those sort of things. And Nightingale square and…

**What was your favourite?**

I think the favourite of all troops was The White Cliffs of Dover.

**That'd bring a tear to the eye pretty easily. You wouldn't give us a little bit of that would you?**

No, my voice wouldn't stand it today with this cold.

**Well given your**

08:30 **incapacitation, I will let you off and I'm disappointed.**

Aren't I lucky!

**Yes! I'd like to talk then about your fiancée coming home. I have a feeling that was really very difficult for everybody.**

Yes, it was. As I say, my friend's description of me, "Run, little piece, stop, yes it is, no…" She said, "I know what was going through your head. You couldn't remember. You couldn't make up your mind whether it was his brother or him."

09:00 But eventually I thought, "It is him, it is him," and ran… I met him across the railway line – good thing a

train wasn't coming. And he'd been sent home, but he had to go the doctor's the next day with his eye and eventually they all got better, but it took a long time really. And by the time we got everything settled and could afford to build

09:30 the house…he came home just before the end of forty-five, I wasn't married till forty-six.

**So it was a good year after he got back that you managed to get married.**

He got back in the…he got back in the January and I was married April the following year. But it took him a while to get better and it took him a while to get his eye better too.

**Did it give you second thoughts about marrying him?**

10:00 No.

**Not one, not a single time?**

Not one, no.

**Did it concern you that he'd lost his…not so much faith but his religious interests?**

Well, it didn't concern me that much: I found it harder when the children were younger. It didn't concern me that much at all while there was only two of us but it was very hard…like he wouldn't

10:30 stop the children from going to church or Sunday school, and he wouldn't stop me, he just wouldn't go. And that is when I found it hard, after we had the children, but as I say he did go to Sunday school anniversaries, Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Christmas Day, so that was that.

**Do Anglicans take the communion?**

Yes.

**And would he do that on those days?**

Yes,

11:00 oh yes he'd do that.

**You didn't have confession, did you?**

No, Anglicans… The evangelical Anglican doesn't. The High Church does, I believe. But no, he came along and accepted all that, and he sort of… When the children came along, I really had to talk hard to get him to the

11:30 christening, but he did come. I think he was more frightened of his mother than me, but he came to all the christenings, he did do all the christenings. But it was just 'Dad didn't go' and that was all. Mind you he'd drive, we lived at Heatherton and the Church of England was really the only little church at Dingley where we went,

12:00 and Dad'd drive them up to the youth groups and anything else, he just wouldn't stay, he'd come back.

**What did you parents think of your fiancée? Did they think he was a good match?**

Oh they thought he was wonderful, he had a circle round the top of his head, they thought. No, he was… my parents were quite happy with him and he got on very well with my family.

**And in the month before the war ended with him home again, was he**

12:30 **at a loss to know what to do with his time?**

Yes for a while there he seemed a bit lost and of course being ill made a difference too but he…actually this was his parents' house, and he did a wonderful veggie garden for his mother. That's what he started on and it seemed to help him a lot.

13:00 Then we bought a…the doctor said he'd be better off in the open air, and we a bought a poultry farm down at Heatherton and lived there for forty-three years. And when he retired we came and bought this.

**I'm curious to know, I mean an awful lot of people were involved in the war effort**

13:30 **but many weren't. For some it didn't…?**

Oh no, some were good black marketers.

**Yeah, and I wanted to ask about the black market because I wondered when you came out of the army and had to learn how to use coupons, and all of the change in the economics and so on, did you encounter…did anyone offer you anything on the black market?**

They didn't offer, well some people – a couple of friends I worked with, they used to come in with new clothes and, "Oh, I got it from a fella down the market," that was the usual story.

14:00 But I was offered coupons, I didn't always take them but I did when I was getting married.

**Where would they come from? I mean obviously some people perhaps don't drink tea, don't need their tea coupons etcetera.**

I think that's just what it was. If you didn't use all your coupons, well you gave it to your neighbour, from what I could see, you know. Because you didn't need it much and whereas perhaps she could give you something that she didn't need, and I think a lot of that went on.

14:30 **So there was a lot of healthy contra bartering?**

Bartering. I got married: I had extra coupons given to me to buy a dress.

**Was that on the up and up or did you think it was worth taking a bit of a moral risk?**

No, that was…well it was within the family, not close family, but they had it. It was an elderly person who didn't use them, the dress coupons,

15:00 so she gave them to me. But that was the only time I did it. Well then, after I was married, I was only married two months when I was pregnant, and you wrote in to the government and they gave you another book.

**Because you had a baby on the way?**

I had a baby, and they had it for the nappies and all the things that you had to get.

15:30 **Coupons lasted a number of years afterwards?**

Well, Kenneth was eighteen months and we were going…we'd saved up for this holiday. We'd got an old caravan, and were up there, and we were at a petrol station. As we came out of the hills near Healesville, on the way to Wangaratta, I said to George, "He's got petrol, no coupons!" and he said, "Oh that

16:00 wouldn't be right, you didn't see right," I said, "I did!" Anyhow he turned round and came back, and said, "He has too." And as we were travelling, they'd taken the coupons off. It was lovely, you could not only go and look but you could buy it. But by then I'm married, and money's got to go round, so I could still only look!

16:30 **Perestroika, I guess. I'd just like to ask a few questions about the wedding. I imagine that austerity of the Second World War lasted quite a while afterwards?**

Oh it did yes, and most women just got a bridal dress made, or bought one. They didn't go out of their road, they bought the bits and pieces and the bridal dress was more or less traditional, except you could have it straight or

17:00 big skirt or whatever. You just went and had it in a public hall and had a dance.

**Did you have a breakfast, a wedding breakfast?**

It wasn't…I suppose it was more like a country fair. There was sandwiches and savouries, and you had a cake but you

17:30 didn't have a big deal. You just sat down, and you had the traditional breakfast, but it didn't go overboard like it does today. And then you just had a dance from the local hall and you were fared off from the local hall. Everybody went to the local hall to have their wedding breakfast.

**And would you have specific invitations or would people just come along?**

Yes, you'd send…they…you stuck to that.

18:00 **Well what was stationery like to get your hands on just after the war?**

Stationery was all right, it was just it cost you coupons but no, it was all right.

**And what about wedding gifts? If everybody's a bit stifled by coupons, I imagine you probably would have got some strange gifts?**

No, I didn't…how would nine casseroles suit you? And eight butter dishes?

18:30 **I wouldn't mind one but I suppose eight's pushing it!**

Casseroles and Pyrex had just come in and everybody was mad over them. I did work my way through the whole lot, eventually breaking them, but I had them in all sorts, shapes and sizes. And I went to another wedding and I bought a little cake thing for a little dish, and I looked around…actually it was Irene's, and

19:00 I looked around and she said, "You're right, I got a whole lot of Pyrex!"

**Can you recall any technological advances that came through the Second World War that became household features afterward?**

Well radio improved and instead of…you could get the great big cabinets but also you could get mantle radios what they called them,

19:30 and that was the smaller one. Radio improved, communications improved.

**Telephones?**

Telephones improved but you couldn't get them, you had to go on a waiting list. Unless you were a primary producer, which we happened to be and we got ours. The usual waiting list was about eighteen months.

**What was it about primary producing that made a telephone essential?**

20:00 Well, now you ask me that, I don't know. But I know all primary producers, they thought, should have a telephone. I don't know the meaning of their thinking but well…I suppose the main thing was the orders that you would get through the phone from your customers and things like that. That's what I'd think.

**Urgency**

20:30 **for WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK ! I imagine being a primary producer you would have come in for a number of concessions post-war when everybody else experienced shortages?**

Well, we were allowed so much petrol before we used the coupons. We were allowed…oh there was a different tax for primary producing and buying any new implements or anything like that: there was a different tax.

21:00 Yes, they did get a few favours, not many. We still had the clothing coupons as I say, till Kenneth was eighteen months old, and that would be half way through 1948.

**Did you know many widows as a result of the war?**

Yes, I knew a few widows. I knew about six in Bentleigh.

**What happened to them?**

21:30 **Obviously now the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] looks after war widows…**

The DVA looks after them and Legacy did a good job. Legacy stepped in, see Legacy was formed in 1923 and they were looked after very well because…oh Jessie, Jessie…it's on there, on that card…

**Vaney or?**

Vacey!

22:00 **Vacey!**

She…

**I'm a sticky beak, I'm sorry!**

That's all right! I didn't realise they gave everyone a card on their eightieth birthday!

**Oh well, you'll be expecting yours next week.**

No, she sent it this week! It came in the mail today!

**Right.**

She was getting in before…yes, it's got Jessie Vacey on it so it must be from Legacy. And they did a very good job. They took over educating the child

22:30 and looking after the children until they were eighteen. They looked after the widow, she still found it very hard but Legacy took over the role and they were very, very good.

**So that would kick in…?**

Yes, that kicked in. That kicked in as soon as they knew she was a widow but she didn't get much as far as pension or anything goes till a long while after that.

**What would happen to wives of men missing**

23:00 **in action, never to be discovered?**

Well, there were so many years I think, and then they were recognised. I'm not quite sure on that but there is something.

**Well, I imagine their pay would continue if they were missing.**

Yes, I don't know about that. But most of them had to go out to work.

**And also just post the war…sorry I have to collect my thoughts. I had a very**

23:30 **clear question for a moment then. I'll let you have a cough…no it's gone. Can you just turn off for a second?**

Because there's the RSL, they have a widows thing and then there's Legacy and the Ladies Guild and Widowed Mothers, there's a lot of them and they all look after us.

**When were you allowed to join the RSL as a member?**

24:00 Years ago.

**But it was many years after the war, was it not?**

It was many years after the war but…well it'd be fifteen years I think since I joined it.

**Why that long then? Fifty years?**

It's nearly sixty…

**Are you right?**

Yeah, just give me a go at this and when I get it on the cough bit, I'll be right!

24:30 You had to have a certain number: you had to have served a certain number of days.

**Did you qualify then?**

Mmm, I think you'd only have to serve at the most, nine months or something, but there is a number of days, okay.

**My question was, Anzac Day 1946, did you**

25:00 **and your husband attend?**

Anzac Day 1946, we were away on our honeymoon.

**Right, so did he have much interest in returning to march?**

No, he wiped the lot for a while, gradually came back.

**That's not uncommon from people I've spoken to.**

No, wiped the lot and then gradually came back and joined the RSL.

**So was he**

25:30 **angry at the army or the war, or at the Japanese?**

Well, he was definitely angry at the Japanese. I think he was angry at the government actually and also, it dinted his faith a bit, because, "How could God let this happen?"

26:00 **Do you know if he saw much atrocity over there? Obviously he was a victim of bombing and…?**

Well, he didn't say anything much. He used to talk to his mates down there, he wouldn't tell the kids anything, but not long before he died he said, "You know I never expected to live through the war," and I said, "But you did!" He said, "On those supply ships and we're unloading and the Japs used to come over,"

26:30 he said, "the bombs hit the other fellas and blew them to smithereens but they never seemed to get to me." And he said, "Every day I thought I was going to die." So he was very angry, he took it personally to his faith to start with I think. And then he sort of got angry with the people that created it, you know.

27:00 But after a while he gradually got over it but he never went back to the…he had his faith but he never went back to church.

**Did he ever go back to New Guinea?**

No, he wouldn't. He was asked but he wouldn't. Yet see me, it affected me differently, I would have gone to have a look, but he wouldn't.

27:30 His mate wanted him to go with him, but he said no. Well then our daughter, our youngest daughter got married and went and lived in Singapore for a while. She married a mud engineer, he's the fella that when they drill for the oil and up it comes, he says, "Yes it's all right to drill, no don't touch it!" That's why they call him a 'mud' engineer. But she was moving to Greece and she said,

28:00 "Dad, I want you to come over and see us before we go." So for a while he wouldn't go, and then she rang and she said, "Have you booked your tickets?" and I said, "Dad still won't come but I'll go." "No, I want the both of you," she said. "Put him on!" Well within five minutes he was going to Singapore. But

he wouldn't get on a plane, he'd vowed and declared that once he got back into Australia, he'd never leave it.

**So it wasn't because**

28:30 **they were in Asia; it was just somewhere else away from Australia?**

Yes, it was, "I've got back safely, I'm alive, I will never leave Australia!" and that was…well she was twenty one and he was still like that, and that was the youngest one.

**Do you have any emotional attachment to the Japanese as the enemy or as a people?**

I never thought I was racist but…

29:00 and I could handle my grandson's friends who – a couple are Japanese. I handled that quite well but I thought, thank goodness George is not here, because the way I handled it, I thought well, they're friends. But Sam, my youngest daughter's little one, is very gifted with languages and he, at Brighton Grammar,

29:30 was top of the school last year in year ten, for Japanese. So, won a trip with six others to go to Japan and he said, "Nanna, what would you like me to bring you?" and I said, "Just bring me a fridge sticker Sam, that'll do, don't spend your money!" which he did. And it was a fan fridge sticker with a red circle in the middle.

30:00 I looked at it on the table and I said, "Oh, that's lovely Sam!" and he said, "Yes, I thought you'd like that!" I couldn't bear to put it up on the fridge, it sat on the table for about three days, and I thought, "This is silly. It's my grandson's, he's bought it for me, I've got to do it." So, I stuck it up on the fridge and there it is. I will admit that I sort of stuck it all together so it wasn't that noticeable!

30:30 I didn't think I was racist, but it proved to me that I could be.

**Did you think to explain to him…?**

No, he… While he was there I looked at it in my hand, and when he went home… It was my youngest daughter, his mother, who said to me, "You haven't got it up on the fridge, Mum!"

**She must have understood.**

She knew, she knew why I didn't. But I said, "Yes, I'm going to put it up there,

31:00 give me just a little time." And she said, "Sam will be round tomorrow, you've got to get it up there before tomorrow!" and I thought, "Oh, I didn't think I was racist." It was seeing that round, red circle, it took me nearly off, but it's up there and it stays there, and now I don't even notice it.

**Is Japan now the same Japan when you were in the war?**

No, I don't think so. The young ones aren't.

31:30 The young ones are very nice young ones, their friends. And also, through living in western countries because this family…the two children were born in America. They were there for six years with the company: they've been here for six years with the company. So they've never really known their culture that much, they're very westernised. And

32:00 you couldn't be mad at them, you couldn't be mad at their father or their mother because they're my children's generation. But he said that he didn't understand the Australians' feelings until there was a movie he saw in Australia, and he said, "You know as a child and we're still only taught that

32:30 we went to war with England and America," Australia was never said.

**Oh yes, no I believe Japanese history is sadly lacking in that respect.**

And he said, "Once I knew that, I understood."

**I wonder what you would do if you were in charge of the Japanese curriculum and wanting to tell your children…?**

I don't know either. It would be very hard wouldn't it? I have a grand daughter who's there for twelve months teaching English

33:00 for Monash. She's over in Japan and she finds them the most delightful people and very generous, you see. But I wonder what I would do: it's a different generation.

**Absolutely.**

I suppose you have to look at it that it's not these children's fault. They don't know anything about it, so

33:30 I can't take my grudge out on them. But it's very hard to do I think. You've given me something to think of now.

**Sorry!**

No, that's all right!

**In reflection then, I assume you think it was a necessary thing to do, to take up arms against the Japanese in defence of the realm?**

Yes, it was necessary with Hitler and it was necessary with

34:00 Japan because…well, Hitler was…well I'd call him a maniac, but Japan is a different religion and in their religion life isn't important. They don't look at it the same way as us, and I think they could have been very cruel. If we hadn't have stepped in

34:30 they would have overrun us, and that was that. They had the money printed: they had everything ready to take over. They thought they were going to. But then you see, they fought with the Chinese and America wouldn't let them – I can see how things started, America wouldn't give them the petrol and all that sort of thing, or the oil and of course, it created a lot of things.

35:00 **And when you turn on the news or read the newspapers these days in regard to recent theatres of war, in Afghanistan and Iraq, and potentially Korea and so on, does it have the hallmarks of what you knew back then, or is it something completely different at play now?**

Gives me the horrors now because I know more about it. See the Islams

35:30 are blaming us, but they're not blaming us for being friends with America. They've got it in for us because we helped to take Timor away from them. And yet during the Second World War we owed those people an awful lot and it took a long time to repay them. When they asked for it, they got it, the help. That's where all the terrorists are blaming Australia.

36:00 They're not, they don't go into that bit which a lot of people think. But it was said even the other day: Australia had a lot to answer for because they took Timor away from Islam, you see. But there were a lot of Christians in Timor and that was the thing. But it gives me the horrors. I just pray they keep safe, that's all. I have a lot of children here, there and everywhere,

36:30 and grand children. And I've got two boys that are mad on aeroplanes and want to fly F18s, so I mean they'll go into the air force. So you know, you can only hope and pray everyday that they're safe. Of course there's another way of looking at it, they could walk out on the road and get hit by a car but you never think of that. But I do worry a little bit about the war. I think there'll be a lot of

37:00 service men wanted for a good few years because it just won't straighten out, the way it is at the moment. But that's my thoughts.