Australians at War Film Archive

Yvonne Day (Dickie) - Transcript of interview

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Some parts of this interview have been embargoed.

The embargoed portions are noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:38 **Yvonne, if you could tell me a little bit, how your parents came to Australia?**

My father was a wool merchant and he came out to Australia with a firm called Piko Fiesse. And he stayed at the house of

01:00 the consul general for France in Australia, in Sydney, in Hunters Hill and he met their daughter, became my mother. But he came out with those wool buyers, a whole lot of them came out from Flanders in France, and his family was a wine merchant people in Rheims.

01:30 But they had properties and he loved animals and sheep and things like that, that's how he decided to do the wool trade. So, and he came out to Perth and brought a few children with him, I was born here.

Can you remember what it was like growing up in Perth?

Well we were lucky, we were a very fortunate family, and a beautiful home

02:00 and beautiful everything. And we had a, you know, we had servants for the, us all, you know, we had live-in maids and gardeners and people like that, and we were very lucky. And he was the consul for France and Belgium in Perth, as well as carrying on his trade, which he bought in North Fremantle, a firm from Craglier and Fernough, they were

02:30 wool scouring people. And he bought the whole of the wool scour and eventually put his four sons into the business. And I just grew up in this beautiful home with, you know, I didn't know how to cook an egg, I never did anything until he died. She died, my mother died in 1932, my father died in 1935 and left us with a step mother, so then

03:00 everything disappeared.

Well that must've been also difficult with the Depression?

Yeah, well yes the Depression didn't seem to worry us as much as it did other people, he was a very good businessman, my father, and a great friend of Claude Debonalese, you know. So, he wasn't naughty though, like that, no.

Can you remember in that lovely time of your life, what sort of things

03:30 **you did on the weekends?**

Well there were lots of parties in Peppermint Grove, I remember that. And, you know, my mother used to have us in beautiful clothes and special things to go to in these parties, and I used to play tennis at school and go around to the other colleges to play. And we used to go swimming of course, we lived at Cottesloe on Stirling Highway, and every morning before

04:00 school we walked to the beach and back with our dogs, we had five dogs. Had a lovely life, really. And after school we were back at the beach again, so that's sort of thing we did. Sometimes we walked down to the river at the back, my sister and I were only allowed to go if we had our brother with us,

sometimes we swam in the convent baths down the back of the,

04:30 the cliffs there at the back of, Osborne Cliffs, they had a big stairway there right down to their baths, sometimes we had a swim there. Sometimes we'd just walk down the track to Peppermint Grove carrying an old canoe, which we made ourselves out of corrugated iron, oh, you remember that I suppose. And you made them out of corrugated iron, and then when the, where the nails had been in the iron before, you had to

05:00 plug it all up with the tar, and invariably they sank as soon as you put them in the water. That's the sort of thing we did. Ran around in bare feet, and no-one ever worried that somebody might come out of the bushes in those back cliffs, I mean, they were lonely little tracks, nobody ever touched anybody then, no one worried about us. So we lived a sort of a separate life, we three, from the four older children.

05:30 They were, you know, getting out with their girlfriends and boyfriends and motor cars, and they all had, my four brothers had motorbikes, and there was, my father had two cars, and for those days it was quite, he must've been very well off. But we soon learned the other side of the picture.

Where were you going to school during that time?

Loretto Convent. Loretto, it was almost beside where we lived.

06:00 **Can you tell me what it was like to go through a day in the convent, in the schooling?**

Oh I loved it, I, some people don't, but I did, the nuns were very kind to us. And when I first went to school I couldn't speak English at all, and the girls used to, if we got there early, the girls would all come early and they'd ask my sister and I, you know, to speak French, and we were terrified, we thought they were laughing at us, just.

06:30 terrified. And we used to cry because we thought they, we were something different. Because we'd say, they might say, "What," you know, "What's that?" And we would say, "la table." Oh, and they were probably saying, "Aren't they sweet," but, you know, we didn't think like that, we thought that we were strange, we never really felt we fitted in. It was funny that. But it was a beautiful school, the junior school was overlooking the river and then the senior school was across the road in Richardson

07:00 Avenue, and that was beautiful too. And I loved the chapel and all the lovely things, and the beautiful music, always music and singing there. And lovely, I liked the nuns, a lot of people don't, but I did. I left when I was fourteen, because my mother died, and my father should have left us there but he just didn't know what to do with himself, he didn't know what... When she was sick, he kept us back

07:30 from school to go and visit her in hospital when he couldn't be there, and he seemed to be terrified of the future. And it wasn't that long then before he married his secretary, after she'd died. She was, you know... I didn't like that.

You didn't like her?

No. Nothing like my mother. No.

How did life change for you?

Well after we had been there about six months with her, and she'd locked up

08:00 all the precious things with keys, big keys, and the cellar where my father's beautiful photographs and things were. That was one of his hobbies, music and photography, and she locked the cellar where all the wine was from France, you know. Oh, all that sort of thing happened, and it was awful, and we used to cry most of the time. And she sent me to business school and I enjoyed that, I liked that.

08:30 And at the end of that year she suddenly said one day, "You'll have to get out of here," it was a Thursday, "You'll have to get out of here, the house is being sold, you have to be out by Monday." And my brothers, the older brothers didn't know she'd said this, so we got in touch with them and there was a big fight. Anyway we did have to get out, she sold the house right over our heads.

How...?

A beautiful home, you should see it. Beautiful home.

Why did she sell the house?

09:00 Well she said she wasn't going to go on trying to pay the rates and everything, and we were just costing money, and I suppose we were. When you look back, perhaps we were.

Was your father still alive at this point?

My father? Oh no, he'd died, he died there. He was ill for a year after he married her, don't know what it was, he came out in rashes and things, was very sick. And she and I nursed him and we had a trained

09:30 nurse all night, every night for nearly a year, and another one all day, that would've cost a lot of money too, I know that. Looking back, I think she was probably wise to get rid of it, with three of us stuck there doing nothing. And my brother was working with my father, in my father's firm, but the firm was sold

eventually. No, we kept that on for some years and then we sold that, and that's

10:00 North Fremantle, of course it's all been turned into a village now. My father's office was on the corner of Cliff and High Street in Fremantle. But my brothers had a lovely wild time, they were pretty spoilt, you know, to have motorbikes and cars in those days, they were lucky. But they used to scream down to work in, on their motorbikes and the cops used to hide and catch them, and it was just

10:30 a big game. It was a very happy time really, before the war. For us.

And what happened after the house was sold?

One of my brothers who had left home, because of his stepmother, he was twenty-one and he could do that then, he had left and stayed with one of my other brothers who was married. He came back and joined with my

11:00 younger brother and I, my sister had gone off and got married, and I had, looked after my two brothers. We rented a house in Brighton Street in Cottesloe, opposite the church there and I, as I say, I couldn't cook an egg and I was supposed to look after the boys. But I did, I looked after them, we had funny meals, I used to burn the dinners and everything. I made a great big production about having to go and do

11:30 the shopping, walk in to Cottesloe, "No I can't do this today because I have to go and buy the groceries," you know, I was just so stuffy, stupid, young. Anyway at the same time I was at business college and I passed that in about eight months, the whole year's course in eight months, I got through quickly, and then I went to work up at, at a instrument makers

12:00 place in Hay Street in Perth. I used to catch the bus for that, and the boys went to work at the wool scour. And at night time in the summer time they used to wake me up and say, "Come on Dick, we're going for a swim," and I'd say, "I don't want to go for a swim, I'm asleep!" They'd say, "Come on, you've gotta go, we can't leave you in the house by yourself." And, you know, I'd have to get dressed in my bathers and go down to Cottesloe at about three or four in the morning,

12:30 and then they'd make me swim right out to the end of the old jetty. Oh, you know, I mean there was a big shark there that was caught not long after that. Anyway, I did that, everything they told me I did, I loved them you know. They used to take me out on the weekends in their cars and on the back of their motorbikes and, you know, that was... I loved that, having those two boys. So, I was brought up with boys.

What sort of

13:00 **things did they teach you at business school?**

Oh I did a commercial course. Oh, my stepmother said I had to do that so I could earn my money, she wasn't gonna feed me any more. But I enjoyed it, I liked being out, away from there, but that home was magnificent. Anyway it's been demolished and there's, the Brookwood Flats is where our house was. Anyway.

That's sad.

13:30 **So there we are. So then I went and... oh, one brother went to England to stay with Claude Debonalese, and he put him through the Manchester Gas Company as an engineer, and he passed all those exams very quickly, he was very smart that one. They all were actually. And he was away from home, so the other one got married,**

14:00 **and I went and boarded with a whole lot of business women up in West Perth. And then I got a job at West Australian Newspapers, and I walked down there in my spiky heels, I used to walk down, didn't have much money. And I was paying twenty-five dollars a week... no I was paid twenty-five dollars a week and I lived on that and, you know, I didn't mind. I had**

14:30 **a navy blue suit which I wore for years, about two or three years, and some black shoes, I was quite happy. And then I met my husband, not there, I met him out at a party, but he worked there.**

Can you tell me what it like to be boarding with a whole lot of other business ladies?

Lovely because I was only a baby, I was only seventeen and they were all in their early twenties, and very sophisticated, and I was young. And the lady who ran the

15:00 place used to look after me as though I was a child, so I was spoilt again really. And if I wanted an evening dress or something, they would go and buy the material and make it for me and I'd just pay them for the material, and I had lovely clothes. I had more evening dresses than day dresses cause they spoilt me. I was lucky.

How many ladies in the bowling, sorry, in the bowling...

About six of us, and yes it was rather unusual.

15:30 I had just a bedroom and at night we went into the dining room and there was a big log fire in there and we had dinner there every night. She used to make us funny little meals to take to work, you know with stale bread and everything, but we weren't paying very much board. I think I was paying twenty shillings a week for board and I was earning twenty-five shillings. That's right, not twenty-five dollars, twenty-five shillings, that's right.

16:00 So I was actually living on five shillings. You could do that!

Did you socialise?

I never went anywhere but Ron, I met Ron the husband eventually, when I was seventeen, eighteen, and I also met the other one that I married later, at the same time. And just after I began going out with Ron, I was paying George Day

16:30 cause I was in the cash desk. And I remember paying him one day and I looked around at the lady who was sort of in charge of my office and I said, "Gee, he's a nice looking young man." And she said, "Yeah, well you needn't look at him," she said, he's older than you and he's going to get married soon," so I forgot him. And years later, after Ron died, I married him. Yeah, so it was all happy, my life

17:00 has been very happy.

How did you meet Ron?

A friend of mine who was here yesterday, is still alive, wanted to go to a dance at Myola Club in Claremont. And she met Brett Langridge and he said he'd take her, and she said she wouldn't go out with anyone unless she had a friend with her, she wasn't going out with a group of people she didn't know, that was the way we were. And

17:30 so he said, "Oh, I've got a friend, I don't know whether he's got a girlfriend or not, I think he has a few but I don't know, he might come." So he asked Ron Christian, who was his best friend, and there was a lot of going on between them all apparently about me. And then Ron rang me up one day at the boarding house and said, "Hello Miss Antoine, you don't know me do you?" And I said, "No I don't know you, who are you?"

18:00 He said, "Oh, I work at The West." And I said, "Oh, I don't know you," I was very uppity. Anyway it turned out, you know, that he said that he was Ron Christian. And I said, "Oh, I have to sign your papers every night." And I thought to myself, "Gee, he's never made one mistake in all that time I've been there, he's the only one in the front office never makes any mistakes, beautiful hand writing." I remember thinking, "He's nice." So anyway he said would I come to this dance with my friend.

18:30 And I said, "Well as long as she's going, well I don't know, yeah okay, I'll go." So they picked me up, Ron and Brett and Enid, picked me up in a car, which they had hired, they pretended that it was their car, they had no money at all, and we went to the club, the Myola Club. And I went and I had a pretty frock the girls made me, and I was, you know, sort of, very, very cool and what have you. And they took me upstairs

19:00 to the dance and the music was lovely, and Ron handed me a Daily News, which was our evening paper at that time, to have a look at, or to mind for him, and he disappeared. And the dances started and I was sitting there by myself and I... "Wonder where he is? That's funny." And I picked up the paper and pretended I had, you know, plenty of friends, and read the paper and nobody was there. And I went and I looked over the banister, and down

19:30 round the keg, they had a keg those days in all the dances, was my escort, and I was absolutely furious, and I went back and I sat there and I read the paper nearly to the end. The dancing went on and everyone was oh, looking at me. Anyhow he came up and he said, you know, would I like to dance. And I said, "No," so I wouldn't, so I had a rotten night. And then they took me home and they put Enid, she was a nurse

20:00 at the children's hospital, and we had to drive right up to the wall, it was after midnight, and the boys stood on the bonnet of the car and pushed her over the wall, and I thought, "Oh this is funny." And then they said, "Right the night's a pup, let's go and play some music. And I thought, "Oh, they're funny boys," but they were good fun. And so they took me to Ron's house in Nedlands, two of them, and they broke in, the mother, his mother and father were asleep, and they broke in through the back door,

20:30 and very softly, on the back verandah, we played music til about two o' clock in the morning. And I thought, "Gosh, old Mrs Young will be upset with her little baby boarder being out so late." Anyhow they both brought me home and said they'd see me again another day. And I never knew which of the two boys was the one that, you know, was really fond of me, I never ever did until Brett was killed eventually in the Middle East,

21:00 and I found out it was him. But anyhow Ron got me. So I went everywhere with those two boys and they had three other friends, and had a funny old sailing boat in the river, and they used to take me out every weekend. I was the only girl with five boys, and we just played, and I just treated them like brothers, I just thought, you know, I had no idea about sex or anything, I just didn't think like that. We used to kiss each other and cuddle, but just he

21:30 and I, but none of the others, just didn't think about that, cause we were, you know, not that sort of, didn't do it. And I swam and I fished and I sailed, sailed the boat with them and, you know, I had a lovely life. Have had a lovely... have haven't I? So that's that.

Sounds quite wonderful. So during this time, you're still at business, sorry, you're

22:00 **working by this stage. How does the outbreak of war affect you?**

Well we were pretty worried about it, we were mainly worried in case some of the boys went away, but Ron said, "No," he'd never go, he was a conscientious objector. But he, his mother died and about two,

22:30 that week Brett was in the Cameron Highlanders and yeah, I was a VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] and every year we had a big field day at Langley Park. And Brett, the soldiers were there too, and Brett was in his kilt and I was in this blue uniform with a hat, not a veil, a hat, and a Red Cross here and everything, and we probably matched each other a bit. But Ron wouldn't join the

23:00 CMF [Citizens' Military Force] or anything, so he used to come to these lunches with us afterwards, dressed in civvies. Anyhow one night, just after the war broke out, Ron, I think he said he was going to marry me or something and, "Will I come to the Cameron Highlanders ball?" So the girls bought me some blue, red velvet to match the tartans, and they made me this beautiful

23:30 dress, beautiful long dress and I had a blue bird in my hair, it was beautiful, and pearls, not real pearls. And when I went to the door, the front door, I could see silhouetted against the light, the street light, the kilt, you see. And I thought, "Oh Brett's come to get me," you know, "not Ron." Anyhow I opened the door and it was Ron dressed in a kilt, and he came in and gave me my engagement ring.

24:00 And I said, "Oh aren't those nice," I thought we were going to a ball, you know, at The Ambassadors. And when we went out I said, "Oh where's the car?" And he said, "Oh he's out there, Brett's in it." And I thought, "Oh, everywhere we go, Brett's there." He was too. He was one of the heroes of the war too. Anyway I went off and we went to the ball, and all, and I matched all the... it was lovely, that was our engagement

24:30 night. And then, about a fortnight later I think it was, suddenly war was declared one Sunday morning. And, oh no that's right, no we weren't engaged then, we had been to the ball. No, but Brett rang up and said, "Ron was going to take you out today," Sunday, "but," he said,

25:00 "his mother died this morning, so I'll take you out." So we went up to Kings Park and walked around and carved our names in a tree, and then Ron's mother died and then we got engaged after that. Yeah. And then immediately Ron was called up, and he had to go to, they both were, and they had to go to Rottnest, and within a very short time they were on a ship going to the Middle East,

25:30 1940, I think it was. Yes the war broke out in 1939. 1939, what was the date? About April I think, wasn't it? No, I think that was the same year they went. They must've gone, it was a few months later, they had a very, very quick training, and they were gone.

What happened to the conscientious objecting?

Well those sort of people couldn't object for too long cause all their friends

26:00 went, and I think that was, you know, really what made them go together. But I met them all again over there, I didn't know I was going to go either. But all that time I was training to be a VAD was because my father had died, my mother, and my brothers wouldn't let me train to be a nurse, and I was determined I was going to be a nurse. And I went and I was interviewed at the children's hospital and I was called up twice, and each time when I asked

26:30 my brothers, they said, "No, you're not going to scrub lockers and wipe up bottoms and stuff."

Why did you want to become a nurse so badly?

I wanted to be a doctor and I thought, "I'll be a nurse first, you see, and learn all the proper bit and then I'll become a doctor at the end of that." I was quite determined to do that. So I waited till I was twenty-one and that's why I got a job and supported myself, you see. And all that time, every Tuesday night, we had a lecture from a trained

27:00 sister and a doctor, Doctor Nattrass, his father, every Tuesday night, I never missed for three years. I got my First Aid and Home Nursing Certificates in 1937, so I was doing all this before there was a war. And I thought, "When I'm twenty-one I'll be such a good nurse, I'll do the first year and I'll sail through that, that'll be nothing to me," so that's what I was doing,

27:30 that's why I was doing it. That's why I was doing it, but a lot of the VADs joined up when they wanted someone to go overseas. I didn't know that, I thought you had to be, you know, trained properly.

How does that work, joining up to the VAD?

How's what dear?

How does it work, joining up for the VAD, what do you need to do?

Well the Red Cross, you had to go through the Red Cross and ring up, I suppose, and ask them could you join, and then they'd tell you where

28:00 your nearest detachment was and who was in charge of the detachment, and they'd give you her phone number. And then I joined the Peppermint Grove detachment at first, and then a woman called Mrs Dick, was a very, very good lady, she was there and she wanted to have a detachment of her own, so she chose a few of us, she only wanted about ten, and we were the crack ones in the state, we really were. And she was so fussy, I mean you had to have your hair at a

28:30 certain length and your shoes that high and always everything perfect, she was a perfectionist, that's why I liked her. And so she started her detachment up in the fire station, which was diagonally opposite my house, that fire station up on Swanbourne Hill, so that was easy for me too. So I went there with her and she chose her section leaders and I was one, me and my friend

29:00 Margie Boulton, who came overseas with me eventually, and Joan Richard, Joan, you know, Joan Dowson, she was Joan Richardson then, and we were section leaders. And what'd we, and then every Sunday, and I never missed one, we went to the Esplanade, and we had a young sergeant train us in drill, and gas drill and everything, cause we thought, "If there was a war we'd have

29:30 to, there'd be gas' and we were trained to deliver babies and everything in the street. And the commandant used to say to us, "You'll never meet any soldiers, you'll never go away, ever. You're going to look after the home state. And when there's a war, you might get bombed and you'll have to be in the streets looking after sick people, and wear your masks," so we had mask, we had poison drill and everything. And we had, we were taught all the poisons, you know, to be,

30:00 treat people for. And the bandaging, oh we were first class bandaging people. And when The West Australian newspapers decided to have a detachment, they asked me to show them how to do the bandaging. I wouldn't train anyone, I had to get a man to do that there, but I did, I trained them on the bandaging. And they bandaged me up once from head to toe, like, I was like a mummy, and there's a picture of me in an old Western Mail, if we could turn it up

30:30 sometime, we might find it, dressed like a mummy, everything, just my eyes showing. Yeah, that was funny. So that was all that, so there's a lot of time before the war that I was in all that. That was my previous beginning.

What sort of duties do you have as being a section leader?

Oh training the other, about four other girls. Yes, training them in everything when sister wasn't there, you know. The sister gave us a lecture,

31:00 that's right, and then every, one night a month Dr Nattrass came and gave a minor, a mini exam, which was very good for us, we learned a.... that's probably why I'm so interested in things like that. Whenever anybody gets sick around here, they always ring up to see if I would know what it is, I don't know what it is but I look it up. And so there we are. I like that. But I never

31:30 did become a doctor did I? I would've loved it. I still would, bit old now though, eighty-five.

You're looking very good for eighty-five.

I'm eighty-five. I don't feel eighty-five, no.

You don't look eighty-five.

Oh yes I do, big old bags and a big nose.

So war's broken out, and tell me how you end up being sent to

32:00 **the Middle East?**

Oh well we had a march through Kings Park one day, and the commandant said we had to wear full uniforms with our veils, and we were lined up in front of the Queen Victoria statue in Kings Park in the shape of a V, V for victory and that. And the, not the doctor but the sister, and

32:30 the sergeant and a few of the older women, better at their work than me, than I was, there in the front, I've got a picture of that somewhere, and that, we did that. And we just were photographed, I don't know, we didn't know what for, and then when we marched up to the gates we were lined up again and told to stand to attention. And then our commandant just said

33:00 that as the war had broken out, she had been asked to choose three of us from her detachment to go overseas, and she said, "I have chosen you but," you know, "we have to see if you can go. You have to pay for your own uniforms, your own luggage and everything and there's quite a lot to be gone through with your families. But the three that I have chosen

33:30 are Yvonne and Margaret and Joan," so that's how Joan Dowson, that's, we three... So course we didn't know what she was talking about, we were absolutely staggered. And I said, "I can't go overseas I'm engaged, and my fiancee is over in Syria, no I'm not going anywhere." Anyhow, eventually I did. I wrote

to Ron and I said, “Good-bye,” thought I’d probably never see him again,

34:00 “…but remember that I was a VAD before you were a soldier,” and, you know, wrote this beautiful letter to him, said good-bye. Cause we thought we might be going to Singapore, cause we were told we were being issued with cotton underwear, everything cotton. So we were very, very quickly we were measured for outdoor uniforms, beautiful navy blue winter uniforms, and

34:30 beautiful royal blue summer uniforms, and what they called a mess dress, a frock with a navy blue velvet collar and long sleeves and a blue and red cross, always, and the red cross on all of them, and hats and everything. We were measured up oh, the city almost stopped to get us ready. And in no time we were being sent to Northam Military Hospital for training for about a month

35:00 and then down to Davies Road here where the, they had a new hospital for the insane down here which hadn’t been used and had become a military hospital, which was the beginnings of Hollywood of course but it wasn’t in Hollywood it was here in Davies Road. I can’t find it now, I don’t know where it was. And we had to come there and we’d do a weeks night duty and three weeks of day duty.

35:30 And I was lucky, the newspapers said that they were, would make up my wages, I was then getting three guineas a week, which was good, for those days, and I was going to get four and six a day as a private soldier and join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], so we had AIF badges on our hats, you know, the rising sun everywhere

36:00 and special buttons.

Before we get into that time when you are joining the AIF, can you tell me what sort of training you did in Northam?

Well mostly it was in theatre, we weren’t, we were not really trained in Northam, we were watched, watched operations mainly, and had to take notes and we were examined on that.

36:30 It was very hard for us then, we’d never seen anything like that before, but we were there for a month.

What would an average day be like?

Oh, I can’t remember that bit very well, usually six o’clock roll call and, you know, a hasty breakfast. And Northam military camp was, I think it was not canvass, that was under, kind of,

37:00 asbestos huts, and I think we had, I think we were allotted to one ward each. We didn’t change wards there, where in the Middle East eventually I think I was in twenty-five different ones in one month, but that was canvass. We had a mess, we had soldier’s food, treated like soldiers really. Yeah, we were. And we had drill every morning, of course, first thing in the morning,

37:30 soon as the sun came up. I remember that now, yes. We had to line up for our breakfast, lovely breakfast, big country food you know. And then get ready and go in and watch whatever procedures there were, that they wanted us to see. Sometimes we were just in a clinic, sometimes we were in an operating theatre. Yeah, when I come to look back I’d forgotten about it, it was probably quite intense. Anyhow

38:00 we survived that and next thing we knew we were on a… we were, oh we had done, I think we did the Davies Road first and then we did the Northam. And then we were still at Northam, that’s right, and they said that we were going away, and about four o’clock in the morning ambulances came to take us to Fremantle. And we stopped, I think we stopped at the, where the East Fremantle Museum is now, where I

38:30 now work as a volunteer, the museum, we either had breakfast or a cup of tea there, or it was at Karrakatta. I can’t remember, but some say it was Karrakatta, but it was the middle of the night, we were still half asleep, and all the luggage was with us, and we went down to the wharf.

Why four o’clock in the morning?

Well because the ships were in, we had, we were going on the [HMS] Queen Mary and the [HMS] Queen Elizabeth and they couldn’t come in then, you couldn’t, they couldn’t come into

39:00 the harbour. It’s since been dredged and they can come in. So the Queen Mary was standing out, and it was all black outs, you see, we had to go quietly, and the idea was that the ships would slip away before the dawn. But we went out in the [MV] Zephyr, the old Zephyr to the ship, you could hardly see the ship it was a big

39:30 looming monster, and we couldn’t get on board, it was too rough. And the Zephyr was small, and the ship was huge and steady, and we were going up and down, up and down, and we, the gangplank that they put through the lower opening, port hole sort of thing, we couldn’t, it wouldn’t match, it kept moving. So they brought us back to the wharf and left us there, and there was about a handful

40:00 of young air force men on the wharf too. And we didn’t know, our parents didn’t know, they thought we’d gone, and the sun broke in the morning and the ship was still there and the Zephyr had disappeared. And it was about seven o’clock I suppose, a bit sort of misty, and a man came off a big

lighter which was

40:30 anchored next to the wharf, tied up. He came up, and I think he was Dutch or something, and he said, “What are you girls doing here?” We’d been walking up and down to get away from the rats, you know, there were rats everywhere there and, you know, sort of, we were cold and starving. And he said, “Come on board and I’ll give you a coffee.” And we said, “We don’t know what’s going to happen to us,” our commandant had no idea either. Nobody was in touch, they didn’t know, they’d all thought we’d gone.

41:00 Anyway we went on board and he gave us a big mug of beautiful coffee. And then, I don’t know how he did it, but he said, “I’ll take you out to that ship.” So he had a radio, and so he took us out, I don’t know how he got permission, and in no time we were on the ship, which is interesting. And the ship took off and we were followed by Corvettes and everything. And eventually we settled down behind a battle ship, which I still think was the

41:30 Sydney.

Before we get...

Trying to prove that one.

Tape 2

00:32 **I just wanted to ask you, how did the transfer of you being a VAD to, into the AIF actually happen?**

It just, as far as we were concerned, it happened then when we said, “Yes, we will go.” It was so quick, you know, one minute we were being, visiting a tailor and the next minute we were visiting a hat person, and another day shoes, and we were really flat out. We had a march

01:00 through Perth, and all of a sudden we were in the AIF.

Did you have any choice about going to the Middle East?

Oh yes they had to ask us first and our families. My brothers objected strongly but I was, stood out on that one, because I thought well, “Ron was away, he could’ve been away for... never come back.” And I thought, “Well I wouldn’t mind going to Singapore,” and we didn’t go

01:30 to Singapore, fortunately.

Did it come as a big surprise that you weren’t heading to Singapore?

Mmm, we wondered where we were. We were just off the... is this being...?

Yeah.

Oh we were just off the north west coast of Western Australia. We started off with two destroyers and a battle ship, a destroyer on either side of us, and the Queen Elizabeth in the front and the Mary

02:00 behind, and a battleship in the front of all of us. And all the corvettes had gone back because they took us past Scarborough and right up there, I can remember so well. And we were just off, I know, the north west coast, one night, in the middle of the night, the engines stopped, and I thought, “That’s funny something’s happening.” And then after about ten seconds,

02:30 I suppose, suddenly, the engines were going like that, and I believe we were doing thirty four knots, which is very fast for a ship like that. And I thought something’s happened, something’s chasing us or something’s happened, and that’s where I consider, and some of us think, that the [HMAS] Sydney was being attacked, and that that was the Sydney in front of us. Anyway we, I’m trying to have that proved, you know, cause I...

03:00 proven is it? Proved. Anyway, so then the next thing we knew we were sitting outside Trincomalee, which is Ceylon, then, and we were quiet, everything was quiet, and then we sailed quietly into Trincomalee. I have a photograph of the boom across the harbour, which I shouldn’t have had a camera but I’ve got, I took photos all the time,

03:30 got them all here. And then we got, there was an air-raid and we were given packaged lunches at our breakfast table, and then we were taken off the ship in small boats...

So this is in Ceylon?

into a train.

What happened when you actually came into Ceylon, did you have a chance to get off the ship?

Yeah, well the first lot, I was in the first lot and we came

04:00 off the ship, and we were just in the train station getting into the trains and the air raid started and the others had to wait. I think you'll find that'll match up with other people's stories. I don't know how long they had to wait, I know we seemed to be forever sitting in this terribly hot filthy train, and all the Arabs were coming and, you know, handing us great big rubies and saying, "Money sister, two thousand... whatever, "rupees."

04:30 And we thought, "Oh smelly," ooh, you know, it was strange really, and it was dark of course inside the train. And a long time later it seems, I couldn't remember when, we set forth, and the train went up the left hand side of the canal, the Suez Canal, and on one side was the desert and as far as you could see it was all red sand, nothing, nothing at all, and a very blue sky.

05:00 And on the left hand side all green and green palm trees, beautiful, beautiful sight. I didn't get a picture of that but then you didn't have coloured pictures then anyway.

Sorry, I'm just a bit confused, did you actually get from Ceylon through to, on the train?

We went through the Suez Canal. I don't know how we got through there.

05:30 We must've gone on boats, mustn't we.

Where were you, where did you go on the train?

The train went up the side of the Suez Canal. Well we did, we got on small boats to get off the big ship. I can't, see we don't know, we weren't told anything, we weren't allowed to look around or anything, and don't forget there were blackouts, you know. It might've even been very early morning and couldn't see anything. Although

06:00 I just remember getting off the ship with a parcel of food, I remember having the breakfast that morning, very quick breakfast with a little bit of lunch set beside us for our train, told to go down the gangway and go down to a little boat. And then we, next thing I remember, we were all... don't forget we were carrying our gas masks and our kit bags. And also we had been given by the Red Cross here leather

06:30 things with, leather bags with thermos flasks in, we had all of this stuff dangling off our backs and our hands, so really the thing was to get down the gangways. I can't really remember that bit, but anyhow I do remember we were in this train and the train went up the Suez Canal, took us up to Port... up to Suez. I think that was Port Tewfik wasn't it, we went to, to

07:00 south of the canal, yeah, I think that was Tewfik, where we got on the train. Then we went up the Suez Canal to Suez and then we went across by train, right up the desert up to Gaza.

At this point are you thinking that this is just one great big, huge adventure, or are you a little bit tense about the whole thing?

Oh I think it was an adventure by then.

07:30 We didn't know we were going there, no idea, to a foreign land like that. Singapore is one thing but that's different, you know, know nothing really, just Arabs and camels. And it was, yes, it was an adventure by then, sure.

What did you think about some of the countryside that you were seeing?

Oh it was fascinating. And going up on the train with the canal besides us, the blue

08:00 of the canal is so very blue, and the very blue sky and the red desert. And then the green on the side just, you know, where the little humpies were, you know, where the Arabs were living with their families, little children. Yeah, it was just like a storybook.

What were you told about where your destination was?

Nothing, never told anything, no idea. We had no idea

08:30 right up, while I'm talking, no idea where we were or, we didn't know. I didn't know that was Trincomalee where I was, you know, I didn't know, weren't told anything. A lot of things we did hear were, we used to call furphies, lies, you know. Anyway we, the train... on left hand side of us by then was the Mediterranean Sea and more little oasis, you know,

09:00 with palms, exactly like we used to think. It was a fairy story, it was beautiful. And then somehow we had to walk down, fall down an embankment to the hospital where the sisters were waiting for us with some food, and I think it was the middle of the night, about twelve o'clock I think it might've been. I can't remember, I just remember that we were dead tired and they put us to bed, and

09:30 it might've been the hospital wards, I don't know. And I think that was the 1st AGH [Australian General Hospital] which'd just come out from Greece, but I'm not certain about that bit, and a lot of us won't be.

When you mentioned before you were told, like, lots of furphies, can you remember what some

of those furphies were?

Oh that we'd never go back to Australia, that Australia had been bombed or London had gone and things like that, any old thing that they could get

10:00 hold of they used to say.

Who was telling you that?

People on the ship, the boys, to frighten us, probably.

So you think it was just boys being boys?

But the interesting part, one little interesting thing about the ship was before we went away, all the young fellows used to drink beer, everywhere you went there were kegs, and when we got on the ship it was Coca Cola, and we'd never seen that before, that'd been supplied by America. And I understand now that there

10:30 was a drug in that, I didn't know that, so no wonder the boys were always drinking cool drinks. That's something else that I didn't realise.

What sort of conditions, what were the conditions like on the ship?

Well we were in a, what should have been a two berth cabin on the main deck and there were six of us in it, so they'd been, you know, bunks had been put on top of bunks. And we had rubber mattresses and of course

11:00 there was black outs every night and all the port holes were shut, and it was just so hot going through the, you know, tropics. And I can remember waking up in the morning and there was, I don't perspire usually, but there was water like that under me, out of me, in the... I weighed six stone, I was so, I lost all my weight. And then first thing in the morning we were allowed to open this port hole, and I can remember being the first one out of bed

11:30 in my nightie and opening that to get some fresh air. And I'd sit in this great huge wide port hole and sit there in my nightie and look at the ocean, which was indigo blue, and get that lovely air, and just watch the fish. Sometimes I used to imagine I could see a periscope, you often imagined that, in the water. We always felt we might go down. Fascinating, and what

12:00 a ship, just to walk around the deck every morning was a mile.

Tell me about what you'd see when you'd walk around the deck?

Well you saw all the soldiers didn't you, but we were treated like officers, they said, for our protection, we had to have officer status. We were very lucky, cause we were only privates. And you'd walk around the deck and the boys would, sort of, talk to you, you know, and you'd stop and talk to them and... And they were always waiting for you when you came round in

12:30 the morning and you'd say, "I'm out for exercise, I'm not here to talk." But, you know, they, "Where did you come from?" And they were from all different states, and New Zealand and everything, that was very interesting, they were lovely boys. And then they started the lunch trail, the decks, you see, the stairways went up and up to the, their dining room, and as you were walking through the ship and down the stairs,

13:00 from quite early in the morning, about eleven, the first of the luncheons started, because the ship was carrying fifteen thousand troops.

That's a lot.

And that's a lot of troops, fifteen thousand, and the crew. And on the main stairway going into the state rooms where we were, there was a beautiful stairway, I think it had golden rails and there was a great big picture

13:30 of the Queen, Queen Elizabeth, beautiful picture, and there was a guard on either side of her, for the whole trip, that was beautiful. The original Piccadilly was there, the original shops, a replica of the London Regent Street and that, the original shops were still going on our trip over, only the cabins had been altered

14:00 with different bunks and I think the curtains had been taken down, otherwise everything was the same.

Were you instructed to keep to certain areas because you were women?

Yes officers.

So did you mix with some of the male officers?

Did we meet?

Were there, were you in the same area as the male officers?

No, I don't know, I didn't see any. I don't know.

14:30 I only know that on the way over my, our commandant from Western Australia was sick, cause she was sea sick, but she didn't say, it wasn't that, and of all the people she sent for, she sent for little me. And I went to see her and she said, "Now listen Dickie, I'm all right but I can't go out now. I have to go to the captain's cabin for a cocktail tonight with the eastern states officers, Miss Brown and Miss

15:00 Whatever and the other Miss Brown, and I can't go, will you go in my place?" And I said, "Well you don't have to have anyone go in to your place, can't they just have a drink with the captain? I don't really drink, I mean, you know, I was brought up on wine but I, I don't drink other stuff." And she said, "This is an order." I don't know whether any of the girls know that this happened, but it did happen. And I thought, "Oh God," and I went back to my cabin

15:30 and they said, "Why you?" And I thought, "I don't know." And anyhow I had to go, and a guard, two guards picked me up outside the door, and I had to wear my full mess dress and I had to climb up a ladder to the captain's cabin. And the other officers, the main head officers from interstate, I didn't even know them, were there and I was, you know,

16:00 I didn't enjoy it a scrap. They were good drinkers and they went on drinking and I asked to come home, I didn't like that, I don't like that sort of thing, I'm not a party girl, so I came home. I couldn't say what happened to all of them but a lot of our girls too they mixed off, the officers all the time, and with the doctors eventually, but I didn't, I mixed with the ordinary people that I knew.

16:30 **You mentioned sea sickness, was there much of that on the boat?**

Yeah there was. You wouldn't imagine there would be on the ship, she had stabilisers, I don't get sea sick anyway. But she was very slow, you see, I don't know how they could get sick, because she'd go, she'd sort of reach a peak like that and she seemed to shudder a bit, and then she was so huge, and then she'd sort of go over that way, like that, and then she'd go right.

17:00 An ordinary ship goes down, you know, they're smart, but this big ship, it seemed to sort of go so slowly and it was a little while before you realised you were slipping. I don't know how they could get sick but they did. And I had a duty on the ship, I didn't tell you that. What did I have to do? I had to do secretarial work up in the bow, that's right. And the bow used to be the cocktail bar, it was still the cocktail bar, it was still rigged out in all

17:30 its brass and it was beautiful, and of course the view from the portholes and the… oh, fantastic, you seemed to be a mile up in the air. And that was a little bit sea sicky when I come to think of it, and you're sort of typing there, and the prow goes down, you know, and then it comes up and you don't know it's doing that. I think I went outside for some fresh air a couple of times, but I didn't tell anyone. Yes I did that all the way over, mmm, that's right...

18:00 **So, what sort of…?**

...I did have a duty. Some of them were in the hospital ward and some of them were patients in the ward, but some of the girls nursed over, going over. We'd had all these injections too oh, for all sorts of everything, tuberculosis... we had them all done in a few days and some of them reacted very badly, and that's why they were in hospital. But I didn't.

What sort of things did you have to type up as part of your duties?

18:30 Oh rosters mainly, rosters and things like that, secret stuff. I loved that.

What sort of secret stuff?

Oh movements I think of, troop movements, yeah, and ships. And, you know, female staff where ever, that sort of thing, you know, the

19:00 long things, horribly uninteresting things, I've forgotten now. I wouldn't have kept it in my mind anyway, it wasn't my business, I just did it. You know, you're sort of typing away and another one comes in and... it wasn't coded it was in proper English. I loved that, I loved typing.

Would you have known more about the movements of the convoy because of…?

No. No, wouldn't have, they wouldn't have

19:30 given that to me, no. I think the signallers would've, we didn't have any female signallers on board that I know of, no. The signal girls were the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] back here, they did a fantastic job. I've met a couple of them and, oh, that would've been fun.

Was there ever a moment where you got a little bit scared because you thought that maybe there would be

20:00 **some sort of an attack on your convoy?**

No, the only thing I was worried about, I wouldn't see Ron again. I really would hate that.

But you've already written him a letter, saying…?

Yeah, I had.

Well that must've been difficult?

It was. But, you know, when the time came, had I had an accident or gone down to the bottom, I would've been sorry for him. I wouldn't have known about him, I would've been dead wouldn't I?

20:30 So all the time, that love was very strong. Yeah, but anyway.

Did you have any idea where he was or what he was doing?

I knew he was Syria, I knew he'd been Mersa Matruh. I don't know how I knew that because I shouldn't have known that, but I did. That's in the desert and he, they got the Africa Star for that. But they weren't there very long, the

21:00 2/16th, they were in Syria by now, I knew he was in Syria, and I don't know how I knew either because their letters were very strictly censored. Then again, he was an officer by then so he was censoring other people's letters wasn't he? I didn't know he was an officer, had no idea. When I last saw him he was a private.

So he must've come up through the ranks pretty quickly?

Yeah, when I first saw him in the Middle East he was,

21:30 had an officer's cap on, he was a lieutenant, I didn't know.

So tell me, we're going forwards to where we were before?

Mmm, us arriving. You see we were so tired, and we'd, we went to Gaza and we were behind barb wire, and right next to us in a great big

22:00 camp were the boys, the 9th Division had just come out from Tobruk. And we were under canvas, we had four to a tent, EPIP [English pattern, Indian product] tents, we had a dirt floor and we had tin trunks, we were lucky we were allowed to have a tin trunk and that was our, everything in it, all our.... and we had a stretcher bed about

22:30 that far off the ground. And the boys lined up of course along the barb wire fences and called out to see if they knew any of us, because they knew some of us, and we'd only been there a few days and I was told... Oh, before that, yeah, somewhere, I don't know where, how this happened but the girls,

23:00 some of the girls could fill this bit in, but one of our girls died on the ship going over, she was, she had meningitis, she had been nursing such a case in Victoria and she was in the hospital on the ship and she died. And so at Suez we were, that's right, before we went, we were kept there at Suez and we had to do a route march for two miles to bury her.

23:30 And we had this Scottish piper, piping us, it was very sad. I never knew her, her name was McEwan, and we went to this lonely grave in Suez, and we had to march all the way there and all the way back, it was four miles. We did that in the desert sun in our summer uniform and our summer hat. And that was quite spectacular, I used to wish then that, that could've been photographed, I don't know whether it ever was, but

24:00 I don't think it would've been. Wasn't any such fuss about anyone then, too busy with a war. Anyway then back at the camp the, well we were there and we were quarantined for, I think we might've been quarantined for three weeks because of her death, and that's when we had nothing to do. We just lay, we pulled our stretchers out into the sun and laid on our

24:30 beds and wrote letters and did things like that. And then that's when I was sent for one day and there was a young gentleman wanted to see me up at the mess, so I went up to the mess and there's, there are Ron and Brett and both officers. I said, "What are you doing here?" And they said, "What are you doing here?" Ron said, "I only came down to the camp, I heard there were some VADs here and I came down to see if there were any,

25:00 anybody knew you, I didn't know you were coming here." And I said, "Didn't you get my letter?" And he said, "No." And I thought, "That's funny." So anyhow they were on leave, and so I was on leave in a way cause I was quarantined, so they let me go into Jerusalem with those two boys.

That must've been a wonderful...?

Yeah, I was so lucky. They hired a cab, and then we went, it was lovely, we went into Jerusalem, and they took me to

25:30 Bethlehem. And Ron said, "Right, we'll get married there," I was engaged to him, "get married there." And I said, "Oh no, we won't." And he said, "Why?" I said, "I can't marry you now." He said, "Why?" And I said, "Because The West is making up my money and they don't employ married women and neither does the army, and I'd go straight back tomorrow on a hospital ship, and I'd never see you again,

26:00 and I don't want to go home." He said, "Would that happen?" And I said, "That would happen, I know." So we kept our engagement a bit dark then, we saw each other only twice after that. The first time he

came down and we went on leave, again we had Brett with us, we went and had a dance up at the Gaza Officer's Club on the roof, you know, garden. But Brett was still there,

26:30 never left us, I could've killed him. Anyway, and then... I was well chaperoned, and he was funny, he had a marvellous sense of humour. Anyway, then I went into the wards and I was working in the officer's ward I think, yeah. And Lord Haw Haw, you've heard of him, he used to make announcements and he said,

27:00 "If you look, if any one of the 2/7th AGH or any hospitals, West Australian hospitals, like to look up the desert, they'll see their brothers and husbands, whatever, marching down there, going down there, going back to Australia." So I thought, "Oh Ron's up in the desert," and I thought, "He won't go back to Australia without me." Anyway by the next morning my luggage

27:30 was packed, and I thought, "Oh I'm going too, I wonder how they're going to Australia?" Anyway, I looked up the desert and there was the 2/16th, and they had a, must've had some leave. But somehow Ron suddenly appeared on the steps of the duty room, and he said he was with the chaplain, had to come and visit some of the 16th

28:00 men in our hospital, and he had hidden him in his van so he could see me. And we stood on the steps and he said, "Don't worry about me I'm, you're, wherever I go you're coming too." So we just kissed each other on the steps and he disappeared. That was that, that was the end of him. So then Lord Haw Haw said the next day, "If any of you people had friends in the 2/16th Battalion

28:30 or the 7/21st Brigade, most of them are on the [SS] Ile de France and she's just been sunk in the Suez Canal and there's nobody alive, there's no-one alive on board. So I had Ron's engagement ring round my neck and everything, and I thought he'd definitely been drowned, but I kept on writing to him every week, it's funny isn't it. Anyway, that's all right,

29:00 so I nursed there and I nursed some 16th blokes there who I knew before. And I was special for four months I think at 7th AGH, and then they were the moving hospital, they were the ones that were to go eventually to Syria and then to the desert.

I think I have to rewind a little bit now, you're jumping so far forward.

29:30 **I wanted to find out what the, when you first arrived and you were living under canvass, how were you like, washing your clothes, how are you washing?**

Yes. Well there were sinks set in stone out in the open air and there were taps, and we washed out there and there were cemented showers, cold showers, no hot ones, right down the

30:00 back of the compound. And we had to walk down there and, in the snow, it was snowing the first Christmas, and have a cold shower, and then come back and stand in our dresses like this on parade, have a parade, a roll call, and then go straight on duty, or go to breakfast and then on duty. And in those basins outside we washed our faces

30:30 and hands whenever, that's just for teeth and things, and we also washed our clothes there in cold water. They were very white though, Sunlight soap. And the latrines were the thunder box style of latrine, three hundred yards from where we, our tents were, so we had to go up there to those, and there was a row of about eight of them, and there was straw, hessian,

31:00 straw and hessian dividers between them, and straw and hessian from the outside world, and there you were. It was nice and fresh in there though, they were beautifully kept.

Were you kept away from the men, were you your own little compound as women?

They were in the compound and they had, they were, they had proper seats, wooden seats on them, and they were really holes in the ground.

31:30 They must've had a frame just there, about that high, and then you sort of sat there, and the sweet desert breezes came through, and then you went back into the ablution block and washed your hands there. It was all very, you know, very, you know, clean.

Was it separate from all the men's facilities?

Yes, oh yeah. From the amenities?

From the men's facilities, like the men...?

Yeah, I didn't,

32:00 I never saw the men's lines there, the orderlies and that, the doctors, no, I wouldn't know, probably yeah, we had an area to ourselves, yes, we didn't share the showers. But the Arabs used to come sometimes in the morning, they, you'd be in there by yourself in the shower, and they didn't have any screens across the front but, I mean, the building was, you were away from the world, but the showers were open, like mine would be if I left the door open.

32:30 And you'd hear a little Arab boy at the end of the thing say, "Anyone there, sister, anyone there? I clean,

I clean" "Yim she, yellah!" You know, you'd have to scream at him. And then sometimes in your bed in the morning in the tent, you'd say, not Subiaco Post... "Post, sister, Post?" The newspaper paper, the morning newspaper, Palestine

33:00 Post, that's right, "Palestine Post, sister?" And they'd be having a good look at you in bed, you know. You'd take a... "Dame she, yallah," and they'd stand and stare at us and laugh, they were lovely little boys really, had very white teeth, you know, and they were everywhere. And sometimes when you're in the ward, you'd come out, put something in the bin, first before you came out you'd look to see if there was anybody there, but there was nothing but desert, and there were little ridges in the desert as you know.

33:30 And there was nothing but desert and you'd think, "That's good, nobody can see me," and you'd put something in the bin, and you'd put the lid on, and before you were back up the steps the place was black with little tiny boys flying down to be the first to get what you'd put in the bin. It's sad because they were starving, and they were often bandages.

Was there anybody sneaking food to these children?

They probably were,

34:00 the cooks probably did, they probably did, a lot of our scraps probably went to them, it was terrible. And that's not any better today, by the look of it. They don't know anything, they don't know, you know, water or clean the, you know, their eyes were covered in scabs and... I got that desert thing in my eye.

What's the desert thing?

Well they, we call it, it was a conjunctivitis,

34:30 terrible.

What sort of things...?

Sandy blight, from the flies. Poor little kids, they had no handkerchiefs or anything. I used to feel sorry for them.

What sort of diseases would happen in the desert?

Well of course there was a special hospital for the men, that was not that far from the one that I

35:00 eventually finished up in, the 6AGH, they all had to wear blue uniforms. Never saw them either, we didn't nurse them, no we were kept away from all that. Yes we were looked after, very well.

How about the food, what was that like?

The food was quite good at first, but in the end we were just starving, we just had, before the Americans came

35:30 in. Like I say breakfast might be a piece of thin camel meat about that big, she'd, the cooks were sweet, you know, they'd put, might try and make it nice and they'd put a menu with, you know, French menus on it. And a little bit of camel meat about that big and some cabbage, that'd be breakfast, a piece of stale bread if you were lucky. The bread disappeared too, we had biscuits in the end, like dog biscuits.

36:00 I couldn't describe the other meals cause they were hardly any there. Then when the Yanks came in, course they had tinned food, it was lovely.

Can you describe your duties in this first camp that you were in?

The first camp, well I was like, I was in the officer's ward and that was, although we were living under canvas and one side of us were the orange groves, and it's famous for its

36:30 orange groves. And we used take pillow slips and get pillow slips full of Jaffa oranges and Jaffa grapefruit, and the grapefruit were like that, oh, and that sort of thing, it was lovely. And the blossoms, the almond blossoms and oh it was beautiful there, and the poppies, the red poppies, from the Flanders poppies in the First World War. If you were playing tennis, we had tennis courts, if we were playing tennis, the balls were red, you didn't

37:00 know whether you were hitting a poppy or a ball. Anyway, that's neither... But the wards, oh they were, the officers ward that I was in were made of timber, they were very nice and they had rooms and doors.

Cement floors?

Yeah, but that wasn't the same in the tent wards later.

Well tell me about the officer's

37:30 **ward?**

Well there's nothing much that I can tell you, except I was working as a first year nurse would work, you know, do all the things that they'd do. We were not allowed to give injections, at least I was never

allowed to, I always had two sisters in that ward, and they did all that...

So what were you doing?

and one orderly. Well what would I do? Probably make the drinks, sponge the patients, you know,

38:00 help them to the showers and the bathrooms and things like that, that kind of job really, nothing very interesting. And never, and I have heard from a trained sister since then, and this is way back with the trained sisters, always a sister had to dish up a meal, even in the public hospitals they always, a trained sister, a third year nurse was not allowed to dish up a meal.

38:30 I don't know... that's a tradition from way back, and so we weren't allowed to either, but we were allowed to take the meals around and of course wash the dishes and, as I say, sponge the patients and take their temperatures and that kind of thing.

What sort of nationalities were in the officer's ward?

Mostly Australian. We had a rare British one, cause there was a British hospital in Cairo, and we had an occasional French

39:00 one, Vichy French, who we had been fighting in Syria. But mostly Australian, and they were marvellous patients.

Why were they marvellous patients?

Well they were so cheerful, I mean, they never complained about anything, they were, nothing was too much trouble. I reckon we were spoiled too because, I mean, I was. I never, I handled the bottles but never a pan.

39:30 Soon as there was a pan, it didn't matter which ward I was in, in either hospital, a bloke would, someone would get out of bed and say, "No nurse, I'll do that. I'll fix him." I don't know why. I must've looked incompetent or something but I never handled one.

That's quite extraordinary.

It is extraordinary. Aren't I lucky? I didn't mind, they didn't mind bottles. You'd look the other way and...

40:00 And the sponging, you know, it was all, we were all so pure in those days. Cause you're sponging, you know, sponging, when you got to this bit, you know, you'd lift up the sheet and you'd sort of sponge them there or, if they were well enough, give them the flannel. Oh, you know, very posh. And of course we made thousands of beds, we had to do all that, and we didn't do any laundry, I didn't ever do... Oh no, the Arabs, the wogs... the Arabs did the laundry, and our uniforms were

40:30 beautifully done, always starched and everything was beautiful, yeah. And we had a mess there, at that hospital too, of our own, you know, where we could go and have coffee.

Was that the major social area?

Mmm.

What sort of things did you do there?

Well talk mostly, we were so tired, we worked very hard. Sixteen hours a day was nothing. But we did have leave and that all, the time I was there I had

41:00 three leaves in the eighteen months. One was to Cairo and one was to Netanya up on Syria, the border of Syria, the other one was to Jerusalem. A week at a time.

Tape 3

00:32 **Yvonne could you describe some of the different ground hospitals and divisions that you were attached to?**

Different ones that I was attached to, yes. The 6th Australian Gen... no the 1st Australian General Hospital was the very first one over there. Oh, you want the Northam one too? No, I was only at Northam a little while. Do you want that?

Just in the Middle East there.

Oh briefly at Northam before we went away,

01:00 for about a month. And then for about six weeks at Davies Road, which was the beginnings of the military hospital here. And then on the ship I was not nursing, I was in the office. And then the 1st Australian General Hospital in Gaza, which transferred and became the 6th Australian General Hospital.

Can I just interrupt you there Yvonne, what was it like settling down into the first ground

hospital

01:30 **in Gaza?**

Oh very interesting, very similar to Northam.

What were you first impressions when you arrived?

Oh I found it fascinating cause I loved it, loved wanting to be a nurse, and I waited all those years to become one, and I just enjoyed it. And the sisters were delightful, the Australian sisters, yeah, they were lovely, very nice to us.

02:00 And they had everyone calling us nurse, which, when we came home we weren't, we were Miss. I liked that. I liked the work we had to do which I've just described.

How were you assigned different duties while you were working in the ground hospitals?

How was I?

How were you assigned the different duties that you did?

Oh, well from our, in each of the hospitals we had a commandant,

02:30 and I think she worked with the matron, and matron would probably say, "I want two VAs in that ward or I want one orderly, I want blah, blah," and went through. The orderlies had a commandant as well, you see, and we were the VADs, the nurses. So it went through from head of the hospital to... we didn't know from day to day, we had to

03:00 look at the roster, and we were just rostered. Sometimes, in one of the hospitals, in the 6th, in the end when the desert, the last, the El Alamein started, that was very, very hectic. And our hospital went up from eleven hundred beds to a fifteen hundred in about two weeks and we were really stressed, and I was in twenty-five different wards on night duty, every night

03:30 for a month.

How did you react to that sudden increase of beds?

I love doing things. Well it's funny that, I can walk into anyone's kitchen and I go straight to their cupboards and knew... I don't know but the wards were set out the same way, each one, and you just went and busied yourself straight away. If you were on kitchen duty you did that, if you were on ward duty you went to the ward and reported to the sister and said, "Where do you want me to start?" And she'd say,

04:00 "I want you to do, make all those beds," there'd be seventy two patients, "make all those beds and in the morning I want you to take all those temperatures," and, you know, that's the way it worked. It was beautifully organised, just like a army. And we had drinks of course, cups of tea and cups of coffee... no coffee, I don't remember the coffee, tea, fruit drinks and

04:30 jugs of water and things like that, on their locker, they all had lockers. And they all had their loved ones... soon as, if you were new in a ward, the first thing that the man wanted to show you was his mother, picture of his mother, or his wife or his sister. Every Australian did that. Funny.

What kind of relationships did you form with the men?

Me, well none really because I'd had four brothers and I had

05:00 my fiancé and his four friends, and I'd always knocked around with young men, and I, they were just young Australian men to me. I didn't go out with any of them. I did go out on leave times with the British sergeants who were there because they had horses and I love horses. And they had come out from England thinking it was

05:30 going to be a war with horses and they were trained cavalry men, and they didn't use the horses so they were, the horses were with them, and they had to be exercised didn't they, so I was very lucky. And whenever I was on night duty I had time off, after I woke up at four in the afternoon till I went in duty till nine at night, and I was picked up and taken to their mess, and I was allowed

06:00 to ride their horses. I was very lucky.

What kind of horse rides would you go on?

Where would I go?

Yeah.

Along the Mediterranean wouldn't I?

And who would you be accompanied by?

With, always a young man, a sergeant, at least one, sometimes two, and they have horses too. And we

were allowed to go back then and have coffee or a drink with them, and then they had to deliver us back at the

06:30 hospital. We were being vetted on that one, cause we were going away from our hospital. We also went for swims in the Mediterranean, there was a bus, a Red Cross bus used to take us for a swim, that was nice, that was one time out of uniform. And also on the horses I used to wear, they lent me some jodhpurs and things. I loved that.

While you were swimming in the Mediterranean, did you reflect on the beach of Cottesloe?

Did I...?

Did you reflect

07:00 **on the beaches at Cottesloe?**

Yeah, they weren't the same as ours, we didn't have big waves like you have, although I nearly got drowned one day. I was swimming, and the Polish soldiers were very rude, very naughty, and they, if they could they'd touch you. When we went to church, we had to have a guard on either side of us, even going down to Communion we had one

07:30 guard, it was terrible, cause the Poles where there. Anyway, in the water, I felt what I thought was somebody pulling my leg under the water, and it was the undertow, so I had to be rescued. And I was rescued by a young man from Perth, Peter Kennedy, Peter St John Kennedy, and I knew him, and I ended up down the Gaza beach with him, I went just about unconscious I was. And we laid on the beach for

08:00 ages, nobody missed us, and then we had to get back to the others. That was interesting. Then the bus came and took us home. He was a patient, you see, that's how he happened to be there, and he was in blues, the patients had to wear blue and a white shirt and a red tie.

What were the men's, what was the men's morale like while they were patients?

He had,

08:30 he'd been wounded, he was from Tobruk, he'd been in Tobruk. Peter, I don't know where his wound was but he'd been shot and he'd been there for quite a while. And the man who eventually became my best man, and who was one of the five who I used to go sailing with before the war, he was shot through the lung and the bullet came through his back and he was there,

09:00 and I nursed him. They were mostly bullet wounds, we also had some plane accidents, some terrible plane accidents, you don't want to hear about that, and they died of course, a lot of them. They always, before they died, they'd call out for their mother. Yeah. Was funny.

09:30 So we had to do all that, you know, prepare them to be buried. Do that, and sometimes help in the theatre. Anywhere that they wanted a VAD, we had to go. Some of the girls worked in the kitchen, most of them were rostered, they were in the wards or in the kitchens. And I never went to the kitchen, I was never asked, I had to be in the wards all the time. And I was lucky, I was always in the surgical

10:00 ward, I don't like the coughy one, you know, I don't like that. You know, TB [Tuberculosis] and everything, I don't like that. So I was lucky, I didn't say, but I did that.

Where would the men who had passed, ultimately pass away be being nursed in the hospital?

I don't know where they went, I never followed that. There must've been a morgue somewhere mustn't there?

But while they were still being nursed, which ward would they be nursed in?

If

10:30 they, when they were dying, in the same as the other men. But as they were dying they were moved close to the duty room, there was a duty room there where the sister was, and if there was no sister, that was one of us. And sometimes I was in charge of a ward with seventy two patients in the end, because all the other soldiers had gone home, the other divisions, the two. And the other one I was with, the 9th Division, they had to do all of Mersa

11:00 Matruh, by themselves with the British soldier, and so we were very short of nurses and orderlies and everything. And our orderlies had to go to the front, so we were very short of sisters, until the Americans came in, but they only came in just towards the end of, not long before we came home. And they didn't...

11:30 yeah, anyway, they were different,

How were they different?

they weren't the same like our girls.

How were they different, can you explain?

Well they had long hair down here and high heel shoes and they were, you know... I had to put them to sleep sometimes in the duty room because I couldn't get on with what had to be done. They weren't trained like we were, and yet we were not

12:00 trained sisters. Just different, you can't describe it.

They were glamour girls were they?

Yeah, different. And the British sisters, their idea of being sister in charge was, all the soldiers had to lay stiffly in bed in the morning cause matron was coming around, or sister was coming around, and they were far from the patients. But our sisters were like VADs, they stood and talked to the boys

12:30 and, you know, looked at their photographs, and they were just lovely. And there was one British hospital in Cairo that used to ask for one of our sisters, one that I worked very closely with, Sister Fielding from Perth, she was trained at the Children's Hospital, she was a beautiful little nurse, and that doctor in Cairo asked for this particular nurse to go to his special patients. They were always sought after,

13:00 beautifully trained here, so that was nice. And all over Australia they were lovely.

So what was the layout of the ground hospital with, of different wards?

The layout, well there was a duty room, a duty room like that, with the men's toilets there, I don't know where we went to toilet, I think we only went in our own lines. And an examination couch there,

13:30 outside those toilets, this was more or less, and a duty room in the front where sister was, with a glass partition or no partition if it was a tent ward, she would just sit there at a desk. And there were beds down there on both sides, and beds down there on both sides, and she was the only nurse there except for the two VAs or one VA, or one VA and an orderly. That's all. Seventy-two patients, you think about it.

14:00 And here the other night, I read in the paper, something about they were growling because there were only two sisters for ten patients, and I thought, "Oh God," you know, you can't believe it, so different. But then again, these were all strong healthy men when they went to the war, they had to be A1 perfect in health, so we didn't get aged people or a lot of those

14:30 diseases that you get in ordinary hospitals. Can't compare them really can you?

Have you followed how nursing's changed since your career in the army?

Oh yes, oh yes, because those sisters in those days were trained on the ward. They had... that's why they were a little bit jealous of us when we came home because they didn't go overseas, they were busy training, and they trained very hard. They were

15:00 beautifully trained they really were, you know, they were like doctors, but they worked in the wards then. The differences you asked for, is that now they work in the university and they have some ward work, and they're not the same. Not my business to say that but they're not the same. They've got a lot of machinery to work on and they, you know, they're highly

15:30 trained in that part of it, but the in-between person isn't there. And I still think they should have VADs or first, second year nurses helping them and then they wouldn't be so stressed out, would they?

No, I think it sounds...

They, well they're working long hours, cause they're doing everything.

Sounds logical.

They are. Well the patients have toilets now, they have

16:00 ensuites, but that, there's still a lot of work to be done with a patient, you know, cleaning up and showering them. And they're never really sponged on their bed, whereas a lot of patients should be sponged on their bed, I think, you know, they're not well enough to get up and stumble into the shower. Anyway, that's me.

Can you tell me how you were expected to cope when all of your orderlies were sent off to the,

16:30 **to the front?**

Well, we just worked sixteen hours a day and just do it.

How did that affect...?

Do all their work, yeah.

How did that affect the nurses working under those conditions?

How did they...?

How did that affect you having to work under those conditions?

Oh made us very tired and very skinny, but mainly we weren't fed either, you see, we had no, hardly any food. I don't think we had rice even. Be lucky if you got

17:00 a little tough old chop from a sheep or a, you know... I don't know how they fed us, but I think our cooks were wonderful the way they made, camouflaged the rats and stuff, we must've had, the horse meat and the camel meat. How did we cope? Well we just did, we were very strong and we came out of it very strong. And even today, the women my age who are having huge

17:30 operations and very sick, they're very tough too. So it probably didn't do us any harm. We certainly didn't need to go to a gym, you know, we were lifting things and washing, the girls who worked in the kitchen. And I think they must have worked in the laundry, because I have a photograph of one of the VADs with a big copper outside, she must've been lifting sheets out on the end of

18:00 a... We must've done, they must've done some of the ward linen in the, there, otherwise the Arabs took the linen away. They must've done some of the beginning stuff there, I don't know, I never did any of that, I nursed all the time. When I look back I was lucky, I liked nursing. And I did night duty a whole month

18:30 by myself, I was the only VA with one sister in each ward and me. And I had to move between wards at night and I had to take a torch because the slit trenches were dangerous, you know, you could fall down a slit trench, we had them outside the... and it was a blackout and the tents were all in black out.

19:00 They had, right along the bottom of the division between the canvas and the floor, there were little lights and very soft lights where you could see the floor, but outside going from one to another... pitch dark. The only saving grace was that the stars were very, very bright in the desert, you could put your hand up and feel you could touch it, a star.

19:30 Beautiful nights. You could read, by the moonlight you could read a toffee, you know, the writing on a toffee paper, you could read every word by the light of the moon. Beautiful. Can't describe that one. I had to go to a ward one night, the 'bomb happy' ward we called it, they were not, you know, they were all insane, waiting to go home on this

20:00 hospital ship, and that was spooky. I was by myself in that ward and I'd never seen that ward before, and I'd never seen the patients. And there were two locked up in, with lock up rooms, with just the bars, screaming at me when I came in, and they all had mosquito nets over their beds and I couldn't see what was behind them, I was really frightened. I didn't have an orderly or anything, but I got through the night. I went to the duty

20:30 room and every time someone appeared to talk to me I was terrified. And one man called, screamed out, and I went out and he was tangled up in this net, in his mosquito net and I had to untangle him, I'd never seen him before, and he was a strong fellow, dark. Yeah, that was frightening that night, but I came through that. And the night sister, she had to go round, the night super, she had to go

21:00 around to all those wards every, all those tent wards every night, through the night, she with a torch. And, you know, when she arrived, you know, she was horrified, she said, "What are you doing here by yourself, Littley?" They used to call me Littley, and I said, "Well there's nobody else." She said, "Isn't there any, haven't you got an orderly?" And I said, "No." She said, "Oh I'll see if I can find one," but she never did. But anyway, that was all right, nobody hurt me. But that was an experience ,

21:30 I'd forgotten about that. I've never told anybody about that.

I think I'd find that experience frightening too.

Thank you. So, now you know. So, nothing else different really.

What, how would the men, the wounded arrive at the ground hospital?

How would they...?

How would the wounded men arrive at the ground hospital?

How would

22:00 they arrive? Oh by ambulance, oh that'd right, that's another thing. Yes well, you'd be in a ward, at night-time I seemed to be a lot alone at night, they seemed to be very short of night staff, and I do remember the nights mostly. Because I remember being in a ward one night, by myself, and the medical centre rang me from the gates and said, "Where's the sister?" And I said, "I haven't got one." And he said, "Well could you fit anyone

22:30 in, we're desperate." And I said, "No, I've got seventy-two." And he said, "Well, could they go under the beds?" And I said, "Well yeah, what, are they on stretchers?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "Oh yeah, I could take, yeah, how many have you got?" "Oh," he said, "ambulance is full." I said, "Well just bring them up and see where you can put them." So I woke up all the men that could help me and they got off their beds and they came and helped. And I

23:00 got them to boil, you know, the kettles in the big boiler things and everything. And between the patients who were walking and me, we just put them where we could, and the stretcher-bearers put them under

the beds or on the beds wherever, lifted them gently and everything. They were smashed up most of them, blood everywhere, they'd come straight from Egypt in a plane. I think the dressing station did a few bandagings and things there, stuck on a plane

23:30 and brought straight to the ambulances to our gate. That was, yeah, that's right. So we took, I don't know, I couldn't tell you how many we took that night, I should... there'd be at least twenty, and the boys were, oh, they were wonderful. And between me and the boys, you see, I didn't feel responsible cause they were Australian boys and I knew they knew they'd be all right, and they were so kind. And we weren't allowed to touch any dressings until the medical officer

24:00 came in the morning, he came quite early about five or six in the morning and did a round with matron and then ordered bandages to be removed and whatever. And as they did that, we did that, me and the boys did that, and cause there weren't any orderlies, and then they were washed and fixed up and, you know, took nearly all day. And I'd been on duty all night and I stayed as long as I could through the

24:30 day and another girl came on, perhaps two, and I went to bed. And I had to sleep in a tent, and I was down near the orange groves and I could hear the pump pumping the water pump, you know, pumping the water out. And then that hospital, before I went to breakfast, we had toilets there, proper ones, not the

25:00 thunder boxes and the other one, and they had lift up flaps at the back, and the Arabs used to come and remove the pans, but they always had a look first, they'd... So before you went to the toilet you had to make sure there was not a donkey with a cart up the top with a slush thing in it and a little black fellow, cause if he was there you knew you'd better not sit on that toilet, otherwise he'd open the flap and say, "Finished sister?" and have a look. Yeah, oh they were little devils,

25:30 but they had a sense of humour and they were sweet, they must've been starving those little boys.

I was just wondering then about the relationships that you had with the, like the matron and the medical officer, what...?

Well we could've had relationships with them but I never did, I was too, quite

26:00 frankly I was too busy and too tired, I had was no social life at all. And I know I've... absolutely amazed now I've found out that a whole lot of the girls did have social life, they were going out to parties and things all the time. But truly I was tired, I was very serious, I took it all so serious, I joined up to do something and I just did it. I'm not special or anything but we girls had

26:30 leave and, you know, one leave was in Jerusalem, and we just met a few men from New Zealand and went and, to the olive groves and went on bus trips and things with them but, you know, they didn't mean anything to me, it wasn't, no night life or anything. You would go dancing a lot though, sometimes you'd go up to the duty room and find there was a, they wanted six girls to

27:00 come to a camp somewhere or another, partners for dancing, and that's all. We would go, we would go together in an ambulance or something and come back together, and you came back by twelve o'clock too, so that was the social life, and that's what you mean, I'd forgotten we had that, yeah. That was nice, we used to get nice letters from them too.

Were you writing to your fiancé at the time?

Was I...?

27:30 **Were you writing to your fiancé at the time?**

Writing to...?

To Ron?

To Ron? All the time, every week. And my letters were landing in the GPO [General Post Office] in Perth, and he was writing to me every week from New Guinea and his letters were there too, so at the end of the war we had a trunk full of letters. We burnt them all.

You didn't open any of them?

Oh yes, we read them. I think I might've taken quite a few to Sydney

28:00 when we were transferred over there after the war by the newspaper, but I couldn't bring them back here. I moved, we moved to Melbourne twice, twice in Melbourne and to two different houses in Sydney and then we came back in 1956 to Perth, I couldn't hang on to everything any longer, so I burnt them. I had five children by then, I had enough to... an Alsatian dog to bring home,

28:30 so I didn't... and my uniforms, I left them all over there.

What were your working relationships like with the medical officer and the matron and the sisters?

Oh perfect, perfect. I specialled in a ward with, in the officer, no, in the burns ward in 6th AGH, and

they chose me

29:00 to special burns with a Dr Clarke, Freddie Clarke from Perth, and Sister Campbell-Smith and a Sister Young. Sister Young was, did the night duty, Sister Campbell-Smith and I did the day duty, and one orderly, we called him Snow, we were the only ones working there. Sister Young had someone at

29:30 night duty with her, I think she had VADs or orderlies but they didn't touch the burn patients, we did them through the day. That was special, and that's interesting, I tell you how we did that, do you want to know, cause they're doing them a different way now. Well we had a, they got hold of a bath tub, big old iron bath tub, and we took the patient off his bed,

30:00 about four of us, and lifted him into the bath. Saline, we had salt, a lot of salt in there, and soaked him in that for a long time, one of us stayed with him all the time, that was almost in the open ward, we didn't have any special place. And then when he'd been soaking for a long time and the skin was all loose, we got forceps and stripped the skin from him, which was

30:30 horrible for him, and awful for us too. And then we had to lift him out again, all wet, and put him on a bed and put the fan on him, to dry him, no towels or anything, and just more or less wait till he dried because, you know, what could you do? It was pretty hot there so it was lucky. In the winter time, I'm not sure what we did, I think we must have put the fan on him too, can't remember. But anyway I wasn't there in the winter. And

31:00 then sprayed the wound with sulphanilamide powder, which was also thought of by a doctor in Western Australia, same one. And then we used what they now call 'tulle gras', you can buy it at the chemist in a little tin, and it's like a mesh, like a honeycomb mesh. It's been dipped and sterilised in,

31:30 I think, Vaseline and fish oil, and then sterilised, and then you tweezed that and put that on the wound when it was dry, and sulphanilamide, and left it. And that was all the dressing you had, and then covered him with sterile blankets, and that's all he had until he was done again the next day. And the wounds healed from the inside. Beautiful.

32:00 We were very proud of that, they were beautifully done.

Were the men receiving pain killers during...?

Were they what?

Did the men have to receive pain killers during that treatment?

Did they have to...?

Receive pain killers?

Oh yes. I don't know what they had though, I can't remember, probably aspirin, Aspros. I don't know what was on in those days, don't think there was anything much. You've had a lot of,

32:30 of new ones since then, but aspirin yes, oh yes, and injections, pain killers yeah. I, we weren't supposed to give injections but some of the VADs did, but we had been trained how to do them. Not that... people can give them to themselves now can't they, some people.

You mentioned the weather before, what were the weather conditions like?

The Americans conditions?

No the weather conditions.

33:00 Oh terribly, terribly hot and dry. Oh, and flies, mmm. And the tent wards of course have, there was no way to keep them out, you had to be spraying the whole time. And even the wooden wards in the 7th AGH, they were, the officer's ward, they only had flaps, and no screens or anything. No...

33:30 but then again that might be why there were never any cross infections, I never saw one cross infection, and I reckon it's cause of the fresh air. I'm a fresh air fiend.

How did you try to combat the flies?

The flies? Oh as I say, spraying and hitting and banging and... couldn't do anything about it.

What kind of sprays did you use?

Oh Flytox, as far as I remember, Flytox

34:00 yeah. And you, there's a, we had bunsen burners, you know, do you know what a Bunsen burner, you know, those little things? And we had those for the day time sterilising, that's all we had, and forceps, and all the things we needed were in the actual ward, you see. And anyone could walk past and see them, spit in them, yeah. And, but we had, I think we covered everything with

34:30 a linen, if we took it down the ward, yeah we, they didn't have steel trays we had, wooden trays I think and things like linen covers over the top of everything. And you just had to put it on the bed, there

weren't any trolleys or anything like that, there was nothing like that. It was interesting. You stuck it on the end of the bed, you know. Say you were going to swab a man's mouth or something, you just

35:00 put it on his locker, they had a locker, or if there wasn't any room on that well you put it on his bed. It was very make shift, but they had plenty of linen, plenty of blankets, plenty of pillows.

Did you ever have any threat of air-raids?

Any rest?

The threat of any air-raids?

Oh yes, well they didn't raid the hospitals because we had a, a

35:30 great big, out of all, outside all the hospitals, it was a thing they had to have, I'm not very good on measurements but a great big square of white sand with a big red cross in the middle of it. And the Germans, of course, were very good, they were gentlemen soldiers, and they wouldn't touch a hospital, so we were lucky. But we heard them going over and they'd go quite low,

36:00 you know, to see what we were at. They never touched a hospital, they wouldn't. And they used to, in the desert, they used to pick up our wounded people and put them somewhere. Yeah, funny isn't it. Wasn't the same in New Guinea,

Different enemy.

but I wasn't there.

When does your war end

36:30 **in North Africa?**

My war, 19-, middle of 1944, it started in 1941. And I had to get out cause I was having my first baby, I was at Hollywood till I was about five months with Julie, and Ron never saw her till she was thirteen months old. Never saw me pregnant. Yeah,

37:00 sad that one.

So you were pregnant before you left Africa, is that what you said?

Oh no, no I didn't marry Ron till I was, finally got home, no I wouldn't marry him over there. And I said, "Give me twelve months and if we're both out of battle, I will marry you here," and I'll be sent me home. Even if I'm not pregnant they'll send me home cause I'm married, and they don't have married women over here, and they don't have married women on The West

37:30 Australian newspapers either. And that's why I wouldn't marry him cause they were making up my wages and sending me parcels, I couldn't do that to them. He was very disappointed, so was I, but I didn't know I was going to meet him there. It was just what you have to do. No, he came home and I never saw him again until I came home. And strangely enough he had

38:00 a week's leave and I had a week's leave at exactly the same time, that was really fate, it really was. And he wouldn't, he shouldn't have been on leave, his battalion had just been on leave and he had malaria and he wasn't, he couldn't come and he came absolutely yellow, skinny as a rake, I didn't know who he was. And I was staying with his sister on my leave waiting to go into hospital to nurse

38:30 again, or to go over, to go to New Guinea as I thought. And he came back from New Guinea and he... couldn't believe me, just stared at me, so I said, "Who are you?" And he said, "I'm Ron, what are you doing here?" And I said, "I'm staying at your sister's place." And he said, "Right, we'll get married." I said, "Oh, no Ron, I won't be allowed to go to New Guinea." Anyway I did marry him, within three days.

39:00 And we had a honeymoon for about, till the end of that week, and he had to go back, and I was damn stuck here at Hollywood. I didn't know, I thought I was going to get, be, go on, but I didn't. He went to New Guinea and so did my, all my friends, my hospital, went to New Guinea and I was stuck at Hollywood. So I nursed in the wards for about five months,

39:30 and then they wanted someone up in the front office cause someone was getting married and they were short of girls. So I went up and I typed the 13/34 which was the intake and output of the patients, and the registrar came in one day and said, "Who's typing the 13/34?" And I said, "I am but I'm only loaned to the, to you people, I've gotta go back to the wards." He said, "Oh no you're not, I'm going to have you for my secretary."

40:00 "Oh," I said, "I can't do that, your secretary's coming back soon from camp." He said, "You don't have to go to camp, you're a corporal." I said, "How did I become a corporal?" He said, "Oh you don't have to go to camp." I said, "Why?" He said, "Oh we've arranged it," so I had to be his secretary and I did that. And then one day when I was working with him the commanding officer came in, with all his red cap and everything, and they were whispering together in the corner of the room. And when he'd gone

40:30 Major Hales said, "I'm sorry I'm going to lose you Mrs Christian." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Well you're going to be secretary to the commanding officer." I said, "Oh, I don't want to work for him!" I

said, “I have to do shorthand again and I haven’t done it for years. And he said, “He doesn’t do shorthand, he speaks his letters.” And I said, “Well that’s worse, I don’t want, I’m not going.” He said, “That’s an order.” So I went up and had to work for him. He didn’t know how

41:00 to run a hospital, he had no idea, he was just a doctor. No idea. Even his orderly rooms, he didn’t know how to run those. So the registrar used to help me and we used to do, get everything set up for him, and all he had to do was come in with his cane and his red cap and everything and sit at his bench and carry out all his orderly things, and we had all the papers ready for him, everything. Anyway, I didn’t get paid for that.

41:30 And then I, I did, I was in charge of all the doctors’ rosters and all the laundry bit and all the cars. Every car that left and every ambulance, I was, I had to say whether they could go or not, and when they came in. And then I, on top of all of that, I had to do all his letters.

Sounds like you were running the place?

Oh…

Tape 4

00:33 **Could you tell me about your marriage to Ron and where you were wed?**

About where I?

Your wedding day?

You want to know about that?

Yeah.

Oh yes. The day, oh well, it was, we only had three days to get ready and I had to get

01:00 special permission to be married as a bride. And I happened to have, when I was in Gaza, I’d bought a whole lot of material, which I thought one day, on an island somewhere, I might meet Ron again, I was engaged to him. And I packed it all, you know, and when I was on the ship coming home, the girls reminded me the other day, I made my self a night-gown by hand, so I had a feeling somewhere I’d meet him, I didn’t know where he was.

01:30 No, we didn’t know there was a war in New Guinea or anything like that. Anyway, so anyway, this was a bit of a shock to see each other and I, he looked awful, and I said to him, “What did I look like?” And he said, “Oh you looked awful,” he said, “you were so skinny and you had that great big nose, and I said, “Yes, I know.” Anyway, I found my old dress maker and she made the frock, she stayed up over night and made the frock.

02:00 And Ron went and had a new uniform made in Claremont, and after three days we had outfits. And I had to then get permission from Canberra to be a bride, because I wasn’t allowed out of uniform. As far as I know, I was the first bride in the army in Australia, cause I know the, it was only because I worked with

02:30 the newspaper that I was able to get through, or they were able to get through on my behalf, they made a great big song and dance and I got, I was a bride. I forgot that bit, that’s interesting isn’t it?

Where were you married?

In Star of the Sea church in Cottesloe where I was baptised, cause we lived just up from there, up on top of that hill. Yeah, and we were married, and he was

03:00 a Baptist and I was a Catholic, and because we couldn’t go into the… I think we were really, actually married in the presbytery and I think we had a… yeah we were, and then we had a blessing out in the church. And the family, the people in the church were gathered up by my various brothers and sisters, while we were in our camps having our uniforms made, and he was in his

03:30 camp, I don’t know where, and I was in mine in Claremont somewhere. And my family, our families just rang people up and said, “Dickie and Ron are both home, they’re getting married, come to the church.” And then my brother threw his home open in Dalkeith here, and anyone that liked could come. And they were even walking down the aisle during our wedding and saying, “Oh, hello would you like to come,” you know, “come home, have a drink.”

04:00 And the place was crowded, it was lovely really. I don’t, I didn’t know what I had to do, my sister-in-law and my sister were on either side of my brothers front door, and they were taking my gloves and telling me what to do, I didn’t know where I was, and I don’t think Ron did either. And we went up to North Beach for our honeymoon, cause we, you couldn’t get into a hotel or anything in those days, and we got this crummy old house. But guess

04:30 what, Ron's father came with us, he said, "I'm coming up to make sure you look after this little girl," that was my father in-law, he was gorgeous, he was Irish. Everyone always looking after me and there's nothing wrong with me, I must be childish or something. Anyway old papa came up. And you should've seen the old house, it was nothing, the stove wouldn't work, the bed was like that, you know, and how we ever... well we didn't get a baby, that was lucky.

05:00 So there we are. So then he, at the end of the week he went back to New Guinea and I just stayed here.

Can you describe North Beach at the time of your honeymoon?

North Beach. Yeah well the same as you saw it when you were little, it never changed until fairly recently, it was just a wind swept place with people's holiday houses stuck in the dunes almost. Yeah. It was rather rocky

05:30 too, I didn't like it very much. I was used to Cottesloe beach which didn't used to be as rocky as it is now, cause in my day it had a lovely pier going out there. And there was that one thing where they were going to make that shark proof fence that, what is it, a...?

The bell?

Yeah, that was there, the bell, but the rest of it was beautiful white sand. And I didn't like North Beach very much, it was too cold to swim anyway.

06:00 And anyhow papa was there and then Ron's commanding officer came and took a house next door to us, though we were on our honeymoon. Then my sister decided to come down from Geraldton, so there wasn't much of a time, really, it was so funny. That's cause they'd missed us, I suppose we'd been away, and I suppose to them we were heroes, I didn't think we were. But you see, they'd been

06:30 through all that time wondering if we were going to come back with our heads blown off. I don't know, I never thought of it from their point of view at all. All I thought of was, "Well, my brother wouldn't let me be a nurse, and I am one."

Did Ron make any romantic gestures at all during your honeymoon?

No, not terribly. Honestly, no it was a bit of fizz, I thought. It wasn't the same

07:00 as when I married George who, had both, it was all behind us. And I only married George when I was seventy-five and that was different, that was a true romantic one. No, not with Brett, because I think our minds were somewhere else. No.

So shortly after your honeymoon...?

Oh yes, oh it was fantastic, yeah, it was wonderful, a real sweetheart, mmm.

But shortly after your honeymoon, Ron returned to New Guinea?

07:30 Yes, for a year. I never saw him, but at least we were able to write to each other, so that was good.

It must have been difficult parting ways?

Oh it was terrible, dreadful, and we, and he, there was no telephone or anything, you see, you didn't have your little thingos then, so it was no contact at all, no. It was like, it makes you tough so, you know, you sort of, nobody else's problems

08:00 seem anything to me because their problems were all manageable, ours were out of our hands really weren't they. But good health was the thing we both had, excellent, always. And when he died even, he died kissing me goodnight in bed, and he was whole, you know. And so was George, never, not a scar or a mark on them. It was lovely. So I'm... lucky.

08:30 **Can you tell me about what you were doing at Hollywood hospital while he was in New Guinea?**

At Hollywood, oh yes, well I was secretary to the commanding officer, yeah, well that brings lots and lots hard work really. Except that I let a burglar in one night, and I didn't know, and the place was burgled.

What was stolen?

I used to work to sometimes

09:00 til about ten o'clock at night and I was there by myself. And I heard, the cleaners used to come in, they used to come in from the back of Hollywood, and I was up in the front, you see, and those, main administration was all up the front then, along the front, and I was in that one on the back corner. And I was working by myself, I wasn't a bit frightened, and when I heard a bit of clanging and things going on, I thought, "Oh that's the..." It wasn't, it was somebody

09:30 breaking in. And he was surprised, this man, I didn't know it was a burglar, he arrived, you see, he was in soft shoes and shorts and a white shirt and he, sort of, he said, "Oh." And I said, "Oh," I said, "have you finished the rest of it?" And he didn't say anything. So I said, "Well look, I'll be finished soon, but

you can start in there if you like,

10:00 in the commanding officer's room." And he brushed past me and went in there, and he realised that I thought... didn't know, I thought he was the cleaner. Anyhow, I didn't know any more about that, so I'm damned if I didn't lock up my office, shut everything up, and walk off. I didn't know where he'd gone off, I thought he'd gone back to get his buckets. And I went out the front and I walked home in the dark to Ron's house, where I was staying, cause I didn't have a house

10:30 by then, and just walked home to Pat and my father in-law, and went to bed, never knew anything. I came to work in the morning, and I was early, causes I walked and I liked walking, and what did I see, I saw something. I went to the cabinet, the filing cabinet and the secret drawer was unlocked and I thought, "I wonder how that got unlocked?" Anyhow,

11:00 turned out we'd been burgled. And when the registrar came in I told him, and he looked outside his window and there was a jemmy outside his window. And he said, "They didn't take my revolver." And I said, "What revolver?" He said, "I have one in my drawer." And I said, "Oh." Anyhow that was interesting. And I must be a dumb-dumb because then the cops came and they wanted to know what the man looked like, and I said, "I wouldn't know," but

11:30 I did. You know how you're making me talk, I was telling them, "Oh yeah, he looked like this and he did that and I did that." Anyway so they, so about a week later they came back with a photograph album and I had to... and I picked him straight away, out of pictures after pictures of men and I picked him, I said, "That's the one," and I put him in jail. And apparently after he left me, he went upstairs and robbed the officer's mess, and then he robbed the golf club at

12:00 Swanbourne and Karrakatta, he was everywhere, he was all round here that night, had a ball. I could've shot him, I didn't even know there was a gun there. Anyway, see in these days, I would've been in danger from a robber wouldn't I? He would've hung around and strangled me, or something. I was lucky. Lucky again.

What was security like in those times?

Oh nothing, there wasn't any

12:30 as you know by the stories of Cook. We all, had all our door... I still have that unlocked half the time, nobody else does here, I just, everything, had all the windows... We used to sleep in our beautiful home out on the verandas at night, and that was Perth, all your back doors unlocked and cars out on the lawn with the keys in them and everything. Yeah. So the

13:00 hospital of course was locked but course the cleaners had keys, but that man couldn't have much trouble getting in that office, and I didn't hear him. Well I did that bit of a noise, and I thought he was a cleaner. Dumb bum. That's a little bit of interest though, isn't it? Something can happen.

What kind of patients were being taken care of there at the time?

In

13:30 that, in the hospital at Hollywood? Oh, well they'd all been through a dressing station or a something before. Oh they had all kinds, they had a lot of TB, a lot of pneumonias and tuberculosis, and a lot of wounds of course, and burns and smashed up bodies, that kind of thing, lots of surgical work. There weren't that many patients there though, but

14:00 the patients, the Germans from the Sydney the ones that... from the [HSK] Kormoran had been there, I think they'd left when I got there, and the sisters from, you know, from the Bangka Straits, what is it, yeah, they were there, a couple of them. I didn't know what that story was, I had no idea. I have learned it since.

14:30 And, see, we were going to Singapore, they must've been just behind us. I could have been one of them. That's right. So the office work, well it was just office work really, I think they had me speaking, teaching French for a while. There was a sort of a social life for the staff at Hollywood but I wasn't there over night, you see, I was sleeping

15:00 in Nedlands, away from there, in Dalkeith Road somewhere.

So there was nursing quarters at the hospital?

There were, mmm. When I first came here, oh that's right, oh, sorry, I was in charge of a hut. I was, yeah. We had huts there where the nurses stayed, I did stay there, while I was nursing, and then when I went to the office, different hours, then I went home and stayed with Pat and Papa.

15:30 Yes we had huts and I was in charge of one. I couldn't manage the girls, they were too big for me. I just, you know, I counted the beds every night to see who was in, took a role call in the morning and got them out of bed, that was all and then went on duty myself.

What was life like for you at the time? Did you have much free time?

16:00 Well I was, being in the office I had office hours, so I did really. And I met, in a ward, one of the wards I

was in, nursing there the first few months before I went up to the front office, I was working with a lovely little nurse, Sister Burgess, her real name was Sister Leach but she, Sister

16:30 Leach then, yeah, that's right. And later on she told me was going to get married to a man in the 2/16th Battalion. And I said, "What's his name?" She said, "Oh you wouldn't know him, he's a, Doug Burgess and he used to work at Elder Smiths." And I said, "No, I don't know him." And she very proudly said, "He's the assistant adjutant

17:00 for the 2/16th Battalion in New Guinea. And I said, "Oh, I'll tell you something," and she said, "What's that?" "My husband's the adjutant." So we became very good friends, yeah. And he was transferred to Sydney later on and so were we, and she went to Sydney. That was good.

While they were both in New Guinea, what kind of things did you two do in Perth when you had spare time to go out?

What did they do?

No, what did you

17:30 **both do while both of your husbands were in New Guinea?**

Oh after, we had babies didn't we, that's why we got out. And I went then and lived back to the place I had been boarding in before the war, and that lady didn't really want to have me there with the baby, but she fell in love with the baby in the end and she gave me a great big room to myself with my baby, and that was nice. And then I met this girl, Enid,

18:00 who had introduced me in the first place to Ron outside of The West, and she had a baby at the same time and she lived in West Perth, and so we used to go up to Kings Park with the babies and spend our time up there picnicking and putting the babies on the horses and swings, and that was nice, walking in the sun. And looking every day for, her husband was in Ron's battalion, he was a dentist, that's right, and looking to see,

18:30 for the telegram man coming down the street to tell us our husbands had been killed. That's all we lived for, we were sure they would be killed in New Guinea, it was very, very bad there, very bad, very dangerous, much more dangerous that the Middle East.

Sorry Yvonne, once you'd had your first child, did you leave the hospital?

Oh yes.

Were you still nursing?

I had to leave her when I was, I didn't have to leave,

19:00 the doctor said I could stay there till the baby was born. Cause he said "I'm a doctor, if you have him in my office, I'll look after you," but I didn't, because I was embarrassed. Those days being pregnant was, although I was so well, you know, it was embarrassing, you wore things to drape and you never showed yourself at all, let alone swimming, oh no, no you were very shy about that, that's why I left, and I stayed with Ron's family.

19:30 Then when the baby was born I went up there and I had my life then sharing a lot with Enid and a couple of other girls who, you know, had babies and waiting for the telegram man. And the telegram man didn't come, Ron came back, with another decoration.

Before we move on, I'm sorry...

20:00 **Did you encounter any difficulties raising your baby alone in the boarding house while he was still in New Guinea?**

No, because the lady was so kind to me and she fell in love with my baby so I, you know, I was, stayed at home all the time, you couldn't travel much cause you didn't have a car, and to get on a bus with a baby in those days, you know, was a bit of a chore. I only tried it one day, and the buses used to put the pram on the back of the bus and drive off and you,

20:30 and you didn't know, you know... then when he stopped he had to get out and help you down and go and get the pram off the back, and it was all too embarrassing, I only went out once ever. Except walking in the park was lovely in West Perth, so we had , it was quite good. And then when Ron came back, what'd we do? Oh he stayed there too but the old lady wasn't too happy about having a man there, she liked

21:00 Ron but she didn't want that. So we bought a house in... I started to have another baby almost straight away, the war had just finished, and we bought a house in Inglewood. And we just moved into it, the baby was just about to be born and The West transferred Ron to Melbourne without me.

Before we move on with, follow that

21:30 **information, had Ron returned before or after the announcement of the end of the war?**

Oh he didn't come back, no, didn't come back till after the war. He came back in November, the end of

November, yeah they came back almost straight away.

Do you remember greeting him when he got back?

Yes, he's such a quiet person, handsome, the most handsome bloke I've ever

22:00 seen, except now for that grandson of mine, golly he's handsome.

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

23:00 **Where were you when the end of the war was announced, do you remember that day or what you were doing?**

Not specially no. I was probably still boarding then, I was probably changing a nappy or something. I didn't join in any of the festivities and they had marches and things and I don't like women marching, I don't think they look right, they look, you know, mannish to me.

23:30 I was a good marcher, I enjoyed marching when there was a real war on but never since. I don't like going to reunions either, but I'm going, in October, I'm going to one. I go, every second year I go to one but I don't like them, I don't know why. I don't feel that we did anything special, I've got that... I am a funny old stick, you know, there was a war so you went and did something, and if I hadn't done that I would've done something

24:00 else. I don't think it's anything smart or clever, and matter of fact I don't like wars. As I say to some people, "Ron went to kill people and I went to patch them up." Different... I think it's terrible the way people go around killing each other. Don't you?

Yeah. Actually each of the veterans that we've spoken to have said exactly the same thing.

Yeah, I mean, you know...

Can you tell me... this is probably a,

24:30 **a clumsy segue, but can you tell me about some of Ron's decorations?**

Oh yes, I can tell you that bit. Well, it was very sad, I was still in the Middle East and Brett had met, because we pushed him into it a bit, one of my friends because he was always hanging about. And he got engaged to Betty, he

25:00 got engaged by word over there, he only met her two nights, I think, but anyway that was that. No, he didn't get engaged, he met her there, that's right, he went back to New Guinea and started writing to her. And one day over there she got a ring from Brett, with a letter, and in the letter he said,

25:30 "Ron and I are going out tonight, I have a feeling I'm not coming back. We had to toss up for which platoon went in, and I lost the toss." And he did. He was killed. So Ron was so upset, I heard

26:00 this, that they had to send him off to a plantation, to stay with a gentleman on a plantation, he must've had a breakdown. And I, Ron has, my kids don't know that. So that was three weeks there he was, and he never mentioned that, yeah he just said, "Brett was killed." But Brett's story's another one, which my son,

26:30 Brett, has done a whole story about in The Post, you've probably read it, about Brett Langridge. We called Brett after him. And that boy, Brett Langridge, about four different men in the battalion have named their son after him. He's a lovely person, laughed the whole time,

27:00 he should never have been killed. Anyhow, Brett was so interested in this story that he has found Brett's sister, and been out to her home, photographed her, and done all this, day after day with this, and he's done a whole story in his paper about Brett Langridge. So that was that little romantic bit. But Ron went into that battle and got

27:30 a Military Cross for... no, wait a moment, did he get it there, at Abuari? No, Brett was killed at Efogi, a place called Efogi, and Ron went on and did one at Abuari, and he had twenty men with him, and they killed, they knocked out three

28:00 Japanese machine gun posts. And in the Japanese war history they say that, "There was a bloke there with a whole battalion and they wiped out our three," and Ron had twenty men, took that. He got a Military Cross and his commanding officer got a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] for that, and that was that one. And then that, Ron, did Ron come home with that one? Ah,

28:30 no. No, he'd had, we'd been married and he hadn't come home, no, that's right, he never came home again. Then he was asked to do the Pimple, you know, the Owen Stanleys and he was sent back to Melbourne to do a course in aerial training, he'd never done that.

29:00 And he was put on a Wirraway and told to go round the top of the Pimple and map it out for them down... and he did all that. He said it was terribly frightening cause the Japs were everywhere. And so they came back and they did the Kokoda Trail then, and he'd mapped all that out. And then, finished that,

29:30 they took the Pimple, as you know. And then he went, he was sent, they were sent to Borneo, towards the end of the war, and he was also asked then, "How many planes do you want? How many ships? And how many everything else do you think you'll need?" And his commanding officer, between him, they did all that. He got, he came down the side of this landing barge in

30:00 Borneo, and he said it was terrible because the little boat was going up and down, and the little rubber ducky... anyway hated that more than anything. And he ran up the beach in front of the men and they took the first mountain, Mount Malang, and they took the first mountain. And his men told me that Ron ran in front of them and

30:30 left his pips on, and his cap on, which he didn't need to do because they always shoot the... and he was shot. And he never told me that but he was, the gun, the bullet went past his chin. He never told me, someone told me later on, you know, "You can't see Ron's scar." And I said, "What scar?" I mean they're funny like that, and Ron never talked about anything like that. Anyway he got a bar for that, that was another Military Cross.

31:00 So he's one of fifteen, I was told at my barracks the other day, one of fifteen in the whole of Australia that's ever got two Military Crosses, and he was only one of two in Western Australia, so I'll show you his medals if you like, mmm, bit interesting. So he was not a tall man and he was very handsome and quiet, had a great sense of humour, and

31:30 was Irish. So, and a lovely family, always laughing, and he and Brett, you know, they laughed their life away. But, and we've never, he never got over Brett, never, so... they were together. But Brett told me a story once and he said that he'd had a... oh, do you want to hear this one?

Sure.

On the way over to the Middle East,

32:00 they went to an Indian fortune teller and he said to Ron, "You will never get, you will never be killed in this war, you'll never, you'll strike a bullet but it won't kill you. And you'll go home at the end of the war and you'll marry a girl, wait a minute... she's a nurse, and she's in a blue uniform with a red cross."

32:30 This is an Indian that wouldn't know us from a bar of soap. Anyhow that was fine. Then he came to Brett and he wouldn't tell Brett's fortune, and he told Ron afterwards, "I couldn't tell your friend what I saw." So Ron had a premonition. It's awful isn't it? But how do they know? Isn't that interesting?

Fascinating.

33:00 So, so they're all gone. I'll go and get his medals after.

Can you tell me, Yvonne, can you tell me what it was like being married to Ron, who had been so highly decorated during the war?

Oh it was good. It was, yeah, you know, he never showed off or anything, he wouldn't be photographed with his medals on or anything like that. I just loved him for himself, I didn't care whether he never was an officer. He wasn't

33:30 an officer when I knew him, he was just a clerk in the front office at The West Australian in the advertising department, you know. No, it didn't really worry me. Other people love to be seen with people like that but nah, he was just Ron, with all his, all warts and all, yeah. Yeah. No, we were great friends and, you know, we were more like brother and sister. See, we'd been going out

34:00 together, I had to be twenty-one to go away, and so, I mean, I was twenty-five when I was married, and so was he, both the same age. And... I don't know, he just part of my life. The same as my brothers, they've all died and they were all part of my life, and my father.

Did your brothers serve at all during the war?

Did they see him?

Did your brothers serve during the war?

They weren't allowed,

34:30 they were wool, in the wool trade with my father, and they weren't allowed, and they were the man power. They wanted to, they all wanted to fly. No, they weren't allowed. They were very strict on that, the first thing they did in Australia was man power, all the school teachers... one of our best VADs was a school teacher, she wasn't allowed to do anything. No, they grabbed everyone they could for the

country.

35:00 No, they were very disappointed. I don't know what they thought about me, they never thought... I don't know. But Ron, they loved Ron, everyone loved Ron Christian, he's very popular. At oh, the men at his funeral, God. Cause the boys were trying to arrange a private Christian, a private funeral like I wanted, and I heard them in another room,

35:30 they, all the battalion officers came down, and I heard them saying, "Oh no, Ron belongs to us," and they had this great big thing, I didn't like that, the Scotties and everything. Didn't belong to me any more, no, no. But I put him in our family grave, which is good. I was lucky with, had a bit of room. And there's room for me.

36:00 **Sorry. And what about your story, how's the family responded to both of your war experiences?**

To my nurses?

No, your war experiences? How's the family related to yours and Ron's war experiences?

Don't know really, I'm not the, you know, I'm not the forefront one. Ron was really because I've got three boys,

36:30 you see. Oh the... I don't know, Julie's... oh yes, well I think Jan is, but I don't see Jan. But Julie, oh yes, she's carried all this on a bit, yeah, and when it was, I think that's how my story got into the... that over there. I think that Julie has, I never hear them talk, they probably talk to their friends but I never hear. I mean, I'm just, you know, the old girl, did all the

37:00 washing and made them go to bed early. I don't know, I don't see myself as being anything. I, even when I'm with my friends from the army, you know, I don't think we, we're anything special, we're just friends we met.

You've never felt overshadowed?

Ron?

Yeah, you've never felt overshadowed by Ron?

Oh, I suppose I did sometimes, only that way,

37:30 with the family. I sometimes used to think, when I saw them always round him, looking at all his photographs and talking to him and dragging stories out of him, I often was in the kitchen thinking to myself, "I was there too." Yeah, I suppose I did. I didn't really feel jealous, I just thought, "I wished that they knew, perhaps sometime before I die, they will see me as a person," you know. But in those days that's the way it was.

38:00 Unless you were a really bossy lady, and I wasn't bossy. You know, some women did run the household, but no, Ron ran our household. I looked after the children, and he was the, you know... and he was so popular at the office, The West Australian, oh yeah, and all his friends from there and the battalion. And that book there, that Pigeon Post, he started that in New

38:30 Guinea, and it was just a piece of paper. And then there was one of the men in the battalion who sketched very, very well and it was a piece of paper with sketches on it. Those old papers would be somewhere now, oh not down at my museum, probably at Hale School, an ex Hale School head... I think he might be a teacher there. He's very

39:00 interested in war history, I think he's taken most of the 2/16th history, and he probably has his hands on those, I've never seen them. But I do know that Ron started that, being a newspaper bloke. And of course that's where Brett's got his interest from.

Was there any time at all that you shared any of your stories with your children?

Shared them?

Yeah, or did you always keep them close to

39:30 **your chest?**

No they all got married, I told them not to get married till they were twenty-two, and every one of them got married when they were twenty-two. And so by the time they were about seventeen or eighteen they were really out with their young friends, you know, you'd know that. I mean even today, and I am an old lady and sometimes I, when my car was smashed up, I wished I had someone to go shopping for me, they're in a different world, you know. And I think, and I

40:00 left them to it, and I was very happy to see that they had such good fun. Cause that's what the war, we said, "Well," you know, "this war is to leave our children free," and that's the way we felt and that's why we want them to be. We were horrified when some of them are going off to this distant war again, because it doesn't get you anywhere. But we were so happy to, and lucky to be home, and have a family.

40:30 **What does it feel like passing on that legacy?**

Passing on...?

Passing on that kind of legacy, how has it felt, the freedom that you've fought for?

Wonderful, I think it's wonderful. I'm glad, I'm sad that so much license has been taken of marriages and things. That, yes it's sad for me but I think it'll come back to the way it used to be, cause everything does turn around. All those kids that are having babies when they shouldn't have, not having them

41:00 and all this, getting all these diseases, that'll all turn round, it must, because it isn't right. Not, nothing to do with religion, but it isn't right is it? No. Get sick for nothing? You got a life to live.

So we're on a cycle you think?

Oh... yeah.

Tape 5

00:47 **Yvonne, when you were in the Middle East how was mail, did you get any mail at all?**

Yes, we got mail. Just AIF abroad,

01:00 yeah, we got mail. The last few months course we didn't with Alamein, they were.. and the Japs'd come in. We didn't, no nobody... everything stayed in the mail GPO in Perth, and we picked it up afterwards.

When you got mail in the Middle East, did you get, like, care packages from...?

I only ever got one and it was apparently from my family, all my brothers and sisters. And I didn't know

01:30 I'd got it because the commandant came around one day and said, "Look, I think it's from Western Australia but there's a whole lot of cosmetics..." and lovely things arrived, a huge parcel, all in pieces, got, the package was broken into. And... "Do you think it might be yours?" And I said, "Oh no, nobody ever sends me anything, definitely wouldn't be mine, I haven't got a mother." And all the other girls were always getting parcels from Mum, you see. I never even thought about it.

02:00 And ages after I got back, my eldest brother said to me, "Dickie, you never said, did you like the parcel we sent you?" Apparently it cost them a fortune, and I didn't get any of it. So the Western Australians just divided up all the things that were there, and I didn't get any cause I didn't know it was mine. So that's one thing, it was broken open or it broke, I don't know. Other mail, well we got some very funny mail, you've probably heard about this. The first year

02:30 we were there the Tobruk veterans were next to us, and they got all the ladies parcels and we got all the men's, and in no time all the Arabs were running round with ladies, you know, sanitary things around their heads, fresh... "See sister?" Lovely fresh new things round their heads... was ours, cause the boys had given them away or put them in the bin, you see. And of course the Arabs had found

03:00 them in the bin and thought, "This is interesting, we'll dress up in them," so they did. And we got razor blades and all kinds of funny things in our packages. And the Red Cross sent them over and they were given to the wrong camp. That was quite funny.

That's a bit of a screw up. Were there any other sort of packages that you'd get, say, from places like the Red Cross?

Oh, don't know whether they were by mail, but I think it was the Salvation Army

03:30 and people like that, there was always something, little packets of things for us, writing things and... no, nothing else.

Did the...?

You mean from the government?

Oh just, I was just wondering.

I don't remember that. No.

Did you have any, like, representatives from the Salvation Army on...?

Oh yes, and churches, especially the Catholic Church. And that priest, that Father Bourke, I didn't have a lot to do with him when I was there,

04:00 but apparently the girls reckoned he was wonderful. And years later I was up in Clare in South Australia and my, with my, with Ron, we went round Australia a few times in a car. And he, this monk came to the gate and let us in, and I thought, I looked at him and I didn't think anything about him. He took us down to the wine cellars and gave us a tasting of wines, and he said, "I don't suppose you've ever been in a

place like this have you? Have you Mr Christian?”

04:30 And Ron said, “Well no, I haven’t.” And I said, “Oh I have, but you wouldn’t know there.” And he said, “Where was it?” And I was quite shy about it and I said, “Oh well, you know, it was in the Middle East.” And he said, “In the Middle East... Dickie,” and I said, “Yeah, who are you?” “Father... Padre Bourke.” That was nice. Yeah, they were very good, they were. They were there and I think, see I didn’t, we were not amongst the soldiers who were marching,

05:00 but I believe, I don’t know about over there, but I know Ron said in New Guinea that they were at the top of every knoll, you know, with hot tea and that, they were wonderful, the Salvos, always the Salvos.

Would they do comforting for when...?

Oh yes, give the boys cigarettes and drinks, hot tea. And Ron said he doesn’t know where they got it from but they were always a little bit ahead of them. And, you know, they saved their lives they reckon,

05:30 many times in New Guinea, cause New Guinea was a long track, and then they went up once and got pushed back, and went back again.

You mentioned that, like, in some of your wards you’d move the patients who were more seriously unwell and were expected to die, closer to the nurse’s station?

Yes, well I think they do that in these hospitals too. Usually you know if somebody’s been moved up

06:00 close to the nurse’s station, she isn’t too good. So...

Would there be any, sort of, comforting from a religious person?

Oh yes, the padres were busy, oh yes. Yes, they went around, they were very good.

What would they do?

What? Oh, I never, we wouldn’t stay there. They usually, if it was a confession they took a confession, or they just talk to them and gave them, I suppose, help for the next world. I mean, most of the boys knew they were

06:30 dying. But no, they were marvellous really, that’s what I think. People don’t appreciate today, you know, they’re inclined to sling off at them, but they were very brave too. I know in the First World War, a priest down at Cottesloe, he got the DSO, he was in the front line all the time. Whether he shot and killed anyone I wouldn’t know, but of course it would have been self-defence . But yeah, he was quite popular. So no, they’re

07:00 not sissies. Coming back on the ship though, that’s what made me wonder about my religion and every other one. Up on the top deck, every morning, on Sunday morning, there’s a Catholic priest back to back with the Church of England, and they were that flock and that flock and the Baptists there. And I used to walk round the deck and think, “Oh, you know, it’s ridiculous, they’re all praying to the same God. Stupid,

07:30 what a waste of money.” I remember thinking that.

Did your experiences of being in the war actually change your religious beliefs?

No, not really. I was at the convent, when I was at the convent, I was just so holy I think I should’ve been a nun at that time, you go through that, I had little altars everywhere at home and must’ve driven them mad. And

08:00 I, you know, I was quite convinced about it until I got to a questioning age and then you think, “Well, why are we so different? And why are we so good? And then, why do they think they’re so good?” So I backed off a bit. And then when Ron went to the Middle East, no, when Ron went to the Middle East it was okay, I was still with Him. When I was in the Middle East and he was suddenly sent home, I didn’t like Him at all, I wouldn’t go to church any more. I reckon He should’ve

08:30 thought a bit further ahead, and He shouldn’t have let us meet again, that was cruel. I remember thinking that. And I wouldn’t go, and the boys, the patients had to go to church, or wanted to, and the ones that knew me used to come and try and gather me up and we only had to walk a few yards to the... I wouldn’t go. They said, “Why?” And I said, “No, cause I’ve given Him up, He doesn’t like me, and He’s took my mother away and my father away and my home away and everything, and now they’ve taken Ron. Don’t like Him.

09:00 You know, I must’ve been sure Ron was going to die or something.

What made you so sure that Ron was going to die?

I just felt he must if he was going to do that battle in New Guinea, we were beginning to hear about it, it was a wicked, wicked battle that one, that, you know, he’d been saved with that one, but sure... And also I thought he might’ve gone down on that ship that Lord Haw Haw said he had gone down in.

Well what happened with that?

Nothing happened, it was a furphy [untruth] as we said.

09:30 **How did you find out that it was, in fact, a furphy?**

Oh, I think when Betty got her letter from Brett with the ring in it, that they were alive, cause he mentioned Ron.

There was no other way you could find out?

No, well we didn't have any newspapers or anything about, no, we were not told anything. Even when we were on the ships we didn't know where we were. We didn't know why, when we got to Fremantle, coming home

10:00 that we were suddenly, had to put on our life jackets and put on all our warm clothes and we were going down to the Antarctic. We didn't know that, we found out later on what that... cause we were being chased by a submarine. So, no, they didn't tell you anything, but the captain of the ship would've known.

Well now that you've mentioned that, so you were coming home and you were getting chased by a submarine?

Well the Japs were around here by then you see, probably was a Jap.

10:30 I don't know, but that's what happened. And the night before I got off, during the voyage back, the officers were told, the male officers were told they could have a VAD at their table. And so there were four officers together and they started asking some of the girls, and then they got to me and Ron's CO [Commanding Officer] from the trip, his trip over, Colonel Caro from here, he asked me to come and have dinner with them. And in the end I was the only

11:00 VAD and the three men, and the girls didn't like that, one of them wouldn't speak to me, but I couldn't think what it was all about, it was just simply I felt that it was cause he knew me. Anyway one night he said, he didn't say anything about Fremantle but he said, "The officer in charge of the British troops on board has just lost his whole family, they were bombed in their home, his wife and his four children, he's very, very upset. And he's met

11:30 you and he wants to know will you, and take two friends with you, come to my cabin tomorrow night for dinner, and we're going to use all of the ship's original gold plate ware and everything, it's going to be a real old fashioned Queen Mary dinner." And, you know, "The chef's going to wear his hat and he'll be there and we'll have the flummery and everything." And we did, and that was,

12:00 they thought we were getting off Fremantle the next day, and I had that dinner with those two girls that I invited. And when we were out on the deck, you know, Colonel Caro said, something about, "Oh well I hope Ron is all right," he was left over there for some reason and Ron'd gone you see, he said, "I do hope that Ron is all right for your sake, and I'm going home now to my wife." I remember that. And I thought to myself, "We must be going..." I said, "Are we going to

12:30 land soon?" He said, "I didn't say we were." Anyhow that night, that's when the, again, once before the ship had taken off, and this time it took off... freezing, freezing cold, and then we came back to Fremantle and got off and nothing was ever said. It's very interesting.

What did they say, like, "Put on your life jackets and put on your warm clothes?" What was the announcement?

Oh well when they'd said you had to keep, sleep in your life jackets, we knew that we were in some danger.

13:00 Normally we didn't sleep in them, we just kept them near, always, took, dragged them around with us, they were big Mae West things, humpty things. Most... worse than having a stick. But yeah, so that night we were told we had to sleep in our jackets... two nights I think we did, and then we got very, very, very cold. One of the girls swears that she saw ice, but I don't know.

13:30 She's got that tangled up I think, she thought that was Tasmania when they'd left us and... but it might be, she might be right, I don't know. But I know I was cold.

So what happened when you actually arrived back in Fremantle?

Oh we were picked up, of course, in the usual ambulances and taken to Claremont... I think it was the training college grounds and we were, you

14:00 know we had to have our pay books, you know, stamped and everything. And then we were not allowed to go home, and I can't remember where we were kept, we were kept somewhere, probably at Claremont showgrounds or somewhere like that, and we had to stay there. But my brother came for me and got special permission to let me out because his, our brother, other brother Marcel, his wife was having a serious operation,

14:30 and they thought they wouldn't be able to save her life and could I go and see Phyllis. I remember walking in, she nearly fell off her stool, she was brushing her long hair, and she, I was only allowed about three or four minutes with her. And she didn't die, she had her operation. But Jack had to take me

straight back and deliver me back, and then I went home to Ron's family place and that's when Ron arrived by mistake. Yeah, it was funny that. So then I took him back again.

15:00 He's not a bad old stick, he knows me. The girl downstairs goes to mass every Sunday and she brings me The Record, which is the paper, and I read it from cover to cover, but since the old paedophiles have got around I've given Him up again. And she said, "You know what? You'll go to hell." And I said, "I will not, He knows all about me." I'm not frightened of Him, no. No, I mean He shouldn't let these things happen should he?

15:30 And we're supposed to be so perfect.

No, yeah, it's hard to understand that one.

It is. It's good if you feel like that though, you don't worry.

How long was it between when you met up with Ron and you realised that he was going to New Guinea?

That he was going...?

That he was going to New Guinea? So, you're back in Perth and you've met up with him at...?

Oh, that he was going to New Guinea? Oh, I knew he'd just been there, he came back

16:00 from there and he had to go back. That's when they started the second push in the Kokoda Trail. Oh, I knew he was going back, it was only a very brief leave, one week.

That must've been very confronting?

Yes it was terribly hard, yes it was, and I threatened Him again, I did. I still come and go, I love all the singing. I've forgotten all the... see the English, I

16:30 knew it all in Latin and, I mean, you know, it's all changed and everybody's changed, and all the priests that I knew have gone away or died or something, so it's just different. But it's still there, I still go down the family grave, and I'm sure everybody's around there, you know, I just feel that they know I'm there.

I'm sure they are sure.

Oh funny isn't it. I'm a strange one. George used to say, "You're quaint." And I used to... "Am I?"

17:00 **How long was he back in New Guinea for?**

The second time? Oh no, our wedding was not... no, I can't remember. He went back up to the, to Queensland and then he went back to New Guinea. Well he was away, we had our honeymoon here and

17:30 we didn't get a baby, so it was another year he was over there, and he came back and I started to have Julie, and then I didn't see him until the end of the war. So Julie was born in 1944, so that must've been 1944 when he came back then, and he came back then on the November of 1945.

You did try to get to New Guinea though, being in the nursing?

Me?

18:00 No I didn't. I knew I couldn't, because while we were on our honeymoon here, the order came out to say married, female personnel had to stay in their base hospital, so when I came back from the honeymoon I realised I wasn't going to New Guinea, or going anywhere, staying here. Yeah.

Can you think of any reason as to why that rule would be?

Yes, because in those days if you got married you had a baby, and it was becoming a nuisance. Well,

18:30 they wouldn't let a girl travel alone, there were not enough planes to bring them home from wherever they were if they were pregnant, and they had to send a nurse with them. That was a rule, they had to have a nurse with them, if they were going to travel pregnant, you know, they really treasured the little babies then. And that would've cost them a fortune, to have me hump over there and then suddenly decide to get a baby and come back, and then send somebody with me, that, and the army would've had to pay

19:00 my fare this way and that way, and they would've lost two personnel. That thinking.

Would you have liked to have had another tour of duty?

Yeah, oh yes, I would've loved to have gone on, but now I'm glad I didn't. Because the girls tell me that the sisters were, not jealous but, I mean, they didn't like the Middle East girls at all because they thought we were uppity or something. Well we weren't uppity

19:30 at all, but anyway perhaps some of us were. So I'm glad, I wouldn't have liked to gone on polishing shoes, you know, I'm better home here at Hollywood looking after the doctor, he was nice.

So tell me about this doctor that you were looking after?

His name was Hugh Hunter Jamieson and he was from New South Wales, and he was here with his family, and no

20:00 he was a nice, very nice fellow. You could get, do, you know, get anything out of him you want. I wasn't supposed to pick flowers in the garden and I like to have flowers in my office wherever I am and, you know, he got around the gardener so I could get flowers, and he was nice like that. But no, he was charming, had no temper, always very happy and he left work about three in the afternoon anyway, so we just carried on didn't we. But he was a doctor but he was

20:30 not acting as a doctor at Hollywood, he was the administrator, the commanding officer. And all he did really, I suppose, was go through the papers and, you know, have the orderly rooms for the soldiers to, you know, let, say they have to stay or give them a bit of leave, or board them out of the army, that was his main job. He was nice.

How did the rest of the staff at the hospital treat you,

21:00 **having come back from the Middle East?**

The VADs were marvellous. They were a little bit sad because some of them had already been signed up to go and when the Japs came into the war they never went. There's lots of them here that trained very hard and they all had their uniforms and they were ready, and they never went, so I feel sorry for them. They were lovely, oh we had fun, you know, we used to have games and things like that. No, we were, we got on very well.

21:30 **What sort of games?**

And some of them I knew before, out of my own detachment were there. Oh, we used to have ball games and, you know, tennis and stuff, you know, and marching things and formations, anything we felt like. We had a couple of mad caps there, you know, who made up a lot of things, and also we were photographed a lot by the Department of the Veteran Affairs, in a pose this way and that way.

22:00 And some of them did fire drill, and some of them looked after the gardens with the gardener, and I've got photos of all of them in my albums. Anyhow you might like to see the albums later.

The VAD, were they used as some sort of a publicity generating mechanism for the government?

They were Red Cross, solely Red Cross in the beginning, that's all they were going to be, Red Cross, and they were to help with accidents in the street,

22:30 help the St. John's cause we had their certificates too. And when we had our big King's birthday demonstrations, you know, we worked against them and we used to... my detachment won a couple of cups against the St. Johns. But they were lovely, they were all men then, mainly men, yeah they were in the ambulances, yeah, and they were stretcher bearers, their drill was different, you know.

23:00 But they taught us quite a lot. How to set, you know, joints and how to, you know, bandage and do all those things, they did all that. But the Red Cross was just like it is today raising money and, you know, giving it out to different people who were working for them. So we were purely Red Cross and we worked under the Red Cross, and even our hospital was painted, I told you, with red crosses. And when we went swimming, we were allowed to wear a

23:30 swimming costume, but we had to have a brassard on our arm with a red cross on it all the time, in case we floated away and they'd know we belonged to the Red Cross and people wouldn't hurt you then... or hopefully. It's quite interesting. But it started with the Red Cross and then I think they needed to regiment us, to get us on ships amongst troops and that. And I think that might be what happened

24:00 and the army had to pay their privates, and it was decided we'd have to be paid something. And probably we were insured, I don't know, or we probably came under the repatriation and all that kind of thing. They felt we had to go with the army, we couldn't just go along as pretty little, you know, outgoing people earning money, we were either a physiotherapist or a VAD. Physiotherapists came under the same

24:30 thing, they were first, you know, working on their own and then they had to go under the army. So the army then had its paws on everything, which is right, we were on the army ships and probably insured, I don't know. But, and I was a private, we all got four and six a day, that never changed. Unless when we came back we were turned into AAMWS, Australian Army Medical Women's Service, and after that

25:00 they began getting stripes and things. But I was given mine because they didn't want me to go into a brown dress at Hollywood, they said, "Stay in your blue dress, stay here, you'll get a baby one day and you'll leave here." So I stayed in my blue, and I never went to a rookie camp or anything. I was very lucky.

What happens on King George Day, did you say, some sort of a games or a special day?

25:30 **King George, oh his birth, the King's birthday. It was always celebrated here, the Queen's**

birthday's celebrated here. And they had military displays and ambulance displays, you see, and we came under that and then we, you know, for various sections of, you know, the army or the St. John's Ambulance or whatever, prizes were given. And that was a drill and ours was marching first, we were marked on our marching,

26:00 **and ours was pretty good, and a lot of them were, and then we were marked for our, you know... a bomb's just dropped and, you know, do this and do that, and there's a bloke killed over there and something over here and something, and fix it up. And the section leader would take her four and do all that and then load them on to a stretcher and put them into the ambulance. And then the speed of the time and the work that you'd done was all examined. It was a**

26:30 **lovely idea, they should have it now, they could be doing it now because the world is at war, they're not doing anything. And also it keeps young people interested and focused, and when there is a war you feel you know what to do, you're not absolutely terrified, sitting shivering in a chair, you're doing something. Don't you think it should be done?**

I think it is a marvellous idea.

Well no-one'll do it, I'm too old.

27:00 But it was a good thing, because we were ready.

Were you at all fearful that the Japanese were going to invade Australia?

No, no idea. No idea, that was the last thing we ever thought. See, we were fighting the Germans and the, you know, Italians. The Italians didn't last very long but the, yes, the Germans did, and we were working, like in the Middle East, in Egypt, with Montgomery. That's why I got

27:30 an Africa Star cause I belonged to the 7th AGH, and I was all packed up to go the desert, and a couple of the girls, not from here, heard this and they said, "Why can't we go?" And the madam said, "Well, you know, cause you don't... you do belong but those are the girls we've chosen." Oh, and they'd go for a few drinks, and next thing our names were taken off, and Margie and Betty and I were seconded back to the 6th,

28:00 and the 7th went sailing off to the Middle East and all got their Africa Stars. And didn't do very much at first, they had leave in Cairo for quite a while and then the dressing stations were set up, and the forward dressing stations were the male orderlies, and the back one was the 7th, And they worked at the 7th there for a very short time and they came back and, doesn't matter, I don't care about that. Cause we were working hard all that time,

28:30 and I think we did, you know, a lot of work, and all those boys were sent, just patched up and sent to us and we had to look after them.

How did they, I'm not quite sure how they pipped you at the post? These other ladies, how did they get in on your action?

Oh it was things like that happen everywhere, even in parliament don't they? Those girls who knew the head, the eastern states officers,

29:00 and I've heard this from an eastern states girl. She said, "Dickie, you know why you didn't go to the Middle East?" And I... she said, "Oh no..." she said... yeah, and she told me. She's dead now, but she told me that. She said, "Yes, you were supposed to go, you were with the 7th." I said, "Well never mind." The 7th also went up to, after Ron's group left Syria, the hospital had gone up to look after them and they were sent home, and the hospital stayed

29:30 and they had, did nothing. Cause they never ever sat, put their tents up or anything, and they had leave while they were waiting to see what, where they were going to go, and then they didn't have anywhere to go so they came back to us. Their commanding officer was sent home over that, in disgrace, and we, and the 7th came down, my hospital came down to the 6th where I was, and we were still working flat out and they weren't given jobs, they were resting,

30:00 wondering, you know. They were 'didtro [?]', and then the war in El Alamein started and they were all packed up and sent over there. And of course we were supposed to be, go too, but we didn't, we stayed there again, in Gaza. It didn't matter, I mean, at least we didn't have to run about and, you know, get under... they were under the bombs while they went there of course. And then Rommel came down the desert of course, and he was going to take Cairo,

30:30 and he sent his big flag ahead, you know, German flag. And one of the eastern states girls has that, yeah, oh, one of the flags that was sent ahead, down to Cairo, cause he never got there.

When you say he, Rommel sent his flag down, how did he send his flag down?

Oh, I don't know. Horseback probably, I don't know, but he was getting everything ready to make that his headquarters. And the, but the,

31:00 the Australians worked very hard... that was the same division that worked at Tobruk, so they well and

truly deserved their 'T' for, you know, Tobruk. And that's my best man was John O'Mahoney, and he was, he did both of those. He was a great friend of mine, he was one of the boys that I used to go sailing with, John. Baby Face O'Mahoney we used to call him, yeah. Yeah, he was one that used to try and let me, make me go back to church and I

31:30 said, "No," I don't like Him and I wouldn't go.

Apart from Brett dying as part of the war in New Guinea, were there any other people that you knew that you grew up with that died as part of the war?

Oh yes, a whole lot from The West Australian Newspapers, couldn't name them, I couldn't remember, no. I go to The West

32:00 lunch, Christmas lunch, there's only about five of the men left. And I can't even remember the business manager's name, I was trying to remember it last night to see if they remembered to invite me this year, and I can't remember it. So, you know, they haven't meant enough to me, I suppose... a whole lot of them have died. Ron Olner, he was the advertising manager then, he's died, he joined the air force. A whole lot of them joined different things.

32:30 But it was fascinating, being on a newspaper is one thing, it's always interesting, as you probably know. And then, you know, and the type of people that you meet, you know, you sort of seem to know all the news before everybody else and it's exciting. It is really. Now I'm still in with Brett and Rod and Greg here.

There didn't seem to be a lot of news filtering through to you when you were in the Middle East...

No. No.

33:00 **How much did you trust the propaganda from Haw Haw?**

Well we, the first propaganda we heard about Hitler was on The Daily News, the evening paper here. He, that Mein Kampf, you know, that book he wrote, they published that night after night, chapter by chapter. And I used to read, I always read the newspapers from there to there every day, still, and I thought, "There's something in... this man knows what he is doing," and

33:30 nobody took any notice of that. He said he was going to do all that, and he did it. He said he was going to. They just said, "Oh he's just a nong, he hasn't got any brains."

What did you think about Mein Kampf?

Well I thought it, I thought, like we think about all these people now, that they're fanatics. They're fanatical about their own country and owning their own things and, to everybody else, you know, and you could tell that, they are fanatical. I mean, they're clever

34:00 too though. I mean, look at Cooke, you know, that... as you probably know, Brett, you know, helped to get that bloke off the, out of jail, my Brett. He, his son, Tony, don't you think he writes a good column in the paper?

Tony Squires? No?

Tony's son. Tony Cooke is, what's the first,

34:30 what's the old chappies name? Cooke, you know, the one that's murdered everybody round here.

Oh, right, right, right.

I've forgotten his first name. But Tony is his son and he's lovely, he writes beautifully. So the father is, there's something just, something missing somewhere, cause this boy's very intelligent and the father was too. I know a few people who knew him, Edgar Cooke, that's right,

35:00 and they knew him and they said that he was charming, there's just something in their brain. And that's what was wrong with Hitler, you know, he reckoned he had a bad background, he didn't... had an unfortunate beginning and they begin to hate the people that have something. They don't realise a lot of people that have what they have, is cause they worked for it. Don't they? But you don't want to hear all that.

Well we do.

35:30 **No, I was just thinking when you were reading Mein Kampf and realising that this guy called Hitler is a nutter, were you discussing this with any of your friends?**

Oh yes, we all did, everybody was reading it every night. But the general consensus of opinion from the men, who we used to listen to, mostly then, was, "Oh, you know, she'll be right, you know, he won't get anywhere, you know. In England, you know, we've got good politicians,

36:00 they know what they're doing," and nobody worried. And this was such a happy, especially Perth, happy, there was nothing but sailing and drinking beer and enjoying themselves. There were very few cars on the roads, picnics and family things and, you know, good fellowship, it was marvellous. No fighting or

nastiness or anything, never had any murders or anything.

Could you see any of the Australian politicians

36:30 **looking at what Hitler was doing and making any noise about the fact that Hitler's a nut?**

No, only these days I could, yes. Because, you know, you've got lots of psychiatrists and scientists now who know so much more. But in those days, he was just a little fellow that, you know, he wasn't even handsome, he was not... he was just all about spouting all the time about, you know, like one of the rabble, you know. I thought, "Well,

37:00 anyone can get up a lot of funny people round them," but he didn't, and behind the scenes he must've been clever. Cause look at the money he must've spent on all those uniforms, cause Germany was very rich in those days. Yeah, it was really interesting, but I don't know what anyone else thought about it. Because we were too young to be bothered, we were too busy enjoying ourselves, dancing all the time. Nothing to go to a dance every night of the week,

37:30 or playing tennis at night, travelling from Nedlands to Mount Lawley in a bus or something, and playing tennis. And working for the Red Cross, a lot of the young people, and I was one, used to go to some of the concerts and picture theatre things, all for the Red Cross, always working towards helping people. Yes that was like that then, and it should be like that again.

Oh, I agree.

38:00 **Yes, but nobody wants to go to the Middle East any more. But, you see, the Islams are probably the same, you know, in their book I suppose the males have always been every dominating of the women, still are, and they just got to fight, they've got to do something. But I never followed the football very much but now I'm beginning to see how wonderful it is, to think**

38:30 **all these lovely young fellows, as strong as anything, in the prime of their life, are only playing a game. It's wonderful, that's something to be said for us isn't it? And to think that millions of people go to see them, and it's only a game. And they're not jumping up and down, you know, screaming and shooting people or pushing anyone or anything, they're just all the crowds wait to get into these stadiums. It's really fascinating when you compare them.**

39:00 **Isn't it?**

Well it's like your generation actually made that possible.

Yeah, well I think that that's, hopefully we'll get back to that, when we get rid of some of these fanatics. And the best thing to do with some of these young fanatics, is to get into their schools and stop making them think that they've gotta kill someone, what they've gotta do is learn something, and look after other people. I don't know. It's hard

39:30 to understand about the Japs though, because they are very family minded, they look after their mothers and fathers and their old people, they push them round in barrows and they, you know, they haven't got much money, old families there, and they look after the old people. And they've got their lovely artistic fingers and you know, their beautiful dances. Very hard to think that they turned the way they did, and they were the young men were taken and told

40:00 that they, you know, throw yourself on your sword if you're in trouble... should never've been taught that. It comes from there doesn't it, the teaching.

What was your reaction when you started hearing some of the stories coming back from, like, Germany about concentration camps and some of the torturing and...?

Well see we didn't know about them. I've just read a book the other day and I see that I was still in the Middle East when the camps were opened,

40:30 I didn't, we didn't know. All I do know is that when we went up to Haifa, I went up there for a drive one day with a couple of those Tommies that had the horses, they hired a little car and they took a couple of us up there, we always went in pairs like nuns. Anyway we were standing at... looking down from the Haifa Harbour, which is on the border of Syria, you could see these great ships, you know, the shadows under the water.

41:00 And they said, "Oh, all the Jews are in there." I said, "Well why don't they get them out?" "No, they didn't bother." Nobody, there was nobody to let them out, when the ships were sunk, they just... well we probably sunk them, we and the Italians and the Germans. They were under the water. And coming back at Eritrea, we had to camp for about a week waiting for the Queen Mary to come in, to get us. And

41:30 we were put in an ex Italian camp, a prisoner of war camp, you know, cause we'd taken prisoners there, and we, they moved the prisoners out and put us there, and that's how we were kept there. And at Eritrea you walk out onto the cliff and you'd see all these ships with their funnels up in the air, all sunk. Whose they were, some were ours, some were theirs and, you know, all round the Mediterranean and all round down there,

42:00 ships sunk, you know, one...

Tape 6

00:36 **We were going to talk about some of the leave that you had when you were in the Middle East?**

Oh the leave. One I think I told you was in Palestine, and we just went round to the back country, another girl and me and two men, you know, little, not your Romeos or anything but nice fellows. And

01:00 we just went round all the back streets where nobody goes of Palestine. Anywhere that took their fancy they drove us and we stopped at hotels and had meals and things, and we saw the old coliseum which probably a lot of people haven't seen. And then we must've, they must've dropped us back at the hospital and then we just, they came and took us out on day trips, but we were on leave so we didn't have to go

01:30 back to work. And then, we did at night of course, had to go back to the hospital. And then the other one, complete leave was in Palestine again and we stayed at the YWC... the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], and that was easy, we just got taxies and went round. And one of my brothers was an engineer and he knew, in London, and he knew

02:00 a young fellow, a Jew, who had come out to the River Jordan to work with the potash works, and he had given me an introduction. And only because we had red crosses on, I was allowed to take my two friends there, and we went in, nobody was allowed down to the Red Sea, ah, to Jericho then, Raoul was with them, and we were very lucky. And then the manager sent this young man that my brother knew, another

02:30 man to escort us, we went right though all the works, the potash works. And when we ended up on the River Jordan, I took a photo of Margie, you know, just sort of waving to us on the shore. I've got that there, on the River Jordan, that's something isn't it? And we watched all the kids swimming in the water and they, you know, coming belly up, you know, cause of the salt. And that was somewhere we went, a lot of the people didn't go. And all the cathedrals, and we had

03:00 already been to the Mount of Olives with Ron and Brett, that's when I bought those, and yeah, we went through all those places again. We were only there a little while and then, that was quite nice, you know, it's nice to get just away from everything, and wear your outdoor uniforms and hats and everything. And everywhere we went people looked at us, and if we went to the hotels or anything for a meal, invariably we'd have a bunch of violets sent

03:30 to each of us from some man in the... that's what they do of course in those countries. That was all very different, very posh. Then one day I was walking up a road near the Hotel Fast, which most people know through the First World War, and under, the ground floor is a photography, a photography office and there was a great big picture of me, that one. And I was absolutely... "Who put my

04:00 picture there? Where did they get that picture from?" I was absolutely furious. I went in and I bought all the pictures and took the things away, and I didn't like being stuck in someone's window. I was very uppity wasn't I? Anyway, I did that, and I've got a copy of it now. Anyway it was, I don't know why they stuck me there, but it was a picture of a girl I suppose. And then... that was interesting.

Can you remember how the photograph was taken?

I don't know, don't know when... I don't know who took it or

04:30 when, no, but it was a great big, beautifully done, frame, you know, there's me there, sitting there. Oh, and I said, "Everyone'll think I've had my photograph taken and now I'm in vain," or something, you know. Anyway there we are. So that was that one, and then we went to Cairo, this is before that war of course.

What were your first impressions of Cairo, cause it's pretty different to Australia?

Oh it's lovely, I love deserts. I still travel as much as

05:00 I can on this train, I can sit there for hours by myself and look at the desert, I love it. Anyway, we went for rides on camels, which was unusual in those days, and we played tennis with the usual red balls and the red poppies and everything, and it was just beautiful there, Hotel Memphis, that's right. And then we were taken from there on bus trips to Memphis and then Sakkara, they were properly, you know, led by

05:30 Arab couriers. And the sisters and VADs, we were all together, that was lovely. We saw a lot of the old cities, because they're lost cities in a way, and I could, and I never could understand how they could make these great big statues out of real granite, which could only have come from Syria. How did they get it down from Syria? Nobody knows. And all the pleating on the

06:00 kilts and everything, beautifully carved, couple of them had been shot by canon from Napoleon of

course, that's why they were laying on their back on the ground. That was something I hadn't know about, was interesting. And we saw the big dams there, and everything, it was good. And, where else? We went, oh, we went into the pyramids, ones we were allowed to, we weren't allowed far in, and I've got a picture of me on a donkey in front of the steps...

06:30 pyramid there. And I did take some pictures of the feluccas on the river, but we went to Cairo and Margie lost all my films. She, yeah, she picked up five films and when she got back... she was a dreamy girl, and she came back and she said, "Look at the shoes I bought." And I said, "Oh aren't they lovely, they're lovely Margie. Where are my films?" And she said, "Oh, I don't know, ah,

07:00 I've lost them." Oh, I could've hit her. She did, she'd lost the whole lot, had them printed and everything. I put an ad in the paper, in The Palestine Post, never heard, anything, cause they'd be valuable, especially for troops, all the strange troops from around the world who weren't allowed to have cameras, and that. And she said, "Every one was perfect." And I thought, "Thanks." God, I hate dreamy people.

07:30 Anyway I shouldn't have ever had the camera but I've taken pictures on the ship too. I didn't care, I thought, "Well I'm only a girl, you know, if I go to jail, well, they'll feed me," I never thought about the other things they might've done, I never thought about that. Terribly innocent.

With some of the little day trips that you did, what sort of day trips did they have sorted out for you?

That, those were the sort, that's the sort of thing,

08:00 just places of interest in the towns, you know, the usual old thing of cathedrals, cathedrals, cathedrals, and there was plenty of things to see over there, but they're not, they're, you feel, you just felt as though you were back in time. You see, you read The Bible and all the old Bible stories, I can see old Mother Killeen sitting in the corner of the junior school at Loretto with the river, Swan River behind her in those days, and the old fashioned

08:30 Irish voice, dreaming away, back in the past, Adam and Eve and these camels and all these things, and I just, sort of, it seemed so strange to really see them. Some of the girls were quite advanced in history and they knew a lot and they really got a lot out of that, they knew exactly where to go. I didn't, you know, not really. We went to the old city of Jerusalem, the wailing wall and all of that and, you know, with all the Arabs sitting around with their brass

09:00 bits and pieces. And the bodies, ah, children with their legs and arms chopped off, or never grew, laying on the foot paths and their people asking for money. And then you went down to the Church of the Sepulchre, we went to that one, but to the other one, the... Bethlehem, and you went down there and... no, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, that's right, and you went down there feeling all holy again. And

09:30 there are little monks in brown costumes and things and, "mooney, mooney, mooney, mooney," you know, oh, I, you know, it's stupid. I mean, here we do, things are done for money in these places, but in those places it's pathetic. Nobody works at all, they just try and live off alms, and they do cruel things to get their alms, they kill each other and things like that. Funny.

Do you think you were treated any

10:00 **differently by the locals because you were women in uniforms?**

Oh yes, yes, they respected us, they were good. Oh you think, oh money, oh yeah they were after our money, yes. I bet by the time the Yanks got there they fleeced them. Yes, yeah, on the beaches though we were pretty safe, very safe, cause we always went with men, patients, or ex patients or orderlies, you know, somebody. But, you see,

10:30 see some of the girls would've gone with the doctors and all that, but they were those sort of people, that's why they joined. I wouldn't do that. I didn't mind if a doctor liked me, that was different, but I wouldn't do it just for that. No. No, we've got, we've all got different stories, but quite a few West Australians just like me, we're not, any of us, that I know of... There's one girl here that she's earned a lot of medals and a lot of work she's done

11:00 since, and some of the girls don't like her, but I'll tell you what, she's still working hard for people. I admire her, I think she's great. She certainly didn't go in there for the honour and glory, which she now has, so she's worthwhile.

Who were some of the patients that've stood out for you in the Middle East?

Who what?

Who stand out for you, that you remember very clearly?

Patients? Oh really only one,

11:30 and he was only really in for a knife wound, no, a bullet wound in his arm, cause I got pictures of us round his bed, he was in for about seven months, and everything went wrong with his operation, just everything. And he was very young, he was only about, I suppose he would've been about eighteen

when we knew him, and he must've joined up when he was sixteen and he was just a child really. And oh, we all loved him, and I've got a picture of him there, and I,

12:00 he came home on a hospital ship before the end, you know, not before his end but before our end. And I don't think I ever learned anything about his family, but just everyone admired him, he went through hell, never said a word. Quite a lot of them did though. Another one that I liked, and he was from Western Australia, his wife used to teach me ballroom dancing, was Dee Meacham. And he,

12:30 it was he and his brother, they called them Dum and Dee, they were both from Ron's battalion, and his name was really Robert, and I don't know what his brother's name was, but they were larrikins, and they were laughing all the time, Irish of course. And they were in the officer's ward and they were just so naughty, they used to get out at night and put each other in wheel chairs and scream up the hills away from our, AWL [Absent Without Leave] and

13:00 people just put up with them because they couldn't stop. They were lovely. But they were patients too, still had to be looked after. And every time they smashed an ankle again you had to go and fix it, yeah. But they were the naughty ones, but the other ones were just ordinary blokes, you know. Used to, when they began to feel a little bit better, they'd have a game of two-up on the end of their, somebody's bed, and they whiled the days away

13:30 just quietly, no fighting or no aggression, nothing, cause they couldn't do exercises much, but they were just, they were much of a muchness to me. And I distanced myself from that, I wasn't there for getting to know people, I was there to do what we went for, I suppose. I don't know.

You mentioned earlier that some of the pilots that came down, they were burnt quite badly?

The burns, yes.

14:00 Yes, well I don't know, they were eastern states, none from Perth. I didn't, I just knew them by their, whether they were Private So-and-so or whatever they were, they were not officers, the ones that we looked after, not that I know of.

How do you treat somebody who's had such a horrific accident?

Oh that's how we treated them, you heard that.

And what was the success rate?

Mmm?

What was the success rate?

14:30 I think it was complete, I don't remember anyone not healing, it was perfect. I mean, yeah, I mean, although we didn't have sterilisers and things, and we didn't have air conditioner and things, that's what I think it is, no air conditioning, it was fresh air all the time, day and night. If it was cold you gave them another blanket, if it was hot you took it off, I mean, it just adds up, it adds up to being correct. As long as the

15:00 flies doesn't get to them, that was the main thing. And if a bloke had a wound, you just flicked the flies away, gave them something to do. Very peaceful I thought.

What's the significance of using fish oil on bandages?

I don't know where they got it from, probably from the whales, probably whale oil. There's an awful lot of it, we had big drums of it, it must've been brought in on the ships. And we, the only thing we had to

15:30 put it in, the orderlies used to cut the kerosene tins off, cut the side off the kerosene tins and then put all this, a layer of mesh and then a layer of oil, and a layer of... right up to the top. And then put it in the sterilisers, such as they were, and sterilise them through and then re-cover the whole lot, and take them out one by one and lay them on the wounds after you've puffed the, after they've had had their saline bath and they've been

16:00 trimmed off all the extra raggedy edges, and then puff that into them and dry them out and then put this on, and the flesh grew underneath it and through it. And there was not even a scar, you know, that's why that young man was there so long, cause we really couldn't let him go home without the use of an arm, he couldn't, we wouldn't let him use it, and he couldn't get on the ship until that was healed. And some of the others had finished

16:30 when I got there.

It's just, it sounds quite amazing cause it seems quite primitive burns treatment?

I know. And yet when my dog, in Sydney, got a tick, my big Alsatian, and I had, took her to the vet, I said to him, you know, "To get that tick out, I can't get him out. But if you get him out don't stitch her up, would you mind packing her with tulle gras?" He said, "Oh, cost a fortune for a dog," and I said, "I don't

17:00 care, will you do it, you know, and just do it and wrap her neck up and just see if you can do it that way." And he did and she had no scar. Took a long time.

What was it wrapped in? Tulle gras did you say?

Tulle gras, they call it tulle gras now, it's a French, a Swiss word. In Switzerland now they're making that in little tins, you can buy it from the chemist. So if ever you got a burn or anything like that, to be packed, ask for that. Lot of the doctors

17:30 don't even know you can get it, you can get it in our chemist shops. And that's what it is really, much refined, I mean, ours was big curtain, coarse curtain material, that's all we could get from Gaza. And then spend hours chopping it up into squares and then dipping it in this stuff and putting it in the kerosene tin. That's what we spent a lot of time doing that.

It would've been a production line, did you each have your own little job?

No, I think, yeah, I did that with one other one, yeah, we did, yeah.

18:00 I was, see, what ever the sister in charge of the ward gave you to do, you did. And if she saw, said, "We've run out of tulle gras, would you go out with so-and-so and do that," well you spent probably the day doing that. It was interesting, and you're talking all the time… no, I didn't of course. Yeah.

How long would it take, like for an average burns patient to be, you know, saline bathed and treated and then…?

18:30 Oh a long time, long time. You had to, first of all you had to get them toileted and that, and then, you know, when they're fresh, wash, sponge them, cause they couldn't go in the bath with, not thoroughly sponged. And then lift them with someone, two other people, or three, and lift them, keep them straight, depending, if it was on the knee or the leg, you had to keep them straight. And we had no lifts or anything, like these days, you know, on the hospitals

19:00 they've got lifts and things and nobody even thinks about what they're doing, they put them in the pools and that, you know. But here, you know, we had to lift them didn't we, and just put them in that and put them gently and give them something for the back of their head, and talk to them quietly. Because it's a nasty business watching… some of them had a lot of burns, you know, on, right down their legs like that, and you had to just be nice with them. And then you had to get the tweezers, which nearly killed them, pull off all that dead… keep it all clean round the edges.

19:30 And then when that was finished you had to get them back onto their bed, lay them on towels, you know, and dry every bit of them except the sore and then fan the sore and then put the sulphanilamide in it and then pack it and leave them. It was only once a day each was done. A lot of the girls don't know a thing about that, they never worked in that area, but I did, I was lucky.

What do you talk to them about

20:00 **while you're, while they're obviously in a lot of pain and you're treating them?**

About what dear?

What do you talk to them about when you're treating them, when they're obviously in quite a lot of pain?

Oh usually, you know, it's easy to get them going about their mother or their father or where they lived and whether you had ever been there or whether you'd like to go there. Usually nothing about the war, sometimes you would say, "How did you get this?" And they'd say, "It was a sniper or it was a," you know, "I fell out of a plane," or I did

20:30 so-and-so. One man, the worst one I ever saw, was the one young fellow, he was only about nineteen, and all I saw of him was a great big mound of ash, like black ash, that's all he… I didn't know it was a man. And I came in on night duty and everyone was quiet, there wasn't a sound on the ward, and there was this great black thing there and I thought, "What's that?" And just across here

21:00 was a bit of skin, forehead, and just across, it turned out, I think, across his back, but I don't think I saw that, and just across one ankle there was a bit of flesh where his boot had been. This was where his helmet had been. And he'd, it was only a, it was an accident, I think he flew into electric wires, and he was absolutely aflame they said, when they found him. And I sort of came in on that, and the sister took one look at it and she vomited,

21:30 and she was so sick I took her off to the duty room, to the examination room, and got the orderly to help me to lift the big fat thing on to the thing and gave her an Aspro and put her to sleep. And so then I came out and helped the other orderly, and the doctor was there, and he said, "We'd better give him an injection." He was in terrible pain, he was screaming, and then they put an injection in the only bit of flesh he could find, and then

22:00 he tried to get to his back and he died. And when he, after he died they said, "Well, you know, nurse would you like to go and help to do something with him?" And course the sister had passed out and there wasn't anyone else, so the orderly and I got one leg and it just, lifted it up, you know, to sort of put something under him or something, and it just snapped clean off like that, you know, just like, as though it was never a person, and he'd only just died. And just before he died, he was screaming out, "Mum!

22:30 Mummy!" You know, nineteen, very young. Yeah.

Was he an Australian?

Mmm, he's Australian, mmm, so that was a sad one. And the men all, when he'd looked around, all the blokes in the ward were turned towards the wall, I don't blame them, it was terrible. And, you know, with the lantern on the floor, cause you had to have black out, and it was a black out, it was pitch dark outside and it was just this lantern

23:00 we'd had down very low, and the shadow of this great thing was coming up on the sheet we put over the divider, so the men wouldn't see him, but you couldn't stop it, and this thing was floating up... oh it was dreadful, with the light from the lamp. Mmm, that was a bad one.

How can somebody still be alive under those circumstances?

Mmm?

How can somebody still be alive under those circumstances?

Oh he did die. Well, inside I suppose his voice was

23:30 still going and hadn't, he hadn't been long from in the accident, he must've been somewhere near the hospital. But I mean his plane might have been shot down, we don't know, all we knew he was in flames when they found him and brought him in. I mean, we, these days you probably wouldn't even bring him, you'd probably leave him there and do the best for him. But they were wonderful those stretcher-bearers, you see, you never hear anything about the ambulance people.

24:00 **Oh we do.**

Yeah, I bet you do, I'll bet you do.

It's just hard to picture that terrible story, would you say that that was one of the worst things that you saw?

Yeah, that's the worst thing I saw. It wouldn't have been quite so bad if he wasn't saying something but he was talking too, it was incredible.

Was there any, was there ever any consideration of euthanasia?

Don't think so, oh

24:30 no, don't think so.

Because certainly that...?

Never was, never even mentioned in those days, never mentioned. Everybody was helping each other, it was wonderful to see. As I say other very, very sick patients would hobble along on two crutches or whatever, to do something for another bloke, it was absolutely marvellous. It was, you know, something, and they were all so careful about it, they weren't fanatics in any way, they weren't,

25:00 you know, screaming at them, you know, "This is for God," or anything. The worst... I shouldn't say this, but the worst person, as a patient, that I struck was a French man from Syria, you know, screaming because he'd broken his ankle, never stopped yelling all night, "Nurse! Nurse!" Yeah, but not the Australians, I have a great admiration for them.

Did you ever see any cases that you thought would

25:30 **not survive and did, miraculously?**

I just knew that they would be given sedatives until they died, but that's what we still do. Yes, just give... look at all the people in the cancer wards and things here, we don't need any Doctor Nitschke, we've got, they're being looked after very, very well. And if you go to visit one that's just on the edge, the lovely people in there will say to you, "I know you think

26:00 she can't hear you, but talk to her just the same. She mightn't hear you, but she'll know you're there," they know all that. And the person's gone the next day, and you did actually talk to them, and there's something between them, it's worth going to see them. Why kill people?

I was just thinking, like, from, you know, the example of the Australian who was just burnt beyond recognition that,

26:30 **that might've been a...?**

Yeah, the injection he gave him, oh, might've been, I don't... yeah, could've been, but you'd never know. He might've just given him an overdose of morphia on purpose, but how would I know? Yes, I think it's been go... do it, they've been doing it, but we can't say that.

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

27:32 There was nothing that could be done for him. I mean his skin wouldn't breathe or anything, he was just like a big, a whole big ash, somebody carved out of black ash.

Has that image haunted you for many years?

Mmm?

Has that haunted you, that image?

No, not really, I just think that's him and this is me. No, doesn't worry me.

28:00 I just think... oh, I worried about him then cause he was so young, you know, but if he'd been an older person dying no, no. See I grieve for Ron and George, but George had already had an aorta nearly burst, and they did the new operation on the aorta, which they showed us, they, was a big risk, and they did it, so Georgie was at risk. And when he had that stroke that morning and

28:30 I had to take him over to the Mount Hospital from East Fremantle, I was reasonably happy with him, but when they said they wanted us to walk him round the hospital a lot, and when we tried to walk him, he kept sitting down, I felt, "No, not a man like that, he wouldn't like that," so he did finally die, only five days later. But it was lovely, he was still a whole person, and so was Ron.

29:00 So really, and, you know, I talk about dying to the kids, I say, I had them all down there to see what I've planned for the grave and I've got Ron's name there and room for me and, you know, they can hop in there when I die, and I talk like that all the time. Why not? We're old.

Do you think that being part of war has made you really realistic about death?

Yeah, oh yes, hundreds and hundreds of people just dying. And I think

29:30 dying young, you see, that's a bit, upsets you, you know, they're there one day and they're not there the next day. And when you were dancing with people, even the Americans, when they finally came, you only danced, you didn't want to dance, you were too tired, but you'd never say no if somebody asked you, cause you'd think, "Tomorrow he mightn't be here." Yes, I think it probably did condition me, I'm very conditioned. Yes, I suppose I was, never thought about it.

30:00 **What did you think about the Americans?**

I didn't like the way they skited and said, you know, "Aren't you glad we're here?" You know, and we were furious because we were so tired and so hungry and they came in when they felt like it, we thought. But, I mean, that was the way we looked at it. And they were so showy-off, they all had ribbons and they'd never been to a war and, you know, we... And their uniforms and their food, it was out of this world, and

30:30 their beautiful planes and everything. Yeah but, you see, the whole idea now is that they've rescued everyone, well they have. And I think that's probably why Howard's trying to stay friendly and give as much, a little bit, even something towards them because Hiroshima was a shocking thing, but it did save Australia.

How did you find out about the bomb being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Where was I? I was

31:00 here. I was in the hospital, but I don't remember the particular day or anything, it's probably I was asleep or something, as usual. I was sorry for the civilians, and I still don't dislike the Japs like a lot of people do, I mean, they might've killed some of our friends and that, but they were trained, when you go into battle you

31:30 expect to kill someone, you're trained for it. When you watch the army training they're bayoneting people all the time and they're being trained to do that so, I mean, what do you expect? So if you don't want to go you don't join the army, go and become a priest or something or a, you know, you can go and be a peacemaker. It's a matter of choice.

You mentioned earlier that you thought that the Germans were gentlemen, can you extrapolate on that?

32:00 The ordinary ones were, they were beautifully mannered people. They even are today, they're, I mean, you know, they're just that sort of a race. It was, Hitler's a different sort of person and he didn't get the really good, genuine families in at all, they hated it all. I only know cause that family of my fathers are all up in the very north of France and I meet a lot of Germans coming through when

32:30 I go to stay with them and... beautifully mannered people and beautifully educated, very clever. But those things against the Jews, well they weren't the only ones who were fighting the Jews, a lot of people don't like Jews anyway. And I do, I think they're very clever and they're very, at least they work hard. Even in Egypt, oh I didn't tell you about the other... from the hospital

33:00 in, the 6th AGH, there was these religions, they were communes I suppose you'd say they are now. Has anyone told you about those? I bet they have.

Maybe a little bit.

Yeah, they were interesting. Yeah, the mother's went out working in the fields and the babies were looked after all day, and at night the parents came in, have their play time with the children. And then the children were put to bed by carers, and then they went in and

33:30 had their meal and then had dancing and singing and danced round the village, that was... sort of idea. And we thought, Ron had seen that before I had. Apparently he wrote a very interesting letter back to The West Australian about it and they wouldn't print it, they said, "It's communist... communists." But I liked the idea, because see what they did was, if there was a clever child or clever young person in the village, they all paid to

34:00 have him sent down to Tel Aviv to be trained in his special field, and that's how they promoted their clever ones. I just thought it was nice, I don't know, was friendly anyway, they had a good time, they laughed and they sang and they danced. The music was beautiful. Anyway, but they are the people who have now replanted a whole lot of that land with gum trees, when nobody else ever did a damn thing. The Arabs

34:30 just sit there fighting, they don't do anything. They climb into each others beds and they climb into each others tents and they talk and they drink and they smoke that hashish stuff round the village squares, you know, their pipes and their white things and everything. Who they think they are, I don't know, but they never do anything. But the Jews do, they work, and they work hard and that's probably why people don't like them because they get on in the world.

35:00 **Indeed. No, well its largely true, it's, I mean, that's, you know, one of the points that, you know, Hitler got Germany behind him saying that, you know, they're taking everything from us. Well if you, you know, put a flip on what you've just said, it might be viewed in that way.**

I know. It's the same as the, some people who, you read the papers every day, moaning and groaning about what they haven't got and, you know, he down the

35:30 street has this sort of a house and that one's a millionaire. And even the paper this morning has Australia's, you know, leading millionaires, well, what the heck's that got to do with the price of tea? I mean, it's nobody's business, some of them might've got it with ill gotten gains, but if they happen to have won it at the races or something, they're clever people, that's their business. I can't think you could envy anyone, just because they've got on in the world. That's the wrong attitude.

36:00 If you envy Mr Next-Door, go and do things like he does, copy him, get out of bed earlier and go and do... there's work for everybody if they want it. I could find a job for a young man or women here today. Ask all the people in this place, "How many of you would like us to go shopping for you once a week, or take you in my car shopping once a week? Yes you can pay me, but I'll take you." There's a job,

36:30 nobody does it. Hundreds of people in these places can't look at me without my car. I would no more ask one of my children to get anything for me than fly in the moon I have to wait, I'll wait till they suddenly wake up and say, "Mum," you know, "is there anything I can do for you?" And I... "Oh yeah," give them a list. But no, so... but if you had someone like that who offered, you know, every, "Which is a good day for you all?" You know, "Every Tuesday? Okay, me and my friends will take you

37:00 out, and after that we'll take you to the park and we'll have a picnic, and you bring some food too," and no expense to the people, and bring them home happy with a load of groceries for the next week. There's a job. Why won't anybody do that?

It's a good idea.

They won't do it, there's lots of things to do.

With, when Ron came back to Australia, cause he had some medals by this

37:30 **time and you've also got some children by this stage, so you've both been working hard.**

Yeah.

How was, how were both of you, actually, viewed by your, you know, friends, family, just strangers, from being a part of World War II?

Oh they were just glad to see us back, very glad to see us back. They didn't, they're not sentimental, they don't say those things, but you can tell that they are. Oh yes, we were

38:00 popular everywhere, you know, with all our family. But then we went to live in the east and we suddenly

had to make more friends, we lived in Melbourne for two years with two little girls and then Brett was born in Melbourne and then we were suddenly transferred to Sydney with no, 'by your leave.' "Just fly up one day, Ron, and find a place." And, "What about my wife and children?" "Oh well, oh you can fix that up later but we're giving you one day to do that."

38:30 You know, "You can do it," that was the way it was then. And we went up to Sydney and we got a little house that we thought was all right, and they paid our rent. And one day the managing editor came up to visit Ron in Sydney and Ron invited him home for tea and he turned his nose up at the house we had, he said, "I don't expect that somebody representing The West Australian newspapers would have a place like this." So Ron said, "Well I can't afford anything else."

39:00 And he said, "Oh I'll see what I can do." And he came back and he said that there was another place there in St Ives that we could have and it was fairly reasonable, but that the office would buy it. So they bought it and of course they owned us then, and that was a pig, we stayed there ten years. And one day they were bringing us home on leave, me and five children then, on leave, and all of a sudden they said to Ron,

39:30 "Sell the house, sell all the furniture you've got in it, and you're coming home." And he said, "Oh I can't just come home like that, there's only me moving and we've got a new baby, is just a year old. Dickie can't do very much, she's got a car but, you know..." And they said, "Oh we'll give you a month." So anyhow, he had to go down town and replace all the furniture and have the place painted, move us all, you know,

40:00 and that's how my uniforms and a lot of stuff got left there. And we piled onto a train and we came home. Yeah, we worked very hard and we came to Claremont, and as soon as we hit the deck, and we hadn't even unpacked anything, Ron was sent on a tour for all the newspaper correspondence around the world, coming to Perth to look at the Pilbara and everything. And because Ron'd done so much

40:30 during the war, they were using him up, that's why he came home. And they left me home with all the children and this Alsatian, alone, you know, without a husband or anything, and he was shot away and he had to do this, he had to map out the whole of the safari for all these people, in that short time with about a week's notice, he had to make his own maps and work everything out. And then all these grand people came over from around the world and sailed off in this big convoy,

41:00 in the old what's-a-name, our Holden cars, the black cars, and Ron was included but he was expected to know everything. He had to knock on the doors of some of the station owners and ask could they have camps at the foot of their gardens, and could they do this and could they provide them with food and meat, could they provide everything for these people he'd never seen. He did it all. No wonder he had a heart attack.

41:30 And he did it perfectly, everything went like that. There's a map, I've got this little map book there. And they all sailed around and I thought, "And they haven't done a thing." And then on the way home the managing editor rang me from his car and said, "Will you be home tomorrow night Mrs. Christian?" And I said, "Oh, yeah." Jim McCartney. I said, "Yeah." And he said, I said, "Why?" He said, "I've just shot a wild turkey, I thought

42:00 you might care for one." I nearly threw it at him.

Tape 7

00:36 **I was going to ask you, you managed to get married again at seventy-five years old, is that right?**

Mind you...?

You got married again?

Oh yes when I was seventy-five, to George Day from The West.

How did that happen?

Well before Ron died, when he, before he died he was moved down to Fremantle,

01:00 with The West, and when he went down there the blokes up in Perth used to have a lunch with him once a month. And one Christmas he said, "Why can't we have the wives?" So we invited them to our house in Melville, and they all came. Then Ron and I retired to our holiday house at Madora Bay, and the next year they all came down there. And then they said, "Well, you know,

01:30 it's a long way for us to come now, we're all getting older, why can't we have dinner in South Perth at the Freeway Hotel?" So that suited us so we went the next year, and then George and Alice were there. And the next year I had to go by myself, he had died. So I wouldn't go and eventually they made me come. And then next year I went and I heard them all saying something about,

02:00 “Isn’t it awful about George?” And another man said, “Yes I called in this morning, I thought he might come but no, he won’t see anybody.” And so I heard this a few times, and when I was leaving I said, “Who’s George?” And they said, “George Day.” And I said, “Oh is he sick?” And they said, “Oh no, Alice died in August.” And I said, “Oh I didn’t know.” So I went home and sent a card, and I said, “If Ron’d been here he’d have shared this card,” that’s a polite card. So he rang up to thank me for the card,

02:30 and talked about caravans, which I had and he had one and, “Wasn’t it awful being on your own,” kind of thing. And then no more. And then that next Christmas I went again, I didn’t want to go, but I went, and they sat me between two widowers, both handsome, he particularly. And he just took me over, he just put his arm around the back of my chair and every time I went up to get myself something to eat he came with me and everything, full of charm. I thought, “Oh, this is nice.”

03:00 And then when everyone was, had gone, I went out to my car and he was beside the car, and he said, “Oh you kept Ron’s car?” And I said, “Yeah, what do you know about it?” And he said, “Oh I know this car well.” And then he told me how wonderful friends he and Ron were and how, through those years since we came back, they had been putting the paper to bed every night, because he was head of the stereo, you see, and Ron was advertising manager. And I hadn’t even known any of that and Ron had never told me

03:30 that he was a special friend. But about two months before Ron died, I was trying to make him look after his heart cause, you know, you could see when we were fishing, sometimes that he was getting a bit breathless. And I said, you know, “I don’t know what I’d do if you popped off, it’d be awful, I hope I go before you do.” And he said, “Oh no you won’t,” he said, “you’re a survivor.” And I said, “Oh well, I don’t want to be a survivor, I’d hate that.” And he said, “Oh you wouldn’t be around very long by yourself.” And I said, “What do you mean?” And he said, “Oh all the

04:00 blokes’d get you.” And I said, “Oh, that’s what you imagine, I think the same about you,” just laughed about it. And the next morning, I slept on that, and the next morning I thought, “There isn’t anyone in all those thousands of people I’ve known, mostly men, there’s not one I’d even think about even looking at again, not one, except Ron.” And I thought, “Oh there was one,” and I remembered George. And I thought I’d tell Ron, and I said, “You know, I just thought about all those

04:30 blokes and there is one bloke, but he’s married anyway,” and I mean he was married before we were engaged, and I mentioned the name. Isn’t that funny. And after, years later, he rings up and he followed me everywhere. And I was going away to a reunion in Sydney just after I met up with George again, and I told him I was going and he said, “Oh I’ll water your garden for you,” and I said, “Oh no, you can’t do that.” “Why not?” And I said, “Well the girl next door will do that.” He said, “No, where are you going to

05:00 stay?” And I said, “Oh, that’s right, I forgot to give a message to the boys, I’ll give it to them, someone’ll take me out to the train and I’ll…” When I went to the train he was there, no boy, none of my family, and he’d rung them all up and said he was taking me to the train. And he said, “Where’s that list for the boys about the things that you want, did you leave it in the house?” I said, “No, I have it here.” And he said, “Oh well, if you like to give it to me I’ll look after that.”

05:30 And he rang everyone I got to, all the strangers, Sydney and Melbourne, he had rung and said, “Dickie’s okay, I’ve put her on the train, she’s coming over,” and they all wanted to know, “Who’s this?” “Oh…” And that was lovely, I had four years with him, five years, and he died.

Sounds like a wonderful romance?

It was really romantic that, cause that was a more mature love, all our children were off our hands and we’d both been through it all before, and it was very nice. Very

06:00 nice. So there’s hope for everybody.

What did your respective children think of this blossoming romance?

Oh they didn’t mind, they thought it was great. He, the first Christmas after I had met him, I was only in a little unit in Woodall Street in Melville and I said, “Well I’ve only got my garage and the land behind them, which is all cemented, I’d like you all to come to Christmas dinner, we haven’t had one since

06:30 your father died.” And so they all came, I didn’t think they’d ever come, they never come now, but they did then, and he walked in. And he’d said to me, “What are you doing on Christmas Day?” And I said, “I’m having the family.” He said, “Oh I’m going to a family christening.” And so I just thought, “Oh well, that’s good, I’m glad you’re not coming.” Anyhow he walked in with a great big armful of wine and a chicken in case he, we were late, and he was late for dinner. And he looked across and he said, “Brett,

07:00 hello Brett Christian, George Day.” “Oh hello George,” shook hands and everything. And Rod said, “Oh, I was playing at your daughter’s twenty-first birthday party. It’s George Day” Oh, and all the girls are saying, “Where did you get him from?” you know. It was, he had a lovely reception. So we got married.

That’s lovely. Just looking back to the

07:30 **Middle East, what did your matron say to you as you were leaving to go back to Australia about the work that you had done?**

Well I don’t remember having a special conversation with her but she insisted that everyone call us

nurse, I know that she did that. And she, according to what the girls said, that she'd said that, you know, "She hoped that we were treated, when we got home, in the

08:00 same way that we had been treated there, because they had loved having us." I don't know any more, there might be a copy of that somewhere amongst the girls, I could ask in October if you haven't got it, but you probably have got it. She must've said something. I didn't go with all that, I never sat around the matrons or anything.

This is just...?

I wasn't the officer type. It's funny isn't it, and yet I ended up with them.

This is just

08:30 **like a bit of curiosity, you were saying when you came back to Hollywood hospital, that TB was quite common?**

Well yes, it seemed like a left over from something. And I don't know whether it was a left over from the, perhaps the ships, might've been from the sailors that were there. It was, struck me as strange, cause they didn't get it over there, they used to get hepatitis a lot over there but not TB.

Yeah, cause I thought...?

09:00 Might've been off the ships, the, lot of sailors did get TB, but I wouldn't know that.

How do you treat TB, in those days?

How do they what?

How do you treat somebody with TB?

Oh well, I didn't have to treat it myself but they drain the lungs, they generally had bottles with fluid flying out from their lungs. And they were made to cough and given therapy and hit on the back and had to cough up, the mucus keeps spreading in the lungs all the time till they can hardly breathe.

09:30 And then, you know, course all of that is highly contagious. Yes, they were in the wards too, I used to wonder how they... perhaps they might've been not contagious when they were brought back to the wards. I don't think they were ever in isolation though, I never noticed that. But there were quite a few there, they might've been off the submarines and things, but I have a feeling they were mostly sailors.

Cause I was thinking if you, you would have to be contained, you know. Was Hollywood the only

10:00 **hospital, do you think, that had a TB area?**

Well that's what I thought, they didn't seem to be that's... unless the ones that were in the ward with them were, had recovered, once they initially... they don't get it again in a hurry. I can't, I couldn't tell you that bit because I wasn't privy to anything, I was only a, you know, and that was, you know... As a matter of fact I was quite pleased when they called me up to the office because I was happy there. But, I mean, you know, I did get the feeling that I wasn't... except for that nice

10:30 little nurse who was, finally married the Burgess boy, that I was just given pantry jobs and things like that. And I remember I went into the dressing room one day and there was a man sitting, waiting for his foot to be bandaged, and it was exposed, you see, for quite a while. And I went back there to get something else and he was still there and I said, "Look, would you like me to cover that for you?" And he said, "No thank you, sister will do it."

11:00 Cause I had these blue chevrons, you see, didn't like them. The blue chevrons said you'd been overseas. So it was very sad, it was better, I was the better off going to the office. But some of my girls went to New Guinea and a couple of them went on to Labuan, and that's a different story, which you'll get or you might have it. But they handled the prisoners of war, but there was no war, they weren't being bombed, but they handled all the, you know, prisoners of war,

11:30 it must've been terrible. So different stories.

You also mentioned that you did a bit of volunteer work at Hollywood?

Beg your pardon?

You said you were still working at Hollywood until recently, was that volunteer work?

Now, no I'm down at the museum, the army museum in Burt Street in East Fremantle. I just go... yes, that's volunteer.

Do you do any work still with the Red Cross?

For the what?

Red Cross?

I did after

12:00 the war, yeah. I was a beautician so I did a lot of, I started at Heathcote, and I did that for quite a while. And then I, Ron and I retired to Madora Bay, so I had to go down to Mandurah, so then I looked after the people at Werner House and I did do fingernails and their faces and, you know, generally chatted to them and made them feel good, massaged their arms and their wrists and their feet. And then I thought I'd like, as well

12:30 as that, I'd like... I was retired properly, and the kids were all up here, and I thought I'd like to be a, do, ah, you know, do fine arts. So I went up to Rockingham and I did a year, oh and I loved it, and I was signing up for the other three years, and Ron had his heart attack so I couldn't, cause Madora's quite a long way from there,

13:00 so I had to give up. I didn't, I just paint a bit now, but, and yeah, I loved that, so that was going to be my new career, cause I got a bit sick of doing the old na... Actually what I didn't like about the old hospital was that they always gave me the old ex foot rugs from the bathrooms and, you know, being a beautician you always had beautiful things, and I wasn't allowed to bring my own stuff and, you know, and I had to use this table and not

13:30 that table. And I got a bit tired of that, I thought, "Well anyone can do what I'm doing, I'm being wasted." Then I thought I'd do the fine arts, I would've loved it, it's beautiful. I was doing nudes and things before I left, I loved that. Anyway, but I can't do them now, I just paint things that I see, yeah. So now I'm doing nothing except sometimes... Well, now that I'm living over here, which has been the last twelve months, I've had a hip done, I just

14:00 go sometimes down to the army museum. But I'd like to do something, I'd love to do something but I can't think of anything to do. There must be something. Read to the patients at the, you know, the asylum, or something like that. Could do that.

Did you ever march in Anzac Day?

Did I?

Did you march in Anzac Day?

Never did, never have, never liked that, to me its showing off. I can't get over the feeling,

14:30 showing off. I go quietly sometimes to the local dawn service. And one year about, just after George died, I went by myself to the Fremantle Museum, and I took my beautiful rose out of the thing, it was early, and I stood at the back of everybody and I couldn't hear a thing. And then when they'd all gone I just went up the steps and put the rose for

15:00 Ron, and I was alone, you know. And a young man came over and I was walking away, and he said, "Excuse me," he said, "could you tell me why you did that?" I said, "What did I do?" And he said, "You just put a rose there, I gather it was for somebody, who was it for?" So I told him this, about Ron, and he shook my hand and went home. The next thing I knew, my son Brett

15:30 had a letter, a beautiful letter and a beautiful poem from this young man about me, yeah. And I said, "How did you get that?" He said, "Oh I know that bloke, and when you said the name was Ron Christian," he said to himself, "I know Brett," and he gave that to me and said, "Would you give that to you mother, I don't know where she lives but this I wrote for her." Isn't that lovely, I've got it there.

That's a lovely story.

16:00 Just nice, but, you know... so.

Is that how you remember the people from your time at war, do you just go to the dawn service?

Do I what dear?

Is that what you do?

That's all I do, oh yes. Nobody's business, I mean, I can't see it, medals and, you know, marching, I can't, I cannot, I try hard, I try hard to understand it, I cannot understand it. Going to the cemetery by your-

16:30 self or with your sons or whatever, burying Ron's ashes in my family grave, I rang up the five children and they all... I said they didn't have to come but I was doing it, and the whole lot of them were there right on time, the boys all had black ties, the girls had flowers. Julie was over from Canberra and there were no in-laws there, just us, and the grave digger was waiting and there was only ashes. And then about three months after that I got a message from the war museum

17:00 say... ah, [Australian] War Memorial people saying if I, you know, that I could put Ron in the war cemetery, and we understood that was only people who had died in the war. Anyway I said, "No," but I see they have given him a brick, but I don't like it, he's got a brick with a Rising Sun on it or something, I don't like that. But he's in with my Mum and... with them. He didn't know them but he will now. And

there’s a little space, I just had the monument finished last Friday,

17:30 and there’s Ron on one side and all, there’s Edna, Antoine and Aurice and John, Marcel, Charles, all the rest of the... Roger. There’s Odette left and me, and Esme, my other sister, they’re all there, and then there’s a space for me at the bottom with the Rising Sun and Ron. And then there’s another book for all my nephews and nieces, anyone that wants to go there. Done that.

What do you think about grandchildren marching with

18:00 **their...?**

They all want to but they never do, and if they do, I lend them the medals. But I might, they’ve got to bring them home, the last ones I lent them to, they ended up in a daughter in-law’s wardrobe, yeah, she’d forgotten all about them... “Oh I couldn’t find them.” And I reported them missing, and they were advertised in all the army newspapers that Ron Christian’s medals were missing, and the 2/16th were very

18:30 upset with me for losing them, and of course, I thought it must’ve been me. And I had all these duplicate ones made, baby ones made for all my children for a Christmas present, which cost the earth, and I went out to Rod’s for tea on the Christmas night and sitting around the pool and gave him his gift and he opened it he said, “Oh Mum aren’t they lovely but,” he said, “we've got the others haven’t we somewhere Trish?” And she said, “Oh yes, they’re up in my wardrobe, my hat wardrobe,”

19:00 and she goes and gets the originals. That’s why I’m careful with them.

Well at least you know where they are now.

Yeah. Yeah.

From your experiences of war and considering what we’re doing now is going to be passed on for generations in the future...

Oh, not all of it, not much of it. It’s really only a short time, eighteen months isn’t long, oh, three years altogether, yeah,

But still...

three and a

19:30 half years, yeah.

you’ve had a pretty specific experience of war.

Bit of time out, wasn’t it, yeah.

Would you like to pass anything on to future generations about what you’ve learned about war?

But in what way?

What do you think of war, does it do any good, does it change you as a person?

No, I never think fighting, I never fight, our family never fights, we never even argue.

20:00 So, we just have our own opinions and live our own lives and come together for special occasions and laugh all the time. I can’t see any point in it, just no point, and being cruel to people or nasty or poohey to anyone. If you’re nasty to someone you say you’re sorry, and if you lost your temper, if you did, you don’t go fighting people. I can’t see it, but that’s, I can’t... you’re all made differently you see. I mean, some people are born like

20:30 that, they have to blow off about everything, and the more they do it the worse it gets. People get offended and they won’t talk to them.

Do you think being in a war has changed you as a person?

Oh, I think so.

How?

It has, I should think it would have, I think it must’ve. That would be the only good thing might come out of a war. I’m sure all the men that you see, all these soldiers and that, would

21:00 feel the same. I mean, the Vietnam men were upset cause they were not welcomed home, you see, I can’t see that. Though it wasn’t, oh it was conscription though, that makes a difference, everyone aged twenty had to go. Yeah, I can see how they feel, I can, when you think of that. But if it was like our war it was not conscription, they went of their own free will, or they went because their mates went.

21:30 No.

How do you think war has changed you, for the better or for the worse?

I think for the better, cause I can see both sides of it.

How did it change you?

Well I wasn't anything before and now I feel I've got some opinions and I've got... they're quite strong now I come to think of it. I don't think I would've been like that, I was a bit... pussy. You know, I just,

22:00 I liked having a leader before. No, I'm not a leader now but I'm, no I just know me well, I just do. See, even when I go to a doctors or anything now, in my mind I'm sorting out what's good for me. I wouldn't have done that once, I would've said, "Oh thanks," and I would've taken all these things, and I don't take them now, I just work out... And if they were to give me five things to take in one day,

22:30 I would take the five at first and if they upset me a little bit I'd start taking them back to one, and I'd tell them in my own good time, that kind of thing you know. It's a good idea. Like with Him, you know, I mean if there is a God, we don't know do we? I mean, why doesn't he come and say. And the other big thing about that which...

We're still recording.

Won't tell you that bit.

23:00 **Okay.**

I'll tell you after.

Okay. Yvonne it's been absolutely wonderful talking to you for the archives.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS