Australians at War Film Archive

Doreen Rowe - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:36 **Okay, so to start at the start, whereabouts were you born?**

Sydney.

What were your parents doing?

My father had been in the navy and my mother was English. My father was in the merchant navy and that's where he met my mother and they married in London and then they came to Australia. Well, being in the merchant navy meant

01:00 that you know, her husband wasn't home very often. So he left the merchant navy and then he couldn't get a job for quite a while 'cause this was the Depression and everybody was looking for jobs and you had these men who would come around with their little cases selling cotton reels, tape, pins, all sorts of things like that, and my mother, she could never

01:30 say no and she would always buy a packet of safety pins, and as a result we had so many safety pins, they lasted us for years, and anyway Dad eventually did get another job and when the Second World War started, he applied to join the Royal Australian Navy but he was a bit too old, they didn't want him, but as the war progressed and they wanted more personnel in the navy, they approached him and so he

02:00 joined the RAN [Royal Australian Navy]. My father was, I was lucky, my father, he was not an educated man, but he had an innate wisdom and he always made me feel good. He always made me feel special and that's very good for one's self-esteem, your self-image. It gives you a lot of confidence

02:30 and security, and he always used to say, not always, but he once told me when I was quite young, he said, "You'll go through life and you'll meet many many people who you think have everything, but if you look at them and think about it, you'll realise that you always have something that they don't have," and at the time I was quite young. I don't think I knew what he was talking about, but as I grew older and I thought about this I thought, I just realised it was just so

03:00 true, and he was a great one for quoting proverbs and sayings, and one of his favourites was "Don't cry over spilt milk." If you became unhappy or, you know, or a bit agitated about something he'd say, "You can't do anything about it, don't cry over spilt milk, get on with it." And that's great advice.

It's a good attitude for depression as well.

Yeah, yes indeed, yes.

How did you find school?

I

03:30 loved school, loved school but I didn't get enough of it. I wanted to; I left school when I was 14. That was the age in those days when you could leave school and I was terribly disappointed because I was expecting to go on to school.

What would you have liked to have been?

A nurse. Always wanted to be a nurse.

Did you have many siblings?

Two brothers.

04:00 **Were they older or younger?**

Excuse me. One was older and one was younger and my older brother, he was born with dislocated hips which for the first nine years of his life he spent in and out of hospital because in those days, I think

they know much more about that condition today than they did then, and he came out of hospital finally when he was about 10 and

04:30 he was home for a year and he was drowned and that was an absolute tragedy, and my mother, she just about had a nervous breakdown because his body wasn't found for three days, but the Salvation Army saved her. In our street we had a Salvation Army Citadel and when they heard about this tragedy they just came in and

05:00 they looked after us. They were wonderful, and as I think I told one of the girls on the phone I will always contribute to the Salvation Army when they have their charity sessions.

So did you leave school to go into the workforce immediately?

Yes.

What did you do?

I had so many jobs.

05:30 I'd have a job, I was mainly in factories working in dressmaking places and then if I had a job in a factory I'd invariably get – they'd put me in the office but I just hated all that because it wasn't what I wanted to do, and then finally when I was 18 I thought I'll do nursing

06:00 now, but my father wouldn't sign the papers. So I thought, right, now I'll join the army and at that time you couldn't leave a job or get a job without consultation with the Manpower Department. So I bowl along to the Manpower office and told them what I wanted to do.

06:30 So they said, "Oh well, we'll come out and see your employers." Well, they did and my employers were furious with me. I mean, this job, I didn't have enough to do. It was just so boring but employers didn't get rid of you because they knew that they wouldn't get anybody else. Anyway when they came along to see my employers, I mean, they had no option, they just

07:00 had to let me go. So that's when I joined the army.

Was this another of your office jobs at this stage?

Yes, yeah.

So how old had you been when war was declared?

Oh golly. When was war declared?

'39.

'39. Well, I joined the army in '46.

07:30 **And do you remember when, do you remember hearing that war had been declared?**

Oh yes. Oh yes, definitely, because of Dad and he'd been everywhere and knew all about various countries and so, yes, everybody knew about the war. It was, for some it was a release in so far as they could

08:00 get away. For others it was just a tragedy because mothers particularly, because mothers knew that they may not see their sons again and that's a tragedy.

So tell us about enlistment and training. Whereabouts first off?

Well, being in Sydney we went to,

08:30 what do they call it? Rookies [novices] camp, I think, at Ingleburn which is just outside of Sydney and you did this course there. I don't remember much about that at all, but when I joined up I wanted to be a teleprinter operator and that being the case you were then sent to Bonegilla where we started this course and then half way through the

09:00 course the powers that be switched us to doing a driving and mechanics course because they wanted to release men who were in jobs that could be done by women, and that was quite interesting because we learnt to drive three ton trucks and went all around the countryside around Bonegilla, which is very pretty countryside

09:30 and there were four girls assigned to a truck with a sergeant who was the instructor and whilst it was your turn to drive the other three would sit in the back, and we had one girl who was a frightful driver. We were so scared when she was driving. We would sit in the back and we would sing just so loud to overcome this fear we had.

10:00 Anyway she did eventually get her licence but at the end of this training we went on bivouac I think for four or five days around that countryside and it was very rough, very rough, and after a few days we stopped at a place called Nug Nug, which is at the base of Mount Bogong and there was a little

10:30 stream there so we all dived in and, it was winter time, but there were no facilities for ablutions or anything like that so we made our own, and at night time they would have this enormous camp fire. That was a lovely time, we'd all sit around there and sing. No, that was good. Then having finished this course, I'm not the slightest

11:00 bit mechanically minded and I just learnt it all by rote and having done the course then we were sent to Melbourne where we were camped in the middle of Fawkner Park. This camp had originally been used by the American Army but they refused to stay there because it was too cold in winter, too hot

11:30 in summer. So they put the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] in there and there was a huge wire fence around the place. The local people complained about our washing on the line. That was quite an education.

And what sort of duties were you doing there?

We were what was called Don Rs, this is despatch riders, and there were two girls assigned

12:00 to a utility truck and you delivered despatches all over Melbourne. This included camps and some of the mansions in Melbourne that had been taken over by the army for various offices, and then there was one run that we used to call the 'rat run'.

12:30 The 6th office was at Grosvenor, which is a big mansion in Queens Road, which is up for sale at the moment. It looks rather unloved at the moment which is such a pity because it's a beautiful building. It will probably be demolished. Anyway, that was the 6th headquarters where you had heavy wireless and cipher and this run then from Grosvenor in Queens Road to Victoria Barracks in St

13:00 Kilda Road, and this was done every half hour 24 hours a day and was called the 'rat run'.

So you'd be working shifts around the clock then?

Oh yes. Oh yes, in the middle of the night it was very quiet of course. I mean the traffic wasn't as bad then as it, as bad today as, no, I've got it back to front. You know what I mean.

Yes.

13:30 And the Chinaman used to take their vegetables to the market and they'd be going along St Kilda Road and the dear old Chinaman, half the time he was asleep and the horse took him, but if you wanted an apple or an orange you'd just call out. We used to call him Charlie. You'd call out to Charlie and tell him you wanted some fruit and he used to give us the fruit. Likewise the milkman. They

14:00 used to go along St Kilda Road with their horse and cart you'd get a pint of milk or whatever.

I always find there's a special bond between people when they're working strange hours in the city.

Could be, could well be.

Jobs I've done.

One of the places we used to go to was the PMG [Postmaster General] headquarters which was in Spencer Street, and it was on the first floor and it had

14:30 a circular, a winding staircase, metal staircase, and you'd be going up there in the middle of the night and one night I was going up this staircase and there was a fellow half way up the staircase exposing himself. So I managed to get past him and shoot into the office and tell the guys and they rushed out but of course he'd gone. Well, after that we both went up the spiral staircase.

15:00 There were other funny instances. We never ever, we were supposed to if we had a puncture, we were supposed to do it ourselves, but we never ever had to do it ourselves because there were just so many army personnel on the road that the guys would stop and they'd do it for us. So we never ever had to do that.

Was that just a matter of batting eyelids and sweet smiles?

Oh no, you really didn't have to try. There's quite a good feeling between,

15:30 you know, if you were in the army you were all pals. No, you didn't have to do anything like that. They just offered.

Okay then, and you were mostly a Don R [dispatch rider] in your time at Fawkner Park? Did you do any other duties?

Yes. When I was being demobbed, in the army if you enlisted in Sydney you had to go to Sydney to be

16:00 demobbed and when I was in Sydney waiting to be demobbed, I was driving staff cars which I didn't like and ambulances. The ambulance, that was awful because we drove the ambulances to a railway siding at Concord and then these young men would be put in the

16:30 ambulance and we'd take them to Concord Hospital and they arrived in these railway carriages that had, all the windows were barricaded and these young men, they were just like zombies. These were the shell-shock victims. Now whether they were drugged to keep them quiet or not I don't know,

17:00 but they were, the conditions under which they were, which they arrived were shocking. They were unkempt, they were dirty and I just, I was so shocked and I was just so angry that these young men were treated this way and it was then that the full horror of war struck me and

17:30 I've never forgotten that to this day and I hate war. Broken bones can be mended but minds, I mean I guess some of those guys spent the rest of their lives in hospital and I was just appalled at that. Staff car driving, I'd place officers in three categories. The first category

18:00 are the gentleman officers. The second category were guys who were so puffed up you thought, what's wrong with you that you, you know, a couple of pips on your shoulder make you feel as though you're JC [Jesus Christ] himself. The last lot, we used to call them the WHS, that was the Wandering Hands Society, and

18:30 you, the best way, I mean I was just so young. I joined up when I was 18 and you just sort of move away and I just used to glare at them because you couldn't abuse them and tell them just what you thought of them because you knew that ultimately in that situation their word would be believed and you just wondered about

19:00 how much they would believe from you. So that's my opinion of officers.

Would a stern look generally work?

Oh well, I just used to glare at them. Did you say a stern word?

Or a look, yeah.

Oh a look, no, it was mainly a look. I'd just glare at them.

Would that do the trick?

Oh yes, and I used to be so angry because I used to think how dare you treat me like this, and I think they probably knew what I was thinking.

19:30 No, I didn't have any problem. That managed to calm them down.

So was this after the war had ended?

Yes.

Right. Do you remember that day? Was that a big day of celebration?

Oh no, wait a minute. No, when it ended I was at Fawkner Park.

Okay.

Oh yes, there was everybody tearing around the place and everybody very very happy.

20:00 **Did you come into Melbourne, into the city?**

No. At Fawkner Park, we just joined hands and went around and around and around.

And so once you were demobbed [demobilised], okay then, so what did life hold for you after the army?

Well, that was one of the reasons how I came to get out of the army earlier because I was going to do nursing and you

20:30 could get out of the army earlier. This wasn't before the war ended, it was just that all the paperwork and all that sort of stuff took so long that if you were going into one of the professions like nursing or teaching or doing a university course you could get out earlier. So that's what I did, having wanted to do nursing for years and years and years I finally got to

21:00 do it.

Whereabouts did you train?

The Alfred. This was quite convenient because living in the middle of Fawkner Park I could just whip over the road to do all the preliminary office work. So I did my training and loved it.

Were you dealing much with ex-servicemen?

Nursing?

21:30 **Hmm.**

No, not much.

Okay.

No, the thing, when I was in the children's ward at the Alfred we used to have quite a number of mothers, or children whose mothers when pregnant were in Europe and they didn't have a proper diet, and as a result of this quite a number of these children were born with all sorts of

22:00 abnormalities and illness and that was rather sad, but not servicemen. No, wait a minute, sometimes we had quite a few ex-servicemen came in with kidney problems and this was due to the fact that when they were in the services they just, they took

22:30 sulphur drugs and they took them indiscriminately and as a result they had, they developed kidney complications. Some of them were disastrous but they just kept on popping these pills and that's what happened eventually.

Did you come to specialise as a nurse?

In what

23:00 way do you mean?

Were you working in one ward, one area?

Oh, you changed around all the time. You do three months, male surgical, female surgical, male medical, children, psychiatric, a bit of everything.

So when did you meet your husband?

In my second year of training.

Would you like to tell us

23:30 **about that?**

Oh, he was a blind date.

Really? They work out sometimes.

Yeah. Well when I finished my training I intended going to the west to do my midwifery, instead of which I got married.

Okay then. Let's go back to the early part of the story. Did your father talk much about his experience in the navy or the merchant navy?

Oh yes.

24:00 He used to talk about the various places he went to, countries, and what happened, 'cause the merchant navy, that wasn't government controlled. The merchant navy, they delivered merchandise, food, all sorts of stuff and they didn't have

24:30 convoys and all these ships to protect them. They were on their own.

It must've been pretty frightening for him?

Yes, but he, this wasn't obvious. It couldn't have been frightening if he wanted to go back when the Second World War started. No, he seemed to be able to cope with that very well, but when he was in

25:00 the Royal Australian Navy he was more or less doing a teaching job at Garden Island and it was during this period that the Japanese sent these submarines into the harbour and one of the ships that was a training ship at Garden Island, that was bombed and there were many young men who were killed and Dad was

25:30 devastated at that. I mean he would've been one of the victims had he been working at that particular time but he wasn't and they were all young men and he was very very upset, very sad, 'cause he used to bring these guys home and particularly the Englishmen because my mother was English and she loved that when these young fellows came because she could talk about London and

26:00 the old country.

Well what did you know of the old country growing up? Did your mother talk to you much about it?

Oh yes, incessantly. London Bridge and Trafalgar Square and all these well known places, and when I eventually went overseas and went to London the extraordinary thing was as soon as I arrived there I just felt I belonged. It was the most uncanny feeling

26:30 and I think it was all this indoctrination when I was a child. Mum never ever went back but I think she may have liked to, but of course finances didn't permit that.

It wasn't as easy back then, was it?

No, no.

Did you grow up feeling that you were an Australian citizen or perhaps a British subject?

Australian citizen. My father,

27:00 his father was Norwegian, not that Dad knew much about Norway, but, now what was the question again? I've forgotten.

How much you felt Australian, or part of Britain.

Oh yes. Oh no, totally Australian but very proud to have an English mother and a Norwegian grandfather.

Did you have much to do with

27:30 **your grandfather?**

No.

Was he in Australia?

No, didn't know him at all.

Okay. What did your mother tell you of life in England during the First World War?

Oh, about the Zeppelins. They were frightening apparently, made them run for cover and there was all this – I don't quite know,

28:00 I think Zeppelins were a type of bomb, I'm not quite sure, but they wrought an awful lot of damage.

I think they were the airships, weren't they, the gas filled airships that came over?

I don't know anything about that.

So did your father, I mean did you grow up hearing stories about how they met and the effect that his

28:30 **travelling had on his love life I mean?**

Oh yes, they met, my Mum was walking down the street and these naval men were walking behind, simple as that, and I don't know just how much influence he, well, obviously he had quite a lot of influence, but as far as

29:00 his experiences, I don't know about. He was a great tease, Dad, in a way. In a gentle sort of way, never cruel, always very gentle.

What sort of person was your mum?

Mum was a firebrand, she'd fly in the air. She had this very quick temper and she'd get upset about trivia and I remember

29:30 as a child looking at her when she was sort of, you know, going crazy about nothing and I used to think I'm not going to be like that when I grow up, and I wasn't but she was a very very kind feeling lady, always seemed to be making a cake for somebody who was in some sort of trouble or she felt they needed it.

30:00 And then she worked for the Red Cross for quite a while. I'm not sure what she did with the Red Cross but she worked at the Red Cross. It was all voluntary, but she was very caring and kind. She didn't mellow as she grew older. Neither of my parents grew to any great age. Dad died in his 50s and Mum died in her early 60s, both from cardiac conditions.

30:30 So I never expected to live as long as I have. With that sort of history you think, well, but I've certainly outlived both of them.

Do you feel your mum always felt she was away from home or did Australia become her home as well?

I'd say Australia became her home definitely, yeah. She made friends easily.

31:00 I can remember her telling us when she was coming to Australia, that must've been extremely rough because, in more ways than one, because they didn't get enough to eat and one day they must've been close to land somewhere and one of the sailors on the boat managed to catch a pigeon and gave it to Mum and she made a pigeon pie on the boat. I mean that sounds crazy,

31:30 doesn't it, but that's the stories she used to tell. She always used to say pigeons make wonderful pies. She didn't ever try it on us but.

I don't think I'm game either.

No.

It's such an amazing commitment to come from England to Australian in that period. Did she talk about what she imagined or why she made such a major decision?

32:00 I think initially she might've been rather homesick, but Mum was a person, she'd make the most of things. Both my parents were like that, and she got involved with the community and then of course with my brother being in hospital for so long, I mean she was kept pretty busy

32:30 because he used to have the operations at RPA. Have you seen this program on television, RPA?

I've heard of it, yeah.

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and at the opening of this program in the foyer's there's, the floor is tiled and I can remember as a child, I mean George and I spent a lot of time going to hospital. You'd go in the foyer and there was this

33:00 beautiful tiled floor which I always admired and then when I saw it on the television I thought, oh, I know that, and once they were convalescing, these children, following operations, they went to Collaroy which was a rehabilitation hospital and it was a big old home and at the back there was

33:30 a verandah, semi-circle, and they used to wheel these kids out onto this verandah in their beds in the summer time. They didn't worry about the effects of sunlight in those days, and George and I, at Collaroy the beach had a lot of rock pools, and George and I used to spend hours and hours at these rock pools while

34:00 Mum would be with Ronnie. Ronnie was a child everybody loved. He had a beautiful personality and the nurses used to come along and give him a hug and I think that's where I decided I wanted to be a nurse, but that kept Mum

34:30 very busy.

What sort of effect did it have on the family do you think?

Look, we just accepted it. Ron would be having an operation, he'd get over the operation, we'd go to Collaroy then it would be time for another operation and so it went on, and it was just a way of life. We just accepted it and George and I,

35:00 even though there was a tremendous amount of attention paid to Ronnie, we didn't ever feel left out. It was just part of our family life. You just have to accept these things. Not that that was our attitude. We just accepted it full stop.

How did your family afford the hospital fees

35:30 **and so on?**

Oh, they didn't have to pay for that, and you see in those days they didn't, surgeons and physicians, they worked on an honorary system and they would work in the hospitals free of charge. That prevailed when I was first doing my nursing.

36:00 **How did they get money? Did they have their own private practice as well?**

Yes,

Okay.

And they would devote so many days per week to working in the public hospital. They were treated like little gods and some of them acted like little gods too, but nevertheless they were obviously generous men.

Did Ronnie have the same doctors throughout?

I think so, yes.

Do you remember them?

I

36:30 don't, no, I don't, but I can remember Mum talking about them. She thought they were absolutely wonderful and they were. To think that they could get him to walk again and when he did finally walk he walked with a limp, but he did walk whereas previously he couldn't.

Was Ron able to go to school at all?

Gosh,

37:00 that's a good question. Oh no, they had school within the hospital. That's right, yeah. I don't know, probably so many hours per day, but yes, they did have school.

I mean, did that mean did you miss school to go in there and did you lose that school?

No. When he was at RPH, that wasn't very far from home, but Collaroy was a long way away and we would only go there on weekends.

37:30 But anyway he knew that we couldn't go there as often as when he was at RPA, and that was another thing, you know, that was accepted. Not enough acceptance today I don't think. Too many people jumping up and down.

I think that's very true. Did your mother have you making cards and things for Ronnie? I mean

38:00 **when he was at Glenroy?**

Collaroy?

Collaroy, sorry, yeah.

I don't know. I don't think so. I don't remember that. But I guess it took over our life but as I say that was our life, that was it.

Tape 2

00:33 **Well, we'll pick up again. I'd like to know more about your school experience. Whereabouts did you go to school?**

I went to the local primary school and then I went to Arncliffe Domestic Science School and that was only, that only went to second year

01:00 and that's when I left. I expected to go on to Kogarah Girls' High School, but no, no, you go and get a job. So that was that. I was just so disappointed because I loved school and I was a good student. But anyway that's what I was told to do and that was it. I couldn't do anything else about it.

Were many of your fellow students able to go on?

Some did but the majority didn't,

01:30 because you know, it was Depression and just people just couldn't afford it, another mouth to feed. No, you go out and get a job.

What did you like most about school?

I've always had a thirst for knowledge and I read a lot. I've always read a lot.

02:00 I just loved it. I was never bored, just loved school.

What were your teachers like?

Oh, they were great. I always seemed to make friends with teachers and drag them back home, and I can remember one of the teachers. I lived in an industrial

02:30 suburb and one of these teachers came from Artarmon which is on the North Shore of Sydney and she took a group of her students to her home. Artarmon on the North Shore, it's you know, the North Shore is rather beautiful, and I can remember this house. I thought it was a palace and it was beautiful.

03:00 I just couldn't believe that anybody would have such a big house to live and so beautiful, but that was an experience.

That's such a nice thing for a teacher to take all her students home.

Oh yes.

You wouldn't do that these days.

No.

You'd be afraid to do that?

Yes, yeah. No, we had some great teachers. They were very good.

Were they mostly male or female?

Female.

03:30 **What were you taught about war and particularly the First World War when you were at school?**

Not a great deal as I recall. You leaned a lot about history and geography which you don't seem to do very much this days, do they? And English of course, but no, I don't recall anything about the

04:00 war.

What about Australian history? What were you taught about that?

Oh yes. Yes, all the explorers, Leichhardt, Burke and Wills, all those chaps. Oh yes, a lot about Australian history, and the geography of Australia too. Sometimes I say to my grandchildren, you know, ask them what's the capital of

04:30 Western Australia? Haven't a clue. So they don't go into that very much these days. Times change. If you live long enough it's very interesting to observe the changes and the way society changes, people's beliefs, but human nature doesn't change

05:00 but a lot around you does. So I hope you grow to a great age and then you'll know exactly what I'm talking about, and fashions, fashions are fascinating. Like you see the fashions change and my daughter, she says, "Oh, we talk about something or other," and I say, "It's just coming

05:30 around again, it's been here before."

What were you wearing as a young teen?

Shortish frocks. Not a lot of slacks. I don't know whether I owned a pair of slacks. I must have, but all I can remember is frocks.

When you entered the workforce what was the sort

06:00 **of standard dress then?**

That was coming into the stage of the 'bobby sockses', you know, short socks and shoes and oh, ballerina dresses with skirts that go way out here. Yeah, that's about all I can remember.

What was your, besides work, what was your

06:30 **social life like? You're still quite young but yet you're in the workforce so it's a kind of in between stage, isn't it?**

Social life revolved around the church and they had tennis, table-tennis, dances on a Saturday night. They used to put on plays, but mainly

07:00 around the church. This is where I think the churches let young people down today. They haven't created enough interests or activities within the church and it became sort of a big family because you knew everybody. No, it was very good, very good.

What were you particularly interested in?

07:30 I played tennis and the dances. Oh, and I was in the choir and went to church every Sunday. That's about it I suppose.

Would you say you were a fairly religious person?

No, no. I believe

08:00 but no, I wasn't religious. Not in a fanatical way, anyway.

Well how were your parents on that front? Were they fairly devout?

Oh no, no, no. They were good people but they weren't devout and devout people are not necessarily good people, I don't think.

08:30 **So for your family the churches had a real social function then?**

Sorry?

For your family the church had a social function primarily?

Well for me?

Mmm.

Dad never went when I was going off to church. He always used to say, well say one for me, and Mum went to church occasionally but not regularly. No, they weren't devout, and George, my younger brother,

09:00 he never went to church. He was a bit of a villain.

The youngest can get away with being villains, can't they?

Yes, yep.

I missed talking about the Domestic – what was it called – Domestic College or Domestic Science?

Yeah.

Yeah. What was involved in that?

You learned cooking, hygiene,

09:30 bookkeeping, typing, that sort of thing.

This is after primary school?

Yes.

That instead of high school or is that sort of in-between?

It's in-between. I forget what they used to call it, but it was just a couple of years in between primary school and high school.

Is that common for people to go through that?

10:00 I don't know about common, but that's the way it was.

Was usual?

Mmm.

Okay. It's just that I've not heard of it so it's very interesting. Did the boys have a similar strand? So I was wondering, I'm assuming it's all girls in domestic science.

Yes.

Did the boys have a similar sort of in-between part of their education?

I suppose they did but I don't know what it was.

Okay.

10:30 No, don't know.

Speaking of cooking and things like that, how did your mum improvise during the Depression?

She was very careful, very frugal and once, I can remember when my father was unemployed a big bowl of soup would be the meal of the day and it was so thick you'd just about be able to stand the spoon up in it,

11:00 but it was extremely wholesome. She used to make our clothes and Dad was a great gardener. So the Depression, you were aware of it but it didn't affect you because you were never hungry, you always had clothes to wear and you were given a lot of love.

11:30 So it didn't impinge all that much, but they just got on with it.

How about things that kids want like treats or toys or things like that? How much of a part did they play in your childhood?

Oh, I don't know, we always seemed to have, oh Mum was, she was very, she was quite clever

12:00 really and she would make toys, this is soft toys and I was unaware of being deprived of any toys. I guess it was because everybody else was in the same boat, and you used to swap toys. We used to do that quite a bit.

With your friends?

12:30 Yeah, yeah, but when I look today and see the abundance of everything I just wonder how young people are going to get on if they ever are in any sort of crisis having been used to an abundance of everything, too much.

Did your family have a radio?

Yep.

13:00 Yes. It was a big thing about this high and I always loved listening to music and I can see myself now sitting on the floor listening to the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] classical music and Dad used to call it my tinkly music because I just loved it and it wasn't because I'd been

13:30 used to it. I just loved classical music and then they used to have children's programs you could listen to, and then there was, I think it was Bob Dyer and Bob Day later. Oh, and another thing I used to do

was, Dad was a great

14:00 card player, euchre, and he belonged to this euchre club and he must've been a pretty good player because he was always winning theatre tickets and Mum never ever wanted to go so Dad took me, and we went to the Tivoli a lot and saw plays like White Horse Inn, Naughty Marietta, The

14:30 Pyjama Game and a lot of vaudeville. That was, I loved that. I used to feel very special going with my father.

Did you get all dressed up?

Oh, sort of, sort of.

Did you have a favourite play or actor?

I used to prefer plays to the Tivoli

15:00 and Roy, have you heard of Roy Rene?

Afraid not.

No? Roy Rene, he was a great comedian and he was on the Tivoli circuit quite a bit. Of course they would have a chorus line. There was a lot of dancing, singers and jugglers and magicians,

15:30 a bit of everything.

What was the comedy like back then? Was it a bit risque for its time?

Yes, yeah. I can remember sitting next to Dad and Dad nearly falling off the chair laughing and I didn't know what he was laughing about. Oh no, it was quite risque, but everybody seemed to enjoy themselves.

How old would you have been when you were going

16:00 **to these things?**

Probably about eight, yeah. But the plays, I loved the plays.

Just back to the radio, what part did news bulletins play in your household?

Not much to me. Mum and Dad always wanted to listen to them, but not me. I was probably a bit too

16:30 young.

I suppose you were a teenager or early teenager when things are starting to happen in Europe too. Did that have any impact on you?

It did to Mum. She was, you know, most concerned about that.

What would she say?

Well, all her family were there and

17:00 it wasn't so much, she didn't say a lot but what she did say you were aware that she was concerned. She used to say, well, they won't have to put up with the Zeppelins but I think they had to put up with much worse actually.

17:30 **You said you remembered when war was declared, what were your parents saying on that day?**

Oh, they just thought it was terrible. I mean I think if you've been through one war, there's another one declared, you don't want a bar of it because you know how horrendous it can be.

18:00 You know, even this present war that's going on, well, they say the war's over but there's still loss of life going on so it's not over.

Well when the Second World War began, what sort of sense did you have then of the scale of it, of how long it would last or anything like that?

Oh, you

18:30 know, the powers that be said it was going to last, you know, they always say it's going to last so many months or a year, and of course it goes on and on and on. So you just don't believe these politicians, you get that way anyway.

What were they saying about the Second World War? 'Cause I think it was September, so.

Yeah. Well they seemed to – everybody

19:00 seemed to be fired up and wanted to contribute in some way, and you know, there were people knitting

and making cakes and sending cakes. You could buy these, what were called, Willow cake tins and they were round and they had a lid and you made the cake in this tin and you put the lid on it and then you had

19:30 to sew it up in calico, which sounds crazy, but that's what you did and then you wrote the address on this calico, and that was to the boys. My mother used to send them to me when I was in the army and it was great because some people never got cakes. The people who did, well, you always shared them around.

20:00 **In those early days were you making cakes for people before you yourself joined the army?**

Yeah, my mother was.

Who for?

I think that you could, you could just make cakes and there was a group who sent them off. It was just a voluntary thing, a contribution to the war effort.

Was she involved in the Red Cross at this stage?

20:30 Yeah.

What was she doing with them for the war?

What was she doing? I think she might've been in an office. I'm not too sure about that, but there were all sorts of things you could do. I mean, there was food rationing, there was clothes rationing, so you had to be a bit inventive to cope with all this

21:00 because you were only allowed so many eggs, so much butter, so much sugar and clothes rationing, well, you had to make do with that too, but when I was in the army I didn't need clothes rations, clothes coupons, so I used to give mine away, and I mean it used to be rather difficult if somebody was getting married because

21:30 they'd need yards and yards of fabric to, you know, make a wedding gown.

So what would happen then? Would people pitch in with –

Yes. There was a lot of that actually which was good. People can be extremely generous in certain situations and help one another.

22:00 No, that was good.

Well in those early days how else was Australia affected by the war?

Travel, couldn't travel, and food of course, food rationing and clothes rationing. When I was in the army, when I first came to Melbourne in Collins Street, they had what they called the ACF,

22:30 which was the Australian Comforts Fund and they had tea rooms and, in Collins Street, it was opposite the Australia, the Australia Hotel that was. You could go in there and it was rather cosy. They would have these lovely chintzy table cloths on the table and a little bowl of flowers and they had, you could

23:00 have pies and pasties and scones and all that sort of stuff, and then they also had an office where if you wanted to be billeted somewhere on your days off they would arrange if for you, and I, when I first came to Melbourne I was a bit homesick so I thought I'll go and get a billet,

23:30 which I did and I went to stay with this family in Kew and they were very kind and I always stayed with them, excuse me.

Sure.

And they had this beautiful old home in Kew and they had,

24:00 all personnel could go there like army, navy or airforce, and sometimes some of the guys would come along and Mrs Gordon would say, they won't be back. You know, oh, and some of the girls too. They wanted a good time, they wanted party time and plenty to drink. Well they didn't get that there, but that didn't really worry me. It was just

24:30 the home atmosphere that I appreciated and I went with them, went to stay with them on all my days off.

Did they have children in the services?

They had one daughter, she was in the air force and they other two children that were younger. No, they were wonderful people, they were English. They were wonderful people and there were a lot of families who were doing that

25:00 during the war. And then you could also, theatre tickets were donated through the Australian Comforts Fund and also at Fawkner Park there were tickets donated. So I saw a lot of plays during that time.

At which play houses in Melbourne?

There was

25:30 the Comedy. The Comedy was the main one and of course there was the Tivoli. Yeah, mainly the Comedy, oh, and Her Majesty's. So you know, there were a lot of generous people.

Note: Audio interference 02:25:45 to 02:26:15.

Any of those performances stand out in your mind?

Oh I think White Horse Inn again. I mean

26:00 they keep putting, they haven't put it on for years and years and years but it was often repeated, you know, many years later. Oh, and I went to some symphony concerts.

Where did they perform? Was there a concert hall?

Town Hall.

Okay.

26:30 'Cause this, the big complex we have today, that hadn't been built then, but the Town Hall, I still think the acoustics at the Town Hall are the best. It's a lovely Town Hall.

That was getting off the track a bit. I was wondering also about that early period of the war when before you'd enlisted but the war had been declared, if you knew any

27:00 **young men who were starting to enlist and starting to disappear from the social scene?**

Oh yes, yeah, yeah. Some from the church and the neighbourhood. Oh yes, quite a lot of them.

How did that affect your community?

Oh, it just, there weren't as many fellows at dances and everybody seemed to be

27:30 writing letters to their boyfriends or sending cakes, and then you'd hear that somebody had died or somebody was missing and there were these lists in the papers and that was devastating.

What would you do if you heard that someone's, some family had lost a son or was missing? What would the community do?

28:00 Well, much the same as they do today, endeavour to be supportive and as caring as you can without being too intrusive.

Would your church do anything in the way of a memorial or remembrance?

I think they just made an announcement, because you know, they came thick and fast

28:30 for a period there. It always made everybody sad and then until the next wave. Oh, not good.

Did you have someone close to you go away and

No, no, no, not really.

Did you have a boyfriend at that stage?

Yes, one of the guys from

29:00 the church. But boy and girlfriends were different situation to what they are today. They were just, you were more or less just friends and there wasn't the sexual activity in those days that there is today. Different world.

29:30 **What would you do together on a date, would you go to a movie?**

Yes, yeah.

Were you one for the movies, did you like the movies?

Yes, still love the movies.

Who was your favourite actor in those days?

Oh, Robert Taylor, Clark Gable, yes, can't think of any more, but they were the two.

Do you remember any of the memorable films of that period?

30:00 Oh, there's Gone With the Wind, Tale of Two Cities, that was Ronald Coleman. I don't know whether The Third Man was in that era, and a lot of the British films, they were wonderful.

Is that your mum's influence do you think?

30:30 No, I don't think so. I think their productions are better and most of their actors were better. No, I just prefer British films.

Do you remember the newsreels that used to accompany films?

Oh yes. Well they were a source of giving you more news because it was the custom prior to, if you

31:00 went to the cinema on a Saturday night there was always a newsreel and then there was always this travel, not Fitzpatrick, there was always a travel film, wasn't very long and that was the custom, the travel film and the newsreel.

31:30 **What sort of things would they show on the newsreel about the war particularly?**

That was very much vetted I think. They didn't show you anything that was too horrific but it was bad enough even so. The theatre was always silent when the newsreel was on, when they were showing

32:00 aspects of the war. It was very silent, in between the smoke 'cause you see, you could smoke in the theatre in those days. There was all this smoke billowing around.

Was there a sense then that you weren't getting the full story from those newsreels or was it something you realised later?

Oh, it's something I realised later. Oh yes, well

32:30 it would have to be vetted I would say.

Would they have a sort of we're winning the war, everything's fine sort of tone to them? I mean what was their message usually?

There was always the politician saying how well, you know, we were winning the war. Oh yes, there was always that.

33:00 **Also during this period do you remember any recruitment drives for men and women?**

Oh yes, in the early part of the war, oh definitely, definitely.

What characterised those? What sort of –

Oh, mainly trying to encourage the public to be patriotic and save your country. All that stuff.

33:30 **Before Japan entered the war was there a sense that people were fighting for Australia or for England?**

For England. Definitely for England.

Well then recruitment drives for that period, how would they present that message? I mean would they say do it for England? What was the sort of message there?

Well, do it for Australia, but you were also doing it for

34:00 England, and Winston Churchill being the great statesman that he was and being a marvellous orator, this made people feel that they wanted to help and Australia in those days was very much royalist, very much. So therefore people felt that they were helping England

34:30 and indirectly helping themselves. Yes, Winston Churchill was extremely influential, extremely.

What sort of influence did Menzies have?

He was a great orator and he was very much respected.

35:00 Oh yes, I'd say he had quite a lot of influence.

Do you remember when Japan entered the war? Do you remember hearing that news?

Yes.

What did you know about Japan before that?

That they made a lot of china. You'd lift up a cup, 'Made in Japan', and Mum always said, of course it's inferior.

35:30 Oh everybody was really afraid because they were so close, and they were regarded as a cruel race in a way. Not all of them of course, it's never all of them, and being, I think being so

36:00 close. This is what people were afraid of. They were called the Yellow Peril, still called the Yellow Peril by some, but that was very much, oh, the Yellow Peril.

I think I've seen sort of pictures, images of the Nazi sort of cartoon and also the Japanese. Had you seen those around at that stage?

I think so, yes, yeah.

36:30 **What sort of image did they present of the Japanese?**

Not good. I can't quite describe it, but they were always small and not tall and always grimacing. Not very flattering at all.

Did you yourself think at that time that

37:00 **Australia was under threat?**

Oh yes, this was very much drummed into you by the politicians and oh yes, very much so.

What were your parents saying about that?

They weren't happy, you know.

37:30 I think many people were frightened and worried that this was going to make the war longer which it did of course and people, by this stage they'd had enough of war, had enough of it.

Already by that stage?

Oh yeah, yeah.

38:00 Yes, well, people have had enough of this present business, don't want anymore, but man being what he is I guess it will still go on.

I wasn't sure, I didn't catch before, did you, were you enlisted after the Japanese had entered the war?

I think so.

Okay.

I think so. I'm not sure about that.

Was there much in the way of recruitment for the women's

38:30 **services?**

Yes, yeah, because they were wanting to replace men with women so that they could send the fellows overseas. That's what it was all about and a lot of people said, "Oh, women won't be able to do this, they won't be able to do that." Well, the women did it very well indeed.

39:00 Oh yes. I mean they were everywhere, the women, doing all sorts of jobs.

So did you start to see women around in uniform?

They were everywhere, oh everywhere.

What did you think of them? What did you think of the look of them?

Oh, they looked good. They looked good.

39:30 Oh uniforms, if they're well designed, can look very smart. Yeah, all the three services, their uniforms were all good and you felt, having been you know, encouraged to be patriotic you felt good in uniform, felt that

40:00 you were doing something for your country, although I mean I wasn't terribly patriotic but at the same time you did feel that you were doing something.

Thanks for that.

Tape 3

00:31 **I had a few questions from before and one was about your father's business in the merchants again, and I'm wondering if you can recall any, his involvement when he was in the Second World War and what he did?**

Well he was, in the Second World War he was an instructor type

01:00 at Garden Island.

Where is Garden Island?

That's near the, you know the Harbour, Sydney Harbour? It's near the Botanical Gardens, not far from there and they had a ship there that they used probably for teaching methods, you know, information, and that's what he used to do.

Okay. So he was

01:30 **instructing other merchant navy men or –**

Oh no, no, this was, when he was at Garden Island he was in the RAN, that's the Royal Australian Navy.

Okay. So he re-enlisted in a different unit?

Yes.

And what was his rank?

Oh. I don't know.

That's alright. Any idea what sort of instruction he was offering on what sort of ships?

I

02:00 think it was just sort of general naval teaching, what duties one performed on a vessel.

Sure. Of course the reason I'm curious is if you recall any of the incidents of the sinking of the [HMAS] Kuttabul in Sydney Harbour when the mini subs came in?

Well that was, you know, I was telling you about the boat that was sunk and the

02:30 boys who were drowned, that was the one that was attached to Garden Island.

So the fellows who went down on that, on the Kuttabul, were his underlings?

Yes. That's why he was just so upset, and he was just lucky he wasn't there, 'cause he didn't live there because he lived in Sydney and he came home every day, every night. Yes, that

03:00 was, Dad was just devastated. I don't think I've ever seen him so upset because these were guys who he used to bring home. Mum would feed them and they'd play with us. No, it was very very sad.

He must've been gutted?

Sorry?

Well he must've been gutted. It's

Yes, yes.

hard enough losing somebody at all but

03:30 **I think**

And there were quite a number of them who were on the ship. Yes, I'd forgotten the name until you mentioned it then.

Do you recall seeing the nets in Sydney Harbour?

They were quite a way away. Like the fringe beaches within the harbour, the nets were way beyond that and you could barely see

04:00 them really.

No, I suppose they'd be under water, but what about when the news hit that there were two German mini subs in the bay, you know, it still seems incredulous today that could have happened?

Well everybody was, couldn't believe it and then when they got over that there was this absolute fear that that having happened, what else could happen

04:30 and that really brought war to the front door, you know, it was scary.

Could you say for example whether there were any real tangible changes before and after that event in terms of how people behaved?

I think security improved tremendously.

05:00 I don't know about behaviour, but security was one thing that was tightened tremendously and not, you know, you were told not to sort of gossip and pass on rumours. Not only because rumours were dangerous but because there could be eavesdroppers. This is all part of security of course.

Do you recall ever

05:30 **wondering or being suspicious of the possibility of someone in your community working for the Japanese or the Germans?**

No, no.

And did you have occasion to catch the ferries in the harbour before you enlisted and went to Melbourne?

Oh yes. Dad was, he loved the beach and it used to

06:00 be an outing when we'd go to the beach. We didn't have a car and Mum would carry this case, a case you know, ordinary case with food and we'd catch the tram to the Quay and then we'd catch the ferry to whichever beach we were going to go to and we'd be there for the day, and when I think about it now, I think the energy, how on earth could they be bothered, but they

06:30 did, and we used to go to Clifton Park, Nielsen Park. We rarely went to Manly 'cause they felt it was too crowded at Manly, whereas Clifton Park and Nielsen Park, they had these adjacent sort of parklands. They weren't exactly parklands but they were,

07:00 they were like parks and there was plenty of room to move around without falling over someone.

They've still got bushland around there too, I guess.

Are they? Yeah, well I haven't been there for years and years.

Do you recall at Nielsen Park there's a huge old turn of the century mansion? Yeah.

Yeah. What's it called?

I'm trying to remember myself. It's something like Grevally or one of those old English names.

Oh yes, that was, I can remember

07:30 seeing that place in the spring time when the wisteria was out and it had one of these verandahs right across the front and this wisteria was growing along this verandah. It was beautiful and of course it was elevated and it had this magnificent view of the Harbour.

It's extraordinary. During the war, would areas like that have been fortified or were there particular kinds of security in place?

08:00 Not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge. No, I don't remember.

And when you caught ferries during the '40s, early '40s, did the war make a ferry ride any different than ordinarily?

No, not really, no.

I just wondered with, you know, the Harbour's huge and the Kuttabul was a long

08:30 **way from the sort of ferry crossings**

Yeah.

but we're sort of still in the same area.

But the Harbour's so big, it's huge. No, I don't remember.

You probably would remember though

Probably, there might've been something at La Perouse, but I'm just guessing here. I don't really know for sure.

That's alright.

09:00 **Okay. I'm sure however though, you do remember some of the American ships coming in?**

I don't remember the ships but I remember the sailors, and when they did come in they were everywhere and of course the girls all used to go crazy. They created quite a lively atmosphere when they were here, but then

09:30 the army were here as well. I can remember seeing trucks with these dark men aboard in their American uniform. I don't know where they were, oh this is, oh yeah, that's right, that's in Sydney. I don't know where they were stationed but there were a lot of them here, but then General MacArthur was here too. I think this was his headquarters.

10:00 I don't know whether that was necessarily Sydney. I think that was Brisbane actually where his headquarters were, but they were in Sydney a lot of them.

With the presence of the Americans coming in after the Japanese entered the proceedings, how would you describe the civilian attitude to the sight and the sense of these Americans in

town?

Well, I

10:30 think the male community were very anti because the Americans had so much money and they could get all the girls, and of course the Australian servicemen and the civilians didn't have the money to spend that the Americans had. So the fellows weren't, the Australians weren't too happy.

What did your old salt of a dad have to say about the American

11:00 **sailors and so forth?**

I think he thought they were there to do a job and that was it.

Did he give you any particular words of wisdom in regards to them?

No, I don't think so, don't remember.

Speaking of which, you were, I'm just looking at the dates, you were only a 14 year old when the war started but you were well into your late teens as it progressed. Did you wonder whether it would take

11:30 **all the men and you wouldn't have a future with a husband and so on?**

No. The former part of the question, yes, I thought, "I wonder how many of them are going to come back," particularly when these casualty lists were printed in the paper because that just went on and on, these lists.

12:00 **Was it the sort of situation in which you couldn't continue to read that information? Would you eventually just stop reading the papers?**

I don't think one ever stopped reading, but you did feel oh, when is this going to end? Because it seemed to go on for so long.

When more and more men, and some women of course, but when more and more men started to die,

12:30 **did your attitude to death shift in any sense?**

I don't know about shifting. I thought it was terrible. No, it didn't shift.

Are there degrees of grief? Can you get used to grief or can you,

13:00 **can you take in the numbers of dead and think, no, I just can't feel that any more?**

I think it has greater impact when it's somebody directly connected to you. You can feel sorrow for other people but not to the degree if it's somebody close to you.

I was just wondering with the terrible tragedy of your brother drowning when you were young

13:30 **and then the possibility of your other brother going off to war, whether there was some connection there for you or whether it was different?**

I think it was different, different.

Where were you when your brother decided to join the RAF [Royal Air Force]?

I think I was probably in the army 'cause I'm, I was a year and a couple of months older than him

14:00 so I would've been in the army then.

Okay. Did he write to you and say he was joining up?

No.

How did you hear about it?

Mum told me. I mean he had, he was sort of wafting and you know, he was all over the place, was George. Now George is a good subject, a very good subject.

14:30 **Why is that?**

Oh, he's, well do you want me to go into that?

Oh yes, absolutely. You were the eldest sister and you joined up first, that must've had some impact on him?

I don't know, don't know. I think he always sort of,

15:00 he always looked up to me, but he seemed to get into situations, George. He married and then he had a defacto wife and children all in a line and then he was living in a caravan park. This is in Queensland or

15:30 northern New South Wales and there were two families close together, husband and wife in these two caravans and children, and they had a ticket in the lottery and they won this ticket and George's wife and Gwen's, the other wife, Gwen's husband, they just nicked off and there was

16:00 George left in a caravan park with two children. Gwen had four and George, they tried to trace this couple and couldn't, so George looked after Gwen and her children and so that was six children between them, and they eventually had a child and then George eventually married Gwen

16:30 and, but George tells this, used to tell this tale about he was in hospital once having a hernia operation and his legal wife, first legal wife came in to visit him and then his defacto came in and then Gwen came in and the patient in the other bed said to him, "Hey George, what's with you, you know, all these women coming in

17:00 to see you," and George told him who they were. This gives you an idea of the sort of person he was. He was happy go lucky, he was kind and I mean for a man to take on that responsibility. Anyway I think I did say they, Gwen and George eventually married and Gwen was,

17:30 they were just great together and I used to visit them up on the north coast and it was always a joy being with them, and George would, he was just so overweight and he'd grab hold of me sometimes and he'd say, come on little sister, I'll give you a big hug, and he was just a delight, and he died about 18 months ago now

18:00 and I was just so sad because he did calm down as he got older, but you never knew what he was going to do.

Was he like that as a little boy?

Well yes, he was in a way. When my brother died Mum devoted all her affection to George and at this stage Dad was in the, he was away

18:30 and no, he couldn't have been away. Anyway he was away part of the time and when George really needed a father Dad wasn't there part of the time and I, with hindsight I realise that I did feel a wee bit rejected, but then I always had Dad who, you know, just gave me so much affection.

19:00 So I didn't miss out, but yes, he was a bit of a lovable villain, he was.

Do you think he got something out of joining the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] because he must've joined quite late in the piece and probably didn't get sent overseas, or did he?

No, he went as far as Queensland I think. No, he didn't go overseas.

Did he do the Empire Air Training Scheme, do you know?

No idea.

Okay, and

19:30 **just at that point I wanted to talk about the Salvos [Salvation Army] too. They were incredibly instrumental during the war. How did they avail themselves to your mother when your brother died?**

Well one of the things they did was they'd provide meals, but the important thing was they asked her would she like to help them with an old

20:00 men's home where they used to hold a jumble sale and Mum went along there and she did this for years. Sometimes I'd go with her and I hated it because I used to hate the smell of old clothes, but Mum loved it and this was an opportunity for her to think about something else and it did help her,

20:30 and she, as I say, she did that for many many years.

And for you being in such a difficult situation, at the time did people offer any condolence to you as the sister of a dead brother?

I don't think so. You were aware that people felt sorry but to actually tell you, no, and

21:00 of course the custom was in those days, was that before the funeral the body would come to the house in the coffin and stay there overnight and people would come in to view the body. Oh, it was barbaric, barbaric custom, and I didn't want to,

21:30 but I was sort of made to feel that I should and I think that's wrong to make a child do something like that when they don't want to.

So you were only about nine or ten I suppose?

Mmm, and for many many years I just couldn't go to funerals, just couldn't. I am over that now but I still don't like it, but for

22:00 years I just couldn't go and after my brother died, Mum would go to the cemetery every Saturday afternoon, to Rookwood, and I would go with her and they used to have a stand there where you could lock up your bucket and your brush 'cause Mum used to scrub the grave. I mean she

22:30 really needed counselling because she was just obsessed. It was awful.

You can see why the Salvation Army gave her some instrumental sort of activity to, as they say, take her mind of it. Obviously it was a kind of obsession too. Are you aware of any help

23:00 **given by the local churches other than the Salvos or by her girlfriends or her own mother?**

Oh well her mother was, you know, she was in England. No, it was the Sallies only. I mean the neighbours were very good but it was the Sallies who were just so positive in what they did, and they did it in such a way that you didn't feel they were intruding. They were just so, and they were marvellous

23:30 to George and I. No, it was the Sallies mainly.

And how did your father take to the fact that your Mum had become so involved in the Salvation Army?

He didn't mind, and it was just once a week she'd go to this jumble sale.

And was it

24:00 **very much a case of, were they all in uniform with – ?**

Oh yes, their bonnets, the lassies.

Did you know much about their own philosophy of the world and their own particular kind of spirituality?

Oh yes, because at one stage we used to go to church there. This was before I started going to the Church of England because I was baptised as a Church of England, but as the Sallies were so close we used to go there and I can remember

24:30 they were, I was taking cornet lessons, yeah, the cornet, that's right, and I was getting on very well with these cornet lessons until I learnt that they expected me to go around on a Friday night and play the cornet with the band outside the pubs, and I thought, no, no, no, that's not for me, and then the lassie would go into the hotel and sell the War Cry which was their publication.

25:00 No, those bonnets.

Did they ever get you into a uniform?

No, no.

And was it very much the case of, you know, the tambourine waving and banging and the, they sold the War Cry but they had a particular kind of a pitch as well I think in the streets.

Oh yes, they'd form a ring and they'd have their cornets, tambourines, trombones

25:30 and away they'd go and then somebody would give a little sort of sermon and ask people to be saved and that was what they used to do on a Friday night. I think it was Friday night, it was either Friday night or Saturday night.

I think you're right and I think it was very much the time when a lot of fellows might take their weekly earnings to the pub.

That's right, and then of course you'd

26:00 invariably get the hecklers and they just used to smile at them and ignore them. Well, they couldn't sort of get into a fight with them really.

What would the hecklers call out?

Oh, derogatory sort of remarks and tell them to go home and that sort of stuff.

I don't think the Catholics have much time for the Salvos

26:30 **but I think everybody's opinion shifted a fair bit during the war, especially the work they did in New Guinea. It's very interesting. Let's talk if we might about some of the work you did before you joined up. I'm interested to know what your connection with Manpower was, if at all?**

That was before Manpower really

27:00 came in. That was when I first left school, I could chop and change, and I'd just, you know, go to a job for a day or two and I'd come home and I'd say to Mum, "I'm not going back there again!" Oh, she was just so patient with me when I think about it now.

It’s interesting, isn’t it, because money wasn’t easy to come by?

No, but there was no way I was going to go back to some of these

27:30 places.

What was it about them that put you off?

Sometimes they, they used to do a lot of piece work in some of these dress factories and I didn’t think that was right. You were just, almost like a big, you know, soldier behind you egging you on, or if somebody was rude to me.

28:00 I don’t like rudeness, I never have. Things like that, or else they were dirty. Some of them were filthy and then as time progressed then the Manpower came into being.

Okay. What areas in Sydney were some of these factories that you worked in?

Newtown, around the Broadway, you obviously

28:30 know Sydney a bit? Yeah. Camperdown, around that area.

You know the occupational health and safety kind of obsession that we have these days, for example, what existed then that would just be an outrage these days?

Cleanliness for one thing.

29:00 And in some situations where there were machines there weren’t sufficient safety guards and all that sort of thing.

To what degree of cleanliness are you talking, rats running around?

Not quite as blatant as that, but lunchrooms that weren’t clean and floors that weren’t swept regularly.

29:30 Just general cleanliness.

What provisions were made for workers in that respect then? Like were you given any security at all with regard to safety?

No. Oh, another thing was, you know, male harassment, that was rampant.

30:00 Yeah, that was really bad in those days.

I imagine the foreman and the managers would all be men and the piece workers would all be women?

That’s right.

So can you give me an example of how that would operate? Would it be like bullying harassment or sexual harassment or what we call, what we now call sexual harassment?

I think what is called sexual harassment today. You know, as I was talking about some officers belonging to the WHS, well a lot of

30:30 these men in industry were like that and felt that it was their right. Yeah, that’s about the worst.

Was there ever a place to make a complaint in that sense?

Not really, not really because these fellows took it as their right and women were sort of not strong enough to stand up to them.

Were there ever old women that

31:00 **would try and sort them out on your behalf?**

Oh, in a half-hearted sort of way, not sufficiently positive to have an impact.

And what about accidents, they must’ve happened in some of those factories?

One most frequent accident was machinists would get the

31:30 needle going through their finger, but that wasn’t any fault due to the factory. That was just, that just happened with machinists because they got a bit careless.

Was there any such thing as migrant workers in the factories then?

No, no.

32:00 **Just lassies from the Western Suburbs or elsewhere I guess?**

No, I’m not aware of that.

I'm not surprised you didn't want to work there for very long, but you said you had this ambition to be a nurse. Was there anything else that you thought you might try your hand at?

No. I can remember when my father signed the papers for me to go into the army.

32:30 He said to me, "My girl, you'll know all about discipline!" Well my girl, it didn't worry her at all. Everybody was in the same boat, you were all doing the same thing. You just did as you were told. It was no problem.

I was going to ask you about joining up in a moment, but the, was there any such thing as discipline in some of those factory jobs?

Oh yes, yes,

33:00 there were rules, but basic sort of rules.

But it was different though. I mean what I'm hearing from a lot of people is that the army gave you something whereas the so called rules and regulations of a job differed entirely.

I think rules in the army made more sense and there's nothing worse than rules that makes no sense but which you have to abide by.

33:30 I think that creates a lot of antagonism.

What was it about the AWAS that appealed to you?

I think initially it was to get away from a boring job and I was starting to feel I'd like a little freedom, but that wasn't really a great issue, it was just being disappointed that I couldn't do nursing, so what else am I going

34:00 to do? So as there were these recruitment drives going on for women to join the services, I thought, yes, that's what I'll do.

What attracted you to the AWAS particularly? You could've joined the WAAAFS Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] or the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service]?

I don't know the answer to that question. I've no idea.

I'm curious about the recruitment drives. Were they like a physical

34:30 **demonstration or were they a poster sign?**

Posters mainly. A young woman up on a poster there somewhere looking all glamorous in her uniform. Yes, that was the main type of recruitment.

There's a couple of shops, I guess they must've been in Pitt Street or they might've been in Broadway, but I believe they had, they redressed the shopfronts with AWAS uniforms and so on. I don't

35:00 **suppose you saw those, did you?**

No, no.

'Cause I'm sure those posters made girls look quite a bit more glamorous than perhaps the uniforms really were.

Could be. They have to get the most out of it.

Did they make any promises in the recruitment drives that they didn't fulfil when you joined up?

Not really, no. You were allowed to state what you wanted to do

35:30 and as I said previously, I wanted to be a teleprinter operator. Well I started that, but then when they were short of drivers there was no consultation, you were just told that's what you were going to do.

What attracted you to teleprinting?

At one of my jobs there was a women there

36:00 who used to talk about teleprinting and I suppose she must've been pretty good at telling me about it because I sort of thought yeah, that's what I'd like to do. I didn't know much about it at all really.

What was teleprinting then?

Oh, it was associated with Morse code but beyond that I don't know.

36:30 **So it was signals work?**

Yes, yeah. Well see, I was in a signals unit, great unit, 6.

Almost autonomous within the AWAS I believe?

You mean women in signals?

Well I'm not sure. I have heard from somebody else that Sibyl Irving thought that, somebody wanted to make the signals a separate unit to the AWAS and Irving said, no, they will all be the same

37:00 **organisation. That could be wrong.**

I wouldn't know.

But they had a reputation I believe anyway, the sigs, for being a good lot to belong to.

Oh they were. They were fair and whilst it was all women, there didn't appear to be any cattiness. It was good, great atmosphere.

Did you know any AWAS

37:30 **women before you joined up?**

No, no.

Did you see them in the streets?

Oh yes, they were everywhere.

Okay, so what branch did you go to join up, what recruiting office?

Oh, it was in Sydney somewhere. I don't know where.

And did you have to have an interview or

38:00 **did they just give you some papers to sign? How did you join up?**

You filled in papers and your parents, or your father had to sign them, but I don't recall any sort of interview. You were told, once all the paperwork was done you were told where you had to report to and that was it as far as I can remember.

38:30 **How long did they ask you to sign yourself away for?**

They didn't, no, I don't think they did.

Okay, alright we're going to swap.

Tape 4

00:35 **All right, the Sally [Salvation Army] hymns?**

Oh well, they, the Sallies' hymns and I think it's the Methodist hymns, there's a slight similarity, but some of the Sally hymns they're really imprinted up here.

Can we get a demo?

Oh no, you wouldn't want it.

01:00 **I think we might.**

Oh no, I couldn't do that.

I don't actually know any, so I'd love to hear one.

Don't you know Hear the Pennies Dropping?

No.

You do actions to it as well.

Well give me a go. I'd like to see it in action.

\n[Verse follows]\nHear the pennies dropping,\n listen as they fall. – Oh God! –\n Every one for Jesus,\n he shall have them all.\n

01:30 **Marvellous.**

Well Joan and I, we threaten to sing to the others. No, no, no, no. And There is a Green Hill Far Away, that's another hymn.

Well let's hear it.

No, no, you've had your fill.

Now when you join up do they ask you questions like what religion are you, what are your parents, etcetera?

Oh yes, general information they want.

02:00 **Did they ask if you knew your blood type? I don't suppose people would've back then.**

No, it wasn't known then. It wasn't all that, when my children were born it was just coming in then, and it wasn't till after I'd had two children that I learnt that I was Rh negative.

You were very lucky to have children then I guess?

Oh, not the first two, but the, I went to a second doctor. I went to another

02:30 doctor by the time I was pregnant with Andrew and that's when I learnt that I was Rh negative. I was just so, I couldn't believe it. But anyway.

Now you've got three by the looks of things, lucky you. Were there any other questions that the army asked of you when you joined up?

None outstanding, no, no.

What about, I can't quite get a handle on whether they asked or told you

03:00 **that you were to sign some sort of a secrets document or commit to not talking about what you did in the army or so on. Did that happen, was that official?**

No, not to my knowledge.

Well then Ingleburn, you said before you don't have too many memories of it, but first of all whereabouts is Ingleburn from the centre of Sydney?

I think it's out near Sutherland somewhere and then, in those days of course, it was sort of

03:30 mostly bushland but there was a camp there, a training camp, and we marched a lot. I don't remember what else we did. It couldn't have been terribly important.

Was your uniform what you expected it would be?

Oh yes, because you'd seen it in the street.

Did it fit for example?

Oh yes. They were most particular about that, that you got the right size.

Skirts

04:00 **and/or slacks or both?**

Both.

And were they a straight slack or a jodhpury kind of look?

No, wait a minute. I think the slacks we used when we used to maintain our vehicles. No, it was skirts all the time, summer uniform, winter uniform.

The other girls that you met, and again if you can't remember then we'll move on, but I'll try and jog your memory a little bit. The other girls

04:30 **that you met while you were on rookie training, what kind of a group were they?**

Oh, cross section of the community, and I mean there weren't too many of them that went into signals. I don't recall what they were doing. I think a lot of them were probably office workers. See, we

05:00 were only there for six weeks and then we were sent to Bonegilla.

Bonegilla, thousands of men there in and out. Was there a large contingency of women there when you got there?

Yes.

Okay. Tell me a little then about fronting up at Bonegilla? Did you already have close girlfriends by then?

05:30 No, no. 'Cause having come from Ingleburn and being there for six weeks only, when I got to Bonegilla I didn't know anyone.

So they just sent you from Ingleburn to Bonegilla?

Oh, there were a couple of others, yes.

That's interesting. Were you sort of selected especially for this work?

No, no.

06:00 **And what about leaving New South Wales? It was only to the border I realise, but was that, that must've been quite a big step for a young lady?**

It was exciting. New territory. No, it was exciting. And there was always home. I mean, you know, you always had contact with home so you always had

06:30 a comfortable base so that enables you to go forth

Let's talk about your driving instructing then. Three ton trucks, four girls in a truck and one sergeant. Who was your sergeant, instructor?

Mark somebody or other, that's all I remember. But these instructors, most of us girls were young and

07:00 these fellows, they were men in their 30s.

Positively old.

Absolutely, and some of them were, we knew they were all married, but oh, did they have a party!

Now, did they belong to the Wandering Hands Club as well?

WHS, get it right.

Sorry. Club, society, it's all membership, isn't it?

07:30 Not as far as I was concerned, no. There was nothing there you'd want to give any encouragement to actually.

Well what sort of men were they then? Were they kind of dyed in the wool army types?

No, they were just ordinary guys, ordinary guys, who knew about cars.

A mechanic basically.

Yeah, that's right, absolutely.

08:00 **When you were told that you wouldn't be teleprinting but now you would be driving what sort of a response did you have to that?**

You just did what you were told.

Are you sure you weren't a bit disappointed?

No, not really, no.

And the sight of the trucks when they told you what you would be doing, how did you take that?

Well, when you, you know,

08:30 these three ton trucks and I mean I'd never driven a car before in my life. I thought, no, I can't do that, but you did. And it's amazing, in the army when you're learning to drive they taught you to double the clutch and when I came out of the army and it was some years before I had a driving licence, civil driving

09:00 licence, I went for this licence and the instructor said, no it was the policeman, that's right. Off we went and I just doubled the clutch because that's what I did ordinarily, and he said, "Have you been in the army?" And I said, "Yes, how did you know?" He said, "Oh, you doubled the clutch," he said, "we can call this a day, we won't worry." So

09:30 it's amazing what becomes automatic after a while.

How do you double a clutch?

You just do this, just double, I've almost forgotten how to do it now. That's how long since I did it, but you just put your foot on it twice.

And what's the purpose or benefit?

No idea.

The army they don't tell you why, they just tell you what, don't they?

10:00 Just do it.

Is there a truck on the road today that you could compare to the three tonners that you were driving?

Oh yes.

What would they be?

Well they've usually got some sort of a, you don't see many of them about today, but you do see them occasionally. They have what appears to be a canvas type over a frame on the back and of course it has a, you know,

10:30 all these gears. I think why they taught us on three ton trucks is the fact that you weren't going to wreck the gear box because you had to go through so many gears before you got to top gear.

How many gears does a three tonner have?

I think it's got about six or more. Now don't take that as gospel.

No, I won't because I'm thinking these days trucks have very small clutch devices but back then what are we talking about?

11:00 Oh yes, on a big stick.

Yep. So could you give me kind of a physical example of when you got in to the seat of a truck where everything was and what you'd have to do and how big the gear stick was for example?

Well it's similar to the way, the wheel, the gear stick here and the clutch and the brake, the accelerator. Oh no,

11:30 wait a minute. Good question. The gear stick was just so long.

One of those really long kind of –

Yeah, yeah, right, yeah, and when you crashed the gears, oh, it made the most shocking sound, really bad.

What would the instructors do when you'd make errors like that?

They seemed to be

12:00 pretty patient sort of guys. No, they didn't say much. I mean they expected that you were going to do that in the initial stages. I think probably as you progressed if you continued to do it, like this lady who we were all scared of, they weren't too happy about that. No, in the main they were very pleasant.

Did they have particular kinds of sayings that they would use for teaching

12:30 **tools, like 10 to 2.00 at the wheel with your hands?**

No, no.

And did they have the kind of characteristics or personalities that girls would be able to poke fun at later in the mess tents?

Oh, there were always a couple of those around who you could have a good giggle about later on, but in the main they were just ordinary sort of guys.

Did you have nick names for them?

Some of them we did. Don't ask me because

13:00 I don't remember.

Never mind, and what other, if any, advanced technology did these 10 tonners have? Were you lucky enough to get a good rear view mirror or did they have anything special attached with them?

Nothing special about them. Only their bulk and they were just so big.

I don't suppose you remember what model they were, like what

I think they were Fords

13:30 I think. I don't remember. I might have a photo of one in there. I'll have a look.

I'm hoping you do. I bet they weren't very comfortable either.

Not very comfortable? Oh no, no. No, they're not.

Kidney bashers probably.

Not enough springs in the seats and all that stuff.

When you're in the back, it'd be one of those canvas backs with running board seating

14:00 **or any seating?**

No seating. We used to sit on the floor. We'd sit behind the cabin the three of us.

The lady that couldn't, the lady, the soldier that couldn't drive very well, did she ever actually cause anyone any injuries?

No, no, but boy oh boy were there some close shaves. I think this is why we, you know, we'd had, initially we had some close shaves and that made us very wary.

In as much as

14:30 **hitting other cars or trucks or going off the edge of something?**

No, she didn't ever get to that but it just went so close at times. Where the three of us, the other three, we were all fairly safe sort of drivers. Well, you had to be in a 3 ton truck, and when we were on this, when we were going for our licence

15:00 around some of that country around Albury and Bonegilla and so forth, we'd be going around mountains and you'd be looking down and you'd think that's a long way down there, so you had to be careful.

Can you describe for me the area there, the mountainous area around Albury?

It's very beautiful some of it.

15:30 You've got mountains, gum trees, perfect peace until we came along. It's just beautiful Australian country and Albury, well, that was just like a big country town, you know, the main street down the middle, pretty ordinary, but it was

16:00 the country outside Albury and Bonegilla.

Did you get to fraternise very much with the locals?

No. Oh no, this is Albury you mean? Oh no, no. I think they felt that the army was an intrusion. Good for their businesses but I think they would've, they could've done without us.

16:30 Especially on the weekends when we'd go into Albury on leave.

And what were you able to get up to on leave on the weekends?

Oh, we used to go to a restaurant and have a decent meal. Not that I'm saying army food wasn't – it was good wholesome food, but it was nice to indulge yourself in a restaurant and have a nice meal. Oh, and go to the theatre and they always had dances there. Yeah,

17:00 that was about it. No, I don't remember anybody being looked after by the community of Albury.

No invites home?

No, no, no, no.

No care packages?

'Cause we were privates too, you know, that makes a difference. Probably the officers were but not the privates.

I'm sure not. The dances that they had, would they be held by the army themselves or would the locals throw, you know, would it be a local dance that you could go to in

17:30 **uniform?**

The latter yes, but the dances at the camp they were fantastic. They had a great band and that was all army personnel. No, they were great dances.

Concerts, army concerts in camp, Bonegilla Camp, did you attend any?

No, didn't have any.

And

18:00 **any opportunities for fraternising with the other male privates at Bonegilla? Were you allowed to?**

Oh, you could if you wanted to. Oh yes, there were lots of romances went on and you could in the evening, there must've been a curfew there, but in the evening you could go for walks to the Hume

18:30 Weir and that was fabulous because you had these lovely balmy nights and of course the stars looked so

big and this reflection on the water, it was a beautiful sight. They were good.

And bird life too, I'm sure.

Yes, yeah.

Yeah. Were there any romances going on in amongst your coterie of friends?

19:00 Not really, but amongst some of the Don Rs there were. There was a wedding at Fawkner Park. One of the Don Rs was marrying a soldier, but not in my immediate – there were about four of us who were friends. I still write to one of the girls, and we were New South Welshmen thrown amongst

19:30 a lot of Victorians.

Yes, how did that go down?

That was okay, but you certainly felt a greater affinity to the New South Wales, Welshman.

I bet there was a bit of kind of friendly rivalry going on.

There always is. It's a bit stupid I think.

Hasn't changed that much, has it?

No.

I wanted to just talk briefly about the five days bivouac that you

20:00 **went on. Around about how many weeks of instruction have you had by this stage?**

It must've been weeks and weeks because there was not only the practical part, there was the theory. You had to know how an engine worked and as I say, I just learned that by rote. Oh no, it must've been weeks.

Could you strip an engine at the time and put

20:30 **it back together again?**

No, but we used to do our own oil changes and maintenance and we started off with a manual grease gun and that used to be really hard work because sometimes some of the grease nipples would be blocked and you'd just have to push and push and push. So it was a red letter day when we

21:00 were introduced to electric grease guns. That was a great day.

How many grease nipples would a 3 ton truck have?

Oh no, this was when we were doing maintenance on our vehicles at Fawkner Park.

Okay.

They were utility trucks.

And an electric one. I guess it would be like a milking machine, I suppose.

Yeah, sort of, yeah. Instead you're pushing in, instead of

21:30 pulling out.

I can imagine. Okay, so the five day bivouac at the end, this was the big test, was it, to see if you could

Mmm, get your licence.

Take me through that a little bit if you would? How many were you?

It must've been about 40, must've been, and it was a series

22:00 of driving and being asked to do this or do that, and then there was the written exam. That wasn't done on the bivouac, that was done back at the camp, but it was just mainly driving. We didn't maintain those trucks.

Thank goodness for that.

No hoist out in the mulga [out away from cities].

No what out in the mulga?

Hoist.

Of course.

22:30 **No, way too big. Was there anything memorable that occurred on that bivouac, like you said**

before there was a lot of singing and campfires and so on?

Oh, these ablutions in that gorgeous bubbling brook. That was memorable. Feeling dirty and then being able to have a wash.

You know this business of just prior to the AWAS commencing, the business of women

23:00 **can't do that sort of work, women aren't up to it, women aren't capable and so on, I mean what was your take on how women adapted to the role?**

They adapted extremely well 'cause we always knew we would. Oh no, that was no problem, no problem.

Were there things that you would like to do that you were still prevented from doing during the course of your time in the AWAS?

How

23:30 do you mean? In what way?

Well, I can imagine that, you know, for example you said that you saw the truck and you thought, I can't drive that, and then a few weeks later you could. There must've been other examples of things where you thought you might not be able to do and then you could, and I imagine there were things you could do that you still weren't allowed to do.

Can't think of anything off hand. I mean there were rules.

24:00 You knew you had to obey the rules. If you didn't do well you'd get into trouble so you obeyed the rules. I think perhaps when in camp life at Fawkner Park we would have liked a little more freedom but it wasn't too bad, but no sort of burning desire to do something that

24:30 one wasn't able to.

What about more responsibilities? I don't think I was clear before. Were there more things in the way of responsibilities that you would have liked to have been able to undertake?

I think I would've liked a more responsible position other than driving, but then you see, I was so young

25:00 but most girls who received commissions, they were all older and had had, you know, experience in civilian life, but when you join and you're so young you have no experience behind you.

Did you go straight from Bonegilla to Fawkner Park?

Yes.

Well, Fawkner Park is in a hell of a nice spot in Melbourne.

25:30 **I know you're not a Melbourne born girl, but –**

But I'm, you see, I lived in Melbourne for over 50 years, 58 years. So Sydney is a long time ago.

So when you got to Fawkner did you know that you were in the nice leafy suburbs of inner Melbourne?

Well you were aware of that because, today it's still a beautiful park.

It's a gorgeous park. Is there much

26:00 **difference in its physical look apart from the fact that there was obviously an army camp there, but between then and now?**

No, not really. The trees are still beautiful, they're still big and oh, I forget how many years ago it is now; the AWAS had a fountain, little fountain, a bubbler fountain

26:30 built in Fawkner Park with a plaque on it saying, you know, it was commemorating the stay of the AWAS in the middle of the camp. That has since gone because the vandals got to it and all the rest of it. But no, it's much the same. Unfortunately the bubbler's gone. I think they took the plaque off and they put it on one of the buildings within the park.

27:00 That is one of the toilet blocks, if you please.

Yes. With toilet blocks there's some cricket stands.

Yeah, yeah, maybe it was a cricket stand, but anyway.

Were the covered shelters there, the ones that go over the pathways? There's a few, there's bike paths or walking paths and there's some covered shelters.

No, I don't know them.

Okay. They might've come afterwards. Now Alfred, the Alfred Hospital was down one end,

27:30 **the Commercial Road end.**

The other side of the road.

Yeah. Was Wesley College built then? That's around the other side.

That's in, on the corner of, wait a minute, St Kilda Road, isn't it?

Yes.

Yeah.

Yeah, that would back on, yeah. And could you see St Kilda Road from the park, 'cause you can't really see it much now?

No, no, you can't. No, you never could because

28:00 there are buildings on the Punt Road side, buildings on the St Kilda Road side and Fawkner Park is between extending from Toorak Road to Commercial Road.

And up the other end I think. That's a bit further on; Melbourne Grammar's a bit further on.

Oh yes, that's further on.

Can you give me a kind of visual description of how the AWAS were set up? For example, did

28:30 **they take up the entire park with huts and buildings?**

No, but certainly right in the middle of the park and there were huts, there was a gateway, you went in the gateway and there were huts either side. As you first went in there was the office and there was an RAP office [regimental aid post] and then on the left there was a rec [recreation] hut where you could play table-tennis. I think they had a piano there.

29:00 They had a scungy library and you could, you know, just sit there and have a game of table-tennis or something, and then all the parks were there, all the huts stemmed from there. There was this main centre way and then on the right there was a mess hut. That was a big hut,

29:30 and that's about it, but all these huts all around.

What did you sleep in?

Metal beds and when we first went there we received this long hessian bag the size of a mattress and then you went to a certain room where you filled up this mattress with straw and then you sewed the top

30:00 up and that was the mattress. After a while you learnt that the shot was to really to fill up this mattress so full because then you didn't have to go through the same procedure too soon. Because what happened was the straw eventually goes to a sort of a powdery consistency and then you turf it out and fill it up again.

30:30 But when you filled these mattresses up so full you almost needed a little step ladder to get into bed, but they were very comfortable mattresses, strange as it may sound, but they were comfortable.

Did the straw not ever stick through the hessian into your body while you were asleep?

It didn't seem to. I think the hessian was, you know, very closely knit. No, I'm unaware of that.

Did they give huts or tents?

31:00 Huts.

Were they decently waterproof?

Oh yes, they were waterproof, but there was no heating or cooling. They were just so hot in summer and cold in winter.

That's right, you said the Yanks moved out because it was too hot in summer and too cold in winter.

Mmm, but what we used to do every now and again at night time if we, you know, got very cold, there was an old guy there who used to attend to the boiler and it was only a little room where he sat and, you know,

31:30 fed the boiler and we'd go down there with great slabs of bread and long forks and we'd make toast and sit by this fire. He just loved it. I mean he was an old guy. I think, you know, the thrill of all these young girls visiting him, he'd never had it so good.

Can you recall around about how many women there would've been there at Fawkner Park?

Oh golly, it must've been a couple of hundred, must've been.

32:00 **And all doing different duties, different, I mean did they divide up the Fawkner Park AWAS into units?**

In the main, yes, because the Don Rs, we were all in one or two huts and then your cipher girls, they were together and the teleprinters and yes, all the various sections seemed

32:30 to be together.

But you were all part of sig?

Oh yes, it was all totally sig, and we would, we the Don Rs, we'd be taken to Albert Park where our vehicles were parked and we'd be given our assignments for that day and then at the end of the day we'd take the trucks back to Albert Park

33:00 and then we'd be taken home to Fawkner Park, and that's how it worked. The main sig's office was Grosvenor. Next time you go along Queens Road have a look and you'll see this.

I will. I'm already trying to figure out where it is actually. There is an old white building that's rather dilapidated.

That's right.

And it is for sale. I think that must be it.

Yeah, that's Grosvenor.

It's got long windows, sash windows.

That's right. Well, that was the main sig's office.

33:30 **So you can see the pathway over from Fawkner across St Kilda Road and then you would've gone through one of those back streets into the sig's building on Queen's Road?**

Yes, from Queen's Road, that's right.

And from there to the Albert Park Depot where your cars were, or is that where they were, is that where your vehicles were?

Yeah.

Oh.

And you know Albert Park when you're going around the lake

34:00 and you come to double gates, big double gates, have you noticed those?

I'm just trying to think of which section you mean. Do you mean right around the lake perimeter or around the actual park lands itself?

No, there's a street that goes, when you come off around that road and you want to go up to Clarendon Street, then you go through big double gates. They're not ever closed.

34:30 Well just before you get there is the Albert Park barracks. Maybe it's not there anymore.

I'm not sure. There's a restaurant there and some rowing edifices.

All right.

I'll have a look. I go there most nights, I'll have a look, and there's that golf course there now too which wouldn't have been there I doubt when you were there.

Well it was there a long time ago because I used to play golf there when

35:00 I was at the Alfred. The golf course has been there a long time.

Was it there when you were in sigs [signals] then?

It must've been, because you see I went straight from the army into nursing and we used to go to the golf course to have a game of golf.

Did you march from Fawkner to Grosvenor

35:30 **to the sig's office in Queens Road?**

No, we had, we'd go from Fawkner Park to Albert Park to get our truck and then we'd drive to Grosvenor. We used to park down, just behind Grosvenor there's a narrow lane, we used to park our vehicles along there when they were, when we were waiting for something or other.

Did the sig's uniforms

36:00 **have any significantly different to any of the AWAS?**

No, they were the same with the exception of a badge. You know how each unit has a different badge and the sign's is blue and white.

Yeah, little ones, little round ones. And did they have any other defining characteristics such as a song which was particular to the sigs?

No, no.

36:30 **And your superior officers, female, male? Female?**

Totally female at Fawkner Park.

Were there any stand out characters that you can recall?

There was one woman who goes to reunions, named Grace.

37:00 She was a captain or a major. She was a delightful woman. She is still a delightful woman today, very ladylike. Really lovely person, but they were all good. No, they were all so fair.

37:30 And that's, I think that's wonderful. I can't stand unfairness. No, they were all good, but we used to, in the hut we had one girl. You know, it's interesting when a whole group of females, children, whatever, are thrown together they all seem to find their own level. We used to have this girl in the hut who our particular group,

38:00 we used to think she was uncouth, she was dirty. I don't know how she got away with that, but she was, and anyway, we just didn't like her, and it was many years after I'd come out of the army and I was at a reunion and we were talking about people in the hut who we'd never seen since the day we left Fawkner Park, and

38:30 I said to them all, "I wonder what happened to so and so." They said, "She's doing the same as she did then," and I said, "What was that?" And they all started to laugh at me. And they said, "Don't you know what she was?" And I said, "No," and they said, "She was a prostitute." She used to get under the wire at night apparently and go about her occupation.

39:00 **AWAS by day and a street worker by night. I wonder when she slept.**

That's what they told me, and 'cause I was just no naïve. I mean, but it just didn't occur to me, and then when I learned about it I thought well, that's interesting, the fact that, you know, nobody liked her. Not because she was a prostitute but it was just her generally that was somewhat unpleasant.

39:30 So there you go. I bet the locals wouldn't have liked that had they known about it.

Probably not, probably not at all. I bet she didn't like wearing those passion killers either.

No, no, no.

Okay, we have to stop unfortunately.

Tape 5

00:32 **I was wondering if you could tell us about those first, I think it was about five weeks at Ingleburn –**

Yeah.

– and that was your first taste of army life, wasn't it?

That was the rookie camp.

Well, what can you tell us about that? How did you find that life?

All I can remember is marching. I don't remember much else about it and we must've been given some tuition because I can remember sitting at a desk somewhere.

01:00 So just what they were talking about I have no idea.

What sort of ages were the people in that rookie course?

From 18 onwards to mid 20s, some even a bit older. There weren't very many 18 year olds.

Not many? How many do you reckon?

Probably about half a dozen or so.

Okay. Were you accommodated there or did you travel back home?

Yes. No, no, no,

01:30 they had huts there.

How many to a hut?

Oh gee, probably about 15 to 20.

How did you find that as a change in lifestyle from a family situation to living in a hut?

I had to overcome my modesty. That was the hardest part for me, being thrown in with all these women and undressing in front of everybody. I found that very difficult, however

02:00 I got used to it.

We've heard that there were some who didn't get used to it –

Oh really?

– and persisted in using evasive techniques. Did you have any of those girls?

Not that I'm aware of, no. I think I was concentrating on my problem in coping. At one camp they had this latrine unit, deep pit latrines and there was a long board

02:30 with holes in it and you, no divisions in between. I found that revolting, didn't like that at all.

On a crowded day it would be a bit much, wouldn't it?

Yes, yes indeed. No, that wasn't good.

How did you find the change into life in uniform and not being able to wear civvy clothes?

Oh, I found that great because I thought they looked good. They were smart uniforms.

03:00 **Were there some ways to personalise or adapt a uniform?**

How do you mean?

Well, what were the limits of having personal expression in terms of make-up or hair?

Virtually none because you had to wear your hair at a certain length, your hat at a certain angle and collars and ties, you know, just straight, so forth. No, there was no – and if

03:30 you did endeavour to exert your personality that was very much frowned upon and you were told about it.

That must've been harder for some than others I'm imagining?

Probably, yeah, probably. Yes, if you get the extrovert types, they're the ones who, you know, there were some girls who were always trying to get away with long hair. Well, they were wasting their time because you

04:00 didn't get away with it. Just like I said, you know, rules are rules, you've got to obey them, otherwise take the consequences.

What sort of transgressions of the rules did you observe?

Transgressions? I think I might've been a bit of a goody goody, for a while anyway.

Well you didn't mention the one girl who would slip out after hours.

04:30 **Was there much of that?**

Oh yes. Sorry?

Was there much of that or anything?

Oh no, she was the only one. No, she was the only one. Some of them would go AWOL [absent without leave] and you know, the punishment for that just wasn't worth it. Anyway I had no desire to do that. I was quite happy doing what I was doing, but

05:00 always at the back of my mind was the thought that this isn't what I want to do.

You mean the army?

Yeah. I mean I wanted to be doing nursing. I was just marking time, literally.

I was wondering about those three ton trucks at Bonegilla as well. How heavy were they to turn and that sort of thing?

05:30 Well, it's just like any vehicle you drive, you get used to it, and you know what you can do and what you can't do, and we had pretty good instructors. No, that wasn't any problem really.

I mean I've got a car from the '60s and I find that heavy

Oh, right.

on a bad day, you know.

Oh yes, they were heavy, no doubt about that, but as I say you got used to that too and when you were driving that

06:00 make of truck all the time you got to know its idiosyncrasies.

Well what were they?

Well, the heaviness to begin with and the manoeuvrability, that was limited, but you see, I hadn't ever driven before so I had no yardstick as to what was a light car and what was this, what was that. I had no yard stick there.

What were some

06:30 **of the problems you had personally with learning on those trucks?**

I think it was the fact that they were so heavy, but apart from that, no, not a problem.

In terms of the three ton trucks, what were you expecting to be doing once you were trained with them?

I think that why we were taught on three ton trucks was

07:00 so that we wouldn't wreck too many gear boxes. That's my own personal thinking on the subject, but I mean we were never going to be driving three ton trucks all the time. It was just to learn on 'cause girls went, "Oh, no no," some of the girls in transport were driving trucks, but in the Don Rs, no. We were driving

07:30 utilities.

Was it something they told you when you were training that these were just training cars and you'd be doing something else?

No.

Okay.

No. We knew that once we got our licence we wouldn't be driving those trucks, that we would be driving utilities.

So you were told that much?

We knew that because that's where we were going to be after we finished our training.

So did you get any training on the utility trucks?

08:00 A good question. We must've have because that was quite a change. Don't remember that.

Can't have been that exciting then?

No.

Well in Bonegilla I was wondering how it worked with the difference between the men and the women and their superiors. If you were being instructed by men, did you have female superiors

08:30 **as well?**

Yes, yeah.

What were their different roles in terms of being in charge of people?

Now this is at Bonegilla you're talking about?

Mmm.

All I can think of is that the females were in this sort of section of their own, so when you were within that section you were under the jurisdiction of the females,

09:00 but otherwise it was the men, the men who were in the teaching role. Whereas the women, they were attending to the general maintenance of the camp, of the women.

Just wondering from your point of view, what you thought of the success of mixing the male and female troops?

Well, they weren't really mixed. I mean there was always

09:30 a line of demarcation. No, they never really mixed. Socially yes, but otherwise no. The fellows were confined to their role and the females theirs. Actually when you think about it now, it was very well organised. Yeah.

Well in terms of being in camp, being accommodated,

10:00 **they were fairly well demarcated as well, weren't they?**

Oh yes. Oh yes.

Were there ways around that?

Oh, you could sneak out at night time I suppose. Some of the girls did. Yeah, there was mixing. I mean human beings being what they are, bound to be, but you always knew the ones who, you'd sort of cover for them too.

10:30 You know, girls were engaged, having love affairs, so you'd help them along the way.

In like roll calls or something like that?

Or if somebody was, their absence was being investigated, you'd sort of band together a bit, make excuses, you know, they were here, they were there, they were everywhere, and of course the person who was asking wouldn't go looking. So you knew

11:00 they were fairly safe, or they knew they were fairly safe.

Did you have any particular friends among the men at Bonegilla?

No, no. When you get a lot of women together like this they all seem to form little groups. It's not exactly cliquey, but they're sort of little groups. Like the girls who were from New South Wales,

11:30 they just automatically remained friends, close friends, but yes, you form your own little group of friends. You're not friends with, well you're acquainted with everybody else but you're not friends with everybody else and there is a difference.

Who was in your group?

There were five of us. There was one, two girls from, one from

12:00 Lismore, one from just out of Lismore, one from Molong which I believe is not far from Orange. There was me and then there was another girl from Queensland. There were about five or six of us, and we used to, on days off, if our days off coincided, we'd sort of do things together. Except when I'd be, when I sort of established my billet at Kew, I went there for my days off and I'd

12:30 just mooch around. We didn't always do things or go out some place, but it was just being within a family unit that I enjoyed.

So these were your friends at Fawkner Park or as well as at Bonegilla?

At Kew? No, this was a private family.

No, but that group you just talked about then?

Oh yes, they were from Fawkner Park, yes.

Okay. Did you have a group in Bonegilla as well?

These girls as well, were there too.

Okay.

We all came

13:00 down from Ingleburn to Bonegilla and then we came down to Fawkner Park so the association was a long one and we all got on well together. No, it was a good group.

Do you have contact with them today?

One I do, yeah. Oh no, two I do, but one, I was closer to

13:30 one. There's always one in a group who you're closest to and I still write to her. She was a bit older than me. She eventually became a sergeant because they, you weren't upgraded unless you were a bit older. I guess they thought that if you were a bit older you had a bit more experience, a little more maturity than the 18 year olds. So that was that.

14:00 **How did her promotion affect your friendship?**

It didn't. She went off to another hut. They segregated the, all the privates were together, all the sergeants, da da da and so it went along the line. No, that didn't affect the friendship.

Just on a social level, at Bonegilla I heard that there were also some people who had gardens as well?

Oh yes, they'd have little gardens outside their hut.

14:30 In one of those photos there's a sort of a garden outside the hut. Oh yes, some of them were beautiful. They took great pride in them.

Were you a gardener back then?

Sort of, not like I am today. No.

Was it something the men would do as well? I don't think I've heard of it amongst the men?

Well, in their part of the camp, yes, they had gardens.

15:00 At Bonegilla there must've been a camp nearby for the Italians and they used to come into the camp and they were the ones that used to dig the deep latrines. All the lovely jobs of course, and they used to wear maroon uniforms, top, shirts

15:30 and pants, but they were all very friendly. And when, I was just talking about when we went on this camp at Portsea, we were in the sand dunes at Portsea and we came across these fellows in these maroon uniforms so we knew they were Italian POWs [prisoners of war], and they eyed us up and we eyed them

16:00 up, and they ended up having a picnic. We were having a picnic in the sand dunes and in the end they ended up joining us. We invited them. They were such nice guys, they really were, and there was one in the group who could speak English and that worked out to be hilarious at times. I'm not quite sure where their camp was at Portsea but there was a POW camp there.

16:30 **What were they doing in the sand dunes?**

They had a pretty free rein. I don't think that they, they weren't soldiers. They were Italians who happened to be in Australia or they were POWs. I'm not quite sure, but they were given, you know, a pretty free rein.

How did you go communicating with the ones, with everyone else basically who couldn't

17:00 **speak English?**

Oh, it was, you know, hands and expressions and then if we were really stuck the guy who could speak English would interpret. That was a fascinating experience. We met them again a couple of times and they were just so overjoyed that we would even talk to them and you felt just so sorry for them, to be treated like that,

17:30 and they came from, I've not been to Italy but I believe Italy is divided into two as far as socio-economic groups are concerned and these guys came from the higher level. So they weren't mafia types. They were quite nice guys.

What sort of ages were they do you think?

In their 20s.

18:00 No, they couldn't have been much older than that.

It sounds like a pretty interesting picnic.

Oh it was, it was fun and we were just so overwhelmed but they were overwhelmed that we would speak to them. 'Cause this is what the guy said to us, "We think it's wonderful that you spoke to us and then for us to be invited to your picnic."

18:30 So that was a nice experience.

The ones that came into Bonegilla, did you have a chance to talk to them?

Oh, you'd be walking by and they'd be digging away and they'd give you a wave and a wink and that's about the only, that's as far as the contact went.

Were they heavily guarded?

No. I mean I don't think there was anywhere

19:00 they could've gone, and no contact probably because I mean there wasn't the high Italian population in Australia then as there is now. No, they wouldn't have had anywhere to go.

Had you known any European families when you were growing up?

Only English. These young English sailors who on the Kuttabul,

19:30 Dad used to bring them home, but they were the only ones.

The Italians at Bonegilla, were they within marching distance or would they be driven in in trucks or something?

I don't know the answer to that.

Okay.

They must've been driven there I'd say. They were used as working parties and any other sort of menial task that needed doing, it was allotted to them.

20:00 **Speaking of Bonegilla, I read a, I saw an article from a magazine at the time and it was talking about arts and crafts and music and talks and lectures and so on. Did you have anything to do with those?**

Well, they were held from time to time in the rec hut. Oh yes, there were all sorts of handcrafts and so forth. Yes, yeah, that was

20:30 quite well catered for really. I don't remember any lectures or talks, don't remember, but I remember the arts and crafts.

What sort of things were you involved with?

Needlework mainly. I've always done needlework. That's one of my passions today, is patchwork. I used to work a lot with felt. Fabric was

21:00 not readily available because it was rationed. You weren't going to use a lot on craft when you could make yourself a frock.

Is that what you did? You made clothes there as well?

No, no.

I was wondering also about the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] and their involvement with Bonegilla. Did you see much of their presence?

Not the YW, no.

Okay. How about the Red Cross or the

21:30 **Salvos?**

No. No, there was this body called the ACF [Australian Comforts Fund]. It was voluntary, I don't know who started it, but these women they had these shops for want of a better name where you could go and have lunch. They had one at Albury too, in the middle of Albury. The seemed to be everywhere and

22:00 their function or their aim was mainly to provide some sort of comfort to the troops and they did that very well. They were all very friendly and all this lovely food they used to cook.

Did they have a presence in Bonegilla itself?

No.

Just in Albury? What did they have there in Albury?

Oh, the same sort of things they had in Melbourne. Not the billeting, but certainly

22:30 a place where you could go and have a cup of coffee and something to eat within a nice atmosphere.

So was that cheaper for troops or is that how it worked, or was it just exclusively for troops?

Only for troops.

Okay.

Yeah. They did a good job.

During that period at Bonegilla did you get any leave to go home?

Oh yes.

How often did that happen?

Once a year and

23:00 when you were going on leave you would always travel by troop train and on the way there were designated stops where when you, when the troop train stopped, along the platform would be these long trestle tables and masses and masses of cups and plates and plates of fruit cake. They were great on fruit cake. So you'd pile out, and sandwiches, and you'd pile out, sometimes it would be in the middle

of the night

23:30 you'd pile out of these trains and have a drink and something to eat. That was all free, you didn't pay for that.

Who organised that?

I think the army did that, 'cause troop trains, they always seemed to travel during the night. It was rarely during the day. Where was one of the places we used to, oh, we always stopped at Albury 'cause Albury had the longest platform in Australia I think.

24:00 **Some claim to fame.**

Yes, that's right.

Well who were they manned by or peopled by?

Railway personnel, all these ladies there in the middle of the night filling up the cups. That was fun.

How long would it take to get from Bonegilla to Sydney then?

Oh gosh. About three hours I suppose. I'm not sure. I'm just

24:30 guessing. It probably took longer than that because you used to take, they used to make lots of stops but not necessarily at the railway stations. It was probably to let other trains go through I guess. Yes, always in the middle of the night and then you, I don't think we went to Central Station. I think we went to another station out of Sydney.

25:00 Bit vague about that.

Roughly how long had you been away from home?

Oh, with the first leave probably about a year. You only had one leave a year.

How had Sydney changed from your point of view?

There seemed to be more service personnel everywhere and

25:30 when you were going anywhere locally and you happened to wear a uniform everybody would stare at you because they knew you, you see, and sometimes you'd wear civvies but you didn't have that many civvies because they were sort of old hat by then, and then to buy clothes, you were limited because of clothing coupons.

26:00 **How do you think you'd changed in that year?**

Oh, I'd become more mature, less innocent, more tolerant. My mother was a lady who, she was very derogatory about Catholics and Jews. When I was in the army of course I met a lot of Catholics and I thought they're no different to me.

26:30 So my changing, my thinking changed along those lines and my thinking changed about Jews when I was, I did quite a bit of special nursing. This is when you go into a patient's home and look after them within their own home and my experience with Jewish people was they were just so generous and they would,

27:00 you got to the stage where you didn't say you liked anything because they'd want to give it to you. Mind you, they always got their pound of flesh out of me, but that's the way it operated, but I just found they were just so delightful and generous. So I thought, "What's Mum talking about?"

Did that cause some conflict or problems at home?

No. Oh, I didn't mention it, better

27:30 not to mention it. She'd tell me her experiences in London.

Well how was your home different from your new mature eyes?

I thought it was very frugal, but I had good education in frugality,

28:00 and just having the bare necessities.

What was your younger brother doing at that stage?

Well the first year, he didn't join the air force until I'd been in the army for about a year. Oh, he was still scallywagging. He used to, in those days the trams in Sydney, the conductor, they had a

28:30 sort of a step outside, and the conductor would walk along this step and collect the fares. He was there in all weathers, and I would be on the tram, this is when I was a young teenager, and George, he used to what was called 'scale the trams', and the conductor would be on this side and George

29:00 and a couple of his mates would be on the other side and he'd see me in the tram and he always used to call out to me and I would sit there po-faced making out I didn't know who this larrikin was, but he delighted in that. It was terribly dangerous because, you see, if another tram passed there were these fellows, but they managed to hop off. If another tram

29:30 was going to pass, they'd hop off. It was terribly dangerous but that was a sport for them.

Well, how did your brother treat you now you were in uniform and older?

Not much different really. No, it wasn't, wasn't much different. When we used to, in later years

30:00 when we used to be together, he always used to tell this joke about me on the tram. There was Doreen sitting there and you should've seen the look on her face. Ah, he liked telling that story.

So he was just getting up to trouble in Sydney when you came back?

Yeah.

Same old

But then when he joined the air force, I saw him once when he was in the air force. He happened to be in Melbourne and it happened

30:30 to be the time of the Melbourne Cup and George liked gambling so he said, "Well, let's go to the Melbourne Cup." Well, I was able to and that was an experience. The only Melbourne Cup I've been to, haven't ever wanted to go to another one. So we did that, but I didn't see him much because he was mostly in Brisbane and further north.

Can you tell us more about that day

31:00 **at the Cup?**

George was mad keen on betting on horses and he was running to and fro to wherever they put on the money. What was interesting was the fashions, not as elegant as they are today,

31:30 and of course the horses were beautiful, but having seen the Melbourne Cup I wanted to go home. I thought, "I've had this," but it was an experience.

I have an image of just a sea of people but also a lot of uniforms as well.

Yeah, that's right, 'cause we were both in uniform. But you see, that was a venue for pleasure and

32:00 a social outing whereas most personnel, service personnel would be working, otherwise engaged, but there were a lot of them there nevertheless.

I was wondering if that was a legitimate excuse for AWL [absent without leave], the Cup?

Who knows, who knows?

I'm sure a lot of discretion was played out the next day.

32:30 **Okay. So in Sydney, that's right, you're on leave. How long did you have and what did you get up to?**

I'm not sure whether it was three weeks or a fortnight. I had a friend in Sydney who wanted me to go on a camp with her and it was called Young Peoples' League and we went out of Sydney a bit,

33:00 not far, and they were holding all these lectures and you stayed overnight, that's right, and as I was listening to these lectures, I thought, "This sounds Communistic to me," and it was. It was the indoctrination of young people by the Communist Party. So I said to Joy, I was asking her questions about how long she'd been in this

33:30 group and her two older brothers were very much involved in it. I thought oh well, that's the last time I come on this camp. I wasn't interested in Communism.

That's fascinating, and what sort of lectures? What were they about?

Very much anti the establishment and wanting to change things and they were very dogmatic about issues

34:00 which I didn't appreciate because there was no, there was no, as far as I was concerned there was no reason or it seemed to me the things that they were advocating would just cause dissension and I didn't want to go along that path.

What did you

34:30 **know about Communism at that stage?**

Not a great deal, but I knew enough to know that I didn't want to be involved in it.

I guess, what was the general attitude towards Communism in Australia?

Well you were either extremely pro or very much anti. I think people

35:00 who were dissatisfied with what was happening in the country, apart from war this is, they would be very much for it and wanting to change everything, and talking about a Utopia. Well, there's no Utopia on this earth, not the way they were advocating it,

35:30 and what they were preaching was that you're not going to get this peaceful situation and everybody on the same level unless you created considerable havoc.

Talking about violence?

No, not, well I mean, if you want to upset systems sometimes violence does happen,

36:00 but no, they weren't, they averted that. It was pretty subtle in a way but you got the drift of what they were advocating.

Was it a secretive sort of camp?

No, I wouldn't say secretive because I mean I was invited and I mean I wasn't a member, but that's why there were inviting new people, young

36:30 people. They were all young, younger than I was. That was their method of recruiting, getting you to go on these camps and then indoctrinating you.

Did it succeed in many cases?

I don't know the answer to that. Well, I mean at one stage in politics,

37:00 Communism was quite strong and then it just faded away. I mean you hear so many people today who had been members of the Communist Party during that era and then 40 years hence they, you know, bad news. Didn't want to know about it.

What games do you play at a Communist camp? Do they have anything other

37:30 **than lectures?**

We used to go swimming in the river, and there seemed to be quite a bit of pairing off too. Couples would just disappear into the shrub and I think probably a lot of young people used it for that purpose, if they had a boyfriend or whatever. Good way of having a bit of freedom.

38:00 But that wasn't, you were just aware of a bit of that going on but that didn't apply to everybody of course.

Were they advocating free love?

No, no. Oh no, no, it was mainly politics, that was their aim.

That's fascinating. About how many people were there do you think?

38:30 There must've been at least 50, at least I'd say. Yeah, it must've been about these 50.

How did your friend take it when you said you really weren't into it?

Well, she just accepted that, because they knew I wasn't around. I was on leave, I was going back to camp so I, you know,

39:00 wasn't too strong about that. I just said, "I don't think I'll be going on one of these again." I didn't give any reason, she didn't ask, so that was that.

You weren't told to keep it quiet or anything like that?

Oh no.

Tape 6

00:32 **Just because you remembered the name of that league at the end of your last tape, could you tell us again what it was called?**

Eureka.

The Eureka League.

I think it's E-U-R, Eureka, E-K-A I think.

Like the Stockade?

Yes, that's right. Oh, it might be U-R. Anyway you can look it up.

And what else was memorable from that leave, that period of leave in Sydney?

01:00 Being with Mum and Dad again and just mooching around, catching up with old friends.

How do you find getting into holiday mode after being in such a disciplined environment?

No problem at all. It was easy.

Well how's the reverse, going back to army life?

Well then you're going back to other friends again

01:30 and to a life you know. It's just a matter; it didn't take a great deal of adjustment either way. You were happy to go on leave, you were happy to go back again. No, I had no problems there.

No problems leaving home again?

Well, by that time I'd been away from home for a while and

02:00 you do get over homesickness, and no, I'd seen them and had a good time with them so that was that.

Had you been writing many letters home?

Oh, always, and my mother was a good letter writer, always sending me parcels with food.

Anything else besides the cakes?

Biscuits. Everybody was overjoyed

02:30 when I received a parcel 'cause we'd have a party. That was really good.

I think the stories I've heard is just generally if anyone got a cake it was just open slather.

Oh absolutely. Mum would send this parcel, all these contents in a carton and everybody would hover around and we'd dive into it straight away. Oh no, you always shared, always,

03:00 and, well everybody was the same, you always shared. It was good, good atmosphere, good way to be.

So when did you get the news that you were heading down to Fawkner Park?

Once we had finished the course at Bonegilla, you didn't know initially where you were going to be sent 'cause girls were sent all over the

03:30 place, but once those plans were in place you were told, and we were quite happy to, and we four or five all came to Melbourne so that was good. We weren't parted.

As a coincidence?

I've no idea. I don't know.

It's very fortunate to have kept those friends in those three places, all three.

Yes, yeah.

04:00 No, I don't know the answer to that.

Was there any room at that point for preference? Could you apply for a certain role or job or place?

I don't think you would've had much chance of changing, having been trained for all those weeks, I don't think the army powers that be would've looked upon you saying, "I don't want to do this, I want to do that," I don't think that would've been

04:30 countenanced. I don't think so.

I was just wondering. Okay then, so how did you find that transition from one camp to another?

Oh, it was much more civilised at Fawkner Park even though it wasn't luxurious, it was better than Bonegilla.

05:00 Oh, and you were doing a job too. That made a difference, and there was more freedom being in the city and all the other things you could do in a city which you can't do in the country. Whilst I loved the country, I liked the things you could do in the city.

What most appealed about city life to you?

I liked going to the theatre.

05:30 What else? Oh, just having more freedom, that was good, and you could go out with your friends and go to galleries and parks and all that sort of thing.

How often could you go out?

Well you always had so many days off a week. I'm not sure how many. I don't remember that. It

06:00 must've been two, not sure. In those days that was always regular, you know, your time off.

So only on those days off or could you go out at night? Say if you'd done a morning shift could you go out at night?

Oh yes, yeah.

So you weren't –

And when you went out at night,

06:30 after a certain hour, probably after sundown, if you were coming from the city, when you got off the tram there was an old soldier at the tram stop and he would escort you down the path to the camp. And when I say an old soldier, he was old.

How old?

Oh heavens, he seemed like a grandfather to me. I think he quite enjoyed that job.

So there was

07:00 **just the one guy doing that job?**

Mmm.

You must've become quite friendly with him?

Oh yes. He got to know you, you got to know him, and he'd always ask you where you'd been and always interested in what you were doing out at that time.

Did he have a different uniform to say an AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?

No, he was in his khakis.

Was he, what rank do you think he was?

07:30 Oh, he wasn't, he was just a private. I mean you wouldn't have a major caught escorting the girls down to the camp.

And so I guess you'd go with your friends when their leave coincided or timed off?

Yes, yeah. Can I have a cough please?

Sure. I was just wondering who you were spending your free time with at this stage?

08:00 Well, your friends, your immediate friends, and then I used to go to Kew and frequently go to the theatre with them, and that's about it I think. Yes, that's about it.

Now, you were working shift work at this stage, weren't you?

Not all the time.

08:30 **Okay. How would that work?**

Oh well, naturally you'd have to sleep during the day and they had one hut where you would sleep when you were on night shift, but you didn't do that, you didn't do night shift a lot. I can't remember how often we did it but it didn't go on for weeks and weeks.

09:00 **Okay, so you might do the, well what times did they go from and till, these shifts?**

Oh, it must've been, they were long shifts so it was probably about 9.00 until about 7.00 or 8.00 in the morning.

That is a long shift.

I'm not absolutely certain about that but I do remember they were long shifts,

09:30 yeah.

And so you might do a whole period of night shifts and then a break and then day shift, is that

That's the way it worked.

Okay, right, yeah, and who were you working with?

Well, there were always two of you to a vehicle and you always worked with the same person, and one day you'd drive, the other day she would drive.

The whole day?

10:00 Yeah.

What would the non-driver do?

You sit there, and this, I think the reason for this was as a security purpose. I mean if you were a staff car driver you were the only one driving, but if you were a Don R there was always two of you.

Now do you mean security in terms of not going,

10:30 **the person driving, not going wayward or do you mean security as in somebody else attacking you?**

Yeah, the latter.

The latter, Okay.

And then some of the fellows used to say, oh well, it only took one fellow to ride a motorbike. Now you're replacing us and it takes a vehicle and two women. They used to like quoting that.

11:00 **I'm sure, ad nauseum.**

Yeah.

Well you must've had to get along pretty well with your partner?

Yes, yeah. It wasn't good if you didn't.

What happened then if you didn't?

I don't know. I don't know whether you could request a change, but that would've created quite a bit of unpleasantness I would imagine.

11:30 No, I don't know of anybody doing it 'cause I was with the same girl for, all the time, and so was everybody else. You always worked together.

Were there some partners who just really had a lot of trouble with each other?

There must've been but I was unaware of it. Yeah, I was unaware of it. The girls in the transport unit,

12:00 they always drove alone but then they were usually transporting people so there was always somebody with them.

Was there a transport unit at Fawkner Park or was it just

Yes, there was a transport unit, but it was a very small one.

What were they driving?

They were driving big trucks, the three

12:30 ton trucks.

You never had to do that?

No, not after I left Bonegilla.

Okay. So how did you find driving the utilities?

Oh, that was okay, much easier than three ton trucks, more comfortable.

What was there to learn about, or what different things were there to learn about driving utilities?

Nothing, nothing

13:00 much, once you got used to it. It was just one vehicle was heavier and bigger than the other, that's all, and you didn't have as many gears to change.

Now you're driving in the city too?

Mmm, mmm.

How did you find that?

Oh, that took a bit of getting used to initially, but when we used to go along St Kilda Road and continue

along,

13:30 what's the continuation of St Kilda Road? Once you, if you were taking that direction at the junction of Swanston and Flinders Street there was a policeman on duty. There weren't traffic lights and this guy always seemed to be on duty and we used to call

14:00 him Smiley, and whenever we came along he'd always change and we'd always get the go ahead sign. He was great, terrible job though, but that's all he did all day.

At night time, was that intersection policed or anything?

It must've been, 'cause I mean we considered it quite a busy intersection in those days,

14:30 and I mean there was only half the traffic then than there was today, probably even less because there was petrol rationing too in those days. So people couldn't use their vehicles as much as they would today. So we considered it a busy intersection then.

15:00 **In those days what was on the corner where Federation Square is now?**

That was railway yards, Jolimont.

Right.

That was, you'd just stand in Flinders Street and you could look down and see all these railway tracks and trams. Well that's all gone now. They're probably still there but they're underneath. I'm not sure about that, must have a look. I rarely go to the city.

15:30 I'm not a city lover, and being here I don't have to go to the city a lot because we've got some very good shopping centres within reasonable distance, and I'm not a shopper.

Well, could you explain to us perhaps an average day at work? What was an average shift when you were a Don R driver?

I think we used to be over at, oh, you'd get up in the morning,

16:00 have your shower, have your breakfast and I think we were over at Albert Park by 8 o'clock. You would have your check-in, you'd be given your job for that day which could be the rat run, or you could be going around the city and to all these various

16:30 big homes. One of the homes was one of the Coles' homes and the caretaker there, must've been a quiet day because we'd always go in there and we'd always say to him, "Oh, this is a beautiful place," and one day he said to us, "Oh, you should, would you like to see the nursery?" "Oh yes, we'd love to see the nursery." So we went up to the nursery and it was as big as this

17:00 house, whole area. Beautiful stained glass windows and of course there weren't the toys in there, but it was a beautiful room and it was so big for a nursery. I often wondered what some of those houses were like when they were given back to their owners because in some of them they put up partitions to make sort of single offices

17:30 and then the general wear and tear on these homes must've been considerable, and there were a lot of them.

Do you know if they were volunteered or were they commandeered?

I don't know. I don't know, and then quite a few of them were used as embassies. There was one in Punt Road, Punt Road Hill, and then there was Frogmore,

18:00 which is in Mont Albert Road. It was only a couple, that was air force, Frogmore, it was only a couple of years that property was sold and sold as building blocks and the most palatial homes built on them. 'Cause Mont Albert Road is the golden mile of Mont Albert.

18:30 **So when you were driving around would you linger at certain places? Were there ways to make life easier and more pleasant when you were on a shift?**

Well, you had to call at these places as they were listed, but one of the places we used to love to go to, there was a gorgeous pastry cake shop in Clarendon Street which was just so close to Albert Park, and we'd go there and

19:00 pig out on something or other. It was a beautiful shop.

Did you have set times for lunch breaks or things like that, or how would you fit that in?

Good question. I think we might've gone back to Fawkner Park for lunch. I don't remember that. Maybe I was too full of

19:30 pastries.

And what sort of things were you taking and picking up?

Oh, it was always paper, big manilla envelopes sealed with red wax.

And who would you have to deliver it to? Would you just go to a front desk or something?

Yes.

Okay.

20:00 Always had to be signed for. Yeah.

You're like a modern day courier.

That's right.

What is now a modern day courier?

Well, you know, a despatch rider. That's what they did, take the despatches.

Did you have a set routine for every day or did the locations differ?

No, you didn't know what you were doing until you booked in at Albert Park,

20:30 and a good trip was when we'd go to Bacchus Marsh. That was a long trip. I used to like that because there was a barracks at Bacchus Marsh, and then there was another one way over the other side of Melbourne. I used to like going there too because you got away from the traffic and the city.

21:00 That was about the longest I think.

Would you perhaps find somewhere quiet to have a sit and somewhere nice with a nice view on the way there or back?

Well no, not really because all these trips, a certain amount of time was allocated, but we always used to bring from Bacchus Marsh, we'd always bring some guys back to Melbourne 'cause they were on days off and they

21:30 knew that the Don Rs were calling there and we'd always give them a ride back.

They'd just be in the back?

Yep, yep.

Did it have any covering on it? Was it just like a flat ute [utility truck]?

I know they sat in the back, whether they were covered or not I don't remember.

Well, did you have to account at the end of every day for where you'd been? Did you keep a log book or something

22:00 **like that?**

Yes, I think we did, yeah, and as I say all these trips were worked out as to how long they would take you. The ones that varied a bit were the traffic ones because of traffic, but I mean they weren't that stringent that, you know, it was difficult to cope with 'cause that was accounted for too. So sometimes you'd have a bit of spare time

22:30 up your sleeve.

There's always gaps, aren't there?

Yeah.

Cracks to slip through. Well who were you accountable to at the end of every day?

Oh, the personnel at Albert Park. They had an office there and we'd report to them when you'd finished your

23:00 shift or the job that had been allocated to you, and then you'd leave your vehicle there and then you'd be taken back to Fawkner Park.

So did you have to worry about things like refuelling or maintenance?

We did our own maintenance. Refuelling was done from Albert Park 'cause they had a section there that was just like a big garage. They had petrol pumps and

23:30 hoists. We used to do our maintenance there.

What would you cover in the maintenance department?

Greasing, oil changes, general cleanliness of the vehicle and we used gallons and gallons of kerosene cleaning the underneath part of the car and when you'd finished your maintenance it would go up on

the hoist and the sergeant would

24:00 come along and rub his finger underneath the car just to see that it was clean. Absolutely ridiculous but that was the system.

It does seem a bit excessive, doesn't it?

I can remember one day we moved the nut from the sump and didn't get out of the way in time.

24:30 Oh, that was a disaster. I think that anybody who was buying an army vehicle in those days would've received a wonderful vehicle because they were so well maintained, and we were always taught that before you turn, once you've turned the ignition on in a car, check POW. That was petrol, oil, water. Never forgotten that, still

25:00 do it, and it's amazing how these things stay with you. I feel very strongly about keeping a vehicle maintained and also not to let the petrol level get really low. Try to keep it at least half full. That's not always possible, but that was what was advocated

25:30 and I still do all those things today. Not clean the underneath part of the car.

I was going to say you'll have to come around and service my car for me.

No thank you.

Did you have the same car all the time?

Yes, yeah. Oh, this gave you a feeling of ownership and you didn't want anybody else getting into your vehicle and messing it up, 'cause when you

26:00 went on holidays and you came back and somebody had been driving your car or had been in your car and it wasn't up to the same standard that you maintained, you used to get very cross.

What were some of the ways of personalising the car?

None really, you couldn't put stickers anywhere. No, that's all no, no, no, no. No, no means at all other than

26:30 taking pride in its appearance, and you had to do that anyway.

What markings did it have on it?

Markings?

I'm wondering, I'm trying to picture it. What colour was it?

They were khaki.

Okay, and would it have a serial number on it or something, a distinctive marking?

I guess it did, probably 'Property of the Forces', I guess.

27:00 I don't remember that one.

Would it have your unit or anything like that on it?

I don't think so, don't think so.

Maybe I'm thinking of American cars in movies. They always seem to have a few numbers on or something.

I don't remember any.

Sure, okay. Well that's cleared that up. Okay, and now, you mentioned Portsea before. This was a facility you had when you were at Fawkner Park, wasn't it?

Yes.

Can you tell us more about

27:30 **that?**

Well it was introduced when some of the girls who were teleprinter operators and various other jobs were using Morse code all the time, and sometimes at some stage some of them used to get a bit Morse happy. So they thought that if they could have a camp and these girls could do down there and

28:00 relax completely, it would take some of the stress away and initially they were queuing up to go down there and then the novelty wore off and then they were looking around for people to go down there, so we interstate people, we always volunteered. So we ended up having about four holidays a year at least and you'd go down there

28:30 with an officer and you looked after yourselves completely. You cooked, you know, kept the place clean and then you did whatever you liked. It was wonderful.

What sort of dimensions was this hut?

There were several small huts which housed four girls and there were bunks on, there was a small door, that little hut, that photo I showed

29:00 you, you went in the doorway and then either side there were two beds, bunks and then we had a mess hut. Oh, it was wonderful and during the day you used to do what you like, and we did all the, we looked after ourselves completely, cleaning, cooking, all that sort of stuff.

29:30 And they had, at Portsea in those days they had what is now the Lord Mayor's camp, it was a barracks for prisoners and that's not the word, that's not the right word, but it was a detention barracks and these,

30:00 these fellows had to spend time at – it was like a prison because there were MPs [military police] there and I remember one day there were big gates, wooden gates, and I had a little sort of look through the door. One day I happened to have a look through there and there were these soldiers, it was summer time, and there were these soldiers with these great –

30:30 **Sorry Doreen, I think we're going to have to, sorry about that, we were interrupted.**

Yes, there were these soldiers in this quadrangle running around in full winter uniform with these enormous packs on their back and there was the MP just haranguing them to go around and around and around, and I thought this is barbaric, but that's the way they were

31:00 punished, and you sort of thought what are they achieving by that? And we used to go to a camp sometimes at this place and in the end we stopped going because we hated dancing with the MPs, but anyway they made it into a more peaceful place by making it the Lord Mayor's camp for children, and some of the girls from the Alfred used to go

31:30 down. These children came from the country, they were under privileged children I believe, and they went down there for six weeks during the Christmas school holiday break and they just had a holiday but they always had a nurse down there just to attend to any minor accidents and the girls used to love going down there.

32:00 It was six weeks, so you had to be pretty committed.

This is when you were a nurse?

Yes.

Right, okay. Was that transition made during your AWAS years?

No.

Okay, it was after the war?

No, it was after the war, and I don't know what it is now but I don't think it's a children's camp anymore. We have a little house down at Rye and I go down there as often as

32:30 I can. I love it, and over the years it's changed hands a few times, but it was a children's camp for a long time. I must have a look and see what it's doing now. After I came out of the army many years, but I don't know.

Well, in the AWAS years, when you went down

33:00 **to Portsea how long would you go down there for?**

A fortnight.

A full fortnight?

That's why we loved it.

That sounds great.

Oh, it was, and the officers who came down with us, they were always fantastic. That was wonderful.

How was the relationship different between the officers and yourselves when you were down there for a fortnight?

Oh, it became, well it was close, you see, you

33:30 were all together. It was more intimate, they learnt a lot about you and vice versa.

I'm sorry.

That was wonderful.

In a way it sounds like good management practice, doesn't it, to get to know your subordinates better?

Yes, yeah, yeah.

I'm not sure they saw it that way then.

Well, one of the officers

34:00 who used to come down with us, her name was Elva Carr, and she was a captain and when she left the army she held a high position within the police force and she was also a very good artist I believe. She's not alive anymore, but she was fantastic, used to play games and I think she enjoyed it equally as much as

34:30 we did. So she was good.

It sounds like a welcome relief too, from having to be in that position of authority. They could relax a bit more.

Absolutely, it was good all around, and the freedom was wonderful. No, they were good times.

How did you get down there?

We were taken down there. The army provided transport. We didn't have any transport whilst we were there

35:00 but they would take as down and leave us and then they'd come and pick us up.

So you couldn't borrow a vehicle?

No. We used to walk everywhere. This, Portsea and the surrounding places were not as – weren't as many people about, and I mean over the years that we've had this little house down at Rye, the building that's gone on down

35:30 there is too much, too much.

You would've seen it change quite a lot I imagine.

Oh yes, absolutely. Yes, we've had this little house for about 20 years or more. So we've seen a lot of changes.

It's that benefit of living a long time you were talking about before?

Yes, absolutely, that's right.

This is a bit out of left field, I was just wondering if within the AWAS there were

36:00 **any lesbians?**

I think there were one or two. Whilst I was unaware of it at that stage, with hindsight, yes, yeah, there were.

Was that something you were naïve of before then?

Yes, yep. I was naïve of a lot of things.

How did the army educate you on those things?

36:30 Well you become more worldly and aware of things, but I mean there were some things that I missed altogether, like the girl who used to get under the wire and about lesbians. I only realised that many years later.

What triggered the realisation?

37:00 Well, you became aware. I don't think I knew what a lesbian was in those days and then when I did, you think back and you think, oh yes, yeah. You knew that they were different but you couldn't, I couldn't pinpoint it. Same as homosexual, they weren't, wasn't talked about very much either.

37:30 But with the media you see, the media educates people tremendously. Good ways and bad ways. Yes, there were some.

Did you get much in the way of sexual education in the army?

38:00 I think we did have some. I'm trying to think whether that was when I was nursing or whether I was in the army, but whichever it was the doctor who gave this lecture, she was so insensitive and she made it sort of repugnant. No sensitivity at all. This has got

38:30 nothing to do with the army or nursing, but years ago there was what they used to call 'mother and daughter' or 'father and son' lectures. Well, Bob had the job of taking the three boys, and because Libby

was the last born so I had the job of taking her along to this lecture. I'm not quite sure how old she was. She might've been nine, ten or something. She might've been a bit younger. Anyway we duly go along to this lecture and it was very

39:00 well done but there was supposed to be a follow-up lecture and by the time the first lecture was finished I thought, What else, what on earth else can they tell them?" So on the way home I said to Lib, "Well now, if you have any questions about what you've learnt tonight I'd like you to ask me instead of talking about it with your girlfriends," I said, "because sometimes people get things garbled.

39:30 So, you know, if you have any questions," and she said, "Oh yes, I have a question. I said, "Oh yes, what's that? She wanted to know how to spell something, and I thought, "You weren't ready for this. Oh dear, oh dear."

That's so cute. I think that's the end of the tape.

Tape 7

00:30 **Okay, I wanted to ask you whether in any of the time you spent down in Fawkner whether there was ever a situation regarding Japanese people or Japanese planes or Japanese sightings or anything like that? Was that fear of the Japanese that you knew in Sydney around the Kuttabul, did anything like that exist down in Melbourne?**

Not to my knowledge, no, no.

Did you

01:00 **in your time as a Don R have anything to do with MacArthur's HQ [headquarters] in Melbourne?**

No. You were aware of the American influence because of the number of American personnel who were here, but there were more of them in Sydney than there were in Melbourne, but there were always a few here.

01:30 **When you were driving at night, I was wondering if you could describe what it was like with regard to the brown out?**

Don't remember much about that.

I was listening to you talking earlier about the sleepy Chinaman off to the market and

Yeah.

the milkman and so on. I just wondered if you could recall what the street lights looked like or the head lamps?

They're just normal as

02:00 I recall. Don't remember much about that at all.

Public transport in Melbourne, the trams, did they run all night?

Yes, they did. It was only – or did they run all night? Look, I'm not sure.

That's okay. I was even wondering who operated the public transport, whether that was civilian

02:30 **service or whether they put military service on board?**

No, it was civilian service run by the government. All these facilities in those days were run by the government.

I bet a lot of women were in uniform, in civilian, that's a silly sentence but you know what I mean, uniforms for civilian activities?

Yes, they wore a uniform. I think they still

03:00 do today, don't they?

Yes. The public transport that still has people on board, of which there is hardly any left.

Yeah, yeah.

Now you know the VDC, the Voluntary [Defence Corps] – I've gotten my acronym wrong, basically what they call 'Dad's Army'.

Oh yes, yeah.

Did you see any evidence of that at night, men doing patrols and the like?

What they used to do, this is civilians, they would

03:30 build dugouts in their backyards, which when it rained would be half filled with water. It was ridiculous. No, I don't remember anybody sort of you know.

It's ridiculous now in retrospect I suppose, because the likelihood of an air raid on Melbourne was very slim but I guess then they just didn't know.

Oh well, I mean psychologically it was

04:00 probably good because they'd think, "Oh, I can dive in there if there's an air raid."

Head first if it's full of water.

Yeah. Drown.

I wonder what sort of food people kept, well maybe they didn't, but I bet they must've kept some canned food or something down there.

Yeah, probably.

Now do you remember the brown out murders, the Leonski business?

Was this the Pyjama?

No, that was a bit later, but it was an American serviceman

04:30 **who unfortunately perpetrated some heinous crimes against women and they became known as the 'Leonski Brown Out Murders' and they would've been around the time you were a despatch rider.**

I remember that name, but I still don't remember the brown out. Yeah, I remember that name now.

Okay. What about the Dugout,

05:00 **the nightclub in the basement that Myers operated.**

Don't know anything about that?

Okay, next question. Accident while you were a Don R, did anything occur along the way?

I remember I was driving along Little

05:30 Collins Street and somebody knocked into the back of me. It wasn't, it was just so minor but that's the only time.

Okay. What about sort of other accidents amongst the AWAS at Fawkner Park? Any old thing really I guess.

No, no, don't remember any accidents.

Did

06:00 **you carry a weapon of any kind in the truck or the ute?**

No, no.

Did they give you rifle drill when you were at Ingleburn?

No.

Never learnt to fire a gun?

No.

Okay. Oh, I wanted to go back to the question about the Melbourne Cup when you went. I don't suppose you remember who won that year?

No.

Things like the Grand Final

06:30 **and the cricket and so on kept going to a certain degree. I believe it was to a lesser degree. I know you're a New South Welshperson so maybe not so interested in the football, but do you recall sort of civilian gatherings like that during the war?**

No, probably because I never ever went. No, I don't remember.

That's alright. I'm striking out here a little bit but we'll get back to your story in a moment and I'll stop asking you these pestering questions.

07:00 **The black market, were you ever offered to buy things off the black market or were you aware of its existence in Melbourne?**

You were aware of its existence if you had friends who had American friends, and they used to talk about silk stockings. Silk stockings and chocolates I think, but as

07:30 I say there weren't as many Americans in Melbourne as there were in Sydney. But that's what the guys used to specialise in, silk stockings.

I guess it was a way of buying a date with a pretty AWAS or similar.

Mmm.

What, on the question of love, did you have any romances in your time as an AWAS?

I had a boyfriend who –

08:00 I had him before I went in to the army and then he went into the army and he went up north and we used to correspond the entire time I was in the army but then when I came out, well, that was all finished. That wasn't on.

Were you a different person?

Mmm.

Was he heart-broken?

I don't think he was too happy.

08:30 **Things must've really changed for women during the war, especially if they joined a service in that regard then?**

Oh, it made them more independent, gave them a better self-image, they were aware that there were so many things that they could do which for years they were told they couldn't. Yes, it made them a bigger person all round.

And in terms of romance and love

09:00 **did it change your opinion of the sort of fellow that you thought was appropriate for you?**

No, I don't think it changed anything.

I wanted to ask about these officers, and not so much the Wandering Hands Society, but the kind of fellows that you met along the way. Some of them would've been World War I returned soldiers and some would've been graduates from various colleges and so on.

09:30 **What kind of officers did you meet along the way?**

Well, you didn't meet very many. The closest I ever got to them was when I was staff car driving and you see, at Fawkner Park, that was run entirely by female officers. There were male officers at Albert Park administrating,

10:00 you know, what we did. Like you know, organising shifts and where you were going to go during the day but that's really the only officer contact I had.

But your description before: they were either puffed up or they were gentlemen or they, you had a third one there somewhere.

That's the wandering hand job.

Yes.

10:30 **What sort of a risk, what could you do in those circumstances when an officer behaved inappropriately?**

There was very little you could do. With the puffed up ones, they were in the main very arrogant and rude and you just had to ignore them because you couldn't

11:00 just tell them what you thought of them. You just couldn't because you knew that they would have more to say than you would.

Well what sort of an incidence can you recall in which they would sort of demonstrate that sort of behaviour?

They just treated you like dirt sometimes and

11:30 it used to make me very angry. I used to think how dare you treat me like this, and there was very little you could do. You'd just try to ignore them and just give them a look of thunder.

Did they intimidate you?

No, they didn't intimidate me. Maybe it would've been better had they done so, but they didn't. They just used to make me angry.

Perhaps that's your father's

12:00 **wise advice coming through. Were you ever reprimanded by an officer or threatened with a charge?**

No.

Spotless record all the way through? There must've been some girls that got themselves into hot water here and there?

Oh, there are always those, always doing the wrong thing but that was just their temperament. No matter what they did they'd probably be doing

12:30 the wrong thing, like me dear brother.

Well apart from this lady of the night that went under the wire,

You like that one, don't you?

I kind of do. It's an interesting little twist on things. Were there any other elements of scandal or outrageous behaviour that was hushed up or kept hidden for years?

There were always the love affairs going on, and you know, everybody would be,

13:00 it was exciting knowing who was going with whom. It used to be quite a giggle actually, but the funny thing was, see, most of these blokes were married and of course these affairs didn't last very long, but I guess in the main they were, you know, a decent bunch, but you're always going to get,

13:30 in a community like that, there's always going to be affairs and so forth.

Are they affairs in the way that we would describe an affair today, but more of a companionship?

I think that today there's not the secrecy that there was then.

14:00 People are more open.

But were there sort of adulterous affairs, were they as serious as that?

Well, I don't know whether they were adulterous, they probably were, but I don't know. And of course I think there wasn't the pill to be used in

14:30 those days and I think that women would go so far but they'd go no further because they didn't want to become pregnant. And there wasn't the knowledge either then, but I mean women know so much more about their bodies today. Not that they all take notice of it; there still seem to be all these unwanted pregnancies.

15:00 **Were there unwanted pregnancies in any of the sigs?**

I don't know. I don't know of any.

Perhaps girls were just whisked off somewhere if that happened.

Well, I think that if they did become pregnant they would have been discharged. See, 'cause you weren't supposed to get married, but we had a wedding at Fawkner Park so I don't know about that.

I saw the photograph of the bride. Was the whole ceremony celebrated there?

15:30 Mmm.

How was it conducted?

They had a minister, had a padre. Oh yes, great excitement.

What happened to the bride after she was married?

I'm not sure. She may have been discharged, because you weren't supposed to be married. If you married in the army you were discharged.

I don't suppose you can recall when

16:00 **the war ended in Europe while you were in the sigs?**

Don't know.

Okay, which typically enough leads to my next question which is celebration of Japanese capitulation.

That happened whilst I was at Fawkner Park.

Yeah.

There's a little photo there showing people dancing around.

Is that at the shrine?

No, there's another one there

16:30 of a group at Fawkner Park.

Holding hands?

That's right.

Oh, I see.

I mean as soon as we heard about that everybody went crazy and that's what they did on the spur of the moment. There was much laughter and happiness and that's what they did, but then they had this other big celebration at the shrine where all those people congregated.

Where

17:00 **were you on this spontaneous moment when everybody went crazy?**

I was there at Fawkner Park. It was a very joyful time.

Were you given the day off?

No, no.

What were you supposed to do as a soldier in a situation like that with the war announced over?

Well, just keep the machine going. You just can't suddenly stop the

17:30 army operating, not within the city anyway.

What were your orders the day after VJ [Victory over Japan] day?

No specific orders. I think we were, yes, we were told to go to the shrine, but you only spent so much time there. You weren't there all day, just for the speeches

18:00 and so forth.

Did it give you pause for thought in terms of what your future was going to hold with the war over?

I knew what my future was going to hold. No problem there.

You'd already made inroads into your nursing career at this point I think, you mentioned earlier.

Yes, but I always knew that's what I wanted to do. Probably I hadn't, you know, well I couldn't have got

18:30 out of the army unless the war was over, but I had some friends who were nursing at the time and I used to spend time with them on days off or nights off. So I was able to find out just exactly what I had to do as far as work and application and all that sort of stuff.

19:00 So I went ahead and did it.

Before we talk about that I wanted to ask a bit about the ambulance driving to the Concord Military Hospital and how you came to be sent back to Sydney.

The system was if you enlisted in Sydney you had to go back to the city of your enlistment to be demobbed, and that's why I was there.

And,

19:30 **so you still had quite a bit of work to do before they were prepared to demob you by the sounds of it.**

Well, it was waiting for all the book work. That took quite a while. I suppose I was there for a couple of months just waiting for these papers to come through, and as soon as they did, that was it.

When you got back to Sydney from Fawkner Park were you given home leave?

No, because

20:00 I was living at home anyway.

Okay. What was it like going back and seeing your folks after a reasonable absence?

That took quite a bit of adjustment, but that sorted itself out really.

In what sense? Were you and your mother suddenly two independent women under the same roof?

Yes, well Mum had to get used to me and I had to get used to her.

20:30 There was compromise on both sides, but it was a balanced compromise on both sides so that was all right.

And what about your dad? Did he sort of feel he'd lost his little girl or was he very pleased to see his grown up daughter back?

He was always pleased to see me back. I had a very special relationship with my father.

You were both soldiers now basically or he was in the navy, but yeah. So I'd like

21:00 **to ask a little bit about taking these returned soldiers to Concord. It's a very sad story in many ways but just on a more basic note, the ambulances, did you drive the ambulances yourself? Were they army issued ambulances or civilian ambulances?**

Army. I don't think the army would've wanted the public to see what was going on, or if they did they should've been

21:30 ashamed of themselves.

Were you given any special instruction regarding these men?

Not instruction, but one of the girls who was doing this, or had been doing it for a while, she said to me, she asked me had I ever done it before and I said, "No," and she warned me that I would see sights that I would find disturbing and that's exactly what happened.

22:00 **Can you take me through that a little bit? Where did you pick them up from?**

We picked them up from the railway siding at Concord and they were put in the ambulance and then we took them straight to Concord.

At the railway siding around about how many carriages full of the returned POWs were there? Was it many dozens of

22:30 **them?**

No, not dozens but there were quite a lot, quite a lot, and they'd come all the way, they'd come from the islands and then they were landed at northern Queensland somewhere and then come by train all the way down the coast to Melbourne, to Sydney, under those conditions.

Did they have nurses, orderlies with them?

23:00 They had orderlies, 'cause as I said, I don't know whether they were drugged to keep them calm or whether it was just such acute shell shock. I don't know that, but they were just like zombies.

Were they physically intact?

Oh yes, nothing physical. It was all mental cases.

And were they,

23:30 **what, you know, how much did they seem to weigh? Were they emaciated for example or were they in reasonable condition?**

Oh, reasonable condition. I suppose they were all a bit thin, but they weren't emaciated.

And their skin colour, was that noticeable?

Oh, they all looked sick and of course they were all just,

24:00 all bearded. Some of them looked like monkeys, it was a terrible sight.

And the orderlies looking after them, how were they treating these men?

Oh, as you would expect them. They weren't cruel in anyway. I mean they had to be directed into the ambulance and they had to be helped because of their mental

24:30 state.

Did they seem to know each other?

No, didn't talk, didn't do anything. They just allowed themselves to be guided wherever.

And what were they dressed in?

Dirty clothing whatever it was. It would have had to have been army issue. They were so dirty, so unkempt.

25:00 They smelled. It was awful.

And when you drove them in the ambulance was there a partition between you and them in the back?

Yes, yeah.

Okay. Was there any exchange between yourself and any of the men?

No.

And for example, about how many of these trips would you have made in that time?

Oh well, you just kept on going to and fro.

25:30 **And the trains had barricaded windows you said?**

Bars, bars. It just, when I first looked at it, I thought, "This looks like an animal truck."

It does, it conjures up some of the images of the [Jewish] Holocaust sufferers and how they were carted around.

Mmm.

I'm sure that sounds opinionated but I'm just trying to get an image.

It was most disturbing. I've never ever

26:00 forgotten it. And to think, I think that what, the fact that they were treated this way, I thought "Why couldn't they have been treated in a better manner and looked after in a better manner." I mean these were men who went away to the war and probably most of them were

26:30 sensitive men. This is what war did to them. It wasn't their fault. I just thought it was an absolute disgrace.

The war's over at this point. Did you have a different idea of what war was before this event?

27:00 Yes. I imagined broken bones and blood, but not this mental tragedy. I didn't sort of think, I didn't know anything about that, but to see it, it just gave me an absolute horror of war

27:30 to think that this unseen tragedy, no bones and blood, could be so –

I bet lots of your friends and family had no idea and possibly would not have believed you if you told them.

No, well, that's true. I mean I didn't know that war could do this to a human being. So I mean who would

28:00 know? You just wouldn't imagine that unless you saw it or unless you were told, and even if you were told it would be hard to believe.

Did you ever make inquiries into these men or men similar to this afterwards?

No.

And was this information ever public knowledge in those years after the war?

I think it was public knowledge that you had these shell shocked men,

28:30 but it was the way that they were treated that I found so disturbing. I mean they must've been on that train for days to be in the state they were in.

And what about Concord Military Hospital? Did you get a chance to see the sorts of facilities that they would be taken into there?

No,

29:00 but knowing a little bit about Heidelberg they would've been very well looked after in a military hospital.

Your knowledge of Heidelberg, was that after, when you became a nurse?

No, that was when I was in the army. We used to go there; we used to take despatches to Heidelberg.

Okay.

And the fellows there were very well looked after and

29:30 at that stage, I mean some of the fellows at Heidelberg, they were shell shocked and then when I saw these fellows on the train I thought, heavens, you're going to be in that hospital, maybe some of them forever.

30:00 **Did you talk about this with the AWAS that you were working with? I'm assuming you were still in pairs there.**

In driving the ambulances, no. We were – I was the driver and then there was an orderly with me.

And did you discuss it with him?

No. I was just so horrified I just couldn't say anything much. I think

30:30 I might have somewhere along the line said something to one of them. He said, "This is just war."

Is that the sort of scene that these days you would sort of seek counselling for? I know it didn't exist really for you then?

Oh yes, yes, probably. I'm a great believer in counselling but I didn't know anything much about counselling in those days.

But is it possible

31:00 **that you were traumatised by that event yourself?**

I would say so; the fact that it's so vivid in my memory today indicates that, yes, in answer to your question.

Did you tell your mum and dad?

No.

And later on when you became a nurse did you have ever have occasion to treat patients who were suffering from what's now known as post traumatic stress disorder?

31:30 Oh yes, from time to time, yeah.

I was just wondering if there was some link in your mind as to what you'd experienced at the end of your war career and what you began to work with as a nurse.

I didn't do much nursing in this line because I don't think I could have for any length of time. I would've found it just too distressing. The same as

32:00 babies who are very, very sick. I'm not very good in that direction either. No, I wouldn't want to nurse too many of them.

It's a pretty confronting way to finish what had been a, what sounds like quite a good experience in the army.

Mmm.

32:30 **I guess it bites everybody at some point. How long did they keep you tied up driving ambulances before you could get demobbed?**

Oh, it was probably about a month I suppose, six weeks.

What was your experience of getting out like then? Had enough or disappointing?

No, because

33:00 I was glad to get out because I wanted to get on with what I wanted to do, but I had some good friends, I had good times and it was a – and I learnt a lot, grew up a lot, matured a lot. So there was a lot that was good about it.

Had Sydney changed much in your time away?

Busier.

33:30 But it was still Sydney, still the cattle trucks up, not that – I mean Melbourne is so well organised as far as streets, but Sydney, you can see the cattle trucks if you close your eyes, but it's a great place. I mean I love both Sydney and Melbourne for different reasons. They're two wonderful cities.

Sydney's just stunning

34:00 **and beautiful.**

Oh, well when you've got that natural beauty of a harbour, that's magnificent. Something that is natural, not man made.

In the year or so, or in that year after the war finished what are some of the significant changes that you saw from a country in war or a city in war to a city post war?

34:30 A lot of happiness and also a lot of sadness, progress, building, lots of food in shops, lots of clothing, no more rationing. Well the rationing did taper off, it didn't sort of, you know, chop out suddenly, but there was a lot more of everything.

And the

35:00 **Americans, did they take a long time to leave or were they sort of gone quite quickly?**

The same again, tapering off. It was gradual, but most Australians were glad to see them go.

And how soon after that did you manage to get your nursing career going because I noticed you came back down to Melbourne. Was that your choice or was that just destiny?

No, I came

35:30 to do my training in Melbourne because it was three years here, four years in Sydney. So I thought I could do with a year up my sleeve.

I'll bet. Did being in the AWAS give you any benefits in trying to become, when you went to become a nurse?

I was far more mature than lots of the kids who were starting, because I was nearly 21.

Gosh, how old.

36:00 **I wish I was as old as that!**

And the rest of them were 17 and 18.

What about some practical free-kicks though? Did you get any, you know, credits towards your –

I did nursing through the Rehabilitation Scheme which I think they gave – sent a cheque every now and again. I think there was a regular cheque, and also you were allowed,

36:30 if you wanted extra books you could buy them. Well, they paid for all your books. You bought the books and you had to get the signature of the tutor sister to say that you needed these books and they recompensed you then.

Did you bump into many folks that you knew during the AWAS while you were training to be a nurse?

Sorry, what was that?

Sorry, did you have occasion to meet any of your fellow

37:00 **AWAS women or officers who had gone on to nursing as well?**

No. Oh, one of the friends from the group that I was with in the AWAS, she did her training in Sydney, but she's the only one.

And did it live up to your long held expectations?

Yes, absolutely. I think I nursed in all for about 35 years in

37:30 between having babies and all the rest of it. It's a wonderful profession because you can still put your family first and do what you love doing. I reckoned it kept me sane because it was mentally stimulating instead of getting in with groups of mums who, they used to talk about cooking and kids, and I used to think, oh my God. So you know, a little bit, I've never worked full time

38:00 since I've been married. I've always worked part time, but yes, it's lived up to my expectations and more.

And on reflection, as devastating as war is for a country, how do you think Australia benefited as a country because of the war?

I don't know whether it did. I'd have to think about that.

38:30 Probably made Australia grow up perhaps, but that's the only thing I can think of at this stage. Might be it made the rest of the world perhaps a bit more aware of Australia, but I mean there are thousands of Americans who don't even know about Australia today. So there you go.

Do you think that we should have got involved

39:00 **then, before the Japanese I'm talking about?**

Oh, we had no option because we were very much a royalist country at that stage. Had no option, and then when the Americans came into the war and the Japanese, I mean we had no option.

Do you think it was a just war that we fought?

39:30 Not when you think of the Changi prisoners of war, no. Is war ever just? I don’t think so.