

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Alison Armstrong (Pippi) - Transcript of interview

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### Tape 1

00:33 **So I will start off with the overview that we were talking about, so if you can just take me through where you were born, your schooling and that sort of thing?**

Well I was born in Mudgee in New South Wales, and then I was baptised in Fiji at three months, because we lived there at Tavua, and

01:00 I lived there until I turned eight. And I went away to boarding school because there were no schools handy. And I went to a funny little school, I think there were 50 in the whole school. It was up at Leura in the Blue Mountains, called Branxton. It was a privately owned one, and I had five terms there. I started in the May, after May holidays, and then my parents were in Sydney. So after that

01:30 we lived out at Vacluse, and I went to Campars as a daygirl because it was the nearest school. And it was a mile; and you walked. During the third year my mother died, so being an only child, what you do, if you can afford it, you send that child back to boarding school. So then I went to boarding school at Abbotsleigh at Wahroonga, and I had five years there. Then my father kept saying,

02:00 "You've got to have some training." So I did a business course and while I was doing that business course I used to go along to Mrs Mac's at night, and learn Morse. By the time the year ended I was up to the 25 words a minute and I decided I'd go into the navy. My father said, "You should be working for the Americans, they pay good money," but there were certain things about the Americans I wouldn't have said to my

02:30 father. So I just said, "No, I am going to the navy." So then I went into the navy at the end of that year, and I was sent down to Harman, outside Canberra. I had eight months there. They taught me the Japanese Morse, but I had the 25 words a minute already so within three weeks I was on watch, as was the girl who roomed with me. And

03:00 August I was drafted to Magnetic, which is Townsville. And we were in a small establishment there, a third of a way up Castle Hill. There were only 32 girls in the place, and we had a cook and a stewardess. And the rest of us were either teleprinter operators or telegraphists, it was called. And I spent

03:30 until, got married in August '45, just after the end of the war, in Townsville. And then the navy threw me out because, you know, if you were married you got thrown out, at this stage, because it was peacetime then. So I was sent down to Sydney and I had leave that I was due. And they said they drafted me to Rushcutter but they didn't do anything at Rushcutter.

04:00 The navy staff office reserves grabbed me because I could type, so I did that for a while. Then I worked for a cousin because my husband went overseas with BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force]. He was a fighter pilot, so he flew the mustangs over there. When he came back we had a bit of holiday around the place and then we came to Queensland and looked for a property. So then I settled down on a property and I had four children. I learnt

04:30 about the land. And then I decided I'd study accountancy, by correspondence, which was a mad thing to do, but I did it. And I got there. I started working and my husband was, it was just as well, because my husband developed cancer and he died within the year. So I was able to work and I was much better off than I would have been otherwise.

05:00 Some years later my youngest son and his wife decided they'd go onto the farm because we hadn't been able to sell it. So they settled down there and I was in Dalby working. And after a time I opened my own door, purely because the boss decided he would get rid of the old women. Yes, and it paid to open my own door. So I had an office in Dalby, mostly with women. Now and then I'd have a man

05:30 working for me. But I had up to eight women working for me, and how long did I do that? Quite some time. I did it until I came down here and I sold out then. I came here in '94, 1st of July '94. I've been sitting here ever since. That's about it.

**That was excellent. Thank you. We'll just go right back to the beginning. You**

06:00 **mentioned that you were born in Mudjee then baptised in Fiji.**

Yes, my father was in Fiji. He wasn't... I would have been born in Fiji, but guess what? The Indians were talking revolt. I mean, what changes? So we lived, fairly isolated place, so my father thrust my mother onto the first ship and sent her home to her mother, who was in Mudjee. So I was born in Mudjee.

06:30 And probably it was just as well because my grandmother died eight days after I was born. So I think she probably knew that I was born, and she might not have otherwise. That was why I was baptised in Fiji, at three months. My mother used to get seasick walking down the wharf. Must have been a lovely trip for her with a new baby. I'm sure she enjoyed it. That's about that.

**What were your parents doing in Fiji?**

07:00 CSR [Colonial Sugar Refining] Company. Years after my father died, an uncle of mine told me we lived on a sugar estate. I mean, I didn't think it was any different from anyone else's. I gather that we were more or less. Dad said he was a tenant farmer, and that's what he was. The Fijians owned the land, and the CSR leased the land from them, and Dad was a sub-lease. So he was a tenant farmer. But I'm not sure whether he had 200 or

07:30 100 workforce. I'm sorry to be vague. Most of the other places, only three sugar estates were ever opened, and the other ones, the people who, the men who were on that were called overseers. I thought, you know, the overseers were ahead of Dad, as a child, but apparently that wasn't that way at all. I mean he wasn't a head of them either but. So we lived on these farms with

08:00 black labour. A mixture of Fijian and Indian. We had what was called a houseboy, who was an Indian. He taught me Hindustani, and if Dad wanted to know how to say something in Hindustani he would say, "Daughter, come here. How do you say this?" and she'd let fly. So then he'd say, "Now, just say it slowly," and he'd repeat it until he was right. Because he just had to pick up Fijian and Hindustani. I never learnt Fijian. Most

08:30 of the children who were in Fiji had a Fijian nurse, and they learnt Fijian, whereas my mother looked after me. So apart from the houseboy we had a gardener, who was Fijian. My father had a groom, because he used to ride out to see that they were working. And he was Indian, and I used to play with his daughter, but I was the 'boss cocky' and I feel quite ashamed when I think of it now.

09:00 Then we had, well they called them a 'Chokra'. It was an Indian. He used to bring the milk up after he'd milked the cows. We had a washer woman. Sounds great, doesn't it? She was Fijian. I think that might have been about all.

**What was your friendship like with the daughter of the groom? What was her name and what sort of?**

Lally

09:30 was her name. And I was fascinated, she had a stick through her nose, just through the bottom there. So that on feast days she could hang something through it, just like people do these days, hey. Yes. I used to think, "They just kept a little stick in it." She usually wore a rather gathered skirt and I wasn't quite sure what the top was but she was a nice girl, and we were very much of an age.

10:00 **Did she speak English?**

I suppose she did. I think we were probably both bilingual. You know I think you had to be down there. Probably a mixture. Whichever suited us best. I had a little cubby house that my father had made that we could walk into, and it was on a flat area. We lived on a hilltop. It was on a flat area which was built up and had about three or four huge, big mango trees, so it was nice and

10:30 shady. Because you never went out without a hat. You never went out without socks and shoes. Hookworm, yes. So, yes it was. We were on a party line. Not up to party lines? Oh, you have to listen for your, sort of Morse code number. You know you might be D, so you would listen for a long and two shorts. Or you might be an S, you'd listen for three shorts. And there were

11:00 several other people on that line. I can't be technical with it because I'm not good enough at technical things with that, but there were lots of party lines, well there used to be plenty out in the bush here. When we were on a farm we had a party line and so it meant nothing to me. I was accustomed to those things.

**In my ignorance here, what are they used for exactly?**

That's your telephone. So that there is one line goes out and might cover twenty

11:30 people. Twenty different properties. And each one has a different code number. So you listened for yours and anyone else can listen to you if they wish to. So it's not what you'd called really private. No.

**And how loudly, like when you say you'd listen for it, would you hear it all over the...?**

Yes, it's much the same ring as your ordinary one rings. You had two fairly biggish batteries,

12:00 and if you leant against those, you'd know, you'd get battery acid on your clothes. Because they were supposed to be hidden away but they weren't always. And usually the phone sat on the wall. You've probably seen them in museums, the type of phone we had. And the headpiece hung there, and there this was a ringing thing for the side. So I grew up with that. It was quite customary.

**What sort of games would you and...?**

Lally play?

12:30 Well, I don't know. I suppose we played house in it. We probably had some little cups and saucers and things like that. And it was water no doubt. I don't know what we played. We probably had dolls and God knows what. And there was a little stool outside so we could sit outside as well. I don't remember us playing much, but I used to play shop with my mother's button box.

13:00 And that was, you know, I didn't go to school until I was eight. But, I had learnt twice times tables then. I was a bit rocky on three times tables. But I could read Dickens, and understand it. And write shockingly badly. That hasn't changed.

**Which Dickens would you read?**

Well when I went to school at the age of eight they gave us Dombey and Son to read and I could understand that. We all could.

13:30 Why? I don't know, we could. It made sense. You always read Dickens in those days and you always had Shakespeare. So I suppose I did have some of that Pole who used to write in English. Who was that? Nigger of the Narcissus and all that, Shadowline, Youth & Gasperus. No, I've forgotten his name. Conrad, Joseph Conrad. So we had that at

14:00 school too, but mostly you had a Dickens book to read. So I was really quite versed in Dickens.

**So, who had taught you to read and who taught you your times tables when you were in Fiji?**

Parents. My mother taught me the treble clef notes. She had a piano and she used to play for us. So she taught me the treble clef notes. On the back of the Russell of Spring there were some various things

14:30 so she taught me from that, which was interesting. I think my daughter now has that copy of Russell of Spring. I'm not sure who taught me to read. I think they must have done it in sheer despair because they couldn't keep me occupied otherwise. Restless.

**How much freedom did you have around the property?**

Well I didn't move far from the house, and when payday was on, all of them used to come up.

15:00 Dad had an office and it had a little window through which he used to put their pay. It used to come out on the train from Tavua, from Ba, and he'd make up all the pays and give them to them. And I wasn't allowed out of the house that day. Oh no, we were. It was, I suppose it was a bit feudal in its way. Because if they got sick, if any of those people got sick, Dad dosed them, probably with

15:30 castor oil. And he'd make them talk to see that they swallowed it. He had a storeroom with all sorts of medicines. Things for horses and things for bullocks and goodness knows what. Yes, but he always kept two horses and he used to ride out everyday. He'd have a white shirt and white, I think, moleskin pants, riding pants. Elastic sided boots, brown

16:00 of course, and leggings, leggings yes, and a topi, you know a sort of helmet, which was white. Brown belt. Fresh on several times a day, probably. But there was someone to wash and iron, so it didn't really worry my mother so much. She used to do a lot of sewing, so she taught me a bit of sewing and how to crochet, how to knit. And

16:30 I had a doll that I used to dress. So I would put a piece of material on the floor and I then I'd put the doll on top of it, then I would cut it out around it, then I'd sew it together, and it fitted. So she must have taught me to allow for seams and sides and things like that. Dad used to look in wonderment. How did I know that? But I think I'm afraid I must have been taught. So yes it was a fairly social life in many ways, but my

17:00 mother didn't drive. We had, at first, a T model Ford. Do you know that they had a gravity drive? Yes, the fuel was a gravity feed. And we lived on a hill, so Dad would take a mad run at it in the car and go as far as he could then leap out and push it the last ten feet. I don't think cars were as heavy then. We didn't keep that car very long. We then

17:30 got an Overland, which my husband always said they were mystery Overlands - it was a mystery they ever went. But they had a little sort of gauge on the front of the bonnet, with a red line going up to see how hot it was. It wasn't the type that they opened the bonnet, and they opened on each side with a hook thing. And you didn't have a boot, you had a little grid thing that folded up

18:00 and then came down, and you lashed your luggage onto that. It would take two or three. And then you

had a little concertina thing that clipped onto the running board. Funny things.

### **What sort of places would you travel to in Fiji?**

Well, the roads weren't so great. They were all dirt roads with six foot deep ditches each side to take the rain. Again I don't know whether it was a hundred inches or 200 inches a year, but it was something like that. And it was all

- 18:30 sugar cane on the flats. And the roads were narrow, so there were passing places. Not everyone had cars. I think the white people mostly did, but not the others. We were beside the Tavua river with a railway over it, which my father had built. Of course he knew nothing about railways but CSR put him onto building the railway and he seemed to manage. I don't know how.
- 19:00 But he was always agitating, "Go on the land," and managed to finally coax them into it. We'd go to Ba, and I don't know the distance. It really should be Ba, because you pronounced the M before B, and N before D, and C is pronounced TH, in Fijian. So the last king of Fiji was Thackembow, but it was Cakabau. Yes, so you need to know
- 19:30 those things. Or we'd go to Lautoka where my mother's sister and husband lived, because he was a surveyor with the company. And we had friends, we knew everyone in the CSR company. And we'd see them. The people who were in Ba, were friends, the Gamal-Smiths, and they were friends of my, well, Guy Gamal-Smith was my father's friend for years and Janet was my mother's friend and she was my godmother.
- 20:00 That's while I was called Alison. She had a son Robert, and then she had a second son who was a twin, boy and girl. And it was Alison and Gavin, but Gavin was always called 'Snape'. I don't know why. But they were out staying with my parents and there was a Morris Headstrom store. Morris Headstrom had all the stores and they sold everything you can imagine. And
- 20:30 my family, Dad I think had gone in to get the shopping, and the children got restless, which was hardly surprising I suppose because those twins were six or seven. And they got out of the car and my mother just turned her head in time to see an Indian pony that was there, kick this little girl and it ruptured the spleen and she died. So I was called Alison, and she was, her
- 21:00 mother was my godmother. Yes, funny but sad. So we'd go to the Gamal-Smiths, but then they were moved up to New South Wales, possibly because it was school time for the two boys. And they moved to various mills around New South Wales, Queensland. But we always sort of knew where they were. We stayed in Fiji and then of course then the Depression
- 21:30 started. So it was 1929 that my father came up, because the CSR said to him, "Will you resign? Will you give it up?" Because they were in a bit of a bad way with the Depression, and they wanted to break it up into smaller holdings because ours was a big one. They did say that the other, there were two others but one
- 22:00 had been broken up some years before. That was on a hill not far from where we lived. And the third one was in, near Ba. Mr Clapcot had that one. Now his wife was part Maori, and there was quite a family, and he was older than Dad. Friends, yes, but older than Dad. And they said, "It should be Clappy," because everyone called him Clappy, "but his
- 22:30 wife wouldn't be accepted in Sydney." Oh no, she wouldn't have been accepted then. "And he has a big family, he's not as well off, he can't afford it as well as you can." I mean they knew what profits Dad made, didn't they? They didn't say what he invested in. But I mean my mother had money invested. My mother had a bit too, and there was only me. So we were in a better position. So he
- 23:00 said, "Well, we really have no choice." So we came up from Fiji to Sydney and that aunt and uncle of mine who were in Lautoka. My uncle had a heart attack so he and his wife went on the first ship for Sydney, because I don't think they had heart specialist and things like that in Fiji. I suppose there was a doctor in Lautoka, I'm not quite sure. I don't think we went to see doctors
- 23:30 very often. And my parents followed on the next ship. And they had two houses to pack up, so furniture got sold, cars got sold. They brought up linen and silver and china, and that was about all. When that aunt and uncle of mine who didn't have any children went for a trip around the world they brought me a doll from every country, dressed in national dress.
- 24:00 I don't know what happened to those either. But I had this massive number of dolls. Spoilt, yes, spoilt. I think that uncle taught me a lot of old songs. He had a very true ear, you know. The Wild Colonial Boy and all those things. What did she tell me? "Her age was four and twenty, and I like a lamb, believed that I was an emu." Gee yes, I knew all those songs but
- 24:30 he had this very true ear. I don't think he ever played any musical instruments, but he was very true in his singing. And years later and I'd hear them and I'd say, "Yes, I remember that." So, but he recovered and lived for many years after that.

### **Had your uncle or your father had any involvement in the First World War?**

No, because they were in Fiji. And I think they formed the

- 25:00 Fiji Territorials. See in the Second World War a cousin of mine was in Fiji, and he was in the Fiji Territorials. He wasn't allowed to leave. Robert Gamal-Smith was in Fiji when the Second World War started, but he got onto the first ship. He and a few others. And it was an American ship that used to service Fiji. And they weren't supposed to be there because they were joining, but I don't know about the others but Robert was joining the English air force, RAF [Royal Air Force]. And they were not supposed to
- 25:30 be on a neutral ship. So they buttoned up their lips and went on the neutral ship. Another cousin of mine was in Sydney, so he joined up. But the younger brother couldn't join up because he was in Fiji and, 'just in case', someone invaded Fiji, so they needed as many men as they could keep. Which fortunately no one invaded, I'd say. So, yes
- 26:00 there was no chance of getting away. If you didn't get away on that first ship, well you'd had your chips with that. I mean everyone who could joined up in the Second World War. And some of them, as long as they were medically fit. I knew one man who. Well I would have naturally have known a great many of
- 26:30 the people who were in Fiji because we'd grown up together as kids. But if they could get away, they got away, naturally. And a lot of them did manage to join up. But they had to be pretty smart about it or else they were already in Sydney or something like that. See Snape Gamal-Smith was in Sydney whereas his brother was in Fiji, so he joined the army, and he was right through the war but
- 27:00 yes, and even the women joined up. And if you didn't, if you hadn't joined up and you were sitting at home idly doing nothing, which it had been customary for you to do, you learned how to keep house, do all those good things. Well I never learnt those. But Manpower caught up with you later, but I was already in the navy by then. And a friend of mine, who was a war widow. She
- 27:30 was in Townsville growing up, and the minute she finished school Manpower said to her, "You will go and work at the Townsville hospital, and you cannot leave." And there were girls who were at school with me who were put into an armament factory that was somewhere around Turramurra or something like that and they had to work there. So I suppose I saved myself the effort, I did the Morse instead. But I suppose it was interesting, yes it was interesting.
- 28:00 We did watch keeping all the time. Which meant, it's a little bit involved. But you were on and off watch alternately for either a 24 hour period, or a 48 hour period. And after your 24 hour period you could probably have a 24 hour period with no watches. Then you'd go on again. The watch would start at midday, and you'd probably then do a 48 hour period. So that was 24 hours
- 28:30 of that 48, you were on watch. You had to fit your sleep in, and bathing and cleaning the bathrooms, because you had to get the bathrooms clean. And meals and anything else you may want to do in the 24 hours that you weren't sitting there on watch with these things on your head. They did train us to put gas masks on and sit on watch
- 29:00 with the gas mask on. Dreadful smell, oh a sort of horrible rubbery smell. And then the earphones on top of that, and no peripheral vision, because they were like that. Thank God they only did that to us once. We used to get things on permanent loan. We'd get things on loan, we'd get things on permanent loan. If you had it on permanent loan you took it from one station to the next if you were drafted. Your gas
- 29:30 mask and your tin hat were permanent loan. I think your overalls were permanent loan. Your shorts and blankets were loan so they stayed where they started. Odd isn't it? We did get issue of clothes when we first went into the navy. And after that we had to buy our own from their own shops. We got an allowance of eight pence halfpenny a day for that,
- 30:00 and that was sufficient. And we had very few coupons. You had to buy clothes with coupons through the war. You probably don't know that. Well we had these, you had these food and clothing coupons. Everyone had them. And I think we had 25 coupons a year as we had to buy pyjamas, dressing gowns, swimming togs. And the socks that the navy gave us were woollen ones and you know
- 30:30 how yellow they'd go if you were washing them all the time. So we preferred to buy cotton socks. So we bought socks and, if you wanted, other clothes. So it was a little difficult to manage with your clothes. There were coupons for tea and butter and sugar.

**Was there anyway to get more coupons?**

I don't think bribery was rife. But when I was getting married some people who had children

- 31:00 found that they had plenty of coupons and they offered them. Some extra coupons for me. Because it could be quite difficult, you didn't get many things. And we became masters of the art of subterfuge, I suppose. Small tablecloths, about three feet square. They were not couponed, neither were laundry bags, neither were blankets. So if you wanted a winter dressing gown you would buy blankets and made it from that. If you
- 31:30 wanted swimming togs - and you needed swimming togs; you were in the water all the time in Townsville. So these little tablecloths made really good swimming togs.

**How would you change a tablecloth into swimming togs?**

Well you might have two of them, in which case you would have enough for a little frilly skirt and a pair of pants underneath and a separate top. Not like the bikinis these days - they were very, very modest in comparison. And I had at least two swimming

32:00 togs. There was a blue one and there was a pink one. Made from tablecloths. I think the blue one had the laundry bag pants to go with it, whereas the other one, I had two tablecloths for that.

**Laundry bag pants?**

Yes, we had a sewing machine up there in Townsville and a lot of us had done a fair bit of sewing in our time. So there was always someone who would help. So yes, it was really interesting.

32:30 You had all woollen costumes before the war and really they did wear out. And what were you going to do? You had to have something on, didn't you? So I had a bit of material and I made that up. It wasn't quite a two-piece, it was fairly close to it, and then the tablecloths and things you see they saw me out.

**Would you ever say to anyone,**

33:00 **"My togs are made out of tablecloth?"**

Well we all knew it, because we knew what we were doing and no coupons for those things. It was quite advantageous to have something that didn't have coupons. Yes. I think when I got married you were given a few coupons. It was enough to buy a pair of double bed sheets and two pillowslips and a tablecloth. It was a big tablecloth. No that

33:30 couldn't have been a coupon; it must have been a towel. And I got something bigger because we had towels; we managed to keep our towels. And they so those were the only towels we had for a time. Yes, I got a pair of double bed sheets and a pair of single bed sheets and I think maybe I got tea towels. Yes tea towels, we needed some tea towels,

34:00 didn't we? And I got larger tea towels and that took more coupons, so I didn't have any left over for towels. You didn't have, you know, six of everything. Definitely not. This was on, and this was in the wash and coming back onto the bed all the time.

**And how did the coupon system work? If I had money, could I buy something that was couponed or was it only...?**

34:30 You could buy something that wasn't couponed, but you had to provide your coupon as well as the money. The coupons were given to you, so much a year, so many a year. If you had children you got a few more because they grew out of them, didn't they? But otherwise you wore things out till they were worn out. So you had to provide your coupons when you were buying milk. I've got a feeling it might have been with eggs, too. I'm not too clear on that. But tea

35:00 and eggs. Tea and butter and sugar were certainly couponed. And you had to buy them, yes, but you also had to provide these coupons which were issued to you every year, per person.

**Would you ever exchange coupons amongst each other?**

Yes, we could do that. I know one friend of mine was going overseas and he said, "Take these." And I said, "But you haven't any pyjamas." He said, "No. I'll play poker and win some

35:30 on the way." And I said, "What if you lose?" Well he said, "Oh, I'll do something." But, so he gave me some coupons and I think I got some more socks as a result. There was some, we could exchange things. We couldn't buy them, but we could exchange, yes. So, different isn't it? You can't sort of think of that. You used to have blackouts, you know, the power would go off. You would...

36:00 this was straight after the end of the war. You'd go to the hairdresser and you were just into the thing, and she was just going to put one of those terrible things, because they didn't have this blow drier system. One of these terrible things and then the power would go off. So you would be there for four hours instead of half an hour. And you'd be halfway through cooking the meal and the gas would go off. And you'd think, "What can we do now?" And I do remember us - because I went home just while my husband

36:30 was still in the forces - I remember us turning the radiator on just to finish cooking the chops, so we could eat. And then my father went out and bought a little kerosene stove. We had a little electric stove; we had a gas stove. I don't think he fancied the radiator. And we had this little kerosene stove to use so we managed quite well. Yes, you wouldn't believe all that, would you?

37:00 It sounds so different. The water used to go off when we were in Townsville because we were a third of a way up Castle Hill, this station of ours. Back to the war. At [HMAS] Harman, they had two stations. One for the Y and the other one for the ordinary station's work. They were separated a good hundred yards from each other and they were

37:30 brick buildings, I think. But they had... About 2 feet 8 out from the wall they had another brick wall, which came up past the eaves, so that you didn't see a chink of light. Very secretive you see. Then there was a DF [Direction Finding - radar] station at Harman too. The men used to manage that because it

- was probably over half a mile away over tusky grass. They had a bike, pushbike, not motor. No fuel,
- 38:00 fuel was rationed. So they used to go out there and listen for various places. We were always searching also for submarines, Japanese submarines. They had a specific call sign, which was RS negative. Sort of, di, da, di, di, di, da, da, da'. And they'd come up and they'd just press their key and it sounded as though it was underwater, really. It had a different noise about it and we always
- 38:30 had someone searching for submarines. We had about six frequencies they used.

**Did you ever hear one?**

Yes. Oh yes. And the minute you heard one, or you thought you'd you might have one coming up, you'd call out, because there was one girl in charge of that particular watch. We'd have about 15 girls on watch together, and two teleprinter operators. And you'd call out, "I think I've got one," and she'd come round and she'd get a pair of phones and plug in. She'd say, "Yes, certainly sounds, what frequency are you on?"

- 39:00 Then she'd rush out to the phone and ring the DF people. "We think we've got a sub on such and such." So he'd tune into that and see if he could get a direction-finding beam onto it, so that he knew which direction. So we always did that sort of thing. I had one come up when we were in Townsville, so got on the teleprinter to Melbourne, which was Monterey. And said, "Will you ring through to Harman and ask the DF to go onto this frequency, I think I've got a submarine?"
- 39:30 Well you know, you do what you can, don't you?

**We'll just change tapes there, we've just reached the end of that.**

## Tape 2

- 00:35 **Yes, I was only quite young. I was just turning eight when I went away to the boarding school and then I came home. I was home for three weeks at Christmas time. The school, Branhholm used to have a mistress take you down on the train from Leura to Sydney.**
- 01:00 **And my mother's sister, who lived in Sydney, used to meet me there and take me home to her place. So the September holidays I spent with her. And then she'd take me back and the mistress would escort us back. I suppose if we'd been older we didn't need escorts, but at my age I think we probably did. Then, at Christmas time, the same system and she'd take me home, and she'd know when the ship was travelling, leaving, and she'd take me over to the**
- 01:30 **ship and go and see the stewardess, who I'd known all my life. And all the crew I'd known all my life, and knew my way around those ships completely. And you always had a fancy dress party the night before you landed in Fiji. And I had my fancy dress ready to wear.**
- What fancy dress would you wear?**
- A sort of Kate Greenaway dress, which you probably don't know. It's sort of up here, and just hanging, very, very discreet you know.
- 02:00 So I had my fancy dress thing. So I only got home for three weeks and then I had to catch the boat back and my aunt met me in Sydney. I thought I was doing this all by my little self. It took a week to ten days to get to Fiji and I thought I was quite smart. I could do this, I knew my around, and of course I was a good sailor, which was a help. But my mother had written to everyone on that ship to look after me. And
- 02:30 they were not obtrusive to me. They thought, "Oh well, she's managing all right, we'll just keep an eye on her."
- What would you do during the days on those ships?**
- Well there were all sorts of games. They would have quoits and sort of circles type thing with the circle, and you played more or less deck tennis and things of that nature. I think they had one of the things the navy used
- 03:00 to play. A board with various things. I don't know whether its called Crown & Anchor, or what it's called, or Tom Bowler, or something like that. But they had all those things. And you had to eat, didn't you? And you had morning tea and afternoon tea as well as meals.
- Were they good meals on the ships?**
- Yes, they were good meals. They were excellent meals. And one occasion my mother and I were travelling back to Fiji. This was earlier. And Dad; the
- 03:30 men only went every second year. So one year, my mother's sister and her husband would go with us, and the next year my aunt's husband wouldn't go, but Dad would go. So we had someone to do the tipping and getting the taxis and things like that. We got looked after. We were coming back from

Sydney to Fiji, and we went into a hurricane, didn't we, at sea. So they had steel covers that they put over all the portholes,

04:00 and they were all over the port holes. You weren't allowed out on deck because it was too dangerous. So the only place you could be through the daytime, was in the, what they called the smoking room. And it was a smoking room. It was a complete fug. Of course no one knew that smoking was dangerous. My uncle had charge of me, which I think must have been a bit difficult. I was the only female passenger who wasn't ill. I suppose I was five, and

04:30 I'd here the gong. "Oh, time for lunch," and off we'd go. And I'd sit down and I'd say, "Yes, I'll have curry and rice and plum pudding thanks." And I'd get some old-fashioned looks from people who were feeling a little on the queasy side. "That wretched child." Because they'd have the fiddles up. Do you know what I mean by the fiddles? They'd have boards put up so the tablecloth went over the top and things didn't slither off the table.

05:00 So they had to have those up because it was a bit rough, and this horrible child just, you know, ate everything and thought it was wonderful. It was great. I didn't like being down in the cabin with my aunt and my mother because they were feeling rather ill, and being ill. And it was horrible. So I used to flit from there up to the fug. And I think we turned back towards Sydney and then we turned back towards Fiji again.

05:30 We finally ended up. I think it took us a time. Sometimes we used to call in at Noumea. I did that once or twice. But mostly it was a direct trip. And they went on to America, those ships. It was before they had the Monterey and Mariposa, they all, it was Ventura [Matsonia] and something else, I forget. Three of them used to do the trip.

**You mentioned that everyone on the ship knew you and you had known**

06:00 **them all your life.**

I knew all the crew. They seemed, you know, you seemed to stay in one place and anyone that was going to Fiji I knew. And you got to know the other passengers too.

**And what was your relationship like with the crew? You were a little girl and...?**

I was a little girl and they were very good to you, you know. I used to play hide and seek with the button boy at the Metropole Hotel, because we used to stay there. They had these

06:30 doors that came out here and there was a place in there. Of course they could never find me in there. They knew I was there, but they could never find me there, because they were good to me.

**Did it seem strange at boarding school that during the holidays you were going to Fiji? Where were the other kids going, and did you talk about it?**

Well, they would go home. Yes, there weren't very many day girls at that school. It was a only a school for girls, but it went from kindergarten up to

07:00 Leaving Certificate, because senior was Leaving in New South Wales. And I think we had five or six in the class. There were only two of us who were boarders of this age group. And we were really spoilt rotten because you know someone would compete to take you home for an afternoon after school. And you'd walk home with them and then

07:30 their parents would bring you home back to the school afterwards. We used to go for a walk every afternoon and watch the mist gathering in the valleys, and then walk home in the mist. It was very pleasant.

**What sort of stories would you tell them about Fiji?**

I don't know that I really told them many. It was just where I lived. It was just where I lived. We did have social outings where we met people.

08:00 They all had parties and things. I was never allowed into the kitchen. Yes, washing up was an unknown quantity. Making a bed was an unknown quantity. I think the first time I made a bed I did alternately, blanket, sheet, blanket, sheet, blanket. Wasn't very comfortable. I had to learn all those things. If my mother made a cake, which she used to sometimes make a cake, she didn't have to wash up afterwards.

08:30 I had a tricycle and I had a rocking horse. I suppose I had a lot of other things too, a lot of toys, a lot of dolls, and things of that nature.

**How were you treated at the boarding school?**

Very, very well indeed. They had a boarders' thing that you could ask for whatever you like. So I asked for raw cake mix, and I got it.

09:00 I'd missed eating, you know, the residue left in the basin, hadn't I? Yes, it was a different boarding school. Tucked you in at night, kissed you goodnight.

**Who would tuck you in?**

One of the mistresses. It had been their home, the McRaes, and they had their mother who was getting on and there were three sisters. Well one of them was something of a blue stocking and she was sort

09:30 of the principal.

**What's a blue stocking?**

Rather bright, academically.

**Why is it called a blue stocking?**

I don't know; it just seems to be a saying. You haven't heard it?

**No.**

Well I guess it's gone out of fashion. One of them was good on the cooking, so she did a lot of the cooking. We only had about 20 boarders and there were only 50 in the school. What did the other one do? I think she did a bit of

10:00 teaching too. You were allowed to climb trees. And I was always in a tree as a child. Loved it. I was allowed to do that. There was a very, very, big old pine tree down in the corner of the garden. The ground sloped away and here was this huge great big pine tree up there. I climbed right up to it, and I think one of these sisters saw this little figure up there and thought, "Oh my God, if she falls." So she

10:30 came down. "Alison?" "Yes, Miss Ross." "Now white ants up there, I think you had better come down." "Oh, all right Miss Ross." How would she have known. She was cute wasn't she? So I came down obligingly.

**What was your uniform like?**

Oh, it was the ordinary three box pleat in the navy, and a blazer with pocket, and a trim around it and a sort of mushroomy looking

11:00 hat with a colour underneath it. A Panama type hat. Winter uniform. Stockings all day, of course. Always wore stockings. Always wore gloves when you went out too. Oh yes, gloves. Church on Sunday, threepence tucked inside your glove. Had to put something in the plate, threepence. And we had

11:30 dancing, we learnt dancing. And that was rather fun. And it was a good idea for you to have a bit of dancing before you went to bed; it warmed you up in winter. We had it at the other school too. I think someone used to play the piano for it. But I was too young then, so I used to dance. So you learnt dancing very early. Not the kind where you sort of shimmer and shake in front of each other. It was,

12:00 we had an ordinary waltz, circling around. We had a sort of slow foxtrot and a quickstep. And if you were very advanced you might do a tango. All those things, and they were fun. We used to have assembly in what was called the gym, but there was only a vaulting horse in there. There was nothing else in the equipment line. But that was all right. And

12:30 there were a few extra buildings where they built places for mistresses or classrooms or something like that. One tennis court. Well that was all they needed for that, wasn't it? We'd go for walks down the town at times, escorted. Yes, you were escorted everywhere. Girls had to be escorted. The boys were more free, always. Which I suppose if you keep one lot under control

13:00 you can let the others go, can't you? Well you used to be able to then, I'm not sure whether you can now. But that was part of it. So yes, it was a very nice boarding school to go to. They were lovely people.

**Were you lonely, being away?**

Oh no, I had companionship, which I had never had really much before. I only had little Lally before. I asked for a cat, and I don't think my parents were over

13:30 enamoured of cats. So we brought a cat home in a bag, and it flew out the door and we never saw it again. So that was the end of that cat, wasn't it. Some people have dogs but I was a bit frightened of dogs. So I didn't have any pet. I wouldn't say I was ever neglected. When we were in Sydney and I had the day school

14:00 it was a mile walk to school, and a mile walk home in the afternoon. There were about a hundred and fifty in that school. There were some boarders. I'm not quite sure how many. But it was a good school. That was a different uniform. We had a grey uniform with yellow. Hideous when you think about it. A pale grey and lemon and a stripey tie, oh dear, sort of knitted looking.

14:30 A white shirt and a grey blazer. I think there was a yellow trim around it.

**Stockings again?**

Yes, stockings of course. And gloves. You wore your gloves to school. You were in trouble if you didn't have your gloves on. And the same sort of mushroomy hat.

**Did you wear gloves in summer?**

Oh yes, always wore gloves and always wore stockings. Yes I was initiated into stockings at a very early age. There's a lot to be said for

15:00 slacks. And girls, I think, didn't wear slacks then. I don't think I had any slacks until I was in my late teens. Different.

**When you were at the day school you were living at Vacluse? What was that like during that time?**

We were in a rented house, which the first one we had was a fairly big one because my mother's sister and her husband were with us too. Dad bought a car.

15:30 We had a Chrysler. Uncle Jack hadn't got to the stage of a car, so that was the car. There was a piano in it - it was a furnished house. There was a piano there so I could go on ahead with music. And the girl who lived just over the back fence, she was going to the same school too. She was called Twinkle, and she used to talk like that all the time, which, I was always taught not to talk like that.

**16:00 Why was she called Twinkle?**

Well she had this sort of twinkly little voice which sounded a little bit girlie, I think. She was a little bit older than me. So we walked a mile to school and it was safe. Which is amazing, isn't it? I mean the mums now, they watch their child if she's walking anywhere. They watch to see she gets there safely.

16:30 And it's rather sad to think that we could walk anywhere like that. And then we moved to another house around the corner, which looked right onto Nielsen Park at Vacluse. We used to play in the park. We used to get up amongst the trees. There were three girls in a family just two doors up, and we'd be always in that park. Not at weekends because it was a lovely picnic spot for thousands of people.

17:00 But we'd play amongst the trees over the far side of the park. It was mostly just grassland close to us. We used to go for a swim every morning, get up early. Dad would take me for a swim and then we'd hose each other down. Then I would practise the piano for an hour and then I walked to school. I must have been fit. He taught me to swim.

**How much time would you spend in the water?**

Well you probably

17:30 don't know. There was a sharkproof enclosure inside the harbour at Nielsen Park, which was good. It had a pontoon here, a pontoon there, and a diving tower up there. So I'd put my hand on my father's shoulder, and he would swim out slowly. He was a strong swimmer, but slow. And I would be allowed to kick at the back and we'd get to the pontoon and I would climb up the ladder,

18:00 and so would he. And then he would dive in and swim around to the ladder, and I would climb down the ladder, put my hand on his shoulder, in complete faith and we'd go to the tower. Up the ladder again and then he'd go from the three metre board and around to the ladder and pick his daughter up, and go to the other pontoon and then we'd go into the, and that was our swim. But then I had to have my swimming lesson. Swimming costumes then were very

18:30 very modest one-piece. Quite often you had a belt. Which was very handy he found. He would suspend me by the belt, "Now kick." "Now kick and thresh at the front with the dog paddle." As I became a little more proficient I would perhaps swim beside him, dog paddling. Then he bought me a book, well he didn't buy me a book, he borrowed it from the library, on swimming. And that's how I learnt to swim, otherwise. It wasn't

19:00 too bad, but different. So I became quite a proficient swimmer as a result of that. My three years went on that way except in the third year my mother died. She decided to have her tonsils out because she had them cauterised. They used to do that, and I just think it meant the roots went deeper. But you know her little daughter used

19:30 to snore at night-time so she was taken to the doctor, and he said, "Oh, tonsils and adenoids, whip them out." So mine were whipped out and they kept you in hospital a week then, would you believe. I had been all right to come out in a day I think. But it was a week then. Mine flipped out so easily, she thought she'd have hers out. Well she was three weeks in hospital and

20:00 she fainted on the steps coming out. And she did come home and then she developed pleurisy, and Dad employed a nurse to come along every day. Then she was starting to get up and walk on one of those resto cane lounges, and she would just walk from the bed over to there. And the third day the clot moved because she said, they thought it was because she had been in bed so long but

20:30 it was the clot moving. And the trained nurse was there and she knew what it was, and Dad was there, and she said, "Ring the doctor." But there was nothing they could do then. It just, if it stopped, it stopped, and you were lucky. And it didn't. So she died. I was at school. And my aunt and uncle had moved to a guest house about five doors down, to keep an eye on things. We did have a maid, we didn't need a maid.

- 21:00 But it was Depression times and a woman who lived up Watsons Bay way had come around looking for a place for her daughter to work because she was leaving school. "Could you use a maid?" and Dad said, "Yes, all right." And she got 15 shillings a week. So it sounds incredible doesn't it. But she was Peggy Knight; she was a nice lass.
- 21:30 And of course I was about 11, 12. So Peggy used to walk down, she had a good walk too, and then she walked home at night also. She was safe and makes you think now. So she was there and Aunt Edie was keeping an eye on things. Of course I was the child, always to her, always the child. Because I was special to her as the
- 22:00 child. She was my guardian after my mother died. So yes, she had gone in, she and my uncle had gone into town because his sister lived at the Metropole and went to England every year. She was filthy rich. So Dad knew where she was, so he rang up and they came out by taxi and picked me up from school and brought me home. Mistress came in and took me through a part of
- 22:30 the school I'd never been. The headmistress came into the classroom where I was and said she wanted me, and someone wanted to come for me. And she took me through this part of the school and she said, "Your mother's ill, and they don't think she'll recover." It didn't mean anything to me. I was just 12. I think I was fascinated by the fact that I hadn't
- 23:00 been in this part of the school before. And I didn't normally go home in a taxi. But when I saw my father I knew what it was. And he just beckoned to me and I went, and my aunt said, "No, wait, Alison." And I said, "Dad wants me," so I went. And yes, it was a bit traumatic yes, it was very traumatic. But so I finished, that was in May, so

23:30 I finished that year at that school.

**What was your father's response to...?**

Well as far as I was concerned, he went grey while I was at a school that day. It did come back a bit later. I never believed about Marie Antoinette but I think she probably looked grey. Maybe it was just looking grey, but he sort of looked so aged. And I didn't then have to be told that my mother had died.

24:00 I knew it. But of course when I went back to school, which was about a week later, there was no way that anyone was going to know I was hurt. So I laughed louder than anyone. You do that sort of thing.

**How did you deal with it in that week as a 12 year old?**

Well it was difficult. But my mother was buried at Mudgee. There was a family plot there. Her maiden name was Wells and the Wells's had been around Mudgee for some time. So she was buried

24:30 up there. I don't think there was any cremation then. So we all went up by train. My mother had one brother lived in Mudgee. Aunt Edie and Uncle Jack went up too. And I guess my mother's other sister, Aunt Effie, she came up. And my mother's third sister, who lived in Mudgee, was already there.

25:00 I'm not sure, I can't remember whether... I think my mother's older brother had died by then and she had a younger brother, but I'm not sure where he was or whether he came up. I can't remember that part. So that was why it took the week, I think.

**And when you went back to school, how had your life changed in the house and that sort of thing?**

Well I think Aunt

25:30 Edie and Uncle Jack may have moved in, as far as I can recall. So we still had Peggy Knight, so it wasn't onerous for my aunt. And I just went to school the same way, had music the same way.

**What was your father's relationship like with your aunt and uncle?**

Well they had been very good friends in the first place, and we always saw them. And you know that aunt was my

26:00 guardian. So we just, it was a very good relationship, very good with my other aunt. It would have been good with my other one in Mudgee, but she wasn't close. And of course my father had a sister who was married and living in Fiji. They had two sons, and Wally and Colin were good buddies. They lived at Nadi, where later an aerodrome was built by the Americans

26:30 during the war. And they lived at the end of it, so they saw a lot of Americans because they used to call in there all the time to see them. And then they moved closer to Lautoka, later. In the meantime, Wally and Colin, they went to school in Suva. There was a school in Suva, but, of course, they had to board there. And I don't know whether it was both boys and girls or

27:00 what. Not too clear on that. But when it was secondary school they came up to Sydney for a time. And they went to a high school and stayed in a hostel, but that didn't prove very satisfactory, so the next year they both went up to Toowoomba Grammar. Colin, later, told his father that he was never warm the whole time he was there, which is hardly surprising I suppose. It's an icy spot isn't it. Wally and I were very much of an age - the

- 27:30 older one. And he did not want to go back to Fiji when he finished with school. Because they both went into CSR. There was always a job for your sons, and sometimes for your daughters too. So yes it was no problem getting a job then. So Wally stayed and he was in Head Office of CSR in Sydney, and I think he started studying accountancy. And then the war came and he joined
- 28:00 up in the army. And our home was his home, because he couldn't get to Fiji and Colin was in Fiji, and his parents were in Fiji and never the twain shall meet, more or less for that time. So Wally always came to us for leave, and to leave any of his things there. And he was sent over to the Middle East and then he came back. They were coming back as reinforcements to
- 28:30 Singapore. But fortunately Singapore fell first. Fortunately for him. So he came to us and had some leave and then he was in Bougainville and various nasty places. But he came through unscathed. He's died since but his widow lives up at Orra Point [Orient Point?].

**So what was the decision**

29:00 **to send you to Abbotsleigh [Anglican School for girls]?**

Well my father had got in touch with his father's first cousin when we came up to Sydney to live. And he was called Roddy Sutter. Well his name was really Albert Bruce but everyone called him Roddy Sutter, and he lived at Killara. Now his first wife had died but he had two sons and four daughters. One

- 29:30 of the daughters lived at Turramurra with her husband. She didn't have any children. She was Nina Defore. Another one, Valerie Ormiston, lived at Pymble with her husband and she had two daughters with a son in the middle. The third sister lived at Taree. She was married to a Doctor Stokes, Ruby Stokes. Gay had not married at that time. She
- 30:00 became my stepmother. She was really called Gladys Mary Bruce, and a nurse had called her Gay and she liked it, and was much nicer then. And the word Gay didn't have nasty connotations then, fortunately. It's such a nice word. A pity, isn't it. Well it is a pity. We shouldn't spoil some of the nice words we have. And it was a nice name to have. So she was Gay, so she was my father's second cousin. And we had
- 30:30 all these friends who were her sisters. I mean I had stayed with the Ormistons. They had, their son was much my age, about three weeks older than me. Marjorie, the older one, the oldest in the family is still alive. She's living in Sydney. Rosalind became a doctor but she died some years ago from hepatitis, hepatitis B. And Adrian died during the war. He was in the air force and he died over in England.
- 31:00 Nice fellow Adrian, stammered like his mother. And Harold was the older one. He went to the First World War. His grandson, who is in Hobart has just written a book about him, Travels of a Lighthorseman I think it's called. I've got it here. And so he went to the Boer War and he also went to the
- 31:30 Second World War. He was at Gallipoli. And Keith went to the Second World War; he was the other brother. I never met Keith. He had been quite badly wounded, I think a sciatic nerve. I think he used to drink to drown it. Who could blame him? Very painful I believe. He married, but he didn't have any children. I knew his widow. So yes, we were a mixed up family, but we all seemed to get on, which was nice.
- 32:00 Gay had had a stepmother with whom she got on, and after her first husband died she married his cousin. So she was still Mrs Sutter. And her niece was a very good friend of mine. We were mixed up, weren't we? But it was rather pleasant.

**And so they decided to send you to Abbotsleigh?**

Well the Ormiston girls went to Abbotsleigh. So Dad talked to Valerie and he said,

- 32:30 "Are you happy with Abbotsleigh?" and Valerie said, "Oh yes, we are very happy with Abbotsleigh." They were day girls of course. And they only looked at two schools. And that was SCEGGS [Sydney Church of England Girls' Grammar School]. Do you know where SCEGGS is? It's on the back parts of Kings Cross in Sydney. You wouldn't really want to be walking around there at night by yourself, even then. So Abbotsleigh it was. And I was very happy there. I had five years there.
- 33:00 There were about 350 in the school. About a hundred boarders at that time, or getting towards a hundred. And by the time I left they had over 500. And there were 120 boarders. Well maybe it was a 130. And it's 65 years since I left school. That's shattered you hasn't it. They are having a luncheon in October. I'd like to go to that.
- 33:30 **What was it like boarding at Abbotsleigh, compared to your previous boarding?**
- Well we weren't tucked into bed at night. But you know, I'd been supposedly institutionalised by then, so it didn't worry me one atom. I knew where we were. Again went into the same box pleated tunics, but then they changed it for a linen dress in summer - green, not as dark as that. And
- 34:00 a flat collar. I think they called it a puritan collar, in a light brown, very, very, very light brown. I would

probably call it ecru. And pearl buttons and a belt and a flared skirt, with one pocket. A dark green blazer with only the one pocket which everyone had, the embroidered pocket. So you couldn't get them out of shape with your hands in them.

34:30 A green suit, semi-tailored for winter, church. Tulle silk shirt, long sleeves and the same collar and white triple, few g [?] I think. A shirt for Sunday. A green velvet dress for wearing in the winter, but you could have your own design.

35:00 And stockings of course. You played sport in stockings. The sports uniform was a box pleated yellow with a black girdle, and black stockings and sand shoes. Hats. But they were Breton hats, Panama hats with a badge;

35:30 the badge was embroidered. On the front it was black and gold but with a green band around it. And then a darkish green winter one, again with the turn up, not with the old mushroom shape. They looked much nicer. I chopped mine in pieces and took it so it wasn't so deep in the crown. Made it much nicer. I didn't get caught.

36:00 That was about that for Abbotsleigh. So I had five years and by that time I was at the Leaving Certificate.

**And were there any boys' schools nearby?**

Yes, there was Barker, which was supposed to be our brother school, which we really didn't appreciate because it was in the secondary schools instead of the jeeps. But we used to, they used to have

36:30 dancing they had there, ballroom dancing. I also learnt Greek dancing at one stage too. And now and then, they would bring the boys down to us. Very well supervised.

**What was the interaction like?**

Oh, well we'd have a man to dance with instead of a girl. That was always held in the gymnasium.

**And did you miss your father?**

Well I'd have

37:00 weekends off during the school term, and he was allowed to come and see me at times. So he, the first weekend he came up to see me I think he brought a sweet shop out and they wouldn't allow me to have them. And Dad said, "For goodness sake, give it to everyone else in the boarders," but they wouldn't allow the boarders to have them at all. Unreal, isn't it?

37:30 So we were never allowed sweets. But we had a headmistress who was rather forward thinking, I would consider. The food wasn't wonderful at that stage but she studied dietetics later. So early morning tea was a piece of fruit. We had no tea or coffee, we could have water, but we could have milk. Big glass jugs.

38:00 And you did know the day of the week by the food you had. But there was plenty of it and it was good food.

**What type of food?**

Well you'd have fish on Tuesday mornings and Friday night. You'd have, I think we had mince on toast some mornings for breakfast. And we'd have cereals or porridge, and see plenty of milk. And as much bread as

38:30 you wanted, and butter and jam or marmalade. We had the system that you never had to, you were never allowed to ask for anything. If you wanted the milk, you'd say to the girl next to you, "Would you like some milk?" and she'd say, "Oh yes, I'll get it for you." Which taught us to look after others, but you did without otherwise. We really needed a mixture for that.

39:00 But it did teach us to look after others. We had big tables, five each side and a mistress at the top end, probably a house prefect at the bottom end. Midday meals, it was swept in on with these girls, maids, in black dresses with the little frilly aprons and squeaky tray-mobiles. And they'd

39:30 put the meat down and the vegetables would be served at the other end by the house prefect. And then you'd have a hot pudding and a cold pudding, and the house prefect would serve the cold pudding and the one beside her with the hot one. The girl beside her would serve the custard. You did learn a few things, didn't you? You'd have something light at night, and your milk. Morning tea you'd have another piece of fruit.

40:00 Afternoon tea, another piece of fruit. Summer time we'd have a prep in the morning and in the afternoon or night. Winter time we went into prep early in the afternoon, and then we'd have another prep after we'd had our meal. Then we'd have 20 minutes of dancing to warm up. Which was a great idea.

40:30 And then we'd disperse to our various houses. Lights out at 9 o'clock.

**We might just change tapes there.**

## **Tape 3**

00:36 **finish up with Abbotsleigh**

Ok, when I. Ready?

**Yeah, we're rolling.**

When I started learning a bit of dressmaking and drafting, and cooking at East Sydney Tech [Technical School].

01:00 I did voluntary help at the children's hospital one day a week too. I was still learning music. And I didn't fit everything in as well as I should, because I really had too much on my plate. And I was having a ball too. And the war started that year. The East Sydney Tech was taken over for the army cooks, so I gave up cooking. And

01:30 then Dad started muttering about, "You must do something with your life." So he kindly paid for me to go to Macquarie Secretarial School which was a year's course. We did typing and shorthand and bookkeeping and one or two other things, some of which I skipped out on. I wasn't too good on the public speaking, so I gave that away and I went away from it. I ended up being secretary

02:00 of the Old Girls' Union too, which was interesting. We send out notices twice a year and you addressed all those envelopes, which was also interesting, by hand, and there were quite a number. There were 600 in the Old Girls' Union. Yes, so I did that and then it was really Stott & Underwood. And we had all

02:30 Underwood typewriters and they had just reached the stage of... We had, I think, one or two of what they called 'noiseless', felt like typing on cotton wool. And I had to do all the reports. And everything had to be exactly on the line, and just so, no errors. And we got an Underwood award if we passed our 50 words a minute in our typing, and

03:00 we got it from Hansard, or something like that. We did Hansard for the shorthand, and they considered what you got your credential was the 50 words a minute typing. Quarter of an hour typing test. And it was a fairly good shorthand test too. So one girl who would have won the speed

03:30 shorthand because she had the right outlines, she got a job so she left. And another girl might have got something else when she left. So I got all the prizes. Not that there was an English Literature one and a Readers' Digest for a year for another or something. So that's where I got my taste of bookkeeping.

04:00 So I didn't mind bookkeeping. I found it quite simple, as long as I could think in red and black. So then I started going to Mrs Mac. She had the three floors in this old warehouse place in Clarence Street, up behind Wynyard. The steepest steps you have ever known in your born days, and no floor. The bottom floor was up the steep steps and the others were up higher.

04:30 She had a little tiny office, and she looked after everything herself. And we paid a penny a week. And men from all the services and all the various navies or armies, anyone who was in Sydney and wanted to brush up on their Morse because they didn't, you know, particularly if they were at sea. They weren't allowed to use it because you had silence. It was only when you were in port that you could use

05:00 your key. So they brushed up their morse here and we taught them. And there were a whole lot of tables. Those 6 foot by 6 foot 3 tables and forms each side, and a buzzer on each one. And you started off at ten words a minutes. And there was the alphabet spread out, written down so that you could look at everything. And there was a girl sending it at ten words a minute with her stopwatch. And when you could do ten words a minute you could move to 12 words a minute.

05:30 When you could do that one you'd move to 15, 18, 20, 22, 25. And if you were at 15 or at 18 words a minute and there was no one to send a ten, they'd hook you over there to send a 10. You obviously, you knew where to send whether you've ever done it before or not. You at least knew the alphabet by then. And you had these things in code so you didn't have to make it up as you went, but you just followed

06:00 that and kept an eye on your stopwatch. And so you progressed. Also you could also learn semaphore. They had an Aldis Lamp there too, so you could have a go at that. And you could learn the flags if you really wanted to. So you had a fairly wide area that you could cover. She had a sort of broadcast system

06:30 on another floor, with more like a language laboratory all around the outside edge. So you could do other broadcast in the middle of the room with a huge big table there. Or the sort of pieces around that you could hear through your earphones. And then she had another floor where she had theatre seats, a bit broken down, and a platform at the end where she'd lecture you. And she'd tell you the

07:00 procedures they used for army, navy, air force, the whole lot. I think that was fairly secret too, but we knew it. And so then we were mostly on the bottom floor, which was up these steep stairs. And for trade

tests to go into the navy, a petty officer came down, and went up another floor and broadcast it for us.

- 07:30 And he really had been into a few pubs before he got there. He sent perfect Morse but it was 15 words a minute. It was rather easy, you know, when you are doing shorthand. If it was fairly slow you would dot the I's and things like that and put all your vowels in. Well we could have done that because we could do 25 words a minute, but it was 15. Perfect Morse though. And she was really annoyed with him. "My girls can do 25." So she was
- 08:00 a remarkable women. I'm sure that he would have heard about it, he shouldn't have been to the pub before. But that was it, he would have heard about it. When she first was, she was training the girls to train others, but when they started having women in the services, and the air force had the first women. They went in, in March '41, the first of them. And she was saying to the navy, "Are you going to take my girls, or
- 08:30 am I sending them into the air force?" and she bullied them till they took them. So they took them in there about April '41, about Anzac Day. So that was when we celebrate the fact that it was about Anzac Day. So quite a lot of times our reunions are then. And all the first girls who went into the navy were Mrs Mac's girls. The first 14,
- 09:00 they were all trained telegraphists, in stations work not other things. And they, two of them, they had a sort of had a repayment method for two of the cottages. So two of the girls said, "All right, we'll cook for them." And none of the men were allowed into the garden of those places. We had wood chip heaters. We had to chop wood
- 09:30 and we didn't know how. And there was a very nice petty officer, Petty Officer Pennyquick, and he used to stand beside his fence, the other side of his fence, and shout directions of how to do it because, you know, he'd have been in real disgrace if he went into those grounds. So I think it was a little bit hard. But they were really nice girls and things went quite well really.
- 10:00 And they went on to watch, having learnt all the procedures. I didn't go in till December '42, so it was about 19 months or so.

**Can I ask you before, what made you join Mrs Mac, Mackenzie's?**

Well there was a lass who was at this business college with me, Enid Savage who had, who nearly went in with the first lot of WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service], but she was an only child and her parents

- 10:30 had the horrors at the thought of her joining up. They didn't fancy it at all, whereas my father didn't mind. And I'd say that my stepmother would have been a leader during the First World War. She went out and worked. She went to a business college and she went and worked for Lever Brothers. And she ended up secretary to the Managing Director, who was always an Englishman. So you know I
- 11:00 had a history of thinking that you could go out and work. It didn't seem weird to me. And I'd been away from home a lot, so it didn't worry me. Whereas this lass had always been at home, the one new lamb. And I suppose I was encouraged more to do things, so it didn't seem weird to me to go into the navy. And
- 11:30 mind you I had been taught that you couldn't trust a sailor, that they had a girl in every port and you wanted to be careful of them. I found it was like having 20 big brothers. "Did he put the word on you? We'll fix him." "No, I can fix it, I can handle it." So it really was like having 20 big brothers and they watched you like hawks. But they were very good to us, marvellously good to us. And
- 12:00 I wouldn't say that we were ever harassed by them. Like that, there was a woman, a doctor, in the navy that said that they were all harassing her. And I thought, "Oh dear." She could have turned it away with a laugh, couldn't she? Instead of bringing a charge against them. You really can do it with a laugh, and she should have had more sense, I think. Maybe she'd never been away from home before and took things the wrong way.
- 12:30 You can give a standard, can't you? You can show that you expect a standard, and that you are not going to get anything that way. And why not? So, yes, they were very good to us. We had our separate barracks; it wasn't mixed together as it is now. There was the station, well we were all in different cottages at home Harman, because there were a whole lot of cottages there. And
- 13:00 by the time I got there they had another station called Molonglo which was completely manned by WRANS. I believe they had a really hilarious time when someone was inspecting it once, and the fire hose took flight and had holes in it and all sorts of strange things happened. They were a bit worried about that at the time, but it was a woman who was in charge of that one. The whole thing.
- 13:30 Now I think they did stations work. There weren't so many doing stations work at Harman itself. It was just down the road a bit and over the other side of the road. There was another, Belconnen, which was manned entirely by men. That was the transmitting station and we were the receiving station. The navy always did this if they possibly could. Separate the two so if one got bombed they had something to work
- 14:00 on. The transmitters used to transfer at night-time through a different frequency. So if you'd been on

8880 during the daytime you went on to 4440 at night, and they fixed that for the transmitters out there at Belconnen. We had nothing to do with the transmitters because we were only receiving. And there were all these thousands of aerals around. And we had two teleprinter operators,

14:30 which they were more or less caged in so that it didn't interfere with our reception. One was a teletype and one was a teleprinter. The teletype was always, the printing was always one letter behind the finger, which I think must have been difficult for them. They were electronic things. You probably don't know what a teletype or a teleprinter is,

15:00 do you?

**Describe it for me?**

Well it had a keyboard, the same as a typewriter. But you didn't throw your carriage back, you pressed something and that took the carriage back. And then you pressed something else and that took it up a notch and then you pressed either figures or letters. And it was all capitals, and then you just typed. It was fairly quick to use and it was more like

15:30 the fax that came out up there. And you had a paper copy of it, what you did. So our messages we received on pads, foolscap size. And there was a place, to and from, operator's number. You had numbers. And time. And we received it in. We used three systems

16:00 of time all the time. 'I' time was Japanese. 'K' was here, and 'Z' was Greenwich. So time slots didn't really worry us very much. We had all these times everywhere and you would look at the time and you would go by the minutes rather than the hours because you had a fair idea of the hour anyway. We went on watch by 'K' time, our local time. We received it in 'I' time

16:30 and we'd put the date, the date first, and then the time and 'I' beyond it, and the month. So we had all of that. We had to give a percentage of our accuracy, because we could hardly ask for a repeat could we. We received it on this side of the page, then we transposed it on that side of the page, so that if we received B, we'd put H.A.

17:00 over there. That was the transposition. And that was called Kana code [Japanese equivalent of Morse code]. Now I don't know that it had anything really much to do with Kana, but that's what they called it. There were a number of letters, which had a niggery [?] with them. Which was like a little tiny 'I', down there beyond the letter. And there were five, which also had a ha-niggery, so we wrote that by a tick. So if you had B,

17:30 da, di, di, dit, di, di, da, da, dit, that was B ha-niggery, so you wrote your B, and you'd put your tick beside it.

**What did this mean? What did a ha-niggery mean?**

Well Har Bar Par. You see the B itself was Har, and with the niggery was Par and with a ha-niggery, Har Bar. No, if was a niggery it was Bar, and with a ha-niggery it was Par. So there were only five letters that had the

18:00 ha-niggery but an awful lot of them had the niggery. So you received as best you could. And of course E is dit, so you either learnt to put a pretty good dot or you did your E like that. Sometimes we put a Japanese symbol because it was maybe easier than writing the letter. So we had to learn that Japanese symbol to write it. And we used things of that nature. Sometimes they used

18:30 to send letters, messages out, like they were going out of fashion. It was as though they were trying to catch a bus. And you'd write it down here and you'd put your percentage and your number and then you'd go over to the next page and you'd do that, the same. And then you'd get a whole host of things, so you'd say, "Anyone not busy?" So someone who was not busy would come and relieve you while you did it. I did about six months I suppose of working on the

19:00 teleprinter in Townsville because the girl had got very sick and she was in hospital for a year I think. So because I could type, "What special skills have you got?" "Yes, I can type." So if you can type on a typewriter you can type on a teleprinter, can't you? You just have to get used to it. So if they were flat out, I could transpose it while I did it because I knew it, which was a help because the girls who did it normally

19:30 didn't know that. We had a series of doors and windows in the middle of the room, so that when the fellows from the post office came up to service our teleprinters they couldn't see anything. You even took the watch off the wall, because it was on Japanese time, wasn't it? And closed those doors and windows.

**What did the I, K and Z mean?**

'I' was the zone.

**Why was it called 'I'?**

Well there are zones all around the world.

- 20:00 Different zones for time. And the international date-line sort of goes through Fiji, so you can be in two days at once there, which is interesting. And Z is Greenwich. And Z and A. Actually I've got it on an atlas, which I don't know whether it was mine or my husband's, but it was a Bartholomew's atlas. And every 15 degrees there's a different time zone.
- 20:30 Right, and it goes, it follows the alphabet. Except you'd leave a few out. Two. A and Z and I think you leave, I think you leave J out, actually. So 'I' was Japanese, so they were an hour ahead of us normally. Is that all right?

**Yeah, yeah. Perfect.**

So we always dealt with different time zones. Watches did start at midday. So

- 21:00 you did the afternoon, midday till four. And then you came to the dogwatches, which can either be split or one dogwatch, which would be four hours. But the split ones, they are two hours. So if you want to change the sequence of what you'll do tomorrow, you have the split dogwatches. So you have four to six, it makes it easier to have a meal if you split your dogwatches. You could have it when you come off at six, before you
- 21:30 go on again at eight. And the one who goes on at six has the meal before they go on. Then you fall into bed at eight, because you'll be going on. The ships usually have three night watches; 8 to midnight, midnight to 4am, and 4am to 8. But we, in Canberra, we did six hour night watches. So we did
- 22:00 8pm to 2am, then 2am to 8am. You got better sleep. At sea they always do the three night watches. But they have three watches and they sort of alternate them that way. And then when they come into shore they have a holiday from it, because the ship's shore would listen to their messages and deliver them to them. But of course ours wasn't like
- 22:30 that so we did a six, 8 till 2, and then you'd come on again at 2 o'clock in the morning till 8 o'clock. So your 24 hours - say you came on at midday till four, if you split your watches you had from 6 to 8, then you came on at 2 till 8, and the other one meshing with you would have the other watch from 8am to midday. And then either you went
- 23:00 on with that same process if you had a 48 hour one. Or another two would come on for watch, and you'd have a holiday for 24 hours. A decent sleep, go out. You always had to be on the station four hours before you went on watch, which meant that when you were on watch you didn't go off at all. We all lived in. And when
- 23:30 we had the 96 at Canberra, where you were on watch for 48 hours of it and you ate and did everything else. You even went to church on Sunday. You'd come off at 8 o'clock in the morning and you'd get cleaned up into your best clothes. Out of the overalls into your best clothes ready for church, which was just what you didn't want because you went on again at midday. So you dressed up smartly
- 24:00 and you had divisions, it was called. And you stood for that. And I roomed with Val Ashley who was Catholic. And, "Fall out Roman Catholics," and she'd fall out; she fainted. I was expecting her to move. I didn't think she was going to faint on me. But she fainted. So a couple of sailors were detailed to carry her over to her cottage we were in. And I got my wits about me and carried her little bag
- 24:30 and went with her, to look after her. So we had a sleep. On Saturday mornings, always, there was captain's rounds. And you had everything more than spick and span. The tops of the doors, the tops of the cupboards. They wore white gloves. Everything was clean. So if you were on watch for that, you had to do your cleaning beforehand, because everyone took a turn in it, didn't they?
- 25:00 And you'd better have it just right because you'd hear about it otherwise. And so yes, we always had captain's round. As that 96 went over the Saturday and the Sunday, because the other people went off and had their weekend in Sydney, you filled in for them. And so by the time you came off at midday
- 25:30 on Monday when another watch took over from you, you were a big light-headed and silly, and really looking forward to a sleep. But that gave us a weekend in Sydney with our families. So yes, for the first 18 months every girl who was in the navy was one of Mrs Mac's girls, and we mostly did the communications. Then they started taking them in
- 26:00 in numbers because this Audrey Cassidy who's up here was the first one amongst the first few who went in in Brisbane. And they started numbering them from 1 again. And then they said, "Oh, this is going to be confusing." So they took those numbers away from them and put them onto other numbers. Now my number was 505, and I was in a month later
- 26:30 than Audrey. I think her number was 3 something, the final one that she got. And it just showed how they were going to take people in. Another friend of mine was 792, and she went in in February, the following February. So yes, they started taking them in in great numbers. But there were only ever 3,000 during the war, WRANS. 30,000 of WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], 30,000 of AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service], 3,000 of us.
- 27:00 So we were looked after, you might say. We got white sheets, we didn't get palliasses. We had white blankets with the black stripe. They had grey. Yes, we were looked after. We had china to eat from and

drink from. I don't say it was super fine china but it was china.

27:30 And when we went on draft we carried enamel plates and they had tin plates. Yes, we were spoilt. So our uniform consisted of this suit, white shirt and a stiff white colour. A tie. And if you were cute you learned to tie your tie, and then pull it down and then pull it up, down, up, to put it on and off, but you know it was those really stiff collars.

28:00 I think we had grey stockings and black shoes. Not sure what the gloves were. Navy hat, with the crown and anchor thing on the front. Because then I went up to Townsville before the summer.

**Before we go there, can I ask you more about, you said the captain would come around. Tell us about...**

Captain's rounds.

**What were they like, the captains?**

28:30 Well he was two and a half ring, lieutenant commander, and he was a being beyond us. There was very, very strict discipline in the navy. You really didn't associated with anyone with a commission. That was no, no, no, no, no. Mind you, I married a man who was in the air force with a commission.

29:00 I certainly had been out with men in the navy who had commissions too. It was supposed to be segregated, from that point of view, the navy more so than the other services. The other services were far more human I think. As far as the air force was concerned, I don't even think they had any discipline at all in comparison to the navy. That type cover it? We didn't

29:30 have many very officers with us. We had a number of petty officers, one of whom had been in submarines, I think in the First World War. We thought he was 'touched', but nice fella.

**What do you mean 'touched'?**

Well, silly. Well in the First World War they were all on one frequency. Can you imagine them all jabbering away at once? How you ever sorted anything

30:00 out, I'll never know. But it must have been really difficult. But the petty officers who did teach us - there was Petty Officer Cole, Petty Officer Pennyquick, Tug Wilson, and there were a few sailors. We were guarded by VDC men, Voluntary Defence Corps, who were older men who were called up. And they couldn't be sent to the front line - they were too old. But we had, there was a mess for them.

30:30 I'm not quite sure, but there were at least three of them on at once, and I think they manned the gate as well when we went ashore. They were good men; they were really nice men. Like fathers to us all, you know. But we also did have some Americans there with us. Operators. They received on typewriters, and they used a bug for sending. Dots one way.

31:00 Ours was a key, which you pressed on the top, long or short. There's was a bug which you pressed one way and it was dots, and the other way it was dashes. And they made an awful lot of mistakes with them. You'd be talking to one of them and you'd say, "You made a mistake there," and he'd say, "Oh the machine will fix it up." You know they might throw in an extra dot or an extra dash.

31:30 **What did they mean, the machine?**

The coding, the decoding thing would fix it, yes. So they always had their signals up very loud. I mean you usually wore your phones up here so that you could talk to people as well. And they were receiving on the typewriter. You'd hear the signal and you'd see what they put. "That's wrong." But yes, we could do that. There were about... They had about three operators.

32:00 They also had an officer. And I think there was another American officer who was in charge of the Z room. And we had four girls who had Bachelor of Science degree. And four operators who had been trained in the Japanese Morse. And they went to another room through ours. A lot of girls said that they really didn't know what we did. So I suppose

32:30 we never talked. I mean we were taught not to talk. We were told it wasn't a good thing to talk too much. And we never did talk too much, so it was natural not for us to talk too much.

**What would you talk about when you did?**

Oh other things, but we wouldn't talk about work. I mean we could go into our station but they couldn't go into ours. And in Townsville we had a guard

33:00 outside our door. And we had a little, sort of, hole in wall with a little thing over it on our side, so they couldn't see in and you could say, "I want to talk to so and so." The CO [Commanding Officer], we had a warrant officer in Townsville. An RCO [Radio Communications Officer] of the station, and he could come in, but the chief petty officer who was there, he couldn't come in. And I mean they were in communications anyway.

33:30 I'd have though they'd knew, but I wouldn't have asked them if they did, what we did. In Townsville,

that's where they gave us the split phones. Two receiving things in front of you, and one phone into this and one phone into that. One message pad, two logs. And you listened with each ear. One had priority.

34:00 But I mean, you became fairly practised, as you can imagine. And you could listen to them sort of sending these and, "Wait, did you receive that?" "Yes, I received that." "Wait." "Wait five," or something like that. And you knew that they were just burbling on. And then if this one starting sending you'd start taking it down, and if you heard the other one say, "Go ahead," you'd say,

34:30 "Can someone take this?" and someone would whip over and take that. So we didn't miss a message if we could possibly avoid it. They used to change call signs for the ships every 24 hours. The ships mostly had a couple of letters and a figure. So we tried to identify if they were working ships together, but mostly they didn't because they kept wireless silence

35:00 too. I mean the Japanese had been taught their Morse in the First World War by the English. Very similar, but they had their own 76 symbols, instead of our 26 symbols for the alphabet. So yes, we learnt that. It wasn't hard once you'd learnt it.

#### **Where did you learn it?**

Well I learnt that in the navy. But I could do 25 words a minute with ours,

35:30 either decipher or code, before I went in so it didn't take me long to do it. I just had to learn the other symbols and how to transpose them. And of course they gave us lessons on this language that the navy talks, which is a different language. Because they have got a lot of rhyming slang into what they'd talk about in the navy. And we had to know, we had to get accustomed to going ashore and coming on board.

36:00 And divisions and scram bags and all these sort of strange names that we didn't know what they were, but we had to learn how to use them.

#### **What other words?**

Well they didn't have the lavatories, they had the heads. And you had the deck head, and the deck, and the bulkhead, and all that type of thing.

36:30 So yes, we had to know that. I've probably forgotten. We've got a glossary somewhere. I think we bothered to keep it. The ditty box. New South Wales WRANS have their magazine; they called it the Ditty Box. Everyone had a ditty box in the navy. Keep your special little things in, that you keep them without letting them loose everywhere else.

#### **What did it look like?**

Oh it was just a box to hold things in.

37:00 But they call their magazine the Ditty Box, which was great. We called ours WRANS Extra. WRANS and the A goes with the...

#### **The A goes with the?**

The A of the WRANS meshes with the Extra part, so we'd call ours WRANS Extra. And of course the Naval Association has the White Ensign as their...

37:30 That was our flag. It is a different one now from what it was then. So we get a magazine every quarter. A glossy looking magazine which is the White Ensign. And the WRANS have ours twice a year. Our WRANS Extra. We'd just photocopy ours or roneoed it, so it's not as smart as the White Ensign.

38:00 Back to what?

#### **We'll take that opportunity. We might go into more detail on Mrs Mackenzie. But before that I was interested in going back a bit, to when you heard about war being declared?**

Yes, I was going to a dance that night and there was a family who had just come back from Kosciusko, and one of the...

38:30 Well all of the brothers in that family had all been to Barker College. I was going out with an ex Barker College fellow by this time and they were good friends. So we were driving along and they had the wireless on in their car and they said, "God, we're at war," which was a bit of a shock to us. So it was a ski club were having a dance in Sydney and the two of us were going to it with these other people.

39:00 I remember the car in front of us did something weird and the fellow who was driving said, "What is this, bush week?" And one of the others said, "Must be, we're here." Because they came from Crookwell, that family. You know the oldest girl in that family, her husband died. I think she's married again, and I know a cousin of mine said to her brother, "It'll be our

39:30 war." And yet those two weren't as affected as the next two in the family. Because the one, the girl, married a man who they wouldn't take because they said he wasn't medically fit, which was a bit of a blow for him. And her brother, was also told he wasn't medically fit. He came down to join up but they said he wasn't medically fit. Now the next two, one married an American,

- 40:00 and went America, and he died of leukaemia afterwards. And she then married an Englishman who was too young to be in the war, but he was a merchant seaman. He would have, I mean he was commissioned. And the other one, the other brother in that family died in England. They've got a thing about people going to England because they all seem to die. Mind you it was 60 percent casualty in the
- 40:30 Bomber Command, and a lot of them went to Bomber Command. 60 percent doesn't give you much of a show, does it? No, awful.

**We'll swap tapes now.**

## **Tape 4**

- 00:34 **We were just talking about when the war started and you told us about being in the car?**

Yes, we were in the car and we went to the dance after that - and enjoyed our dance, I might add - and everyone was a little stunned. We shouldn't have been because it was very nearly a war two years before, or two

- 01:00 and a half years before when Hitler marched in to Austria, and we didn't take it up. I guess none of us wanted war. We're not a country which looks for war, in my opinion. And they were really looking for war. Would have been at least two years before, because the girl who was rooming with me at Abbotsleigh -
- 01:30 I was still at school before - and a girl who was rooming with me, her parents went overseas. I think it was 1936. They had the Olympic Games in Berlin and Jesse Owens won three, and he was black. They didn't like that in Germany. They didn't like that one little bit. He was black! And you know black people were beyond the pale really.
- 02:00 Whereas they had to have these people who were white and perfect. Aryan. Anyway he did win it, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if Hitler stamped his feet or something. But anyway, they had got tickets to go to the Olympics, and they saw this sort of performance of the Heil Hitler salute and all these stormtroopers
- 02:30 everywhere. And they cut their holiday short and came home fast. They had visions of being immured in Germany and not been able to get home to their daughter and son. So you know they couldn't get home fast enough to make sure that the family was all right. You would wonder what to do. You were wondering what would happen if that did happen. Because I mean I knew people
- 03:00 whose families were captured in Papua New Guinea. I don't know quite how they managed, because I mean those kids were growing up. They were at school down here, and they were growing up and they grew up and that, had to manage as best they could. I suppose there was some means of doing it, but I'm not quite sure how they did manage. Anyway these people got home in time and that was averted that time.
- 03:30 I don't know whether we should have averted it, or should have gone to it, I've got no idea. And how can you work it out? But you can't just be a doormat can you? So then I think it was...

**I'm sorry. Were you hearing these stories of Hitler at the time?**

Well we didn't know about concentration camps. We knew that Hitler was there and we had lots of newsreels those days. We had theatres which showed

- 04:00 newsreels, and nothing else. And before you went into the pictures, the pictures weren't just one solitary little one showing. You usually had two, and you would have an interval in the middle. And it was three hours you went. And they'd show some newsreels first, and then they'd have perhaps a documentary, and then an interval, and then the main one. And you always had God Save the King it was then.
- 04:30 George the Sixth, I think. Had to think. So you always stood up for the anthem. We didn't have an Australian one then. And once America came in, we had also Stars and Stripes played. So we stood for the lot. I'm not sure whether we stood for the
- 05:00 Russian one, when they joined us. I'm not quite sure about that. Any show that you went to, any play or anything, they had the anthem at the end. It was the done thing. And I think Americans still make a great deal more of respecting their country than we do. I think we are a little bit slaphappy about it, which is perhaps a bit of a shame.
- 05:30 But anyway, that was it.
- Pre war, it would be with these pictures shows. What were they saying in these newsreels that you remember?**

Oh there would be newsreels all over the world. Whatever happened. Because they'd be, well I suppose I didn't have very much of it before the war started you see, and then they'd be newsreels of the war.

And you'd see people marching

06:00 into these countries and goosestepping - the Germans. God, imagine goosestepping! And Heil Hitlering everywhere. We still didn't know about concentration camps, but there were a lot of books came out. There was one, I think called Officially Dead. I probably have it here still. There was an American girl who was Jewish,

06:30 was in Germany, and she had relatives in Germany, in this book. And the families used to correspond America to Germany, and someone was pursuing her in Germany because she was a Jew. And she went to her relatives and they wouldn't let her in. And I think she was lost. And I don't mean lost, couldn't find her way -

07:00 I think she was probably killed. But the relatives in America still kept on writing and they wrote as if there was a code. And eventually I think they got the letter back, officially missing, or something like that. And they knew that they'd got their revenge then. There was another one, The Moon is Down, which was about Norway. A book about the Germans invading Norway.

07:30 And of course this was where the term 'quisling' came from, because he was a Norwegian who went over to the German side. But the Norwegians you know, they used to escape from Norway in any kind of a boat that they could. And they were a seafaring nation, and they'd get over to England. And they were very, very one minded about fighting this war, because why wouldn't they be? I mean their people were back there, weren't they.?

08:00 But they never, there weren't very many who joined the Germans in Norway.

**When you'd see this goosestepping before the war, what kind of feelings would...?**

Well it wasn't so much before the war, though we would have newsreels, which would come out by air. We didn't have the communications we have now. But they'd come out by air. And I'm not sure how long, perhaps 48 hours, something like that,

08:30 because planes weren't as good, were they? And it became quite a normal thing for the Americans to fly across the Pacific, but it was unusual then. Seems funny, doesn't it? I mean when you think that my father saw a telephone come in, and he saw a wireless come in, and he saw planes come in, and cars come in.

09:00 And yet we'd think that's nothing. I mean I always knew that there were cars. I always lived in a family with a car. And a lot of people didn't in those days. And yet they became so commonplace. And television, forget it, we didn't know anything about it. That was after war. So I had been an enormous

09:30 stretches of imagination to take these things to where we are today.

**So how old were you when you joined Mrs Mackenzie?**

19 or 20. Enid took me along, you see, because she was doing the same business course. And we were perhaps a year or two older than the others. So we became

10:00 friends and I thought, "Well I might as well join up."

**Did you join that with the idea. What motivated you to join?**

I always had the idea that I would rather like to know Morse. God knows why. What was I going to do with it? I'd never been a Girl Guide or a Brownie or anything like that, but I just thought I'd like to learn Morse. So this was the opportunity. So I did it.

10:30 We also joined, what was it? Emergency Services or something like that. You could learn running repairs on cars in three nights. That was really good, wasn't it? Air raid precautions and first aid. We did all those things. My father used to make three

11:00 camouflage nets a week. And he used to go out to the showground in Sydney and make wills. A lot of retired men, they'd be a solicitor prowling around in case anyone had a rather difficult question to answer. But a whole lot of them used to go out there and make wills for the people who were joining up. I was probably one of the few who, when asked, "Have you got a will?" would say, "Yes," because you know I turned 21 at

11:30 one stage, and my father - I must have been 21 when I joined up - my father said, "You'll go in and make your will tomorrow." I said, "I've got nothing to leave." "Yes," he said, "you have." I said, "I don't know what to do for a will." But I went in and made a will the next day.

**So when did you first want to get involved**

12:00 **with this?**

Well, when Enid told me that she'd been at Women's Emergency Signalling Core, and that she had learned Morse there, so she took me along. I said, "I think I'd like to do that." So she took me along. So I joined up there. The business course was in the Bank of New South Wales, as it was called then, which

was just George Street and Barrack Street in Sydney,

12:30 and it wasn't far to go up there. And I'd usually go through Wynyard to catch the train up to Killara and then walk home, a mile. Really good at walking a mile. So we finished at 4 o'clock and we'd go up there for a while and do a bit of Morse, and then go home. I remember we came out one afternoon and the hoardings said,

13:00 "Japanese, Jap submarine in Sydney Harbour." And we said, "Oh, they'll tell you anything to sell the papers, won't they?" And then Enid, who lived at Hunters Hill, which is sort of further up the harbour, she said, "Quite noisy last night." So we bought a paper, and yes, those Jap submarines were in Sydney Harbour that night, and we nearly died of fright.

13:30 I was in greater danger there, from the Japanese, in Sydney, than I ever was in the navy. But that's life, isn't it? And we couldn't believe it. And of course another bigger Japanese submarine stood off Bondi and shelled, tried to shell. Well I know the shells landed in the Royal Sydney Golf Club. They didn't do much harm there but there was supposed to have been one, one

14:00 woman was an air raid precaution person. Warden I think they called them. And she stirred her son up and said, "You'll have to go down to the shelter." He said, "Oh, that's just a practice." And I believe one came in and it went under the bed, and it was a dud. Wasn't that lucky? He moved then. It could have all been rumour. I wouldn't know. But that was certainly the rumour I heard. But they did, they were off

14:30 Australia quite a lot. And you just never knew. I mean they certainly sank the Centaur, didn't they?

#### **So was this kind of news motivating you?**

Well I suppose it was in a way. And obviously I was coming to the end of this course and, "I have to do something." So I thought, "Why don't I go into the navy? Do the Morse?" I mean I could have gone in using

15:00 what I'd learnt, but that didn't, I felt that it might be more use doing the Morse.

#### **And at this stage, were women being encouraged to be involved?**

Oh yes, because they were really being involved. Manpower had not started then; they started it later. And they didn't have the call up of people who were sent up to New Guinea

15:30 but they were pulled back from the top of the Owen Stanleys [Owen Stanley Ranges] because they couldn't go out of Australian territory, and that was an Australian protectorate. I knew someone who was on the land, that family at Crookwell, and he was the youngest brother. Now the oldest brother had a faulty heart, so he couldn't go. And it was a big property, so he had to help Dad. And then the next two brothers said, "You stay home and help Dad,

16:00 because Dad and Eric can't do it all." "You stay there till you're called up." "We're going to join up." In the way of lordly older brothers. So he did that, because there was a need. One of them, well they both tried to join the air force. One of them did get into the air force. The other one didn't because he tried to close the same eye once, because he had a very faulty one eye, and he was caught doing it. So he went into the army.

16:30 And young Pring who was called up in the 'chocos' [chocolate soldiers, CMF - Citizen's Military Forces], as we used to despairingly used to speak of them. He saw more action than the others did. In the chocos. When he came out of the front line, up there, the brother who was in the army claimed him. You could claim your brother, and he went to that battalion, or whatever it was. And he didn't see any more action.

17:00 The older one who was in the air force, he was a pilot and he used to fly Mosquitos, I think. You know it was everyone, it was everyone. It was hardly anyone who wasn't in. The people who were not medically fit, they really had a dreadful war. Because particularly if you looked healthy. They did have a thing they could put in that they weren't

17:30 medically fit but I think most of them thought, "I don't want to wear that," which was fair enough. Why would they want to wear it? But they became quite withdrawn and I felt desperately sorry for them, because it's not much fun being told you're not good enough, and not medically fit, when all your mates are going. It would be awful, wouldn't it? It would be absolutely shocking. I mean I knew one very nice young

18:00 man who, well he was doing law, and he managed to poke an eye out with scissors when he was a tiny one. He had a very nice glass one. And he was an extraordinary nice fellow, really nice, but he did become quite withdrawn. I mean I knew the family so I knew that he'd done that, and that therefore he couldn't join up. And

18:30 he had an uncle who was a judge, and he became, what do they call it, Judge's Associate. Sit down in front of them. And so it did hurt him career wise. I don't really think going and joining up helped anyone's career unless you wanted an army or air force career. It really didn't help you otherwise. You had to get back to

- 19:00 tours again. And sort of start again. A lot of the men who were older, who would have been forcibly retired, at I think 65. They couldn't retire. The firms kept them on. And you had to, if a man was working in a firm beforehand, if he was that bit older, rather than joining up straight from school, they had to keep that job available for him later
- 19:30 when he came back. Mind you, you might not want to do it. Who'd know? You might want to go into some other field, but they had to protect the job for you. And these men who were older, and people didn't live as long those days, they just had to keep on working. And then when the war finished and the other ones came back, they were gradually eased out then. Must have been very difficult because
- 20:00 the people who were coming back from the war had been doing such a lot of different things. I mean it took them a year to train a pilot, and they had to really work at it. Having trained them, then half of them died, which wasn't so good. I mean I'd look at the fellows in the navy, and fellows I'd known when we were at school
- 20:30 and here they were in charge of a fairmile. Well how did they know where they were? I couldn't help wondering. I mean all right, if you could see a point there and you can see a point there and you can see that its such and such an angle from you and such and such; you can find it. But when you can't see a place, how do you know in a heaving sea, let alone up in the air. How do you have any idea where you are? You had to learn a lot. And the
- 21:00 army had to learn a lot too.
- You mentioned before some of the guys which couldn't go. Did you hear of any examples where you know they were treated badly or looked down upon?**
- No, I don't. But I know they were. I know they were. There is always someone who's got a white feather. I mean you should really give it back to them, shouldn't you? Its about what they
- 21:30 deserve, because they don't know the facts of life at all. They don't know whether that man is medically unfit. You shouldn't do that.
- Any people you knew who gave out white feather?**
- No, I wouldn't say that I knew them, but a cousin of mine who was married to a man who couldn't join up because he was medically unfit, I'm pretty sure she said that he got the odd white feather. And how dreadful. And you see her brother came down to join
- 22:00 up and they told him he was medically unfit. Now he'd been staying with us. He's been staying with us and he tried to join up. And then he was a qualified a fitter and turner and he went then to work in a shale oil place which was up around Lithgow I think, where they were trying to create fuel out of shale oil. Because by this time you know
- 22:30 Malaya had gone and there was a lot of oil around there, and we were kind of worried about oil. I don't think we'd found any oil in Australia at that stage. So the oil situation, or the fuel situation, was quite bad. That was rationed too. You could usually get... You
- 23:00 could do about 20 miles a month. My father-in-law, who was managing a big property out west, he could do 20 miles a month but he'd have to go in 50 miles to get it, then he couldn't get home. So I'm not quite sure. And he was trying to manage this property, so
- 23:30 he had to do everything on horseback. Later, he came and he was down in Toowoomba I think. So he worked for the Americans guarding the arms dump, riding around all night to see that no-one got in. And I mean he was 70. Fun. He said that he went to AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave] to go to his brother's funeral.
- 24:00 **And during these times did you think it personally, did you feel that the Japanese would invade Australia?**
- It was very close. It was very close indeed.
- But remembering at the time.**
- Yes, they censored things. There was a lot of talk about the Brisbane Line. I mean there was talk that they would abandon the whole of northern Australia and group behind that.
- 24:30 I mean there weren't very many living out in the [Northern] Territory, or in Western Queensland. There were big properties and they didn't all have [air] strips. There were strips all over the place down from Darwin, because, well my husband was up there and he landed on most of them. But they were strips that were built later. I think Singapore
- 25:00 falling was a terrible shock. And of course then Hong Kong and Corregidor in the Philippines. But I mean Pearl Harbor was a terrible shock; it was an awful shock to the Americans. I can only say thanks to the Japanese for dropping those things on Pearl Harbor, because it brought the Americans in and I don't know how we would have survived without them. I don't thing we would have had a Buckley's hope without them. Because

- 25:30 England had all they could do. They couldn't send anything out to us. They didn't. And without America... And I mean the American mainland was safe, wasn't it? All right, they had submarines all round and things like that, but they didn't get shelled. Or I never heard of it if they did. And they didn't... They weren't invaded. Well I mean they were pretty close when they
- 26:00 were up over the Kokoda Track. And Milne Bay, it was fairly dicey. And I mean Rabaul went, and all those places. It was really bright to have the guns only pointing one way for Singapore - really, really intelligent. And it was really that they ran out of water that they had to
- 26:30 surrender Singapore, because they had no water. The Japanese had overrun it. And they were trying to blow up the causeway but I think they didn't manage it. And I don't know whether they ran out of...

**Where you hearing any of this news at the time?**

We weren't hearing as bad as it was, but we did hear that Singapore had fallen. We did hear about Pearl Harbor. And we knew

- 27:00 that they were fighting a rear guard action on Corregidor . I wouldn't say that it was a popular move that they brought MacArthur out with his family, and even the child's nurse, by submarine, and left the soldiers. Wasn't what you'd call popular. No one admired him for that. I guess it was nicer for her.
- 27:30 I don't know. I mean it's easy to judge after the event. They did bring him out by submarine and then they met up with a ship and he came to Brisbane. You know, Saint Johns were thinking of calling one of those towers that their building in the cathedral here. They were thinking of calling it MacArthur Tower, but they decided against it. And I know why.

28:00 Just that.

**Ok, so tell me about Mrs Mackenzie's signalling core.**

Yes.

**Tell us about Mrs Mackenzie?**

Well she usually wore her uniform that she had designed herself, which was a green one, with a white shirt and a brown tie and a brown leather belt. Brown stockings of course, and brown shoes and a forage cap. A green forage cap. And we had some kind of insignia on the sleeve, but I'm not quite sure what it was

- 28:30 now. A lot of the girls wore uniform in every day, because it was easier, instead of... When you had coupons for clothes it was easier to wear a uniform. You knew what you were wearing. I hadn't bought one. I bought a secondhand one when I was going into the navy because we knew it would be a while until we got a uniform. And to be wearing ordinary dresses can be a perfect curse. You know, you felt you can't wear the same one for about
- 29:00 six days running. And it was easier to have a uniform that you could wear, so I bought a secondhand one and wore that. We had to come to a tailor in Sydney to be measured up for our uniform, and then it arrived eventually. They were deciding to change the summer uniform. They'd had a navy blue dress with a white peaky collar which you clipped on with press-studs,
- 29:30 and a white peaky belt. And it had the naval white buttons. It was just a button all the way through. Just a gored skirt. And short sleeves and with the badges on, and blue badges for those. And they were deciding that they'd have to go into the khaki. I went up, I was still, I don't think they had khaki down in the southern states,
- 30:00 but I had got a blue uniform because we were going up to Townsville. I hadn't been issued with it; I'd bought it from someone else so that I'd have something to wear up there. Though when we first went to Townsville we could wear ordinary clothes out when we went ashore, and that was quite nice. But then they put us into khaki shirt and skirt and the
- 30:30 khaki Fairfield hat, more of a pork pie shape. But it had this chinstrap on it, which was great. Can't remember whether they put a sort of a band on the outside. Do you know those hats at all? They had an inner lining, which fitted more onto your head, and there was a gap between that inner lining and the khaki Fairfield. You had it sort of laced on with
- 31:00 a shoe lace type of thing, and that made them a bit cooler to wear. And they had ventilators up here. And then we went into a tally. You know the tally the navy has on their hats? Those things that say HMAS [Her Majesty's Australian Ship] so and so. That's a tally. And you're supposed to have the bow up there. And if you were smart you would get a sailor to tie it with a threepence in it, because it
- 31:30 made a lovely thing. So we went into tallies with HMAS Magnetic on our heads; that was good. You know there was an invasion of Americans all round. When I first went to Townsville, it was all I could do to gather the courage to walk through the street, the main street of Townsville, because they sat shoulder to shoulder down the gutters, and they weren't as averse to whistling
- 32:00 at a girl, as ours were. Ours weren't, they really didn't, because they were in their own country, weren't they? They probably would have whistled them somewhere else. But the Americans used to whistle you

like crazy, and oh dear. After Canberra it was really something to walk down that main street. So I used to avoid it like the plague until I'd been there about a month and then I thought, "Oh well, got to go and do some shopping." But there were

- 32:30 a lot of Americans about, a tremendous lot of them. And of course the jeeps with the drive on the wrong side. And I don't know if you've ever been in a jeep, have you? You hung on because you could get pitched out going around a corner. And they had blitz buggies too, and weapons carriers and heaven knows what. And of course you didn't have a key you could take out
- 33:00 as you can with a car. And so when you got out of your jeep you took the bonnet off and took the thing at the top of the, what do you call that thing? It goes around. Sorry, can't think of its name. But I remember when I was getting married and my father saw all these jeeps come to a stop, and up came the top and they took something and put it in their pocket and put it
- 33:30 down. He said, "What are they taking?" I said, "They're just making sure that its not stolen." "Oh." He looked at his daughter with surprise. He didn't think she'd know things like that, but she did know things like that. I remember being taken home by the police one night because the Blitz had been stolen. The fella I was out with didn't know to take part of the engine with him. Yes, you needed to know what to do. It was only a little part. I'm sorry I can't remember the name of it.
- 34:00 I should know. But yes, you all did that. And if you wanted to steal one you have to bring one with you. You would have to find one first. So that you could steal the car, or a jeep. Back to Mrs Mac. Righto. She serviced all the equipment in the place because she was an electrical engineer. And everything worked, always.
- 34:30 And it was a remarkable place really. I wouldn't say there was discipline, and yet it was disciplined. And she had a big trestle sort of table from which you could get tea, not coffee. No-one drank coffee much then here. You could get tea and I suppose there was an urn or something like that.
- 35:00 And you could buy a cup of tea. Glass cups. That was available every now and then. And all these men used to come in, and in their droves, because they wanted to keep their speeds up. So they could send if they wished or they could make sure of their own receiving speed. So there was everything available to them. And there were people learning and you would be...
- 35:30 There would be a boy and a girl. And you just decided that you were really to move on to the next one, because you would receive everything and you thinking about it and you know, you didn't need to, you weren't pushing yourself. So you had to keep on pushing yourself all the time. So she kept everything going. She had a little photograph album like this. And Julia Leslie had a
- 36:00 photographic studio in Sydney and she gave us a free sitting, any one of us who were there. And she'd give Mrs Mac a little sort of postcard sized one. And she had this photograph album with all our photographs in it. Now I think that photograph album of hers is in a museum in Sydney now. I'd love to see it. But I know she had one of me in it. I
- 36:30 didn't know that she even had it. But I did buy a couple of the photographs, that's why I have one of the Women's Emergency Signalling Core. An aunt of mine, now my cousin has that one. It's a much better one. I'm smiling in the other one. But you're not going to see that one.

#### **So what was she like as a woman?**

Very nice. A very nice woman. Very understanding and she was wonderfully good,

- 37:00 particularly to these girls. You know she would subsidise someone if they had to come to Sydney to learn Morse. I think she even took some of them home with her. She was an amazing woman. She looked after us. There was no doubt she meant to look after us and didn't seem to worry her that she had about a hundred of us to look after. And when the first girls went in the navy she took
- 37:30 them down in the train and saw that they were all right, and see that they'd have a decent place to live. And she'd have ticked the navy off no trouble at all. She would have told them. And she was, but she was wonderful to us. She was absolutely magnificent to us.

#### **What did she look like? How did she carry herself?**

There's probably a photo of her somewhere, might be in that Ship's Bells.

#### **Just describe how she carried herself?**

Short.

- 38:00 Short. She wasn't particularly fat. She was a fairly neat woman. Neat in build, but short. About to here on me. Small, really small. And dark hair. Knew exactly what she was doing with the electrical engineering, and I think Qantas kept her going afterwards. They had a Bendix system of... I
- 38:30 don't know if it was navigation or what. She kept going for a time after the war ended because they wanted her to keep going. And the girls didn't only go into the navy from there, but I'd say more girls went into the navy from her place than anywhere else. They did go into the other services as well. I've got a book there called The Eavesdroppers, which is talking about the -

39:00 it was mostly men, I think - in the air force who did the same thing. Then I've got another one, The Emperor's Codes, which talks about the Japanese Morse and how we transposed it.

**Did you learn that at Mrs Mackenzie's?**

No, I didn't learn that, but she did say to me, "Alison, you're going to join up?" And I said, "Yes, I think so. Yes, I'll join up." And she said, "You want to go in the navy?"

39:30 and I said, "Yes." "Well," she said, "there are two starting fairly soon. One will be in Melbourne, that will be stations, and the other one will be at Harman and that will be wire work." Now I wouldn't have said wire work to my parents, or anyone else out from there. But she said, "That will be wire work." And I said, "Oh, I think I'll go to Harman, I'll do the wire work." She said, "Good, right." Well this was Friday, she said, "Have you put your name in yet?" I said, "No." She said "Well you'd better do it.

40:00 Go for your medical on Monday, but you'd better get your name in first." So I said, "Right." So I trekked down to Loftus Street where the naval office was. We all knew where the naval office was. I said, "I want to join the WRANS." The man behind the counter gave me this piece of paper and I started filling it in. And then I thought, "I'd better just check on this medical thing." I said, "I've been told to come on Monday for a medical." And he just looked at me and then he said, "One of Mrs Mac's girls?"

40:30 And I said, "Yes." He said, "Come on Monday." She had it taped.

## Tape 5

00:36 **We just ended on the other tape you were talking about when you were going to join up, and what the man said to you, "Are you one of Mrs Mac's girls?" What was, why was?**

I think by this time Mrs Mac had become renowned throughout the navy, possibly the other services too, you'd never know. But she rather

01:00 told them what she thought and as he, I think he felt that no-one else would come along and ask, "I've been asked to come for a medical on Monday." And here I am joining up on Friday. Most people would have waited some little time and have to wait until they were called up. Whereas I did it all the wrong way around. "Yes, I'll do this, and I'll go there," and "Have you put your papers in?" You know. Should have come first, shouldn't it?

01:30 And then I should have gone where they sent me.

**And what was your decision about the navy in particular?**

Well I supposed Mrs Mac had sent more girls into the navy than anything else, so I thought the navy. You became, I had thought about the WAAAF at some stage and some of the fellas I knew said, "Oh no, stay out of the WAAAF."

02:00 Well there were so many of them, and you had these straw palliasses you know. Didn't fancy that. You'd be given this, and, "Go and fill it up with the straw there." Oh no. It was much nicer being in the navy.

**And so tell me about going for your medical?**

Well they had us there for the whole day, for the medical. Asked us thousands of questions and you mostly told the truth.

02:30 **What sort of questions would they ask?**

Well, "Have you ever had any of this, this, this, and this?" I was healthy, so I could quite honestly say, "No, I haven't had any of those things." "Do you get asthma? Have you got diabetes?" The same as with the licence; you answer all these weirdo questions. And they checked your heart, they check your blood pressure and eyesight.

03:00 And they checked you for, well I don't think I needed to know whether I was colourblind or not, which I wasn't anyway. But a lot of the men who were joining up got an awful shock when they found they were colourblind. They had no idea. You know, they would try to. I don't think they could get into the air force if they were colourblind, particularly for flying crew. But they had absolutely no idea. The could get

03:30 into the army though. Not with flat feet. I suppose it was a fairly high standard. Checked your teeth. Hearing, yes, hearing was important. I felt I was going a bit deaf for a while. Using your ears all the time, and sometimes there was a lot of noise coming through the earphones because there was

04:00 an American station which sent incessantly. Sending nothing except V's and WYVP [US identification Signal], these from WYVP, and belting into your ear.

**Why would they send that?**

Well I don't know. It was their station. It took us six months to get them to change it, the frequency. And

we were trying to listen to something that was sort of twittering underneath in a tiny noise that you couldn't hear. And there were about four or five

04:30 different places working the one frequency, and you had to identify which was which so that you had some idea that they would be any use. And it was quite a strain listening to that underneath this thing that was really belting into your ear. I mean we knew how to tune the things, but it was hard to tune that out because it just kept on belting. And I felt that it was affecting my hearing. Mind you

05:00 I'm not at all sure that we're not breeding a nation of deaf people right now, because everything's so noisy. Well it is, you know, the music. I would sooner have it a little quieter. And those disco things that they have going around. Oh God, that would make me sick. Couldn't cope with that.

**And so what was the procedure after you'd**

05:30 **had your medical?**

Well they then would... Well I don't know whether they told you immediately that you had passed your medical. I think they would have probably told you if you hadn't. But, then they'd say they would call you up when we need to, and you'd get called up. And we were, what did they say, they said we were 'enrolled', I'm not sure. But you know it was the finger, the hand on the

06:00 Bible. And quite a number of us together. And of course the WRANS was always royal. I don't know why the others were not. The WAAAF was Women's Auxiliary Australian Air force. And the AWAS was the Australian Women's Army Service, whereas we were always Women's Royal Australian Navy Service.

06:30 **And did this make a difference in the way you had to sign up or anything?**

I don't know. The WAAAF who went in that first year, they only enlisted for the one year. At the end of that year, if they wanted to stay in they could, but if they wanted to get out, they could too. Whereas we joined up for the duration of the war and a year, I think it was. A year or six months thereafter, whichever was the longer.

07:00 See I didn't last for six months after the end of war because I was married. So they had to get rid of me. Well because it was the end of the war. They would take married people if your husband was away. There was a woman with us who had joined up. And her husband, she didn't know if her husband was alive or dead. But he'd been sent to Singapore and up into Malaya. And she didn't hear until after the war that he was dead.

07:30 So then she went and did nursing. She was 29, and there was a limit of 30 for starting nursing at that stage. So she went to do nursing. Then she did midwifery in Sweden, which I think must have been a bit difficult with the language.

**Interesting.**

Yes, they did all sorts of strange things.

**And so did you talk to your dad about the fact that you were joining up?**

I just told him I wanted to.

08:00 He wasn't fazed. I think I'd been away from home so much that it didn't really, you know. And everyone. There would hardly be a house without someone away. So many. Perhaps not so much women but the men. And it was as though a tidal wave had gone out, something like that, because one minute you were going out with heaps of people

08:30 and then they weren't there. And then they would come back. That unit would come back on leave and you'd be thinking, "Oh God, they'd better go soon. I need some sleep." And then they'd go again and it would be awfully quiet, and you'd go to the Comforts Fund and make socks or camouflage nets.

**You'd go where?**

A Comforts Fund. They had heaps of Comforts Funds. And you

09:00 might have a Comforts Fund for one particular unit, and then they'd have room somewhere in town, and they may have sock-making machines and you could make a pair of socks, double quick time. Or they'd have sewing machines and you'd make underpants for them and all sorts of weird things like that. And they'd have camouflage nets you could make. We all seemed to know how to do those things. We did learn them.

**And would you make them**

09:30 **for blokes that you'd been hanging out with?**

No, we would make them mostly for a unit. But a lot of the girls I'd been at school with had brothers who were in a particular unit. I think they were 2/6th Field Regiment, so I used to go to that Comforts Fund. I don't know quite where my father used to go, but he used to make, I think it was two camouflage nets a week. And he'd go in and collect the string, bring it home and he had a

10:00 place set up on the verandah with a sort of a... You know, you used to have a window curtain with a fairly sheer thing, with top and bottom, so that it fitted into screw things. So he had something fitted like that and he'd put the camouflage nets on there, and he had a stool.

10:30 So, they were quite easy to do, but a bit tedious. A bit hard on the hands perhaps, because it was a fairly coarse string and it wasn't very 'frayey'. And I think someone used to put bits of material through them, so it was more camouflaged later. But I don't know who did that. But everyone seemed to do something.

**And when say people**

11:00 **would come home on leave, and you'd all go out together, what kind of places would you go in Sydney?**

Oh, there were heaps of nightclubs. And pictures. And you would go onto a nightclub afterwards if you wanted to. Or there would be a few dances, not as many, but there was always the Trocadero. I never went there. It was a dancehall you could go to by yourself I think. But I think a few girls would probably go together, rather than by yourself. I don't think it would be quite so sensible to go to these places by

11:30 yourself. And there was always somewhere to go.

**What were the nightclubs like?**

Well pretty nice really. Fairly small dancing floor. You could have a meal. You didn't bring your own drink, you had to buy them and pay corkage. They had them at a fantastic price. And they'd have a pretty good band. They may have a singer with the band. One of the girls I'd been at school with had been to sing with

12:00 a band at Princes for a while. She had a nice voice too.

**What kind of songs would they sing?**

All the latest sort of songs. You know, 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' and all that type of thing.

**How does that go? I've heard of that.**

'When you're hearts on fire...' Can't remember it. 'Alexander's Ragtime Band', which I've only heard been rejuvenated three times so far. I'm sure it's due for another one.

**How does that go?**

12:30 'C'mon along, C'mon come along, Alexander's ragtime band.' 'Run Rabbit Run', you are hearing on TV now, that was another one.

**Which one?**

'Run Rabbit Run'.

**How does that go?**

'Run, rabbit, run, rabbit, run, run, run'. 'Hanging out the Washing on the Siegfried Line' - that was hopeful. No-one hung out the washing on the Siegfried Line, they went through the French one instead.

**What were the words to that one?**

'I'm going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line

13:00 if the Siegfried line's still there'. 'Lily Marlene'. 'Bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover'. 'Nightingales Sang in Barclay Square'. And of course there was that man, Victor Sylvester and his orchestra, from London. And we'd have records of his. 78 records,

13:30 not like we have now. And there were a lot of good American bands. Of course there was Bing Crosby with 'White Christmas'. And we used to go to so many films you see. We really did go to films. Ginger Rogers, Fred Astaire, all those. Heaps of them. And actually one lass who was at school with me, her father ended up as Lord Mayor of Sydney. But he had been in films;

14:00 his name was Crick. And then there was another girl at school with me, who's name was Doyle, and her father had a lot to do with films too. Because the first time Snow White and the Seven Dwarves came into Australia, we saw the first showing of it, which was at the school, because she was boarding with us. So we saw that. I suppose there were a lot of

14:30 not so much bands. Orchestras, or people like that Cossack Choir came out and their show would be in the town hall. And I never missed a thing when I was at school, because if you were music student you got preference and you had the chance to go. So I went to the lot of those. I don't think I went later, I think I was a bit lazy then.

**And during those first little while of the war, before you joined up, was there anyone**

15:00 **special that you would go out with?**

Only about three or four. I was having a good time.

**How did you manage that?**

Oh on different days.

**Were the others aware that there were?**

Oh, yes, they were aware.

**Was that okay?**

Oh yes, it was okay. I think we did much more going out then and much less limiting yourself

15:30 to one. Much less. And of course if you lived in the country you had it made, because there was always dances. And you went by yourself, and everyone knew you. You knew the whole lot. My kids saw that when they were growing up, because we were in a country district and there was frequently, at least once a month, perhaps more, there'd be a dance on. And an orchestra would come along and the kids would get up there and they'd start dancing

16:00 early in the piece. I remember a friend of mine, well he was a friend of ours, and he had a son the same age as my youngest. And he rang me up and said, "Bill's coming up to you this weekend," and I said, "Yes, that's right." Well he said, "and you are going to a dance at Cooyar?" and I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well get him up on the floor will you?" I said, "Why, doesn't he do it?" "No," he said, "he's scared of it." And I knew that his father was a good dancer so I said, "Yeah, all right Bill, I'll get him up." So you know Bill's

16:30 son was sitting beside me and I said, I think it was a progressive barn dance or a progressive Pride of Erin, they did a lot of old-time ones. I said, "Bill come on, I'd like to dance. Take me up and dance." He said, "I can't dance." "Of course you can, come on." So I took him up, didn't see him the rest of the night. He had a ball and he wasn't nervous about it any longer. I told him years later that it was his father had put me up to it.

17:00 Well why not, it was a good thing.

**And so these three or four guys that you were going out with.**

Well I'd known them all. We'd had Kosciusko holidays and they'd have holidays with the schools all up there. And they'd be a whole lot of them. I mean there might be Kings and Knox and Grammar and Barker, and heaven knows how many. Shore.

**So how would someone ask you out in those days?**

17:30 Well they'd just ring up and ask you.

**Well what would they say?**

Just, "Would you like to come out, so and so?" So you'd say, "Yes, thanks, I'll do that."

**And would they come and pick you up or would they pay?**

Oh yes, and usually in one of father's cars, you know. One man had, his father had been at grammar. Went into the air force later. His father was in car salesman area and

18:00 you never knew what kind of car. You know, I went out in Cadillacs, and all sorts of strange things. He sold rather good cars. And he'd just appear in a different car every time and I'd go saddling off with...

**What was the nature of the relationship with these guys. Was it?**

Fairly distant, yes. Oh, we were never close. There was no pill then. And

18:30 there was a very real fear of pregnancy. So yes, you better behave yourself.

**So that was almost acted as a contraception?**

Yes, that was a great deterrent.

**Was there much talk about that between the girls, about that sort of ?**

I think most of us were fairly careful. I think its probably easy to get carried away at times. Yes, there were some early marriages at times.

19:00 But they did get married then. I don't think they worry about it now.

**And so, I should probably go back to joining up.**

Having veered off a little.

**I always get interested in those areas.**

Well, why not?

**Exactly.**

Well different age, different customs perhaps.

**Exactly. I find it fascinating. But we will talk about that a little bit more**

19:30 **within the navy as well, and obviously when you met your husband. We were talking about what happened after you'd had your medical. Was there an official time when you were 'sworn in'?**

No, they'd call you up. I think we were actually sworn in when we went down to Harman. But they'd called us up a week before and then they discovered they had no where to house us.

20:00 So they gave us a sort of armband with WRANS on it and told us we had to wear it all the time. And we weren't doing anything, so I mean we had to wear it all the time. And it took a week and then we went down to Harman. In fact that was over New Year, that week. So it was just after Christmas. So New Year came along, and I'd expected to be at Harman. So I was at home, and Adrian Ormiston

20:30 who was, I suppose he was really my third cousin, but we were cousins, you see, because he was my stepmother's nephew, and I'd known him since we were bits of things because I often had holidays with them at the beach. And he came out to see us because his parents were down near Canberra. So he came to us of course. You know everyone, they found a place to call home. He was in the air force and he said, "What are you doing

21:00 tonight?" I said "Nothing, I'd thought I'd be at Harman. What are you doing?" He said, "Nothing, I'd thought I'd be on the high seas." So then presently Adrian said, "Come on, we'll go to town and look for some fun. See what we can find." And as he didn't come back either. No, he was killed over there. And years later I was talking to his sister, his older sister, and we came across some photographs of Adrian and she said, "Oh, Adrian." I said,

21:30 "Marjorie, take it." "But don't you want it?" I said, "I have one like that. You take it. Don't you have one?" "No," she said, "I don't, I'd love it." I said, "You take it." And I told her that I 'd been out with him that last New Year that he was in Sydney, and she said, "Oh, that was nice." But there were quite a number of us of an age, because there was Marjorie and Adrian and Rosalind, and then they had first cousins and

22:00 there was Marsha and Boyd and Lynette. And we all knew each other, and we were all very friendly and quite happy to see each other. And of course then I had Wally. Colin was in Fiji, but Wally was hanging around our place all the time because he has nowhere else to go.

**And when you went out with Adrian that night, it was New Year's Eve?**

Yes, it was New Year's Eve.

**And did you find some fun?**

Oh we wandered

22:30 around the town and we saw the new year in and caught the last train home. And if you didn't get the last train home you had to get a taxi, and that was pretty expensive because we were 10 miles out.

**And we were talking about going out, but did you notice much of a difference? I mean, I suppose you were a bit younger before the war, but did Sydney change much in a going out sense, as the war progressed and there were more, I guess, transient troops around and stuff?**

Well I wasn't

23:00 there in Sydney very much after I joined up. It was only if you had leave, and if you had a month's leave a year, you did very well. And you mostly didn't get it. You didn't get nearly as much as that. So, I think there were more nightclubs open up because there were always men on leave and they wanted somewhere to go. So the nightclubs were there. There were quite a number around

23:30 Sydney, and of course there were some that weren't quite as, what should it say; that could be raided. Oh yes.

**For?**

The police could raid them.

**Drugs, alcohol?**

No I don't think there were drugs around then. They all had alcohol yes, definitely, but I don't think, there were illegal night clubs and around Kings Cross there would have been some very strange

24:00 ones. I think there was one called the Ginger Jar; I never got to it. I thought it was a wiser to stay away from those places. I didn't want to be in a police raid. The idea was you got out the back door if you could, and vanished. I'm not sure how you could vanish like that. Could be difficult, couldn't it?

**Did the war change the nature of relationships?**

I think it possibly did.

24:30 Look, when we got up to Townsville, Townsville was the last jumping off place before they went to the war. When it was just up in the north. And you know, a lot of the fellows would like to have some girl behind them. And it was pretty upsetting because you didn't want six fellows hanging onto you. Weren't interested in them, but they just wanted to have a girl back home.

25:00 And it could be, it became quite difficult to us. But there we were, and they always looked you up. If they knew anything about you at all, they'd looked you up. And you'd suddenly, "Will you come over here?" "Yes." "There's someone here to see you." "Okay." And we had no place that we could take anyone to. If someone said, "Come out with me," you could go and sit on the beach, or you could go to the pictures in Townsville.

25:30 That was about it. Yes, not much going there. There were two, there was the open-air theatre and another theatre. The Americans had a place where you could go dancing and there were other dances where you did have too. If we went, just the girls, we'd always have three of us at least. Safer for getting home.

**You mentioned**

26:00 **a little while ago about when your dad said, "Oh why don't you work for the Americans?" and you said that you weren't quite sure if you'd tell him what they were after. How had you formed this impression of them?**

Oh, you knew.

**How?**

Oh well they definitely wanted to get you into the cot. There was no doubt about that. And I didn't want to work for them. A lot of the girls did. I don't know, they didn't come at me. I kept away. I did go out with some of the Americans.

26:30 **Was there a difference, going out with an American?**

Well I think they thought they were out of their own country too, weren't they?

**We will come back to Townsville. Can you tell me how you got to Harman?**

By train.

**And who was on the train?**

A naval RTO [Rail Transport Officer]. We'd appear at Central Railway Station. We'd get our warrant to go on the train.

27:00 **Where would you get the warrant from?**

The naval RTO there.

**What does RTO stand for?**

Railway Transport Officer. And they always had an office for each of the services. And it was only a few hours down to Canberra, and then they'd usually have someone to meet you.

**Was this the first time you'd worn your uniform?**

We didn't have a uniform at this stage. Well I wore the winnel [?] uniform, because what else.

27:30 And some girls if they'd been in the Guides, they might wear a Guides uniform because it was useful to have something like that, that you didn't have to take a great number of clothes with you that you didn't know what to do with later. At Harman, all the times you could wear ordinary clothes was if you went for a picnic, and you got permission to go out. Or in your cottage in the afternoon

28:00 or some time when you weren't on watch, or you were doing the washing or something mad like that.

**And what were your first impressions of Harman?**

Well, even to find yourself was interesting. But there about three streets of cottages which had three bedrooms and a sort of sitting dining room

28:30 and a kitchen, bathroom. That was about all. They converted the sitting room dining room into another bedroom, so we had four bedrooms. Three in the sitting room and two each in the others, so two, four, six, seven, eight. Nine into a cottage.

**What was it like? I guess you'd had an experience from boarding?**

Boarding school didn't mean a thing to me.

**Did the girls get a bit**

29:00 **catty?**

Oh sometimes, not particularly I don't think. We were too busy, and we probably all... In the cottage you tried to be in the same watch as the one you shared the room with. But people moved quietly because there would be someone else asleep in the place. So you had to learn consideration for others. The mess, where you had your meals, was a fair walk away. The station was another great walk away.

29:30 Always put your hat on of course. Try not to be caught by the eight o'clock, the flag going up at eight o'clock flag, or sundown. Because you had to stand to attention and salute, facing the flag. And if you were going on watch at eight o'clock you really should have been there beforehand, shouldn't you?

**And what was your orientation like there?**

They had quite a big

30:00 rec [recreation] room and they started us in the rec room. They had a buzzer in there and they started us on this Japanese Morse, because we were all Japanese ones. And they'd give us lectures on customs of the navy and what we could expect. And then they'd give us a little bit of marching too.

**What sort of customs would they teach?**

Oh well, the language that the navy used, which tends to be a little different from a lot of other things. Because they use a lot of the rhyming slang that the cockneys use.

**I know Keirnan**

30:30 **asked for some examples of that, but are there any more of the rhyming slangs?**

I noticed one in something the other day. They said, "Have a look," and it would be a baker's...

**Butcher's.**

Or a butcher's, yes, yes. So that they'd leave the last part of it off, which would rhyme anyway. But when you leave the last part off you think, "Oh my God, what are they talking about?" which is

31:00 difficult. And we spoke in watch keeping times. There was a name for each of the watches. There was the afternoon watch, there was the morning watch, there was the first watch, the four noon, the dogwatches and things like that. So we spoke about those, as watches.

**Why was the dogwatch called the dogwatch?**

I'm blessed if I know. Sorry, I don't know.

31:30 Probably a bit of dog to do it at that time of day. In the navy, if you're not on watch keeping, your day ends at 4 o'clock. Mind you it starts early, but your day ends at 4 o'clock. So there are always people that have to keep watch in ships, and anywhere else. There would always be the watch keepers

32:00 because they'd be. Stokers would have to be watch keepers because they'd have to have people there all the time. The telegraphists would always have to be there, because they would always have to have someone there all the time. The watch keepers who, the able seamen. They'd have to be watch keepers. But I mean the cooks and stewards and people like that, they would be on day time, so their day would normally end at 4 o'clock. They'd have to get a meal later. But if they're

32:30 at sea, in wartime, and the alarm bells go, they'd all have a place to go in an alarm. And the stewards and cooks, the chances are they'd be down passing up ammunition. Lovely place to be, it blows you up. They all would have to, the ones manning the guns would have to get their flash gear. And they were pretty good on those upright ladders.

33:00 They seldom put their feet on them, they slithered down on their hands. I used to be able to do that but I'm a bit nervous to do it now.

**How much time did you spend on ships?**

Not very much. The idea was, particularly in Townsville, if you knew someone who looked you up, you'd say, "Are you having a boiler cleaned? Wouldn't you need a trial run before you go?" If they commissioned, it was quite a good lurk, and

33:30 if they'd have a trial run, you'd suggest that they suggested to the CO that they were to take some WRANS out. "Oh righto, well when would it suit you to go?" and you'd tell them.

**And sorry, what was the trial run for?**

For the, to make sure that the boilers worked well.

**What would that involve?**

Well they'd take you out to sea and they'd probably drop off a few depth charges and see if they could get any fish. Or demonstrate the paravanes and things like that.

34:00 And you'd prowl all over the ship and be fed. And of course they used to line us up on the foxhole, leaving harbour. And there might be an American ship next, tied up just along, and you'd hear them say, "Good god, they're taking girls to sea there." I thought, "Yes, but we'll be coming back tonight." So yes, I went out in a corvette and a frigate. In fact I think there might

34:30 have been two corvettes.

**Were they meant to take the WRANS out with them?**

Oh well it was official. You couldn't do it otherwise, because they wouldn't have been coming back. I really wouldn't fancy swimming to shore through shark infested waters. And the fellas thought it was a good idea. I mean they probably needed a bit of light relaxation somewhere.

**How proud were they of their ship, when you came aboard?**

They were proud of their ship, yes.

35:00 The frigate, the fellow I knew there, was married to a very good friend of mine, and whenever he came into Townsville. See if you were in a ship your letters were addressed HMAS so and so, and this was Barcoo, care of the GPO [General Post Office]. And that was all they did; that's how they addressed the ships. And the letter would

35:30 follow you around for months probably. You eventually might get a fistful of them. And so when Peter came to Townsville, he'd ring me up, because he knew I was there. Ring me up. I'd say, "Oh, righto Peter." The minute I could get out I would get down the post office and send a telegram to his wife and say, "Peter looks well," even before I'd seen him. So then she would send a letter to me, much fatter than she'd normally send me

36:00 one. And then he'd ring me up from the depot and he'd say, "There's a letter for you from my wife. I'll divorce her if she's writing all that to you. Can I open it?" "Yes." And so we circumvented things, because that was strictly. But we could send telegrams you see. Peter couldn't, I could. So we always did that and it worked quite well.

**At Harman, just**

36:30 **a question. I could be completely wrong about this but, is it just the army, or is it in the navy that they wake you up with reveille?**

Army is reveille. They had a man riding around on a bike, on a bike with a bosuns... you know, a bosun's pipe. Its sort of shaped liked that and so they, "Wakey, wakey, rise and shine, PT [physical training] starts in ten minutes' time. Rig of the day for such and such, rig of the day for sailors, WRANS, and so and so. Number ones,

37:00 number twos, number threes." The rigs were. You see Prince Philip put rig of the day for the Queen. Each thing was numbered because he'd had it in the navy, and the accessories that went with it, and they found it a very convenient thing. Well he'd seen it was good, because if they go around and say, "Rig of the day for sailors is number sixes," well I think we'd call them ice cream suits. They were all in white, with

37:30 what do you call them, the big wide ones. I had a pair of them too, in navy, which had to be folded in a special way. You had to take them inside out and then they had to have seven folds. Because they had nowhere to hang anything. They had a locker. That's it. Everything in there. And they lived in supreme discomfort in the ships because they slept and dressed

38:00 and ate and had their clothes in the one thin, the foxhole. And they slept in hammocks, and they were allowed 18 inches per person per hammock. And you'd hook it on there, and you'd hook it on there and when you got out of it. And they had grips in the deck head so that you could swing up into it. I think it was an art to get into them. I never tried that, I thought, "No, that's not for me." And then

38:30 you had to lash up and stow your hammock every day, and they'd be a big sort of enclosure and they'd go into there. And when they were, they used it as something to store extra bullets and things coming in too. But they had this place in the corner where all their hammocks were and they were all named. And then there were mess decks that were fixed,

39:00 and sort of formed. There was no comfort to it, none. No comfort whatsoever. And all the, they would have a petty officers' mess, but that wasn't so good. And the one submarine I got into, was a... I was on my honeymoon then. My husband went from end to end of it, crouching the whole way, because you know he was a bit tall. I sat in the wardroom which

39:30 was about six by six, and four of them lived there. Four, might have been three. You had a sort of table and form there and a form there and there were cupboards underneath those forms. And these were beds and that was a bed and everything was sort of behind something. Supremely uncomfortable and very claustrophobic.

40:00 You know Stewart was fascinated with how machinery worked so he went and looked at it, and I thought, "Well I won't understand that, I'll sit here and drink."

**We'll just change tapes on that note.**

## **Tape 6**

00:36 **You were just talking about those naval traditions. How was some of them applied at HMAS Harman?**

Well I suppose they weren't applied so much in a place that was purely watch keeping, because it was only really the cooks and the AB [Able Seaman] in the guardhouse who really followed the daily

01:00 routine. I suppose the captain did. We didn't see him very often. And the rest of us were just all watch keeping, so you were just trying to be considerate to give the people a chance to sleep because they needed their sleep. So it didn't impinge on you too much. If there was some VIP [Very Important Person] coming and we've have to march for them, well then every time you came off watch you'd practice marching again

01:30 which was tedious, but it passed and you forgot all about it until the next time.

**What would you have to do on a march?**

Oh usually it was just a plain march, it wasn't fancy. Just march. They taught us how to salute the navy way. Rather than the army and the air force saluted differently.

**Show us how?**

Shortest way up, shortest way down. And shade your eyes, you know.

02:00 **How's that different?**

They come up the longest way and shortest way down. And they have it this way. And if you look at JAG [Judge Advocate General], who's supposed to be navy too, they do it that way too. And that's American. They probably thought they didn't have enough room for anything else then.

**Was there any reason you were given for this?**

Possibly we might have been, but I know there were always pushed for

02:30 room in the navy. And you know you look at some of those ships over there, and you think, "My God, they must have just about been crawling through them." Because they were very small, very small indeed. Very short in height.

**So it's a case of just...**

Yes, get there and down.

**So talking a little bit about a typical day there. What are some of things that you would encounter, like**

03:00 **in your day?**

Well if you were on watch, you were on watch, or you were off. And there were things you had to do in that 24 hour period. So there wasn't much time for anything except eating, sleeping and going on watch, and leaving things tidy behind you. Until you've finished with your watch, and then the chances are you'd go out. We'd catch a liberty boat, which was a bus,

03:30 and go into Canberra. Now there was a place we could dance. There was a sort of club for ex service people in at Manuka, or Kingston, one of those parts of Canberra. And we'd go there, the chances were. And there was I think the YW [YWCA - Young Women's Christian Association] had a little hostel in Civic Centre, and we were, at some stage, allowed to stay the night there.

04:00 But, those were about the only places we could go. The hall, big Albert Hall sometimes have dances or concerts or something. There wasn't much to do around Canberra, terribly quiet. I mean there was the Duntroon [Royal Military College] fellows were there, just across the creek. And there was air force there, quite a number of them.

04:30 I guess people were pretty busy because they had to fulfil this, that or the other per day. So you didn't have much time for fiddling about. And I know I had a bike. That was my means of transport mostly. I bought myself a bike. And Phyllis Lane-Poole was one of the girls who was with us. And her father was head of the Forestry School right out at Stromlo. And I went out with her one week again

05:00 and we push-biked against a headwind. And I think it was eight miles into Canberra and was a fair way the other way too. I don't know whether I ever recovered from that, because I still had to come back. She got a motorbike later; I know why. She couldn't cope with watch keeping. Not everyone can sleep at odd times. And she couldn't cope with the watch keeping, so she was put on as a driver instead, and

kept in the navy.

05:30 But if you just can't sleep... I mean I had the idea that I couldn't sleep during the daytime before I went into the navy, but I soon found I could. It was a matter of just going to sleep.

**What other activities would you do? PT or?**

Well we had a few tennis courts there and basketball courts, and we could do those. There was a piano in the rec room, and we had quite a few people who could play the piano. We'd have a singalong

06:00 or maybe a dance, or play sports. They've got a swimming pool and God knows what now. We didn't have any refinements like that. I think there was a swimming pool at Kingston, but we probably didn't get to that very often. We went out to a picnic at Cotter Dam. I think we managed to get a horse and a dray, God knows how we got that, but we did.

**What's that, a dray?**

Oh a sort of cart thing on wheels.

06:30 You know like a square looking thing on wheels with a couple of other pieces going each side of the horse. Someone drove it.

**How were your friendships developing here?**

Well you mostly made friends with the ones on your watch. Or the ones who were on watch when you were off, so that, because you had the

07:00 24 hours off together or the 48 hours off together. So you kept your friends to those and you might not really know who the other ones were. Because when they were on watch, you were off, and vice versa. So you just didn't naturally mix with them particularly. Nothing against them, it was just a case of you had to see the ones you could see when you did see them.

**Did you come into contact with**

07:30 **the men in the other signal station, or the women in the other one?**

Well we did go out to Belconnen and play tennis at times. So we met them sometimes there. There weren't very many on Harman station. There was the CO and there were all these petty officers, and one or two ABs. And there were some men who were watch keepers in the

08:00 stations work, but I didn't work in that. Our room was all manned where the wire room was completely manned by women. But the Z room had one man going in there, and I think he was American. And we weren't allowed in there. It was too secret for us. Yes, we only just knew it though.

08:30 I think a great amount of the traffic for the stations was done from Molonglo, which was completely women. So they relieved all those men. Marion Stephens was in charge of that one. In that book she says that she was one of three WRANS who was chosen to go over for the coronation I think. And a man she met over there said that they never

09:00 had any trouble with the Bells Broadcast, the broadcast from Belconnen and Molonglo because they were always perfect, and he said, "And years later we found that it was a woman in charge of it. I would have loved to have met her." And she said, "Shake hands then." And I think he just couldn't believe because Whitehall apparently didn't think the women could do it, but they did.

**Speaking on this issue. Were you paid the**

09:30 **same as men?**

We got six and eight a day. Now that was... Now I doubt if it was the same. But at that time it was two pound 10 was the basic wage for a man, wife and two children. Two pound 10 a week. And see we got two pound six and eight a week. And we were all found, food and everything else. I could save

10:00 money on that six and eight a day because there wasn't much to spend it on. I mean didn't have all that time either. Because that six hours a day, seven days a week, its a 42 hour week, that you were actually on watch. And everything else had to fit in the rest, as best you could. And if some of us got sick, which could happen, particularly up in Townsville,

10:30 because you got dengue fever - that's about all we ever got. And if we were short handed, so we went into three watches. 56 hour week. And everything else fitted into the rest. How would you fancy a 56 hour week? It always seem to come when we were doing an exam, funny that. They decided that they would give us exams so that we could get promotion.

11:00 Not like roll out the barrel. You get no promotion this side of the ocean. So they gave us exams they thought up. The men did exams, so you had your wings and your streak of lightning through. And if you got the first exam you got a star on top. If you got the second one you had the start underneath. And they gave us exams on the composition of the Japanese fleets. There were nine of them. We had to know the names of all the aircraft carriers, all the battle cruisers

11:30 and the numbers of, even down to submarines and things like that with each fleet. And we had to know the geography of the Pacific. And it's remarkable how good it is to have that geography. I really learnt it. I have a fair idea where all these islands are, and I was glad to do it. I don't think the Japanese fleet was much use to me. No, but the

12:00 geography of the Pacific was quite good.

**And what about learning the Japanese signals. How were you able to learn this?**

Well we were taught them. See a lot of them were used as procedural signals for the Australians. 'Tiddly' was one word that the navy uses. Tiddly or passas, and Tiddly is sort of the fancy one.

12:30 So we'd say, "Tiddly B," which is a B with a line across it or a barred B. Well that's B is just da, di, di, dit and the tiddly B is da di di dit da. So that was one of the things that we had to do in the Japanese. That was one of their symbols. And then there was OA, so da da da di da, or UA di, da, di, da, di, da. And there were various other barred ones. And then

13:00 there were da, di, da, dit which was stroke, and that was one of the ones. And there was GN, we called it good night. A few things like that. And we just had to know how they transposed later into the kana.

**What was easy about learning it?**

13:30 Easy, well you learnt it. I mean you learn the alphabet and there are 26, but they had 76, so you learnt it. And once you had it, you had it. Then they used to send their messages probably, mostly in cipher. And cipher is very slow, because you know its di da da da da, or di di da da da, or di di di da da, or di di di di da, or di di di di dit, or da di di dit. And

14:00 then they thought up an abbreviated cipher. So they send tiddly A, di da di da, and they'd mean five. So you'd hear some and write something else down, which is always interesting, isn't it?

**So what was difficult then?**

Well getting it down in time because they were very good operators. They were very fast. They were very fast and very accurate and as

14:30 long as the atmospherics weren't interfering with your reception, you could get it down pretty well. But if the atmospherics were bad, well God help you. And of course when we were in Townsville we were a third of a way up Castle Hill. And the planes, for an hour and a half every morning, the DC3s [transport aircraft] used to take off from Garbutt and fly right across the top of us, low. And that blotted everything out, which was really interesting for that hour and a half.

**15:00 So the Japanese messages?**

Towards the end of the war, right near the end, they'd send them sort of in plain language. And you'd get a message from Singapore saying so many B20s, B74s or B27s [aircraft] or whatever they were, in a raid. And you'd think, "Good" and they'd rip them off at about 30 words a minute. About a dozen of them, one after the other.

15:30 I mean, we knew what they were saying then. And it was lovely to hear that, it was really pleasant. Used to think, "Good," keep to it.

**How would you like understand the Japanese?**

Well those ones, they sort of put it in plain language that we could understand. And they called the planes by the same name we did. So it was easy. And they'd give the number and their numbers seem to work the same way,

16:00 and oh it was so nice to hear that the war was coming towards an end.

**I'm trying to get my head around why it wasn't in Japanese.**

Well part of it would be in Japanese but it would only be a little message. You know, two or three lines, and B24s, so many B24s. And we'd think, "Ah, that's a raid," because we knew what they were.

**Tell us. Describe**

**16:30 what the station looked like at Harman?**

Yes, well you came in the main gate here and there was fence all the way along. The road to Queanbeyan went along that way. There was a whole lot of cottages along the road there. Inside the fence there was a road. Cottages there, backed by other cottages there and another road there. And then there was a sort of semicircle piece that went around. The mess was

17:00 over there. The Americans were in a cottage or two down here. The VDC [Volunteer Defence Corps] had their mess and things there. The rec room was there. The parade ground was up there. The CO was there. The Jimmy had the cottage there and the road went up the hill there. The flagpole was here beside the... And the wire was over there attached to it and the station over there, and the DF away to glory across the paddocks, roughly. There were about three rows

17:30 of cottages, and it's quite changed now. You can't recognise any of it. And you don't even see a Morse key any longer. They have computers everywhere.

**How was the security there?**

Well there were guards all the time and there was quite a good fence. And it was about eight miles out of Canberra and about six or four, four or six miles out of Queanbeyan ,

18:00 so it was fairly deserted. I don't think anyone, we had the VDC on duty all the time. We had at least three VDC on duty all the time, so I don't think we needed to worry about that. It seemed to be all right. And we were all in uniform. You couldn't mistake us.

**And what about the lighting there?**

We were under, what do you call them, these good lights?

18:30 You know, yes that kind, the long...

**Fluorescent?**

Fluorescent. We had those fluorescent lights. And we'd have in the office part, in the wire room, you'd come in the door here and there was a place to boil up tea, coffee. And then beyond that where the two teleprinters and the teletype,

19:00 was all sorts of metal things around the outside. There was an entrance here. And then over here there was a table and that was where the woman who was in charge of that watch would be. She mostly stood, so it was a high one. Then there was another table here with a telephone on it, connected to the DF, where the DF sightings were phoned through. And the one who was collecting messages, and making the teas would receive that, write them down, code them up,

19:30 take them over to the station to be sent away. So that one who was there, was always the messenger one. But we rotated around the room. Then beyond that was the room with all these tables with the receivers on them. There was the very low frequency one here, and then there must have been about seven or eight on each side, and right down the bottom there you would listen for the submarines and

20:00 then there was a door there in the corner into the Z room, which I never saw inside.

**What would you talk about, about the Z room? What would you say was in there?**

We weren't supposed to know anything about it, but somehow I did.

**What did you know?**

Well I knew that we were transmitting, we were sort of photographing the transmitters, so that they could identify them through the ionosphere.

**Sorry, explain that to me?**

You know there is a troposphere and an there is an ionosphere and all those things.

20:30 Well they sort of bounce; the radio waves bounce. I mean there is a land one and there is a bounce one. Yes we learned a little bit about those sorts of things. Not very much, it's gone mostly.

**Is there a pay parade?**

Yes, you were paid twice, well every fortnight. And you'd line up

21:00 in your places. And the men. And you'd be called out by name and they'd have a table and chairs. The officers would be sitting down. And the men of course would have these little round hats and they had to take them off this way and hold it there and the pay was put on and they take it there and put their hat on again, like that. We didn't have to take our hats off. We'd just have our hands out. And they came in envelopes; your pay came in envelopes. They didn't give you any sort of coin change. So

21:30 on two pound six and eight a week, so that's five, thirteen and four. So you'd get five pounds ten of that. And the three and four pence would go onto the next one. And unless you started counting it up the first pay you ever had, and you never thought of it then, you never knew where you were. But you only got notes you see.

22:00 Either pound notes, or five pound notes or ten bob notes. So that was how your pay came.

**What happened to the three and four?**

It was, they kept a record of it, I hope. So you had three and four carried forward, and the next time you'd get another five thirteen and four, so you would be due, entitled to five thirteen and four, plus three and four pence. So you'd be five, sixteen and

22:30 eight. So you'd again get five pounds ten, and they'd be six and eight carried forward. And the next time you might get another ten dollars you see, ten pounds. Ten bob. Currency!

**Would you definitely get that, or...?**

Yes, I think you did, but you know, you had to wait several weeks for it. And then of course

23:00 we had this eight pence halfpenny a day towards clothing. You were given your initial issue of clothing but then you were supposed to replace it with your eight pence halfpenny a day.

**Now you were talking about the Japanese Morse code. What if you identified a submarine?**

23:30 You could identify it by the call sign it would give, because they might, they'd come up and you'd hear this noise and you'd think, "That sounds like a sub." The minute you'd hear that noise you'd call out to the one who was in charge. She'd come rushing round with a set of phones and plug in and say, "Yes, does sound like it. What's your frequency?" She'd rush back to the phone and ring the DF operator.

24:00 "We think we've got a sub on such and such." "Right," he said. He'd write that down and change his frequency to that and listen and see if he could get a direction on it. And hopefully others would get to the same. And of course the time would be included in that. So they may get a few and that would give them a location of about where they were. If they had three and they sort of came to a nice even one, well that would be pretty good.

24:30 RS Negative was the call sign for the subs. So when they might sort of start sending a few Vs if they want to send a message, and then they'd say, "From RS Negative." You'd hear RS Negative di da di di dit di da da da, and you'd say, "It is a sub, quick." We galvanised into action then. We didn't muck about with that at all, because we wanted

25:00 to get the message, and we wanted to get the direction. So it was important to make sure of those things, if we possibly could.

**So just take us through basically how you would find the subs. So you'd get a direction?**

No, we wouldn't. The direction finding man would. But we would have a set of perhaps six frequencies to search. So you'd be searching around

25:30 that and thinking, "Getting no joy here, I'll go this one." And maybe three of them are more for night-time and three of them more for daytime. So you'd look on the daytime, you'd get an idea from the size, what sized frequency it was. Whether you'd get it in the daytime or night-time so you just search. And if you found anything you'd keep on going. And it was awfully hard to keep awake. But of course you know that was no good, you would be

26:00 up on a charge going to sleep on watch.

**So you'd notice, you'd get this Japanese sub signal...**

And you'd take the message if they sent one.

**And so they'd see the direction of the...**

The DF man would be hunting for it on his set over there, to get a direction. And then he would send everything that he sent. He'd send it through back to the wire room, and the girl who was collecting the messages from each set and taking them

26:30 to the teleprinter, or first of all to this girl who was in charge. And then she would take it to the teleprinters. And then it would then go down to Monterey in Melbourne. And Monterey was manned both by Americans and Australians. And the girls, I think, received the messages that came on the teleprinters and took them wherever they wanted to be. The Australians only dealt with decoding the addresses at

27:00 the beginning of the message. The Americans did the others. And they'd work on each set of messages for 24 hours, then they'd microfilm it and send it to Washington.

**Ok. So where did you go from HMAS Harman?**

Well then I was on draft up to Magnetic, Townsville, with \*

27:30 three other girls. So we were with our luggage, were taken into Canberra and put onto the train, which was only a little train to go to Sydney. And we'd know we'd be going straight on the other train up to Brisbane so we'd got in touch with our parents. So they were on the platform waiting to see us, you see. And they had a porter there and we sort of slung things out at them and we said, "Hello," and "we've got to get to such."

28:00 And the Naval RTO was there. "You've got to get to such and such. It's due to leave in five minutes' time." And so we ran from one platform to another. We flew onto the... "You're in this carriage." And we flew into there and the luggage was poked in, and we said, "Thanks for coming to see us. Goodbye. Will someone pay the porter?" And we'd gone. Just like that. So then we had about 24 hours to get up to Brisbane. And then we had two days to kill in Brisbane. So we stayed at a little hostel that was

28:30 just behind the city hall. And we went out on the tram. We knew we'd heard of Clayfield, so we went to

have a look at Clayfield. We weren't a bit impressed with all these Queenslanders. We were accustomed to brick houses. But we went to the terminus, and we came back, and we had a look at anything we could look at. Then we went on what was really a suburban train from Brisbane to Townsville.

29:00 I wouldn't say it was very comfortable. Frances Provan, who was WO1 [Warrant Officer First Class], had been in Queensland a lot, and she said to us, "And when you get to Rockhampton, don't worry about the food, go and have a shower, you'll feel much better." And we agreed with her. So we had a shower instead, because otherwise you didn't have a shower the whole time. And we were... It was just a suburban train. There was no division

29:30 between the top of the seat and the roof. And there was this silly little luggage rack. A stupid little thing. But however, we had sailors in with us of course. "Well, now come on, we'll put your suitcases here, and then we can all lie down, all of us there." We had rugs and cushions too. And some of them were on the floor. The luggage rack wasn't big enough, but we all could lie down. And you had to carry knives, forks and

30:00 plates, a mug, when you were travelling. So we did that, and they sort of served it out at you as you lined up.

**You mentioned before that you were told to watch the sailors.**

Oh yeah, you've got to be careful of sailors.

**Did you have to watch them on the...?**

No, not so much watch them, but you know I'd been taught all my life that sailors were dangerous people. And why did I go into the navy? You might

30:30 well ask, might you. But oh, they looked after us like crazy. There not as dangerous as they are pointed out to be. Maybe they are when they are over there.

**Any of them have interesting tattoos?**

Oh yes. I think they usually get drunk and find they've got a tattoo at the end of it. I think that's how it works out. Can you imagine having a tattoo, no?

**Do you remember any?**

No, I don't.

**Okay, so you caught this train and then**

31:00 **tell us about arriving in Townsville?**

Well, yes, we were in blues, except we had sort of boiler suits. Navy blue boiler suits. And we used those for travelling. You know, all-in-one. But of course we had to get into blues when we got to Townsville. And it was towards the end of August and it was stinking hot. And one of the girls came down to meet us, because we knew the ones who were there. And she, I think she was in khaki, or she might have

31:30 had a blue dress on. And we thought, "Oh my God, we'll never survive in this heat." And the navy put on some transport for us. We were frequently taken places in cars, whereas the other services were frequently sent in the back of a truck, standing, or sitting on your luggage. We were spoilt. So we went up to the station and found out where we were

32:00 sleeping, and unpacked ourselves, and found out when we had to go on watch, which watch we were on etcetera. And found our way around the place. We had two floors, and there were three big rooms, one after the other, and there were five beds in each. So that made 30 of us. And then there was a bedroom at the end with two. Well Betty Brain had got herself into the two bedroomed one, and she'd kept it for me. So I did very nicely

32:30 thank you, for some little time. And we didn't have to have alarms clocks to wake ourselves up. Someone would come, probably a teleprinter operator would come over and say, "Wakey, wakey, time to get on watch." They hated waking me because I woke so easily. You know they'd put their hand on the door handle outside and I'd sit up and say, "I'm awake," and it was unnerving to them. So it was never a worry to me to be able to be woken up in the middle of

33:00 the night. I'd just go. And you'd just fly into whatever, as little as possible probably, and go and relieve the person you were relieving. They could go to bed then. And the teleprinter operator would come over and get you a drink through the watch, and keep the traffic going. We just put our messages on top of our receiver and she'd come and collect them and put them through to Monterey.

33:30 **So what was the station like?**

Well it was an old house. It was an old house converted. It had Arctic glass in the windows, which had a sort of hinge thing in the middle, which you could lift them right out and put them against the wall. So the whole window space was just open, which helped because it made a bit more air. We did that all the time. We'd have a big

- 34:00 table there and another big table there. And they'd be two, two of these receivers in front of one, and four in front of two others. I think we had a big sort of chest that was fairly secure. And then the teleprinter was over at the back here. And there was a big cupboard there with extra stationery in it. And Arctic glass doors here with a
- 34:30 guard outside so that no one unauthorised could get in. And then so we'd come on watch and go off watch and then. And through the middle of the night the insects nearly sent us mad. They were everywhere. You'd sweep up a couple of times in a watch. And we used to use a piece of paper from the pad underneath the, to stop them crawling through
- 35:00 your hair. And they have, have you seen those big rhinoceros beetles which tear a hole in anything if you try to pull them off? Yes, well we had those too. We really enjoyed them. So there was the station there, which looked right out over Cleveland Bay. And our part was this side and then there was another equal room there, which was the stations work. Then there was a sort of closed-in
- 35:30 verandah there, and we went onto a little tiny verandah there and there was a room there which was the CO's, and there was another room here which was the PO's, Petty Officers. And around the back there was a place where all the radio mechanics hung out, and I think there was a storeroom there too. We had quite a lot of radio mechanics because when the ships came in, if there was something wrong with their radios, they used to go down and fix them. And they kept our
- 36:00 things in order as well. So we have a leading radio tell, radio mechanic, and about four or five others.

**And what was Townsville like? What did you think of Townsville?**

Oh, it was a bit of a mess really, but the sewerage worked, and the water mostly worked, and the electricity worked, and that was the main thing. I

- 36:30 mean I think they went from 10,000 to over 20,000 just like that. How they managed to make things work I'll never know. Must have been a terrible effort. Though I'll admit that some of the army places, which were a bit further out, probably did their own thing. It really grew like topsy. They were everywhere. And I mean Garbutt. Well I suppose it was an airfield beforehand, I don't know. But then
- 37:00 there were at least two other airfields, because there was one at Stuart and one at Boley River. And sometimes they had Beaufighters, or Beaufort out on those. And then other times they'd have fighters and whoever. You always seemed to know someone in those squadrons. And you'd run into them, because there wasn't much of Townsville. There was Flinders Street. So you'd run in to them. "Oh, you're up here."
- 37:30 "Whereabouts are you?" "Oh up there." "You'd better come out. Yes, come out." And so on. And there was a fighter squadron, I don't know which. I think that was Nick Dreyfuss but I don't know, not quite sure. No he might have been in the Catalinas. There was a Catalina squadron too.
- 38:00 And then there was a fighter sector in one of the parks. And there was an ex Barker boy was there, and he was trying frantically to get a flat to get his wife up. She came up later. And we used to go swimming. I'd meet him halfway down, and we'd go down swimming down there. And I seemed to know a great selection of people who were in that flat, just behind the Sea Breezes Hotel. And eventually
- 38:30 Ron and his wife were in there too. So I could still go and visit them. It's amazing how many people you'd get in there and you'd find that you knew them.

**Knew them from where?**

From before, from Sydney before. And I'd barely got up to Townsville and they said, "We want some volunteers to do a march through Townsville. You, you, you, and you. You'll be off watch. You can do it." So we did it, and a couple of fellows who were

- 39:00 watching, one navy, and one air force, and Ron was one of them. "Oh." Pippy was my nickname. "Oh, that's Pippy. Didn't know she was up here." And Taffy Davies, who was also married and his wife lived at Lindfield. I knew her and her sister. So as the day went on they thought, "We ought to try and get in touch with Pippy. Well she had
- 39:30 a telegraphist badge on. Must be up there, hey." So, on to the phone: "Pippy Francis up there?" "Oh no, she's gone out to the dance at Garbutt." "Oh righto." Ron said, "I can get a jeep" So the two of them piled into a jeep and came out to Garbutt. And it was a non-commissioned dance so they weren't allowed in, they were only allowed in the foyer. They were both commissioned. So I got a message with,
- 40:00 "Would telegraphist Francis come to the front?" And I thought, "My God, what have I done?" You know, guilt. And I went outside, and Ron and Taffy were there and I said, "Oh, what are you two doing here?" And they said, "What are you doing here?"

**We'll continue this after the tape, sorry.**

00:35 **First thing, why were you called Pippy?**

When I first went to school I was fairly short, and I used to squeak for some odd reason, so I was pipsqueak.

**Sorry, so what kind of squeaking?**

Just a kind of squeak, I don't know. And one of the mistresses called me pipsqueak, because I was a pipsqueak. And it followed me through three

01:00 schools and then the navy. And then I got dignified. Used my name instead. Not many people think of me as Pippy now. I mean they dropped the squeak.

**And so you were just finishing that story about how the Barker boys tracked you down.**

So there they were and they said, "Can you come with us?" and I said, "Oh I suppose so. Wait while I go and tell them what I'm doing."

01:30 "Righto." "I'll be back in a minute." So I shot through to the other girls I'd come out with. "There's a couple of fellows I used to know when we were all at school, and they want me to go with them. Is that all right?" "Yes, go, enjoy yourself." And mostly the fellows who took you out in Townsville had a revolver sitting on the hip, you know. Yes, well there were a few sort of fairly pitched battles between various countries at times.

**What happened?**

Oh well

02:00 none of us had any leave the night I think. I'm not sure whether it was the 7th or 9th Div [Division] that came through. And there was a lot of smashing glass going on that we heard, and there were a lot of windows boarded up the next day. Our particular, the 7th or 9th Div, whichever it was, didn't get any leave. But they walked out along the railway tracks. They were pretty good at innovation.

02:30 **Were there any sort of unsavoury things that went on?**

Well I think there probably were, but you mostly didn't hear about it. Though I was... When 84 Squadron was there, fairly soon after they went there, again there was someone I'd known in Sydney and they had rented a house, which was a lovely

03:00 house, it had parquet flooring, and we were dancing on it. My God. And there was practically no furniture in the place but they had a pick up and we were dancing there and I met... Someone said, "This is Jim C," and I said, "Jim C from Sydney, and this is Pippy Francis from Sydney." So naturally we went out. He was very enamoured of an Alison Playfare I know. But we knew those things. I didn't know Alison. I knew Eve, her sister.

03:30 And I think Gag married her later. No, Jim didn't marry her because he died. Someone else. Gag married Eve later, yes. So we were dancing and just as the dance was coming to an end, one of our girls, who was a little bit on the naive side, was dancing with the fellow who was Acting

04:00 CO. And someone rushed up to him and said, "Someone's been 'done over'," and you know, Andy dropped her flat and rushed away. And we all sort of converged into a circle. And in her perfect and clear diction went and said, "What's 'done over' mean?" We said "Shh, we'll tell you later." And the other fella said "Ooh," and they were gone. Never seen anyone go so fast.

**What**

04:30 **did done over mean?**

Oh, she'd been raped. There were nice grounds around it. She was a WAAAF from Garbutt. And I never did hear who. So the next morning I ran into Jim C down town, and he said, "Oh, I've had a dreadful morning, I've been standing to attention while I heard all about it. And we don't own that, we don't rent that house any longer, and Andy Taylor's gone, God knows where, and I'm still trying to sort things out."

05:00 **What had happened?**

Well I don't know. I think someone had had too much to drink. It wasn't one of their own fellows but they had rented the house, which wasn't good.

**And the fact that they all ran out so quickly.**

Well they just ran out to see if they could help, because they all thought, "Oh my God." They all had commissions. And I mean they weren't old,

05:30 because fighter pilots were all terribly young. Let me think. I think Stewart went to a squadron when he was 23, and he was called 'Pop' because he was one of the older ones. 23. Unreal isn't it?

**So tell me about meeting Stewart?**

Well we had a party at our place because we felt we needed to return some of the hospitality we'd had,

so we asked 84 to come along.

06:00 **Were you allowed to throw parties?**

Well we had special permission, but no grog. So we made up a beautiful punch, and we said to them, "You can't have anything, any hard drink." And they all brought gin, and put it in the punch, and it really made a very nice punch. But unfortunately we had a girl who was a teetotaler and she'd never tasted it before. We didn't have the heart to say to her, "I don't think you'd better have too much of that."

06:30 She thought it was lovely. We didn't tell her.

**What happened to her?**

Well she was all right. We were there. So he came and I hadn't met him before. But Jim C, this other one, had crashed, and two of them had been killed, just when they came back from holidays. So I didn't go out with 84 after that. Some

07:00 of them did.

**Why didn't you?**

Well none of the others asked me to go out with them probably. But quite a number of them came along that night and Stewart came along. Pop.

**And how did you meet? What was the connection?**

Well he was part of the... And then he'd sort of ring me up, and you could hear echoing around the mess because one phone was in the mess.

07:30 "Pip, this is Pop." Oh, they thought it was hilarious. It was too. He was being very discreet and asking me to go to a party that was on. "Look we're having a party out here, could you?" "Oh, I'm terribly sorry, I'm already going out." By the time I said that four times I thought I'll freeze this man off.

**Why did you keep saying no?**

Well because I was going out.

**Who were you going out with?**

Oh,

08:00 this and that. This and that.

**Did you have an interest in Stewart?**

Well, not at that stage. But you know, I thought it would be nice to go out with him probably. So anyway, I finally said, "Well look, some of us are going over to the island for the weekend, why don't you come?" "Yes, I might do that." So he came. I had to go back on Sunday afternoon because we

08:30 had an earlier watch on the Monday. We had to go on at midday. The other ones have to back until then. So I had to be back by 8 o'clock in the morning. So they had another night there. And I think one of the other girls tried to inveigle him into carrying her case down, but he went fishing. So I thought that was interesting. He went fishing somewhere else. He wasn't available to carry her case down to the ferry.

**Did you think**

09:00 **that was...?**

Well I didn't know, but I knew she'd make a pass at him somewhere. And I didn't know whether I'd hear. How would I know whether I'd hear? But two of my friends were laughing a bit, and I said, "What are you laughing about?" "Go on, tell her," said Nina. And so I heard.

**Heard that?**

That Stewart had gone fishing.

**Rather than...**

Take things down for her.

**And what did this start to mean to**

09:30 **you?**

Well I thought, "Well if he's got enough sense for that, he's got a bit of sense."

**And did you get along on that weekend?**

Yes, we got along on that weekend. We went to, if they had a squadron party and I was free, I could go out there.

**And what happened to the other couple of people?**

Well they moved on always, you see. You never knew whether you were here this week, or not. So

10:00 on one occasion, I think we were engaged by this time, and I was the only WRANS there. Now the WRANS had to be in by midnight, always. The WAAAF, on Saturdays nights, could stay till half past twelve. So we suddenly looked at a watch, and we were out at Stuart. So we flew into a jeep and went like steam. And Stewart completely forgot

10:30 about their guardhouse, and we sort of said, we heard, "Halt, who goes there?" and it was getting fainter as we went, so Stewart just put his foot on the accelerator and went. And the shot went over our heads. It was a different way. And we were out of sight by the time he could have got the next one off. He knew that the first one would have gone over our heads. So he apologised on the way back but I got in, in time.

**What happens if you were late?**

Oh, lack of

11:00 leave for some time. Bad mark.

**And when did the relationship with Stewart go from someone to hang out with on a weekend, to someone who you were going to marry?**

Well I would say it was fairly swift. I met him in the middle of May, we were engaged for a month and a day. We got engaged in July, married in August.

11:30 It was quick, wasn't it?

**So what changed it, what made you?**

I don't know, it just worked. Just worked. We did plan to be engaged for two years. Did break down, didn't it?

**Why?**

Just did. Of course then we had no money. Naturally.

**And what were, I guess, you and the other girls thoughts on marriage at the time?**

Yes, some of the others had got married

12:00 because when the war had finished they stayed, they could stay in, if their husbands were away. But once the war finished, they sort of eased you out, smartly. Because they had to start somewhere. And see I got married just after the war finished.

**And so what did you tell the girls when Stewart had asked you to marry him?**

Oh well, they found out we were engaged, yes.

12:30 So then it was a rally round wasn't it. And one girl made my wedding cake, and she couldn't get the things she needed to ice it, but she found someone to ice it. My parents in Sydney were the busiest.

**What did they think of you marrying a man they hadn't met?**

Well Stewart wrote a very nice letter to my father, which was good. And they came up to Townsville for the wedding. And

13:00 Gay sent me up a whole lot of underclothes. And I had bits of material at home, so we'd go on watch and the CO would say, "Would you like me to move that set back so you've got a bit more room to cut out there?" "Yes, thanks."

**What kind of things would you make on watch?**

Oh well I was making extra undies because I had this material. Well I was cutting out.

**How did you manage? Were you just listening with your headphones**

13:30 **and cutting the...?**

And then you'd drop it and you'd grab your pencil. And by the time I came back from our honeymoon we weren't listening to Japan any more, we were searching for China and Russia. I suppose if you do Japanese morse you can do anything. How would we know what it was? I had no idea? We were just measuring every frequency and reading a call sign, and if we didn't know the symbol that

14:00 they sent, we'd just do the best we could.

**And just on the wedding still. What sorts of other ways did people club together to help you get it off the ground?**

Well in those days, of course, you always wore a hat into church. You've never seen a better selection of hats. And I had a wedding dress, and I had a wedding veil.

**Where did the wedding dress come from?**

Gay bought it, my

14:30 stepmother. She tried it on, was a bit too loose for her so she said, "That will be all right for Alison." Bit too long. "What do it do to lap it up?" And she got her mother's veil, which was creamy colour so she got a creamy coloured dress. It was a beautiful veil, but it disintegrated later. And "Now," she said, "I've got to put it onto her hair, how do I put it onto her hair?" So she worked all this out and then they looked at my evening shoes. And I had a pair of silver sort of sandaly things, so they got some more silver stuff and they silvered them up again.

15:00 They arrived, and I didn't have a going away dress. And you had to have a going away dress. So I muttered at Dad. "Dad, can I get some money out? I need some more clothes." And he said, "No, you can't, you've got to pay your tax." And I'd given him power of attorney, you see. And Gay said, "What do you want?" I said, "I haven't got a going away dress." "Frank," she said, "you'll have to give her

15:30 some of your money because she needs a going away dress." So he gave me some, just like that. So then he had to pay for a wedding too. And of course it was just after the end of the war. You couldn't get a drink in Townsville, and I was so frantic about having a dry wedding. I thought, "God, Dad wont like a dry wedding," and I thought to myself, "let alone the air force." So I said to Stewart,

16:00 "Do you know anywhere we can get some grog?" And he said "Oh, we're cleaned out in the mess." He said, "I'll go to Cummings in Campbell." So they gave us a bottle of champagne, so we kept that for ourselves. And when Dad arrived, which was barely a week before the wedding, I had booked them into Queens Hotel, which had just been released by the Americans. So Dad spoke to the manager, and the manager said, "Oh, we've got plenty. We'll

16:30 send along a waiter too." Simple wasn't it? Because then the air force said, thought they'd get my father drunk, but he was sly old boy. He knew - he'd been to those places before. So yes, it went off quite well.

**And just to bring it up now, you keep mentioning it. The end of the war, tell me about that?**

It was weird.

17:00 You know we heard about this first atomic bomb, the Hiroshima one, and nothing happened. We thought something was going to happen, nothing happened. Then the Nagasaki one, and that brought it to an end very quickly. And people were walking up and down the street in Townsville all day, just about. And I think I was off watch that day so I was walking up and down with them. And then it suddenly hit us that, "We're going to be out of a job. What are we going to do with ourselves?"

17:30 Fellas who had been in a job beforehand knew that they had a job to go back to, whenever they were discharged. But otherwise they had no idea. And I didn't have a job, so I thought, "This will be interesting." I mean, yes, it was good that the war had ended. You certainly didn't want it to go on forever, but it had gone on for six years. And all these fellows

18:00 looking for jobs. Well the women wouldn't get many would they? See what I mean. You didn't get any preference then.

**What were the celebrations like?**

Strange. I do remember Stewart coming in a jeep, standing in the back of a jeep holding a branch of a tree up above his head. I never worked that one out.

18:30 And I think his shirt was ripped. I didn't work that one out either. So yes it was all celebration, because it was finished. And you see his squadron, the two fighter squadrons that were in Townsville. They had just converted to Mustangs from Kitty Hawks, and they were to take part in the invasion of Japan. Well there wouldn't have been much future in that, so it was a relief.

19:00 **What was the talk about the bomb? What did you know about it? What did people say about it?**

Well we didn't know very much at all. A different, a new bomb, and they dropped one on Hiroshima and wiped out the city. We all looked at each other and we thought, "We don't know of any bomb like that." It sort of filtered out gradually. It wasn't nearly as effective at Nagasaki because it didn't have the hills around it which Hiroshima had.

19:30 But I don't think they would have given up the fight, even though they were beaten, without something like that happening because they were a bit rabid about it. So yes, I was hustled out the door fairly smartly, and in fact I managed to get into

20:00 an aircraft from Townsville to Brisbane, and from Brisbane to Sydney. It was an air force one, of course. It was a DC3. And they were bringing some of the POWs [Prisoners of War] back, all looking very, very skinny. And there were some who were not POWs, who were imprisoned because of their nationality, but they were not army people or service people. There was one

20:30 stretcher case. And there was an air force trained nurse on the thing and she had cool drinks and sandwiches and things like that, because they obviously felt that they needed to feed them up. I was included because I was there, which was nice for me. Because usually those DC3s were at the height of discomfort, because you leant against the ribs of the plane. There was no lining in them. And the seat you sat on

21:00 was dished to take a parachute and it cut off the circulation in your legs. So you were facing the people across there. And down in the centre where all the luggage was lashed against, with straps, against the, they had little things that you could put straps through to lash them in place. So you had room for your feet, just to hold them like that. And you sat like that, and it was five hours from Townsville to Brisbane.

21:30 Three hours from Brisbane to Sydney. And noisy. And if you wanted to look out, you sort of looked out through the little sort of porthole thing there. Of course it wasn't pressurised, so you didn't go over 10,000 feet. It wasn't a pleasure trip.

**Just a few more questions on Townsville during the war? Can you describe some of the**

22:00 **physical differences between, you mentioned that the base at Harman was all built with that strange brick wall so that there was no light?**

Yes, nothing like that in Townsville, and the windows were taken out of our station and the lights were on all night, and shining straight out to sea. And we had aerials all around the place. I mean, you couldn't mistake what we were. It was weird. I did wonder if it was the same war.

22:30 Really strange.

**Townsville had been bombed.**

Yes, they'd had a bomb, just about the end of the breakwater. And if you were in Townsville then, and within a half kilometre of that, it was qualifying service. But I got up there soon after that.

**Did people talk about it?**

Not particularly. I don't even remember

23:00 hearing it in the papers, that time.

**Did it bother you being in such a lit up station, or base?**

Well it just seemed to be rather strange to me, because I couldn't see there was anything to stop people coming and shelling you if they wanted to, or dropping something from the sky. They did have radar places. The army had a place out at Kissing Point, and there was something else

23:30 out on top of Castle Hill. And there were various places round about. There were always some ships, but there was big breakwater, and things like fairmiles used to be generally inside the breakwater. But all the liberty ships would be anchored in the bay. And Thursday morning you might have 60, 70 liberty ships. And Friday morning there might be six. And it was as regular as clockwork.

24:00 I thought that was strange too. I thought it wouldn't take a lot of working out would it. But that's how you fight a war, apparently. So yes, there was just a notice on the notice board and, 'all come if you possibly can'. So the girls who came off at midday were relieved early, so the ones who had the midday to four o'clock watch,

24:30 they missed it. The ones who came off at midday skated down the hill, slapped their hats on and skated down the hill and into the church. The ones who came off at 8 o'clock in the morning, having gone on at two o'clock in the morning, they decorated the church for me. And they changed into different clothes at the YWCA. One of them said that she was feeling a little bit silly, because it was a good

25:00 48, she'd been on and off you know. And she said, got down to the reception after the wedding and someone gave her some nice sparkling burgundy, and she downed it in one hit and she thought, "Ooh, I'd better be a bit more careful of this," so she eased up a little then. One lass said she considered my wedding was propped by her, because her parents lived

25:30 at Bowen. She got all her clothes up and everyone wore her clothes. You know, they have these white cap covers for the chief petty officers. All his cap covers were used as hats. There were some down this way and some up this way, every way you could think of. And a lot of people had bits of felt made into hats with some flowers sitting on it.

**How would you go about getting a hat from the chief petty officer?**

Well you just borrowed his cap cover. "Can I have your cap cover, I want it for a hat?" "Yes righto."

26:00 **What were they made of?**

It was like a peaky material. They had a sort of fastener at the back so that you could put it on and then fasten it. And it covered the top of the cap. And you know they had to be washed all the time. So I don't know what he did when he wanted to change the one that was on his cap, because he'd have had them

all dirty. Because there were several of the girls were wearing them and others just... I think Nina had a hat because she owned one.

26:30 But they'd buy bits of felt and make them into a hat, and put a flower on it.

**What did the chief petty officer think?**

I don't think he could come because he had to stay on the station. But the CO came, and his wife was up there by then, so his name was Mr Tiller. Very apt, wasn't it. So he and his wife came. So the chief had to stay on the place so the few who were on watch. And everyone else was at the wedding.

27:00 The air force arrived in a multitude of jeeps. And the YWCA was just around the corner from where the church was then, and then you just walked down there. We got the supper room from the Sea Breezes dance hall, which was on the beach. And I think the governor of the Commonwealth Bank at the stage, was a man named

27:30 Armitage. And this, there was a man named Armitage, I think his son, in the air force that Stewart knew, so that's how we got that. I don't think we paid for it. I think we just got it. It was one of those huts they had a multitude of, but this one had curtains at the window and a bit of paint slapped around it, and it looked rather nice and had a kitchen and the end of it. And it was much nicer than anything else in Townsville. So we were fortunate to have that.

28:00 **And what did Stewart wear?**

He wore his uniform, which was getting a little on the threadbare side I think. But his best man wore a uniform too. And his looked newer than Stewart's. And Helen and I thought "Well, if we have to wear uniform, we'll wear a uniform." But we both, Helen had a dress of Nina's and I had this wedding dress that Gay had arrived with, so it worked quite well.

28:30 So it went on.

**And were there many air force guys there?**

Yes. Well there would have been a fair few. I honestly don't know how many were there. But there must have been between 60 and 100. I don't know.

**Was it, I'm just interested, because everyone seemed to club together and help out.**

Yes, they did.

**Was it a common, were all weddings like this**

29:00 **a bit special?**

Yes they were different. You didn't have a thousand relatives there. There were no relatives there, just about. Because parents yes, and Stewart's mother was up, because she was staying with her sister who was driving for the Americans. I forget what it stood for, but she drove for the Americans. And we both thought, "Well, if need be we'll

29:30 wear uniform, and that's it." She had one of Nina's dresses and I had a wedding dress. So it worked out quite well. And I didn't have an engagement ring because we weren't able to buy one at that stage. We couldn't find anything we liked. But I had a wedding ring, so that was something.

**Did you ever get an engagement ring?**

Yes, I got an engagement ring. And there was a jeweller's shop in Townsville.

30:00 I'd found some people to do some catering for the wedding and told them where we were having the reception. And I said, "That's all you can provide." I think they were talking about sandwiches and a few cakes or something like that because there was rationing, you see. When Gay arrived she said, "What have you got for the catering?" "Well, all I've got," I said. She said, "Take me around to see them." So around we went to see them and she said, "Can't you get some sausage rolls or something like that, or what about?" So they

30:30 had twice as much, which cost Dad twice as much, but that's all right. That was fine. And what with the Queens Hotel providing all the drink and the waiter. It went off very well. And Dad paid.

**And did your father give you away?**

Yes. I was the only child. I had to be given away by my father. I couldn't have deprived him of that. That would have been awful.

**How was he feeling about the whole event?**

Well I think he was very

31:00 delighted that I was getting married, that I would be happy, and that we were there together. And Gay was a tower of strength. She knew everything, how to do this, and I couldn't have done it without her.

So I was very fortunate. Very fortunate indeed. So it went off well. And then we had to rush away and catch a plane because we were going to Mackay

31:30 and then out onto Daydream Island. And of course Skipper Moody, who was an early Qantas pilot, and his wife, had Daydream Island. And they'd been out west in Queensland and Stewart had known Skipper Moody, and you know the added both being pilots, Qantas, when they first started, they went to a lot of stations

32:00 in Western Queensland. They had one every two miles, just in case. And at that stage my father in law was manager of a property called... It was a show place anyway. And so that was one of the places, Lansdowne it was. So that was one of the places they landed. You know, funny airplane,

32:30 all cloth etcetera. And they offered to take these children up, and of course my husband was the youngest of the children. He was something like this. There is a picture standing in front of the plane of Mr Armstrong. Betty was away at boarding school, so Helen was there and John, Ewan and Stewart. And the overseer I think, standing in front of his plane. And when they were fixing

33:00 the route for Qantas to start. Amazing isn't it, when you think about it. And when you think we think nothing of just getting into a plane now, we just go.

**In Townsville, during the war, what was the attitude of the civilians in Townsville to this influx?**

Well we really didn't meet many of them.

33:30 Though some of them were very good to us. There was Dave Hastings. Now his family had a printing works and a shop in Townsville. And here we were. There was our quarters there and the station there, and the men's quarters over here. And his house was down there. So we used to be able to sneak out the back way into his house, and he used to entertain us right royally. And the air force and everything else you see. His marriage had broken up. I think a woman

34:00 would have gone demented with all these people arriving all the time and just coming and having his food and his drink and things. But he was, he was wonderfully good. He had a brother in it, and they lived further down over there. And the brother had a very nice daughter who worked in one of the banks in Townsville too. But then we couldn't find a place to live in Townsville, so I prowled around looking for a place that might have something. And a very nice woman, Mrs Suthers, whose husband was a solicitor

34:30 said, "Would you like a cool drink?" And she brought me in and gave me a cool drink, which I needed. And then they had an extra room under their house. And they let us have it, which was very good. We only had a very short time, at this stage, because Stewart went off to go to Borneo, to Labuan. And they took off there to fly to Japan. And she drove me out to the airport and waited for me to come when they left,

35:00 which was very nice of her. Actually I've got a cartoon that someone did of Stewart while we were out there. And I think they'd had a pretty good party in the mess the night before. And Denteri was a cartoonist, before the war, and he had a bit of a writing paper. He turned it over so that the little lines didn't show, and he drew one of Stewart. I'll show it to you later. I thought

35:30 it was too precious to throw away. He's got horns.

**Why horns?**

Yes, they put horns.

**Why?**

Just as a cartoon. And holding a jug of beer in his hand. That would be right.

**And when you went out in Townsville, would you wear your uniform?**

Yes, we only could wear ordinary clothes

36:00 for about a month or so. And then one of the girls went out one night in her ordinary clothes and she was going out with one of the navy officers. And he took her to the wardroom, which was rather stupid of him. He was a married man, but she'd known him before. And the CO was very charmed with this nice girl. "What a nice girl that was." And then he found out it was one of his WRANS. Well, she went that way and he went that way, and then

36:30 we didn't wear ordinary clothes any longer.

**What was the issue?**

She shouldn't have gone. She had no rank, and she shouldn't have gone out with an officer. So we had to be very silent you see.

**What was the protocol with that?**

Oh you didn't go out if you... If you didn't have the rank you didn't go out with someone with a commission. I mean you did, but you didn't. So you didn't take them to the wardroom because that was the officers' mess. I mean I'd been in a

37:00 number of wardrooms, but not where I'd get caught.

**What if you really liked someone with a commission and you, like what if...?**

Bad luck.

**Well what if someone did go out with them and it progressed to the point of they wanted to marry them or something? What happened then?**

Well Stewart had a commission and I married him. But he was in a different service. Helped. But you know a young cousin of mine came along and he was in the navy

37:30 and we walked around town. You walked everywhere, unless you had a jeep or access to a jeep. So we walked around and he had a commission, but we didn't get caught doing it. And he wasn't part of Magnetic, he was in a Fairmile or something like that.

**Why did the rule exist?**

Oh, it's a rule. It's still a rule. Yes,

38:00 they get a bit fussy about that. I don't think we were as class conscious as perhaps we should be. I mean are you class conscious? Couldn't care less. No, no. You accept whatever, and talk to anyone. It's much more interesting isn't it? I think so.

**You mentioned that you walked everywhere around Townsville.**

Well you really didn't have much

38:30 choice. I was a really good walker in those days. And the place where we were was a third of the way up Castle Hill, which is still a hill, but is only just a hill, because it is just under the mountainside. And it was behind the Roman Catholic cathedral. So we sort of walked up a goat track behind it. And if we wanted to climb Castle Hill we continued up that goat track to the top. One of those little snaps I've got is on top of Castle Hill.

**Was it ever a bit dodgy to walk around areas of Townsville at night?**

39:00 Well mostly we went up there in the daytime. Yes, it would have been. You wouldn't have walked by yourself. We were warned not to.

**What was the danger?**

Other men. There were a lot of negroes. There was a big feeling between the negroes and the others for the Americans. And when it's unknown, you avoid it, don't you, if you have any sense. So you avoided it. And they did say to us, "All right, if you

39:30 are going out with a man, you can go out with a man, or three women. Not by yourself at night, ever." And the commissioned men usually had this revolver strapped on. You just accepted it as par for the course. Didn't matter. Crazy isn't it?

**Just one more question. The tape's about to run out. When you'd go out at night...**

What did you do?

40:00 **Would you wear your uniform or plain clothes?**

No, uniform. You wore your uniform, and your hat. Had to have your hat. Always had your hat because you couldn't salute if you didn't have your hat on of course, could you?

**Why?**

You don't salute unless you've got a hat on.

## Tape 8

00:36 **Okay, you were just telling us about your riding.**

Yes, there were some people in Townsville, around Belgian Gardens, who had some horses, so someone found out. So we used to go riding out to Cape Pallarenda. Girls, boys, mixed, both. When we'd have a day off, it was quite fun to go out. And it was a pleasant

01:00 ride and there was hardly a house out that way. There was an AGH [Australian General Hospital] under canvas; Australian General Hospital, from the army out there. And if some of our girls would be quite

sick they went out there. We only had a little sick bay which had about six or eight beds. So if they were really sick they'd be sent out to the army hospital. There was another one at Aitkenvale too.

- 01:30 The girl who was sick for a year, she was out, she was sent out to Aitkenvale. We all got food poisoning. That was from a sweet we had. They used to set jellies and things in a half kerosene tin, and apparently they said that it was a bit of fungus on the outside. We had bananas in jelly and it was a bit of fungus on the outside of the banana skin which
- 02:00 got in the inside when it was cut up. So a lot of us were quite sick. Everyone who had that pudding was sick and we had to close up for a while. In fact I went out to the pictures that night and I came back before midnight, because I was off watch. And the guard on the gate said, "Are you feeling all right?" and I said, "Yes, why?" "Oh," he said, "they are carting them off like flies." He said, "They keep on taking more away
- 02:30 in an ambulance." And I said, "Why, what's happened?" "I don't know," he said, "They are as sick as can be." So I sort of went over and found people and the CO was up, everyone was up. It was a hive of industry you know, and he said, "Alison, you're the only teleprinter operator we've got for in there, so you just go on and when you've cleared the traffic go off and have a sleep, and then come back." So I was doing, I was my own boss as it were. Do what you like. But I only went on and off once and then
- 03:00 it caught up with me but I wasn't as sick as most of the others. But some of them were really, very, very sick indeed. They eventually flew this one girl down to the Repat [Repatriation] Hospital in Sydney, out at Ryde, out that way. And it took her a year to get over it. And then her appendix played up some years later and it took her six months to get over that. So it was something that lingered in her body.
- 03:30 And then she was killed in a car accident, so that was. She married a German who had been at Peenemunde [German rocket base], and then he went to the London School of Physics, and came out for the Snowy Mountains here and met her there. She was working for, I think his name was Barnes, I'm not sure, but he had been the CO of our establishment at
- 04:00 Magnetic. And when we went out on a trial run, when they had a boiler clean, and we went out in the Barcoo, Jean, who had very nice clear diction too, she was up on the bridge and she got into the captain's chair and she said, "And which is Benny the bastard?" - because we all called him Benny the bastard - in this very clear voice, and you know she was hushed. And that's the one she worked for
- 04:30 later. She said he was a very nice man. He didn't hold grudges apparently.

**You were talking before about the danger of walking at night in Townsville.**

They said there was danger, I wouldn't say that I ever saw anything to warrant that, but, really it's sensible to be a bit wise, isn't it.

**05:00 What kind of rumours were said about the black American?**

Well we knew that the black and the white didn't agree very well, and particularly the southern Americans. They hated them didn't they, they appeared to, they thought they were jumped up so and sos. I think the black Americans did very well actually, and I would say that I've never been offended by anything any of them every did anywhere I was near. But then I probably didn't meet them very much,

- 05:30 so I can't honestly say from experience, but we were warned.

**What kind of warnings would they give you about them?**

Don't be foolish enough to go out unless you've got three of you there. Well if you used a bit of commonsense you'd tried not to walk into very lonely places.

**Would the black Americans mix at all?**

I don't honestly know. I never saw them mixing but they

- 06:00 could have. But I didn't see an awful lot of the Americans. I saw the ones who were in the navy at Canberra, at Harman. And they'd come from, they'd been at Bougainville. And they'd had six or eight months at Bougainville, whereas the soldiers they only kept for three months. It was very severe. But the telegraphist ones, they kept for longer. So they
- 06:30 had come from Bougainville to Harman, which was a bit more peaceful for them. And then I did meet some of the pilots who were piloting the DC3s. They were taking supplies from Townsville up to New Guinea, to Milne Bay, etcetera. And we also met some of the Guinea Airways pilots who were living at Queens Hotel when it was released from the Americans.
- 07:00 Nina, who was a friend of mine, she knew some of them. Her father and the father of one of those pilots, they were both doctors, and one had bought the other one's practice at some stage. And we used to the say to the Guinea Airways pilots, "Can you take us up? lets have a look at New Guinea? We'd love to." "Well," they said, "yes, we'd have to put a guard on you overnight." And we'd talked about it and we thought about it and we thought, "Well, flying is their

07:30 occupation, it's their job in life. We'd better not endanger their job in life," so we'd thought we'd better not do it.

**What was some of the activities you'd get up to in Townsville, apart from the social?**

Well we went swimming a lot. There were supposedly sharkproof enclosures, and there was one over at Picnic Bay, and another one at Alma Bay. So we'd go over to the island and go swimming.

08:00 We went up to Crystal Falls, or something like that. Up Mount Beck - we went by bus up there. We weren't supposed to go too far away, you see. We did go up to Cairns once, because one of the girls had a sister who was in the AWAS and she was living out. So we said we were going to her and we whipped onto an aircraft and went to Cairns. But we weren't endangering someone's career with that, whereas we would have been if we'd gone up to New Guinea

08:30 and got caught. So we managed to get to see Cairns a little at that stage, which was nice. We could go up to Mount Spec for the day. The number who were off duty went up. There was a funny little bus went up there. We went swimming up there. I do remember driving with an American who was looking for a plane that had landed on some strip somewhere, and he didn't know which strip it was

09:00 and we almost went to Charters Towers looking for it. And every time there was a strip we went up and down the strip, but we never found the plane. But however, because someone found him eventually. But that would have been a different thing. And then there was a ship came out, when they were released from England, when that finished. And it had marines. It was an English ship and it had gone in to Normandy on D plus three.

09:30 You know what I mean by that? The third day after they first invaded. They called it D plus one, D plus, etcetera. And they had marines on board. And at this stage there was an old skating rink in Townsville down near the railway. So I think someone put on a big dance because it was a huge floor, and we were asked if we would go to it. And there was a bus going from here to bring us back then. So we went down

10:00 and you know the Americans used to jitterbug a lot, but it hadn't occurred to us that the English would too and we were absolutely shattered. All these English doing this jitterbug. Well that's different, because we weren't inclined for the jitterbugging thing. Some of the girls did learn it from the Americans, but not all the jitterbugs were quite as jittery as some of the others were. The Americans

10:30 I danced with were more conservative, should I say, which I found quite easy to cope with. But well I didn't write anything in a letter. I was careful about what I wrote. But some of them had their letters slashed. And, "We were surprised so many of them were jitterbugs," one girl had put in, and that was cut out. Don't ask me; I don't know. I don't understand the way of these

11:00 censors. We had to leave our letters open unless we had it in a privilege envelope, which we had a certain number of privilege envelopes, but we had to sign it saying there was nothing inside it that would endanger anyone. I think I've still got some one here probably. She didn't put it into a privilege envelope and they really cut her letter to shreds. So she got her mother to send it back to her, and

11:30 we were absolutely astonished at this. Seemed different to have marines aboard ship too. I can't remember the name of the ship. I think it was going up to New Guinea then.

**I think I saw in my notes an HMAWT [His Majesty's Australian Wireless Telegraphy Station]. What does that stand for?**

His Majesty's Australian Wireless

12:00 Telegraphy Station. You see all our ships were all HMAS. And the shore stations you could put the name of it, so we had HMAS Magnetic, Her Majesty's Australian Ship Magnetic. But the men who were going to sea, they just wore HMAS on their tally so that people couldn't tell where

12:30 they came from because everything was security.

**You mentioned also that towards the end of the war you stopped listening to Japanese frequencies.**

It was after the end of the war.

**And there's China and Russia.**

China and Russia, yeah.

**Tell us about.**

Well we had a frequency measuring device

13:00 which we could use, and we'd just twiddle till we found something and then we'd listen and take down the call sign. And we'd measure the frequency, and then we'd send that down. I think they were just searching for what they could find, but we didn't really know whether it was Chinese or Russian. How would we tell? Have no way of knowing would you?

**What did you think of this situation?**

Well I presumed they were looking to the future.

13:30 And so I'd say that the future's still being looked at.

**Did it seem quite immediate to you?**

Yes, because I was married on the 29th of August. Well we were still doing the Japanese stuff then. And that was just after the end of the war because it was about the 16th of August I think. And then I suppose I was away about a month so it would have been

14:00 September. Well then they threw me out in November so I didn't have much time with that. In fact my draft came in for me to go back to Harman while I was on my honeymoon. I was due for... We got travelling time if you got leave, so I had three weeks leave I think, and a week's travelling time, which is the way of doing it.

**You mentioned also**

14:30 **briefly the story of a woman being raped.**

**Yes she was an air force girl, a WAAAF. And I never heard the end of it, but they said that she was raped, and certainly the CO, the Acting CO of 84 Squadron went. I never saw him again. So it was a wonderful way of clearing the decks I think. "You went and**

15:00 **allowed them to rent this house and look what happened, so you're going."**

**Did you hear whatever happened to her?**

No, I didn't really. I heard that she was all right. I don't think it was as bad as it sounded at first. But I never knew her. I never knew who she was.

**Okay, I'll move to talking about your husband leaving. How were you feeling when he was leaving?**

Rotten, but we had no money, had

15:30 we? And no job. I suppose he could have gone back to where he was but that wouldn't have been entirely satisfactory. It was six years down the track and he'd been on the land. He had worked for Toowoomba foundry before, but then he decided he wanted to go to the land instead. So he left Toowoomba factory, because he knew the Griffiths, and that's how he got that job. He was in their office, but

16:00 you know there were plenty of them who'd been at school with him to carry on the business, so he wouldn't have been in the offing for a good job. So he went out onto the land. And he decided to start a bit of dealing beforehand. And he had his first mob, then he had to sell them smartly because he wanted to join up because there was a war. So he didn't make much money out of that one. So

16:30 no job, what do you want to do? So he decided that he'd better go to BCOF and we'd better save a bit of money if we could. There was English air force there and they started using rockets, air to ground rockets, when they were up in Japan. They may have started them in while they were in Labuan before they went, so it was quite new at this stage. They'd sling them underneath

17:00 the Mustang. And they could only carry one, so that was something that was a bit different. And the English air force... I think Stewart had a fair idea of ballistics and things of that nature, so the English air force asked him if he'd go to England and train them in rockets. And he didn't think I'd be able to get to England, so he thought he'd better not go. I think I would have found it easier to get to England than I did to get to Japan, because I tried to join everything imaginable and

17:30 unimaginable to get close to him, but without success. You know Red Cross, UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], you just send me there. But that didn't work. So I then got a job and worked till he came back.

**What did he do after that? Did he stay with them later?**

Well he could have, but he said he didn't want to be a taxi driver. Well a fighter

18:00 pilot, you know, you'd have had to fly a commercial airline. And he thought that was just being a taxi driver. And he wanted to go on the land, so we went on the land. Bought a farm.

**Who were you living with before you came back?**

I was living in Sydney with my parents. And working. I worked at a solicitor's office and then another, then my cousin

18:30 who was another solicitor, I worked at his place when Stewart came back.

**What was that like?**

It was quite good. It was interesting. I think my cousin was more interesting. It was a smaller office. The

other one, they really didn't have quite enough work for one person to do. I was sort of assistant to the bookkeeper, and it wasn't quite enough work for me, so that wasn't particularly great. But the other one,

19:00 oh, there were two solicitors and they went out of their way to be interesting. So you know I took papers suing people and served them on them. And I took divorce papers and served them. Then when Bert had a court case going on he had a barrister in the court conducting it. And he came down to the office and he said, "Get your hat," and took me up to the courtroom

19:30 so that I could see what was happening because we had typed everything up for it. Then he took me back and took the other girl up so that she could have a look at what was happening. It was very interesting, really good.

**What was it like serving papers and things?**

Well, "Are you so and so?" and of course they picked a girl because she could duck if she saw a man coming. "Are you so and so?" "Yes." "Well here you are, I'm serving these papers on you."

20:00 And then I vanished. And Bert, this cousin of mine, had a brother who was his solicitor in Charters Towers, and he had a huge Estate with an awful lot of shares. And the head office of a lot of those shares were in Sydney, so you had to take probate along and get it noted, so that it went into the name of the

20:30 Estate and it went into the name of whatever later, and I thought it would never get through. So lunch hours, I used to go to the head offices of these various places. "Here's a probate and a will," you know. And then Bert found out I was doing it, and said, "You don't have to do that." Well I said, "I'll get it through this way. It's faster."

**What was it**

21:00 **like settling back into civilian life?**

It was difficult. Just living was difficult. For one thing, because you'd have blackouts all the time. The gas would go off or the electricity would go off, things like that, which made it hard. And so you might go to the hairdresser and you'd think you'd be there for an hour perhaps, and you'd be there for three, because she couldn't dry your hair

21:30 and set it probably because the power went off. You'd be halfway through cooking a meal and the gas would go off. I do remember using a radiator to finish the chops once.

**What about the end of your regimented life?**

Oh that didn't worry me. It was more free, yes, but really it wasn't too regimented. I mean we knew when you had to work and you worked, and that was that. And you became

22:00 accustomed to that, but you knew that out of the navy you weren't going to work that way, so that was all right.

**What about living with your father again?**

Well I had no where else to go, so they kindly took me in. But yes, it was all right; it was fine. People were gradually coming back and you'd run into someone you'd known, used to go around in the same crowd, and he might say to you, "Peter didn't come back.

22:30 He bought it." And you'd say, "Oh," because you knew that those two brothers were very close and you thought, "My God, that must be awful." And I don't think I've ever really caught up with how many didn't come back because you didn't know half the time. And I moved away so I didn't find them all. Besides, I was married, I wasn't on the loose as it were.

**Were you worried for**

23:00 **your husband?**

Well not really because it was peacetime and I considered he was a pretty good pilot. He wanted to try and break the record from Japan to Australia, but they wouldn't let him. I think they probably thought that the plane was too valuable. He was also the

23:30 parachute officer. And he wanted to jump from a parachute, but they said, "No." I mean he had to know how to fold them and how to make sure that they were correctly folded, and they had to shake them out and refold them every now and then. I think he was the photographic officer. You would have thought they would have had a few more in that squadron, wouldn't you?

**What kind of letters would he write to you?**

I'm not telling that.

24:00 **Fair enough. That's a straight answer, yeah.**

That's a straight answer.

### **Well, tell us about him coming home then?**

Well he got back to Sydney just about Anzac Day in '47. So he marched in Anzac Day that, because it was just before. I know I rang up Bradfield because I knew they'd be sent there. And I said, "I

24:30 think my husband's coming back from Japan. I think they brought them back by sea." And he said, "What's his name?" and I said, "Armstrong," and he said, "Oh, 411111." I said, "Yes, that's right." Because that was his number. Awful isn't it? So, I mean you'd never forget it, would you? It's so simple. So I said, "Where can I meet him?" and

25:00 I think I met him, I think I was able to go to Bradfield and meet him there. And then of course there were parties all around Sydney because there were a mob of them everywhere.

### **What were they like?**

Good, pretty good. And then I managed to get a flat for us for a while. It was quite a nice flat. Huge big rooms with cedar skirting boards and window sills. It had

25:30 been a very old house. But not very modern, but still that was quite pleasant. I knew some people who'd had it. The man was getting married, but he wasn't ready to be married yet - it was in the future - so he'd taken the flat. Actually his father was my dentist; he'd been my dentist. And I'd been at school with his sister. So you know, wheels within wheels as it were. So he said, "Oh, you can have that if you like for a month

26:00 or so." So we had a flat for a time. And it was, you were very lucky to get a flat in Sydney. They were really in terrible demand, and it was hopeless. So that was quite pleasant. It was at Kirribilli, where you just caught a ferry over to the city, which was great. Then we came up to Queensland because I had met his mother and his brother, but not his other brother or his

26:30 sister. Oh I'd met one sister, but not the other one. Or his father. So we came up and stayed with his parents. They had a dairy farm out at Quilpie. And then we went out to Morven where his married sister lived and stayed with them, and then Stewart went back. He had leave before he finished. And then he went back and was discharged, and we'd found the farm

27:00 while we were up here. So we moved onto a farm. And we found out about farming then, which was different. That was different. Because there was no electricity, had a kerosene fridge, and thankful to have it. And a wood stove. And kerosene lights. Different. No septic system.

### **How did you adapt to farming life?**

Well,

27:30 I suppose I had as much of an outlook of, "whether thou goest," so I adapted. And Dad bought my electric sewing machine, which he had given to me in the past, and he gave me another one instead. I was lucky to have a Dad who could do those things. So then I had a treadle machine. And I was having a baby, wasn't I? So I had a

28:00 baby, and that was a new life too. In fact I finally had four babies. I learnt to drive a tractor and all sorts of strange things. Feed calves. I always got the easy job.

### **How would you describe the life?**

Very demanding. No money. Always broke, but very

28:30 satisfying. And you were a family. You were always a family. Everyone was part of it, and that was very good. Kids learnt responsibility very early. They all had their jobs to do, and they did them. And you know John used to ride his pony to school, and then Sue and John both rode their ponies to school, then we had another pony for the third one to ride to school. And that one had had a foal so the foal used to trot along behind.

29:00 And everyone from the district, they knew that the Armstrong kids were riding their ponies, so they used to crawl past on the other side of the road. They were all farm people. They knew, which was good. And then by the time Peter went to school there was a bus; the local school closed. It was a one teacher school, which I think is very demanding for the teacher. They had up to about 24 or 25, but you know, a lot of grades, which I think was very difficult. I do

29:30 remember the parents were very cooperative in doing things for the school. If you had a working bee, every parent would be there, and that was good. I do remember one teacher saying to the P & C [Parent's and Citizens' Committee], "Could we have some new library books because Susan's read everything in the library?" That's my daughter. She'd read everything at home too. And I mean, we always had a lot of books so she was a

30:00 definitely a reader. She was a bigger reader than the boys, and they were pretty bad. So we got some more books for the school library so that Susan would have something to read. So they went through to scholarship there. But then they closed it the year Suzy was finishing. And they started a bus run into Yarraman, which had a high top. You know what I mean by a high top? Only went to junior, it was a primary school which went

30:30 only up as far as junior. And if they wanted to go on to senior they would have had to go to Nanango, which was the nearest one, which was 20-odd miles away, and the buses did not connect. So if you wanted to send your child to that high school you really had to have them boarding in Nanango. So we sent ours to boarding school and be done with it. Well it

31:00 seemed more satisfactory to us. Really I think it would have cost much the same because you were always on the road otherwise. Picking them up every weekend, taking them back every Monday. And you know at boarding school they were looked after. They had the illusion that they were looking after themselves, and it is a bit of an illusion, but they were looked after. Boys not as much as the girls. The girls were fenced in, naturally.

31:30 **So why and when did you move from here?**

From the farm. Well my husband died in 1980 and I was studying accountancy at that stage. In fact I had studied it and I had qualified, by correspondence. And I'd come to the conclusion that I'd either have to study at something else or I'd have to work at it. So I got a job in Dalby and I used to go over Monday morning and come back on Friday night.

32:00 So I was working for an accountant in Dalby. So I think I had one more exam to do, so I finished that exam then. And then I had my qualification, which was a good idea. And I carried on there for some time. And then there were two men who were bosses, but one of them decided to open a branch in Brisbane

32:30 and he was overseas at a seminar, and the one who was in Dalby decided he'd get rid of the old women, so he fired me. And so I opened a door. And, having a qualification, I could afford to do that. And he fired another man who worked there too. And he was offered another place immediately. And then another man who had taken my place at the desk the day after

33:00 I finished, he moved out into that other place. They did offer me a place there too, but I thought I'd do my own thing. I think that it was probably the best thing to do. And between us we rather, I think we more than halved the practice. Because I would say that that man was not really a very popular man. One of the clients who I got from that business said that

33:30 the publicans in Dalby should pay him to come in at five to ten at night, so that everyone would go home. That's popular.

**So how did you cope with your husband dying. Was it hard, or...?**

No, it was cancer. We had a horrible eight months. We got a new car then. That was the first new car we'd had, and I was very thankful to have that new car.

34:00 We still had a big old Humber, which was a secondhand one. We left that at the farm and Stewart had a ute as well. But if he got onto the tractor for half a day he tended to end up in hospital, which was very difficult really. And he was having chemo [chemotherapy] and radiation. I was always chasing the medical benefits book. He had a very small part pension.

34:30 I guess he could have had more, but we didn't know enough about it. In fact I didn't realise that I would have been eligible for war widow's [pension] after he died. For five years I think. But I got it straight away when I did find out. It was only when I bought this place, because I realised I would want to come to Brisbane and I thought I'd better find somewhere. And we were rather active

35:00 as a family in the three months between, when Joe [Bjelke-Petersen, Queensland Premier] wiped stamp duty on a gift of land or something like that to a child. Before capital gains came in. There was just a three month period, and we were very active. I mean I was in the right game, wasn't I, to know that. So Peter and Wendy took over the farm. Stewart's will left a quarter to each of them. A quarter of his share, and I had the other half. So

35:30 I gave them my share, so they had five eighths without any money, and they bought the other three out. And I bought this house. And I think my other son John, went into his property in the Territory, before capital gains. So, yes, we were very active that time. We made sure of it.

**And you've been active treasurer with the WRANS?**

Yes I'm the treasurer for the WRANS Subsection of the Naval Association, and I go from

36:00 WRANS Subsection to the State Council of the Naval Association, and I also go from the WRANS subsection to the Council of Ex-Servicewomen, as a delegate. I did end up as State President of the Council of Ex-Servicewomen for two or three years. But then I went in as State President of the War Widows' Guild. And I thought I'd get out of one of them - it was being a bit too much.

**And how do you find this work?**

36:30 Well I'm not State President of the War Widows' Guild now. They have a limit of three years, so I had three years and I finished in August. So now I'm the honorary treasurer of the War Widows' Guild, Queensland.

**And what does this work given you?**

It keeps me busy. I'm on one or two other things too. From the War Widows I go to the Veterans' Children's Education Board, and I also go to Anglicare Foundation for the Aged.

37:00 I thought I'd get out of that, because I went along to them and I said, "I think I have a conflict of interest because I'm on the board of the RSL [Returned and Services League] Care, which is the war veterans' homes." And they said, "That's all right, we all have conflict of interests." So I was stuck with it. So you kept on going to something else because of it. QERT for instance, which is Queensland Ex-Service Round Table. But now Norma, who is the new President of War Widows', she's going to QERT, and she goes

37:30 to National Council of Women, which she always did before. One of the other war widows goes to AVADS [Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council] and yeah, we seem to go to all sorts of funny things.

**Do you march on Anzac Day?**

Yes.

**How do you enjoy that, or what are you doing?**

Well we all decided to march as a body. We have wartime as well as post wartime WRANS. They're all one in the WRANS. We still call ourselves

38:00 WRANS. And it probably is more uniting than in the other services, because they have changed their name. See they all disbanded about 1946 and then they started up again about 1951. Well the WAAAF became WRAAF [Women's Royal Australian Air Force] then, so they say, "Those are the triple As and those are the WRs." And the army became WRAAC [Women's Royal Australian Army Corps], so they are a different

38:30 name too, whereas we've got the same name.

**What's the feeling like on Anzac day for you?**

Good. Look Brisbane has gone mad for Anzac Day. We had a reunion of WRANS here a couple of years ago, and one of the girls said, "Oh, I don't think I'll march." I said, "I think you might enjoy it if you do." Well she came in and she said, "I've never known anything like it. I've never been cheered like that." And I've never marched, oh yes I have marched

39:00 in Perth, but never anywhere else, of the capital cities. And Brisbane really goes mad. They are very enthusiastic, and it's astonishing. They are very supportive.

**Do you have any final words you'd like to say about your service or your time?**

39:30 I don't think any of us who were in the services have regretted it. It did influence our lives, or the rest of our lives. It still does. And we meet women from other services and we all automatically have a bond because we were both in the services. And it was a good thing. It was very good for us. We felt we were doing something for our country and no regrets. It was good.

**Excellent.**

40:00 **Thank you very much.**