



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S05522
Title	(NX148142/N443790) Stocks (née McKenzie), Lila (Private)
Interviewer	Michaelis, Angie
Place made	Sydney NSW
Date made	17 March 1989
Description	<p>Lila Stocks (née McKenzie), Voluntary Aid Detachment [VAD] and private, Australian Army Medical Women's Service [AAMWS], interviewed by Angie Michaelis for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939–45</p> <p>Discussing joining VAD; training at Ingleburn Camp; posting to 114 Australian General Hospital [AGH]; posting to 2/5th Australian General Hospital; New Guinea; nursing POWs; contact with American servicemen; uniforms; nursing duties; hospital conditions; social life.</p>

Disclaimer

The Australian War Memorial is not responsible either for the accuracy of matters discussed or opinions expressed by speakers, which are for the reader to judge.

Transcript methodology

Please note that the printed word can never fully convey all the meaning of speech, and may lead to misinterpretation. Readers concerned with the expressive elements of speech should refer to the audio record. It is strongly recommended that readers listen to the sound recording whilst reading the transcript, at least in part, or for critical sections.

Readers of this transcript of interview should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal conversational style that is inherent in oral records. Unless indicated, the names of places and people are as spoken, regardless of whether this is formally correct or not – e.g. ‘World War Two’ (as spoken) would not be changed in transcription to ‘Second World War’ (the official conflict term).

A few changes or additions may be made by the transcriber or proof-reader. Such changes are usually indicated by square brackets, thus: [] to clearly indicate a difference between the sound record and the transcript. Three dots (...) or a double dash (—) indicate an unfinished sentence.

Copyright

Copyright in this transcript, and the sound recording from which it was made, is usually owned by the Australian War Memorial, often jointly with the donors. Any request to use of the transcript, outside the purposes of research and study, should be addressed to:

Australian War Memorial
GPO Box 345
CANBERRA ACT 2601

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is tape 1 of an interview for the War Memorial World War II Sound Archive. Angie Michaelis is interviewing Mrs Lila Stocks (nee McKenzie) who served as an AAMW in the 2/5th AGH in New Guinea. Interview recorded at Mrs Stocks' home in Hunters Hill on the 17th March, 1989. End of Identification.

To start with ... When and where were you born?

In Sydney in August 1920.

And where did you go to school?

I went to the local school at Drummoyne and then I went to Fort Street Girls High School. It's now the National Trust Building on the approaches to Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The Old Fort Street – um, and what level did you go to at school?

I went to the intermediate. Left in 1935, yes.

Did you think about going on, or why did you leave at intermediate?

I don't know. Um, I think so many people left at that stage in those days that – of course it was towards the end of the depression and our parents, I suppose, felt that it would be wiser for us to get a business – have a business career or ... rather than go to the university because in those days there was only one university and one had to be particularly bright to go.

So what did you do then on leaving school?

Well, I was at home for a while and then my father met a gentleman in town who talked about this new machine called a 'comptometer' that he'd just installed in his office and suggested that it might be an idea if I was interested, to come in and have a look at it. So I went in and saw it and was – thought oh yes, this is quite a nice contraption and I went then to Peacock Brothers who used to import the machines and I did the course there and then I went and took a position in a chartered accountant's office and I did enjoy doing it and I did it up until the war years.

Now was is your choice of career?

Well, I suppose you could say it was my father's more than mine. Um, in those days girls either did shorthand and typing, comptometer was considered to be something new on the horizon. Others, of course, went into nursing and I didn't really become interested in that until later, uh, just before the war years when I was a VA and went to Ryde Hospital and did some VA work and then I became interested in nursing but the family felt that it wasn't for me. So of course, in those days one did as one's father suggested and I didn't become a nurse.

We might come back, I think, to that later when we're talking about your enlisting – well, enlisting as a VAD ...

... yes ...

... when joining the VAD. Um, in the meantime, just a couple more background questions. What religion were you?

A non-conformist.

Was that important to you?

Oh well, yes, I suppose it was in those days because I went to church in the morning with the family and I went to Sunday school in the afternoon and later, when I was older, I went to church again in the evening. So yes, I suppose it was very important to me in those days.

Did the war make any difference to your religious beliefs?

I don't really know, but I tend not to go to church at all now, so whether the war had that affect on me or not I never really thought about it.

(5.00) But, certainly, I'm not as interested in church matters as I used to be.

What about politics? Did you have an allegiance to a political party?

No, I – I didn't. Um ... lately, um ... I have joined a political party. I can't say that everything they do suits me, but I suppose I agree with their philosophy more than anything else. Not so much the people who are a part of the party.

I – I guess the question really is, whether, anything in the war made a difference to your political awareness or political interest?

No, no, I don't think the war made any difference because I felt that, um, during the war years, party politics were forgotten and the idea was that we did what was best for Australia, which is a pity that we can't do the same thing these days.

Uh, and the other background question is, what class did you consider yourself?

Lower-middle class I would think.

Had you travelled much by the time the war came around, round New South Wales or beyond New South Wales?

Around New South Wales, yes. Um, oh a little bit interstate but never overseas.

And what were your main leisure activities? What would you do in your spare time?

Well, tennis seemed to be ... and swimming. Uh, that would be about – about all, yes.

Now I guess the AAMWS, like the nurses, you had to be single for overseas service, at least presumably, did you have to be single to join the VAD?

Yes, yes, one did.

Um, some people, when it came to – to the war years – perhaps postponed marriage or, in fact some of them of course rushed into it, because the war was on. Were there any – were your marriage plans affected in any way?

No, not at all.

Did you have any military connections in the family, perhaps uncles, or fathers that had served?

I had an uncle – I had two uncles that had served during the First World War but I don't think either of them ever suggested that I should be part of the war at all.

So they weren't any influence on your ...

... no, no ...

... your desire to serve?

... No, no influences.

I guess you can probably remember the declaration of war – Mr Menzies' declaration of war ...

... yes ...

... what were you doing and what was your reaction to it?

Oh, a little bit horrified I think, because one immediately thought – I belonged to a younger set in those days – it was the UAP [United Australia Party] Younger Set in Drummoyne – and naturally I thought of the young men that I'd danced with, who indeed later on were in the services, and I think I thought mainly, oh dear, oh dear, you know, our life style will change and goodness me, and yet in some ways it seemed a long way away.

So you didn't immediately think of serving yourself?

No, no I didn't.

So when did you join the VAD?

I think it would have been about September, 1942. Mainly because I'd joined the local branch of the VAs and there was more talk about the war and the young men were going away and I was doing hospital work and then I really became quite involved.

Well let's go back a little bit then. How did you come to join the local branch of the VAs – what ... how did you – did you get to be invited in those days?

Oh dear, I'm a bit vague about that. I really can't – can't tell you exactly whether I ... I – I'm not really sure of how I came to be one of them. I just was.

So would that have been round about 1942?

I think that possibly would have been about the end of '41, something like that. Yes, I'm not too sure of that date.

Were you in with a group of people that all joined together perhaps?

Yes, I – actually I – I was very friendly with some lasses from Huntleys Point.

(10.00) And they started a branch and I tended – even though I lived in Drummoyne – I went in with Huntleys Point and then they were so small we later combined with Drummoyne and in Drummoyne I was with a lass that I was at school with – indeed we went to ... even though she married an American and lives in America now, we went to Europe together last year.

So did you stay with her then, through the war?

Uh, no, no. But we lived a few door – a few streets from each other.

Right. So that's what got you into the VAs and what sort – what sort of work did you do when you were with them?

Well we did lectures on first aid, and home nursing, and periodically one of the local doctors would come along and we would do a verbal test and ...

... that's alright, it just makes a click ...

... and what else did we do? Oh yes, we naturally did hospital work and anything at all that we could do for the Red Cross we did. I remember we went up to Drummoyne school on one occasion and had to stay there the night just in case there was an air raid and we took blankets and pillows with us and then various fathers would pop their head in the – in the door during the evening to see that we were all right.

So this was – this was preparation for if you were in real air raid?

That's right, yes, yes.

So all the time you were working as a comptometrist and how much time would the VA work take up?

Well, once a week we would have lectures ... I, at that stage, was doing part time work – I wasn't doing full time work – so that that gave me an opportunity of selling buttons or going up to the Ryde Hospital and doing things like that.

So what would you do, say in the hospital?

Well we helped the nurses make the beds and give out the morning teas and if we happened to be in the children's ward, picking up rattles, rattles and putting them back in cots and playing with the babies and making lots of sandwiches and helping with meals and we would go round with the nurses whilst they poured medicines and then we would hand it to the patient. Oh just – just little generalities.

Mmm, can you remember, looking back on it, why you joined the VAs? Was it a social thing, was it part of the war effort, was it because you were interested in hospital work?

Well I think I felt that I would like to do something for the war effort and that was the one that appealed to me the most. Um, I – I can recall being asked to do some canteen work and I thought oh I don't know that I'd been keen about that. I was never keen on washing dishes, so – but I think that I've always had a feeling for people who, um – who weren't well.

So when you made the decision to go from the part time – from your part time job as a comptometrist and your part time work for the VAs to enlist, tell me a little bit about that? What – what made that decision for you?

Well, Norma and I were coming home from VAs one evening and we both chatted about the war and so forth and then we thought we would enlist, and ... we weren't too sure where we would go. Because in those days you could also choose where you served and so she said, oh well her father who, at this stage, was in the army, had a friend who was the CO at Bathurst and she said, 'Oh father said if we joined, the idea would be to go up to Bathurst because he knew the CO'. So we decided we would and I said – then I said to her, 'Well actually I

wouldn't mind going overseas', and she said, 'Yes, well she thought she might too', so we thought well we'd join and see what happened. Anyhow we weren't chosen to go overseas but indeed, when she tried to leave – she was working at the MLC Insurance at the time – and when she tried to leave the insurance company they said, 'No, we're a restricted occupation and you can't leave'. So I ended up going to Bathurst alone.

And were you – I mean you must have been disappointed about that – were you a little bit, um ... Did you have any regrets about what you'd done then, if you were doing it on your own?

No, not at all. I – I was in in the ... I wanted to go. I had actually made up my mind and right, that was it.

(15.00) So, did you family support your decision to enlist?

Not particularly. But I think that, for the first time in my life I – I'd really made up my mind about something and nobody was going to change it and I felt that they possibly thought, oh well, Bathurst is not all that far away. I think that all the business that went on with the family before that, was just to prevent me going – going too far away.

Because the family, what – when you say the business that had been on before ...

Well when I talked about going overseas, even though they – they didn't actually stop me going in to – to have an interview, I think they were very pleased that I wasn't chosen because they certainly didn't want me to go overseas.

Did you, in deciding to enlist, did any – were there any questions of how it might affect your long term career? Were you perhaps looking for different job opportunities or ...?

No, I didn't ever think of a career or ... No, no, I didn't – it didn't alter – I didn't think about my future life at all.

So it didn't – you didn't for example think oh this might lead to a career in nursing?

No, no.

So, again, was it a sense of excitement or in a sense of wanting to do more for more the war effort?

Yes, I think it definitely was a thought of doing more for the war effort.

What can you remember about the actual enlistment process? Where did you have to go, what did they ask you?

I went into rooms in Macquarie Street and there were a number of ladies there. I can remember a Mrs McVitty tended to be the one asking most questions and there were some other ladies there whose names escape me, and they asked me if I would be interested in going overseas and I said, 'Yes', and would I be also happy to serve in Australia and I said, 'Yes', and ... was I well, was I in good health, did I keep good health, what did I do in my leisure time, and that type of thing.

And you had to – Is this the point at which you had to provide some references? You have one here from the Egg Marketing Board. Tell me how you came to get that?

Well I was doing some part time work for – from Peacock Brothers and they sent me to the Egg Marketing Board and the secretary there asked me if I would stay on as one of their girls had left I think, because of ill-health. So I stayed there. Then when I had to go to have my interview, I was told that it was a restricted occupation and I was very – I was very unhappy and then I pointed out the fact that I – when I originally had taken the position it was on a part time basis and at this stage, I think, great tears welled up in my eyes and the gentleman said, 'Oh yes, yes, well we understand that', and he very kindly gave me a letter to the people at the – on the VAD board.

So you had to put in a personal appeal to let them let you go?

Oh yes, yes.

So what – when you'd enlisted, when did you hear that you were going to be sent to Bathurst?

Oh, I don't think it was very long but I couldn't tell you – only a matter of weeks I think, yes.

And then did you get a send off when you went to Bathurst? What do you remember about actually ... Was that your first thing or did you have training first?

No, I went straight to Bathurst and I can remember it was very low key. I left home in the morning and went in a got myself on a – on a train and when the train stopped at Bathurst another lass ... came into the compartment and she looked at me and she said, 'Are you going to Bathurst?', and I said, 'Yes', and she said, 'Well so am I, so I suppose we might as well sit together', and I said, 'Yes that's a good idea'. And she's proved a very good friend of mine, Dorothy [Stirdave?] and so we spent ... So when we arrived at Bathurst, they had the huts divided into rooms for two, so she and I spent our Bathurst time in that room and then we went to Ingleburn to do this rookies course. That was some – oh some months after we'd been at Bathurst and then I went with the 2/5th and she joined the 2/1st AGH.

Mmm. So what sort of duties were you doing when you arrived at Bathurst?

Mess duties. I was in the sisters' mess for a month. We had to do a month's mess duties when we first arrived, either in the sisters' mess or the AAMWS' mess and I did the month in the sisters' mess, um, which was quite good because I got to know them before I entered the ward and that was quite pleasant.

(20.00) So what do mess duties involve?

Well, we had to serve the meals, set the tables, help with the vegetables, I don't recall ever having washed up though, but I guess we had to do that too at some stage. Yes, we would have. Yes, we would have washed up and wiped up and literally kept the kitchen in reasonable order. We had a very nice girl as a cook. She was funny and she kept us in constant laughter, so it was a very happy time in the mess.

In spite of your having said you didn't to wash up, you weren't disappointed to find yourself doing that?

No. No, I think that we'd all felt that it didn't really matter what we did when other people were losing their lives.

So after that month of mess duties, what happened then?

Well we went into the wards, and I can remember we had – Sister Williamson was the Tutor Sister and she used to also give us lectures and she also taught us how to give needles and some of the boys were very nice and would lend an arm for us to practice on. And we once more made beds, and gave them nourishment and gave out medicines and we did more or less most things except that we didn't ever do any wounds. We didn't ever do any dressings or anything of that nature.

Right. So then – you were getting training in nursing duties while you were there, when did you get some army training?

Oh, Ingleburn. We marched, we jumped around, we had lectures on feet. I feel now that I could have been very interested in the lectures on feet but when one's young and one's feet are in perfect condition there's nothing more boring than sitting and listening to lectures on feet, and ... The PT instructor was a sergeant from the First World War and he was a delightful man and we used to do terrible things. We'd go out on a route march and then we'd tell him that we were going to faint and so he'd let us sit down by the side of road at Ingleburn and then he'd say, 'Come on, you have to get up now', so we'd get up and march a little bit further on. Actually, I – I didn't like the army training part of it at all. I didn't enjoy that.

How long would – would it have taken? How long were you at Ingleburn?

Oh goodness me, I don't know. It seemed like years, but I know it wasn't.

A couple of weeks, a couple of months?

Oh, yes, I think probably it would have been a couple of months, but I really am not sure about that.

Do you remember – apart from the route marches – do you remember anything else in particular that you enjoyed or didn't enjoy about that time?

I enjoyed being in a hut with a whole lot of people because I was an only child and even though I didn't ever realise – never felt lonely – I suddenly was in a hut with all these people and they were all so different, but they were all very nice and I enjoyed talking to them and getting to know them and yes, I did enjoy – and I enjoyed meeting the other girls and being in the hut and being part of a group. Yes, I enjoyed that part of it.

Now, it's interesting that you say that at Ingleburn, where – where had you been living at Bathurst and why was it different?

Well because I'd been living in a – a hut at Bathurst, but the huts there had been divided off into rooms for two and Dorothy and I had shared the room and even though we were very compatible you – you didn't feel one of a group, even though when ... we were all together in the mess, but somehow at Ingleburn it was quite different.

So, at what point did you develop some loyalty to the unit you were with? Was – did that start in the – in the training at Ingleburn or was that perhaps not till later?

No, I'd – I think that, um ... I liked the unit at Bathurst but when I was at Bathurst I really felt I had to get away and, um, I don't really think I had a unit feeling until I was with the 2/5th and then I – really became very attached and it was a very happy unit. We had marvellous COs, and we had a lovely matron – Matron Cooke – she was really super.

(25.00) Good, well we'll talk more about that a bit later. Um, perhaps, either at Bathurst or at Ingleburn, you had an opportunity to talk with other recruits, were they similar to you in age and background?

Yes, they were, mmm. Um, yes, yes I think so. There might have been a few of them who would have been considered to have been girls in the social swing before the war but they certainly didn't ... Once they were at Ingleburn everybody was the same. They went – you know, they didn't say, 'Oh I was in the social columns' or anything of that nature.

So they mostly came from – they'd already served as VAs outside, they hadn't had any other army experience of any sort?

No, no.

Um, and what were your – your trainers like there? Were they generally competent, do you think?

Oh yes, I think so. ... Yes they were people, I would think probably from the same middle class – they were probably keen about making a career of the army I guess because they did take the army training extremely seriously, so that I feel that probably they – they had decided that they would make the army a career.

You mentioned a PT instructor was male, what ... Who would have been women and who would have been men?

No, the CO of the – was a female, Captain Cave. She seemed quite a reasonable woman, quite a nice woman actually. We had visiting people to lecture us. Um, the doctors came – various doctors came and gave lectures on various topics. The only male was the gentleman who used to march us round the parade ground.

Mmm. How long did you spend at – well we can't quite remember how long you spent at Ingleburn – how long were you at Bathurst including that Ingleburn period?

Oh, I suppose it must have been about six to nine months.

Would you have got leave during that time?

Yes, I did. I came home on leave and caught chicken pox and the thing is that there had been a medical – a dental officer in the ward in which I was working prior to my leave and he had had chicken pox, so you can imagine the unit paper when I arrived back. They all had copies of the unit paper so he and I had a great giggle about it.

So you spent most of your leave in bed with chicken pox?

Yes, I did.

How was the family feeling about your enlistment by that stage?

Oh they had come to terms with it. I think so many girls had joined the army that they had become quite used to it.

So you definitely wanted to be sent overseas?

Yes, yes.

Did you have to apply specially or were you – you plucked from Bathurst?

Now when I was at Ingleburn, I was told that I would not be going back to the unit at Bathurst, that I would be staying at Ingleburn to do a NCO School and I didn't want that because I certainly didn't want to have to stand on a parade ground and call out Attention and all that. So I felt a bit unhappy. And then I heard about a draft that was going and I didn't know to where. I went up to Captain Cave and I said to her that I had heard that there was a draft and I would like to be on that draft and she said, 'Oh well we have our NCOs', and I said, 'Well I really wasn't interested in promotion at all, but I was very eager to go overseas and to get myself on a draft'. So she said she'd let me know. So the following day an orderly came down from the office and suggested that I went up to see Captain Cave which I did and she said, 'Right, you're on a draft' and I said, 'Oh, do you know where it's going?', and she said, 'We don't know but we think that it's New Guinea'. So I was delighted because at that stage somebody had told me it was Darwin and I thought oh, I'll still be in Australia. Although from what I hear some of the Darwin people had it rather – rather grim. So at that – I felt much happier then.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

So, did you go straight from Ingleburn then overseas or were you sent back to – to Bathurst?

No I didn't ever go back to Bathurst but I did go straight home on leave and then I was told to report to Victoria Barracks which I did and I didn't leave from Victoria Barracks. Once more I was – I was sent to the showground and – to have injections and that type of thing – and then I went home and then I was told to report to Ingleburn once more. So, I then took – I can't remember whether – how many days it was. Perhaps a couple of days, and then I just took myself back onto a train and this time to Ingleburn, and once more I met somebody on the station but this lass had been to the Middle East and I saw her on the station and I thought, no, I won't go up to her because I'm not too sure what sort of a reception I might get. Instead of which, Sue came up to me and said, 'Oh, you're going to Ingleburn', and I said, 'Yes', and she said, 'So am I. Let's go together'. So I said, 'Fine'. So on the way she said, 'Now I understand that we'll be in tents for three'. She said, 'Do you have anyone else?' and I said, 'No, I don't. I'm alone.' And she said, 'Well I have two friends who are looking for a third to make up their tent, I'll introduce you to them.' So I met two girls from South Australia and I tented with them all the time I was in Moresby. Once more had a very pleasant tent.

Sounds like an excellent arrangement.

Mmm.

Um, so do you – what was it like that last leave, before you were sent overseas? Was that different in any way?

No, I think that the family had come to realise that I was in the army and that I had chosen what I wanted to do and therefore there was really nothing that they could do about it. Although my mother was rather funny at the time I told her I'd joined the AIF and I said to she and my father and my maiden aunt, who had looked after me as a babe and had lived with us ever since, I said to them, 'Well you can't do anything about it. I've had my medical', and my mother turned and said, 'Well they obviously didn't examine your head'.

I'm going to get you to tell me that story again because there's one car horn in the middle and it's a good story. So perhaps we could just go back to when you – when you came back and told them that you had enlisted.

Uh, yes, well when I told them I had enlisted in the AIF and that I intended to go away as soon as I could – get myself onto a draft – and that having had the medical there was absolutely nothing they could do about preventing me, and my mother suggested that I obviously hadn't had my head examined.

Well, I'm pleased to hear that they did become resigned to it in the end, what was the real reason for the opposition do you think?

I was an only child and a daughter and I think that was the only opposition quite frankly. I don't for one minute think they thought I was going to be killed.

Mmm, they just liked to keep an eye on you.

Yes.

(5.00) So you didn't get – because you were off to Ingleburn and then sent off on a train, you didn't get a bit send off with ticker tape and things, did you?

Oh, no, nothing like that, no. They were all very low key.

Did, you know, parents give you warm socks or anything like that?

No.

So from Ingleburn, you – would you have spent some time there or that was really just a transit thing?

Oh no, that was just a transit.

And what happened then?

Well from there we went on a troop train and we went to Brisbane. From Brisbane we went to Enoggera which was a place similar to Ingleburn and there I had the first experience of filling a bag with straw on which to lie in the night and they were double-decker beds and I had the lower bunk and all night I was getting little bits of straw coming down from ... because each time Jean turned up, you know, turned, a little bit of the fluff would come down on one's face. But ...

So what did you learn about making straw beds in future?

I would never make one if I didn't have to, but nevertheless it was an experience.

Um, was there anything dramatic or interesting about the – the train journey to Queensland? Was it – it would have taken a long time I imagine?

Yes it did – no, except that we were in those – oh very old fashioned carriages and in the evening we would each – I think there were four on each side of the ... and we would lie on each other's buttock to have a bit of a rest and ... but the – the train that we caught from Brisbane to Townsville was quite different. It was a hospital train and that was extremely comfortable and I remember going through Rockhampton and the folk there passed up pineapples, pawpaws, all those lovely Queensland fruit and we had a marvellous time, you know, eating. I've never taste ... you just don't ... it's just not the same down here. The flavour on that occasion was quite different. But we – that was quite an enjoyable trip. But the one from Sydney ... But when one's young and excited and looking forward, you just don't seem to notice how uncomfortable it is.

Right. There would have been men on the troop train – on the hospital train?

No, I don't think so, no. No. It was probably going up there, you see, going up empty and that's why they decided to take us and probably have the boys on the way back.

So how many would you – how many of you would have left Ingleburn for – for Brisbane?

Oh I think there were probably 100–150. Yes, I think so.

I probably missed this. You spent some time in Brisbane?

In at Enoggera, out of Brisbane.

So were you doing duties there or again, it was just a transit place?

Well it was just a transit camp, yes.

And Townsville, again, was an opportunity to – to wait?

No we were only there a day. I can remember we – we decided we had to have a shower, and I can remember going to the YWCA and they'd run out of towels and we were drying ourselves on tea towels. We had a very pleasant day in Townsville and then we left late that night for New Guinea in the *Canberra*.

Did the Townsville people give you a send off, or they were so – I mean they saw troops going the whole time?

Exactly, yes. Oh no, it was a very common occurrence there.

So what was the *Canberra* like and – and was the *Canberra* carrying troops?

Yes, yes. The *Canberra* had troops as well as us and it was very, very hot. I can remember all the port holes were covered and it was a black out. We had bunks on the *Canberra*. The boys were lying all over because I can remember in the morning stepping out of the bunk and there was a boy lying on the floor outside. They were – they were more or less lying all over the ship, um, but we did have cabins, but a lot of the girls were seasick. Fortunately I have never suffered from seasickness and I was very pleased because there were about four of us in the cabin and it was very hot, and one girl was very ill but even then I was able to keep my equilibrium. I was very pleased.

(10.00) How long did the trip from Townsville to Moresby take?

Oh dear, a few days. I can't remember.

Nobody seems to be able to remember. I don't know what this means Was it an unpleasant voyage?

No, it wasn't unpleasant. Um, I can remember sitting on – we all sat round on the hatch at the back – I think that's what you call it – and we talked and we read and the weather was beautiful, thank goodness. Had it rained it would have been very unpleasant, but no, it was – it was quite pleasant.

And this was in ... when?

This would have been in early – early '43, yes.

Right. I might ask it now rather than later. What were your first impressions of New Guinea when you disembarked at Moresby?

Well, I can remember there was a great sign across the – I can't actually remember getting off the ship – but I remember we were on trucks and we were going out towards Bootless Bay. The hospital was on the way out from ... towards Bootless Bay, and I can remember there was a huge sign across the road saying that I was entering the portals of the largest mosquitos in the world, or something. I can't remember the exact ... but it was a huge sign across the road and um, I know that we were all, you know, very giggly and well I think most of us had never been in a place quite like it before, you know.

Can you expand on – on that? I mean what was most different about it?

Well, coming from ... Sydney, there were no large buildings, there weren't even houses in the – the manner that we were used to housing. Um, ... it ... oh, the vegetation was different, um, there didn't seem to be any birds either. I don't know, maybe they have, but I never ever remember seeing any bird life there. No, it was just – just completely – completely different. There were an awful lot of – of men all in uniform, all dressed the same, you know, slouch hats ... We were given – we had slouch hats too in those days.

Mmm. I just want to summarise then, the time that you spent in Moresby – we'll go into the details later – but you were there for how long?

Well we had Christmas '43 in Moresby. Um, I can't ... Look isn't it dreadful, I can't ... I suppose we must have been there about eight – eight or nine months, because we didn't go until early '43. We had ... isn't that dreadful, I can't think. Um, I don't think we were there twelve months, but it would have been fairly close to twelve months.

And then you presumably came back to Australia and then were sent to Morotai?

Yes, yes. We came back to Australia and had leave and then I went to, um – we were split up when we were on the mainland and I went to Kenmore which is a psychiatric hospital in those days – out of Goulburn – and I spent some of the winter there. I caught a dreadful cold, um ... and yes, then I was recalled from there and came back to Ingleburn and then from Ingleburn I went to Morotai, with the 2/5th.

So were you in Morotai at the end of the war?

Yes, yes. Um, I was in Morotai on VE Day, I can remember, because I could hardly believe it and we said – we were sitting on the beach in the evening and someone came down and said, 'Oh, isn't it marvellous. The war in Europe's over', and we thought it was somebody having a

joke. So we – we went up – we thought well the boys in the ward ... they wouldn't say if it was – so we went up and we asked one of them and they said, 'Yes, it had come over that it was over'. Well, of course, then of course, we just ... we were absolutely ... we couldn't contain ourselves, you know, we were so pleased and we thought well if it's over in Europe it'll only be a matter of time for the – for it to be over in Japan – and yet it was quite a long time ... or it seemed a long time to us.

Mmm, another four or five months I guess.

Mmm, yes.

Um, and do you remember VJ Day then?

No, isn't it funny, I can't. I can't remember VJ Day. I don't know where I was or what I was doing and yet it's funny, I can remember VE Day so – you know, really ... And yet I was in Morotai when the surrender was on.

(15.00) So you must have been in Morotai ...

I must have been in Morotai when the uh ... Yes. Because I've got a copy of the surrender thing.

Isn't that fascinating?

Maybe I was – maybe we were all too busy.

Well that's possible I suppose, at that time ...

Well, you see we had a lot of POWs.

Did they start coming through before the surrender though?

Yes, some – I think some of them from Ambon which was ... I think they did come through before the surrender. They were the worst that I had seen – that I had seen. But ... they were in a very bad way.

What sort of condition?

Well, quite emaciated and then, um ... it was quite extraordinary the fact that one person would know when another person was going to die because I can remember one of them died and we were all very upset and one of the other boys said, 'Oh yes, but we knew he would die'. They had lived together apparently so long and had become so friendly with each other that ... It was something quite extraordinary to us. It was unbelievable to me, but ... yes, that was extremely sad.

Yes, absolutely. How did the experience of nursing the POWs affect your attitudes towards the Japanese?

Well, I really felt that – that what they had done was unbelievable. I just didn't think that one human being could treat another human being, regardless of what race they were, in the manner that – that they treated the Australians.

How do you feel about the Japanese now, forty years on?

Well, I don't think that you can force one generation to ... uh, cope with the woes of the previous generation, but I personally, would never trust them.

[long pause] What sort of nursing duties would you have with the – with the POWs? What – what would you be doing for them?

Well, I – I was only in the POW ward for a little while and then I worked in the facio-maxillary and plastic surgery ward in Moresby. Mainly it was to see that they didn't overeat and that they were eating the right things. That was the – the – our main ... and to look after them gently, you know. Help them wash and make beds and things like that, but I was only ever there on night duty so that I didn't do a great deal with the POWs.

Was there a sense of shock amongst the nursing staff when they saw the conditions?

Oh yes, oh indeed, yes, yes. Yes, there was.

So, just much worse than they would have expected?

I think so, yes, certainly from the reaction that I had personally, and the others that I'd spoken to that I knew, yes. But we didn't talk about it really.

Yes, what was then the attitude towards the patients? I mean, did you jolly them along or ...?

Oh yes, I think we did as best we could. I can remember on one occasion – not in the POW ward but in another ward – thinking, you know ... I just felt that people were a wee bit depressed and that I – I was once more on night duty and it was early in the morning. I felt really tired and I felt that the place was very ... The atmosphere wasn't right, you see, and so I hit myself on a tent pole as I was going down, as if I was drunk, you know. So then I started to sing that 'I belong to Glasgow' and then I purposely hit myself against some tent poles and of course, the boys thought that was very funny. Some of them joined in and others just sort of laughed, you know, and asked me what I'd been doing all night ... Um, oh yes, you did things like that now and again if you felt it was needed.

So that was a time when morale was perhaps a little bit lower than other times?

Well I think that, um ... no it was probably just on that particular occasion. I don't know, I can't remember what would have happened. Perhaps something happened to make the ward become very quiet. Um, but I don't know that ever you could say morale was low or morale was high. I think it was – we were just natural.

(20.00) Mmm. Well let's go back to just some of these more mundane questions, I guess. What were mail services from Australia like during your overseas service?

Oh, very good, very good.

Your letters were censored out, I guess ...

... oh yes, yes ...

... how did that affect what you wrote?

Did affect what I wrote. I didn't have anything that I could really ... that anybody'd be interested in, particularly the enemy. No, no, I didn't – I don't think mine was ever – it was censored I know, but I don't think I ever had anything cut out.

Did you manage to keep in touch with what was happening in Australia?

Oh yes, my father and mother wrote, and my aunt wrote. Um, not so much girl friends, no. But, so it was mainly family things that – that we talked about. My mother used to send me books now and again ... pardon me ... and, um, food, because she quite – felt the army would starve me you know, so she sent me parcels of food till I told her not to, that I had quite enough to eat.

The army didn't starve you?

The army certainly didn't starve me, no.

Now you mentioned earlier that you were given the opportunity of NCO training but you rejected that idea because you didn't want to do the parade ground stuff. Um, were officers – did you feel that gulf between officers and um, the troops, how did you think of yourselves? ... not the troops, what ...

Well I never felt there was a – a gulf at all. As far as I was concerned they were just other women. Um, they didn't have any ... No I can't say that I thought them any different. I didn't have any troubles at all.

So differences in rank certainly wouldn't matter by now?

Oh no, no, they didn't – it didn't worry us at all. I don't think it worried any of the girls I was with.

Perhaps you could clarify a point for me. Would AANWS working in the field, who would they be responsible to?

Well, I think that when we were away it was more the CO. I can remember when we were in Moresby, the CO came round one night and he said, 'Now when you girls go back to the mainland, you will find that there will be people there who will have rank and ... we are going to have a selection committee at NGF and all you girls are eligible, if you wish, to go in and be interviewed with the thought of going to an officers' training school back on the mainland'. Well nobody tended to bother applying and so then, Major Christie selected about half a dozen girls to go and they went in and had an interview. I think why the girls didn't bother going was the fact that they felt that they'd rather be with the unit than to be sent to some officers' training school back on the mainland. I certainly had that feeling and I think that that was the feeling ... Well I think that we were of the generation that rank didn't really mean very much to us at all and – and none of us were career people. Um, it's hard but today it's such a different world for women to what it was when I was a young woman. I can remember one girl coming back and saying – she didn't actually want to go but she was a sergeant so she was sent – and she said, it was rather funny, he asked her what she wanted to do after the war and she said, 'She wanted to start a pig farm', which was the last thing in her mind to do and he happened to be very interested in pigs. It happened that he kept her talking about pigs. Anyhow she did – she did come back later on and she did become an officer but ... She was a Melbourne person and I haven't seen her since, but I know it was quite hilarious when she came back and said – told us about this pig farming.

Did she become a pig farmer, that is the question?

I don't know.

(25.00) So, um, during your work in the wards, who would you be reporting to?

Oh, the sister in charge of the ward.

And what was – what were relationships then like with the sister in charge of the ward?

Well, I always had a very good relationship with the sisters and most of the girls did. Um, I think there was only one girl that I can recall who used to come – to come back and weep and I think this particular sister I can recall one of the other sisters weeping about her too, so ... But no, we were lucky, we had very nice sisters, very nice.

And off duty, who enforced discipline?

Oh well, um, Wendy Rappell was the captain in charge of us and Mavis Bentley was a lieutenant and she was also in charge, they were our two officers, and then Major Christie was in charge of any female personnel in the area. Well not long after we went up there – I don't know how long – the 2/1st AGH came up and they had about, um, I suppose they would have had about 100 girls there also. Well Major Christie was in – oh and we had come up with the girls ... When we came up, half of our girls went to the 2/9th, they were up towards Rouna Falls and we were down towards Bootless Bay – well Major Christie was in charge of the 2/5th, the 2/1st and the 2/9th girls, and then we also had a captain and a lieut(enant) in charge of us.

So was discipline, uh, was it a problem? Would that ...

No, no, there was no – we didn't have any marching or any PT or any of that. Really the sisters were our ... I think the officers' used to have censor our letters and I suppose they did tent inspections to see that our tents were in order, and I don't know what else they did. I suppose they wrote lots of reports back to Victoria Barracks if the truth's known, but I really don't know.

We would have to ask them no doubt. Service vocabulary. Now there are some areas of the forces, like the RAF that are absolutely famous for their slang. Did you have any?

Not that I can recall – oh except that there was a word called `doover' and they used to ... I don't know that we used it a great deal, but the boys used to and they'd talk about `doover' this and `doover' that, you know, and the extraordinary part about it was that you would know what they were talking about.

And what would they – what would a `doover' be?

Oh well they would say, `Would you mind passing that `doover'?', and it might be an ashtray or a book and yet they would say `doover' and you would know exactly what they wanted.

It meant something like a thing?

Yes.

What about when you were in New Guinea – or for that matter Morotai – did you pick up any – any words from the natives? Any, you know, kai kai for food or anything like that?

No, we had a couple of natives ironing for us. But indeed if we wanted anything really special, if we there was something on at the mess, we would wait till they went home and we'd race over and iron it ourselves. Um, I think one of the officers, I think, Miss Bentley, used to supervise them. They used to just come in by the day and do some ironing. Later on, when we were in Moresby, we had, um, a very nice recreation club built for us, down right on the beach at Bootless Bay, because we were back from – a few miles from Bootless really – and they did have some of the natives there serving because I can remember quite a funny incident there. I could never manage the boots very well – the army boots that we had to wear in the evenings with long trousers and then we'd have the gaiters on, you see – and I stood up from the table and apparently Wellington, the native, was standing there and I stood on his feet.

(30.00) But having no control over my feet in these boots I wasn't aware that I was standing on him and the person I was with said to me, 'For goodness sake, Lila, get off Wellington's foot', and he said that Wellington was making all sorts of grimaces with his face but not saying a word and here was I standing on his foot So I apologised and after that I managed to acquire some American gaiters and then I – that enabled me to wear ordinary shoes because the American gaiters came over the top of the foot and underneath and then I managed to control my own feet.

Wonderful. Um, just a couple more things on vocabulary. Did ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

Now did you ... what did you call yourselves amongst the girls?

Well from what I can recall we just called each other by our christian names.

Not surnames as the nurses report to me they did.

No. If we wanted to be slightly facetious we would probably say 'nurse'.

Was there – that distinction then ... but, I mean, were you very conscious of the distinction between nurses and – and your own positions?

Oh I think we were aware that they – well they were professionals and that they had so much more expertise than we did. Oh yes, I think we – we paid the ... for their knowledge, yes, quite.

Mmm. What did the men – what did the patients call you?

The patients called us 'nurse' and indeed I can honestly say I've never had a nasty patient. They were all delightful people.

Sounds terrific.

Yes.

Um, would they call the nurses 'nurse' or would they call them sisters?

Oh no, they called the sisters 'sister' and they called us 'nurse'.

Right. And did you have nicknames amongst yourselves?

No, I tented with a South Australian and her – she was Rusty – but I was introduced to her as Rusty and I guess that was a nickname, but as far as I was concerned it was her only name. So she ...

If it was a nickname she'd picked it up before she came to you?

Yes.

What do you think of as common terms of the time? Is there any – not particularly service slang – but general terms that would bring back that period to you?

No, I can't think of any. I think that I spoke the same then as I do now.

And what about – what about the songs of the time? Do you recall particular songs?

Oh, '*White Christmas*'. Oh yes, '*White Christmas*'. I remember – that was extremely popular the whole time when we were in New Guinea, yes. Um, this was really – everybody sang it. Really was the most popular song there.

Anything else?

Yes. I can remember ... the Ingrid Bergman film – isn't it terrible and I can't think of the name of it now – but that was very popular and ...

... '*Casablanca*' ...

... '*Casablanca*', yes. I can remember going to – to see that and the – it was an open air picture show. You know, just a screen, and they had slit trenches round and then they'd have little pieces of wood over, you know, planks, and I can remember wandering down there and seeing that and thinking oh how wonderful it was and writing home and telling my mother not to miss it when it came to Sydney. By the time I came on leave it was just arriving in Sydney so I took her to it. She wasn't at all impressed by it and I had thought it was so marvellous, you know.

So you were getting first run movies?

Oh yes, we did. Yes, I'm quite sure that we did have the films before they ... Because I can remember – I can't recall the name of it – but there was another film I was quite fond of, and I can remember telling the family to see it and it wasn't on in Sydney until I was back on leave. So, yes, we did get films very early.

Tell me a little bit more about – I haven't got a very clear picture of the open air picture theatre. How – where were the slit trenches, what was the relationship between them and the boards?

(5.00) Oh, oh well, there were a few ... There's this great expanse of space and um, then they had the screen set up and there'd be a few – perhaps few little seat there but not many. We usually took the drums from the fruit – that the fruit cakes arrived in. You know, they'd – they'd be about, oh, I don't know how many centimeters, but you know about half a

dozen fruit cakes high and very large round fruit cakes. And you would wander along with one of those, or with a chair or something like that and there were thousands would come and I believe they – the boys used to have a two-up game behind the – the screen. But I didn't ever go to any of those, but I know that it was there and, um, there we sat and they put the film on and around, they had the slit trenches. Not so much for when I was there because there was only ever one small raid when I was there, but prior to our arrival they had needed them, but I had never had to use a slit trench, thank goodness.

So potentially people would have leapt from their seats into the slit ...

... yes, I guess they did at one stage, yes. But they had – they used to, as I said before, have very – very good films.

Mmm. Interesting little diversion there. Um, just a couple more questions about language. Now did the men use, what we would call, bad language?

No, I've heard more bad language in recent years than I ever heard in the army.

Do you think they were being particularly careful when there were nurses around?

Well I think probably they were, yes, yes.

So you didn't hear things that were offensive?

Oh never, no, never.

When you came back between the New Guinea experience and the Morotai experience – when you came back presumably you got some home leave, um, was it difficult fitting in during that – that time? Did you find things had changed very much, or you'd changed?

I think I had changed. I think the family felt that I was different. In as much as I can recall, the first evening I was at home I apparently just sat down and, um, if I wanted anything I would stretch across and take it until my mother said, 'All you have to do is to ask me and I'll pass it to you', so I think probably my manners had suffered a little. But I – oh and she felt that I smoked too much, you see, because smoking – I mean ladies ... When I was growing up, ladies did not smoke, um, and I did start to smoke actually before I had joined the army but it was all very low key. You know, at a theatre or something like that, never in the – in the home. Well, now of course I just lit up cigarettes when I felt like having a cigarette and my mother never said anything, but I could tell by the look that, you know, it was considered not the done thing, particularly at home. Um, but apart from that – and I think probably I – I didn't care so much about what their standards were, than when I was growing up, I was very aware of the standards of behaviour and things like that and I think probably that had to ... you know, I altered a little bit there.

Were people at home interested in what was happening or did you sometimes feel it was another world?

Oh my father was very interested in the war and I think my mother was too. They followed it and, uh, one always listened to 2FC for the news and also for the gentleman who's now the professor at Sydney University – um, oh he's the chancellor, Sir Herman Black. He used to – after the news he gave a talk for, I don't know how many minutes – but he did and he would

give them a synopsis of what was going on. Well, I mean one just did not speak during that time. One listened to the news and one listened to Sir Herman Black and then one could speak if one wished, but you wouldn't dare during his little sojourn. Oh yes, they were very interested in what was going on.

That's – I had no idea about that. It's lovely to have that recalled. Um, just to go back one step, did most of the girls smoke?

(10.00) Yes, most of them did. But the funny part of it is none of us do now. Um, I stopped when John was about three and – uh, it was rather funny. A friend of mine that I was in the army with, just after the war she bought a motor scooter and had a fall. So I used to go over and stay with her in the evenings and another one of the girls that was in the army with us, she used to go down during the day and see if she could help her, and Judy said to me, 'Oh look please, just have a cigarette with me – with the evening meal, just to be sociable'. So I said, 'Oh yes, all right'. Well it wasn't very long before I was having oh, not one after the evening meal, but then one with supper and then one after lunch and then you know. So when I decided to give it up again I thought right, no, so I just stopped and when some people would light up after dinner, oh, I'd think I would love a cigarette but I knew that I was hooked so I knew I couldn't do it because I'd be back on. So that actually I – I haven't smoked for twenty-seven years.

Not a bad record. What brand did you smoke back in the army?

Oh goodness me, we used to smoke in – we used to smoke American brands in – in New Guinea. Um, Phillip Morris, oh what else did we smoke? We smoked another that was an Australian brand and I can't think of the name of it now. It used to be in a yellow packet and it had a red – a little red ... Peter Jackson – Phillip Morris, Peter Jackson. Uh, they're the only two that come to mind.

Was it more common to smoke – for girls who were in the army to smoke than it was for girls who weren't in the army do you think at that period?

Well I think probably there are a lot of people like me who – whose family disapproved but when they went into the army they didn't have that – that tie and therefore they did smoke. But then they gave it up later on, you know.

Um, I can ask you now about concert parties but I think I'll ask you when we talk specifically about New Guinea about concert parties. I think that might be the best. Did you – did you have any organised sport or anything while you were in the services?

No, we didn't ever have any organised sport.

What about newspapers or magazines that were produced by the army for – for the troops? Do you remember either – well *Guinea Gold* you remember because you've got a couple of copies ...

... yes ...

... anything else like that? The *Current Affairs Bulletin* is one that's mentioned here and a magazine called *Salt*. Do they ring a bell at all?

Well they don't ring a bell to me. *Guinea Gold* was the one that I remember most of all because we always had *Guinea Gold*. Um, but I can't remember any others, apart from ones that were sent to us from the mainland.

Right. Now pay is an interesting one. Do you remember what you were paid?

Yes I can. I was paid five shillings a day and there was nothing to spend it on so ... Well money was just – one never ever thought about money. I can't remember ever thinking about money.

Mmm. How would that have compared with what you were earning outside?

Oh well, I think I was earning about – when I did temporary work – I think I was earning two pounds ten a week or something like that or ... I think it would have probably been about that, maybe – maybe a bit more. Maybe three pounds a week. I can't remember to tell you the truth.

So did you think that army pay was fair?

I didn't think whether it was fair or whether it was unfair, it was just it.

And did you spend some, save some?

I think I probably saved more than I ever spent. Um, most of our needs were – were supplied. I don't think I spent very much at all.

Were there canteens to spend money ...?

Yes there were canteens but, um, apart from buying cigarettes I don't think I bought anything else. Can't remember – don't think so.

You mentioned getting chicken pox while you were still – still back in Bathurst. Did you get any other illnesses while you were in the services?

Yes I did get a skin condition on my hand when I was in Port Moresby and I was very lucky because I had Colonel Belisario as the CO and I showed him my hand and he gave me some medication for it and it didn't clear up, so he said, 'Well you're going to make history', he said, 'I'm going down to the American hospital' and he brought up penicillin from the American hospital and he put lint on my hand ...

(15.00) Oh he said, 'Right, you'll have to go to sick bay for few days'. So I went over to sick bay and he came over and he put lint on my hand and he poured the penicillin onto the lint and he said, 'Now, you are not to have it dampened in any other way', and he said, 'I'll be back to see you in a couple of days'. And this skin rash that had started to travel up my arm and it looked as if it was going to start on the other hand, cleared up and as you can see they're well worn but – they're worn well – but one couldn't tell that I'd had such a nasty skin ... Apparently, um, a staphylococcal infection had – had entered the skin condition. So he told me that I had made history by having local applications of penicillin. So we were lucky that he knew so many people at the American hospital.

Good one, yes. Somebody else mentioned the topical applications which I've never heard of before and I've heard so many different stories about penicillin, it must have been very exciting to suddenly see ...

... Oh yes. Well, the Americans were the only ones who had it. You see we'd only just had the sulphonilamide [sulphonamide] – sulphur drugs that only come in when we were in New Guinea and the Americans were the only ones who had the pencillin.

I know it's a hard one, but when might that have been?

Well, um ... that would have been – oh probably mid '43.

Good. Um, no other illnesses or injuries?

No, no, that was all.

The Yanks, and again the Yanks I think seem to come up in various places. Did you come across the Americans in the Australia? I mean, were you aware of the – of American troops being around or was it mostly when you went to New Guinea that ...?

Oh I can recall having seen Americans in Sydney, but I didn't know any Americans in Sydney. When I was in Moresby we used to ... The American units would apply to the CO for girls to go to their messes and we had – we used to have to go out in sixes. If we – a notice would be put on the notice board and then you would write your name if you wished to attend – and if ... if they couldn't get six, well then they just couldn't go. So girls would come around and say, 'Oh look would you mind going so and so, you know, I'd like to go', and you'd pop your name down. I went to a couple of American dos and they were very nice and, um, indeed that's where I got my gaiters that I was able to wear and we – we found the Americans very nice and in Morotai they were particularly nice and they used to fly ice cream down from Manilla twice a week. They'd fly down ice cream and coca cola and then they would always invite us and we used to pop round and help them eat their ice cream and drink their coca cola and I found the Americans were delightful people and generous and very nice. But I didn't ever go out with any of them in Australia but I must tell you something funny. When I – I'd decided that I'd accepted their hospitality on a couple occasions and it was up to me to invite them back to the mess. Well you could invite them one at a time to your own mess. So there was this gentleman, he was really very nice, so I suggested that he should come to the mess and that we would go to the pictures. Well now, I used to always go to the pictures with the boys from the ward. So on this occasion I had to tell them that I wasn't going to the pictures with them. So I went in and said that I was very sorry, that I wouldn't be going to the pictures with them, that I had an American friend that I'd invited to the mess. Well you could imagine. Ah so, you're going out with the Yanks are you nurse. And I said, 'Yes', and I said, 'Now you people – if you're going to the pictures with me, you make sure you behave yourself'. You know because all the things they were going to do, you see. Blow me down if when we got there with our, you know, chairs and put them down, here was quite a few from the ward right behind me. I thought 'oh no', so anyhow I didn't look at them and they were all saying 'Good night nurse', you know, and I just sort of sat down. So then it came God Save the King and King George VI's photo went up on the screen and this American was sitting and I said, 'Oh quickly, you have to stand up'. And he said, 'Honey, I'll stand up for your flag but I don't stand up for another man'. I said, 'Well please, please on this occasion, stand up'. I thought with the boys at the back oh goodness me, what will they do, you know. So here am I dragging this American gentleman up by the arm so he'd stand up for God Save the King. So that was all right. They behaved themselves very well, you know, and then of course the next morning when I went in they were saying 'Oh, we don't think much of him, you know, but it all went off very nicely'.

(20.00) But not to be repeated?

Well, no, I just felt that, um ... Well that, you know, we had eaten the ice cream and drunk coca cola and I felt that we should invite them back because they were really quite nice. But I didn't ever go out with any of them in Sydney because – well I suppose ... I sent a couple home to my mother, you know. I said, 'If you're in Sydney, go and ...' A couple of them did, but they only ever made the one – one call. I could well imagine what my mother was putting them through – the kind of degree, you know. But, um, I felt they were nice and they sort of missed – missed being at home, you know, and I'd heard about all the things that were going on in Sydney, you know.

In opposition to them, you mean?

Well yes, and I think probably in some – some areas it was probably warranted and in others it wasn't. So these – these two were really quite nice and I thought oh well, I'll send them home for a home cooked meal.

Um, was there an equivalent of – were there women serving in the American forces in an equivalent capacity to you?

Well, um, on our way to Morotai, we left Biak rather hurriedly.

Sorry, Biak is ...

Biak's on the way to – on the way to Morotai and we'd called into Biak – and we left very hurriedly and we could tell why because the next morning we went through 9 Div[ision] convoy and we realised then that ... We went up on the *Manunda* which was, you know, had lights blazing and of course to go through the convoy would have been rather dreadful – it would have lit them up. Well, I understand that just after we left Biak there was a dreadful bombing raid and there were a lot of Americans at Biak. Well we had a couple of American girls came and stayed with us after that raid on Biak, before they sent them home. But they were the only two Americans that I met.

And were they American nurses, American ...?

... No they were American Red Cross girls that stayed with us on that occasion.

Mmm, and what were they like?

Very nice, very nice. They only stayed a couple of days and then they flew them back.

Did you have anything to do with any black Americans?

No, I understand – I remember ... I don't recall seeing any of them in – when I was in Moresby. At Morotai we had a perimeter just beyond where they had the Japanese camp and I understand that there were Negroes up there, and I remember one time we went up there in a bus and I did see – see them, that they were stationed at that perimeter. Um, but, no I didn't – there were none down on our part of the island.

Was this a deliberate sort of policy, that they didn't mix with the white troops?

I don't know whether it was or not, quite frankly. Um, but we certainly never ever received any invitations from their messes, so whether there was a policy or not I just don't know.

We've talked quite a bit about the end of the war already. Um, ... And yes, you don't remember VJ Day, yes. Um, yes we might have a little look at post-war. How long did you, after the war was over, which VJ happened ... VJ Day happened while you were in Morotai, how much longer did you spend in the army?

Well after coming home, I was discharged on the 13th of February '46.

She remembers that.

So I remembered that date because when people talk about the thirteenth being terribly, you know, very suspicious of it and you know, they don't like it, I say, 'Oh I don't mind it at all, that's the day I came out of the army', and I was quite happy to come out of the army then. I'd been in for a long time and I – I didn't know what I wanted to do but I knew that the war was over and I didn't want to stay in the army. So I just came out and didn't do anything for a while.

And then how long before you did get a civilian job?

Oh ... I don't know. Um, the next thing I did, I went to ... Oh that's right, I – I met a friend who told me that they – I didn't feel like going back on the machine, that's right, and I didn't know what I wanted to do, and Jill and I went to Melbourne and bought some clothes.

(25.00) And we came back and I – I didn't know what I wanted to do and my mother said, 'Well you can't be moping around this house', because apparently I was moping. I wasn't aware that I was moping but she told me I was and a friend of mind, who was a doctor and used to go to Balmain Hospital, told me that they were looking for somebody to – for their outpatients department. So I thought I'd quite like that. So I went over and I suppose I was there for about eight or nine years and there were two of us in the office and I quite enjoyed working there.

So was there – were there enough jobs to go around at that time? Was it difficult getting a job?

I don't think so. I can't ever remember anybody saying they were having any difficulty. It was more that they found that things had changed in that length of time and often they didn't want to go back to doing what they were doing beforehand and quite a few of us hadn't – hadn't learnt anything at all. They had stayed at home the whole time before the war because in those days, um, a father could cope with – with one daughter at home to help her mother. But times had even changed in that length of time. I think when they came back they – they all wanted to have a job of some sorts.

Mmm, yes I wonder if, um – I mean so many women must have been brought into the workforce during that period and then perhaps been forced out of jobs ... Yes, but you personally didn't have that experience of – of finding it difficult to get a job. It was more a question of deciding what you wanted to do.

Mmm, yes.

Did you ever think about any of the schemes that were available for training?
Did you ...

Oh post war reconstruction, yes. Um, I – I went – there was a Dr Martin, who was a senior lecturer in the Psychology Department at Sydney University and he had started a – it was

called the Australian Institute of Industrial Psychology – and he had started that ... I don't know whether it was during the war or just after the war – and it was more or less the nucleus of people who are now industrial psychologists and he had this two year course – it was a part time course – and I – I can't remember some – I can't remember now who suggested it to me – so anyhow I thought well, right, I'll do it. So, um, I went along – I think it was two nights a week – and I learnt the different types of groups, the factories and – and a lot of other things – and then it was suggested that perhaps I might like to take a job as a – as a ... interviewing people for positions in – in factories. Um, this was long before the degree business came in, you know, so anyhow I thought oh yes, well I wouldn't mind giving those tests. But when I was told that I would also have to suggest different changes to buildings and things like that, you know, whereby you would have to go to the top management and say, 'Well, you know, I don't think that – you know, that room is suitable for that type of – or work and that you ought to change your lighting', and all that sort of thing. I thought to myself, oh really, you know, I wouldn't care for that very much, so I declined. So that's when I was moping around the house and and I took this – you know, took the job at Balmain Hospital.

Right. Um, you didn't think about taking up nursing as a career?

No I didn't. I – I often wonder why, because later on I – I thought to myself I wouldn't have minded ... I should have, and the funny part of it is, none of us did.

None of the people who you were close to ...?

Yes, none of the people I was close to did. One girl went and started to do medicine but I don't think she ever finished.

(30.00) I think she got married and had a family. Um, but none of us that I was close to went into nursing. One did chiropody – or podiatry it is now, isn't it?

Was there any encouragement or a lack of encouragement to go into nursing?

I just think that – no there probably wasn't any encouragement, no, no. It was just up to the individual.

Mmm, um, and nowadays, you still keep up ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B.

Do you keep up with the people that you were in the services with?

Oh yes, I'm a member of the ex-AAMWS Association which covers all AAMWS, whether they went overseas or whether they were at – within Australia, and I'm also a member of the women's sub-branch of the RSL. Indeed I was their president for a couple of years and those girls I see quite frequently about once a month.

Do you march on ANZAC Day?

I do now, but funnily enough I didn't for many, many years. I used to watch the march and the 2/5th was a unit that was in Greece before the AAMWS joined that unit and a lot of those men were taken prisoners of war and a lot of them are just not well enough to march. So our secretary asked if we would march to fill the ranks a little bit. So for the last few years, yes, I have marched and it's rather funny. I have two grandchildren and I say to the girls, 'Can I – can I stand there so that when I get to King Street I can look and the children will see me'. So

they say 'Yes', and one year Luke said, 'Oh Grandma they didn't leave you on very long did they?'.

Isn't that cute. Uh, so what's it like marching on ANZAC Day? What are your feelings?

Well I try to keep my eye so that I won't fall over because the road's so dreadful. I – I don't know, I just – I don't know that I ... I'm glad when I get to Hyde Park because I'm feeling a bit tired but I think I march for – I think I started to march because I – I think there should be a march for the boys and if a lot of them are not well enough to march well at least they know that somebody is keeping it going.

Looking back on it, are the war years important in your memories?

Uh, oh yes, I think so. Yes, I think – I think in some ways I got a real mental block when I start to think of some of the things about the war.

What do you mean by that?

Well for instance, I never go to a war film because I'd absolutely make a fool of myself. I would – I would just start to weep, so I just ... People will say, 'Did you see the 'Bridge Over the River Kwai', and I'll say, 'No I didn't', and they'll say did you see so and so and I'll say, 'No I didn't'. And indeed I don't and if I know that something is going to be on ... for instance the other night when there was a film on about Vietnam and someone said to me, 'Oh now, don't forget to ...'. I just say to them 'No, I won't forget'. If there was nothing else on TV I wouldn't look at it. I just get so upset and I feel well there's no point in me wearing a hair shirt.

So what ... what do you ... what does it trigger off, I mean, to watch something like that, what do you recall from your own experience?

Well I think it's terrible to think of young men in their prime being mutilated. Um, oh, oh, you know getting things that will ruin their lives.

Did you see a lot of that then?

Oh I saw a lot of people with, you know, who had had gun shot wounds, who ... who'd been near a mine. Yes, yes I think I have.

Bearing in mind that you say you avoid films about the war, are there any, well, books or films that you have seen in your life that you think encapsulate your sort of experiences or how you feel about the war particularly?

I've never read – if I know it's going to be that I don't read them.

(5.00) Fair enough. So, have other people been interested in your war time experiences, do you think?

I don't think so, no.

Is that disappointing or a relief not to have to talk about it?

More of a relief not to talk about it, mm. And even with the people that we've been with. We might mention things now and again, but not very often. We tend to live – live in today, today.

Mmm, although it is important to you?

Oh yes, yes.

Yes. What sort of long term effects do you think it has had on you?

Well I – I think that when I went to Moresby, all I had ... The only hospital experience I had ever had was at the Ryde Hospital. All those things that, you know, people get perhaps when they're older, and little children with childish complaints that they would get over. I didn't see anybody who was about to die. The day after we went to Moresby the 2/33rd Battalion was going down into the Ramu Valley and, um, the um, the airstrips there were not similar – were not like the the ones in Sydney. They were just straight strips of land and the boys were in trucks going in a circular pattern and they'd been given their ammunition and hand grenades and things like that, and this Liberator was taking off and it ... When it was about to become airborne it didn't become airborne and it went straight into the trucks so that, um, the first morning on duty I would see things that I had never seen in my life before and quite horrified. Um, and I think that that was one thing that really horrified me and particularly later on when I was told that – that sort of thing had happened on a number of occasions and that it was sabotage. That, um ... Whether it was true or not I don't know, but they said that they used to put cotton waste in some part of the engine so that when the plane would become airborne, instead of becoming airborne it would come crashing down. So that – that was the – what was said at the time. Whether that was true or not I don't know. Then of course, at Morotai seeing the POWs, I think that, after having experienced those two things when I was ... particularly the Moresby one, when I had never seen anything like that in my life before. Um, yes, I think the war has made a great impression on me.

How did you cope that – that morning that you went on duty?

Um, well I ... I don't know quite frankly. You just do. I mean it's ... When one is young you just cope with things. I can't ever remember even being upset, but now when I think of it I become very upset. Uh, but when you – when you're young you can cope with those things.

They would mostly have been burn victims I imagine?

Yes, yes, very badly burnt and I can remember one – one man's head, you know, very badly ... Funnily – he did survive because he came to see me one time in Sydney. He was from Cessnock and, um, when he was well enough to travel, they sent him down to the 2/6th to Colonel Money, who was on the Atherton Tablelands and was a neurosurgeon and, uh, he looked after him there and then he came to Concord and he survived. But I've often wondered what happened to him now, you know, how he's going now.

Nurses I suppose, often feel that they're – that they have to develop a professional detachment from their patients. Was it the same for you?

Well I think we probably looked at the sisters and saw how they were coping and we knew that we had to help them and we just ... we just drew a bit of strength from them and we in our – we in turn apparently had it. Because I can't remember anybody falling by the wayside, ever.

(10.00) Mmm. Well thank you for telling me that. That's very – you know, it's very moving. It's good to have that. Um ... the only other thing to put on this part of the tape is about documents and that's really just a matter of reading in the sort

of things that we've talked about. A couple of questions though, talking about documents. Has there been a history written of the 2/5th?

Yes there has, but unfortunately I haven't got it. I – I've got it, but I've lent the book.

Is it any good?

Well I think it's – it's ... I think it's quite good. It's rather funny. I've got a rough copy here which I thought well I'll ... One of the sisters rang me and said, 'Would I do a little bit on a – on the plane accident coming home from Morotai', you see, so I rang a few of the girls and they came over and none of them had written a thing you know. We sat round the dining room table and here's the bits, you know, it's ... I sort of said, 'Well come on', and we started to write and somebody's put in a bit there and this is my scribble here and so then I wrote – I rewrote it. It took us the day. There was, oh Jill came, and Patty Sinclair and, who else, oh Nell Williams and Winsome Lipscome-Roach. Winsome couldn't come so she wrote me a bit. So then I sort of pieced all this together, you know, and said how lazy they were not to write out their own bits and – and sent it to Sister – Sister Naulder and it was put in the – in our book. And it's quite – you know, it's quite nice. But – I've read the book and I think, you know, from what I know of it, well and truly But you see they were in the Middle East and we weren't with them in the Middle East. We were with them in New Guinea and in Morotai. Some of the photos that they've put in I notice – they've put sisters. And we pointed out to them, there were quite a few of them they weren't sisters, they were us in the boats, going onto the island. But, um, yes I thought it was quite a good book. I'm sorry I don't have it with me, I could probably, you know ... I'll post it to you.

No, not to worry, it must be around somewhere. It just – I had some background reading before I came. That one wasn't listed but I think somebody else has mentioned it to me as well.

Yes.

I think we should – although we haven't dealt in detail with Morotai, I think we should put on record your coming back from Morotai. Tell me the story of what happened.

Well, we – we all went into – onto this Liberator and the Liberator has to have ballast, you know, to sort of take off. So quite a few of them had to go into the bomb bays, up this little tiny part, like that where they used to walk along and and then there'd be the bombs here. So the girls would have to crawl into the bomb bays and we're all in and I was in a little part up where the wireless operator was, you see. So we ... we came down from Morotai and we stayed the night in Darwin and then the next morning we went out and we got back in the plane and then as we went down the – the runway there, which was red gravelly sort of thing – we went down the runway, and as the plane was taking off, um, I think it must have come crashing down and then the next thing we saw was the engines at the side were all on fire, on that side and fortunately the pilot kept us on the red asphalt or whatever it was – the red rubble – and we didn't go off where we could have collected some grassy sort of stuff, you know, on the side he kept us there and then the plane came to a stop. We had an air force – a couple of air force boys were going down on leave from Darwin and one of them broke the perspex [perspex] and then we sort – they pushed us out and the plane went up. Oh we were very lucky we just all got out and bumph, up she went. So we considered ourselves to be very lucky and we stayed ... We were lucky to have, you know, have good pilots too. We stayed

the night at the hospital and then we went out – oh dear we were dirty too. We had all this red all over our – we had the – we had our, you know, trousers and safari jackets and of course, we'd lost all our personal belongings.

Because you were about to be discharged?

Yes, yes. And fortunately Rusty, whom I had tented with in Moresby was the Red Cross officer at the hospital at Darwin, so she came along and she brought us lipstick and perfume and oh goodness only knows what, Rusty came loaded down with stuff, you know. And then the next morning we went out and we got onto ... oh a Douglas – one of those Douglas transports.

(15.00) We went to Adelaide and then from Adelaide we went to Melbourne, and from Melbourne we came back to – to Sydney. And then they wouldn't let us go home. I think they thought we were all going to have nervous breakdowns. We went to ... to Burwood, to an AAWR barracks at Burwood and then from there we were given some fresh clothing and allowed to go home for a while.

You mean you were still in the same clothes?

We were still in the same clothes. Oh dear they were ... We did wash them in Adelaide and the ... We went to an AAWR barracks at Adelaide and the girls were really super there and we were very cold too, and they lent us overcoats and they lent us some clothes while we washed ours, you know. But we never ever got the red dirt – it was really ingrained, you know.

And is that the sort of memory that ... I mean is that ... You mentioned when I said what are your strongest recollections or what effect has the war had on you. Is that one that features up there with the other ...?

Yes, I think – I think – I think it does because I think that we could have, if we had been five minutes longer in that plane we wouldn't be here to tell the tale. Yes I think it does.

Mmm. Do you fly in planes now?

Oh yes, frequently, many times, many many times.

Before we started taping, you said that there was an incident that you had thought of that you wanted to tell me about, so please go ahead.

Oh yes. I can recall being in the mess in Moresby and we had a wireless there and I remember someone saying 'Come and hear Tokyo Rose'. So I did. Very staticky, but I – she spoke very good English and her message was to the troops to go home because all the Americans were in Australia taking their women away from them and how, when they returned home, you know, their girl friends and wives wouldn't be there. Which of course amused us immensely but we understand that it did – that it didn't have a great affect on the troops thank goodness.

Um, you mentioned that you only heard her once. Was – did people spend a lot of time ... How did they come to be tuned into Tokyo Rose?

I don't know because we certainly didn't have it on all the time. Um, I can only remember having listened to it this once and I think that was only because I was called over. Whether this person had a visitor who knew what time she – she did her recording or not, I just don't know. But we didn't listen to the wireless all the time, no.

Did people have wirelesses?

Well we certainly had one in the mess, but nobody had any – any little ones in their tent or anything of that nature no, no. No, we had lanterns in our tent.

What sort of lanterns?

Hurricane lanterns.

Would that – that was the way they were illuminated. Did you have electric light as well?

No, no. We, um ... I don't know whether – I think they had some electricity in the – in the mess, but no we didn't have any electricity in our tents, we had hurricane lamps.

Well I guess that's a good point at which to start talking specifically about New Guinea. Um, I think we pretty well covered how – well how old were you when you actually were sent to New Guinea?

Twenty-three. I had my twenty-third birthday in Brisbane before I left.

Tell me a little bit about the uniform that you wore. In fact we might need to backtrack and go on from the days of your voluntary part time experiences as a VA.

Well as a VA we had blue frocks with little white collars and we had navy blue capes that we wore in the ward and and little white voile veils with the red cross in the front and, um, our uniforms were navy blue with white blouses and navy blue ties. But then when we went into the army, we went into khaki and the uniforms were the same as the male officers' uniforms, apart of course, from the fact that we didn't have any pips on our shoulders. In New Guinea we also had – oh and indeed for working uniforms we had khaki with a white pocket and a red cross on the white pocket and the same veil and we didn't have capes though. We had khaki cardigans and ...

When you say they were the same as the male officers do you mean the marking ...?

Well with the – yes with the four pockets and the belt, um, and the fact that – oh a skirt, not trousers, and brown shoes and khaki type stockings. Um ...

(20.00) In the tropics we wore the same uniform during the day. The frock during the day, but instead of wearing stockings we wore woollen – short woollen socks – and they were marvellous because they absorbed the perspiration. We wore the same shoes. Then in the evenings we wore safari jackets and trousers with boots and gaiters. Um, the um, I think we had red crosses on our – on the arms of our safari jackets. So that more or less ... and instead of having the veil we used to tie the veil in a knot in the front and turn them in so that they were sort of a tight cap.

Was that effective?

Well yes, I think it probably was, yes.

A couple of questions come out of that. One, were you sorry to give away your blue uniform and go into khaki?

Oh yes, very sorry. You see when we first went into the army, they used to pay – they used to ... First of all they didn't do anything, then they pay ... When we went full time, that's right,

they paid us ... Look I think it was twenty pounds for what they called a uniform allowance and then I suppose that was all right when there were only a few people in but when they tended to have recruiting drives, well then I guess it got a bit out of hand and that's why we had to have, um ...

I've just thought of something funny. We – we had these white bonds, you know, pants, and they had the arrow, with a DD on each side of the arrow that reminded us of convicts, you know.

And what did DD stand for?

Defence Department.

Did people always wear regulation underwear?

Well I always did when I was in the army, yes. Not going to bed. I'd have my own night attire but – but yes, yes, we did.

Um, as I say there were two things that I thought of. Oh yes, did you, um – you said they gave you a twenty pound uniform allowance and out of that you had to buy your blue uniforms ...

... yes ...

... and that sort of thing. Were there other items that you had to buy for your service?

Oh I think – I think, um ... Did you mean clothing or other bits and pieces ...

... well either ...

... bits and pieces of clothing, yes. But we didn't ever have to ... Oh and we used to usually buy plates and things like that if we were moving, you know, to ... whereas once you were in the army you were issued with those things. But I don't think the twenty pounds ever covered everything one wanted, but it wasn't unreasonable in those days.

So you didn't get issued with – as indeed some of the nurses did – with a long list of things that you then had to go to David Jones to buy?

Oh, oh only that they would state the uniform was such and such and such and such and you went to David Jones a new – and you bought your uniform, yes. But I don't think the twenty pounds was unreasonable but it never covered everything, no.

Was there anything that you were required to buy that you didn't really need?

No, I don't think so.

Right. Did you feel that – with the khaki uniform you said that you were sorry to give away the blue uniform, was the khaki any less flattering than the blue or was it ...?

I think it was the colour more than anything else. It's an uninteresting colour. That's why I was so surprised when one season, not terribly long ago, I saw these models in khaki and I thought good heavens imagine choosing that colour and yet it was highly fashionable. We didn't like it at all.

But it was also sentiment that you were attached to ...

Oh yes, yes, quite.

Now what were those – did it worry you at all being in – in the malarial ... the tropical dress, the anti malarial dress of trousers because slacks were less worn in those days, weren't they?

Yes, that's true. Um, no, it didn't, it didn't worry me. As a matter of fact, we used to look rather funny and I can remember someone saying we all looked like elephants at the back – from the rear view. No doubt it was a male who said it too. And when we were looking, you know, we'd say, 'Well look, do you really think we look like an elephant?', you know, to each other. And think well gosh perhaps we do.

Still you adjusted to it all right?

Oh yes, yes. It didn't cause us any – any mental upset in any way.

And it was effective as a protection against mosquitoes?

Oh indeed, it was, yes. Yes, certainly.

It must have been pretty hot though, wasn't it? Were they very uncomfortable?

No, it's quite remarkable you know. I don't seem to – to have noticed it. I think some people felt the heat more than others.

(25.00) I was very fortunate. I didn't feel the heat a great deal but I had a friend there and her safari jacket, down her back – she'd have it on for a very short time and it would just be really wet – whereas I didn't suffer like that. But ... Funny thing, I can't remember anybody ever complaining about the heat. And yet if it's a hot day here, I'm sitting here putting the fan on and you know, in those days I just didn't seem to worry about it.

I wonder if it was youth, or devotion to duty. You mentioned when you first arrived in New Guinea you had the dreadful experience of having to cope with the injuries from the crash of the Liberator. What other – after that, how much experience had you had in coping with the sort of wounds and the sort of conditions that you experienced in the wards?

Yes well, after I – I worked in Ward 8 for quite a long time, which was a burns – burns on one end and facio-maxillary at the other end and then after the 7th Division went down into the Ramu Valley they had a lot of scrub typhus. Now Ward 13 was to be a female sick bay, and there were a few females there. Well then there were so many that they put the girls down into the lines, made a sick bay in the sisters' lines for them and they opened that ward as a scrub typhus ward and I went up there. I think I did some night duty ... Oh that's right, after I came from Ward 8 I did some night duty in a dysentery ward and then when I came off night duty they opened Ward 13 and I went up there and I spent the rest of the time in Moresby in that ward which was a scrub typhus ward and that – there was a lot of nursing in that scrub typhus ward.

What sort of things would you be doing?

Well ... in those days they didn't know a great deal about scrub typhus and they were experimenting a lot in as much as ... They boys as soon as they felt better they wanted to wash – they wanted to go out to showers to start off with and they wanted to feed themselves. Well

first of all they were not allowed to go to the shower, under any circumstances. They had to be washed. Then ... they were nursing them in what they called a Fowlers position and the MOs found that, you know, they felt they would change their position and then they had them in another position and then they ...

... what's a Fowlers position ...?

... Well that's sitting up with, you know, a sort of a semi upright position and then they had them lying down and they had – there were quite a few deaths in – from the scrub typhus. And then they said that even when the boys were starting to feel better they were not allowed to feed themselves, that they had to really remain rested and then we used to feed them too. And there was a lot of nursing went into the scrub typhus ward. We did a lot more there than actually ... In the surgical ward, the thing that I did mainly there was sterilising the – the instruments that the sisters were doing on the wounds, and it was fairly heavy and when you're doing it with a couple – a few primuses and sometimes the primuses were pretty old, you know, and they'd break down, um, that, you know, it was pretty worrying. Particularly – not that we ever had any in our ward, but I was told that on one occasion there was some cross infection and you know, and the sister said, 'Oh well if there's cross infection in this ward, we'll know who's responsible won't we?'. I was a bit shattered, you know, but that was the only thing that was ever said – said to me that you know, that I was a bit ... But I could imagine how she'd be feeling.

Well it must have been very difficult to maintain the same level asepsis that you'd heard in your lectures for example?

(30.00) Mmm. Indeed. I can always remember something really funny though. When I thought of primuses I thought of it. At one stage I was in a malaria ward and I'd become rather blasé about primuses, you see, and I had a cigarette lighter in those days and I'd forgotten that it was filled with high octane petrol. So I – I'd – we didn't bother to put the methylated spirits on that little part. We would just pump like mad and pump the kerosene up you see, and I then, put my cigarette light to it and bumph, up it went. And of course, I grabbed it and – and it and me went out into the road you see, outside and when I came back into the tent sister is looking up and saying, 'Oh nurse, where are you?' ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

START TAPE 3, SIDE A

Identification: this is tape 3 of an interview for the War Memorial World War Two sound archive. Angie Michaelis is interviewing Lila Stocks (nee Mackenzie) who served as an AAMW in the 2/th AGH in New Guinea and Morotai. Interview recorded at Mrs Stocks' home in Hunters Hill on the 17th of March 1989. End of identification.

What – what sort of nursing did you have to do with malarial cases?

Well once they'd had their rigor they more or less ... um, were well again, until they got their next attack of course. So we – we used to let them go out and shower and that. It was a – the malaria was an easier ward on a whole. It couldn't be compared with a surgical ward or a scrub typhus ward, or even in the dysentery. It was much easier than the – the patients were ... You had to be careful, they'd be up to some tricks you know. I can recall on one occasion, one

of them decided to make 'jungle juice', you know and you had to – have to keep very aware of what was going on in a – in a malaria ward, yes. Lots of fun.

How did they do it?

I don't know, except that suddenly you'd see a demijon, you know, and I can remember this sister in that malaria ward that I was talking to you about the primus business, she said, 'That man has got to go. He must go. He's well. He shouldn't be here.' But the MO apparently maybe felt that his spleen wasn't in the fit condition to go back to his unit and said, 'No sister, he must stay', and she said, 'But he's made some 'jungle juice', and the MO said, 'Has he?' and 'show it to me'. Of course when we went down it just wasn't there. Then when the MO would go it would suddenly turn up again, you know, it was quite remarkable how the ... we don't know how the boys manage it, you know, but of course, I think that the MO thought sister was making it up just to get rid of him. Instead of that, it wasn't so at all, you know. So I can remember one time on night duty we did find it and we, you know, brought it out and put it under the desk in the office, and then often early in the morning – in that ward – we used to go out and watch the 'biscuit bombers' go back ... They'd leave Moresby and go out very early in the morning to go to – to the units further up and drop them food.

What are 'biscuit bombers'?

Well they were very large transport aeroplanes and they used to take food to the boys, you know ... Well there were some in the valley and there were some going up Finschhafen, up that way, and, um, he must have crept out and collected ... because sister said, 'Oh I'll get rid of him tomorrow. I'll show this to the MO', and you know Captain so and so, I'll soon get rid of him. Blow me down, when we went back into the tent, he must have came out of bed and stole it and back he went.

Yes, I bet you you were pleased to see the end of him. Now you mentioned your experience with penicillin, did you get to use it at all?

No, never. No doubt some of the sisters may have, but no, I've never used it.

(5.00) Did you have anything to do with intravenous drips?

No, no.

Um, what was involved in – in dysentery – in nursing dysentery cases?

Well, they used to usually have two of us. One who would make the beds and bathe the patients, would be called a 'dirty' nurse and the 'clean' nurse would be the one who dealt with the food and she would bring the food and either feed the patient or – or give the patient the meal. But the person who – who was the 'dirty' nurse would not go into the day room at all.

And it would be her job to ...?

... to stay in the ward, yes. And – and, yes – yes, she would do some of the panning. There's usually in the dysentery wards, they'd also have a couple of male orderlies as well.

Mmm. Right. Um, and the – that raises the question of what – how was the work shared between yourselves and the male orderlies?

Well, we didn't have a great number of male orderlies because most of the male orderlies would be – would be in CCSs [Casualty Clearing Station] and – or forward surgical units, or

ambulance units. We did have some, yes, certainly and um, in some wards there'd be a couple and then perhaps in other wards there wouldn't be any at all and then – or there may be one – it just varied. I – I wouldn't know. In the surgical wards ... I can't remember any male orderlies in Ward 8 but there must have been some there. I really don't know, to tell you the truth.

Would there – where there were male orderlies as well as – as you, would there have been an overlap of duties or would they have just done the heavier work or done the cleaning or something like that?

Oh no, we all – we all did the same things, yes. Um, I suppose there would have been an overlap of duties. I think it depended on the individuals in the wards. You know, there'd be some who – that you'd get on with ... I always got on with the male orderlies very well actually. I remember in Ward 13 there was one – we used to work very well together.

Mmm. Now you mentioned nursing 'psych' cases at Kenmore, did you come across any 'psych' cases in New Guinea or Morotai?

Uh, no. Uh, well, yes and no. I can remember there was a boy in the surgical ward that had been brought down from a psychiatric ward and they did have a psychiatric ward there and I can remember I was there, but only for a very short time. They did have – they did have shock – but not ... I think they were insulin treatments. Yes, I don't think there were any electrotherapy there, no.

Some of this might apply at Kenmore?

Yes, Kenmore they had all types. They had ... Now I don't know whether they pronounce it 'cardiozol' [sic 'Cardiazol'] or 'cardioazol' because I've heard it pronounced both ways, but they had those. And they had insulin shock and they had the electrotherapy too. Uh, yes they had the three types that I can remember there.

Mm. Now my little questionnaire says that young men suffering traumatic shock were more likely to talk to nurses than to doctors in the psychiatric wards. Do you think that that was true at all?

Well, I didn't find it so.

Mmm.

I don't know. Maybe, um, some people did, but I – I didn't find it so. What used to happen ... one ward that I worked ... The – the, um, the night staff would give them the injections and when we came on, they would be just almost ready to come out and we would give them glucose to bring them out and ...

... and what was that for?

Well that was to bring them out of the insulin shock. Um, I think that was what we used to give them and then we used to give them lots of good nourishing food. Really big meals they had there – good wholesome meals – because as you could well imagine, in New Guinea and that they were living on bully beef and – and you know, very ordinary sort of ... just to keep them going. Well when they came down to Kenmore, that – they had really very good food at Kenmore. Um, and the same – the 'Cardiazol' were much the same. They were in um, ... They suffered from ... No, that's right, the 'Cardiazol' – it was very much like the insulin.

(10.00) The electrotherapy, they – I can remember, they used to be two of us and there

were two orderlies, a sister and a medical officer and there'd be two orderlies holding their legs and the other girl and I would hold an arm and the sister would put the thing on the head and the doctor would apply the shock and, um, then he – I can remember, we used to go out and we used to give them something – warm milk I think – and they used to suffer from a retrograde amnesia and they probably some of them wouldn't ... When they woke up they wouldn't be in the same ward, they'd have to go back to their own ward you see, and they would perhaps think they were still in the ward. They often couldn't remember that they'd had the shock, but it didn't seem to give them ... I think I was so horrified on the first occasion that the MO had said to me, 'You go out and talk to them because I am not doing anything that's hurting them', because I was appalled when I first saw it, as you could well imagine and – and I found that they were suffering from a retrograde amnesia, but then they seemed to be as right as rain and some of them, I don't think, have ever had any repercussion ... I don't know about – I've heard that some did, but I've never known any who did.

It may be rather a big question to ask, but do you think that these people were suffering from psychiatric illnesses or they were simply fairly normal reactions to some difficult situations they'd been in?

Oh dear I wouldn't like to say. I wouldn't like to say.

Did you feel that any of the people you came across, either in New Guinea or at Kenmore were malingerers?

No, I didn't ever have that feeling about any of them.

Mmm. Did you encounter any cases of men with self inflicted wounds?

Oh I believe there was one in Moresby that had drunk some – something and it had torpedo juice in it, but, um ... Oh that's right, I believe there were some who drank torpedo juice who'd – who died and we had another one in the ward and someone told me that he had – had something of that nature but he tended to get over it and, you know, left the ward. I suppose he went back to his unit.

What was torpedo juice?

Well I don't rightly know, but I'd imagine it must have been something that made the torpedoes go.

Some sort of petroleum thing?

Mmm.

Mmm. Now you didn't work as a theatre nurse ...?

Never, no.

(long pause) Many of the doctors were young and they were encountering a new range of wounds and diseases. Was that apparent?

Well no, not to me it wasn't. Well when I ... The young doctors that came to our unit never ever stayed. We – we, you know, some young ones would come up to the unit and, um, and they'd probably only be there a matter of days and they'd go off to an ambulance or a CCS or a – you know, I mean our doctors appeared to all be round about middle aged and they were mainly specialists in their fields.

Yes, that's what I've of heard from the other nurses as well actually. Air raids. When and where did you ever come across any air raids?

Well there was a very little one when I was in Moresby and we – we sort of knew that it wasn't our plane – you could tell by the noise. So we went out and had a look to see what it was and there was a notice on the notice board from the CO asking the nursing staff to please, when there was ... when there was enemy aircraft overhead would they mind not coming – coming out and looking up. So that was the only one in Moresby and then the – the ones ... We had a couple at Morotai and they came over and they dropped some pamphlets saying that they – that they knew there were women there and that they were going to come over, you see, and I can always remember one of our sisters saying, 'Oh dear I hope they woo me first'. But after – after a couple of those the planes went out but I – I understood that there were Japanese planes on the – in the Celebes and we were in the [Halmahera?] and you could sort of, on a clear day, see the Celebes but with the, you know, how MacArthur went up and he sort of kept cutting off.

(15.00) Well they had no fuel or very little fuel, so the Americans – I think they were Americans – would go out and just sort of – you know sort of drop a couple of bombs on them I think, probably to make sure their planes couldn't come over any more. But I didn't encounter ... But I understand before we arrived in Moresby they had some very nasty raids there.

Right. Um, so, yes, it would be fair enough to say you weren't overly frightened during the air raid in Moresby.

Oh no. I think there were about two planes, something like that.

Now this is – it's what I say to everyone – it's my favourite question. Which particular feature of New Guinea nursing conditions do you recall as being most difficult to cope with – the heat, the wet and mould, inadequate equipment, understaffing, insect and animal life?

Oh. Oh, let's think. Well I – it was the first time I'd ever seen cockroaches and they were huge.

Drummoyne was different in those days.

Drummoyne was very different, we didn't have any cockroaches in Drummoyne, but my goodness me, I've never seen such cockroaches. I don't know. I – nothing tended to worry me. I think everything was so different to anything that I had ever experienced in my life that it was all, you know, I sort of took it as 'oh goodness me is that so?' You know, I just took it in my stride.

Mmmm. So you weren't – were you troubled by understaffing? Did you feel that you were overworked, understaffed?

No. No I never felt that.

How long a day would you have worked?

Oh goodness me. Isn't it dreadful. I can't even remember how long I worked. It seemed to be fairly early in the morning. I think we used to rise fairly early. Then you see you'd break your day. You'd work perhaps to one o'clock and then you'd have the afternoon off and you'd

perhaps work from six till nine or something like that, you know. You had days split up so I really wouldn't know how long.

Um, it's probably more the case in the early days when casualties were coming over the Kokoda Trail and that would ... How would casualties ...?

... I wasn't there during the Kokoda Trail.

Mmm. In that case it says sometimes injuries and diseases, it might have been two weeks that they'd gone virtually untreated – or they were at least two weeks old before they got to them. Would you have had that experience at all or would casualties have been coming by air?

Yes, most of ours did come by air and then the ambulances bring them out from the strip. I know that – that we were set up as a 500 bed hospital and towards the end of '43 we had over 1,000 patients there. Um, it was very crowded because the 9th Division was – they were going up the coast and then the 7th Division was in the Ramu Valley so that we had a ... We really had a lot of patients – a lot of patients. I can remember seeing the ambulances, you know, coming in – in a convoy. Um, but people tended to cope.

Was equipment adequate to cope with that?

Well yes. Apart from the fact that the primuses were always going bung. Um, I suppose – yes, well I suppose the sisters would know more about the equipment, but I've never heard anybody complaining about it. Let's put it that way.

Right. Did you work with any non-European patients?

Oh in Morotai we had some ... I suppose they'd be Indonesians and we had one particular funny one called Ahmed and he had two wives. He had his ring wife who lived in Java and then he had his Morotai wife that he'd bought with so many animals. I've forgotten now what they were now, and he used to say that he was looking after us and he used to sit with a – a helmet on his head and sometimes at night, if you'd come round a corner quickly, it'd give you such a fright. And then there were also some Indonesians and the boys used to laugh. They would have been in the army something like sixteen years and they'd still – would never have had promotion. The boys used to say oh dear, look at this rapid promotion they get in their Indonesian army. But, um ... only a few not very many.

And no New Guinean patients?

No, I've never met any New Guinean ones. Whether there were any or not I wouldn't know.

And you didn't get any Japanese POWs at any point?

Well there were POWs – Japanese POWs – at Morotai but there were never any in the wards in which I worked.

Just going back a little bit to the air evacuations. Do you remember the air evacuations from Nadzab?

(20.00) No I can't remember those.

No, right.

I can't remember any particular ones, you know.

No, they may have gone to the 2/9th at that time anyway. Uh, we've talked on the first tape or the second tape, I can't remember now, but in the first questionnaire about how you got into the AAMWS and about how you went to train at Ingleburn. In hindsight, how adequate was your training for what you met in New Guinea?

Oh I think it was probably adequate. Um, I think some people had more – had more idea of what had to be done than others. Um, as with anything some people have got more aptitude than – than others, but I think we all did very well and we all seemed to work together quite well. I think it was adequate for what we – we were expected to do.

If you were organising training for someone, would you concentrate on the same things they concentrated on? What sort of tasks would you set up?

Well, I think perhaps I would give a little bit more thought to medical terms – the medical terminology – because there were very many things that – that were written in the reports that we were supposed to read, that quite frankly were just beyond my comprehension because I didn't know what they meant. But I think probably in that – that area they could have perhaps made a little bit of a difference.

So you would be given – there would be a medical report that came with a patient and your instructions would be in that, would they?

Well no, the sister used to write a report and she would expect you to read it when you came on duty in the morning. Now in some wards that would be all right, I could understand it, but then in others I would not be able to understand.

And I suppose it's useless saying 'Can you give me an example?' because it's the sort of thing that might be hard to remember.

Well I can remember ... I just decided well what's the use, I won't bother reading it and then sister was quite annoyed with me, you see, because I ... She said, 'Have you read it?' and I said, 'No, there's no point in my reading it because I can't understand it', and she said, 'Well the only way to learn is to read it and ask a few questions'. But then when you were ready to ask questions, perhaps that person would be so very busy they wouldn't have time to ... So I think probably from that angle it would have been helpful if we had had some time on report reading and medical terminology.

Mmm. Did you ever find yourself expected to perform tasks that you had no training for at all?

Oh no, I think that if we were ever asked to do something we were told the manner in which it had to be done if it was such that they would know that we wouldn't have ever done it before. No, I didn't ever feel that way.

Now my background notes here say that most of the – most of the AAMWS did general duties in kitchens, wards, and messes, about thirty per cent of the service acted as nursing and ward orderlies. Well now, clearly you were part of that thirty percent. Was there any distinction between those who – who nursed and those who did the washing up?

No. I – I didn't think so. I've never noticed it.

Did the girls that you shared the tent with, for example, were they all in the – in the wards?

Well actually Rusty was in charge of the sisters' mess at one stage. Kath was a nursing orderly in New Guinea and in Morotai I – I shared with Jill Linton and June Stafford and we – the three of us were nursing orderlies.

So you might tend to hang together because you were doing ... because you met each other doing the same kind of work?

Oh no, we would have decided ... For instance when I went to Moresby, Sue introduced me to a couple of girls who was looking for a third to – for the tent and then in um ... They didn't go to Moresby. Um, Jill – the people that Jill tented with in Moresby were not going to Morotai so she was alone, I was alone, the people who 'Staffy' lived with in Moresby weren't going to Morotai, so she was alone. So we three just got together. Um, it wasn't – it was just a case of finding somebody to tent with.

Mmm. So just – I mean clearly you worked in a number of wards while you were in Moresby, perhaps you could just get me ... give me an idea of say that one of the first wards that you were allotted to. What would your duties have been?

(25.00) Um, making beds, giving of – particularly for the facio-maxillary they'd have their jaws wired – so we'd have to make up liquids so that we could put the – feed them, to allow a rubber tube to go into the mouth, we did that. And, um, we did the sterilising and helped with the meals. That would be the extent, but that would keep one going, I can assure you because there would have been thirty-six patients in facio-maxillary and there were thirty-six patients up the other end with burns and the burns had to be fed too, some of them, because they were ... they had bandages all over their faces, you know, and they had to ... Often you would feed them and as you brought out the rubber from the cup, you'd have the – you know the part of their skin from the inside of their mouths on the – on the rubber of the feeding bowl, you know, feeding cup. So that was fairly – a very heavy ward.

Uh, would plastic surgery have been, if it was performed, that would have been performed back in Australia?

Um, I think probably most of the big stuff was, you know. I can remember at Morotai the – the OC surgical at Morotai was a Colonel Starr who was a plastic surgeon – um, Colonel Ken Starr – and I know that he did some up there. I don't know, quite frankly, in Moresby whether they did any or not.

What would be the policy with say bad burns cases?

I would think they would have done – I think they would have probably done some in Moresby too, yes.

Mmm. So not necessarily evacuation straight back to Australia with serious cases?

Not until they'd be well enough to travel certainly, because a lot of those people were – men were not well enough to travel.

How long might some of your cases have spent in hospital?

Oh.

I seem to ask a lot of 'how long' questions, it's not fair.

I suppose probably a month, maybe – maybe a bit longer.

[noise on tape] Must not do that. What interaction did you have with native men and women in New Guinea?

Oh, no interaction at all. I can remember on one occasion, it was my day off, and I went riding with the Pack Company – they used to have a Pack Company there for going up the Kokoda Trail apparently, they were there for that – and they were still there and we used to go out riding and I can remember going over a bridge – I don't quite know where – and seeing the native women all together down by the water, and they were in the water and ... That's the only time I saw native women and they were – they were all together in a camp I guess, and then just the couple of natives that used to come in and do our ironing in Moresby and then those that acted as waiters down at the club. But never any interaction.

Well tell us a little bit – more about the club because we're onto the social life section?

Oh right. Well we had an officer in charge of all AAMWS at all hospitals in New Guinea – Major Christy – and, um, she felt that we needed a little bit of relaxation, so they built this club down at Bootless Bay and a couple of the girls went down and acted as hostesses and we danced and we had meals down there and we would spend our rest day there and it was very enjoyable. I'll show you a little photo after of – of us down at the beach – and it really ... it was really marvellous. We'd just – we'd hop on the back of a truck and down we'd go and spend our day there and then ... and we could swim there so long as we put shoes on because of the ... We had special shoes that we used to wear because of the coral and we were told not to go out beyond the reef because they had those sea snakes there and they were the type that if one was bitten it acted on the nervous system and consequently was quite fatal. So not too many of us swam over the reef. We kept well and truly inside the reef. But it was – it was very nice, yes, lovely.

So what else might you have done in your off duty hours?

Well I – I used to go riding now and again with the Pack Horse group. Um, some of the girls went picnicking ...

END TAPE 3, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE B.

We were talking about your leisure activities. You went riding with the Pack Horse people – you didn't go picnicking.

No. Mainly riding or down to the – down to the club. Before the club was built, um, it just, you know, I just went riding.

Did you have any concert parties visit?

Oh yes, yes, we did. We had – we had one group called – they called Shells A-Poppin' and their leader was the famous Horrie Dargie and even though I didn't ever meet him personally, I met different ones in the band because they – they had their headquarters in Moresby and all

the props and things like that. But then various ones flew away to different units to – to entertain the troops, but there'd always be a couple left in Moresby to look after things and they used to come down to the club and play.

Were they basically a dance band?

Oh I think they could do almost – they could play almost anything because they were all very good musicians. They did play for us to dance but then they used to also play, um, some of Duke Ellington's and they were really super ... great fun. Really I was very fond of them, yes.

Did you get anyone up visiting from Australia? I know people – well who do you remember?

Oh yes, oh yes. Um, I can remember Gladys Moncrieff came and ... oh another singer. Oh dear oh dear, isn't that dreadful. She's quite well known too – from Broken Hill. Help me out? Um ...

... Strella Wilson is a name that I've had mentioned, no?

No, that – no that's not the one I'm thinking of. June Bronhill, I think she came.

Oh really, oh – I didn't think she ...

... oh yes, I think so ...

... would have been that generation.

... Maybe I'm getting mixed up. Maybe it was Strella Wilson. Look, I can just remember one really, and that was Gladys, but I know we had two who came and stayed actually with us and then they went on, you know, else ... to other spots.

What about other concerts? Would the troops sometimes get up concerts?

I don't know, maybe ... We had one – we got up one concert ... and I remember – I don't know which concert party it was – but I know that some of our girls went in it and some of the sisters went in it, you know, and I can remember the end finished up with the 'Rose of No-man's Land' all very weepy sort of thing, you know. But not that any of us were weeping but ... And of course the Americans used to bring up people from time to time. I can remember Francis Langford and – I can't remember ... Oh isn't it dreadful, I can't remember too much – not much of a help.

Well you've remembered, um – yes, about the open air films.

Oh yes, yes. Oh well that went on – oh quite a few nights during the week. Mmm.

Uh, it's been said that quite a number of nurses found marriage partners as a result of their service in New Guinea.

Oh yes, yes, yes. We had one marriage that I can remember in Port Moresby and – and we had a florist there who ... we had flowers there. You know, the fragipannis were beautiful, and she made the bouquet and ... Mavis Bentley made a wedding frock out of cheese cloth and mosquito bits and – oh yes, yes. And I think there were a couple in Morotai. I didn't go to those, but I went to the one in Moresby, yes, yes.

When you say a florist made it, was it someone on the staff who was a florist?

Well she was a florist before she came into the army and she was a florist when she left the army, although she's retired now.

(5.00) Wonderful. So would you get – would you get something special in the way of a celebration meal for a wedding?

I don't know that they did, but I know that they went on a honeymoon.

Where did they go?

I can't remember, but they sort of shot off and had a – had a few days honeymoon.

We are coming almost – well we really have sort of come to the end of the, um, questionnaire, unless ... Are there any more aspects of social life, off duty hours that you can remember?

Uh, no. We – we did invite people to come to the mess and we'd – I think we ... I think ten o'clock was our curfew and – but they would come out and sit in front of the mess. And I can remember, it was very funny, we used to have orange juice and we'd also have black currant juice and we'd loved the black currant juice. So that our guests would drink the orange, this other friend of mine we used to say – oh I don't know if I'm supposed to say this or not – we used to say, 'Would you like a glass of boong's blood?' and the boys would say, 'Oh we'll have the orange juice thank you', and we would drink the blackcurrant juice.

And you said that you didn't have any slang terms amongst the girls.

I – I don't know that – that ... I mean in those days it was quite – quite – you know, one could say that, but I suppose in these days I'd probably get into trouble for saying such a thing, wouldn't I?

Well I'm sure it wouldn't – it would be considered more offensive but was 'boongs' the usual term for the natives?

Well yes, I think – I think sometimes ... Not that we ever talked about them as that but it's just that someone must have given the black currant juice that name and we used to refer to it as that.

So you would – I mean – if ... What would you have called Wellington if you were describing him to someone else?

Oh I wouldn't have – I would just say ... I would call him by name. I would just say Wellington or I would say oh one of the natives. I didn't ever actually call them that, you know.

Right. Anything else that comes to mind of the good days, or the bad days?

No, not really

Well. ...

END TAPE 3, SIDE B.