



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Title	(NFX131141/NX131141) Linton (née Oliver), Jill Edith (Private)
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Description	<p>Jill Edith Linton (née Oliver), Private Australian Army Medical Women's Service, interviewed by Angie Michaelis for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archives of Australia in the War of 1939–45</p> <p>Discussing joining the Voluntary Aid Detachment [VAD]; training; assignment to the 2/5th Australian General Hospital; change to AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service]; nursing in New Guinea; contact with American servicemen in Papua New Guinea; nursing POWs; uniforms; working conditions; use of drugs for skin diseases; leisure.</p>

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Identification. This is an interview recorded by Angie Michaelis with Mrs Jill Linton who served with the AAMWS, as a nurse in New Guinea and later Morotai. Interview recorded at Mrs Linton's home in North Sydney on 20th March 1989. End of identification.

Right, well to begin with then, when and where were you born?

I was born in England, Portsmouth, on 7.7.21.

And when did you come out to Australia?

I came first to Australia in 1932.

So you were in the middle of your schooling then?

Yes.

And where were you educated?

I was educated partially in England, first off by a governess and then a college in Surrey, then when I came out here I was educated at Wenona at North Sydney.

And what level did you go to?

Leaving as it was then.

Yes. After you completed your Leaving, did you go straight into nursing, what year was that?

Dear, memory.

Approximately.

I really didn't have long from leaving school to when the war broke out, so I hadn't I'd started to learn to fly and then the war came, so everything became completely different and a friend of mine, an old friend whom I'd known since I was about the age of five, she said she wanted to join what was then the VADs which was a local detachment in the area and we just progressed from there. We went to the army after that.

Can I ask you a bit more about learning to fly? Did you plan this as a profession or this was an interest you'd always wanted to do?

Oh it really happened by accident. I had a cousin at the time, he was keen on flying, he used to take me up quite often and he introduced me to Kingsford Smith and he was the first one that really got me interested in flying.

How exciting. How far had you progressed?

I didn't get very far, I was only flying Tiger Moths.

Still sounds pretty impressive to me.

Not really, not really.

So did you start you started just part time as a VA?

Yes, yes. It was a yes VAD means voluntary aid and we used to go to hospitals, and we had to go to lectures and things. Go to meetings and sort of learn learn the rudiments of nursing.

Now what got you interested in that?

My friend really. You see I couldn't fly and everybody felt patriotic. We had to do something and she said 'Come and do this with me' so this is what I did.

Can I just back track a little bit for a couple of background questions. What political affiliation, if any, did you have at the start of the war?

Wasn't really conscious of any. I suppose I would have been a what were they, they weren't Liberals then were they they were

The UAP [United Australia Party] I suppose was

Yes, UAP, yes.

And what about religion?

Church of England.

Was religion important to you?

No, I wouldn't say it was important but it was there, it was, you know, I'd probably go to church. I wouldn't say I went every Sunday.

Did the war make any difference to your, well to either your religious or your political beliefs?

No, no.

And what, sorry, did you want to say more?

No, I'm just trying to think what it did make a difference to, but it certainly wasn't religion and it wasn't politics. Can't come to that for a moment.

No, perhaps later on that will come to you. What class did you consider yourself?

Middle.

Now. You were were you employed in any fulltime work at the outbreak of war?

No.

Were you married, well you couldn't be married when you enlisted in the AAMWS or is this a so had you married before that?

When I changed my name it was I'm sorry, I can't

You'd rather not talk about that. Fair enough. OK, before the outbreak of the war had you any military connections in the family at all?

No. My father was in the navy. I suppose you think I should go to the WRANS but I didn't.

(5.00) Why not?

Well there again, that was in England, and I didn't have any affiliation with the navy here, and it was as I say, my friend she said 'Come and join the VAs'.

Was the naval connection at all important in your wanting to serve in the services at all?

Probably, yes, I should think so. I had a twin brother who was still in England and of course he was in the navy and I suppose I just sort of felt well everybody's doing it, I'll do it.

Had you did you think of yourself as an Australian or as an Englishwoman at that point?

English.

So was a desire to help either England or Australia in the war effort, an element?

[inaudible] it was all just the one.

Well that's what Mr Menzies said was it not.

Was it?

When he declared war he said 'Britain is at war, therefore we are at war'.

Oh that's right, yes, yes. I'd forgotten about that.

So do you remember, you said that you were brought in as it were by a friend. Do you remember when you first enlisted, or enlisted may be the wrong word for actually joining the VAD to start with.

I just remember going to a meeting up here at the North Sydney Council Chambers, but I couldn't tell you the date. It would have been about, possibly two months after the war broke out I imagine.

So, well yes it does suggest it was definitely a war related thing, it wasn't a ...

Oh, for sure, oh yes.

Was there any other social reasons or anything like that?

No, no, not at all.

So then how did you come to go from the part time service with the VAD into full time?

I think that as a detachment, so many of them were going into the army full time, so that I probably just followed along. They were doing it, I did it.

How old would you have been when you enlisted in the army?

Nineteen.

And do you remember that point, do you remember going along to wherever?

Yes, I do. Yes, I went out to Victoria Barracks, I do, and we were still in those days of course, even though we're in the army we're still VADs. We didn't wear the khaki uniform, we wore the blue uniform.

Yes it wasn't until about 1942 that they changed over?

Yes, well late in '42, was more, was nearly '43 they changed over.

So what do you remember about that enlistment, what sort of things did they ask you?

Oh, I'm sorry, I can't I think they just asked general questions. It was all very quick, very formal. You shuffled in and out and given a medical and I don't think They didn't bother to sit down and have a little chat. They just said 'Right, your number now is so and so' and away you went.

You're in the army now. Did you have to have references either when you originally joined the VAD or then?

No.

No, right. So, just following through some of the questions here. When you joined the VAD, or when you joined the army, was there any thought that it might affect your career, that you might for example, get some experience in nursing and choose nursing as a career. Had that occurred to you at all?

No, no.

When you filled out your papers, did you tell any lies about your age, occupation or religion or fitness?

No.

Right. So, when you were in the army, what sort of service training were you given?

First of all we went to a camp hospital at the showground and we were virtually not given any training. Nothing at all, we just went straight in and we just worked in the old pavilions which were made into wards which were absolutely enormous. Beds upon beds and we just seemed to spend our day being told what to do by the various matrons etcetera, and you just gained knowledge every day. Nothing sort of organised to teach you.

What sort of duties would you have been doing?

Very basic nursing, very, but it was only a camp hospital so there was no major nursing. It was mainly things like outbreaks of measles and chicken pox and rashes and flu and then they started to get a few malarias down, but it was nothing very critical.

Would it have been purely what you call nursing duties or were there any domestic duties as well?

Oh no, it would be more on the domestic side. But just one thing I have remembered, before we went to the camp hospital we had to go to a public hospital and I went up here to North

Shore and we had to do it for six weeks, every day, which I absolutely loathed and nearly gave up.

(10.00) What did you loathe about it?

I think probably the matrons and the charge sisters. They were just so unbelievably cruel. The first day I got there, and of course I was young, I was nervous and they said the matron, the charge sister of the ward said 'You will go down and lay out Mr So and So, he died last night' and I said, 'But I have never even seen a dead body let alone lay one out'. She said 'I will give you a book on it and you will go and do it' and that, you know that sort of started me off and I went home and I said, 'I'm not going back', but I was told I had to, and I had so many demeaning things to do, some horrible things to do, and as I say I nearly gave it up many a time but I didn't.

So what did keep you at it? I mean the difficulty of getting out because you were enlisted in the army?

Oh no, no, that didn't seem to worry me at all. I suppose being told that I had to do it and

Being told by your family, your friends, or by your superiors?

Superiors and the friends possibly, and I thought oh well, I suppose I've got to do it. This is the war and this is it.

Did it get any better when you got to the showgrounds?

Yes, I wasn't – we were treated better.

Why do you think that was?

I think the old fashioned matrons and the charge sisters were always like that. I think they were like it to young nurses coming up. I don't think it was only us. I think that I saw many a young nurse in tears by the rudeness and the quite unwarranted demands of these women.

What then made the army nurses at the Showground Hospital for example, what made them that bit more flexible or kinder than the others?

Because it was a completely different set-up. As I say there was nobody really sick I mean they were sick but they weren't critical or that and it was a very lax atmosphere. Nobody seemed to take life seriously. If you got on duty late nobody worried, it was that atmosphere. Because I think everybody knew they weren't going to be there for very long.

And how long were you there?

I think I was there, six or nine months I imagine. Wait a minute, I'll try and work it out.

It's that last page where the service may have the details on.

Yes, that's right. Yes about six months.

Were the other, well not AAMWS at that stage, but the other VADs that you were working with, were they similar to you in age and background do you think?

Yes.

Same sort of motivations for joining?

Yes I think so.

So you found obviously, well the conditions when you did your six weeks stint extremely difficult. This was, it was basically a question of discipline, was it?

I suppose they thought it was, I don't know.

But the actual army discipline if you can make, summarise it that way was certainly no more strict than the hospital discipline had been that you'd come across.

Yes, but we really didn't, we weren't under the army as such very much. After we left the Showground we went out to Ingleburn because we were joining the unit to go up north to Port Moresby so it was very like a staging camp but they treated us as the army and we had to do parades and had to do clean latrines and do all those things. But, it wasn't all that hard. As far as I can remember I got a bit bored with it all because you knew you weren't going to be there and you wish you'd hurry up and get away.

You were obviously keen to get overseas.

Well not completely the overseas, but just to get to doing something.

So how long would that Ingleburn period have been, do you think?

Oh about six weeks.

And what this was presumably service training, you mentioned parade ground

They called them holding camps until you're away you knew you were waiting for the next move but you had to stay somewhere until everybody was ready and there was transport ready to take you to the next move.

(15.00) So was there any I'm sorry

Sorry, but we, after that we went up to Brisbane. We picked up a hospital train and went up to Townsville and then a ship across to Moresby.

So was there any aspect of service training then in the Ingleburn thing? I mean, did you do drills so that you could do parade ground was there any physical training. Was there any more medical training?

No, I think you just did drill because everybody at Ingleburn did drill.

Right. Do you remember anything about the people that you worked that you were under there, and their attitudes compared to the ones you'd come across so far?

Not really, no. They weren't attached to Ingleburn and we were just going through and they didn't make any impression on me at all. They weren't hard or anything.

So from the time you were sent to Ingleburn, you were aware that you'd been allotted to the 2/5th?

The 2/5th, yes we knew that. We had that's when we got into khaki.

Right. In fact because that was the you were actually wearing khaki well there are some questions about the actual change-over from blue uniforms to the khaki uniforms. Perhaps I'll come back to those ones later. When did you hear then that you were going to be sent on from Ingleburn to did you hear at that point that it was going to be New Guinea eventually?

Nobody said anything because nobody you weren't supposed to say but everybody knew. I don't know why we knew but we knew.

Right. Well then, what you went by train to Brisbane and then to Townsville. Can you remember anything about that journey? It must have been fairly onerous travelling in war-time Australia.

Yes and the hospital trains were incredible because if you can you know how the size of the carriage but there were three bunks on each side so that to get into the bunk, you couldn't do it sitting down, you had to slide in more or less horizontal, and it was so slow. I've forgotten now how long it took to get up to Townsville, but it seemed to be forever, because any train that came we were put on the shunting line and we just had to wait till that one came and went and then we were moved off again.

And did you stop in Brisbane for any length of time?

Not long. We were maybe a week or something a short time.

Were you excited at this point. Did you feel you were actually getting into something that was closer to some real work?

I suppose I was. I was just restless. I wanted to be doing something and I was glad that we at last looked as though we might be getting somewhere.

Did you want to be sent overseas were you, or did you have any reservations about it?

I think I must have because you didn't have to be it was to be overseas was completely voluntary. Nobody in the war was sent overseas if they didn't want to be, so I presume I must have wanted to be.

So they may even have asked you back at that initial interview or something?

Yes, I think now you say that, I think they probably did say would you be prepared to go overseas. So that's possibly when it happened.

When did you develop, if you did, develop some loyalty to the unit, to the 2/5th AGH [Australian General Hospital]? Would it have been right from the beginning or when did that grow?

Oh no, it wasn't the beginning because we didn't really know. I think it just probably grew slowly.

How long and all these how long questions are difficult they don't have to be answered exactly but how long roughly, were you in Townsville? Was that again just a staging?

Yes, very short I think we more or less got off the train onto the ship.

Right. Do you remember that embarkation process?

Yes, but I'm trying to remember the name of the ship but I can't.

Some people went on the hospital ship the *Manunda*, some people went on the *Canberra*.

We didn't go on a hospital ship from there. We went on a hospital ship to Morotai.

Right.

It was the *Wanganella* then.

Oh yes, that's another name I've heard. Was it a troop ship that you were on?
Was it a converted liner, some were?

Well I wouldn't hardly say a liner, it was little. But it was a troop ship and flat bottom so we rocked at every little ripple.

(20.00) Did you get sea sick?

No, I travelled a lot on ships and I don't get sea sick.

You did have a father in the navy after all. Do you remember anything about that trip. Was it very crowded?

Very crowded.

Now this is a question that nobody has been able to answer and that is how long did it take to get from Townsville to Moresby. It may have varied, or it may, it's not a very significant thing. What's your recollection?

I would have felt four or five days. But it certainly doesn't it didn't make an impression. I know I was glad to get off.

And what would conditions have been like on the ship? Did you mix with you were travelling with men on the same ship. Did you mix with them?

Not allowed.

So it was just the other AAMWS and you were fairly strictly supervised.

Um, um.

(20.00) Did you get up to any entertainment or how did you occupy yourselves over those few days?

We certainly didn't have entertainment that I can remember. All I can remember was playing cards and reading.

Had by this stage you formed some friendships with other girls?

Yes and this friend that I was talking about, Joan, before, she was onboard with me because we stayed together a lot of the time.

Oh right, this is the one you'd actually joined the VAs with, and she'd gone along with you to enlist at the same time, that sort of thing?

Um, um.

So when you arrived in Moresby, this wasn't your first experience overseas. Was it your first experience of what we now call a you know, a third world country?

Not really, no. I'd lived in India a little bit and I'd been to South Africa so it didn't have any impression that way.

So what were your impressions of Moresby, or of New Guinea?

I was surprised at how like Sydney it was. Australia.

In what way?

The growth, the vegetation, the dryness. I thought it was going to be all wet and dripping, the forests and things, but it wasn't. Moresby wasn't but up in the hills of course was, and the surrounds, but Moresby itself, I was the dusty roads.

Was it dry season when you arrived?

Must have been, yes.

During the period that you spent in New Guinea, how much did you keep in contact with what was happening in Australia?

Only the odd letter, nothing else. Oh, there was a wireless in our recreation area but it was such a terrible wireless and the static was so awful I don't I didn't bother about it much really.

What were mail services like?

Oh quite good, quite good considering everything.

And did you find the fact that your letters were censored made a difference to your ability to communicate?

Oh yes, it does, it does. But I learnt ways of getting my message over.

Can you give me an example?

Oh for instance if I wanted somebody to know where I was, I always used to say now look, I'm writing this letter today and I'll write you another one in a couple of days. But each time I would put a different initial to say for instance I wanted to tell somebody I was in Morotai I would say Mr and Mrs M, the first letter, Mr and Mrs A [sic], for the second, whatever the surname was, they ultimately got the message as to where I was. And you'd work out all sorts of little devices like that.

That's actually fascinating. Nobody has mentioned to me that sort of code at all, I find that most interesting. Were your letters saved, were you able to look at them afterwards?

No, I never saw them. Probably weren't worth it, you see after a while, what do you write about? It's the same thing every day. You can't say in the letter we were bombed once again

and all those sort of things are cut out so you become very stereotype, just the whole lot were sentences really. I suppose it just lets people know that you're still in the land of the living.

What about other things that might have kept you in contact with Australia. Do you remember any of the army newspapers or the magazines that were produced?

Not a lot, no I don't. In fact I don't think we saw very many.

One that I've heard mentioned is called *Guinea Gold*.

Yes, yes.

I don't know if that came out weekly or daily.

We certainly didn't see it daily. Those sort of papers were put in the mess somewhere and if you picked them up and read them you did and otherwise you didn't bother about it too much. But I used to have a great friend who was on Sunderland aircraft and he used to come back and forth to Australia, so he used to bring me up messages and things. So that I didn't really worry he used to bring the Sydney papers up to us, so I didn't really worry about the local papers.

I'll just raise the question, I can understand why you wouldn't have joined the navy, why didn't you join the air force nursing service? Was it in operation then?

Well the VADs didn't go into the air force, they only went to the army.

Right, I'm with you. Just a couple of questions about New Guinea, I mean clearly it was under Australian, well it was under military rule at the time, but did you have a chance to observe at all the politics or the way the country was run apart from the war effort?

No.

What about relations between the races?

The locals? We really didn't have a lot to do with them. I can't remember having very much. We used to go out on their lakatois and they would obviously, the natives would be the crew, but I don't remember any other contact with them.

(25.00) Were you aware of a definite hierarchy with whites above the natives?

No, no. I think probably the civilians of Moresby would have it but as far as we were concerned it didn't matter.

Did you meet civilians?

No, I didn't meet any.

I believe that a lot of the women at least had been sent back to Australia or wherever they came from anyway.

Uhm.

This is all about officers. Service vocabulary is one that I think is quite interesting. In some areas, like the RAF are absolutely famous for their slang. Did you have anything like that in the AAMWS amongst the nurses, between you and the boys? Do you remember any sort of special army terms or nursing terms?

We certainly did but I can't remember them. I should, but there was a lot.

Would you have had slang?

You mean things like furphies and that?

One of the things I was going to say was is there a slang term for a rumour, for example?

Furphy.

You'd use a furphy for that right. And food, would that have been had a special term? Some people I think

Oh yes, because some of the food was so appalling

It was numerable.

Yes. I can't remember but you can imagine what dehydrated eggs and dehydrated potatoes, they all tasted the same, they just looked a different colour but I've forgotten now what we used to call them.

Well if any of them come to you let me know. Did you pick up any local terms? For example did you hear kai-kai used for food in New Guinea?

Yes.

Would you have used it yourself?

No, I don't think so.

What about the terms for the enemy. Did you call them just the 'Japs' or what would have been the expression?

'Nips' I think, possibly.

And what about the local people, natives, 'boongs'?

'Boongs' mostly.

Right.

But that wasn't said in a derogative way because I think, you know, they were good and you didn't, you weren't rude to them.

But it was just the usual term? Right. What about terms say for the matron or about anyone that you would have come across in your professional nursing life. What would they have been called?

I don't really think that I had a name for the matron because I liked her.

So you would just have referred to her as the matron?

Um.

And what about amongst yourselves, did you use surnames as many of the nurses did?

Yes, a lot of them did, yes.

And, say in your tent, or the people you were with, would you have used surnames or first names?

Possibly surnames.

Again, there may be things that come to you later, but are there any words or phrases that are just reminiscent of the time? Maybe they weren't to do with the services in particular but they were just sort of current slang?

No, I'm sorry I can't remember.

What about the men? Did they use what we would call bad language?

You mean the patients or the staff?

Well, either for that matter, yes. Did the patients?

Yes, they would. But I don't know that I would think of it as bad.

What would I mean with them was there any attempt to modify the language they might have used. Did they use swear words?

Well some of them would modify it when the women were about, there was no doubt about that, and some didn't. But I can't remember being upset by it in any way I think. It was just the norm really.

So what would be the, you know the worst term of abuse that you'd hear bandied around?

They certainly were different to today's slang I must admit that. I suppose they meant it just the same.

.... Gladys Moncreiff came up and I remember her singing *The Lamb of Hawke*, and what is it, 'You Put Your Right Foot In, You Put Your Left Foot Out'.

The Hokey Pokey.

The *Hokey Pokey*, that's right. That was another one. Can't say I remember the others too well.

Any songs you hear now that just evoke those war years for you?

No, no.

Did, someone mentioned *'The Old Grey Mare'* was sung because the nurses, wearing the grey, but that probably if you did you identify with the nurses in that way? I mean when they sung *'The Old Grey Mare'* would you think that that was applying to you?

No, no.

Were you very conscious of being an AAMWS as opposed to a AAMWS, as opposed to being a VAD for that matter as opposed to being a nurse? Was there a sort of a strict awareness of the difference?

In some cases, yes. Some nurses, some sisters were well, it's like the old fashioned ones, you know, there was that barrier that you were the under-dog but in the main they didn't, they were very very good and you know, we made some good friends and it just didn't seem to matter.

Right. Now leave. Had you had any leave before you went overseas?

Before we went to Ingleburn we did, but after that we didn't.

But before you went to Ingleburn, oh well you've been in for about six months or perhaps a little bit longer. When you

When I was at the showground I was living at home, I wasn't in a barrack or anything.

Right. So it was really just a little bit of it wasn't a very significant period that particular leave, no. And then the next leave you would have had would have been on your return from New Guinea, between New Guinea and Morotai. Well I might ask then about I might ask now about that. When you came back, what was the feeling about Australia. Were people aware of what was happening in the war, did you find it hard to fit in at all?

I didn't find it hard to fit in but I was I remember being very cross when we came home because we arrived and we were just, I think it was probably at the showground somewhere, and we were sent on our way and said you can have leave now until such and such and of course, we had all our goods and chattles with us, and it was peak hour, and it was so hard to get on the trains with all our luggage and the civilians were so rude because we had no right to be on the trains with all our luggage and they couldn't get on the train and that was the atmosphere that really hurt, coming home.

Did you find that in other ways that people weren't very understanding?

No, no, because after that, on leave I never wore a uniform. They never knew who I was anyway.

Were people interested family and friends were they interested in your war experiences?

Yes, yes.

So you didn't feel that they were ignoring what was going on?

Oh no. It was just this awful business of getting home and everybody being cranky.

What did you do with your leave at that time?

I went up, I stayed for a while in Sydney then I went up to the property up at, between Armidale and Tamworth that I used to go to a lot.

And did you meet up with in that period did you meet up with people that you'd been serving with or did you get right away from it?

Right away. Because you see a lot of them were different states.

Right, so it was partly a lack of opportunity as much as anything else.

Um, um.

(5.00) We might talk about concert parties I think when we talk about New Guinea. What do you remember about pay? What did you get paid when you joined the VAD?

Very little. I can't remember how much we got paid. It was they always called it so much by the day. It might have been a shilling a day, something like that.

Did you think of it, at the time, as very little?

No. You see I had no idea, I didn't know what other people got anyway.

Fair enough. Did you suffer from any illnesses while you were in the services?

No.

None at all. You did well. Meeting the Yanks. When did you first come across American servicemen in Australia?

I didn't. I came across them in New Guinea.

We'll talk a little bit more about them there I think then.

They gave me a very treasured gift.

Tell me about that.

A wooden lavatory seat.

And did you then take that with you wherever you went?

Yes because we didn't have it was only sitting on iron and my lavatory seat was lent around to everybody.

Wonderful. I never actually asked you if you remembered the declaration of war. Do you?

Yes, very well.

Tell me about it and how you felt.

Well I it was a Sunday night, we were out to relatives at Neutral Bay and of course everybody most people knew war was imminent anyway and they announced over the wireless it was on and I was shattered because I had a twin brother over in England and I wondered when or if I would ever see him again.

Did you see him again?

No. No, he got killed over there.

So it was a feeling of, obviously of anxiety, of sadness?

Yes, yes. Horror really. I've always had horrors of wars and things and that, I do remember that.

What about the end of the war then. First of all VE day on 7th May.

Yes well we weren't terribly aware of that.

Were you in Morotai at the time?

Yes, yes, and I remember somebody saying to me about the atomic bomb and I said, 'But you can't split an atom' and they said, 'Well they have and it looks as though the war's going to be over' and I suppose another week went by before we realised the war was over.

And were there great celebrations then when you did?

Not a lot. We didn't come home because we were a staging hospital for the prisoners of war coming through.

So in many ways your work was

We didn't get home until, sort of early December, which was quite a while after the event.

What Yes I suppose we might talk about then that period of Morotai. Then did you have any contact with Japanese troops in Morotai after the surrender.

Yes. Oh, not after the surrender so much because they had part of the island so we saw them quite often. Not that they troubled us in any way.

So this was just a sort of division until the surrender, was it?

No, they were on the island when we got there. Presumably they'd been robbed of all their guns, but they certainly didn't do anything about it.

Did you have any POWs in did you treat any? Were there any in your hospitals?

Yes, a lot. Coming through after the war, yes.

What was the reaction towards them when they were your patients?

You mean as far as I was concerned, or as far as they were concerned?

As far as you were concerned, what was your attitude?

Oh I was horrified, horrified to see them. What a great man could come back looking like a skeleton, knowing them.

Sorry, these were the Australian POWs? Yes, I will ask you a little bit more about them, I was wondering if you had any Japanese POWs?

No.

No, right. Let's then talk about the POWs now, because well a couple of people have mentioned to me that they were involved in Morotai, in nursing them.

Can you remember when you first, when the first POWs came into your hospital?

Yes.

(10.00) What sort of condition were they in?

Oh, terrible, terrible condition. One thing I noticed with several of them, certainly not all, was their fear. For instance I was on night duty and they of course would try and get as much food as they could and we tried to ration it because they obviously got very ill if they got too much too soon, and if you walked down the ward at night, because it was tented and there was no wood, no floor it was earth, and you walked into what was the kitchen area and they were trying to get food and they would feel terrible and they would slink away and hide, and you know, that to me, I thought this is terrible that these men who had been through such privations that they still felt guilty even though they're with their own.

So what was the atmosphere like in a POW ward?

Well we as far as I can remember and I certainly just pretended I didn't see anything that was untoward. If they were doing something that they felt they shouldn't have been, although it didn't matter then, I would just ignore it.

Was there joy in the wards as well?

Oh yes, for sure, yes.

Did you lose any of the POWs after you'd taken them?

No, not to my knowledge, no. You see, we didn't have them for very long. Most of them were put onto hospital ships which got them in a fitter condition before they finally got home. The very ill ones were flown out.

Right, there may be more that's relevant there that we'll come back to, but just continuing on here. What when did you get out of the services? When did you leave the AAMWS?

February '46 I think it was.

What was the process of getting out?

I think they just said, 'Well you know, there's no more work for you, do you want to stay in full time or do you want to get out?' So get out I did. I wanted to get out.

What, why did you want to get out? What were your feelings about the army by that stage?

Oh I'd had it, I really didn't want it anymore, at all.

What clothes or other possessions did you take away from that time?

Well I was in an accident, an aircraft accident coming back from Morotai and I lost absolutely everything. I just arrived home as I stood up. I didn't even have a toothbrush. So I had little to take out of the army.

Was that a distressing sort of feeling?

What, to have nothing?

Yes, I mean rather than the accident, but to sort of be standing with nothing very much to show for those years?

Well it didn't matter, because I didn't want them anyway. You know mostly just uniforms, certainly my photos and a few little memorabilia like that, but having lost all the other things didn't worry me overly.

Was it hard to fit into life as a civilian?

Yes.

In what ways?

I don't know about being a civilian, it was hard to settle down I felt.

Did you go out and get a civilian job.

No, I went to England, as soon as I possibly could I went back to England.

And spent some time there. I mean that was going back to live.

Yes.

Can you explain why?

Well, I suppose it was restlessness. I just didn't know what I wanted to do and I'd lost my bloke and I'd lost my twin brother and I just, I don't know everything was wrong, you know, I just felt if I could get out of Australia I might feel better.

Did you feel better?

No, never go back I've learnt. Never do. It's the worst thing to do so I came I stayed over there for about six years and then I came back here.

Do you think that other people left the services with that same feeling of not knowing what to do next, not knowing where to go?

Yes, I do. You see quite a few of them got married during the war and they settled down quickly. It was a whole new ball game but to go back to a similar sort of set-up I think you had to get out, you had to do something else.

And it was a question of just finding something that you could settle to. How important were your wartime the friends that you'd made during the war how much did you keep up with them after the war was over?

Oh constant I still see them.

So even in spite of your having spent six years, they were still there's still connections that are valuable.

Oh yes, I mean Lara and I we tented together in Morotai. We still see one another regularly. If we don't, we ring up.

And do you march or go to reunions on ANZAC Day, any of that?

No, no I don't. I know a lot of them do but I don't.

So have you, do you keep up in any way with the 2/5th as a unit, or is it with personal contacts?

Personal people. I don't go to ANZAC Day reunions.

(15.00) Did you join the RSL?

Yes.

Why did you join the RSL?

Really because it pays me to belong.

In what way?

Well I'm kept informed of one say for instance, if they bring out pensions, they keep me informed as to what's going on and also I feel that it's a connection with a lot of good friends. I don't want to go around waving flags or anything like that, but no I can't really explain why I wanted to join, but I did join, I do belong.

Do you think it's been effective as an organisation to look after the welfare of ex-service people?

In the main, yes. I know there's the odd case that isn't, but I think they've probably done a fairly good job.

And what about issues that are outside the welfare, the sort of broader issues, defence, aborigines, immigration. Do you think the RSL should speak out on issues like that?

No, no.

Do you think that generally the Australian government has treated ex-service people well?

No.

In what ways should they have looked after them that they haven't?

Well I think they do now because the proof has been so great but when you see the poor old blokes from the First World War and what they've gone through, they were treated appallingly I think 'cause seeing what we get now and I don't think we're too badly off frankly, but I'm probably one of the lucky ones that they've you know what I've got out of it. Not from any I haven't fought for it, but it's come my way.

Perhaps that has been a role of the RSL between the First World War and the Second World War.

Yes, for sure.

Have you suffered any long-term illness or disability as a result of the war? Probably not when you said you had good health through there. Are the war years important in your memories? [Dog barking interruption] Right. The war years. Are they important in your memories?

It's hard to know because if I didn't have them, would it matter? I don't know.

Do you often think of those times?

No, no I don't.

Have other people, over the years, shown an interest in your wartime experiences?

Not really. I don't think so. See they're all much my age. They've all had their own experiences, whether it be here or wherever and unless you get round to really talking about war, I don't think anybody it matters that much.

What about younger people do they, are they interested, do they care, should they care?

No. Well I don't know whether they should or shouldn't care? I mean should I care about the First World War?

Do you care about the First World War?

No. I mean, there's always going to be wars and I don't blame the young for not being curious.

What about things like attitudes towards the Japanese? Have yours been shaped by the war?

Isn't that the fifty dollar question? I don't know how I feel about that. I feel probably the same about the Japanese as I do about the Germans but I still feel that you can't go on fighting wars and you can't suffer the sins of your father. You've got to some time bury the hatchet and that's it.

Have you come across Germans and Japanese in your travels, or in Australia for that matter since the war and how do you feel about them?

Oh well I've been to Japan, I've been to Germany and I feel that I don't it doesn't affect the way I feel towards them. I take them as individual rather than collective.

Right. So I asked earlier on if the war had influenced your religious beliefs, your political beliefs. In what way do you think the war might have affected you?

I suppose if anything, I could easily become a pacifist I'm not but I'm not far from being one because of the horrors of it. Whereas I used to hate seeing them go off from Morotai or across to Labuan to fight and come back as wrecks and I think that made more of an impression on me than anything else because I saw it practically happen overnight. You know, I'd sit and go one day and the next morning they'd come back as a badly wounded patient and when it's as close as that I think it makes a bigger impression and you sort of see somebody go off and come back in six months. To me it made a big impression, that horror.

(20.00) What other affects might it have had. I mean did it change the shape of your career of your life?

No, no. I think because you see it happened before I really got involved in anything completely. If I'd sort of if my life was established before the war I might have been affected in a different way.

And do you think that it's helped or hindered your deciding what you did want to do with your life in the long run?

No.

Neither helped nor hindered?

No, no. It's hard to answer that because I don't really know if there hadn't been a war what would have happened.

Do you think that your reaction about feeling that you you know could become a pacifist do you think that that's similar to some or most of the people that you served with?

No, no. I think some of them came out feeling oh, even slightly more aggressive if possible.

So you feel a little bit of an odd one out with those reactions?

Oh no, I don't think about it in that way.

Now, documents. You said you hadn't saved photographs, letters, diaries, other papers, you don't have those sort of things.

No, you see I left them here, the ones I had in Australia when I went to England but when I came back the place had been robbed and I never saw them, what happened to them I'll never know.

Do you miss not having any written or any other sort of documentation of that period?

Yes, I do sometimes, yes I do.

Has there been a history written of the 2/5th?

Yes.

Is it any good?

The book? It's not very well written but it's quite interesting.

Do you think it gets down your the flavour of your experiences?

No, no.

What's missing from it that should be there?

Well you see, to me it's a book of facts. It has a few little incidents, talking with people, but very superficial. I'm sorry they didn't get a better person to write it.

Well that's worth knowing.

I hope you don't know the author.

I don't know the author, no. No, I haven't seen the book, I've seen one about the 2/9th but not the 2/5th. Have you read books, or seen films about the wartime that are successful in reproducing your experiences or some of your experiences, your feelings?

Haven't really read many books about the war. In fact I could say I've read none.

What about films, anything come to mind?

No, no.

Well that is all for this first half of the questionnaire. This is the beginning of the questionnaire on nursing in New Guinea and we've talked about when you were about nineteen when you applied to join the service. Before that, how much experience had you had in hospitals with the VAD.

None.

None. So it was really straight from the VADs into joining up? Ok, well that's why we didn't have it down before. Can you tell me a little bit about uniforms. What you wore and then what you wore when you went to New Guinea.

In New Guinea one by day it was a frock but by night it was trousers and gaiters and long sleeves.

Before you went to New Guinea, when you first joined up, you wore the blue uniform of the VADs and then you switched over to khaki I think when you said you went to Ingleburn now some people have got a real attachment to the VAD's uniform and were disappointed to have to go into khaki. Did you have any of that feeling?

Yes I did.

Why was that because you'd only been with the VADs a fairly short time hadn't you?

Well I suppose vanity it was a nicer uniform and they were made for us, they weren't just handed to you across the counter.

Whereas your army ones were just off the peg.

At least the blue ones fitted.

That seems a perfectly good reason for liking them. Did you think of yourself as a VAD or as an AAMWS?

You mean ultimately?

Well, if you did ultimately, at what point did you start thinking of yourself as an AAMWS?

I can't say that I consciously thought of it very much one way or the other. You know there seemed to be too many other things to be thinking about and I remember being equipped with this ghastly khaki uniform and thinking, oh well, you know they'd sort of quickly run a tape measure over and say yes right, you're size so-and-so and whether you weren't or not it didn't

seem to matter, you were just equipped with number five, or eight or whatever it was and that was that. Whereas the blue ones, we were fitted for them. They were made in a lot of instances for us.

(25.00) Were you in the situation where you went and got them made and then you got reimbursed afterwards?

No. You mean for the VADs? No, you paid for them yourself.

Right. Did you have a list of things that you went shopping for that there was some reimbursement for?

From the VADs? No. Not to my memory.

So you didn't have to apart from your uniforms, was there anything else for the VADs that you were required to have?

No.

Did you think it was fair to ask people to supply their own uniforms?

Well after all it was the voluntary aid so that everything was voluntary so you couldn't really expect it otherwise and I think in those days, most of the women's well I suppose men's too for that matter voluntary whether it be traffic wardens or air raid wardens, they all bought their own uniform. It wasn't until later on that when everything became compulsory that people got paid for things.

Yes. Was it difficult to keep uniforms as neat as you might have liked under wartime conditions or was there any pressure

In Australia it was quite easy.

And in New Guinea?

Not so easy because washing was appalling. See it was hard to get things dry, it was hard to get them clean.

Did you do your own laundry?

Yes. You were allowed to send a certain number of uniforms to the hospital laundry but they would usually come back in two or three pieces rather than one so by the time you put it all together again it was better to do your own.

Was there any pressure on you from you know matron or anyone else to smarten up your uniform? Was there any difficulty in keeping up the standards you were supposed to have?

There was a difficulty and there certainly was a standard. You had to look presentable.

So did you ever get, you know, hauled over the coals for your veil not being starched or something like that?

No, I think by some miracle I managed to get through that one.

Right, so yes the khaki, not as flattering as the blue had been. Was there any sentiment involved in wanting to hang on to the blue rather than the khaki in your case?

I think in a lot of people there was.

And for you?

No.

So how effective was the dress and then for night the trousers and safari jacket? How effective was that for the conditions in New Guinea?

I think very, very effective.

Was either of them very hot and uncomfortable to wear?

Well the trousers were hot. The dresses weren't, they were quite cool, but the idea of the trousers at night of course was the mosquitoes.

Some people have reported embarrassment at having to wear men's trousers or trousers with a fly front. Did you find that?

I didn't have a fly front.

They were side

Buttons.

Side buttons, right. Well then you wouldn't have found that embarrassing. Were you at all worried about the idea of wearing men's clothes or were you already a slacks wearer from

I didn't think of them as men's clothes. They were just women's slacks, women's pants.

Right. So the new uniform, the uniform with the safari jacket and pants and gaiters was very effective as protection against mosquitoes, did you ever have I've seen pictures that probably were eliminated fairly early on of the sort of a large helmet with a veil, looks a little bit like bee keeping. What did you wear on your heads?

Oh just veils in the wards. We just wore an ordinary slouch hat but I never had a net.

I think they must have gone quite

... I did when we were up at Rouna and we were out at night, I'd probably have a net on, but that was, that was all. It wasn't on duty.

That would be a net attached to the slouch hat?

You'd just put it over.

And that was just an informal thing that people did to avoid the mossies there.

It was a comfort thing too because you know they'd just swarm up in the mountains.

Um, that's interesting because no one else had mentioned that. How experienced did you feel you were for the sort of wounds no we're almost at the end.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B.

START TAPE TWO, SIDE A

Identification. This is an interview, Tape Two, of an interview recorded by Angie Michaelis with Mrs Jill Linton, who served in the AAMWS as a nurse in New Guinea and later Morotai. The interview is recorded at Mrs Linton's home in North Sydney on 20th March 1989. End of identification.

So, how experienced did you feel you were in treating the sort of wounds and conditions that faced you when you reached New Guinea?

Not at all.

How much of a shock was it?

Probably quite a shock but up in New Guinea, I seemed to spend most of my time in a skin ward which was really quite revolting because we had to wash all bandages, they were always reused, nothing was disposable, and to try and get greasy bandages clean, you'd have to stoke the old stove outside and the wood was wet and everything would you know, it took two or three times longer than it would normally because of the conditions. So I didn't really come face to face with wounds as such, till I'd been up there and moved ultimately to another ward. So probably [inaudible] I was more able to because I'd seen a lot even though I wasn't working with it and so that's, it probably didn't come as quite a shock as if I'd gone straight into it.

Did you you didn't happen to be part of the detachment that arrived in New Guinea just the day before or after a major accident.

Oh yes.

Was that part of your experience?

Um.

Can you

That was that air force accident.

There was I think a Liberator crashed into the ground. Can you place that in relation to your arrival and tell me what it was like?

We'd been there for a little while. It wasn't just sort of overnight or anything. I don't really know that I can. It was just sort of panic, because we'd heard it and saw them all coming in, but I still had to go to the skin ward. I mean you still had to go on doing what your own job. So that I didn't really have personal contact with them.

Just getting back to the general question of preparedness for the conditions that you were going to, to encounter. What had you been either formally trained, or had experience with before you got to New Guinea?

Just general nursing. Nothing in particular. In fact it was rather silly really, I was put in the women's ward for quite a while, looking after women's ailments.

Had they given you training or lectures or anything like that in say, in tropical diseases. Had any of the training been relevant?

We had a few on tropical diseases.

Any use?

No, only in the hygiene area, I imagine that would probably have been useful.

Do you remember that training as being generally as being useful or

You mean to now?

Well, for when you were hit, for your working conditions in New Guinea.

Oh yes, yes, I think you do.

So what would have been valuable to come out of it?

Well the hygiene, the contagious part and what you do and what you don't touch and those sorts of things.

Right. Did you generally find that the unit that you were working in, the 2/5th was understaffed at any stage?

No. I didn't think of it as understaffed. I mean we were all there, we were all working, but we worked long hours.

How long hours might you have worked?

Well it wouldn't be uncommon to work a fourteen hour day. If you were very busy on night duty, you'd you wouldn't think, 'Oh it's seven o'clock I'm off now', you'd have to finish and it might be nine or after that before you left.

Do you often remember the feeling of exhaustion?

Yes I do because I did a lot of night duty and I don't know why I did, and I found it extremely hard to sleep by day so I used to get completely tired and sleep every second day.

Um, not much of a life. Were there times that you can remember when the workload was say, much heavier than another time? Perhaps it related did it relate to a particular campaign or a battle or something like that?

Yes, it was coming in what had happened you know. Yes.

Were there any is there a period that you can recall that is related to evacuations from such and such a point?

No because we wouldn't have been affected that way where we were. They would have been further up the mountains.

So was there any period that was much busier than another period that you do remember, that you can relate to some incident?

I can't relate it to anything, but there certainly were busy periods. Because in Morotai that was the case more than it was in Moresby because in Morotai the people going off to Borneo and coming back, you'd practically could say well tomorrow's going to be busy whereas in Moresby it was different. You know they were coming in in slow numbers, practically constantly.

(5.00) You were relatively farther back from the line of fire in Moresby than you would have been in Morotai?

Yes, yes.

Can we talk a bit about nursing techniques. I've got a number of questions here, some of them you may not have come across at all, some of them you may like to talk in some detail about. One is about penicillin which would probably have come in in your period in New Guinea. Do you recall any experiences with using penicillin?

No, no.

What about other drugs, sulphonamides I think were probably in use for wounds?

Yes, sulphonamide was certainly in.

Did you use them in the skin ward or in other wards?

They were certainly used in the skin wards, yes. But more in the sort of ointments because in those days they used to use ointments a lot. Grease and that sort of thing and they were certainly the sulphonamides were involved there.

What sort of skin conditions would you have been dealing with?

Oh! You name it, I should think it would have been there. Some of the most revolting things. I can't even remember their names half of them. People seemed to be losing skin after skin after skin. But I'm sorry I can't tell you their names.

As somebody said to me that they thought that the skin ward was the most depressing ward to work in because people didn't die but they were always uncomfortable. Did you find that?

Yes, and also they knew they looked awful. You know if you've got something wrong with your face you don't feel happy and they it was hard for them. Variably they'd have all their hands bound up and they couldn't eat and they couldn't do things for themselves and it was no it was depressing, very depressing.

What sort of duties would you have in caring for them?

Well you may or may not do the dressings. You'd certainly have to do all the washing of these revolting things. Do all, you know, beds, pans, feeding. As I say a lot depends on the sister. You see some of them would rely on us completely to do the dressings or partially do the dressings and others wouldn't. Whatever it was, we were terribly busy doing it.

If it was a depressing ward to work in, and perhaps particularly if you were very busy there, what was morale like in that ward?

You mean for the staff? I think it was pretty good really. I think you probably had to be good, had to have a otherwise the patients would get further down. You had to present at least a smile for them.

Were there any boards [wards?] or any areas where morale was noticeably higher or lower than at some other time?

I think when there'd been a big battle and a lot of people killed, the morale could get very low, yes. Especially if they were badly wounded. They'd see themselves and they knew what they'd been through and they were probably reliving it, I should think.

And for the nursing staff? What was morale like for them?

I think on the main it was good. I can't think of it as not being good.

A few more medical facts and conditions. I'll just wait till the clock's finished chiming which it has. Did you use intravenous drips at all?

I didn't personally but they were used.

Would they have been used in your ward and do you remember what for?

They would for people who got dehydrated, they'd be given saline drips and those sort of things.

Is that would dehydration be connected to skin things?

It can be, yes.

Did you ever, I mean did you get mortalities in a skin ward or?

We didn't. I never saw one. Whether they moved them out in the nick of time I don't know.

I suppose if they developed some complications, yes they might then become the responsibility of someone else. Did you deal with the following categories of patients and if so, what do you remember about dealing with them?
Dysentery?

Oh yes. I was just going to say to you, you know, apart from skin, dysentery was another very dirty, horrible area. And highly infectious of course.

So what sort of set-up would you have and what sort of nursing techniques would you use with dysentery patients?

Well, first priority would be cleanliness.

(10.00) How did you get that cleanliness in New Guinea conditions?

Not easy. You just had to boil things. You couldn't use anything twice it was course it's the patient that you're trying to isolate more than yourself. And of course you had to tell them, it was really I suppose educating the patient of the firm necessity for cleanliness.

What sort of ward would you have your dysentery patients in? I've heard is it dirty wards and dirty rooms and clean rooms. What was the physical ward like?

That was only a term. The state of the ward would be the same.

Yes, yes. It was a question of limiting infection, wasn't it?

The infectious from the uninfected, yes, yes.

So this would be another tented ward in the same way as the others?

Yes.

So what would happen if you were working in either the clean section or the dirty section, what would the duties have been?

Probably more the same but you'd be stricter in a dirty section. But you still had you see like most tropical countries, everything becomes infectious so much easier than it does in a normal say, bad type of not today of course. And when you're in any hospital of course, infection is paramount as you would know, look at Legionnaire.

Too right.

Why they don't clean those air conditioners out regularly I'll never know.

That does seem extraordinary, it keeps recurring, isn't it terrible, can't seem to keep the standards up. What about malaria? Did you nurse malaria patients?

Yes we had a lot of malaria.

Now what, what did you do with malaria patients?

Well when they got rigors you had to sponge them, keep them cool, seem to be constantly pricking their fingers to check them to see whether they were still active with the bites.

So you'd take the blood samples?

Yes, yes. Wasn't a great deal you could do for them except in once the rigors was over and they were completely spent and you would they would then get the shivers and we'd bed them down and they would probably sleep it off. What on earth's that? [motor mower noise]

Right. Scrub typhus. Did you come across that and what did you do for them?

Yes, I didn't really know much about it but a friend of ours got it. She was sent home with it.

One of the nursing staff?

Um.

Um. What were her symptoms and how did she contract it?

I never saw her, but I heard that she had it and she was isolated and then she was sent home. So I really can't tell you much about scrub typhus.

Now dermatological cases which were your specialty are there other techniques, other conditions that we haven't mentioned that you could throw some light on?

Well it would be so completely different now but as far as I can remember it was just these ointments and things that they used to put on them. Some of them had sort of saline baths and things, but they didn't seem to have a very well advanced method but I've no doubt they've improved on all that now. Because a lot of it was skin diseases they'd never seen before, so it was trial and error.

Would well antibiotics, there were the sulphonamides around and then the penicillin as I say it seems to have come in in that period, would some of the would antibiotics have been used on some skin cases?

Oh yes, the sulphonamides were.

How were they applied? Were they a topical thing or an oral thing?

Yes, um. Mostly in the ointments as far as I can remember.

Right. What about dengue fever? Did you come across dengue fever?

Yes, I didn't but I mean I know it was there.

Did you have any experience nursing psychiatric cases?

Not up there but I did at Goulburn.

Oh yes, in fact Mrs Stocks was mentioning that she was at Kenmore, was that the one?

We all were we went when we came back from Moresby and had our leave, we went to Goulburn, Kenmore, before we went up to Morotai.

And what was that an awful shock to the system?

Yes, it was horrible, horrible.

What sort of conditions were you dealing with there? Was it people who had long-term psychiatric illnesses or people who'd had bad reactions to war experiences?

Both I should think. I really didn't know a lot of them why they were there or I didn't know their history. But it was very depressing. It's, you know, and you had to be so very careful. It was quite an eye-opener to me every time you went into a room you'd unlock the door and then you had to lock it again, and it was this constant locking and unlocking and going around and you couldn't put anything down, like if it was a pen because somebody would pick it up and then they'd probably say it could be an implement they could use.

(15.00) You were constantly on the alert for things like that, that you don't think of in ordinary wards. I just remember the padded cells and these they used to give them shock treatment and they'd be screaming and carrying on. Yes, I found it very depressing.

Did any of the patients talk to you about their experiences that may have precipitated some of these illnesses?

You mean at Kenmore? No.

Do you think that any of the people either there or at any other point that you might have come across them, that any of the men might have been malingerers?

Yes.

What makes you say that?

Oh just the signs and symptoms.

What made you suspect that, you know, one person wasn't genuine while the next one was?

Well you got to know after a while the things that the malingerers did.

Like?

Well for instance they could rub something into their skin to bring up a rash, or blisters, and after you'd seen two or three of those you'd think, oh well they all know how to do it, so that's what they're doing.

So you'd come across those in the skin wards back in New Guinea?

Yes, not so much in New Guinea I wouldn't. But you did see them, you certainly did see them.

So would these, I mean someone with a skin rash brought on in this way, this is more likely to come across at Goulburn or they were sort of beyond that there?

To be – I didn't see any up at Goulburn but I did see some at the showground, that's when I first when I was completely innocent, this is when I was told to watch out for these sort of things. You become alert to the once you've got a patient that's fronting up with something like that or a split ear or whatever, and you see two or three, you think, 'Oh well, look, this isn't a coincidence, this is self-inflicted'.

So what was the reaction of yourself and of other nursing staff towards someone that you thought had say, a self-inflicted wound?

Well I think I'd probably, not that it would be up to me to do anything about it, but, because you knew that the higher up would also know, they'd be aware of it, and you just, probably just used to I just wasn't very sympathetic probably. I know that sometimes I would think, oh well you could go and do your own dressings, I'm not going to be too fussed about it. There are plenty people that are worthy of it, something like that, but you couldn't do any more.

Right. Now you didn't work in theatres, did you?

No.

What about your relations with other medical staff. To start with, the doctors. Were they were some of them younger and less experienced than others?

Oh yes, 'cause some of them weren't long out of university. They were sent up.

And was their lack of experience obvious when it came to treating patients?

Probably not so much to me because I didn't know any way, but to their fellow medicos, no doubt it was very obvious. But then again you see, even the older medicos, everything was new. They'd never been to war, any of them. So they were probably just as much in the dark.

But, yes, certainly you weren't in a position to guess if they were doing the wrong thing rather than the right thing. What about the nurses, what were relationships between nurses and the AAMWS generally like?

You always get the odd one that you've got, you know, that it's not easy. But in the main, they were all good. I didn't have any complaints.

And what about the male orderlies that you may have worked with. Were you working side by side with those often?

Yes.

Did you get on well with them?

Oh yes, no problems.

In some areas I believe there was resentment from some of the male orderlies.

There was, but you get that. Yes, I find that you get that through in life, don't you? So that's, I didn't think it was really any different.

Why do you think they were resentful of either, well of nurses, of female nurses?

Because originally there weren't any female nurses and you know, a lot of men have a natural aversion to women working side by side. It's not so much now but it certainly was then.

Where you had both yourselves and male orderlies working in a ward, were there sort of clear differentiation of who did what duties?

Don't think so.

It might just be worked out and what was required in that particular ward do you think?

It doesn't come I can't remember any sort of barriers there.

And did you personally experience any resentment from the males you were working with?

No.

(20.00) Air raids. Did you experience any air raids either in New Guinea or in Morotai?

Yes.

Can you tell me about them?

Didn't have many in Morotai. Strangely enough the ones that I can remember most are on the hospital ship going up to Morotai, and there it was, all blazing with lights and red crosses and things, but it didn't worry the Japanese, they still managed to have an air raid over us.

So you were actually bombed?

We weren't touched, no, weren't touched. Probably why I remember it is because we were all locked below deck which I thought was a most terrible thing to do.

Was that, I suppose that was just standard practice?

I suppose it must have been, but I thought that was the worst place to be locked.

What was it like? I mean you had had some experience of air raids before in New Guinea, at that stage.

But nothing very much really.

So why was this more frightening?

Because I was locked below decks.

How long would the thing have lasted?

It seemed like forever, but I suppose it would all be over in a matter of minutes, a few minutes.

And was there did you have to go through a drill below decks?

Oh yes, we were all down there with our little gas masks or whatever we had to carry, water bottles and things. What good it would have been I don't know.

And this was just the once on the way to Morotai?

Yes. There was another false alarm but they fortunately we didn't we were on our way to be locked below decks before they said 'Oh it's over' so we all came up again. There was the horror of the air raid of course in a tented situation, everything goes up in fire so quickly.

Yes, there was always that possibility. Did anything fall in the camp, or it was really just an alert?

I remember a couple of times, you know, looking out and seeing the tent caught and you could see the flame rush along the top and the whole thing seemed to collapse in a flash, like that, that was just how quick it happened.

What would happen in a case like that? Would there be patients in that tent?

Oh yes.

So, who would rush into action, what would happen?

Whoever's there to do it. I remember throwing blankets, mattresses over a patient in bed that I couldn't get out of bed there's only things like that that you can do.

And did you, did you fear for your own life? Were you very frightened in those cases?

I probably was frightened, yes, but you're busy doing if you're busy doing things you haven't got time to think of that.

I guess that it's as good a place as any to talk about the accident that happened on the way back from Morotai for you. Can you tell me what happened there?

When we caught on fire?

Yes.

When we were in a bomb bay, we had to stand in the bomb bay I might add, all the way down.

Tell me from the I thought that the plane you were in took off close to landing, close to I thought that the plane caught on fire when you took off?

Yes, it did.

Perhaps you can tell me from the beginning?

But I'm only making this point that it was a Liberator Bomber and they have this what they call a cat-walk, about that wide, between the bomb bays and we had to stand on that all the time. Occasionally you might be allowed to go up and sit on a mail bag or something and come back. So that, and you sort of looked down through the there's a crack like that on each side, you just looked down to whatever was down there. So we were standing on these bomb bays, and we got airborne but he obviously had a tremendous trouble getting up. In fact we didn't know if he would. Not that we could see ahead but we could see down and I thought, 'He'll never clear these trees' because they seemed to be getting closer instead of further away and then of course the whole thing caught on fire and they managed to get us out of the bomb bays and out of the plane.

Did the plane manage to return to the runway or where did you come down?

No, it just crashed.

And caught on fire instantly, or what happened?

Well it was on fire when we got out. Now, because of us being in the bomb bay and not being able to see out, I wasn't sure, I can't tell you whether it was hitting the trees or not getting airborne enough that caught on fire or whether it was on fire and that's why it couldn't get airborne. I'm not too sure about that, but they got us all out. So we're lucky.

(25.00) So what were your feelings at that time? What was the worst moment?

I don't remember feeling you know, terribly upset. I was probably obviously terribly relieved to get out and of course you just ran like mad, cause you knew it was going to explode and I just remember us tearing as fast as we could away from it, but they took us to the hospital. I suppose they gave us sedatives or something, they gave us something. I don't know what it was but I don't remember being terribly upset about it. I mean there was a couple of us that wouldn't get on the next plane to go down, but I don't think it worried me so much that I said 'No, I'm not going down'. I mean I'm not going up again to go south. So it couldn't have had

that much effect but I suppose because I didn't see much. I think if you don't see things. I mean, I obviously knew it was going to there was trouble afoot, but I don't think I ever thought oh it's going to blow up or anything. I think I probably thought I hope he gets it down safely somewhere. Something like that.

And did it explode after you'd got out?

Oh yes.

Right, and it hasn't stopped you from flying since or anything like that?

No, but I'm probably more cautious now. Because the next plane we got into was an old Dakota and, 'cause I was sitting next to Lyla, and I looked out and there was all this oil coming out of the engine and I thought, 'Oh crikey, don't tell me it's going to happen again'. And we had to do a forced landing up there, up in the never-never somewhere, but we got home safely, ultimately.

And did it worry you that you'd lost the possessions that you had. You said it didn't worry you in the long term, what was the sort of after effects, the immediate after effects?

I didn't realise it or it didn't sort of sink in, oh gosh, I've lost everything. It probably wasn't until I got home that I thought, 'Oh I haven't got anything', and then I got to thinking of all the things I wished that I had, and I did wish I had, but I haven't.

And that was actually fairly close to I mean you were coming home from Morotai to be discharged at that point, weren't you?

Well, not to be discharged. I was coming home. But we were ultimately. There was another I think we were given six weeks leave or something and then we went back and got discharged. Something like that.

Right. This is an interesting question I think. 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?

For a while, this friend I was talking about, Joan and I, we went to a convalescence sort of clearing station up at Rouna Falls and we were up there for quite a while really. Two or three months

Yes you were talking about Rouna Falls and, well tell me a little bit about the conditions at Rouna Falls?

Well I think it must have been an old rubber plantationer's house, or their servants' house probably, because it was a funny ramshackled sort of oh I think it had a tin roof, wooden floors, had a swimming pool of sorts which was very like mud and we had, where we lived was in tents but they had the biggest snakes I've ever seen. I was absolutely terrified and of course, being up in the mountains it was always wet and the vegetation was lush and the grass was up, literally to your eyes and of course the lavatories were way down the mountain path and you had to go through all this awful grass to get there and I never knew when I was going

to put my foot on a snake or not until we finally, two or three of us, made a path and it was our job every day, to clear that path and make sure that the grass didn't grow because everything grows so quickly. So at least we could see where we were going, but there was no electricity or anything, you had to use kerosene lamps. But that was, when you talk about insects and the wild life, that was an absolute horror to me and I always check my bed before I got into it.

Snakes weren't a problem down at Moresby?

No. They were there but they were nothing like you know it was more civilised in Moresby. Moresby was really very civilised.

Tell me a little bit more about Rouna Falls. What you were doing there?

As I say it was a sort of a convalescent place and we never seemed to have many patients but we invariably had to do the cooking and that in itself was quite a chore, because it was a very old wooden stove and where you made the fire, would have only been about as deep as that pen which is what, five inches, six inches, and the area would have been about two or three feet to cook on and of course you had these great big, what they call dixies, used to be great big cooking pots and I'd never cooked rice before. I didn't have a clue what you did with it and I knew I had to. Well Joan and I both knew that we had about, say fifty people to cook for, so we put in we thought we won't give them one cup of rice each, we'll give them two and so we cooked with this rice and of course it got bigger and bigger and we'd have to put on another dixie and we ended up with about six dixies full of rice. It would go on and on like a nightmare! But to get the wood burning was the hard part because it was always wet as it was down in Moresby. But it was harder there because it was such a little area to get a fire. But we used to throw kerosene on it which of course is a highly risky occupation until somebody threw too much and the whole stove left the wall!

And what did you cook on then?

I think we just had to make, you had turn about doing the cooking so we didn't do it all the time. But I've forgotten now what they had to do with it until they got the stove repaired. But it was quite a nice place, it was more like a garden of Eden, it had such lush vegetation and fruit and things. We used to go out and shoot pigs at night, wild pigs.

Did you personally go shooting?

Yes, this is when I wore the veil, the mosquito thing because the mosquitoes were ripe up there. We used to wear pants practically all day there as well as night time.

So was it a different atmosphere?

Oh completely, yes. More relaxed.

So would the men get in and help with chopping the wood?

Oh yes. We had natives actually, to do that for us. They used to help us with that. For reasons best known I suppose to the army, they weren't allowed within the kitchen. So they just used to get things ready and present them. But they must have laughed at our efforts to make a fire.

(5.00) So were you as busy with nursing duties at Rouna Falls?

No, being convalescence, it was very little nursing as such. It was a sort of I suppose it was more domestic than anything else, but everybody used to help, it was very informal.

So apart from pig shooting, that was day or night, the pig shooting?

Night.

What would you do with your day?

When you had one off you mean? Can't really remember. Oh sometimes we used if somebody had a jeep you'd go down to Moresby over the most terrible roads, and you'd think well is it worth it, I might as well stay put. Dreadful roads.

How far up from Moresby was it?

Isn't that silly, I can't think. Cause being such terrible roads it seemed to take all day to get there, but in mileage it probably wasn't too far. I suppose thirty, forty miles.

A couple of hours by jeep?

Oh no, more than that, much more, because you couldn't go fast. It was just a mud track.

You said it was lush, was it beautiful up there?

Yes, it was beautiful. The flowers, you can imagine the flowers, they were lovely.

Is this actually, it's in the foothill of the Owen Stanleys?

Yes, yes it is.

So did you get views from

Yes, yes you could. Actually where we were stationed we couldn't, but you didn't have to go far to get views and there was a lot of rubber plantations up there, some of them going to neglect because the staff had gone, but some were still being used, I mean what you call them, harvested.

Would patients be up there just for a few days or would they spend longer?

Yes, they wouldn't be there long. A week I suppose, something like that.

And they would be reasonably fit but not quite fit enough for active service?

Just a break really, for a hospital to back into wherever they were heading for.

Would most of the patients who were going to go back into the, into the field get a convalescent period there or was it

No, most of these, there were more women really a lot of them were nursing staff that had been, you know, the awful one reason or another, they seemed to go up there. I think probably a lot went there because it was high, it was cool at night.

And was that a was it a social time, did people you know, get

Yes it really was quite social.

What did people do to amuse themselves?

I think we used to I don't know what we did really. I think somebody presented us with an old gramophone which probably came from one of the plantations, but that's I don't remember a wireless. So I think that was all there was. I mean there's always the odd card games and those sort of things. I think you just had to make up your own amusement. There was nothing you could say was planned or anything.

Um, well it's interesting to hear about that. And that's, how we got onto that was the snakes.

Yes. They were like this.

Oh, six inches across. What sort of snakes were they, do you have any idea?

Well they would have been more like boa constrictors.

So not necessarily poisonous. Were any of them poisonous?

Oh yes, a lot of them are poisonous. Oh yes, the boa constrictor's not, they just squeeze you to death but the others were poisonous.

But nobody had any injuries from snake bite?

No, no, but there was a funny occasion one night when there was a great screaming in the middle of the night and somebody called out 'I've got a snake in my bed, quick, quick' and what he'd done they went in of course and had a look and he didn't have a snake at all, he was lying on his arm but his arm had gone to sleep so he couldn't feel that and he was quite sure he was on a snake.

And I bet you were relieved that you did not have to remove the snake in the bed for him.

Oh, gosh yes. I was always told they were more frightened of me than I of them, but I never believed that.

Very wise I think. Um. Some casualties and it may not be the period that you were serving there, when they actually made it to the hospital, the disease or the injury was often a couple of weeks old. I guess that's when they'd come down the Kokoda Trail for example. Did you come across cases in conditions like that?

No. But that certainly did happen.

(10.00) What about air evacuations? You got casualties sent back by air to the 2/5th?

Yes, yes, they used to come in by air.

And what sort of condition might they be in?

I imagine much like any of the others, you know, the good and the bad. The fact that they came by air they'd be more critical than the ones that came, sort of by jeep or whatever.

Do you remember any particular influx of casualties connected to a battle at all?

Not in Moresby.

There's a mention here of the air evacuation from Nadzab asking in what condition were the casualties after the air evacuation from Nadzab mean, do you recall that at all?

No, I don't. I think I was at Rouna then.

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

No, can't remember any.

No natives, no Japanese, no Seiks which turned up in one or two places?

No. When you say that, I think there were Japanese somewhere. No, I can't really I know they were there but I can't recall the details.

Another mention is of the negro problem. Did you come across black American soldiers at all?

Yes, we did. But I didn't find them a problem.

So they were, excuse me, not warnings out to be careful of negroes anywhere that you were?

Not that I was aware of.

Neither in Morotai nor in New Guinea?

No, no.

And now these are specifically AAMWS questions, we do hit them eventually. Well, we've dealt with a number of these things. You were a private when you went into the AAMWS. About training in hindsight how adequate was the training that you had received for the sort of experiences that you met?

Not good at all.

What could have been done that would have been better?

Well, seeing that we were going to a war zone which patients would be predominately men, I think it would have been better if we'd been given a casualty treatment and with men, not dealing with women's complaints. I know that they can say 'Oh once you're treating your patient, it doesn't matter what they've got, the basics of nursing is the same' but there are a lot of differences and I would have been far better equipped if I'd known a bit more about nursing a man because, being raw, a lot of the patients they loved to have a raw nurse and they really took the mickey out of us, and I just didn't they used to ask me questions and in my innocence, they'd say, 'Give me a lemonade bottle' and you see, in my innocence I'd give them a lemonade bottle. Much to the roar of laughter in the ward, which really we shouldn't have had to bear. That should never have happened to us. If they'd given us a better training, we wouldn't have been embarrassed like that.

Would you maybe just have been embarrassed at an earlier stage down the line?

But it wouldn't have mattered then, would it?

Because then you would have been being treated as recruits, yes, and here you were trying to hold down a job as a nurse.

Yes, and a great big long ward with masses of people. You can imagine standing up there and being laughed at and you couldn't just go away, never to come back, you just had to come back and front something else that's going to be just as awful.

Did you feel that the men were being cruel to you?

I think they thought it was terribly funny. I don't think they set out to be cruel, I just think that just in their coarse humour, they felt it was funny. Yes, go on.

I was going to say well there's the aspect of being embarrassed, having the mickey taken out of you, would you also say that you made mistakes because of inadequate training?

Oh yes, definitely.

(15.00) What sort of mistakes?

Well for instance, I'd heard about TB, I didn't realise how infectious it was, that the spitings in the pans and the urinals and things I'd put all together with other patients things, not knowing they had to be kept apart. So of course, I got hauled over the coals for this, and I had to boil everything before anybody could use anything. You see, that should have been told. I mean, now I think, golly, fancy being as innocent as all this, the things I did, but you are innocent of that world. It's a different world.

I think most of us would yes feel exactly very innocent in a situation like that.

But fortunately being human nature, you overcome these things and you survive, but that's why I think that the training was not good.

So how long had you been serving in the war zone before you did feel at home, that you could cope, that you weren't going to be embarrassed, you weren't going to make mistakes?

I can't say in an exact time, I think it just gradually happened. As I say, you knew you had to keep going, you had to go back and face those faces that you knew were going to laugh at you, so unless you put a barrier up and got on with it, you would never survive.

Did you find that you were expected to perform tasks which you'd had no idea how to go about at all?

Yes.

What sort of things?

Well I was in a mumps ward once, I don't know whether you know or not, but mumps affects men's testicles quite noticeably and painfully. I believe terribly painfully. Well we had to wrap them all up in [elixial?] pads which you wouldn't use now because elixial's not used and I thought, you know, I don't know that I like this much.

And what in nursing in a situation like that, would there have been any embarrassment, would there have been any jokes?

With some of the men, they were very embarrassed and very nice about it but there was so much pain that you really had to be very careful and you didn't want to hurt them anymore than it was going to be hurting anyway and so there was this sort of conflict. But you had to do it.

Um. Yes. Well they're some good examples because I yes, I mean I didn't canvas those things with Mrs Stocks so it's good to hear about.

Well it may not have affected anybody else, I don't know. I never discussed it with people.

She mentioned that, you know, she said she was she found it difficult not knowing the medical terms and so she'd go to read a report and it would mean absolutely nothing to her so she stopped reading the reports until she got hauled over the coals for that. Did you feel at home with the terminology that was being bantered around?

No, but I had a little dictionary in my pocket.

So that's what you would do if you had to read a report?

Oh yes, yes.

Now some of the AAMWS worked as nurses, in fact about thirty percent as nurses and ward orderlies whereas others were working in kitchens and wards and messes. Was there any differentiation between the nurses who did work as nurses, I mean between the AAMWS who worked as nurses and the ones who worked in the other things?

No.

But once you were trained in the wards then you tended to stay in the wards, is that how it worked?

Oh yes, yes. Because a lot of them went up as clerical. They were only going to be clerical, they weren't going to be in a ward. So you were pretty well, you knew what you were going to be doing.

And so you were in wards all the way along?

Um, um.

Right. How did you get into being in nursing duties rather than in any other thing in the first place?

I don't know. I don't know that I knew there was any choice. I think I in fact I'm sure I was quite surprised to find that some of them were secretaries and telephonists and people.

Did you share tents with people who worked in the other sections? Were you ...

No, no.

So you tended to perhaps to stick together with the ones who were in the wards?

Not always. I myself, didn't, but I do remember people that did. For instance there was a group that came from Tamworth, well they were a couple of telephonists amongst them, and they all dossed down together. So I don't think there was really a barrier.

Right. You were with the 2/5th all the way along. Did you perform higher level duties when you were sent to New Guinea. I'm not quite sure what they mean, did you perform any higher level duties?

No.

Did you become ill during your time of service in New Guinea? Nothing at all. This is the question about the Liberator bomber, in early September 1943 a Liberator bomber crashed on take-off into a company of 2/33rd Battalion causing many casualties. They were distributed between the 2/9th and the 2/5th. You weren't involved in actually nursing the casualties from that accident because you were busy with other things, and you didn't go across to Brunei, but some AAMWS did. Did nursing service in New Guinea encourage you to consider nursing as a peace time career?

No, but I did veterinary nursing.

(20.00) Did you? Oh! Was there any connection between the two do you think?

No.

Did you maintain nursing or VAD connections when you returned to civilian life we've said, yes you kept up quite a lot of contact with people you'd met. What interaction did you have with Papuan and New Guinean men and women?

Very little, very little, apart from the men that did the fire up at Rouna and the ones that took us out on lakatois, I think possibly no more.

Did you have servants in either did you have servants in was there a club in?

There was a club at Bootless Bay.

Did you go to that often or occasionally?

Yes, um. Quite a nice club really.

Tell me a bit about that.

Well it was just a big square building, practically nothing in it that you could call it. It didn't have any amenities or anything, but you could go there and it was on the beach and you could swim and that sort of thing. I don't think we had any servants though.

Could you get food there independent of your mess back at the camp?

There was food there but I never was quite sure how it came to be there. It wasn't prepared there. I presumed that when there was a function on people took it. You know, it wasn't as if you could go along and there'd be a lunch served or something. I think you had to have it all organised beforehand. Can't remember the details of that much.

Right, and you didn't have any Papuans or New Guineans ever to treat in the hospital?

No.

Now social life for all interviewees it says. Well a lot much of this was prepared by Hank Nelson who's an historian who I think has sort of done the research. I don't know if he personally formulated the questions. What are your recollections of your off-duty time in New Guinea, off-duty hours?

You mean what I did? I think quite a lot. We went out on boats, out on the reef and swum over the reef, we did that a lot.

Was it a pretty spot?

Over the reef was beautiful, um. Not as beautiful as Morotai reef, beautiful. We went along the coast, west from Moresby, across the little mud villages and things.

Did you ever call in at the villages, did you meet the people in the villages?

Yes we did.

What were your impressions of Papuan New Guinea like?

Pleasant people.

And if you went to would you hire a lakatoi from them they're the canoes, aren't they?

Yes, yes. I don't know how we came to get them. We certainly didn't hire them. There must have been some arrangements with the recreation area that such and such a lakatoi would be available on that day and you could go. I don't ever remember paying for them.

Tell me a little bit about, you know, what a lakatoi was like?

Well it was as you say, like a canoe, but it had this sort of out-float that kept it sort of from turning over I presume. It had a funny little sail.

How many people would fit on a lakatoi?

Well some of them were quite big. We could be about a dozen or so. Sometimes we'd go out on a launch, they had launches. Old, very old launches. I can remember being stuck on reefs in them and the tide went out at the wrong time, getting awfully sunburnt, but mainly they seemed to be lakatois and just swimming off them.

Did you do anything else. Did you ride?

No. Oh they might have, I don't remember anybody riding. They might have, I don't know.

Somebody mentioned it to me but I've only heard the one person mention that. Alan Walker who's written a medical history of the war says that quite a number of nurses found marriage partners as a result of their service in New Guinea. Did you go to any weddings or have any experience of that?

Yes we had I went to one, but I don't there were three I think and of course as soon as they got married, they got home. They weren't allowed there married. If you were married you didn't go.

(25.00) Would that be, I mean a good reason for getting married? Would people have either rushed or postponed marriage because of that aspect do you think?

I don't think so, no, I don't really feel that came into it.

And did you get to did you take up invitations to go to dinners or anything with the troops in other with the men? I know this happened with the nurses, I don't know if it happened with the AAMWS that you'd get an invitation for X number of nurses to go to did that happen?

Oh yes, yes.

Would you go along to functions like that?

Oh yes.

And what about things like concert parties? You mentioned Gladys Moncrieff came. Were there other concerts that you recall?

There possibly were. There were band concerts. I don't remember any individual apart from her being there. I think practically the whole hospital went. It might have been at the hospital. I think it was on part of the hospital and you're all outdoors anyway, like the movie theatre, it's all outside. The films.

Did you get lots of films?

No. It invariably rained anyway.

Do you remember any films that you did see at that time?

No, I don't remember them. I can remember going and being washed out and coming home but I don't remember what they were.

Something that we have recalled that we forgot to ask about was relationships with the Americans. Tell me first of all, what you remember about the toilet seat?

I remember being given the toilet seat and I'm afraid I can't just remember the circumstances and sadly I can't even remember the nice little message he wrote on it for me, but it became a treasured possession because of this terrible business of having to fire the latrines with oil because, being coal, you couldn't dig a hole so it was all sitting above the ground.

This was in Morotai?

Yes, and you had to, everybody had to sit on this terrible black oil encrusted pipe it really was, a great big pipe, so you can imagine that a good old wooden toilet seat was a valuable asset.

What else did the Americans have that we didn't?

Very good gaiters, very good boots and you were lucky you got the odd parachute which was pure silk.

And what did you use those for?

To make clothes. Blouses and things. Not that we used them much up there, but we'd bring them home with you.

Was there any resentment that the Americans seemed to have so much when the Australians had much more basic fare and much more basic equipment?

Not to me, but I suppose the Americans, the Australian soldier possibly had it. But as far as I was concerned, I couldn't resent them, I mean after all I was receiving their goodies.

Did you give anything in return?

No.

Beer rations?

Oh well, sometimes I would swap beer rations for their cigarettes, but that's all I had to give and my beer ration I think, amounted to one bottle a week or two a week or something, so it was hardly a great exchange.

So did you go out with Americans?

Yes. Not a lot, but we did go out with them. They had, the Americans used to organise parties and they'd ask us and we went.

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

END OF INTERVIEW.