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## TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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<b>Interviewer</b>	Connell, Daniel
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GPO Box 345  
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Identification: This is the first side of the first tape of the interview with Mrs Jess Dare. I'm Daniel Connell and the date is the 3rd February 1990. End of identification.

Right. Perhaps if we could just start back a little bit. If you could tell me a little about where you grew up.

I came from West Wallsend and my father was a coal miner.

Where's West Wallsend?

Fourteen miles out of Newcastle, and it was affected by the earthquake that was just happened up that way. My father's a coalminer. He came from Scotland and my mother came from Scotland, and they were both married out here. So we were first generations, more or less, of Australians. And during the war, when war first started - I was only a schoolgirl still - and then we got word to say our cousin from Scotland was going to be an evacuee and she came out and stayed with us for the duration of the war.

How old were you at the beginning of the war?

Round about fifteen I think, fourteen, fourteen - fourteen, fifteen, and I joined up when I was nineteen and a half.

How did you find out about the land army?

Well I was having a bit of medical problem and I went to a lady doctor in Sydney, and she told my mother I would soon be fit enough, should be able to join the land army. That was the first thing I knew about the land army. And from then ....

What else did she tell you?

Oh she didn't say anything. I didn't know much about it and I can't remember much about how I got around to it. My mother was a bit worried whether I'd be able to do the work, because I had a few problems. But I joined up. We had to have a medical examination by a government doctor when I joined up and he said, 'What do you expect to do?'. I said, 'Oh well, pick fruit or things like that I suppose', you know, just like that. So that was .... Next thing I knew I was getting the uniform down in Sydney and being put on a train to come down to Leeton.

What date? When did you join?

I joined either early ... end of January or early February. Those days are very vague with me, I can't remember. And I have no ....

What year?

(Laughs) 1944.

Right.

Yes. 1944. You're making me think too much. (Laughing). And we came down in an old dogbox and I met a girlfriend there - I met a friend - but she was coming down, we travelled down together and we're still friends, and she lives up in Wallsend still. But I didn't know her until that time. We had a great old time comin' down on the train, hoppin' out at each station and we arrived here on the Wednesday afternoon. Therefore we were allowed to go up the street and that's when I got my big shock and found the shops all closed, because they closed on a Wednesday afternoon here and then they opened on the Saturday all day.

Right. So, how did Leeton strike you? You had been used to Wallsend, but ....

West Wallsend. Two different places Wallsend and West Wallsend (laughing). Well, I thought we came out and we got on the side of the station and I said, 'Oh well, we are out in the bush now' because there was nothing over this side. When you stood on the railway station you just looked out. And then the next day we went out to work.

Well, before you get to that, um, could you describe the barracks or the boarding place that you stayed in?

I was down in the Leeton showground hall, and where it still stands, and they just had petitions and divided into three parts, and we just had a single bed with a palliasse on it and one little narrow wardrobe to hang our clothes up on.

How many other people there? Say roughly, not exactly.

Oh well, there was quite a lot of girls. I didn't know all the girls in ....

A hundred?

Oh yes, easy. You know, there would be about ten in our little sleeping place like, you know, but we had plenty open space in it because there was plenty air comin' in from all the cracks and so forth like that, and I was there for a while. The meals were good. Had to queue up for your showers and rush for those kinds of things, but the meals were quite good as far as I was concerned.

(5.00) What sort of work did you do?

Ah, well mostly I was out at Braithwaites and I picked grapes, table grapes and apples, and ... yeah, table grapes and apples were the most. I had a few oranges, but not many. I didn't .... And then during the winter time, we made half cases for the, ah, pack the grapes in, which I quite enjoyed, hammerin' away. It was quite good. Then we dig, we cleaned out ditches and spread manure and, you know, general farm work like that, which I found quite good, because I liked outside work. But then the heat got to me and so I asked for a transfer. And I was here for ten months working on the same property.

Before we go to the transfer, um, the life that you were leading, you've described the showgrounds. You stayed at the showgrounds all the time?

No. After a while we got moved out to Wamoon and we stayed on a private house there that was land army camp. And, ah, we just walked to work from there and we used to walk back and what did take my attention when we used to walk home was the beautiful sunsets when we first come here. And of course, then we experienced the beautiful dust storms that a lot of people (laughing) don't know about, but was, I'm quite happy to say that I was pleased to see those dust storms to know what the experience was, and they were beauties. And another thing that took my eye was the fluffy galahs, when I first saw them. But I know now what damage they can do (laughing) so I'm not, I don't think they're so pretty, but they were really, you know, took me. Oh we used to walk into town. We were five miles out of town there, but we used to walk into town of a Saturday morning, do our shopping and sometimes I walked in, went to Church on a Sunday morning.

What about in the evenings? What did you do in the evenings?

Well by the time you came home and had your tea and did your washing and so forth, and you sat down and wrote your letters or that, I was ready for bed, and most times just went to bed, you know. Just had quiet yarns with the girls, or a bit of muckin' around - not much. Oh, I mean I was a very quiet girl. Well that's how I remember meself, as a quiet girl.

What about the weekends?

Oh more or less the same. We'd go into town sometimes and do our shopping on Saturday, but then I did meet my future husband in Leeton, so I used to meet him of a Saturday night and go to the pictures or something or other, you know.

What, fairly soon after you arrived here?

No, about seven months after I arrived, arrived here. And then we just corresponded while I was away and picked it up that way. So I kept in touch that way.

How did you find the local people reacted to all you visitors?

Well when I was in Leeton showground hall, I mated up with another girl, and she had been in contact with a family in Leeton. Well they treated us tip-top. They were Fultons by name and they just were open-house to we few girls, and some air force chaps used to come to their place. And when I think back on it, (laughs) I think we must have been a bit of a nuisance at times, 'cause they had a big family of their own, and, but we were quite welcome to sit down at their table any time and beautiful home-made sponges and things like that, which we didn't get in the land army. But, no, I found it quite alright, and out at Wamoon well, we were just quite accepted I think. I, I didn't feel that I was out of place anywhere.

What about the Italians? They had been ... or not they, but the ....

I had nothing to do with Italians while I was here.

Right.

But since I've come back I've met a few. We've got, you know, some livin' near us and I get on alright with them ....

No, I'm just thinking of the situation during the war when ...

No.

... Italy itself was at war with Australia.

I had no contact with Italians at all. Other girls worked where some were but I had none.

What sort of problems, if there were any problems, what sort of problems did people worry about? You know, generally, you know, things that detracted from the quality of land army life?

I don't, well, as far as I'm concerned, I don't think we worried about anything.

What about pay? How much were you paid?

Two dollars er, two pound fifty - two pound five shillings, and then we had to pay board, and then we paid tax. So it didn't leave us much. Oh we had very little to live on compared to today, and we did get working clothes to work with and that, but we still had to supply some other clothes - our underclothes and things like that - you didn't get all that. No, I, oh I suppose I was brought up the hard way and I didn't expect too much in life. But, no, I really enjoyed the friendship and the company.

(10.00) The employers. Well, you were working for one all the time you were here. How did you get on with that?

I got on very well with them. In fact, I was kept on and in fact I suppose I might have done the dirty on them and I left just before the next season was coming on, because that I found it was a bit too hot, and ah, the health problem came back up again, so I had to go down and get that checked up and so forth.

Right. Discipline. Obviously from what you were saying, it didn't apply to you, but what sort of discipline was exerted at times?

Well, we had to be in by nine o'clock in some camps, and light went out at nine in some camps, but I found (laughing) the majority of us, we were ready to go to bed. And there might have been those few others that .... I admit I stayed out a couple of nights a bit late when I was at Wamoon, but that was the only place, and that was only when (laughing) I was out with the boyfriend. But, no, just, no well see, we just got up and went for our work - er, jobs - came home. In fact, I'm workin' harder now than I did in those days I think.

Um, well going back to the time when you were still in Leeton before you went out to Wamoon, um, were there any strikes, any disagreements like that?

Not to my knowledge. No, we just .... We might have done a bit of a grizzle but no, we, I never struck anything like that.

Um, how did you find that people in other services reacted towards the land army? You know, you mentioned the air force, but other people as well. How did they, um, I mean the CCC - the men in the CCC - were looked down upon, they say, quite a bit. What happened to the land army?

Well you got me there because (laughs) no, I don't think anybody looked down on it. I had a sister that was in the AAMWS and one in the AWAS, and I had a brother that was in the 6th Division.

I'm not saying they would have. They could have looked up to you. I'm just asking you how they reacted?

I told them that I was doin' a better job than the AWAS and the AAMWS because I was really workin'. But no, there was only, no, I wouldn't say that I got in contact with anybody that would, but I just said, we were workin' - they were just playin' around. So I suppose it was just fun rival, you know.

Where did you go to when you moved?

I was sent to a private place at Capertee - that's up near Mudgee on the Mudgee line.

How did you spell Capertee?

C-O-P-E-R-T-Y I think. C-A-R-P-A-P-E-R-T-Y. It's up near, um, well in fact the little town I went to was Running Stream, but we got out at Capertee. And that was just on a private house and I was actually only there for three weeks because there was three girls there before me and I only went up to finish off. And once we got the crop finished well we came back to Sydney.

What was the crop?

Apples and pears, and we finished pickin' them and packin' them and that .... Well we had no life at all there. It was just in the house. We went nowhere or anything. Oh, he did take us up to Mudgee one day but, I mean, it was just work. Oh, we got on alright. In fact, one of those girls and I are still very close friends. She lives down in Tumut and we just made our own, you know, we just talked, and as I said, by the time you finished work at night and had your tea you were ready - I was anyhow - ready for sleep, because it was a solid day's work we did. Oh yes, it was hard work. But then a lot of girls did harder work than I did. If I'd been put on sheep and cattle and things like that, well I don't know whether I'd have made it. And then, went back and then we were sent to Gooloogong, and I was there for five weeks pickin' beans. And that crop finished and we were sent - I went on leave for a little while - and then I was sent down to Batlow. And Gooloogong, we were only in a hall - er, shed - and there was nothing there, very little. There was travelling picture shows used to come through at times and we used to go to them. But apart from that it was just friends made, you know, talked and had your own fun and went for a bit of a walk or something like that. Then down in Batlow, well I kept swappin'. I was in the shed at one time and then, but they knew I liked

outside work, so then I gradually got outside Tumbarumba and we picked up potatoes. And we were only in the showground hall there, which was another very cold place, and by this time it's mid-winter, and that was very cold. But it was good fun.

(15.00) Had my twenty-first birthday down there, and the girls put on a surprise party for me. Some of the local ones turned up so we had a real good night, only the girls told me not to have it on a Monday night again because it was, we had to work all that day and get up and go to work the next day. But no, it was good fun. No, my days in the land army I thoroughly enjoyed. We had a good camp at Batlow. I finished up in Wakehurst - Lady Wakehurst camp - which is now the Batlow hospital, and the meals on whole were very good as far as I was concerned. First time at Tumbarumba we had a cook down there that wasn't very good, but then that soon got changed and I remember in Batlow I was sent out to a Haroldine camp - there was only about ten of us in that camp ...

What's a Haroldine camp?

Oh that was just the name of the camp, and it was just a bit out o' town on a farm, but I never worked for that, but we were working in the cannery, and the lady there, she was an excellent cook. And I got in her black books for not eatin' her cabbage, and she said, 'Why aren't you eatin' that?' I said, 'I never ate cabbage for my mother, so I'm not eatin' cabbage for you'. (Laughing). So I got into trouble for not enjoyin' her meals. But she was a very good cook, we had good meals there. But on the whole, we had good meals I suppose. Missed all the nice sweets though, I mean, 'cause I had a sweet tooth. But, food was a bit scarce. Tumbarumba we were rationed on butter and, you know, we all just got an ounce of butter. Well that didn't go very far. And milk sometimes, in some camps where it was a bit scarce. But, no, ....

Was there any variation in the style that you've described earlier, in terms of what people did after work, on the weekends, at those other camps?  
Tumbarumba and Batlow?

No, we just made our own fun and some of us got to know a couple of locals, and they took us out occ... you know, out on a picnic, but no, mostly, by the time you did your washing and caught up on your letter writing and, no, in my eyes we just did the same thing - we just had a quiet life. But happy life.. None of us seemed to be complainin' about there was no .... Oh, some of the other girls I know went out a bit wild, had their little drinks and so forth, but no, there was .... We kept in our own groups if, you know, there was different types, just the same in life today. You mix around with your own group. But the ones I were very close to, well we're still very close. Well I mean we correspond. We're scattered around but we still keep in touch with each other.

How often did you get leave? Just between jobs?  
Or ...?

Yes, more or less, just when you kind of wanted it and things like that I think, 'cause any time I asked for it I managed to get it.

Did you get paid while you were on leave?



Yes I did, I come to think of it. But we didn't have that much leave in between. I think I might have had, oh, about three .... No, once I went down to Batlow, well I .... I had three weeks after I left Gooloogong, then I went down to Batlow and we didn't have any then until the end of the war. So I, that was a few months.

So you stayed in the land army till the end of the war?

Yes, yeah, just, yeah just as it finished, and then we came out. That was it.

So, how were you discharged? Was there any particular ceremony involved in that?

No, I, I just came up and went to the head office in Sydney and that was it. I still kept my uniform. I, you know, I don't think they took anything back from me. I still had all that but .... Some of the girls stayed on longer and I think they were discharged, you know. But once the war was over, well quite a lot of us left. No, I can't really ... and we didn't have any marchin' or ceremonies like that. It was just like boardin' out and goin' to work and coming home again.

Did you ever have parades at any time?

Never. Not in my times. I think in the earlier times before, before the actual land army started, I think they might have had a bit, but they found out that didn't work. So we were more or less just boarding out in land army camps and going to the works where ... and it was the farmers that paid us.

You were paid directly by the farmers?

Yes. Yes, that's right.

And the land army organisation, um, how often did it actually come in contact with you? You mentioned that it was just like ordinary work and ordinary boarding, but apart from the matron, would you have any other contact with the land army?

Not really. There was the matron and then there was the sub matrons and the girls that did the general cleanin' and cooking, but that's all. I never come in contact with any of the other head ones. There was a head office down in Sydney but ....

Did you ever go to that?

No, only just to get our uniforms when we came and when I finished up I think. I think we had to go there and sign off or something. But that's a bit vague to me. (Laughing) I've had too much happen in between.

(20.00) At the end of the war, what sort of recognition did you get?

None. We just left and that was it.

Did you feel you should have got more?

No, no, definitely not. And I don't even think now. I mean, there was lots of other jobs that were just as important. I mean, our job was important and farmers definitely couldn't have managed because when I was working at Braithwaites, we had twenty-one girls on during the season pickin' fruit. Admittedly there was about five men there, but - no, there was about three men and a boy. No, I don't feel .... I just felt we were, well we were doin' what we want... - I was doin' what I wanted to do. I wasn't pushed into the land army. I was working down in Sydney just before that doin' nursery housemaid, lookin' after young children, and I wasn't real happy in doin' that. And it was when the doctor said to join the land army I thought 'Oh, that was good'. I felt more like doin' that than joinin' the other forces, or otherwise, as I got older, I might have been put into other works, you know, like ammunition work and things like that. I think I'd rather been out pickin' fruit than makin' bullets and packin' bullets and things like that. But down in Batlow I was on the orange shed job, and we was squeezin' orange juice and that was goin' to the Americans, I think. But, no, all the work we did in the sheds, or down at Batlow, they were all goin' to the forces. So we were doin our bit, and I'm afraid they wouldn't .... And see, where we were picking potatoes up at Tumbarumba, well those chaps - those farmers - had to grow potatoes and that. I mean, I think they were told to, the same as the ones with pickin' beans up at Gooloogong, 'cause they were all sheep and cattle stations and things like that. So they were just told to grow a few vegies and that's how we land army girls come in to do it.

What about marching on ANZAC Day?

Oh it doesn't worry me.

What? Not, not, well would you like to take part?

No, no. I've never worried about it. We did tak... march up here one first ANZAC Day I was in Leeton. We all did - well, the matron got us all together and we did march that day - but no, I do my thinkin' at home on those kind of things. I never go up and watch them or anything. I'm, no, a war's a war and life's a life and you've got to mix the two and separate the two and don't hold grudges, but hold respect. That's my life. But my brother came home safely, thank goodness. He had a couple of wounds. He had one bad one, but he's alright, still goin'. And we did have some girls that lost their boyfriends in the army. That was sad times for them and we all felt it when they did. And you could see the joy in the other one's faces when they got their letters from their boyfriends and things like that. But no, I suppose I've been brought up the old Scotch way (laughs). No, I don't think the others, no, I don't care if we don't get any more recognition, you know, (laughing) that's why I'm not very worried about this.

You were saying about the victory march.

Yes, well we all went from Batlow down on the train to the victory march down in Sydney and we did march and join in the fun and that down there that day. But it was really an eye opening to me to be in the land army. I seen a lot of country that I would never seen before and gave a lot of nice close friendships, and the countryside was quite nice, you know. I, I remember, if you ever have any white grapes, just think it's not an easy job pickin' white

grapes. They're got to be white, they're got to be ripe, but they haven't got to be white, but they are white. (Laughs)

I'm not quite sure what you mean.

We had to stand on ... most grapes - this was my first surprise - grapes, when I came to Leeton were on the low growing grapes. But when we came to pickin' the white grapes they were on the high trellis grapes. Well the ladders couldn't fit underneath 'cause they were too high. So we had to stand on boxes. Then you had to look up in the leaves and pick the ripe grapes. Well if you're tryin' to work out what looks ripe .... So if you ever get a bunch of grapes that's not quite ripe, just say `Well that was the shadow that made it look ripe', because it was one of the hardest jobs out, trying to pick a bunch of ripe, white grapes.

And balancing on the boxes, did they ever fall down?

No, I was a good balancer. (Laughing).

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

END OF INTERVIEW.