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TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00768
Title	Piltz, Linda
Interviewer	Connell, Daniel
Place made	Not stated
Date made	31 January 1990
Description	Linda Piltz, Australian Women's Land Army, interviewed by Daniel Connell for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45.

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Side 1, Tape 1 of the interview with Mrs Linda Piltz. This is Daniel Connell and it's Wednesday, 31st January 1990. End of identification.

[Inaudible]

Right. Mrs Piltz, if we could just go back and if you could tell me where you were born.

I was born in Boggabri.

Where's that?

That's up near Gunnedah. People don't know it very well.

And could you tell me a little bit about your family, please?

Well, we were I came from a big family of twelve, and I

Farmers, or?

No. No, just ordinary workers.

But working on farms?

Yes. But I didn't work on a farm.

And your parents came from, um, what sort of background? Were they English, Irish?

Australians.

Australians, okay. And religion?

Church of England.

And so you went to school, where?

In Boggabri.

Right. And when did you leave school?

I left school at the age of fifteen and went to work.

And what date was that?

I was b.... What date did I leave school?

Mm.

Oh. You got me there.

Well, was it before the war, or?

Oh, yes. I was ... I joined the land army when I was twenty.

Right. So in the, say, early years of the war, where were you at that time?

Well. I'd been I was in Gunnedah at the early part, working.

What sort of work?

I was doing cafe work.

And did you see much impact of the war during that period?

No, not really.

Rationing, of course.

Oh, yes. Everything was rationed - tea and sugar and clothing. You had to have your, what do you call them?

Coupons?

Coupons for that.

And did you have any relations who were, say, called up, away with the war ... had volunteered?

Yes, I had an uncle, he was away with the war. But I was the only one in my family that joined up.

Were you the youngest or the eldest?

I was the third one.

Right. And they were mainly girls, or mainly boys?

No, there was half - there was six of each.

Right. And so you'd been in Gunnedah, you said ...

Yes.

... working there.

I was working in Gunnedah, yes.

Right. And what caused you to vary the routine? To decide that you were sick of doing that, and you wanted to join the land army?

Well, I said to my girlfriend, I said, 'Come on. Let's join the land army'. And she was a bit younger than me. So 'right-oh' we

But why did you, why did the land army strike you?

Oh. We wanted to get away and see Australia, we thought. And at the finish, I was the only one that went. She was too young. So I landed here by myself.

Right. So, let's just, sort of, trace it through a bit. From that moment when you When did you first hear of the land army? How was it that you heard of it?

Oh, well, you heard of the ... with the war, and they were wanting women to work on the fields and I said, 'Well, here's an opportunity to help', so

Were there any around Gunnedah?

No. There was none there at the time.

Mm. Right.

So I decided, yes, I'd join.

And could you just describe what happened? I mean, did you go away? Did you write a letter?

Oh, yes, we wrote to the land army. They sent us forms back and then we both filled in the forms, but she couldn't get a uniform because she was under-age. She could only join for three months. She said, 'Nope'. So, I ended up coming by myself.

(5.00) What, she could have joined if she was willing to go in civvies?

Yes, in civvies. But not in, she couldn't get a uniform. And she wanted uniform.

Right. So, you conducted this correspondence with the land army headquarters.

Yes.

What ... when did you first leave Gunnedah? Did they send you a rail pass, or something like that?

Oh, yes. You got a rail pass to go down.

Where to?

... to, um, which street was it? Can you cut it off for a minute?

Oh, no. Just keep [inaudible] ... don't worry.

Um. What's the big place in Sydney where the army was?

Victoria Barracks?

No. Not Victoria Barracks. In the city there was a big building. Oh, I've forgotten it, now.

Right. But it was in central Sydney.

It was in central Sydney, and then we A friend of mine met me at the station and she took me.

Was that the first time you'd been to Sydney?

First time I'd been to Sydney.

Right.

That I could remember, you know. So, any rate, we landed there and when There was another young girl coming to Leeton and she was under-age but she didn't mind not having a uniform. So we 'palled up' and there was two of us coming to Leeton that night.

Did they give you any training, or telling you what was expected of a woman in the land army?

No.

No. You just They just gave you your pass and your clothes and everything. And then we just - on the train and arrived.

And what did you find when you got here?

Well, I didn't know what to think of the place. There was only half a dozen houses near the railway and I thought, 'Oh. What have we come to?' But when you got into the streets you found it different.

Right. And where did you stay?

At the dormitories. And the first thing they did when they - you arrived - they gave you a calico bag. And they took you over to the straw and you had to fill your bag with straw for your bed. And they gave you your bedroom, and, um - huts they were. But by the time you got the straw all in, and the worst of it The first night was the worst, because the straw would be stickin' into you. But once you got your bed down, you never turned it.

And, so, what you're saying, that was actually a very comfortable bed despite the fact that

It was comfortable after, when you got it all down.

And how many other girls were there?

Oh. There must have been a hundred or more, at the dorms.

How many people in a dormitory?

Well, I couldn't tell you exactly how many, but ... I wasn't there for that long at the dorms, and then we went

Oh, well, just a little bit. If we could just talk about the dormitories a bit. How were they run? Was it a fairly strict atmosphere, or what happened?

Oh, yes. You had to be in at a certain time. And you had to be there for tea, when tea was on. And you had to be in at a certain hour every night - you might say - the lights had to be out, because you had to be up early the next morning to go to work.

What would have happened if you were late?

Well, we were never caught bein' late, put it that way.

Well, what did you think would happen if you were caught?

I don't know. But we were never caught. We were able to sneak in.

How did you sneak in?

Well, one of the girls said to us when we got there, they said, 'See this post out here' and they had pegs in the post where you could step - climb up this post, and jump over the fence, and that was one way of getting in if you were late coming home at night and the gates were shut.

Right. And who was in charge of the place?

Look, I've forgotten the matron's name, now, from there, from the dorms. But, oh, she was - she was a good matron.

Were there any disputes between her and some of the girls?

No, no.

Some of the women?

Not really. They all got on well. It was one big happy family.

Right. And in the evenings, obviously, some of you, some of the time went out, but what happened to the people who stayed in? What sort of things would they do?

Well, they'd just sit there, either play cards or listen to the wireless. There was nothin' else to do, but mainly they all went to the pictures, or somewhere like that.

Right. And when you went out, what sort of things could you do?

Well. We used to just go to the pictures, because we didn't play tennis. Some of them may have played tennis, I don't know. But we used to just go to the pictures and then come home after the pictures.

(10.00)What about the foods? Where did you eat? Where were your meals?

Oh. Well, the meals were in a big dining room. And you just lined up and got your meal, and went and sat down. You had your own plate, knife and fork, and cup and that. But that's the main thing.

Right. What sort of food?

Well, I didn't complain about the food. The food was really good.

And, so, that was the pattern. There was a matron, any other staff?

A matron and the sub-matron and the cook and that was all, really.

Right. What sort of work were you doing?

Well, I was - first of all when I got there - I was planting tomatoes. And we were out on one farm and it started to get very dark. So the farmer came up and he said, 'Come on, all up to the shed'. He said, 'That's a big dust storm coming'. Because we'd never seen a dust storm like it. And he kept us all up in the shed till it passed. Then we'd go back to work again. But that was the first one, was picking tomatoes. Then we were picking oranges and just doing a bit of everything. But I never was out on the wheat or the rice, or anything like that. It was just in the vegetables and fruit.

And you mentioned that you moved on from the dormitories to somewhere else.

Yes. I moved on from the dormitories out to Wamoon and that was - there was a matron out there, her name was Armstrong. And the cook was Gwen, she was the offside for the matron. And she was - they were all very good - and the matron was very good out there, too. But she was, the only thing she didn't like was, late phone calls at night, where she had to get up and answer the phone. But otherwise she was very good.

Many late phone calls?

Well, some of them used to get phone calls about midnight. And she jacked up about that, after. She said no more phone calls that late at night.

What sort of work were you doing when you were out there?

Well, I was picking oranges at Wamoon. And we were doing peas, and I was up on top of the truck. They'd bring the peas in ... cut the peas for the cannery. And then I was ... they'd put me on top of the truck and I had to make sure they wouldn't fall off the top. And then after that, well Oh, we were doing carrots and everything like that. But on the peas, one of the men got a snake, a dead snake on a pitchfork, chased me round and round the top of the truck. But when the boss's wife brought down the morning tea, they weren't allowed to do it after that. She went for him, because I was screaming.

Yes. How did you find that people treated you, you know, employers treated you? Did they treat you in the same way that they'd treated, say, the labourers that they'd had before the war, or did they treat you as someone special who was doing a patriotic duty?

Well, they really treated us as somebody special. And you couldn't complain about them, at all. I had good bosses and good bosses' wives, and you couldn't complain.

Right. Was that true of all the ... all the women you knew, or not?

Yes. Well, all the ones I knew. They all got on well their bosses and their wives, the whole families.

What about the other women involved in the land army, did you see much of them?

Oh. Do I see much of them now, you mean?

Well

Or do you mean before?

Before. I mean, obviously you were working together during the ... to some extent and you were eating together, but, I guess you have to see a fair bit of them, but, did you also ... your social life was that with them or was it outside, or?

Oh, no. You had social life with the girls. We'd go out and if one was invited to a party and they'd say, 'Well, what about so and so?' 'Right. Bring her along.' And you know, they just all worked in together.

Right. And what about the land army women back in town, over at the dormitories at the canneries?

Oh. They were all very good.

Did you see much of them? Did you systematically get together with them, or?

No. Well, you just got away from them after a bit. But you used to see them in the town and you'd always stop and talk.

(15.00)Right. There was a strong feeling of 'We're all land army's, land army women together'?

Oh, yes.

When you went up to town, would you be wearing civvies, or your uniform of some sort?

Oh, no. You'd be wearing a uniform. You had the summer uniform and the winter one. And we used to wear our overalls as well, if we just wanted to pop up town to get something, and We didn't get dressed up just to slip up and get a drink or something like that.

Right. And how much were you paid?

Oh. Three pound fifty for the - three pound, five shillings. And then you had to pay two pound out of that for board. So it didn't leave you much, did it?

No. And in terms of meeting troops and people like that, did you see many people like that?

Well, you saw a few come through - those few air force people from Narrandera used to come over. They had a restaurant here, just a shop where they used to give you afternoon tea and that. A couple of - some old ladies used to come in there and they used to run it. But it didn't cost you anything. That was just to go in there and rest, if you had nowhere else to go.

A comfort station.

Yes. And they had piano, and they had a wireless, and if you wanted ... if anyone played the piano they could get on the piano and play it, and And they were very nice. They were local women that run that. And they were very good.

Um. The authorities, did they give you much recognition at the time?

No, none at all. We were just, what would you call it? [Laughs] we were just the workers. We didn't get anything.

I mean, did you, were you ever involved in ceremonies where you might be inspected, or where you'd meet people passing through who'd inquire about your welfare?

Oh, no, nothing like that. Not in my time. We did We had one chappy here, he used to see ... if he saw any of the girls up the street, he used go down and tell the matrons that he saw them up the street. And it didn't matter if they were goin' to a doctor, or what.

What did the matron say?

She, well, she Some of them were out of town girls. And I went in one day and that's when we were at ...I was shifted from Wamoon after that ... and it was another place I was at, it was down at the showground. And he came down there and he said, 'Who was with you, up

the street?' And I said I had been to the doctor and he said ... I said, 'Nobody', and he said 'Yes, there was'. I wouldn't do her in. Because she'd taken a day off work.

Who was he?

He was ah, Dick Strut. He had something to do with the RSL.

What, he was a first world war veteran, who was around the town, and ...

Yes.

... and being a bit of a busy body.

He was a real busy body. And he used to do us all in [laughs].

You said nothing much happened.

No. Nothing other than that. He was the only one that used to do us.

Right. Um. When did you meet your husband?

Oh, I met him about a month after I got here. And then we just We were going to a party and we had no way of going. And one of the girls from out of Stanbridge said, 'Oh, well' she said, 'Be out the front of the picture show. You going to the pictures?' I said, 'Yes'. 'Be out there and' she said 'I'll have someone there to take you'. And fr... and I met Eric and we ended up gettin' married.

Right. And there was no problem, courting wasn't difficult ...

Oh, no.

... meeting, or anything like that?

No. Nothing like that. Well, they'd meet you out in front of the buildings, out on the street.

Right.

And then, you - we'd go to the pictures and be back on time to go back into the barracks.

Right. Did you get away very much? Did you get back to Gunnedah, to meet your family, or ...?

Yes. I went back once. And we had a really They were really pleased to see me in uniform. They hadn't seen me in uniform before, and I arrived in uniform. I was only there for a week and I went - I came back again.

Right. How ...? Your feelings about Leeton during this time, how had they developed?

Oh. I just love the place. I'd never leave.

I mean, back in the '40s. I'm not talking about now.

Oh. Oh, well, in the '40s, they were beaut days.

(20.00)Right. The In the local community, the young men that were around, were there very many young men around?

Oh, there was a few, but, mainly they were younger boys. Younger than we were - a lot of them. But you'd, they'd always stop and talk to you. But the girls weren't very proud of us, they'd say we were taking their boyfriends - the local girls.

Right. And so, when you came to get married, where did you get married?

Well, um. I was married in the Church of England and the mother-in-law put on the reception at her place. And I had a couple of land army girls there and Because I didn't like to put on a big one, because she was doing all the work, my mother-in-law. But my people didn't come down because they couldn't afford it. So it was a bit lonely but after I was married I was happy.

And at the end of the war, what, it must have been about the end of the war that you got married?

Yes, it was. I got married on 14th July 1944. Well, the war ...

You got married in '44?

Yes, oh, I mean '45 [laughs], '45 I got married and the war ended just, I'd say, a month or so after. Might have been about two months. I've forgotten when it ended.

August 15th.

Yeah. Well, July, August - that's two months after I was married.

Right. And so looking back on the land army, how did you feel about it?

Well, if I had my opportunity, I'd do it again. I'd join up and have a lovely time like I did have. I really enjoyed it.

Right. So after the war, how did you find that people treated you and your record? Did you think that you were treated appropriately?

Oh, yes. Definitely. I'd go up the street and, oh, it's Everybody still knew who I was, you know, and the ... we'd stop and talk, and as my mother-in-law said, 'You know more people than I know'.

What about the Government? Do you feel the Government should have done more?

Yes. I think they should have done. Because we don't get anything, recognis.... They don't recognise anything we did. Now, I've lost my husband, and all the other girls that husbands went to the war, well, they get looked after. What happens to us? We worked in the land army, we get nothing. That's my opinion. So you're left with nothing.

What about ANZAC Day? Do you think that's important, being able to march on ANZAC Day?

Yes. Well, I haven't marched since I've been married but I've marched before.

What at ANZAC Day?

On ANZAC Day in the land army, we marched.

That was during the war.

During the war, yes.

Right.

We marched in Leeton.

Right. And so, the people who were in the land army, you've maintained fairly close contacts with them?

Oh, yes. We're very close. We see one another easy once or twice a week, you know, if you go up the street, well you'll always meet 'em. And we do go and visit one another, a few of us. But if you don't go and visit, well, you see them just the same, up the street.

END OF INTERVIEW