



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is an interivew with Mrs Joan Johnstone recorded on 30th January [inaudible] in the series for the Australian War Memorial and this particular item begins in five seconds from now. Oh, ten seconds from now. This is Tape 1, Side 1.

Joan Johnstone where and when were you born?

I was born in Garden Street, South Yarra, Christmas Day 1923.

Tell us a bit about your parents. What sort of people they were.

Ah. My parents. I was always very proud of them. They've both passed away. My mother was a child theatre person - 'Baby Jones - The Child Wonder of Prahran'. I've got a little scrapbook that my grandmother kept with all of her stage appearances from the age of five. She died when she was forty-nine.

What did she do that made her a child wonder?

She was a little song and dance star in the early depression days and when vaudeville was the thing to do. And continued on from a child star to having quite a voice, never made really big time, but every time I hear Gladys Moncrieff ... she had that sort of lovely happy ballad style. And in those days people would say, 'Oh, we're having a few friends over, will you come and sing for us, Doris?' She'd always say, 'Oh, yes. No problem', and she would go and sing for them. And you'd hear the old songs like 'High in the Tree There's a Little Brown Bird Singing' and 'Lo, Hear the Gentle Lark' and those ballady type songs, um - 'Just the Song at Twilight'. Those lovely songs that everybody knew and she would sing [inaudible].

And what about your father?

Um. My Dad was an ordinary bloke from Prahran, one of five brothers. A very good looking fellow who married when he was twenty-one. Um. Was remote as father's were remote, when I was just growing up, but very proud of anything that we might have done.

Was that the fashion of the day, to be a bit remote in a way?

I feel that it was. I feel that it was. I think that it was still very much a man's world and the home and children were left to the mother. On looking back, I think this is the thing - if ever anything important cropped up and I said: 'What about this Dad?' he'd say: 'Ask your mother'. He wouldn't take credit for anything. But he was a builder, oh, a timber worker, went out ... he was one of the first out on strike in the early depression years. I can remember quite a bit of this. They had ... my eldest sister was born in 1922, she was about thirteen months older than me - children came close in those days. And when she was six she lost her sight. She had been very sick up until that stage and, so, they were very young and they had lots of trauma in their early life. And then with the strike, the general strike, and then the depression starting. I know Dad was out of work for quite a number of years.

Was your mother able to earn money during that period ...

No.

... on the basis of her talents?

No. My mother never earned money. She gave of herself but she never took. I think if she was asked to sing, perhaps at community singing or Prahran Town Hall, they might pay a little fee, something like, or whatever, a small minimal fee. But in those early days of her having her babies she wasn't singing.

How many were in the chilren, er, how many children in the family?

Three girls - she lost the boy. She had a stillborn son. But three girls, I'm the second child. Then there was the boy that she lost and then my younger sister is seven years younger than me.

So how did you manage during those years of the depression?

(5.00) Um. We always had - I can never feel any sense of not having had enough to eat - there was always food to eat. But we never had bread and butter and jam. We might have bread and butter or we might have bread and jam. We always had butter on the table. And I can remember that being a topic of conversation amongst the, you know, the kids going to school: 'We haven't had any butter' or 'We don't have butter'. 'Do you have butter?' or whatever. Children, sort of, spoke about those things somehow. And I can remember saying, 'We can have bread and butter or we can have bread and jam but we don't have both together'. And I can remember visiting a girlfriend, a little girl playmate's home and her mother said, 'Would you like a piece? What would you like on it? Would you like bread and sugar?' I said, 'Can I have bread and butter on one piece, and bread and sugar on another piece?' And then I put them both together and I felt very pleased about that because I thought, you know, I've got what I wanted. Because bread and sugar was very dry, very dry, not nice at all.

As you were growing up, what sort of ideas did you have about ...? When I say growing up, before you were even, say, a teenager. What sort of ideas had you begun to have about where you were going and what you'd do with your life? What were your expectations?

I didn't really have a lot of expectations. I didn't plan ahead. I was quite content to go along the track I was going. A lot of things happened at home. I wasn't a brilliant student. I ... we just went to the local school. I'm a Catholic but I didn't have a Catholic upbringing which was a great pity, but still in all ....

Did your Catholicism come later? The family wasn't Catholic?

My Catholicism came in an unusual way and it's had a very big bearing on all of my life, even right through my army days. My mother was a Catholic, my father wasn't. When my younger sister was - this is digressing a bit - but when my younger sister was five years old she had hurt her leg, she was in a ... involved in a bit of ... climbing a fence, I think it was. And she got a nail in her knee which apparently went straight in and straight out. It was a day or so before it was realised that she had a problem. We lived in A'Beckett Street, Toorak, at that time and Dad said, 'Take her down to the Alfred Hospital'. They took a sample of fluid from her knee which had swollen and it was ... this had happened on the Monday, this was about

the Wednesday morning. The result of the test wasn't back until the Friday and by that time she was not expected to live. And gangrene set in to this infection in the marrow of the bone of her leg and it was absolutely dreadful, absolutely dreadful and my older sister, my blind sister, was attending the Blind Institute and was receiving instruction from a young blind brother, Catholic brother who had been training for the priesthood but had lost his sight and couldn't go on. And Patsy lived at the Institute through the week and came home at weekends and she had to go to church. Well, my mother said to me, 'You'll be the one to take Patsy to mass'. I always had to look after this older sister, so I ... this blind lass. She was my constant companion when she was at home. So naturally I was the one who had to take Patsy to church. And so I'd take her every Sunday morning around to Our Lady of Lourdes in High Street and follow the crowd, and I'd say, 'They're kneeling' and we'd kneel and then I'd say, 'Well, come on we go to the seat'. 'You've got to kneel', 'Everyone's standing, stand' or 'They're doing this with their hands and crossing themselves'. I didn't have a clue. I had no idea what was going on. But we got through it and Patsy was all right, she didn't get into a blue because she hadn't been to church on the Sunday morning. But I didn't get anything from it, personally.

However, when the night came, on the Friday night after Thelma had ... was taken to hospital and she was admitted. Dad came home terribly distressed and he said, 'She's not expected to live overnight and if she does live they want to take her right leg, operate on her and have her leg taken out from the hip'. Because apparently this gangrene had gone right through her leg - before tetanus injections. And so that was a dreadful, dreadful thing and my mother was distraught. They're only in ... they're still only in their twenties. And she said to me, 'Your father and I are going out for a walk, you stay with Patsy'. And so off they went to walk and they walked all night and Patsy said to me, 'What can we do?' and I said, 'I don't know, what can we do?' and she said, 'Let's go and see the priest and ask him to say a mass'. I didn't know what good this would do but off we went, us two kids - I was twelve. And ... eleven or twelve. And around we went to ... and knocked on the door of the Presbytery. And the priest came out, and he said, 'Hullo, you two, I've seen you at church', you know, 'What's your story?' And Patsy spoke up and she said, 'Father, our little sister is in hospital and the doctors say that she mightn't live through the night and we want you to say mass'. And he said, 'Yes' and he said to me, 'What about this?' I said, 'Yes, that's right. That's right', I didn't know whether to call him mister or uncle or what. He said, 'I've seen you at church, do you ... you don't go to our school'. I said, 'No'. He said, 'What school do you go to?' I said, 'Toorak Central'. And he said, 'Are you Catholic?' And I said, 'Yes'. And he said, 'What do you know about the church?' And I said, 'Very little, Father'. And he said, 'Would you like to know?' And I said, 'Yes, I would'. And he said, 'Well, look, before I enter into anything, yes, I will say a mass for your sister in the morning. I'll pray for her tonight. I will say mass for her in the morning'. And he said, 'If you would like to learn more about the church, I'll arrange for you to receive instruction from the sisters at St Mary's'. And so I thanked him and off we went. And my sister lived through the night. My mother refused that operation. She said, 'No. I've got a little blind girl. I don't want a little crippled girl. If it's the will of God that she's taken she'll be taken. If she's going to live, she'll live and she'll be complete. We'll see what happens'. And so they didn't operate. She was in the Alfred Hospital for twelve months. They couldn't ... they had her in a little room right out the back - the back grounds in that area because they couldn't constantly dope her up to ease the treatment and so they had her out in this area so that she wasn't too distressful for other children in wards. And they would have to ... she was in a plaster case with iron things around her to keep all pressure off her body ... this beautiful little child. And ....

She'd be screaming in pain at times?

Screaming in pain, yes. And we'd go down there 'cause we lived close to the Alfred and she would say - I'd read her comics - and she'd say, 'Oh, not ones that make me laugh it, hurts me'. and so we'd have to be very caring. Mum took most of her meals down to make sure she had nice food and to know that we were still loving and caring even though she was stuck in this horrible little remote area. And apparently ... there were holes in various places through this long plaster cast ... and she had to be syringed with some solution to keep ... try and free the ... wash out whatever was there. And eventually she ... the doctors said, 'This is ludicrous. If we save the leg the marrow has gone from the bone, it won't renew itself. And she's only got to trip over and chip her leg and it's going to come off anyway, but that didn't happen. Her kneecap was taken out so she's still living - she's still alive and well, beautiful, beautiful person. She's got four daughters. Her youngest daughter ... the three older girls are married. She's got grandchildren. She's had a lovely life, lovely happy life. She's certainly had a stiff leg.

Did that seem like a miracle to you at the time?

To us that was a miracle. To us that was a miracle. And gradually as I went to the sisters, I've developed a wonderful faith which has sustained me through lots of things, got me into lots of trouble, marriage-wise, but my life has really taken funny turns. But that was the beginning of my faith. How did we start getting onto that [inaudible]?

Well. At this age, it sounded like you were saying before then that your expectations of growing up, maybe having a family and the usual sorts of things, was that the case?

No. I knew that would probably happen, that I would marry. My parents were very happily married. There were wonderful moments between them. I can remember sitting listening to the radio and seeing my Dad's going over and holding Mum's hand and my feeling of - a lovely feeling of unity. There was a contentment, a lovely happiness in my home. I had no doubt that I would marry and that was the way life would be - lovely and rosy, full of contentment, lovely little children, perhaps a bit of sadness but still the love of your husband sustains you through it all, and there you go, that was all there was to it.

(15.00) Well, it sounds like that didn't happen.

That didn't happen. No, that didn't happen.

Well, what happened then?

Well. I had just coasted through school here, it was no problem but it was nothing terribly important. And I, through a friend of my mother's, I sat for the entrance exam for the University High School, not thinking that I'd ever get anywhere and I passed that examination. So I started going to the University High School and that to me was the beginning of thinking. I started to learn.

Incidentally, around that time, what was the feeling in the family towards matters, say, as to the sense of identity? Were you ...? Did you regard

> yourselves as British? Did notions of the ANZAC tradition, Gallipoli and all those sorts of things, did they loom at all in the concerns and interests ...?

No. My mother was born in Australia. Her parents were born in Australia. Their parents ... my great-grandmother was born in Australia. We didn't know much about Dad's family. As far as we know, the same applied. Because I know that they were in ... my grandfather was born in Blackflats[?] which is now Glen Waverley, I think, that area. But Great-grandmother was born in Victoria, yes, in Victoria, in Bendigo goldfields area. My grandmother was born ... at her aunty's pub at White Cliffs, the opal place. My great-grandfather was ... he was a master mariner, we've always .... He was known as 'Captain'. He was a master mariner in the Murray-Darling area - Darling River. And in my mind they went up the Darling and across land from Wilcannia ... is that that area up there ... through Menindee up across to the pub. I don't know, my sister's doing the history and she's all involved and you know. But, even so my great-great-grandparents - mother - was Irish. I think great-great-grandfather was English. They're the two who married and came over here. He was in the army, I think - Queen's Irish Guards, or something or other. But we haven't verified that. The family seems to be a bit romantic when they talk about what's happened in the past so I'm not really sure about that.

> Was there a first world war involvement? Did members go off to war?

My grandmother's brother went to the first world war and died at Lone Pine. But he was the only one. I can remember the family ... my mother always referred to England as the home country - back home. And we always, always identified as British, rather than Australian.

> Were patriotic songs part of the family repertoire with that musical background?

Yes, yes. We used to sing ... there was one thing about

> 'I'll go one, said Poland,
> I'll go two said, France,
> I'll go three, said Germany if I get a chance,
> I'll go four said someone and wipe them off the map,
> But they all cried out when Britain said I'll go nap.'

Because they were all card players and nap was a card game. And apparently you'd go one trick, two tricks, or whatever.

> 'The British lion is a noble sign and proud of his conscious might,
> The terror of those he's made his foes if he always defends the right.'

Yeah, we had ... knew all of those stirring patriotic songs that came back from the first world war and even earlier. And they were part of it. We were very traditional.

> So from University High School, where did you see yourself going?

I didn't know. I just wanted to keep on learning. Then a friend of my Dad's ... there were still ... just out of the depression. Dad had got a job as a model. He was discovered on one of the beaches paddling his feet after looking for work, by Pat Hanna who was a commercial artist of the day, taken and asked if he would model for a new brand of cigarettes that was coming

out for Careras, Standard Cigarettes .... He was tall, great looking fellow, typical Australian bloke. And as a result of that, every time I got in a tram or train or opened a paper which said, 'Dad, stick to a Standard' and he was that commercial man ... this was 1931, round about the time Thelma was born, and he was given a job washing windows at Careras in Cato Street Prahran, so that he would always be there if they needed him for these assignments, and from that he worked in other parts of the place. He finished up ... he stayed there ... he was working there right up until the war and he went back there after his war service. And that solved his problem. But back then when I ... I had two years at University High School and Dad had said - he was very proud of me passing for this examination, you know, he thought that was really great. And he said, 'Whatever you want to do, whatever you want to go on and do, we'll be behind you. We'll help you'.

(20.00) And so I sort of thought, 'Go on - what will I do, nursing?' but I had no real bent to anything. And then a friend of his worked for Consolidated Press Limited in Newspaper House in Collins Street. His name was Arthur Raynor and he was the circulation manager for the *Women's Weekly* and various other papers, mostly the *Women's Weekly*. And he had remarked to Dad that there was a chance that they'd need a junior girl in the office. And so I finished school that year in the December that I was fourteen. And Dad said, thinking that I was going to go back to school the next year. And Dad said that this job was there and so Mum went in with me, I mean, I was told, I didn't ask about this, I was told. I went in and I was interviewed for this job as junior office girl at the *Women's Weekly* and I got the job. I can remember the man, Charlie Sanderson was the name of the accountant who interviewed me. And I remember him saying 'Write', you know, 'write this. Give me a sample of your handwriting'. And I had a dreadful scrawl. And I can remember Mum saying, 'She prints rather better than she writes'. And he gave me a little list of figures to jot up. And so it was my job to go through the mail and sort out people who wanted patterns and enter that costing in ... you know, paper patterns they had. They had the sixpenny one and they had the higher, bigger fashion ones for one and six.

Did it seem a bit glamorous to be associated with a magazine like that?

Oh, it was wonderful. It was wonderful. I loved it. I loved it. I had very few, very little in the way of clothes to wear because, you know, we didn't have many clothes. I had an uncle who was my mother's brother who couldn't get work during the depression and so his parents bought him a horse and dray and he became a bottle-o, ragbag man around South Yarra. I think he was one of the first. Billy Jones was his name. My mother's father had a hairdressing shop in Chapel Street and then later a little shop in Simmons Street which was when they put the high rise flats in that area that they went. But I liked this area because it's sort of associated with those days. So Uncle Billy became a bottle-o and he was a bottle-o till the day he died. And he would bring home clothes and things that these days go to the Brotherhood of St Laurence, or whatever. But in those days, they just would go out to the rag and bottle man. And so we'd go through Uncle Billy's ragbag if we needed anything and it was amazing the lovely little things. So clothing ... I mean, we didn't go out and buy clothes, we made do and what my sister had was passed down. So wardrobe-wise, you know, when it started off - going to work was very difficult.

It didn't make you discontent. You didn't feel that somehow you were outside this glamorous world?

Oh, no. No, no, no. It was the way of the day. When I was outfitted for my school uniform. Mum bought the material and made the little summer dress. But my blazer and a school hat - I walked down ... I had to do a message for Mother ... and I marched down Malvern Road. I was wearing my blazer, green with UHS on the pocket. And I was just so proud. I was twelve. And this was just it and a bit. And a friend of my mother's saw me apparently and she said, 'I saw Joanie walking down Malvern Road with her shoulders back, marching out as if she was on some great long trek, with her head up and her shoulders back'. And I thought that was it. And I can still feel that. I loved it. This was another good thing about the army, joining the army. We were all dressed identically and there was no difference between any of us. And we just ... and because we'd all come through that same school, we just loved this feeling of being in uniform and equal with each other, not competitive. Loved that lovely sense of sharing and ... it was great.

So where were you when the first notion that there was trouble looming in Europe was about?

I heard the men talking. The men used to ... would play cards at home. And the men talking about ... if there was a problem what they would do. Dad missed out on the first world war. Dad was born in 1900 so he was fourteen in 1914, and always was a bit annoyed that he missed out on the great adventure, which it was. It's written up quite ... that they did think it was a great adventure and they ... if it ever came again they wouldn't miss out. They would make quite sure that they were there. And the older ones who had been there and they'd say, 'Oh, it's not all fun and games, Harry, to ...' - my Dad was Harry - 'Not all fun and games'.

(25.00) But Dad knew that this was going to happen somehow. And also, working at the *Women's Weekly*, I was there at this time and there was talk there, of course, amongst the men. George Gibson was the advertising manager in Melbourne for the *Daily Telegraph*. I remember him talking about, 'What's going to happen?' And he did, he joined the air force and he was one of the first men killed and that was very very tragic. A boy that I was at school with, Mervyn Finster was one of the ... he was some air force cadet scheme even before - even before the war he was interested in aircraft. And he joined as well and he was one of the first casualties and that was very, very sad.

But just at the period, near the war, for yourself.

For myself. No. Women didn't do things like that. Women stayed at home. Women didn't join the army or do anything like that. But Dad bought, knowing that this was going to happen, Dad borrowed fifty pounds from my grandmother and put a deposit on a little house in Bonbeach. It was either Greensborough or Bonbeach, we were living in A'Beckett Street, Toorak at this time. And he thought, being a handyman, he bought this little old place, a stone's throw from the beach, about four houses from the beach at Bonbeach. He did it up quite nicely and he said, 'Now, I know you'll be all right here when it happens'. Dad was preparing to go. He joined ... he was forty in June 1940 and the war broke out at the end of 1939 and Dad joined the army. He was still thirty-nine, because forty was the cut-off point. Dad joined the army a month before his fortieth birthday. Did his training. Meanwhile we're living in this lovely area down near the beach. I mean it was just magnificent we loved it. I was travelling up to town every day doing my work at the *Women's Weekly*. Um, and then, um, Dad was the 8th Division, and sailed off in early '41, I think ....

How did your mother feel about that?

Resigned. Resigned. She knew that she'd stay at home, 'Keep the home fires burning', look after the girls and pay off the house with, on his money, and because the army allotment was steady. My sister, my elder sister, Patsy, at this time was living at home. The infantile paralysis epidemic closed a lot of the boarding schools and so she, I think she was about sixteen at this time, and the Blind Institute closed its doors whilst this dreadful epidemic was raging and Patsy came to live at home at this time that we went down to Bonbeach. So Mum was there with Patsy, Thelma was still a kid at school she went to St Joseph's at Chelsea, and I was working.

> Incidentally, with that musical interest of your mother's, was there any sort of pressure or did she try and push you into a show biz career or any aspirations of that sort?

No. No. I can remember, I used to fancy myself a bit as a singer and, you know, I'd sing around the house where, you know, I'd think I was lovely. And Patsy too would ... we'd get around the pianola and we'd sing and belt our hearts out, you know. And an aunt of mine came in one day and she said, 'You'll never be as good as your mother, my girl', which stopped me, I would never sing in public, I would never sing out in front of anyone or, if there was a gathering at home, I would never be the one who would sing songs.

> We've a great tradition, Australians, of putting each other down in those sort of creative ways, haven't we?

It's sad. It's sad. It's very sad, it shouldn't be. Because ... I'll sing at the drop of a hat now, no matter where I am ... any group that I'm with - playing cards I'll burst forth in song. Dad was a great singer in the old musical hall style. Dad's father was one of the early clog dance champions and my Dad used to say, 'If any song was ever sung in a music hall, I know it'. And he did. He knew them all. And I can remember taking a particular boyfriend home, not so ... oh, about how many years ago ... well ten years ago, or something. And Dad sang the old thing 'A good man nowadays is hard to find' and he said, 'Take care Joanie' - you know - 'you've been trapped here, there and everywhere'. But he always had a song for, no matter what. And he'd say, 'Always look after your mother' and he'd sing a little ditty about 'I found in my mother's eyes' or something like that, one of those old songs.

> Where had he gone off to with the 8th Division? I cut you off at that point.

He went to Malaysia. And was taken prisoner of war in Singapore in 1942.

> Had you joined the army by that time?

No. That was one of the reasons that caused me to join the army at that time. At the end of 1941 the ....

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is Side 2 of Tape 1 of the interview with Mrs Joan Johnstone about the Australian Army Women's Service and was recorded on 30th January 1990 and continues in five seconds.

Sorry. You were saying?

I was eighteen in that December of 1941, born in 1923 ... that's right. And so I was only eighteen when I joined the army. And a girlfriend of mine, a couple of years older than me, said, you know, 'We should be doing something'. She put the idea into my head. She said, 'How do you feel about joining one of the services?' and there had been a bit of talk about WAAAFs. You know, they were sort of, you know .... Girls only joined the air force because they were ... they started off a bit before us. And I said, 'Well, I don't sort of fancy, you know, joining the WAAAFs'. Dorothy said, 'But look, you can join the army'. And I thought, 'Well, that's it. Great. I'll be in that. Yes'. I went home and I said to Mum, 'Dot suggests that we go off and join the army, Mum'. And she said, 'Oh. Would you have to go away?' And I said, 'Oh, I don't really ... don't know anything about it, wouldn't have a clue'. And she said .... I said, 'But would it be all right with you if I did?' And she said, 'Oh, Joanie, I don't know where your dad is, or what's happened to him'. There'd been no official news that .... We knew that they'd all been taken, of course, but there was nothing to say that he had lived and was a prisoner of war. We didn't know officially. She said, 'I don't know, I couldn't bear it if anything happened to you'. She said, 'You can join as long as you're not sent away. Don't go away. Don't make me go through that'. And I knew I couldn't, I knew I couldn't make her go through that - suffer - that I'd be sent away.

To that point, had you been involved in any local activities or were supportive of the war effort in one way and another?

Yes. Yes. But, sort of, it didn't have any depth of meaning.

What sorts of things were you doing?

I did join a little local group of girls who were some sort of - they called themselves, I think, Civilian Defence or something. I only went to a couple of meetings before .... I know we did some exercises and there was a little khaki drill uniform you'd get with a little glengarry cap, that I hadn't invested in as yet. It was all too new. Girls sort of didn't really become involved. I was never in the Guides or anything like that as a kid so I didn't have that beginnings. I just, sort of, kept working. I had gone from Careras - gone from *Women's Weekly* at the time because Dad had suggested I'd make more money at Careras. And he'd arranged an interview with me there and I got a job at Careras. It was factory work and I didn't like it. So when Dad went off to the war after stirring farewells from the Careras people, I ....

Did you see him off, by the way?

Yes.

Describe the scene when he went.

We only saw him off from Melbourne, from Melbourne, by train. He had to go up to Pucapunyal and then they were transported to Sydney. And he left on the *Queen Mary* from Sydney harbour so we didn't go up and see that. But I was sort of background, I was in the

background with Patsy hanging on to me arm. Mum was the one we watched. Mum was the one we watched being so very, very brave. She was only, barely five foot tall, my mum. And such a brave little soul. She always seemed to be going through so much. She just tore my heart strings, my mum. And it was just - it was her - it wasn't Dad going off very brave and strong and handsome and just going to kill them. He was going to just wow them because he always did, no matter where he went, he was just a wower. He was going to be all right. I knew he was going to be all right. It hadn't struck me then that something ... that he also was vulnerable. But it was Mum, Mum who was ....

Where were you then when you heard the news of the downfall of Singapore?

(5.00) I can't recall.

Do you recall the feeling at home when you got the news - anxiety and all that?

There was a feeling of ... it was horrible. It was a feeling of horror, that was when I knew Dad was vulnerable. We'd had letters from him, talking about training, doing training in the jungle because they didn't have a lot of training back here - using broomsticks. And the first guns - from my memory and from the letters - the first guns that they held with live bullets in, they were virtually in action. So it was a very untried army that was sent over there.

So he did actually see some action before the capture?

He saw action. He was made a lance corporal in the field, which was a great honour he said, much more honourable to be a lance corporal, one striper, in the field, than working around a barracks and getting something. 'Those fellows can easily get a stripe'. But no, he was .... I can't .... The feeling at home was strong and the feeling that we at home were vulnerable ... and the local people putting in air raid shelters. We had a vacant block on the corner of our street - Williams Grove and Nepean Highway. And so they put in an air raid shelter, dug - very sandy soil - dug out this, you know, trench, zig-zaggy trench across the corner block and braced the sides with ti-tree sticks. I saw the milkman's horse fall into it. And the only other thing that I remember about this air raid shelter, I used to run across that corner block from the station to home and I'd grab a few sticks to put in the chip bath heater so that I could have a hot shower that night. And by the end of the war, I mean, all of the sticks had gone, I used it all for our air ra... for my chip bath heater. But no, it was just an overwhelming feeling of dread, I think, that took over.

So where did you go then, when you looked at signing up? What was the actual process?

Dorothy and I went into Melbourne to the Town Hall, signed the papers ....

Many people round at the time?

Big empty room with trestle tables and a few officer type ladies sitting taking .... We had to fill out forms and we were asked what experience we had. And I said, 'Oh, well, I worked at the *Women's Weekly* and I can operate their little switchboard'. And they said, 'Oh, good, you can operate a switchboard. Can you type?' And I said, 'No, not really'. I'd picked out ... I could one finger type, two finger type - three hands on one finger and one on another - three fingers on one hand - what am I talking about. Anyway, I wasn't really a typist but I knew I

could operate a switchboard because the *Women's Weekly* had a little board with three incoming lines and ten extensions and I could do that off the back of me head. I didn't even have to think about it. We had three phone numbers - F six, double six, three, four and five. And the phone would ring and a little shutter would fall down. Oh, I knew how to operate a switchboard, no worries. Of course, when I got up to 2nd Army Headquarters there was this enormous great big thing with lines and plugs and cords and everything like that. And I thought, 'Goodness, gracious me, is this what a real, big switchboard looks like?' But I was ... went to the command paymaster's office and just had a little board and I could cope with that very nicely - very similar to the one back home.

> Just at that point of joining up, had there at that stage been much promotion to attempt to encourage women to join? Were there advertisements and appeals and so on?

Yes, there were, but not that I'd taken a lot of notice of them. I first knew about the army through my friend, Dorothy. And she said, 'Well, the army have got ...' you know, 'You can join the army now'. So off I went and then I noticed, it was then that I became aware of the push and the need. And the rookies course at ... the rookies school that I went to at Glamorgan. Gradually I became more aware, more absorbed and the stridency of it came, and it was a very vital thing but not until I was in the army, was I fully aware of that.

> At the Town Hall then, and as you were filling in those preliminary papers, was there a medical at that time? What was the process you had to go through?

No. I had to go ... I had to have a medical and I weighed 140 pounds.

> Where did you go for that?

You're diggin' them up, aren't you? I think it was a drill hall in Victoria Street, in the city - I'm pretty sure about that. A drill hall, yes.

> And what ...? How extensive was the test?

(10.00)We had blood pressure, eyes, weight, teeth were looked at, hearing, stethoscope over the chest and the back because, you know, we weren't long over that dreadful tuberculosis scare that was on. We had to tell them all about our childhood illnesses and things. And I can remember saying, 'I've got a sister who's blind but it was the result of a brain tumour, it's not a family thing, you know, it's nothing to do with ...' genetics wasn't a word that I knew in those days. It wasn't a genetic thing, I wouldn't have said that because I didn't know the word - that's a recent thing.

> Was it all a shocking experience for young women? I mean, you weren't required to strip in a group and present yourselves or anything like that?

I don't remember it as being shocking. I can't even remember whether it was a female or a male doctor. I felt, I was very grown up about stripping off, you know, because I belonged to the Bonbeach Lifesaving Club and us girls, well, you'd get in and you'd have to change out of your clothes into your togs and out and hop back in and have your showers. So, you know, I was ....

So you got used to being with a group of other people.

Yes. I wasn't ... I can remember some of the girls when we first were in barracks and they'd be very timid behind their towels going to have a shower. I couldn't understand that. I mean ... and that was a normal thing to me. That was never a problem. I'm not saying that I'd strip off in front of a room full of fellas and if there were men in the area ... but I was accustomed to being with girls and changing into swimming knicks and getting down onto the beach and so on because we had this little changing room at the life saving club. So that didn't worry me, there was no horror or, I wasn't worried at the thought of having a medical examination. I'd always been a healthy girl. In fact I'm still a very healthy girl. Sometimes I get a feeling of guilt, with the sicknesses that my family have had, that why am I the healthy one, why am I fit and strong and well when Thelma had her problems but they still, Dad was a healthy man.

So after the medical what then?

After the medical. Then we went home and waited until we were called to .... So I received a notification that, yes, everything was okay, and my intake was 6th June 1942, when I was to present myself with my toothbrush at Glamorgan.

How did you receive advice that what you took was a toothbrush?

I'm saying that, sort of tongue-in-cheek. I'm quite sure that - I don't really know - I'm quite sure that I didn't take a lot with me. We had to have .... We would be there for, the course would take two weeks and we would be in civilian clothes and so take basics - skirt and sh... whatever. Girls didn't wear much in the way of slacks in those days. I can remember I had a couple of skirts and a couple of shirts, and that was ... a couple of blouses and that saw me through with underwear that we rinsed out. We went home ... we had one stint ... one day's leave in that two weeks of the rookies course.

Where was that again?

Glamorgan.

And what sort of quarters did you find yourself in and so on?

We had .... There was a couple of dormitories there, a couple of dormitories and I know that ... a flight of steps, I think two storeys. And, oh, it was trudging up with the case when I first went there, and by the time I left I was running up. We were fit. It didn't take .... In two weeks us city slicker kids who'd probably never done any violent exercise, perhaps played a bit of sport. I was never sport involved, even at school. But we marched and we exercised and we drilled and we were given lectures on this, that and the other thing to do with army procedure and protocol. And who you saluted and who you didn't. And who wore the red and the gold. We had medical lectures and a Dr Mona Blanche who I went to see later on in civilian life, she was a medical practitioner on the corner of Grange and Toorak Roads. She was our medical officer during the rookies course. And she gave us our lectures on S-E-X and [inaudible].

What form did those lectures take in those days? Were they sort of coy or were they very abrupt, or ...?

She was, she was a very well spoken doctor. And the girls had to be told and so she told them nicely. It was quite an eye opener for a lot of us. She advised us on hygiene, much more than our parents - my mother - had done. I mean, certainly given us ... But she instructed why we had to be clean. She spoke about intimacy between male and female and explained more in detail of sexual intercourse - as we very coyly spoke about it to each other. But that was still, hadn't entered my sphere, so I wasn't ... that was .... I thought, 'Oh, I'll come to that when it's necessary to know about things like that, that'll ... I'll remember that information'. But she also spoke about, and it was the first time I'd ever heard of Tampax being referred to, and the fact that you stuck something inside yourself when you had your periods, I mean, that wasn't ... oh, I'd never heard of that - I'd never heard of them. We were supplied with packets of Modess every month, you know, and the fellows, of course, referred to them as girls' boxes of chocolates when they arrived and what have you. But she helped in a lot of ways [inaudible].

> Was there a code of what, if you like, was regarded as acceptable behaviour in relation between the sexes now that you were in the army? Were there certain expectations that you would or wouldn't ...?

No, no. There was still that very .... As far as I'm concerned, and I can only speak about myself, I know there was all talk about, you know, she's fast, she'll go off with Tom, Dick or Harry or whatever, and we'd sort of know about those girls but they weren't in our group. We were not like that. In doing the early part of my career there were some married ladies in our group and there ... one, Elsie Oakleigh, whose husband had gone, was serving overseas, and Rachel Trethewie who was married and her husband was overseas, and they'd joined the services. And so we had a mixture then and it was very good because they were like little mothers to us young girls. And when we went away and went to Sydney they might accept an invitation from someone to go to have dinner or whatever. But we never doubted that they were still true to their husbands who were away. There was never a feeling that .... We'd have a unit social and the girls and the fellas would dance together and I can remember 'Elma's Tune' and 'I don't want to set the world on fire' was one of the hit tunes of the day and 'Sweet Leilani, Heavenly Flower', I can remember we'd sing and we'd waltz and we'd dance. But it was like a brother-sister relationship, as far as I was concerned.

> When you joined up and during that induction period as a rookie as it were, how many were in that particular camp?

About eighty I think.

> And so it was dormitory style accommodation?

Dormitory style accommodation, yes. We were taught to ... I was taught how to make a bed and for the first time I realised, I came to learn that there were two sheets on a bed, not just one. When I was a little girl, when I was very little, looking back on it - it was poverty, depression - we were very lucky to have a sheet on the bed.

> What sort of beds did you have in the army? Were they bunk beds, or stretchers, or what?

Iron framed stretcher-type with a straw palliasse on it. And we had two sheets and two army blankets and a love... and a pillow.

Comfortable?

Very comfortable, oh, yes - great, great - it was army, it was .... I wouldn't have complained about anything in the army. It was wonderful. We had to make our beds and we learnt how to tuck the sheets in correctly - that the top sheet had to have a turnover of so many inches and every ... and the grey blankets with the blue stripes - all the stripes had to be running the same way. And you could go into your dormitory and look down and every ... oh, very uniform. I learned so much.

How was the introduction then, in those first couple of weeks, to discipline? Was it something that many young women had trouble accepting, or did they accommodate themselves pretty well?

They accommodated themselves very well. We, I was on a, in a little group of four on yard duty this particular day and it was in June and windy and autumn leaves blowing everywhere. And we were told to sweep up the yard. And we swept it and there was not a leaf about. And then ten minutes later when we finished the job and we went and reported, you know, 'Finished, what's next?' 'Sweep the yard.' And we said, 'We've swept it'. 'You don't question an order. You sweep the yard. Somebody's life might depend on your immediate reaction to that order in another circumstance.' The penny drops very quickly and we went and swept the yard. And I never, ever after that, questioned an order, that was discipline.

How was the food?

We had poached eggs for breakfast and I loved it. Poached eggs? Ooh, great! And a tiny little bit of bacon. I can't remember much about the food, so it must have been good. I didn't .... The food was adequate, I was never hungry, the food was good - must have been.

(20.00) So after the first two weeks, after that training, what then?

We were issued with our uniforms.

Which was?

Khaki skirt, jacket - safari-type jacket with buttons down it, and I was always big in the bust and it was awful. I sometimes had a little gap between that second and third button, it was awful. I'd do everything to pull meself in. Browny/beige lisle stockings, brown walking shoes and our little felt hat with the rising sun badge in the middle.

Were they well fitting, the uniforms?

Yes. They were well fitting. They took care that they fitted us, fitted well. Considering the mass production of the day, the girls always looked very smart.

What was the footwear like, was that comfortable?

Yes. Brown lace up shoes, strong, sturdy, good, comfortable, good for marching. We had to be able to march. We had to be able to .... We had to feel comfortable and we were. And then later on of course, the summer uniform came through which was a drill, khaki drill dress,

buttoned down to just below the waist, with a belt around the waist, and the same hat, stockings and shoes. I can't recall a jacket. I don't think there was a jacket. We had a big, heavy army greatcoat of course, heavy khaki wool, I think it was. We were warm, we were comfortable. We were issued with 'passion-killer' bloomer-type khaki pants.

> Were there toiletries at all? Were you given any sort of make-up or any basic sort of things?

No, no. You supplied those yourself if you needed them, if you wanted them. In those days just a dash of lipstick on generally.

> What was the attitude towards lipstick? While you may have been able to wear it, if you wore a bright scarlet or something would there be some objection to that?

I can't recall that there ever was. There may have been but probably because it didn't apply to me I ... I've never been a ... never ever used a lot of make-up. And so whether anybody else was told about it, I don't know. No, I can't recall it. But then you suited, you adapted to your uniform. You wouldn't want to be flamboyant in any way with your make-up.

> Before you were sent away then, you went to New South Wales, did you?

Yes. I was stationed in Frankston at first.

> When did you first get to see your mother in your uniform? Was that a particular moment for you?

That was wonderful. She was just so proud. She was just so proud. Incidentally, I did say to them when I joined up, 'Yes. I could join up but please my mother wants to know are you going to send me away'.

> What did they say to that?

She looked up at me, she sort of gave a little bit of a half smile and she said, 'We'll make a note of that'. So .... And it was, I think it was, Lady Cowen as she is now who was the interviewing officer. I know she was there, she was there. She's one I remember very well.

> So what did you do at Frankston?

Switchboard, at Long Island Golf Club, we went, and there were six of us and we were the first of the girls to be sent into the field, the others .... The first intake were accommodated at the big records offices. They needed girls to work and look after the records of the fellows, make sure all their pay claims were right and medical claims were right and that everything was in order to go to their different areas, there was just so much basic book work to be done, that was being done by young men who were needed further up towards the front line areas. And so the girls went in to get those fellows out. And as those jobs were filled up .... The 9th Div and 6th Div had just arrived back from overseas, they'd been sent back to help up in the New Guinea area because of the threat up north. And 2nd Army Headquarters was formed, and so they had .... They had a base down at Long Island Golf Club and the command paymaster's office was setting up and the six of us were sent, we were the first girls to go to

2nd Army Headquarters at their base camp at Frankston. And then after that little camp, after they'd grouped and organised, then we went to Parramatta to the big 2nd Army Headquarters up there. After that they were going up - further up north and I knew that I was - Mum was in trouble at home. I knew I'd been away long enough, I came back home to Melbourne. I asked if I could, instead of going further north, could I come back home to Melbourne.

(25.00) Incidentally, before you went to Parramatta had MacArthur come to Melbourne at that time?

Um.

Were there many America servicemen around?

Oh, yes, there were American servicemen around. But I didn't, I wasn't too much worried, I did have a little bit of involvement, not person to person involvement with Americans, I didn't have much of that because I was having love problems at this time.

What sort of problems?

When I first .... After I left Careras and I went for a very short while to Paterson, Laing and Bruce and they had, they had ... the war feeling was coming on a little bit more strongly and they would have social nights to entertain the troops. And every, once a month, they would have a little dance in the city and all of the girls from Paterson, who worked at Paterson, Laing and Bruce would go along and take supper and what have you. And men who were - troops who were in town would go to these functions. They had The Dugout in the city and they had various other things. And with my mate Dorothy, we ...

What was the Dugout?

The Dugout was the name given to an area, I think it was in the basement of Manchester Unity building where there's Hungry Jack's or something is there now. I think it was there. And it was called The Dugout being a typical term that might attract the servicemen. And girls would go in there after work and dance with the blokes who were in town wandering around. And there were usually a few Americans around the city, around town - a few navy blokes, our Australian navy blokes, or our servicemen on leave in town who would call down to The Dugout and they can always get a cup of coffee and a sandwich, all provided. The good ladies of the town got in there and made sure that our boys had something to eat and a bit of music and someone to talk to. And if you had magazines or journals or whatever, you'd take them in there so there was something for them to read. A place where they could write letters home. The boys were being looked after as well as could be done in a little place like Melbourne. As Melbourne was only a little place then - not prepared, not trying to find out how to live with this war business.

Anyway, you were saying you were having problems at that time.

Yes. At one of these functions I met a fellow who walked with me down to the station and asked if he could keep in touch with me and I told him I was joining the army. He was in the army and he was stationed somewhere in Victoria, he was with one of the tank regiments. And he visited home, met Mum, and then I was in the army and he wrote. And then I was in Frankston and he visited me when I was in - stationed down at Frankston. And I got to like

this young bloke and then I went to Sydney. He was about nine years older than me, I think. I went to Sydney and he was stationed then at Rosebery Racecourse and he would come across and so whilst things were going on I had an involvement I would see Ray, Ray Quilty. And then I came back to Melbourne. Very, very important in those days, of course, was - there's so much going on, don't question too much, don't speak in too ... in public about anything you don't know who the enemy's listening, walls have ears, you went into toilets and they were all these signs, apart from the old VD sign that you always saw in the toilets in those days, thank God they've gone. I think they've gone. Now it's AIDs isn't it, the big scare, it used to be VD. That was one of the things Mona Blanche told us about, the VD. But anyway, he started to tell me different things about his career, then he joined - he was with some paratrooper crowd - and he started telling me, there was an air of mystery about his background and about what he could do and what he couldn't do and he couldn't tell me too much because [inaudible]. Anyway, I was getting, falling madly in love with this bloke. And he was a Catholic and I was a Catholic, following my religion. I had by this time had my first Holy Communion, when I was sixteen. I'd kept on with the church, you see. And he asked me to marry him. He said, 'But we'll have to keep it secret because I'll be going away and I can't say too much'. I believed implicitly everything he told me. And so I didn't tell Mum. And we went off and I went and saw ... we went together to St Patrick's Cathedral. First of all we went to St Francis in the city and they said they didn't perform marriages in St Francis, so we went to St Patrick's Cathedral and spoke to Dr Lyons there, who later became, I think, Archbishop of New Zealand. Spoke to him and said, you know, we wanted to marry but it was ... we had to sort of [inaudible] ....

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

> Identification: This is Tape 2, Side 1 of the interview with Mrs Joan Johnstone about the Australian Women's Army Service recorded on 30th January, 1990 and begins in five seconds.
>
> So you were arranging to get married.

Yes. So we went along and we spoke to this bloke at St Patrick's Cathedral. And he said normally you had to have so many weeks and investigation had to be made by the church to make sure that this was going to be a safe marriage but because of the war time conditions, et cetera, blah, blah, blah, he'd waive all of that. Yes, we could get married. He would perform the service at St Patrick's Cathedral on this particular date, 11th August 1942. We're still in 1942, aren't we. I think it was '42, '43. Anyway, he said, 'You must go to confession, of course, both of you'. And we said, 'Right', and we were to meet at that particular time. I asked a girlfriend of mine who was, I was working with at that particular time. I was back in Melbourne after the Parramatta stint. And, if she would stand by me and he had a friend of his to stand with him - witness. And off we went to St Patrick's Cathedral. Didn't tell Mum. And we were married. And that evening Mum was singing, she wrote a few songs as well. Mum was singing, Johnny McMahon at that time had - he recently passed away, Johnny McMahon - had some show and it was held at one of the theatres in the city and he used to let the local people sing or air their works. And Mum was singing one of her songs at this particular concert that night. And we went along to it and it was very - I was very distressed that I hadn't told Mum and here she was singing this lovely song about some, er, 'Let little

children play' and another one about 'When my love comes back to me', very 'nostalgicky' things. And I hadn't told her. And I went away with Ray for a weekend after this. I said to Mum I was going up to Wangaratta with him with friends. And that was when our marriage was consummated in Wangaratta and I was a little virgin on my wedding night. So, it was very, very meaningful and then we came home, he had to go back to camp. And it was weighing on me, this not telling Mum, and so he came back, about two weeks later he came back and I said, 'We've got to tell Mum. I just can't go on like this'. And he said, 'All right, but we have to ask her to sort of join with us in keeping it quiet'. And so we did, we did, we told Mum. And she said, 'Oh, I wish I'd known. I would have loved to have been with you'. The sort of things mothers say, 'But I understand' - very, very hard to bear, understanding mothers - they break your heart. She understood and so there you were. So off he went. Mum had a friend who worked in Victoria Barracks, whose husband worked in Victoria Barracks. He'd been in the first world war and he was also a mate of Dad's and was too old for service in the second world war and so he was working in some civilian capacity at the barracks. And Mum told Wyn and she, of course, told her husband. And he thought to himself, oh, Joanie should be getting some sort of an allotment through and so he checked the registrar, or whatever, you had to check. Bastard, I wish he hadn't. I don't know whether I wish it or not.

(5.00) Anyway, of course, Ray Quilty was married. An allotment was being paid to him for his wife and two children. And so um, I'm innocent of all of this and Ray was away and I had arranged - there was some show on in town that Mum said she'd like to see. So I bought two tickets. And this particular night we were going in to see this particular show, what it was I can't recall. And I said to Mum, 'Well, come and have something to eat first. I'll stay in town, you come in and we'll have something to eat and go to the show and then go home'. And she said fine so I met her and we were having our meal and I said, 'Good [inaudible]'. And she put out her hand and held mine and she said, 'Joan, we're not going to the theatre'. And ah, I don't know if I made any remark at all. She said, 'This breaks my heart, but there's something else we've got to do'. And she said, 'And I'll have to tell you first'. She said, 'We've got to go round to the South Melbourne Police Station because Ray Quilty has been arrested. He's, he's married. He's got a wife and two children and he's been arrested and charged with bigamy'. And so around we went.

How did you react to that news?

I was shocked. I was stunned. I didn't believe it or not. I didn't know, it was, it was ah, it was like a hard kick in the stomach. It was just dreadful. And there was Mum being so brave and trying to give me every support that she could. But knowing that she had to tell me this. My family loved this bloke, we all loved him. And so around we went and there he was. I was taken out to the cells at the back and he talked and told me that he'd married, been married, naturally, he was married. He'd married her. He'd got her pregnant and so he married her. I don't know the full details of all of it, but that was enough for me. The very fact that he was married was enough, I didn't have to know any details of why or how or what or the rights or wrongs of it. And he said, 'She won't give me a divorce, now. If, after the war I'll be able to do something about it but my hands are tied at the moment, I can't get free. But I wanted to make sure you were here for me when I came home. What else could I do? I had to secure you. And then when the war's over I can do something about it but just now I can't'. I could see all of this. I could understand this. The sun shone from his eyes for me, he was just wonderful. Anyway, legally I was informed there at the Police Court, I would have to

divorce him because we'd contracted a legal marriage - I had. And so I had to clean the slate, I had to divorce him.

I would have thought if he were a bigamist then yours wouldn't be a valid marriage.

That's right. But I had made a legal contract, was the terms used to me. And I had to get a divorce. Meanwhile he's on a charge, the case came up and he was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. I still saw him in that time. Thank the Lord I didn't become pregnant. And then he was sent to Pentridge. Mum came with me one day and we went to visit him out there and then his wife stepped in and stopped any visits to any outsiders. And so I wasn't able to visit him. I could see what it was doing to Mum. I, um .... The Catholic, local Catholic priest came to see me and said, 'This is a binding marriage church wise.

You can't divorce.

Legally you can get your divorce, that doesn't matter two hoots as far as the church is concerned. This is a Catholic marriage. You've made a cross for yourself, my girl, you're going to wear for the rest of your life'. My lovely local priest said to me.

Was he unsympathetic in that way?

Most. Most. If I had gone to my local church .... He said, 'If you had come to me, I would not have performed this marriage. You did this to yourself. You took yourself off to St Patrick's. Why didn't you come to your own local parish?' So there you go. When Ray was in prison he poured his heart out to the Catholic chaplain at the prison who contacted me. I was trying to dodge him, I thought I can't bear any more of this. What am I going to do. And he left his number for me to ring, so I rang him and he said, 'This man loves you. This is a Catholic marriage. We, in the church will do ... you must keep your contact. We will do everything we can to hold you together and help you'. And I said to him, 'If we have children, they will be legally illegitimate children'. This was the main thing and he said, 'But not in the eyes of the church'. I said, 'In the eyes of the law, my children will be illegitimate and I love my children that I haven't yet got and I won't do this to them. I can't do it'. And so I said to Mum in one of our long close talks, 'I'll have to, I'll have to deny him when he comes out of prison'.

How was he treated in prison? How was that seen, do you know?

Very well. He was treated very well in prison. He was .... He would ring me at work from prison. He was apparently .... He was well liked, it was a civilian crime. I mean, he wasn't a criminal person. And apparently he was allowed to do gardening or what have you, and was allowed a certain amount of privilege in the governor's residence, whatever. And he could use the phone, so he made ... he would, he would ring me. I had my twenty-first birthday whilst he was in prison on the Christmas Day, and that Christmas morning there was a knock on the door. It was about nine o'clock in the morning and there was the local, local florist, old Mr Williams with enormous spray, an enormous, beautiful big spray of flowers. And when I took them into my room and put them down they covered almost the length of my bed, with a lovely letter and a beautiful poem that he'd copied out from something in the prison for me for my twenty-first birthday and Christmas. And I just thought, what, I was just full of despair. There was no one I could talk to about it because it was just a no-no situation as far as

conversation with anyone. And so I took them over to, and showed one dear old lady who lived over the road and who knew my story and I took them up and I put them on the altar of the church, those beautiful flowers. But still and all, the church had said, 'This your marriage, you're stuck with this'. They were most unsympathetic. His first marriage was not in the Catholic church. And so there you go. When he came out of prison I said to my girlfriend, Dot, who was engaged to be married to a soldier. I said, 'Dorothy, can I borrow your engagement ring?' And she said yes, and I said to him, 'I'm engaged to be married'. And he was distressed and I was distressed but I'd ... you can cut off emotion if it's strong enough. And I knew that I could not, I couldn't ... I just had to turn my back on him. I couldn't go on with it. It was too much on Mum, it was killing Mum. Dad was still away. It was just ... I couldn't cope. I couldn't bear any more and I sort of entered into a zombie-like state emotionally if I can .... It really was, I'd ... I'd, I couldn't have touched him and so I just was very cold, very remote and said, 'I'm engaged to be married to the fellow'. He said, 'You're my wife'. And I said, 'No, no. You've got a wife. You go back to her'. And I didn't mean any of it. He came to see me a couple of times. The last time I saw him was, at that stage, was soon after the war was over and he came and he said, 'You're Dad'll be coming home. I would have loved to have met your Dad. I can't stay around in the city any more. I can see you're quite serious that you don't want an involvement. I'm sorry for the distress I've caused you. There's nothing ... it's done. I'm leaving town and I'm going away. I'll ... I don't know what I'll do'. And he eventually went to Mansfield where he met and had an association with another lady and had children to her. I did meet him some time later, about fifteen years later and we had a short association. I still had the same feeling for him, although I'd married again and left - had two children. And by this time the war - the divorce laws were becoming more relaxed and the guilty person could get a divorce and so his wife divorced him, charged him with everything, adultery, this that and the other thing. He'd always maintained his two children. And had a strong love for his two children. And then she divorced him. She didn't even allow him that privilege of divorcing her - bitch. Anyway, he said to me, 'Will you marry me again?' And I said: 'No. You owe, you owe that to the lady you've lived with and she's got your children' - and my feelings for him would never change. And I said, 'You know I'll always feel that way, the way I do towards you but we've just got to go our separate ways'. There was just no other way for it.

(15.00) Well. Coming back then to your army life, was it difficult to sort of slot yourself back into ...?

Very difficult to slot myself back in. I knew I could not, I knew I had to have a complete break - change away from the environment I had known up until that time. I knew I had to get out of that ... I couldn't leave the army, I mean, that was it. But I knew I to .... I'd cried myself out there was nothing, I was just in .... So I went to the barracks and I spoke to Colonel Burgess and I explained my situation and he referred me to the - Colonel Burgess was the CO of the barracks at that time. He referred me to Senior Little - AWAS officer - and I spoke with her and she said, 'You need a change. We'll see what we can do for you'. Back to Colonel Burgess and he said, '*Salt*, the army journal want, want a girl. They want somebody who'll look after their little switchboard. They want somebody who will help them with their filing and research work. What do you think of that?' And I said, 'Oh, let me take it. Let me go'. That was the first, apart from seeing little copies of the journal .... And so I went to *Salt* and that *Salt* saved my sanity.

Where was *Salt* put together?

Salt was put together in Rechner's building, as it was then. I think it's down, been pulled down now, in Latrobe Street in the city. And because I was stationed there I could live at home. I didn't have to live in barracks. We were disassociated to a certain extent from the regimented protocol of army. It was more or less ... it was being run as a journal, by military staff, wonderful people, wonderful writers and journa... and old journos and artists and lovely, lovely people. And I worked their little switchboard and I had a little bit of practice at typing and in the end I became quite a proficient typist. And I got my first two stripes, um, typing.

Was *Salt* an acronym?

We always thought of it as 'please pass the salt'. There were only three co... one copy to every three personnel. Yes, an acronym, 'please pass the salt'. It was a token of goodwill, universal token of goodwill, *Salt*, for - since forever, I think.

But it didn't stand for Standard Armies ...

No, no.

... Literature Tabloid, or ...?

No, no.

It was *Salt* as salt.

Mm.

'Pass the salt', as you would at a table, move it around and because of that introductionary goodwill [inaudible].

What did it look like? Weekly? Fortnightly? What size ...?

Came out fortnightly.

It's about the size of a *Reader's Digest* in format and about ...

That's right, yes. It's sort of very similar to ....

About thirty pages, or something. Yes, thirty-eight pages, there - forty pages.

That was the last copy.

Mm. Let's have a look at the interior and see what some of the topics are, does it have an index at the front?

Yes.

'To you', 'This is how it was', 'A Note from this War's historian'. Little cartoons.

A service section, '*Salt* Service'. Articles, poems ....

Got a cartoon on the front of this issue. It's sort of breezy and meant to lift morale and ....

Lift morale, answer questions, give hope for the future. I think that's Vane Lindesay, isn't it? That's a Vane Lindesay cover.

Mm, mm.

Vane Lindesay, see, Vane Lindesay still. Bluey - Bluey Lindesay. I've got a little one ... a little bit in this last one.

Was it fun working on it?

It was fun. It was sad. There you go.

What's it say? It's got a ... this is a sketch by you or of you?

Of me, by Aub Stapleton.

[Reads] Sergeant J E N Tilshy[?] married a returned PW, keeps track at *Salt*'s library, runs files and such.

There you go. So .... And that is, that's an autographed copy of all of the blokes who were there. Jules Feldmann. I still see Jules. I saw Hume down ... Mungo McCallum was our CO. Mac Gordon who compiled *The Poets in Uniform*.

And how often did it come out?

Fortnightly, fortnightly. Weekly there.

How was it distributed?

We had our own distribution service. We had our own blokes who worked in distribution. It was printed at Truth, the old Truth building, and packaged and the parcels made up and the labels put on - slapped on - in the distribution section out the back, and transported by rail, ship, whatever to get to the troops in the field. It went everywhere, everywhere that Australian - the Australian army served and the navy, copies were sent.

(20.00) Was it carefully monitored? Was ultimately there somebody who would look at each issue with a very critical eye and be ready to jump on anything that were thought to be not quite right, for whatever reason?

Um, Mungo McCallum was our CO and yes, he did have problems with the, the overall ... politicians of the day, the government of the day. He had to be very careful that there was no, nothing communist in it, communistic, or anti-political or ... and that it did portray the true events of the day. And he has written quite brilliantly about it. There is um, ... *Poets in Uniform* was published earlier this year and it's a compilation by Mac Gordon. It's called *An Anthology of Verse from Salt, the Australian Army Education Service Journal, World War Two* and because the paper of *Salt* is such poor quality it's disintegrating. All of those who

have kept copies, it's all disintegrating. And so to, to keep the memory of some of this magnificent verse that was written by troops in the field and contributed to *Salt* in those days, he has compiled this anthology. And Mungo McCallum came down last year to do the introduction of the journal and there's quite a very interesting spiel there on *Salt* itself.

> To work particularly well with the troops, one would suppose that it might touch on that kind of rather sardonic, irreverant, ironic humour that seems to have been a bit of a tradition. Did that in itself present problems?

No, that came out. But also, um ....

> Was there concern though .... I mean, given that the army fundamentally is a bureaucracy and all bureaucracies do stupid things and presumably the army would have done a lot. Was there concern that it oughtn't be too critical? That, you know, it had to tread a bit lightly there.

No. No. It was taken as um ....

> I'll just put that down now because of the crackling noise.

I can hear ... you can hear the rustle of the paper, yes. No. It was very much a journalism thing, truths were written and condensed and published in such a way that the men away knew what was happening at home and overseas, so that there was news. Everything that came up, for instance, home loans for men overseas, what they could expect. Prospects as far as education, furthering their careers. Um, the fact that their jobs were being kept open. Every, every vital decision made at home for the good of the men in the field, they were told about it in their journal.

> Were there any controversial issues, that really created a storm that they got out, and then, you know, there was a reaction of concern and ...?

Not um, not that I can recall, not that I can recall. But then, the men at the top - don't forget, I'm just a little office worker - the men at the top might have, might have had that. Hume Dow was the editor. Um ....

> How many people working on it, then? Do you know offhand, roughly?

Roughly twenty.

> Full-time?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, full-time.

> Were they also producing other literature and material?

No. No, just *Salt*. They were there to do a journal and they did it. We had Leo Basser who had been with *The Sydney Morning Herald* - the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, I think. We had Matthew Stanley at one stage who was one of ... an old Canberra political writer. Mungo McCallum, well known of course. Hume Dow, professor of Engish at Monash - Melbourne University for years after the war. Jock Hector who was another old journo. Bill Cust who

was a sporting write for *The Age*, or one of those papers. Roy Waters who was another sporting bloke. Everything was covered. Mungo McCallum, Mac Gordon who is still, I think, editing various journals and papers around the place, was the man in charge of all of the .... Anyone wanted to know how to solve a particular problem - a chess problem, how to build a prefabricated house, who won the Melbourne Cup in 1822, any question that someone wanted answered, Mac could find the answer, publish it in the next issue.

(25.00) There was a bit of a tradition that journalists had to be hard bitten and drink a lot. Was it the sort of place where you'd get characters who felt they had to live up to and maintain that image?

No, but there was, um ... if they drank, they drank. I don't know. They were all heroes in my eyes. They .... I ... absorbed it like a sponge. It was just magnificent, I loved the atmosphere, the feel of it, the despair of it, I just, just loved it. We had some strongly communistic tendencies there. We had Frank Hardy with us, and I mean, he's still a bit iffy, isn't he, Frank. [Laughs]

Did you get to know him at all at the time?

Yes.

How did he strike you then?

He was not there as a writer, he was there as an artist. He was ... used to do the little sketches and things and illustrating. But he said that - he was very Australian, well, as you know, his Australianisms and his Australian slang was just brilliant, brilliant. And I can remember, he wanted to do a story on something or other and - he was writing but he'd write away to .... Do you remember *Argosy*, that little short story magazine? And I think he contributed to *Argosy* and another small magazine, using another name, I don't know what it was. He had some sort of a pen name, anonymous name under which he'd write. And he said, 'I want to do a story', he said, 'One of these days I'll startle these bastards. I'm a bloody genius and they're not awake', or something like that, you know, 'They're not awake to the fact that I'm a bloody genius and I can write as well as them'. But that was before his *Power Without Glory* days and before he was a writer. And whether he was trying to just break in, or let them know, or tell them, but they were .... He was there as an artist and that was it.

Did he get embroiled in discussions about the future of the working class and that sort of thing?

Everybody got embroiled in discussions about the working .... Ambrose Dyson was another one who was, um, a communist in those days, or communist feelings, if I can use it that way.

Was that regarded with concern around the army, because it was the time when ...?

This was the time when communism was a no-no. You didn't go and they used to go off to these meetings and they'd refer to them as the cricket meetings, I can recall. And they invited me to go along and I did, to one of their meetings one time. But what it was all about, I don't know. It was just a lot of talk and a lot of kerfuffle and it was just part of the local scene. But they were, they were very concerned and aware of their fellow, their fellow people.

Was there a feeling that also it was a time when those sorts of issues were one to be kept under surveillance? Was there a feeling that, well, people would be listening and reporting things that might have seemed communistic?

Yes, yes. As I say, it was a no-no thing. They didn't say they were going off to their Communist Party meeting, they were going off to a cricket meeting. But I knew, how I knew I don't know. I didn't have any political feelings myself in those days, but it was, it was um ... but very, very much a newspaper world, um, with joy in getting an article, having it published and scoop... having it published before someone else got it. Apart from the news aspect of it, there were the, the writings of the troops in the field .... Some of their work, I'd take it home to Mum and I'd say, 'I'll read this out to you, Mum', and I'd start to read something and I couldn't, I just dissolved into tears and I'd say, 'No, you read it yourself' because we were very tearful. And if Mum was writing something she'd say, 'Joan, I just want to read this to you. Just sit down and listen'. She was doing a little series for radio on little um, little fifteen minute scenes on things happening today and how they reverted back, like nurse would ... reverting back to Florence Nightingale, things like that, you know, however. And she would say to me, 'Let me read this' and I'd cry, and she'd say, 'If I can make you cry it's good', so she'd be happy with her work.

However, to get on. When the war was over, when the Japanese war was over, um, the Army Education Department sent a group of fellows over to be there to let the ex-prisoners of war know - bring them up to date on what had happened and so on. And Leo Basser was one of the fellows who went over with others. I think George Hawkins, the photographer, and they took photographs and brought them back and ....

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: This is Side 2 of Tape 2 of the interview with Mrs Joan Johnstone recorded on 30th January 1990 and continues in five seconds.

You were saying you had photographs.

Photographs taken of the interiors of the, what were termed the hospitals in Changi, in the prisoner of war camp, Changi. And they were virtually just a rough, very rough building of ... not a solid structure, just seemed to be bamboo slats forming a covering and raised platform of slats on bamboo poles and these very weary, sick, thin, gaunt, emaciated men lying on them. A trench running along the centre of the floor for drainage purposes in the case of the extreme rain which, of course, always falls in those areas. And just the feeling of dreadful, dreadful hospitalisation of these sick, sick men .... And these photographs were bought back. They were rough proof photographs and our next issue was coming out in a day or so. And one of these photos was going to feature on the inside cover of the journal. And the ones that were to be used were kept and the copies just thrown away. And I said to, um, CO, 'These are being discarded, can I take them home and show Dad?' And he said, 'Certainly, because ... show the family'. He said, 'Yes, of course'. Dad was home on the first hospital ship, the *Oranje*.

Incidentally, when had you first got news that your father was okay?

About twelve months after he was taken prisoner, but letters stopped coming in so we didn't know if he was still all right. And it wasn't until the names were published of the released men that we knew he was all right, that we knew he was still alive.

So even up until the actual end of war you were still left in doubt.

That's right. We still didn't know that he was all right. And the um, the Saturday before he arrived home there was a photograph published in *The Age* and it was of Dad shaving. And we saw the ... we were at the front of the house and a neighbour went up the street and he called out and he said, 'Did you see it, Doris?' he called out to Mum, 'Did you see it, Doris? Did you see it? Jesus, Mary and Joseph be praised. Doesn't he look bloody wonderful?' and Mum said, 'What, what?' He said, 'You haven't seen it?' and there was this photo that ... Mum got the paper and we saw this lovely photo of Dad. So we saw this photo before he came home.

What sort of condition was he in, in fact?

Thin, but he was never a heavy man. He looked wonderful. When he came home he looked like a man of thirty-five. He was .... He'd had a few weeks to recover, but he was never a fat man, a big man. Didn't have a grey hair on his head and there was little Mum who'd put on weight and gone white. Mum died in 1949. So in 1945, '46 - end of '45 when Dad came home - she was a worn out, tired little lady.

So you were showing your father these photographs.

Showing these .... So I took them home to show Dad. Meanwhile back at the ranch, Frank Hardy had said ... oh, there was a communist paper, I've forgotten the name of it. It was published, a *Midday Times*, that came out in those years. It was a newspaper, with overtones. And Hardy and these 'reds' would contribute or whatever to these papers and they knew blokes who worked on them as, you know, journos all knew each other. They still do today I guess. And they wanted to do an article ... There had been a lot of talk on ... that a lot of the troops coming back, the other rankers, were in disharmony with the officers who had been taken prisoner at that particular time, and these men were ferreting out these stories and knowing that my dad was back they said, 'Can we go down and see your dad?' So Dad was always a very ... Labor, and a bit left of Labor I suppose. And he said, yes, he'd talk to them. Meanwhile I've taken home the photos. Meanwhile the reporters from this *Midday Times* go down there and see Dad. He shows them the proofs and the day before our journal's published here comes this, *Midday Times*, comes out with one of those ... very, very, very dicey situations. Of course, they realised what had happened and Dad had just ...

A bit awkward for you.

It's still spoken about. 'Now if you talk about any stories ....' [Laughs] It's still spoken of, you know. The fellows say, 'Do you remember that - you scooping the pool?' But it wasn't me, it was Dad with the ... but still and all. That was in the times of the day. It was just - ooooh, I wish it had never happened! But still and all ....

Just on a personal note there. There you are after this very traumatic incident in your life working in an environment with lots of creative people, one might

have supposed that as a personable, attractive young lady, you'd have quite a lot of men make passes at you?

I said to them all, 'Don't look, I'm just ... I'm a man hater from way back'. They never knew. They didn't know that I'd been through this.

Did you cut yourself off, then?

Completely. I just said, I'm just .... I could be one of them with them. It was just a 'hands off' situation, I just was not interested in any commitment, any involvement, no way!

What about American servicemen? Would they make passes at you in the street?

Oh, yes, oh, yes.

Sort of fall in along side and attempt to engage you in conversation?

Oh, yes. But that was just fun. You could enjoy it as fun. Travelling up from Bonbeach into the city, they were stationed down at Frankston, of course, the train would be full of them. And the blackout trains, and coming home in the evenings the trains were blacked-out, no lights. And you were in there with them. Who'd be snuggling up to you by the time you got home. But the trains were crowded and packed and it was always good hearted. It was light hearted. It didn't affect ... nothing affected me.

What about the time of the American serviceman who killed a number of women around Melbourne? Was that a time of fear for you?

Leonski. Um. Well I was, was never one to wander the streets at night. Yes, it was, um .... It didn't affect me. I knew that it was happening and it was dreadful but I wasn't frightened. He was just one odd crank. It could have happened anywhere. I was never frightened.

You went on to join the Army Education Unit, when was that?

That was *Salt*. *Salt* was part of it.

That was part of it.

That was part of it. Yes.

Were there any other propaganda duties?

No. They did have a thing called *CAB, Current Affairs Bulletin*. That was one of those things you were saying, wasn't it? *CAB, Current Affairs Bulletin*? But I wasn't involved. There was a Major Madgwick and they were in another area. We were *Salt*, we were just *Salt*. We had a journal to get out and we did it.

The *Current Affairs Bulletin*, is that the same one that continued on for a long time afterwards, many years afterwards?

Yes. Yes.

That was generally, fairly sort of, I suppose, centre to right wing. Was it more overtly propagandistic during the war period?

I didn't have, I wasn't involved with that. I don't know. I don't think I ever read a copy front to back. *Salt* was my baby.

How long were you working on *Salt*?

I'd say three years.

So the Parramatta thing had been in between that, had it?

Yes. Immediately after .... That was 2nd Army Headquarters before I came back. It wasn't a long period of time.

How long were you at Parramatta?

I suppose I was there about six months.

What were you doing there?

Switchboard. Switchboard for 2nd Army Headquarters command paymaster's office, command paymaster's office.

So what sort of matters did you personally deal with? It was just a matter of passing the calls through to the sections, or ...?

I was switchboarding. I say switchboarding, the captain said to me, 'You young girls away from home, you're not getting much money'. We weren't paid a lot of money. We didn't get full pay until we had rank. He said, 'Being a switchboard operator you don't' - being a telephonist - 'you don't - that isn't a rank entitlement - but if you were a typist, you'd, I could give you a couple of stripes'. I said, 'Oh, I've picked out a few ... Captain, and I'm ....' And he said, 'If you go into the typing pool, do you think you could get up enough speed so that you could be one of our typists, and then I'd be able to give you a couple of stripes'. And I said, 'I'll do me best, Sir'.

(10.00) And so down I went to the typing pool and I just fiddled around with the typewriter and the first competent memo that I thought, now, I can send this one out. This looks great. We had a little memo form and had to do things in triplicate. With all the carbon and everything else I was black by the end of the day, making mistakes and rubbing them out and no white ink or any of those other things that they've got today on their machines. We would have a little thing to whom the thing was addressed and then the army name, the name, rank and number - serial number, and underline that. And it was always, 'With reference to the above named soldier', the memo started. All of these memos 'With reference to the above named soldier ...' but I'd struck a 'k' instead of an 'm' and I had 'With reference to the above naked soldier', and that was my first official memo that went through. Anyway he laughed, he laughed and I said, 'Oh, look what I've done'. And he said, 'Oh, that's not too bad'. And my

stripes came through and I went back to the switchboard. I was corporal, switchboard operator then.

Did the stripes actually mean anything? Did you get saluted, or ...?

More pay. Oh, no, you don't get saluted. You got more authority. You can get to the front quicker than the privates.

The front of what?

Anything. Any queue or whatever. Whatever. It really didn't ... but it was an increase in pay.

How would that work? Give us an example of a situation where having the corporal stripes would enable you, and how would you set about getting to the front?

Oh, yes. Well, if, um, if I was in the shop going to the store, wanted the malted milk in the local bar up at Parramatta. I'd say, 'Oh, excuse me Private'. And they'd say, 'Oh, right Corp.' They make way for you to get through to the front. I mean they did it, you did it. But not a lot, but it was just a little thing. But you didn't .... It's not anything to play on. It was just a little thing ... it was more in fun than anything else. I'd say, 'Hey, look at me, I've got two, you haven't got any, come on it's my turn up there'. And they'd laugh and say, 'Oh, fair go', you know.

Did you ever actually pull rank? Did you ever find yourself where it mattered and was of value?

No, no. Never, ever. Never, ever. Then when I got my sergeant's stripes, I was married. I'll tell you about that. And when I came back from my marriage. Meanwhile, I'd been divorced and everything. I borrowed my deferred pay to ... it cost me ninety something pounds, the divorce. And I had 103 , I think, pounds, in deferred pay credit, so I took that and paid for the divorce. Paid for four ....

As a telephonist/typist from the perspective of today where the notions about what's appropriate in a work schedule between men and women, where it's no longer thought really proper for the women automatically to make the tea and those sorts of things, while at the time you would have taken it for granted, how do you think the relations were in the office place? Was it a patronising sort of attitude towards women?

No. It wasn't. It was a sharing, it was a sharing and it was a very equalising thing. They knew we were taking their place and so they couldn't look down on us in the .... Not ... I'm not speaking about the *Salt* situation, that was very sharing, we were essential to those fellows. I became a very proficient typist and they'd come in and they'd say, this has to go out. And they'd stand and read and I'd type straight onto the machine and off it would go. They needed us, and it was an equal thing. The writers knew that they could rely on me to get their words down and send them off on the wire.

What about the petty things like, oh, 'Look I need a ... would you get us a cup of tea, love.' Was there that sort of thing?

There was an orderly who did that. There was a little bloke who was the orderly for ... got the tea and all of that.

> What about pinching bottoms? What we now call sexual harrassment? Did that happen around the office place?

No. In .... It could have been a little bit of light hearted fun but not, there was no harrassment. We were, we were ... there was a brother/sister relationship. And you would take something from a brother that you would take from - I'm speaking personally - you would take from those fellows. I mean there was certainly things and they'd tell you a dirty yarn and ... or they'd ask you a question and ... but there was a brother/sister relationship. It was .... Most of the fellows had wives.

> Let me ask you a fairly delicate question. It's not one that I've asked thus far and I'm not sure that I'll get to again. But the Women's Army is not uncommonly associated with some women who are very masculine in their manner and it may be the sort of role that might attract women who are lesbians. Was lesbianism a taboo topic? Was it something that was talked about on the quiet, or ...?

No. In barracks in Parramatta, there was only this one instance. There were two girls who were very close and they used to brush each other's hair. And I did hear it said, it was said, 'Gee, they're a bit matey, aren't they?' But never the word lesbian. I didn't know that word. 'They're a bit matey aren't they?' But we did form friendships, loving friendships, loving in that you'd put your arm around a person's waist. But you wouldn't bend down and kiss them goodnight. And even today, I've got, I've got friends and I see them and I love them. I hug them - women. But it's not, not a sexual thing - it's a caring ....

> Well apart from ....

It's a caring thing. But no, I'm not saying it wasn't there but I didn't come across it.

> Well apart from sexual activity, you get some women whose manner is so abrupt as to be quite masculine and rather sort of - get around and bossing people, and that. I presume you'd get a fair share of that sort of character?

There was a little bit of that. But that was a moment of power thing, that you're going to find anywhere. Any .... I think of it as a moment of power thing. 'I've got this opportunity to do this and it's the only chance I'm going to ... ever going to have in my life, of ordering someone around, so I'm going to do it.' But ....

> How would men react to that sort of woman? Who maybe had a bit of rank and, you know, was quite hard, and I suppose in the contemporary manner of things men would say, 'Oh, she's probably got balls' - if you'll pardon the expression.

Yes. Yes.

> Would they joke about women like that?

Probably, probably.

But they'd be discreet by the sound of it.

Well, what they would say amongst themselves, I've got no doubt. But I didn't hear it. I didn't hear it. I've heard since of one particular woman officer who was involved in getting men and women transported off to a certain area and she made quite sure that there was a rope put up and the women were one side and the men the other, which is ludicrous [inaudible]. She's still much the same. She's still much the same.

What do you mean she had a rope put up? What sort of ...?

She had the - an area divided off. I was told about this, I wasn't there. And it was on a ship, they were being - I think they were going from .... They were one of the contingents where some of our girls went to New Guinea, not a lot of them went to New Guinea, but some did go to New Guinea.

I would have thought that would be almost standard army procedure. They'd be very anxious to separate the sexes and make sure there wasn't a crossing of the line.

Well, maybe they did. But this is one instance that was remembered. And speaking of this particular officer. [inaudible] and, oh, God she was an absolute, she was an absolute tartar and this lady was one of those who went to New Guinea, and she said, 'Do you know when we had to go from there to there [inaudible] and she made sure that she had this rope, paddy rope across the deck and the men had to stay on one side and the women the other'. And she said, 'Oh!' and she said, 'Nobody was going to get up to any tricks', but she thought, she knew they would. She knew they would. This is it. Knowing that they would and they wouldn't. The fault is in her mind, not in the people she's ....

Anyway during ...

So she must have had some experiences.

During your time in Sydney, where were you staying there?

In barracks, Gowan Brae. Lovely big old homes in Burn... the Burnside Homes, they were, I think, just out of Parramatta.

So what about recreation? What sorts of things were you doing at that time, when you had time off?

Going to the pictures. Going to Sydney. Go and have a swim at Manly, it was unpolluted.

Dances?

Dances, yes, going to .... I used to love going to Cahill's coffee lounge in town and having ice cream cake with caramel sauce. Ooh, that was a delight. I used to love walking up and down

Castlereagh Street, that was the home of Consolidated Press Limited. I used to work for them and, you know. I didn't mix with lots of people, I was a bit of a loner.

Was there, were there any rules about fraternisation in uniform? Would it have been not the done thing for an Australian army woman to be seen in uniform with an American serviceman?

As long as you were respectable. As long as you weren't sort of arm in arm and kissing and cuddling on street corners. Oh, no, you could do that, that was no problem.

And if you were ...

As long as you carried ....

... could you be reported? I mean was there a code of conduct?

There was a code of conduct. There was a code of conduct. You respected the uniform that you wore.

What were the consequences then if somebody were canoodling, as it were, in a public way and breaking that code?

Oh, they'd be reported, spoken to, loss of privileges, confined to barracks, that sort of thing. 'Don't let it happen again'. You'd lose rank if you carried rank.

Did that also cover going into bars or being under the influence? What were the rules there?

You could, well, we didn't go into bars. Women didn't go into bars. Women went into hotel lounges.

There was the Ladies Lounge.

You could go into the Ladies Lounge and have drinks.

You could do that in uniform?

Oh, yes. You could do that in uniform, but don't .... You were expected to respect your uniform and if you did anything that was disrespectful there'd be somebody there - we were a pretty proud lot. We didn't like to see it happen. We'd say righto, you've had enough, love, come on, you know ... help you out or .... You'd protect, you'd care for your fellow.

(20.00) Did you see any of the discord between American servicemen and Australians in the streets at all?

I saw a little bit of it at Frankston. There were dances there and the Americans would come to it and the Australian soldiers would be there and sometimes ...

Fights?

Oh, yes, sometimes they'd come in, they'd leave the hall and come back with a black eye or a blood nose or something but it would soon pass over. They kept it away from the girls, they wouldn't involve the girls. The Australian men were very protective of their women when they were being threatened, when their home territory was being threatened. But, oh yes, you'd see the occasional stoush down there.

Did you see anything of the running brawls in the streets that sometimes occurred?

No. No, I didn't see any, sort of, ongoing violence. What I saw was, sort of spontaneous: 'Come outside, mate.' And that was it. They'd go outside and come back in.

What was the general feeling that was felt towards Americans? I mean in the groups that you were with, how did you think they were seen?

Oh, the girls loved them.

And the fellows?

Oh, the fellows didn't like them. But then they were a threat, weren't they?

Did you have any girlfriends who got seriously involved?

Yes, I had a girlfriend who became, actually became engaged to a young, to a young marine who was killed at Guadalcanal. She was very distressed. He was a nice young bloke and he was killed at Guadalcanal.

Anyway, it was from Parramatta that you said you might have gone north and it was at that point you felt, well, no you shouldn't.

I came home. I came home.

But remained in the army?

Remained in the army. Just came back to a Melbourne division of command paymaster's office. And then, of course, had this traumatic marriage and then was transferred to *Salt*. And then I had to get this, get the divorce and when Dad came home, Dad being an older man in the prisoner of war camp had looked after a lot of the young boys. There were a lot of young eighteen, nineteen, twenty year old kids joined up at that particular time in the same unit as Dad and he looked after them. They called him 'Dad', until he died, some of those blokes still called him 'Dad'. And he said, they were very closely bonded these fellows from the prisoner of war camp in Changi and he said to Mum, 'These boys will be coming down home here and any of my boys who come here are welcome to anything I've got. I think of them as my kids and they'll be coming back'. He was like a man with no arms when he came home and his boys weren't around him and he had ... they weren't there to .... It took him a long while, I don't think he ever got over that feeling of bonding that he had with these boys.

Where were you at war's end, by the way?

In Melbourne with *Salt*.

Can you remember the moment when it was announced?

I can remember the moment when it was announced.

What were you doing?

Working away on the journal, at *Salt*, and, oh, everyone back, everyone - none of us went home. We walked around the streets for a while and all gathered together and couldn't believe it, because it was rather sudden. And we all finished up with a rip-roaring party at Jules Feldmann's place. And with another girl from ... Lenore Cameron whom I haven't seen since the end of the war, we put tables together and slept on the tables. All the beds were taken up so we slept on tables.

Were the streets filled with dancing people and that sort of thing?

Dancing people. Wonderful. Wonderful, wonderful. Joy, just unbelievable. Unbelievable! Un-bloody-believable!

As men started to come back then and former prisoners of war, did you see some of those who were in very emaciated conditions?

I went out with Dad, went out to welcome Dad home, that particular day yes, there were some very, very emaciated blokes arrive back. Beryl Westons, one of the girls who was in Sydney, in Parramatta, at the same time as me, she was engaged to be married. Her fellow had been a prisoner of war. He came back minus a leg. And they had hoped to marry as soon as he arrived home and he said he wouldn't marry her until he could walk down the aisle and it was six or seven months before they married. He made sure he had a leg that he could walk on and he walked down that aisle as straight as anything. But yes. Dad was in a very, very bad state as far as his nerves were concerned. It just .... To look at him he looked wonderful but he was a bit, you know, never quite right nerve-wise, although he lived until he was eighty-two. Married a second time. But one of his mates who came home in the October came down to our place - a boy from Wonthaggi - and Dad said, 'If this boy was my son, I couldn't love him any more'. He asked me to marry him and I said ...

(25.00) After how long? How well had you got to know him?

About a month after he arrived home.

Were you going out with him?

We'd been to the pictures a couple of times, but not - he was with the men most of the times. He'd go to the races and they were gamblers and off to the races. And, oh, money and betting and life and living, it was just wonderful. And he said would I marry him and I said, 'No, look I'm ... I've got no ... I don't love you. I like you, you're a nice person but [inaudible] anyway, there's a lot about me you don't know'. And he said, 'I know your story, your father's told me'. And I said, 'Oh, look ...' He said, 'I know how it's been with you but I think we could have a good life together'. And so I said, 'Oh look, I'll just have to think about this'. And then I thought, well, I could never marry in the church - he wasn't a Catholic - I could never marry in the church and I would like to have a family, I would like to have children and

what have you. So after a couple of weeks I said, 'Yes, I'll marry you'. So we married in the February 1946. We married the first week in February 1946 and my daughter was born in November 1946, my beautiful Kerry.

Did you just have the one child?

No. Our marriage ... the marriage wasn't a happy marriage. He was a gambler and a drinker and wanted to ... just wanted to be with the boys. I mean that was his - they still had this 'must be with the boys' attitude.

Was the war? I mean, was his experience, do you think, to do with all that?

Yes. Yes. I blame ... yes, yes. He'd wake up. He woke up one night throttling me and ... throttling me to get me out - he was a big strong bloke. And he woke up and he thought I was a Jap. Never really .... He was .... He died when he was forty-four but I'd separated and divorced him by that time. He used to bring these blokes home, these no-hopers into the house ...

Had he become a drinker?

Yes. He was a very heavy drinker. Heavy drinker, worked at the brewery, full all the time. But anyway, that was that. And I said, look, this has got to stop. I went off. He did something that I can't talk about that distressed me and I went to Sydney. Mum had passed away by this time and I knew I - but Dad loved this bloke. And I thought, God, I can't do this to me Dad. I was always worrying about someone else. And so I went home and I said, 'Look, I'll ... let's start again. Let's just try for heaven's sake'. And he said, 'Oh, you'll just do the same thing again. You'll up and off and I said, 'Look, I'll have another baby. I'll show you that I'm fair dinkum. I'll have another baby'. And so I had Leigh, my other girl. So I've got .... I eventually left him. My eldest daughter said, 'Mum, do we have to?' She was eleven. 'Do we have to put up with this?' And I said, 'No, we don't'. My sister had seen the way things were going and she said, 'You can always come to me'. So I took my girls and went to my sister.

END OF INTERVIEW