



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Description	Beryl Joyce Fowler (née Brentnall), as a corporal, Australian Women's Army Service interviewed by Harry Martin for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45.

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Side 1 of Tape 1 of an interview with Mrs Beryl Fowler about the Australian Women's Army Service recorded on 31st January 1990. And it begins in five seconds from now.

Beryl Fowler where and when were you born?

Where? Melbourne, born and bred, on 7th July 1922.

Tell us a bit about your mother and father, what sort of people they were.

Well, my father was a soldier in the first world war, 2nd Field Ambulance, Gallipoli, France. My mother's two brothers were more or less brought up on war in a way, you know, those days. I was an only child and led a fairly sheltered life, I suppose, really. Whenever we went out my father would always be down there at the bus stop to meet me. And he was a sick soldier, he was TPI from the first world war. And that's about all.

What ailed him? What had affected his health?

I think he was gassed.

Did he talk much about the war?

Ah, yes. Well, we always had a great, large volume of *Our ANZAC Hero* or whatever it was. I still have it here in my bookcase. And you'd go through all this on ... from time to time. And there was Dad's picture. And Mum's two brothers were killed in France, and .... Things like that. And, of course, there was always ANZAC Days and very proud to wear your father's medals at, going to school next day. We lived next door to a school in East Brunswick. My mother still lives there, she's ninety-two ... Father died about mid-1966. But, that's about all.

So the Gallipoli tradition and the ANZACs and all that would have had a very special meaning for you ....

Well, in those days, we were brought up on it. There was always, um, ... at school you'd wear your father's medals. ANZAC Day was remembered always. Armistice Day, as it was called then - Empire Day. And there was only twenty-one years between the two wars if you remember. There was .... We were all brought up on it, really, those days. And, very much part of the home.

What was your father doing before the war?

My father was a dental mechanic. He would only have been in his very early twenties when he joined the army.

Was he able to return to work then, after, with that disability?

No. He wasn't able to return to work. So he was more or less ... he was a sick soldier. We used to say he was ... Dad was a sick soldier.

What about your mother? What sort of person was she?

She was a very strong, a very strong woman - still is very strong-willed and strong-minded person because given the circumstances she had to always be in cha... always in command as it were. And always doing .... We didn't have very much because he had a very, very small ... there was a very small pension in those days, when it was finally granted, I think. I don't know all the details of that. And Mum was a marvellous housekeeper - thrifty. And I don't know that she ever had holidays or anything like that. But always cheerful, always bright and those days, voluntary work even though you didn't have very much money, voluntary work was the thing. Even at the beginning of the war years she went out to 'Stonnington' and, oh, I could tell you lots of tales about what Mum did those days to overcome difficulties - a great one for overcoming difficulties.

What are some of the things?

Well, for instance, she used to belong to the YWCA and when the war broke out in the early years she went out to 'Stonnington', this was before I joined the army, and to get to 'Stonnington' - it was on a Sunday ... it was ... her period of duty was early in the morning, on a Sunday morning. There was no transport - trams from East Brunswick, you know, you had to walk to Lygon Street and go in a tram, or catch a tram somewhere from the city baths, I think. So she hit on the idea, well, the only way I can get there is to ride my bike. I had a bike then and she'd never been on a bike before. So we were up and down the local street - her trying, falling off every five minutes, learning - she was determined to get there. So she sat on that bike and as the story goes, she was pushed off, no doubt by my father, in the morning, when she was off on her course of duty. I don't know whether she stopped pedalling, she probably couldn't stop pedalling and somewhere out that end of the globe on the ....

(5.00) We were in the northern suburbs so everything was the other side of the river, and we weren't terribly familiar with the location of places. But I think she fell off eventually and a milkman picked her up - all these things that you were told never to do and never to go with strangers - but anyway, the milkman picked her up and she was transferred there and the bike was finally bought home in some way or other, but it was smashed up. But that was just one thing that .... She would overcome all those sort of things.

Was it a religious environment?

Well, yes. I went to Sunday school from an early age and Mum and Dad were both Methodists, one went to 'Little Nicky' as it was called. And 'Big Nicky', that's in East Brunswick, Nicholson Street, there was a Methodist .... These are all practically folded up now. And, um ... not religious, not too religious but they went to .... Dad used to go up, Mum didn't always go. But I was sent to Sunday school at an early age and ... up, locally.

What about politics?

Um.

Did social issues play an important part in family discussion, and so on?

As far as politics go, I don't know what was discussed that way. I know the preferences of my parents, which have never changed from that day to this. And they had nothing to do with ... we were very ... modest means. But they were al...

What were those preferences?

Liberal, always Liberal - Liberal voting.

Did your father get involved in discussions and arguments with friends about the issues then?

No. Nothing. He was a very mild, gentle man and I remember mostly my father sitting out on the verandah, which you could do those days in peace and leave your doors open and everything, with the neighbours. They'd sit out there and I used to like to sit and listen to 'man's talk' though I didn't know what it was about. But they'd only be talking about cars or machinery or making things. He was ... also had been a carpenter, Dad, and he was very good with his hands even though he was .... He was still quite strong in the arms and could make things and made a ... you know, used to potter round in his shed most of the time.

So as you were growing up before you left school, what sort of things had you begun to think you might do with your life? Did you have any particular dreams?

No. You didn't think about things like that, those days. You went to school. You ... I didn't question anything. I was an only child, there was no great upheaval with, say, siblings or anything like that to worry about. You mostly did what you were told. Though there were ... it were depression times and the neighbours, for instance, across the road .... He was a paint... he was a painter and a paper hanger, he was out of work and they were in very poor condition, poor circumstances ... was very proud, wouldn't allow anybody to help them. But we had the income, such as it was, of the pension, so to my knowledge you always had plenty, there was always plenty due to my mother's thrift and care. Your clothes were always handmade, those days, and .... We lived right next door to the school which is still down there, the East Brunswick State school. And I went to school there. My mother would stand up on the fence, hand me over my play-lunch, which I didn't like in front of everybody else. They were poor days, those days, and people were ready, you know, you were expected to share - whether you did or not, I don't remember. And, I was never deprived of anything that I remember, always had ... Dad built a play house. I'd had loads of toys and things like that.

The pension seemed adequate.

It must have been adequate. But only due to the fact that my mother was very thrifty.

Did you become conscious of other children whose families were obviously in difficult times, come without, you know, adequate clothing, shoes?

Yes, well, the folks that were across the way, they didn't have very much. And, at school I remember being, sort of, bullied, and further up the street they were in even worse circumstances, I think. I remember distinctly, at school, having an apple for play-lunch, no doubt, and up against the wall. And the girl said, pushing me on the arm, 'Come on, give us your core, give us your core, give us the core' - of the apple. Things like that, but that's all I

can remember of those days as far as ... except for the family across the road, when they fell on good times later on anyway.

So you, sort of, accepted that ultimately you'd leave school, maybe get married and all those sort of things?

Oh, I don't know that you consciously thought .... I think, yes, perhaps you did, because it was the natural progression of things, those days. Because I used to like to sit and - I was always quite content with my own company - you'd have the wireless. It was wireless, those ... that's what we called it - the wireless. And listened to all the different programs of years ago. And I used to sit and draw, sit by the mirror and draw myself and all that sort of thing. And I remember one thing, it was written in sort of a white ink, 'I hope that .... I hope some day in joy and pride that I shall be a happy bride.' And there was a drawing of a bride, so I suppose that was what we really thought about and putting things away for your, you know, the future.

(10.00)But we just grew up naturally there. You left school at about fifteen - you left school at fifteen. I did do more than most of the local girls by having two years at high school which was pretty lucky those days, to go to high school. Some of them just went straight off into factories, or if you went into an office you were really going to something, those days.

So after high school what did you do?

After high school, that was only forms one and two, which was fairly ... and then at fifteen you were off, we were all off to our work. Coburg High School I went to. And my mother took me into a position at Ball and Welsh - into the interview. You always had your mother with you for the interview and decking you out. And I worked at Ball and Welsh then in the office for four years until I joined the army, so that was all. It was school, worked there for four years and then the army for five years.

What were you at Ball and Welsh? What did you do?

A junior. You were a junior till you were twenty-one and I left when I was nineteen and a half. So I was still classed a junior. A junior Burroughs ledger machine operator.

Did you have a glory box in those days?

I don't remember as such, but I think we were always doing fancy work, er, needlework and we called it fancy work, those days. You know, embroidering doilies and duchess sets. But no conscious sort of .... I didn't go out a great deal, so I couldn't have had too many boyfriends, those days. But we mostly went out with girls and you could go out in freedom then. Go out .... You'd get decked up on a - Saturday night was dance night. You'd go dancing on a Saturday - a long frock, flower in your hair up, to the Brunswick Town Hall to a dance. Always have company home, or else, while I was at work we'd perhaps stay into town later, after .... We used to work till nine o'clock on a Friday, from nine till six were the working hours those days, nine till nine, nine till one on a Saturday. So there wasn't too much time for leisure.

What were your favourite dances, do you recall?

Oh, I can't .... Oh, I used to like the Pride of Erin, the barn-dance and all those sort of things. And, the foxtrot, everything that we used to do those days. Up to the Brunswick Town Hall and then that would be Saturday night. Saturday afternoon would be probably .... Saturday would be taken up with tidying up your room, afternoon you may go out. I had a bicycle, I'd go out with a girlfriend riding on a bike, to my mother's dismay. Funny, I ended up right out this way. You know, you used to ride for miles and miles which you wouldn't dream of doing. And 'Where have you been?' 'I've been right out there.' She'd have a bit of a fit from where you've been, and from the distance that I'd covered. Or we'd go skating. We used to go to the pictures, perhaps, Saturday afternoon or ice skating down at the Glacierium - loved that.

What was it like at the Glacierium, it's an activity that these days seems to be associated with a lot of fairly rough kids and so on?

Oh, no. Nothing. There wasn't .... It was .... You wouldn't - we wouldn't have been allowed out. Everything was all right those ... it seemed to be all right, those days. You'd go with a girlfriend but if I went at night, my father would be at the bus stop waiting for me. You might get a sour look but he was always there, poor old Dad.

Did you ever miss the bus?

No, no, no. I had to come home that way. If not you had firm instructions to 'Hurry up, hurry up, round the bend' 'Come round the bend quickly'. But .... And all the instructions of .... We didn't know too much really. I was pretty slow growing up one way and another, but you knew ... you lived by instinct. Your parents had told you so and so and you just did that. But those were activities - there were pictures, there were the Glacierium. There always seemed to be something to do. I remember being given tennis lessons, having tennis lessons, and we used to play tennis at school. And I had two or three horse-riding lessons. Somewhere there were stables locally. And, what was another thing? Oh, yes, loved to go Scottish Highland dancing, Scottish National dancing. There used to be a place in Nicholas Buildings opposite ... in Swanston Street which is a sleazy old place now, that we would go to for Highland dancing on a Friday night.

With the depression years, understandably a lot of people would turn to drink as perhaps the only solace. Did your family drink at all?

No, no, no. There was nothing like that at all. In fact my mother was dead against drink right from ... and is so till this day. I think mostly because a family incident, perhaps her, perhaps her younger brothers or something or other like that. But no, we were more or less lectured on the evils of drink which ... that lasted a long time. And I can tell you a little incident of later on which would revert back to that.

Well, did your father drink?

No, no, no, no. He smoked, he smoked. He smoked till the day he died. Rolled his own. Dad would roll his own. I loved to sit there and watch Dad rolling his own and I'd say: 'Dad, can I' - you know those little pieces of paper they used to have. He had a way of doing it, rolling it like this - the tobacco - flipping it over onto the paper, turning it. 'Can I lick the paper, Dad?' 'Yes, you can lick the paper'. And then into a holder. And my standard, my, the usual present to my dad was to go to Coles and buy, which cost all of threepence probably

those days - a cigarette holder, cigarette holder. 'What do you want for your birthday, Dad?' 'Oh, just a packet of papers and a holder' or something like that, so that was it.

(15.00) Well, when did you first begin to get an impression that there was trouble looming as far as the second world war was concerned?

I don't know. Well, we would listen to the wireless. I can remember when ... I can remember when the announcement came in the September about the outbreak of war. But there was ... these are only impressions, I can't remember actions or what was said, or anything .... But there was great consternation somehow or other that .... And I used to have a little chair sitting beside the wireless, listening to all these things. I don't think we were too conscious of those, except that there was an air of concern and seriousness.

So what lead to you deciding to join up? And how long after the outbreak was that?

Um, the outbreak was in '39, we just went along with our merry way. I think in, how old would I have been, '39, '40. About '40, when I'd be about seventeen, everybody made their debut those days so that all went on, the same. You know you were all dressed up in the nice white gowns.

Did you make your debut?

Yes. This was made at the first Brunswick Scottish Ball that they had. The Brunswick Scottish Society's first ball was held in Melbourne, at the Brunswick Town Hall, and there was a group of us. We went for training and all that sort of thing. I do remember that partners were a bit hard to find at the time. The older - older, younger men must have joined up by that time, you see. But that was in 1940. That would be '41, '40, 1939, 1940.

Was it an important event coming out as it was called?

Well, I don't know whether it was called coming out, it was just the Deb ball, that's all. Yes, it was lovely. Have all the pictures still.

So then ...

All those functions still went on, you see. So, you weren't terribly conscious about ... at my age. No doubt the older people were.

Well, when then, did you make the decision?

Well. As with most things I seemed to .... I saw a notice in the paper. I did keep that little piece of paper for a long time, whatever it was about. And so a week after Pearl Harbour I found myself up at the Melbourne Town Hall applying to join the army.

Had you discussed it at home?

Well, it must have been discussed, yes. It must have been discussed. I don't recollect any objections put to it. No doubt they were a bit concerned about it because it was an unknown factor really. We didn't know what it entailed. I didn't know what it entailed. But it was just

- seemed to be a natural thing to do. I suppose had I been a boy I'd have joined up in one of the services before then.

What was the actual process? What took place?

Well. I can't remember too much except that it was a week after Pearl Harbour. I was up there at the Melbourne Town Hall applying for it. The next thing I can really remember is that I must have had some other notification and we were down at the, er, it was down in Victoria Street, some army barracks for a medical examination. On the twelfth of ....

As a single daughter ...

Yes.

And as you said, leading a fairly sheltered life, did the medical shock you a little bit, to find yourself with a whole group of people ...

I can't remember that. I can't remember anything like that. It couldn't have been .... It must have been done in such a fashion that ... and we were all girls together. If we were all girls together it wouldn't have worried me too much, you see, I imagine. But I can't remember things like that. Things just ... they just flowed on in a natural fashion. Had there been anything that was alarming that would have stuck in my mind I should imagine.

How long then before you actually joined?

Well, that was the week after Pearl Harbour. I have a notice there from the Controller of the AWAS, Major Deasey as she was ... Major ... no, Major Deasey it was, on 12th January to say that I had been accepted, with certain requirements - being a birth certificate. That was on 12th January. On the 19th January I was sworn in at the first AWAS school - recruit school. So things happened fairly quickly.

Did you get anybody at all who felt that it, you know, it wasn't perhaps a good idea - friends or relatives, or ...?

No. No, I shouldn't think so. I don't remember anything like that.

Was there much voluntary work around at the time? Were your parents at all engaged in ...?

My mother was always engaged in voluntary work. As I said ...

To do with the war activity, I mean.

To do with the war activity. Out at 'Stonnington' and out at, oh, I can't think of the other place now.

What sort of things would she do?

Well, just helping in the kitchen and washing, you know .... It was 'Stonnington', I think, was a place for where they were recuperating - men, there. And she .... It wasn't in the wards or

anything like that. She'd just be helping out in the kitchen, things like that. She would have done anything at all. That's how she managed to get out there on that particular occasion.

(20.00) So where did you go to start off your training?

Well, the first AWAS recruit school was held at Merton Hall, Church of England Girls' Grammar School in South Yarra, just opposite the Botanic Gardens. And we went in on the 18th, my father took me to the gate. My mother would have insisted that: 'Make sure she gets in there, and don't leave her till somebody takes charge of her'. That would have been her ....

Do you remember what you took with you [inaudible]?

I don't know what ... we must have had some requirements to take. I can tell by the pictures that were in the paper later on, that we must have had shorts and blouses, and things like that. We'd have taken our nightwear and all civilian clothes, of course. There was no thought of uniform at that time. So he would have taken me on that Sunday 18th January '42, right to the gate, seen me in, and the following day we were takin' the oath, we were sworn in to the army. There was just a small intake in that first school. And, I do remember, I'd never been away from home, apart from going to - being sent to YWCA children's camps, round about the age of ten or eleven, or something or other like that, or nine or ten. And I do remember I did have one holiday away with a girlfriend at work. We went to Marysville for a week. But apart from that I don't remember ever going away without parents or ... apart from going up to stay with my granny at Lilydale, or something like that.

So did this make it all rather exciting?

Oh, yes. Well, anything was exciting really. It was exciting, it was new, not that you thought consciously about those sort of things. But I do remember the very first night in that school - in that recruit school. Somebody else was supposed to have occupied the same room - it was a boarding, a girls' boarding school, you see, so we were all allotted ifferent rooms - and that person didn't turn up. That meant I was on my own all night. And I seemed to remember that.

What, did it bother you, or seem a bit strange?

I never did like the dark very much. I used to, when I had my own room at home I'd .... Dad would say: 'If you're frightened, love, just bang on the ....' Me, banging on the, banging on the side of the wall, things like that.

What was the food and so on like at this place?

Um. The food must have been very adequate. I can't remember anything, um, to remark about food really. I always had a healthy appetite. We were always well looked after.

Did you have communal toilet facilities? Communal showers?

Yes. As I remember ...

Was that difficult for somebody who'd led, you know, such a ...?

I can't remember anything like that. So that must have been all in order. If it was a boarding school, well, there would have been a certain amount of privacy which we did not have later on in certain camp areas, and that tended to bother me a little bit, later on. But um, we were there for a fortnight.

Well, what sort of things did you do?

We were there for a fortnight. We had mostly .... Well the officers themselves were fairly young and just fairly young into their job. They'd only just come out of their school a few months before and they were our .... They were in charge except that we had a warrant officer who put us through physical education and things like that, exercise and things like that. And we had daily lectures. And we had wonderful route marches through the Botanic Gardens. Oh, I thought that was wonderful. Just .... We'd be taken out to route march through the Botanic Gardens, that was a marvellous thing. The daily lectures were, I've got an old notebook there, were things about the canteen service, lines of communication, one I was reading the other day was about salvage and the things they used to do for salvage those days were quite interesting.

What sort of things?

Well. For instance, wood, the source of wood was gone .... Paper, paper was made from the wood from the Scandinavian countries, those days and .... So I've forgotten what they used to do. They ... everything was recycled anyway. They couldn't .... Rereading that the other ... sometime recently would be an eye opener to all the salvage people and the recycling things that are going on these days. I can't remember all in detail.

Was all that salvaging done with appeals to people to, sort of, help the war effort by ....

I should think so, yes. Bottles sent back to hospitals and things like that. Old uniforms dyed maroon - given to prisoners-of-war. Something else about waste cloth, it was all recycled, and recycled, and when it was finished they said it was better than the original. I remember reading that, that's all in the notes.

What about the discipline? Suddenly finding yourself where you were being ordered to do ... [inaudible].

Well, it would not have come, it would not have been a difficult thing for me, personally, as I'd always done as I was told, I imagine, with a few reservations - a few other things.

(25.00) Did you meet many people who just - where the bit of authority went to their heads and were unduly bossy, or that sort of thing?

I can't remember, not those days, no. They were all very, very nice, very fine, very refined officers, young women who had come from a variety of .... I don't know where they'd come from but they must have done - been in some sort of public work of some sort.

One might suppose that not all the recruits would necessarily be refined. Did you encounter for the first time people who ...?

Not in those times, no. We were all much of a muchness. I don't remember anything like that.

So after your two weeks had you been issued with a uniform?

No. No uniforms for a long time, we didn't know anything about uniforms. You just went on from one thing to the other, with not thinking too much, really. And I wouldn't have needed to think. The army must have suited me pretty well because I'd always done as I was told, so I would have been a pretty good candidate for the army in a sense.

Were you being tested on the things you were being instructed in?

I suppose there was a little thing. I don't remember. There must have been some sort of testing because when the school was over we were assigned to different jobs and myself and three other girls, particularly, who'd been in that recruit school, we went to the District Records Office which was in old Tattersalls building in Swanston Street those days. So we just used to thumb over, you know, do the records - District Records Office.

What did that mean? What sort of records?

Well, the records. Everybody who was in the army had a record of every movement they made. And the dispatches must have come through and you'd have to enter it into a big book, you see. And you'd be thumbing through this great big, um, volumes of books and things looking for them and entering -putting the entries in. I do remember there, though, I used to think ... it was very smoky, a very heavy atmosphere, as I remember, it was a cramped old building ... and I used to think, oh these old boys they're always - whether they were old boys or not, they may have been young people from the last world war, I don't know how they come to be in - but to me they were - everybody was old boys - and they were always smoking. And I remember dashing up to the lavatory, as we called it, to get a breath of fresh air from time to time. But, um, that went on for a few months, I think, then. And then as with most other things I've either seen a notice or seen a notice on a noticeboard and I've just acted on that for whatever reason, I don't know. But there must have been a notice somewhere where the ... an anti-aircraft unit was ... they were recruiting girls for the anti-aircraft. So I put my name down for that and that was it. I was accepted into that.

So where did you go for that?

Well ....

Was there an aptitude test for it, by the way?

Oh, I suppose there was, I really don't know. Can't remember all those little bits. But, um, we went first down to, um .... By this time we would have had uniforms.

While we were at Records Office we used to go on a Saturday afternoon parade to Glamorgan - it was a private school out on the other side, in Toorak - and you'd have drills and lectures and all that sort of thing. And finally there we were issued with our uniforms. Our summer uniforms as they were. And I have a long photograph, a long stretched out photograph of that. And, so that was our summer uniform. I don't know when we got the winter one. It must have been later on.

Did you have trousers included in the outfit?

Not in that, not in that. Those days we just had the hat, the jacket and skirt, shirt, tie, stockings would have been brown, and brown shoes - I don't know - might have been black shoes, I can't remember.

Did you like the uniform?

Yes. I liked being in uniform, I liked it.

Did it give you a sense of pride to go home and ...?

Yes, I liked to be in uniform, that was lovely, yes. But we must have had uniforms by that time because we had all been given two - most of us working at Records - were given two stripes, we were corporals then. And there was this group of girls, I was supposed to take them down to Williamstown - that was the training base, down at Williamstown rifle range. At the time there were notices in the paper when we finally got down there and started training. 'Here we are the pioneer girls of the, of ack-ack at somewhere in Victoria.' The 'somewhere in Victoria' was Williamstown rifle range. But of that the one thing I do remember was, I was supposed to take this group of maybe a dozen girls down to Williamstown. Well, at that stage, I don't really - we travelled always by tram or bus - I don't recollect ever being on a train, or ever buying a ticket myself. If I'd have been on a train going, say, up to the country to Ballarat or, which was about as far as you went those days. My parents would have done all that sort of thing. But what ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is Side 2 of Tape 1 of the interview with Mrs Beryll Fowler about Australian Women's Army Service, recorded on 31st January 1990. And it resumes in five seconds.

You were explaining that you weren't familiar with how you got tickets ....

How I got there, I don't know. Every .... These girls seemed to be, oh, so much more sophisticated, one or two of them, than I was. But anyway we must have got down there. I really can't remember how I got from whatever station we got on. We must have had directions to go. But we finally got down there and we, I would .... Well, most of us were city girls, there may have been one or two country girls who had to be barracked down there, I can't remember, but we'd travel backwards and forwards daily for that training. Any who had come from the country must have been billeted perhaps down there. But .... And the training was in ... with rifle training and we were instructed on small arms training. But mostly it was, we were assigned to the radar - GL, gun laying.

Incidentally, where had you been staying during the time you were in the Records Office?

Home, backwards and forwards, living at home.

> And this continued even when you moved to the anti-aircraft ...?

Well, for the initial training, yes. We were backwards and forwards down to Williamstown daily, I was anyway. I can't remember whether others who may have come from the country would have had to be billeted either with relatives or they may have been billeted down there.

> By this time there would be American servicemen on leave occasionally in the streets, and so on. Were they conspicuous? Was there much talk and excitement about them?

Oh, I don't remember too much about them until much later, till I was in Brisbane. I can't remember anything much about American ex-servicemen until then, really. But that just went on down there. We were just backwards and forwards with that. And I do remember having to route march them around and we'd route march down to Footscray and back again and things like that. Eventually we went to Coode Island and had some more training prior to being drafted, and that was down to Yallourn in Victoria, that's where we first went in the anti-aircraft.

> Do you recall your reaction to being close to a gun going off for the first time, the concussion and ...?

Oh, much later on when we were on a station we would have what they call shoots. Then you would be, that would be pretty deafening. But, oh, I remember we were taken out and, down on our tummies and all the rest of it, doing our rifle training. We had that down at Coode Island. We were instructed in that sort of thing [inaudible].

> How tough was it? Did they get you to crawl through mud or anything particularly arduous?

No, nothing arduous like that. No. It was just plain rifle training and instructions in the various small arms. Don't ask me what they were all about, I can't remember all of them.

> What was the feeling about that at the time? Did it seem a bit make believe, or did it seem real, or ...?

No. Everything was quite real. Everything was quite interesting and real. And we did it the best of our ability. You know, we didn't want to be seen not to be able to do it.

> Were there any young women who decided it was all a bit monotonous and boring and too much ritual?

I can't remember. I can't remember that. We mostly all just went on and went on and went where we were sent.

> So how long did you stay running backwards and forwards to Williamstown?

Oh, I think it must have been only a matter of months. I can't exactly remember when we went up to ... whether it was at the end of '42 or the beginning of '43, I'm not too sure ... up to

Yallourn. Yallourn was the centre of power, the power service with the brown coal mines. That was considered a strategic spot in those days. And we - there were just a few of us - went up to the headquarters base for a start. And then later on there were two camp sites, two gun sites up at Yallourn. H1, which was down near what used to be, was probably a sw... I don't whether anything's up there at all now, but near the lake, and the other one was further up near the brown coal mine. But that was interesting.

So you would have been staying in a camp there, of course.

Oh, we were in a camp. That was our first real barracks. That was my first real barracks.

(5.00) You remarked before that when you found the lack of privacy involved in the camps, the first time, that was a bit hard. Tell us about that.

Oh. Well, that wasn't ... that didn't come till much later on, much later on really, when I was over in Western Australia.

You had pretty good accommodation then [inaudible].

We had good accommodation. We had comfortable accommodation. I can't remember, I suppose we did our usual moaning and groaning about all sorts of things, but to me ... I can't remember anything troubling me that way.

You said it was interesting, what was interesting about it?

Everything was interesting. We were learning things all the time. There was companionship which I perhaps had never, I had never had before, really. And lots of things were interesting there. We were up at .... The first thing that we did in Yallourn, which was an interesting thing, was another NCO and I .... Oh, by the way, by that time we really had to earn our stripes. I think they were - were they - they were taken away from us. I lost the stripes when I left Records Office and then you earned them, what I considered earning them the hard way. And that, sort of, stayed with me always, with another little incident later on. And you really had to earn, you had to study and you had to do and you had to be proficient in what you were doing. So you earned your stripes then. But we were bombardiers and that was wonderful.

What was the incident that you just referred to?

Oh. Much later on, much, much later on when I was in New Guinea the major wanted me to ... to elevate me to sergeant's rank at the time and I had a, I dunno know, an odd sense of loyalty or something or other. That meant, oh, being away from a particular friend and I'd have to eat in the sergeant's mess. And I must have been very rude, but I knocked it back. He couldn't understand why at that time, this was much later, this was back in ... this was way in '45, '46, you see. And if I'd have known how much longer I would be in the army I don't suppose I would have knocked it. But with me it was always that sense of, we had earnt it in anti-aircraft. But the first job there was with a Volunteer Air Observer Corps. That was, had been set up in the town by a civilian and there was some sort of liaison between army and air force. It was, you know, how you see in those pictures with the bomber command and you've got the operational table and when you hear about a plane coming in you're plotting its course. Well, there, they had a small group who were on duty day and night, and of our girls, and you'd get phone calls in from the local farmers and dairy farmers down in Gippsland that way.

And, if there was an odd plane coming over, a sighting of a plane had to be reported and it would be plotted there, and then whoever was on duty would ring through to the air force people.

Well, what sorts of planes were they usually?

Well. I don't know what they were but if there was a plane flying over so and so's farm down there, they were obliged to - they were all volunteers, too, these people - to ring in to this headquarters, Volunteer Air Observer Corps, which had been set up in Yallourn and report it. So, what - they could have been just training planes - could have been anything. But at that time everything was taken very seriously and that's why there was, um, an anti-aircraft base there at all.

How long before was it then that you got to first fire a gun? When did you do that?

Er, I didn't fire a gun as such, personally, at all.

What was your role then?

I was with radar, radar equipment. You had a trans... had an engine. Radar equipment was comprised of an engine which had to be started up, a transmitter, a long way away - a receiver. Little boxes, just little boxes. This was GL Mark II in those days. It was early days of radar. Somebody would be assigned to the transmitter, winding the handle, going round and round. The signals were picked up in the, at the receiver end and you're sitting down in the dark box looking at the, you know, little pips going up and down.

(10.00) Was that a strain?

Oh, we weren't in there all that long for it to be a strain.

Well, how long would you spend in there at a time?

Not too long, not too long. You'd just go through the paces of doing it.

Ten minutes, twenty minutes, longer?

Oh, I can't remember, I can't remember. It would all be done in shift work, I suppose. But that was the nature of the work that I did in anti-aircraft. There were other girls assigned to the predicter and the range finder and they would be in the command post, you see. So there were no guns fired as such, unless, until there was ... they had a shoot, what they called a shoot, a night shoot. That was to test the radar equipment and everybody else on the ball, I do remember that. I think that was at Yallourn up at the brown coal mine, so then we would hear the big guns, so, what were they, 3.6, were they 3.6 guns? Yes.

How were relations with the local people at Yallourn? Did any of them get sick of the sight of all these people in uniform all the time?

No. That I do remember - the relation, they were wonderful really. We would go .... Well, the camp was practically on the town, the township of Yallourn. The camp was, you know,

practically in the township almost. But on Sundays we'd go to church and the local people would ask you back home - marvellous suppers. And two families there kept in touch with me well after I was married. And so, as far as I know, the relationships were good.

Had you by this time teamed up with one or two girls who would become firm friends?

They were firm friends at the time, yes, yes.

Did any of them endure?

Er. No. Because I went on to other places, but mind you, the friends on the whole, I still at Christmas, from different parts of my ... from different areas in was in, I still correspond with them after all these years. We send our Christmas card and news. We're not harking back to those days so much, it's all family and what the children and the grandchildren are doing these days. But we are still in touch.

What about relations with army servicemen? Were you briefed about how you should have behaved and what was expected of you?

I'm sure we must have been, yes, I'm sure we must have been. There were always lectures and lecturettes about behaviour, they were quite strict about that.

Do you recall the thrust of the lectures?

No, not really. We just had to do ... had to behave yourself and comport yourself properly.

Were there any incidents that you recall?

Not that I can remember. No doubt there were but I didn't, I was a bit vague about a lot of things those days.

Had you got to take a drink by this stage of your life?

No. I hadn't, no.

Was there pressure to do so?

Not then, no, I don't remember anything in those days at all. Well, I'm jumping a bit to another area if that's all right while your on this particular thing. When we were, we were at Yallourn, we were finally posted over to Western Australia, but while we were on a site over there in another battery, that was the 11th Anti-Aircraft Battery in Yallourn, by the way - 11th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. We were later posted over to the 29th and I remember at the time there was a canteen on the site and somebody, the girls must have been agitating or some of them must have been agitating, 'Why can't we have our ration of beer, beer bottles', bottles of beer and they knew that I didn't drink. And I remember them saying, we were all known by abbreviation of our christian names, I was 'Brenty' and my surname ... an abbreviation of maiden surname. And, 'Oh, Brenty, you don't drink, when ... if we get our ration or ... will you give us yours?' They were lobbying me for theirs. So remembering, harking back to my

own growing up days, I do remember sayin': 'No, I'll draw it myself, and I'll pour it down the gully trap'.

They must have been horrified.

So. Whether they ever got it, I don't think it ever came about that they were given a ration.

What would you do for recreation at Yallourn?

At Yallourn. Well, I can't remember. Not a great deal because if you were off duty you were mostly washing or doing things like that and we were still doing our fancy work and knitting and things like that, things of that nature. And if we were on leave we'd go into the township and ... with some of these local people were very nice, very ... families were nice. It wasn't too remote from the community.

Were you writing back home? Did you keep ...?

Always writing back home. Well, that wasn't too far away to come home on leave from Yallourn. I'll tell you something. We used to come, be taken down by truck to ... Yallourn was in between Moe and Morwell ... we'd be taken down by truck to Morwell, the railway station and had fairly regular leave as I remember. Some of the country girls would have to wait till they accumulated leave to ... so that they could have a decent leave to get back to the country areas. But being in the city I must have had it more frequently or, a shorter time but more frequently. I do remember one thing that, sort of, was a nightmare for a long while afterwards. It sounds silly, but when we .... The train was always fairly packed because there was the air force station further down at Sale so you were mostly sat in the corridors or, you know, it was fairly packed, the train. Whether we got in .... I imagine we'd have got into Spencer Street, whether it was Spencer Street or Flinders Street, I don't remember. But whatever it was when I got there, you'd always bring your kit bag home and you were only there for the weekend, but your mother was supposed to tidy up and you'd take the washing home to mum, as well as doing it up there.

(15.00)I found that I didn't have my purse and no money for my ... it would have been a bus fare, I think, out there - a Tramways bus or something that went out to East Brunswick then. They didn't have the continuation of the line right out. I didn't have my purse and the fare would only have been threepence I suppose then, and I didn't have the sense to ask anybody or enquire, but I was about to get on whatever vehicle which was to take me home, I didn't have the money to pay the fare, not when I got on, but before I got on. So I walked home that night and ....

How far was that?

That's from the city to East Brunswick. That means going along Spring Street, along Nicholson Street through Carlton, North Fitzroy out to East Brunswick.

About eight miles would it be?

Oh, no, no. It would only be about three miles. The distance as such was not what bothered me, it was being out in the dark and on my own. And I do remember walking along there, my mother had said don't go near the gardens, don't ... always do, you know, always warnings

about all these sort of things, and I walked on the opposite side to the Exhibition Gardens but I walked all the way home. How I got home ... I got home eventually and they said: 'Well, why didn't you ask somebody?' I never thought to ask, or anything like that. But that was a sort of recurring nightmare for a long while afterwards, that walk home. I must have been afraid.

> Was it a rewarding business still, getting around in public? There you were in uniform. Did you get, sort of, encouragement from people: 'Good on you, girlie', you know that sort of thing?

I don't recollect anything like that because there was so many in uniform then. I don't remember anything like that. Before we went into ... were posted away ... it would have been while we were still at Records, there was always a lot of war rally marches that we'd be, um, that we would be doing, say, in the lunch hour. War bonds, war bonds they were, weren't they? War bond marches. And I remember all that sort of thing. I used to like that. I used to like, used to love marching.

> Did your jobs either in Records or at Yallourn bring you into contact with male members of the army where you would be subject to their orders at all?

Oh, well. We would all be .... We would be subjected to their orders all the time, all the way through really.

> In a very direct way, where a man would be in effect taking over and telling you what to do and so on?

Um, yes. I should think so in Records certainly. Um, and in the anti-aircraft most certainly. The warrant officers there, they'd have to be there to instruct you in the equipment you see.

> Was there ever anything condescending about the manner, or ...?

Not that I remember, they were most helpful. They were most helpful as I remember, all those instructors.

> So how long did you stay at Yallourn?

Not too long, by '43 we were over in Western Australia. Some had to stay behind, it was a disappointment for them. How we were chosen I don't remember. We were sent over there, it would be '43 I think, Western Australia - '42, '43. And there were ... to the 29th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, there were four gun sites, one was at Park, one South, one North and one East. I was posted to the one at East which was East Fremantle on the Richmond Park trotting ground, I think it was. We were always on trotting grounds. Those places were always taken over during the war years. And, there was a camp site and a gun site there. So I was ....

> How did you travel? What was the method from when you left ...?

I travelled on the troop train across the Nullabor Plain.

> But from Yallourn were you trucked or trained down?

Oh, from Yallourn you would have been, would have come down to home and had a bit of ... had some leave at home, and then you would have assembled somewhere or other, at Spencer Street, I should imagine and then there was the broken rail gauges, those days, so you stopped at Adelaide, or Port Pirie I think it was, and then on to another train and right across the Nullabor.

What were the conditions like in the train?

Well, pretty primitive I suppose, by these days standards anyway, but I thought it was marvellous at the time. I loved travelling.

Crowded?

Yes. It was crowded. And it took about four days, I think, to get across there altogether. And, um ....

Did you have sleepers?

No, no, no. There was, let me say, about six girls, six people in a carriage. And I do remember there used to be: 'Well, who's going to sleep where?' Some managed to get up in the luggage racks. The others were on the ... there. Or you'd end up on the floor, or sitting up in the corner. So that was sleeping arrangements.

Were these both men and women being sent over at the time?

Ah, yes, there must have been. Yes, there'd be men and women on the train but you wouldn't be in a mixed carriage, though.

Were there rules against men going into the women's carriages, or vice versa?

I imagine there would have been, yes.

Were there people who nonetheless were determined that they were going to, did you know?

I can't remember. We all kept to ourselves, I suppose. I don't remember anything like that. But I do remember, I went in all told, six times across the Nullabor and that does figure very pleasantly in my memory. In the course of ....

Why pleasantly? What did you like about it?

Well, I loved the travel, I suppose.

Uncomfortable though it was?

(20.00) Uncomfortable though it was. I was fascinated by the nothingness. Those trains had a bit of ... a something or other at the end of them were you could get out and look out, those old trains. And I remember standing out there in the sunset and looking at all this and taking it all in. I thought it was wonderful.

Did they have occasional stops for no reason?

Oh, yes. You had, you always stopped for meals.

But ever any breakdowns where you just stopped in the middle of nowhere?

There could have been. There could have well been those sort of incidents, I don't remember them.

Did you see anything of Aboriginal people?

Yes. We'd see them. I have some snaps of them, that's how I remember some of these things. They seemed to be pitiful, really ... would be our first contact with them, I should imagine, in those days and they were fairly .... Oh they sort of had used, old, used clothing on and they seemed to be .... I suppose they were looking for handouts or something or other in those days around the troop train.

Had you previously ever seen any Aboriginals in Australia?

I may have seen them, yes. I would have seen them there, there would have been some in Fitzroy, that area, I should think years ago. But, you weren't conscious of ... wouldn't be conscious of them apart from what you'd see in story books, in the books, history books.

You never actually got to speak to any.

No, no.

These would have been steam trains, across the Nullabor, were they?

Must have been, yes, yes, steam trains.

There used to be a tradition of throwing things out to gangers as they went passed work places and that. Did they used to do that on the troop trains?

Well, I don't remember. These were mostly ga... the stations you would stop at would be ganger stations. There would be just a small cluster of houses, weatherboard houses, tin roofs. And that's about as much as I can remember then. We'd all pile out for our meals with our pannikins. And talking of food, the only thing I can remember is ... food ... is little tinned sausages which I didn't mind really, in the pannikins. Everything was piled in together and then you'd have to use the communal basin for washing which must have been very awkward for the cooks and everybody else on those trains. You know, seeing to all these things. And I do remember if you were late in the queue it was pretty greasy, the water by the time you'd washed your pannikin out.

What about the toilets, did they get in pretty poor condition, or ...?

Blowed if I can remember what .... We must have all used them but there must have been something on the train. I can't remember those little bits and pieces.

So when you arrived at the other end on your first trip, where did you go?

Well, we went to .... We were sent to the 29th, as I say, Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery and we were divided up into the four gun sites that were there.

And you were billeted at the trots down there.

It was the Richmond Park Trotting Ground at the time.

Tents, or Nissan huts?

No. They were huts of some sort. There were some tents whi h we used to like to sleep in. Even at Yallourn there were tents there. We all had a turn in that, that was rather fun with a little lantern and all that sort of thing, we used to like sleeping in the tents. But they were mostly huts and you would take turns to .... Well, you would be rostered to be either on the manning station. Manning, up on the gun site or down in the camp site. And when you were up on the manning site you weren't allowed down and the meals were brought up by truck, you see, and the messing facilities there were under the back of the old grandstand that was there. I remember us all being at the back of that somewhere. That's where we had our messing facilities.

Even today the Western Australians in terms of their attitude towards east coasters and particularly people from Canberra can be quite extreme.

Yes.

Did Western Australians seem different to you in those days?

Yes. Even then. The girls there ... we were ... the local Western Australian girls, South Australian girls and the 'Vics', most of them had come from country areas. Things that you remember and notice then. The Victorian - the South Australians spoke much better than we did. 'We went to school, 'school' they seemed to pronounce school, little things li e that you remember. They seemed to be, to have been better educated than the Vics or the Western Australians were pretty on the slow side and had chips on their shoulders, I think, those girls. There was always something or other there.

Did they seem more country like, the Western Australians?

Slower, and country like, yes. Well, a lot of them had come from the wheat-belts or the goldfield-belts. One or two girls I was associated with they'd come from, their families had been in the goldfields all their days from .... One I still write to, she's only just left Kalgoorlie, her husband. And another one was from the wheat belt somewhere. But talking of, before, about embarrassed with washing. When we were up in the gun site there was an open ablution thing, all cold water, and well, I didn't much care ... some of them would strip off and just have their showers, cold showers ....

(25.00)I didn't fancy that much, but in any case I probably didn't like the cold water too much. So we used to have what they used to say: 'Oh, we'll just have an APC today', armpit and crutch, a quick wash. There was one who was particularly fussy and she would gather up all the little bits and pieces of stick, there wasn't much wood, and light it up on a wood fire and

make herself a bath, hot water bath. But she was the only person that I remember ever doing that. But the rest of us would just have ... and wait till we get back to the gun site again, the camp site to have ... where there were proper showers, showering facilities down there.

> By this time one might suppose you might have met somebody who'd naturally swore a lot, did you ever recall having been shocked to find a lady or a woman swearing a lot, did that happen?

I don't remember that too much. Some of them smoked, I suppose that was, I'd never, you never sort of, you always looked twice if somebody smoked in a public tram or bus those days, you know - they're smoking. That was an odd thing those days. But some of my best friends smoked and nobody, it didn't worry me in that regard. But there wasn't too much of that and I don't remember ....

> Were there women who were regarded as fast?

In civilian life as I remember, yes. If a person smoked in public they were seen to be a bit fast. But in the services, I suppose we must have got used to that. But over there, I can't remember too much about that.

> Were there ever any women who gained reputations because they were seen to chase men? Or have an undue interest in men?

Um, where was I then, yes, that was in the west. Yes, there were some who'd .... At the time I didn't really understand what it was they were all getting up to, to tell you the truth, as I say I was a bit slow growing up. And there was one and she was a very likeable person but I think she was going AWOL and probably nipping off to other camps and things like that. But she, I liked her very much and we were pals really. But I didn't really know what it was all about, what they were getting up to, or anything else, but no doubt they were.

> Were you at all unusual or were there lots of young women like yourself who were very innocent?

Oh, I should imagine so, more so - realised that these days when we talk at reunions and we think back: 'Gosh, we must have been dumb' and things like that.

> You remarked that some of the West Australians seemed to have a chip on their shoulder. In what way would that show itself?

Oh, they would keep to themselves a bit, and ....

> Would those in command who were from the west be, perhaps, a bit harsher or different in their attitude?

No, I don't think so. I don't remember too much about who was .... Well, we were under the command of the male officers on the station. There was a female officer, I think, there must have been one there doing the rounds, at least doing the rounds of the camps. But we were under the authority of whoever was in charge of that gun site.

> Was it regarded at all as a coup for a young woman to be invited out by, say, an officer?

Oh, I don't know. I didn't think in terms like that really. I couldn't remember. I think some of them might have associated with them but ... gone out with them. I don't think it was allowed really. There wasn't that fraternisation between officers and other ranks. Certainly wasn't in the rule book.

> What seemed to be the sense of going to Western Australia, I mean in retrospect even? Did it seemed to make ...? Could you see a lot of point in your being sent all the way there on a number of times?

At that time, um, it was meant to be a ... it was a vulnerable area, the port of Fremantle. And I remember that there were lots of boys stuck out in the desert there who must have been itching for active duty but they were in a tank corps, I think they were. They never really saw .... They were stuck out there for some reason or other. It must have been considered a strategic area. All of Australia was at that time, because at that time you didn't know where the Japs were going to end up coming, which .... They ended up in Darwin as it happens and that was a great surprise to everybody.

> How big a surprise, do you recall? Was there a real sense of shock? Did you feel shocked?

I don't remember at the time because I was probably doing something else. The events of the war in a sense passed you over. It's only in retrospect over these years, when you see documentaries about this that and the other aspect of the war that you realise what has gone on. At the time, you were concerned only with your every day living and serving.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

> Identification: This is Side 1 of Tape 2 of the interview with Mrs Beryll Fowler about the Australian Women's Army Service, recorded on 31st January 1990 and begins in five seconds.

> During the time you were in Western Australia, were you being briefed about the course of the war? Was there document...

I'm sure we were.

> ... aries about what was going on?

Yes. There were always lectures. I do remember those days, it must have been with the Stalingrad business, the Russians were our allies at that time. And I do remember seeing lots of films, and we'd be cheering them on. This was held .... They were also held in the back of this, um, what do you call it, grandstand on East station. I remember seeing films like that of the course of the war and of course they were all, you know, they were ... we were taken in. We were kept informed in that fashion.

> Before the reality of the Japanese fighting force was realised soldiers were being briefed that they had bad sight, they were short, they were stunted, they were ... you know - didn't amount to much. Was there a continuing flow of propaganda about just how awful the enemy was in terms of their lack of humanity or whatever?

I suppose we must have had heard all those sort of things but I can't remember in particular anything, but it would have come over in films I suppose. The same as we, everybody, was cheering on the Russians at that stage, which was right at the time. And, um, that's all I can remember there.

> How real did the threat seem to you, say, in a place like Western Australia, down south, of possible invasion in that area? Was it really a war to stop it happening up there, or was there in fact a sense that you might be overwhelmed?

I don't think we felt threatened in the least. We just went about .... Everything was normal, there was the civilian population .... You go off on, you go off for your weekend leave and make the most of it. Then we used to go ... we'd have a weekend leave, a weekend pass, and you'd take a bus into Perth and the first thing we'd do .... The bus must have put us off quite handy to this place called the Sportsman's Lodge. The Sportsman's Lodge was .... Whatever it had been before - I suppose the name says what it had been. But it would have been run perhaps by volunteer ladies at the time. You paid a shilling, you dumped your haversack, booked in for your room which was a nice clean bed. You could have hot showers, and tea making facilities were there. But we'd just get in, pay our shilling, dump our things, and off into Perth for leave. And, I'm trying to think what really, what did we really do. We may have gone, if we had a Western Australian pal, they might have taken us .... As I say I remember going to Araluen and places like that and ....

How far out was that?

I'm blowed if I know, I can't remember. I can't remember that. It was an outing. But other times you'd be in the gardens or going to the pictures or something or other like that. The evening was the best part because we went to .... We'd always go dancing at the YAL, I think it was the .... YAL, was the Young Catholic Ladies ... I don't know, can't remember what it was, what the ... you know, what the YAL stood for. But anyway it was the building where we used to go dancing there. And then we'd go back for the night to the Sportsman's Lodge. Sunday, I'm blowed if I know what we did. We must have gone to church or gone around somewhere or other, and back into camp by ten o'clock on Monday morning.

Was there any discernible shift over the period of the war, as you saw it, in terms of the way young women behaved? I mean, they all sound a very genteel lot, as you described them in the first instance. Did they start to become just a little wilder or just a little reckless?

There are always some in a group who were a bit more worldly wise than the others, and there would have been some who may have got ... may have gone against the rules somewhere along the line. I can't remember anything in particular.

(5.00) Did you ever get into any trouble at any time anywhere?

[Laughs] Sounds dreadful, doesn't it. I don't remember but ....

Did you ever not salute even, you know, something really outrageous?

Oh, no. I did all those sort of things. The nearest, I do remember when we were still at East, towards the end everybody seemed to be ... the only time I could remember going out without leave ... was, everybody was going through this hole in the fence up to the pictures there and I must have ...

You were a bit worried about that?

Yes. I couldn't tell you what. I must have crouched in the seat. Mind you, the pictures were filled with people from the camp. The picture theatre was filled with people from the camp who'd done the same thing. But I did have a guilty feeling about that. I hadn't gone against the rules too often. Sounds a bit smug but that's how it was.

Now you said you went backwards and forwards ...

Yes.

... across the Nullabor a number of times. Did you come back on leave or were there other reasons?

The reasons were that they must have had a quota to fill and two or three girls from the various stations in that particular battery were sent across to the School of Artillery in Sydney, which was on Randwick racecourse. I think it was the racecourse but it was at Randwick and we were there supposedly to learn the finer details of GL Mark II and then GL Mark III. This was the later version of the gun laying radar equipment. And they were fairly long courses

there, they were about a few weeks in length, in which time of course you got to see Sydney which was the one and only time I've been to Sydney. But we did our travelling that way, those days. But they were interesting, they were interesting. I didn't always understand what I was being taught but it was interesting and you had plenty of leave to see things. The only uncomfortable thing that I can remember from those particular times was ... I had also been to a couple of NCO schools before I went away. One was at Darley and while I was over there I went to an NCO school at Guildford in Western Australia and did reasonably well. I enjoyed it, I always liked marching and all the military side of it. My weakness was always when you had to give a five minute lecturette and I used to have to bluster my way through that. But on this occasion we must have been all allotted our particular themes we had to speak on. I obviously didn't know a thing I was talking about and must have mumbled away, whatever it was. Unfortunately there were other people in the class who had been appointed to criticise you as well. So I do remember this poor chap doing his best to say something kind, I suppose, and there I was blubbering away, blubbering away in my seat.

You were crying?

Blubbering away, yes, crying. Whether it was with emotion from the whole business, it wasn't so much his criticism, it was the emotion of the whole exercise of having to do the lecturette. I didn't like that part of it. And I do remember being very embarrassed and wondering how to face up to classmates in the few days to come, but still I got over that.

How did Sydney seem to you after Western Australia?

Sydney. Sydney seemed fast, it seemed fast to me. And people all looked different but then again some of the girls .... One of the girls I was with, she had relatives there, so we were taken out there, to private places. And also my mother had a cousin out at Willoughby I think it was, so I, in turn, took whoever was my friend at the time, we went out there. And it was nice to have the personal contact with relatives with either one or the other of us. But we got around a bit and ....

Did you get to the beaches?

Yes. I remember going to Coogee Beach and Bondi Beach, seeing them, walking around. That's about as much as I remember of that.

What sort of costume did you have at the time?

Oh, I don't remember much swimming over there. It wasn't ... the swimming part of it didn't come until we went up to New Guinea and the costume part of it. But ....

What about at Coogee?

I don't remember going swimming as such there, maybe we didn't even take bathers with us at that time. We were only going there for a school. I can't remember ever going swimming there, at all.

So, over how long a period then were you moving backwards and forwards to Western Australia?

It would be right through '43, '44 - '43, '44, backwards and forwards, that was on two occasions I went there and on each time you would have leave at home in Melbourne before going over. I remember in my album I've got written down twenty-four ... I've had twenty-four days leave' and that was the last time. I must have had twenty-four days leave there before I went over there again, or was it the other way round, on our way to New Guinea, I think, then.

(10.00) Coming back then for a period of leave of that sort and fitting back temporarily into a civilian lifestyle, were you conscious of any change in yourself? Had you become in any way more independent, or different in any way?

Into civilian life?

Mm.

Well that was a long progression really and it was, a lot went in between, before I came back to civilian life which was hard to settle down but ....

No. I mean not before the end of the war. I mean just as a result of living in this way and living in the army.

I think you were always glad ....

Had you changed, do you think?

You were always glad to get back to the service. You were always glad to get back to camp. It was nice to be home, nice to have a particular favourite roast dinner or something like that, but it was always lovely to get back.

But did you feel at all different? Did you feel at all more assertive or independent or anything of those things? Had there been any trouble?

I certainly must have been more confident than I had been when I started out, but I don't remember analysing those sort of feelings.

So when did you go to Brisbane?

Well, things were starting to wind down in the west towards the end of '44. That's right, I had had a long leave at home and when I returned to Western Australia I was posted down to South Beach. That was another part of that and things were winding down a bit over there with the war receding from our shores. And we were there for a while but there was nothing much doing, it was mostly just maintenance and playing around on the beach there, we were at South Beach, Fremantle. Another thing, those days our work outfits were, what do you call men's ... would be something like ...

Boiler suit.

A boiler suit. Well, I've got snaps there - they were sort of blue colour - and I think one of the chief occupations of the girls there was boiling them down to a beautiful pale blue or white. I've got snaps there where they look almost white. They'd boil them and boil them up in the

old coppers till they were practically white. But there was, yes, another notice on the board and it said something about applying for New Guinea so I put it in. I put in my name and I was accepted and, well, I can't remember how we got .... We must have got back, had some leave, I do remember assembling somewhere in Melbourne and going up to Brisbane then.

How did you travel up? Train.

We travelled by train. That was my first .... A lovely long train ride, I do remember the lovely lush country of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland, that I can remember very well, that train trip, it was wonderful.

Was it a troop train as such?

Oh, yes, I think it would - they were all troop trains. Yes. It wouldn't be civilian train. And we were then in transit for some five weeks, I think, being acclimatised, being kitted out before we went up to New Guinea. We were stationed then. We were billeted there on the campus of St Lucia University which is the St Lucia University that now is, I think it was only partly built then. And we used to have leave into Brisbane. We must have had to go across the river for that in a little punt.

Was there particular tropical kit?

We were issued with tropical kit, yes.

What was it?

Well. We were issued with eventually a safari jacket and trousers which buckled round the ankle, um, I'm trying to think of the thing round me ankle, you know, anyway I'll remember. Boots, rubber boots. Boots, leather boots. Slouch hat which we'd already been used to. We had six of those outfits and then there was a frock thing, um, a work frock, skirt, various bits of underwear and all the rest of it. I have got a list of it somewhere. But there were six, we were issued with six safari outfits for going to New Guinea.

Were you, even for living in Queensland ...

Gaiters, I was trying to think of. Gaiters. That's right.

Were you given mosquito coils and briefed about things like dengue fever or those sorts of things?

Oh yes, very much so. The time spent there would have been spent in a certain amount of physical exercise I suppose to keep us fit, lots of lectures and about tropical diseases and all that sort of thing. The very first thing we ever got up there, there weren't too many such malaria cases, at that stage by the time ... very few I remember ever having malaria. But the first thing we all ... we couldn't get into the sea quickly enough and with the little bits of coral we all got ear infections. We were told we would get it and we did get them. But that's as much as I can remember happening to me up there.

There were rather more Aboriginal people up north. Were you briefed at all about whether you should or shouldn't have anything to do with Aboriginal people?

In Brisbane as such, I don't remember anything like that.

(15.00) In Brisbane is where we came up with - you asked me about US servicemen - there seemed to be a terrible lot of them up there. My only contact with them was, well fairly brief, we mostly went to the pictures and things like that on our days off and looking at the sights of Brisbane. And also I had a cousin or other relatives of my mother and I was taken out there to, I think, somewhere around south Nerang, I think. It's probably where the Gold Coast is now, but it was just a sleepy river at the time. But I was with a girl, Elsie. Elsie was a good girl, a really good girl. I would say a good Christian girl who lived her faith, she was the only person who I remember through the service who knelt down beside her bed, wasn't ashamed to kneel down beside her bed. And there was another Catholic girl who did the same. They were the two girls I can remember, you'd say were truly witnessing to what they believed in. The rest of us who had had a Sunday school upbringing might read a bit of something or other under the covers but not to be seen, you know. And .... But anyway, I was out with Elsie and I always felt safe with Elsie because ... and she was a lovely girl. But whether we were going on leave or not but we hadn't been accustomed to jeeps at that stage, we were more accustomed ... they were the normal mode of travel when we were in New Guinea. But a couple of Americans came along with a jeep and offered us a ride, so we had a lovely time. I think we might have gone to Lone Pine Sanctuary.

Did that seem a bit exciting?

Oh, that was exciting, marvellous ....

But I mean exciting in the sense that one might suppose American servicemen had a bit of a reputation and so it was being a bit daring to get into the jeep with them.

It was. It was, yes, but I was with Elsie, you see, so as far as I was concerned there was, that was all right. And well, if she was going to do it that was ....

Did you sit together or did you share seats?

Oh yes, we - I can't remember, we were all in the jeep but we had a lovely time running around in the jeep. I remember them buying something, it was in a built up area, it wasn't out in the whoop-whoops, or anything like that. They must have bought something. We must have had something at a local shop. But anyway, it was coming on to evening and they must have suggested: 'What are we going to do tonight?' you see, so Else said: 'Oh, we're going to church'. So, I do remember, all I can remember is that there was a bit of a surprise and we were dropped pretty quickly, wherever it was. We had to get back to the city. So that was the end of that little episode.

They didn't go to church with you.

No. They didn't go to church. The invitation was extended, it would have been extended by Elsie: 'Oh, you can come along with us, too' but that was that but I do remember that. That was an excitement for us, for me.

> Do you know any other young ladies at the camp who did go out with American servicemen?

Quite possibly they did, I don't remember.

> They didn't sort of talk about it and there wasn't ...?

No, not in the, not in our particular hut. But that was all about that. But we spent an interesting time in Brisbane looking around and there wasn't too much to do but being kitted out and prepared and I think there were certain delays in getting up to New Guinea. There might have been shipping troubles and things like that till we finallyjp72
boarded the *Duntroon*.

> What about Queenslanders, how did they strike you? Did they seem different at all?

Ah.

> They have some speech differences, anyway.

I .... Yes they did. They didn't have, they didn't have a suitcase, they always carried a portmanteau. A suitcase was a portmanteau, little things like that. But apart from the girls who had come from Queensland, we weren't too much in touch with Queenslanders as such. It was more service groups. I know you had dickens of a job to get into a picture theatre there, you were queued for a mile away, you know, trying to get into the pictures there. There was such a lot of conc... there was such a big concentration of American troops and our own.

> Did you sense anything in the streets of friction between American servicemen and Australians?

I didn't see anything, no, I didn't see anything like that.

> So, you were saying you boarded the *Duntroon*.

We went up in the *Duntroon* and ....

> Well tell us about the boarding. You ... boarding?

I can't remember it except the only thing that I can remember is that at that time, it was on May 1st or early May and it was towards the end of the European war and there was much excitement and leaning over and newspapers and seeing, catching up with the news then. It was towards the end of the European, the war in Europe was coming to a close. But we had four, I think it was four days on the ship.

> Was it an exciting notion to you?

Oh yes, wonderful, wonderful. I loved the travel and we called into Bowen on the way as I remember. And I can't remember what else we did on this ....

Did you get ashore, or just ....

Yes, we went ashore at Bowen.

Not a lot to see there now, let alone then.

[Laughter] We called in there on the way home and there wasn't too much there. I think, they did, they had a cyclone or something or other. There wasn't too much to see there. But coming back I remember, of course, having been up there, the first thing another friend and I did was to go to the nearest shop and buy some wool and knitting and knitting patterns and get on with our knitting, that used to be a recreation back over in Western Australia. We used to do a lot of knitting, things like that as well as other sport.

(20.00) But we went up to New Guinea and rereading a book that's just been put out in the last two years. Lately they've been having reunions there, the Lae contingent - '45, '46 contingent. There were about 340, I think, in that one contingent that went, the first one that went up and they've had reunions over the last few years. The next one I'm looking forward to is in Canberra in March and the one before was down here in Melbourne. Prior to that they had one up in Queensland and New South Wales. I wasn't able to go to those. But they've put out a booklet with all the details of our service up there.

What was it you understood you were going to be doing?

We didn't know what we were going to be doing. We weren't going to be doing the things we had done in our other service life. We mostly went up as clerks. Some girls who had been transport drivers thought they'd be transport drivers, but there were no women transport drivers in New Guinea because we were all pretty well looked after, you know, all policed around. There were some linguists, one or two girls who were, which was a rare thing in those days, Japanese linquists who were interpreters. Others worked in intelligence. It wasn't till this last reunion that I saw the name of one of the girls who had been in our hut who'd been in intelligence and was mentioned in dispatches, I didn't know anybody had been mentioned in dispatches, but there's quite a list of them, of girls.

For what had she been mentioned?

I don't know, I really don't know. But she had worked in intelligence so .... And others were, um, we were allotted to various tasks there. Some of them would go to .... We were all in a big compound up there.

On the trip up, how seriously was the security taken at that point? Was it lights off, blackouts, or were things a bit more relaxed?

I think so, I think there was all that, all the usual things were done there and of course letter writing was always censored, even then. And, um, yes, all the precautions would have been taken getting up there.

How did you get ashore?

Getting ashore. Well, it seems that the Markham River had broken its - had flooded down to the sea and washed away the pier so the getting ashore part was by barge, on barges. We have a snap there of our colonel in charge, Colonel Spencer climbing up the Jacob's ladder to greet us, she and other officers had flown up there to prepare the camp, climbing up the Jacob's ladder to greet us there. And how we got off was, first onto American barges then we were transferred to our Australian barges.

You didn't have to climb down ropes down the side of the boat, or anything?

No, we must have got down somehow or other. There must have been ramps or something let down. But all the little details escape me. You just moved along, moved along like this all the time, that's how you can't remember the details.

So where did you go?

Well. We were in, it was at Lae, New Guinea and we went to the big compound that had been prepared for us, very high barbed wire enclosure, very well protected.

From what? From whom?

Well. From everything outside I suppose. I don't know whether the native population was a threat as such but we were women in a war zone and a male area so we were well and truly protected. All the way through there, there was all that sense of being protected and looked after, as I remember. But we had our huts which were lovely huts, long huts, louvred huts with sack-sack roofs on them and I think we were about twenty, twenty-two to a hut - a long street. So we've got snaps of before and after which was all rough and - at the beginning. Later on we were all given seeds and tools and I've got pictures of before and after the garden, you know, looking after the garden in which things grew as you were looking at them up there practically. But we were allotted to our huts. There was a big recreation hut that was the mess hut. There were certain huts down the other end for, say, the signal girls, a lot of signal girls who had to do shift work so they would have to sleep, you know, away in the daytime, further away from the noise.

How many in this camp?

Ah, there were 300, between 340 odd in the first contingent that went to Lae. There was another contingent came later on which bought the strength up to I think something like 360 something altogether.

Were mosquitoes a problem?

We had mosquito netting and we always had to roll down the sleeves at, in the evening. We already had our long trousers that ... our long trousers that, which were belted at the ankle and the gaiters around them and the boots. And you always had to put your mosquito netting down when it was dusk at night-time.

(25.00) When you were arriving was there at all a sense that, oh, it was known that there was a batch of women arriving that a lot of fellows would come to check you out as it were?

Oh, well, that happened later on. There was great excitement when you read back on ... the *New Guinea Gold* was the newspaper up there and there was all different articles about the girls arriving, great excitement, of course, we must have caused. And later on, of course, the invitations flooded in thick and fast which were well and truly vetted from both ends and we got pretty choosy after a while: Where will we go this time? We will go to this picnic or will we go to that picnic. Will go out on this barge picnic? And so on and so on. But that followed after a while. But we were allotted our different duties to different places. There was the 1st Aust. Army, the girls would march out each morning that was within marching distance. They would go there, there'd be all the different branches and signals and so on. I was allotted to Lae base sub-area. To get there we went in a bus each, taken in a bus each morning and brought back to the camp, and ....

Could you wander, say, in the evening could you wander outside the camp?

No, no. You never went anyway without an escort. You didn't even go to the pictures without an escort and ...

What form would the escort take?

Well, armed guards, with their rifles and never any ... always ... never less than six girls at a time, I think that was, remembering back, we were allowed out even then at a time, but .... At the various ... one little thing about safety. My first place that I was sent to down there was down the Butibum Road or the the Busu Road I forgotten. We were ... that was the name of the street the Butibum Road which was ... the compound faced this road there. It was down the end of there somewhere and I was in army education in the library and I was the only girl there at the time which didn't seem odd to me, I was quite happy - all the books around that was just to my liking, that sort of thing. But, the only - it wasn't a run-in but the only altercation I suppose you would say that I had with an officer was when I was being removed from there and put down to the Lae Base sub-area library and I didn't like it and I didn't know why. But it wasn't quite proper really, it was in the interests of safety and propriety and everything else that I was to be removed from there. But I do remember approaching the officer and not being too happy about it at the time. Looking back, of course, it was the right thing to do.

Well, what was the danger?

Well, I suppose you're only one girl and the rules were saying that there had to be more in a place. How I come to be there I'm not too sure, maybe it was just an oversight, but it wasn't right, the girls were well protected in that way that there was ... they were in groups, or you were escorted there and back all the time. So I finished off my time in New Guinea in the army education library. [inaudible]

What sort of things did the library carry?

The library carried all sorts of th... all sorts of books of ... a wide variety of books ....

Was it vetted for, you know, I mean, our attitudes and censorship continued up until pretty late in the piece? Was it fairly rigid sort of scrutiny of everything that came in?

I've no idea how the library, how the books were selected, or anything else. But to follow up, in a way, that question, this was a bit uncomfortable at the time. A lot of books were going missing, I remember at the time, and the major who was in charge was concerned, and they were mainly books, sex books, books on sex or sexual education.

Instruction books.

Yes. Instruction books I should say.

Because they had illustrations.

They must have, they had illustrations. Well anyway, so much so - this was so much so that curious me thought she'd have to have a look and see what they were all about. So, as I said, I was a little bit slow growing up, what was I, about twenty-three then, be twenty-three by that time. So I smuggled one of these home, back to the barracks, I mean. I do remember reading it inside of another book with the mosquito net well pulled down around me. And whatever it was I read in there, which I can't remember to this day, but I do remember that all of a sudden the penny drops, if you can understand. It seems a bit strange in this day and age when everybody grows up so much more quickly, you know. But all of a sudden it was just like the blind being drawn up on everything and suddenly I understood and as I remember I felt physically ill for about a week. But that was the awakening of Beryll if you like. But then, of course, I smuggled that pretty quickly back to the library. But that's all I can remember of that little bit. But we used to come backwards and forwards by bus each day which was good fun, lots of fun and, oh, I can't remember, others were working in different departments there, different branches - G Branch, and all that sort of thing.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: This is Side 2 of Tape 2 of the interview with Beryll Fowler about the Australian Women's Army Service recorded on 31st January 1990, and continues in five seconds.

With these various social outings which you say were being very closely vetted, were they all logged in effect so people were checked in and out ...

Oh, yes, yes.

... just so nobody disappeared?

Yes. They were and the units, various units would have to put in an application, it would be posted up on the board and we were getting pretty selective by that time which wasn't too fair on some of the little units who didn't have a great deal to offer. For instance, an invitation to go out on a barge picnic was much more exciting than just going around to the - a little local mess or something or other like that. But they were lots of fun and we had ....

Tell us about a barge picnic, how would it ... what would be involved, what would you do?

Well, you'd go out on a barge to some other part of, round the bay.

They'd bring a picnic lunch, the people taking you?

Well, you'd get over there and really they'd have, of all things, sucking pig, all sorts of things. They'd put on a great spread for you. And they'd be just showing you around whatever their locality was and coming back and swimming and things like that. They were barge picnics. Or they would be other picnics round about or there would be invitations up to, say, up to Nadzab and places like that. Nadzab was a graveyard for old planes, you know, those days. And some of the, I've still got some of the, what do you call it, the menus and the things that the boys used to put on for us up there. They put on a great treat for you but it was really ... that's .... And then, of course, we'd have them back to the camp as well. In the course of the week there was two nights of closed camp but you could get out one night, Monday and Thursday. Monday you could get out ... and another girl, one or two other girls and I went on cultural - for cultural pursuits. That took the form of going in the jeep up to, up the road a bit where somebody was instructing you on classical music and we were listening to lovely classical music. That was a way of getting out on that particular night. It wasn't so much a way of getting out but we were, one or two other girls and myself, were interested in that sort of thing, so that was lovely. And the other night, closed night, would be a make and mend night when you'd all go down to the recreation centre and do all sorts of handcrafts. I remember, I thought I'd do leatherwork and there was all this business with how you do leatherwork and sending home a little album to my dad with my photo of myself in a bathing suit and so on. And then two nights out, two nights would be picture nights when you were always escorted. And it's good to see the old films back again these days on the pictures because you think, 'Oh, yeah, I remember seeing that way back in New Guinea', but you didn't really see it too well because if it was a fine night you had this glorious great moon filling the sky which would waft you off into romantic thoughts or else it was raining and you'd just sit there, you couldn't see the screen you had our gas capes and ground sheets and water dripping off your head. And you were allowed to meet friends there. You were allowed to meet friends there from other camps and sit with them, so you could hold your hands under the gas cape or two time it with one on either side perhaps.

Did you have canvas deck chairs as ...?

Oh, I don't know what, they must have been old ... I think they were just old wooden benches, old wooden - no, no canvas deck chairs. They were just long wooden things, whether they had a back in them I don't know. But we would sit and be at moonlight or rain watching the pictures.

Mosquitoes, as well?

I don't remember that. I don't remember too much. And then we would be escorted. You could, your friend you were with, they would come back with you to the camp gate and you could say your farewells immediately outside the gate or inside the gate and there was only a certain time allowed for that. But then we'd have things at the camp, recreation, when you could invite your friends in for ... on Saturday nights, things like that and ....

(5.00) Are these lady friends or men friends?

No, these were the men friends that you'd met.

Had you formed any romantic attachments at this stage?

Yes. Most of us had. And, which sort of dissipated later on. But anyway, yes, we had and that was fun.

What about local people? Did you get to meet any indigenous people?

There were no local people. The indigenous people, those days, were just labourers. We would see them around the camp. They would be digging the drains, the native New Guineans and there was always strict rules of speaking with them. There was ....

What were the rules?

Well, you wouldn't be allowed to, in any way, speak with them unless somebody had to give them an order around the camp, I should imagine. But ...

What was the reason for that? Was there a sense of why this was so?

I can't remember but the only time you would see them was when they were labouring around the camp area. They were in those ... when we went up there the first thing we wanted to do was go in swimming, well, bathing suits, I remember in ... while we were waiting to go up ... 'Oh, don't take woollen bathing suits'. So I sent home to Mum to make me a two piece, you were talking about bathing suits then. It wasn't two piece as such, it was joined up in the middle and had a skirt around, that was the fashion at the time. And she sent something up to me, it wasn't, it hadn't quite arrived when I got up there, and if you hang things on the line, some of these people were attracted to colours, some of the native people, and they'd go missing. So I remember having to be without my suit for a while and borrowing other peoples' suits until I sent back to Mum, 'Make me another pair ... run up' so that was sent back in due time. But we did a lot of swimming and it was lovely swimming up there. But for entertainment that was it, that was the week. And then Sunday, Saturday night would be dance night or, if you were ... either at the recreation hall, or invited out to these various units for some sort of a do. And Sunday, it was church. We'd go to church. There was a nice church parade in the morning you could go to and, or else, you could go in the evening down to Lae Base there was another, [Padre Awl ?] was the padre there, it was a great time. Well, you'd meet up with your ... the male population there because you'd have tea, a cup of tea and a bickie or something or other afterwards and get to know people that way.

Were there any Japanese POWs about?

No.

One might suppose if there were you'd be curious as to what they looked like?

No, no. Saw nothing. The nearest I got to seeing anything Japanese was, in the course of being up there, we were all given a rest and recreation holiday over at Salamaua which was round the other part of the island, you see. We went across there in a barge and in turn we were given a week over at Salamaua, supposedly for rest and recreation, but we were swimming or out on little native lakatois, or being taken in a bus up to the native villages, that

was the nearest native people that we would see. And watch them doing their food with banana leaves and, you know, how they used to cook in the open fire. All that was very interesting. Or else walking up Salamaua hill where there was still guns emplacements, old Japanes gun emplacements, and you'd see the odd little rubber shoes that they used to wear. That's the .... And fox holes, odd fox holes around about. That was the nearest the Japanese that I would have had, that I had come near, up there.

By this stage had you ever wondered about the morality of the business of war, ever had any doubts or questions in your mind about whether the involvement was correct or ...?

No. Never questioned. I don't recollect ever questioning. I don't recollect anything, any discussion about that until in these recent years when everybody's been going through the archives and you've been looking at it and thinking what a futility certain things were. And the thing that always got me and still does, is still the first world war, with my father and my uncles, the things you've heard about them in the trenches. That still gets to me more than .... I know all suffering is relative and you can't say what was the worst time or, than another. But to me, that is the part that gets to me still - those stories of Gallipoli.

So how long did you spend in Papua New Guinea?

We were up there for ten months. And in that time ...

Were you getting homesick at all?

Not really, no, no. Not at all. Liked to get mail and all that sort of thing, no not at all. And some of the boys who, when it was getting towards the end of the war, they applied for the - you weren't going to be discharged immediately. Well, the end of the war, the Japanese war came in the August or September, August, I think - March, April, May. We hadn't been ... we'd only been up there a few months and that was the end of the war. There was a lot of rejoicing, there was a lot of .... I felt more like crying somehow or other, I don't know what it was.

(10.00) Well, where were you exactly when you heard?

We were all in the huts, in the huts when that news came through that night.

On radio or was it announced?

It must have come through by radio and then it would be announced from the hut I should imagine.

Well what happened? Did people immediately ... was there silence or people start cheering, or ...?

There was a lot of cheering and all of them hugging one another and cheering but I felt more like crying. I happened to be in the barracks and I felt quite sad about it. I can't remember why. I can't really analyse why. But after that a lot of them ... you weren't ... a lot of the boys we had been associating with, or having as our friends, they applied to go in the British Occupation Forces because they knew they wouldn't be demobbed - British Commonwealth

Occupation, BCOF - and went off to Japan to finish off their army days there. But, what was I going to say about something up there. That's all I can remember about that part.

How long was it then before things were organised to get you back?

Well, we came back in February of ....

How did you spend that Christmas?

Er, I don't know. We would have had Christmas do's. They always seemed to put on things. We used to have plenty of fancy dress balls and .... We had a fancy dress ball. There were concerts and you'd go to concerts where the men were putting on a concert. You were invited out to those things and one thing I remember particularly was we had these wonderful artists coming up to New Guinea and Gracie Fields - the Gracie Fields concert was a wonderful one. But ....

What about New Year's Eve, an occasion often associated with a lot of drinking? Were you pressed to have a drink on New Year's Eve?

I can't remember. I don't remember. Those who wanted a drink I suppose. In the sergeants' mess they had drink available and I think they may have allowed people, other ranks as well to have so much, but I didn't bother about anything like that. Except that I must admit, before New Guinea days were over, I had become acquainted with cherry brandy and green stuff, creme de menthe. Where the bottles came from I don't know but I thought they were very nice.

Did you feel a bit guilty?

Ah. No, not at that stage. I must have been ... the time was wearing on. No. I wasn't guilty at all about that.

I think early on, when I first started to talk to you at the start of the interview and I asked you about drinking, you said there was some, you referred to some incident that was related to that?

I was thinking about the pouring the ....

Oh, I see.

That's all I can remember because that harks back to really my upbringing and that was still in my mind at that time, you see. That was still ... but no, things were getting a little bit looser - loosening up a bit.

So how did you come back, by boat again?

We came back on the *Canberra* and we would disembark at ....

Must have seemed a rather grand boat at the time? I mean the *Canberra* was a very handsome boat.

I remember sitting out on the deck chairs, and after having gone to Bowen and we picked up a bit of knitting and knitting wool and patterns. I've got pictures, snaps of us sitting there on the deck of the .... It couldn't have been as cluttered, it couldn't have been as crowded coming home, I don't think, as going up. And called in to Bowen and called in to ... then we were back to Brisbane, then home by train, you see. I didn't want to get out of the army when I came home and I didn't want to get out at all. I liked the army, I loved the service. And so I went back to District Records Office, was posted back there, which was in a different building - a bigger, a different building in Melbourne at the time. But things didn't seem the same after the life we'd been leading. So I eventually did put in for a discharge and the discharge was held up for quite a time.

What do you mean, things didn't seem the same?

Well, being in an office and just doing the sort of routine work, even though it was doing clerical work of a type in New Guinea, you'd been used to barrack life, you'd been used to a different order of things, perhaps it was a freer life than ... or perhaps this was a freer life, I don't know. But whatever it was I wasn't, didn't feel comfortable and eventually put in after - I may have been there for two or three months - put in for a discharge and the discharge was a long time coming through. They gave me a couple of weeks leave, I remember, and I went with a friend up to the Grampians of all things. Where you were climbing crags and climbing, you know what the Grampians are like. And eventually then I was asked to go for another x-ray, so then I, on 1st July which was about a week before my twenty-fourth birthday, I found myself in Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital with what was alluded to then as a shadow on the lung, and into wards with other girls. And I think the cure was more complicated than the complaint, as I remember.

Was this a tuberculosis ward as such?

A tuberculosis ward, yes. And the ....

(15.00) Did that give you a chill, because tuberculosis was seen as a very grave ...?

Yes, that gave me a lasting, a lasting impression because ... and also you suddenly knew how close some friends were. Some would come to visit you and stand at the end of the bed. Some would come regularly and little things like that. Yes, that went very deeply with us.

Did it shock your parents?

Yes. And .... But we were young girls and we felt we'd been cheated out of a couple of years because the type of treatment in those days .... I think these days they'd give you a few tablets or injections or drugs or something. And what ailed us then which was not really very severe, in all but one or two cases, could have been cleared up in six months, I imagine, or less these days. But those days it was - collapse the lung and all sorts of things.

How would they do that?

Well, they used to pump air into your lung. The idea was rest and ....

How was that done?

Oh, just through a tube into ...

The ribs.

Your ribs.

Painful?

Well, if they struck a nerve, yes. But we were collapsed and the fact of, I don't know all the technical terms, but the fact of it being collapsed, there was some bits and pieces which were referred to as strings, were still adhering to the chest wall, so the next business was to go and have your strings cut. You'd go there, it was just a small incision made in the side and under local anaesthetic, and have these little bits of - adhesive pieces of lung wall cut and that seemed to set up a lot of fluid in the body. So the next, the long process was getting rid of the fluid. So each week, we were totally bed patients for a good eight months of that time out there, totally bed ... so you really got to know one another in that ward and a bond was forged there that was different and closer to anything, which was rather hard to explain, but anything in the previous service, but ....

Was it depressing? Did you get down?

Well. You went through all your moods, that's how your friends saw you and that's how we saw one another. If you're living together in that close, in a bay of six girls, there were AAMWS and from all services but that didn't really matter, we were all dressed in the same uniform which were pyjamas in those days, that was our uniform and you got to know one another pretty well. You went through everybody's .... You got to know all the relatives that came in and out. You got to know emotional upsets and romantic, you know, upsets and all that sort of thing. But life there was mostly taken up with once a week going down to screening, that was being x-rayed and seeing how much more air you wanted, needed pumped into you. Or else, if you had a lot of fluid, it was taking off the fluid, called aspirations. I remember having about thirty of them. Sometimes it would be anything from, oh, maybe half a pint, a pint of water down to a few ounces. That had the effect of, all the same, of keeping your lung collapsed. The idea of it ....

Was it hard to breathe?

You'd rattle around in bed a bit with this water that was down in your lung at the time.

Painful?

A little bit, but more a discomfort than anything. We all looked as rosy and the healthiest lot of girls as you ever saw after a little while, rosy cheeks. Always tissing ourselves up for visitors on Sunday. We had visitors a couple of times a week. But it was an experience that is not even now easily forgotten, that particularly little last tail end period of my service anyway.

What about the overall quality of service and being looked after? Did you feel it was adequate? Did you feel it was in keeping with having served your country and so on?

Ah. I wasn't thinking in terms of serving my country. I know I was well looked after. That's why I don't think I ever wanted to get out in civilian life. I was well looked after. I'd always been looked after at home and this was just an extension of all that, only more so. Everything was provided for you. Everything was looked after. You were transported here and there when you were travelling and it was a wonderful protective feeling.

How long then did it take you to recover from the treatment for the TB?

I was there, um, eighteen months altogether at Heidelberg. The first six months I was still in the service, that's how my discharge certificate reads: From 19th January '42 to February '47.

Did you get a full rate of pay then through that period?

Um. Well, whatever was corporal rate. As I said before, if I'd known I was going to be in all that longer I wouldn't have been so huffy about knocking back a sergeant's rank, but .... And then for the final twelve months out there, was as a civilian, not that you realised whether you were civilian or in the army because it was still an army hospital, you see.

(20.00) But, um, one regret I have of army things. I've got loads of snaps and loads of mementoes and old cuttings and things like that. I didn't have my army pay book, I'd have loved to have had my army pay book. Kept ... you know, you've got all the record of injections and your pay and where you've been and a whole history is - would be contained in your army pay book. But I kept meaning to write away there for years and years but I didn't do it but it must have all gone down through the shredder by now, I should imagine.

When you were finally leaving the hospital, how did you feel about that? Was it good to get out, or were you a little bit, sort of, sorry to leave it behind, your friends ...?

It was hard facing up to civilian life more so then because you had this feeling about you - where you've been. You know, it was a thing that was, er, not to be talked about.

Why was that?

Well, that was the nature of the complaint.

Oh, I see with the TB, yes, yes.

That's the ... in those days. Yes. But all of those girls with whom I'm still in contact, we all lived to see another day well and truly. And married, and families of threes and fours and now we're exchanging news about our grandchildren. I personally have never looked back healthwise, even all my married life, apart from going to hospital to have the babies. That's as much as I've ever had my feet up in the forty years of marriage.

So this continuity of the friendships that formed then has been a very important part of your postwar ...?

Wonderful. Yes, wonderful. Yes. And more so now that we're all getting older and many of them have their husbands - widowed. They're widowed now. And their children have grown up so they're freer to, say, come to reunions and chat over things that .... We are seeing more

of one another and talking more over these days than ... and getting things in a different perspective probably, than ever before. As I say, those days you just went along with the current of things. You weren't considering the whys and the wherefores of the war or the implications or anything like that, really, at that time, as I remember.

Just as a very brief postscript. Where and when did you meet your husband and when did you get married?

Um. Well, whilst in hospital there were broken romances there and, um, as I say, some .... We lived through all that together because in those days, I suppose, a young man that prospects of somebody lying there in hospital, it wasn't too inviting. Whether that was the real reason I don't know, for some of us. But I was corresponding. Ours was through correspondence. My husband is ...

Had you met?

No, no. My husband was born and bred - he's a Londoner. And he was in the Black Watch. He's had six years of service, in the Wiltshire regiment in the Black Watch. And then he eventually came out in '49 and, anyway, we were married in 1950.

How many children?

We had three girls [inaudible].

And grandchildren?

And we now have five darling granddaughters - no boys, no boys.

How did the original correspondence start? Where did you ...?

Um. It was .... Years and years ago, remember England was in a bad - poor state, and it must have been through the Red Cross or somebody out there. But we used to contribute to 'Parcels for Britain', 'Bundles for Britain', or something or other. There was some sort of communication there. But my husband got my address from some friend over there and that's how it started.

How long before you had a photograph so you had some sense of ...?

Oh, photographs were going backwards and forwards all the time, and ....

Did he live up to his photograph?

Well, it was different altogether. It was quite different really, you know, when you see people face to face. But anyway, we've had a very happy - a very happy married life and really that's been ... I've got a lot to be thankful for. At one stage I didn't think .... Can I go back to something a long while ago that I remember?

Yes.

In the very early days - they may not have known that we had an AWAS choir. This is going way way back. When I was still at Records Office, there was a choir formed with AWAS and I've got a lovely big snap with Sybil Irving the colonel in charge and Isadore Goodman, the pianist, who is also in his military uniform, coming out to visit us there. And while we were in hospital we used to have a lot of the radio personalities come out to entertain us. And Norm Banks and Billy Bouncer and all of those people who went on to make names for themselves in radio and probably television, I suppose, later on. But they were things to be enjoyed out there. We used to have earphones from a closed circuit - a radio station within the hospital. And you could have your requests sent in for them. And most of us spent our day with our earphones on, if we wanted to get away from the girls - whoever was around about us. That's one way of getting away from everybody - putting your earphones on. But they were very interesting days and the associations formed of ... have been lasting. And gone on right till, well, even this last Christmas - letters and everything like that. I wouldn't have been without it.

END OF INTERVIEW