TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Description	Reena Rad née MacDonald as a sergeant, Australian Women's Army Service, interviewed by Harry Martin for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-1945

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: This is side one of tape one of an interview recorded with Reena Rad about the Australian Women's Army Service on 13th April 1990 and it begins in five seconds from now.

Reena Rad, where and when were you born?

In Sydney in 1922.

What date?

The 24th February.

Tell us a bit about your family and the circumstances into which you were born?

My father was a world war one veteran who spent most of his life after the war in hospital. He eventually died in a military nursing home when I was quite young so my mother was really left to rear my brother and I, which was a struggle, but she did her best to educate us and my father is just a very shadowy figure.

How did your mother manage financially during that period?

She was a school teacher but, because in those days married women weren't supposed to work, the Education Department wouldn't take her back after my father died so she got a job as a waitress and learnt the business and then went on to run her own business in Sydney.

And how many of you were there in the family?

My brother and I; there were two of us. My brother also served in world war two.

So your recollections of childhood, did it seem hard to you at the time? Did you feel that you were particularly poor, or you had that sort of feeling about growing up?

No because my grandmother came to live with us and she brought us up in the old British tradition which later on we managed to throw off. But, no, we had a reasonably happy childhood. We didn't have much money. But I can remember we had picnics on a Sunday and my grandmother, quite early in the piece, before we went to school, both my brother and I could read and recite poetry and things like that which gave us an advantage in those years.

With that background of your father's experience, was there a sense of being British, a sense of pride in the notion of service and all those sorts of things or did your mother turn away from that field, perhaps even bitter about the war?

My mother didn't like ANZAC Day and didn't perhaps allow us to participate in ANZAC Day ceremonies, but at school you had to, and we had Empire Day and with my grandmother who was this very pro-British, though she'd been born here - we've been here since 1823 - everything that the Crown did was brought to our attention. So maybe, for me, it had a big bearing on my life. My brother on the other hand turned away from things that were British.

What about religion? Was that an important part of your mother's life?

Yes ... No, no, she didn't have time but it was a very important part of my grandmothers life. So Sunday I had to go to Sunday school and then church. My brother - when my grandmother got too old and couldn't take us - my brother would drop me outside the church and he'd go off and pick me up after the service was over and yet his whole life has been one of ... he's perhaps more religious in a way, or follows the Christian teaching than many people do. But he didn't want any structured thing in his life so that's had a bearing on me because he became the father figure.

Was your mother also concerned about social or political issues? Was she the kind of person who'd debate those things?

Yes, yes, quite early in life. In those days the politicians used to come around and talk in the street and my mother felt that women, as they'd got the vote, shouldn't - how can I put it - should be able to know what they were voting for. So therefore my brother and I, both, were taken round to listen to them promising all these kind of things and then my mother would sit down later and say, 'Now, you have to work out what is truth and what is fiction of what they're saying'.

So where did you actually do your schooling?

I went to Williams Street Girls' High School. Both my brother and I went to high ... he went to Sydney High, I went to Williams Street Girls' High School.

As you were growing up then, and before you left school, did you have any particular ideas about where you were going with your life or any special aspirations?

(5.00) I wanted to be a nurse, but I was waiting to go nursing, but I was a bit young so a did a shorthand/typing course which most children did in those days and got a job doing shorthand and typing.

Did that reflect some sort of developing notion of service that somehow service in a way was an important path to pursue if possible?

No, not really, because I know right from a young age I used to gather up children who weren't doing anything that lived near me and want to take them out in the bush and I did that quite early.

I used to take them hiking which later on I joined the Girl Guide movement and was a leader - well, I'm having a holiday at the moment from that - so I continued that all my life.

So when did you leave school?

When I was fifteen and a half, in Year 5.

Why did you leave then?

Most of the girls did. It was that era where your parents either couldn't afford to let you go any further, but we all wanted to go ... get out in the workforce and do something with our lives. That was that era.

So what did you do?

I became a stenographer.

Whereabouts? Tell us a bit about the work involved.

I went to work for Farmers in Sydney and, if I can digress slightly, we had a Miss Swinney working there who later on ...

Stella Swinney.

Stella Swinney, who later on became one of the heads of the AWAS and ...

She was a very formidable lady, or is a very formidable lady and must have been pretty impressive when you were quite young I'd imagine?

No ...

No?

But what she did with me and perhaps she wouldn't remember, they used to have once a week for the young people - because when you joined a firm in those years you weren't sat down straightaway and did shorthand/typing, you had to learn what was going on, so make the teas because you were very junior - and she decided with these girls they should have a competition. Go down every week, show what their skills of shorthand or typing, or both, were and then at the end of the year there was a test to see who was the best one there and I won a prize which she gave me. It was a powder compact for being the fastest typist of the year. So, really, that's how I first met Stella Swinney. The next time I saw her, because she was high up in personnel, was when I went for my interview in the army.

So in the intervening period then, how long did you spend as a stenographer?

Ah, I think it was three years. How old was I when I enlisted? I was nineteen.

When did you first get an inkling that war was afoot?

Oh ... we used to listen to the wireless and we were ... my mother and all of us were very interested what was going on in Germany when Chamberlain was visiting Germany and coming back and saying all these promises were made and that's when we realised that there would be a war. Maybe from my mother who was a very strong woman and my brother, also very strong-minded, this general discussion within the family, because Sunday night was the night when, whatever happened, the family was always together. During the week because my mother was working it was just my grandmother, my brother and I but Sunday night was the night. My brother used to go sailing on a Sunday afternoon and though we didn't have much money, everybody came back, and it was a general discussion. Me being the youngest didn't have very much to say but I used to think a lot.

Was your mother concerned that she might lose you to the war? Was she anxious about that?

She never discussed it and that was why, when she did finally sign the papers for me to go in the services I was very surprised. I had already written to my brother in New Guinea to say what I intended doing and to convince mother that that was what I should do.

Did you feel she might resist?

I ... She did in the beginning. She didn't want to sign the papers and then she said, 'Not for overseas service, you're too young', but eventually she signed.

How were the actual processes? What did you go about it? Did you go to an office and inquire or ...?

I don't know whether they've heard of an organisation called the WANS, well, before Australia ... or just about the time Australia got involved with the war, whoever decided they would form this group for women and it was the Women's Australian National Service. And what we did, we used to go once a week and we'd train and one of the heads of the Guide Association in Sydney, Eleanor Manning, decided that she would take these girls who, if we signed to say that if Australia was involved in a war, we would enlist, she would take us and train us every Saturday afternoon and so we used to train there. We learnt first aid, home nursing, map reading, signalling and some of us were really quite good with the Morse code. So we had all these things going on. Well, of course, when the Japanese came into the war straightaway, these group of women were saying, 'What are you going to do?', because the VADs had already gone to the Middle East and proved that they were doing very well and I always look at them as the pathfinders. Their success made it easy then for the Government, I think, to decide that they would allow women into the services. And they needed us to release men to go to the front.

When you were in the WANS was there any thought at all that you'd go to theatres of war?

(10.00) I don't think we thought of that, really. We were young: seventeen. And so we didn't think of it. They were there, the Middle East ... our boys had gone to the Middle East and a lot of my brother's friends were over there and they used to write back but they never mentioned war. It seemed to me as if they'd mention only what they were doing on leave and I think that we didn't think war would come to our shores. But then when the 8th Division went to Singapore I think the community started to worry about what was happening.

When you signed up, how were the papers obtained? Were they posted or did you pick them up?

No, they put an advertisement in the newspapers. One ... it was before Christmas and it said to go down to this office in the city, so I went down there and there were just women packing it everywhere and there were three very - what I thought then - elderly ladies giving out these papers and I thought 'They can't cope with that!'. So I went behind the desk and said, 'Can I help you?', and I started giving out the papers too. And after they'd gone and I looked at the time, I had to get back to work, they said to me, 'You fill in this paper now and we'll put yours forward', because the usual things that perhaps elderly ladies say to people that they think are polite.

And how long then before you were taken into the army?

I signed up and I was called in and I had my medical in the first week in January '42.

Was there much of a delay in the process?

Yes. I didn't get called up until ... I was actually in the army by the first week in May.

So from the time you signed to when you were called, about what sort of delay was there?

That would be ... well, oh, I must go back. We then had our medical test and all that which wasn't really finished - finalised - until the end of January. So it was three months before I was called up. But you have to ... you may not know, but they were only taking in a few at a time. We trained in a house in Killara in Sydney and it was only a fortnight's training and then straightaway we were sent out to a unit. These are those early ones. They hadn't opened any of the big camps.

What about the medical? How comprehensive was that?

That was very thorough. And the doctor who examined me and my girlfriend was our family doctor. So it was relatively easy and she rejected my girlfriend, who she discovered had a hole in the heart, but had never been picked up.

When you then went to this house for training, what was the ...

At Killara.

What was the training ... suburban house, what was the nature?

No, it was in Killara and in bushland. It was a huge house where we - we all wore our own clothes by the way, there were no uniforms issued then - and we had a chap who'd been returned from the Middle East and he was our instructor. We had also a few female instructresses too. And it was ... oh, on the parade ground and the normal things that the army learnt, the men do. We had to go out with gas masks and then there'd be a sound and you'd have to get behind bushes and things, put your gas mask on.

Did it seem real or a bit of a game?

No, it didn't. It seemed real because the war seemed to us to be getting close. I remember where I was working they gave me a farewell party and then we all went to the pictures and it showed the Japs coming down to Port Moresby and I remember thinking, 'They'll be here before I've even joined up', and then later on the same thing occurred when I was in the army. I thought, 'We'll end up prisoners of war before we've even had time to do anything about it'.

Could you imagine that they were going to sweep down? Your mother, everybody would be ...

My mother never discussed the war. The only thing she was worried all the time about my brother but never commented.

Did you have that sort of fear? I mean, did it seem possible that the Japanese would sweep down and take over Australia?

Yes, at that time it did to me; it did to me. But then I was young and impressionable.

So with the nature of that training in those first few weeks, how did it strike you? Did it seem to all add up and make sense or did aspects of it seem a bit silly that you were ...

No, nothing. We were all very enthusiastic because we were in the first groups. I think we would have been in the first 250. Because numbers were so small going in and training. Later on they opened the big camps but we were all very concerned. All we wanted to do was get through our course and as we thought, pass, and get out into units. But I don't think any of us realised

what we would be doing. We hadn't been told anyway and it wasn't till we all had to report to Victoria Barracks where we were told which units we were going to and I was sent to Army Psychology.

When you were at the house were did you stay? Did you live in the house?

(15.00) Yes, yes. It was a two storeyed house that obviously had been converted to have all these beds in the rooms where you shared and shared showers and things.

Were you briefed about hours that you could keep, no men, and all that sort of thing? What were the ...

Yes, yes, yes. We had to be in bed, lights out at ten o'clock. We had to learn the meaning of reveille and all these terms and a lot and lot of note-taking. I still have my original book where I took all these notes and I can laugh about some of the things. For instance, sex wasn't discussed, it came under hygiene and what it said is, 'Girls don't'.

That was sex instruction (laughs).

(Laughs) And I might say I didn't know what it meant and neither did any of us know what it meant, so we just laughed.

So after the period then at the house, what happened then?

Well, we were sent to Victoria Barracks and then posted to our unit and we were given uniforms then and we were issued with a steel helmet and a gas mask and these awful uniforms with ... we all had a jacket over it because they didn't have any winter uniforms. So we had a khaki frock with a long-sleeve jacket. I might say, when I got home with mine and my mother saw me, she burst out laughing because nothing fitted. But, if I can digress, the girl that tried to enlist with me was a very skilled - what would I call her - more than a dressmaker and she spent the whole weekend altering them and she did with all my uniforms and from then on I was always asked, 'How is it your uniforms fit so perfectly?', but she was a tailoress.

How did you come down to Melbourne from Sydney?

I didn't come through Melbourne till I went to Darwin, I ...

I thought you said Victoria Barracks?

Yes, in Sydney. They're all Victoria Barracks.

Oh, I see, right. So, from Victoria Barracks you were then posted to a unit?

Yes, to Army Psychology.

Now, what was your understanding about what you were going to do before you arrived there? What did you suppose you'd be doing?

I had no idea. I thought maybe it's because I'm a stenographer or is it because I'd proved that I was very good at Morse code, that I would be doing Morse code. I had no idea and to be quite frank I didn't know what Army Psychology was.

So what happened?

Well, I reported there and they gave me a desk amongst all these men, most of whom had just graduated from Sydney University and were young psychologists, not terribly much older than me, maybe in their early twenties. Some of them, Major Hammer was the eldest one, and everybody referred to him as 'Tack' and I wondered who they were talking about. And what we did there? Well, when they called up people to go into the army - because conscription was in - they used to aptitude test them so that they could find the most suitable people for units because they found, so I understand, that those who'd gone to the Middle East, a lot of them were skilled but because they'd put them into units, into infantry and what they needed, they really hadn't looked at this, to try and put men into things they were suited to. So that's what they started doing.

Do you recall what the nature of the tests were? Were they questionnaires essentially or ...

Yes, there were questionnaires and for those who were illiterate there were certain tests with blocks and squares and those things that they had to do. And, if I'm right, one of the most intelligent was a young man who'd never ever been to school and the psychologists were saying that his father apparently had been a commercial traveller and had taken - the wife had died or left him or something - and he'd taken this baby, or young ... yes, young child round with him where he was travelling and apparently his general knowledge was amazing and yet he couldn't read properly or write properly.

So what were you doing in this process?

Typing up all these reports on the people. They had an IPR which was an intelligence percentage rating and they were judged on that and then sent to units and all I was doing at that stage was typing up these cards. And I was there for a couple of months ...

Now, let's get a bit more about this process. Did you actually get to see the interviewees? Could you relate the interviewee to the question, the thing you were typing?

Occasionally we did but mainly there were two other lasses there with me but we were so shy that if the men had said 'jump' we would have jumped. And so we didn't ask questions at that stage.

Did you find it interesting seeing these profiles of people?

Yes, I did, most interesting. Years later I went to work for a group of psychologists and those same psychologists were the top professors in Victoria and New South Wales.

It sounds like it could have been a rather exciting environment with young men who have just finished university, probably full of life and themselves as well. Was it a good place to work?

(20.00) No, no ... Well, it was interesting. But they perhaps were like everybody else, it was a very serious business. Maybe they skylarked between themselves, I don't know. We realised we were very lucky to be in the services and perhaps behind it all we wanted to make a good impression; that we were capable, that we did what we were told and we could manage the job.

What was the feeling about the work environment? Was it one where it would have seemed wrong to fraternise socially, or, could you in fact, if somebody invited you out socially to go out, what was the sense of ... what was the appropriate behaviour?

Well, for me, I wouldn't have gone out with them because a few were sergeants but we were instructed that officers and other ranks didn't fraternise anyway. And some of them were married and in that era, well, you didn't cast your eyes around at married men particularly. It's a different era. No, we didn't even think about it.

So where were you staying during this time as far as ...

I was living at home then and I used to go every day because we were at the showgrounds and there were just hundreds and hundreds of men pouring in. And I'll always remember the saying was, 'You'll be sorry'. All the new recruits that came in, the older ones who were completing their training there or whatever they were doing would call out, 'You'll be sorry'. I mean, that was said to us too when we first went to get our uniforms. All the men were calling out to us, 'You'll be sorry'.

Was it more joke that fact? I mean, were the conditions particularly arduous as you understood them to be for the men?

No, we worked hard and we just accepted it. Going back, it was that era.

How long were you there?

I was there two months and then Major Hammer called me up one day and said, 'You have to go home, pack your bag, I'm sending you up somewhere to do a job', and he didn't ever say what it was. And so I went home and packed my bag and reported to Movement Control at Central Station and they said, 'You're going to Warwick Farm'. Well, when I got out at Warwick Farm there was another girl got out. Nobody else got out there and there was a car waiting for us and we didn't go to the big Warwick Farm house - the big Warwick Farm place where all the troops were stationed - we went to a farmhouse and where it is I wouldn't have a clue and there were we two girls ...

Was this done deliberately? Was it intended that you not understand where it was located?

I have no idea. We didn't think. In those days you did as you were told. You obeyed the command and challenged afterwards. So we just went there. And that was ... there were about six officers there and a cook and some general duty men and they had constructed what looked to me to be barracks to hold a few people. Anyway, we were put in what looked like a stable or something. I know we had to climb a few stairs and there were just two beds in it and a wardrobe and that was all that was in it.

At this stage had you made friends who'd made the move with you?

No, I didn't know the other lass and to this ... I never, after we completed our time there, I never saw her again and I can't even recall her name.

So what transpired to be your duties there?

We had to type and duplicate. And what we did ... I didn't see what the other girl did and she didn't see what I did and we worked quite long hours doing that. Sometimes I'd be asleep and that lass would still be working and vice versa. And the cooks were very good, they came and made sure we had our meals and made sure we had cups of tea during the day. And the officers we very rarely saw. Sometimes their wives came there. I think we were there for about three weeks. But what we did, we only duplicated what we typed and the other things I would think the officers destroyed.

I gather this was part of preparation for Allied defensives?

Yes. We didn't know at the time what it was. But I didn't know till many years later when I asked somebody down here, one of our female officers, what it was and she said she'd find out. And what it was, it was the training manual for the retaking of the Pacific.

So, as you were typing up various sections, did you get any sense at all as to what it was to do with?

No, we just thought it was some kind of manual. But if you are not seeing page after page you really don't relate and it seemed to me that the officers must have been writing this all the time, that I seemed to be doing one page or two pages and the other girl was doing another two pages. Now how they were going to put it all together ... maybe they would put it all together later and have the whole thing retyped in one. But we didn't know what it was.

> Well, not then being able to have much continuity in what it was you were writing about, did it make it rather hard work and perhaps boring?

(25.00) No. No. It was this attitude of ours that whatever we were told to do ... we wanted to make a good job. We felt we were the first and so everything we did was important for those who were then coming into the army.

> How would you end your day? What time of day ... what were the ...

Well, sometimes ... maybe sometimes it would be late, about eight o'clock; other times it might be quite early - whenever. I presume now whenever the officers had finished running off ... writing something up, they would just say, 'Now you can go'. So we used to go for a walk. But very rarely did I see ... did the other girl, no. I can't recall any conversations we ever had.

> Were there any recreational facilities of any sort?

No, no, no. And we didn't leave that place the whole time we were there.

> How many other people were there?

There was only the two females, the cooks and the staff who were all officers.

> Of about how many?

There would have been about six.

> So how long did you stay there?

I think about three weeks, that's all. And then we were sent back ... I was sent back to Army Psychology. I ...

> In retrospect, looking back on that relatively short period, did it seem that it was some systematic insurance that people wouldn't get to know too much about what the work was about, that you were rotated in that way?

Quite possibly, because we were young. The other thing was it was impressed on us also you didn't talk. So I never even discussed this when I went back to the unit, the Army Psychology,

nor did I ever discuss it with anybody during my whole time in the services. But I was just very curious to know what it was all about.

> When you got back to the psychology unit, did it feel good to be back amongst people you were familiar with again?

No it didn't because I thought, 'Now I've got to live at home', and I felt, 'Oh, it's not like being in the army'. I enjoyed, even though we were tired and worked hard, I enjoyed the way the life was. I felt then I was in the army. So when I went back to Army Psychology I said that I would like to go to a unit and I did eventually go to a unit, I think two months ... oh, it would be about six weeks after that.

> Given the sorts of numbers that were being processed, did you have any feelings at all about the worth of this screening process? Did it seem to make sense or was it well-intentioned?

I thought ... yes, I did. I really thought it was most important not to put square pegs in round holes. That was the one thing that came across very much so. If I could tell a funny side. A certain, very prominent jockey was called up - he was one of the top jockeys I think in Australia at the time - it turned out he was illiterate. He wanted to take the papers home for his wife to sign so that they wouldn't pick up that he was and ... but when some of the hierarchy of the army learnt that this jockey had been called up, they wanted him as their driver. So you can make your own impression of that.

> Do you know what in fact came of him?

No, I don't. But I think he did end up as a driver to somebody and raced every Saturday at Randwick.

> So who was the jockey?

I'd rather not say.

> Oh, look, I'm sure that, you know, there's nothing untoward ... I mean, this is part of history. It's important to establish these things.

No, maybe his family may not want the community to know about that.

> Anyway, sufficient to say he was extremely well-known and famous jockey.

Extremely well-known and quite famous jockey in New South Wales.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE A

START TAPE ONE, SIDE B

Identification: This is tape one, side two of the interview recorded with Reena Rad about the Australian Women's Army Service on 13th April 1990 and continues in five seconds from now.

So having applied to go elsewhere, was there a sense from within the unit that you were wrong to do that? You should have stayed there? Did they feel you were betraying them or anything?

I have no idea.

What happened then?

I had a couple of friends who I'd done my training course with that were at Coast Artillery at North Head and on my first weekend after I'd come back from that fortnight, or three weeks sojourn I went over to see them and straightaway they said, 'Come over here and we'll introduce you to somebody' and they said, 'Mac, would like ' - because nobody ever knew my name was Reena, I was always referred to as Mac - 'Mac would like to go into a unit'. So the next thing I knew that I was being transferred there.

And where did you go?

I went to North Head right at the entrance to the Sydney Harbour where there were big 9.2 guns. Both North and South Head had these ... and Middle Head too, had these guns and I thought, 'What am I going to do here?'. So they put me in an office and there were quite a lot of the other AWAS that I'd been in camp with, were there, and they said, 'Oh well, now you look in this box and keep this information up-to-date'. And I always remember there was this 'Blue Fish' and I thought, 'What's Blue Fish?', and that was a code name for one anti-aircraft group placed around the harbour and there were all these names and I thought, 'Oh, how boring'. I'd been there a week and the next thing they said, 'We're going to send you up to work with Lieutenant Smith who's in the Battery Office', so that's where I went up and worked with one major and a lieutenant and a sergeant. They were all regular army, so I worked in the Battery Office there for the next two years.

You weren't there when the Japanese submarines entered Sydney Harbour?

No, no, I wasn't.

That was before or after?

After that. This was '42.

I see.

Yes.

So ...

We did have a lot of scares and things like that and if I can tell something funny about that. I was on leave - we used to get eight hours every four days which meant that if you lived a long way away you couldn't get back to camp in time - so we used to go into the city, across in the ferry, and if there was a scare on the boom would be closed so that if you were in the city you couldn't get back and they'd shut the ferry ... the ferry service would close down. You'd have to come, oh, miles around through the Spit Junction and there was ... The air-raid sirens went this night and I was watching, if I'm right, 'Gone with the Wind' and I thought, 'I'm not leaving', and anyway I didn't want to go across to the railways underground which was a St James Railway Station. So ...

What? On the basis if there were a raid you might get trapped?

Yes, yes. I don't like heights or I don't like being underground. And so we stayed there. But the ironic thing was ...

You saw the end of your film then?

I certainly did but when the raid went, not only those in army uniform but some in civilian clothes went for their lives, because maybe to try and get back to their unit. But it took me till two o'clock in the morning to get back to where we were billeted at that time and it was all locked up and I thought, 'How am I getting in?' because you're put on a charge sheet if you're not back by ten o'clock which was the time I ...

Had you had that happen to that point?

I ...

Of being put on a charge sheet?

(5.00) Never, no, never in my whole service. So I thought, 'Well, I'll try and get through, there must be a window open'. So I tried the window and got in eventually and the girl in the bed under the window got a fright. She must have thought somebody was breaking in and let out a yell and there was I falling head-first on top of her and everybody yelling and screaming because they thought it was somebody breaking in.

So what happened? Was there anything to do about it?

No, no, because we had a sergeant in charge of it and she understood that it was difficult and the girls told me that they had to go into slit trenches which was behind a school near them and stay there until the 'all clear' went.

> What happened if you ... or what did you understand would happen if you were put on a charge?

Well, you'd be paraded before your CO and then he or she would decide what the penalty was and either you would lose pay or ... and be confined to barracks.

> Was there a sort of general feeling that to have that happen would be letting the side down and a rather shameful thing to do?

Yes, yes, for the girls, about the men, that ... well, when I went into the battery office of course that happened quite often with the men. A lot of married men who mostly were concerned about their wives or children or mostly family problems or with those who weren't suited to the army.

> How was the nature of discipline? Did you get some who were just a bit overboard with the way they stamped around the place and shouted orders or were generally people fairly sane and rational?

No, no. There was none of that and maybe we were one of the few units there. We didn't have any female officers. The brigadier in charge there, I think he felt he was in charge and he wasn't going to have female officers. Also they would have had to reconstruct the officers' mess because there would have been no facilities for women.

> Was there a feeling at the time that there was resistance against women getting into a variety of roles? Was that ever talked about?

No, I never felt it, but it was the system that you had to always stand back to let the senior man go before you. If it was a male officer well you always stood back and let him and he was addressed as 'Sir'. You were supposed to be addressed as 'Gunner MacDonald' say, but most of them after we'd been there a while would use your nickname or whatever it was, but you didn't call them by their nicknames. They all had to be 'Sir'.

> If you then stepped back in difference to somebody of superior rank, what if you were a male of similar rank, would the normal courtesies to women occur?

I felt that most of the officers over there were a bit embarrassed about that.

> About them having to precede you?

Yes, and after a while I think they forgot it. We had a RSM there who was a gentleman of the old school but he had to obey orders. I mean, we went up and we ate with the men and they said,

'Well, the women line up first and the men follow them through into the mess'. We all ate in the same mess. But gradually I think that changed. Whoever came first got in first after a while. We got used to each other and might I make one comment that in all my time in the army with the men, for me personally and the people I knew, they had very great respect for us. We never heard anybody swear and if there was a crude word there was always an apology straightaway.

> There was a Colonel Irving associated with the Australian Women's Army Service who had very particular views about the nature of what was expected of women. Did you encounter him at all?

That would be Sybil Irving, Colonel Sybil Irving. No, I didn't.

> Did you get to know of him?

No - of her - no.

> Sorry.

No. I'd heard of her but it was mostly Stella Swinney and Eleanor Manning were the ones. And there were the two Roger sisters. They're the only ones until I went to Darwin really that I knew of and we had nothing to do whatsoever with any of the hierarchy of the women's services because we were posted to these units where the men were.

> So how long did you stay at the Heads?

Mmm. '42 to the middle of '43 ... '44, sorry, '44.

> And from there how did you come to move?

Well, the unit I was working with, they were moving on to New Guinea so I was posted back to the barracks and I was asked, 'Would I be prepared to go anywhere?' and I said, 'Yes'. So they sent me to work in an office at the barracks for a fortnight and the people in charge there said, 'Oh, don't go. Stay with us'. But I'd already decided I wanted to go, so I went to Darwin.

> What was the feeling about seeing men that you'd been working with going to New Guinea? Was there a sense of sadness or anxiety?

We wanted to go with them. We felt we'd known them and we felt that we wanted to be there and we wouldn't have been in any fighting but to be back-supporting them, we felt that there were very strong influences. As a matter of fact there's one or two of those people I'm still friendly with now after all these years.

(10.00) Were there representations made to try and effect that, to have you go with them?

No, because we weren't allowed to go there.

Did you have a sense that some of these people would go and might not come back? Was there that sort of feeling about the time?

No. What impressed me, several of them didn't want to go at all. I can remember one from a very, very wealthy family in Sydney who did all he could not to go.

What was the feeling about that then?

We felt terrible about it.

You were embarrassed for him or ...

Yes, and disappointed.

Did it seem like cowardice? Was that the feeling?

No, that wasn't the word we would think of. We just felt that maybe he was letting the side down. I think eventually he did go.

When you left to go to Darwin, how did you travel?

I travelled by train.

Issued with any special extra kit or anything?

Yes, we were issued with tropical kit. I think we got extra clothing and we got a sea trunk and summer clothing more so. I came ... I went ... I came down through Melbourne and travelled across with the 7th Division who were going on leave from Melbourne to Adelaide and I can remember there were only two of us on the train and the colonel who was in charge of them said, 'Mmm, we'll put you next to us', we were in the next little compartment. They were those old fashioned carriages where you have like seats - how can I explain it?

Facing each other or ...

Yes. And then there was a corridor and these little compartments had glass doors and so he put the two of us in there and he said, 'Now I suggest you lock yourself in' and we thought, 'What for?'. Well, when the men came in, I don't know how, they were eventually sleeping it seemed to me one on top of the other. They were just jammed in. But quite a few had been imbibing and that but they sang all night, 'Nursie, come over here and hold my hand'. And when we wanted to get out and go to the toilet, I don't know how they sort of all got up to let us go through. But

there were only very kind remarks and much jollity really on that train. And that really made me proud that I belonged to such a group, really.

Were there stops on the way?

Yes, where we got out and had something to eat.

Where was that?

I can't remember. We had several stops: one for dinner at night, I think, and one for breakfast in the morning.

Was it orderly or pretty chaotic; a great rush to scramble and get seats ...

No, no and strangely enough the men all stood back to let us go first. And it seemed to me that the officers, they had this wonderful feeling for their men and that there was nothing needed to be said.

Did you find that sort of touching in a way?

I thought it was wonderful. But then I expected that too.

So having arrived in Adelaide did you spend some time there or ...

Yes, we spent about ten days waiting for other people to arrive to start on the trucks to go ... we were going by train from there to Alice ... by there to Quorn, we stopped over at Quorn, and I remember we were feeling dirty and untidy and there was a hotel and I said to two lasses that I'd chummed up with, 'How about we go and we'll book a room so we can have a shower and get clean?'. We went into the hotel through the bar - we didn't know it was a bar - and all these men, elderly, were drinking there and we said, 'Could you tell us, we want to get a room so we can have a shower', and they all burst out laughing and they said, 'We haven't had rain here for several years'. So that was it.

What was the feeling in Adelaide? Adelaide is a rather different sort of city. Was there exactly the same sort of mood or did it strike you as sort of different in any way?

I was a stranger and so I didn't get to speak to any of the local people except to ask them where this bus was. Everything shut down there at twelve o'clock. That was one thing I noticed; there was nothing. All the buses stopped running at twelve o'clock and I hadn't noticed that in Melbourne or Sydney.

On the train from Quorn were there many service personnel going up?

We were just all women as far as I knew.

How many?

Mmm.

Did it appear to be a special train or just part of a regular service?

I can't remember. There were ... I think there were thirteen or fourteen of us on that train if I remember. There might have been more, I just don't recollect.

How were the conditions on the train? Was it comfortable or packed?

Oh well, we had a bed to sleep on and that. It was just like any train at that time. We were all excited and so we didn't know what to expect so we accepted.

Was this your first glimpse of the outback?

Yes.

What were your feelings about it travelling through that part of the country? Did it seem a bit of an adventure?

No, not really. All we wanted to do I think was to get and see where we were. We wanted to get to the end of the journey.

How did you find Alice Springs?

(15.00)I thought that was very nice there, very nice. The Todd River was dried up because apparently a fortnight before it had been flooded and it was completely dry. We were only there in Alice for a week and then we boarded trucks to go on to Darwin and that was a bit of a journey. I slept nearly all the time, I wasn't feeling ... when I was on the train coming across to Adelaide I wasn't feeling very well and I felt worse on the train from Adelaide to ... to ...

Alice Springs.

Alice Springs, yes.

Were there Aboriginal people around Alice Springs at that time?

Very few. Didn't see many at all. All I remember was the Chinese laundry. Don't ask me why I remember that.

I was about to ask you: Why do you remember the Chinese laundry? So, then what about the train up
to ...

No, we boarded trucks.

Oh, you went by trucks, of course, yes.

Yes. And I don't whether I can tell you ...

No, keep going.

Because women's biological make-up is different to men I was having ... menstruating and there was no provision that I knew of to help my situation and I'd been issued ... I had six pairs of stockings with me and my winter uniform and only giggle frock because I'd packed all the other.

What was a giggle frock?

A giggle frock was a frock that was buttoned down the front and that's what you were supposed to do camp duties, apart from where you worked, everybody had to do ... perform camp duties. That was, maybe you had to help wash up or do all these kind of things.

How did it get the name 'giggle frock'?

I don't know but that's what we called it, a giggle frock. And there was no preparation for my biological difference so I had to cut up my stockings. Years later when I was asked where my army stockings had gone by a male QM, I had to say, 'I lost them' because you didn't discuss those things in those days. So I always say I left my imprint all the way between Alice Springs and Darwin by digging little holes and putting these things in them.

Was it an embarrassing experience? I mean, was it one that ...

I didn't feel very well so ... and you didn't discuss these things with other people and I didn't know the others. There were thirteen of us. There was two nursing sisters and the rest of us of other ranks and so you just didn't discuss those things. But I always thought, 'If only I can get over this I can survive anything'.

Was there at all a sense of concern that by going north you were heading nearer to the possibility of being where the Japanese might come?

Well we thought that, yes, we did think that. But the overall thing was, well, we'll relieve the men to go forward. We stopped at all these way stations and the only time those men had ever seen women was through these transports going to Darwin. There was a big convoy of males also going up and there was a convoy coming back which we used to pass. The men travelled in

the convoy one mile ahead of us. We could see them in the distance. So when the truck stopped - ours - we were on the back of a ... I think it was two-tonne truck and we used to rotate one to sit in the front with the driver. So ...

Was it sealed, the road, at that time or was it dirt?

Oh, not all ...

Was it dusty, do you recall?

Some of it was sealed, some of it by the CCS had been working along these roads. They were males who were called up to do that kind of work or had volunteered, I don't know.

What was the reaction then of these men who'd seen so little of women?

(20.00) Well, they'd straightaway say, 'Can we put on a dance?', and they'd drag out some old phonograph and there we'd be dusty and dirty and we'd have to rush in. We sometimes had to fill these palliasses with straw to sleep on and I was frightened all the time that there was something crawling out of it. But we'd rush and get changed and say, 'All right, we'll do that', so they'd put on this music and you'd chat or have a dance and then lights out at ten o'clock. We'd go to bed and be up very early in the morning on the trucks and that happened all the way right through.

What was the food like en route?

Army food. Just ... nothing special.

Was it a difficult trip as such or was there reasonable sort of ...

No, we enjoyed it. Apart from me not ... if I had have felt better I would have enjoyed it much ... But recalling it it sounds now like a big adventure which it was.

What about Darwin? How did that impress you?

Darwin when I got there and I saw this field kitchen and all these huts I sort of got quite excited. But when I got off the back of the truck there was this officer, a Lieutenant Pip [inaudible] there, and she looked at me and I looked at her and she said to me, 'Don't let anybody know I know you'. I hope I'm not offending Pip but I feel she might have put her age back and she had been a school teacher. She taught me at school and it was a wonderful feeling just to get off the truck and know that she was there.

So what happened then? How were you set up and so on?

Well, we were all billeted in these huts and I was separated and sent ... because the other girls all seemed to know one another very well and I was put into one small hut, there were two sergeants

there. And, anyway, the next day, two of the lasses that I'd travelled on the trucks with, came over and said, 'Mac, there's a bed next to us. Come over. Move over to us'. So I got permission to move over there with them.

Was there then a doctor available that you could see?

They had a small RAP, rapid aid post, where they had an AAMWS and there was a doctor but I never ever saw a doctor the whole time I was in Darwin.

So how long before you picked up? You'd been feeling ...

Oh no, no. Well, I was all right. When we got to Mataranka, from Mataranka there was a small train that ran I think from there to a certain spot and there'd been an outbreak of dysentery we heard. Of course, we all thought, ah, we're not going to say anything and I'd been having a bit of a problem and I thought, 'No, I'm not going to say anything' which looking back was a bit silly. So I just travelled on with them but everything cleared up by the time I got there.

So what sort of things did you start to do in Darwin?

I was sent down to Winnellie where there was a unit training there and I worked in an office and did office work there. The lass I relieved, I didn't know, how dumb we were in those days, she'd only been there a little while and she used to have these fainting attacks and I'd be running around trying to help her and I wondered, none of the men did anything. And later on one of them said to me, 'Mac, did your mother tell you the facts of life?' and I wondered what he was talking about. And this lass, she must have been pregnant before she went to Darwin, didn't know, and so she went down. It was very sad; I felt sorry for her. But I didn't have a clue.

Do you know what became of her?

No, I don't.

What was the attitude towards her of those who knew? Was she regarded as, you know, it was something shameful or ...

We didn't talk about it. I didn't talk about it to anybody but occasionally later I heard that most of the girls realised. So what happened, it could have been one of these tragedies of war.

There was a vague sense of embarrassment, would she have felt sort of isolated do you think and was rather conspicuous?

She probably felt very sad and unhappy about it but we never discussed it with her and when I knew, I still felt very sad for her. So I don't know.

What sort of things were you doing in the office? What kinds of things were you typing up?

Oh, still shorthand and typing; general things. We used to have the people from Z Special would come over and get a lot of electrical equipment and ...

These were the people for commando raids and that sort of thing?

Yes, yes.

Did you know of them? Did they have a particular ...

No, but the boss told me eventually that they were from Z Special.

Did that seem awesome in a way?

It did. And I used to want to look at them and maybe being young you felt they were a bit different to everybody else. So ... and the men then built us a little hut. There were only seven of us used to work down there in various offices and they built us a little hut with a shower so we could have a meal and have a shower because the weather was terrible and in those kind of facilities, all the houses that hadn't been flattened up there were all on stilts and were louvred so that any air could blow through. But these steel huts, they were very hot. We never ever closed the doors and all we had in the huts - and that was the working conditions too - were just the bare essentials.

Were they the Nissen-type? The round curved ones, or what were they like?

No. We had these - what would you call them - like triangular ceilings on them and I can remember there always seemed to be spiders around and they said, 'Oh, don't kill the big ones, they eat everything else'.

How many to a hut and how big were the huts?

Mmm. I have an idea we had about eighteen in our hut. I couldn't be quite sure. But all we did, we had ... was just the bed and a cupboard between two girls and I've got a photo of myself sitting on the only chair up our end of the hut and it was so hot. We all had mosquito nets and I can remember once a lass I knew who was much older than me, I thought, 'She doesn't wear anything in bed', and I got a frog and I put it in the bed and this nymph went running through the ... I suppose this wet thing on her, went running through the hut. We were all in hysterics about it.

Were they concrete-floored huts?

Yes.

And what sort of ablution facilities were available as such?

We used to have to walk up the back and there were a group of them there.

Were you in a camp that was guarded? Did it have sort of high barbed-wire around it?

(25.00) No. But we had military policemen on guard there. And that was another thing. My first day in camp ... Oh, we used to have the Aborigines doing a lot of the work, the females, and then we had the men. They ... all the toilets, the ablutions, the toilets were seats and it was a big hole in the ground and no doors on it and that was one thing about the army, this lack of privacy that struck me terribly. Everywhere I went they used to say, 'Mac's in the cupboard getting changed'. I just wasn't used to ... a lot of the others ... it took a long time to get used to the lack of privacy. But in this instance they used to pour tar down these holes to burn it I suppose and the whole toilets caught fire and there we were waiting for the new toilets to be erected so that we could go to the loo. But later on they put better ones in.

What was the attitude towards the Aboriginal women? Can you recall anything about the relations between ...

We thought they were nice. One lass I knew quite well who was in charge of them, we really thought they were nice and would give them things of which they'd put on a frock and if you gave them another one, they'd put it on top of it too. No, they were nice, really.

Were they ordered around as if they were in the army or how were they ...

No, I don't think so. They were just told to do certain duties like washing the shower floors, what other duties I don't know. It would be only the people on camp staff who could tell you.

As to the nature of the camp, was there any sense that somehow it was less secure in the north? That Darwin and the heat and the drink was a different sort of climate and maybe ...

No, no. And where I worked the seven of us used to leave very early in the morning to go down ...

What's very early?

About quarter past seven and we had military policemen go in front of us on a bike and then because there was huge camps of American servicemen both army and air force there, as well as from the United Kingdom - a very famous Spitfire squadron, 54 Squadron was stationed there - and so at a certain part our provost would leave and the American provosts used to take over until we got to Winnellie to start working there. Now that continued when even it wasn't

necessary because I felt the Americans provosts just like to do it. And I'm very grateful to one of them. You got to know them when you were sitting on the back of the truck because there'd be one in the front and one in the back and they'd come right up and say, 'How are you girls?', and I had very bad eye problems and skin problems and at one stage I was told if my eye problems didn't clear up I'd have to go home. Anyway I happened to mention it to this American provost who must have discussed it with one of the doctors because the American sent me this pair of glasses to wear - sunglasses - they were very good.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B

START TAPE TWO, SIDE A

Identification: This is side one of tape two of the interview with Reena Rad about the Australian Women's Army Service recorded on 13th April 1990 and begins in five seconds from now.

What was the feeling about the American servicemen? Were they seen or perceived as more of a threat as it were to the security of women there at Darwin?

No, I don't think so.

Did the Australian men see them as a threat?

No, I really don't think so; I really don't think so. Some of the girls knew American servicemen. When we first went there we were asked by our CO would we go over to the American hospital and - when we were off - and sort of talk to the Americans who were sick. So we did that for a while. We got to know some of the American nurses and the Red Cross people. They were invited to our barracks. But they were mostly officers, so officers and other ranks didn't mix.

Did you get to socialise at all with the Americans?

Some of the girls did. Further down the track, as we say, they used to run a dance and so there'd be a notice go up on the board to say, 'You're invited to attend this' and there'll be nylon stockings as a gift or prizes and I can remember my girlfriends, we'd never put our name down and one day our CO came in and said, 'You, you, you and you, you've volunteered to go'. So we thought, 'Well, what can we do'. So we went down and that was the only time I really felt a bit strange, not because of the Americans individually but I'd never seen at close quarters so few women. I think there would only be about ten of us and it had been raining and we all looked like drowned rats because it had come through the truck we were on and we got there and they'd gone to great lengths to make us welcome. But I'd never seen so many women ... so many men and so few women. I really did feel a bit concerned about that.

In what way?

I felt ... I can remember we said, 'Be very careful, don't look at anybody' ...

Because you thought you might start a riot!

Yes. (Laughs) Which in these days the young could have coped with very well but we just felt a bit nervous because they were just crowded around the dance floor that they'd made - a beautiful one - and there was a band playing. Because the Americans had everything but we did feel a bit worried. We thought, 'Don't get too friendly', we were saying this in the kitchen where we were trying to dry our clothes off. We said, 'Don't get too friendly and just smile but don't show any interest in any specific person'. And it was a tap dance and I can remember our dresses; we were covered in perspiration because, naturally they all wanted to dance. They were away from home, hadn't seen females for a long time but we were a bit worried.

Were there any indiscretions?

No.

What about relations between Australian and American servicemen in Darwin? Did you ever see any scraps or ...

No, never heard ... no, never heard of anything.

Were there any air-raids or warnings during the period you were there?

Yes, we did, and reconnaissance planes came over, so they told us. When we first got there the Spitfire pilots, they would go out on a raid or whatever it was and they'd come back and they'd do a victory roll over the barracks where we were. But apparently, I understand the CO spoke to them about that in case there was an accident. But ...

The first time there was an air-raid warning was there a sense of fear; maybe this is it, the Japanese are coming?

No, because we thought it was just a precautions, which it was, because it was '44 then you see. But we did hear on the grapevine, now whether it was a good old army furphy I don't know - probably was.

What time of the year were you there or how long were you there?

I was ... I'm one of the longest serving women. I served just under eighteen months.

Well, people talk about going troppo in the north and there's supposed to be a period as the build-up of the wet when you get suicides and so on. Did the climate seem to affect people?

One particular friend of mine, it affected her, not that way but it affected her biologically. She put on a lot of weight and for years afterwards she'd have problems. She'd be walking along the street, she used to blackout slightly and then come too and she still to this day has problems with health.

> What about generally, temperamentally, did it seem to have an effect on people, that sort of very humid period just before the wet?

(5.00) I can't remember. Maybe there were people who got into arguments but you gravitated in the army towards people with similar ideas as your own. And with my group of close friends, who we are still friends now after all these years - write to each other - no, we didn't have this problem. I can't remember. My particular friend was Pauline, we used to argue about everything, of how we were going to change the world and when everybody was in bed we'd get up and the group would say, 'Mac, would you and Pauline come to bed and stop that arguing', but it wasn't arguing ...

> What sort of things were you going to change?

Oh, we were going to change the world was going to be a much better place. There was going to be no poverty, there was going to be a world where everybody was happy. An idealistic thing that we, couldn't possibly work out but we thought we were going to change the world, that after this war that was it.

> Was there a feeling that with the experience of war everybody would realise the need to get together and work for ...

Yes, that's right and this particular lass's brother had been shot down over Holland and so ... and though she never spoke about him till the day war ended and we went to church together and that was when she spoke about him.

> Did you have any bad times in Darwin?

The weather was the worst. The weather was terrible. My second wet season there I really felt that affected my skin and everything else but otherwise ...

> How did it affect you? What were the problems?

Oh, it probably affected you, like we'd get rashes on our skin. I had my hair, it was all sort rashes in the hair and under the arms.

> It would affect your morale somewhat I'd imagine.

No, not really. I think we just accepted that. Overall, because the ones I knew all had somebody away, or like my own brother who'd come back, very, very badly affected in health we sort of felt

there should be no complaints. That's amongst the group that I knew personally. No, we didn't complain and nobody every said, 'I'll be glad when I go home'. We just knew that we would go home one day and that was it.

What other recreational facilities were there? Were there film nights, that sort of thing?

As the war receded we had a hockey team which we used to play against the men, mainly this 54 Squadron, the RAF. They had an All-England goalie there and we used to play quite regularly against them and we were determined we were going to win a match. So one day we charged and he ended up, I think, with a broken leg and our centre forward ended up with a broken arm. We didn't mean it but with hockey sticks we were so sick of not winning that we, just everybody with hockey sticks. Now, maybe, I don't know, because he was middle-aged. But I'm not sure about the broken leg but we heard that and we thought, 'Ah, well, we've won at last'.

Did you goal in fact?

Yes we did, but whether we ... we were so concerned about Peanut who came from Western Australia, that she'd broken her arm, that that was the end of the hockey match. And many of those girls, when we all got together after the war, we shortened ... we took our giggle frocks which we hadn't handed in, shortened them and we formed our own ex-army hockey team and we played very successfully for two years afterwards.

Whereabouts did you play?

This was in Sydney. We played at Moore Park.

As the conflict was receding and the threat diminishing, did you have formal briefings about the course of the war? How did you know what the state of affairs was?

No, we had a noticeboard and things would go up there. We also had a newspaper, The *Army News*, and that kept us up with what was happening down South and in the islands and in New Guinea. There were big celebrations on V Day which was Victory Europe because we felt then that it was coming to the end of the war.

How did you celebrate?

We all went to church but then, after that, we had a party in our rec hut and all our friends that we knew in the services, in whatever service they were in, we invited the men to come over. They used to come over once a week where we could talk and listen to music and things like that.

Did you drink?

No, I didn't drink.

Did you ever drink at all, alcohol, while you were in the army?

Yes, we could purchase two bottles ...

Did you?

I think only once or twice I had a glass. I didn't like beer and so that was the reason I didn't drink. And strangely enough none of my friends drank either.

With these bulletins that were being posted and other official notes, what was their credibility? Did you generally accept what was in them or was there a feeling, 'Oh, this is propaganda, you've got to read it with a grain of salt'?

(10.00) No, we didn't think of propaganda. We thought that if it was told we had to accept it. There was no way we could find out. It's a very isolated area.

Well in that kind of isolation would you get odd rumours floating about about sort of curious things?

Oh yes, quite often there were rumours about things but I think we were all so busy, the climate, and also you had to wear these frocks that were starched, so when you'd get back or come off duty then you'd have to think, 'Now have I got enough frocks to wear?'. We were issued with six frocks, now there's seven days in the week and they allowed us three - there was a laundry unit that did a lot of the officers uniforms - now they did three of our uniforms a week. You'd change twice a day and all of us, we starched these frocks, so you were kept busy doing those things. Also there were certain duties that you had to do around the camp.

Like what?

Well, to clean up the area and if you didn't go to church on a Sunday, well then you had to stack bottles or ... because some of the girls needed the yeast from the beer so you could buy two bottles of beer a week which were nine pence a bottle. Now some of the girls did drink that and they needed it but ...

Was this for thrush or things like that or ...

Oh, they just said the yeast was very good for you because of the food. See, everything was dehydrated and perhaps they felt that we might lack certain vitamins so they said, 'If you possibly can, drink your beer'. But where could you keep it cool anyway? So if you took one glass of beer out of it, what the girls did who drank, they would share one bottle between four so that for four days they would have ... The men used to say to us, 'What do you do with your beer?' and those

of us who didn't drink at all would say, 'We don't collect it'. So they'd say, 'Well, will you get it' - like in the unit they'd say - 'Will you get it and we'll buy it from you?'. So a lot of us did that.

Did you have Coolgardie safes?

No. And sometimes the men would invite us on a chop picnic, which is the good old barbecue, and where they got the meat and that from I don't know but we did occasionally, if you were off duty, and you could never go out alone, there always had to be three people and they had to come and sign for you.

Did you ever go fishing, on fishing trips or anything?

No, I don't think so. I went out on a duck once ... oh, the war was over there and there were still a few Americans left and a girlfriend of mine was friendly. So she asked us to go out in this duck - you know those landing crafts - so I went out and went swimming. That was the only time really.

What about your first Christmas and New Year in Darwin, how was that?

Well, Christmas, most of us used to go to church and you were supposed to eat with the unit if you were invited, otherwise in our barracks they had a Christmas lunch there and the officers used to have to wait on you. That was the one time of the year when they ... for Christmas dinner. But where I worked down at Winnellie, we used to go down and have it with ... and you could bring another girlfriend if you wanted to. Our CO used to say, 'Come down, it's good for the men to come down and have a meal with them'.

What about New Year's Eve?

New Year's Eve, yes, we were allowed to have a party in the rec hut. Of course, after the war finished, that was the real bang-up party, believe you me.

Where was that, in Darwin?

That was ... yes, and that was in our rec hut. I must say when I first went to Darwin and reported to our CO he said to one of the drivers, 'Take Mac round and show her the naval headquarters'. Now, maybe the CO forgot, he said, 'I've got a message anyway to go to whoever was in charge of the navy there', so I went in the truck and when I was looking around I thought, 'What's that driver ...', he started to get red in the face and he was getting redder and redder and I thought, 'What's wrong with him?' and I looked round and I could see all these men sunbaking and they didn't have a thing on. I thought, 'My goodness', so I started to sink down lower and lower in the seat and then the next thing one of the navy provosts, I suppose they call them, came over and said, 'What's that woman doing in this area? Don't you know it's a restricted area?'. So he delivered the message and got out quick. Maybe our CO didn't realise, I think he'd forgotten.

You said the New Year's Eve was a bang-up party, in what way?

Oh well, we celebrated till much later than ten o'clock.

Did you drink that time?

No, I didn't. No, I didn't. And I was friendly with an air force Liberator pilot and I can remember he brought me this present up and it looked to me as if it was a box of chocolates and I'd already been sent one by my future sister-in-law and when we'd opened it there was this molten mass, so I just dumped this down under the seat, thanked and said, 'That was very kind'. When I opened it later it was a beautiful beauty, in the leather case, to thank me for being friendly. And a couple of years later I got an invitation to his wedding. It was this sort of friendships.

Did you form any romantic attachments while you were in the north?

(15.00)I didn't because, really, I didn't want to get married during the war and I think most of us - mine friends - didn't either particularly thinking of my mother's life, I thought maybe I was opting out. We were friendly but that was it. There was nothing more than holding hands. Now, what the other's did I wouldn't know, but that was as far as I was concerned.

What about officers? Did you have any bad officers, people who were just bossy or made your life miserable or, say, you get some people who seem to take a delight in throwing their authority around, did you have any of those sort of experiences at all?

Ah ... I was in a car accident, this was after the war, so whether ... you can't say the officer concerned was bad but I think she could have been a bit more sympathetic. And the lass in the front seat ... we hit a ... oh, I was in a weapons carrier and this car ... no, I was in a staff car with another friend, there were four of us. Now this weapons carrier, it was a RAAF weapons carrier, that he'd apparently gone to collect the mail, it was a Sunday and we were going back to the barracks, and it hit us head-on and the girl in the front hit the dash ...

No safety belts of course in those days.

No, no. Hit the front dashboard and split - she had beautiful white teeth - now they completely broke and went into the gums and I was in the back and I flew up into the ceiling and then bounced down on the front seat. Anyway, it was near a RAAF station so the RAAF doctor came and all I can remember is he got us out of the car and they were attending to the girl because the mouth was all bleeding and I couldn't focus my eyes and all I remember him saying is, 'She's suffering from shock' and he was feeling my head. Anyway, they got our CO to come down - this was the lass who came quite late - and I can remember her feeling my head and I still couldn't focus my eyes and she was saying, 'She's got a lot of dandruff there, she'll have to do something about that'. Later on I thought I could have been dying and all she was worrying about

was my rash on my head. But that was it. I had to get up and go to work the next day, I know that. The other lass had to get her teeth ...

You were in Darwin when the war finished. Was there at all a feeling that it was difficult to maintain an enthusiasm for rather mundane chores after that?

No. The thing that crossed my mind - and I don't know what the others - what now? What am I going to do with my life now? And of course a lot of the girls ... we were supposed to be single or if the girls' husbands were POWs they could go to Darwin but there were a few, they found out they were married and their husbands were coming home from all over the place so they got priority to go home.

Did you see any POWs come through by Darwin?

Yes, we did, a lot. They came through on the *Oranje* and we were the first Australians in Australia to meet these prisoners of war and they ... it was very, very sad and actually there was ... there should be - I don't know whether the archives have got that - they made a film of my girlfriend and I taking these POWs down to swim and that went all over the islands because I had letters from everywhere, from friends that I knew, writing to say they'd seen me on that newsreel.

Were you prepared for the sort of condition in which these men were to return? Did you have any inkling as to how bad they were to be?

Well, at first we thought they looked very well. One of the things the CO had said, 'Don't give them too much to eat', we were allowed ... we were given extra rations and we bought things from the canteen and so they came off the *Oranje*, those that were well enough to walk, some of them stayed on and if anybody had a friend there they could go and see them on board the ship. And we thought, 'Oh, they look very well', some of them were quite plump but then we realised that was beri-beri they were swollen up.

You didn't see any of the worse cases that were flown back?

I didn't. No, well, they stopped flying a lot of them because it was too much of a change for these people that had been, particularly on the Burma-Thailand railway, Changi, and that because some of them had apparently died on the plane and I think there was a crash at one stage. One plane crashed so they started bringing them back by hospital ships and it was the *Oranje* that came into Darwin. And we sort of entertained them the best we could. Everybody stopped work. We did have a lot of Dutch female POWs came there and we had to prepare barracks, make the beds and everything for them, and ...

How did they seem? What sort of condition were they in?

(20.00) They seemed to be all right. I can only remember one incident where there was a Malaysian girl and they wouldn't let her sleep in the barracks with them and apparently she was

married ... she'd married an Australian soldier. I understood her family had helped him in the camp. I don't know very much about it. But, anyway, they just said they didn't want her to sleep with them and we felt that was terrible and so we were told we would withdraw our services if they didn't accept her in the barracks with them.

Did that work? They took her in or ...

I don't know and I wouldn't like to comment any more about that. We just felt it was terribly sad that these people had gone through so much and that the Malaysians and Singaporeans themselves had gone through a terrible time and this lass was married to an Australian serviceman anyway, a POW, that there shouldn't have been this discrimination.

With the war's end was there any sense of discipline problems in the larger camps, that men were fed up and wanted to go AWOL perhaps in great numbers?

Well, they were too far away. Most of the men of course wanted to go home. Some of the girls married the men that were there. My own best friend became engaged to somebody up there but it didn't last; they broke it off when they got back. But most of us, we felt men were seeing us in a different life. When you've got so few women and such a lot of men, I think even the plainest person would look beautiful after a while. That was our attitude anyway.

So how long were you up there after war's end before you ...

War ended ... I stayed there till March '46 and I was there when they closed the camp and then those of us who had to stay ...

Were you getting impatient?

Well, we were because we couldn't see any future there and so we were the lucky ones, we came home on the *Westralia* and ...

What was the ship like?

Very good but they didn't have any freezing works so the food that we were to get - it was a navy ship - and it was all packed in ice and of course the ice melted. But, there again, the men were packed in holes. We were on one of the upper decks and we had a separate place that was our little possie to sit out on the deck because we were jammed up. And if I have one criticism to say, and I've never really got over that, is I think our female officers who had quite a large area for the number of them, to sit out during the day, could have let some of those men who were down below decks come up and sit there. And I still feel annoyed about that. We were jammed up and what they did with the men below decks, they used to swap them over. They were below decks and then you know the first deck of a ship, they'd bring certain ones up each day but there was this extra room on this other deck, apart from us - we weren't allowed to go on that deck. Now the navy officers and that, we didn't see much of them and the navy boys were great. They

were cooking our meals and things and we used to have to go down below to this mess hall to have our food. But I do feel if there's one criticism of my whole army life it was these people had this extra room where they could have sort of let some of the men ... or moved us up to share and let the men have part of our deck.

There were some anxieties I gather about floating mines coming down the coast?

Yes, they were. And we hit a storm when we came round Cape York and that was worrying. A few people lost their luggage over board. But ...

Did you get seasick?

I did in the first instance but I was one of the sergeants on board and so I used to take the girls down for their meal and bring them back and I can remember a couple of the sailors who in the beginning used to say to me, 'How would you like a nice pork chop?', and I'd just run. But then when they realised that I really was suffering from being seasick and some of the others, they gave us soda biscuits and they were very helpful but I was only a bit sick for the first twenty-four hours after that.

When had you become a sergeant?

I came a sergeant towards the end of the war. When ... in certain units the women and the men had to compete for ranks. So, quite fairly enough, the men got the ranks but as the war changed a bit then I got the position.

What did it mean to you to become a sergeant?

I thought it was great. My brother had been a sergeant for years. I'd been a lance corporal back in Coast Artillery but when I moved out of the unit you had to drop your rank. So I thought it was great.

Did it change at all, the nature of your relations with people around you?

No. No, no, no. You got more duties that was all and you ate in the sergeants' mess.

Did you ever have to use disciplinary measures against anybody?

No, no. Because, as I say, we worked separately - everybody worked in different areas - and it was the camp staff that remained in the camp doing the cooking and all those duties. So you really didn't have to do anything. From the time ... once you became a corporal you had to do orderly room duty and you stayed on in the orderly room till ten o'clock and then you went round and checked that everybody was in bed.

Did you ever find anybody who wasn't?

(25.00) No. If they were you couldn't tell anyway. There was nowhere to go there anyway.

Did it bring about extra respect from the male ranks to have the extra stripes?

No, I don't think so; we got the respect anyway as far as I was concerned.

So coming down the coast in this ship, overall, how was that trip?

It was great. We enjoyed it and we weren't aware of these mines being there but I understand, I learnt afterwards, that that was a worry for them.

When you got back, where did you go, Sydney or Melbourne?

Yes, Sydney.

And what happened?

Well, I was last off the ship. All the others went up to, I think it was Burwood where they went, but I had to remain back to see that all the luggage was packed on the trucks and in the meantime my brother and his best friend had ... were waiting. Had gone up to ... they'd come down to where we disembarked and asked had anybody seen me and, of course, they said, 'Oh, we think she's in the truck ahead of us' and they told him where we were going so he got up there and when he got up there he found out that I wasn't there, that I was still back at the wharf seeing that the luggage was put on these trucks. So he waited. Well, when I got there, maybe in that barracks up there they weren't used to a great lanky sergeant hanging around after ten o'clock at night. So when I got there they said, 'Your brother's waiting for you, you can go straight home'. I nearly died. So I didn't wait, I went home and reported back the next day to get my leave and we were given so much leave or whatever leave because we had quite a lot of leave owing.

END TAPE TWO, SIDE A

START TAPE TWO, SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape two of the interview with Reena Rad about the Australian Women's Army Service recorded on 13th April 1990 and continues in five seconds from now.

What was it like to be back in Sydney on leave after such a long period in Darwin?

Strange. And I remember I wanted ... I was craving for a drink of milk and as a baby I couldn't drink cow's milk but I had this terrible craving for milk because in Darwin we didn't have any fresh milk. Though once I said to my friend who was in a bomber squadron, 'If you ever go

south' - which they used to do and bring up more planes - 'bring me some milk'. And he came up with it would have been about two pints of milk and when I took it into the mess and showed the girls we ended up having just enough to top up our cup of tea with fresh milk. But that's what I asked and so my brother said, 'Well, we'll pop into a milkbar' which was still open. They said, 'Oh, we're sorry. There's no fresh milk. It's powdered milk'.

How long before you were to get fresh milk?

I think when I got home, I think my mother had some there. She'd got tired of waiting up for me. She'd watched the ship coming into the harbour and ...

Where was she living then?

We were living near Rose Bay. And so she and my brother and Peter, my brother's army friend, had gone down to look at the ship coming into the harbour because there was no secret then. That was the most amazing feeling: when that ship came into the harbour there was just this, I don't know, we all felt like crying. It was just the most wonderful feeling.

What about when you saw your mother? How was she?

Oh, we just sat and talked till about two o'clock in the morning. I think she was glad to see that there was my brother, who'd come out of hospital then, and to see the three of us back as a family.

By then had you any clearer ideas to what you were going to do with yourself?

I had thought I was going to do nursing and ... but when I reported back, you had certain points and because I was young when I enlisted, the older girls, the older you were you got more points. So they said to me, 'Oh, we're not going to discharge you. We're sending you up to disposals, so you can work up there and then you'll get your discharge' and I had to apply twice to get out of the army.

Did you go to disposals?

Yes I did. That was miles away; miles out of Sydney. I'm trying to think where it was.

What were you doing there?

Just shorthand and typing.

What was disposal, getting rid of all the surplus gear that ...

All the surplus gear, yes, and none of them had ... there was only one officer there who'd been away anywhere and I felt I embarrassed them partly because we were used to saluting officers

and carrying on with all this and they hadn't been used to that during the war. So this sergeant marching in and saluting everybody and being very regimental, I think they thought, 'What's with this?'.

Maybe they thought you'd come direct from the front-line or something.

But there was a captain, he was giving out the pay, he'd been in the Middle East and he thought it was great. He used to come and talk to me afterwards and say, 'Well, at last, we've got people who' - not that I'm casting aspersions at the disposals unit but it was just that they had lived at home and gone to work everyday and so it was a different atmosphere.

Did you make a conscious effort to stop saluting?

Oh well, after a while I knew I was getting out of the army and so, yes, I did. But in the beginning I thought that's how you do it and that's what I did.

(5.00) How were they getting rid of the surplus gear at that time?

As far as I knew they were selling it off to people who would buy it, like trucks and all those kind of things.

Was it by auction or by public tender? Do you know what the ...

No, no. I was never out where they kept all the ... I just was in the office working there.

So when did you get your final notice that you ...

It was September '46. We all sort of joined the army, those of us that were eligible joined the RSL and that brought us very close together. We used to meet and I was employed by the RSL when I got out.

Was there a moment where you came to take off your uniform for the last time and, well, 'This is it'?

Yes, and it seems strange, I remember I went into David Jones to buy a frock and I thought, 'I've put on weight', because I was seven-stone-four when I went into the army and five-foot-three and I'd grown another inch and I'd put on weight. I was up about eight stone.

Did you feel better? Were you sort of feeling fitter or how did you feel?

Oh yes, I felt ... I'd always felt fit all my life by, no, it was just this what am I going to do now. And as I say while I was on leave I got a job. I went back to where I'd worked and I felt there that they, the girls, were worried about me. They were thinking because it was service preference and I felt they thought, 'Which one's going off to find a place?', because the person who was in charge

said, 'I don't know where I'm going to put you' and I said, 'Oh well, that's all right', and that's what I felt, that I was different to all these other girls. So I went away and I thought, 'I'll think about that'. So then I saw this ad in the paper, they wanted somebody in the RSL and I just went along - and there were about forty people there - and the moment they said, 'Would you start?', I rang up where I'd worked and said, 'I wasn't going back'.

What sort of things were you doing in the RSL?

I was on the reception desk and they had accommodation there so we used to book accommodation - that was for males only who were coming from ... even from New Zealand - used to come over every year for ANZAC Day. I was there for four years. Everything to do with this accommodation part. We used to listen to all their troubles of the men coming in, it was quite interesting, but after a while I felt ...

What sorts of troubles? What were the kinds of things?

Well, some of them, their wives had gone off and disappeared and some of them had troubles resettling. And we had the paraplegics coming in who wanted to talk.

During that immediate post-war period, you might suppose that now you'd have a grateful Australia that would do all that was possible to re ...

(10.00) Yes, and I felt that they should have done all that was possible. The RSL did.

Did you start to become disenchanted to see that it wasn't happening?

No, because working there and seeing what they did I thought, well, that was their right to do that and that was the men's right to receive that help too. I can remember one instance where a young man was sitting crying on a bench and he couldn't stop crying so I went over to ask him what was wrong and he said, 'Oh, don't ring ...'. I said, 'You need hospitalisation'. 'Don't ring up the hospital', he said, 'I don't want to go back into that ward'. Anyway, we eventually did have to ring and he'd been in a psychiatric centre. It was very sad.

Were there times where the nature of bureaucracy would thwart the possibility of getting things right for men, where you'd become frustrated and angry and that, or maybe, you'd be encountering people who didn't understand what the position had been for men at war, people who'd not gone and so on?

No, working there, no, it didn't. When I left, yes, it did. But in those days the main problem was accommodation and a lot of landlords also, they didn't want to perhaps give preference to the returned man because, I don't know whether they brought in that moratorium that the rent had to remain the same. But everybody was looking for accommodation. The men were coming back, they were getting married and if there were more than one child in the family they couldn't stay at home. So it was the breaking up of the family and starting new lives and it was very difficult.

People were living in one room. There was such a shortage everywhere of accommodation. They talk about it today, but in those days it was terrible.

Did it make you angry, a young woman who with her friends were going to change the world immediately after the war?

Yes, I thought we should be doing more about it and yet I realised you couldn't from one night, stop the war, because they had all those people who'd been working in industry for the war, I mean, their lives had changed too. They had to be found jobs as well and it was ex-service preference and of course a lot of the men too, quite a few that came in there, they then wanted to do university courses so there had to be places found for them.

So how long did you stay at the RSL?

For four years.

Why did you leave?

I felt that I, really, was still in the army. You're surrounded by these people. I loved it but I felt it was time to move on. So I went in the completely opposite direction. A friend of mine who'd been in Darwin with me said they were looking for somebody to work in a displaced persons' camp. And she said it needs to be somebody who's very level-headed and what about you, because she knew I wanted a change. So I said, 'Why?'. She said, 'Well, the person before who had the job we'll offer you had a nervous breakdown, couldn't get used to all these single males coming out from Europe'. So I said, 'Well, all right, if I get it' - I had to go before the Public Service Board - and that's where I ended up, working in a displaced persons' camp.

Whereabouts was that?

In Bonegilla.

When you look back to the period of the war, is it a special time? Was there something about the nature of service and common cause that gave it a particular quality?

I felt Australia was very united. That was the one thing ever since. I don't think we've ever been as united as we were then. And this feeling towards each other, men or women, this respect of each other. But that was that era maybe.

You say there are a few funny things that happened?

Well, when I went to Coast Artillery there was a chap there who wanted to get out of the army so he used to always go AWOL, so they brought him up on a court martial and women were very rare in the army then so they said, 'Well, you've got to go and give evidence'. So I went over to

where the court was held and I'm sitting there waiting and an officer comes out and puts a notebook in my hand and said, 'You're to record the court martial'. So being young I didn't realise that if you're a witness you can't be in the court. Anyway, there I am busy writing down the proceedings and they call 'Gunner MacDonald', so I put my hand up and there was quite a kafuffle there. There I was recording what was going on and there I was a witness.

So did they take your evidence?

Well, they had to because there was nobody else there.

What was the nature of the case?

Oh, I had to say that he reported back after being AWOL and I was the first person that had spoken to him.

Do you recall what became of him?

I have no idea, no. He would have been put in the brig no doubt.

You said there were a couple of funny things, anything else?

Well, the other one, when I first went there, I was looking for somebody and I saw this room and I went in there and this young man was working behind what looked to me a grill. And I thought, 'Isn't that funny'.

Sorry, where is there?

This was ... North Head, sorry. And he was working behind this grill sweeping up. So I said to him, 'Do you know, I've got the report to the Battery Officer. Where is it?' and he said, 'Well, there'll be somebody, one of the guards will come back in a minute'. And I said, 'Oh, what are you doing?', and he said, 'Cleaning up'. He said, 'By the way, if I give you a letter would you drop this in the mail box?', he said, 'It's very private, there's nothing in it', and I said, 'Yes'. So I put it in my pocket. So the guard came in and said, 'Oh, you're in the wrong place' and off we went to meet the officer to tell me where I was going to live and all that. Anyway I discovered later ... oh, well I kept that letter till I went back to my billet and one of the girls was going on leave and I said, 'Here would you pop that in the box?'. Now all letters were supposed to be censored - I didn't realise this - and later on I discovered he was up on a charge and he was the son of another very wealthy family and he didn't like the army and he was determined he was going to get out. And this was a letter to his brother apparently to get him out but I didn't know that and I didn't know he was a prisoner. I thought he was just one of the troops cleaning up and I didn't discover till much later. But they're the only two people in the army that - and both from extremely wealthy families, and I'm not criticising the families but that particular gentleman, later on you'd see his name in the press at all these gatherings and things. So I determined clothing

made by that family, or the material they produced for clothing, I would never ever buy anything. I don't know whether that's amusing.

END TAPE TWO, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW