



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00960
Title	(VX378) Hanna, Margaret Jean (Major)
Interviewer	Martin, Harry
Place made	Not stated
Date made	27 September 1990
Description	Margaret Jean Hanna as a major, 2/4th Australian General Hospital, interviewed by Harry Martin for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45.

Disclaimer

The Australian War Memorial is not responsible either for the accuracy of matters discussed or opinions expressed by speakers, which are for the reader to judge.

Transcript methodology

Please note that the printed word can never fully convey all the meaning of speech, and may lead to misinterpretation. Readers concerned with the expressive elements of speech should refer to the audio record. It is strongly recommended that readers listen to the sound recording whilst reading the transcript, at least in part, or for critical sections.

Readers of this transcript of interview should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal conversational style that is inherent in oral records. Unless indicated, the names of places and people are as spoken, regardless of whether this is formally correct or not – e.g. 'world war two' (as spoken) would not be changed in transcription to 'second world war' (the official conflict term).

A few changes or additions may be made by the transcriber or proof-reader. Such changes are usually indicated by square brackets, thus: [ ] to clearly indicate a difference between the sound record and the transcript. Three dots (…) or a double dash (- -) indicate an unfinished sentence.

Copyright

Copyright in this transcript, and the sound recording from which it was made, is usually owned by the Australian War Memorial, often jointly with the donors. Any request to use of the transcript, outside the purposes of research and study, should be addressed to:

Australian War Memorial
GPO Box 345
CANBERRA ACT 2601

NUMBER OF TAPES: 2

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is tape one, side one of an interview with Jean Hanna about the 2/4th Australian General Hospital, recorded on 27 September 1990.

Jean Hanna, where and when were you born?

I was born in the Upper Murray in Victoria on 1 October 1902.

Tell us something about your parents. What sort of man was your father, what he did?

My father was born on the Yackandandah goldfields and his father took my father and the family to the Upper Murray when land was opened up for selection, and they went on the land.

What sort of man was he?

My father? He was a very big man. A stern man, but a very fair man. Was very highly regarded in the area.

And what about your mother, what sort of person was she?

My mother was also .... She was born at Carlsruhe near Kyneton. And her family also went to the Upper Murray when land was opened up. And it was there my father met her and married her.

Was she a strict person also?

No, she was a lovely person really, delightful, and a hardworking, loving mother, and cared for us wonderfully well. Brought us up very well, both of them.

How many children?

There were five of us, three boys and two girls.

Was it a religious family? Churchgoing?

Yes, we were brought up .... We were all very strict Presbyterians because my ancestors came from Northern Ireland.

Was it the sort of family where political issues, social issues of the day, were discussed?

Never. Everybody was friendly no matter what religion or creed, colour, anything. They were a very, very friendly community.

Was it a hard childhood? How would you place the family in terms of the social structure? Were you middle class, upper class, working class?

There was no class. No class in the area at all.

What about later in the depression years? How were things then?

Well, very difficult at times but we never went without. We grew our own meat, our own fruit and vegetables and we didn't want for anything.

What about schooling? Where did you go to school?

I went to a state school - a small state school - until I was fourteen and then I was sent down to boarding school at Presbyterian Ladies' College.

What were your aspirations as a child? When you came down to Melbourne did you have any sense of what you wanted to do with your life?

Not at all because my father was one of those people who never thought women should work, not as a profession. He was of the opinion that we were home people and he didn't agree with me at all taking up a profession when I started nursing later on. He was very much against it. It was only my mother who persuaded him to let me.

So when did you leave school?

I left school when I was sixteen. At the end of the first world war.

And then?

Went back to the country and I was there with the family until I was twenty-three. I didn't start my training until I was twenty-three.

So how did the nursing come about? What led you to that?

Because I felt that I would like to do something at that stage. I had a very good life and a very good time. We had a lot of social life and a lot of enjoyment with our family but the rest of the family got married and I just felt I'd like to get away.

Was it a family that the first world war had particular meaning? Were there members who'd gone off to war?

Yes, my eldest brother was an ANZAC and later went to France and was severely wounded in France. My second brother went away too, with the Lighthorse. My first brother was with the Lighthorse first and then went to a machine-gun company in France. And my second brother went away with the Lighthorse and he also went to France. My youngest brother was only in camp when war ended. He was only eighteen.

(5.00) So where did you start your nursing?

Where? At the Alfred Hospital.

And how long did you spend at the Alfred?

I trained for three years. I then did my midwifery. I went back to the staff of the Alfred Hospital as theatre sister. I had eighteen months in England and overseas. I came back and I was on the staff of the Alfred as a sister until I joined up.

Even up until quite recently many hospitals had different sorts of almost cultural attitudes towards trainee nurses. In some hospitals trainee nurses would be treated almost as the lowest of the low. Was it a tough introduction to nursing? How was the Alfred?

No, it was a very, very high class training school and the nurses in general came from very good homes.

When did you first get an inkling that there was war brewing again?

When I was in England 1937-38. In early '38, no July '37 I went with three other friends on a motoring trip round the Continent and when we got to Germany it was very evident then. There were swastikas everywhere. The *autobahns* were starting to be built. There were German military cars everywhere and there were even, in Berlin when we were there, they had demonstrations of war and all sorts of propaganda. And it was obvious then. And strangely enough we stayed one night on our way to Berlin - three miles out of Berlin - at a place called Jüterbog and it was the headquarters of the Reichstoflen[?] Air Force. And the hotel we stayed at was full of German air force.

Yet at that time there were many people who were rather taken with Germany and Hitler's ideas - the sense of strength and purpose. What was the general feeling amongst people you knew about the way Germany was going?

We were very nervous in Germany at that time because if you had a car accident you weren't asked, you were popped straight into, what shall I say, holding until you were investigated. And even when we were at this place at Jüterbog with the air force it was very obvious that we were looked on as rather, er, unwelcome strangers.

Were people generally familiar with Australia then? There weren't so many Australians travelling around.

Oh yes, there were quite a few travelling around. But we felt it more in Germany than we did in any other country in Europe.

When you went to England was there a sense, as continued to be the case for a long time for a lot of young Australians, that one was going to the home country, or the mother country?

Yes. And another thing before we left England they were talking of issuing gas masks so they were very, very much aware that there was something in the wind in Europe, even before I left, and that was in April '38.

Was that same impression shared back in Australian when you got home? Or were you a bit concerned?

No, no one seemed to worry about it at all.

Were you concerned about that? Did you feel there was a need, a sense of urgency?

I felt there was something wrong somewhere but I was young enough and not worried that much about it.

So how did you come to join up?

Well, I was on the Reserve because Miss Wilson, who was our matron at the Alfred, had put us on the Army Reserve because she'd been an army matron in the first world war.

Could you have said no?

Oh yes, we could have if we wanted to, but we didn't even think about it.

So what did being on the Reserve mean? Did you have special training?

No, it meant that in the event of war we'd be the first ones called up.

And when did that happen for you?

That happened .... It was late '39 when war first broke out. We were told then that we would be probably called up in the event of Australia being involved. And we were actually taken on strength in February 1940.

(10.00) Where did you go to enlist? Did you have a health inspection and all that sort of thing?

Oh yes, we had to go through a very strict health examination.

And where did you first start then, your army life as it were?

On board ship. [Laughs].

Well, what was the procedure from the time that you got your notice to when you went aboard.

Nothing, except to be medically examined and outfitted. And then we waited until we were put on board the ship.

What was the outfit, do you recall?

Yes, we were given an outdoor uniform, indoor uniform, and all the equipment. We had to have a container for our clothes and our equipment and we were given haversacks for carrying all sorts of the odd things with us in case of emergency.

And you were then attached to, was it the ...?

The 2/1st CCS.

Yes. Which ship then did you go in?

A ship called the *Neuralia*. It was a first world war Anglo-Indian troopship and not a very wonderful one at that.

So how were you quartered?

Well, we girls were very fortunate because we were given amongst the best available. But the troops, they had to live, sleep and eat, all in the same quarters and we had blackouts.

In the hold, was it?

Well, not exactly. They were allowed to sleep up on decks and things like that. And through the tropics and the blackout we were allowed a section right up in the forehead of the top deck which they roped off and we were allowed to take our canvas stretchers up and sleep there in the tropics.

With the medical experience you had behind you, what rank did you get on joining?

A major, I was.

Did you have a sense of what that meant, how it fitted in with the army scheme of things?

Oh yes, because of first world war and my brothers being in the army. I had quite a good knowledge of that, yes.

How would army personnel respond to you then, as a major? Would they salute you and how would they address you?

Sister, really. They called us sister. They didn't call us by our rank. It was only a courtesy rank actually.

Would soldiers salute you if they were passing you?

Yes.

Did you enjoy the sense of being in the army and serving country and that sort of thing? How did you feel about it at the time, do you recall?

I don't think we thought anything about it except that a sense of excitement, I suppose, more than anything else.

What about the voyage? How was that? Was it rough or smooth?

Yes, we were seasick, very seasick. But it gave us an opportunity to get to know our medical officers and also our medical orderlies. I might add that we had the 6th Battalion of the 17th Brigade on board and we were only a small part of that because the CCS was a small unit.

How many people in it?

In the CCS? There were eight sisters and I think there would be eight officers - let me see - eight or nine officers. I'd have to count them. There was a CO and there were three surgeons, two physicians and an anaesthetist and a quartermaster. So what would that be? About nine.

What was the relationship with the officers, the surgeons and doctors? Was it a friendly one, or formal, or?

Actually we knew a lot of them in our public nursing before we even joined. Some of them were even our own hospital surgeons and physicians.

Did they feel any need now that they were in the army to adopt a more formal manner?

No. It was very professional but quite friendly, but professional. We had to be. But it did give us a chance to help train our medical orderlies because they hadn't any experience at all whatsoever.

How would you address the medical orderlies? What was the relationship there?

We usually called them by their Christian - not their Christian name, their surname.

Was it a friendly relationship?

Very. As a matter of fact we still meet every year at ANZAC time no matter the rank at all and we're on Christian names now. There's no rank at all amongst us. We're all very great friends.

As it was to happen later when the nurses were evacuated from Tobruk, the medical orderlies were to do a lot of theatre work. Was there an anticipation of that early on? Were they getting training of a sort that was above the norm?

(15.00) Fortunately, if you've read the book you would read that one of the medical orderlies had already some nursing training and he was able to help train the boys to take over some of the nursing duties, you know, more senior nursing duties. But they had to manage because there was just no way ....

But in the early part of, even in those early times, was there any expectation that they might have to do more than the normal male orderly work around the wards?

Well, I wasn't with them at that time so I really don't know.

With your own orderlies though? Or were they just trained in the usual routine?

No, our own orderlies were not trained in any way in medical nursing at all. They were trained under us as we went along.

So how long aboard the ship were you? About.

I think it took us about three weeks.

To where?

To Egypt.

You stopped on the way at Colombo?

Yes, we stopped at Colombo and we stopped at Aden.

Did you change ships at all?

No.

Did you have time to look around in Colombo and Aden?

Yes. Not all went ashore. A few of us went ashore in Aden but only a few. The troops weren't allowed. Some of the officers and we went ashore for a while, but only a short time.

What about Colombo? Did you have a chance to look around there?

Yes.

What did you do?

I don't even remember now. I think we might have gone to the [inaudible] (laughs). I've forgotten really what we did.

So when you finally arrive in Egypt how did you go about setting up? What was the procedure?

Well, we arrived at [El] Kantara and we were straight onto the train to Gaza.

Was it crowded?

The train? I didn't particularly notice that we were crowded. We had a compartment, the eight of us, to ourselves - the sisters.

What was your impression as to the organisation at that stage? Was there a sense of urgency and perhaps occasional chaos? Or were things pretty orderly and smooth?

No, they were very well organised. And when we went to Gaza of course we were with the 2/1st AGH which was already established there. They were the New South Wales hospital unit that that gone ahead. I think they went in January of '40 and they were well established.

What was their circumstance? They were in a proper hospital building?

They had some hospital huts but then there was tents as well. And a lot of the sisters were in tents.

What about your own accommodation?

We were in tents.

What was expected as to the relationship between the nursing staff and soldiers? I gather it was not acceptable to talk to other ranks.

Yes, as a matter of fact some of the sisters had brothers and even I had friends. We couldn't entertain them in the officers' part of the mess but usually there was some arrangement made that if there were relatives they could see them - you know, partners - at some section of the mess that they could meet.

Were you briefed about what was expected in terms of those relationships? Who you may and may not associate with and in what manner?

Not particularly, no, but I think it was more or less on a disciplinary - oh, what shall I say - way that the officers had to keep a certain amount of rank for discipline more than anything else.

What about social life? What were the expectations as to how much you could spend out? What hours you could come back and those sorts of things?

Yes, there were definitely .... You had to be in at a certain time and also, for instance, there were times when we weren't allowed to go to places unless we were escorted perhaps by some of our own officers.

Why was that?

I suppose for safety reasons more than anything else because white women by that time weren't very plentiful around the place.

Were there any incidents that you know of?

No, actually things were very, very well conducted.

So what sort of things did you start to do then?

(20.00)Well, we set up - it was the CCS. We set up a small camp hospital and we were going to start and take infectious diseases which was quite foreign to a Casualty Clearing Station but they felt that there should be an isolated section. But before we could do anything the 17th Brigade had then been camped from Gaza right up toward Jerusalem to a place called

Qastina, I think it was called. And by that time the Vichy French in Syria were posing a threat and there were threatened raids so that we were sent as a CCS camp hospital to the top of the line to receive any casualties that might occur. And we were very busy there, not with casualties but with all sorts of sickness and whatnot.

What were the main sorts?

I suppose diarrhoea and they had fevers from - sandfly fever. They were the main things.

Was VD among the infectious diseases that you were to be concerned with at the hospital?

No, we didn't have to deal with them at all.

The troops of course were generally lectured on the perils of VD. Were nurses also warned about the problems that might be associated with relationships in the Middle East?

No, because I think that there was no danger of us being involved with relationships of others than our own people.

So at the clearing station, how long were you up there?

Well, we were there until the first North African campaign and we were then sent down to Egypt and we were camped, set up hospital outside Alexandria to take any sick people amongst the troops that were there waiting to go north to the first Bardia battle. And on New Year's Eve 1940 we were entrained on our way to Mersa Matruh and we arrived at Mersa Matruh in pitch black, hadn't a clue what the area was like or anything and we had to sleep in our uniforms on a wire mattress in an old Egyptian barracks building. And the next morning - they couldn't unload our equipment the next morning - they had to unload our equipment and set up our CCS. By two o'clock we were receiving our first casualties.

What sort of casualties? What was the nature? Serious wounds?

Yes, some of them were, yes. We had a few very serious ones. We evacuated all the ones that could be evacuated. There was a train service to Alexandria and there was an English CCS there as well. And the English CCS took the officers and we took the other ranks. And we were in Egyptian barracks which were big solid buildings with terrazzo floors. They were very good buildings as a matter of fact. We were under British medical command then and the British heads came up and said, 'The sisters can't stay here, it's too dangerous'. And our colonel said, 'Well, they're going to stay'. And he defied them and we stayed but we had to live twenty-five feet underground in a concrete .... It had been built earlier as a regimental aid post - medical aid post, down underground - and there was an engine at one of the entrances that supplied electricity and there was a huge tank in the main part underneath it that was filled with water from the top. That was our living quarters, and we had to go backwards and forwards by ambulance to the hospital to do our duty.

Was the danger from artillery shelling or bombing or both?

Bombing, because Haifa was raided even while we were there - at least not Haifa - Alexandria. Alexandria was raided. Mersa Matruh had been bombed even before we got there.

Did any come close to where you were?

No, we had to .... When we were waiting to go up to Mersa Matruh tents were erected over trenches because they were bombing at Alexandria. We had a flood then and water came in and nearly flooded us out.

What was the feeling about the bombings? Was it a bit frightening?

(25.00) Well, it did seem too far away. It didn't worry us particularly but, you know, it was rather scary to think that they could come as close as that.

How were the British? The British generally had a much more formal system of command. How did you find them in the hospital?

We didn't really have anything to do with them actually in the hospital. It was only our CO dealt with anything to do with them at all. We didn't come under them at all.

Did you encounter the British officers socially and so on?

Not very much. We did in Jerusalem later a bit, but not that much in the CCS because there weren't very many British troops with us there [inaudible]. It was mostly Australians.

Had you been briefed about relations with local people as to how you might behave, or ought to behave and so on?

Not really because I don't think people thought it was necessary to tell us that because we were brought up to behave in a dignified manner and I don't think it mattered.

Were there any orderlies or people working around the hospital who were local people, or were they all Australian and British?

No, we had some Arabs around the place doing some of the chores.

In those days the white man it seemed ruled the world and a lot of native peoples were regarded as inferior. The Arabs were often regarded as 'wogs'. Was that the sort of manner of the way most people related to them?

Well, to a certain extent because some of them were a bit hostile. But we had some Arab casualties at Mersa Matruh. They happened to, on land mines which were scattered around the area, and we had to look after them.

Did that present any particular problems in terms of their attitude ...?

No, our orderlies looked after them. They were alright. They were no problem.

When you say some Arabs were hostile, how did they show that?

Well, mainly in Gaza, not the ones in Egypt at all. We didn't have any trouble with them there. But around Gaza they were .... They used to make rude remarks to us, things like that.

Such as, do you recall the sort of things they'd say?

I wouldn't like to repeat them. (Laughs). We didn't know what they meant until someone explained.

Were you dismayed? I mean, how did you feel about it?

No, we felt a bit revolted, that was all.

What did you attribute that attitude to?

I don't know. I don't know why it was, probably because we'd gone into their area I think and taken over more or less, it could have been.

So what happened next?

What, with regard to them?

No, working with the hospital, I mean.

We stayed at Mersa Matruh until the Australians had more or less driven the Italians back. By this time Greece was invaded by the Germans so we were withdrawn to Alexandria and on notice to go to Greece, and so were the troops, the 18th Brigade. Now the other brigade, it was 6th Division, took over from the 17th Brigade and they were withdrawn to go to Greece. And so we came back to Alexandria and we were on notice to go to Greece.

Did you know you were to go to Greece, or was that just rumour?

No, we knew we were on call. We had twenty-four hour notice. Then Greece fell before we went. Even some of our boys - who went as, they went ahead to sort of organise, just some of our transport people - were taken prisoner. But we didn't get away at all. Well then, when Greece fell the Vichy French in Syria became a big menace and we were transferred then to Nazareth to take the casualties from the central Syrian campaign.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape one of the interview recorded with Jean Hanna about the 2/4th AGH and other things, recorded on 27 September 1990.

To that point had you been taking any Italian prisoners of war who were wounded?

Yes, we took thousands of Italian prisoners up at Mersa Matruh, North Africa. And they were encamped. And a whole Italian hospital came and were under our control at Mersa Matruh.

In fact their equipment was so marvellous that we were thrilled because we were able to equip our hospital, which wasn't well equipped at all, with wonderful medical equipment from the Italian hospital. And some of our hospitals too, were able to take or acquire quite a lot of good equipment.

Were you actually treating Italian POWs at all?

No, they looked after their own.

What about Germans? Were there any wounded Germans that came your way?

Not there, but we got a couple in Syria.

Did you treat them yourself?

Yes, they were in our hospital. And the Vichy French we treated too.

What was your sense on encountering these people that represented the enemy for the first time?

Well, we didn't know at the time who they were. It was found out afterwards that they were. We just knew that they were prisoners but there was nowhere else for them to go.

Were they treated any differently?

No, they were treated as patients.

What was their manner, were they accepting of their condition?

Quite, yes. No worries. When we went back to Syria to Nazareth we had great problems because we had a lot of Indians and a lot of them wouldn't touch food that was prepared by us or there were lots of their religious taboos, do you know what I mean? So we had to get their unit to send some of their own people to do their food. They would eat out of a packet of biscuits which wasn't handled by us or an egg in a shell. As long as the food wasn't handled by us. But we eventually had to get their own people to come and do the food for them.

Would staff tend to think this was damned stupid and a nuisance? What was the feeling about it?

We just understood that that was their religion and they couldn't help that.

With the Italian, French and a couple of German prisoners, were there any you were able to talk to, who spoke reasonable English?

As a matter of fact we were so busy it didn't worry us and I don't personally remember talking to them. Whether any of them did or found anything, I don't know.

Coming from a family that had a church upbringing did it seem sort of strange to go to Nazareth in a way?

Not strange but very, very interesting, *very* interesting. In fact we visited a lot of .... Nazareth particularly as you know .... And we went to Bethlehem and when we were in Jerusalem later we visited all the historical, biblical places. It was terribly interesting.

So what, as far as your nursing work was concerned, happened at Nazareth? What did you do there?

(5.00) We were stationed in a monastery - part of a monastery - a beautiful building. We sisters were quartered in one wing, very well housed there, safely housed. And the patients were in another section. And we had a lot of hard work there. We were very, very busy with casualties from the central sector of the Syrian campaign. Well, when the central sector and the Syrian campaign faded down, we were then transferred to Beirut. We were stationed in part of a mental hospital, three miles out of Beirut on the road to Aleih, halfway up the mountain. Beautiful view over the Mediterranean and the city of Beirut. Beirut was a beautiful city then but of course it breaks our heart now to think what it's been like since.

Were there lulls in the campaign? Were there occasions there where you weren't so busy and could take a bit of extra time off to look around and so on?

Well, at that particular time we were terribly busy because we were very busy at Nazareth and then we were very, very busy at Beirut. In fact we hardly had any break at all. We had to get extra help because we were supposed to look after 250/40 patients and we had over 500. And terribly, terribly sick malarias and dysenteries - very, very ill.

Did the pressure take its toll on people? Did it strain things a bit?

Yes, we all - the sisters all - lost a lot of weight and two of them got malaria, and we were really very, very tired.

How were provisions at the time in terms of food? Was ...?

No trouble at all. There was plenty of food available.

What about drugs and medicines, that side of it? Were you well equipped or would you run short of things?

No, we seemed to be reasonably well equipped by that time. Mind you they'd captured a lot of equipment, as I said, from the Italians. The local people .... The food supply seemed to be .... We were able to buy fruit and things like that in plenty.

What were the main sorts of injuries that you were encountering?

The wounds? I personally looked after two very, very badly burnt soldiers that were blown up in a tank and they were very, very badly burnt. So much so that they couldn't be moved for quite a few days until we got them able to move.

Did they survive?

Yes.

Did it get to you at all, seeing so many young men coming in all the time with wounds that obviously would perhaps cripple them for life?

Of course it affected us but we were so busy trying to look after them that you hadn't time to .... If you started to feel mentally upset over these things it would affect your work so we just had to do the best we could for who we could. It was when anyone that we knew came in that was the trouble. Two of the sisters had brothers in an anti-aircraft unit at Haifa and they were always nervous about what would happen to them.

Did that happen? Were there people ...?

No, they were alright.

Did you encounter anybody you knew that came in injured?

Yes, one boy from Tallangatta. I didn't know him that well but I knew of his family quite well. But he wasn't badly wounded fortunately.

Were there some staff who just couldn't cope? Who it got too much for?

No, they were all marvellous. They were wonderful. They were a wonderful team. The boys, well, they worked and they worked, no problem at all. They didn't cause us any problem.
They were wonderful.

At the busiest times, how would a day go? How would it break up? Supposing you were getting up if you were on an early morning shift, just roughly how would ...?

We'd just .... There were only eight sisters, and I've forgotten how many medical orderlies there were, but we were working almost twelve hours on and twelve hours off and sometimes more. And we just tried, we overlapped a bit, and we just had to cope. But we had to have some break to rest or we couldn't have gone on. And not only that in Nazareth and Beirut we were on quinine all the time, the anti-malarial other drugs hadn't come in then. And of course when you're on quinine - I don't know whether you've ever taken much quinine - but when you sat down to eat, your mouth would fill with this bitter fluid and you could hardly eat. It's a terrible sensation.

How long were you at Nazareth then?

(10.00) Oh my goodness me! You're asking me .... Now wait a minute. Be about six months I suppose. And it was from Nazareth I joined the 2/4th AGH.

How did that come about?

Matron of the 2/4th had been killed and it was a matter of someone being in the next line of seniority being transferred and I happened to be that one.

Was there a choice in the matter or you were just told that you'd have to?

I was just told that it would happen.

So where did you go?

I went to Jerusalem then to join the 2/4th.

This was after they'd left Tobruk, was it?

Yes, after they'd left Tobruk and come out, yes. They had already moved into the old Italian hospital in Jerusalem when I joined them.

How well were service people briefed or made aware of the way things were going on in the campaigns? I mean, prior to the withdrawal from Tobruk did you know much about it?

We didn't hear a great deal at all about the happenings anywhere. I found out long after the war of things that we never ever heard about. And I think that was probably to try and stop any, what shall I say, deterioration in morale, to keep the troops from knowing if there were any disasters. Like for instance, we didn't know what was going on in Europe particularly.

Do you think that policy really worked, because there are others who've said that, for example, when Montgomery took over and he had a policy of briefing everybody about what the great push was all about, it engendered a much greater sense of teamwork and in fact had a much better effect?

Well, I think, I don't know but it may have as far as I know. But we personally didn't know a lot of the things that were happening.

There had been one notorious fracas between the 6th Division and military police of the British, did you know about that, or hear about it?

No.

Did you ever see any signs of hostility between Australian servicemen and British MPs, or that sort of thing?

No.

So having joined the 2/4th what did you start to do there?

I had a bigger group of girls of course under my supervision and ...

Did your rank change?

Yes, because I was only a major in the CCS and then I became a lieutenant colonel.

What did that mean in terms of pay? Was there much of a pay increase?

Our pay wasn't terribly high anyway, not in comparison to today. I suppose it would be at that particular stage.

> Did it seem to make any difference in the way you were responded to by other officers, to have the extra rank?

Yes, of course it did, because I had to work with the CO - the colonel in charge of the hospital - very closely, because that was necessary from the point of view of caring for all the patients and alloting the staff to different sections and seeing that they were efficiently carried out and so on.

> Did you ever have to pull rank as such, where you weren't getting the level of cooperation or response that you thought was appropriate, and you had to make it clear that you wanted things done in a particular way, that indicated your rank?

Not particularly, no. The strange part was that there were quite a number of the nursing staff of both the CCS and the 2/4th Australian General Hospital who were Alfred trained sisters that I knew well long before the war. In fact one of the sisters in the 2/4th trained with me.

> What about the nature of your duties, with the extra responsibility, did it change your working life? Were you becoming more just an administrator as such?

Yes, very much so because in the CCS I was one of the working team but as the matron I wasn't. I was a supervisor.

> So how would you spend your day?

I'd spend my day going round the hospital and seeing that everything was being done that should be done.

> Were there any particular times of crisis or where there were problems that seemed almost insoluble?

No, we had .... There was one thing that happened when we were in Jerusalem, was the first snow for twenty-five years, and it was deep snow. It was beautiful but it meant that we had to walk backwards and forwards from our quarters to the hospital and it meant trudging through snow. But it was beautiful to look at.

> It must have presented problems in the hospital in keeping all the patients warm. Did you have adequate clothing and blankets and all that sort of thing?

(15.00) Those hospitals were very well equipped with - the Italian hospital that we took over. No, it didn't seem to have any problems.

> How did you spend that Christmas with the snow?

Would you like to see a photograph later?

Later, yes, just tell us about it.

It was a whole hospital, actually we were fairly quiet at the time, and we were able to have a whole unit get-together. We had long tables and we had lovely fruit and vegetables and we had a lovely Christmas. Even had some dancing.

And what about in the wards, did they have Christmas as such for the patients?

Yes, the patients had as big a Christmas as we could give them.

What about New Year's Eve?

New Year's Eve I think, if I remember rightly, some of us went to the King David Hotel and had a .... There was some dancing and dining there with other officers.

Were festivities underscored by the news about Japan entering the war and Singapore falling?

At that particular stage, it wasn't until we were having to come back, because when the 2/4th came back from .... When we left Jerusalem, we were on our way to Malaya and of course that had all crumbled and we were off-loaded at Colombo. And we had to set up hospital in Colombo at St Peter's College. The 2/12th AGH was already there and we started to. There were a lot of British troops there, and of course we were air raided by the Japanese while we were there in Colombo.

Did the attack come near to where you were?

Yes, and the fighter planes went up over our hospital and we could even see the fighter planes attacking the bombers. And we even saw the bombers. One came down in the sea just off the Galle Face Hotel.

With the way rumours would float around in the army was it a particularly alarming period? Were there all sorts of rumours going around?

Yes, because people were fleeing from Malaya and a lot of them got back to Colombo by boat, some to Australia and some by boat. But we were told .... We were even told in Colombo to be prepared to be taken prisoner.

Was that frightening?

Yes, we were really quite .... We were very nervous about it.

Just prior to leaving the Middle East, inevitably there'd be some romances between nursing staff and ...

Yes, many of them, yes.

So what was your feeling about this. I mean, as the person who is in charge over all, were there any periods of anxiety regarding relationships?

No, some of them - one or two - married and came back. They had to come back if they married but there were one or two. One of our girls married in Colombo and stayed. She married a man who was on a tea plantation there and she stayed behind.

Did it present you with any disciplinary problems of, say, nursing staff coming back late, or ...?

No. They behaved very well. I didn't have any trouble with the staff whatsoever.

You never had any unwanted pregnancies or that sort of problem?

No, not one. No, I'm very proud of that because it didn't happen in too many of the units.

It did happen elsewhere?

Yes, it did.

How would people have dealt with that problem? What was the attitude at the time?

The attitude was in strictest secrecy. No one knew. They were dealt with by the heads of the medical and they were just evacuated.

Did you know of any particular cases, how they fared? What became of them?

No. Well, it wasn't my .... When I say it didn't - it wasn't anything to do with me because I didn't have it happen with my unit. I didn't have to happen [sic], and therefore I wasn't involved.

You were saying before that there was a special section for VD treatment, but did you ever have men, who in the course of examination for other injuries, during the presentation at the hospital would be found to have VD?

I don't know because we wouldn't be told. The medical men would deal with that.

Was it a bit of a taboo topic? Was it one of those things where it wasn't proper to discuss it with the women and this sort of stuff?

No, it didn't involve us at all so it didn't worry us.

(20.00) So how long did you then spend in Colombo with the uncertainty about what was going to happen?

Now, wait a minute, that will come back. April '42.

How did you find Australia when you got back? Did it seem a different sort of place somehow?

It was to a certain extent, I suppose, because everybody seemed to be involved in doing something for the war cause or something like that. Even my sister was working in a munitions factory. And she was married and she was ten years older than me so ....

Was the American presence conspicuous?

Not particularly, no. Yes. When I say yes, my sister entertained some of the American boys at her home in East Malvern and they were very nice boys. In fact one of them even wrote to my nephew last year.

Because there were some celebrated incidents between Australian servicemen and Americans. Did you get to see anything of hostilities between Australians and Americans?

No. As a matter of fact we had quite a bit to do with the Americans, or some of the Americans, in Borneo because they had patrol boats going all round the area there. And we had quite a bit to do with them. They entertained us a few times. This is a funny incident. I wasn't particularly young at that stage because I was thirty-five when I joined up and we were being entertained one evening - is it alright to say it?

Yes, of course.

We were being entertained one evening by the American officers and the girls were all pretty well warned, you know, how to take care of themselves, that sort of thing. But I was dancing with a very tall, good-looking young American officer and during the course of the dance he said would I like to go and have a look at his pictures. And I said, 'Don't be funny. I'm old enough to be your mother. You can't inviegle me into things like that'.

So how did he take that?

Very well, no problem.

As a more mature person, there's again perhaps a bit of a tradition for matrons in hospitals to have a, if not a formidable manner, at least one that is a bit aloof. Did you feel a need to sort of separate yourself a bit so you could maintain discipline and so on?

No, I used to talk to the girls because .... I used to say to them that I couldn't control them altogether but I did want them to behave with dignity and also to beware of getting into any sort of unpleasant strife, and they were very, very good. I didn't have any trouble with them at all.

Having got back to Australia, did you have some leave then?

Yes. Not much. The girls went out to Heidelberg and I went to a camp hospital out near Dandenong for a few months until we were sent up to Brisbane and we set up hospital at Redbank outside Brisbane. And we got a lot of troops sent from New Guinea.

From the Kokoda Trail?

Yes.

What sort of condition were they in?

Poor, because a lot of them - the ones we got - were mostly malarias and very, very ill patients. What was the .... There was one fever that they got, it was only ...

Was it dengue?

No, it was worse than that. Blackwater fever I think, but it was a sort of malaria and they were very, very ill - very ill. We had a lot of dysentery.

Were there some treatments that turned out to be particularly unfortunate in relation to some of the tropical diseases, that weren't well understood?

(25.00) Actually by that time they had developed .... Atebrin was the first one, and then later on they even advanced with paludrine I think was the next anti-malarial drugs. And of course that made a tremendous difference. The atebrin unfortunately had side effects and it caused a lot of problems with regard to skin trouble. And quite a few of them had to go off atebrin and be evacuated.

There was also rumour around that it caused impotence. Did you get any resistance from people to taking it?

There was resistance, yes, but the same with quinine. Also there was a lot of trading amongst the troops with the natives with tablets. They'd trade them for something perhaps to eat or something like that.

Why would people resist taking their anti-malaria tablets, or their treatment tablets for malaria? Atebrin and so on.

Yes, I think a lot of them didn't like taking them. I think a lot of them got to know .... See, atebrin did have side effects and I think possibly some of them knew that which would cause a certain amount of resistance.

How busy then, were you at Redbank during that period?

We were quite busy there.

Colonel Speirs was still your ...

Yes, he was our CO there.

Did you develop a personal relationship with him, a close relationship?

I wouldn't say a close relationship but a very, what shall I say, amiable relationship. I got on well with him.

Did you ever get the impression, his was a particularly difficult job, or that it was a lonely job, or he did he manage to live with it pretty well?

I think he lived with it very well because he was quite a good disciplinarian despite the fact that he got on well with most of them.

> Incidentally, one other area that was of concern to some people, at least in Tobruk, and whether it was a concern with your hospitals or not I don't know, and that was the use of x-rays where the level of exposure for many people was far in excess of what was thought safe. Was that ever a concern or an issue?

I don't think anyone ever thought about it because when you're in wartime and you're working under facilities that are not, what shall I say, as good as you might have in civilian life, you've got to put up with it. It's probably one of the dangers that you've got to face.

> I think it was at Redbank you also had Italian POW wounded being cared for there?

At where?

> Did you have Italian POW patients at Redbank?

No.

> In the Middle East there were some occasions I think where Tobruk wounded found themselves alongside Italian POWs. Did that ever happen in any of the places you were working?

No, the only time that we had Italian prisoners of war was at Mersa Matruh.

> Were they kept separately?

They had their own medical unit, yes.

> So you didn't have any that were alongside Australian wounded?

No. Their own medical people looked after them.

> As things settled down at Redbank I gather there were education programs and special recreation programs introduced.

Yes, I came down to Melbourne to do a course, a special officers' course at a place called Grong Grong in Toorak Road. And I suppose there'd be about twenty matrons from all the different units. They would have a course of twenty and then another group and so on.

> What sorts of matters were you being taught?

Administration.

> Was it useful.

And military .... Yes, when we joined up we had no idea about military tactics or all that sort of thing and we were taught all about military set-ups and how they worked and all that sort of thing.

What was the value of that for you as a nursing person?

I think more from the point of administration than anything else.

Was the army worse in terms of the paperwork required to keep things in order than, say, working in a general hospital?

No, I think easier because in the general hospital you were training nurses which was a different thing altogether.

What about when George Swinburne took over? Were there changes of style and manner and so on?

No, he was very popular too. He took over before we went to Borneo. He was a much younger man than Colonel Speirs.

Was Colonel Speirs given a send-off?

I can't remember.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification: This is side one of tape two of the interview recorded with Jean Hanna about the 2/4th Australian General Hospital and other matters on 27 September 1990.

Did part of your role as matron also include having to look after as well the public relations side of operations at Redbank? Would you have visiting VIPs?

Yes, we had a group of Red Cross ladies who regularly visited the hospital and brought things for the patients and for the troops. They were a wonderful group of women. I had quite a bit to do with them of course.

Would you have parliamentarians and other people visit that you'd have to sort of turn to especially for? Or was that just a very occasional event?

I remember going to a reception for General - the American general.

MacArthur?

MacArthur. I met General MacArthur and his wife at a reception once.

In Brisbane or?

In Brisbane.

Did you form any particular impressions?

I thought he was a bit autocratic. (Laughs).

How did he display that?

I think it was - he deigned to meet people. He gave the impression that he was above .... It was a sort of, 'I'm here. Be proud of it'.

There seemed to be some ambivalence towards MacArthur after arriving as the hero who was going to save Australia, there was then the 'Dugout Doug' term pinned on him by Australians in New Guinea. What was the feeling by the time you met him? How do you think he was generally regarded?

I couldn't form an opinion because we'd only come back from the Middle East and it was a bit difficult to know because things were so strange to us from the Pacific area at all. We were more or less only catching up on the whole position.

What was Brisbane like generally? Was there a sense that it had been taken over somewhat by the army? Was there that sort of presence?

Yes, there were a lot of Americans there and a lot of army.

Again were there any problems that you became aware of in Brisbane in relations ...

No, we didn't have any problems, no. We had access to go in and out to Brisbane on free time and that sort of thing.

So when did you get word you were to go to Borneo?

Well, I'm trying to remember when it was.

Well, how were you informed?

To begin with we were all told that we would be going to somewhere and we had to learn to swim eighty yards. We had to learn to fire a pistol from our hip. We had to learn to swing across a space on a rope. We had to learn to climb a rope ladder.

Could you do all those things?

We had to.

That must have excited a bit of speculation about where you were going?

That's what I say, it did too. We were told that we may have to climb off a ship and swim ashore. This was why we had to do all this.

And how long before you found out what was to happen, about?

It wasn't very long. Once we were off and we were put onto the hospital ship, *Wanganella*, I think it was.

Was there a sense of anxiety being aboard a hospital ship, given that the Germans had attacked hospital ships and the hospitals in the Middle East had been strafed? Was it anxious?

Well, the hospital ship hadn't been sunk at that stage - our own.

(5.00) Did you expect that the Japanese would respect a hospital ship?

We expected they would, yes.

What were conditions like aboard the *Wanganella*?

Very good. We were off-loaded at Morotai.

Swinging on ropes and ....

No. There was a hospital there already, the 2/7th, I think it was - 2/9th.

Did you all go ashore equipped then with hand-guns?

No. I think by that time they realised we probably wouldn't need it. Anyhow when we got to Labuan we didn't have any of that at all. We were able to go ashore quite well and we set up hospital on the ridge.

When you say you set up hospital, what was involved?

All tents. Everything was tented.

What would you do during that setting up period? What was your role?

Well, I was allocating .... Once I knew which tents were going to be for which areas: surgical, medical, ENT or whatnot, I would allocate the sisters accordingly. Theatre, operating theatre and so on.

Did it all work pretty smoothly?

Very well indeed. And actually it was very tropical there you know, and of course you were just wet with perspiration nearly all the time. They'd rigged up showers and we were entirely in tents and of course every night the tropical rain would come and it would pour down and then the days wouldn't be bad except you'd be perspiring all the time. Of course we started to get .... First of all we got the prisoners from Kuching, and they were in a terrible state.

Was that distressing?

Very, very distressing, very.

There were those sad cases of men who'd got that far and then would pass away having seen ...

Actually we lost very few because .... It was a fantastic thing because you couldn't .... They were starving of course, and they were just skeletons, and you couldn't give them a large amount of food or you'd have killed them. So we had to give them blood and the blood bank and the doctors worked. The troops were marvellous and they gave blood and we just gave blood transfusions after blood transfusions and they were flat out the whole time. And once we gave them blood transfusions so we could start and feed them.

What was the amount of blood that you'd give an individual?

Oh look, I can't tell you that. We had to just do what we could with what blood we could get. And they just kept on. See they had to be typed too. They couldn't give some blood to some, they had to give them the right type of blood. It involved a lot of work.

How marked was the turn around, once you started to give ...

Once you started to give them blood, it was fantastic the way they started to come good.

And after the blood, how would you then build them up again?

You could start and feed them then, but you had to be careful. A lot of them were so starving that they would have just almost killed to get food and we had to be terribly careful that they didn't get at any food before we were able to regulate their intake.

Were there any misguided attempts by people to give more than some of the men should probably have? Friends or soldiers who may have visited?

No, I think they were well informed.

How long would you have some of those individuals then before they'd be well enough to be moved on?

I can't remember now, but I think we had them two or three weeks before they were able to go. As soon as they were fit of course they were evacuated.

Were you able to talk to them about their experiences?

(10.00) Yes. I'll tell you what we did have amongst them. I don't know whether you know about the death march in Borneo from Sarawak. Well, there were two survivors picked up on the beach by the American patrol boats and we got one of those boys. The Americans had looked after him a bit before we got him and he wasn't too bad. But I had a talk to him because I had a very great friend there and he knew him and he'd died on the march, this friend of mine. He told me about it. We also had a Dyak girl flown in with a fractured leg. And also there was a special unit of men in central Borneo that worked with the Dyaks and there were two boys attached to the air force at Labuan who flew a little Auster plane, and they were the contact with this special unit.

Was that Z Force, as it was called?

That's right. These two boys - they were both West Australian boys - used to fly this little plane into central Borneo where the Dyaks and this special unit had made an eighty-yard strip. These two boys .... How I got to know them was that they were at Sandakan and one of the officers who was with the 6th Battalion that I knew quite well, they'd been there, and he sent a sucking pig with them to me at Labuan, and I got to know them quite well. They used to come and see me sometimes when they'd be on shore. Anyhow, they told me about this and they used to bring me special tropical fruits and things from in where they used to go into the Dyak area. And this Dyak girl broke her leg and they flew that girl to us to look after.

Was it badly fractured?

No, I think it was simple fractured. It was set and she was looked after until it was alright.

Did you have other local patients?

No.

What sort of impact did the plight of the POWs have on those who were in the nursing sections and medical sections in terms of their attitude toward the Japanese? Did it affect your attitudes?

Not really, until we started to get the prisoners from Burma. I had a cousin came, one of them, he was an officer with Weary Dunlop. It was then when we started to hear what they'd been through that you began to feel ....

Did it make you angry, or just despairing, or?

Very angry, and I think rather filled with hate which I think still exists amongst a lot of the prisoners of war - must do.

Well, during that period in Labuan did you have time off? Were you able to get around at all?

There was nowhere to go, except we did .... The American PT boats did take some of us for trips up to Brunei and up the Limbang River, I think it was - I'm not too sure, I think Limbang was the name of the river - to see a few of the native settlements and things like that. It was quite interesting.

How did the local people respond towards you?

Quite friendly. No problem.

Where were you when you heard the news then that the war with the Japanese had ended?

We were in Labuan, because I was there when ...

Can you remember the moment? What you were doing?

I really can't.

Were there celebrations?

I think there were but I think at that time we were busy with all the prisoners of war. And then the surrender .... General Wootten was in charge of the area there and ...

Had you met him to that point?

Yes, I'd met him. And he came a couple of times. I think I've got a snap somewhere with him with Lady Mountbatten and the CO and me, somewhere. Then I got an invitation with the CO to the surrender of the Japanese. As a matter of fact I've got a Japanese sword.

Where did that surrender take place? In Labuan?

In Labuan.

Where? Aboard a ship, or on land?

No, on land at the headquarters.

Can you describe the scene as you recall it?

Yes. There was quite a few seats lined up and all the heads of the units were there and General Wootten. And the Japanese general presented his sword.

(15.00) Was this the first time you saw a Japanese?

Yes.

Do you recall your feelings or impressions?

I think I had a feeling of thankfulness more than anything else.

Was there a general security concern at all? Any sense that somebody might try and take vengeance on the Japanese who were to be at the surrender? Did they have armed sentries around to guard, or that sort of thing?

There was always a guard with the general of course, yes. But when we first went to Labuan we had sentries posted round our quarters and a wire fence because there were still Japanese in the jungle and they didn't know where they were or what they might do. I know one night a couple of girls woke up to hear breathing, and they were a bit scared, and they wondered what it was. It turned out to be a wild pig. (Laughs).

Well, what about concerns of security with Australian troops who'd presumably be anxious to try and make their acquaintance again with some Australian women? Was that a concern?

You mean the friends of the girls?

> Well, not friends, just troops who'd been stationed there for a while and would hope to make some acquaintance, perhaps not necessarily wanted.

I don't think they had any problems really. We had quite a few American patients at Labuan, too.

> Were there dances and that sort of thing?

What?

> Were there concerts or dances, or social functions organised? Or were you just too busy?

Yes. No. We did. The CO had found a pile of timber somewhere and they put up a floor and a big marquee over it, and some of the boys had formed a band, and so we had a few dances.

> Did you have any luckless people who just had bad accidents and were severely injured in ways that just had nothing to do with the war, and with war so near end?

Yes. While we were at Nazareth there was a car accident and we had a - now wait a minute, I can't think of his name. He was quite a nice man, too. He wasn't a general. I think he was a .... He was a fairly high-ranking officer and he and his aide had turned over in a car and he had a fracture somewhere I think. But he wasn't with us very long.

> In Labuan I gather only about fifteen per cent of the patients were battle casualties. Malaria and dermatitis was a big problem.

Yes. Dysentery, malaria and dermatitis, and fevers.

> Did you have any personal health problems? Dermatitis, or any of those sort of things?

I got a bit of dermatitis in Labuan from the atebrin but fortunately we left before it got too bad.

> What was the effect of it? How did it affect you?

I had a rash around my neck and down here and on my body.

> Was it uncomfortable? Was it incessant? I mean, what was the nature of the discomfort?

It was just an irritating rash.

> Any effective treatment?

No. The only treatment was to go off atebrin.

And if you did that the risk of malaria?

That's right.

Did any of the nursing staff get malaria?

No, not in Labuan. There were two got malaria with the CCS in Beirut.

After the surrender then, how long before you left Borneo?

Not very long at all, once the sick people were all evacuated which they were quite quickly by air. We finished. We came back.

Was there a sense of urgency, with the war over, everybody was anxious to get back and get out?

I think there was, yes, because once we stopped having to .... Once the troops were all being evacuated - the sick people - there was no need for us. And there was another hospital on Labuan as well. The 2/6th AGH was there as well.

So when you came back to Australia, what then?

I was transferred to Darley for a while.

To do what?

In charge of the hospital up at Darley.

Was there any rank increase there?

Any what?

Was there any change in your rank?

(20.00) No, the same. There were quite a few ex-prisoner of wars [sic] who were still being treated for amoebic dysentery and things that they'd acquired medically while prisoners of war and still had to be treated - a few there. And then I wasn't there very long when I went over to the Northfield Hospital and we had TBs there.

Incidentally what was, generally speaking, the mental state of most of the POWs that you were treating? Were they generally quite lucid or were there some who ...?

No, quite lucid and quiet. I think, just had a sense of relief that they were out and alive.

Having got back to Australia, did you participate in any victory parades or that sort of thing?

Yes, we had parades through the streets of Melbourne, yes.

Was it an exciting time? How do you recall it?

Well, it was because everybody was so thrilled that it was over and that the boys had come home and, oh, there was a wonderful feeling really.

At Darley, how long did you remain there?

I wasn't there very long, only a few months before I went to Northfield, Adelaide.

And what was the basis for the transfer?

Well, because Darley was closing down.

And at Northfield?

They had TB mostly at Northfield.

Had you had much experience with TB?

During my training days I had, because we had TBs when I was training. We had special areas where we had TBs. I'd done TB nursing.

A lot of people I gather had almost the same sorts of fears about TB as people now have about AIDS. There are all sorts of beliefs about how you might catch it and so on. Did you have any personal anxieties?

No.

What was the main method of treatment, then? Just rest and care?

That's right, yes. We had a lass who was a prisoner of war in Japan in our hospital at Northfield. She died later but she was one of .... There were very few girls and they were taken prisoner from Rabaul.

Did she tell you her story, what happened?

Yes. As a matter of fact her story's written up in that - now wait a minute. Which book have I got there?

Well, what do you recall of her story?

They were lucky to be rescued because the Japanese didn't want them to know that they had them prisoners of war there and they tried to isolate them. Two of the girls happened to see an American Jeep and they ran and the Japs tried to stop them but they eventually got to them and told them who they were. And the Americans got in touch with the people and they got them out.

What had been their experience in wartime then?

They were used as coolies in the fields.

And generally badly treated?

Yes. Not as badly treated apparently as the ones in Changi. The girls weren't at Changi, were they? They were at? Near there anyway. But they weren't starved to such an extent. But she had TB.

And she died, you say?

She died later, yes.

With the social attitudes towards TB, were you able to reassure some patients that perhaps things weren't as bad as they supposed?

Yes, well, of course things were developing as far as TB was concerned. They were having more success in treatment.

By this stage had you begun to wonder what your own future held? Were you looking at the possibility of remaining on in the army? Was that an option?

I really hadn't decided. My parents were both dead and my brothers and sister were all married and had their family. I really hadn't decided.

Your parents had died during the war years, had they?

My mother had died a little before the war. My father died at the end of the war. He actually died while I was in Adelaide. It was a request from the Alfred to go back that decided me. The opening came there to go back as the deputy matron to Miss Shaw who was matron and when the opening came up for matron I had applied but she got it ahead of me and then she asked for me when she wanted a second. She asked for me and they sent for me. And then she got married and I took over.

(25.00) What had been your association with her before that time? Had you worked with her during the war years?

Yes, I'd known her. She was matron of the hospital ship, *Wanganella*, that we travelled on. And I met her a few times.

So what was the process for getting out of the army?

Well, I just applied to be discharged and I was medically examined, and was fit, and that was it.

How long did it take?

Not very long, a few days.

Did you have any regrets at leaving?

Not really, no, not going back to my old stamping ground. I was very happy to go back to the Alfred.

> With war's end, with many ex-service people there were all sorts of possibilities of education courses and other supposed advantages that might be available. Did you avail yourself of any particular facilities?

No, I didn't need to really.

> What about association then with your former colleagues?

It's still as firm as ever. In fact the 2/4th sisters here in Melbourne, we meet every second Wednesday and have done since the war.

> Did that continue immediately after the war?

Immediately. It's never ceased. We are still a close-knit family, and there's no question of being matron and sister now. We're all friends.

> What's been the value of that association?

Wonderful. Wonderful. You couldn't imagine it. It's the most wonderful, what shall I say, group of friends that you could possibly imagine.

> When you look back then at your service period during the war, was it a very special time for you?

Very special and very happy in lots of ways, very. And we're still a very, very close-knit unit, as you will no doubt .... I believe you are coming to join us on Sunday. But this is only a small group. Our big reunion's on ANZAC night.

END OF INTERVIEW