



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is tape one, side one of an interview with Betty Rothstadt about the 2/4th AGH recorded on 16 September 1990.

Betty Rothstadt, where and when were you born?

I was born in Adelaide.

When? What was the date?

June the 24th.

Which year?

1911.

Tell us something about your parents and the circumstances in which you were brought up. Tell us about your mother and father, what sort of people they were.

I was brought up in a, I presume you'd say, very comfortable surroundings. Nice suburb. Nice house. Brother and sister.

What did your father do?

My father was a leather merchant.

What sort of person was he? Was he a disciplinarian? A gentle man? How would you describe him?

A very clever business man. A very quiet man.

And your mother, what sort of person was she?

Oh, you know, bright, efficient, attractive woman.

What are your first memories of childhood? Were they easy times or hard times?

Probably easy times, yes.

And schooling, where did you go to school?

I went to school - Adelaide's quite a small place - I went to a very nice school, the local school. I went to a kindergarten first and then to a school in the same suburb where I was born in North Adelaide.

Was that a state school or a private school?

No, a private school.

Do you remember the school?

Creveen.

What was the focus of private schools in those days? What was the sense that you had as to what it was they were trying to impart to you?

Well, I expect in my day they probably imparted to you .... I had a good education but with a girl it wasn't .... I enjoyed school a lot and a girl didn't have to go to the university in my day but you went as far as you could. But I did go to the university.

As you were a child do you have any recollection as to what sorts of things you thought you were going to do with your life?

Not when I was young, no.

Well, as you moved along a bit. When were your first thoughts about what sort of aspirations you had?

I had no .... Actually in my day, because I'm very old now, a girl didn't have to think that far ahead. But as it happened just after I left school I went overseas with my father and on the way back - we went to England, the Continent - I met a Scottish man, an orthopaedic surgeon who was coming to Australia to work and he was the first one who spoke to me about physiotherapy.

Where were you going then? What was the purpose?

Just for a holiday. My father was sick and he went away. In those days you went away for twelve months.

How old were you at the time?

Seventeen, when I went with him.

By boat of course?

By boat, yes.

You said your father was a leather merchant.

Correct.

So what did that mean?

Well, it meant he owned a warehouse where they made and sold all leather goods. In those days all the suitcases - the better suitcases - were all made of leather and even in those days your saddles for horses. I mean, he had sort of a big warehouse in the city.

So in those days I suppose leather would have played a much more conspicuous sort of place in all sorts of things, wouldn't it?

That's right, yes. There were no such things as plastics or anything like that.

What kind of household was it? Was it one where there was a sense of social issues, the politics of the day were discussed over dinner?

In my household?

Mm.

Not as much as they were now, but I mean to say, in Adelaide especially, you were in a social setting where you mixed with people that were like you. In those days the mothers never worked, you had servants, you know, all servants were cheap. It was a different sort of, well, I expect a quieter sort of life but a very congenial life.

Was it a religious household? Was church part of the family tradition?

Not a lot.

A bit?

I am Jewish, you know, but I mean to say, you'd go to the high holy days but that was all.

Was there a feeling of anti-Semitism at all in Adelaide in those days?

There could have been. There weren't a terrific number of Jewish people in my day but if it was there, I didn't feel it. I didn't know it.

You mentioned servants, how many servants might there be ...?

Well, you see in my day - I had a brother and sister - when we were young we'd have a cook and a housemaid and a nurse. Then as you grew older you'd have a cook, and a house parlourmaid and you wouldn't have a nurse. And you'd have someone in to wash and someone to clean. I mean servants were ever so much cheaper in those days.

Was the custom also for the children to be looked after much of the time by the nurse, freeing the mother then for social activities?

Yes, yes.

Did that leave you at all feeling lonely?

Oh no, not at all, no. You just accepted it. And then when you were old enough you went to school and you mixed with others and then, of course, you didn't have a nurse. You only had a nurse when you were young.

What about the social circumstances? Where would you describe yourself? Were you middle class, upper middle class?

Upper middle class.

> Well, what did that mean? What were the sorts of occasions that determined the boundaries of the classes in Adelaide in those days, would you say?

Well, I suppose when I was young I didn't understand really, would I? You were sent to a nice school.

> At that time were there areas of the establishment that were closed to Jewish people? Were there clubs ...?

Probably. I believe in Adelaide now, the Adelaide Club is .... The Melbourne Club, I don't know if they admit Jewish people now. Probably. But as a child I didn't understand any of that.

> Young Jewish people that I got to know well in Melbourne had grown up with a very strong sense that the possibility of discrimination was always there. I was surprised at how real that was. Was that part of your upbringing?

Well I didn't know about that in Adelaide because there were very few Jewish people in Adelaide. But I'm sure it was there, but I didn't know about it as a child. I realise now.

> It wasn't the sort of matter then that your parents felt in some way they had to prepare you for harsher realities in life?

No, because we were not a great religious family. I mean, we never didn't say that we were Jewish, I don't mean that for a minute but as a child I certainly .... True Jewish people, they sort of mix only with Jewish people. But I didn't understand any of that when I was a child because it didn't happen in our family. We had a lot of Christian friends. Is that what you mean?

> Well, as I say in Melbourne, the impression that I've had from many young Jewish people is they're almost warned not to feel too secure, they should be alert to the possibility that there may be a wave of activity against Jewish people.

Well, I think perhaps when you grow older you might realise, but if you asked me as a child I certainly didn't realise. And as I say, as a family we had a lot of Christian friends.

> Many young Australians at that time grew up with a sense of being British? How did you see yourselves?

Very much so. Adelaide was very, very conservative, very much so. Much more socially so than Melbourne really. You never went to town without wearing your gloves and that kind of thing. Oh yes, you spoke of England as home.

> Had your family originally come from England?

No, my father hadn't. My mother did.

You say your mother had. Where had your mother come from then?

Well, her people .... She was born in Melbourne, my mother.

Part of that whole British thing was also based on the sense of Australia responding to the needs of Empire, and that many families had a lot of relatives who'd gone to war. Had members of your family participated in those British activities?

You mean the first world war? No, because don't forget I would have been three when the first world war was on. No, no. I expect some of my mother's relatives did, yes, but I wouldn't have known that.

Well, later at school, did the term ANZAC, was that one that was treated with special significance that meant much to you at all?

Well, I mean, you were always brought up that you were part of the British Empire, that's the only way I can answer that.

The saluting the flag at school on Monday mornings and that sort of thing.

That's right. Things like that. Yes. Mine was a private school. It was a girls' school, a bit like St Catherine's here. Do you know what I mean? The way you imagined it was. I married and came over here. I was brought up in Adelaide.

Were you learning French and Latin?

Yes.

At seventeen then ...

(10.00)I was ready to leave school and as it happened my father was sick and he'd come from Germany and Holland. He had a lot of relatives over there so he thought he'd go for a holiday and see his family. Of course he died quite young and he had very high blood pressure and I think he felt he wouldn't live terribly long. He thought he'd like to go and see them again. That's how I went to England with him. My mother stayed and looked after the rest of the family.

Was it an important trip to you at that time? Can you remember much of it?

Oh yes.

What were the highlights of them? What were the sort of things that still remain with you even today?

Well I remember in those days it was very pleasant travelling by ship. It was good fun on the ship and there were other young people with me. And of course I was young. And we went straight to the south of France. As I said my father was sick and we went to Monte Carlo - all those sort of places. I expect I could have been very lonely really because he had to rest a lot

of the day. I've always been able to not feel lonely really. We were there for three months in the south of France.

Do you remember the liner that you travelled in?

The *Orontes*. I went on the *Oronsay*. I think it was the *Oronsay* or the *Orontes*. It was an Orient line.

And they continued for quite a long time. I can recall them in the '60s even.

Oh, it was good fun. It took a long while to get to the west. It took you about a month to get overseas. And as I say, you were looked after very well. I expect as a girl coming from school it was all very exciting, like a novel, wasn't it, really?

So at seventeen was there by then a sense that the family were looking for you to get married and have children?

Not at seventeen, no.

You weren't being fixed up with another family?

No, nothing like that. I went really to be a companion for my father and then when we were in the south of France his brother from Holland came to meet us there. And then we travelled with him to Holland. I can remember my stay in Paris. Well, I was too young to go to any of these places that people go to. And then we went across and they lived in a place called Arnhem which is near Amsterdam. And I lived with them for three months while my father went to a hospital. And it's amazing when you're young, they could speak French perfectly because they travelled a lot - Dutch people are very good with languages. They couldn't speak any English when I came but somehow or other I made myself understood.

Was there at all a feeling of unease in Europe? Was there a sense that maybe ...

Not in those days. You see, that was only 1927-28.

And when you came back then, you said there was no immediate expectation that marriage was there but was there a feeling for you that you would marry Jewish? Was there that expectation?

Not from my particular family. I didn't understand this Jewish side of it at all until later when I was older.

Could you go out with 'goys' as they were often called?

Sure, yes.

Was it acceptable in those days to have a boyfriend at seventeen? Did you have a boyfriend as such?

Oh, you just had someone from one of the boys' schools would invite you to their dance, not like it is now, no.

Did you have a coming out as such?

I did, yes. But in my days in Adelaide everyone had big yards. We had a tennis court. And you'd have mixed parties in the weekend but it didn't necessarily mean to say that you were going to marry anybody. It was all, I expect, a much slower way of living and I expect you just didn't think of those things.

Had you been across to the east - Sydney or Melbourne - at that time?

Yes. My mother came from Melbourne.

Was there a sense that these were very different sorts of places to live? Adelaide still maintains a very special and separate kind of existence in a way, doesn't it?

Yes, I expect it does. People in Adelaide are much friendlier because it's much smaller. There's much more entertaining at home, or there was in my day, because people used to come from interstate and they didn't fly. They'd come by train or boat and you'd entertain them when they were in Adelaide.

So returning then from Europe at seventeen, what happened then for you? Did you continue schooling?

No, I went to the university to do physiotherapy.

Whereabouts did you do that?

The Adelaide University.

What was the nature of the course - physiotherapy then? How extensive was it?

In my day it was only two years, now it's four years. We probably got through quite a lot of .... I mean it was the same university and you spent a lot of time in the medical school. We did two years' anatomy with the med. students. And then you did your practical work in hospitals.

Did you enjoy it in fact?

I loved it, yes.

So at the end of your two years at university?

Well, I was eighteen by the time I came back from Europe, wasn't I? And then I was twenty when I got through. And then they decided you couldn't do private work until you were twenty-one. So I did what they call honorary work at the Adelaide Hospital. They let you work there but you couldn't take any private patients until you were twenty-one.

Was there the sense that somehow as something less than an adult you weren't mature enough? What was the sense of that?

I've got no idea. I think perhaps they hadn't had many students. I've got no idea. But it was after our year that you couldn't begin, say, till you were nineteen so that you would be twenty-one when you got through. Then they made the course three years and four years. There was no harm of that then.

(15.00) So at twenty-one, what then? Did you set up in private practice?

When you say 'set up', I used to have private patients.

Well, what sorts of people and what kinds of conditions did you begin to treat? What were the more common things?

Well, I expect in my day there was an awful lot of .... You've probably never heard of infantile paralysis, poliomyelitis. Well, that's what I had a lot of. I always liked working with children. I liked the work at the Children's Hospital best and therefore I always worked with children. And then, as I say, there was a polio epidemic and I did quite a lot of work with that.

What were you able to do? Was it essentially a matter of helping to maintain mobility and trying to minimise the loss of movement and so on?

Well, as a matter of fact, you've probably heard of Sister Kenny, have you?

Yes.

She was only a sister - she hadn't had any training - but she worked up in Queensland and she had her own way of treating poliomyelitis and we didn't agree with it but I think it woke up the whole of the profession about perhaps considering different ways of treating it. But her way as against ours - we put people into splints to try and stop deformities and she didn't believe in that. Consequently the parents liked her. They thought it was cruel putting children into splints but it was the only way of stopping them getting deformities because the strong muscles would work against the weaker muscles.

Did you meet Sister Kenny?

I didn't, no. I didn't ever work differently. I was very conventional in how I worked and [inaudible].

So did her work begin to replace, or her approach begin to replace the splints method?

I don't think - I shouldn't say I don't think it was all that successful - but she did good work up in Queensland where no-one had treated these people at all. So in that way she did do good work.

And apart from polio then, what were the other main sorts of things that you'd be dealing with?

That I did? Only because I was interested in children, I liked it so much. I came over to Melbourne and worked in Melbourne just before war broke out. And there was a doctor here, Dame Jean MacNamara, that did a terrific amount for children with infantile paralysis here.

What led you to come to Melbourne? That's a fairly adventurous move.

It was adventurous in that I met some very good friends over here - relatives - and they invited me over to stay for a fortnight and I enjoyed it very much in Melbourne. Then I thought I had the chance to work in Melbourne because there was a polio epidemic and I wrote over and Dame Jean said, yes, she would have me on the staff but she'd like me to train at one of her hospitals for a few months to learn their methods which I was willing to do. I was what they call an 'itinerant masseuse', in those days. You were paid so much and then you were paid so much for your car. I've always liked working alone. And in that way I worked in Melbourne till Dame Jean was satisfied with my work and then I used to work out in sort of Coburg way. You had so many patients on your book that I used to go to about thirty homes.

Were they mostly also polio victims?

I only treated .... That's what I was doing - work with polio. There was a big epidemic here. A doctor used to come out once a month and we used to hold a clinic in the local church hall or something. I was very happy. I did that for two years.

What was the mood as far as polio was concerned? Were there a lot of misconceptions? Were people very frightened?

You would be if you had children because it attacked anybody. Kiddies got what you would think was 'flu and then after the 'flu went this paralysis came. So you had to keep them in .... We had them in these splints. You wouldn't have remembered seeing children wheeled about in prams, these great big prams. We used to go and treat the children. A lot of physios did it in their homes.

Well, what was a fairly typical treatment? Supposing you'd gone to a home what would you do?

Well, you'd take them out of their splints. You'd give them exercises. The whole thing was to try and exercise the weaker muscles. And then to put them in splints to give them a rest.

How long would a treatment take?

I expect twenty minutes, half an hour or so. And then you'd teach the mothers. The mothers were wonderful. I've got so much respect for working people. These mothers were absolutely wonderful. They had to take the children out of the splints and give them baths each day. They did everything.

In coming across to Melbourne, what about the effect on your social life, as it were? In Adelaide there's always been an establishment. Was upper middle class part of the establishment?

Sure. But in Melbourne as a matter of fact I had these relatives and people I met and I had a very good time socially. I didn't go out on week nights much but I used to go out on the weekends and they introduced me to people. I boarded.

(20.00) Where were you boarding?

As a matter of fact I was boarding in Dandenong Road. Would it be called Armadale? You know the top of Dandenong Road near Malvern.

Do you remember what you paid in those days?

I know what I got, and I got such a big .... I was paid .... Now what was I paid? I think I was paid five guineas a week and I was given two guineas a week to run my car. And out of that I boarded. But I did have a little bit of private money of my own. But I lived very well.

In Melbourne in those days, and it continued for a long time, many of the more established clubs were closed to Jewish people, the Melbourne Club I think was one of them.

I know they were. I think it could still be.

Did you start then to get a sense that there was a different sort of attitude towards Jewish people?

Well I met a lot of Jewish people over here.

Did that make you conscious that there ...?

Actually, it was the first time I had met many Jewish people, when I came to Melbourne. They were wonderful, you know, very kind to me. They were sort of relatives of my mother's and father's who lived in Melbourne.

Was it puzzling to you to find that there was this sense that somehow ...?

I still didn't feel it because I was mixing with them. I didn't try to get into the Melbourne Club, did I? A girl. I didn't know till I had children of my own that today some of the golf clubs won't admit Jewish people. One of my daughters was a very good sport and a great friend of mine wanted to put her up and she was very embarrassed. She had to tell me that she couldn't put Libby up because we were Jewish. But I didn't know till then.

How did that strike you? I mean what was your reaction to that? Did it just seem puzzling or hurtful or ...?

Well, I expect it's hurtful but you've got to accept it. I mean it didn't make me feel inferior. It didn't make me feel cross. I think they were the losers.

With war starting to loom, when did you first become conscious of the possibility that war was going to touch this country?

Well, I expect I didn't realise. I realised in 1939. I was with these people who were relatives of mine who were very good to me. It was one Sunday and we were listening to the wireless in those days.

> What was the circumstance? Were you in somebody's lounge room in a house?

That's right. In a lovely home, yes. And it came out that war was to be .... You heard over the air that war was to be declared and Australia was going to send forces and all the rest of it. And I can remember my hostess thinking, 'Oh, my goodness' thinking of their husbands having to go. And I was the one as it happened that went.

> How did it strike you? Was it chilling? Was there an ominous feeling about it?

Oh yes. It seemed so far away.

> So what led to you joining up?

Well, as a matter of fact I was so surprised. I was, I expect, out somewhere one night. I had no idea they were accepting physios. I knew that they were .... Doctors were going and sisters were going. I doubt whether they had physios in the first world war. And as soon as I heard - I wasn't married - I thought, well, I'll make enquiries.

> How did you do that?

I can't remember how I did it. But I found out they did accept physios. As a matter of fact a friend of mine, we went to lunch with a great friend of hers who was a sister who .... She was going, she'd enlisted and she'd been accepted. And she was going fairly soon to the Middle East and she was telling us about it. I don't know where I did. I made enquiries and I found yes, they were accepting physios. And of course I had to enlist as a South Australian - I was a South Australian so I enlisted as a South Australian.

> What was the basis of you wanting to do it? Was there a sense that it offered excitement and adventure? Or was it doing something for home and country?

Both. I thought how lucky I was to do it and what reason did I have not to do it.

> So where was the induction? How did you actually set about joining up? What was the process?

I can't remember that but I know that I applied to enlist. I can remember dropping the letter in the box and thinking, 'Oh, I've done it now'. And of course my father wasn't alive. My mother was a widow and I had to write and tell my mother and she was upset of course. And then you just waited to see when you would be accepted and to which hospital you'd be accepted.

> And how did you find that out?

You were notified by mail and then you had to see about getting your uniform which I had to get in Melbourne. And then I had to go across eventually to Adelaide where I enlisted proper in Keswick in Adelaide.

What was the uniform?

Our uniform was .... The sisters wore grey, we wore navy blue.

Can you describe it? What did it consist of?

(25.00) Well, it was exactly the same as .... It was a navy blue, what do you call it, a jacket and skirt and a sort of a bright blue shirt with red shoulder tabs and a navy blue hat. It was a very attractive uniform.

And then you actually joined up in Adelaide, did you?

I joined up as a South Australian. I had a South Australian number.

Did you have to make your own way, or did they provide you with transport to go to Adelaide?

I think I would have had to pay for my own way to go to Adelaide but I can't remember. I know I joined up in Adelaide and I waited in Adelaide to be told when we would sail. And you didn't know where you were sailing to. I knew I was going to the Middle East. And then you came across .... When the time came you got all the luggage and everything in Adelaide and I left from my mother's home but then I came across - and we called it then the *Adelaide Express*, do you know what I mean - by train to Melbourne and then from there we were taken to the barracks in St Kilda Road.

Had you been in barracks in Adelaide, or were you just at home?

No. As a physio it was quite an adventure in a way because I'd never even lived in a sisters' mess. I'd never lived in a hospital. When the sisters trained in those days they always lived in hospital but as a physio you didn't.

When you joined in Adelaide then, before coming across to Melbourne were you formally part of the ...?

2/4th. Oh yes. You were told your hospital, oh quite some time, of course, you've got no idea when you're going to sail you see. You're probably told months before.

Was there immediate training in Adelaide? Did you do any training?

There was no training.

So you weren't, as it were, inducted into the army in a formal way where you presented yourself each morning for the start of your day or anything?

Oh no. But when I went to the Keswick Barracks you sort of had to swear .... I presume that you joined up and I presume we had to sign. I've forgotten all that. Oh yes, because I can

remember them saying, 'You're in the army, now'. You know the saying, all that kind of thing, out at the Keswick Barracks but then you did it and you just waited to be .... You got your uniform and you were told a list of all the things you have and the luggage you had to have, and the luggage had to be marked and everything. And you just waited to be told a date you'd go.

Were you given advice about what you were allowed in the way of personal effects and those sort of things?

Yes.

What about cosmetics and that sort of thing? Were there regulations about what was proper and not proper in the way of make-ups and ...?

I expect we didn't think much about it - never have thought much of make-up to this day, no.

So when you were coming on the train were you coming with other people who ...?

Yes, when we went to the train, you know, that was the beginning of it. There was only one other phsyio with me from Adelaide and I think there were ten sisters on the train. I'd never met anybody before. And just my family saw me off at the Adelaide station and that was it.

Was it tearful?

It wasn't a very happy time. I felt sorry for my mother. She had no idea when she would see me again or had no idea where you were going. You just had 'AIF Abroad' marked on your luggage.

Did it touch you? Do you recall were you emotional yourself?

I'm sure I was. I can remember saying to my sister, 'Oh, I don't want to do this again'.

What can you recall of the trip on the train itself?

It was only one night from Adelaide.

But was there a sense that now here you were, of growing excitement, this is it, we're all together, and that sort of thing?

Am I stupid, or not? You were there now, you couldn't get out of it. And then we went from here .... When we got to Melbourne we went straight to St Kilda Road.

When you were being assembled was there a shock in the sense that suddenly this was the army - that you were addressed like you were part of the army? Can you recall how you were dealt with?

Well, you were just a number, weren't you? We all had numbers.

Were you ordered to parade and get together in that sort of way?

I didn't have - nothing like that in Adelaide. When we went to Melbourne you had to .... When we went to the barracks, you knew then you were the 4th AGH. I assume you went to the spot where all the sisters were for the 4th AGH.

Where was the barracks?

In St Kilda Road. And then we were told to .... We had to come back, I think, at two o'clock. So I took this other physio with me and we went to my friends' place. They lived in Malvern. And they drove me back to the barracks at two o'clock and that was it.

What happened then?

Then we were driven to .... Where do the ships go from?

Well, down in Port Melbourne, at the docks?

That's right.

How long then in between arriving in Melbourne before you were to go aboard the ship?

I think we would have got into Melbourne early morning and then we had to be back by two o'clock at the barracks.

It was a pretty swift departure, wasn't it?

Oh yes. Well, you knew it would be. I mean you were on your way when you left Adelaide.

What sort of rank did you have at that point? Were you given a rank?

As a matter of fact, as I said, the physios, by mistake - I don't think the sisters were given a rank - were put in as sergeants [inaudible] on the troopship and it was a bit of mix up there because there were five physios ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape one of the interview recorded with Betty Rothstadt on 16 September about the 2/4th AGH.

You were saying there is a bit of mix up when you went aboard the ship as to where ...

Well, we didn't realise that because we went on the *Mauretania*, but it had been turned into a troopship. I mean not all the .... You can imagine in the cabins, for instance, there were no showers, things like that. It had been made a troopship. But we were with the sisters.

It was a rather different ship to the *Oronsay*, I dare say.

Well, probably it was bigger. You didn't have any of the amenities, no, of course it didn't.

What were the facilities like? Can you recall the actual going aboard, how it was organised and so on?

That's when you did feel apprehensive, when you went up this huge gangway and that was it you were on the ship. I shared a cabin with another girl and that's all there was to it.

In being directed aboard the ship, who were the commanding officers and how were you addressed?

We were always addressed by our surname because the sisters all went by their surname. Strange enough I was always Betty but ...

Well, what about to other army personnel, how would they address you?

Well, of course the matron we called Matron, all the sisters were called Sister so-and-so.

What about regular army people, how would they greet you? Or if they were instructing you or giving you orders, do you recall ...?

Well, you see, as a physio you got your orders from the medical officer which you always had got.

So you weren't sort of taken under the wing of a section of the army for that purpose?

We were under the matron for the way we behaved, for our behaviour, for our discipline. We were exactly the same as the sisters. We were in a sisters' mess, do you understand? The matron was your superior. And when I went to the 2/4th there were four physios and one senior physio. Now the senior physio was a Melbourne physio and there were two South Australian physios and two other Melbourne physios. Therefore there were three Melbourne physios and two South Australian physios. There were only five physios in our hospital. We were a 600 bed hospital which carries five physiotherapists.

What was the scene down at the wharves? Was it one of excitement? Were there lots of people boarding?

Oh no. It was all supposed to be very secret. You just did what you were told. We went up the gangway and you were told which cabin to go in, to stay there till you were told what to do.

So you had a two-berth cabin, you said?

I was with one other girl, yes.

Can you recall the nature of the cabin? How it looked and so on?

No. It was just a cabin.

Well once you were aboard, how were you briefed about what the expectations were of, say, your behaviour, what you'd be doing and so on?

Oh yes, you were talked to. I remember we were spoken to. We had to assemble on the deck and some brigadier or other spoke to us and then you went back to your cabin and I guess you were told when to go for meals and so on and so forth, and your behaviour. The matron would have addressed us and told us. Actually the matron we had then was later killed. We didn't all .... The men might have all gone together but the sisters didn't all go together. We physios all went together. Some sisters went to England first and met us in the Middle East. You didn't have your whole contingent of sisters then.

So when you were boarding the *Mauretania*, how large a contingent was going aboard?

How many sisters were there?

Well, just what other personnel ...

I've got no idea of the number - might have it in the book. I've lent you the book.

So of the group that you were with how many were you together?

Well, let's see, ten sisters came with me from Adelaide - I've got no idea. I can't remember. It might be in the book.

(5.00) What were the relations between physios and nurses? Was there a sense of different status at all?

Yes, I think so. Of course when you worked, you see you worked in certain wards and got to know perhaps the sisters you were working in the wards with. But don't forget a lot of those girls had even trained together. I as a person knew nobody. I was really very brave. I didn't know a physio. I'd never met the Melbourne physios. And the Adelaide physio - as a matter of fact she was younger than I was - I hadn't met her before.

Coming back to going aboard the ship, had you then been told where you were going?

No.

Were there rumours about?

There were always rumours in the army. You lived on furphies, as we called them. We knew we were going to the Middle East.

You knew?

That's right. Then we sailed.

How long were you aboard before you sailed?

I don't know.

Was it a short time or a day or more, do you recall?

I think we began to leave then but you had no idea when you might have stopped. You didn't know where you were going. We called in at Fremantle.

Was it day or night when you were pulling out?

Well, we had to be at the barracks at two o'clock. I expect we came down to Port Melbourne by about three or four. I've got no idea. I expect towards the end of the day we pulled out. I really can't remember.

You don't have a sense of sort of strong feelings about leaving shore or that sort of thing?

No. Don't forget my family were in Adelaide. I'd gone. I was South Australian.

How was the voyage around to Fremantle? Was it rough? It can be very rough.

It could have been. I can't remember.

What about conditions aboard? Do you remember the quality of the food and those sort of things?

It wouldn't have been like a first-class liner but we had plenty. We had enough to eat.

During the period of the voyage did they set out a routine where you were to attend classes for drills or ...?

No, we always had our sea transport bag. We had that sort of drill. You had your stations to go to if anything happened.

So what sort of things did you do during the voyage?

Well, being me, I probably did a bit of sewing. You know, it's a long time ago.

What about the ship's crew? How would they address you? Was there saluting part of the ...?

Well, they didn't address us, the ship's crew.

Were there rules about fraternising?

Oh, a lot of rules about fraternising. There is a lot of discipline in the army. Poor things, I can remember different soldiers were supposed to be guarding the sisters but you never spoke to them, you know.

Would they salute you?

No. It's only Americans that salute all the time.

Did you have sergeant's stripes on your sleeve?

No, but when we became lieutenants we had two pips, I remember that. We had a pip, didn't we? Then when you're captain you got a second pip.

That came somewhat later though, I take it?

Yes. After a while they decided to give the sisters rank and all sisters were lieutenants so we were lieutenants.

So at Fremantle you were just there for a day, I think, was it?

That's right, not a whole .... We pulled in in the morning. We were allowed to go ashore to do what we wanted to do and then come back.

And what was the feeling there? Were you taking more people aboard?

Yes, we would have taken some Western Australian nurses aboard. And I don't know, I've got no idea about the troops. We didn't see them. You didn't fraternise with the troops.

But they were boarding there?

Probably. I don't know.

Again, fairly low key, was it?

I wouldn't know. Very low key, yes.

And then you went to Ceylon?

That's right.

What about the voyage to Ceylon, how was that? Was there any entertainment or that sort of thing?

Not as normal, no. I mean, it wasn't like a liner when you went before, like the way it used to be. No.

Was there anxiety about submarines on that part of the ...?

Yes. That's why we did this .... We always had to have our sea kitbag with us. And you did a lot of this different stations you had to go to if anything happened. And they'd have mock ones so that you knew what to do.

How long did that part of the trip take about? Do you recall?

Would it have taken about nine days, probably from Fremantle to Ceylon, I should think. And don't forget you were zig-zagging.

So during that part were there special induction courses? Were you being briefed on different aspects of military life and that sort of thing?

I wasn't, no. If I did, it didn't make an impression on me, no.

What were your expectations as to what it was you were going to be doing? If most of your expertise had related to polio, what did you suppose you'd be doing?

Yes, well, I thought, 'Poor men'. Well, no, I knew there'd be no more polio. The doctors would say what they wanted you to do. You still had your phsyiotherapy training.

(10.00) You disembarked in Colombo and were transferred to another ship called the *Nevasa*, was it?

Nevasa, you're right.

How long did you spend ashore?

Well, we only had the day in Colombo, or not a whole day. I remember going to, was it the Gaulface[?]? One of those hotels. I must have had a meal there. We only had a matter of hours in Colombo. No, we didn't disembark there, we went on to Suez.

So what was the *Nevasa* like as a ship?

Oh, it was very slow. I think they used to signal 'Where are you?'. We were the last one.

How many in the convoy? It was quite a big convoy, was it?

Oh well, the thing is that we were split up then. The *Nevasa* is only a small ship. There were quite a few ships took us on from Colombo onwards. It wasn't the *Mauretania*.

It was rather more crowded I gather, the *Nevasa*.

It could have been but I didn't realise that.

At Port Tewfik, was it, there was an air raid?

Is that Suez?

Yes.

Could have been. I wouldn't know. We had a lot of air raids and things.

Did any shots get fired near the ship, or shells near the ship?

I wouldn't know.

Where were you?

I don't know (laughing).

So where did you disembark then?

At Suez. And wouldn't we have gone .... Oh no, dashed if .... Did we go to ...? Have you got your little book?

It's alright. I've just got some general notes.

Where did we disembark at Suez?

Well, it says El Kantara.

Oh, I know, El Kantara was where the 2nd AGH was, that's on the canal.

What were the sort of circumstances there?

At El Kantara? It was big, it was a 1200 bed hospital. I thought we went to the 2/1st CCS first of all at Gaza. I'm sorry, I've forgotten exactly when we went. I know we worked .... We might have stayed with the 2/1st for a while but I know we worked at the 2nd AGH.

Where did you stay? What were the sort of conditions you were staying?

Well, I was mostly in tents because we were sort of just the added personnel. I spent a lot of my time in tents.

Can you describe one of the tents? What the area was? How it was set up? The sort of things you'd have in it?

They were what they called EPIP tents. They are big tents and they had floors.

Made of wood?

Oh yes.

And what sort of bedding and so on, did they have there?

We had stretcher beds from the hospital. We had beds, like they have four, one in each corner. And when we were at El Kantara a lot of the staff were in huts but we were in, I expect because we were attached, we were in tents.

What about for personal use? Would you have cupboards or ...?

No, you would just have a box next to your bed.

When did you see and begin to treat your first men then?

Oh, I didn't even worry about that. Oh, in any of the hospitals.

> Can you recall the first sorts of wounds you were involved with, or the first treatments that you were involved with?

I expect there were always backs, weren't there? I can't remember the first ones I had, no. But if you're a physiotherapist it doesn't matter much where you are, you are just doing your specific work.

> Was it hard physical work as such because of the time that you would be required?

How do you mean the time that you would be required?

> Well, were you spending fairly full days? Were you working long hours?

Yes.

> Was it tiring in that respect?

No, don't forget you're young.

> So what are the things that remain with you most about that period?

When we were attached to the 2nd AGH? Well, as a matter of fact you were just working in a hospital. You went to whichever ward you were told to go to or you worked in the physiotherapy department. I happened to work with another physio in the x-ray department because they had room there. But you just did whatever work you were asked to do.

> What was the sense of morale? What was the feeling at the time?

You mean your discipline?

> Well, no, not so much the discipline as how you felt about .... Was there at all the sense of dismay to suddenly find so many men who were disabled or badly injured in one way or another? Did that touch you at all?

No, you accepted it. You realised they would be.

> How about the discipline? How was that?

Oh, there again, it didn't worry .... I mean you knew that you had to do certain things. That certain things were expected of you. For instance, when you went on leave you always had to be home at a certain time.

(15.00) Where would you go on leave?

Well, when we were at Kantara we went into Port Said.

Tell us about Port Said. How did it seem to you at that time? What are your memories of it?

It was the one place we could go and have a hot bath. We used to go .... You'd have one day off a week. And you always went with other people. You were never alone in the army you had to travel with other people. And you go into Port Said and you'd go to one of these, would they be? I expect a hotel. And you'd pay to have a hot bath which was a great luxury. And then you'd have a meal. And sometimes you went to the officers' club, there was always the officers' club. You'd do a little bit of shopping and you'd come back and that was your day off.

What was the feeling about the local people? How were they seen and regarded, as you recall, by people in the army?

You mean the Egyptians?

Mm. Were you told you oughtn't fraternise with them, or ...?

We didn't fraternise with them, but you went to their shops if it suited you, of course you did. You didn't fraternise with them at all.

Was it exciting to you at that time? A sense of the exotic and so on.

Well, it was exotic but don't forget you didn't have much money to spend anyway. You didn't have anywhere to put things. You didn't buy things like you buy them now. You'd just buy what you wanted or perhaps you'd buy something and hope, well, you'd try and send it home, hoped it got home.

What about the nature of the climate? Did it seem unbearably hot or unduly hot?

It was hot. The sandstorms there are very hot but you had a summer uniform which you wore and which could be very cold at night in the winter - freezing.

What about the sandstorms, were there any that were particularly bad?

Well, they are very bad. We used to wear these glasses, they were army issue, that you wore around because the sand was very - it's the desert, you can imagine all the wind - it was very cutting, all that.

Did it permeate everything? Did the sand get into all the equipment and so on?

Oh yes, but you had only your tent and the floor and your one box next to your bed. You were alright. And don't forget what struck you when you first went .... What struck me was these huge ablution blocks. You realise you're all in tents or huts but there's only one ablution block and about twenty women cleaning their teeth and all these lines after. It was quite a different life. It was good for you.

What about relations with officers? How did the officers regard you? I gather it was acceptable to fraternise with officers.

Yes, and it was quite unfair in that way because if you were on leave and there was someone from home and he wasn't an officer you weren't allowed to bring him into the mess. They had to be officers, didn't say they were gentlemen.

And did you meet some who weren't gentlemen?

Probably. (Laughs). No, but there was that much over there we used to .... You'd go to Cairo on leave if you had a week's leave. And it was quite exciting. This is where we could stay at hotels like Shepheard's. Whatever the tariff was on the door, you paid exactly half.

Were there social functions where officers would take nurses out and so on?

Yes, they had officers' clubs. They could take you and we could invite officers into the mess but all we could offer them was drinks. You'd buy a book of drinks and just tear off. That's all you could offer them as hospitality.

Were there romances?

Oh, probably a lot.

But there were none that remained with you particularly?

No, I was very lucky. I married. I married a doctor from another hospital. And I can remember after he married he said to me, 'I expect you thought I'd drink an awful lot of whisky, that's all you saw', because I'd never been much of a drinker but he really wasn't either. But that's the only way you could entertain people.

But that was later on I take it, that you married?

Yes, I married towards the end of the war. I married before the war was over.

Well, from the point of arrival then were there particular events that occurred. I mean were there, for you, any special highlights as such of that period?

How do you mean?

Well, having arrived, you found yourself ...

Having arrived where? Kantara?

Yes, and you're living in these tents. What were the next things that happened, that sort of stand out?

What happened? Oh, you worked and then when you worked you changed your uniform, and we always used to went .... We called them mess, where you sit and mess where you dined. You'd perhaps have a .... All you could do was with your friend have a drink and then go into mess which was always the same, a roast - we used to say roast camel - roast potatoes and

things. And you stood up when the matron came. You didn't begin until the matron ate which was good and then we had the same .... Don't forget the cooks were soldiers, poor things, they'd probably never cooked in their life before and they had to cook for these huge messes.

(20.00) Were there formal entertainments as such?

Oh well, you invited .... The formal entertainments were that the officers' messes surrounding you, they'd say put up on the list they wanted twelve sisters and you'd put your name down if you thought you'd like to go. Then you'd be collected altogether and taken and brought home altogether. That was the social entertainment.

You mentioned there was fairly strict discipline, well, what ...?

Yes. You always had to be in by twelve o'clock at night. No excuses.

What happened if you weren't?

Oh, you got into great trouble. You'd be confined to barracks for a while.

Did that happen to you?

Yes. It really wasn't my fault. That happened in Colombo later.

What was the incident, do you recall?

I went to an air force mess and coming back the car did actually - bringing us back - did break down and I think about five of us were caught coming in late. And the matron always said later she caught the wrong girls because I was rather a good girl, but I was confined to barracks for a fortnight; it didn't hurt.

Was that onerous?

I didn't mind terribly. I thought it was really rather funny. No, but some of the girls hated it.

Were there any who got into a lot of trouble? Who found it hard to adjust to the requirements?

I don't know. I expect some did.

Were there any scandals, were there any ladies became pregnant, or ...?

Oh yes, but in our hospital strange enough, perhaps it was luck, we didn't have any girls that became pregnant. Poor girls would be sent home if they were.

Was there a sense of disgrace attached at that time?

I expect you'd feel a bit silly, wouldn't you?

Now later on I take it, in February 1942, you went to Alexandria by truck. Did you go, the 2/4th?

I think you might have that wrong. Now, I know what you're thinking of. You mean on the way back from Tobruk?

Well, I've simply got here, 'On 28th February 1942 the 2/4th went by truck to Alexandria and on to the *Knight of Malta*.

No, look, I'll tell you where you've got that wrong. The 2/4th - those were the men.

Oh, I see.

We females, we were attached to the 2nd AGH at Kantara and the men went first. You'll hear all about their trip up by Malta because that was exciting. They had a shipwreck and things. Have you come across that yet?

No, you're the first person I've started with.

Oh no, but it will all be in the book. And they were to establish a hospital in Barce - this is our 2/4th. But by the time they got there to establish it the Germans were coming back again therefore they came further down and established the hospital in Tobruk.

So how long did you stay at El Kantara?

I think we were there for about eight months waiting for them to establish .... I can't remember the time, I really can't. But then they sent for us when the hospital was to be established and we went up. I can't remember the ship. I think we went up on a hospital ship from Alexandria and then we worked in the hospital only for, I think, it was just over a fortnight and then the British insisted that the 2/4th got rid of all their sisters because the Germans were coming down. And we felt pretty awful. We were sent out. We came out, I think it was on the *Vita*, another hospital ship with very sick patients, and we came down to Alexandria. And that's where the hospital was so marvellous. They functioned for nine months without any sisters at all, they only had orderlies. They did a wonderful job. And that's when we sisters were sent back to the 2nd AGH again.

What were relations with orderlies? You had male orderlies, presumably.

Well, I couldn't tell you that because as a physio I didn't work with that, you see. We just worked in the wards and I expect the orderlies were doing their job, but I didn't know any of the orderlies really till later on.

So what happened for you then after the move? How long were you at your new post before you were withdrawn, or it was said that everybody should be - all the women should be withdrawn.

In Tobruk? We were only there for a fortnight, the women.

Where did you go from there?

Then we came back to Alexandria and went back to the 2nd AGH at Kantara.

(25.00) Was there a strong feeling about having to ...?

We hated coming out. I mean, how do you think the patients felt the next morning when all the sisters had gone. Wouldn't they feel dreadful? And they were bombed there. They did a magnificent job, all the men.

Was there a strong feeling the place was going to be overrun?

That's right, yes.

What about relations with the British? Had you had much to do with the British?

Well, I hadn't. I don't know.

What about socially? Did you meet British officers?

Well we were only there in Tobruk for such a short time so I didn't meet any.

So where did you go from Tobruk?

That's when we came back to the 2nd AGH in Kantara again and we worked there until the hospital came out.

And how long were you there that ...?

Well, I can't remember. It must have been quite some time because when the men came out they were terribly thin. They had lived on rations and they'd been bombed and worked for this nine months and the hospital was established in Jerusalem for a short time but I personally didn't go there. I was working at a British hospital then.

What was the British hospital?

I can't remember the name of it. It was the other side of the canal. I'd been doing a lot of work with, in a plastic .... I was very lucky, I was trained in a plastic surgery unit. When I was at the 2nd AGH they trained a physio from each hospital in plastic surgery because they didn't know which hospital would have a plastic surgery unit. And I happened to be the one from our hospital that was trained in it.

What were you actually trained to do? I mean, what did that effectively mean as to the sort of work you were doing?

Well, you'd have to understand the plastic surgery work to know what the physio had to do, you see. It is specific training. And that's why I went across to the British hospital for a while because the patients from the 2nd AGH were moved to a British hospital because the 2nd AGH came back to Australia.

Was this dealing mostly with skin grafts and that sort of thing?

Skin grafts is only part of it. They do a lot more than that.

> Well, in terms of what you were doing, the hands-on part of what you were doing, what did it mean to your work? What sort of different things were you doing?

They did much deeper things. They did tendon replacements and awful burns and things like that. And we just came along in the end and we were trained to do different treatment that the surgeon wanted.

> Was it an effective form of treatment? Did you feel that what you were doing was ...?

Oh yes, I liked it very much because it was very personal work, sort of retraining, re-educating nerves and things.

> Was it a painful process for the patients?

No, not our side of it.

> What was the feeling in the British hospital? Was it basically the same in terms of discipline?

When I went to a British hospital you realised that there was so much more discipline there. And I was only there for a short time, it would have been about a month or more. You didn't meet many, there's not a lot of .... They're not as friendly as the Australians. I'm sure they're very good people. It was a different atmosphere in the mess there. I mean, they didn't try to talk to you or anything. It was quite a lonely time really, but it was an experience.

> Even now the English people like to refer to Australians as colonials, was there that sense that, 'Oh, colonials'?

They probably thought of us that way, yes.

> When you say the discipline was much greater, did that also mean more efficient?

Well, in the ward it was so much more. When the honorary did his rounds everyone stood to attention; I mean even more. We had enough discipline in our hospital but somehow there was much more in the British hospital in those days. I don't know what it's like now.

> Was it better run for that?

No, I don't think it was any better run. I think on the whole Australians are much friendlier people.

> Was there more warmth with the patients?

Much more warmth, yes, with ours, yes.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

Identification: This is tape two, side one of the interview with Betty Rothstadt recorded on 16 September 1990 about the 2/4th AGH.

So how long were you at the British hospital?

Only a matter of weeks. But I wasn't with the 2/4th in Jerusalem so I don't know how long that was. But we met in Suez. From there I went to Suez and met up with my hospital and we caught a ship bound for Australia as we thought but when we got as far as Colombo we disembarked there and they'd had a scare there. They thought the Japs were going to bomb Ceylon and all the Indian shopkeepers had run away and the British people who lived in Ceylon, the wives were told to go to England. They expected the Japs to invade Ceylon and there was a hospital in Colombo, the 2/12th, but we were established sort of in the heart of Colombo.

Were you sorry to leave the Middle East?

I just thought, 'When you're in the army it's rather nice to get a move'. Do you know? You thought you were going somewhere else.

Going to Colombo or Ceylon then with the sense that the Japanese were a threat. Given the reputation that Japanese had developed as a result of their activities in Manchuria was there a sense of fear of falling into Japanese hands?

I think so, yes.

What did you know about the Japanese at that time? What were the sorts of things that ...?

We knew nothing except what we heard as furphies.

Such as?

Had Singapore fallen then?

Well I'm not sure of the date that you arrived at Colombo.

That's right, sorry, no. You'd have to see it in the book.

The Australian army before they encountered the Japanese, as part of their training were told, 'Oh, the Japanese are hopeless. They've got bad eyesight. Their planes are made out of paper and bamboo.' Did you believe those same sorts of things?

No, we soon heard that that was very wrong, yes.

So what did you start to do in Ceylon?

We established a hospital. We established it in a big .... Do you know Ceylon at all?

No, I haven't been to Ceylon.

No. Well, we established it in a big school not far out of Colombo. It was a big boys' school and the hospital was there. I can't remember - it was in Colombo. And I know as a sister, our sisters' mess was .... In the East they had homes where the families live and when they marry they still live. So it's a very big home and that's where the sisters had their mess not far from the hospital.

In setting up a hospital it's a very big undertaking. Was there a lot of confusion and problems associated with it?

Well, I wouldn't know any of that. I mean you're just told where the hospital's going to be established and where you're going to work.

So where were you billeted?

Well, we were billeted near the hospital which had been a huge home. You see there's nothing in these homes, there's no furniture, there's nothing. You just have your bed and everything and it doesn't matter where you are.

Were mosquitoes a problem?

We all had nets on our beds.

Were you taking malaria tablets?

No. I think they did all that in the .... I didn't go to the islands - New Guinea.

Were there concerns about tropical diseases or particular perils facing you as such?

Well, I didn't know them if there were - just as well.

So what sorts of things did you begin to do there? The same?

Physiotherapy. As a matter of fact in Colombo I worked in the dental unit because there was not enough for five physiotherapists to do there. So I was quite interested, I worked in the dental unit.

Not pulling out teeth?

No. Making the fillings and mixing fillings and I enjoyed it. Something different.

Was there any reconstruction work as a result of bullet damage or that kind of thing?

We didn't do that there. There was a lot of it we saw in Queensland when we got up to Redbank. They had what they call a facio-maxillary unit which is part of the plastic surgery unit. And they did wonderful work with all these jaws.

(5.00) But before you came back to Australia, how long did you spend then in Ceylon?

In Ceylon we were about four or five months.

What about socially? Was it ...?

Socially, all these beautiful hotels, they more or less had no food. If you went there you'd have one course only and to one of the hotels we had to take our own army rations. There wasn't anything in Ceylon. And as regards to shopping, a lot of them were closed because the Indians had run away and the other people were told to go. But still Ceylon is a lovely place. Terrible climate - it's so muggy. You wash your hair and it never dries.

Did you get to meet any of the British who'd been plantation managers?

There was one family I knew and they invited once me for the evening meal and when I arrived they were having afternoon tea. They have such a different life. I said I'd had my mess. I'd been to mess, you know, they eat so late. I only went once, so I really didn't .... But the plantation people were quite kind to us. They were quite pleased to have our company because their wives had gone and they had these nice tea plantations, and that was interesting. If we had transport, if they invited us up, you'd go. These lovely big bungalows. The natives draw your bath, you know the way they lived. I've never had such a curry and all these different things being passed to you. I only went up there a couple of times, but went up on leave just for the day.

Were they still working the plantations at that time?

Yes. The men were on their own.

Did you get to travel around much?

We could only go where we were allowed to go. You weren't allowed to go to many places. Went up to Kandy. But you'd only go for a certain - perhaps a part of a day.

What was the attitude of the doctors and nurses towards physios? Was there at all a sense of, 'Oh, she's only a physio', or were you treated with a reasonable amount of ...?

As the time went on you became friendly. I think to begin with, I made very good friends with the sisters.

How did the relations seem to you between the nursing sisters and the doctors? Was there a very authoritarian relationship?

Always, yes.

Did it seem disproportionate to their skills, or was it just something you took unquestioning?

No, I was used to seeing it in the hospitals. You deferred to the doctors always.

So at the end of a couple of months what happened then? How were you informed as to what your next move would be?

Where were we going? Well, we didn't know. We stayed there about four or five months and then we came back to Australia. We were very lucky. I think we were supposed to go to the islands. You've got no idea why, but we did come back to Australia.

Do you know why? What was the basis of the move?

No, I don't know. Well, I mean, we'd been away for about eighteen months/two years. We came back to Australia and then from my point of view ...

How did you come back?

We came back by ship.

Do you recall the ship, and the conditions?

They were all the same. The ships were all stripped. We were alright. We had our sea bag, just the same.

Were they well marked as hospital ships?

We weren't in hospital ships. We were in troopships.

Did that make you feel a bit vulnerable, the possibility of ...?

We were vulnerable. We were on a convoy, you went like this all the way. You were quite glad when you got back.

Were you bringing wounded back?

Not on our troopship. They did that on hospital ships. We were bringing troops back to Australia.

What was the feeling about coming back? Was there a good feeling about it? Were the men ...?

The men were thrilled, yes. A lot of them were married, came back to their families. Of course everyone was thrilled.

And where did you disembark?

We disembarked in Melbourne.

You didn't go to Queensland straight away then?

No. We were Victorian. No, we came back to Melbourne and as a South Australian I went to Heidelberg, you know the repat hospital there. Then after a while I was sent back to .... I had my leave in my home state - South Australia. Then you come back and I went to Heidelberg again.

How was Heidelberg in those days? How did it seem, the nature of the place? Was it basically much like where you'd been working in ...?

We thought it had so, you know, mod cons. Lovely showers and things. But it was a base hospital.

Was it good to be back in Australia? Did it feel good?

Yes, it was very good to be back in Australia.

Did wearing the uniform and having served overseas have a special meaning at that time?

(10.00) Yes it did. We were dreadful. We thought of these other poor people that hadn't been away. Have you ever heard the word 'chocos'? Oh yes, we felt very superior which we shouldn't have.

Did you have any parades as such? Did you march or anything? Were then any formal marches?

Not in Melbourne. I didn't march in Melbourne, no.

And you went home for leave?

Just for leave, yes.

Did your mother know you were coming?

No, she had no idea when. Because when the 2nd AGH came home she asked everybody if they'd seen me and of course they didn't know who I was.

You were corresponding? Had you been able to maintain ...?

I wrote every week to my family. You're not allowed to say where you were and your letters were censored. And I got letters every week too. They just addressed it to 'AIF Abroad'. They didn't know where we were.

Was it possible to read between the lines? Did you get the impression your mother was able to pick up some idea as to where you were?

Perhaps other people would have told her. But they'd just guess.

Do you recall the homecoming? Coming and finding your mother there.

Yes, I came in the end. It might have been a troop train I came across from Melbourne in. She didn't know when I was coming. I just arrived. You couldn't be met at the station or anything like that.

And do you recall the moment of walking in the house and finding her?

No, I don't. But it was a very happy time for us.

How long were you allowed?

I think I only had about a fortnight home and then you had to report back in Melbourne. Our hospital was mostly a Victorian hospital.

Well, what was the feeling back in Australia? Was there still anxiety then about the Japanese or by that time ...?

The thing was they thought they'd been through so much hardship because there was no petrol here. But what are those things they had on their cars called?

The coal burners?

That's right. They all had those on their cars. And I thought because my mother loved tea .... When I was in Ceylon I brought back I can't think how many packets of tea because I knew they had tea rationing. I needn't have. But they did have tea rationing, and also had rations for clothes. And they thought they were very hard done by.

So back to Heidelberg. How long then back at Heidelberg this time?

I can't remember how long. I worked there for quite a while then I eventually met up again .... Our unit by that time had gone up to and established in Redbank, Queensland, that's on the Oxley line. I don't know if you know where Redbank is.

And where were you staying there?

At Redbank? Redbank's the place where we established. You're still your same tented hospital, you're still in your tents.

Without the dust though?

Without the dust but it's hot up in Queensland. Yes, and cold. But we were at Redbank. I think we were at Redbank for three years - the 2/4th.

Incidentally, when you were in the Middle East, did you come across any Italian or German prisoners?

I came across Italian prisoners of war in Tobruk. They were very nice little men.

Did you have any opportunity to talk to any. Met any who spoke English?

I was working at one stage .... Once again in Tobruk I worked in the dental unit there and they had a lot of prisoners of war working around the dental unit.

How did you see them? I mean how did they ...?

I think they were very happy to be prisoners of war. Happy little men that sang away.

But how did you feel? Did you feel, this is the enemy I should not like them, or ...? Do you recall your feelings towards them?

Not really. You didn't come in contact with them really. They were just round about.

So in Queensland then what did you find yourself doing?

[Inaudible], you're doing your physiotherapy. Your hospital's established.

There was some quite famous brawls between Australian and American servicemen in Australia, did you ...?

Famous what?

Brawls. Fights between Americans and Australian servicemen. Did you get to hear of those?

No, I didn't. We used to go on leave into Brisbane. Redbank wasn't far from Brisbane, just like a little, on a country line, that's all, or a suburban line. And when we came into Brisbane we sometimes went to the officers' club there. When you had leave .... It was a funny life in the army. What did you do on leave? You'd go and have a meal. Perhaps you'd go to a cinema and you'd go back to camp. It wasn't exciting all the time.

Had you met American servicemen in Melbourne while you were down south?

Well, I wasn't long in Melbourne. You mean in Brisbane? We saw a lot of servicemen in Brisbane.

Did you get to meet any at all?

I personally didn't but when you went into restaurants in the city you saw plenty. You always knew they were Americans. They had a glass of water before they began. And of course they had [inaudible]. They gave all the young people a wonderful time. There were an awful lot of them with their girlfriends. They were all over Brisbane.

(15.00) What was the attitude towards them? I mean what was the impression you had as to how your contemporaries felt about the Americans?

It was just that they'd come, hadn't they? We felt they came in a bit late but, I mean, they were there. And as I say you saw an awful lot in Brisbane. I wasn't here often. I didn't notice them much in Melbourne but they were everywhere in Brisbane.

Their relative wealth in terms of income and what was available ...

I think they gave the girls a very good time. You can't blame the young girls, they'd probably had a pretty rotten time for a few years.

Did you pick up that a lot of Australian servicemen resented them for that?

I really don't know. I can't answer that because I don't know.

So how long did you stay in Queensland?

I was three years at Redbank. And then the hospital .... By this time we were getting - unfortunately for us - sent round to different hospitals after that. The sisters were getting promoted and I became a captain then which meant you had to go somewhere where you were in charge of a department. I was doing still my plastic surgery and I went with .... I didn't go to Labuan with the hospital. I went to Greenslopes which is another base hospital in Brisbane.

Incidentally, when did you become a lieutenant or second lieutenant?

We became a lieutenant when the sisters were all made lieutenants. Just automatically they called the physios lieutenants.

Where were you at that time? In Australia? Was that early on?

That would have been in the Middle East when everyone became lieutenants.

And then you got a couple of pips.

Did you have one as a lieutenant and then the second one was a captain? But by this time all the girls were being transferred round because they were more senior then. They'd been in the army quite some time, you see, a good three years. And you were getting reinforcements to your hospital and we were all moving on.

Was the extra bit of rank important to you? Did it seem to be in some way or other an important acknowledgement of what you were doing?

No, it just happened. It was just the time you'd spent in the army.

Well, what about the term captain? Did that not give you a small sort of satisfaction.

No, we were never called .... No, it didn't give me any satisfaction. I was only a physiotherapist all the while. The army side didn't interest me. From when we were in .... No, when I was in Greenslopes towards the end of the war they sent us down to an army school. I expect they thought it was time that we all learnt something about what the army was made of and all the different things. And we came to a .... Actually the army school was in Toorak here, Grong Grong, not far from here. And I think we spent about a month in this school being lectured by the different .... You've probably spoken to a few of the army people, have you?

No, not as yet.

Not yet? Nothing to do with the 2/4th. But they sent the physios down to the army schools. Don't forget when we were in Queensland we took a lot of AAMWS.

Well, what was Grong Grong? Was it a big, old mansion, or?

Big, old mansion.

Were you billeted there as well? Tell us about the way of life, the quarters and so on.

They were just great big old homes and you always shared rooms with other people. And we had lectures all day, and we did go for marches from there.

How did you find that after your years with the service and suddenly being ...?

Just something different. You didn't mind. And as a matter of fact you had to learn quite a bit - these jolly lectures. I'd no idea about all the different .... They wanted to teach us all about the army. That was the physios. They sent us all down in time to learn but that was getting towards the end of the war. You see we had AAMWS - we took AAMWS in - when we got back to Australia. And of course they were all army.

What were they doing?

They worked in the wards and they assisted the sisters. We had a lot of AAMWS up in Queensland. They did a very good job.

In that they were people who were more used to the routine of army life, how did they address you? What would they call you? Sir? Were you 'Sir'?

I never was 'Sir'. I expect they called me .... My name was Betty Cohn. I expect they called me 'Miss Cohn' in the wards and they'd call the sisters 'Sister'. They assisted the sisters. They didn't become lieutenants. It was only the top ones that became lieutenants, but all the sisters .... They were senior to them.

Were you ever able to get any satisfaction out of your rank? Were you ever tempted to think, 'Well, I'm the captain, I can use this in some way?'.

Where?

Well, perhaps putting somebody in their place, or seeking some ...

But you could do that without being a captain.

When did you put somebody in their place?

I hope I never did. But I mean, you felt you could. I hope I never felt I had to.

(20.00) Well, coming back to Grong Grong, as to the training and so on. Was it sort of odd to be on the parade ground stepping out, left right, that sort of thing?

It was just a change, wasn't it?

Did you become good at it?

I wasn't bad. I took it all very seriously. You did what you had to do because they sent a report of how you behaved and how you did your exams to the CO of your hospital. You had to.

What other sorts of things were you doing?

As I say, I had no idea about all the ranks of the army and all the people in headquarters - what they were and everything. You had to learn all that. I expect it was sensible. I wouldn't know.

What other sort of things were you being instructed in?

Just army life in general. We were on the medical side, weren't we?

How was the food at this ...?

At this Grong Grong? I expect it was really rather good.

Were you allowed recreational leave during your period there or was it strictly confined to barracks during that period?

You had to be in at a certain time always, but you expected it, you'd done it for years. But of course you had some recreational time off. As a matter of fact I got married as soon as I came out of Grong Grong.

Where had you met your husband?

Well, I had met him. Actually I met him once in Australia before we left and I came across him again when we were in Kantara because he went away with the 2nd AGH.

He was a doctor, I think you said.

He was a doctor, yes.

And where did you meet up again?

Well, we met up again, strangely enough, when I came back to Grong Grong. He'd been all over the place. And in those days people gave cocktail parties and he happened to be on leave and I happened to be at Grong Grong.

Had you previously developed a special interest in each other?

In those days you had to be quick because you didn't know where .... After a fortnight I was engaged and we got married. And he went up 'Woop Woop' somewhere and because I was married I didn't leave Australia again which suited me.

Where did you go to then from Grong Grong?

I went back to Greenslopes and I got out ...

Was that by train?

Yes.

What was the nature of the train journey, can you recall?

The troop trains were pretty awful.

In what way?

They smelt of orange peel. You can imagine one hundred people together and you sat up and so on and so forth. It's a long way from Adelaide up to Queensland.

Could the troops get rather boisterous? Did they drink while on the trains?

We didn't come across any of that. But coming down when I was going down from leave from Queensland. I was lucky I brought a couple of patients down which meant I flew. The first time I'd ever flown in my life - from Queensland to Melbourne. Queensland to Sydney and Sydney to Melbourne. And then I had to catch the train from Melbourne to Adelaide.

What was that? An old DC3 or, do you recall the ...?

I don't know. I'd never been in a plane before. There weren't any seats. You just sat round the edge. And I was bringing a poor fellow down with a jaw and I thought he knew much more about it than I did.

What had happened to his jaw?

He'd been shot.

What, shattered bottom jaw or ...?

Yes, and he was all wired up. And I took him down to Heidelberg. We had to go for further treatment.

How long did the flight take?

I can't remember now. I presume we came down on the same day because we didn't go anywhere that night so we must have. I went in an ambulance with him as far as Heidelberg then I had to get from Heidelberg to where I was going myself.

Where were you going?

I was going home.

So how would you get from Heidelberg then? Train or ...?

From Heidelberg to the city. I might have managed to catch a lift from Heidelberg. I would have caught a troop train from there to Adelaide. We were used to travelling around.

And after that?

After that I .... That was that. Then after I got married I had to go back to my hospital in Greenslopes.

Did you have a large or small wedding?

Small.

Service people along?

Yep. Whoever happened to be in Melbourne then. You see we were all scattered round. And then I eventually lived in Melbourne.

Were you allowed a period for a honeymoon as such?

We had a week.

Where did you go? Stay in Melbourne or?

We went to Sydney because my husband had - he was a lieutenant colonel - and his unit was out of Sydney, his hospital. So I took myself after that ...

Was he Jewish by the way?

He was Jewish, yes.

How did that come about because you'd said that it wasn't particularly important to you when you were growing up?

It wouldn't have been important to him, no. It just happened. I presume my family were pleased but I hadn't been with them for years. They wouldn't have been so upset if I had married ...

(25.00) Did the matter of you being Jewish ever come up in your army life?

It didn't to me and that's what I always tell my children; that army life taught me an awful lot. From my point of view I gained because I learnt to mix with everybody. It didn't matter. We were all on the same pay. It didn't matter how much money a person - we all had the same amount of money. If we'd made an allotment to our family nobody knew. And it didn't matter what religion you were on a Sunday. If I wanted to I could go to any of the services.

And it's the only place I know where money didn't come into it or social status didn't come into it, and it does in civilian life.

But for all that there have always been Jewish jokes.

Oh sure. Well, you've got to learn to take those.

Did you ever ...

Oh, of course you do.

... say to people, 'But I'm Jewish'?

Yes.

What sort of reaction would you get?

Well, I think I used to work out would it embarrass them more to tell them now or later. It wasn't an advantage to me that I don't look Jewish, do I?

Not particularly, whatever looking Jewish is, but no.

Nobody knows what Jews look like. Therefore I probably had many more Jewish jokes said in front of me than I would have, do you see? And I was strong enough to be able to say after a while to my friends .... I wore a ticket round my, the whole while when I was away to say that I was Jewish - had my number and my religion. And they did that because if you were killed they had to know how to bury you. And before I left more than one elderly, much older man - could have been my father - said to me, 'Please don't wear your religion round your neck', because they thought if I fell into the hands of the Germans what would happen to me. I said, 'Yes, I'm always going to'. And I did. But you see that was said to me. And when I went to bed at night I always took the thing off round my head and had it next to me on my box. Anyone could read .... All my friends in the tent knew that I was Jewish but I was only with three other people, wasn't I? And all my friends when they spoke to me would know but I never hid the fact that I was Jewish ever.

The curious thing about anti-Semitism for a lot of Australians of that period was, it wasn't based necessarily on any direct personal experiences, rather taking on a range of jokes and remarks that were about Jews.

You will always get that, always.

So if you then turned round and said, 'Well, I'm Jewish', how would people react?

A lot of them were very embarrassed and say, 'I had no idea'. And some people think that they are paying you a compliment, they say, 'But I never think of you as Jewish'. And I said, 'Well, it's time you did'. They think that's a compliment saying it to you. They are terribly superior, a lot of Anglicans.

Roy Rene and his character Mo McCaughey had he emerged at the time?

Oh yes, my husband thought he was terribly clever. I probably hadn't seen him as much as he did. My husband loved all these sort of jokes, used to shriek at them. But there still is anti-Semitism. I'm sure there is.

How did you see Roy Rene? His was a very gross depiction of the stereotype Jew so-called, wasn't he?

[Inaudible] with his lisp and he looked awful. I didn't .... My husband thought he was terribly funny, loved him. And there still are an awful lot of Jewish jokes. There are a lot of Jewish comedians, I'm sure.

Anyway, so here we are, you're back in Melbourne ...

Am I married yet?

Yes, you're married. You'd come down from Queensland again and ...

I got out of the army because I was pregnant. That's the way I got out.

So when did that happen? When did you get out, that is?

'46, I think it was. I know I'd been in the army for five years.

Do you recall where you were when the end of the war was announced? Or the end of the war in Europe?

I was up in Brisbane.

Was that the end of the war in Europe, or Japan?

I think that was the end of the war altogether.

Were there celebrations? Can you recall your own feelings?

Yes, I wasn't in my own state. All this kerfuffle up in the cities and things, yes.

What did you do? Did you celebrate particularly?

Nothing special, no.

What was the process by which you were ...

Got out of the army?

Mm.

I had to come back to Adelaide to be demobilised, I expect you'd call it. And then I had to decide where I was going to live because you didn't know where you were going to have the baby.

Did you hand in your uniform as such? Was there a formal process?

You didn't hand in your uniform. I can't remember. I still had my uniform, I know that much. You went to the barracks. I had to go to the barracks to be demobbed; that was in Adelaide, at Keswick in Adelaide.

Did it strike you in a way that you were saying to what had probably been a fairly important part of your life?

Oh no. I always think your life is divided into chapters. I was very thrilled to think that I had a married life coming ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape two of the interview with Betty Rothstadt about the 2/4th AGH, recorded on 16 September 1990.

Having got out of the army, apart from your relationship with your husband, did you pick up and maintain any social relations with former army personnel or hospital personnel?

Yes, that's where our hospital is marvellous. We still have, after forty/fifty years, we meet every fortnight - the sisters that are still alive. Perhaps because it was a 600 bed hospital, not a 1200 bed hospital, we've always kept in very close contact. We're terribly close to each other. And over the years I've got [interruption].

We were talking about your friends that you made ...

Our army friends, yes. Our hospital is ...

Tell us about some of your friends. Who are some of the characters that you developed good, close relations with?

Well, the thing was. Did you say, how did we develop the close relationships?

Who are some of them because to this point, apart from your husband, there's not been a single sort of character emerged through the whole thing?

Well, there isn't in the army. I expect - I was tented with the physios.

Were there any people emerged during that period who impressed you a lot?

But you don't know their names. I got .... Our first matron was killed and the present matron we have now, I still see her every fortnight.

How was your first matron killed?

She was killed in the Middle East, actually in a car accident which was very sad. It was nothing to do with the war. With one other sister she was killed. It just happened. And then Miss Hanna came to us. As you'll find out she came. She went away as a senior sister to the 2/1st CCS and she was our matron for many years. But how did the friendship come with the sisters? It just happened over the years. When we came back to Australia, when we all got out of the army a lot of the girls didn't marry and the ones that did marry led their lives but a lot of us have stuck together and there's only one physio except me left now. The senior physio - I'm afraid she's very sick - we don't see her, and two of the physios have died and there's only one left now. But the sisters that are left from the 2/4th, we meet frequently. And for some reason our hospital is known for it, they were all very close to each other. Probably because we were all away together.

Who were some of those friends?

The ones that are alive, do you mean what are their names?

Yes.

There's Gay Mole, Ailsa Storrer, Miss Jean Hanna's our matron, Ivy Matheson is the other physio, Jean Hood is a sister, Robby Valentine - the ones that we meet now. I don't know why we've all stuck together.

With a group of friends like that as you get together and relive the times, often there are stories that are very special ones, either funny things that happened or particular moments. Do you recall any of those sorts of stories that you share?

No, I think you have to ask the sisters for those because as I say, I expect in war years the sisters were much friendlier with each other than I was because they worked together. A lot of them had even trained together. I can't recall any stories. I'd rather they tell you the stories. A lot of funny things happened.

During the war years are there any particular people that you met or saw or heard who impressed you very much, either for what they had to say or their manner?

It's an awful thing. I feel so awful now because so many of them are dead. I don't like talking about it really. Of course I met a lot of wonderful people.

Any in particular that particularly impressed you? People that you'd call outstanding.

(5.00) Yes, a lot of them, but I made an awful lot of good friends and I was very lucky to marry and I had a very happy marriage. And as I say, from my husband's point of view I expect they could have been years wasted for him because he was a very clever physician and he was in the army for six years. And he just did what he did, went where he was sent. But from my point of view I didn't waste anything as regards my work. I just gained all the time really because you made these wonderful friendships and it helped your character so much.

In what way?

Well, it helped you to be tolerant. I'm sure it did.

> A lot of ex-service people were entitled to special benefits at the end of the war, whether it was for educational purposes, low interest loans, those sorts of things. Were they made available to your group?

Any of us could take them. I'm a war widow now.

> Did you avail yourself immediately after the war of any special sorts of opportunities?

No, I didn't have to. My husband, he was an honorary at the Royal Melbourne and he worked terribly hard. I had children quickly because I was older by the time I had children, by the time the war was over. I had the children to look after and I had very little help in the house, you didn't in those days. And being me, as soon as I could when my youngest went to school, John - he was the youngest - went to Scotch, I did a lot of work for cerebal palsy, children again.

> How many children did you have?

Three, two girls and a boy. Two girls did medicine.

> For quite a lot of people it seems the war offered a very special sort of feeling about who they were and what they were. It provided a sort of bonding together and a kind of sense of common and national purpose in a way that perhaps has never been offered to subsequent generations. Do you feel that it was a very special time?

I think if you were lucky enough to go to the war you learnt an awful lot and you did have this binding that other people haven't got. I'm quite certain of it.

> Well, the fact that you still maintain these friendships suggests that it's still important.

That's right. As I say, I've taught my children, in your present life people are assessed by the money they make or .... You see, it wasn't in the army, you were all the same. You all wore the same, you all earned the same, you were no better than anyone else and you had no right to be.

> So in many respects they were good years for you?

I think so, especially as I came from a small place - Adelaide is a small place.

END OF INTERVIEW