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INTERVIEWEE: Jean Bennier

INTERVIEWER: Sue Maslin

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SUMMARY: Jean Bennier as a member of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), 1942-1945, interviewed and recorded by Sue Maslin on 21 March 1985 at Mitchell Park, South Australia.

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> We are interested in hearing about your experiences in the Women's Land Army. Can you recall much about your experience in the Woman's Land Army?

Sometimes if there are two together you can recall, you know, lots of things. One might miss things the other may remember, and the first may remember other things the second may not. You know, you can sort of recall things together sometimes — if you've worked together, that is.

> That's right. Up to date we've gone along to the reunions. We went to a meeting in Sydney and then to a reunion here in Adelaide on Monday at lunchtime. That was really good because everybody was together and talking about their memories and so on; but you couldn't possibly record in that situation.

No. But that's the sort of thing where I think you'd recall lots of things like that, whereas you may sort of overlook quite a few things yourself. It just brings the recall back.

> We are really interested in hearing about any aspects of your work. Perhaps we could start by hearing a little bit about your life before you actually joined the Land Army.

Oh well, I did live in the country before. It wasn't until — we were right in the far north actually. My parents were on a sheep station and so I've always loved the land. Then we came to town and I worked in a store for a while. Then, when the war broke out, I joined — there wasn't anything on the land at that stage, but I worked in a munitions factory. I loathed that because it was all indoors and, you know, there's awful repetition. My mother wasn't well, and that gave me a chance

to get out. Then I got out, and I suppose it was about 12 months later when the Women's War Service Council was formed. Well, it was in action then, I guess, but they decided to call girls for the land. My first job then was — I think I was the first who sort of joined up at that stage in the Women's War Service with Pat Bailey, or Pat Cartwright as she is now. Then we were sent picking peas out here on South Road, right down here. Well, there weren't any houses there then. We picked peas for — I don't know how many months or weeks we were there. Then the next job, we were up at Magill with Mr and Mrs Yateman. Then we picked the cherries and did all the — milked the cows in the morning and picked cherries. I think we must have worked such long hours, really. But we loved it, you know. It was just marvellous.

What did you do after that?

I think then we went up — sometimes it's very hard to recall after a long time. Then we went up a little bit further and we were with another family called the Barndys. I think we picked cherries there too, and we weeded and hoed onions and that sort of thing. Then our next job was down here in the south, a vineyard, with Mr Laffer. That's when Madge Hastings — of course, she was Madge Pritchard then — that's when I met her. There were four of us there together, with Betty Hogarth, or Betty Tapp now, and Lucy Ives, who's not living now. Then we did the vineyard work: the ploughing, the harrowing, the pruning and picking of the grapes, all that kind of thing — almonds we had there.

What about after that?

Well, we were there most of the war years. Then, after we were there for a little while — or at least I was and Betty

Hogarth; we were on loan, more or less — we were asked back to the Yatemans up here at Magill. There we picked cherries again, because they couldn't get other girls to go up there as there weren't enough. So we went back there again. Then, when we finished there, we went back to the vineyard and did the same thing all over again. Then we were there until the end of the war. We stayed there then. We had a little flat. We called it the shelf, because we were all on it. There were four — oh, there were five of us at one stage, Betty Fuhurhart and Madge. We stayed there until the end of the war. I actually went and stayed there until after the war. When we were disbanded I stayed on there and still worked outside. I didn't want to go back anywhere else.

Let's just go right back to the beginning again. I wonder whether you could describe your work in the munitions factory.

Well, we were inspecting shells and they were — I found it very difficult on the eyes with this repetition all the time. We were sorting out the shells and looking for defects, you know, and we were in this — well, it was a very quiet room. It wasn't noisy like the machine factory. We were just in this special department just inspecting the shells. But we worked night shift, of course, and the day shift, and I didn't like it at all.

What sort of hours?

You know, I can't remember. There would have been hundreds of girls down there, hundreds.

When you left the job, was it a problem with Manpower to actually leave that job, or did you get transferred into another one?

Leaving the?

The munitions job.

Yes, I had to get special leave because of my home — my mother being ill, you see, and I had to look after her for some time. But they didn't recall me there. Then, as I said, the Women's War Service was formed and they were calling for girls on the land.

How did you hear about the Women's War Service?

I saw it in the paper and then I thought: that's just what I'm looking for. And away we went.

Why was it just what you were looking for?

Oh, I loved outside life. You see, I'd lived all my life, my early life and mid-20s, in the country, and I just loved the outdoor life.

What sort of life did you have in the country? What sorts of things did you do?

Oh, it was a sheep station, a long way away out. It was just out of Leigh Creek. We were 130 miles from there. There we were with horses and sheep, and we had correspondence school. And I didn't like — we left there because of my mother's illness then and we came to town. That's the reason why my

father left up there. But when we came to town I thought it was dreadful.

What did your father do?

He was a manager on a sheep station.

When you came to town?

My father then took a business. He went into business, and that's when I was helping in that business. Then came the munitions and the Women's War Service.

Can you remember back to the day you joined the Women's War Service? What did it involve?

Yes. As I said, I saw it in the paper. Miss Marshall was there in those days, and I went along — yes, it was Miss Marshall. I can remember the day we went along. I was only recalling it to Madge because Madge hadn't remembered. It was in Treasury building or somewhere in Flinders Street. Going up the stairs I thought: what have I let myself in for? You know, they'd said it was going to be pea picking, and I thought: goodness. I met Miss Marshall, and she was a lovely person. She made me feel immediately, you know, that it was really something and she explained everything. It wasn't long before I got the letter from her to say that she had a first job. But, my goodness, picking peas. Have you ever picked peas?

Can you describe that job?

Oh, I know it was very hot. Of course, those days when you were young you really didn't notice it as much. But we went

along. We had to produce our — because there was no clothing issued or anything like that, we bought our own overalls and things. I remember hopping on the — how did I get there? I think I must have gone on the bus. And how did I — I can't remember. The bus didn't go as far as we were picking, but I don't really remember. It was there that we were detailed off with our sacks — our buckets to pick the peas and, of course, that meant with our noses in the soil almost and picking these peas from, I suppose, about 8 o'clock until — it would have been, I suppose, until five. I just can't remember. And backache; it was dreadful. I thought: how can I go on like that? But that's when I met Pat Bailey, and there were a number of other girls there. I don't know how many were there. But we stuck it out and then, you know, we reported back.

Can you remember the things that you had to take with you when you joined the Women's War Service?

What, for instance?

The clothes. What did you actually have to bring with you when you —

When we went to the job?

Yes.

Oh, we had to have overalls — just our own thing really; just wear, I suppose, whatever you wanted to. There wasn't anything that specific, but I know — I just can't recall exactly — but I know I bought the overalls and a blouse, I think it was. As a matter of fact, I've got a photograph here of the first picking pea days. It was in one of the papers,

the *Expression Journal*, here. They're putting the peas into the bag. You know, they'd put the peas into great big sacks. But we were only allowed to pick the big peas, you know. We were not allowed to pick the little ones; they had to mature more. It used to be dreadful because we used to be hunting around over and over the bush, you know, hunting for these. And if we picked the small ones we got into trouble — you know, the little flat ones. We had to pick the plump ones. Well, that was a bit difficult, hunting around for them all the time and not coming up with the ripe ones. We had to look busy looking for the darn things.

What did you do for your backache?

I suppose it was a good hot bath. Then we had to face up next day and I thought I'd never make it. Oh dear.

Can you remember where you lived at that time?

Yes.

Can you describe it?

At home, at Kensington here; East Parade, Kensington.

So you would travel to your work from home?

Yes, yes, and I went home in the evenings. I don't remember how long we were there. I haven't got any idea.

Can you remember your pay?

No, I can't remember the pay. I'm quite sure it wasn't very much. I can't remember the pay.

Can you remember whether it was more or less than the munitions work?

No, I cannot remember that either. I am not very helpful, am I.

No, that's fine.

I remember when we went to the vineyard we got £3 a week. And that was tremendous because that was the highest paid job I'd ever had, and so it must have been considerably less.

Did you have any other friends that were already in the Women's War Service when you joined up?

No.

Were there any others in the family in other services?

My brother was in the Air Force, yes.

Before you joined up, did you have ideas or plans for yourself in the future?

Well, I was always interested in the land and I would have liked to have done a horticultural course. That's what I would have liked to have done. But apart from that, there didn't seem to be — there wasn't the opportunities in those days, and not before the war. Then, of course, really the thing that I wanted to do, apart from that, was to be a — to do cooking, you know, the course in — what do you call it?

Domestic science?

Domestic science, yes. I was very keen to do that. But of course the war altered all those things and there wasn't the opportunities before. I was never interested in indoor, you know, in really sitting down at a desk and doing typing or, you know, office work. That was out for me.

Can you remember when the Land Army was formed, when Manpower took over the Women's War Service?

Well, I think I have a little piece in the — no, I can't remember.

I am not really asking for the date. I am more asking what the effect was of the Land Army being formed into —

Well, we were at work. I think we were at work with — Madge and we other three who were down there at the vineyard, we were working there before the Land Army was formed. It was just really formed and then we had — I think Miss Marshall came down to see us, or did we have to see her? At that stage we had to have then — when it was actually formed and when we signed up for whatever period we wanted to, we had to have a medical, and that started the thing off officially. Then, when it was official, we were issued with uniforms and things like that. But with any specific time I can't remember, you know, what happened in between that.

Can you remember back to your first day on the vineyard and what that was like? Can you describe the work of the vineyard?

Well, I know — I hadn't met any of the girls before we went down to the vineyard. I don't remember how it all started,

it’s very vague, but I remember that we were allotted that job and I remember — we came home at weekends from the vineyard job. We went home at weekends and lived there during the week in the shelf, as we called it. I can remember getting on the tram with my bag — my notecase or bag or zippered-top thing — hopping on the tram at 6 o’clock in the morning because we had to go down the railway station and then hopping on the train. The train went I suppose about three miles from the vineyard and our employer picked us up there. And I can’t recall to this day whether the girls were all there together, you know, whether we met on the train or what we did. And I can’t recall the first day, you know, what we did on the first day.

Can you describe your work at the vineyard?

Well, I think we must have gone down there — the first thing must have been, I think, the vintage time when we picked grapes. They were table grapes, muscatels. Beautiful grapes they were. It was a prize vineyard, you see, and it was beautifully looked after, the whole place — a beautiful place. We picked muscatels at the beginning and then we got through — now, they were packed in half cases. They were exported — some of them were exported and some of them went to market. A lot of them went to market around — people used to market them and we used to pack them in half cases. They had to be packed so beautifully. We were not allowed to knock the bloom off, you know. What they called the bloom was all that soft look — none of the shiny thing, you know. And our boss was extremely particular. We were not allowed to knock that bloom off — and the tears, I think, the horrors we went through trying to pack this case. It had to be — the fruit had to be that much higher above the half case. It had been to be squared off at the corners so the fruit wouldn’t fall

off, you see. We had to pick a certain bunch to drape over the top and put the brown ones on the top and ‘don’t knock the bloom off’. It was dreadful. I can still see it now, the horrors we went through: don’t knock the bloom off. Dear, dear. Then we’d pick those. Then we went from those into the wine grapes. Those we picked in buckets, and that was hard work. They had to be taken down to each end of the row, then they were thrown onto big bags of hessian and then the men loaded them onto the truck. They were thrown up onto the truck. A man at each end and that would throw them onto the truck. And we would go down with the buckets and tip them onto the bags. But they were long hours. We worked long hours there and it was very hot and very dusty. We were filthy. Oh, I don’t know, we somehow didn’t mind that much. We were very tired but we didn’t sort of mind. I don’t know. It was different.

Can you remember the hours you actually did work?

I think we started at half past seven and I think it was until five.

They are long hours.

Yes; half past seven until five, and that was in the fruit picking. Well, all other times we did too. We did the pruning, pruning vines, and we had almonds there too. The pruning on cold mornings was a disaster, you know — terrible. We didn’t knock off very much for wet weather; we had oil skins. But I don’t recall knocking off that much. You know, we used to jack up a bit and look at one another and say, ‘Well, we’re not going to do it any more.’ And we used to complain to the boss. Eventually he’d let us knock off and we’d go down. If we had anything to special to do in the —

but, even so, if someone would go down — perhaps on a wet day, someone would be detailed off. We took it in turns, you see. We'd have a roast on those wet days. Someone would go down and put the roast on, you see, and nip back and do the pruning. Oh dear.

What was the part you enjoyed most about working on the vineyard?

Well, I think it was that the fellowship was marvellous, you know. With the girls, that was tremendous. And there was the very fact of having that free, open life. Some of the girls, of course, had been in the city all their lives. But I'd sort of got off to a start because I had a love of that land. But perhaps it was easier for me to do that than lots of other girls.

How many other girls did you work with at that time?

There were five of us down there at that period, and eventually it got down to four — four of us. Of course during the season there were more girls down there — during the busy season. That's the vintage season. But normally in the pruning times it was just the four of us, and they had extra people from outside but not actually in the Land Army.

Can you describe where you lived at that time?

At the vineyard? Well, our boss built this little place for us. It was just at the back of the sheds where we were, which were kept in immaculate condition. The little place that we had had a living room and a fireplace. I think it was built of asbestos. There was a living room and off of that was our bedroom. Now, there were only — that's right — there were

four beds in the bedroom. That was a little — I suppose that was asbestos too and it was lined. I think it was lined with kainite. There were little windows like this at the top; there weren't windows right up. We managed to, you know, put curtains up and bits and pieces. And you went down a little step and there was — we had our bathroom and shower there. Not all mod cons, I might add, but it was a bathroom. Off of that was our little kitchen, and we had an electric stove in there. I don't know whether we started off with a wood stove and then we went onto the electric. It was only a tiny little kitchen. Then we, you know, had our meals up in the little living room.

Who would get the meals?

We'd take it in turns. Those who weren't cooking that week would do the other chores, you see, the little bits and pieces. We used to take it in turns always with the cooking because such-and-such a one did a good roast and the other one did something else good and, you know, that sort of thing.

Can you remember your meals?

Well, as I said, I think we often used to have grills, you know, lots of grills. And breakfast — dear, dear — one of the girls used to love fried things, and a number of us didn't like these things. We used to like perhaps toast and whatever, but we were always told to have a bigger breakfast really. And so Lucy used to cook up the old fried things and have this, and we used to just look at it and think 'oh, no' and go for our toast. But each one had their little specialties. I was just trying to think what Madge used to do. Madge used to make beautiful scones; they were the times

Madge used to make beautiful scones. Those days, if it was a wet day, Madge'd hop into the kitchen and make these scones. And we used to be able to have our afternoon noon tea because we had the afternoon off — not really off. We'd be in the sheds, oiling the harness or cleaning up the implements, you know, all the handles of the spades and shovels and oiling everything. Oh, we had to have things — everything was washed before we put it away. But those things were done quite often in the off season or on a wet day. We were never left idle.

What was it like living with a group?

Well, I found it, at the beginning — I didn't have any sisters and the other girls did. I found it a little bit difficult at the start because I wasn't used to living with a group, but I jolly soon got used to it. Oh, I think it was — oh, I think we got on remarkably well, you know. I think Madge did know one of the girls before she joined. I didn't know anyone down there. Madge new three — two girls. I didn't know anyone. But, as far as I can remember, we got on remarkably well. We sorted each one another out, you know. I think not to know one another and suddenly you were there together, night and day —

Do you remember any funny incidents?

Yes, I do. I think we all must. Well, this one really stuck in my mind. One of the girls — I don't know what happened that night. This was one of the nights I think there must have been a little bit of a difference of opinion, and we had pork chops for tea. I do not know but I think — I don't know who cooked them that night, but anyway they cooked pork chops. And a difference of opinion must have occurred during our dinner, you see, and one of the girls was rather quick

tempered. She picked up the chop a threw it at the wall, and away went this pork chop. I can still see it. It landed on this kainite, which was that porous stuff, you know, and, wow, bang went the chop. I can still see that. That was — we've often recalled that. Oh dear, I don't know what the opinion was about, but I can still see that pork chop hurtling through the air.

What happened after that?

I think — I really don't know. I think we obviously must have sorted that one out.

Were there any difficulties with living in a group?

Well, I suppose there must have been a difference here and there, but there wasn't anything to worry about. I remember, you know — when I think back, we got on so well when we all came from different walks of life.

What sort of walks of life; how were they different to your experience?

Well, some of the girls hadn't worked — some of them hadn't been working, you know; they'd been at home. And the other girls — some had worked in different capacities. One of the girls had been with — had lived — not lived on farms. She'd lived in the city but she'd had friends on farms and, you know, loved the outdoor life as well and had been with horses and that sort of thing. But there were two girls who hadn't really worked. I think they made a remarkable transition really because I think, you know, I really knew — well, I didn't know what I was going into, that's quite wrong, but I more or less loved outdoor work. I think the other girls had

been with horses and things like that. They'd had their own horses and perhaps lived in a different way.

After you finished doing a day's work, what would you do when you returned to hostel?

Well, we didn't — I don't recall — well, I think some of us sometimes went up to town. But to get there we had to walk about a mile up to the bus. Sometimes two of us went. We may have gone to a film or something like that. But there wasn't a lot to do actually. I think we spent a lot of time there. But I think their friends came; they took us out and that sort of thing for the evening. We'd go to a film or whatever. But we never had a great deal of time — you know, an opportunity for that down there. As I said, we used to walk up to the bus and come home on that bus and walk that nearly a mile. But you wouldn't do it now of course in the dark, you know — walk in the middle of the road and run halfway.

How would you keep yourselves occupied at 'the shelf', as you called it, in your leisure time?

Well, of course we were only there — like, weekends we went home, and that meant — but we had to work Saturday morning. It wasn't the full morning. We just worked Saturday morning and then we went home. But I'm trying to recall just exactly what we did do quite a lot. No, I think we used to have people to a meal and that sort of thing; you know, friends would come down for a meal.

Did you have much contact with the local community?

Well, we used to — well, I don't suppose; not really. There were a lot — oh, we used to know the neighbours on different

adjoining properties and things like that, but we didn't see a great deal of them. I can recall — oh dear. No, there wasn't a lot of contact with the — I think we weren't far enough away from the city here to have a lot of contact with local people. It was that you had a lot of contact with the people you knew really. I think the girls who were further out away from homes and didn't have contact with their homes at weekends, they'd have a lot more contact — I know they did have a lot more contact with local people.

Did you each have nicknames? Did you have a nickname?

No. I think I was called Ben a lot, but no — oh yes, Lucy. I don't know how she came to get the name of Lilly, but she got the name of Lilly, and I don't really know why. But Madge was always Madge. No, we didn't have nicknames; not that I can recall, no.

Madge was talking about Titch. Was that someone that you knew?

No.

That must have been at another place she worked.

No, Madge only worked down there. You see, there are things that I would not remember, and it just takes a little bit of prompting for other people to remember.

I was wondering a little bit about your employer at that time. Could you describe your employer and what sort of a relationship you had with him?

He was, you know, really very helpful and very exacting in the work he wanted done. You know, everything really had to be almost perfection. It was good training and we've never forgotten it — I've never forgotten it. I dare not touch now something in the garden without washing it, you know, afterwards and putting it away. I always think that I'd better wipe that and wash it and put it away. And those things have really stuck. Our employer down there had two children, and they used to come up a lot when they were littlies. Until they went to school they used to come up quite often. They lived at Brighton, not very far away from there. And then our employer's sisters lived across what we called the little footbridge. His sisters and mother lived across the bridge, and we used to see a lot of them. We used to go there for lunch sometimes, which was marvellous. We thought that was terrific because we didn't have to get anything for ourselves, and it was nice having, you know, to meet other people and that. We really enjoyed that.

So you had a little bit of social contact with your employer?

Yes. Well, as I said, we quite often went to lunches over there. As I said, they used to have us over there and we used to see a quite a lot of them, the sisters, and that used to be really fun. As I said, it let us off the hook for a while; we didn't have to think about meals. And that was something to look forward to. Besides, it was in working hours, you see, and we used to sit and hope that our employer wouldn't get up smartly and say, 'Back to work, Girls.'

What about other employers at the pear picking?

Well, you know, I can't even remember anything about that employer — not a thing.

Did you work somewhere else after the vineyard?

No. That was our last job.

You were there for the duration of the war?

Yes — no, there was Mr Yateman, Mr and Mrs Yateman. They were where we picked cherries up at Magill. There, our first job — that was when I was with Pat Bailey — that was Women's War Service though, first of all, my first job — my second job there up at Yatemans. But there we lived in a — we boarded up with a couple who lived on the property, Mr and Mrs King. Pat and I had lived there and had our meals there, and then we picked our cherries and did the milking of the cows — only three cows — and generally. But at the Kings — I was only recalling this the other day; I'd almost forgotten that. I can always recall this event. One evening Pat and I had gone to bed, and it was a very hot night and there wasn't any screen on the window. We'd put up the window as high as we could, and a bat flew in. Well, I was scared but not Pat; she wasn't. So I put my head underneath the sheet and stayed there, while Pat wafted around with her knickers trying to hit the bat. Eventually she got it, and I was just carrying on underneath the sheet, you see. I wouldn't pop my head out, but she was tearing around the room with these knickers and looking for — and getting — and obviously she got bat, and the poor thing ended up with a rather disastrous death in the chamber pot. So that was the bat. Then one of the people we boarded at, the husband was quite a drinker. Pat and I often used to be awakened with him tramping down the paddock. He'd hide some of his grog down there, you see, and he used to go

down there and get his grog and go back. But it never worried us. There were a very nice couple really.

There were no difficulties?

No, none whatsoever. No, it was very, you know — they were nice people. Then of course we went off to do our work. And we used to go back there. But the second time I was there I was with another lass, Betty Hogarth — Betty TAP now — and then we stayed with Mr and Mrs Yateman, our employers, and then worked from there. But I think we worked pretty long hours there. I think we used to start at seven then and go on until they got their quota of whatever we were picking.

Did the wages vary at all between the different jobs?

No, you see, I can't remember that. As I said before, when we went to the vineyard we got this enormous amount of £3 a week. After what we had before, and I can't recall what it was, we were just on clover, you know.

Can you remember what you used to do with your pay packet?

I used to give it to my mother, I'd keep a certain amount and the rest she'd put in the bank for me, because I thought that was a huge amount of money, you know, and that is how I started the old bank account — with our £3. But that was a lot in those days. I just cannot recall what we got on the other jobs. But I know it must have been a lot less because I just couldn't believe that it could be £3 a week.

I was just wondering about any training that you might have had. Did other girls have training before they came

into the Land Army? Did you receive any training at all from the Land Army?

No. That was all done by employers. No, we didn't get any training — at least we didn't on any of the jobs I was on. I think that came probably with the other girls — I don't know how the other girls on other jobs managed on different kind of work. I know that Pat didn't. Pat had lived in the country also — Pat Bailey, or Pat Cartwright. She had lived in the country also and she loved country work. But she certainly didn't have any training, and we didn't have any training for this kind of thing. It was all done by our employer. There wasn't any training whatsoever. No. You were just given the things. But down at the vineyard we were trained very thoroughly, as I said, and everything had to be pretty right.

Do you think your employer treated you any differently at that time because you were a girl?

I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think so. They did have the odd man or two. I think occasionally we used to have — there was an older man down there, Claude; that was his name. Through the vintage there used to be an odd man or two perhaps. But, no, there was never any difference.

Did other people work alongside you, other than other Land Army girls?

Yes. There were women in the — like, married woman would come and do seasonal work. I think that occurred in lots of — like, that kind of seasonal work. A lot of the married women would come and work; or perhaps younger people, quite young people, would come out. But a lot of married woman.

They would be from the local community?

Yes, they all came locally. And that's when it was quite fun because we enjoyed their company. Oh, you know, when we look back there was quite a lot — there was a lot of fun.

Do you remember a typical day working in the vineyards with all the others, say, picking? Can you describe a typical day?

At the vintage time?

Yes, the vintage time.

Well, as I said, there used to be quite a lot of people. I suppose there would be about — at some stages, with the five of us, there would be 12 — oh, I don't know how many people — I suppose about 15 people maybe at the vintage. There might be more than that. They always used to start at half past seven in the morning. They'd come on their bikes or whatever, mostly on bikes, but some would walk. Then we'd go trailing up the vineyard with our buckets. The buckets used to be left at the end of the row, and we used to look the buckets over and pick the ones that were nice and not jagged. Then we'd sort of — most days we used to perhaps change over on rows. You know, one person is each side of the row and we'd work along like that. There was lots of opportunity to talk on the way, you see, and we used to change over sometimes and have a different partner. There you were able to have more fun or get to know people. Then there used to be morning tea. We used to have the old morning tea at half past nine. And people used to sit around, just sit around, and we used to have our little 'swap morning tea'. We'd swap with our employer sometimes. He used to have something very nice and

we didn’t have something very nice, and we used to swap. Silly things.

Why wouldn’t you pick the jagged buckets?

Well, you know, they used to be — see, we used to wear shorts most of the time — either shorts or overalls. Quite a lot of the time we wore overalls but, if it was very hot, we wore shorts. Well, the jagged ones, you’d be able to jag your leg on there. So we’d pick out the nice buckets and hope we’d get the same ones back at the end of the row. But they were quite heavy, those buckets. I cannot recall how — they were buckets that were cut lengthwise and then they used to have the wire over the top. But we’d fill two and carry them down. Very often they used to have carriers; men used to come down and carry them down. But, if we particularly wanted a bucket, we used to call out ‘buckets’ and down would come a bucket thumping alongside of you and away you went. Then, if you were short of buckets, you went down and emptied one yourself if you particularly wanted to keep that bucket.

Did you work with other nationalities during that time?

I don’t recall anyone really; probably, I think, afterwards. But no, I can’t think of — probably a lot of people associate the vintage time with quite a number of perhaps European people who come. But I don’t think they were there. They had their own vineyards around there. There used to be a great number of vineyards and fruit blocks around there. But now there aren’t any more. Actually, where we were working down there, that vineyard — most of it’s still there. It was going to be built on at one stage. It hasn’t been built on but it’s been left to run to ruin really, which is rather sad when we knew it at its best.

What sort of reactions did you used to get from local people when you walked downtown in your uniform?

Well, you know, when you say ‘reaction’, we heard all about that afterwards, after we’d finished. There was not much specific notice taken of us really. We just sort of were working there and we learnt afterwards that people were taking — but we just felt we were a little bit isolated, you know, and no-one sort of really — when I say ‘no-one’, quite a number of people didn’t really take much interest in us.

What did you hear afterwards?

Well, we learnt that they knew we were there and knew what we were doing, you know. But, as for uniforms and things, I don’t think they ever — I never heard a remark down there that I can recall. I can’t remember.

What about in the city when you would be on leave, for instance, and you were perhaps catching public transport and you were wearing your uniform?

Oh yes, they were distinctive, because our badges were different to other people’s. There were quite a lot of people who would ask what we were. They’d probably never heard of the Land Army, you see. They did; they displayed interest in the patches and badges on our hats. When we’d talk about the Land Army, a lot of people wouldn’t sort of think about the ‘land’ part of it but would think about the AWAS. They wouldn’t think about the land part of it but they’d just sort of automatically — even now if I talk about the Land Army, even here for instance, quite a number of people wouldn’t think of it as the Land Army. They’d just think of it as the

Army. Now, I mean, I've put my tunic on the line to chase the moths away and they've said, 'Oh, that's your Army uniform.' It looks like it. But they would never connect it with the Land Army. I think that was quite true for a lot of the Land Army. I think they just didn't connect it as a service.

When you actually joined the Women's War Service, did you see yourself joining a military or a civilian force?

No, there was no thought of the Land Army then. It was just the Women's War Service, and that was the part of the service as being on the land. I don't know whether there were several — no, I think Miss Marshall at that stage — I think it was primarily for the land that her side of it was. I can't recall whether there was a difference, but I know when I saw it in the paper that it was distinctly land work that they also required, and that was, you know, my choice.

In what ways do you think it was like the military service?

No, I didn't think it was like the military service; other people did. I think they just thought of it as the Army and not attaching the land to it. It was only down the street perhaps or in town that they would see the distinctive badge and they would realise that it wasn't just the Army — 'What is it?' you know, that sort of attitude.

How did you see the Land Army? Did you see it as a civilian force.

Oh yes. I wouldn't have thought of it as anything else, no. There was no thought of it being anything else. I know they used to be — were they laying mines or putting fences or

whatever up near the property where we were? And we often used to think then, ‘Goodness me, could it ever be that there would be an invasion of some sort?’ We used to really quite joke about it, as you did in those days. You didn’t used to think, oh you know: here they come and we’ll hear a burst of gun fire and think this is it.

Did you personally know any women in the services?

No, I don’t — yes, I did. Yes, one lass. She was in the armed services. She was a nurse.

What were her conditions of work like?

Well, I don’t recall — I mean, she was a nurse. I think she went to New Guinea and she was at Alice Springs and she was at Darwin. Very often people said, ‘Goodness, the Land Army. Why on earth did you — you could have travelled if you’d been in other services.’ But that never occurred to me at the time. I think I just enjoyed being out of doors and I suppose, though, probably the girls did travel and had probably better conditions than possibly we did. But at that stage — it’s only when you look back you think there may have been other opportunities. But at that time I just didn’t think of it.

How do you think women from other services regarded the Land Army?

I don’t know whether they even thought it existed. I don’t know. I wasn’t really amongst other service women, to give a proper reply. I don’t really think that a lot of people realised just what the Land Army was or if there was a Land Army. They just probably thought, ‘Oh yes, the girls are out

there working here, there and probably they were just sort of absorbed into the land and that's it.' You know, 'There they are.' I don't think they realised. Of course, a lot of people did realise. Employers must have and friends of the employers or whoever, you know. I mean, they weren't all on the land and their friends would know. But I don't think a lot of people realised that there was a Land Army, that it was an official sort of thing — not in my experience.

Do you remember the day that the war ended? Do you remember what you were doing?

Now, that was — let me see, what were we doing that day? I remember it was around midday and we were — I think we all just went and joined — you know, there was so much excitement that we hopped into our uniforms, as far as I can remember, and off we went. I don't know whether we went home. I don't think we did. I think we went into the city and joined the throng, because there were, you know, thousands and thousands of people down the streets.

After the war, what did you do? When did you leave the Land Army?

Well, we were there until the end of the year, officially, down at the vineyard. That was disbanded at the end of the year, wasn't it, the end of that year. But I stayed on down there to work out of doors. Was I the only one? Yes, I stayed on for some time. I think Madge came back for a vintage, as she probably told you or will tell you. She came back for a vintage, as some of the other girls did. But, after that, I was there for some years and then I got polo, and that was the finish of that. I don't know what I would have done after that, after I'd gone on from there. I was seriously thinking

at the time that it was time I made a break there and did something else — not indoors, but something outside.

Was there any difficulty in staying on at the vineyard after the war had finished?

No. That was my concern. I was asked to stay, if I wanted to and, well, you know, I did. I went on doing exactly the same thing as I was doing all along. I found that, after all those years and liking the out of doors, I just couldn't imagine taking up something indoors.

Did you receive any rehabilitation after the war ended?

No. Actually, I didn't even know there was a Land Army Club.

Until just recently?

Yes, up until last week.

Really?

Yes. Madge didn't know; we didn't know. No, there was no thought of rehabilitation. I think, there again, it probably would have given another opportunity to take on something a little bit — a study of some sort but not entirely out of doors; something that you could take on as a career. But that wasn't offered at all. Nothing was. You know, you were just lost in mid air sort of thing. There was just nothing. You were just disbanded and that was it.

How did you feel about that at the time?

Well, at the time I felt very sort of let down, because I didn't know what I was going do or what I really wanted to do at that stage. But all I knew was that I didn't want an inside job. And I think, if there had been some suggestion that you could do something, some sort of rehabilitation, I would have jumped at the chance. But there wasn't very much choice at that stage — no choice at all really, unless you wanted to do something indoors. Looking back now, I think I certainly would have taken on a study of some sort connected with the outdoors or gardens or whatever. But there wasn't the opportunity. There was no opportunity whatsoever. No, we just disbanded.

> Looking back over the years, do you feel that your contribution to the war effort has been acknowledged?

Not really; I don't think so. If it was, it was done in a very quiet way. I'm sure our employers were all wonderful really. They realised — well, of course, as they said, they couldn't have coped without — well, in our case, they couldn't have coped without us. I'm sure they were ever so grateful. And they were wonderful encouragement really, all the employers. But, apart from that, I really do think that there should have been some rehabilitation of some sort. Had there been in any of the other states?

> We have only heard of one case where a woman has received any rehabilitation at all.

The English Women's Land Army is very enlightening. In England they were given the opportunity of a tremendous lot of rehabilitation. You may like to look at that book or you may know of it. It's really — I'll show it to you afterwards, if you'd like. There they were given tremendous

opportunities, all sorts of different kinds of work, particularly those who wanted to go and who wished to be associated with the land or out of doors one way or another in parks, gardens or whatever. And they were given opportunities to study. But nothing of that sort was here. I think it might have provided tremendous guidelines for a lot of girls who were associated with the land and the Land Army that, if they could have something associated with that afterwards or be given the opportunity, I think there may have been, you know, a lot of girls who would probably have jumped at the chance. I know I would have.

Did you know of other girls who, like yourself, wanted to stay on the land after the war had finished?

No, I don't. No, I don't know anyone. The lass that you were talking about — she had some kind of rehab, did she?

I'll try to get more information about it.

To be able to, you know, seek help in lots of ways — in the Women's Land Army in England, they also had resources where they were able to speak to different people for counselling and that kind of thing after the war and help them in different directions. Now, for instance, the veterans affairs here — I was thinking of buying a car, a new car. On various occasions I'd had second-hand cars, and I had to have — I would have had to give up driving 10 years ago because of my handicap and I couldn't drive a car. So a couple of years ago I was going to go back to driving, and I rang the veterans affairs to ask whether they could tell me whether they could help with stamp duty. I talked about the Land Army and, no, that was a big no-no. We weren't, you know, one of the services. And, of course, I got not cross, but I pointed out

to him the various things the land girls did in the wartime. I said we probably worked a lot harder than a number of girls in the other services and it seemed extremely unfair that the Land Army were excluded from all these helpful things. And he agreed that it was not fair and it should not be so, but he couldn't do anything to help. That's just one of the things. The other services have so many little helps along the line, you know. It doesn't seem quite the right thing. But it just has not got the recognition. But it would have helped a lot. I think it would have helped a lot of lives in different direction. I know it would have helped mine if I had had some direction. But there was no direction, and so you just got along the best way you could.

Can you tell me what it was like working on the vineyard after the Land Army had finished? Did your conditions or work change in any way?

No, the work was just the same. I lived in the little shelf and then I was there by myself. No, it didn't change in any way. I still did the same thing. But when I stayed, yes, I lived down there most the time. By that time I had left home I stayed down there. Then, as I said, I went on until — no, there was no difference. I just went along and did the same thing. But I missed — you know, it wasn't the same. I missed the close companionship and fellowship of the other girls.

Have you kept up with the other girls over the years?

Yes, especially the four. One lass I don't know. But, of course, Madge and I have been friends ever since. One of the girls — oh, I was very close with her too, but Lucy died a couple of years ago. And Betty, who lives at Mitchum, is not

well. So I'm in contact after all those years. You know, it's over 40 years and I'm still seeing the girls.

One thing I was going to ask you: Madge said that a publicity photographer used to come down to your vineyard and take photographs from time to time. Were you in those photographs at all?

Yes.

Can you recall what it was like on the occasions that the photographer would come down?

It was Krishok, the photographer. We had been advertising I think in the *Chronicle*, yes. Well, I think he just came down. We were prewarned that he was coming — or were we? Anyway, he came, and there was a great to do. We were detailed off to do certain things, you know, so they could photograph the occasion. Then they would select the photographs, and some of them were in the papers.

Would he photograph you while you were working or would you pose for each picture?

I don't recall that he actually — well, the only one where we're working was the one with the two horses and me; I was ploughing. That was the only one we didn't pose for. But the others were more or less posed when we weren't working, which I thought was a pity.

Why was that?

I don't know — you mean?

Why did you think it was a pity?

Well, I think it would be, you know — if he came down to photograph the Land Army girls, well, I think it would have been better if we were working, showing what we were doing, rather than sitting up posing more or less, you know. Anyway, it did give a little bit of publicity, and I think one or two of them did appear in the paper. And I think that one down at the Constitutional Museum — did you see it?

No, I haven't seen it.

I just wondered. I cannot recall just what it was. I haven't got a photograph of it. I think I was — I don't know — standing by a couple of horses or doing something with horses. But I can't recall that one at all.

You do not have any of those photographs here?

I've got photographs here, yes.

Any of the ones he took at that time?

Yes.

May I have a look at those?

We were picking grapes at that stage. Where are we? Oh, that was another one.

With this photograph here, can you tell us a little bit about the horses?

Oh, yes. That's Bacchus and that one was Chloe. Gorgeous. He was a Percheron and this one was a Clydesdale. I remember standing on a box to harness those. I don't know how I did it when I come to think of it now, but I used to stand on a box and lift all that heavy harness up there. But we did that all by ourselves.

How did you use the horses?

Ploughing and harrowing with the harrows — those two harrows. We walked. I looked up the book here and it said we were not supposed to walk. But it's a bit late now I suppose to issue a protest. We were walking behind the harrows and ploughing, cultivating, rolling, all that sort of thing. They were beautiful horses. That's that one there.

Can you describe a little more how you put the harness on the horses?

You'd hop on the box, put the box here, and that collar had to go on. It was a very heavy collar. You'd put the collar on there, you'd get the hames and then you'd have to reach up again — it was heavy hames — and fiddle around there. Then came this part here. You'd have to stand at the back of the horse with these heavy chains and throw it over onto the back horse — and the horse was up here. You'd throw it like that and then run around the other side and pull up one side, and then you'd have to come back this side and you'd have to hitch it on here, you see. Then, before this, we had to go down to the stable or wherever. and the horses used to run free there. Sometimes the water used to be running down the river there and the horses wouldn't come over. Of course you had to wade through the other side. And then they'd tear around, you know — especially he used to frighten me a bit.

He was a great big horse but he was beautiful, and he used to come at me. He used to race towards me and then he'd stop like that, you know, and I used to be scared. Anyway, he used to stop after. After he'd pranced around for a while, we'd go and put his blinkers on and he'd come back docile.

He looks twice as big as you.

Oh, he is — he was. He was a very big one. He was a beautiful Percheron. Of course, that was ploughing time and that had all been pruned there. Then there was the harrowing. I can recall one day — I think I was ploughing, or was I harrowing — and going down what we call the land. They called it land in between the vines. I used to be scared of lizard, and this lizard was sitting down there in the middle of the row, you see — oh, he was not in the middle, he was just towards the side a bit, and I was just able to go past him. But if I came back the other way, I would have had to go near him, you see. So I missed it all together — missed the whole land. And the boss came up and said, 'Why didn't you go down that row?' I said, 'There was a lizard there.' Really, he thought that was a bit much.

Was it a blue-tongue?

I don't know what it was. But there used to be lizards even when we were picking grapes, you see. Oh no, that was almond blossom time. We were posing there. That was taken by our employer.

What did he used to say to get you to pose in that way?

Oh no, these were beautiful pink blossom and we just sort of came — the afternoon was a beautiful day and we went across

and he said, ‘We’ll come and take some photographs.’ That was one of the Krishok ones.

Can you tell me what you were doing here?

Well, we were posing. We are ploughing — I was that day ploughing, you see, and that is what I was doing over here. That was Betty Fuhurhart down there. That is me, of course. We were ploughing there.

Did you used to put the plough onto the harness and everything yourselves too?

Oh yes, we did that. You see, it’s hooked on here. Do you see the back of it? Of course, we had to carry the old oil can and carry this. That is a heavy plough and, when you got to the end of the row, you had to lift it around.

Did you have trouble with the heavy machinery?

That was a bit heavy. Well, it was a bit difficult at times. We had to walk with everything. Oh, that’s the same — oh no, it’s not. That’s Madge there. Oh, that’s another posed one. That’s Madge and Bet Fuhurhart. Oh, that’s the Women’s Land Army book. They are just little ones. It was while we were — they’re yellow with age — that was a bit of publicity. That was in the Adelaide *Chronicle* of September 3, 1942. I had a letter — I was looking for that the other day. We had a letter from one of the men in the Army. He wrote me a letter when he saw that. All the boys saw it when they were away in the forces.

So somebody corresponded with you. He thought you looked pretty interested in the back of the horse’s head.

Yes. He was in the land too, you see, so he —

Oh, what's this here?

Yes, pea picking. Look at this.

How old were you when you joined up?

Gosh, you ask me these things. You know, it is over 40 years ago, Sue.

Is it in your booklet?

No — well, let's see. This wasn't even finished off properly. No, I don't — I suppose — no, it's only my Land Army number. No, it hasn't got any. Those were in '42 but the jobs — they didn't all sort of go in here.

This is the Land Army. Did that cover the time of the war service?

No. I was about 22 I suppose then — would I have been? No, I might have been 23. There you are, you see; I am not quite sure. I'm much younger, as you can see. Of course, you've probably seen one of these, and that's a letter of appreciation.

Yes, I have seen that one.

That was a letter that I had. That was at cherry time. We used to put these on our shoulders and go off with half a case of cherries on our shoulders.

Gosh.

That's Betty Tapp and that's Madge; that's the three of us. But a lot of them I've lost. I had some of the onions and all that sort of thing and the peas and whatever. But over the years, you see, with moving on, you mislay them and put them away.

With making this film, we are also just asking various Land Army women what sort of things they'd like to see going into the film; what sort of stories they'd like told that they might feel haven't been told about the Land Army in the past. Are there any particular things that you would like to have said in the film about the Land Army?

In what way?

We are interested in knowing if you feel there are things you would really like to see in a film about the Land Army.

Well, I think you've covered it quite well, haven't you, really? You know, we've covered a bit this afternoon.

It is just whether there are any particular things, that's all. As you can see from the sorts of questions we are asking, we are taking a general approach and trying to be as wide as we can.

No. I just think it ought to bring it to people, as we've gone through this afternoon, that the women did work on the land. I think the assumption was, as I said, that the Land Army was sort of almost forgotten about. I think that

appeared so too in the English book there. There seemed to be some thought of them saying there that they were a sort of cinderella service. But, there again, they went further ahead with it, with the rehabilitation and all that kind of thing.

I will be interested to have a look at the book. I'll just take a quick flip through that.