Australian War Memorial

# Sound Collection

## ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

**ACCESSION NUMBER: S02696**

**TITLE:**

**INTERVIEWEE: Madge Hastings**

**INTERVIEWER: Sue Maslin**

**RECORDING DATE: 22nd March 1985**

**RECORDING LOCATION: Hazelwood Park, SA**

**SUMMARY:** Madge Hastings as a member of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), 1942-1945, interviewed and recorded by Sue Maslin on 22 March 1985 at Hazelwood Park, South Australia.

**TRANSCRIBER: WRITE*people***

**TRANSCRIPTION DATE: July, 2002**

What were you doing before the war broke out?

Well, I suppose I was — well, I couldn't say I was one of the lucky ones, but I was the youngest of four and I wasn't so awfully bright at school. And we lived in — well, it was quite a large house and garden, and I was more or less detailed off to stay home and look after my mother. I mean, girls did do that. Most of them went into nursing or secretarial work — you know, that sort of thing. A few, of course, went to university but not in the numbers of today. My sister did; she did physio, and that was all right. And, really, that was my role. Well, I did the housework, I did the cooking and looked after mother and dad. Well, as they tell us, I did charitable work. I've always done charitable work. And then the war came. You see, I was only 19, and a young 19 in those days too. I think the girls now are much older — and the boys too. It really — you know, I was sort of thinking, 'Oh well, perhaps I could do something.' And I was an outdoor type — I rode and we had horses and that sort of thing — and I heard about this and joined. And that's all. That's it. So I didn't leave an office to join the Land Army or those sorts of things. I was just — I used to garden, you see, at home, and ride and all that sort of thing. So I suppose that's why it appealed to me more than the other services.

You say you had a horse. What sort of country experience did you have?

Oh well, see, this is going back to '39. We had paddocks all behind us. You see, it's all built on now. And I used to ride — in fact, I used to ride up to the top of those hills and down the other side. And, of course, there were a

lot of vineyards up there. Oh, there were plenty of places to ride, yes. But I didn't — oh, well, we had a little local show and I had a pony, and I used to go in for that, you know, the sort of egg-and-spoon race. So that was all I did. So I suppose the Land Army would have appealed to me more than the navy or the air force — but purely, I suppose, because I didn't have any training. You see, I was not trained for anything. So I joined. And that's what I rang Jean about. We can't remember whether it was '41 or '42. She said she thought '42, but I don't know. I think I was 21. Well, it was one or the other. And we stayed — obviously, you've probably got all this — we stayed for — there again, '45. I don't really remember the date. And then she stayed on. She told you that, I suppose. I went back for the — well, when did the war end — August, around that part of the year. And then I think I went back for the next vintage, you see, because the men hadn't come back then. I remember I went back for one or two. And I think that almost finishes my career in the Land Army. I feel that you know what we did because you've seen her and —

> We are really interested in hearing of your experiences. So don't feel that, because Jean's told us her story, the story has been told, by any means.

Well, I quite enjoyed the work, and I was always very pleased that I learnt to prune. I really enjoyed pruning and the ploughing. I think the vintage itself — it was pretty heavy work really, because we were out at half past seven, and I imagine we worked till five at least. Some hot mornings when we picked table grapes, we were out earlier, and they had to be picked when it was cool and sent off. So, anyway, with that we'd be finished earlier in the afternoon. Of course we rostered our cooking and that sort

of thing, looked after ourselves. Not very exciting. I feel that the girls that did go to the mid-north certainly had more social life than we had. You see, we went home at the weekend, Saturday midday, and all we did then was to do our washing and bake a cake for the next week. So we really didn't have — our little group didn't have very much social life where we were. I think a lot of the other girls — well, as that magazine tells you — had constrict cricket matches and dances and little things in the country, as country people will. And we'd be weeks if we start on that. On the other hand, we were free to go home at the weekend. And we knew where we stood; it was constant sort of work — Monday morning, very early.

What did your father do?

Well, he was a produce merchant. Well, you don't know the state, you see, so it was hams and bacons and things like that. Well, he sort of more or less inherited that from his family and one thing and another. So he just did that.

And your mother. What sort of work did she do; how did she spend her time?

Well, I don't sound very enthusiastic about mentioning the family, do I. As I said, when I went to Girton to interview the headmistress with my daughter, 'My sister was clever' — I think she was the clever one of the family. Mother didn't do — she was one of a big family and her father died when she was three. I frankly don't know how that family managed and, as far as I know, she didn't do anything either. She didn't marry until she was 27, the same age as myself, and that was that. She helped her mother at home as far as I

would know. So that's that. I don't know whether that has much to do with it, has it?

Could you take yourself back to the year before you joined the Land Army; what were you doing then?

Well, I helped at the — there was a kiosk — where our Festival Theatre is, there is a swimming pool and a kiosk. And I helped there just getting lunches and things, and the money went to Red Cross — you know, any money we made. I organised one or two things for what was called the Fighting Forces Fund. I think we provided, hopefully, comforts of some kind. That was through 1940. And, if Jean says it was '42, then it would have been 1940 and '41. And I just helped around, and we all busily knitted and all that sort of thing. Well, you see, I was only 17, 18 — no, I wasn't. I was 19 at that stage, wasn't I? Yes. That was all.

Do you remember having, at that time, plans for yourself for the future?

Turn that off and I'll tell you. No, I mean that.

Really?

I mean that. I'd like you to turn it off.

Do you remember the day that you enrolled?

Not clearly. This is something I can't. I know how it came about. This other lass — now it doesn't really matter because she has died — Lucy Ives; I was at school with her. She joined — did Jean call it the women's services?

Women’s War Services?

Yes, before the Land Army. And this lass had joined and she was picking cherries and what have you up here in the near hills. And I remember coming out on the tramcar — it wasn’t a bus in those days — with her and we were chatting away. And I said, ‘Oh, I could do that.’ And that’s the only thing I can remember. So from there I must have joined. And it must have been the women’s services, because we didn’t have a uniform, because I remember it was some time, and it wasn’t the Land Army. And I gather our employer, Mr Laffer — and Jean would have told you about him — he must have applied to the women’s services for women, and we were allotted to him. And he’d brought us quarters, of course, and what have you. But I don’t remember it clearly. I think — you know, when you think we’d go in and we’d sign on the dotted line, and it’d be half an hour out of your whole life really, and I don’t remember that. I remember we must have signed something and said, ‘Yes, we will do this and do that.’ But it would be all over in the matter of an hour or so — and 43 years ago.

Do you remember having ideas of what it might have involved before you joined up? Did you have any idea of that?

Yes, I would think so, because we lived amongst the vines really. They were all — they were around my home here and, as I say, I’ve always enjoyed gardening. So I suppose, you know, I thought it would be — I believe we really only, you know, in our own minds, went down there for the vintage. You see, we went in February and harvested the almonds, and then we were to stay on to do the grapes. And then I think

Mr Laffer asked us to stay on permanently. That's only just come back to me. I think that's really how it all happened. We really just went, yes, till the harvest. And I think he probably recognised in Jean a fairly hard worker. She really was a conscientious lass. Yes, I think that is really how it happened, and we stayed on — and we just stayed on.

> Can I throw in here: so was Jean working while you had blossoms in your hair? Were you fooling around while Jean was working? I saw you had blossoms in your hair.

Oh no, she's in there too. That was just one spring day. I can't think who — that was the almond blossom, of course, and that flowers about August/September. We must have been feeling silly. Oh, we had our little moments like that, but really it wasn't terribly exciting when you look back.

> Can you remember any comments your family made about you joining the Land Army?

Oh, mother hated it, I think, but she didn't — neither parent objected. I could have just stayed home. I didn't have to do any like this. But I was always very pleased that I did do something. And I could have just stayed home and, you know, joined committees and done things like that. But I think she missed me. You see, as a generation, we stayed home until we married. Well, you see, young people today don't. You go out — and I don't know whether it's good or bad, to tell you the truth. I think it depends on the parents a lot. Anyway, we won't debate that one. But it wasn't usual for children to leave home. Well, I virtually left home, because we were living down there 5½ days a week. And this was a bit foreign to my mother. Dad was

awfully good. He used to get up Monday morning and walk me over to the tramcar about 6 o'clock or half past six, whichever was the first, to go in to catch the train to go down here. And he used to help me get breakfast and all that. He was very good that way. But I don't remember either of them actually commenting. But I don't think mother liked me being away. But she was awfully good. I'd come home Saturday and she'd — you know, you take it for granted with your parents. I'd come home about 2 o'clock Saturday and she'd have lunch of some kind ready for me. I really didn't deserve it, you know. I mean, why should she?

Were you very close to your parents?

Well, that's a tricky question. Yes and no. No grumbles or grizzles really, but I think we were a rather shy family — put it that way. But we were all quite happy. Yes, I think that my father probably spoilt us. I think until the day he died he had one idea — that he had to provide for his children, you know, whether we were grown up or not. So there we.

Would your mother help out by making cakes? Jean was telling us that everyone would bring back cake and bits and pieces.

No, she didn't perhaps actually do that. I think I usually did that. We used to do our washing Saturday afternoon I think, probably, and then we would go out on Saturday night if there was anything to attend. You know, when the blokes came back on leave and things like that, someone would ring you up and, oh, that was a great thrill and you'd go out. If not, we went out with any available girlfriends that we had, you know, that were not either away or something like

that. There was nearly always someone to go to the films with or something to that effect. And, as I say, if fellows came back on leave, that was nice; they'd perhaps take you out to dinner or a dance or something. So that was Saturday. And then Sunday I suppose we made the cake and did the ironing and packed our clean clothes ready for Monday. We might have got some tennis in occasionally, and things like that, and a swim. But, of course, there was petrol rationing and that limited us all a little bit. So, oh, it was a fairly dull life. When my children got to 20 and 21 — it seemed odd because there were no young men about, as there should have been in anyone's life at that age. They were just not here. When I had children of that age, I thought how odd that they do — not that it did them any good, but still.

If we go to the Laffers, the work itself, you were saying before that you really enjoined the pruning. Can you describe the pruning and what you liked about it?

Oh, that's hard because I — even with this small garden, we have a gardener come occasionally. He always wants to prune the roses and I say, 'No, I want to prune the roses.' I just like doing that sort of work. That's all I can say. You can't really — you know, you can't really describe it because it's just a matter of, I think, tidying things up. You know what I mean? It seems to me quite a relief to the bushes to be cut and tidied, and I like doing it anyway. I still hack at my daughter's vines — and 'hack' is the word because I didn't get any sultanas last year and I thought, 'Well, I must be losing my touch.'

What other sorts of jobs did you do?

Well, we ploughed, of course. We had to plough up and down between all the rows. And then he was a very meticulous fellow — beautiful vineyard and in a very good area there. We had to clean all the weeds out, you see, from between — where the implements can't get in. We had to do that all by hand with the hoe, up and down, up and down. It's surprising how many acres you can get through if you keep at it. That. And then I suppose Jean told you about the apricots. We dried apricots. But that was really on the side. I think he would have sold some for, you know, just general revenue. But I think mainly they were for — I suppose we got some — and his use and friends and that sort of thing. So we dried apricots. Almonds, of course, were part of his income. They were picked and husked. You know, you'd take the husks — not shelled; you know, just the husks — and dry it off a bit, and all that sort of thing, and packed and they were sold. They were sewn up — oh, I'd forgotten all this — and he did — this was not really Land Army work, but I guess everyone had something like this. He had a rose garden. Did Jean tell you about that? No. Well, that really wasn't Land Army work. But he was very keen on roses and he'd planted a side of the hill down there with roses and, of course, we learnt to prune those too. But that was just his hobby. And it wasn't huge; it was only a patch. It would have been just a little bit bigger than this. That was just a side thing. So we learnt all that sort of thing. And, of course, there were the few fruit trees. I learnt to prune fruit trees. I suppose I just liked pruning. I really enjoyed that.

Did you receive much training from him? Would he spend quite a bit of time training you?

Yes, he probably had to in the beginning. I don't really remember. He'd have to show us how. It's not very difficult — not very difficult. And, I think, if you have a feeling for plants, you know, it comes — I would think it did come fairly naturally to me too, pruning, because I still like doing it after all these years. And I suppose I did it well enough. I was kept on in the team; I wasn't told to go and do anything else.

How did you find having to learn how to plough?

Oh, that was great. I loved that. Yes, I really enjoyed that because, you see, I had horses. Well, I had a pony from eight on, you see, up until the war — a pony and then a horse. I love horses, love the smell of horses, and so I used to get a lot of satisfaction out of ploughing. Yes, I enjoyed that.

Do you remember harnessing the horses?

Oh yes, but I don't suppose I could harness one now; that's a bit complicated really. When I see one, you know, from time to time — you see something perhaps on the television or films — I suppose I've got more idea of doing it than someone that hasn't done it. You sort of think — I've sometimes just thought, 'Oh yes, that goes down there and that there.' But I don't suppose I could do it now. I don't know.

What do you think were the hardest jobs, the most difficult jobs?

Well, I suppose the most unpleasant was pruning first thing in the morning. You see, we pruned through — oh, I'd better

get this right — I suppose — when did we start? About July, June or July. I've rather forgotten that. The vintage is over April/May. And you don't prune immediately, of course, you know, when the leaves fall. It was jolly cold. We wore several pairs of socks under 'gumboots', as we call them, and I think that was the most unpleasant part. I didn't like that much at all. Until the sun came up, it was very, very cold — and, of course, some days the sun didn't come up at all. But, other than that, I think I enjoyed most of it.

When did your uniform come through?

Oh well, that's —

How long were you working before you got —

I would think about 18 months, but I don't really remember. I think we worked all that first year — you see, we started in the February of either '41 or '42. We worked all that year, and I think perhaps the wheels were turning some time in the next year.

What sort of clothing did you have to provide before you were issued with your uniform?

Well, we just wore — I'm obviously there wearing a pair of old riding pants that I had at home, and gumboots and just shirts and jumpers of our own. And we just went up and down in ordinary clothes — our jumpers and skirts or whatever. I don't think I had a pair of slacks until after the war. I was scared stiff my father was going to have a piece of me when I appeared in my slacks, and I'd bought rather a nice pair. And all he said when he came out, 'My word, they're

nice. I'd like a suit made of that.' Oh dear. So we didn't wear slacks. We wore skirts up and down and we went to dresses, summer dresses sort of thing, yes.

Do you remember what your wages were?

Well, I thought you were going to ask me that. I think we received £3 a week. What did Jean say?

Yes, she thought it was £3.

Yes, I think it was £3 a week. See, it went a lot further in those days.

Did you think it was a fair wage at the time?

Well, I think it went around. I didn't at that stage actually receive any money from home. I was always provided for, you know, because, as I said, I'd go home and lunch would be ready and everything like that. And I could bake my cake and do my washing and ironing, and that was it, and off I'd go. But I don't think I received any money from home, and I think it went round. I don't ever remember being drastically short. And we couldn't buy many clothes or anything because there were coupons and that sort of thing. So, no, I don't remember thinking, 'Oh goodness, I'll never make it to next week,' that sort of thing. So I suppose it did go around. We put so much in the kitty. I think we had a purse or something and we each put, I suppose, 30 shillings in, I should imagine — because we cooked, of course, and brought our own food during the week. I believe it went around.

How did you get on living together?

Very well. Did Jean tell you that? No, I think we got on very well. There were four to five of us; it varied a little bit. But I think Betty — I could never say her name — left early, and that left the four of us. And I don't think we had an argument for the whole five years. Oh, I suppose we were getting older all the time. But I think — without talking about it, I think we all realised if we did argue that'd be the end. If someone had a snip at someone — well, once you've done it, you do it again. And I don't think we had an argument the whole five years. I think that is one of the amazing things of the life down there for those years, that we got on very well, because by were a mixed bunch.

In what way?

Well, I think different backgrounds.

How were their backgrounds different to yours?

Well, turn it off — turn it off, because I really can't say. I feel that Jean — no, I think that that was quite almost a miracle the way we did, yes, have no arguments.

How did you organise, say, the cooking?

Oh well, that was a roster. I think perhaps we had — one cooked and a helper, you know, something like that, and then it was the helper's turn to cook and — when I say a 'helper', for the washing up. I think we did it all. I'll always remember when we came to a nasty, dirty jam jar or something, we used to say, 'I think we'll let that soak till tomorrow,' and got out of it that way. And then, you

see, you only cooked one night a week each. So it wasn't too bad really, because we could wash our hair and write our letters and do our washing or little bits and things like that when we were not on duty. So that worked very well. And I think we — also, from the weekends, we possibly brought down cold meat or something for lunch for the first couple of days at least. I don't think we had a refrigerator. I can't remember. No, I really can't remember that.

Can you describe where you lived?

Well, it was very small, for starters. Mr Laffer had built one room, but it would be from that curtain across, only a rectangular shape. And we lived and slept four or five of us in that. Some sort of — I don't know what our beds were. I think they were more than stretchers, but I really couldn't say. That was the one room that was everything. It had a fireplace in it. We had plenty of wood from the wines, you see, from the cuttings; they'd burn beautifully. Well, then he built a little kitchen. There was a little outdoor part and then, over there, he built a kitchen and a bathroom, and then there was a separate toilet just there. There wasn't a door. We had to come around and come in the door there. There was a kitchen, bathroom, and we had to come down this little path, you know, in all weathers to come in. And then after — probably not very long because, after all, we were up there — he built another room almost the same size and put a door through that we could use. We put all the beds in there and so we all slept together, and had the first room he built as a sort of living room/eating room. But at first we slept and ate and used it at night. Of course, we only had the wireless then, the radio, to listen to and that sort of thing.

How did you entertain yourselves?

I think we were pretty tired, you know. It didn't take much. Everyone listened to the radio in those days, and they had plays and different sessions that we had all worked out that we liked to listen to, the same as you would with the television. And we'd see that we had it on at such and such a time. By the time we'd finished and put all the tools and the horses and everything away and showered, usually, and got our meal, it would be eight or 9 o'clock and we were fairly tired. We'd sit around in the winter, around this fire, knitting and what have you. And then we'd just go to bed because we'd be up early. And so it went. Not very exciting, really, for young girls.

Did you have much contact with the local community socially?

No. Not a lot, no. That, as a matter of fact, disappointed us a little built. I thought that they were — that someone — there was not many people living there, nothing like you would see going down there. It was all paddocks and vineyards and all sorts of — only a few people living there. But then I think the fellow across the road was an Italian — what was his name — you know, a market gardener. I suppose there were really not many people for us to contact or for them to contact us. But, no, we didn't know the locals that were there, only the woman that ran the little store. And it was a little store, but we could get most things there that we wanted that we didn't bring down. And I think Mr Laffer used to bring our meat from Brighton, which was a bigger area. So, no, we lived very much to ourselves. You know, I was thinking about this. You

wouldn't let girls do it today. Oh, there was a cottage on the property with a fellow and his wife and a couple of little kiddies. He worked on the property. He was there. But he was only a little bloke, about so big, and he wasn't terribly strong and he wasn't terribly well. But I suppose that was something so that we were not completely isolated. But I wouldn't let a girl live there, like the way we did, today. But you were all right.

Did you have others working alongside of you, apart from the five of you?

Yes. Others came in for the vintage, if I remember rightly. I was trying to work this out. Did Jean tell you about Carrel Simon?

No.

Oh, she must have forgotten that. Oh, it was really rather sweet. Well, he was the son of — oh I don't know what I'm going to tell you — he was the son of Josiah Simon, who was Adelaide's leading criminal lawyer, I would think. And they lived in the hills way back here, further than you can see. And there were several Simon boys. There was one — oh much older than us. Carrell — C-a-r-r-e-l-l or e-l or something to that effect — I don't know but I think he possibly did law. I don't really know. But he decided he should do something for the war, you see, and he was — oh, he must have been into his 50s; you see, too old to go away. And he came down and Carrell carried grapes. Now, how we did it — are there any more of those little photographs? They were all — we picked into buckets, and they all had to be carried out to the end of the row. Yes, you see, we picked into these buckets and — there's some — and they had to be

carried out and thrown up onto the truck. I don't know how they do it now. But he came down and he worked valiantly carrying these. He was a very florid fellow. If I knew then as much as I know now, I would have been worried about him. He walked up and down carrying two buckets of grapes, threw them up on the truck. Anyway, there was Claude here. We couldn't do this work; it was far too heavy. He was an ex-baker, I think, Claude. Oh, that's the little fellow that lived in the cottage. He's only a little fellow. I don't know who that was. Yes, a few, well, obviously older — because you can see that — men helped through the vintage. But I suppose Carrell was the most outstanding. I just think that, with the family he came from, it was rather funny, I thought. So, yes, we had Carrell Simon. Of course, Simon was a very well known name in Adelaide, of course. But he's not in any photographs. I don't think I've got a photograph of Carrell.

Is Mr Laffer in here?

Yes. He's that one there, in the shirt sleeves.

Can you tell us a little about Mr Laffer as an employer?

Oh, he was very good. There again, the Laffer family — well, he used to describe people as the salt of the earth. Well, he was the salt of the earth. He was a very nice fellow. All the Laffers — I think he had some cousins in parliament and all sorts of things — they really were very good citizens. That's about the only way I can put it. And he did everything for our comfort as could be done. Now, nowadays we would have had a television and a refrigerator and probably a video and all that sort of thing. But they

were not available. We didn't look for them. But he gave us, I think, pretty well every other comfort. And his sisters — did Jean tell you about his sisters? Well, where we were — oh, of course, you haven't seen it and I keep thinking Jean's down there. The vineyard was a triangle of land by Flinders University, and the creek runs through there. And it was very fertile and it was very pretty. Right in the middle the Laffer family lived when he was a boy. And he married and lived in Brighton. Well, his mother — I think his mother was alive — and two sisters lived in the family property. And every now and then they'd have us over to a lovely lunch. You know, they'd roast this lamb and have apple pie. I'll always remember the apple pie. It was awfully good of them. And, oh, we'd all clean up at lunchtime and go over and have lunch just ever now and then. Well, his sister Millice Laffer still lives there by herself. She must be — oh, she must be getting up to 80. She'd have to be late 70s. They were just nice people, very nice people. And Harold had half the land there and Albert, his brother, had the other half. But we didn't fraternise with Albert very much. He had some land girls and he was over the creek. And I don't really ever remember meeting him. I suppose I did, but I don't really remember. He worked his half and we worked our half.

Did you have contact with any other Land Army girls?

Well, now, I think Jean told me she was trying to get you in touch with Pat Cartwright. Well, see, she came down for the vintage. I don't know whether she didn't stay for the pruning. Not a great deal. Lal Proudfoot; she was another one that came up from Brighton. I think she joined the Land Army. I think we had a few lasses, little casual workers, that were not Land Army. I really can't remember. But, no,

not a great deal with other girls, unfortunately. I think it was rather a pity really that we were not able to mix more. But we were allotted that job and we just worked there — did as we were told.

Did you used to get the *Land Army Gazette*?

Well, I don't think there was — I can't even — I don't know where this came from. You see, that's 1944.

Or the *Roundabout*?

It was getting on a bit. No, this is all I've got. I can't remember whether there was a paper or not. I really can't. I don't remember getting anything. There may have been something, but I don't remember.

Do you think that the time you spent in the Land Army affected your health in any way?

Oh, no, no. But then I've always been a fairly healthy person. No, I've always been — I've really had very good health. I put it down to very good food; you know what I mean? I think it all — well, part of it — I think it all helps. My mother was a good plain cook, and I've always been very fortunate with my health, and I think it probably only did me good, yes.

With the work and the food side, did you put on a lot of weight at the time?

No, I've always been very — I've only put on weight recently. I was eight stone five when I married at 27, and

that's not much for my height. I've put on a bit now. Oh, yes, mid-life — oh, a bit later than mid-life.

Did any of the girls at Laffers have any accidents?

No, I don't think we did. I can't think of any serious ones. We may have had a few cuts or something like that. But no-one broke anything, you know, as far as I remember.

Did you do any work that you considered was dangerous?

No, not really. See, we didn't have a tractor. I don't like tractors. Oh, they're funny things. We didn't have a tractor. We only had the horses, and they — oh, I suppose they could have put on a bit of a turn. They were quite energetic horses. They were not really old and doddery, by any means. But they must have been good horses — well trained by someone. And I think we all liked them and I think, you know, the animals know. We were all fond of horses. In fact, we all rode, when I come to think of it. That is one thing we did have in common. At some stage we would all have been connected with horses — I've never thought of that before — in our lives; all of us. Lucy Ives; I used to ride to school with her and my sisters. Jean was a country girl. Betty we used to teach riding. And the other Betty; she rode.

Were there a lot of horses apart from the Clydesdales?

No. I don't think so, no.

Did you go riding at all while you were —

No, no riding horses. I don't know whether you're getting anything from this or not.

We do. It helps us build up a picture, and we are just trying to understand what it must have been like.

At times pretty boring, really. The only way we could get home was for Mr Laffer to drive us to the train, or walk about three miles, which I don't think — which is not impossible, but we didn't want to do. There was not a bus service or anything like that. So, to a point, we were rather buried and just on our own. I don't sort of mean the work and all that. Seeing that we all got on so well, I think this is where we got our enjoinment. But it probably was a bit silly to stay in the one place. I think we should have asked for a move.

So throughout that time none of you really considered moving?

No, it didn't occur to us. No, we just went on. Oh, dear.

Did you have any contact with other women in the services? Did you know any women in the services?

No, not really at all. Let me think. Most of my friends were married, really. I'm trying to think of who — oh well, some were in the — what did they call them — the VADs.

What is VAD?

Voluntary Aid Detachment. I think that would be it. And they were with hospitals mainly; they helped the hospitals. A friend of mine, a lifelong friend, reminded me — we were

talking about riding bikes recently. And she said, ‘Oh, I remember riding down to the vineyard’ — and, quite frankly, I don’t remember and so I didn’t say anything — and she said, ‘Oh, I didn’t think I’d ever survive that.’ Well, now, she was at a hospital at Goodwood, you see. You don’t know the area, but it’d be down — let me see, how far would it be — it would only be about four miles, I suppose. And she was — I remember her being a VAD and I remember her being there, but I don’t remember her riding down to see us. Oh, she was a cousin of Betty Tapp and a friend of mine, so she had sort of two. But I think that perhaps two or three of them rode bikes down, but I frankly don’t remember them coming there. But, again, what’s one visit 43 years ago? Oh, we’d have a few — Betty Tapp had a fellow that rode — a couple of blokes came down on horses, because she was a very horsy woman and used to hunt and all that sort of thing before the war. She’s a little bit older than us. Oh, a couple of her friends and another girl rode down on horses once to see us. You know, things like that happened. They were home on — both Air Force boys, I think — and I don’t know where they got the horses — they just rode down. That sort of thing happened but, on the whole, we didn’t have much contact. Well, no-one did during those years.

With the Women’s Land Army, did you feel that you were in any way like a military service?

No, no, not at all. I wouldn’t have thought of it like that, no. No, it wouldn’t have meant that to me at all — not at all.

It was more a civilian force then?

Yes, just doing our little bit — and 'little' is the word. I feel that, on the whole, the five of us more or less just kept an industry going. I feel the girls that did work on farms really probably did more.

Why is that?

Well, I think it was perhaps more of a service — although, if we hadn't run this vineyard — as I said, it was very well kept and very high quality grapes and everything; an industry. Well, I rather feel that perhaps it wasn't — how can I put it — doing as much as the girls that supplied milk and eggs and that. No, I can only think — oh well, there were table grapes, of course. I think they may have been exported. Someone said that to me in the meeting on Monday, and I hadn't looked at it and I can't remember now. I think they were sent somewhere, but whether it was out of Australia I don't know. But I suppose they supplied fresh food in their own way, apart from the wine grapes and the almonds. I suppose they probably went away in cakes and things.

Jean seemed to think that the grapes went off to Singapore.

Yes, I think someone said that. I believe that's right. I'd forgotten that. They said that at the meeting on Monday and I thought, 'Oh, I think some of those grapes were sent away.' Yes, I had quite forgotten that. So I suppose, in some small way, we believed we were doing something anyway.

How often would you wear your Land Army uniform?

Oh, only twice a week. We'd wear it home and wear it back, once we had it, yes. Sometimes — of course, we had some leave; I can't remember that very much, but we probably all had leave of some kind. But we didn't wear it then. We all went off to Mount Gambier, I think. I had a little car and packed them all in. I think the four of us possibly went down to Mount Gambier for a bit of a holiday. We always used to laugh at Mr Laffer. We used to talk about the 'slack season'. He'd talk about the slack season being about November, but we always thought he kept us fairly busy. But there is a little bit of a slack season there just before the vintage starts. And it must have been then, I think, we all went off for about a week just to have a break. So we did that sort of thing.

Do you remember what you did for entertainment during the week while you were working there?

No, I can't think of anything outstanding, but we giggled a lot; we used to make our own fun. We did. We were happy enough; there was no question about that. I think going home at the week end probably helped us, because we'd more than likely have some story to bring back. I think most weekends we would do something or there'd be some news from home and we'd sort of pool it all. And, of course, we got very interested in one another and that sort of thing, living like that. So I suppose that helped us through the week in a way, knowing what we'd do at the weekend and this, that and the other. If we'd been there the whole week and just had annual leave or something, I don't think it would have been as successful as it was — if we'd a slack day down there or something like that. But we were pretty busy all the time.

When you used to go home on the weekends and you would be wearing your uniform, did you ever get comments from people about the uniform?

No, because we'd go home — we'd walk through Adelaide and you could fire a gun up and down North Terrace and King William Street and you wouldn't hit anyone in those days, nor a motor car. We'd probably catch — we'd knock off, I suppose, about 12 o'clock and, by the time we all showered and got dressed, we more than likely caught a train at about one-ish or half past one. There was always a scramble to get to the train; I know that. And it wasn't very fair, of course — half an hour journey at the most. Well, we'd be walking through Adelaide at 2 o'clock and there wouldn't be a man or a boy, or even a dog. So I don't think very many people saw us. And then Monday morning it was usually dark. So we didn't wear a uniform — we didn't. Others may have from the other parts. But we wear our uniform in public very much at all.

When the war ended, did you receive any sort of help or rehabilitation of any kind?

Well, someone said — oh, you turn that off and I'll tell you a funny story. No, you've got to. No, you mustn't put it on there. I sort of vaguely do. I could talk myself into saying, 'Yes, we did,' but I wouldn't have recalled it or I wouldn't have told you that. No, that's all. And we kept our uniforms. Now, didn't one of you say that New South Wales — someone said it on Monday; and we were all South Australians, I would think — they had to hand the uniform in? Did you hear that? We didn't. We kept it all.

Yes, they had to hand everything in. What's more, they were booked or charged for anything that they lost.

What would they do with it? No, because I've got my jacket. We all dyed our skirts because we were, you know, rather starved of clothes, and I don't remember what happened to that. I probably dyed them black or navy, thought we were going to wear them, but I don't ever remember wearing it. But I kept my jacket. Strangely enough, my husband disposed of his uniform just recently. So I thought, 'Oh, I'll get that out of the cupboard.' He used to wear his when he was involved in the Anzac Day march. But he marches for Legacy now and so he doesn't wear anything like that, just ordinary clothes. So I don't know what he did with it. And I was just about to say to him, 'Oh, better take my coat too; that's silly' — and I didn't. But that is of no interest to you, is it?

Probably not at this stage.

I don't want it and I don't think my children would be interested in that. I mean, I really don't mind what happens to it.

Can you remember what you were doing on the day the war ended?

Working. Vaguely, yes. It came over the radio. We were down there. There again, you see, we didn't really celebrate. I guess we all had a drink because, by then, that was '45. You see, I follow the year exactly with my age so I know how old. I must have been 25 and I was getting on. Oh, it came over the radio, and it was just a great relief all round. That was all. We didn't have any particular

celebration. As I say, I guess we did have a drink of some kind, but that was about all. And then we went back to work, because nothing happened immediately. Nothing happened immediately; it was all very much the same. You know, it was all — do you watch that series *Tenko*? Have you seen that on television? Oh, it was really worth it. It's nearly finished now. The women were taken prisoner by the Japanese from Singapore. They've had two — I think this might be the third bite at it. They're now in Singapore, and everything was chaos. No-one knew what — well, it was a bit like that for a long time, as far as I'm concerned. Yes — no, it wasn't anything very special. Because none of us were married, no-one was really expecting anyone back from the war on the spot, not like that. Oh, we were going out with friends, of course. But, for us, as far as that goes, I think we just said, 'Oh, jolly good,' and went on working.

How much longer did you stay working there?

Well, that was towards the end of the year. I think I probably stayed until after that vintage was over. That would be Christmas — January, February, March. I think I left about April. Now my family at this time were thinking it was time they left the biggish house. You know, it was too big; the family had all moved out. Of course, building materials and houses — everything was short. I think I helped — I left the vineyard to sort of help them, you know, with the packing up. And dad managed to get half a house. Well, there were just the three of us then, you see, in Unley. And he wanted to do it up a bit — it was rather a shambles — and I helped with all that sort of thing, and I don't know what I would have done. Then I met my husband, you see, and that's — there again, I'm back where I

started. When I say half a house, it was the people that were living in the other house that actually introduced us on the tennis court. Well, that was 1946, and we were married at the end of the next year. So, by the time I got the family settled — well, you know, helped them with this, that and the other; you see, they were getting on a little bit then, not too bad — so, by the time I'd helped them to get settled, well, then I started thinking about getting married. So that was that. So I really, you see, didn't worry about — I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't married; I really don't. I haven't got the remotest idea. I think I probably would have gone on and looked after my family, because mother died at 80 and dad was 88 — not by present standards terribly, terribly old. But I think that's what I would have done. I would have just looked after them. And they could well have done with it. It was a bit of a pickle for me in the end, being married, and I was the only one to do anything and I was always running backwards and forwards. But, still, that's life. Everyone gets these things. So, if you were going to ask me what I would have done, I wouldn't have. It really just worked out, I suppose, one could say, yes.

If you had wanted to, could you have stayed on working there?

Well, Jean did; and, of course, that was possibly her downfall, because that was — in 1947, we had a polio epidemic here; and where in the world would she have caught that, being out there? Oh, Mr Laffer himself had it, but he had a different kind. His was one that affected his heart. Now, a hard-working, very slim man — where would he pick up polo? And then Jean did, you see. But I don't think it was from the same source, because hers was a different type.

But we didn’t know much about polo then. I don’t think she got quite the right treatment and, of course, it’s bugged her ever since. And that was 1947. Just before our daughter was born, I went down — oh dear, she was born in March, and I went down to see them at Christmastime, and I think Jean — I was obviously pregnant with this first babe — and she contracted it pretty well straight away, you see. And, oh, I had my fingers crossed, of course, being in contact with them like that. But, anyway, all was well. But, oh, it’s a pity with her because she’s an exceedingly nice, conscientious person. She really would have made a worthwhile citizen, whatever she’d gone into after. She was hardworking, conscientious, and I feel she’s just been lost to the community. In a way, she hasn’t. I think she’s — oh, I’ve learnt a lot from her; I know that. But I think it’s pretty tough that she has to have polo for 35 years for me to learn something. And I think a lot of other people have learned something from her. But it’s hard on her. So she stayed on — oh, well, she would have been there all ‘46 and into ‘47, you see. And, when she went down with polio, well, just at that stage, I lost track of her a bit, because obviously I had a new baby to look after in March. And, until my two children grew up — oh, I kept in touch. Then really it was, I suppose, a bit like this: once my children grew up and could be left, they were growing up but she was going down. It was then that I started regular visiting. And I suppose I’ve been doing — I suppose I’ve seen her fairly regularly for the best part of 20 years. I do what I can for her, but it’s little enough.