

Australian War Memorial

Sound Collection

ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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INTERVIEWEE: Lal Proudfoot

INTERVIEWER: Sue Maslin

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SUMMARY: Lal Proudfoot as a member of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), 1942-1945, interviewed and recorded by Sue Hardisty on 28 March 1985 at Glenelg, South Australia.

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Can you give us an idea of what you were doing in the years just before the war?

Before the war broke out, I was in Melbourne in the Wool Exchange. I was working in the office there. Of course, we all immediately were pegged in that job. Being wool, you see, that was a product of Australia and it was necessary for making uniforms and all that kind of thing. But, as I wanted to get back here to join something, I was given permission to resign from there. As a family, we were on the land up on the Murray in my very early days.

Whereabouts?

Up beyond Renmark. Then, after my father died, my mother and my sister and I came down here — or just before he died, he was sent down here to a specialist, and we had to sell up and come down here. We have been here ever since.

How old were you then?

I was about 19 when we came down — no, nearly 20, I think I was. So it meant leaving the friends we had made over the years in the town of Renmark and coming down here and picking up the threads and making a new life. But, you know, these things happen.

So why were you in Melbourne?

Well, I had a job here for quite a long time. I had never been trained for anything. I didn't think — in those days, there was no need for women to work. I didn't start training until I was 20 — about 22 I think. I went and did a business

course and was working here. I was, I suppose, nearly 10 years here working. That brought me into the thirties. I wanted a change, so I got a transfer. I was doing the Burrows calculator. I wanted a change, and so I put in through Burrows here. That's how I got over into the Wool Exchange in Melbourne. I was there for a number of years until war broke out.

How old were you when the war broke out?

Well, war broke out just on 1940 — just a little bit before, I think. We came into it about 1940. Well, I would have been 39 then. By the time it really sort of hotted up and became very serious, we were 1940 then and getting on for '41, I suppose. I was 40 then, you see, and I was not wanted in any of the recognised services like the WAAFs.

Can you remember what the age limit was?

Oh, I think 40. They brought it down later because they couldn't get enough women in that age. Anyway, that's how this came about and I joined the Women's War Service Council. That eventually, of course, became the Land Army.

Where did you hear about the Women's War Service Council?

I just can't remember that. As I say, it's a long time ago. I can't remember how I came to hear about that. But I wanted to do something. I didn't want to have just an office job. I felt it wasn't — well, I felt a bit dedicated and I felt I should do something that was more helpful. Office jobs anybody can do, and I know they were necessary. However, I heard about it from someone or saw. I think there must have

been something in the paper; that's how I came by it. So I went in and applied and was off the next day.

And your sister?

My sister? She was married. I didn't ever marry. She was married and had a family. She used to do auxiliary work in the Land Army. At one stage we were on a vegetable garden not terribly far from here We lived in Brighton, which is just along a bit further from here, and we used to ride our bikes over there. It was very nice, and we could live at home. I'm a bit of a home bird, you know; I like to be near home or at home.

So each day you would go over to the vegetable garden?

Yes, we'd go over there. We enjoyed that. I loved that life. It came to an end when Miss Marshall — they wanted her to go overseas after the war to work with UNRAR; you know, displaced persons. Oh, she twisted my arm to come in and take over, which I didn't want one bit because I was so happy out of doors in the free and easy life. We had an awful lot of fun all together. But to come in and have all that responsibility was really not my thing.

What did your job involve?

Well, I was in charge of these girls, you see. We didn't have a tremendously big Land Army, about 400-odd, but it was a full-time job with all its problems and what have you. I was there until the wind-up. I think we wound up in 1945 — finished up everything. But really, once I came in in there, it became a different thing altogether. Of course, you're an outdoor girl; I can see that. You'd be a real recruit.

Yes, I've been working on the land for the last five years.

Have you? Oh, lovely. One job sticks in my mind, after I became attached to headquarters. About 24 girls were sent out on a consignment to pick peas up in — well, the Murray Mallee really, up from here, up from Mannum. We were billeted in an old stable, complete with a very, very rough and ready sort of manger, which we had to put boards on to make into a table for dining. Our beds — the mattresses were made of cocky chaff. I suppose you'd know what cocky chaff is — or do you? When they're thrashing the wheat, it separates the grain from all the dross, you might say, all the roughage, rough bits and sticks and what have you, and that's bagged. I think the cattle eat it. Anyway, that was what we slept on, and the result was violent hay fever from everybody. At night it was just a series of sneezes. Anyway, we spent three weeks there, and these poor girls — we had no conveniences at all. It was not wind proof or even a stable sort of a toilet. It was just a few stakes put in and some hessian draped around it. The wind blew continuously. Of course at one stage all the hessian blew away, and there were the four stakes and nothing else. And there was no shower — well, there was a kerosene tin with holes in it, and of course we had to take it in turns to take buckets of water up into the thing while the other one stood under and had the shower. But it was all cold; no hot and cold. What else? Oh yes, our oven was an old camp oven — you know, a little old thing that stands on four legs, a cast iron camp oven. We managed to cook. I had been in charge of a hostel on the flax before I went into head office, and I had to do all the cooking and run the whole show — be the mum. Of course I'd done quite a bit of cooking for all these girls, and so I knew a little bit about it. But

I had never been confronted with a camp oven before. Everything had to be done on that. Boiled, baked or whatever, it all had to go in the camp oven. Anyway we survived. After three weeks we were not very sorry to come home to a few modern conveniences, I can tell you.

How was the work organised under the women's war service? How was that different as an experience to being —

Oh, well, I don't think it was any different. For instance, there were some girls who were assigned to a vineyard not far from here.

Jean Bennier —

Jean Bennier, Madge Pritchard and Bet Hogarth. They were there for years. It was a delightful place, you see. They had a very nice little cottage there that the employer had provided for them. They were very happy. But in the hostel, the war service council didn't know — also, this council used to billet us. We were billeted, the first job I went to, in a boarding house down Port Noarlunga and we were on very short rations. The proprietors didn't seem to think we needed feeding very well. Of course, we used to come home starving, and we spent anything that we — I think at that stage we were getting 10 shillings a day. It was shillings then; 10 shillings a day. But, with the war service council right up until the time of the Land Army, I think that same set-up existed. We were billeted if we went out to jobs. I was lucky enough to get this job near home, and I was in that for quite a while after the flax finished. But, after I went into head office, I didn't get any of that fun and games. I can't think

of anything else terribly funny, but that job down there on the pea picking was really very funny in patches.

Did you join with any friends?

No, no. But the lass who went in the same day as I did was — she came from up country here a bit, and we became friends. We are still friends. She married and has a family, and we keep in touch. I see her fairly, what, occasionally. But, anyway, we keep in touch: we phone each other and that sort of thing. But, you see, most of them were younger than I. Although she's younger, she's not that much younger that it matters. But nearly all the others were. You see, they'd have been around about 18 when they joined, and there was I in my forties. It is a big difference.

Was it very difficult for you socially?

Oh no, no. We all got on well.

But you would have had different interests for your leisure pursuits.

Oh, yes. Well, most times I was able to come home. I was assigned to this flax in the first case, and that's only a matter of — it's down the coast a bit.

Where was that?

Port Noarlunga, just down the coast. It might be 20 miles or so. Oh, I doubt whether it would be that. At one stage I used to ride my bike home and back. I couldn't do it now.

Every day?

No, for weekends. You see, we did a Monday to Friday job, and then we were off. There was quite a good bus service we could get from Port Noarlunga to over not far from here, and someone would pick me up. But I know one night I had an awful time. The bus broke down and we didn't get back until well after midnight, and I was locked out. Well, this was not the first year we'd been there but the second year I think, because we went back; the jobs rotated. We went back. Stella was there too, this mate of mine, but we were not in the same boarding house. Well, I had a little flat, a little sort of motel thing and, when I got there, I was locked out. And I went and knocked at the door and nobody came, nobody came. Oh, there was I for about two hours and couldn't raise anybody. I went and got a phone and phoned them through, and they knew that — of course, there was hell to pay next morning for rousing them and I shouldn't have stayed out. It wasn't anything to do with head office or anything. They didn't say anything; they didn't know. But the boarding house proprietress took a very dim view of it. She thought I'd been out on a scoot and got in late. Anyway she calmed down afterwards. I think she heard of somebody else who had been on that bus, and she then knew it was genuine. I didn't get into my room until about two in the morning. That was the worst experience. You know, it's a dreadful feeling.

What tasks did you enjoy in particular?

I enjoyed them all. I loved them all. I didn't get on to any farms or anything like that, which I would have loved, but we were pretty tied to home.

Were you a seasonal worker or rural? Did you have S or R?

Oh, well, I was seasonal. Because of having a mother who was very old, I put in to be, as far as possible, assigned to jobs near enough for me to get home. That made a difference. Otherwise I probably would have gone right out on to a rural job. I'd have loved that.

Perhaps you could go through the things that your work involved, the variety of work that you did, the places that you went.

No, well, you see, I didn't go far afield. I was brought into the office while our superintendent was still here. Before ever there was any talk of her going overseas, I was brought in there. I then had a nine to five job. That entailed — well, if a prospective employer applied for girls, for instance grape picking, they would to have supply quarters for them. And we would never send girls out before we'd been to see these quarters that they had. Well, there was a lot of that had to go on, especially through the grape harvest. Sometimes she and I would go, and sometimes I would go on my own if it was only fairly small sort of thing.

You mean Miss Marshall?

Miss Marshall, yes. We had a lot of that to do.

Did you very often have to suggest that changes be made?

Occasionally, yes. But on the whole they were marvellous really, the employers, very good. I mean, some of the girls were not as good as they might have been, I know. But in most cases they were very lenient and very good, the employers. Now, what else? Then of course there was a big fruit canning

place up on the Murray up at Berri. Well, that took quite a lot of girls. The employer there built a big hostel type place for these girls. We had to go up there periodically to sort of just be there and see if there were any queries or any trouble or anything, and there wasn't really. They got along marvellously. Then up at Undalia, up near Laura, was a big flax place. They had a big hostel, an old home for the girls. We'd have to go up there periodically just, I suppose, partly for moral support and hear any grizzles and grumbles. But there were not too many of those. Then there was interviewing a lot in the office, of course The girls would come in there with their complaints, and we'd have to try and sort those out.

What sort of complaints might they have?

Oh, some of them would have trouble — a few had trouble with the wives. Two women get together and there used to be a clash of temperament and so on occasionally, and they would like to be moved somewhere else. Well, we'd have to see if we could work that out. There was one hostel where they had an infection of head lice. These girls had to come in and we had to inspect their heads to see what we could find. Then we had to get a chemist's prescription and douse their heads with it and so on. There was nothing else like that, but that was a very funny incident really.

Were they the only two hostels, the ones that you have mentioned?

Laura and Port Noarlunga, yes, and Berri with the fruit canning place. Only three hostels. You see, we weren't a very big organisation in this state. I believe, of course, in

Victoria they had all sorts of things. Up in Queensland they had a lot of girls out on cotton, didn't they.

What other complaints might the girls have when they came in to see you?

Oh, sometimes they didn't get on with so and so: 'I don't like being sent out with her,' and 'We don't hit it off,' and that sort of thing. When the Yanks were here — we didn't have much of that here though — they played up a bit, a few of them. Nothing really bad though. Mainly it was just sort of, I think, being away from home, a lot of them would come in all starry-eyed and thinking it was going to be all glamour. And they'd wake up after a while and they'd get homesick. When I was in charge of a hostel, one morning, when I got up early — they had to be on the job early, of course, which meant early breakfast — I had to go out and get some wood, and it was pouring with rain. So I went to put on my gumboots and, as I put my toe down, something was in there wriggling around. It was a mouse. It had been put in there by one of them. I thought it got in there by accident, but years afterwards I heard that two of them got this and put it in there. Oh dear. We had a wood stove and all sorts of things like that. One morning — I had to set the fire the night before so that it would be just ready to put a match to and get everything cracking. This morning I got up and I put the match to the fire that I'd set the night before and put the kettle over so that it would be all boiling with the porridge and everything. When I came back it was all blackout; the kettle had leaked. So there were panic sessions that morning.

Did you have to get up very much earlier than the girls when you were matron?

Oh, yes. I had to be up about half past five. I'd rather be half an hour earlier than half a minute late. It was nothing much.

As matron, what was involved in your being in charge of the hostel?

Oh, listening to all the complaints, if any. I'd keep the books, run the place and cook, keep it clean. I mean, it was everything that you'd do in your own home really.

Did you like that job?

Oh yes, I liked that. It was a bit strenuous, you know — long hours, 24 hours a day really. But you'd think: well, it's all in a good cause.

Did you get much more pay?

Oh, no. I've forgotten what I got. It wasn't much. What was it? I can't think what it was any more; I can't remember. But we were getting 10 shillings a day. For those days it was quite all right; not these days.

What was your official position called when you took over from Miss Marshall? Were you superintendent?

Superintendent, yes.

Land Army?

Yes.

Did you ever have to confront employers if they weren't up to scratch?

Oh, yes.

Did that happen occasionally?

Oh, yes — no, I don't think in my time there was. I think when Miss Marshall was there there was something, but I think that was a very isolated case. I don't think I ever had to handle anything like that. I was there for about two years.

What about dismissal of girls? Did that ever happen?

No, I don't think so. It got pretty near it once or twice; but, no, I don't think so. We used to have a little bit of trouble with uniforms. Some of them didn't want to conform to the way the hat was worn. They used to like to wear their hat at a very rakish angle, you know, and it just wasn't done. They'd come in and Miss Marshall — she was much more authoritative than I ever could be — she'd put the fear of the devil into them. She'd have them in there and she'd give them that look, you know, and they'd feel about that big. She'd tell them how they must wear the hat and she'd pull it into shape, and they'd go out the door. One time I looked out the window and saw them going along the other side of the street with the hat back the way they had it before. You just couldn't do anything else. It was the same with their rooms. Frocks, their skirts; they used to hitch them up until they were just about up above their knees. They were only very small things, which really you could laugh about. I don't know whether there is anything else. We had one funny old bloke we were working for over here. We were doing glasshouse work, tomatoes in glasshouses. There was a flap at the top of

the door in the glasshouse, because it had to be kept so humid and hot; they didn't let the air through too much. He looked in there and he said, 'Have any of you women seen a rat?' Of course there was a scream. Someone jumped up on the box; oh, she wasn't going to have this rat running around her feet. Real panic set in, until the old boy then said, 'It's a straw rat.' That was one of our jokes. We used to get a lot of just funny little incidents that are hard to remember and really not worth recording.

Could you describe Miss Marshall's personality?

Oh, she was a very fine woman, a very fine woman — very intellectual and very, very astute, understanding. She had been a schoolteacher. She was a teacher in high school, and her pupils all adored her. She was a very, very fine person, and I couldn't think of anyone more suitable for that job, any more than I could think of more of a misfit than myself. But anyway, that's beside the point. I wasn't there for that long.

Why do you say that about yourself?

Well, I'm not a bit — I'm no leader really. I enjoyed the life out with the girls when we could all be on the same level and have lots of fun. No, she was a very, very fine person. She was not a very big woman, although she gave the appearance of being bigger because she carried herself so well. She was very straight, and she appeared larger than she was.

Why did she get appointed as a superintendent?

Well, that I don’t know. You see, she was put in charge of the Women’s War Service Council, and I really assumed then that she must have just carried on as head of the Land Army from there. But at that time we had a very helpful — of course, we were connected with the Manpower, and the head of the Manpower then was a very helpful person. He was a great help to us, and that made a big difference.

Who was that?

Mr Hunkin, Leslie Hunkin. He’s pretty old.

Was that for in the state?

In this state, yes. They had quite a big — we were in the same building. Our headquarters were in the same building as the Manpower office. I don’t think I can tell you any more.

Were you provided with a vehicle at all for your job as superintendent?

Oh, no.

How did you get around?

Public transport. We were dependent entirely on our own feet. But, of course, head office was up in the city and there was a good train service, so that didn’t worry us. But, if we had to go out into the country, so often we would be taken by the prospective employer. He would be in the city perhaps and he would take us if we had to go up the country to inspect a property somewhere, inspect the quarters where the girls were to stay. I don’t remember ever — we used to occasionally have to go by train, and then we’d be picked up at the station.

No, there didn't seem to be ever any hassle there. I don't remember any hassle at all.

Was it your responsibility to expand the Land Army in terms of the numbers?

Oh, yes.

Could you say anything about that?

Well, we were very fortunate there because Mrs Dolling, who was on our committee — she was not in the Land Army — was attached to our leading daily paper, the *Advertiser*. She was always very glad to get any news from us for her. She was social editor for a long time and then some other — I've forgotten what else she did. But she and Miss Marshall were great friends. They were very similar — intellectual, plenty of nous, you know. Oh, there was no trouble at all with the advertising, which had to be done periodically.

Was there a goal for how many you wanted in South Australia?

I don't think so. I don't remember there ever being a goal. We were around 400, and I think we mostly remained there throughout.

What would have been the total numbers that went through?

Oh, I couldn't remember that. I kept the papers for a long time, but we had to move a couple of times in that 40 years, and they just had to go. When you get down and down into such a small area as this, you can't have anything more than

you're really using. The book has a whole lot of data in it. I think you might find there how the war service council really came into being; you might find it in that. That is the one I told you about that is in the archives. I had that. I was given that when Miss Marshall died. Her mother gave it to me, you see. Well, the girls had it, and I said that it mustn't be lent out and lost track of. Well, for a while I think they were not sure who had it or what. I then said, 'Well, look, please put it in the archives and I'll know it's safe then' — because it is quite a valuable record. She'd got all the cuttings and a lot of the photographs.

What is it called?

Well, 'Land Army'.

Just material and copious records?

Yes. It's a big exercise sort of book thing, about that thick. She put all these early cuttings in and did it very meticulously.

Could you talk about being in Australia at that time and when you were working on the land and in your job as superintendent? You were older than all the other girls.

Oh, yes.

What sort of everyday consciousness of war did you have? Did you feel its presence all the time?

Oh, yes.

In what ways did it affect you?

Well, of course you forget, but there was rationing. We lived almost on the Esplanade. There was a vacant block between our home and the Esplanade at Brighton at that time. All our beaches had barbed wire along there, and we had blackouts every night, that sort of thing. There were shortages of a lot of things, which you seem to forget about now. But I know there were shortages of butter and sugar. They're the things that I can remember. But it's hard to realise now that we were rationed.

What was the wire there for?

Barbed wire? Because they feared an invasion, you see, being on the coast. Although we're in a bay, you might say, the military were down there.

Was there any patrolling?

Oh yes, all along the Esplanade. Yes, well, we were very conscious of it, and of course there were quite a number of air raid shelters. A lot of people — we had one in our backyard, an air raid shelter, which fortunately we didn't ever have to use.

How was it constructed?

Well, my brother-in-law and his brother I think built it. He was a fairly tall man and he could stand in it. It was just in our backyard.

Underground?

Underground, yes.

What material would it have been built of?

Oh, galvanised iron and then all covered over with a good lot of earth over the top. Being at the beach, of course, it wasn't very difficult; it was sandy. But in a limestone area it would be a big job.

Did you have any relatives or people you knew who went away to war?

Oh, yes. I didn't have any immediate, but I had two cousins who were both lost. One went in the Air Force and he was transferred to the RAF and sent to England. He was sent to join up with the Pathfinders. They had what they called the Pathfinders, who had to go out ahead of the actual raid over Germany. He was lost, never ever heard of — shot down, of course. Another one came back so badly wounded that his life was very shortened. The other cousins — they were all a lot younger than I. He was younger too, of course, quite a lot. But no actual immediate, because there was only my sister and I; we had no brothers. Quite a lot of the young men that we knew were killed and one or two girls we knew who became nurses, nursing sisters. One of them was in that — you know, Sister Bullwinkle — she was in that crowd. They didn't ever hear what happened to her. A very sobering thought.

Do you feel that the younger Land Army girls had a consciousness of war?

Oh, I don't know. Some of them might have, but I don't think the majority of them did. They enjoyed the life and they used to have a lot of fun, which was just as well. There were some

of them who were very serious minded, I think. But I think the majority of them enjoyed it.

You said you were in charge when the Land Army was disbanded.

Yes.

Were there many applications from Land Army girls to stay on in the jobs that they were in?

Oh, yes, I think quite a few did. Quite a few married the men — perhaps sons of the employer. I know quite a few who did and are very happy.

Was it possible or difficult for a Land Army girl to stay on on the job if she wanted to?

Oh no, I don't think so. Most of the employers were very happy to keep them on.

Was that only for a certain time or in the long term?

I don't know. Some of them are still on the jobs. They've stayed on and married. But once they start their families, of course, unless they're married to somebody who is already on the land, then they just — well, they marry them and then that's their home. I don't know. I think it would be a fair number who did stay on.

Was that your concern?

Afterwards? Oh, no.

No. At the time, did they apply to stay on to you?

Oh, no. They knew that the Land Army was disbanding at a certain date and they would just automatically leave, or they would stay on if they wanted to or if their employer wanted them to. But these girls who were over here living in that cottage, Madge Pritchard and Jean Bennier — Madge married, didn't she? Yes, that's right. They were a different set-up. I think they joined during the war service days, yes.

And Jean stayed on?

Yes.

Do you remember when news came about that the war had finished? Where were you?

I was here in Adelaide. I remember more clearly Sir Robert Menzies telling the nation that we were at war. I remember that very, very clearly.

Where were you?

I was in Melbourne. Mother came over; she was staying over there. We had a flat in South Yarra. I remember this news coming over and Sir Robert saying, 'It is my melancholy duty' — I think he said — 'to tell you that we are at war with Germany.' That seems to have stuck more clearly in my mind as regards the war than many other things. In a way it was almost unbelievable to think that we were actually at war, although I do dimly remember the 1915-18 war. But I was young then and it didn't make such an impression as this one, naturally, because I was so much older. But the end of the war I was at home. I think we all just were so thankful it

was over. Actually, I was in Sydney when the end of World War I finished, 1918. I do remember that, because we were coming through the city, mother and my sister and I — we were coming through the city when we heard, and we got stuck in Martin Place and we just couldn't move for the crowds. But that was that. That was 1918. I don't know whether I was at work or home or where I was when I heard the news that actually World War II had —

Did you join in any celebrations?

Oh, I guess we did. I think we drank to peace and all that sort of thing. There wasn't any wild hilarity in our area that I can remember.

How long did you stay on in your job after the war was officially over?

Just until we cleared everything up. You see, we had quite a lot of equipment in the quartermaster's store. We had a woman, one of our members, who was in charge of the quartermaster's store. It was her job, with our help, to dispose of the stuff. I think the military took a lot of it, if I can remember. Then members could buy, at very cheap price, quite a lot of things.

Did members keep their uniforms or hand them back?

Yes, they kept their uniforms. They were pretty worn out by the time we'd finished with them though.

Was that decision made on a state level or nationwide?

Oh no. It would be national, I would think. We were under the Commonwealth government, so I suppose it would be national.

Did you have any thoughts at that time about what you might do once your job finished as superintendent with the Land Army?

No, I hadn't a clue. I didn't know what to do. After having a taste of the outdoor life in the earlier part, I didn't relish the idea of going back to indoor work. I don't remember. For quite a while I did a lot of artwork at home — I have done a lot of artwork in my day — I made a precarious kind of living for a few years that way.

What sort of artwork was it?

A few of those paintings are mine. That one is and this one over here. But those are my grandfather's over there: Edinburgh castle, and one on the Murray. But art is, as I say, a precarious way of living. Then I saw an ad in the paper for a job as occupational therapist or handcraft teacher at a men's TB hospital, and I applied and got that. Well, I was there until I retired at 60.

Would your wages have been very different to those in the Land Army?

Oh, they were quite a lot more — didn't get much in the Land Army. I can't remember the exact amount, but it was more. It wasn't a princely sum. I was there for 12 years, I think — yes, that's right — until I retired. Then I was put out to clover and have been ever since. The old pension comes in every fortnight. It makes you lazy having the pension handed to you.

Did you hear of any discussion at top levels about the Land Army being a fourth service?

No, I didn't. I heard sort of unofficially every now and then that they were trying to have it brought in. But, no. You see, because none of our members went overseas or were likely to be sent overseas, they didn't consider that we were truly one of the services. But so many of the services have never seen an overseas job and they still have all the privileges, or did have, and were recognised as an arm of the services. But, no, I didn't ever hear that.

Did you consider the Land Army a military or civilian force or having elements of both?

Well, I suppose elements of both. What we did was to help the — even tomatoes were sent up north to Darwin where there were — I think a lot of them went overseas too, perhaps into New Guinea or somewhere. But the flax was really entirely for use by the military or the services. Then all the other vegetables and fruit and all that sort of thing that we worked on was to feed the army. No, from that angle, it was definitely military; it wasn't civilian — because we couldn't buy ad lib; we couldn't buy fruit or vegetables here until sufficient was supplied to the army. But no, we didn't have — I mean, we were never likely to be in the firing line or anything like that, like any of the other services were or 'the services'. I shouldn't say 'the other services' because we are not really recognised. But I know that, when the war finished, there was a lot of bitterness amongst our girls because of the nonrecognition. But that was that.

Was there ever any representation to government to try and get repatriation benefits?

I don’t know that there was in this state, but I think there was in other states. But we got sick and tired of hearing: ‘Oh yes, you’re just Land Army’ — not from the top people, but other women in other services were apt to take that attitude. But I think, when they saw some of the jobs that we had to do or heard of them, they realised that it wasn’t any soft job at all. Anyway, we couldn’t do a thing about it. And there was great glee and excitement when we were first allowed to march on Anzac Day.

When was that?

I can’t remember when it was, but we’ve been marching here for a few years. Oh yes, it would be 15 years — a long while ago that we were first accepted in that. Then later on we were allowed to join the services — you know, up in the city they have a club up there. I have never gone because I was too old then to bother with these things. But, when we first disbanded, I would have been very thrilled to have been able to march in the Anzac march and to belong to one of the service clubs. But when you get old you think: oh, what’s the use? You can’t be bothered.

Do you think the general public at the time were aware that a Land Army existed?

No, a lot of them were not. Probably they might have been more in this state, being smaller, than in the other states. They’d see us perhaps and our uniforms were, well, practically khaki — you know, very similar to the AMWAS. They’d probably think we were AMWAS.

Were the conditions very different, do you know, for women in the services compared with those for women in the Land Army at the time that they were in the —

Do you mean financially or just generally?

Financially and generally.

I know financially they were a lot better, and I think they had free medical. I think a lot of them anyway had accrued pay and, when they disbanded, I think they all got a lump sum. I wouldn't be sure, but I think so. We went out unsung, and that was that — not that we minded. We didn't mind. We didn't go in for that really — well, most of us didn't. We went in to do a job. But the younger ones felt it badly.

Was it difficult for them to adjust, do you think?

Yes — 'Why can't we get this? So and so gets it, and she's in the WAAFs' and 'Somebody else is in something else,' you know.

Did you have to face all those complaints?

Oh yes, quite a lot. But we had some lovely girls. You can imagine. There were quite a lot like those you've met, Jean Bennier and Madge Pritchard. I don't know what old Bet's like now but, gosh, she was a funny girl.

Hogarth.

Yes, Hogarth. Yes, she was Hogarth when we knew her. She was really marvellous company. I hope you are able to contact

her. You can remember me to her if you do. Tell her you had a yarn.

> With accidents and safety and all that sort of thing, what was the situation? Did you hear of accidents happening very often where Land Army girls were in place?

No, no. I can't recall any. There must have been some, of course.

> What was the situation if a Land Army girl did have medical problems arising from the work she did?

Oh well, they would be covered on the job by workers compensation. Like an ordinary worker, they'd be covered by compensation if it occurred while she was on the job. But, apart from that, coming to work or going from work or on her days off, I think that would be her pigeon, if I can remember.

> Do you know of any cases where Land Army girls, after the war had finished, may have had health problems arising from the work that they actually did?

No, I don't; I can't say that I do know. But I know quite a number of them naturally, as they've got older, have contracted various things — multiple sclerosis and things like that. But you couldn't say that was caused through the work she did. No, I don't.

> Do you feel that, in that sort of situation, the Land Army should be entitled to some sort of medical coverage?

Oh, well —

How do you feel personally about that?

Well, we were not one of the services; therefore you couldn't say they should have been. I don't remember but I expect we went in knowing that, if we were sick — I didn't have that experience personally — as I say, we did have a medical officer and we would have an appointment to see her. It was a woman doctor. She would follow up the thing, but I don't remember anything very serious ever coming out of that.

The doctor was quite a character, I gather.

Dr Plummer?

I am not sure if it was Dr Plummer.

Yes, she was. Dr Violet Plummer. She's passed on now. Oh, she was a funny old soul — blunt. We all had to have a medical before we were accepted. I was very thin then and I remember she said, 'Gosh, go and put some more fat on.' She said, 'You're as skinny as a rabbit. You'll be no good in the Land Army.' Anyway, I got by.

Was there any training provided in this state for the girls before they went on to the jobs?

No. You learnt by trial and error. We had to do lines and pruning for fruit trees. The boss would tell us how to do it, and whether we were quick in picking up or not wasn't — we just didn't know anything. Some of them didn't cotton on at all; it wasn't their thing. But, no, we were just like any

ordinary civilian really coming in on a job that we knew nothing about. There must have been some terrible muck-ups, I think, in various places.

Who was the patron of the Land Army in South Australia?

Lady George was, and he was governor.

Was it Napier?

No, wait a minute. Anyway, that will all be in — I've forgotten.

What would your relationship with the patron be?

Oh, she used to attend occasionally if we had a big gathering. But we didn't see much of her. It was just a name, really. I wish I could think of more things worth telling.

One question I have is: you know that we're going to make a film on the Land Army.

Yes.

I would just be very interested to know what you would like to see go into that film, what you would like to communicate with a general audience about the Land Army.

Well, the true essence of the thing — the hard work, dedication and so on of the girls who went into it. To make a success of it they had to be dedicated — dedicated both to the country and to the work on the land. Some of them had more than others. No, they were very, very loyal. Taking them as a whole, they were very loyal to their employers. I will

say that for them — most of them — and I think particularly perhaps the rural workers. You see, they got to know the men on the farm or station or wherever they were, and the wives. They realised how much the owners valued their land. Really they would have to be dedicated too to continue through life as they had with it. But, of course, there was the love of animals. No, I can't recollect what else I could suggest that you bring out more strongly than that. It's a big job you're taking on, I don't need to tell you.

Do you feel there was a variety or was there a similarity in the backgrounds of the different girls who joined up in South Australia?

Oh, yes.

Could you describe some different backgrounds that you felt the girls came from?

Well, I think the majority of them came from middle-class homes — when I say middle-class, I mean they came from good solid homes. There were one or two what we referred to as society girls. Some of them made it very well, but others didn't. But the little lass who came from a hard-working mother and father usually came out tops, we found — or not necessarily hard-working mother, but coming from good-living solid types of homes they made a success of it.

What about country experiences or country living in the backgrounds of the girls?

That helped a lot. But it was surprising; some of them had never been out of the city perhaps, and yet they fell into it and they worked and they came good.

Do you think they were the exception?

Well, yes, I think maybe they were. You'd have to have a love for the country. Most girls would have to have a love for the country to want to go into that. Of course, I'm country bred and I naturally felt that was my forte. But, no, it was hard to pinpoint when looking at them and trying to sum them up and thinking: will you make a go of it or won't you make a go of it.

Did you have to make those kinds of assessments?

Yes.

On what grounds could you reject someone coming into the Land Army?

Well, some of them — I don't know. There were very, very few. I didn't ever have to say no to anybody, I don't think. Of course I came in when it was well and truly — up top, I mean — when it was well and truly established, and all the rules were working then. But there were some that you would think: oh, I'm afraid for you. But very few of them turned out really failures. They just wanted to get out, and that was that. There was no hassle if they felt they were not suitable. But very few of them did. They enjoyed the companionship. There were some, of course, that perhaps were an only girl in a family and they lapped up the life amongst a lot of other girls. There were all the jokes they played on each other and all the fun they had; they really did. There were several families where we had two or more sisters in together. There was one family of four sisters.

Evans?

Yes, Daisy, Enid, Eva. What was the other one? I've forgotten. They were on the pea picking episode.

I've interviewed two; it could be Daisy and Eva — Mary?

I think Daisy is about the eldest. She was a good lass, Daisy; a very, very nice girl. Daisy, Eva, Mary, I think. Oh, I can't remember. Then there were the O'Briens and the O'Learys. I think it was the O'Briens and the O'Learys. They were both multi-sisters. They were good lasses too. Two of the O'Learys I think, or one of them anyway — she's living up at Renmark, Paringa. She married a Frahn up there. I think she worked for them. Eileen O'Leary she was, and she's Eileen Frahn now. But they were very good girls, good workers. You haven't come across Lucy —

Not Ives?

No. Oh, Lucy Ives was with Madge and —

Yes. She died.

Did she die?

Yes.

Oh, poor Lucy. I'm sorry to hear that. Lucy Dyke: have you met her?

No. Do you mean Jenny Dyke?

Oh, Jenny Dyke, yes. I'm thinking it was Lucy, sorry. Jenny Dyke. I've forgotten what her single name was now, and she married. She was a stumpy, fat little thing. She's up in the country somewhere on a farm. Badgery I think it might be. Somewhere up there.

Did any of the Land Army girls as single women stay working on the farms afterwards?

I think there might be. There probably are, but I don't know.

Do you think it took a certain type of girl at that time to be attracted to the Land Army?

Oh yes, I think so. You see, when we first went into the war service, there wasn't any uniform; we had to buy our own gear, whatever we worked in. But, once there was an issue of uniform, surprisingly a lot more joined up. They liked that little bit of glamour, I think. And another thing: it was less expensive, you see. They were issued with a uniform and it saved their other clothing. Shoes alone, you know, were things that wore out pretty quickly when you were on that work.

So you might have got a broader group of people coming in later?

Yes, I think so.

Not only in terms of personality or personal qualities though, when you think it attracted certain —

Oh yes, I think so. Of course, there were such a lot of — even at 16 they wanted to join, a lot of them, you know. And then of course it was 18. But some of them got in under 18.

Did you have any difficulty when a young girl might have wanted to join up and the parents wouldn't sign?

Oh yes, there was a bit of that, yes, but they usually got their own way in the end. I seem to have run myself dry, I think, Sue. We were all out of doors; we were out on the field. But it was all carted into the mill and put through the process of separating the fibres from the actual flax, you know, the thread.

Did the Land Army girls have to work in the mill?

No.

They did in Victoria.

Did they? They might have here if they'd been needed. I was called in once there, simply because their typist was away and I could type. But that was not general. No, none of them here went in.

What about the cannery?

They were all indoors under this big — I think originally it was a discarded hangar they started off with. The Morrises up in Berri, or Barmera it was really, had that. But lately there's been no end of strife with it, you know. They knocked it — those people I think have sold it, the Morrises.

What conditions were laid down? Were there specific rules in terms of the Land Army girls working in the cannery?

Oh, yes. I can't remember anything much though about that. You see, they built the hostel for them, and I think they paid them so much rent each. I think it may have been deducted from their salary; I don't know. But the whole conditions up there, the set-up, seemed to be very happy. There was never any trouble up there. They always seemed to get along well with their boss. They were taken — the hostel was in the town and the cannery was three miles or more out, and they were called for and taken out each morning and brought back.

By motor vehicle?

Yes, a motor — a covered thing I think it was, like we had for the flax. We used to go off in this every day.

Was it shift work?

No, it was all just eight — I think 8.30 to 5.30, or something like that.

Did you ever go inside the cannery?

Oh yes. I've been up there to see the Morrises. After I was called inside, I went up there with Miss Marshall, and a couple of times we went over the cannery. It was very interesting.

Was it a noisy place?

Oh yes, noisy. But they did a lot of — used to pack big cartons of raisins, you know, those lovely big table raisins; beautiful. Oh, they did all kinds of things there: potatoes and peaches and apricots.

So dried fruits as well as —

Yes. They go through a huge tunnel with a strong hot air blowing through, and it dries the fruit or whatever.

What about other workers on farms where Land Army girls were? Did you have any Italian prisoners of war working in South Australia, for example, at the time?

Oh yes, we did. They were up there at Cadell, and they still have a prison. It's a general prison, a training place there. Every now and then there's a breakout and prisoners get away. Yes, they had them up there, but I don't remember hearing anything about that. But I do know when these girls were up there, when we were up at this place on the pea picking episode, the employer there also engaged a band of all sorts of nationalities — men. Unfortunately, they were camped not terribly far away and, of course, you know these European men: 'There's a camp of women over there; let's go and visit them.' And we did have one or two unpleasant episodes there which were rather frightening. One of these men was quite mad, and he used to haunt the place a bit. And we couldn't lock it, because it was just a big stable. But nothing very bad happened, fortunately.

Did employers have a choice of labour? Did many have prisoners of war on their farms? Were there any farms in South Australia that had prisoners of war on them?

I don’t think so. They may have had. Perhaps up in the fruit picking area near Cadell, they may have employed them. They seemed to have a certain amount of strife during the fruit picking time, but not necessarily with prisoners of war. It was just anybody I think; fights and punches were thrown and so on.

Did you have to spend much of your time disciplining people as superintendent?

Oh no, not really. You could generally reason pretty well. Most of the girls were very reasonable. I don’t know how it would be — I wouldn’t like these days to have to manage a lot of girls. I don’t think I could do it, because some of them are so unmanageable. What, with drugs and drink and so on, it would be rather frightening I think. But with these girls perhaps there was one in a hundred that was unruly. But, as I said, you could generally reason with them.

Do you think anyone would have ever left because of pregnancy?

No — now, let me think — I can’t remember anybody. No.

Could they leave if they wanted to marry?

Oh, yes.

Could you have the choice of signing up for a particular period of time?

No, you’d just sign up for the duration really. But with extenuating circumstances they always got a sympathetic hearing.

Is there anything else?

I had something in the back of my mind, but I can't remember now what it was. No. Well, the victory march, we took the salute in front of the town hall. I had to lead it that day. That was one thing I remember about the end of the war. But, apart from that, there's nothing I remember — and I did have a photograph somewhere, but I can't find it.

So you were allowed to march in the victory march? You were given permission to march?

Yes, in uniform, yes. Oh yes, took the salute and all.

That must have been a thrill.

Yes, but I can't remember what happened afterwards. I suppose we disbanded and went our ways — but that's all.