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INTERVIEWER: Sue Maslin

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Daphne Fraser (Simmons) as a member of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA) written and recorded by Sue Maslin on 17th May 1985 at Deniliquin, New South Wales.

I'd be very interested to know a little bit about your life before you joined the Land Army. You know, about your family, and your sisters.

Well, there were fourteen in the family. There were eight girls and then there were six boys. There are still nine of us living. We lived out of town on a… Dad used to work on the railway. Of course we gradually got into town. From there we worked at a hotel, because it was… then we went to nurse at the hospital as a nurses aid. Another sister, she's not alive today, we both went to work at hospital and we nursed there for I suppose, about two and half years. Then we gradually went to Sydney. When war first broke out, in '39, I went to Johnson and Johnson's, with my sister, Mary. We used to do the catgut up into files. They used to… put in the hospitals and use the cat gut for sewing people and they used to have air raid warnings at the Kellogg's factory and from there, from Johnson and Johnson's. From there I used to be one of the nurses aids that would help any casualties, you know, sort of. And from there I joined the Land Army, but it wasn't called the Land Army. It had some other initials before it.

Would it have been the Women's Auxiliary National Service?

When I joined that we didn't sort of do anything, only sort of used to go to meetings. Then I got my sisters interested, so we joined the Land Army.

How did you first hear about the Land Army?

Well, it was through the WANS and we went down, we thought we might go into the Army, and then we thought No. We've always been in the bush and we thought that the Army would be much… the Land Army would be much more suitable for us. And the three of us went down together and we joined up in the Land Army. So I dropped the WANS.

Can you remember the day you joined up, the three of you?

No, I couldn't really. It was fairly early because our numbers were four hundred and thirty-three, thirty-two and thirty-four. We were fairly early in the Army because otherwise we'd have much longer numbers. And from there the first trip was to Batlow. We went down and picked the fruit, what fruit was left, we had to go into the… where they put all the apples through and made the apple cider, and things like that. And from there we went up to Queensland, up to pick cotton. We were up there from the twenty-seventh April; I know that because it was my birthday. We caught the train from there, and we arrived at Rockhampton, not that day. We spent a night in Brisbane, or part of the time in Brisbane, then we caught a train, and we arrived at about four o'clock in the afternoon at Wowan. There was bales and bales of hay, or straw, and you were given a palliasse and a lot of girls wanted to know what they did

with it, so we went and broke open the straw so we could make sure we had plenty in ours because we knew what they were for.

Why did you know what they were for?

Oh, well we had some of them down in Batlow, but they were already made up for us down there. So you stuck as much as you possibly could into them because you had a softer bed. They were quite good really. And for… we used to go out by truck every day and pick cotton, and then we'd come home and they'd weigh what you picked at night. And the three of us would pick the most, like each time we took our load in to be weighed, the three of us would take it together and we used to pick the most for the day, the same as we did with apples.

And what did the other girls think about that?

Well they didn't like it, because they reckoned that we, you know, they'd play a lot of them. But you were there to do a job and the sooner you got… picked it, well the quicker you got out.

We came back then, and we went to out of Carcaul to a little place… it was on my brother-in-laws farm. And then we picked potatoes, we bagged wheat, we stooked hay, we baled straw, we built haystacks, we ploughed, we milked, picked beans, peas. Just you know, everything you normally do on a property. And then we split up… we came up here to Wanganella. The Air Force was very much in the go then. We did a lot of boundary riding, mustering sheep, milking cows, lamb marking, dipping, everything in that nature.

What did you mean by the Air Force was in the go?

Oh, well see they had a big Air Force Station here, just out on the Googa? Road, where the planes land low. That was all one big Army base there, and they had another big one at Toak? You'd be mustering these sheep, and you might have two or three hundred sheep and there were ways, which they flew, and you'd be close up to the gate, you know, where you're trying to get them through the gate and the planes would come down, and you know, of course, we weren't very polite because they couldn't hear us. You'd have to go after the sheep, they'd just scatter. But the planes come down right over the top, enough to get over the fences, and of course as soon as the planes come down the sheep would take off. Of course we'd start it all over again. Many a time I think if the fellows had of come down we'd have did that quite cheerfully. But I wasn't at Cowra when my other two sisters were. They picked tomatoes and went through the watermelons as you saw on the photos. And one went over to Renmark, where she was picking grapes. It was after that I left the Army and got married. That was in '44. In '44 I was married, but it was later, later in the year.

So did you have quite a bit of experience with the land before you joined the Land Army?

Well, my mother's father had a dairy farm and of course we used to do a lot of riding. We lived four miles out of town and grandfather he lived a mile out of town. We used to ride the horse in to help him milk the cows. But you did that all by hand not with

machines like they do today. And then before we went to school we'd have to do a milk round, around the town, and not be late for school.

What time in the morning?

Oh, well, you'd get up about three thirty. Ride a horse for three mile and then you'd catch another horse, and then go and collect your cows. Then you'd do… while we were having breakfast another sister would help mum and grandfather milk the cows. Then two of us would take the milk round the town and then be early for school. Mum would meet us up the street and take the sulky back home… the milk cart back home, so that we wouldn't be really late for school.

Were you the eldest sister?

No. There was… I was the fifth eldest. I've still got two that's older than me alive. And I've got two younger me that's alive.

And what did your family think about three of you joining the Land Army?

Well, they thought it was very good. They was glad that we didn't join one of the others. They didn't want to see us go on a boat. And my brothers were all too young to join the Army. Because there was eight girls and them the six boys came after. I have four brothers still living. I've got one over in Albury. Two in Forbes. And one in Queensland. So we've got quite a scatter on us.

Did you know anyone else? Any other friends who were in the Land Army before you joined?

Only the three of us. That was all we knew. And of course, we went up… first of all we went up, two of us, the eldest sister, Mary; she was working still working for Johnson and Johnson's. And we went up to Cattai, just out of Richmond in Sydney, and we went onto a farm there. The man's name was Moses and we… first they had two or three acres of cabbages there and we had to hoe them to make… get rid of all the rubbish. We had an old pair of gloves, we'd put on at night, and then we'd our Metho into our hands and then we'd put our hands in socks. And that's how we went to bed, to harden up our hands. But there were blisters on blisters, and that was our first week in the Army. But after, when the cabbages were all done, they just sent them all down to the Army and of course that finished. Well, we did do a lot of picking of beans and peas and that on that property. We did a bit of ploughing, but we lasted there for about four months. And that was after that my sister Mary she joined us. There was two of us at the start and she joined us after that.

And why do you think you stayed working together?

Oh, well, we used to go from camp to camp and that was why. And we'd finish one job. See we'd finish picking the cotton, and then we'd finish the apples and then of course they'd send you somewhere else where there was a… We wanted to be together so therefore you were sent into a camp. But there was no men in the camp whatsoever. It was only ladies, and we all sort of, preferred it that way. Then when we

were sent out here to Wanganella, we stopped out there for… From August after we'd come back from Queensland, from August 'til, must have been 'til February.

Over the summer?

Over the summer.

Can you tell me a bit about your time there?

Well, we rather enjoyed it. We used to have to take it in turns. I went out recently to see the place and it was entirely different, because it's all been broke up into different parts, whereas it seemed to be miles and miles and miles, and you'd have to go after the sheep and you'd get on a track and there'd be that dense a fog that you just sat there, and you let the horse take you. One particular day it was dreadfully foggy and my sister said that … she said, "You go and see if that gate's shut over there." Which was about a mile away, "and I'll go up to the top where the windmill is." And when I got over to the gate, she was there. I said, "You're lost." And she said "No I'm not," she said, "I'm up where the windmill is." I said "No windmill here." I said, "Did you let the horse take you, or did you take the horse?" She said, "I took the horse, I knew where I was going." I said "Well I'm at my gate, now we'll follow the fence and go up to your gate." It was that thick you could not see. The horse could so you just let the horse go itself.

What do you think was the worst job while you were at Wanganella?

Well, I didn't mind even the pressing of the wool. We didn't mind that. We helped around the sheds when it was shearing but the lamb marking was the worst.

Can you tell me a bit about what you were expected to do to them?

Well, they wanted us to hold the sheep, just to hold them. But I wouldn't. I refused. I would do anything other than that. I said, "No, I'll do anything. I'll go and pick up after the shearers rather than do the lamb marking." And I just refused to do the lamb marking. I used to hunt… get the lambs all into a pen, sort them from the ewes and then they'd go and catch them from there.

What was it about the lamb marking that you didn't like?

To hold the poor things there while they cut 'em… ah… didn't like it. So I just didn't do it. If I thought there was somebody outside now that was going to mark a lamb I wouldn't go within a bull's roar of it. No. But other than that I thoroughly enjoyed the time that we were on the land. We did have a funny experience one day. The boss, Mr Wallace, he said to my sister, youngest one, it was her… and it was my turn to do the milking. So you had a month in the garden, milking and doing the chores around the yard and you'd rake from here to that big fence over there, every leaf and that, and round through the orchard. You'd have everything spick and span and he said to her this day, he said to her "I want you to go down such and such a paddock and bring up a Springer." And so away she goes. Mary was gone somewhere else; I don't know where she went this day. Anyway, when she brings the Springer home, the calf was about three months old. And of course we just sat down and laughed, because a

Springer is something that's just about to have a calf, and the calf was about three months old.

Can you tell be about your living conditions when you were at Wanganella?

Marvellous, really they were. We had a cottage. There was everything in it. Beautiful log fire and plenty of wood. Each had a bed, which was marvellous. And there was a bathroom. We didn't have to cook our own meals; they were all cooked at the homestead, which wasn't very far away. It was about a little bit further than from here to your car, and we used to just have to go up there for meals. But if you went out bush you had sandwiched for the day. And then you got a hot meal cooked at lunchtime. If you were in the garden and milking the cows you got a beautiful salad for lunch.

How did those conditions compare to what you were used to at home?

Well very much the same. I mean you were sort of… only there was, might have been a bit more crowded at home, because when you get, oh well, by the time the last baby was born the eldest one would have been about twenty anyway. So they were out working. You went to work. You left school in those days when you were fourteen. And then you'd try to get a job, which I used to try and go and baby-sit from three o'clock to six, and you got twelve and six, and that was marvellous. But we didn't get much more in the Army, I can assure you.

When you were living at Wanganella, did you have much to do with the Air force men?

No, didn't have nothing whatsoever.

Could you if you wanted to? Were there social occasions and dances?

Oh, well there were dances in Denny. You see Wanganella as you know, is twenty-six miles away. We did come in but you had to hitch a ride home if… unless you knew somebody who was going that way. I would have come in to a few dances but… We had twin cousins that were in the Air force out there, and we didn't know until we went to the dance at night, and of course one said to the other one "Is it, or isn't it?" And of course we walked up and you could not tell them apart, their mother couldn't tell them apart. You'd say, "Is it Edward or is it Arnold?" But anyway eventually Edward got into trouble but poor Arnold got put in the compound, because they couldn't tell them apart. But no, it varied… and the people were terribly good to us at Wanganella.

What sort of contact did you have with the local people?

Oh, we had good… they used to have a dance practically every Saturday night and we'd go to the dances.

Where would the dances have been?

Wanganella Hall. But very seldom you'd come in. Because unless somebody was coming in you couldn't get a ride, unless you hitchhiked and we didn't feel like hitchhiking for twenty-six miles. But we did, we enjoyed the whole lot. It was very good. Big experience.

If we could go back to the cotton, when you went to Queensland and you were picking, can you tell me a little about the work itself?

Well cotton as you know is grown in rows. And the cotton comes up and these hold the cotton, so you have to put your down to grab the cotton. We got to the stage where we used gloves to pick cotton, because those things are very spiky. And the first day, well the first few hours that you pick cotton, your fingers would bleed where they touched. So therefore you woke up and you picked the cotton with gloves, which we found much easier because you didn't get hurt.

And it was hard work?

It wasn't hard work, it was back breaking, because you had a big sack, that you shoved the cotton in, and you had to drag that with ya and then you had to drag it back up to where they did the weighing, and that sort of thing. Bit it was very bad on the back because they only grow about that high, about two feet. But now it's all done by machinery.

Can you tell me a bit about your living conditions when you were cotton picking?

Yeh, we had… there were… we had tents. You've seen the army hut with the big haulm, well there was one, two, three, four, five, six, there were about eight tents. Some of the girls lived in the, just off the… where they did the cooking. But you had this great big long room where you had your meal, on stools and the big tables. You were all… but us three we had a tent to ourselves. And there would… some of the tents would have four girls in them but the Matron had the best tent because she was the Matron, I suppose, but she had the biggest tent. They all were spotlessly clean. You had to do all that before… clean you bed, make everything up, do it all up before you went to work. You had your cut lunch, they cut you a lunch and you'd go out to the different farms and then you'd pick there all day, until you finished that one and then they'd send you to another farm.

And the tents would stay in the same place, or would you pack up camp?

No. Those tents, I don't know what happened to the tents once we left. I dare say that they would be pulled down and, or, possible, there'd be more people live in them for something different.

What would happen when it rained?

Well, when it rained you didn't pick. Even the frosts were so thick, some days, you wouldn't even get to start picking until half past eleven, until the cotton dried, because it's like wool, or bales of hay, that if you press them while they are damp they are

inclined to burst into flames, so you have to wait until the cotton was dry before you picked.

What about the tents?

Well some nights we'd have a singsong. There was a big piano there, and we'd have a bit of a singsong. And sometimes we'd just go down… we might get two or three other girls would come over and we'd tell jokes or we'd get outside amongst, in the big campfire in the middle of the yard, and then we'd tell stories. Ghost stories or anything, you know, which was quite good. Some were quite, not good enough for them. And sort of, you made your own fun, which was quite good. Of course, when you finished work at night you'd make sure you boots were polished the next morning because you lined up every morning for inspection, and if your shoes weren't clean or if your boots weren't clean, well, you got, you had to do, possibly wash up and wipe up after tea. That would be your punishment for not having you shoes polished. I'm afraid that we used to have ours polished that much that we used to be very proud of our shoes and boots, because they did polish up beautifully.

In what other ways was it like a military camp?

No, I wouldn't say it was anything like a military camp, although you were allowed out if you wanted to but you had to be in by a certain time. The night the Americans came there was a lot of us left camp, but in the opposite direction to what the town was because we thought the Yanks might come in. There was a few of the girls that went to town to the Yanks and I'd hate to tell you what they looked like the next morning. They were black and blue, and they had bloodshot eyes and great big black cuts, you know, big cuts under there and their eyes were black, and they just got… you know. I don't know what happened, they would never tell us what happened, but they were a sorry sight and they never went to work for nearly three weeks some of them.

They decided they would go to town to meet up with the Yanks?

Meet up with the Yanks.

And why did you all decide that you'd go the opposite way?

We'd go the opposite direction because we thought they mightn't take any notice of what the Matron said so we went out and went, oh, I suppose we walked for about five or six mile in the opposite direction, and just went walking, so that, in case they came to camp, and we wouldn't be there when they came. We had to be back by ten o'clock. I know my sister… the Matron used to come around at night, and have a look at your beds to see if you were in bed and my sister Marj, the youngest one, I can remember the other girls that went, one of the girls that went, her name was Roxy. I can't forget Roxy because she asked Marj when she… the Matron had been to our tent, then Marj would run and get into her tent to make out that she was there, and she already had gone to town to the Yanks. And then Marj came back and we'd ask her where she'd been "Oh," she said "I went and got into Roxy's bed to make Matron think that she was still in bed." Anyway the next morning the girls were very sick and

sorry for themselves. You couldn't imagine that anybody could belt up, there were three girls it was that went.

And the Matron had been told before that the Americans were coming?

No. The Americans arrived. These three with all their buttons and their brass nobs and what have you, they drove up in the jeep as we were having tea. Because our camp was like the table, it was long like that, and the jeep pulled up here and the doorway was there. The Matron walked down the steps and she asked what she could do for the gentlemen. And they said they were here on a mission and she asked them what their mission was and they said would you open up the camp for the men. For the girls. She said, "indeed, I will not." And a few adjectives she used, and they whirled around and went off. Well some of the girls defied her and went out. But they just wanted her to open up the camp for their soldiers.

That's incredible isn't it?

Yes

Can you tell me a bit about the Matron, what sort of person was she?

Well she was the most beautiful lady I think I've ever met. Her disposition and everything was really lovely, it really was. I mean there was nothing that you could say about her that wasn't nice. The only thing I didn't like about her, she used to give us boiled beetroot every night for a hot vegetable, but that would be the only thing I could say that was nasty about her. She used to just keep giving this beetroot as a hot meal.

Can you tell me again about marching to church?

Well, every Sunday about, I think it was eight o'clock; no it must have been ten o'clock church I think, because it was a bit later. We used to have to get all lined up, I know, because I think the three of us were the three leaders in marching. And you marched into town, and I remember this day in particular because there was a lot of Yanks. The first day we arrived there was a lot of Yanks in town, and of course, we got all the wolf-whistles in the world. And you had to march properly, and stop, you know, the way they stop, full stop and turn. You had to have your arms swinging and I thought I was a pretty good marcher. I don't think I've lost it even yet. And we'd… she'd break ranks, and then we'd go to church. And then we'd, after, they'd give us a cup of tea from church, then after that was finished we all form ranks and march back.

How did you learn to march?

Oh, I think you learned at school. We always had to march at school, when we were kids. When you got into your lines, you might have to do… go around the playground three or four times, march back and forward and turns and all that sort of thing. It wasn't any problem as far as I was concerned, or my sisters. I think the other girls did just as good a job as we did. They had no problems.

How did you find living with all the other girls?

Well, lets put it another way, we associated with the girls, but sort of lived our own little… we… anything that they had we would join in. We were going out to work one morning, I was sitting in next to the driver and we had an old truck, and old truck it was, that the farms used to come and get us. And they had two seats, it was only, one either side of the old truck, and they'd line the girls all up on the two sides of the truck. Some would sit on the floor, but this day the driver looked back to see if everything was all right, and he hit a boulder, oh, a big stone about that size and it capsized the truck. Quite a few of the girls got injured but nothing terribly serious. I sat in the front, helped everybody, because the first aid, I've a got first Aid medallion and certificates. And I helped the ambulance men when they came. After they were all over I spent three days in bed, and I wasn't even hurt. The shock after everything was fixed up and everybody was gone, I just passed out on them.

Was anyone badly injured?

No. There were a few sprained ankles and wrists and a few cuts and bruises, but nobody was hurt badly. There was a lot of screaming, I'll admit. You know, because it was such a… you get up on a truck, oh I suppose you were up that height off the ground and then you were sitting on seats, and it's a big fall. But no, no, nobody was injured badly at all. Even my two sisters that were in the back, I don't think they even got a scratch.

Were there any times in your work that you felt your health was affected?

Never. Never felt better. We were like niggers. Brown as brown could be, we were. Because when you got out into the… the first thing you did, you rolled your pants up as high as you could get them, and you socks down as low as you could get them. Until, one of the girls, I think it was Marj, had a green ant, got in the leg of her pants and bit her, and she downed her 'dacks' in the middle of the cotton. That was just one of those things and the blokes would be right away. There were a couple of old blokes that own the property you know. They'd be somewhere else and of course they used to do all the weighing up of the cotton and that at night. There were a few incidences like that. But you didn't care, you just whipped your trousers off and that was it because you always had your underdacks on anyway. You had to find that ant because they were very painful.

Did you ever have men, or local people working alongside you?

No. No men. No men whatsoever. Only women. As I said the owners of the properties where, even out of Wanganella, Boabula, we never had any men work with us. We used to do it all on our own. Unless, if they were penning up things, or the men might help us put the sheep through the dip. You'd be standing there as they'd go through and you'd had, you had a big, had a wide piece of wood like that, and it had a big handle on it. As the sheep went through you'd push them under to make sure every bit of them got… sometimes the men would help us do that or they'd push the sheep through the race to go through the dip. But other than that we didn't have any men to help us.

When you were at Wanganella, how did you feel that your employer felt about employing women?

Well, there was three girls there before us and they wanted us to break in some horses but we wouldn't have it. The other girls apparently did… used to get in…they had a big high stock fence where they used to get in and one of the girls apparently used to get and help break in the horses. But we never did that. We got thrown off plenty but just riding the boundary at different times; if you took a horse into have a drink out of a dam. My sister, Marj, she got on one, one day, and they said it hadn't been broken in properly and she tool it down into the dam for a drink and it bent down, she went straight over it's head and into the water. I mean, the funny things like that. She'd been thrown off. We were thrown off many times, but we got back up again. Nobody was hurt, we used to get a bit saddle sore.

Did you have your own horse?

Oh, no, they supplied everything. Oh, no we didn't have… no.

Did you have one horse that you used to…?

Oh yes, I used to have one particular horse that I liked to ride, but if you got neaten for that horse, well it was just bad luck. But oh, no, you sort of kept to what you knew.

Well how do you think your employer reacted to having girls doing the work?

Well, he was very good. One night we decided, they had beautiful oranges like this in the orchard, but you had to rake that orchard every day. And this night we decided that we'd go and get an orange. I knew the way because I was the first to find out where all those nice juicy ones were. As we walked up we picked one each and we got called before him the next day, asked why, couldn't we ask for the fruit instead of pinching it. We only took one each, but he saw the tracks, we forgot to use the rake to cover our tracks.

How did you feel about that, wouldn't it have been reasonable to take the fruit from the tree?

Well, he said we could have asked. Well we thought it was a bit late and you wouldn't like to go out and pick it anyway. But he didn't, he wasn't put out that much, but he did give us a lecture on that he thought that we should have asked him for it. But we used to have to pick al lot of lemons. They had a big room, similar to this, which was downstairs and we used to have to so them in Vaseline and put them all along, not that anyone touched them on the floor. And put Vaseline on them, and they would keep for such a long time, because there was no air could get into the lemons.

I asked the lady recently when we were out there, back to Wanganella, I asked them was the room still there. She said "Yes, but it's…" she said "I wouldn't like to go and have a look at it now." And I was, from when we were there, I was terribly disgusted to think that the place had gone back so terribly. There was branches right up to the

backdoor. And we used to have to rake from here over to that fence, round, right around the house, which was a bit disheartening when you went back to it.

What sort of hours did you work?

Some nights we worked… Some days we worked from… we used to get up at six and we'd work some nights to nearly seven o'clock. Some nights it would be much… when we were… that was when we were on properties. But when we were in camps you were home by five thirty. You had tea at six and then your time was your own until ten o'clock. Then you had to be in bed by ten, or in camp by ten. That's if you wanted to go out, but it was a mile into town, and who wants to walk a mile. You'd only have… you wouldn't finish your tea until nearly seven, and by the time you'd walk into town and come back… Well you'd be just be straight in and straight back, it wasn't worth it.

Did other girls go into town?

I think there was other girls that went in, and they got different ones to swap beds with them, you know, after the Matron did her round. But we very seldom went in, unless we marched in.

Did you feel you had much in common with the other girls?

Oh yes, we did really. You were mates. But for a while you sort of wrote to different ones, but then as the years went past the letters got fewer and fewer and eventually they were dropped off altogether. You sort of just never bothered. As I was saying, my memory is not as go as it used to be, but…

What sort of backgrounds did some of the girls come from? Did they have similar backgrounds to you, coming from Paden (?)

No, some of them wouldn't have even seen the bush. They would not have had the slightest idea, but they thoroughly enjoyed it. They reckoned it was an eye opener to them because they'd lived in the city all their lives and they thought by joining the Land Army… by joining the land army you didn't have to have a good education, which a lot of them didn't. You had to have a good education if you wanted to get into any of the others. Which, like the Navy and those places, you had to have a fairly good education. With the Land Army you didn't, and a lot of girls found that they couldn't get into the others because they didn't have the education. But they enjoyed the country once they got out into it.

Not at the time though?

No, you didn't sort of… you didn't get time to mix with other people really. We met quite a lot of soldiers, at different times but nothing out of the ordinary. You know, you just sort of spoke to them. They'd talk to you because they knew you were Land Army, and hat sort of thing.

Where would you meet them?

Oh no, you might… They might just stop and talk to you in the street and ask you where you were working and that sort of thing, and you'd tell them. They'd say they'd be in a camp not far from there, but we'd never see them. Oh, one night we did. There were two of us, two sisters, we made up… they were to come over to the place where we worked. Mr Moses said we could have visitors for tea if we liked and this night coming home on the train to Richmond, these two chaps talked to us, and asked us could they come home. And of course we caught a taxi and we dropped them down at the gate, and they said… we asked them if they'd like to come for tea the next night and they said, "Yes, they would". Cause we had to tell the boss we were bringing a couple of soldiers for tea. The whole trouble was the two soldiers we met weren't really pally, they'd only just come home on the train, and the next night they arrived over, each one had a different mate, so we had four for tea. But they were quite good. We played cards and they went home which was quite… you know… it was nothing hanky panky about it or anything. They were quite, quite decent people. But other than that we didn't have anything to do with anybody, other than that. More or less ourselves *(gap in the tape, end of one side and the beginning of the other)…* What they called crusher. But I never used to watch him do that either.

I was wondering if at any time you thought about joining one of the other services? Before you were recruited with the Land Army did you ever think about joining on of the other services?

No. That was the only one.

Can you tell me a little bit more about the WANS?

No, I was only in it for about two months, and all they did was just have meetings. They didn't go anywhere. You just left that night and they sort of talked more or less about nothing and I thought Oh, I couldn't be bothered with this. So I said to my sisters what did they think about joining the Land Army? Marj said "oh I reckon that'll be good." So we joined and went to Richmond. Then Mary, we used to tell Mary about our escapades and what we did and that, and she said, "oh I think I'd like that."

Can you tell me what your sisters were doing before they joined up?

Mary was working with me. She used to… the glass tubes that we sealed the catgut up in; she used to make the little mark around then with a machine, so that they were easier to break, and I used to seal them. There'd be girls that would fill them, with the,oh, what is it, sort of a disinfectant sort of thing, and then they'd bring them out. You'd have a flame, two flames, in front of you and you'd seal them. Heat them and seal them.

What was the factory work like?

I enjoyed it very much, I thoroughly did.

What was it that you enjoyed about it?

Oh well, you did meet a lot of nice girls there. You went from toothbrushes and you filled up all the army little packages of army requirements, that were sent with the men, you know, for wounds and things like that. Every… all those little packets, I think they were about that big, and they had everything in them from anaesthetic to what ever, you name it, it was in there. And oh, we stopped there for… I don't know where Marj… I don't know whether Marj was there with us. I have an idea Marj was there with us to start with and then at night, after we were finishing work at Johnson and Johnson's we used to go out, and we'd joined an exercise club, and do all the exercises, you know to keep fit. Mary said she wasn't going to do that, she'd wait until we'd come home and then she wasn't going to pay, I think it was about sixpence to join, to do the exercises. We'd do it there for about half an hour, solid half an hour, and when we'd go home, she'd say, "oh well, now you're home you can show me what you've done." So we'd say "No, not tonight, too tired tonight." We'd wait for a week and then we'd say were ready, we'll show you. So we went through a vigorous program and she could hardly walk the next day. But eventually she did join up with us in the programs.

Why did you do the exercise programmes?

Well, you sit down, see I had to sit down all day and you sit… you had a mask on all day. You worked there sealing little pieces of glass, cutting pieces of glass. The glass was about that long and you cut it down to about that. The seal where it was broken was there and it had all catgut in it and so you had to cut it off there, with one flame and seal it with the other. You sat there from nine o'clock in the morning 'til five o'clock at night. So therefore your bottom got a bit tired, so as soon as we finished work, we'd go down and do the exercises. That was our exercise for the day, otherwise you'd be just… go out…

Had you always been very close to your sisters, or do you think…?

We've all been pretty close. Always. The whole lot of us, even the brothers and that now, we're all still pretty close.

So you were used to living in groups?

I think possible, we got on very well with everybody. You know, everybody, if we… It we wanted to do something, a lot of the girls would like to be in our group. I suppose we were a fun loving group. We were, because we were used to making our own fun from having a lot of kiddies. And you lived out of town, four miles from anybody; well you had to make your own fun. So we played rounders, football or whatever was in at the time. Played tennis and everything. So everybody would want to get in with our group because we were so used to doing it. And girls from the city, well, what do you do in the city if you're not used to making your own fun. They could go to Lunar Park and all those sorts of things I suppose. But that's not fun. That wasn't… it was fun to us when we'd go but not make your own fun. So they used to like come to us because we used to make our own fun.

Can you remember some girls having a very difficult time?

I think some of them found it very hard, you know, because, if you were used to a city and then you're thrust into the country, where you're stuck with a lot of girls. Oh no, some weren't as good as workers as the others. We found the best way to do it was to get stuck into it, and get it over and done with. Get your work done, and that was it for the day, but other than that you sort of took your time.

Can you tell me a little bit about the apple picking at Batlow?

Yeh, well some times there were five of us. I think we've got five of us there in one group, but they were too slow for us. They wanted to more, sit down and talk, yak. Well you could eat as much as you wanted to. Once you've eaten apples, picked straight off a tree on a frosty morning, it makes you think twice about eating another apple because they were so beautiful, crispy, crunchy. You'd dribble. The girls down there were very good. One of my sisters did have one experience. We had a 'leso' got in the camp, and she picked on my sister. The next day the Matron packed her off to Sydney.

What do you mean picked on your sister? What happened?

Well, she'd got into bed with my sister and started running her hand up and down. Of course we all burst out laughing, we knew what was going on 'cause she tried to make up to different girls, and they told her to get lost. And Mary knew nothing about this, so we waited with our heads covered up. As soon as she got into bed, and this girl jumped into bed with her, we all burst out laughing. She went and reported it to the Matron and of course the Matron had her on the train the next morning to Sydney. She didn't want that sort of thing. That was the only place tat we didn't really get enough o eat. Especially on a Sunday. The food was very poor of a Sunday and we used to go down the street and buy a steak to eat after.

Why was the food poor on Sunday?

I don't know whether she was a bad manager, and didn't get enough in for the weekend. I think that was the whole thing. She just wasn't used to a lot of girls and because we used to get pretty hungry. Then we'd go down to the café. I think there was only actually one café there at that particular time… that's going back a few years. They tell me it's much nicer now, but it was lovely down. We had snow and that down there, while we were down there. I was used to that too. We didn't mind that, but no, it was only a small place. And they used to take us out by car, or truck, whatever. It all depends which property we were going to. But after the first lot of apples that were picked, different orchards would ring up the other bloke and tell them to get the so and so sisters to help. The Simmons sisters to pick their fruit. Because they reckoned we were the best pickers.

How did the other girls react to that?

Well, the other girls didn't know. But the blokes would come along and say "how you getting treated?" We'd say "good, why?" "Oh well, we recommended you to the…" You know they reckoned you were the best workers and of course, we went on from one place to another and picked, you see.

Would the three of you just go together to different places?

Oh no, there might be about twenty-four to thirty go to the place, but they'd tell us they had any good apples, or the best trees. They'd let us pick them.

Did you ever get a bit more pay, or better conditions?

No better conditions. No nothing. We didn't mind, because we thought it was great to think we were being picked out, because we were the best pickers. Of course to pick an apple, you must try your best to pick it with the stem on it.

Is it very difficult?

No. You sort of got… it's more or less… when they're ripe you sort of give them a little bit of a twist. The worst picking was the oranges. Where did we pick oranges? Oh I can't remember where we picked oranges. And that was very difficult because…

Did you go to Griffith to pick the oranges?

No. No, we didn't go to Griffith. No. Marj went to Renmark to pick grapes. We went up to Wowan to pick the cotton. Batlow to pick the apples. Wanganella where we did all the mustering and the things out there. And then we went to my brother-in-laws farm, and we went up to Cattai where we did the cabbages and that. You'd sort of go round each time and do the job.

Can you tell me about the day when you left the Land Army? Why did you leave?

I left to get married, because it was getting close to the end of the war. We were working at Boabula, Wanganella, when, well I got permission. We had to write to the Minister at that particular time, of Denny, Joe Lawson. He was a Member then of Murray. And my husband wasn't allowed to join because he worked on Wanganella Station. We worked on Boabula Station and he worked on Wanganella Station. And he wasn't allowed because he was in rural work and I met him at Wanganella. We were playing tennis when I first met him. He didn't play but we were playing tennis at Wanganella when I met him first.

And were you able to see a bit of each other over those months, were you?

Oh yes, he used to walk out to Boabula.

How far was that?

Oh, it would have been a good mile. Mile, possibly a mile and a half. Some nights we'd walk in… the three of us would walk into town and we'd have… we'd go to the pub for a drink. It would only be squash, because neither of us… none of us were drinkers, at least we weren't then. But Marj does drink a bit of beer; Mary and I never touch it. You'd sort of just go in and have a squash and you'd sit around and talk. And then there were other boys there, you know, that had no girls, and they'd walk home with us and see us home. Then they'd walk back in the dark, so we didn't mind. But

you sort of got to the stage where you knew your way blindfolded. But that's about all I can tell you.

> Well then, after the war can you just tell me a little bit about your life after the war? Where did you and your husband settle when you got married?

We lived with his mother for about six months and then we went out to Wanganella where he was working. We lived in… was what they called the huts, had a bathroom and everything there. And from then… we did leave Denny and then went up to Carcoar, and my husband went to do this kind of work, build chairs and that. He found that it didn't work so we came back and he went to the CSIRO and he worked there for quite a few years. I went nursing at the hospital, and I was there for about three and a half years as a nursing aide. And then I went to the paper shop in Deniliquin and I was there for about twenty-one and a half years. Then I left. After we built this, I left. Got what I wanted, a home… which was a home, and left.

> So you built this home did you, you and your husband?

Yeh. Oh, we didn't build it. I mean, I worked until I got it because I think we built it for about two thousand five hundred pounds, in those days, which was quite good.

> Did you join in the Victory Day March, or any of the marches when the war ended?

No. I was down here then. Would have liked to, but it meant that you had to travel. It's a bit hard place to get to from here. You've sort of got to gat a… you've got to get over to… you had to get over to Finley; to catch a train from Finley, I don't think there was a plane going from here to Denny… from Denny then, but now there is. It was a very hard place to get to and from at that particular stage. I've never been in a march in Sydney, not that I wouldn't have liked. But I have marched around… we go, every twelve months they have a reunion. We started at Balranald and then they had one here in Denny.

> Who are they? Is this the Sydney…?

No, this is the… each service. Each one of the services they have a group here in Denny. And we held remembrance. We go up… we used to march up to the cenotaph.

> Did you used to join the Women's Services to do this, or would it just be Land Army women?

Oh no. No, all the women. Combined services. Yes, they were going to put up a plaque somewhere. Now I can't tell you where they're going to put the plaque up. Was supposed to be in this little park across here, but they changed their minds and I'm not sure now where they're going to put it up for the… to the women… Air Force, Army, Land Army, and what have you. And they've had one at Swan Hill, on the twelfth of April, but I didn't get to that one, I was away. I forget where the next one is.

> So you've up with some of the Land Army women?

Yes. We have a talk, the Land Army, three… the girls that are here, we talk every now and then. We don't come across one another because our lives sort of don't mix. They've got their life and their kids. I've… I haven't got any relations here at all in Denny, and nor has my husband. So we sort of… we talk when we go to the meetings and that sort of thing. Other than that we don't mix with the other women from the armies at all. Although I still… well some of them we do but some of then were a lot older than me and some of them were a lot younger than me. We all… you know… some of them play bowls, and some don't.

> Looking back over the years do you feel that your contribution to the Land Army has been acknowledged?

No. Positive it hasn't. I just think they just thought… oh, it just went unrewarded as far as I'm concerned. That was why I answered that ad in the paper. Someone told me that there was something coming up about the Land Army, in the Weekly Times, because I never read it. And when it came up, I read it. I just thought, oh, I'd write and tell the lady, you know, that I did have some photos that she could have a loan of them, but I wouldn't like to think that I wouldn't get them back. That one in the frame is of the three of us; I wouldn't like to lose that. They did ask for photo's years ago, when they were doing the Sullivans, because they wanted to put the Land Army in the Sullivans. I had another one taken off and asked them would they send it back, put a self addressed envelope and all in it, but they didn't send it back.

> Oh well, we know the contact. Do you think the women from the other services knew about the Land Army, and the contribution?

Well, I said to one girl, when she went up to see a young fellow, that came from Sydney, about the service, and they mentioned to… was the Land Army entitled to anything from the services you see. And he said "What Land Army?" You see and she said "Oh god, fancy sending some…" what did she call him (I hope this is not turned on), she said "Fancy sending some yoggle from the city that knows nothing about the Land Army". She said "They were as much as part…" I said to one of the girls that lives here, we always knock around together as a matter of fact, she was in WAFS I think. And she said that they didn't do any heavy work at all. She knew that we did the heavy work, but they did the mental work. Which was right. We didn't have to do any. We didn't have to fill in any books, or anything like that at the end of the day. Like they probably would have to do. Or punch a clock, or anything like that. We never had any of that. But we worked hard, and very hard. I mean if you can get two girls that can lift up a bag of wheat and throw it onto a truck, you're not doing too bad. And to pack it and sew it up and all, that sort of thing. But we were young and healthy which was no problem.

> Well, we're making a film, as you know, about the Land Army, and we're going around and asking each Land Army girl we're meeting, what sort of things or messages you would like to convey to people who have never heard about the Land Army. What sort of things would you like known about the Land Army?

Well you can imagine, even yourself, I don't know… have you ever crutched a sheep, have you ever done it?

No

Crutching wigged sheep is pretty hard work. And for a woman, and I wasn't as heavy as I am now, to bring in one of those big wethers and pick it up and use an old blade to cut it's wig. Pretty heavy work for a lady. And oh, I think, just in general that unless… look even if you wrote it up in a book, I still don't think that it would sink into a lot of city people. The city people wouldn't know what goes on in the country anyway. The majority of them don't. They just think, I think, milk, butter and that… just go like that, and it's there. Because they haven't had anything to do with it. But if you've got to milk the way we had to, oh, we never had to cut any wood, thank goodness, that was one chore we never had to do during the Army because that was all done by men that worked on… there'd be men working on the properties, but we'd never… you might see them for a meal. Most of them worked around… lived in the town of Wanganella anyway and they'd go home for tea so they… therefore we never had much contact with them after our work was done, even if we had have any during the day. But no, I can't say that there's a message because… unless, they were out and knowing something about the country and how the country works, I think it would be a waste of time trying to get it across to them. I do really because if you were just from the city yourself, now you wouldn't have a clue would you? But you know what the country is like. You bring up somebody from the city, and put them out and ask them to do something, they wouldn't know.

They'd be lost, wouldn't they?

They wouldn't even know which way to put a saddle on a horse. They wouldn't. Unless they'd been watching the jockeys put them on and take them off. That would be the only way they'd know. No. I can't… I don't regret any of it really. I do not. I thoroughly enjoyed it, the whole lot of it.

Are there any other little incidents or stories that you could remember?

Don't know. But if I had my sister Marj here with me she could tell you a few.

Yeh, well I think we'll have to meet your sister Marj.

Well, I'd love you to because she could tell you things that I can't and I'd love you to meet her.

Someone was getting out his petrol and he wanted to find out who, and so while his son was in town, he decides to go down to and rake all the shed where he had pumped for petrol. Then he got the hose and he watered it, watered it very heavy. He came up inside and the next morning he goes down and of course there's feet marks all around it and he traced them back to his son who was doing the pinching. The petrol traced back to his bedroom, he didn't know his father watered it, so he had no problems tracing him back to his petrol. Oh no, it's very good.

Well thank you very much, that's very good.