Australian War Memorial

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ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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TITLE: Mary Macklin as a member of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA).

INTERVIEWEE: Mary Macklin

INTERVIEWER: Sue Hardisty

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SUMMARY:

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Mary Macklin as a member of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA), 1942-1945, interviewed by Sue Hardisty on 19 August 1985.

… where you were born?

Briefly, all right, I don't mind. Are we on here?

Yes, we're ready to go. You were born in Yugoslavia, were you?

Yes.

Do you remember any of your life there?

Well, I was nine when we left and I do remember quite a lot of the events vividly because it was, there were no new issues from day to day. It was all every day seemed to be the same, a lot of hardship.

Was it in the country you were living?

In a village in the hills away from the pirates. And my father was in Australia. He had been in Australia most of his life and when he married I was a two-year-old and my brother was seven months when he returned to Australia. And then seven years later we followed to Australia and settled here in WA.

Do you know anything about your parents' political beliefs?

I don't think they had any specific beliefs, it was sheer survival.

What work did your father do?

Well, my father was a stonemason by trade but when he came to Australia he worked at Currawong near Kalgoorlie cutting timber. And then later when he mastered the language, he worked in the mines and he sent us financial support in the seven years that we were separated. And then eventually he brought us out here when the situation in Europe looked rather bad and the war was just… it was just a bad situation.

Did you talk to your parents later about why they came to Australia?

Not really. It was a better lifestyle in Australia, of course, and wages were better and it was just virtually a better existence.

Do you know anything about your mother’s family, what they did in Yugoslavia?

Well, they had some land. Usually the land was divided amongst the family. Mostly the boys were always inherited the property and the girls usually married and therefore they were looked after in that regard.

But those that didn't marry, it was an obligation to be cared for by the members of the family as a unit.

So what work was your mother doing in Yugoslavia?

Well, she used to tend to the plots of vegetation. It was a terraced land. Volcanic, rather fertile and they used to grow their own vegetables. If they could get work anywhere - work was very, very, scarce so money was scarce also. And they virtually lived off the land. It was very primitive. And they fished and seemed to supplement their needs by fishing. Dad, he was a stonemason, as I say, and I really don't know where the stonework went to other than construction, housing, everything's built of stone there.

So when you came out later, did you with your mother?

Seven years after my father.

And did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had a brother also. I was nine when we arrived in Australia and my brother was seven.

Can you remember arriving in Australia or your first memories?

Yes, we came by ship, Otranto Orient Line at the time, and my father met us at Fremantle. That was a very exciting reunion and, of course, we didn't know him at all really, only by photo. And he had in the meantime bought a property, a farm, in Bunbury and that's where we went to and my first real experience working on an Australian farm. But the years of separation had it's consequences with Mum and Dad and things weren't going quite to the way Dad expected. And it was extremely difficult period with Dad.

What was on the farm?

Cows, we had ten cows that we milked and sent cream to the butter factory. And also crops, but only a small part of the farm was cleared. The rest we cleared. Tree puller that was about 40 years old, and I was usually on the tree puller. It's very hard to describe, that piece of equipment, but it was extremely laborious to work on it. It was a big wheel with teeth and a bar with hooks that you went backwards and forwards pulling, winding a steel rope which was pulling the trees down. And my brother used to clear round the trees, expose the roots, and Dad would cut them with the axe, until the tree was pulled down. We cleared many, many acres that way, and then, of course, it had to be stacked and cut up and burnt. And he planted whatever was viable in the way of vegetation, pumpkins, tomatoes and he also planted a vineyard, I

believe, after I left. It was quite profitable, but we cleared a lot of land for him.

You said your father was having difficulties, could you tell us about that?

Well, they were of different conflict and Dad was pretty intelligent but also a very, very hard man. He expected too much of us all. And I was never able to really find out what motivated him to be so hard as he was that we eventually all gradually left him.

Did you meet his family, did you know his family in Yugoslavia?

Oh yes, I knew Grandma and Grandad back in Old Country, his parents, yes. He had three sisters that went to America and one other brother stayed in Yugoslavia with the grandparents. The grandparents died during Second World War.

As a consequence of the war?

Not really, I think it was just old age.

So, if you could tell us when you were born again? You were mentioning it before the interview?

I was born in a very simple stone cottage out on the property that they had.

That was in 19…?

‘24.

And you said you came to Australia when you were nine years old?

1934 I came to Australia.

And so your father actually came out in the ‘20s first?

Well, he came out at the age of 16 first, because his father was in Australia and they were both cutting timber at Currawong near Kalgoorlie. And then First World War it was an enemy at it time and they interned, oh, Grandad had gone back, but my father was interned and he was kept on Rottnest Island outside of Fremantle until the end of the war and then he was transported back to Yugoslavia via Liverpool, England and he stayed there some years, I don’t know how many. In the meantime he married and we two children were born. And then he borrowed his passage and returned back to Australia. And that’s when we followed seven years later.

So could you tell us a little bit about your schooling once you arrived in Australia?

Oh, that was extremely difficult. I think only somebody who has to master the English language would know. The teachers were very cooperative and sometimes they took us aside and used to draw objects on the blackboard so to identify them with names. There was no ethnic education such as it is today. So we just were absorbed into the ordinary school and learn what you can or miss out on what you can't. But, Dad kept us at home for six months before he let us go to school so that was quite a gap that we lost. And, really, I only went to school in Australia for about three and a half years which I didn't even master the language to speak of that I could communicate adequately let alone read or write. That was definitely out, it was much later that I learned to read and write in a limited capacity via newspapers and books with a dictionary on the other side and check up words that I didn't know, that I wasn't familiar with.

> Must have been very lonely for you before you learnt English?

Yes, it was but I think too with children there is a communication without words sometimes.

> So how did you find the children at the school where you went?

Mostly were very good. And we seemed to be object of curiosity, I must say. There was some anti-attitudes,

particularly just from one family and I think that it was possibly lack of knowledge on their part why they treated us in the way that they did.

Was it a very big school?

Primary school it was. No, I think it was a small school. I couldn't really say how many children there would have been there. Could have been about a hundred at the most.

How did you get to school?

Walk. Three miles to school and three miles home in all weather and without adequate clothing. We arrived at school many times soaked to the skin and the teacher would then dry our clothes round the fire. They had an open fire at the school which was good, of course, West Australian climate can be cold.

So how many years did you spend on the farm there with your parents?

About four years, no, more than that. Five years or six years, I'm not sure now.

Could you tell us a bit about your life once you left there or where you went?

Oh yes, well, I met some people who were Queenslanders and because of the extreme harsh existence with Dad, there was a lot of brutality, too, I was planning to leave and I did, eventually, with these people and I came to Queensland with them. It was a terrible trauma for my father and he never forgave me, I might add. But the survival with him was just unacceptable in this country. Mainly because of brutality.

Was your Mum still at home that time?

Yes, I was the eldest and I was the first to leave. And the others subsequently followed. There were four of us but my younger sister, oh, there were two children born in Australia and my sister was married before she left home but that was an unhappy marriage and that broke up.

So then you went to Queensland with some people?

Yes, and I worked on farms, a couple of farms for these people because they seemed to be a bit of nomads, I guess and they moved about and worked on farms. And I was a good prospect of labour on a farm because I did virtually anything with cattle, with horses, and equipment. I didn't plough as such but scuffling, that's cleaning in between rows of vegetation with horse and implement, and so I was used to farm work with all that in the background.

Where was it in Queensland that you came to first?

Came to Brisbane, and then a farm in the Boonah district and then later a farm in the Monto district. After that we came to Maryborough and these people then settled there and I took a job. And the people that first assisted me there when I arrived and I needed help, they remained good friends ever since to this day.

That's nice. I didn't ask you about your parents' religious beliefs?

Well, in our village and the island, we knew no other religion but Roman Catholic. It was very, I think everybody was dedicated Catholic. You went to church every Sunday and you supported the church, too, in whatever way you could. And it was only just Catholic religion.

So were you working with these people up until the war broke out or did you do other jobs?

No, no, I took a job privately, well, a couple of jobs. They were live-in jobs. And it was eventually after that that I decided to join the Land Army because of my experience and I just felt that I would probably be best suited to that as I had no clerical experience. Also, the situation was that I couldn't join any other services because I was still an alien. My father was

naturalised before we came to Australia but he didn't include Frank and I, my brother and I. And Mum automatically became an Australian subject when Dad was naturalised but we children were left out for some unknown reason to me which caused problem along the way later.

When did you first realise that?

Well, I knew all along, but the true meaning only came when I tried to join the Land Army.

Could you tell us about what happened when you went in to join?

Well, they accepted me without any hesitation, the only problem was I required my parent's signature and approval to join. But I said to the fellow at the employment office, which was the source of information, that if I sent the papers to my father he'd probably tear them up and I wouldn't get them back again. And he said to me, "Well," he said, "put on it," he said, "parents in Western Australia, address unknown." Which I did. And as soon I think as the application arrived at Headquarters, Land Army Headquarters, it was a matter of days I was accepted then sent to this property, first property.

Where had you heard about the Land Army?

Oh well, there were many posters during the war advertising services of various description.

> And before you made that decision to go and try and join up the Land Army, had you any idea what you thought of doing in the future?

Not really. My ability was limited, I guess, because I had no specific training. So it was a job and there was a job to be done. There was a shortage of manpower because men had been called up so there was vacancies everywhere to be replaced by some other source, and for this reason there was no problem to get into that sort of work.

> If you'd been naturalised, I know it's a hypothetical question, but if you'd been naturalised, would you have chosen something else to do that at time or would you have still chosen the Land Army, do you think?

Well, I possibly might have considered, it's very hard to say now whether I would have joined any other Services. They were more glamorous Services where as the Land Army was really the hard, really hard work there. And I knew, too, that apart from chopping wood and killing animals, we were left to do virtually everything else that was required on the farm. They were the only two stipulations that we were not be

required to do. But whether any did so, I don't know, possibly not. Although I didn't mind chopping wood.

Did you know any other young women who'd joined the Land Army at all?

Yes, I did know. One of my friends joined a little after me. I was a little bit disappointed because I would have liked to have gone with her, but nevertheless, she decided after I joined, and so she went to a training farm which I didn't. I didn't go to any training farm. Of course, I suppose it wasn't particularly necessary for me.

So where was your first assignment?

In the Gayndah district. Dairy and citrus.

Would you like to tell us about your experiences there?

Well, I was sent there with what clothing resources I had of my own which was very little. We had no uniform issue whatsoever or any working clothes. I worked on this property for six months at least without any uniform at all. And it was dairy, sixty odd cows in full milk, and citrus, cotton and tomatoes. Planting tomatoes and harvesting them.

How were you treated there by your employer?

Quite well except the hours were very long. It was virtually from daylight till dark on thirty shillings a day and your keep.

What had been your pay before you joined the Land Army, do you remember?

Well, I was working at a private home for 17 and 6 a week and my keep which was really only a few hours a day it wasn't, it was just looking after the home, helping business people.

Did you live in with the family on the dairy?

Yes, yes, and I ate with them. The meals were quite good. Social outlets, there were virtually very little or practically none. I suppose they may have taken me twice to a country dance and they were also, they used to dance. And that was very nice to be able to go out. But during the day, there were no visible homesteads or anybody in the area. There was the river on one side, the road way in the distance in the other, and one way at night-time you could just see the flicker of a light through the trees. But apart from that it was totally isolated. Although I used to go to an orchard where there were Land Army billeted, Benyenda, and I used to ride the horse down there.

How far was that?

That would be probably about four or five miles away. And I used to spend Sunday afternoon with them and then get back in time again for milking. The employer on this property, he had a bit of an alcoholic problem and he used to go to town and sometimes be late coming home, and then, of course, we'd be milking cows in the dark. And mostly I decided that I would stay and milk even if it meant on my own in daylight instead of going to town. Especially if there was no real need for me to go in. I didn't have much money to spend anyway, so that was no problem. On one occasion he, the boss, had gone into town with part of the milking machine and therefore I wasn't able to use the milking machines to milk the cows. So we turned the cows out that evening and the next morning he still wasn't home, and his wife was at home, she didn't go in with him, and we decided then we'd have to milk these 64 cows by hand and we had milked about three each when we could see the dust rising from the region of the main road and she knew that he was coming. So she promptly left the dairy and I was left there, so I went to the utility. When he had arrived he was intoxicated and there was another man with him and they had a bottle of rum and they were drinking rum and milk. He really wasn't in a state to do any work anyway. But I went to the utility and I got the releaser from the utility and attached it to the milking machines and cranked the engines, started the machines off and I milked all the cows on my own. Fed the calves and the pigs and it was midday.

Do you feel, did you feel that you had to work harder on the dairies than the other places you went to?

Well, the two dairies I was on, they were both isolated to a point. And there was no company for me anyway. And the hours were very long. Virtually you had to get up at 5am and muster the cows into the bales, and then you were still working late, it was dark. And you didn't have a siesta during the day. It was lunch and perhaps a snack break of some sort but I can't recall very much about that. But there was lunch, we used to walk to the house for lunch because most of the work area the vegetation, the citrus, et cetera, was not far from the house.

So you were working on the citrus sometimes in the day?

Yes.

You said you worked on two dairies round the Gayndah district, how did they compare in terms of the hours of work and your accommodation?

Well, the second place, I was asked, I asked the Headquarters to move me from this first one because I wasn't particularly happy there. And they did eventually after some time, but they only moved me

about three miles up the river to another dairy. But it was a better place really socially from the social point of view. The work was still dairy and citrus - pruning, chipping, fertilising and killing bugs that sometimes infested the trees. I used to go round and round the trees, and these green bugs I just used to, by, hand kill them. Because I don't know if there were any sprays available in those days to exterminate them. But on this particular property also there was a snake infestation because probably of the region of the property, it was between a creek and the river. And you could see the grass parting on the approaches and you knew it wasn't just a little snake, because some of the grass was pretty high. And there were Brown snakes, venomous types. And I was pulling Burr, that was a pest weed and very prolific and growth and seeding, and you virtually had to pull it out of the ground. And I was on my hand and knees, by that time I might add I did get uniform, working clothes which were long overalls and shirts and that was great, and I was on my hands and knees pulling burrs when I came upon a tremendous heap of a Carpet snake. It was huge. And I got such a fright. I moved away from it and the boss wasn't far away and he came with the hoe and he attacked it and he thought he had killed it but really it got away. Later when we had a look it wasn't there, it had moved away. Whether it ever died or not I don't know. But the Carpet snakes were frightening, the size of them. But it was the Brown snakes that were more dangerous and venomous. I had boots too and

fortunately I didn't ever meet a situation where any of them had attempted to attack me.

Was it difficult for you to have adequate clothing when it wasn't supplied at the beginning of your work?

Oh it was, at first, the first six months I just had some shorts, probably only two or three pairs, shorts. And only thin clothing. And I was there during winter and I know it was bitterly cold.

Because your wages weren't very high just before you joined the Land Army?

Yes, I wasn't able to provide. And also I didn't know what my needs were going to be. And waiting all the time, everyday, that a parcel might arrive with clothing. And those in camp, they seemed to be provided for a little better than some of us on the billets, private billets. So clothing was…

Did you employers ever help you out with that?

Yes, one employer did, one lady, she gave me just one set of clothes which were shorts and a shirt.

How did you get on with the wives of your immediate employer at the two dairies?

Quite well, they were usually attentive of any needs. Of course, I was reasonably independent so I didn't expect too much at all. They always cooked the meals, provided the meals.

Do you remember about how old you were when you joined the Land Army?

I was 19, 18 I think, or 19, 18 I'd say.

(Break in tape)

There comes a time when you feel, this has got me beat. Look, I don't want to consider it any further or dismiss it. You know, this is how you feel. But the stuff is all around you all the time. There's paper today, paper tomorrow. Or you see a sign, what does this mean? What does that mean? So you really have to muster all your resources and accept, even if you don't understand, and from there study it sort of. If it's interesting enough, study it, and from there on it sort of grows into a more meaningful knowledge, I guess.

Must have been very hard to do it by yourself, though?

It was, it was. My brother, his IQ is not, well, mine's not that sharp either, but his is not quite as high as mine. So he went to school a lot longer than I did and a friend said why couldn't he teach me because

I left school earlier because Dad wanted us on the farm. And then Dad said that my knowledge was better than his. So that was the situation there. It's a tremendous hurdle, you only know by experience. It's just as if you had no knowledge, you went to Japan and you were young, you were going to school. So you've got the learning, the education point and you've got the language as well. And the customs and the culture and everything else. It's not easy. It's easier now today when you have got resources and help. But in those days, as I say, we were a point of curiosity and there was some nasty incidents. We're not on there, are we?

Oh, I did put it on. I'll turn it off again, or do you mind if we leave it on? You'd like it off?

(Break in tape)

If we could move on to the next place where you worked?

Eight Mile Plains.

Had you asked for a transfer after the dairy?

No, I had joined for twelve months and my twelve months were up and I decided then in my interests I wanted to be in a camp with other Land Army members. I didn't particularly like being on my own and twelve months was

long enough. So there was a need for help at Eight Mile Plains and head quarters sent me up there. There were about six or eight girls working there cutting lettuce for the market. And by the time we got to the end of the beds at one end, the other was ready to start cutting. So it was chipping and cleaning, thinning out and then cutting, packing and, marketing. Also there was a poultry farm there. I can't recall just how many birds they had there. The eggs were marketed to the Egg Marketing Board and the fowl manure was used as fertiliser to grow lettuce. We had a house cow for our own needs for milk and I was assigned to milk the cow was I was the only one experienced other than young lad they also had working there. He used to rotary hoe the beds in preparation for lettuce so that was his job. And we were accommodated in a nice new home - four bedrooms and we had a cook. The people were very nice, excellent people. Many years later after I was married I used to visit them with my family.

What did you do in your leisure time?

Well, leisure time was spent, if you didn't go out which we really didn't go out very much but sometimes we did, with crotchet and fancy work and writing letters and just staying on the premises. But sometimes, in a group, we used to come into Brisbane and a couple of times I went to dances. We used to stay at Kelvin House in Adelaide Street in the city and

that was a hostel for ex-Servicewomen where they could stay during their stay in Brisbane and that was very nice there, too.

Were you allowed to stay there as a member of the Land Army?

Yes, yes.

How long were you at Eight Mile Plains for?

Oh, I was there quite a few months. Possibly six months. I'm not quite sure but it was an extended period. And the lettuce, it was an ongoing crop all year round, summer and winter. We used to cut early in the morning, rise probably 5am, or earlier, and assemble on the lettuce patch and cut and pack in bushel cases and also pineapple cases which were much larger. And we always carried two at a time and subsequently you'd get a bruise on the hips. But that was extra pay for cutting before hours, we used to start work about 8am and finish at 5pm, the normal working day there which was good. But cutting lettuce, it had to be on it's way to the markets about 7am, so it was an early rise and we had to help load a very large truck the owner had and he used to go into the markets with the load. Few girls came and went during my stay there. Some stayed for the duration that I was there but on one occasion we had one or two new girls and usually the boss came in the evening before we

finished work at five o'clock to let us know whether there was lettuce to be cut early in the morning or not. And on this one occasion he came and he told us, "Well, girls, there's lettuce in the morning". And how many cases, it varied, there were hundreds of cases that had to be marketed. However, as a result of his request, one of the girls refused to get up in the morning at that hour and cut lettuce. And I think he was a little surprised, he said, "Oh". She told him she didn't want to get up, she wasn't getting up at that hour. And he said to her, "Aren't you?" And that's all I can remember. And he disappeared only for a short time and he was back again and he said to this particular girl, "You, and you, and you, and you, you finish up today." And he came to me and he said, "Mary." He said, "I'd like you to stay on and help Ray and I to cut the crop off", because it was ready for the market. He said, "That's if you will stay and help us", and I agreed to stay. So I was left on my own there. And I had a cook also until the crop was finished. After that, then I believe, he employed POWs, a couple of Italians anyway. And later, after the war when we visited them, he said there were problems there too with the staff.

So, again you moved on after Eight Mile Plains?

Well, when the crop was finished there and there was no more lettuce to market, my employer's wife rang the Headquarters and she asked them would they send me to a

nice camp. So Headquarters got in touch with me and asked me where did I want to go, and I asked to go to Atherton. I had met members who had been there and it sounded an interesting place to be so that was agreed and I was sent to Atherton. And usually when there is a new arrival at the Atherton camp, the Headquarters notified them beforehand but in my instant they didn't. So I came unannounced and there were a few surprises. Some of the girls I did know. Anyway, it was a very nice camp and I was allocated out to a farmer with small crops of carrots, beetroot, lettuce, beans, turnips, et cetera. I think at one stage there were about 25,000 troops on the table lands stationed in various camps up there. So apart from supplying the market in Cairns, there was also the need for vegetables for to feed the troops on the tablelands.

Australian?

Australian troops, yes. And that was a job from normally from about 8 to 5pm working hours. But we used to leave in a large truck about probably thirty of us and be transported and dropped off at various farms where we were employed. And my employer and his family, they were very nice people who I had the pleasure to meet and to work for. Also later after the war in their trips to and from Brisbane they used to call into our home on the way and sometimes for a meal or a cup of tea or stay the night.

Could you tell us about the work that you did at Atherton?

Yes, well, it was harvesting crops. As I say carrots, and beetroot, and lettuce, and beans, and peas, and turnips. Planting, helping to plant, and also big job of cleaning. It was volcanic soil and the grass grew in profusion as well at the plants. I was thinning out and cleaning constantly there.

Was that by machinery or by hand?

Hand, chip hoe, and by hand. Up and down the rows. Sometimes our boss would be using tractor and other implements wherever it was required and possible to clean that way. But you couldn't clean between the plants anyway. You could clean the strip down the rows but round the plants no, that had to be done by hand, chipped out.

What was your accommodation like there? Could you go into a bit more detail about that?

Yes, we had a camp there that the Government had built. There were four long barracks. One was the Mess and the kitchen and the other three were sleeping accommodation. One of the huts had Matron's office at the end. We had Matron Broadhead the most of my stay there, very nice lady, and then later Matron Moore.

> You must have met quite a few girls at the camp, did you feel that they had come from a similar background or very different backgrounds?

Probably very different background than mine was. I think that some of them were experienced on the land to some extent, yes. But the fact that you could join the Land Army at the age of 16, I believe, casual for three months or six months, and permanent at the age of 17 on was what motivated a lot of the girls to join where the other Services they had to wait another year.

> I think you mentioned in a chat that I had with you at the reunion that at one place you were working with a girl who's father was a Bishop. Could you give us some idea of the girl's, you know, backgrounds?

Well, she was one of the girls that made up about 60 odd in the Atherton camp and she had been to boarding school until she was 17 and she just promptly joined the Land Army. She was a very nice person, very nice person.

> Did you get the impression that the girls came from, you know, city areas or that they'd actually come from rural areas?

I think it was a cross section of both but possibly more from other than rural areas.

Were you able to make friends from that camp? Were you there long enough?

Oh, indeed, to this day.

Well, could you give us a bit of an idea of the background of your friends, where they'd come from and what their fathers did?

Well, one of my very good friends was from Bundaberg and I think her father worked at the sugar mill. She had no farming experience before she joined. She suffered towards the end from bending over from migraine and then she left the Service ahead of me. And another lass that I knew and I still see from time to time now, she was a Brisbane girl. I also met two New South Wales sisters in the Atherton camp that I remained in touch up till now. And, of course, they're back in New South Wales but they were in Atherton camp and prior to that they were in Callide Valley on the cotton fields.

So did you find it easy to make friends once you arrived at Atherton?

Oh, yes, no problem really.

Did any of them pick up that you had a slight accent, you know, that your background had been very different?

I think it was accepted, or sometimes perhaps a surprise to some of them. But I was accepted as the next one.

You said in Western Australia, you know, that you brother had encountered problems with, you know, an anti-foreigner type feeling and that you had too. Did you encounter any hostility during the war towards you?

No, none whatsoever. No, I think sometimes school years do breed a little bit of anti-attitude from children that perhaps have had no contact with ethnic people. But during my days in the Land Army I just didn't encounter any problems whatsoever.

Were you posted anywhere where you were near Italian Prisoner of War Centres, or where Prisoners of War were working?

No, no, I never met any POWs, or any obvious ethnic people.

I'm just interested in the feeling in Australia or amongst, you know, the Land Army girls at the time in terms of how they felt, you know, Germans and

Japanese and Italians, the people that we were at war with.

Oh, I see.

Can you remember any of the feelings?

Well, they were supportive, of course, of Australia all the way, and perhaps if they weren't you didn't hear of it. But after all, this is our land now and this is our country and I guess one should accept it regardless of a political feelings or any other.

Were you stationed anywhere where you saw US Servicemen?

Only in Brisbane here but I wasn't associated with anyone at all. But I did see them. At Eight Mile Plains a couple of girls did have brief friendships I believe with a couple of fellows but there wasn't anything that I was associated with at all.

And with your parents being in Western Australia, what did you do when you sort of had leave?

Well, often I went and stayed with friends and Land Army, too. There was another lass from Eight Mile Plains, she always used to take me home to her home whenever she was going. I used to join her unless I had other commitments. But I used to go there. There

were two girls, Brisbane girls, that I used to go and stay with. And that was very nice, their families were always very kind to me.

At the camp at Atherton, what sort of social activities did you have?

Yes, well, Matron used to organise picnics and also dances. We had two late nights a week which was Wednesday and Saturday night and that was 11.30pm, we had to be in camp by 11.3pm. Mostly we went to the Shire Hall to the dances there. If you wanted to go to the pictures, you had to get the transport driver who used to take us to the farm to smuggle in a jumper on the seat because there were so many troops that you'd come in and there wouldn't be a seat available. There was a big line up outside. So we loved the dancing, my friends, and we used to go to the Shire Hall to the dance there. So that was Saturday nights, mainly, and sometimes Wednesday night but not often because we had to get up early to go back to work. Monday and Friday was 'closed camp', we weren't allowed out at all. The rest of the week was 9.30pm curfew. We had to be in by 9.30pm. And these rules were, I might add, rigidly kept. There were no problems to my knowledge at all. Or Matron having any problems with anybody coming in late. Maybe there were but I wasn't aware.

What sort of things did the Land Army girls do together back at the camp if they didn't go out?

Well, there was always cleaning and washing, et cetera. And Friday nights we used to have a dance in our Mess hut by arrangements with Matron. She used to organise perhaps a certain unit of the army and there was no drink permitted, none whatsoever. And they used to come, and not too many, but to have a dance and just a social evening. And that was always very nice. They used to erect a tent outside in the yard and set up tables and prepare supper and all the goodies that we couldn't get on coupons. Tinned fish was some of it and asparagus and many things that were just not on the market any more during the war. They sometimes used to perhaps save it and they would prepare all these lovely savories and stuff. And cakes, too. They had their cooks in the Army and that was always very nice. Monday night, 'closed camp', well we just didn't go out. We just… I used to write letters.

Did you have sing songs?

We had no piano, no, we had no sing songs. And it was left to the individual just what you wanted to do with your spare time. But embroidery and knitting was always not far from one wherever one may be. You always had that to fall on.

What was the knitting for, for your clothing?

Oh yes, jumpers. They were too expensive to by ready-knitted so you bought wool and knitted jumpers. I always knitted a jumper for one of the employees, male employees, in Atherton that worked on the farm also, an elderly man. And I knitted during my lunch hour and my time in camp, I used to sit and knit.

Was there any voluntary war work going on, were there any girls in camp, you know, doing things outside of hours for the troops?

No, not that I was aware of at all. I think there were Comfort Funds, and Red Cross, and they had their special branch of helpers, usually the civilian population amongst those that knitted socks for the Services. And also provided sometimes hampers or packed those sorts of things or any needs that they may require.

And after Atherton, you went back to Eight Mile Plains for another season, did you?

No, no, I didn't go back to Eight Mile Plains. After Atherton I went to Inkerman, and there we were there for a few months. Tomatoes was the main product on the farm that I was on and there were potatoes. But the employers there, if their crop was harvested perhaps before they expected or whatever the circumstances may be, they used to lend us around to the other farmers who were in need of extra labour.

Was that a camp situation?

Yes, the camp was at Inkerman near the railway station and we were living in tents. There was a hall there and that was the kitchen and the Mess hall.

What season would that be if you were living in tents?

Well, it's a frost free area and I think it was part of winter. Oh yes, it was the middle of winter because the war finished there in the Pacific which was the 14th of August and so we were there during July-August months. And there was a false alarm or false report that the war had finished but apparently it must have been during debate. And then we never knew whether to accept the reporter's fact when it did eventually come. But it was genuine that the war had finished and we just dropped our kerosene tins and walked off the harvesting of the tomatoes for the rest of the day. And I think the next day, it was possibly the next day, all the farmers rallied around with transport and they took us out to the coast which was over salt pans, there were no roads or anything, and we had a picnic out at the sea which was quite some distance away. And all these trucks and anybody, all the farmers and their families, their employees and us Land Army, that's where we went. And they were fairly well organised, really, at such short notice, because they had erected

toilets and changing bays for a swim, and it was a very pleasant day. So it was then back to the farms after that and finish harvesting for the farmers until the crops were completely finished.

Were you anywhere else during the war years?

Yes, our service wasn't required any more in that area so we had to report to Headquarters in Brisbane and when I did I was posted to Wynnum, a Brisbane suburb, a small crop farm. Beans, peas, tomatoes, and strawberries, et cetera, carrots because the harvest there was required and the men were still not back to do that. So I was there for a few weeks until the crops were finished.

Was that an individual assignment?

Yes, that was a private billet and I stayed with a family and they were very nice people who I visited after the war finished.

You mentioned at the reunion that you worked at Home Hill.

Yes, that's Inkerman, Home Hill, near Home Hill it is. Inkerman is a siding really, a railway siding. There's no township or anything there, or there wasn't then. That's where we were.

How did your employer regard Land Army labour there?

Well, it was obviously satisfactory. And where we were sent to pick potatoes, we were organised with some of the more experienced girls since I wasn't on the potato farms, I was on the tomatoes. But the potato pickers were required to count their bags and therefore we were grouped into six or so girls together and then they pooled their entire bags that they picked for the day and they shared that money. Then we were paid, I can't recall now how much a bag, but I think it was 1 and 6 or something like that. And I remember picking 32 bags there in the one day, just my own effort and I wasn't in the more energetic group. The other group had picked even more. But some had even picked even less, some of the groups because some of the girls either didn't have the skill or they were just a bit too tired. And I did speak to one girl, who was sitting down, that it wasn't fair that the others should be carrying. I said you get up, I said, and do your share. But that was the only incident that I can recall.

You said that the girls in the Land Army worked very hard, do you feel they were ever exploited as cheap labour?

Yes, well, probably it was a lot cheaper than male labour because wages, male wages, were a lot more in those days and female wages were just so low.

I just wondered if you felt that employers took advantage of girls being on the farms in any way or if that was not the case?

Well, perhaps they did. I just feel that probably the effort contribution on a basis of individual male or female workers, the girls that I worked with, they would have been equivalent to a man working almost. Except perhaps you couldn't pick up a sack of potatoes and load them, put them on your shoulder, the strength just wasn't there. But at Inkerman we were exploited there by half an hour, the four of us. And us four that worked on this particular property, we came together from the Atherton camp and we were fortunate to be placed together. And instead of finishing work at half past eleven, because I think we used to start either seven or half past seven, must have been half past seven, and our four hours was up at 11.30 and the boss kept us going to 12.00. So he had half an hour's work from each one of us girls for nothing for half an hour. The rest of the day was spent on contract work. I was appointed to make half bushel cases for tomato packing and the other two of us were appointed to make cases, the other two girls were packing tomatoes. And they used to get so much a case for packing. And we used to get so much a case for making the cases, which

I can't clearly recall now. So it was half a day on hourly basis and the other half a day on contract basis. I think, I can't recall the wages paid there, whether it was seven and six a day, I really can't recall.

Were you required to join a union at any place you worked?

No, no, never.

Were you anywhere where the girls, you did mention one incident where a girl refused to go to work in the morning, but were there any other problems in anyway between the employers and Land Army labour?

No, not that I know.

What about accidents and safety? Were any jobs that you had to tackle unsafe?

Well, there was a good deal of climbing, especially when it came to harvesting citrus, ladders. Whether you were spraying either we used to have to spray the orchard also and sometimes you had to climb on ladders to get up to the top of the tree. So I guess that's a risk. But, if there were accidents I think you just leaped to your feet. Less likely to be injured in those days than when you were much older.

Were you ever asked to do any job that you found an unreasonable request?

Yes, I accepted at the time but there was one property, the first dairy farm where they had tomatoes also, I was planting tomatoes under irrigation. The irrigation spray was going while I was planting them which I don't think that it would have been acceptable just at any time for everybody.

So you got wet?

I got saturated, absolutely wet, yes.

So what time was it that you left to Land Army, do you remember?

When I finally left, well, I was at Wynnum and when this crop had finished, that was the end of the Land Army for me.

Would it have been about the end of 1945? You mentioned the war ended in the August '45 and you still had another placement after that?

It was August yes, it would have been all of September I would have spent at Wynnum and possibly part of October, so that's when I would have finished, yes.

Could you tell us how you felt when you left the Land Army? Do you remember the day you left?

I remember leaving the property very clearly. The farewells, et cetera, to the employers. And the family, there were three families there really, that was I associated with. But, it wasn't too bad really or emotional by any means because Brisbane wasn't all that far away, or Wynnum rather, and I visited them after the war, both with my husband.

Did you participate in any marches at the end of the war?

I think, I can't recall that clearly. But during the war, those of us that were close to Brisbane were called in to participate in the march, yes, and I think two or three times which was quite an experience, rewarding experience I guess to participate and be part of. But at the end of the war, I'm afraid that leaves me at a loss, I can't reflect on that very much just exactly what I did.

What did you actually go and do then? I mean, where was home for you, what did you do?

Well, I had to look for another job which I did find eventually and I was engaged then, so I was waiting for my husband-to-be to come back from New Guinea and we had planned on his return to marry and we had made some

preliminary plans and arrangements. But, of course, one didn't know just exactly when the troop ship would come back. And when they did come back they disembarked in Sydney and they arrived in Brisbane ahead of their papers so they kept them in Brisbane until their papers arrived so we didn't know what day it would be. But the following Saturday, once they did get their leave, the following Saturday we were married. Rather at short notice, but we had a celebration with quite a few friends gathering.

Where had you met your husband?

In Maryborough.

Was he in the Services then?

Yes, he joined, yes, he was, he had joined later, after I met him.

Were you in the Land Army when you met him?

No, I met him before Land Army.

I'm interested to know when you were in the Land Army and you were living in Queensland and working in country areas, how conscious were you that, you know, that there was a world war going on?

Well, I think we were all conscious and very aware, especially after the shelling of Darwin and possible threat to Townsville. I think that was shelled too, and Sydney. I think we were very aware. And I think there was concern, much of it expressed.

Was there any… did you ever think there might be an invasion?

Well, that was always a possibility, but unless you lived through an experience, you tend to live in ignorance, to some extent, you don't know the unknown.

I mean did you live in daily fear that the Japanese might come or was it different to that?

Well, it wasn't particularly in fear, in my environment where I was, any one of them. But I believe in Cairns, in that area, there was. Of course, we had blackouts, every home had to be blacked out so you couldn't see any visible light. And even railways, stations, and carriages were travelling without any lighting. And every now and again there'd be a siren in case of bombing to prepare us to head for the shelters wherever the shelters were.

Were you required to have dug outs or slit trenches in the Land Army?

No, no, nothing like that.

Say when you were living in the tents, what camp was that?

That was at Inkerman.

Well, what were you to do if there was…?

There was no preparation for that whatsoever. There was a roll call most days there, but this was from one particular matron that was very regimental. But that's the only place that I can recall roll calls. We had liberties and we had rules and regulations that you abide by. But to me, none of them were really that were unacceptable at all. I thought, under the circumstances in that day and age, you accepted that.

Were you writing to anyone else away from war aside from your fiance?

To some girlfriends I was, yes, especially those that I met during my time in the Land Army and that I became acquainted with. All those friendships were quite precious to me so we kept in contact.

I'm interested to know, when you had to shift from one assignment to the other, there were quite vast distances really between some of the assignments. How was that organised for you to get from one place to the other?

Usually public transport. You just packed up and you just by train mostly. Coaches was virtually nonexistent unless it was on the main routes of the coast. But it was mostly by train that I travelled.

How did you know where to get out when the stations were all blacked out?

Usually the station master would ring the bell that we were there and also those that may have gone to sleep, which was never the case with me, and also announce what the station was, call out whatever the place name that we had stopped at.

Which place did you enjoy the most?

Well, I liked Eight Mile Plains because the people there. And also close to Brisbane which was very nice to be able to come into the city and shop sometimes or meet friends at Kelvin House. And also Atherton, I enjoyed my stay in Atherton very much.

Was that, why was that?

Well, the work there, the employer, the camp system was quite good. And also as I stated, Matron used to organise outings, picnic outings to the various lakes or the waterfalls. And also the once-a-week dance, usually in camp which was all very nice. And having

been on for twelve months on two dairy farms with virtually very little or practically nil social life, this was great. We were not permitted to ride in military transport but perhaps sometimes some of the girls might have done without the knowledge, but I certainly didn't. But if we were going on a picnic the matron would organise with a senior officer for his group of Servicemen to join us and pick us up and take us to wherever it was. And the picnics were really good. And we used to swim in the lakes and I enjoyed that very much, the swimming.

When you joined the Land Army at the beginning, were you aware that it wasn’t a fourth Service?

Oh, yes, well you could join for the duration of the war. I don’t think there was any stipulation that you couldn’t, but because of the need and there was a great need for labour on the properties, they also brought in the younger age and also casual, three months Service, six months Service and I guess a girl at 16 or 17 could do just as much as one much older if she so wanted to.

How did you feel that the Land Army was treated relative to the other three Services?

Well, there was a point there, we were not recognised as a Defence Service which is for perhaps obvious reasons in a way. But it was a little difficult because we weren’t issued with enough clothing

sometimes. We didn't have enough coupons to purchase otherwise. So we were in between a Service and a civilian. But we managed, I don't think there were any real hassles or problems.

Do you feel those that served in the Land Army were treated fairly in terms of, you know, concessions and benefits?

Well, to compare them with the other Services, I guess not, but then again I guess I'm not in a position to judge that. It's the day and age and the time and the needs of the country where it was an organisation that perhaps was not…

(Break in Tape)

… economic and deprived underprivileged circumstances, they all pull their sleeves up and work hard.

Would you like to tell us about your experiences as an alien in Australia during the war years?

Yes, well, I had an identification card. I had to have a form filled out which was typed by a friend and it was quite extensive. I can't recall the full details that was in it, and I was given a folder identification card with my photo in it and finger prints. And I have had no conflict with the law in any way whatsoever, but before I left to go to an appointed job during the Land

Army service I had to report to the police before I left and when I got there. Now, it wasn't always possible for me to do that because of the transport. So sometimes it may be days before I can report back at the police station to say that I am at such and such an address. And on one occasion at Eight Mile Plains I wasn't able to come into Holland Park during the week, and a policeman came out on the motor bike. And he stopped and I wasn't at the house, the barracks, and one of the girls put her head through the window and she said to him, "What do you want?" And he said, "I want you", he said. She said, "I haven't done anything wrong." And he said, "You're not on the roll." And she said, "I'm not 21 yet", which was true. But anyway he told her he was looking for me. So I came eventually and he just wanted to see me in person and in fact that I was there. And then eventually I did come into Holland Park to the police station. And I can't recall any paperwork being dealt with on any of those occasions - it was just personal appearance. But when I arrived at Holland Park Police Station, the Police Sergeant was so surprised when he saw me, he called his wife into meet me. And he said to me, he said, "Well, you shouldn't have to be put to this extra inconvenience", and he said about sending me into the city to one of the Government offices to see whether I could be included on my father's naturalisation papers because he was naturalised and Mum automatically and us two children, I was nine when we came to Australia, he excluded us for what reason I don't know. So we were

hoping that I could be included on his naturalisation papers to dismiss with this problem. Which was a problem at times, inconvenience mainly. Anyway I did go to this particular office and they typed a letter out for me which I did sign and eventually send to Canberra but there was never any reply, so I just remained an alien until I was married and then I automatically became an Australian subject, or British subject as it was known then. And I reported to the police station to tell them so and they just took my identification card and kept it and that was that. And I was a free person.

How did you feel having to do that reporting when you were actually in the Land Army and doing work that contributed to the war effort?

Well, it amazed me, that in fact the Headquarters also had to report on my moves. I was very surprised. Apart from having to physically deal with it myself, they also had to report. So I was rather resentful about it. But there again, I suppose, because I didn't have the experience or the know-how of any channels that may have been open to me, I just remained in that situation.

When you look back on your time in the Land Army, during, you know, those two and a half years, how do you feel about that time in your life?

Well, the circumstances I was in, which were no better in fact probably more disadvantaged, to me it was quite a good experience. You know, I feel happy having participated and being part of. I felt I had a sense of belonging. And especially in the camps that I was in, I enjoyed the company and friendship and it was quite good.

> Would you say that that was the first time that you'd had a sense of belonging coming to Australia?

Well, I had some of that with my family, but certainly not supportive enough and accepting enough from my father. But after I left home, yes, I suppose that would have been. I felt I was part of a unit or part of people.

> We were talking at the reunion the other day about Pam Carlton's thesis and you've seen the thesis. And I'd be interested if you felt… like Pam's written a thesis and she wasn't in the Land Army and has given her point of view of how she perceived the Land Army, but I'd be interested to know how you feel about that? Whether there are things that you feel have been left out that you'd like to comment on, or things that she'd said that you have a different view about?

Well, there was only one point really that I felt it could have been more constructive in other fields, is personal opinions of two or three of the members, ex-members, on issues of personality and character. I felt that it lacked to some extent the program of the day, or what was involved in that eight hours of work. But then, of course, I can't stand in adjustment there because it's a thesis and a massive coverage, a great deal of archives that had to be delved through to compile that. It was the only thing. That rather surprised me a little.

> So the conflict it dwells on is at the administrative level, rather than looking at the, you know, the everybody life of the girls who were in the Land Army and the work that they did. Is that what you mean? I just haven't had a chance to read it yet because it was given to me yesterday.

It was just mainly the assumption and assessment of two or three of the interviews on personalties that they met and these members, ex-members, are not particularly known to me, but by the coding, I felt that their information would have been perhaps more valuable in dealing with the type of the work that they did of the hours, the payments, and those sort of things, rather than focussing on character issues of the individual.

> Well, you know, Sue and I are making a film on the Land Army, and we'd be very interesting to know what you would like to see included in the film to communicate about that experience you had during the war years. You know, what did it mean to you to be in the Land Army?

Well, I felt that I was serving the country, I guess, in broad terms. And there was a job to be done and I was there to help and do it. And I felt part of the group, which I was grateful, and I think wherever there is a need and one is available, you move in a direction. You work on it and assess it, does it suit you? And if so, you do something about it.

> Do you feel the work of the Land Army has been acknowledged sufficiently?

Well, perhaps it's been lost to some extent because there wasn't a coverage of records kept and I believe that some of the records were destroyed there after the war which could be quite, could have been quite valuable. But no, it's a little hard, I guess, to focus in any one direction. I just feel that honesty and authenticity should prevail rather than… and of course, it's hard I know, taking notes and information and individuals after nearly 40 years. One has to understand that the mind is not so active perhaps and the memory has failed to some extent. And it's not easy to reflect back that far, all the minor details.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about that time in your life?

I think we've covered fairly well.

(Break in Tape)

To become naturalised I would have had to take out a public declaration through the media papers, et cetera, and it would have been have cost me about ten pound which was quite a lot of money to me in those days. Whereas today you can have a civic ceremony naturalisation at a City Hall or Civic Centre which is so much simpler than in those days. But I accepted the rules and regulations as they were. And you knew no different so therefore you had no alternatives.

Could I ask you to go back again to that time just after you left the Land Army and then before you were married. You would have had to find accommodation and found a little work?

Well, I worked at private home for a chemist and his family. They used to go to work and I just house-kept for them which was very good there.

Where would you have found the job? Through newspapers?

I can't recall exactly how I got that job. It wasn't through the papers, no. Probably somebody who knew somebody, or somebody told me something, or somebody that knew of me that I was requiring accommodation and a job. Having no home was difficult at times, yes. But having met some of the friends which I did and my husband's family were very good to me too, it was very supportive.

> Can I ask you what work your husband did after the war?

He worked for the City Council.

> I was just interested if you ended up on the land again or not?

No, no, mind you I think it would have been a good idea but he's not a farmer type of a person. And for me, well, it would have been quite easy. But no, he worked for the City Council.

> I was just wondering if you wrote back to your family during the war years and did you keep in contact with them?

I had very little contact with them. Mum couldn't write, Dad wouldn't. And Frank occasionally but his comprehension of writing wasn't all that good either. So they knew where I was, but eventually, my sister

grew up, because she was only five when I left, and when she left home, well, she was married at 16, rather than her leaving the way I did, Dad saw to it that she married which was a very unhappy situation. But she got an address which was a very old one. So this employer that I had worked before for, he came to me with this letter and even my name wasn't spelled correctly. So we've been in touch ever since. But it can be difficult, to be sort of part of the society and lost in the society, as perhaps I was in a way. But when you look back I accepted it and I had no alternatives, so it's the situation that you went along with.

Thank you very much.