Australian War Memorial

Sound Collection

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TITLE:

INTERVIEWEE: **Pat Dennis**

INTERVIEWER: Sue Maslin

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SUMMARY:

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Could I begin by asking you a little bit about your life prior to you joining the Land Army? Whereabouts did you grow up?

Oh, we were on a farm on the Peel Estate, Wallard. As a child, but then we moved to the city when I was about ten, no eight. And I went to school in the city, in Nedlands, and always hated it. We used to go for holidays to the country.

Can you describe where you grew up, until you were ten? What sort of Estate was it?

Oh, it was sort of group settlement farms in the Wallard area. We had a dairy farm. I don't remember a great deal about it except that it was a lot of fun for me. I can't even remember how many cows we milked, probably about twenty-four, all by hand. And I can remember hay cutting going on, and we used to ride horses. But, the milk was separated and cream sent away to Fremantle.

Had you ridden horses from a very early age?

Yes. It's a funny thing, my father always insisted we learn to ride horses, and having an only brother, he said to Tom that he had to ride a horse or have a hiding. And Tom said "I'd rather have a hiding." But all the girls, there were six girls in the family, all liked horse riding. Not that I was very good. I was just a rider in those days, but several of the girls were very good.

And were you one of the elder children?

I was the youngest. I have a twin sister. We were the youngest. So life was all fun in those days. The other girls all worked very hard.

On the land itself?

Yes. We'd be happy there, and I was most unhappy.

What was it about the city that you didn't really like?

I don't know. I don't really know at all, I just wasn't as happy there. Oh, it was all right. I mean, as a family we were… it was all right, but once I left school I couldn't get away from the city quickly enough. Mrs Fry… I'd been for holidays with Mrs Fry, and she knew I liked it and she'd write to Mum, the war had started then. I was about thirteen and when the war started, well a couple of years later she'd write and say to Mum, "Can Pat come and help us on the farm, we're short of labour?" And Mum, having had such a hard time on the farm, wasn't keen on any of us going back to farming. She'd battled to get me a job in Perth, making hats, or dressmaking or something, because I hadn't done terribly well at school. I'd got through, but that was all. And didn't do typing or any sort of career work. And she thought I might make hats, make dresses or something, but that wasn't in my line either.

What were your mother's experiences on the farm?

Well, just hard work. And not much money. She'd had a life of luxury up 'til she was about twenty. She'd lived

well, and then the bank crash came in 1900. Well after that they had to fend for themselves and well, she couldn't boil water when she was married, when the first lost all their money. And then, she made bread, made jam, she did everything. She worked outside and she had babies, and you know it was just a hard life, with very little assistance.

And what made them finally decide to move away from the farm?

Oh, well, Mum's idea was having… I think, having six daughters, and a son that wasn't… all he could dream of doing was being an Engineer in those days, she wanted something better for the girls because she couldn't see them getting anywhere in the country. Well, they all ended up getting good jobs in the city and so on.

And what about your father?

He didn't like the city. He moved out. Well, the break came then. He went away. And Mum looked after the family in Nedlands.

So at what age did you leave school?

Well, we did the Junior, which in those days was, well fifteen, but we were… we started school a year before our time, so that the school in Wallard could be kept open, because they were running short of children. And we didn't ever lose a class. So that means I was fourteen when I left school, but actually I had done the full

twelve years. It is twelve, is it? Nine years.

Probably would have been nine years.

Yes. Well, anyway the full time. But you weren't allowed to leave school 'til you were fourteen in those days anyway. But we did the Junior.

And then where did you go after that?

Oh, that's right, Perth Tech., and learnt a little bit about millinery and dressmaking. But that's when I started going back to Donnybrook, to help the Fry's.

So, had you actually started working as a dressmaker?

Oh, I worked in a couple of factories. Dressmaking factories. Sewing on buttons. Making buttons. Sewing seams and things, but not very much.

What was the factory work like?

I…

Can you remember much about the working conditions?

Oh, it was all right. I can always remember one girl who had a lovely voice, and she used to sing all the time, while we were sewing. We'd just… a line up of machines, and no, I haven't thought about those days. I mean, I did millinery too, and used to sew bands on hats and things like that. I'd never ever got very far because I never

stayed very long, at any of the jobs. Oh, you know, four or five months or something.

Why was that?

Because Mrs Fry would write and say "Can Pat come and help on the farm." Because, she just knew I was unhappy in Perth, that I wanted to be on the farm.

Did she write a couple of times?

Yes. I went back a couple of times, and in the end Mum allowed me to stay. She realised that I really didn't want to be in the city and she knew Mrs Fry was good to me and looking after me well. And I suppose she got tired of the arguments too. That's the only thing I ever argued with Mum about.

What were her feelings about you going on the land?

She wasn't really keen, really happy. But she came down to have a holiday on the farm and I think after that she realised that farming wasn't the hard life that she'd had to put up with. We had a wonderful time at Donnybrook. We worked hard, but we had a lot of fun too.

Can you describe to me the work that you were doing at the Fry's?

Well, there was the dairy, we milked the cows in the morning, and I fed the calves. During the season we picked apples, and packed. And there was shearing time. And I became quite good at the rouseabouting. I never

actually did shearing, but used to the rousing. But hay time of course, and it wasn't bales in those days, it was all loose hay. And the Fry's were the first ones that got this grab, hay-grab and… that you swept the hay into a stook… or the stooks of hay into this stack with a rake, and then the grab was pulled by a horse, and the hay manoeuvred onto the stack. I did ploughing, tractor work.

Were there horse teams with the ploughing, or was it tractor pulled?

No, I think the horses were… the tractor had come in. They only used the tractor as far as I can remember, for ploughing, well rotary-hoeing it was, in the Orchard. They grew flax for a while, but that didn't last. That was just an experiment.

Why didn't it last?

Well, I think that shortage of labour mostly, probably, and they had the flax mills or perhaps their country wasn't quite as suitable as where they had the flax mills. I don't really know. I only just used to do the work that I was asked to do, and perhaps I didn't take enough outside interest in that sort of thing, I don't know.

And who else was working there at the time?

Well, Phillip was, he joined the Army but then he was Manpowered out, and he was on the farm. He was the eldest son. Rachel was there some of the time, but she went away working on other places. And Tim was at school. And

Michael was away at school. So there was only Phillip and myself. And then there was a married man, an elderly married couple, and he helped with the dairying and everything. It was… the farm was about eight hundred acres, and there was a lot of different going on, with the orchard. They had a few sheep and the dairy. The dairy was the main thing. We did clearing. That's… oh fencing you know, whatever farm jobs needed to be done.

Was Mr Fry there at the time?
No he had died some years before.

Was Mrs Fry actually running the property?

Yes. She was a wonderful person. Took such a… she knew everything that went on, on the farm. She was just a marvelous person. They were all very good.

And what were your living conditions like there?

I lived in the house with them. I was treated as one of the family. Oh, I used to make the bread and we'd bottle fruit and you know, any… just whatever went on. It was as if I was a daughter in the house and I just helped with whatever was going.

And at that stage were you aware that there were other land girls?

I had wanted to join the Land Army, but I wasn't worried because they told me I was too young. I was fifteen when I went to Fry's, and turned sixteen early in the year. And I did get in touch with Land Army, and they said "No,

you’re too young.” Well, then, when Mrs Fry arranged for me to go to Mt. Magnet, she suggested that I join the Land Army, again, because she thought by going up there, I’d have better conditions if I joined. And, I don’t know specially why, because I wasn’t seventeen then, I don’t know… special permission to join. I think Mrs Fry might have put in a word, because she knew I’d have eventually have a uniform and better pay. ‘Cause they didn’t pay very well. They were only paying their daughter ten shillings a week, and she was working like a man. Well when I went up in the Land Army, I got thirty shillings a week. And that was a lot of money in those days, to me.

What was her daughter’s name?

Pat.

Pat. And what work would she do?

Well, we all worked together. Once again I was treated as one of the family, and we used to do the mustering and drafting. There was an Overseer on the station, and a half-cast, and Pat and myself. And we’d have to fix windmills, check fences, mustering, drafting, tailing. A contractor came in to do the shearing, but we kept the sheep up to them. Carted water and did the gardening.

This is at Mt. Magnet now, we’re talking about?

Yes. After the shearers went there were always stragglers. Mustering seemed to be the main part of the work up there. Mustering for one thing or another. And after the shearers went, we’d go out and you’d find all

these sheep. So you'd bring them in. Well Pat would shear them. I didn't have to, although she got me to have a try, but I wasn't strong enough. We'd camp out a couple of times, because the paddocks were so far away, when we were doing the mustering.

Can you describe to me the first time you were camped out?

Yes. We camped by a clay-pan in a… I can't remember what the tent was, but it was a sort of a tent, and it must have been taken, I think Mrs Lejeune must have taken it out on the ute. And we set it up by this playpen. And we had… must have had a camp fire to cook our meals. And I can remember Pat's way of making you comfortable on the ground. We had… we'd fill bags with some grass or something just to make it a little bit softer, and you'd sort of, make room for your elbow in the dirt and you'd get quite comfortable. When you're young you sleep anywhere. I don't remember a great deal about it really, just the fun parts of it.

And where would you be camping, would this be on a muster way out in the back paddocks?

Yes, it could be twenty miles from the actual homestead. Fifteen to twenty miles. And the thing was it was such a big paddock, that you mustered each day and yarded the sheep out there. And when you got them all then you drove them into the station, into the sheep yards.

What was the size of the property?

Two hundred thousand acres. It was a long way between gates. And the telephone was the top wire of the fence. And the Emus would jump the fence and twist the wire, so then the telephone would be out. And you'd have to go and check the fence to find the break and just untwist it and you'd be on the air again. Because that was your only method of communication up there. And, oh, a jackaroo came up, he was about seventeen, and oh, one of my jobs was the milk the cow every morning, for the house milk, and I was to teach the jackaroo to milk. But he wasn't going to have any tart teaching him to milk a cow, so the first morning he came along, and I showed him what to do. And he said "I can see, you do it." Course I was young and not very forceful, so I just milked the cow and thought he was learning. Next morning he saw me coming with the bucket and there was a little hill just at the back of the men's quarters and he saw me coming and took off. And he raced over the hill, the sandhill. Next thing he comes rolling and crawling down the hill groaning "I can't breathe", and he was having a fit. So, well he got over that all right, he was told to rest for awhile. And then another day we went off to fix a mill, and this was a long way from the station homestead and we were fixing… oh, we had to fix sheep yards around the mill, that's what this lad was doing. And we were working on the mill and things. I was able to help a bit, I don't remember how much, because I didn't know anything about mills before I went up there. Anyway then during the morning, this lad came along having this fit again, saying he couldn't breathe and so Pat told him to go and rest. And then I was sent to call him for lunch, and he was gone. We couldn't find him anywhere. He was having this fit and he didn't know what he was doing, and went walk-about,

and got lost. So then we had to search for him. No phones or anything. No way of getting in touch with the homestead. And we walked and walked and walked, tracking this boy. And all he had on was a pair of leather sandals with a tin. One of those metal heel plates, on one of them, and every now and again we'd see this heel plate in the dirt. So, we took ages trying to catch up with him, and we got near the next door neighbours station, which was 20 miles from ours, or well, by near, I say about five miles from the homestead. So the half-cast was sent onto the homestead to ring home, but Mrs Lejeune had the Grandson with her, and he'd been playing with the phone so it was un-connected, disconnected. So it wasn't until dark that she was worried about us, naturally we weren't expected home, and then she went to ring the neighbour to see if they knew where we were, so that's how she heard that we were in trouble. So, that's right, Stan the half-cast went onto the neighbouring station and Pat and I just sat on the road and waited, because we knew eventually a car would come along. We had no food or anything with us, we'd left everything back at the truck. I think we probably took a bit of water. So we just lay on the road and went to sleep until about ten or eleven o'clock when they came and picked us up. They rang the police in Mt Magnet, they were sixty miles away. The police came out at dawn and went on search and they eventually met up with this young lad, Neil, and as it happened he was walking towards home, quite by chance, so there was a happy ending. He was given the sack and went back to Perth.

And the fits were quite genuine?

Yes. Some sort of epilepsy or something like that, I don't really know what his trouble was. But, I think apparently if he got a bit excited or something he…

And did you know anything about his background or why he came up as a jackaroo?

Well, I think that they just wanted the help, and he wanted a job. I don't ever remember that we worked… I suppose another person mustering, you know, with the horse work, probably he was needed. Well he must have been needed; they wouldn't have got him, because they didn't like paying money for nothing.

Did they ever consider trying to get another land girl?

No. I went up there… the reason originally was because Pat's sister got married, and it's a pretty lonely life up there, and they wanted this sort of companion for Pat. And Mrs Fry thought it would be good experience for me too.

How old was Pat at the time?

About twenty-four I think. Twenty-two or twenty-four. But she worked hard all her life I'd say.

Who would be actually responsible for the day to day management of the place?

The overseer would discuss it with Mrs Lejeune. But he was… she knew everything that was going on, but he gave

us the orders.

> And can you describe to me the water carting, what did that involve?

That was just an old wooden cart with a draft horse in it and the tank was a mile away from the house, and how did we fill the tank? I think there was a hose, you know, a pipe, attached to the tank, sort of siphon and you'd just load the hose into one hundred gallon tank on the back of the cart and fill it up, and then you'd tie up the hose again. We sort of siphoned it out. And you'd take it back and fill the tank at the garden, because Mr Lejeune loved her garden. She had veggies and beautiful flowers, and she spent a lot of time in the garden. I think the women up there would have to because petrol rationing they couldn't travel around much, they couldn't visit much. They had to make their home comfortable and nice. So then, we'd have to water the garden two or three times a week. That was a big job. I suppose twice a week. The water for the house, I can't remember if it was rain water or if we used the bore water. Oh, there was a cook there, old Nellie, and they got a young half-cast girl into help her, because Nellie was about 80. She'd been there for years and years and years. And one day we found a nest of Emu eggs, and of course Emus were a pest up there, so Pat said "Well smash all these eggs", which we did. And then she said "Let's take one home and suck it." Oh, that's right I wanted to save it, take it home. So we sucked this egg out and gave it to the cook, said "Would you like to make a cake", and she put one Emu egg in a one egg cake, and you'd about… it's equal to about ten hen eggs I think, so the cake was heavy and as doughy. So

that was a lesson I'd learned. I hadn't done a lot of cooking, but I always remember that one, you don't put too many eggs in a cake.

And what were your living conditions?

Good. I had my own room, in the house, and ate with the family. The Overseer ate with the family. But the half-cast and the jackaroo ate in the kitchen. It's real, you know, station people had their rules, but… But I was treated very well, as one of the family, really.

And when you describe the half-cast, who was he, and what was his background?

Oh, he came from **Dandaragan**. I don't know. He was there when I went there. He was good with horses. He was a good worker. I don't know if he was married or… he never ever had a gin there. He lived in the men's quarters, as did the overseer and the jackaroo.

Were there many aboriginal people around that area?

No. Oh, well there might have been. Yes, most of the stations had aboriginals helping them, as far as I know. But I don't ever remember seeing a lot of them, only this half-cast girl and the man on the station we were on. And there certainly weren't any communities on the station.

What sort of things would you do in your time off?

Oh, they had a tennis court. We'd play tennis at the week-ends. We did have one tennis party when other folk came and visited. Write letters. Read.

Would there be… Was there a township anywhere nearby, that you could visit other people?

Sixty miles away. We went once while I was up there. And I made friends with the girl on the next door station. We'd ring and chat sometimes. And I went to stay with her. Oh, Lejeune's had another daughter who lived about forty miles away and they'd sort of drop me at Nandi with Mary Bogle and they went onto Plooms, to their station. But they were about the only twice I left the homestead. But you didn't seem to mind not going out, there was always something to do. You just, I don't remember the time dragging at all. Perhaps, I suppose we played cards and things some times, and take…

Did you get on all right with Pat?

Yes. I did really. There was just this, I feel there was this little bit of jealous because I was getting this money, that really, she should have been paid more than I was, but the station couldn't afford it. But that was just an underlying thing. She always made sure I did my half of the work. We had to paint the roof of the house one day, and I was… I've always been frightened of heights. We had to get up on this tin roof. And she drew a line right down the centre. She painted hers and shot through and she left me to it. And I knew I had to finish it. Well I got it finished and got down eventually, but gee I was scared. Just little things like that made me

realise that she wasn't going to let me get away with anything. But she was good to me really, and we did have quite a lot of fun together.

So at this stage you had, had you actually become a member of the official Women's Land Army?

Oh, yes, I did join that before I went up to Mt. Magnet. And, I… there were no uniforms available when I first joined. I'm pretty sure they sent my uniform up. That was a red letter day, photos and everything. It was all very exciting.

What parts of the uniform did you get? Was it a dress uniform, or were you getting work clothes?

I think work clothes. I think the dress uniform came later. Overalls and leggings, slouch hat, boots, you had to wear boots up there because there was snakes, and oh, the rough country it was better for you to wear boots. We had everything you needed. I think they even gave us underclothes, stockings and socks. Oh, I've got a list here; I'd probably know better what was given in that. Gradually we were given more and more. Like the great coat and skirt and jacket. Just while I was up there every now and again a parcel would come. It was… I thought we were very well looked after with our uniforms, when they really got organised.

Was there ever any comment when you were first joining that there was some problem about you joining because you were already working on a farm

at that stage?

I don't… I think I couldn't have stayed at Cremden if I'd… The Land Army wanted you to be in a position that they could send you where they wanted to send you. And well that's why farmer's daughters weren't allowed to join, but I don't think there… the only thing that was preventing me was my age. Because, originally it was eighteen, but I think they did reduce the age after awhile.

Can you remember what your pay was at that stage?

Yes. I was paid thirty shillings. I have an idea there might have been a raise. I just can't remember. No, that might have been when I went to Brunswick Junction, but I can remember the thirty shillings, but I can't remember any more. But I'm sure there was a raise when I turned, I turned seventeen at Mt. Magnet. I must have turned eighteen at Brunswick Junction, and probably there was a raise then.

And what was Pat getting at that stage?

Well she, before I went to Mt. Magnet, she was getting ten shillings a week, and it was increased to a pound. And I didn't work as hard as she did, and I can understand now how she must have felt. Because, also, I was given uniform and everything, and she had to buy her own clothes.

I was wondering at that time, how much contact you had with the Land Army administration and so on, did

you get the Land Army Gazette, or very much information?

Yes. That was always interesting to have. They were put out monthly I suppose, I can't remember. But I did save them all for a while. They were very interesting. I always enjoyed receiving them, and I think I must have had… Mrs Carlton, I think she kept in touch pretty well, to make sure the girls were being looked after and you know, checking if we had any problems. I know at one stage, at Mt. Magnet, I forgot to wear my hat one day when I was water carting and next thing my nose was bleeding furiously, and I had a lot of trouble with nose-bleeds for a little while after that. And then something or other happened, I can't remember why, but I had to end up going to the doctor, and Mrs Carlton knew all about this, because she was keeping in contact because I was ill. And it turned out that I was anaemic. This one trip we made to Mt. Magnet was… it was a business trip for the Station, and the fact that I had to go to the doctor, and everything. We went and stayed one night in town to get everything done. And it turned out I was anaemic, and I suppose from all this loss of blood, because it's a very serious offence if you don't wear a hat up North. Well, it affected me that way anyway. But I can remember Mrs Carlton wanting to know everything. All about the visit to the doctor and everything. So, I think that they kept in very close contact, or fairly close contact with the girls.

Were there any other Land Army girls in the area?

No. I don't know how far North other land girls went.

Not as far North as that?

No.

How long were you actually at Mt. Magnet for?

I went in February, and I must have… well I went straight to Pinjarra, Fairbridge Farm. I was there at the end of October, so it must have been about eight or nine months.

And had you ever been on anything like a station the size of Mt. Magnet before?

No. No. I'd never been so far from home before.

So what were you first impressions of the work there at Mt. Magnet?

Well, I think I was just pretty excited about it all. I was doing something different, because I loved riding horses, and the fact that I was going to be doing a lot of that was great. Well, just doing things I liked doing I think.

What were your first impressions about the size and the isolation of Mt. Magnet, did you find that difficult at first?

I don't ever remember finding it difficult. I… we had to stop… we called at a place on our way up to Mt. Magnet, that impressed me, that it could be so far away, that we

had to stop overnight to get there. And I've always looked on, thought of, station life, as being something special, something… I was very thrilled to have the opportunity to go up there.

But how did you actually get up there?

Mrs Lejeune and Pat had been, they'd been down in South for their annual holiday, and we drove up by car. I don't remember it being a very big car, but we seemed to have a lot of luggage in it. And the place we stayed at was a very well known place. They were friends of Mrs Lejeune's. And I was terribly impressed there because they had a maid, in her little black frock, and white apron and little hat, waiting on us, you know, everything was done properly. I just can't remember the name of.. **Le Steere** might have been the name. But all these things, I was very impressionable in those days and I just thought I was very lucky.

And who was actually in the house when you were up at Mt. Magnet, just yourself and Mrs Lejeune, Pat?

There was the cook. She had her room there. The overseer lived in the men's quarters I think, if I remember rightly. And the men's quarters were, oh, one hundred yards or so away from the house, probably more. Yes, just the girls in the house.

And can you remember the sort of things, discussions or whatever that you might have at the end of the day, sort of things that might be discussed?

Discussions? I suppose we just talked generally about the war. Of course the war was the main topic of conversation. What was happening overseas, you know, you were waiting for news. The radio was always on at news time. And we named our pet lambs after places that were, you know, that were brought to our notice, like Derna, and Poona and Moscow and names like that. And oh, family life. Mrs Lejeune had this daughter and husband and children, they filled a lot of the discussion, and the children they came to stay at one stage, and oh the little boy did.

> Were you at Mt. Magnet… were you aware of the bombing of the North West, of Western Australia, can you remember that happening before or during the time you were there, or did that happen afterwards?

Well, Pearl Harbour happened when I was at **Donnybrook**. I can't actually remember Darwin, you know, just where I was when it happened, but I think I might have been at Mt. Magnet. I know, yes they were getting concerned about the fact that the Japs might get onto our country, might land eventually. But, once again, at that age, I, well "It can't happen here", sort of thing. Or perhaps that's my way, that's the way I am - It can't happen to me. I don't… I remember thinking that we must do our bit to help, but I don't remember being unduly concerned.

> Do you remember there ever being any discussion about the Brisbane line?

No. No, I don't. Not off-hand.

Was there any discussion about the possibility if there was an invasion what you might do?

No. No. Do you know, the only time I can remember that, is when I was at school, and we used to have air-raid practises, and that was, well of course before then. No, I can't remember at all. No doubt there was discussion on it.

Just, you know an awareness of the war going on around you?

Oh, well, we were very aware of it. I suppose because of the job… because I had joined the Land Army to help.

Did they know of any servicemen away at war?

Oh, yes. That was one of the things Pat and I would do, we'd write to a lot of the boys that we knew who were in the forces. And then we got the idea of, because we were writing so many letters, we used carbon paper, but unfortunately some of the boys were in the same units and they used to compare notes. But the main thing was that they were getting letters I think.

These were boys that you'd known of before-hand or..?

Yes, some from Donnybrook and cousins. Oh, mainly the lads I knew from Donnybrook, because Donnybrook was like a second home to me.

And can you tell me about your dog?

Oh, Roger, he was lovely. I was allotted a dog. There were about six or eight dogs up there, and of course anyone who did mustering needed a dog. And you had to feed your own dog, and do everything for it. And so, whenever we went mustering, if we were going a long way, Roger used to hop up on the back of my horse and ride a lot of the time, because he got sore feet if he ran all the time. And we'd come to… if we came to water he liked to hop off and have a swim around and a drink. But mostly we used to carry a water bag on our horses necks and you'd just sort of knock the top of your hat in, if there was no water, you'd make a hole in the top of your hat and poor water in it out of the water bag and the dog would have its drink whenever you stopped. We had, we always took our lunch when we went mustering. The cook would cut us sandwiches, and we had a saddle-bag. We used to put our lunch or anything we needed in that. But the dog was marvelous. He was one that used to… most dogs would go around sheep and push them from the back, but Roger used to go at the front and not let the sheep get too far ahead from the ones behind. And, well, he was… a dog is a wonderful companion. It's like a horse.

Was he already trained?

Yes.

And how did you find having to learn how to work a dog?

Well, I think I must have learnt a little bit at Donnybrook about it, because I don't really remember having any trouble. Roger must have been a pretty good, adaptable dog. Although if anyone around about shouted loudly or swore or something, loudly, any abuse, he'd run off and hide. He was a bit timid. But, I could growl a little bit, but not too much. But, no a good sheep dog knows it's job, it doesn't, well you tell it when to get away back, and so on but there wasn't a great deal, with the work I did, there wasn't a great deal that I needed to learn about managing dog.

And how did your mother feel about you going up here to Mt. Magnet?

Oh, she wasn't terribly thrilled. But the fact that I was going to a family and friends of the Fry's and that I was going to be living in, she accepted it.

Can you remember the sort of comments that she might make in her letters or anything?

No. No, not really. Except that she did worry because I was mustering with a half-cast, because she didn't know what the half-casts were like. You know, she didn't know if they were decent people or not. And being so far from home I think she just worried a little bit about that.

And why did you finally leave Mt. Magnet?

To… well partly because Mum was worried about me being so far away, and she wanted me closer to home. Oh, and well mainly that I think.

And, so where did you go once you left Mt. Magnet?

I went on the… oh the mail used to come once a week, and I went on the mail truck into Mt. Magnet and caught a train there to Mullewa and home to Perth, and I stayed at home for, overnight or something. And then I went to Fairbridge Farm and was there for about, for the training course, probably six weeks, I don't really remember and then I was sent to a dairy farm at Brunswick Junction.

Can you tell me a little bit about Fairbridge Farm, your first impressions on arriving there?

Well I was rather amused at the time that I should go there, because I thought I'd been on farms enough not to need training. But, all the girls apparently went there, and we did, I did a bit of horse, sheep work, droving. There weren't many girls that could ride a horse when I went there, so I was a bit of help in that way. We had to take sheep into Pinjarra sometimes. We milked cows, killed sheep. I think we did some orchard work. Just about everything that was involved with farming.

And, were there many other girls there at the same time as you?

Yes. We lived in dormitories. I can't remember how many were there, but there must have been sort of twenty, or, I suppose. I can't remember a lot, might have only been about a dozen. There were two dormitories that I can remember. Yes, perhaps only about twelve, because they weren't large dormitories.

I was wondering if you could remember back to arriving at Fairbridge and the first sort of week there? How did you find living and working in a large group of land girls?

I don't… that's terrible, I don't remember.

Was it difficult adjusting? You came from somewhere so isolated, to being in the middle of a camp.

No. I don't remember being ever worried about it. It just, it's something that I had to do and it was nice. I can remember pillow fights and tickling fights, and things like that at night in the dormitory, and just a lot of fun. I think I probably enjoyed the company after the isolation, but I don't remember, unfortunately, a great deal about it.

And can you remember, were the girls, the other girls there, did they have similar backgrounds to yourself?

Oh no. No. One of them… I can remember one wouldn't have known one end of a cow from the other, I don't know why she wanted to join the Land Army, but she just decided she did, and probably became quite a good worker. No, they came from all walks of life to join the Land Army. I suppose they wanted… some wanted to just be in the Services, and that was the best one they could think of. There was a Cottage Mother looked after us. I don't know if she was a Land Army personnel, or Fairbridge Farm mother.

Was Kath Egan there at the time?

I remember that name, perhaps she was. And she was Land Army was she?

She was a Training Officer, a member of staff.

Yes. I think I've got her autograph in that book. Yes.

Did you find yourself in a position of being able to give advice to some of the girls who hadn't been exposed? I mean was there a problem in that, you know, you were obviously much more experienced and you were training with girls that had never had any experience whatsoever?

I just did things. I don't remember being required to help them or anything, but if you could do things it was… well the work just got done quicker. I know another thing we used to do was chop wood. Little things come back. There would have been a lot of wood burnt in the place in those days. No, perhaps I've just been one that accepts what comes and I just do it.

Was there any aspect of the training that was useful to you?

Not unduly I don't think. I think it was just a period in the time I was in the Land Army. And oh, I killed a sheep, I hadn't done that before. I'd seen it and so on. Not that I'll ever use, ever used that again, but I think that was the only thing I did there, that I'd never done

before. But, I enjoyed the time there I'm quite sure. I look back on it happily anyway.

And so you were there for about four to six weeks?

Yes. I don't even remember the full time I was there. I don't remember how long.

And where were you posted after that?

To a little dairy farm at Brunswick Junction. Two hundred acres. And you had to keep getting off your horse. You'd ride a few yards and get off your horse to open a gate. But that was quite… Although I had wanted to go back to Donnybrook, I didn't mind being at Brunswick Junction. It was a very different life. And there was the young sister, who was my… sister of the farmer's wife there, and she was my age. And we shared a room and worked together. We milked the cows and, there was no calf feeding. We had to clean out irrigation channels. But milking took up so much of the time. You got up early so you had quite a long spell of, at midday, you'd get two to three hours off. Well, we might, we were only a few minutes out of Brunswick Junction, and we'd hop on the horses and go into town, or go for a ride somewhere at lunch-time. It wasn't… its, dairy farming like that is not as interesting as mixed farming, because you're just doing the one thing all the time.

Was it hand milking, or was it a machine?

Had a machine, and we used to milk about eighty cows, eighty to a hundred. The boss used to go off and buy cows

to keep… they had to keep their quota, milk enough cows to keep their quota up.

And was the other girl there was she a Land Army girl?

No. She was just there living with her sister. Somewhere to live I think.

So, was she being paid a similar rate to you, or..?

I suppose she would have been, I don’t know. Yes, I don’t know.

How long were you at Brunswick Junction for?

Until I got out of the Land Army which was… what was that date?

October 1944.

Well, I must have been at Brunswick nearly a year, because I went straight from Fairbridge there, and I was there over Christmas/New Year, until I left the Land Army. And… then my mother needed me at home, so I went home. That was the end of my Land Army days.

While you were at Brunswick Junction, apart from the milking every morning and every evening, were there other duties that you had?

Just the cleaning out irrigation channels. But…

And what did that involve?

Oh, we had to dig the grass away from the pipes and just make sure that they were clear for the water to flow through. Because there were quite a lot of… oh, that was the main channels. I can't remember any other work really there. Oh, we used to you know, check cows for calving cows, and bring them in and so on, but the milking took up a good deal of the time.

And what were your living conditions there?

Oh, one of the family. In the house. Treated very well. Actually while I was there the husband and wife split up and the husband's mother looked after us, and she was very good. And that's why, I think that's why the wife's daughter stayed, sort of, companion/help to me as much as to help on the farm.

So after… her mother left the farm?

The wife left, 'cause she had been helping her husband, but apparently they weren't compatible, and he needed a couple of girls, or a couple of people to help him, because he had to take the milk into the factory, and had to go buying cows, and he was away sometimes you know, and the milking had to go on.

And what sort of social life did you have while you were there?

Oh, well, we did quite a lot there. Went dancing, pictures, and horse riding. We used to have some great horse riding time.

> Where would you go horse riding? (Telephone rings) I was asking you, some of the social activities, but I was wondering who you would go horse riding with and..?

Oh, well the other girl, Terry, and I used to ride. And then I met Jack when I was at Brunswick Junction, and they lent him a horse. And there was another chap in the district and only two or three or four of us go. And we'd just go riding. You know there a lot of places around, out towards the Coast, you know, and there were a lot of nice bush trails and things around you can find if you look for them.

> Did you have much contact with the local people in the area?

With dancing. With going to dances, but not much else really. I got to know one or two folk, but not really a lot of contact. We had enough entertainment with ourselves and, well… I'd go up to Perth on my weekends off occasionally. But the time just seemed to be well-filled. I don't ever remember being bored.

> Can you remember any sort of comments, from local people, about a land girl being on a dairy farm?

I don't. They had a very good name for working. I think that the dairy farmers used to like the land girls in the

shed. Well that's the impression I've always had when I've worked on farms. They find them, you know, pretty adaptable and helpful.

You don't remember getting any comments yourself? Whenever you'd go into town in your uniform perhaps or..?

No. See most people when I went into town it was on horse back and I'd just be in jeans and so on. The uniform used to be admired. I was always proud to wear it. But no, I don't really remember any comments.

Did you have any contact with women from the other Services during those years?

No. No, only my sisters and immediate sort of family and anyone I knew, but no other contact really.

What about men in the Services? U.S. or Australia servicemen, did you have any contact?

Well, at dances, that's all, you know, only socially.

Did you ever come across United States servicemen?

Yes. One time I was carrying two heavy cases from the railway station down to St. Georges Terrace to catch my bus, and this fellow sort of stepped out and I thought he was going to offer to take my cases. I just put them down. And he said "Would you like to go to a party?" And I looked at him; I said "No thank-you. I was scared then,

because all I'd heard of the Yanks and their parties was not very good, and I grabbed my cases and shot through. But, we did… my mother had an open house to all servicemen and… servicemen and women, and we had a lot of folk come in there. And I can remember different ones, all being very nice, and just appreciating being accepted into a family home. But apart from that I don't remember a great deal. See, we lived near the Catalina Air Base in Nedlands, so a lot of Americans there. And my older sisters were all popular. They met a lot of young men and…

What sort of things would you hear about the Americans, and their parties?

Oh, terrible things. About how they all got drunk, and oh, I can remember, it might have been in Mt. Magnet when they had parties, well very obscene parties in those days. Girls getting pregnant and all that sort of thing.

Would that come up as a topic of discussion?

Yes, I think it did, you know. Horrifyingly. Because I'd always lived in a very, well sort of Victorian times, and these things were horrifying to me. My mother was pretty strict with her upbringing, and Mrs Fry and Mrs Lejeune, you know. So I was very naive and anything like that used to horrify me.

Were any of your sisters engaged, or going out with the Americans?

No. No. One… oh, know he was English I think. One sister brought a very nice fellow home, but then it was no time before she was shot off to the Islands, as a nursing sister, and you know. No, none of them were ever engaged. I think, one sister did marry, he was a long time friend from the West, she married in 1942, but the rest of us were all married after the war. There were no engagements or anything. Oh, I became engaged while I was still in the Land Army, but that was… I was the only one that did; the others were all after the war.

And Jack was in the Air Force at that time?

Yes. Yes.

And, what… how did he feel about you being a member of the Land Army, can you remember any comments that he made in those days?

Oh, he thought it was pretty good. Yes. Well, we met at a dance in Brunswick Junction, and of course he… I suppose he hadn't thought of anything but farming when he came back, so he was quite interested to think that he'd met up with a land girl I think. And there weren't a lot of us. I suppose in a way we were a little bit unique, because there were not mobs of us like there were Army and Air Force girls, and naval girls.

Did you know any other land girls in the Brunswick Junction area?

Well, I met one or two, but no, we didn't associate very much. We just sort of, knew enough to say Hello. Perhaps

if I'd been on my own at Thakesley's on the farm, I might have been looking for other company, I don't know. But we just used to do things together and I didn't get to know a lot of people there really, only be sight.

So looking back over your time in the Land Army, can you remember back to what you thought at the time were the most difficult jobs?
Well, going up the top of a windmill, because I was scared of heights. And painting the roof. Not really, I just, I just enjoyed doing them all, because I just loved being where I was.

Were there ever any jobs that you felt you shouldn't have been asked to do?

Oh, no. I do remember know, we did Super spreading at Cremden, and I was to take the bags of Super out to where Phillip was doing the spreading, and I was to butt the bags, because they were too heavy for me to lift. Well, I suppose it was hard, but I didn't notice it. To me in those days, it was one of the jobs to do and I was strong enough to do it. No, I don't really think I was ever asked to do anything hard, you know, or made to do anything that I couldn't cope with.

And what did you have to do, can you describe your, the work you did on the windmill, you were saying before you'd never had any experience with mills?

Well, the Overseer would have to get up to fix a windmill, well I might have to go up with him, and hold things, or, you know, while he was fixing it or

something. But that… I didn't, I only went up one a few times, and I don't know whether he could have managed on his own and he was just sort of getting me to help him because I was there, or whether I was needed.

But that was a frightening experience for you?

Well, I got to not mind that height so much, because you could hang on. On the roof of the house there was nothing to hang on to, but on the windmill there was. You at least had something you could hold on to. And there was a ledge up there to sort of stand on.

Do you think at any of the places that you worked, that your employer treated you any differently because you were a woman?

Well probably, I didn't have to do (interruption)

Sorry; I was just beginning to ask you if you felt at any of the places you were treated any differently?

I don't remember that we were, because we were just given jobs that we could cope with. Now, we carted hay, and you had to cart it with a fork in those days, and feed it out to the stock. It was quite hard work, but it was just another of the jobs, and I never ever felt that I was over-worked or made to work too hard.

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

I don't really know. I was bucked off a horse at Mt. Magnet and landed on a rock, and badly bruised you know, on my backside and on the hip. But my mother was crippled with arthritis, perhaps I was going to get it anyway. I've now got two replacement hips. And I have had trouble ever since that fall, you know, I've gone into remission but there have been times when it's been quite bad, until I got my hips done, whether it was the fall or not we'll never know. I suppose it helped. I think an injury helps to cause arthritis. Perhaps all the horse riding I did, might have been part of the reason my hips went on me. The fact I think it's hereditary though, arthritis. I wouldn't blame… I use to cart… now that was one thing I'd forgotten about. At Donnybrook I used to cart two kerosene tins of milk, two full gallon kerosene tins of milk, well that was I suppose quite heavy, but I never ever thought it was beyond me. I could do it all right. Perhaps it has helped to cause problems. But I never had any, I mean apart from that fall I never had any other injury. So… and it certainly hasn't affected my health, because I'm just a healthy person. I don't have any troubles.

So after twelve months, or ten months or whatever, it was at this stage that your mother was writing to ask you to come home?

Yes.

And how did you feel about the prospect of leaving the Land Army?

I was sad, but I just sort of.. I can remember feeling it was my duty to go home. I didn't really want to, but, you know I was sad to leave the Land Army, because it meant going back to Perth, which I hated. So then I lived in Perth with Mum for twelve months, and the war ended and got married.

And did you go back onto the land?

Straight away.

Straight away?

Yes. Yes, Jack got Married Couples jobs and we were at Kojonup for a while and then we came here, in this area. And he put in for a Land Settlement Farm and we've been here ever since. We've been about… came here in '48.

When the war was ending did you have any particular ideas about what you wanted to do after you got out of the Land Army? Were you already engaged to Jack by this stage?

Yes, I was engaged. No, I just… I tried to do a few sort of jobs from home, so that I could look after Mum. I did craft things and sold the articles I made. But I didn't really have a job, I had no income then. Well Mum just kept me. No, I had… I just couldn't wait to get back to the country.

Looking back over the years do you feel that your contribution to the war effort in the Land Army has

been acknowledged?

Well, it's being acknowledged now. But, all through, you know, ever since the war, people have been interested you know, if the subject happens to come up that I was in the Land Army, or about Land Army, they're interested. And occasionally have been asked what we did. But, it would be nice to see it come to light much more. I would like to… I was always sad that we were not accepted to march on Anzac Day parades. And actually our local RSL, when we go to their Annual Dinner, the men all stand up and give their number, name and number and everything, and they have asked me to stand up, which I have thought was rather nice to be recognised. But land girls, I mean even some of those servicemen are surprised that there were land girls, I think. Oh, not surprised but, you know, they didn't realise that land girls should be accepted. I suppose they hadn't thought of it, should be accepted as part of the Services.

Can you remember ever taking part in any marches in your time in the Land Army?

No. No. None at all. Of course they didn't have Anzac parades during the war I don't think, did they?

I think they did in some areas.

No, but anyway, I can't remember ever being in marching.

Can you remember the day that the war ended, and what you were doing?

Not really. I just remember being very excited and thinking oh, the boys will all be coming home. And there was people all rushed to Perth and dancing in the streets and so on. But I don't think, it was just this wonderful feeling of elation, excitement, freedom from… that everything was over.

Were you in Perth at that time?

Yes.

And did you go into the centre of the city?

I think I did. But I didn't… I always kept away from crowds rather. I didn't and unfortunately I can't really remember what I did. I know I didn't have much money to go catching buses and trains and things to get to Perth. We probably, Mum and I probably had a sherry together or something and you know, got excited 'cause I can just imagine that happening, because there was something to celebrate.

Sorry you were just starting to say?

Oh, well we were out riding one day and we saw this roo that wasn't hopping very fast, so we decided to chase it, because dogs' meat was always needed. And, the roo eventually hopped into a cave in the breakaways. And then we thought, well somehow or other we've got to get this roo and we weren't game to go in, and go in with t, because they can be pretty dangerous. And then Pat had a pocket-knife in her pocket, and she decided we'd tie it on the end of a long stick and stab the roo. And it was a

long stick. So by the time, you know, the end of the stick was a bit, it was a bit bendy, and you'd go to jab it and the roo would just push it away. Anyway eventually she did get it in the jugular vein, and looking back now it was horribly cruel, but it didn't mean anything to us then. And then of course the roo started to… the blood started to pour out of its jugular vein, and eventually the roo would just go, wave its hand across its eyes. It must have been going dizzy and eventually it fell over and died. And so Pat went in and pulled it out and slung it over the back of the horse, and we took it home for dogs' meat. But, to me it was another experience up there. And in those days roos were such a menace, and well you needed the feed for your sheep because of the droughts and so on.

What about rabbits, did you have to go around checking the fences?

I don't remember a lot of rabbits up there. The rabbit-proof fence was through of course. And I can't remember trouble with rabbits, but no doubt they had them up there. No, the roos were the problem. Roos and Emus. And, another day, we shot a… or someone shot a roo, but it happened to be a big buck and the cook cooked some of it for tea, and I haven't eaten roo since. Because, I think a young roo might be tasty, but not old buck.

Were there any other male workers apart from the half-cast aboriginal and the jackaroo that lasted for five minutes?

And the Overseer. No, only at shearing time, and a team would come and do it contract. They had their own cook, and everything. We just did the mustering for them. But, no the only other person that ever came onto the station was the, Mrs Lejeune was part-owner in it, with a Mr Sewell, and he came, you know, just to check things. And the mail truck.

Can you describe to me the mail truck and how often it would come?

Well it came once a week. It was a little old ute. And it was a red-letter day when the mail truck came. And it you wanted anything brought out from Mt. Magnet you'd ring and he'd bring all your needs. But, you didn't, you know, you got your groceries bulk and stored them. I can't remember how… I suppose we ate a lot of tinned food. There wouldn't have been a freezer, but they would have had a fridge, but I'm sure no freezers in those days. I suppose most of the cooking was done, you know, you did all yourselves. We didn't have the variety of food. You killed your own meat. We grew veggies. We got fruit, perhaps the mail truck brought any fruit out. That's right, yes; he'd bring some groceries out from Mt. Magnet, any of those needs, perishables. The mail truck driver was always a happy fellow and it was always good to see him. You heard him coming from miles away.

Did you ever compare notes with your sister about the conditions in the..? (gap)

I'll never forget the first day I did tractor on my own. I was left to plough the orchard, and Phillip and his

mother had to go to town. And just as they drove in home I drove out the gate, having finished the job, and they were so pleased with me, and I was so proud to have done it, because, well I just liked to please them. I liked to do everything properly there, because it was rather a special place to me you know, a special time of my life. It was just… and there was a rotary hoe behind the tractor and I don't know apparently they were hard to drive or something, I don't know. I was only sixteen.

Can you describe the tractor itself, it is charcoal burner, or a gas producer or..?

I can remember the gas producer on the car, but I can't on the tractor. Also, seeing it in the photo there.

How did you get it going, you know, how do you work a gas producer?

Well they started it for me. I don't think I ever started it. And I just… could switch it off, but I wouldn't have been able to start it if I stopped.

Had you ever driven a tractor before-hand?

Not before I went to Donnybrook.

What do you think was the job you enjoyed most doing, while you were in the Land Army?

Well, that tractor work was pretty exciting. And of course, the horse riding, the mustering, was really good.

I loved that. I liked hay time, that was a busy time, but it was good.