

Australians at War Film Archive

Patricia McKenzie (Pat) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Thanks for talking to us today. Can I ask you to give us a summary of your life?**

Briefly, that's asking a bit. All right, my mother and father were first cousins, and they are of Scottish and British descent, and my mother was just, what do you call it, home duties.

01:00 My father was a master plumber, and I was born at a small hospital in Hornsby, that's while we were living in Stuart St, Wahroonga. And then, eventually they sold the house, and when I was about three or four I went to live with my elder sister in Strathfield while Dad built a house at Hornsby, in Balmoral Street.

01:30 We moved there before the house was finished, but he built the garage and the shed beside the garage. So, we lived there, and I had to have a bath in one of those old tin baths, and, just my brother and I, he was nine years older than I, and then we moved into the house, and I was there until I went to a small private kindergarten,

02:00 and then I went to the Hornsby Public School, then I went to Hornsby High School, then I went to the Metropolitan Business College, and I got a Harp Scholarship for that. Then I got a job with a Japanese firm, they were importers, and the boss was a pet, I want to enlarge on that later, I hope. Then I went to work, and because Japan was going to come into the war, he must have known that.

02:30 And so, I then went to work for Cunard White Star, and they dealt with the ships, troopships, Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary, Aquitania, and Mauritania. From there, that's when I joined the army from there, and I was three years in the army, 'cause I didn't go in until I was twenty-two,

03:00 because Mum and Dad wouldn't give me consent, and in that day, you know, eighteen year olds and twenty year olds, they didn't have the same say that they do today, and then I got back. I was at Movement Control first, that was dealing with the troops that were going on board those ships, and then I met Peter Finch and went to Entertainment Unit,

03:30 and did tours around, down to Melbourne and back up along the country. I'll tell you about when they hennaed my hair. Then we went to New Guinea, then over to Rabaul doing the two three-act plays, and came back. The ship was supposed to come to Sydney, but

04:00 it was diverted to Brisbane, so I was held up there for a couple of weeks. Then we came down to Sydney, got out of the army on the Friday, and was married on the Saturday. And, then I, because my husband said he didn't like New South Wales, didn't like Sydney, I thought, "Oh well, he'd like to go down to Melbourne," his people are in Melbourne.

04:30 His father was a Presbyterian Minister at St Kilda at the time. And so I went down there, we lived with his parents. I got pregnant straightaway, then we got a flat at Armadale, and I did live with my

05:00 mother-in-law's brother and his wife for a little while, and we slept in the single bed together while I was pregnant. I used to crunch granny smith apples in his ear, and he used to get mad. Anyway, then we went to Armadale for a while in a little flat at the back of a house, and the woman said we used the electricity when there was a strike, and we used the water when there was a strike, and she'd hear the water going through the pipes, and all this sort of rot.

05:30 So, I was getting very upset, getting close to birth, and so then we went back to my mother-in-law's, and then, after the baby was born and a little while later, we got a flat at St Kilda, and then I think about three times my husband and I were separated, unfortunately he had a drinking problem.

06:00 The last time I left, because each time I'd come back over to Sydney, the last time I went back to office work when I was 56, Telecom it was, in the stores section, typing contracts,

06:30 and we had to do nine carbon copies of every contract, which was a bit hard on the old typewriter.

That's great Mrs McKenzie, that's absolutely perfect. I might go back and talk about your childhood now, that was perfect

07:00 **You mentioned that your parents were immigrants?**

No, their grandparents were. They came from England and Scotland.

What do you remember about your parents when you were a child, can you describe them for me?

07:30 Well, Mum was forty and Dad was forty four when I was born, so I was the youngest of six children, and I don't really remember, the main thing I remember about my father, the main thing, was the time he brought home a little kitten in his pocket for me, and

08:00 I remember that, and I remember when we were moving from there. We had a billiard room there, and there was a big billiard table, and of course, they couldn't get it out the door, and I don't know why, he threw it out the window. How on earth, it must have been a big window. Then it was under the other house we moved

08:30 into for years, I don't know what happened to it in the end, somebody got it, and my mother, I don't really remember much about my mother, except I remember doing the washing. They had a laundry underneath the house. What I do remember, you know Bea Miles, she used to live very close to where we lived at Wahroonga, and she used to come up,

09:00 my mother used to let her use her sewing machine. And so I used to climb up in the pear tree, I've got a photograph of it somewhere, and climb up in the pear tree, and wait, or else I'd peer through the gate, and she used to call me Douglas Fairbanks for some reason or other, I don't know why.

09:30 Do you want me to say anything about my childhood, apart from my mother and father? I don't know what happened to the little kitten that Dad gave me, it, the poor little thing must have died, but then they decided to give me another one, and there was a lady down the end of the street, and her cat had had kittens, but they'd drowned them and buried them, but the mother cat had dug them up, so they didn't have the heart to do it again, so I got one of those kittens.

10:00 I thought it was all right, but I don't remember what happened to it either. I remember we had a banana passionfruit growing, I remember my two boy cousins. One was a little bit older than I, and his older brother, daring me to jump, when I was about three, jump off our back veranda.

10:30 And I did, it seemed very tall but it must have been at least ten feet off the ground, and of course I landed with my feet on a concrete block, and I still feel the top of my head today when I think about it, and I got into trouble. I got into, I was yelled at for doing it, and I don't remember, I don't think the boys got into trouble at all.

11:00 **Mrs McKenzie, was this the house that your father built in Hornsby?**

No, this was still at Wahroonga where, after I was born, I lived there till I was 3 or 4.

Can you describe what the house looked like that your father built?

11:30 Yes, for a long time, it didn't have a front fence, but then he eventually built a lovely brick fence. It had a front veranda, it had two bedrooms, a dining room and a kitchen, a lounge room, a back veranda, laundry. The toilet was out the back. Redback spiders, you know,

12:00 and the squares of telephone book, newspaper, I don't know if there was toilet paper in those days. We had newspaper. That was way back, you know, 80 years ago, I don't remember whether there was toilet paper. But eventually, of course, we got sewerage on.

12:30 **Can you explain what you did before you got sewerage?**

Well, we had to trot down the back. I think we had a passionfruit vine growing over it. We had a lot of trees, we had a loquat tree, beautiful loquats, and a navel orange tree, mandarin tree, Granny Smith [apple], Jonathan apple and peaches

13:00 and figs, all those trees. I used to climb up on the garage roof with about six oranges and eat oranges. And there was a gum tree growing at the back, we had a ramp down from the back veranda, and there was this flame tree, I think, and I used to take a saucer of sugar and cut

13:30 lemon and dip it in the sugar and eat that and read a book.

Did your mother cook with the fruit from the trees?

She would stew some apples, but mostly we just ate them raw.

What do you remember about what Hornsby was like then?

Oh, when we went to Hornsby there was

- 14:00 one house next door and then there was bush. We had a double block, and Dad gave the second block to my sister when she married. There was bush everywhere. The Hornsby hospital wasn't built at that stage, it was built later in the next street, and now of course, the street is all built up all around.
- 14:30 I used to go down to Sunday school at Turramurra because my sister had married the chappie and his sister who was close to my age. I used to get her hand me down clothes during the depression. But anyway, I went down there for Sunday school and I used to walk home all the way from Turramurra.
- 15:00 I was trying to think how many boys used to walk home with me. It must have been four or five boys used to walk home with me, and I suppose because my parents were older, they didn't think about inviting them in for a drink or a biscuit or anything. So they just, we stood outside the house, then I went in, and I suppose they walked all the way back. They might have caught the train back.
- 15:30 **Were they courting you?**
- I guess so, but I was only, well I suppose I must have been fifteen or sixteen.
- 16:00 **What sort of things were you taught at Sunday school?**
- Fancy asking me that! Well, I got to be a Sunday school teacher, and in my class I had a very knowledgeable little eight or nine year old, and I used to just introduce a subject, which I'd read on the train on the way down, and I'd say, "What do you think about it?" and off she'd go, and there wasn't much for me to do, and I was awful.
- 16:30 Don't ask me what I learnt at Sunday school, that's too long ago.
- Did your family go to church often?**
- No, my father never went to church. He said he didn't know whether,
- 17:00 he just couldn't believe, but he said if there had been a man called Jesus, that he was either the biggest confidence trickster or the most marvellous person in the world. He couldn't make up his mind which, so he didn't go. He went to church to give his daughters away, and funerals, of course, but my mother used to.
- 17:30 Oh, Dad used to go to church, because I think that's where, apart from being cousins and they sort of knew each other, I think it was the church where they used to go, because they both used to sing in the choir. My mother had a very nice voice and they both played violin.
- 18:00 **Did they play the violin at home?**
- Dad did, but Mum didn't have time.
- What sort of things did the family do for entertainment at home?**
- Well, we used to read a lot, and listen to the wireless, the radio, and play cards
- 18:30 when the whole family got together, we used to play Up and Down the River, which was hilarious, but I can't remember how you play it now, 500, or have a sing-song around the piano. But mostly I think reading was the main thing we all did.
- What sort of things would you listen to on the wireless?**
- 19:00 We used to listen to Jack Davy, Pick-a-Box, the American Bob Dyer, I didn't ever listen, Dad used to go to bed early, and the wireless was against the wall next to his bedroom, and he used to call out, "Turn that bloody thing off!"
- 19:30 I remember reading a book by Lenny Lower, you've probably never heard of him, His Luck, I think was the name of it, and it was so funny, and one night I was reading it and I couldn't put it down, and my mother started to get worried, she thought I was going to have hysterics,
- 20:00 I couldn't stop laughing it was so funny. I'd roll and roll around and fall on the floor with laughter, it was so funny. I don't suppose I'd think it was funny these days.
- Where did those books come from?**
- I don't know. My sister belonged to a library.
- 20:30 My sister probably would have got it. No, that wasn't a library book. My brother might have bought it.
- What do you remember about how the Depression affected your family?**
- Well, I don't think that, I didn't notice much, except that
- 21:00 I got these hand-me-down clothes; they were very nice clothes. But I wasn't very happy about it, and that I was at high school, and I wanted to take hockey, and I couldn't understand why my mother said, "No you can't, we can't afford to buy the hockey stick."

21:30 So, I would say that they felt it a lot, and I know that a lot of people weren't paying for the jobs that Dad was doing, and he said he was upset about that, but probably I suppose they had a bank overdraft or something, I don't know.

22:00 In those days, they didn't tell the kids anything much, so I don't think I was affected myself.

What do you remember about how the Depression affected other families in the neighbourhood or at school?

Well, I had a friend that, her father was out of work,

22:30 and I know they were very strapped [cash strapped - broke]. She started making her own clothes, she was very young, and I thought they were good. The father was out of work for many years afterwards, even. Do you know what year that was?

23:00 **I think it was 1929 for the Great Crash.**

In that case, I was only ten.

23:30 No, I don't remember back then. I suppose I must have been reasonably fortunate because I can't remember.

What did you do for fun when you were a little girl, around ten?

Well, I wasn't allowed to play with the children next door, because they weren't considered to be nice, so I had a lonely childhood,

24:00 so I used to make up my own games. I had a three-wheeled tricycle, which I used to pretend was a railway train and stop at all the stations. As I say I read a lot, and ate a lot of fruit and when we were in the garage,

24:30 I used to follow my brother around, want to do everything he did, and if we did anything that was wrong, we used to have to hold our hands out. Mum used to break the stick on him, so I only had a small stick. I only had a little bit, I suppose she realised that it wasn't my fault.

You mentioned that you were quite an avid reader,

25:00 **What sort of subjects did you particularly enjoy when you were at high school?**

Subjects, English, and we had to write a composition on our pet, well I didn't have a pet at the time, so I had to make one up and I had a pet monkey. And I wrote a marvellous composition, and I had to read it out to the class, they thought that was wonderful, I got full marks for that.

25:30 I don't know whether the teacher really thought I had a monkey or not. What else did I like? I liked trigonometry, I didn't like maths or geometry, but trigonometry I could do, I couldn't do algebra, because it didn't make sense to me. That 'x' was the unknown didn't make sense. Even when I was at the very first little school I went to,

26:00 I was always being kept in for counting - if Johnny had six apples and he gave two to Sophie and three to somebody else, I couldn't do those sums, because I'd say, "If I had six apples, no way would I be giving away all those!" And that stopped me from learning how to do those sums, they used to keep me in every time, I thought that was very unfair

26:30 And the little school, it was a little private college, little Camelot College, and we had French and physiology and ballet and all those sort of things, and then I was ten when I went up to public school. So I was a bit backward in maths. English, I was always good at English. It was the only thing I got an A in the intermediate [certificate].

27:00 I took Latin, so I wouldn't have to take geography. And so I took Latin, if I had taken geography I would have had to do botany and elementary science, I wasn't mad keen on that either.

27:30 I didn't want to go on to leaving. I wanted to go on to fourth year, because the fourth year kids got all the privileges of the fifth, but they didn't have to work so hard, and they didn't have that horrible exam at the end. But my Mum said, "No, if you're not going to stay on and do your leaving, you've got to leave now." So I had to leave, go to Business College.

28:00 **When you were in high school, what did you think that you wanted to do when you left?**

I don't think I thought. My father kept saying he wanted me to be a biological chemist, I think that's what he wanted me to be. So I was so busy saying, "No, I don't want to be a biological chemist,"

28:30 that I don't think I thought of what I would like to do and came up with. Now I think I should've been, he would've paid for me to go to university, you see, I'd say, "Oh, no, I don't want to go to university." Not then, but I wish I had now.

How common was that for girls to be able to finish school and go on to university and have a

career?

29:00 **Well, I think quite a few did, but I was boy crazy, you know. I didn't want to be bothered going to university. Nobody told me there were a lovely lot of boys going to university!**

29:30 **So I came up with, I nearly got expelled from high school. Well, it wasn't my fault. I don't know whether that was the same day that I pretended to swallow the pin; no I don't think it was. I think it was during a lesson, and this girl was bumping me, and in the end I got so fed up that I gave her a big bump and she went on the floor.**

30:00 **And I got sent to the headmistress. She sent for my mother and all sorts of things. They said I was a disturbing influence. So even in those days there were naughty kids.**

So what was your punishment?

Oh, that was enough, because I got so stressed out,

30:30 that my mother came up, and there was Mum and the headmistress, and of course, Miss Brewster, oh boy, she was a tartar. And I was so overcome that I nearly fainted, and she nearly ended up giving me some Sal Vital to revive me, so I didn't get any punishment. Just told to be good.

31:00 **What was Sal Vital?**

Well it was a, what would they give you nowadays, I suppose they'd give you brandy. Like smelling salts, if you're going to faint, to revive you.

So when you were boy crazy, were you allowed to go out with boys?

31:30 Well, it started from Sunday school up, and I went there till I was about 18, and so the mothers of the boys that I walked home with me, they used to say, "Oh, I wish she would make up her mind which one she wants," but I just used to enjoy the...quite a few of them have died since, you know.

32:00 I belonged to a tennis club, so I saw the boys at the tennis club. And then, when I got older, there were some boys I wasn't allowed to go out with, but there were a couple of boys who came from Lindfield, brothers, two brothers, and I was allowed to go out with them and we used to

32:30 go out to balls and it was lovely going dancing. They were wonderful dancers. Different styles, but both wonderful dancers.

Where would the dances take place?

In the city, the Hordern Brothers, well they're not there any more, but they were next to Farmers, you know Farmers, but Farmers aren't there anymore. What's there now? Grace Brothers - Myer. Hordern Brothers, they used to have a ballroom, and

33:00 the Rural Bank, they had a ballroom, and McDowell's, I think next to Hordern Brothers, and we had a lovely lot of shops in those days, but now going into the city is awful. David Jones is the only shop there.

What did the inside of the ballrooms look like?

Big.

33:30 I don't remember, and also the, what are those nightclubs? Romano's, Princes, and there was another one up in North Street, I can't remember the name of it.

34:00 But I was always with a group that didn't drink, fortunately. And of course, there were no drugs as far as I know in those days.

How would you get from your house in Hornsby to the dances in the city?

The boys would come and pick me up. Oh well, wait a minute, it all depends on who I went with.

34:30 Because I do remember a couple of times having to come home by the last train, but I used to get out at Waitara and walk. My mother told me, "Don't you walk across the park," which meant that I would have to walk quite a long way around the corner, and of course I didn't take any notice of her

35:00 until one time a chappie had followed me from the train. All he wanted to do was kiss me. So I just pushed him away, and he just said, "Sorry," and ran off. You wouldn't be so lucky today, would you?

What sort of dangers were there for a young woman who was out at night time?

35:30 Well, I suppose there was always the chance of being raped, but it didn't occur that much, and I mean to say that chappie probably had it in mind, but when I, well I think it was because I thought, "Oh, Mum will kill me, she mustn't find out," so I didn't tell her. For a while there, I used to walk around the corner.

36:00 **Did you wear makeup to the dances?**

Yes, as far as I can remember, only powder and lipstick. I had very, very red cheeks in those days, so I didn't have to wear rouge. I don't know whether any of the other girls used to wear eye makeup, I can't quite remember.

36:30 **Where did you get your makeup?**

Because I was working in the city, I think I was working mainly in the Japanese place in Clarence Street; I had a little lovely Japanese boss. But, he used to

37:00 say, "Miss Rose, take a letter," and I'd have to go across and he'd hand me a brown manila envelope, he'd slit it open, and we had indelible lead pencils, and I would have to write this shorthand on a brown envelope with an indelible pencil. And no lines, as you can imagine.

37:30 This was my first job after leaving business college. No lines, of course, we'd learnt up above the line, on the line and below the line. Shorthand outlines. And so he'd just keep passing me these brown, I'd get back to my desk and I'd find this pile of... I did have at one stage, I did get a shorthand notebook, but at first

38:00 it was dreadful.

Why was he getting you to write on envelopes?

Well, he thought that was all right. He didn't see anything wrong with that.

We might talk about that part of your career a bit later. I just wanted to ask a bit more about the dances. What sort of dresses would you wear?

Well, my mother used to make them for me.

38:30 I had a white one, of course, when leaving school, I had a white dress. The chappie that was my partner didn't wear gloves, and of course it was all soiled at the back from perspiration. I can't remember whether it ever came out. I had a beautiful blue background with

39:00 pink flowers, it sounds a bit lairy [loud], but it was beautiful. Mum made a beautiful job on that one, nice and slim. Oh, yes, I was slim. I was only seven stone nine [pounds] when I was married. I won't tell you how much I weigh now. I had a green one, and a blue one

39:30 and from a twenty first [birthday], I had a royal blue chiffon, made in an Egyptian fashion.

You mentioned the white dress. Did you have some sort of debutante ceremony?

Yes, sort of, I forget what they called it.

40:00 Graduation Dance or Ball I think they called it and that was in the high school, in the assembly hall. I went to another dance there, and my brother escorted me, and I went to another dance, I didn't have a partner at that time and my cousin was

40:30 talked into, that's when I had to go by train, because he lived at Wollstonecraft. I don't remember where I was going to that one. It was in the city somewhere, because I was in the train, and he got in at Wollstonecraft, he was a lot older than I am, too, but he was talked into it by his mother through my mother.

Tape 2

00:31 **Mrs McKenzie, I wanted to ask you about the first job that you described. Could you explain how you got that job after leaving Business College?**

The College, they used to get the jobs for us, so I was sent for an interview, and I wondered what I'd struck because he was a dear little man,

01:00 Mr Yama, the name of the firm was Kokigami Pty Ltd. He was sitting at the table with a cigarette and the smoke curling, and I thought, "Oh dear," and - how old was I? Seventeen, I think.

01:30 I had this interview, and he said, "Yes, all right, when can you start?" so I started practically straight away. I was there for four years, and I used to answer the telephone and do bookkeeping

02:00 up to, I used to send out the statements, but it was only very limited bookkeeping. There were three travellers, because they used to import crockery and glassware and things like that.

02:30 I had to make the Japanese from yen into Australian currency - I used to quite like doing that - and

shorthand, send out letters and things.

03:00 There were two girls there, one came from Campbelltown, and I got very friendly, she used to invite me up there for holidays and weekends. There were two country travellers and two city ones - four. They used to have Japanese coming out for,

03:30 I think they used to go out and take a lot of photographs, and they might be on the golf course, but always in the background, there'd be a building or a lighthouse or the bridge.

Did you go to these golf courses when they were doing that?

04:00 No

So how did you hear about the photos that they were taking?

I used to see them; they'd come and show us the photographs. But after the war started, I used to worry a bit. I used to think, "I wonder what they do with these photographs?" and they'd only come for about 12 months, but they were supposed to be learning the business, but as far as I could see, there wasn't much learning the business going on

04:30 apart from travelling around and taking photographs. I really did, I worried about it. Anyhow, the boss must have known, it was a shame, it was his business, and he didn't want to be involved with them all, but he said to me,

05:00 "I'm very sorry, but you're the junior and the last one to be, I'm sorry but we're going to have to let you go, but I'm just giving you plenty of warning, take your time and find a nice job." So I tootled down back to the Business College, and they sent me straight out for an interview, and I got the job.

05:30 He was furious, he said, "You weren't supposed to go get a job straight away, I wanted you to take your time." And I went there to Cunard White Star; from a Japanese place to dealing with the troop ships.

Whereabouts had been the office of Mr Yama's?

162 Clarence Street.

06:00 **And do you know much about him and how long he'd been in Australia for?**

No, I can't remember, he had been there for quite some time, and he had two children, and the eldest boy, every year on his birthday, Mr Yama would take all the staff out to dinner, and they'd cook the most marvellous Japanese food.

06:30 Poor kid, just had all these adults there for his birthday. He lived out at Rose Bay, so we used to go out there. There'd always be a couple of Japanese as well as him and his wife. She didn't have much to say, of course.

Did you know much about Japanese culture?

07:00 No, and I don't think I learnt anything while I was there. He did give me some Japanese - you know those Japanese dolls you see in museums, I don't remember what happened to those, they must have all gone up in smoke,

07:30 when my unit was burnt. I did have a beautiful one, about that tall, it was a Japanese lady in a beautiful dress, and because when I was living at Hornsby, we had an old gramophone, and it was my secret possie, you know the thing at the front that you could lift out?

08:00 I put her in there, and of course, forgot about her. When I went down to Victoria, I took all the other dolls with me, but I forgot about that one. Then my brother decided that there were borers in it, and he burned the gramophone, and my doll was in it, and he didn't know. It was one of those dressed in traditional attire.

08:30 The male ones had swords and things like that. When I went to work for the Cunard White Star, I had been there for quite some time, and I was called into the manager's office, this great big officer

09:00 introduced as Sergeant or something, but he was a police officer or intelligence or something, and I had been reported by somebody, I don't know, I'd been put in saying that I'd been giving information to the Japanese. And I was so indignant, and of course he was asking me questions, and I was denying everything, flatly denying everything.

09:30 When I went there, I had to take this oath of secrecy, and I took it very seriously, and I never even breathed a word. Anyhow, the manager got up and walked out, he thought, "Oh, this is ridiculous," and I didn't lose my job. The Secret Service, or whatever he was with,

10:00 wouldn't be Secret Service, would it? Whatever that section of the police was called, and he apologised in the end. See, I was nearly crazy, I was so indignant. I never found out who it was who had reported me.

10:30 **What kinds of questions did he ask you?**

I can't remember, but I remember saying, "Oh, I've got to go to a wedding next Saturday," for one of the girls that I'd worked with was getting married, "and the two Japanese will be there". Well, he said, "You're not to have any contact with them."

11:00 "How am I going to manage that?" I said. "Well, you're not to go near them, you're not to talk to them," and of course, at the reception I looked at all the waiters, and I thought, "Are you a policeman, are you a policeman," you know, my vivid imagination taking over. My Japanese boss kept looking at me, and he came and spoke to me and I edged away and

11:30 ducked away, and of course I couldn't tell him. And Japan was nearly into the war, hadn't really started yet. Anyhow, shortly after that, he went back to Japan, and that was that, I didn't hear any more about it. While I was there, there was a major there that kept,

12:00 there was Movement Control, it was in half the floor of the same building, and this major used to drive me mad.

Was that down at Cunard White Star?

Well, Cunard White Star had half the floor, and the army had the other half, it was quite a large building. They both had floors up above as well, but this

12:30 major kept saying, "You know, why don't you join the army? Join the army." And anyway, I thought, "Oh yeah, that wouldn't be bad, I want to get away from here," but I tried to, no, I'm wrong, I'd forgotten.

13:00 **What would you like to tell me about the work that you did at Cunard?**

I used to take down in shorthand movement orders from the, no,

13:30 that was the army, being on the same floor, I get mixed up. I used to take down shorthand for movement orders, movement of the ships.

14:00 I want to ask you, Mrs McKenzie, about when you got the job at Cunard White Star, and whereabouts that was.

That was in Bank Street, in Sydney. I was really engaged to a filing system; of course I had done a bit of filing, so I did. They were all British chappies,

14:30 one of them used to call me 'Sunshine', he was from Liverpool, "Here comes Sunshine," I don't know why, but apparently he said that they weren't used to office girls being able to do things. In England, he said they had to be told to do every little thing. He rather liked the way we

15:00 Australian girls were independent, we could work and do things on our own bat, you know. I used to have access to cables and things like that, about the ship movement. I suppose the person who reported me thought they were doing the right thing, because I can remember when I was at the

15:30 Japanese firm, how worried I was about them taking the photographs, and I suppose they could've felt the same way. But I didn't look at it like that at the time.

16:00 I'm sure I was doing movement orders for the ships. I was doing movement orders for the troops that go on the ships when I was in the army on the same floor, but that was a long time ago, I can't quite remember.

What was Cunard White Star's involvement in the war effort at that time?

Well, they had to be an office over here,

16:30 and they owned the ships, you see, so they had to be in Sydney, the troop ships, in order to stock them, equip them, for when the troops were, they were sort of the head office in Sydney looking after the troop ships.

17:00 **Had most of their ships been converted to troop ships?**

I don't know how many ships they owned, but these four had. There was a fifth, but I can't remember the name of it, and it didn't come out very often. The New something, too long ago.

17:30 **What were the names of the ships that they used?**

Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary, Aquitania, Mauritania, and the fifth one that I can't remember. I got quite friendly with the Staff Sergeant on board the Queen Mary, Harry Grattidge, and I was his hostess at a party over

18:00 at Admiralty House.

What did that mean?

Well, I had to go over by the little launch, and go across to Admiralty House and just welcome the guests and look after them during the evening.

18:30 Apart from the time that he took me out on the roof to gaze at the stars, and he didn't have a telescope either! He was a bit of a lad, that one. I thoroughly enjoyed my time there, and made some good friends.

19:00 I remember the oldest girl there was 38, and talking about makeup, she used to wear eye shadow and mascara, and about half an hour before lunch break, she would start doing her face up. I used to think, "Fancy a woman of 38 using makeup like that."

19:30 38, gosh, only a baby now when I look back. That would have been 63 years ago. 38 seemed terribly old to me then.

20:00 **Can I ask you about your memories of when the war broke out? Do you remember where you were, and how you heard the news?**

When the actual war broke out, I don't remember. 1939, I was 20.

20:30 Well, my brother was in the army, and he was overseas. I was so busy.

21:00 I really am ashamed to admit it, but I can vaguely remember the great black headlines in the paper, but I think I must have been, quite a few of the boys

21:30 from Sunday school, one of them was in the Black Watch and I remember going to a ball with him, and his blooming sporran, it was banging against me. I must have been pretty shallow I think, unfortunately.

Or young?

Well, I suppose.

22:00 I forgot, I was in the ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Services], now what did that stand for? Army, I had a uniform, I had a hat with the sides turned up. I'd forgotten about that. I don't think I could have been in that very long, because I don't remember much about it.

22:30 **Where did your brother go to war?**

He went over to Malaya, I think,

23:00 He was with the Army Service Corps, I think, and he was over building a, oh, I've forgotten, he's been dead for quite a while, too. But he was helping build an airstrip. Solomons?

23:30 **Do you remember much about him going away to war?**

No, I don't. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I don't.

How about the way life changed with the war? Did you notice differences to your lifestyle?

24:00 Only the fact that they had coupons for everything, and it's a bit of a problem, you'd try to barter coupons, you know - I'll give you this, you give me a coupon, sort of thing. I am getting the time

24:30 with Cunard White Star and the army confused in my mind. And that war didn't mean much to me until it was nearly over, because I enjoyed working at Cunard White Star and the captains of the troop ships would come into the office and all the rest of it.

25:00 The more I think about it, the more I don't want to think about it, because I feel, well I must've been very shallow, because I had a good time during the war, and that's terrible.

I'd say that that's probably the experience of a lot of Australians.

I suppose, but when you think of some of them that were Japanese prisoners of war and that sort of thing,

25:30 it makes you feel useless, sort of thing.

Why don't we talk about what you enjoyed about those times? How had Sydney changed during the war?

26:00 I remember they had to put up barbed wire on the beaches, and I remember going across on the Manly Ferry, and it was all black, and there was the submarine net was across the harbour to stop submarines

26:30 The ferry had to sort of, I don't know whether it was hovering, or whether they had to lower it or what, just vaguely remember these things. I do remember some black screens up against the house, the windows, and we had to be careful

27:00 about putting lights on. But I hadn't thought about that for a long time, and I don't know why at Hornsby we had to do that. Whether the whole state was blacked out?

Did you ever have to do air raid drills?

- 27:30 I think when I was in ATS, I have an idea we had to, but I think we were told if we were in the city to go down into the railway stations, like Wynyard.
- 28:00 The bridge opened in 1933, didn't it? Before that, we used to have to go by train to Milson's Point, and then get a ferry across to the city. So the bridge was built, I can remember the first time I
- 28:30 got the train into Wynyard, going into the tunnel – oh it was dreadful, and in those days quite often the train used to break down in the tunnel, which wasn't very nice. It used to break down on the bridge, too, but we used to just get out and walk to work.
- 29:00 Most of the effect of the war on Sydney was when I was in New Guinea, so I don't remember much about Sydney in the war.

Did you go to parties, where there were servicemen there?

Oh, yes, dancing at the Trocadero.

- 29:30 That was a most wonderful ballroom, huge. They used to have two orchestras, and it used to revolve. All the servicemen used to go there on a Friday night; there was always somebody to dance with. I got to go with a German,
- 30:00 he had been in a concentration camp, so that must have been later on. That was when I was at Movement Control, I'd joined the army.

What was that story, with the German?

Well, he had a lopsided way of dancing, and I used to get such a sore hip, because of the step he used to do all the time. I went out with him for quite a while.

Had he been interned during the war?

Yes, he had been interned, but I don't know why he was out.

Do you remember much about him, what his story was?

No

The Trocadero, if we could just talk about that for a while. What did it look like inside?

Well, it was a wonderful dance floor. Such a shame that it was pulled down. Where the Hoyt's theatres are now.

- 32:00 The Regent Theatre was there. I don't remember much about what it looked like inside, did Gloria ever mention the Trocadero, because she used to get out the front where the band was.
- 32:30 She could do the, she's a 'Buggy', but I never learnt the Jitterbug.

What dances did you do?

The Jazz Waltz, and the Fox Trot, and the Polka. All those other dances, the old time ones, I wasn't very keen on those, but I used to do them.

- 33:00 I wish you'd get on to when I joined the army, are you going to do that this afternoon? Can I tell you about between living at Wahroonga and going to Hornsby, I was living with my elder sister and her family. I was going to school; I must have only been in kindergarten,
- 33:30 and there was a terrible, horrible teacher, and she used to hit me on the knuckles and make me use my right hand. When I was about 56, and I had a funny turn after a gall bladder operation, they did an ECG [electrocardiograph], and he said he couldn't find anything wrong, the only thing he found was that I should have been a left-hander.
- 34:00 My brother who died, and a sister who died, they were both left-handers, and I should've been. I've always thought, "I'll blame that, that's what caused me to always be such a nong."

What about the American presence in Sydney, did you notice many Americans?

There were a lot,

- 34:30 but I only went out once, making up a foursome with another girl that lived nearby. They were two American marines. I suppose we went dancing, I just don't remember. They insisted on coming home with us, well Christine lived in the same street, and we tried to persuade them not to come back home with us by train, because they
- 35:00 wouldn't get a train back. It was very late, and I didn't want to get stuck, I didn't know what was going

to happen, I didn't know how to cope with an American, what people said about them, the American soldiers and sailors. But they insisted, and they walked home with us from Waitara station, Christine and

35:30 her bloke, we came to her place first, so he went in there. We got to my place, and of course I wasn't game to ask him in, even though I was over 20. He said, "Let's go and sit on the lawn," and I said, "Oh, no, I couldn't do that."

36:00 He got fed up and tootled off, so that was my one and only experience of going out with an American.

What kind of reputation did the Americans have?

Well, they were sex maniacs, supposedly, that's what we were told. I didn't want to go that far, not with a strange bloke you'd only

36:30 just met, but he was good. I think he was bored stiff, to be perfectly honest.

What kind of warnings were there for women with a lot of servicemen in Sydney?

Well, that was before I was in the army myself,

37:00 and it wasn't until I was in the army doing my rookies, that we had a lecture, and we were told not to have anything to do with the American servicemen, and even the Australian servicemen, not to have sex, not even to do

37:30 heavy petting, because sperm could get through our panties. So, that's our sex lecture.

Who gave you that sex lecture?

Oh, a lady captain, I don't remember who it was.

38:00 Rookies, six weeks of hell.

Was there a fear of pregnancy amongst your friends?

We didn't talk about it. I'd been in the army and I had to go out to Concord Hospital to have my appendix out,

38:30 and I was in the little cottage right down the end of the street, not in the big hospital. There was a girl there, she was pregnant. She told us that she got pregnant because she'd had a bath in the same water as her brother-in-law. After he'd had his bath, she'd had her bath, and that's how she got pregnant.

39:00 I don't think we believed her.

What used to happen to girls who were pregnant?

I'm not sure, I think depending on what they were going to do about the baby, if they were going to give the baby up for adoption I don't think anything happened, but I think if they wanted to keep the baby, they had to be discharged.

39:30 In those days, if you were in a camp and you married somebody within the camp, you weren't allowed to stay. One or the other was transferred.

Why was that?

Blessed if I'd know, that was one of the rules of the regulations, I don't know why.

40:00 We might talk about how you came to join the army. Could you explain how that happened?

Well, this major that was in Movement Control when I was in Cunard, he sort of nagged and nagged and nagged at me, and I said, "But I can't, because they won't release me," because it was a protected industry, Cunard. He said, "Oh, I can fix that"

40:30 And he did. So I went out and joined up. After rookies, they asked you what you'd like to go into, and I said I would like to go into transport. I had visions of driving ambulances, and things like that. Big trucks. But they said, "Oh no, you're a stenographer,

41:00 we need them too badly." So I finished the rookies and then they sent me to an army school to learn pages and pages and pages of abbreviations, what DAQMG [DAA&QMG - Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General] means and all that. The army ranks and

41:30 then I came out of there as a Group 2 specialist, which meant that I got six shillings a day, rather than five shillings a day. I was a Lance Corporal in rookies, I think they thought I looked as if I was efficient, I wasn't, because I couldn't delegate, and I had to get up earlier than everybody.

Tape 3

- 00:32 I was sixteen before I knew where babies came from. I was standing at the sink, and I was doing the washing up, Mum was drying up, and this friend of mine that I used to go down in the train with when I was at Business College, she had a boyfriend who was
- 01:00 studying medicine and I don't know how the subject came up. I said to my mother, "Margaret was telling me the other day about babies." "Oh yes" said Mum. "Yeah" I said, "Oh, it must be dreadful the naval opens out, and
- 01:30 sometimes they have to cut them down and get the baby out." And Mum said, "No, that's not right." I said, "Well, where do babies come from?" and Mum said, "It comes down between your legs." Well, I was so horrified; I thought that was terrible.
- 02:00 I was so mad with Margaret, I said, "You told me that babies came from the navel," and she said, "So they do," and I said, "They do not," and she said, "Yes, they do, I read John's notes, and that's what he's got written down."
- 02:30 I didn't know what was what anymore; I didn't bring it up with my mother again. It was crazy, we didn't know anything. My eldest sister, she died, actually, because she got pneumonia, we were at Newport, and I was thirteen, and she got this terrible chest
- 03:00 infection. I didn't know till years later that she was pregnant. I used to even, walking along the beach, I said to her, "Why do you wear corsets, even under your swimming costume?" and she said, "To keep my stomach in." I just accepted that, would have thought she'd have told me.
- 03:30 She had five children, and this was her sixth baby, but because she was pregnant, and she got pneumonia, and this was before we got penicillin, the local doctor said it was rheumatism, because she'd been sitting out on a rug the night before, but it wasn't and they rang
- 04:00 their own doctor from Strathfield. He came down to Newport and grabbed her up and drove her back, but it was too late and she died. She had five children and they were all split up in the family. Mum and Dad took on a six-year-old girl. My sister took the youngest boy, and the two eldest girls were left at boarding school, and one other was taken on by another relative.
- 04:30 Until my brother in law married again, and he married another Marjorie, and they only had one child.
- You mentioned that the US servicemen were considered sex maniacs; did men try and have sexual intercourse with women at that time?**
- Yeah, successfully sometimes, too.
- 05:00 **How sexually active were women in the army?**
- Well, it wasn't fair to give the girls this, but some people said that they were the boy's groundsheet, but I don't know, because I was never in a camp.
- 05:30 First of all, I was living at home, and used to travel in by train, but that got to be too hard, because I had to be in at half past eight. I went and lived at a hostel at Darling Point. That was much better. That was for servicewomen,
- 06:00 so I have no knowledge of it actually happening, but I think it did.
- Do you remember any backlash, or anyone looking down at you because the female servicewomen were considered camp mattresses or groundsheets**
- 06:30 No, because as I say, I wasn't in one. I wasn't ever looked down on.
- 07:00 **Maybe it was just women who had boyfriends.**
- I don't like to say this, and you'd better not print it, I think the air force were more that way, I was army.
- Why do you say that?**
- I'm not going to say it.
- Were they considered a bit racier?**
- 07:30 Yes. I don't know whether that's right or not, of course.
- Can you tell me about your rookie training, where you went and what you did?**
- I went to Ingleburn, which was way out, you know.
- 08:00 If you came down to the city on leave, you'd have to get the train back, and you'd used to have to thumb a lift back to camp. I can remember one time, I don't know why, but it was 3 o'clock in the morning. I

got to camp

08:30 just as they were all lining up, so it must have been six o'clock in the morning, but of course you couldn't get a train. If I missed the train, I couldn't get there. I had my leave pass, but I was in fear and trepidation, I knew I'd get into trouble, but I was lucky, because when I got to the orderly room, there was

09:00 nobody there, because they were all out on parade. There was all this pile of leave passes, so I just slipped mine on the bottom. Nobody ever knew that I wasn't there all the time.

What might the punishment have been?

I don't know, but the thought of being punished

09:30 was enough. I suppose we might have had some of our money stopped, or we might have had to do extra marching, there was non-stop marching and physical culture. It was so tiring, extra tiring for me because being the lance corporal of the hut,

10:00 I had to give the others their jobs, so I had to make sure they did their jobs. When I used to go and inspect their latrines, they didn't clean them properly, so of course they would be inspected so I ended up doing them all, making sure they looked all right for when the inspection happened.

10:30 Of course, we had to get our jabs of our, for smallpox, my smallpox injection didn't take; it just came up in the tiniest little pimple, so they decided that couldn't have been any good that batch. So, they gave me another jab, and that didn't do any good either, so they decided they'd better not give me any more.

11:00 When we used to line up, boys and girls all lining up together and there was one young chap, every time he was sickened from when it was being done, he'd faint. They'd take him aside till he'd recovered, then they'd take him back in line and he'd get up the top and he'd faint again.

11:30 I was finished and off and I don't know how many times, and how long it took to do him, but the boys were a bit scared of the needles.

What sort of contact did the women at Ingleburn camp have with the men?

Well, that to my recollection, was the only time that we were together. We had

12:00 men that were taking us for drill, and the time we had to put on gas masks and go through a hut. I don't know if there really was gas in it, but we were told gas. I hope it wasn't, because my mask wasn't fitting very well. We had to practice it, so men were taking that. But I had a boyfriend at the time

12:30 down in Sydney, so I wasn't interested in any of them.

Who was your boyfriend?

He was an Englishman. No, that's not right, that's the wrong one. He was a hairdresser in Sydney, fifteen years older than I was. I used to get my hair cut for nothing.

13:00 **How did you meet him?**

He was the hairdresser, and I used to go and have my hair cut, and he asked me out one night, so it just went on from there.

Would you have your hair styled or curled?

I used to wear it in a page-boy [cut, women's short hairstyle].

13:30 There is a photograph of me with a page-boy. No, but he used to henna it for me.

Can you explain that process?

I don't know what it was made of, but the henna was like

14:00 mud, and he'd put it on my hair, and one time, he always said that it was the fault of the henna, he couldn't get the good stuff. It came out, talk about a strawberry blonde. It was such a bright red, you know.

14:30 Before that, I'd been just like tinted auburn, but it was very bright red. People used to turn around in the street and have a look, it was so unusual at that time.

Was the page-boy cut fashionable?

Fairly, yes, but the beehive was very fashionable with some of the older women,

15:00 ones in their thirties. There were a couple of deaths, because they wouldn't wash their hair, they'd leave it up in this beehive. I think it was nits in it, and they'd burrow into their head, and they died.

15:30 Nobody that I knew personally, but it was in the paper.

What sort of things did you do with your boyfriend? Dating and going out and things.

What a nasty question!

What would you do for fun?

Horse riding.

16:00 That was back when I was about in my early twenties. There used to be a riding school over near Waitara station, with Tim Walton I think his name was.

16:30 No Tim was the name of his horse, Jim Walton was the bloke. It was a beautiful horse, it had been ill-treated at one time, and so his mouth was ruined, and he never used to have a bit in his mouth.

17:00 Nobody was allowed to ride Tim, only Jim when he took us out. I had Rex, Rex was an ex steeple-chaser. He was a gorgeous horse, I loved Rex, and he was usually given to me. One time I got there and I had Taffy,

17:30 and Taffy was a golden mare. We were going along and we came to a sandy patch. We were right on the patch and Jim called out to me, "Watch Taffy, she likes to roll in the sand," and just as I heard that, I felt her going down, I had to jump off while she had a roll in the sand. I wasn't very happy about that. I loved Rex.

18:00 We were riding down to Bobbin Head one day, through the bush, not down the road, and we came to a tree that was across, and all the other horses were going around the tree. This was my first experience of jumping. Rex just came along and went over it, and how I managed to hang on I don't know, because I got such a shock.

18:30 There was a rodeo held, and I saw Rex in the ring with his feet tied, doing these pig rooting, and I thought, "Heavens, I hope he never tries that with me." I was going with one of

19:00 the boys there. At night, we'd ride our horses across to Koala Park at Pennant Hills. It's still there, like a nature reserve, animals and birds, but they had a kiosk there,

19:30 and we used to ride across in our boots and riding gear, and dance, and then we'd ride our horses back in the moonlight, it was very romantic, it was lovely. Tennis club, I played tennis.

20:00 One boy got a motorbike and kidded me into getting on the back of it. Of course he was showing off, he was about eighteen, I was seventeen, I'll never get on that bike with him again, he was crazy. How we managed to not have an accident, I don't know. He did all crazy, crazy things.

20:30 Bushwalking.

Did any of your boyfriends end up enlisting?

Oh yes, one very nice chap from Sunday school, one was killed. Another boyfriend was killed in New Guinea, and one

21:00 was sort of lost, missing. I never ever heard what happened to him, but I think he must have been killed.

21:30 They weren't killed while they were my boyfriend so, although I was upset, I didn't go into a decline or anything.

Did it seem that there was a shortage of men? Did it seem like there were less men around

Well, I never experienced that.

22:00 There were always some there on leave, I didn't notice there being a shortage. And once I got to Entertainment Unit, I was with a group of boys all the time or men - call them boys? Call them boys, boys and girls.

22:30 **You must have been highly sought after, Mrs McKenzie, for dates.**

Well, no. I don't know.

What were your reasons for joining the army?

23:00 It was a very tame reason, really. It was because I wanted to get away from home. By that time, when I was twenty, and my mother was sixty, and my father was sixty-four, when I was home I felt a bit restless

23:30 with the companionship of two elderly folk. I guess I did want to do my bit, I felt as though that was the action, and I should be in it, I felt out of things. I couldn't until

24:00 Cunard released me, and then I went to Movement Control. There I was taking the movement orders for

the troops that were going on to the troop ships.

- 24:30 Being on the same floor as Cunard, several times they'd come in for me, "We can't find this, come and look in the filing cabinet," so I was glad in a way. I enjoyed being at Movement Control, and I used to
- 25:00 get away with murder there, really and truly. We had a warrant officer in charge of the girls. If you felt sick, you'd put on a sob story, and he'd let you go home. I used to do my block quite a bit, you know, lost my temper. I forget why, I remember
- 25:30 picking the typewriter up and throwing it. I was a bit appalled, but I don't remember why I did it, and I don't remember what happened.

What was the office equipment like that you used?

- 26:00 Well, some of the typewriters were pretty old, there were some Underwoods. The keys were very high and you had to press them down. I had a couple of good ones, I eventually got a nice one, I think it was a Royal.
- 26:30 Different to the computer, different touch. We had a male who was head of the typing room, he only used to work for the colonel in charge, and he was a funny bloke, he used to sit there and work hard, but his ears, sometimes you'd look at him and think, "I think Corporal Beaton's blushing,"
- 27:00 and then we'd think, "Oh, yeah, what were we talking about?" We'd chatter and we had, including myself three AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] and two Public Service girls. They weren't in uniform, but they were working there. We used to talk about all things under the sun, we used to have our bets every Saturday, you know, sixpence each way on this, and
- 27:30 sixpence each way on something else. I don't think we ever won very much.

How would the bets work? Who would make the bets?

We'd just ring up. Up at the Central Railway Station, there was an army outfit there, and there was a chappie there who was an SP bookie [Starting Price bookmaker].

- 28:00 I used to take sixpenny bets. Somebody would always go, if there was any money to collect, they'd always go up and collect the money.

Can you give me an example of what your daily routine might have been while you were at Movement Control - once you got to work, what you would do, who you would report to?

- 28:30 Well we had to sign on when we got there, then we'd go into the room. Then we'd usually phone call. I used to do a lot of shorthand and typing and we'd be called to one of the majors, and take down the movement order.
- 29:00 We'd type a stencil, and the stencil would be run off with copies going to everybody concerned, including what time they would embark, what time they would leave their camp and the time that they had to catch either trucks or trains
- 29:30 to get to the embarkation point, what stores were necessary for the trip and all the regulations that were governing their movement. We'd type that and then we'd be brought daily shipping
- 30:00 arrivals and departures. We were going all day, mostly doing the movement orders. Sometimes I had to take down notes for a meeting
- 30:30 and type those up. That's what I did all day, just shorthand and typing. I got sick of that and I applied for a transfer to the provosts, the MPs [Military Police]. The adjutant wouldn't give me leave; he said, "No, I don't think you'd be suitable for that." And then I applied for something else,
- 31:00 "No, you wouldn't be suitable for that." When it came to Entertainment Unit, he said, "OK." He said, "Oh, yeah, I think you'd be all right at that."

To what extent did you feel like you didn't want to be in an office?

Well, I think it was because I got a bit restless,

- 31:30 I think I probably would have stayed there. By this time I was living at Darling Point at the Servicewomen's Hostel, and there was a girl there who talked me into joining this play reading group with
- 32:00 Dennis Glenning, he was in the army. He was running this group, we'd read plays and go around to the various metropolitan camps and entertain the troops. He said to me one day,
- 32:30 "They're forming a group out at Pagewood Entertainment Unit, they're going to call it the Army Theatre Group. Peter Finch is running it, and they need a couple of female servicewomen. I think you'd be quite good." So he said, "I'll arrange for you to meet Peter".

- 33:00 He said, "We've got to go out to Kings Cross," because Peter lived at Kings Cross at the time with his Russian ballerina wife. We went to the flat first, and Tamara couldn't speak English very well, but she said, "Peter's up at the Chinese having a meal," so we went up to this Chinese restaurant, and
- 33:30 it was upstairs somewhere at the [Kings] Cross, and it was smoky and spooky. Anyway, there was Peter stuffing his face and Dennis introduced us and Peter said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, right, sit down." He asked me a few questions and he said, "Oh well, come out to Pagewood
- 34:00 and we'll give you an audition. I'll ring you up and let you know when." One day I was out at lunch from Movement Control, and I got back and the girl said, "Guess who I spoke to on the telephone?"
- 34:30 I said, "I don't know, who?" and she said, "Peter Finch." I said, "Oh, right," "And you have to ring him back." So I rang up.

Can you describe his voice?

Well, it made you go to jelly, it was a lovely voice.

- 35:00 I can't describe the voice. Because he'd been on radio, he had that radio voice. It was a nice voice. So he told me when to come out, and I had to get to
- 35:30 Pagewood, which was a problem, because I had to go to Taylor Square, and I didn't know where Taylor Square was, but anyhow, I don't remember how I got from Taylor Square out, because there was no bus or anything at that time. Must have had to thumb a lift. I really don't remember how I got there,
- 36:00 out to Pagewood. And I did an interview, you know I had to walk across the stage and read, so that was that, he said, "OK, I'll see if we can arrange for a transfer."

Before we go and talk about your work in the Entertainment Unit, can you tell me physically what were your first impressions of Peter Finch in that Chinese restaurant, what did he look like?

- 36:30 Well, I had seen photographs of him. I was a little bit overcome, you know, I felt
- 37:00 "Oh, this is happening too quickly," I hadn't done anything about getting there, I was being, just happening to me, so it was all part of this exciting, and I was in a bit of a daze.
- 37:30 I felt my legs being a bit, you know. Actually, he had dirty teeth. I shouldn't say that, but I don't think he ever cleaned his teeth; his teeth were a bit green. The voice was the same.

Can you explain, just for the sake of people that don't really know a lot about him and his background, who he was and how famous he was at that particular stage?

Well, nobody knew very much about his background, but I think he had a French father,

- 38:30 I don't know what nationality his mother was. I think that he hadn't even met his father until late in life. He was known as a radio personality. He had performed out at the Minerva Theatre in Kings Cross.
- 39:00 We were doing Where the Sun Shines; it was one of our plays. Although he was in the army, he was still acting in it, and it was being performed at the Minerva Theatre. We all went out there to watch how it was to be done.
- 39:30 The girl that played Lady Elizabeth, I felt, was very stilted. He said he liked playing it with me better than her, which was pretty good because he used to have me in tears at rehearsal. Sometimes he'd say,
- 40:00 "Well everybody better be a bit better than they were yesterday. The only one that was any good was Pat, and she was very good". Then you'd get all puffed up, and the next thing he'd say, "You were terrible today," and he'd go this, and tell me where I was wrong, so I'd be in tears, and all he would say was, "Remember how you're feeling at the moment, that will come in handy when you're doing the tearful scene in 'French Without Tears'."
- 40:30 So, you're up and down.

What were his looks like?

Because he'd been in radio, and he'd performed in plays on radio, his voice was the main thing about him. I don't think he was very handsome. When we knew him out at Pagewood, he was always pretty untidy, and he used to drink a fair bit. He was not the only one, the men lived in the camp at Pagewood, but the girls lived outside. They used to drink all night, I know because the chap I married was one of them. He wasn't an actor, but he was one of the officers in charge of our detachment.

00:10 He was a little bit older than I, and I think he was only fifty-odd when he died. He died after that film.

Mrs McKenzie, I wanted to talk to you a little bit more about rookie training. Could you explain what you actually had to do in that training?

Well, I had to get up

01:00 before the other girls in the hut, being the lance corporal, and I had to get them up out of bed, and they didn't want to get out of bed, did they? So that was a bit difficult. We'd have to be out on parade early morning, and then...

01:30 When did we have our shower? I can't remember, you'd think we had to have our shower before we went out on parade, but I don't think we did. I seem to remember falling out of bed, getting them out of bed and going on parade, but I might be wrong. Then we'd have to come back in and everybody would have to make their bed.

02:00 Then everybody would have to go and do their jobs, and, "I don't want to do this" sort of thing, and you'd have to make them go and do it.

What kind of jobs were there to be done?

I can't remember, I can't get past that cleaning the latrines. Then there's cleaning the showers

02:30 and the washrooms. There must have been other jobs, but I can't remember what they were. Then we'd have to do drill, we'd have to be lined up and marched all around and up and down, and taught formations and that sort of thing. And then, we'd have to do physical jerks [exercise].

03:00 We were so tired, and we'd have to do... We had to attend lectures, don't ask me what they were about because I can't remember. It was go, go, go.

03:30 Towards the end we had to do the gas mask one. We had to have one of those dreadful iron helmets, and they were heavy, and most uncomfortable, and you had to have one of those each. You had to have a knapsack with our water bottle, and we

04:00 had to do our drill with that on.

What did you learn about the gas mask?

Well, that we had to know how to put them on, and make sure that they were fitting properly, and how to keep them clean.

04:30 I don't know if there was anything much else about the gas masks.

What was your accommodation like at camp?

They were tin huts, long huts

05:00 with about twenty girls in each hut, and I had a little cubicle at the doorway. I'm sorry, I can't jolly well remember anything past marching and exercising.

05:30 We had the needles, some of the girls got infected arms after having their smallpox and a good friend of mine, who I'd known all my life, was in at the same time, but I hardly saw her because she was in sick bay because her arm swelled up, this colossal arm that she had.

06:00 **How different was it for you to be in the army?**

It was terrible. I had my period when I went in, and I had my period when I came out three weeks later. It just couldn't stop. We had showers without doors or curtains or anything, toilets with half doors, so it was pretty dreadful.

06:30 I can't remember if we had warm water or whether it was cold. I think we had cold showers. The food, I don't remember much about the food, but we had a tin plate and a tin pannikin, and cutlery, you had to look after it and take it to the meals. I think we all had to wash our own.

07:00 The food wasn't too bad there, but at that age food didn't worry me too much, I wasn't very critical.

Was there a difference during the war in terms of the kind of supplies you had when you had your period?

No, that was free issue, the pads you mean?

07:30 Free issue. Modess [sanitary napkins], if you please, was used for all sorts of things. They used to use it for work, the transport boys used to use it for wiping up the grease and that sort of thing.

08:00 There was always a plentiful supply of that.

You mentioned that you were living in a hostel for servicewomen. Could you describe where

that was?

Darling Point, just a little way up from – what's the name of that street that goes out to Rose Bay? The main street that goes through the Cross?

08:30 You get to Kings Cross, and say for instance you were going further on.

09:00 I can't remember now, whether it was before or after Edgecliff. It was before Double Bay, just a little bit up the street, it was a two-storey place. Beautiful accommodation there, and I shared with a girl from,

09:30 she was transferred to Movement Control from South Australia, and she didn't have anywhere to live, and I said, "Oh, you want to come out and live at Reynalla, so she did and we ended up sharing a room together. I've kept in touch with her all these years since, but she's back in South Australia.

10:00 **Did you have to pay for that board? How did it work?**

No, I don't think so, because it was run by volunteers. Strangely enough, one of the ladies that was running it was Lady Parker, and I had known her from when I was at kindergarten,

10:30 before Camelot Cottage. It used to be held at Willow Park, which was her home at Waitara. When I got out to Reynalla – Lady Parker. She was marvellous. She was sweet to me because I arrived back there about three o'clock in the morning, and all the doors were locked

11:00 and I had to throw stones up at the window, and Lady Parker came down to let me in. So it was a lovely old mansion that had been taken over by the army.

11:30 I don't really know much about, I know they were voluntary workers. I don't remember ever paying anything, so I suppose I just accepted it, you know.

How about food at that time, was it supplied in board?

Yes, I don't remember paying anything there.

12:00 The army must have paid for a certain amount, for the upkeep of the place and the food. There was no accommodation for the girls out at Pagewood, so I guess the army paid for it.

While you were at Movement Control, what kind of secrecy arrangements were there in terms of the work you were doing?

12:30 Well, of course we had to take the oath again, that we wouldn't talk about it outside. We just didn't. I would know ahead when troops were going,

13:00 and my brother used to pester the life out of me, "When am I going? When am I going?" But he reckons that I told him, and I know I didn't, but maybe I gave him a hint. Other than that, I wouldn't.

13:30 At that stage I wasn't at Movement Control, I was at Pagewood. I was still in touch with them, I don't really remember telling them, but maybe I did, maybe I found out, which is very wrong.

How much pressure was there on you at that time, when you were working at Movement Control?

14:00 We didn't volunteer the information that that's where I worked, because once you let on that you worked at Movement Control, that's when you were under a bit of pressure, but if you just said you were in the army,

14:30 and you worked in the city, and you're a Stenographer Group 2, that was enough for people, they didn't pressure you. Other service personnel, they didn't pressure you either. They knew where you were.

15:00 Nobody pressured me. I remember being on a little coach trip down to Jenolan Caves, coming back the other people in the coach were talking about one of the ships in the harbour, and they wondered when the troops were going,

15:30 and I was just with a chap from Cunard. We just sort of looked at each other and didn't say a word. Nobody commented. Apart from my brother who drove me mad, I don't remember anybody asking me questions.

16:00 **Were you conscious of how secret the work was that you were doing?**

Oh, yes, terribly conscious. You wouldn't dream of telling anybody anything of what you were doing.

What were you told would happen to you if you did?

16:30 We were just trusted. It was a pretty severe interview. With Cunard it was a very strict interview, but Movement Control, of course, there was this major behind the scenes. It was his fault I was back at Movement Control, because he'd been pulling strings.

- 17:00 So I was known by the army personnel and presumably they thought, "Well, she probably keeps secrets, she's been keeping secrets about the ships, she'd keep secrets about the troops." I don't know what would have happened, we might have been jailed or something if we'd given away any real information.
- 17:30 **You mentioned that there was a male in charge of the area where you worked, and that he'd often blushed. What was it that you were talking about that made him blush?**
- We talked about everything, we were probably talking about periods or babies or something. We used to talk about everything, and forget that he was a bloke, because he'd just sit there so quietly.
- 18:00 Occasionally, he'd burst out laughing, just occasionally. He used to talk to me, because I didn't like him sitting there and not talking, I used to make a point of talking to him, so he'd have to answer me. He kept pretty busy, though.
- 18:30 Sometimes he used to be reading, so he'd have his book there. I suppose he was listening to us. We were working too; I suppose we do find time to chatter.
- What was your uniform like?**
- Ah, well, that was interesting.
- 19:00 You know what the army uniform was?
- Could you describe the women's uniform?**
- Well the winter uniform was khaki, with buttons and two pockets up here. Khaki shirt, khaki tie,
- 19:30 lisle stockings, brown shoes and a hat, I have a photograph over there. We were issued with bloomers
- 20:00 and issued with a certain number of pairs of stockings. Summer uniform was also khaki, and it was a drill material. It had brass buttons down to here,
- 20:30 short sleeves and an epaulet thing. At that time when I went into the army I was going with that hairdresser, and he didn't like the issue, and he knew of a manufacturer down near Central [Station], so he sent me down there and he bought me two tailor-made
- 21:00 beautiful uniforms. I don't think anyone in charge ever realised, because they didn't, but it fitted me beautifully. It was so lovely and comfortable. I had two of the others as well.
- So that was a complete uniform?**
- Well, the dress, yes.
- 21:30 The summer uniform was a khaki dress. I don't know how much he had to pay for them.
- What was it like for you to be in uniform?**
- It was good, apart from the hat, I wasn't mad keen on the hats, I didn't like hats much.
- 22:00 The army regulation haircut, there was a measurement. I can't remember whether it was three inches from the collar, but of course, once I got to Movement Control, I had to have my hair longer, so we used to have special permission to wear our hair longer,
- 22:30 Gloria and I, because in French Planters, my part I had to copy her in everything; I was the French girl, she was the English girl. She was Mabel Crumb.
- 23:00 I wanted to copy her, and I had to have my hair done exactly the same as hers, so we both had to have our hair long. And when we were over in New Guinea, we were in the AWAS barracks and the girls there they were mad about it, because they had to have their hair cut short, and they couldn't see why we
- 23:30 were allowed to wear our hair longer.
- When you moved to Pagewood, whereabouts were you doing the rehearsal?**
- In Pagewood, they had some buildings; it used to be the Holden works, where they used to make the Holdens.
- 24:00 No, that was next door. I don't know, because the Entertainment Unit had been going since the beginning of the war with the concert parties, the men that used to go around, and of course any female parts were taken by female impersonators.
- 24:30 **Could you tell me about those female impersonators?**
- Well, my first introduction to the female impersonator. I was the first girl in army theatre that was taken on strength. First payday, I was lined up outdoors with the boys, when all of a sudden I heard this noise,

- 25:00 a sort of a screech, and a voice said, "Oh, it's a real live girl." I looked up, and all I could see were these plucked eyebrows and eyes glaring down at me.
- 25:30 And that was a very, very bitchy female impersonator. He was one of the bitchy ones, I think his name was Danny something or other. That was my first experience. I don't think I knew about female impersonators. I don't think I knew that there were, what do they call them, gays, or something. I just didn't know, and I
- 26:00 had to have it explained to me. The boys were always explaining things to me; they thought I was a dummy. There were quite a lot of things that I didn't know about life, even though by that stage I was twenty-three. They'd make jokes, and roar with laughter, but I couldn't see anything funny, so they'd have to tell me about it. But anyway, that was that female impersonator, but
- 26:30 there was another young one, and he was such a nice boy, he was a pet. When he was done up, he could sing. I can always see him, he had this chiffon dress on and he had this chiffon
- 27:00 scarf, and he'd just float across the stage, oh, he used to be lovely. He was such a good performer, and such a nice boy, but unfortunately he was, whatever you call it, gay. He was one of the nice ones.

- 27:30 The real live girl business caught on. From then on, we were referred to as 'the real live girls'.

Where did the female impersonators come from?

Well they were in the army.

- 28:00 They'd been in the concert parties. All the concert party's members had been in active service at some stage or another. They were brought in to Entertainment Unit, and so they were formed into concert parties, then went around to the troops overseas. They used to sing and dance and they'd have to have the females to sing, so they needed females.
- 28:30 Then when they decided they were going to have a drama group, they thought they had to have real live girls, so the female impersonators had their noses put out of joint. They didn't see why they shouldn't be doing it, that's why the nasty ones, although I only ever came into contact with those two, but there probably were others.
- 29:00 Because I was going with this officer out there, I didn't get to mix, because he was terribly jealous, frightfully jealous.

How did the female impersonators make themselves up?

Well, they had lovely wigs, beautiful wigs.

- 29:30 In those days we used the makeup that was in waxy sticks, you'd have to just dab the stick over, then smooth that out.
- 30:00 The whole works, eye shadow and mascara, lipstick and earrings. With the wigs on, they used to look lovely. In fact, they used to look beautiful, but I don't know, they'd have to shave pretty well before they'd do it, I suppose.

What would they wear?

- 30:30 I don't know what they wore when they were overseas in the concert party. When they were performing, they would have their wardrobe, beautiful long dresses. That's about all I can tell you.

- 31:00 **When they weren't performing, what were they wearing?**

Just ordinary army gear.

How did the army respond to the female impersonators?

Well I don't really know. The ones at Pagewood, they just treated them, well, a little bit differently. It depends.

- 31:30 Some of the boys were nasty about them and ragged them, but most of the boys accepted them for what they were. Bill, the nice one, and I used to talk quite a bit. But the other one, I used to avoid him like the plague, because he was sarcastic and bitter and jealous of us - the girls. Not of us as people, but
- 32:00 jealous of us because we were taken on as the actresses and he felt they should be. I had to even go on guard duty. When I first went there, the trucks that would come into Pagewood, first of all they thought we were female impersonators and they said, "Oh, you've got some new ones on."
- 32:30 So I said, "What are you talking about?" and he said, "Are you a girl?" and I said, "Yes, I'm a girl, a real girl." You'd have to explain and mark them off and take the vehicle number. They got used to it after a while. At first they couldn't make out why they had real girls.
- 33:00 **Do you remember that discussion when someone explained to you what female impersonators**

were?

- 33:30 I said, "Why did he say 'real live girls'?" and they said, "Because, he's a female impersonator," and I said, "What's that?" and they said, "You saw the plucked eyebrows, didn't you?" "Yes," "Well, normal blokes don't pluck their eyebrows, do they?"
- 34:00 So, they didn't explain, they didn't go into any medical reason, anything about 'some people are born this way'. I got the impression that they did that because they wanted to.
- 34:30 And yet, I could see that they were different, or this nasty one was with the plucked eyebrows. They were laughing all the time when they were telling me, so I wasn't sure whether they were pulling my leg or being serious.
- 35:00 They said, "Oh well, you know, they had to have somebody to do the female songs, they needed somebody that was
- 35:30 more feminine than the ordinary bloke." Nowhere did they say that they might have been born that way. I just accepted what they said, and let it go. Then, when I used to talk to the nice one, I thought that he didn't seem to be all that different. I thought he was just acting a part.
- 36:00 **You mentioned you were let in at the hostel at 3am, and you think that it was VE [Victory in Europe] Day. Could you explain where you were when the war in Europe ended, and what you remember of that?**
- As I said before, I can't remember whether it was the first,
- 36:30 Victory in Europe was first, then Victory in the Pacific was second.
- 37:00 I get the two mixed up. I can only remember the one, I was out at Pagewood when we were told. I was to meet my boyfriend, who I ended up marrying, at the David Jones
- 37:30 opposite the GPO [General Post Office], because it was run by the Australian Women's Weekly. It was set up as a hostel for the girls, for servicewomen. I was to go upstairs and wait in the waiting room. I'd had some lunch, and waited and waited.
- 38:00 I was writing letters and reading, and his ex-fiancé kept walking past me making remarks like, "Oh, he's keeping you waiting, is he? He hasn't turned up yet, has he?" I got to hate that girl; he'd broken the engagement off with her,
- 38:30 and she was very bitter and had it in for me. I'd got a lift as far as Taylor Square, all the people were all over the street, traffic couldn't get through or anything, so I had to walk from there all the way in to the GPO, and
- 39:00 of course everybody was cheering and everything else. I was hurrying, because I didn't want to keep him waiting. I was tired, and I was getting very miserable, and I waited! I kept staying there, and it was closing time, which must have been about half past nine
- 39:30 at night, or ten o'clock at night, and I'd been waiting there all afternoon and night. I can't imagine anybody would be so stupid. Why didn't I go home? Why didn't I leave, just shows you how stupid I was. So, it closed, and I had to go downstairs, and who should walk past but the ex,
- 40:00 and she laughed, she came over to me and said, "Ha, ha, ha, ha!" in my face, you know, "Aren't you a silly one, fancy waiting all this time. He's not going to turn up". Anyway, about five minutes later, I suddenly saw him coming, well he couldn't walk straight, and two of the other boys were holding him up. He was staggering, and they plopped him in front of me and said, "Here you are, if you want him."
- 40:30 One of them, Johnny Storr, from Melbourne, said, "Well, I didn't think he'd ever make it, but here he is," and so off they went. He couldn't stand up, I had to grab him and hold him up, and I said, "Well, we'd better walk it off," or something. We walked all the way out to Hyde Park and sat down on the grass, and
- 41:00 he promptly went to sleep. I really felt I wanted to get up and go, but I thought, "I can't get up and leave him there asleep, because he'll be robbed", because servicemen were being robbed. I didn't think about me being hit on the head, sitting with a drunk. Eventually he woke up, and I said, "You'd better get back to camp", so
- 41:30 poured him on a tram, and that's the night I got back to the hostel at three o'clock in the morning. I had a miserable time. I don't remember which one it was, and I don't remember what happened on the occasion of the other one.

- 00:32 I feel very guilty because you asked me what were my memories of my mother and I couldn't think of anything. Well, I remember that when I was about six, we were at Hornsby, and we used to always be pestering her to play games with me.
- 01:00 One day, I dressed up as an old tramp, and came to the door, knocked on the door, and I asked her for some food, and she actually went in and made me some sandwiches. Now, to this day I don't know whether, I'm sure she knew it was me, but she really played the game with me and I was so pleased. I thought, "That's lovely". And one time in the railway, I had my hands on the sill, and the window
- 01:30 slammed down on my hands, and she couldn't get the window open, and I'm yelling my head off, I can remember this, the pain. She raced away and got the guard and he came and opened the window. So she was very sweet and kind then. One thing she did tell me, never to accept money from anybody, and the one and only time that I ever met my father's parents -
- 02:00 I don't know how old I was, six-ish - when we were leaving, my grandfather offered me sixpence, and I said, "No," and Mum said, "Take it!" I was that indignant, after telling me I mustn't accept money from a stranger, and that might have been my grandmother, but as far as I knew, it was the first time I'd ever seen her. Of course, that was a bit silly. And the other thing I feel guilty about
- 02:30 is when you were asking me how did I feel when the boys that I used to know were killed? At the time, it was very traumatic, and I was very upset. But now, living here, death is just, you know, so many people have died. And so, now, death, looking back... I just didn't want you to think I was hard.
- 03:00 I didn't, Mrs McKenzie, not for a minute. It's fifty-five years ago, so I can fully appreciate what you say, quite the contrary.
- Once you were selected for the Entertainment Unit, can you explain what happened then in terms of rehearsals?**
- We had to
- 03:30 do lip exercises like, "Puh-wa-loh, one, two, three," I forget the rest of that one, and then another one was, "Flip-ar-ty, flop-ar-ty, fre-ddy,
- 04:00 swinging on a bough, hello Freddy," oh I forget the rest. And other exercises, walking, practice with a silly old book on the head and all that sort of thing. And then we were rehearsing While the Sun Shines, and that was the part that I was
- 04:30 to do Lady Elizabeth, then Gloria came.
- Just because we know Gloria, but other people don't, can you explain who Gloria was and who the other women were in the unit?**
- Gloria Robbins, or was it Rowings? She
- 05:00 came and she took the part of the oomph girl in While the Sun Shines. She used to sing beautifully, she used to sing in nightclubs, and I don't know what unit she came from,
- 05:30 and she joined us. There was the two of us, and we'd rehearse. They needed girls for Friends Without Tears. They couldn't get them, so in the meantime, Peter said to me that I could do
- 06:00 Jacqueline the French girl, and Gloria could do the other, Mabel Crumb? I can't remember her name in the play. So, we were just to do the other parts, until such time. Then Peter decided, "Why worry, they can do the two of them", so we two were doing both shows. Then another, Iris Shawn, she came on strength, and
- 06:30 they'd booked her because of the photographs she'd sent in, she must have come from a fair way. The photographs were beautiful, but she wasn't. She had a very nice figure, she was short. She really wasn't an actress. She couldn't do it. Poor old Iris,
- 07:00 all the way down in the southern tour, because we went down to Melbourne first and worked our way up, all the time she was understudying the French girl, and at Cowra Camp I lost my voice completely, and woke up this morning and couldn't speak. I said to Peter, "I can't," he said, "Oh, you'll be right for tonight," and all day I didn't have any voice, and I thought, "What's the matter with the man,
- 07:30 he's got an understudy, why do I have to do it?" Right up until the time I stepped on that stage, I didn't have a voice, and got it back. But, poor Iris, she was so upset, to think she'd been rehearsing all day, thinking she was going to get an opportunity and she never ever played it.
- 08:00 She played the part of the maid in it, I think she had about two lines or something. Then, when we were going overseas, Iris couldn't go because she was too old, I think at this stage if they were forty, they couldn't go overseas. Anyway, she was over age. They got another, Vera Tighe, she married
- 08:30 a chappie she met over in New Guinea and she went to Queensland, he was a Scot, and he had a moustache with a curl. Then we got a hairdresser, Mary Wemyss, who was with what we used to call

- Comedy Group, they were doing Maid of the Mountains. They were in Rabaul, but when we got her,
- 09:00 when this Scot was drunk one night, I wasn't there, because I was with my fiancé, but at this party, she shaved half his mo [moustache] off. We all thought he was going to kill her, oh, he was so furious. He never forgave her.
- 09:30 Really, he had a terrible temper, this bloke. The other women that were in Entertainment Unit were in Musical Comedy, so there were about six of them in there, and they went to Rabaul, but Gloria and I went to New Guinea first, and then we went to Rabaul.
- 10:00 Mary Wemyss, what's her name now? She was the hairdresser, she did have a little bit of a part in the Musical Comedy, so we got her when we got to Rabaul. Gloria and I must have done our own hair when we were in New Guinea.
- 10:30 That's all the women there were - the 'real live girls'.

What were those first few performances like in Australia, were you nervous?

Terribly, particularly when, the first night, our opening night, we had Colonel Davidson, he was in charge of Entertainment Unit.

- 11:00 Also, our parents were coming, and some other VIPs [Very Important Persons], and I was terribly nervous, but it went over very well. Every show we did went over very well. One of the country towns advertised us as being Wait till the Sun Shines!

11:30 Where was the opening night show?

I knew you were going to ask me that one, Gloria would have told you that one!

Was it in a camp, or was it a special show?

We had a show at Pagewood before we went, but that wasn't classified as being opening night. It was more like a dress rehearsal, with people there.

- 12:00 I think our opening night was at Heidelberg Hospital down in Melbourne. There's an army diary there, which probably tells us where. I can't remember. We had a show at the Victoria

- 12:30 Headquarters of something or other. Dear my memory is shocking - I'm eighty-four.

What can you tell me about the two plays that they were rehearsing? What, roughly, were they about?

They were both written by Terence Rattigan, they were both comedies, and While the Sun Shines, Peter Finch was the male lead,

- 13:00 and I was his fiancée Lady Elizabeth. There was an American soldier that I had to kiss, I had to kiss Peter too, but kissing Peter wasn't very exciting because he had his eyes open and he's looking at everybody to see where they were on stage. Although,

- 13:30 both Gloria and I tried madly to get Ronnie Falkard to react to us, but he was a lovely bloke, not interested. A very nice chap, he lives up at Palm Beach somewhere now. I haven't seen him, he's a bit of a hermit, I think. He was the American, I had an affair with him,

- 14:00 and Peter was a Lord. And Johnny Storr from 3XY [Radio Station] in Melbourne, he was in the army too. He was a colonel, or a commander?

- 14:30 Until recently, they were quite clear to me. Gloria would have told you what her part was, and I can't remember. I know what her part was, but how it blended in.

15:00 The other men that you were acting with in the play, did they have a musical or entertainment background?

Johnny Storr was radio in Melbourne. The others all came from various active services, Colin Croft

- 15:30 came into our unit from Musical Comedy later on, because one chappie had to go back because he had bad knees. He was a song and dance man. We had a couple of chappies from Queensland, and country,

- 16:00 Kempsey, I don't know what their backgrounds were. I don't think so, I just think they were interested and wanting to be actors. They wanted to join the army theatre. We all worked in very well, a wonderful family atmosphere.

- 16:30 I know that While the Sun Shines opens with Peter Finch having a conversation with one of the others, and I arrive, and I run across the stage and throw myself in his arms, and he kisses me, I can remember that bit. I can remember the bit with the American soldier, he got me tiddly, and I had to act drunk,

- 17:00 I remember that bit. That was the end of the scene, because Johnny Storr's looking over the edge of the

lounge, and I'm sort of, you know, drunk. As for the story of it, I just can't remember it.

17:30 **What sort of scenery did you have?**

We had wonderful scenery, and beautiful wardrobe. The wardrobe mistress at Pagewood had provided us with a uniform. I was wearing an English air force uniform, because I was in the British air force.

18:00 I was in uniform all through that one. And so were the others, all in various uniforms. The set,

18:30 until we got to Rabaul, the boys, the actors, we had the most terrific mobile stage. Everywhere we went, they had to erect the stage. Of course it was so hot, and all day they'd be working so hard erecting the stage and the perspiration would be pouring off them, and then they'd have the play at night.

19:00 We girls, Gloria and I, and Vera, we had to take turns at ironing all the wardrobe. You know, it would get packed up, get crushed, and if there was any washing to be done, we had to wash the stuff. They lost, somehow or other,

19:30 a part of the scenery. I forget what it's called, a big bar that goes across the top with the lights. It's got a name, that got lost, so we had to get an engineer over there to make us a new one. Then of course, what happened, the original one turned up.

20:00 When we got to Rabaul, there was a theatre already built, so that was good.

Did you have a curtain?

Yep, oh yes. We had everything, it was a real theatre.

So once you got on the road, once you'd left Pagewood, and you were travelling through Australia, how was all this equipment and staging transported?

We had the big trucks, we had a utility, or was it a jeep,

20:30 no, I think it was a utility, which my fiancé drove, because he was the officer. I don't know how many trucks we had, whether it was two or three, full of equipment and wardrobe, probably two while we were still in Australia. Coming back,

21:00 I had to have my hair hennaed, because my normal colour, that Colonel Jim Davidson, who used to be a band leader, said my hair was mousy, I had to have some henna in it. It had gone back to normal from when I had joined up years before.

21:30 They all gathered around, there was a big copper they'd boiled up, it must have been to dissolve the henna in the copper, and one of the boys said, "We've got to put a penny in, because that will take the brassy look off henna," so then they had an argument about who was going to put the penny in the henna.

22:00 So, I got my hair hennaed. I found a photograph of the army theatre group, and I've got a scarf around my head, because I'd just had my hair hennaed, with a couple of ring-ins, I know one was the chappie in charge of entertainment at the country camp, but I don't know who the other little man is. We used to

22:30 gather people as we went. When we were over in New Guinea, and the boys were getting tired with erecting, they were allowed to take on a few extra hands, they weren't actors, but they would help with assembling the stage.

How did you travel down to Melbourne? Were you in the trucks?

23:00 I came back on the trucks. I have no recollection of how I got down there, because coming back we stayed in the different camps.

23:30 My first experience of staying in a tent. I think that was Cowra, I think that's why I lost my voice, with the cold. Bathurst was freezing; first time I'd ever seen snow. We were going uphill, oh, I was in the bus, we had a little bus, that's how I went down there, in the bus.

24:00 I didn't think I was in a truck, but I was in the bus. A utility, the bus, and there must have been just one truck. I wanted to get out and see the snow, so they stopped and let me out, and I'm down playing with the snow, and they take off. Oh, I thought they'd left me, but they were just playing a joke, you know. So they waited for me.

24:30 **What sort of camaraderie was there?**

Oh, wonderful, it was really wonderful. And the boys were so good with us. If they were using bad language at any time, one of the others would say, "Cut it out, the girls are here." They really were wonderful, just like brothers.

What was the role of your boyfriend in the unit?

He was the officer in charge.

25:00 **What did that mean?**

Well, Johnny Storr was the Sergeant, and he used to do all of the office work. David, my fiancé, I didn't have a ring then, I got my ring over in New Guinea, he used to have to sign everything, but Johnny used to do all the work.

25:30 John knew all about entertainment. I think, David hadn't got overseas, he had been taking a convoy over to Darwin to embark and he'd been driving utility, or a jeep, and

26:00 one of the chaps on the motorbike, it was freezing cold, they were over in South Australia, and David said to the chappie, "You come into the vehicle, and I'll get on the bike." So, crossing the railway line over there, the ice was on the road,

26:30 and the bike skidded, and he broke his leg, the bone in his leg from here to here was just open right way down. The bone was sticking out everywhere, in fact the hospital, they wanted to take his leg off, but one doctor said, "No, we'll save it." But he was in hospital for eighteen months. So when he came out, of course, he was unfit for service overseas, and they posted him up to

27:00 Mackay, and then for some reason or another, they posted him back down to Entertainment Unit. So he didn't know anything about entertainment. He was responsible for us, let's put it that way, and had to make, to go with John and make arrangements for everything.

27:30 But he wasn't an actor, he used to stand off stage and glare at me while I was kissing the other blokes.

How soon after arriving at the Entertainment Unit did your romance blossom?

He wasn't there when I first went there. It was quite some time,

28:00 we knew we had to have an officer to go away. We all knew that there was an officer coming this particular day, and I was standing talking to another chap, Eddie Corduroy, who used to write music, he was a composer, and he said, "Oh look, here comes your new officer," and I turned

28:30 around and I looked back and I said, "I'm not interested, I'm not a baby snatcher," he looked so young. Actually, he was three years younger than me. It just happened that he was from Melbourne, and I felt sorry for him and invited him home to my parent's place for a week

29:00 so he'd have some family. It just grew from there.

When you were performing at the camps in Australia, what were your performance spaces like?

How do you mean?

What sort of rooms were you performing in, in the various camps in Australia?

Theatres, or halls, you know.

29:30 I don't think we did any outdoor ones on the southern tour. Mostly the camps have a big hall, some of them I suppose were built for theatres, others were just cleared out dining rooms and things, but we had one hall

30:00 that was a couple of thousand soldiers in. We didn't have this equipment that you've got today; we had those big trumpet things at the side of the stage. Peter would stand right at the back of the hall, and say, "No, can't hear you! Can't hear you! Speak up!" We learnt to project our voice

30:30 and to be heard right at the back of the hall. I think we did do an outdoor one, but I can't remember where it was.

How much do you think he taught you as a performer?

Well, right from childhood, I'd always been dabbling in things,

31:00 Girls club and performances like that. He taught me to enunciate, I'm not being very good today, I'm out of practice, but we had to make sure that every word could be heard, and we had to

31:30 practice expressions. He'd say, "You're very happy," and you'd have to show you're very happy, or, "You're sad," and you'd have to look sad. "You've just had some bad news," and you'd have to look as though you've had some bad news.

32:00 He taught me those. I don't suppose it's similar to the way they teach these days. We'd rehearse, and if he didn't like the way we did it, then he'd tell us what he wanted, and we had to practice that until we got it.

32:30 I think today, how they're teaching acting is pretty torrid. Well, it was torrid for us too, sometimes.

How hard was it in a room full of two thousand men, who I assume weren't terribly quiet?

Oh, they were wonderful. They really were, yes, and they laughed at all the jokes.

- 33:00 Particularly if we got a laugh it was a great celebration. "I got a laugh on that line, that's the first time I've got a laugh on that line."

What sort of a dressing room, or a green room did you have?

That varied. We usually had some sort of a room.

- 33:30 I don't know how the men got on, because there were usually more men to fit in the room, and there were just two or three girls. The toilet business was the worst. When we were up at Bathurst, they hadn't realised, they hadn't thought about that, so they busied themselves and brought it up backstage!

A pan with a seat and everything,

- 34:00 and then they had to rig up something around it. Oh, it was so embarrassing. Of course the boys were all right, there were plenty of men's facilities. I don't know why we couldn't have used those, we used to do that quite often at other places. But it was cold, it was freezing cold, so I suppose they didn't think we could go outside.

What did you do in your spare time when you were on the road?

- 34:30 **Did you go out and drink together?**

No, because most of the camps were pretty far out. But after each show, the officers' mess would put on a supper.

- 35:00 Actually, the non-commissioned ranks weren't supposed to go into the officers' mess, but Peter, he was only a Sergeant, but Peter said, "If we can't all come, nobody comes." So they used to let us entertain everybody, Privates, Corporals, everything. One camp we went to, it was the sergeants' mess.

- 35:30 It was shocking, I forget where that was, I mustn't say a camp in case that's wrong, but it was somewhere back towards Sydney. The floor was just a swill with beer, it was disgusting, and I kicked up a fuss, I said, "I'm not going to stay here."

- 36:00 The boys didn't mind, they were getting pretty stuck into the grog. One camp, see my husband drank far too much, and I wanted him to give it away, so I said I was going to have drink for drink. I thought, "If I can drink,

- 36:30 maybe I won't notice him drinking". So I had eight glasses of beer and I was so sick, and they brought on the most magnificent supper, the best supper, and I took one look at it, oh, I dashed outside and I was sick, and he was holding on to my belt at the back, and I'm being sick.

- 37:00 I went back in and I couldn't face eating a thing. So, I mean, he didn't seem to be affected in any way, he can drink like I don't know what.

So what sort of a drinker were you after that incident?

No, I was a two-pot screamer, they used to call me. We went to the prisoner of war,

- 37:30 Japanese had been imprisoned there at Tatura, and Johnny Storr said, "I know what you'd like, you'd like a cherry advocaat?" So he went and got me one, then he told me it had raw eggs in it, and that was enough, I couldn't drink it, it was awful. Some people think it's beautiful.

- 38:00 I like Crème de Menthe; I used to have Crème de Menthe, just a couple. And Pimms, do they still have Pimms, but mostly I'd have soft drink, I was a sook [soft].

That Japanese camp, was that at Cowra?

- 38:30 No, Tatura, or maybe, I'm not sure. I've often wondered where Tatura is, I think that's the name. But I don't know where it was, whether that's the name of the country town?

What do you remember about that place?

That's where I had the cherry advocaat, and also the fact that I was given a bouquet of flowers.

- 39:00 I got a bouquet of dried Australian flowers. What are those big red flowers?

Waratahs?

Yes, waratahs and other dried natives.

- 39:30 Gloria got proper flowers in her bouquet, and I got these, they were very nice.

Who gave you the flowers?

I was presented with them on stage, like a real performer. I suppose they thought, a professional, better give the girls a bouquet.

That Japanese camp, do you remember roughly what it looked like, or what was left there?

- 40:00 No, I think there was still Japanese there, but they didn't come to the show. No, I don't remember anything much about that at all. Some of the camps, little things stood out, like being in a tent at Cowra and losing my voice. And Bandiana or Bonegilla, whichever, for the
- 40:30 number in the audience, and also the henna in the copper. You asked me about what did we do, we had some picnics, I've got a couple of photographs of those.
- 41:00 And the toilet at Bathurst, and the snow.

Roughly how long were you away for on that tour?

The southern tour? No, I can't remember.

- 41:30 I really don't remember. I've probably got something written in my army records, I might have the dates. I can remember I went in to rookies on Friday the thirteenth of November, I remember that, but I can't remember any other dates as to when I moved in to the various units.

Tape 6

- 00:32 **Mrs McKenzie, I might ask you about when you were told that you might be going overseas.**

We were worried, I shouldn't say we were worried, but because the war had ended, we thought perhaps we weren't going to go. So we were still out at Pagewood, and still rehearsing and all the rest of it.

- 01:00 Then, yes, we were told we would be going. The ship that we were supposed to be going on was in dry dock. This is where Gloria and I disagree, she says that the hold up was because she wasn't twenty-one, but she wasn't twenty one when we did go, because she had her twenty-first birthday over there. I say, and what I was told was,
- 01:30 that the ship had to have its bottom scraped, you know, it was in dry dock, and it wasn't ready, and that's what was holding us up, but she will have it the other way. In those days, I think they must have known that the war was going to come to an end, and so they thought probably that we wouldn't go, and anyhow they decided that there were so many troops over there, that
- 02:00 they would send us. So, that's what happened, and we eventually went. The AWAS, I should remember her name, but I've forgotten, in charge of the AWAS in Sydney, she came down to the ship to see
- 02:30 us off, and she brought Gloria and I a box of chocolates. And we hardly got any, the boys, "Oh, chocolates!" and they came and ate all our chocolates. So off we went.

What was the ship that you went across on?

- 03:00 I was going to say 'Morella', I'm tired, that's why I can't remember.
- 03:30 I'll check that out when we get onto the diary.

Do you remember much about the journey over?

Well, yes, a couple of things. We were at the captain's table. He was a bearded Scot. He was so stern. I know that Gloria came to the table one day, and

- 04:00 she'd been up on deck, and she was with one of the boys. She was late to the table. Oh boy, did he give her what for, told her she looked as if she'd been dragged through a hedge or something. He wasn't very pleasant. Also at the table, there was a Red Cross,
- 04:30 and he was a guts [greedy]. He'd have every dish on the menu, and he'd double up, and we couldn't believe that he could eat so much. I remember that, and I remember we had boat-deck single cabins.
- 05:00 It used to be a ship that belonged to a foreign prime minister, or duke, or prince or something. For a private ship, it was huge, and it seemed quite big, but it's tiny in comparison to the ships today.
- 05:30 The first morning, I woke up and I thought, "Oh, nobody's told us what to do". Of course I'd got so used to being told what to do, and this time and that, that I just suddenly realised I didn't know what to do. So I got out of the bunk, and I was just
- 06:00 starting to get dressed and there was a knock at the door, and I said, "Yes," "Your tea," so I hopped back into the bed and this Indian, they were all Indian crew, he brought me in a cup of tea. So I thought, "Oh, this is all right," you know. Corporal in the army getting waited on like this, you know. So he went out and I had my cup of tea,

- 06:30 I got out of bed and I started to get dressed, and a knock at the door. I called, "Yes," "Your bath's ready, madam," because I didn't know where anything was on the ship, so I wasn't going to bother, I'd just had a little wash in the cabin, I wasn't going to worry about it.
- 07:00 So I put my dressing gown on over what I had on, and he led me down around and opened the door on this big bathroom, and the bath and he said, "Salt water," pointed at the bath, and across the bath there was a wooden shelf and a bowl. "Salt water, fresh water," and I said, "Thankyou very much,"
- 07:30 he stood there, and I said, "Thankyou very much," he nodded his head, went back to the doorway and he stood there. I thought, "Holy smoke, is he going to stay there, does he expect me to have a bath with him standing there?" So I said, "Thankyou". Afterwards, I thought, "He's probably waiting for a tip. Of course, he wouldn't know that we were army.
- 08:00 We female, and on the boat-deck". Anyway, so eventually I got rid of him and had my bath, so every morning I knew then, for the next morning. This happened every morning after that, but I was ready for it. We played cards, we walked around, we talked. And Peter couldn't come with us
- 08:30 because he was unfit for hot, humid climate, so one of the others had taken over the part. More or less, Johnny Storr was in charge of the acting section, and it was a beautiful trip, lovely. Beautiful weather, and this was the first trip that the ship had done
- 09:00 with lights on. The staff were absolutely petrified, and the captain had to go out and bellow at them to tell them that everything was all right. They were terrified. A photograph that I had done of one of the crew, I was telling someone the other day that
- 09:30 he had five toes, and she said, "Oh that's strange, how many have you got?" Five toes! I think what it was, there was something wrong with his feet, I think his big toe; it was so strange there was something wrong with his feet.
- 10:00 Johnny Storr, he sat on the shelf that goes across the bath, the boys were laughing because he was a big man, and he broke it, he fell into the bath. I don't know why he was sitting on it, he was supposed to sit in the water in the bath, and use the fresh water to sponge yourself.
- 10:30 For some reason he was sitting on it. So he broke it.

So the bath had salt water that you sat in?

Yes, it was hot, but the fresh water to clean off the salt water. I think John must have been not sitting in it

- 11:00 because he must have been very fair skinned, he had a bit of trouble with his skin, it would get sore. So I suppose that's why he was sitting on the thing. I don't remember rehearsing, I suppose we must have.

Who else was on the ship going over?

There were some Lutheran priests going over,

- 11:30 and I don't know whether Gloria told you, but there was one of the priests, oh he was so handsome. She was going for him, I don't know if she got anywhere. He really was handsome, gee yes, he was. But they were being nice; they were going over to New Guinea. Then there was this Red Cross chappie, and I think that's all there were, there weren't any other passengers.

- 12:00 **Do you know what this ship had been used for during the war?**

No, I don't, but apparently it had been used for something, because the crew had been frightened of the lights.

- 12:30 **What were your first impressions of New Guinea?**

Well, I didn't have much chance to take in the scenery, because the ship was met by the AWAS officer in charge of the AWAS barracks, and she had come to meet we three girls. But David, being the officer in charge,

- 13:00 he had a blazing row with her, he said, "No, the girls are coming with us," and she said, "No, they're not. The AWAS are under my command, they come to me," and they argued back and forth. He went mad at me afterwards, he said, "Why didn't you stick up for me? Why didn't you take my part and say you had to go?" I said, "I couldn't do that, I'm an AWAS, I had to go with her." No, he wouldn't have it, oh no, he was

- 13:30 very offended to think that I didn't take his side, but how could I? He was ridiculous. How could we have been with the boys, there was no accommodation where they were going.

So, whereabouts did you go?

We went to the AWAS barracks in Lae,

- 14:00 where I don't know what the other AWAS were doing. We were living there, and I know some of them

were

- 14:30 working there, they must have been doing clerical work and working in the canteen. There were quite a lot of them there. I don't think I even knew then what they were doing. We were called for early in the morning and taken away all day long, so we were only there for breakfast, and the
- 15:00 evening meal. Even then, I suppose we were there for the evening meal, where else would we have eaten? We would have had to go; we were out just about every night doing shows. And weekends, we were allowed visitors, so I blotted my copy book there as well, because
- 15:30 my husband was a chess player, he taught me how to play chess, but we used to argue a lot – oh, we had fights. But this particular night, we were playing chess in the recreation hall where we were entertaining our visitors, and I must have got mad about something
- 16:00 and in the end I just went (motions across the table). Well, that's a terrible thing to do if you're playing a chess game, to wipe the board. He was absolutely struck dumb. I was informed in no uncertain terms that I couldn't do that, and I don't think I played a game of chess afterwards.
- 16:30 What else did we do there? Well, we rehearsed in the daytime, and did our wardrobe and the boys erected the stage, where did we get dressed?
- 17:00 We must have had a couple of rooms on the stage.

Where would you perform? Where would you go?

In New Guinea? Oh, we went to First Australian Army Headquarters in Lae, we went to the hospital in Lae, we went to a place called

- 17:30 Yalu, and we went up to Nadzab. When we got to Nadzab, we were told that there would be some natives coming to the performance, and we'd have to, we were doing Friends without Tears, and I was
- 18:00 introduced as Professor Mango's number one Piccaninny, Jacqueline. We had to cut out, Ron Paton and I had practiced and worked out the most wonderful stage, where we were going to a fancy dress ball,
- 18:30 something falls on the floor, and we both get down, and we find each other with eye contact and we kiss. We practiced, Ronny kept saying, "We have to practice this, we have to practice this." And we had to cut that out, because you can't have any physical contact. I had to change some of my lines.
- 19:00 I think it must have spoilt the whole performance. I don't know how it came about that Dave and I were alone in this jeep, it used to be an air force base, quite a long way up from Lae.
- 19:30 Just the two of us were in the jeep, he must have wangled it somehow. We got lost, it had a big high wire fence all the way around, and we got into this place, and we drove around and around, and we couldn't find our way out. We got down to a real graveyard of American planes, you see them in the movies today with
- 20:00 the number and the crosses of how many planes they've shot down. There were these with painted girls on the side of the fuselage. It was very interesting, but it was spooky to see all these planes. You think, "Well, what happened
- 20:30 to the pilots?" There were great holes in them you could see, where the bombs had gone in. The machine guns had blown holes in them, and you'd think, "What happened to the chaps that were in there?" The cemetery over there was just crosses and crosses everywhere.
- 21:00 I wanted to get out, which I did, and have a look in the planes. I think I got a little bit of Perspex or something as a souvenir. It was a grim experience. So then we went round and round and eventually we managed to find our way out.
- 21:30 We must have just been going for a drive, because on the way up we had to be towed across one of the rivers where it flooded.
- 22:00 There were cars and jeeps overturned in the river, and we didn't know whether we were able to get through. A bulldozer came along, and hauled us over; the water came up through the floor of the jeep – that was exciting. Going back, we came to the river, David got out and started to wade into it.
- 22:30 I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm seeing how deep it is." He's up to here, getting wet. Anyway, we managed to drive across the river, he reckoned it was safe enough to drive back. The trucks were coming along behind. Then we got a bit further on, and there was this huge tree, a great trunk
- 23:00 across the road. So we pulled up, David got out, and said, "They've sent for somebody to saw through it, because it is far too big for somebody to move." We said, "Well, how long is it going to be?" and he said he didn't know how long it was going to be,
- 23:30 but they've sent for it. Gloria and I were standing off to the side. David had wandered over, he said he thought there was some way of getting over it, and he wandered back over to the tree to think about it.

Gloria and I were just standing and all of the sudden, we both were conscious

24:00 somebody was waiting behind us. We turned around, two great big American Negroes standing behind us. Of course, we had been warned about the American Negroes, to keep well out of their way, because they were supposed to be worse than the American whites. At the same time, David turned around and saw us, and he

24:30 comes back over like this, with his hand on his pistol, revolver. I thought, "Oh, what's he going to do? Is he going to make a fuss?" Anyhow, he just came over and said we'd better move over here. He'd put a couple of branches up against the big trunk,

25:00 the same width as the wheels on the jeep. He gets in the jeep, and he revs that up, I've never seen a jeep fly before. It went up over there, over the trunk and over the other side. So, we girls got back that night, but the boys didn't get back till the next morning, because they didn't come to cut the tree.

25:30 So that was a very exciting performance up there at Nadzab. On Sundays we used to go for picnics, we had to catch a little ferry across to an island, Labu. There had been a camp there at one stage, but they weren't there anymore. That was lovely, we used to have some swims.

26:00 **The camp at Nadzab, who was based there at that time?**

I don't know, you might find it in the diary, because that was a diary that Johnny Storr wrote, and

26:30 he typed a lot of the pages, and I typed a lot of the pages, and when we came back he made it into a magazine and we all got a copy. Mine got burnt when my unit was burned, but I've got David's. His is singed and burnt a bit, but not too bad. That's probably in there.

27:00 I don't think that was air force that was there.

Was it American or Australian?

Australian, but the planes were all American planes, I think, pretty certain.

What was the atmosphere like at these shows? These men were obviously waiting to come back.

27:30 With the exception of one particular camp, it was jolly good. There was one air force camp we went to in Lae that was shocking, they were drunk, it had been their payday, and they were very, very receptive.

28:00 Calling out all sorts of things. Anyhow, we called it off. I didn't, but Johnny Storr conferred with a couple of others, David was there. It was New Guinea. They must have decided that it was just impossible to keep going.

28:30 That was the only camp that we found. When we got there, there was a tent for the girls to get dressed, and hurricane lamps in the tent. Vera and I were getting undressed, we had to take all our uniform off and put on special bras and

29:00 all that. All of a sudden, we could hear all the whistling and cat calling outside, we weren't taking any notice, we didn't think it was us. We thought, oh the boys must have been putting on some sort of a show beforehand, and all of a sudden, one of our boys raced in with a blanket and put it up over the side of the tent, he said, "You're putting on a shadow play here!"

29:30 They had all been watching us getting undressed and dressed. I'm not sure whether that was the camp or not. Probably was, but that was all in good spirit, but I suppose they felt that if we could put on a show like that, they could yell out and call out all sorts of things to us.

30:00 That was the only camp that we weren't received with respect.

What do you think it was like for the soldiers to see women at this stage?

Speaking for myself, I didn't find, apart from that camp, they were just

30:30 normal, I mean, when you'd meet them afterwards to talk they were eager to talk to you, but there was nothing, it was all good fun, it was never nasty or anything. When we were over in Rabaul, one time

31:00 after the show, one of the boys came and said, "Somebody wants to see you from the audience." I said, "Oh, I can't", because I'd had a tooth out that day, and in fact there were two dentists trying to pull the tooth out, and they got it out eventually. I was a mess,

31:30 my face was out like this. I'd got through the show and I said, "Oh, I'm not going to see anybody, tell him to come back tomorrow night." So, they went and relayed the message, and the next night he waited, and I went out and I said, "I'm awfully sorry I couldn't come last night," and he looked at me and he said, "Why, no, I wasn't here last night." I've never known who it was who came that first night. The second young

32:00 chap that came, he was from Hornsby. I didn't know him, and he didn't know me, but apparently he just

came to have a little chat, you know, at the stage door.

Was that quite common for people to come and want to talk to you after the show?

No. I don't think anybody else ever did, or if any of the others ever got anybody.

32:30 I was always so curious to know who that first one was, it might have been somebody really exciting.

When you were based in Lae, could you explain where you used to rehearse?

Yes, the boys would come and pick us up and take us to where they were

33:00 erecting the stage, because of course we'd have to do the ironing. Once it was up, then we'd rehearse on the stage. When we went to the hospital, there was a stage already there, but we were washed out that night. We were doing the show and the rain came,

33:30 and we kept going as long as there were people sitting out there in the rain. The rain was beating in, and all out carpet and our curtains and everything were all getting sopping wet, so we had to call it off. I think we went back and did another show, we were supposed to, I think we might have.

34:00 Mostly we just did it where they were erecting the stage.

How many times a week would you be performing?

About every night.

And how long did you stay at Lae for?

Well, we were over there for nine months. I think we were longer in Lae, then we flew over to Rabaul.

34:30 We girls flew, but the boys came later on the ship. But there wasn't any accommodation for females on the ship. And they came over with one of the Japanese, a very top notch Japanese chappie that was being taken back to be hanged.

35:00 A war criminal, I can't think of his name now. He was a Colonel or a Brigadier or something in the Japanese army.

Could you explain what Rabaul was like and where you were based there?

We were based at the hospital again, quite a fair way. There was a stage built over there by the prisoners

35:30 for the musical comedy group that had gone there first, so we came on afterwards, and we had use of the theatre; there were dressing rooms and everything there.

Just wanted to clarify, the stage was built by prisoners, were they Japanese prisoners?

Yes, and

36:00 they were all Japanese. In Lae, I think they were Formosan, because we were sleeping in these big long huts in Lae, and these prisoners used to work around as gardeners. It would be nothing to look around and see somebody looking in; all the sides of the huts were louvres.

36:30 The Japanese were looking up underneath, or the Formosans. I don't know the difference really, between why they were Formosan, where was that? They were Japanese anyway.

What was your impression of Rabaul?

37:00 Well that was rather lovely when we flew right over the top of one of the volcanoes. The pilot took us right over so we could look right down into the crater. Then, flying over the harbour, there was a little island, it was called the Beehives, and the couple of volcanoes, a little bit of smoke coming out of them.

37:30 It was a lovely harbour. Then we got to the airport, somebody must have met us at the airport. I think this time it was our own boys met us.

38:00 I can't remember who met us at Rabaul. Anyhow, we ended up at the hospital, where the nurses and the AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] and the other patients and everything were there. And we had to be picked up every morning and taken to the theatre, at Tillyilly Bay. That was the bay where the theatre was built.

38:30 Same thing, rehearsal, ironing in all that heat, the ironing. We put up with ironing and the perspiration would be pouring off you. Getting our hair done, Mary would be doing that.

39:00 While we were there, there was a warning that one of the volcanoes, Vulcan, was going to blow. You could smell the sulphur, and all the ash. We weren't anywhere near the township,

39:30 I can't remember why we were in the town, but I remember driving through the town, being driven, I

should say, at the time when the scare was on, and we'd see all this stuff. We were all wondering whether the volcano was going to erupt or not, and it didn't, it just got very noisy and smelly. We used to go for a swim

- 40:00 a little bit further around, I don't know the name of the bay in Rabaul. I saw a swordfish there one day with a thing on its nose, sticking up out of the water, where we'd been swimming a few minutes before. I thought, "Heavens above!" I never thought about the dangers.
- 40:30 One night during the show, we were doing Friends without Tears, and at this time Colin Croft had taken over the part, because Ronny Paton had gone back here with the bad knees. I'm sitting there, and I'm supposed to be teaching Colin French, cause I'm supposed to be French.
- 41:00 All of a sudden, on my back, and I had a very thin blouse on, was claws. I kept on going, and I didn't know. I don't know whether it was a big beetle, and Colin managed to get it off for me. Gee I got a fright.
- 41:30 There'd be big moths flying around you, and I'd think, "Stay away."

How was the stage lit?

Well, we had lights along the top and footlights. I don't know what we had behind, but they were pretty bright.

Tape 7

- 00:32 **We were talking about the shows you did at Rabaul. How were the audiences different in Rabaul to what they were in Lae?**

Well, I suppose because we had the theatre built, there seemed to be more connection.

- 01:00 Whether we were friendlier, or whether they were a friendlier crowd, it did seem to be a happier atmosphere, even though it was a longer time that they'd been there after the war. I think, probably, the troops that had been there, apart from wanting to be home with their family, it was a lovely place to be.

- 01:30 Swimming and everything else. I guess they were pretty happy.

What was the activity of the troops, what were they doing?

I don't know! We didn't ask them, didn't even think of it, as long as they came to the show at night.

You mentioned you were swimming. What were the beaches like, the water and the sand?

The water was glorious, and the sand was a bit like Sydney.

- 02:00 There wasn't the surf that you get here, certainly not at the beaches that I went to, just very, very gentle waves. So I don't know what would happen in a storm or anything. It just flashed

- 02:30 into my mind, when you asked me what the troops do. I do remember one night, these two chappies, they were very early for the show, and it started to rain, and so we invited them up backstage, they were very early. They came, and they'd got a ride

- 03:00 on a truck, and it was covered over with black plastic, and they were sitting in it. So I asked the driver what was under the tarpaulin, and the driver told them a bunch of bananas. When they got out, the driver said, "Do you really want to know what you've been sitting on?" And they said, "Yes."

- 03:30 "A couple of corpses we're taking to bury them." They believed it, so I suppose it was true. I think they were Japanese bodies they were taking. I don't know how they ever got back to their unit, I think a lot of their troops moved around, petrol was scarce, very scarce.

- 04:00 They had to be very careful, the ones with transport. And the ones that did have transport came in hundreds to the shows, so they managed to get there somehow.

How did you travel around?

In a jeep. A second jeep, because the first jeep,

- 04:30 my husband to be lost it in Lae, and he had the revolver in the glove box, and of course, that is a criminal offence. He could have been on charge, he could have been jailed for it, but nobody ever heard what happened to that jeep, he just lost it. I suppose it was stolen, but nobody ever found it,

- 05:00 and he wasn't ever in the clink, so I don't know what tale he pitched, but it must have been a good one. He was a very good pitcher of tales.

At that stage, did you keep your relationship a secret?

They all knew in the unit, and I think eventually they must have been told back.

05:30 He came to Rabaul, but he was recalled, because Johnny Storr was promoted to Lieutenant, and David was a Lieutenant at that stage. So, there couldn't be two Lieutenants, and seeing that Johnny was the performer, David was recalled to Sydney, and I think it probably had something...

06:00 Whether they knew back at headquarters, I don't know. All the unit knew. I can remember Peter Finch saying to me before we went away, "Don't marry him, don't marry him. Stick to acting." But of course

06:30 I couldn't be told. Some of them went on and went overseas. Gloria went with a group of people, but then of course, she was a singer.

At that stage, did you want to go on and continue a career in entertaining?

07:00 Oh no, I wanted to get married, couldn't get there fast enough. Silly.

What was so appealing about marriage?

I don't know, I think it was like the next step.

07:30 It didn't enter my head that I was good enough to make it a profession. It was all right for Peter to say that, but I didn't have much self-confidence.

08:00 I just thought it would be wonderful to be married. The girls today have got so much over us, you can go on and have a profession, and make something of your life. But I was getting on,

08:30 I was twenty-five when I was married, twenty-six.

While you were in Rabaul, where would you eat?

At the hospital, breakfast was at the hospital.

09:00 I don't remember. I don't know whether we were taken back for lunch.

Given it was the tropics, what can you remember about the sort of food you ate?

The only food I remember was in Lae,

09:30 when they served us up Farax for breakfast - you know, the baby food. They'd run out of porridge, and they'd run out of everything else, plenty of baked beans. But Farax, I don't think anybody ate it, it all went out in the bin. I didn't mind the food; I suppose I grizzled at the time,

10:00 but I suppose it wasn't too bad. The only thing was the eggs, dried egg powder, I wasn't so fond of that. Scrambled egg made of egg powder wasn't the best, but we ate it. And the tea, somebody said, "You know why it tastes funny, it's because it's got quinine [probably means bromide] in it.

10:30 You've got to keep your sexual desires down somehow." I don't know whether that was true. When paw-paws were just hanging on the trees everywhere, I didn't like the smell of paw-paws then, now I love it. I like to eat them. There were coconuts.

11:00 **What that the only time you saw any of the local population, at that show they came to that was censored?**

We used to see them walking along the road, and what used to intrigue me was that one breast would be reasonable, and the other breast would be down here on the women,

11:30 and of course I had to be told why, that the hanging down one was for the piglets. I believe that's true, the women used to feed the piglets as well as their babies. It was so stretched that you could have slung it over your shoulders; it was dreadful.

12:00 **In Rabaul, because Rabaul had been the base for the Japanese for the war in the Pacific, or one of them, what did you see of what they had left behind?**

Well, one day David said to me, "I'm going up to find some of the tunnels, do you want to come?" So I said, "Yes." Women were not allowed, in fact nobody was allowed through a certain

12:30 area, but we got to this area where there were two army guards on, and David pitched some sort of a yarn while I was there, and I had to go too. He had to go through, and therefore I had to go through, because I was responsible, and I had to take the notes, and all this sort of thing. So they let us through, and we went and we found a Japanese tunnel, and we went in and

13:00 the equipment that was there. All the transmitters and receivers beautifully boxed. I decided I'd souvenir one, and I think I got a transmitter. I took it back to the camp,

- 13:30 and had it in the room. I didn't come back to Australia with it, because the Sergeant that was in charge of packing all the goods for us to come back said to me, "You needn't think you're bringing that back," and I said, "Yes I am," "No, you're not," "Yes, I am," you know. He said, "It's no good to you," and I said, "It's a souvenir, I want it." He said,
- 14:00 "I'm not taking it, because I'm not going to be held up by customs just because of you and a stupid Japanese transmitter." So I went back to camp and I threw it out into the garbage bin just outside where my room was, it was a long building with all these little rooms
- 14:30 off it, and up on stumps. I was on the end one and I put it in the bin outside. A little while later I heard this jabber, jabber, jabber, and I looked out, and there were three Japanese, and they had it. They were so excited at finding it, and they went off somewhere carrying it between them. I suppose they could probably transmit a message through back to Japan, I don't know.
- 15:00 Apart from that, when we used to go over to Labu at the beach when we went on picnics from Lae, there was a camp that had been, I think it was an Australian camp that had left a lot of equipment. Apart from that and the tunnel and all that wonderful electrical equipment, I didn't see
- 15:30 anything else. But of course, the prisoners were still there. David got a camera from the Japanese for so many tins of tobacco, and they'd give you things for cigarettes and tobacco at the drop of a hat. He got a sword, a proper sword, one that the handle undid.
- 16:00 There was nothing in it, we were looking for jewels in it, but there wasn't anything in it. He was recalled, so I used to get taken up to the radio station, and we used to radiotelephone calls to each other.

What was it like saying farewell to him?

It was awful, at the time it was terrible.

- 16:30 But it wasn't as bad as saying goodbye to him in Lae, because we were flying, and I got in the plane and I cried. I cried all the way to Rabaul from Lae. When I went up to the radiotelephone in Rabaul, the chappie that was working there said to me, "You were airsick, weren't you? Coming over in the plane." And I said, "No, I wasn't airsick,"
- 17:00 "Oh, you were, you were so upset, you were crying, and I felt so sorry for you. I thought you must feel terribly sick." I said, "No, I was only crying because I left my fiancé behind." "Oh" he said.

Was that the first time you'd been in a plane?

Yes, and I swore black and blue they'd never get me in another one. It was a real big old bomber that had had all the seats stripped out.

- 17:30 It just had a metal seat all the way around, and you're sitting there so uncomfortable, and we had to put lifejackets on because we were flying over water, in case we crashed. Yes, I didn't enjoy my first flight.

How big an adventure was it for you?

It was wonderful, it really was. But at the time

- 18:00 I just took it all as it came, and only later on I realised how wonderful it was.

Were there many other army servicewomen up there at the time?

Yes, there were quite a few, because in Rabaul there were all the nurses, the AAMWS, because it was a hospital. But in Lae, I don't know how many,

- 18:30 but there must have been almost a hundred I suppose, or more. I don't know, but there were a lot.

What sort of camaraderie or rivalry was there between the various servicewomen from each department?

- 19:00 You mean like air force, army, navy? Well I didn't really come into contact with them, but they were all army girls. They were jealous because we had long hair, and when we first arrived they said, "Oh, look at the pink and white complexion." Of course, they were all yellow from taking Atebrin.
- 19:30 They were jealous because we were picked up each morning and taken out of the camp, and we didn't seem to have to abide by the rules of the camp that they had to, because we'd just more or less in and out, we didn't have to get permission or anything else.
- 20:00 We were just there to sleep and eat.

You mentioned that there was this security area. Can you give me an idea of how large that area was that you technically weren't supposed to leave?

In Rabaul? I suppose, David was driving the jeep, and we were up in the hills,

- 20:30 but we were outside the perimeter. I suppose it was rather dangerous. Somebody told us that the tunnel

was dynamited the very next day, but I don't know whether they were just saying that to frighten me. I believed it at the time, and I thought how fortunate we were.

21:00 Because nobody knew we were there, except for the fact that the jeep was parked outside.

When you say dangerous, what did you perceive the dangers to be?

Well, there was so much ammunition still around the place, and the tunnels and the holes. I suppose it was considered too dangerous to go into that area.

21:30 **Were you ever warned about Japanese that might still be...?**

No, never thought about it. We weren't supposed to be anywhere near them, so we were never warned about it.

You mentioned briefly the African-Americans you met on the road.

22:00 **What impression did you have of the Americans as a whole up there, what did you see of them?**

Well, we didn't come into contact with them, and those two Negroes they were nice, they were so amused at our reaction, because they were so big. They would have been quite nice chaps.

22:30 I always felt a bit guilty to think that we showed that we were scared of them, there was no need to be.

Do you remember what you were told, and who told you?

About the Americans? I don't think we were officially told about Americans, we were just told men.

23:00 Men. No nationality mentioned, just men.

At what point did you become engaged?

In Lae. Got my ring.

Can you tell me how that happened, how you were proposed to?

23:30 Well I was proposed to in Sydney before we left, at Romano's one night when we were there. It wasn't very romantic, I think it just came up in conversation, and he said, "How'd you like to get married?" Or something like that, you know.

24:00 So I said, "Oh, you'd better ring my Mum and Dad." So we went and rang up, and what could they say? So that was that.

Did you correspond with your parents while you were up in...?

Oh, yes. They used to write every Thursday night, so I was supposed to write every week, and I tried, and to a certain degree I did.

24:30 There were suitcases full of my letters. I was always going to make a history from them, and never got around to it. When I was leaving for the last time, I had all this stuff and I burned it all. And I burned all the letters that David wrote. He used to write me a letter every night when we were over there, and hand it to me the next morning, and I had to write him one.

25:00 There were all these letters, and I burned them all.

Was he ever jealous of the contact you had with the other actors or other servicemen?

He was very jealous when Ronny Paton and I used to do our rehearsing, you know, of the kiss. He used to think it was quite unnecessary. "No, that's a very special moment in the play, we have to".

25:30 If during the kiss with the American on stage, that used to go on for quite some time, he used to say, "I think that went on a bit too long."

Mrs McKenzie, was there any other changes to the scripts or the performance, apart from the love scenes?

No.

26:00 Just that there was one scene between Gloria and I mostly, but there was one night when her understudy did, and some of the dialogue was cut because it was between the two females and it was amazing how boring it gets with just two women on stage. I was quite glad of that.

26:30 That was the one part of the whole play that I relied on Gloria to know the dialogue, so I was a bit lazy. When it came to being that I was playing with somebody else, I thought, "Oh, I'm never going to remember it," so I was quite glad about that.

So did you know that you were coming home, was there a certain date?

- 27:00 Oh yes, we knew for some time that we'd be coming. We came back on the Westralia, and after the beautiful trip on the way up, coming back, we were right down in the bowels of the ship. Women everywhere,
- 27:30 sleeping all over the place, you could hardly move for bodies. It was a terrible trip back and, of course, I was supposed to be married on the eighteenth of May, and we were supposed to come to Sydney. We were on the way and we were told that we'd been rerouted to Brisbane,
- 28:00 and I was stuck up in Brisbane. I didn't see anything in Brisbane, because I was haunting the orderly room, "I've got to get back to Sydney! I've got to get back to Sydney!" "Go away," they'd say, "We'll get you back when we can." Anyway, eventually, a troop train from Brisbane got back to Sydney,
- 28:30 it must have been Thursday night. Mum and my sister came up to Hornsby station as the train came through, and we said hello. I had to go into, no, it was a Friday, because I had to go into Victoria Barracks to be discharged, and I flew from one section to another, "Sign this, sign this,"
- 29:00 "You've gotta go and see the dentist," "No, I don't want to see the dentist," "You've got to go and have your medical," "No, I don't want to have my medical." They just let me get away with it, they shouldn't have, but they did. They said, "You're not going to get through by five o'clock," I said, "If I'm not done by five o'clock, I'm going AWL [Absent Without Leave], because I'm not coming back, I'm getting married tomorrow." So they hustled through and I got out and got married the next morning.
- 29:30 **Given that it was not long after the war, and rationing was still in place, what sort of a wedding did you have?**
- Oh, I had a proper wedding. My sister had borrowed the dress from a girl in the next street, she'd hired a veil, and my sister had made the cake, and my sister-in-law was having the reception at her house in Mosman and they'd
- 30:00 arranged for the minister at Mosman Presbyterian Church. They had to borrow some coupons for something or other, I suppose it might have been for food, must have been, because, you know, food was rationed and everything.
- 30:30 I was right, I didn't have much headache at all, I just got back on the Friday and got married on the Saturday. Mary came up and did my hair, and Gloria sang at the wedding, and I had a honeymoon. We were married, and spent the first night in the city. The hotel has been pulled down; it was up near York Street.
- 31:00 That's gone. Then we went by train up to Ulladulla, no Ulladulla's down south. Up north.
- 31:30 We stayed a week there and then I went somewhere else for another week. I can't remember the name of the place! For someone who was cracking their neck to be married, you'd think I'd remember, and I do remember, it's just that I'm tired.
- After being a working woman for so many years, what was it like adapting to married life?**
- 32:00 Well, it wasn't as exciting as I expected, because I fell pregnant straightaway. Living at my mother-in-law, and then various places. We had a flat. My eldest son was born on
- 32:30 Labour Day in Victoria, a Monday holiday, because my mother-in-law used to work, because her husband had died, or he was very ill. I went into her, because David had been to a party the night before, and I couldn't wake him up. I went into her and I said, "I'm coming into labour," and she said, "Oh, no."
- 33:00 The first opportunity I've had to sleep in," because her husband was a Presbyterian minister. Sunday was a very busy day for her. Monday, she was looking forward to having a good sleep in, and I had to come into labour. So, I was very miserable, I was in Victoria, and I couldn't wake my husband up, because he'd had a late night, and she didn't want to know me, so I just
- 33:30 went back to bed, and started trying to wake him up. Eventually I succeeded, and he said, "Oh, no, not at this hour." It was seven o'clock before I could make him realise, and I had a terrible labour. It went on and on and on, it was eight o'clock at night before Tony was born, he was ten pounds five.
- 34:00 We were at St Kilda. I lost another baby after that, and then I was pregnant again, and it was a little girl. She was three months old when we got a war service home, and we went up to Kilsyth in Victoria, which was
- 34:30 about twenty miles out of Melbourne. That's where my family grew up. I had three foster children, I didn't want any more of my own, but I wanted more kids. I used to go and be a helper on a little twelve-seater
- 35:00 bus for the intellectually handicapped, children and adults. One of the drivers said to me one day, "How would you be, I want to give up driving. How would you be taking over driving?" And I said, "Oh, I wouldn't know where to go," and she said, "Well, you've been a helper on the bus, with the kids, putting

their belts on and looking after them on the trips”.

35:30 I said, “Yes, but I don’t know where to go.” Anyway, she wrote out all the places, and I had the bus home for a weekend and practiced, and it was so funny driving, sitting right at the front without a bonnet in front. So I drove the bus there, picked them up and dropped them back in the afternoon. I really thoroughly did enjoy doing that, but it was a bit of a strain with the family as well,

36:00 but that was good.

How do you think your experience in the army changed you?

I don’t think it changed me very much at all. I think marriage changed me into a screaming shrew. I don’t think the army changed me, except that I could no longer wear high heels

36:30 after, you know, being in flat heels for so long, three years. I just found I couldn’t get into high heels again, so that’s about the only change. I’m shallow, you see.

How do you think Australia changed because of the war?

37:00 Didn’t I say I didn’t notice any change? Except that it was easier to get around, and there weren’t any restrictions on places. Well of course, straight after I was married I went down to Victoria

37:30 to live, so it’s not as if I had come back to Sydney where I was used to. Melbourne was a different chapter for me.

What’s important about living in a community now with other veterans? Why do you live in a community with other veterans?

Well, I was over here on my own, and

38:00 my sister died and my brother died and I was all alone. I had children, but they were living a fair way. I decided I’d put myself into somewhere, so I wouldn’t get old and dodderly and the kids might not be able to get me in anywhere. I might not even have my own toilet and shower, which I think that’s so important.

38:30 So I thought, “I’m entitled to come here,” so I did. Actually, I’d gone back to work in an office when I was fifty-six, and at first when I first came here I was working still, and then I was told I could work for three months, but after that I couldn’t work full-time because I was supposed to be in a retirement village.

39:00 Part-time didn’t suit, because by that stage I was the secretary to the manager, and he said, “You know, I need you every day,” so I said, “I understand that,” so I had to leave. While I was working there, my daughter and son-in-law and their two little boys were over in England, and they went over with a Melbourne Outreach [Program].

39:30 And they got over there, expecting that this whole unit was going to be built for them, but they misunderstood, and they got there before it was even started, so they had to be billeted out. The two little boys were very aggro [aggressive], and didn’t get on with all the dear little sweet girlies, so they were ostracised a bit, and Suzie was very possessive of her husband.

40:00 They didn’t like that, they reckoned she was holding him back in the movement. They had a lot of trouble, they were living in a caravan, and they were living somewhere else. I realised there was something wrong, and I’d had a passage booked on a ship to go, and I cancelled that and flew over, and

40:30 they said, “We’re living in a bus,” and I said, “What do you mean, you’re living in a bus?” “Oh, we’ve got a bus, and it’s parked in a poultry farm.” “What do you mean, in a poultry farm?” “Well”; she said, “This man took pity on us

41:00 and let us park our bus in the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [poultry] yard,” with WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s all around. It was all stripped of everything, and they had a little alcove for me, that was rather embarrassing because they had rigged up a toilet in the front, only for the little boys to use – one was six and one was five – if they were caught. Other than that, we had prune tins underneath our beds and we used that.

INTERVIEW ENDS