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Full transcript of an interview with

MARIE BOYLE

On 26 September 2007

by Dr Susan Mann

for the

VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Recording available on CD

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Okay, thank you very much, Marie.

My pleasure.

Now, as I said, I’ll just ask you a few demographic questions to get started.

Okay, then.

Okay, so can you give me your full name?

Marie Constance Boyle.

And where were you born, Marie?

I was born in Peterborough in South Australia.

And when? What was the year?

Ninth May 1933.

Okay, thank you. And what was your father’s name?

My father’s name was Paddy Sullivan, always known as Paddy, he was Patrick John, and he was the chief clerk in the railways at Peterborough until he came to Adelaide, eventually.

All right. And when was he born, do you remember?

He was born in the year 1900.

Okay. Well that’s good, thank you. And what about your mother, what was her name?

She was Moya Bennett

Moira?
Moya. M-O-Y-A, Moya Bennett. And she was born in Quorn and her father was a printer, and that’s how they came to go to Peterborough, and my father was sent there by the railways, and that’s how they met.

And can you remember when she was born?

Pardon?

Can you remember when your mother was born?

Yes, 1902.

Okay. And what was her main role in the household? Did she go to work or did she — — —?

Well, during the [Second World] War she worked at the printing office but she was also heavily involved in Red Cross and Country Women’s Association, and it was actually our association with Red Cross as children that is why my sister and I got so involved.

Well, that’s very interesting. So she was quite an influence on your life.

Yes, she was.

And you lived in Peterborough, your family?

Yes, lived in Peterborough until I was twenty-one.

And where did you go then?

I came to Adelaide.

All right. You had one sister, is that right?

Yes, and she’s five years older than me.

And she’s still living?

Yes, she is, she still has an association with Calvary Hospital where she did her training. She’s been associated with Calvary for about sixty years.

Excellent. Another story to be told, isn’t it? (laughter) And do you recall your grandparents at all?

Yes. I remember my grandmother was one of these people who used to pull the tangles out of your hair. (laughter) I don’t remember anything very pleasant about
her. Also she had very bad arthritis and we used to poke fun at her legs, which was not very nice. (laughter)

No.

But my grandfather died when I was quite young, would have been when I was about six, I think. He had a terrible stroke and died.

Oh, that’s sad. And these were your mother’s parents?

Yes.

Okay. And what about your father’s parents?

My paternal grandmother was a lovely little lady and we spent – she was at Mount Gambier – we spent a lot of time with her, but Grandfather Sullivan died the year I was born, so I didn’t ever know him.

Okay. Well, thank you. Well, that’s just those demographic questions that I was talking to you about. So I’ll just move onto the more specific questions about your experience as a Red Cross Field Force officer – that’s the correct title, is it?

Yes, it is.

And so can you just tell me a little bit about how you came to be involved with Red Cross?

Well, I came to be involved because of my mother. During the War the Peterborough Red Cross ladies used to feed the soldiers on the troop trains going north.

And this was the First World War?

No, Second World War.

The Second World War.

Second World War, and I was six when the War broke out and Terry and I used to go with Mum to do this.

And Terry’s your sister?

Terry’s my sister, and she was actually in the junior VAD\(^1\) at that stage. I was very envious because she was allowed to have a uniform and I wasn’t. (laughter)

\(^1\) VAD – Voluntary Aid Detachment.
I didn’t ever think that I would spend so many years, later in my life, in a Red Cross uniform.

Yes, amazing.

And then when I came to Adelaide I went to the Blood Transfusion Service, which was just opened in the old building on Pirie Street, as a telephonist. I stayed there for quite a while and then I worked in an accounting office, and then somebody said to me that they were looking for people to go overseas so I applied for the Field Force and I was interviewed here and then sent to Melbourne to national headquarters. Then I was selected and went quite quickly – I was gone in about two or three months.

Really? So what year was that?

Nineteen sixty-five I was selected, ’66 I went early.

And your first – when you say you’re sent, your first place you went to was Vietnam?

No; the first place I went to was Butterworth –

Oh, yes?

– and I was there for seventeen months because all the medical evacuees coming out of Vietnam were staged through Butterworth on their way home so that they would come as far as Butterworth and those who could go straight – well, they didn’t go straight on, they were there for a couple of days. Those who were very badly injured, they were sometimes kept there for weeks. There was a lot of mine casualties during the time that I was in Butterworth and some of those boys had lost limbs, some of them their two legs and things. They used to stabilise them a bit more at Butterworth before they sent them on because in those days they were travelling in the old Hercules, which was a bit noisy and not really comfortable. Later, while I was still at Butterworth, they got the new Hercs which were more specifically designed for casualties.

Right. And how were they more specifically designed?

Well, one of the things that they had were they had toilets, which they didn’t have on the first ones, the girls used to – I mean, they had male facilities but they didn’t have any female facilities – (laughs) and the nurses used to dry themselves out so that they
wouldn’t have to go to the toilet between Butterworth and I think it was Cocos Islands they used to stop, and then Darwin and then Richmond.

**Incredible, really, isn’t it?**

It is, yes.

**So tell me a little bit more about what your role was in Butterworth.**

Well, Butterworth was a quite different role to Vietnam in the way that we had families there, it was an accompanied posting for the Air Force, and we had British Army – in the hospital we had British Army, British Air Force, Australian Air Force, we didn’t have any Australian Army people – so that we sort of did a bit of family work as well. And with the mothers, a lot of the mothers had babies up there because they had amahs and things to look after them –

**Oh, I see.**

– so that we used to also visit them. But we were really, most of our work was directed at the Vietnam casualties, even though they only came probably every other week, sometimes they’d come every week, they were there for just a few days. We used to do all their shopping, buy their gifts and things to take home, and talk, you know, spend a lot of time with them. And we had a British Red Cross girl attached to the hospital as well and she used to come with me – she had a car, so we had the two cars between us – and we used to take them to Penang Island, sightseeing, and I think I probably went to the Temple of the Reclining Buddha (laughter) once a fortnight for seventeen months.

**Goodness me.**

Yes. In fact we – the British lass and I – were so well-known by the monks that when they opened their new pagoda we were official guests and were asked to come in our uniforms. (laughter)

**Oh, that’s wonderful. So obviously it was something that was very important and offered some sort of comfort to you.**

Oh, it did. And the ones who stayed a long time, we used to try and get them out as much as we could, even if it was only somewhere on the base, out of the hospital, but of course a lot of the amputees couldn’t.
One of the more difficult things I found, and I believe some of the other girls did too, was when the boys were going home, particularly the amputees and those who’d lost eyes and things, we had to reassure them that when they got home that they’d still be loved by their family. They’d say, ‘My mother won’t want me minus legs and arms and things’, or ‘my wife’, and it was – – –. In the beginning I found that very hard but I guess I got a bit tougher after that, (laughter) I was coping quite well by the time I went to Vietnam.

Yes. So I want to come back – so you’ve been involved with Red Cross virtually all your life, really, haven’t you?

Yes. Well, I’ve actually got a fifty-year long service medal.

Incredible, yes. And I know that you also had awards for your recognition of service and one of those was because of your work in Butterworth, is that correct?

Yes, it was. I was nominated for the MBE\(^2\) by the CO\(^3\) of the hospital because he actually didn’t want me to go to Vietnam and I only stayed in Butterworth so long because he was pleased with the way I was working and he asked, and eventually Red Cross said, ‘No, she has to go now.’ (laughs)

Yes. And so can you tell me a little bit about what the CO – what was it that you had done that he recommended – – –?

Well, one of the things that I had to do was with the shopping with the patients – I only discovered a couple of weeks ago that this didn’t happen with later girls – but when I was there we weren’t allowed to take the shopping across, because it was customs between Penang and Butterworth, we weren’t allowed to take all the shopping across until it went straight on the plane. So I used to go back to Butterworth with the patients and settle them in and sort out the change and all that sort of thing and I used to leave all the shopping in a British Army hostel, and then I would go back there and sleep the night. And then I’d have to be up very early and be on the first ferry, which was about five o’clock, half past five, and I used to have to pick up the customs agent, go into the shed with all the big trucks and things and pick up the customs agent, and then he would go with me to the base and see the stuff

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\(^2\) MBE – Member of the Order of the British Empire.

\(^3\) CO – commanding officer.
put on the aeroplane. I was quite surprised when I discovered just recently that latter girls didn’t have to do that, that they just used to take them through the day before and say they had (laughs) nothing to declare. I guess by then the customs were more used to it because it was quite new when I was there.

Also we had a couple of big medivacs⁴ that I did a lot of things for, and one in particular was the biggest medivac that ever came home, I think it might have been after Long Tan. There was fifty-something on the aeroplane and they got not quite to the point of no return and the aircraft, something happened to the aircraft and they had to come back so they couldn’t even go on to Cocos. So I – like everybody else in the hospital, I just got up and went to welcome the patients back. And the CO was there, of course, and also Air Vice Marshall Trudinger, who was – I think he was the head of the Air Force medical corps at that stage; when they changed the service arrangements he was later the director general of all the medical – they used to take it in turns, the Army, Navy and the Air Force.

**Oh, I see.**

But he was there also. And they were most impressed that I’d got up and gone to – you know, I got sick of hearing about it. (laughs) And then he wrote to Red Cross and said that he would recommend me for an honour and they said no because they had their own awards. So he did it off his own bat.

**Okay.**

And it was for services to the armed forces.

**That’s very special.**

Yes, it is.

**So you must have been very young when you first got that.**

Thirty-five.

**Goodness.**

It was 1968. It’s incredible to think it’s all that time ago. (laughs)

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⁴ Evacuation of seriously ill and injured personnel.
Yes, definitely, definitely. So when the CO was then unsuccessful in keeping you there, (laughter) you went off to Vietnam.

Yes, I went to Vietnam and I was there then to complete my two years. We actually went on a two-year contract, posting, and we all did some time in Malaysia and some time in Vietnam, and it was really meant to be a year in each but because I had longer in Butterworth — —. But I actually went back. I was only home not very long, probably a month, when the girl who replaced me had some medical problem and had to come back to Australia for surgery, so I actually went back for about − oh, it was eight or nine weeks. That was in June and I’d gone home in March, so it was −

Not very long.

− not very long, no. And then I was only just home from there about a week when the Red Cross Field Force officer at Terendak, which was in the Commonwealth Garrison at Malacca, she resigned so they rang and said could I go to Terendak until they could train somebody, because there was nobody in the pipeline being trained, so I went then to Terendak.

This is in Singapore?

No, that’s in Malaysia.

Back in Malaysia?

In Malacca, yes.

Okay, okay.

That was the Commonwealth Garrison.

All right, yes, all right.

And they had Australian, New Zealand and British forces there, and a very big hospital which was beautifully fitted out, but when the garrison closed down the Malaysian Army took it over. They even wanted the Red Cross books. Not that they could read them, they said, but they liked the look of them. (laughter) Because we had a library in every hospital −

I see.

− a Red Cross library.

I see. Well, perhaps I could come back to that −
Okay.
– because that would have been your third posting. So you had Malaysia, Vietnam, then Vietnam again and then you went back to Malaysia again?
Yes.

Okey-dokey. So, if it’s okay, could we just concentrate a little bit of the time while you were in Vietnam?
Yes.

So tell me what did you have to do in Vietnam, what was your role in Vietnam?
Well, we were like family members. Like in all the hospitals we talked to them, we wrote their letters and, I mean, just held their hands if necessary. We had dartboards and things that they – we had a very small Red Cross Centre when I was there that was chock-a-block with cakes and biscuits and toilet gear and library books (laughter) and drinks and – – –. But the boys used to be able to come down from the wards, it was at least some place they could come. When 1 Aust Field Hospital came to the site they rebuilt the hospital and they had a fabulous Red Cross Centre with billiard tables, and I went up there for a visit when I was in Singapore and couldn’t believe it. (laughs) I remembered what we’d – – –. And I mean the girls before me had been in tents, so –

Gosh.
– you know, it went from being very primitive to being very flash.

So this was the field hospital you’re talking about, in Vietnam –
Yes, it was, yes.

– and that was at Vung Tau, is that correct?
Yes it was, yes. The one we worked in first was 8 Field Ambulance and then, when it became a field hospital, 8 Field Ambulance went to Nui Dat and they were there and then 1 Aust Field was a very big hospital and it was airconditioned and – – –.

So you say ‘1 Aust Field’, that’s Australian Field – – –?
Australian Field Hospital, yes, the abbreviation is 1 Aust Field.
Yes, okay.
And I actually served there when I went back for those eight or nine weeks so that I’d —. You know, it was just — they didn’t have the Red Cross Centre built then but (laughs) we used to be able to take the patients to the beach every day because the ALSG,⁵ the Australian Logistic Support headquarters, was on the back beach on sand hills and we just used to take the boys down, the boys in the hospital who were able to go, and we had a VW⁶ station wagon and we had a Land Rover, so we used to fill them up and it didn’t matter how many there was in it we always seemed to be able to fit them all in. (laughter) And when the wind wasn’t blowing it was lovely, but it was a very windy place and the sand used to get in everything. But there were three of us in the time when I was there so one or two would go to the beach and the other one would stay in the hospital.

In the early stages we lived in Vung Tau with the American Medical Corps in a villa. But when Tet ’68 broke out we had to go in under Australian security so we went into what came to be known as ‘Fort Petticoat’. (laughs) The nursing sisters were there by then, of course, and they had accommodation; and they were building more for us but we had to go in without it being finished because not only did they want us under security but the Americans were bringing a lot of their girls out of the field into the security of Vung Tau.

I see.

Although how secure it was, nobody ever knew because they used to say it was a R&C⁷ place (laughs) for the Viet Cong.

Which means?

Rest and —.

R&C?

R&R is rest and recuperation and R&C was something different and I can’t remember what the ‘C’ stood for.

Okay. But it was a bit of a target for the Viet Cong they thought?

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⁵ ALSG – Australian Logistic Support Group.
⁶ VW – Volkswagen
⁷ R&C – rest and convalescence.
Yes, yes. And when Tet ’68 broke out, we — —.

So just – can I just interrupt you –

Yes.

– so Tet ’68, that’s the Tet Offensive you’re talking about?

Yes, that’s right, yes. When that broke out we were told that we had to have an armed soldier in our vehicles and I had a big argument with the CO – of ALSG, not the hospital – because I said it contravened the Geneva Conventions. ‘Lot of rot’, he said. Anyway, he talked it over with his legal eagles who decided yes, I was right and he was wrong, because they were just afraid that if we got a flat tyre or something. And we said, ‘We’ve got the red cross, the red cross on our vehicle.’ And it said ‘Australia New Zealand Red Cross’ on our vehicles, in Vietnamese as well as English, so that we felt – I guess it might have been false security, but we just felt that because we had the red cross on our vehicles — —. I mean people knew us: we used to go to Vung Tau village almost every day shopping in the markets and things, so we were just part of the scenery as far as we were concerned.

And your uniform clearly displayed a red cross as well, didn’t it?

Oh, yes. Yes, it did. Yes, it did.

Okay.

And it had ‘Red Cross’ written on it, it had a flash that said ‘Australia New Zealand Red Cross’ as well as the one on our left breast. (laughter)

You were well marked, by the sounds of it.

Yes.

Okay, so that was basically your broad roles and responsibility. So can you just paint me a picture of what it was like?

Well, the accommodation for the Red Cross Centre and for the wards was just old Kingstrands huts\textsuperscript{8}, metal ones with louvres. And there was a big medical ward and a surgical ward and intensive care, which was the only place in 8 Field that had any airconditioning, the post-op that was attached to the operating theatre, and all the

\textsuperscript{8} i.e. prefabricated steel huts.
post-op patients sort of went through that and then anybody who was very sick stayed in it. I don’t remember how many beds there were but Colleen – see, Colleen worked in there, so ——.

She’ll be able to talk about it.

Yes. And we had all these cakes and biscuits that were made by the branch members in Australia, all over Australia the branch members made fruit cakes and biscuits and they used to be taken up by the Air Force or by the Navy when they brought the troops up, and we used to be able to give them home-made cakes and biscuits twice a day or four times a day if they wanted it. And when they were working in the theatre, if there was a big lot of casualties in and they were working all night and things, we used to make sure that they had plenty of cake and biscuits just to keep their morale up, too. But we used to go through the – visit all the patients in the mornings and get their shopping orders or see what they wanted and then we would do that and then go to the beach with them in the afternoon to spend – we sort of worked from about eight till six, I suppose, or longer if necessary.

But we also had a little helper, a little prisoner of war, who came in. He was the only one left in a village that they did a search and destroy mission on and he was left behind because he was so sick and the Viet Cong didn’t want him any more. So he came in and he had rickets and malaria and, oh, he was very — well, they didn’t know whether he’d last the night; but they gave him a blood transfusion and by eight o’clock the next morning he was running around saying rude words that the soldiers had taught him. (laughter) Well, we had him for six months and he was like a member of the Red Cross staff. We used to get the boxes of cans of drinks for the Red Cross Centre and he had been an ammunition carrier – he was only ten – he had been an ammunition carrier and he was able to carry three of those boxes of drinks on his shoulders, two on one shoulder and one on the other, and run up the hill to the Red Cross Centre. We started him at school and of course he didn’t know anything but – never worn any shoes or anything, and I bought him his shoes and school clothes and things and the first pair of shoes went down the latrine (laughter) as soon as he [could], because he wasn’t going to wear those. So I got him another pair and I kept those and he only got to put them on when he got in the vehicle to go to school. But he didn’t ever settle, he didn’t learn very much I don’t think, but he wasn’t used
to playing with kids and things. Anyway, eventually the CO was given orders that he had to go to an orphanage. We were hoping that somebody in Vung Tau might adopt him, but they said that he was too much of a security risk because he was Viet Cong. It was a shame, really. And at one stage they were talking about – they knew where the people had gone, the Viet Cong, from his village and they were going to drop leaflets to say that they had him and would they help them with intelligence because of looking after him. But we talked them out of that, we thought that was terrible. But he was a dear little boy. We often wonder now because, see, he’d be fifty now.

Yes, wonder what happened to him.

Yes.

And I guess this wasn’t an uncommon story. I mean he was one of the child soldiers, I guess, wasn’t he?

Yes, he was, yes.

And we had a few women POWs in. I had a funny experience one day when the CO said would I give them some Red Cross soap and things and take them to the shower. When I got there they didn’t know what to do, they’d never seen one before, and I really thought I was going to have to take my uniform off and get in with them (laughter) but fortunately they got the message. And we had one nurse, she was a real character, who used to make sure that the Viet Cong ladies had the lippy on. (laughter) She was always – because the patients used to want the girls to have their lipstick and perfume and things on, and so Terry thought that these ladies should have theirs on, and I can remember seeing this old lady, very old and very crinkled up, with the bright red lipstick on! (laughter)

Oh, dear.

It looked a bit grotesque, I thought, but have to have your lippy on.

Yes. Oh, well. And the women prisoners of war, did they do any jobs or – – –?

No.

No, they were just – – –.

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9 POW – prisoner of war.
No. As soon as they were well enough they – because they were taking up beds and also because the patients, the soldiers, didn’t like having them there too much.

Right. So what happened to them?

They went up to the Americans.

Oh, right, okay.

Because they had the compounds and things and I suppose – – –. Mot was the only one, the little boy, he was the only one we had for any length of time.

Okay. It’s a story that you hear very rarely –

I suppose.

– about what happens. Yes, definitely. So the conditions on the ground then were fairly hot and humid –

Yes.

– and when the winds blew it was very sandy.

Oh, it was dreadful, yes. And there was a wet – like most of those countries, there’s a wet season and a dry season, and in the dry season the wind hardly stopped. And for quite a long time after I was there the medical officers were still living in tents, they were up on the flat part of the sand hills in their tents. The accommodation that we had was adequate, but only just, and, as I’ve said, when we first moved in in a hurry the sand was coming in through the walls and things. But we had quite a good officers’ mess where we used to eat and drink and play. (laughter)

Yes. So there were some good times amongst it all?

Oh, yes, there were, yes. Well, one of the girls that I was with just recently, down at the History Trust, you would have thought that she’d been on an overseas holiday (laughs) when she talked about her time there, and yet she was intensive – she did a fantastic job, she was the intensive care; but after work she obviously enjoyed herself very much. (laughs)

Yes. So obviously that camaraderie amongst you, and particularly the nurses, was very strong.

Oh, yes, it is and still is, yes.
And how did you – if I can just recant a little bit, like when you were telling me about Butterworth you were saying how when you first got there it was quite confronting seeing the men –

Yes.

– and particularly the amputees and the ones that had lost eyes and what have you. So when you were even closer to it in Vietnam, seeing them just come out of theatre, that sort of thing, was that as confronting for you or more so or do you feel that you had – – –?

I feel I’d accepted the situation a bit better by then. There were some – no, Long Tan was when I was at Butterworth. There was a big battle with 7 RAR,10 which was when I was there, and there were some dreadful casualties with that and one of the sergeants was very – he lost a leg, I think he lost an eye – and they didn’t think they’d ever be able to resuscitate him but they did eventually. The anaesthetist and Michael Boyle, the doctor, they eventually got a drip in somehow and in fact he came back to Adelaide, he was a Scotsman but he must have had connections here because he came back to Daws Road, so that we kept in contact with him for a long time, and then he married the switchboard operator down there. (laughter)

That’s a nice story.

And actually I still have contact with her, poor old Jock died a long time ago with cancer but she’s very much involved with 7 RAR and all the other Diggers and things, yes. They had two lovely children, too, which is nice.

Yes, it is nice. Okay, so you felt that because of your experience you were able to stay a little bit – I don’t know what the word is – perhaps a bit calmer?

Yes. Yes, that would be a good word, I think. The only time that we were confronted with real bad casualties was during Tet and some of our casualties came in to the Americans in 36 Evac, which was the hospital in Vung Tau, and we were asked to go over there because in the triage area, which we didn’t ever do in the Australian hospitals, we were kept right away until the patients had been to theatre or been settled, what have you, but with the Tet Offensive we actually had to go over and talk to the patients while they were being triaged and that was the most confronting thing I think I ever did in Vietnam.

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10 RAR – Royal Australian Regiment.
What was it that was so confronting about that?

Well, that they were very bad, I mean dreadful casualties and things, and they were just lying there waiting for the triage staff to come along and say, ‘I’ll take you now’, or ‘You can stay and die’, or whatever, you know, how they – –. The triage situation I think is what saved a lot of patients in Vietnam, and I mean that firstly they were there so quick with the helicopters, I mean sometimes it was only half an hour from when they’d been shot till they were in the hospital.

Yes, it’s an amazing – the helicopters did an amazing job, didn’t they?

Oh, fantastic, yes. And they’ve just been pensioned off.

Have they?

The Hughes. This week –

Yeah?

– yes, last weekend, the last three.

Wow, okay.

We had one here in Adelaide for the Vietnam Day.

Did you? Actually, I did see it flying over, I think, yes.

It had a very distinctive noise, sound.

Yes.

And it was funny because that day you could see the reaction in the shoulders as the helicopter went over the parade ground.

Everybody tensed up?

Yes.

It’s interesting that it still has that impact, isn’t it?

Yes.

So what was the major influence on your life at that time, so while you were – you know, if I asked you to consider, like while you were in Vietnam undergoing that experience, what was the biggest influence on you at that time?

I just think that I was able to help people. I’d been brought up in a family that was very involved with all sorts of social society things and we were always encouraged
to do what we could as often as we could and I think I was just in my natural environment. I didn’t feel as if I was doing anything extraordinary, I was just doing the job and I just –

You just did it.
– did it, yes.

So how did it feel to be serving in that capacity?
I didn’t think about it too much. (laughs) I knew what was expected of me. I mean we were trained to – well, I think once you make up your mind and you accept the things you just go on and do it.

Were there other Red Cross workers there with you?
Yes. When I was at 8 Field Ambulance there were three of us, a senior who was attached to headquarters and the two junior ones who worked in the hospital. I think by the time – would have probably been by 1969, they had four girls at 1 Aust Field because it was a bigger hospital and they also had a New Zealander joined us. I don’t know whether that made five or whether she filled in for one of the Australians, but they did have four. Not all of them served a year, some of them didn’t. Initially, in 1965 when the first Field Force officer went, Pam Spence, she was only posted in for six months and then the army said that if the soldiers had to do twelve months we had to do twelve months in Vietnam, so that’s how our postings got changed. (laughter) I mean we came under the discipline of the Army –

I see.
– and they did all our administration, we were paid by Red Cross but we had an Army pay book, and we used to go to the pay office with our pay book the same as the soldiers. And we had a regimental number as a philanthropic – oh, that’s a dreadful word – (laughter) but we weren’t the only philanthropic people there, the Everyman\textsuperscript{11} was there and the Salvos\textsuperscript{12} and the YMCA\textsuperscript{13}.

Okay, all right. And did you work with those other groups?

\textsuperscript{11} Everyman’s Welfare Service.
\textsuperscript{12} Salvation Army.
\textsuperscript{13} YMCA – Young Men’s Christian Association.
Yes, yes, and the Everyman and the Salvos were actually out in the Nui Dat area with the boys and the YMCA man was actually in the area where all the trucks and things were, where they used to do all the convoys, and he used to – nobody ever knew how he did it but he used to have fresh cake for them every morning before they went off on the convoy. (laughs)

**Goodness me.**

Which we used to get sometimes. (laughter)

**That’s good. So the Everyman was an agency? I haven’t heard of that agency.**

Yes, it’s a philanthropic organisation and they still serve. I’ve met one here, they’re still in uniform.

**Oh, okay. So they’re still around.**

I’d never heard of them till I went to Vietnam.

**Went to there.**

Yes. And all the blurbs that we used to get about the philanthropic things used to include them.

**Okay, I’ll have to have a look. Right, so tell me about this ‘playtime’.**

(laughter) Well, as you can imagine, with so few women and so many men you could probably go out to dinner every night. And when we lived with the Americans we didn’t actually have any mess hall or anything there, it was just accommodation, so we used to either go back to the mess, the Australian mess, or go out somewhere, and there was a fabulous French restaurant in the town (laughs) that was actually owned by a woman who wasn’t terribly old, with young children, whose husband was a political prisoner in Saigon. But there must have been something, you know; we often used to wonder how come she got so much –

**Good food?**

– good food (laughter) and pleasure and everything. And everybody seems to, over the years when all the girls talk about going to Cynnos, so obviously – –. (laughter) And there was another French restaurant that was up on a high hill but that used to be out of bounds a lot because it was near the – –. The beach was divided into the Australians, the Americans, the Koreans – is that all? Anyway, and the restaurant
was fairly near the Korean area so that we weren’t encouraged. And also with the
health and safety bit, ‘hygiene’ was what they were called, they had a hygiene
company, and they used to go out and – an army unit – used to go round and check all
the restaurants and things. And we had a favourite Chinese restaurant and that used
to be on bounds, off bounds, on bounds, off bounds, (laughter) so we really didn’t
ever read the notices before we went, we just used to go. Because I think it depended
whether the boys had actually visited it whether you got the right details.

Also there was a lot of fraternisation with the Americans because they had lavish
accommodation, they lived in trailers – the officers, anyway – lived in trailers, which
were airconditioned and had baths and all sorts of things in it, and they were always
anxious to have – I mean they had a lot of American women there too, but they were
always anxious to have the Australian girls as well. One of the first things I ever did
in a team in Vietnam (laughs) was we won the race when you had to skull[^a] a glass of
beer, (laughter) and I’ve never been a beer drinker, and I’d only just arrived so of
course I was put in the front of the line and – this was in an American party – and
anyway the Aussie girls won so we were very proud of ourselves. (laughter)

**What was the prize?**

I don’t know. But their food was not very good. The best food in Vietnam was the
Australian Air Force because they used to fly so much in.

**So you’d angle for an invitation to the Air Force mess?**

Yes, yes. (laughter) And these girls that I was with just recently, they were all
talking about the food they used to get from the Air Force.

**Oh, well, that’s good.**

And when we used to fly in and out of Saigon the Air Force there had a Sunbeam
frypan that they used to heat up Aussie pies in, so if you were a very good girl
(laughter) they’d give you maybe half a pie or if there was nobody else around you
might have got a full one. But the Aussie pies were something that — — —.

**Wow. And they would be flown up from Australia?**

Yes. They’d come in on the Heres, yes.

[^a]: Drink a glass of beer in one draught.
Oh, gosh, for heaven’s sake. So how did you as a group – you obviously made good friends there and you’ve stayed friends with many of the women that were up there with you.

Yes.

**How did you actually debrief, like if you had really difficult times, how did you – did you debrief or was it – – –?**

We used to with our senior, yes. And I would think the nurses did, too. The nurses worked incredibly long hours and especially when there was a big lot of casualties and when a dustoff, which was the helicopter with the patients, when a dustoff came in everybody was on standby. The boys would be waiting on the helipad, which was called ‘Vampire’. (laughter)

**Why is that?**

Well, they needed a call sign, I guess, and it was the –

**Oh right, that was the call sign.**

– that was the call sign, yes. Because we were trying to remember just recently what the – because the Vampire call sign went from 8 Field Ambulance to 1 Aust Field because when they changed names they kept the call sign, and we were trying to remember what the call sign was for the detachment out at Nui Dat. Nobody could remember; we all knew Vampire. (laughter)

**It’s that sort of wicked Australian humour, isn’t it?**

Yes.

**It’s a bit black at times.**

Well, actually, 1 Aust Field Hospital have a reunion group and they’ve got Vampire, and on our name tags we’ve all got it’s all got the vampire on it and your name, and the magazine has a vampire on the front.

**All right, so you were there for six to seven months –**

Yes.

– and then you went home and then you went back for another about eight weeks, you said.

Yes.
And were the same group of people there when you went back?

No.

No, different group.

No, the hospital had changed. I went home towards the end of March and 1 Aust Field Hospital was born on 1\textsuperscript{st} April.

Oh, okay. So it was a good opportunity to see the difference, I suppose.

Yes, it was. And I actually served with 1 Aust Hospital on two military exercises in Australia, you know, when I was really too old to be there: (laughs) Kangaroo '92, which was in Darwin; and Kangaroo '94, which was in – I think it was four years, Kangaroo '96 I think was the second time, and that was in Katherine. And I was really – I went in a hurry for some reason and they didn’t do my medical (laughter) and after I’d been there about a week they flew in a female doctor from somewhere to do my medical, (laughter) so I don’t know how I would have got on if she hadn’t passed me. But she knew my stepdaughter who’s a doctor and we had a good chat and she signed the papers.

Oh, well, that’s good. But it’s not that long ago, is it?

No, no.

Perhaps I could come back to those because I’d like to ask about that. So then after you finished your time in Vietnam you then went back to Malaysia?

Yes.

And what was your role there?

Exactly the same.

Okay.

Once again, we had the British Red Cross with us because we had British forces. It was actually a British military hospital but we did have Australian Army nurses as well as British Army. I don’t think we had any Air Force. Also, some of the New Zealand casualties were coming down to Terendak from Vietnam. And also the sad
thing about my time was that the Kiwis\textsuperscript{15} were not taken home to be buried, they were buried in the Terendak cemetery, they were brought back to Malaysia.

**Why was that?**

I don’t know, I think it was just a government thing. See, the Australian Government brought all our boys home but the Kiwis, a lot of them were buried at Terendak which is sad now because of course there’s no forces there any more. I mean there are war cemeteries all over Malaysia anyway, but I just thought it was sad for them to be – when they’d gone to Vietnam to – – –.

**Yes.**

But the New Zealand Government didn’t treat their veterans very well at all and they only had a welcome home parade, I reckon it’s in the last ten years. It’s since my husband died and I was back in Canberra because I flew – Colleen and I went to New Zealand for it. And that was sort of their welcome home.

**It’s very sad, isn’t it.**

It was, yes, because there were New Zealand nurses, we had New Zealand nurses worked in 8 Field Ambulance and 1 Aust Field Hospital. I don’t know whether they had any physios, we had some physios.

**Right. So how long were you in Malaysia the second time?**

From August to December, four months, and then I went home and in March went to the UK for three months’ holiday and then went to Singapore.

**Okay. And how long were you in Singapore?**

Three years.

**Oh, okay.**

It was a real hardship posting. (laughter)

..... tell me a bit about Singapore.

But it was very interesting because I was the senior for the area and used to have a lot of contact with the Singapore Red Cross – Malaysian Red Cross as it was then, it’s

\textsuperscript{15} New Zealanders.
now Malaysian Red Crescent – and we used to meet a lot of people going through at the airport. We all had airport passes and we used to spend hours and hours at the airport meeting people, sometimes people going for medical treatment to Europe. I can vividly remember one dear old man from New Zealand that actually stayed off for some reason, because we took him out and showed him round, and he was going to the London Eye Hospital, he’d lost the sight of one eye and he was going to have some special operation. And so we used to do things like that. And of course in Singapore we had lots of very important visitors who used to do their shopping. (laughter) They used to drop in on their way to Geneva or coming back from Geneva and of course some of them used to bring their wives with them, so that was another part of our duties was to take them shopping.

Amazing. So this was all still defence personnel?

Yes, yes. Because when I first went to Singapore it was Far East Land Forces that was commanded by the Brits, and the Australians worked with them. Then the Brits decided they were going home altogether and the Australians were going to do it, it was going to be Australia and New Zealand, and then the Brits decided some of them would stay. So it became the ANZUK force: Australia, New Zealand, UK. And actually for the first time in a situation like that the Australians did the logistics and ran the medical service and so forth and we had what had been the Changi Air Force Hospital became the Australian hospital. And the naval base in Singapore which was near Woodlands Garrison, they had another hospital there so that the girls used to work between the two; and we had British Red Cross, two Australians and a Kiwi.

And we used to do the library rounds, beautiful, the Brits had been there for a long time so it was a beautiful library. And also in Terendak, and I actually, when I was in Singapore, closed the Terendak Red Cross department down because of the pulling out and it was great — —. A lot of the things we sent to Butterworth, but of course now Butterworth’s gone, so — —.

Well, that’s very interesting. So then after you came home from Singapore, and then you settled in Canberra, is that right?

Yes, I was married, came home in the June and was married in November, and my husband was an army doctor and we were posted to Canberra, that’s how we
happened to go there, and then after a couple of years he had a disagreement with the general and he resigned. (laughs)

Oh, okay. Well, look, I’m going to stop the tape here and swap tapes and we can perhaps talk a little bit about that.

Okay.

So thanks, Marie.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

This is tape two of the interview with Marie Boyle at the State Library of South Australia on 26th September 2007 and the interviewer is Susan Mann.

Okay, thank you, Marie.

My pleasure.

Now, what I thought would be good to continue our discussion is to talk a little bit about your time after you came back to Canberra and you said that you had got married.

Yes.

And did you meet your husband overseas?

Yes, he was a doctor in 8 Field Ambulance.

Was he?

Yes.

Yes, lovely. So you married and you came to Canberra on a posting, is that correct?

Yes, that’s right, yes.

Right. And what happened after that?

Well, he left the army and we went into medical practice. I worked as the practice manager and one of the secretaries. And they were building the Vietnam memorial and Colleen, my friend, was I think the secretary of the committee and raising money and doing things for the memorial.

And this was in Canberra?

This was in Canberra, yes.
The national memorial?

The national Vietnam memorial, yes. But in between times we went to Queensland and I got involved there again with the Red Cross, or I was still with the Red Cross, and I served on the executive of the Queensland Division of Red Cross and also became a bit involved with the Vietnam Veterans’ Association. Because my husband was an ex-army doctor, and he was quite good on the psychiatry side of medicine, he had a lot of Vietnam veteran patients and they just used to come out of the woodwork when they knew there was a Vietnam vet medical officer around. So that in actual fact we didn’t have a lot to do with the social side of Vietnam Veterans while he was still around but after he died I became involved. But when he was not able to work in the medical practice any more and we were just doing part-time locums up and down the Sunshine Coast the veterans used to follow him. And they’d ring up and they’d say they wanted to see Doctor Boyle and they’d say, ‘Oh, he’s not here today’, and they’d say, ‘Well, where is he?’ And they’d say, ‘Up at Coolum’, or, ‘Up at Maroochydore’, so they’d appear up there. (laughs) He also had post-traumatic stress disorder.

Your husband?

Yes. And after a day with the Vietnam veterans in the surgery he didn’t want to have anything to do with them socially, so that’s why our support for the veterans at that stage was really on the medical side. They all knew that I’d been to Vietnam too and of course on the Sunshine Coast there are thousands of Vietnam veterans, a lot of them are on pensions so that they don’t work and a lot of them have drinking problems so that it really – we became involved with the medical problems quite seriously. And also I had a cousin who worked at the Buderim Hospital and they had a ward there that they used to have – Vietnam veterans used to go in to be dried out with the alcoholism, it was terrible. And then after Michael died and I became more involved with the Vietnam Veterans’ Association, they made sure that they (loud talking outside interview room) kept in touch and asked me to do all sorts of things. I became sort of a welfare officer, there were two of us.

Okay. I might just interrupt you there, Marie, because we’ve got a bit of a problem here. (pauses) Okay, maybe it was just on the stairs. So after your husband died you became involved with the Veterans’ Association.
Yes, yes. And because there are so many up there they used to have a lot of social things which I used to go to but also I became involved with some of the wives and there were a lot of medical problems among the kids which they – I don’t know whether it was ever proved but they thought it probably was Agent Orange, they had cleft palates and things.

Marie, I’m sorry, I’m just going to see if I can stop that noise.

Okay.

Just excuse me. (leaves room, no break in recording) Okay, it’s Susan Mann, the tape was just interrupted for a little while to wait for a group of schoolchildren to go past the room.

Sorry about that, Marie. I’ve just got to shut the door. (closes door) Okay, now you were just saying that then you got involved with the Vietnam veterans and you were very aware that not only just the veterans were suffering from post-traumatic stress and lots of alcoholism but also there was issues with their children.

Yes. Then I decided I wasn’t going to stay in Queensland, I wasn’t very happy with Mick gone, so I went back to Canberra and became more involved with the Vietnam Veterans’ Association again. And also there were a few of the nurses around so that the contact was back straight away.

And when our Vietnam memorial was dedicated, some of the American nurses came out for it and they were raising money to build a women’s memorial in Washington DC and they invited us, said as they’d come to our memorial would we go for that. So a group of us went. There were two army nurses, there were two Red Cross girls who went from Australia and one who was living in America and she joined us, so we had three Red Cross, and we had some Australian civilians who’d worked for the Americans, and they came with us, they were secretaries and computer operators and things even in those days! (laughter) And so we went to Washington for the dedication of the memorial, which was absolutely wonderful, it’s actually in the area where the wall is, the Vietnam name memorial which is the wall with all the names on it. And we actually took our wreaths from here. We only got them as far as Los Angeles when they took them away from us and took out all the gumnuts and things because of course – I mean I didn’t realise how many eucalypts there are in that area and of course they didn’t want us bringing disease in. Anyway, as it happened, another lass and I were staying with an army officer at the Australian
Embassy and his wife and they had some Australian friends who had some Australian flowers (laughs) so we went off to the dedication of the memorial with our wreaths complete again.

Oh, wonderful.

And I think we took – one of the girls who had died, one of the nurses got leukaemia when she was up there, she died not long after – well, probably in the first year she was back – we laid a wreath for her, and we laid one for the RSL\textsuperscript{16} and ourselves, there were about four, and we were in the official parade to the statue and we were the first Australians to touch it. (laughs) I made sure that I put my hand on it as I put the wreath down.

That’s wonderful.

But it was really wonderful. And we marched through Washington to the – – –. And they had marvellous things arranged. They had a candlelight service that night at the memorial and it was just wonderful.

What year was that?

Nineteen ninety-three. In fact it was 11\textsuperscript{th} November, it was the day the ‘Unknown Soldier’ was laid to rest in Canberra, and we were torn between staying in Canberra for the Unknown Soldier or going to Washington for the Vietnam Women’s Memorial, so we went for the women. And it really is a beautiful, beautiful statue.

Yes, it’s wonderful.

It depicts a nurse with a soldier in her arms looking up for the helicopter to come.

Yes. If I go back to America, I’ll look for it.

Yes, it’s easy to find because there’s a big statue of fighting soldiers in their uniform, you know, in fighting gear, and we’re just a bit further on. But that’s another extraordinary statue. It’s so well done that the bullets in their ammunition belts look real.

Goodness.

\textsuperscript{16} RSL – Returned and Services League.
I couldn’t get over it, I kept going back and (laughs) touching it and looking at it because it was just so incredible.

Amazing. So you stayed in Canberra and you stayed very involved then with the War Memorial, didn’t you?

Yes. Well, the War Memorial were doing a series of ‘Museum in a Box’ and they did one on Red Cross and they had a prisoner of war from Changi who had Red Cross parcels and that sort of thing. I can’t remember what the others were but my story was in it as ‘The Young One’ (laughter) – I wasn’t very young then but I mean I was when I started out. And I got involved with the education section of the War Memorial because they were very interested in the fact the Red Cross had been so involved in Vietnam, also that we were the latest women who’d been to war, so that was another aspect of it. They had several special things on women in war and, because the guides and things didn’t know anything about women in war and neither did the staff, they actually had a thing where I spoke to the – have you ever been to the auditorium in the War Memorial?

Just here?

No, in Canberra.

No.

Oh, it’s incredible. And there was I faced with this audience and all this technical stuff. I’d taken some slides and somebody looked after those for me but I was surprised myself that I spoke so long and once I got wound up I – – –. (laughter) And that led to me doing lots of public speaking at things about Red Cross and about particularly in Vietnam because everybody was – even now people are still interested to hear the story of the Red Cross in Vietnam.

And the other thing is that they have open days for special things and they have people in the various – not the guides but other people like, well, Colleen and I did it a few times in the Vietnam section, people just come along and you’d have a sticker to say who you were, and people’d come along and ask questions and talk to you, so we did that quite a lot. They also have special days at the memorials along Anzac Parade, and they have people at the memorials who’ve been there too, like the Vietnam memorial was always staffed by Vietnam veterans and so forth.
Also the War Memorial copied a lot of my photographs so that – I mean a lot of other people too, but because I had the contact with them they asked me, so I gave them all my photographs. They only had them for about two and a half years but (laughter) I did eventually get them back.

Oh, good.

But I was amazed when I was looking up something on the War Memorial site on the computer one day and I came across one of my photographs.

Oh, that’s very good.

And the War Memorial made a book about the nurses in Vietnam called *Tears on my pillow* and the cover of that is one of the photographs I took. It’s a Red Cross girl in her bikini with her Red Cross hat on, hanging out the washing (laughter) and the matron or the senior nurse at the hospital, but I often was pleased that Mrs McDonald who was our principal commandant had gone to heaven and she never saw it. (laughter) She would have probably dropped dead. And of course now it’s all over the world on the cover of the book.

Is the book still in print?

Yes.

*Tears on my pillow.*

*Tears on my pillow.* 17 It’s the story of a lot of the girls.

Okay, that’s good. So then you came to Adelaide, you came back to Adelaide.

Yes.

And what’s your ongoing commitment to the servicemen and women now?

Well, I really just – I belong to the Vietnam Veterans’ Association and I go to some of their functions and things. I don’t have any – because of my health and because of my involvement with Red Cross my commitment really is a volunteer now as to Red Cross because I work in the Emergency Services department and also in the archives. We had a big session where two of us worked for six months to actually get all the old archives in the boxes and got them to the State Library where they’re safely kept.

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Excellent.

And I’ve got an ongoing commitment now, which is not (laughs) going very well at the moment. It’s either too hot or too cold out in the warehouse, (laughter) so they’ve given me a little space in the office now that I can – – . But then I have to get someone to bring the stuff up and I have to go through it and eventually it’ll come here.

Oh, that’s very good that it will be so preserved, isn’t it?

Yes. The only problem is there’s a lot of it missing.

Oh.

We had a CEO\(^{18}\) who didn’t believe in keeping anything old and a lot of stuff was thrown out. Some of it was actually saved by a staff member who’s still there, who’s been there a long time, who saw it in the rubbish bin and she removed it, but there’s lots of gaps.

What a pity.

Yes. And also with the photographs, nobody’d written on them. We threw out wheelie bins of photographs because –

You couldn’t identify them?

– well, some of them – we took them around to people who’d been in Red Cross in World War I or World War II and things like that. Some of them we were able to identify but it was very sad, really.

Oh, yes, yes. Okay, so Red Cross has been an enormous part of your life hasn’t it?

It really has, yes, yes. In fact, the day my husband died he made some comment about, ‘The Red Cross will look after you’, (laughter) only a couple of hours before he died.

Oh, goodness.

It’s the last thing he said.

So he was caring for you right to the end.

\(^{18}\) CEO – chief executive officer.
Yes. And actually he got involved too with Red Cross when we went to Queensland. (laughter) No, when we went to Canberra he got involved because he was the chairman of the Youth Committee and he was on the Blood Transfusion Committee and – –. Then when we went to Queensland we ran a horse race, a race day, for the Red Cross, and he organised all that because he was the Turf Club doctor. (laughter)

Yes – lots of connections, you two.

Yes.

So, tell me about your OAM.\(^{19}\)

I received that in 1998, it was just thirty years to the day, actually, that I’d got my MBE. That was for my services to Red Cross but also to veterans because of the and also I’d forgotten about we had a – I suppose we really currently do but it’s in the filing cabinet – have an Australian Women’s Vietnam Veterans’ Association, of which I was the secretary/treasurer and Colleen was the president, and we organised that actually to go to – started that to go to America. And we had a banner that somebody made us a banner which we took on the aeroplane with us and carried it in the – in fact we didn’t carry it, we were very well-supported by the service personnel at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC. Some of them had been patients, one in particular. It’s funny because we all remembered he had a plate in his head. (laughter) I couldn’t remember his name, I only could remember he had a plate in his head.

Oh, dear!

But I mean that’s the sort of closeness you had with the patients.

Yes, indeed. He obviously remembered you.

Yes, yes. Well, I think the boys always remembered the female staff in the hospital because there were so few of us, you see, and until the nurses came in 1967 the Red Cross girls had been there for two years and they were the only females. In fact, they worked in Saigon to start off with and then they came down, worked in the American hospitals up there because we had a field ambulance but it was small but then they brought them down to Vung Tau and that’s when we lived with the American

\(^{19}\) OAM – Medal of the Order of Australia.
medical corps in the villa but their offices and everything were tents. That’s when the amazing photograph that’s in the – somewhere around in a tent with a fan on. 
(laughs)

**With a what?**

With an electric fan on on a hot day (laughter) sitting on the Red Cross desk, yes.

**So there’s some very good memories there amongst it.**

Oh, wonderful memories, yes. And I still keep in contact with a lot of the Red Cross girls.

**Are they in South Australia or scattered all over?**

We have one in South Australia but with the Vampire reunion they come from all over the place. I’m actually not going this year because I’ve been to Perth this year, but they’re having a big reunion there. They have it in a different state every year.

**Okay. That’s nice. And Colleen is obviously your best friend, you were saying –**

Yes, she is, yes.

– and so you two have done a lot together.

We have, yes, and been strength for each other, too. She’s been wonderful.

**That’s excellent.**

Because she knew Michael very well because of working with him in the hospital.

**So you have a lot in common.**

Yes, yes. But there seems to be a real bond between all of the – particularly the medical staff. Because with our 8 Field Ambulance group here, we have a reunion every year on the Anzac weekend – this year it was here in Adelaide, next year it’s in Canberra – and they’re all the medics who were the young nashos and things that were the medics in the war, a lot of them before the nurses came, and then they worked with the nurses. And then we had seventy-something here this year and they bring their wives and their families, and we marched in the Anzac Day march here.

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20 National servicemen.
and they’re just wonderful. And if anybody’s sick they let everybody else know and it’s a very tight family, really.

**It’s wonderful. So how do you feel when you reminisce about this time?**

Sometimes I have a nightmare. (laughs)

**Yes?**

I wondered last night how I’d sleep but I slept all night, so – – –.

**That’s good.**

Had a lot of champagne. (laughter)

**Oh, good.**

But I’ve had post-traumatic stress disorder and had treatment for it in Canberra. Actually, whether it was triggered off by Michael’s death or whether he just kept me in order, because it was when I went back to Canberra that I had the problem.

**Okay, and what happened?**

Oh, I had terrible nightmares and flashbacks and things like that. The sound of the helicopters used to send me right off. And in Canberra, of course, there’s helicopters all the time. And my husband had the same trouble with the helicopters, he used to have terrible nightmares and it was always the dustoff coming in and he was trying to get to the helipad to get the patient. And even when he was very, very sick, not long before he died, he was in Royal North Shore Hospital and unfortunately the helipad was just near his room, and at one stage when he was all full of tubes and things the helicopter came in and he jumped out of bed and – it’s dreadful.

**Yes. Absolutely traumatic.**

It was, it was very traumatic. But I don’t know anyone that hasn’t been affected somehow by it, really. This lass I was telling you about before who was at the Historical Society that had the great time, sounded just like she’d been on a holiday, she says she had no effect, but I’m sure that – – –. I mean, just the way she rabbles on.

**Yes. So, what do you – do you have to take anything ongoing for this or are you sort of all right now?**

I have some medication I take every day, every night going to bed.
Right.

It’s a very mild thing but once I started it they said I was not to stop it. Whether I need it or not, I still take it.

Yes, so it’s – – –.

I don’t want to get, you know, in a mess again. (laughs)

No. No, of course not, of course not; and it’s good that you’ve been able to find something that can help you, I mean that’s really important.

Yes. And my GP’s very helpful. And I was amused that she told me that she discovered her next-door neighbour was a Vietnam veteran and that he’s got post-traumatic stress and I said, ‘Well, yes, I’m not surprised.’ She said, ‘But I understand him better now,’ she said, ‘but having talked to you,’ she said, ‘I –’, and I thought, ‘God.’ It’s amazing.

It is, isn’t it?

Yes.

Yes.

I mean, she’s reasonably young – well, I suppose she’s in her forties, and would have been a child, probably, mightn’t even have been born.

Yes.

Oh, yes, I think she would have because she was a doctor in Canberra when we were there.

Right. But still, I guess the good part about that story is that she’s open to learning.

Yes, yes, and she’s now – her objectionable neighbour has become quite a friend. (laughs)

That’s a good outcome, isn’t it?

It is, yes.

So what do you think is important about recording these memories?

21 GP – general practitioner.
I hadn’t really thought – – –. Well, I think it’s probably having worked, particularly now in the Red Cross archives, I realise how important it is to keep a record of things where there’s some stage it might help somebody else. I know they’ve done some oral histories for the Red Cross and we were very pleased to get all that down because they were ladies quite a lot older than me, and I just regarded that as being very important.

Right. That’s good, that’s good.

So that’s, you know, when June spoke about it, that’s why I said I’d do it.

Yes. Well, it’s been wonderful; thank you very much, Marie. Is there anything else that you would like to add that you think is important?

No, I’ll probably think about it when I get home. (laughter)

That’s always the way, isn’t it?

Yes.

Well, thank you. I think perhaps we’ll draw it to a close.

Yes.

END OF INTERVIEW.