

Phyllis Alberta Hancock (nee Humphries)

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Arriving at Teacher's Training College, Claremont, we were the group of girls who made up the 5th Camp. Enthusiastic, and ready to learn the way of our new life, we all wished to help the war effort.

Our training commenced immediately, physical training, marching, lectures etc. The days were busy, so most slept well, even though a palliasse was different from home. Weekend leave was granted, and after three weeks, we were sent out to begin work with different units. I was sent to Hollywood Hospital, to become a canteen assistant.

The girls in our unit all lived in small wooden cottages, opposite the hospital. They belonged to the Salvation Army, who used them for boys' holiday camps. Friendships were made and the girls worked well together. During the time I was there, air raid shelters were in the hospital grounds, we had gas masks and were told to leave work and go to the shelter when the siren sounded. This was just practice, not a serious raid. After four months I was transferred to Guildford Grammar School.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour, it brought the United States of America into the war and thousands of American service personnel arrived in Australia. Guildford Grammar School was taken over by the government to be used as a military hospital for the American troops.

The school had a red cross on the roof. When the American troops moved forward, our Australian troops were being brought back home. The 2nd/1st Australian General Hospital returned from the Middle East, and moved into Guildford Grammar School, for their hospital.

The girls had to be 18 years old to join the services. I was 24 years old and had eight years retail experience, so I was sent to Guildford to establish a canteen for the hospital for both staff and patients. Our pay was 4/- per day (which is now 40 cents) so the promotion to sergeant with pay of 8/- per day was wonderful.

I had a small staff with just two girls, so we opened the canteen more for sessions, than full time. We lived in one of the large buildings close to the canteen.

Rationing was a way of life during the war so the canteen was popular. Cigarettes were rationed and ration coupons were given out on payday. Cigarettes were then 6 pence for a packet of Turf or Capstan - a packet of 10 cigarettes. Craven A packets of 10 cigarettes were sold for 9 pence.

It was a very special posting, which lasted for nine months. A base camp was then available at Nungarin for the 2nd/1st AGH so they moved there. The canteen was closed and the school was returned to the owners.

I was then transferred to Northam Camp. It was entirely different, a huge canteen with a large “dry” section and a “wet” section managed by the men. I was sent to No 3 canteen. The camp was so large another canteen, No 9, was in a different area of the camp. We worked until 9pm every night, including Sunday night.

The canteen had long tables and seats. It was somewhere for the troops to spend a social evening out of their tents. Sometimes a musical instrument was brought along, which brightened up the evening and always popular. I had more girls of course, and they did a good job and worked well together. I was also at 118 AGH in Northam, before being transferred to Brisbane.

Our uniforms were very nice. Our summer uniform was a short sleeved frock; winter and summer uniforms were a khaki colour. We wore a tie, stockings, brown shoes, a nice felt hat, brown kid gloves and a small wallet type purse. Winter uniforms were smart, a skirt and suit coat, with shirt, tie, hat, stockings, brown shoes, gloves and a wallet type purse. We also had “great” coats and kit bags. Our work frocks were neat but the girls christened them “Giggle Frocks”.

I had never been to Queensland, so that was a wonderful experience. I worked at several different canteens. It was usually busy, but I enjoyed the work and always found it interesting.

I was stationed in Brisbane when peace was declared in August 1945. What a marvelous celebration that was. People on the streets were so delighted after a six-year war. Strangers were hugging, it seemed their enthusiasm for peace was unlimited.

I left Brisbane to return to Karrakatta for discharge. The war was over, and that was a great relief. I was fortunate to come home by sea and traveled on the English ship, the “Sterling Castle”, though very rough weather was experienced in the Great Australian Bight.

I shall always appreciate my army days and felt they were excellent for me. I was reluctant to leave, it surely was a great experience. I made friends and those friendships lasted a lifetime. The government offered us rehabilitation courses on return to civilian life. I was stationed at two different barracks where approximately one hundred girls lived. Of course we were all subject to the same rules and discipline, but it was such a contrast becoming a civilian again.

I was then Phyllis Humphries
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