The memories of Private L. E. Humphrys W.F.X. 38297

I joined up early in 1943 after enlisting at the D.D.M.S. in Kings Park Road. I was to become a nurse with the VAD'S or Voluntary Aid Detachment to the Australian Infantry Forces which later became the A.A.M.W.S. or Australian Army Medical Women's Service. I reported to the Army Barracks in Francis Street and was then taken by truck to Claremont.

After doing a rookies course at Claremont Teachers Training College – learning how to drill, the procedure of gas masks and living with girls my own age and also living on baked beans and apple jelly jam with tinned peaches for sweets every day, I then received my posting.

All the girls at rookies were not going nursing just eleven of us, the rest were going on to be drivers, signalers, gunners etc., with the Australian Women's Army Corps, we were Army Medical.

Four of us were posted to the 2/1st A.G.H. unit at Guildford Grammer School which had been converted into a hospital. You can still see the faded red cross on the school church roof as you drive by. We were in for a rude awakening. No fevered brows to tend, we were not even to go near the wards we were just domestics. How often it was said to us that if a nurse cannot do cleaning properly she would never be able to look after patients. The most basic rule of nursing is to keep everything and everyone clean. It certainly was a shock to the system to have to wait on the sisters in their mess. Do general duties like cleaning bathrooms and of course toilets. Not being very experienced in this field it certainly was a blow to the ego.

MERREDIN

It was not long before I was informed I was to enter the sanctuary of the wards, so I must have been considered fairly proficient. The only catch there, was that it was at the other half of the hospital the 2/1st A.G.H. at Merredin. A camp hospital was established at Merredin because it was a rail junction which meant it was an ideal fall back position if ever Perth was invaded as well as being an execellent training hospital for nurses destined for service overseas.

I had to catch the train early one morning to get to Merredin. The ambulance was waiting for us at Merredin to take us out to the hospital about a mile out of town. By this time it was dark so little was seen of the campsite until morning.

Mud, mud and more mud that is my main memory of Merredin. Clomping around in knee high boots and sleeping in enormous red cross pyjamas. The wards consisted of four large tents joined together. Ward 1 the one where I worked consisted of three of these structures. The ablution block was a corrugated iron building and all water for the ward was obtained from here. It meant dashing in and out with buckets and bowls, trying to ignore patients who were showering in open fronted stalls, and seated on open fronted toilets etc.

Outside the tents were buckets of water for fire prevention but inevitably every morning they were covered in ice. The patients in this ward were medical cases mostly stomach ulcers. They were on very stringent diets and required warm milk seemingly every five minutes of the day, which had to be warmed to the right temperature on a pump up primus stove which always seemed to be out of methylated spirits at the crucial time. It was so bitterly cold in the wards that most of the patients sat up on their bed with crocheted coloured rugs around their shoulders. Sponging the patients was very torturous for them so speed was the kindest way to save them from freezing.

There was no electricity in the wards, and as it became dark very early evening temperatures had to be taken with the aid of a hurricane lantern, and good eyesight was required to be able to read the thermometer correctly. When the days work was done, there was always the hazardous trip to the mess for evening meal. Sister always delegated a patient to accompany me to the gate of the quarters, armed with a hurricane lamp not only because it was pitch black outside, but there were also slit trenches half filled with water to be negotiated.

Our bedrooms were large tents which housed four to six girls, my particular one had six, they had wooden floors and all clothing hung on a wire down the centre and was always damp. But what a welcome place it was after a hard day's work in the wards, a letter or two to write (with the aid of the hurricane lamp) and then a chat with the girls and then blessed sleep. The morning call seemed to come so quickly and then another long day was about to begin. After breakfast and morning parade at 7.00 we would begin work which went through to six or up to eight o'clock in the evening depending when your work finished.

The members of the Australian Army Medical Womens Services (V.A.D.S.) who served at Merredin, had all volunteered for overseas service or in Army jargon were in the A.I.F. The rest of the staff from Guildford joined us after a couple of months and we were informed we were suffering all the hardships of a tented or field hospital, a training ground for service in a theatre of war. The conditions were as

primitive as possible as would be expected in New Guinea for example. That made the work seem a little easier as there was some purpose in it.

After many months of training the unit was ready to embark overseas. For some of us it was not to be though, as after embarkation leave we were interviewed by the senior commandant who informed us that all girls under 23 or over 35, (about 20 of us) were not to go. As I was then nineteen I knew there was little hope for me but to some who were within weeks of being 23 it was a bitter blow, but no amount of arguing helped.

It had been decided that there were several girls in a base hospital to replace us who had volunteered for duty in the Middle East, but because of the cessation of hostilities over there, they were not needed. We all were bitterly disappointed, all our hard work and privations were for nothing. We had heavy hearts as we packed our bags to be sent to base hospitals. The months of mud, slush and hard work were all to no avail. As we said goodbye to our friends and the unit to which we had become attached, all agreed that perhaps the best days of our lives in the Army were the ones spent in Merredin. Our next posting was to be 118 A.G.H. at Northam.

NORTHAM

Northam was a very different hospital as the wards were buildings not tents. The hours were just as long and the work every bit as arduous but it was a much larger unit. Our quarters were tents two to each and gardens were made by the girls to make it seem more homely. The last couple of rows of tents down toward the river were rather lonely but we were never frightened.

One night my tent mate and I were awakened by two of the girls in the tent behind us who were terrified as two fellows on horses were trying to undo the tent flap. They rushed out the other side into our tent and we waited a while before we could go for help. My tent mate gathered her courage and dashed to our officer's room which was a good distance away and guards were summoned. We heard the horsemen gallop off, luckily no harm was done but it made us very careful to keep our tent securely latched, that was the only time we had a scare. It was at least a year before we moved into huts which were very long rooms with beds each side which we separated into bays by our lockers.

I worked on night duty with a sister and an orderly, it was a very busy ward with some long term sick patients back from the Middle East. We had a ward full of malaria patients and a ward full of Prisoners of War. They were sent here to work on

farms and many worked down the South West. A lot of them were the much hated Germans and many of them were Italians. The German and Italian Prisoners of war worked in timber mills and farms and when they took ill they came to us.

I considered myself very lucky as I did not have to work in the wards for very long before I was sent to work in the theatre. At first I was apprehensive as I did not think I could handle such a task but before long I found I was enjoying it and found it very interesting. The theatre was to remain my job until I left the army but I look back now and consider it the best job I have ever had.

On one particular day in the operating theatre we were doing a routine Hernia operation on an Italian P.O.W. I was assisting the doctor who was the head surgeon with the rank of Colonel. He did the actual Hernia then said to me you can close it up. As I had never put stitches in anyone before I was very apprehensive but managed to do the job and was complimented for my good work. A few weeks later a P.O.W. brought the parcel from the ward to be steralised, the poor man was almost bent double he was bent right over and could only shuffle along. The colonel came in the door as the fellow was leaving and called me over and told me that was the man I had sewn up. I nearly fainted as I asked what I had done wrong. The surgeon just shrugged and said I don't know but you did it. It was at a dance not long before we left Northam that the colonel confessed it was not the same P.O.W. but one that had arthritis of the spine needless to say I was relieved even though it was the enemy I hated the thought of causing such agony.

Despite all our restrictions and discipline we all got along extremely well and our days off, one per week we would walk into the town do some shopping mainly for fruit and goodies we were not given. We had one late leave pass (till midnight) per week so we would visit the movies or go to a dance either at the local canteen, run by the townsfolk or at the Town Hall.

On one occasion a Repertory Club came up from Perth and performed "Blythe Spirit". It was a play concerning ghosts and was set in well-off England. It was really embarrassing as the soldiers didn't appreciate the toffee nosed production and the audience yelled out many awful comments.

Many good friends were made at Northam, some married and some left the army. Others moved on to other hospitals and some were sent to units in the islands. In the latter half of 1944 we were told our hospital was closing and moving on. We had a lovely closing down dance and everyone sent home for their civilian clothes to wear to the dance. It was a lovely party and all of the officers mixed in with everyone

Nurse Lola Humphrys

Lunch on the Nullabor – Lola up the front on the right.

else. Our patients were all farmed out to other hospitals and we had the enormous task of packing up. Most of the doctors and nurses were sent elsewhere and I know packing up the theatre was a terrible job. All instruments had to be wrapped individually after being thoroughly greased with vaseline. I could smell it for some time after. Rumours flew around the place, some said we were going East others said New Guinea, we were warned to be ready by a certain day, then that would come and go so then the rumours would fly again. Girls who had good reasons such as husbands, sick parents and who just did not want to go were sent to Hollywood Hospital.

THE EASTERN STATES

Finally we were told have your kit-bags in front of your huts by a certain time then we were taken by trucks to Northam station. After a meal of baked beans, one of the many, we joined a troop train and headed East.

We had to change trains at Kalgoorlie as the rail line was a different width from there to South Australia. After another meal we boarded the bigger train which had sleepers but no mattresses. With eight to a compartment, two to each bunk, we did not have very much room.

Our meals were cooked in a mobile kitchen on the train. The poor soldiers travelled in cattle trucks, so we were lucky. We had to get off the train and line up with our tin plates and cups where we would have a dollup of stew with a chunk of bread and a cup of dishwater or maybe it was meant to be tea. Our dining room was the Nullabor Plain and our seats were the ground. Wild goats nosed around us for snacks and believe me they got plenty as I don't think the cooks were trained at a very high class cooking school. When the girls would start to get back in their carriage more often than not, one of the soldiers would grab a goat and put it in the corridor. There were wild screams as the poor frightened goat charged through the carriage while the soldiers were all killing themselves laughing. We did not think it funny.

At one stop a priest who had been travelling on the train got off and began walking into the desert. As the train pulled away we could see his small figure walking way off into the distance. He must have been walking to his mission – the train crew did not seem concerned, hopefully he knew exactly where he was going and how far he had to walk.

Our next change of train was at Port Augusta in South Australia we had breakfast on the station before travelling on to Adelaide. We were taken to an army camp for

lunch which was an improvement on the Nullabor. At this camp I was summoned to the Salvation Army Officer's office. I couldn't think why but was pleasantly surprised to find the officer was the sister of my friend Miriam Clair who had died suddenly in Northam at the age of eighteen. She was a lovely girl so kind with beautiful honey coloured hair. I shall never forget her, I had sent her sister a photo of us both taken at Merredin by a patient, so that is why Captain Clair wanted to see me. After an emotional visit we said goodbye, no doubt she would have been thinking her sister would have been with me on that day, if fate had not taken a hand.

We entrained again this time for Melbourne where we spent a couple of days before the last legs of our journey loomed. We thought we were uncomfortable before but this was all night sit-up in very cramped conditions. We changed trains again at Albury with a very long walk along a very long platform lugging all our gear. The next train was a little more cosy but we were very pleased after five long days and nights to reach Sydney. After being shunted all over the place we were finally on our way to new our hospital in a place called Punchbowl.

We did not know until we got there, that there was another unit in residence the 101st A.G.H. I was allocated a room near the operating theatre. As I was often on call at night it was much more convenient. We had to unpack all of our instruments etc and we took over the theatre as we were told the others were moving on. I was the only permanent member of the theatre staff so it was rather good instructing the sisters about where and what instruments we had.

Most of the doctors were our Northam ones so I think I upset some of the sisters who did not approve of them speaking to me. The Charge Sister was a lovely person a Tasmanian who had escaped from Singapore, so she was very easy to work with. In all they were a nice group and we all slotted in to our jobs very well. Our orderly was a character called Mac who could always raise a laugh from us and he did terrible things which he got away with. After the war he committed suicide by hanging from a tree in King's Park. His laughter must have hidden a tortured mind.

We spent several months in Sydney and while on leave my friends and I were able to go day trips and came to know Sydney quite well.

THE ISLANDS

The nuclear bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the war was coming to a close but not for us, once more we were prepared for another move this time to the islands (New Guinea). We were excited at this posting and considered ourselves lucky to be

sent. Long trousered safari suits and broad brimmed hats were issued, once again the unit was culled, married girls and those under age were moved to other hospitals. It was sad to see them go and many tears were shed, we had all been together a long time. The overseas posting age was lowered to 21 and four of us just scraped in. There were a couple of girls who were so close to 21 but no amount of tears or pleading could sway the heirarchy.

We were a very excited bunch who were finally lined up and told we were embarking that day. Hurried good-byes were said to friends we were leaving behind. We finally went up the gangway of the 'Taroona' with a piece of cardboard in our hat bands with a large number on it. It was to be a fateful journey for me.

The Taroona was not a large ship it was 4,286 tons and 350ft long and in peace time had been employed on the Launceston-Melbourne express mail passenger service. We set sail and sailed under the beautiful bridge and proceeded to the oiling wharf on Middle Head. When we set off again it proved too much for the ship a mechanical fault was found in the engine room. We limped back to Darling Harbour. As we were sailing back to Darling Harbour the ferries and passengers gave us a rousing welcome as they thought we were returning from overseas. We all waved furiously they were not to know we hadn't been anywhere. As time went on it was decided to give us a few hours leave as maritime requirements were fulfilled. I later learnt that one of the engineers wanted to be married that day so he made sure we did not get very far.

We stayed in the harbour for about three days, wharfies at the next pier threw apples up to us that they were unloading from Tasmania. We were allotted our cabins some being two bunks and others three. The cabin steward made himself known to us when we arrived but we never saw him again throughout the voyage. As our cabin floor was kept clean I presume he did that when we were on deck. Each morning the Sergeant Major in charge of troops would begin shouting in the corridor about 0700 hours to 'Show a leg'. That was the call to attend to your ablutions and get up on deck in readiness for breakfast. We were lucky enough to eat in the dining room, we were at one end and the officers the other. Snow white table cloths were a luxury we had not had for some time. A menu was presented to us which enabled an adequate choice.

After three days we were very pleased to hear the engines start up and once again we sailed under the Bridge and out of the Heads.

There were several hundred soldiers aboard as well as us fifty or so girls. After breakfasting it was a race to get a position on the decks, my friends and I claimed a place on top of a hatch. There was no where to sit as there were no chairs or any other places to sit other than the deck. At night we travelled in complete black-out conditions so we were not able to open the port-hole.

The first pangs of sea-sickness began to appear – for the first few days there were quite a few empty spaces in the dining room until we all got used to the roll of the ship. I of course managed to be sea sick and to go down to the dining room was unmanageable. The hatch became a haven and it was great to be able to lie down and being in the fresh air was the best thing for the sick ones. Luckily there was a kind sailor a Royal Australian Navy gunner who along with about six others manned the guns on the troop ships to keep an eye open for submarines.
For a couple of days he plied me with tomato sandwiches and by the time I had got my sea legs and was able to go to the dining room we were firm friends. He too came from West Australia.

We berthed at Brisbane and we were given a few hours leave which helped to break the monotony before we were on our way again. A few of us went into Brisbane with the gun crew. The next day 300 more troops joined us, it did become more crowded so it was imperative to be up bright and early for the best spot on the deck. We did not have to do any work of any kind, life boat drill was the only compulsory chore so all we had to do was to idle the hours away and after lunch we were allowed to go to our cabins if we wanted to.

Five days later we entered Milne Bay on the south tip of New Guinea, we were not allowed to go ashore though some of the troops disembarked. Our final destination was to be Weewak, on the north-east coast of New Guinea. What a sad looking place it was when we got there. We were all ready to go ashore - by then the second nuclear bomb had been dropped in Nagasaki and the war had finished. Somebody had forgotten to tell the Japs. The place was being shelled both night and day, there was not a tree standing with any foliage on it. We waited on the deck ready to go ashore, we could see where our hospital was being built and after several hours they decided we would have to stay where we were. We were in the harbour for two days and nights all the time the whistle and noise of the shells going over the ship was continuous. My brother Len had been at Wewak for sometime and tried with all his might to get out to the ship to see me however he was not allowed to.

Lola in the army jungle green nurses uniform

The Catalina Base at Jacquinot Bay

At long last they decided our destination would be Jacquinot Bay, on a large island to the east called New Britain where we were to nurse the troops who were going to round up the Japs also to take care of the P.O.W.'s.

We sailed next morning and went back down the east coast to Finschhaven on the edge of a peninsular to disembark some more troops and take on thirty sisters from the 2/11 A.G.H. While we were at that port a concert was held on the hatch. Our unit had several singers both male and female and there were several quite good acts from the others on board. As soon as the concert began American soldiers appeared from nowhere and made themselves comfortable on deck. Just as everything was going in full swing a part of the dock we were tied up to collapsed with an awful bang and an American jeep went in to the water. It didn't seem to worry them it gave us all a bit of a fright.

We continued on our way the next day and eighteen days after we left Sydney we arrived at our destination. In different times it would have been a lovely cruise, but travelling under strict war time conditions with nothing but the bare essentials around us it was not the most enjoyable but it provided us with a rest which after our years of hard work, with a lot more to come, it gave us a breather.

JACQUINOT BAY

We alighted in Jacquinot Bay on the island of New Britain. As we had been cooped up on the ship for so long they told us to go for a walk before bedding down. Nobody told us not to go far because there could be stray Japs around so we just walked where we wanted to. Some officer in a camp down the road saw some of the girls walking past his camp and rang to report them. Trucks were sent out to collect everyone but for once my friends and I had not gone very far and were safely in our hut. We all got a terrible telling off and were confined to barracks for a fortnight. As there was nowhere to go it didn't matter much.

Our quarters were a disused ward with an iron roof which was pounded all of the time with falling coconuts, what awful shocks we got when they fell. We were staging with the 2/8th Hospital unit who were glad of extra hands.

The war finished and our job began in earnest. Prisoners of war from Rabaul were sent down to us, mostly Indians who were in a shocking state. The poorly supplied Japanese soldiers were starving and had hacked off some of the Indian prisoner's buttocks for meat. Our theatre was a very busy place. We also received several nuns, about twenty or more who had been imprisoned in a valley not far from their

convent. They had tunneled into the walls of the valley for shelter. They were all very sick with T.B. and malnutrition, some needing urgent operations and all sorts of things.

The poor women had little clothing and the Red Cross supplied striped dresses - all that they had. The nuns were used to ground length habits and head coverings, so sheets were torn up which we hemmed and provided the veils. They were so thankful, they had had a dreadful time at the hands of the Japs and had buried so many of their order, they would never forget.

We did all we could for them and were so pleased when a ship called to take them home. We worked long hours but it was really heart breaking to see how cruelly the Japs had treated their prisoners.

After the surrender Japanese zeros began to fly in from the out lying islands to land and turn themselves in. They were given only enough petrol to fly in and some only just made it. When the cockpits opened and the pilots climbed out – many of them were very young men and some of them were women.

While we were at Jacquinot Bar we were in great demand for dances at different units, of course our officers did not accept many invitations but if the girls had some time off they were royally treated if they went to a dance. One I managed to go to was at an air-force base, they were New Zealanders and I can remember how amazed I was at the preparations that had gone on. We got to know the airmen fairly well and the Catalina crews were very kind. They used to get fortnightly care packages whereas the Australians were lucky to get one a year. If they came to the hospital for a dance they would bring biscuits and fruit cake from their packages.

Often the Catalinas would fly to a bay where the crews knew they could get oysters. They would collect large kerosene tins of them and on the way back would drop a toilet roll in the hospital grounds with a message on to say they had oysters for tea. During the evening the girls would walk down to the beach with bread and butter and pepper and salt and the New Zealanders would bring up their tins of oysters for a beach picnic.

RABAUL

When time came for us to move up to Rabaul the New Zealanders flew us up there in their Catalina's – twenty five at a time. No mod cons of course and rather packed

in. It was a thrilling experience none of us have ever forgotten. I was fortunate as I got to travel with the gunner in the blister as I had my injured foot – the thrill of taking off from the water was unforgettable. We think we were the only females during the war who got to travel in this way, we consider ourselves very lucky to have had the experience.

After landing we were loaded on to a bus – the local woman along the road threw flowers and yelled out White Missie!, White Missie! It must have been years since they had seen white women and gave us a beautiful welcome.

We were very busy with all sorts of complaints and we worked very long hours. We were all scheduled for a ten hour day but many times a couple of extra hours were worked. By this time the Japanese were our prisoners and each ward or department were given two each day to do our manual labour. Some of them worked quite well but others would not, if they caused any problems we had a ward master who carried an axe handle and a quick call to him and he soon had the Japs on the move. They had so ill treated the prisoners of war that no one felt guilt at any beatings they got.

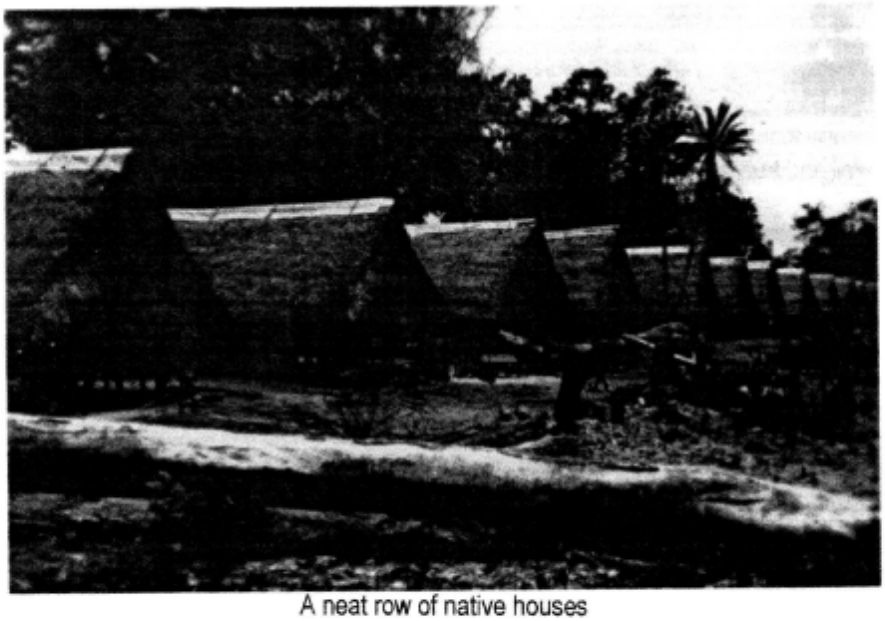
While soldiers were fighting overseas their wives and families anguished at home for them and assumed the poor soldiers were wishing they were home. Nothing could be further from the truth. The soldiers we observed living in terrible hardship and under dangerous conditions absolutely loved it and never gave a second thought to home.

Rabaul must have been beautiful before the war with a large harbour and volcano cones. Many of the palm trees were just trunks as the tops had been blown off by shells. Around the hospital bananas, coconuts and paw paw's could be picked from the trees. The huge frangipani trees had flowers as big as saucers and giant hybisucs trees covered in vivid blooms dotted the jungle. All that remained of the town was a pockmarked wall of the Burns Phelp building – a well known island trading company.

The patients with time on their hands used to steal the hospital pure alcohol and brew up a potent jungle juice from the wild grapes and cucumbers that grew in the jungle. The doctors also had their own still and would occasionally have a party.

One day a Catalina flew low over the hospital and a toilet roll came flying down and rolled up to the post office steps. On it was written "Bye Bye Aussies – Off Home Now". Our friends the New Zealanders were going home.

Beautiful Rabaul



A neat row of native houses

One night the ammunition dump blew up and caused a beautiful fireworks display that carried on for three days and nights. We worked flat out and two threatres operated all day. Mostly Japs were injured in the blast. At one stage we had ten on stretchers waiting for surgery and the doctors on their feet all day and night stopped for a cup of tea. Four died before we could tend them while the surgeons had a cup of tea. We were all so tired in the tropical heat and the Prime Minister Mr Chifley chose that time to pay a visit. He told me I looked very tired, I felt like telling him I well and truly know that.

Our quarters were tents for several months with dirt floors which were pumis dust from the volcano's. We got tired of dirty feet so procured some thick brown paper which we spread out on the ground, that had its drawbacks as each night land crabs were everywhere so all night we could hear the pitter patter of them crawling over our floor. After about two months they built huts for us and two shared a room which was lovely. We were surrounded by a high bamboo fence to keep intruders out but we never had any cause for alarm. We had lights out at nine and we were always glad to go to bed. Occasionally we held a dance in our mess and we had no difficulty in getting partners to attend. A surgeon once said to me 'Damn it aren't you going to ask me to your dance'. I told him he could come if he wanted to and he duly turned up and soon found someone to pair off with. Our socials were over by nine thirty and that was giving us another half hour.

Our Christmas party was no different but for New Year we had to beg Matron to allow us to stay up till ten. We were allowed to go for a picnic but always in two's accompanied by two soldiers who were armed and had the consent of their colonel and also our officer in charge. We managed to go a couple of times and one memorable time was to a mission where the nuns made us most welcome and provided us with a lovely lunch.

The native children were beautiful – the laughter of them playing on the beach and swimming in the sea. The fuzzy wuzzy soldiers were very proud and looked smart in their lap lap uniforms. All you could hear was the soft pad, pad, pad of their big feet as they marched along the roads without shoes. Most of the natives ate beetle nut and would give beaming smiles with red stained teeth. They believed it made their breath sweet and aided digestion. Once we went on an excursion to the island of New Ireland off New Britain. We visited a village which was swept immaculately – very very poor but spotlessly clean. On occasion a Sing Sing would be held. Villages in their best bird of paradise feather headresses and grass skirt finery would walk in from miles around for the dance. A Sing Sing would go on for days.

Our Chinese cook had been brought up in New Guinea. When the Japanese invaded they posted a notice up proclaiming that any unmarried women would be rounded up to work for the Japanese on a certain date. Our cook had two unmarried sisters. Every available man in Rabaul hurredly married a single girl before the set date and one of his sisters married an 80 year old man. His other sister was not so lucky and was forced to work for the Japanese. She was not co-operative and was tied to a tree with fire ants. They began to eat her alive. She survived the experience but her face and body was badly pock marked.

One of the joys we had was to attend the movies which was in the open-air and seats were logs. Sometimes it rained but we had big gas capes which kept us dry. Soldiers used to walk long distances to see the movies and awful comments were passed in a loud voice at various scenes in the picture. When we walked in there were always loud wolf whistles so we tended to find a space near the back to save embarrassment.

A couple of tents were erected beyond our huts but in our fenced off area they told us they had found some geisha girls in one of the Jap camps and they were to be kept in these tents. They were not allowed to leave their compound and I can recall seeing a rather haggard looking persona. They eventually were shipped off to their homeland but we never fraternised in any way. Years later a story has been told about them, and apparently they were some of the Korean women who were snatched from their families and put to work as prostitutes for the benefit of the Japanese Army. They were seeking compensation for the atrocities that happened to them, had we known I wonder if we may have helped them or shown a little kindness.

Japanese POW's worked for us in the hospital we called them Number 1 boy – number 2 etc. We often saw Japs being beaten by their officers they apparently were used to it. We had a Jap working in the theatre who dropped one of the sister's irons. If an iron was dropped then it ususally didn't work again. She was near him and hit him across the head with a large test tube she was carrying which just shattered. She ordered him out and sent him scurrying, shortly after he returned with his officer who through an interpreter asked what he had done. When sister told him he proceeded to give the Jap the most awful hiding then with much bowing and scraping and profuse apologies they went off and we never saw the Jap again – he must have been given some other job.

The next one we had working for us was given a bucket to carry which contained a foot wrapped up, to be taken to the incinerator. He flatly refused to carry it and

although the orderly who was to accompany him hit him with a bamboo he was carrying the chap still refused. He was also removed by his officer after he was reported, after all of the terrible things they did to their prisoners of war it's hard to imagine how they could be squirmish about anything.

Our lives were very busy and we relied on our friends to provide companionship and enjoyment to take us away from the horrors of hospital life. A swim in the nearby ocean did wonders.

One of my friends knew a chap from her home town who was with the War Office Property Group. They arranged to take four of us on a picnic and were able to show us places of interest. They had to be armed to take us and one of the girls asked one of the men if he would he show her how to fire his gun. We moved into the jungle a short distance out of harms way and as we did we discovered an underground hospital built by the Japs. The boys immediately made us go back to the Jeeps while they inspected it as that was their job. They suspected it had been booby trapped but luckily it was not so, but it was complete with beds equipment and all that is needed in a hospital. They marked where it was, and we cleared out but there must have been many of these things hidden in the jungle perhaps not discovered to this day.

The first war crimes trials in the South West Pacific were held at Rabaul. A gallows was erected beside the court and after sentence the prisoners were taken over and immediately executed. I witnessed some of the trials and watched the expressions of the Japanese as they were sentenced. They had no reaction – it was as if they expected it. I could not watch the executions take place.

After morning tea I used to give the Jap P.O.W.'s the left over sweet biscuits. One day I was presented with a beautifully carved small thin dark wooden box containing a pair of chop sticks and a lovely painting of a Japanese lady on some white parachute silk. As the Japanese compounds were cleared and ships became available they sent the prisoners back to Japan.

We were the last hospital unit to be brought home to Australia. We had to wait until the hospital ship "Manunda" arrived for our departure. It was terrible to see the poor Troppo soldiers being led around the deck of the "Manunda" for exercise all tied together on their journey home.

It only took five days to reach Sydney – as we entered the harbour all of the soldiers tossed their tin hats over the side. As we stood on the deck after docking an officer

on crutches beside my friend Kath and I yelled out to the wharf "Mummy I will be coming down on a stretcher". That was all we needed we both tried to muffle our giggles with little success.

We had to wait five days in Sydney for the troop train to begin our arduous journey home. We marched in a parade through Sydney, it was such a memorable and emotional experience that I have never marched in a parade since.

In Sydney we all stood out as we had been made to take Atebrin up in the islands to prevent Malaria which had turned our skins daffodil yellow. Unfortunately it did not prevent my malaria, the symptoms of which appeared soon after I arrived back in Australia. I believe I had been bitten by mosquitos when summoned to the operating threatre for emergency operations at night.

After a stop-over in Melbourne for two days we eventually left for home. Travelling across the Nullabor by train on our journey home from the islands we stopped in the middle of nowhere for lunch - which was the usual thing. There were about four railway huts at this place and my friend and I had just finished our lunch and we were a little apart from the others. A scruffy looking man beckoned us from his hut. We tried to ignore him and he called out to us a couple of times, we decided to see what he wanted but no way would we go inside his hut. We felt so guilty at thinking how awful he was when he gave us both a lovely bunch of beautiful red Sturt Peas.

We were all very excited to be nearing Perth and it was great to have family and relatives waiting on the station. After some well deserved leave I had to go to 110 P.M.H. Hollywood Hospital to work for a few weeks before my discharge and subsequent marriage. Perth had changed – rationing was still in and everything was hard to get. My family had changed – my brothers had married and serving in the Australian army had certainly been a life changing experience.