



---

## South Australians at war – transcript – OH 371

### 'Women and War': Zonta Club of the Riverland's Australia Remembers 1945-1995 Project

---

#### Marj Osborne

SIDE A

START 1:28

I was in Adelaide and when the war broke out I was managing a homemade cake shop down at Glenelg, Wenzels, which is still going as a matter of fact. And in 1940 I went to Penfield to work in the munitions. Working mainly with the powder, making pellets for the anti-aircraft missiles. A lot of hard work down there. We worked in the powder bay and it was a fairly lethal mixture that we had to work with. It was a mixture of ammonia nitrate and trinitrotoluene which was very potent and working in the powder you're supposed to only be in working a week and then out for about three weeks or a month, but because some of the girls couldn't take the powder at all some of us worked in there most of the time. And we finished up with our front of our hair all orange, our nails were all orange and you'd go in shopping into Adelaide and the people would look at you and it was a real no-no if you touched any clothes or anything because people didn't understand about the colour of your skin.

Also we would have to, there were areas\_\_ \_\_a clean and a dirty area. When you went in in the morning you'd take your clothes off and step into the clean area and out other clothes on. When you finished your shift you would come out and have a shower and then put your clothes on. You couldn't have any grit or anything around where you were working.

Good atmosphere really, except that they were hurrying us along because they were needed so badly. So some of us did extra shifts, sometimes two shifts at a time because things were very, very bad over there where the boys were. They didn't have a lot of ammunition and they had to get it out quickly. END 3:33

#### Enid Rofe

SIDE A

START 4:42

Well the Second World War, about in 1943 I joined the Air Force when I was about 19 years old. And I did my initial training at Mount Breckan, Victor Harbor. Then I was posted to a technical training course at Ultimo, Sydney, where it was a slum, but the course consisted of metal fitting and we were making spanners and things like that – a bit different from\_\_ \_\_I used to work for a dressmaker before that, so it was a little bit different. And the building was in an old messy...factory thing, so it wasn't very nice, very cold but our barracks were the Oceanic Hotel at Coogee Bay which was quite different, stripped of its fittings course.



And from there I went to Ascot Vale, Melbourne and we were in the showgrounds which were converted sheep stalls that was our barracks there. And there we learned about the F-frames(?) and things like that.

Oh yes, lots of them. This was a different course that we did, it was the technical training courses, we ended up by the mechanics, armourers, all sorts of things to do with aeroplanes.

The only time I did miss it I had to come home on compassionate leave because my mother was very ill and that's when I did miss it because we lived out on a sheep farm which was petrol rationing, no company and I really did miss it then, the company and things, but apart from that no, not afterwards.

Oh, well we had lots of good times, I made some very good friends, in fact two of the girls I joined up with, we're still good friends and the friendship continues today. At Sale we had lots of outside interests apart from our work. We worked in a hangar at Sale, about four aircraft used to come – Beaufort bombers. Afterwards we could go onto Sale for meals or there were dances and things at the station, pictures. I played basketball for Sale...all those Gippsland districts. So there was lots of good times.

But the other part that wasn't so good was I did have a very lucky escape I suppose you would say. I was riveting, which was my job more or less, in a wheel bay and the power went off and I got a bit lazy, I was up the top of a ladder, so I asked someone to put the power plug back and there was evidently something wrong because the power was on alright, it went right through me. I was told I screamed and I\_\_ \_\_ a man walking past, he'd heard this particular sort of scream before and he pulled the plug out and I fell six feet onto a concrete floor. And I didn't even have a bruise, but I did have a few hours off. That wasn't very funny at the time, but looking back it wasn't so bad. END 7:48

## **Mae Campbell**

SIDE B

START 20:21

Housekeeping was very difficult during the war years. There were so many things that one could not buy, even if you had plenty of money you still couldn't get them. You've heard a bit about ration tickets. We were all given ration tickets for tea and sugar, flour, meat, butter, coffee, soft drinks, cocoa, chocolate and clothing etc. But I was fortunate enough to be able to get butter from my mother-in-law who had a cow and that helped us quite a bit. And I didn't drink tea, well very rarely drank tea those days, so I was able to give my mother-in-law and father-in-law my tea coupons and they loved tea, they drank a lot of tea and in return she would give me p'haps sugar tickets of something to replace that. We'd switch around. The neighbours did the same. My sister was one neighbour and Mrs Biggs the other and occasionally we'd swap if one had too many tickets for something then we'd change and get something from one of our neighbours. So we managed that way quite well. And as far as cooking was concerned, I had the butter and we had chooks, I had chooks and plenty of eggs and I was able to make cakes and biscuits and things for the children, puddings and so on. And we did get plenty of milk. We got that from my mother-in-law too. So we were one of the fairly fortunate, well I was a fortunate woman. I had three children to look after. But it was quite a big thing.



We had to try and make the best we could in clothing from second-hand clothes. We used to cut down trousers and make trousers for the boys and open the legs up and use a couple of the legs of trousers to make skirts for the girls. And I think someone said material was very hard to get and it was. You were very lucky if you got some material. But curtain material was free and I was fortunate – one day I came to Berri and I was looking around and I found the most beautiful silk curtain, cream silk curtain material, so I bought a few yards and I made a lovely evening frock out of that. And I thought I was very good, absolutely marvellous when I wore this evening frock because you just couldn't go and buy frocks and things you just had to makeshift.

And for the children's underclothing, we used to get our flour in 25 bags, calico bags. And it was wonderful material in them and when they were washed they really came up quite well and the neighbours too used to give me some of their bags that they'd had their flour in and I made the children's underclothing out of the calico bags. And they really made up quite well. Even little petticoats for the girls were made out of calico bags and that worked quite well. So we had lots of fun in some ways trying to makeshift with these things.

We used to have plenty of fruit too because we lived on my father-in-law's fruit block. And we had some fruit trees ourselves so we had plenty of fresh fruit and stewed fruit which a lot of people p'haps didn't have but we were fortunate being on the block. And I used to help pick on the block some of the time and spend a few hours while the children were at school picking and when Bill went into Loveday camp, he had a plumbing business of course, and he left fairly suddenly to go into camp and there were quite a few things left in the shop to be attended to so I learnt to mend dip tanks and baths and thread pipes and all sorts of things. The channels in those days had little outlets and we had to have outlet shutters or at least the blockers had to have outlet shutters, so I made hundreds of those I think, outlet shutters. And that kept me busy with looking after the children and helping out. And then I gradually sold the fittings, plumbing fittings, that he had in the shop. Everyone was coming and wants some taps or a socket or something like that so I ended up selling most of the things in the shop. So I was a shopkeeper and a housekeeper and a fruit picker and all sorts of things. It's amazing what you can do when you have to, isn't it?

We couldn't get films either in those days, so none of us have very many films of our children, which is unfortunate really. A photographer used to come around and I had some photos of the children, but you just couldn't get the film to take photos yourself. END  
25:25

## Joy Sweet

SIDE B  
25:28

I was a school child, I can remember the day that I heard about war was when I was having a drink at the tap at the Glossop Primary School and one of the boys told me that war had begun. I've never ever forgotten that. So I spent most of my time at school and while we were at school we used to raise money for the Schools Patriotic Fund. We used to bring along all of the paper and glass, batteries and things like that and the parents used to have their trailers and utes and bring it there. Then that would all be sent away on the train that



---

went through Glossop and then we would get points for that, for bars and aeroplanes for the SPF fund.

I don't know about amusing, but I do know that when my father came back from Loveday, he was at Loveday and tried to get overseas, but they kept him there because he was in the essential forces – he was a plumber – and he used to come home with his pockets full of chocolates and things like that from the canteen. And I can always remember that when he finally came home my brother, who was five at the time, stood behind a chair and didn't want to come out because of this man that was there. Dad had been away so often and just came home at weekends that he didn't realise it was his dad, I think. But some of them when their fathers went away and were away for several years, that was very, very difficult, whereas we did see dad, you know, quite often.

I can't really remember anything about VP day, but I can remember when they announced on the radio that war had ended. I said to mum "What will they do for news now? There'll be no news." END 26:56