

Interviewee: Doris E. Pullen

Interviewer: Malin Lundin

Date: 01.11.2010

Interviewer: This is an interview with Doris Pullen and the date is 1st November 2010 and the interviewer is Malin Lundin.

Interviewer: Would you be able to tell me your date of birth please.

Doris: October 1920.

Interviewer: So how old were you when the war started then?

Doris: Oh, it started in 1939 didn't it? I was married at 18.

Interviewer: So you must have been 19 when the war broke out. So where were you living?

Doris: Not quite 19.

Interviewer: Just about. So where were you living when the war broke out?

Doris: In Newlands Park, 66 Newlands Park.

Interviewer: And who were you living with?

Doris: With my mother and an Aunt.

Interviewer: You said that you were married when you were 18. So that was just before the war started then?

Doris: Yes, I stayed – we stayed living at my mother's house. Yes.

Interviewer: When did you meet your husband?

Doris: Oh, gosh. I suppose I was about 16.

Interviewer: How did you meet him?

Doris: Oh, I don't really know that. I suppose – I used to go to dances, pictures met him and I got married to him. I'd just come back – come back from Egypt. My father was in the service, he was in the air force. He had joined the Royal Flying Corps and then gone in to the RAF. In fact he served 30 years in the air force and we – he wasn't at home very much. He was always away and we used to travel with him, my mother and I. Quite often mother used to take a room where he was stationed sometimes although we kept our home in Newlands Park but we used to go around and –. He went to Iraq for a while then he went over to Egypt. They weren't allowed to take their wives into Iraq in those days. When he was in Egypt we joined him and went out to Port Said and stayed in a desert camp for

probably nearly a year I suppose which was quite another experience before the war of course for service people. And it was a desert camp which – not too far from a place called Ismailia, in Egypt, called Abu Suwerr a training camp for pilots in those days. And in the desert with barbed wire and guards around it all the time. You couldn't go out the camp on your own you had to stop inside the wire. It was an experience because 20 boys used to come out every – like a term to be trained as pilots and one was always killed and 19 went back. And then another 20. Whenever anyone crashed, all the others were sent up again immediately to fly to keep their nerve. I had quite a lot of experience there then. Then when we came back from Egypt I went back to Newlands Park with my mother and I went out to work after that before the war of course started.

Interviewer: What kind of work did you do?

Doris: I was trained as a hairdresser then. My family had had hairdressers in the trade and I did that. But – I was quite young I suppose because I sort of started to run my own business as well before.

Interviewer: As a hairdresser?

Doris: Yes, what they used to call then a 'private hairdresser'. You didn't go to anybody. You went to – you had clients and went to their houses and did their hair at home and had to go and dress brides and put their things on and things like that you see¹.

Interviewer: Did you enjoy that work?

Doris: Yes, I didn't mind it. It was quite alright. And then of course I got married. We knew the war was coming by the way before it started, my father came home on leave and he would say he felt sure we would be at war. And after Chamberlain came back from his trip to Germany, 'Peace in our time' speech, we all cheered like mad - thank goodness we had a whole year to prepare for the war after that. We thought that Chamberlain postponed it very nicely for us. In that year before I was making gas masks up at a boys school up at Mayor Road just the odd time and I went into the Red Cross and I became a – I worked as a VAD. That's Voluntary Aid Detachment. And that meant that you could go and volunteer at a hospital or anything like that and they took you on to help in the hospitals so I did a bit of that.

Interviewer: So when did you start volunteering as a VAD?

Doris: I don't know. I suppose it was – the war started in 39, I suppose 39 to 40. I've got some certificates upstairs I'd got to show you when you're here. I've got one for First Aid and one for nursing, home nursing, and I've got another one for – I've forgotten what the other one was now but the one I [unclear] with, which all show you, I don't suppose there are many around, I've got a copy I can give you, is when I went in the gas chamber in my training.

Interviewer: Ok, would you be able to tell me a bit about that?

¹ 5 min

Doris: Well, you had – they had a gas chamber, it's up near Forest Hill somewhere, I don't know where it was now but it was somewhere where they had a room with gas in it you see and you had to smell the gas. You had to walk through this room and smell what the gas smelled like and come out the other end [laughs]. So I've got these certificates. So whenever – when the war did start you – I went to – my husband – my first husband went into the air force and wherever he was stationed I used to go and stay you see. And then I'd go to the hospitals on the camps where he was and volunteer. I had my own uniform and all that sort of things you took with you. You didn't get paid for anything in those days you see. You didn't get paid for doing it, you had to buy your own uniform and do your own expenses. It was purely voluntary – you were volunteering. So I used to go and that at several air force hospitals I used to go to. And I learnt the hard side of war. I learnt what happened to men – they didn't want to fight. I never met any – is it alright how I'm talking? Is it what you want?

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Doris: I don't think I ever met any heroic soldiers that wanted to go and be killed or burned or anything like that. They did it because they had to do it. They did it to help your country because we were brought up that way. Everybody that you knew in the war they were in uniform and if they weren't in a – if they hadn't joined up and if they weren't in uniform you wondered why. And you had to be either sick so you couldn't do it or you couldn't do anything else to help because we were very proud of being British then. We thought a lot about our king and country. Perhaps because I was the daughter of a service man I don't know, because he was a regular and he was – maybe it made –. But all my relations were in the services of some sort too so I hadn't – we certainly wouldn't have stopped now. My husband, my first husband, and my brother went into the air force as volunteers but that was because they didn't want to go into the army cos when you were conscripted you went into what they used to call the PBI, that's the Poor Bloody Infantry [laughs]², and you didn't want to go into the infantry if you couldn't help it. If you could volunteer and get into something else you weren't so likely to be killed so they did it to help.

Interviewer: You husband volunteered early in the war?

Doris: Yes, yes, yes. Rather than be called up. If you were called up and if you didn't belong to anything you see that's what happened. You went into an Infantry regiment probably.

Interviewer: Did you volunteer for the Red Cross throughout the war?

Doris: Yes, yeah. I was in the Red Cross all through the war then. But doing it voluntary wherever I wanted to be, wherever I was you see. Yeah, they always took me on. I used to get told off sometimes but – I used to get told off for having my hair poking out. I had curly hair a bit and had to put my cap on so my hair didn't come out of it – show out of it you see. It was a stiff cap and a back thing and you had to poke all your hair and I was always being told off for having curls coming out under my cap and [laughs].

² 10 min

Interviewer: Did you feel like the training you had received that that prepared you for what you later came to experience when you were volunteering in different hospitals?

Doris: Well, I'd been trained on the job, basically. I had the certificates for going in to a course that sort of thing and pass a little test of some sort and that was it. You learnt as you went along mainly because you had all sorts of things to deal with. I think I used to make up - I used to work with - in the men - servicemen often times were - I'd get them to hold on - they had to hold on to me when they had something done to them without an anaesthetic because we used to run out of anaesthetics sometimes and it wasn't always very nice and so I used to rather like - I don't know - in these comic things they have to stick their hands on my chest and I used to hang on to them like that and then they didn't shout so loudly [laughs]. So I had my uses. The ones that - some of the burns were very nasty but they weren't what they are today I think. Well, they weren't as bad as they are today but. We didn't get the men as they are coming back now, with their legs blown off and that sort of thing. I did go in to the operation theatres, working in the operations theatre too but I didn't like that very much. I wasn't - I don't think I ever saw a whole operation through. I used to go down with people because you'd take them down on the trolley and they said 'Don't leave me. Stay with me' and I said 'No, I won't' so I used to stay with them until they started the operation and I'd go outside until it was finished and then I'd be picking them up when they were unconscious to come back again. They didn't know I'd been away. We'd have a proper gown and mask and all of that sort of thing. I saw a lot of things didn't think was very pleasant to watch put it that way. You couldn't go and faint on the floor that would have been a disgrace to come out.

Interviewer: Did you work mainly with the men who had been injured in service?

Doris: Yes, all sort. All sorts.

Interviewer: Or did you deal with people who had been injured in air raids on the home front as well?

Doris: Well, no. Mainly I think they had been in the air force, in the service hospitals with wounds of some sort and things like that. But I didn't ever see any amputations or any of that sort. No I didn't, probably more minor things.

Interviewer: So how come you volunteered to join Red Cross then?

Doris: Well, because you all did. You'd all join something or other. People did. All-body did something. They wouldn't not you see. It was your job. You helped your country³. We weren't going to let the Germans take us over.

Interviewer: How come you picked the Red Cross though and not any other?

Doris: Well, I don't know. Well probable because it was - do you know St. Christopher's Hospice don't you in Laurie Park? Well, Miss Bennett was the person running it there and she was in the Red Cross

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in some way or another. She gathered – it wasn't St. Christopher's Hospice then it was her home. She gathered people up because – and they wanted volunteers and you did and I know we had a doctor in Sydenham who was lecturing us. We had to go to lectures with him and work. Well, later on in life, of course, she sold out and it became St. Christopher's Hospice. She moved out of the hospice, she died, I don't know. But I suppose I went in to the Red Cross because of that.

Interviewer: So, when you were volunteering in different hospitals, where did you live? Did you live in rented accommodation or?

Doris: Well, until I was bombed out I lived in Newlands Park with my mother's home.

Interviewer: So you lived at home throughout the war?

Doris: For a base, yes. My aunt, she wasn't me real aunt, she'd come to live with my mother, her name was Eva Waller and she was a soldier's daughter too. She was actually, she had been in the First World War as a – when they had some women soldiers in the First World War called the WAACs and she served in France and – she was great, she was. She came to live with my mother when I was born. She was with my mother when I was born and she never left us. She stayed the rest of her life with us. That was our Auntie Eva and she was marvellous. She – in the war – in a shop – there was a shop called Penton's, a butchers in Sydenham Road, and she worked in the office one time there and did the books and [unclear] and that sort of thing and then in the war she was also in the shop and she always, it didn't matter if the raids were on or not, she went up and opened the shop. Always. In the – during the war her mother, her mother was Spanish or Maltese, she came – she came and lived with us. And when the war was – we were being bombed in Newlands Park, Grandma Waller, that was her mother, we used to have a job get her to come down the stairs from upstairs, she had a room upstairs, to come down and to take shelter downstairs because we had what they called a Morrison shelter. We had a big – it was like a big steel table, which you would get under if the raids were on, you see. And Grandma Waller wasn't coming down. She'd gone up the northwest frontier with the men, with her serviceman husband [laughs].

We used to shelter under that and my first baby, in 1942, I had there in Newlands Park and by the time I had my second one, 1944. She – I had to go up to a nursing home. Because I had the first one at home, in those days you could have a nurse to come in and a doctor could come in so you could have a baby at home if you didn't want to go away. The nurse was at hand, because they came in for three weeks. Not like they do today, you weren't neglected. You'd paid a bit but it wasn't terrible. She had a nursing home in Forest Hill this nurse I had, so when I had my second baby I was going up to her nursing home in Forest Hill to have the baby. Three days before she was born, that one, we had incendiary bombs all around the house. So we were putting out incendiary bombs, my mother, aunt and I. That sort of shook me up a bit so then went in to her nursing home and had my second baby. An air raid was on at the time but we got over that and came out again.

And then the raids were a bit heavy then in 1944. Quite a lot of bombing went on around here⁴ and I wasn't getting any rest or sleep because you couldn't rest you see and after, I suppose she was about six months old I suppose. No, I must go back a bit then, when she was six weeks old, my mother and I said we'd go down and stay with my father in South Wales who – it was quieter down there from the raids so. We went on a train down to Wales, I had a two year old child and a six weeks old baby and we went up by a car to London and there wasn't any room on the train to get on. In those days you could tip a porter for things you see, you gave him a tip and he'd find you a seat. So he took us up the train with my luggage and put us in this carriage. And it was just this one man and woman in the carriage. Which we were lucky it was very alright and they were very chatty to us and my two year old was sitting on her lap and eating her chocolate and things like that and I had to feed the baby you see. So of course, I had a shawl which you didn't sort of show off about that in those days, you wouldn't have let anybody see, and he sort of turned, he was looking out the window all the time at the other end and I was in this end. So I had the baby and fed the baby under my shawl you see and that. He was very gentlemanly, later on he said 'Oh, are you not going to feed the baby?' as if he hadn't noticed [laughs]. They were gentlemen in those days. We had – we got down to Wales it stopped at Badminton (?). When the train stopped the train platform was all lined with the station master in his gold cap and all the rest of it outside our carriage. They got out this – and it was Lord and Lady Beaufort and she said to me 'Oh, well if - where are you going to stay?' and I said we were going to stay up where my mother was lodging in Cowbridge. She said 'Well, if you don't and if you want to come back you can come and stay with me' [laughs]. I wish I had gone afterwards instead.

I went to Cowbridge and stayed there, well it wasn't – it was a maiden lady that my mother lived – lodging with and she wasn't used to children at all and you can imagine you had nappies, and in those days you didn't have these ones that you went up the shop and bought, you had Terry squares and another liner and you had to wash them by hand and children made a mess. You had – you didn't have central heating, you had coal fires and things like that to that you got to dry everything around the fire and of course too much chaos so I had to leave there. For the lady I stayed with in Cowbridge then couldn't stand my two children. So I put them in the pram and had to walk around trying to get someone to take me in because I wasn't very popular anywhere with babies. But I did find, I went up this hill and there was an old lady who came to the door and her daughter came after her and she said 'Oh, we'll have you'. So they wanted me – she wanted me to go –. So I stayed – I went into her house to stay. We were friends with them for years afterwards and after the war they used to come and stay with me. But she took us in but I stayed I think for about 3 weeks because it was pumping water from a pump outside. Outside to the garden for the loo and you had a pump to pump the water. Cold water which you had to heat up on a fire to do your washing and everything else. And I think I ran the well dry, I think it went dry and I knew I couldn't stop there for very long either so I came home because it was easier to come home and deal with the bombing. So I came back home and we were here during raids and things for a while until my baby was six months old and it – we were having very

⁴ 20 min

heavy raids at that time. I had another aunt in⁵ St Albans up there and they said 'it's quieter there, you can come and stay with me' so I trangled up there to St Albans and I had only been away for three days and our house was bombed completely. So I hadn't got a home to come back to. I was homeless after that. I did come back afterwards to see what we could salvage, without the children I left them there to come up and see what I could salvage. We dug out a lot of bits and pieces and took them – my brother lived at number 88 Newlands Park so we took it up and used his house was full with our bits and pieces you see. We could stop for there for a while but then we had to get a rented house and we went to Bishopthorpe Road and I had – we had a rented house up there for a while until – I was there until 1946.

Interviewer: Did you find the rented house yourself or did the government find it?

Doris: I don't think the government helped us, no. I think you paid – we had an insurance for the house when it was bombed. You got a bit of money but it wasn't very much.

Interviewer: When did you receive the money? Straight after the house was bombed or?

Doris: No, no. Afterwards, a long time afterwards. When we had my third child I had him up at my – I had this house but I went up there to have the baby it was my mother's house then. She was very good, my mother was, she put up with me. And in this Bishopthorpe house, that was in 1947, I moved in to this one in 1946 you see so I went up there, overnight, to have the baby and I stayed there for a little while and came back. The night I had him, I must say was remarkably good with my children, I had one of two and one of four then didn't I? And the night I had the baby in my mother's house, they were in the other room and in the morning my eldest one had cut of my younger daughters hair, only for play she chopped that off, and she'd drawn all over the wall. I don't think my mum didn't grumble too much. I would have done if it was my grandchildren. I would have throttled them. So we came back to this house and then by 19 – I don't know, 1950, I had got divorced – I had got divorced in '52, my divorce came through and I married my second husband.

Interviewer: Did you get the chance to see your first husband a lot during the war or was it very rarely?

Doris: No, not very much. I used to keep – you see the men went away wherever they was posted to and you didn't necessarily know when they were going and you didn't know where they were going. They didn't tell you. You didn't talk about that you see. You didn't even - in my case being a serviceman's daughter I was learnt – I learnt how to hold my tongue, you didn't talk about things. You didn't always know where they were until they would contact you by letter too which used to take quite a while if they were gone overseas. I can't – I really don't know exactly, except when he – my second husband – my first husband was in England. I knew vaguely where he was then and I'd go and join him but when he was overseas I didn't necessarily know where he was.

⁵ 25 min

Interviewer: Did you use to write to him a lot and did he use to write to you?

Doris: Yeah, we wrote but perhaps a letter would take two or three weeks to come through so –

Interviewer: How did you feel being separated from him early on in the war when you had only been married for a short while?

Doris: Well, we drifted apart really you see, very much. Because you just did you know. When he came back it was like having a stranger coming back to really. You didn't sort of - you felt completely separated⁶. It wasn't very easy.

Interviewer: Did he talk about his experience in the war when he came back?

Doris: Not a lot, no. In fact my second husband who was in the army for seven years, I didn't know much about his war – they didn't talk about it much when they came – in our generation.

Interviewer: What about your aunt who served in the First World War? Did she talk much about her experience in the First World War?

Doris: No, I know she was in Ypres – Wipers, I know that, in France. She didn't talk about what had happened very much, no, I don't think she did. They were all – all my – all the various relatives were in the services of some sort. I've got some letters upstairs to show – to let you have copies of. One or, when I take you up, two are friends of mine and one was my cousin he was a – he was taken down in El Alamein, a prisoner. He was in a tank I think and he was taken – he did the long walk back through Germany after the war and he was a French master, his mother had been half French and he was French and German he could speak, he used to be an interpreter when he was coming back on the war march through Europe. He would – they would go into houses and talk the language and get food for the men on the way back. His name was George Holley and he got back in the end and he was starving of course. He was very thin in mass (??) and had to go to hospital for quite a long time and it was when he was ill afterwards that's when I wrote my wartime memory book because he started me off on it. He wrote his war story in that and then I knew a lot of men of course who'd been in the war and they wrote bits and I had – you've got one of the copies of my book haven't you? That started that book off and of course I did sell quite a lot of those. I could have sold a lot more but I couldn't in the end handle the sales anymore.

Interviewer: Around what year did you start collecting the material for the book?

Doris: What?

Interviewer: In what year did you start collecting the material for your book?

Doris: I don't know now. I can't remember now. 197 – No, I can't remember. I'm won't say the date when I started. Different ones that came back – I knew all the people that have written – or wrote bits

⁶ 30 min

for me gave me their stories and I put out into the book. I knew them all and I would say they're all true stories, they were not made – the experiences that they had.

Interviewer: How did you deal with other challenges on the home front so the blackout and the rationing and things like that?

Doris: We were blacked out and of course you could walk about in the blackout. Now – then you were safer then and you wouldn't do it now. I wouldn't walk around in the night if I could now. I wouldn't trust the people now, then you could trust people pretty well. You did all that without – you had all your windows blacked out and you didn't show any lights of course, no. Because the planes could see a light and then might bomb you.

Interviewer: Was it often that you had to go out when it was completely dark outside or did you stay in much of the time?

Doris: No, it didn't really. We just carried on I suppose. Yes, I didn't – when I was staying down in camps where my husband was stationed then and he was down near Weston Super Mare, Locking. I took a room down there and I used to stay there for a bit and⁷ walk into Weston Super Mare from there in the dark and come back again. I didn't come to any harm [laughs]. And go to the dances and things that they used to run, dances used to – cinemas used to run and yeah. We carried on the best we could.

Interviewer: What about rationing?

Doris: Rationing, yes you were careful. You didn't – you didn't – eggs you didn't get. You didn't get butter, you didn't get much sugar. You had to go without certain amounts. But you survived.

Interviewer: Did you use to do the cooking or did your mum look after that?

Doris: No, I didn't really do that much cooking. You know, auntie would do a lot of it and yes. Coal was rationed of course too. I remember we had, in the house in Newlands Park we had a big cellar under there and rooms as big as these rooms underneath the house. You could walk about all under the house and we had a whole room full of coal cos they had an outside thing that you tipped the coal into – to – what do you call it? Come on help me out? What was it called when they – things you dropped the coal into shoots of some sort.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, I can't think of the name but I know what you mean, yes.

Doris; You know what I mean? You used to go down into the cellar and we had coal, a room full of coal. When we were bombed from there, the coal was still there so I had to get a man with a horse and cart to go down under and – cos we used to shelter in the cellar. We slept in the cellar when the raids were on. He'd go down the cellar to dig out the coal and brought it up and put it in sacks and

⁷ 35 min

took it up to my brother's house but we didn't get all of it you know he just brought up what he felt and took home the rest [laughs]. Cos after the house was bombed, this is another story I suppose I'd better tell you. The house when it was bombed and furniture was all over the place you know and all broken and things but chairs perhaps what you could pick up and that all taken out whatever you could. And the lots of people around used to take the things off into their houses. When we came back and they knew where we were they brought them back again. So we didn't have all this looting that went – that they talk about went on. In our case people returned what they had taken mainly. We found that people were very much more honest and trustworthy in our case than would be today.

Interviewer: Did you hear a lot about looting during the war?

Doris: What? Hear about?

Interviewer: Did you hear a lot about people being looted?

Doris: Looted. No, not during the war. No, we didn't. No, it was after the war they seem to say had been looted here and there. We lost a lot of things that were blown up in the war that you couldn't use you see. The flying bomb that fell in our garden in Newlands Park and books and things went. Lots of things and small things but they were sort of blown up anyway. We got over it.

Interviewer: How did you feel that the war affected you as a person? Did you feel like the experiences that you had during the war that that changed you at all?

Doris: I should think so, yeah. Oh, yes. I know when on the earliest slots of bombing in Sydenham, I can remember there was a nursing home in Newlands Park along there and I came along afterwards and they were carrying out the mothers and babies. It wasn't bombed down completely but it was damaged and they had to take them all out and I felt I could have killed the next German myself then [laughs]. I was very annoyed. And certainly down by the end of the road here at Penge East station, cos I know they were probably aiming for the railway line you see but didn't hit that⁸ they hit a house down in Linden Grove there. Mrs Simkins used to live and she was killed in the house. There is a gap there now, I don't think they ever re-built on that bit of land. They still got a gap. Yes, I remember – I remember that she was killed. But people were killed that you knew sometimes but that was it.

Interviewer: How would you summarise you wartime experience?

Doris: Well, I wouldn't – I wouldn't want to go through it again. I wouldn't – I don't think – I think war is a very nasty – is nasty and I think when you lose somebody in the war, killed, especially for the mothers when they lose –. It is an awful experience for them to lose their lovely young men who go out and get killed and that. I don't like war at all, I don't like the –. To make up, I must tell you this one I think, to make up after the war we felt – my children were at school and my school – my son was in I think they came from the Gramm –. He was in Beckenham Grammar down in Beckenham and I think

⁸ 40 min

they probably started off – they were asking people to take in foreign students and things you see so we took some in. We took – and then when they had some revolution in Hungary or something they were asking for people to take - and I took a boy. It gotta be a boy from – a Hungarian boy. I had this boy brought up from the school to me and I took him on and he – it turned out his father was half Russian and his mother was half German so the Germans wouldn't have him because he was an illegitimate child of a Russian you see so he was sent away and I had him here in England. And I did have him for a year, taught him English and then he went to another home because I had already got about 6 or 7 children then. So he went – he went. My son had some German boy brought up from – over from Germany and he came here to. Well, he was a German boy and we got on very well and then I had him for a while. I had French boys and all different ones that used to come and stay with us. We had a lot of – we formed a friendship with them by letter writing so after the war with my second husband, we toured – we went for a tour around into Germany. In the car, we drove over you see and we drove around there and we stayed with some of their families out there and that was a sort of make-up for my husband, my second husband, had been in the army fighting too you see so he made up with this German man that we stayed with. He was a doctor actually and we were friends with them for years and they came over and stayed with me here after that. And he – it was a German soldier and English soldier having a drink of beer, you know, in the kitchen and that and formed a relationship. So we did it that way and got over the aggression with Germans. Sort of [laughs].

Interviewer: Do you know if they ever spoke about their experience in the war?

Doris: To each other?

Interviewer: To each other, yes.

Doris: No, I shouldn't think so [laughs]. You didn't do that. You didn't dig it up because it was better left not. But we were very friendly with them. We went out and toured around a lot of Germany with them and it was a very nice holiday. They had the same. They came over here and stayed with me. I had to take a lot of people in to this house you to stay with me at one time. Different people especially when they've lost their parents or something. I had another boy whose mother and father had both died and⁹ he still comes to see me. He's in his fifties now. They all – I don't think I've really fallen out with anybody [laughs]. I hope not anyway. I don't like making enemies. I think it's better not to.

Interviewer: How was your experience during the war as a mother and having very young children with all these air raids going on around you?

Doris: Well, you had to get on with it didn't you. What could you do? I know when I had my baby, my second baby, I got the one at two she was a nuisance cos she always wanted to get crawl out the shelter, she never wanted to stop under there. So you'd always had to grab her. I had to put my baby underneath my body so she had a better chance if we got blown up. I think you got on with it. No good

⁹ 45 min

moaning about it is it? No good bursting in to tears and jumping up and down. You've gotta get on with it and hope for the best.

Interviewer: Did you get a lot of help from your mother and from your aunt as well?

Doris: Looking after the children? Oh, yes. Yes, I couldn't have – I found them very good. You had families around you more too you see then. You didn't have –. In Newlands Park my uncle and aunt whose son was taken prisoner. They lived opposite and I was born in the house opposite and you knew the people would all help. You all knew everybody really then.

Interviewer: Did you continue with any volunteering for the Red Cross after the war as well or?

Doris: No, not really. I supported them, yes, but I didn't do anymore nursing really after the war finished. I visited one or two people in hospital afterwards who had been injured or wounded in the war. Some of my friends that had been injured. I used to go to the hospitals to see them. I didn't actually go, no, cos I got the children you see. It wasn't - you couldn't go to hospitals to work when you got young children in the same way. Because you'd had to leave them with somebody wouldn't you?

Interviewer: Did you – have you ever received any recognition for the work that you did during the war from the government or from –

Doris: No, I don't think so [laughs].

Interviewer: How do you feel about having volunteered and helped out in the hospitals and being part of the war effort but not having been –

Doris: Oh, I was glad to do it. I didn't expect any, no. No, I didn't think so. That was just – you did it that's all. I think I did – had a high moment when I used to go every year to go to – I had go to the air force service in Westminster Abbey. When they used to do the air force one I used to like doing that. I couldn't go once I got old and couldn't manage it on my own I couldn't go there anymore. I used to like going to that. And also we used to go to the Field of Remembrance when the Queen Mother used to lay a cross and I used to do that every year and I met the Queen Mother on one of those do's. I used to go and stand with the nurses, of the VAD, and she came up to me and held my hand and talked to me. She was lovely. I am a great Royalist I am afraid. I think they're doing a wonderful job on the whole our Queen has. The young ones have slipped of the rail a bit I think but they'll pull out of it I expect. I think the Queen mum was wonderful. She's lovely.

Interviewer: So have you met up with other member of the VAD after the war?

Doris: Not particularly, I don't think so. But I was thrilled to meet her. She used to come and put her cross down¹⁰. One of these crosses on the field. You've been up there, have you? And seen it when

¹⁰ 50 min

they used to cover the ground around Westminster Abbey with these crosses and they used to put them down there and have a little service up there and she used to go around. I think it was Prince Phillip last year. I believe I went last year actually. But then they go and talk to people. Walk around and went talk to them. They do a very good job because I wouldn't like to be on show all the time like the queen. Every movement you make is criticised and they try to pull you down and they couldn't do their job. No, I am afraid I have to stick up for them, the royal family.

Doris: You see I haven't had any – I had a veteran's badge. I could show you that in a minute if you like. I have one of the veteran's badges. I did get that but that –

Interviewer: When did you receive that? Was it straight after the war?

Doris: It was a few years ago. Oh, yes not long ago that I had to go. They were giving out you know for the people in the war. You got a badge for being a veteran. I'll show you when if you want to come up when you cut your machine off [laughs].

Interviewer: I don't have any more questions. Is there anything you wanted to add that you feel like you haven't had a chance to talk about?

Doris: No, I don't know. I haven't talked much about the Burma boys, the 8th Army they had a rough time when they went through fighting the Japs and I had a friend, 14th Army and that, and he wrote. I used to write to a lot of people during the war too. A lot of men that used to like having letters from home you see. So I did a lot of letter writing. And he came back from the war and I'm still in touch with his family that one and another one I – one I had a – I've got a prisoner of war card from him to show you. I've got a copy that I can let you take back with you. A Canadian one I had. Now he was badly – he came back once and he was very badly burnt. I think he came back from the Dieppe raid, Canadian Army was thrown into that one. But the men that went over and went to – as I said you didn't know that they were going. They didn't tell you 'we're gonna...' because it was far better not to talk in those days because they said 'careless talk costs lives' which it did really. You didn't tell the enemy. These days they blast it all out don't they. You were safer if you didn't say anything.

Interviewer: So were the men you wrote to, were they personal friends or were they men that you had been put in contact with just to write to?

Doris: They became friends. I mean whether – I might not have known them from start but I mean if they, you know, you wrote to them and sort of got friendly with people, yeah.

Interviewer: How did you get in touch with them?

Doris: I don't know. How did I get in touch with them? I just met them. I don't know I can't tell you that exactly. You just talked to people [laughs].

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me. I'm going to turn this –

End of Interview.