

Marie Pethick (nee Bidgood) – PVT. SF84053

In November 2010 Ken Hayes (Almoner) Brighton Sub-Branch of the R.S.L on one of his visits asked me if he could bring his Granddaughter Victoria Guthrie (Prefect) to visit me in relation to a project by the Brighton Secondary School, the subject being Next of Kin and Anzac Day Marches. Ken has been a regular visitor to me which commenced in August 2008. This I agreed to, Ken also told me that the club wishes to interview several veterans about their military service, and would I be one of the “lady” veterans?



In early 2011 Ken gave me a questionnaire in relation to the subject that would assist me and give me some time to gather thoughts and information of the WWII era which I subsequently did. I put my thinking cap on and I gave Ken a written summary and he also recorded other items that arose.

I was born Marie Bidgood on the 30th September 1922 at Kensington and my childhood home was at 3 Young Street Burnside. My father and three uncles had served in WWI, and I had one sister. I went to Burnside Public School and then to Miss Mamy's Business College for approximately two years. Then I was lucky enough to get a job at Foy & Gibson's Department Store, wages about 6/- a week. About two years later I shifted to the Manchester House where I earned approximately 6/6d per week.

During this time WWII broke out. It was Sunday night about 8-00 pm and I was on the tram going from North Adelaide to Edwardstown. Suddenly newsboys were jumping in the tram in King William Street yelling war was declared. It was a big shock. I arrived home to tell my parents. Mother had often remarked that she hoped never to see another war. She took ill that night and never recovered, passing away just three weeks later.

I then shifted to Glenelg to live with my two Aunties. I soon joined the Women's Australian National Service. Meetings were held one night per week, down Kintore Avenue and we marched and drilled on Saturday afternoons in the South parklands. We learnt first aid etc and how to change globes, tap washers and other tasks to take the place of men going to war. It was always good to see the men in uniforms at the Glenelg Tram stop when we arrived there, we felt safe.



We wore a very smart uniform and cap and were very proud of what we were doing. By this time the AWAS (Australian Women's Army Service) had been formed under the guidance of many prominent citizens, Lt. Colonel Douglas becoming the head of same. I joined the Army on September 13th 1942. On the Friday night September 30 (my birthday) we were kitted out and then found ourselves at the Adelaide Train Station on the Melbourne Express - destination Ivanhoe for our “Rookie” training. I was then Private M. Bidgood, L of C Signals.

Ivanhoe was an Ex Grammar school which had been taken over by the army. So began our life as soldiers: drill, and more drill. The

huts were our sleeping quarters, straw mattresses etc. Most weekends we were allowed out to private homes, or into Melbourne. After about three months we were all sent to different camps. I was sent back to Keswick in Adelaide. My job was to be an Orderly Room clerk, to sort and send mail, type movements and orders etc with Lieut. Johnson Ellis. At times we were required to replace batteries in searchlights which were located along the seafront from Kingston Park to Port Adelaide. We would drive along the beach and had a wonderful crew comprising Major Lawrie, Captain Eaton, Lieut. Williamson, Captain Brown, Cpl Webber and Lieut. Ellis beside myself.

When we were younger there was never a problem in getting all sorts of food but not so now. I can remember on Sunday nights getting cold meat; but you had to be quick before the maggots beat you! But overall we had no real complaints. The meals at Keswick were OK.

In relation to accommodation we were in huts at Keswick that are still there today. We spent some time at Mt Lofty, a lovely old place with an enclosed veranda. I remember waking one night screaming due to a dream with me having snakes coiled around me - when it was just the sheets!

In early 1943 we were kitted out with summer gear to go to Alice Springs. Many relatives and friends were lined up on Adelaide Railway Station to farewell us. When we were called to attention the order came through "All Personnel under 21 years of age to return to Keswick". The Major who issued the orders had a daughter who was one of us. So it was back to Keswick for me. A few weeks later we were taken to a secret camp in the Adelaide hills - now more than 50 years later I can reveal it was Mount Lofty. Each weekend we were able to go home and return on Monday morning.

My fiancée Colin Pethick (who was in Darwin with 2/27th Bat) wrote to his mother and sent £6-00 down to get me an engagement ring if I would like to be his bride. He did not even ask me! But I did say yes. By this time we were back at Keswick. In November 1943, a Saturday afternoon the boys came home from Darwin - oh what joy. I think Colin had a few days off and then went to an Ordnance Depot at Hindmarsh. We planned to be married the first Saturday in September 1944.

Three weeks before our wedding I had to type a movement order with Colin's name on it. I can honestly say that I did not tell him (by then the war had begun to change). We went ahead and were married on the 16th September 1944. My army pals were wonderful and all helped me with coupons for clothes etc. We both got ten days leave and spent our honeymoon at Victor Harbor. In approximately May 1945 I applied for a discharge which I was lucky enough to have accepted. I have always been happy to have been a soldier and would do it all again. For the next 60 years we girls had lovely reunions, but now it has sadly folded up. (I am now 88 years old.)

It is very good to catch up with old army mates and only recently I caught up with Anne Dawson, another of the girls, at a Legacy meeting which she had now decided to join. This followed a "get together" that Ken had arranged with Anne, Ken's wife Barbara and me. We were there for nearly four hours, what an enjoyable afternoon. We spoke about lots of items that we had forgotten about. One item runs into another and then it snowballs. Lots of wonderful memories came back to us that we had not thought about for many years.