Interviewee: **Dierdre Farrell**

Date: **11 May, 2016**

Interviewer: **Cameron Auty**

Note: [?] indicates words/names to be checked for spelling, and...................indicates words which are left out because they are indistinct or inaudible.

Time (min.sec)

00.04

Cameron: **This is an oral history interview with Dierdre Farrell and my name's Cameron Auty. It's the 11th of May, 2016 and we're at Bentleigh RSL. Okay, can I get you Dierdre to introduce yourself, just state your name, your age, your place of residence so we've got it recorded?**

Dierdre: Oh my name is Dierdre Farrell. I'm eighty-eight. I live at the Unit 10, 16 Florence Street, Blackburn.

Cameron: **Okay, great thank you. So the reason that we're here, or one of the reasons that we here, is that your father was a First World War veteran. Can you tell me briefly about his war service and mention his name as well, for the interview?**

Dierdre: His name was Leslie Gordon Campbell. He joined up right at the beginning. They were out at Seymour, I think it was, Seymour or Broadmeadows, and a whole lot of young clerks, uni students. He was in the Crown Law Department doing quite well. He was twenty-two when he joined up. This was 1914 and they sailed in, I'm just trying to think when it was, October I think, 1914 and on the way they were diverted to Egypt. Oh, he was made a Second Lieutenant when they were out training. The Officer in Charge selected some of the young fellows out and said 'you'll be a Lieutenant' etc, etc and I've, there's a photo of him in that book I showed you, *Rough as Bags*, leading the embarkation parade, just before they embarked and sailed away. So they went around to Western Australia, picked up a lot more people, sailed off and instead of going to England and France as they thought they would, the political people changed their minds and sent them to Egypt and eventually from there to Gallipoli. They landed on Gallipoli right near the beginning of the whole thing and he was injured and taken off onto a hospital ship, patched up, back again again and a few months later he was injured again and this time they sent him to, I think they sent him back to Lesbos and then, or Mount Alexandria rather, and then they sent him off to the London Hospital, patched him up, sent him back to Egypt. Then he went, joined his Unit in France and he fought in France right through till 1918. In 1918 he won the *Croix de Guerre* with star, which is a French decoration. He was a Bomb Officer and when he was seconded back to the Unit, he was a Bomb Officer and they went out into no man's land and raided the trenches and bombed the trenches and brought back prisoners and tried not to get killed. Ah, and he was doing this from about April through till August and I think that's how he won the *Croix de Guerre* according to the citation that I read. He was still there right through until 1919. I think he sailed, in October '14 and I think it was September 1919 when he came back home. And when I did my research on them, the Soldier Settlers at Red Cliffs, I found that once the war was over they dumped these soldiers out in Salisbury Plain and left them there for the time being because they had to get trade going again, so it was important to use the shipping for what was considered priorities. So it would have been 1919 by the time he got back to Australia. Now his job was still waiting for him at the Crown Law Department. He was a very talented man in many ways. He wrote several plays, he wrote a series of articles for one of the country newspapers. I heard one of his plays being broadcast on the ABC years later, during the Second World War. I didn't really know a lot about him because he, he didn't say much, he was... Anyway, except when he was out in company apparently. My mother called him 'a street angel and a house devil', which was a phrase in those days. But anyway apparently they were supposed to get a certificate and he decided to apply for Soldier Settlement, like so many who came back. They, they were restless, they'd been away too long and they just couldn't settle back to what they were doing when they went away, because he was twenty-two when he went away. He would have been twenty-nine or something like that when he came back. So, anyway he apparently did a bit of work on a farm somewhere, didn't have any previous farming experience and they were allotted, they were accepted and they were allotted these blocks on the North Woodlands Estate. Now, that was an Estate that had been settled back in about 1912, 1910/1912, so these were the bits that were left over and these chaps were going on about 1921-1922. So this is several years after the war and most of the blocks were, they were over-valued and undersized. So they had to pay that back. They didn't have to pay anything for the first few years, so that was fine but then it started catching up with them 'cause they couldn't produce what was needed to provide the income to pay back the Soldier Settlement Board and they all started getting into trouble. So, when I did my research on the Soldier Settlers generally, I was looking at the general picture when I was doing the Red Cliff's Soldier Settlement. Over 50% failed, even the Red Cliff's people who all started together, they were all soldiers, so they built the thing from scratch and they had a much better life. These chaps on the, these very poor quality blocks up in goldmining country in Navarre, which was between Stawell and St.

Arnaud, Navarre and they gradually started dropping off one by one and the survivors were sort of squabbling over the bits of land that were left 'cause the Soldier Settlement was parcelling out bits to this one and that one and some were complaining they should've got more and some were complaining they, etcetera. And as for the closer settlers they tended to regard the Soldier Settlers a bit like the way some Australians regard Aborigines. They were getting a handout. So they weren't up for, mind you the closest settlers had done very well out of the war. They were all very comfortably off. There was one big, a couple of big estates near where we were and they really thrived. I went back years later.. Oh to begin with, about 1938 the Soldier Settlement handed over to the Closer Settlement Commission, they just couldn't cope. There were a whole lot of things that they couldn't do. There were roads. They were continually asking to have the roads improved. You can imagine what the roads would have been like in the winter and the Soldier Settlement Commission would be saying 'I'll ask the Council' and the Council would be saying 'Ask the Commission', so in the end they passed it over to the, this organisation that came in called the Closer Settlement Commission and they proceeded to practice the 'lifeboat principle', I don't know if you know what that is? That's where you save those you can and dump those you can't. [Chuckles] So my father was one of those who finally in 1938 was dumped. So he had precious little, I've had a letter there that I found when I was doing the research where'd he appealed to them, the Commission, asking if they'd give him a better deal. He had a wife and children to support and he had to go back to Melbourne and get a job and all this, of course, is just before the War, the Depression. There wasn't much around. When he did come back to Melbourne he walked the streets for about a month trying to get work. Finally he managed to get a job in a munitions factory and because he was on the Reserves List of Officers, he, either he applied, or they called on him to join up and he joined up and saved the day as far as he was concerned. It meant that he had a job again and something to do. But as far as we were concerned, it was a a free life. My parents were both well-educated. My father had been Dux of the school at one stage. I found this pile of Fenimore, J. Fenimore Cooper books that he'd won, the year he was Dux. And my mother was, they were both very well-read people. She used to write away to, I suppose, I don't know whether it was school, what it was, to get books for us, this was a long time before we went to school and she was trying to teach us at home and the Commission, and I don't know what other organisation, decided they better build a school for the soldier settlers' children. The school lasted about eight years. It was at Tulkara which was between where we lived and where the school was, and there was a waste, there was a station there, a water station, or whatever they call for trains where they used to fill up the engines, they had this big thing that came down and filled up, they pulled up there and filled up the engine, and they had gangers going up and down on the line and we didn’t tell mother, but we often hitched a ride with the gangers home from school. She wouldn’t have approved. Anyway we walked about two and a half miles each way to school but I would have been seven by the time I started. But I was a voracious reader and by the time I was in Grade 3 we had a teacher, one teacher and about twelve kids, one classroom and twelve kids divided up amongst all those grades, means that that were pretty thinly spread. So I’d be doing reading with the Grade ones and Grade twos and half the time the teacher was asleep and I’d be doing my reading with the Sixth Grade or whatever it was, Sixth or Seventh or Eighth Grade. It must have been Eighth Grade because they went Merit, yeah. The kids, that was about the extent of education for the boys, most of them, but not my brothers. My mother was determined that they should get a good education and I had a grandfather and aunts living in Geelong and two of the aunts were teachers and, so the boys went off to Geelong College and lived with the grandfather and the aunts. But she didn’t have anything to pay the fees with. [Laughs] I don’t know how they managed, perhaps grandfather helped out, I don’t know, but so they, as they [coughs] pardon me, reached a certain level they went off to school. My middle brother won scholarships all the way through school anyway, which made a big difference, for the rest of us we were there until I was about ten, when we, ten going onto eleven when we moved off the farm and came to Melbourne and mother sent us off to the Girls’ Grammar school there. And we attended that school, not my youngest brother, he was too young. But the rest of us, we, as I said, we used to walk two and a half miles each way to school. There was a library of sorts, but my parents had a good library and, as I said, my father wrote. He also, he and, when they first went on the block, he and a fellow officer thought they’d grow tobacco ‘cause it was being grown in the Grampians and this house that the Soldier Settlement put was, it had three floored rooms; the rest of it was dirt floors. The kitchen, the laundry and what have you. It was too close to the creek but it flooded every year. You’d get up, sometimes in the night and you’d find you were knee deep in water and frogs under the bed. My poor mother, she was pretty distressed the first time it happened ‘cause all her lovely stuff was in a bit Saratoga trunk on the floor and the water got in but, as I said, these two chaps, they tried growing tobacco but it’s not the sort of thing that you can grow in a small way, and so Brownie eventually left, that was father’s friend, and father tried sheep and wheat, ran a few cows, had a bit of cream they sent off to Stawell. It was, it was a real struggle and when he got a bit more land he had to shift sheep from the home property off to the, this bit of land which was a couple of kilometres away and leave them there and, sort of, spread out the problem of the feeding, but he was constantly in debt. Dalgetty's were one of the major organisations then, that supplied feed and all the things that farmers needed. They must have had a hell of a lot of debts by the time all these soldier settlers moved off but, as I said, apart of that, as I said, I was a good reader and I read my way through the school library in quick order and mother used to send away for a lot of books for us and I learnt to read very quickly once I got to school because I was *dying* to find out what all the words were. The pictures weren't enough.

14.09

Cameron: **Okay.**

Dierdre: And when the two boys gradually, after the other went off, there were just the three younger ones left. But as I said, the youngest was too young, so Joan and I used to trot off to school together. There used to pretty severe droughts, so severe that the tanks could be down to frogs in the bottom in the end and occasionally I'd be sent over to the next farm with a bucket to get some water and mother used to put, oh something in the drinking water to make it more palatable because it was a bit erky [laughs] but, when we came to Melbourne, it was very different then because having had all that open space, you felt like, you know, crowded in, you know..

Cameron: **Where did you live in Melbourne?**

Dierdre: Lived in Glen Iris, but it was closer to Gardiner actually there, this, where Gardiner Railway Station is, we were about two and a half streets down from there. Father used to go off on these, during the, when we were on the farm, he'd go off on these binges with his buddies, off to Landsborough or somewhere like that and when I went back visiting, to check to see if anybody was still there, I found two survivors. They both had family backgrounds, two out of the soldier settlers, out of all the ones that went there, were still there. This is a couple of generations later, you know, but I went to see these people who befriended my mother. They had a station outside Navarre and we used to, she, the father would harness the horse onto the buggy and she'd drive the, I don't think she'd ever driven a horse and buggy before, but she'd drive us in the horse and buggy over to visit these people and we'd spend the afternoon there in this wonderful garden they had, while mother had people to talk to, yeah. And they, they were actually getting wood from out the other side of Navarre, they had a railway that ran, they had put in, that would run through to pick up the wood and take it back to Ararat and when the boys came home from school, they dropped them off at the front gate, which was about oh, 500 yards from the house, whatever it was, and they just dropped, pulled up the train, dropped them off and they could walk there .. But as I said it was, it was a very different life when we came to live in Melbourne and in a way it was, you felt a bit safer because there'd be these terrible, terrible arguments when father came home after one of his binges and one of the people I was interviewing told me a couple of stories [Laughs] and he said – on one occasion father rode a bike to Landsborough and met up with some buddies and had a few drinks and they said, 'oh we'll give you ride home'. So they attached the bike to the back of the, back of the ute or whatever it was, and bounced the bike back home. It couldn't have been much good by the time he got back. Another occasion he came back with some bottles of beer and this person was telling me, he put them in the creek, tied them with strings and put them in the creek to keep them cold and mother went down and cut the strings. [Laughs] We used the creek a lot, we used to go yabbying there and as kids, you know, and the leeches, you'd get out and you'd have leeches hanging off your legs, errr. But those were things that you accepted. Then, as I said, we eventually came to Melbourne and, of course, the war broke out the following year and father re-joined the army. My eldest brother eventually got in and my middle brother struggled for a long time, because he was underage. They wouldn't take him until right near the end of the war. He was old enough and he got in and he went up to Darwin. He was a gunner up there and I wanted to join the Land Army but they wouldn't accept girls under a certain age, at that stage. But, as I said, it was a very mixed sort of life. There was all this trauma. You know, just you know, kept just hoping that everything would be alright, there wouldn't be a fight.

Cameron: Yeah, can we talk a little more about that? I'm interested in, in your father's personality and the impact that you think the War had on him as a person and how that, how that kind of affected on your family?

Dierdre: I think, not just the war, his father was a very.. I never met my grandfather, but the stories I heard of him. He was a Presbyterian, he was a relieving Postmaster, he went around the towns and he'd relieve in a certain area until the other part.., and he spent quite a bit of time in Nagambie and my grandmother, she was very popular. There was organisation called the Dorcas Society which I think preceded the, the Country Womens' Association and she died apparently just after the birth of her last child and my father would have been only about eight and then subsequently my grandfather married again and had one more child. But there was all, there were all these pressures on the kids not to do this, not to do that. You're asking for trouble, aren't you? I don't know really, I mean he had a good job so that was something and he had great prospects of promotion but he had a severe drinking habit when he came back. At the same time, he managed it very well when it came to his work life; this was after coming off the farm and he was popular. As I said, my mother called him a ‘street angel, house devil’. I can’t ever remember having one proper conversation with my father, not one, and in later years, he reconnected with the older boys, or the three boys actually but as far as my sister and I were concerned I don’t know that he ever connected really. And he was, he actually spent some time with my eldest brother who was living in Brisbane, married and had children. He’d go up there and have a bit of a holiday with them and actually, you know, enjoyed the grandchildren whereas he didn’t seem to have enjoyed his own. And it was the sort of culture, you know, if you did something *naughty* your mother would say, ‘you wait till your father get’s home’ and then father would have to be the one that would have to give you the strap and the strap was always there. You held out your hand and you got the strap right up your arm, you know. Whereas mother used to throw things [Laughs]. She’d get really mad at you and chuck a half brush somewhere, or whack you on the legs with the handle of the feather duster that was more painful than the strap really. But, I guess too, I used to retreat, I read. I had a lot of freedom of activity too, but never the less, I used to, when the boys were away at school I used to retreat into their bedroom, or get round behind the big wattle tree in the front yard where nobody could see me and I’d read and read and read. And that was my salvation. My sister didn’t fare so well. After we came to live in Melbourne, once the War was ended, the relationship became a lot worse because during the War he was away a lot and we were so relieved and we heard he was coming home we’d all be full of apprehension, wondering what was going to happen next and my mother lent, lent very heavily on my eldest brother and also on my youngest sister and she developed anorexia and he, as soon as he got away up north, he got married. He was only twenty. I think it was just their way’s of dealing with it. My middle brother was the clown. He was the one who could laugh his way through everything and my youngest brother was too young for it to have a major impact. It didn’t. By the time he got to school we were living in Melbourne and I think father was quite proud of him really. He was most probably was quite proud, I know he tried to protect..., my middle brother told me a story about when he went up north some of those, he was only just eighteen and this is towards the end of the war, the Second World War, and some of them were going to be sent on to, sent overseas, and he actually wrote a letter to the Commanding Officer asking him, you know, to keep an eye on Doug and sort of, more or less saying don’t let him go. Anyway Doug opened the letter and tore it up, and never showed it to the Commanding Officer but he wasn't sent overseas. So he did care, he did care about the boys anyway. I don't know what he thought about the girls, I really don't.

23.43

Cameron: Okay, that's interesting. I'm just, okay, the next thing I'd like to cover, you mentioned the other day that you left home at a fairly young age? And..

Dierdre: Oh well I wasn't that young actually, I was nineteen. [**Cameron: Nineteen, okay**] I tried to, I'd, I applied to Prince Henry's, I just got sick of the arguments, once father was demobbed, they'd be these terrible arguments and I couldn't stand it, which wasn't fair on Joan, I think it bounced off Ian to a great degree, but I applied to Prince Henry's to do nursing and mother said 'oh please would you wait until Douglas comes home', and that was my middle brother. So as soon as he came home I said 'well, I'm off'. I said 'you can take over' and I applied to the Alfred and started training there when I was nineteen and I didn't, I mean I kept going home all the time and after a while I noticed that father wasn't around, but I was relieved about that. I mean that was the state of our relationship. And, I didn't realise that at some stage they got divorced because it was after he, oh, quite a long time, I was talking to the family when I was doing the research on the other soldier settlers and I said to Doug, Douglas seemed to know all about it. He said 'yes, they got divorced, it was about 1951 or '52'. So by the time he died, he married again to somebody who just went along with the, 'oh, it was nothing, he bet on the horses'. So all the money either went on drink or betting and my mother found that very hard to handle because, while he was in the army they had to pay out their salary, so much [sorry I didn't mean to] they had to allot so much to their next of kin and I think he was pretty mingy and he allotted her the least he had to allot and I mean she was still supporting kids, you know, a house full of kids. So that didn't help with the relationship. So, anyway I went off to do my nursing and escape with great thankfulness. As I said went backwards and forward.

26.14

Cameron: What do you think, why, do you know why you chose nursing? What…

Dierdre: Well, I'd wanted to go to Uni and if, my father was getting a good salary and I was bright. I was doing very well at school. I could've gone, in different circumstances, but there was no way I was going while mother was on this measly allowance. So, she pulled me out of school and sent me to work in a place called Sisalkraft which made cladding and that sort of stuff. Well I worked there for a couple of years and I was nearly going out of my mind. I thought – this isn't what life's about – and I'd just wishing each week away for the weekend. What can I do that's going to be useful? And we were, we kids used to go up to St. John's Church of England in Malvern there, High Street Malvern where a lot of our social activities took place and it was just something that the Minister said one day and I thought, 'yeah, got to be useful, now that would be useful' and having an adventurous spirit I thought 'oh good I'll go and do Nursing and I'll race off and rescue the hero[?]'. Well not quite that, I was thinking I might do some good in other parts of the world before I realised how much necessity there was to do some good here. So I went off, started my training, made a lot of friends. It turned my life around really. It made a big difference because I was shy and I was, had very poor self-esteem before that, and by the time I'd finished Nursing and then done my Medi, after which I got married like so many people do. I had some kids but after the first one, oh, before the first one arrived, before the third one arrived, my husband had come back from the war and he'd, he'd been fighting through North Borneo and all up through that area, New Guinea and what have you, and I think he had only got Malaria and I think he was a bit stressed out and then they put, suggested that he do this course. He was with the SEC and they suggested he do this course, you know, to go up to the next level. So he was doing that working, two young kids, a wife pregnant with the third. Well I'd only just got pregnant actually. I wasn't even pregnant at that stage. He had a massive, oh gosh, epileptic fit which frightened the hell out of me and so anyway it took a lot of time trying to sort it out and sort of, stabilise him and they couldn't find a cause for it, they just said 'oh it must be stress, we can't find any physical cause'. So, with all that on the plate, after Sally was born, when she was a year old I went back to work and when I was doing my Medi, what I noticed was, I went out, you had to go out with the District, the District Nursing Service. You'd go out with them, if there weren't any Mids coming in. So I did quite a lot of stuff for them. We were, spent some time with the District Nursing Service and I saw how some people had to survive. You'd find old people sleeping between newspapers, on mattresses and things like that. Things that, I mean I thought, 'okay, well we had to go without a lot, but we weren't like that though', nothing like that happened to us. Just seeing what was happening to these people. So, when, as soon as Sally was old enough to go to kinder, I spent the first few years doing night duty which was pretty killing with a year old baby, as you can imagine. I switched over to day visiting and I spent about twenty-five years doing that sort of thing and I saw everything from the very wealthy to the very poor but it was, I loved it. It was something I really enjoyed doing. And then when Gough Whitlam came in and they'd, they made Uni education free, my middle daughter, my older daughter who was at Uni, the two, I made sure my kids were going to Uni, I made sure that they weren't going to miss out. She said 'mum why don't you come along, they're taking in mature …?'. I said 'I'll be taking someone else's place'. She said 'no you won't, they set aside places'. So off I went and ohhh I was wonderful. But I did it part-time because I was still working and when I got to my Honours year, I thought oh, now this is going to be a problem and they decided just before I did my Honours year that we could do that part-time too. So, I was able to do it over two years, which made a big difference. So, that was a wonderful part of my life.

31.25

Cameron: **And what did you study?**

Dierdre: And then after I finished that a friend of mine said, some years later, 'come on, you're not using that, come and use it in the Nursing Archives'. So I was there from '93 till this year, at The Alfred Nurses Archives.

Cameron: **What did you study?**

Dierdre: Pardon.

Cameron: **What did you study at University?**

Dierdre: I did an Honours Degree in Politics and History. Yeah. I was going to do English Lit because that was one of my strengths, but then I found Politics and I was so enamoured of politics and of course, I enjoyed the history. I did a lot of Australian History as well as some other branches but it was Australian History that I graduated in. Yeah.

32.07

Cameron: **Okay, can we go back just a little bit. As you know we're researching the Caulfield Hospital,** [**Dierdre:** Oh that was ….] **so I'd be interested to know, you mentioned you did some of training, as a nurse, at the Caulfield Hospital.**

Dierdre: Oh, that was at the, that wasn't at the Repat, that was the, the other section and what happened was the Alfred took it over from the Royal Melbourne and we were the first ones to go out there and I can't remember what year it was now, I'd have to look up the archives but we were about the first lot to go out there and so there was still some old Royal Melbourne sisters there. One of them came over to the Alfred later on, I think the others all gradually retired, one by one, they were all getting on in years. So that was a very enjoyable experience actually. It was a bit like out in the country almost. [Chuckles]

Cameron: How long did you spend there?

Dierdre: Well you spent so much time in certain, like you'd spend so much time on night duty, so much time in theatre, so much time out at Caulfield. I only think, I only did the one stint at Caulfield. I would have gone for, perhaps, two months or something like that, six to eight weeks possibly, something like that.

Cameron: And while you were there, did you stay in the nurses quarters?

Dierdre: Yes, we did.

Cameron: And was that still in the big, the big white house?

Dierdre: Yes, it was like, like an old, a bit like an old army barracks. [Laughs] And one of my friends was in the bath, lolling back in the bath having a bit of a singalong and she looked up and this pair of eyes peering at her and she screamed and jumped out of the bath. Everybody ran around in circles [Laughing]. I can't remember whether they ever caught the chap or not, but she reminded us of that experience just recently. And then later on when I waiting to do my.., I'd got engaged in my second of year at, second year of training but my husband was back from the war and had put in for war service homes but you had to wait years, but he put his name down anyway and I said 'I'm not going to get married, I'm going to finish my course, I'm not going to leave it half way'. Well he didn't expect to do that anyway and I said 'I'm not going to move in with your parents', 'cause I'd seen what happened to a few of my friends who did and also his mother was an invalid and every time I was there I was expected to, to do everything, which I did. That was alright. But anyway so, we were engaged for a fairly long time and then after I graduated I wanted to do my Medi. So and, we must have been engaged for about eighteen months, something like that, Medi was about nine months at that stage. I suppose I got engaged towards the end of my second year, I can't .., yeah it must have been. Anyway, just trying to think what I was saying … Medi, oh yes, Caulfield Repat. I had a bit of time to fill in before I did my Medi 'cause you had to wait till the school was available. So I went to Caulfield Repat and they had a lot of, they had a ward full of Amoebic Dysentery patients, as thin as rakes. A lot of them had been POW's for the Japanese. A very close knit group and the one that, the worst bout ironically was a boy that never got further than Adelaide. How he got it there I don't know. Also, I also spent time in the TB ward. They had a TB ward there, old TB's going back to the First World War, these were a lot of them and a lot of old nurses and a lot of old army nurses who'd been around a long time and I, just being out, fresh out of nursing school, I was horrified to see that they weren't wearing masks and they said 'oh, the boys don't like them dear, but look you wear a mask because you're young and one of these days you're going to want to have babies'. [Laughs] So I was there for, oh I don't know, a couple of months before I started my Medi course, but they were very stoical the soldiers there, but a lot of them, as I said, were Second World War, all those Amoebic Dysenteries and you know, quite a few of the TB's too.

36.53

Cameron: **Mm… do you have, we're really interested in the Repat and the kind of the feel of the place and the patients and the nurses and how it felt to be there. So do you have any thoughts…?**

Dierdre: Egalitarian.

Cameron: **Yeah?**

Dierdre: Yeah, you know, after training school, where you, you know when you're training the school above you had the powers of God, everybody did. You were below the nurs.., the ward's maids, you were below everybody. We even had a long corridor that ran from the, a passageway that ran from the corridor down to the dining room and when you got down to the door of the dining room you had to look back and see if there was anyone senior to you coming down the corridor and if there was, you had to stand with your hands behind your back and wait for them to come down and go in the door. That's the way it was, you know. Also when I did Medi, that was egalitarian too, that was different again 'cause by that stage we were all, had a badge, you know, but no they were, they were great they treated you like an equal not like a, a [?] novice, you know, 'cause at that stage you are a novice and bit anxious to do the right thing and you're still trying to do it by the book. [Laughs] One of the things you find out.

Cameron: **Do you have any, it's probably a bit far to remember back, but do you have any specific memories of the First World War veterans that were at the Repat?**

Dierdre: Not really, no, but I did, I did meet a lot of them when I was doing my research but they weren't actually, a lot of them came down to Caulfield, 'cause they told me their stories. They came down to Caulfield when they had a bout of, you know, they'd all been gassed. They, periodically they had to come down to Caulfield or the other Repat place and it was a regular procession for them 'cause a lot of the ones that had been gassed wound up on the blocks up at Red Cliffs. I don't know about where father was, I don't think any of those people had been gassed. They all seemed fairly fit. But they really were a very close-knit group, the Red Cliffs group, because somebody had to, after vintage had to come in, you know, it was time to bring in the vintage and they were down in hospital, the neighbours would all rally round and they'd bring it in. Nobody was ever, sort of, left high and dry. Also I interviewed a man, a Captain I had, an amputee, and he told me this story about when he was repatriated back to Australia, the first thing they did was plonk him on the block [Laughs] fortunately he was a smart chap and he'd had a job with the railways before he went away. So he got that and employed somebody to do the block work. But they put a lot of amputees on blocks at Birdwoodton, which is near Merbein, near Mildura and that was early in the war about 1916, I really don't know what they thought they were doing. Oh, one of the things was 'oh it's good for them to get out in the fresh air and…' One of the good things that came out of all that was that at Red Cliffs there was a chap called Chandler, Albert Chandler, along with some others who lobbied ferociously for a better deal for the chaps coming back from the Second World War, the chaps coming back onto blocks and Chiefly was Treasurer and he had launched this enquiry. I read it at the time and I thought a whole lot of detail. As a result of that when they came back, they started up that one just over the river, the other side of the river I've forgotten its name for the moment and they had bigger blocks, they were better financed, they had longer to pay back everything. Those people were able to get off their block about the same time as their fathers. Some of the soldier settlers, the Red Cliffs ones and I did see a lot of them, talked to a lot from and as I said most of them had been gassed so. Ah, they used their, you know, they had extra abilities, you know, to make money. One of them had come off, he'd been in the Mallee. Now that was a disaster. They cleared the Mallee, they put all those soldier settlers, it was bad enough up in the Wimmera, when the dust storms came through from the Mallee or you had a drought or the land wasn't up to it, but the poor Mallee settlers they really got a bad time and no, a shortage of water, they had to have these tank stations.. Every farm had a Furphy, we had a Furphy, it was a water, an elongated sort of, cigar shaped… Have you seen one? Yes you have. And they had on the back 'Good Better Best, Never let it rest, Till your Good is Better, And your Better – Best' and one of my nephews told me that my middle brother, Doug, used to always say that to them when they were striving to do something. So we all remember the bit off the Furphy, but the Mallee people, I did get to interview one guy who'd come off – they just walked out, left everything and walked out and the sand was just coming in, coming in, you know, all, they stripped off all the vegetation. They had this gigantic thing which they used to clear the land. It's still up in the square at Red Cliff's, this great big monstrous thing which was driven up from Richmond to help clear land and somebody found it decaying away over in the Western District somewhere and so they put it together and took it back up to Red Cliffs, and stuck it in the square, this gigantic thing which, of course, made it much faster to clear the land as you can imagine. This chap who came off the Mallee block, I said 'how did you survive?' He said 'I got a contract to cart wood' and his wife took the baby and went out and went behind the, you know, when the crops were being harvested. Like the gleaners, a lot of women did that. Parked the baby under the tree in the shade and just go and do that, and they got by. And there was another one that he told me, he carted sand from the riverbank 'cause they needed sand for a lot of building. It was a hard life for those fellows, they really got the worst of it. Yeah.

43.31

Cameron: **Yep. It sounds really tough.** [**Dierdre:** Pardon] **It sounds really tough.**

Dierdre: Yes it was. Well 'cause I only found out a lot of this later on. It was when I was at uni and I started doing some reading about the First World War. Father brought home a book, and I don't know why, I think my eldest brother's son might have it, I wish I had, I wish, I couldn't show it. My husband brought one back called 'Khaki and Green' from the Second World War, it was a bit like that. It had all these cartoons and things in it. So a sense of humour kept them going. So, that was about my extent of knowledge of the First World War because humour was a major thing they emphasised in this book, I suppose it was part of their survival really. When I started reading ah, Bean and all the rest, got past Bean and started reading some of the other stuff. I thought oh God, I didn't realise how, well I suppose I did, but I hadn't really given it a great deal of thought and since then, of course, I've given it a lot of thought and so I started, started reading up about it and then I decided I didn't think I'd go that path for the thesis, my honours thesis, but I wasn't going to get enough out of the North Woodlands Estate, I needed a bigger area and I met somebody whose husband had been a doctor at Merbein and had looked after all the pickers who came in seasonally and lived along the riverbank. And from there I, sort of, moved to, across to Red Cliffs and I met all these wonderful people there who were so helpful. There was a chap called Jack Edey, he had a block. He wasn't a planter, he had a block further out where he managed to survive and his wife was saying they mostly lived by barter, you know, swapping things backwards and forwards. He wrote a book called 'From Lone Pine to Mallee Pine' and he had an idea for getting the, desalinating the, because that was a big problem, the saline. The saline, they dredged out these huge channels for the irrigation but they had a problem with the salinity of the water table, the salinity in the water table just kept rising and rising and rising. Well it's got a lot worse since then. And he thought he had really good idea but no one was paying a great deal of attention at the time. It's quite interesting and they used horses and a great big piece of equipment. They, they had kids digging out these channels and then, of course, they have problems with the land yabbies breaking holes through the channels and then later on they had Filoxera which killed off a lot of the vines, so they had their problems too. Yeah.

Cameron: **Okay, you mentioned that you a, later in life you came to get a better awareness of the war and impact of the war** [**Dierdre:** Yes.] **and so you, not only your father but your husband both served in wars.** [**Dierdre:** Yes.] **I'm very interested in your, you said something to me the other day in, when we were talking downstairs, you said, about a family with a war history, that if you throw a rock in a pond you'll get ripples.** [**Dierdre:** The ripples go out.] **Could you repeat that in a sense for the interview, I'd love to hear your thoughts on that?**

Dierdre: Well that's what I thought as time went, you know, seeing what was happening to my siblings and to myself, I think, perhaps I was tougher. Tougher than my gentle sister. She went on to become a, she went on to do nursing too, got out of the office and went and did nursing and was in charge of the Victorian theatre that did the first heart transplant, so she was a legend in her own time. But, looking at her and looking at the fact that in the end she wouldn't get married. She was a beautiful looking girl but no, she always chose somebody that she couldn't marry, if you know what I mean, and seeing my eldest brother, sort of, run away almost and my own reactions, I always thought, you know, if you throw a stone in a pond the ripples go out and out and out and they can effect, not just you but your next generation and the next generation and being aware of that, I tried very hard not to let it affect my children because I'd seen how it could affect other children. And I know my brothers did the same. I'm not so sure about me, me youngest brother, but then he had his own war and they had Agent Orange and his wife lost, after the first baby, lost about two more babies before the last one was born. In fact, one was a cot death, he was actually born and died prematurely and died when he was two months old and they were in New Guinea at that stage. She was in the permanent Army at that stage and they all smoked, smoked like mad. They all got emphysema. The only reason I didn't get emphysema was because my son started nagging me at the age of about eleven, when they did the compulsory lecture about smoking in the primary school and I took him to a, a Science exhibition and he marched me over into the corner and said 'Look, this is what you're doing to your lungs. Don't you want to see your children grow up? Don't you want to see your grandchildren.?' This was from a twelve year old kid. [Laughs]

49.28

Cameron: I did the same to my mother at the age of twelve.

Dierdre: Well good for you. Did she stop smoking?

Cameron: Yep.

Dierdre: Well I'll tell you what got me. He worked and worked on me and then my uncle, who was also a chain smoker, another banker. I got a call to go over there, he'd had a heart attack. And he had emphysema and I looked at him and I thought - oh this is what Peter's been telling me, for goodness sake, I know life's tough and you smoke a lot because I work terrifically long hours, just working to hold the family together, supporting my husband who was on this medication which wasn't a doing him a great deal of good and I thought, right you've just got to stop, you've just got to tackle it another way and I stopped dead. I came home and I said to Peter 'Right, I've stopped', and I often say to him the only reason I'm still here honey is because you stopped me. But my brother died of emphysema, my younger brother died of emphysema, my sister died of emphysema and I remember saying to my doctor, is it.. he said 'no', he said ;no that's familial but you want get it'. I said 'how do you know I won't get it?' He said 'you've stopped smoking'.

Cameron: Good choice.

Dierdre: [Laughs] But I do think it's like that, I think the effects just go on and on and I really think it started before my father, I think. I don't know what my great grandfather was like. He was the one that migrated to Australia, but my grandfather sounds to me like he was a really hard man and he would have been hard on those kids. One of his daughters, the poor girl, she got pregnant. Can you imagine what it was like getting pregnant back in those days? So she was also an artist. Apparently she turned out to be a good artist. She fled to Sydney. He never spoke to her again. A couple of her sisters kept in contact and wrote to her. But I mean there would have been, there wouldn't have been any forgiving and my mother's generation, they also had this very rigid system too. If I'd got pregnant out of wedlock, I don't know how she would have accepted it and some of my acquaintances, when I was nursing, did get pregnant out of wedlock and they virtually became pariahs. But that's the way it was in those days. I've now got three great grandchildren, one grandson's married, I've got six great, I've got six grandsons actually and one granddaughter, one grandson's married, he's got one; one grandson's got a partner and they've been together for a long time, they're not married, no intentions; I've got a niece who's got four children, they're all grown up now and she and her partner have no intention of getting married either. It's just a different world, but the world was like that, in fact the world was so rigid and so inflexible, there was even this attitude towards Catholics which I think was a hangover from the conscription period where, because Catholics were prominent, they weren't the only ones against conscription. When I did my Australian history I found it was right across the board but Mannix was being blamed for the whole thing 'cause he said it was a trade war. And if you've read 'The Sleepwalkers' or some of those books, you'll realise what he's saying is pretty damned accurate. But anyway, oh god, I've lost the plot, or I've lost the thread there for a minute.

53.10

Cameron: **That's okay. So we're coming up to about an hour ..**

Dierdre: Oh right.

Cameron: **.. of the interview, so I just wanted to ask is there anything else that you think we should talk about, or anything else you want recorded for this history?**

Dierdre: Oh, not really. Just that I'll, there, there's one thing I, I actually went off and studied Soldier Settlement because I felt I owed my father a debt, which I couldn't really repay because when he was dying, I was pregnant with my first child and very happy. Life was lovely. And my sister came round and said 'father's out at repat, he's got bowel cancer and he's dying' and I said 'big deal'. And I've never forgotten that and I've not really forgiven myself for it either, because I didn't go and see him, and Joan went out and Douglas went out, but Ian didn't go, he didn't go either. And Paul, and when the second wife went up north to, she rang Paul and said 'I've got some of your father's stuff which I thought you'd like, can I come out and see you?' and Paul said 'Oh no, I don't want you at home, but I'll come and meet you in the city' and he took it from her there, so he hadn't forgiven either, but I felt that I owed, not just him but all those other chaps, and because the whole scale of it horrified me so much and since then I've read a couple of books, one of them was 'The Sleepwalkers' and realised how pointless the whole thing was. And of course they'd had all those small wars before the Great War and there was all this talk about it'd be over by Christmas and talking to those chaps up at Red Cliffs, you know, they said 'oh, it was going to be a big adventure getting off, you know, going away from home and going and doing something different and seeing a bit of the world and we'll be back home in a few months', well lots thought like that, yeah. But they didn't realise what they were in for and you've only got to look at some of the films and some of the photos to see what it was like and reading that book, they really skip over the horrors don't they? They don't emphasise the horrors.

Cameron: Yeah, I know, it's definitely something that was hidden away a lot and continues to be.

Dierdre: And there's a place called Craigie something, in Scotland, I think it was, where they took young officers to…

Cameron: Yeah, Craiglockhart medical, psychological hospital.

Dierdre: Yeah I read those books by Pat Barker…

Cameron: Mmm, *Regeneration.*

Dierdre: And I also read that book by that English nurse, also the books by the Australian nurses about what they saw and some of the stories they told, those young officers, you know, arms and legs sticking out of the wall of trenches, the decay and the flies and the smell. Whereas in these books they tone it down.

Cameron: I think that's why it's important to, to do things like this and talk to people [**Dierdre:** Yeah] **and you get those real experiences rather than just the sanitised…**

Dierdre: You see, father never talked about it.

Cameron: Yeah, yeah.

Dierdre: He and Brownie, that first chap that he was going to grow tobacco with, they created a dado in the boys room, a black and white dado all around the walls, all these little black characters on a white, as I said, he was, he was a very clever man and he wrote a, and I don't know where that stuff is. At some stage, I keep saying I must go and try and see if I can find it as, if I could just remember the name of the paper. He wrote this serial about a couple of young soldier settlers - John and Mary. He didn't give them very exciting names. And what it was like on the block and what have you, and it was a series that went every, week or how often the paper came out, I'm not sure, it might have been a week, I'm not sure. That was one thing that kept mother sane, the fact that she could get the *Women's Weekly* and it was very hard to try and grow anything, vegetables. There was an old Chinese chap who came round with his cart and we'd get veggies from him and the Rawleigh's man used to come round about once a month and he'd camp in the home paddock and we'd all go down and sit round the fire and hear his stories and, of course, there were the swaggies, there were a lot of swaggies. My mother used to, she'd bake them a batch of scones and give them a meal and get them to cut a bit of wood or whatever. These were people that sort of came and went and then we had the locust plagues and the locust plagues used to go right through and they'd strip your whole gardens, they'd strip your crop and they were, I mean they still have problems with those. I remember a few years ago it was a mouse plague but at least I don't think we every had those. But, as I said, it was the *Women's Weekly* and something else she used to get and her friends in the city used to send her, and 'cause she used to get a lot of books, they'd send her magazines and things like that but the *Women's Weekly*, I think that kept a lot of country women sane. In fact, when I was doing my research, I found out that it was the, the people in the town, sort of, not exactly passing through, but there for a while, they used to create things like sporting clubs and what have you, be the bankers, the teachers, people like that 'cause they had the time, the farmers were too scattered. I mean they couldn't, sort of, even get out and lobby successfully, 'cause they were scattered around whereas the Red Cliffs people were in a different situation, 'cause they were all together. So I noticed there was a huge difference between them and what happened on the North Woodlands Estate. I think the one on the North Woodlands Estate, those farmers were more or less in competition to try and each get a bit of extra land and they'd get together to lobby for this, that and the other but didn't get very far.

Cameron: Okay, well if that's all you've got to mention on that, I think maybe we'll wrap up and very much appreciate all the information you've just given us, some wonderful stories and I think it will be very useful for the exhibition that we're working on. So we'll, we'll use some of this and we'll focus a bit on your father in the exhibition so I think that will help bring his story to a wider audience and if there's anything else that you think of that we've missed out on, you can always send me an email and we'll put that information in.

Dierdre: Yeah. One of the things about my father's Croix de Guerre I didn't realise is significance. It's curious, you know, to know how he got it. When I asked, he just laughed and said he'd won it in a card game and my mother belittled it and I didn't realise until I read that citation that he'd been involved all those months and he'd won it fair and square.

Cameron: What makes you, what do you think why your mother belittled it?

Dierdre: Because I think it was the toxic atmosphere.

Cameron: Yep, and it was a representation of the war obviously.

Dierdre: Yeah. And he never talked about the war. I can't remember him ever saying a single thing about the war, whereas my husband quite often mentioned it. He mentioned on one occasion where he had to take stores across the island of Bougainville, I think it was, and he had a line of porters and a Fuzzy Wuzzy guide and he said the Fuzzy Wuzzys were indispensible. He'd say 'Japan man up in that tree' 'cause here's my husband just an ordinary corporal leading this line of porters across, through the jungle there, hoping he won't get shot. And he also, he had, he got Malaria. By the time I met him he was over the malaria. Fortunately he didn't get the worst kind, there was a very bad variety which didn't do you any good at all, but I think a lot of them got Malaria. Oh, he used to tell some funny stories about, towards the end of the war, when they had a movie, movies out in the scrub and they'd turn around and they'd be a couple of Japs who had snuck in to have a look. [Laughs] And the stories about the Americans, the way they treated the coloured Americans; Australians were horrified. So they used to, they used to give the, a lot of those coloured Americans, I think they called them CB's, they created their airstrips and did the, sort of, donkey work, you know. So they'd give them, the Aussies apparently had more, they would give them a bottle of Whisky and if an American white one wanted to buy one, they'd do something about a hole in the bottom and put a bit of water in it, do something stupid like that. [Laughs] But I think, I think he didn't find his war, he obviously found his war stressful 'cause all those things happened, at least he did talk about bits and pieces of it, and make jokes about it, but father never. But then my father's war was much worse.

Cameron: **Okay, alright, well thank you. I'm going to wrap up the interview now.** [**Dierdre**: Okay] **It is, it's ten past eleven and I'm going to end the interview.**

Dierdre: Lots of talking.

Cameron: **Lots of talking. Thank you very much Dierdre.**

Dierdre: It's a pleasure.

End of transcription Interview at 63.22