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AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING COMMISSION
SHORTWAVE DIVISION
375 Collins Street,
MELBOURNE.

"WOMEN AT WAR"

by

Catherine Duncan

Interviews with women in Industry. No.1

Miss Catherine Duncan interviews Mrs. Hammond -
a Melbourne Tram Conductress.

To be broadcast in transmissions 2, (to BRITISH ISLES),
6, 9, and 10 (to NORTH AMERICA), for Tuesday, May 11th, 1943.

ANNOUNCER: Women at war!

Under this title we present now the first of a series of interviews with women in wartime industries. We introduce, first of all, Miss Catherine Duncan; an actress who is known, both on stage and on the radio in Melbourne.

In private life Miss Duncan is married to a well-known journalist. The responsibilities of a growing family, including a baby girl of only eight months has somewhat curtailed her dramatic activities of late; and when her husband joined the ranks of Australia's armed forces she found time on her hands, "rolled up her sleeves", and undertook playwriting, for which she had long had the urge, but not the time. In the last few months the A.B.C. has produced three major plays, including one in verse, written by her. In addition, some half dozen plays have been broadcast by the Commercial stations of Melbourne.

She seems to us a fitting person to conduct these interviews, so we ask her to introduce the session, "Women at War".....Miss Duncan.

DUNCAN: Pasted on the windows of all Melbourne trams is a poster bearing a picture of one of our attractive conductresses, with the words..."She's Helping You". Tonight, I have in the studio with me the original of that picture, and I'd like to introduce her to you....Mrs. Nita Hammond. Good evening, Mrs. Hammond.

HAMMOND: Good evening, Miss Duncan.

DUNCAN: You know, I almost expected you to say - Fares Please. I suppose that's because we take tram conductresses so much for granted these days.

HAMMOND: Well, we've been working on the trams now for eighteen months.

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DUNCAN: Is it really such a short time ago? How long ago is it since you started work yourself?

HAMMOND: I was one of the first...the thirty-fourth applicant to be accepted, to be exact.

DUNCAN: You're almost a pioneer, then. And what made you decide to take on the job, Mrs. Hammond?

HAMMOND: My husband used to be a bus driver with the Tramways, and when he joined up, I felt I'd like to carry on where he left off.

DUNCAN: That seems a pretty sound reason. Is your husband abroad with the Forces?

HAMMOND: He went abroad three years ago - first to England and afterwards to the Middle East. He was one of the original "Rats of Tobruk!"

DUNCAN: I suppose three years ago if anyone had called your husband a "rat," you'd have had something to say about it? But you must feel very proud of the term now.

HAMMOND: All Australians are.

DUNCAN: Before the war, Mrs. Hammond, did you have a job?

HAMMOND: No, I was just an ordinary housewife.

DUNCAN: You had your own home?

HAMMOND: Yes. But I had to break it up when my husband went away. I couldn't do the impossible.

DUNCAN: That must have been a bit of a heartbreak?

HAMMOND: It was - particularly losing the garden - and the dog.

DUNCAN: You had a dog, did you? What was he?

HAMMOND: A Cocker Spaniel. We called him Laddie. He was the real boss of the household. But, of course, it wasn't fair to him to have him in a flat, so we had to give him away.

DUNCAN: I can understand how you hated that. So, you exchanged your old boss, Laddie, for a new boss in the Tramways Board? I suppose you had to go through a period of training first?

HAMMOND: First of all we had a very thorough medical examination. My tennis helped to keep me pretty fit, so I didn't have any trouble with that.

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DUNCAN: No, you don't look as if you're a candidate for a hospital exactly. And after the medical?

HAMMOND: We had one day's training at the Depot, learning about tickets and fares and so on.

DUNCAN: You don't mean to say you had to go straight on to the trams after that?

HAMMOND: Yes. Not on our own to begin with, of course. We had another conductor to keep an eye on us.

DUNCAN: Even so, it couldn't have been very easy.

HAMMOND: I think taking my first fare was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my whole life. We had a bag put round our necks, and then the conductor said - Go ahead!

DUNCAN: Easier said than done!

HAMMOND: It was. I felt as if my legs wouldn't move. I just stood with my back against the door and said - I can't.

DUNCAN: But eventually you managed it. I hope you were on a nice easy run that first day.

HAMMOND: No, it was the 6 a.m. shift on the Wattle Park run, bringing the workers into town, so we were kept busy. But I don't think I remember very much about that first day. I seemed to lose all sense of direction. I couldn't even remember where streets were I'd known all my life. One woman asked me to tell her where Market Street, city, was, and I had to say I'd come back and tell her later.

DUNCAN: How long did it take you to find your tram legs? I suppose, that's literally true - you must have to learn a sense of balance in a tram.

HAMMOND: Yes, you do. It took me about a fortnight before I felt really at home.

DUNCAN: But now you're a real old hand.

HAMMOND: Yes. When my husband returned from the Middle East a short time ago, he said he was amazed at how efficient the girls are.

DUNCAN: That's a real compliment.

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- HAMMOND: And talking about tram legs, there's one thing I've learnt since I took on this job. I'll never wear high heels again. It will always be flat heels for me after this.
- DUNCAN: I should think they were a necessity when you're on your feet so much. These new war-time jobs women are doing will have a big effect on fashion. How do you get on with the other girls?
- HAMMOND: Well, at first I didn't know how I would get on. I'd never worked with girls before. But now that's one of the reasons I'm so glad I took this job.
- DUNCAN: Because of the girls?
- HAMMOND: They're^a marvellous lot of girls. We've got University students, teachers and nurses as well as housewives like me. I've made some very good friends - and when I say friends, I mean real friends. Working with them has taught me to know much more about human nature.
- DUNCAN: When you feel that way, working becomes far more than just a mere job doesn't it? I suppose most of the girls have men in the forces?
- HAMMOND: All of them. If not husbands - then brothers or fathers or sweethearts.
- DUNCAN: You work shifts, of course. Do you ever work night shift?
- HAMMOND: No. I'm stationed at Head Office. My shift is from seven in the morning until six-thirty at night.
- DUNCAN: You get breaks during that time?
- HAMMOND: Oh yes. We mess all together at Head Office. But the girls at the Depots work night shift. Often they don't finish until one o'clock in the morning. Some of them come from as far away as Chelsea down the Bay. They have to start off for work at two o'clock in the morning.
- DUNCAN: I didn't know there was such an hour!
- HAMMOND: Neither did most of us till we took this on. But wars aren't fought by shifts. It's a round the clock job.

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- DUNCAN: And you're certainly helping to fight this war in your job. But most jobs have a lighter side. Have you ever had any amusing experiences as a tram conductress?
- HAMMOND: Well...It's a bit hard to think of any off hand. Funny things do happen all the time. But I'm afraid some of them aren't repeatable.
- DUNCAN: That's not fair. You only make us all curious.
- HAMMOND: I was very puzzled once by a group of American soldiers who paid their fares several times during a longish run through a dull part of the city.
- DUNCAN: Good heavens are they made of money?
- HAMMOND: Oh, it didn't cost them much. As you know men in uniform travel half fare and a penny takes them quite a long way.
- DUNCAN: Yes, but why did they pay several fares
- HAMMOND: Well, you know the serial numbers printed on the bottom of the tickets?
- DUNCAN: Yes.
- HAMMOND: They treated these numbers like a hand of cards to have a little game of show poker. When the hand was over they bought another round of tickets to have another hand.
- DUNCAN: You can't beat the Americans for knocking up a bit of fun. I suppose you have seen quite a bit of our American friends at one time or another.
- HAMMOND: Yes, a fair bit, and they are always most kindly and courteous to our girls. In fact its my impression that they seem to like our girls.
- DUNCAN: Yes, and I think our girls like them too. By the way, now your husband is back, do you intend carrying on with your job?
- HAMMOND: Yes. I feel that now I've started it I'd like to see it through.
- DUNCAN: That's the spirit. And it's very nice to have a little money of your own, too, isn't it?
- HAMMOND: We get very good money - although it's hard work.

DUNCAN: I'll bet it is. It can't be any fun trying to collect fares on some of the crowded trams I travel on. But I think you girls are doing a wonderful job. As a member of the weaker sex - so called - that gives me a great kick.

HAMMOND: I don't think they'll ever be able to call us the weaker sex after this war. When we first started some of the men on the trams were a bit ^{curious} ~~sceptical~~ as to how we'd get on. But now, I think, they quite accept us, and we work very happily together.

DUNCAN: What about after the war? Will you give up your job then?

HAMMOND: There are going to be tremendous readjustments necessary after the war. There'll be a good many girls who won't want to give up their jobs and their independence.

DUNCAN: How about you?

HAMMOND: Well, when we signed on we agreed to give up our jobs in order of seniority as the men came back. But I think it will take quite a few years.

DUNCAN: You still haven't answered my question.

HAMMOND: I suppose I'm hedging, because I don't know quite how I'll feel by the time the war is over. I wouldn't like to spend the rest of my life on the trams. But it might seem a bit dull going back to housekeeping.

DUNCAN: Did you consider it when your husband came back?

HAMMOND: Yes. I thought it would be fun to have a home again, and be able to see my friends whenever I wanted to. I've missed not being able to work in the garden or play tennis.....

DUNCAN: Not to mention Laddie.

HAMMOND: Oh yes, I miss him badly. But somehow, this job is so interesting that I think I'd miss that even more.

DUNCAN: Well, there's no question of you're having to give it up yet. Not until after the war.

HAMMOND: I hope it won't be too long. I'd give up my job tomorrow if it meant the war was over.

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DUNCAN: Of course you would. But in the meantime you're helping to bring that day closer by carrying on at your job.

HAMMOND: I hope so.

DUNCAN: Well, Mrs. Hammond, thank you very much for telling us about yourself and your work. Next time a conductress asks me for Fares, please - I won't think of her as just a uniform... but as a woman like yourself perhaps, who before the war was a housewife. I'll remember that she wasn't content to let her husband do all the fighting, but rolled up her sleeves and hoed into the job of making victory certain. "She's Helping You..." the words on the Tramways poster - is a pretty fair description of the work you're doing. And I know after what you've told me tonight that it isn't just as simple as it seems when you say.....

HAMMOND: Fares, Please.
