

CHAPTER TWO

Red tape

And so in the forties these two were wed,
On the edge of the war a strange life was led,
Waiting and hoping he'd be able to stay,
Soon hopes were shattered, he was on his way.

(Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', November 2001.)¹

Despite soaring marriage rates for all age groups in Australia at the outbreak of WWII, getting married in wartime was not a simple matter, and to marry an American was made even more complicated by specific wartime regulations and red tape.² This chapter examines the oral testimony of the war brides to uncover the way in which these women dealt with the extraordinary obstacles put in the way of their weddings. Certainly there were some 'whirlwind' romances, and some babies were conceived before marriage, perhaps due to the women's ignorance of sex and its consequences. Among this group, while actual wedding ceremonies were often arranged at short notice, most marriages were the result of weeks, months, and sometimes years of getting to know each other. These protracted romances were the consequence of their fiancés being shipped off to fight in New Guinea and the Pacific islands, combined with necessary delays brought about by official regulations which required obtaining permission followed by a six-month waiting period before marriage. Initial friendships developed over time – often through letter-writing – into meaningful relationships which led to

¹ Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', in *Albany Writers' Circle No. 19. A Collection of Short Stories and Poetry by the Writers of Albany*, Denmark Printers, November, 2001, pp. 36.

² Peter F. McDonald, *Marriage in Australia. Age at first Marriage and Proportions Marrying, 1860-1971*, Department of Demography, Institute of Advanced Studies, ANU, Canberra, 1975, p. 203; Patricia Grimshaw *et al*, *Creating a Nation 1788-1990*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, Vic., 1994, p. 265: The increased incidence of marriage, was accompanied by a younger marrying age for women, and childbearing earlier in married life, leading to the post-war baby boom. Wartime marriages were popular but not so stable, with many taking place in haste before the groom was transferred to the battlefield, which was evidenced in the 1950s by the divorce boom which followed on the heels of the marriage boom. (p. 265); also See Appendix 5, Marriages and Divorces and Ex-Nuptial Births, Figures 1 and 2.

marriage. Couples who wished to marry faced opposition from both Australian and American authorities who urged caution and actively discouraged Australian-American marriages.

LONG DISTANCE LOVE AFFAIRS

Shortly after meeting their Australian girlfriends, most American GIs who were to marry women interviewed for this study were shipped out to New Guinea or some other secret location in the Pacific and this separation, for weeks and sometimes months, ensured more than a short interval of time between their first meeting and being wed.³ The oral testimony of the war brides reveals evidence of long distance romance by mail. At least ten of the 60 war brides interviewed received love letters sent from unknown locations, due to wartime censorship, and for some these formed the most important part of their courtship. The war brides' information regarding this romantic correspondence was largely volunteered. No direct question about this was asked as part of the interview, therefore it is quite possible that more than this number conducted their courtships in this way. Letters were the most expedient way for the couples to get to know one another and for their relationships to develop, given the exigencies of wartime. Despite requests, and the intentions of several war brides to send copies of some of these letters for the purpose of this study, only one was received. This indicates a reluctance to share such a private part of their romantic past, and is understandable as many of these women are now widowed, and the letters which have been kept have become virtual treasures.

Communication in this written form, during long periods of physical

³ See Appendix 2 (7), Profile of War Brides – How long was the average wait to get married?

separation, heightened the romantic nature of these liaisons. Historian Kate Darian-Smith points out that during the constant separations in wartime, letters were a part of the 'paraphernalia of memory', together with mementos, keepsakes and photographs exchanged between men and women. Letters themselves became 'treasured objects' which were 'reread, handled with reverence and stored...in personal archives'.⁴ In her study of discourses of 'romantic love' in Australian love letters written between 1860 and 1960, historian Hsu-Ming Teo argues that 'love' was one of the major tools women used to determine their futures, and writing letters was one of the ways they produced and managed love.⁵ The testimony of the Australian war brides studied for this thesis reveals that letter-writing was an important component of many courtships which survived wartime separation.

Because their men were in the US army, long periods of separation were unavoidable and the process of letter-writing was subject to a great deal of 'red tape'.⁶ Bureaucratic procedures under the Defence (National Security, General) Regulations were in force in Australia as early as August 1939.⁷ These regulations prohibited the obtaining, recording, communication, publishing or possession of any naval or military information which could be useful to the enemy or might influence public opinion in Australia or elsewhere, which might be prejudicial to the defence of the Commonwealth or the efficient prosecution of the war. This censorship affected the press, radio broadcasts, cinemas, posters, booklets as

⁴ Kate Darian-Smith, 'Remembering Romance: Memory, Gender and World War II' in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds) *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 125, 126.

⁵ Hsu Ming Teo, 'Love Writes: Gender and Romantic Love in Australian Love Letters, 1860-1960', in *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 48, November, 2005, p. 345.

⁶ See Anne Atkinson *et al*, (eds), *Macquarie Dictionary*, The Macquarie Library Pty. Ltd., North Ryde, 2006: Red tape: excessive attention to formality and routine; official procedures.

⁷ John Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors. Censorship and Propaganda in World War II*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984, p. 31.

well as postal mail.⁸ Both civilian and military mail could be opened and read by official censors, with sections or words of a sensitive nature which identified the locations or activities of the armed services being either thoroughly blacked out with ink or actually cut out before the mail was delivered. US regulations saw US military mail subject to similar censorship and delivery of letters was unreliable and there were often long delays. For example, US Marine, George Gierhart, wrote to his family with important news of his wedding plans to marry June Ferreira, and sent a photograph of his intended Australian bride. After two months he wrote 'I imagine that we can write it off as lost. It was a nice picture too.'⁹ Later, postage containing photographs of the wedding was held up. The long delays resulted in extended periods of silence, which he attempts to clarify by explaining the complications caused by censorship in a subsequent letter to his parents:

Perhaps by now the unexplainable period of silence has been broken and you have heard from me also. The censorship regulations for June are that she is not allowed to write to you through the normal channels. She can however write to you and enclose it in my mail, although she too must abide by the regulations under which I come. So if you haven't heard from her that is probably the reason. She did write, before she found out she couldn't, but those letters were most likely held up.¹⁰

⁸ Hilvert, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁹ Letter from Lieutenant George B Gierhart to Mr & Mrs Harry S. Gierhart in Yonkers, New York, dated 7 September, 1943. (Sent by daughter of war bride in 2004, copy in possession of author.)

¹⁰ *ibid.*

However, the oral testimony of the war brides evidences that despite the official intrusion of the censor, courtships were pursued by mail, and even marriage proposals were contained in such letters. For example, Peggy Dunbar Blackman had only two dates in Australia with her husband-to-be before he was shipped out, and she felt that letters proved to be an excellent means of communication:

We both found that we were good letter-writers
and so we discovered that we had many
common interests and liked the same kind of
books, and music and theatre and all of those
kinds of things.¹¹

It was similar for Joan Hamilton who also got to know her future husband 'through phone calls and a lot of letters' during the ten months between meeting and marrying.¹² Love letters were sent back and forth between Joy Shaddle and her fiancé, Lloyd, a dentist in the US Navy. It was a serendipitous meeting at a luncheon bar during her lunch-hour in Sydney when they first set eyes on each other. He sat down next to her on the only stool available, and when the waitress accidentally swapped their orders, they struck up a conversation. After seeing Joy during his ten days' leave, the handsome American left, but they continued to write to each other over the next two and a half years. Eventually, Lloyd wrote: 'The war is over, but I can't get you out of my mind. Would you marry me and be the mother of my children?' Joy accepted the proposal and, as his fiancée, travelled

¹¹ Interview with Peggy Dunbar Blackman, Sacramento, CA, 29 September 2001.

¹² Interview with Joan Hamilton, Anaheim, CA, 19 September, 2001.

to New York to marry the man she says had 'stolen her heart'.¹³ Their letters were such an important part of Joy's courtship with her fiancé that she keeps them in a box tied up with ribbon. Joy proudly relates that she still has every one of the 'love letters' he wrote to her, and now at ninety years of age, they bring back memories of her late husband and still bring tears to her eyes.¹⁴ The love letter represented much more than simply a means of communication. As Hsu-Ming Teo has observed, it was sometimes a 'fetishised object' in the practise of romantic love, especially when the couples' separation was prolonged and letters were often tied into neat bundles and kept in boxes or placed in scrapbooks so that they could be re-read.¹⁵

Letter-writing was also an important part of Jean Wilk's courtship. The daughter of a Mounted Policeman, Jean and her family moved from place to place, and she grew up in various suburbs of Perth. During the war Jean joined the Navy as a Signaller and was stationed at Rottnest Island. She met her future husband when she went home on weekend leave and he came knocking on the door. She recalls: 'he was looking for another girl he had met. I didn't know her, so he stayed!'¹⁶ As he was often on duty, and his leave didn't always coincide with Jean's time off, they rarely saw each other. Jean remembers, 'I knew him for a year' and 'we wrote letters after he went back to America'. The couple's courtship blossomed through letter-writing and led to marriage on Treasure Island, a naval base in California, in June 1947.¹⁷

¹³ Interview with Joy Shaddle, Forestville, Sydney, 4 October, 2002.

¹⁴ *ibid.*; also Mark Coultan, 'After 54 years, Australia reclaims its lost Joy', *The Age*, June 5, 2007.

¹⁵ Teo, *op. cit.*, p. 346; A fetishised object is something, especially an inanimate object, that is revered or worshipped because it is believed to have magical powers or be animated by a spirit. (p. 346).

¹⁶ Interview with Jean Wilk, 1 July, 2007.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

It was through correspondence that Dorothy Hammond, also, was able to get to know her future husband. Dorothy was 24 years old when they first met, and it was only one week later that her boyfriend was shipped out. Dorothy remembers announcing to her family that she was going to marry this American. Her father said, 'I'll give it three months and you'll forget all about it.' However, this was not the case and she tells how 'we just kept writing each other letters and getting in deeper'.¹⁸

Similarly, Joanne Patterson corresponded for two and a half years with her future husband before they married, because he had left Melbourne and gone north to Townsville. Joanne recalls that he was able to get leave every once in a while:

he would come down and look me up,
sometimes with great difficulty, because by that
time I had joined the service – the AWAS – and
I would be moved from place to place and he
would have to track me down, which he did!¹⁹

Although he was persistent with visits when he could, she maintains that most of her courtship was conducted through letters, despite the heavy censorship regulations which applied at that time. While the official invasion of privacy resulting from the censorship process did nothing to foster effusive expressions of love and desire, the reliance on having to 'read between the lines' in some cases intensified the romantic nature of these communications.

¹⁸ Interview with Dorothy Hammond, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

¹⁹ Interview with Joanne Patterson, Portland, OR, 14 June, 2004.

So, despite mandatory censorship, the flow of letters between the young women and their American boyfriends over extended periods created heightened romantic expectations as well as offering opportunities for freedom of expression. The influence of advertising, women's magazines, contemporary fiction and Hollywood films during the war years saw a shift in women's construction of their sexual self-representations within the discourse of romantic love.²⁰ As historian Katie Holmes points out, the sexualisation of modernity not only presented women with a new language in which to write about their feelings of attraction and their relationships with men, but it also provided the narrative of 'the love story' in which to frame their experiences.²¹

Such a narrative of love is written by war bride Dawne Balester who tells in her journal of the passionate romance that she and her American boyfriend conducted by mail during their wartime separation. Fred Balester left Australia to fight in the Pacific, and Dawne made up her mind to forget this man with whom she was passionately in love. She writes: 'He was just gone, gone from Australia, gone from my life, gone! I had no address for him.'²² Then a letter arrived from him, and 'the letter writing years began'. Although she dated a lot, Dawne always 'compared the men to him' and subsequently left them. She tells how: 'waiting for letters became the main part of my life.' She remembers: 'Mail was slow, irregular and heavily censored', and 'one page full of his writing was a windfall'. Fred always ended his letters simply, 'Love, Fred', but after the couple became

²⁰ See Teo, *op. cit.*, p. 356; Lake, Marilyn, 'The Desire for a Yank: Sexual Relations between Australian Women and American Servicemen During World War II' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1992, pp. 621-33; Susan Sheridan with Barbara Baird, Kate Borrett and Lyndall Ryan, (Eds) *Who was that woman?: The Australian Women's Weekly in the postwar years*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, pp. 30 -33.

²¹ Holmes, Katie. *Spaces in Her Day: Australian Women's Diaries of the 1920s and 1930s*: Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1995, pp. 9, 13.

²² Dawne Alison Balester, 'Dawne's Story', (unpublished, undated family history) [Source: The American War Brides Experience, http://www.geocities.com/US_warbrides/bride_stories/dawne.html] [Accessed 4 December, 2007.] (Permission to use received from Dawne Alison Balester, 22 August, 2008.)

engaged he ended his letters with the words 'I love you' which made Dawne very happy. The letters continued to flow between the two and Dawne even corresponded with Fred's mother and sent photos of herself and her family.²³

Letter-writing was an important part of Dawne's romantic relationship, as she relates:

Fred's proposal of marriage came to me by letter. Funny, how you can really get to know someone through an exchange of letters, and how a marriage proposal can be just as thrilling when the person you love and long to be with writes it to you.²⁴

Red tape also applied to foreign war brides of American servicemen in other allied countries, and their plans to marry were also officially discouraged. The European Theater of Operations, US Army, justified its deterrent policy in Britain as partly military, not wanting wives living near military bases and distracting soldiers' attention. However, it was also to prevent 'gullible men' being readily seduced by British girls, whose ulterior motives may have been to gain extra remuneration from the US Government as well as from the soldier. In this context they also needed official permission to marry, followed by a prescribed waiting period before the wedding could take place. In Britain, if a GI married without official permission the soldier was liable to court-martial, but his wife was entitled to the benefits of the Servicemen's Dependents Allowance Act.²⁵ In Canada,

²³ Balester, *op. cit.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations. The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945*, Harper Collins, London, 1995, pp. 213-4.

similar regulations applied, but if a soldier married without permission, no disciplinary action was taken. The soldier would, however, be denied any access to the allowance for his wife and any children. The Canadian government was of the opinion that: 'In general, marriage is regarded as a civil right, which should not be interfered with by military regulations.'²⁶

In other countries, also, foreign war brides of US servicemen had restrictions placed on their plans to marry. In Italy, initially a GI could marry his Italian girlfriend with permission from his commanding officer. However, after the Italian Decree 430 on 18 December, 1944, a marriage form filled out in triplicate in both Italian and English was required. Later, a US Army Review Board required that one of the couple should speak the other's language, and an interview and question period was also required.²⁷ In Germany, there was an official ban on women marrying American GIs, however, some marriages did take place without permission - usually in secret – and the legality of these marriages had to be recognised.²⁸ The ban on marriages between American servicemen and German women was officially lifted on December 11, 1946. However, there was a three-month waiting period while the German woman was carefully screened, and then the marriage could not take place until a month before the American was scheduled to depart from Europe. The necessary paperwork process often took more than the required three months.²⁹

In Australia, the official policy of the United States Army Forces towards

²⁶ Reynolds, *op cit.*, p. 213.

²⁷ Shukert, Elfrieda and Barbara Scibetta, *War Brides of World War II*, Presidio Press, Novato, CA, 1988, p. 100.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 140.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 144.

American-Australian marriages was clearly spelled out in a letter of May 20, 1942, which stated that their 'consistent policy' was 'to discourage marriages of American soldiers in Australia during the progress of the war'.³⁰ In July 1942, the US Chief of Naval Operations issued orders stating that 'no member of Naval, Marine Corps or Coast Guard Forces on duty in any foreign country or possession may marry without the approval of the Senior Commander'.³¹ In August of the same year, an official letter from US Army Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, notified the Registrar General of New South Wales of a directive that 'all registered Celebrants in New South Wales' be informed of the 'harm done to the individuals, the armed forces, and the war effort' by the continued 'practice of marrying members of the United States Army Forces'.³² Celebrants were specifically requested 'not to perform such marriages, unless the officer or enlisted man involved displayed written authority from his proper Commanding Officer'.³³

In the same month, the Registrar General of New South Wales received notice from US Army Headquarters of a directive from the US Secretary of War that gave similar orders that no personnel of the United States Army on duty in any foreign country could marry without prior written approval.³⁴ The reasons given for the restrictions placed on American servicemen marrying Australian girls were set out in the letter:

³⁰ Letter from George L. Dutton, Lieut. Colonel, A.G.D., Acting Adjutant General, Headquarters, United States Army Forces in Australia Office of the Commanding General, dated May 20, 1942. [Quoted in Jessie M.G. Street, *Truth or Repose*, Australasian Book Society Sydney 1966, p. 228.]

³¹ Naval Order 144, dated July 7 1942 [NARA, RG38, Chief of Naval Operations, CNO Index 1942-43 (Box 73) ALNAV 144-42].

³² Letter from Headquarters, United States Army Services of Supply, Southwest Pacific Area, Base Section 7, A.P.O. 927 to the Registrar General of New South Wales, dated 10 August 1942. [National Archives of Australia, Series MP508/1, Item 115/701/352]

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

No. 9 – Permission to marry

APO 301
9 June 1943

SUBJECT: Request for permission to Marry.

TO : COMMANDING GENERAL, I CORPS, (USA) APO 301

1. It is requested that I be granted permission to marry an Australian girl, Miss Betty Millard, age 21 years, of, c/o Chevron Hotel, 519-St. Kilda Rd., Melbourne, Victoria

2. Both Miss Betty Millard and I have read and understand the provisions as outlined in USAFFE Regulation 10-10, dated March 1943.

(a). I am not married or involved in any former marital status or allegiance.

(b). I understand that, should authority to marry be granted, the United States Government is obligated in no way to transport the wife or dependents to the United States during the present emergency.

(c). In addition to my army pay, I have no other income at present. I have \$10,000 NSL insurance to which the prospective wife would be made beneficiary if permission to marry is granted.

(d). I understand that personnel who marry, with or without approval, will not be given special consideration of any sort on account of family duties and responsibilities. Personnel on duty will be required to live with their organizations.

(e). Military personnel who have been authorized to marry and who are entitled by law to quarters, will not be furnished with quarters in kind.

(f). Dependents of military personnel who marry in Australia are not entitled to medical or dental services, baggage or transportation allowances or to Post Exchange or Commissary privileges.

3. Although both parents are living they are not now, or likely to become, dependent upon me. Attention is invited to attached certificate.

Edward L. Hawks

EDWARD L. HAWKS 37078324
Cpl. Btry. "F" 147th F.A.

1 incl: Certificate, Miss Betty Millard

1st Ind.

Btry. "F" 147th Field Artillery APO 301

10 June 1943

TO: COMMANDING OFFICER, 147th Field Artillery APO 301

1. Having investigated the circumstances involving the request for marriage of Col. Edward L. Hawks, this organization, I recommend that this permission be granted. His character rating is Excellent.

James S. Grutz

S. GRUTZ
Capt. 147th FA
Comdg. Btry. "F"

**Request for permission to marry Miss Betty MILLARD from
Corporal Edward L. HAWKS, 9 June, 1943.**



Betty MILLARD in Melbourne c.1943.



**Betty and Edward HAWKS
on their wedding day.**

- Should the individual be ordered to depart for the United States...there is no assurance that his wife can accompany him.
- The strict immigration laws of the United States may preclude the wife accompanying the husband upon [his] return to the United States.
- Soldiers who marry will not be given special consideration, and will be required to live with their Organizations.³⁵

The official directives above leave no doubt as to the US Military's official policy, which clearly defines that marriage between American servicemen and Australian women hampered the war effort and was therefore to be avoided at all cost.

In Australia, the US army requirement that permission to marry was first obtained from the serviceman's commanding officer, meant that it was entirely at his discretion that permission was either granted or not. It often took weeks and months for the paperwork to be completed. In an effort to prevent hasty and ill-planned marriages, it became mandatory that after permission was granted, there had to be a 'cooling-off' period of six months before the wedding could take place. The US Secretary of War issued a directive that those personnel who married without authority would be subject to severe disciplinary action.³⁶

US immigration policy regarding visas and restrictive quotas also put obstacles in the way of Australian women wanting to marry an American

³⁵ Letter from Headquarters, United States Army Services of Supply, Southwest Pacific Area, Base Section 7, A.P.O. 927 to the Registrar General of New South Wales, dated 10 August 1942, *op.cit.*

³⁶ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

serviceman and live in America.³⁷ Reforms to immigration policy brought changes for the better at the end of the war (see details in Chapter 4), but this was to be more than three years away, and did not help the plight of war brides and fiancés who were already at the mercy of wartime authorities, and who experienced long and frustrating delays in making their future plans.

Clergymen were often reluctant to perform ceremonies for brides marrying Americans, creating another impediment to marriage. Church authorities did their best to discourage American-Australian marriages, and in Brisbane, the Catholic Archbishop James Duhig publicly urged a ban on such weddings until the Americans could prove that they were legally free to marry, claiming that he feared bigamous mergers. Meanwhile, these marriages were not allowed to take place in Brisbane Catholic churches, creating a serious impediment to Catholic couples by forcing brides to seek permission from ministers of other denominations to marry them.³⁸

In Townsville, Gladys Borger had taken Catholic instruction as her future husband was a Catholic, but when he returned from New Guinea the priest wanted to sight his baptism papers. Gladys says:

there was no way you could get baptism papers from the United States then, so the priest wouldn't marry us and we got a Methodist Minister to perform the ceremony instead.³⁹

³⁷ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³⁸ Campbell, *Heroes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-5; Michael McKernan, *All In! Fighting the War at Home*, Alan & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, p. 198; Interview with Gladys Borger, Sacramento, 29 September 2001.

³⁹ Borger, Sacramento, *loc. cit.*

Religion was important to most of the war brides interviewed in this study, and attending Sunday school and church had been a significant part of their upbringing. Disillusioned brides found their expectations of a traditional church wedding were upset by such opposition from the religious establishment. However, these negative attitudes to Australian-American marriages displayed by the church as well the Australian and American government authorities, most certainly heightened the whole notion of 'romantic love' for these couples. Faced with the reality of the situation, their resolve to marry, albeit in a church of another denomination, was strengthened. Although marriage did not confer US citizenship, nor did it guarantee the brides' subsequent admission to the US, the couples' determination to have a church wedding demonstrated a continuation of traditional values midst the upheaval of an unpredictable wartime period.⁴⁰

The wartime environment dominated by rules, regulations, specific legislation and red tape, had a huge impact on different aspects of the lives of these young Australian women. Their new-found freedom was hampered by the necessary adherence to the severely limiting conditions of wartime, giving them few options, causing difficulties and frustration, and putting obstacles in the way of their plans for the future. As Darian-Smith claims, the restrictive legislation and red tape undermined the sense of the period as 'a time of personal liberation and independence from the shackles of pre-war social conventions,' and brought about 'a psychological dependency on the state and a general sense of helplessness'.⁴¹ In the face of this restrictive atmosphere, however, Australian war brides showed patience and determination to overcome the challenges they faced.

⁴⁰ Potts, *Yank Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁴¹ Kate Darian-Smith, 'War Stories: Remembering the Australian Home Front During the Second World War' in *Memory & History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, edited by Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 145

Amidst the urgency of wartime, complicated by an atmosphere of restrictive laws of officialdom, there was little opportunity for women planning to marry an American serviceman to fully express their independence and personal freedom. Early in 1943, when American serviceman Tom Atkins filed a request to marry Lola in Northam, Western Australia, she was interviewed by an officer of the US Navy. Lola writes in her journal:

The interview concerned the realities and was designed to acquaint Australian young women with enough information to be able to make a reasoned choice.⁴²

During the waiting period of six months before the couple could marry, Lola remembers: 'the mixture of reality and romance gave me much to ponder'.⁴³ This mandatory waiting period was a sobering experience for Lola, as it was for many other war brides. It allowed them time, in the pressing atmosphere of wartime, to give serious thought to the reality and importance of their decision to marry an American serviceman. It also served to heighten romance and strengthen their sense of commitment. These young women were determined to marry the men they loved, despite the discouragement of the authorities and the hindrance of obstacles they had to overcome.

When Joan Byer's American boyfriend Raymond asked her to marry him, she remembers that this was no easy matter and there was much planning to do:

Ray had to get permission from his commanding officer to marry while overseas. That was not

⁴² Lola Atkins, *A Mystic Journey*, (unpublished journal, in possession of author.) p. 39

⁴³ *ibid.*

easy to do. The Navy was reluctant to grant such permission, and put all sorts of obstacles in our path. We needed birth certificates from both sets of parents, letters of recommendation from our superiors, character references from long-time friends and the pastor of our church, plus a citizen's report from the police. We also had to write personal letters detailing our reasons for getting married. It was somewhat of a nightmare, and not for the faint of heart.⁴⁴

Ray finally obtained permission to marry Joan just a few hours before the wedding was planned to take place on August 19, 1944, at St Joseph's Catholic Church in Subiaco where Joan had been a parishioner all her life.⁴⁵

Brides under the age of twenty-one also had the additional requirement to obtain permission from their parents before they could marry an American serviceman. Dawne, a 17 year-old Melbourne girl, was working as a temporary female assistant for the Australian Army when she met her American boyfriend on a train crowded with hundreds of young men just back from fighting on Guadalcanal. Dawn says that he was 'the handsomest boy I had ever seen in my life'.⁴⁶ He visited her family home and, with her mother's permission, he took her to a movie and from then on they saw each other constantly. Dawne writes in her journal of the powerful emotions elicited during the uncertainty of war:

⁴⁴ Joan Byer, 'The Dance That Changed My Life', 'Reminiscences', Unpublished journal, c.1996, p. 61

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Balester, *op. cit.*

Early in our relationship I realized [sic] that I was in love. Not a quiet love. I knew what passionate love was now. It blinded me. Fred never used the word love, I never mentioned love. After all what future did we have? I was seventeen, he was nineteen how could we ever be sure of a life together? He would have to leave Australia to fight again and would never return...So, I made the most of every moment and never worried about the outcome.⁴⁷

In this wartime atmosphere of urgency and uncertainty, Dawne seemed to 'live for the moment' (which appears to conform to contemporary stereotypes), and not to consider long-term outcomes or the longevity of a relationship, as in more normal peace-time society. Dawne's mother, 'the strictest of women where her daughters were concerned', seemed to like Fred and saved the meat ration to cook dinner for him, and Dawne was impressed with the way he put up with her little sister, who was a pest and a tease.⁴⁸

When Dorothy Pence Berry, who grew up in Sydney, met her American boyfriend it was the beginning of a whirlwind romance! She was working at Lennon's Hotel in Brisbane which was frequented by US servicemen. She recalls 'we got together immediately and set up house, but the navy wouldn't let us get married!'⁴⁹ After waiting six months, the Captain still refused permission, so the couple decided they would 'fool the whole world' and have a baby to expedite matters. Dorothy tells how this made no difference, and she was four months

⁴⁷ Balester, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Interview with Dorothy Pence Berry, Denver, CO, 6 September 2001.

pregnant when they finally married in August 1943. She remembers with indignation:

it wasn't a very good feeling for us, because I
was a very proud Australian. I thought I would
make a good wife, and the Navy didn't think
so!⁵⁰

Dorothy's romantic emphasis on the nature of the couple's courtship signals the use of 'composure' in its translation. This was possibly to ease the painful memory of all the opposition to their marriage that they had encountered and to justify the pre-marital pregnancy. The reason the authorities gave Dorothy for not allowing their marriage was that 'they didn't want any more marriages to foreign wives', and yet, Dorothy says, 'I didn't feel "foreign"!'⁵¹ The couple had a very small church wedding in Brisbane, with only her husband's best friend and her own best friend as attendants. Her husband was shipped out three months later.

So, while there were cases of 'fast' romances and passionate liaisons among this group, they were exceptional and certainly were not impetuous one-night or even one-week infatuations, but were long term, and mostly became lifelong relationships of fifty years or more. These experiences do not fit the pattern of the stereotypical war bride who was perceived to be hedonistic and opportunistic, rushing into relationships and marrying hastily without sufficient consideration of the possible outcome.

⁵⁰ Berry, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*

THE CEREMONY

Weddings in wartime were very different to peacetime weddings. The traditional white wedding gown had for decades been standard regalia, symbolising qualities of purity, virginity, innocence, and promise.⁵² In her study of the history of the Australian wedding, Margot Harker claims that the white wedding was a nineteenth century British invention, subsequently shaped by forces such as Hollywood, marketing, women's magazines, and televised royal events'. These forces, she claims, have been 'particularly influential in constructing the idiom of the "fairytale wedding" and the "princess bride"'.⁵³ Harker argues that 'the pageantry and expense associated with the event came to signify upward social mobility' and the white wedding 'became an object of desire for aspirants to middle class status.'⁵⁴

Harker found that in the first half of the twentieth century the wedding 'remained resolutely conventional and backward-looking, even though its "traditional" aspects acquired a new Hollywood glamour'.⁵⁵ Despite 'the enormity of change in the twentieth century, including two wars and great economic distress as well as major shifts in Australian culture and lifestyle', she found that 'core notions' of what was 'proper' about a wedding changed very little. She maintains:

its 'whiteness', 'its emphasis on the bride, its importance as a signifier of wealth and respectability, its mainstream middle-class Anglo character and the highlighting of the public images

⁵² Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings: romancing heterosexuality in popular culture*, Routledge, New York, 1999, p. 34.

⁵³ Margot Harker, 'This Radiant Day', *RSSS Annual Report*, ANU, Canberra, 1998, p. 11.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Margot Harker, "'This Radiant Day': A history of the Australian Wedding, 1788-1960", unpublished PhD thesis, ANU, Canberra, 1998, p. 3.

No. 10 – Bridal fashions in wartime



Betty MOTT (wearing a non-traditional picture hat) married Raymond DE SAINT GERMAIN in Brisbane, Queensland, in 1944.

it produced over the relationship and social responsibilities it generated – all these endured with very little alteration.⁵⁶

During the war years, however, wedding arrangements were fraught with obstacles and difficulties, and were often made with as little notice as three or four days. In the urgency of the wartime atmosphere, despite the importance of the white bridal gown and its symbolic qualities, wedding preparations were sometimes forced to give way to expedience, economy, and availability. In place of the traditional white wedding with 'all the trimmings', the bride quite often wore borrowed bridal gowns and veils, had small gatherings, and ceremonies were conducted in haste. Wartime shortages, rationing of luxury goods and the issue of coupons made it difficult for war brides to make wedding preparations. An appeal from Prime Minister Curtin in 1942 seemed to be directed at women when he urged the public to bring out the darning needle (described as 'a weapon of war') and to repair old clothes, and asked Australians to live as austere as possible.⁵⁷ Commodities such as petrol were also in short supply and honeymoons away were rare occurrences. Some brides married one day and went back to work the next.⁵⁸

According to Chrys Ingraham's study of weddings published in the late 1990s, the wedding ceremony is more than simply a ritual, and represents 'the heterosexual imaginary at work, the moment for creating the illusion of happiness, order, well-being and plenitude'.⁵⁹ Ingraham suggests that weddings are 'feel-

⁵⁶ Harker, "This Radiant Day", (PhD Thesis), *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 3.

⁵⁷ Michael McKernan, *All In! Fighting the War at home* (Allen & Unwin) St Leonards, 1995, p. 148

⁵⁸ Interview with Dorothy Thompson, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September 2001.

⁵⁹ Ingraham, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

No. 11 – ‘A glorious wedding’



Alice Kathleen (Allie) DREW and Lowell Robert (Bud) RUDY married in Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Melbourne, Victoria, on 20 November, 1943. The bride held a fragrant bouquet of white gardenias and waterlilies.

good' experiences that allow us 'to feel comfortable with the dominant social order, conceal any of its contradictions, and anaesthetise ourselves against an everyday "state of affairs which needs illusions"'.⁶⁰ Ingraham's theory could be argued to apply to wartime weddings between Australian women and American servicemen which took place in an atmosphere of social upheaval and tension when 'feel-good' experiences could provide illusions of comfort and happiness. The oral testimony of the war brides, however, suggests otherwise. Certainly, some war brides interviewed remember their weddings of around sixty years ago with romantic nostalgia and with little mention of the upheavals and tensions of wartime. It is possible that the reality of the circumstances of wartime, on a romantic occasion such as this, has been dimmed with the re-telling over time, and only the happier moments are recalled. Here, in a small number of cases, the concept of 'composure' can be applied in the interpretation of these stories. For example, Allie Rudy remembers her wedding on November 20, 1943 at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Melbourne (where she had attended school) as 'a glorious wedding' and the reception 'was just a beautiful thing'. The memories flood back as she recalls how she wore the beautiful wedding gown that she had seen in a store window, and remembers vividly how she 'loved the white Venetian lace veil' and the gardenias and waterlilies she carried in her bouquet.⁶¹ Colleen Halter fondly remembers her wedding in Brisbane in November 1945, at 'the pretty little Methodist church right across from the City Hall' with a carillon which rang out for the first time since the war began. She recalls, 'we had a big family wedding, bridesmaids, best man, groomsman and flower girls – the works!' Colleen doesn't remember any problem finding a bridal gown, but does remember the three-tiered

⁶⁰ Ingraham, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁶¹ Interview with Allie Rudy, Denver, CO, 7 September 2001; also Rudy, Allie, 'The Story of My Life', November 13, 2006. (Excerpts copied from unpublished manuscript supplied to author in May 2007 in Washington D.C.)

wedding cake and a large reception at home with the family catering for about fifty guests.⁶² Although these weddings took place during and just after the war, these two stories are narrated without any mention of the war itself or of the problems associated with having a church wedding at that time, the absence of which points to the useful concept of 'composure' when interpreting these particular interviews.

For most war brides, though, the special circumstances produced by war had such great impact on these young women's wedding arrangements that it is doubtful that the ritual of their wedding ceremonies could have produced sufficient 'feel-good' experiences to act as an anaesthetic or conceal the social chaos of the 1940s. The fact that so many couples attempted to have a traditional church wedding, despite the difficulties at that time, is representative of traditional values which saw romance and marriage as the socially appropriate path for the 'good woman' to sexual fulfillment. As Harker maintains, WWII 'if anything tightened the grip that formal white wedding rituals held on the Australian imagination'.⁶³ Great efforts were made, sometimes at very short notice, to arrange for a church wedding with full bridal regalia, and as Harker observes, 'The more they were moved tantalisingly out of reach, the more desirable they became.'⁶⁴ This was certainly the case with the efforts made by the participants in this study, who were determined to have a white wedding if at all possible. At the same time the traditional church wedding helped to reinforce the romantic notion of marriage, which carried the promise of a secure and happy future in a time disrupted by uncertainty.

Edna (known as Teddy) Pickerel, born in Boonah, Queensland,

⁶² Interview with Colleen Halter, San Jose, CA, 27 September 2001

⁶³ Harker, "This Radiant Day", (PhD Thesis), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

describes the atmosphere at the time her husband proposed three months after they met: 'Things at that time seemed to be more urgent – you didn't have time to wait and think clearly.' Teddy recalls 'there was a lot of red tape' and she found the pre-wedding arrangements quite rigorous. Enlisted in the Air Force, she had to get permission from her commanding officer; she was not yet twenty-one so her parents' permission was also required; her fiancé had to get permission from his commanding officer, who also interviewed Teddy; and finally 'we went to see Reverend Englington' for his permission to be married. It took a couple of months to organise all this paper work, without which he would not marry them.⁶⁵

In this wartime environment young women preparing to marry were constantly confronted with challenges, but despite this there is much evidence of the war brides' determination to have a white church wedding. When Mary Bourne married Herb in Albany, Western Australia on February 24, 1943, she wore a borrowed wedding dress and a borrowed veil. Her bridesmaid wore a dress previously worn at another wedding, and the reception was held at a Greek restaurant, which her husband called 'the greasy spoon'! Wartime petrol shortages disrupted their honeymoon trip when 'the taxi driver had to stop in the middle of the road...to put charcoal in the burner.'⁶⁶ Similarly, Rita Hopkins had a small wartime wedding on May 27, 1943 in Brisbane. She borrowed her aunt's bridal dress and her cousin had 'a piece of lace that was way, way old and had been in the family forever', which she used for a veil. Being a schoolteacher, resourceful Rita overcame the fuel shortage and took the ingredients to school where she used its cooking facilities to make the wedding cake for her 'sit-down'

⁶⁵ Interview with Edna (Teddy) Pickerel, Salem, OR, 11 September 2001.

⁶⁶ Interview with Mary Bourne, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

No. 12 – Traditional white weddings



Barbara SHERIDAN married Bernard James (Jim) GLEASON at the Wesley Church, Perth, WA, on 19 February, 1944.



Dorothy (Mary) COOK with her mother on her wedding day outside the family home in Albany, WA, on 24 February, 1943.



Dorothy MILBOURNE-JACKSON married Everett PENCE in Brisbane, on 13 August, 1943.



Dorothy LEISHMAN married Leroy Ferdinand THOMPSON at Albert Street Methodist Church, Brisbane, Qld, on May 27, 1944.

wedding reception.⁶⁷

It seemed that having a church wedding in bridal regalia, even though problematic in wartime, was important to many war brides. As Harker found in her study, there was evidence that

having a wedding (participating in pageantry and image creation), has for many people become as important as becoming married (altering individual and social status) if not more so.⁶⁸

During the 1940s, many of the Australian war brides and their families made enormous efforts to have a traditional wedding, despite the rationing of luxury goods such as bridal dress fabrics, the shortage of alcohol, the scarcity of photographic paper, and lack of preparation time midst the urgency of wartime. Cynthia Peters grew up on Sydney's north shore and had been engaged for a year when her fiancé returned from the Philippines and called her from Brisbane. He said 'I'm coming down so we can be married!'⁶⁹ They had three days notice. Cynthia was twenty when they married at St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney on July 24, 1945, on her husband's 25th birthday. Generous friends gave her clothing coupons and in three days her mother made her wedding dress and trousseau from satin and parachute silk that Ray had sent her. Cynthia remembers the urgency of the time: 'Of course you didn't send out invitations in those days. You got on the phone and said "Can you come to a wedding – next Tuesday?"'⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Interview with Rita Hopkins, Salem, OR, 11 September, 2001.

⁶⁸ Harker, 'This Radiant Day', *RSSS Annual Report*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Interview with Cynthia Peter, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

⁷⁰ Peter, *op. cit.*

When Dorothy Thompson made her wedding arrangements, the minister said 'we have one opening at four o'clock next Saturday – don't be late!' With only five days notice Dorothy and her bridesmaids made their own dresses, and her mother's friend made the cake. Dorothy describes the confusion caused by multiple weddings at the church:

The Minister told us not to be late, but one bride was coming out as the other was going in...you didn't know whose family you were with! ...all the churches were very busy because a lot of the Yanks were getting married.⁷¹

Due to their personal circumstances, not all war brides married in the traditional white gown, or had the pageantry of the church ritual. Sometimes a simpler wedding seemed more appropriate, especially in a time of national austerity. Joan Hamilton describes herself as 'a run-away bride'. She had known her husband for almost a year, but her mother would not give permission for Joan to marry, initially unhappy at the thought of her leaving Australia and going 'into the unknown'.⁷² Joan recalls:

I was 21, so I packed my bags and took the train from Goondiwindi to Brisbane...I stayed with a friend, an older woman whose daughter was my attendant.⁷³

At a small wedding in the Albert Street Methodist Church, Brisbane, Joan wore a pink linen suit, as she had no coupons for a bridal dress. As she had run away from home, she felt that it was inappropriate to have a big wedding. The couple

⁷¹ Interview with Dorothy Thompson, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

⁷² Joan Hamilton, *op. cit.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

spent their honeymoon in a hotel because 'Charles didn't have time to take a proper holiday'.⁷⁴

Last minute cancellations and changes to schedules caused consternation for some women planning their weddings. Joyce Olquin, from Bundarra in outback New South Wales, had known her fiancé for a year but had only seen him three times before they married: the first time when he had seven days leave, then when he had ten days leave, and then all leave was cancelled. She recalls:

We were planning our marriage...I had a cake ordered, and I was taking in the sugar coupons when they cancelled Americans! Then I cancelled everything! Then all of a sudden he shows up on an Australian holiday – and then we found five cupcakes!⁷⁵

Joyce wore a street dress of 'very pretty blue crepe'. Her aunt had given her coupons to buy gloves, and others gave her coupons for stockings and a hat. As well as wearing 'something new' she had no choice but to wear 'something old'. She recalls, 'I had the same shoes and the same underwear as I didn't have enough coupons for anything else!' ⁷⁶

Brides, whose husbands were shipped out soon after they were married, suffered a real sense of abandonment. Lola Atkins married Tom in the Catholic

⁷⁴ Joan Hamilton, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ Interview with Joyce Olquin, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

⁷⁶ *ibid.* Note: Coupons issued during wartime austerity campaign were to ensure that everyone had fair access to food, clothing and other scarce goods. Coupons had to be handed over along with money in order to buy rationed goods. Source: John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, John Curtin University, <http://john.curtin.edu.au/manofpeace/homefront.html> [Accessed 13 December, 2009.]

Church at Northam, Western Australia on December 16, 1943. Lola wore her sister's altered wedding gown and had family and friends to a reception in a hotel there, with a wedding cake and all the trimmings. Tom's reassignment to the US came quickly with orders to leave just thirteen days after the wedding. It was an eventful two weeks with her father's death occurring the day before her husband was shipped out. Lola says she 'felt excited, scared and slightly abandoned when Tom said, "I'll see you in Frisco!"' but, she added 'it did feel like an adventure'.⁷⁷

MARRIAGE IN AMERICA

Some engaged couples were unable to marry until they were reunited in America after the war was over, and this presented them with more red tape. A pre-paid bond of \$US500 was required from the American serviceman, to ensure that his future partner would not be abandoned on arrival, and that the marriage would actually take place at the first opportunity. The bond money was to cover the cost of a possible return trip by sea if the marriage did not take place within the stipulated time. By law, Australian fiancées of American servicemen had three months after their arrival in the US in which to formalise their marriages which were arranged to take place at the first opportunity. For these women, their patience and determination were truly tested as they waited patiently to marry when they could eventually get passage to America to reunite with their fiancés.

Valda and Harold Hertzberg were married on 29 August, 1946 three days after her arrival in America. She explains:

We had to have three days to wait to see that I
didn't have VD or anything – it was Pennsylvanian

⁷⁷ Interview with Lola Atkins, San Diego, CA, 22 September, 2001; also Atkins, 'A Mystic Journey', *op. cit.*

law – but we were being married by a rabbi and the only one my husband knew happened to be Orthodox and couldn't marry us on a Saturday. So we had to marry a day before, and neither of us was Orthodox.⁷⁸

Valda tells how she was married in her mother-in-law's unit in a beautiful gown that her father had had made for her in Australia. Despite her mother-in-law's advice that 'you want a simpler dress' Valda wore it to the rather large reception that her mother-in-law had arranged.⁷⁹

Patricia Law was engaged to be married when she arrived in San Francisco on SS *Marine Phoenix* in 1947. A friend put her in touch with a lady who was a Red Cross nurse who insisted on meeting the ship. This well-meaning lady took Patricia home to stay for a week, changing her plans of travelling directly to join her partner as she had always intended. She then travelled by train to Casa Grande, Arizona where a Texan lady who sat next to her said 'You poor little thing, are you getting off here?' It was a small town of 6,000 people. Her fiancé met her at the train and Patricia recalls:

He looked so different out of uniform...he had this big cowboy hat on. He's always very quiet, and you know me, I was telling him everything! He said 'look, we've got a lifetime ahead, slow down!'"⁸⁰

Her husband-to-be worked at the newspaper and had rented a little apartment for

⁷⁸ Interview with Valda Hertzberg, Darling Point, Sydney, 30 May, 2007.

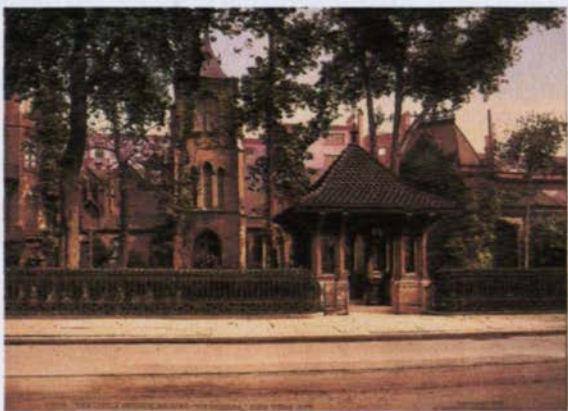
⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Interview with Patricia Law, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001.

No.13 – Married in America



Joy PARKER married Lloyd SHADDLE
in New York City, on 14 March, 1947,
in 'The Little Church Around the Corner' (pictured).¹



Jean Constance REEVES married Casimer WILK at Treasure Island
Naval Base, near San Francisco, CA, on 25 June 1947.

¹ 'The Little Church Around the Corner' is the popular name for the Church of the Transfiguration, an Anglo-Catholic Episcopal church founded in 1948 'to embrace all races and and classes'. It is also known as the 'wedding church' because of its popularity for weddings. Source: *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Transfiguration [Accessed 12 June, 2009].

her in “the ladies’ yard” where she stayed until they were married six weeks later. The wedding took place in a ‘beautiful old Episcopalian church in Tucson, Arizona’, with two neighbours as witnesses and Patricia remembers that ‘it was about a hundred degrees even in October.’⁸¹ Although Patricia had brought a bridal dress with her from Australia, she decided instead to wear ‘a crepe dress with a lot of beading on it that was very fancy’, and which made her feel ‘kind of pretty’. The newlyweds could not spend the night in Tucson as they had to drive the two witnesses back home. However, on their return ‘the neighbours had a full-sized wedding cake and all the gifts and a lovely reception’ waiting for them and the new bride was made feel very welcome.⁸²

On the east coast of America, Joy Parker’s fiancé Lloyd Shaddle had travelled by train from Forrest, Illinois, to meet the merchant ship MV *Lowlander* which had sailed through the Panama Canal and up the east coast to dock in New York in early 1947. As soon as they could get their papers ready the couple was married at ‘The Little Church Around the Corner’, a historic church in downtown New York, on March 14, 1947. They honeymooned in New York and visited Niagra Falls before taking the train to Forrest where they stayed with Lloyd’s parents until they were able to buy their own house.⁸³

For these fiancées the absence of their own families from the important occasion of their marriage was inevitable, and somewhat similar to the experience of some war brides who married in Australia during wartime without family members present. However, for the fiancées who married in America, the absence of family added an extra dimension to the emotional experience of their wedding

⁸¹ Law, 8 September, 2001, *op. cit.*.

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ Shaddle, *op. cit.*

day, with few people in attendance, in a country in which they had not had time to settle.

It was just three days after arriving in America and after travelling for seven days by plane that Sunny Sansing was married at the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee on September 26, 1946. Because she had been married before and had been through a divorce, Sunny says, 'they would not marry me in the church. I was married in the basement', where the Sunday School was held. She says: 'I really didn't appreciate it at all!'⁸⁴ However, these were typical of the unexpected situations which many war brides had to accept on arrival in a new country where rules and regulations varied from state to state.

The interpretation of the oral testimony of the war brides in this study has taken into consideration the necessary component of nostalgia when remembering such a romantic period in their early lives; the concepts of 'composure' and 'discomposure' have also been considered in their analysis. In the majority of cases, however, there is evidence of an almost relieved outpouring from the heart, as they relate their stories of love and marriage which they have been waiting to tell for many years, to take their rightful place in the public arena. There is little evidence in the majority of the interviews of the restructuring of their stories in order to present an acceptable picture, but rather an enthusiasm to tell how it was for them, both good and bad, and to inform the younger generation of their part in the making of women's history in a by-gone era.

⁸⁴ Interview with Sunny Sansing, Reno, NV, 28 September, 1999.

CHAPTER THREE

‘Ladies in waiting’: the long wait to join husbands and fiancés

All the girls around Australia,
Married to Yankee Sailors:
The fare is paid across the sea,
To the home of the brave, and the land of the free.
From west to east the young girls came,
all aboard the Bridal Train.
It was a farewell crossing of the land,
She's gone to meet her sailor man.

(Lyrics from chorus of *The Bridal Train*, written and sung
by The Waifs, 2004)¹

This chapter examines the experiences of some of the thousands of women who travelled from rural and urban locations across Australia to embark on a long shipboard voyage to join their husbands and fiancés in America. It reveals how they plunged from the ‘highs’ of anticipation to be quickly reduced to the ‘low ebbs’ of frustration when their expected shipboard passages were cancelled or delayed. By examining original oral testimony of the war brides this chapter highlights the realities and nuances of their experiences, and addresses a previously neglected chapter in the history of female migration. It reveals new evidence which highlights the long and sometimes anxious periods spent waiting to secure passage to reunite with their partners, some of whom had returned to the United States up to four years earlier. Journals kept by war brides almost 60 years ago are also drawn upon to give insight into their self-representations, by observing the way they recorded their feelings and experiences at that time.

¹ The music and lyrics of ‘The Bride Train’ were written by The Waifs, an Australian musical group consisting of the grandchildren of an Australian WWII war bride (Betty Kane) who married an American sailor and who crossed the Nullarbor on the ‘bridal train’ to sail to America. When the song was released in 2004 she was 83-years-old and living in Albany, Western Australia.

By looking at contemporary accounts, as well as these more recent oral sources, a fuller understanding can be gained of the circumstances encountered by war brides. By becoming the bride of an American serviceman, these women were subjected to a quasi-military experience, which rendered their experiences very different from other Australian women, their fate being largely determined by the US military authorities. Their oral testimony reveals the way in which they responded to the official red tape which caused frustrating delays, cancellations, arduous travel and onerous paperwork. Services such as the Red Cross, previously dedicated to care for soldiers, also became involved in caring for the war brides as they made their journey to America. Official correspondence and other archival records underpin the oral testimony which records the women's apprehension and nervousness, often mixed with a sense of excitement and adventure, as they battled to obtain a passage to America.

After overcoming the obstacles confronting Australian-American marriages, dealt with in the previous chapter, most of these women were quickly separated from their husbands who were either deployed to fight in the Pacific War, or shipped back to America. There were few opportunities for honeymoons, with many couples spending only a few days or weeks together before the husband was shipped out. The war brides were required to wait, some longer than others, and often under quite stressful conditions away from their homes in the country or in another State, with little money and much uncertainty, until a berth on a ship became available to transport them to America. Audrey Westley was 18 when she met Private Angelo 'Bob' Capuano at a weekly dance in Strathalbyn, South Australia. They were married two years later in 1944, and while waiting for a berth on a bride ship, she helped to pass the time by knitting a jumper in the design of

the American flag, which she wore on finally leaving Australia in April 1946.² Although frustrated by the delays in transportation, the war brides, many of whom by this time were caring for their infants, demonstrated patience and determination which traits were found to be characteristic of this special generation of women produced by the war years.

GENDER AND EMIGRATION

The global phenomenon of the mass movement of war brides at the end of the war, exacerbated by the shortage of passenger ships, caused countries such as America to examine and make fundamental reforms to their immigration policy. It was the predicament of the war brides in Australia, as well as other countries, which was the catalyst for new American legislation regarding visas and immigration quotas at the end of the war. This chapter will provide new insights into the experience of this particular cohort of Australian women, revealing how gender was a significant factor in the migration experience of war brides and fiancées. It also gives insight more generally into the female experience of migration to the United States.

In the mid-1940s, the thousands of Australian WWII war brides and fiancés of American servicemen, who waited for transportation to join their partners in the US, were about to become female immigrants in America as the war came to an end. Female immigrants in America, according to Dorothea Schneider, had been 'the subject of a lively scholarship during the early 20th century' which has held up well as social history, although she points out that 'in their own time these works

² Penny Cuthbert, *Dictionary of Australian Artists Online*, www.daao.org.au/main [Accessed 4 December, 2007].

were not paradigm setting'.³ Between the late 1930s and the late 1960s, due to influences of Cold War concerns as well as political and diplomatic history, women's history and immigrant history took a back seat in American historical scholarship. When it re-emerged in the 1970s, the prominent focus was on the 'lives of men' and women's experiences were marginalised.⁴

More recent studies of migration figures show that there was a predominance of female immigration to the US in the years after 1930 which peaked at 61.2% during the next decade, a time when there was an outstandingly large US military presence abroad.⁵ Figures from the United States Department of Justice reveal that during the three years immediately post-war, from January 1946 through December 1948, there were 112,882 war brides, 322 war grooms, and 4,479 children admitted to the United States.⁶ During this period the migration of war brides was responsible for the large numbers of female migrants to the US, making up almost 25 percent of all immigration to that country.⁷ The large contingent of up to 15,000 Australian war brides and fiancés of American servicemen, who crossed the Pacific to resettle, were a significant component of this female immigration, none of whom were at that time the focus of American historical scholarship.

In 1951, American immigration historian Oscar Handlin declared: 'I once thought to write a history of immigrants to America. Then I discovered that the

³ Dorothea Schneider, *The Literature on Women Immigrants to the United States*, Dept. of Sociology, University of Illinois, March, 2003, <http://barthes.enssib.fr/clio/revues/AHI/articles/volumes/schneid.html>, [Accessed 12 September, 2007.]

⁴ Schneider, *loc. cit.*, Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender and Immigrant Life in the US, 1820-1990*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1992, p. 2.

⁵ Marion F. Houstoun, *et al.*, 'Female Predominance in Immigration to the United States Since 1930: A First Look', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Special Issue: Women in Migration (Winter, 1984) p. 920.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*; Gabaccia, *loc. cit.*, p. 35.

No. 14 – Australian war brides waiting for passage on a ship to America.



'Australian wives and children of United States servicemen who are now awaiting transport to America'. (*Herald*, Melbourne, Vic. 25 April, 1944.) Left to right: Mrs Joyce MAY and son Mack Barry MAY; Mrs Peggy MAGISANE and daughter Jane; Mrs Marie SISMA and daughter Janice May; Mrs H. A. GREEN; Mrs E. CHARLEBOIS and son Robert Edward; Mrs H. M. STERNBERG; Mrs O. WEBB and son Robert Lee; Mrs R. GROBER; Mrs CLARK and son Michael. [Photograph courtesy of Australian War Memorial Canberra.]



Group of Australian wives and babies 1945 waiting for passage to America. [AWM P00561.036 – Photo courtesy of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.]

immigrants were American history.’⁸ However, Handlin’s writings and those of other pioneer historians of immigration in the US do not tell the whole story as women are excluded from these accounts.⁹ American historian Donna Gabaccia points out that most histories of US immigration ‘begin as experiences of migratory men disguised as genderless humans’ and women are only occasionally mentioned.¹⁰ War brides are almost entirely absent in this scholarship, leaving a unique chapter in the emigration experience to America largely untold.

The patience of many young Australian brides of US servicemen, some with children, was sorely tested as they endured long and frustrating periods anxiously waiting to be transported across the Pacific. Newspaper reports claimed that the delays were not caused by red tape or unsympathetic administration, but that it was simply due to ‘the necessities of wartime shipping’.¹¹ Priority in obtaining a passage to America was according to the date on which the girl’s visa was issued, and the US Consular officer admitted that ‘it sometimes takes a long time to move up the list’.¹² A Joint Transportation Committee of Army, Navy, War Shipping Administration and the US Consulate were in control of shipping and ‘were anxious to help these girls to the States’.¹³ However, while the war was still being fought, the war brides’ transport came second to the war effort and they had no choice but to wait.

The predicament faced by the Australian war brides was given prominence in the American press early in January 1945, when the *New York Times* urged that

⁸ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migration that made the American People*, Little Brown, Boston, 1951, p. 3.

⁹ Schneider, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Gabaccia, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

¹¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 4, 1945, p. 4.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

No. 15 – 'Supply line cut'



This cartoon in the daily press highlights the plight of war brides world-wide, as they waited for transport to join their husbands.
[*The Daily Telegraph*, January 16, 1945.]



Jean WILK in Subiaco, WA, waiting to join her husband in Newport, Rhode Island.

'Washington should give official attention to the plight of Australian brides of US Servicemen waiting for a passage to America'.¹⁴ The newspaper stated:

It is certainly not a very happy introduction to their new country for the 1,200 war brides waiting in Sydney, some with babies, many with insufficient funds, and all, apparently without a definite promise from anyone as to when, where, and if they will be furnished with some method of transportation.¹⁵

The Sydney Morning Herald reported the next day that between 10,000 and 12,000 American-Australian marriages had been recorded since the Pacific war began, and 'probably many more of which the US Consulates and Service authorities have not been notified'. The paper stated that between 1,200 and 1,500 Australian brides and fiancées of American Servicemen had already made their way to America, and now 'nine hundred more were waiting, with visas signed, in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane.' Some had already waited for six months.¹⁶

The situation was the same for brides of US servicemen across the globe. In Britain in September 1945, approximately 50,000 brides were waiting to go to the US to join their husbands and the US War Department was 'worried about how it is going to get them there without a delay'.¹⁷ Brides of US servicemen were warned that because returning soldiers were to be given priority, they might have to wait until next spring or early summer for sufficient shipping to become

¹⁴ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 3, 1945, p. 1.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 4, 1945, p. 4.

¹⁷ '50,000 Brides Wait for Ships', *Stars and Stripes*, 10 September, 1945. [The National Archives, London, Ref:FO371/44657 297185]

available, at which time they would be shipped at US government expense under a priority system depending on when their husbands were returned. Those women who were only engaged to US servicemen were to pay for their own transport. British wives were to be allowed to live permanently in the US but were required to apply for naturalization.¹⁸ Journalists in London reported how ‘a thousand angry British wives of American Service men demonstrated...and marched to the American Embassy with cries of “We want our husbands,” “We want transport”’.¹⁹

A small number of Australian women managed to secure passage to the United States before the war had ended and they endured a precarious journey as the ship dodged mines in the ocean as they went. Near the end of the war, some war brides were able to fly to America via New Zealand and other islands for refuelling. Most brides and fiancés, however, travelled by sea to join their American partners after the war ended, when finally ships became available and the mass movement of brides began.

ESTABLISHMENT OF CLUBS FOR WIVES AND FIANCÉES

The women anxiously waiting to sail to America had no idea how long the delay might be, and some who waited in accommodation away from home worried that their money might run out before they were allocated a berth on a ship. As early as March 1944, *Pix* magazine ran a story about the hundreds of Australian girls who had ‘married their new-found sweethearts’ and who had ‘since been left behind, temporarily, while their husbands kept their appointments with Tojo in the

¹⁸ ‘50,000 Brides Wait for Ships’, *Stars and Stripes*, 10 September, 1945, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ ‘G.I. Brides are told they must wait’, *News Chronicle*, October 12, 1945. [The National Archives, London, Ref. FO 371/44567 297185]

far-flung fronts of the Pacific'.²⁰ Wives and fiancées packed into the libraries of the US Information Service in Sydney and Melbourne to learn more about America.

The magazine reported the formation in Melbourne of the Friendship Club for Wives of US Servicemen, the first of its kind in Australia. The Club, founded by a group of lonely war brides had a membership of more than 400, including fiancées as well as wives, and 25 babies classed as junior members. The object of the Club was social contact, and activities included culinary trials of recipes for American dishes, outdoor meetings in a city park, 'singsongs', exchanging news and comparing notes from letters, especially those from new relatives in America.²¹

The need for such organisations existed all over Australia and saw the formation of similar clubs in other cities. In Sydney, the Club for Wives and Fiancées of US Servicemen met weekly. The first Australian woman Senator, Dorothy Tangney, elected in 1943 to represent Western Australia, was a strong advocate for women's rights and was Patron of this Club.²² War bride Nell Rassmussen remembers visiting the Club during her wait for transport to the US:

I went to the Wives and Fiancées' Club which held their meetings in the Museum on the corner of William Street. We mostly wanted to hear about transportation. My father had paid 500 pounds to a man who said he could get transport - my father

²⁰ *Pix*, March 18, 1944, p. 3.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 365; Note: Senator Tangney was served in the Australian Senate from 1943 to 1968. See Ann Millar, *Trust the Women: women in the Federal Parliament*, Canberra, Australian Parliament, 1993.

never saw him again! I still have a copy of a letter from the Prime Minister in answer to a request from my father for assistance in getting transportation for me to get to America.²³

In Brisbane the Australian Wives' and American Husbands' Club was set up during May 1944.²⁴ Organised by the Allied Relations Committee, a two-day school was held at Newport on Sydney's north shore, for wives and fiancées of American Servicemen to help the girls to brush up their knowledge of Australia and to learn something of American customs and history before they left for the United States.²⁵ In January 1945, a lecture on America was given by feminist politician Mrs Crawford Vaughan,²⁶ attended by 50 members of the First NSW Wives and Fiancées of US Servicemen's Club, which was located in Castlereagh Street, Sydney. The young wives and fiancées showed keen interest in social and economic conditions in their adopted country and asked such questions as: 'Can a woman become President?'; 'Is housekeeping really so much easier than in Australia?'; and 'Will we find the weather very extreme?'²⁷ The young women also were anxious to know exactly what happened regarding their nationality and that of their children when they married and entered the US. This query is significant in that it signals later concerns about citizenship after the war brides had settled in America, and had to make a decision about whether or not they should become US citizens.

²³ Telephone conversation with Nell Rassmussen, Florida, USA, 6 November, 2007.

²⁴ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

²⁵ "'School' for Wives of US Servicemen' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 1946, p. 9.

²⁶ Millicent Fanny Vaughan (nee Preston Stanley) 1883-1955, politician and women's activist, wife of former South Australian Premier, Crawford Vaughan. See Heather Radi, 'Preston Stanley, Millicent Fanny (1883 - 1955)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 11, Melbourne University Press, 1988, pp. 285-286.

²⁷ 'Questions about America', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 25, 1945, p. 5.

Towards the end of the war in 1945 when there were many more brides waiting to join their husbands in America, more clubs were formed in Perth, Townsville and Rockhampton, which offered companionship and other useful services. At these clubs, brides also learned more about Australia so that they could speak about their country of origin when they reached the US.²⁸ In this way, the clubs provided the early 'grooming' for these women who were expected to fulfil a role of 'good ambassadors' for Australia in the US. The various Clubs saw the importance of a smooth transition from Australian to American culture not only to assist these young women in adjusting to their newly married status and settling in a new land, but also to foster good relations and a lasting alliance between the people of the two countries.

Around the same time, similar clubs also began to appear in America. The Australian film actress, Shirley Ann Richards, who went to America to live in 1942, set up a club for Australian brides of US Servicemen living in the vicinity of Los Angeles. Meetings were held each month in Hollywood's luxurious Studio Club for Women.²⁹ *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

the club will afford the brides an opportunity to form friendships with other girls from Australia, as well as to meet American women who are likely to help them.³⁰

The first Australian war brides crossed the Pacific as early as 1943, but it was mainly from 1944 onwards that war brides began to sail on ships which often

²⁸ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, op. cit., p. 365

²⁹ 'Australian Brides' Club in USA', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 February, 1946, p.3.

³⁰ *ibid.*

carried American servicemen who had been invalided home or were on furlough.³¹ However, most war brides and fiancées had to wait until berths were available on ships no longer needed for carrying troops at the end of the war. It was after the Japanese surrender that there were thousands of women waiting to sail to join their husbands and fiancés. Having to compete with returning servicemen for space, these women had no option but to wait until ships under orders from the US Army Transport Service had room available to take them to America.³²

Agitation by 'bride clubs,' and letters from US servicemen to their congressmen, highlighted the plight of these women who objected to their treatment by shipping and Government officials. In September, 1946, fiancées claimed that they were given no priority on ships to America, despite some having waited for more than four years. This was brought to the attention of Senator Dorothy Tangney, in her capacity as patron of the US Servicemen's Wives and Fiancées Association, and even US President Harry Truman was petitioned for assistance.³³ Such attempts to find solutions to transportation problems demonstrated the need for urgent official intervention.

US IMMIGRATION POLICY

Australian brides planning to live in America were classed as 'aliens' by the American government. They had to conform to legal requirements and apply for permission to enter the United States as immigrants regardless of their husband's status; the immigration quota during the war allowed for only 100 Australian-born

³¹ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 372

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*, p. 365; "Girls' Long Wait for Ships", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 September, 1946, p. 3; Potts and Strauss, *For the Love of a Soldier*, *op. cit.*, p.71.

people to migrate to the United States each year.³⁴ A letter from the US Army in Australia dated May 20, 1942, used emotive language stating: 'Australian girls who marry American soldiers at this time do so at their own risk', and it highlighted the fact that 'marriage does not confer American citizenship'.³⁵ The US Army disclaimed responsibility, stating that the Australian brides' subsequent admission to the United States as aliens is 'wholly under the control of the United States Immigration Service' whose action in individual cases 'is difficult to prognosticate at the present time...a matter over which the military authorities of the United States have no control'.³⁶ The official attitude of the US military authorities was clearly evident in the last paragraph, which stated: 'The present time is not deemed propitious for pressing the issue, which may well be left for determination at the conclusion of the war.'³⁷ As a consequence, many Australian girls and their American fiancées, as well as Australian-American couples who had already married, had no option but to wait.

In cases where the Australian immigration quota to the US was not full, Australian women married to a United States soldier had to obtain a visa from the American Consulate which required in particular, evidence of good health as well as evidence of the means of the applicant, so that she would not become a public charge (this being strictly enforced), and then she had to comply with immigration formalities.³⁸ On the other hand, if the immigration quota was full, then a petition could be made through the American Consulate to Washington on the grounds that the applicant is married to an American citizen. If granted, this could

³⁴ Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

³⁵ Letter from George L. Dutton, Lieut. Colonel, A.G.D., Acting Adjutant General, Headquarters, United States Army Forces in Australia Office of the Commanding General, dated May 20, 1942. [Cited in Jessie M.G. Street, *Truth or Repose*, Australasian Book Society Sydney 1966, p. 228]

³⁶ Letter from George L. Dutton, *loc. cit.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Minute Paper, Department of the Army, Melbourne, 'Marriage of Australian Women to American Soldiers' 26.3.1942. [National Archives of Australia, Series MP508/1, Item 115/701/352.]

overcome the quota difficulties but it did not waive the other immigration requirements, particularly good health at the time of actual entry and that the person entering would not become a public charge. Such a petition took five to six months to be sent to Washington and returned.³⁹

Although the 'time was ripe' for various issues affecting the status of women to be approached at a national level, as historian Jill Roe points out, it was some years before new Australian nationality and citizenship legislation affecting the war brides was to be passed.⁴⁰ The war brides waiting to join their American husbands had no financial support as military allotments had not been allocated. However, Jessie Street, a campaigner for women's rights and co-founder in 1929 of the United Associations of Women, wrote as Vice President of that organisation to the wife of the American President, in June 1942. She wrote to clarify the position of Australian wives of American servicemen and the lack of provision for their maintenance and that of their children. The wife of the American President, Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, replied advising that recent legislation (The Servicemen's Dependents Allowance Act of 1942) passed by the US Congress provided dependent wives with an entitlement of \$US50 per month partially composed of an allotment made by the soldier, and partially from a contribution made by the American Government.⁴¹ In addition \$US12 a month was granted for one child and \$US10 a month for each additional child. The soldier could request the allotments be made, or lacking such a request, a petition by the wife would be given consideration.⁴² The US Government feared the failure of wartime marriages

³⁹ Minute Paper, Department of the Army, Melbourne, 'Marriage of Australian Women to American Soldiers' 26.3.1942, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Jill Roe, 'What has Nationalism Offered Australian Women?' in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (eds), *Australian Women. Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 38.

⁴¹ Jessie Street, *Truth or Repose*, Australasia Book Society, Sydney, 1966, pp. 229-230

⁴² *ibid.*

with foreign wives and the subsequent responsibility, both financially and logistically, for the future lives of the war brides and their children. It was for this reason that the war brides faced strictures which did not apply to other Australian brides. Thanks to Street's intervention, however, the dire financial position of some of these women was improved.

Despite this new legislation, more than twelve months later American Red Cross officials continued to visit families of girls about to marry American soldiers, asking them to sign a form approving their daughter's prospective marriage to an American serviceman. The parents were required to guarantee that they would fully support their daughter without calling for 'assistance on charitable societies, or the United States Army, during his absence, in the event of his death, or in the event he is ordered to the United States'.⁴³ The prospective wife had to certify that she was single, had never been married, that she was self-supporting and would not seek assistance from charities or the US Army. As well, the young woman and her parents had to sign an acceptance of the understanding that the US Government made 'no promise or guarantee whatsoever to transport the prospective wife of the officer'...nor...'any subsequent dependants... to the United States of America, either during the emergency, or at any time after the duration of the present war.'⁴⁴ These punitive measures of such an intrusive nature were unique to the experience of the women who became brides of American servicemen.

⁴³ Street, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-230

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

In October 1943, Mrs Street asked Prime Minister Curtin to inquire into 'this disgraceful state of affairs'.⁴⁵ The American Legation advised that the forms issued by the American Red Cross were made up at the request and direction of the US Army authorities, who admitted that their primary purpose was 'to impress upon an Australian girl and also upon her family, that the obligation of the United States Government toward her and any possible children is clearly limited.'⁴⁶ It was also admitted that the affidavit which the girl and her parents were asked to sign 'has little or no legal force' and that 'it is useful in so far as it emphasises the actual position of the wife in the event her husband is sent away from his post in Australia or becomes a war casualty'.⁴⁷ This admission was embarrassing to the Americans, and it certainly did nothing to engender any sense of security in the minds of the young prospective wives and mothers, or their families.

The gendered divisions of wartime not only impacted on the war brides' experiences of courtship and marriage, with legislation and red tape causing impediments to their plans, but clearly the process of the war brides' emigration to America was also affected by misleading stereotypes. The contemporary notion that war brides married in haste, thus with poor judgement, was obviously an opinion shared by the US Government which put in place legislation and red tape to hinder the process, or at least to make it difficult.

Mrs Street made further investigations and she received more positive information in January 1944, advising that the US War Department had indicated that dependants of American servicemen were:

⁴⁵ Street, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-230; Potts, *Yanks Down Under*, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

⁴⁶ Street, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-237.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

entitled to dependency allotments... and that all laws as to retirement, pensions, death gratuity, hospitalisation and dependency benefits are applicable to such persons and their dependants regardless of their citizenship or residence.⁴⁸

This was in accordance with the *Servicemen's Dependents Allowance Act*, which had been in force ever since 1942. However, it was not until 1944 that as Jessie Street reported, 'once and for all this put an end to the tragic exploitation of the affections of young women'.⁴⁹ In her opinion the 'standover attitude' on the part of the American Red Cross could be interpreted as a lack of knowledge or lack of understanding of the new regulations.⁵⁰ It is also possible that the contingencies of wartime delayed communication between the relevant authorities, particularly where it concerned the 'foreign' wives of American servicemen when such marriages had been so actively discouraged.

The role of the American Red Cross is clearly seen here to be one of surveillance and policing of war brides. However, my research demonstrates that this role was highly ambivalent and contradictory. It was at odds with their principal support of these women, especially at the end of the war when the American Red Cross made enormous efforts to ensure the war brides and their babies made a safe journey by train to the eastern sea ports, as well as on their subsequent sea voyage, and on their arrival in America.

⁴⁸ Street, *op. cit.*, pp. 232

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 233.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

In other countries the Red Cross organisations also eased the plight of war brides. In the UK, war brides waiting to get passage to America were corralled at bleak Tidworth Barracks for days in shocking conditions with rudimentary washing facilities, abysmal food and an obligatory and demeaning physical examination for VD. After protests from wives and their stateside husbands, conditions improved and the welcoming Red Cross Club made their wait more tolerable.⁵¹

THE LONG WAIT

Destined for places in the US about which they knew very little, thousands of young Australian women waited for passage to America. Most faced the prospect of meeting up with their future partners they had not seen for months or sometimes years, as well as meeting their in-laws who were not always welcoming. Data from my research shows that among this cohort of young Australian women, very few had ever travelled outside Australia. Making plans to leave their families, friends and the country of their birth, and to travel a long distance by sea to live in America, produced mixed emotions for these women, made worse by the uncertainty of being able to procure passage on a ship.

Most of the 'bride ships', specially designated to transport women from Australia to America, sailed from the eastern ports of Brisbane and Sydney. For war brides on the east coast, securing a passage on one of these ships was challenging enough, but for those young women in Western Australia it required determination and extra stamina. They first had to undertake the arduous week-long journey by train across the arid heart of Australia to reach the eastern states,

⁵¹ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations. The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945*, Harper Collins, London, 1995, p. 419.

where they then faced a long wait – sometimes months – to board a ship to the US.

Barbara Gleason was 21 years old when she married Jim in February 1944 in Western Australia. In March, she found that she was pregnant; in May her husband was shipped out; and in June she travelled by train to Sydney and stayed in a boarding house with a lot of other brides. She says:

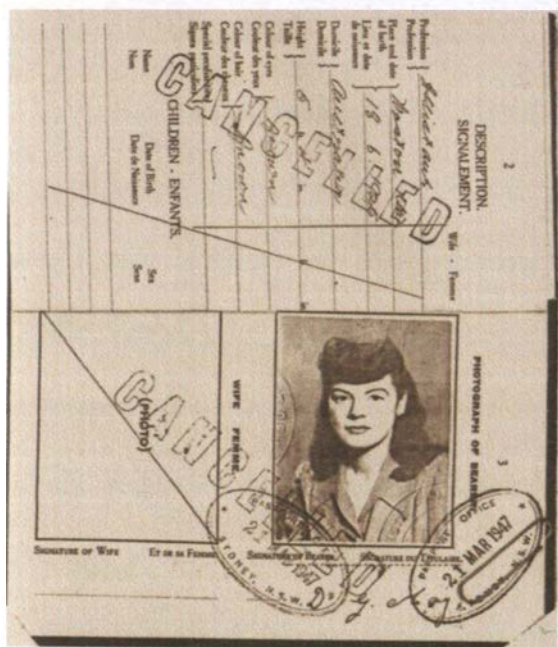
we called ourselves ‘the ladies in waiting’ –
waiting to have babies and waiting to come to
America! We were booked with Cooks
...supposedly they would get us on a ship to
come over here...but there weren’t many ships
available.⁵²

Barbara and two other girls at the boarding house went to town every day to check their progress with Cooks shipping agency. She remembers how the man behind the counter said ‘You’re going, you’re going and’ – pointing to Barbara - ‘you’re *not* going!’ So the two girls left on a train to Brisbane to sail from there, and Barbara was left on her own. Moving to new accommodation where other war brides were staying, she remembers how ‘we just waited and waited. We were all paying room and board and we weren’t working’.⁵³ She stayed there until December, the month when her baby was due to be born. Finally, an American officer found Barbara a seat on the only train that went back and forth to Western Australia. She recalls how difficult it was:

⁵² Interview with Barbara Gleason, Anaheim, CA, 20 September 2001.

⁵³ Gleason, *loc. cit.*

No. 16 – Off to the USA



Doris SAARF has kept her original Australian Passport as a memento of her journey to America in September, 1947.



Doris and Bob SAARF in Seattle, WA, c. 2004.



Barbara GLEASON (right) and baby with friends June and Peg at Melbourne station after crossing the Nullarbor from Perth, WA, in September 1945.

You'd sit up from Sydney to Melbourne, then you'd sit up from Melbourne to Port Pirie, and then you'd have the sleeper across [the Nullarbor Plains]. I was eight months pregnant – I was crazy when I think about it!⁵⁴

Back home in Perth her healthy baby daughter was born on December 28, 1944. As the mother of a small baby, Barbara was now at the top of the priority list to sail to America, but still there were no ships available. She was living at home with her family when she received a call to come to Fremantle as a ship was leaving from that port. She remembers how 'we all went down to Fremantle, nursing our babies, and sat there for hours with all these guys typing up all these papers' and when the officer finally emerged, 'he said "Ha, ha, ha! Guess what? You're not going!"...So we went home again!'⁵⁵ Dorothy's report of her frustration on this occasion is typical of the disappointing treatment suffered by the brides and fiancées during the protracted wait for passage to America.

THE PERTH PERAMBULATOR AND THE RED CROSS

The US Army in Australia was accompanied by social workers of the home service organisation of the American Red Cross. They recognised the threat to marriages through family separation and the slowness of transportation and mail services and they provided a much needed service for war brides and fiancées of US servicemen. When the war came to an end, the American Red Cross, in continuing their supportive role, asked the Australian Red Cross to carry on this

⁵⁴ Gleason, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

necessary work.⁵⁶ When the war was almost over, the women of the Australian Red Cross Field Force accompanied the war brides across to the eastern states on a train, so that they could board a ship bound for America. An Australian Red Cross recruiting officer recalls:

Instead of bandages and blankets we were now collecting and packing baby food onto the train, things for the children; you never saw anything like it – napkins flapping to dry on the back of the train. What a circus they must have looked chuffing away across the sandy wastelands.⁵⁷

The train to Melbourne took five days to cross 2,694 miles of country stretching from west to east.⁵⁸

Barbara Gleason was a passenger on the train, affectionately called the 'Perth Perambulator' because of the number of mothers and babies on board. After another period of waiting with her baby daughter Lynette, Barbara had finally received word that a ship was leaving from Brisbane, but first she had to get there from Perth. A special car for the war brides was put on the train from Perth, and the families of the war brides filled suitcases with food for the journey. In what seems like an understatement, Barbara recalls 'there were quite a few of us went on that train', and a Red Cross representative travelled with them.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Leon Stubbings, *A History of the Australian Red Cross 1914-1991. Look what you started Henry!*, Australian Red Cross, 1992, p. 29. [ARCS Archives]

⁵⁷ Memories of Gwen Cadd, cited in Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 233, 234.

⁵⁸ Potts, Annette & Lucinda Strauss, *For the love of a soldier: Australian war-brides and their GIs*, ABC Enterprises for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Crows Nest, NSW, 1987, p. 69.

⁵⁹ Gleason, *op .cit.*

The 'Perth Perambulator' was 'a mammoth undertaking' for the Australian Red Cross who assigned Red Cross Hospital Visitors to accompany the war brides and their babies overland by train to the eastern ports.⁶⁰ Their work began at Perth railway station and continued day and night for almost a week until they reached Melbourne. It began by assisting in crowd management at the station as parents and friends swarmed onto the platforms to farewell the war brides. The scene was described by a Red Cross Hospital Visitor as one of 'utter chaos'.⁶¹ Most of the passengers had packed so hurriedly they had not been able to organise their luggage, and the majority had at least two suitcases in the crowded train compartments, which 'did not add to the general comfort'.⁶² The Red Cross aides spent much of their time 'soothing crying babies, cheering hysterical mothers, and re-organising luggage'.⁶³

During the long train journey there was an enormous amount of community activism and support for the war brides, such as the provision of meals and refreshments at stops along the way, making up bottles of baby formula, and helping with heavy luggage at change-over points.⁶⁴ The fact that many ordinary Australians went out of their way to help the women who were about to leave Australia, belies the often-claimed negative response to the war brides of American GIs.

The brides' train made stops at Southern Cross and Northam, in Western Australia, where hot water was put on board. At Kalgoorlie, a change to a broader

⁶⁰ Stubbings, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁶¹ *ibid.*; also E.M. Webb, *The Australian Red Cross at War*, unpublished manuscript, p. 509. [ARCNA].

⁶² Webb, *The Australian Red Cross*, *loc. cit.*, p. 509.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Stubbings, *loc. cit.*,

rail gauge took place, and a buffet car was provided with hot water continuously available.⁶⁵ When the train reached Cook, a small town in the centre of the Nullarbor Plain with the harshest of climates, the war brides were taken to the local bush hospital by members of the Soldiers' Welfare Community where they were treated to an egg and bacon breakfast.⁶⁶

On her journey, Barbara remembers the priority given to the war brides and their babies. Everyone else on the train waited while the brides were taken off. Barbara appreciated the care provided by the Red Cross and recalls how they 'sat on the verandah of this hospital and ate a really nice meal they set up for us'.⁶⁷ At Tarcoola, an old gold-mining town in South Australia, the brides were taken off the train and a special tea was provided at various nearby homes and mothers had the chance to bath their babies while the resident took charge of the children to allow the brides to have a peaceful meal.⁶⁸ Barbara remembers the brides being taken to private houses for refreshments, and reminisces:

I've always been so sorry I didn't take people's names, but you were kind of numb by then. You'd get to wherever you were going and you'd kind of just fall into their arms, and somebody would take your baby and lead you to where you were going.⁶⁹

At Port Pirie the next morning, a trained nurse gave advice on the health of some of the children, and the local branch of the Red Cross served morning tea at the

⁶⁵ Webb, *The Australian Red Cross*, *op. cit.*, p.509.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Gleason, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ Webb, *The Australian Red Cross*, *op. cit.*, p. 510.

⁶⁹ Gleason, *op. cit.*

station.⁷⁰ On arrival at Adelaide, lunch was provided in the Railway Refreshment Rooms, and buses took the mothers and children to Red Cross headquarters where they were provided with soap, towels and make-up kits, and 'sweetly talcumed babies and rested mothers were served supper' before re-boarding the train.⁷¹

There were no sleeping cars on the train from Adelaide to Ballarat where the train stopped for a brief pause. On arrival, the women felt stiff, tired and cold and were pleased to find personnel from the local branch of the Red Cross waiting on the platform with 'piping hot tea' and sandwiches, as well as fruit and daily newspapers.⁷² Once in Melbourne, a team of Red Cross personnel was waiting to take charge and accommodated the brides and their babies at the 'Lady Dugan Hostel', and at 'Edgecliffe' and 'Rockingham' Convalescent Homes.⁷³

Barbara remembers being taken to an 'R & R' facility previously used for men, 'somewhere on the ocean, quite a way from town'. She recalls:

there were a lot of us and the babies had to sleep
with you – in these high hospital beds – and we
were scared the babies would fall.⁷⁴

They stayed there for several days and made daily trips by bus into town to take care of necessary paperwork such as procuring taxation clearances, travellers'

⁷⁰ Webb, *The Australian Red Cross*, *op. cit.*, p. 510; also Stubbings, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Gleason, *op. cit.*

cheques and exchange of currency. Finally the women and their babies were put on a train from Melbourne to Brisbane.⁷⁵

Headlines in the daily press in early September 1945 highlighted 'pandemonium unlimited' which 'swept through Melbourne's Spencer Street station when 230 Australian brides of US servicemen, and 70 children, left on a special train for Brisbane, en route for USA'.⁷⁶ Other accounts told of 'hysterical mothers' of war brides in Sydney jumping on to the railway line at Central Station and chasing the US bride train which bore the chalked slogan 'Brides' Express'.⁷⁷ Other vivid newspaper reports confirmed this chaotic situation. In the congestion on the Melbourne platform, at the call of 'all aboard', some distraught brides tried to find their luggage and to comfort their crying babies while saying their last precious words to their relatives they were leaving behind, perhaps permanently.⁷⁸ Streamers stretched between the passengers and those on the platform and as the train slowly pulled out of the station they broke, seeming to symbolise the last bond being broken between tearful brides and their more tearful mothers and loved ones.⁷⁹

One frantic woman on the train rushed along the corridor crying out that her baby was still with her mother on the platform. A 'big RAAF Sergeant came speeding along the platform with the child in his arms', according to the report of a Red Cross Hospital Visitor, who writes:

Before he reached me a toy kangaroo, bunch of violets,
and wooden horse were thrust into my arms by various

⁷⁵ Gleason, *op. cit.*; also Webb, *The Australian Red Cross at War, op. cit.*, p. 510.

⁷⁶ 'Brides and Babies Leave for USA', *Argus*, September 8, 1945, p. 16.

⁷⁷ 'Hysterical mothers chase US. Bride train', *The Sydney Sunday Telegraph*, 9 September, 1945.

⁷⁸ 'Brides and Babies Leave for USA', *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

people on the platform, and then the baby was suddenly hurled at me. The force of the impact knocked me backwards on the well-nigh hysterical mother and the three of us, complete with toys, collapsed on a pile of luggage. Such was our grand exit from Melbourne!⁸⁰

The Australian Red Cross provided “thermos urns to heat water for babies’ baths, hot-water bottles, soap, cotton wool, fruit, blankets, cushions, first-aid kits.”⁸¹ Seven Red Cross Hospital Visitors travelled to Brisbane with the train, and local Red Cross branches were on duty to assist with caring for babies when the train stopped to change engines or take on water.⁸² At Albury, on the border between Victoria and New South Wales, after the change-over of trains because of the different rail gauge, a carton of cakes and sandwiches was found on every seat, thoughtfully provided by members of the Albury Branch of the Red Cross.⁸³ The train by-passed Sydney but stops were made for refreshments at Gosford and Newcastle and a hot dinner at Taree.⁸⁴

Travelling by train from Melbourne to Brisbane, Barbara and her girlfriend, stayed together. She recalls:

we had a private car where we put the babies on the seat and we slept on the floor. My hip *still* hurts from that! [She laughs.] At least we slept overnight!⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Webb, *The Australian Red Cross*, *op. cit.*, p. 511.

⁸¹ ‘Brides and Babies Leave for USA’, *op. cit.*

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Webb, *The Australian Red Cross*, *op. cit.*, p. 511.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 512.

⁸⁵ Gleason, *op. cit.*

Barbara clearly remembers the train making a stop at Newcastle for refreshments, because when her younger brother came to see her there, he was not allowed into the station and she had to go outside and talk to him through the fence.⁸⁶

None of the war brides was sorry when the long and tiring train trip finally came to an end. For those from Western Australia, it was a journey of nine days with only one proper break in Melbourne. Other 'bride trains' followed much the same pattern, transporting the brides and their babies from Melbourne to Brisbane. From Sydney one special train was used, and with extra war brides being picked up the number of passengers grew to 279 women and 85 babies.⁸⁷ For all of these journeys, the Red Cross girls provided invaluable services, their trips being 'one round after another of preparing bottles of milk and food for the babies, issuing rugs, soap, powder, napkins, barley sugar, oranges and cigarettes'.⁸⁸

On arrival in Brisbane, buses took the mothers and babies directly to the ship. Barbara vividly remembers her first glimpse of SS *Lurline*: 'when I looked at that boat, my gosh, I'd never seen anything so huge...and it was filled with troops.'⁸⁹ It was the 21 September, 1945, the war was just over and the American authorities were keen to send the troops home. Brisbane girls were put off the ship to let the troops on, but luckily for Barbara and her travelling companions, who had come all the way from the West, they were given first priority to be on the

⁸⁶ Gleason, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Webb, *The Australian Red Cross*, *op. cit.*, p. 512.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

ship. Barbara said with a sigh, 'so finally we were on the *Lurline*!', and the first stage of her epic journey was over.⁹⁰

Jackie Hansen tells how the war brides in Perth had been waiting for a year, sometimes more for a ship to the US. She says 'we kept hearing of ships such as the *Lurline* transporting brides from the east coast. I think they forgot about the brides in the West.'⁹¹ It was a year before she could get transportation to join her husband, Lee, in the US. War brides in Perth were eventually summoned to a meeting in the Perth Town Hall, where advice was given by one of the City Councillors. Jackie recalls:

Councillor Caddy told us all to write to our husbands right away and have them write to their Congressmen asking for transportation for their wives. It worked!⁹²

Within a few weeks there was an army transport ship, USAT *Fred C. Ainsworth*, sent to Fremantle, the port of Perth. Jackie remembers the protracted departure and the sadness of leaving family and friends:

Everyone was teary-eyed both on the dock and on the ship. The ship was delayed waiting for supplies for babies – diapers [napkins] and food. I called to my parents to go home and get some rest as they had been standing on the dock all

⁹⁰ Webb, *The Australian Red Cross*, op. cit., p. 512.

⁹¹ Jackie Hansen, email dated 16 January, 2004.

⁹² *ibid.*

day. The ship was not a luxury liner by any means!⁹³

WAR BRIDES AND FIANCEES ACTS

At the end of the war, the patience of the war brides waiting to join their husbands was rewarded and their plight was relieved by the introduction of *The War Brides Act* in December 28, 1945 (59 Statutes-at-Large 659) which waived all visa requirements and provisions of immigration law for the foreign brides of American WWII servicemen.⁹⁴ Despite the passage of this legislation, however, these women still had to wait for available shipping before they could travel to America.

Due to a worldwide shortage of ships to transport the war brides, a similar situation applied to the British wives of Australian servicemen who had almost given up hope of ever reaching their husbands. In March 1946 they marched in protest to the Ministry of Transport in Berkeley Square in London. In Australia, Prime Minister Chifley stated: 'I am not one to discourage the realisation of love's young dream', and declared that his Government was anxious to find a solution for these brides who were coming to Australia to join their husbands.⁹⁵

In Australia, however, the much welcomed US legislation in the form of the *War Brides Act* did not make any provision for the fiancées of American servicemen, who resented the favouritism shown towards the brides. Dorothy Hammond and her fiancé decided to marry after knowing each other for only one week when her husband was suddenly shipped out. In contrast to many couples

⁹³ Hansen, *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ US Citizenship & Immigration Service, <http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm> [Accessed 18 April 2004]

⁹⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 8, 1946, p. 4.

who were anxious to marry as quickly as possible, Dorothy explains how they 'were both cautious people', which is an interesting contrast to the usual contemporary image of war brides. Despite describing themselves as 'cautious', however, the couple did become engaged after a very short time, which complicates rather than contradicts the prevailing stereotypes. The use of the concept of 'composure' is useful in interpreting this narrative, as it is possible that Dorothy is claiming to be cautious in retrospect. After all, being engaged after only one week of knowing each other does not seem to display much caution at all. Although the couple did not want to rush into marriage, as Dorothy claims, it was in any case impossible for the couple to arrange to get married in just one week. Eventually, after he was shipped out, she had to wait two and a half years to join her fiancé in America, and she remembers, with some bitterness, that:

all the brides got to go – they were entitled and
they had children – but after the war they let us
[fiancées] go, and very grudgingly too!⁹⁶

Dorothy says that she felt sure that the mass exodus of war brides and fiancées in such numbers was seen generally to be 'wrecking the population' in Australia.⁹⁷

Similarly, Patricia Law recalls her wait for passage to America to be with her fiancée. Because they weren't married, she explains, she was 'on the bottom of the list and the married ladies with children were at the top of the list!'⁹⁸ Eventually, six months after the *War Brides Act* was passed, the *G.I. Fiancées Act* of June 29, 1946 (60 Statutes-at-Large 339) was implemented, which finally

⁹⁶ Interview with Dorothy Hammond, 19 September, 2001

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Interview with Patricia Law, 8 September, 2001.

facilitated the admission to the United States of fiancées of members of the American armed forces.⁹⁹

Mothers of war brides were concerned for their daughters' welfare as they faced the predicament of not being able to get passage on a ship to America. In Melbourne an organisation known as the Australian Mothers of War Brides Goodwill Mission Club was formed to help publicise the plight of the war brides and to help raise funds towards costs associated with delays and the prolonged wait for passage on a ship.

Joanne Patterson remembers her mother being a member of such a Club:

It wasn't a big organisation – maybe eight to ten people. They had a badge with a kookaburra on a boomerang in a circle, embossed with the words "U.S. Wives Mothers' Social Club".¹⁰⁰

Joanne remembers her mother becoming very involved as Secretary of this organisation, the members of which did all they could to assist their daughters. Proceeds of 'bag sales' and raffles also went towards the passage of a mother to visit her war bride daughter in the US. The money was raised to send two women each year, and this was the way that Joanne's own mother was able to visit her in America for the first time. This effort made by the war brides' mothers again highlights the strong bond that existed between mother and daughter, and demonstrates how this assistance helped to facilitate the war brides' continuing links with Australia in the early years of separation from their home country.

⁹⁹ US Citizenship & Immigration Service, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Joanne Patterson, Queens Park, Sydney, 5 April, 2005.

The logistics of reaching the eastern ports by train, the long wait for passage on a ship, the sense of uncertainty together with the final sad goodbyes to families and friends was a stressful time for the war brides. For these women who were about to leave Australia for the first time, and to sail the Pacific to join their partners, it was a defining moment in their lives requiring courage and commitment; a significant time on the brink of a new life which was imprinted in their memories.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sailing to America

The U S Navy treated them grand
'The Monterey' took them to their new land.
A ship full of brides and children small,
Three weeks they travelled, in no time at all
The shores of America loomed in sight,
Some scared and nervous, numb with fright.

The girl with Sue was one of this kind,
While others appeared not really to mind.
Excitement was high, excitement all round,
Soon they would have their feet on the ground.
They'd be with their men, a new life would start,
Hopefully never again to part.

(Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', November 2001.)¹

By drawing on the oral testimony as well as diaries and journals of Australian war brides, this chapter explores their experiences as they journeyed from their homeland to a new location across the Pacific. Many war brides were apprehensive about what lay ahead. They wondered if they would still be in love and if they would even recognise their husbands after such a long separation. Most of these women had never travelled outside Australia before, and one described her sea voyage as 'like going to the moon!' She said:

Nobody travelled! I didn't know anybody that had
been outside Australia! Nobody flew anywhere,
only the Forces went in planes. So it was like
going to Mars, to the ends of the earth'.²

¹ Betty Kane, 'The War Bride', in *Albany Writers' Circle No.19. A Collection of Short Stories and Poetry by the Writers of Albany*, November Issue, Denmark Printers, Albany, WA, 2001, p. 36.

² Interview with Joy Shaddle, Forestville, Sydney, NSW, 4 October, 2002

At a time of global conflict and social change for women, Australian war brides and fiancées stepped out of a familiar world into one about which they knew very little. This chapter examines the ship voyage from the war brides' perspective and examines the significance of the long journey and what it meant to this group of women and to the development of their new identities as 'war brides'. This was the largest contingent of Australian women ever to travel to the United States, although they were not the first to do so. Historians Magarey, Roe, Radi and others have documented the travels to America of women such as writer and reformer Catherine Helen Spence as early as 1893; feminist suffragist Vida Goldstein in 1902; writer Miles Franklin from 1906 to 1915; and feminist Jessie Street in 1945.³ These were high-profile women, however, and as Roe observes in her study of Australian women in America, to date very little is known about the experiences of women of less conspicuous profiles, such as the war brides.⁴

In the 1920s and 30s, prior to the sophistication of modern air travel and global telecommunication, travel was traditionally seen as the realm of men and understood to be the 'culturally privileged phenomenon' of middle-class

³ See Susan Magarey *Unbridling the tongues of women: a biography of Catherine Helen Spence*, Introduction, Hale & Iremonger, 1985; Susan Eade, 'Spence, Catherine Helen (1825-1910)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 6, Melbourne University Press, 1976, pp. 167-168; Goldstein, Vida, *To America & Back January-July 1902. A Lecture by Vida Goldstein*, Prepared for publication by Jill Roe, Australian History Museum, Macquarie University, 2002; Janice N. Brownfoot, 'Goldstein, Vida Jane Mary (1869-1949)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 9, Melbourne University Press, 1983, pp. 43-45; Jill Roe, *Stella Miles Franklin. A Biography*, Harper Collins Publishers, Sydney, 2008, pp. 11-196; and 'Franklin, Stella Maria Sarah Miles (1879-1954)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 8, Melbourne University Press, 1981, pp. 574-576; and 'Australian Women in America, from Miles Franklin to Jill Kerr Conway' in *Approaching Australia. Papers from the Harvard Australian Studies Symposium*, Harold Bolitho & Chris Wallace-Crabbe (eds), Harvard University Committee on Australian Studies, Massachusetts, 1997, pp. 142, 150; Heather Radi, 'Street, Jessie Mary Grey (1889-1970)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 16, Melbourne University Press, 2002, pp. 328-332.

⁴ Jill Roe, 'Australian Women in America, from Miles Franklin to Jill Kerr Conway' in *Approaching Australia. op.cit.*, p. 152; also see Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London. Australian Women, Colonials, and Modernity*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001: 'By the beginning of the twentieth century some Australian women had come to identify the United States as a locus of political progressivism and of career opportunities for women', (p. 199).

Australians.⁵ These women travellers were, as historian Ros Pesman observes, mostly 'lower- middle- and working-class women, many still in or barely out of their teens'.⁶ When Australian war brides embarked on their ship voyages to America in the mid-1940s, however, there was also evidence among this cohort of some upper-middle-class backgrounds where fathers' occupations included 'journalist', 'magistrate' and 'engineer'.⁷ Tears flowed on the ships' decks and the wharves as many of these young women thought they might never be able to afford to return to Australia, and it seemed likely that they would never see their families again. Some were more optimistic about a future return visit, while others gave little thought to what lay ahead, simply wanting to be with the loves of their lives.

The passage from Australia to America, for thousands of Australian war brides and fiancées, was a life-changing journey. As shall be shown, it offered a space outside their normal routine – a time 'in limbo' – which gave them the opportunities to make new friends, encounter new experiences and broaden their cultural horizons. The sea voyage, often slow and uncomfortable, provided a space which was a threshold between the old and the new, in which they had the opportunity to deal with the broadest emotional spectrum: grief, sadness, separation and loss at leaving their families and friends and everything familiar to them; fear of the journey itself (especially during wartime) as well as fear of the unknown circumstances which lay ahead; seasickness; concern and responsibility for their children; excitement at the prospect of seeing their husbands and fiancés again, and as well as hopeful anticipation and optimism that everything would work out for the best. Although experiences differed for individual women, the sea

⁵ Ros Pesman, David Walker, Richard White (Eds.), *The Oxford Book of Australian Travel Writing*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, Introduction pp. xxii, and 104, 166.

⁶ Ros Pesman, *Duty Free, Australian Women Abroad*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p.198.

⁷ See Appendix 2, Profile of War Brides.

voyage provided a space in which they shared a common identity as war brides and could begin to come to terms with their own situations. Within the confines of the ship these women were in effect offered the opportunity for reflection, and drawing on their inner strength, a chance to consider the reality of the consequences of the major decision they had made, and so begin to mentally prepare for a new life in a new country.

For these women, crossing the Pacific by sea also provided a symbolic interlude; the first part of a longer journey towards their future lives in America which would bring cultural, familial and geographic change. The voyage from Australia to America importantly provided a connection between the old and the new, thus linking the lineages of place and time and revealing a significant part of women's history both in Australia and America, as well as a largely overlooked part of burgeoning trans-national history.

LOGISTICS

The war brides interviewed for this study travelled on fourteen ships which were: SS *Arongi*, SS *David C. Shanks*, SS *Fred C. Ainsworth*, SS *General Butner*, SS *General Mann*, SS *Goonawarra*, SS *Henry T. Buckner*, SS *Lurline*, MV *Lowlander*, SS *Marine Falcon*, SS *Marine Phoenix*, SS *Mariposa*, SS *Mirrabooka*, and the SS *Monterey*. The *Mariposa* and the *Monterey* were Matson Line luxury cruise-ships re-fitted to accommodate war brides and their babies.

The women who travelled on these ships generally spent two to four weeks at sea, sharing crowded cabins with other war brides and babies, some in dormitory-type cabins accommodating up to 22 women. There were no facilities for washing babies' nappies; many war brides suffered seasickness, and on some ships there were outbreaks of measles which spread quickly among the children. Some ships encountered typhoons in the Pacific which made conditions on board extremely uncomfortable. The small number of war brides and fiancées who travelled by plane did not fare much better. Sunny Sansing's flight to the US took seven days because of breakdowns *en route*, and she finally arrived in Memphis exhausted and 'deaf as a haddock' from the noisy engines.⁸

Vessels ranged from converted troop ships, ordinary passenger liners and cargo freighters to the uncomfortable 'Liberty' ships which were mass-produced cargo ships built cheaply and quickly in the United States between 1941 and 1945.⁹ By September 1946, the acute shipping problems of wartime had eased, and thirty-two ships had carried Australian brides and fiancées and their children both to England and America.¹⁰ Eighteen of these had transported between up to 15,000 Australian fiancées and war brides, many with children, to the United States. Prior to April 1946, ships were not available from Western Australia, and those women first had to make the five-day journey on a crowded steam train across the arid Nullarbor Plain to Melbourne and the eastern seaports.¹¹ Shipping

⁸ Interview with Sunny Sansing, Reno, NV, 28 September, 2001.

⁹ 'Liberty ship' [Source, Wikipedia online http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty_ship - Accessed 27.06.2008]

¹⁰ Melanie Oppenheimer, *All Work No Pay, Australian Civilian Volunteers in War*, Ohio Productions, Walcha, 2002, p. 202.

¹¹ Memories of Gwen Cadd, cited in Patsy Adam-Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 233, 234; also Potts, Annette & Lucinda Strauss, *For the love of a soldier: Australian war-brides and their GIs*, ABC Enterprises for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Crows Nest, NSW, 1987, p. 69.

routes across the Pacific included stops at Fiji, Pago Pago, Samoa and Hawaii.¹² Some vessels sailed via New Zealand to pick up New Zealand war brides, and others via New Guinea to collect troops returning to the United States.¹³ The usual destination was San Francisco, but some ships sailed through Panama Canal to New York, and others docked at the naval base at San Pedro, California.¹⁴ The last vessel to cross the Pacific with a contingent of war brides was the SS *Marine Phoenix*, which left Australia on 6 January 1947.¹⁵ In this cohort the first bride sailed to the US in 1943, and the last sailed on SS *Marine Phoenix* in 1947.

While American/Australian wartime marriages were not encouraged, once married, the wives and families of the US servicemen were entitled to travel and financial support, and they were given free passage to America by the US Government. The Australian fiancées posed more of a problem, as they were not legally committed to marriage and could possibly change their minds once they arrived in America. Therefore a bond of \$US500 dollars (a considerable sum at the time) was required to be paid by the American fiancé, to cover the return trip to Australia should the marriage not take place within three months of his fiancée's arrival in the US. This bond was refundable upon application after marriage.

Some war brides and fiancées – almost a hundred between December 1942 and October 1943 – managed to get passage to America before the war had ended, but most had to wait until the war was over.¹⁶ The implementation of the

¹² Interview with Barbara Gleason, Anaheim, 20 September, 2001.

¹³ Berry, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Shaddle, *op. cit.*; Berry, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Daniel Connell, *The War at Home. 1939-1949, Australian Broadcasting Commission*, Crows Nest, 1988, p. 137; also E. Daniel Potts, & Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under 1941-45: the American impact on Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 373.

¹⁶ Potts and Strauss, *op. cit.*, p. 68; Note: Eight of the sixty women interviewed sailed to America before the War had ended, Betty Stites being the first of this cohort to migrate to the US in 1943. (See Interview with Betty Stites Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001.)

War Brides Act of December 28, 1945 saw the United States undertake the mass movement of war brides from all over the world. Under what was known in the American press as 'Operation Diaper Run', approximately 40,000 war brides from the UK were provided transport to the US;¹⁷ similarly, in Australia, 'Operation Warbride' saw a constant passage of 'bride ships' between early 1946 and 1947 back and forth across the Pacific, each carrying hundreds of war brides and their babies to America. Despite more berths on ships becoming available, a US Consular official had earlier cautioned the prospective passengers, and it was reported in the press that: 'every girl is warned that she cannot expect peace-time luxury cruises'¹⁸. The direct route of these vessels from the east coast of Australia to the west coast of America took approximately two weeks, with stops at islands in the Pacific. From Fremantle in Western Australia the journey took an extra week. Up to 15,000 Australian war brides obtained transport to America under 'Operation Warbride'.¹⁹ Most of the participants interviewed for this study were transported under this scheme.

LEAVING HOME

Historically, the phenomenon of travel has been primarily the domain of men, and the journey takes on different perspectives when the travellers are women. The male journey is often portrayed as a quest for glory and adventure. As feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe observes, the journey in masculine terms is often 'infused with masculine ideas about adventure, pleasure and the exotic', as in tales

¹⁷ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations. The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945*, Harper Collins, London, 1995, p.420; also Shukert, Elfrieda and Barbara Scibetta, *War Brides of World War II*, Presidio Press, Novato, CA, 1988, pp.49, 57-64.

¹⁸ '900 Brides Wait for Passage to America', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 4, 1945, p. 4.

¹⁹ Potts and Strauss, *op. cit.*, pp. 66, 72.

of exploration, hunting, trading and sailing by ship to distant lands.²⁰ In comparison, the outcome of travel for women is more 'ambiguous, uncertain and multi-layered', and being a 'foreigner' in a new land is more complicated for women than for men.²¹ For the Australian war brides and fiancées of American servicemen, leaving home for a new land presented all sorts of challenges, particularly for those who sailed while the world was still at war. It was a frightening journey for those on ships which had to have 'lights out' and manoeuvre in zigzag patterns through dangerous minefields in the Pacific Ocean.²² Pregnant women, or those travelling with small children, were usually on military vessels unsuited for such a long journey.

The shipboard voyage for these women began the process of re-location from a familiar environment, to one which was largely unknown, yet to be explored and evaluated. For most it was also the beginning of their new role as wife and mother in which they were anxious to excel, to overcome any doubts and to prove to their families back home, their husbands and American in-laws, that they were equal to the task and had made the right decision in marrying an American serviceman. The war brides' memories of this voyage to their new future confirmed a range of emotions which were full of contradictions and ambiguities. While their oral testimony reveals feelings of excitement at the adventure they were undertaking, it is apparent that this was often accompanied by feelings of anxiety, fear of the unknown, as well as nostalgia and some regret at leaving their families and friends behind. Some women were optimistic about seeing their husbands and

²⁰ Enloe, Cynthia H., *Does khaki become you?: the militarization of women's lives*, London : Pandora, 1988, p. 20.

²¹ Robin Lucas and Clare Forster, (eds) *Wilder Shores. Women's travel stories of Australia and Beyond*. UQP, 1992, p. viii (Preface).

²² See Interview with Allie Rudy, Denver, CO, 7 September, 2001; also Berry, *op .cit.*

fiancés again, while others experienced palpable feelings of dread, uncertain about their reunion with a partner they had not seen for months or years. These mixed feelings are understandable given the exigencies of wartime, when these women were subject to restrictive red tape and much uncertainty.

Betty McIntire, for example, had feelings of foreboding before rejoining her husband who had returned to America within a week of their marriage in Australia. After he resumed his job on the railroad in Green River, Wyoming, she recalls:

things started to change. Sometimes I'd get a letter every two or three weeks until they got to be...every one or two months, and I got to thinking..."did I want to go?"²³

Betty sailed to America on board the SS *Monterey* in early April 1946, but did so with great trepidation, which proved not to be unfounded.

Parting from family and friends was heart-wrenching for most Australian war brides and fiancées, and for some saying goodbye to their mothers was particularly traumatic. Many women at this time still lived in the family home and were used to close proximity to their mothers in everyday life. The oral testimony of some of these women reveals the very strong mother-daughter bonds which existed sixty years ago, and which endured for decades, despite (or perhaps because of) the cruelty of separation and the distancing of the miles, as in the case of Dorothy Pence Berry. The bond between Dorothy and her mother was very strong and on Christmas Day 1944, her last day in Australia before sailing to America, she travelled from Queensland by bus to spend Christmas Day with her family in

²³ Interview with Betty McIntire in Reno, Nevada, 30 September, 1999.

Urbenville, a small town in New South Wales, just 25 miles over the Queensland border. Because of wartime travel regulations which restricted the crossing of state borders, US Navy officers took Dorothy and her baby off the bus and issued orders for her to go back to Brisbane. Dorothy recalls:

I was eight miles from my mother's, so I called her up, and I'll never forget. We both cried, and she said "Oh, never mind. Just think about the moonlight nights on the ship".²⁴

After having to say goodbye to her mother and family by phone, Dorothy was not to see her family again for twenty-six years. She says: 'it was sad, and very hard to leave Australia...I didn't know how hard until I was on board the ship and kept seeing the land getting further and further away. It was awful!'²⁵

For Dorothy, as for many other war brides, travel by ship during wartime took great courage. She left Brisbane on board the naval troopship *SS General Mann* on Boxing Day 1944. She recalls, 'there were just twenty-five women and ten babies' aboard the ship which had no special food or facilities for babies. It sailed via New Guinea, where it took on two thousand servicemen and women as well as Irving Berlin, the famous American songwriter, who was there entertaining the troops.²⁶ One day, Dorothy recalls, 'the ship was rocking back and forth' and she ran to the deck to see 'all these great rusty things out in the water'. The ship was zigzagging through a minefield, and with hindsight, Dorothy realises 'how skilful

²⁴ Berry, *op. cit.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ After the attack on Pearl Harbor Irving Berlin wrote a show titled 'This is The Army' and premiered it at the Broadway Theatre on July 4, 1942. The show toured the US as well as the combat areas of Europe and the Pacific and was made into a movie in 1943 starring a young Ronald Reagan. For his contributions to war charities and the uplifting of homefront morale, Berlin received the Medal of Merit from General George C. Marshall. Source: Parlor Songs, <http://parlorsongs.com/bios/berlin/iberlin.php> [Accessed 16 July, 2008]

that Captain was to get us through those hundreds of mines'.²⁷ It was a dangerous time to sail in the Pacific, and a wonder that the military authorities allowed this risk to be taken by wives of US servicemen who often had young children.

When Hazel Walker sailed on 28 May, 1945, on the Matson Liner, *Lurline*, which had been commandeered by the US Army to transport troops, her son was only three weeks old. She was not keen to travel so soon after having her baby, but was told that if she did not go then, her name would be put at the bottom of the list. Her mother encouraged her to go, although the war was not yet over. Hazel remembers the hundreds of US servicemen returning home at the end of their overseas tour, and how they were assigned to one side of the ships' decks, and the war brides to the other side. All day there would be announcements from the loudspeakers. Hazel remembers:

Every morning we'd hear 'It's 5 o'clock at sunrise.

Hit the deck. Hit the deck'. In the evening... 'It's 5 o'clock at sunset. It's blackout time. No smoking on the open deck. All blackout blinds will be shut'.

At 10 pm there'd be an announcement... 'Lights out. It's ten pm. Lights out.'²⁸

These announcements were interspersed with instructions to military personnel over the loudspeakers. Hazel recalls: 'We had to carry life jackets every time we left the cabin. Military rules applied to everyone.'²⁹ On the first day at sea one of the announcements was: 'This is an American Ship. All personnel will keep to the right using the gangways and ladders.' Hazel remembers how the Australian girls

²⁷ Berry, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Email correspondence with Hazel Walker, in Phoenix, AZ, 31 August, 2007.

²⁹ *ibid.*

‘had been keeping to the left and the Yanks had been keeping to the right’ and how they would ‘often run into a jam on the “stairs” between the decks.’³⁰ As the war in the Pacific was still going on, the ship zigzagged across the ocean for three weeks. Hazel remembers having numerous ‘Abandon Ship’ alerts, both day and night, when the war brides had to grab their life jackets and head to an assigned place to wait until there was no longer any threat. All the water in the taps was salt water, but because her baby was so young, every day Hazel was assigned two buckets of fresh water which was shared by her two cabin mates and their two one-year-old children.³¹

The war was not yet over when Melbourne war bride, Allie Rudy, received permission to sail to America on the troopship *SS Lurline* on 19 June, 1945. She had a six-month-old son, and ‘jumped’ at the opportunity to join her husband. She explains that ‘if you didn’t come when they wanted you to come, you had to wait.’³² She was young – about 23 – and she still remembers the anguish of the sad farewell as the train pulled out of Flinders Street Station in Melbourne. Her mother, to whom she was very close, was knocking on the train window mouthing the words, ‘Don’t go! Don’t go!’³³ On her arrival in Brisbane, Allie with her child in her arms looked up in awe at the ship. She ‘had never seen anything so huge!’ She remembers the anxious minutes when she thought ‘I’ve got to run! I cannot do it!’³⁴ She recalls that there were approximately 400 wives and about 150 babies and children on board the troopship. It was still two months until the war would be over, so the ship’s lights were extinguished at night, the darkness adding to her uneasy

³⁰ Walker, 31 August, 2007, *op. cit.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Rudy, *op. cit.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

feelings as she sailed away from Australia.³⁵ Similarly, Joan Moran from Western Australia recalls the fear she experienced when she left Sydney on USS *General Butner*, a converted troopship, in June 1944: 'it was the middle of the war – and we had a submarine scare and thought we were going to be torpedoed. It was very scary!'³⁶ Although it was frightening to sail in wartime, some war brides remembered the departure mostly as a time of excitement and the beginning of the adventure of travelling to America. Lola Atkins and her friend Irene Perucci, both originally from the small country town of Northam in Western Australia, first took a steam train across the Nullarbor Plain to Melbourne. After a long two months of waiting, they received instructions to board a ship in Sydney. Lola's journal records that it was 'a really hectic two or three days' following the telephone call from the American Consul, and 'a flurry of activity' began for the two young women as they said final farewells, attended to last-minute business matters concerning their passports and found transportation to Sydney.³⁷

On 5 April 1944, after a hurried breakfast at the YWCA in Sydney where they stayed overnight, the two friends travelled by taxi to Wharf 12, Pyrmont where they first saw the converted troop ship, SS *Lurline* 'in all its grandeur', the decks 'already crowded with American sailors, soldiers and nurses all homeward bound'.³⁸ Lola writes in her journal: 'the pier was a colourful sight with dozens of excited women, some with babies, being questioned and examined by customs officials'.³⁹ News passed around the ship that John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia, and General Blamey, Supreme Commander of the Australian Imperial Forces were aboard. Lola remembers how they were 'rushed to the boat deck to

³⁵ Rudy, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Interview with Joan Moran, Garden Grove, CA, 19 September, 2001.

³⁷ Atkins, *A Mystic Journey*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

have pictures made by the reporters who were busily lining up women and babies and actively clicking cameras'.⁴⁰ The bustling atmosphere as the war brides went on board the huge ship is clearly portrayed in the above description. Lola remembers, with some nostalgia, the two-week sea voyage to America as 'pleasant', although she shared her cabin with five other war brides. However, she also recalls initially being 'terrified' as she remembers how she slept with her life jacket for a pillow: 'We had lifeboat drill every day. It was very scary as the war was still on'.⁴¹ Nostalgia and fear were emotions that overlapped in her narrative as she remembered the voyage.

When Gladys Borger sailed from Brisbane on SS *Lurline* in 1944, she not only left her Australian family behind, but also her American husband. He was to leave Australia after her departure, to sail north with MacArthur's troops on the *Apache*. She remembers that day: 'I could see my mother, and I was waving to her on the shore', then she turned around and was surprised to find her husband standing behind her.⁴² The US Navy 'had let him off from duty in Sydney and he had flown up...he was on the ship and I saw him for a couple of hours before I left'.⁴³ For Gladys, this time was precious: she was sailing away to a new land, but at the same time she had to farewell her husband who was still engaged in the war and likely to face further hostilities before being deployed and returning to America.

Adelaide war bride, Doris Harburt, has unhappy memories of her journey on the USS *David Shanks* – a Liberty ship which she describes as the first 'all-bride' ship from Fremantle, the commissioning of which was a result of the US War

⁴⁰ Atkins, *A Mystic Journey*, op. cit., p. 42.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Interview with Gladys Borger, Sacramento, CA, USA, 29 September, 2001.

⁴³ *ibid.*

Brides Act of December 28, 1945. The brides were from all over Australia, and Doris travelled overnight from Adelaide by train to board the ship in Melbourne. There had been some confusion as to whether the war brides were required to be inoculated for the sea voyage. Doris received advice from the Consul that 'it would be safer to have the inoculation' so she had it before sailing. With the number of war brides going to the United States, some bureaucratic disorganisation was inevitable. Doris' tells of boarding the ship: 'up the gangplank we went and they stuck the needle in our arms without even checking whether we had already been inoculated'. On the 10th day, a severe reaction was felt by those who had had a double inoculation, and Doris says 'we were not very well for quite a while!'⁴⁴ Jackie Hansen, who sailed on SS *Fred C. Ainsworth*, was another who had a bad experience as a result of an inoculation:

I had a smallpox vaccination on my left hip shortly before leaving Perth. I had a swelling the size of a dinner plate and it was very painful. It was difficult to sit and when turning over in bed. I went to the doctor on board and he said that it was a wonderful reaction!⁴⁵

There was more bungling when empty milk cans were mistakenly loaded, while the full cans were left on the wharf. As there were so many babies on board, milk was in short supply and extra supplies had to be loaded when the ship docked at Honolulu.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Telephone conversation with Doris Harburt, Torrens Park, SA, 12 April, 2004

⁴⁵ Email from Jackie Hansen, dated 6 November, 2004.

⁴⁶ Harburt, *loc. cit.*

When Ruth Frost sailed on SS *David C Shanks* in March 1946, she had been given only a week to prepare for the journey, and with little time for sleep, she comments: 'it was hard to comprehend that I was finally on my way to the United States. It felt like a dream sequence.'⁴⁷ It was a time of urgency when things happened quickly and events took on a surreal quality. She had received a telegram from the US Army to 'report to the SS *David C. Shanks* on March 28th, 1946'.⁴⁸ Ruth remembers the busy time with the army, navy, Red Cross officers and medical staff all 'checking papers and passports, giving smallpox shots and getting us all on board ready to sail before nightfall.'⁴⁹ There was 'no time to deal with the emotions of girls who had never been further than a camping trip to the beach or a visit to relatives on a farm.'⁵⁰ Victorian war bride Shirley Norton left with her baby son, Robert, on SS *Monterey* in early April 1946. Shirley's sister Joanne, also a war bride, had sailed to America just two months earlier, and her parents found it very difficult to say farewell to their second war bride daughter, and their first grandson. Shirley travelled from Melbourne by train to Sydney to join the ship where relatives of brides from New South Wales assembled at the end of the wharf at Darling Harbour, standing on empty oil drums as vantage points to catch a glimpse of the passengers⁵¹. Shirley said she 'had no intention of staying away permanently – it was not to be forever'.⁵²

When SS *Mariposa* sailed from Brisbane in April, 1946, Margaret Fosmo's husband was still in the US Navy and had already returned to America. She was on a waiting list and had only three days notice to prepare to board the ship.

⁴⁷ Ruth Frost, *Pavlovas to Popcorn*, Community Books, Darling Heights, Qld., 2007, p. 1.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 8, 1946, p. 3.

⁵² Interview with Shirley Norton, Reno, NV, 30 September, 1999.

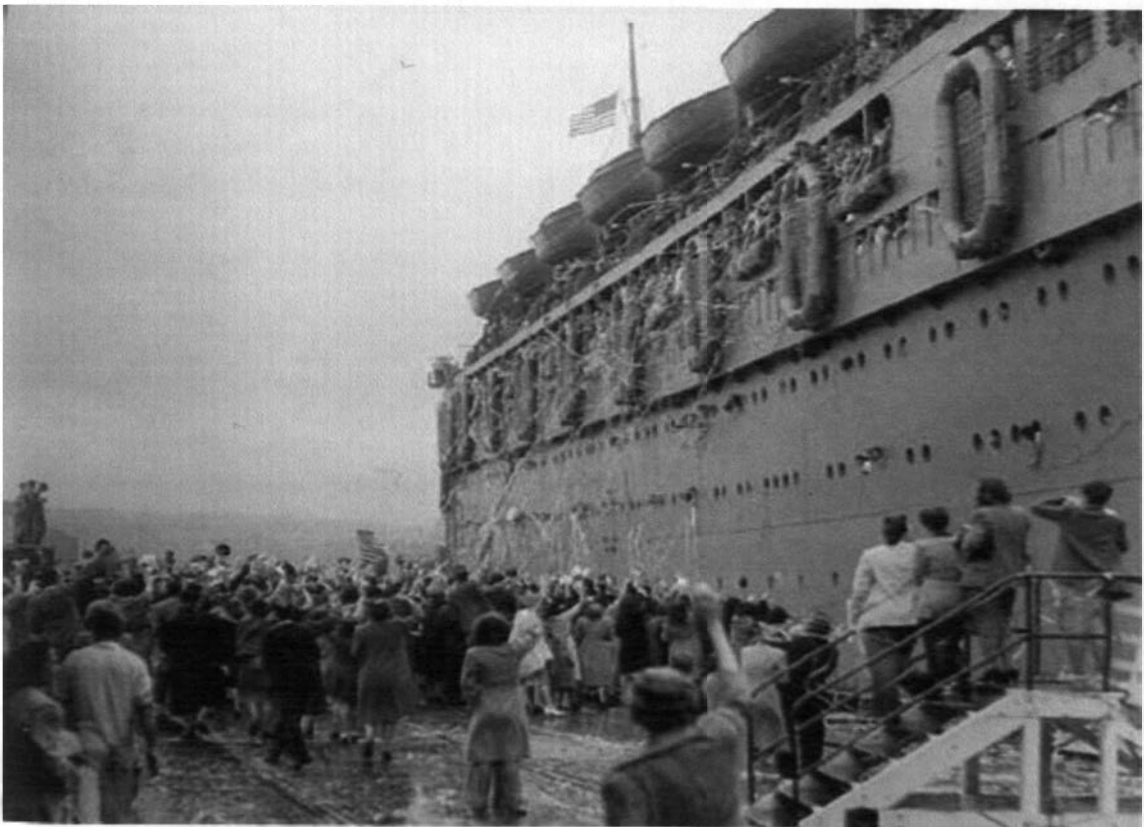
No. 17 – Saying farewell ...



Relatives farewell Iris CRAIG and baby daughter Erin, who sailed for America on SS Lurline on 21 March, 1946.



Iris CRAIG with her mother, Mary Josephine ADAMS.



Australian WWII war brides leaving Sydney for San Francisco on SS Lurline, 21 March, 1946. [Photo courtesy of war bride Iris CRAIG.]

Distressed because her father, who was still in the Australian Army, was away at that time, she thought she would never see him again. Many families came to the dock to see the brides off, but as the ship was not to leave until the next morning, the crowd gradually dispersed. Margaret remembers her surprise when her father suddenly appeared in uniform on board the ship: 'I was going to dinner and I met him in the hallway! I'd never expected it...I thought, "I'll never see my father again" – and there he came!'⁵³ Margaret remembered little about the voyage except that she 'cried all the time', and for her it was not a happy journey. She explains:

My baby was ten months old and then she got sick on the ship. A lot of babies did, with the different food and the different milks...so I was stuck in the cabin most of the time.⁵⁴

Marge Andreatta, who sailed on the same ship, clearly recalls leaving Australia with her fifteen-month-old baby. From the porthole in her cabin she could see her mother and several other girls' mothers waving goodbye while the band played 'Now is the Hour'. Marge has not been able to listen to the haunting tune ever since, because of the association with feelings of separation. But she was also anxious to get to America to be with her husband as he had only seen the baby briefly while on leave six months previously.⁵⁵

After a 'very, very sad' farewell to her family who were 'all there at the wharf', Australian war bride Iris Craig and her small daughter Erin sailed from Sydney on March 21, 1946 on SS *Lurline*. Iris recalls how 'it didn't help' cheer the sad occasion as the ship sailed past an island in the harbour, and voices of

⁵³ Interview with Margaret Fosmo, Seattle, WA, 13 September, 2001.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Interview with Marge Andreatta, Lakewood, Denver, CO, 8 September, 2001

workmen could be heard calling out: 'You'll be sorry! You'll be sorry!' This was evidence of some of the resentment which was directed towards Australian brides who married American servicemen. As Iris points out, some of the women on board did indeed appear to be sorry. After a very rough trip the ship called into port at Fiji, where a few of the brides decided that they didn't want to continue on the long journey and 'they jumped ship'.⁵⁶

Many war brides and fiancées found the final 'goodbye' to their family and friends required all the courage they could muster. For instance, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported how in April 1946, less than an hour before the US Army Transport SS *David C. Shanks* sailed to America with 430 wives and children of Americans aboard, nineteen-year-old war bride Josephine Hatton from Lidcombe, New South Wales, who had 'a horror of confined spaces since early childhood', walked off the ship.⁵⁷ Her mother, three sisters and brother had been waiting on the Pyrmont wharf in Sydney since 1 am to wave goodbye, and at 5.30 am they were surprised to see her run down the gangway to the wharf gates. Her mother is reported to have said, 'She has a fine husband, but she doesn't like leaving us. She must go back on the ship.'⁵⁸

ON BOARD

On board ship, the war brides had to deal with feelings of grief, sadness, discomfort and apprehension which were combined in an uncomfortable mix with excitement, anticipation and hope. This cohort of young women came from diverse locations and socio-economic backgrounds; however, they all shared the common

⁵⁶ Interview with Iris Craig, Sydney, 15 November, 2003. The island in Sydney Harbour was most likely Cockatoo Island where there were many naval apprentices and workers employed.

⁵⁷ '2 War Brides Walk Off Ship for U.S.A.', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 13, 1946, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* Note: It is not known whether or not she did in fact go back on board the ship.

experiences of undertaking first-time long-distance travel to a new environment, as well as travelling to America to join their partners, who in some cases they hardly knew, and from whom they had been separated for some time. The war brides and fiancées shared the common struggle of dealing with heightened emotions caused by separation from family and loved ones; the challenges of caring for young children in uncomfortable and difficult conditions; and the anxieties about the uncertain futures they might face.

For all these young women, the voyage was a significant watershed in their lives. Although they were all sharing a similar experience tinged with feelings of adventure, separation, anticipation and some uncertainty about their future, the time on board ship produced differing memories.

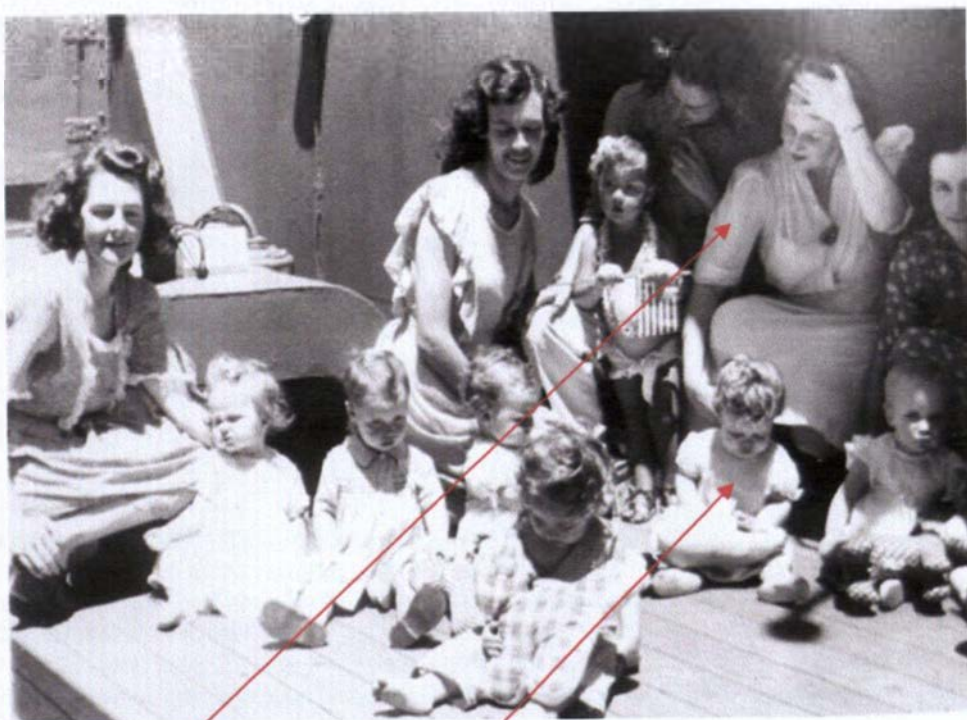
A few women participants remember little more about the sea voyage than the daily routine and survival in uncomfortable conditions, made worse for the women with babies and small children by the absence of any special facilities. Discomfort in cramped conditions was exacerbated by seasickness and outbreaks of measles, and for many there was no time for diary-keeping which may have sharpened their later memories of the voyage.

Many women seem to remember the trip quite clearly, without the aid of daily jottings, simply because it was such a major event in their lives. For example, Dorothy Bourne sailed from Fremantle on the *Fred C. Ainsworth*, which she vividly remembers as 'an awful...Liberty ship with no portholes'. She shared a cabin, dormitory-style, with 17 women and 22 babies. She recalls: 'I was seasick the

No. 18 – Mothers and babies on board Bride Ships



Australian war brides and their children on board USAT *Fred C Ainsworth*, April, 1946. Dorothy (Mary) BOURNE and her 15 month-old daughter (2nd from right).



Iris CRAIG and daughter Erin on board SS *Lurline* with other Australian war brides and children, 21 March, 1946.

whole way. I had my little girl tied by her harness onto my wrist, sitting up on the deck for ninety percent of the way'.⁵⁹

Supplementary evidence, such as three war brides' shipboard diaries (copies and extracts), have been donated for this study.⁶⁰ These contemporary records kept during the voyage provide nuance and a deeper understanding of the young women's thoughts during the voyage, as well as capturing their reactions to their shipboard experiences when they actually occurred. Also in my possession is a book published by a war bride, which is based on her shipboard diary.⁶¹

Daily handwritten entries describe their thoughts and surroundings, the atmosphere and activities on board, and observations of other passengers, thus providing a degree of comfort for the young women in their new temporary environment. Confined in unfamiliar surroundings, as Dugan and Szwarc argue in their study of the Australian migrant experience, 'writing about space helps the diarist to create space in which they are comfortable, a space which they can know through narrating it'.⁶² Through writing, the diarist could 'begin to make sense of the tangled feelings and extraordinary experiences of migration'.⁶³ The war brides' diary entries often describe the cabin space and the arrangement of bunks, as well as frequent descriptions of shipboard food, part of a 'general normalising discourse that almost obsessively describes the practical details of life on board ship'.⁶⁴ The

⁵⁹ Interview with Dorothy (Mary) Bourne, Sacramento, CA, 29 September, 2001.

⁶⁰ Shirley Tronic, unpublished diary, recorded on board SS *Frederick C. Ainsworth*, April-May, 1946, (Photocopy of diary supplied by Tronic family, May 2008, in possession of author.); Kathleen (Kay) Feehan Newell Bertram, unpublished diary, recorded on board SS *Lurline* in June, 1945. (Received by email from daughter Linda Babin on Sunday 27 May 2001, in possession of author.); Betty King, (unpublished diary) written as Betty St Germain (nee Mott) on board SS *David C. Shanks*, April, 1946. (Copy of extract in possession of author.)

⁶¹ Frost, *op. cit.*

⁶² Michael Dugan and Josef Szwarc, *Australia's Migrant Experience*, Edward Arnold Australia, Caulfield East, 1987, p. 135.

⁶³ A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten pound Poms. Australia's invisible migrants*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, UK, 2005, p. 99.

⁶⁴ Dugan and Szwarc, *loc. cit.*, p. 136.

descriptions of their cabins, daily routine and activities, as well as helping the war brides to become familiar with their new surroundings, were sometimes written with their families and later readers in mind.

These personal hand-written records helped to maintain links with family and loved ones they had left behind. Historian Katie Holmes has observed that 'women did not simply write a record of their days', but 'the very process of writing in this form gave women the space in which to define their own lives and to shape their identities'.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note how both food and space are recurring themes in both written and oral sources.

Lola Atkins from Western Australia remembers the two-week voyage from Sydney to San Francisco on the converted troop ship SS *Lurline*, where 'the food was good' and 'it was just like travelling on a cruise ship', except for the addition of bunks. Fritz, the cabin steward, told her that Dorothy Lamour – the famous Hollywood star and romantic 'pin-up girl' of the American troops in the Pacific – was in the same cabin on the last voyage.⁶⁶ Lola comments wryly: 'But she had it all to herself! Now we were six women, and we had to get up and figure out who was going to take the first quick bath.'⁶⁷ Unlike the range of cabin-class travel earlier in the century, accommodation on board 'bride ships' was virtually one class, with berths allocated according to whether or not the brides were accompanied by children and babies. The wives travelling alone shared cabins, and mothers with children were generally placed together. As their passage was

⁶⁵ Katie Holmes, *Spaces In Her Day. Australian Women's Diaries 1920s–1930s*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, Preface, p. x.

⁶⁶ Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, 'Searching for Dorothy Lamour: War and Sex in the South Pacific, 1941–1945', *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, Palmerston, No. 18, July 1999, pp. 3–18.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*; Atkins, *op. cit.*

19. The Sea Voyage



Betty DE ST GERMAIN (3rd from right) with other Australian war brides on board SS *David C Shanks*, Sydney, April, 1946.



Dawne MACLEOD-SHARPE writing on board SS *Monterey*, 27 October, 1947.
[Photo courtesy of Dawne Balester.]



Menu from SS *Lurline* in 1945.

financed by the US government, class or financial distinction was usually not a factor in the allotment of cabins to the brides and fiancées.

On board ship, some war brides found the American food much too rich, and some longed for 'a good old fashioned baked dinner' and 'Grandma's scones and some of her tea'⁶⁸. Others enjoyed the abundance of food provided. War bride Ruth Frost writes in her book, based on her ship-board diary, how 'the hungry girls waited in line, cafeteria-style, and ogled the sumptuous food'. After the Depression, then wartime rationing, Ruth writes, it was a treat to view the 'different cereals that we had never seen before'.⁶⁹ It was Ruth's original diary notes on board ship which have helped her recall in detail the 'heated platters of eggs, fried or scrambled, bacon, sausages and steak plus fried potatoes, tomatoes alongside huge stacks of thick hot toast' which caused 'mouths to drool'.⁷⁰ There was 'a choice of orange, grapefruit or tomato juice plus milk and coffee – but not tea.' Ruth adds: 'The tea drinkers had plenty to say about that!'⁷¹ The dormitory-style cabin was crowded and Ruth remembers there were 'no cupboards or wardrobes. We were to live out of our small suitcases for the duration of this voyage' and 'wet towels had to hang on the bottom of our bunks.'⁷²

South Australian war bride, Kathleen Feehan Newell Bertram (known as Kay), jotted in her daily diary when she sailed to America on the troopship SS *Lurline* in June 1945, before the war had ended. The first entry describes the atmosphere on board:

⁶⁸ King, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Frost, *op. cit.*, p.33.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 6.

Today, Sunday, we boarded the ship, of course there was great excitement and bustle, but things have gone without a hitch, considering the great numbers of girls and babies, there are also...wounded men, American nurses, refugees, and able soldiers returning home after years abroad. The Australian Red Cross were marvellous minding the babes.⁷³

Before the ship had left Brisbane, the menu on board had already provided Kay's first taste of American food. She writes: 'We had a lovely tea, turkey, sweet corn and ice cream, typically American.'⁷⁴ Similarly, war bride Joyce Balogh first encountered American cuisine on board SS *Lurline* when she asked for jelly for her small daughter Jill and discovered that 'jelly' in America is called 'jam' and she should have been asking for 'jello'.⁷⁵ These small examples of cultural difference presented to the war brides on their journey were early hints of the adjustments they would face in America in the coming weeks and months. Kay's diary paints a picture of the ship's departure, with her small child Corinne 'sleeping through all the commotion'. The band played its last tunes, *Now is the Time* [sic] and *Auld Lang Syne*, as the boat pulled out. Kay noted that 'we have our own toilet and shower, and wash hand basin, quite cosy compared with some who have 15 and 16 to a cabin'. By the following Saturday the diary entry was not as happy after 'a terrible night' when she was kept awake by crying babies and unbearable heat.⁷⁶

⁷³ Feehan Newell Bertram, *op. cit.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Interview with Joyce Balogh, Tigard, OR, 10 September, 2001.

⁷⁶ Feehan Newell Bertram, *op. cit.*

Kay's diary compares the 16-berth cabins which are 'light and airy' with others like hers, which was 'small without portholes, 6 berths and unbearably hot'. She describes the dining room as 'nice' and 'the food plentiful', and adds 'I might say luxurious for wartime'.⁷⁷ The daily routine was fairly rigid:

Of a morning we are called up at 6:30 am
...Breakfast at 7:30 am. Lunch at 11:30 am. Tea at
5pm. We generally have fire drill, and then
10:30pm all passage ways cleared passengers in
their cabins with lights out.⁷⁸

Kay's diary notes: 'there are said to be 600 war brides, 190 babes on board' which she thought to be 'the most to travel so far'.⁷⁹ The long sea journey no doubt encouraged some shipboard romances, as suggested in the diary entry which mentions that there were fifteen husbands with their wives on board, but queries the fact that 'last night the sentry discovered 26 husbands ?? [sic] cuddling upon the boat deck, how come?'⁸⁰

Leaving Brisbane on 21 September 1945, after her long and arduous trip by train from Western Australia with her baby in arms, war bride Barbara Gleason was impressed by the size of the *SS Lurline* when she first set eyes on it. Barbara tells how 'Brisbane girls had to be put off to allow the troops on board', but because she and the other girls from Western Australia had travelled so far, they were given first priority of all the brides to board the ship. Barbara shared 'a big cabin with twelve bunks' with six women and their babies. She recalls how they had to quickly

⁷⁷ Feehan Newell Bertram, *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

adapt to a sudden change of diet for the babies: 'We ate down in the mess every day and they had food there for babies that we were not acquainted with – canned food and bottled food – and that was for 13 days.'⁸¹ Unlike most war brides, Barbara felt little emotion when she sailed away from Australia as she had no-one to wave goodbye, and she was anxious to join her husband. She admits that if she had been leaving her home in Western Australia she probably would have felt a little different, but the ship left from Brisbane where she knew nobody. She recalls: 'We went down the river to the ocean...the whole ship was filled with troops so the war brides could only use the very top deck – the sundeck'. The floor of the ship's ballroom was covered with mattresses where she and the other war brides put their babies down and 'just...sat on the floor there with the babies and spent our time that way'.⁸²

Most war brides understood the difficulties of sea travel during and just after the war. When Joan Byer reached the end of her long sea voyage from Fremantle in Western Australia, she was very weary. The dormitory, with 'layered beds', was 'dank and stuffy' and Joan was sick for the whole journey. Pleased to see land when they reached San Francisco, Joan thought 'I'll never go back again if I have to go by ship!'⁸³ Marge Andreatta did not have any problem with seasickness, but like other mothers she was concerned about the shipboard food for infants and remembers how she dealt with this problem:

the babies used to have all this strained food... my
little girl wasn't used to that and she didn't like it.

⁸¹ Gleason, *op. cit.*

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Interview with Joan Byer, Vista, CA, USA, 24 September, 2001.

So I used to take her with me into the dining room
and feed her from my plate.⁸⁴

The health of babies was a cause for concern for many of the mothers. Apart from the sudden change of formula and the use of strained canned food, the quality of hygiene was also questionable. Shirley Norton remembers her trip on SS *Monterey* in early April, 1946:

It was sort of nightmarish at times. We were crowded ...we had to line up at the dispensary to get the baby food and the diapers and all the needs and stuff for the children...we had no facilities to wash diapers.⁸⁵

There were US Army nurses on board, but according to Shirley, the only contact the war brides had with them was when they went to get the food for their babies. Shirley's eight-month-old son contracted *streptococci* on board ship and became very ill, needing to be hospitalised on arrival in America. She was suspicious that the containers and utensils on the ship were not properly sterilised and that 'this is where my son got the infection.'⁸⁶ Conditions were difficult, especially when caring for their babies, but generally the war brides and fiancées adapted as well as they could and accepted that this was the way it would be until they reached their destination. However, they did appreciate that the navy and the staff on board made every effort to ease the difficulties and inconveniences of the voyage.

⁸⁴ Byer, Interview, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵ Norton, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

Despite the lack of facilities, according to Dorothy Berry, the navy tried to make the journey in wartime as pleasant as possible for the mothers and their infants. For her daughter's first birthday the Captain sent a cake covered with 'floppy pink frosting' into which the baby delighted in putting her little hand.⁸⁷ Dorothy also remembers a ceremony held in the officers' quarters when they crossed the equator. The passengers had to participate in an initiation ceremony and 'go through Davy Jones' Locker'⁸⁸. Dorothy recalls:

They had us suck on a baby bottle that had alum in it so it tasted horrible, and we had to wear our clothes backwards! Dorothy still has a certificate which states 'I'm a "shellback" now because I crossed the equator'.⁸⁹

In these small ways, she felt that the navy, despite their limited resources, did try to entertain the passengers and to make the war brides feel more comfortable, although nothing was done to ease the 'prickly heat' many suffered when crossing the equator.⁹⁰ Shirley Tronic also remembers the ceremony held when crossing the equator, although it was two years later, when the war was over. Shirley wrote a detailed account in her diary and proudly recorded that she too had 'ascended with all the other girls, from the lowly order of a Pollywog...to an esteemed Shellback'.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Berry, *op. cit.*; Pam Uher, 'The origin of Davy Jones' locker', *Helium* www.helium.com/iter [Accessed 29 August, 2008] "Davy Jones' Locker" is an idiom meaning the underwater or bottom of the sea graveyard for dead sailors, many of whom drowned at sea. It has been popularised by pirate stories and movies, where the villain makes threats to kill a victim by sending them to "Davy Jones' Locker". Reference to 'Davy Jones' in a nautical connotation can be traced to Daniel Defoe in his book *The Four Years Voyages of Capt. George Roberts* (1726) and in *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* by Tobias Smollett (1751).

⁸⁸ Berry, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Tronic, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ Berry, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Tronic, *op. cit.*

Shipboard life, however, had other memorable moments which were not such fun. Shirley wrote of the 'most miserable' day she spent on the ship during the whole voyage. Having congratulated herself on successfully withstanding 'seasickness, vaccination reactions, measles, diarrhoea, colds etc.' on the voyage, Shirley felt 'just about sick' to discover she had nits in her hair. The whole cabin and all the girls in it had to be disinfected. Shirley writes: 'The doctor, nurse and some assistants arrived and we all had to dip our heads in a mixture of D.D.T. and kerosene.'⁹² After 15 minutes the girls washed their hair with a special shampoo, dried it and then had DDT powder sprayed into it. The bunks were stripped and everything sprayed with DDT. Shirley suffered great discomfort as she accidentally got the DDT and kerosene in both eyes and in her left ear, the latter requiring treatment with mineral oil. Shirley felt so miserable that she went to bed very early, but couldn't sleep because of ear ache. She writes:

One of the girls got me some ear drops and that eased it a bit. Then all the girls kept coming in and we started showing photos and snaps all around and ended up by having a real jam session.⁹³

Young and resilient, the war brides dealt with problems in a practical way and made the most of their time on board ship. A sense of camaraderie grew among the women as those sharing large cabins got to know each other and shared their everyday experiences, complaints, laughter and problems. Kay Feehan Newell noted: 'Friendships between the war brides developed during the

⁹² Tronic, *op. cit.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

voyage'.⁹⁴ She wrote that there were 'some very nice girls on the boat', although she observes that perhaps some of the girls were not of such good character. Her diary reads:

We have arranged to go up on the boat deck tomorrow with our children. I've been wanting to take C[orrine] up for a sunbath, but all of the officers and a lot of ? [sic] types of girls go up there, so I wouldn't go alone for fear of being thought the same.⁹⁵

This diary entry hints that some of the women going to meet their American partners were not so blameless. But it is difficult to tell if this was the diarist's perception only, or a matter of appearance and assumption. However, another war bride, Irene Franck, who travelled with eight war brides on a Swedish freighter during wartime, reported some promiscuous behaviour. One of the girls who shared her cabin 'just slept with everybody – even the deckhand on the ship!' She remembers:

They'd come in the middle of the night and slide into her bed, and you know, I'd be lying there dying [with sea-sickness] and having to listen to all of this.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Feehan Newell Bertram, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Interview with Irene Franck, San Diego, CA, 25 September, 2001.

Later, when the ship docked in San Francisco, Irene was upset when this girl's husband was waiting for her on the dock and 'she acted as though nothing had happened' and 'was all lovey-dovey.' Irene wondered if that marriage ever lasted.⁹⁷

From the interviews conducted for this study, however, this sort of sexual behaviour did not seem to be prevalent among the war brides. This promiscuous behaviour was not the norm, and only a small number of incidents of this nature were mentioned. The foregoing narratives clearly demonstrate the desire of the war brides interviewed for this study to set themselves above contemporary stereotypes surrounding girls who fraternised with American GIs. This is evidenced by their disapproval of promiscuity and illicit love affairs on board ship and is testimony to their higher moral code of behaviour.

‘HOME DUTIES’

As the Australian brides did not automatically become American citizens upon marriage, they travelled on their British passports.⁹⁸ Some passenger lists for the 'bride ships' were headed 'Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States of America', and contained columns of information about those on board.⁹⁹ Most adult passengers on the 'bride ships' were females, and their occupations were identified by the words 'home duties'.¹⁰⁰ Many of these women, however, had served as valued members of the AWAS, the WRANS and the WAAFS, working as signallers and in other areas of responsibility during the war.¹⁰¹ Others had volunteered for the war effort, at clubs and canteens, in addition to their paid

⁹⁷ Franck, *op. cit.*

⁹⁸ Note: The words 'Australian Passport' first replaced 'British Passport' on the cover of an Australian passport in 1949. Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Website, <https://www.passports.gov.au/Web/PassportHistory.aspx> [Accessed 2 August 2008.]

⁹⁹ Outgoing Ships Passenger Lists 1944 to 1947, [NAA, Series A/906/1, Canberra].

¹⁰⁰ Outgoing Ships Passenger Lists 1944 -1947, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ See List of Abbreviations

No. 20 – ‘Bride Ship’ Manifest

1/04/6/00/11/19

PASSENGER LIST—OUTGOING
Names and Descriptions of Passengers

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Name (separate line to be used for each Passenger.)	Age (under 18, Child, or Boy)	Profession, occupation, or Calling	Sex (M or F)	Age (at Birth)	Place of Birth	Country of Birth	Country of Birth	Country of Birth
64	U.S. PORT								
65	Mathis, Mrs. Selinda	2	Home duties	F	23	OM	Australia	1	American
66	" Miss Lynette	2	Infant	F	1	18	"	1	American
	Mathews, Mrs. Josephine	2	Home duties	F	29	OM	"	1	British
	Norton, Mrs. Shirley	2	Home duties	F	24	OM	"	1	British
	" Mr. Robert	2	Infant	M	1	18	"	1	American
	McIntire, Mrs. Betty	2	Home duties	F	23	OM	"	1	British
	McKeough, Mrs. Violet	2	"	F	31	OM	"	1	American
	O'Brien, Mrs. Lorna	2	"	F	24	OM	"	1	British
	" Miss Annette	2	Infant	F	1	18	"	1	American

Outgoing Passenger List for SS Monterey, Sydney, 6 April, 1946. Shirley NORTON, with her baby son Robert, and her friend Betty McINTIRE sailed on this ship to America. (Photos of war brides taken by author in Denver, CO, in 2001)



Australian WWII war brides sailing on SS Mariposa, April, 1946. Mavis SALAMONSKI (nee McSWEENEY) from Rockhampton, Qld, is 4th from the right, 3rd row from front. [Photo courtesy of daughter, Sharyn Bartlem]

daytime jobs. The war brides' considerable contribution to the war effort was unable to be detected from the shipping lists. These reflected the gendered nature of wartime society, which saw males as heroes on the battlefield, and women as supporting the war effort in domestic and voluntary capacities on the homefront, only filling vacancies in the workforce for the duration of the war. For the purpose of the ships' passenger lists these women were seen to be wives and mothers occupied in the typical female role of 'home duties', often identified by the letters 'HD'.¹⁰²

Joan Byer had served in the WRANS, working in the degaussing (or demagnetising) department. After basic training, Jean was selected to be 'the liaison between the degaussing office and the ships that came into port' at Fremantle. She went on board the ships to deliver instructions from the officers at the degaussing department to the captain. She explains the importance of the demagnetising process:

where I worked...they had cameras set up and,
when the ships came into the outer harbour they
were signalled, and they'd go over cables that
came into our office and registered on the
cameras...this was to prevent them from being
blown up by mines.¹⁰³

From the perspective of both Australian security and the US Navy this was important work, and sometimes it also facilitated the young women's meetings with their future husbands, as was the case with Joan who first met her husband-to-be

¹⁰² Outgoing Ships Passenger Lists, 1944 -1947, *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ Byer, Interview, *op. cit.*

on the wharf in Fremantle, when she and six other WRANS listened to the lunch-time renditions of the USS *Pelius* band.¹⁰⁴

Sunny Sansing, from New South Wales, was a Wireless Telegraphist in the RAAF, stationed at Garbutt Field Airforce Base in Townsville, Queensland. She proudly tells how she was designated 'Aircraftwoman First Class'.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Victorian war bride Joanne Patterson joined the AWAS and was assigned to the Signal branch where she worked in the basement of the University of Queensland, at St Lucia.¹⁰⁶ Jean Wilk, who arrived in San Francisco on SS *Marine Phoenix* in June 1946, served in the WRANS and was stationed at Rottnest Island, just off the coast of Fremantle, Western Australia. She explains that during the war, the WRANS took over the signal station previously run by the Harbour Trust.¹⁰⁷ She remembers being 'a very bad traveller – I was sick every time we went over to Rottnest with the Navy', in a boat that was 'just a little flat-bottomed thing' which 'just rolled!' Her journey to America on board the *Marine Phoenix* was no better for Jean who remembers: 'there was not much time for friendship – I was sick and kept busy caring for my son.'¹⁰⁸

Billie Ringen, joined the WAAFS and after training at Robertson, New South Wales, was transferred to Brisbane, Queensland. Billie did general office work 'to replace a man who would go overseas', and one of her daily jobs was to take mail from her office in Brisbane to an office building 'just around the corner' where General MacArthur (Supreme Allied Commander of the South Pacific theatre of war during WWII) had his headquarters. She recalls: 'often times I'd see him drive

¹⁰⁴ Byer, Interview, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Sunny Sansing, NV, 28 September, 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Additional conversation with Joanne Patterson when visiting Australia, 5 April, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Telephone conversation with Jean Wilk, Mt Pleasant, IL, 1 July, 2007.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

up in his big limousine...He was a big, tall, handsome man' and she remembers the 'thrill it was to see him in person.' She remembers this time as 'some of the best years of my life. Oh, yes, every minute – I loved every bit of it.'¹⁰⁹ Billie remembers her time in service with youthful fervour; a time when she genuinely enjoyed the new opportunities and independence for women which followed the outbreak of the war.

The contribution of these women to the war effort was important to them and to the nation, but it was as if they were stripped of their work status and their valuable experience when they boarded the ship bound for America, where their occupations were noted simply as 'Home Duties', and their immediate future seemed to promise a return to a domestic role.

'NEW' LIVES

Anthropologist Caroline Brettell has describes the 'time-out' while on a voyage as a time which 'allows an individual to gain or regain control of the future'.¹¹⁰ For all the women interviewed, whether consciously acknowledged or not, their sea voyage represented a threshold between two worlds through which they were required to pass to continue on to their new lives. It was a liminal space 'where one is...betwixt and between'; between the comfort of lifetime familiarity on one side, and the new, unknown and unexpected on the other.¹¹¹ This was an initial and transitional stage of their ultimate journey, where the war brides occupied a space on board ship between two countries, and where they were in a

¹⁰⁹ Wilk, *op. cit.*

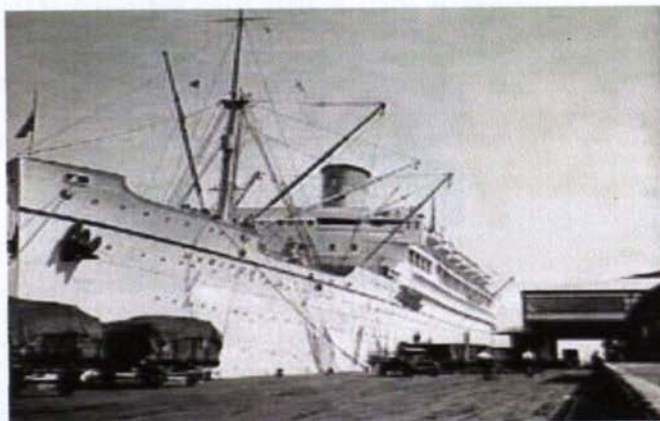
¹¹⁰ Caroline B. Brettell, 'Liminal Space and Liminal Time: A Woman's Narrative of a Year Abroad 1938-39', in Linda Straight (ed.), *Women on the Verge of Home*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2005, p. 121.

¹¹¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1969, p.95; also see Kathleen Manning, *Rituals, Ceremonies, and Cultural Meaning in Higher Education*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000, p. 71.

No. 21 – Time for reflection



**War bride Joyce Street MORSE sailing to America on
SS Mariposa, 1946.**



SS Mariposa

state of transition between their old and their new cultures and societal roles. Thus the voyage to America marked a period of 'liminality' in the lives of these war brides. As Kathleen Manning states, liminality is a process and space in ritual, where people are transformed from role to role.¹¹² The process is 'a release from normal constraints, a deconstruction of the constrictions of common sense and an introduction of new ways of viewing the social structure' to reveal 'new constructions, freedom and indeterminacy with the culturally constructed social world'.¹¹³ The same concepts of ritual and liminality can be applied to the shipboard voyage of the war brides in this study, to add meaning and to explain the significance of their experiences on their journeys to America. During the voyage within the confines of the ship, in new surroundings and restricted by the rituals of shipboard routine, such as set meal times and the rite of eating and drinking together, regular safety drills, and the special ceremony to celebrate the crossing of the equator, the Australian war brides and fiancées occupied a liminal space.¹¹⁴ This was a transitional space or threshold between their lives in Australia and their new lives in America where they were to step into the new roles of wife and mother.¹¹⁵ Thus following a painful separation from family and friends, and then constrained by the exigencies of the voyage, the women left behind their old lives and gradually became part of a group with a common identity of 'war brides' on board ship, thus beginning the next stage of their life.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Manning, *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Note: See Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1960, p. 29. 'The rite of eating and drinking together...is clearly a rite of incorporation, of physical union.'

¹¹⁵ As Manning maintains, 'seeing the [social] structure from outside or...from the margins, can trigger the reflexive process', See Manning, *loc. cit.*

¹¹⁶ See Kate Darian-Smith and Rachel Jenzen, 'Memories from America: Australian War Brides and US Marines Remember the Pacific During the Second World War', in Martin Crotty (ed), *When the Soldiers Return: November 2007 Conference Proceedings*, University of Queensland with RMIT Informit, 2009, p. 13.

For most Australian war brides embarking on the long sea voyage to America, it was a momentous event, and they had to deal with the full gamut of emotions as they left for a new land and an unknown future. In April, 1946, *The Sydney Morning Herald* stated that one hundred brides from Victoria and several hundred from New South Wales embarked on SS *Monterey*, and described how, 'Many were tearful'.¹¹⁷ The newspaper reported that the assistant State controller of the VAD¹¹⁸, Mrs. Persia Porter, 'has a remedy for tearfulness' which was: 'Give them a dose of *sal volatile*, a cup of tea, and a bit of cheerful conversation.'¹¹⁹ At such a time when emotions ran high, it is doubtful that this practical solution was the panacea sought by the war brides.

¹¹⁷ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 8, 1946, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) were nursing orderlies who worked in convalescent hospitals, on hospital ships and the blood bank as well as on the homefront. [Source: Australian War Memorial website <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/vad.asp> accessed 4 August 2008]

¹¹⁹ Daphne Guinness, 'Mrs Beeton's house rules', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 13, 2007. (Note: A teaspoon of spirit of *sal volatile* (ammonium carbonate) in water 'swigged' during the day is recommended by Mrs Beeton for treatment of hysteria in her book *Mrs Beeton's Household Book* first published in 1861.) Also *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 8, 1946, p. 3.