

Australians at War Film Archive

William Abbott (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Okay Bill. If we could just start with an introduction to your life story so far? Starting with where you were born and where you grew up.**

I was born in Newport, New South Wales in 1922. When I was two weeks old I moved to Collaroy down the coast a bit further. And there I spent the rest of my life up until

01:00 1976 when I moved north here. I've had a good life, plenty of adventure, plenty of surf and everything like that. A good Father. He used to take us fishing and rabbiting and all that sort of thing. So I had a good life. I went to Narrabeen Primary School and then Manly High. I left Manly High at fourteen and a half.

01:30 My Dad was a carrier and I was spending half the time with him so my teacher thought I would be better off leaving. So I stayed with him then up to 1939. He enlisted with a truck in the militia and left me to run his business for six months. That was a bit scary because he left me with a truck that was a 1927 model and had to be worked on nearly every day of the week.

02:00 Anyhow I took it upon myself to buy another one. The bank manager, who was a friend, stuck to me which made my job easier. Also my mates, I had about six mates. I used to work my way to Sydney in the morning with mainly eggs for the Egg Board and a few other things and then we would pick up in Sydney. We had mostly all the motor firms and Norco Butter and

02:30 some of the produce stores in Sussock Street. I would work my way home to Collaroy and be there about six o'clock, and around our lounge would be sitting all these boys waiting for us to go. I'd have dinner and then out we'd go. They made my job that easy. Anyhow it was good. They managed to get enough vehicles to supply these units and he came out

03:00 of the militia and sold his business and he went back into the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. He went straight back in being an old soldier you know. Well, I went with a chap, I worked with him from early '40 until July...sorry, in July I enlisted and I didn't get called up until December so I worked with him right up until December. Prior to that I was

03:30 swimming and playing football and nearly every week I would win something, like an open order for something, a few shillings in those days. Plus I was getting four pounds ten [shillings] a week working for this chap. I gave Mum thirty bob and I had the rest to spend. Well, I had a motor bike. I played football and I was in the

04:00 President's Cup side and when my call up came I thought, 'What am I going to do', things were too good. Anyhow I eventually went in...I was supposed to go in on Christmas Eve and Dad said 'If you go in Christmas Eve, you won't be home at all. You'll be on fatigue right through.' They were camped in the Sydney Showground at the time. So I had it deferred until the 21st of January. The day I went into

04:30 Moore Park, this chap yelled out, 'Billy Abbott', and I turned around and it was a fellow from the North Narrabeen Surf Club that I knew, who was a recruiting sergeant. He got me into the engineers and that's the reason I stayed with the engineers. And I'm glad now because it was one of the best units you could get into. So off we go. It always amused me, as we walked in, in civvies, a recruit from yesterday

05:00 would be yelling out, 'You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry.' And the next day we were doing the same. Anyhow we stayed at the showground for quite a while. If we happened to cop kitchen fatigue or something like that, we'd just walk up the hill, do our duties, jump on the tram, go down to Bondi and have a swim and come back in time for lunch. We had a good time. But that ended. They sent us to Tamworth.

05:30 Training started in earnest then, like long route marches and manoeuvring in preparation to send us away. I managed to make the First Grade Army side in rugby and about a week after the grand final... the only match we got beaten in was the grand final, we had our week's final leave

- 06:00 and I'll never forget. Dad and Mum and the kids came to see me off at Central Station back to Tamworth. Dad was very upset because he had been through it all before you know. Anyhow that was all right and we go back, and the next week we come back to Sydney to board the Queen Mary. You wouldn't believe it, the officer checking us in was a Collaroy fellow I knew.
- 06:30 A bloke by the name of Jack Minute. So that was all right. We got on the Mary and got our cabin and we went up on the deck to have a last look at Sydney. Anyhow there was a friend of mine from our surf club in air force uniform. Prior to this they made us cut our hair to an inch and then the boys decided we had to have it shaved.
- 07:00 So I had this damn lumpy head and I went up to this Tony Tubb and I said, 'G'day Tony, how are you?' He said, 'I know your face.' I used to go to school with him and he used to come to our place nearly every night, but he didn't recognise me. Anyhow, off we went and the Queen Mary had three pools and of course I couldn't get into the pool quick enough. Anyhow we get in the Bight and struck one of the biggest seas in history,
- 07:30 it was 80 foot high. They were breaking over the top of the Queen Mary. Anyhow, the Sydney was our escort. It had its focsle stove in. It was a massive sea. Anyhow we got to Fremantle and they changed escort ships again there and we went onto the Trincomalee. We went on the Trincomalee to Ceylon. It's a beautiful harbour, and someone said
- 08:00 'We're on A Deck which is 80 feet off the water.' And someone said, 'No one could dive off there', so I said, 'I'll jump.' And someone said, 'I bet you can't.' So I did and got into trouble over it. I didn't get paid for the bet either, two bob [shillings]. On the way to Tewfik in Egypt I developed this ear. Actually yesterday it was playing up. I've had it ever since.
- 08:30 I don't know if it was the pools...when we were in the cooler area, there was no one in the pool but when we got in the tropics there were 5000 in it. So I might have got it out of that or out of the Trincomalee. I've had it ever since. When we landed at Tewfik I was sent to the AGH [Australian General Hospital] at Gaza straight away and they poked everything they had into it but it didn't do any good.
- 09:00 Anyhow they sent me to the Engineers Training Depot near Gezai, another 30 kilometres down coast. We trained there and we used to march over to the beach, have a swim, have a meal and then march back. The next thing they sent us down to Ismailia. We had to go through the Sinai Desert to do a bridging school. No, can I go back...
- 09:30 While I was there I got the message that a few of my primary school mates were over at a place called Nusrat in an infantry training battalion. So I went over there one day and had a party with them, then the next thing we know we're heading for Egypt. At Beersheba, where we crossed into the Sinai Desert they used to check your trucks out for
- 10:00 dope. In those days, 1941, they used to pull the truck apart looking for dope. Anyhow, also it's all sand. It's like sandhills on the beach. It always amazed me. I did it a few times eventually and you'd pull up for a break and out of the desert would come these wogs. They had no water or food
- 10:30 and they would be after 'backsheesh' and we'd hand out a smoke or something. That used to amaze me. Anyway one time we went through and we struck a wind storm and it just polished our cars like it was stainless steel. Took the paint clean off them. When we got to Ismailia they handed us a bucket of khaki paint and a handful of sand so we painted it and threw the sand on it. That was great.
- 11:00 Anyway we ran into a couple of air raids while we were at Ismailia. One day we were at the bridging school which was on the Sweet Water Canal which is a tributary of the Nile. One day we were doing this bridging work and there were these girders. They were 480 pound and someone said, no one person could lift that and I said, 'I can.' Which I did and that night I was in terrible pain and the next day I was on my
- 11:30 way to a place called...it's on the Suez Canal anyhow...I'm sorry. Anyway it was a hospital and the next day I was on the operating table having my appendix out. It was touch and go apparently. It was swollen and inflamed.
- 12:00 El Kantara. There was a ferry at El Kantara, also the AGH. Anyhow one morning when I was coming out of chloroform...there was a poor fella who came in. He had been smashed up badly by that 'Bardia Bill', the big gun that the Jerries [Germans] used to fire from about 30 mile. Anyhow when I was coming out of chloroform I must have been talking about Collaroy,
- 12:30 where I came from, and this poor emaciated wretch said to me, 'You wouldn't know Billy Abbott from Collaroy would you?' I said, 'Yes, and who are you?' He said, 'Don Welsh.' Well he was in the 2/17th Battalion. They put him alongside me for the few days I was there, but prior to this at Manly High. I
- 13:00 clobbered up with him. I'm a bit anti bully and this big fella was giving him a bit of a flogging in the ablution block this day and I took the fight away from Don and gave this bloke a couple and made a friend for life. Anyhow, I had to go and Don, I don't know where he got to. I made enquires. I've even contacted his unit,

- 13:30 and one day I was talking to one of my mates who was ex-navy, he was a bit younger than us. He said, 'Donny Walsh came to school one day to Manly High. He said he had two sticks and he gave us a bit of a talk.' So he got back to Australia but I could never find him. Even though last year ...the year before last I enquired and no one seemed to know where he got to.
- 14:00 The worst part about it was, his Dad was in a wheelchair from the First [World] War, and some bright spark sent him an envelope with three white feathers. I joined up fairly early but Don would have been in 12 months before me. We were the same age so he would have been 17 when he went overseas. That's what made me cranky more than anything else. But anyhow...
- 14:30 life goes on. Anyhow, then I had the best three months I've ever had. The sent me down to a convalescent camp to Zikhron Ya'aqov. It was in between Haifa and Tel Aviv. They had their own orchard. They had billiard rooms and good food and I was there for I suppose another month or so before I went back to the Engineers Training battalion where I became an
- 15:00 X-List. I was allotted to my unit by this stage. Anyhow one morning the CO [Commanding Officer] said, 'Fall out any lifesavers.' Well four of us fell out. One was a lieutenant. Ellis Flint from Queenscliff. His brother and I were good mates. Actually his Father and my Dad were good mates too. And a chap by the name of Bill White from
- 15:30 Wide Bay up here in Queensland and a chap from Dee Why and me. I can't remember his name and I, we got on the beach patrol at this Nusrat. We used to go out and wait for the infantry to march over and have a swim and have a meal. That's what we did all day. Just swim. The best job I've ever had. The tucker was crook. We only got bully [canned meat] and biscuits and a hand full of tea. But the conditions were A1 you know. The next thing I know I got a call up
- 16:00 to go back to a place called Quastina and join the 2/4th. Well it was like coming home. All my old mates from the training days. I never looked back...I had a great...from the minute I stepped in the unit I was accepted. One of my first jobs was...they told me to drive the 2IC, a chap by the name of Bill Rouse and the sergeant major, Sess Kemp
- 16:30 into a place called Hofa, a little village between Quastina and Tel Aviv. They wanted to go to a night club. Well, when we got into the nightclub, he said, 'What am I going to do with you?' So I said, 'I'll just have a snooze.' Anyway, he took a pip off each shoulder and he put them on me. So I went in and had a great time you know. That's the way it went with the 2/4th right through. It was fantastic.
- 17:00 It was funny. One night we ...it was like being a lot like Abos. If one's got a quid everyone's got a quid. Well, this afternoon, we're broke. I had a pair of shoes. When I was swimming I used to run an account with the local mercer. I used to have a pair of shoes or a sports coat or something. It might take me a few weeks to get it you know. Well, I had this pair of Zugg brogues. They were pig's skin
- 17:30 brogues. Beautiful shoes. And of course privates weren't allowed to wear shoes in the army. You had to wear boots and putties and long socks. Anyhow I took them down the road and there were these women working on the road in Palestine. I took them around and someone offered me sixpence so I took it. And I took it up to the two up and I built it up to nine pound Palestinian,
- 18:00 which was about twenty five shillings. So we had a party with that. Anyhow, the next thing...oh, I had a swim in the surf race. They had a carnival at Tel Aviv and I ran third. Actually I ran fourth but the Palestinian police chap who won it never went around the buoys. So I was real pleased about that because I hadn't been getting into the water very much.
- 18:30 The next thing we know we're packed up and they issue us with black boots. We always had had tan and they were a pommy boot. We got down to Tewfik and they load us on this rotten old freighter. It was a coaler. It used to ply up and down the English coast.
- 19:00 It was called the Industria. As it turned out it was a godsend for us. Anyhow we get on this thing. Five knots wringing wet it went. We get into India a week behind the convoy at a place called Cochin. We were in there for a couple of days. We had a day's leave and we ...you couldn't buy beer but you could buy Bell's Whisky for nine rupees a bottle. So we had a whisky party and a game of soccer with the kids and the next
- 19:30 thing we know the pommy red cap's have got us and we've been arrested. We're taken back to the ship and the ship's officer, our artillery major, he tongue in cheek gave us a caution you know. But he reckoned that because we had fraternised with the natives we cost the Royal Indian Navy a frigate or corvette or something.
- 20:00 They reckoned they had cancelled it but it was all bull. So that was the last time I had a drink of whisky. Well, we had an uneventful trip to Perth, and then we went across the Bight and oh gee, it was as flat as a pancake. I was praying the sea wouldn't come up as this old rotten thing used to go sideways quicker than it went forward. So we get to Adelaide.
- 20:30 Talk about hospitality. They spoilt us. The first thing we arrived at the dog racing track at Glenelg and they gave us...the meals were absolutely marvellous. Then we...they took us out to Sandy Creek out near Gawler....it was unofficial but the people lined the track, lined the road like it was a procession. Thousands of people. We used to go into town nearly every night, into Adelaide. And do you know

- 21:00 you couldn't buy a beer. You were invited out for meals. So when I think back to what the poor Vietnam fellas went through. We were treated like gods, like kings you know. Well, then we stayed there for a few months and then we went over to Tenterfield by rail. They loaded us onto flat tops in Adelaide and we went through to Tocumwal
- 21:30 and then transferred to more flat tops to Tenterfield and then they gave us seven days leave. I lobbed home and of course I couldn't get into the surf quick enough. I raced down the beach and didn't see this steel picket. They had the barbed wire fence in you know. I kicked that and opened the top of my instep and
- 22:00 I had to have about 12 stitches. I didn't get it stitched until about 10 o'clock the next night No anaesthetic. One doctor. So that was all right and I got an extra seven days leave out of it. Anyhow back we go to Tamworth and we have a pretty good time there. We generally did have to work when we were in these places. Being engineers our little bridges had to be repaired and things like that. Anyhow
- 22:30 we go up to Woodford up on the Brisbane Line [notional defensive line in case of invasion of Australia]. So we did the same thing. We repaired nearly all the bridges around the place and we had platoons nearly into Caloundra and up into Maleny and my job was supplying them with petrol and oil. That was crook because everybody had plenty of petrol and I couldn't make a dollar out of it. And tyres they couldn't get. So that was all right. Then
- 23:00 we would move. I was left in the rear party. We cleaned the place up and it ...this was now Eagle Farm Racecourse, Ascot Racecourse it was. There were four of us and we decided...we had a 2IC then, a chap named Dumphy.
- 23:30 Captain Dumphy. A Lieutenant McKenzie, Freddie Crick, Georgie Campbell, Nick Richards and myself. All footballers. Someone said, 'Let's go to town and have a drink.' We were in our working gear...a closed camp. I said, 'If we go to town we'll get picked up, nothing surer.' Someone said, 'Hey, the Q truck's still in.'
- 24:00 So we go through it and I get the Q [Quartermaster] Sergeant's uniform with 3 stripes and someone else got something else. We all got set up anyhow. We go back to the tent and I started to take the stitches off, and someone said, 'Don't take them off. They'll know we've been at their gear.' So I was promoted straight away. Georgie Campbell came from Southport
- 24:30 and he knew Brisbane and he said, 'The Grand Central's a top pub and the sheila's are good.' So down we go to the Grand Central and we're having a great old time and I happened to be facing the door and in walks the 2IC [Second in Command] McKenzie. And I said, 'Geez, look at this.' Up he walked and of course I went, 'Good evening sir,' 'Good evening Sergeant Abbott.'
- 25:00 Anyhow he shouted and I said, 'Let's get out of here.' So we excused ourselves and the tram used to terminate...I think it was opposite the Town Hall, up under the hill there. Anyhow we were going across one of the roads and Crickie had a football knee and he stepped off the curb and he's done his knee.
- 25:30 So he's sitting on the curb and we're standing around waiting and then along came the Provos. A sergeant in charge and he said, 'What's going on here?' And I said, 'One of the boys just put his knee out, Sarge, and we're heading back to camp.' 'Oh righto Sarg.' And so off we go to camp. It was the longest night I've ever put in I think. I thought, 'Now what's going to happen in the morning when Dumphy turns up?' I shouldn't have worried. He walked up with a grin and said,
- 26:00 'Good morning Sergeant Abbott.' I could see myself going into gaol for impersonating an NCO [non commissioned officer]. And I thought I was in a hell of a fix. I tell you I was that relieved. Actually I wrote that article for our journal. We have a quarterly journal. I called it 'Off the Hook Thrice.' Three times. But anyhow we get on the Anchung I'll never forget it for as long as I live.
- 26:30 The 2/12th Battalion were on it, and...I think they were ASC [Army Service Corps], and us, the rear party. We were on the wharf and I'll never forget, these two 2/12th fellas came up and they're drunk as skunks and the CO came to the rails and said, 'Go on buzz off. You're not coming with us to pick the plums.' I don't know...he must have been as dumb as we were. I don't know what he
- 27:00 had in mind. Anyhow that was all right. We set sail and we get out about three days. It was a Dutchman. It got sunk eventually. I've got the photos there. Anyhow you wouldn't know but we all contacted bloody dysentery. They've got three toilets over the stern. You've never seen such a mess in all your life. Anyhow
- 27:30 we had attached with us, Roy Hodgkinson, the war artist. And he drew a sketch and he's shown all these backsides everywhere, and he called it 'Action Stations'. Freddie Crick said, 'Roy, can I have that sketch?' Roy said, 'What for Fred?' And he said, 'I want to send it home to Mum, I think she would appreciate that.' You've never seen such a thing in your life. We got it cleaned up and eventually we came into Milne Bay. It looked like paradise.
- 28:00 Sun on your right. It looked beautiful until we landed. Right up to your neck and that's when the whatsaname hit the fan. Anyway about a week we were there and of course our unit was in front of us. Anyhow then the Japs arrived. Well, that was a shemozzle [mess]. I don't think anyone knew what was

going on. The militia struck them first.

- 28:30 I finished up with the 2/10th Battalion on Number 3 strip the night they attacked the strip and I've read where they reckon there was 88 Japs [Japanese] killed. But if there wasn't 400 I'm a bad judge. They were four foot deep. I've never seen carnage like it. Lucky Bill again. We were on the flank and we didn't strike much opposition. I think the 9th or the 12th struck most of it.
- 29:00 Anyhow...oh prior to this they sunk the Anchung. I used to be the odd job boy. I was a truckie before I got into the unit and we had a section, or a platoon working on the Anchung. A wharf was being constructed when the Japs arrived. It was
- 29:30 just a dirt wharf and they used to pull alongside this wharf. Anyhow, when I'm going down...of course no lights. I could hear all this shell fire and I thought, 'Gee, the artillery is active tonight'. I get within about 100 yards of the wharf and there's our boys. And I said, 'What happened?' And they said, 'We got sunk.' This Nip cruiser came in and sunk it. And luckily...I don't think there were many casualties at all.
- 30:00 None of our boys were hurt anyhow. Also the hospital ship was in the Bay with its lights all ablaze and it never touched it. It just signalled or something, standby, and just took off. But a mate of mine was on the Kapunda and it was hiding behind the island, Gili Gili Island, and I used to sling off at him, 'Why didn't you have a
- 30:30 go, you mongrels.' And he'd say, 'What, our 4.7s up against 15 inches.' Because this cruiser had 15 inch shells. And of course they panicked. They blew up all the food and panic reigned. Actually I think we were very lucky that we had the air force there. 75 and 76 Squadron
- 31:00 and 100 squadron bombers. And that Truscott and Turnball they worked dark to dark. You would see them landing on the strip with a red lantern on the end of the strip. Mud a foot thick. Look, they can say what they like about the Coral Sea but I reckon these boys saved Australia. They were marvellous. Anyhow eventually we finished and it's all over.
- 31:30 We were marking time. Anyhow one day a couple of boys came along and said, 'Listen, we want you to race Jack Hatten between the new wharf.' It was about 200 yards long, like a U. I didn't know... his reputation in the army, but I knew he was a member of the North Bondi Surf Club. Anyhow I said I would swim against him.
- 32:00 That was the first time I ever got paid for swimming in cash. I finished up beating him and I got £5. Which was good. Another part too. I won the sweep in the Melbourne Cup that year and the fella who ran the sweep I didn't like because they were taking them home just for malaria...because everyone had it. So Bondi's on his way home and
- 32:30 I haven't got my...£8 I think it was. So I hitched a ride on the work boat and once in my life I showed a bit of stomach and I walked up to him and he nearly fainted when I put my hand out to him. But after that...or somewhere around that time I got hit with a bit of shrapnel. We were in this coconut plantation and there was a big bare strip right along it and I had to go over this ford onto the airfield.
- 33:00 Well this Jap plane came down. I don't know why, because he couldn't have seen us. We could see him but he couldn't see us. And he dropped it about 50 feet away. That was all right. But half an hour later my boot was sort of full with water and I thought, 'What's this?' And it was blood. Anyhow I had a bit of shrapnel in my shin about there. I pulled it out and they finished up operating on me and
- 33:30 somewhere there is a scar. Anyway my foot got infected. It blew up like a football and they put a drain in it. I was out for about 20 days or something like that. Anyway in the records it doesn't say that. It says I got spondylitis which is nothing to do with your legs. I think it's spine isn't it.

Definitely not a shrapnel wound.

No. See I only went to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post].

- 34:00 I pulled it out and actually I never felt it. You get that many stings and bites you don't worry about it. All I knew was my boot got a bit squelchy and when I looked, it was full of blood. So that was the end of that. Anyhow the next thing we go on the bantam up to Oro Bay and that was about 100 k's up the coast towards Buna. We became an independent company.
- 34:30 We brought a couple of those landing, bridging pontoons and we tied them together. Oh, there was a coral reef and you couldn't get within about 400 metres of the beach in a ship. So we tied these two together and we landed a truck and a compressor and all our other gear. And our job was to
- 35:00 build a wharf so the Yanks [Americans] who were going to Cape Endaiadere could get supplies to take up. And they also came through that way. Anyhow some bright engineer decided we'd jet these piles down with air. Well then the trouble was, how were we going to get the pipe down? So they made a mask out of a gas mask and you got air straight out of the compressor, like a...similar to a hooker gear. It would have been the first hooker gear.
- 35:30 Anyhow we did the job and one of our jobs, the swimmers, we'd take out about 3 or 4 boxes of gelignite and make up a bomb, dive in, put it in the coral, come back and boom. And the coral disappears. That's

how we made the channel to get the ships right through. In that book I said,

- 36:00 the Greenies wouldn't have liked that very much. Just ruining the coral like we did. Anyhow we eventually got the wharf finished and the Yanks came. Oh, when we first arrived, Fred Barry who was a corporal...well I was a lance corporal, he and I were given the job to try and find gravel so when the Yanks got their equipment we would have gravel for the roads. So we finished up on the hill about 2 or 3 mile away.
- 36:30 We went into this dry gully and there was the biggest one toe foot print you've ever seen in your life. I think it would have made Thorpie's [Australian swimmer, Ian Thorpe] look like a boy's. Anyhow Fred started to go up the creek. I said, 'Where are you going?' He said, 'Up there.' I said, 'No way, let's get out of here.' I had a Yankee automatic and he had a .303 [rifle]. Whatever it was would have eaten us. Anyhow I took over
- 37:00 and we went down and followed the creek down into this big swamp and we landed about four mile from our camp eventually through these swamps and sago palms. We finished up with these thorns. They were about an inch long and they would fester and you'd squeeze them and they would jump out. So that was all right. One day I was told to report to the orderly room with my gear. We had
- 37:30 gear if you were going into action. You had half a towel, half a blanket, your ground sheet plus a couple of tins of bully and biscuits and your weapon and ammunition. They told me to report to headquarters, so I went down and it turns out that me and this orderly sergeant, a chap by the name of Don Tyler have got to carry
- 38:00 despatches to Buna which was about 40k's, or 40 mile, I'm not sure. That was actually a two day march. So off we go, and we did it twice. One time, the creeks were up and we had to wade them. Anyway we came to this village and there was an ANGAU [Australian and New Guinea Administrative Unit]...they were the carriers.
- 38:30 The fella said, 'I can dry your gear and everything but I can't...' I only had a pair of socks, that was the only extra clothing we had. So he said, 'I can dry your gear but I can't give you any food.' We said, 'We've got some bully. We're right.' Anyhow, the nights are terribly cold up there and we had this half a blanket and ground sheet and before the night was over we finished up cuddling each other and putting the blanket on the floor
- 39:00 and the other one on top of us. Anyhow we got through. The next one we got a bit of a surprise. We pulled into one of the villages and there was the 2/6th Field Regiment there and they said to be careful. You see we didn't know then...I only knew until just lately when I saw a map how we skirted where all the action was. We didn't know...the Buna Track they called it. Now, in hindsight we didn't know where we were.
- 39:30 Anyhow that was always a worry. Anyway they said, 'Be careful. There's a patrol of 30 odd Nips [Japanese] out there. We beat them off last night but they're out there somewhere so be careful.' So off we go. This was Don Tyler. He used to sing with Gladys Moncrief. He had no fear and he'd be singing all these excerpts from bloody Madam Butterfly and all that. I was nearly dying of fright.
- 40:00 Anyhow there were big kunai [kunai grass] patches. They might be a mile in circumference and around it was all these trees and you never knew if there was going to be a Nip in the trees or not. Anyhow we get through all right. Anyway, going a bit forward, Don came to my wedding and he said to my wife, 'You know I slept with your husband in the nude don't you.'
- 40:30 So that didn't go over too well.

Tape 2

00:33 **Okay Bill, we were talking about Buna.**

Right well, diverting a little bit, or digressing a little bit. One of the trips we made...we went through two villages. I think it was Napean and Embogo, and one of the Napean infantry boys had come home to see his Mum. He had his MM [Military Medal] on his shirt and it was just like you and I coming home to greet your Mother.

01:00 She embraced him and that and I thought it was great. It's no different no matter what you are or who you are. Anyhow...can I start...well I did that twice. In the meantime...I'm sure these footprints that ... the Japs had outposts in the hills you know. They started to bomb us

01:30 and anyhow one day, I was just near the wharf and they started. I was laying on the side of the road and something cut my finger off. I don't know what it was. I don't know if it was a bullet...the Yanks used to go a bit crazy....the Yanks were there at this time and they would shoot at anything. And it whipped the end of my thumb off. We had no doctors. We only had the RAP. We only had a tent flier to sleep under.

- 02:00 I used to tie it up with that to try and take the pressure off you know. Anyhow that was all right. Well then...was it before...anyhow Eichelberg, the Yank general had his men up at Cape Endaiadere. They were there for six weeks and they couldn't advance. So they came down, or he came down and he saw Brigadier Wooden,
- 02:30 our 18th Brigade and Wooden went up and inspected it. 'How long do you reckon it would take for you to take it?' He said, 'An hour and forty five minutes.' He said, 'We've been here for six weeks and couldn't advance.' Anyhow the next thing the tanks arrive. General Stewart's. I'm not sure of the regiment. Either 5th or 7th, something like that.
- 03:00 Anyhow we had the job of carrying them up on a lighter. A lighter that we used at Milne Bay and we could put two on that. Anyhow we did that. Anyhow...one night....you see we had to put our own defence out
- 03:30 and in came this jeep, motor roaring and the next thing this Yank's yelling out like a stuck pig. 'Where's the officer of the guard?' No one answered. 'Where's the sergeant of the guard?' No one answered. 'Where's the corporal?' 'That's me.' And it's this General Igelburg. Well he strips me to threads, I don't know what for. Anyhow it didn't concern me very much.
- 04:00 It turns out...I've got it in the book. It turns out he had come to our perimeter. I don't know how he got that far in the jeep. He must have either come down by landing craft or something and they dropped him somewhere near our camp because the creeks were four foot deep. Anyway this Lucky Woods stopped him. He threatened to run over him. He wouldn't give the password. So Lucky said to him, 'Look, either you give the password or my mate
- 04:30 will blow you out of the jeep. You've got a Bren gun on you now.' Well Igelburg didn't like that and I copped the brunt of it.

What did Igelburg make you do?

No, they made him give the password. You have a different password every day. A different one. He was just big headed, too big to give the password. And that's a no-no see. Everyone gives the password. Anyhow the next thing, he comes down...we're only living in

- 05:00 these tent flies and he pulls into the camp yelling out for the officer of the guard. So in I go and he tears me to threads. So that's all right. I don't know where he went from there. Anyway the next morning I'm walking down and I don't realise I'm outside the OC's [Officer Commanding] tent and Fitzzy Fitzsimmons started slinging off at me and I took this Yank off in a Yankee voice and the next thing a quiet voice said, 'Do you mind coming into my tent
- 05:30 Corporal Abbott.' So our major tore me to threads too. So they called me Bones after that. No flesh on me at all. But it was funny...we never thought much of the Yanks. As it said in the book, we weren't too concerned about them.
- 06:00 They were all full of bull and that. So we kept doing things. One day I got a message...oh, another day, Gelbart said to me, 'I've got to go to Div [Division] Headquarters; I want you to take me.' Well this Buna track was about six feet wide and it was about a million years old. And of course there were all these creeks and that.
- 06:30 I don't know how I got him through and we nearly finished up in the fighting. He reckoned I couldn't drive for nuts and I told him to drive it himself, and it looked like being on for a while. Anyhow I got him there and got him back. The next thing I was told to go and get me gear. I said, 'Where am I going?' 'Go and get your bloody gear.' So up I go
- 07:00 and get my gear and come back, and I had a chat with Sergeant Fred Lumburger. 'You're going to SME [School of Military Engineering] in Sydney. But you've got to walk to Popondetta.' I think it was either Popondetta or Dobodura. One of the two. It was out from Buna. But we had to walk up which is what we had to do. So that ended that campaign for me. I then went to school at SME at Liverpool. Anyway we got a plane the next day to Moresby. Then we got a plane to Cairns. And we got on the train and we went straight through to Sydney...12 days in the same clothes.
- 07:30 What we did, we'd go to where the train was watered and splash ourselves. When we got to Maringal they re-equipped us and I reckon our clothes stood up on their own they were that dirty. That was all right. They gave us winter clothes and we got on the Manly boat to go home. I got malaria. I've got a greatcoat...this is February...I've got a greatcoat on and I'm shaking and the kids
- 08:00 thought it was great fun. So I get off the Manly ferry and I was that crook I couldn't lift my kit bag onto the bus. This elderly lady she gave me a hand and I got on. Anyway I got home and our house at Collaroy used to have a stable door. I knocked on the door. I had a big cold sore, I'm about 10 stone wringing wet, Mum opened the door and promptly fainted. She thought she had seen a ghost.
- 08:30 So off we go and we go to Coosula. Well, the first few weeks they couldn't understand why they couldn't...they had to run about 3 ks of a morning...we couldn't make it. They just didn't understand that we had come out of a forward area, crook tucker and everything. Anyway eventually we got going and I got into the river every day.

- 09:00 I would have a swim and I started to swim well and two days before I went home, back to camp I mean, I went to a surf carnival...the only surf carnival I went to down there. I won one race. So I had a good time. The next thing, we get back to Ravenshoe and there's only a skeleton crew. Our boys were forgotten in Buna. They were left about 3 months longer than they should have been and
- 09:30 they lobbed home virtually the same time I came out of the school. I thought I saw them...I was coming up on the train. I thought I saw some of them on the train going down. Anyway I get back to Ravenshoe and the next thing I'm quartermaster sergeant, acting. Well, I gave everybody everything they wanted. Everything that was there and I was also in charge of the canteen. One morning the tin box with about 200 quid in it is gone. Well, they didn't suspect me.
- 10:00 I'm sure. Anyhow that was all right. Another day I get a call for me to report to CRE [Commander, Royal Engineers] to Colonel Thompson, our CRE. He tells me he wants me to drive General Vasey in our staff car. He said, keep your mouth shut and your ears shut and so forth and so up I go up to Atherton. I report to Div Headquarters, sent back to the lines and the next thing I'm called to go
- 10:30 back to the office and out comes the general, General Vasey. I salute him and open the back door, but he said, 'No, I want to sit in the front so I can have a look at the view.' So I think, 'This is lovely.' So anyway off we go. The first thing he says to me is, 'Where do you come from, son?' 'Collaroy, sir.' 'Oh, I know it well, I used to go there on my holidays.' Well, we became good mates. We used to talk about everything.
- 11:00 After about 14 days I had to drive him and his aides...oh, all his aides sat in the back. Anyhow they go to Mareeba and I help him on the plane and he wished me luck. So I thought, 'What am I going to do. I'm half way to Cairns. I've got an aunty and uncle in Cairns', so I thought, 'Well, I'll go down to Cairns for a couple of days, which I did. I put the car in the Provos [Provost or military police] depot with my G2,
- 11:30 the paper work. Had a couple of days, picked it up and drove back. Well, when I got back, I started spreading all these furrphies. I'd be in the toilet or down the shower and someone would say, 'Do you know where we're going?' 'No.' 'Someone heard the general say we're going to Ambon.' We were going all over the place and I used to nearly bust myself because I started all this. So anyhow, that's all right, we go to New Guinea,
- 12:00 to Moresby this time, on the Taroona. We were camped at Pompom Park, you might have heard of it. Anyhow the next thing there was about six of us selected to go up to Lai and Nadzab. So the morning we were leaving, we had to leave early...prior to breakfast there was this giant explosion, a bomb. Anyhow I
- 12:30 had claimed a mate of mine, actually he was an orphan. He just about lived with us at Collaroy. And I claimed him in the unit and he was in my section. And I said, 'Jack this is your first air raid.' So off we go and when we got to the airport, the Provos [Provosts - Military Police] turned us back, sent us back to camp. Well, what had happened, a Liberator had crashed into Don Company of the 33rd Battalion and
- 13:00 just about annihilated them. It's in the book. About 99 killed out of 1000. We didn't know until about lunchtime. Well, we didn't get going then until a few days after that. We followed...we came into Nadzab and we were attached to the 21st Brigade. Then we went out to the Ramu Valley up to a place called Dumpu and when we got there
- 13:30 they brought in a couple of bulldozers in halves. They had cut them in half and we had to pull them out of the planes with a pair of shoe legs and assemble them. And then we had to build a road from Dumpu up to Shaggy Ridge. That was five or six thousand feet. A jeep track. Well, off we go and we worked three six hour shifts from dark to dark. Anyhow, on morning shift we
- 14:00 would run into two brigadiers and the general, Brigadier Eather, Brigadier Dougherty and General Vasey. And then the afternoon, the jeep would go as far as we were and pick them up to bring them out. I ran into him a couple of times...he was a terrific man. We had to have it finished by a certain time on Boxing Day.
- 14:30 Anyhow I was just finishing it and in came the jeep with all the top brass in it. General Vasey put his head out the back window of the jeep and gave me the thumbs up, so that was all right. When they piled out there was Field Marshall Blamey, Eather and Dougherty and Vasey. Well, they started the attack on Shaggy Ridge with these Mitchell bombers with cannons in them,
- 15:00 75 mil [millimetre] cannons. A little Boomerang led them in. One of our little fighters led them in. They were all there watching it and Vasey put his hands behind his back and he gave me a double good luck sign. That's all right. He would acknowledge you. He was an amazing man. Anyhow I went down with MT and BT, malaria and suspected typhus.
- 15:30 I was crook for I don't know how long. This male nurse, I don't know what his gender was but I had my doubts. He used to stuff food down me; force feed me, like a little baby. One of my mates came down to see me and walked right passed me I was that crook. Anyhow I got well enough to be sent to Nadzab
- 16:00 and I get on the Douglas, the DC3 [aircraft], and you know who was sitting opposite me, the general. He said, 'Hello son, how are you?' And I said, 'Pretty good, sir.' 'You don't look too bloody good to me.' Anyhow, that's all right. Eventually I came back to Dumpu and we camped at a place called 'Guy's Post' where the road ended, and we were cutting tracks to get the wounded out. We had a little saw mill and

we used to cut strips like planks

- 16:30 to make steps. It was taking them about 12 hours to get the wounded out. Anyway, along came the general. Well, Arthur Moss was our sergeant and we're all there talking...oh, whenever he came past he would say, 'Cigarettes boys.' Lovely man. Anyhow he leans over...and Arthur's leaning on his shovel and he said, 'Well sergeant, I suppose you're worried we might leave you behind this time are you?' And Arthur said, 'Not unduly, sir.' He said, 'You're coming with us this time, don't worry about that.'
- 17:00 You know, with all his worries and he said a simple thing like that. Well I never saw him again after that and then he got killed. He was killed down at Trinity Beach. I went down last year when we went up to dedicate our plaque. I went down to look at his plaque and it's only this...it should be this high. He was a mighty man. A mighty man.
- 17:30 **He got killed by a Japanese bomb?**
- No, no, the plane crashed. Oh, I'll show you the letter he wrote to us. He wrote to all his units. God, he was a compassionate man. It was like he was writing individually. He left us before we did the Balikpapan and he must have been pretty sick because he said,
- 18:00 'He hoped to resume his command when he got over his problem.' So I don't know what he had wrong with him. Anyhow the whole crew and everybody in the plane was killed.
- Did it crash of its own accord or did...**
- Yes, something happened and it crashed, yes. That was near Cairns, Trinity Beach.
- That's very sad.**
- Yes. So off we go and you wouldn't believe it, we get
- 18:30 on the Duntroon and a lad walks up...this had been all my life from day one...someone would know me. When we were on the Industria, we had a big pipe that went over the stern and we would all walk under the water every day, whenever you liked. This day I go down there and there's this big fellow from North Narrabeen Surf Club, a massive man, and I said to him, 'How would you like to be down the
- 19:00 alley?' That's a good spot for surfing at Narrabeen. He said, 'Who are you?' I said, 'I'm Bill Abbott.' He said, 'Oh, Bonny's boy.' That's my Dad. Well, he was the officer's cook. Anyhow he said, 'Don't have anything to eat of an evening, come up and I'll fix you up.' Well the food. Anyhow we finished up...after the war he had a fish
- 19:30 shop at Narrabeen, in the big provedores and he used to come to my place, all hours of the night. He would knock at the door at about 10 o'clock at night. The kids used to call him Uncle Don. He was about 20 stone this chap. Lovely fella. That was that particular time and then when I got on the Duntroon this boy, the bosun's boy, the deck boy I think they used to call him. He said, 'How are you Mr Abbott.' He was a boy from
- 20:00 Collaroy. The same thing, the tucker was A1 [food was great]. I got the best of tucker. That was great. Anyway we had 50 days leave and then we came back and we went to Kuri again. Well, we boxed and we swam and we played football and we were super fit. The next thing they call on us to form this underwater demolition unit. We used to swim in, practice blowing up these obstacles
- 20:30 at Trinity Beach. Anyhow we never had to do it as it turned out. We had no gear, we had nothing. The charges were made up by ourselves and we had to get gear. Over in Borneo, in the Malacca straits, the tides are 25 feet high. They run like rivers.
- 21:00 But anyhow so off we go and eventually we go to Balikpapan. We went up on a LST [Landing Ship Tank] and the first few days we struck a cyclone which took us 80 mile below Cairns where we started from. It took all the pontoons off the side of the LST and everything. Then we get to Milne Bay eventually
- 21:30 and then we went to Wewak and then to Morotai. Morotai was half held by the Japs and we did a landing on the Jap side but no, they didn't want anything to do with us. So we went and did the landing. We landed on in those alligators [Tracked Landing Vehicle]. The Yanks who did the later landing did it. Anyway our job was to clear tracks up...the Yanks had
- 22:00 a frigate which used to fire 200 rockets at a time. It would fire 200 and then turn around and fire 200 and of course half of them never went off. So we had to clear tracks to get our equipment up after the landing. This Gus Hurley and I...Gus was a hilly billy, a lovely big bloke. So he and I were working away and stacking things away
- 22:30 so the alligator could go up. Also we ran into...they had mines made into booby traps and shells made into booby traps. So we're working away and the next thing there's a hail of bullets and Gus said, 'Let's get out of here.' And I agreed with him. We'd gone 100 yards passed the infantry. Anyhow as we were coming back...we had rechecked our
- 23:00 way and for some unknown reason I went up to this alligator and you wouldn't know, but the one I came in on, we had straddled this 15 inch shell that had a plunger on it and the plunger was that far off the

bottom of the thing. Another 3 feet and we would never have made it. We would all have been blown up. Anyhow I went and got the captain, I think it was a captain, a two bar Yank bloke. I said, 'Look at this.' Well. he went the colour of

- 23:30 the wall. He went that white. He said he had been sitting there thinking they were safe. All they had to do was move forward a yard and they would have been gone. But to delouse it you just pulled it out like a mushroom. That was all you did. The same as those depth charge mines, the mechanism was like a jam tin. They had two bits of wire holding it and then a wire through
- 24:00 to a tunnel. What we used to do was grab the wire and cut that and then pick it out. That was all, safe as a bank then. But they were effective because there was about 400 pound of explosive in it. Anyhow we take that...there was a bit a story in there. I wrote to the Reveille about it because someone had reckoned that we never struck any opposition. Well, we were being fired on when we were coming in on those alligators. As soon
- 24:30 as we hit the beach, these infantry boys were like a football team, a well oiled machine. They would clean these pill boxes up in about two seconds flat. Actually we were envious of them. We couldn't be in it. We had to do our job. We had a job to do. Anyhow after the campaign's over, we shouldn't have worried...oh, also, when we attacked
- 25:00 with the infantry we used to blow...as we progressed, we used to blow the tunnels in. The Japs were notorious for tunnels. A bit like the Vietnamese. They'd drop the rifles and Owen guns and you'd have to pack the timbers and blow it. It was a hairy job because you never knew if someone was going to race around the corner and blast you. But anyhow, after the campaign....they estimated that we entombed over 2000, so we did our job too.
- 25:30 Anyway we were going up this sunken road, the whole battalion, the 2/10th Battalion and us and in came this Yankee Corsair and rocketed us, killed 16 of the infantry boys. We were lucky, we were right under him. We were safe. Anyhow we take this hill and dig in. We called it Parramatta Ridge. You've never seen anything like this.
- 26:00 You see, we patrolled constantly, that's why I reckon our soldiers were so good. We knew virtually what was going on. They sent a patrol across this valley and the next thing they came back at the double and down the valley came this oil burning. 200 feet high the flames were. They were higher than we were and we were 200 feet off the ...it just missed the patrol. They had ruptured these tanks and set fire to them.
- 26:30 You've never seen anything like it. The next morning, half of the platoon had to go down to Div Headquarters, the 25th Brigade had arrived without any engineers. The 2/5th, our sister company was out in the water somewhere. They had got lost somewhere. So we dig in. At first they were shelling, a bit spasmodic you know. We dug in and parked about 20 feet away was
- 27:00 this....one of those big tanks, a Crusader or something. It weighed about 50 or 60 ton. These two fellas climbed underneath it. I thought that's not a bad idea. It would be pretty safe. About 10 o'clock these screams started. The tank had broke through the crust and just squashed them to death. It went on for hours before they died. Anyhow I had dismissed this out of my mind
- 27:30 and Billy Burnheart who was with me in my hole, he said to me about three Anzac Day's ago, 'Remember the day those guys got squashed.' I had forgotten all about it. But there was nothing we could do. You couldn't move it. You couldn't lift it. So that's all right.

But how did they get squashed?

The weight of it broke through the surface and it just pinned them. You couldn't do anything about it. Anyway to make it worse, the next day we were heading

- 28:00 up...we were going there and the 2/12th is going that way, and two of our boys, a sergeant and a corporal...we always travelled at the tail end with headquarters. They didn't want us mucking up their fighting. It was all right when you were on the perimeter, they wanted you there. Anyhow, we're talking to them and without a word of a lie, we
- 28:30 wouldn't have got 30 feet away and we never ever found them. They were blown off the face of the earth. I actually asked our committee if they would like me to mention this but their family would never have known what happened to them. A chap named Jimmy Hoskiss was the sergeant and Jimmy Melville was the corporal. Anyhow that's all right.
- 29:00 I didn't know where we were at this stage because we were just following like sheep. So we get up and we dig in and the next thing the company runner said, 'Where's the senior sapper corporal?' I was back as a sapper by then but that's another story. We're going up this track....they were booby trap happy the infantry. They were scared of booby traps. We had a car once and we put on it, 'bobby trapped' and they'd walk around.
- 29:30 There was nothing in the car. Anyway we're walking up this ridge. Curly Gorman is this chap's name. He was with me and the next thing we get blown off our feet. A mortar burst about 3 metres up in the air. The poor fellow down here had his head sliced open like a watermelon. So when we get up there it

was nothing to worry about. It was a little frame that they used to put three little bombs in and the bombs would leave it and

- 30:00 it would fall down. It was stuck in the ground but it looked like it had these antennae sticking up you know. After digging round a bit I discovered there was nothing wrong, so we go back...prior to this, when we were leaving Div Headquarters we were told that anything we saw of importance to send a sig back about it. About tanks or anything like that. So we're going up this
- 30:30 bit of a track and I look across and there's a big gaping tunnel, wide enough to get a vehicle in. So I said to these two fellows who were with me, 'I'm going down to have a look at that to see what it is so we can send back a message if it's anything worth while.' So I did. And when I got in there, there were these big radio valves. They were about 8 foot high and about 2 feet through.
- 31:00 Chockablock and also other radio equipment, so I head out to go back up the track and when I get half way up the track, there's a Jap who had committed hari kari [suicide] in the meantime. So I thought this is lovely. So I wedge my way around him and up I get and when I get up there they were gone. Anyhow, if you've ever been real scared, I was scared that day. I thought what am I going to do, where am I
- 31:30 going to go. I didn't know the area, didn't know anything. I looked on the ground and there's these steel heel marks which we used to have on our boots. So I followed them for about a mile. I was petrified. Anyhow you wouldn't believe it, I found them up under the lee of an old dry creek having a rest. But the two silly coots...thought I had gone. Anyhow didn't I give them a bit of abuse. Anyhow
- 32:00 they let me down again later. So that's all right. We take a hill...I forget...it would be in the 2/31st records; either Nail or Nurse, which we took without much trouble. But in the night we had a decent sort of a raid. Anyhow about dawn they sent a patrol out along this big flat valley
- 32:30 and they were coming back. They had had a look and they were coming back and the Japs got them. I don't know if they were mortaring them. I think it was mostly artillery fire. So we're on the sky line and we're barracking them see. The next thing, I'm flying through the air and I land on a ledge and they decided to give us the works. So that's okay. I shook myself
- 33:00 and got up and down in the valley is this water tank. So I thought I'll go down there and check it out. As I went to go down the captain, a chap named Livingston said, 'You'd better give those fellas a hand while you're down there and bury those Japs. This tank had a burst of machine gun and what I did, I got some box wood and I plugged all the holes to stop it from leaking,
- 33:30 then I went to help with these fellas. You have no idea. They were 20 stone, these Japs. With little caps like a cup with a little white anchor on it. They were monsters and they had been wounded prior. They had dressings on wounds. They were monsters, these blokes. We were lucky. Actually our position was A1. That helped us I think. Otherwise they would have got us, overrun us.
- 34:00 But anyhow that's all right. We go up to take a hill called Liverpool Feature. The artillery were shelling it and we went up and were laying on the backward slope of this creek waiting for the barrage to lift so we could attack
- 34:30 and a machine gun gets stuck into us. One of those woodpeckers, and he was in a tunnel somewhere. We couldn't find him; we didn't know where he was. This chap who was with me, the runner, he copped it right at my feet. Anyhow, we get him on the stretcher and he'd fall off. Talk about a shemozzle. Anyhow they got him but he died. His time was up. He shouldn't have been there but yet
- 35:00 he wanted to stay and he copped it. Also while this is going on, there's a Liberator came round...there was a big group of trees about 400 metres away and apparently, we found out later...this Liberator...the skipper was a chap named Jack Redman. He was the squadron leader. He played football for Balmain and represented New South Wales. He was due to go home and someone went to the airport, one of the diggers and said,
- 35:30 'I want someone to take me out and have a look at these trees.' Well, as he did, he came round like this and as he did the little Nip twin ack ack [anti-aircraft] gun hit him and straight into the deck. Anyhow eventually we took this ridge...oh, we've got 30 pound of TNT [explosives], and dets [detonators] and primers and gelnite, each three of us. When they say go,
- 36:00 these two blokes went the other way and they left all this gear and left me...one person to look after a whole company. Anyhow we take this hill and we were getting shelled all the time. One night there's an explosion in my slit trench. I got a bit of shrapnel in my wrist and the poor fellow alongside me who I didn't know from Adam, finished up losing his leg.
- 36:30 I sat with him all night putting a tourniquet on it to try and save it but it eventually had to be taken off. Next morning one of the infantry corporals goes out and he digs these two blokes up, these two Japs. This Livingston said to him, 'Take them back to headquarters for interrogation.' He said, 'They won't get there.' He said,
- 37:00 'You'd better make sure they do.' So off he went. But in the meantime the 2/1st machine gunner's sent an attachment over to help us out. We were sort of static. Anyway they came and mounted up their machine gun and sent off a few bursts. It was real good. The next thing, our first lot of hot tucker

turned up. We were about 50 feet away and we rattled our dixies [cooking pots]

- 37:30 with our spoon. They grabbed their dixies and they walked up to where we were and the next thing a shell went boom and that was the end of the gun. The barrel was like a figure eight. You wouldn't believe it. Anyhow we put up with this for a few more days and the 2/25th Battalion came to relieve us. Oh...the top brass, every day would come up. They get on the sky line with their glasses and of course when they'd leave
- 38:00 it would start up again. They used to draw the crowd. The 2/25th came up to relieve us and we were to go into reserve. Well, they started lighting fires and we said, 'Hey hey, don't light fires. We've been shelled for days'. They said, 'She's apples and the next thing whack whack whack. I counted 11 as I walked past. Anyhow that's all right. We go into reserve
- 38:30 and that night we were attacked. Luckily A company copped it not us. Anyhow the captain said to me next morning, 'Make us up a booby trap. It was only virtually for a flash. So anyhow I made it up and we used to have what we called a Murray Switch. The same mechanism as the hand grenade.
- 39:00 You put a cartridge...take the fuel out of the cartridge and put a bit of fuse in and a detonator and that made up a bomb. And then you put a trip wire on. So we were all sitting around and I'm sitting like this and I said to them, 'This is a touchy B...the lever was just catching on the striker pin like ...like just the merest. And I put it onto the ground and bang.
- 39:30 Up it went. Hit my arm, up under my knee, in my groin. They all got a little bit each. So that ended the war for me to be honest. I was finished then. I tell you what, I can't help but admire these doctors. You know who lifted me on the operating table was a doctor. You wouldn't believe. Anyhow that's all right
- 40:00 I go down to CCS [Casualty Clearing Station] and this Bill Burnheart...we used to look after water points and all that sort of stuff too. He came to see me and there was a Yank who got put alongside me. He had more holes in him than a colander and all he could say was, 'It was my own fault. I should not have been there.' Anyway, his mate used to bring him in this big can of chilled juice every morning. Burnheart used to arrive at the same time
- 40:30 and we used to flatten this every morning. They put us on a LST to go to Morotai to the AGH [Australian General Hospital]. There were 34 of us and some were severely wounded. I had my arm in a sling and my leg in a sling and the chap I clobbered up from the 2/14th Battalion, a chap by the name of Frank Spalding, he'd been shot through the arm.

Tape 3

- 00:36 When we got on the LST, someone forgot to give us orderlies and the Yanks wouldn't give us any treatment at all, any help. Well, you know what it's like, a steel vessel and it's a 100 odd in the shade. So we washed them and shaved them and did their toiletries and that, the best we could. Now one chap had been nearly blown in half.
- 01:00 He was very ill. We tried to get oxygen, they wouldn't give us any. We tried to get them to help him up because I had one arm and the other fella had one arm so we couldn't help him up on deck, but they wouldn't do it. He died on us. I'll never forget it. Then one day I was shaving this chap and he said, 'G'day Billy, how are you?' And I
- 01:30 didn't know who he was until I shaved him. I had to laugh. He died just lately and in our journal a lady wrote an article and it was about him. We did well considering we had nothing, but we did our best. I'm cranky about the Yanks though. They just didn't assist us in any way.

Why not, considering the condition of you all?

Yeah well, you'd think so wouldn't you? And as I say there was only two of us who were walking.

- 02:00 The rest were all cot cases. And this poor fella. I mean I'll never forget it. That was a terrible death. So anyhow we go to Morotai and into the hospital and my wounds wouldn't heal. I think I must have copped all the big stuff because I had holes under my knees you could put your thumb in. Anyhow they wouldn't heal so I said to the matron, 'Do you mind if I go
- 02:30 down to the sea?' She said, 'I'll have to see Colonel Star.' He was our colonel in the hospital. Anyway the colonel came down and had a look and he said, 'I can't see how it would hurt. Don't get any foreign body in it.' So I did that and you could see it growing out. Anyhow a couple of days...I had been there a few days and in came one of our boys on a stretcher.
- 03:00 He looked a million dollars and I kept harping at him. 'What's wrong with you, you bludger?' and this thing and that. The sister said, 'Get away, he's a very sick boy.' He had been hit through the chest with an incendiary and they had to take most of his lung out. But anyway after a while I said to this matron, 'What if I take him down...' They always had the physios working on him. So I said, 'I'll take him down the surf with me.' Which I did. The first couple of days he could only swim from me to you and

- 03:30 then he was getting better and better and his wound was growing out and out. By the time they kicked us out he was on his way back to Australia. Marvellous. Anyhow, when we first go into this ward, the fellow who I nursed that night, they took his leg off. And he was a buck jump rider from Lismore. Well, I never saw anyone take it as tough as he did. You can imagine
- 04:00 what it was like when they told him it had to come off. But that was all right. So anyway we go back to the GDD [General Details Depot] and the war's over. Well you wouldn't know, I got into a fight that night, and the next morning we...of course, we got drunk. We bought all the beer we could buy in the town and the next morning this Frank Spalding and I were lying in our cot
- 04:30 licking our wounds and in walks two sailors from our surf club. Two mates. How the hell they found us I'll never know. Or found me. They said, 'Go on, have a shower and a shave and come with us. We're going to have a big feed today.' They were on the Stuart, the naval ship. So we went down and had a great day. We ate food we hadn't seen for years. So we were going back to Borneo then
- 05:00 on the Warrego. It was a survey ship. I'm walking up the deck and this boy from Queenscliff Surf Club, Bobby Richardson. Bob was later a commentator on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation]. He yelled out, 'Billy Abbott' and off we go again. Anyhow we get back to Balikpapan and the town's pool had been blown out. Then Colonel Taylor, he was our OC [Officer Commanding] at the time. He finished up as our CO [Commanding Officer]. He was promoted to colonel. He contacted me and he said, 'Get your boys
- 05:30 and go down and repair the town's pool.' So we did that. And he said, 'Fill it up,' which we did. Then he said, 'You'd better look after it.' So every day was like a swimming carnival. We had swimmers coming from far and wide. And anyhow one day I went to dive into the water and oh god, I couldn't lift my shoulder up. There's a statute of declaration there. The army wouldn't accept it.
- 06:00 One of the other chaps we clobbered up with, he was born in China, British parents, educated in America and fought in the AIF. 'Hank the Yank' we called him. He was on guard, guarding the Jap prisoners of war and anyhow he said, 'Come up with me and I'll get the physio to have a look at you,' which he did. Like a fool I never went to my own MO [Medical Officer] and yet there were officers and everything getting treated by him.
- 06:30 Anyhow he fixed my shoulder up and it never came back until 1988 and I had a couple of car smashes and it played up.

What happened to it?

Well, the three times I got blown over, I must have done it one of those times. I reckon it was the one when I fell about 10 feet. I reckon that might have been the time. They still won't accept it. Not that it matters. It's fixed now.

- 07:00 Anyhow we used to go down the beach and have a swim occasionally and this Bill Burnheart and I go down and there's a lackatoy on the beach, like a native sailing boat. So we take it for a bit of a flip. We get out about a mile and in came one of these tropical squalls and it turned us over. Well, we're heading for Australia at 100 mile an hour and
- 07:30 he said, 'I don't know if I can swim in.' And I said, 'Who's swimming.' There was no way in the world I was going to swim. Anyhow out of this squall comes this Yank landing craft. It came alongside us and they said, 'You in trouble Aussies, are you?' So they towed us in and I didn't criticise the Yanks after that, because they would never have found us. Anyhow that's all right. Just before I left to come home, one of my other mates
- 08:00 has got a little fast supply boat for the water transport. He said to me, 'Do you want to come up to Samarinda for a trip?' So I said I'll see if I can. So I said to the Lieutenant...I used to always put them in the picture. I said, 'Look I want to go away for a couple of days.' He said, 'Only a couple of days?' And I said, 'Yeah, it will only be a couple of days.' So off we go. We've got the General...not Vasey, Milford I think it was. And a couple of Brigadiers. Off we go about 18 miles to this place called Samarinda.
- 08:30 So we pull into the 33rd Battalion's outpost. It was an awesome place. It was like a maze. The banks were high and then the kunai was another ten foot higher and you wound your way up this river. So we get up there and the next thing in comes a work boat and so we decided to go up to town. I don't know if we had to take the officers or not or if we just went up by ourselves. It was a rickety old wharf
- 09:00 and we pull up at this wharf and get off and have a look around and out of the scrub walks this fella from Collaroy. His Father was a test cricketer and his brother was an air ace. Rowan Waddie his name was. He was a friend of mine. 'Where you been?' He said, 'I've been out with the Dyaks [indigenous people] watching that Sandakan' he said. He gave me a hell of a shock. He just walked straight out and nearly right into my arms.
- 09:30 Anyhow well the Japs slaughtered nearly all of those fellas down there. But I only learned just lately that our paratroopers were ready to go but someone mixed it up and made a blue. Anyhow that was that and the next thing I know I'm heading for home. I got home on the Saturday and I started work on the Council. I had already raised a job with the electrical department because I knew

- 10:00 the engineer, the chief engineer at Warringa and so I started work with them. The night I got home my sister won the New South Wales breast stroke championship. But prior to that when I was up in the Ramu, the same thing happened to me. When the Japs had gone, they were on their way to Madang and we formed the front line at a place called Kesawai.
- 10:30 We had nothing to do. All we did was sit round the creeks and that, and one day out of the scrub came these chaps from the 2/2nd Independent Company, and one of them was a school mate of mine, Frank O'Neil. He was ex-Timor. You know the ones who had been in Timor and that. I said, 'Where have you been?' And he said, 'We've been over at Bogajim getting a few Nips.' And another bloke said, 'Yeah and he's bloody mad.' I said, 'Why?' And he said,
- 11:00 'We loaded ready and they piled up their gear to go and have breakfast and we got stuck into them. We got about a dozen. And I said to Frank, let's go.' And he said, 'Oh no, let's get a few more.' He said he was bloody mad. And he was the most unlikely soldier you have ever seen too. Going back...just lately, I was given the job of finding all the ex-servicemen who served
- 11:30 out of (UNCLEAR) Samarinda for an honour role, and I had seen Frank about twice since the war and I thought, 'I wonder if he knows about it'. So I gave him a ring and he said, 'You know, I've got cancer. But I might come up and see you soon.' I said, 'All right.' In a couple of the next editions of the Reveille, he
- 12:00 had died. He was a legend in the unit too. He had been right through from Timor to everywhere. His CO was another surf club chap. Geoff Laidlaw. Geoff was the CO of that battalion. But anyhow back to civvy [civilian] life after that.

Bill I might take you right back to the beginning now so we can go through everything you've told us in a lot more detail. If we could start in growing up in Collaroy.

- 12:30 **Just what that was like at the time. You mentioned earlier that your Dad was a really good bloke. Can you tell us about how you got on with your parents?**

Our family was a bit the same as I am. Our house was an open house. If you and I were mates and we were going away for the weekend somewhere, rabbiting or something, then you could come along.

- 13:00 I took one of my mates away with us for 6 weeks once. People joined the surf club and if they didn't know where to go, they would come to Abbott's place. After the war the same thing happened. The surf club has been very good to us.
- 13:30 I did my first rescue when I was 13. That's what that book's all about. But we used to fossick around in the rocks and then we had the bush behind us and we used to even walk over to the golf course and caddy. Swim the creek...buddle our clothes up and put them above our head and work your way across the creek.
- 14:00 One day...that's in the other part...I was going to write the whole story in one but it's too big. I look through the water and I see this big fuzzy white thing. So I dived down and they're golf balls. I got about 50 golf balls and I got threepence each for them. I was a millionaire for a day. We used to have a great time and as I say, Dad would take you fishing or rabbiting. We were always around the rocks and
- 14:30 I used to even go outside fishing when I was about 13 with the professionals.

Was it your Dad who introduced you to the beach and the ocean?

Oh yes. Dad was an original of Collaroy and he was captain after the war for about 12 years straight. I was born into it. My first photo there I was two years of age. We went to a carnival at Cromer, and of course Mum...

- 15:00 all our family has done rescues. My sister, my Mum, Dad and my brothers.

So you're a family of life savers?

Yes. And soldiers. See Dad had four discharges. He was wounded a couple of times and frost bitten. Uncle Tom...he lost one in Gallipoli and one in...up at Montevardo Maru, the one that was taken to Rabaul...[the ship that was sunk]

- 15:30 he got killed in that. We go back...He had an uncle in South Africa, the Boer War. So we're a bit soldier orientated too I think. I had a great life. I played football from year one, at school and right through. I represented in the President's Cup and then

- 16:00 after the war I played first grade with Manly. I was in the army first grade side in Tamworth. That was a good experience. I was only 19. And then I swam well. I could always swim. I did well.

Bill, what was Collaroy like back then?

It was a country town. A holiday resort.

- 16:30 People used to come down from the bush. A lot of farmers had properties there. Like the Luderviscees

and the Manchees, the Lonregans from Mudgee and all those people up in the hills. (UNCLEAR) the great polo player, he's in that book. They used to come down there. He was one of the greatest polo players. You know Sinclair Hill...you might have heard of him. He was one of the great polo players.

- 17:00 You actually knew everyone. Dad knew everyone and he was a pretty popular fella. I know nearly everyone too. We had a good life.

Did you get on with your brother and sisters?

Oh yes. My sister's dead now, both sisters are dead. My brother will be over...he's from Fremantle. He'll be over on the 30th of the month. My younger brother lives out at Laidley.

- 17:30 He's got a place out there. He's into horses. We're a bit horsy too. We've always had horses and been mixed up with horses. That's another story. I used to get paid two shillings a week to look after a local butcher's cart horses. I had to bring them in, in the morning, groom them, feed them and harness them up. In the afternoon, reverse it. One day I was reminiscing...I had separated from my wife
- 18:00 and I was reminiscing. I thought I must have been about 13 when I got paid for looking after horses. She said, 'Don't be stupid.' She's a bit of a pessimist you know. The phone rang and it was my brother John. I said, 'Johnny, how old were you when Fox kicked you over the six foot fence by the head?' He said, 'Two.' So that made me nine, not thirteen.
- 18:30 So that bugged that argument. But this fella had a trotter. He brought him in, no extra money for me. But he was a gentle thing. He would follow you anywhere. Like a gentle animal. One day I was putting his...in those days as I said it was a holiday area and in winter half of these places were empty. You could get permission to put the horses in their yards to keep the grass down and that. So he followed me up the road and I put him in the butcher's paddock.
- 19:00 I had an old copper and I'm tipping the feed into the copper and look up and see him lash out and I see young John go over the six foot fence and down into the gutter. Shocking. I raced round. Brains exposed. He's got a shoe mark around here. Still got it. His ear's hanging off. So I pick him up and I'm screaming running down the road. I shoved him under Granny Port's tap. How I never drowned him I'll never know.
- 19:30 Anyway eventually...ten weeks he was unconscious. He got right. Played football. He's got one flat side with a big horse shoe mark and a cauliflower ear. He was two. So that ruined that argument. She is a pessimist. I don't know...she's a good scout but we can't get on. I think I was too hard an act to follow.
- 20:00 When I came back from the army I resumed swimming and then I got into football and then we started up...a mate and I started up Dad's...Dad didn't want to go back into business and I didn't. I went onto the council as I said and I was earning good money. This mate brought a truck and got a job carting meat to start with, and my wife said, 'Why don't you be in it?' So anyhow off we started and
- 20:30 within 3 years we had 3 trucks and we owned them outright and we picked up all Dad's old firms. Anyhow we had a block of land each. One day he walked in and said, 'I want out.' I said, 'What's the trouble?' He said, 'It's too hard for me.' I said, 'Gee Tommy....' We were sitting over at Harbord Hill near Freshwater. I said, 'I can see all that place as houses in the near future.' 'No, I want out.'
- 21:00 Then I couldn't buy him out. I only had to give him 750 quid. We started on a repatriation loan of 375 pounds each. Anyhow, I couldn't raise the 750 to buy him out and my wife said...she had some money. She had been in a bus smash at the Spit and she had this money doing nothing, so she said she would buy him out. So we became business partners from then on. So we built it up into a big business
- 21:30 but we were never compatible, we'd fight over nothing. It was shocking, terrible. It was like that for 50 odd years. Anyhow I think...I didn't want to be in the limelight but I was getting write ups in the paper and I was the white haired boy of the district, being in the war and coming out and all this sort of bull. It was a shame but we've got lovely kids,
- 22:00 but the only trouble is they don't want anything to do with their Mother. They chose me. I didn't want it that way but they went my way. There was nothing I could do about it you know. It's a shame. She's out on the farm now on her own. We've only said two words in three years.

Where's your farm?

Out at Quanabow[?], out behind (UNCLEAR) there. Very valuable now. My son's in real estate now. He rang her the other day but she won't listen. She's made

- 22:30 up her own mind. She's a nice person but it's just that I'm the trouble. But other than that I had a great youth.

Can you tell us about your first rescue at 13?

It's in the book.

But let's hear it from you?

Well actually I wasn't a surf club member, although Dad was captain. This Saturday afternoon...of

course I was

23:00 always down the beach. There was one of our elder members with a surfboard with 10 people on it. Down in...Collaroy's got two rips. They've been there since year one. And this is down behind where the RSL is. So we go down and of course I was the swimmer. I go out and I tried to hold onto the board but the rip was too hard.

23:30 After a lot of trouble...I didn't even know the signal. I knew to put your hand up to be pulled in. But I didn't know 'lost patient' and all that. So eventually I took the belt off and we tied it round and they snapped it, snapped the line. So they brought down another reel and I swam in, and I brought it out so we got them in that way.

24:00 In the meantime a couple had been dislodged and they were in the rip going for a sail and so I went and got them. We got 10 altogether. So when I came in, my first linesman was Trigger Travess, a Rhodes Scholar, head of Short College and a brigadier eventually. He tore me to threads for not knowing my signals. I wasn't even a life saver.

24:30 Jimmy (UNCLEAR) the 2IC on the line was an ex Sydney stock exchange chairman, and he got into me. They all got into me. So Dad came running down and he got into me too. It's in the book. The lot of them...I never got one ounce of credit. They all tore me to threads because I didn't know my signals. Oh god.

So you thought you had better sign up and become a life saver?

Yeah. Anyhow I finished up...

25:00 they accepted me but I wasn't even on the books. I won the club championship that year and in the book, it's unknown. Well I had a cup for it. My wife got a bit cranky and she threw all my medals and the Australian championship medal and other medals and all my trophies down the tip. One of my best mates...actually he was my first rescue.

25:30 We used to make little tin canoes out of galvanised iron. It was down...between Collaroy and the Basin we call it 'Little Waikiki'. I was around there. It was a calm day but you always get a little wave in there. A bloke by the name of Dick and his brother Stan...and Dick insisted on having a ride so I put him in it. He was about 8. The next thing he's upside down and he was going for a sail. So I wade out and I drag him in

26:00 and eventually when he got older he ended up beating me in nearly every club championship for about 20 years. So I wish to goodness I had let him drown. He's an AM [Member in the Order of Australia]; he's a great life saver. Really a top life saver. But I've had some fun.

And as kids would you spend some more time with your brothers and sisters or would you hang out with other mates in the neighbourhood?

26:30 No, they'd be mates. My sister next to me, she was two years younger and then John's seven. And of course the war came along and as I said I enlisted at 18 and John was only 13 then. He was a cadet in those days. My mates...my mate who lived next door to me

27:00 I finished up claiming him. As a matter of fact, that book I'm sending to his son. He and I became close mates when from school, like right through school. I claimed him out of the commandoes. He went over the Owen Stanleys [Ranges] in the 2/6th Regiment. He wrote to me one day and said get me out of this lot I'm liable to get killed. So I...Colonel Ray Taylor was our major then, he was a

27:30 real top fella too. If you wanted someone you could get him. So he came and joined us and we stayed together right through and then we started in business together. We played football together and we boxed. We're closer than brothers really. But John has been a good mate since he got older. We've always been good mates. We've never had any problems. I don't like fighting with my mates anyhow. There's no future in that. I can't see any future in it.

28:00 **Did you know much about World War I as you were growing up?**

Yes, Dad told us a bit. Not that much but a little bit about it.

What sort of things did he tell you?

Well I heard things like he got blown out of hospital. He got cut off on the Somme for about six weeks. They had a tin of bully and a packet of biscuits between a section during that time. They used to draw straws for the crumbs.

28:30 He got frost bite. A lot of little things he told us. Nothing gruesome. There were a lot of things....you don't forget about but you dismiss out of your mind. Silly things. But mostly the funny things. I often lay awake...I don't sleep much after midnight

29:00 I haven't for years and some nights I bust myself laughing about things that happened. There were some real comics. Like one night...I could go on forever. I was corporal of the guard at Woodford and we had a thieving so and so. He was a thief. And I got him in the can. Anyhow along came Herbie Ellis

- 29:30 and Doc Hayward. Doc later finished up our RAP [Regimental Aid Post] corporal. Anyhow, Herbie had been the victim of this fella and I had him in the compound and there's an argument. The next thing this creep laid on the ground and Doc Hayward said to Herb, 'Don't you kick him Herb.' He said, 'I'm not going to kick him.' So he lay down on the ground and punched tripe
- 30:00 out of him. I was guarding him, protecting him. Another time, when I had this ankle...we only had an ordinary...one of our trucks was an ordinary two wheel drive. This creep was hitching a ride and I was going down to the CCS and a 6 by 6 was in front of us. He jumped onto the running board and slipped
- 30:30 and he finished up going under the two wheel dual. They bounced over him. The mud was that thick. Anyhow down the CCS they take him and there's nothing wrong with him. When I got out of hospital no one would believe me that the truck had run over him. He was that much of a liar and a cheat and he cried wolf and no one would believe him. I said, 'I saw it, I did with my own eyes.' One Anzac Day he went and grabbed
- 31:00 the flag. That didn't last long...no hide. A thieving damn kid he was. We had some great fellas.

Can you tell us why you joined up in the first place?

I was always wanted to be a soldier really. I couldn't be a permanent soldier, I don't know why.

- 31:30 I don't have time for permanent soldiers as a matter of fact. But I wanted to volunteer. We had a few permanent soldiers who were failures. Of course a lot of them joined up when the Depression was on because it was better than nothing. And they didn't really want to be soldiers. We had one fellow up in Dumpu...there was a book, I don't know if you've ever seen it, with
- 32:00 all photographs. Typical of the Australian Army. You had to ballot for it and I got one. This chap was leaning on a shovel rolling a cigarette. Magnificent style of a man. He said, 'I shouldn't be here.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'I should be back teaching fellas in Australia.' I said, 'Pigs. You should be here as much as we are.' That was their attitude. They reckon they shouldn't have been up there. I don't say all of them, but some of them. That's the only reason. I had too much to lose. That first
- 32:30 year...as I say I was earning good money. In those days it was good money, four pound ten a week. I had a motor bike and I was playing good football and I swam well. See normally I wouldn't have swam that year only for not being called up. I won the Senior Belt Race and I doubt if I was out of a place during that time.
- 33:00 **Why army? Why not the navy...**
- Oh I didn't tell you this story. When I went to Martin Place, this gnarly old First War sergeant...when we were lined up he came up to me and said, 'How old are you son?' 'Twenty one.' Dad wouldn't knock me back but he wouldn't help. He signed the papers, there was no doubt about it. Anyhow he said, 'Buzz off.'
- 33:30 He didn't say that but in those words. So I walked over to Millers Point and I went into the...it's the oldest chapel in the Australian Army and it's also the recruiting office and I enlisted there and then I went down to Woolloomooloo and joined the air force. But I'm glad I didn't go in the air force because I didn't have any education you see.
- 34:00 I didn't want to be a guard or something. When I was at Tamworth I got my call up for the air force. So I didn't go. I had made mates. Actually I could have gone to an officer's school. A mate of Dad's was a captain and he was a bit upset because I had an officer's course at Randwick Race course and I didn't want to go. I didn't think I was up to it. He was real upset. But I'm glad I didn't know because I had made my mates and
- 34:30 I don't think I would have made an officer.

And what did both your Mum and Dad think of you signing up?

Well Mum accepted it but she was like most mothers, she had a heart as big as a horse. She had three kids to look after and my grandfather and Dad away and my sisters were in the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] up in Townsville. I don't know how she did it. They were tough women. But as I say the day

- 35:00 I came home, she thought I was a ghost I'm sure, knocked on the door and I had this big cold sore and I was about that fat. Oh god. She lived until she was 83. A fit woman. She did rescues and she had to resuscitate on one of hers. My sister did a belt rescue one day at a carnival somewhere and they got criticised for using our equipment.
- 35:30 Women weren't accepted in those days in surfing...in the surf club.

Really? Even though your Mother and your sister were both doing rescues?

Yes.

So how was that possible?

Well, the ladies happened to be on the spot. She rescued a kid in a lake. These kids used to come down from the south western Salvation Army. This kid must have not known how to swim and he got in this lake and of course he took a bit too much water in and

36:00 these lakes were full of that algae and I'll never forget...I was at home at the time. We lived three doors off the beach. And Mum had walked down the beach and across the road home and she had this green hanging off her and everything. I said, 'What happened?' She said she had rescued this kid in the lake. She was that ashamed with all this green over her. I said, 'What you should have done was put your chest out and walk through the middle of town'. She was a gem. She could

36:30 surf as well as the average man. My sister was a beautiful surfer. She could ride a wave better than any man. But in our book it says that Betty was in the Land Army. There's a few mistakes but not many. It was the AWAS.

And did your Dad have anything to say to you when he knew you had signed up or were going to sign up?

No.

37:00 No, he accepted it. As I said, if I had been in the Provos he would have gone off his brain but I was in a respectable unit. Dad gave me a good old talk the day he took me back to camp after final leave. He was a bit upset. I could understand that because he had been through all that before.

What did he say to you?

I can't remember now, but he was pretty docile you know. He was

37:30 a good man. He was a good Father. Hard. When I ran the business at 17 years of age and made no money and only procured another truck, he went off his brain. A damn kid of 17. I don't know what he expected. The funny part about it,

38:00 when he enlisted he had these two trucks doing nothing. A chap who later owned the site where the casino is, he had trucks and all sorts of things and they made him a major and he was commandeering transport. They took Dad's two trucks which he didn't appreciate. I don't know. He got something for them but it wasn't much

So was he strict on you as well?

38:30 Yes he was a hard man. Yes he was hard. You didn't get any sympathy off Dad. If it was your own fault you got none. He was a good Father. He was a fit man. He lost his right bicep out of his arm in 1925 I think it was. He had always been in the surf club

39:00 and he was one of the originals as I say. He was painting the reel. I was only three and I pulled the paint brushes out of the water and they got hard. His mate called around to see him. He had lost one leg in the war...on his motor bike. He said, 'You drive and we'll go down the road and get one. Collaroy in those days had no footpaths and that. When they got near the shops

39:30 Bob Larkin jumped off and the bike went straight into the plate glass window. It smashed and cut Dad from there to there. One hundred and eight stitches. The nerves and the muscle went. Eighteen months he was out of commission. Anyhow when he came back the surf club gave him £100 and his boss gave him £50 and he started up

40:00 carrying again with this one arm virtually. He was a tough man. That hand, all bar that finger and that finger were dead. He used to carry things and people would be complaining about their sore arms and he'd say 'I've got a crook one too, don't feint.' He got back to swimming. And someone said, 'How's your arm?' He said, 'It creaks a little bit.' He was a tough man.

40:30 They were hard men then. I think they had to be.

Tape 4

00:32 Dad kept his business going right through the Depression but he incurred a lot of debts which he paid off. Anyhow I was working for him at the time and he gets summoned to appear at Central Court Sydney by the Taxation. Well he and Sir Adrian Curlewis were buddies and Sir Adrian was only a barrister in those days and he said to Dad, 'Would you like me to represent you?'

01:00 Dad said, 'I wouldn't mind thanks, Adrian.' So in they go. Adrian said to the magistrate, 'Your honour, what's a life worth in Australia today?' 'I think about ,£1500 Mr Curlewis. Why do you ask that question?' He said, 'Well Mr Abbott saved so many hundred lives, therefore the government owes him so many hundreds of pounds.'

01:30 And the judge said, 'I think Mr Abbott and Mr So and So had better go outside and work this out between them.' Dad came out and he was busting himself laughing and I said, 'What are you laughing

about?’ And he just told the story. I put it in the book. You wouldn’t believe it would you. Dad never paid a cent. But he was a nice man too, Sir Adrian. He was about 40 years President of the Surf Life Saving.

02:00 He finished up a judge. He was a prisoner of war in Changi [prisoner of war camp]. I was like his godson. He treated me like a son. That was a funny old story that. Now where are we now?

Well I’ve got a whole lot of questions Bill, but I was just going to go back just a little bit. You were born in ’22 is that right? So during your early teenagehood, you were part of the Depression. You witnessed part of the Depression.

Well we

02:30 never...Dad kept us well fed and everything. We didn’t really realise that the Depression was on. We were pretty fortunate. As I say he incurred a lot of debts which he paid eventually but he kept going.

That was my next question actually. You said he was a carrier...do you mean he drove a truck for Woollies or something like that?

No, we were general carriers, we would work for anyone. We would run to Sydney...

03:00 well, Palm Beach to Sydney we used to do. We had motor firms, furniture, Norco Butter and we had produce stores. Our depot was in a produce store...when Tom and I started, we resumed his depot. They were ex-Collaroy members. We used to do Cadbury’s Chocolates, we used to cart for them, Castrol Oil and

03:30 all that sort of thing. Anything. We carried anything. A bit like Anthony Hordin’s. You wouldn’t remember Anthony Hordin’s would you. They used to do that. They used to send a truck out with everything in it. All we ever carted was...we carted butter in boxes and eggs and a side of bacon. As I said, when I ran it you would pull up at the shop and you’d have a clip and the boys would say, ‘What have we got here’, and you’d say

04:00 a box of butter, a bag of spuds and boom boom boom, in it would go. A few years ago in Southport, I said to Jim...he was one of the navy ones, I said, ‘Jim, if you blokes hadn’t helped me get rid of all that stuff in those days I would be still out there trying.’ They would be great. They’d be sitting up there and they’d say, ‘What have we got here?’ It might be a wardrobe...

04:30 **So why was your old man so upset with you that you didn’t make any money? Did that mean that you weren’t trying to get contracts?**

I spent it all, you see. I bought a truck. What should have been profit went on a vehicle. It cost me £275. The banks stuck with me to do it but as I say, after he came out there was no money. It had all been spent on another truck. But what he left me was an old ’27...and I got fined

05:00 ...on my receipt. I was coming through Mosman. I didn’t know. I was driving along the tram line and this thing used to rattle like...it was a shocking vehicle. The next thing a copper pulls me over and it cost me 25 bob for holding up the traffic. And the judge said, it was in the paper in the court topics, he said, ‘Why didn’t you...when they were tooting their horns, why didn’t you let them pass?’

05:30 I said, ‘The truck had that many rattles I couldn’t hear them.’ Anyhow that got in the paper, The Evening Telegraph. But other than that...it was a big thing for a young bloke. See, Dad couldn’t cope on his own; he had to have me to give him a hand when he was going normally. It was a terrible

06:00 truck.

What happened to your older brother?

I’m the eldest.

You’re the oldest. So that would have brought a lot of responsibility in the family as well.

Oh yes, I had to set the example. That was one of his sayings...it’s your job to set the example. That was what I had to do. I did all right. Actually it stood me in good stead because when Tom and I started up again, I just went straight into top gear because when I went with this chap Bill Virtue

06:30 I had to drive. He had a later model truck and everything and he was only a little Scotchman, a lovely fellow. I did all the driving and all the bullocking. I was doing a man’s job so I was getting a man’s pay.

Let me ask you one more thing before we go back to Moore Park where you got recruited. You mentioned something about how women weren’t part of the surf life saving scene

07:00 **in those days growing up. And now they are. Why was that do you think?**

Well the women were treated different in those days. They did have a club of their own but it was like a swimming club which Mum was a member of. They weren’t...actually women were slaves in those days. I used to see my Mother still sewing

07:30 by the hurricane lamp. When I gave her 30 shillings a week, she was getting two bob pocket money to buy her cosmetics and everything. My Father ran the roost. He gave her this two bob a week. As I said

when I wrote the story for the kids, Mum had never seen so much money in her life

08:00 and neither did I. Things were hard.

So you gave them an allocation of 30 shillings a week during the army...

No, no. I gave them Mum...that's another story. I gave Mum three shillings a day and she used to pay two shillings a week for insurance, and when I came out of the army, in the savings bank was £500. She had saved the lot and I spent it on an engagement ring

08:30 for my wife.

The whole lot?

Yeah. In those days it was a lot of money. Easy come, easy go. My mate, actually he's half abo. He was in my section, he came home and his Mother never had a cent. He allotted that sort of money. See I went onto Group 1 in the same year when we were getting

09:00 nine bob a day. So it didn't matter to me. I was still getting as much as the average private was getting. And Mum was still getting her three bob. I was getting more than the average...when we were in Palestine we got an extra sixpence a day for the exchange because we went onto sterling you see. Their pound was twenty five bob...anyhow a bit more than ours. So

09:30 they had to give us sixpence to bring it to the same level.

So she never touched the money that you...

Only paid my insurance. And then I never got what I paid in. I tried to fight it but you were just wasting your time. I didn't even get the money I paid in.

But what was the idea with the insurance with the army? You paid ...

It was only private insurance. One of those little policies they used to take.

Like a health insurance?

It was a life insurance for

10:00 20 years or something like that.

And you never got it back?

No, never got the whole lot, no. I never got what I paid in. And they said I was lucky to get that, the solicitor said.

I know you did that as a private thing, but did all the soldiers do life insurance?

No. No. I would say...not many at all, I would say. Of course most of them were battling. I know when I joined up

10:30 I was 13 stone. A pretty big kid and they were hard men, those early soldiers. I know for a while I used to think I was pretty capable and everything, but I never said a word for about 3 months until I was accepted. They'd sit you on your bum quick and lively. They were tough men. Actually the war was a relief for them because half of them had been humping their blueys and

11:00 working in the bush trying to keep their families. It was a bit of a relief because they were getting paid every fortnight you know. It's funny. That Taylor, he was a mighty man. When my younger sister got killed, she ran underneath a car, there was a fete on at the hall where the RSL [Returned and Services League] is now and she ran straight across and this poor old fella killed her. He didn't even see her.

11:30 Taylor called me up to the office at Keerine[?] and he told me the story. He said, 'Your parents are in dire straits aren't they?' I said, 'I don't think so.' He said, 'Are you sure?' I was a bit upset and I didn't know what I was thinking. I went out to the Orderly Room and there was this sergeant, he was a cobbler, and he said, 'You're bloody mad, all you had to say was "yes"'

12:00 and you would have got compassionate leave, you could have gone home.' And here I am saying, 'No, I don't think so.' There was the man telling me...he couldn't say to me...he was being suggestive sort of thing. But he did the same with my mate. Tom hadn't seen his boy Wesley who's my godson actually. He came one night and said, 'I'm shooting through.' I said, 'I'll see you later.' He said, 'No, I'm not coming back. I'm finished.'

12:30 Anyhow eventually he came back and he had been gone for three months which is desertion. Anyhow, he handed himself into the Provos Master at Victoria Barracks, and the Provos said, 'Where do you want to be charged, back at your unit or here?' He said, 'My unit.' So when he got back it was Divvy Boxing time and Tom did a bit of boxing like we all did and Taylor said, 'Well Tom, what are you going to do?'

13:00 He said, 'Are you going to box or am I going to court marshal you?' He said, 'I haven't got much option have I, sir.' So he got off scot free. That's the sort of fella Taylor was. He was a real gentleman. I know of five cases where he has helped people. One of them, when the war was over...our platoon were top

blokes, alcoholics. They loved grog. These two brothers and Ronny Williamson

- 13:30 decided to drink this Jap alcohol. It was lead alcohol. Torpedo juice and it killed them. Well Terry Ellioton had seven kids and his family would have got nothing, self inflicted. Taylor said he was accidentally killed. That's the sort of man he was. Very compassionate man.

Can I just ask you about the alcohol? What do you mean that it had lead in it?

Yes, it was lead alcohol.

- 14:00 It was deadly just about.

How would the men have known?

Someone had died with it before...out of the 2/12th Battalion. They tried it and died.

Where did they get it from?

Out of the Jap store or something. There's always ways and means. Like they used to brew their...you've heard of jungle juice haven't you? They used to brew jungle juice the same way and they'd drink that. I couldn't do that. I had too much respect for my stomach.

- 14:30 They were ratbags. They were good blokes but they were funny blokes.

So it was Taylor who told you about your sister?

Yes.

And you could have said yes...

Yes.

You could have gone home?

Yes, I could have gone home. It was too much of a shock really. But he put the words into my mouth but I didn't wake up. He was a great man.

- 15:00 I don't know how many he assisted. I know Bernheart, he came from a unit he wasn't happy with. He was made a batman [officer's servant] and he didn't want to be a batman so he boiled the lieutenant's Sam Brown [explained below] and everything, all in one. Of course he was in a hell of a fix.

What did he do, sorry?

His Sam Brown, you know the belt and the shoulder strap. It's what they hang their weapon and their sword on. All officers wear them.

- 15:30 He boiled it with everything else. He came over to Taylor...one of the names I've given you there, Jimmy Tattersall, one of our sergeant majors, he was ...at the time he was our sergeant major. He said to Jimmy, 'Go and get the jeep.' When he came back he said to Burnheart, 'Jump in the back' and he took him over to where the camp was and he said you never heard a row like it. He came out and he said, 'Go and get your gear.' That's how he joined us of course. He thinks the sun shines out of Taylor and

- 16:00 so does this fellow who lives at Labrador now. He's half abo I found out after 50 years, and he was the same. He wasn't happy where he was and Taylor did exactly the same thing. So I don't know what power he had. Taylor was a King's major. He got his majority on the field in Tobruk and after the war... he was also a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] and MC [Military Cross],

- 16:30 but after the war he had to go to London and that's his title in life, was Major Taylor.

Is he still alive?

No. I rang him the night before he died as a matter of fact. He was at Ubina. I was at Danny's place and I said, 'I think I'll ring up' ...we used to call him Ray. We wouldn't call him Ray to his face. But he said to me a few times, 'Call me Ray'. But I couldn't do that. But anyhow

- 17:00 I said, 'We'll ring up Ray Taylor'. Anyhow, I think the nurse answered and she asked, 'Who's speaking?' I said, 'It's Bill Abbott here.' She said, 'Would you like to speak to Bill Abbott, Colonel?' She said, 'He's not up to it, sorry.' 'Thanks very much.' I said to Danny, 'I don't like the sound of that.' He's dead next day. So he must have been pretty crook.

- 17:30 A fine, big man too. A big bar moustache. I got on well with him. I was one of his chosen few. He was good.

You seem to have a lot of mates in the army who knew you from Collaroy, Narrabeen, Manly and all those places? And also after the war?

I never had to advertise in business.

- 18:00 I built up a big business, or Betty and I did. We built it up to 50 registered vehicles. We were wealthy at one stage and owned everywhere. We owned about 7 properties in the Manly area. We tried to breed

these slow racehorses which ...

That's something we'll talk about later if that's all right Bill. I'd like to bring you back to when you first got into the army and you met up with another bloke, the major was it who was the recruiting officer?

18:30 He was only a sergeant. Yeah, Sid Wright. Sid was from North Narrabeen Surf Club.

And he put you in with the engineers?

Yes.

Was that something...were you handy with your hands?

Oh yes. Yes I have always been handy with my hands. I was even mechanicing when I was doing jobs with Dad. Dad was a mechanic originally and I was working on the trucks when I was 14 years of age. I used to grease them and do all sorts of things. Pocket money you know, or to get my pay.

19:00 I had to grease the truck before I got my pay. But I had a natural flare and then I did a diesel engineers course. I was sitting around doing nothing like you did for half the time in the army. I thought I would do a course in diesel engineering. But I was always handy with my hands. I could make anything.

So you were all right about being recruited over to the engineers then?

Yes.

But you had never thought about it?

19:30 No. I would have preferred to have gone to the infantry, but once I made my mates. A chap joined up the same minute and I never knew him from Adam, but then I was with him right through the war. Mick Richards. All that sort of thing. You made these mates and as I say, when that chap suggested I go to the officer's school at Randwick

20:00 I knocked it back. He wasn't too happy, but I had made all these mates and that's a big thing I think, comradeship.

You said before when you were talking to Chris [interviewer]...or maybe it was me, about making bombs and what have you...the detonator and mechanisms and all that...did you do that kind of course?

Well you see in SME we did all that. The School of Military Engineering.

20:30 That's where we did the fighter part. But even there we had sergeants who instructed us just the same. We learned...we did things by the book. We even made Molotov cocktails out of tar and that. We built things...

21:00 we had some superior engineers. Like we built a walkway...a walking bridge up in the Ramu Valley to get the infantry across this big gully. We built it by hand. We stood up 70 feet trestles by hand. Today... actually I said to a couple of engineers...I went to a seminar once, and I said how would you lift a 70 foot trestle up, and they said they would get a crane. Well

21:30 we did it all by hand. And put wire through and made a walk bridge, a single lane thing. As I said to Chris, we had to put these piles in. We jettied them in with air from the compressor and then we made like hooker gear. We were breathing...getting down like a diver. We were divers. All that sort of thing. Just improvised because we

22:00 had to. We didn't have the gear that the Yanks had. We had to improvise something. One time we had a jeep running across two wires, we took the tyres off and it was running back and forth over these two hanging wires. Like a flying fox sort of thing. We had a lot of tricks.

I'm curious to know how you made Molotov cocktails [homemade bombs]?

Yeah, tar and petrol.

They don't usually use tar when you see them on the news do they?

22:30 I think they use anything inflammable really. You'd put a wick in it and it was alight and then when it smashed it would all catch alight. But we never had to use those. The terrain beat the Japs' tanks at Milne Bay. They just couldn't handle the bogs and the ditches and all that sort of thing. We did all sorts of things.

So what was your actual position in the

23:00 **engineers?**

I was a lance corporal for a while. That's another story. I went away...there was an understanding...we had a vacancy for 2 platoon for a sergeant, and I was to fill that if I did all right at SME. Well, I had about a 75% pass. Anyhow when I came back...and after the units had got together,

- 23:30 as I said, they were on leave when I came back to Ravenshoe. The next thing a sergeant appears in our platoon from the armoured div. They disbanded the armoured div and they had all these confirmed ranks and they had no where to put them. So if you had a hole, they would just plonk you there. So I paraded to Taylor about this. He said, 'Bill, I can't help it.
- 24:00 It wasn't my doing. I had no option. I had a vacancy for sergeant and the army put him in here.' So I threw my stripe in. Anyhow I went back to Group One from there. But then I still got corporal jobs. They'd send you out and you'd be the senior sapper and you'd be in charge. Well, I had no authority and these two blokes who walked out I couldn't do anything about it. I was just the same as they were.

- 24:30 I wish I had have been a corporal or something, I might have been able to give them a charge. I don't know what happened there. I decided to soldier on. Up until then I didn't want a promotion. But then I thought I might as well now that I've started. As I say I was told that if I had a reasonable pass it would be there for me. Anyhow it didn't work out that way.

Why did you join the army rather than the navy or...

- 25:00 I think just because Dad was in the army and my uncles were in the army. I don't like confined space. I don't mind shelling or bombing but I like to have a bit of space. I think in those tin cans...not that I run. I'm a fatalist. I reckon I stayed in the one spot. I thought if it was going to get me it was going to get me. There was no way I was going to run like some used to do.
- 25:30 I couldn't do that.

Did you have a girlfriend before you headed off to training?

No. I've never had a girlfriend really. I had girls who used to write to me, but I never had a real girlfriend until I...I met a girl at Burleigh. When we were camped at Dinmore, we were doing a bridging school. This was in '43. I think it was '43. One of our boys,

- 26:00 actually his sister and her husband...her husband was from the Collaroy Surf Club, and they had a weekend at Burleigh and we used to come down from Dinmore in the old train every Friday night and go home Sunday night. And this weekend was our last weekend and I met this lass at Burleigh. I knew her for about two hours and she used to write to me. Anyhow she wrote to me until the end of the war. She lived
- 26:30 at Glen Innis. She lived at Kyogle originally. Her Father had a property outside of Kyogle but she worked at the bank at Glen Innis. After the war I invited her down to Collaroy for a week and then she went back and then I...actually I had seen my wife...it might have been that year...the year I finished up at SME.
- 27:00 It was at Whale Beach at a carnival. The only carnival I swam in that year, and I saw this luscious girl. I thought well I'll never see her again because I was leaving next day to go back to the unit. Anyhow this girl came down for a week and she went home, and I went to the pictures this night and there's this girl at the door. Of course I got to know her
- 27:30 and then I...it got serious and then I had to go and tell this other girl that I couldn't write to her. I had to go up to Glen Innis to tell her. She was heart broken. But there had been nothing between us luckily. I was glad. I never knew her long enough. I only knew her for a week and two hours. Anyhow, we eventually got married and we came to Currumbin on our honeymoon.
- 28:00 You know, a head came over division...you wouldn't remember the old Currumbin pub would you? This girl put her head out and said, 'Hello Billy.' Of course my wife never spoke to me for three weeks after that. I don't know why. There was nothing in it. I just couldn't write to her and say, 'Look I've met another woman', or another girl or something like that. I had to go and see her. That 'Dear John' business; I couldn't put her through that. Anyhow...
- 28:30 the other day we were swimming at Coogee. We swim in the winter as well as the summer. This lady was talking about the war and that...I knew this girl had finished up living at Mooloolaba and I said, 'You wouldn't know Nancy Stevens would you?' 'Oh yes, a tall blond girl?' 'That's her.' She died just lately. I had never contacted her since and that was '47.

29:00 You don't know if she ever married?

Yes, she got married. And she married a no hoper. That's what this woman told me. He was a drunk and everything. She was a nice kid. Oh, going back a bit. She swam in the State...oh a good swimmer, a good all round athlete. My sister was swimming and this girl was just about to swim in an event and one of our officials said to her, 'Your brother's just been killed in England.' Why wouldn't they have waited until she was finished or something.

- 29:30 Of course that caused...he was the only son too and there were about five other girls. There's some creeps around, silly people around, isn't there. But that's about the only girls I had. I've taken out about three girls in my life. I'm not queer or anything, I've just been too busy.

Maybe you were a bit shy as well?

Well, yeah I was. I'm still shy.

Bill let me ask you about the first lot

30:00 of training that you did. How was that, getting used to the discipline?

No trouble. I think the discipline in the surfing movement...actually the transition wasn't a problem. See we used to have to drill...like I was competing in the R&R and that, and you couldn't just do what you like. I mean, your Father was captain and when they said jump, you had to jump. And

30:30 you couldn't...like if the older boys, the men, were talking about what they did on Saturday and they happened to catch you standing there with your mouth open, they'd kick you in the tail. They'd say, buzz off. It was well disciplined, the surfing world in those days. So I never noticed it. It never worried me, the discipline. It just had to be done and that's all about it. I'm a bit of a crank. Whatever has to be done has to be done

31:00 and that's all about it. I've done it all my life and I'll never change. I'm still the same.

Where was your first lot of training after you joined up at Moore Park?

Tamworth. We used to march down the streets, like down Woolloomooloo and all that. We would do route marches and on the road. When we went up to Tamworth we used to manoeuvre and all that sort of thing.

31:30 The air force would throw flour bombs at you and all that sort of thing. We were super fit when we were up there. Good food and good beer and plenty of rest. It was good. Cold in winter time and we were super fit. That was one of those tribunals I went to; the chap said, 'What did you feel like?' Well, we felt superior, you know.

32:00 We were well trained and you were super fit.

What tribunal was this?

When I went about my shoulder and that up at Brisbane. The chap was named...he's a fella you ought to get onto to. Neil Harcourt. He's an advocate for the Surfers Paradise

32:30 RSL. He's an old commando. He was very good with me. See, when I had my heart attack I had only...I had a white card for my ear...no sorry, going before that. When I was at Mullumbimby one night there was a cyclone and my wife kept harping about these horses

33:00 and I was...the fellow who owned the property had said never worry about the water coming any higher than that fence. they were quite safe. Anyway my son said to me, 'I'll come with you Dad.' And as I was coming down the road, my knee collapsed. After I got wounded it used to collapse periodically. Anyhow when it did, it tore this muscle out here. So I went to the old doctor at Mullumbimby and he said, 'There's nothing we can do about it. We can stitch it up but it will only happen again'.

33:30 He said, 'What's all these scars on your knee and that?' I said, 'I got wounded in the war.' He said, 'This is not a civvy thing, this is a repat [repatriation].' So with that I didn't worry. A while later I get a letter and a train pass to go to York Street Sydney on a certain date, which I did. I didn't use the pass but I took the family down for a week.

34:00 They went over me and they gave me \$16 a fortnight. Well, I never worried about it. It went in my bank and I never worried. Anyhow, then when I had my heart attack...we had gone bad and I was driving a cab. I had nothing coming in and I didn't know what way to turn and someone said, 'You're an old digger, [soldier] why don't you try and get a pension?'

34:30 So I contacted Veteran Affairs and they sent a young lady out. My silly wife wouldn't have anything to do with her and shot through. Anyhow, the next thing I've got a pension and I've never looked back since. I didn't know when I was going to go back to work or what. It all happened so suddenly. I was sort of well one day and crook the next.

35:00 It happened in Sydney. I had a few heart attacks but the major one was in Sydney. So I got done down there. I can't say a word against the Repat. They've been good to me. They saved me anyhow. It was just one of those things. I don't know her attitude. She had something against the army.

35:30 When they were at Monavale, they lived up in the hills at a place called Ingleside, and they put an army camp alongside them in the war years. And something happened and she used to always say the army's this that and the other. They caused us to move off the hill. I've enquired around people who should know but it's that long now no one knows. So I don't know if something went on with her or her Mother or...

36:00 with the group of men you know. I wonder what caused it. She was always harping about the army.

This was Betty?

Yes. So I don't know. But a friend of mine...this is what I was saying to Chris. Her husband was the one we took away for six weeks on a holiday with us. I thought she would know because she went to school

with them, but she didn't know. It was too long ago.

36:30 **Were the mates you met up in Tamworth, were they mates that you stayed with through the entire war?**

Yes, most of them. Not all but a few were close mates. Yes, we went to the same unit. Once we went to that engineers training depot, they allotted you to your unit.

When did you go to the Engineers Training Depot? Was that after the general training?

Yes, when we went to the Middle East. That was in Palestine. That was ETD too, the Engineers Training Depot at Tamworth, both the same.

37:00 **So what did you do, did you do the regular rookie training with everybody else?**

Yes.

Which was what, ten weeks?

We trained right up to when we left...oh gee. Summer was still on. I know because we had a swimming carnival. So it must have been early in '41 until September. We trained virtually right the way through.

37:30 We did no engineer training. We did all infantry training, and as I said we played football and we played tabloid sports. We were super fit. Good food.

So when you went ...hang on, that would have been about 8 months then that you were there?

Yes.

That seems a long time for the army before they posted you on?

Well

38:00 yes it is. I'll tell you what. We lost quite a few to Malaya. Actually I was a bit disappointed that I didn't go to Malaya at the time. As it turned out Lucky Bill again. So we lost a few in Malaya. But my closer mates we all stayed with the 2/4th.

So you went straight from

38:30 **Sydney to the Middle East after 8 months up in Tamworth?**

Yes.

Were you glad to finally leave Australia?

Oh yes. I think you get that way when you're trained up. You feel like you should ...there's something that you have to do. It was only automatic you know.

Were you concerned about if you'd be able

39:00 **to handle seasickness?**

I had been on the sea since I was a kid. I could handle it no trouble at all. As I said I used to go fishing outside with these fellas when I was about 13. That never worried me. Although one of my mates, Bards, he was a shocking sailor. Every time we went somewhere

39:30 he'd finish up in a coil of rope and we'd be bringing him up food and there would be food in his beard, and yet he was a sailor. He used to sail in the harbour. I just put his name on that list. He's got a frame now. He's virtually bed ridden now. He was another top fellow. They were great mates. They would give their life for you they would.

Tape 5

00:34 **So Bill, could you just talk us through the detail of the bridging work you were doing?**

Yes well that was in Egypt at Ismailia on the Sweet Water Canal. I don't know if you've seen how you can have pontoon bridges, where you put pontoons and all that. All we did was construct them, that's all. And dismantle them and do it again.

01:00 There were two different types. We had one with an open folding boat and the others were solid pontoons. It was quite simple. I remember we had the Bailey Bridge where we covered a gap of about 40 feet from one side and you could launch it and build out from it.

01:30 Like you'd push the girders out and then you'd deck it all in. That was all it was. It was simple, just hard work. We did that up here at Dinmore and we did it up at Gordonvale one time. We never came to use it. We never came where there was water and where it was necessary. The day I got wounded

02:00 they were putting a Bailey Bridge over a bit of a gully. Mind you, we did infantry training and then we did explosives naturally because we were handling explosives.

What kind of explosives?

TNT and gelignite and mines and all that sort of thing.

02:30 We had the enemy in mind and what we could expect and how to delouse them and all that sort of thing. Most of that was just inside your own unit. We would even go out and have grenade throwing. One day at Moresby...the fella who got wounded and I told you had half his lung taken out; he for some unknown reason rolled this grenade along the ground. Well you've never seen so many people scatter in your life.

03:00 No one was hurt luckily. I don't know why he did it. He just threw it along the ground. Everyone ran everywhere. That's about all. We used to go down and swim in the Suez Canal, and have a swim every day in the Suez. That's about all.

How did you find the local people?

They were all right. I mixed a bit with their army on the Suez. When I used to swim

03:30 at various posts, where the ferry used to go across. I used to swim over a couple of times and have a cup of tea with them and bit of their bread but I don't think they knew what I was saying and I didn't know what they were saying. But they seemed to be hospitable enough. But what amazed me were these wogs coming out of the sand. You're miles away from anywhere and the next thing you stop to have a break. Every hour

04:00 they would stop for a break, even in the convoy as well. And out of the sand would come these fellas you know. They had been living on crickets or cockroaches or something. Bloody amazing. But I'll never forget that at Beersheba when they loused our trucks over for hashish. They were looking for hashish. They pulled all the seats out and everything you know.

Was that a common problem within the forces?

There it was, yes.

04:30 I think it was a civilian problem too I think. They were border police and they were just trying to stop the flow of it. So in 1941 it was a problem. That's amazing. Army life when there was nothing doing was pretty humdrum. You spent most of your time waiting.

05:00 You'd sit around waiting to do something.

How would you keep yourself occupied?

As I say I went and got a correspondence course, but others made souvenirs and different sorts of things. Others would read.

What would they make souvenirs out of?

Bits of aluminium and stuff and bits of aeroplanes. The Yanks were great customers for anything...it wouldn't be made out of a Zero but...

05:30 it could be made out of anything and you could sell it as a souvenir to the Yanks. I had a mate who used to make...actually he's the fellow on the walking frame now. He did a bit of sculpturing out of rocks. He would pick a rock up and put a horse's head on it. He had things he'd scratch with, like needles and sharp things, anything sharp. They all had ideas. Some people...like when we were up in New Guinea,

06:00 up in the tablelands, they used to get these big trees. They were walnuts and the roots were high and narrow. They'd chop them off and make trays and that. They'd make them by hand, scrape them with a bit of glass or something and polish them up by hand. All sorts of things. I made a steam engine and I couldn't work how

06:30 to...I had it all together but it wasn't working, and I said to this chap who was our QM [Quartermaster], he was the only sane man in the unit, I said, 'I can't seem to work this out, Jack, how it's going to...' He said, 'I'll fix it for you.' So he went and got a bit of lead out of a pencil, put it in the porthole and went like that 'Drill your hole there and there'.

07:00 Simple. I couldn't work it out. So there were all sorts of tricks.

What sort of things would you do in the Middle East for fun with the boys?

I went to Tel Aviv but I never went any further because you had to have £12 Palestinian or £12 sterling in your pay book before you could go to Cairo or Alexandria or

07:30 those places. They wouldn't let you go until you had that much in your pay book. Well I never had it. In those days I was only on ordinary... I was getting 2 shillings a day. Two and six a day. But when I got to Group One I got 9 shillings a day. But that was later. I was an ordinary sapper until we got back to Australia from the Middle East.

- 08:00 **I know you were out of action for a bit of that through appendicitis and things like that. What of your daily duties can you tell me about, as a sapper. What were you required to do?**
- Well as I say, normally anything. It may be building bridges or anything like...anything that had to be repaired.
- 08:30 We generally mostly repaired bridges and things like that you know. Like we didn't have to in the Middle East; when we were in Australia on the Brisbane Line, all around Kilcoy and those places, all the bridges were in bad order, bad repair. So we had to cut logs and trim them up and put girders in. That was our main job around there.
- 09:00 We're the sort of army handymen. If they wanted something, they'd call on the sappers.
- For the purposes of the archive can you talk us through some of the mines you were taught about and how to disarm them?**
- Well the 'gibo mine' was quite simple if everything went all right.
- 09:30 It was just like a....the det was on the end of a pencil and stuck with a bit of sticky tape and on the end of this bit of wood like a pencil was a like a mushroom and you would pull it out and if you were lucky the det came with it. We had five killed...and the officer...see when you pulled that det and stick out you would give it to the officer. Well
- 10:00 he ...then he counts his dets and he counts his mines. But if there's one either way, or if you're short of a det the lot gets taken away. They just put them back. But if it's correct then it's all right. Well this particular load they missed it somehow and they hit a bump and the next thing it blew them all to billyo. One lost his hands and his feet and he was blind.
- 10:30 The rest ...I don't think anyone...oh yes, one survived I think out of about 6 or 7 fellas.
- Why was that?**
- Well it ignited you see. It was armed and he had missed the det somewhere. One was armed so when they hit the bump off they went. But this chap...it's funny. I never knew him at the time. I never knew him anyhow. But when I was in hospital at El Kantara, there was a chap across the road from me.
- 11:00 He was always whingeing. A machine gun had taken his knee cap off and he was always whingeing about how crook it was. Anyhow this chap of ours who was there, Peter La Febb, they wheeled him in, in a wheel chair. He's got no feet and no hands and he was blind. And we never heard this bloke complain again after that. It was good treatment...what do you call it, psychology.
- 11:30 But the others...there's all different sorts. You could put a nail in or something like that while you deloused it. Some worked like a ...how can I explain it? The coffin mine' was like two halves. One half had springs and that, and when you pressed it down it sheered a bit of wire which hit a striker pin.
- 12:00 That started it off. Our ones were the same as the gypo [slang term for Egyptian] mines. We used to use a lot of other people's mines as a matter of fact.
- What do you mean?**
- Well we'd pull them up and reset them again. We always worked to a plan. That's why they're having trouble in all those foreign
- 12:30 countries now. They don't work to a plan. We knew exactly where each mine went. So we could go out and pick them up without any trouble.
- How would you do that?**
- On a map. We'd put them on a map and stick to it. If you ever had to lift them up again and you can't find them well they were a problem. It's a big problem. I think I saw something the other day in Africa, there was a kids with arms missing and that,
- 13:00 still from mines that had been left there. Indiscriminately set. We used to plan a mine field. Then you'd have...for our benefit, if you were going to go through it you'd have a tape so you could follow the tape and be safe. They nearly all work on a similar principal.
- 13:30 I don't know what our mines would be like today. We didn't have that many anyhow. I think we must have used everyone else's.
- And how about detection Bill. I'm assuming that the whole purpose of a mine is that they're camouflaged, so nobody would see it. Were there little tricks to look for?**
- We used to just look for them with a bayonet or something.
- 14:00 Just gently dig round these spots ...that was like the bombs with the three ...I just dug around that gently and discovered there's nothing there. That was the way to find them. Of course today they've got mine detectors. Now what was I going to say...the infantry always protected us. Like when we put that

bridge up at Dumpu, the infantry...we had about a platoon

14:30 of infantry out protecting us. And when we cut that road to Guy's Post with the bulldozer, the 2nd Pioneers protected us. They were there all the time. So we got a bit of protection. We were always pretty well protected. It was only when you overstepped the mark. Which does happen when you get engrossed in something.

15:00 There's nothing much...the Japs as I say had booby traps...I suppose you could call them booby traps. They were 15 inch shells made into a mine with depth charges. Then they would set them off. They would sit in a tunnel with a hand full of wires hooked up to these things. They'd pull them and boom down they'd come.

15:30 So what we used to do was grab the wire and cut it in case someone decided to pull the wire. We always carried a pair of pliers. Most sappers did.

What else would form part of your standard sapper's kit?

Well, we used to make those Molotov cocktails...no not Molotov cocktails, bangalow torpedoes. They were out of pipe and

16:00 you'd slip them out through the barbwire and set them off and they'd blow a hole in the wire so the infantry could get through.

How would you make a bangalow torpedo?

Just fill it full of explosive. You'd have a plug on one end and in the other end you'd shove everything in. You'd put your det in. Generally you'd use a primer to boost up your charge and when you wanted to, you'd just light a fuse and walk away.

16:30 Of course, as I say, we improvised a lot. The same as when we were blowing those tunnels. We used to pack them up with an ordinary fuse and det and then let them go.

Did you see anything of the action or the enemy in the Middle East at all?

No, I was only in an air raid at Ismailia.

17:00 There used to be a plane that would drop magnetic mines in the Suez. That used to come up. You'd hear it. And we had another plane that used to delouse them. It had a big ring round it and you could hear this diesel engine going as well as the plane. It used to send power down and it would release the magnet and they'd pop up. So as soon as they put them in, we'd get them up. That was a normal daily thing.

17:30 It was like a circuit. Other than that I was pretty lucky. I missed it because I was crook. If I hadn't have been crook I would have got to Tobruk. But there was nothing I could do about it unfortunately.

Someone was looking after you?

Yeah. I reckon it would have been a good experience. See, the boys who were over there, the early blokes, they were in the Benghazi Handicap and then they were the last...our brigade was the last to leave Tobruk, the 9th, 10th and 12th.

18:00 They handed over to the Poles I think. Anyhow, I wasn't there so I don't know. They were there right through the siege. As I say, that Harry (UNCLEAR), he could tell you a lot about that because he carried in an officer...

18:30 and all he got was a Commander-in-Chief's card. He should have got a VC [Victoria Cross] apparently for what he did. He was a good bloke too. He would be getting old now. He would be about 90 I should imagine.

Bill tell us about the tropical ear that you developed?

Well, it itches and then it discharges, it aches.

19:00 It sort of builds up to it, then it discharges and then it eases off and then it goes back nearly to normal and then...it's always sort of there though. And it's raw. Even yesterday when I was putting some ointment in there...it's deep in this one. It's raw when I touch it. You can feel it's raw. They call it 'coral ear' or something.

19:30 **And how bad did it get when you first got it?**

Oh shocking. I used to bash my head on the ground it was that bad. I've learned to live with it. But I've been very crook with it. Of course in those days they didn't know how to treat it. They put those wicks on it and they used to grind it. Now of course they reckon you only scratch your ear with your elbow. It's a no-no all this grinding and all that.

20:00 But it's definitely an inch or so deeper in this one. So I think that's because of all the treatment I've had with it. I use an ointment now and I think it's got cortisone in it...to deaden it and stop it from aching a bit. I've learned to live with it. It's like everything else.

And even though they didn't know how to cure it, what was the treatment they gave you?

The first thing they do is put ethanol wicks in it.

20:30 Poke it full of ethanol and draw whatever's there out of it. Then they used to probe it and put drops in it. The same as what they do today. It's funny. I can swim in salt water with it but as soon as I swim in chlorinated water it plays up. The chlorine must be the problem.

21:00 After you came out of the hospital with your appendicitis cleared up, you were put on the X list and given a whole lot of odd jobs?

Yeah, any little odd job that came along.

What sort of things would they get you to do?

Anything around the camp and that. That's when I got the job on the beach. As I said, they called us this morning and four of us went over. We used to go over every morning and stay there all day and come

21:30 home. The best job in the army it was. Swam all day. I can't think of the chap's name from Dee Why. It's on the tip of my tongue. But I can remember the other two. One of them, the first year with the Australian Championship up here in Queensland in '46, I was in the dressing room at Southport getting dressed and a voice yelled out, 'Is that you Billy Abbott?' It was this chap Bill Wight from

22:00 up near Hervey Bay, Wide Bay. I think he's Wide Bay. Yeah, he heard my voice and he recognised it after...well, it was a few years, a couple of years I suppose.

So what would you and your mates get up to for a bit of fun in the Middle East?

We'd played football.

22:30 We had canteen. We had beer, terrible beer. That was about all. There was no picture theatres or anything like that in those days. That was before they had those entertainment units. Oh yes we did....we saw a concert once. And there was a black singer.

23:00 And American fellow and gee he was good. That was about the first time I saw any of that entertainment. Later in the piece at Moresby and that we used to see them. We used to get leave...well, every day there would be a leave party going to Tel Aviv. You wouldn't be able to go every day but if you wanted to you could go at least once a week.

23:30 That was about it.

What was Tel Aviv like?

Oh a lovely city. A bit like Kings Cross. Mainly units. Those days it was like today, real modern. The beach...no surf, or very little surf. The boys would go up on the promenade, a big promenade, a bit like Bondi.

24:00 Up one end was where a ship was sunk, where the refugees came in and just drove it ashore. But these girls used to get undressed on the beach. We'd be all hoping they'd drop their towel or something. But it never happened. They were beautiful girls. They were Russian Jewesses. Over there you couldn't talk to a girl on her own.

24:30 If you took a girl out you would have to take two. You've never seen...beautiful children. Like on those kibbutzs. Beautiful healthy kids. Gee they were healthy. I said to a fella one day, 'I'll give you a hand.' And he said, 'No way, you're not in the race.' They were funny like that. Very strict. But there were some beautiful girls. I've always had good teeth and

25:00 they'd say to you, 'Gee, you've got nice teeth, what do you do?' Most of the people had false teeth. I never knew. I would say I didn't know what I did right but there was something I must have done. Yeah, they had false teeth. Not like today when you can hardly tell the difference. In those days you could really tell. And they had their little trinket shops and souvenir shops.

25:30 It was great. The only thing was you couldn't get on with the girls. Fancy me talking like that.

Did any of the fellas take advantage of the brothels that were set up?

Yeah, I suppose they did. My Father frightened ten years of growth out of me when he gave me a lecture.

How did he do that?

VD's a crime.

26:00 You get your pay docked. And he gave me this lecture. I thought it was going to jump out of the woodwork and bite me I think. I'm not a sook but I'm not that brave, I'm afraid. Yeah, they used to. I didn't go there but they used to. We had some VD [venereal disease]. I used to be Father Confessor I think.

- 26:30 I think I should have been a priest. One day, one of the blokes, he wasn't a young fella either. He came up to me and told me his story and we didn't know where we were going at that stage. This was when they were going to send us to Borneo. I said to him, 'The only thing you can do is go up to the MO [Medical Officer]. And he said, 'Oh no, we're going home.' And I said, 'You have got past about six doctors before you even get on the ship.'
- 27:00 I said, 'You won't get past one.' Anyway he disappeared and the war's over and my brother and I, we started carrying meat. We're unloading a load of meat at Collaroy this morning and along he came. And I said to him, 'G'day, how are you going?' And off he went. You know he used to dodge me after that. I don't know what he thought I was going to do. He'd see me and he'd go across the road, silly coot. He was a married man and I think he thought I was going to tell on him

- 27:30 or something you know. He was one of few. I don't know, they used to tell me all their problems. I don't know why. I must have had a kind face or something.

What was the strangest story you ever heard?

The worst...well that goes back to VD too. When we were in Borneo they had what they called...I don't know what the right name is, but it was 'Black Jack'. It was like leprosy

- 28:00 and there was no cure for it. And a couple of fellas had...mind you talk about...we're as bad as anyone else, Australians, don't worry about that. Anyway they went to these doctors and the doctors would hand them a pistol and they'd say this is the only cure for you. And apparently it is. It eats all your genitals away and everything. It's like a leprosy. When we went to Samarinda

- 28:30 there was a house of ill fame across the road, and you've never seen anything so funny in all your life. There were blokes carrying naked girls and talk about Little House on the Prairie.

What were they doing carrying naked girls?

I don't know what they were doing. But it was a house of ill fame.

They were carrying them upstairs?

Oh upstairs and everywhere.

- 29:00 Anyhow we ...there was a Bishop I think he was in Melbourne. They called him the Red Dean or something. He wrote an article in the Herald about VD in Korea. And my wife said, 'That's not right. They wouldn't be doing that.' They were doing exactly the same at this particular time.

- 29:30 They were shocking. See penicillin had come in then and they were just taking no notice. And people say...not our blokes. Not much they didn't. I know, I could tell you some other stories too.

Could you?

Yeah, but not in mixed company.

- 30:00 The outhouse...I suppose you would call it.

Sorry you were with the ...

The 33rd Battalion. That where I told you about the maze where we came to a wooden hut with a shelter. Their boat pulled up and this was at Samarinda. A bloke got off and he walked down the gangplank and the fellow in the office yelled out, 'Hey Jacko. I hear you've got the Jack?' And he pulled his pants down to give it a couple of wanks and out passed this pus...well, my mate was the skipper of that little boat, Tommy Roberts from the

- 30:30 surf club, he'd been knocking around with the Balinese nurse. He was dark complexion and you know what, he was going grey. And every time he went to have a leak, and his mate Curly Curlewis would say, 'Have a look at Tommy.' And we'd look and...

What was left of him?

He didn't have it but he thought he did see. After seeing this bloke...Christ!

- 31:00 They were mucking about with these sheilas. Anyway, one day we were coming up from town at Balikpapan and there's a cue of mates. My mate will tell you, he was there. And my best mate said, 'Stop a minute.' There was a sheila there. Henrietta and there were about 50 blokes in the queue.

- 31:30 I thought, 'Jesus Christ, I couldn't do that'. That was typical. A lot of our blokes were just like animals.

But where did Henrietta come from?

She was Malayan or from Borneo. See there were not many civilians there at that particular time. One night they brought one through our line

- 32:00 that the Japs had sliced up like a bit of pork. She must have been either running messages for us or something. They brought her on a stretcher right past me and you'd think they had cut her with a sword

right up. She was...

Was she still alive?

Yeah, still alive. She might have survived I don't know. They were rough those Japs. They spread the disease too. They were worse than us I think.

32:30 **How often did you see a case of Black Jack around the place?**

Well I never saw it. Danny went to Makassa and they walked a whole battalion passed one woman and there was nothing left of her genitals. Just to demonstrate. There were blokes fainting.

33:00 As I say Dad frightened me. He said, 'Those black sheilas over there...you get The Jack.' Jesus, I thought it was going to jump out of the woodwork and grab me. Dad had been all through that in Palestine and in Egypt and then France.

Were you thankful for his advice after what you'd learned?

Oh yes. I went out to the brothels once, only to look...one night at Ismailia.

33:30 I only just hung round for a while. I'll never forget it. And then along came the Pommy Provos. It was out of bounds see. We weren't supposed to be there. Well there was a Pommy bloke with us and the Pommy bloke said to us, 'When are you going back to camp?' And we said, 'Now.' He said, 'I'll drive you back.' He was a provo. The little Pommy bloke said, 'Can I come too?' 'No walk!' There were his big boots going down the road.

34:00 Christ. Those black sheilas. I couldn't pull them on.

Were there any other...I guess, for want of a better word, girls on the island that were prostituting themselves?

Well no. I don't know. I never struck it. We never had much to do with the ordinary natives. We saw... there were a couple at Milne Bay...actually

34:30 the chief joined us at Milne Bay and he had two twin boys. We never saw much of the ordinary natives. They used to go bush and that I think. Even now you can see there's a lot of Jap in some of them.

They used to have them as 'comfort women' didn't they?

Yes.

Whether they were willing or not.

35:00 Yes, they were a bit like that. I think the Germans were the same. It's a funny old world.

All right I'll bring you back to Australia the first time. I was just wondering if you could tell us in detail about that reception you got in Adelaide?

35:30 Oh yes. As I said we left ...what's the name of the place down near the entrance to Port Adelaide? Oh gee whiz. It's gone right out of my mind.

36:00 As we went through Adelaide...like it was impromptu, like we were in transit, the locals...nearly half the city turned out you know. Well then, when we used to come into town nearly every night, you couldn't buy a drink. You'd go into a pub to buy a drink and they'd say, 'No that's all right mate'. And people used to invite you out for meals and it was just like we were gods.

36:30 It went on all the time we were there. It was great. We didn't have an official march or anything through Adelaide. We had a bit of trouble...this is changing the subject a bit...at Gawler, we had two hoodlums who nearly kicked an old fella to death.

Where was that sorry?

At Gawler, just near Sandy Creek.

37:00 **What was that about?**

I don't know what started it but they weren't any good these two fellas. Anyhow when we got up to Tenterfield, Joel Bart had to give them field punishment. He tied them up and did it right to the book. The press got the smell of it and they made him the greatest so and so of all time, yet if it had been in any other army like the Germans or the Japs, they would have

37:30 shot them without any provocation. Well, these two blokes, they were never any good. One disappeared. I don't know where he got to. The other bloke stayed with us but he was very easily led. His name was... they christened him Gallery for some unknown reason. But the other fella was no good. He was a shocker. Poor Joel Bart copped this abuse in the paper

38:00 and everything, but he was only doing his duty. As I say, they should have shot the coots. But that was... other than that we had a good time. We did plenty of exercise...

Bill can I just take you back to the fellas and they were getting disciplined. You mentioned they were tied to a post and they were disciplined by the book. What was that...by the book?

Well, you had to tie them up and you had to exercise them and you had to feed them at a certain time. Actually

- 38:30 in the old days they used to tie you to a canon wheel and ...I don't know how many hours. As a matter of fact our 2IC at the time, Norm Tedder, his son did the same thing in Korea and they ostracised him too. But you get court marshalled and you've got to carry it out. But these two fellas were no good. No good.

Tape 6

- 00:32 **Bill I want to talk to you about the Brisbane Line, were you sent up there after being back home in Australia after being in the Middle East to guard that? What were your duties about there?**

The whole division was in that exercise. It stretched from Caboolture through to Maleny I think it was. Right up to Somerset Dam.

- 01:00 I don't know...there weren't enough troops to man it properly. We were scattered groups. We played sport mostly. We played football and all that sort of thing. It was a big deal. The other day on the talk back show it said we had three [defensive] lines in the world. There was

- 01:30 the Maginot [Line], the Seigfried [Line], and the Brisbane [Line]. The fella said that the Brisbane Line [explained below] was never manned, but it was. But it was never a real...anything to talk about. There was too many areas for too few troops.

What was the story with the Brisbane Line?

They decided that they were going to let the Japs take all of Queensland and we were going to stop them at the Brisbane Line.

- 02:00 I don't know what happened. They changed their minds and we stopped it in New Guinea.

What did you have to do? Did you have to make anything?

Well we did. We mainly maintained the bridges in the area which hadn't been touched for years and things like that. Just ordinary sort of maintenance. But we played a lot of football, and a lot of sport. A truck loaded went to Brisbane every day.

- 02:30 And things like that. That's where we...our company side beat the 2/5th Field Regiment. Our mob beat the 2/5th Field Regiment up at Somerset Dam. They were a regiment and we were 280 strong and we rolled them. They never forgave us for it. They had about six internationals in their team. The former Australian captain and

- 03:00 I think they thought...they took us too easy you know. So they never forgave us. Actually they were our brigade's artillery. We were in the 18th Brigade and they were the 2/5th Field Regiment and the 9th, 10th, and 12th Battalion; and 7th Div Sigs naturally.

What happened that night after you won?

Well, you won't believe this but it was dry. The local people at Somerset Dam who put it on, fed

- 03:30 us up like...the best of everything. Cream cakes and everything, but we never had any beer or anything like that, because beer was hard to get in those days. So it was a good day. Beautiful cream cakes and strawberries on it. But as I say the old Arty didn't like that very much at all.

The old who? The aunty?

The Arty. The artillery.

- 04:00 **So that was your term for them?**

Yes.

But you weren't much of a drinker then anyway were you?

Oh yes. I started off when I joined...I wasn't until I joined the army. But I had my fair share everyday. Actually that screed they sent out, I don't know if you saw it, not so long ago. I used to drink about...well it would equal today about six stubbies a day. That's all you had to do really. You'd knock off and go to the canteen and have

- 04:30 a few beers. It was generally hot which was the worst part about it. Other than that there was nothing else to do. We had no radios or anything like that. You read a fair bit.

What do you think would have happened if the Japanese had been given everything...would all

the bridges have stood up?

Oh well, the ones we repaired would have.

05:00 Some of them would have been 50 years old that we repaired. They might have been older. But I don't know. It would all depend on...I don't know if they would have carried tanks or things like that. See we didn't have any tanks or that with us there. The armoured div were still in Western Australia in those days. We had Bren carriers but they were only like ordinary trucks. They wouldn't weigh much more than an ordinary truck.

05:30 Often I think when you listen to some of these people, we should have let them come down to the Brisbane Line and let them realise what it's all about. They whinge and cry over nothing. It's not necessary.

What were the men's thoughts on the Japanese been given Queensland?

They didn't like it very

06:00 much at all. We thought there was nothing we could do about it. They make these things...and when they say jump, you've got to jump. That's all there is about it. We have no say. I know a couple of times I got away with it. I didn't refuse a duty but I told the officer...like one particular day up in New Guinea

06:30 we were working on this track...18 hours a day, and they wanted us to work through the night. We had marks on these dozers that were obviously bullet marks. I said to this young officer, 'I think you should go back to div headquarters and find out if this is correct because it's too dangerous working of a night.' Anyway he came back later and said forget about it.

07:00 They must have thought about it. It was a stupid suggestion anyway because even in the day time with the motor roaring you don't know what's going on. As I say the marks were obviously bullet marks and you never knew what happened. A machine roaring its head off and you could see chips off the paint where someone might have been having a shot at you from half a mile away or something.

Do you think there were Japanese there?

07:30 **In Australia?**

Yes, they were in Australia. But also in the west, they also landed a full unit in the west and we knew about it and they didn't try and stop them. They went back again. It must have been a reconnaissance team. They were in Australia, there's no doubt about that.

08:00 We were lucky really I suppose.

But was the idea of you being there at the Brisbane Line to protect it in case the Japanese wanted to go further south. Was that the idea that you'd be there in case the Japanese came into Australia, you could push them back?

I think they...see the line of communications was one of our biggest problems. They were going to let the

08:30 Jap extend his line of communication further which makes it harder and in the end it would help in defeating them. That's what happened to them in the long run. They just couldn't keep up the supply. That was one of the problems. That was one of our jobs you see. That was why we cut that road up to Guy's Post to get the food out and the

09:00 ammunition up. That was a big problem, food and ammunition in New Guinea.

Perhaps we'll go to New Guinea now. You went over on the Anchung wasn't it?

Yes and then that was sunk. And we went up on the Bantam to Oro Bay and that was sunk.

Not while you were on them though?

No. Next trip up. You see when we went the first time on the Anchung the

09:30 Japs hadn't arrived at that stage. We got there a week or so before the Japs arrived. The next time...they were already in that area around Buna, all around there when we went up there.

What had you heard about the atrocities that the Japanese had inflicted at Milne Bay?

Well, we heard the truth.

10:00 We heard that they had killed those nuns and that they had impaled them with sticks and things like that. I had to go up to KB Mission but I never saw...it must have been before I got there, but they definitely mutilated these Sisters of Mercy. They did the same at Buna too at the mission there.

10:30 When I was going to school, we stayed over night at the army co-op squadron at either Popondetta or Dobodura and there was a native working around the camp and he was in with the Japs when they mutilated the women, the nurses or sisters at Buna, and they were waiting to kill him. He didn't know.

He was walking around as large as life. But when they were ready, they were going to hang him.

- 11:00 They hung a fella when we were at Dumpu. See, we had instructions to shoot any native wearing a red lap lap on sight when we were up around the Ramu Valley. Anyhow...

Why was that order given?

Well, they were leading the Japs into...helping the Japs. And they got this fellow and built a stage.

- 11:30 The whole village, elderly ladies in litters and everything and they hung this fellow. This was at Dumpu. And the brought everyone from the village, just to set an example. They hung him. But he had done something like that. See they were leading our patrols into ambushes and this sort of thing.

So it was the Australians who hung him?

Yes, the authorities.

- 12:00 **And what happened to that guard who witnessed what went on with those women?**

He was apparently going to be killed but he didn't know. He was walking around as large as life. They planned to just pick him up and do it I suppose. I don't know how they were going to kill him. These army/air force blokes were the co-op squadron, they said, 'That bloke's going to get killed.

- 12:30 He was in that thing at Buna with the Nips.' They wouldn't hesitate in getting rid of them.

The Japanese would kill them?

Oh, they'd kill them before we did.

Do you think the Australian authorities got him?

Yes. We had him but he didn't know he was under arrest. He was under house arrest and didn't know it. But the Japs are funny people...oh not funny. But when we were going up to the Valley,

- 13:00 there was a big open pit. There were bamboo ladders going up. They would knock one out of tree and down he would come and up goes another one. I suppose about five got knocked out of that tree before they stopped. And I think, there would have been an officer there...this is my opinion...with a gun saying if you don't go up there I'll shoot you. So he was going

- 13:30 to get shot by the Aussies or by the officer. It was so stupid. You'd see them wandering up the ladder and the next thing down he'd come. Everyone shot at him. I got him I reckon.

But apparently the officers were very hard on the Japanese soldiers?

Yes apparently. Luckily, I never saw much...

- 14:00 the only time I saw them was when the war was over. I saw plenty of dead ones. They were a funny little mob. In our book, I had a working party one day, and this fellow had an Olympic belt on. And the boys wanted me to take it off him and I wouldn't. I wasn't going to take it off him. There's an article in the book about it.

- 14:30 I couldn't do that. You have to work hard to become an Olympian you know. I thought, 'I couldn't do that.' I couldn't take it. I should have, because someone else would have.

Where was this at?

In Borneo.

He was a prisoner was he?

Yes.

He was taken prisoner. I wonder why he was wearing his Olympic belt?

I suppose...it had the 8 circles on it, on the buckle. He told us he was a swimmer. Actually I think in the book

- 15:00 it named him, if I remember rightly.

What happened to him do you know?

No, I don't know. Some of them...as I say, one committed hari kari but not many did I don't think.

Can I ask you when you did witness that man who had committed hari kari, was that actually removing his stomach innards?

No, he had a knife straight in his stomach.

Was he already dead when you saw him?

I think so yes.

15:30 I'm sure he was. All I could do was get round him in a hurry.

I wonder if that was a common thing?

I don't think it is. I think they're like everybody else, they don't want to die. Of course some fanatics... see some of those officers, when they failed they committed suicide, when something failed. The Samurai, they were born to be soldiers.

16:00 They might have been the ones who did all these stupid things. They're a funny breed the Japs. That night I was telling you about when I got that in my wrist. Those two fellas must have panicked or something, and someone must have seen them and this corporal went down and dug them up and brought them back.

The two Japanese men?

Yes. So they must have been

16:30 panicked.

How did the natives surrounding you at Milne Bay treat the Japanese?

Well the only natives we saw...that was before...we didn't have carriers like Angow, like they did later. We had a chief and two twin boys who came and stayed with us while we were at Milne Bay. And then we saw a couple of native women once and that was about all we ever saw.

17:00 This chap came with the strength...actually he had been educated in say Brisbane or somewhere like that. One day one of the boys said 'Get the boong to do it', and he said, 'Not very likely.'

He understood?

Oh yes. He was educated and he didn't let on. But he came where the strength was. He wanted to get away from it.

Was it your whole battalion that went over on the Anchung?

17:30 Only the 2/12th and our rear party, when I was in the rear party. I think there were a couple of AFC [Australian Flying Corps] personnel. There must have been about 1400 on it.

And how many men do you reckon got dysentery?

About 100%

You had it?

Oh yes. It was shocking. Wind swept.

18:00 And Roy Hodgkinson drawing this thing. I had to laugh when Quicky said, 'Can I take it home for Mum?' By gee, he's a clever artist though. When you look at that, you'd think it was a photograph.

How did you cope with the dysentery? Was it something that came on early in the piece?

18:30 I don't know if I had it before I went to New Guinea. But see you couldn't keep anything...see we never had refrigeration or anything like that. I don't know why we never got poisoned before then...I'm telling a lie. When we were up at the Ramu cutting that road up to Guy's Post, we had the same stew for weeks. All we did was add to it every day. We put in more

19:00 bully beef and stir it up and off we'd go again. It's a wonder we never died of some poisoning or something. Actually I wrote an article about that—a long while ago now. It did last for weeks. We'd just heat it up and stir some more into it. I don't know why we never died. But these people complain about food and that. They wouldn't know what it's all about. After I got crook...we started to get

19:30 dehydrated vegetables. I must have been about...I was up there about 10 months I think it says in the book. And I must have been a month away or something like that. When I got back we were getting dehydrated vegetables like carrots and I used to eat them. You can see that photo. That was taken about that time and I was in good condition.

20:00 I came out of there in better condition than most. My mate used to call me 'Fatty'. Yet all I was eating were those extra vegetables.

Do you think that's what saved you in a way?

No, I was cured then but this built me up. The food was good at the AGH. As a matter of fact they had tripe and stuff like that, that I used to love. I still love it. It was like a general hospital.

20:30 It was just like an ordinary hospital only under canvas that's all.

You're one of the few people I know who enjoys tripe. So can you tell us who you reported to when you first arrived in New Guinea?

No, see I was in the rear party. Our unit was there when we got there.

Because you came in as reinforcements?

No, we were left behind to clean the camp up at Woodford. The 2IC, a lieutenant and the rest of us.

21:00 The rest of the unit went on ahead. I don't know what they went up on. They were there and they had a bit of a camp made when we got there. But they had started work as soon as they got there because all that was there was like a bullock track, about ten foot wide and gutters about 3 foot deep, like that.

21:30 They had the Zebu which used to bring the copra. We had to fix that so you could run a jeep on it or a truck. That's how we...when we got the shovels and that and the dozer and that from the Yanks. And we built a few bits of road. There was plenty of gravel in the creeks.

What about your Dad during

22:00 **this time? You said he re-enlisted and went in. Where was he?**

I don't know. See he went in...that militia unit he was still with, although he joined the AIF, the 3rd Motorised Machine Gun Regiment. They never went to New Guinea until about '43. That's when he went to New Guinea.

22:30 I don't know where he was camped. It think he was somewhere out the back of ...is it Rooty Hill, out behind Parramatta there?

Yes.

Somewhere out there I think.

So there wasn't a chance you could meet up with him?

No, no. I never saw him just about nearly all the war. In the first part, but once we left Sydney...

23:00 unless he was on leave. I wrote to him every week. Actually I wrote to both Mum and Dad nearly all the time, and my friends. I think I wrote nearly once a week.

What did you think of New Guinea when you first arrived?

From the ship it looked like paradise but when you landed ashore it was a different kettle of fish.

23:30 There was mud up to your neck. Shocking country. That was another funny thing. I was up there with one of the battalions, I forget now which one. One night this fella came sloshing through the mud. He's got a naval officer's uniform and it was another mate from Narrabeen. He was an engineer on a ship and he found me.

24:00 I never saw him again. He's still alive. I said, 'How did you find me?' It was semi dark. He used to play football with us.

Can you tell us about your first operation there in New Guinea?

Well that was...well the first...

24:30 See we worked in the early part. We had to try and get roads and that in. Then I went to KB Mission....what did I have to do up there? Young Gavin Campbell and I had to go up for something. Gee I forget. I never saw much action until the night of that

25:00 one on Number Three strip. We had had a few air raids but nothing...see our air force was so strong there. One day they shot 11 Jap planes down.

Did you actually see them fall?

Yes. It was great.

25:30 They were top. I've said right from the beginning, only for them I reckon Australia would have gone, there's no doubt about it. It was only a hop step and a jump into Australia from there. They did a mighty job. And that old 100 Squadron in the Beauforts, they used to go over these Jap ships and drop bombs down their funnels and things like that. About 50 feet off the ground.

26:00 Turnbull, they found him in the bush. He was dead. I think fatigue got him because they were working the clock round you know. And Truscott maintained that while our boys were fighting up the front, our blokes had to back them up. They were great. It's funny, things were crook and it looked like we would have to vacate, and

26:30 I had my eye on a Puss Moth. I thought, I'm not going to get taken. I'll just in that and try and fly it. Anyhow one day after the campaign's over, they're flying around and the prop fell off it. You wouldn't believe it.

27:00 They float pretty well and the fella landed all right. It would be just my luck to get half way to Australia and my prop [propeller] would fall off.

What do you mean things were really close there and you might have to vacate. What happened there?

Well only for the Japs...only for the air force I think we would have got beaten there. They were too strong for us. See the militia had never been in action before. Our boys went in sort of blind. There was no information coming in and things like that. I reckon that...when they blew up all the tucker and that,

27:30 they must have thought something was wrong. That's what I think. I think things were more serious than what we knew. That's just my opinion but I think it was plenty of other people's opinion too. There was no where to go. There was a mountain behind you and the coast. The coast was the only way you'd get out of it. If I was going to get taken, I would have gone up the coast and done something. I wouldn't have been hanging around there. Eventually we got the upper hand.

28:00 **Was this the action you were telling us about on Number Three Strip? Can you take us through slowly what happened?**

We had retreated back to the southern side of this strip. This strip had never been used. It had been built but it had never been used. In a way it was pretty good thinking.

28:30 And of course the Japs came in their hoards and couldn't get across it and they just mowed them down like grass. And the more that came the more got mowed down. Without a lie, the dead were that deep, 100 yards long. There would be 100's, not just 88 as someone said. That went right to the sea and up to the end of the strip where the

29:00 hill hit the mountain.

And where were you in this?

This side. Down on the coast side. There was a Yank half track. It was there firing. It had a point five machine gun. They were alongside us. But I never saw anyone. But we were there. As

29:30 I say we were lucky that it happened a bit further up. I saw them burying them. They had to dig a hole as deep as this and 50 yards long to bury them. That was what broke their back. I think they took us too cheap too. I think they thought they were just going to walk over us. They got a shock.

30:00 **Were you using your 303?**

Yes. I only had a 303 then.

Did you have any machine guns on the Australian side?

Yes that's where we did a lot of damage.

Who were manning the machine guns?

There was the machine gun battalion plus they had the Brens and in those days, the Thompsons [types of gun]. We didn't have an armoured gun in those days.

30:30 So plenty of fire power and as I say, well dug in. They were just like sitting ducks. We still got a few casualties. Our brigade had the most casualties in the war, the 18th Brigade.

What from? From actual shrapnel or...

All over. Bombs, shells

31:00 and you name it. I think...I read the figures just lately somewhere. I think they had over 300 killed in New Guinea campaign alone. That's killed. That was out of 9 battalions. So approximately 9000 men.

31:30 **Did you lose any mates that day? Sorry, was it a night fight?**

Yes. I only lost a few there and that was from a grenade. I can't remember if it was before or after that. One chap lost his hands. We only had about 20 killed in the whole war. We were pretty lucky. We had a few wounded.

32:00 Behind that thing, he had half his hand blown off but he still stayed in the army. We were pretty fortunate.

Bill you mentioned before in an earlier tape that comradeship was really important. Can you remember during this fighting some of your mates helping other mates out?

Oh yes. All the time.

32:30 When I was with the infantry, a couple of times I had to give them a hand. Like that chap that I tried to get onto the stretcher and he kept falling off. You had to give them a hand. That's part of the...

Can you tell us about that? Was this the same battle?

No, this is in Borneo.

What happened to him?

He got shot through the throat. He was the fellow who shouldn't have been there.

33:00 He and I nearly got killed ten days before or something like that. His time was up but he wouldn't go, so they made him company runner for safety, and he copped it. There were a few hit that day.

Did he die?

Oh yes. He was dead before I got him to...we put the field dressing on him but the blood would just go...you couldn't suppress it.

33:30 As I say he shouldn't have been there. I'm just saying a lot of luck. It's all luck. The luck of the draw.

It's bingo. A raffle.

Yes it is. Life's a raffle isn't it? I look at war like a big football game

34:00 you know. You get hurt playing football but you don't stop because someone gets hurt. It's a bit the same as war. You can't stop. You've got to keep going. It's a bit more permanent I suppose than football. But it's surprising the fellas who come to the fore too. You wouldn't think they had it in them.

Can you give me an example?

34:30 Well let's take my late orderly room sergeant. Now there's a man who you could say was a bit effeminate. He was very well spoken and tall, but he had no ounce of fear. Even when he was...one of these hoodlums who got the field punishment thought he could fight

35:00 and one day he picked on Don, and he gave him a hiding and I don't think he ever knew he could fight. He punched him to ribbons. He never ever went near him again. We had a little fella, I think he was about 14. He was that sick. He shouldn't have been in there and he still stayed, Gavin Campbell. There were a lot of little blokes.

Did he live?

35:30 Yeah he lived.

How did he get in at 14?

I don't know. Like that other mate of mine up here. He was 14. I met him in 1946 and he had been in four years.

Did they lie do you reckon?

They had to. Someone must have enlisted for them or something like that. I can tell you another one.

36:00 A friend of mine, he had one leg and his brother was a real good mate of mine too. We played football together, and I'm in New Guinea and along came Huey. He said, 'Don't you tell anyone.' He's got one leg. How would he get away with one leg? Someone must have...I reckon they must have enlisted and gone to the toilet and given him the papers and ...He said, 'Don't you tell anyone.'

36:30 **Because he wouldn't have passed the medical?**

I don't know how Dad got in because his arm was virtually...I mean it was all right but nothing like it should have been. It was dead. His ear drum burst in France. He had half his hoof [foot] cut out with frost bite. But he got in. People...say they had a crook wrist or something...if you wanted to get in you could get in. There was no doubt about that.

37:00 **So as they say if there's a will there's a way.**

That's right. They wanted to send me home because of the leg business. I said I wasn't going home. What was I going home for? There was no one back there. Everyone was in the services. Anyway in a couple of weeks I was right again. But malaria was a problem. I don't know how we survived with malaria. You'd go down and you'd be sick for four or five

37:30 days...it was like you could set an alarm. You'd go down at 11 o'clock every morning. If a change of weather came you'd be down just like that. I don't know how we...everyone was the same. I don't know how we beat the Japs. They were the same I suppose. Full of malaria and that and all the diseases.

That night you had that conflict on Number Three Strip,

38:00 **was there a lot of strafing going on at all?**

No, no. I think it was fairly dark when it started. So they only work from daylight to dark. The Kittyhawks. They were flying Kittyhawks. They could carry one bomb. But mostly they just strafed.

38:30 The just strafed all the time, day and night. That was a big thing. It kept them pretty well tied down.

The other bombers were terrible machines. I don't know how they ever got anywhere. There would be flames throwing out of the exhausts. They were slow.

39:00 **Bill, that night you had that conflict there, did you have to help any blokes basically get out of the way or give them a hand?**

No. Not on that particular one, no. No I didn't

39:30 have to...on that campaign I didn't have to help anyone who had been hurt I don't think. It all caught up with me anyhow...see that Ramu Valley, I was shelled and strafed and that...I was up there for 10 months and I hardly saw a shot fired.

40:00 Yet we were...I don't know how far off the front line we were, about 1000 yards from the front line. It was a funny old set up. The last time it was on from the word go. It was on from the minute we hit the beach.

Tape 7

00:34 **Bill you were just about to tell Heather [interviewer] about the hairy end of the campaigns that you got involved in and your initial landing at Balikpapan?**

Well, I saw more action in, I don't know how many days then than I saw in the rest of the war really. As I said, I had been bombed and shelled and

01:00 that but as I said, I had never seen hand to hand fighting like I did then.

Can you talk us through it step by step so we can get a bit of a picture of what it was like?

When we landed on the beach, our job was to clear a track so we could get the infantry straight away started to silence the pill boxes. There were bullets going everywhere. That why I said I felt envious.

01:30 I had a mundane job like clearing a track and there they were fighting. Anyhow then we finished up taking the beach head and then we took this other hill. We would just follow the infantry right up close and when they came across a tunnel or something they would give us a yell and they'd leave someone with us to protect us.

02:00 We always seemed to be on the receiving end, although luckily I was the only one...no, we got a few wounded...but we seemed to be on the receiving end of it. We couldn't retaliate. As I said that's what irked you. As I said before, you felt real crook about these blokes cleaning up these pill boxes and all that sort of thing

02:30 and you're doing nothing, only blowing up tunnels. But there were snipers. A whole battalion passed a sniper one day. Not many. And things like that, spasmodic shooting.

Did the sniper get any of the...

No, the closest I knew was a fella in front of me, it bounced off his trenching tool. It ricocheted off it you know.

03:00 It only missed him by that much. But it could have missed you by that much. I don't think they were good shots. As I was saying when they started shooting at us, you'd bend over and you'd hear the bullets whistling and then you'd stand up. You and I could work it out...you would count three or something and when you stood up they'd shoot. They were dumb. I don't think they were good shots. We didn't give them the opportunity. We soon got out of there.

03:30 **So what happened after you secured the beach?**

Well that's when we took that big hill, that Parramatta Feature, and that's when they set fire to the oil. See even then, the patrols never had much trouble. They'd get shelled and that but that's about all. I think the Japs might have just about had it there too you know. They fought pretty hard

04:00 and they'd fight of a night. They'd put these night raids on. One night they chopped one of the companies. They had knives on the end of sticks and things like that you know.

Can you describe that for us? What did they have?

How can I explain it? They called them Banzai Raids. They used to run amok sort of

04:30 thing and attack. But that was ...as I say, not always. How can I explain it? Most of the time we were getting shelled and mortared, but when we took that hill at Liverpool,

05:00 the Arty had done all the work for us. That's when we got the machine gunners. We were waiting for the barrage to lift so we could attack and by the time we attacked there were only a few dead. I don't know how many to tell you the truth but I saw a couple.

And Bill, what did you see of hand to hand or close quarter fighting?

I never saw any. I was always on the outskirts of it. I don't know why.

05:30 That's just how the luck goes. I wasn't supposed to be there anyhow. That wasn't supposed to be our job. The closest Jap I ever saw was the one I think I shot out of a tree. I think everybody else thinks they shot him too. But that's the closest I ever got to them. As far as shelling and mortars and that, we copped our fair share of those.

06:00 Of a night it was a problem. They used to put these raids on of a night. But as I say, I was lucky again. They never came into my sector. But there were times that I thought they were. Your imagination used to run rife of a night. You'd sort of...you'd view your front before dark and you'd see there was a log there and a tree over there. They'd put over a couple of star shells and when the lights went out

06:30 they'd start to move and you'd think, is that a person? You wouldn't know and you'd be that tempted to shoot. And of course as soon as you shoot you give your position away. But that was it. It must have frightened me more than anything else. Those nights. It would make your knees knock. I was lucky in that respect. We just got a taste of it. See we mightn't go back again...I was with them all the time at Balikpapan

07:00 but prior to that we'd get up and we might be up at the front line for two days and do what you had to do and then you'd come back. It was good in one respect.

How did the engineers get on with the rest of the army fellas?

Oh the infantry, they loved us. They all reckoned we were mad. We reckoned they were all mad too. They did, they respected

07:30 us quite a lot you know. They knew they couldn't get their wounded out in a lot of cases or they couldn't get ammo [ammunition] without us. In that respect....but then when the mining and that was on they'd give us protection. See, they'd be out in front of you in case something happened.

08:00 Were there times you or the rest of your company felt exposed or vulnerable?

No, see we always...how can I explain? We still had to do our sentry duty. I don't know if we were lucky or not, but most times we didn't have to worry about it. We did it because we had to, but you didn't know where the

08:30 Japs were most times. It was something you had to do. Sometimes your mates would let you down. They'd go to sleep on the job or something, but mostly you just did your guard duty like anywhere. No matter what, you had to do it.

09:00 I don't know. We were pretty lucky in that respect. I think in the desert they saw some more hand to hand fighting than they did in New Guinea I think.

What would you do at night time and that? How would fellas cope with the fear of not knowing where the enemy was?

Some

09:30 people couldn't cope. They'd want to talk to you all the time. They'd want to come up and talk. They were tough men but they just couldn't cop those nights. I know a couple who were like that. They'd want to come up and keep talking to you. They didn't like being on their own. It was hard to control. Your imagination

10:00 used to run riot. But other than that, you just had to do it. I know some people you just couldn't wake them up. You used to do an hour on and hour off in the front line, and you'd go and wake up the fella who was supposed to relieve you and he'd say, 'Yeah righto', and you'd go back a half an hour later and

10:30 he'd say, 'Yeah righto, righto.' And then you go back again and it would be too late. You had to keep doing it. It used to amuse me. I could never do that. It was just your luck that someone decided to pay you a visit when you weren't there, you know. Some people are funny like that.

It might sound like a bit of a gruesome question

11:00 but I guess, what was the worst of it in that sense for you?

I think the uncertainty...not the uncertainty, what's the word? You're always a little apprehensive. You'd say to yourself, is today the day you're going to cop it.

11:30 There was always that apprehension attached to it and even when you're being shelled or being sniped or things like that, you'd be wondering if one's got your name on it. That's the only thing. After a while it doesn't really worry you. You sort of get immune to it. Especially the infantry boys. They became like zombies. You'd see them coming out and they'd be zombies.

12:00 Yes, you've got to take your hat off to those fellas.

In what way were they zombies Bill?

Well they became immune to any dangers or anything. They just couldn't care less sort of thing. It gets you like that. I've never been worried about dying. If it happens it happens. I think that's the way it gets you after a while. You sort of

12:30 ...you become a bit of a fatalist you know. If you're in the wrong spot at the wrong time, or when your time's up. It's amazing the fellas you knew who went through the war and everything and came home and got run over by a car. I've had more accidents out of the army than I ever did in the army.

13:00 And they could have been fatal, most of them.

Were fellas still coming up to you and talking to you and looking for confession or someone to chat to in New Guinea as well?

Oh yes. I don't know why, I must have had a pleasant face or something.

13:30 I was always a...it's a bit the same now. I had a fella last week...what's today? No, last Saturday. He came in on Thursday. I used to deal with him actually in the shop. He's got personal problems. He came down to see me. He said, 'I'll be back on Saturday.' I waited in all Saturday and he never turned up. He's

14:00 not as old as me but he's a man of the world and his heart was broken. His wife had dumped him after 30 years. He might have committed suicide. He looked like he was ready to do it last Thursday. I haven't heard anything so he must be all right. I don't know why they pick on me. I don't listen very much either I don't think. It's amazing.

And how could you tell in the field if fellas were a bit on edge, even if they wouldn't say?

14:30 Oh well, with some of them it stuck out like a sore toe. Like if you were in an air raid, they'd never stop. They'd be here and then they'd have to move over there. I'd stay in the one spot. I would think if my luck's out they're going to cop me. But they'd be all over the place. They just couldn't keep still. I reckon that was looking for trouble.

15:00 You're likely to run into something like that. We had one fella used to have terrible nightmares. Everything would be quiet and then he'd go...here they come! And panic reigned supreme. Anyway, we go to Nadzab one night. When we first landed and we had those sort of square mosquito nets and we just put them on the ground and we climbed under them. The next thing there's this scream and

15:30 then someone said, 'There's Fox up to his old tricks.' The next morning he had the biggest black snake you've ever seen in his life. Fair dinkum. He came from (UNCLEAR). It was a shocker. He let out this roar in the middle of the night and there'd be people scratching around and nearly dropping dead. As I say, there'd be other fellas who'd want to talk to you all night. And yet in the day time they'd be as tough as teak.

16:00 And yet in the night. They were shocking nights. They were terrible nights.

Did you get a sense from any of them what they were most afraid about?

No. No we never delved into that much. It's like religion, we never argued much about religion or politics. No we never...

16:30 and of course in those days you didn't. They talk now of stress and things like that but nothing like that was thought about in those days you know. You might see them and they'd have a bit of a tick in the eye and that. Like that fella there who was with me in that photograph, he finished up going off his rocker. I think he's John Law's Father.

17:00 In what way, how did he go off his rocker?

He went troppo. And this is after the war. He's an original and he went right through the lot. He was my corporal there at that stage and we used to treat him like dirt. It was shocking. We used to go and drink at that Green Gate I think is it up at Turramurra there somewhere. He'd walk in one door and we'd walk out the other.

17:30 He was absolutely crazy. He went crazy.

What would he do?

Just his behaviour and his talk and that you know. They call it bomb happy. I wrote to John Laws [Sydney broadcasting identity] about him asking if he was any relation because he came from Hornsby, and Laws came from that area. He would never answer my letter. But when you look at his face and you look at his voice,

18:00 he's got a similar speaking voice to Laws, and if he's not his Father, he's some relation. He didn't live long. He died fairly young. But we had some shocking cases. Another fella lost it. He couldn't stop still. He was skidding under this and that. A bonzer big fella, he was a nervous wreck.

18:30 That's just a couple I can think about. But poor old Jack. It was terrible you know. He was one of your mates so called and then you dump them when they're in strife. Of course now they would get treatment. But in those days it was a bit of a joke, if anything, if you couldn't stand the strain.

Did you know of any fella who tried to get a passage out of the army?

19:00 Yes, actually I know one well. He used to make out he had a dog with him and he used to smoke a fictitious cigarette. Like he would strike a match and pat his dog. I don't know if it got him out of the army or not. A few were like that. They were funny. There was one in particular, I didn't know him

19:30 that well. He was supposed to have gone deaf. Anyway he was walking out the door and the door was open, and I don't know if it was the doctor or an officer said, 'Would you shut the door please,' in an ordinary voice, and he shut the door. He wasn't deaf at all. He was trying to make out he was deaf.

20:00 They were funny. We had some funny people.

Was a sense of humour important to keep you going?

Oh yeah. A little fella, he died last year, just before Anzac Day. He was the funniest little fella, Roy Lewis. He was a great mate. He was full of beans. One of those chaps you know, his eyes used to sparkle. We used to play all sorts of tricks.

20:30 One day when we were doing that trip up to Ramu, up to Shaggy Ridge, he said to me one day—there's two lakes right up in the hills—he said, 'I'll tell you what, I'll race you across the lake'. It would be about a kilometre...for so much, a couple of bob or something.

21:00 He said, 'But you've got to give me a couple of hundred start.' And I thought that will be easy. Well, I never made an inch on the coot. Anyhow he used to say to everyone. 'I'm the only one to beat him in the 2/4th swimming. He could swim like a fish. But going back about 2 or 3 years ago, I hadn't seen him for a long while and he was not well. He was like a vegetable.

21:30 Well, I walked across Hyde Park with him hand in hand, and I was that upset and we went out to Coogee to our reunion, the RSL at Coogee and luckily they had teed up special food for him. They had to feed him by hand. Anyhow I had a funny feeling before Anzac Day. I wondered if he was still alive. I rang his phone number in Sydney

22:00 and there was no answer. Anyhow when I got down there on Anzac Day they told me he had died. And two of his boys...he had two boys who used to come down with him every year. They were bonzer kids. He was a real wag, and full of beans. The first day I saw him, I had just come out of the desert and he's...of course all the khaki used to fade,

22:30 it would be white just about with the heat and the sand and everything. Someone said to him, 'All your clothes are white, Roy.' And he said, 'Yeah I washed them with me towel.' Another day when we were at Woodford, this Bluey Hunter...I wrote it in my story there. He was a funny bloke. A big hefty strong man and not a bad fella, but one of those gruff blokes. You know....

23:00 He was driving and so I had a big bit of chalk and I wrote on the side of the truck, 'The Strawberry Bull'. He goes into Brisbane with the leave party and then comes back and we're all standing there and everybody's laughing and he gets out and he lams on it. Well poor little Roy is standing alongside him so he grabs Roy by the throat and Roy was saying, 'It's not me, it wasn't me.' It was me.

23:30 So he's throttling little Roy. It's the sort of thing he would do see. Bluey lamed on him straight away. God we used to have some fun.

Bill as we broke for lunch you were telling us about how you improvised getting a jeep across a river. I just wanted to spend a bit of time talking about, as an engineer

24:00 **how you would improvise in the jungle and how you would get around some of the things?**

Sometimes we had to put a flying fox over...

To get across a river?

Yes. Or we would make a bridge out of sticks and that, just sticks. The first thing you did was do a reconnaissance of the creek or the river and see how high the floods had been and then you built it above that. But we built bridges for guns to go over just out of ordinary

24:30 saplings and cordage. There were many like that.

How would you pull it together?

Just tie it together andactually you could tie it real tight and then cross it round and then you'd go that way, it was good. We built quite a lot of bridges like that.

25:00 Then we'd drop a couple of trees if they were tall enough to go straight across. Up in the Fly River we had a log bridge. As a matter of fact that's another story. I got the job of teaching our boys to swim. I had one failure. He was from South Australia, Farrell's Flat, this big chap, Tiny Turnbull. He was a man

about 18 stone but not fat. Just

25:30 a big man. Never seen the water until he joined the army. He couldn't swim. He would sink. We were going across this log this day and he fell off. He got a grip around it and me and another chap waded out and said, 'Come on, we're all right.' It was flowing. The Fly runs about 20 miles an hour I suppose. It was a 1000 feet down in a gully. Anyhow

26:00 we got him off but we couldn't teach him to swim. He said, 'You know Bill, I never saw the sea until I joined the army.' So I taught everyone else...his brother I taught to swim. He was just like a stone. He would get in the water and sink. But in that red book it shows the Fly. It was at least 1000 feet down. That's why, when I talk about Guy's Post, that was as far as we could take the jeep

26:30 track. The rest was all hard yakka from then on. I don't know how they got up there. Especially the 21st Brigade, there was piles of rocks with bodies under them who had been wounded. The Nips must have had a picnic as they were wandering up the side of the river.

Into what territory, sorry?

This was up at the Shaggy Ridge area.

27:00 That's where the padre used to carry a revolver up there. You'd see him going out the front every day to bury the dead and he had a revolver. That book there, it's a very good book. It talks about all those campaigns. That fellow saw a terrible lot of action. He was a sergeant in

27:30 1943 and he was a colonel at the end of the war or the end of Korea.

You were partly responsible for building the tracks up to Shaggy Ridge?

Yes.

I know we've seen a lot of photographs of them and all that sort of stuff, but from a first hand point of view can you tell us how you did it?

Well we had a lot of big trees, Hoop Pine.

28:00 We had a compressor and you could run a saw off the compressor and we had to do them by hand. We used to cut these planks about 6 by 1's with stakes and we'd make a step, we'd make steps up. That's how Vasey came up one day. I was telling you about Vasey when he said to Arthur Moss and that 'we weren't going to leave you behind this time'. Things like that we used to build. Those sorts of things.

28:30 Of course you couldn't get guns up. We couldn't get guns up anywhere near them. That's another story. I got called down on a hill somewhere between Kesselwar and Dumpu one day to try and put this 25 pounder up on this hill so they could get a shot at something. You know what, a dozer couldn't put it up. Yet a fellow in a jeep kept saying to me, 'Give me a go.'

29:00 I thought he was wasting his time. He got it up in two minutes flat. A jeep's got better traction than a bull dozer has. You wouldn't believe that. He ran straight up, and I had wasted all that time coming down to do it and couldn't do it. They did a mighty job those jeeps.

Where were you at

29:30 **the time you were getting the jeeps across the river?**

That was up nearly to Buna, and we ran them across a creek there. It was just like two flying foxes and we took the tyres off and just ran it back and forth on the wires. Some of those gullies, by the time you bridged it and that, it would have taken days.

30:00 Like everything else time was of the essence. Another time, I wasn't there...actually the 2/5th company did it. They crossed a river somewhere up near Sanananda and one of the boys swam. One of the boys said to me last Anzac Day. He said, 'Do you remember the time...' I said, 'I didn't.' He said, 'Yes you did.'

30:30 I said, 'No I didn't. It was someone else.' They swam across and anchored...got a steel wire across and anchored and then they pulled themselves over in a boat. Like a ferry. They did all sorts of things.

I guess as the engineer who had to do all these things, what were the main obstacles?

Mainly the gullies,

31:00 inaccessible sort of gullies. Where you'd have to go three mile around to get across, and with others you could go straight across and keep up your momentum. But at Dumpu we put it up in about a day and the infantry was over it in no time. They took a battalion over it in no time. Otherwise they would have had to go up, I don't know how far up and

31:30 around to get to the same place. It just saved a lot of effort and time. We tried there at one stage...they imported up these pipes, galvanised pipes. They came in two halves and you could lock them in. We put thousands in this dry gully and a storm came and the lot just went 'whoof' and disappeared.

32:00 It got washed away. It went down the drain. It was useless trying to do anything like that. The volume of water's just too great up there. Anyway that happened here at my place. They put in these culverts and I told them they wouldn't work. Anyway the first flood it tore the eastern abutments out which I reckon would have cost them \$50,000. The next one tore the back out and I reckon it cost them four times that.

32:30 It got down to bedrock. They wouldn't listen. They just put pipes in and I told them it wouldn't work. We'd had that experience before, as I say. I told the engineers that too. Also about them doing a reconnaissance. I said to them, 'Did you do a recce on the creek?' They said they did. And I said, 'Well in one of the trees is a plastic container 15 feet above water level. How did it get up there.'

33:00 That's why it's a problem. When it floods...it's bad too, it's worse than it was. Actually I've written to the National Resources about it but it just fell on deaf ears. Someone's going to get drowned there one day. People push their way and the water's four feet deep. It's a worry. Anyway, I won't be up there again. I'm finished.

33:30 So that's one of the things we used to do. In training that was part of the job. But our engineers I'd say were second to none. Most army engineers were in those days.

What was it that made them so good do you think?

I think their training and they built bridges all around Australia. See some of our sergeants were virtually engineers.

34:00 They'd built all sorts of structures and they were top blokes you know.

What was the toughest job you had to do in the island as an engineer? Or one of the biggest jobs?

Oh gee, that's a good question. I suppose that wharf would have been a pretty big one.

34:30 See we had nothing and we had to man handle everything.

This was at Oro Bay?

At Oro Bay, yes. See at Milne Bay we finished up with a bit of equipment, although we finished up with...we didn't finish up with equipment...no, yes we did. We finished up with a dozer at Oro Bay.

35:00 We found a gravel pit quite close to the bay. That's another story. I was driving the dozer this day and I finished the shift. I loaded it up and pushed it onto the chinaman and pushed the chinaman and the load on top of this Yank truck and squashed the bloke in the ... never killed him but I could have...in the cab.

Sorry, what was this?

They had been working

35:30 it for days and I must have just gone a little bit one way and picked up a bit of this timber, this chinaman, and pushed it and tipped the lot on this truck. The fella injured his eyes. He had glasses on...rimless glasses like they used to wear. I don't know how he got on. They took him away. That's all I know. But that was one of the jobs I did. I made a mess of that one. It was so simple. I don't know why. I must have been just a bit off centre.

36:00 Of course the others had been doing it for days. At least for a day. We had a bulldozer there, but the only truck we had was an ordinary GS wagon. A two wheel drive job. I got into trouble over that. Donny Barns one of our...a corporal from headquarters. A mechanic.

36:30 He came from Bangalow down here. He had malaria and he had a temperature of 108. Well Jimmy Daven our AMC [Army Medical Corps]...what do you call it, our RAP man, he said to me, 'I've got to get him to hospital.' So I borrowed this truck.

37:00 It was an ADS [Advanced Dressing Station], not a hospital. So we got down and got him admitted and went to turn around and I got bogged. I didn't get back until dark, and well, wasn't there hell to pay. They had had no rations for the day and they had to go on supplementary rations you know. Didn't the major go off to me, and he said, 'You think you own

37:30 the unit don't you.' It was just one of those things. What were we going to do, let the fella die? Something had to happen so I just helped myself, not thinking that anything would happen. That I would just drop him and there'd be no hassle you know. But I got bogged.

And once you explained yourself were you out of strife?

Yes. Well I suppose he had to say something to me.

38:00 As I say he must have thought something was on because he sent me to a school shortly after that.

As a unit Bill what range of gear did you actually have your hands on?

Well originally we had a compressor and that was it. When we came back from the Middle East that's all we had, a compressor truck. It was a Morris truck that used to run the compressor. Then we

38:30 got about three...two or three Blitzs. The Blitz wagons, they were 4WD and the rest were only single drive. When we landed at Milne Bay that's all we had. Then the Yanks brought in these dozers and shovel and a grader and things like that. Well that's when we started to...

39:00 we could do things then. As I say, I drove the little dozer for a while. I had a bit of tractor experience down in the country at Holbrook. I used to go down there for holidays.

And what about tools, like a workshop of tools?

We had picks and shovels. A few bars.

39:30 We had star picket drivers. That's about it. Oh, and we had carpenters' tools and that you know. But that's about all. We had nothing. We had to improvise. As I say, just about everything we did we had to improvise.

Tape 8

00:33 **Hang on Bill. Just for the purpose of the tape. You just happened to mention during the break that yourself and the engineers built a hospital in New Guinea. Can you tell us that story?**

I won't say we totally built it but we did a lot to it. When we came to New Guinea and they took us out to 17 Mile

01:00 and we had to work on this hospital. We worked there for quite a long while building wards...like a tent hospital, with wards and all that sort of stuff. Then we went over to Pom Pom Park[?]. This was before we left to go up to the Ramu Valley. I don't know how long we were there...we were there for quite a while, but when we first got there, we had a new lieutenant come to us.

01:30 He was a bloke named Bennett. He was a boong [derogatory term for Indigenous people] basher. Can I say those words?

He was a racist?

In New Guinea they used to run the native boys and that. Boong bashers. They were sort of overseers you know. Anyhow he thought we were boongs. We were going on a bivouac for a couple of weeks and we were all still pretty crook with malaria

02:00 and in the army you march to ten to the hour and then you have a break no matter what and if you drive it's the same. So we went through this period and Jack Dower, our platoon sergeant said, you've gone through the spell time. So he said 'Don't worry about it.' Anyhow we had blokes dropping out and everything and I was carrying someone's Bren gun. So we decided to put him

02:30 into coventry. Well after a week or so we heard him crying. All we said was 'Yes sir, no sir.' Anyhow a little fellow...he was an orphan. We befriended him at home and I got him in the unit. He was down the creek one day and he couldn't help but talk to the bloke. Anyhow the rest of us thought, 'No way, we're not going to talk to this coot.'

Because he was crying?

03:00 He had no one to talk to or anything and he got down in the dumps. But Jack my mate took pity on him. But none of the rest of us did. Anyway we finished the war and he came to one Anzac Day reunion with us. He said, 'You boys didn't like me very much did you?' We said, 'No.' And he never came back again. But he used to march us through the break period.

03:30 Especially in New Guinea and half the blokes were still crook. And as I say, I might be crook one day myself, but a lot of them couldn't even stand an hour's walk let alone two hours walk.

Why did he do that, to keep you fit or something?

No, he just thought he was Hitler. I think I told you, we used to go down to Bootless Bay and we'd have a

04:00 fossick around and get mud oysters and have a meal and a swim. One day one of the Liberators [aircraft] crashed in the bay. I started to swim out but I never got anywhere near it before it sunk. They all went down in it, no one got out of it. That was about three to my knowledge and there were about five or six. The fifth columnists were sabotaging them. They were putting steel wool in the petrol lines and

04:30 it would only allow them to get a certain amount of revs and they couldn't rise so they would have to come down. Well, the one that landed in there that morning, the 2/33rd Battalion D Company copped it. We were supposed to go up...did I tell you this story, I don't know if I did. Anyway, we got up nearly to the airfield and the provos turned us back. We didn't know it until about lunch time. We could hear

05:00 the light ammunition going off in the fires, but we couldn't make out what it was. We could smell a funny smell too, like cooked meat. Anyhow when we discovered what it was; we realised then. But we never went up for another day or two.

Sorry Bill. Can I just interrupt there? You said something...who was sabotaging the planes?

Well they were spies I suppose. They were sympathisers with the Germans. They were...

Australian or Americans?

No, Yanks.

Americans! Really? And they did it to the Australian planes?

05:30 No, the American planes.

So the company that went down were Americans?

Yes. The first one that we heard, that day we were supposed to go...the first thing we heard was this bomb at about four or five in the morning. I said to this mate of mine, 'This is your first air raid.' It was definitely a bomb. We thought they had dropped a bomb on the

06:00 airport or something. When we got up there...well as I say we didn't know. We heard this small arms going off and that and we never thought for a minute that it was as big as it was. That was a bad injury. It's in the book there. I think there was about 99 killed. That was only out of their company. There would have been ARC [Australian Red Cross] fellas and

06:30 provos too and other troops. I don't know how many were killed altogether. It was about the biggest single fatality in the war I think. These dirty coots.

Do you know if the Americans ever caught any of them?

Yes, they reckoned they caught them. They hammered them to death. They reckon the mechanics caught them. They must have been mechanics these fellas, and who ever caught them they reckoned they hammered them to death with their spanners.

07:00 That's the way the story goes. I presume it's pretty right. Oh yes. I was instructing the 503 Parachute Company, the battalion. They were Yanks. They were the ones who did the landing at Nadzab. One crashed one day that I was there. I said, 'What's the noise?' And they said, one of the Liberators crashed.

07:30 **Do you think all the planes that actually crashed were sabotaged?**

I think these would have been. They were an unusual plane these Liberators. When they ran out of power they wouldn't float, they just sunk. I saw one shot down and that never floated. When it was hit it just went straight down like that. See a lot of planes floated. They were all power and that's what kept them going.

08:00 **You mentioned your mate Jack being a bit of a sympathiser to this lieutenant, was it? The...I was going to say a rude word then...being a sympathiser towards him. What did he do? Did he used to go and talk to him or...?**

He was having a wash in the creek this day and this bloke was having a wash and he just couldn't resist talking to him. He said he felt sorry for him so

08:30 spoke to him, whereas we would have just turned out back on him and got on with the job. He was a nice little fellow. His name was Jack White. He was an orphan and we used to call him Cupie. He was the funniest little bloke. He was a little fat fellow. He shone. He was the sort of person who rejects dirt. Have you ever met anyone like that?

No.

It was amazing. We would all be grubby and he'd shine like a new pin. Anyhow one day

09:00 we were attacked at Nadzab and Dumpu by the...the Japs had Messerschmitt [German] fighters and they must have got them off the Germans. That was when I was in the hospital that time...you wouldn't believe it, I was on the toilet sitting next to a mate of mine

09:30 from Narrabeen who I used to play football with. Around came this Nip and strafes up the area. It must have missed the hospital on purpose. At the same time there was one happening at Gusap and the one at Dumpu, the same time. Well, our mob were in a copse of trees...were camped there. Jack hadn't been away before so he raced out to see what was going on. They reckoned it was comical. Here's the bullets flying all around him

10:00 and he's running back and forth and all over the joint and it didn't get a scratch. He said, 'I'll never do that again.' I can imagine it. His little fat legs would have been going and dust popping up all around him. It was a funny day. They hit everyone at the same time, simultaneously you know.

What ever happened to Cupie?

He died of

- 10:30 cerebral haemorrhage. He went back to New Guinea. He used to come on leave and he'd stay at our place and he used to stay all over the place where he wanted to go. Anyhow one day I got a phone call from Brisbane. He said, 'I'm in hospital.' I said, 'How are you?' He said, 'I'm all right.' And the next thing I know he's dead. Well, he left me everything he had. His car...but it cost more than it was worth to get it out of New Guinea. I got it all down and actually
- 11:00 out on the farm I've still got boxes and that he made. Like big boxes. But it was very thoughtful of him. He was like of the family. We looked after him. When he used to work down at Holbrook, he went to the bush and I used to go and stay with him. The station owner never minded me going because I used to work too. I used to go down on school holidays so it must have been before I left school. That's how I
- 11:30 learned to drive a tractor and that. The kids of twelve could drive a tractor better than the average person and of course we kept together right through after he joined us and then he went his way to New Guinea and as I say when he died I got all this stuff. There were some beautiful paintings and things like that. They're still out on the farm. He gave me a little Mazda
- 12:00 rotary. I forget what it was...and I gave it to my son and he got smashed up in it. It got written off. The thought was there and it was good. He always got a feed at our place no matter when he came. He would never let Mum wash his clothes. She'd say, 'Why don't you bring your clothes up Jack and I can wash them?' He used to be
- 12:30 immaculate. He used to scrub himself and he would shine. He was a funny little bloke. He was a bit of a ditherer but other than that he was all right. He dragged himself up. His grandfather tried to rear him and his grandfather died and then he lived on his own. He did a good job actually, but he was a funny little bloke. I got this surprise when the solicitors rang me and he ...
- 13:00 I had to go over and see the solicitor and go and organise for it all to come down. A lot of things were handy. I suppose I got out in front but not much by the time I paid the freight and everything. But anyhow the thought was there and that was the main thing. But he went back to New Guinea and was in Lai at the time. He had been up at Bulolo for awhile...he had had a fair spin. He had been there
- 13:30 from the end of the war until the mid '60s. So that would be 20 years I suppose.

Bill, can I ask you how you lost your thumb?

That was a bit of shrapnel or a bullet, one of the two. That was a horse. I was in horses for

- 14:00 30 years breeding slow race horses.

This was when you were married?

Yes. We built up a big business and I sold out. I was having matrimonial trouble. From the day we got married it was a love/hate thing and I thought that by moving elsewhere things would improve but they didn't. We sold up. We had 7 properties

- 14:30 in Sydney. We sold our home, a nice home and we came up to Mullambimby and we built another home. That didn't work out and then we went further afield and we built two homes on this place up here and a stable block and everything. But it never worked out. So we just wasted all this money. We lost hundreds of thousands on the place at Mullambimby.

- 15:00 **So did a horse bite it off?**

No, it pulled it off with a rope. Just like a carrot they are, no trouble. It's surprising. They tried to save it but it didn't work.

What about this one. Was that at Milne Bay?

No that was at Oro Bay. That was in an air raid. I don't know what it was. The Yanks were firing bullets everywhere and there was shrapnel everywhere, so it could have been either. It just ripped it off.

- 15:30 **How did you deal with the pain then? Did you have any Panadeine Forte?**

No. No, I just tied it up to the roof. In that painting where the plane's being shot down, you see the tarps....he's got a few tarps there. We were living under tent flies. Oh that hurt. It was still raw

- 16:00 when I went to SME. It was still raw. It took a long time to grow but it's right now.

Why didn't you go to the hospital?

There was none there. This was before the hospital had arrived. We had a little RAP, Doctor Jim, all he could do was give you Number Nines. He used to have a bottle of pure alcohol and if you felt in the dumps he'd say, 'Have a sip of this,' and you'd

- 16:30 have a sip and ...

Did you have some?

Only once I tried it. He was a great fellow. His brother was in our unit and his brother used to write poems. There might be one in that book there. They were bonzer fellas. Davan, Dr Jim and Jack Davan. Doctor Jim we used to call him. He was a wag of a man.

Did you have a nick name?

Yes, I got Abbott the Rabbit.

17:00 What was the opinion of the Americans by the blokes over there in New Guinea...as fighters?

They weren't any good. It wasn't their fault, they weren't trained. They were ill trained and they had no common sense. You'd hear them yelling and they'd have radios

17:30 going and all this and they used to have their ice cream and everything. See, when they went to Cape Endaiadere there, they ended up shooting more of each other than the Japs shot. That Eichelberger, when he came down to see Wootten and took Wootten up there...he took it in about an hour and forty minutes. He lost lots of men but he took it. They had those naval guns in this position and that knocked a few of the tanks out. The

18:00 tanks couldn't cope with it. They were only infantry tanks; they weren't made for armour. They were just protection for the infantry more or less. But they got bogged and had to go over logs and all that. They were poor coots the Yanks. They even had paratroopers...we had, the 2/6th had, a platoon jump with them and the 5th Field Regiment had a

18:30 battery jump with them. We never got a casualty but they had blokes...we had never jumped before. They had people hanging up in trees and all over the joint. But their food was terrific. That was another good job I had. I didn't want to give it away. You'd go up there for your lunch and you'd have this beautiful meal and ice cream and gee, all this stuff. We never had a fridge the Australian Army.

19:00 If you wanted to keep anything you had to cook it straight away. If you shot a pigeon or something or caught a fish you had to cook it straight away. Leave it overnight and there would be nothing left. It would be full of grubs and...it was terrible, a terrible place. But the Japs were like that. I had to help bury quite a few and they'd go rotten overnight, where our

19:30 people weren't so bad. I don't know if it was the food they were eating, fried fish and rice and kelp and that. They were shockers. We never wore gloves or anything and you'd smell it on your hands for weeks.

From burying the dead Japanese men?

Oh yes.

And these were the big blokes...

Not always, the ordinary ones too.

20:00 I had to help with a few at Milne Bay. Isolated ones.

Sorry for interrupting Bill, but was there a procedure that the governments followed for burying...in other words did you keep a record of who was killed for the government?

Well I think they must have. I was only saying to someone...I don't know if it was here...my records aren't real accurate.

20:30 But I don't know how they kept them...how they virtually kept them at all. It was virtually infantry people on the front line and how can you keep an...I can't think of the word...like an accurate journal? I mean when you read about...even COs got

21:00 killed. Shells would land in their camp and they were a bit behind the front line and getting killed by mortars and things like that. But it's amazing.

Was there a fear amongst the men that they could possibly be gassed like the First World War men?

No. Although they did bring gas to New Guinea. I know that for a fact. We did.

Can you tell us about that? I haven't heard about that.

The sunk...they took it off the coast and sunk it all.

21:30 It was in cylinders. So we must have been prepared to use it, maybe as a last resort. But I know they definitely took it out to sea and sunk it.

At the end of the war?

No, this was just after the campaign was over. So it must have been pretty close them getting to Australia. I think it was desperation...so I was told. I never saw it myself but I was told we had gas.

Were the men issued with gas masks?

- 22:00 We always had gas masks right through the way...we carried a gas mask.
- They must have been heavy things to lumber around?**
- No, they weren't that heavy. They were rubber and it had a canister off them. We had a shoulder bag. Luckily we never had to use them.
- 22:30 The only time we used them was when we did that job making the wharf.
- What do you mean?**
- We used it like a diver's mask. We had the compressor supplying the air and we went down and jetted these poles in with the air.
- Gee that's clever.**
- Yes it was clever. I don't know who thought that up. Someone was pretty smart.
- 23:00 **It wasn't you then?**
- Oh no.
- One of the engineers maybe?**
- Oh yeah. They were pretty good engineers those fellows. Often when I see things now, those old fellas would roll in their graves if they saw what goes on now. They were top men. They had to be in those days.
- Were you a bit of a diver? Had you done a diving course?**
- No, I don't think anyone did. Those days it was before that. There was no scuba diving
- 23:30 like today where you can do and learn. I think there was only hard hat divers in those days. Yeah it would have been later. Even when we went to Borneo I think they only used snorkels. Snorkels and goggles and wet suits and flippers.
- Can you tell us the story of what you were doing? Did you say you were...it was something about a wharf? You were drilling**
- 24:00 **the inside of the jetties?**
- No. You can do it with water. You can jet anything into the ground with water by making...by slurring the hole with air...like in the sea. You just jet this stuff around the pole and the pole just sinks down and down and down. It would go as far as you want it.
- 24:30 Then you bolt everything down. We had air tools, like drills and that and saws for the air. The only thing they had was the compressor. We made a floating wharf because the tides were pretty high and you just went up and down with the wharf. After I left the Japs bombed it and
- 25:00 bugged it up. That's the only word I can think of. Actually Oro Bay turned into a big...not a station. Where we used to have all the supplies and all that.
- A port?**
- Yes like a port and I think after we left they hit it with a bomb. They hit the Bantam. It was parked right on the wharf.
- 25:30 You wouldn't believe it. The second hold had been emptied of all ammunition and everything and the bomb hit the middle hold and they drove it high and dry on the beach. If it had hit either end...it was all explosives and it would have just gone up.
- Sorry, you're telling someone who doesn't know anything about military procedures. What is a bantam?**
- That was the ship.
- Oh that was the ship that got hit**
- 26:00 **right in the middle. Gee that was fortunate.**
- Yes it was. The planes came in ...like here. The way they came down...they were what was called a Betsy Bomber. They were like a...not a dive bomber but similar to a dive bomber. They just helped themselves. The Yanks were hopeless. They were hopeless. But the other one was funny. Another chap and I jumped in a
- 26:30 boat...we were right on the shore when it happened and ...the first thing we knew, we could hear this machine gun fire coming down the coast. Well, the next thing the Lockheed came into view with a Zero [Japanese fighter] on his tail. Well the Lockheed tried to entice the Zero down over the Yank guns. Well,

the Yanks shot the Lockheed down, see. You could hear the bullets going through it, the incendiaries and that.

27:00 The Zero just did a flip and turned around and as he was going off he waved to us, cheeky cow. Anyway, we started to row out in this folding boat and out of the mangroves came a motor torpedo boat, a Yank boat. No one survived and it was full of wounded as well

27:30 and the skipper of the torpedo boat was John F Kennedy [later American President]. You wouldn't believe it. The quickest bit of work the Yanks had ever done I think.

I remember actually reading about that at the Kennedy Museum in Boston. At the memorial in Boston so it's interesting that it should come up in one of these interviews.

Yes he was quick.

28:00 But it's a shame that no one survived. You can imagine, these guns filled it full of bullets. You could see them going through it. We're spewing naturally and the old Jap decided to give us a wave as he took off. Cheeky bastard...excuse the expression.

That's all right. You don't have to worry about that with me. I know you met General Vasey but that was back in Australia wasn't it?

And New Guinea and...yes, in New Guinea too. In the Ramu Valley.

Oh that's right. After you had malaria. After you had been sick.

Yes I used to see him...if I had been on say morning shift

29:00 we had a staggered shift...you'd be morning today and then to midday and then the...there were three shifts a day. If you were on morning shift they'd come as far as you were, get out and walk up the front. And in the afternoon, they'd come to where you were and the jeep would come and take them out. So would see them every second day or something like that. But I can't remember how many times

29:30 I saw him but he always acknowledged me every time I saw him.

Can you tell us about...now you were in Buna before you went back to Australia to the Tablelands or were you back in Australia and then up to Buna?

No we went from the Brisbane Line to Milne Bay and then to Buna...

And then you came back to Australia?

30:00 Yes I came back to SME in Liverpool.

How was that coming home? You'd been away for a couple of years.

I had been away from about ...no, it wasn't quite a year. We got home about May I think in '42 and I was home in February '43. So it was not a year. And the next time was

30:30 '43 for another year...yeah about a year each time. Close to a year each time. The next time was from '44 to '46...the next time.

I've got my dates mixed up because that's right. That's when you came back. So the Atherton Tableland business, that was in between all that?

Yes.

31:00 The Tablelands started after our first trip to New Guinea. We came back to Ravenshoe and then the next time we came back to Kurai. That's right.

So when did you do the course in Casula?

That was in '43. About the first of February or something I left New Guinea.

31:30 I got home in late March. It was 12 weeks. February, March, April. At the end of April or something like that.

What was that like in Casula?

It was marvellous. Only that we were crook. But the food was A1, hot and cold showers. It was just like a hotel.

32:00 **Was it nice not to be wearing the same clothes every day?**

Oh yes. We were spoilt rotten. The girls were great. They used to look after us. Actually, another quick story. A young lady said to me...I've only met her just lately again. She said to me, 'You just down from New Guinea, are you?' I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'My husband's in New Guinea.' I said, 'What's his name?'

32:30 She said, 'Jock Doyle.' I said, 'I know Jock Doyle.' When we were in the army football side...it was a combined side of all the engineers, artillery, infantry, signals, and they made up this army side. Well,

these two boys from Port Macquarie, John Doyle and Wally Beesley, we were in this team and we clobbered up. So I said, 'Yeah, I know him well.'

33:00 She said, 'I'm his wife.' So I thought, 'Gee whiz,' and that's all right. About two years ago these boys came up from Port Macquarie and I said to the little fellow who sort of runs the place, Dave Richards, I said to Dave, 'Dave you wouldn't know a Jock Doyle and Wally Beesley or Teddie Wothington from Port?' He said, 'John Doyle's my uncle.'

33:30 I said, 'How's he going?' He said, 'He died 3 weeks ago.' So I said, 'I met his wife. She was an AWAS at SME at Liverpool.' So I gave him a note to tell her, and about 3 or 4 months later she popped in, she and her daughter, to see me. Of course we were all old. I wouldn't have recognised her. I didn't know much about her anyhow. But it's amazing.

You've given me goose bumps.

34:00 **All those years.**

It's funny. And they're great fellas too. Last week I got a parcel from one of them at Shell Harbour. It had a skivvy shirt and everything and I got an invitation to come down for the state championships and stay with them. The New South Wales State Championships next year some time. They are a bonzer lot of young blokes. It's amazing. It's a small world.

34:30 **So you saw your wife Betty at a surf carnival at Whale Beach, and you didn't talk to her then did you. You just saw her and thought she's a spunk, and then you saw her on the door of the movies. How did you start going out? This was while you were on leave wasn't it?**

No, no. The war was over and that was why I invited that girl down for a week. She went home...I sent her home and

35:00 all of a sudden I met this one. And I sort of got onto her somehow, I don't know how. But we even used to fight then. It's funny isn't it.

Maybe you like to fight?

I don't. I hate it. I think she does. She's a black Irish...of Irish descent. I think they love to fight. Oh no. It got too much and she wouldn't let go unfortunately. She kept calling me these

35:30 words and I copped it all right until she put another one in front of it and I went off my brain. I've seen her once since then. That was three years ago. She kept calling me a 'yellow cur'.

What's that? I don't know what that means?

You know, a squib I suppose you could call it. And that didn't worry me much and then she put an F in front of it

36:00 and I went off...I was crook. I had had a bad back and I hadn't had my back operated on at that stage and I tried to rake up the grass. Like it was dry weather and the leaves were that thick around the house, and I snapped. I didn't hit her but I smashed her car with the grass rake. So she told me where to go. She told me a few times where to go and I said, 'Are you sure this is what you want?' And she said,

36:30 'P... off.' So she went to golf...she's a mad golfer. And so I P'd off. It had been going for years. I don't know where she got that word from, but it hurt when she said it. It was all right when she was saying it normally.

What's a squib?

A scaredy cat sort of thing.

What did she think you were scared of? Or did she just do it to rile you do you think?

37:00 She'd say it...well not once but day after day. Also she used to walk past you and say, 'I hate your guts.' She kept at that for 12 months or more. It got that way...I've never put my hand to her. I like giving. I've never missed her birthday or wedding anniversary

37:30 or things like that, or the kids' birthdays. I bought her a present this day and I went to kiss her on the cheek and I got the biggest cramp I've ever had in my life. 'Oh Christ!' That's as much as I did. I haven't done that for ten years, put my hand on her. Oh god! Talk about funny. It was not funny. But anyhow my only thing...the kids...my youngest daughter, they bought a part of our farm. We had to sell half off up there to get out of trouble and

38:00 they've sold it now I think. The prices out there have skyrocketed. They're going north. They're going to outside Bundaberg, Brass Creek or something like that. They've got an option on 175 acres out there.

How many daughters and how many sons?

38:30 Three daughters and one son, and I've got 15 grand kids.

Have any of your daughters got the same temper as your wife?

No, none of them have fortunately.

I just need to ask you, where were you when you heard that the war in the Pacific was over?

Morotai. I had just come out of hospital. I got into a fight that night.

What for?

- 39:00 This chap I clobbered up with I was telling you about...when we nursed those people, we bought all the beer we could buy. We got ten shillings a bottle. We had a party and he went out to go to the toilet and he went missing and I went looking for him. It was in the general details depot, all these odds and sods and anyhow I must have been yelling out. I didn't
- 39:30 think so, but this fellow got upset and of course he came out and threatened to belt me and I told him to go back to bed and he wouldn't so that was it. Anyhow...of course I had been a bit lucky. I had had quick hands all my life. I knocked his teeth...I made a shocking mess of him. He fell on a tent peg and broke ribs
- 40:00 and anyhow the sergeant who was an ex 2/1st Machine Gunner, a fella by the name of Lyall Williams, he said, 'Come over Bill, that bloke's crook.' I said, 'I don't give a bugger, Lyall. I didn't want to fight him. I told him that. He hit me first.' Anyhow I went over and this bloke's propped up in bed. He said, 'A man ought to be shot. You get half full and you think you can beat anyone.' So that was all right. We go back to Balikpapan and one day
- 40:30 I'm going down the beach and there he is. He was in the 2/12th Battalion. I said, 'How you going?' He said, 'Yeah good. I've got a new set of teeth.'

You did him a favour.

Talk about funny.

Tape 9

- 00:38 **Bill you told us this morning about getting to know General Vasey but I just wanted to go back to him a little bit. You were driving him around for a couple of weeks...**

Yes, a couple of weeks.

If you could just tell us what you talked about?

Just topical things you know. He said he used to come to Collaroy on holidays

- 01:00 and we were just like mates. We talked about anything. The war was never mentioned. He was great. A great man to talk to about the things we did and what we didn't do. Just ordinary conversation you know. But as I saw...he astounded me when he used to acknowledge me. He was with this top brass and he'd say, 'Hello son, how are you going.'
- 01:30 He used to call me son. I suppose he called everyone son you know. As I say, when I said Collaroy and stuck my chest out I could...I had always been a Collaroy boy, you know, and he said he knew it well. He was a remarkable man.

And would you ever talk to him at all about what you were getting up to

- 02:00 **as an engineer or anything like that?**

No no. I don't think we ever discussed the war at all. It was more or less personal things that we talked about. I suppose it was a bit of a break too for him. It was a break for me. It was great. The top man talking at the same level. Actually I got a surprise. I had seen him before but I never

- 02:30 thought...well I never knew him before. I got to know him in that couple of weeks like real well. He was a real nice chap. Even when he was leaving he would shake your hand and wish you the best of luck. Half those other blokes would just sit there in the car and walk off.

Which leads me to my next question, what was the general feeling towards Blamey at the time?

Not real good.

- 03:00 No one seemed to have any thought about Blamey. Some of the things he got up to were pretty terrible.

What sort of things would you hear at the time?

He was seen coming out of brothels in Alexandria or Cairo in civilian clothes and things like that. He was 'do as I say' sort of thing.

- 03:30 To me, I didn't like...another quick story on [Australian General Thomas] Blamey. When we were at Balikpapan [Balikpapan] and the war's over, Mountbatten [Lord Mountbatten - Head of Combined Operations Command] came and he had his big red Chev Tourer. I was no further from here to the wall from him. He stood on the back seat and Blamey was standing there, and he said, 'Righto fellas break ranks because I want to have a look at you and I suppose
- 04:00 you want to have a look at me.' And of course the mob got right round him. They said Blamey's face dropped down like a...you know. He didn't like that at all. But Mountbatten was like Vasey in a way. He had that much charisma and that. He was a fine looking man. I reckon Blamey had the 'whatsa names' that day. I could see it in his face he didn't like that one ounce.
- 04:30 See he got into trouble up in the Owen Stanley's when he called them rabbits, our blokes, for running or something. I don't know. No one seemed to like him. Another case...I think his name was Hill, Captain Hill or Major...from one of our battalions. He went to a ball in Atherton and he was there with Lady Blamey. He patted Lady Blamey on the bum or something and he got a bowler hat...they got rid of him. He got him out of it.
- 05:00 That was a bit of a scandal you know. I suppose hitting the Commander-in-Chief's lady on the bottom...
- A very easy way to get out of the army**
- Yes, an easy way. But he was a different man to...see that MacArthur [General Douglas MacArthur Commander-In-Chief of the Allied Forces] never got within 200 mile of the front line.
- 05:30 In all that time up there. He was always criticising and making bullets. He criticised that Milne Bay campaign because we weren't advancing fast enough and so forth like that. As one of the brigadiers said, 'What can you do when you're up to your neck in mud?' He was right. But he was a show pony too I think. They reckon he came to Balikpapan but I didn't see him.
- 06:00 It must have been after all the trouble was over.
- And you mentioned this morning too Bill that when you got to Milne Bay there were a lot of militia battalions there as well. How did the AIF and the militia get on there?**
- We didn't have much chance. By the time we got going...we were there about a week.
- 06:30 I don't know how long; the 18th Brigade wouldn't have been there for much more than a fortnight. They really didn't get much chance to mingle at all. They met them first see. They met them up at Kaybee Mission and up in that area. Of course they came back higgledy piggledy and with no information. Our brigade started off on a bad footing because they didn't know what was going on you know.
- 07:00 **There's been many things talked about and written about the strife between the militia and the AIF.**
- That went on. I don't know why. Actually I've always been a one army man. I don't think we should have had such a thing as a militia and the AIF. I think we should have been one army.
- Did you feel that at the time?**
- Yes, right through. Right from the word go. I had mates myself who were in the militia.
- 07:30 That was in their prerogative. I always wanted to get into the AIF, but my mate went into the permanent army first...two of my mates, three. Tommy Uren who used to be the politician, he used to be another mate of ours. He went into North Head Heavy Artillery. I didn't want to do that though. I said to someone today. I wouldn't have liked to have been a permanent soldier.
- 08:00 It was just against...I don't know.
- What is it about being a permanent soldier?**
- I don't know. Well you see, at that particular time, just before the war, it was a job. You couldn't get jobs. See that was what happened in Singapore, that's why the Poms all went bad. They were all living in the laps of the gods and when it came to a bit of a war, they didn't like it too much. That's why Singapore
- 08:30 failed. They had been living too easy too long. But anyhow, now it's a different kettle of fish. Like those boys...my grandson, he's as well trained as anyone and he's still militia, you might say.
- Bill, with the atrocities that you kind of saw and heard about, that the Japanese committed...**
- 09:00 **was there a lot of hatred of the Japs?**
- Oh yes, yes. We all hated them. As matter of fact it took a long while to get it out of our system too. But I only saw one actual atrocity and that was a girl in Balikpapan and they had chopped her up like a bit of pork. She was still alive. They had cut her arms and legs. They were cruel.
- Why did they do that?**

- 09:30 Trying to get information or something out of her. There would be no rhyme or reason why they would do it. They were animals anyhow.
- So how did the men in the ranks deal with it? Did they look to get after the Japanese and take any kind of revenge or anything?**
- They hated them. We all did, but them more so. See we never took many prisoners. Only when we had to. There was a fellow,
- 10:00 an ex surf club member from Bondi who wrote a book. In the Owen Stanley's they shot 70 prisoners of war because they couldn't do anything about it. They couldn't keep them, so they just shot them. Changing the subject a bit. I don't know if you read that case where that fellow in Timor kicked a body. I rang up one
- 10:30 of the talk back shows the other night and brought it up. They used to lie doggo like that, the Japs. In every war there's been someone like that. I said to this bloke, 'What were they supposed to do. Take his pulse?' I mean, you're fighting a war. You haven't got time to ...I said, 'If he had blown his brains out, nothing would have been said.' But he kicked him with his foot to make sure he was dead and now there's all this trouble. He
- 11:00 got out of it. The Kiwi [New Zealand] witnesses and that wouldn't come over to the court. I don't know. I mean, a war's a war.
- You said Bill that it took a while to get that kind of stuff out of your system. Hating the Japs and everything you saw. I'm curious about how you actually do that?**
- 11:30 Well here in Australia we couldn't blame the young people. But I tell you what, one day I picked up three middle aged Japs at Palm Meadows and took them back to the casino. They were having a great time. They were laughing and joking and I thought, 'How could I kill these bastards?'
- 12:00 Just out of the blue. Anyhow I got rid. I was thinking, 'Could I run them under a truck or something?' When I went around to knock off, the owner said to me, 'What's wrong with you?' I must have been showing it still. I said, 'I had these Japs and I was that wild I could have killed them.' But before that I had never thought like that. And I've never felt like it since. But it was just something that snapped in me this day.
- 12:30 I don't know what happened. I just wanted to get rid of them. I think it was because they were having too good a time or something. I thought, 'Where can I kill these bludgers?' The opportunity never came. It was funny. It was the only time I ever felt like that. And of course I didn't have as many axes to grind as some of the infantry boys. I bet some of them have got some tales.
- 13:00 **And how have you felt about the Japanese tourism boom and the lots of Japanese that are coming to the country now?**
- Well in a way I still fear that Indonesia is our biggest threat. I've got a map...I don't know if it's there; where they're supposed to own a third of Australia now.
- 13:30 I reckon one day the Japs might save Australia. They'll have too much tied up here to let the Indonesians come here I reckon. I wouldn't be surprised. Of course they're a nation...they've got a national pride and they love their country. I don't think the Indonesians care.
- 14:00 I can't follow them. I'm not really racist. I always had a funny feeling about them. When I was up there in Borneo, I never sort of...I went back into the CMF [Citizen's Military Force] for two years when that Indonesian thing was on. What I did, I joined a docks operation company and we were supposed to go and Mr Whitlam stopped it, but
- 14:30 I was going to transfer into the infantry as soon as we got away. That never eventuated. Thanks to Mr Whitlam. He let them walk into Dutch New Guinea and that, and that irked me. I didn't want to see that. Not that I could help much. It was a disgrace really especially letting them take over that mine. I had a couple who came from up there. They worked on that particular mine
- 15:00 at that time and they said they just walked out and left everything. They just gave them this big...I think it's about the biggest mine in the world now. They just gave it to them. An old fellow I used to have a beer with just about every night. At the moment he's back in Melbourne but he's a mining engineer. He's had a lot of time up there and his son-in-law and daughter have just finished up there. They were up there when they got ambushed...
- 15:30 remember when they had the ambush up there and killed quite a few. He reckons it's still a hot spot up there just the same. There's nothing we can do about it just the same.
- Bill I guess just going back to the end of the war. What was it like coming home for you knowing the war was over?**
- That was great. Of course you knew
- 16:00 everyone...not everyone, but the majority of people. See there was no one here. All your mates were

gone.

Gone how? Still overseas?

Yes, still overseas. When you all got back we of course just picked up where we all left off. Especially in the surf club, we finished up with a very strong club. We only had about 6 killed, and about 90% of them joined

16:30 up. One of them was coming to us and he was another mate and came from Lismore. He came to my place and lived...he virtually lived there. He was in the paratroopers and they made him do another jump and he got killed. He shouldn't have done it. There's a photo there. He's got our colour patches and all on and they made him do a jump and he got

17:00 hooked up in the plane and got killed. One other fellow, I saw him before he went to Cape Endaiadere in the 2/12th Battalion. He got killed in the first couple of minutes up there. He was our secretary at the time. We used to call him Shitty Liver Jack. He was a cranky bugger.

17:30 Oh, he was a crank. I saw him for about 10 minutes and the next thing I heard he was dead. We were lucky. And the air force, we had...not aces but pretty well up in the air force.

Over the whole day you've told us about a few mates that you've lost at various times, and in particular people in your company and stuff through accidents

18:00 **and what have you. I was just curious how you actually deal with that on the day?**

I think...it upsets me. We even, about a month ago we went down to Sydney to scatter one of our mate's ashes. It's just one of those things. If you're dead, you're dead and that's all about it. I've been like that

18:30 virtually when I went to Milne Bay. I used to believe in religion and all of a sudden I changed my mind. With things that happen and you see, I can't really think there's anyone up there really looking after you. I can't see that.

So what you saw at Milne Bay changed your mind?

Yes. And young people who have been away for five minutes

19:00 and get killed and there's some old codgers who have been right through the lot and never get a scratch. Then old blokes get killed. I don't know. I'm not a heathen but I just can't follow religion you know. Yet some people...I never try and poke it down anyone's neck, but some people believe and some don't. That's all there is to it.

19:30 That mate of ours, that hillbilly fellow, we used to even sleep on his pants to put greases in them and polish his boots for him because he was a real hillbilly. It's funny. When my mate brought him out and he went into a firm called Moffet Virtue. They were farm machinery people. He was down and decided to call in on Gus.

20:00 Anyhow when he got there, there was a slab hut, WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s everywhere, and Mrs Hurley said, 'Take a seat, Mr Dawson.' There was this cow poop on the seat and he's got this 100 guinea suit on. Anyhow she said, 'Gus won't be long. He's down in one of the paddocks.' So up comes Gus and they had a good old talk, and anyway that's all right. Anyhow Gus met this girl from Five Dock.

20:30 Well, you know what Five Dock in Sydney's like, it's a suburban town. He took her down to the farm...I can imagine. Anyhow it wasn't long...one Anzac day he turned up and I said, 'How's things going?' He said, 'Not too good. Me missus has left me.' I can imagine. Taking a girl from out of the suburbs in Sydney and put her in that environment. This is after the war. A dirt floor. They were hillbillies.

21:00 Top bloke and a mathematician. He'd work out a maths question for you in two seconds flat. But he talks slow and this. A bit like that Partridge. He was the same. Maxwell, he was a hillbilly. He used to study by lantern and all this sort of thing. He was a VC bloke. He was a wag.

21:30 His real good mate was Benny Benfield and he was about this big. I think he had a bit of abo [Aboriginal] in him. Well they were a great couple. Oh god.

Bill did you have any trouble settling in after the war?

No. A little bit. I used to have

22:00 a lot of bad dreams but I got over them eventually. I don't know why. You'd be dreaming...you'd be on your own and there'd be a herd of Japs coming and you'd be yelling your head off and no one would be coming to give you a hand. You'd be in a sweat and you'd wake up and ...oh god. It was funny that. That was one of the questions that psychiatrist asked me. I used to have some terrible dreams like that. Or there'd be paratroopers coming by the hundreds but we never saw

22:30 Jap paratroopers. Occasionally you'd hear a [car] backfire and you'd be looking for some cover you know. Your subconscious used to take over I think.

How long did the dreams or nightmares last?

I think the nightmares last longer than anything. Then

- 23:00 I had these bad dreams with my wife....embarrassing me too. That was another thing that used to upset me. Some terrible things. But after a while it wore off. I gave away worrying. That was one of the things. I couldn't care less. That's why we finished up...well not broke, but losing all our money. I just couldn't care less.
- 23:30 I would think, 'What's the use?' That would start a run. When we used to have these domestic problems. We couldn't even go out to dinner because it would finish up in a row. I got dumped four times up here. The first time I had my eye knocked out with a golf ball and they stitched it back. Then we came up here for a week. I went for a swim at Coolangatta.
- 24:00 When I came back the car's gone and I waited for about 3 hours and looked all around Coolangatta and I thought she must have dumped me. So I went and got a ...lucky I had a Diner's Club. When we had the business we had a Diner's Club. So I got a Fokker back to Sydney, got home. My Mother was minding the kids. My phone rang at about 6 o'clock at night. She's at
- 24:30 Yamba, so she must have shot through straight away just about. In those days you couldn't get to Yamba under about 4 or 5 hours. The next time...we went to Brunswick Heads. We were there for about two days...my wife used to drink dry Cinzano. She might put about that much in a glass and she would keep topping it up
- 25:00 with soda water. Say I met you and your wife...which I did. I met this couple and I said, 'What are you drinking?' I never said to my wife, 'What are you drinking,' because I knew what she was drinking. So I got into trouble over that. The next day we're heading for home. We get between Lismore and Mullumbimby and it's on for young and old. So I jump out of the car and off she went. So I finished up getting the plane at Casino. And then the next time,
- 25:30 my daughter was with us, my youngest, Bettina was with us, and we get to Armidale and we were going down to Muswellbrook through (UNCLEAR) that way. I went into the bank. I had run out of money. I had a cheque but they couldn't cash it. So they rang through to Sydney or Collaroy to see if it was all right. They cashed it and when I came back
- 26:00 she'd gone. I finished up down at Muswellbrook and I didn't stay that long. I knew she had gone. So I jumped the plane and got home. And then the last time I took her to...she's always been captain of one of the golf clubs. She was captain of Helensvale at the time and she was playing in the country championships. She's a good little golfer. Only a little woman. And she said she was going to play in the country championships, 'Would you caddy for me?
- 26:30 So I said, 'Yes, no trouble.' The first day it was all right. We went to bed early. The second day we decided to go down to the golf club for dinner. We finished dinner and had a blue. That was all right. We went back to the unit. Went to bed. The next morning I woke up about six and there's no one in bed with me. I thought that's funny. She must have gone for a walk or something. I thought I heard her walk... you know how you know a person's
- 27:00 walk. About 8 o'clock the phone rang. 'I'm at Maryborough. I've tipped the car over.' She had rolled the car over. This went on. Like you couldn't go away for a week. You'd be home in 2 or 3 days. A 3 day holiday and there'd be some unearthly blue. I think I should have been a commercial traveller or a sailor. Get home every couple of months and it would have been like a
- 27:30 second honeymoon. I kept getting to my expiry date. Talk about a bloody wag.

Did you ever think to yourself well maybe this isn't a good place to be?

Well actually I left 3 times. The first time was for 12 months to the day. She was out on the farm on her own. We hadn't sold half of it then.

- 28:00 The kids went everywhere bar out to her place. So I brought...I was living at the Queens at Southport. And I went and bought a pot plant and took it out and I didn't get a very good reception. Anyway the next day I had a head on smash. I was in turmoil you know. Anyhow the next day she came along and asked me to go back. Well I shouldn't have gone back.
- 28:30 It was never the same. The next time, it was Boxing Day. The kids had all been up. Peter was last to go. Anyhow I had to go to work that night, and ...I didn't know, he must have heard her carrying on. Anyhow she said to me, 'I'll pack your gear.'
- 29:00 I said, 'You don't have to, I'll pack my own.' I went to work. When I got around to Crane Crescent at Nerang...he had a twin cap, a ute, and I thought 'Gee that looks like Peter's ute.' He waved me down. He was balling his eyes out. He said, 'Dad I don't know what you're going to do about this.' So I pulled the pin that time too. And I went back. She came down again. I was living at Labadore, 14 months this time. She
- 29:30 asked me back and it was never the same. She'd walk past me and call me...'I hate your guts.' We had a bit of a problem. One of my son-in-laws played up and he punched my youngest daughter. Well, I just had my hip done. My son was due to have both his hips done and we were up one end of this long table.

It was a family reunion. By the

- 30:00 time I got there my grand son-in-law had wrestled him onto the ground. Well, the fight was over. Anyhow going home...it finished up going to court. My daughter ...he cracked her jaw up here. And going, it started this yellow cur business, and I said to her, 'What did you want me to do, kick him?' Well of course
- 30:30 she kept it up until...that was Boxing Day, until the 19th of this month. This morning she started... 'Why don't you piss off.' I went out and started raking all this stuff. She was going to golf. And she said, 'You're a f...ing yellow cur.' Well I snapped. I whacked the car. How I never hit her I'll
- 31:00 never know. Anyhow she took off and she went to the police. The police told her it was nothing to do with them. Anyhow when she came back I said to her, 'Is this what you want?' She said, 'Yes, P... off.' The next morning...I was back driving then. I saw this place at Labrador...
- 31:30 accommodation. What was the name of it? Anyhow I rang it and I asked if they had a spare room there by any chance. And it was food and everything supplied. Acacia Lodge. And he said he had a unit. So I said I would be down in about an hour. She had gone off again that morning. Well the next thing
- 32:00 I just packed up and went. After one of those turnouts, she burnt or dumped Dad's and my discharges. I got an award for rescue, the Royal Humane Society Award. My instructor's certificate. My medals. My gold medal for swimming, and all this down the tip. I had cups, pennants. Anyhow
- 32:30 one day we were having lunch. Bob...actually he's dead now. He died of cancer. Bob said, 'A lady wants you out the front.' She started, 'I suppose in the war you pulled people in front of you.' I said, 'See you later.' That was the only words I've said to her.

Which leads me to one of my other questions. Did you share any of your war experiences with her or your kids?

- 33:00 Oh yes. I suppose I did. See I always had some mate turn up and that and they'd listen to what was going on you know. Well Peter was the one who instigated for me to write my life story for him. If you read that, it's referring to them. Like I said, that chap from the old Industria, Dolly Williams. The kids used to call him Uncle Dolly. The same sort of thing.
- 33:30 I would say Granny might have it, like a photo of our army football team or something. I was telling them a story about us you know.

Do you reckon you were...your whole war experience kind of changed you as a person?

I don't think so, no.

- 34:00 No I don't think so. This mate of mine whinges. He only saw one campaign. He was only a kid. But he's always whingeing about being in the mud. But that's par for the course. That's the way I feel about it. It's like the pension. I feel guilty because I was a millionaire at one stage. I feel I shouldn't be getting it.
- 34:30 But I didn't have any other way to turn. I couldn't work and I had no money left. But I reckon everyone should get it. If a crisis comes you've all got to do something. You've got to dig in and help. Like these people in the war, they might have got paid well but they worked 16 to 18 hours a day for years...to keep us in the war.
- 35:00 That must deserve something. I don't reckon...I think we're overpaid really. And a lot of these people...I never saw that much but I saw a fair bit. I was there. A lot of these people weren't even in the war zone and they're demanding it. All these perks.

- 35:30 **You said this morning that being an engineer was actually the best.**

Well they were all men of the wharves virtually. They were all tradesmen. They'd been around and had knocked around. We never had many hassles amongst ourselves. Not many arguments. Occasionally but not very often. I went through all those years and I never had one fight with one of

- 36:00 those people. You hear people running...they hated it. Actually our grounding...surf life saving is one of the best groundings you can get. Even today. It's a lot simpler today but there's still a certain amount of discipline. We had a fella suspended the other day because of his behaviour at the bar.

- 36:30 He was given three months. He was a club captain.

Probably good for a sense of community too?

Oh yes. I think...a lot of sports are character building. I reckon football is another one where you can't let your mates down.

- 37:00 **If you had your time over again would you have gone back into the army?**

I would do the same. Yes I reckoned...see I tried to get into the paratroopers and Taylor wouldn't let me

go. Then after I was wounded and they were calling for volunteers for Japan he told me to get back to the unit as quick as I could because he had a job for me. But

37:30 see I had just as much overseas service as the average married man, and that meant that it was only about a month after the war and I was on my way home. But I would have gone to Japan and I would have finished up in Korea. Like that fella there. Bill Cooks, he finished up in Korea. He's dead now but he finished up a sergeant in Korea. And that Bill, the bloke who gave me the pip, Billy Rouse, he

38:00 finished CRE, a colonel in Korea. I liked the army life. It was good.

What advice would you give to a young fellow now who came up to you and said he wanted to go into the service?

There's a boy in the club now. On the 17th he goes for his second interview. I encouraged him because that's what he wants to do and he's a good type.

38:30 He comes in. I showed him a lot of things. I showed him those books and things like that, and he wanted to do it. I saw his Father the other day. He passed his first exam well, easy. And he was supposed to be going into the engineers but apparently he has to go into the artillery first. The engineers are full up and he has to wait for the opportunity.

39:00 The next test...he goes to (UNCLEAR) on the 17th for another exam. He's a cadet.

And what do you think the service has to offer?

Well I think there's a mile of opportunity. A fellow who swims with us now, he's a Lieutenant Colonel. Actually I gave Mrs Richard's his name...a chap named Stanfield, John Stanfield. He's head of the 'terrorist organisation' in Queensland.

39:30 He's still in the army. He hasn't retired. He started as a Private. I said to him last Sunday, I said, 'John, did you go up through the ranks?' He said, 'Yes.' He's 53 or 54. He'd come out with a decent sort of pension. We call him the 'General'. A real competitor though. A real tough competitor.

40:00 He hates to get beat and if he's got a team then it's got to be the best team. He picks all the good swimmers for the relay. I went off my block last year. He pinched my grand son who'd be one of the best swimmers in Australia and I said, 'You're not relaying with us, Nick?' He said, 'No Johnny Stanfield's grabbed me.' Another day I brought a new member in, a young chap.

40:30 I said, 'Will you swim in our relay?' And he said, 'I can't, I'm swimming with the colonel.' So I went off my block. I said, 'You grab everyone you can.' But he's all right. He's a good bloke.

What did he say to you?

Oh nothing. He just laughed. We're swimming next Sunday and he's got a barbecue at his home. He lives just up the road a bit from TSS [the Southport School]. His wife's a lovely person. She's a lovely person.

41:00 Actually I've got a daughter very similar to her. I think it's a good career. It's like 'luck of the draw'. It's like walking across the road. Well, the number of people who have. I know a chap who was in the paratroopers. His brother was in my platoon. The paratroopers had the best rugby team in the army.

41:30 Anyhow we had a combined team this year. We had like the 2/4th and 5th...2/5th and 6th, and then we had the Field Park. Well, we had about 1500 men to pick from. And we had a pretty good team. We went over and played them at Maroubra. This big Jimmy Lynch, I whacked him one and opened his eye

42:00 from there to there.

INTERVIEW ENDS