Australians at War Film Archive

Terence Irwin (Terry) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 8th April 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/102

Tape 1

00:39 **What I would like to do this afternoon with you is for you to briefly run through your life history. It's just to summarise it and then we'll go back. We'll do that fairly promptly and succinctly, so if you could just go through and hit the major points in your life starting with your childhood.**

Well I was born in Portland NSW,

01:00 the 18th September 1924. I lived there for a number of years. I went to primary school at St Joseph's Convent School in Portland and then I moved to Mudgee, I think I went to Mudgee somewhere about 1938 towards the end of 1938. I was in high school at that stage, I continued my education then at St Mary's in Mudgee.

01:30 When I left school I was interested in pharmacy and I gained an apprenticeship with HS Elton of Mudgee. For in those days you had to do an 18 month apprenticeship before you went to university to finish the course. I finished the course and of course before I finished I'd turned 18, in those days the military called you up for World War

02:00 II but however "Pop" Elton as we knew him, he'd got me 12 months off from that, deferred for 12 months, because a) he wanted me to finish my apprenticeship and b) he had one son who was a pharmacist but he was already in the army. He was a bombardier in the artillery unit in the second AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and he had his second son was at university doing medicine, so he got a 12 month deferment until

02:30 his eldest son Basil was discharged from the army and could come to the pharmacy. Having joined the army, having been called up for the army then in due course I received my notice. I had to travel to Sydney and report to the RTO [Rail Transport Officer] at Central Railway Station. From there we went out to the Showground in Sydney, where we spent some five weeks which was an education in itself for the simple reason we

03:00 lived or domiciled in the pig pavilion.

We can come back to that.

Come back to that. Following that after having been there for some few weeks I was then posted to the 1 Recruit Training Battalion at Cowra and spent 12 weeks there. From there because I had done an apprenticeship for pharmacy I was posted down to 2 RAAMC [Royal Australian Army Medical Corps – N.B. was AAMC until 1948] at Darley which is just outside Bacchus Marsh

03:30 and that was the Army Medical Corp Training Unit. I'd been there for three or four weeks when I was posted to Heidelberg Military Hospital, where I did pathology training for 6 months. Following that I came out, went on leave, only had 4 weeks annual leave and then I was posted to transit depot in Queensland.

04:00 We went first to the transit depot in Brisbane from Brisbane to Charters Towers, from there to Townsville, Anoonba [?], another transit depot, and from then I was moved to the Atherton Tablelands and I was posted to the 2/3rd Field Ambulance which was with 9th Division. I spent a few months there with the 2nd and 3rd, and the 2/11th

04:30 Field Ambulance was short a person, so I was posted to the 2/13th and then to the 2/11th correction, and then I was posted to the 2/13th because they were short, so I went to the 2/13th which was located at a place called Wongabel on the Atherton Tablelands and while there I went down to the 2/6th AGH [Australian General Hospital], only a short detachment down there for three or four weeks

05:00 and then back to the 2/13th by which time the unit was ready to move down to Cairns where we did our beach training and landing training there at Cairns and back to the Tablelands and within a few weeks we went back to Cairns again where we embarked on the Sea Barb and went overseas. We went to Morotai at a place called Wewak on our way over we had the first casualty

05:30 and it was one of our chaps. We were at Morotai, we were at Morotai for a few weeks where we built a camp. We set up an advanced dressing station at Morotai. The next thing we were doing training on Landing Craft Infantry, LCIs for a future invasion. We didn't know where, beach landing, we did that and it was early in June 1945 that we embarked on the LCIs

06:00 and we landed in Labuan in British North Borneo. From Labuan having been there we went across to the mainland after hostilities ceased on Labuan, that was a few weeks - 3 or 4 weeks, we went over to a place called Mempawah where we set up a main dressing station and we were there at Mempawah until the end of the war. Following that, at the end of the war I went back to Labuan, back

06:30 to the 2/6th AGH and the 2/6th AGH started to pack up ready to come home and I went to, all of us went to the 2/1st CCS, a casualty clearing station on the opposite side of the island and we where there until, I think it was February, I think, February 1946, when we sailed back to Australia. Landed at Brisbane, spent

07:00 some time there in a Transit Depot at Enoggera, and then we moved down to Sydney. Went on leave for four weeks, back to Sydney, again a transit depot, posted out to the 101 General Hospital at Punchbowl and I remained there until I was discharged from the army in 1946, December 1946. Following discharge from the army of course

07:30 I went home for a few days, because I think it was about the 20th of December that I was discharged and I was already at a position in Mt Isa at the Mt Isa Hospital, so I went home. I think it was Boxing Day I left Mudgee and travelled to Mt Isa where I did both pathology and radiography and I stayed up there until October 1947,

08:00 when I came down here to Orange. I was at the Orange Base Hospital for 41 years doing pathology and radiography. Initially after 16 years there was just too much work, so I had to make a decision whether I would stick the pathology and radiology and I went with radiography. I was in charge of the medical imaging department there then for the rest of my time at the base hospital. We took on ultrasound and some other imaging

08:30 modalities. I retired from there in 1988 from the base hospital. I was already at that stage a director with the Orange Ex Services Club and vice president with the RSL [Returned and Services League] Sub Branch.

You were also with the Military Reserve, I believe?

Yes, well that's right. I joined the Reserve in about

09:00 1952 or 53 and here in Orange, this barracks of course didn't exist then, we were in Kite Street, Orange, one of the main streets. We had a depot there. It was an armoured unit, the 6th Mounted Rifles, which was the successor to the 6th Light Horse. I went in as a medical corp., the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] sergeant. I did the

09:30 exams for appointment to commissioned rank but their closest unit was located in Sydney, one field ambulance and the CO [Commanding Officer] of the day was Colonel Cantrell who suggested to me that it might be a better idea if I transferred over to armour because every time a camp came around I'd be a loss to the unit, I'd go with one field ambulance. So I decided well, so he asked whether I would sit for the examinations for armoured corps

10:00 and I did. I qualified those, so I transferred then and went in a lieutenant then with 6th Mounted Rifles. I was there until 1956, the 6th Mounted Rifles were taken off the order of battle and we became an infantry unit, still known as the 6th Mounted Rifles but an infantry unit. We joined a brigade by which time I was out here as a signals officer in those days

10:30 and then I became 2IC [Second in Command] to the armoured squadron or infantry unit out here and eventually in 1959, that 6th Mounted Rifles again was absorbed into what was known as the 2 Battle Group and became part of the Royal NSW Regiment, the 2 Battle Group, and

11:00 we were reduced to a company strength from a battalion strength. I became the company commander and had depots located at Dubbo, Parkes, Bathurst and Orange.

What year was that?

That was 1959, 1960 when that happened. I was the company commander here and in about 1960, 1965,

11:30 2 Battle Group closed down and was absorbed into 17 Battalion so we became part of 17 Battalion and then because I had opened depots at Forbes, Lithgow, one at Cowra, one at Katoomba and I was the detachment commander, I remained here until 1968

12:00 when I went to the Command and Staff Training Unit. I went there by which time I was a major and I had already qualified for 21A course for Lieutenant Colonel and in 1969, Dec 1969, I was appointed as the commanding officer of the 19 RNSWR [Royal New South Wales Regiment] and in 1971, 1 RNSWR was taken off the Order of

12:30 Battle and closed down and it was linked with 19 so we became 19 RNSWR and I was the first Commanding Officer of that unit and I relinquished command in April 1973 and in 1974 I went on the Reserve of Officers, so I spent some 20 odd years with the CMF [Citizen Military Force] after World War II.

Fantastic, great.

13:00 **That's a very good summary of it.**

And after that of course I became the president of the Orange Ex-Services Club which I was there for 10 years as the president and we turned the club around. It was going down the gurgler. I think with two years running we had lost money. The first year we eventually reached a net operating profit of two million so that will just show you what poker machines can do for you.

Your personal life after the war?

My personal life after

13:30 the war. Well when I came to the Orange Base Hospital there was a lass here who commenced her training on the 1st of April 1947 and I came here on 27th October 1947. Well eventually we became engaged and we were married. She finished her training in 1951 and we were married in 1951.

14:00 We have three children. I've got quite a few grandchildren. And I have one great-granddaughter. My wife and all of our family live in Orange. Some moved away, my son moved away, my eldest daughter went to Sydney but they've eventually returned and now they all reside in Orange which is good. And as far as anything else in

14:30 family life you know apart from travel, we have done a lot of travel in own time. We have done quite a bit since I've been retired, and apart from that, that's it.

That's great. We might just now go back to more or less the beginning. That's a great summary, very good, very succinct. Can we just rewind a bit Terry,

15:00 **just perhaps back to your childhood and it was during the Depression. Things couldn't have been very easy for your family at that stage?**

No, well they weren't at all. I suppose it could have been a bit more difficult for mine. I had one sister. My mother and father they separated

15:30 while we were quite young.

How old were you?

Oh what would I have been? I would probably have been four, five. Around about four I think because I can remember when I first went to school to kindergarten, I was then living with my mother and my grandparents.

Do you remember your father?

No I only have a very, very hazy memory. Very hazy.

Did he visit you

16:00 **after the separation?**

Never saw him.

Do you know where he went?

Yes I did. I knew about 1973 or 74 but I'd sooner leave that out if I can.

Yes, sure. So how did your family, your mum after the separation make a living? There were some pretty tough years I understand.

Yeah well they were tough years

16:30 particularly in Portland because Portland was a town, an industrial town that manufactured cement but nevertheless being an industrial town they were a very close knit community. Only a small place but there were a lot of people there and if anything happened to a family you know people wanted to come in see what they could do. My grandfather was a carpenter

17:00 and he worked mainly the whole time during the Depression. Sometimes I know that he was out of work and I know he worked for some time as a carpenter on the Sandy Hollow/Merrivale railway line which was going to be constructed between Newcastle and Gulgong. He worked over there. My mother she did

17:30 some odd work around Portland. I know she worked for a while just as a casual in one of the hotels. She also worked, her cousin owned a boot shop and saddlery in Portland and she did book work for him. My grandmother she was busy looking after the family. Well then my mother then remarried.

How old were you when she remarried?

I think

18:00 I was probably about eight or nine when my mother remarried. Initially, my stepfather he came from Mudgee. Initially they lived in Portland for about 18 months and then they moved back to Mudgee. Now my sister and I, we didn't go with them initially when they went back to Mudgee. We stayed with my grandmother but eventually we

18:30 rejoined my mother and Charlie, as I referred to him, and then they had three children of their own. They had two girls before I went away to World War II and my stepfather also went to World War II and he served in New Guinea.

If we can just stay on personal things for a little while because we can really get an idea of how you were projected into the war. You went and moved into

19:00 **a new family. How did you fit in with the other children in the other family?**

Oh I fitted in very well. Yeah my stepfather was beaut, he was a good bloke. There was no question about that.

What did he do?

He worked for Joseph Longregans. He ran the hardware department in Joseph Longregan's at Mudgee. He treated Cecily and myself just the same as he treated the other two girls so we were no different.

And you went to school in Mudgee?

I finished off

19:30 schooling at Mudgee.

Up to what grade did you finish?

I finished at Leaving Certificate.

And during your schooling when you were in Mudgee, did you start to become aware of the Anzac tradition? Was your family very interested in this?

We used to see it on Anzac Day and a couple of my grandfather's, he had two of his brothers who had served in World War I.

Did you know them?

20:00 No they came from, one came from Forbes and the other one lived here in Orange. No I'd never really had any contact with them at all.

Did you go to Anzac Day ceremonies?

In Portland we did. Yes, when it was on. We'd always go and watch.

Do you remember those?

Oh, only vaguely, vaguely. I remember them in Mudgee when I was older and of course they had a

20:30 detachment of the 6th Light Horse in Mudgee as well and I think I was about 16 or 17.

Were you aware of the reputation of the Light Horse?

Yes I was and we were very keen on horses or most of the young fellows in those days you didn't have a motor car so your means of conveyance was either a pushbike or a horse.

Did you have your own horse?

My own horse?

21:00 Yes, I did eventually have my own horse and we did a lot of things with those horses. I had quite a few horses from time to time. I met with a lass, she came from Gulgong, that was 18 miles away and as I said you didn't have a motor car and it was a fair way to ride a pushbike so many a time on the weekends I used to go out by horse. Either I'd rather ride the horse or we'd drive out by sulky, stay the weekend and come back to Mudgee on

21:30 the Sunday night, late Sunday night.

Are you still in touch with her?

Yes, as a matter of fact, yes we're very good friends, well their family virtually became a second family of mine and I'm still friends with all of the family. The mother and father are now deceased, but with all the girls and there were four girls and one boy. They are all great friends of mine and I see them quite frequently.

22:00 **You must have been keen on them to ride 18 miles.**

Yeah well it was a fair way to go; the ride was alright - the sulky ride. I used to have a friend sometimes who would go with me and we'd stay in Gulgong for the weekend -a beaut little place.

This was while you were still at school?

No this was after I'd left. This was while I was at the pharmacy.

Is that why you left school, to go into the pharmacy?

Yeah well I'd finished school and then I wanted to do pharmacy

22:30 so that was my first position there.

What made you want to be a pharmacist?

Well I'd always had an interest. I suppose it really stemmed from my early days in Portland. A chap by the name of Dr Lorger who had a practice there. He was just around the corner from where we lived and as a young boy, a little fellow, and he became friendly with me and he used to call and pick me up and I'd travel with him in his car when he used to go

23:00 around to visit patients. I also had a cousin of my grandmother's. He was a pharmacist and he was a pharmacist in Portland by the name of Dick Milgate and I had a lot of contact with him as well.

Was there anything else you wanted to be as you were growing up or was that a strong ambition of yours?

Yes that was a strong ambition. Yes. Which I never followed through with, I changed direction then but nevertheless it

23:30 was a strong one in the early days.

How long were you an apprentice pharmacist?

18 months.

I'm not clear about what the career path is for a pharmacist. Can you explain a little bit more in detail?

Well it's different today to what it was then. In those days you did 18 months there and then you were at University for 18 months and then you came out as a member of

24:00 the Pharmaceutical Society and that meant you could open up your own pharmacy and dispense medicines. In our day when I was there a lot of the things you can now buy out of a bottle we had to make and I spent many hours making pills and we would make our own APC powders of two different strengths under the name of HS Elton.

24:30 **What are they?**

APC? Well you go and buy aspirin today or Disprin or paracetamol or something and these used to be called APC powders. Aspirin, phenacetin and caffeine, that's what they were made from. One was 13 mgs in total strength and the other was 18 mgs in total strength. Well you would mix the aspirin, phenacetin and caffeine in the correct proportions and then you would put them in the paper. You

25:00 don't see too many of them today but there used to be an APC paper and you would put it in and fold the paper. Something like you see in a bandaid about that size they would be and they were under his own brand. We used to make all our own hand lotions, face creams and a lot of the syrups that are used in medicine as a sweetener. We'd make those. You would sit out in the backyard of the pharmacy and

25:30 you'd be like a witch. You'd have a big copper and you'd light a fire under it and put in the required amount of water and sugar and you would sit there and you would boil that until it came to the right consistency and make sure you didn't turn it into toffee and that would be our simple syrup. And then from simple syrup you would make the other syrups needed in the pharmacy.

You wouldn't get away with it these days I think doing that.

No, no well my brother in law he qualified as a

26:00 pharmacist after the war, my wife's brother, and Bobby came up here because he had to do an assignment on pill-making and he didn't have the faintest idea. Bobby came up and spent two days here with me and I taught him how to make pills.

So you were well and truly into your pharmacy or potential pharmacy career when the war was coming up? Were you aware of Hitler at that time?

26:30 Yeah, well the war had really started because the war kicked off in 1939. No, except what we used to read in the newspaper. Well we were just coming out of a Depression then and there weren't too many, a radio set was a rare item, you might find in one block, one street block of houses there might have

been one radio. Although Charlie had a radio and all the kids they used to gather down

27:00 there and listen to Dad and Dave[a radio serial]. That used to come on at about 6 o'clock. Well then you might get some news from that. We were certainly aware from when war was declared because there was a lot of publicity in the newspapers.

But were you aware of the build up to war?

Not a great deal. No not a great deal.

Why is that?

Well the communication in those days, as I've said wasn't so great, and we were coming out of a Depression

27:30 and newspapers were expensive in those days for people to buy and then the lack of radio communication. Why what did we have in Mudgee? I remember the 2GZ Central NSW was the first station we heard and then eventually Mudgee got their own radio station 2MG that was about, that would have been about 1940 when Mudgee got that.

28:00 **What about a bit earlier on when there were rumblings of war? Were you aware of the possibility that it was coming up?**

Well I don't know, I don't think so because you know teenagers, I don't think we had a great deal of interest in that. The elder people did, I know my stepfather did, but as a teenager I was more interested in travelling out to Gulgong, working through the week and going to Gulgong on Saturday afternoon.

28:30 **Did you know any old WW1 diggers at this stage as you were in your adolescence?**

Yeah, I knew some people that had been in WW1 but you didn't have a great deal of contact with them.

Did you have any feelings about what happened in WW1, much knowledge about WW1?

Yes, we knew a fair bit about Anzac Day and the ANZAC landings over there.

29:00 You know we were pretty well grounded at school. You studied that at school and not a great deal. We studied earlier wars at school, War of the Roses and all those things but WW1 there were things written about it but mostly it was about the landing at Gallipoli. You didn't learn anything about what went on in the desert. You learnt about what went on in France in

29:30 World War I. But no we didn't have a great deal.

Did you regard yourself as a British subject or an Australian citizen?

Oh no, a British subject. A British subject to the core. We were taught that. We were taught that at school. You were a British subject. Oh it was many, many years later that people classified themselves as an Australian citizen.

30:00 **And how did you feel about being a British subject living in Australia?**

Well I suppose we thought it was pretty good. You know "Britannia ruled the waves". It was worldwide it was one of the greatest nations in the world, "The sun never set on the British Commonwealth" and oh no when the Royal family and members of the Royal Family came out to Australia and if

30:30 you were anywhere near, well that was a great thing to go and see them and if you got a visit as some towns and cities did from members of the Royal Family, you know, well who, the Prince of Wales, he was to be Edward the VIII. He came out, he visited around schools here, he wrote letters to schools. He wrote a letter to our school and I have a copy of that letter still that he wrote.

31:00 Somehow or other it came into my possession.

What did he say?

We thought it was great and of course when we were called up to the army well you know it was for King and Country. We didn't think we were going to war for Australia. We were going to be part of the war for King and Country.

You were called up, weren't you?

Yes, yes once you turned 18 on your 18th birthday

31:30 you had to register and within about six weeks of that you would get a notification where you were to present yourself time and place for a medical examination. They used to do the medical examinations in the larger towns so I initially did mine in Mudgee.

You were training in pharmacy. Was pharmacy a protected profession at that time?

No it really wasn't,

32:00 except if you had, you know, a really legitimate reason why you wanted somebody deferred. Well Pop Elton, HS Elton, he felt that he did. He spoke initially to the team that came around. There was a captain in charge of the team that came around for the medical examinations, he wasn't the medical officer but he initially spoke to him and he told Pop how to go about it if he wanted

32:30 to apply for my deferment which he did and they said the maximum they would grant would be12 months. And the reason that he applied as I told you was because a son of his, Basil, who was already a qualified pharmacist but he'd joined the army and he was a bombardier in an artillery unit. Well he wanted Basil released from the army and he had the other son, he was doing medicine

33:00 at Sydney University. They agreed to a 12 months deferment for me and in the meantime arrangements would be made to release Basil but I'd been called up and gone to Sydney and Basil still hadn't been released from the army but I think it was only two or three months after that that he was discharged.

And you were keen to go?

Yes, well as a young fellow, yes we were,

33:30 we were keen. You know it was something that was going to happen in our lives and something new, something exciting. I don't think anybody really minded going. We thought going to war was going to be glorious and what have you. We didn't worry about anything else about it. You'd be in uniform, you'd be doing things. We knew

34:00 the discipline would be pretty tough. Some eventually didn't like the discipline, couldn't stand it, but it was give and take.

Did you have any concept about what the war was about really?

Oh yes, we did because by the time I went in battle for the Kokoda Track and that and we did get a lot of publicity about the war in New Guinea. Once the Japanese came in then you

34:30 knew a great deal. Of course there was no TV and the news you got was always 10 days, 14 days old, might be longer when it came out but we knew all about the battles for New Guinea. We knew all about Pearl Harbour - the Japanese bombing the base at Pearl Harbour. We knew all about that.

Did you talk about it with your mates before you joined up?

No because, no I don't think we did because

35:00 I didn't know who else was going from Mudgee. I did initially but when I was deferred for 12 months well I didn't know who might be in the draft when I went. When I went to Mudgee railway station, from memory I think there was only about six of us that went from Mudgee that particular night.

Did you know them?

Ah yes I knew them but I'd only ever had contact with three of them since WW2.

35:30 We all finished up in the recruit reception depot at the showground, we all finished up in Cowra, recruit training battalion, but then they went their way and of course I went mine. I was the only one that went to Darley.

Can you talk us through the day you walked into the recruitment centre and you got up in the morning?

At the showgrounds in Sydney?

36:00 Well the train, we left Mudgee on the night train to go to Sydney and you travelled, all you had was a railway pass so you travelled fairly independently to Sydney. When you arrived at Central Railway station, well there was the RTO the Railway Transport Officer, was there. He met you and directed us to where we had to go. We were just loaded into a vehicle. There was a lot more than six of us on the railway station

36:30 at Central. Trains came in from all other areas and we had a truckload and there was more than that and we went out to the showground and recruit reception depot. Well that was certainly an eye opener out there. Because here you walked into an extremely unknown environment altogether. You know dispense with your civvy clothes and you got issued with one set

37:00 of army uniform, slouch hat of course and boots. I don't think I'd ever worn boots in my life until we got issued with a pair of boots. And you might complain to the quartermaster well you know the trousers didn't fit you, the shirt didn't fit you and he'd tell you that what you see is what you get. And that's what it was like in those days. And initially the uniform that we got consisted of a pair of khaki trousers and what we called a 'giggle' jacket

37:30 and the 'giggle' jacket was just a khaki jacket done up with tin buttons down the front and there was a cord on the bottom which you would tie to the jacket and we had a pair of, two pair of khaki socks and a pair of brown boots. The boots were brown in those days and of course you had a slouch hat with a green puggaree on it. And we were issued then with

38:00 what we thought was a chaff bag but it was called a palliasse and you were taken around then, well you were marched around to where they had a store full of straw and it was your job to fill the palliasse because that was going to be your bed. Got issued with a blanket, got issued with a pillow, you didn't get any sheets, but you got one pillow case. We lived in the pig pavilion.

Tape 2

00:26 **I think we were in the pig pavilion.**

Yeah the pig pavilion we were. And we'd been issued with our clothes and our palliasses and what have you. Where did I work there? Well we had two jobs, the details were picked out, one of course would be the tour through the kitchen. You washed up the dishes and that that the cook used and by geez, some of those army cooks could use a lot of utensils to cook a meal. And they had the big soyers. I don't know whether you know them as a soyer but a soyer is like an

01:00 outside copper that stands about so high. It has got copper in it and of course a great old army favourite the stew and everything like that would be cooked. In the soyers as we called them and if we got an intake come in because the cook would yell out "Put another gallon of water in the copper" and that would increase the quantity but certainly not increase the bulk. Another job I had on a detail there was

01:30 scraping off the blackout paint on the windows but the amazing thing was, you might be there for three weeks and they really didn't have the jobs for people to do, so we'd go around scraping it off. Following us would be another team painting the blackout paint on the windows again. The only problem that I really run into there was that I got a message. It was out of the showground and next door which is now the Moore Park, it was the Moore Park

02:00 Depot, it was right alongside the Showgrounds in Sydney but that's where the headquarters was. And I was told by one of the sergeants there I had to report over to the headquarters at 2 o'clock. When I went over there it was a major that wanted to see me and when I went in, marched into his office and did all the right things and he said "Why don't you write home to your grandmother". And I said, "Gee whiz I've only been here for three days sir".

02:30 "It doesn't matter." He said "I had a letter from your grandmother this morning and she doesn't even know whether you've arrived in Sydney or where you are because she hasn't heard anything". So he said "that's the job that you will do tonight. You'll write to your grandmother. You'll come back over here tomorrow and you will show this letter to the Corporal and he'll tell me that you have written to your grandmother". I wrote and I went a bit crook because I said "all you did was get me into trouble. I would have

03:00 eventually written to you", but I thought that was a neat little episode.

It's the first time you have left home isn't it?

Oh yes the first time.

And you'd only been there three days?

Yes, because my grandmother had left Portland at this stage and you see she'd lived in Mudgee as well.

Had you seen Sydney before?

Oh yes. I'd been to Sydney before. Yes we had a couple of aunties that lived in Sydney and we'd been down to Sydney. We might go to Sydney

03:30 you know, a couple of times a year and of course I'd been to Sydney myself with a couple of friends. When we were old enough we went to Sydney.

When you first came into the army did you know exactly what you wanted to do in the army or did you just want to join up?

Well no my first, well

04:00 my friends that came down, they wanted into, go into infantry they said and two of them did and one of them is still alive in Mudgee. And I know very well and we had to do a psych test and what have you. We did the psych test and then I was told that I wasn't going to infantry due to my background. I was being sent off to RAAMC after I finished recruit training. I knew that there at the Sydney Showground

04:30 because everybody at recruit training common training for everyone that went in and I know that following that I was going to finish up at this camp at Darley down near Bacchus Marsh.

What does a psych test involve?

Oh yes, a psych test. Ah there were a lot of silly things in there but the psych test was questions they would ask you. One they'd show you photographs. I remember one this chap saying to me. He showed me a photograph of

05:00 a rabbit chasing a dog and he asked me what was wrong with the photograph. I said “Well any idiot would know it would be the other way around. You know the dog chases the rabbit and not the rabbit chasing the dog” and I don’t know what he deduced from that. I don’t know what anybody else would have said when they saw the photograph. You know, surely everybody whether you were city bred or bred in the country, surely you would have known that the dog chases the rabbit and not the rabbit chases the dog. The other one he showed us was,

05:30 oh he showed us quite a few things but, the ink blots and what he deduced from that I’m blowed if I know.

Did you meet anyone at the time who really didn’t want to be there?

Oh yes, yeah, there was a few there who didn’t want to be there. We didn’t get any leave while we were. There they didn’t let us loose to go into Sydney. We were there the whole time but some of the people who knew Sydney pretty well, they just said well

06:00 they were going on leave and they just went. Because as I said you know they didn’t work you hard you were in your own time from about 3 o’clock on until the next day. And they’d just go at willy. I don’t know, they’d just jump the fence anyway at the showground. That’s what they did. Well we didn’t, we just stayed in the camp. There wasn’t anything to do at night time except talk. If they had

06:30 a canteen you could go down to the canteen. You could have two beers. That was it. The rest of the time you could drink what we termed “Lolly water” but I didn’t drink much anyway. One beer was always enough for me. I’d go down there and just talk to the people.

Did you get homesick?

Yeah I suppose we were homesick. First time away like that full time sleeping on straw without any sheets and just a blanket. Yeah I think everybody got

07:00 homesick. A couple of people from our group they just disappeared. We don’t know whether they ever got them and came back. You wouldn’t know but they just decided to go at willy and that was it.

Did you talk about that with the people you met there, the other recruits?

The other people? Oh yes, you’d talk you know. “Oh Jimmy Burke’s cleared off”. We might say it a bit stronger than that but “I wonder why Jimmy cleared off”. “Oh well you know he

07:30 didn’t like the army, he’s homesick”. He wanted to go home so away they go but eventually the Provos would pick them up. And of course you know they went long after that, long after that.

How long were you at the showgrounds for?

Oh about three weeks, about three weeks. Then we moved out. We went to Cowra by which stage it was pretty hot too. It was the summer and it was a fairly large camp at Cowra as well as the

08:00 recruit training battalion that was there. There was also an infantry battalion there which was 19 Battalion by the way and that was an infantry training battalion. There was a camp hospital and that’s when we started to, really our introduction in earnest to the army.

Had you made any good friends in the showgrounds before you left?

Oh yes, most of us were lucky we lived in hutted accommodation

08:30 at Cowra.

I mean at the Showgrounds in Sydney?

Oh yes but most of the people I was with yeah we’d all made friends. We all finished up in Cowra. Everybody went to Cowra and we had friends and we finished up in company a lot of us but we were all around the area. We’d see everybody that we knew from the Showground at the canteen in Cowra. Of course on our free nights the canteen was open but again the limit

09:00 was two beers but you could sit down you could play cards. The Salvation Army was there with their huts, the Salvation army hut, and you could go there and play cards, you could read books, somebody would always be playing the piano and musical instruments were there. It was a good spot which you needed too because we would spend, why in the first two to three weeks I suppose there at Cowra we’d spend all day

09:30 in what was known as the bullring doing drill and then weapons and then of course, it was about the third week I think when they decided put on the route marches. Well the first one started at five miles and we thought that would never end, you know that was as far as we were concerned well as I said I’d never worn boots before, we got blisters and god only knows

10:00 what after that but then the next week they upped it by a couple of miles.

What do you do at route march?

Just to toughen you up strengthen you up.

Do they do that?

Oh yes, my word. It did it alright. We got up to 10 mile on the final route march that we did there. Because an infantry soldier is supposed to be able to march

10:30 all night and fight at first light in the morning.

Did you ever question the training style at all?

No the instructors at Cowra were in my opinion were absolutely first class. They all had battle experience, they were all back from the desert, they knew their game and they knew how to look after the recruits and to treat people as a human being.

11:00 Each hut had an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer], usually a lance corporal or a corporal in that hut. We slept about 24 diggers to a hut and then had the NCO there. If you had any problems you could go to the NCO and talk to him but they were really good.

How were you at following orders?

Yeah I didn't have any problems. The only time I think

11:30 where I run up against a bit of army discipline that was foreign was we had an outbreak of diarrhoea in the camp and it was about midnight I think I needed to go to the toilet and well I just raced out of the hut barefooted on the way to the toilet and slipped over on the gravel and took the skin off the top of my foot. Well when I couldn't put my boot on the next morning

12:00 with my foot I had to go on sick parade, sent over the camp hospital and when I arrived back from the camp hospital I was told that at 1400 hours I was to appear before the company commander. I'd be in trouble for a self inflicted wound. Because when I got up in front of the company commander. He only gave me a talking to

12:30 and nothing else but he said "Let that be a lesson to you that you don't move anywhere outside without your boots on and if you do, as you did, well." he said, "That's a self-inflicted wound and you can be charged for that." Anyway I'd been put on no duties for 48 hours but he said, "We're off to the rifle range and you're going to come to the rifle range too. It won't affect you to lie down there and carry out your shooting." so that was my first run-

13:00 in ever with the company command or anywhere else.

In the conscripts was there an awareness that people were trying to get out of the training?

Oh yes, we had a few that went ackwilly [Absent Without Leave], disappeared from Cowra. We never saw them again. Where they went we have not idea but no doubt they would have been picked up. Oh yes and you always found that there was one or two agitators that tried to go against the system but you might

13:30 as well go with it. You had no hope in Hades of beating the system or going against it. They were the winners in the long run.

How did you feel there? Did you still feel a British subject going to fight for the realm or did you feel you were being trained to fight specifically for Australia against the Japanese?

No we still thought we were British subjects. That never changed for quite a number of years. That never changed.

14:00 **And how long were you at Cowra?**

We were at Cowra for about three months. I think it was about, ah it was February I think the following year. That would have been 1944. I think it was February when I marched out of Cowra having completed the recruit training and went down to Darley.

Were you aware of the Cowra breakout?

Yes we were aware of the Cowra breakout.

14:30 I'd left Cowra then but we'd heard about it and knew about it because the platoon commander who came from 19 Battalion he'd been one of the instructors over at our recruit training battalion and then he'd gone back then. I just can't think of his name now, but he was killed in the Cowra breakout. No we heard all about that.

15:00 We knew all about that.

Did you know him very well?

Oh no, we only knew him that he was lieutenant so and so. We didn't know him. No most of the people we saw after hours when we were at the canteen you know were NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] up to corporals. Sometimes you'd see a sergeant there. You might see an orderly officer come around to

inspect the canteen but no, you didn't know the officers that well.

Did you meet any of the Japanese prisoners

15:30 **or see any of the Japanese prisoners when you were at Cowra?**

No we didn't see any of the prisoners, no. We didn't go anywhere near the Cowra camp. That was on the opposite side of Cowra to where we were.

What did you know about Japan?

Well what we knew about Japan wasn't too good. We thought they were, let my put it quite plainly, we thought they were a bunch of mongrels

16:00 for attacking Pearl Harbour without any prior warning. We'd heard stories back from New Guinea of their barbarism and the things they would do, bayonet soldiers. We'd heard stories about them cannibalising some of the people that were killed, some of our blokes that were killed, Aussies. We heard all of those. We'd

16:30 certainly been instilled into us that they were not invincible because there was a current thought that they thought they were invincible but of course by this stage, well the Australian army had defeated them at Milne Bay and that was really the first defeat they suffered on land by the Australian forces and then following that well of course they were beaten, they were pushed back along the Kokoda Track. We knew all about those. We knew about the 8th

17:00 Division in Malaya becoming prisoners of war.

Did you know any families around Mudgee who had sons who were prisoners of war?

No I can't think of any in Mudgee. When I was in Melbourne at Heidelberg I was friendly with a family who lived at Preston and their son was a prisoner of war of the Japanese and I'd been friendly with that family for years since, I know after the

17:30 war I kept in contact. I went to Melbourne two or three times and it was two or three years after the war before they found out what had happened to their son. But he never came back to Australia. He died over there. Yeah that was the White family at Preston. I was at Heidelberg then. They were a good family. They were another family that were interested. I was invited just with a notice that went up on the noticeboard at Heidelberg

18:00 but ring this number in Melbourne, the White family were interested in entertaining two or three soldiers, so I rang. Nobody else rang, but I rang and we became very good friends.

This was after you left Cowra. Just going back to the Japanese. Was there a real fear in Mudgee at the time that they would invade Australia?

No I don't

18:30 think there was a fear in Mudgee. I don't think there was a fear in Cowra either even though they had the Japanese as POWs over there. I don't think there was a fear then. You know when they bombed Darwin then Townsville they thought they may attempt to make a landing but I don't think. Because Milne Bay and the defeat at Milne Bay and the defeat on

19:00 the Kokoda Track plus the battle at the Bismarck Sea and then all these things were finished then and any thought of Japan invading Australia just wasn't on then. The Coral Sea Battle, the Bismarck Sea Battle and that wiped out any hope because they were stretched way beyond their limit.

Just go back to the training in Cowra. Did you enjoy it?

Oh

19:30 yes, I guess I did. Because I never had any problems with it. I certainly enjoyed the weapon training. We had the Enfield rifle, we had the Bren machine gun and we thought they were beaut and we did a lot of training with the Bren. And I enjoyed the times that we went to the range and of course well we used grenades, 36 grenades, we threw all

20:00 those out on the range and they were good. No I enjoyed all that.

Had you had any experience with a rifle before?

Oh yes, living in the country you know I'd owned a, what we used to call a P rifle which was a .22. We used to do a lot of shooting rabbits and what have you and as I said my stepfather was a good shot. He belonged to the rifle range in Mudgee and I went up to the rifle range a few times with him when he

20:30 was shooting and he was quite a good marksman. No we'd had plenty of practice with weapons.

Did it cross your mind when you were learning to use those rifles that you may have to use them in battle against an opponent?

No it didn't then but it did when we were at Cowra for sure because that was the aim of, the aim of weapon training to close with and kill the enemy, and what you had to kill the enemy

21:00 with was either the rifle with a bullet or the bayonet on the end of it.

Did you do bayonet drills?

Yes, we did bayonet training, yes.

Can you describe to us how a sergeant major may instruct you in a bayonet drill?

How he would instruct you?

And what you would do, maybe talk us through that?

Oh well, first you'd be taught the drill to fix bayonets and that's a drill movement to fix a bayonet. You'd be standing at the position of attention, you'd push the rifle forward with your right hand and

21:30 grasp the handle of the bayonet with your left, turn it over so as the shaft of bayonet was pointing towards your left shoulder. And then you would withdraw it from the stab bit, place it on the rifle. They were all full movements done one, two, three. And then you'd go on the on-guard position and then the rifle at the high port. You have the rifle like that and then on guard would be like that and then charge which used to be a

22:00 bag, usually a sugar bag filled with straw or something, that was the dummy and that's what you would charge and you were always instructed to strike, push the bayonet in, turn it 90 degrees, pull it out. Never pull it out as it went in. Turn it because that, we were instructed, created more damage.

What was that?

It creates more damage to the person who gets the bayonet in them,

22:30 when you turn it 90 degrees. So you were really taught how to kill, to be a killer. No question. That's what the army's all about. Anyway when you go to action it's either kill or be killed.

When you were approaching that sugar bag did you feel you were approaching an enemy?

Well you were supposed to psych yourself up you see. And you just didn't charge at the sugar bag, you had to

23:00 yell or scream what have you at the top of your voice as you did it to instil fear into the enemy. That's why the Japanese you would always hear 'banzai' [a Japanese cheer of enthusiasm or triumph], you know they'd sing out 'banzai' and that was to try and instil fear into the enemy.

What did the Australians scream?

No, well you'd usually scream but usually swear words, things like that, and some pretty coarse language but it didn't matter

23:30 you had to get yourself up to that pitch, the fever pitch. And that was the role of the sergeants or these people to get you to that pitch to do it.

Did you ever feel you could actually do that to another, a person?

Yes well, yes, we did because it was inculcated into us and that's what your role was, and it was either kill or be killed and so yes, well, faced with that.

24:00 Sure.

At the training were they also looking at how you worked together, not individually, but in a unit, as a team?

Oh yeah, sure a lot of your training was based on the team. See on the Bren gun which was the main weapon of the section and that was light machine gun there'd be a number one on the Bren and he was a gunner and then you'd have a number two and number 2 would be the one with the ammunition for the

24:30 Bren gun which came in magazines, 28 rounds to the magazine and that was loaded and of course if a gun jammed or stopped, well you'd work as a team to carry out what they called IAs, they were the immediate actions, as to what you would do to clear the stoppage with the Bren and get it back into action. The other people you had were the section commander and other people were the riflemen in the section and you would work as a team and it became a drill

25:00 as to what you would do.

What's your immediate action on a Bren gun if it jams?

Remove the magazine first, cock the weapon, pull the trigger, nothing happens. Right then you've got to take the barrel off, unlock the barrel, slide it forward, change the gas. There's four outlets in the Bren

gun for the gas. Change the gas outlet which used to be the one that cocked the weapon you gassed from the previous round. When you change it, put it back together, and

25:30 put and the magazine back on, fire the weapon. And the other one was, the barrels become hot, well you take that barrel off and put another barrel on.

What other weapons were you trained on?

HE well the hand grenades which were HE high explosive No 36. You were trained on a hand grenade they usually had a four second fuse. Once you pulled the pin out and you had

26:00 hold of a handle that was on it, once you threw it that handle would fly off and it would be four seconds before the striker would hit the explosion cap and it would explode. We were trained on those, they had a special phonic for it. I can't think of it now but you would go through that but you had

26:30 to get the grenade. First you had to clean it, you would take the explosive out, the detonator and what have you, would clean it, put it all back together before you went up on the range to throw it. That sometimes was quite a difficult thing because sometimes the soldier would freeze. And he would be there either with it in his hand and the pin out of it or and he'd freeze

27:00 and didn't throw it, or he would throw it and still stand up so every time you went onto the grenade range you had an instructor with you and he was there and if you threw it and were still standing, well he'd push you down behind the sand banks and that was the first one of the phonic, was 'fear', fear was the first thing. I can't think of the others though.

27:30 **What was that supposed to mean?**

You had to remember that this could be a problem with the hand grenade because a lot of people, quite a number of people froze on throwing a hand grenade and you might go through you know say five or six times with the instructor to get rid of your fear.

What does one do if you are with somebody and their hand freezes on the hand grenade?

Well then that's up the

28:00 instructor then to either get them to throw it, or to tell them not to let go and he might even put the pin back into the hand grenade to stop it from going.

Did you know anyone who froze?

Oh yes, I don't think I was too happy the first time I threw a hand grenade. We'd been through the drill with drill grenades, a lot of times you'd go through as a drill grenade. It didn't have a detonator in it so it was no problem

28:30 but when you get the live thing and you know the damage that it can do and the distance that you must try and throw it. Many just rolled over, if the sandbags were there at that table, the sandbags would be about that high, a lot of grenades just go over the top of that. Well you would have to hit the deck. And do that, oh no they were dangerous things, hand grenades.

29:00 And then you'd fire them also from a rifle, they had a special cup that would go under the .303 Enfield that was called a discharger cup and with a special ballistic cartridge in the rifle, you could load that grenade in to the discharger cup and then you could fire it from the rifle. But you never put it up to your shoulder and fired it because it'd slam you back into the ground.

29:30 You would always put it on the ground and pull the trigger. And I think they were our main weapons. The Owen machine carbine that was a 9 millimetre that came in later on in the army, eventually they had it up in New Guinea towards the end of the campaign.

30:00 And the 9 millimetre which was an Australian weapon designed and built in Australia and that was a magnificent weapon, the carbine. Yeah, you could cover it in mud and pull it out and it would still fire.

Did you do any training on that?

Yes eventually on a machine carbine.

And would you ever forget those lessons 60 years ago?

No, I don't think you ever would. I think if you put a Bren gun down there I could go down behind the Bren gun and carry out the IAs even now.

30:30 Yep you never forget those. They were instilled into you, they became second nature.

What other training did you do at Cowra? Was there anything apart from weapons?

We did field craft. Field craft was movement in different types of country. Movement by day, movement by night.

31:00 We did map reading, worked with a compass, how to plot a compass course, and I think that was

probably the sum total. A lot of drill of course but I think that was the sum total. Because you'd go from recruit training and that classified you as what they call a DP4, that's draft priority 4. Well you had to

31:30 get to Draft Priority 1 before you were ready to be sent overseas. So you'd go from DP4, DP3. If you were in infantry you would go to an infantry training battalion and you would carry on with the next phase if you were training there which would take again another 12 weeks. From there you would go to DP2 and then by the time you got to DP1 you'd have all your inoculations and everything and then you were ready to be moved

32:00 out to a forward unit. Now they did the same through the Army Medical Corp. You did your DP3 training at Darley and then I did my training, introduction to medical training, when I was at Darley there for a few weeks where you were over at the camp hospital. You learnt how to make beds and they had to be down correctly and again a drill movement and done a proper way. You just didn't put sheets or blankets on a bed.

32:30 They had to be folded and done correctly. You had nursing sisters there and male orderlies which would teach you that and I went to Heidelberg and of course by the time I'd came back from Heidelberg, well I'd completed DP2 and then I was ready to be transferred then to a unit ready to go overseas.

This was after you finished at Cowra. What happened after you finished at Cowra?

I went to Darley. Down near Bacchus Marsh 2 RAAMC

33:00 and was the Royal Australian Army Medical Corp Training Unit at Darley and that was just outside Bacchus Marsh. And I told you the NCOs you know that we had at Cowra were excellent. We were on our last evening, I think we were to catch the train at about somewhere about 11o'clock that night. Well the NCOs from our platoon, they put on a party for us and that was my first

33:30 introduction to gin. And of course we were pretty merry by the time we got on that train. I was going to Darley but of course we had to go through a staging camp at Albury first. We got to Albury, and there were three of us and I woke up, I was the first one to wake up and I looked around and couldn't hear much

34:00 noise on the train. The other chaps were still asleep so I woke them up and we had a look out of the train window and we could see a station in the distance and this train was parked out of the Albury station. So no one else was on the train and we collected all our gear and got off the train and went up to the station. The RTO said, "Yeah they'd been looking for you three blokes. You know the rest have gone." so we had to stay there with him and we got the next train that was going to Melbourne.

34:30 He notified them down at Bacchus Marsh. I was taken off the train down there. I went to Darley; the other two blokes went on to Melbourne. But whoever was the person who was in charge of the detail of the troops moving, he certainly didn't search for us. We were just left on the train due to the gin I suppose the night before.

Was this your first hangover?

Yes that was the first time. Yes I'd never even tasted gin

35:00 until that night but NCOs I think they wanted to give us a good time and liven us up for the next stage and that's what it was.

So what happened to the party? Can you remember?

At the party that we had at Cowra camp? Well the party was we just sat around and drank. A few people sang songs in the rec [recreation] hut, played the piano and we had all our gear packed and we stayed in the rec hut until it was time to board the trucks to go to, no it wasn't Cowra,

35:30 it was Homeward which is just out of Cowra a bit, railway station and we had a train there.

What were the songs?

Oh some of the songs back in those eras. Crikeys, The Old Kentucky Home, You Are My Sunshine, you know songs like that. You fellows probably haven't heard any of those.

I think they're American songs aren't they?

Mostly, we'd sing Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye. That was a

36:00 British song and Lily Marlene that was a German song. We didn't mind where they came from as long as they sounded great and we had a good time. Which we did.

Down at the training course at Darley, you've arrived there, you survived Albury railway station.

Well Darley was,

36:30 as I say we just went on then with our introduction to medical training. You know you'd go to lectures, anatomy, physiology, the art of taking temperatures, the art of enemas, and all kind of things like that is

what we learnt there for a few weeks. As I say we had to learn how to make beds. Beds that satisfied the nursing sisters,

37:00 they were all lieutenants, some were captains and of course we were just ordinary diggers and they were great. We got on well with them if you did your job. I found if you did your job life was pretty good.

Were you still homesick at this stage?

No, I don't think I worried about it too much. I hadn't been home from the time I'd left at that stage.

37:30 I didn't get home on leave until towards the end of the year but no I don't think we were. Darley was a pretty good place. We had a good canteen. Again you were restricted to two beers was your drink but down there was my introduction to what we called "Swy", Two-Up, and there was a game of two-up on every night at the canteen.

38:00 Or you could play cards. The Salvation Army had their rec hut down there and they'd provide you with a hot drink while you were there. You could read, you could play the piano. People could play the piano, you could sing, you could do all sorts of things like that. And that was the other thing we did while we were at Darley was sent out to a bushfire

38:30 that was about 20 miles away and this happened at night time and a group of us, about 15 of us, loaded up and went to this particular, Daylesford, we went to that was the name of the place where the fire was. We arrived there about midnight. The only orders that we got, you then were supposed to come after the fire fighters "there's a blaze over there so put that out". We put that out and I think we went to

39:00 sleep for the rest of the night and somebody found us the next morning. There was nothing organised or coordinated about it at all but we sent out to fight fires and I don't think we were really impressed with that because a) we didn't know where we were really and there was only our little group, we didn't see any of the fire fighters or anybody could tell us anything. We didn't know where we were going to get breakfast, how or when

39:30 we were going to get back to Darley. When it came daylight of course we found people, some ladies were out there, they had a canteen, they were serving breakfast and what have you, so looked after then but through the night we were just out there on our Pat Malone [Alone].

What were they training you for then in Darley?

In Darley training for? Well they were training to be stretcher bearers, to be nursing orderlies,

40:00 that was the main training at Darley. People from there would be posted out to AGHs, Australian General Hospitals. They'd also be posted out to casualty clearing stations or to field ambulances or they might be posted out to a unit to work in the RAP, the Regimental Aid Post. Because that was the first line of medical help was the RAP

40:30 and they'd have the stretcher bearers which would go forward. They'd go back from a RAP to a ADS, an Advanced Dressing Station, and go from the advanced dressing station back to the MDS [Main Dressing Station] and the ADS and the MDS were both set up by a field ambulance. They had doctors in attendance and all of the nursing orderlies and that were males and they'd go from the MDS back to a CCS, a Casualty Clearing Station where they had a mixture of

41:00 male and female. They would be your first contact with some of the nursing sisters and from the CCS you'd go back to an ADH. So that's what they trained for.

Tape 3

00:41 **I wonder if we could just go back and continue talking about Darley the training camp you were at in particular what did you feel you were being trained for specifically and how were you feel about being there?**

Yeah, well in the army I thought I was being trained you know as a medical orderly and it was during the

01:00 course of one day that I was sent for to go across to headquarters. I was asked over there because I'd done a fair bit in pharmacy you know would I like to do pathology. And I said "well what's involved with pathology?" and of course when they told me what it was all about and "you'll be sent down to Heidelberg, 115th AGH and you'll work

01:30 down there for a few months doing a course in Melbourne". Well that appealed to me to go to Melbourne and so about, I suppose four or five days after that event I left and went down to Melbourne to work. I was taken down in a vehicle, handed over at the gate to again corporal and this corporal was to be play a pretty big role and I

02:00 was taken to show me where I would live and this was beaut. Again this was hutted accommodation and this was split up, there was only two, two diggers to a room and in the whole lot I think there were about 14 of us so there were seven rooms to a hut and from there I was taken up to the Q [Quartermaster] store and kitted out again with clothing, suitable

02:30 to wear in the AGH, 600-bed AGH, it was a big hospital, Heidelberg.

Why was the army training pathologists at this stage?

Well because there was so much malaria, dengue fever, all the other diseases that you can catch. You know blood counts on soldiers who might be a bit anaemic or get ulcers and things like that. They wanted pathology technicians

03:00 as far down the field as a field ambulance, so I was the only trainee when I arrived at Heidelberg I spent the rest of the day just, oh they call it orientation these days where I was taken around. I was shown where all of the wards were, where radiation was located where the physiotherapists

03:30 were, the kitchens, the cook house, where I would eat and where the ablutions were and things like that. That was the rest of the day and the next morning. It was strange to me too. I didn't have to go on parade. I didn't have to appear on an admin parade. I had to present myself to the pathology department at 0800 the following morning which I did. I presented myself up there. I was greeted by a sergeant and taken in and introduced to the

04:00 boss of the place who was a Major McGeary. He was the OC [Officer Commanding] of the pathology department, a pathologist. He later became Professor of Pathology at Sydney University and it was tremendous. The first day I spent with a chap who was a microbiologist by the name of Lieutenant Lewis was his name and he just went through, it was like going back to school he just went through all the different bacteria,

04:30 staphylococcal, meningosis and all sorts of things you just learnt all about those and when you had grasped them then you would go to a dual microscope with him and he would have all the slides and then he'd go through all those with you and eventually you had to name them and then you would learn how to collect the material and stain the slides. And you were rotated. I was rotated through each department.

05:00 The first month I spent in bacteriology and that was where you grew all the organisms and you grew them on plates, blood agar plates and all different types of plates you'd grow the organisms and you'd put them out the next morning on a slide. You'd get one of the colonies and put it on a slide. When it was dried, you would stain it and then examine it under a microscope. And I went to the media making department and that's where you

05:30 made all your media. You know we became cooks in actual fact 'cause we'd make broth, three or four different types of broth, glucose broth it used to grow certain types of organisms. You'd make all your plates, all your agar plates. We had sheep there and when you were making blood agar plates you'd have to go down to the sheep pens, get your sheep and you'd put a needle in their jugular vein and get 50ml

06:00 of blood. You'd take that back, and of course that was collected sterile, and you'd take that back and that would be poured into your agar and that would become a blood agar plate. And you grew most of your organisms, staphylococcus, even the golden staph and the golden staph was back in those days. We used to grow the golden staph there at Heidelberg. And then I went into biochemistry and that's where you do all the different biochemical tests,

06:30 glucose tolerance test, all things like that. Tests wild felix reaction, osamine tests for syphilis, all sorts of things like that. And then into histology and histology you worked, you know, in the post mortem room and you'd come back with your sections and then sections, how they were fixed and when they were fixed, you'd have to cut them with a instrument called a microtome and they were cut down to very thin sections so you could see through them on

07:00 a microscope. They would be put on a slide after you'd fixed them in paraffin, things like that, put them on a slide, cut on a microtome and then stained and then you'd come up with an answer as to what killed the person. So having been though all of those I was then ready to go back to Darley. That took six months.

Was that the first time you had worked in

07:30 **that environment?**

Oh yes, first time that environment. And there was a chap there by the name of Bond, a Lieutenant Bond. And he was a biochemist. There was another lass there by the name of Margaret Murray, she was also a biochemist, and we finished up at the Walter and Eliza Institute. At that time penicillin was still in its infancy and they were doing work out there on growing the penicillin. And I went out

08:00 with, that left Lewis and the staff sergeant there was Glen Dettman. I went out with those two to the Walter and Eliza Institute and two or three times we went out there in the early days of growing the penicillin and harvesting it and they also worked on the anti gas gangrene serum. That was worked on at Heidelberg too while I was there. And while I was there a couple more trainees

08:30 came into Heidelberg. One lad was a chap by the name of George Gordon and George was a glass blower by trade. He also used to, when he was a civvy before he came into the army, at Luna Park. He was a glass blower at Luna Park and of course he was suitably employed there because a lot of glassware was used like double surface condensers, a Davies double surface condenser,

09:00 it was what you used to produce distilled water. Well any glassware they needed, George used to do it and in his spare time he got his pathology training when he wasn't glass blowing. Oh there were a couple of others that came there too.

And you worked with patients at that time?

Yes, you would go around to patients to collect your specimens.

Were they returned soldiers?

Oh yes, we had a lot of malaria

09:30 and things like that. You'd go around and collect the blood, stain it and examine it for the malarial parasites and you always had two types you would get which was known as BT and MT. Benign tertian was one type of malaria and the other one was MT which was malign tertian malaria. They had different parasites under the microscope. They were both different and then you had another one. You would get cerebral

10:00 malaria too but usually those patients didn't survive.

Did you talk to the soldiers about their experiences?

Oh yes, when most of them were in Heidelberg you know they were very sick, very sick, because it was an acute hospital and they would only be in there until they recovered sufficiently to go then and be sent out to a convalescent

10:30 hospital. Some might be in Heidelberg you know for many months getting them their war wounds and that. Oh yes, we used to often talk to the soldiers there that were patients in the hospital.

You'd be taking blood samples from them?

Yes, take blood yes. External punctures and any that we would query as leukaemia and things like that, well there would always be an external puncture and that was usually done by Major McGeary

11:00 but you'd go around with him and he would put a needle in their sternum and collect the specimen and we'd go back to path and you'd do the procedures to verify what type of leukaemia it was. And you'd do blood groups and cross matching for blood transfusions.

You said you were also taking samples from the morgue. It must be pretty shocking to see a body for the first time?

Well it was I think for the first time.

11:30 Because well you'd be in there with the pathologist and you'd be his offsider. You didn't stand back there in the corner you had a job to do when you were in the post mortem room. And it was usually your job to remove the rib cage and take the top of the skull off and you know that's really a work of art to take off the top of a skull because when it went

12:00 back on and the scalp was sewn back, relatives were not to be able to see any suture marks or anything like that so that was quite a work of art. And this chap I told you about who was the glassblower. I can remember, he only ever went to the mortuary twice, and he was banned because George came in and both times George just disappeared into another world. He just couldn't hack that at all.

Did you actually do that?

Oh yes you had

12:30 to do it, physically remove the skull. You were trained how to do it. You used a saw and you used a hammer and chisel, you had to split the mastoid areas which is above your ear, you had to split that with the chisel and you took it off behind the hairline both in the front, the frontal region, and the occipital region, and then when the scalp came back you'd suture across the top of the head and in the hair you wouldn't see it

13:00 and you couldn't see anything when you put it back. And you'd take the ribs out, take the rib cage out. That pathologist when you had all that cleared for him, he would do his job and then it was your job then to do the sewing up.

These were the bodies of soldiers?

Yes, all soldiers. It wasn't a nice occupation. I don't think I

13:30 slept that night. The first time you go down you only go down just as an observer and I know that I

didn't have any dinner that night and I know I didn't sleep that night either. And I just hoped the next morning when I was on the way up to pathology that we didn't have to go back to the mortuary again that day. And he didn't go back for a couple of days later.

How had most of them died?

Oh they died from

14:00 war injuries. They'd died from infections that they had, malaria, get cerebral malaria, usually they didn't recover from that. We had patients who died from leukaemia, renal disease but all were related to war injuries and their war service.

These were mainly soldiers who had been serving overseas?

Yes

14:30 that's right.

You were part of the field ambulance division still?

No, at that stage when I was at Heidelberg I still belonged to RAAMC. I hadn't been drafted out to a unit because I hadn't completed my DP2 training and DP2, Draft Priority 2, I was completing at Heidelberg and when I completed at Heidelberg then I was reposted

15:00 back to Darley and it wasn't very long after that, from Darley that I was transferred up to then, oh we were marched out up to 2 Military District which was in the Sydney area and then I went on leave and this was towards the end of 1944. I went on 28 days leave and found out later that was pre-embarkation leave and everything.

15:30 **Just might go back to the penicillin and the gangrene. You said that penicillin was new then. What was the army doing to develop penicillin?**

Oh well because they had the scientific people there they were all the research and that was being down at the Walter and Eliza Institute which is a big research centre in Melbourne and the army of course were invited to participate and they were growing the moulds

16:00 for the penicillin out at the Walter and Eliza and then they would extract the mould from which the penicillin was a filtrate, it filtrated out and the same with the anti-gas gangrene. Because there were a lot of problems with soldiers wounded getting gas gangrene and you know they would lose limbs, lose their life if the gas gangrene was bad enough or with both with the

16:30 penicillin and the anti-gas gangrene serum that saved a tremendous number of lives.

Were they manufacturing penicillin or just for use in the hospital or for trials?

No, they were only just doing the research on it. It was being manufactured by some of the pharmaceutical companies like Sterling and those people. They were doing the manufacture of it.

It was in general use in the army at that time?

Well it was in use. It was only in its early stages

17:00 and it was in general use around about towards the end of 1944 and in 1945. It was certainly in general use in '45 so was the anti-gas gangrene serum and they stick with you. You know with gas gangrene you can remember those things because you only have to touch somebody if they've got gas gangrene. You can smell them usually and you never forget the smell and if you run your hand

17:30 down you can feel the bubbles crinkling under the skin. I can remember many years later here at the base hospital at Orange. A patient came in from out of Orange, I think he was out somewhere near the other side of Dubbo, and he'd put his arm through a glass window and of course he'd cut the artery and he'd walked in and he'd been sent up to us for x-ray and the surgeon was there waiting for him and when the patient came

18:00 in on the trolley through the front door I said "He got gas gangrene" and John said "How do you know?" and I said "Well I've smelt before. I've smelt it too much'. I said "You run your hand over his arm that was cut" and I said "I bet you'll feel the crackles from the bubbles" and he did too and the person he had gas gangrene. It travelled too far and too long and he lost his arm but they gave him the anti-gas gangrene serum and that saved his life

18:30 but he still lost his arm from the elbow but it stays with you. I could still smell it today if somebody had gas gangrene.

What's it smell like?

Oh absolutely putrid. You can't miss it. You've smelt rotten egg gas from when you've been a kid in the science labs at school. They make rotten egg gas, well it's worse than that. You can smell it and that's what crackles under the skin all that gas in little bubbles.

19:00 **Did you first encounter that in the hospital in Heidelberg?**

Yes, that was the first place I'd ever saw it was there. From gas gangrene you've got an organism which causes called bacillus welchii. You can pick that up when you've stained the slide and you can pick up the bacillus

19:30 and you can see the gas in the bacillus. It's a gas forming organism.

So many soldiers were dying in the hospital because of gangrene?

Ah yes, we lost quite a few. A lot of them didn't survive to get back to Australia even. Of course as things went on well our methods of evacuation became much better and you would get them out because you would eventually reach the stage of aerial evacuation and things like that

20:00 and we had you know had good hospitals for them .We had the 2/5th, 2/6th and 2/9th Australian General Hospitals in New Guinea and the same as we had the 2/6th and the 2/5th over in Morotai for the Borneo thing and then of course you had AGHs back here in Australia so you know the medical services they were tremendous. They were really good. They saved a lot of lives. Yeah together with the natives

20:30 in New Guinea.

Was the hospital full in Heidelberg?

Yes, I think we were mainly close to using the total bed state from when I was there and from when I left.

Did your experiences with the wounded soldiers and seeing these people coming in from battle from overseas make you anxious about

21:00 **your service in the army?**

No, I think by that stage that was just something that could happen to you. It was going to happen to you. It wasn't going to happen to me. It could happen to your mate but not you. No I don't think we ever really put much thought into that. Youngsters you can relate it to today, you know you put a teenager out on the road in a motor car.

21:30 A lot of them don't really worry, they're interested in getting the car from Point A to Point B in the shortest possible time. If they stopped and thought about as to what's likely to happen to them. I had a son, I had problems with him too on this thing on the road. He never ever thought about what was likely to happen to him. He enjoyed what he was doing.

But surely it must have built up on you over time seeing so many young men your age coming in and you're treating them, must have affected you in some way?

22:00 Ah yes, we knew that there were a lot of people coming back that were wounded and disabled and a lot of them died. A lot of those we had at Heidelberg were going to die. 'Cause we saw them later on when we were over in Borneo and those places and that's where you came up, they were really first hand what you saw over there.

Did you

22:30 **know at this stage you might go overseas?**

Oh yes, I had a pretty good idea when I went on that 28 days leave to Mudgee. You come into these staging camps. This particular one was in Sydney, I'm just trying to think, out at Leichhardt no not Leichhardt, I'll think of it in a minute because my brother-in-law had his pharmacy out there. You go

23:00 into a staging camp and when you got back you had experienced diggers who had been there saying "you'll be sorry son, you'll be sorry". That's all you ever got from a lot of these blokes. They were just trying to egg you on, stir you up a bit. No I don't think we really put a great deal of thought into it. You were there with your mates and you were all in the same boat.

Did you have many good mates at this stage,

23:30 **people who had been through with you from Cowra?**

Oh yes we had a lot of good mates and I'm still mates with quite a lot of them. Even as late as this after World War II. I have a couple of good mates in Gulgong, they're still there. Two or three in Mudgee that are still over there that I see from time to time. And of course 1 unit I was with was the 2/13th,

24:00 well that's a West Australian unit and I've been over there to a couple of reunions since then so you've got some good friends. I've got some good friends left in Melbourne I was in the army with.

You mentioned that you went and saw that couple in Heidelberg who had that, had a son as a POW.

Yes, that's right, the White's at Preston.

Can you tell us a little bit about why you went and saw them?

Well they put a notice on the

24:30 noticeboard. It was put up at Heidelberg and you found a lot of families did this through the war years. Well you see it still today. A ship comes in and families invite the sailors home for a meal and things like that. Well this is what people were doing in Melbourne and the White Family, 13 Stone Street, Preston, and they had a telephone number there, they would like two or three soldiers to come to their home for an evening meal

25:00 and just friendship. Well I rang up and they invited me out. It was about two nights later after that I went out over there for dinner. As a matter of fact I walked form Heidelberg to Preston and I suppose that would have taken me about 40 minutes to walk there and walked home later on that night and I went over for the evening meal. There was the family,

25:30 Mr and Mrs White, John White was his name, he owned a shoe manufacturing business and there was his wife and they had one daughter and one son. Of course the son was a prisoner of war and Joan was the daughter. Well after spending three or four hours there that night of course I went home and when I went home they invited me back the following Sunday if I was off to come over for Sunday lunch

26:00 and then by this time they found out if you'd played any sports and I said well yes, I played tennis and Joan their daughter played tennis so the following Sunday after lunch we got in, he had a car, we got in the car and I forget where we went it wasn't far. It took us about half an hour's travel and we played tennis. Joan and I played tennis all afternoon, while mum and dad sat around on the seats and that. And

26:30 I used to go over there, I'd go over the Whites I suppose a couple of times a week while I was at Heidelberg. We didn't do much work at night time in the lab. You'd probably be placed on call once a week. The rest of the nights were yours, they were free provided, you went out of the place with a leave pass, quite easily arranged. You just go to the orderly room and you'd be given a

27:00 leave pass.

Did they talk about their son who was a POW?

Yeah, they told me they assumed he was a prisoner of war because the British General Percival he had surrendered Malaya and the 8th Div was there and they were all prisoners of the Japanese. Yeah so they assumed that he was but they didn't know where he was. And eventually it was found out that he'd been

27:30 in part of the group that had been sent to Sandakan and it was roughly 2,500 that went to Sandakan and only six that ever came out of the place alive at the end of the war, at the end, apart from two or three that during their period of their captivity that they escaped from Sandakan and joined the Filipino guerrillas, the regulars. There were only six at the end of the war but they still

28:00 couldn't at the end of the war because I went back to, after I was discharged, well that same year, in 1946, I had some leave towards the end of September I went down to Melbourne and for a week. I spent a week with them and they still didn't know at that stage. And even when I left and I came back from Mt Isa and they still hadn't found out properly by then. Eventually they did find out

28:30 and of course I don't know whether you've, Lynette Silver, she's the historian for the 8th Division. She wrote a magnificent book because she did a tremendous amount of research. But even as late as two years ago she has found out the names of people who have just been missing. They didn't know, you know, they'd never officially listed as missing, believed killed as a prisoner of war, died as a prisoner of war but

29:00 Lynette Silver has found a lot more.

How was that family coping at the time during the war?

It was a big wrench. A big wrench on their family because John White himself he'd served in the First World War and he'd served overseas in the First World War and to be your only son it had a detrimental effect upon Mrs White. She was always upset about her son and I think when I was down there well of course I

29:30 was the only, other people who had visited later on, but when I was visiting I was the only one and they treated me as part of the family. Joan and I, she was a lovely girl and we were great friends and you know we'd go to the pictures occasionally and things like that. And I've seen them both. Since then Joan's married and had children. I took my wife and myself, we went to Melbourne a few times.

30:00 They moved eventually down to the Lakes District in Victoria and we've even been down there and seen them down there. So some people like that are great when you make contact like that. I wasn't the only soldier that they entertained in their home. They had that notice there and they were willing to entertain any.

Did

30:30 **many of the soldiers have girlfriends in Melbourne?**

Oh yes, yes, quite a lot of them had girlfriends. I suppose I looked upon Joan as a girlfriend of mine while I was in Melbourne because I knew her for I suppose for four and a half, five months, and I say we used to go to the pictures and what have you. Oh yes, a lot of them met girls while they were patients in the hospital too you know. Some of them would come in from the

31:00 WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] or the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service], they'd be sick and they'd be sent to Heidelberg Hospital.

What pictures did you go and see?

Oh crikey, look I couldn't even remember the names. I'd have to put my thinking cap on and think about what pictures we'd see in the war years. Crikeys, that would be hard. Films about the American Civil War,

31:30 you'd see those over and over again, we'd seen some of those. Some of the British pictures but oh no for the life of me I don't think I could remember their names today.

Did you get newsreels?

Yeah, we got Cinesound newsreels. And that used to run for about 20 minutes at the pictures and you'd get all the news. They had some good footage of the war. Damien Parer and all of those, we'd always get those. We'd get the

32:00 cartoons, you know Popeye the Sailor Man and all those types of things and you'd get usually two films one was a support and the major one came on after interval and it was the main film.

So it must have been hard when you left Melbourne?

Yes, well I suppose it was hard when I left Melbourne but then again it was a new adventure. I knew

32:30 I was going to finish up in North Queensland for a start and of course that was another adventure. I also knew that when I reached Sydney I was going to go on leave for 28 days and I hadn't been home to Mudgee since I left it. And I had that girl out in Gulgong but I didn't have any horses left to ride out there because they'd been sold so I had to catch the train.

Did you write to Joan?

Oh yes

33:00 I corresponded with Joan yes my word. I can remember receiving a photograph of her, or two photographs, the only two I ever received while I was in Morotai. There was a letter from Joan and a couple of photographs that you put in your pocket and you'd carry around. I had a photograph of the girl in Gulgong too.

But you never forgot the one in Gulgong, you went back to Gulgong instead of Melbourne?

Yeah I went back to Gulgong. I went to Melbourne when I came

33:30 back from Mt Isa. I went down to Melbourne again and by this stage Joan was engaged and I knew the chap she was engaged to, I'd met him. Our friendship with Joan was fairly platonic but we were really good mates. On no, yes I think all of those play an important part in your life.

34:00 You had to have something to come home to.

Tape 4

00:48 **Tell us about your first experience of overseas service?**

Well I suppose the first experience was when we landed at Morotai. We disembarked from the Sea

01:00 Barb, the troop ship we were on, via cargo nets into barges and then landed on one the beaches at Morotai. From there we embarked on, they had transport there, we embarked on trucks moved inland for about 15 or 20 minutes by truck. On arrival there well we had to set up our camp. We did this the hard way because

01:30 well we did it with what picks and shovels, we had to clear the undergrowth and that from the jungle. Across the road were the SeaBees [US Naval Construction Force] working for the Americans and of course they were constructing their camp using bulldozers. However we completed our camp sufficient for us to live there for a short time. We only expected to be there for a short time and things were quite comfortable. We didn't erect any large tents, just small two-man

02:00 tents and what have you.

Before we move into the detail of Morotai, can we talk about the journey to Morotai? I believe that was quite a memorable journey in itself?

Well we moved from the Atherton Tablelands down to Cairns, Redlands staging camp, on our appointed day which was Friday, 13th April, we embarked on an American ship called the Sea Barb. The tug which was pulling out to the channel, unfortunately the Sea Barb dragged the tug under and both

02:30 the skipper of the tug and the engineer were drowned. Eventually we were out in the channel just as the Captain announced that President Roosevelt had died and you know that was a bit of a shock to everybody. We expected him to go on and then on the way we sailed with one escort, a destroyer

03:00 there was just the one troop ship and the destroyer, and off we went. The destroyer was harassed by Japanese Zero and while the anti-aircraft fire from that we suffered our first casualty. One of our chaps was hit in the head with shrapnel. He was wounded, not killed, but he was evacuated from Morotai to the AGH and eventually back to Australia. He never joined the unit again. That was part of our trip, our first trip away from Australia on active service

03:30 and they're the events that happened.

Can you describe for us what was involved in an amphibious landing?

Well it all depends on how you went in. When we went in we came off the Sea Barb on cargo nets but when we did the landing in Labuan we travelled in landing craft infantry and they run right up to the beach and you land from there. If you are on other craft well you can land in barges a wave of barges. The LCIs

04:00 were tremendous because they were right up on the beach. You'd land in water I suppose up to your waist or sometimes a bit higher and you just wade ashore. And of course when we did the landing at Labuan well the LCIs carried rocket launchers in those days and the bombardment of the battleships and the cruisers that were there you know, Victoria on Labuan island it was practically obliterated. There wasn't much left.

04:30 **Moving back to Morotai when you first landed what were your first impressions of the island?**

First impressions of the island. Well I suppose was the dense jungle, the coconut trees, which of course you didn't see many of those in Australia and the heat. The heat was very oppressive and of course we were not acclimatised to that and consequently, you know that's why we were moved on trucks to where we

05:00 were going to camp and you just had to take it easy. It took about seven to ten days to become acclimatised to the tropics. Beautiful days, I suppose is another thing we remembered, the days, the look of the sea with all the palm trees on the beaches, coconut trees on the beaches, yeah it was quite a good environment.

Was it also a scene of devastation when you arrived?

No, not a great deal of devastation on Morotai. Not on

05:30 the part that we were on. It was a strange thing there we never ran across any islanders on Morotai. They were over the other side of the island.

So you had no evidence of indigenous culture there?

Not on Morotai. No we knew it was a Dutch culture on Morotai, Halmaheras, but that was as much as we knew about

06:00 it there.

It was a deserted island when you arrived wasn't it?

Oh no, it was populated but it was on the other side of the island to where we were. Well you know you were restricted to your own unit areas so you never got out to go and see anything. You couldn't travel from point A to point B on the island.

So what kind of work?

06:30 **Could you describe your day to day work on Morotai?**

Yes, well after we'd established our camp we set up a small ADS, an Advanced Dressing Station, which only treated people who got very sick. We didn't have any war injuries there and then of course we also had to carry out our training for the future landing. We didn't know where but we knew that we were going to do an amphibious landing and that we were going

07:00 to board LCIs. They carried between about 185 and 190 troops. They were pretty tightly packed and so while we were on the island we would go down to the beach and we boarded LCIs so as we could have a drill which would cut the time when we had to board, and to get us acclimatised or used to the LCIs we stayed aboard all day and overnight.

07:30 Which was pretty rough because they were not at sea so therefore there was no breeze. There was no air conditioning or anything like that and they were pretty hot, pretty humid and it was a pretty sweaty

time. We thought that we were going to do the amphibious landing sometime in the middle of May but that was changed so that was put back, so we left the LCIs

08:00 and we went back to our camp. We came back about two weeks later and went through the same drill again and of course the rest of the units that were going, the 2/28th Battalion and the 43rd and the 32nd, they were doing their amphibious training too and they travelled on things called Landing Ship Tanks, LSTs, and of course they were worse to travel on than what the LCI was. They carried more troops but they also

08:30 carried amphibious tanks that did landings and they carried you know vehicles, artillery and things like that. Sleeping accommodation was fairly limited and they were packed in wherever they could like sardines so they had exactly the same complaints as we did about the humidity, the heat and the sweaty atmosphere.

Did this affect the morale of the men at all?

No I don't think so, I don't think so. I never saw anybody that was affected, not in our unit anyway.

09:00 And pretty prolific in snakes. If you left any of your webbing open and as one of my friends did and he put his pack down and opened his pack and put a hand in and of course out flew this snake. Scorpions, they were things and of course we were just sleeping on the ground, on a ground sheet on the ground.

You mentioned training but can you describe some of the other aspects of your day to day activities. I mean for instance were you treating casualties?

No we didn't receive any casualties

09:30 there. There was an AGH already on Morotai, the 2/9th AGH was there. No we only set up an ADS in case the activity towards the Halmaheras but no we didn't receive any casualties at all and we didn't treat any casualties.

What did you do for entertainment?

Nothing, nothing. When the sun went down you couldn't light fires so you

10:00 just firstly, you just sat around your hooches or went to bed. So we went to bed when the sun went down and we got up before the sun got up.

So there were no memorable storytellers?

No, no, nothing really memorable about Morotai. It offered nothing for us for the few weeks that we were there. Just worked by day and sleep by night.

Were you getting letters from home and were you able to send them?

We only got one

10:30 mail delivery while we were on Morotai. Yes, and I got a couple of letters. I think most of the lads got a letter or two because well the time we spent travelling from Australia and originally from the Tablelands down to Cairns, the time in the staging camp, the mail was all behind us so that followed us over and of course that was quite good when you get a mail delivery.

Who were the letters from?

Well I had a letter from

11:00 my mother and I had a letter and a photograph from a lass whose family befriended me while I was in Melbourne, so it was quite a good day.

And what sort of news was coming from home? Do you recall that?

No, not much. There was nothing about the war news. They were on restrictions and rationing and things like that which we knew of course before we

11:30 left Australia. No their main concern in the letters when they wrote was our welfare, how we were, whether we were being looked after, whether we were in trouble. I was asked a question by my grandmother you know if I'd been wounded anywhere or anything like that. Oh no it was just nice to get something from home.

Were you homesick?

No not really, no. Because I had another 300 blokes with me. I suppose we were all in the same boat.

12:00 It didn't pay to get too homesick.

Now what do you recall of your landing on Labuan?

Well the first thing I recall about Labuan was hearing all the gunfire. I think we arrived off Labuan just after first light in the morning and then of course the bombardment started from the cruisers and destroyers and what have you and that

12:30 went on for a long time, quite a lot of rocket firing and of course then we had an underwater team from the navy which had to clear underwater mines and obstructions. And I suppose we didn't land until oh probably 10:30, 11 o'clock in the morning. The first infantry landing went in about 10 o'clock but the bombardment was absolutely horrific from that

13:00 and of course, typical as they do it you know they really shattered the beach and the trees. There was hardly a tree left standing when we landed on the beach.

Can you recall what impact seeing this first sustained action had on you?

Well I think the main thing that we had was to get off that LCI as fast as we could and get on the beach, back onto ground. And believe you me the American crew they don't muck around. You have

13:30 to get off quick because they're ready to back out and get out into the open sea. Another thing that concerned us just initially was that we were going to be close enough into the beach that the water would only come up to our waist or our chest and not over our heads. But that wasn't so, it only came up to our waist and we just waded ashore and I suppose it left quite an experience with us. I think the biggest experience; the biggest thing I remember about it was that

14:00 we landed without any enemy fire because the enemy had been wiped out on the beach so we came ashore no fire at all. Quite often those beach landings earlier, particularly in New Guinea you know were pretty horrific under pretty heavy enemy fire but the Japanese on Labuan appeared to want to move inland away from the coast because by this stage they knew the fire power they would have to put up with from the

14:30 Americans and from the Australian ships.

Were there any other aspects of the landing which were memorable? I mean on a moment by moment basis, were there any other things that cropped up that you remember?

Well I suppose when we run across our first casualties. Because you know we had nothing erected and nothing set up when we started to receive casualties so things had to be set up very quickly. Well

15:00 I know the infantry, they had moved in to just south of the airfield where Government House was, and by about midday or a little after we were up in that area and that's where it was planned that we would stay and set up an Advanced Dressing Station and of course the infantry were held up at the airfield, that took a bit of taking, and that's when casualties started to come in. The casualties were

15:30 heavy there for early in the piece and they got worse as we went on of course. It took about 10, 12 days to really secure Labuan in a place called 'the pocket'.

'The pocket' was where the Japanese had been holding out basically, wasn't it?

Yes, that's where they held in. They went in that defensive position. It was quite hilly terrain and the two battalions

16:00 and the armour that we had and the field regiment with the artillery. As I said there was heavy fighting there for about 10 days. And eventually the only way they secured the pocket was the use of bulldozers and flamethrowers.

Can you tell us what the nature of the injuries were that you were having to treat?

Oh yes, you know gunshot wounds, wounds to the chest, gunshot to the chest, to the abdomen. We had one

16:30 lad that came in. He was one who did stick in our minds because he was only about 19 but he'd copped a burst of machine gun fire across the chest and he knew that he wasn't going to survive but he was peaceful. You know, never heard a murmur out of him when he was moved from the stretcher and taken inside, never heard a murmur, but he knew. There was some serious wounds. A second lad, just after him,

17:00 he came in with the same lot, his elbow, his right elbow, was absolutely shattered, and the lower forearm was just hanging to the upper forearm, there was no bone in between. It had just been knocked out. Oh no, we had some pretty bad casualties there. I think in all on Labuan, 2/28th they bore the brunt of it the 2/28th Battalion, we had about 34

17:30 killed I think and 100 wounded in action on Labuan in that time. The Japs I think they had about 3-400 killed and of course we took 11 prisoners on Labuan.

Why was that?

Well the Japanese were fairly fanatical. And they didn't mind dying for the Emperor. That was the way to go out as far as they were concerned. They were prepared to fight. About 50 of them on

18:00 one night they broke out of 'the pocket' and they were heading to the beach area. Well to get to the beach area they had to come right past where our unit was and we suffered our first casualty. One of our blokes, a chap by the name of Green, he was shot that night, he was wounded, he wasn't killed but

Greeny was treated and evacuated back to Australia and his wounds were severe enough that he was discharged form the army. But that was on the way back to the beach. They wanted to, the Japanese

18:30 plan was to get down there. Down there of course was the British 7 Administration Unit ready to take over Labuan when the army had finished its task. Oh well they wanted to wipe them out but they were all killed on the beach.

In the midst of having to treat the wounded did you have any time to reflect on what sort of an impact this was having on you?

No well I don't think we did. No, I don't think we did.

19:00 We just had a job to do and we just carried on and we did that, we did the job. Sure the casualties had an affect on quite a number of our people because some of them well they'd never seen anybody wounded and they'd never seen anybody who was dead. And of course that did have a big impact. Well fortunately I wasn't in that situation. I'd seen people that

19:30 had died that did affect some of them and it affected some of them after the war too, post war.

Were there any particular rituals that surrounded the process of death? That once someone had died, that there were observances of one kind or another?

Oh yes, yes you know we, padres were with us of all different denominations, all the different religions, and they worked overtime there with the people

20:00 in the hospital and also with the units was a padre you know, one of the padres, I don't know whether it was one or two, were killed on Labuan of ours. Of course, they worked up with the troops and of course, the Salvation Army with their cups of hot tea and what have you and they were fairly close to the troops and of course some of them got into trouble. But you know all the proper things were carried out and observed for

20:30 even the Japanese and the Japanese died. And we did get some Japanese casualties in there. They got exactly the same treatment as the Australians, no different at all.

Were they buried according to Shinto custom?

No, we didn't have a Shinto priest so all that could happen was that they would be buried. But any of the Australians that were killed, well they were buried according to their denomination and a padre would in attendance and the pall

21:00 bearers, and the members of the unit and if in the case of the 2/28th their people were busy up front well other people from other units would attend and stand in to make sure somebody was there.

You have spoken before about your attitude to the Japanese earlier in the war. Did your attitude to the Japanese change during your time on Labuan, particularly when you were treating Japanese patients?

No, well it didn't really. We didn't like the Japanese.

21:30 We didn't have any time at all for the Japanese due to what we'd been told and what we heard. But no it was instilled into us that when they were a battle casualty then you'd forget that they were Japanese and you would treat them as another human being and that's what we did. You even found that amongst the infantry. You often heard, friends of mine have told me that you know

22:00 wounded Japanese, they'd take their water bottle and give them a drink of water and put something under their head for a head rest even while the battle was still going on.

Were you ever tempted not to give full medical attention to a Japanese soldier?

No, I don't think so, I don't think so. No our unit was fairly strict on that. Our CO [Commanding Officer] Colonel Johnson, he had stipulated that everybody

22:30 would be treated as a human being.

Since the war has your attitude to the Japanese fundamentally changed?

No, I've got to admit that I don't like the Japanese. I don't blame the current generation because they were denied the history, they were not told much about World War II and what they were told was that the Western world had started the war, not them, so I don't blame

23:00 the current generation at all. But and I listened to a, I read it was posted to us, when Hoshijima, he was the commander at Sandakan before he was hung on Rabaul, he stated that "Japan would win even if it took 100 years." And because they were a warlike race and always had been, I don't think I could give full trust

23:30 to the Japanese. I don't think I would ever trust them. They're all right with the peace, 100 years is not up yet. I won't be around to see the 100 years but it would be interesting to see what happens. I don't think a race can really change their culture. I don't think we'd change our culture.

How were Japanese POWs treated on Labuan?

Well initially they weren't treated very well.

24:00 Because initially the compound was built and the released POWs [Prisoners of War] Indians, Sikhs, were placed in charge of the prisoner of war compound and I suppose they wanted mete out exactly the same treatment or as close as possible to the treatment that was meted out to them. And every afternoon I can remember that we used to call at a PT [Physical training] parade and diggers who were on stand down would

24:30 move over there and the Sikhs would start to put the Japanese through their paces. And I can vividly remember you know they might be carrying a coil of barbed wire on their shoulder and one Japanese, his bootlace came undone, and he put the coil of barbwire down to tie up his bootlace. Well he got the greatest boot up the backside from this Sikh and when he turned around well of course he got hit with a rifle butt as well. No

25:00 they were as villainous as what the Japanese were. I suppose they put up with enough with a few years. And they used to watch, 'cause prisoners came into that compound not only from Labuan, over on the mainland some would come in and as they'd come in a jeep and you'd see these Sikhs move pretty quickly out to the jeep. And one day, one of the Japanese prisoners came off the jeep and they recognised him and they knew him and he wore glasses.

25:30 This Sikh made him take his glasses off, drop them on the ground and jump on them, well he was practically blind and oh no they gave them a rough time. That was stopped because the Sikhs were taken away and L and C, Land and Communication Provos [provosts – Military Police] from Melbourne were brought to Labuan and they took over the POW camp.

How long had that process of the Indian ill-treatment of the Japanese continued?

Well that went on for

26:00 about seven or eight days.

What were your responses to seeing that happen?

Well, I suppose our responses were, we were youngsters "Well they're receiving exactly what they deserve". You know, these Sikhs were down to about seven stone in weight and you could see their ribs, their skinny arms, their skinny legs and they'd been maltreated as they told us

26:30 and so they were just getting back some of their own.

Now you've described the physical surroundings, the scenic surroundings as you found them on Morotai, could you describe Labuan as you found it?

Yes, well except for the devastation that was down near the harbour, one of the photographs I've got there will show you some of that. But we found Labuan and our camp and our environment there we

27:00 were not allowed in the early stages far away from our own unit lines because you're on duty 24 hours a day. But no, our time on Labuan we thought was quite pleasant except for this one night when the Japs broke out and came through our lines.

Were there any times during your time on Labuan where you had to take up a rifle and defend yourself?

No, not on Labuan,

27:30 over in Mempawah different yep.

Just moving back to the Japanese Prisoners of War, did Australian soldiers ever mistreat the prisoners of war?

Not that I know of because they had nothing to do with the POW camp on Labuan at all. Only the Australian provos when they came and of course the provos were trained. They just treated them as prisoners. But there was no bashings or anything from the Australian provos.

28:00 **So for how long were you on Labuan?**

Oh we landed on Labuan on the 10th June. It was some time

28:30 in May, I suppose it would have been five or six weeks later when Labuan had been taken and secured that we moved to a place called Mempawah on the Borneo mainland.

Could you describe your arrival there and what you found?

On Mempawah? Well again we landed there on barges. We went across on barges from Labuan to Mempawah.

29:00 The unit that went with us was the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion and we had again an unopposed landing there. All that area had been practically secured by the 20th Brigade of 9 Div that had landed there at the same time as we landed on Labuan. The war was still going on over there but it was further south and north of

29:30 where we were. We set up you know the main dressing station at Mempawah. Virtually though, we never received any wounded. By this time the 2/6th AGH had arrived on Labuan, the 2/6th AGH was set up, and casualties mainly were evacuates straight from the ADS and AGH. We treated a

30:00 number of malaria, dengue fever, so you know we had a lot of patients but the patients were mainly just sick, not war wounds.

You mentioned not having anything to do with the locals on Morotai because you were across the other side of the island but were you interacting with the local people on both Labuan and North Borneo on the mainland?

Not much on Labuan because the whole time the fighting was going on

30:30 to secure Labuan you didn't see too many of the locals but we did have quite a bit, a bit of interaction with the locals over on Mempawah.

What was the attitude of the locals?

Well they were very pleased to see us. They wanted the Brits; they wanted the British back there. There was no question about that and they'd had more than enough of the Japanese. Because the Japanese you know they treated those people just as badly as they treated anybody else.

31:00 **Did anyone describe to you in more detail how the Japanese had treated the people in Borneo?**

Yes, we became friendly because there was a family there, a Chinese-Malay family called Shims and there was this chap and his wife and they had one daughter, that was a teenager, another child was a little younger, a boy, but they were badly treated

31:30 particularly in the times when the Japanese wanted any work done. They were just treated like slaves. They were bashed if they didn't do it. They would take the food off them and they would even take the food they were cooking for their midday meal if a Jap patrol came by. The Shim family like quite a lot of the others, a lot of Malays there too living on the river and they used to lose a lot of their food. The Japanese would take most of

32:00 it and just leave them with the remnants. No, they were all extremely happy to see the Japs and they would tell you where they were. There was no question.

Do you think the Japanese would have stood more of a chance in Borneo and other places obviously if they had employed more of the 'hearts and minds' technique?

I think they would, certainly, if they'd got the people on side but they didn't do it. They just did the opposite thing the whole way round.

So there were still Japanese being rounded up when you landed in North Borneo?

32:30 Oh yes, over on the mainland. Oh yes that went on for quite a while because you know they went down to Merri, the 20th Brigade did down at Merri. Some of the oil wells had been set on fire like they're doing at the present moment. They'd been set on fire by the Japanese up at Kuching and Jesselton, there was still Japanese there. Pockets of resistance both north and south.

Did you have much to do with Japanese prisoners once you reached the

33:00 **mainland?**

No, because the Japanese prisoners were sent across to Labuan.

Did you feel that the battles and casualties in places like Labuan and Borneo and obviously other areas of the South West Pacific once the Americans had moved on were actually justified? I've heard some of those battles described as part of the

33:30 **unnecessary war that happened at the end of World War II.**

Yeah well Borneo was classified in that as an unnecessary war. But I don't know you see it would have come in the higher politics. Of course the Americans were keen to you know just smash their way through to the Philippines and what they left, they left behind them still had to be cleaned up. They were a long way past New Guinea, Wewak and those

34:00 places, when the war ended, when 6th Div and other divs were in there, they were still having major battles that was. Of course I think MacArthur wanted to beat the American naval commander. They each shared a role in the Pacific and MacArthur wanted to be first through as well as the navy admiral did too and MacArthur was mainly interested in getting back to the Philippines.

34:30 So you couldn't leave pockets, well I suppose you could and you'd have starved them out, but I think

they posed a threat to the local people who lived in those areas and the aim was to defeat Japan so wherever there were large pockets of Japanese I think it was fairly reasonable to expect troops to go in to clean them out.

What was your attitude to the Americans?

Well we had mixed feelings

35:00 about the Americans. They were a fairly powerful nation and they were a good friend to Australia because there's no doubt we probably would have lost Australia without their help with the Japanese earlier in the piece. No we were good friends with the Americans and with individual Americans. They came in with a lot of largesse. I know we got a bit crooked on that at one

35:30 stage in because in Borneo we could get half a dozen eggs from the natives for one cigarette. Immediately the Yanks arrived one egg would cost you a packet of cigarettes. And we didn't like them for that because they had a lot more than we did. They had a lot more money. They were paid a much higher rate and they tended to buy their way and buy their friendship. The natives

36:00 weren't really impressed with them but of course they knew here was a good market for them because they were all short of cigarettes and things like that and so were we. We didn't get issued with many cigarettes a week and they reckoned that was a pretty good deal, half a dozen eggs for one cigarette but a packet of cigarettes for one egg, we couldn't keep up with that.

Were there any other aspects of the Americans' day to day behaviour that gave you those mixed feelings?

Oh yeah, you know,

36:30 we'd heard the stories back in Australia. You know, "Look out for your girls, the Americans are there in their smart uniforms." Our uniforms weren't smart at all, they were pretty baggy and what have you and of course the Yanks when they were on R and R [Rest and Recreation], on leave, they were out for a good time and good luck to them. But quite a lot of my friends anyway, they'd had lost their girlfriends due to the Japanese so there was some anti-feeling from

37:00 there.

You've just said that quite a lot of your friends lost their girlfriends due to the Japanese?

Due to the Americans I mean, due to the Americans. Well if you take the root cause you'd go back to the Japanese. The Yanks wouldn't have been here if we weren't having trouble with the Japanese.

Was there a good sense of mateship among the people that you worked with?

On our own side?

On your own side, I'm talking about your own unit, was there a good sense of cohesion and mateship there.

Oh yes, my word.

37:30 All of the units were like that because that was the thing in the army. The hard part in the army was the initial training, your recruit training, and the word was when you get to your unit you will find it's a totally different life, it's a much better life. Well your unit was your family and you were part and parcel of it and you stuck together. We all wore colour patches. And of course we had the T from 9 Divvy and then 6 Div had its own colour patch and 7 Div.

38:00 We were all on the Tablelands together but if a brawl broke out, and quite often they did, it was between the divisions. One Div on 6 on 7 on 9, or 9 on 6 or something like that. Well if you saw your blokes with a T colour patch on their hats that were in trouble well of course you'd be in to help them and particularly if they were from your own unit.

Did you ever take part in or witness such a brawl?

Oh yes I witnessed a couple of

38:30 brawls. One up near Atherton at a place called Wandecla there was quite a good brawl there. It took the Provos to clean it up.

What sparked the brawl?

Oh it didn't take much to spark a brawl. You could just walk past and a 7 Divvy bloke might say to you, "You'll be sorry mate." Well if you'd had a couple of beers in Atherton well that was enough to kick it off. You'd tell him he'd be sorry too and then that would start it then. You see

39:00 it only takes one or two to start it and the rest just join in.

Did that continue right to the end of the war?

Oh more or less, but the end of the war when we came home well we were all mates. The Aussies of

course, if a brawl broke out with the Yanks anywhere well it didn't matter what Div you were. You were all together against the Yanks you see or anybody else. Yeah, there were some pretty hectic brawls during the war years.

Tape 5

00:34 **Going back to treating casualties, what wounds were the most challenging for you to treat?**

Oh I think the most challenging wounds of course were well chest wounds because they're rather horrific. You get pneumothoraces and hemathoracies and everything from chest wounds. They were a real concern to the medical officers.

Could you tell us what those conditions actually are?

01:00 Pneumothorax, you get a collapse of the lung or part of the lung it collapses, and if you've got a sucking wound to the chest well then instead of sucking air down through your trachea, you suck in and out through your lung you see, out of your chest wall. Then of course the hemothorax is when you get a lung that's filled with blood, a haemorrhage, and they were very difficult to treat in those days. Abdominal wounds were another

01:30 great problem. And of course attached to all of these places you had a surgical team and you know these were specialist surgeons and the theatre would run 24 hours of the day.

What sort of shifts were people working?

The surgeons, sometimes the surgeons in a surgical team were working 24 hour shifts and that was a long time. And it was fairly primitive

02:00 you were operating in a tent dependent upon a generator, generating light inside the theatre. You didn't have the mod cons out in the field that you had in an AGH. When the 2/6th AGH arrived well they had theatres which were very modern, quite modern, and today the army's advanced to such a stage, particularly in Australia that they've

02:30 set the standard for field operating theatres in the world. They've set that standard and that's completely portable.

You've described some of these most serious wounds such as the collapsed lung etc. What sort of treatment would you give to alleviate these conditions?

Well if you've got a collapsed lung well then you've got to get the lung re-expanded. In those days you'd get it re-expanded mainly by getting a person, you'd have two

03:00 bottles. One filled with water and connected to the other one and you'd have to blow and you'd blow the water from one bottle to the other and that was pretty difficult. But of course that blowing would re-expand your lung, a sucking wound of the chest because that wound would have to be operated on by the surgeons so they would all have to be closed and then you had to then re-expand the lung after that. Of course the nursing that came afterwards and bear in mind in ADSs and

03:30 MDSs we didn't have any female nurses, any sisters, which were a great morale booster particularly to the wounded. You see the girls there and that was a lot better than seeing some bloke. The diggers would tell you this. But there was a lot of long time nursing taking care of particularly chest wounds. Abdominal wounds were bad, fractures were bad, any of the wounds, head wounds, they were bad.

04:00 **Can you tell us about some of the other equipment you were using? You referred to the equipment you used or the devices that you used to reinflate a lung but what type of equipment did you have or did a surgeon for instance have as part of his day to day work**

Well he had his ordinary tools of trade. His scalpels and his needles and his syringes and what have you and your steriliser. You had a steriliser 'cause all the instruments had to be sterilised. They were all

04:30 sterilised by lamps, spirit burners, methylated spirit burners would heat the water to sterilise those things. If you got to an AGH well of course you would sterilise by the use of an autoclave which is a pressure steam vessel but in an ADS we didn't have anything at all like that that you could use.

Did you have access to penicillin at this stage?

Yes, at the end of the war, yes we had

05:00 penicillin at that stage and anti-gas gangrene serum which you needed. Blood transfusions, you know you'd do blood transfusions.

And opium to dull the pain?

Oh yeah, you'd have morphine and things like that. Oh yes, you'd have all the pain killers for sure and you'd need them.

How much a problem was malaria in areas where you were treating people?

Well malaria would have been a big problem but we had it fairly well

05:30 controlled because we were on Atebrin which is an inhibitant and it was so important that Atebrin was taken on a parade. So on the parade the orderly officer or one of your own company officers would come along, you'd be given an Atebrin tablet, put it in your mouth, drink the water, swallow it. You'd have to open your mouth to show that you'd swallowed the Atebrin. And if you got malaria,

06:00 well then that was a chargeable offence because the Atebrin would inhibit malaria appearing while you were there. Now I got malaria when I came home but it was totally inhibited while I was in the islands. And the other great one as well as malaria was dengue. Dengue fever well you didn't have any inhibitor for that. Of course that was the

06:30 real bone breaker. You know the pains in your joints and your bones were absolutely horrendous. We had quite a few diggers in with dengue fever. We had I think, on Mempawah, we had about three with malaria. They weren't from our unit but Colonel Johnson, by crikeys when I put the reports in they were positive for malaria, he just about

07:00 blew his stack. Oh yeah, because that was really bad news to get back to divisional headquarters that a soldier had contracted malaria. New Guinea different but in the latter stages, 'cause due to the inhibitant that we had you weren't supposed to get it.

So for how long after you came back to Australia did you continue to suffer from malaria?

Well when I came back to Australia…when did I get malaria? Oh about the

07:30 March or April of 1946 I got malaria for the first time. Luckily I was then posted to an AGH. I was there but I was off duty when I started to get the chills and the fevers and I was going out that night with a friend to the pictures in town in Sydney and of course I didn't go near the RAP. Well malaria went through in

08:00 cycles you see for 24 hours well I had the wriggles and the shivers and the shakes that night at the pictures and of course when the film was over well we were off home and I went back to the unit. I went to the RAP next morning and I was a patient in the hospital then for 10 days. And then I got it two or three times through 1946 and I even got malaria as late as,

08:30 never got it while I was in Mt Isa in '47, but I came to Orange I got malaria in 1948 and that was my last attack. I got it here. I was sent down to Concord and then they put me on a treatment of Paludrine and I've never had malaria since but it certainly knocks you. It is very debilitating.

Did you feel that in terms of

09:00 **equipment and technology you had, that you were fully stored up to treat the sick and the injured?**

Oh yes, we did very well with the … of course they'd had a lot of experience and they'd gained a lot of experience in New Guinea and places like that and oh no they were fairly well equipped for those days. And their service and their treatment they gave

09:30 was really excellent.

You mentioned before that when you arrived on Labuan you basically had to start treating the sick and the injured immediately. How long did it actually take to set up everything that you needed to adequately treat the sick and injured?

Oh well to say adequately treat them it would depend totally on the rate of casualties coming in. If the rate of casualties was slow you could be set up to adequately treat two or three casualties

10:00 within probably five to six hours.

What about the psychological side of war? Were you treating any patients who had been really psychologically rattled by what they'd gone through?

Well not up there I didn't see many up there but I'd seen them at Heidelberg. That was before I went overseas. They had two wards there of psychological. I suppose it was a very rude term we used to use in those days. But it was 'bomb happy',

10:30 it was known as the 'bomb happy ward' but they were really psychologically affected. There was no question about that.

Could you describe some of the symptoms that you saw?

Oh some of the patients they were depressed some of them. You couldn't get some of them to talk to you, they were depressed. Others were completely irrational in what they would say, what they would do. I'd seen a couple of patients at Heidelberg, great difficulty; they had no war wounds, great difficulty in

11:00 getting them to get out of bed. They just didn't want to get out of bed, they didn't want to face the world, didn't want to face anybody. Their relatives would come, some of them when their relatives came they would just spend the whole time crying. It was grown men, soldiers, so yeah it had a detrimental effect on them.

Did you ever get a sense of what the recovery rate from that kind of war-induced trauma was?

I thought

11:30 they had a pretty good rate of recovery. But permanent recovery I don't think they ever really had permanent recovery because I knew of cases that long after these people would commit suicide. Long after we had a couple out here in the west further out from Orange. And to talk to them you thought you know they were exactly the same as you but they had been and they'd go

12:00 through stages of depression and eventually they just committed suicide. I think a lot of the Vietnam people went through that when they came home.

You've spoken about the morale and the day to day outlook while you were on Morotai, were there any changes to that among the people you were working with, particularly the surgeons who were probably dealing with fairly confronting situations once you reached Labuan and the Borneo mainland?

No the surgeons and that and all of those

12:30 people they were fairly stable and they had a great outlook. They knew what they were there to do. They were professionals in that job. Some of them told me it was a great experience for them in their field of work. Mostly you didn't see, well I never saw any psychologically affected on surgeons or medical

13:00 officers. They were all very stable.

Did your experiences in Borneo and on Labuan change your outlook at all? Would you say?

In what way?

Just in terms of your broader view of life, your day to day outlook on life?

Well the only thing that it did. Well it certainly was an experience. We couldn't wait of course to get home. We thought about going to Japan in

13:30 the occupation force but changed our minds and couldn't wait to get home, and couldn't wait really to get out of the army. And as far as we were concerned we didn't want to have anything to do with the army once we were discharged. We'd had enough. And consequently, and that had a bad effect I think on the majority of people of my time because we were told nothing. We knew very little

14:00 about services that were available to returned soldiers or returned servicemen after the war. We knew nothing. It was many years before it started to filter through about the repatriation services and that. Well I can take the case of myself. I think I retired early and I think that was due to

14:30 some of the things. I'd suffered a ruptured ear drum on the way to Labuan from the gunfire on the deck but I never ever put in for claim. I'd had malaria. I lost my glasses in the China Sea. I wore glasses then and I went without for months and all of these were claimable things from the Repat.

How many years did it take you to realise that you were quite

15:00 **within your rights to claim on these?**

Well it was about 1987 and I retired in early 1988 and of course by the time and I didn't put in a claim until two or three years after that. Of course really it was a little late but it was only because we didn't know. We hadn't been told. Thank goodness they rectified that

15:30 because when the Vietnam boys came home they were told, they were fully briefed, and they had a very good repatriation service so all I can say from that is, and that was a government responsibility not a military responsibility, the government really learnt from World War II and they also learnt from Korea that they had to provide, they had to have these services and fully inform the people when they arrived back in Australia.

Just moving back to

16:00 **North Borneo, could you describe for us your visit to the Sandakan prisoners of war camp?**

Well the war had finished by this stage and there were troops going, some were going to Sandakan for the release of the PWs. We travelled from Labuan and Colonel Johnson, our CO went and we were only a small detachment that went there. We travelled by Corvette.

16:30 When we landed at Sandakan there was nothing there. The camp had been burnt. There were no prisoners, none of our prisoners to be found. There were no Japanese.

What was actually there? Just charred ruins?

Yes, just charred ruins. There was nothing. Burnt, they burnt it all.

Were their bodies to be exhumed?

We didn't see any of that because our main purpose when we went there was for treatment

17:00 and take care of any of the PWs. No it was the war grave commission war units, they stayed on, we didn't, we returned. There was no work for us to do.

Did you encounter any particular feelings or emotions when you went to Sandakan? The whole saga of Sandakan has become quite emotionally significant to a lot of people over the years.

Oh yes, now. We didn't know a great deal about it. We didn't know a great deal about it.

17:30 We knew that there were prisoners because some of our POWs were on Labuan but most of those were killed. Of course there were only six that escaped from Sandakan and but until we were told we were going to Sandakan and what we were going for, I never knew there was a prisoner of war camp there.

I believe Warrant Officer Sticpewich comes into your story?

Warrant Officer Sticpewich,

18:00 he was one who escaped from Sandakan and when he went to Kuching and that's where they established another Japanese POW camp at Kuching and he went along the compounds and he identified Japanese people from Sandakan. And of course the ones he identified, they were all tried as war criminals.

Did you ever meet Sticpewich?

18:30 No. He came to Labuan at one stage Sticpewich but no I never met him. I've had friends who knew him and met him. There's a couple in Orange, they're ex-PWs, they're here in Orange and they knew him. No I never met any of the six survivors from there. I've met other survivors from other camps but not from

19:00 Sandakan.

Just moving back to the war itself. Were you ever in a situation where you had to take up weapons?

Well only once on Mempawah because during the pathology work. The pathology was just a tent, with table, microscope, stains and what have you and for some reason or other that tent was located a bit away from where we had the MDS, probably

19:30 50 yards or so and to protect the equipment I had to live in that tent and by myself and the war was still going on. So from the transport people in our unit, we had transport people there and they carried arms, well I borrowed a Enfield .303 rifle and I had that in the tent with me. And it was an amazing incident because CO walked in one morning and he asked me what that

20:00 rifle was doing on my bed. And I said "I'm up here, I got to sleep in this tent to protect the equipment, I'm by myself, the closest people are 50 yards away, if Japanese comes in here, anybody comes in here well what am I going to do?" Well he said to me quite candidly, "Well you are a non-combatant. You've got a Red Cross card" and I said "Yes" and he said well "Take that out of your pocket and show it to them". Well I said "It might be too late". He informed me that was in for a

20:30 dig. I was not allowed to have a rifle at all, any sort of arms, and I said "I'm not too keen to sleep in this tent by myself without arms" so he said "Ah well you can get your best mate and he can live in this tent too". He took the rifle. The transport chap who loaned me the rifle well I think he got into more trouble than what I did. And it was loaded of course. We had rounds in it and then I met a chap by the name of Bicknell. We were pretty good mates. Harry came

21:00 and lived in my tent and we were there until the war ended.

Did you ever have to fire at the enemy?

No, no, no, no, no. No there is one incident but I'd rather leave that out because that involved a couple of other blokes but no I never really had to.

The incident it involved a couple of other medical blokes did it?

No from other units.

21:30 A couple of friends of mine from other units.

I mean basically if you want to tell a story you can place an embargo on it. Either tell the story now or think about it?

I'll think about it. I'll think about that one, yeah. Because you can place a complete embargo, you can

place conditions on the use of the material.

22:00 **Where were you at the end of the war when you heard about Japan surrendering?**

We were still on Mempawah. We were still there when we heard about that. It wasn't long after that when hostilities completely ceased that we closed down the MDS. We moved back to Labuan from Mempawah and went

22:30 across, I was transferred across to the 2/6th AGH. I worked in the laboratory there for a couple of months. Then when the 2/6th AGH had cleared all of their casualties they closed down. There were some other friends of mine that were there with me. Quite a number of us went to the 2/6th. 2/13th packed up and came back to Australia. When the 2/6th closed down

23:00 we were transferred out then to the other side of the island, Labuan island to a place called Timbali Beach and there was the 2/1st Casualty Clearing Station. I was posted there; I was there at Timbali until we left Borneo to come home. I did originally, I got the dates wrong. I thought we came home close to Christmas but we didn't leave Borneo until February

23:30 1946.

Do you recall your reaction, your own personal reaction when you heard that peace had been declared?

Oh yeah, we were pleased, yes happy as larry. Australia was still safe; our families no longer had a problem. We hoped that by the time we got home that rationing would be all over and life would be back to normal in Australia. As

24:00 I said we did think about going on the Japanese occupation force but changed our minds.

Why did you change your mind?

We wanted to come back to Australia. We were thinking about this, the Japanese occupation force, this was before hostilities really ceased and we thought that would be another great experience but when the war over and we could see well if we don't go to Japan we'll go back to Australia so we'll go back to Australia.

How do you think you would have felt about the Japanese had you

24:30 **gone to Japan as part of that force?**

I don't know we might have been like the person that you told me about, people that went in the Japanese occupation force when you started to mix with the Japanese people. Of course I don't think they would have all been warmongers. They'd be like the people today you would have found people over there who were quite decent people. Our attitudes might have changed completely.

You referred a moment ago to a sense of relief for the people at home.

25:00 **Had you entertained any anxieties about the people at home while you were overseas?**

Oh yes, because you know we'd heard about the submarines and that, that off the east coast of Australia, the Centaur was sunk, the hospital ship and these things that were going on and we thought well you know it's possible things could happen like that again. There were still remnants of Japanese still close to Australia, up Bougainville and all those places.

Now of course you talked about

25:30 **Mempawah. I don't have a clear sense of what Mempawah actually was. Was it an island off the coast?**

No it was the mainland of Borneo. Yes it was well I suppose a native village, well a kampong a native kampong. It wasn't that large but it was very extensive because it'd go right down to the river. I think it was the Clarence River.

26:00 It would go down there and there were families the whole way through. They didn't live in a structured society like we do in Australia. Where there was British influence their villages tend to be structured but where there wasn't a real British influence they weren't that structured, you'd just find villages all the way, I suppose it

26:30 would be four or five miles down to the Clarence River from where we were and you'd find people living all the way down there. And of course when you, there was a lot of people living on the river. Their homes, you know on stilts in the river, and most of those you could walk from one home to the next one without touching land at all and you'd see the native women there catching fish and what have you for their

27:00 meals and the males collecting coconuts and things like that because they used the coconut milk in their cooking.

Have you returned to any of these places since the war?

No. I've been to Singapore and I've been to Thailand and I've been up to the Burma Thailand railroad and I've been to the

27:30 big war cemetery and the museum that was established in Thailand. I had thought … well the local doctor here John Paton, John also served in Borneo and John and I were going to go on one of the return trips by diggers to Borneo. Unfortunately John got cancer of the lung and he stepped off the planet and

28:00 he didn't go. Then I had another friend here, Winston Bennett, he was a doctor, he was a surgeon and he was the medical officer with 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion and I knew him in Mempawah because they were the next unit to us and I did some path work for him and I knew Winston Bennett very well and we were going to go back. Well then Winston's wife died so that put an end to that.

When you were in North Borneo did you have

28:30 **anything to do with an organisation called BBCAU?**

Oh the British Borneo Civil Administration Unit? Yes they were located on the beach on Labuan when the 50 Japanese broke out and that's where they were aiming to get back to the beach down where the BBCAU were. Yes we had some dealings with them.

What was the purpose of BBCAU?

Oh the civil administration they were to take over from the military when hostilities ceased. Exactly the same as what they are talking about in Iraq

29:00 today. You know, the army ceases it work, the military and then the civil administration will take over. Well the BBCAU a lot of those were civil servants that had been in Borneo as part of the administration at the outbreak of war and they formed and I think they were located in Melbourne, their headquarters. There was a little bit of a hassle between them and the military. I think the BBCAU wanted to come in

29:30 earlier than what the military wanted them to come in and there was quite some discussion between the two as to when they would come but they were just held on the beach and they just had to wait. They didn't play any part until hostilities really ceased on Labuan. Well eventually they took over and only places like the general hospitals remained on Labuan.

While you were in Borneo what did you do during your spare time?

30:00 Well when hostilities ceased we did have a fair bit of spare time and it was a Major Salter from South Australia who suggested to me "You've got a fair bit of spare time currently at the moment and why don't you undertake some further education?" We had an army education officer with the unit,

30:30 each unit had an army education officer and Major Salter suggested that I might think about doing radiography. As I had the time I said "Yes I would", so along to the education officer who organised it through the Institute of Technology in Melbourne as an external student and I started that. I carried that on when I came back to Australia and

31:00 when I was posted to the 101 General Hospital at Punchbowl I was posted to pathology because that was the trade. The radiologist there a Major Geoggly [?] I was talking to him one day and he knew I was doing the course and he said "Why don't I get you transferred here to the x-ray department and you can get your practical experience here?" So that eventuated and I transferred down to his

31:30 department. I worked there for just on 12 months in that department and when I was discharged I had 12 months to do in it as an external student. That's when I went to Mt Isa and I completed it up there.

Just moving back to Borneo itself, what did you do in your spare time for recreation basically for fun?

Just swim, we'd so a lot of swimming. We were right on the beach. We'd do a lot of swimming.

32:00 We'd go down into the Clarence River and talk to you know the Malays and the Chinese and that's where we became friendly with the Shim family. Oh no, we were quite occupied with that.

Were there any touring entertainers at that time coming into places like Borneo and Labuan?

No. No the only

32:30 entertainment we had, we never saw any live entertainment. We only ever had one picture show and that was on Labuan and that was ruined by the Japanese. We went to the pictures, the lights from the projector of course, they decided to put a couple of aeroplanes over and bomb us. So that was the finish of the picture show.

You were bombed during the screening?

Yes, they missed us but they dropped the bombs. They dropped about two or three bombs.

33:00 They missed, well they missed us. They never injured anybody. They blew out a few coconut trees and what have you.

So basically the audience scattered?

Oh yeah we never went back to the pictures. No way.

Did you get up to any mischief at all?

No there wasn't any way you could get up to any mischief over there. We went to a native wedding. Well it was semi-native I suppose, a marriage between a Chinese and

33:30 a Malay. We were invited to that and I think it was the first time we'd ever tried rice wine. And that had a very detrimental effect too drinking rice wine. And of course the plate that they served it on, oh it was like some of the wafers we get today. It was made out of coconuts and what have you and we didn't know. A couple of us we'd had enough rice wine

34:00 anyway we ate the plate as well as the food that was on it. Apart from that no I don't think we ever got into mischief. Quite a lot of home brews were made. Oh and of course some of the troops did I suppose because somebody had raided the officers' mess for liquor and a lot of their liquor disappeared. And I know Bicknell and I were woken up by a lieutenant. He was in our tent, he was poking a screwdriver in the ground

34:30 and we asked him what was going on and he told us somebody had raided the officers' mess and knocked off all their liquor and they had a lot of spirits. There were officers going through every tent digging in the ground trying to locate the spirits but they never ever found them. No they were too smart for that. Well, we only got two bottles of beer a week and a packet of tobacco per week and the officers were entitled to

35:00 whisky and gin and everything like that. So the CO became very smart because he then painted, they had all the bottles in the mess painted, now what was it, silver nitrate. They were painted with silver nitrate. One morning a few days later, a parade was called, a CO's parade everybody turned up on parade and we were given the order that everybody would

35:30 show their hands in front and your hands were to be inspected and of course the diggers who had black hands from the silver nitrate they were charged with stealing the liquor from the officers' mess.

Just moving back to this wedding you mentioned. Could you describe the wedding for us?

Ah well yes, it was not like the Western weddings at all. It was a purely a native wedding done with a lot of, I suppose

36:00 you'd call it tribal music, drums and triangles that would make quite a lot of noise but quite harmonious. The bride she sat over with her parents and the groom sat over the other side. That's when we had the big feast and everything to eat and everything to drink. I don't know we called him the witchdoctor. We didn't know what it was but at the conclusion of that

36:30 they were just called to the middle and they had to sit on the ground and garlands were placed on their heads and next thing we knew the ceremony was over and they were off back to where they lived but both parents went with them and both parents spent the first night with them. What went on there well we wouldn't know. You could only hazard a guess.

Tell me were you able to meet up with or interact with the local girls?

37:00 No not really because you could talk to them but they were not girls you would see in Australia. You know they were natives, native girls and they were treated as natives. The Shim family, we met up with the Shim family. Well two or three of us, we went out there quite often it wasn't too far away. We'd sit down and

37:30 talk to Cathy Shim. We didn't talk too much to mum and dad. They'd tend to stay in the background but they were tremendously appreciative of what the Australians had done for them. And you could talk to the other girls but it wasn't like Australia you know, you wouldn't see a single digger with one of the native girls. A bit different when we were over on Timbali because there were a lot of Dutch

38:00 PWs that had been released and there were quite a number of the women amongst those. And some of our chaps, I wasn't one, but some of our chaps became involved with the released Dutch prisoners of war females in particular.

Tape 6

00:32 **I think we should back and let you tell that story that you were thinking about telling before?**

Yes that silly little incident that went on. Well a friend of mine from another unit and it was a combatant unit came along to where we were located on Labuan and we had some spare time. He had a friend with him. I knew him because he came from Gulgong and I came from Mudgee. He said

01:00 “They had located a Japanese Q store up towards the airfield and would we like to go along?” So a friend and myself we said “Yes, we’d go along”. And he said “Well you’ll need to be armed”, so we borrowed two rifles from a couple of our friends in transport and away we went. Well as we got near the airfield we could hear the sound of firing and of course it was the engagement with the 2/

01:30 28th and the Japanese. We still continued on a bit and the firing got louder. Well we estimated that some of the rounds went over our heads so we went to ground and when we went to ground there was a patrol that came out from the 2/28th Battalion, a small patrol. The patrol leader just said to us that we were getting into pretty dangerous territory because the Japanese were ensconced just a little further along

02:00 and that the CO of the battalion would like to see us and find out what we were doing. Anyhow our friend explained to him we didn’t really want to go along and see Colonel Norman and we’d sooner go back to our units. And anyway he agreed he said “Oh right then, so far I haven’t found you, so if you turn about and go back to your units well that will be the end of it”. So that’s what we did we turned around and went back but it was just a silly incident and

02:30 a stupid incident probably because it could have led us into a lot of trouble. We didn’t think about it like that in those days but on reflection you do. It was just one of those things that could have finished up quite serious. Either way we could have got up there and been shot or wounded or b) if we’d fronted up to Colonel Norman we would have been in buckets of trouble.

What was going through your mind when you were under enemy fire?

Well I don’t think we were

03:00 that close and we could hear it. Of course we were already aware that they were engaging the Japanese but when the rounds got a bit closer and you felt they just went over head, well it was time to get yourself as close down to the ground as possible into cover. Well we don’t know whether the rounds that went out were friendly fire or whether they were from the Japanese but after talking to the chap who was in charge of the patrol we didn’t waste

03:30 any time. We just turned around, backtracked and went back to our unit.

So you heard the bullets, you got down on the ground, what was going through your mind at that point?

We didn’t know. We knew the patrol, we’d spotted the patrol. We knew the patrol was coming and we would find out when they arrived exactly what was going on. Well of course they were in contact with the Japanese.

Was there fear, feelings of fear?

Well I suppose

04:00 there was. I think you know everybody has a feeling of fear and that’s the fear of the unknown. Of course you really don’t know what’s going on. That passed off anyway we got back. When we got back to our unit at that time we thought oh well that was a pretty good joke and a good experience. And we told some of our friends about it but that was the end of it.

Did you feel if you had to you

04:30 **would be capable of shooting your weapon?**

Oh yes, we were trained initially that way. If I hadn’t had a pharmacy background I would have been in the infantry no trouble at all.

I just wanted to go back to that family that you befriended in Borneo, the Shim family. How did you come to be friends with the Shim family?

05:00 Well because we’d treated the Shim family at our MDS in our RAP. They didn’t have any war wounds or anything but the father had a small tropical ulcer. We treated him. The young son, he’d been sick for a while so the doctors looked at him and as they were going back to where they lived which was

05:30 quite a way from our unit, a couple of us who were on stand down we walked back with them to where they lived and that’s how we became friendly. And we did quite a lot of things for them. Other people from our unit too did visit and did go out there and you know we provided them with food and drinks and that, things you know we could get from the canteen that they had no way of buying and we could get it and so

06:00 they were very friendly to us for the things we did for them. And they were very friendly to the infantry troops that had been through before and had cleared out the Japanese so we were welcomed with open arms by the Malays and by the Chinese and by the mixed races.

It seems like they might have been a substitute family for you all while you were over there?

Oh yes, I suppose they

06:30 could have been. And there were some very good artisans amongst them too. I had one he was a, he called himself a goldsmith, he was a native, he was a Malay, but he made me a ring. I had him make me a ring out of a sovereign that's where he got the gold from. And it was magnificent to watch him work. To cut it and then he'd file it and as he filed it he'd put a sheet of paper

07:00 under it and every grain was saved and then he'd smelt that down so he had gold. Of course they were fairly rich in stones over there. You know emeralds and sapphires. He put an emerald in this ring for me. It cost me, what I paid him 30 Malayan dollars which was the equivalent of about six Australian pounds so in our money today that would have been about

07:30 $12.

And who did you buy the ring for?

I gave the ring to a friend that I had back in Gulgong.

And does she still have the ring?

Well I'm still very good friends with them. Well that was my second family, second home. I am still friendly with all the members of that family. As a matter of fact, her name was Trix, or well that we called her, her name was Iris but

08:00 I've never asked Trix as to whether she has still got the ring but knowing Trixie I think she'd have it there somewhere.

Was it intended as an engagement ring?

No it wasn't. No, no. It was just a friend.

You spoke a bit at the start when you were talking about correspondence home. I'm just wondering how your correspondence continued throughout your period in Borneo with your family?

08:30 You'd write your letters. You'd write your letters home. They all had to be left unsealed because they'd go through to the officers and they'd be censored. But you worked out. Sometimes you beat the censors. You worked out simple little codes would tell them. I know I got the message back to my family that we were in Borneo and

09:00 the censor probably picked it up but he ignored it, he didn't scratch it out or anything. That was just writing the Bs the Os and the Rs and that a little larger than the other letters as you did it and they picked it out from their news and the newspapers that the Australians were over there, well then they knew that I was in Borneo because you couldn't tell them and their letters were only addressed to me and my unit

09:30 the "2/13th Field Ambulance AIF Abroad". But oh no you could send as many letters as you liked, as you liked to write.

How important was it for you to receive messages from home?

Oh the mail from home? Oh yeah that was tremendously important. Early in the actions you didn't get regular mail runs but you know they might be two or three weeks

10:00 apart but in that two or three weeks you might get half a dozen letters and of course that was great. And of course you see people would treat them differently. When I got my letters if I had the time I'd like to sit down and read them. Harry Bicknell who was a friend of mine used to look at the letter, he'd smell the envelope and he'd know whether one was a letter from his girlfriend or a letter from home and Harry'd put them in his pocket and he mightn't open them until the next day and read them.

10:30 By which time I'd have read mine and he'd read mine. We'd let our friends read our letters too and you'd read their letters. You'd share the letters around and you'd find some of the lads who didn't receive too many letters. Well they'd read everybody else's who were in the tent with them. Whereas I lived by myself initially and then I had Harry Bicknell sleep in the same tent as me. In the other tents there were six soldiers so if you got letters the other five soldiers would read your letters

11:00 and you'd read theirs. It was tremendously important. Of course we didn't get any newspapers. The only newspapers we saw was a publication printed by 9th Divisional Headquarters and we'd get that probably once every couple of weeks.

And I take it you got letters from Trix?

Oh yes I got letters from Trix. I got letters from a lass in Melbourne

11:30 and another couple of lasses in Sydney. Oh no we got plenty of letters.

What sort of letters would Trix and Joan exchange? What would be in a typical letter?

Just a newsy letter about what they'd been doing and how they were spending their time. Joan played a lot of tennis and she'd tell me who she'd been playing tennis with,

12:00 what mum and dad were up to, and of course she was still concerned about her brother who was a prisoner of war and she'd always have something in there about him, Trixie and her sisters. It was a funny family the Tomlinson family because Frank the father he wanted all sons. Well the first one born was a daughter and she was

12:30 christened Esme but she was always called Mick, and Trixie was christened Iris but she was always called Trix. She was lucky. Leslie was the next girl that was born and she was always called Tommy and never been any different and then he had one boy who was called Bill. And his father used to always call him Boy, his name was christened William but his father Frank would always call him Boy.

13:00 Well all of those people are still alive and I see them quite frequently. And Micky and Trixie they were keen on riding horses and of course I used to either ride or drive a horse from Mudgee to Gulgong so we'd spend our weekends horse riding, pictures on a Saturday night and Trix'd write letters and I'd get letters form Mickey and from their mother too. She'd write to me and she used to always send

13:30 me, send me a cake. The girls didn't but the girls would tell me about the horse riding, any new horse they had and what they were all about, what they were doing.

So you'd receive other things in the mail as well not just letters, like cakes?

Oh yeah you'd get a parcel, you'd get a parcel. Oh no well I got two Christmas cakes in Christmas 1945. I got one from Mrs Tomlinson in Gulgong.

14:00 I got three actually. I got one from my mother and one from Mrs White in Melbourne and they were great you know they'd be shared amongst all your friends.

Probably want to start moving away from you actual war service now but before we do that I'd like to ask you what your most vivid memory of your service was

14:30 **if there is one?**

My most vivid memory was I suppose was the pre-bombardment on Labuan and the landing at Labuan.

And why does that stand out in your mind in particular?

Well because it, well it was one of the greatest things that we'd seen. We'd never seen rockets fired before from ships and we saw the rockets that were fired and also some rockets fired from

15:00 the LCIs. But there were four crews of us there and three destroyers for the landing on Labuan. They didn't join us when we left Morotai, we'd been underway for about three days and then the cruisers and the destroyers joined us then for the rest of the journey to Labuan. And of course when they opened fire well it was real fireworks

15:30 and of course then when the naval bombardment ceased well then we had the aerial bombardment with Ventura bombers from Morotai and that was really a great show. Something that we'd never ever seen before so I think that was my experience.

Did you expect that to happen?

Oh yes we knew that the island was going to be heavily bombarded

16:00 before we landed because the Americans and Australians had learned their lessons. The easier you can make the landing for the infantry and the combatant troops well the better chance you had and they really bombarded them because the infantry battalion as I said moved straight up to where Government House was with little or no opposition until they got there then started, strike it then from there to the airfield. And of course the other thing that

16:30 struck me and stayed with me was the casualties and the damage that was done to the soldiers when they were wounded.

What did you do to cope with seeing all those injuries?

Well I don't think I did anything. It was just an impression that has stayed with me but not that I can recollect, see it's

17:00 a long time ago. It may have affected me there on the spot but I have no real recollection of it. They were wounded, the ones that were killed well the Labuan War Cemetery was across the road, it was established just across the road from where we were, and as I said we had about 34 killed there from the 2/28th. There were a lot of others that were killed and a lot of them were

17:30 moved, eventually moved into the Labuan War Cemetery. A lot of Japanese were killed and but oh no I don't think it had any lasting effect on me but the impression of the bombardment did. I can remember that quite vividly.

And is that something that you still think about now or dream about now?

No, no.

Do you have dreams about

18:00 **any of your war time experiences?**

No as a matter I don't dream so I'm probably fortunate in that respect. No I don't. The one thing that I suppose it was in all of the service people. My children tell me quite frequently "You know you really don't tell us anything dad about the war". Well we didn't, we got out and we just

18:30 wanted to forget about it. We didn't talk about it.

Did you talk about it with your mates when you got back, when you returned to Australia?

No I don't think so. I can remember when I went home on leave, we arrived back in Australia and I went home. You know my mother asked me, my grandmother asked me, my sisters asked me, you know "Where you'd been?" and "What you'd done?", well told them you know, only in short

19:00 detail. And of course the next day, well no the day after that, I hopped on the train and went out to Gulgong. Tomlinsons knew I was home and I wanted to go out there, can remember this quite vividly. We were sitting down, or just about to sit down for dinner, and Frank Tomlinson asked me, he had a big map on the wall and he had most of these areas with pins in where the Australians had been,

19:30 he wanted me to show him on the map the route that we followed when we left Australia on the Sea Barb. I just looked at him and I said "I'd just rather have dinner and I'd just like to go for a walk with Trixie". And so he said "Ok you can tell me later on tonight then", so that's what I did you see, so rather than talk about where we'd been and what we'd done my priority was a

20:00 little greater than that so and that was to get outside and really say g'day to Trix.

Do you think there was a certain amount of wanting to protect the people back at home from what you'd seen and done?

While we were there?

Yes well we thought well you know, it was told to us what we really wanted to do was to clean out the pockets of

20:30 Japanese resistance just to make sure that they couldn't congregate and go on and create more damage. We just wanted to push them out and get them back to Japan and wherever they were going to go.

But in terms of by not telling your family and your friends about what had happened and your experience, do you think that was because you wanted to protect them from being told

21:00 **about what actually had gone one?**

No we just didn't want to talk about it. A little of that went on when I went to Melbourne to see the Whites. They were very concerned about their son. I never mentioned anything to them about going to Sandakan for that to say the prisoner of war camp was burnt down. We saw a lot of the PWs because out of Changi and Malaya the ones that were really in

21:30 a bad way they were brought across to the 2/6th AGH and we'd see them come in and a lot of them were down to five stone, six stone in weight . No the Whites asked me if I'd spoken to any released PWs and I said yes we'd spoken to one or two but I didn't say that much to them. Of course their concerns were

22:00 very great. No I think we just wanted to come home and forget it.

Could you describe what happened when you arrived back in Australia after leaving Borneo?

We came home on the troop ship called the Lake Charles Victory and we sailed up the Brisbane River and

22:30 we were going to disembark there. Well the odd thing that struck us was the Australian customs people came on board the boat or the ship. We were told that long before we got into the Brisbane River that we could only bring back so much tobacco or cigarettes and things like that. We were very amazed when we were on the deck

23:00 and all sat down and these customs blokes come and we had to open our packs and what have you and show them what goods we had. We were allowed to bring in two tins of tobacco and it was fairly free to buy after the war finished over there, and I think it was 10 packets of cigarettes. Well of course we had a lot more than that. Well the customs people wanted to charge us duty and you know we were five

23:30 shillings a day soldiers, 50 cents a day. And of course we weren't interested in paying duty so he said he'd confiscate it. So we said that was all right. So we all sat on the deck and we opened our extra tins of tobacco and our cigarettes and threw them in the Brisbane River. The customs people were pretty irate about this but nevertheless the officers supported us because we, they had all their

24:00 supplies and everything. We were not going to pay duty on it and we thought that was pretty rough treatment. We're coming back from an operational area and here we got a pack of civvies that want to charge us duty on tobacco and tobacco was a scarce commodity in Australia but anyway that all finished up in the Brisbane River. I've been back to Brisbane two or three times and I've had a look when we've gone for trips on the Brisbane River and I have shown my children and my wife where we despatched our tobacco and

24:30 cigarettes. And that impression stayed with me for a long time. We didn't have a great deal of respect for the Australian customs service after that. And we went then to a staging camp out near Enoggera called Yeerongpilly and to us it was a way out in the sticks. We were there for about five days being processed before we went on leave but to go into Brisbane was a real

25:00 headache. You'd have to catch a tram and a train to get into Brisbane. Brisbane was full of provos after the end of the war they'd make your life pretty miserable. If you had a button undone on your shirt you were in trouble with the provos so we stuck mainly to the camp at Yeerongpilly. The Salvation Army had good amenities there for us. There were pictures on every night. There were concerts in the rec huts

25:30 run by the Salvation Army so we generally stuck to that. I only ever went into Brisbane once while we were there.

You mentioned the ring that you got made in Borneo. Did you bring back any other treasures at all?

We brought back a few native souvenirs that were made. I brought back some souvenirs that were made by some of our transport people. Course there were some really good artisans amongst them.

26:00 Bread and butter knives made out of .303 shell cases and brass. Brought back a Samurai sword that we had, a native parang [a machete]. They were about the only things we brought back. An American bayonet, we had an American bayonet and another we had is the Ghurkha knife. Brought back

26:30 one of those.

When you were arriving back in Australia was there a sense of relief?

Oh yeah, yeah. It was tremendous when we first saw the coast of Australia from our troop ship. Yeah we were pleased to be home.

What did you do when you saw the coast of Australia?

Oh we gave three good cheers for Australia. My word yeah, we couldn't wait to get up to the end of the Brisbane River where we

27:00 would disembark. We couldn't wait to set foot back on Australian soil. It was good. It was a great feeling.

And was there any, apart from the hostile customs people, was there any other welcoming for you?

No we had nothing. No we just embarked in trucks and went straight out to Yeerongpilly. There was nobody there to

27:30 welcome us home.

And how long did you stay there for?

We were there for about five days and then of course we moved out. We were going on 28 days leave from there so we went from there to Sydney and the LTD I was trying to think of yesterday, was located at Marrickville. We went through the LTD at Marrickville. We were only there for 24 hours, everybody was

28:00 at Central Railway Station on their way home.

How long were you enlisted in the army for?

Oh I went in about October 1943 and I

28:30 was discharged on about the 20th December 1946. So just a bit over three years, three years a couple of months.

So how long was that after you arrived in Australia after coming back from Borneo? How long did you stay in the army?

Oh yes I came back in February 1946 and I was discharged in 20th December 1946. So about 11

29:00 months, 10 and a half months.

And then what did you do after you were discharged?

After I was discharged well I went home to Mudgee. I only had a week so I was home for that

Christmas. So I went to Mudgee and I went to Gulgong. On Boxing Day I left Mudgee and I left for Mt Isa. I was going to work at the Mt Isa Hospital

29:30 and I think that took me seven days travelling to get to Mt Isa. It was all by train and that was an experience. That wasn't long after the war and of course Mt Isa was probably the last frontier in Australia. And when you arrived at the Mt Isa railway station you just didn't get off the train and walk into Mt Isa. You were interviewed by the police who wanted to know why you were coming to Mt Isa.

30:00 Did you have a job to come to, if you didn't you were back on the train. I suppose out of a little over 100, there was only about seven of us allowed into Mt Isa because you know it was a mining town. It was pretty rough and ready and the police didn't invite trouble into Mt Isa. If you had a job you were right, if you didn't you were on the train and back out. So I arrived in Mt Isa, I at that stage I was just booked into a

30:30 hotel, the Mt Isa hotel. Stayed there, reported to the secretary at the hospital the following day and he informed me that I could move out of the hotel because he had already booked accommodation at the staff quarters on the mine side. Mt Isa was split in two, the mine side one side and the town of Mt Isa on the other and that was quite an experience because the people who lived on the town side were on a far lesser wage than the people who lived on the mine side.

31:00 Because on the mine side you were paid a lead bonus if you worked for the mines and that lead bonus was more than what your weekly wage was. Of course I worked at the hospital on the town side and also at the hospital on the mine side. I did all the lead slides each week for the miners from the smelters just to check for lead poisoning and if they had lead poisoning and that was quite an experience.

31:30 There wasn't a great deal of difference I don't suppose from being in the army except of course you were much freer. On the mine site every afternoon you could find a game of Two-up outside the community store because it was private property. The police were only invited onto the mine site once a year. The rest of the time it was private property and they'd only come on the mine site if they were invited by the management if anything was wrong but it was a

32:00 great experience in Mt Isa. And I learnt a great deal of industrial experience because while I was there that was when Queensland Rail decided to go out on strike and of course those inland towns were crippled if there were no railway lines. Well JK Kirschner was the general manager of the mines, an American, and the railway people approached the miners in Mt Isa to join them in the strike.

32:30 Well Krishner who called a meeting, he informed them they would be in trouble if they did because how could they get food stuffs if there no trains coming into Mt Isa. However he, because the strike was on, the mines had charted aircraft to fly in food. The miners decided to go on strike they were agitated by the union organisers and they declared they were going on strike the following morning and JK Krishner informed them "OK

33:00 the minute you go on strike the minute that I cancel the aircraft and there will be no supplies into Mt Isa at all". The strike in Mt Isa lasted less than 24 hours so it was good strike. He was a tremendous person because, I know his wife, she got pneumonia, she couldn't be moved to the hospital. They had a hospital on the mine side as well as the town side and we needed an x-ray machine to take x-rays of her chest. We didn't have a mobile.

33:30 He ordered a mobile x-ray machine from Watson and Victor in Melbourne, chartered an aircraft and flew it to Mt Isa. We x-rayed Mrs Krishner's chest I think on three occasions when she recovered and he donated the x-ray machine to the public hospital in Mt Isa.

How long did it take for you to settle back into civilian life after the army?

Really being in Mt Isa it didn't take any time at all. It didn't take any time at

34:00 all. I played a lot of bowls in Mt Isa particularly at night time. I used to play bowls with them there because we used to play bowls. Whoever won at the end would be shouted beers by the opposing players. So Mt Isa was a great life except the ratio of the population. The males outshone the females by about six to one.

34:30 It was very difficult to have a girlfriend in Mt Isa. And of course you'd go to the pictures and the pictures would cost you the equivalent today of about 30 cents but two could get in for 30 cents or 30 cents for one. So you'd see a lot of males. A pair of males would go to the pictures together you see. The floor used to slope from the back to the front and of course in Mt Isa you could take your bottles of beer in there or your bottles of lemonade whatever you liked

35:00 to drink and all through the night you'd hear these bottles rolling down this cement floor. Which they'd just put them on there and give them a push and down they go. Oh no it was a pretty wild and woolly town. You could walk into the newsagents and on one side of the shop you'd buy your newspapers and on the other side of the shop he was running an SP [Starting Price] bookie all the starting prices and the horses and everything were up on the wall. And the police had a custom in the hotels. I was in there having a drink one

35:30 afternoon. We used to go down the medical superintendent and a couple of the junior medical officers, we'd go down in the afternoons of course we always had night surgery at the hospital and I was having

a quiet drink with them one afternoon about half past three when this person tapped me on the shoulder and I looked around and it was the policeman. Well they wanted to know what was going on. Oh a couple of the blokes sitting at the bar said that was alright, “You’ll just go for a ride with him up to the station. It’ll cost you five bob and he will bring you back

36:00 and your beer will still be on the bar when you come back”. And they had a rule they didn’t do that to you more than once a month. They had to be doing their job and seen to be doing their job too.

Did you manage to find a girlfriend in Mt Isa?

Oh yes, I had a girlfriend in Mt Isa. I had a couple of girlfriends in Mt Isa actually. And one of them left Mt Isa with me and came down here to Orange. When I left we didn’t travel by train we

36:30 flew down. Yeah we got engaged in Mt Isa but she stayed here I suppose for about, she was down here I suppose for 12 months but then she got homesick for Queensland. She came from Queensland. Myrie was her name, Myrie Cook. She came back on holidays to Queensland. She wanted to come back on a holiday. I couldn’t come back and

37:00 I came up here on my first leave and Myrie was here. I asked if she was coming back to Orange and she said no she’d rather stay in Queensland so how about you come to Brisbane and no that didn’t suit me, so we just parted ways then.