Australians at War Film Archive

Norman Anderton (Norm) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 My name is Norman Edwin Anderton and I'm 82 [born 1922] years of age. I was born in Bondi and at the age of five, my father, who was in the then called GPO [Government Post Office] was transferred to do country service at a little town called McLean on the Clarence River. I went to primary school in McLean and got

01:00 involved in swimming at a very early age in the baths on the Clarence River and then Dad was transferred to Lismore and I did High School in Lismore. After High School I got a temporary job with the health laboratory attached to the Lismore Base Hospital and Dad was transferred back to Sydney and I joined Maroubra Surf Club and I'm still a member actually, having been a member for over 60 years now. I was fortunate enough to win the junior surf

01:30 lifesaving championship at the Club for two consecutive seasons and I got a job with W D & H O Wills [cigarette company] which was sort of a family history because my mother and several of my aunts worked there and my father's best friend from the 13th Battalion in the First World War was the foreman there and he got me in and then I joined the militia. My uncle was a member of the 2nd Cavalry Division, Signals and at the time he joined, they had horses

02:00 and by the time I joined as a cadet, they'd got rid of the horses but we still had the leggings and jodhpurs and bandoleers and emu plumes in our hats. When I turned 18 I transferred into the militia proper and I only attended a few parades then before I joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. We did our training Casula and Liverpool, Ingleburn then we went to Bathurst where we had our final leave. Then we

02:30 sailed on the Queen Mary for Singapore and for 12 months in Singapore and Malaya, we had an absolute ball. I was a wireless operator with a mobile wireless set and we traversed the length and breadth of Malaya and also had quite a period with the British Signal Unit on Singapore Island. Well we sailed on the Queen Mary and in conjunction with the Aquitania and the Waritania and one other ship, we

03:00 went across the [Great] Australian Bight and stayed briefly at Singapore and some of the West Australians jumped ship and managed to get 24 hours unpaid, unwanted leave in Fremantle before they came back and then we left the convoy at …, we all thought we were going to the Middle East until one of our more enterprising colleagues broke into the hold and came back with a whole heap of little green books telling us all about Malaya and Singapore and what we should do and shouldn't do so we arrived

03:30 in Singapore and we were greeted by the Chief Signal Officer and I can still remember his words. He said, "thank God you've arrived." Then the section or my unit that I was involved with, we went up to Kuala Lumpur which was our main base. Our unit consisted of a number of sections and each section had specific tasks. Some of them had to work with brigade headquarters and they worked forward to battalions. Some of them worked with regimental

04:00 headquarters and they worked forward to artillery batteries and I was part of a mobile signal unit and we went anywhere and everywhere and as I said for the first 12 months we traversed the length and breadth of Malaya and we did so-called stunts [stints] all over the place. We had some terrific periods at Malacca and Endow and up in the Cameron Highlands. Then the balloon burst and I happened to be on wireless watch and I heard the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbour and a

04:30 simultaneous landing at Kota Bharu because the Japanese, no matter where they were, they always worked on Tokyo time so actually the bombing of Pearl Harbour; the landing at Kota Bharu and Singora [now Songkhla] in Thailand were a simultaneous events. Then of course we began our backward runs and the AIF had been in Malaya for 12 months and they were very highly trained. They'd done a lot of training in the jungle and right up as far as the Thailand border but for some

05:00 inexplicable reason, General Percival [General Officer Commanding, Malaya] saw fit to drag all the highly prepared Australian troops back into Java or Buru and send an Indian division up there with a lot

of quite raw Indian troops up to meet the Japanese at the front. They had a very highly trained battalion of the Argyle Southern End Highlanders with them but the rest of them were relatively raw. The Argyle and Southern End Highlanders started off meeting the Japanese up there

05:30 about eight or nine hundred strong and by the time they got back to Singapore there was only 200 of them left. Now we had a series of fairly eventful episodes on the way down Malayan Peninsula and then we finished up in Tanglin Hospital. I was in Tanglin Barracks and we'd been three or four days without a shower or anything so when we got to Tanglin Barracks my sergeant said, "You go and get yourself cleaned up." So I went into the ablution block and had a shower

06:00 and a shave. Then the Japanese started shelling the place and I walked out to see what was going on and a shell fragment hit the brick wall behind me and bounced down into my neck and that's the last I remember until I woke up in Alexandria Hospital [Singapore]. As I was coming out of the anaesthetic I could tell this annoying thing kept hitting me on the head as I tried to wipe my brow and when I came to fully the doctor had taken a piece of shrapnel out of my neck, wrapped it up in a piece on it and tied it on

06:30 my thumb and as a matter of fact I still have it. When I came home I had it chromium plated and you'll remember the furore about scrap-iron Bob Menzies? ["Pig Iron Bob" Menzies - Prime Minister of Australia] So on one side of this piece of shrapnel I wrote "With regards from scrap [pig] -iron Bob" and on the other side I put, "With love from General Tojo." [Japanese Prime Minister, General Tojo]. We had quite a period of time in Singapore after the capitulation, cleaning up all the debris and detritus from the battles and that was when we got our first

07:00 inkling of what sort of thing might be in store for us in the future because we went into Singapore one day and, they're sitting up on stakes, were six Chinese heads. They had been decapitated and stuck up on these spikes as a warning for the rest of the population to behave themselves. Then we started building a scenic road over the Royal Singapore Golf Course. That was a truly magnificent golf course because they brought all the grass for the greens out from England and you couldn't

07:30 play on there unless you happened to be one of the upper crust. Anyway they cut all the golf course up and put these scenic roads in and they built the shrine to their own war dead and with representation from some British and Australian officers the Japanese also agreed to allow a smaller shrine to be erected in memory of the allied war dead: [it] was only very small in comparison to their shrine. There were some very, very funny episodes

08:00 happened there because the Japanese hadn't much to do with Australians. One of the things that we found when we went in there, there were all sorts of things that you could sell on the black market to the Chinese and the Malays and the Japanese at one stage insisted that the Australians should bow to their troops. There was a great deal of resistance to this because we weren't prepared to do that but after a great deal of negotiation with the Japanese High Command

08:30 the Australians told 'em that the Australian soldier didn't bow, he saluted. So they compromised and we were told that we had to salute all the Japanese whether they were privates or whatever. [Anyway] on one particular exercise, you've heard the old saying, "everything but the kitchen sink?" You had a wheel barrow in which we'd loaded up with all sorts of material from the kitchen, including the kitchen sink, and some fans. [We] walked down the road with this wheelbarrow, walked up to the Japanese guard,

09:00 put the wheelbarrow down, saluted him, picked the wheelbarrow up, went around the corner and sold the whole lot to the Japanese, or to the Chinese rather, and came back minus the barrow, saluted the Japanese guard and went back again. Yes we were housed in houses that were previously occupied by Europeans including a lot of Dutch people and German people and we spent I s'pose some months there building the shrine.

09:30 There were other people sent in various parties around Singapore cleaning up and walking down on the wharves and the railways. Then at that stage things were getting a little bit tight as far as food was concerned because the British and American submarines were sinking the Japanese supply ships so the Japanese, before that happened they had the famous incident at the square and Selerang Barracks. We all had to sign a no escape document and the officers told them that that's

10:00 the duty of every soldier: to escape so, they refused to give permission for all our people to surrender. We were in Singapore at this time so we didn't suffer that badly from it, but back in Changi they took all the people from the hospitals and wherever they were living in these old British Army barracks and they put them in all in a square. What was intended to be a parade ground for about 600 soldiers had something like 15 or 16,000 or more people all crowded round.

10:30 They had to dig latrines all around the outside of the square and get the cooking out and the hospital orderlies there. That went on for three or four days and then our officers said that that was enough, that we could sign it because it was being signed under duress and it didn't mean anything.

Just telling us about how the officers?

Well they said that it didn't make any difference because we were signing under duress and it wasn't legally binding. Not that it made any difference because there were very, very few

11:00 escapes. Two or three, maybe four or five people escaped immediately after these capitulations. One

chap from my own unit paddled a canoe for some hours out into the sea and got picked up but the majority of them were captured and shot or executed. There was never a successful escape from up on the railway because even the most highly organised escape party, which consisted of British officers, who spoke the language and had a lot of money, they got away but they were turned in by the Burmese

11:30 natives and they were captured and brought back and executed. You no doubt know the story of Owen Campbell and a few survivors from the Sandakan to Ranau death march but couple of them got away and fought with the Philippino guerrillas and you're probably well aware of Owen Campbell's story, but even though we were given permission to sign these, they signed names like Ned Kelly and Jack the Ripper and Joe Blow and my best mate and I signed each other's names

12:00 so after that we were told by the Japanese that things were getting pretty tight and food was scarce. They didn't have to tell us that and but they were going to send a group of people away to lower Thailand where there'd be a land of milk and honey and there'd be hospital facilities and because it was a hospital camp but a recuperation camp, half the party could be sick men so they called for a party of 7,000 which

12:30 was the, turned out to be later known as the notorious F force group and we were told we could take whatever they liked. They actually took a grand piano from Changi by lorry into Singapore station and I had an old mortar box filled up with bottles of salt that I'd rendered down from sea water and books on astronomy and when we got to the station in Singapore, all that stuff was put aside and we were put on these rice trucks which are very small

13:00 squat steel structures that had about 28 to 30 odd men in them. You couldn't lay down. You'd either stand or sick. If people were crook you had to make room for some of them to lay down. There was no toilet facilities and it took us three or four days to travel up to a place called Bampong in lower Thailand but we were only part of all these groups because, with hindsight, they started off with a group called A Force that sailed by ship

13:30 and had a very, very bad trip from a place called Tavoy in lower Burma, then they went to a place called Thanbyuzayatand started working on this railway from Burma southwards. They had a group, B Force went to Burma, to Borneo rather to build an aerodrome. C Force contained a group of people who went to Japan to work on the docks and the steel mills and the coal mines. D Force went to lower Thailand and started working north. E Force was a small group that went to Borneo

14:00 to reinforce B Force and that was where the, most of them were in Sandakan and finished up on that death march and we were F Force of course. We were the biggest group and the reason they sent us was because the work was falling behind schedule. The area in the middle between the Forces working north and those coming south, very little work had been accomplished, so we got stuck right in the middle, right up near the Thailand Burma border and we marched for about almost a week.

14:30 They wouldn't march us during the day because we could be observed by allied aircraft so we used to march of a night and we'd have to walk 20 or 30 kilometres every night and we'd do that for two nights and then we'd rest, well we used to rest in the daytime but after the second night march we'd rest a day and a night. Then away we'd go again and it was a fairly rugged sort of a period by the time we got to our final camp, which is a place called, I forget now was either Taimonta or Kon Koita. The particular group

15:00 that I was with then started working, building a bridge and it was while we were building these bridges and other groups were working on the roadbed for the railway, we noticed all these yaks wandering free in the jungle and what the natives used to do, is when the monsoon seasons came, they'd just unhook their yak carts and leave them on the side of the road. The yaks would just run free into the bush until the dry weather came and then they'd go and pick their yaks up and hook them up to the yak carts and away they'd go

15:30 so we decided we were going to have one of these yaks. There were four of us and one of them was a big wheat lumper from Wagga Wagga, another one was a butcher from Tasmania who finished up a major jeweller there in Hobart and my friend and I so the wheat lumper said, "we'll fix him up, all you've got to do is hit them between the eyes with the back of an axe and they'll go down like lightning" so we tied this yak to a tree and we slipped away from the working party and the friend took the axe and took one mighty swing

16:00 at it and the yak moved and it knocked its horn off. Course it bellowed like mad but he finished up despatching it with a couple more blows so we skinned it and we only took the four quarters and we buried all the rest of the carcass and we took all this meat back to camp and we gave big chunks of meat away to some of our friends. The rest of it we put into the kitchen and the fact that we hadn't had any meat for such a long time upset our stomach considerably. The remainder of the meat after was cooked, we hung it up on

16:30 the hut but the one the mate and I had got flyblown and I finished up with a severe case of dysentery and was sent to a place called Neiki and from there when I'd recuperated I finished up being sent up into Burma, a place called Tambaya which was the major hospital camp. This was getting towards the end of the building of the railway, which had been going on for about eight or nine months and this camp contained all the very worst of the people that had been picked up from all the various camps and taken up there. The others

17:00 were taken back down to southern Thailand at Kamburi or Kanchanaburi so I finished up working in this hospital as a volunteer medical orderly and I was put in probably one of the worst wards which was, consisted of dysentery and ulcer patients and these ulcers were virulent. I mean they'd eat the whole of the calf of the leg away and I've seen people with their

17:30 shin bones exposed and perforated and there was nothing to treat them with of course except hot water and bandages. You just had to take the bandages down to the creek and wash them out and I also assisted a couple of times in operations where they were taking the limbs off. They tried to hang on as long as they possibly could because this ulcer used to eat away and the people's resistance became very low and it got to the stage where the only alternative was to remove

18:00 the limb. The doctors realised then that this should have been performed earlier but by then, a lot of cases it was too late and I think in this particular camp there was something like 90 amputations took place including one big toe and I think only four of them survived. The had a funeral prier there which never went out the whole time I was there and they were burning bodies at the rate of about 40 a day. Anyway when that was

18:30 finished we came back by railway because they had the railway operating then and they sent some of the group to Bangkok and they were shipped to Japan to work in the coal mines and the steel mills and as you and as you're aware quite a few of those ships got sunk and there were very few survivors of them. We were lucky. We went all the way by train back to Singapore and by this time the Changi jail which had housed all the civilian

19:00 internees had been emptied. The civilian internees had been housed in Singapore and the bulk of the troops coming back from the railway were then housed in Changi jail and we were then given a job of working on the wharves and the railways and building the, what is now the Changi Airport. We were building it as a military Air Force aerodrome for the Japanese and it was during this time that the

19:30 enterprising people were able to get on what was called a P party and everybody tried to get on P party because it moved around various parts of Singapore and you could steal from one area and take it somewhere else and sell it. Two friends of mine got onto hundreds and hundreds of boxes of cotton and that was a very scarce commodity. They were selling these reels of cotton for a phenomenal price to the Chinese and they became millionaires

20:00 in Japanese currency. They had so much money that they were able to employ one of their sick friends to purchase food for them and cook it for them when they came back from the working parties. My friend and I got into an amazing thing. We went to a warehouse where they had calico curtains covering all these shelves so we took that and wrapped it round our waist. The next time we went to another area which would be down on the wharves we were able to sell it. There were some enterprising

20:30 Chinese who were, had the machines and were making clothes and we got caught and the Japanese are a funny race. You've seen photos of them. They don't speak normally, they roar and yell but you could commit a minor offence like a handful of rice or a small item and get quite a severe bashing. On the other hands, they caught someone selling something much more significant and all you'd get was a slap in the face

21:00 so we thought we were going to be in for quite an event because the Japanese officer was going past on a motorbike and he saw us and he had us picked up and paraded before him but all we got was a severe dressing down which was quite a relief. At another time we were working in a go-down on the wharves and it had been filled up with cement and they'd taken all the bags of cement away but there was a layer of cement three or four inches deep over the whole floor and our job this day was to shovel up this cement and put it in, reclaim it into

21:30 bags and in one corner of the go-down the only other thing there was a half a dozen wooden crates so we knocked the lids off. They were full of Indian cotton singlets and underpants so we had all these strapped around our waist and the next time we went to an area we sold them off and it was a long distance affair. You'd, the purchaser would be here and the buyer would be over there and you'd show your goods and then you'd start signalling which price you wanted for them and you come to an agreement, you'd go into the toilet,

22:00 they'd be on one side and you'd be on the other and you'd pass the goods over. There was also another incident. We had these tanks full of palm oil and palm oil is sort of reddish in colour and it's very thick but it happens to be chock block full of vitamin A and they used to take the old army water bottle, which was in a cover and fill it up with this palm oil and bring it back to camp. A Japanese officer was puzzled

22:30 by the fact that there was water everywhere and that everybody was carrying a water bottle so he opened the water bottle one day and saw that it was filled up with palm oil so he lined this fellow up and made him drink two pints of palm oil straight down so they compromised. They had, cut the water bottle in half and put a false bottom in it and they had water in the top half and palm oil in the bottom but some genius, some absolutely genius developed what we

23:00 call a crutch bag. Now you know where the Japanese didn't have underclothes like we did? They used to have what we called a G string which is a piece of white cloth about three foot long, tied round the waist and brought up through the legs and folded over so this genius made one of those out of cloth but he had a false bag in it and you'd, anything that you could steal you'd slip it down into this cloth

between your legs and it was undetectable. The biggest

23:30 thing I ever crutched, as we called it, was a big tin of fruit, tinned fruit and the worst thing was a cake of carbolic soap. I don't know whether you remember the old Life Boy soap but it was, soap was as scarce as hen's teeth so I crutched this bar of soap and we'd always been picked up by truck and taken back to camp. This day the truck didn't turn up and we had to walk two or three miles and because by this time the carbolic soap was all frothed up and I had a fairly bad rash between my legs.

24:00 I don't know, but there's one particular thing, this was very funny but I can't dress it up and it contains the F word and it uses its sense but this Japanese officer fancied himself as being quite ofay with the English language and in the early days before the advent of the crutch bag you'd put these things under your hat and he woke up to this and he lined everybody up one day and he said

24:30 "you think we're stupid." He said, "we're not stupid." He said, "you think we know fuck nothing but" he said, "I tell you, we know fuck all" so when you see the way that they used to go, they used to treat their own soldiers something terrible. I mean they'd slap one and they're all the way down the line. I mean it was nothing for an officer to slap another officer of junior rank and of course right on the end of the line were these poor little one star Japanese privates and they used to have three stars.

25:00 One star one year, two star and three star for three years service and we saw them lined up on parade one day with this quite brutal Japanese Sergeant Major. They used to wear putties and they had a kit inspection and they were all lined up and their putties were all rolled up and strapped and he used to throw these rolls of putty up in the air and if they burst open when they hit the ground he used to give the private a hell of a bash across the face and they had to, even if they got knocked down, they had to stand rigidly at attention and get knocked down again.

25:30 We saw them teaching, a Sergeant Major teaching a Japanese private to drive a truck and he's standing on the running board with his bayonet in a scabbard and every time this bloke made a mistake he'd bash him across the head with the bayonet scabbard but they used to work themselves into an absolute frenzy. They'd start off yelling and shouting and what turned out might be a few mild slaps on the face, particularly up on the railway, would turn into something shocking and you know we saw some terrible beatings

26:00 up on the railway but anyway after the, we started work on the aerodrome at Changi we saw a few, this is about the time when the B29's were coming over. They were so high you could hardly see them, just the vapour trails and the Japanese used to get into quite a panic and run around and they had these Japanese Zero's that they were using the aerodrome before we'd completed it and we had these little metal skips on light rails. We used to have to carry the,

26:30 dig the dirt from one place, fill these skips up, push them along the railway line and tip them into the ocean around Changi Peninsula. This particular trainee pilot was trying to take off with a Japanese Zero and he miscalculated and he didn't clear the row of skips and he clipped them with his wheel and crashed. Course there was all sorts of cheers and everything going on but there was another famous incident while we're working on this railway. We were all split up in different groups

27:00 and this particular group with which I was involved, was in charge of a Japanese officer who was very meticulous. He used to wear a white coat, white gloves and a white pith helmet and of course he got christened the ice cream man and he kept hearing this reference to himself as the ice cream man so he made some inquiries of what ice cream man meant and when they told him, he went right off his brain and he started to bash this chap up. There was a Dutch officer there and he raced in to try and stop it

27:30 and course the rest of the Japanese came in and started, and it got quite dickey there for a while but there was an Australian Sergeant who happened to be an Australian amateur wrestling champion and he rushed in and grabbed one of these Japs and threw him into the water and course the Japs started closing in with all their rifles and it got a bit dickey for a while but anyway they quietened things down. There was a British Major who was a Japanese interpreter and he was a Shell representative in Tokyo and he spoke fluent Japanese

28:00 so they all finished up in the Japanese Officers offices to discuss this business about the ice cream man. This Major said, "they called you the ice cream man?" He said, "you should be pleased." He said, "in Australia Mr Peters is an ice cream man and he's a millionaire" so that quietened that one down but then course the Japanese themselves capitulated and surrendered and they became quite tame. I mean they

28:30 just, once the found out the Japanese that the Emperor had ordered them to surrender they just were real compliant, no troubles at all and then the Australian Parachute Regiment landed. They were the first ones there and two of my friends, one of them who happened to be an accountant where I worked at Wills. The other one was a colleague of mine from Maroubra Surf Club and then they started preparing everybody to go home. Of course the

29:00 worst went first. The very worst were flown out. The others went by British and Australian naval ships, some of them were on American aircraft carriers and the fittest of us sort of had to wait for a month or two and we came home on two ships The Larges Bay and The Esperance Bay and we did nothing but eat on the ship so by the time we got back to Australia we looked reasonably fit. We arrived in Sydney Harbour

29:30 and we had two people on the boat, one of them was in my unit and his brother was in another unit, but their name was McEvoy. Their parents had Fostars shoes and when I looked over the rail they'd closed the factory down at Fostars and hired this ferry and took all the employees out to meet these two brothers and when I looked down, there as my uncle and my uncle was the sales manager for Fostars shoes so I got the ferry captain to bring the ferry over as close

30:00 as he could to the ship and I threw a ladder over the side and down I went into the ferry and got loaded up with ice cream cones and oranges and climbed back up onto the ship so we went to Ingleburn camp. Then we were sort of checked out and they started checking everybody for hookworms and they found out it was a waste of time cause just about everybody had them so they said they'll give everybody the hookworm treated which consisted of some,

30:30 I forget what it was but it was a little medicine glass full of ether with something else in it and you had to drink that down. Well it might have killed the hookworms but it didn't do much to your stomach. I went into, I at one stage I had a couple of teeth just sort of fell out except for the stumps and I had those pulled out while I was up in Thailand. They made me a,

31:00 took some more teeth out and made me part plates which finished up destroyed my gums and I finished up I had to have the whole lot taken out so we had, I forget, some months leave accrual, we had all our back pay but I couldn't wait to get back to work so I just wanted to forget everything and get back to work, which I did and I became involved with swimming and basketball and surfing and I spent 47 years with W D & H R Wills. I finished up

31:30 rose to the exalted position of Assistant Factory Manager. I had a couple of periods of service in Fiji with the company and three services in Papua New Guinea. I finished up managing the plant up there for four years before I retired, became involved with the Rotary and I had quite a ball up there and came back, worked another year and then retired, moved up to the Gold Coast and from there I said to my wife,

32:00 I couldn't live without a diary while I was working and I said to my wife "that's it, no more diary" but after a few years up here I found I was getting involved in so many different things, Legacy, Papua New Guinea Club. I was secretary of the Anglican Men's Society for about 13 or 14 years and I belong to about four Masonic organisations so now, you look at that calendar it's just chock a block full every day. We had a wonderful time up here. Unfortunately my, our eldest daughter was intellectually

32:30 handicapped and we spent some 26 years involved with the intellectually handicapped and I was the foundation president and president for 26 years of a state wide organisation providing sheltered workshops and residential care for intellectually handicapped people and on behalf, I was just more or less the figure head because I've, of all the work that the people of the organisation did, I was honoured with being awarded an MBE

33:00 so after we came up here we got involved with the local organisation Endeavour Foundation but unfortunately my daughter had a pulmonary embolism and a blood clot broke loose and she's died quite young, on about 39th birthday so the wife and I, our other daughter married an American who came to Australia on R and R leave several times and she moved to America and they're quite

33:30 happy. My son spent 12 months overseas wandering around and working on the oil fields off Dundee in Scotland and came back home to Australia and applied for a job and got a job with what was then Woodside Burma but is now Woodside Petroleum and he's done exceptionally well for himself and he's on the point of retirement now. I've got a grandson and a granddaughter in Perth. One's in his last year at University. The other one works for a film company. In

34:00 America my eldest daughter graduated with a Bachelor of Science and is studying for her Masters degree. She's working as an environmental scientist and my American grandson is currently at University and is a member of the United States Marine Corps and that more or less brings us up to date.

Beautiful, well if we can go back, what are your earliest memories of your childhood?

Well I could, my father was a member of the

34:30 First 13th Battalion and he got wounded four or five times on the Somme and he had one bad wound in the knee which affected him for the rest of his life. It used to swell up like a football and my earliest memories when we first went to McLean of the doctor with this ruddy great needle he used to jam in and draw the fluid off my father's knee. Eventually it got that bad that he,

35:00 he was what was known as the line foreman and he used to have to install telephone poles and string the telephone lines to put phones out to places like Evans Head and Brooms Head from out McLean and Lismore. It got so bad that he had to wear a leg iron and he couldn't carry on so they brought him back to Sydney and he finished up working in the main GPO in Sydney so the earliest recollections were not so much in Sydney, but when we went to McLean and

35:30 we, the first year we were there, one of the periodic times when the Clarence River floods, I can remember my youngest brother paddling around in about a foot of water outside the front. We also used to swim out into the Clarence River to try and get cane stalks off the punts that were being towed down by a tug from up around the cane fields to the Harwood Sugar Mill. Some of the tug operators were all

right.

36:00 They'd just go on normally and we'd hang onto the cane stalks and pull them off but some of the others would detour and you'd have to swim right out in the middle of the Clarence River to get these cane stalks. We also had a, up on a hill, well when we first went to McLean we lived on the low spot down near the town and later on Mum and Dad moved up on a hill opposite the McLean Primary School and of course there were two groups

36:30 of kids in gangs, the hillies and the townies. We were the hillies and at the bottom of the hill, erosion had eaten the dirt away. There was a sort of cliff or about that, three feet tall and we used to dig tunnels in there and roof them over with corrugated iron and pine branches and then we'd invite the townies up for a clod fight and course when they came up they didn't have the elaborate structures that we did. They used to just have to bail in and we were tossing these

37:00 clay clods at one another. Anyway the local policeman came home one night and fell into one of our caves so that was the end of that. We had to fill them all in. Another occasion, two brothers and I were playing cowboys and Indians and they, two brothers were hiding behind these small pine trees at the back of our house and I picked up a half a house brick and lobbed it up in the air and it fell down and hit my middle brother right in the middle of the

37:30 head and split his head open and he came out with blood pouring all over his place and I shot through. I didn't get home till about eight or nine o'clock that night and he wants to say, "look bro," and he's still got a full head of hair. My younger brother and myself are bald and he's got this patch in a luxuriant growth of hair which is quite grey. In Lismore we used to have these bike clubs and there were two big butter factories in Lismore,

38:00 Farley's and Norco and around the back of the factories they had the loading docks. They used to take the butter boxes and they had a wooden chute running down to the river and the boats would come up or the barges. They'd scoop these boxes of butter down and they'd pick them up and it was made out of hardwood and we used to get these butter box lids and sit on them and scoot down this chute into the river and my brother, my middle brother was sitting on one of these butter boxes. The chap in front

38:30 of him didn't get off, so he moved back a bit so he wouldn't get his toes hurt and he fell off the lid and skidded down this chute and he had some shocking black hardwood splinters all in his back and his legs. Course Dad had to take him to the doctor. I can always remember this doctor, he was quite a character. He couldn't get them out. They were too embedded so he said, "I'll put this on it." I think it was called Venus turps or something and he said, "This stuff will draw dole for you, draw money for you while you're on the dole."

39:00 So we had to wait for some days until this stuff softened the timber, splinters up so he could get them out. We used to ride our bikes around that concrete at the back of these factories and they had a wooden ledge edging right round the concrete floor and we used to race up and try and get up onto this ledge and ride our bikes along. In those days they didn't have the ratchets [freewheeling], they were all fixed wheel, and I miscalculated and I missed the ledge

39:30 and the peddle came down and hit this thing and had quite a load of gravel rash.

Tape 2

00:33 **If you just want to continue from your exploits as a young rascal in Lismore?**

Yes and we formed a gang there called the Purple Triangle Gang and we had this cloth that we'd cut up into a form of a triangle and we got Mum to dye it with purple dye. We used to go out raiding the local fruit trees and I remember one particular night we were out and of course you'd get into the peaches and

01:00 plums or whatever and you'd eat them in the dark. They could have maggots or anything in them but we went into this particular yard one night to get some peaches. I think it was and there was a dog there and of course the dog come charging out and myself and my middle brother managed to fly over the fence and my younger brother got stuck half way up and the dog tore the seat out of his pants. We had another thing, we used to get these willow sticks about three feet long and we'd make mud balls

01:30 and we'd put the mud ball on the end of the stick and put it behind our back and then 'whoosh' and just throw it. Then you'd stand there waiting for it to land on somebody's corrugated iron roof and I wasn't there at the time but my other two brothers went up into the bush behind where we lived in McLean and they unearthed this great boulder and started it off down the hill and it cleaned up several fences on the way down. Quite, quite, quite ridiculous some of the things we got up to as kids.

02:00 When we were in Lismore we lived in a house which was opposite the carriage shed yards and that was a stupid thing to do now, but when you're kids you didn't realise it. We used to get these six inch nails and put them on the railway line so that when the train come over it you'd have a flattened six inch nail. I joined the, got involved in surfing, well before that we had a

02:30 in Lismore the Memorial baths had their own, we had our own private swimming club there and we called ourselves the Pirates and the president was a chap named Frank Casey who's Ron Casey's [Sydney Football TV Announcer] older brother and I was the Vice President and Vice Captain. Then I got involved in the surf movement and we used to go down by the old New England bus from Lismore down to Ballina on Friday afternoon and we'd stay Friday night and do our patrols on the Saturday and the Sunday

03:00 and come back on the Sunday afternoon and that's, I got my bronze medallion and my instructor's certificate. I put a couple of squads through for their bronze medallion while I was at the old Ballina lighthouse. The Lismore [club], I remember one chap there, he was a farmer's boy and I just could not get him to swing his right arm with his left leg. He always used to swim his left arm with his left leg to I had to tie his left arm to his side so to try and get him to swing his arms

03:30 and legs alternatively. When I went back to Sydney I joined Maroubra Surf Club. I finished up taking my examiner's certificate and I became one of the officials that used to conduct the surf carnivals. They used to have monthly meetings of all the examiners and of course you remember then the head of the surf life saving movement was Sir Adrian Curlewis and Adrian Curlewis was the Captain in my division and he'd go for, well he

04:00 didn't give 'em but we used to have some lectures given to us by various people when we were prisoners of war. I remember one lecture was given by Padre Foster Hague, a British padre. Adrian Curlewis introduced him as Padre Foster Hague and he said, "What I wouldn't give now for one and two fingers of the other." We also had some very interesting [stories], one of our officers was Ben Barnett a Captain and he was a famous wicket keeper in Victoria but

04:30 he never got into the test fame because he was up against Bert Oldfield [famous cricketer]. We had a very interesting lecture by a Captain from one of the Cold Stream Guard regiments so it wasn't all bad. There was some interesting highlights. I got very closely involved with a British padre by the name of Duckworth and he was a little fireeater. He was only about four foot nothing and he was the padre with the Cambridgeshire Regiment and

05:00 after the capitulation, the Japanese were walking around taking watches and everything, so he just pulled his watch off and threw it on the ground and stamped on it with his boot but he was a terrific feller. I mean he used to save up his meagre rice allowance and if anybody went to see him for a consultation he used to say, "Have something to eat," and he also gave away all his clothes and he got in trouble with some of the senior officers for walking around with the backside out of his shorts. I became

05:30 fairly closely involved with him up in Burma when we were on the railway and I assisted with another chap from England who was a bit of an entertainer. We sort of acted as a sidesman with communion services up in the jungle but this other chap was a sort of a stand up comedian and I used to be his foil and we used to put these concerts on up there in on the railway. I dressed up in a

06:00 so-called sarong [wrap around skirt - common clothing in Thailand] and pair of wooden clogs and I'd got some coconut halves to make a bra and got some mercurochrome from the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] for my lips and I'm standing outside waiting for my queue to go in. This Japanese guard come past and he looked at me very funny so I hurriedly bust onto the stage before my cue. I wasn't going to stand outside dressed up as a woman with him looking at me like that. We didn't know it at the time but

06:30 we were woken up in the middle of the night to unload a couple of railway trucks and we thought we were unloading goods but when the doors opened there were all these ladies got out with their kimonos and their sandals and their parasols and we knew they were prostitutes but we didn't realise until much later on that they were these unfortunate comfort women that were dragooned into service for the Japanese troops. Here they were right up in the middle of the Thailand jungle in the monsoon season.

07:00 There was some very interesting episodes when you were pinching food. The Japanese had a big hut in which they'd stored their goods, and my mate was cook at the time so I broke into this place. They used to have a lot of whale meat and I managed to get hold of a big chunk of this whale meat and put it in the old crutch bag and bring it back. We were chewing on this raw whale meat and another night

07:30 there was a hut where they stored their rice and it was built up on stilts and we could hear the noise in there. There were obviously some Japanese soldiers but there were also some Australians in there as well. We crawled underneath the hut and we drilled up or made a hole up between the bamboo slats into the rice bags to collect the rice and we heard a mouth organ started to play and this Australian voice says, "Go away you silly bastards,

08:00 go away," and we did. It was full of Japanese guards so we had to leave that one alone. The worst, probably the worst period was when the monsoons were so bad and we were stuck right in the middle and they couldn't get food up the river by barges. They couldn't get trucks in because the roads were a quagmire. The only way they could get food in was to take people and bring rice in, in the haversacks and course that was only a minor supply.

08:30 I think it was for eight probably 10 days all we had was a half a cup of watery grill twice a day and also at that time cholera broke out. The civilians that they'd brought up, the Tamils and the Chinese and so forth they were brought up on the understanding that they could take their families with them and they were going to get paid for all the work they did. Course when they came up there they, absolutely deplorable conditions. I mean there was no order, no organisation, no doctors, no medical supplies

09:00 and they just died like flies and of course bodies in the river and so forth and we were always, had to boil our dixies. When you went for your meal there was always a big drum of boiling water and you had to sterilise your dixies before you got your food but that didn't stop it. I mean cholera was rampant there for about a month or more.

What were they able to do to try to

09:30 **attend to that sort of problem? Was anything done to try to address the problem?**

Well they did what they could. I mean some of these things could have been cleared up so simply if they'd have, I mean the dysentery could have been cleared up if they'd have had amatine [?] or charcoal. I mean you had people walking around chewing on charcoal out of the fire to try and keep themselves healthy. A simple saline solution would have helped with the cholera. The doctors did some sterling

10:00 service, I mean the way they improvised is unbelievable. They made needles out of bamboo and they made tubes out of all sorts of things. They worked with whatever salt they could get, trying to put intravenous saline solution into some of these cholera patients. Up in Tanbaya where they did the operations [amputations], the only saw they had was an ordinary wood saw that was used to go and cut the trees down for the fires and they used to have to get this saw and

10:30 boil it up and sterilise it. They had a few scalpels and some clamps and so forth but the saw itself was just an ordinary wood saw, to cut the bones off . I remember the doctors used to make fun of it: I remember one doctor saying that one day in his internship, when they were doing an amputation. They used to have to cut the skin down that way and fold it back so that when they cut the bone off they could put the flap back and he said he cut the flap the wrong way, cut it down that way.

11:00 I heard a lecture given by a doctor once that he said that these ulcers contained just about everything you could think of including diphtheria germs would you believe? Initially the way of treatment was quite brutal. They used to try and scrape all the muck out of these ulcers with a spoon and that must have been [horrendous] but if you, an individual who had a small ulcer happened to catch malaria, then, they'd spread overnight. I remember

11:30 a medical orderly, he went to jump up on this bamboo platform and he slipped and he got two small ulcers about the size of a five cent piece on each shin. They were healing quite well and then he went down with malaria. The next day it turned black and from there it just sort of [raged] and they were absolutely virulent, they'd spread, you know terrible. I remember one British chap, he absolutely refused to allow them to take his leg off and he used to sit up on this bamboo

12:00 platform and I don't know where he got it from but he had a big brass syringe and all he did all day was to just keep putting water on it. I mentioned it before, that shin bone was yellow and it was perforated and I don't know what happened to him in the finish but he wouldn't allow them to take his leg off. They made crutches, when they got back to Changi [POW Camp on Singapore], they made artificial limbs out of aluminium that they were taking from planes that had been shot down. They made

12:30 hollow ground razors out of bits of steel from truck springs. The way you used to collect the wood for the fires When we were back in Changi, they had all these trucks that were stripped right down, they took the engine off, everything except the chassis and four wheels and they used to rope about 20 or 30 prisoners up to this truck chassis. One lucky bloke would sit up and steer it and you'd have to drag these rubber logs back into the camp

13:00 to be cut up for the fires but when we got into Changi jail after we came back from the railway, that was heaven as far as we were concerned. I mean we always get quite disturbed when they talk about what a hell-hole Changi was. I mean Changi was a holiday camp compared to the railway and what they suffered in Burma and Sumatra in Borneo. I mean you had running water, you had toilets and you had good, electricity. They had their gardens, they had ducks and chickens and they were growing greens and their own vegetables.

13:30 You could go down, if you happened to be in a working party you'd get a big dixie full of seawater and boil it down to get the salt out of it. I'm not saying the people at Changi didn't have it tough. Some of them did, but by comparison to the rest of the working parties they, I mean people who went to Japan working down in those coalmines in the middle of winter. I mean they suffered pneumonia and tuberculosis and on the shipyards they were handling hot metal and

14:00 it was quite severe. Some of them including a couple of friends of mine were in a camp near Nagasaki when they dropped the atomic bomb and some time after they were released they just sort of strolled around and had a look at the area. Quite a few of them developed cancer afterwards but they weren't to know that at the time.

If we can go back maybe Norman

14:30 **back to, I think you were up to sort of all your involvement in the surf life saving clubs and things like that. What sort of happened from there?**

Well I was a junior when I first joined Maroubra Surf Club and we used to go to surf carnivals. They had north and south branches in Sydney and course Maroubra was in the south branch but we used to do

surf carnivals all the way from Cronulla right up to Whale Beach and

15:00 every year on anniversary weekend a small group of us used to go down to a place called Tathra down near the Victorian border and we'd go down there and you'd be involved with everything. I mean you might specialise in surf racing but you'd go down there and you'd row the boat, you'd try on a surfboard and you'd be part of the R and R [Rescue and Resuscitation] team and part of the march past team. As a matter of fact I was a member of the march past team in Maroubra and I think we were probably one of the most successful clubs until Narrabeen: South Narrabeen many years later

15:30 but I think we won 16 consecutive march past competitions in surf competition and we, that including four national titles. You'd do your Sunday patrol and of course as an examiner you had to keep au fait with all the changes in the rules and the handbook and we used to have to go to a particular surf club in the middle of winter every year and with all the people

16:00 from all over the State and you'd review the handbook and you'd be walking around the beach in great coats and gloves and hats. They were good weekends those. There were some very, very funny people in those, that movement and of course we had the monthly meeting of the Board of Examiners of which Sir Adrian Curlewis was the Chairman but there were some pretty important people. In one of them

16:30 was a police prosecutor. He was a sergeant and I remember this particular time they were arguing about colours. There was a new surf club had been formed and they had applied for a certain set of colours for their uniforms and their caps and somebody, the question came up about black and white and somebody said, "Black and white are not colours, you can't call them colours." This crown prosecutor got up and said, "Do you mean to tell me that north Narrabeen march in the nude?" 'cause

17:00 their colours were black and white but he was a phenomenal, I mean Adrian Curlewis could tell you the name of every surf club from Scarborough and Cottesloe in Western Australia through to Glenelg and Henley in [South Australia], and Portsea in Victoria and then all the surf clubs from south coast of New South Wales right up to the north coast and right up into Queensland. He had a phenomenal memory.

You've been involved with the surf club for such a long time, how do you see that the

17:30 **surf life saving association has changed in the years in Australia?**

Well I s'pose the biggest change that I can remember was the introduction of ladies into the movement. You know they had to make provision for them to, I mean they were there before in auxiliaries but when they became full members of course that meant big changes within the club itself. You had to have separate toilets and separate showers and of course you know the results have been absolutely spectacular when you look at people like Reen Corbett [Mooloolaba QLD] and some of these other young girls in their iron

18:00 women events, they're as good as the men and I mean even in the surf boats they have showed their metal there. That's probably one of the biggest changes but I think one of the most devastating things that's happened in the surf movement has happened just recently and that's this question of insurance cover. I mean that's killing, the surf movement went, surf life saving movement went through a bad period after the war when people were, these surfies groups, they'd have a panel van and about six or seven of them and all they'd do would be run all over the place looking for

18:30 the best waves. The membership suffered a little bit badly then but it recovered and it's done very well since but now this business about insurance cover, it's quite devastating. It didn't, it never raised its head when I was younger, I mean I, you might, I think they called it Black Friday. Bondi was the one that suffered the worst. They had a sandbar just sort of collapsed and hundreds of people got carried out and they made a

19:00 phenomenal number of rescues. A similar thing happened at Maroubra but not on quite the same scale. It was only about 30 or 40 of them there. The chap that used to be our club captain won the bravery award for dashing into the surf and rescuing a bloke that had his leg taken off by a shark. He was the superintendent of the fire brigade in Maroubra if I remember, at the time but

What about rescues that you've done? Have you done any rescues

19:30 **yourself?**

Yes, well nothing really spectacular. Done lots and lots of rescues but I mean we, at Maroubra they had a point round to the north end of the beach and it was, you could walk around the rocks and you could dive off the rocks to save you the trouble of swimming through the [surf] break and there used to be some tremendous waves. They used to be beautiful for a body surfer and we were out there this particular day and we were so far out that we could see around the corner into Coogee

20:00 and one day we were out there waiting for a wave and this Italian lady came out on a surfer plane and is paddling madly along. She had no idea what trouble she was in. I mean she was way away from the beach. She didn't speak English so we had to drag her back in but you know I mean that was just the norm. I mean people outside the flags get into trouble you just, but the worst one in which I was involved was a surf carnival at Cronulla. I think it was Cronulla or North Cronulla and it was an R and R competition.

20:30 The beltman had been out, had rescued the so-called patient which she swam out to the buoy first and he was getting pulled back in by the rail and there was a signal you had to give. If you lost a patient, first of all when you went out and secured the patient you put one hand up and that was a signal to start pulling her in. If you lost a patient you put both hands up and that was a signal to stop pulling on the line. Well this chap who was the club captain from Cronulla and he had the

21:00 so-called patient in the R and R competition. There was a lot of seaweed on the surf and the line got tangled in the seaweed and he got pulled down and course he couldn't signal. They just kept pulling and of course by the time they realised what happened, they dragged him up on the beach and he was drowned. Of course the strain on the line, he couldn't get out of the belt so at that stage they'd done away with the old Schaffer method where you used to put your

21:30 hands on a back to resuscitate that person. They had what was known as the Eve Rocker which was a stretcher on a platform and you'd just rock it up and down and they must have worked on him for half an hour on the beach and they, a doc there giving him an injection straight into the heart, but he never recovered. As a result of that, they redesigned the surf belt. They had a series of brass clips with a brass rod through them so that if you got into trouble, you just pulled on the brass rod and

22:00 the belt fell apart so it was a very practical solution evolved from that tragic accident.

What about can you remember any Guy Fawkes nights and anything like that when you were a young feller?

We didn't call them Guy Fawkes nights. I remember Empire nights, was a cracker night.

What was Empire night what was that all about?

Empire night, well it was a world wide celebration of the British Empire. They used to have all these fireworks and it wouldn't be allowed these days but they used to have what

22:30 they called basket bombs in those days and that was a sort of gun powder and it was I s'pose the bomb would be about two inches square all made up of bamboo strips woven together and it used to make one hell of a noise and of course they automatically used to go into letterboxes. To increase the effectiveness you put them in a kerosene tin and let them off and that's, talking about kerosene tins, I remember once the people behind us in McLean used to

23:00 supply petrol in four gallon petrol cans to the surf, not surf planes, the flying boats or sea planes that used to land on the Clarence River. My brother got hold of one of these empty petrol tins and he was a bit interested to see what was, so he lit a match to look inside it and of course, boom! The petrol can just collapsed and he got all his eyebrows burnt off and his eyelashes and his hair. Yes,

23:30 well throw-downs were the, they were just a little packet about half an inch square and you used to just throw them on the ground and they'd [explode]. The Catherine wheels, the big Catherine wheels used to be [popular], and the sky rockets but these days there's been some tremendous accidents with fireworks. Those basket bombs are banned these days Yes.

So what about with your dad having served in World War I and that, did he speak much of his experiences

24:00 **to you?**

No, the experiences of most of those First World War victims was followed by the people in the Second World War. Nobody wanted to talk about the bad side of it, only the funny side and all we got from Dad were the funny stories. There were some very funny stories and most of what I learnt about the First World War I learnt from reading. It wasn't a particularly good time to read it of course, but I read a book called by Sir Philip Gibbs and it was called The Realities of War [In 1920, war correspondent Philip Gibbs published his account of World War I ... Government offer a selective view of the realities of war] and I read that just as I joined the army

24:30 about the corpses and the gas and horses being blown apart and trench warfare and all that sort of thing and you know Dad wouldn't talk about it and the same thing happened to us. We might talk about it when we get together for a reunion but I never spoke about my experiences for about 40 years. I was asked to give a talk one day and that was the first, I've given a couple since but that was the first time I'd ever spoken at any length in detail

25:00 but I had told many, given many stories about the funny side of it.

And looking at your father say and yourself, when you did tell these funny stories, was that information you sort of volunteered or did people ever ask you about things or did you ever ask your Dad about things?

Well we didn't find this out till many, many years after and it was probably a reason why, I mean we'd never heard of

25:30 the term post traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]. I mean we'd heard about shell shock in the First World War but it wasn't until after Vietnam that this post traumatic stress disorder and looking back I realised that that's what happened to so many of our fellers because they kept it bottled up and our parents and our fiancés were told before we came home, not to discuss it, don't talk about it, it'd be too upsetting so

nobody asked us anything.

What were you guys told by the powers to be when you returned?

26:00 Not much actually. I came home and I had to front up before a medical officer and he was a young feller, nice enough young feller I s'pose but he was only in his early 20's and he said to me, "You got anything wrong with you?" and of course the only thing I said was, "Got this scar on the back of my neck where I had this piece of shrapnel," and he had a look at it and he said, "You're all right," he said, "I'll discharge you A1." I said, "What!" cause my father said before I went away he said, "Son" he said, "I don't care what,

26:30 whatever, whatever happens to you, you make sure you get it put in the back of your paper," which I did. I was lucky enough to have my original paperwork all the way through and I said, "What!" and he said, "Don't you agree with that?" and I said, "No." He said, "Would you like to see someone else?" and I said, "I would," so he sent me next door and there was a lovely old bloke there. He must have been in his mid 70's and he was a kindly old doc, like a kindly old country doc, and he said, "What's up lad?" and I told him so he just got me to stand up against the wall and he got me to squeeze his hands and he had a look at it

27:00 and he gave me a 10 percent pension, and that's [why] I never worried about it. I mean I used to have friends that practically lived in the Repatriation Department, Sydney and I couldn't be bothered so I was on 10 percent pension for about 40 years. [When] we came up to the Gold Coast, they had people from the Department of Veterans Affairs having seminars at some RSL [Returned and Services League] clubs and I went to see this bloke and he said, "Is that all you've got?" He said, "You must be the only prisoner of war in Australia that's on 10 percent." He said, "Is that all that happened to you?,"

27:30 "You know, well we had malaria and dysentery and Beri Beri and this, that and the other thing, you know pellagra and all the rest of it," and he said, "Why didn't you mention that?" and I said, "Well what for?" I said, "Everybody had it, was nothing (UNCLEAR)[we could do] about it." I showed him my pay book and he said, "I'm sure I can do something with you." He said, "I can't go outside my bible." He had a big blue book there. Anyway he got me to fill in the form and I got an increase in pension for 50 percent, which I stayed on for most of the time until recently when I got another rise

28:00 but you know I mean I, all I wanted to do was to get it behind me, get back to work and get involved, which I did and I think I was a pretty fit young feller when I joined and most of the [people], in my unit were around about 18 or so. Then there was another group who were, one of them was a veteran from the First World War and a lot of the people, of course it was a technical unit, were radio operators from the Post Office [or] the

28:30 Overseas Telecommunications [Service] and they were in their late 30's probably early 40's. They were the people that suffered very quickly first of all because with the lack of vitamin B and vitamin C: the first thing that started happening to us was you know cracked lips and rashes and skin complaints and swollen legs. They used to call them 'happy feet,' but fortunately I didn't suffer from it but there was nothing happy about it. I don't know whether you ever saw anything about Slim de Grey's book [Changi Songbook] but

29:00 there's a burning, tingling sensation in the feet. You couldn't sleep with it and all they could do was to walk around and they used to walk around all night so they devised a thing where they had a piece of plywood with four bits of rope around it, tied around their neck and that was a mobile card table and they'd walk around all night playing cards off this. So that's where they got the nickname from, happy feet. There was some particular complaint we had when we first went to Malaya and

29:30 it was called scrotal dermatitis and the British had it pretty good there. In their bunks they had, barracks they had Indian servants and Chinese women used to do their, repair their clothes and you'd have your own. We didn't realise what was happening but this big Indian came around, big Sikh with a big beard and he said, "I would like to help you," you know, "And you pay me some," miserly amount, about a Malayan dollar and you'd wake up in the morning and

30:00 there'd be a mug steaming sweet tea and a big slab of bread with butter and marmalade jam on it and you'd get out. They'd make your bunk up for you and when you came back at night your bunk would be made up, the mosquito net would be put down and there he'd be with your mug of tea and a cocoa for you and they had these sew-sew girls. Course when we got there we still had the pre war stuff, leather bandoleers and our boots and our bandoleers were green with mildew and the brass was all

30:30 tarnished so we'd give our boots and everything and this bloke would clean it all and polish it all up. I've lost the track a little bit. Oh yes, this scrotal dermatitis and course they have what they used to call dobey boys and dobey is an Indian term for washing. They'd take your clothes down to the river and wash them in the river, you know you bash them against a rock with soap and course it wasn't boiled or sterilised and you'd get what you'd call dobey's itch

31:00 and we had singlets and big thick underpants and you know they wouldn't allow us to go around without shirts buttoned down. This dobey's itch was so bad your whole back would be inflamed and red and you'd be standing there and course you're all soaked in perspiration and you'd move and your back would be on fire but the worst part of it was it started to attack you around the scrotum and all the area on the inside of your thighs and around your genitals would be just seeping, just a mass of, and the skin

would slop off

31:30 and this was particularly bad when we first became prisoners of war. The doctors had nothing to do with it and going back a bit, before the Japs landed we had this scrotal dermatitis and they used to treat it with what they call Whitfield's ointment. Don't know whether we have Whitfield's ointment but you'd stand there with your hat in your hand. The doctor would say "right" and he'd slap this Whitfield's ointment on and it'd burn and you'd be fanning yourself like crazy running around

32:00 and later on they mixed it up with what they call gentian green or gentian violet [an antifungal and antibacterial agent for use on the skin] because the ointment didn't last long. When they mixed it with gentian green and gentian violet it used to last a lot longer. They'd plaster all this gentian green and gentian, and your underpants would be all purple and green but course when we became prisoners of war. The same thing happened again due to the lack of vitamin C, there was nothing to treat it and the doctors would say, "Well all you can do is to get some dry rice and pound it up and sift it through a handkerchief to try and get some

32:30 fine powder and put that on it and lay with your legs open underneath a ceiling fan," but that was like putting sand on it and of course it'd just go solid under the fan. It was a terrible complaint but that sort of died away a little bit and at one stage we were told that, because of the lack of vitamins we were getting, we'd probably be sterile when we came home and one thing that might help was if we ate some hibiscus leaves. Course that [meant]

33:00 people were stripping the hibiscus leaves, hedges and eating these hibiscus leaves. At one stage we got involved with the snails, not the escargot that the French have but these ordinary little snails that used to crawl around the hedges. We collected all these snails, a great big dixie full and took them back to the bloke in the kitchen and he said, "What am I going to do with those?" They said, "Well boil them up in salt water and then break 'em open and clean all the muck off and then boil the rest up in salt water again and clean 'em up again

33:30 and boil 'em up in fresh water and then grind 'em up and put 'em in the rice." Course instead of doing like they do with lobsters, have the boiling water and you put the lobsters in, he put all these snails in the dixie in cold water and put on the fire. Course all the snails are trying to crawl out of the dixie and he had to keep knocking them back but there was absolutely no taste to it at all, it was just like chewing ground up rubber and our people had no idea in the world how to cook rice when they first come, not in bulk. They either put too much

34:00 water with it or it got sloppy or there was not enough water with it and it was gooey and of course the stuff we were getting was second hand. I mean some of the rice we got had calcium and it had weevils but after a while they became quite adventurous and they not only were able to cook the rice properly but they were able to make what we used to call doovers. They'd get the rice, make a rice cake and they'd put whatever sugar they could or whatever little bits of thing and as far as the tea was concerned you didn't get, the tea ration wasn't

34:30 used to make individual cups of tea, what they did, they used to bung the whole lot in and boil it up and you'd get an extremely strong tea mixture which was ladled in and then filled up with hot water. I can remember they used to cook this rice in bathtubs with a shovel.

Did they ever get any instruction from the Japanese, you know, how to cook rice properly or?

No, no, no, most of the instruction they got from people who

35:00 knew, you know, the ratio of rice to water and so and so and so and so until they got used to it but they did.

Like how much rice would the average Aussie have eaten pre war ?

Well they tell me that you, the minimum absolute minimum that you could live on is about eighteen hundred calories a day but you should get something in excess of two thousand two hundred calories. I mean we were down to 12, 11, I don't know. I mean there's absolutely, the only thing you get out of rice is a bit of energy

35:30 but there's no vitamins, none. It had to be supplemented with all sorts of vegetables and, I mean the Japanese used to have all sorts of things they'd put in but we were getting issues of little dried fish and rotten fish and occasionally there you might get one small yak calf for 200 men so whatever you could get to put in to flavour the rice, they had goola Malacca was a sort of a brown sugar that they used to produce in Malaya

36:00 and you could sometimes get some of that. It wasn't too bad around Singapore. There was a reasonable amount of vegetables but when you got up, further up [north], when we got off these rice trucks in Bampong in lower Thailand we really thought we had arrived in a land of milk and honey because we walked into this camp and they had these great kwalies [?] just chock a block full of vegetables all boiling away with boiled eggs in it and pork fat. It was absolutely beautiful.

36:30 Course we'd had, never had anything like that for months and months and we were getting stuck into these eggs and vegetables and pork fat and boy did we suffer badly and course the Thai women would give you a bunch of bananas. We were getting 10 cents a day which is about threepence. I mean it was just prisoner paper money and the officers got some more and they used to have a bit of a canteen fund

but once we left lower Thailand and we started walking up [north] things just got gradually worse and worse.

37:00 **Before you'd gone to war like in your younger years, had you ever eaten rice?**

Yes, I still eat rice. I don't cook it for myself but I used to love rice puddings Yes, rice custard, absolutely.

What about food in general like in the Depression years, can you remember what that was like?

Well, we didn't suffer too badly in the Depression because Dad was a public servant and he had a steady job but I can remember when we were a kid in McLean all these so-called

37:30 swaggies coming, their humpy and their bluey and my cousin came through and my father's brother had two boys and one of them was humping, or he'd jumped the rattle they used to call it. They'd jump on these freight trains and just go from town to town. They used to have a, used to be able to collect a chit which entitled them a certain amount of flour and food and so forth and they'd just wander all over the country looking for a job. I mean in Sydney they had what they called Happy Valley I think which is an encampment

38:00 of tents and humpy's that people lived but we didn't suffer too badly, as kids I don't remember, we didn't do too bad and I mean the river was there and there were fish around and we used to go up into the bush. We didn't know they were macadamias at that time. We used to just call them bush nuts and we used to get these bush nuts and take the green husk off and bash the kernel up between a couple of bricks and it's a thriving industry now, the macadamia.

Can you remember any of your school mates that were worse off?

Yeah I can still remember them Yes.

38:30 I can remember one chap he was a bit of a scallywag and we got into an altercation one day and we had a fight. I believe that fight went on for about an hour all over the place and I went to see him. His family had a business in McLean, haberdashery and, you know, all the rest of it and I called in to see him one day and it must have been 50 or 60 years since I'd seen him and I said, "Is Noel around?." They said, "He's out the back." I walked out there and he's out there with a

39:00 customer measuring out some lino and he looked up and he said, "Bloody Norm Anderton." He said, "Remember that fight we had?" Yes well we were taught pretty much to stand on our own feet because Dad, he had a father who was a typical old tough old Yorkshire man, shocking grandfather and he made life so tough for my father and his brothers, they ran away from home. Dad sailed before the mast as a cabin boy from the age of 14 and he went all over the world on the old wooden ships and iron

39:30 men and then of course he went to the First World War and he played rugby in New Zealand and he was quite a tough man but he was a bloody good father.

Tape 3

00:32 **OK so we'll pick up from where we were from the last tape, if you could just tell us a little bit about your school life?**

School life? Well as I mentioned before I went to primary school in McLean on the Clarence River and that was a really wonderful period. I mean it was so open. I think the city kids miss out a lot in not being able to get around in the country and we were fairly close to Yamba but in those days transport

01:00 wasn't the way it is today, with you know only a bus down there very now and again but my father had an Indian, red Indian motorbike and sidecar, and we used to get around in that a bit. My uncle came up from Sydney and he worked for, he was a superintendent of the York Street telephone exchange in later years and he was the one that encouraged me to join the militia. He took us for a ride from McLean

01:30 down to Yamba and when we were coming back I was on the pillion seat and my brother, two brothers were in the sidecar and one of those little dust willy willy's came up and he lost control of the bike and he ran off the side of the road into a ditch and I somersaulted from the pillion right over a barbed wire fence and landed in a paddock on the other side. Luckily we weren't hurt but there was a similar incident happened many years afterwards when we went down to Wollongong to visit a friend of mine down there and he had

02:00 a motorbike and sidecar and he took us for a ride, right up the top of Bulli Pass and Mount Ousley and then all, came all the way back down again and we're turning into his street and the sidecar came off and it ran into the ditch and my two daughters and my son, they thought it was great and I'm, we're on the bike of course with the pillion and there's the sidecar in the ditch with the three kids and I thought boy if that'd happened coming down Bulli Pass you'd never know what would have happened but

02:30 I s'pose that there were a few sharks in the river in Clarence but we never actually saw any of those but yes we did, we have one, two, two instances. They caught a groper, it was a great big one too, massive and they had that tied up at the wharf at the end of the street where we lived in McLean and course the kids are always going down there having a look at this great big groper. A little while later they caught a shark and they pulled that up onto the shore

03:00 and everybody thought it was dead and my brother went over to touch it and it went shoo and it just missed his hand so I mean even in those days there were a few shark fatalities. Even up as far as Grafton the sharks used to get up there but the Clarence River, they call it the big river. It's not wide by some standards but it was wide enough and we kids used to swim right across the river and back again. There was

03:30 and it still happens, McLean is a very, very Scotch town and every year they have a highland gathering there. They have pipe bands from all over New South Wales and Queensland come there and I've been fascinated by pipe bands ever since I was a kid because Dad was attached to Scottish regiments and every pub in the town used to have a Scotch band in it. They'd be up on the veranda of a pub into the early hours of the morning all playing the pipes and banging the drums

04:00 and it's quite a spectacular event that, that's still as I said it still goes on. I got involved with [it], I was attached to the Gordon Highlanders and the Argyle and Southern Highlanders when I was in the army and at one stage one of the Argyle and Southern Highlanders was a member of the band and he was teaching me to swing those sticks but it never came anything further than that. After we left McLean and went to Lismore, before, one story.

04:30 Dad had a horse named Charlie and he used to hitch this horse, Charlie up to a sulky with a great big bag of chaff and corn and he'd go out surveying the lines for the telegraph poles to be erected. One particular day Charlie took fright and he bolted down the main street of McLean straight out into the traffic and he wrecked the sulky

05:00 and Dad had to limp back home, unload the sulky and load it up on Charlie's back with a bag of chafe across his neck and he had to ride the horse out. Well this particular horse developed a growth on its foot, was almost as big as a tennis ball it was and it looked shocking like a great big oozing wart. The chap next door to him said, "Tell you how to fix that, Harry" he said, "Just tie a piece of cotton round it and pull it tight," and he said, "Every day pull it tighter," he said eventually it'll drop off. Well it did but unfortunately

05:30 that bloke's dog ate it and got quite sick and course in McLean there were no toilets. There was only the old dunny cart used to come around and they had a sewage farm out the back and a sewage farm consisted of these great big ponds all filled with gravel and a great big aluminium, pipe with all the outlets on it and it just goes round and keeps spraying and we used to stand on that pipe like a merry go round and go round and Mum come out and caught me one day

06:00 hitching a ride on the back of the dunny cart, swinging my legs and another thing I remember about that, they had a chap there and he used to sell ice creams in the summer and hot pies in the winter. He had this little cart, horse and cart and you got in it from the back and he had containers for ice creams and then of course when the summer was gone he used to have his hot pies in it. We had a

06:30 particular accident that happened at primary school one day. We were racing around and this chap cut his leg rather badly on a nail sticking out of a piece of board and he lived quite some distance away from the school. The teacher asked for some volunteers to help get him home so there were four of us, we volunteered and we took turns to carry him and we must have carried him several miles to get home. Soon as we got home, he's jumped up, said, "Righto, thanks," and away he went.

07:00 **What were the classes like, your teachers and?**

We had one particular teacher. I can still remember her name, Miss Donnelly and she took me and all my class mates all the way through from first class right through to fifth class, primary. She went with us every year and of course when we got into sixth class that was the, well they called it in those days, the primary final and you sat for your primary final and then you went to High School and did

07:30 three years and then you, no was it three years? Then you got your Intermediate Certificate and then you carried on for another two years and got a Leaving Certificate so I did the primary final in McLean and then went to Lismore High School and did the rest of my high school term up there. The job I had, I really wanted to get into the Post Office and I sat for a Public Service examination and I think there were, I forget how many there were, maybe a hundred or so

08:00 but they wanted about four and I think I came fifth in the exam or something so I missed out. So when I left high school I got a job working in this health laboratory attached to Lismore Base Hospital and my job was to feed the guinea pigs and the rabbits which were used for pregnancy tests and other tests. I had to clean all the equipment because they'd get stuff sent from the hospital and surrounding districts, women's breasts and false teeth that had been pulled out that they had to go through, they had to

08:30 be checked and my job was to dump all that into a special garbage bin and then they had an autoclave which is really a big steam cleaning, used to have to wash all these glass utensils and everything and then bung 'em in the autoclave and put 'em under steam pressure for some times then take 'em out, wash 'em again then dry 'em and put 'em there. I spent a year there and then Dad got moved. I also had

a temporary job delivering tele [telegrams] No, while I was at the health laboratory I had to deliver the reports to all the various

09:00 doctors at hospitals after the results became known and pushing one of those old commonwealth pushbikes were quite heavy and Lismore was a fairly hilly town and it was quite a chore to ride this bike up and down all these hills so at Christmas time I got myself a job delivering telegrams, Christmas telegrams and there was, you remember the old? You may not remember, it's back too far. They had special telegrams

09:30 that were birthdays, Christmas and all sorts of events and they were coloured and had special designs on them but there was a particular service that they used to have where these chaps would tip horses in the races. They'd send a telegram to their various clients tipping the horse for the race and it was a collect telegram and you had to collect the money from the recipient for this telegram and some of these blokes were too tight. They wanted to have a look and open the telegram

10:00 to see what was in it before they paid the money and at that stage the bike I had was an old Malvern Star which had a ratchet gear on it. You could peddle it backwards and I went to the pictures this night and Dad didn't want me riding the bike home in the dark so he said, "I'll ride the bike home for you," and course he was used to riding the old commonwealth Post Office pushbikes without a fixed gear and in McLean there's, Lismore rather there's two bridges over the arms of the Richmond River and he was

10:30 half way across one of these bridges and the bike he used to ride had the old peddle brake. You press backwards on the peddle and put the break on and course the bike I had, had brakes on the handle bars and he went backwards with the peddles and it was just going and he ran off the road, over went the bike and the handle bars got twisted right round so he couldn't ride it. He had to more or less carry it all the way from over the second bridge in Lismore to where we lived alongside the railway line.

11:00 **What was it like moving from a small town like Lismore to the city?**

That was another, we were going from McLean where they had no toilets, to Lismore where they had sewage. We stayed overnight in a hotel on south Lismore before we moved into the house that Dad had, Mum and Dad had rented and we'd never seen flushed toilets. Us three kids, we were up all night going to the toilet and pulling the chain to watch this water going down, gurgling down the toilets and of course going

11:30 into a hotel dining room and sitting down and being waited on, that was fantastic as well, where we were concerned, the modern living.

Did your mother enjoy that?

No, no Mum had three boys.

But did your mother enjoy sitting down in the dining room?

Yes I'll say. Mum always used to have especially in wintertime in McLean she used to make pies and she'd spend all day making these pies while Dad and his three sons

12:00 were down at the local football ground, cause Dad was an avid rugby league fan and he used to take us down to watch the football and we'd come home to all these magnificent pies that Mum used to make. Another specialty we had was lamingtons. We'd be waiting at the end of the table for the lamingtons to be dipped in the chocolate and then rolled in the coconut and then as they came off the end of the table we'd, they'd be fresh and licking the chocolate bowl out of course. Another favourite, Mum used to make a Christmas pudding and ever since I can remember

12:30 as soon as the wrapping was taken off, I used to turn the Christmas pudding on its side and cut the bottom off because the bottom had a nice soft white base on it and I did that all my life and my wife got my mother's recipe for the Christmas pudding. The very first Christmas when she made the Christmas pudding of course I, she said, "What are you doing, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm cutting this off." She said, "You can't." I said, "I've been doing that ever since I was a kid. I'm not going to stop now," and I still do it. Whenever I make a Christmas pudding I always cut that

13:00 bottom slice off for myself, Yes.

So you were talking about moving from McLean to Lismore and what was the difference from Lismore and Sydney

The difference, well it was a much more modern town of course. A lot more shops and a lot more activities going on and whereas in McLean they just had a baths which were part of the river with piles around them but when we got to Lismore they had a proper 33 yard swimming pool and a diving board. Two of the people with whom I was associated

13:30 with there were a brother and sister, Freddie and Lurlene Hook. They represented Australia in the diving champion, in the Olympic Games in the early years. The chap that had the baths a chap named Harry Knott. He must have been there, he was a grandfather figure to us but he managed the baths and we had all our local competitions and we used to go to swimming carnivals at Murwillumbah and Mullumbimby so we had a very, a very good childhood

14:00 actually, we three kids and course when we moved back to Sydney, back to the big smoke that was something altogether different again.

What was the first thing that shocked you or your first impression when you went back to Sydney?

Well I had one trip down. This chap that I mentioned, this Freddie Hook the diver, Mum and Dad sent me down by boat from Lismore to Sydney to stay with my grandparents and that was the old North Coast Steamer Company. They used to

14:30 be able to take these steamers right up to the wharves in Lismore and then they'd go out at the outlet at Richmond River and sail down the coast to Sydney and Freddie said, "Never mind about all these stories you hear about getting seasick, just do what you want, eat anything you like," and the cabin we had was, as you walked down to the dining room, you could smell all this oil fumes coming up from the engine and Freddie got as sick as a dog and he went in his bunk and never got out of it till he got to Sydney

15:00 and no, before that, he said, "Get me a great big piece of steak with all that fat round the side," then whoo, so he never left his bunk and I used to get out and stand right up in the bow of the ship and let the salt and air run over me and I actually didn't get sick but Mum had fitted me out with new clothes. I had a brand new felt hat and we sailed into Sydney Harbour and I walked off the gangway to stand on the deck and shoo, away went my hat.

Oh no?

Yeah and of course

15:30 my paternal grandmother and grandfather were pretty staid old Yorkshire people. They lived in a two storey place in Paddington and you know you get these impressions on your mind as kids and you walked in the front door. The place smelt musty and stale and my grandfather smoked a pipe and my maternal grandfather also smoked and he had a big moustache and he was another old fashioned, he had

16:00 I think seven daughters and three sons and the eldest two daughters finished up old maids. They never got married and one of them had to look after Grandpa and we'd be visiting them and my mother used to say "Go and kiss Grandma goodnight," grandpa rather. Well grandpa supper consisted of Sao biscuits and onions and cheese and he'd walk out there and there'd be his nicotine stained moustache and onion and cheese flavour and we always used to take a great big deep breath and go and kiss grandpa good night.

16:30 **What about when you joined the Militia?**

Well as I said I was encouraged to do that by my Uncle. That's where I learnt, in those days that was, still had a hangover from the Boer War and the First World War and course Morse Code. I'd learnt that and they didn't have so much as the wireless those days but was landlines and you'd send Morse over a wire but you also had to learn how to send Morse Code with

17:00 a flag. You'd hold the flag like that and a short from that to that was a dot and a dip down like that was a dash so you'd dit, dit, dash, dash. They also had the heliographs which they'd used extensively in India where you lined the heliograph up on the sun on the spot where you wanted to send it and then when you depressed the key a mirror used to move, so I don't know whether you've ever seen any of the old films?

17:30 There's lots of old films about the British Army in India and they'd have a heliograph up on a hill and 10 mile away or something another one and as you pressed the key the sun would flash on the mirror and you'd send Morse Code like that. Also used to have a lamp, something like the aldis lamps they had in the navy where you had a little gun and you squeeze a trigger and you flash the lights with dots or dashes. That was all very interesting and I

18:00 didn't get involved in the senior part of it, like as I said when I turned 18 I joined the Militia proper but I only attended a few parades before I joined the army and I went into the army in the showgrounds we were stationed before we were selected for our units. I met this chap there who, God bless him, he worked for STC a radio company. That's where he invited me to go to a company dance so we went to the company dance and he introduced me

18:30 to the lass who would eventually be my wife but he was the one that decided that he'd had enough of Singapore. When food started to get scarce and he said I'm going to volunteer for the next group that goes and we said, "You're mad, you're crazy. You never volunteer for anything in the army." Anyhow he volunteered for E Force and he ended up in Borneo and was on that march but when I was in the showgrounds in Sydney I got to know two young chaps from the country and they were real country boys.

19:00 They used to drag me out of bed at four o'clock in the morning and we'd go for a run, then we'd come back and have a cold shower in the middle of winter, then we go round to the cookhouse, you'd get a big mug of cocoa and dry biscuits. They were going to join the 2/13th battalion as signallers and I very nearly went with them because that was my father's battalion but I thought no, you know, I'm interested in telegraphy and wireless and so forth so I stayed there and eventually got inducted into 8th

19:30 Division, Signals and the Colonel came round. They were mainly interested in people with backgrounds in telegraphy or radio operators and telegraphists from the post office and overseas telecommunications and of course I was automatically selected to go into a signal unit. So then we went up to Liverpool and the huts we slept in at Liverpool were the same huts that my father slept in, in the First World War. Wooden buildings with corrugated iron

20:00 walls and roofing with holes in them and freezing cold but while we were there, the mate and I got volunteered to go to a place called Casula where they were having an officers training session and we had to set the camp up for them and course we were sleeping on their stretchers and eating their biscuits and we were only there for a few weeks until the course had finished. Then we moved into Ingleburn which was a lot more modern camp

20:30 which was all wooden buildings and we finished our training there and we had a passing out parade in full uniform at Ingleburn and then we went by train to Bathurst. That's where the whole division was encamped there and we were engaged in certain divisional exercises and they had two radio sets in the army at that stage. One was called a 108 and one was called a 109 and the 108 set was made by A W A [Amalgamated Wireless Australia Pty Ltd]. That

21:00 company was run by Sir Reginald Fisk and his son Sir Ernest Fisk was the Captain in my section and the other bigger unit called the 109 was made by Standard Telephones and Cables. The smaller 108 [radio] was used by the infantry and it had a very limited range and they had a telescopic aerial. The 109 was a mobile unit which was fitted into the back of a one tonne Ford truck and you had a battery charger and two batteries and the aerial was attached to the

21:30 truck but when we got into Malaya, because this Captain Fisk was, and of his father's background, he introduced us to what they called a half hertz aerial [half wavelength] and we used to have a rock tied on a piece of rope tied onto this wire and you'd throw it up into a tree and then throw it up in another tree and you'd have an extended aerial with the wire coming down from the middle and we were getting a far greater range with it than was ever

22:00 designed for and our unit was so highly regarded we were told that we were considered the best trained signal unit ever to leave Australia. Our Colonel was a Colonel Thigher [?] and he was a Duntroon man and a very, very strict disciplinarian, very, very aloof man and he had his officers so buffaloed that in the officers' mess he used to put the newspaper up against the milk jug and the officers were frightened to ask him to pass the milk. They used to get the orderly to come

22:30 over and get 'em some more milk but he was a very fair man and he ran a very tight ship and we never lost communication in the whole of the war, from the time the Japanese landed, even at the worst of times we maintained communication all the way through. We only, as I said before, worked from divisional headquarters to brigade headquarters or regimental headquarters. That's the unit we were with and then the other units of the, sections of the unit rather used to work from

23:00 brigade headquarters or regimental headquarters through to battalion headquarters or regimental artillery headquarters and from there the battalion signallers or the artillery signallers used to take over and run the cables and lines up to the front. One stage when we were coming back from, I think it was either Yong Peng or Kota Tinggi and course the,

23:30 all the civilians and everything had gone and there was nothing around. The Japs were just up the road and we came to this pineapple plantation and it was deserted and we went into the factory. There's cases and cases of crushed pineapple, pineapple cubes, pineapple slices so we loaded our one tonne truck up with all this pineapple and then we went back and we finished up going back onto Singapore Island. The first thing we had to do was to dig ourselves a slit trench to get our set below the ground and get ourselves below the ground and the ground was

24:00 hard. It was all clay and stony and we heard all this noise through the bushes and we went through and had a look. There was a labour battalion consisting of Tamils from southern India and they were sort of the lower cast and they had all the dirty jobs to do in the British army. They're working like crazy digging this great big thing for all the Indian regiments and we just sort of beckoned them through the hedge and when we came through the hedge

24:30 we said to them, you know, we gave them all this pineapple and we pointed to it and we just sat back under the tree and watched while they got stuck in and dug our slit trench. That went very well until they were about three quarters of the way through and the officer came through the hedge and tore a strip of 'em and tore a strip off us and we had to finish digging it ourselves but they had scorpions in Singapore and Malaya like you've never seen. Not the little grey ones that you, but these are great big black ones and

25:00 you'd be digging away in the ground and one of these things would fall out and, I haven't got it unfortunately but, I saw one somewhere, had taken a photo of this black scorpion. You know those big tins of herrings in tomato sauce? They must have been about nine inches long and about three inches wide, with one of these things and it was as big as that tin. Massive things they were and course the snakes, they had some very poisonous snakes around the place. The worst one was called a crait I think C-R-A-I-T banded Crait] and they

25:30 named that commando ship The Krait that went into Singapore Harbour and blew all those ships up,

that was a Japanese fishing vessel that had been captured and they nicknamed it the SS Krait. At one camp I was in somebody had killed this cobra and his mate's sitting on the steps leading up to their huts and his mate said, "Don't move." He said, "Why?" He said, "There's mates there," and there's this other cobra underneath the steps. We had a

26:00 few people got bitten by snakes but not too bad.

Anyone bitten by the scorpions?

No, no thank, you although when we were marching up through Thailand on the railway, we stopped one night for a break and somebody lit a fire and we had this great blazing bonfire going and of course it had been raining and everybody's wet and we took the boots and socks off and try to dry them in front of the fire and my mate put his sock back on again and said, "Ooh," and he pulled his sock off

26:30 and there's this little scorpion inside his sock. He got bitten on the big toe. Lucky it was only a small one, it didn't make much difference. Unfortunately those boots didn't last long in all those tropical monsoonal conditions. They just rotted off and a lot of time you just spent walking around in bare feet but, well that was about the militia wasn't it?

What did your father think of you joining the militia?

He didn't mind me joining the militia. He never tried to stop me because he knew that, you know,

27:00 his own background, he did what he wanted to do anyway. I had a visit from that chap that I was associated with, whom I was associated in the baths in Lismore, Frank Casey [?] and he joined up early and he was going overseas to the Middle East and he called in to see us and course that got me started and so I immediately decided I'd join up straight away too so I went down to the recruiting station. The sergeant

27:30 took one look at me and he said, "You'd better go away and have a couple of birthdays son," so I had to wait another year but even then when I went to join up the second time, I was told I had to go home and get my father's permission so I went home and Dad signed the paper so in I went and then couple of years later both my brothers joined up. My second brother, the one I hit on the head with half a house brick, he joined Dad's old battalion the 2/13th and that

28:00 was after they came back from Tobruk and he went to New Guinea and then he finished up in the landing in Borneo. My youngest brother, he got in just in time to go to Papua New Guinea and he was in Papua New Guinea when the war finished and he attained the exalted rank of a corporal but when it became general knowledge of the sort of treatment we'd received at the hands of the Japanese, my youngest brother,

28:30 middle brother rather, he was a very, very tough boy. They both went through Canungra Jungle Training camp. They were both pretty tough boys and a friend of mine from work was in the 2/17th battalion which was a sister battalion of the 2/13th and the 2/17th had the job of guarding all these war criminals and he didn't know my brother then, but he found out because we all worked together at Wills and he said to me he said, "Norm," he said, "your brother came up to me one day when I was on guard duty at this

29:00 war criminals camp and," he said, "I thought he was walking funny. He was walking stiff legged," and he said, "Let us in for a minute will you?" and he said, "Well I'm not supposed to," he said, "Go on, let us in." So he let him in the gate and my brother had a pick axe handle down his leg and he got stuck into these war criminals and my mate said, "We had to go in and drag him off, he'd have killed them," so he exacted his own revenge but strangely enough I don't recall anybody that I know of or heard

29:30 about that attacked the Japanese after they were released. The only one that I can remember is a chap who was in, he tried to escape from Singapore in the early days. He and his friend and they got several miles away from camp and his mate got malaria and his mate said, "You go and leave me," and he said, "No," so he took him back to Singapore and course the Japanese caught him and he, together with this other friend who was picked up allegedly

30:00 organising a resistance movement among the Borneo people, they finished up in Outram Road and Outram Road jail was a jail run by the Japanese Kempetai which were the equivalent of a Nazi Gestapo and they had, every day they were beaten up and this chap, they used to sit themselves, they weren't allowed to talk, they used to have to sit there all day, very little exercise, absolutely minimum food and

30:30 daily beatings. This chap got so bad that he was on the point of death and when they got that bad the Japanese would allow them to go back to the main camp at Changi where our own doctors would look after them and sort of restore them to some semblance of health and back they'd go to Outram Road and when he was released he got on a British ship to come home. As a matter of fact, one of the sailors on that British ship is associated with this place where I live now and he said they got this

31:00 bloke, he was walking down the gangplank one day and he said he looked a bit funny. They said where are we going, and he'd got a revolver from somewhere and he was heading off to find some of these people that were guards in Outram Road jail. They had to stop him but that's the only incident I know where anybody tried to extract revenge. Where do we, we jumped a bit there did we? Where were we?

What did, your father signed the papers when you joined up the militia?

Yeah he signed the papers Yes.

Did your mother have to sign them as well?

No, no, no, no just

31:30 Dad Yes.

So what happened the day that the war was declared? Can you just step us through your?

Well the fact that I was in the militia, I'd rigged up a communication system between my bedroom and my middle brother's bedroom. We just ran a cable up through the ceiling and we had a Morse code key at either end and we used to send one another messages when we got into bed and I heard the broadcast from

32:00 Mr Chamberlain [British Prime Minister] in London saying that the war had started, that's the first indication we had and actually two brothers were still at school then so of course from there things sort of moved on a little bit.

What were your first reactions when you heard the news?

Well like most kids I sort of glorification of war. I'd read heaps and heaps of books and particularly about the First World War and the different battles, that had maps and all sorts of things and I

32:30 you know I was a real keen history buff on the First World War and so forth and I couldn't wait to get into the army, you know, great big adventure and well later on I think I would have still joined up but it's not the sort of experience that I would want to or think I could go through again. The fact that we were so young and so healthy I think stood most of us in good stead but I was almost

33:00 sure that we were, well so were the rest of us, that we were going to the Middle East because that's where all the action, I mean we'd never heard of Singapore and Malaya you know, it's a strange funny place and it was, exotic when we got there. I mean we were camped at Kuala Lumpur in a school called Princes Road School and they had one of the biggest railway stations in Asia there. It was a long, like the big station in Melbourne and Albury, great long station but the exterior was all done like Indian

33:30 this architecture and design. They had a restaurant there called The Station Restaurant and this thing used to serv about nine or 10 courses and my mate and I would go in there twice a week and you'd sit down and there'd be two little Chinese boys up against the wall, white suits and white gloves and one of them would have a big silver tray with freshly baked white bread and the other one freshly baked brown bread and you'd just call them over when you wanted them and we used to go through this menu from soup to nuts twice a week,

34:00 fantastic, so when we went up after the war I said to my wife, "I'm going to take you round to the station" I was really looking forward to it. When we got there the place had been closed down and we had, I went into one place and it was a selling those exotic Chinese pyjamas and things like that and the chap that was in it was an Egyptian. "Oh I knew Australians, I knew your father," you know and he, I brought a five piece

34:30 pyjama set for my wife and it was an elaborate affair, black velvet with dragons and everything on it and I don't know how much I paid for it but when we walked out the door there was this Scotchman came past and he was a rubber planter and he said, "What did you pay for that?" and I told him. He said, "Give it to me." He took it back inside, went back and jabbered to this bloke and got our money back. He said, "He's the biggest cheat, biggest cheat in KL [Kuala Lumpur]." He said, "I'll take you somewhere where they won't get to you," so he took us to

35:00 a place called G and Sings run by an Indian company and I got an absolute magnificent kimono for my wife. It was from the shoulder to the ankles and it was silk on one side and satin on the other. You could reverse it and it started off black and as it came up the colour gradually changed to dark blue and then to light blue and it had flowers, it was an absolutely magnificent thing and I sent that home and my wife wore that right up till we moved up here

35:30 and then she put it aside and now my daughter's got it and you could get a tailor made suit for a few dollars so we had all our rough, daggy army gear and we got, I'll show you some photos after, we had some suits made, tailor made suits, long trousers and shorts. It was fantastic and then we got invited to an Indian tea plantation and I couldn't go at this time because I was on duty back at camp.

36:00 But the rest of the camp went to this tea plantation for an Indian curry and for those that couldn't come, he sent this curry back to the camp in these great big stone jars but it was a typical Indian curry, burn your eyeballs out and at one stage we had a break in a place called the Cameron Highlands and it was a series of hills outside Kuala Lumpur where the Europeans used to go on holiday to get away from the heat of the summer

36:30 and it was a beautiful spot. It was cool and course we saw this pool there and we all rushed in and jumped in. It was as cold as ice and that was a nice break we had. We also saw the oldest parts of Malaya and from the time the Portuguese were there at Malacca and Penang and there were Indian, it was a poly got group, Singapore and Malaya but not the same as Singapore.

37:00 They had Indians and Chinese and they had Hindu's and Buddhists and Christians and because it was British controlled it was, everything was law and order, no unrest like there was afterwards. The Singapore Malaya railway FMS Railway, the Federated Malayan States was all built by the British and that was a first class railway. They had three grades, first class, second class and third class and we'd been given a lecture on

37:30 the way over on the Queen Mary by a colonel who was a, he was in an infantry battalion but he was a doctor before the war and he'd been in Asia and he gave us a lecture about what we could expect to find, venereal diseases, tropical and we were so scared to even put our head against the seat. We're sitting up and course every time the train stopped, these Malay kids are out there with bananas and coconuts and we wouldn't take it. We were frightened we were going to get, a couple of years later we'd have eaten anything.

38:00 **But when you left Australia, before you left Australia what were your expectations about Singapore and Malay, what had you heard?**

We didn't have them. We didn't know we were going to Singapore and Malaya. All we knew was that we got final leave in Bathurst. We were allowed to go home for a few days then we came back, we got on a train, we went to harbour, we got on little ferries and we were taken out to the Queen Mary and oh look at this and course the Queen Mary

38:30 at that stage was only early trips. I mean she'd taken troops to the Middle East but it hadn't been modified. I mean a friend and I slept in a two berth cabin. They had hot water salt baths and they had three swimming pools onboard, the lifts were all working and we had devilled kidneys and bacon for breakfast the whole way from Sydney to Singapore except for the Sunday and when the Sunday came we had bacon and eggs and you'd go into the kitchen on the Queen Mary and it was a massive thing. They had their own bread

39:00 making machines and because we were life savers, they called for volunteers that had had life saving experience and we got excused from all other duties and we just were on duty at the swimming pools and walking around the deck in case somebody fell overboard and it was only when we got round to left Fremantle, we were in company of these other three ships that all of a sudden, and going across the Great Australian Bight which is supposed to be pretty bad, was like a mill pond. We didn't even get a roll and when we

39:30 got left Fremantle the Queen Mary started to pick up speed. You could hear the engines and the ship started to vibrate and then it took off and it just formed one great big circle, right round the convoy. Then away it went and we said, "Hey we've got no escort," and the, one of the sailors said, "Don't worry about that chum," he said, "there's no submarines will ever catch this ship at full blast," so we went unescorted from Fremantle to Singapore. One incident when we got onboard the Queen Mary:

40:00 we're all lined up at the rail and this lady was in a rowing boat and a chap rowed around, right round the ship and she sang the Maori farewell. Made a terrific impression on everybody that did but was properly a delightful voyage on the Queen Mary and course later than that they tore the inside of it out and put bunks and everything in it and when they were transporting the Americans and

40:30 the British. But as I said it was only when some of our more enterprising members broke into the hold and came back with all these little green booklets about Singapore and Malaya, about the language and the customs and the diseases and everything that we knew where we were headed.

Tape 4

00:33 **So we'll just pick up from where we left off with the Green Cards that you were issued, that were given to you on the Queen Mary?**

Well when we arrived in Singapore Harbour we were met by the Chief Signal Officer. I think he was a Brigadier

01:00 the British army and as I mentioned earlier on in the preliminary so he said, "Thank God you've come," he said, "We really need your assistance," because this is just before the Japanese landed and [it] was another 12 months actually before they did, we had no idea that there was any sort of a menace from the Japanese but of course they'd already occupied Manchuria and they'd wrecked havoc in China. Have you heard of the Rape of Nanking?

01:30 That's an infamous incident. When they captured Nanking the Japanese officers let them have their head and for almost a week there was just pillage and murder and rape and I mean that still rankles in the Chinese people's mind. The Japanese refused to admit that it ever happened, but it's well documented and the Rape of Nanking is one of the biggest stains on the scutcheon of the Japanese navy, nation rather and then [of] course they came down then and they didn't actually

02:00 military capture Thailand but they were, by the tacit agreement of the Thailand government they occupied Thailand or the coastal part of it anyway and it was from there that they launched their attack

on Singapore, on Malaya first of all. They came down the west coast and landed at a place called Kota Bharu and Singora in lower Thailand. Then they swept across the top and came down the west coast road

02:30 from a place called Alor Star and then they sort of hopped around. Their tactics were fairly well known and I'm not saying it would have made that much difference, but I'm sure, absolutely certain that if the Australian troops had have been allowed to go up and meet the Japanese it would have had a different outcome because we found out later that by the time they'd got to Singapore the Japanese army had just about run out of everything. They were short of fuel, they were short of food, they were short of ammunition and

03:00 I can remember reading where a Japanese tank was rolling into Singapore and it just stopped and the troops that were quite some distance away wondered what happened. It had run out of petrol and of course the British situation was worse because the Japanese had captured the water supply which was in Malaya. They had a big reservoir on Singapore and they just cut it off and the civilian population in Malaya and Singapore were absolutely devastated with bombing raids and shelling

03:30 and course that's when General Percival decided that he was going to capitulate but the Japanese tactics when they met resistance was not to have a head on confrontation but to sidle around and infiltrate behind the troops. They also used to set off crackers to simulate gunfire and of course some of the raw Indian troops had never had any action at all and they just sort of melted up but Percival gave away huge amounts of

04:00 land. I mean when there was ever an encounter between the Japanese and the British he used to bring 'em back 30, 40, 50 miles. They were giving away huge chunks of ground and that's why I'm sure that had the Australian battalions, who'd been there 12 months and were highly trained, they would have had a lot more resistance because the Australian troops didn't really encounter the Japanese until they were two thirds of the way down the Malayan Peninsula and that's the first encounter the Australian troops had with the Japanese. They just about wiped out a whole battalion. They had an ambush at

04:30 a place called Gemas and they let these Japanese riding pushbikes cross the bridge over the Gemas River and the Australian troops were all lined up in the jungle. They had their machine guns and they also had artillery zeroed in on the area and mortars and course when the Japanese, most of them got across the bridge they just opened up on them, just about wiped the whole lot of them out but they couldn't get through to the artillery and the mortars because the telephone lines had been cut, otherwise there would have been more devastating

05:00 but that was a real victory for the Australians and then on the other side of the Malayan Peninsula at a place called Muar and Parit Sulong there was an Indian group there, group of Indian soldiers there as well. They run up against the Japanese was it marine? The Imperial Japanese Guards probably the most seasoned troops in the Japanese army that had spent all this time in China and Manchuria. There were three Australian battalions there as part of its defence at

05:30 Muir and Parit Sulong. They held the Japanese up there for three or four days but they were completely surrounded and a friend of mine, he got the Distinguished Conduct Medal and another friend who got the Military Medal were one of our signal units attached to them. They sat in this Ford one tonne truck with their wireless and kept communications open with base back in Singapore and lower Thailand until they got the signal to say fold up and

06:00 get out the best way you can. Now their batteries were running low at that stage and they were subject to Japanese sniper fire and the third member of the crew got killed and the one that won the Military Medal got wounded in the arm, now they sat there and kept the signals going right up, and then they were talking about trying to get fresh batteries to them. The friend and I volunteered to sort of go and try to get through with these batteries but this Captain Fisk said, "No it's hopeless, forget it, they're going to come out," so they had to break up

06:30 and infiltrate through the mud flats and the rubber plantation and straggle back to get back to base where they linked up but that was a particularly bad spot for the Australian and Indian troops. There was a Captain, a Colonel Anderson [Lieutenant Colonel Charles Groves Wright Anderson, VC, MC], part of the, Commander of the 2/19th Battalion who won the VC there in that action. There was an ambulance full of wounded and it was parked on the road and they tried to get permission from the Japanese to

07:00 let the ambulance go through. They refused permission so every time somebody went up to try and get to this ambulance they got shot so Colonel Anderson went up there under cover of darkness and got to the ambulance and had a bit of a fire fight with some of the Japanese and got in the ambulance and released the brakes and let it run back into the, into where the bulk of the people were, but they wouldn't have got them out and of course after that was over, when the Japanese finally came through, they just went round and

07:30 bayoneted everybody that was still alive. There was one chap there who happened to be underneath all these dead bodies and he'd been, a Japanese officer tried to cut his head off but the sword just went across his neck and it just opened his neck up and he laid there for several days and he managed to crawl out and got picked up and eventually got back. I saw him when he was in, when we got back into Changi, this is after the capitulation

08:00 and he'd been some time behind the Japanese lines until the capitulation. Then they allowed him to come back to Changi camp and the orderly was just sitting there picking the maggots out of this wound on the back of his neck. Actually that's what saved his life but we found after we were working on the, this little shrine on the old Royal Singapore Golf Course, we found individual Australian

08:30 soldiers wired up to tree with barbed wire where they'd been used as bayonet practise and they were particularly savage with the Chinese. They hated the Chinese, particularly the Chinese guerrillas. They used to get a dozen or more Chinese and tie them up with barbed wire and just throw them into the river and they really ran riot but I came back to where

09:00 I forget the name? Alexandria, no it'll come to me in a minute. Durong I think it was. Anyway that's where we were, had been three days getting back to this place and I was on wireless watch and as I mentioned before the sergeant came and told me to go and have a shower and get cleaned up which I did and when I came out that's when they started shelling the place and

09:30 shrapnel hit the wall and came down and hit me in the back of the neck. Matter of fact I've still got it I think. That's what they took out of the back of my neck so I carry that round as a lucky piece but I woke up in a British military hospital called Alexandria Hospital and

10:00 an Indian battalion had retreated through the grounds of the hospital. The Japanese chased after them and I was lucky because I was a bed patient and my bed faced a brick wall on the opposite side of the ward but on either side of me, two patients one of whom was in my own unit, had been shot in the neck. He was hit in the front of the neck and I was hit in the back but his bed faced an open doorway and as the Japanese came through with their machine guns and rifles I heard him say, "Oh God I've been hit," so he got shot

10:30 through the foot. They took him away and I never saw him again but when they came into the hospital proper they just threw hand grenades into the operating theatres, they bayoneted everybody that they could find that was walking around. They bayoneted all the medical orderlies and they herded all the walking patients together and took them round the back of the hospital and put them in three small rooms that used to be used by the Chinese or Malayan servants and they left them there overnight.

11:00 One chap was lucky that he'd managed to get out a very small window high up on the back wall and he got away but the rest of them were taken out in groups of five and six and all bayoneted to their deaths the next day. I didn't see a Jap until about three days after when one of them walked through the ward. By that time the Japanese officers had more or less got the troops under control a bit and there was no further incidents but the first three days they really cleaned up everybody that was walking around. One chap that had his arm in what they called

11:30 an aeroplane splint, up like that and they just got hold of it and reefed it down and course there was no food, no water for those three days and I had this wound in the back of my neck all plugged up with gauze and it was all dried blood and everything and I sort of staggered out. I was raging with thirst and I staggered round and I found a bathroom and course when the water was cut off they'd filled all the baths up with water and the water in this bath was brown

12:00 and it had cockroaches floating in it but it tasted like the Elixir of the Gods to me. Then I looked around and I found a tin of canned peaches that had been opened up with a bayonet and all the edges of the tin had been ragged and somebody had put their hand in to pull the peaches out and cut their hand and there was dried blood all around the outside of the peaches but tell me, that was terrific too. That's the only thing I'd had to eat or drink for several days, but after that

12:30 things sort of quietened down and a few days after that I was put in an ambulance and taken out to Changi. They had two lots of barracks out there, Roberts Barracks and Selerang Barracks and that's where we were all incarcerated but I was captured two days before the official capitulation. I was hit on the 13th. The surrender wasn't such that a lot of people believe, that all the Australian troops just walked out with their hands up. It didn't work that

13:00 way at all. There was lots of discussions between General Percival and General Yamashita at the old Ford Motor Works and I've got a copy, which I've sent into our national magazine, Barbed Wire and Bamboo, of a word for word or a verbatim account of that discussion between Yamashita and Percival. Percival wanted all sorts of concessions and Yamashita wouldn't give him any so they were told they had to

13:30 cease fire and stack their arms at a certain time. General Percival said they wouldn't have enough time to do it so Yamashita gave him an extra few hours so all that happened was that most of the troops, particularly all the Australian battalions were still in their positions ready to carry on the fight and they just received orders to "Stack all your rifles in a heap," and just stay there, so that's all that happened. The Japanese just come along, picked up all the rifles and

14:00 herded everybody back to Singapore and then they had to march from Singapore town out to Changi which is on a Peninsula at the end of the island, some 20 odd miles and they had Chinese and Malay people were throwing bread rolls and bits of food to them on their way out so I was lucky in a way. I got a ride from Tanglin, that's it, Tanglin Hospital to Changi and by the time I got out there they were told by the Japanese that they had to wire

14:30 themselves in so sort of don't fence me in, they fenced themselves in and they got things organised and they left control of the camp to the Australians and the British officers so they organised digging of what we used to call bore holes. They had this great big tripod with a great big auger on it about two foot wide and they just used to drill a great hole in the ground and you go down 18 to 20 feet and they'd dig a line of those

15:00 and they'd have three banks, then they built these old wooden thunder boxes that you sat on as a toilet and as they filled up they took the wooden boxes away and covered them over with wood and dirt and then moved onto the next bank and of course the maggots and everything do their work and after a few months it's all eaten down. They'd open the first lot up and I remember sitting out on there and one of the chaps was an amateur astronomer and he used to point out all the constellations and stars up in the sky while we're chatting around on these thunder boxes

15:30 and course our hygiene was good. I mean that was most of the Australian were self-sufficient. They'd either been bushmen or they'd they could look after themselves very well and their hygiene and cleanliness was pretty good but a lot of the British troops that come from inner London and, you know, they did what they were told and they never had a great deal of experience. Some of them were very self reliant but their standard of hygiene was nowhere near as good as ours and that's why their death rate up in the

16:00 railway was twice what ours was. Two to one was the death rate. I mean that F Force was 7,000 strong and about half of them died, either on the railway or as a result of what happened, by the time they got back to Changi but they were half British and half Australian but the British contingent suffered twice the death rate that we did. I mean they, I can't go into detail but I walked through some of the British camps

16:30 on the way up from Neiki up when I was going up into that hospital camp in Burma and the filth laying around was dreadful but it was typical. I mean I've got a lot of time, I mean my, both my paternal grandparents are English but it was a caste system within the British army and it maintained, I mean you talk about the white man being king in Asia, whenever they went into a camp, the British officers got the pick of the tents

17:00 then the NCO's got the best of what was left and the privates got what was left over and I mean, you know, that used to really get our goat. I mean my father told me lots of things about the British justice and British system in the army and I mean they had a thing in the First World War called 'dumb insolence'. You didn't have to strike an officer, you didn't have to even abuse him, you only had to look at him in a certain way and you got accused of 'dumb insolence' and they used to

17:30 chain these people to the wheels of an artillery thing and leave them there for a couple of days and you can imagine how the Australians felt. That's why they got such a bad name with the British because they called 'em undisciplined and everything but they proved themselves in the First World War but that's the same sort of system carried on. I mean it was incredible, you know, I mean we run up against it when we first, the British officers they thought they were Lords. They expected obeisance and everything which they didn't get

18:00 from us but that's why their system broke down when they were prisoners of war, whereas ours didn't. Everybody got together. We had good discipline, good mateship.

So just going back a little bit to when you arrived on the Queen Mary, what were the stereotypes?

What, the natives?

Yeah?

Well

18:30 my best friend's name was George and I used to say, "They're talking to you George", but they weren't saying, "Hello George" it was, "Hello Joe," and that's the way they, you know, all these little Malay kids, lovely little kids they were, beautiful faces and everything, "Hello Joe," "Hello Joe," you know and course we'd give 'em cigarettes and money and all the rest of it and it was very strange for us. We didn't spend a great deal of time in Singapore to start with. We got straight on a train and sent up to Kuala Lumpur but when we got to Kuala Lumpur we began to see the

19:00 system as it was. The British master race they ran the plantations, the rubber plantations and the copper and all the rest and the Indians were the labourers. They did the tapping of the rubber trees and they were supplied with rice and a few other things and they had their little, what do they call them? I can't think of them at the moment but their little villages and they used to climb up the rubber trees and tap the juice from the top and

19:30 make a sort of a brew out of it. I can't think of the name of that at the moment but it was a pretty virulent sort of a brew and they used to brew this thing up, was like a yeasty beer and at the end of each week they'd have this big party and they'd get stuck, toddy, that was it. They'd make this toddy and the men would get in and get blind drunk on the toddy and you know I mean they had their dirty loin cloths and dirty turbans and the women got round in dirty. The Malay people were a little bit

20:00 more clean, cleaner but they had an attitude they used to call tea dapa. It's like the Mexicans with their

manyana [tomorrow], very lazy you know, tea dapa, don't worry, we'll do it tomorrow and they had their kampongs which were mainly huts on stilts and ducks and fowls and everything, pigs running around and the Malays owned all the land, same as what happened in Fiji. The Fijians owned the land, the Indians were imported to look after the cane fields.

20:30 In Malaya the Malayans owned all the lands and the Indians were brought in as labourers, but Indians being enterprising people, they took over all the businesses and they made all the money and lots of rich Indians but not too many rich Malays. Malay's were sort of village people but they were a very friendly group and you know we got on pretty well with them and we saw what happened out on the tea plantations and the rubber plantations and

21:00 we had 12 months in Kuala Lumpur and we did all these various stunts. You know we travelled up as far as the Thailand border at Alor Star and we went out to Penang and the big Air Force base at Butterworth and there were two places on each side of the Malay Peninsula. [Endau] [?] was on the east side and Malacca was on the west side and Malacca was a very Portuguese town and they used to have a special place in Malacca where they used to hold all these wedding ceremonies.

21:30 A very ancient temple and the bride and groom used to stand in front of this temple to get their photos taken and there was a very mixed culture. I mean there were Sikhs, there were Punjabis there were Chinese, there were Tamils, there were Christians and the European population were pretty close knit, very aloof, very stand offish. They had their own clubs. We couldn't even

22:00 get into some of them, they were that exclusive: Raffle's Hotel, we weren't allowed in there. I only got in there after the war when we went back on a trip and they had a system whereby they'd bring people who, probably no more than clerks from England to work in these different companies. They'd be clerical officers but they had their own home, they had a Malay driver which was called a sise, they had an amah [nanny] which looked after the children, they had a

22:30 gardener that looked after the garden and a cook so you know you can imagine these people coming out from England and suddenly they're princes. They've got four servants and they've got cars and although was one thing I will say about the British. When they gave all their old colonies their independence at least they had a highly trained cadre of administrators. I mean right up the top level. The postal telegraphs,

23:00 the railways, all the rest of them were highly trained national people so when the British moved out they were able to carry on and keep things running. Quite different to the French and the Portuguese because when they left, even the very lowest levels of administration were done by their own nationals, Portuguese and French and so forth. When they walked out the natives, nationals, didn't have enough knowledge or skills to keep, that's why places like the Congo and some of these other places where they

23:30 moved out of, Algeria there's so much unrest but it was the British presence that kept all these races apart. The system began to fold up particularly between the Malayan States and Singapore because Singapore was a very cosmopolitan city, very go-ahead whereas Malaya was a Muslim State and quite different and that's, in the early days there was so much antagonism. That's why Singapore broke away and became an independent

24:00 State but before the war it was called the Federated Malay States and Singapore was known as the Straight Settlements and the Malayan States had their own sultans and they sort of a Royal family but they were more or less subservient to the British overall as far as administration and control was concerned and the British did sort of keep the drug business. There was lots of opium smoking and

24:30 it was strange to us at first but to try and control it the British had these places where the people used to be able to go and have a smoke, smoke their opium or get opium given to them to try and break them of the habit but of course it goes back to the Opium Wars where the British sent the army and the navy into China to force the Chinese to allow them to conduct the opium trade. That's where they made all their money and of course that's where opium sort of spread through the

25:00 Far East even into Singapore and Malaya and it was pretty rife. I mean you could see these people laying there stoned out of their mind, smoking their opium pipes and around the water front it was absolute, the stench was absolutely shocking. The water was black, absolutely black. I mean everything got tipped into the water and when the tide went out and the mud came up and oh, but after the war when the Singapore government really got in control, they cleaned that, I just couldn't believe it when I went back after the

25:30 war, the change in Singapore. I mean they used to have a dawn patrol that goes around every morning with a truck and pick the dead bodies up out of the gutters and the streets. I mean you'd see people lying in the streets asleep or sick. When [Singaporean Prime Minister, Mr.] Lee Kwan Yu got in and they started to clean things up they really did and it was just unbelievable the change in the situation in Singapore with the way it was clean and tidy, the way it used to be as we remembered it.

Did the drugs enter the army at all?

26:00 I don't know. I don't know anything about it, no not that, I can't remember it. I mean it wasn't a big thing in our day. I mean nobody wanted to get involved in opium anyway to start with and these other drugs like amphetamines and heroine and cocaine they weren't available then. They probably were

available but not in Singapore and Malaya as I remember it. Opium was a big thing there.

Did you have much interaction with

26:30 **any of the locals?**

The natives? A little bit, not a lot, not a lot. I mean it wasn't encouraged. They had what they call, can't think of the name they gave these girls, taxi dancers. You'd go to a dance in Singapore and they had these Chinese girls and probably a few Malays, nicely dressed and you'd buy a roll of tickets and you'd just walk over to one of these girls and ask her for a dance and you'd

27:00 give her a ticket and then she'd dance with you and then she'd go back to her table and you'd go back to yours. You know there was a bit of interaction there. We did get involved in a little bit of sport. We had a very mixed group. We had about, I don't know, 20 percent New South Welshmen, 20 percent Victorians and about 10 percent Queenslanders. The rest were made up of Western Australians and South Australians and Darwin and a few New Zealanders so we had the old inter-state rivalry

27:30 rugby union, rugby league, Australian Rules and our CO was an international hockey player. He represented Australia at hockey so we played all those games and we played against the Malays in hockey and that's the only time we ever got into this very posh club in Kuala Lumpur. It was called the Gaylang Club or the Spotted Dog Club, so after the hockey game we were allowed to go in there and have some refreshments but you just couldn't walk in off the street and go into one of these clubs

28:00 and an idea of just how engrained the system was, that in the closing stages of the war and I didn't find this out until I went on a trip up to Cook Town and I met up with a chap there who was an Englishman and we got talking and I found out that he'd managed a rubber plantation. The owner of the plantation and his wife, the owner went into the army and the wife moved back to Singapore and as the Japanese are coming down the Peninsula

28:30 they were getting close to this rubber plantation and he had a great warehouse full of sacks of rice and he lined all the workers up and started giving them the rice away and this junior British officer came down and tore a strip off him. "What do you think you're doing?" you know and he said, "It doesn't belong to you, it belongs …" and the bloke said, "But the Japanese are only a few miles up the road. If I don't give it away to these people they'll get it." "Oh." Anyway he came back to Singapore and the manager had left a little

29:00 Austin A40 and some brand new tyres so he loaded these tyres into the little Austin, drove all the way down to Singapore. It took him about three days and he hadn't had a shower or a shave and he found this women, this wife, who was living with a friend in Singapore and he knocked on the door and he said, "Oh look Mrs so and so," he said, "I've brought the car back," and he said, "I've brought these tyres back," and she just nodded her head and he said, "Look," he said, "I haven't had a shower or anything to eat or drink for a few days, what's the chance of getting a cup of tea?" She said, "Go round the back

29:30 the native will get you some," so she just shut the door in his face. So he went down the road and he saw these Chinese with an aid station like an ambulance station and he asked them about it and they said, "Oh, Yes there's a British club just down the road, go down there," they said, "They'll probably get you something," so he said he walks into this club and the place is all closed up but he could see a chink of light so he knocked on the door and he said the door opened and there's a Chinese in a white shirt, bow tie

30:00 black trousers, a cumber bund and he said to him, "You know I haven't had, I've just come down from up country, what's the chance of getting a shower?" "Are you a member here sir?" and he said, "No." He said, "Well I'm afraid I can't let you in." and he looked in the door and they're all having a ball in there. So he said, "Well look I don't mind what you say," he said, "I'm going to come in and have a shower." He said, "Just a minute," and he went away and brought the secretary of the club, which was an Englishman back and the bloke didn't want to let him in, so eventually he let him in and there's all these tables

30:30 lined up with food, so he let him have some food and a shower, went out and away they went but they were having balls and social functions in Singapore. The Japs, they just carried on as usual, wouldn't believe that things were going to happen and he said, he had a friend who was up in right up on the Thailand border, he was, he'd been a rubber planter and he came back to Singapore. He went out to General Percival's headquarters in Singapore and he went up to this, he said, "I've got a message for General Percival."

31:00 The bloke said, "What is it?" He said, "I'd prefer to tell General Percival myself." The bloke wouldn't believe him so he said, "Just a minute," so he came back with a more senior officer, the bloke let him out and he said, "There they are," General Percival and all his staff sitting out on the lawns five o'clock in the afternoon having their cups of tea and he said, "What do you want to tell General Percival?" He said, "I just wanted to let him know that the Japs have brought tanks in." "Don't talk rubbish man" he said, "You know they can't use tanks there because of the jungle." He said, "I'm telling you, they've got tanks up there." No, wouldn't believe

31:30 him. Sure enough a little while later the tanks come, later on they come rumbling all the way down the Peninsula. It was unbelievable.

In that 12 months was it a good time?

Before the war? Fantastic, fantastic. That's where the air force contingent up there got the name of the Blue Orchids because they were flying planes and course they were going back to starched tablecloths and cutlery and the best of China and they said, "What,

32:00 they're only blue orchids" you know but we really did. It was a very, very interesting 12 months that, a great experience, opens your mind.

How often were you reminded that it was, of the war?

Not much at all. Actually we didn't realise what the situation was until we found the Japs had actually landed. I mean we trained hard and we knew that we were training for something but the possibility of being invaded by the Japanese, I mean they had the story that Singapore

32:30 fortress Singapore was impregnable. Well it might have been as far as naval ships are concerned and that was another furphy about those 16 inch guns that they could only fire out to sea. That wasn't right cause we saw them afterwards. They were full circle and they did turn them around and fired those 16 inch guns up into the Malayan Peninsula at the Japanese but the trouble was they had armour piercing shells. I mean when that 16 inch shell went overhead it was like an express train going overhead but just buried itself in the ground, didn't

33:00 cause any damage at all so you know I mean even when the Japanese had landed and things were looking really crook, we all expected we were going to be evacuated and I can't understand Churchill because the British perfected the art of torpedo bombing from low flying aircraft at a place called Taranto. They sunk several elements of the Italian fleet there by using these torpedo bombers. Now the Japanese were very quick to copy

33:30 that so Churchill sent two capital ships; the HMAS Prince of Wales which was a modern battleship and HMAS The Repulse which was an older battleship, sent them out to Singapore without adequate air defence right close to the coast. Now if the idea was that those battleships were going to go up and attack the Japanese invasion fleet, if they had of got amongst them they really would have made a mess of them but they couldn't find them and course they got all these Japanese land based aircraft with just a few minutes flying time

34:00 and course they just sank both those capital ships. That was a disaster that, absolute disaster.

What did the Australians think of the British?

The ordinary British soldier, got on well. You know we had some great times with some of them but some of the senior officers, best left unsaid, best left unsaid. There were some pretty good ones but the bulk of them were career

34:30 officers.

Can you remember the day when you heard that the Japanese had landed?

Yeah I was on wireless watch at a place called Seduni River [?] and I was just listening, on a listening watch and I heard the news come over about the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour and I also heard that they'd landed at Singora in lower Thailand and

35:00 Kota Bharu on the west coast of northern Malaya. That's the first information I got from it and we'd had some, later on they had a boom across this river to stop the Japanese craft coming up the river. They sent some of the naval ratings from the Prince of Wales or The Repulse up there to lay naval mines in the river and they put these big naval mines in and they connected them up to cables and they had these big heavy

35:30 batteries in sort of concrete machine gun post round there. This naval rating said, "I wouldn't like to be around here too long chum" and I said, "why?" and he said, "under these tropical conditions" he said, "those batteries are going to corrode." He said, "they could finish up going off." This is some time after the Japs had landed of course and I was attached to a battalion of Indians called the 2nd, started with a J, I forget now

36:00 and they were Muslims or and I went down to their kitchen and he was baking these hard rations. They were like sweet biscuits and they used to give them like our hard tack Sao biscuits and they had this great big thing there with, and I went over the get some and the next minute the cook went off his brain. He threw his arms up in the air, he knocked the thing over and these biscuits scattered all over the ground and I beat a hasty retreat

36:30 and they had a British officer in charge and I said, "what was that all about?" He said, "you defiled that food." He said, "you allowed your shadow to go on it." He said, "he'd have to go and cook all that again."

So when you heard the news, who was around you, what did you do?

I was just attached to this Indian unit and it was only when we got back later on

37:00 that we'd heard that elements, I mean by that time they brought all the Australian troops back into Lahore. They sent the British Division up there and the Argyle and Southern Highlanders to meet the Japs on the border and, [of] course from then on and we were getting bad news all the time. It was just one bad thing after another. They kept, I mean as I said, not only did they infiltrate round behind the lines when they come up against any opposition but they also had all

37:30 these boats and they used to just get out and go further down the coast and land further down and cut everybody off so the Australians didn't really get mixed up in it until just some time before the war. It's a little known fact but it took the Japanese longer to conquer Malaya and Singapore than it took the whole German Army to conquer France. I mean we held out longer than the French and British did in France and in terms of

38:00 awards, bravery awards in a short period of time with a number of people involved, the issue of VC's and Distinguished Conduct Medals were very high and we actually delayed them long enough to enable, and of course Mr Churchill wanted the 7th and 9th divisions to go into Burma to protect the jewel of the crown which was India and the Australian government wouldn't have a bar of it. They said, "no you come back" and

38:30 Churchill actually admitted that he was prepared to sacrifice Australia. He said, "we'll get that back later" but by that time the damage would have been done because if the Japanese had landed in Australia. Australian women would have been forced into prostitution as comfort women the same as they did in the Philippines and China and elsewhere and Dutch East Indies and I mean they'd have wrecked havoc and I mean once, if they'd have landed in Australia they'd have been very hard to dig out, once they got here, the defence … but luckily it didn't come to that

39:00 but I forget, I've lost the train again now.

What did the natives feel at the news?

Well they were fairly good but after the Japanese sort of took ove. A lot of them turned, particularly the Malays and some of the Indians because the Japanese had a very, very potent propaganda item that they were coming to free these people from the yolk of the

39:30 white man and a lot of them believed that, much to their cost later on, but there were a very large number of Indian troops went over to the Japanese and they formed what they called the INA Independent, Indian National Army and it was run by, they converted this officer, who'd been a candidate in the British Sandhurst, he was Sandhurst trained and his name was

40:00 Chandra Bose [Eminent freedom fighter Subash Chandra Bose] I think and he had control of this Indian National Army and they actually fought alongside the Japanese in some areas, particularly in Burma but the rest of the Indian troops remained very loyal. I mean the Sikhs particularly, they used and they hated these people that sort of went over to the other side. The Chinese were good. I mean they were always good to us and course the Chinese formed the bulk of the guerrilla forces. They were the ones that

40:30 fought the Japanese behind the lines in Malaya and that's why the Japanese hated them so much because of their experiences in China but the probably some of the worst incidents were done by Korean guards because the Korean was looked down on by the Japanese. They'd captured the Korean Peninsula. They treated the Koreans as second class citizens and they treated them pretty badly and course they took it out on

41:00 us so the Koreans weren't really fighting them, they were mainly guards and depot troops and they were the ones that provided all the guards for us up on the railway and in Singapore which freed the Japanese to do all these other things. Some of the Malays turned against the white man a little bit but not all of them, but they really, I mean the Japanese had this fantastic scheme they called

41:30 the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and they allocated a certain role to each of the Malayan States. I mean this State's going to be the rice State, that one's going to produce the tin, this one's going to produce the rubber. Course it never worked out in practise but these were the stories they put across and initially they convinced a lot of the national people it was in their best interests.

Tape 5

01:00 **So what stage are we up to there? You've been rounded up from Singapore, where did they move you in the first instance from Singapore?**

Well I went to hospital of course but they sent everybody up to the Changi Peninsula. That's where they had the two big British army barracks, or two of them, Roberts Barracks and Selerang Barracks and that's where we, they were three storey high buildings,

01:30 parade grounds and cookhouses and all the rest of it and we were quartered in there until they started sending people out on working parties and eventually on the, to Burma and Thailand and Japan and

What were conditions originally like there when you first got there?

What in Changi itself? Not too bad initially. There was quite a lot of tinned food around. We were able to get back into camp and

02:00 we had the Japanese began supplying rice to us but the rice was supplemented by remains of tinned food but that very soon ran out and got down to basics then, was rice and a few greens and some dried fish or bits of whale meat.

So with the Japanese brutality did that start straight away from the moment

02:30 **they came into Singapore?**

Yes that started straight away. Yes. There were some pretty savage beatings early on but it reached the climax up on the railway. When you reflect back on it, it was quite an engineering feat. The British had surveyed it. They were going to link up from lower Thailand up through Burma into lower …, up through Thailand rather into lower Burma but they gave it away because the conditions were too bad and monsoons, cholera

03:00 and mountains and rivers and stuff like that but the Japanese basically followed the same route but they had literally 10's and 10's of thousands of labourers to do it with and it was supposed to be 18 months I think, that was the deadline they were given but they did it in nine months and it was about 425 or so kilometres and through some of the worst territory in the, on the whole Peninsula. The Japanese lost quite a few lives.

03:30 They had what they call railway regiments and these were filled up with Japanese soldiers or civilians who had worked on the railways in Japan and other parts of the world and they were each given a section of the line to complete. The worst period was what was known as the Hellfire Pass because that was holding the completion of the whole line up. I mean they had to build bridges over rivers and they had to build roadbeds and all sorts of things but this mountain

04:00 or hill or two hills it was actually was more or less solid granite and they had to be cut through by hand with what they call hammer and tap crews. They had a drill, steel drill and a sledge hammer and teams of two and each time the sledge hammer struck the bit that had to be turned and each hammer man had to strike the steel bit one hundred times and then they swapped over. Course quite a number of times the hammer slipped off the edge of the bit and smashed onto

04:30 somebody's hands and that was, became known, it was known as the speedo period. The Japanese didn't know the word for "hurry up" or anything they just know speedo which means go faster and it was speedo, speedo, speedo and they worked themselves into quite a frenzy over that and they worked 24 hours a day on Hellfire Pass. You'd get up in the morning and you'd have breakfast in the dark and then you'd walk out to the work site and you'd work there all day and they'd have

05:00 rations brought out from the camp. Then you'd come back into camp and you'd get back to camp at dark and you'd have something to eat, as meagre it may have been, then you'd go down to the river and wash yourself and your clothes and you'd get in as much sleep as you could but when they got to Hellfire Pass they increased that to two or three working parties at a time. They kept going, worked right through the night and they used these bamboo torches to provide illumination and that's where somebody's allegedly said, "This must be what hell looks like." But there was one incident

05:30 up where I was, up in upper Thailand. This was a Portuguese Eurasian, he was a middle aged man and he'd been attacked by this Japanese and he fell over and he had what they called a chunckle, what we know as a hoe, and as he got up off the ground, he had this chunckle in his hand and the Japanese guard claimed that he was going to be attacked

06:00 so he really got stuck into this poor old feller, gave him a terrible beating and this is where they become quite sadistic. They didn't sort of beat somebody up and leave it go at that, they sort of carried on with it so they dragged this poor, unfortunate feller back to their guardhouse and they tied him to a trunk of a tree with barbed wire and then they took it in turns to stand on the top of the tree trunk and hit the opposite side of the tree trunk with a sledge hammer so that the force was transmitted through the tree trunk into his body and he

06:30 finished up black and blue from head to foot. They kept him there for some days and nights and he finished up with pneumonia but strangely enough he survived, he came through and their most, one of their favourite punishments was to make you stand with something heavy in your hands. It might be a lump of wood or a couple of bricks and you'd have to stand with your hands like this and if you try that for quite a while with some heavy object, it's quite painful and soon as there was any instance of the arms were being lowered then you got bashed until you

07:00 put your hands back up again. Kicks and hits with rifle butts and sticks and it was a bit dangerous working up on top of a 30 or 40 foot above the riverbed on a trestle bridge and you know you get yourself whacked with a stick when you're trying to knock dog spikes into the tree. A number of Japanese fell off and got killed as well. I just don't know what their total number of deaths was but they, it was fairly significant.

Were there any Japanese

07:30 **rail engineers or anything like that, that you can recall?**

Well they were the ones in control. We were basically controlled by the Japanese administration back in Changi in Singapore but the actual physical control was in the hands of the Korean guards so we'd have our guards, Korean guards and probably one or two Japanese, in charge of the camp but when you went out on a working party you were then handed over to the Japanese engineers and they

08:00 weren't, well they could have been, but most of them weren't front line troops. They were just engineers who were charged with this job of getting this railway finished. They used to demand a certain number of people every day and in some camps, if they couldn't get the quota, they'd go into the camp with the doctors and the doctors took some terrible beatings trying to protect the sick men and they'd go into the ward. Now if they couldn't see some physical evidence of a chap with bad dysentery or cholera, if he was just lying there with Beri Beri or

08:30 something like that, as far as they were concerned he was fit. They'd force them out of bed, out of the hospital onto, and they've been many instances of patients being carried out of hospital and laid on the side of the roadbed and they just lay there all day trying to make big bricks into little bricks or big bits of gravel into little gravel for the ballast and get carried back to camp of a night. The Japanese had a procedure that if you don't work you don't eat so they would cut the rations to the people in hospital ostensibly to try and

09:00 force them to get better and go out to work. Of course our officers in camp administration made sure that the food was shared around equally. As a matter of fact the people in hospital managed to get a little bit more than those that were out working on the railway but the doctors, there's no praise good enough for the doctors. I mean most of the praise has been heaped on Doctor Weary Dunlop [Dr Edward Dunlop] and there's no doubt about, it he did a good job, but he was only one of many. I mean every camp had a doctor who went through exactly the same things as Weary Dunlop and the camp

09:30 I was in, we had a mild mannered doctor named Roy Mills, Doctor Roy Mills and he suffered some terrible beatings and it really affected him after the war but they were there all the time, day and night.

How hard was the actual fall in Singapore in, you'd been knocked out by the explosion and that, hit in the back of the neck with that piece of shrapnel.

10:00 **How hard was it waking up and all of this has happened?**

Well to the people in the infantry battalions it was just a matter of unbelief. What are they doing? You know, we're ready to go, let's get at 'em and it was something that was forced on them. I mean as far as most of our people were concerned, they were ready to carry on with it. They would have done too but it basically came down to what was happening with the civilian population and the lack of food and the lack of water and the horrendous casualties in Singapore itself.

But it must have been

10:30 **weird for you because one minute you're walking out of the ablutions block, no worries at all sort of thing and all of a sudden you wake up and you're a prisoner of war? How did you cope with that?**

I s'pose I was young enough to sort of accept things as they were. I mean you live from day to day. I think that was the secret of surviving. If you started to worry about what was going to happen in the future, I mean a lot of people dropped their bundle. There are many instances of mates sitting on their mate's chest trying to

11:00 force rice down their throat and they just didn't want to eat. No, they just a lot of them just gave it away, folded up.

So what did you use as your sort of your personal motto to get you through those days?

Live from day to day. Just get through the day. I mean in the early days on Singapore Island when we were going out on working parties, initially they left the organisation of these working parties to our own officers. They had a Japanese, probably a Corporal, with a pushbike with a

11:30 flag on his back to designate where you were supposed to go and work for the day, whether it was working on a road or whatever. The officers, they'd tell them how many men they wanted and our own officers would get up and start organising the working parties. You know they'd read out a list of names, you go with A party, you go with B party and we'd be up there from daylight and we'd be up there for two hours on the parade ground getting organised and the Japanese used to go off their brain, try and understand why we couldn't get things going in a hurry

12:00 and at one [time] we were building a scenic road around the golf course. There was a big stack of bags of cement and my mate and I climbed right up to the top of this stack and moved a couple of cement bags from the top and made ourselves a bit of a hollow and we went in there and sort of went to sleep. We used to do this every day. One day there's a truck pulled up. There's a great heap of noise and they, we looked over the top and here's a truck load of British soldiers pulling all these cement bags down and loading them in the truck

12:30 and we were saying, “stay away from us, stay away from us.” So they worked around us and another friend of mine, he got himself a beautiful little lurk. They had these drainage pipes down the side of the road and they were only half pipes and they just laid them end on end with just a crevice in them and he got himself a little bucket and filled it up with cement and he had a book and he used to sit on a brick in the drain and if he saw a Jap coming he used to start cementing the cracks in the drain and when they’d gone he’d start to read his book again.

13:00 This Japanese Sergeant Major came along and just stood there looking at him, you know and next day he got a personal guard and he must have cemented the cracks in these pipes for about a mile going at it all day and there was another lurk. They used to bring the food out from camp in a kerosene can or an empty petrol can on a sling with a barb (UNCLEAR) [bamboo] pole and two blokes would come from the cookhouse in the camp, bring the rice out and when everybody

13:30 had finished they’d take the empty cans back to camp and the mate and I said, “we’ll fix this up.” So we found a bamboo rod and an empty can and as soon as the march, we’d put the, we’d all go back to camp again. The Japanese, I mean the ordinary Japanese soldier was pretty uneducated and you know, they used to get into all sorts of trouble trying to count us. You know the old story, count the feet and then divide by two and they could never agree on a count cause people used to move around. Anyway they

14:00 told us one day that we were going to have a holiday, holiday tomorrow. The Emperor’s Birthday, big holiday so what the holiday entailed was you worked half a day and you went back to camp for the other half of the day so we finished work after lunch, after dinner and we’re walking back to camp and they stopped and there’s this great big tree that they’d cut down and they decided they were going to dig it out because it was in the middle of the road, so they said, “right, well before you go back for your holiday, you’ll have to dig that out.” Well it took us the rest of the day to try and

14:30 grab all these roots out but as we were going back to camp, you used to walk around the edge of the reservoir and you’d have a shovel or a hoe or a fork or something, pick axe or something on your shoulder and as they walked past the reservoir they’d schwooo they’d throw all these in the reservoir and after about three weeks or so they were running short of tools, they never had a tool and they suddenly woke up what had happened. They had all these blokes diving in the reservoir to reclaim all these tools and on other occasions they were

15:00 building a, one of the first things they had to do was build a quarters for the Japanese officer so I don’t know if you’ve had any experience with bed bugs but they’re a shocker. They get into all sorts of crevices. They’re only a little red bug like that. They bite you and you bleed and if you squash them they stink to high heavens and these bed bugs were prevalent so when they built these Japanese quarters they’d always get big boxes full of these bed bugs and tip ‘em all over the place where he was going to sleep but they,

15:30 this speedo or hurry-up period, I wasn’t in this particular camp. I only heard about it or read about it later, but the Japanese officer got in charge and he got up and more or less indicated that the railway was running behind schedule, or schedule, whether you’re American and he said, “sorry, Nippon very sorry, many men must die.” In other words, they just pressed on. They didn’t care about the loss of life till they got it, but they completed that railway in half the time that was allocated and they pulled up railway lines

16:00 from Singapore, from Thailand, from Java, from Sumatra, from all these spur lines and shipped them up to Thailand and Burma and as the roadbed was completed they had two flying squads I s’pose you’d call it, they were track layers and they worked from either end. They laid the tracks from both ends until they met, strangely enough about the same camp that we started in, at about Taimonta or Kon Koita which was about halfway between the two ends of the line

16:30 and they actually started running trains, carrying supplies up into Burma but the place was constantly bombed and after they moved the bulk of people to either Japan or back to Singapore they kept maintenance parties at different parts along the line to repair the bomb damage and unfortunately a lot of people got killed from allied bombing.

Can you recall at any time that you were working or even in the prisoner of war camps, seeing allied aircraft flying around?

Yes .

17:00 the Japanese used to call them sqawkay, squwkay [spelling?] and you could see these vapour trails of these B29’s, you couldn’t see ‘em but the Japanese used to get into a frenzy. I wasn’t anywhere where they were bombed. You’d just see them flying overhead but as I say they did bomb the line and some of the maintenance crews that were left behind were killed by the bombings.

You never saw anything any lower than a B29 at high altitude?

No, no, no, didn’t see any of the medium size bombers or fighter planes, just the evidence of the B29’s

17:30 way up.

What about, was there any other sort of contraband that you had in the prisoner of war camps, like was there any radios or things like that?

Yes they used to call them a canary and we had, in our unit there was one section called M section which was the maintenance section. They did all the maintenance on our electrical equipment and wireless sets and everything else and one of those blokes built a radio and they used to have to get the source of power of course, pinch a

18:00 battery from somewhere. Finished up getting a British Empire Medal [MBE] for his work in doing that but one particular one we had was in a broom and it was just a block of wood with holes drilled in it and the husk off a coconut, like the fibre, the coya. The handle on it and that was the broom but it had a false compartment in it and that's where they built the radio and they had two little holes in it to organise the controls

18:30 and the bloke had an ear piece and two little screwdrivers and he'd adjust it till he got the BBC but it wasn't broadcast widely. It was told to one officer. He'd tell him. He wouldn't write it down, he'd just commit it to memory and then he'd walk around the camp and say, "the canary's just sung." Then he'd tell us about what happened in the Western Desert and what was happening in Europe and we heard about the atomic bomb but we didn't realise the significance of it at the time but we heard about it, so there were a number of wirelesses

19:00 in different camps.

So did you find the morale of the guys in the camp ebbed and flowed with things like that?

Yeah, Yes actually I don't think you could say that the morale was very high at any time on the railway. I mean it was too bad. I mean the conditions were deplorable and the food was practically non existent but when we got back into Singapore of course and we were back in a more civilised quarters and we had fresh water and good, decent cooking facilities and

19:30 good shelter and electric light, you know morale started to pick up a lot then and we knew it was inevitable. We knew it was inevitable that the Japanese would eventually be defeated but we, I remember one instance up in… There were a couple of times, we struck a couple of these chaps, one was an airline pilot for Japanese Airlines and he was in America and of course he had to fly backwards and forwards and he just happened to be unlucky enough to be in Japan when the war broke out, so they grabbed him and shoved him into the army

20:00 and he was a Lieutenant and he was in charge of this working party in the first camp we were in at the time at Taimonta or Kon Koita and we had an RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] and our RSM was Duntroon trained and at this particular job we had was pile driving and they had a barge out in the middle of the river and you'd have to cut down these trees in the jungle and drag 'em down to the river and float 'em out to this barge and they upend them and then they had a big scaffolding around

20:30 it and a big iron weight and that iron weight was attached by pulleys to about 20 or 30 ropes and the ropes went all the way back to the shore and you'd have to stand on the shore. The Jap would say "Ichi, Ni, San" you know and the one, two, three pull and that's all you did. You just kept pulling this rope and up went the thing and down it come to drive the pile into the river and this had been going on for some hours and the RSM went up, said to the Japanese, "Yas me" which is Japanese for west.

21:00 "Yas me, ni", "yas me, ni." so he took it for a while, then he went back and he said, "they've got to have a rest." He said, "no" so he just turned around to us and he said, "stop" so we all stopped and he pulled the gun out and he stuck it in his ribs and he said, "tell 'em to go back to work, or I'll shoot you" and the RSM said, "they are not going back to work till they've had at least 10 minutes rest" and they had an eyeball to eyeball confrontation for a while and he said, "you're a very brave man," so he put the revolver back in his holster and

21:30 we had our 10 minutes rest and there were a few occasions like that. Another incident we struck a bloke they called him 'the Yank' 'cause he spoke with an American accent and he was fairly tall for a Japanese but he was in charge of these working parties down on the wharves. This is where it was an ideal spot to knock stuff off, rice, sugar, whatever and this is what I say, you get the difference between them. Anyway there was a bag of sugar missing and this Yank was raving up and down and talking in his American accent

22:00 you know and "I'll catch this God damn so and so." Course they found the bloke and he got a slap in the face just for a big bag of sugar, but on the other hand somebody would knock off something small and get a terrible beating over it so they were unpredictable but there were a number of Japanese who got scooped up because they just happened to be back in Japan from overseas at the time the war broke out and got seconded into the army.

So you wouldn't go as far as saying that all the Japanese guards or all the Japanese soldiers

22:30 **were necessarily bad?**

No well the chap that was in charge of all the prisoners was a chap named Bano Colonel Bano [?] and I believe that he was at an Agricultural College in Australia before the war. He was reasonable but he had no opportunity to exercise, I mean he was back in Singapore and we're up there in the middle of Thailand or Burma so they had no …, I struck one I suppose you could say one reasonably decent Japanese officer

23:00 and that was when we were building, prior to building the shrine around the Royal Singapore Golf

Course, we had to build a road from Bukit Timah Road through to the Golf Course. The work was divided into three sections and each section had a different Japanese officer and one section was controlled by a bloke who was portrayed, a typical portrayal of the Jap. You used to see it before the war, big thick lensed glasses, a vacant look on his face, dumb

23:30 as you come and one of the chaps there was in charge of a steam roller and he had to light the fire to get the wood going to get the steam going for the steam roller and he used to go to this Japanese every day and said, "you going to get some petrol, some petrol for the steam roller?" and he'd get a big four gallon can of petrol. He'd put a couple of good (UNCLEAR) [sprinkles] on the wood and sell the rest. Up the other end, closest to the golf course they were in charge of a bloke who was nicknamed the 'Black

24:00 Prince' and he used to ride up and down this road making business on the running board of a truck with a big pick axe handle in his hand and if he caught anybody slacking, bang, bang and we were in the middle section and our bloke was named Captain Sarto and he spoke pretty good English so when we started he said, he was setting a darg [five cubic metres] for each man and the darg was you had to dig out one point five cubic metres of earth per man. Didn't matter

24:30 what he was doing, even if he was the billy boy so they'd mark it out with a rope and they'd work out the cubic meterage and they'd say "right, there's so many men, one point five cubic metres per man, that's how much you've got to dig out." We were sort of digging the hill to grade it down so after a while, we'd start early. We were getting home pretty late and our officer complained to him and said, "it's too hard, it's too much work, they're not getting enough food" and the Japanese said, "what do you mean?" He said, "you're getting as much food as my men are."

25:00 He said, "no I don't think so, well you come and see" so he went back to camp and he saw what food we had. Next day there's a truck arrived with a whole heap of rice and vegetables but he did agree that one point five cubic metres was probably a bit too much, cause what they said was "you can't go home until you've dug out that cubic meterage of dirt." That's why we were getting home pretty late so he brought it back to I think it was one metre, one cubic metre. That's where we had all our

25:30 cunning fellers who'd worked on the roads so they used to, they had a big army truck and by that time the wall was, the face we worked on was about six feet high or a bit higher so they backed the truck up against the face of the cliff and we'd dig two channels alongside and across the back. Then we'd get hold of a great big lever and we'd lever and we were putting chunks of dirt in this truck that must have weighed about a tonne and course we were finishing about two o'clock in the afternoon, but he stuck to his word and we were allowed to

26:00 go home and then he said, "no, I'm sorry" he said, "that's no enough" he said, so they built it up again to about one point two so we woke up then, we didn't sort of finish too early but he also was a swimmer or he wanted to learn how to dive off a diving board and he also wanted to learn how to play tennis properly so we all got lined up one day and he said, "now is there anybody here who can teach me to play tennis, or who can teach me how to dive" and I shot my hand up straight away so I used to go with him to this swimming pool and teach him how to dive

26:30 off a one metre springboard and another friend of mine used to go to the tennis court and teach him how to play tennis, but that was the only one I can think of that was anyways decent but some of them up on the railway, there was a chap, he got hung I think. I can't think of his name though, it'll come back to me but he wouldn't even let anybody sing and we had some quite good artists. They'd get back to camp and they'd organise a bit of a impromptu concert and they'd sing song and he'd just line 'em all up and he'd go bang

27:00 bang, bang, walk up and down the line knocking 'em all down again, "no sing, no sing" and he was he finished up as a war criminal.

That sounds like a pretty unique story that story you were telling about teaching a Japanese officer to swim and to dive. Can you tell us more about that?

Well I didn't see this until many years after we came home and they had this propaganda film that the Japanese had made and I didn't know anything about it until I saw it many years after and they got all these chaps from

27:30 the different working parties, they dressed 'em up in new British and Australian uniforms. They took them to the Singapore swimming pool which was a magnificent swimming pool and they showed them swimming in the water, drinking beer and they took them into the kitchen and there's the cooks with carcasses of, beef carcasses cutting it off and everybody getting stuck into steaks and everything. They showed them getting paid and they showed a sick man being taken into hospital with Japanese doctors

28:00 and Japanese nurses in white uniforms and it was just a big con because when they came back home and told the story, the blokes that were selected were put in these uniforms, they were taken to this place, they were allowed to go in the swimming pool and dive off the board and they were given this bit of steak but after they had two mouthfuls that got taken away. They had one glass of beer and that got taken away. We never saw anything like Japanese doctors or nurses except when we got up to lower Thailand and they had a test, testing people for

28:30 cholera and the usual test was to put a glass right up your rectum and put it on a jar and send it away for inspections. Well that started it off and then we went into this room and we got the glass rod and

then we went over there and we got an injection of that and another injection, then came down and got another injection. We had five needles and the cholera inspection but later on, further up the line, they didn't have the glass rods so they used to get wire bent over and they'd shove the wire up your backside

29:00 and at other times they'd get bits of bamboo that they'd shaved down and filed so we got the rod properly in those cases but that's the only time we saw, sometimes the Japanese doctor would come into the camp and argue with our doctors about how fit the men were to go out for work and they'd say to the doctor "no he's fit enough, out he goes" so they had to get their quota but you know as time went on the quotas got less and less so the others had to work harder and longer.

29:30 **How did you go teaching this fellow diving?**

Al right, all right Yes. He was reasonably proficient, not that I was any great diver. I wasn't a very good diver at all but I could do a one and a half somersault or a back somersault off a diving board so I taught him how to do that.

Must have been a fantastic reprieve to be able to go and do that for a while?

Yeah, Yes, Yes but as I say in the early days there, life was fairly tolerable and we lived in these, as I mentioned before these European houses and they had some fantastic literature there. I mean leather bound books

30:00 and we went into one place, they had a complete set of Encyclopaedia Britannica and course everybody got hold of a volume and you'd read that and pass it all around and I swore that when I came home, that I'd buy a set and I'd only been back at work about a few months and this bloke come round flogging these Encyclopaedia and I made the mistake of letting him into the house. Next thing he's got these brochures and maps and everything spread all over the lounge room floor and he really, he was a Hungarian, really talked my head off

30:30 and I said, "all right you don't have to, I'll buy it, I'll buy it" so I had to sign this contract and it was pretty expensive. I mean I'd only just gone back to work and I wasn't earning that much money so after about a few weeks I thought better of it, so I rang him up and said, "no I don't want it, I'm not going to" so he came out to work, saw me at work and he got stuck into me, I'd signed the contract and I'm legally bound to buy it and this, that and the other so anyway I went ahead and brought it and I didn't get much use out of it myself. I had a friend build me a special bookcase for it

31:00 and the kids used it a little bit at High School but the only one that got any benefit out of it was the next door neighbour's kid. He used to come in and, so eventually I packed it all up and sent it over to Perth to my son over there.

What about when you were working was there the sort of go-slow attitude? I mean you mentioned about probably doing things a bit too fast at some stage?

You did everything you could to sabotage what you were working on.

So what sort of things did you do in that regard?

Well when you were building those bridges, they only had like

31:30 matchsticks but held together by these dog spikes and a lot of those were put in wrong and how they held together I don't know but one of them was called the pack of cards bridge and it was a sort of a three tier thing. They built all these piles around and they had poles strutting them and they'd built the next layer and then the top layer and that fell down at least once, probably twice it had to be rebuilt but you'd have to go into the jungle and cut

32:00 these trees down, cut all the branches off and then bring 'em down to the roadway and then carry 'em to the bridge site and the Japanese had no idea of organising it. They'd look at a log and they'd say "six men" and you know you'd get about 12 men on it. "No, no six men" and they'd go out and they'd bash six blokes out of the road but people are all different heights. The correct way to carry a log when you're different heights is you have the shortest in front and the tallest at the back or the other way around so that you each get a share of the load on the shoulder

32:30 but they'd have two tall blokes at the back and all the little blokes in the middle that couldn't even reach the top of the log and then they said one day that "tomorrow yas may, big rest." They're going to have an elephant, so we had to cut the logs down, drag 'em down to the road and the elephant was supposed to come along and hook up and the elephant just jacked up, took off, shot through into the bush and we had to finish up. There's a very good book written by a, I can't think of his name now, but it's called One Fourteenth of an Elephant [by Peek, Ian Denys] and the chaps used to reckon one elephant, 14 men

33:00 yeah. The, what made it so hard was, it's not so bad handling dirt, they just had poles with hessian bags tied underneath them and if it's dry you can work the ground and you can put it in there but in the monsoons it's all

33:30 mud and you'd get a spade full of mud, go to put it in and it wouldn't come off and you know you had to stagger along here and lots of times the roadbed got washed out. They were building it across creeks and when the floods came they just washed it all away again.

You mentioned some the little schemes blokes got into. Were you involved personally with anything?

Those schemes? Yes we did all right, we did all right.

34:00 I s'pose the best thing we had were those calico sheets and the singlets and underpants but there were, anything you could get your hands on and at the end of the battle for Singapore the last camp payroll wasn't distributed. There was a story went around that this payroll was buried in the Botanic Gardens in Singapore which was the place where our unit finally

34:30 congregated before the capitulation so after, when we come back from the railway, we were working in what they called X3 party. We were digging tunnels into the hills and building machine gun posts and this camp we were in was surrounded by barbed wire and it had atter, like palm leaf fronds all around it but they finished up about two inches, two feet or so above the ground and the toilets were right in the middle of the grounds

35:00 so we used to go to the toilets about two o'clock in the morning and slip across, slip underneath the fence and go out and get whatever you could, fruit or tinned fruit and so on, so we decided this night we were going to go out and look for his payroll so we each had a shovel, so out we go under the barbed wire and we got into the Botanic Gardens and we were round where we thought the last place were and then we started digging. Then we stopped and we could hear voices

35:30 and we thought they might have been Jap patrols so we just ran away and course we made a bit of a noise running away and then we stopped. We heard another crashing and it was another party running the other way and when we got back to camp there was an officer there who finished up a senior member of Parliament. He was only a Lieutenant at the time and he caught us coming back in so he lined us up and we got charged

36:00 with going AWL [Absent Without Leave]from a prisoner of war camp and we got fined five pound each. That was written in the back of my pay book, absent without leave from a prisoner of war camp. Anyway he had another brother officer and when we walked out he called us to one side and he said, "look, if you're thinking about going out again" he said, "I can tell you where there's a carton of bully beef and a carton of Swallow and Aerial biscuits" so we said, "where is it?" and he said, "well it's

36:30 buried in the embankment of a tennis court near where you were" so a few nights later we slipped out again, we found this tennis court all right but it was floodlit and it was right in front of where the Japanese officers were living so we had to give that one away.

What about, with some of the blokes we've spoke to that used to buy cigarettes and tobacco and things like that, and then they would end up selling them to the Japanese guards and things like that?

37:00 Well you didn't get a chance to get too many cigarettes. I didn't start to smoke because I was a swimmer and a member of the surf club, until I joined the army and course you got an issue of cigarettes and when you were attached to a British unit, you got a free issue of cigarettes and a free issue of rum every day and there was quite a few of these cigarettes available after the war but we didn't see much of them but our people who were heavy smokers would smoke anything. I mean you've seen these paw paw leaves when they start to go yellow?

37:30 It just looks like a beautiful piece of Virginia leaf and they were rolling up paw paw leaves and cutting them up. They used to get dried tea leaves and smoke that and there was a Chinese tobacco they used to grow and it was a sort of a reddy pink in colour and it was shocking. It would blow the back of your hat off and I went out with a team of Sikhs one day and they had tobacco stalks, the stems off the tobacco. They chopped it all up and were smoking it in a pipe and they gave us

38:00 a handful of these tobacco stalks which we chopped up and duly smoked into a bit of a pipe but a lot of them heavy smokers suffered badly. I mean they'd smoke anything and same as the drinkers. They were brewing up vegetable peelings and making a yeasty thing and then they'd distil it and, Yes.

Was that the jungle juice and stuff like that?

The jungle juice that's right Yes.

Did blokes ever suffer from, I've heard stories like blokes

38:30 **going blind temporarily from some that stuff?**

That was the glycol out of the torpedo tubes and that sort of thing, Yes. That was pretty rife amongst some of the people that had access to glycol and all that sort of thing.

So what was the nationality breakdown of people in the camp that you were in?

Well we, our people did their very best to keep us together in units and the various working parties that we were on, were mainly all members of my own unit but we did get involved with people from some of the artillery units

39:00 and some of the infantry regiments but by and large, people were mainly kept within their own groups

and whatever working party they went onto there'd be people from different units but the bulk of them would be with their own units. They'd stay with their own units and their own officers.

Tape 6

00:34 **So did you know at the time how full on this railway thing was?**

No, no all we knew you worked to a certain spot and you started work. It wasn't till we got home we realised what the extent it was. It became a bit clearer when, we knew how far we'd come from Pangbong which was in lower Thailand up near the Thailand border so we knew how far that was and of course then we met up with the people that came

01:00 through from Burma and we knew where they'd been so we gradually got to know the full extent of the project.

So in retrospect like since the war when you look back at what you guys created, what's the sense of what you accomplished there?

I don't say we were very proud of it, probably proud of the behaviour of some of our mates and what they did. There were quite a number of instances of officers standing up

01:30 and taking the brunt of the pressure off the other ranks and I mentioned, the doctor specifically and the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major]. There was a small incident that happened when we were building this area around the shrine on the Royal Singapore golf club that this particular chap was giving this, one of the blokes a bit of a hiding. This officer went forward to stop him and the officer

02:00 dragged his sword out and up in the air she went and we all thought this bloke's going to get his head cut off but he turned the sword around and brought it down on this officer's arm, broke his arm and I finished up with that same officer after the railway was completed and we were walking on the aerodrome at Changi and I think I related earlier this story of the ice cream man. Well he again got involved in trying to stop one of our blokes getting a hiding and finished up

02:30 got done over himself. One of our own officers was particularly involved. When we finished working on the aerodrome and they sent us into Singapore and this is the last big job we were working on and we had to dig a series of tunnels into the hills around Singapore and it started off, you had to drive four shafts into the side of a hill in the form of a W and we understood that the reason for going in on those angles was to sort of

03:00 act, reduce the blast of a bomb and when you got into the centre of the hill and you had to dig these tunnels quite some distance, 20 or 30 metres right through and then they turned at right angles and drove a shaft to link up the two shafts and they had no idea of tunnelling. We had people who'd been goldminers and coalminers and all you did was to, you're digging through wet clay actually. It was clayey ground and they had

03:30 pit props up and layers across the top but the people said, "look it's absolutely useless. There's nothing along the side. If you get a collapse, all that dirt will come in there" and they said when they put the rooftop on they'd sometimes have a gap of six inches between the soil and the roof and they said, "you can imagine how many tonnes of earth there are above us. If that sank that would all come down and just squash the lot flat." Anyway there was one tunnel did

04:00 collapse and two of our chaps out of my unit were in there and the dirt kept falling in around them and they were alive, they could hear them. They were trying to tunnel in to them and one of them had his arm trapped and one of those dog spikes came loose and it, the point sort of gradually forced its way into his head and he got killed, so this officer said to the Japanese "that's it, the men are not going out to work anymore until you allow some reasonable safety to be employed."

04:30 So they raved and ranted and they took him away to the Jap headquarters and we didn't go out to work for about three days and they threatened to shoot him and cut his head off and everything. Eventually they agreed to allow these things to be done so then our blokes took over. I mean you'd get a Jap engineer come along and he'd cup this rail and he'd stand up and he'd close one eye and say "that's the line there" so they allowed us, we put rivette in, they call it, rivetting up the side. The main thing is when you do this you pack the earth in real tight to

05:00 do away with the gaps so when you got right into the end of the tunnel and you had to turn at right angles and drill through, the Japs used to act like small children, get excited, who was going to break through first and you'd have about, I don't know, a metre or so of earth still had to be dug out and they're trying to push crowbars through it to be the first one to make a hole to talk to one another but at the end of each tunnel they went through about another six feet from where the linking tunnel was to be, and this we assumed was to be a little

05:30 store room and there was nothing there to lay rivetting and this is pretty late in the day just before we finished work and the water started coming down and these people that had experience say "that's a bad sign" you know when you get water running down like that. Well I was in right up in the end of this

little room with a Jap and another friend of mine and sure enough down come all this dirt and we just left the Jap, we just schooo we got out so they made us stay there and shore it all up again and

06:00 we came out and then the next day we went back in again and they wanted to put all this rivetting around and my mate was a carpenter and he made himself quite a favourite with the Japs because he made a little thing and he was sharpening saws and everything and he was using a hammer to knock this dog spike in. This Jap was curious, walking up behind him to see what was going on and he copped a hammer full on the forehead and down he went but we were told that those tunnels were for storing of stores and ammunition and

06:30 foodstuffs and all that which was probably right but I wondered afterwards whether we might not have been digging our own graves because I've got copies of an order that was issued by the Japanese High Command in Japan when the allies looked like, Mountbatten [later Lord Louis Mountbatten, 1st Earl Mountbatten of Burma] looked like landing in Singapore and elsewhere, that if ever there was a landing by the allied troops, the Japanese camp commandants were to kill all the prisoners and erase any trace of their having been there and they gave them the option of how they could kill us.

07:00 They could either cut our heads off or shoot us or drown us or just bury us. Luckily the atomic bomb saved our lives but Louis Mountbatten and Lady Edwina came through not long after the Japanese surrendered and Louis got up on a stump and we all stood round him in a big circle and he told us all what he was going to do to get us out and I also had a friend of mine who was an Anglican Minister and he joined

07:30 the Australian Parachute Regiment and they didn't really see action but I think it was called Project Kingfisher and they knew all about this camp in Ranau in Borneo and they were all prepared to parachute in and rescue the prisoners. Now there's some argument about what happened but they had to get C47 bombers [transports] from the Americans to take the parachute troops. One story is that [US General] MacArthur refused to release them

08:00 and the other story is that [Australian] General Blamey decided not to go ahead with it but as a result course nothing happened and they all lost their lives but it was funny, I found out that there were, I asked this padre, I said, "I had two friends in that battalion, regiment. One was an accountant from work and the other one was a friend of mine from the surf club" and he said, "what were their names?" and I told him. He said, "oh I knew them well", so I was talking to one of these fellers later. Another thing he said

08:30 he wasn't prepared to do anything that the other members of the regiment didn't do so he did his required number of parachute jumps and got his wings, so I was talking to one of the fellers out of that Parachute Regiment later on and I asked him. I said, "did you know the padre?" and he said, "yeah." He said, "do you know what we used to call him, don't you?" and I said, "no." He said, "we used to call him 'Jumping Jesus.'" So I said to him afterwards, cause he was associated with our church later on, I said, "do you ever know what your nickname was?" and he said, "no"

09:00 and I told him and he went "never knew that".

What about like did you know, you said before you went out on one of your last jobs. You wouldn't have known at the time that it was one of your last jobs?

No we didn't know, had no idea it was the last job. We didn't know until we got word over the radio that the atomic bombs had been dropped. We knew that it was something mementos but we didn't know the nature of what it was, just told it was a super bomb and then we were told that the Japanese

09:30 had been told to surrender.

But on their last, like once the railway was completed and you went back to Singapore what did you know, like what did they tell you about going back to Singapore?

They didn't. We didn't know where we were going. We just got put on trucks and some of them got sent to Bangkok and then went on the ships. A couple of them unfortunately got torpedoed by the Americans, the rest just went back into Singapore and we went out on the Changi airport to start with

10:00 then we went in Singapore and started digging these tunnels.

What was the feeling when you first sort of you know getting off the railway and building the airport, was it easier work?

Elation I mean we'd been prisoners at that time for well over three years and never seen one Red Cross parcel. We knew they were there cause the Japanese had warehouses full of them. They used some of them themselves. After we come back off the railway, that's the first Red Cross parcel I saw. It wasn't a whole parcel

10:30 but my friend and I got a half each and we, amongst it was a coffee bean (UNCLEAR) and we had our first cup of real coffee and course it kept us awake and we just talked all through the night.

How good was that?

Yeah.

What else was in it, can you remember?

I can't remember. There was chocolate and biscuits and I think there was cigarettes and coffee but you know there was heaps and as far as communication was concerned, we were

11:00 only allowed to send home cards the Japanese had prepared. I mean they'd always been pressed by our people about the Geneva Convention and they were reminded that they'd signed the Geneva Convention but they always used to say "yes, Japan signed it but that was never ratified. The diet never ratified it, so we don't recognise it" so they got pressed about this letters so they prepared a series of cards. They were only about four inches by three inches

11:30 and it just had three lines on it "I am well, I am happy, I am looked after" and you were allowed to address it and you could write a couple of things on it and that's all and I think I sent three of those home. I think I've still got some in there and my mother, I sent them to my mother and father but they sent it onto the girlfriend and my brothers to read. I didn't see one letter come back the other way, but after the war I wrote a number of letters on aerogram paper and my wife, well she wasn't my wife then, she

12:00 kept them all for me and Mum kept them. They were written in pencil and I also had some plain sheets of brown paper and I don't know how I got it, but I got a transcript of the discussions between General Yumasita and General Percival and I copied all that and I also got a copy of a report that a British Colonel named Colonel Holmes [The Secret Diary of Dr Robert ... Holmes] [?] was asked to write by the Japanese authorities in Singapore explaining what the conditions on the railway were and

12:30 he wrote this report and he didn't pull any punches either so I copied that and I also copied an order that the Japanese had issued about signing the surrender document and it took a bit of deciphering but in our national magazine there was a lady who was looking for all this sort of memorabilia to write a book so I got out, I had to use a magnifying glass and a bit of imagination and I typed it up on the computer all these things and I sent it off and recently, in the last issue of our magazine [Barbed Wire and Bamboo,]

13:00 they've started to publish it so that's, I reckon it's quite an historical piece of documentation, that.

Where did you get all that information from originally?

I can't remember. It was after the war, after the Japanese surrendered. Somehow or other I got hold of this transcript of these things and this order and just copied it all out.

So would have been stuff in there, officers and things like that was it?

I can't remember quite frankly

13:30 **How much Japanese did you learn to speak?**

Basically nothing. We used to have a saying "it's remarkable how quick you can learn Japanese at the wrong end of a pick axe handle" but all we learnt was to count. I mean some of the people that went to Japan they had numbers running into the hundreds and they were not known by name, they were known by their number, so they had to be able to say their number. You know I could count up to 10 in Japanese and you had a

14:00 few words like good morning and thank you. Two of the worst we learnt were macari masu and macari masen and I'm not sure which way it goes, but one means I understand and the other one means I don't understand and we had a chap named Wood and the French word for Wood is doowah and that's what we used to call him, Doowah so anyway this Japanese yelling at him one day and he tried this out and I think he used the right word. He said, "macari masu" and bash, bash, bash so he didn't try out his Japanese

14:30 anymore but you had to learn too the word for attention and left and right and, you know, a few other things like that.

So what was the best way to sort of pose yourself in front of the Japanese soldiers? Would it be to show respect or would it be just stone cold?

Keep away from them. Don't get in a confrontation. I got caught one day when we were working around one of these roads around the golf course and I got

15:00 whacked by the Jap across the back and across the back of the arms and at that stage I had an old British pith helmet and I'd allowed my beard to grow and strangely enough it was red. I had a big bushy red beard and this British pith helmet. So anyway when he bashed me I just moved in amongst the crowd and disappeared and he kept looking for me but he couldn't find me and we got back to camp that night and I said to my mate "he's bound to be looking for me in the morning" so I shaved my beard off and I swapped my hat for a cap and we walked out the next

15:30 morning and there he was standing on the side of the road. He's looking for this red beard so actually the best thing you could do was avoid a confrontation. Sometimes you couldn't of course but I don't remember any of the blokes that I was with bowing to the Japanese. They'd salute 'em, have to, but that was it.

What about, did any of the blokes give them cheek and that sort of thing?

No, no that was fatal. That was fatal. I mean that's why that

16:00 TV series Changi was so unrealistic, absolutely unrealistic. I mean if anything happened that would demean them in the eyes of their fellow soldiers or their officers or anything else, they'd go right off their brain and in that documentary Changi when the very opening scene when they started making fun of this Japanese officer's name and he had this bamboo cane or golf club or whatever, he just walked away. I mean in real life he'd have gone for them and the one where they broke into the Japanese

16:30 Colonel's quarters and put this caricature up behind the wall and exposed it in front of the General and absolutely humiliated it, that officer would have gone through that camp like a packet of salts so it's most unrealistic a lot of that.

Have you seen films other than that, that do show the prisoner of war in an accurate way?

Yeah, Yes one of the best was called Blood Oath with Bryan Brown and he played the part of the Solicitor General who prosecuted the Japanese for war crimes on the island of Java or Sumatra I think it was

17:00 for beheading these captured airmen and he, Bryan Brown's father actually was the solicitor in that (UNCLEAR). Now that was realistic and there was a scene there where they had all these prisoners inside the cage, in the wire and the Japanese guards, a dozen or more of them, just walked in there with pickaxe handles and baseball bats and they just knocked people left, right and centre. I mean that was a very realistic film, that one. Bridge over the River Kwai was absolute rubbish. I mean

17:30 the bridge they built looked nothing like the bridge in that and you know I can understand that there would be instances where, to make things easier for yourself, you'd say to the Japanese "no, that's not the way to do it, do it this way" and when they realised that what you were doing was better than what they were doing, they'd let you get away with it but

What does that do when you watch films like that, how do you feel?

You know I mean I probably said earlier on there are certain things

18:00 that come back now and it's a bit hard to take, bit hard to take.

What about Christmas in the camps, was there such a thing?

There was such a thing but it didn't make any difference, you had nothing to work with. I think when we got back onto Singapore the last Christmas we had there this friend that lived up in Caloundra he was a bit of an artist and he got some cardboard and

18:30 he made a Christmas card. I think I've still got that around somewhere and you know the cooks made some special rice doovers fried in fat and so forth and made a bit of an effort to jazz things up but nothing really spectacular.

And you said you weren't allowed to sing carols or anything like that?

Well that was up on the railway. That was just in this one particular camp. That was one Japanese officer but back on Singapore they had some first class artists, world class artists and that's when they formed the Changi Concert

19:00 Party and that was a terrific morale booster. I mean they built a stage out of coconut trunks off the coconut tree and they made their own props, they painted their own scenes, they wrote their own plays. A lot of them put on plays that, like, can't think of the name, not Byron. Oscar Wilde and you know The Art of Being Earnest and that and they were really good. They made their own musical instruments and

19:30 we had a chap there who was a female impersonator and he made a good living from it when he came back to Australia and course Slim de Grey was one of the comics and you know Sid Piddington? The name that used to bend spoons and he had, he was in a submarine and his wife was in an aeroplane and they communicated. He put on some good shows too and one of the very last shows they put on when we got back into Singapore was a ballet. The story went on and this

20:00 obviously European women in a white flimsy frock was tied to a stake and there were obviously people dancing round, looked very Japanese and course the climax of the scene where she burst her bonds and I mean the lesson was so obvious but the Japs always used to come along. They enjoyed it as much as we did. The Japanese officers come along and but that was in Changi but there were Christmas,

20:30 not Christmas, concert parties performed wherever you were, little skits and so on. In one camp I was up in Neiki up in Thailand there were two Englishmen. I can't remember one's name. I think the other chap's name was Dennis Eastman and he was a concert pianist. The other chap was a concert violinist and somehow or other they got hold of a pretty cheap violin for this bloke and he played it beautifully but the chap that was the pianist, they gave both these jobs back in camp

21:00 as a sort of orderlies, keeping records and there was no paper but what they did, they used to get strips of barbed wire, barbed wire? Strips of bamboo about a foot long and you know curved and they'd scrape

it with a knife and they'd write on it and when they wanted to reuse it they'd just scrape it again and he made himself a keyboard and he'd spend all day doing his exercises with the fingers. Unfortunately he never made it, the pianist but the violinist did and he went back to England and

21:30 resumed his career as a violinist.

And when blokes are dying from disease and things like that, what process do you go through as far as?

That's tragic. There were two types of Beri Beri and Beri Beri's caused by a lack of vitamin B and you get what's called dry Beri Beri and the body gets extremely thin, you know like all the ribs are exposed just like a skeleton and eventually the heart gives out. The other one

22:00 is what they call wet Beri Beri and the limbs all swell up and you know you get swollen limbs right up to the thigh. It's just like almost translucent, just full of water and they'd just lay there and you know and eventually their heart would be squeezed and they'd die but the solution was simple really and they tried and tried again to get the Japs to provide it. The rice you eat was polished rice and all the goodness is in the husk so they tried to get unpolished rice, which we didn't get

22:30 but eventually the Japanese did get, allow them to get supplies, bags of rice polishings and they kept pumping this rice, it's bloody hard to get down. I mean it was dry and you had to try and swallow it down but once they got this rice polishings in, this wet Beri Beri would start to subside but some of those blokes weighed a tonne, you know trying to move them around and there were no such things as bed pans or anything like that, bottles and the only thing you could use was a dixie. You know the army dixie?

23:00 And if a bloke wanted to go to the toilet you used to get him to lift his backside up and you'd put this dixie under it and when he'd finished you'd empty it out and we used to upend it on a fire and let it get red hot to burn it out and when it was finished, you'd just kick it off the fire and let it get cool and one morning this bloke got caught and he picked up a dixie that hadn't been properly cooled down. Bloke got himself a hot backside but there was an Indian doctor, Doctor Wolfe and he was only a Sergeant

23:30 Major in the British navy, British army rather but he was a fully fledged doctor and his duty was to come round every morning and just do a dawn patrol to see who'd died during the night but initially you tried to do the best to give the bloke a decent burial and play The Last Post or you have a little ceremony but the death rate was so high in one camp that they used to put the body in a woven mat

24:00 and then carry it along to the grave and then unroll the mat and put the skeleton in. Finished up they got that callous they just used to just never unroll the mat, just tip the body into the grave and course they gave up in Thailand in Tan Bay [?] the hospital camp. They didn't have any burials. They were all cremations and you know, you've heard the story about when you put a corpse on the fire and the sinews and everything start to shrink and the corpse just sits up and they were

24:30 burning them there at the rate of about 40 a day but it was quite, I mean the worst one that I mentioned before working in the ulcer dysentery ward, the stench in there was just something shocking because you'd be trying to clean an ulcer up on a bloke's leg and it would be back, suppurating and that plus the dysentery it was a terrible, terrible situation but you got sort of immune to it, you know what I mean? It was just a fact of life.

Speaking of, you know, getting immune to it, how does that

25:00 **the Aussie, that dark Aussie sense of humour, how does that range in?**

That always, I mean people made fun of their ailments all the time, not only about themselves but about their friends as well. I mean that always went on. I mean Yes. That's what got a lot of people through but you know I saw a lot of good friends go out.

25:30 The death rate dropped back considerably after we got back from the railway. I mean those people that were brought back from the railway in a bad state, they died when they got back and some of them never really recovered but the actual death rate

26:00 dropped off, I mean back in Singapore then they had duck farms and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK farms. They were growing their own vegetables and there was eggs available and not a hell of a lot of food but the nutritional value was improved a little bit.

What about the, were there church parades and things like that?

Yes there was church parades. That padre that I mentioned with the Cambridge Shire Regiment, I got to know him very well and

26:30 I used to serve communion up in the jungle and he used to have bibles and scriptural texts and New Testaments that he would give away to people and course paper was an absolute dearth so these people were tearing the pages out of the bible and New Testament and using it as cigarette paper and he got to know about it and, boy, did he preach a fire and brimstone sermon and I heard him preach a sermon one day

27:00 in a very loud voice in which he called the Japanese apes and monkeys and mongrels and he didn't pull any punches. I mean if they'd have heard it and understood he'd have been in real strife but I went to see him in England after I came home and I'd married and I had one son and my daughter were living away from home, they had jobs of their own and our eldest daughter who was intellectually handicapped, we took her with us so we went to London and I'd already written to the

27:30 primacy in Canterbury to find out where this padre was. They wrote back and told me that he'd retired but he was living in a place called Rippon in England which was close to the parish church that his father used to have and where his sister played the organ, so when we got there I rang up the church office and I asked. They said, "he still comes to communion, but he keeps to himself, he doesn't stay there" so I got his phone number and I rang him up and he said, "who is it?" I

28:00 said "it's your nemesis." He said, "what do you mean?" I said, "a voice from the past." I said, "can I see you tomorrow?" "Yeah" he said, "who are you" and I said, "I'll see you in the morning" so we went to church and I saw him come in and after the service I made known and we went back to his place for morning tea. Now when I was married I was a real male chauvinist. I didn't believe in male wedding rings so when we went to London I said to my wife "look, you buy me a wedding ring" and I said, "when we get to see Ducky", his name was Padre

28:30 Duckworth I said, "I'll get Ducky to marry us", so actually the wife and I got married three times. When the first wedding ring wore out we went back to our local church and just repeated the ceremony and the exchange of rings, so we got to Ducky's place and I said, "will you do me a favour?" and he said, "yeah what is it?" I said, "will you marry us?" and he looked at me and I've got a 25 year old daughter. I said, "whoop that came out the wrong way." I said, "will you repeat the part of the service on the exchange of rings?" which he did but he coxed the Cambridge

29:00 crew and he was, that was probably the most successful Cambridge rowing eight ever. They rowed all over England and on the continent as well and he gave a lecture, one of these lectures we had during the, you know, incarceration and he told all the stories about Cambridge Oxford boat races and boat racing in Germany and he was quite an interesting character.

So can you describe to me that special bond that you have with other POWs

29:30 **that were particularly in your camp that you've seen, that you catch up with?**

Well it's, I say it happens in just about every unit. Doesn't matter what it was, whether infantry unit, artillery regiment unit, signals or anything, but that bond's still alive today and we used to have a reunion every year and we'd all go to a club somewhere but you couldn't hear yourself

30:00 talk for the noise and the poker machines so one of members happened to be a councillor at, not Ipswich, Inverell and he said, "Why don't you come up to Inverell? We'll look after you" so the President and the Secretary went up to Inverell and they interviewed the Town Clerk and the tourist officer and we all went up to Inverell, about 120 of us and we had an absolute ball. We went fossicking for emeralds and not emeralds, sapphires and we decided then that we wouldn't go anywhere else except

30:30 a country town so every year the Secretary would write to several country towns and say "what can you offer us for a week?" and we've been all over New South Wales and down into Victoria and we all used to take our own cars but as time went on it got a bit of a chore driving around so we got onto a place, the first one was in Foster in New South Wales. The people that had, sometimes we'd have to stay in different hotels and this hotel motel was a two storey, plenty of room so the proprietor said

31:00 "we'll do everything for you. You just come and stay here" so we all booked in. We had three meals a day. They organised coaches, they took us all over the place and we finished up doing that again the following year and then we went down and the same thing happened down at Mollymook down the far south coast of New South Wales but two years ago it got to the stage where they weren't getting enough people to go. They have a group

31:30 called the Widows Club in our unit consisting of about 20 or 30 widows and they have their own functions but they still have these get togethers and they're just starting to fade off now. Most units are finding that to get people interstate or from different parts of the State to come and they're only very localised one. The local branch of the Ex Prisoner of War Association, we have about 60 or 70 maybe 80 members

32:00 but we usually only get about a dozen or so at our meetings but there are a lot of widows about 12, 14. They have a meeting of their own and we get together for morning tea. Now we run bus trips and rail trips three or four times a year and we have an annual Christmas party so the spirit's still there but the body's getting a bit weak and it's getting a bit hard and you know I've been to see some people out of my unit now who are at death's door and it's

32:30 quite devastating to just watch 'em go. I mean our, well the Department of Veterans Affairs took our statistics a long time ago. They found that prisoners of war were dying at about three times the rate of the normal population and at the current stage, ex prisoners of war from Japan are dying at the rate about three every two days so out of 22 and a half thousand altogether, I mean there was only about 18,000 in Singapore

33:00 but they were also in Java and Sumatra and Rabaul and a few other places so there was twenty two and

a half thousand altogether. There's less than 2,000 left now so they're going out backwards.

I asked you before about the railway and you've been back since?

Twice.

Can you tell us about those trips to go back?

The first time we went back was when I was working in Papua New Guinea

33:30 and one of the trips we took was Singapore, Hong Kong or Singapore, Manilla, Hong Kong and we left the main trip in Singapore and I hired a car and I drove my wife and daughter all the way up to where we'd been during the war and we went to Bangkok and we went up to, didn't go up as far as Hellfire Pass because the railway's all finished now. They've kept a certain section of it maintained

34:00 and they laid about 20 or 30 feet of track in Hellfire Pass itself but that's disconnected from everything else and there's only a section down around Bampong now that's, they keep open for tourism purposes. You can't get into Burma very well. Some parties have managed to get in there but not too many but that was a sort of an individual trip and then on the 50th anniversary of the capitulation they had a big trip back there and went back with the wife there and we had a memorial service on

34:30 Anzac Day at Kanchanabura, not, the big cemetery, Kranji Cemetery on Singapore and then we went up to Bangkok and then we went up by boat, like a barge up, it's not the Mekong or the Meklong, it's I can't think of the actual name of the river [Mae Kiong also known as Khwae Yai] but that's where they had most of their camps because they followed the course of the river because of the ease of getting barges

35:00 up to supply it and we went up to, I can't think of the name of the camp it was now, but it was one of the major camps on the way up through Thailand. That was a joint very big reunion and then we came back by what was left of the railway back to Bampong and then we flew back from there to Singapore and then back home but there's, I'd say there's a

35:30 party goes back up to Hellfire Pass every year now. With the help of the Australian Thai Chamber of Commerce there are a couple of very good Australians there who've done a lot of work to, the first museum was run by a couple of Buddhist monks and it was the replica of one of the long huts that we lived in. You know you only had about two feet of bamboo slats to lay on. You used to lay head to toe and they built one of those and they had all this memorabilia

36:00 and photos and things all around the wall but then they built this big museum now, opposite the Tanbaya Cemetery and it's quite a big tourist thing and they also got a magnificent museum at the site of Hellfire Pass and they're running short of money actually. They're trying to keep that going but that's an annual event. A lot of people go back there every year just like pilgrimages back to Gallipoli.

36:30 A lot of, not so many widows now but lots of children and grandchildren are going, joining these pilgrimages back to those places.

And what did it mean to you to go back to that place after all that time?

Mixed emotions, it was interesting to see what had happened to the place over the years and to see the sort of remnants that were still there. There's not too much of the camps left, some bricks that the Japanese used to have for their cookhouses.

37:00 The rest of the place is, you know, there's nothing to see actually. It's just the terrain and you can still see some of the sleepers that are rotting in the ground. There's only one bridge that's left and that's sort of been modernised and upgraded but it's still basically the same sort of a structure. The best exhibit is the one on Santosa Island in Singapore. When the Japanese surrendered they

37:30 surrendered in the Municipal Council building on a big padang in Singapore and my mate and I were lucky that we were there and we were sitting on the brick wall on the veranda of this municipal building and the Japanese delegation had to walk up these stairs to get into the room where Mountbatten and all the allied officers were and they deliberately picked the tallest, Australian, you know blokes six foot four, six foot six, great big blokes and these little Japanese

38:00 had to walk through and up the stairs. They had a replica there or wax figures of the Japanese on one side of the table and Louis Mountbatten and all the allied officers in their white uniforms, on the other side and they have a recording in Urdu, that's Indian, and Chinese, Japanese and English and they repeat the actual wording of the surrender ceremony and they don't pull any punches but they've shifted that exhibit now from Singapore

38:30 onto a place called Santosa Island and they've made a, it's the same display and it's still very realistic and when we went to the Philippines we saw the devastation that had been caused there by both the Japanese invasion. The American invasion to retake the island and one of the guides' father was a prisoner of the Japanese and they take you into this prison it is and the cell, the prison cells are below the water

39:00 level and what they used to do, they put the prisoners in the cell and lock 'em up and then the tide

would come in and they'd all drown and his father suffered fairly badly and there were all these Japanese tourists around looking through this place and I said to this bloke "what do you do when you get the Japanese tourists, do you tone down what you say?" "No way" he said, "I tell 'em exactly the same as what I've told you" and it surprised me that that film Blood Oath that they allowed that to be shown in Japan and I saw it on

39:30 TV. These Japanese kids coming out crying their eyes out cause they never knew anything about it, but in Singapore the Japanese schools, private schools there, part of their curriculum, they have to teach the students what happened in Singapore and Malaya and they don't get licence and they're not allowed to run unless that's part of the history they teach, but in Japan of course it's, you've got all these revisionists like Dr David Irving who are trying to say the holocaust never happened.

40:00 Japanese insist that these things didn't happen and they've still got Japanese Prime Ministers who go to this cemetery where all the war criminals are buried and, you know, the ultra right wing Japanese psyche is still there and you saw examples of that when they were building that new aerodrome at, what was it? It's outside of Tokyo? Nagata I think it is. They had these right wing Japanese dressed in army uniforms

40:30 with steel helmets attacking the police and they're all highly organised and that feeling is still there and it wouldn't take much to break out again.

Tape 7

00:32 **Did you know it was close that the war was ending when you were working on the aerodrome?**

No, no it was only after we heard the announcement about the atomic bomb and we heard that the Japanese had been ordered to surrender but we knew that the things were coming to and end because we knew that Lord Louis Mountbatten was organising for an invasion of Malaya. We knew that MacArthur had taken the Philippines and we knew that the Japanese were

01:00 being forced back island by island so we knew it wasn't going to be much longer but we thought at that stage that the Japanese would defend their homeland to the very end and we thought that would be a particularly bloody and long battle, which it would have been because I've read some material since, in the last 12 months actually, about how many artillery guns and modern planes that the Japanese had and you know, when you heard that they were using all

01:30 those old fighter planes in the kamikaze attacks on the American navy, they had lots and lots of brand new stuff in caves all around the southern coast of Japan and they'd have fended it up to the end and they had the plans that had been devised by the Americans and their estimate of the casualty rate was going to be horrific. They knew it would be really bad and they had plans to assault the Japanese mainland in two separate attacks, but from what they learnt afterwards about how much

02:00 material and that the Japanese had and you know the Japanese civilian population were going to be armed with pointed sticks and they'd have sold their lives very dearly and it if it hadn't have been for the atomic bombs. The fact that the Emperor was convinced that they couldn't win the way, that he ordered them to surrender but if that hadn't have happened God only knows what sort of a blood bath there'd have been in the invasion of Japan, but that's what we more or less were led to expect, that the Japanese homeland was going to be invaded

02:30 and the advent of the atomic bombs was unexpected, unexpected.

What did you know about the atomic bomb?

Nothing. All we knew was that they'd dropped a couple of super bombs. We didn't know what, much about the atomic bombs at all. We didn't find out about that until after we were released cause it was pretty secret around the world, you know what was it? Project Manhattan? It was a closely guarded secret. I mean the Russians and the Germans, they knew about an

03:00 atomic bomb being developed and there was a big race to try and get it first, but the details of it, not known.

What were your thoughts when you did hear more details about it?

Relief.

No, about the effects of the atomic bomb?

We didn't know about the effects of it until we came home either. I mean we didn't know anything about radiation or radiation poisoning or the horrific effects of the bomb itself, not until after we got back home. We didn't know at the time. As I said all we knew was that they'd dropped a couple of super bombs.

03:30 **And when you found out?**

I mean it's pretty devastating when you saw the, just like that images they have of that Vietnamese girl running down the road that was burnt with napalm. I mean when you saw those Japanese women and kids with their skin burnt off and, you know, that's pretty horrific.

What are your thoughts now about atomic warfare?

Well all I can say is if it hadn't been for the atomic bombs,

04:00 I'd have been dead so would everybody else because the atomic bombs actually saved our life and you know it's like a shark attack. It's so savage and so brutal, when you look at the number of people that have been taken by sharks, sharks against the number of people that swim in the surf every year. It's the same with the atomic bombs. The effect is brutalising and horrific but there were many, many more people burnt to death in the firestorms in Tokyo with the incendiary bombs that were dropped

04:30 and the number of people that got suffocated in Hamburg when the firestorm was so bad it just sucked all the oxygen out of the air and the German civilians in Hamburg just suffocated to death so, you know, when you balance it out, although the atomic bomb was severe and very bad, in terms of comparison with the number of people that died by other means, it's pretty insignificant. I mean it's not insignificant in the damage that it does, but in terms of the casualties

05:00 from it. It's the long lasting effects that are the worst thing. I mean, you know, cancers and leukaemia and everything and radiation poisoning, that's probably the worst part of that.

Do you know anyone personally that has been through that?

I had some people in my unit who were at Nagasaki when the bomb was dropped. They were some time, some distance away but they heard the noise and they saw the

05:30 smoke and they went there after, some time after the bomb had been exploded and I suspect a couple of them might have had some effects from it.

And when you heard the news, were you convinced that the end was?

Yeah well I mean you could see the Japanese guards. They just stopped. You know we didn't go out. We just stayed in camp. The Japanese more or less just disappeared.

Walk us through that

06:00 **day, tell us what happened through that entire day when you heard the news?**

Well we, the first, well we got the news by our secret radio, these bombs had been dropped but the first real effects we saw was in the change in the Japanese guards and the fact that we weren't going out to work. We were just left to our own devices and we, you know, we knew that that's it, it's all over and because they came round and told us actually, our officers "Japanese have surrendered" so it was great relief and

06:30 sense of elation that it was all over and immediately started talking about how long before we can get home.

Can you remember the first thing that you did?

Not really, no, except that we were, got increased food and the planes came over and dropped leaflets. Told us we're not to sort of get out and we should stay where we are until British or

07:00 Australian troops came in to take control of things. The first lot that we saw were members of the Australian Parachute Regiment who were dropped by parachute and came in and sort of took control a bit, then they started rounding up all the Japs and put 'em to work cleaning the place up. They became absolutely and entirely subservient, just couldn't believe the change in their attitude, absolutely subservient.

How did they, how

07:30 **did their behaviour change towards you, how did they treat you?**

We didn't have anything to do with them. I mean they just disappeared. The only thing we saw of the Japanese afterwards was when we walked around and saw them with Australian soldiers standing guard over them, digging ditches and cleaning up the mess around the place. We had nothing to do with them after the surrender.

So you never saw any of those guards for the last time or anything?

No, not specific, not particular guards no. Actually the

08:00 worst guards that we saw would have been up on the railway. They would have been the Japanese engineers and they were long gone. I mean after the railway finished they went their own way. They didn't come back. We never saw them again. Some of the Japanese that were in charge of our camps, we never saw them again until we found out that they were being tried as war criminals. The only one that we saw and it was a funny thing, that this Padre Duckworth that I mentioned, he gave me a book of

08:30 common prayer that was wrapped in green velvet and it belonged to somebody from the Manchester Regiment I think it was and I've still got that. I've carried it with me ever since and a Korean guard came into our quarters. Yes well he gave me this book of common prayer and he wrote a very nice message in the front of it but then this Korean guard came into our

09:00 quarters and made himself known. Then in sort of halting English he told us that he was a Christian and that he had to keep his Christianity subdued because of the Japanese attitude towards it and I showed him this book of common prayer and he wrote a message in it in Korean in pencil and I didn't know what it meant and many years after, I went to see somebody at Sydney University and they said, "it's

09:30 pretty difficult to translate because it was in pencil" and they were ancient characters, not like the modern characters and the same was when I tried to get something deciphered. We used to get little metal tags with Japanese characters on them and I went into one of these Japanese duty free stores and they couldn't understand it and I went to a couple of places. They said that the modern characters are different from the older characters and they're very difficult to translate

10:00 but anyway the message he left in it was something to do about Christianity and I got a sort of a translation. It doesn't make a lot of sense. It doesn't flow but it's just sort of individual words that are translated so I've had that pasted into the front of that prayer book ever since too, but there were one or two, I know when you reflect on, I mean he wouldn't be able to do too much because of his colleagues and the Japanese themselves.

10:30 I s'pose he would have been one of the better ones but they disappeared very quickly too. We didn't see them again. They got them out of the road very quickly and we were just left on our own and you know the British and Australian administration took over and

11:00 food gradually began to appear and then they started treating all the worst of the people and then arranging for them to be transported home. You know was a sort of a priority system. The very worst were flown out, the next level were taken out on warships and the best, the rest of us had to wait till normal transport was available. Freighters and ordinary ships came to

11:30 take us all back.

How long did that take?

A couple of months or more.

So you were there for a couple of months more before you left?

Yeah, Yes at least a couple of months.

What did you do then?

Practically nothing. There was a friend of mine, he was a member of the Singapore Volunteer Force and they were mostly Portuguese descent and we became pretty friendly during the war, particularly up in the railway and we went out

12:00 to meet his parents. Like I said I remember they live at 77 Telacarue Road, Singapore so we went out and had a meal with them, met the family and years later, we kept corresponding and years later when the communist insurgency happened in Malaya and Singapore and the Australian troops had to go there and help fight the Japanese and communists and the Indonesians, he wrote to me and asked

12:30 me if I could get him into Australia as a migrant and there was another chap who was pretty friendly with him but he was in different unit to mine and the Minster for Immigration at the time was a member of the 8th Division and he'd been a prisoner of war, so I wrote to him about this chap and I said he's a very responsible man, got a wonderful family and he's well educated and he happened to be the second in charge of the Singapore Main Water and Sewage and Drainage Board

13:00 so his application was approved for immigration to Australia and he came out and he finished up getting a job with the Sydney Main Water Sewage and Drainage Board and he was with them right up till he retired so there was only a few of them came in. There was another one, his, they were part of the Royal Borneo Police Force and one of them was executed and a couple of them went to jail and

13:30 he came out to Australia, one of them, afterwards and he got a job working for the Australian Army. He wasn't an Australian citizen but he got a job working for the Australian Army in a civilian capacity and one of his sons joined the Australian Army so he died but we still see his son occasionally and what they did, they took the Governor of Borneo and put him on an island off the coast, together with senior officers but a lot of the

14:00 Royal Borneo Police Force officers were still working with the police force. The officer in charge of the main camp in Borneo that was B Force, he either died or got shipped out somewhere else and they made one of our officers the Officer in Charge of the camp and this other officer that had the beginnings of communication, through various people with the Governor of Borneo, and they were arranging a resistance force

14:30 but unfortunately a couple of people found out about it and they informed to the Japanese and course they all got roped up and the officer was tortured for some weeks and eventually shot and he was

granted the George Cross posthumously. The others were sent back to this very shocking prison run by the Japanese kempetai in Singapore and one of them is a friend of mine and he still lives here on the Gold Coast. He lives at

15:00 Broadbeach Waters so he survived all that.

What were the locals thinking? What were their reactions like?

They had learnt very quickly that the Japanese weren't the, what's the term I can use? They'd come to release them from the bondage of the white man. They very quickly found out that that wasn't the case at all so they were really pleased to see the

15:30 Japanese defeated and surrender but there was still that nationalistic feeling that had been engendered by the Japanese that became fairly strong and that's why it wasn't long before Singapore and Malaya became independent States. Well they were one to start with but then Lee Kwan Yu and [the] Prime Minister of Malaya didn't get on too well together so Singapore went its own way and prospered very well.

16:00 **Just going back a little bit to the camps, how was working on the aerodrome different, sorry not to the camps, how was working on the aerodrome different to say?**

Compared to working up on the railway, was a breeze. I mean it was hard work but you knew that when you finished the day you went back into Changi jail and you had electricity and you had water and you had a reasonable amount of food and the shelter was good. You know you weren't out in the rain and you only worked a certain

16:30 number of hours in the day and so at that time we knew that the end wasn't far away, that eventually it was going to happen so we knew that we had some expectation of becoming free sooner or later, sooner we hoped.

Did the Japanese guards have that sense as well?

I'm sure they did. I think they realised very quickly that they had no hope of winning the war. I mean they must have known that the Philippines was lost and Saipan

17:00 had been invaded and Okinawa and Iwo Jima. They must have known that, you know, the allies were knocking on the door of our homelands and I think they were pretty dejected in some ways. I think they knew that it was all over, was only a matter of time.

So you hung out for a couple of months after and then how did you get back?

Well we were, there were two ships TheLarges Bay and The Esperance Bay and I just forget the sequence but we travelled from Singapore

17:30 to Darwin on one ship and we were all mixed up. There were New South Welshman and Victorians and South Australians and Queenslanders and when we got to Darwin they re-sorted everybody out and we got taken from one ship onto the other and we went straight from Darwin to Sydney, whereas the other ship called in at Brisbane and then I think went on to Victoria, I'm not sure so we had a sort of a double trip home but we got looked after tremendously coming home. We did nothing but eat, eat and

18:00 sleep.

What was the feeling like between all the men?

It was good. You know, I mean we were all in seventh heaven then. You know we just couldn't wait to get home and get back into normal life.

What did you take away from the Japanese culture for example?

From our culture?

From their culture, what did you learn about the Japanese?

Nothing, nothing at all.

18:30 They have a story that all the Japanese Emperors that are descendents from Amaterasu, and she's the sun goddess, and all the Japanese Emperors are supposed to be a direct descendent of Amaterasu. They have a code, two codes. One is called Bushido [Way of the Warrior] and the other is the code of the Samurai Warrior. Now when you read what those codes actually are, they're a very honourable code and they teach tolerance,

19:00 they teach being merciful to your enemy and your captors but they certainly didn't practise it. They didn't practise that code of the Samurai or of the spirit of Bushido as far as their prisoners are concerned because to them, from the very earliest age in school, you could see them dressed in uniform and marching like a sort of a Japanese goose step and waving flags and patriotism was the main key of their life

19:30 and they were also taught that it was absolutely disgraceful and dishonourable to allow yourself to be

taken prisoner so when they suddenly get confronted with a 50 or 60 allied prisoners, 22,000 Australians and about 40,000 British and all the rest of it, we were treated as the lowest of the low. We were dishonourable and all the rest of it and there weren't too many Japanese taken prisoner. My brother was a guard at the Cowra prisoner camp when they had that big breakout there many years ago

20:00 and some of the prisoners in there were fairly placid but a lot of them were militant and they took over the camp and organised this big breakout and quite a few of them got killed and so did some of the Australian guards but that was their background, their culture. That was absolutely disgraceful and rather than allow themselves, they would commit seppuku or hara kiri [ritual suicide] but there were quite a few Japanese officers did commit hara kiri

20:30 rather than be taken prisoner.

What are your thoughts of the Japanese today?

Well I've got no ill feeling towards the younger Japanese because they didn't have anything to do with it. I, the older Japanese, particularly those who were there, I sort of adopt a Christian point of view that you should forgive your enemies but this question of forgive and forget? Forgiveness yes, forgetfulness,

21:00 never. I don't, whenever I talk to people, I go to, be invited to high schools to give an address or anything like that I always say that these things should never, ever be forgotten because they can so easily happen again. When the wife and I went to our trip and we were in Germany and we went to, what was it? Dachau One of the those infamous concentration camps and inside the

21:30 grounds of the concentration camp they had four chapels. There was a Christian chapel. There was a Protestant chapel, a Roman Catholic chapel, a Jewish synagogue and a sort of a universal church. They were all inside the grounds of this concentration camp. They had a great big symbolic wall there and all the prisoners had to wear different coloured patches designating what they were and where they came from and these are done out in ceramic material

22:00 and they're cemented on this wall and they have a replica of barbed wire with prisoners hanging on the barbed wire as if they've been caught or shot and underneath it says "never again" and I said to my wife "you know, when you look at that and you see what's going on in the world" when, in, [President Allende's Chile] General Alliandi [Juan Domingo Perón Sosa] in Argentina and General Pinochet in Chile murdering their own people, and you had the

22:30 Serbians and the Croatians and the Muslims all tearing one another to pieces, you talk about never again. I said, "it's unending" and you had the Protestant Catholic divide in Northern Ireland and you've got the Hutu and the Tutsi in African States [Burundi, Rwanda] murdering one another by the hundreds of thousands, all these tribal things. I mean they just don't go away. It's unbelievable. Even when the

23:00 Russian empire collapsed and you've got now Georgia and you've got Russia and the Georgian rebels at one another's throats. Yes it's all very well to have these high flying principled ideas but when you're dealing with human nature and old hatreds and bitterness and tribal rivalries, you can't see an end to it. Even in a place like Papua New Guinea and I worked there for four years, they've got different tribes. Some of them up till 70

23:30 years ago had never seen a white man. They all have their own languages and you've got over 700 individual languages in Papua New Guinea. The Lingua Franca is of course Pidgin English [pidgin, a trade language used by numerous language communities around the Mediterranean, to communicate with others whose language they did not speak.] and lot of them speak English but they, I thought Australian was the most over governed country in the world when we had a Federal Government, six State parliaments and two assemblies for about 18 million people. In Papua New Guinea they've got 22 provincial governments

24:00 and a national parliament for about five or six million people and all their cultural differences come to the fore. I mean they, I don't know how they're ever going to, I mean they've got this one talk system over there that if you've got something you've got to share it with your one talks, or your best friends or your family and it's a cultural barrier that's, I don't know that they'll ever get over it.

You mentioned

24:30 **that you had a bit of correspondence when you were in the camp?**

I didn't have any.

No, no you wrote correspondence, you were issued with cards?

Yes.

And so you were sending them back to your girlfriend who was?

To my mother, I sent them all to my mother but they used to pass them onto my girlfriend and they kept them for me and I had three or four when I came back and also some letter-grams that I'd written after I was, after the Japanese surrendered. We were allowed to write letters home then

25:00 so several letters got home then.

So when had you, how long before you left Australia had you already met your girlfriend?

Not a single word until the first letter we received after the Japanese surrendered. That's about three and a half years or more.

Three and a half years?

Three and half years, not a word. I mean

25:30 there was voluminous correspondence in the 12 months when we were in Malaya before the war started but after the war started, when we became prisoners of war, apart from those three little cards we sent home, I didn't get any reply to them. I didn't get a letter from home until after the Japanese surrendered so that was over three and a half years.

What was it like when you saw her again?

Unbelievable, unbelievable

26:00 and I mean to come back home to Australia and all the things that had happened in the past, you know, the songs like Lilly Marlene and Boogy Woogy Bugle Boy from Company B and what was the other? Another famous wartime song, I just can't think of it now. It was a real hit. I mean we'd never heard any of that, never heard any of it.

26:30 **So she must have told you about her three and a half years, did she tell you much about what her life was like?**

Yes, Yes it didn't take us long to catch up on what had happened and of course the main interest was to find out what happened in the other theatres of war, about Dunkirk and Arnhem and El Alamein and all those other places. I mean we'd heard some snippets of it

27:00 over the wireless but the details of it were not known and course that was very interesting catching up with all that.

Were there any surprises amongst any all of that?

Well I suppose the enmity between Montgomery and [US General] Patton were the things that stuck out most of all. I mean they were both egotistical and go-getters. They both wanted their own way and I think Eisenhower must have

27:30 invoked the wisdom of Solomon to solve the differences between those two and that plan of Montgomery's to capture those five bridges and break over the Rhine and get into Germany could have shortened the war by 12 months but Eisenhower had three competing things. He had the clash between Montgomery and Patton. Patton wanted, he's

28:00 broken through with his tanks in the south, he wanted to get all the fuel to charge up that way. Montgomery wanted to go round and capture these bridges and get into Germany up on the top end and course the thing they didn't take into account on that rush to capture all those bridges, if you saw the film A Bridge Too Far [re Arnhem bridges], that the road was the only way in and once you got off the road, it was just marsh and mudflats and course when the tanks and

28:30 trucks and that were breaking down they were holding the rest of the column up and that's why they never broke through to release the garrison at Arnhem. They did actually get the bridge at Arnhem but they couldn't hold it because they were cut off and they couldn't get supplies through but if that had succeeded, that plan of Montgomery's would have been absolutely brilliant but unfortunately that was one of the tragedies of war. I had some friends who were part of that battle of Arnhem, who got out of it.

29:00 **What was it like catching up with the men who'd been in the Mediterranean and Europe and Africa?**

We didn't actually get, the only ones that I met up with there was when I went back to work and I began, some of my old workmates who'd been in the army and the air force and so forth and the navy and different theatres of war and you'd talk to them about their own personal experiences but we didn't get involved a lot with people from all those areas as a group.

29:30 We'd see them marching on Anzac Day but after the march at Anzac Day you'd go and congregate with your own group. The one that we did learn about was from my two brothers and their own experiences in Papua New Guinea and Borneo and my Dad had always been too crook. He couldn't march with his bad leg but he said that he was going to march the first Anzac Day when he came home

30:00 and we said we'd march with him, so in the those days the Anzac march in Sydney was a tremendous event. It'd take hours and hours to go through because you'd all congregate down in the domain and you'd walk all the way round and by that time, the old fellers from the First World War were getting a bit long in the tooth, so we marched with Dad and his battalion. They only marched a short distance so we broke off and he went to the, one of the pubs, I forget the name of it now and we all went back and marched with our own units

30:30 and when we'd been round with them we met up with Dad again and had a few beers and, Edinburgh

Castle that's it, in Castlereagh Street and spent the rest of the day with him but that's the only time we marched as a family Yes.

What was it like when you were reunited again as a family? What did you father and brothers say?

Well I didn't see my two brothers because they were still in the army and they had a points system for discharge and the more

31:00 points that you accumulated in terms of length of service, the quicker you got home. Course we got home straight away but my brother in Papua New Guinea he was guarding Japanese war criminals. He was one of the last groups to come home because he didn't join, he was only, he's five years younger than me so he just got in right at the tail end. My other brother came home fairly soon after I got home and boy, I couldn't get over how wiry and strong he was. I mean

31:30 the training they undertook at that jungle training camp at Canungra up there was tough, it really toughened them up but we all got back together again. We were all members of Maroubra Surf Club, we all got back into the surf club activities and we all used to go to the surf club balls and all the functions from work and the company I worked for was a terrific company. They had all sorts of sporting activities. They had cricket and football and golf and tennis and basketball and

32:00 you know, you got involved with all those different activities and each of those sporting groups had their own little function at the end of the year and then they had a swimming carnival at Coogee Bay baths, Aquarium Baths in Coogee Bay in Sydney and there were five different factories at Wills. There was a cigarette factory, there was tobacco factory one and two, there was British American Tobacco Company and I forget what the other one, but each of those factories had their own

32:30 cheer squad and their own swimming team and you'd have an inter factory relay and the place used to be packed to the roof at Coogee Aquarium. They'd all be wearing different colours and they were great years.

The brother that got back first, was he the one that you had done Morse code with in your bedroom?

Yes that was him, Yes, Yes.

What were the main differences

33:00 In age?

No, no what were the differences between when you had seen him last and when you saw him again after?

Well he was older certainly but how tough he was and he'd always been a pretty volatile sort of a brother, my middle brother. My father, because of his background and the things that he'd been through was a pretty tough sort of a bloke but always very fair with us and my mother was a very sweet woman

33:30 and I always reckoned that I was 75 percent Mum and 25 percent Dad and my younger brother was 25 percent Mum and 75 percent Dad but my middle brother was 50 percent Dad and boy he was a tough cookie. Gee he was a, you know they say that all small people are volatile and antagonistic to compensate for their lack of height, like Napoleon and all the rest of it and my middle brother

34:00 makes up for it. Still we get on very well together Yes.

What were the main differences that you noticed in him? How had the war changed him?

It's hard to put that into words I don't suppose. You know I don't think that I noticed much difference to the way I knew them. I mean we were all pretty young when we joined the army. I mean they were still at school when I went away but you know we

34:30 just became just carried on as a family as if nothing had happened. I mean we used to visit all our relatives in Sydney and we had our family picnics and we'd carry on like as if nothing had happened. I mean the war didn't interfere with our lifestyle at all actually, not at all. I don't think it affected us at all. I mean it certainly affected me and I mean they had their own experiences but we, that didn't intrude on our family life, not at all.

Did you talk about it much?

35:00 No, no, a little bit, not much, not a lot. I mean we only used to talk about it amongst ourselves at our own unit gatherings and that was always done in a sort of a light hearted sense, make a lot of fun of things that happened

35:30 but it's a shame to see the way they're fading away now. You know there are members of my unit that are going downhill very fast. I don't know how much longer our unit association will hold together really. The secretary is the one that's mostly, mainly holding it all together and we've got an officer who has taken over the publication of our

36:00 unit journal which is a tremendous thing. I mean that gets published, it used to get published every

quarter and you get contributions from members of the unit all over Australia. The widows find it particularly helpful and, you know, every issue you get you're reading about things that happened or people you knew and that's really helped to hold our unit together, that magazine. I'd say it's probably the best magazine of any unit that I know.

36:30 Not all of the units have one and some of them do have them, but they're not the same standard as ours. I know it's skiting but our magazine is tremendous. I've got a copy in there I can show you after if you want a look so that sort of keeps us together. It's a great communicator. That was the name of the game for our unit, Communication so

Does it come up much?

The war?

Yeah?

Yes

37:00 yeah, it comes up. I mean it's inevitable when you get together and it's surprising but, you know, 60 years after the war or more, I'm still learning things that I had never heard of before. It's incredible some of the things that you, you go to these reunions and you hear things and say "gee I never knew about that before" and individual members of the unit have published little snippets in the magazine about their experiences and you learn something all

37:30 the time.

Does anything come to mind of what you have learnt?

Not off hand. One of our chaps wrote a book and he addressed it, he handled the truth with great carelessness, let me put it that way. He used poetic license to the enth degree and when we read his book we looked at one another and said, "what?" Some of the stories he told in it were just unbelievable.

38:00 I don't think it could have been in any way true but he did tell us, you know, some things that we didn't know about. I'm just trying to recall some specific instances. There were, there was a great deal of scorn and criticism heaped on our General, General Gordon Bennett. He was a very courageous bloke and he was probably the youngest Australian ever to gain the rank of Brigadier and he was

38:30 the Brigadier in the Brigade in which my father served in the First World War. He was a civilian soldier. Course when the Second World War started, he got called back up to the colours and they put him in charge of our division but he was running up against officers who'd been through Duntroon and he wasn't that highly regarded and he was pretty blunt sort of a bloke and he ran up against General Percival. The things General Percival was doing in Malaya and the tactics he used

39:00 and that and anyway after the capitulation he escaped and he got back to Australia. There was a lot of criticism about him leaving his men but the point about it was, he didn't escape until after the capitulation and he had oodles and oodles of sensitive information and he wrote a book about the Japanese jungle tactics which the army adopted but just before the capitulation in Singapore, they sent home two official

39:30 escape parties and they comprised of people who were specialists in different units, engineers, signals, artillery, infantry and they were to come back to Australia to pass on this knowledge back home. One of the groups got home and the other one didn't and one of my best mates was on the second one and he never got away but they left within the last weeks of the war but the criticism that was heaped on Gordon. There was a court martial and a public trial and he got roundly condemned

40:00 but he wasn't, when we came home we made a big fuss of him. I mean he was a bit nervous as to how he was going to be received and the rousing reception he got when he went round to all our different reunions. We couldn't understand what all the kafuffle was about, you know and instead of using his knowledge and putting him back up at Papua New Guinea; they sent him over to Western Australia and put him in charge of an armoured brigade that didn't see any service. It was an absolute waste of talent, absolute waste of talent

40:30 but that's the army.

Tape 8

00:31 The thing that we couldn't understand of all this criticism of Gordon Bennett was the fact that if he had have stayed, he'd have gone with all the rest of the senior officers like Percival and all the British. They sent all British and Australian officers above full Colonel, full Colonel's above, they sent them to Formosa [Taiwan] and they spent the whole of the war in Formosa so if Gordon Bennett had stayed, he wouldn't have been able to do anything for his troops anyway and it was far more use for somebody like him to get back to Australia

01:00 and pass on the knowledge that had been gained against fighting the Japanese in the jungle so we just couldn't understand all that but anyway, as I said, that's the army.

Was that the general feeling across the unit?

As far as the 8th Division was concerned Yes, Yes. I mean our own Colonel was one of those who was ultra critical of him and he was a Duntroon man and he gave a pretty unfavourable comments at Gordon Bennett's trial so we were a bit disappointed in that because

01:30 we had a lot of time for our original Colonel. His name was Thigher, Colonel Thigher and his nickname was Sig Toc, Signalman Thigher and sig is alphabetic speak for S and toc is alphabetic speak for T so that was his nickname Sig Toc but he was a pretty straight laced, Duntroon graduate and he was one of the ones

02:00 that was highly critical of Gordon Bennett.

You were mentioning before that you did know a song. It is really important to the archive to hear of any songs.

Well as I said, I mentioned a couple of them Boogy Woogie Bugle Boy from Company B and Lilly Marlene. The other one I couldn't think of before was American Patrol and that had a terrific beat and it took us a while to get into the swing of those things because all this

02:30 sort of thing was just hitting Australia after the war, jitterbugging and boogy wooging and all the rest of it and some of the old songs, what was that English singer's name that, White Cliffs of Dover and We'll Meet Again and,

Vera Lynn?

you know, they were real sentimental, tearjerkers they were. We'd never heard those.

What about songs that you, did you sing any songs on the camps or the working parties or?

We only sang all the

03:00 old timers like The Parody to Colonel Bogey and another march they had, I can't think of the name at the moment but it had some rather naughty words to it and, you know, the old First World War songs were all the ones that we sang although the Changi Concert Party and a couple of people in my own unit wrote some songs and I can't think of the words, but they were really good and one of the chaps in our unit,

03:30 he was a Sergeant and he finished up an Inspector of Police and he was a member of the police choir and he and a couple of chaps from Victoria who always had our own little concert party, unit concert party, every reunion they'd get together and sing all these old songs. I can remember one but I couldn't repeat the words here.

It'd be great if you could. I'm sure I've heard every word under the sun anyway so don't worry there?

I don't know if I can remember

04:00 the whole lot but, I mentioned before about scrotal dermatitis and when we were working in Singapore and this scrotal dermatitis, the only thing that they had was to bathe your testicles in Condes crystals and we'd been standing up on the hill all bathing ourselves and all these old Chinese women would be down there digging in the fields looking up at us and he

04:30 wrote this song and it was called, the nickname they had for this scrotal dermatitis was bookateema balls and he wrote this song about bookateema balls and it was an absolute scream when it first came out and I can't remember the whole words to it now but that was typical of the sort of songs that they'd written and some of them were published when we came home and I don't know if you read that book by

05:00 Slim de Grey, he wrote a book called Changi. I think I've got a copy of it there somewhere. There's lots of those songs mentioned in there as well Yes.

Can't remember any of the words?

No, no, no, no, no. I mean if somebody started to sing 'em I'd probably be able to join in and go along a little bit but I can't remember all of them and

05:30 there was one song we had was, I don't know if you've heard of the Malayan song called Trarn Buland? Well its literal translation is bright moonlight and it sings a song about "when am I ever going to see you again" and it was translated into English and I've got it all written down. "Trarn Buland, true (UNCLEAR) bright

06:00 when am I ever going to see you again, how long will it be before I can hold you in my arms" that's about as much as I can remember of it at the moment. No I can't remember any more.

When did you hear that song?

That was when we were in, before the Japanese landed. That was a famous song. They had another couple of sayings there like,

06:30 Malayan witticism. A durong have you heard of a durong? Not a durong, a it's a spiky fruit and it doesn't taste too bad but it smells something shocking. Durien that's right durien and our blokes used to get these durien's after they'd fallen on the ground and burst open and carry them down into the slit trenches and hide them so that when somebody went down to work on the wireless set this rotten durien

07:00 smell used to be there but anyway the durien falls off the tree about spring time and you know that when spring turns man's thoughts turn to love well they have a saying, calling "durien druss, sarong zatus" and when that means is that when the durien's fall, the sarong's rise. They had another one too that it was a take off of the Dutch Airline called KLM

07:30 and they had a saying there called a "niat us lakusmarti [spelling]" which means if you go up there, death will come quick. I started to learn Malay before the Japs landed. I mean you picked up what they call bizarre Malay fairly quickly which was a sort of a

08:00 lingua franca but the real classical Malay takes quite a while to get your tongue around and I'd only, we had an English lady there was taking Malay classes and we had another feller who started studying Chinese and he had a book that thick with all these Chinese characters and he was teaching himself but he used to get away from these working parties as frequently as he could and get huddled in a corner with a Chinaman and start talking to him and trying to learn the language,

08:30 didn't last long of course when the Japs got onto it.

Earlier today you mentioned the comfort women?

Yep, we'd never heard about them. We didn't learn about that until just a few years ago and we know now of course that the Koreans particularly and some Chinese and Philippino women and some Dutch women from the Dutch East Indies were dragooned into service

09:00 as prostitutes like forced prostitutes for Japanese troops. The Japanese government very reluctantly admitted to it some years ago and there's been a marked effort to try and get compensation for these women but the Japanese government won't give them individual compensation. What they did do, they set up a fund that was to be of benefit for some families just the same as they would never agree to pay compensation to us as individuals because they took the tact

09:30 that when they signed the surrender document on the USS Missouri, [US Battleship] in Tokyo Harbour, that part of that surrender document was the fact that there'd be no further reparations and we got a small amount of money from Japanese assets that were confiscated in Australia, didn't amount to much but it was only two years ago when the Australian government decided to compensate all Japanese ex prisoners of war and wives, or widows rather

10:00 and prisoners of war from the Korean conflict, 25,000 dollars each but they only did that because the British government agreed to pay all their ex prisoners of war from the Japanese ex prisoners of war 10,000 pounds so the Australian government got caught on a limb rather. I mean I was part of a group called the Reparations Committee that was set up about 10 or 12 years ago in an effort to try and force the Japanese government to accept

10:30 their responsibilities and pay reparations. They went to the Human Rights Committee in Geneva or the United Nations, they went to Japan and they spoke to government bodies there. The Australian government and the RSL wouldn't support us but we spent over 10 years trying to get them to pay individual compensation which they refused to do, so we switched tact then and it was the same committee

11:00 but we set up a group called the Asia Pacific Foundation and we tried to use that as a, to give the Japanese a face saving device to pay some form of compensation. The amount of compensation we were asking for amounted to something like 600 million dollars from the Japanese government. When they refused that we set this Asia Pacific Foundation up in conjunction with the School of Tropical Medicine at Captain Cook University at Townsville

11:30 and the idea was to build a research centre in the grounds of Captain Cook University which the Japanese would build and fund and they would conduct research on tropical diseases that affect all the countries that Japan occupied during the war like the Philippines and Papua New Guinea and all those other Pacific countries, that would be of benefit to all the Pacific area but they wouldn't come at that either, so eventually we had to fold

12:00 up but these comfort women, as I say we only learnt the full truth about that a few years ago but we realise now that that train we had to unload that night up in the jungle in the rain when all these ladies got out in their kimonos and parasols and that's what they were. We thought they were Japanese prostitutes but they obviously were Korean.

Did you,

12:30 **you got some money from the government?**

Yes.

How did you feel on receiving that?

Pretty good, got myself a new car Yes.

What was the general feeling amongst the men that received it?

25 thousand dollars was the amount.

What was the general feeling amongst the men when they received it?

They were pleased to get it of course but the point was it was all too late because, you know, 80 percent of the men that were there are all dead and their wives

13:00 are dead so it was only the survivors. There was only about, at that time I think there was about 2,000 of actual ex prisoners of war and probably a few thousand widows so it's, you know, it's far too late. I mean we were pleased to get it, no doubt about that but should have been a long, long time ago.

Were you part of the surrender ceremony?

What when the Japanese surrendered?

Yeah?

No,

13:30 no. We just happened to be spectators when the Japanese officials walked in to surrender to Lord Louis Mountbatten. We just happened to be interested onlookers at that stage.

So when you came back, you got married, when did you get married?

I got married in 1946. I came home in late 1945 and got engaged straight away

14:00 and got married in March 1946 and our first child was born in I think it was the following March. She just beat the nine-month barrier. Unfortunately she was born intellectually handicapped but it wasn't obvious. I mean she was a beautiful child and we didn't notice there was anything different with her until she went to kindergarten and when all the rest of the kids were starting to do their walking sticks and colouring in, she

14:30 was just scribbling on bits of paper so she was assessed as being mildly intellectually handicapped and unfortunately in those days they didn't have any special schools. The only schools that were around were run by an organisation called the New South Wales, I forget what they called themselves now but they had lots of schools and hostels but they were for the moderately and severely intellectually handicapped

15:00 and they were trying to get some of the mildly handicapped kids into the normal schools but the only school that was available for my daughter was a residential school run by the State Government, a place called Glenfield and they had four dormitories, two for boys and two for girls and she went there but she was a real homebody and she used to break down every time. I mean we only used to be able to bring her home every two weeks for a weekend

15:30 on a Sunday rather and when it came time for her to come back she used to cry her eyes out and that later, she became a mild schizophrenic and I'm sure that that was what brought it on, being forcibly dragged away to go back to school. Anyway she was only there until she was 16. By that time we parents had realised that there was nothing available after it so we formed our own organisation and there were only 15 of us to start with and we put in a dollar each and that's the way we started.

16:00 We eventually formed an organisation and we'd had the experience of the Civilian Maimed and Limbless and the Crippled Children's Association so we got together and started our own sheltered workshop and we proved that these people, given the right assistance, could do simple tasks. That organisation grew to about 15 or 16 branches and 26 sheltered workshops and half a dozen residential care units and they

16:30 were doing jobs in those sheltered workshops that normal people, I mean quite complicated things like assembling cigarette lighters and, but they didn't do the whole lot. It was broken down and they only did a small section each and because of my position at work, I got half a dozen girls and a couple of boys a job doing normal work within the company and they were terrific employees and course the whole thing's grown now and the sheltered workshop movement is doing, you know, quite remarkable. I mean they're taking groups of these young people

17:00 into the factories and they're doing jobs in the factory under their own supervisors for specialist things that happen only once or twice a year and it's turned into quite a big movement but as I said I'm sure that, our daughter lived with us until she was 39. Then she developed a pulmonary embolism and she just dropped dead on her feet in the kitchen but, you know, we had a terrific group of people in that organisation. I mean they came

17:30 from all walks of life even, school teachers and industrialists and sales directors and, you know, steel

mill owners and everything and it was no respecter of person and we, as I say we formed all these branches with people who had like problems and we used to go around. I was also on an organisation, it was a State wide one that was coordinating the efforts of all these individual organisations and we finally convinced the State government, took us a long while

18:00 to set up these special schools. They set up two types of schools, called OA and OF and the OA schools were for the mildly handicapped and the OF were for the moderately handicapped and they couldn't do anything with the severely handicapped but each of those schools formed their own Parents and Citizen Association and we used to go out and talk to them and say "you know why don't you join us and set up a sheltered workshop?" which they did and that's how it spread to all the different parts of the State

18:30 but, you know, the group of people there were, they did everything that all the parents do for their normal children like Scouts and Girl Guides and Parents and Citizens Association, but they did so much more for their handicapped children and they were a terrific bunch of people. Still write to all them. I'm the only one of the original ones left.

What was it like the reaction

19:00 **from general public when you arrived back?**

Well they certainly made us feel very welcome but as I mentioned before, they were all advised not to ask us questions about our experiences for fear that it would upset us and that's why, you know, nobody much spoke to us about it. I mean my parents never asked me any questions about it. My girlfriend didn't and I didn't volunteer any information. I used to get a few questions occasionally from people at work but I used to just pass it aside but that was one of the features

19:30 that we, you know, I mean it was only when the newspapers started publishing some of the things that happened on the railway and in Borneo and Ambon and all these places that the general public really began to understand just how bad some of the things were.

So you got back and what, the next day like you're sitting round the dinner table?

No well I mean that was it, got back into the family but I had quite a deal of accumulated leave

20:00 and course we had our deferred pay and everything and my girlfriend had worked in this Standard Telephones and Cables [STC] making these wireless sets but during the war when the manpower came in, they had no right to go to any particular job. They were directed to go and work and she got directed to work as a clippie and she was a bus conductress and I used to spend my time travelling around with her, riding around in a bus all day and I got

20:30 sick of it. I said, "I want to go back to work" so I cut my leave short and I went into the company and said, "I want to come back to work" and I just got back into work and threw myself into, back to night school and took a course through the government Commonwealth Rehabilitation Scheme and I studied supervision and management and got a certificate and eventually broke out of the ranks and got appointed to the staff and finished up an Assistant Factory Manager so, you know,

21:00 I just threw myself into all sorts of things, Rotary.

Are your memories of war your strongest memories?

Yeah, Yes actually the war itself the actual action that I saw was rather limited. Being a mobile wireless, we didn't get into the full action. I mean we were

21:30 only working back from brigade headquarters to division headquarters so we were more or less behind the line. The only actual involvement I had was, you know, we got shelled a few times and bombed a few times and one of it was a sort of a long distance thing. We had our wireless set in this place and we looked up and the Japanese were shelling this hill and we saw all of these fellers run out of this hut and run down a hill and we thought "have a look at those blokes, look at them going like rabbits", you know

22:00 and the next thing the shells started dropping amongst us and we were down in a hole ourselves so, as I said I was involved in a few artillery barrages and one bombing. That's not very pleasant but I think probably the worst thing that I could think of that some of the infantry blokes they were involved with mortaring and the Japanese were very strong on mortars. They had mortars from the big three inch ones to the little ones they used to put on their knee and they'd fire

22:30 these little small mortar bombs and there's not much you could do about those because they go up and come straight down on top of you so I, you know, I read a fair bit about some of the artillery barrages in the First World War. The sort of artillery barrages at places like [El] Alamein and when the Russians were coming through Germany and that must have been quite horrific but I didn't have any personal effect on that so my particular active

23:00 war only lasted about six weeks and apart from those two shelling barrages and the one bombing, that's all I experienced and I didn't see my first Japanese till I woke up in hospital so after that course. That was the other thing that a lot of, in all the big battles in which the Australians fought, they got a break. They were in the line for a certain time and then they got relieved and went back and had rest and recuperation

23:30 but in the battles of Malaya and Singapore that was 24 hours a day, every day for six weeks and there was no such thing as getting relieved and going back and have a rest and then going back in the line. It was there all the time and of course after the capitulation we were faced with our Japanese captors 24 hours a day, seven days a week for three and a half years so, you know, in the other big actions

24:00 you faced the enemy for a certain period of time and then you didn't see them again whereas we never lost sight of them for three and a half years.

What did you think of the other services?

You know, I mean the things that happened in Greece and Crete of course, Greece was an absolute debacle. That was another thing where politics came into it and Churchill sent all these troops into Greece knowing that they didn't have a prayer and

24:30 of course Cyprus or Crete was another one. They got, you know, the Germans sent in the parachute battalion there and cleaned up Crete. We were extremely proud of the 9th Division in Alamein of course and the Rats of Tobruk, I mean I only just finished reading an article which I sent over to a friend of mine that the Australians of course were under the

25:00 command of the British Generals in the First World War. They weren't allowed to fight separately and it was only when Sir John Monash became the head of the five Australian divisions and he had quite different ideas to the British. They were always fighting one war with the tactics of the previous war and they believed, well so did the Germans, these head-on mass charges in a machine gun fire and you know, I mean 60,000 people killed in one day was just a butchery. Course when Monash, he wasn't going to have any

25:30 of that. He developed a tactic where he concentrated the whole of his force on a very narrow sector and they broke through and the five Australian divisions represented one tenth of the 50 allied divisions on the western front, yet they captured 25 percent of the territory, 23 percent of the prisoners and about 30 percent of all the artillery and Monash was so well regarded that King George came out and knighted him in the field

26:00 but people like General Haig and Joffre [General Haig visits General Joffre (1916)] and all those others, they wouldn't recognise him, wouldn't give him any credit so, you know, when the Australians fought individually as a group with their own commanders they really showed things the way they should be done. I mean when the Americans sent their troops over in the First World War, he would not allow, they wanted to be, the British and the French wanted the fresh American troops to be thrown in with the French and British and General Pershing [US General John J. Pershing. ... 1860-1948] said, "no way,

26:30 no way" he said, "my troops are not going to go into action until they're fully trained" so they put a lot of the American troops with the Australians in the trenches to learn a bit about trench warfare and then when they'd had a bit of experience General Pershing took command and they fought as an American group and they didn't get involved with the British Generals at all. Now there's a lot of criticism and probably justified about the Americans that they didn't join the Second World War until it was just about finished and they made

27:00 billions and billions of dollars by supplying equipment. In the Second World War they didn't get involved until Pearl Harbour but once they do get involved and they really get going, they showed their metal and my father used to be a bit cynical about the American effort but in reading what they did in Polygon Wood [On 26 September 1917 as part of what is generally called the 3rd Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) the battle for Polygon Wood] and Bullecourt at the tail end of the First World War they showed their metal there too, particularly the American marines.

27:30 **When did you enjoy the war?**

Did I enjoy it?

When did you enjoy it?

When did I enjoy it? I didn't enjoy the war at all. I enjoyed what happened before the war and I enjoyed what happened after the war but as far as the actual war itself there was really no enjoyment. I mean I can remember coming, one stage we were retreating back down through Malaya getting towards Singapore and the Japanese bombed an Indian

28:00 hospital and set it on fire and you could smell the burning flesh and that's, you know, there's nothing enjoyable in that sort of thing.

How did you cope when you saw things like that?

I s'pose I was young enough then to be able to

28:30 cope with it. I mean it wasn't pleasant but you just carried on and, you know, it's part of war. That's just what happens in war. You do what you're told to do and do what you're trained to do. It's only when you get older and you reflect back on it that it hits you.

Did you ever tell your children?

No

29:00 they probably read a bit about it. I've spoken a little bit but nothing expansive. Nothing in great detail.

Have they ever asked?

No, no just let things be. One of the first times I spoke about it and my son happened to be there and I think my daughter as

29:30 well, daughter in law rather, I went to Perth for my grandson's high school graduation and my daughter in law wrote over and said, "One of the teachers at the school had asked would I give them a talk" and I said, "yes I would" so I gave them a talk and I was fairly detailed, particularly about things like tropical ulcers and some of the things that happened on the railway and I broke

30:00 down a couple of times but they had a reporter there from the local Perth paper, West Australian and he took some photos and he came up after me and said, "do you mind if I publish this?" so he published it in the paper the next day and it came out on the front page the speech that I'd made and my photo and then I had a ring from the local ABC announcer and said, "would I be prepared to go in and be interviewed over the air?" which I did so that was really,

30:30 that's about 40 years after the war. Since then I've spoken a couple of times to some high schools and I spoke to the, our branch gave three big shields for annual competition amongst the cadets in the Southport School Cadet Corps. They've got a army, navy and air force cadet group and we were invited over there to talk to their assembly one year and

31:00 I gave a fairly detailed talk there but I got invited to speak to a high school in one of the suburbs of the Gold Coast and it was a lady head mistress and she invited me out to talk and she also invited some of the Vietnam veterans. They turned up there with their bushy beards and their big Harley Davidson's and I must say that the chap that gave a talk on behalf of the Vietnam Veterans gave a terrific address.

31:30 Anyway I gave my talk and next year we were invited back again but I rang up the head mistress to find out when I was supposed to get there. The deputy head mistress answered the phone and she said, "I don't believe in that sort of thing." She said, "I hate people talking about the glorification of war and I refuse to let my students hear" and I was flabbergasted. I felt like saying "if it hadn't have been for the people that you're talking about, you'd probably be talking Japanese

32:00 today." Anyway she just wiped us off, didn't want anything to do with us, wouldn't let us go back to the school. I felt like writing to the head mistress and saying, you know, "is this the sort of thing that goes on in your school these days?" but she was one of those people who were a pacifist and just didn't want people talking about what happened in the war. That wiped me a bit but

Do you come across those people often?

You occasionally get 'em Yes but that's the worst example that I've seen. I mean there was

32:30 a group in Sydney and another group in Melbourne at one stage and you mightn't have been old enough to remember this but they were mostly lesbians and they formed a group against women against rape in war and they demanded, demanded to be allowed to march as part of the Anzac Day march. Of course they got refused. There was no way they'd get permission to march with all their banners and that sort of thing so they were told that they could march through city of Sydney and Melbourne

33:00 after the Anzac Day march was officially over so after the Anzac Day march I met my wife and we were going to the pictures in George Street in Sydney and here's all these lesbian women come along with their big flag and it was pouring with rain. They were absolutely drowned but the next day I read a newspaper and it had a photo of one of my colleagues in our unit in Melbourne who was a pretty volatile sort of a bloke and he'd been to the Anzac Day march and when he came, after the march

33:30 he came across these women marching up Melbourne and they had banners and he did his crumpet and he raced over and he tore the banner out of their hand and ripped it up and somebody took his photo and I said, "oh there's Geoff McDonald."

Do you ever dream about the war?

Yes it intrudes, it intrudes. You

34:00 can't help it. I mean when I went back to work there was one place that we worked at. It had a peculiar smell attached to it. I don't know whether it was something to do with the cardboard they used in the manufacture but it was quite a significant smell and as soon as I first smelt that, my mind immediately went back to this ulcer dysentery ward and, you know, I've spoken to psychiatrists about this and the sense of smell

34:30 is so typical and this happens a lot with the Vietnam veterans. There are certainly smells that I get now that immediately take me back 50, 60 years and, you know, it doesn't matter where you go or what you're doing. You can read something in a book. You can see something on TV or on the pictures and it immediately has a relevance to something that happened during those three and a half years. I mean there's no way in the world you can suppress that sort of thing and if you suppress it too much, it

35:00 affects you and, you know, when I reflect back on some of the things that happened, I used to have a, lose the crumpet and get angry at times and, you know, and certain things that would blow up and I'm sure that's the sort of reaction from bottling all these things up. You know you get a certain repressed, you know, what they call now PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] and you're talking about dreams. I mean that's

35:30 inevitable, you know, you just can't force that down. You can get involved and you can be deeply involved during the daytime in a whole heap of things but when you're on your own or like when you go to bed at night, that's it, you just can't control what happens so yes those things still come up.

Any reoccurring dreams?

Nothing spectacular, nothing specific. No it's just

36:00 I mean there are, Yes I'd say there are one or two things that are specific that sort of recur. I mean mostly about working as a, you know, these people with ulcers and dysentery and amputations and that sort of thing. That occurs occasionally.

Would there be any singular element of the war that you remember most?

Well as far as the actual war itself

36:30 is concerned, you know, there are certain things that I remember there quite vividly. Just prior to getting wounded, just after being wounded, that incident in Alexandria Hospital when the Japs rampaged through the hospital, that's paramount that one, but bombing of the Indian hospital. That's another one that's a bit paramount and certain working,

37:00 work on specific sections of the railway. There was one night that we were moving from one camp to the other and they had this yak cart with this poor old yak in it carrying all the heavy stuff and my mate and I were assigned to stay with this yak cart and help pull the wheels out when it got bogged in the mud and the rest of the party had gone. They were hours in front of us and it got

37:30 dusk and we were all covered in mud and the poor old yak was bogged and the yak cart was bogged and the Japs flogging this poor old yak trying to get it to pull and we're on the wheels and these gnats came, you know these little midges, a whole cloud of them and they just enveloped us and they got in your eyes, in your ears, in your nose, in your mouth. They'd just about drive you mad and we were screaming and yelling at one another trying to get out of this. We didn't get into camp some hours after dark but that was

38:00 one particular instance that, you know, was pretty bad, getting attacked by these midges or whatever they were.

Is there anything that we haven't covered today?

I don't know? What have we covered? We've covered so much Yes.

I'll give you a moment to think about that, if there's something that you can think of?

No it's all right.

38:30 I can't think what else we haven't covered. The visit to the cemeteries is pretty traumatic. I mean I've been a couple of times to the big cemetery in Singapore, that Changi cemetery and the really big one at Kanchanaburi which is called Kanburi

39:00 for short in Thailand and I mean when you walk around the gravestones there and you see the names of so many people you remember and the one we saw in the Philippines in America the big American cemetery. I mean that's just outstanding. You ever seen that show called Hawaii Five O? Well the opening scene of Hawaii Five O the camera flashes round on the entrance to this big cemetery on Honolulu and when you've been in

39:30 and looked at that and they've got great big black marble walls there with a depiction of all the battles in the Pacific with the American fleet. They don't say too much what the Australians did, it's all American but it's so well done and when you go to places like France and you go to the cemeteries from the First World War, particularly at Verdun. I mean Verdun was an absolute slaughterhouse for both Germans and

40:00 French and the French cemetery at Verdun covers acres and acres of ground but we had a photo, or at least my mother in law did, had a photo of her brother, my wife's uncle and he got killed in 1917. The photo she had was just a black and white photo with a simple wooden cross with her brother's name burnt on it, so when we did our trip through Europe, she asked us if we'd try and find this

40:30 place so we took the photo with us and he was killed at a place called Arras so we went to Arras and the little hotel we stayed in just happened to be right alongside the Australian War Graves Commission which was next door. I said, "look at this" so we walked in there and we saw the lass behind the counter and we showed her the photo and she took this, they've got all these massive great volumes and she pulled it down and she found this chap's name and he said, "oh yes

41:00 but he’s not buried in Arras, he’s buried in Ypres” which is just across the border into Belgium in a little ceremony, a little farm cemetery and what they did, they had all these little groups of British and Australian servicemen who’d been killed and they buried ‘em on these farms and they’d erect proper marble headstones and so forth and they’d pay the farmer so much a year to look after them. They’re beautifully kept. Anyway after

41:30 some trouble we found this little cemetery and at the entrance they’ve got a nice little gate and they’ve got a little thing there, alcove with a book in it and you can turn the book up and find the name and actually the site of the grave, couldn’t have been any more than about 20 or so grave stones there. Anyway we found it and I’ve got a photo of my wife standing behind the grave of her uncle but those visits to cemeteries are particularly poignant, particularly if you happen to have friends buried there.

Tape 9

00:46 **Were there any artists that you can recall in any of the camps?**

Oh yeah. Probably one of the most famous was a chap named George Sprod.

01:00 You remember oh you I keep forgetting that you're in the younger group. 'The Girls of St Trinians'? Oh well he no George Searle that was he was the one that was involved in that. He was a very famous British artist there and we had a chap named George Sprod who also used to do quite a lot of cartoons about the when we were prisoners-of-war and one of the most famous was we had a senior officer who was a shall

01:30 remain nameless who rather disgraced himself. He sort of crumbled in front of the he wouldn't have anything to do with the Japanese. He left it to his junior officers and he wasn't very highly regarded but anyway when he was coming home, he had a cache of tins of food and what not. They threw it overboard and he saw all his stuff floating around the ship and he went

02:00 quite off his mind but they had a cartoon of him getting off this ship and he's the only one and except for one little face peering over the railing on the ship, much like those American things 'Kilroy was here' so forth. The reporter said, “Where's all the men?" and he replied "They died that I might live to tell the story." It was quite a savage piece of satire. No, there was

02:30 there were lots of very good artists. I had a I was just showin' your colleague there a couple of pencil sketches and watercolours done of me after during the prisoner-of-war years there. So there were some good artists actually and one of the most outstanding ones, there was a British artist and he got very sick and he was in either Roberts Barracks or Selerang Barracks and while he was in there and he was recuperating he painted these murals on the wall and they were religious background with

03:00 portions of scripture from the Bible and so forth and I think it went must have been forty years after the war they asked him to come back and retouch them up and we saw them on the last trip we did to Singapore and it's quite a tourist attraction now and he got sort of world recognition for the quality of that those paintings on the wall there.

Did the different buildings within

(UNCLEAR) the Russian front apparently the fantastic

03:30 **religious paintings inside one of the underground bunkers and apparently people used to go and visit this bunker just in awe of this fantastic artwork this guy done and that's probably just (UNCLEAR)**

I was gonna ask you, did the different barracks in the camps have names as well did they?

Oh yes. Singapore was a permanent defence station and British regiments used to rotate through there.

04:00 Just before we arrived the Seaforth Highlanders had been there and they'd disgraced themselves and they had a riot in Singapore. A particular street called Lavender Street, which was where all the brothels were, and they just about wrecked that so they got sent up to the Khyber Pass in as a punishment, which turned out not to be a punishment at all but each time each regiment when they were in Singapore for whatever period they were there had their own barracks. There were the three that I can remember

04:30 were Tanglin Barracks, that's where I was when I got wounded, Roberts Barracks. Oh Tanglin Barracks was in Singapore Central. Roberts Barracks and Selerang Barracks were adjacent to one another out on the Changi Peninsula and they were the barracks that we occupied when we went out from after the capitulation. So they did have the names, yes.

What about say in the prisoner-of-war camps? Did you did any of the huts and that have

05:00 **different names there or**

No, no. You only knew it by the name of the camp. There were two different designations. A Force, that came down through Burma, their camps were what they call kilo camps and they were either ten kilo, thirty kilo, fifty kilo or fifty five kilos. Ours were all named after the local district, which was Taimonta, Kon Koita, Neiki, Tumaneiki [?], Camaneiki [?],

05:30 Tanbaya and further down, Kamburi. Oh I can't think of the same. I've got a map of whole list there somewhere but on F Force and Don Forces the camps in Thailand were named after the local area. In Burma they were just named after the kilos from Thanbyuzayat.

Were there any general sort of nicknames for different things

06:00 **or different people**

Oh yeah.

Within the camps and things like that?

That chap and I mentioned one before the Japanese one of the Japanese when we were building this road was called 'The Black Prince' and there was another one was he was called 'The Boy Bastard'. 'BB' for short, and his offsider was called 'BBB' – 'The Boy Bastard's Brother'. What were some of the others they had?

06:30 Oh 'The Icecream Man' of course. We mentioned him. Of course Tojo was constantly referred to as Tojo. I don't think the Japanese ever got (UNCLEAR) of that, because that would have been pretty bad, insulting the Tojo. Otherwise they were just known by their names as either Sato or I can't think of the name, oh Mariama. Mariama, that's the name of the bloke

07:00 that was knockin' all the people down that were singing. He eventually got hung as a war criminal. He was a bad sod that fellow. He fancied himself a bit of a boxer and he used to you know practice on the blokes. Yeah, Mariama. Muriama. Muriama, that's it. Mm.

What about were there nicknames for your own guys? For the doctors and the cooks and things like that?

Oh yes. One of the better known doctors, who did a fantastic job, was a Dr Rowley Richards. He was just referred to as Rowley.

07:30 The doctor Mills, the one that was he was the he was in one of the field ambulance units, he was attached to my unit up on the railway. He was just known as Roy. There were two Carls. There was a Lloyd Carl and a Frank Carl. I don't think they were any relation. Ah one of the doctors, I don't know whether he was a doctor when he went away but he certainly became a doctor. Highly regarded. He was in charge of the gynaecological or the maternity ward in one of the

08:00 big hospitals in Brisbane and he got an award before he, he was one of the group that got picked up in Borneo as part of this conspiracy and there were two types of punishment or torture that some of they were subjected to. One was to put chopsticks in their ears and penetrate their ear drums. The worst one, and this is one of our officers, I think he's in Melbourne now, was subjected to, was to put raw rice down their throat. Keep poking raw rice down until their stomach became

08:30 extended distended with raw rice then put a hose in their mouth and pour water on it and of course when rice gets wet it extends and of course it's absolutely agonising and it got so bad that part of his bowel protruded out through his rectum and he never ever really recovered about that, but this particular doctor, Dr Esler was his name, he became involved with the Japanese language after the war and he had a Japanese computer. We went up to see him one day and it had

09:00 all the writing was in Japanese characters and it had a Japanese thesaurus that when you weren't sure, you highlighted this character and you got half a dozen other characters with the same or similar meanings. So he went back to Japan and he was asked to lecture about his experiences and as a prisoner-of-war and he wrote several books and he retired not so long from this hospital in Brisbane and unfortunately he died about twelve months to two years ago.

09:30 **When the Japanese finally did surrender, did you suddenly get an influx of Red Cross parcels or mail or anything like that?**

Oh they released some Red Cross parcels. Not a hell of a lot but that's when we started getting some mail, about a week or two or so after and that's when we were allowed to write and of course we were writing letters home like crazy.

And do you know at that stage was the mail still censored or was it pretty

No, no. The mail wasn't censored then.

Were you told by

10:00 **your family about receiving that first letter?**

Yeah. Yeah.

How did they feel when they

Oh, it didn't tell 'em anything you know. I mean that was all all a load of rubbish you know. A big propaganda thing.

What about Dutch? Did you

Yeah.

Have any Dutch people up there?

Yeah a lot. Quite a lot. They got picked up in Java and Sumatra. Ah the funny thing about the Dutch, when I say funny, if a Dutch man married an Indonesian woman she be got Dutch citizenship

10:30 and if a Dutch woman had an affair with an Indonesian man then the offspring were became a Dutch citizen and they had lots of those sort of Dutch-Indonesian mix who called themselves Dutchmen. They had a with their background in Java and Sumatra we unkindly called them offal eaters because they would be eating stuff that we wouldn't touch. You know they'd

11:00 be eating, they'd clean 'em up and cook 'em of course, but they'd be eating the entrails of the cattle and all that sort of thing. I mean it's you know you have 'em in sausages and all that but some of the Dutchman who'd been in the tropics for a long while were sort of pharmacists. They were making medicines out of certain ah herbs and tree plants that they knew about and some of them even made anaesthetics but it's quite distasteful but we never tried it, not that I'm aware of any of our blokes doing it, but they used to eat the maggots out

11:30 of the latrines. Not as they were but they'd bring 'em back to camp and they'd wash them thoroughly and they'd cook them and they'd be full of protein and I know a chap on the Gold Coast who was an internee and he was interned with his mother and he said his first job every morning when he was about ten years old was to go down the latrine and get a bucket of maggots and bring 'em back to the cook house to be cleaned and cooked. So there's a certain practicality about the things that they did but

12:00 we found the sort of offal they were eating a bit distasteful and hence their nickname but we had a good relationship with some of the Dutch officers. We didn't get to know them a lot because they were separated. I mean we weren't working with them and we only had a fleeting contact with 'em at various times. We had one Dutch officer who was part of that incident on the Changi aerodrome when the

12:30 with 'The Icecream Man.' He couldn't say bleeding. He was saying bluuding bluding blooding.

And when you were starting to be beefed up so to speak

Yeah.

Was that a slow process? Like did they ration it out to you so you could be brought up gradually?

Oh yes. Yeah. Well that was one of the things that we were warned specifically not to eat big quantities. Eat often but eat small and of course you know you can imagine

13:00 the temptation to get stuck into all sorts of things but we I fairly responsible. I don't remember getting any sort of massive great feasts or orgies but we certainly picked up, it's remarkable how the body picks up so quickly you know and I mean you see photos of me when I got off the boat in Sydney you'd say "What? He was a prisoner-of-war? Rubbish. Don't believe it" but people were putting on weight by the kilos and they were we had a probably a long

13:30 trip back home by sea and we put on weight like crazy.

Did you ever feel like that trip home was actually lengthened so you could have

Oh

Time to fatten up?

Could have been. Could have been. I don't think they delayed it specifically. I mean we stopped at Darwin for probably two nights while they made the transfers between the two ships and then we took off and it was just a sort of a leisurely trip 'round the north coast and east coast of Australia down to Sydney.

Can you remember at any stage with any of your mates fantasising about what you'd eat

14:00 **when you got a chance?**

Oh I'm glad you touched on that. You've got no idea the things way we used to fantasise. The things we used to dream up. I dreamed up a special dish that I was going to cook when I came home and it involved slicing a length of sandwich bread right across the top, lengthwise, taking all the middle of out it and then filling it up with layers of mince meat and peas and beans and carrots and more meat and it

14:30 had a layer of about that thick inside this thing then putting the top back on and baking it in the oven. I didn't get 'round to doing it but I did cook a meal for the family. My parents and my brothers were quite good. They didn't say anything about it, but I had a maiden aunt and she kept telling me how beautiful it

was and actually it was bloody shocking and I made a sort of a vegetable meat and vegetable rissole. It was about that size and about that thick and she waded her

15:00 way through this thing saying oh but you're right. I mean we used to fantasise about food like nobody I mean that's all you used to talk about. I mean sex was right down the bottom. Hardly anybody ever talked I mean it the subject raised its head naturally at different times but food was the prime subject that you know that we talked about and we got sent with this Dr Woolf that I mentioned, that Indian doctor, we got sent from Tanbaya

15:30 hospital camp to a little Burmese village to get some supplies. The Jap guard we had with us was fairly docile and he allowed us to go into this little hut and the doctor we had some fried eggs. The only thing we had to eat with was a pair of chopsticks and if you've ever tried to eat a fried egg with chopsticks, it doesn't work too well.

I'm surprised you were restrained enough to use utensils at all myself.

Well it got shovelled it in the finish

16:00 but

So can you recall perhaps what the best thing was that you ate at you know when you first got back and

Well the Malays used to cook a dish called sweet potato fritters and they were delightful. It was sweet potato cooked and then sliced lengthwise and dipped in batter and then fried and it was a delightful dish. I mean it would probably taste better than what it actually was but

16:30 and also banana fritters. They used to make banana fritters and the curry that before the war we tried that Indian curry but that was far too hot for me. I couldn't stand that. They used to make a dish called sambal and it's a sort of a rice, a sauce, and these friends that I spoke about, these Portuguese, and they used to make them from all the remnants from the heads of the ducks and all that sort of thing and whatever flesh was left

17:00 over mixed with chillies and it's like the hot sauces they use with the curries and you put it in the rice to give it a bit of flavour. First time I tried this sambal I thought my eyes were gonna fall out, it was that hot, but we ate we had a lot of stuff that we'd never even heard about or seen about before. When you go into the Singapore markets and of course of a nighttime they set up all these little stalls and the smells of the different dishes, the Indians and Chinese

17:30 and Malays, and it is it assaults the senses but the food tasted very well.

Do you think in any way that the whole food thing has affected the way you eat?

Oh undoubtedly. I mean I just cannot stand to see things wasted. I mean I'll force myself to eat food that I really don't need rather than leave it there and I always was a big eater and I still eat a well I mean I only have a plate of cereal and a

18:00 banana for breakfast and probably an apple and a glass of water for lunch and I cook myself a full meal at night and I'm beginning to find now that what I usually cook is beginning to be a bit too much. I'm gonna have to cut down the quantity. You know 'cause you don't need as much as you did but when I went back to work at one stage I was in charge of four different departments and each of those departments worked three shifts and I used to have to spread myself I used to work day shift one day and another day I'd come in late

18:30 and I'd go half day shift and half afternoon shift. Another time I'd go in after midnight for the night shift. Then stay on for half the day shift and part of the agreement when we started shift work, the company had to provide everybody with a taxi at home after midnight and they also had to provide them with a full meal and they had a big canteen there and they used to put on some terrific meals. I mean they'd get a three-course meal. Soup and chops and cutlets and steak and all the vegetables and I went on there this night and these

19:00 people are whinging and moaning. I said, “What's up?" "Look at this rubbish. You wouldn't feed it to your dog" and I said, “What?" and the strange thing about it was, that's the same meal that they used to serve on the day shift and on the day shift people used to have to buy it and you'd get no complaints but because these people on the night shift were getting it for nothing, they used to moan their heads off about it. Couldn't understand it.

Did you say anything to them

Oh not really. Just

With regard

Get yourself in too much trouble.

Did you find yourself ever

19:30 **saying things to your kids? You know saying you know "You don't know what (UNCLEAR) is" and stuff like that?**

No. No our kids were pretty good. We didn't have any trouble with them with their food but the lady next door, boy she used to have a pile of trouble. We used to hear her yelling and screaming at her kids and if they didn't eat it at breakfast they got it for lunch and they didn't eat it for lunch they got it for dinner at night and my sister-in-law was the same. Her mother was a real old straight-laced Victorian type lady and the daughter, that's my sister-in-law, was a schoolteacher

20:00 and they had nine kids and it was traumatic to go to their place. She'd sit at the head of the table with a ruler alongside her and any intransigence or (UNCLEAR) bang bang across the back of the hand and they'd have to sit there and force this food down and you could see it was painful. Oh dear oh dear. No we didn't have any trouble with kids. We didn't force them if they didn't want it.

What was the quality of water like in the prisoner camps?

Quality of?

Water?

Ah not real good. It depends where

20:30 you were. On Singapore Island and in Changi you could drink the water with impunity because it came from a dam and it was treated. They had the British treatment plants. If you got outside there you only drank boiled water. If you drank water from some of the rivers and streams up you know you put yourself at risk from cholera or dengue or you know. I mean dengue and malaria and were rampant and malaria, I had several doses of malaria. Luckily they were what they call

21:00 I only had the, there are about three different types of malaria. There's the one is recurrent and once you get it you can get it treated and it keeps coming back. The other one's malaria that once you get it and you get it treated with quinine it goes away until you get reinfected and the other one is the worst type is I see it's BT is the recurrent one. MT is the sort of standard one that and MT is the worst one. That's the one that affects your brain and if you get a dose of MT malaria you can just sort of kiss it goodbye

21:30 but it's a it's a shocking complaint. The way you feel. I mean the sight of food wants to make you sick. Even when you're starving you nearly starve to death. Somebody puts a place of rice in front of you, you couldn't eat it.

I've heard of cases of even the Japanese officers and that being treated by Australian doctors that

Oh that would happen. Oh yeah. Yeah.

Can you recall any instances of that that you saw?

I can't recall any but I know that it happened. I know they would come to the Australian

22:00 doctors to be treated. They had their own doctors but they weren't always there, whereas we had doctors on every force that went away.

What about have you had any long term health problems? Sort of

Me?

Yeah.

Oh yes. Had a few. I had a few stomach problems. I had a bit of bleeding at one stage and I've had a couple of colonoscopies. I haven't got any major problems.

22:30 I after the war for a while I was pretty badly affected by this wound on the back of the neck, because it shot away all the nerves and that under all that side of my head is just dead. There's no feeling to it at all and it got a certain amount of I suppose you'd probably call it arthritis or something like that but that was the worst. Nothing I didn't finish up getting what they're now known as Strongyloides. It's a sort of a something like hookworm and it gets

23:00 in the system and the body breaks out in rashes and nobody in Australia knew anything about it and a friend of mine had it and he was telling the doctor about it. He said, “Don't know what you're talking about. Load of rubbish, garbage." Anyway some years afterwards he saw an article in the British Medical Journal, the Lancet, and they explained about this Strongyloides and he took it up to his doctor and said, “There. That's what I've been trying to tell you for years." So they developed a treatment for it and it was a treatment that lasted for some weeks and it killed the strongyloidie

23:30 germ itself but it wouldn't kill the eggs. So you had to wait 'til the eggs hatched then go through the treatment a second time and it was pretty severe I believe and when we were given a lecture about it I said, “Well do you think we ought to go and get treated anyway prophylactically?" He said, “I wouldn't advise it. It's too unpleasant." So I didn't get anything like that.

But you were all treated for hookworm?

Yeah.

Mm.

Yeah. Oh we were all treated for hookworm. That was standard treatment when

What else? Were there any other generic sort of treatments that you got when you

24:00 **returned home that they would be trying to cover you for?**

Ah gingivitis. I had that because of a couple of my teeth fell out what not. Ah I didn't have any, well I thought they were but they turned out they weren't recurrence of malaria. I got what is called ah irritated bowel syndrome. I've got that and

24:30 I've got a list of about a half a dozen complaints that the Department have recognised as war-caused. They don't affect me that much. I can still get around. I played golf until two years ago. I still play bowls a few days a week, so I've got a lot to be thankful for.

Did at any stage when you had your daughter, who was handicapped, did you ever think that there was a

I didn't, but my uncle did. He asked me. He said, “Do you think that

25:00 the privations you suffered and the lack of vitamins and anything had any cause in your daughter being handicapped?" and I said, “I don't know" but when I thought about it, the number of people with whom I was involved in that organisation and they didn't go to war and their background was such that they you know they were fairly wealthy some of them and I think there must have been something else. Some genetic disorder. I'm not sure.

25:30 **And did you ever see yourself as being you mentioned before sometimes you used to get angry.**

Yeah.

Did you find in general did you feel like you were a more angry person or a more mellow person or did it (UNCLEAR)?

Well I'd say quite frankly and honestly that that experience gave me a set of values that I would not otherwise have had and I mean that's when I say you know I mean the value of food, the value of friendship, the value of keeping yourself healthy and looking after yourself. Those sorts of values and a certain

26:00 spiritual value too, there's no doubt about that, but there as I said as I mentioned before there were things that I pretty short fuse and I used to get upset so quickly. I mean I used to try and control it. It didn't affect my work. I never did it there but at home and even now you know I get so frustrated so easy and so quickly and I thinking back I never had that sort of a problem when I was before the war. I was pretty placid and easy going but not after I came back.

26:30 **Has anybody been able to explain what causes it?**

Oh yeah. I mean I had a couple of sessions oh I've had quite a few sets actually with a psychiatrist. I had a very bad time when my daughter died and my wife died. There was a particular psychiatrist who looked after my daughter and he was quite good so when she died I went to see him a couple of times and he was quite helpful. Then the Department sent me as a matter of routine to see

27:00 a psychiatrist a couple of times and I had a couple of tearful sessions with him and it was only in the last six months ago that I was sent to this particular psychiatrist who diagnosed me as having post traumatic stress disorder and all the things that I were just talking to you about, it all fell into place. So he wrote a fairly strong report to the Department, which they have now accepted, but you know I

27:30 we never knew anything about that. It was just strange to us. We'd hear about all these blokes coming home from Vietnam and getting TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] pensions at the drop of a hat and everything. You know I'd say "What the bloody hell did those blokes do?" I said to a friend of mine once I said, “Is there any Vietnam veteran who hasn't got a TPI pension"? I said, “I know they had a tough time" and I said, “Surely they couldn't have all" and I said, “and then some of them must have worked in the orderly room and the cook house" but they got treated disgracefully and our and I mean it was just unbelievable the way they were treated

28:00 and all the things they went through. They were forced to go there. They came home. There was no welcome home parade, no parades through the streets. They just brought them home in midnight on a plane and said, “Hereya. Goodbye. We don't want to know ya" and they were it was disgraceful. I mean it was only when they had those big Vietnamese marches and a few years ago that they were really began to be recognised and I mean my son-in-law was in Vietnam in the with the American army and he never talks about it. I mean he came out to Australia R & R [Rest and Recreation] leave twice. That's where he met my daughter

28:30 and of course he came went back he went back to college and got a degree in hotel management and catering, came out to Australia and got a job as the restaurant manager at the Hyatt Kingsgate at Kings

Cross and my daughter was working there in the accounts department and that's how they got together and he said he'd never ever go back to America while Richard Nixon was [US] President. 'Course when Richard Nixon was forced to resign they got married and hoofed it off back to America but you know I mean

29:00 those marches through Vietnam when these people were in there throwin' buckets of blood on people that really got up our craw. They didn't go there voluntarily. They were forced to go there and my son was really cracking his neck to get to Vietnam and his ballot came out in those birthday ballots you know and that and he went to and he was a very fit boy. I mean he played A grade squash. He got a he was a cricket blue, a rugby blue, a rugby league blue and an athlete at school. Fit as a fiddle

29:30 and he had a friend who was coaching the rugby team he played for in Victoria and he was in the commandos or the what are they air service regiment and he said, “Don't worry. We'll get you in. We'll have you jumpin' out of helicopters" and he was really lookin' forward to it and he went for a medical examination. He got knocked back and he said he just wouldn't believe it. He said to the doctor "You're kidding?" The doctor went "No" and he said, “What's wrong with me?" He said, “You've got an anal fissure." He said, “If you got accepted in the army and that got infected you'd be in real

30:00 trouble." So that the son wouldn't didn't want to accept it. He said, “Well I'll send you to a specialist." So he got sent to a specialist and the specialist confirmed it that he had an anal fissure. So the wife and I were delighted that he did. I mean we wouldn't have said anything if he'd a gone but we were delighted when he got knocked back.

So did you find talking about your experiences did it did that help in any way?

Ah I didn't talk about it.

No, eventually when you

Ah

30:30 **Finally spoke about it?**

Yeah. Although as you've probably seen during the interview I still find it difficult to talk about it because I get upset pretty quickly and I I've given a couple of talks where I couldn't carry on you know. I mean if I talk about the light hearted side of it it's all right but you start talkin' about the more serious details of it you choke up. I mean I've seen so many of my friends the same. They just one chap that died recently, I took over

31:00 his job as the secretary, he was a British commando and he really had it tough and he was a tough man but he was like a baby. I mean when he got emotional he just burst into tears and couldn't carry on and there's quite a lot of that I've seen.

But do you think in retrospect that it probably wasn't the best idea to bury it for

I'd say that's right for sure. Yes. You know you suppress these things. Doesn't do you any good.

31:30 **How did you see your war experiences affecting your life in general?**

I think it affected my wife. I mean she never said anything but she had to put up I mean there was never any physical violence but she had to put up with some pretty bad mood swings with me and some outbursts of temper. I mean she just let it ride over her head. Didn't wear it all. The kids were never affected because it didn't happen to them. Didn't show them at all. I mean there was never any problems with them but my

32:00 wife, when I look back I think she I gave her a pretty rough time on occasions.

And how about your work life?

No that didn't affect me there because I got so deeply immersed and involved in my job that that's about all I had time for when I was at work and of course outside of work I got involved in so many different organisations that it kept me you know really going.

So do you think you

32:30 **probably worked so hard and been involved in so many things to just to keep busy and**

Oh that's right. That's exactly right. Yeah.

What about Anzac Day? What do you think on Anzac Day?

Well when I was a kid we used to go to with Dad to stand on the sidelines and watch the Anzac Day marches and we were all fairly reverent and we used to stand quietly by while they played 'The Last Post' and it didn't have a great deal of meaning. Even when I joined the army it was

33:00 traditional that 'The Last Post' is played at sundown when the flag comes down and you know it at special remembrance services. Didn't have that much effect on me but during the war, during the prisoners-of-war when people died and they played 'The Last Post' and even now I can't hear it played without gettin' real upset. I mean it has a very special meaning when you've been involved with the

reason why 'The Last Post' is played and why

33:30 it and how it's played and it's a it really gets to you. Of course it just brings all these things flooding back.

How good was it marching with your dad and your brothers?

Ah well I've only marched with 'em once and that was when we marched with Dad but the big thrill was when I marched with my two grandchildren in Perth and they marched with me through the streets of Perth and my son was

34:00 runnin' up and down the sidelines takin' photos of us. That was great. I'd dearly love to have my American grandson march with me. He came out to Australia with his mother and father when we had a very special remembrance service down at Twin Towns RSL [NSW /QLD Border towns Tweed Heads /Coolangatta]. They allowed him to take part in the ceremony and he laid a wreath and he stood beside me while I gave my speech and that was but he he's military mad. He anything he

34:30 can get his hands on about the military. Even when he was a kid that high he used to play with his GI Joe and oh he and his cousin used to play out in the sand on the beach diggin' trenches. So it's not surprising that he joined the army and when he made they had a recruiting sergeant came to the high school and he expressed some interest and my daughter said, “The next thing we know there's this American recruiting sergeant in full dress uniform, black pants, red stripe, white hat, white gloves coming

35:00 and saying "I've come to sign your son up"" and he said my son-in-law said, “What? Hold the phone here a minute" and he said, “Well he expressed some interest in it" and my son-in-law said, “He hasn't finished high school yet." He said, “And then he's gotta go to university." Anyway they eventually let him join and he joined and he did his basic training and he's a very good athlete and he got a scholarship for both track work and a marine scholarship, which is helping through the university but I wanted

35:30 to get him over to the war museum in Canberra and I kept telling him that they had a fantastic display there about the Vietnamese war and I said, “Your Dad was there and you'll be able to see all these hidden tunnels." We got down to Canberra and the big one was closed down for renovations and the only part that was open was on the First World War and he was mad keen to see the midget submarines and when I enquired about that and they said, “Oh they're in storage in Sydney." So I'm dying to get him back out again to take him down to see the war museum

36:00 because he'd really lap that up.

Has he heard your story?

Ah pardon?

Has he heard you story?

I don't know. I don't think I've spoken to anybody about it in America. I've spoken to schools there but not about I've spoken to them about Australia. Gave them a big talk about Australia. No when you tell 'em that nine of the ten most venomous snakes are in Australia and half a dozen of the most venomous spiders are in Australia.

36:30 They've got no conception of the size of Australia you know. No conception at all. When I talk to them about the out stations. I said, “You call 'em ranches" I said, “but in Australia they're called stations." I said, “Some of our stations are so big it'd take a man on a horse back days to walk around the perimeter." I said, “They fly around it on a helicopter and they muster their cattle by helicopters and motorbikes." I said, “They're huge." I said, “Some of the cattle stations in America are bigger than some of your states" and

37:00 we went on a trip through Central Park with this Italian in one of those open landaus [horse drawn carriage] and when he found when you say when they say "Where do you come from?" and you say "Australia" they think you say "Austria" and when I said, “No, no, no, Australia." "Oh" he said, “I've got a cousin lives in Australia. His name is so and so. Do you know him?" I said, “Listen mate there's about eighteen million of us" and then he said, “Have they got any horses in Australia?" I said, “They supplied the British and Australian cavalry and light horse with horses." So oh dear.

37:30 Their concept is terrible.

What can you tell us about mateship?

Well you know it's pretty broadly known about what mateship is in Australia and we have a saying in our magazine that when you go to that nobody died alone. You know there was always somebody there to hold his hand or to sit with him and oh and you can't carry that through into civilian life because you know the families are around. You can't go and sit with somebody in hospital for days but we always try to be

38:00 represented and are represented at all the funeral services and we have our own little service but you know that's the thing that got you through. If you didn't have a mate to help ya you're if you were a loner and on your own I mean you went down the drain very quickly and it was only the group effort

that sort of got you through these things. You know people as I said sittin' on your chest trying to poke rice down your throat to keep you alive and all that sorta thing and going scrounging and knocking stuff off

38:30 to bring it back to give your mate something to eat. I mean that's all the time. Yeah.

Tape 10

00:32 **Can you tell us about first of all the flag the you know flag you found?**

Yeah well we were marching up to Thailand and it was about half way between Bampong and where we finished our work party, and this is of course in the middle of the night and black as pitch, and something got tangled around my feet and I didn't know what it was, and I bent down and found it and I knew it was a piece of cloth of some sort

01:00 and of course cloth of any sort was as scarce as hens teeth, so I just shoved in on the top of my pack and when we got finished the march that night, the next morning I went down the river and washed it and it turned out to be a Union Jack and obviously it had belonged to somebody in the Manchester regiment because there were some names on there were their regimental numbers and their ranks from the Manchester regiment. So I used it and I had it signed by all the members of my unit with whom

01:30 I was involved up on the railway from the time I found it 'til the time we got right up and the railway was finished and we came back to Changi and I managed to get it home and by the time I got it home of course it was pretty threadbare and my wife sewed it up but I it was written in indelible pencil and I had the story on the back of how and where I found it and what I'd done with it and I had that hanging up on the wall in my home in Banara [?] in Queensland for about

02:00 fifteen years or so. Then my wife said to me "Why don't you send it down to the war museum?" and I said, “Well that's not much good." I said, “They've got so many items down there they don't know what to do with them. I said, “It'll probably finish up in a vault somewhere and hardly see the light of day." So I kept it and then in our unit magazine they had a story of a museum they were setting up in the barracks in Melbourne, which is the signals training barracks [Watsonia], and they were asking for memorabilia from

02:30 all over the place, not just (UNCLEAR) the war, but signals who had served in all the divisions and in all theatres of war. So I sent this flag down with an accompanying story and I also sent down some other things that I had. One was a beautiful little box that was made out of some scrap aluminium from a Zero that had been shot down and somebody had beaten it into shape and made a little box out of it and then they'd used a nail and a hammer to emboss the top of it. They painted my unit colour patch on

03:00 it and my name and I sent that down together with some other articles and that now has a place in the war in the signals museum in Watsonia Barracks in Melbourne. The other interesting thing about a flag is that when the Japanese surrendered we happened to be working on this X3 party building these tunnels in Singapore and the officer in charge, a Captain Stahl, he got hold of some red cloth and some white handkerchiefs and they

03:30 cut out the Southern Cross and the Federation Star and they got hold of a small Union Jack and sewed it all and that was the first Australian flag flown in Singapore after the Japanese surrendered and I have a photo of that flag in my album and that has also been recognised in several magazines and journals but the flag has got that many names on it. I did my best to I put an ad on the billiard table one day

04:00 and I tried to write down the name of every person with their regimental number. Some of it was pretty hard to decipher but I listed them all and I had them published in our unit magazine so that those who had been good enough to sign their name knows that it's now in the museum in Melbourne.

The other thing that I was going to ask you is when you got back to Sydney Harbour and you met your uncle and (UNCLEAR) on the boat and that then when you finally walked down the gangplank and set foot

04:30 **on Australian soil, how good did that feel?**

I don't recall any special emotion about setting foot on Australian soil again because we were surrounded by people who were trying find out did we know so and so, what happened to so and so. They were asking questions about their brothers or their cousins or their sons and you were more or less overwhelmed and they got us off the boat as quick as they could and into double decker buses and took us out to, I think it was Ingleburn camp, where we went

05:00 through a sort of a check and then they started the discharge arrangements.

And were you able to go home that first night?

No. Not the first night, no.

How long was it 'til you were able to leave?

Ah I think we got leave within a week if I remember rightly, but they wouldn't let us go until we'd been checked out. So I suppose we had to spend about a week getting kitted out with new uniforms and getting our back pay and new pay books and all our medical records

05:30 listed and

Can you tell us about the first time you got home to your family?

Ah no I can't really because by then my Mum and Dad had moved from where we were at Bellevue Hill to a place in Kingsford and quite frankly I can't recall that. I can recall the first time I met my brother when he came home, because it was a pretty crowded it was only a two bedroom detached villa and Mum and Dad had three sons and

06:00 of course when I got married we moved into Mum and Dad's bedroom. They moved into the second bedroom and one of my brothers slept on the lounge on the lounge room and the other brother, Dad rigged up a blind on the verandah out the front and he slept on a thing on the verandah but I came home this night from work and I got grabbed in a bear hug and I nearly had my arms broken and my ribs crushed. I look around and it's my brother and he'd just been discharged and that was a very joyful reunion. We wrestled on the floor and

06:30 I mean the first twelve months after we all got home together was a fantastic time. Ah that was it was joyous.

How hard was it for your mum having three boys away?

Well she had four actually and the first baby died just after like just after it was born so I was actually the second son. They had four boys and I've got a copy of an article that appeared in the local newspaper from Maroubra, it was the Maroubra Messenger I think it was, and it's listed "Digger's

07:00 Digger Sons" and they had a photo of my father in his first war uniform and a photo of myself and my two brothers with a little article about each of us with our service in Maroubra surf club and what Dad's service was then it had a photo of Mum in Red Cross uniform. Yeah she worked for the Red Cross while we were all away.

Do you think your dad, having served in World War I, in any way influenced you wanting to serve?

Oh, no doubt about it. No doubt, yeah. I mean as I said he served

07:30 before the mast on the old wooden ships and sailed right 'round the world and he told us some terrific stories about his shipboard life and the places that he visited and although he didn't tell us anything about the serious side of the Second World War, he certainly told us lots of things about his leave in England and his leave in France and the some of the sights and things that they'd saw and he had photos of him mixed up with a Scottish regiment and he's got a Scottish hat on and his mate's next door, the Scotsman's, got a slouch hat on and I had an uncle in the First World War

08:00 too and you know we got regaled with stories of them about their experiences in France on the lighter side so you know it certainly encouraged us all. I mean there was no way in the world that myself or my two brothers weren't gonna go in the war at some stage of the game.

You never had any thought of joining the navy?

No. No, no.

In regard to your dad's stories and that?

No no no no. No we never thought of anything else but the army and of course with my background in the militia, the only thing I wanted to do was to get in a signal regiment, which I did you know.

08:30 Yeah.

But you can't can you ever remember getting home and seeing mum for the first time?

No.

After the war?

No. No I that's I don't know what's happened but that's I can't actually remember that first time. I can remember meeting them on the like seeing them on when we got off the ship but I can't remember the first time back home.

Well what was that like? When you saw them when you first got off the ship?

Oh you know there were that many people around you know. You didn't have time to do much. We were all

09:00 bundled on the buses as quickly as we could and it was a bit disheartening because the first Anzac Day I marched, the first girl I saw waving madly at me was the sister of that chap that died on the Ranau

march. I went out to see the parents of course and told them as much as I knew about it but you know that was a bad memory that he didn't make it.

Was there much of that that you had to do or just that?

Oh quite a bit. Yeah. Quite a bit. Yeah.

09:30 Well we had a welfare committee in my unit association and we used to go and visit people who were sick and the widows and we had a couple a brothers there and one of them had a he had a mental breakdown before we came home and he went 'round the bend a bit and it affected him when we came home and one night we were marching up through Thailand and you couldn't see your hand in front of your face so what we used to do, they had this phosphorescent

10:00 fungus in amongst the mud. So you'd pick up a handful of mud and slap it on the pack of the chap in front of you and it it'd it was phosphorus and you could follow it and the column came to a halt and we must have been stopped there for minutes. Pouring rain you know. We just come to a dead stop and I was behind this fella and I looked in front of him and he'd stopped in front of a tree with this phosphorescence on it and I abused him up hill and down dale. Anyway, we went to see him when he was in the psychiatric centre at Darlinghurst

10:30 in Darlinghurst Square and we walked in to see him and soon as he saw me he pointed his finger at me and he said, “You so and so. I remember you. You abused me that night on the march in Thailand." It was clear as crystal to him and unfortunately he got to the stage where he was buying motorbikes that they couldn't afford and he had 'em stored in the lounge room of the house and one of our other chaps was a senior executive with Manufacturers Mutual Insurance Company and he arranged to sell the bike and to get the wife the money and

11:00 I think it worked out all right but you know it's there were remarkably few people that got mentally affected, but there were a few. About half a dozen that I could think of that were in a special hut in Changi after we came back from the railway.

What about coming in through the heads and seeing the

Oh that's

The coat hanger [Sydney Harbour Bridge]?

That was that was out of this world you know. It was just absolutely unbelievable and I mean we came in in the daytime and the harbour was alive with little boats

11:30 and oh everybody's waving madly. That was a great experience that. Great. I mean of course we were one of the last lot to come home and we all walked off the ship and but when we started seeing news reels and things of the earlier arrivals when they were carried off on stretchers and hobbling down with one leg and crutches and that, that must have been pretty devastating for their relations

12:00 but that's a long while ago.

Like you said, hopefully we've learned something from it.

Pardon?

Hopefully like you said earlier, I hope you know just hope that we've learnt something from it.

It's hard to depict. I mean with what's happening in Iraq and those places now. If

12:30 a group of people got captured by some of those fundamentalists you can imagine the sort of things that's likely to happen to them. Well you saw what happened in East Timor with the photographers and those Fretlin prisoners that got captured by the East Indonesians, the Indonesian army. Yes.

INTERVIEW ENDS