Australians at War Film Archive

Bernard Langridge - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Can you tell me what it was like for you growing up in Donnybrook?**

Well very similar I suppose to most country towns, I mean there was no electricity in the homes, you know; portable gas lamps and that sort of thing. We had our own little generating plant

01:00 to generate light for the house and whatever things we were doing in the shed. Roads and things weren't anything like what they are today; you know gravel in many cases.

Donnybrook must have been quite a small little town?

It was really; post office and pub, and two banks I think.

01:30 Maybe two pubs but fairly typical of you know the outback towns. I suppose they needed developing. You know they needed to do things. Shires didn't have the equipment they have today and a lot of it was a pick and shovel job. Carting gravel to patch roads with

02:00 done with a horse and dray and shovels were used usually by the owner of a horse and dray which was paid so much per cubic metre for drifting gravel to patch holes. And motor cars very scarce, in fact I went to school in a buggy for the first few years, about 4 or 5 miles to school. Very small school with all grades mixed together

02:30 and a single teacher. In fact, the trauma of getting to school became too great for a while and we did home schooling or correspondence, through the department but schooled at home. And that's my schooling, that's where I finished but it was a

03:00 very meagre education I had really.

How far was it go to school?

Donnybrook was six miles away and Newlands was four. Donnybrook would have been a preferred school, but the distance precluded it really. So we went to Newland school which was four miles away. Half the students I think would have been Italians because Newlands was a sort of a base

03:30 for Italians. It was really quite a strong family of Italians there and of course they attracted Italians and it became and still is quite a strong Italian community.

What did you think of the Italians?

We got on well with them, they drove a bit of a hard bargain, but generally they were very generous once you get doing with them. So we had some wonderful relationships with Italians. In fact we still

04:00 correspond with one who worked with us, in fact more than that, we visit them and they visit us. They've both reared families similar to ourselves, they are great settler really I think.

What sort of subjects did you enjoy in school?

None of them. No I wasn't much of a student. I think I coped with maths

04:30 as it was about 5th grade. That was enough to get me through life. I ran a fairly big orchard well after the war. I'm pretty well known as a reasonably good orchardist. We reared 5 children and I had a lovely wife of course, an ex-nurse. And this is just about our 55th wedding anniversary coming up.

05:00 So we've stuck together despite things not always being easy.

You would have been busy with so many children?

Yes, and she got involved in scouts and guides and whatever else made the community. And I was involved in organisations, farmers' union,

05:30 fruit growers, potato growers and all those sort of things that make an isolated community function.

When you were growing up did you have some fruit?

No, well some, yes it was, when my Father bought it, it had an old orchard on it. But yes, pears and apples, not good varieties, but nevertheless, fruit.

06:00 And we had a dairy, that's what brought the income in such as it was. It was pretty tight times, it was not quite the end of the Depression and there was no money. Tramps used to come in and see if they could do something for a meal and things like that. There was no government support really for people who were finding it tough. And my Mother and Father used to sell produce. Mum sold

06:30 cooked goods, like cakes and things, to the road gang which camped outside our property but not far from our home.

How would that work; you said tramps would come through, where would they be heading?

On the road, just with a swag and go, I suppose they'd, say, go south and look for work. And our home was on their path and they called into the

07:00 next place as well. I don't know quite what their pattern of finding food was. And some would come and chop wood or give something for a meal. So it really quite tough times and very small profits would be made out of almost any business.

How did the depression affect your family?

Well

07:30 just tough conditions I suppose, I mean no money to be made to do things outside than work on the farm really. In fact I grew up enjoying the army virtually without 2 bob [colloq.: shillings] in my pocket. So that's hard to realise but that's how it was.

Did you do any jobs like a paper round?

No we were too isolated for that. We were 6 miles from any community of any size. So

08:00 no, there wasn't any way of making a dollar really. I did trap possums and things, I'd get up early in the morning and get out into the bush, I had some snares that I caught possums. And if I caught some I'd bring them home and skin them and peg the skin out on a board, and do a sort of - if people came around looking

08:30 for possum skins and I'd sell them to them. But that was about the only source of income I had as a boy.

What would they do with the possum skins?

They'd export them, it was pretty big trade. The fur trade had got so big world-wide that they had to ban a lot of it. Ban the slaughter of animals that provided the fur.

When you did get time to yourself

09:00 **what sort of things did you get up to?**

There was only the family really. Sometimes we'd have friends over, people in a similar position that, you know, weren't able to go away to enjoy themselves. Probably played cricket or something with a makeshift team of about 6 or 8 people and things like that. We had to make our own

09:30 passtimes but generally it was work, work, work. Every day we used to milk cows before we went to school. And when we came home probably two or three hours of work before we went to school and the same when we came home. Very little to time to do homework, in fact I don't remember dong homework. No it was work really occupied most of my youth,

10:00 and many others; I wasn't an exception in that regard.

Sounds like you were working 12 hour days?

Well including school, at least, yes.

Kind of tough?

Yes, but everybody was doing it; if you were out on your own you would feel that and probably take exception to it. But when you are in the same boat as everyone else, that's it isn't it?

10:30 **How old were you when you left school?**

About 15 I think, in about grade 6 I suppose, but there was a lot of time lost. We'd get to school at 10 o'clock and leave again I think probably the normal time. So there was a lot of time lost, and we moved from Picton to Donnybrook when I was 9, that was a bit of an interference too.

11:00 I was going to school in Picton but that was very early, probably 1st and 2nd grades. So that - it's been a

fairly big handicap in some ways, I think, the lack of schooling, because schooling gives you a lot of general knowledge which we didn't acquire. But I read quite a lot, I was quite a keen reader.

What sort of things did you read?

Well quite often American cowboys stories, probably not great educational stuff

11:30 but there wasn't a lot of time for reading either. You can just hardly imagine how full each day was. There was chickens to feed and eggs to get and of course I was only one of 11. And I was 3rd from the top so I got most of the work coming down from the top and most

12:00 of the work coming up from the bottom. So I was probably a fairly key figure in the family-raising issue.

That's a huge family.

Well it wasn't then. I suppose it was bigger than average, but you know families were big in those days. But I think we were bigger than average by quite a bit.

Why did you move from Picton to Donnybrook?

Well we needed some

12:30 way to make a living I suppose. Father bought a farm in Donnybrook and moved us there and we were there 20 years.

Picton would have been about the same size as Donnybrook?

Picton was a sort of an offshoot of Bunbury; if you lived in Picton, Bunbury was your centre. And it's still quite a prosperous town, Bunbury.

It's got huge over the years?

13:00 Yes

From country town to city?

Yes.

How aware were you of the outbreak of war and what Australia was doing in relation to war?

Well I was very aware. We had a wireless and we'd come in and all sit around the wireless, like the older members of the family and watch, and listen very carefully to the

13:30 progress of the war. But of course quite helpless in the move towards the war; it was just a force that took us all with it really. And I joined up in '41 and didn't get out until '46 so I had quite a stint in the army. But we were very aware of the

14:00 international issues really, probably almost as much as today. There weren't sports items occupying the TV. like there are today; there were more, I think, world issues.

Were you always aware that you would be a part of the war effort?

What?

Did you know that you would end up in the army?

Well you had the option, I mean it was a voluntary -

14:30 you know, I volunteered and most of the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] - that's the part of the army that can be sent anywhere overseas. I volunteered for that. But if you didn't volunteer there was a risk of conscription which I think did come in, in the desperate days of the war in Japan. And they even had to pass a special Act. I think

15:00 the people in the militia were the ones that didn't volunteer. They had to pass an act to send them to New Guinea because the AIF were away in the Middle East. So desperate times for shortages of soldiers really at that time. And the militia surprisingly acquitted themselves wonderfully in New Guinea, a very tough campaign, the

15:30 Kokoda trail is recorded one of the toughest that the Australian army, including the militia, because they were the main force that we had available to send there,... And they acquitted themselves wonderfully.

What did you choose the army?

Well I think perhaps I felt I needed a better education to get into the air force, it was a bit more technical. And I was used to

16:00 fairly hard work and I knew if marching in the army wouldn't worry me. And I hated the sea so it only left the army.

How did you go about joining?

I just went along and volunteered, I just offered myself really and I was scrutinised a bit medically and passed and I was in.

16:30 **Did they have some sort of recruitment in Donnybrook or did you have to…?**

I think they may have; I was at Donnybrook or Bunbury but it was quite possible.

Was the only scrutiny just a health check?

I think it was, yes, there was no other limitation. I mean you could be illiterate and still get in. But that would be very different today, it's just such a technical world.

17:00 **How long was it from when you joined up and when you were sent away for training?**

Almost daily I think. After I volunteered on the 14th of May '41, I think I was in camp 2 or 3 days later.

Where did you go for your training?

Northam was the

17:30 main training camp really, so for recruits.

Was this the longest distance you had travelled in your life?

Pretty well. I can't remember, perhaps I had been to Bridgetown, not that that's far away, and I had moved around in the area. But that's the longest trip from home I suppose.

18:00 **How did they get you up to Northam?**

Train I think was the main means of carting soldiers then.

Can you remember anything about the camp?

Just rows of tents or in some cases buildings. And quite a rigid schedule of work, from your call,

18:30 5 or 6 o'clock maybe and out on physical exercises - PT [physical training] they call them. And then the breakfast and then formed into groups and out into the parade ground and taught, you know, the units of a rifle and a Bren gun and machine-gun

19:00 and given drill. Quite an important part of the army or considered important in those days was the drill. We were marching and that sort of thing.

Did you enjoy the gunnery part?

Gunnery, oh yes. I was a reasonable shot, I had been shooting rabbits and kangaroos as I grew up

19:30 and yes, I don't know about enjoying it but I didn't dislike it.

You'd probably be a better shot than some of the city kids?

Well probably but training was well, what you can make of a person, the training was quite surprising really. Some of the wonderful feats that special units have performed, it's all due to the training.

20:00 Just so perfect with everything they do, they are taught almost every possibility of what can go wrong or that sort of thing. So training is terribly important for any group of people really.

Did you think the training was good at Northam?

Good? Yes, I think so.

What were trainers and instructors like?

20:30 They were usually, in the early parts and probably right through, they were returned people from the world war, you know World War I. Because that was only 20 years after the world war, that means a lot of them were in their early 40s. And they were quite good instructors, they were probably not fit enough to joint the current war but still

21:00 quite able to remember a lot of their old experiences.

How strict was the training in Northam?

I think it was pretty strict, I think you didn't have to step out of line much to cop a charge of some sort or a deduction from your pay book if you were given leave and didn't come back within the time your leave lasted.

21:30 **Was there much of that going on?**

Quite a bit, especially I think the Kalgoorlie boys were fairly reckless, they took risks that people who were reared in a more secure environment, were more law-abiding.

So the Kalgoorlie boys were the ones to watch out for?

Yes, we had quite a big lot in our unit too, they were good soldiers but you know just

22:00 go just a bit further in most of their activities than people who were reared under more stable conditions.

You mentioned that the Northam camp was made up of tents? What were you staying in?

Tents, probably 8 or 10 just with floor boards and a straw mattress and you'd sleep four this way and four this way, a little bit of an alleyway to

22:30 walk in and out. It was fairly rough but still the world was rough then.

What were the other facilities like?

Well very much designed to handle a lot of people, no great comforts anywhere. 20 men would strip down and go through the showers and toilets

23:00 and that sort of thing. Toilets were generally a trench dug in the ground with a pole to sit on.

When you got leave, what would you do?

Go into the town, Northam such as it was, but there were that many others there of course that you didn't have a lot of options of doing things that you might

23:30 have liked to. But they were only small towns and couldn't cope with big mobs.

How was the town of Northam receiving you?

Well there were a few outlaws that gave us a bad name but generally soldiers were pretty good. And they were generally welcomed by the town.

How long were you in training in Northam?

24:00 About 2 months - or maybe only 6 weeks, because while we were there they decided to form this 'special independent company', a series of them from 1 to 12. And a fairly high-ranking officer, Lieutenant Colonel, came and arranged to interview those that were interested in volunteering

24:30 for some secretive unit; could have been parachute unit or anything. And quite a number of us put our names down. And country people were preferred by this Lieutenant Colonel because it was envisaged, just as it finished up, how people would have to more or less live off the land if supplies were cut off and things like that. So the preponderance of country people

25:00 nearly made up the unit. And after that, a month or so, we were all then trained to go to Victoria, Wilson's Promontory, to a special army training camp where we learnt quite a bit outside the range of normal military training, with the use of explosives and

25:30 things like that.

Can you remember how they selected you for the Special?

Well we were just interviewed individually and at the end of interview, you know, you would depart and the next thing you would hear you're accepted or you weren't. So it was pretty simple.

26:00 You were questioned pretty carefully about how you had lived and what you had done and I think that had quite a big bearing on the selection or not. Because people who had roughed it a bit in the country are more likely to survive the tough conditions.

How excited were you to be chosen?

Oh pretty excited I suppose because for one thing it got us out of Northam camp, that was a very

26:30 boring existence there because that's where most of the troops were waiting to be either a new unit formed or reinforcements for army units that were in the Middle East. You know we were pleased to be out of that and I think you sort of hoped for something new pretty often; going to Victoria and the training there it was all

27:00 quite exciting really, and a challenge.

How did they get you to Victoria?

By train, then truck I think. Trucks took over, I'm not quite sure where, the railway station in Victoria.

Was it a journey that you can remember?

Partly I suppose but you were a bit enclosed; the trucks, you only look out the back really. Oh yes, I suppose I roughly remember most things about

27:30 in my life but…

Would have been rough and boring?

Not boring as there was a lot of chiackings going on in that truck; about 20 soldiers all feeling excited about doing something new. And going somewhere new because many of them had lived a similar life to myself, mostly work

28:00 and not a lot of outings and it was all quite new really, but you were young and energetic and the world was a wonderful place even though you were going to war.

Sounds like you were making some friends on the way to Victoria?

Oh yes, in fact I joined with some friends, really a Bridgetown friend of mine, we were joined up and stayed together most of the war.

28:30 **That's good?**

Yes it was.

What were your first impressions when you arrived in Victoria?

Well it was very hilly, it was colder than WA, there were rivers and things that were part of our training. We had to plunge into rivers and cross them, run up mountains and all sort of things to toughen you up. A lot of night exercises were arranged against someone else too.

29:00 One would pretend to be the enemy and you would have to attack them, fight realistically really. Not all firing bullets but certainly the next thing to it.

What sort of specialist training did you get as part of the specialist unit?

Armed combat, you know, where you learn to fend off a person coming at you with

29:30 a rifle or something. And you know different ways of protecting yourself. Mostly and -

Was this based on martial arts?

Yes I suppose it was really, the shortage of good instructors was a bit of a problem I think. I mean usually amongst the gang there would be someone who was pretty good at it, and he

30:00 might finish up being an instructor or part-time instructor. But we had some pretty select British officers. Very good mountaineer chap and a very good engineer who used to take the groups of, recruits I suppose we were, and instruct them.

How many were there in the camp?

30:30 Well the unit consisted of about 300 and the whole unit would have been in training I think in Victoria. And it was formed into platoons. There were 3 platoons of about 60 in each. And then there was the specialist platoons or units that the signallers were separate, the settlers or engineers were separate and then headquarter's staff, the

31:00 administrative people that kept the whole thing recorded and in order. So it was made up of about 300 and each troop had a breakdown of quite often a captain in charge of the group and he had 3 lieutenants under him, and had sections of about 20. And further down were NCOs [non-commissioned officers],

31:30 two NCOs to each troop and troop sergeant usually. When we all went out together on the parade ground, the troop sergeant was in charge of marshalling the soldiers in to learn their proper places in their unit.

Can you tell me about the average day?

32:00 Day?

You get up and what happens?

Yes, well I suppose it's generally up in the morning and rough, you know preparation for the day, maybe not a shower, that was often later, but toiletries and then PT [Physical Training] I think was before breakfast, half an hour of PT and then

32:30 breakfast. After that they would allow more than necessary time to eat, perhaps half an hour. Then you would prepare for the day, which would be perhaps going out under instructors of some sort. There was a lot of branches in the army; there was field craft, learned to make use of the bush…

What sort of things were you taught in field craft?

Well to make use of cover if a

33:00 certain objective you had to take. You would look at the most covered route to get there so you were not

in the open too much. And the training sessions would be broken down into probably [an] hour or less of that, and the next thing would be learning something about rifles, how to strip a rifle down blindfolded, put it

33:30 back and that sort of training, it's quite important really to be able to look after your weapons. And those were the main things I suppose.

How important was fitness?

Fitness? It was very important really. In fact some of the people didn't quite make it, there were those that couldn't last long enough going up the hill or

34:00 something like that, a real test of your physical fitness. And if you weren't reasonably physically fit in your 20s well you are never going to be really so I think, you know, they would fit in somewhere, perhaps fatigues, that's looking after the kitchen or helping to prepare vegetables for meals. And there was plenty of places for people who can't handle

34:30 physically difficulties of the actual carrying weapons and packs which can be quite testing really.

What sort of equipment would you carry?

Well sometimes we had a ground sheet; was fairly important either to lie on or cover up or whatever. And

35:00 in active service of course you had this webbing on that had two pouches in front and a water bottle, and you'd have grenades in your pouches, or magazines for Bren gun or whatever. And your rifle, belt of pouches to carry ammunition for your rifle. And

35:30 pretty crude rations I think, a few dog biscuits as we called them.

They sound terribly appetising.

They weren't but if you were hungry enough they tasted pretty good.

How long would they send you out on extended training?

It varied a lot. There would be a lot of day trips and then they'd extend them into 3 or 4 days. And even a week, quite a long

36:00 route march and it was all a part of the toughening up really. But it varied quite a lot, there would be some that I said, a day or 2 days trips. And eventually I think about a week long was the general length of them. And just cover all sorts of areas, you go up mountains and cross gullies, and all the sorts of things

36:30 that we eventually had to do in the army.

How tough was the instruction?

It was fairly tough I suppose, there was no loitering.

It's hard to loiter under these conditions?

Yes.

Did you enjoy this kind of training?

Oh yes, I think if you were fit and - yes, I think a lot of

37:00 us had the attitude that this was it; we made the most of it. Anyone was going into it with resistance, they weren't happy people, I mean you've got to enjoy life if you can.

What sort of things did you do on leave?

Well in Victoria there was nowhere to go on leave really. In fact I don't think there was any leave. But

37:30 I think after we finished Victoria training we had disembarkation leave, which sent us home for a fortnight or something. So I went home from that and then, the unit was formed then, so at the end of our leave, we all returned to our base somewhere, probably Karrakatta or somewhere

38:00 and then trained. I forget where we went when we come home from leave, we went east anyway on the train, and were based in a couple of cities, Adelaide for quite a while, and Melbourne. And it was really a fill-in time while they were deciding what to do with us. I suppose that's quite a big decision for the top

38:30 brass to decide where to send a unit, because shipping units about is quite expensive and it is a fairly slow operation. We waited I think in Adelaide for quite some time in Victoria. And eventually we were sent north

39:00 and had to build a camp in Katherine. I think this was sort of something for the future; when we moved

out there'd be a camp then for other units. So we spent a couple of months I think building a camp at Katherine. And by then it had gone around to December and Japan had come in on the

39:30 7th of December. And we got our marching orders on about the same day, about the 8th of December.

In Victoria camp how far away from Melbourne were you?

Probably 30 or 40 miles I suppose.

Would you be quite isolated then?

Oh we were. I think that was the idea

40:00 of forming or training the unit there, to maintain some secrecy, it was what the enemy hears of what happening decides quite a few issues that the enemy makes. So we tried to keep our activities - it was quite secretive really, we were encouraged not to talk to people about it.

40:30 **Was there any indication at this point as to where you might end up?**

No but I think the top brass had a bit of an idea that Japan was a likely place. But I think Japan was waiting to see which way the war went in Europe. If it looked like the Germans were going to win, they'd came in, in fact Italy did much the same. Because they didn't want to be left out of the dividing up of the spoils. So Japan at that time thought Germany was going to win the war and if she didn't make her move then she wouldn't be a part of the sharing people.

Where did you go after Melbourne? On embarkation leave?

No we went back, we'd had embarkation leave, I think that's what they called it although embarkation leave was usually [what] you got just before embarking.

This would have taken you a long time to get back to Donnybrook?

Two or three days I suppose but they allowed for that on the leave pass, so those that needed more time to travel were given a longer period of leave, so that they could, you know, travel the distance and still not be penalised.

Tape 2

00:33 **You went and did more training in Adelaide and Melbourne?**

Well that was fill-in stuff really, not so much training as you have to do something with, you know, a lot of men. So we had arranged marches around the city which was quite enjoyable I suppose.

01:00 And I don't know that we did any specialised training in Melbourne or Adelaide but you know PT was pretty important, fitness. But it was a way of filling in time whilst decisions were made. In fact the first six - perhaps more: 12 to 18 months, the first years of the war, I think they

01:30 called it a 'phoney war', sort of waiting for something to happen. And after Germany first thrust into Poland and some of the lower countries there and eventually turned into France. And that was all over in a few months. And they were sort of consolidating their position and waiting really

02:00 for the next phase which I think turned into the Battle of Britain, the air battle, which Hitler had to win before he could invade England. And we really surprised the Germans, the way our pilots were able to hold bay for long enough. In fact they destroyed virtually thousands of German planes and this prevented really Germany from attacking

02:30 England. I think she wanted to do something impressive, this might sound cheap, but she decided to go into Russia. And that was really the part of the downfall because Napoleon made the same mistake of heading to Russia too late in the season. By the time they got there the snow and ice really beat the Germans as much as the Russians beat them.

Well it's a big country.

Yes.

03:00 **While you were waiting were you listening to war bulletins?**

Yes, very much, we'd get the paper daily and scrutinise it and try and see how things were going. But for the first two or three years of the war it was almost

03:30 disastrous for the Allies because Hitler had spent years preparing and Britain hadn't really. And I think the miracle of the war was the way Britain held Germany off during that air war period.

How did you get to know that you were on your way to Katherine?

Yes

04:00 I don’t suppose we knew really. We were going north and it’s quite a mystery being just a cog in a fairly big machine. A lot’s happening and you don’t really know, and part of what’s happening is you are being transported somewhere and surmising, or the rumours that come out of it is quite surprising.

What were the rumours saying?

04:30 Well that we were going, you know, just, the whole possibilities were discussed, what our destination was. We had no idea of the progress, or not necessarily progress, but the information of the top echelons of government while they were assessing the threat from Japan. And they had done a bit, they had scouts out,

05:00 they had [a] very good chap in Timor who was really a top pilot, but he was there as a sort of a trade representative. So he could use his skill as a pilot to assess what’s happening, under the guise of being a trade representative. And some of, yes, he was a great help to us when we got

05:30 to Timor because, although he was a trade representative in the eyes of everyone, he was really a very skilled technical person, air force-wise and also, he was able to advise us that there had been

06:00 a lot of Japanese filtering through Timor and looking at places and assessing what they could do with Timor. And for one thing they took a lot of soil samples, some of the plateaus in the Timor, you know, for converting into large bases. Because somewhere she had to plan an attack on Australia and it was either New Guinea or possibly

06:30 Timor. And some of our value once the campaign started in Timor, was to advise Australia of the activities of the Japanese and what they were doing in the port. But we weren't really able to control the Japanese - but they couldn’t control us either. We filtered in and out and learnt a lot of things. Am I jumping the gun a bit?

07:00 **Yes a bit. At this stage, how did they get you from Perth to Katherine? On a train?**

Train to Alice Springs and trucks from Alice Springs to Katherine. And quite a long trip too I think about 1000 kilometres or something like that.

07:30 **What did you think of the countryside?**

I suppose it was a bit foreign to us in a way. But generally you look at land with an idea of what you would do with it. And I saw some wonderful land in New Guinea later on that I would have been quite happy owning. And perhaps going through the Northern Territory, the land was wonderful but

08:00 there were hardships that had to be overcome and transport was one of them. Yes I think we were fairly impressed, not necessarily with productivity of it but the quality of the land.

What were you told about your mission in Katherine was?

No I don’t think we were, I think we just

08:30 followed daily orders to do so and so. But I think it filtered though that we were building a camp and we might be stationed there for a month or 6 months. But we were in the process of building the camp when Japan came into the war. So that was on hold straight away. In fact we boarded cattle trucks about the 8th of December to go to Darwin.

09:00 **Can you tell me what you did to set the camp up in Katherine?**

Well we had builders of course in the unit, not selected because they were builders but that’s what they happened to be and they helped construct the camp. I seem to think it was quite a bit of steel in it, whether it was pre-cast and drilled and everything like it is

09:30 in a pre-war steel building. But that’s what I remember of it being pretty big buildings. But much of it being steel and galvanised iron. And of course lots of things to do when you were camped. You got to provide for toiletries, and that meant a trench usually or something similar. And the cookhouse to make and offices to equip

10:00 so the administration can go ahead.

What were your duties at this time?

Just one of many who got caught up in whatever was happening. Perhaps a part of the building because I was a rough shed-maker, sort of. And then if there was some other duty, I can’t just think of something at the moment.

10:30 But we were all occupied every day and a lot of us were still doing some training like technical stuff. We used to what we call map-making, a couple or three of us would go out with a compass and… Where are we?

We were talking about map-making?

11:00 yes,

What sort of things would you do as part of that?

Well we needed, especially when we go to Timor there was quite a lot of map-making because the area hadn't been mapped. But to make a map you take a bearing with your compass and then measure whatever you want to the next object. Maybe 500 yards or something and you plot this in, and from there you take your

11:30 next bearing. And with enough of that you can, you've got all the main items perhaps I should say, recorded and where they are. And that all helps for operations later. But we did this partly for training and partly to fill in time while we were at Katherine.

Were you told the reason for the base at Katherine?

The base? Not really I think except that

12:00 I think we might have thought that we might be staying there quite a few months, as sort of our home for a while. And then we sort of realised that it would help movement of troops for going north, because that looked like it [was] going to be an area of activity.

How much of a surprise was Pearl Harbor?

Yes, that was a shock to the world really I think. But

12:30 it certainly changed the direction of the war very considerably.

Were you taken into a briefing about what was going to happen next?

No I don't think , that doesn't happen much in the army, the heads do what they want to and what filters down from the top filters down. But no, I don't think, at some stage they might have said,

13:00 "We are going to Darwin." But as soon as you make a statement like that, this can leak somewhere and some one could, you never really know whether you have got a fifth column or not, I think we knew we didn't have. But as soon as you say something like that, this is advanced warning to someone. It's just a world picture really and you don't know where the information can finish up. So I suppose that's the main reason

13:30 for not giving advance information almost at any time. At the last minute we may have been told we were going to embark in Darwin, but it would certainly be the last minute.

Did you have suspicions that you might be entering as the army into the Pacific against the Japanese?

No well I suppose suspicion

14:00 is too much of a definite word. I mean the rumours move around in the army and it could have been rumoured but perhaps not quite as strong as suspicion. But as soon as Pearl Harbour happened I think it was pretty glaring then that our position would be somewhere in the Pacific for some reason. But quite a lot of troops spotted around the north of Australia

14:30 and New Guinea and a lot of the smaller islands. Which proved very helpful to the war in the long run. Which was some forward thinking by someone.

You move from Katherine to Darwin then?

Well that was a half day trip on the train. I think it was loaded with cattle and this word got out;

15:00 the cattle were shifted out and we shifted in. Pretty crude issue really; a result of cattle being yarded is usually a fair sort of a mucking area. And I think that was still there when we went to Darwin.

What did you do when you went to Darwin?

Well we just waited around, in fact we had to wait for the wharfies [wharf labourers]to load some of the

15:30 stores. And surprising to us was some of the wharfies were just about on strike. In the middle of a war! I think it tuned us against the Labor government really because we felt that the Labor government was really too supportive of people who wanted to run things as they wanted to, like the unions. It was quite a

16:00 surprise to us really I think to find that some Australians wouldn't load stores for the army going into action. Anyway that's one of the surprises. And I think it turned quite a lot of soldiers against unions really because of that act. Anyway it was eventually and when it was ready it sailed off.

16:30 **What sort of a ship are you on?**

It was on the HMAS Voyager, I think it was, most of our ships were pretty crude little things. Old things and this was overloaded to (b… UNCLEAR) I think it had other units on it. It had the 2/40th unit that was going to Koepang which is the other end of Timor. We went to the Portuguese end and the 2/40th

went to the Dutch end.

17:00 **What were the conditions like on the HMAS Voyager?**

Pretty awful, very hot, nowhere to move and just lie on the gear and wait. Waiting is one thing you've really got to become good at it in the army because a lot of the time you are waiting for something, when it's preparation for some action or

17:30 waiting for the enemy to do something. It's just an awful lot of waiting, in fact when the opportunity was there, most of them learnt how to play bridge and poker and any other card game just to fill in time.

What did you do to fill in time?

I played bridge quite a bit. I haven't played since I got home, out of the army.

Did you win any money?

18:00 There wasn't much money, the only time soldiers had money was when they got to some destination and they could draw cash out of their pay book. Mine was pretty tight; I didn't touch mine till I got home. And then eventually I drew it all out and bought a farm. So -

Where did you sleep?

18:30 Just sleep where you were wherever it was, but there was an awful lot of troops I suppose. We would have had 300 in the 2/40th, there was perhaps 6 or 800 so I suppose it was a bit unit.

How long did it take you to get to Timor?

Well from Darwin to Timor about 2 days I think on the HMAS Voyager. But quite a bit less in the

19:00 faster ship of course, in fact a lot of our evacuations from Timor to Darwin were done in a day really, if we were evacuating sick or wounded soldiers.

Are you being briefed at this time on where you are headed and what you will be doing?

No I don't know we were. It wasn't until we got to Kupang and the 2/40th stayed there and we stayed a night or two and then

19:30 we were loaded onto some Dutch ship I think, and taken to Dili, which is the area we occupied in Timor.

Did you get to disembark from the HMAS Voyager?

Yes, yes. A pretty crude disembarkment, they usually had a lot of porters, natives to carry goods, and I don't even think there was a wharf there.

20:00 You know just pulled into water about a meter deep and, from memory of it anyway, I don't remember a port. And we offloaded into Kupang and a couple of days later we were loaded again into this Dutch ship that took us to Dili, which is where we finally landed and that was our base for 12 months.

20:30 **Was there any sort of base in Kupang?**

Yes, there must have been but I can't quite remember. There was an airfield there and the paratroopers eventually landed in the aerodrome at Kupang. And made it pretty tough for the soldiers that were defending it.

21:00 **So you got on a Dutch ship?**

Yes, there was only a day's trip, just up the north coast really from Kupang to Dili.

Were the conditions any better on the Dutch ship?

Not much.

You're not getting any comfort out of this were you?

No, not really but they weren't built for comfort, the ships that they used for shifting troops about.

21:30 **Can you tell me your first impressions of Dili?**

I think the first impression was the mountain. There was this sort of flat area around the coast and it goes up very quickly into high country. The landing there was a bit of a sort of a fiasco because there were negotiations going on between diplomats whether we were even gong to be allowed to go to East Timor because the Portuguese

22:00 were putting up a bit of a front that they didn't want us there and anyway eventually I think it was decided that we would go there despite their non-approval. And we were not exactly told to expect resistance. That we were prepared for having our rifles at the ready. and I think loaded in most cases.

22:30 And we waded ashore and perhaps jumped into 3 feet of water and we waded ashore and a bit surprised

at the long grass and coconut palms and things that we had to wade through. But anyway it went ahead and we assembled on I suppose the beach area of Timor

23:00 whilst the CO [Commanding Officer] and so on was making decisions where to camp. It was all fairly undecided a lot of issues. And I still think whilst we were even going ashore, they didn't know whether that was going to be our base or not. Because they hadn't resolved this issue with the diplomatic issue

23:30 about the rights of, because Portugal was neutral. But we thought, I suppose the government thought, "Well despite that, was enough issues to have troops there ready to not necessarily repel the Japs but certainly to keep an eye on them".

In Dili was there also representation from the Dutch and the British?

24:00 Well it was Portuguese territory that we were really occupying. I don't think they came into it very directly.

Is there almost like a United Nations front going on there?

No I don't think it was. I don't think United Nations really became active until after the war, active with any influence I think. No I think it was

24:30 just finally decided between the Portuguese, which didn't have much option but to accept us. They could have resisted but it would have been a bit pointless I think. And anyway their sympathies were with us, not the Japanese, probably made it easier to get a break-through there.

Is the Australian troops in the highest number in Dili?

25:00 Yes they would have been I think. The Dutch had a unit, not necessarily in Dili but between Dili and Kupang there was a bit of a Dutch army. But otherwise, and the Portuguese had, what should I say, a token army. Generally I'd say that the Australians well and truly out-numbered the others.

25:30 **Where did you set up camp in Dili?**

We selected areas, we made a big mistake in the first instance by building a camp on the plateau near the beach area, where mosquitoes were just terrible. And of course the mosquitoes were all laden with malaria and we hadn't been in Dili many weeks before there was quite an outbreak in troops with malaria. But once you moved up into the hills,

26:00 which we did do reasonably soon, the mosquitoes weren't there, it was fairly mosquito-free; the cold and the height I suppose. But we made a tremendous blunder by camping down in the flat country, because malaria is quite a problem in the tropics really. And all the natives are carrying [it] but build up some sort of resistance.

26:30 We didn't have that and of course we went down like shot soldiers I suppose.

Were there any precautions being taken for malaria?

Well there should have been but weren't. The Dutch had been in the tropics for hundreds of years really, and quinine was one of the common treatments. I don't think we even had quinine, but when we finally did get quinine

27:00 it was in a powdered form, terribly bitter. And the only way to take it was to have a cigarette paper and put your dose on the cigarette paper and roll it up and get it down as soon as possible.

Eat the cigarette paper?

It would go too.

That must have been bad tasting stuff?

They had Atabrine too which was a medication for malaria but nothing

27:30 was plentiful. I suppose all this happened so quickly that the powers that be didn't really know where we were going into the tropics and very few preparations were made for looking after troops in the tropics. In fact we had Bombay shorts I think we called them, shorts that came just below your knee, whereas we should have all had long trousers.

28:00 Lots of mistakes made which I suppose they were always going to be. Because of the unknown factors.

I'm surprised that you weren't taking Atabrine before you went there?

No I think that's a pretty common surprise too. Although our doctors didn't know much about treating tropical illnesses, the Dutch doctors did. And the liaison between the two wasn't good, I don't know.

28:30 But that's one of the many mistakes.

How many came down with malaria?

Well I'd say early in the piece 10 to 20 percent. But it wasn't a permanent, I mean you have an attack of malaria and you are not good for a day or two but eventually you get over it. And you are back to more or less normal. It was quite a severe blow to see people who were perfectly fit go down with

29:00 malaria.

What sort of medical facilities were available?

Very, very minimal, our doctor was a wonderful doctor really. He was a First World War soldier but he did medicine after he got back. So between 1918 and '39 he did this medical

29:30 degree, but he was a wonderful person, looked after troops under frightful conditions really because he didn't have a hospital, didn't have a base. Very hard for him.

Was it just like a tent facility?

Yes, that was lucky, because quite often nowhere to go where he

30:00 felt he could look after sick patients. Perhaps the worst part of the Timor campaign was looking after the wounded soldiers. Eventually because we were cut off from Australia, after the Japs landed, wireless contact was lost. And it was two or three months before, with ingenuity, they built a wireless, and did eventually contact Australia. So

30:30 for a month or two we were carting wounded soldiers about with no hope of getting them evacuated to Australia, until they got contact and eventually light boats would come in or even flying boats or what do they call them? Catalinas service, would land on the sea and we would load wounded soldiers onto

31:00 them. But this couldn't happen until we made contact with Australia, which was May, April I think.

With malaria, were you given mosquito nets?

I think we did have mosquito nets yes, but quite often you were in conditions where you might as well to have them because

31:30 there was nowhere to hang them, that sort of problem. Yes we did have mosquito nets I remember. But it's the time between getting under the net, you know, the evening sort of, you know you can't go to bed at 6 o'clock. But that was the risk period, I think, and it sort of nullified the effect of the mosquito net to some extent. Because of the area between

32:00 getting under the net in the evening and getting out of it in the morning when the mosquitoes were still active.

Can you describe the first camp-site on the beach?

Well do you know what cactus plants look like? Well I think we called it Cactus flats in the end. Because to find a flat enough, clear enough area to

32:30 camp we had to cut down this cactus stuff. And it was almost lousy with scorpions and centipedes and all sorts of other frightening things. But we more or less prepared a flat area, put up a tent I suppose, yes I think we did.

33:00 And you know that was it.

Were you sleeping on a bed roll?

I don't think we had straw mattresses because there was no preparation for us by anyone that was already stationed there because I think our arrival was a surprise to everyone including the top Portuguese. So I think it was lie on your ground sheet and make it flat, I suppose, as possible

33:30 to sleep on. And of course once you are in that situation you never leave your rifle anywhere, you take it wherever you go; if you go for a drink or a toilet stop or something you take your rifle. So that became an unwritten law really: don't move without your rifle.

34:00 **What had you heard about the threat of the Japanese on Timor?**

Well the Japanese moved so quickly that they were moving down, in fact I think within a few days Singapore was almost threatened if not overrun. And I think we knew without any information that they were going to occupy any area they could north of Australia. That was their aim to take New Guinea and set up operation for landing in Australia

34:30 so although it wasn't known that we were going to meet the Japanese some time, it was accepted, you know, with a sort of a usual Murphy, what we call 'Murphy' was a something that was possible but not sure. It was

35:00 sort of accepted that we would cop Japanese forces sooner or later.

What sort of weaponry did you have with you?

We only had light machine-guns, we had a Bren: a Bren is just a little bit lighter than the Vickers but a little bit better to move around.. Very good light machine-guns, fires 5 or 600 rounds a minute I think.

35:30 Quite a few of us with that, and Tommy guns which are much more like a rifle, a little short gun, very manoeuvrable, very effective at stopping, you know, a bit of an army force within 50 yards or so. And grenades too were very good close-range weapons. You could throw 20 or 30 or 40 yards, it would explode and do

36:00 terrible damage, it would explode into shrapnel sort of. Quite a good protective work, with the enemy approaching. But we were fairly inadequately equipped for holding off, or even attacking enemy forces.

36:30 **How were you getting supplies? Food?**

Food, well I think we had some army rations but very soon after landing in Timor we started dealing with the natives who just loved to bring bananas or whatever they had. Which was bananas and vegetables and quite good food really, and we would deal directly with them with whatever money we had.

37:00 It became quite an issue later in the campaign to be able to find enough silver to buy stuff from the natives. Because that was [the] main part of our rations; we had very little army rations, in fact it became quite true that we lived off the land - which was an essential part of our training, to live of the land.

37:30 And we got on very well with the Timorese. You know the natives, they are quite small people, very active little people and most of us sort of run over a boys of about 8, 10 or 12, and he became what we called a ‘creado’. He lived with us and stayed with us and he’d looked after our wants, he’d wash our socks and clothing, go to one of the

38:00 streams in Timor and we had a wonderful relationship really with the Timor people and it stood us in good stead. Because we as Australians quite recently went to Timor, they were accepted. Because of the honesty with which we dealt with them, there was a bit of a temptation to get something from them for nothing but I think we avoided that. We played

38:30 straight with them and it stood by for most of the Timor campaign.

What was the sort of bartering system?

Well that was quite, well there were a dozen different methods of bartering, you know, you sort of assess the native, and perhaps, you know, not quite give him the price he asked. Because they didn’t really know what was the top price. So there was a bit of negotiation, eventually you know we’d give them what they wanted and you know

39:00 we’d take it away, but we bought very little food that we could cook. Eventually we bought goats and even parts of buffalo and - not quite sure how that worked but buffalo was a bit much for a small unit but it could be spread around, but I don’t remember much of that happening, but I think it did. Because meat was quite a big requirement of the army

39:30 and eggs of course, you could buy eggs, and raw chickens.

What did you do with them?

Well I suppose we prepared them. I don’t quite remember how we cooked them, but I know there was some dealing done with WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

Was the currency the Timorese were most interested in silver coins?

Well yes they were most interested in,

40:00 they just loved the silver. Because quite often they would melt it down, and quite a lot of people were making you know artefacts, like silver brooches and things, they are quite clever little people at that. But I think every art that exists was sort of tested by the Timorese because they had no industry. Getting money of some sort was

40:30 quite important. But they just loved the Australian silver and the Japanese tried to palm off some worthless money I think, and they soon woke up that silver was the thing.

So the Japanese were giving them something they couldn’t melt down?

Well that was paper money.

Well that’s kind of useless?

Yes, it is.

41:00 **How did you decide to move camp?**

I think it was forced on us. I think we had done a bit of recce-ing [reconnaissancing] - what that is, is

going up and checking out areas. And we decided to move up in the formation of platoon, that's about 60 men in a platoon, 60 men in B platoon , 60 men in C platoon and occupy

41:30 various places above the area, you know, above Dili in other words. Until it was established what we called platoon headquarters. And then there was the sappers, they probably had an area dished out to them; the signallers, well the signallers were distributed between the 3 troops because they were the communication medium by which one resumed contact with another.

Tape 3

00:32 **Can you tell us about the defences you set up when you moved camp?**

Yes I think our main role once we landed in Dili was to protect and eventually destroy the aerodrome. So most of our preparations went into

01:00 preparing a defence system in Dili to prevent arrival of the Japanese and then if we were overrun we would blow the 'drome, which we had prepared with various charges; blow great holes in it so it couldn't be used immediately. It was fixed of course soon after, but that was our main job to prepare

01:30 the Dili 'drome firstly for defence and then destroying once we lost control. But the Japanese landed on the 19th of January I think; may have been December, no, be January. And they landed in force of course and we had one of the sections,

02:00 which is part of a platoon, dug in and hold it for as long as they could. But the Japanese did most things with great numbers of course and they came and the section we left there put up a tremendous fight, you know, knocked probably hundreds of them because we had guns, positions you know

02:30 to protect the approach. And they certainly made good use of our defences. But eventually they were overrun, after quite a stubborn fight in which the bayonet was used by some of our men. And eventually - we always had an escape route if you are in a fighting position -

03:00 they just withdrew as orderly as possible; they lost one or two, and one or two wounded. But generally it was quite a successful defence really although it was fairly short lived. But they certainly took quite a few Japs before they were overrun. And then the Australians moved

03:30 back up into the hills where we had prepared bases, as I said earlier, to avoid the mosquito problem.

Can you describe where the gun positions were and the strategies against the landing Japanese?

No I wasn't really involved in that, eventually I would have been but we used to take it in turns in sections.

04:00 It was number 2 section. But I'd say they had Bren gun posts, certainly in the corners or more or less the outside of the 'drome, which cross-fired, you know; the Japs couldn't approach anywhere without running into machine-gun fire. And once they stated landing of course these

04:30 defences came into being and they of course had hand-grenades and some of it was quite close quarter fighting. It was quite an effective - perhaps in the long run ineffective but it did what a small unit can do against a stronger unit. And then at the final stage they blew the 'drome, which was organised by the sappers,

05:00 so that it wasn't any use to the enemy for many days really, perhaps weeks.

Did they successfully retreat to join up with the rest?

Yes, yes. Quite an ordeal really because it was pretty hot country and hilly and a lot of obstacles and yes, they did.

05:30 **What kind of defences did you have set up at headquarters in the hills?**

Well we didn't try and defend any other place really, we just depended on our capacity to be warned and put up a fight and then move out. That was our whole plan of survival really, we didn't claim any place

06:00 whilst we were there. It was ours and if we were driven out it wasn't ours.

So there was no stationary fighting?

No, nowhere else did we try and defend a place because we knew in the long run if we sustained casualties that was our problem, there was nowhere to go with them. The only way to look after them was to have some stretchers, native stretcher-bearers,

06:30 and overall we didn't get a lot of casualties but that was part of the plan, we couldn't cope with wounded soldiers. We had some: we had a chap with his jaw shot off more or less, and he was quite a

problem to look after because he had to be straw fed, you know. And we

07:00 had a chap shot through the knee and he was quite a problem, but that was our big worry, until we got contact with Australia. And once we had that we could notify Australia to send some means of taking a prisoner out, taking a casualty out and you'd light fires up on the hill and this would be conveyed to the incoming ships and we'd have, you know,

07:30 the wounded solider down near the beach somewhere. And they were quite successful in getting out the wounded.

How long where you without radio contact?

A bit over 2 months, from February to late April I think it was.

What were your movements during that time?

Well we were carrying on fighting, you know, we would decide,

08:00 'this is where' we would camp and if the Japs came and drove us out we would put up a fight. We'd ambush them if possible and knock as many off as possible. And then move out if we had to and quite often we'd move out for a few days and then move back. Because the Japs were doing something similar, they were testing us all the time too.

How many contacts did you have with the Japanese during that time?

08:30 During?

Those couple of months during radio silence?

Oh many, many issues, I mean B platoon was in one area; that's about 60 men. A platoon was in another area and C platoon in another area and between the lot of them, they'd probably have a dozen contacts within that period, maybe more. And they were all

09:00 a bit effective because you would get a few Japs every time.

How did you rate your chances on the island, outnumbered by the Japanese?

How did we…?

Rate your chances.

Well it was just survival while we can and perhaps eventually be rescued by Australia because we knew that we couldn't - you know, if you

09:30 think of it as a war, we couldn't win the war on the island against the Japanese purely on a numbers basis, because they I think at one time had about 15,000 troops there. But there were using that also as a sort of a toughening up area for their troops as they moved further, I suppose it would be south.

10:00 The went towards New Guinea and you know where they, I think they had plans really to attack Australia from New Guinea. And our job was just a part of many other units doing something similar in the islands north of Australia.

What was morale like during that period?

Morale was pretty good I think until sort of

10:30 quite late in the campaign. The Japanese slowly I think won the natives over to some extent. You know partly by a sort of a forced issue and partly by I think, the Timorese sort of making an assessment because you know, you got to sort of go with the winner haven't you? And I think they sort of influenced the Timorese towards

11:00 the end of the campaign. But morale was pretty high most of the time I'd say. There were periods when it looked pretty hopeless but I think we always felt that we could evade the Japanese until perhaps Australia was able to supply the reinforcements or evacuate us.

11:30 **Had you mapped the area in the highlands you were now occupying?**

Yes, I think we had it pretty well sorted out where we would go if we were attacked. And our long term plan was to move slowly towards the east. And that made it a longer trip for the Japanese from Dili to go east to attack us.

12:00 But it was just a means of surviving the best we could.

Did you identify any areas that were strategically good areas to defend?

Yes I think, well to defend, I don't think it ever sort of became an issue; we decided to defend anything, we didn't have the troops and what's more the wounded was always a big problem for us, we couldn't

12:30 put up a stand if it meant losing 10 men or something wounded because there was no way we could handle them. So part of our survival tactic was more or less to handle what we could handle and put up a fight and get out.

How close to quarters was the fight with the Japanese at that time?

Well it was varied quite a lot. If we had an opportunity to hit the Japs there at 500 yards away because the machine-guns have got

13:00 tremendous range and if a good target occurred 500 yards away we'd accept it. But generally we liked to be in closer quarters before taking them. But of course there were many opportunities, the Japanese were careless about spreading their troops out and quite often on a road you would get opportunity to fire

13:30 into a group of 100 which was pretty effective really. But they seemed to be able to afford to lose troops. So very little gained, in fact I think a lot of the Japanese, it was an honour to die for their country and that was one thing that was going to make the finish of the war very difficult. Because a lot of them would fight to the last. And because

14:00 the atomic bomb, as you probably remember, that finished the war.

Who was in command during these months?

That was Lieutenant Colonel Spence, in the first instance. And then Lieutenant Colonel Callinan, Bert Callinan, he was a wonderful soldier in every sense of the word. Spence wasn't quite as

14:30 popular as a commander, but Callinan was wonderful, he was an engineer and finished up doing quite brilliant work in Melbourne. I think he built or was responsible for some of the building of the new parliament house.

15:00 **What lead to the change of command?**

Well I think the top brass decided that, you know, they'd change our leaders. All we heard [was] that Spence was going back to Australia quite often because some other job, I think he took command of some area. And then of course everyone moves up at that, 2IC [second in command] becomes the leader and

15:30 his junior becomes 2IC and so. Almost a constant movement of commands of different units.

When was the change of command made?

From memory, probably

16:00 about October '42.

At what point was that of the time you spent in Timor?

What was…?

At what point in time?

Probably about 8 or 9 months by then.

When and where did you make the first radio contact with Australia again?

Well I think it was late April and

16:30 we'd built a wireless out of bits and pieces, or the signallers did it. And they used to try every night and eventually they got response from Australia. And of course having been such a long gap in communications between Australia they were very suspicious in Australia that this was some sort of a hoax. So they asked could they speak to Captain

17:00 Parker I think it was, and Captain Parker came on and they said, "What's your street number?" And he gave that and they checked it and that's what it was; "What's your wife name?" and they checked that and it proved right. So eventually we proved to them that we could only have a lot of inside information by being

17:30 genuine. And that started really the communication to Australia.

What did that communication mean to you?

It was just wonderful because it meant that supplies could be built up. We'd fought on in our old clothes and boots for a while, worn out clothes because it was nearly all bush work. Clothes were torn and they started dropping supplies and food

18:00 and even silver to deal with the natives from planes that flew over the designated drop area. And planes would come and supply us almost with anything we wanted really.

Had you ever come close to running of supplies like food and ammunition?

Well we were virtually out of food nearly all the time. We did get some food dropped in about early May I suppose.

18:30 And ammunition we had carted ammunition up into the hills and hidden it. So as well as you can hide something from natives, it was still secure. But the natives are all over the island like ants, so it's really hard to hide something from them. But generally they were friendly natives, and ammunition was fairly safe.

Did you name the locations for the ammunition dumps?

19:00 Well the people concerned would have I think, I don't know off hand but I'm sure they would have had them pretty closely tabbed. You know, some local object that they could nominate as a sign close to or somewhere to find where it was hidden.

19:30 **So what happened once you established radio contact and were re-supplied?**

Well just carry on really, only under more comfortable conditions, perhaps new goods and clothes and the feeling that we had back-up. You know to be out on a limb is a bit frightening especially for a commanding officer, if he's got all his troops he is responsible for and

20:00 not sure just how it was all going to turn out. But that's war I mean there are a lot of situations you just can't help and we were in one of those I suppose but we just did the best we could.

Where did they find the various parts they made the radio out of?

Well I think some was down in Kupang where quite a fierce battle took place.

20:30 And you know going back into the area and rummaging amongst things that were discarded. And found parts that they needed to make a strong enough wireless to reach Australia. It became quite well known as 'Winnie the war winner', the wireless that they finished up making contact with Australia.

21:00 It's in the war museum anyway in Canberra. And -

Who named the radio Winnie?

Who did? I don't know which individual but that's what it got named and that's what it is named in the museum.

Did you have any kind of celebration once you had made radio contact?

Well only within one's self, great relief and cheering.

21:30 But it all remained pretty much low key.

How high was people's energy at the time?

Energy? I think mostly you'd have breakouts of malaria and that would knock a person's health for a few days. But mostly I think we made a point of trying to keep reasonably fit. But there were some who couldn't quite overcome

22:00 but if you had a weak physique well that would eventually decide your health really. They may have even been evacuated or flown out because of a lack of capacity to survive. But mostly you know our health was good and our intentions to looking after our physical fitness was quite strong.

How did you look after one another? How important was that?

22:30 That was very important. You know if a chap was sick in some way you would do your best to do all you could. There wasn't a lot you could do, but you would try and get a bit of tucker to him and cheer him up like that. But I had quite a good friend who was sick for about a week I suppose. He became quite a priority of my life then to look after him and he eventually got well.

23:00 He was a damn good solider in every way.

Can you tell me about some of the mates you had at that time?

Their names?

And the experiences you shared? May the jokes that you made? Nicknames?

Now you are testing me. Well I suppose some of my special mates was Tom Foster. He eventually, he was commissioned.

23:30 And Harold Rowan Robinson was a very good friend from Bridgetown and he was the one that was pretty sick for a while really. But lots of others there were pretty good mates, but to itemise them or separate them, hardly seemed justified. You know our whole troop was pretty friendly with each other

24:00 or mostly. Your mates were very important really and they'd grab you if you were wounded and look after you in some way.

Do you remember somebody helping you?

I seemed to be looked after pretty well by most of them. No I can't remember any special incident. I wasn't wounded but I was in plenty of

24:30 places where you could have been wounded. It's surprising how many people come out without being wounded. You know, it's all those bullets flying everywhere; one has to hit you and wound you.

How would you spend time after you regrouped after a bit of a stoush ?

Generally regrouping I suppose, perhaps organising a bit of a

25:00 camp somewhere. And where are you going to get your next meal. And just anything to help survive really.

After a stoush your nerves would have been a bit frayed?

You got pretty tough, you know, I don't think, you didn't live on unless you had a wounded person with you. That was the real test of your moral strength I suppose, to see

25:30 someone you've worked and loved and perhaps dying from the wound that you can't do much for, is quite an issue really I think.

What did you do with the wounded or those that passed away?

Well we buried those that were killed almost wherever it happened to be. And the

26:00 wounded ones we did our best to get them to the doctor to get the best medical attention they could. And just look after the wounded until we could get them to Australia. I mean, we did manage to evacuate most of the wounded. With very great help from Australia and the air force and

26:30 captains of boats that came in. Wonderful support from all those people.

Were you able to hold ceremonies for - ?

No, no. We never - now we are back here, whenever we have a meeting we remember the ones that didn't come back. But on the island, what was the point really of assembling and having some commemoration

27:00 that we all felt the loss? What more can you do?

Was there any kind of ritual at all?

No not by a person, not that I remember, I don't remember being at any burials. But possibly you know some bit of a ceremony was held and that you all…

27:30 **What was the outcome in Timor?**

Well it continued really I think, that was the use of it, continue surviving, you know, until something really happened. Eventually they sent reinforcement, the 2/4th company which is a similar company to our own, which was the 2/2nd but unfortunately

28:00 in the unloading of the 2/4th the ship went aground, we lost the ship. It couldn't be moved, which was quite a desperate issue really because it was intended that that ship would take the 2/2nd back to Australia. It was a tremendous blow, and a big blow to Australia

28:30 but once it was known that the ship wasn't going to get out of it, you know, they blew the anything that was valuable on the ship, blew it up. They had these contingencies I think on all fighting ships, you know, to destroy, so the enemy can't use it. That was the sort of first request and

29:00 'take off what you can use yourself'; I think they did. Because the problem was not having trucks and that sort of thing, if they did want to take off some of the guns on the ship there was no way of transporting them, all we had was horses; little tiny ponies which could carry great loads considering but you know a great load was 40 pounds on each side, sort of a hang on saddle.

29:30 **What was the name of the ship that ran aground?**

It was a destroyer, I should know, I've heard it hundreds of times, destroyer I think.

What happened with the crew of the grounded ship? Did they join the 2/4th?

They did very temporarily. We got word to Australia and I think the sailors

30:00 were all taken home within 24 or 48 hours. Because you know, trained personnel are very valuable. I mean just as valuable as a soldier really.

How were they evacuated?

By a small ship I think. A corvette type.

How much longer was the 2/2nd on Timor?

We didn't get off till late in December so it was

30:30 really 2 or 3 months we had to hang in there. And our health was deteriorating quite a bit. I've got a picture of us when we landed back in Australia, do you want that?

Once the 2/4th arrived did you join forces?

Yes, we joined forces until the next attempt at getting us off

31:00 happened. We finally got off on a Dutch submarine I think it was, a Dutch ship of some sorts, and we came off in 2 or 3 lots. I think A troop and C troop went first and B troop was taken a day or two later.

What kind of relationship had you made with the 2/4th?

31:30 Well the two commanders really knew each other in civvy life, they were both engineers I think. So it was a Major Walker and Major Callinan, who were civil engineers. And I think we knew some of the individuals but I can't think of any specific one at the moment. But we were quite good friends and we knew they had come to

32:00 relieve us and any help we could give them settling in and we gave them. And any help they could give us; I suppose it made our withdrawal, that was help.

Where were you settled at that time?

Down on the south coast, where the destroyer went aground. And the thing was to try and hide from the

32:30 Jap air force you know what was happening, because they soon saw the destroyer and wasn't long before they were over bombing it. It didn't matter much because I think the air crew on the ship shot down a Jap plane or two. But the Japanese you know got onto that pretty quickly. And what's more of course they had a

33:00 pretty good look around the area. Because to hide a lot of troops and stores and that sort of thing was not easy. You know those low-flying planes, easy to pick up some activity that the Japs could blast away at. Pretty tight period then really.

33:30 **Had you set up a defensive line?**

I think we were prepared to not necessarily hold the Japs but to look after ourselves. You know, until something came of the position.

What was the outcome of that position?

Well eventually I think we burst and went back into the hinterland a bit and carried on as we were

34:00 with communication with Australia still of course. I think that's about it, we just hung in there. Great disappointment to ourselves of course because we were well and truly [ready] to be relieved, our health was fading and the stress of almost 12 months of battling on, took its toll really.

What kind of support did the 2/4th provide?

34:30 Mainly physical support, you know, being fit and just being with them I suppose was support. They couldn't do a lot else really. I think they brought mail over or something, just some little things.

35:00 **When did you leave the island?**

About mid to late December.

Where did you leave the island from?

From the south coast I think. Bitano or one of the villages along the south coast I think. And went back to Darwin of course.

How were you evacuated?

I think we

35:30 had a Dutch submarine or a Dutch destroyer; some sort of Dutch boat picked us up. Because the Dutch were in the war just as much as we were really.

What became of the 2/4th once you left?

They struggled on; I think they were evacuated about January the next year. Much the same means as

36:00 we were evacuated.

So what was your arrival in Darwin like?

Wonderful, yes there was all sorts of people there to welcome us, quite high army officers I think were there to welcome us. But certainly a great day that was, to be back in your home country.

36:30 **What happened when you got back?**

Once we got back we were taken to some depot I think, Miramar I think they called it. But we came back with beards and instructions went out that they were to come off. So we were all shaved and we were pretty well infested with internal parasites

37:00 of some sorts, you know worms. And there is a hookworm that comes into your system through your feet and we were all lousy with hookworm . So we went through a treatment process, which involved, not sure what the chemical was, but if you burped it would just about blow your head off. It certainly shifted the wogs out of us,

37:30 because you hardly survived the treatment.

What were the symptoms of hookworm?

Well just a general debilitation of the system really. All sorts of wogs living on your - I think the lungs and the liver were the most damaged. The treatments seemed to clean them all out because we eventually, we went home on leave -

How long was it before you returned to full health?

38:00 Oh I suppose probably a month or so.

You spent that time in Darwin?

No we went home on leave I think. Quite a long trip back to Western Australia from Darwin.

How did you make that trip?

By train. I think we went to Mount Isa and then

38:30 down the coast from Townsville to Brisbane I suppose.

That's a few miles?

Yeah, I did it a few times too. We were on our way back in a couple of weeks time.

So you were on your way home to Perth for some leave? How was it to be back in your home town?

Pretty terrific as well. I don't think you can describe the

39:00 relief and joy of situations like that, that just defy, they just so overwhelm you that you just accept it without trying to describe it.

How were you greeted by family and friends?

Pretty joyously. Because they didn't know for many months whether we had been, you know, knocked off in the war.

39:30 **They must have been overwhelmed?**

They were, especially I suppose the feeling in families was very strong. But you know, a new relationship with a couple of lovers is just impossible to describe I suppose really the joy of the meeting.

What did you do on leave?

I think I worked most of the time. I think they

40:00 were harvesting or something - doing something where I felt I was needed.

Did you get a rest?

Well you got the normal rest. We met up with friends and did some parties I suppose.

Bit of dancing? Bit of drinking?

I wasn't a drinker;

40:30 I always had a bit of money in the pay book. So those that were drinkers were borrowing money from me. And I was worried a bit that I might not get it back, but I always did. You know there was just something about the army that your loyalty develops I'm sure. You know you are just so dependent on each that you don't become a cheat in the system really.

Tape 4

00:33 **Can you give us some more detail about Timor?**

Well one of them was, in Dili and the hills above it we were able to watch the wharf and the harbour and the aerodrome. We were able to watch these constantly

01:00 in fact we made a point of building OPs (observation posts) to watch these. And quite often you would see a fleet of ships come into the Dili harbour and we'd wireless Australia straight away. These ships were generally on their way sort of - what would it be? - south, to reinforce Moresby or some other base they had there.

01:30 And we 'd get in touch with Australia and she'd be waiting for us somewhere, it was quite an issue that quite a few of the communications we sent back to Australia resulted in attacks on Japanese shipping. And really eventually Japanese shipping virtually collapsed under the pressure of American sea battles. There were two great sea battles and American won both of them. And it so

02:00 depleted the Japanese supply lines that it was obvious that they couldn't go on. I mean the war was winding down, perhaps 10, 12 months before it finally ended. But it was mainly because of destroying their supply system. Thousands, probably millions of tonnes of Japanese shipping was destroyed and it was partly because of the chain of

02:30 reactions, I mean, communications from Timor to Australia helped warn them of many shipping movements. And probably air force movements too. I certainly remember some, you know, quite important shipping communiqués being sent to Australia, and they were looking out for them and virtually

03:00 waiting for them. But this was all around northern Australia because they had observation points on most of the islands and this was all fed back to, you know, the fighting quarters in Australia. It certainly prepared, or enabled them to prepare attacks on shipping lines, which, as I just said, virtually knocked the Japs out of the war.

03:30 **Sounds like invaluable reconnaissance?**

It was, that sort of justified our existence there apart from other issues there we helped with. Because any information in the war is valuable.

Was there any thing else you wanted to fill in about Timor that we missed?

04:00 Probably think of it some other time.

So you were telling us about your leave when you returned to Australia?

Yes we returned to Canungra, which became the jungle fighting training camp in Australia. And after our leave we assembled there a bit sort of like brown cows coming in, one here and one there. But we eventually

04:30 all got back and assembled and counted and so on. And then reinforcements were decided on, I think we took in 150 reinforcements in Canungra and they joined the unit and we went into a fairly strict training program.

What kind of training program?

Well all sorts of

05:00 stupid things. Having been in the war for 12 months, a lot of things seemed a bit stupid to us.

Can you point them out?

Well, quite a few of the things testing Reos [reinforcements], of course we really didn't need. And I think they had barricades that you had to climb up with your pack on and then jump on the other side where there is a great pool of water.

05:30 All sorts of things that we felt we could do without, but the reinforcements needed it of course. But we did get some wonderful reinforcements that really made the unit, I think, better than it was when we went to Timor because I think we had a few there that we might as well have left behind. But that's, you know, without naming anyone I think

06:00 it's pretty hard to have an equal team. And you can always sort of try for the best, but that's not possible, you come down the scale a bit. But the type of soldier we had in the 2/2nd was quite remarkable mostly I think. I think to have survived almost 12 months on an island under the conditions we survived under, well we know it's unique, it's recognised in history as

06:30 being quite a feat really, under the circumstances. It's not as though we had all the requirements of the war - food and ammunition - we had them but to a very limited degree.

What else took place during this training that you found amusing?

Well we sorted out people, the reinforcements,

07:00 who was to go where, so and so A troop, so and so B troop, until you brought them all up to what we called strength, you know, full strength of a troop was about 20. And once we had all this sorted out we were then prepared to move on again and New Guinea became the place that was a pretty close call really. One of the greatest

07:30 island battles I think took place on Kokoda trail.

Before you went to New Guinea what was your knowledge of the Japanese landing and fighting there?

I knew we had them pretty well bluffed on every corner really. But the Japanese are such that you can't wipe a unit without wiping out every man. They have a sort of a non-surrender

08:00 policy. And although I think eventually a lot did surrender, it was almost forced on them by their commanders. This is after the atomic bomb of course, which is a bit down the track still. But anyway, we had quite a - we went by ship from Townsville to New Guinea. And landed

08:30 there for a few days and were sorted out and we flew up into Goroka/ Buna area which is lovely country with rich soil and from there we were dispersed into different areas. Well keeping the Japs under surveillance really. But we were under 7th Division command there.

09:00 And our role there was to scout, find out where the Japs were and where they weren't. So that the higher planning can take place to do what action they decide, whether to eliminate them from New Guinea and all this sort of thing. So our role in New Guinea was quite different to Timor in the sense that we were under

09:30 Australian command, direct control of a General. Not quite sure which General it was but in Timor we were free to do what we wanted, never given directions where to go or what to do, or certainly not by higher command, it was always by our own CO. But in New Guinea, it was a tougher campaign than Timor in some ways;

10:00 it was harder country to live on, it was wetter I think.

What other differences were there in the terrain?

Well New Guinea had a lot higher rain fall, quite a lot of area in Timor almost had drought conditions. And their bush in a lot of Timor was rather like Australian bush; small eucalypt was the main,

10:30 you know, forest tree. In New Guinea the rainfall was a lot higher. In fact it was very difficult to go through a day without being wet through in New Guinea. And the tracks were slippery and muddy, and generally it was a much less, if a campaign can be pleasant, it was much less

11:00 pleasant than Timor. And anyway we did our 16 months in New Guinea, which is another pretty long stint to be battling on.

Can you go into more detail about the area you were scouting and how your patrols were organised?

Well it was in the Ramu valley, between the Bismarck Range and the Finisterre I think.

11:30 Quite a big valley and a very fast flowing river I think, Ramu. And it was fought on both sides of the Ramu and quite often we had to cross this Ramu in a very flimsy native canoe. And there'd be about 10 soldiers sitting in this canoe with rifles. And the little native trying to guide the canoe across but it was really quite helpless to control the canoe,

12:00 all you could do was sort of direct it . It would start up here and a mile further down it would hit the other side. That's how much the river took the canoe down stream. So it wasn't the best of feelings, especially when you can't swim, and you've got boots on. But there were some pretty close tragedies I think. Different ones,

12:30 I think I even tried going on the float they made - what do you call it? - a raft. Went across and a couple of chaps fell off I think and had to be rescued; there were usually some pretty good swimmers in the team. Anyway I don't think we lost anyone there but it was pretty close at the time.

13:00 It was a damned unpleasant experience crossing this raging river in a canoe where water was practically lapping the side of the boat.

Sounds like it left an imprint in your mind?

Certainly in mine. And then we'd land on the other side and then go looking for the enemy and then you got to repeat it coming back, only you start up there and go down this way, as sooner start to here and going that way.

13:30 **Can you describe what would take place on those patrols?**

Well you loaded up, you'd go out on the patrol; maybe it would last a few days to a week. And you'd have your pack and you all had to carry your own food and your own ammunition and that sort of thing. And people that had the Bren gun, it was quite a load for them because the magazines held 30 rounds or something

14:00 and you might have 5 or 6 magazines or more. Then you'd hit the other side and you'd have an object in view that you would try and make, and the enemy allowing it you would get there and perhaps settle for a night or two. And then check out various spots that you were sent out to do. And see where the enemy was and the enemy wasn't and

14:30 come back and report, and that's that for the next week sort of.

Did you have any confrontations with the Japanese on those patrols?

Oh yeah, mostly we did. The thing was to try and be out of the boat and in the bush before they happened.

So you were at risk of being under fire crossing the river?

Yes the Japanese could be hiding on the other side. But I don't think we had any disasters where we were attacked before we

15:00 sort of got off the canoe and in the bush. And we tried to reverse it; if they crossed over we hoped to catch them in that position. And I suppose we did but it was a fairly evenly matched thing, patrolling and fighting and so on.

Can you describe a couple of the more dangerous situations you overcame on those patrols?

15:30 I should give you a book or two to read.

I'd like to hear it from you first hand?

Yeah. Well there were many situations really bordering on the impossible almost, you know, we were - where nature turned against you.

16:00 There was very high rainfall in New Guinea, about 300 inches in some places. And you could be wet through, from leaving the depot on a patrol until you got home. And to run into the enemy there, which often happened, was quite devastating really to be wet through and have nature against you as well as the enemy. But

16:30 yes they were, I think New Guinea was a much tougher campaign than Timor. But I think as I said the reason for that was we had a lot more freedom, choice-making in Timor than we had in New Guinea. We had objects, or objectives in New Guinea that we went down to achieve. And you almost felt obliged to go to dangerous limits achieving these objectives:

17:00 attacking perhaps a depot that the Japs had occupied for quite a while or something similar. But you were sort of under pressure to achieve results. Whereas Timor you were left to your own devices and whether you did a certain thing or didn't was less important.

17:30 **Would you say you were more on the offensive rather than the defensive?**

Yeah we would have been in New Guinea more on the defensive. Because you were there to do a job, to scout for the 7th Division.

How do you think the independence you enjoyed in Timor might have affected your experience in New Guinea?

18:00 No I don't think it did really, it was all experience, Timor, and I think you sort of understand that campaigns change, different campaign in New Guinea, it was one, I just said, much more a direct control of the whole army system really. I think, as I said,

18:30 Timor was a bit of an isolated case. And we may have got recommendations from Australia to try and do so and so. But we very seldom got orders to do so and so. It was more or less left to our own judgement.

What did you think of the command in New Guinea?

As far as the ordinary soldier can tell it was quite good I think.

19:00 There was a bit of bickering between top rankers and so on, but I think that's always on. I mean there were two, there was the 7th company there, the 2/7th and the 2/2nd and it's not easy for the commanders of each company to agree exactly on what each one should do. So there was a bit of cooperation which is, that's how it generally finished up. But there was always the potential there for

19:30 the agreement not going on as easily as it might have.

What kind of issues were they discussing?

Well which areas each one had to manage. And one might think he was getting the worst end of the deal and things like that. Because a CO's aim is to do what he is asked to do but secondly is to look after his unit. And if one CO feels his unit is being a bit disadvantaged by

20:00 the role he is being asked to do, well then he will come back and talk about it, try and level it out a bit. But that's roughly you know,…

Did you ever feel your unit was getting the rough end of the stick?

Well I suppose you always think that but pretty briefly I think, unless a thing like that lasts long, it can be serious, I mean you've got to sort of handle each day or each problem as it comes

20:30 and try and settle it. But I think they did that pretty successfully really.

How would you settle those thoughts? Your own personal doubts?

Well you have to accept them, you know, if you don't even realise it's going on, but you know that your CO is doing his best for your area of control. And if you miss out, and it's usually conjecture, never sure on anything. And,

21:00 well it was a minor problem really, but it exists.

In the back of your mind?

Well yes I suppose.

Did your unit take very heavy casualties?

New Guinea we copped a few losses I think, not sure what the casualties were, but quite a few places where we lost a couple here,

21:30 a couple there, but they weren't heavy casualties really. The modern approach to a soldier's life I think is quite different to what it was in the First World War, where you just peeled them off by the hundred and just didn't give a damn if he didn't come out of it. But now I think that's it's a very conscious issue. And,

22:00 'is a certain job worth the cost?' And sometimes it is of course. But it's weighed up pretty carefully.

How strong was the Japanese resistance?

They had their weaknesses. But generally when they were well fed and well looked after they are pretty tough. But towards the end it was obvious that they were

22:30 hungry and fairly badly led and things like that. Almost a breakdown I think in the Japanese administration. But it generally relates to supply of some sort. And they [were] obviously pretty tight for most essentials as the war progressed. As I said before, their shipping losses were just staggering.

23:00 In fact I think we won the war in the air and on the sea long before the war finished. That's my impression.

Is that an impression you made after the war?

Well I think you probably didn't know enough about it until after the war, when you started reading some sea battles and plane battles. But you were perhaps conscious that they were copping it

23:30 pretty tough in both those areas, but not until after the war was sort of decided, well they were really finished then but they hung on.

When did you learn of the bombing of Japan? Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

The atomic bomb. That was pretty close to the end of the war, I think the war only went a couple of weeks

24:00 after the first bomb was dropped. Because Japan could see another couple of bombs there would be [no] Japan. Although they resisted heavily, especially field commanders, they just hated the thought of surrendering, but it came from the - not the president, what's the top boy in Japan? The Emperor - it came from the Emperor. He had to chuck it in and

24:30 they eventually accepted because another bomb or two and Japan would have been history.

Were you still in New Guinea when the bombs were dropped?

We were still in New Guinea but we had moved from New Guinea to New Britain. So we were still in the war, still in the front line.

We should cover those movements? Can we back track a little?

Yes.

25:00 **When and why were you moved?**

Well we came out of New Guinea 16 months after going in, I'm not exactly sure of dates. And went home on leave, which is quite an episode really. To send you home from Townsville to Western Australia and get them back in time. But it all happened, they did that, we went home on leave

25:30 and I think as usual I got caught up in the farm after I went back and had a fortnight's leave. Most of the soldiers were broke because drink, you know, drink is pretty fatal if you are a drinker; you socialise and go through your money pretty quickly. So a lot of them were glad to get back to refurbish their bank accounts or their pay books. So we

26:00 went from Townsville south on leave and returned of course after our fortnight, and back to Townsville I think. And then we were shipped, I didn't go on the ship, I was a small arms corps in Bougainville, no

26:30 a place where there is a small arms corps, ah, I can't think of the name of it. Not far from Albury, a small arms corps, it was there when the boys went back to Timor, to New Britain.

How come you were separated from the rest of them?

Well they used to send off

27:00 fairly regularly different personnel to different schools back in Australia. there was the (eye … UNCLEAR) school that a couple of our chaps attended, and what did they call them, your field campaign sort of lessons, you know, everything is progressive and the war is the same. And as I said the I [Intelligence] section sent people home and I was a small

27:30 arms person, pretty good with rifles and Bren guns. And I went to a small arms school and that's where I was, it was about a month's school I think. And I didn't get back to the unit; I didn't go to New Britain. But the boys were only there a few months and once they dropped the bomb

28:00 the war finished pretty quickly. But there was a fair bit of mopping up to do.

You remained in Australia once you took leave?

Well that's right. I went to, I can't think of the name.

We can find that name in the break.

How much more have we got?

28:30 **Another 10 minutes, we'll break for lunch and then…**

29:00 Well I suppose I can wind up. I didn't get back to the unit. I came from the small arms school back to the echelons, you know, where the decisions were made about where troops go and had a thrombosis on the leg, you know, a clot stuck in my left leg.

29:30 And they wouldn't let me move in case it moved around and lodged in my heart. So I was sort of kept pretty quiet for a month or so. And this was during peacetime; have I got to where Japan surrendered? Pretty close I think.

30:00 **Where were you when you got the news that Japan had been bombed?**

Well the unit would have been in New Britain, and I would have been somewhere in Australia, probably, I was in a hospital for about a month I think. It might have been Heidelberg in Victoria, waiting for this clot to dissolve. So I didn't

30:30 partake in the unit from then on. So my real knowledge of it ends there. But they spent you know two or three months in New Britain. And I'm not sure how long they were there after the bomb was dropped. Not very long I'd say, dispersement of the unit was a bit slow. They had a system of people having a certain number of marks or

31:00 whatever they call it, depending on their length of service. And those that had been in there longest, they were, I can't think of the word – 'discharged'; they were discharged first . So the process of dispersing the unit was you know

31:30 on the go and it took a month or so I suppose. But there was no great parade for our unit, like there is for some. We just drifted back to civilian life after being discharged. And it was a great time in Australia, except for shortages, but there was plenty of work everywhere, sort of back into Australia

32:00 after the war. Are you ready for that?

When you were discharged did you return straight to Perth?

I think I did. I went to, yes, I was sort of semi-hospitalised, because they wanted to prevent me from moving much. So I went back and I was in hospital.

In Perth?

32:30 Yes.

Would that have been Hollywood?

Pretty likely I'd think, yes. And that would have been for a month or so. But I was discharged in January of 1946 I think, yeah, and

33:00 able to make my way home. I probably had to go to the army discharge centre, which was Karrakatta. To get my discharge certificate and whatever else they, had my pay book made up.

Can't go home without that?

No. That's just about the end of my -

Did you make your way south to Donnybrook?

33:30 I went home but when I got there, they were in the process of selling the farm. My Father was 60 odd and not that well and he decided to sell. But he sold to the land settlement; you know, people that were buying land for returned soldiers. So they bought one half of our farm and I bought the other off my Father. He didn't give it to me, I had to buy it.

34:00 And fortunately I was one of the few that saved most of his money. And a pound was a pound then, it was really worth money. And I had enough, just about to buy the farm.

So you were able to save the family property in a sense?

Well I bought one half of it and the rest of it went to the land settlement people. But the half I bought had the little orchard on it but no buildings;

34:30 I had to build a shed and a house, and it was a real start from scratch case.

Pioneering stuff?

Yeah. And anyway I enjoyed that.

Did your father stay on with you?

No he moved to Busselton. In fact I think I was really responsible for enabling him to get out, 'cause otherwise he would have had the other half of the farm

35:00 which land settlement didn't want. I thought it was the best half, so.

That's a fortunate disagreement?

Well it suited me because that's the half I wanted. And I wouldn't have taken the other half anyway it was a different type of land really. It was quite steep, hilly country and

35:30 I just didn't fancy that. So you know, by agreement I bought what I bought.

Were there many other returned servicemen returning to Donnybrook?

Yes, they were all coming home about that time. And many of them went back home, you know, on the farm. There was a land settlement scheme, where the government bought land

36:00 and allocated it to soldiers, sort of on a priority basis. I was eligible for one of those but it was such a rigmarole and such a drawn-out deal, that I couldn't wait, I wanted to get on. So I just accepted what I might have missed out by not applying for a land settlement block. Are we still on air?

Yes, we can have lunch after this?

36:30 Anyway I managed to develop this farm and build a bit of a house on it and a shed. That's [the] shed up there, it finished up, the shed which you probably could have looked at…

The photo I saw when I arrived?

Pardon?

The photo I saw?

Yes, that's how we finished up and

37:00 30 years later that's what I sold and went to Mandurup. Enjoyed it all, it was a bit tough, but when you are young, change is a part of your life.

After surviving Timor and New Guinea I think you would have been equipped for the challenges of Donnybrook?

Yeah.

Tape 5

00:33 **With the experience that you had in Timor, was there ever a point, I mean especially when you were out of contact, that you felt somehow deserted by Australia?**

No I don't think so because war's war and you know, it's how it turned out for us. No I don't think we did. As soon as we contacted them, they helped us all they could.

01:00 **How was morale during those times when you were out of contact?**

I s'pose it was a bit patchy but there was always someone to, you know, stir the camp up a bit and no, I think we survived well really.

How did you lift your spirits when your spirits were a little bit low?

I think it comes back to training. We expected this or something similar

01:30 and with that background I think it was easier to accept and that's what we did I s'pose: accepted it as a part of what we were trained for. And we volunteered anyway, so we can't blame anyone.

You figured that you got yourself into this place in the first place?

Yeah.

Right. Did you ever think during those times when you didn't have regular contact that you might be

02:00 **in danger of being lost forever?**

Well certainly in danger of not getting home, because islands all around Australia were falling under the pressure of the Japanese Army and yes, I s'pose it crossed our minds many times. Perhaps it wasn't discussed but it was certainly a thought in the background of most of us.

Was there ever any consideration

02:30 **to maybe make a some sort of a boat and...?**

Yes quite a few of them did and there was a successful party or two and I think there were probably three attempts by three different people or three different groups. And one was captured I think by the Japs and one got back to Australia and they copped a bit of a blast as being not exactly charged with desertion but

03:00 it was certainly a part of the thinking of the - what's it? You know, the trial: court martial. But they got off because I think it was announced by some of the leaders there, it was every man for himself. You know, this fight's over, so every man for himself. That was particularly so at the Dutch end.

03:30 I don't think that was ever said in a - well we were still an organised group under command of whoever it was, so it was more an announcement from the Dutch end that it was every man for himself, which meant do the best you can to survive.

But what you're saying is it didn't really affect your lot?

Well there were some in our lot that attempted to make

04:00 the break but I think some of them got a couple of days out and the sun nearly cooked them and there was other things and they eventually got back to land and were glad of the security of land.

What would you build a craft out of?

Well I think there were many things and many skilled people and some unskilled in making crafts and I think a canoe was perhaps - but a canoe to go across the ocean

04:30 is just stupid I think. I mean you've got no leeway, a splash of water and a canoe hasn't got to tip much to fill up with water and there may have been other attempts where they got lost. I'd be surprised if there weren't.

So what you're saying is there were some incidences of court martial?

Well I'm not sure if it was a court martial but they certainly got well and truly chatted by the officers.

05:00 **Was there ever a point where it went into discussion about what you should be doing next, rather than living on a daily basis?**

What, on the island?

Yeah?

Well what alternative was there?

I just thought maybe there might have been, you know, some sort of a plan to go to another area or look for some sort of…?

Well the island was, that was it. Without some reasonable craft, that's where you stayed and

05:30 I think you were more secure there than attempting something a lot less secure.

Because there were places that you knew HQ's [headquarters] were? I'm just thinking if you might have thought about, you know, sending out help to some of the other bases that might have had wireless contact?

No I don't think we seriously thought of that. I s'pose we were confident eventually we'd make contact with Australia and you pursue one until

06:00 you know it can't work and then you pursue another. Well the one we first pursued did work.

You mentioned that you actually made a wireless. How do you do that?

Well by collecting pieces that were perhaps bigger in capacity than the ones that we lost and, you know, joining things up. It's more a technical question you ask me but

06:30 building a wireless, I s'pose putting together things that make a wireless work.

How did you lose the first wireless?

I'm not sure whether we were overrun or what happened but wirelesses were very scarce and very poor performers very early in the campaign, particularly when they were equipping us, because when the 2/4th unit came along it had much better - they could reach Australia with their equipment,

07:00 whereas maybe ours wasn't strong enough to. Although I think they must have thought it would work when it was issued to us and I'm not sure whether it didn't work or we lost it or what. I'm not quite sure about that but anyway we finally made contact.

Just wondering if there was any facility to communicate with Morse code?

I still think you need - I think

07:30 they would have used it if there was so, don't know what distance Morse code will operate over. I'm not sure.

Were there wireless specialists along as part of your team?

Yes we had - what do they call them? Signallers, and we had other signals. We had a lamp, you know but quite often the climate wasn't suitable for that. It'd come in raining and very

08:00 few things that operate perfection in all weathers and I think wireless is one of the exceptions really. I mean it doesn't matter whether it's cloudy or raining or dark or what, your wirelesses usually worked but [if] you've got a lamp to send a signal and the other party can't see it, well it's pretty pointless.

Can you tell me about some of the difficulties you experienced as part of the weather conditions on Timor?

08:30 Well Timor was better weather than New Guinea. As I said, New Guinea is constant rain but Timor, a lot of the climate was not dissimilar from Australia and a lot of the areas were covered in a eucalypt very similar to the ones that grow here, only they were smaller. And they have a wet and a dry season in Timor and the dry is quite pleasant. You know, it's cold at night and

09:00 nice and warm in the day but when the wet weather comes it's a bit like our north west. It's, you know, rain like hell and then fine for a day or two and we had to carry on irrespective. So if it was raining we carried on as well as we could and I think they're fairly equal balanced in time. You know the dry is November, I think, through to about

09:30 March and well March is the start of our tropical weather up north and I think that's pretty general. In the islands it's the monsoon period.

Well while we're on the subject of weather conditions, can you tell me what made New Guinea difficult, as far as conditions were concerned?

Well the wet mainly I think it was and leeches. Because it's constantly wet, leeches are all through the grass

10:00 and people would come in with boots up to here but the leeches would go in through the eyelets and then settle on your legs. And there was also another tick. What was it? Quite a dangerous tick, particularly if it'd been in an area where there were corpses or that sort of - you know where rats and mice and things might be

10:30 partly on corpses and then these ticks come along and get on the rats and then back onto humans and what do they call that? Scrub typhus I think. Yes that's quite a serious illness and as soon as you feel it coming on, you're supposed to stop totally, don't use any energy and you'll very well survive,

11:00 but if you try and battle on, which is fairly well an instinct in most of us, you'll go under. It's pretty fatal I think, a bite, unless you look after it.

How would you look after it?

Well, be idle. That's practically the only treatment that I know of, just to stop being active.

What are some of the symptoms of scrub typhus?

Well they're pretty, you can die in a couple of days and

11:30 if you're starting to feel off, I think you've got to be suspicious of scrub typhus and I don't know about any other treatment, but certainly, stop spending energy is number one.

Did you come down with anything that was reasonably serious?

Well malaria was very general but healthy people didn't stay down for long. But it knocked you down almost no matter how healthy you were for

12:00 a day or so and you'd sweat profusely and get the shakes and you know look quite serious but mostly you came out of it. But some of the, you know, ones with less vigour, with not such a good system really I s'pose, finally went down to the point of being sent back to Australia,

12:30 and I think as far as I know, everyone recovered from malaria and I did anyway. Within a year or two I wasn't getting recurring bouts of it.

Thank goodness, sounds terrible. What was the purity of water like in both Timor and New Guinea? I mean how did you go about finding regular water supplies?

Well in Timor

13:00 there were lots of springs but there was also the constant risk of drinking below the excreta of different natives where they dropped their pants where they were sort of and if it was on the waterway well there was a risk but I don't think anyone got any illness through it.

So you didn't actually purify your water?

No I mean we didn't, couldn't look after things that you

13:30 needed, well you need something to boil water don't you? And you couldn't cart extra billies around just for that so you drank from a clear stream or whatever and filled your water bottle from a good source, as good as you could find. Actually I don't think we had water bottles in Timor. I don't remember using a water bottle in Timor. Pretty sure we would have been issued with them

14:00 but anything that was a bit surplus was diced on one the scrambles to get away sort of. I think we went there with steel helmets and I didn't bring mine home because they're too much of a handicap. A steel helmet weighs I s'pose maybe a kilogram, certainly half a kilogram, and that's just something else to cart around which might save you a bullet through the scalp but it might not.

14:30 **Can you describe some of the jungle in New Guinea? Sounds like it was pretty dense?**

Yes it was and there were little tracks all through the islands. They've been occupied for a very long time and whenever we could we stayed on a track because they usually - you know the gradient is

15:00 better than branching off into the bush and hacking your way through with a machete is a pretty laborious way of travelling. So we travelled on tracks that had been used for generations by the local people and otherwise the -

15:30 it was quite tropical in a lot of places, especially down the Ramu Valley, and it's impenetrable really without some means of clearing your way but a lot of it even in Timor is sort of a very strong rush, the difference in between a rush and sort of a strong grass. This was [what] we called kunai and it could grow six or eight

16:00 feet high and that dense you could hardly walk through it and that's probably why we stayed on tracks, because to get off them was usually some obstacle that made wherever you wanted to go pretty difficult, and generally [there] were places on the tracks that had a name. You know the natives would give it an area so that they could refer to them in their talks and that,

16:30 so they were dotted about, you know, not in any system but along tracks that generally we had to travel on to get to where we were to go.

Surely if you were using these tracks, then the Japanese would also be using them?

Well they would, yes. That's why scouting is a pretty risky thing. Depends who sees who first in many

cases.

Can you describe to me the process of scouting? Like what is the sort of set-up in order to go out on a scout,

17:00 **'cause I know that you were out scouting to try to find where the Japanese were?**

Yes, well in New Guinea, ANGAU [Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit] had trained natives. You know they had a little army really and these ANGAU native personnel were sometimes allotted to our troops and we'd use them for scouts where we could because it wasn't as unusual to find a

17:30 native walking through the bush on his own as it was, you know, a number of Australians, so he was less conspicuous as far as the enemy's scouts were concerned. You know, he mightn't have Australians behind him and they quite liked it too. I think they felt it was a role that they could do but in many cases we didn't have them and then we'd make some decision about who was going to be scout

18:00 and you'd have one say, 10 yards in front of your main body, another one say,, two or three yards in front of the main body and they'd communicate silently if possible; but that was roughly the scouting system.

What were some of the signals that you'd use as part of that silent system?

Well probably stop and if your next scout could see you, some sort of a hand signal

18:30 to say we are stopping or probably, you know, a sort of a down sign but that's roughly it. Just get the message back to stop for a minute while we check what's in doubt in front.

Were you ever surprised during one of these scouts?

Yes. Generally 'surprise' meant a physical encounter with

19:00 weapons and sometimes one party didn't succeed, didn't survive. We've had scouts shot and we certainly [shot] the enemy scouts but that's all.

What's it like to actually have to be on the ready and sort of, so sharp?

You get used to it to some extent and well the whole issue

19:30 really is being alert because [it's] not only on scouting that you can have trouble and I think you sort of adapt to your circumstances or most people do. There were probably some that couldn't take scouting because of the pressure but it's all a part of the game really.

How did you go with that sort of constant alertness that you had

20:00 **to keep?**

Well we didn't use scouts any more than we had to and it might only come up once every 10th patrol or perhaps less than that but yes I s'pose I coped like the rest of them.

Why would you choose to use a scout like once every 10 times instead of every time?

Well I mean it might be your turn every 10 times but someone else would be doing it so there would

20:30 be a scout every time but use a different scout, different person in the troop or whatever.

Good I've got you. How often would you spot Japanese, like say, you know, would it be every day?

Yeah someone would spot Japs every day. It wouldn't be the same troop or

21:00 same group of people. Probably once a week or it depended a bit on the Japanese activity. Sometimes they were quite active trying to see where we were because they needed the same information that we needed. That's how they sort of decide the strength of their base and that sort of thing so I s'pose at least you'd have a Jap contact

21:30 almost once a week I think and some were close shaves, some weren't. Some you'd get warning of, some you'd hear something happening and it would get back to you that the Japs were there so you wouldn't pursue that unless you wanted to find a number of Japs.

What was your closest scrape with the Japs?

Well I s'pose it wasn't exactly an ambush

22:00 but it was a very close encounter. The Japs came up over a saddle and we were waiting for them really on the bottom side of the saddle and I think I was one of the first to see a Jap and I reported to the officer in charge and at about the same time we heard firing and that, you know, that means that, you know, the rest of the troops had made contact. We only fired

22:30 for a brief time and then got ourselves out which was - merely our main objective was to survive I think

because there's not a lot of point in not surviving.

So what was your main brief? Was it to kill the Japs or was it to identify where they were and report back?

Kill what we could of course, certainly priority number one, but,

23:00 well, the encounter was reported and sent back to wherever but yes, the object really was to patrol to the point of reducing their numbers I s'pose.

How many Japs do you think there were per Australian?

I think we claimed to have knocked over about sixteen hundred. That's some of the records and

23:30 our losses were probably 25 or something but we tried to preserve manpower. We wouldn't go along a track with 50 people unless it was to do a specific thing and then we'd be fairly sure that we were in the clear as far as being ambushed was concerned. But we certainly, I don't know if the Japs were new to that kind of

24:00 warfare. I think they might have been to some extent but they were certainly pretty easy to catch early in the campaign. To catch in the sense that they were careless about their field craft and -

Can you give me an example of where they were careless in their field craft?

Well they would march along the road without due regard to how vulnerable they may be to a scouting

24:30 party hiding somewhere to ambush them. And I'm pretty sure that was something that they disregarded in the early parts of war in Timor but as it progressed of course they learn and so do we.

Can you give me some other examples of how you could outsmart the Japanese?

25:00 Well I s'pose to commit soldiers cautiously or sparingly. If 10 men could do it we wouldn't send 20 and therefore our losses were a lot less because if you fire into a group of 10 you might get one but if you fire into a group of 20 you might get, you know, quite a lot more and I s'pose knocking each other off really

25:30 was the name of the game and so [it's a] fairly merciless deal isn't it?

How close would you actually get to the Japanese? I mean would it be sort of hand to hand combat at any stage?

Not often but occasionally you'd more or less bump into someone. I think on occasion there was some Japs around a cookhouse and if you didn't see them you'd

26:00 sort of go in to make sure there was no one there and suddenly a Jap would be there, so it's the quickest on the trigger that usually survives in a case like that. And it did happen, not frequently, but at times.

I'm just thinking, you know, 16 hundred verses 25, that's…?

These are probably not authentic figures but they're certainly figures that are used

26:30 by quite a few reports. Even the book I've just recently read by one of our officers uses that figure; I think 15, 16 hundred to I think it's about 25. So it's a tremendous difference but that's how you regard your human resource really. I think Japs are fairly, almost

27:00 unlimited in the size of their army in the spot, whereas I don't think we ever lose sight of the fact that we were pretty limited in total reserves.

I just find it stunning that there's, you know, this incredible difference. I mean, you know, even if you give or take, you know, 600, I mean still that's a thousand to 25?

Yes.

So I'm just wondering what it is that

27:30 **the Australians are doing much more effectively than the Japanese? I mean would it literally be a case of soldiering skills?**

The Japs are good soldiers, especially night time or moonlight soldiers, but I think you could bring this back to the war. I mean Japan probably came into the war with a couple of million soldiers and we may have had 500,000, we may have had more. But some of their losses at sea were staggering really. You know, their troop ships

28:00 [had] probably got 5,000, 10,000 troops and their ship is sunk. The losses there are tremendously out of balance really, so I think it's probably something similar in the land encounters, where I think we were probably much more cautious. We certainly knew we had a problem if we had a wounded soldier and we'd avoid that, even perhaps at the expense

28:30 of missing an opportunity to hit some Japs.

What did you observe about the Japanese, as far as taking care of their wounded was concerned?

Well we didn't usually wait to see but I think they were pretty reckless really. If a Jap didn't look like surviving he was pretty well disregarded. He's paid his price so he's to go to heaven. And that was a pretty important issue,

29:00 that they died for their country and went to heaven in their view. I think it made them tough soldiers to knock off because it was, in a way, not a fear of death, and I think that's quite a big thing to overcome. Well even towards the end of the war they had their kamikaze I think they called it, where a Japanese would dive with a plane load of

29:30 explosives; well it's a bit like today's terrorists. They're a person that will blow themself up just to get some revenge on the enemy so I think that was, you know, wanting to die in a sense and that's why without the atomic bomb we would have had Japanese in the islands for years, because they wouldn't surrender. It's very anti their culture.

30:00 **How did you cope with that fearing of death?**

Well I s'pose you sort of think well if it's my turn, it's my turn and do what you had to. You were cautious and easy you could…

What was the thing that you actually feared the most?

I think being wounded or captured, because they were brutal people with their

30:30 prisoners. There is an international protocol that protects prisoners in most situations but the Japanese certainly didn't observe that.

Did you see any examples of that?

I think we did, yes.

Such as?

Well I don't really, I don't want to detail this too much but when the Japs landed in Dili and

31:00 the issue was fought out and we weren't able to get a message to a party that was coming in, in a truck, coming into Dili and they, because we couldn't get a message to them for various reasons, they were captured by the Japs and they were actually witnessed being bayoneted or shot and the truckload was killed that way, whereas they should have just been taken

31:30 prisoner by the Japs. That's certainly a glaring case and I'm sure there are others.

How did you find out about that?

Well it became known by everyone very soon. In fact we have one great little soldier who survived it. He was bayoneted in the neck and I think maybe shot as well but he lied doggo and the Japanese

32:00 thought he was dead and left him and he crawled away eventually and he found some natives and this native took them up to his home and his mother or whoever it happened to be. The lady in the house looked after him and he recovered and was eventually taken back to our headquarters and he was evacuated, you know, got back to Australia.

32:30 But he was a determined little cuss. He got home and got fixed up and then joined another unit so…

That's certainly a great tale of survival?

It is a wonderful tale of survival. Without the natives he would have just wasted away really.

Have you heard of other tales of survival that happened in New Guinea and Timor?

I'm sure there were plenty but

33:00 yes, where people have got lost in the New Guinea jungle and been in there for almost weeks, nothing to eat and one of the survival tactics was to eat; there was a big bird called the cassowary and it used to eat nuts of different sorts and these nuts passed through it without being digested so this person that survived this,

33:30 washed the nuts and cracked them and survived on a diet of nuts. So the human being is a resourceful sort of person, and there were others. Lots of, I think there was, the centre of a bamboo plant you can break open and it's quite soft. You can chew it and that sort of thing. But natural food in New Guinea is pretty scarce unless

34:00 you happen to be in an area where pawpaws or coconuts or something are grown. But they're mainly around the coast and we were almost in the middle of New Guinea. You know, down the centre of a very big river and very big valley really, where all the water comes in. There are no rivers and, I mean, New Guinea rivers and Timor rivers can rise very

34:30 quickly, you know, perhaps 10 feet in an afternoon and what was crossable in the morning isn't later on in the day. Usually the rain comes in fairly systematically at about three o'clock and rains for the rest of the day and of course this brings up rivers, so if you're planning to cross a river, the first thing in the morning is the best time.

How about fishing? Was that an option?

35:00 Fishing? I don't think fishing in Timor was; we weren't around the coast that much and you need a boat to get out a bit. But I think in New Guinea we did some fishing. I've even heard of dropping a grenade into the water and it makes a blast and the fish come to the surface for, you know, 15 or 20 seconds and

35:30 you can grab them, they're in a stunned state. But that's about the only fishing that was done I think. You need gear for fishing and we didn't have the capacity to carry gear.

Still, a grenade counts?

Yeh, it wasn't looked upon very favourably I don't think, perhaps because of the use of the grenade, because supplies of many things weren't

36:00 always that plentiful and, you know, to think of the Aussies using grenades to catch fish, which is a very worthy cause but still not admired by the hierarchy.

That's ludicrous but when you were out of contact for such a long time, did you run short of ammunition?

No I think we'd taken the precaution of moving that from the low

36:30 country up into the mountains and hiding it in various places. I expect we were getting low but our use of ammunition wasn't wasteful. You know, I mean we realised that it had to come from Australia and it wasn't always easy but you can be wasteful or use it, you know, carefully so I don't think we

37:00 ran seriously short. We often wondered where the next lot was coming from but once we made contact of course it was assured.

While we're talking about getting supplies in, can you tell me how you designated a drop area?

Designated it?

Yeah because I mean if you're getting supplies dropped in, how do you know where to go?

Well we'd probably light

37:30 four fires in corners and that would be the drop area and usually it was somewhere where we could rescue the goods reasonably quickly because sometimes the Japs could be in that area when the drop takes place so we usually had plenty of natives to help carry the stuff under cover somewhere but unless there were four other easily

38:00 designated spots for the aircraft to see, well we'd light fires and that's how we brought the ships in; light a fire up on the hill here and another one there and ships would line them up and come in on that line. So many ways of directing ships and planes to certain spots.

38:30 **Surely building a fire though would be pretty dangerous when you've got a lot of Japanese around?**

Well the Japanese weren't there all the time so that's what scouting was for, to know where they were. And we'd perhaps have a pretty good search in an area, notify Australia and the goods would be dropped the next day. It was a risk certainly but I think it was a calculated risk by trying to check where the Japs

39:00 were and then drop. I don't know of a case where the Japs were in the area that the dropping took place, so you solved the problems as best you can.

So I mean pretty much what you're saying is it was a pretty successful drop?

Well generally yes. Sometimes the containers burst and if it was a tin of biscuits of course it was a bit of a harvest for the natives

39:30 but I don't think we wasted space on things like biscuits. I mean when I say biscuits, I don't mean the dog biscuit which was the diet really. For patrols it was light to carry and it was fairly nutritious and there was usually a bit of chocolate in it so chocolate is quite energising.

You mentioned some of the natives, I think it was

40:00 **in New Guinea, the ANGAU?**

Yes ANGAU. That's Australian New Guinea something force or something like that but it's about five

letters that make up the word ANGAU and they're quite a well-respected and it's a properly trained little army of natives really,

40:30 under the control of the white officers.

Who were training them?

I suppose the officers that were on the island. It would be a part of the army, some, you know, probably a lieutenant or captain or someone, and I think perhaps they even had depots of them because it was a fairly big issue [in] the New Guinea campaign where

41:00 we needed reliable natives.

What did you think of these native fellows?

They were good, yeah. They were top people really and in the Owen Stanleys I think they were essential at the Kokoda Trail. That was one of the great, certainly land battles in the islands,

41:30 was the Kokoda Trail. There were probably bigger battles as far as numbers were concerned but for sheer toughness it was one of the greatest I think.

How aware were you of Kokoda Trail existing?

Well not until it actually existed, I don't think. It amounts to the Japanese wanted to get to Port Moresby and

42:00 being denied a round track and perhaps…

Tape 6

00:37 **Do you remember whereabouts you were, Bernard, when you heard the news that Tokyo had been bombed?**

I was in Australia somewhere but the boys, the unit would have been in Rabaul.

How did you feel abut your separation from the unit?

Well you - that's another thing. What you were sent to do, you do. I was sent to the Small Arms School at -

01:00 I've thought of the name since. It was near - I've lost that now. I accepted it. I mean quite frequently they'd send different people home to get acquainted with some of the new ideas in the army or some new weapons [that] had come out. It was necessary to send odd ones home, especially if

01:30 they were, you know, had a bit of a skill in what they were being sent for, because the whole unit couldn't come home so they'd send some to… I had quite an interesting time at this school because there was a new weapon. I think we called it a bazooka and it fired from a rifle but it could knock a tank out. You know it was a very powerful warhead.

02:00 **I bet you could have done with a few of those up in New Guinea and Timor?**

Well there weren't tanks there to knock out but I s'pose they'd have knocked out a man just as efficiently.

How did you train with the new bazooka?

Well we were just instructed how it worked and you had to lie down to load it. You know it was a very strong spring I s'pose and quite often we'd have, you know, we'd

02:30 be perhaps 15 or 20 chaps at this lesson and certain people looked a bit odd trying to cock it. You know lying on the ground wrestling with this bit of metal and there'd be outbursts of giggling and -

So quite a bit of strength?

Yes it was quite a lot strength needed but you had to lie down I think. You used your feet in some way. I forget but

03:00 it had a strong enough spring to send off I s'pose an explosive head but it was at this end but the head that knocked the tank out was on the other end of course.

What was the recoil like, firing a bazooka?

I expect it was pretty severe. I mean it would have to be to propel a

03:30 you know, warhead, couple of hundred yards, but I don't exactly remember and, you know, it was a

fairly brief training period.

Were you introduced to any more small arms that you hadn't been introduced to before?

I think there was a second Tommy gun, not sure when that became, you know, part of the army. There was the Owen gun. That was the first one.

04:00 They were very fast firing short-range, big cartridge, or stumpy but big; devastating to be hit by one, just about blow your insides out.

Can you compare the differences between the Tommy gun and the Bren gun?

The Bren?

And the Owen?

The Bren is a long range, you know, very penetrating but the Tommy

04:30 gun is perhaps, a hundred yards would be its range but, you know, deadly if you're in that range because of the size of the bullet and it was quite fast firing, probably, you know, 500 a minute or something, like 'bdddddd' and you had bullets everywhere. The main difference was the distance really. The Bren was 500 up to a thousand

05:00 yards if the visibility was good enough.

And what about the Owen?

The Owen was very similar to the Tommy gun. You know both weapons were I think designed in Australia during the war and to get something passed for manufacture for the army is not easy. It was pretty rigidly tested, not only under good conditions but under fighting conditions

05:30 which was mud here and mud there and, you know, it's fairly tough on machinery I think.

How reliable were your weapons in those conditions?

I think mostly they were very reliable. You'd hear odd cases of a misfire or - and if they misfire of course, it needs the recoil to operate and if you have a misfire there's not the recoil to, I s'pose you have to start again or something.

Did you ever become frustrated

06:00 **with your gun misfiring?**

No I usually just had a .303 a rifle but they're very reliable.

What can you tell me about the .303 rifle?

Well I think the .303 is the size of its ammunition, which is just a bit under half an inch. How would they get .303 out of that? It was -

Pretty large

06:30 **bore though isn't it?**

Well it's not quite half an inch, whereas the Tommy gun I think would be half an inch and the Owen gun. They're a very big pellet but the Bren is a very penetrating bullet. You know it would knock out light machinery and bring a vehicle to a standstill and things like that at quite a big distance but

07:00 those would be the main differences I think: the Tommy gun is a short range, close action weapon and the Bren a very good weapon even for close quarters but much heavier than the Tommy gun. You usually need two, not to operate it but to carry the spare magazines for the Bren. They had what they call Number One and Number Two on the Bren and the Number One operated it and Number Two

07:30 carried the spare magazines.

Did you have Brens with you on patrol?

Yes there was usually a Bren gun on most patrols.

What was in your kit exactly, apart from your .303 rifle?

Well probably some rations and some grenades. Probably a water bottle, although I don't remember carrying

08:00 a water bottle but I s'pose I did because, you know, thirst can be quite a debilitating problem really. Although you might be in the rain and so on but you weren't always in the rain so there were times when you needed a drink. Rations, perhaps a ground sheet, maybe a bit of a blanket but not often. It was only when you got up in the mountains that it was cold; in the islands around the coast.

08:30 it can be stiflingly hot but up in the mountains it can be freezing cold. In fact there is I think about

10,000 feet; you're at almost freezing point on a cold night.

What would happen when you'd reached the end of the day of patrol and you'd set up camp? Was there a routine?

Well you picked the best spot you could. If there's a native hut vacated

09:00 somewhere handy, not too liable to be sprung by the Japanese, you would camp in there. Otherwise you'd just camp in the safest place you could find in the bush and use a groundsheet for protection.

Was there any kind of formation that you'd camp in overnight?

Not really. We'd try and be where we could easily be alerted. We'd have a guard out for, you know, to watch the likely approach of

09:30 an enemy and we'd take it in turns, do an hour at a time.

What were those hours like, spent on watch in the middle of the night in the jungle?

Pretty awful. They could be cold depending on whether you're up in the mountains or down on the plain country. In the plain country cold wasn't a problem. You could be quite wet and yet comfortable, but get up 5,000 feet and above, it was

10:00 pretty unpleasant if you had to go to bed wet.

Were there many distracting sounds or noises in the dark?

There were pigs, wild pigs that could move around and perhaps not so wild because natives put a pretty big value on a pig. You needed so many pigs to buy a bride and that sort of thing and that's how women

10:30 were virtually sold by their fathers for a number of pigs. I don't know how many or how valued he thought his daughter was but depending on that aspect, so pigs would buy a daughter and there were other animals but not very many ground animals. There were little monkeys but they weren't all over the island. They were in some places. I think more in the semi-tropical area

11:00 and I can't think of other animals. I s'pose there were lizards but -

Do you ever remember being particularly alarmed while you were on watch?

Yes I s'pose you hear something and you go back and wake your boss, your corporal or whoever it is and between you, he would probably come out to where you heard the sound and you'd listen for a while.

11:30 If it went quiet, you'd say, "Oh well it's some animal or something that made the disturbance", but you'd usually sort of have to be fairly satisfied that it wasn't enemy movement.

Were there ever any enemy engagements at night?

Yes, usually, sometimes a guard was killed. You know, Japanese would sneak in and kill a guard. That meant the group wasn't warned. Sometimes

12:00 groups were jumped and, you know, perhaps you'd lose a man or two but they weren't frequent.

Did you have any encounters like that in your unit?

I can't really think of one but I'm sure there would have been close encounters like that a number of times.

You were talking earlier about the native people and the currency of pigs and

12:30 **culture of buying wives. Did you have much of association with the native people and learn any other customs?**

I think we did, but not close socially in that sense but most of us had what we called a creado, a boy of sort of eight to 12 years old who, you know, sort of adopted you and lived with you and stayed all day with you. I don't quite remember spending a night with them but I think they probably

13:00 wouldn't have been far away and I don't know that we learnt many of their customs but we certainly had a very good relationship with the natives and particularly these boys that we called creados.

How did you communicate with the natives?

Well we learnt a few words and that seemed sufficient. You know I still remember a lot of words. There was "burrock",

13:30 meant "plenty" and "dork" meant "a long way" and "lick lick" was "just around the corner" sort of and you sort of learnt enough if you were having a talk with a native boy and talking about a place you'd ask him if it was "lick lick or dork?" so eventually you could work out - and what meant "bing"? I can't think of the word that meant "bing" but you could really, you know,

14:00 get around most issues with the words that we learnt.

A few charades? You mentioned earlier today that there was a point when the natives' loyalty started to wane and they became supportive of the Japanese?

Yeah.

What incidence revealed that waning loyalty to you?

I think lack of willingness to

14:30 be with us where encounters were likely. You know, they would rather be with the Japs. This was not until about September, October. Fairly late in the campaign and the Japanese were slowly obviously in a winning position because they had their numbers and they had machinery; they had big guns. They had mountain guns and mortars, obviously things that we didn't have.

15:00 No-one wants to belong to a losing side so I think the natives sort of felt that's how it might be going.

Did you develop a distrust of the natives?

I suppose to a lesser extent yes. I mean the ones we knew, we trusted but quite often it was obvious that they were more or less anti us and we had to be prepared to shoot some of them. I don't remember ever doing that or having heard of it being done but I think it was

15:30 quite something that we would have done if we had to, if there was a traitor type. Traitors in war are disastrous.

I just have to ask this question. Did any of the Australian men have relationships with any of the native women?

Quite a lot yes. It was very much looked down on by our medical staff because many of them caught some of the venereal diseases that were fairly prevalent.

16:00 Yes it was a pretty frequent issue really. You know, I s'pose you'd ask your boy to bring a girl and things like that. It didn't interest me but there were quite a few who were treated by our medical staff for having had intercourse with the native girls.

What kind of talk did this create?

Where?

Amongst the soldiers?

16:30 **There must have been some talk around the traps?**

I don't really remember. I think it was, yes, it would be whispered that, "So and so had to go and see the doctor", and sometimes they'd say they had a crook back and, you know, different things like that. It wasn't, you know, rabid talk. It was sort of whispered and, you know, kept a bit quiet I s'pose but it certainly,

17:00 you know, was a topic of interest.

Were they attractive women?

Some, yes; they lose their beauty very early like a lot of Italian people. I mean work does degrade the human figure I think really but young Timorese women, you know 15 to 25, were quite beautiful really.

17:30 **Was there any trade of Japanese souvenirs?**

Yes I think if you happened to come across a Japanese sword, it was big money, especially once we were mixed up with the Americans. They had money everywhere and if they wanted something they paid for it.

Do you yourselves souvenir things from the Japanese that had fallen in the jungle?

No,

18:00 you could only carry so much and I never saw much value in it anyway, although if you're that way inclined you can pick up some dollars here and there.

What were popular souvenirs?

Well revolvers for instance and particularly our own revolvers. They could quite easily be stolen and sold to the Yanks but you needed contact with the Americans to get money for them because the natives couldn't buy a revolver,

18:30 as much as they might like one, but a lot of our contact later on was with Americans and I s'pose that encouraged trade.

When did you come in contact with the Americans?

Well, in New Guinea probably was the first time because the Americans were, especially the air force and there was a lot of bombing going on

19:00 and we didn't come in contact with many ground forces of the American army but we had a couple of small aerodromes close to our headquarters in New Guinea in the Ramu Valley. And Americans would fly in, you know, on some mission and whatever it might be or changing personnel,

19:30 you know, with our forces, and quite often fly in a fairly high-ranking American Air Force person, but that was about our only contact with Americans.

Did you visit canteens or messes at these aerodromes?

No I don't think we did. I didn't but there could have been - but that's true. They

20:00 fairly soon set up a canteen where you could buy almost everything and anything. Ice cream and goodness knows what. Must have cost a fortune to transport in and to keep frozen and things like that but the Americans, that's just how they do things.

In what situation would you wind up getting mixed up with the Americans?

I think one was, we had a boxing

20:30 match on. There must have been a good few Americans quite close and some of our people negotiated to put on the boxing match and the Australians and the Americans matched up different people and put on a boxing match and it was, you know, quite tough at times.

Where was that held?

I think that was at Fizand down in

21:00 the Ramu Valley but fairly towards the end of operations really. I think it was obvious that things were toning down a bit.

Was there much rivalry between the Aussies and the Yanks during that event?

Well I think that was more in Australia. You know the Australians used to think the Yanks were taking their girls because they had a lot of money to spend on them. And it happened too of course and there were

21:30 fights between the two, Australians and Americans, mainly over women.

And what did you think of that tension?

Well it's natural isn't it? I mean that's the way life is so you accept it.

Did you ever find yourself having a stoush with them?

In the boxing match I finished up boxing an American.

And?

And he beat

22:00 me.

He beat you?

Yeah.

You let down the boxing kangaroo?

I did, yeah.

What was your main base while you were in the valley there, the Ramu Valley?

I think it was up towards the airport where we flew in. Goroka or

22:30 Bena Bena or one of those names. Would you like to have a quick look at a [book]?

No I'm just curious to ask you?

Yeah.

Perhaps we can have a look in a book later on. What facilities were at the main base?

Well very few. I mean we may have had an RAP [Regimental Aid Post]. That's sort of a downgrade from a hospital, where they treat, you know, minor accidents and minor wounds but I don't think there'd have been much more there other than

23:00 sort of headquarters facilities where the administration was carried out, because there's always something to do with a group of men. You've got, you know, different records to keep and pay sergeant

and postal people and yeah, that would about consist of our headquarters.

What was there? Did you have tent rows for accommodation or -?

23:30 Well probably a crude sort of a building 'cause you have to keep papers dry and that sort of thing but I think it was more to protect, you know, records and so on than for any other purpose.

Was there just the 2/2nd there or were there other outfits?

I'm not sure whether the 2/7th, who were also in the area, whether they worked with us but

24:00 in the field they did work with us. You know we'd cooperate on, as I've mentioned, which area we'd work on, but I'm not sure about the headquarters.

Okay and did you have any contact with Portuguese or Dutch here?

Yes quite a lot with the Portuguese and Portuguese Timor. In fact there was some quite good relationships developed between some of our officers

24:30 and Portuguese administrators. They were very helpful, the Portuguese generally. There was the odd anti few which is fairly common. There's usually a few that aren't in the run of the mill sort of, but quite nice relationships developed. They'd put on a bit of a show for the officers. It was pretty much an officers' deal. One of the officers could almost speak Portuguese.

25:00 He was a school teacher. He managed to make some good friendly relationships and get asked to little parties where a bit of grog was available. They had wine of many sorts, the Portuguese. They're quite fond of their drinks.

They make a pretty good vino don't they?

Yes I think they do, not that I had much of a go at it but the Dutch had quite a lot of, what is it? Bowls gin I think and

25:30 our boys found that somewhere and had a bit of a go at it.

And what was your poison?

No I don't think I - I was very much a quiet little farm boy really. You have to get out into the world to lose that. I s'pose I lost it during the war but I didn't change all that much. I still liked the quiet, secure life of being

26:00 more or less master of my own destiny where possible.

Fair enough. And booze didn't play a part in that?

No.

During that time when you were hospitalised with thrombosis and your unit had gone back up to British North Borneo, were you receiving any kind of correspondence about how they were going?

Not really, no.

26:30 It was probably my fault. I didn't write as many letters as I should have, you know, including to the CO but I s'pose I just enjoyed the security and seclusion of not being involved really.

I imagine it must have been quite restful, although you were ill, to be laid up at home in an Australian hospital bed after being in the jungles?

Yes it was. I took on a few minor hobbies like making

27:00 slippers for people and just something to do but, no, I s'pose they were really wasted years, well months really but, you know, that's how it was.

Sounds like a good time to recuperate?

Yes it was.

What other kinds of things could you do there besides slippers to help the work effort, the war effort?

I don't think we, if you're not able to move around, you're fairly

27:30 restricted in what you can do and that was my main treatment, was to keep me still and I s'pose eventually I don't remember being, you know, what's the photograph? What's that? Yeah I don't remember having a, can't think of the word, where they, you know, have a look to see if the blockage is still

28:00 there but they must have been satisfied that it had cleaned up. My leg used to get quite red and swollen and as I spent time in the hospital it cleaned up.

You must have felt quite concerned? Potentially it could have been quite a dangerous position?

Well it can be if the clot floats around in the bloodstream; it can land somewhere and be fatal really

28:30 but, you know, I may have been concerned but I s'pose that's a part of life isn't it?

So do you recall what you were doing the day that the atom bomb was dropped on Japan? Must have been pretty amazing news?

Certainly was but if you can't dance around, you can't celebrate much. But I expect there was

29:00 quite a bit of celebration but it wasn't - you know the first bomb, I s'pose we realised it was a mighty step forward but it took a week or so for the Japanese to realise it wouldn't take many of these to make Japan history and I think the very top brass in Japan had to come in and, you know, ensure that a

29:30 surrender was effective because without the top brass in Japan insisting it, field commanders wouldn't have had much control I don't think in stopping Japanese from fighting or asking them to surrender 'cause it was just a dirty word, surrendering, to Japanese and they would have lived in small parties in the islands for years without that. Possibly a few did

30:00 but would have been a general thing for Japanese not to surrender but to disappear into the jungle and live with the natives rather than surrender.

What did you feel personally about the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan?

It was the only way. I mean the war wouldn't be over yet I don't think if we hadn't got surrender orders from the,

30:30 what was it? Not the Pope; the Emperor. It had to come from there. No field commander I think had the control of his men to the extent that he could get them to surrender in the field.

Did you respect the Japanese as an enemy?

Yeah well there were different armies for some reason. Some of the Japanese

31:00 troops were good. They cleaned up after their camping and whatnot. But others were quite frightful. There was a tremendous range of quality I'd say of the Japanese soldiers. Some were really good and some were - it made it hard to sort of generally say, 'yes I respect them', because you couldn't respect some of them.

And how did you feel personally about the atrocities of the

31:30 **the Japanese?**

Well pretty disgusted really. I mean some of the things they'd come at was pretty disgusting, is about all you can say. Not that I've had experience with other enemy soldiers. I mean it's not as though I'd been on any other front like the Germans or Italians but I think some of the Japanese were quite nasty people

32:00 really.

What do you think of the following generations of Japanese people today?

Well I think they've learnt a lot from the western world about, you know, how to function really but, well, I think we've got to live with them and

32:30 we may as well accept that fact I think and if living with them helps by accepting the fact well it's really the way we've got to go.

So I take it the VJ [Victory in Japan] celebrations passed you by in hospital, did they?

Yes, more or less I s'pose but I didn't get out until the sixth of

33:00 January '46 so I was cooped up for quite a while and I'd like to have been active. I think the Japanese war ended about August wasn't it? Late August, I think so and it took quite a while

33:30 to be disbanded and they were in New Britain at the time and as I said there was a sort of a scale of points you had to assess your priority in being discharged but there was a war in Korea fairly soon after wasn't there? Fairly soon after the Japanese war ended and quite a few of our soldiers went there.

34:00 They obviously liked the army sort of discipline or something. In fact some of them went to Japan to help create discipline and so on, so quite a few of our members went as I said from disbanding in our unit to join, you know, some of the forces that went from Australia to Japan.

34:30 **While you were fighting in New Guinea against the Japanese, were you fighting for any particular reasons? Were you fighting for the protection of Australian shores? Or what was it for?**

Well I think that was certainly a factor when the danger looked, you know, quite serious really. I mean the way Japan swept down through the islands. I mean Singapore was supposed to be impenetrable and things like that; it looked as though nothing would stop them and I think they were stopped on the water really and then

35:00 in the air. Those two factors between them really, you know, jolted Japan into knowing that she couldn't win the war but of course you'd fight on tenaciously because of the psychology of the Japanese.

Did you ever fear that they would get through your defences in New Guinea?

I s'pose there was certainly concern. I don't know whether you'd say fear but it was certainly concern that,

35:30 you know, we had to stop the push of Japan. But even in the islands she was very strong, you know, in New Guinea and Rabaul I think and some of those were quite fierce battles between American ground troops and Japanese north of Australia in those islands but mainly to stop a thrust into Australia really. But you needed a very

36:00 good base, Japan did, and when she couldn't get that in New Guinea, well, then I think some of the decisiveness went out of their fighting.

Some would argue that there is no evidence to suggest that Japan was going to invade Australia?

Well I'm sure that was the long term plan but she needed to built up resources and that's where the sea battles come in.

36:30 There were two very successful sea battles fought, successful from the allies' point of view of course, where the warships were sunk and many planes, troop carriers, they were devastated there really and I think that really knocked the drive out of them.

What did you think of the command there between Blamey and MacArthur?

Well we thought MacArthur gave us

37:00 a very raw deal and Blamey was just nothing but a so and so, according to Australian soldiers, because he came in and abused them for not stopping the Japanese. Well I think that was a very unfair, matter of fact I think he could quite easily have been shot by some of the Australian soldiers for some of the things he said. No, he wasn't regarded very highly by the rank and file of Australians.

37:30 MacArthur I think was a pretty brilliant tactician but he certainly didn't give Australia it's fair share of praise where it had some wins. It was always Americans but I think that's a part of their makeup too.

The Americans?

Yes.

So you felt robbed of a few victories?

Well certainly there was, you know, the advertisement

38:00 where, you know, victories are claimed, we certainly were short-cheated there I think. I mean we had a few victories due to the Australian forces but it was never printed as that. It was, "Americans had done this and that", but as I said, that's the way they are but without them we'd have never gotten free of the Japs I don't

38:30 think, so the bombing of Pearl Harbour really brought America into it and then that of course meant blocking of sea lanes and all sorts of other very big issues that are critical in wars and, you know, she was able to sink so much of their commercial shipping that they couldn't supply their troops. And that's usually what causes most defeats: the supply line is

39:00 too long or too great or not able to be serviced. It's more that, than a lack of winning in the field because without these backup supplies, winning in the field isn't worth much.

And in the case of Australia, we seem to have a shortage of any kind of supplies in the first place?

Well before the war we weren't prepared.

39:30 You're quite right there. I mean that, you know, we could have lost the war on that issue alone but supplies are just so critical.

The Australians developed a bit of a reputation for pilfering American-issued equipment?

Well possibly by some. I don't know about a reputation but yes it certainly happened and it's, you know, not to be admired

40:00 of course but -

Does say something for our resourcefulness though?

Yes I s'pose so.

I mean for instance the radio that you were able to make was an extremely resourceful accomplishment?

It was, but it may not; it certainly wasn't stolen from the Americans. It was really left in the field where battles were fought and lost I s'pose and, you know, we went back and looked for what might be useful.

40:30 **Well I guess once you come out of hospital and you've been discharged, it's time to return to civilian life?**

Yes.

And I'm wondering how difficult that was to return to day to day civilian life after the extreme conditions you'd been living in during service?

It was no problem to me. I just wanted to farm my little farm and my whole enthusiasm went

41:00 into it and I cleared land and built sheds and built a house and planted more orchard and, you know, I was just totally occupied, although I was on leave, strictly speaking, until about April. I was discharged on the 6th of January so I was paid from January to April as if I was still serving.

That's a bonus?

Yes so that was paid

41:30 into my pay book and it gave me, I found, you know, I think about 170 pounds. Some quite significant figure then, but now of course it sounds silly but to, you know, be walking around with the capacity to spend 170 pounds was quite something. It would have bought, well it did buy, a small farm really and that's saying something. Although I was entitled to a land settlement

42:00 property, I couldn't wait while the selection -

Tape 7

00:34 **Can you tell me why you made the decision to not be a part of the land settlement selection process?**

Impatience I think. That's a short answer but that's it. I couldn't wait while the processes were worked out and blocks were prepared and it was two or three years before some farmers got their blocks but it was probably worth

01:00 the wait because they could get a job. Some of them got even into the system and helped look after blocks while they were being prepared. They usually had to have a house of a certain standard and a shed and fences that would keep stock in and things like that and many of the blocks they bought didn't have that, so that had to be provided by the land settlement authorities. The trouble is I think, I couldn't see an end to this

01:30 and I had a piece of land I knew because I'd lived on a lot of that. That was part of the old home farm but a part that wasn't developed. It had bush and, you know, a lot to do, fencing and all sorts of things and I just was waiting to get on with making a farm. That was the main reason. I think the system was good and a lot of individuals that couldn't have ever been farmers

02:00 got a good deal. You know they got land that they could afford yet on terms that they could manage so it was quite a good system but it was too slow developing for me. That was the main reason.

Could you actually select the piece of land that you wanted?

Well you could apply for it and in some cases get it but not every case and I think that was a weakness in it too. You could spend a lot of time

02:30 deciding which block you wanted, apply for it and then find you didn't get it so that's another factor I think that sort of discouraged me.

Where there any other sort of repatriation type deals that you - ?

Yes, you could get 10 pounds worth of tools. Something about a thousand dollars I think. Whether that was a loan or what I forget but I think somewhere

03:00 in the scheme of things there was a thousand pounds you could, or get a thousand dollar loan from the bank. There was something. I can't quite think how it worked but I was, by careful spending in my army days, I came out with more money than many others did.

Careful saving and no drinking from what I see?

Well yes that's it.

So?

No

03:30 gambling. I wasn't a gambler.

Rather sensible as far as I'm concerned. So what happened after you decided to actually claim this piece of land that actually belonged to your family? Did you get other people to help you work the area?

Yes I did actually. I had a very good unit mate came and lived with me. Although I only had a two bedroom house, he was married and they had one room and the rest of the house

04:00 was for general use, providing food and so on. But he was a great worker. Unfortunately he's gone now but yes I s'pose he was about, but I did employ other people. I had fencing done and, you know, things like that. I grew potatoes, which involved labour, and had a little apple orchard which I looked after dearly and

04:30 it was a life I enjoyed really, although it was nearly all work. Fact, you know, my wife says I never took the family away on a holiday. Well that's pretty right, I didn't, but whereas most people live from holiday to holiday, I didn't.

What happened to your mate Harold that came from Bridgetown?

Harold died a couple of years ago.

Was he helping you out on your farm at all?

No.

05:00 He was busy doing the same thing in Bridgetown. He would have been eligible for a war service farm but he got on and made his own farm in Bridgetown. Pretty good farmer and businessman I think he was.

So I do need to know, how did you meet your wife 'cause I know that we haven't talked about that?

Do you need that?

Yeah it's a

05:30 **part of your life, it's a very important part of your life, you're still together, what is it 55 years?**

It'll be 55 years in '05.

So not quite 55?

No, I think we'll make it if I'm still here. Well I was pretty pally with our unit doctor, a Dr McInerney, and he was in the medical business of course in the army

06:00 and he must have been discharged and went to Perth hospital, what was it called? Royal Perth Hospital I s'pose and Babs was nursing there and I was walking and I was in the street one night and he came along and he said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I think I'm at a loose end." And he said, "Well come with me, I've got some nice nurses

06:30 that I'd like to introduce you to." So he took me along and I think there were four nurses there and I had a quick look over them, as men do, and picked Babs out and I corresponded with her for, not closely, but she wouldn't wear me at all for quite a long time. I think her mother was the problem. I don't know, I don't want to be unfair to anyone. Anyway,

07:00 nothing came of it for two or three, in fact it was four years before she started to think I might be all right and -

So were you in New Guinea during the time?

No I was at home on the farm. That was after I was discharged that this took place but Babs was still nursing. She went to Melbourne and did a stint over there. I'm not sure whether that was to get away from - not that I harried her much. I should have harried her more I think.

07:30 **A bit slow off the mark?**

Well she was a bit particular. What sort of a choice was I? I had virtually nothing and she could have grabbed any doctor of any standing, had a lovely home and so on. Instead of that she came to live a life with me which was not always easy. I don't say I wasn't reasonably easy to live with but there weren't a

lot of comforts.

Did Babs have anything

08:00 **to do with the war effort as a nurse?**

With what?

Was Babs in the war as a nurse?

No she was a civilian nurse.

So when actually did you get married?

The 21st of January 1950.

So you'd been seeing each other for a while really on and off?

Well not frequently but I s'pose

08:30 a couple of times a year and odd letters but eventually we were somewhere one night and I just said, "You know I want to marry you, don't you?" And she said, "Yes." Whether it was "yes" to that or "yes she would maybe", I didn't wait to see.

So how did, what sort of social things were going on at the time in order for you to get together 'cause

09:00 **I mean you're on a farm and you're working pretty hard, so it's a bit of an effort?**

Well there weren't many social things. I mean I went to dances in Donnybrook and there were agricultural shows and things but towards the, you know, the last six months Babs would come down on the train and I'd meet her at Picton and we'd go home and she'd spend the weekend

09:30 with me. I'd take her back I s'pose Sunday night or something as the trains ran but we didn't have much of a social outing in our courting days really.

Kind of all a bit about hard work?

Well I don't know whether, it was certainly a part of it but opportunities certainly weren't all that frequent. Well she was up there and had to come down and I wasn't very interested in other

10:00 people so it dragged on a bit.

What were the general reactions that you would get when people found out that you had such an extreme experience in Timor and New Guinea?

Well I don't know that they really knew. Timor was a pretty hushed up thing I think, almost until this recent invasion, not necessarily invasion but an occupation

10:30 by Australian forces. That brought Timor to light. Until then it was a pretty secretive little event really and didn't affect a lot of lives. It wasn't a big issue in army numbers but it was a big issue to some of course but outside Timor and the people that were there, it wasn't a big thing.

11:00 **Did you notice that there was more awareness after the recent Timor?**

I think it was just so much more publicised. It involved, you know a current occupation by troops and in Indonesia [the] issue didn't help it at all. I mean that massacre of a lot of Timorese after the vote was taken was a devastating thing really, after such a convincing vote;

11:30 a lot of Indonesians didn't want it to happen. They didn't want to lose Timor. Not that Timor was a great prize. I think it's got oil but not much else. Grows a bit of coffee but otherwise it's not a commercial island really.

Have you always taken an interest in Timor?

Well ever since then of course but before then, you know, we're like thousands of other people,

12:00 didn't know it was there virtually.

I'm just asking that because I mean the East Timor, you know, issues with Indonesia were around, I mean I became aware of them in about the mid '90's maybe and I mean it was very much, you know tiny, weeny little groups who were, you know, "Free East Timor! Free East Timor!" But up until, you know, just recently,

12:30 **nobody even knew where it was. Were you following all that political strife?**

I expect so, yes, with a sort of a feeling of impotence, not being able to do much about it but our little unit, our army unit has turned itself into, at the very earliest stage, an association and we've all been members of it and we've raised thousands of dollars for East Timor, you know with this association.

13:00 **Well how long have you been doing that for?**

Well ever since the war virtually because we never stopped doing things for East Timor ever since we were there. In fact we very much regretted leaving our creados there. We would have brought them home if it had been possible. So we've really been involved with Timor ever since the war.

What sort of fundraising activities would you do?

Well,

13:30 we started what we called an Independent Trust Fund and members of the association put in 50 or a hundred dollars or whatever they could afford and they did this frequently, you know certainly once a year. Not necessarily once a year but many of them would have put in a hundred dollars a year for many years and I think it got up as high as 20 or 30 thousand dollars and we've

14:00 sent up garden seeds and various agricultural implements and done many things for the Timorese people and the difficulty has been to get them distributed fairly. They, you know were pilfering, and law and order is a bit of a problem unless you've got it established. People see a chance to take something and there's nothing to stop them, so okay, that's what they do so

14:30 pilfering has been a bit of a problem and then the Indonesians are even worse I think as dependable citizens go. So we've been helping them really for what, 50 or more years I s'pose.

That's quite extraordinary.

It is really. It's just a wonderful little unit this but we're having our last, what we call, "safari" in November.

15:00 That will be the last one because so many of our members aren't fit to travel but a lot travel from the eastern states and from here and I think we've got an event which is going to have a hundred odd attend what we call "the last safari" and that's on the 12th, I think, of November.

And what sort of things are you going to be doing?

Well, mainly providing dinner and

15:30 some speeches I s'pose. You know just to renumerate some of the things we've done and some of the people we've helped. But we've been a bit of a thorn in the side of the government because we're always giving them a prod for not doing this and not doing that. Mightn't have been very effective but I s'pose it gave us some satisfaction.

Well what did you think about Australia being

16:00 **recently involved in Timor?**

Well we agreed with that because it was something we were doing and I think they did some good. I mean without our troops there I think the massacre of Timorese by the Indonesians would have been much worse. It was terrible as it was, you know this imitation army, you know,

16:30 coming in and murdering, just destroying the country really weren't they?

I was also going to ask you when you went back to Canungra, 'cause you'd just come out of Timor and you were on your way back to New Guinea, am I right?

Yes but we had home leave after coming from overseas and then we regrouped

17:00 in Canungra at the end of our 14 days leave or whatever.

Was it just your group that was regrouping in Canungra or was it other?

No I think quite a few other units were getting their reinforcements, because as people joined up they went through jungle training and they were really waiting in Canungra to be allocated to a unit and when we came back, we needed 150 reinforcements to replace

17:30 people that weren't well enough to go on or didn't want to or for some reason so if many other units had the same wastage as that, that absorbed a lot of the reinforcements but they'd had their training in Canungra, jungle training, so they were really ready to join a unit that was going away, so once we were there and

18:00 collected our reinforcements who were all trained except that they needed to weld together a bit, we were ready to go and of course off we went to New Guinea.

How were you treated by some of the other fellows who were aware of the fact that you were in Timor for such a long time?

I don't think it made any difference. Our reinforcements, you know, some of them looked up to us but generally we were just in the army and so were they.

18:30 **Were you passing on some of your skills and tips during that time?**

Well, we did certainly once we were in action; what we'd learnt in patrolling we certainly helped spread around.

Another question that I've been thinking of when I was sitting back behind the camera, you know how you're walking along some of these trails, 'cause you mentioned that you can't hack your way through a lot of the jungle?

Yeah.

What are the chances of getting

19:00 **booby traps along these tracks?**

Yes, reasonably, actually I think we did a bit of booby trapping but as often as not we booby trapped our own people because it's very hard to hide a booby trap and you needed a bit of luck that a Japanese is going to walk into it, so although I think the enemy had booby traps, I don't remember walking into any of them but we had booby traps.

19:30 You know, grenades fixed with a wire across the track and so on and we didn't damage a couple of our own people but the explosion, a bit of shrapnel's got in the back of the head of one of our unit people. It didn't do him much harm but he certainly wasn't quite the same afterwards so we caused a discharge of one of our unit members by setting booby traps and eventually we decided it wasn't worth the -

20:00 because you needed a bit of luck for the Japanese to walk into it and if they were going to attack you, they'd probably come in from some other direction anyway so the booby trap was… I was a bit of a master at making booby traps and it was my job to set up a grenade that went off when someone walked into it so I felt a bit guilty eventually when these two mates of ours,

20:30 weren't seriously hurt, but enough to cause concern. Any rate it was decided not to go on making booby traps.

Did you think it was one of your booby traps?

Possibly.

Well while we're on the subject of booby traps, how do you make a booby trap? I mean, I don't know?

Well, you know what a grenade is? It's got a little lever on the side that controls the

21:00 plunger that sets it off so it's not until you throw the grenade and this lever throws out and the plunger goes down and hits the detonator that the grenade explodes. Well, what I organised was a piece of wire around this loop that you hold until you throw it, so this wire was stripped off when someone kicked the wire,

21:30 so that enabled the grenade to go its full circle. You know where the lever throws away and the plunger goes down and detonates the grenade. It's very easy really but it's a bit dicey because if you make a bit of a mistake when you're setting it up and the lever is released the grenade will go off and if you happen to be close to it, you'll go off too.

22:00 **Anything to do with weaponry always scares me. I think, you know, the chances of there being an accident is just so high.**

Well I s'pose it is but that's what training's all about. I mean I think that, you know, so many soldiers go through with a loaded rifle next to their bed and that's what we did. I mean we may have had it loaded but the safety catch would be on so that it couldn't go off.

22:30 But with a dozen men sleeping in an area about that size, half a dozen anyway, all with rifles, you know there's got to be a time and I think there has been, when there's been an accident, but not always fatal.

Sounds like a bit of a time bomb really?

Well that's what war is, isn't it?

I'm just thinking, you know with a whole lot of blokes who are not sleeping very well, who are, you know quite nervous

23:00 **in the middle of the night if somebody hears the wrong kind of sound?**

I think by nightfall you're ready to go to sleep, generally I think that'd be, yes I mean there's the odd case but it's certainly not a general thing to -

Was there ever an occasion where you could see, in any of the units, some blokes weren't coping with the pressure too well?

Yes I think they're slowly

23:30 weeded out if you have too many of them. They won't do patrols willingly. They won't do guards willingly. They're difficult things that you need to do on your own, were things that they couldn't do. They'd be all right in a group but once they needed to sustain themselves sort of, like with a guard, being on guard 10 or 20 yards away from the main group and waiting in the night time

24:00 for something to happen, it slowly wore them down I s'pose.

See any of these blokes go a bit troppo?

No I don't think we did, not seriously. There were quite a few accused of being troppo but I don't think it was the true case.

Was more of a humour thing than a reality?

Yes I think so.

What sort of things did you do to lighten up some of the tension as far as humour's concerned,

24:30 **'cause being Australians you're not going to be sitting there being extremely serious a hundred percent of the time surely?**

No we'd play cards I s'pose and gamble in a very minor sort of way, 'cause you didn't have much to gamble with, but no I think could relax quite a bit by playing cards and I was going to say yarning but you'd run out of things

25:00 to yarn about. You know everyone so well that you can't make a conversation really unless it's about something very current like the football or something that everyone looks at.

Are you saying that you knew everybody so well that you'd run out of subject material?

Well it wasn't everybody you knew but you knew those that, through their placement in the organisation, you were always next to.

25:30 You were in their small group of 10 or 20 but there were perhaps 50 just a little bit away that you hardly knew so it wasn't, you didn't get to know everyone.

Why do you think that happened?

Well I think it's the way the army is structured. You know you have for instance a troop with three sections and each section has an officer with two NCO's

26:00 and that's how they look after that little unit. The officer is responsible for them and any allocation of duties is given to, for instance the officer or if there weren't that many people required in this duty, it'd be an NCO or a corporal or someone with about 10 people under them and they'd always work together and, you know, when the

26:30 job's finished they'd come back and perhaps wait for something else to turn up but they'd probably be with the same people all the time. Sometimes the hierarchy interferes if there's a bit of a misfit. The person who doesn't sort of fit in and is always being abused or something and they'd move him over to one of the other sections and hope that he'd fit in better there and that was a reasonably simple method

27:00 of sorting out personality clashes I s'pose. If you're that close to people sometimes it doesn't take much to stir people up, especially two that can't get along and you may as well get rid of one of them as have that happening all the time.

When you say people being abused, what do you mean by abused?

Well not being fairly treated by their mates or the hierarchy,

27:30 the top hierarchy that, perhaps an officer mightn't be that keen on someone and if they have to live together it's better to try and sort it out, as let it drift on.

I thought mateship was pretty highly regarded?

Well it is but there's the exception of course. This is perhaps one man in the whole unit of 300 men and, no, mateship is very important really. It's

28:00 the centre of the army in a sense I'd say.

How important do you think that is for survival in places like Timor and New Guinea that you were at?

Well we certainly looked after each other if we could and, you know, you could say something that helped someone overcome some problem, well that's how it worked.

Do you think it's the difference between surviving and not surviving?

Well in the long run I s'pose it is, depending how general this problem is but if

28:30 it's a whole army problem, or a whole army unit problem, it'd certainly be the difference between living a reasonable life and living a hell of a life.

It doesn't sound like you had it too cushy there?

Well that was war wasn't it? I mean we didn't decide where we wanted to go. We were just told where to go and once it's been allocated well you make the most of it or live a pretty unhappy sort of a

29:00 person. It comes back to yourself really I think.

Do you think that you got anything positive or beneficial from some of the extreme experiences you had?

I'm sure meeting, you know, the number of individuals that I met. I won't say many of the experiences helped me much. It's not as though I intended to go on doing it. Whereas as soon as I could I left the army but had I

29:30 intended to stay in the army, probably some of them would have helped me because it's a part of the army culture to know how things function.

I'm just wondering if anything helped you as far as personal fortitude was concerned, considering you went into a pretty hard life with the orchard and farm?

I think your mates help you with that, yes really, your mates helped you sort of maintain a

30:00 bit of a front, if it's nothing else. It's not showing some weakness and I s'pose eventually it becomes a bit of a strength.

Are you suggesting that mateship is just simply peer group pressure?

Well I wouldn't say pressure. It perhaps enabled you to get through a difficult time.

30:30 **How does that mateship translate to Anzac Day?**

Well certainly, as far as our unit is concerned, it's a great day but it takes you back to the days when, you know, you were really under pressure in the army fighting but we have a commemoration service the third Sunday in November every year and all the people that can, unit members,

31:00 wives, children and everything, they attend and that's where we honour in a sort of a silent way our mates that didn't come back. There's still a sort of a part of reliving with your mates that aren't there.

Why is it important to do that?

Well I think they paid the supreme sacrifice and the more people that remember this,

31:30 the more, you know, respect there is for people that gave their lives for the cause. Because sure, without a lot of people giving their lives, we could have been living in a very different environment.

What sort of activities do you partake in on Anzac Day?

Well now I don't take many but for most of my life

32:00 I've been a strong supporter of associations like the rural associations. There's a Fruit Growers' Association. I was Vice President of that for some time. Potato Growers' Association, Farmers' Union and then there's the social things, the Freemasons and the Lodge.

32:30 I mean, yes the Lodge and the Rotary and then towards the end, the Probus Club. I've been in all of those and for long periods.

I'm not at all surprised you didn't manage to get the family out on a holiday. Sounds like you were certainly very busy?

Yes I was mostly. I didn't attend many football matches and things that didn't really have a lot of

33:00 importance really I s'pose.

What do you think about this concept of how grandchildren are taking over their grandparents' medals and walking in their place on Anzac Day?

Well I think as long as there's some sort of order, I think we're in favour of it really but once you get a whole lot of people that aren't taught to march and to, you know, remain under sort of control of some sort, it becomes a bit of a mess

33:30 really because if you've got your trained people who form up in three's and that's how you march down and then you bring in a whole lot of people who haven't had this experience, you lose control. But whether that's important - it depends how the younger people are sort of remembering the loss of uncles or whatever it might be but otherwise I think

34:00 it’s quite harmless. You know it’s sort of remembering the lives of people that didn’t come back that you mightn’t remember otherwise.

How do you think Anzac Day has changed over the years?

I think we’re getting more support from younger people. The last year or two the attendance has increased quite a lot, certainly by people that are viewing it.

34:30 Just why, whether it’s some sort of satisfaction they get from the hum drum of the music and what not, hard to say but -

Do you think young people of today have any understanding of what the folk of your generation went through?

It is very hard for them I think and reading about it is about all they can do

35:00 and I think that’s the case with so many things. Without experiencing it, how do you get to understand something and we hope they don’t have to experience war but we hope that they understand that it was necessary to protect our way of life where it was threatened. It certainly was threatened by Hitler because he was such a beast of a man I think. No one’s life

35:30 meant anything to him and no amount of suffering affected him. He just went his way and I think Japan was much the same and Russia certainly was, but they’ve come into line really I think. I mean Russia’s almost a sensible country in some of her diplomatic moves I think. Germany too, although I’d like to have seen a bit more support for the United Nations actions, because without

36:00 that sort of thing, I can’t see how we’re going to overcome some of our problems. We’ve got to tackle them on a broad front by most nations I think, rather than leave odd ones. I think America’s almost too dominant but maybe she needs to be to get things done. I mean we’re pretty good at talking and leaving it at that.

Are you

36:30 **suggesting that some of our world difficulties should be tackled by the UN rather than another war?**

Yes I’m sure. I don’t like the way we went into this last war but that’s the way things evolved really, I think the tension building up against Saddam Hussein got so great that I think America and Britain, without the support of finding, you know,

37:00 the ‘weapons of mass destruction’ as they were called - you know I’m a bit sorry that Germany and France didn’t give more support to the program of trying to drum up international support for, whether it was for or against the war in Iraq.

It certainly got a bit messy there and the mess is continuing to …

That’s right, yes.

37:30 **… proliferate? Considering that we’ve been talking today and everything that you’ve said is going to be put on an archive that people can access, you know many, many hundreds of years in the future, do you have any good philosophies about how to survive a war or some of the things that you’ve gone through that you’d like to pass onto people in the future?**

That’s a big issue isn’t it?

It is a big issue. You can have a bit of a pause to think if you like;

38:00 **just wondering about some words of wisdom?**

It might even sound stupid. No I think there’s a lot of interest really in trying to overcome this, well the anti-terrorist issue really I think is perhaps one of our main ones but there’s a lot of issues being discussed to try and overcome it and I

38:30 can’t think of anything better than a strong United Nations. So there’s no country that isn’t in support of destroying terrorism really and there are rogue nations like Korea with the possibility of nuclear war but I think it’s got to be united opposition to it. I think one country

39:00 mightn’t have much effect but a lot of countries will because trade has become so important between countries and once a country that’s depended on exports upsets his purchasers, well, he’s in trouble. You know he can’t sell what he’s making, things like that. I think everyone’s got to help each other. I mean, that’s got to be the solution I think. That’s

39:30 the words of wisdom.

There are some great words of wisdom and it’s good to see that you’re so on top of world issues still at the age that you are and I just want to thank you so much for talking to us today, Bernard, for the archive.

I hope it’s of some benefit to someone.

It most certainly will be. Thank you so much for talking with us.

And it probably touches on things they wouldn't know of or hear about or see otherwise. Well if it's that, well, you know I haven't wasted

40:00 my day.

Well in order to look to the future, you've got to see the past I think so that's certainly…?

Yes well that's why you can't put wise heads on young shoulders.

Well you're a wise head and hopefully some young shoulders will be soon reading and seeing some of the works that you've shared with us today.

INTERVIEW ENDS