Australians at War Film Archive

Charles Griffin (David) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:57 **Good morning, Sir David. Thank you very much for**

01:00 **giving us your time and speaking with us today. I'd like to start off today by asking you if you could give us a brief overview of your life and your war history and starting with where you grew up.**

Well, I was born in a house in Leura during a snowstorm on the 8th of July, owned by one of my great aunts, Winbourne,

01:30 and it's still standing which is actually now one of the oldest houses in the Blue Mountains I suppose. And my parents, we lived in Double Bay, my father and mother and I, the only child. My mother was a very distinguished person in every respect, she was originally going to be an artist and went to Berlin to study painting and finished

02:00 up as a high distinction graduate in both Latin and Greek at the university, the first woman ever to be so and maybe the only one ever to be so, I don't know about that. And my father was doing various different things, I can't remember what at that particular time, as I say, we lived in Double Bay. I went first to Ascham to the famous girls' school in Edgecliff which is still going which

02:30 took some small boys in those days and Dr Gunther was there with me and he narrowly beat me, he'd be the first Ascham old boy to go overseas with the 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. Anyway, then I went to the famous, most famous Dames' school at Edgecliff called the Edgecliff Preparatory School and it was presided over by

03:00 a draconian Dutch lady, Miss Van Heukelem, who owned the school and she brought us up with an ebony ruler and with slaps on the back and so on. And there were a few masters there, the headmaster was a man called Mr Butterley who was the father of the composer, Nigel Butterley, who would have only been a little boy then he wouldn't have been composing anything. And I stayed at that

03:30 school and mostly people from the Edgecliff Preparatory School went on to the Sydney Grammar School and it was always expected that I would go to the Sydney Grammar School because my father was at the Sydney Grammar School and he had a distinguished academic career, he was there with Mr Justice Nicholas, who was the grandfather of the present Mr Justice Nicholas, you know, on the Supreme Court of New South Wales. And they always used to say that

04:00 Griffin and Nicholas between them won all the prizes. The prizes that Nicholas didn't win, Griffin won and the other way round. So it was always assumed that I would be going to the Sydney Grammar School but for a reason which I really can't be precise about, I decided I didn't want to go to the Sydney Grammar School and I thought it would be nice to go to Cranbrook School which had only just started in those days

04:30 and it was close enough for me to walk to the school and I knew one or two of the boys who were going there and so it was my first independent decision I suppose. I told my parents that I wanted to go to Cranbrook, I think it was a disappointment to my father but he didn't say anything about it, and I did, I went to

05:00 Cranbrook where I had what I thought was a very good, liberal education. You see in those days the big schools paid practically no attention to the arts, or music or any of those things. It was maths and English and football and cricket really, that's what you learned at school. And I just grew up, my parents were artistic people, we had very interesting

05:30 guests would come, you know, if I'd have known how interesting some of them were I would have paid more attention to them. But I was brought up at Cranbrook. Yes, well, at Cranbrook as things turned out I had the sort of education that I'm very glad I did have and it was a

06:00 school that set out to be sort of interested in some of the finer aspects of life. It was, of course, quite a

small school then, I don't think there were 300 boys at it. Now, of course, it's a very large school but they still keep up the same style. But my whole time at Cranbrook was marred because I was desperately ill, in fact I was dying everyone thought.

06:30 So I sort of, the very minute I was getting launched onto something it was truncated and I sort of went in and out of the school to hospitals and things like that and didn't sit for any public examinations at all and

07:00 when I finished, however, I hadn't matriculated and I had to go to the university so I did. And I'd been so ill that I went to the university really, that part of it, just to rehabilitate myself I suppose. And we a some very good professor of English who died quite a young man, it was a great

07:30 shame, called Waldock. And I went to his lectures and I met one of my greatest friends there, one of the Ryrie family, Ted Ryrie, and we became great friends until he was killed in the war. I had a very bad war from that point of view, almost everyone I knew was killed or died. When I came back I more or less had a clean

08:00 start. Anyway, then I became a lawyer, I enrolled in the Faculty of Law under Sir John Peden, famous professor, Jacko he was known as, and graduated. And then the war came in the same year and I then got myself involved in the

08:30 Army and into the 8th Division and I went to Singapore or to Malaya and served in the campaign against the Japanese and was taken prisoner of war. Before that, my wife and I were married just before I went away and she had a pretty dreary time for four years, of course not knowing anything

09:00 about it – but I assume we'll go into detail about all that later on. Anyway, when I came back I became an Associate to Sir Braddon [Dudley] Williams, Justice of the High Court of Australia. I then went to the Bar myself and after a brief but successful career I decided – I was offered a senior partnership in a very much a rising firm of solicitors, called

09:30 Dudley Westgarth & Company, which has now risen to such an extent it's called Corrs Westgarth and it's a huge firm and one of the largest in Australia, so it wouldn't have interested me; I don't like those big institutions much, but still. So that's when I left the Bar, great dismay because only failures left the Bar in those days. No successful barrister would ever dream of leaving

10:00 the bar. I did against all advice because I thought there was more to life than being a barrister and then maybe being a judge and I got myself launched into a legal/commercial career which went form one thing to

10:30 another and I finished up as the Executive Chairman of a company called Nabalco which was owned by, the majority was owned by Swiss Aluminium Limited which was the biggest aluminium company in the world in those days and I stopped being a lawyer altogether but I went on to a number of boards of interesting companies, John Fairfax Limited being

11:00 one of them, being the most interesting I think. A number of other European and American companies which meant that I went to Europe 4 times a year, I think, for years and years and years. And I made a sort of career of that. When I was a prisoner of war I wrote a book for children

11:30 which had an extraordinary history – it's still being published, it's still being read 55 years after it was written. And it was, well, it was suggested by my greatest friend in the prison camp was Alec Downer, who was the father of the present Foreign Minister, and he and I were tremendous companions, he was older than I was but we had a great

12:00 rapport we were interested in the same things and the same ideas and he was an Oxford graduate and had a lot of interesting English friends, one or two of them who were actually in the British Army in Changhi. He died unfortunately, he became Minister for Immigration in the Menzies government and then High Commissioner in London – I used to go and stay with him and we used to have tremendous fun.

12:30 Then I came back and devoted myself to being a company director and I was gradually retired, I finally got too old for Swiss Aluminium so I retired from Swiss Aluminium. And then my eldest son, who was also a lawyer, and one of the leading contract bridge players [card game] in Australia,

13:00 he got onto something new altogether, this was the dissemination by IT [information technology] of government information and there's an interesting story about that. I don't know whether this is the time to tell that but that's got to be

13:30 mentioned because very interesting things happened. And I thought this was a good thing to do and I backed that myself and it was a very good thing to do, our partner was Telstra and we finally sold it or Telstra sold their interest – their interest was a greater interest than ours so we went along with that

14:00 and suddenly, aged about 80, I found for the first time in my life I hadn't got a job of any kind. And all my life I have played golf, that was, my family was an athletic family and I was a golfer and quite a good one. And I was captain of the university golf team and that sort of thing.

14:30 So when I came back I was invited to play and to join a Sydney club because they'd all been out at war-time, during the war of course, and they wanted to improve the standard a bit and they thought I might be able to do that. So I did and that meant that we – also by coincidence too a very famous

15:00 golfer called T.S. Mackay the Australian Amateur Champion and New South Wales Amateur Champion who now lives up here and hasn't got too much longer to go I'm afraid – but he had an empty house at Pymble and you can't imagine what that was like in 1946 because nobody had anywhere to live at all, not a house had been built in Australia for

15:30 years of course and to be suddenly offered a whole house was amazing. And so we decided we would go and live in it but for somebody who was brought up in the Eastern Suburbs to go to a place called Pymble which we'd hardly ever heard of was a tremendous uprooting. I remember we were giving a party and more than

16:00 one at one of them one of the speakers suggested I'd now be happy to join the Country Party because Pymble was so far away that no one had ever heard of it even. And it's funny to think that the main road to Pymble, or to Brisbane, was just a single track, you know, bitumen road and many of the other subsidiary

16:30 roads were ordinary metal dirt, gravel roads. Anyway, he had a very nice house right on the Avondale golf links, right bang on the links, where I played anyway you see and we went to live up there and then he said, "Well I'm afraid the time's come to an end I've got to sell the house". So I then bought, fortunately there was a spare

17:00 acre and a quarter, or acre and a half of land next door, owned by Lady Gillespie, the Gillespies, the flower milling people and we heard that Lady Gillespie would only sell the land to a returned soldier so I qualified in that respect. So I bought the land and I used to play

17:30 golf with an architect called Charles Madden, who was Errol Flynn's first cousin, and he was a very distinguished architect. The firm was called Bunning & Madden and they built the National Library in Canberra and all sorts of other things. And I said to him one day, "Charles would you design me a house to live in?" Well he said he wouldn't ordinarily be designing houses but

18:00 you know, "We know each other, where's the land?" I said "Right at the edge of the club". "Oh", he said, "That'll be interesting. So he then designed us a house it could only have 12 ½ squares, that's 12 hundred square feet. Under the law you couldn't build a bigger house than that. And we had a couple of children, young children, so it had a little bit more. Anyway, he designed this

18:30 house and we got it built and there was a great story about that as well because there was no building material in Australia. You could have a nice design of a house but getting it built was something else. Anyway, we duly did get it built and so successful was it that people used to come in motor cars and photographs and I'm quite sure hundreds or many, many other houses in Sydney were

19:00 built from Charles Madden's charming house that he built for us. Anyway, being so small, I think it from only 12 ½ squares we got it up to 16 squares because of the children, that's still a tiny little house and as soon as they started getting bigger we had to up sticks [move]. So we bought another lovely house on the Killara golf

19:30 links, a really beautiful house this was. And I put down a cricket pitch and we had a very nice lawn tennis court and golf so of a weekend we'd play golf, cricket and tennis on the same weekend. A former Australian test bowler, Everett, he lived next door to us, he had two boys that were good cricketers so we used to have tremendous fun playing cricket and tennis and so on. And well then the

20:00 boys by this time they were grown up of course and it seemed sensible to leave this house because it was a very big house and we moved to another house in Killara and then finally the urge to return to the eastern suburbs for me was very strong and we found a beautiful house to live in and bought it, my wife never liked it, she didn't like the eastern suburbs

20:30 anyway. Although she was a very good golfer, indeed a champion golfer, and she decided that she was very much involved in showing dogs, labradors, she was quite a big word in the labrador, whatever it's called, association and she used to chase round all over New South Wales, and I mean all over New South Wales, she would drive hundreds of miles to these dog shows

21:00 and we always had some dogs, very nice dogs too, and Sydney wasn't a very good place to keep them and after we'd bought this other lovely house, designed by Gilling, who was a very noted architect, in fact if people have

21:30 houses for sale today in the advertisement if it's been designed by Gilling they always say so. And my aunt, one of my aunts, saw a house in Kent Road, Rose Bay, which is where the Royal Sydney Golf Club is, and she said well there's quite a nice house in Kent Road. And I said, "Well I've seen it for sale and I've driven past it".

22:00 And she said, "We'll go and have a look at it because it's much nicer than you think it is, it's much bigger too". So I did and it was a very nice house, I bought that, we sold the other one and my wife then took off for Burradoo which is a suburb adjoining Bowral, to the south, the next suburb south of it and

she bought a nice house there

22:30 and I would come up for the weekend. I was still working then of course and would come up for the weekends and really liked it, enjoyed it. Of course it was much more difficult to get here then than it is now because of the road it took quite a long time. And the road improved and improved and improved. And then she was always keeping her eye open for some other property because she

23:00 thought we could do, you know, have a nicer house. And one day she rang me and said, “Yes, I’ve just had a look at a very interesting place I think could be made very nice”. And I said, “Well is it worth me coming up and having a look at it?” And she said, “Yes”, she thought so. So I did, I came up and had a look at it. It was owned by a

23:30 man called John Bligh, who was a direct descendent of Governor Bligh, and he had some of Bligh’s instruments in this house, they’d have been absolutely priceless relics of course, priceless relics – I think he even had his chronometer here and, you know, if Bligh’s chronometer was put on the market it would really fetch a price. Anyway, he wanted to leave, he was a strange chap, a nice

24:00 fellow but he wanted to leave so we sold the other house in Burradoo and bought this house where I’m sitting at this moment and then in due course I think I mentioned, Telstra wanted to get out, the company was called Lawpoint Pty Limited, that we owned with Telstra – and I’d like to talk about that, too, because that was an interesting commercial story.

24:30 And, well there we are and here we are today. I have two children, Edward, the elder who was noted as a bridge player and other things too, and the younger one, Alistair, and he’s got three children and he lives in Gordon, a suburb of Sydney and Edward lives at Northbridge, which is a very nice part of Sydney

25:00 that people who’ve haven’t been there would never realise how nice it is and how extraordinarily close to Sydney it is. And that’s the family. That’s about it and I’m here, I’m still alive anyway.

Thank you very much for that. Now what I’d like to do is go right back to the beginning. I was wondering if you could tell me about your father. I understand he wasn’t involved in

25:30 **World War I, can you tell me about that?**

Yes, yes I can. My father’s name was Eric Furnable, Griffin-Furnable was a sort of vague family name, I don’t quite remember what it was but his mother and my grandmother was one of the Sutters from Bathurst and they’re still in Bathurst. Sutter came out here at the suggestion of Sir Joseph

26:00 Banks. Sutter was a young man and we don’t know quite where he was, a Chelsea gardener or something like that I think, and they were having terrible trouble out here in the colony growing anything. They tried to grow wheat of course near Sydney and you couldn’t do it and you can’t do it still to this day and of course the colony was nearly starving to death because each time a new fleet came out all they brought was more convicts and

26:30 no food. And he was, he established a property, I don’t remember the name of it, but it’s not far from Sydney it’s up in the sort of Castle Hill area and he was the first person to grow citrus fruit in Australia, he brought some orange seeds with him and

27:00 of course was no more successful than anybody else in trying to grow wheat because it’s not on down there. But he established himself and his wife came with him and he arrived in 1800 on a ship which was then called the Porpoise. And what was interesting about it was, when you came to Australia in those days you

27:30 went first to Rio de Janeiro, all the ships did, and then they sailed across using a trade wind I suppose and they sailed right across the ocean. And the Porpoise got as far as Rio de Janeiro on the first trip but in such terrible shape that they couldn’t go any further they had to turn round and sail back to England again so that the Porpoise could be made seaworthy.

28:00 And it duly was made seaworthy and came the second time, we were always disappointed with that, because if it hadn’t happened the family would have got here in the 18th Century instead of the beginning of the 19th. But the point of mentioning the Porpoise is it was then renamed, I forget what it’s re-name was but it was used by Captain Flinders when he sailed and

28:30 was wrecked on Mauritius where he stayed of course until Napoleon was defeated, but Mauritius was a French colony and the whole thing was made famous by Ernestine Hill in her novel My Love Must Wait and that was the Porpoise that my great, great, great grandfather arrived in Sydney on.

29:00 That was one side of the family and the other side was William Cox, Cox’s River you’ve probably heard of. He was a captain in the New South Wales Corps and he came out with Governor Macquarie or I think before Macquarie but about that time and when the Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson discovered the route over the Blue Mountains which of course was the birth of Australia

29:30 really, until that had taken place there was no future for Australia, and suddenly they saw the Bathurst Plains and, you know, it was like El Dorado really and my great, great, great grandfather, Cox, he was

commissioned to build the road over the Blue Mountains which he did, with a team of convicts, very

30:00 few of them and they did it an amazingly short space of time and they loved him too, he was very nice to them, there was no animosity whatever. And really it was an amazing engineering feat I think it was built in about 9 months or just astonishingly short period. And where, when you go up to Orange, or you don't go that way I suppose but if you do you go to Faulconbridge,

30:30 or it may be before that where Sir Henry Parkes is buried, but the interesting thing is that there is a ridge there it's the only way you can get across the Blue Mountains that's why the road and the railway for that period go exactly side by side. And if Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson hadn't found that it might have been many, many years before anyone had crossed the Blue Mountains and

31:00 even, you know, it's not inconceivable that the whole colony might have to have been abandoned because of starvation and everything else. I mean that's rather speculative but the crossing of the Blue Mountains was an absolutely critical event and William Cox, he took advantage of it, he moved to Mudgee and they owned large

31:30 areas of what is now Mudgee. And the Suttors went to Bathurst, you see.

Can you tell me why your father was not in World War I?

Yes, I can. Well he was then, when he left school, in those days gentlefolk only had two things to do, they either went into a bank, that was a commercial occupation, or in a shipping business. Other

32:00 forms of activity were not considered socially acceptable. And his father was a manager of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Limited and my father went to the commercial within it as a clerk, to the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Limited which took him to Bourke and it took him to Bourke when the typhoid epidemic was raging in Bourke and people were dying from it, goodness knows how many,

32:30 to such an extent that you couldn't get into the hospital until somebody died because there was no bed until somebody died. Well he got into the hospital, he didn't die, but typhoid is a complaint that leaves you almost always with some even crippling disease or complaint and it did so in his case it completely knocked his right leg; almost unwalkable

33:00 and all his life he had to have a large stocking on his right leg which he used to have to lace up every day, I remember, so he was ineligible for World War I. He was the only male member on both sides of the family that wasn't there, they were all at the war and one of my uncles died as a result of the war but he wasn't killed by

33:30 enemy action or anything, it was amazing. I don't know how anybody lived through World War I because he was at Gallipoli as well and to survive Gallipoli and then France for four years the odds would be millions to one against. Anyway, they all came back, but I say one of them came back in such poor shape that he didn't live terribly wrong. That that's

34:00 why my father, who couldn't go to the war, I think felt, you know, felt not only disappointed but, you know, felt unfulfilled I suppose. You can't imagine what it's like at your age. You'd think, "why would anybody want to go to a war?" and everybody does, you see. And he did good works with the Red Cross and all those sort of

34:30 things but he was a very interesting intellectual sort of person and I mean I can talk about him for a long, long, while but that's why he didn't, that's why he wasn't involved in the war. And, you know, it didn't really do him very much good not being. Nowadays, of course, in the Second [World] War if you didn't hear the bugle you had enormous opportunities because there were so few people to go around but in the First World War

35:00 Australia, you know, it was such a small place. There weren't a million people in Sydney, of course, even, in my time that is. So it was fundamentally a grazing community as far as New South Wales was concerned. Victoria had the gold rush at Ballarat and so on but New South Wales was very

35:30 much a grazing community with sheep. Now the Cox family they did a wonderful job with merino sheep. In fact, I'm on the Royal Agricultural Council, I have been so for years and years, here in Sydney, in Australia, in New South Wales, but the general feeling is that the Cox's made far more of a contribution to the wool industry than Macarthur [known as the 'father of the Australian wood industry'] ever did.

36:00 Macarthur brought the sheep out but Charles Farren, and Cox, who would have been my great, great grandfather, he developed them to a tremendous extent and I presented a silver cup to the Royal Agricultural Society which he won for the best pen of sheep, oh, years and years ago. And they never did, they had no sense of publicity or

36:30 anything, neither the Cox family nor the Suttor family. They sort of hid themselves away and weren't a bit interested in public life at all and the only one was, Sir Francis Suttor, my grandmother's brother, he had a bit to do with public life but all the rest of them were tucked away in Bathurst and Mudgee.

37:00 **I'm wondering if you can now, I guess, take me to the 1930s and the impending World War II. What did you know about the coming war?**

Well, the first thing one has to remember is that we were still completely overwhelmed by World War I. You see, the time wasn't very long, I

37:30 mean all these uncles I'm talking about of mine weren't old chaps like me they were young people. In fact many of them enlisted again and had a second slice of World War II – not my particular family but a great many did. And that meant that if you were from a family which was, you know, felt that military duty was part of one's responsibilities for the

38:00 privileges we had because, you know, I had a privileged society, no question, and a modern Australian would have no conception of the difference that existed. So World War I was almost still going on in a way, although it finished in 1918 and then there was soldier settlement, you know, and then the

38:30 Depression of course came in 1929 and all we were thinking about was World War I. I remember when I sailed through the heads in World War II, and I wasn't the only one either, I had a great feeling of exultation really because I sort of said to myself, well, now I'm a returned soldier whatever happens, if I return at all, I'll

39:00 either have been killed or I'll have been returned. And that was a tremendous thing, suddenly you were somebody. It's extraordinary but these young shrieking people marching up and down George Street would find that incomprehensible but it was a fact and it's relevant to the question you asked me, too. Well, we knew about, of course, about Hitler [Chancellor of Germany] and the rise of Hitler.

39:30 Mussolini [Prime Minister of Italy] started things going and the general feeling was "Oh, well it's about time someone took control of Italy". Nothing was happening in Italy, you know, the whole place was - it's a mess to this day, one of the most charming messes the world has ever known, I love Italy. So that was Musso, you know, drain the Pontine Marshes [1930s land reclamation project], you know, and get the trains running and all that sort of thing.

40:00 And dictatorship was obviously very good in some respects, you see, and we used to say we want a few Mussolinis out here, you see, we could use him in Australia. Well, then, Hitler was much the same because I think it was generally realised that the reparations after World War I on Germany were, they were unbearable really, I mean something had to happen. It was, you know, we can understand

40:30 how vengeful everybody was but, you know, there are limits. And the Germany people were, you know, sort of battling on and doing their best and then of course this charismatic genius, because he was no less, Hitler, emerged and

41:00 I think at the time people thought well that's got to be an incredibly good thing for Germany too, it's about time that got somebody who'd get them back on their feet again. And particularly the English aristocracy, they were keen, very keen on Hitler, many of them.

I'm just going to stop you there.

Tape 2

01:06 Yes well alright well so, but we had a lot of other things to be thinking about. I mean the Depression was receding but not, not all that quickly and, in the early thirties you know Australia wasn't a very attractive place, one way or another, nowhere was really. And then there was

01:30 a picture show in Bligh Street. The building was owned by the Theosophical Society and these were these ratbags of people who thought there was going to be a second coming of Christ all the time and they built great amphitheatres to receive him. And he was coming to Sydney. So a great amphitheatre was built in Middle Head somewhere to receive Jesus Christ as he came suddenly came across the horizon and, and

02:00 you know reinhabited the earth you know. The most absolute nonsense you've ever heard. Anyway it was so and they owned, the Society owned this building in Bligh Street called the Adja Hall [?] and in the Adja Hall they showed films. They call it the Savoy Theatre. And there was a celebrated series of films which you probably might not have heard of but may have been called The March of Time.

02:30 And this was, these were the first sort of, serious documentaries ever in history. And, they had a - they were started off as talkies [films with sound], which had only just started anyway. With a very portentous voice saying "The March of Time". And this particular one was the first I'd

03:00 ever seen - this was the rise of Hitler and the development of the army. And I suppose I saw this in about 1938 and, most of the audience was laughing because the antics of, the antics of the Nazi's is like

03:30 the preposterous antics of the North Korean's who I'm sure you've seen on TV marching. I mean it was so exaggerated and so ludicrous that one had to laugh or react in some way or other. But I wasn't laughing because I thought to myself, goodness me, no-one would have prepared such a gigantic fighting force unless he was intending to use it.

04:00 And from the very moment I saw that first version of The March of Time, I had no doubt whatever that there was going to be a war of some kind. And - but I think that for the - well I don't really think, I know that the majority of people never would've given it a thought at all. Anyway of course one thing led to another as we know

04:30 and the Rhine - the occupation of the Rhineland and all those things happened. And the next thing we, we knew was that the Right Honourable R.G. Menzies, K.C., the Prime Minister was saying, "It was my melancholy duty", those were the words he used, I can remember. "It was my melancholy duty to tell you that we are at war with Germany". And that meant that recruiting

05:00 started all over again. And, most of mine - I had graduated from the University, well just in 1938. And most of my friends were in the same position exactly to me. And so we, the question was you know, well

05:30 when were we going to be joining up. And they started to, they decided to have a 2nd AIF and call it the 2nd AIF and decided to, the units of 2nd: 1st Battalion and the 2nd Battalion and so on. And, we went to, they were in, most of my friends got into the University Regiment which was

06:00 quite a celebrated sort of peacetime unit. In fact one of my uncles was a commander of it. And a cousin also before him. And so they joined, they joined that. But I wasn't you know physically fit enough to get into, into the University Regiment. And I was very sorry about it but I was - they wouldn't take me. So my particular

06:30 friends Ryrie and Britain and others, they, they sort of got absorbed into the University Regiment. And I then decided that one had to be in some military organisation for two reasons. One because it was a question of satisfaction. And two that I knew perfectly well that

07:00 anybody who hadn't been so when the war was over would be a second class citizen amongst the sort of group that I inhabited. And that turned out to be quite correct incidentally. Anyway I then got myself into a funny sort of a unit, oh it was an Royal Australian Engineer

07:30 the 33rd Fortress Company, Royal Australian Engineers. Which they gave a funny name to, they called them the :temporary permanent forces". And our job was to operate searchlights for the big guns which were at North Head, at South Head and Middle Head.

Where did you enlist?

That's a good question.

08:00 I mean I can tell you where I enlisted in the AIF. I can't remember, frankly I can't remember how I got into the 33rd Fortress Company. I know where it was, we were at North Head, training over there. And I can't answer that. I don't know. I've got a good memory but I just can't work out how that happened, I can't tell you that. At Cranbrook of course we had a, our headmaster was Sir Ivan McKay who

08:30 became - he was the first successful general in World War II. And so we were very militarily inclined at the school. You know there was a lot of training and all that sort of thing and I was in the school cadets, everybody was in the school cadets. And I, I - not too many questions I can't answer about my life but that's one you - I've never been asked before and I simply can't answer, I don't know.

Well perhaps before

09:00 **you go on to talk about it you can tell me what it was like being involved in the school cadets?**

Well the school - I was very disappointing because when I was reached the - when I was at Cranbrook and I reached the age of I don't know what it was, let's say it was 13 or 14. That was when you had to be compulsory military service and the cadets was, was Australian law in those days. And Scullin [James Henry] was the Labor Prime Minister

09:30 and the very year I was about to step into my uniform Scullion abolished the compulsory military training. The Labor Party don't like any compulsory anything you see. They still don't. And so I, when I was about to put my official uniform on it never happened. So we stayed on with the cadets and we had an ex-professional Sandhurst [Royal Military Academy Sandhurst]

10:00 officer who was on the staff. He was one of the mathematics masters. And we used to train away and do the sort of thing that cadets do, you know march about and, we didn't go to the more exciting things that happened after the war. They used to go to camps at Singleton and do, none of that existed then. There was nobody to sort of run it. But we took ourselves quite seriously and we used to clump about

10:30 with Lee Enfield service rifles and all that sort of thing. And we'd go out, once a year we'd go out to Long Bay and do some shooting. And we wore a smart uniform. I was thinking - not that's not a picture, that's a picture of me in my real uniform up there. But, and many other men that went to the University went straight into the University Regiment from school which I was not able

11:00 which I was not - oh for me, what I was not able to do. I got into this other unit and went to North Head and it had some funny features to because, the, the power that services searchlights has to be made locally because otherwise if the place is bombed of course you'd lose a current so, it has to have its own, searchlights have to have their own power

11:30 supply. And they were, they were powered by huge diesel engines called Gardner, Gardner diesels they were called. And so we had to know something about how they worked. And no diesel was able to work properly without a little invention called the Bosch injector. And that was able to

12:00 inject diesel oil into a cylinder when the air was under tremendous pressure and that brought about the explosion which caused the engine to run. Excuse me I've just got to sneeze.

The point about me telling you all this is that, I had to go for an examination on the diesel engine.

12:30 And this meant I had to know something about the Bosch injector. And I came top of the class there. And I'm only telling it because years later I became the Chairman of Bosch itself. And I'm greatly astonished that one day it operates in Melbourne, still does. And, all Germans on the board but me. And I remember saying, "Well gentlemen I'll tell you something that'll surprise you.

13:00 That I'm a fully certificated engineer in the Bosch injector." And the Germans nearly fell off their chairs they were so astonished. Because they weren't even born when the Bosch injector - anyway so, and having done well at this course as a reward I was sent down to Port Kembla where BHP was and still is. And

13:30 about three or four guns to defend BHP against the Japanese, against an invasion, not Japanese but, German. And while I was there, we had a, a regular army officer, a professional soldier in charge. And, I was a sapper, my rank was.

14:00 I had no responsibility, I had to go to the cook house pretty often. And I was in there one day peeling potatoes which is what you have to do when you're sapper and private. And in came a sergeant in the Royal Australian Artillery. And we were attached obviously to them you see because they were firing the gun, all we were doing was putting the lights on. And I played golf against him.

14:30 And he was a bit astonished to see me sitting there with a big vat of potatoes peeling them into a bucket. He was a sergeant. And he said, "I'd like to see you afterwards, would you look me up?" So I said yes I would and I did. And he said, "Why don't we go over on Sunday afternoon and have a game of golf." Excuse me.

15:00 I was all for that. And our commander, this regular officer he had a very low opinion of the AIF. And I remember particularly one day we'd be, we were being drilled outside the orderly room, that's where the officer is

15:30 and he came out of his orderly room while we were marching up and down. And called the sergeant major over. "Sergeant Major!". And this chap came stamping over, you know and, "Sir." And he said, I can remember very well he said, I won't name him. He said, "These men look like the AIF. Train it out or drill it out of them. Drill it out of them."

16:00 "Yes, sir, yes." So after my cookhouse episode with my friend Jack Lemmon his name was, suddenly I got an order to report to the commanding officer, the gentleman in question. He said, "Sapper Griffin, I've been having a look at your record here. Would you be interested in promotion?" I said, "Yes, sir I'm always interested

16:30 in promotion." "Well" he said, "I think, I think you're a bit wasted in what you're doing just peeling potatoes and so on. I think we, we ought to try and further your career in the army." I thanked him very much. And I said, "The only one thing wrong with it sir and that is that I've already got my name down to - with the AIF. And I'm waiting for a call up notice." There was a hitch because they had

17:00 so many applications they closed down recruiting for a while, administratively. "The AIF." he said with astonishment. "What on earth for?" "Well sir" I said "I thought that was the way that one could be of most use to Australia." And he said, "I think that - I very much doubt that." Or something. Anyway he said, "Thank you for telling me." Well within, within two or three weeks of that happening I did in fact get

17:30 my call up for the AIF. And I had to report at Moore Park Recruiting Depot which is, an area outside the Sydney showground really. Where cars used to be parked. And Jean my, she wasn't my wife then, I had my own car, little Hillman it was, very proud of it.

18:00 And she, she waited while this long recruiting process took place. You had to go through about eight different stages. And, I think this was a, I think it was a Friday - it was either a Saturday morning or a Friday afternoon. Anyway I got to the second last point when a bugle was blown or a bell was rung and they said, "Finished. All over."

18:30 "Report back on Monday morning at eight." Or something or rather. Well we had to start, go back and come back all over again. And to my astonishment instead of being starting at the second last place you had to start all over again, the whole thing. Because under the rules you had to do the whole thing in the same day. So it all went on again and finally this time I, I got - I was sworn in.

19:00 **Can I just ask you before you tell us the story, when you first signed up, where, what were your hopes, where were you hoping to be?**

Well I was hoping to be - I was hoping I'd get into the AIF, which I wasn't able to do via the University Regiment you see. I was hoping that I'd be, that I'd be considered good enough, fit enough when they started getting towards the bottom of the barrel that was really

19:30 the idea of it. And if not, well then I'd be serving in Australia and that, I knew that wouldn't be nearly as good but, at least that was you know that was the idea of the thing. Well I got right through and I was in uniform because I was in the Engineers at the time. And there was a person sitting at a little table, like a little bridge table. And he said to me

20:00 "Sit down soldier." So I did. And he said, "Now what unit would you like to be in?" And I said, "Well sir, I had no idea I had any choice." "Oh well" he said, "Yes up to a point we try and fit people in you know if we can. We don't guarantee it but…" And I said, "I've never given any thought to it." "Well" he said, "What do you do in private life?" Well I said, "I'm a lawyer in private life."

20:30 Oh he took on a very grim face. He said, "Oh there's not much opening for lawyers in the army I'm afraid." And I said, "Yes I know sir I realise that." And he said, "Just a minute I've got an idea. Do you know Brigadier Simpson?" And I said, "No." Well he said, "He's up at Victoria Barracks which of course was almost next door to where we were, you see we were opposite the showground. He said, "I'll give you a note to Brigadier Simpson

21:00 and can you get there?" And I said, "Yes I've got my car outside." Well he said, "Take yourself around to Victoria Barracks and get yourself paraded to Brigadier Simpson." So we drove around in the car with Jean. And we had trouble getting into Victoria Barracks because when wars are on it's a very formidable thing. But anyway we got in. And I was duly directed to Brigadier Simpson's quarters. And

21:30 went in and low and behold there was a collection of lawyers in there. And Brigadier turned out to be a person I knew as Bill Simpson a barrister, I'd no idea he was a Brigadier. And one or two other lawyers that I knew quite well. One was a connection of mine and I was greeted quite warmly you know. "Come in come in come in." And Simpson read this bit of paper. He said, "Oh" he said

22:00 "You might be the very man we're looking for." He said, "I'm taking a legal unit to Cairo and we're one man short. Would that interest you?" And I said, "Mr Simpson, it interests me very much indeed." Well he said, "Oh that's good." And I was thinking my goodness me, this is, this is like winning the lottery until up spoke one of the Captains, Lord Suppleton.

22:30 He said, "I'm sorry Sir." He said, "This position is for a typist." So Simpson said to me, "Well Griffin can you type?" And I said, "No sir, no sir." Well he said, "I suppose you can learn." And I said, "Yes why not." Well he said, "There we are, that should be enough." And said the same devil's advocate, "No Sir I'm afraid not." "Because",

23:00 he said, "What will happen is that, you will be calling for reports and all sorts of things that have to be typed and if they're ready because we haven't got a typist who can type properly or insufficient then you'll be in a rage and we'll all be in trouble." And well Bill Simpson sort of contemplated this and finally said, "Well okay I suppose that's right, I suppose that's right." And he said, "I'm sorry."

23:30 And I said, "Well am I too." And he said, "Just a minute I've got an idea" he said. So he picked up the telephone which is on his desk and he asked for a number. And quite shortly along came a voice and he said - I remember the conversation almost every word of it. "Good morning George." Pause. "I've scratched your back a few times haven't I? Well what about scratching mine?"

24:00 Conversation kept on going and he said to me - he hung up - he said "Thanks very much." He said, "Do you know, do you know Redford?" And I knew Redford very well because it was one of the Hordern's houses at Darling Point and we lived in Darling Point Road not very far away from Redford. And I said, "Yes I do know Redford." He said, "Redford's been taken over by the army and

24:30 if you take yourself around to Redford and see this officer here, Campbell" he said. "He might be able to do something for you." So Jean and I then proceeded to drive to Darling Point to Redford. And we were duly admitted to Major Campbell's rooms and he was the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General

25:00 for one, the 1st Cavalry Division. Imagine the word "Cavalry" still being used in 1941 you know. Anyway he was a great big fat chap. Tremendously fat chap. He was a manager of one of the Lloyd's Insurance Agencies in Sydney, the General Manager. But he was full of smiles as fat people tend to be. And he said, well he said

25:30 "I've got, can you leave, I've getting a unit together and we're out at Liverpool camp. And we'll be sailing pretty soon. You know does that present any particular problem?" Well I said, "Well no I want to get married before I go on away." And so on. And so he said, "Oh it's not as quick as all that", three weeks or something. And I said to him, "What?" "No" he said. "Well I'll take you."

26:00 And he said, wrote this down and said, "Take this out to the camp, B Block at Liverpool." And I said, "Well what's the unit called?" He said, "The 2/3rd MAC [Motor Ambulance Convoy]" he said. I had no idea what MAC meant even. I thought it meant something to do with engineering, with machine guns, but it turned out to be not so at all. And it was the Motor Ambulance, the 2/3 Motor Ambulance

26:30 Convoy. And we had the job of keeping 50 ambulances on the road, we had nothing to do with the

medical, what went on inside them but we had a big thing called a mobile workshop and it was like a huge engineering works really. But we had all these ambulances which had to be, the drivers all had to be trained. Quite a lot of them were real ambulance drivers in private life, quite a lot of them were not. And

27:00 so then out - oh Jean and I were married in St Mark's Church, Darling Point where my parents had been married and my grandparents had been married I think. And out we went to Liverpool Camp. And this was a horrendous experience for me because suddenly I found myself with sort of

27:30 working class Australians that I had never met in my life before because I'd had no occasion ever to meet them you see. I mean people today can't imagine how separated one was, completely separated. You know the gardener'd come and the milkman and you'd say, "Good morning David" or you'd say, "Hello Jack" and that was about our only contact at all with working class people.

28:00 Until I was suddenly, I was - I mean I had a few at North Head but that was, they were quite selected people, quite a different set up to - to being in - this was in the 8th Division. And well then I was in Liverpool - it was a bit longer than we thought. I think I was there about a month or something and then, sailed away.

Well before we hear that story

28:30 **on that note of class I'm wondering, I know you've just told us this morning that you were in the cadets at school and then felt a fairly high degree of I guess, peer group pressure to enlist.**

Not even peer group pressure, no no pressure it was just from my own, I mean everybody, everybody like me who had any sense wanted to get in the

29:00 army. For example when I was in, when I was in Changi Camp as a Prisoner of War one of my - I ran into one of my friends I had no idea he was anywhere near or even in the army. And Dick Olsen his name was, an awfully nice chap. Became the head of the Art Gallery in Queensland. And I said, "Well Dick, what are you doing here?" He said, he was a fantasy eight [?]

29:30 type of person. He said "Well", he said "David, things had reached such a point that I was no longer being invited to the best drawing room so I thought it was time I enlisted in the army." And that of course was a bit of fun but I mean that, that, you know that was the sort of thing. And, there was no peer pressure, absolutely definitely not. It was completely one's own feeling. There was no pressure whatever. That was just

30:00 it was automatically assumed that if, if you were a member of any way of what was certainly the upper class then and still is incidentally that's something you did. And you just did it you know. And one was very disappointed - I was very disappointed when I couldn't get in via the University Regiment because my, all my pals were in the 6th Division. I mean Ted Ryrie's picture's up there and he was

30:30 one of them. He was shot on my birthday, tragically really in 1944 in Bipupun [?] up in, near New Guinea. So that's why, I mean I don't think - there was definitely not any pressure, it was a completely - a part of our life. And when I came back from the war I was sent a copy of the Cranbrookie and that's the school magazine, you know all schools have them. And

31:00 naturally with, I thought the returned soldiers, pages and pages. And of course I looked for myself to see that - and I was not there. And I thought, that's a funny thing. Until I realised that these were all the people who'd been killed not the people who'd enlisted. They were all dead. Because we, we had people who were very interested in the air force and they went into, excuse me, you think all the Empire Air

31:30 Training Scheme in Canada. And of course they were all in the RAAF and RAF in England. Excuse me. And of course they died in droves. I mean nearly all of them. One of my own cousins did so too. So that it was absolutely the thing to do, it was de rigeur absolutely.

Well I'd just like to perhaps take you back to

32:00 **the 33rd Fortress Company 'cause we skipped over that a little bit. Can you tell me a bit more about…?**

Well - no it was a - I say it was nicknamed a temporary permanent forces and I can't remember how I got in there. And, well it - there was a bit of a "Dad's army" in it to some extent. There were some old soldiers

32:30 from World War I who you know were too old to be going to World War II. It was run along strictly, you know strictly military lines. In fact very strict indeed. And what would have happened if I hadn't been accepted by the AIF I don't know. I suppose I would have then been promoted and given a commission. You see I remained a sergeant the whole time, no-one, very few people in Malaya were promoted because there was

33:00 no way you could be and when I came back I think I was the most senior sergeant in the whole of the Australian Army you see because I'd been in - kept a sergeant for nearly five years. And that was, that was seniority with a capital S.

And why do you say that the 33rd Fortress Company was a bit of Dad's Army?

Well because there were some older people in it. Who had different

33:30 duties to ourselves who, who were people who were too old to be in the, you know in the rough and tumble of the army. Now we had a lot of those in Changi for example. We had people called VO and that meant Voyage Only officers and these were people from World War I who came over, went over on the troop

34:00 transports to help with all the organisation. And then, excuse me, they would sail back but of course in our particular case, four of them - no ship sailed back so we had four VOs in Changi with us. But they, they were the same, exactly the same sort of people. You know they were delighted to be back in the army and you know, so and so forth. And

34:30 well they weren't very delighted being in Changi, nobody was that. But that was the sort of tradition - I don't know what happened to the 33rd Fortress Company. It probably became absorbed or did something else but I don't know about that. I don't even know how long they had the searchlight but we had some very very potent artillery. Nine inch guns in the artillery. If you're hit by a nine inch gun you stay hit.

35:00 It was you know, it was at least, at least, no troop, ships couldn't have just sailed into Sydney Harbour. They'd have been blown out of existence, genuinely there was no question about that. There was no Dad's Army about that, it was the real thing.

Well can you describe the search light. What sort of gear did you have?

Well the search light is - I suppose you've - I think they were bigger then than they are now but I mean they're much more powerful now of course.

35:30 And it was, as I say it was operated by a power unit, powered by a Gardner diesel or a Lister diesel engine, those were the two most famous engines in those days. I think Gardiner's are no longer made, I think Lister's might still be made to this day, I don't know. Both English engines. And when you got there to do a tour of duty, because you were only on at night, all

36:00 night long you see. And you'd have to start up the engine and this was really quite something 'cause it had a fly well which meant it had a diameter of you know I think about 7 feet, it was a tremendous thing. And two of you would get onto this and, you know wind it up and wind it up and wind it up. And presently the engine would start, "chug chug chug" and, then you'd - then you'd switch on the generator.

36:30 And then the search light would be switched on. And to see that you were in business, you'd send a ray of light out, I suppose it would go about 20 miles. And a tremendous light of course, I mean you couldn't, if you shine it on anybody I mean you would be fearful you couldn't look at it or anything like that. They were used of course in the war all the time for aircraft.

37:00 Very few would have been as ours were for, sighting ships. But, oh well they go to this day of course, I mean you know the searchlights are very much - and they're run by the engineers still. And that's the way, that's the way it works. You have a- the engineers arrive and just as the artillery arrive with a battalion, there's a section of artillery which is usually

37:30 supporting a battalion. So there was a section of engineers with searchlights if they're got anti-aircraft guns, otherwise not of course. And oh they were highly efficient things. In fact without them the bombing damage would have been a great deal worse in England, the UK [United Kingdom] than it was.

And what, can you just describe what the

38:00 **I guess the function or the role of the 33rd Fortress?**

The role of it was to entirely to support the, I think it was the 9th Heavy Battery it was called. Which it was, and, Colonel Shannon was in charge of the whole of the thing and it was the - it's role was exactly that. It was nothing more than to man the searchlights, maintain them and operate them. But that's what we did.

38:30 That was what, what happened. And I don't know whether, I suppose it was a hang over from World War I, you know. But at North Head, it was very interesting at North Head. We had - there was a group of about 30 people called the Darwin Detail. And Darwin was then thought to be an

39:00 absolute hell hole from which death was almost certain. Not from hostile action but from disease you see, and people were supposed to go off, out of their minds. We had a Sergeant Helpin, he was a permanent regular soldier. And the bugler used to go, everything was on the bugler at North Head Barracks - it was a lovely barracks, first class place. Bugle would go

39:30 and the commander'd ring out "Fall in the Darwin Detail." And then out would scamper these unfortunate people. Well they were thought to be unfortunate, in tropical uniform. And they would fall in. And then they'd be drilling up and down the place. And Sergeant Helpin several times said, "Oh poor buggers, you know, it's terrible thing, nice young chaps." He said, "You know within three months …

40:00 finish.” And later on when I became the Chairman of Nabalco, building the Aluminum plant in Arnhem land of course we used to get there via Darwin and I never went through the place without thinking, hearing the bugle and the command “Fall in the Darwin Detail.”

Tape 3

00:32 **You had spent a long period of time growing up as a quite sick young man?**

Yes I had.

How did that affect you as, your personality and the kind of chap you were?

Oh well I suppose it affected my personality to some extent but, I think I’m a generally fairly cheerful person. And, while I was sick, I mean my personality disappeared

01:00 and I very nearly disappeared with it.

What were the circumstances of your illness?

Well I got, I was, I was playing golf with a bad cold and I got pneumonia which of course is now curable but in those days wasn’t curable. And, and I got what was called an empyema which is an abscess on the lung which has to be drained. The lung gets full of

01:30 pus. Has to be drained. And then I got a dreaded complaint called osteomyelitis which is, you can really - almost the only way you can get is from a - is from exposure of the bone. You see to drain the abscess on the lung they have to cut through a rib. And that means the end of the rib is exposed you see. And I think this, well most people, many many

02:00 people die of osteo anyway. Mostly they did then. And it meant that I was in hospital, well sort of, dying in a way for months and months and months. I was in a little hospital in Darlinghurst near SCEGGS [Sydney Church of England Girls’ Grammar School] called Calmore, a privately owned hospital. I had a wonderful wonderful treatment ‘cause nursing was marvellous then, they really were interested in you

02:30 and you know, they’re not any more. And, I was brought back from the brink of death. I was operated by Sir Benjamin Eddy who was the leading, one of the leading, if not the leading surgeon in Sydney. Everything was done for me that could be done for me and fortunately my genes were strong enough to survive the experience really. And I was so thin you couldn’t believe it, I was like a skeleton.

03:00 And yes I suppose, I suppose - well yes it did have an effect, of course it did but, I don’t think as much as a lot of people. When one of my partners said to me years ago that he thought I was the most adaptable person he ever met in his life. Because no matter what happened, whatever was happening and I suddenly could sort of, be part of it. And I hadn’t ever thought about that any more

03:30 than anyone thinks about themselves much. But it’s probably right I think. And I, you know I got back, I got back to school and, and I got back into the class I was, my chaps I was with so I knew them of course, it wasn’t - but I was you know very much behind everything of course and so on. And I sort of fitted it, I didn’t, you know I never felt that I’d been dealt a bad hand

04:00 or anything like that.

The reason I ask is that obviously you had a creative impulse, an artistic side later in life. And a lot of people who have childhood illnesses often point to that period as something …

Oh no not in my case, no no. In my case it was the, it was being in Changi and having the time, well not exactly the time but having the absolute necessity to do something. And I established this literary society and so on.

04:30 **Well we’ll talk about that in some detail later on. We’ll come back to joining the 8th Division, you mentioned it was a bit of a culture shock for you. Can you talk about some of the characters who you were exposed to during that time?**

Well yes. I went straight in to the sergeant because that was the vacancy. Orderly room sergeant. And we had a group of officers, that

05:00 really were, by the sort of upbringing I’d had were simply laughable except for the CO [Commanding Officer], except for Campbell. You know they hadn’t the faintest idea and of course they’d never had to order anyone to do anything in their lives and they were totally unfitted for it. When I was on the city council with the Labor Party it was just the same. They had no idea whatever. Anyway the, the

05:30 I forgot what I was going to tell you - oh yes well out at - I had never had any occasion to have anything to do on a social level. There was no reason why I should. I mean I wasn’t sort of, absenting myself or going around with my nose in the air, there just was - you just didn’t mix with them

06:00 at all. They had to be just as bored with me as I was with them. But, of course they had no conversation by our standards at all. They were interested in horse racing and, we had one wonderful fellow. He was our regimental sergeant major. And he was a buyer for McDowell's which was one of the shops in Sydney. I think, oh they still going McDowell's.

06:30 And he was a great chap. I mean - Pringle his name was, Frank Pringle. And you know I'd have followed Pringle through thick and thin, he was a marvellous fellow. And to think all he did was you know, he was a buyer, sounded very grand but I don't think it really was at all. You know I mentioned him after the war to one of the McDowell's, you know I had Frank Pringle - didn't mean a thing to him.

07:00 Anyway he was a sort of link for me, he was the sort of lynch pin. He made it all sort of possible and I adapted myself to it. I mean, you know I think they thought I was an extraordinary sort of person but they'd no more met somebody like me than I'd met anyone like them. And we were very friendly there was no, there was no hostility whatsoever. And I

07:30 got on with everybody perfectly and I was a drill sergeant. And you know used to drill people up and down and I probably still could if I had to. When we, when we were over there we went to, we - when we sailed from Darling Harbour on

08:00 Good Friday 1941, it was the beginning of April.

In the period leading up to that what had you been doing?

Well I'd been doing very little with the AIF because I'd been in the 33rd Fortress Company. And I'd only been in the AIF, I don't know for how long it was. I doubt if it was more than six, five or six weeks before we set sail. I don't remember. My wife came to live in Liverpool.

08:30 To bear me company. And we had the most ghastly room - she had poor thing. And there was an advertisement for Sheaf's Stout which was illustrated, a red flashing sign which came off. And throughout the whole night, about every second or every two seconds the whole room would be illuminated in red while Shief Stout was on and

09:00 the sign would go off you see. Anyway we found another hotel later on and that was better. But, then I had another real culture shock I'll tell you. I got to know the fellows quite well and so on, we got on very well together and there were quite a few sergeants. But, oh eight of us or something or so at least. Anyway then we were going to embark you see and then they had

09:30 a pre-embarkation party at which the wives and girlfriends were invited to come. And boy, you know - I had got used to the fellows because they were all in uniform you see and we look more or less alike but when the girls arrived I tell you what it was something else. Anyway, they were, farewelled and, and that was the last we saw of anyone, my wife included. That was

10:00 the end.

Can you tell us about leaving the harbour on that ship?

Yes we went down on a train all the way down to Darling Harbour. I think it's a goods train line, I've never been on it again but I'm sure it's still there. And in the harbour was the largest convoy up to that point, or I think up to any point that had ever been into Sydney Harbour. The ships were the [HMS] Queen Elizabeth,

10:30 the [HMS] Queen Mary, the Aquitania, the Mauritania, the Il De France and the New Amsterdam, a brand new ship owned by the Holland American line, so brand new she'd never carried a passenger. We were the first people on board. Well they were all to big to get alongside so when we went down there I think we got onto a ferry I think it was and we

11:00 just, and we were chuffed off into the harbour and they all went to various - all of our people went on the New Amsterdam. And well in due course we, that day we weighed anchor and set to sea with two destroyers too as an escort. I might say I had this great feeling of almost of achievement

11:30 when we sailed through the Heads. And we went way down south, we must have gone, we didn't go through Bass Strait we went way down south because ice even formed on the rigging, it was freezing. And we heard that Goebbels [Nazi propaganda minister] had announced that our convoy had been very largely sunk you know but we had no interference.

12:00 And then we finished up in Perth at Fremantle. And I thought, oh well this is going to be our last - we didn't know where we were going even you know, at all. And we'd been given balaclavas and you know all this was most unsuitable to go to Singapore in, you can imagine. Anyway we, the CO, two things happened. The first

12:30 was that they'd confused the officers in the other rank's quarters. And that I was one, an occupant of one of the bridal suites on this brand new ships. Admittedly there were 8 of us there but it was deluxe absolutely deluxe. And of course officers being the sort of the people they were they greatly objected to this and, and General Freyberg VC [Victoria Cross] he was in command of the

13:00 thing and he was on the Queen Elizabeth. And signals were sent to authorise us to change cabins. Well

I'm glad to say Fryberg wouldn't be in that. So we went in the luxury cabin as sergeants and the officers for the first time in their bloody lives they had to, not the first time, but the first time in their army life, they had to take second fiddle. And then

13:30 we went to Perth. I knew some people, I had an aunt living in Perth so I thought, "Oh, I'll have a dinner party". So it was a very nice hotel, the Esplanade or something it was called. I gave a little dinner party there and that was great, great fun. I knew that'd be the last because I thought the next thing I'd be at Cairo or, you know.

You mentioned a feeling of exultation and achievement. What were your other emotions on leaving

14:00 **the country?**

Oh well pretty, pretty terrible. I mean there was Jean left behind and the family and you know all the rest of it, it was anything but - much better to be thinking about the other thing and I had an ability all my life to switch off and my wife rebukes me for it because I do it to this day. If I don't want to think about something I'm able to switch it off. And well you switch that off and I mean it's exciting, it's something completely

14:30 new and you know you're on, you know you're standing on a ship and you're going to war and you know the bugle's blowing all over the place and you have boat drill and - you know it's quite an experience, it's not just, not just like going on a cruise or anything like that, it's really quite an experience. Well then we set sail and got out into the Indian Ocean. And it was most exciting because then we were told to watch

15:00 out and the, the Queen Elizabeth which was then the fastest ship in the world and we were a pretty slow convoy because the Il De France was an old ship and of course the convoy can't go, had to go at the speed of the slowest ship. And the Queen Mary took off and sailed right around the convoy while we were still going ahead, that's the speed it was

15:30 able to carry. I think it, I think it could do something like 30 knots you know and for 85,000 tonnes that's sure as hell moving. And it was rough and I'll never forget it. It was the, the, the spray or, well more than spray, the spray from the Queen Elizabeth was going right up onto the bridge and that is a bloody long way, that's a very long way, it's five or six or seven story

16:00 building I suppose. Anyway around she went and, signals were exchanged and, and all the convoy sailed to the Middle East except the New Amsterdam and we headed for Singapore.

You mentioned you didn't know where you were going and you had been given balaclavas, what did you pack?

Oh well you didn't really pack anything. You just had your army, you just

16:30 had a kit bag you see, you couldn't take anything else. Oh well I took photographs of Jean and you know, you took the sort of thing - all soldiers tended to take the same thing. You really couldn't take any gear at all because you had to carry it all. You know you had a service rifle and all the other things and, you know what do they call it, respirator have I got it right? Yes respirator. That's when you wore, that's anti-gas equipment. You know and the soldiers

17:00 are pretty loaded up carrying some of these, when you've got it all on board. And we stopped off - we got to Singapore, that was quite exciting. One of the books I did for the leaving certificate was some short stories by [Joseph] Conrad and the chief one was called Youth. About a sailing ship called Youth, Conrad you know was a sailor.

17:30 Arriving in Singapore. And the extraordinary sounds and smells of the East you know, and I'd read this story very well indeed, many times having been obliged to do so. And it was wonderful because it was just as though I was arriving in Singapore for the second time, you know extraordinary really it did, so brilliantly written, that I felt I'd sort of

18:00 been there before in a way. Anyway we landed there and we went straight into a train. And we went up to a place called Kajang. That's about 13 or 14 miles south of KL [Kuala Lumpur]. It was a high school, quite a new high school. In which all the pupils had been given the order of the boot and the army, I think we moved

18:30 in there, there were quite a number of units, small units. 2nd Force CCS, that's Casualty Clearing Station. And it was a strange thing that you should be here because I made a great pal of Bevan Brown and he now lives in Launceston and he rang me up yesterday. He's aged 88, he's now been elected into, they own a string of pharmacy shops. And he and I are almost the only survivors.

19:00 My unit was wiped out in Borneo but I'll come to that later on. But anyway we went straight up by train to Kajang.

Just on that journey you mentioned the sights and sounds of Singapore.

Oh landing, actually coming into Singapore that was.

Could you describe that scene for us?

Well it, it was just - we sort of, we got off the ship. I, I don't think we came alongside even there in Singapore, I can't remember that. The New Amsterdam was quite a big ship, about

19:30 34,000 tonnes which was big in those days but not huge but big. And I think we came ashore in lighters and things and of course it was unspeakably hot - in all our uniform and stuff. And well we really were just sort of hustled about the way you are in the army. And I don't remember it particularly except it was very interesting to be going by train up through the jungle.

20:00 And a lot of it was rice paddies but there was some jungle there. And I think we probably went to KL but I don't remember how we got to Kajang. I think we, after all it's getting on, it was well over 60 years. I think we were probably offloaded at Kajang, at KL and then went back to Kajang where we had to - it wasn't a tented camp, we had

20:30 well sort of buildings we had later on in Changi gaol. Attap rooves, that's you know palm rooves. And sort of dormitory type buildings. But as I was a non commissioned officer I had my own little room at the end. Which was wonderful for me because that was the thing that you really;

21:00 the first shock you get in the army is the loss of privacy, you know, completely. I mean everything, you know no privacy at all, you can't get away from anybody. But I was able to in Kajang because I had my little - it was a little room. In fact I've got some photographs up here of me taken in the room. And we had the sergeants' mess which is always a jolly nice, jolly place. We had

21:30 two warrant officers first class. That's as high as you can get under a commission. And Pringle was one of them, "W.I. Pringle" we called him. And well we sort of settled in and we had all these vehicles, then they all had to be delivered, 50 for the English - we were part of the, what we were intended to be was, to help the Indian Army. Because

22:00 they were, they had a lot of men but they had no people that could drive, you know what I mean. There was, well it was still a pretty primitive place but then of course it was extremely primitive. I mean the whites did everything, you know everything. And the Malays too did nothing but drive or chauffeur, they didn't do a thing. The whole place was run by Chinese and, and with the Malays really doing nothing. And anything we settled in quite soon then we got the vehicles.

22:30 And then we had to start all sorts of training. Not just driving we had to you know go for route marches and all these things. All of which was done, we were well, really well trained I think. And moving these convoys, these - on narrow roads was a very - had to be a very disciplined operation. In other words you can'tjust unleash 50 ambulances

23:00 onto a small bitumen road which has other traffic on it, that's all got to be, carefully planned. And for example when a, when a convoy which we - MAC stands for "Motor Ambulance", the C is "Convoy", have to move off - every vehicle has to start at the same time. You don't just wait for the one in front of you, everyone starts and stops simultaneously. And it has to keep the same distance

23:30 between the one in front in case you're being bombed and you know, all that sort of thing. And I was, I didn't ride in an ambulance I had a motor cycle, a Matchless motorcycle, which, which undid me in the end. As most motor cycles do but, it was a very nice form of transport for me and I would - my job was to - we had four companies in our unit.

24:00 I left the orderly room very soon and became a company, a company sergeant. Each company had a sub-lieutenant and a sergeant. And the whole unit had a sergeant major and so on. And well that's - we sort of settled in and then we went from there - we were at Kajang for quite a long while which was very nice. We went down to Malacca which was

24:30 oh you know fascinating historically but, dreadful place to live and oh terrible. And, the roads, the whole place is, is intersected with canals and things. Malacca's of course on the coast, Portuguese settlement of course. Think St Francis of Assisi was in Malacca or Marco Polo certainly was. And one night we used to do these driving exercises

25:00 at night. And I was in an ambulance this particular night not on my bike and the leading driver took the wrong turn and I was in that vehicle and we went straight into the river, the ambulance went straight in. And well there we were in full military equipment in the, in the Straits of Malacca I suppose it was. And it had a very extraordinary

25:30 sequel. Because that was alright, nobody was drowned we got out but the vehicle you know, very bad news to report that we'd lost an ambulance before the war had even started. But years later when I was Lord Mayor in the town hall, we had a delegation or something from Malaya. And I was there receiving them

26:00 and there you know the Lord Mayor's orderly calls out their names and in they come and they're presented to me. And so and so from Malacca was announced. And when he got to me I said "I've got very clear recollection of Malacca because, a vehicle I was in we plunged into the Malacca River." He said, "Did you really? I was one of the people that pulled it out." Isn't that an extraordinary thing? So

the odds against

26:30 that chap turning up at the town hall would be several millions to one against. Anyway then we - so then we were there for a while and then we went to - over onto the east coast. That was all on the, western side and we went over to the east coast.

While we're on Malacca why do you say conditions were so bad there?

Well we'd come from a brand new high school with its own oval, padang it's called over there

27:00 and, you know by Malayan standards that was pretty upmarket really. We didn't know it at the time because, you know we'd never been to a primitive place like Malaya before. I never had, never been out of Australia of course. And, well that was a bit of a culture shock and when you really - when you went to a really old historic city like Malacca it was like Nuremburg you see. And

27:30 sweltering heat and you know, everyone living in fearful, you know fearful conditions and, on the ground practically. Oh no it was, you know it was sort of bad news. But there were a great many places like Malacca it was just that we were - KL was decidedly upmarket place and apparently now it's wonderful. This chap my friend Bevin Brown was there not so long ago and he said

28:00 really it's a sight to see, it's a wonderful city today.

What did you see of the local population in these places?

Oh we saw - they were there all the time you know - we couldn't talk to them of course, we couldn't speak Malay and they naturally couldn't speak anything but Malay. Most of the population were Chinese and we couldn't speak to them either

28:30 but some of them could, you know speak a bit of English. And we learnt a word or two naturally of, I can count in Malay and those things. And well we really were, you know it was like sort of, you know "A brave new world that hath such people in it". I mean we were so different from everybody else that you couldn't, you know there were so, there was no question of any fraternisation

29:00 not that there was any objection to it, but it just couldn't take place. You know they were pigmies compared, you know in those days they all had poor food and, you know the Malays were little, you know little chaps about that high hopping about the place. And the Chinese no bigger. And of course we were all, you know pretty man-sized tailor-made Europeans and you know we really did stride the world like a Colossus

29:30 I can assure particularly when the vehicles got out and the guns and all that sort of thing.

How were you supplied with food?

Oh quite well. We had army tucker which isn't very exciting but it's quite good, not too bad. And we used to go to KL. I was very lucky because, one of my friends, a golfing companion of mine he was a senior officer in the 8th Division, stationed

30:00 in KL with Gordon Bennett. And every now and again, he would arrange for me to get into disguise, in other words get out of uniform and I would go to the Salang Golf Club, which was a very lovely place. And I would play - we would play golf with a four. And it was so luxurious that if you were in the pool and you wanted a drink

30:30 or a gin sling or something you didn't have to get out of the pool, you stayed in the water and it was served to you in the water. And the great club there was called The Spotted Dog. And it was made famous by Somerset Maugham's famous story The Letter, which was made into a film, and Bette Davis [actress]- she was a planter's wife, shoots her husband and the dog.

31:00 And so we were then - it was pointed out to us but we were not - no-one was allowed into The Dog unless you were an officer of field rank, that is to say, you had to be a major or upwards. Well that had a funny episode about that because, the local unit in Malay was called the JVE, the Johore Volunteer Engineers.

31:30 And everybody who was anybody got into the JVE you see. And as it so happened the president of the club, the president of The Dog was himself a sapper in the JVE. And he turned up at the club, he was there of course all the time I suppose. And he turned up and he sat with uniform and a very outraged British

32:00 brigadier ordered him off the premises. And we were told that there was a sort of committee meeting held on the spot and the decision was, well that the best thing to do is to get rid of all the officers. The whole lot of them. And they decided that that was going too far, the army talked them out of it. But I, we'd have been absolutely delighted

32:30 to think of all the officers being tipped out of The Dog because a senior British officer had ordered the President of the Club to leave the building you know.

Were you ever able to go in?

Oh I was able to go in yes because I was a member of the Union Club in Sydney. And I was able - but not in uniform - not, not not a sapper no way, oh no no no - I had to put on other clothes. But I was only in there about

33:00 once I think. But I went a lot of times to the golf club.

What were your impressions of the high ranking, the British army...

Well we had very little to do with them. They were really sort of hopeless kind of people and I actually met Percival once purely by chance. I was riding my bike, the roads were very dangerous and very limited because there were paddy

33:30 rice fields on either side of them, I don't know if you've been to Malaya. All the - many of the roads are like course ways which go on for miles and miles. And, I came around a bend and there was a staff car, British staff car stopped. And I stopped my bike to see if I could be of any assistance - it was obviously broken down you see.

34:00 And this turned out to be Percival's car. And there were two - he had two motor cycle escorts but no-one, no-one could fix it and I made a suggestion or two and we finally got it going and he sped off. But he was a very odd case because he had all qualifications but apparently

34:30 none of the sort of necessary ability. He made his name at Dunkirk, organising very large - the evacuation from Dunkirk. And also interestingly he had written a paper in which he thought Singapore would be attacked by land, which of course was an unheard - really a very unusual suggestion.

35:00 So he for one wasn't surprised when the Japanese did attack by land but everybody else was dumbfounded. And he completely sort of, lost control of the thing. Sir Charles Moses who used to run the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation]. And I got to know him very well after the war - I was on a couple of boards, in fact I was his Chairman a couple - on a few things. He was a major

35:30 or I think he was a captain, it doesn't matter. And he told me that he was on Bennett's staff and he went out - that bastard Bennett who left us you know, but he came with him, Moses came with him. And he told me that one day, towards the end. Before we were on the island but when we were coming down Malaya, he was told to go - by Bennett to go and - to Percival and report and some situation.

36:00 And he did. And he said Bennett was sitting at his desk and he put his, head in his hands, sort of like this and he said, and after all Percival was a Lieutenant General and Moses only a captain, or a major. He said, "Well Captain what would you do?"

36:30 And Moses told me many a time, he said "Well that was really, that was the end of the earth, when the supreme commander was asking me a mere messenger, what to do". And there's another funny story. We had a Major Hunt, he was a regular officer too and he'd been in the Middle East. And he wore the sand brown and the

37:00 pith helmet just as my chap at Port Kembla did I may say. And he arrived out and they couldn't stand him you know, they couldn't stand him. And he, he was detailed to go - this is when the front was collapsing very much in Malay - he was detailed to go to Percival's headquarters, rather like Moses and report the situation.

37:30 And he went down there in - by staff car I suppose and went in and, said what he was and that he wanted to report to the commander in chief. "Oh" they said, "Hunt, well that's fine. We're just, we're all having drinks before lunch, you'll join us." "Oh yes thank you". Yes he would. And so they had drinks before lunch. And then they had lunch.

38:00 And then they said, "Well now you might be in a position, you might care to report." Yes he would. So they went into sort of operation - it was only a tent. And there was a big sort - there was a situation map on the wall. And he started telling them where the Japanese were. And the conversation just died away. And finally somebody said

38:30 "Well Major Hunt, what, what units of the Australian Army are between the advancing Japanese and these headquarters?" And he said, "Well sir the only unit I can think of is the mobile laundry." And apparently there was a very rapid clearing of the, everyone then

39:00 really got to work and disappeared. But you know the whole thing was so sort of, lackadaisical, most extraordinary. And then Percival had, what I think was probably almost an obsession. He was convinced that the Japanese were going to land on the eastern end of Singapore Island, at Changi. Whereas all the Australians, we were on the

39:30 extreme western end. And so the British troop of course who outnumbered us by two or three to one, they were all I presumed deployed on the end that Percival thought they were going to be landing, and two Australians were asked to swim across the Straits of Johore by night to see what was going on. That was a bloody brave thing to do.

40:00 **Just finish this story and then we'll have to change the tape.**

Anyway so they had their faces blackened and everything and swam across the Straits of Jahal, that's quite a long way I can tell you. And observed what was going on and they realised that the Japanese were getting ready to, to land, to cross the Straits of Johore on the western side where both the Australian brigades were. And

40:30 they swam back and reported this but Percival still thought that was a feint for some reason or other. He thought that the eastern side was the side they'd land on. Well of course the next thing that happened, they did land and the Australians bore the full brunt of it absolutely because, the British troops weren't in it - they

41:00 were too far away I think to be involved much.

Tape 4

00:33 **You mentioned that your company was moved to Malacca to the west, can you tell me what happened at that stage?**

No, because it's very important to remember that when you're a lowly soldier in a war you really have no idea what's happening. I mean really no idea and even, and that just doesn't mean lowly soldiers either because I got to know quite a lot of the

01:00 commanders later on and they really didn't have much idea either. It's all just something that's happening, you're just told to do something. You're not told why because that's no party of a soldier's duty to know why he's doing something, he just has to do it. So, really, I mean although we were the troops involved in the whole thing we really didn't know much about it than somebody sitting in

01:30 Victoria Barracks in Sydney, really.

That's a very good point so rather than talk about what was happening at a strategic level or in the whole scheme of things, what was happening for you at the time?

Well, we were just – you see it's interesting that there was a very strong body of official opinion that the Japanese would attack the Russians, not us, they wouldn't come south that they would open a campaign

02:00 against Russia. And there was no certainty at all that there would ever be a Japanese push to the south. So we were sort of, we were just trained, it was assumed that if anybody did, because they were part of the Rome, Berlin, Tokyo axis it was called, they were the axis, three. And it was assumed that the Japanese would

02:30 come and it was assumed they would come by ship, or by sea, they'd make a sea invasion, which they didn't do of course. And, well, really we just went about our business in a completely unrelated sort of a way. We were just trained, I mean, the Battalion, the 30th Battalion with whom I had a lot to do with later on, and I'm a member of the 30th Association

03:00 to this day, you know, they were simply given the most tremendous training. They were all very, very fit, our troops. It was just as well they were because they were just about the only ones that killed any Japanese. Well, it was in a way it was like being at school, you know, you really didn't – you knew the weekend was coming and you might be playing a cricket match against somebody else but, you know, it generally just all went on and you were just

03:30 part of it really.

How did that make you feel, I mean, you'd gone off to fight a war?

I was quite happy with that. I like the army, I liked discipline, I still do. No, I had no worries with that and, you know, we thought, for a time we might easily be transferred to the Middle East. You just didn't know?

Where did you move to after Malacca?

04:00 **Where was the last place?**

Well, it's hard to remember but I think it was a place call Seremban and then, for some reason which I simply cannot explain, I was moved up to Ipoh, now that's a very interesting place. Ipoh was the capital of the tin mining industry. It was tin and rubber it was the great products of Malaya.

04:30 And they were two completely different classes of people. There was a complete sort of segregation, the rubber planters were the sort of social lions of the place and the tin miners were not. And Ipoh was all tin and no ruber and KL was all rubber and no tin. And I can't tell you at all how I came to be transferred to

05:00 Ipoh, I don't know, but I was. And I remember the day very well, I was shaving, having a shave in my little tent, and in came a breathless orderly to say, "Sergeant you've got to report immediately to the sergeants' mess in the morning". I said "Well, what's happened?'. He said "The Japanese have landed".

05:30 I said “Have they, where?” And he told me and it wasn’t so very far from where we were it was much closer to Ipoh than to anywhere else. So I rapidly got myself into position and raced down to the sergeants’ mess where a meeting had been called by the Senior Regimental Sergeant Major and the question, real question, for decision was “Well the war’s started,

06:00 gentlemen, so we’ve got to decide what to do with the beer. Somebody may as well drink it” - carried unanimously. That was all we were there for. But unfortunately we ran out of time because there was no time to drink the beer. And I was then asked to report back straight away to my unit which was then in Johore and I had a

06:30 most extraordinary trip in the big train going down and all the memsahibs [ladies] were on board, you know. And I had a seat because most of them got on at KL and I was ordered to vacate my seat. And I thought to myself, “To hell with this, I mean these ladies are just clucking away, I’m going to fight a war, and I refused to vacate my seat”. I said

07:00 “No, I’m going to sit in it until I arrive”, which I did - applause from the troops and very bad looks from, not all the wives, but most of them. Anyway we got into KL, Ipoh’s quite a long way from KL, we got into KL and oh, it was a fearful scene there. The line was packed with Indian

07:30 people, not troops, just ordinary people, cooking, fires, and cooking their meal and so on and I think the train even ran over a couple of them. It was all dark, you see, it was really terrible. And I remember the Bishop of Singapore got on board, he got on board at KL going back to Singapore and I got off, I don’t remember where, but I didn’t go all the way back to Singapore or anything like that, I got off

08:00 and rejoined my unit. And some of them went off right up to Thailand, because we were attached to the Indian Army, as I think I told you, and they fought the longest campaign of any Australians there were because they were the only Australian unit to go into Siam [Thailand], it was called in those

08:30 days, and they fought all the way down the peninsula and onto Singapore island. And we used to take shelter in red palm oil plantations, that was a major product of Malaysia was making red palm oil for the French, a big French company called Sokfan [?].

09:00 It was interesting because these red palm oil plants are pruned at the bottom and completely impenetrable at the top, it’s just like being in a building, it’s extraordinary, you know, a building of perhaps a quarter of a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide and so on. And you were completely hidden, just as though you were in a house. And that’s where we used to spend lots of nights.

09:30 It never stopped raining, the whole campaign was wet, every day and it was the most depressing place. And then the night I retired from the piece we were told that the 19th and 29th Battalions, who were part of the 27th Brigade, that they were in real trouble at a place called Muar

10:00 and our whole group of ambulances were asked, not asked ordered, to go up to a place called Seremban, no sorry not Seremban, Ayer Hitam, I think, it doesn’t matter to see if we could - we knew that stragglers would be coming out because it was every man for

10:30 himself, you know, they ran into the 9th Imperial Japanese Guards, a whole division, just these two battalions, they had a fearful time. You know, people don’t realise how many people were killed in action over there. I think the 19th Battalion lost 422 people in one day. Well, you know, there was a tremendous amount of people killed in Malaya, the

11:00 imprisonments sort of overshadowed the campaign. It’s a great pity really because they fought extremely gallantly, particularly the 19th Battalion, they were a terrible case. They and the 29th, the 29th was a Victorian unit, the 19th was New South Wales. And my closest friend, apart from the Ryrie, who was a captain in the 19th in charge of mortars, so I was keeping my eye open for

11:30 him. The idea is we would go up to this place and have the ambulances there because there might very well be these unfortunate people coming out that you might have to transport. As far as I was concerned the boot was on the other foot because I was on my motorbike and I rode it into some sort of a hole, I don’t know whether it was a bomb crater or it was just a great hole, and damaged myself,

12:00 that put me out of the war. And I then went, I was then taken back to Singapore as a casualty so I really was the most useless troop, as things turned out I wasn’t able to do much really at all.

Can you take us through that incident in which you were injured, what happened exactly?

Well it was pouring with rain, it was night and I was in charge of, I don’t know,

12:30 three or four ambulances and well the next thing I knew I was no longer upright up on my bike but I was in water, because of course every hole filled up with water, it was teeming with rain. And I remember in particular I was taken into this tent where there were some doctors and the doctors were

13:00 the absolute heroes of the Malayan campaign, they were absolutely marvellous, they were as good as most of the officers were not. We were in this tent and it was lit by a couple of acetylene lamps and the rain was pouring down and as the raindrops came down outside it was like a waterfall of diamonds as

they flashed in the arc lights,

13:30 you know. And there I was and I was pronounced unfit, I had to go to hospital. And I was put into an ambulance, this is an extraordinary coincidence, not one of our ambulances, but an ambulance, and there were four occupants of that ambulance and all four had been to Cranbrook. You know, there were

14:00 only about 300 people in the whole school and this Dick Austin I told you about who said he was no longer being received in the best drawing rooms, he was one of them. He'd been shot in the mouth and we thought he was dying. A chap called Tony Rabett who was actually in my class at school, he did die, and me, and Dick Parker, who was the Captain who was in charge of the ambulance. We'd all been at

14:30 school together, isn't that amazing thing when you think of it. anyway, I was driven all the way back to Singapore and put into one of the Australian General Hospitals at Singapore where I stayed until the Japanese arrived at the hospital.

How badly injured were you?

I wasn't badly injured but it was all part of the old osteo being lit up and everything else. I'd hurt my hip,

15:00 the bike had rolled off and fallen onto it and I was so lame I couldn't walk and I mean you can't be in the army if you can't walk about. So that's really what happened and I had to have an operation on my hip there. It was done by a certain Captain Huxtable who I knew quite well, his family lived at Leura where I was born,

15:30 where we had a house and we became quite good friends. In fact there's a lot about me – he wrote a book about it and there's a lot about me in it. So I had a very inglorious army career really.

How long was that period of time between when you came down from Ipoh and the invasion and your injury?

I suppose it was about a fortnight, maybe less, maybe less

16:00 because we were retreating, you see. The Japanese were very sensible, in fact they fought a brilliant campaign, there's no question about that. In this dreadful weather, in the monsoon, to be coming by land in the monsoon that was something unheard of really and when they got to us, which was in Johore, that's right in the southern part.

16:30 The troops would spend a great deal of time digging in and making a good defensive position and the Japanese would find this out and then they would decide "Oh, well blow that, we're not going to take that on". They had commandeered all these fishing boats, a hundreds and hundreds of them, and they would take to the boats, you see. And we had no air power at all, absolutely none, they commanded the sky. And they would come down

17:00 behind our troops, you see, and in those days this question of troops being supplied form the air like Wingate [?], that hadn't been invented in those days. In those days if you were, if the enemy was in behind you

17:30 they took to the boats and then you had to abandon the position you were in and fall back again and off course that's very demoralising if you were in a good position like the Australians were. They caught them, the 30th Battalion caught the Japanese at a place called Gemas and that was an ambush and they killed hundreds of them, over 400 I think. And that was quite an event because even General

18:00 Yamashita in his book, when they first met the Australians they encountered resistance hitherto not experienced in Malaya. In other words, the Australians were wonderful troops, you know, they were marvellous troops. But anyway, then of course he whole thing deteriorated and I told you about Percival's idea and of course they got onto the island.

Just before that, in the two weeks in which

18:30 **you were in action after the invasion. Can you talk about how the atmosphere suddenly changed?**

Oh, well the atmosphere changed very dramatically when we heard that that [HMS] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse had been sunk because that was really bad news. And once we heard these two great ships had been sunk by the Japanese in 20 minutes or something or other drowning thousands of

19:00 sailors, and we saw none of our own aircraft, I never saw one allied aircraft in the air the whole time, not one. The poor things had all been shot down and killed, you see, because they had antiquated planes and the Japs had these Zeros, Mitsubishis and very efficient aeroplanes. Well they just simply

19:30 cleared the skies of course and it was a very disconcerting thing. I remember one day I was riding my bike, this was when the war was on, and I remember these causeways with the rice fields on either side, so you were completely exposed. And I saw a Japanese plane sort of in the distance, circling, and I thought, "That

20:00 bloody thing is going to come back and give us the one-two". I was on my own, I had no troops at all.

And fortunately the road at that point just entered, there was a rubber plantation, so I just made it and I abandoned ship and got under a log and up came this plane

20:30 going very slowly and firing machine guns and all the leaves, the bullets made the leaves fall down from the trees, you know, and you feel every one going through your own back of course, you know. And then it passed and that was that and then suddenly out came a whole battalion of Indian troops, I'd never even seen them, they were all

21:00 together there. That was, you know, that was an occasion when I mean I might have been shot, it would have been very bad luck, but that's what the Japanese were doing. They were firing their machine guns from a very low altitude, like about 500 feet, into the troops. As far as I know they didn't hit anybody but that was it.

21:30 **How were the lines of communication during this time?**

Well I don't know that was out of my league.

Well, I'll ask that question differently, how were you receiving information and how much did you know?

We simply received information from whichever officer it was whose job it was to tell us to do something. You know, I mean you just, you were just told to do something. There was no question of what you're doing it for or why you're doing

22:00 it or anything. When war is going on that's the way it is, I think you'd find practically everybody, except for a set piece like the Gemas that I told you about – on the road when the Japanese, they waited for them and they knew they were coming, you see, that was an exception, a very successful exception but it was an

22:30 exception.

What did you know about this Gemas incident?

Oh, I knew nothing about it at the time, I wasn't even near, I wasn't even near Gemas, Gemas is sort of in the centre part. I was away over to the east I think. But I don't remember - you forget the date, you don't know what day it is or anything else. You know, you're so tired maybe you haven't slept for two days or so and quite often people would simply

23:00 fall over, just go to sleep on their feet. It's a chaotic sort of affair really.

You mentioned hearing the news of the Prince of Wales and the Repulse. Where were you on that occasion?

I was in Johore and we were told this, you know, half of it was rumour and part of the things

23:30 weren't true, but that certainly wasn't, that wasn't untrue. I took a very sober view about that and I wasn't the only one either. We thought, "Oh these bloody Japs they really mean business and they must be pretty good because if they can sink two of the world's capital ships, one a brand new one". You see the Prince of Wales was brand new and the pride of the Royal Navy, the Prince of Wales. And I mean if they could put them under the water

24:00 in twenty minutes they weren't going to be all that easy. You see because the Japanese were sort of represented to us as hopeless sort of people, they were all short-sighted, they couldn't see, they all wore glasses and their aeroplanes were built of bamboo and you never heard such nonsense in all your life. But that was the sort of general feeling until they really got stuck into us and then, you know,

24:30 we had an agonising reappraisal about the Japanese and we thought we'd do very well to save our skins which turned out to be so.

What happened when you arrived in Singapore what did you see?

Oh nothing because I was just in an ambulance and you don't see anything. But I went into this AGH [Australian General Hospital] and

25:00 it was like something out of a movie, it was like being in a convent. In fact it was in fact was a Roman Catholic establishment – in fact it was a school but it had a great type of Roman Catholic convent in it and we were actually in the beds of some of the patients. Most of the patients were actually in this chapel, quite a big place and I was in one of them.

25:30 We were bombed one night, an alarming experience, because you hear a string of bombs getting closer and closer and closer and closer and finally, bang, one hits. It hit, there was a water, a water sort of tank in the roof or up on the top of the building – it hit the water tank and of course the next thing we knew, lying in our beds, was a deluge of water coming

26:00 down. We had some very dramatic moments there, when we had a review by a British Officer, this was really extraordinary – a sergeant major stood at the door and suddenly called out "Lie to attention". A command which was unheard of in the Australian Army but that meant that you

26:30 had to stay rigid and have your hands down beside you and so on because the doctor was coming, an English doctor, and you couldn't be seen to be lying in the ordinary way, you had to lie to attention. That was one thing I'll never forget "Lie to attention". So then we were outside the perimeter, after a

27:00 while, in other words we were in Japanese territory and just waiting for them to – we had no idea what was going to happen of course at all. And the battle for Singapore was going hammer and tongs. And war is all a question of noise as far as the troops are concerned. The noise is tremendous while things are going on – it's either completely

27:30 silent or pandemonium and it was pandemonium. And I wrote about this in my book – this particular night, the 15th of February it was, of course, at 6 o clock at night it was complete silence and we knew the war, we knew that was the end, it was over. And then we just had to wait for the arrival of the Japanese and of course we had no idea what to expect. Well they

28:00 arrived all beautifully turned out. Their officers wore black boots right up to their knees, beautifully polished and we saw very few officers after we became prisoners of war because officers were few and far between in Japan and they were absolutely the gods of the place, you know, even the sergeants, which I was, in the Japanese army was a very big shot indeed. And if you got up to something like a captain

28:30 well, that was it. And if they were generals - we had, our supreme Japanese commander was a general, he'd got a funny name, I'll remember it in a moment, but he was a cousin of the Emperor's and that meant when he went about Singapore everyone had to lie down on the pavement. Lie down, not sit down, because you couldn't stand up if a

29:00 member of the Royal family was in the vicinity. It was a feudal society of course, completely. He had a good name, too, field marshal, oh, how silly I can't think of it anyway. But you know they were completely illiterate people, you know, the Japanese. The way the Russians were too, in Berlin, just the same, you know the people from Siberia and Mongolia and these places.

29:30 Well it was just, I'd only seen about two Japanese before in my life. A couple of wool buyers used to go up to the Leura Golf Links and play golf, I'd never seen a live one, there was no reason why one should you see. So we didn't know what to expect we thought we'd all be killed and of course a lot of them were. They went out to one of the hospitals and, even one chap on the operating table,

30:00 they killed him on the operating table even. But they didn't do anything with us, they just made it quite clear that they were in command and I just really went from there to Selarang barracks where we started off our imprisonment.

Can you just take us back to that moment in the hospital when the Japanese first came in, can you just take us through that?

Yes, I can because I

30:30 actually saw them. The windows were high up in this chapel but I had one I could see out of and they arrived, all with swords and so on, and looking very militaristic and superior and a great deal of saluting of course going on and very formal, they're a very

31:00 formal people anyway, I mean they salute even now, you know they're bowing all the time. Well we didn't know what to expect at all and the events which happened – nothing happened really. We though they might come in and we might all be bundled out and shot or something or other but nothing happened at all until it must have been several

31:30 days later. Then we were told we would have to leave and we went to Selarang barracks where everyone was at first to begin with, we weren't in the gaol you see for quite a long while, in the gaol itself. We were about fourteen months before we were actually in Changi gaol. It was the old, it was the 2nd Gordon Highlander's old pre-war barracks that we were in, a very nice place really. It had been bombed quite a lot,

32:00 it was damaged quite a bit.

In that period while you were waiting, you know you've been defeated and you don't know what's happening to you. How do people deal with the fear and deflation of that?

Well, you don't sort of – I don't suppose you deal with at all really. You can't do anything about it so you just wait and hope for the best really, you know, there's nothing you can do.

32:30 We had a very bad time as I say when Gordon Bennett left you see it was shocking. I was actually in bed in this chapel and I was handed a piece of paper by a Roman Catholic Padre called Marsden, who was the uncle of the famous solicitor Marsden - you know with the homosexual libel case and everything,

33:00 he was his uncle and he was a very impressive chap. The nurses had gone, they'd been ordered out, that was a terrible thing, they were murdered. They were shot in the back by the Japanese in Sumatra, only one survived and we gave them messages to take back to our families and so on but they never got them of course because they were killed by the Japanese. Anyway

33:30 Padre Marsden handed me a piece of paper and on this was an order by Gordon Bennett, the General, to say that nobody must attempt to escape. And someone said, “Well, that’s bloody wonderful because Bennett’s gone himself, he escaped”. And this little bastard of a fellow, imagine, the first

34:00 time in history that a European army had fallen prisoner to an Asiatic power, he just went off home. It was absolutely appalling because we were simply disgraced. I mean the British couldn’t believe it, naturally. I mean in an army a corporal wouldn’t even leave his section. It’s just a thing that doesn’t happen, you don’t leave your troops and as for a whole division, because he didn’t want to be a prisoner of war. So he arranged his

34:30 escape and he took Charles Moser with him and I don’t blame Charles Moser at all because he didn’t have any troops. He was a staff officer he didn’t have anybody to leave. Otherwise it would have been a disgraceful thing and I don’t think he would have done it.

When did you find out about Gordon Bennett?

While I was actually reading this document with Padre Marsden standing at my bedside having handed it to me and another one that came in and said “Bennet’s gone”.

35:00 And Marsden was just, we were all struck by lightening we couldn’t believe it. It turned out to be correct. And my friend Tony Newson, who was with me and who’s just in hospital up here, he’s just had a stroke poor chap, he was in headquarters, he actually typed this piece of paper, he typed Bennett’s order on it. And I was really impressed with Marsden because I remember saying to him something about, you know,

35:30 “we’re going to have a pretty tough future” and he said “Oh, no, not tough for me”. He said “This is an opportunity that doesn’t come too often”. He said “This is going to be, this is it for me”. You know, this is what God intended me to do and all that sort of stuff. Of course I think that’s absolutely nonsense but I mean it was very impressive really, he was looking forward to it. He said “Now I can really do something

36:00 worthwhile now you’re prisoners”. He couldn’t do anything much while we were troops of course but when we were prisoners he suddenly felt he had a mission. And his cousin , Marsden, who I was signing an agreement with in the Law Society, I told him this and he said he was a wonderful chap, he said we called him Uncle

36:30 Patrick or something I suppose. I’ve never forgotten that it was full marks as far as I was concerned.

How frightened were you at this time?

Not at all and nobody was I think - apprehensive, yes, but not frightened, no, no. It was sort of the thing was so vast and you were just a part of it. It wasn’t as if you were on your own you were with

37:00 everybody. To be taken prisoner on your own would scare the hell out of you, well, war scares the hell out of you anyway. But it was quite different being with everybody. You see, we were sort of a going concern and the Japanese were quite capable of machine gunning the lot of us and we never thought that would happen and of course it never did happen. But

37:30 it’s being taken en block so to speak makes a big difference.

How was your hip and how was your injury at that time?

Oh, well I was getting better, I was getting better, I could limp about and I was obviously going to recover I wasn’t ill the way I’d been in Australia or anything like that it was just extremely

38:00 humiliating really, you know, to have made so little contribution. I used to say to people well the only thing I did really was to prevent somebody else being there as well but that sort of thing happens in war anyway.

How did the other sick and injured in that hospital get on when you moved to Serelang?

Well, I remember the end of the war, I’ve read about this in Changi

38:30 Days, the book, when this 6 o clock came, all the blinds of course were drawn because of, you know, the black-out and everything. The blind, one of the chaps let it up, it was a roller blind that went up with a great bang and the chap called out, you know “put down that bloody blind” said this troop. And somebody said “Oh no,

39:00 soldier, it’s all over, it’s finished”. I remember that very well and well it was, it was finished. And we went out to Selarang and before we sort of got really organised, dysentery hit the place and I really thought I was dying that time. In fact I had a blanket put over my head but I didn’t and

39:30 dysentery sort of struck the place very early in the place. You have to learn how to be a prisoner of war, it takes quite a long time to do and the Australians were absolute experts at it. Far more than the Brits [British POWs], the Brits died in great numbers because they were from very depressed areas from England, Wigan, you know, and Manchester and the slums of these places

40:00 and they had, the poor things, they had no initiative, nothing. They’d been told from the day they were

born, they'd been told what to do and they'd never done anything else. And they died in far, far greater numbers than we did, the Australians, we became absolute experts. And by the time of the Japanese surrender

40:30 every position of authority in Changi gaol was held by an Australian officer, every single one which was quite interesting because, in other words, the cream had floated it's way through all through the years and they ran the whole show. And we were experts at it because our whole temperament and training and lifestyle – you see I had a lot of

41:00 country people in my unit. They were country coves– they were first class, marvellous people when you got to know them. They had no conversation, that's true, but you know they were wonderful chaps, wonderful people to be with.

We'll just stop there. We've just entered that phase of the story.

Tape 5

00:30 **David I'd just like to take up your story. Before we stopped for lunch you told us about your time before the Fall of Singapore. Can you tell me now what you were doing on the Fall of Singapore?**

Well on the Fall of Singapore I was in hospital and just went off, went out to Selarang where all the troops were first of all imprisoned at the old Gordon

01:00 Highlanders barracks and when we'd been there for a while a very far-sighted Australian officer, who was grossly underrated by Gordon Bennett, who in my opinion was a terrible piece of work anyway. This was Brigadier Taylor, he was a government analyst for New South Wales in private life, and he thought that we and we knew we'd have no food but he knew we'd have nothing to do

01:30 either and he hit upon the idea of telling all the troops who had a book in their bags to hand it in so that we could start a library. And in addition to that he decided to set up what was officially known as the AIF Education Centre but we used to call it the University of Changi.

02:00 and he got hold of about 8 people to become teachers in various things and also to run the library. And I was one of the 8 and my colleague, Tony Newson, who's in Bowral now, who's had a stroke, he's no good any more poor chap, he was another one of them and Alec Downer

02:30 was a third one. Adrian Curlewis, who became Sir Adrian Curlewis, who founded the Surf Lifesaving affair in Australia, he was another one and we had a Brian Badgery, Badgery's Creek, you know the famous airport, well he was one of the Badgery family, he died. And we were teaching

03:00 and we set up this library and the library became a great success and the focal point for all sorts of people, British as well as Australians. So we got to know a very large number of people because they would come to the library to borrow a book. And we worked out a system of cards so you knew where they were. Well then

03:30 quite early in the piece, on my first birthday in Changi, so it was in July 1942, the force people that were sent away in large numbers were called forces for some strange reason. A Force was the first to go and then B Force came. And B Force was to go to Siam, or to Thailand as it now is, as a health

04:00 cure because the Japanese maintained that there was no food in Singapore but there was abundant food up north so they'd take us all up north to build everybody up so they could be nice and fat and healthy. In fact of course they all went to their deaths on the famous Burma Railway but it was thought that it was a health cure. But before that, before B Force

04:30 there was another force to go, they didn't quite know where, but they thought to Borneo, or possibly Borneo, and these were the unfortunate people that were on the death march where the Japanese marched them all until they died and the only six that didn't they shot them when they got to the end. Well, I was, my unit, most of my unit was on that

05:00 party and I was on it but I was living, of course, away from my unit because I as one of the lecturers in the education centre. Anyway, the time approached and I had great misgivings about it I thought, well, I might stay alive in Changi but I don't know about anywhere else. And all the NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers], we were summoned to the only hall that was left in

05:30 Changi, the officers' mess it was of the old days. And we were addressed by Colonel Caffrey [?], the most senior officer left in the place, how we were to conduct ourselves, you know, and what the score was and so on. And that lasted, I don't know, about ¾ of an hour I suppose. And I came out of the building to go back to my tent, well the tent which I shared with a very large number of

06:00 other people, one of whom was Alec Downer, Alexander's father. And he was just ambling up the road and as I sort of joined him he said "Oh by the way" he said, in the most casual way "Oh by the way you're not going now". So I said "Well, what's happened". And he said "I don't know - a new list's come

round and your name's not on it". Well I've never found out how that

06:30 happened and I wouldn't be talking to you, today I'd be dead with all the others. So that was one absolute escape. Well then just before Singapore fell and this was a simply disgraceful affair, a large number of completely untrained Australian troops arrived on the island of Singapore. So untrained were they, that three hundred of them

07:00 had never even drawn pay out of their pay books. The first thing a soldier does is draw his pay so they were in the army so little they hadn't drawn any pay out of their pay books. And one unit was what we called the Fighting 43rd Dental Unit and they came up in some large ship to Singapore and they transferred into a small boat to get

07:30 ashore and the commanding officer of the Fighting 43rd very proudly, he was a dentist from Bondi Junction, the first time in his life he'd led troops anywhere - a very funny parade state, one captain, CO, two staff sergeants, one corporal and four other ranks. Anyway, they fell in and marched

08:00 down. At the foot of the gangway on one side was a British regimental sergeant major with a great stack of sergeant rifles, Lee and Field service rifles and on the other side a corporal. And as each soldier came down, knowing nothing about the army at all, the sergeant major would thrust a rifle into the troop's hand and the corporal would put a bandolier that we keep all the bullets in over his head and on the

08:30 went. Staff Sergeant Masur, who appears in the story a moment later, he was a senior staff sergeant in the Fighting 43rd and he was directly behind the commanding officer. The commanding officer got to the foot of the gangplank, regimental sergeant major with the rifle, he very ceremoniously pointed to his medical tabs on his uniform. "Captain" said the sergeant major "If you want to draw any more

09:00 fucking teeth, you'd better take this mate". So he suddenly found a service rifle shoved at him and a bandolier around his neck and they were called the Fighting 43rd because it was only one day before the Japanese crossed the straits off Johore. So they went straight into action, they didn't see anything, any teeth. They might have seen a few of other people's teeth being blown out of their head. Now it comes back to the story. When B Force was being talked about and the

09:30 health cure and everything else I was very suspicious about it and I still took the view if I could stay where we were I reckoned I had a fair chance of surviving the experience. But if I went out into the wilds I wouldn't stand any chance at all. So I made it quite clear that I was a reluctant nominee for B Force and being in the library

10:00 you see we had contact with a tremendous amount of people because they'd line up to change books so we got to know hundreds of people through the library. And one of the hundreds of people was Staff Sergeant Masur, the senior staff sergeant of the Fighting 43rd Dental Unit. And he came to the library one day and he said "Sergeant, can I have a word with you". And I said "Yes".

10:30 So he took me aside and he said "I understand you don't want to go up to" – I knew nothing about the road, to Siam. I said "That's right, I don't, Glen", Glen his name was. Well he said "Would you mind if I took your place". And I said "No, I wouldn't mind but I won't do anything about it. If you can arrange the whole thing that's fine otherwise we'll let matters

11:00 stand". "Oh" he said "Thanks very much". And I said "Well why do you want to go?" He said "Well Begg" (and that was the other staff sergeant) Begg and I enlisted together quite a long time ago and we've been together all the time and he's on the party and I'm not and we'd like to go together. Well, he actually got me off the party that's why I'm still alive of course and put himself on, and miraculously they both came back both Begg and Masur both came back.

11:30 But that's a fair illustration of the vicissitudes of army life. You know, one minute you're on a party where it's absolutely certain to die, I mean in Borneo everyone died because the Japanese killed everyone. And in the other, railway, all the weaklings, of which I would have been one, we would have been dead inside three weeks I think, that's why I'm here today.

That's a very interesting story.

Yes, it is, but it's a

12:00 good illustration of what armies are like, you see. You know, you sort of think of people being in a certain position because they've become celebrated and they're written about or something but you've no idea what extraordinary circumstances because all sorts of people have amazing – I mean why was I ever in Malaya at all - because I couldn't type and one of the captain's insisted on me being a typist. Otherwise, I would have been in Cairo and maybe in my grave by now.

12:30 You see, you just can't tell these things.

Just on the topic of your health. You were still in hospital the day that Singapore fell. Can you tell me how you got the news and then how you got to the prison?

No, I can't tell you how we got the news exactly but we knew because of the silence suddenly falling. Suddenly the noise, which had been tremendous, you know, for a week there'd been

13:00 constant firing and of course shelling and everything else. And even worse from our point of view, the Japanese fired a torpedo at some ship which missed its target and came out of the water right beside the hospital, the school building, and it went off and I've never heard such a stupendous noise in my life as a torpedo going off in the air so to speak, not in the water but in the air, it was terrific.

13:30 Well, then I told you that the silence fell, we knew it was all over and we waited for the Japanese to come and they did come but they didn't do anything. And I went in, I suppose an ambulance or a truck, I just don't remember how I got there but I did.

And how was your health when you arrived at the prison?

Oh quite good, quite good, I was -

14:00 apart form my hip problem I was good. I caught dysentery but then so did hundreds, may be a thousand others and that polished off quite a lot of people.

I guess I'm wondering about, it's an awful sense knowing that you've got to surrender?

Well the

14:30 people in the fighting line were very, very much upset by the Australians. They thought there was a lot of fight left in us and as it happens they were right because General Yamashita, who was the Japanese Commander, he only had one day's ammunition left, so they just surrendered one day too soon because if they hadn't have surrendered then that would have been the end of the heavy attack and, you know, they'd have been

15:00 firing rifles but that's a very different thing from field guns of course. And they were very dismayed and apparently when they all had to throw their arms down into a huge stack, and it stacked up like an enormous building of course, and they all had to fall in – there's a film, there's a Japanese film in which you see them all, you might have seen it, on the side of the road - and Yamashita, he drove down

15:30 through the lines. They were very, very shocked and humiliated because they didn't think it need have happened. But of course the water had been cut off, the water was in Johore, you see, there was no water, there were 3 million Chinese living in Singapore and Percival had a fearful problem to know what to do, of course. I mean, O.K., you fight the last man and a million or so Chinese die of

16:00 water, you know, lack of water, but the Brits really were very bad. I mean first of all Churchill's attitude towards the Australians was outrageous, simply outrageous, even objecting to the divisions coming back when we had the Japanese on the damned doorstep bombing Darwin. You know, he raised the most tremendous objection to that. Curtin [Australian Prime Minister] stood up to him which really took a bit of doing.

16:30 And I was going to tell you something else about that. One loses ones train of thought a bit that's the trouble. I was saying about these untrained troops coming in – well on the question of untrained troops, the British 18th Division, they had been 3 months at sea, they arrived at sea with no maps of Singapore at

17:00 all. This is not gossip, this is a fact. So the officers were summoned on the ship and they said "Well gentlemen", said the general, "We're sorry, we've come to Singapore we haven't got any maps but we've got maps of the Isle of Wight which is roughly the same shape and we ask you all, we're issuing everybody with a map of the Isle of Wight". And they'd struck out Cowes and written Singapore in and all this sort of

17:30 thing and they fought on the island with a map of the Isle of Wight – not a very good way to fight a war against a huge, highly efficient, Japanese army. It was all sort of un-coordinated I think, no one ever knew what was happening. Bennett couldn't get on with Percival. Percival was a

18:00 dreary looking chap, he wore Bombay bloomers, these shorts that came down below the knees and he looked anything but an inspiring sight, poor Percival.

How do you thin, I guess looking back now, what do you think your spirits and your mood were like when you first arrived at Changi?

Oh we were all very depressed when we arrived at Changi. That was everybody I mean

18:30 suddenly to be one of a 100,000 or whatever there was of us just being driven into a camp with no facilities, nothing at all, that was terrible. And then after a while we defied the Japanese army, we got an order from the Imperial Japanese Army, the IJA we always called them, to sign a non-escape declaration and it had

19:00 "I hereby swear that on my honour I will under no circumstances attempt to escape" and you had to sign that. Of course, that's a breach of the Army Act, you can't do that. So our Commander, "Black Jack", the famous Commander Galleghan, and Colonel Holmes, who was his opposite number in the British Army, they simply said "We will not advise the troops to sign it". So the Japanese ordered us

19:30 all into the barracks square, everybody, with all our goods and chattels, everything. Now this was an

asphalt parade ground surrounded by buildings and I forget how many were in there, something like 15,000 people with only one tap, no latrines, nothing of course, and there we were huddled together.

20:00 And the cook started cooking rice and they had to dig latrines so armies of people had to be given shovels and started digging through the parade ground. And my pal, Major Gunther, who I've already referred to, he took charge of it and he stayed up on his feet until the things were dug which took about 36 hours.

20:30 And as they threw the earth up, of course where he was standing it rose higher and higher and it was called "Mount Gunther" after him. Anyway so then to sweeten it up the Japanese said to Colonel Galleghan "We want you to come down and we're going to execute five of your men". They were in hospital, taken out and tied to a stake and shot, bang.

21:00 And Galleghan, he was a tough man, but he found that a bit severe. And then he went back to the camp and by this time dysentery had started, you see, and one of the leading doctors was a Dr Glynn White, in private life, and he was the head of the medical services in the 8th Division and he told Galleghan, "Look, you must

21:30 order the men to sign because in a few days everyone's going to be dead". So then we were told we had to sign and we all did, with great relief, except for one chap. One of the VOs, a certain Flight Lieutenant McAllister, he refused to sign. And he refused to sign on the grounds that he was not obliged under the Army

22:00 Act to carry out an illegal order and it was an illegal order on our commander's part to order us to sign so he wouldn't sign. So then there was another great hullabaloo and I think they got his hand and they wrote McCallister. And about two years ago up here, I had a letter from a chap this was his father, Old Mac we called him, and he said "That was dad all over". Well we were very glad we got we disposed of him

22:30 we got rid of him, he signed it. And then I had another interesting experience over that – about the same time, a bit after that I had an order to report to Black Jack's headquarters – everyone was terrified of Galleghan, even the Japanese were terrified of him, everyone was terrified of him. A friend of mine was fighting at Gemas, a mate was telling me about it a few years ago, I said "You know, the Japanese were a

23:00 pretty frightening side". "Oh, Christ, the Japanese were nothing, Black Jack was the one that terrified us", he was walking about. Anyway, we had to report, and I did so and [Sir] John Carrick, who later became the Minister for Education in the Menzies government, he was one of them and one of the Hordern family was another and a chap from Western Australia was another and we had

23:30 no idea what we were summoned for, there were eight of us. So we were then marched into Galleghan's room and he said "Well I don't know quite what we'll do, the Japanese have asked for 8 men with educated voices". And he said "They're not easy to find but I'm told you all have educated voices so you are the eight men that we've selected and we think you have to

24:00 broadcast but we don't know". And he said "My order is that you are not to broadcast you are to refuse unless the Japanese threaten you with physical treatment in which case I order you to broadcast". Because a man called Cousins, Charlie Cousins, was already broadcasting from Japan under "Tokyo Rose" [propaganda broadcaster] who was the famous, you know, and of course he got into real

24:30 strife because he was court martialled when he got back and everything else. Anyway, Black Jack, this fellow he had piercing eyes, absolutely piercing eyes and he said "Are there any questions?" and here we are trembling in our shoes. And I said "I have a question, sir". And he said "Well, sergeant, what's your question?" I said "Well, you've given us this order but suppose you don't survive

25:00 the imprisonment and we do and we broadcast, how are we to justify it?". He said "That's a sensible question, I'll let you have it in writing" which he did and I've got the letter to this day. And it had an interesting consequence because we had to go back to our lines and stay ready to move within a minute's notice. We never got the order to move because they intended to be

25:30 broadcasting from Saigon and the found the radio station hadn't got enough power to get to Australia so they sent bogus messages from Japan via Tokyo Rose. And my wife, one because they had all our names and it was clearly a phoney message because it said something like this "My dear wife, I am 27 years old" you know, only about, you know, 15 words.

26:00 So she immediately knew that her husband wasn't going to waste a precious 15 words saying how old he was. So that did nothing to calm her fears except the chances were I was alive of course she had no idea for eighteen months whether we were alive or dead, no idea, we just vanished. But that turned out to be a fortunate circumstance for me and it sort of established a bit of a channel of

26:30 communication. And all sorts of people were listening 24 hours a day to Tokyo Rose and they'd write down all these messages and they'd get in touch with the people and Jean even had a letter from Menzies which I've got somewhere here saying, "You'll be interested to know that your husband's name was mentioned and so on". So I forget what you asked me but that's as far as I'm going on that particular line.

27:00 You asked me some question, I forget what it was now.

Perhaps you could just describe what the prison was like?

As I said we were absolutely – it was a shattering thing. The most horrific thing was that the whole of the world stopped, you see, there was no news at all. And you don't realise until you've got none at all just what a difference that makes, you see the world just vanished completely.

27:30 And that gave you a feeling of real hopelessness I mean one didn't know what was happening, you didn't know whether Australia had been conquered by the Japanese, as it bloody nearly was, of course. You knew absolutely nothing at all and they at home similarly knew nothing a bout us. But they at least had newspapers, they knew how the war was going, we had nothing. And of course 1942 was the worst year at all for the allies during the war that's when we

28:00 came within an inch of losing it and it mean, and this is very interesting, all my three friends, Newsom and Downer and I, we sort of became very close friends indeed – educated people had a tremendous advantage because you had something to talk about and you had something to think about. The troops discussed the Melbourne

28:30 Cup, the Caulfield Cup - everything. They knew every horse that had been placed in every race for the last 50 years and they knew practically nothing else. And when they ran out of conversation they ran out of virtually the will to stay alive even. And our little library, I mentioned in the book, was described in England during the war by one of the British officers as "the only lighthouse in the darkest

29:00 night". And they would come over – now, for a British officer to come to an establishment which was run by other ranks was out, absolutely out, absolutely. That would be a social misdemeanour of great velocity even though we were prisoners of war. Anyway, they came and then I started the Literary Society which became a tremendous

29:30 success and poets and people – we gave a literary prize, a certificate, there's a copy of it in the book there and consequently it was rather like throwing burley [bait] out for fish, we attracted a lot of intellectual people, particularly from Britain, to come over and be in it. The famous Ronald Searle, who was the most celebrated prisoners we had afterwards, he invented this dreadful school, St. Trinian's, and

30:00 he's a world celebrity, he lives in the South of France now, he illustrated one of my stories, poems. But that was a tremendous thing for us because we had this, you know, this magnet of drawing people who wanted to talk about serious things. One of my friends a chap called Johnny Lewis, his wife left him, many wives did of course,

30:30 and he only had one card from outside and guess who wrote it, Dylan Thomas. I'd never heard of Dylan Thomas of course he hadn't written Under Milkwood then. I said "Who's Dylan Thomas?" "Oh" he said "He's an extraordinary chap, he's a genius, he's a Welsh genius". I think he was Welsh, might have been Irish, oh Thomas, he'd have had to be Welsh "He's a Welsh genius". Well, I would never have known Lewis and he was a brother of a great celebrity,

31:00 Wyndham Lewis who was an extraordinary London, English eccentric, artist and writer and so you know one was really in the top ranks. And my great friend Leslie Greener, who became the CO of the Education Department, he knew even Middleton Murray and I think Australia's only, Australasia's only literary genius from New Zealand, I'll think of her name in a

31:30 moment, I just worship her work. And he knew them, he knew - Catherine Mansfield was her name, she was the only literary genius I think we've ever produced in the Southern Hemisphere really. And here I was, and he was a wonderful illustrator too and he illustrated The Happiness Box and all the rest of it. And that was a tremendous

32:00 the library and the literary society, and my idea of giving the prize, that was a tremendous help to a lot of people and no one more so than to us because it brought to our door, you know, leading figures. You know, not just Meggs [?] and so on we had the

32:30 real thing.

How long were you at the prison before the library was set up?

Well we weren't in the prison we were in the prison camp don't forget, we weren't in the gaol end. But it was not very long at all because the library we got going straight away you see because – to get the books. I don't know, I've got the date somewhere, I would think four or five months, something like that, not

33:00 long at all by prison standards.

Can you tell me what your daily routine was when you first got taken prisoner?

Well, I was in the education centre, otherwise you'd be out working of course, but I was in the education centre. We were all on Tokyo time, everybody was. That was a very sensible thing the Japanese did – there had to be no synchronisation allowance for watches, everybody was on the same on Tokyo time.

So when Tokyo

33:30 said something's got to be done by half past two, that was half past two everywhere – even if it was the dead of night, it was half past two. So of course we got up and went to bed at very extraordinary hours because Tokyo time is not terribly accurate by ordinary sound methods. We'd get up, we only had two meals a day, we had nine ounces of rice and nothing else at all would be in it, nothing else, no salt

34:00 nothing. And the cooks couldn't cook rice, they never had any training so we had a glutinous mass of frightful stuff twice a day, nothing else and a cup of so-called tea, we did have – it was called tea, I don't know where it came from. And I had made from me a one pint mug, exactly one imperial pint, made from part of a steel

34:30 locker, it had been part of the Gordon Highlanders there, and I gave it as a prize at the Avondale Golf Club – it's the chief event every year of servicemen, so the Changi Cup it's called. I had all my meals out of that, eats and drinks, out of the same vessel. And then as time wore on we started what were called gardens growing sweet potatoes

35:00 but only the tops, we weren't allowed to eat the fruit underneath that was for the dead and dying. And what saved us was a thing called tapioca root, I don't know whether anyone eats tapioca any more but it wasn't a bad thing but it grows under a very swiftly growing tree and it has roots, I don't know about that thick I

35:30 suppose, the outside of which is very poisonous but you break that off and inside it's like a sort of parsnip in appearance and we lived on that. And we had red palm oil so they were able to cook it and so we had rice – and you know, it's very hard to live on nine ounces of rice I can tell you that much, I mean that's not

36:00 much. We were working then, too. We weren't we were only in the library but the others were all working and later on we were working ourselves. So we got up and went on parade and fell in and were numbered and counted by our own people, we hardly ever saw the Japanese at all. They kept right away from us they let us run our own show. All they wanted us to do was to die as quickly and as quietly as possible

36:30 to get rid of us. And of course in the end they were going to kill us all and 10 days after the bomb fell we were all going to be executed. And it used to drive me and my wife up the wall to see these bloody protestors objecting to the dropping of the bomb on Japan when it saved the lives of the whole of the 8th Division and 50,000 other people - no thought to them at all. "Oh, blow them they're just

37:00 soldiers, what do they matter, nothing". That really used to irritate us but they've stoped now, they've stopped protesting about the bomb but in your day they were still doing it – dreadful, you know, it's so insulting really. And I mean I think the American estimate that they'd never take Japan without a million casualties, a million people dead, dead Americans and Brits

37:30 too. It saved all that, it was a miracle of course, from our point I mean it's the only reason I'm alive, absolutely.

Can you tell us a bit more about your living conditions, where were you sleeping?

Well, the living conditions weren't too bad. We were in what was left of the barracks, the Changi barracks, as I said, they'd been bombed quite a lot but they weren't too bad. There were a lot of houses which they

38:00 officers had lived in, you see, and continued to live in but of course grossly overcrowded. There were some tents and the area, I don't know, it must be – it would be two or three hundred acres. If ever you're over there do go out there because it's very interesting to see it. Well, we were given, to open the library,

38:30 we were given one little corner of the officers' mess which – it's the only building still standing. The only original building that's still there, it's the only one. We were given a corner of it, and it had a window, and we rigged up a little table inside and the library was open twice a day one session in the morning and one in the afternoon. And the chaps would all queue up outside with their book and

39:00 handing it in and we would be, one of us would be on duty writing it all down and everything. And then Downer and I were lecturing as well. Our real job was lecturing. He gave a series of lectures called "Government in Two Worlds" on Tuesday night I think it was and I gave a "History of Poetry" on Wednesday night. And that was a very difficult thing to do because we had no

39:30 books. Fortunately I can remember poetry pretty well but there were some pretty odd quotations I think from it. It was very exciting for me because I remember the night I got onto the Elizabethan poets and I was standing up there in front of about 200 starved people who would never had heard one line of poetry in their lives, never. And I had an old golden

40:00 treasury of verse which were the selections of the famous poems and I remember reading something like "Drink to me only with thine eyes and I will pleasure with mine" and so on and, you know, they were absolutely captivated. I thought I might be, as I mentioned in that compass thing, I thought we might have the raspberry and that might be the end of it. Not at all and indeed it actually

40:30 started people having a real interest, a chap called Stan Arneil who became a professional writer he came, he was in the audience and there were others too. And even Alec Downer stimulated an interest in politics – two of the audience became members of the Federal Parliament. And really our life in Seralang, except for the starvation and that's pretty hard to live with, was really quite good but when we went into the

41:00 gaol that was a different story all together. Once we were in the gaol - it was designed for 600 Asiatic prisoners and we had 5,000 people in it.

Tape 6

00:30 **While we're still on life in Seralang Barracks, you were describing some of the buildings, can you take us through that description again?**

Yes, well the centre piece was the Barracks' square surrounded by concrete buildings, three storey's high they were which shut off all the

01:00 air, I mean that's why we were imprisoned in there, it was absolutely insufferable because it would just be used for marching up and down that was the central part. Then there was the big officers' mess which was a big, big building, a very nice building, still standing, the only one that is because I've been back several times. And then there were like all these bungalows, they called them bungalows which was silly because bungalows is an Indian word meaning single story but they were all

01:30 double story houses. It would be, I suppose, like Killara was in Sydney or Kew I suppose in Melbourne, it was like a very nice leafy suburb. Very steep, up and down, with tarred roads and the Japanese were amazing, they rode bikes, and they could

02:00 pedal up these frightfully steep roads without standing up in the saddle. Now that shows pretty strong leg muscles, I'll tell you that, they could ride up – they didn't go backwards and forwards the way most of us had to, they would just ride up sitting in the saddle. They must have had immensely strong legs to do that – anyway, these were just dotted about all over the place. That was what it was like, we looked after it to some extent. We had our

02:30 own guards at the gate. You see, there was no possibility of escaping anywhere. And we asked the guard if we could put up a sort of memorial at the gate and they had no objection, of course, it didn't worry them. So we came up with a good Latin one "Forsan et haec olim memenisse iuvabit" " which means "One day we will look back on all these things with pleasure".

03:00 And it turned out to be a very prophetic utterance or statement. There was barbed wire and all the rest of it of course but there was nowhere to go you see. It was different in the gaol of course, quite different but in Seralang, well, if we'd have had decent food and all the rest of it, it probably would have been thought quite a nice place to be. But of course there was no

03:30 food and not knowing anything at all that was bad.

What was directly outside that barbed wire?

Well, there was country much the same. We could see the famous British naval base, it was just in sight in the strait. It was very pretty really we looked onto the straits of Johore. And one day I remember I was there and I watched the Japanese fleet, I counted the number of ships, indeed I wrote them down, seventy-one

04:00 ships, battleships and aircraft carriers. This was going to Midway or the Coral Sea, I don't know, one of the two, that's where they were sailing out to. And there were junks going down the river as I wrote in my poem Changi Days and really the situation was very nice. I mean the British had picked it out for themselves so I mean it was climatically quite nice. There were, you know

04:30 breezes and things (but not in the gaol of course, on breezes in the gaol). But as a place to live it would have been an A Class residential area, that's what it would have been, absolutely.

You say that you looked after yourselves, how much contact did you have with Japanese Guards?

Practically none. None at all, they never came into the place. They sent in some of these wretched Sikhs, they went over to the Japanese and they were simply detestable people we couldn't

05:00 stand them. For example to get from one camp to another, the British and the Australians were in different areas, the same situation but they were in a place called Roberts' Barracks. And it was about a mile walk I suppose and you had to go over, it was called the ferry, you had to fall in and a Sikh guard with one of our rifles and a bayonet on it he would then

05:30 march you across, one lot you see, and then he'd march the others back. And sometimes when the

Indian officers would be on the party, they'd make them lie on the ground and they'd stick the bayonet in their backside, you know, not lethally but pricking them along and that was really terrible. That was a dreadful indignity, they certainly didn't earn that.

06:00 But otherwise, as I say, if we'd had nice food and radios and all the rest of it everyone would have been very happy to live in Changi.

Were there work parties, can you describe those for us?

Indeed there were, oh yes. Well, they were all working illegally, the Japanese of course were not part of the Geneva Convention and they had them working on the walls, unloading munitions, doing all the sorts of things that

06:30 prisoners were absolutely forbidden to do, well that the captors were forbidden to make them do. And they were in stores and all sorts of things. They actually lived in Singapore and we were in quite regular contact with them because the odd chap would come back, you know, and he'd just tell his mates, you know, what was

07:00 happening. Those working parties were quite tolerable. It was only when they got up to the railway and, of course, things got worse too. The Japanese, when they took us prisoner for example, they had got 120,000 prisoners, some great number like that. A lieutenant only was in command of the whole thing, a Japanese lieutenant - later, of course we got up to a major general.

07:30 I was trying to think of the commander's name when we were talking earlier, Field Marshal Count Hisaichi Terauchi. He died, his grave is in Singapore, he died there. But no that was all really quite tolerable. I mean there was no water of course and a lot of things were dreadful but troops are used to putting up with things that aren't too

08:00 good. And we got theatres going, we had quite a lot of professional actors. We had one very good stroke of luck because this British 18th Division I told you fought the thing on a map of the Isle of Wight, they had a famous English regiment called the "Artists Rifles" which was set up in World War I when leading actors and musicians and people when they

08:30 joined up they'd like to put them in the Artists Rifles. For example, we had the concert master, he was the leader then of the London Symphony Orchestra. We had a very good professional singer, I think his name was Foster Woods. We had pianists, we had no pianos to play on until the Australians found one. And we got a very good theatre going, we had one of the West End producers a chap called Bradshaw

09:00 and another one called Daltry. The Brits have got their drawbacks but by God they're a remarkable people. For example, Daltry lost both an eye and a leg in the campaign and imagine on the top of that being a prisoner of war. It didn't make the slightest difference, not the slightest, he just took that in his stride as though it hadn't happened at all. And then we had the Indian Army

09:30 and they were an absolute godsend because they had no troops, you see, the Japanese hated any black people, The Ghurkhas, everybody, all their troops were sent away. So they were all in Changi with no troops at all. And they were absolutely amazing, they completely ignored the Japanese in every possible respect, it was just as though they didn't exist. And every Thursday night they had a formal

10:00 mess, nothing to eat of course. We had to drink a dreadful concoction called grass soup and this was lalang grass which was put in a great press and fearful, the most disgusting green slime came out of it and this was the only vitamins we got, you see, it was to prevent blindness so it was compulsory to drink it. And for some of the troops they could just never do it, they were just

10:30 retching all the time. But not the Indian Army they made a feature of it, they toasted the Queen, or the King it was, they toasted the King, we used to see them. And in the Indian Army in those days you wore a different hat depending on what time of the day it was, you wore three hats. And they kept them all and they'd be solemnly in these hats, and they'd be toasting the Queen's health, you know, "Gentleman"

11:00 or the King, "Gentleman, the King". We used to watch them drinking away, it was wonderful. And of course the Japanese simply couldn't possibly understand them, they'd never seen anything like it and we hadn't seen anything like it either. They were just amazing. We had even Colonel Clive, a direct descendent of Clive of India, he was there, I used to play bridge against him. And well they were just – we had another one

11:30 called Major Dart and he was as thick a head as you could imagine but the most delightful chap with the most perfect manners. With the concert party, we had this very good Australian concert party which used to put on these marvellous shows, written in Changi, and they were always taking these people off because they couldn't believe them, they were like something out of Punch magazine, you know, you couldn't believe they were real.

12:00 And one night the concert party, I was there, you had to draw for seats and everything, you know ,and who should I be sitting beside but Major Dart himself with a fellow Indian Army officer on his left and the last scene of the first act, part of the bill, was a marvellous take off of Major Dart and this other chap who's name I forget. And everybody was absolutely rocking nearly

falling off their seats, you see, and that was the end of that. And so Dart said to me “Well, Griffin” he said “What did you think of that?” Well, I was in rather a difficult position. I said “Well, Sir, I think it was a bit exaggerated”. “Exaggerated” he said “My God, it’s clear to see you’ve never been in India. I knew a chap there exactly like that”. They were like that all the time and they had a sort of

good effect, you know, they were absolutely impervious people. You can easily see why the British Empire was such a great organisation because you could send them to Timbuktu, anywhere, and they’d be just the same as that. It would have been the Queen then, drinking the Queen’s health and, you know, absolutely oblivious of everything that was going around them. One day - the badge of rank which I’ll try and show you, we were our badges

of rank if we had any rank on our wrist, we had no shirts anyway. And I hopped across something and mine fell off into the long lelang grass and I was looking for it on my hands and knees. And along came Major Dart. “Lost something?” he said. “Yes” I said and then I thought of a bit of fun”. I said “I’ve lost my crossed baton”, you know it’s a Field Marshal’s rank. “Oh,

cross batons have you, my God, I’ll help you”. And then he never sort of said, “We can’t be looking for crossed batons, we haven’t got any field marshals”, it never got as far as that at all. They were something, they saved a lot of lives because they were so, so, absolute - one of the great parties went up to the railway. You know, one of these awful, dreadful death camps they went to.

Everyone was told that they could take nothing at all and if you had even photographs they had to give them, you couldn’t take them. So we who stayed behind, I’d swapped you see with Masur at this stage, we had all this stuff and they were to leave at dawn Tokyo time which was the middle of the night probably. I went up to the barracks’ square to see them off and we travelled round in Marmon Harrington

trucks which were five tonne trucks and the Japanese put 90 men into them, 90 men. And everything was worked out, there was to be so many trucks and of course the Australians love organising things and everyone was properly organised and the thing was perfect. And sure enough at first light the trucks arrived but before they did arrive Black Jack, I was

standing quite close to him, and he had an adjutant called Stuart Peach, he was a professional soldier. On the other side of the barrack square was a great heap of luggage. And as the light sort of got better BJ, as we all called him, BJ said “Peach, what’s that on the other side there?” “I don’t know, sir”. “Well” he said “Go over and find out”. So Peach went off and in a moment or two

came back “Sir, it’s baggage for the Indian Army officers, sir”. “They’re taking baggage?” “Yes, sir”. “Well”, he said “Go over and find out who’s in charge and tell him to report to me straight away”. So in due course a captain or something arrived of the Ghurkhas or you know something like that, or the Hyderabadis [from Hyderabad, India] or – and much saluting, you know.

And BJ said “What’s that over there?” “Baggage, sir, officers’ baggage”. Black Jack said, “Well haven’t you read the regulation or the orders?” “No, sir”. Well he was almost exploding with exasperation. It made no effect whatever on this, he was only a subaltern or a captain. So Black Jack said “Well, you’d better go back and tell your people that

that’s just going to be left behind”. Not a bit of it. The Japanese put on an extra truck and loaded the whole lot – it had a piano, it had a crate with WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in it, two goats and the officers’ steel trunks. And our poor boys had even given the photographs of their wives away, you know. They were just really something else, it had to be seen to be believed.

Obviously within the different national groups they had their own administrations but they mixed together?

Oh, not very much, no. No, the Brits were all under one command just as we were. And at the end, you see, Galleghan was in charge of the whole thing, Brits and Australians as well. He was king.

You talked a bit about, obviously the Indian Army was a particular example, but what about the Australians? What sort of

characteristics did display in this circumstance?

Oh, very good. I think that we were wonderful prisoners. We were just the absolute experts. I got to know a Malayan, an English chap who lived in Malaya, quite well, a chap called Riley. He said to me one day, he said “David” he said “Does everybody in Australia go round with a hammer all the time?” I said “No, why?” He said “Well everybody, every time I see an Australian he’s hammering something”. And I

hadn’t thought about it you see but as I say we were a very large number of country people, particularly in our unit, and it’s very important also to remember that the time we got to the 8th Division we’d got down to much more serious people. Many of the adventurers had gone in the 6th, you know it was a great thrill to go overseas, as they called it, the 6th and the 7th, but the time they got to the 8th

we were very largely people who were employed and everything else. You know, I think there was quite an increase in every way, really. We had some riff raff of course we did, but not much. And I forget what your first question was?

Just about the characteristics displayed by the Australians?

Well, yes, the characteristics were that they became absolute experts at being prisoners of war.

19:30 You know, they made the best of a bad job right from the start. One day I remember we were out marching somewhere, this was when we were prisoners, and we came round the bend of the road, we were near Changi I suppose – I can't remember the facts but there was a whole group of Brits. You know, there might have been two hundred or three hundred, perhaps two companies of a battalion, sitting down

20:00 and apparently they had been sitting down for 1 hour, just sitting down. Of course, the minute the Australians came fires were lit and billies were produced and tea was made and everything. And these poor guys, that hadn't crossed anybody's mind, you see, because they had to be told, "Make tea". And the Australian temperament was very good for it, too, they sort of amused, amusing, they amused

20:30 people Australians. They're ironic people and, you know, it just suited us – it didn't suit us being taken prisoner at all but once we were prisoners I think we were the star turn, I'm sure of it, absolutely sure of it, temperamentally we were suited for it.

Can you talk a bit about the process for you of learning to become a prisoner?

Well, you just, yes, you didn't sort of

21:00 realise it was happening. One day just sort of came after the other and no news and nothing. And the Australians are very good at scrounging things and the only way out of the camp, there was a stormwater pipe, which I don't suppose the diameter would have been more than 18 inches at the very most, maybe less, only little

21:30 coves could fit into it. But these chaps would go out through this pipe and it was about, it must have been sort of 50 metres long, anyone with claustrophobia of course would have gone mad. And they would climb into this bloody thing and find their way to Chinese campongs, that's villages, and do some trading, trade watches and things and come back again. And then they'd set up a little store, they'd sell it you see.

22:00 And Black Jack was very much against that, not the enterprise but he didn't like anybody making any money out of anything. Well, they just got good at it. The Japanese were mad on watches, and they were very honest, extremely so – watches and pens. They only knew one sort of pen and that was a "Parker" pen and they only knew one sort of watch and that was a "Rolex"

22:30 but most people had other watches and if you had a Rolex watch, the Jap - you did trade. At the wire, they'd be outside, they'd do a deal, I didn't trade my watch, I kept it. But they'd do a deal and "O.K". they'd hand over Jap money which was not worth a crumpet really but then at other times the Japanese would say, "Well, I'll have to get this

23:00 valued". Of course nobody could talk Japanese and "I'll take it into Singapore and have it valued" and they'd give it to them and people would say "Christ, I'll never see that watch again". Not a bit of it. In about 3 weeks or so they'd be back and they'd say "Two Hundred Dollars". They were extraordinary – the worst thing about them they're intensely cruel, cruel, cruel people. When they're not being cruel they're being quite agreeable.

23:30 But their cruelty is really something.

What instances of brutality occurred?

Well they were brutal to each other, they lived a brutal life. This is the Middle Ages we were back to, the Middle Ages really, completely. Major Wild was the chief interpreter, he spoke perfect Japanese, indeed he even wrote a book in Japanese and he was a great friend of Alec Downer because they'd both been at the same college in Oxford, Brasenose College in Oxford. So we saw

24:00 quite a bit of him, he went over with the surrender, he's in the picture with them all going over, he's one of them. And he said you can't appreciate the Japanese until you've lived in Japan. He was in Singapore and one of the Japanese guards was sitting in the gutter there crying – they're very emotional the Japs, very emotional. And Wild went up to him and of course, being able to speak Japanese,

24:30 you know, he said "Are you having wife trouble?" "No, no, no". "Mother died or something?" "No, no, no, no". So this chap could neither read nor write of course himself and he handed him a letter written by some scribe in Japan, this was a letter from this cove's mother saying how insulted she was that he hadn't yet been returned

25:00 to the shrine. Now the only way he could return to the shrine was to return to action. Dying behind the lines was no good. So as far as she was concerned he hadn't done the right thing because he was still alive, you see. And I remember Wild saying to us, look until you can understand a mother who writes to her son rebuking him for not being killed you can't begin to understand the Japanese approach.

25:30 It was completely foreign, you see, completely foreign and it took a long while to sort of get accustomed to it. And their moods, their moods were amazing and they all seemed to be in a good mood or a bad

mood on the same day. Even though they had no contact, we were on the gardens - we built what is now Changi Airport in Singapore – It was just a small fighter strip there but we built it. And we'd march

26:00 out, with Japanese guards of course, and we'd go past the main guard house at Changi, near the gaol, and a salute would be given to the guard house and more often than not the guard would be there and saluting and bowing. And one day, for some reason or another, you'd be stopped and he'd be in an absolute

26:30 rage, he'd be screaming, and they scream, they don't just shout they scream, he'd be screaming in Japanese. And we never knew what they were screaming about but then eventually we'd go on. And that day every Japanese would be screaming and they had no contact at all. It was a bad day and you had to watch out extremely closely on a bad day because anything was likely to happen. But on a good day they would all be, quite often, quite peaceful.

27:00 They wouldn't have liked you, they hate tall people.

How much for the educated people that were you with in Changi was it an intellectual pursuit to try and work out or understand your captors?

No, because we had practically nothing to do with them, we never saw them. You see unless you were on a working party you never saw the Japanese at all. They didn't come into the

27:30 camp or very, very occasionally but hardly ever. Sometimes one would come but I never saw a Japanese officer for example in Selarang, not the whole time I was there, I never saw one. And very few other ranks just occasionally, as I say, on these bikes that they rode up these streets, that's all. But we had practically nothing to do with them.

Did that situation change once you were inside the gaol?

To some extent but not very

28:00 much, no, they left the administration of the troops to the Australians and the Brits. They gave the orders of course and they relied upon Black Jack and Co to have them carried out. So, no, I'd say there it very little. It wasn't that we were always slinking around terrified of the

28:30 Japanese. When one appeared, and drew their sword out you were a bit alarmed because you never knew what was happening, you see, and they were so hot tempered that you could never be sure that somebody's hand wouldn't be cut off or something. They cut off the Ghurkha's hand, that was a great punishment. The troops would sometimes come all the way out, John Wilson Stevens, was the adjutant of the 2nd Battalion of the Ghurkhas, permanent. The Ghurkha officers loved the

29:00 Ghurkhas and the Ghurkha troops loved them. It was the most wonderful unified thing probably ever in the history of an army and I understand they still do because the Ghurkha officers now are all Ghurkhas not whites, but they were – it was a wonderful bond they had. And his batman, or servant they called it in the English army, his servant several times came all the way out from where he was in Singapore, all the way to Changi, that's about 15 miles, and went

29:30 to say to the Saab he should have some new trousers because those were terribly worn out and then he would measure him up and he would go back and maybe in a month or so he would come back again with a brand new pair of trousers. And there was that major affinity that they had for their troops. But of course, they were heartbroken when they were made to cut off, if they found them they'd cut their hands

30:00 off, you know, with a sword - terrible to imagine, being a young man and having blood streaming out, dreadful.

How did the administrative system we are talking about keep control and order and discipline maintained?

Well, perfectly, perfectly. Black Jack ran the place like the 30th Battalion only more so because

30:30 he was frightfully opposed to prisoners of war, much too much so. He said "When we get out of this we're going to march down George Street. We're not going to be marching down as prisoners, we're going to be marching down as soldiers". And he carried it too far he wouldn't join any prisoner of war associations and he made no recommendations for bravery or medals for people who performed some tremendous acts of courage, tremendous. They got nothing because he wouldn't be

31:00 associated with achievements as prisoners and that was very unfair. I mean people who would volunteer to look after cholera patients – half of whom died of cholera of course and they needn't have been anywhere near it. Well, you know, that's a supreme act of heroism really and nothing, just nothing at all. No prisoner got anything at any stage.

31:30 **Was there ever any anger or disrespect shown towards Black Jack in that respect?**

Oh, no, none, no. Well it hadn't happened then. He only didn't do anything after the war, you see - no, not at all. He was feared and in many ways he was detested because of the discipline. If he saw a Japanese soldier incorrectly dressed he would be immediately summoned and told to do that button

32:00 up, you know, and so on. And everybody was terrified of him, absolutely. One of my friends in the 15th, Second 15th Field Regiment, that's an artillery unit, they were providing the guns at the Battle of Gemas and I was talking to him one day I said "What are you frightened of the Japanese?". He said "Oh Christ no, we were frightened of Black Jack but not about the Japanese".

You mentioned people volunteering to help with cholera victims. It brings up the subject, how was the

32:30 **medical side of the camp organised?**

Well, absolutely superb. Mark you, I wasn't on the railway, so I don't know what, how that, but I know that happened as a fact. Superbly, the doctors were absolutely marvellous and inventive. For an example Dr Frank Mills, still alive aged about 94 or so, when he was in Sandakan in Borneo

33:00 he invented and sketched out a heart machine which was subsequently built and the first heart operation by a South African doctor, I forget his name, he became a world-famous figure, the blood was kept circulating by a machine that Frank Mills had designed in Sandakan. You know, that sort of thing, Frank Mills was a fairly

33:30 outstanding sort of person anyway but, you know, that was really something.

What happened to the sick inside the prison camp or those who needed medical attention?

Well, they were very good with them, our people were very good with them. They had a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and any eggs were given, we never had them, and the sweet potatoes that I was telling you about they used to get those

34:00 and they looked after them, that was wonderful. And apparently up row on the railways it was absolutely marvellous because they died like flies and nobody was allowed to die alone he had somebody who was hugging him, you know. That was apparently really wonderful, wonderful and even when they came back to us. You know, I didn't see anything like that because they were dying in so-called

34:30 hospitals, I mean, they were no more hospitals than Florence Nightingale found in the Crimea [Crimean War], but Australians were very good at that. That was one of the great features of the place I think. And, you know, there are many Australians that I've sort of seen and heard of on the radio and that's the one thing – Stan Arneil, this chap that became a writer because he won the literary competition and became quite a friend of

35:00 mine. And he was up on the row, and he was 6'4 and he was bashed every day as a matter of course. He said it was just wonderful to see the devotion and, you know, these people that would sort of act as though they were mothers. These were often kids, 17, 18, 19 and 20, they had no experience of

35:30 life and suddenly they were dying and they knew they were dying too of course. And apparently it was really very moving indeed. In these frightful places, in squalor and filth and rags and blood and ulcers and I'm glad I never had to see that but I've heard a lot about it and I've got a pretty good idea of what it was like.

And how much did that lie about the rest camp and the Japanese taking them off to better conditions, how much was that exposed?

36:00 Typical of the Japanese, you know, I mean that wouldn't have worried them in the least. It was swallowed to such an extent that the Indian army officers conducted a race over 40 metres and the losers, not the winners, the losers went on the party because they weren't fit enough and they had to be built up so they were put on the party.

36:30 There could be only one race of people in the world who could do such a thing. You know, everyone trying his hardest and the losers got the reward. And, you know, that was the sort of, that's the really great side of the British - I mean they've got some terrible sides – and their courage too, they're courageous people, the officers particularly, they're courageous people. Courage doesn't, the upper classes of the English,

37:00 we had a couple of Peers with us, and courage is absolutely part of their life. They don't regard it as courageous at all. That's why in World War I a third of the aristocracy were killed of course because they would go over the trenches with a revolver or some bloody thing into a hail of German machine guns. And that is the interesting thing about the British

37:30 aristocratic tradition that the minute war comes, they lead it all. They are the ones that get killed. Other people aren't sent in to be killed, they lead them all.

Was it genuinely believed then for those left behind in Changi that these people had gone off to a better life?

Yes, I think so. I don't think there was any need for the penny to drop. I'm not suggesting everybody believed it but I mean that was the idea. None of them of

38:00 course dreamed what it was going to be like. I mean first of all they spent five days in steel trucks

without the doors open on the trip, terrible, terrible. And they had to march, you know, I think some of them had to march nearly 200 miles. And they were thin as rakes in Changi anyway, it's not as though these were fit people marching

38:30 200 miles these were people on their last bloody legs.

How did you take the news when you found out at the end of the war about that?

Oh, it was dreadful, it was dreadful. It was our finest hour though. They came back about four days before Christmas in 1942 and we'd been saving up little bits of food which was a common effort so we could have a big feed of rice, and so on, on

39:00 Christmas Day. In other words a little bit had been put aside, each day a tiny bit over a long period of time, and the cooks had made little fancy things and so on. And then back came – they suddenly arrived, we had no idea, Black Jack might have known, we didn't. They suddenly arrived and I mean if you think you've seen a thin person I'm telling you, you haven't seen a thin person until you've seen somebody coming back from the Burma

39:30 Railway. They were so thin that someone like me, who was much stronger then than I am now, but I'm no strong man, I was able to lift fully grown men out of a truck, myself, with two hands, lift them up this way. So they weighed – one guy only weight, I think, I forget what it was, it was 60 pounds or something, that was his whole weight. Well, it was dreadful,

40:00 they weren't all like that of course but they were all in terribly bad shape. And Black Jack (this was in Stan Arneil's book, this is a fact) Black Jack had told Arneil, he was a sergeant, and who'd been there, you see, on such and such a day and they'd been back a few days, it was after Christmas I think. He said "I want to see the Battalion,

40:30 Arneil you get them organised". So he did and the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], he didn't go he was Walker his name was, he was still there and they had this parade these unfortunate people. And everything was done very formally with Black Jack, you know, the parade was handed over and all that stuff. And BJ stood there, Stan Arneil was out, up just behind Walker so he was right at the front,

41:00 and he said, he looked sort of dazed. And after the parade had been handed over to Black Jack he said "Sergeant Arneil" and so he sprang to attention as best he could and went up to Black Jack. And he said Black Jack said to him "Sergeant, where is the battalion?"

41:30 Well he said so. And that was apparently too much for BJ he was speechless, completely speechless. So I mean you know that was a fearful experience when they came back but the good thing was we gave them all our food. I mean, as much as there was, was all given away and that was being, it was worthwhile.

Tape 7

01:34 Well the experiences on the Railway it was just that's all it was just called and that was the railway in Burma and Thailand that they built. And over 50,000 people died on it, over 50,000 you know, not all prisoners but a great many of the prisoners of war died, the others were mainly natives.

02:00 But their experiences there with cholera and everything else were so frightful that when they came back we were almost like people who'd never been even to war. You know, there we were leading what ordinarily would have been a pretty poor existence but compared to what they'd been enduring, you know, it was easy street. And

02:30 although going and not going was just a complete fluke, like everything in the army is, I said in my book it's rather like people at the coal face resenting the mine manager because they say," "Oh, he doesn't know a bloody thing about mining. You know, he just sits up there in his office all day, he should come down here." And quite often of course the mine managers have started off as miners

03:00 themselves, they knew all about it, but created a complete barrier between the people down below and the people up above and I understand that exists to some extent to this very day. But it did very much so with the people on the railway. You either had been on the railway or you hadn't been on the railway. And there was no way that a person who hadn't been on the railway could have any concept of what it was like.

03:30 And it was a bit like the people who had been to the war and been prisoners and the people who were at home who hadn't been prisoners. I mean, it was very hard with ordinary language, very hard to bridge the gap, you couldn't sort of believe it really. You can't imagine what it was like to have no news about anything at all suddenly and to be starved suddenly and to be dying suddenly. You know, that really takes a bit of

04:00 getting used to. And so even to this day a group of us meet once a year for lunch, we've just had one. One year in the Union Club and one year in the Australian Club in Sydney and our ranks are very thin,

we can only muster 11 people. Nobody else goes, no secretaries or presidents, just prisoners. And, you know,

04:30 the non-Japanese prisoner, there was one, it only happened, only a fortnight ago we had it, he is a very nice person. He said to me before lunch “This is the most embarrassing day of the year for me”. He said “I hate coming”. And I said “Why?” He said “I was a German prisoner and of course we just lived in luxury compared

05:00 to the Japanese prisoners and it just makes me embarrassed to think that I’m sitting here at the same table. The sort of life I led in a German prison camp compared say with Changi Jail it’s just no comparison”. And just by the same token there’s no comparison for the railway because that’s got to be absolutely horrendous, that and the Borneo death march

05:30 you know, they were – there’s no equal because there’s no Borneo survivors now, and there were very few even then, one or two were taken off by an American submarine by a miracle. Well there it is, it’s wearing a bit thin now. Funnily enough, I only know one survivor from the railway and he lives here

06:00 also in Bowral and he’s quite a bit younger though and that’s of course a tremendous help. People of my age had practically no chance. And John Howard went up there, I think about three years ago, to Hellfire Pass where they had to pick this rock that’s like steel, they had to cut a, not a causeway, a cutting through it

06:30 50 ft deep with blunt picks and things which was just like hammering into steel. He told me, you know, he said it was beyond belief you couldn’t just, you could hardly endure it.

Well perhaps you could tell us a bit more about how the men in the camp received the returning

07:00 **soldiers?**

Well, what I said a bit before was that they were wonderful really. We had very little to give up but we gave it up. Our larders weren’t exactly full but we put aside things for Christmas Day and that was to be a great feast and everything else but we gave it all to them without even a moment’s hesitation, you know, that was

07:30 automatic and they greatly appreciated that of course. As time wore on like all these things, you know, they came back, they lived, they’d gone through the railway, O.K. they’d survived, and people had been at Muar and they’d lived too and time goes on. The large experience sort of overtakes the

08:00 lesser ones I think and I would think nowadays, you know, in the earlier days one was always asked, always asked “Were you on the railway?” by another prisoner, no longer. If you said “Yes “ well that was full marks for you as though you’d performed some heroic act just by being there but in my case I didn’t even

08:30 go and I can hold my head up without being in shame because I didn’t try and get off it. I only got off it because somebody else was wanting to take my place and I think I had enough sense to realise that, you know, that was good for me. I don’t think nowadays it probably means very much but certainly for the first 20 or so years after the war, even 30, that was always the

09:00 question. “How are you, were you on the railway?”

Do you think at the time it created tension?

Not tensions, on people, starving people don’t have tensions, they don’t have time for that you’re just staying alive. No that’s a sort of civilian thing that people don’t have anything to think about but their own and this sort of thing. But, no, prisoners aren’t worried by that kind of

09:30 thing – no, that doesn’t enter into it. We were just thinking about surviving long enough to get home.

And I suppose seeing those railway men might have contributed to a loss of morale?

No, I don’t think there was any loss of morale, no absolutely none, morale was very good in the camp, very good indeed. No, no one was saying “Jump in the lake” or anything else to an officer or a senior,

10:00 we didn’t respect the officers but we obeyed them certainly. No, I think morale was extremely good in the camp and, you know, with our theatre party and so on, these were professional actors and so on, it was really, really splendid. I’d give all the Australians a very high mark indeed. I don’t think you can be a better prisoner of war than an Australian really. We were

10:30 built for it. Even for someone who’d led a secluded sort of a life like me, you sort of rallied to it, it was part of what life used to be like. Like On our Selection and all that kind of thing because even my own ancestors who came out here in privileged positions they just didn’t sit on the front veranda of their slab hut

11:00 and watch the wool grow on the sheep’s back. They had to work probably 18 hours a day with axes and everything else. The gentry settling in Australia they had to get to work like everybody else, otherwise

you died. And I think that created quite an egalitarian, basic atmosphere, the

11:30 surface in Australia I grew up in, in Australia, was not egalitarian at all, it didn't even pretend to be but out in the bush it certainly was, you know, it certainly was. My uncle had a property and people that we used to call sundowners used to turn up and they'd work and we'd give them a feed and all that. Anyway, we'd better go back and talk about the surrender, might be interesting for you. I had, we had heard, we had the secret radio of course

12:00 most of the time, it had to be very carefully organised. A great deal of erroneous information had to be given on it so that the Japanese never found out that we did have a radio otherwise of course heads would have been chopped off and so on. It was called the "pipe" and it was run by a certain Major Bosley and in private life he was the general manager of a

12:30 shop that sold Speedwell push bikes, Bennett & Woods. Anyway, we had this mostly ridiculous news and of course one or two tiny bits of truth in it and finally we were told that a new bomb had been produced, a white paper had been tabled by Churchill [Prime Minister of Britain] in the House of Commons about the

13:00 testing of a new weapon in New Mexico and there was quite a bit of detail about it that the steel towers that it was on had vaporised that all the sand within a mile or so had turned into glass, molten glass and, you know that the blast had been felt 200 miles away or something. I heard about this and I remember saying "Oh, that

13:30 must be correct because a white paper is a sacred document of the parliament. Nothing goes into a white paper that's rumour, that's fact. I said "If that's been in a white paper this has got to be some bomb that's done that". O.K., we put it out of our minds like the way you do everything else, I mean you just live for the day - by this time nobody had any watches, they had all been traded, mine had

14:00 gone. And then Mountbatten was supposed to be coming down or was coming down with a great fleet to attack Malaya – coming down the straits of Sumatra. And we knew that and we knew this was going to be bad news for us because we thought the Japanese would kill us all which they were going to do. And then

14:30 I used to sleep beside Alec Downer, we used to touch each other on the ground. And one night – and we had a wonderful conjuror with us called Sydney Piddington who was a member of the magic circle and there are very few people in the world who achieve that eminence as a conjuror – and I was sleeping away there in this hut, we were in a hut inside the gaol

15:00 and suddenly I felt I was being woken up. And I sort of looked up and here was Piddington and he thought I was Alec Downer, he woke up the wrong person, he meant to wake up Alec and he woke me instead. And he said "Where's Alec?" And I said "He's next door" And he said "Well, wake him up". So I did and he said "It's finished". Well, we'd heard that a hundred times of course

15:30 and I said "What do you mean it's finished?". He said "The Japanese have surrendered". "Surrendered?" I said. He said "Yes". I said "Oh, that can't be so". "Yes" he said (every prisoner will know what this mean) "Yes" he said "I've gone for the Parker". Now you'd have no idea I suppose what that means but that means the Parker pen was the only pen that was known, that meant that they'd signed something.

16:00 And well there we were – I've often been asked what it was like. To me, in those days if you had a nice big roast joint, it would often come in on a huge silver gadget with a great lid on it, the lid was on a hinge and you pushed the lid back and the lid went under, it was like a tray, the lid went underneath and suddenly there exposed was the joint.

16:30 And I felt like a joint all of a suddenly that was looking up, there'd been a lid there all the time and suddenly there was no lid. And our first feeling was one of absolutely of exaltation because we'd made it, we'd actually lived through it we'd actually survived, we couldn't believe it. And it was amazing round in this hut, it was quite a long

17:00 hut it would have been 50 metres long I suppose, crammed with people of course, we were all sleeping touching each other in four rows. So you know, there might have been probably 200 people in it and suddenly everyone was awake and alive and, well, you know, this was a supreme moment. But we weren't out of the woods because we had a fanatical Japanese commander in

17:30 Singapore. And he refused to surrender even though the Emperor had announced the surrender he refused to surrender until he saw it in writing. So General Macarthur, in a rare display of leniency, he arranged for a plane to come down from Tokyo

18:00 with the Imperial Rescript, that was the actual official surrender document signed by the Emperor of Japan. And our chap in Singapore saw that and that was good enough authority for him but this took about a fortnight to organise and on one day I remember there was a raid and over the gaol flew American planes called Lightning's, they had a

18:30 double fuselage – we'd never seen them before ever. And they flew over to drop leaflets but of course the Japanese opened fire on them and they must have got the scare of their lives thinking they were on a leaflet run and the next thing, "Bang", anti aircraft fire went up. Well, we had to wait about, it must

have been about a fortnight and it was a very, very tricky period because we knew the war was over and the

19:00 Japanese hadn't the faintest idea the war was over, you see, they had no news at all. And we were on a working party out in the gardens, growing, doing the so-called vegetables and one of our party was Staff Sergeant Turnbull, who became the member for the Riverina in the Federal Parliament, he was in very bad shape physically and he had a little

19:30 bitch of a Japanese guard and we used to work, we had a half day once a week on Wednesday afternoon, we worked otherwise the rest of the time. And he fell us in and he said to an interpreter that he was very dissatisfied with our work which had probably fallen off a bit in the last fortnight when we knew we'd won the war.

20:00 And he decided that a half day a week was too much, he'd only give us a half day a fortnight. And when Staff Turnbull heard this news he fainted clean away in the ranks so we used to have to get him and put him, we used to haul home, we used to fill a water cart, we had no source you see, with water from the South China Sea and haul it back, 20 or so men, just like horses even.

20:30 Anyway, we filled up our water cart and we stuck Staff Turnbull in a fainting condition on it and we trudged back to the gaol which we did every day. And as we got to the gaol, who I mentioned earlier with Black Jack and the departure of the Indian army officers (we'd got to know him quite well), he

21:00 came alongside and as it so happened I was in the front, I was the front horse on the offside, and he came running up beside it to me and out of the side of his mouth he said "They know, they know, they know". I remember three words. And apparently what had happened during the morning or some time, there was a padang, that's an

21:30 oval in Malaya, a small oval, where the Japanese used to play games, war-like games and things. A little stage was built and erected and so on and then out came the general and his staff and they could see this, but it was far too far to hear anything, they could see these little figures and every now and again

22:00 everybody fell on his face in one direction, that was facing the Imperial Palace in Tokyo and Peach realised that they were at last getting the drum [detail] on the whole situation you see. Well when that was over they knew they'd surrendered and of course they couldn't believe it because they never had any news at all. They thought that London was about to fall and Paris and everything else.

22:30 And I can't imagine what the effect on them must have been because with no preparation whatever and thinking you were going to be masters of the whole of the south east Pacific. They called the war the Dai Toa Senso, that's the "war of the Greater South East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" in English and of course they all thought they'd won it long ago. And then suddenly,

23:00 suddenly, they hadn't won it. And then Mountbatten arrived with General [William] Slim, who became the Governor General of Australia of course, they both arrived, Slim was in charge of the 18th Army that were going to do the fighting. We'd have all been killed. We were going to apparently be put in that tunnel in Johore and block it all up so we'd all die of asphyxiation. Anyway, Mountbatten got up and

23:30 spoke in the gaol on a packing case there, he stood up and he was a most charismatic figure - amazing really because we didn't like him at all. We called him "Linger Longer Louis" because he took so long to get there. But then Slim was a wonderful speaker, he got up and he said "Well" he said "I thought you'd be interested to know what's happened to General Nagasaki" whatever his name was.

24:00 There was a general murmur of approval. He said "Well, I called on the General yesterday in his cell. And he said "I thought he looked far too fat for a serving officer so I told him he had to run, I gave him orders that he had to run every day and he's running at this moment" he said. And so a great cheer went up from everybody, the thought of this fat Japanese officer being ordered by

24:30 Slim to reduce weight by running. So that was tremendous fun. And then I came back very quickly because Black Jack had got me to organise some articles to be written by the prisoners about the experience and I

25:00 got hold of quite a few writers. I knew quite a lot of them you see through the literary society and I wrote one myself, I wrote two articles myself. And then when the surrender was all over I was flown back, I didn't come back in a transporter I came back in a plane, I was flown back with all this material which was to be delivered at the War Memorial in

25:30 Canberra. And this all happened but unfortunately the whole of the War Memorial was run then by a committee of three, of whom the Prime Minister of Australia was one, and that happened to be Chifley at the time. And he, mistakenly but quite honestly, I'm not suggesting

26:00 any politics in this at all, he said he wouldn't allow it to be published because it would be too unsettling. Now he was quite wrong about that because for years afterwards all prisoners were asked by widows and people, please tell us something about it. They all wanted to know something about Changi and the articles I'd written, one was about

26:30 books and the other about the theatre and all these things and all together, Tom Mitchell, who became

the Attorney General for Victoria, he wrote, he was one of them. And one of Melbourne's leading surgeons, Kennedy Burnside, I got him to write, Russell Braddon became a professional writer, Stan Arneil – and I had a manuscript that thick and this would have been terrific you know to be published

27:00 and it needn't have had to be edited really because, you know, it was readable and everything else. Anyway, that was a very great mistake and I then sold my part commercially because, you know, that was something, but that didn't make any particular impact. But had it all appeared as a commonwealth document, under the stamp of the Commonwealth Government, as an account of what, you know, it would have been a

27:30 marvellous thing and it never saw the light of day. It was a great, great pity because when I was doing the performances of Changi Days, you know, we went to England and everywhere with it, we never had a performance that somebody didn't come up begging for some information, you know. They said "Well, my brother died there and I know nothing about it, can you tell us more". And, you know,

28:00 these nights with the poems, great numbers of people came. We gave a performance out in Burrawang, a one horse town and more than 300 people turned out. Nothing like it has ever been seen in Burrawang before and I think probably will never be seen in Burrawang since.

I'd like to talk a lot more about your release and coming back to

28:30 **Australia after the war ended but just if we can go back a bit to your time in prison. Can you just tell us a little bit about how conditions changed for you once you moved from the camp into the prison?**

Oh, very easily, very easily. Well first of all the gaol was all concrete and steel. There was no wood of any kind in it and if you suddenly find

29:00 yourself living your whole life in a concrete and steel building which nobody has ever done before, quite apart from anything else that is a very severe psychological blow. Then you've got to remember that the cells, because they had these great things in the middle where I think prisoners were supposed to

29:30 sleep it meant that this took up a lot of space and you couldn't, the whole camp couldn't have slept at the same time because there wasn't enough room for everyone to lie down. And they built huts inside the gaol itself in the exercise yards and things like that and we even had to go outside the gaol, the 30th Battalion, they built huts outside the

30:00 gaol, surrounded by you know, embedded with wire and, you know, you really were locked in. And we all suffered from a complaint called "happy feet", it was a vitamin deficiency. The muscles in your feet, or the nerves of course, they would peter out and it meant that you couldn't hold your foot up at all it would

30:30 droop down and it was painful as well. And these unfortunate Happy Feet people they had to be walked around at night, walk, they couldn't sleep or anything and Sid McGray who was a very talented person, he was one of the composers of the music, my wife plays his music on the piano, he had Happy Feet and he

31:00 described it, it was really, really terrible, terrible. He used to try and play chess, somebody had a little chess board, walking around at night. So that was another very bad thing and then of course we all got throat infections, you see, because we were living – and this is funny too – there was a certain Judge Brody, he was an Englishman, he was a judge in Singapore.

31:30 And a pal of mine who was living with us in the library, he was an Englishman too, he knew Brody, he was an Englishman who actually lived in Malaya, and Brody said to him one day "I can't talk". Well, Brody, he said "have you tried – do you know so and so, he's good on

32:00 throats" he said. "Go round to see him". So he told him where his cell was and he went round (Warren is the name of the chap with the bad throat) and he said "I've got a bad throat" and he said this chap didn't react very much and Warren says "Brody tells me you know a lot about throats". Well, the

32:30 next thing he was thrown out of the cell and for god's sake who was he but the hangman in Singapore, this was a great suggestion of Brody's, "Go and see so and so, he knows a lot about throats". But anyway, we had a lot more disease and of course malaria I think it was an 85% infection of malaria and up to that point that was the highest

33:00 percentage of infection of malaria ever recorded in medical history. So you were getting malaria all the time, you know, and even if you went to the concert part there always would be some trembling, ague stricken character, tottering out or being helped out. So there was a very big incidence, a sharp rise in disease of course because we were much, much too

33:30 close to each other.

Can you tell me a bit more about that loss of privacy once you got there?

Well you can't imagine what it was like, you've got to experience it I think really. It's just something we all take for granted because, you know, if you want to be on your own if you go to your own bedroom or

your own bathroom or something it'd be most unlikely that anybody's going to come in. But when you're living with nearly

34:00 6,000 people in a gaol built for 600 people you don't go anywhere. I mean your life becomes, not that there's anything sort of immodest or anything, that's not the point it's just that you're not on your own at all. And you could only be on your mind if you shut your mind up, you see. And some people did this to their great detriment because it sort of, they became morose

34:30 and quite a lot of them died just from nothing towards the end. We had a chap, an Englishman, Paddy Williams, he was a Regimental Sergeant Major, a nice fellow, but a bit too old for the camp I suppose, but he just got sick of the whole thing and he died within about three days. We carted him out with the Union Jack on him with flies all over it, I remember it very well, to bury him.

35:00 And my doctor friend said there was absolutely nothing wrong with Paddy at all he just got sick of being a prisoner of war and pegged out [died]. And as I said earlier the lack of education was a very serious thing. Now when I was first recruited to the Education Centre I was asked to teach a class to read and write.

35:30 And I hadn't the faintest idea how to teach anybody how to read and write, no more probably than you do. Anyway, they said "Oh well, go and have a crack at it". Well there were about 10 people, it might have been more. And I said "How can you possibly not be able to read and write when eduction had been compulsory in New South Wales since 1870?"

36:00 You know, and you can't leave school before you're 12, and I said, "How's it possible". And they said, "Oh well, we wouldn't go to school", they mostly were country people, "We played", whatever they call it neck or something or other, "We took neck and pretended to go to school but never did". And then one of them said to me, "Oh sergeant, look"

36:30 he said "this group that are here are only the ones that admit they can't read and write". He said "There are many, many more who won't admit it". And so that as the extreme bottom but then, as I say, you got the lack of conversation. You see if you've never read any booking, if you've never done anything which working class even to this day don't do, or don't

37:00 really, apart from television they'd know all about that, they don't know anything. Well you can't go on talking about nothing for ever because no new things happen. I mean if we're living here we are now, we pick up the paper tonight or watch television and something dramatic has happened but if there's none of that in existence nothing dramatic happens. Nothing happens. So what do you talk about, well if you're an educated person, you talk about

37:30 books and, you know, Oliver Twist and Mr Micawber and all that sort of thing, there's a whole world. But if you're not educated you're completely foreign to that you see.

Well perhaps you can tell us how you came to write a children's book?

Oh, the Happiness Box, oh, that was quite a different thing. On the first Christmas some very -

38:00 and indeed that reminds me, it might have been 1943, you might be right, I can't remember – you know you asked me them coming back from the railway. I think it was 1942 but it could have been 1943, anyway it doesn't matter. As the fist Christmas approached to our great surprise we found out that in the gaol there were quite a lot of young children, I mean some only 1 and 2 years old up to about

38:30 sixteen. No parents, I mean imagine going from an ordinary home to be thrown into Changi gaol for the term of your natural life. And some bright Australian, he should have been recommended for a decoration I think, hit upon the idea, "Well why don't the troops make toys for the children?" And that was thought to be a great idea and in the army somebody can do anything, anything at

39:00 all. If you want a glass eye somebody is a glass professional, a glass eye maker, yes he'll be in the 26th Battalion, "Have a word with Joe Smith, he'll make a glass eye for you", anything. Well, it was put to the Japanese and they agreed. They mostly disagreed with everything but they were very keen on children so it was agreed that these toys could be made subject to them being displayed and the general of the time

39:30 was to come out to inspect them. O.K. That was very easy thing to agree to so that was agreed to and because we were living in the end of the old officers' mess we had this great big hall, you see, where we used to give the lectures. So it was agreed that as the toys were made they'd be taken into this hall but they were handed in to us. And they were mostly marvellous toys, I mean just amazing. I mean a

40:00 working model of Sydney Harbour and dolls, not just made out of coconut, wonderful, just wonderful toys, many of them moved and all that sort of thing. And towards the end of the thing, I thought, "Well this is marvellous, what can I do?" Well, "Maybe I can write a children's book". And Leslie Greener, my Commanding Officer, who was a terrific artist, he did the illustrations,

40:30 I said to him "If I write a story, Leslie, would you illustrate it?" "Oh yes, it would be fun" he said. So he said "Well I don't know anything about children's books but I know you've got to have an illustration on every page because otherwise they think it's very heavy dull going". So we sort of mapped out the pages and I had an idea of a story, they were animals but they were all people in the gaol you see,

adhered to the prison in Selarang.

41:00 **I might just stop you there, just remember where you are.**

Tape 8

00:33 **The characters in the Happiness Box you say were based on people in Seralang**

Yes, well they were but I said to Greener, “I thought about the characters and I thought of names for them” and one of the principal characters was a frog called Wobbly. And Wobbly got his name because I was determined to have a crack at a ridiculous old Colonel called

01:00 Webster. At once stage, this has got to go on, at one stage, you can’t believe this, I had taken with me a pair of hand-made shoes. Two places in Sydney; one Abbey’s, the other John’s, made hand-made shoes. And I had a pair of hand-made shoes because I used to wear hand-made shoes and I took these with me and got right into Seralang with them. And one day an order came through

01:30 that any other rank like me that had a pair of shoes had to surrender them so that headquarters so that the officers could wear them because it was undignified for the officers to be having clogs if the men had shoes. Well, I refused, I thought “Bugger them, it’s one thing to be ordered about by them but another thing to be handing over my pair of hand-made shoes”. So I was

02:00 paraded before Colonel Webster and he’d been wounded in World War I so he had a limp so we christened him Wobbly, Wobbly Webster. I was paraded before Webster and he said, “He understood this was the situation”. I said “Yes, sir, that’s right”. “Sergeant Griffin” he said to me “you’re nothing but a communist”. Well anyone who knew my political views would regard

02:30 communism as a very odd description for me. So I wouldn’t hand them over but he became Wobbly the frog in the book. And Wobbly had some good characteristics but he was a very dense frog, very slow on the uptake. Anyway he was one of them and I called the little “chi-chak” the little lizard that they have, I called him Winston because they’re bright and they’re hopping about. That was a mistake.

03:00 Anyway, Leslie said he’d do the illustrations so we roughly planned out the pages and made gaps for his drawings and I had a kobe called Bruce Blakeley who had one of the only two typewriters in Changi, we had it for the library you see. Yes, he’d type it out. And we had a book binder because we had to get our books rebound all the time because there were so few of them. Yes, they’d bind it. So I was writing the story,

03:30 Blakeley was typing it in the places where we’d left the gaps and then Greener was doing the illustrations which were charming in his original version. Anyway, we got it finished in no time, in less than two days it was all done, bound up into a nice little book which is now in the State Library in Sydney. And then it went to the exhibition you see, because of the General, and as good luck would have it my friend Phil Head who I used to play

04:00 golf with in KL, I told you about, he was a very senior officer in the Division, DAAQMG [Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter Master General] it was called, and it was he who was taking the Japanese general through the exhibition. Anyway, the General arrived apparently and was very pleased delighted with everything with these children’s toys and he even picked some of them you know. And suddenly the whole atmosphere

04:30 changed, the way it did with the Japanese, when he saw my book and Phil told me after the war he absolutely flew into an absolute rage, a seething sort of passionate rage and the reason why because there’d been no permission for written material to go into the gaol, it could obviously be a code that we were trying to communicate you see. So he ordered

05:00 that it be destroyed immediately and Phil Head whipped it from its position and he was wearing a shirt because the General was present (we had no shirts ordinarily of course) and he said he would do this so he put it down his shirt and the General, in a moment or two, he was changed completely in the way they do, it’s either one thing or the other and I suppose he’d forgotten all about it.

05:30 Anyway, I was unaware of all this and I thought the book had gone down with the toys to the gaol for Christmas. And the bloody Japanese, you could hardly believe this, because we’ve met one of the children who was in the gaol, we’ve met her, she now lives in Australia and she remembers it very well and the Japanese actually said that they’d made they toys, they didn’t even give us the

06:00 credit. I thought that’s pretty mean spirited. Anyway, after the surrender, what Phil Head had done is he’d put it with a lot of AIF records which were being buried all the time in Seralang, you see there was nowhere in the gaol to bury them but this was before we were in the gaol we had the big area. And they knew exactly, they had proper surveyors of course, they knew precisely where they were

06:30 and he put it in there and after the war it was dug up, before we’d even left Changi, straight away. And I got it back, amazement. And all that had happened was that the illustrations had been under pressure

in this container, they'd transferred themselves to the opposite page so it's full of pictures, there's twice as many pictures as there should be. Anyway, so then when

07:00 Mountbatten came, he came to inspect the camp and before he came a Major in a maroon beret came up and we had with us a chap called Paul Miller, who was a lance corporal in the British Army, and they suddenly recognised each other. And this strange stranger in the

07:30 beret said "Paul Miller" and Paul said "Yes, you're Tom Dryberg". And he said "Yes, that's right". So Dryberg said, he became Lord Dryberg, he was a Labor Peer in England, he said to Paul, "what are you doing here?" Paul said "It's pretty obvious I'm doing here, what the hell are you doing here?" "Well" he said "I'm supremo's press officer" – supremo, Mountbatten called himself supremo.

08:00 And so he said, "You haven't met supremo I suppose?" "No, no". And he said "When he comes round I'll introduce you to him". Anyway in due course supremo arrived and we were presented and Paul Miller was presented, he was a Protestant monk in England if you please, Paul Miller. Well, I don't know what a Protestant monk is but that's what he

08:30 was. Anyway, Dryberg had told Mountbatten about the book you see because it became quite a celebrated thing and Mountbatten said "Did one of you fellows write the children's book?" And I said "Yes, sir, I did". He said "Could I see it?" And I said "Certainly". So I produced it and he sort of ran through it and

09:00 he said "By Jove, this is a curio" or something. He said "I think the King would be most interesting to see this, would you have any objection to me taking it to Buckingham Palace?" Well I had every objection of course because at least my wife would have had first look at it. So I was faced with a difficult diplomatic situation. Anyway, I said "Well look, sir, I have got a wife" and he said "Oh, that's quite understood". So that's the only reason that the Happiness

09:30 Book came back and was printed by Harraps for the first time as a real book, this second printing has done very well they've sold thousands, they're still selling them. But what was interesting was this, when Mountbatten came out to Sydney years and years later, he was staying at Kirribilli House – politicians hadn't taken it over by then and we were asked to afternoon tea, Jean and I,

10:00 at Kirribilli House and he still remember the Happiness Box and I thought, well that's pretty good because he'd been Viceroy of India, you know, and they'd had the mutiny over giving them independence too soon and 3 million Indians had been killed and obviously somebody had prompted him but it was very good staff work wasn't it? So then, that's the story of

10:30 it but it did very well, there had never been a thing called Children's Book Week before so it was put it, it won commendation or a prize and I had it put in the public library where it now is of course so it can be preserved because of the atmosphere and everything but I've been produced to see it every now and again.

Aren't there any other hidden meanings in the Happiness Box

11:00 **who does the monkey represent?**

Well he was my friend Newsom, as I was saying who's just had the stroke who's sitting up here, speechless poor old thing, dreadful. Yes, he was one and then we had a marvellous pharmacist from Victoria called McDonald, he was a mine of information. No question could be asked of any kind

11:30 that Old Mac (he's a different Old Mac from the other Old Mac) couldn't answer. So I made him the Bee that solved the problem, that was Mac. And then we had a very comical solicitor from Melbourne called Bob Dick, who was an odd cove all together, so I made him the turtle where you had to hit on his back to wake him up to say something. That was Bob Dick.

12:00 There was another little chap that was always busying himself about and I can't remember his name but he was Winston and of course Winston wasn't a very popular name with the Japanese in those days either. But the blurb is incorrect, the blurb says that they read it and saw Winston, of course they couldn't read a word of English, that's not so but it makes a good story but all the rest of the blurb is correct.

What about Flappy the Bird King?

12:30 Indeed I should he was the General Manager of Mount Morgan Mines Limited.

Can you explain the character?

Yes, I can. He was one of the VOs, he was a voyage only officer, he'd lost one of his arms in World War I and he was drafted to come over on the transport but his ship never sailed back so he was there. I think it was his right arm and he had to sort of carry things on it and we called him Flappy because it was like a bird you see and I made him into a bird.

13:00 And it was very sad really, it was very sad because when the war was all over and he went back, he went back to Mount Morgan Mines, and in all the mine buildings the stairs were all made of steel and you can't believe it, he flipped and fell and his amputated arm pierced his chest and killed him. Terrible

having gone all through Changi and that to

13:30 happen wasn't it? He had a very nice wife, much younger than he was, and I kept in touch with her for a while too. But they were the main characters and Leslie Greener had great fun out of old Wobbly and one of the illustrations in the book you'll see that old Wobbly's

14:00 dug up the box, the Happiness Box you see, and he's dug it all up and it's out of the ground and he then suddenly starts to wonder what it is. There's a picture of him putting his hand up on his head and Leslie got great fun out of that because that was an indication that Wobbly's intellectual prowess didn't operate very rapidly.

14:30 And Leslie himself is a fascinating person, you could go on about him for hours but he became the Director General of Education in Tasmania. He married his first wife, she died, drank herself to death, and he married a Chinese lady, whom I've never met, but in the great fires in Hobart the whole place was nearly burned down, his house was burned and he lost everything – all the manuscripts, all his paintings, every single

15:00 thing. And he would have had a lot of interesting memorabilia but I've still got that little picture when he's ... to his birthday party on February 13th. "Eats" that was rather an odd thing to put because no one ate anything, there were no eats of any kind of course.

Can you explain how important he was in the AIF education centre?

Well he was terribly important to me. He was a Sandhurst graduate to start with

15:30 he got bored with the Army. His father was in the famous Siege of Mafeking in the Boer War, he was also a regular officer. And Leslie got sick of the Army and decided to leave the Army and England and came out to New Zealand. In the South Island of New Zealand he got a job as a telegraph linesman and he said it was so cold sometimes in the woods in the

16:00 South Island that they had to leave their gloves hanging on the wire because they were frozen on, the only way was to take their hands out of the gloves and leave the gloves frozen on the top. Anyway, New Zealand had a distinguished artist who Leslie met and married and they both went to live on a houseboat in Cairo. Leslie spoke French

16:30 and he taught English (because most people in Cairo spoke Gyppo [Egyptian] and French you see). And she was painting and it was a fearful tragedy – they were up on top of one of the buildings in Cairo which are like boxes, you know, there's no protection or anything and she put her little stool backwards and fell off the building and was killed of course, fell down below and she was killed.

17:00 And he got a sack and sewed her body into it and got stones and rowed out into the Nile and dropped it in, extraordinary chap.

What did he do in Changi?

Well, when he left the Army first of all he had this New Zealand affair then she died. He then went back to England and the New Zealand government was going to have a showing of his deceased wife's paintings, because she had then

17:30 died you see. And they asked him would he come out and hang them and of course he said he would and on the way out he met his second wife, who was a failure really all together, and her name was Mary but he hated Mary so he gave her an Egyptian name, Nasla she was always called. Anyway, he told me, we were on the ship one day, and she would

18:00 come out sort of with an elderly female, she was her sort of minder you see and Leslie had taken a fancy to Nasla and said, "What about us getting married? And she said, she was a strange person too, "I'll only marry someone who has a white elephant". He said, "That's all right, I've got a white elephant down in the cabin". And down he went and brought it up, and he had it on a little string, well they were married on the strength

18:30 strength of it. And she went and arranged the exhibition and everything else and then they came back to Sydney and one of the editors of Pix which is a pictorial magazine, published by The Sun in those days – in fact it was the first pictorial magazine in New South Wales or probably in Australia I think, it's all photographs. But you see, because he'd been to Sandhurst and everything, he was on a

19:00 reserve so the very minute the war started of course he had to either go back to England or they gave him a dispensation and he enlisted here as a captain and that's how he got into the 8th Division, that was the way of it.

He was known as The Dean?

Well called him The Dean, The Dean of the Faculty of Education and he loved that, he thought that was the

19:30 greatest fun. We always called him The Dean and indeed in an invitation it would say "The Dean is having a party" and we called him The Dean, it was all a joke of course.

Did you have any nicknames in your military career?

Well I was always called, Housey was the great game, and I was called Legs Eleven because I was very thin. Legs Eleven Sergeant Griffin and they used to call me Eleven

20:00 even. That was the only one but in the Army proper there's not much time or space for nicknames because if people use them impertinently well you put them on a charge sheet you see. So in the prison camp it was a bit different because we lived as ordinary human beings really – no rank would worry us at all. Not for someone like Black Jack but you know with the other officers some of them were at school with so

20:30 of course we couldn't be going round calling them "sir" and saluting them all the time. But I said I think before when we were talking earlier that the Brits didn't like it at all, the English officers we had, one of my greatest friends was the Honourable R.P. De Gray, now he was the brother of Lord Walsingham, now the Walsinghams came over with William the Conqueror and have been on the same property ever since, in Norfolk, you know,

21:00 that's from 1066 to 2003, that's a fair tenure. And we became very great friends and in fact he wrote some of the poems in the book and when I went to England I used to go and stay with him in a place called Merton was the family seat. And it was a real family seat, I mean five or six hundred years they'd been on it.

21:30 Well some of the other officers, some of the English officers we got to know because the Australians were so stuck up they wouldn't have anything to do with other ranks but particularly the British aristocrats, that was quite a different story all together.

You mention the Poms, the library and education centre became a focus for poetry and poets. Can you explain how the poets came together and what happened with the poems?

They came together because I thought in the early days of staging a literary

22:00 competition and I put this to Leslie Greener and he said he'd have to put it to Black Jack for permission, of course, and permission was granted. And we even wanted Black Jack, we were going to give certificates for prizes, and we wanted Black Jack to sign these certificates which he agreed to do. And I've still got one but not signed by Black Jack. They were done by the principal timpani player in the Sydney Symphony

22:30 Orchestra a kobe called Fred Brightfield. He was very good with a pen and in those days we still had some ink - there was no ink after it so it was a real work of art these certificates and he did about six of them I think. And because of the library all sorts of people came, Brits and everything, before they weren't segregated right at the start, they were later. But because of that

23:00 they got to know us quite well and when we had the literary competition we put a sign up in the window of the library saying, you see, that this was going to be held and there were various classes, a poem, a short story and an article, an essay I think it was, so that attracted quite a lot of people that we would otherwise never have met. I mean the famous Ronald Searle for example that's how we got to know

23:30 him. He didn't enter anything because he was an artist not a writer but we got into this sort of camp of these people and they then, having judged the articles, and Stan Arneil was one of the prize winners and Russell Braddon was another – I forget who we gave the poetry too. Leslie Greener and I judged it you see. Well

24:00 then I hit upon the idea well we've got all these people together why don't we keep it going in some sort of a way. Well we tried to but the Burma Railway and all that and that sort of wrecked it until all that were left came back and we went into the gaol and I revived the whole thing. We were all together then, you see, there was no going across in the ferry with Indians sticking bayonets into people's

24:30 behinds or anything. And it became very successful, we had regular meetings I think once a month when the poets particularly they would submit a poem or a verse or whatever it was and they could either read it themselves, or if they found that a bit embarrassing and it was a bit embarrassing for an amateur to be reading his work

25:00 to, you know, to professional listeners, so we would read it if they wanted it done, one of us would read it. And we had quite a little coterie of interesting, educated people you see. And I think I mentioned this earlier, Leslie Greener having known Catherine Mansfield and Middleton Murray her husband I mean they were at the very pinnacle of literary life in England of course that

25:30 group, the Bloomsbury Group I think they called them, with the Mitfords and, you know, really top line thing and so I got to know indirectly these people because I had no contact then in London because I got to know London very well later on. And that sort of established a fraternity really.

The poetry you say was an education outlet. You wrote some poems yourself. How much for you was it also an emotional outlet to express how you felt?

26:00 Oh well, it was very important because in the book I wrote, – a prisoner's poem the theme is that the only people who escaped form Changi were the people who made an intellectual escape, particularly

the poets, because we suddenly were able to observe our previous life in extremely acute outline. In a way

26:30 you can't remember now, any more than you can remember, it's not a question of being old it's just there's too much distraction in modern life to be having the clearest possible recollection. But when you're a prisoner of war, for example, there's practically nothing to distract you because if you're working that's so unrelated to what's going on in your head, you're shovelling earth or something,

27:00 but you have this very strange thing happen, and I wasn't the only one by any means, you suddenly had a recollection of something that had happened to you – not necessarily an extraordinary thing, you know – I had one, I wrote I think the best poem I've every written. It's in that book, it's called The Excursion, about the little boy that was taken by his uncle to the beach.

27:30 And even sitting here in this room now it's absolutely clear to me, I'm not at all a sort of reflective person, it's exactly, I can see the scene, the whole thing, the beach which was sort of up towards the northern end of Palm Beach which in those days was virtually uninhabited of course, nothing like it is now. And the wind was blowing and there's a funny

28:00 grass that grows there, a grey-looking salt-encrusted grass, and I could write about that exactly as though I was standing on the beach at that moment and did so. And others had the same experience, it was something – you escaped on what I said were the wings of poetic imagination and you only had that because there were no distractions, no intellectual

28:30 distractions whatsoever. You know, nobody was getting sick, no children were getting an appendix, nothing was happening at all, not a thing. Nothing was happening in the world either because we didn't know what – the world had gone. So you were completely thrown up to your own resources.

How much was hunger a distraction?

Oh, that was terrible, that was terrible. In the early days that was

29:00 absolutely frightful. You know, you ate anything at all, I even used to eat bits of army blanket, you know, it was dreadful. But as time went on the body, you know, it's a wonderful organism we have here, it sort of accommodates itself. Firstly, you extract every particle of food, when you're like that, you know, people used to be constipated

29:30 I remember for weeks at a time but it was no problem because there was practically no waste matter because every jolly thing, every particle of the rice had been absorbed by the body, you needed it to stay alive, that sort of thing. And your hunger in the earlier days was absolutely overwhelming I mean you couldn't have been writing poetry or doing anything. But we got used to that, we

30:00 sort of wore off that. Just as you see about these desperate people in Africa, you wonder how they stay alive, well I know how they stay alive because they somehow get used to it. Somehow get used to it. But in the early days that's right, there was no question of literary societies and no one had any time for reflection really, you were reflecting on one thing only and that was food.

30:30 I used to think about scrambled egg. I used to think that I'd love to have so much scrambled egg that I couldn't finish it you know, couldn't finish it. And other people had the same sort of thing about other dishes that they liked and this friend of mine, Tony Newsom, who they say is now paralysed poor old thing, he was always talking

31:00 about food. And we christened him Woolton because Lord Woolton in England was Minister for Food during the war and I call him Woolton still. And Alexander Downer calls him Woolton, they call him Uncle Woolton. And still up here I talk about Woolton of course people have no idea who the hell I'm talking about. But he was another one and he didn't like rice so he had a dreadful four

31:30 years and I liked rice and still I like rice but he couldn't stand rice and there was nothing else. As time wore on the rice ration varied, we got up to as much as 14 ounces a day at one period and that mightn't seem much rice but it's amazing. We did hard physical work, you know, building the aerodrome, two of us used to have to fill these steel trolleys on

32:00 rails and I think we used to shovel something like three or four tonnes of sand a day for two people. I may be over exaggerating a bit but a hell of a lot and you could do that on a starvation diet but if you'd just been taken prisoner of course you'd die you couldn't possibly do it but you adapt to it.

What was the worst

32:30 **time for you as a prisoner of war?**

Oh the worst time was the start of it because it was just dreadful and everything had just gone you see and you hadn't learned to be a prisoner either, you hadn't learned the ropes. And that was the worst time and even the bad things that happened, like the barrack square incident, which used to be called the Black Hole of Changi [after the Black Hole of Calcutta, an infamous British prison incident in India] when we were all put in there, you know,

33:00 and started to die from the shock and they took the chaps out of the hospital and shot them and everything. Even that wasn't as bad as the first few weeks. The first few weeks were desperate, really desperate, dreadful. But of course the people on the railway, the whole of that experience, you know, they can hardly even bear recollecting it but that was for me and I won't say it got better

33:30 all the time it didn't sort of change once you got into the groove. When you were ill it was very trying – with malaria for example, they were sweating on sort of rags and no quinine of course, nothing, you felt absolutely ghastly while the attack was on, you know, which would last 24 hours or so and afterwards

34:00 it would leave you terribly weak. That was bad, too, very bad. When I had dysentery that was in the early days, that was appalling. But once you sort of got over that and you weren't on the railway it was tolerable. And it was character forming, I've said this many times that I can out of Changi an infinitely better man that I went in there's no question about that. I'd

34:30 lived with myself for a long time under pretty extreme conditions and come through at the other end and, you know, you learn a great deal about yourself and about other people too. I mean I can get on with anybody now, I can joke with a gardener and all that sort of thing because, you know, because I've had a tougher life than he has and he knows it too. And it's quite different, quite different, I can be,

35:00 even if I'm perhaps rather condescending they're quite happy with that because "Oh, you know, he's had a terrible time" and so on and so on. The taxi drivers (I live in taxis, I can't drive any more, I live in taxis) and well most of them, well I get on very well with all of them, I can talk to anybody now.

After you'd spent 3 years locked away adapting to the life you'd been living what was it like to suddenly be

35:30 **released, you wrote a poem about it?**

Yes I did, I did, I wrote The Guns of Peace. Well, it was true, much less so with me because I was a university graduate, an educated person and so on, and it meant I was going back to a life with which I was quite familiar but for these wretched people who had nothing – I don't know whether I mentioned it in the book I think

36:00 I do but there was this chap that said to me "Oh Serg, I'm quite happy here, things will be pretty rough for me back home". Well that really is a pretty pitiable thing to be saying after nearly four years in a prison camp that he was happy there. But he'd never had any friends before you see and he was going home to none.

I think it is in the book. Could you tell the story for the archive? What was this chap's situation?

I don't know but the worst -

36:30 the real one for the archive, the most tragic of all, when we had been prisoners for about I don't know 14 or 15 months, through the Red Cross we were told we could write a card, one card home, and it could only be 30 words including the address and if you messed up your card you didn't get another one. So it became very important as far as we could see that the fellows didn't

37:00 waste their cards and we put up, in the library, we put up a pro forma card saying "This is Robert Smith" you know, "23 Gallipoli Avenue, Monee Ponds, Victoria" for example though hadn't heard of the Dame [?] in those days. And then on the other side was "Dear Mum" something,

37:30 something, something and so on. And Russell Braddon won the prize, he did a brilliant card he said "Dear Mum, Guess who's a prisoner of war? Love Russell". It was beautiful because she would know it wasn't fake, she would know it was the genuine article, she would know that he was cheerful, amusing, I thought that was a master stroke using "Who's a prisoner war". And no Jap could think of it, it had to be genuine, you'd have to know the English

38:00 language extremely well before you knew what it meant you see. Well on the other side we had this card, righto, and this was a great help to people and they would come in and peer very closely at it and sort of count the words up, you know, because they didn't want to – too many words, out. Well, the time for collecting the cards and they were to be handed in, they were going to a place called Lorenzo Marcs [?] which was a

38:30 Portuguese position in Africa somewhere I think it was on the east coast of Africa. Well, there was a charitable men's organisation, what do they call it now, I should know, they're marvellous people, they were the only charitable organisation that stayed behind. The Red Cross cleared out, they all cleared out

39:00 but the YMCA, yes, the YMCA, the Young Men's Christian Association – they were mainly Methodists and Baptists and so on but very good people, they stayed behind. And they were enlisted to do all sorts of things and one of them was to collect these cards you see. And they collected whatever the number were and they sort

39:30 didn't exactly censor them but looked at them to see if they were O.K. you see. And quite a number of them were addressed to a fictitious address, "Mrs Smith, 32 Gallipoli Avenue, Moonee Ponds". That was

something we never thought about you see particularly these people who couldn't read or write you see they'd just copied it out. Well, they were absolutely,

40:00 they were sort of horrified, they thought these chaps had made a mistake and George McNeilly, who was the senior one of them through music, which was an interest of mine, and they went to one of these chaps and he said "No, no, he had no one to write to and he didn't want to admit that to his troops, they were all writing cards", so he wrote that card.

40:30 It's dreadful isn't it, dreadful, dreadful. To think that there's not a single person that he knew that he could even write a card to. I think that's the single most horrifying event I think of the whole outfit really. But otherwise, you know, otherwise they were a cheerful lot of people definitely.

41:00 And you had to stay in good health otherwise of course it was hell. But if you did it was quite tolerable really.

We'll just stop there and take a break.

Tape 9

00:38 **David, can you just tell me how your wife and you I guess coped, you'd only just been married before you went off to war, can you tell me how she coped?**

Well of course we'd known each other for a long, long time, it wasn't as though we'd just met at a dance and got married or something, that's true. She's a very

01:00 determined person and she wrote, when we were prisoners of war or even before I suppose, she wrote every day and she followed up every possible thing she could. I mean she wrote to the Vatican and you know letters were supposed to be going through Russia and Lorenzo Marcs and a great many of the wives they said "Oh no, we're not writing,, they'll never get the letters". And

01:30 she wouldn't accept that she just wrote, and wrote and wrote and wrote. And I only got a small percentage of the letters but I got more than anybody else because they were in such enormous quantity. And that was her – she did a sterling job there, she became a VA, that's a Voluntary Aid worker. And she was at a hotel in Leura called The Ritz where wounded soldiers were looked

02:00 after and sent back to the war again - sort of a, not exactly a nurse, but sort of half way kind of thing.

And what would she say in her letters to you?

Oh she'd just talk about herself and my parents and you know as much news as she could get in. They weren't pages and pages every day but they were a proper sort of thing.

02:30 And I think they were sort of in, we used to have air letters in those days which you sent over. But just sort of information, you know, I'd be tremendously interested to receive because I'd received nothing at all for 15 months so they tended to be a bit out of date. But she went back to lie with her father and they had a lovely property on the golf links at Leura, St Anne's and when I disappeared

03:00 she went back to live there. And the mail used to be delivered in Leura by the postie on a horse, Mr Booth, and Mr Booth was a very grim character. He wore a felt hat with PMG [Post Master General] written on the front of it and he had this horse that sort of really knew its way round Leura, and one day, St. Anne's was the name of her father's place. It was a

03:30 lovely place, a really lovely place, with a long, long drive and one day she heard postie blowing his whistle very loudly and very continuously. And that was very unlike Mr Booth because he just used to give it one little tiny blow and then his horse would wander off with him on it. Anyway, she actually ran down the drive of St Anne's and finally got to the gate and there was Mr Booth on his horse

04:00 with a card in his hand you see. And he handed it to her and said this was from me, you see, and of course that was a tremendous experience, and he'd had a Colonel Connor Harvey who was a leading thoracic surgeon in Sydney, we knew them very well, his wife got one, she was also in Leura

04:30 and one or two other people. And Jean said to him "Oh, Mr Booth, did you have one", I forget what his son's name was. "No, no" he said "No, no. He'd died, the sad thing was that Booth's own son had died and of course he had no idea whether he'd died or not. And then, of course, the cards took forever to get back and when I came

05:00 back and Jean had found a flat in Macleay Street and I was up at St Anne's this day and down I went to receive a letter and I received my other card I'd written myself, you know, goodness knows how long, maybe nine months before, had arrived. And somewhere, I'm not at all sure in the library

05:30 in the dining room we've got it, we've got a copy of it which is a strange thing.

I'm wondering how important were your letters in the prison, when you were in Changi?

Oh tremendously, tremendously important I mean they gave you at least the world started to reappear a bit too. But of course

06:00 we really didn't think we'd ever, the Japs would ever let us out you know so it was wonderful to know because it was just a sheer fluke, we were all to be executed in about 10 days before the atomic bomb went off as I told you before. So it was wonderful to know that, you know, it was not as though, you know,

06:30 wish you were here or anything like that, it was a bit agonising in a way. But it was much better to hear than not to hear, very much better.

I'm wondering if the letters contributed or helped your sense of hope?

Not at all, no, not at all because well, the odds against us ever going home were

07:00 hundreds of thousands to one against and I didn't delude myself. Naturally one hoped it would happen but I never thought it would and anybody who really faced up to the situation couldn't have thought it would either because in no way you could dream up an atomic bomb and all and the thing was so extraordinary and events were so extraordinary and they were the only way

07:30 that it could have happened. As soon as Mountbatten had landed, because there's no way the Japanese were going to have 15,000 potential fifth columnists [clandestine agents] sitting on Singapore island, no way at all. According to that chap on Compass they were digging the tunnels in Johore, we were all going to be put in these tunnels and they were going to seal them up which is quite

08:00 plausible, I'm not a bit surprised to hear that, that's much easier than shooting people because you've got to do something with the bodies. If you make the bodies transport themselves, you know, to the tunnel of execution that's a much more sensible way of doing it. I have no doubt that that would be - he was one of the diggers of the tunnel you may remember and the Japanese told them that's what was going to happen.

08:30 They were going in and we were coming up from Changi as well so I mean no greater miracle has every happened to anybody than happened to all the survivors of Changi at the end.

You've talked a lot today about how you sought I guess intellectual escape but I'm wondering if you ever contemplated a real physical escape?

No, no it was out of the question. You

09:00 see nobody can make himself look like a Japanese or like a Chinaman and the local population very largely were pro Japanese as well. They were not all pro Japanese but there was a big pro Japanese element. When we went into Changi the streets were lined with Malays and Chinese waving Japanese flags, not waving Union Jacks or anything else.

09:30 And it was absolutely impossible because we were thousands of miles behind the line, you know, anyone could go into Singapore you'd probably be executed or shot by the Japanese, there'd be a hundred ways you could do that but what the hell did you do next, nothing, you see. There was nowhere to go, absolutely nowhere to go at all. So escaping wasn't on but funnily enough in the very early days some people when they were

10:00 fighting, actually fighting the Battle of Singapore island, they were cut off and if you please they set out by boat for India and got there what's more because some of our Indian Army officers got cards from them saying "Good luck, fellows" you know, "We're in Rangoon" or somewhere else. But for the overwhelming

10:30 majority that simply wasn't feasible at all, there was no escape. There was an intellectual escape only, there was no physical escape. A few people attempted it I suppose but I mean they either died or were killed or something because it was completely pointless. It was too far away, if you fly to Singapore as you know by 747 it takes you nearly,

11:00 it takes just on 8 hours to get there so it's a bloody long way to go by boat. No, escaping wasn't on, that's why we weren't even guarded by the Japanese there was no point in doing so. You know, we'd have just died of starvation or anything else I mean the best thing to do you didn't exactly get three square meals a day but at least you got enough food to survive on.

You've

11:30 **already talked about the surrender and that you flew back to Australia. Perhaps now you can tell us how you coped at first in the early days of your release?**

Yes, I was ill again when I got back, the same old trouble which I hadn't had at all in Changi fortunately. I was taken out to I think 114th General Hospital at Concord which was on a lovely property

12:00 formerly owned by Dame Edith Walker. And indeed I'd been out there playing tennis my previous visit

but the next visit was a patient in a vast military hospital which became known as Concord Hospital and stayed there for a long while – I suppose it's still a hospital but it's no longer I think a military hospital. And I couldn't get out. There I was in the

12:30 hospital and everyone, all the troops, thought I was out of my mind, "Mate, what the hell do you want to leave here for. You'll never cop it as well as this, why do you want to get out?" Well, I wanted to tell them, "I'm a barrister and I might go broke if I don't get out". "Oh, you're out of your mind they'd say". Well one day I was lying in bed and I saw a great splash of red, you know all the

13:00 red tabs and I suddenly recognised, saw the face, he was the leading brain surgeon, one of the leading brain surgeons in Sydney, his name was Douglas Miller, he became Sir Douglas Miller. And I suddenly thought, I think that's Douglas Miller so I said to one of the nurses "Would that by any chance be Douglas Miller?" (he wasn't Sir Douglas then). They said "Yes" (I think he was a

13:30 major general or brigadier or something). "Oh, yes, that's Brigadier Miller". Well I said "Could you bring yourself to tell Brigadier Miller that there's a soldier called David Griffin in the hospital and he'd very much like to see him". Well, she was terrified but she said "I'll do my best". Well sure enough Douglas turned up and I said "Douglas, for god's sake get me out of here". And he did otherwise I think I might have

14:00 been there to this day. And I got back into civilian life through knowing Douglas Miller. I suppose I would have been discharged eventually but they wouldn't have been in any hurry about it. And then I went back to my office, Jacques and Stephens it was then it's now called Malleson Stephens Jacques.

And what type of I guess, I'm wondering if you had any lingering affects from being in Changi?

I don't think so,

14:30 no, no. I just went back to my desk as a solicitor. I wasn't admitted then but I qualified but I want to the war instead you see. And then very, very soon I hadn't been, I don't think I'd been there a week, when the telephone rang and a chap called Ted St. John was talking to me and I knew him, he became famous over the Voyager

15:00 case where, you know the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne cut the [HMAS] Voyager in half and killed, drowned 88 of the crew people and he raised the matter in Parliament and blew the top off the whole thing, accused the captain of the Voyager of being an alcoholic and oh dear or dear, a dreadful to do it was. But he said "Look, David, I've been a High Court associate for some time and I'm leaving, I'm

15:30 going to the bar now and I was wondering if you'd be interested in taking my place". And I said "I'd be most interested". So he said "Well, Sir Dudley Williams is my judge and he's very keen on returned soldiers, he went to World War I himself and won the Military Cross so I'm sure if you get on with him he'd be only too pleased". So I then went to the High Court and I had a marvellous time for about 14 months. On the Court, we had to travel around

16:00 Australia, there was no, you know, that lovely High Court in Canberra of course that was possibly only an idea then. And I had a marvellous time at the Court, very valuable for me and then finally I left the Court and went to the bar.

I'm just wondering who you might have talked to about your experiences as a POW. Did you talk to your wife?

16:30 Oh, anyone who was interested but they weren't interested. The public only started becoming interested in us when they had that, about 5 years ago, Australia Remembers, it was a thing organised by the Commonwealth Government and it was the first time any interest was shown in us at all. Since then there's been a lot of interest shown but there was none at all. People weren't interested in the 8th Division or

17:00 anything they didn't want to hear about it and, you know, a bit like these unfortunate people who were in Vietnam, you know, they were even booing them in the street. That's absolutely appalling they were conscripted to go to Vietnam and hundreds of them died or were killed and the survivors even got booed in the street. We didn't get booed in the street but we were sort of ignored. I used to march on Anzac Day

17:30 and nothing would happen much. There used to be great cheers for the 6th Division and so on and we would come along, rather a bedraggled looking set of people of course, and we got some polite applause and then it all started to change. After the Australian Remembers event which was I suppose the 50 years or marking something or other, the whole thing changed very much and on the

18:00 march, for example, people would run out from the crowd and hug you and all sorts of things. We often used to stop, when we were marching up George Street, there was often a hitch outside one of the stores there where the Legacy Widows, these are ladies whose sons and husbands were killed in the war, they would be sitting in chairs – and twice our march

18:30 halted there and they left their chairs and came running out and putting bits of cake and everything, it was very exciting, a complete change took place in the public mind. They became suddenly very

interested in us, people would ring up and ask me for interviews, the sort of thing I'm doing now – that would never have been done 20 years ago. No organisation would have been

19:00 sufficiently interested to say, "Well we'll go and talk to him he'll have something interesting to say"", it wouldn't have happened and didn't happen either.

When you first returned to Australia, I'm wondering whether you were able to share your POW experiences with your wife?

Yes, very much so. Yes, yes, yes, certainly, that was no problem. That was no problem I had no hang ups or all those things, no I had no

19:30 time for all that kind of thing at all, absolutely none. It was just an episode and the episode was finished and I got on with my life. You know, you had to make up for a lot of lost time because you see a lot of my contemporaries had a five year start on me, the ones that didn't go to the war, and law is a very competitive profession, you know, you've really got to, you're competing with each other all the time. So the sooner I got started, the happier

20:00 I was of course and then I gradually went into this big firm and then I gradually moved into a commercial zone which I had had in mind to do all the time, you see, and I was able to, I became Lord Mayor of Sydney and then I was the Executive Chairman of a company called Nabalco and we built the aluminium plot in Gove which is still there and which is

20:30 the foundation of the Northern Territory's income really because until we started that they had no income at all except from the unfortunate Australian tax payer. So I've had a very exciting life, I became a sort of professional company director and I was on all sorts of boards, one I particularly enjoyed was John Fairfax Limited, when it was owned by the Fairfax's. It was quite a different

21:00 different thing to what it is now, it was a public company, but the Fairfaxes controlled it and that was very exciting really. If you were on the board of a major, one of the world's oldest and most celebrated newspapers you really have a pretty good idea of what's going on I can tell you.

Yes, you've had a very distinguished career.

Well I've had a lot of good luck that way. You become fashionable, you know,

21:30 you do.

I'm just wondering if you suffered any nightmares or any kind of?

None whatever, in fact, absolutely none. I dream very seldom anyway, very seldom, although a little bit lately I've dreamed a bit and I dream the same sort of dream over and over again and it's got nothing whatever to do with Changi or anything even remotely connected with it. I dream that I'm always missing an international plane

22:00 because I can't find my luggage because I can't remember what hotel I was in - but no, absolutely none as far as I was concerned. I had a lot to do with television, I got on to a marvellous television program called "Any Questions" which I was on for twelve years and then I used to act before the war at Bryant's as well. I was always fond of the stage and the presentation of things

22:30 and I was able to keep a lot of that going and I helped to found the first recorded music society in New South Wales, I'm very interested in music. Well, what I have adopted, and I nearly always say yes to everything, not no, because if you say no you sort of extinguish everything. If you say

23:00 yes then a prospect opens up – sometimes it's not a very satisfactory prospect but mostly it is and if people ask me to do anything I would tend to say yes, and still do, tend to say yes.

I'm just wondering with all the years of reflection and hindsight when you look back what do you think stands out as your strongest memory of your war-time?

Oh, with the war? I suppose

23:30 my strongest memory of the war is that I wasn't able to perform my part of the bargain really. I came into my own as a prisoner – I was nothing as a soldier. Partly because I hadn't any particular rank, I mean I was a sergeant, and partly because I wasn't able to perform because of my illness as I would like to

24:00 perform. So I was a wash-out as a soldier really but I was not a wash-out as a prisoner, I think I really made a contribution there and I know I have because even today, mostly they've died, but I run into a prisoner and more often than not I don't know them at all, they've come to my lectures and they've got to know me far more than I know them and they say "Wonderful to see you

24:30 sergeant". Wives say "Oh, my husband died a couple of years ago and he was so grateful to you". And I mean that happens, I won't say it happens every day of course it doesn't but it happens quite a lot. And that's very nice to hear because at least I was able to make some contribution to the whole outfit, certainly not as a cobber [friend] but I did as a prisoner I think, I do

25:00 think so.

And what do you think was the key?

Well the key to anything is that first of all you have to have the right gene, you have to have the right mind I suppose, you've got to have the right opportunity and you've got to have some judgements and you've got to take risks, you've got to take risks. You se when I left the bar -

I'm just talking about your war-time?

Oh, I see.

25:30 Well I think, I just think being, you know, being myself and being a friendly type who can amuse people, that's just as Noel Coward said "a talent to amuse", I have a talent to amuse and that's a wonderful talent to have. You know, I've done a great deal of public speaking, I mean I've got 300 speeches they wanted to publish and I had the greatest pleasure and I was sitting at

26:00 dinner and I knew these people were expecting a dull, boring speech and I'm going to amaze them and I mostly did. And that was really exciting and satisfying too. And you can do that in all sorts of ways but that's my particular way, writing, writing is my talent really.

You mentioned

26:30 **earlier in the day that you've been back to visit?**

I'm sorry?

You've returned to Changi?

I have on a number of occasions.

Why has it been important for you to return?

Well, for various reasons. One for sheer interest and first of all to show Jean what it was like, I mean, that's one thing and to go back yourself as a

27:00 free person, not being a prisoner in the army, and to be made a bit of a fuss of, you know. We for example one of the times the Singapore TV people said, "Would I consent to a profile being done?", which meant I was followed around all over the place by TV cameras and not only was it nice but it was very useful because I was able to go actually into my old cell in the

27:30 gaol which I never would except it was full of prisoners you see, which I never would have been able to do. And I went with Tony Newsom, we went together because there was a ceremony it was 50 years or 60 years or something. And it was very amusing because we went into the gaol, into our old cell, we had eight, because we had the library there so it wasn't a real cell it was a sort of

28:00 contained area and we used to sleep on the ground and we had the books and we had a little, literally through the bars we would hand the books. So we both went in and of course the noise in our day was terrible because it was all concrete and everybody had wooden clogs so the whole time this noise was going on, twenty-four hours a day because there was somebody always up

28:30 walking about – you know, people on night duty and everything else. We were taken in by a very nice – it's all Asiatic now there's no European officers of course – he was very nice, he was a captain or a subaltern, I forget which. "Well" he said, "Here it is, what do you think of it?" And I said "The first thing I can think of is the door's been moved". "Oh no, sir, he said". I said "I beg your pardon, the door's been

29:00 moved". He said "No, the door hasn't been moved you must be mistaken". So there was Newsom there, I said "Where's the door?" And he said "I don't know, it's been moved". So he was very mystified and he had a sergeant with him who said "Excuse me, sir", saluting, he said "I think the door has been moved". So then another

29:30 sort of authority was sent for and sure enough the door was moved. I said "My friend, you couldn't live in this place for 2 years without knowing where the door was". So that was that side of it, it was very interesting to see the gaol itself. They're going to pull it down unfortunately, you know, I just saw it in the paper last week. I think it would be very nice if they could leave the main gate as a sort of memorial. The gaol's going to be taken away

30:00 apparently, they must have built a new one because when we were there last it was the principal gaol, it was full of criminals, and the execution room was there, they used to execute them of course but this penalty was two a penny in places like Changi. But that was an experience and oh well, you know it's fun to be – I was interviewed for the

30:30 radio and all that sort of thing. And we went up into Johore, we went to Malacca which was very interesting to go back after all those years and of course greatly improved to the miserable place it was when we were there and I was falling in the river. And we went to Muir where the battle took place with the 19th and 29th Battalion. We have a friend Ian Ward who published the second edition of the

31:00 Happiness Box. He used to be, he's Australian, but he lives in Malaya, he was the far eastern

correspondent for the Daily Telegraph, a very nice chap, and of course he knows Malaya backwards and he does tours of the battlefields, battlefield tours and in the bus they play a tape. When they get to the spot they press a button and play a tape and then Ian Ward's voice,

31:30 recorded voice tells everybody where they are and exactly what was happening. It's very interesting and I've spoken to quite a few people who've been over there and they say that was the highlight of the whole trip. But, you know, then I went back to read the, we did the performance of the Prisoner's Poet, we did more than one, and I took the actors back there. Well that was

32:00 exciting to do and very interesting to a lot of people. I've mentioned General Grayson who was the head of the whole army there, he was in the one we actually did in the very room that Percival decided to surrender the troops. Just by and large it's interesting to do and I love the food they serve there too. There's imitations of Indian and Chinese

32:30 food you have in Sydney is very poor fare compared with the real thing in Singapore. If you have a Nasi Goreng in Batavia, what you call it now, not Batavia, what's the capital of Indonesia [Jakarta], what the hell is it called – oh, you'd know the name of it. Anyway, have one there and have one in Singapore and you're really have a princely meal.

33:00 **I'm just wondering, we're coming to the end of our session today but I'm just wondering if any of your grandchildren came to you looking for some advice about war, what would you pass on to them?**

Oh, I don't think anything because all politicians say that's a hypothetical question and it is a hypothetical question.

33:30 It really can't happen again because of technology and everything. There can't be an ordinary sort of a war. I mean, sure, the Americans have fought a fabulous campaign in Iraq and they're now being killed poor things but they're not fighting a war any more I mean that's just – now that people have decided

34:00 they don't mind killing themselves you see the whole concept of war changes and what do you do about it. Up to now for the last 2,000 years you have put yourself in a position where you kill more of them and finally that's the end of it but, no, see they don't mind being killed at all, I mean, all these people strapping bombs to themselves. I don't see how you can cope with that I can't imagine what the outcome's going to be really. I just don't see

34:30 how you can deal with somebody who is perfectly prepared to kill himself. You see the Japanese really started it with the kamikaze [suicide] pilots. There they were these young people and they would toast the Emperor, you know, with sake [rice wine] and then they'd have a red ribbon tied around their forehead and within 2 or 3 hours they were dead, all of them. At their own hand, I mean, they just flew their

35:00 planes into the side of ships just like these people do with the bombs strapped to their bodies. And I mean there was really no answer, there was no proper answer to the kami kazikamikaze people except to have superior aircraft which would shoot them down. But it's quite a different matter if you're riding a bicycle and you've got enough explosives to kill 50 people and you don't mind blowing yourself to bits.

35:30 You know, there's the problem, I think that is going to be the problem for western society. What do we do about it? I simply don't know and I think if you ask Colin Powell or anyone you like they'd say "Well, I don't know". What do you do about it? How can you possibly, how can you possibly legislate for somebody to walk into the Sydney Town Hall, for example, with

36:00 so much bombs, it wouldn't blow the building down, but you know he could kill 200 people. How can you stop that?,You can't be searching everybody, you can't stop everybody in the street. It's like these boats, they talk about stopping these fishing boats, well for goodness sake there are hundreds of them, you know, that are coming. This one the other day, it's a perfect lot of nonsense, there's five or six hundred of those all the time

36:30 fishing. You can't be stopping one out of 600 boats every ten minutes, that's not possible. And I don't think it's possible, I don't see how you can stop these bombers either, I don't see how it's possible. If somebody says "I don't in the least mind dying provided I can kill another few more people on the other side". Well now you'd be killed in the rush if

37:00 two a penny would be offering themselves, what do you do about it? I don't see what you can do about it. somebody tries to shoot down and maybe succeeds in shooting down a civilian airliner and he's immediately shot but that doesn't worry him at all whereas up to now it's worried him a great deal, he's determined not to be shot but now it doesn't worry him a bit. So

37:30 I don't know how you deal with that I must say and I'd be very interested you know to be still around the place in 50 years time to see how that is coped with because it's beyond my comprehension. War as we knew it, and as mankind knew it for 4,000 years at least, that's gone completely

38:00 and all the tactics associated with it are gone as far as I can see. I don't see how you can stop it, well, we haven't had one in Australia yet but sure as hell we're going to I mean somebody's going to walk into the Opera House or something or a service station or DJs [David Jones – department store] or something like that and "Boom!" You know, sort of a Bali type of thing and apparently at Bali the main

bomb didn't go

38:30 off either – it was bad enough as it was but if the main bomb had gone off as well absolutely hundreds more would have been slaughtered. So that's a problem people of your generation have got to cope with.

Well as I said, we are coming to the end of our session today and thank you for that. I'm wondering now if there's anything you'd like to say in closing or if you feel like there's anything we've left out?

39:00 Well, I suppose there's a great deal I'd like to say really. What the most distressing thing is that the Australia that we were hoping to save and did save is disappearing before our eyes in a host of ways because it's become so undisciplined and so irresponsible. You

39:30 see in my time people did what they were told, I did what I was told, it never occurred to me not to do what I was told (except the time I didn't hand my shoes in, in Changi). One did what one was told and the odd person didn't and it didn't matter very much because he could be dealt with but now, now there are thousands of people who are only too happy not to do what they're

40:00 told. They parade up and down the streets and, you know, they don't know the facts and there's no way in life you can let a thousand people know the facts about anything – that's one thing lawyer's know that cases are decided on facts, very little on law, on facts. And the lack of self discipline and responsible that is

40:30 so frightfully evident here now, not only amongst the Asiatic community and these places at all, I'm talking about all sorts of Australians, European Australians as well, I think that's a very, very disturbing thing. Here, and in London too, not just in Australia. Imagine in London 200,000 people protesting

41:00 against the death of Saddam Hussein, that's what it amounted to. You know, that it was unjust, that they should have waited for the approval of the United Nations and that they didn't well – you know, it's inconceivable really. People wonder why they didn't stop Hitler going into the Rhine. That's nothing to what they're not stoping now, you know,

41:30 nothing. And I think that's a sad thing that I know older people will say "Oh, your father said the same thing about you". But that's not so, there's a new element now that's come in a sort of religious fanaticism that has come in and religion didn't worry me, I thought if people want to believe a fantastic proposition that you're asked to believe let them do it, that's not doing

42:00 me any harm.

INTERVIEW ENDS