

Australians at War Film Archive

Neville Barnes (Neville) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **So can we start off by, if could you give us a summary of your life from start to present day?**

Oh yeah. Well I was born on the 11th of the 11th 1922 in a little town called Gilgandra

01:00 and we stayed at Gilgandra for a couple of years and then moved to, I think the first place we lived in was Glebe. My father was a rabbitier and he was out in the country area chasing rabbits and my mother was employed in cafes and thing along

01:30 Glebe Road and of course we found it very difficult. I was the eleventh of 12 - 3 girls, 3 boys, 3 girls and 3 boys. I was the second youngest and because mother had a hell of a battle to keep things going so she put us in

02:00 an orphanage at Narellan. St Joseph's Orphanage at Narellan and I can't remember how long we were there but it was some time. Then she took us out of there again and we moved from Glebe I think to Ultimo. Jones Street Ultimo. Then we moved to Forest Lodge and then we moved to Newtown

02:30 and we stayed at Newtown. I forget how old I was when we went there and there I suffered infantile paralysis. I'll never forget she was going to take me to the Prince Alfred Hospital and she got a pram from somewhere

03:00 and dumped me in the pram and I was screaming my head off because I wanted an ambulance. I didn't want to go to hospital in a pram because all the kids would tease me. On that particular day, I was lucky. I struck some doctor who was at the hospital and he made me stand up straight against the wall and walk towards him and

03:30 where I was taken to hospital crippled that day, I walked out of the hospital thanks to that doctor whoever he was. Then we moved to O'Connell Street, Newton. That was from Albert Street, the first one that we moved to O'Connell Street. Ernie McQuillan's gymnasium was

04:00 a few doors up and St Joseph's Church at Newtown had a gymnasium under their church and I started to go to the gymnasium at St Joseph's and started boxing there. Then I was 10 years of age, Ernie McQuillan had boxing tournaments on most nights of the week and I

04:30 fought there when I was 10 years of age and then we moved to another street, Longdown Street and then we moved right down the other end of Newton to Albert Street. I think the landlord must have been chasing us all the time. I started work when I was 14. I worked at the Panels and Veneers

05:00 at Rosebery and I used to walk over there and back each day. Panel and Veneers. I must have been there 12 months, 18 months. I had various other positions then I finished up with Ernie McQuillan when I was 17, I was fighting at Sydney Stadium

05:30 and Parramatta Stadium. I was working at Herman Plastic Mouldings, HPM, at Darlinghurst at that time. Then I turned 18 in November and in the March - I had applied to the navy, to

06:00 join the Australian Navy and they sent me a letter to ask me to sit for an examination at Rushcutter's Bay on 11 March 1941. I went down there and sat for the examination and they said, "You failed." It was only Dictation and English and

06:30 Mathematics. I don't know how I failed. So I walked from there to Victoria Barracks and down to Moore Park Barracks behind it and signed up there that day with the Darwin Infantry Battalion. That afternoon they put me on a bus and took me over to North Head and issued us with equipment and bedding and such.

07:00 The next day they gave us 4 hours leave to go home because we were leaving that night they told us. I went home to Newtown and saw my wife, who was my girlfriend then and my mother and I got back to

North Head Barracks within the 4 hours anyhow. That night they marched us down to Central

- 07:30 Railway Station and put us on a train and we went off to Melbourne, Adelaide and a small town up from Adelaide, we were there 7 days. I can't remember the name of the town name. I think it was Terowie or something. I don't know if that was in Queensland. We were held up
- 08:00 in front because the Northern Territory was flooded so there was about 7 days at this little town in South Australia. Then we moved up to - got a run on and got to Alice Springs and I don't know how, there only 1 or 2 days. We went on to Barrett Creek and
- 08:30 we were there a couple of weeks at Barrett Creek. All that was there was a hotel and a police station and we were camped about two miles away from there. We used to go down of an evening and have a meal there at the hotel. The river was that dry at that time we had a boxing night whilst we were at Barrett Creek and we fought in the
- 09:00 bottom of the riverbed. We set the ring up there. It was some warrant officer. I forget his name now but he was the one who organised the boxing. So we went on to Darwin Infantry Battalion at Parap. Silver City as they used to call it because it was all tin huts.
- 09:30 I was in Don Company at that time and a chappie came round from the signal platoon and was looking for people who wanted to train as signallers. I and one my friends Vicky Bennett volunteered to go over to the sig platoon. We became sigs and
- 10:00 sat for our signal examination. By that time we were only getting 5 bob a day which was £3.10 a fortnight in the infantry platoon but in the sig platoon we got £4.08 or 18 a day. Got an
- 10:30 increase in wage anyway. They put it up because it was the sig specialist. Then one of my friends was Darcy Armstrong. He was there. He was a motorcycle rider and I started riding a motorcycle and I became the dispatch rider which they called then motorcycle orderly.
- 11:00 From there we went down to 29 Mile after the bombing of Darwin. That's right. When they bombed Darwin they put us out between the aerodrome and the water. I think it was to act as a buffer against any Japanese landings. To keep the aerodrome safe.
- 11:30 It was a bit of a hectic day the day they first bombed. It was quite a surprise. Then we went to the 29 Mile and finally they sent us home on leave and they had us camped out at Narellan and after
- 12:00 the leave we went to Narellan then they took us up to Gan Gan near Nelson's Bay. We did the beach landings with an American unit there. They called it JOOTS. Joint Overseas Operational Training Station. That was the barges and then the boats without the drop front.
- 12:30 Used to land on the beach and as the American officers used to say, "Hold onto the bar and hang on momentarily when you jump over the side." We also did the barges that had the drop front on them. So we did all those landings and training and then we went to Queensland and we were at
- 13:00 a little place called Gordonvale. It was 14 miles south of Cairns and the American paratroops were on one side of the town and we were on the other side of town so they must have a gutful of all the servicemen by that time in the town. It was there that I applied for leave to come home and be married.
- 13:30 It came up the Saturday before I was to be married and the leave hadn't been granted so I happened to catch a train south. It was a troop train going to Brisbane. I went to Brisbane and marched in with all the other soldiers of the camp. Had a meal and bedding and
- 14:00 the next day we got up and I was lined up with the others to go on a train south to Sydney. Went south to Sydney and jumped off out near Hornsby and caught an electric train from there. Got home and got married the following Saturday and kept saying I would go back next
- 14:30 Sunday. When Sunday came, I'd leave it till Monday so that happened for about 3 weeks and I told my wife "I'd have to go." I went to the showground and there was one of our ex-officers in charge out there. I went to him and told him I'd been AWOL [Absent Without Leave] and wanted to catch
- 15:00 up with the unit because they were in the islands. He told me I was supposed to go to the Military Police but then he put me under open arrest and told me nobody would know about it. So I went and got on a train. They put me on a train then up to Queensland and I went to some camp. I can't remember it now.
- 15:30 I think it was out from Rockhampton. It was a staging camp anyhow and I took myself under my own steam all the way but that time I had my name and that on the roll. The only thing I wasn't doing was getting paid. Then I got on a boat to
- 16:00 New Guinea and then they flew me over to somewhere near Nadzab way somewhere I think. Oh no that was Oro Bay. I went on a ship round to Gona and they got off at Gona and I caught up with the battalion at Cape Killerton and then it came up Christmas time and the court martial was held. I was sentenced to

- 16:30 60 days field punishment instead of a prison sentence. At the field punishment centre we wired ourselves in and fortunately we did go. The 36th Battalion was near us. We used to go to the pictures there at night at the 36th Battalion and then go back and lock ourselves up in the tent.
- 17:00 Then they got us on an old, old ship, Francis Parker, and they sent us over to New Britain. Jacquinot Bay and then from Jacquinot Bay we went up to Wide Bay somewhere. Then we got off there and we were there with the
- 17:30 14/32nd I think was a Victorian Battalion and the 2/14th Artillery and right on the other side of the island was Open Bay they call it over there. It was the poor darn 36th Battalion all by themselves. No support, no artillery or anything. They were just stuck on the beach over the other side of the island and we were
- 18:00 on the bottom side. Then we moved against the Japanese right up. I can't remember the river's name. We took different positions and then pushed the Japanese back quite a way. Then the 16th Battalion from Western Australia came and relieved us and
- 18:30 said, "We're going home." but we went to Headquarters which was at Jacquinot Bay they were at. They were short of operators in the signal platoon. I was nominated for that one and I got
- 19:00 left off the boat. When it went though it sailed off to Sydney to Australia and I remained with the Brigade Headquarters as a signaller. Mainly a switch operator and then finally I got away and got back on leave.
- 19:30 We went to Narellan, back to Narellan. After we all got together again we went up to Queensland. Some little town not far from Brisbane. We did our training again and then we
- 20:00 were on our way to go overseas again and peace came. That was the bit of service except when we were at Cape Killerton there was a boxing tournament
- 20:30 at Oro Bay and it was organised by a Joe E Brown, an American Comedian who was a wonderful fellow. He organised a big boxing tournament and he got a number of American film actors and actresses to donate medals for the championships
- 21:00 and I was fortunate enough to win the Middleweight championship which was a medal donated by Greer Garson. I wrote to Greer Garson and she answered me, wrote back. She congratulated me and then after that they used to have me appear. Make appearances down at the ring at
- 21:30 the Oro Bay Stadium. They had another singer there. Lennie Ross. He often used to pick me up in the jeep to take me down there to referee different fights. It was fortunate for me. I was very lucky that he used to be able to sing songs for me as we were going along. He'd sing a song for me.
- 22:00 Our own colonel when he wasn't using his jeep on occasions when I was stuck for a ride down he'd supply me with his vehicle to go to the stadium. I was a very lucky fellow being so well looked after.

So what happened after the war?

I joined the Police Force and that stopped the fighting

- 22:30 because the Americans wanted me to go to America and fight in America and I got discharged on 22 November and in January I think it was I joined the Police Force. I was stationed at Newtown and
- 23:00 I was fortunate. I was lucky with a couple of enquiries I did so they put me into plain clothes. I was working with the detectives at Newtown in plain clothes and then I went to Mosman with another detective Jack Whitfield and I was his offsider at Mosman for quite a long time.
- 23:30 Somehow or other I became a drunkard because I was drinking beer from when I was in - it started off when I was in Darwin and I was an out and out drunkard so they reverted me to uniform and I went to Redfern. Then a country
- 24:00 trip came up at a one man station in Bonalbo. I went out there. It was a one man station with my wife and eldest son. I was still grogging on all the time. I started a boxing and gymnastic club for the children of the
- 24:30 town and we used to have the vaulting horse out in the main street and we'd have the kids doing exercise there to show their parents what they were capable of doing. Then I resigned from the Police Force because I was such a drunkard and I went back and I thought I'd go into the army again. So I rejoined
- 25:00 the army and joined the Military Police. Once again at Moore Park. It was the same place I joined up before. I did a course in Melbourne and I was fortunate again. The officer in the charge of the school, I forget his name. He was the
- 25:30 Provost Marshal of Victoria. He had me transferred to Melbourne each year to an instructor on the schools. The Military Police Schools. I was promoted up to sergeant and then

26:00 they sent me on a long plane trip from here to Singapore to Tokyo and I finished up in Korea at Vietnam and I was in charge of the Commonwealth contingent of the Military Police in Inchon in Korea and

26:30 I stayed there for a while then I came back to Australia and I was still drinking, drinking, drinking. Late at night everybody else would leave the mess and I'd keep on drinking so I applied for a discharge from the army before I got thrown out. So I served another 10 years. I served

27:00 10 years. It was 5 years during the war days in the army and then I was 10 years later on in the peacetime. So I made this application because of my drunken state and they accepted it and discharged me after 10 years.

27:30 From then I went and became an Enquiry Agent, Private Enquiry Agent. I was working with a group of men over at Crows Nest then I branched out on my own and I was doing quite well with that. Still the grog got the better of me so I just

28:00 fizzled on and battled on my own for a long time. Then I finished up when I was about 59 or 60 working for St Vincent de Paul at their clothing store at Leichhardt. I think it was Leichhardt. It was over that way, Annandale or Leichhardt.

28:30 I stayed there until I went on the pension and I did nothing. Stopped altogether. It wasn't until I had the ulcerated stomach and on one occasion I woke up through the night

29:00 with terrible pains in my stomach and they took me to the hospital and operated on me and then I kept on drinking after that. I was down in the hotel at Yagoona having some beers and I got this terrible pains in the stomach. I just collapsed and the ulcer started bleeding again. I was raced over there

29:30 in an ambulance and the doctor said he made such a mess of my stomach cutting it open because he had to get in very quickly to stop the bleeding. So that finished that.

30:00 From then on I became a gardener. I also had a cancer in the throat on another occasion and I was a very heavy smoker. I took up smoking when I was 18 in Darwin as well as the drinking. So with the ulcers then, when the second one burst that when I stopped drinking beer altogether. Stopped drinking any sort of liquor other than soft drink.

30:30 Then when I get the cancer in the throat I just threw the cigarettes in the top drawer and that was it. So I didn't drink or smoke again. It was a bit too late by the time I did. Should have stopped many many years ago. So that's about it I think.

31:00 **Thanks for that. That's a really wonderful - that's a great summary. I've learnt a lot from what you've told us so thank you for sharing that with us. So what we'll do now of course is go right back to the beginning and go into more depth about your childhood and your pre- war years because we're interested in hearing about that as well. So can you just**

31:30 **tell us again when and where you were born?**

Gilgandra which is the other side of Dubbo on the Castlereagh River and it was 11 November '22 as I keep saying 11/11/22 because 11 came up so many times in my life. I was the 11th child and I was born on the 11th day of the 11th month 1922. I joined the army on

32:00 11th March. I was discharged on 22 November '45. So 11 came up quite often.

Do you think it's your lucky number?

I don't think so.

Because I'm the 7th of the 7th so I always think 7 is my lucky number.

I see.

So describe - how long were you in that town outside

32:30 **of Dubbo?**

Oh, it would have only been a couple of years although I was old enough, I must have been 3 or so because I was old enough to remember living at Glebe when we moved to, came down to the city.

So you must probably have more vivid memories of Glebe I imagine?

Oh, yes. I don't remember much. They tell me a horse had me by the hair up in

33:00 Gilgandra. The horse was leaning over the fence and I was sitting beside the fence and evidently I had snowy coloured hair and the horse evidently wanted a feed and picked me up by the hair and I think I got too close to a well once. The well in the backyard. I went down the well and they had to fish me out.

33:30 There's another occasion. I have a scar on the nose. I fell down the riverbank. The Castlereagh River when all the family was out there swimming and struck my nose on something. But I don't remember

too much about the country until we got

34:00 down to Glebe. We were living at a little place on the side of Ferry Road, Glebe. At the end of the Ferry Road was the Monkey Hill. We were living in an old tin house that was perched on the top of Monkey Hill.

So you - sorry, keep going, I interrupted you.

That's all right.

34:30 **You were the 11th child?**

Yes.

Of all 11?

12.

12? So that's a pretty big family?

Oh yes. That's why I say, there were 3 girls, then 3 boys, then 3 girls then 3 boys.

So what was that like? Growing up in such a large family?

It was all right. As long as the sisters didn't bash you at all. When they did give you a hiding they'd clip your ears. Because mother used to get

35:00 upset. I suppose we'd antagonise her, keep her going. With the husband out in the bush and working to keep us going by working in the café and she'd lay it on although the older boy, one older than me was crippled and the one younger was the baby

35:30 so I used to cop the results. On one night when we were in Newtown we went to Clay's Vaudeville. I don't know how they let us in, we were so young. We got home very, very late that night. We lived in an old house at that time in Richard Street

36:00 and it had a long hallway from the front to the back. The rooms used to run off each side and of course Mervyn went in and he got a little clip on the ears, then Kevin went in and got a little clip and she finally takes me up for getting up there but I landed up the other end of the

36:30 hallway because she clipped me right behind the back of the head. I went straight along that hall. She used to take everything out on me instead of the other boys. As I say, one was crippled and one was younger. The baby. So I used to get - she broke a pot stick. A pot stick was what they used to use for getting the clothes out of the copper. She broke a pot stick on my back one time.

37:00 **It sounds like you certainly learnt. You certainly toughened up during those years.**

Oh yes.

So describe Glebe to me as you remember it?

Glebe? All I can remember is that there were a lot of shops along Glebe Road. Oh yes. One time I went swimming down at Glebe Point and

37:30 you know yourself if you've been swimming in the salt water your hair and that reflects that you've been in swimming. So we were running late again coming back from school and used to go to St James' School originally at Glebe and later went to the public school. Got home late and

38:00 crash! I got belted around the head and she said "Have you been swimming down the bay?" She says "I'll give you swimming!" So she grabbed me by the ankle and put the plug in the bathtub, turned the taps on and as the water was coming up she dunked me in the water as it was filling up in the bath. She said "I'll give you swimming". So I got that

38:30 and got a belting. But that was normal. It was always me that used to get the savage bits because as I say didn't get much of it.

So it sounds like your mother had a lot to deal

39:00 **with? Her husband out in the country.**

Oh yes, she did.

Looking after 11 kids. Tell me more about your mother?

Well, she was a very good mother. She must have been. She put up with what we were doing. Somehow I

39:30 can remember back in the country area I climbed up on the roof and jumped off on a bed. It was a big double bed. It was at the side of the house. I got a bit of a hiding for that too. I suppose she had so much to put up with. Just do her block all of a sudden,

40:00 crash, bang. That's why we went in the orphanage. I think she must have relented about the orphanage later on. That's why she got us out because I can't remember how long we were in there.

We'll have to leave it there because we've just finished a tape.

Tape 2

00:32 **So you were talking about your mother and the beatings that you used to cop? I believe your mother was also in ill health?**

Well, she'd had so many operations. Her stomach was a total mess. She used have a corset and she couldn't get around without the corset on. She was only

01:00 small in height but she was fairly solid and stout build and she had to put the stays on and of course, stays as she called the corset. She was always putting the stays on. She was very ill. She wasn't really a healthy woman. She was a

01:30 good fighter. She used to give her husband when he was around. He came down once from the country and I can remember in the country we had a kitchen out in the back yard. It was like a shed and he came running out of there one time with cups and saucers flying after him and hitting him on the back.

02:00 She must have given him a punch up every now and then.

Did you see much of your father?

I saw him a couple of times in the country and once when we were in the city somewhere. I think it might have been Ultimo. He came down for about a week and he went off again. Then during the Depression days

02:30 two of my brothers went out with him rabbit trapping all over the State. That's how they got their living too. Trapping rabbits with him.

Would he send home money to the family?

I don't think so. I don't think he earned enough. No I think she got it all because of the working in the cafes, restaurants.

03:00 She used to work in them all along. I think she used to do general labouring but she was so used to washing up I think that's why she worked in the cafes I think.

So what memories do you have of the Depression?

The Depression?

Mmm.

I used to sell bottles to

03:30 get money and used to find bottles somewhere and run up to Cordukes - was the bottle yard at Newtown. On King Street, Newtown. I think we used to get a penny for a soft drink bottle and a ha'penny for a beer bottle I think. Something like that we used to get.

04:00 It would be enough money to get us to the pictures every now and again. Had to hole it up until we got sixpence to get into the movie at Hoyts Newtown or the Hub or the Majestic. We used to go to the Majestic a lot. There was a lot of Vaudeville on in those days. I still don't know how we used to get in because we were only kids.

04:30 **Where was the Majestic?**

On the corner of Erskineville Road and Wilson Street, Newtown. Just down from the Newtown Bridge. Later on they had the Police Boys Club further down Erskineville Road which was near the

05:00 railway line and I think that later became the Hub No.2. The Hub was on the corner of Lennox Street and the Newtown Bridge. The Majestic was at the corner of Wilson Street and Erskineville Road and then the Police Boys Club was down Erskineville Road near the railway station

05:30 and that become Hub No.2 theatre and then there was Manchester Unity Hall in Enmore Road, George's Hall in King Street. Manchester was on the way to Enmore on Enmore Road. George's

06:00 Hall was on King Street going towards St Peter's from Newtown Bridge.

So how often would you sell enough bottles to afford to go to the theatre?

You want me to tell you? Well, Cordukes had a back gate in Longdown Street and

- 06:30 his front gate was up on King Street. His office was up near King Street. Often times we would wander into the back section and find a couple of bottles and then go out again and then run right around the block, come in the front door and sell them to Mr.
- 07:00 Corduke and he'd give us money. We needed money so that was one way of getting the money.
- So you were selling him his own bottles?**
- Yes.
- You sneaky little thing!**
- It was terrible, wasn't it?
- Yes. Well you got to go to the pictures. You probably deserved a bit of escapism?**
- Yes, that's right.
- What do you remember of the Depression? Is there**
- 07:30 **anything else from that time?**
- No, just that, stealing cakes. Each day I used to go from North Newtown School. Come out at lunchtime and run all the way down to Missenden Road
- 08:00 and Salisbury Road. Salisbury Road, Camperdown and down at the bottom of Salisbury Road in the hollow somewhere just going towards Camperdown Park there used to be a soup kitchen. We used to get a run down there each day for dinner to the soup kitchen. The women used to do a marvellous job there. Serve us kids from all different schools would go
- 08:30 there and have the soup and the women used to volunteer and go in there and deal it all out to us.
- How many children would be at the soup kitchen?**
- Probably, maybe in excess of 100. They came from various schools. North Newtown
- 09:00 of course was the furthest away because it was down in, bottom of Queen Street and street runs, an avenue. It's the old timer's disease catching up, see.
- You're doing fine.**
- 09:30 **So would that soup you would have had at the soup kitchen been your maybe only meal of the day?**
- Oh yes. Oh no, Mother would make sure we had porridge and that of a morning. She was really a good mother like that. Catering. She cooked very big meals. She always used to cook. She was a real good
- 10:00 supplier.
- So tell me a bit about your schooling?**
- I started school at Ultimo and that was Jones Street Ultimo, that school. Oh no, before that I was at
- 10:30 St James and then at Glebe. I don't remember much about there. I don't remember much about Ultimo. I know I used to try and get out of any school work and then we went to North Newtown, no Forest Lodge then to North Newtown.
- 11:00 Went to the Primary school and I must have been one of their fair pupils. I did fairly good there because one teacher in 6th class used to take us on outings. Whoever got near the top of the class he'd take us on outings. Places to the zoo and such things.
- 11:30 Then I went to the North Newtown Intermediate High School. After the primary school they had the intermediate high school there as well and I got to 2nd year. I was 14, that's when I left. Got the job at Panel and Veneers.
- 12:00 **So what did you do at Panel and Veneers? What was your job there?**
- Spreading veneer at the frame works at the kiln and pushing the tracks in so the veneer would dry out because they'd steam logs and then they'd put it in a
- 12:30 slicer machine and they'd slice it off and cut the veneer off. It would be very wet so I used to put it in the kiln to dry it out. I must have been there about 18 months.
- And what would the veneer be used for?**
- It was sold out to all types of business. Some used it for walls. Some used it for tables or furniture.
- 13:00 **What did you think about doing that kind of work?**

It was the only job I could get. . It was a long way to walk from Newtown to Rosebery.

How long did that take you?

About ½ an hour, ¾ hour. Used to walk down Erskineville Road and across next to Australian Window Glass there. There was a

13:30 big pipe run beside all the Chinese Gardens near the sewerage near the Alexandra Canal. The Chinese Gardens were there and this big pipe. I could walk on the ground mostly but I used to walk on this big pipe that went right across. I don't know what was inside it. Water I suppose.

14:00 Just going back to when you left school to go to and start this job. Why did you leave school?

To go to work because mother needed money.

Neville I might just get you to stop tapping the chair because we can hear it on the microphone

14:30 **apparently.**

Oh yes.

So your mother needed help.

We needed help because the girls were working. They used to get some money. They were at Sydney Cab Company. My older brother was working somewhere but he was crippled and generally she was taking him to the hospital.

15:00 I used to contribute. I forget how much I used to get. 10 shillings a week I think. I used to give it all to the mother and she used to just give me a couple of bob to go to the movies now and again. When I was fighting, this was later on I'd

15:30 get my own money to go to the shows. I used to get 30 bob I think it was for the Sydney Stadium. That was big money. Ernie would take 10%. Parramatta Stadium, I'd get £1. Ernie would take his 10%. But mother

16:00 needed the money to pay the rent because often times she didn't have enough money to pay the rent so I had to get a job. Couldn't not be without it.

You mentioned that you went to the gym starting from about the age of 9 was it?

10 when I was with Ernie McQuillan. He used to run tournaments.

Can you tell me a bit about

16:30 **your experience at the gym there?**

Well I used to train at the gymnasium. It was at St Joseph's at Newtown. At the bottom of Lennox Street, Newtown. They had a gymnasium underneath the church and that's where I used to do all my training. I used to fight at Ernie's on the boxing nights when he had the nights. Although he'd

17:00 let me go up and punch the bag around when I was fighting but he used to chase me out when I'd go up and try to punch a bag every now and then. You'd sneak into his gymnasium and he'd chase you out. All the kids wanted to go and punch a punching bag. He'd have to chase you out to get rid of you. I had a few fights there for Ernie

17:30 but I never got anything out of it. Sore ear and such things but it was something to do and that's what I used to do. All I used to do was mainly fighting.

Tell me a bit more about Ernie.

He was an old time fighter. He used to live in Horton Street, Newton

18:00 when he was younger. That's where his family all lived his parents and brothers. He was quite a nice fella. Not much I can tell about Ernie. He was a good trainer. Used to look after all his

18:30 boxers and he was well up in the boxing world. He and Harry Miller from the Sydney Stadium were great friends. Ernie could get his boxers on the fights at Sydney Stadium. Monday nights, I think were the nights at Sydney Stadium.

19:00 He'd have quite a card full of fighters to look after. Get all his fighters. That was good too because it was 30 bob instead of quid.

So when did you start to box professionally?

With Ernie when I was 17.

17?

Yes. I forget. I used to know the record and

19:30 I got knocked out the first fight. Then I won all the others and then I went to Darwin and I had 3 fights in the Darwin Stadium. I won the 3 of them by knockout and then we were down 29 Mile in a ring down there and I used to fight there and

20:00 also train a lot of other fellows. I used to put boxing exhibitions for the rest of the troops. The crowds down the 29 Mile. Then when we were at Gan Gan I fought at Newcastle Stadium and I had 3 fights there and I won them all

20:30 by knockout. At that Stadium had a 10 rounder there was the last fight I had before I went overseas. I won that. Used to get plenty of applause from the press in Newcastle.

It's a very impressive record.

Yes.

I'm very impressed.

21:00 **So was it around, just getting back to working with Ernie and the boxing and between that age of 14 and 17 had you met your future wife to be by this point?**

Yes.

How did you meet her?

Well I joined the Scouts at Newtown. St Joseph's Church at Newtown. It was the 4th Newtown as they called it. 64th

21:30 Catholic Troop and Anne at that time was Lady Cubmaster at Redfern. Redfern Catholic Church and she left there and came over to start one at Newtown, 4th Newtown and she started the Cubs there and I was in the Scouts and of course we got together and

22:00 I think she was 15 or 16 at the time. She was much too young to be Lady Cubmaster but she was the Lady Cubmaster of the pack, the Cub pack. She worked as a secretary at HC Bowdens. He was the contractor for the IXL Jam Factory. The carter then had all the trucks

22:30 and her father was the right hand man of Harry Bowden's on the trucks. I started going out with her. We used to go to the Hub Theatre every Saturday night and I'd buy a chocolate and then,

23:00 I don't know when it was but I used to have her doing the banking for me. She used to bank money for me because the day I joined the army, my mother had rang her to see if she knew where I was and none of them knew where I was because I'd gone

23:30 down the previous day to join the navy. Sit for the naval examination. She had the bankbook there to draw the money out. I think we got £2 out. I think that shook the balance around a bit. Then when I was in Darwin every payday, the £3.10 I used to get to start with and I used to go to the Post Office and send £2

24:00 down. I'd wire £2 to the Newtown Post Office and she'd put that in the bank. She did that all the time I was in Darwin and so we had a little bit of money when I came back. I used to bank that £2 out of the £3.10 every fortnight.

Nice bit of savings there?

Yes .

24:30 That's when we were going. Then we finally got married on 29 May 1943. 60 years in another 2 weeks.

Not bad. You guys are doing all right.

Yes.

One thing that we didn't cover was the fact that your mother sent you and some of your brothers to the orphanage.

25:00 **Can you describe the reasons why, about why she sent you to the orphanage?**

I don't know. It was a long way away. I didn't know how she found it was up there because it was at Narellan. She just took us up and deposited us there and walked away and got the train back I think it was train or bus or whatever it is. I think it was a train.

25:30 **How old were you when she put you in the orphanage?**

I don't know. I would have been about 5, 4, 5 or 6.

And were you with all your brothers and sisters?

No, only the younger ones. 3 girls and 3 boys. The youngest half. The others were all working

somewhere. The girls were married. They were all married

26:00 at that time. The older girls. One was dead. She was deceased. She died before we left Gilgandra as a matter of fact. The other 2 older girls were both married and the 3 boys, they were all working somewhere. So there was the 3 girls

26:30 and 3 boys. There were 6 of us went up to the orphanage.

What was that like when your mother took you up and left you at the orphanage?

That was pretty crook because I was running after her crying. So didn't want to be left there, you know. But she just had to keep going and that was it.

What was the orphanage like?

It was pretty reasonable. They were

27:00 all nuns running the show. We were treated pretty well. Yes it was quite all right. There was a lot of religious stuff at that time because it was a Catholic orphanage and the nuns were running the show so quite a bit of religion

27:30 came into it.

How long were you there in the orphanage?

I don't know. I don't know how long we were there.

But she came - your mother did come back to collect you and bring you back down?

Oh yes. She took us back out. She must have got some money from work again and thought she could take

28:00 care of us again. So she came and got us out again.

I bet you were happy to see her again?

Oh yes. Renew the old acquaintances and the pot sticks.

The what?

The pot sticks. .

What are the pot sticks?

What she used to belt me with. She used to use it to lift the clothes out of the copper and put them in the

28:30 water, oh what do you call it?

Oh the copper boilers?

Yeah, she'd stir the clothes in the copper boiler and then lift them up and put them in the tub. Tub, that's it. The washing tub and soak them in that until they cleaned up. That was what the pot stick was for.

29:00 Other than for belting me.

And it sounds like you were the only one of the children to get the beltings?

Yep, yeah.

Do you have any idea why that was?

No. Oh no. Because I was the cheekiest one I suppose. I was too cheeky for her.

I'm wondering, just going back to the orphanage. That's quite a stressful thing to happen

29:30 **to a small child and I'm wondering if it had any impact on you later on in life about having been left at the orphanage?**

No, I don't think so. I don't think I ever worried, once I got over it. I don't think it ever worried me. Probably made me a drunkard. That may have been why I started drinking so much beer.

30:00 **Yes. It sounds like you had a very stressful childhood.**

Yes. Colourful .

You're a real survivor I think. You can see that with your boxing. You're a fighter. A survivor. It's quite an amazing childhood.

Yes.

So getting back to

30:30 **Sydney and enlistment. You mentioned in your summary that you did try for the navy. To enlist in the navy. Can you explain why you wanted to enlist in the navy?**

Because the chappie next door, Bert. He joined the navy and was quite happy about it.

31:00 I thought, "I might as well be in the navy too" because Bert was enjoying life in the navy and I was trying to get in the navy. Didn't eventuate though. Didn't take long to join the army though.

Tell me more about the test you had to do to get into the navy?

Oh, it was only mathematics and

31:30 dictation and yet I could do all the maths and spell quite well. I'd gone to high school and they just said "I failed". I don't know how come I failed.

How did they make you feel when you failed?

Downhearted. Not going to get in the navy. That's why I walked from

32:00 there to the Army Depot and went into the Victoria Barracks and they said "Go down and join." So I went to Moore Park Depot and that's where it all started with the army.

You were a very determined fellow.

Yes. .

So what can you remember of enlistment in the army at Moore Park?

32:30 Just that I was sitting there waiting and they asked me to sign the papers and I signed them. My mother did try and endeavour to get me out a bit later when I was at Darwin because I didn't have her permission to go in the army but they knocked her back so I had to stay in the army

33:00 up in Darwin.

Because you were 17 at this point, weren't you?

Just turned 18.

Just turned 18, right.

I was 18 in November and this was in March, 11th March.

So what did your girlfriend think? By the way what's her name? What's your wife's name?

Anne.

Anne. What did Anne think of you enlisting?

33:30 I don't think she liked it very much because she still goes crook now. She says "I spent all my time alone without him". 60 years and when it comes up she says well I was away for all that time to start with and away, only home a couple of days and then when I

34:00 rejoined again at 10 years, then I was down in Melbourne quite a few times a year instructing down there. Then I went in to Korea. She says I was away again. I don't think she liked it. Although she didn't mind. She used to come to the Sergeant's Mess at Moore Park and join in. That's when we got around a little bit.

34:30 **You mentioned that you enlisted in Moore Park and you signed the enlistment papers. What else was involved in the enlistment process?**

Nothing just that I wanted to join the Darwin Battalion because the fella next door. This is the nephew of the one who joined the navy.

35:00 He'd gone and joined the Darwin Infantry Battalion so that was the only Battalion I knew so when I went down to Moore Park I told them I wanted to join the Darwin Infantry Battalion. They'd just gone to Darwin. They went up on the Izlandia[?] though. The first lot. A big crew and so I was the first lot of reinforcements for them and I was the first one to go

35:30 overland down via Melbourne, Adelaide and so on. Alice Springs.

At your enlistment, was it at that point that you got given your specific job as a despatch rider or did that come later?

No, that came later because see when I joined I was just going to join the Battalion so when I went to Darwin they put me in D Company, which is an infantry company

36:00 and it wasn't until the signaller corporal come round looking for recruits in the signal platoon that I

decided I'd become a signaller. Up till then it was just wherever they sent me and that's when I joined the signal platoon and of course that included the dispatch riders

36:30 as we called them but Motorbike Orderlies. That's when I took a likening to the motorbikes so I started riding a motorbike and then they accepted me as a dispatch rider.

So, just getting back to your enlistment. I believe things moved fairly quickly after you signed all your papers, etc. Could you go into a bit more detail about what happened after that?

37:00 They just said "Sit around" and then a bus came and they said "All for North Head on the bus". They took me over to North Head Barracks. It was the, what do you call it when people go into, it used to be our - quarantine. The quarantine section, that's where we were. They were using that

37:30 as the army Barracks and they issued us with the uniforms and full rig out. They had what we used to call the Mandrake Capes. Capes with cross over straps here (indicates under arms). They called it the Mandrake Cape. We were well known. Our Battalion was the only one

38:00 that had this Mandrake Cape. It was a rain cape.

Could you describe it for me because I've actually never seen one?

It was just a cape that come on the back of your shoulders down the back and it had cross straps that did up around the waist. There was a strap there and a strap there (indicates crossing over on chest) and they did up on each side.

38:30 Looked quite well it did. The Mandrake Cape.

Thanks for that. I've never actually heard of that or seen one.

We were the only Battalion to have that.

So what happened after you were kitted out?

I had to go to bed and go to sleep. . I woke up the next morning and they allowed us 4 hours

39:00 to get from the Quarantine Depot to Sydney and back again and so we had to make our own way from the Quarantine Depot down to Manly. Get the ferry across and the tram out to Newtown and that's when Anne and my mother were in the house still trying to

39:30 find out. Well, Anne had, I think she rang the army and they'd said that "I'd enlisted".

So you hadn't told anyone that you were doing this?

All they knew was that I was going down to sit for a navy examination. I finished up the same day in the army. Didn't even know myself until I got in the army .

40:00 But I was so disappointed I think with the failing and not making any impression on the navy that that's when I decided to walk from there all the way to Moore Park and signed up.

We've actually come to the end of another tape.

Tape 3

00:35 **Right, just to go back Neville over your reasons for choosing Darwin, it was because a neighbour had enlisted?**

Yes, a chap, Keithie Beasley. Keith Beasley was the chap next door.

And what had he heard about Darwin that made it sound so attractive?

No, he'd just gone up but his Uncle, Bert Pollard. I couldn't think of Bert's name earlier.

01:00 Navy. He was the one that went in the navy and 'cos I thought I'd like to join the navy. Then Keith Beasley had been in the CMF [Civilian Military Forces] at Addison Road but he went and joined the Darwin Infantry Battalion and 'cos they'd gone on the Izlandia to go to Darwin and of course when I was - I suppose I was so disappointed not getting in the navy and

01:30 the only thing I knew was the Darwin Infantry Battalion.

So you opted for that one?

Wanted to join it, which they accepted me that same day.

Just before we embark on Darwin, a bit of a flashback question and that is when you were growing up did you know any people that had been through World War I?

Only my uncles.

And did they talk about the First World War?

Not very often. They were nearly all from the

02:00 west of NSW and the only time like the Pictons, they'd come down. They'd stay with us at Newtown and that was the only thing I knew about the army actually. They'd been members of the army during the war, the '14 to '18 war.

So where were you when you heard that

02:30 **war had broken out?**

Walking along King Street, Newtown I think. In the shopping centre. Yes. We used to go quite a lot Friday nights. Every Friday night we'd go for a walk up the shopping centre and stop at a milk bar and have a milkshake.

03:00 We'd always go right along the Newtown shopping centre, 4 of us.

So you were walking along there. How did you actually find out that war had broken out?

Someone happened to mention it and I remember Harry Powell was my friend at the time. He was the one who used to walk with us. We used to go every Friday night and he almost broke down. He says "Oh no"

03:30 someone yelled out "The war's started".

Why did he nearly break down?

Because I think he didn't like to see the world at war I think. Harry finished up, he joined the air force, went to Canada and trained as a pilot and then went on to England. He came back from the war still in one piece.

04:00 **So what was your reaction when you heard war had broken out?**

I don't think I worried much about it because there wasn't much interest in it as far as I was concerned. But I didn't react like Harry did. Harry was really upset that war had started.

So why did you decide to enlist?

04:30 I think it was just for something to do and of course Bert had joined the navy and I thought oh well the navy might be - I suppose I thought the navy might be quite a good show so that's why I decided to join the navy and I applied to the navy. Put an application in and they sent me a notification

05:00 telling me to go down to Rushcutter's Bay. To report to Rushcutter's Bay on a particular day in the morning.

So we've covered what happened after that. Could you see that enlisting was going to improve your lifestyle and your life generally?

I thought I'd get more money that I was getting at the works, Herman Plastic Moulding at that time.

05:30 **And what about doing your bit for Australia? Did that come into it as well?**

No, I don't think Australia did. I don't know whether I was thinking "Oh well, get away with the mob", you know because most of them were starting to go in the army, join the army by that time and

06:00 getting way. So I suppose that's why I went in to be one of the mob.

Probably there was a sense of adventure or promise of adventure?

Probably that would have been included in it yes.

So, once you enlisted, did you undergo any training in Sydney?

No, I was only here the one day. Like I joined the 11th and the 12th I was on

06:30 the train. The only time was a little town. See we went down to Melbourne, on to Adelaide and then up to this. Fancy forgetting that town, little town. Terowie, I think it was. I think that's the name of it unless Terowie's in Queensland. I think Terowie was this little town and they camped us there on

07:00 one side of the town, the road and the town was on the other side and they decided to take us for a swim. That was the first bit of training I ever had. That's where they taught us to form 4's and line up and so on.

07:30 Then they said we'd go out for a swim in the salt lakes. They didn't tell us it was so far out and we marched and marched and marched. When we got out there - oh, that's right. When I was at school too, 13 at the Domain Baths. I used to go down to the Domain Baths.

08:00 I was at High School yes, I was 13. I got the Bronze Medallion for Life Saving. But I had turn 14 before they could give it to me and so I was 14, when I turned 14 they presented me with the Bronze Medallion for Life Saving.

Did you competitively swim at that time?

No.

08:30 That was just the life saving and going to the Domain Baths. But when we got to this Terowie or whatever it was and they'd taken us out for a swim in the salt lakes. When we got out there they enquired "Any lifesavers here?" So we had to sit on the side while all the others swam

09:00 and they let us go in for 10 minutes at the end. I only got 10 minutes and the others got a couple of hours. We had to sit there in case we had to dive in and pick them out. The lifesavers had to sit on the side.

Did you ever volunteer for lifesaving again?

No not again because that was a really hot old ground out there. We walked for quite a few hours, we marched

09:30 and then we had to sit there while the others all enjoyed the swim in the salt lake.

Now that must have been quite a momentous trip through central Australia at that time?

Oh it was quite, very very good.

What were some of the highlights of that trip?

Just that, I think we were there for 2 weeks at that little town and then they,

10:00 I forget all the names of the places now but they put us on the train to Alice Springs. 'Cos riding on that train was a highlight because I'd never seen a carriage like it.

Can you describe the carriage?

Yes. It had seats right down the side, each side. Not in the middle. Not crossways or anything. Just long seats along

10:30 under the windows. Didn't seem to be a very big engine. Went along all right. (Phone rings) That's my wife, I think.

At Alice Springs, I presume you got off the train?

Yes. We had some camp. All I can remember of Alice Springs is that it was such a pretty place.

11:00 It was green and white. All the places seemed to have lots of lawns, green lawns and the buildings seemed to be white. It was such a clean looking place.

How long did you spend in Alice Springs?

Maybe 2 days or 3 days. They also had a boxing ring in the bottom of the

11:30 river in the bed of the river in Alice Springs. Same as they did at the next place up.

Katherine?

No. It was - oh dear.

It was one of those towns on the way up?

Yes. Where the Englishmen are supposed to have got killed from. Barrett Creek.

So did you box on those occasions?

Yes.

You did? So what happened?

12:00 **How was it organised and who were you fighting?**

There was one fella. He was a Warrant Officer. He was a Newcastle fighter and his brother was a Newcastle fighter. He was a Warrant Officer. He'd just joined - couldn't have just joined because he was a Warrant Officer. He had something to do with the ring and because he used to come into McQuillan's gymnasium

12:30 and he knew me from there. Of course he was advising everyone to put their money on me in boxing.

So you volunteered? You wanted to be in these matches?

Oh yes. Yes. I always volunteered. Same as the old Darwin Stadium. It was just a round tin fence with no

roof on it

13:00 and logs for seats.

So just sticking with Alice Springs for the moment, how many people would have been watching and betting on the match?

I don't know. Only just the soldiers. Whatever number was there. Just something for the troops. For the battalions to break the monotony. Give them something to do.

Do you recall any of the details of any of the fights?

No.

Did you win?

I don't know.

13:30 I think I must have. .

So you then got involved in another boxing match at Barrett Creek?

Barrett Creek, yes.

And it was just one fight each time?

Yes.

Were there other fighters. It wasn't just the one fight I presume?

Other people. Some with experience. Some with no experience. They just got in and had a go. Just something to do. It's like show night.

14:00 Just for something more or less to happen.

So approximately how many troops were travelling with you and on the trucks later on?

Oh, there would have been, I think it would have been a couple of hundred troops because there were quite a lot of trucks and

14:30 I've got photographs out there when next place up we stopped at was Newcastle Waters. That was when the flood was on because there was a flood and we used to have to put 40 sandbags on each truck and drop them off as we went across this water where there was evidently a bit of road washed away.

So why would the sandbags be put aboard the truck?

To drop them off

15:00 as they went across where the water was washing the road away.

Oh, to stops the trucks washing away?

No, as the trucks went across, they'd drop the sandbags off and put them under the water.

Oh, I see. To create a bit of a causeway?

Yes. To make the road more stronger. The passageway more stronger.

15:30 **What was the mood amongst the troops like as you travelled north?**

It was quite all right. It was a bit tiring I think. Just sitting in the back of those trucks all day didn't do you much good for moving around.

So was it fairly boring?

Oh yes. Except for the scenery. Like even on the trains there were lots of camels and donkeys.

16:00 In all parts of the things as we went there. So there's wonderful scenery out there. Like at where that Aboriginal rock is. There's some rock out there somewhere that every person, people go out on holidays to look at this rock. Well at Barrett Creek there were 3 of those hills.

16:30 That was quite nice to see and climb up them. We used to climb up the hills but there were 3 shaped the same as that one in the...

Three basically the same shape as Ayer's Rock [Uluru]?

Ayer's Rock. Yes. That's the one. Same as that.

And of course on the train you would have been travelling past the Flinders Ranges in the distance? You would have taken the Ghan wouldn't it? The train.

Yes, the Ghan was

17:00 what we went on from Peterborough to Alice Springs. Like we went from this little town Terowie or whatever it was to Peterborough on one train and then we changed onto the Ghan, I think it was from there from Peterborough which is also where the railway line comes from Broken Hill

17:30 to South Australia. Meets at Peterborough. That's when we got on the other train and went to Alice Springs from there.

So once you reached Darwin, what were your first impressions of Darwin?

Not much there. There was three streets. Our army camp was only a couple of miles out from

18:00 Darwin itself. At Parap. That was the army camp we were at.

Could you give us a bit of a description of what that army camp was like?

Yeah it was all tin huts. Silver City it was well known as because there was all silver tin huts. Down behind it was the Chinese Cemetery and

18:30 got some photographs of the toilets and that out there in the army in the photograph. Old hessian covered showers and toilets. The hessian round the walls.

Approximately how many men were in this army camp?

1000.

1000.

19:00 **So what it's here that you first did some training?**

Yes this is where the training started because I was in D Company and we really got into training up there.

Can you say what form the training took?

Well ordinary drill training at Don Company because it was a Rifle Company.

19:30 It was just Form 4's. Ordinary parade ground stuff. I think it was every week we would have a battalion parade. I'm sure that was every week. The battalion parade and the whole battalion which was a 1000 strong men. Would be out on parade every week because we had quite a big parade ground

20:00 and it was dirt. It wasn't cement or anything, cemented in it was just gravel parade ground. Very big one. Right in the middle of the camp.

What were the instructors like, what were the trainers like?

They were the NCO's [Non Commissioned Officers] in the battalion and they were quite good because most of them were from the Darwin Mobile

20:30 Force. Originally the Darwin Mobile Force they went to Darwin. They were the regular army. They went up there as the Darwin Mobile Force. Well then in I think it was 1940 they decided to form the Darwin Infantry Battalion to take over from the Darwin Mobile Force. The Darwin Mobile Force

21:00 men came down and became the officers, NCO's and so they were fully trained, well trained.

So the officers and trainers that you were encountering were members of the Darwin Mobile Force?

Darwin Mobile Force, which was the permanent army.

Were there any tough or memorable characters among the trainers?

Wonderful fellas. Jimmy Ore was a wonderful man on drill

21:30 and he was Captain. So many of them they were really wonderful soldiers. Len Hutton, a Stawell Gift runner, he later became my trainer, boxing trainer and Len Hutton, Harry Fall, another Australian Rules Player from

22:00 Adelaide although Harry came later on, that's right. Len Hutton was a regular army fellow and he was a Stawell Gift runner. We had some wonderful fellas there.

You had quite a few sportsmen among you by the sounds of it?

Oh yes. We would have won the rugby league competition that year except the 2/3rd Pioneers beat us for

22:30 the final.

How soon did you make it known that you were a boxer when you reached Darwin?

When I was fighting in Darwin Stadium but that was only, as I say, a round tin fence. No roof and the seats were just logs driven in the ground with forks on them then a log across from each

23:00 fork and sit on the logs and that was the seating. I think the ring was built up on (phone rings)

You were just beginning to describe the boxing ring.

Beer crates were put down first, then the boxing ring, the base of the ring

23:30 was on top of the beer crates so it was a real old bushy boxing ring. Quite a good ring though.

How many spectators would the place hold?

A couple of hundred, only a couple of hundred because not many people up there at that time. There'd only be 2000 white people in the whole town.

In the time you were in Darwin, how many fights would you have had there?

24:00 Oh, whole time maybe a dozen, 2 dozen because there was so many at the 29 Mile as well.

So what weight were you? What category of boxer were you?

At that time I was a Welter Weight. I was 10 stone something and later on that was in the early days.

24:30 Later on I became a Middle Weight and I was 11s 2p.

Were you a right handed or left handed boxer?

Orthodox.

Orthodox. Now you mentioned you had a trainer who was also one of your army Trainers. Could you tell us about working with your trainer in Darwin as far as boxing was concerned?

Len didn't take on with me until we got to Newcastle.

25:00 At Darwin it was just my compatriots. Darcy Armstrong used to fight at Queanbeyan, Canberra. He was in the sigs. We used to just put the gloves on together and do some training with each other.

25:30 It was just a get together, no real trainer there.

So you didn't have a regularly daily routine of skipping, punching bags or anything like that?

No. Oh no. Just whenever you felt like getting it done.

Were the crowd betting on your matches there?

I think so. Where was it? It was in the Yank at Oro Bay used to run around with a hundred dollars

26:00 in either hand "I'll have a hundred dollars on the Aussie!" There was someone in Darwin who always used to have a bet. Used to always bet on me.

Now at what point did you learn that you would be in signals?

When this Corporal came around, "Harry, someone looking for people to learn

26:30 the signalling, go in the signalling, signal platoon." That's when I decided I'd give it a try, the signal platoon. My little mate, Vic Bennett he went with me and the two of us learnt the Morse Code. Learn to operate the switchboard, put up lines, signal lines, wires and so on.

27:00 **This was obviously at the Parap camp in Darwin?**

Yes. Parap. All at Parap.

So how did that training process take?

I don't know. Harry ran a school. I suppose the school would have went for about a month and then they'd give you the test for the Morse to see if you read Morse. We had to read the Morse

27:30 at such a speed to become a Group 2 Specialist as we were and so we that's what we got the extra money for. Being a Group 2 Specialist.

What speed did you get up to?

I don't know. It was probably 20 words a minute. We had a Stan Bellis, an old Postmaster fellow

28:00 and he used to take the news everyday over the thing that would be at 30 words a minute and Stan could just read that like he was reading a book. No problem to him. But he was a really marvel with the Morse. But I suppose 20 words a minute would have been the most I ever got up to.

So that was training in Morse. What

- 28:30 **other forms of training were you doing?**
- Semaphore. With the flag. Semaphore Flags. That's 2 flags and the Morse was one flag.
- There was a visual form of Morse was there?**
- Oh yes. 2 flags for Semaphore and one big flag for Morse Code.
- So how would you signify**
- 29:00 **the dots and the dashes?**
- Dit Dit Dit (showing with hands moving flag a small way to the side) Da was right over (showing with hands moving flag right down). Dit was a little one.
- The Dit being the Dot?**
- Dot yeah. Then Dit Dit Dit Da. Big one would come right down to the side and the other ones would only come a little way over.
- So what form did the Semaphore take?**
- Arms.
- 29:30 It was A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I J and so on (Showing different movements with arms for each letter of the alphabet).
- All of this was sandwiched into a couple of months training that you had?**
- Yes.
- From where were you getting your information about the war at this stage? About the progression of the war?**
- News everyday. Stan Bellis
- 30:00 used to take the news over the radio with the Morse. It'd come over in Morse all the time. So there was a Morse. There were messages every day on the war.
- So the messages that he was receiving in Morse were official messages?**
- No. It was the news of what was happening all over the world with the war. Not official stuff. No.
- 30:30 **So that's how you were learning what was happening?**
- What was happening, yes. Throughout the world.
- So was it in Darwin that you started to drink fairly frequently?**
- Oh yes.
- How did that come about?**
- I don't know. I just became brash. I was able to beat everyone and I started smoking as well. I started drinking as well. I don't know how I got to the drink.
- 31:00 I think it was because I went up to the canteen one night and I just started to drink and then went on and on.
- Would you drink to the stage where you would lose consciousness?**
- Not lose consciousness but I was pretty dopey.
- Was it pretty much a drinking culture among your mates there?**
- 31:30 Only amongst some. Some yes like poor old Stan Bellis. He could still take Morse even though he was rotten. He was just phenomenal.
- So were you and he drinking mates?**
- No. Stan only drank by himself. He always turned up for his news though. Take his news and his Morse then he'd go out and get on the grog again. I just started to drink
- 32:00 because I was the big smasher, I could beat anyone and just grew that way.
- Could you describe your personality at that stage? What sort of person were you?**
- Pretty easy to get on with but I suppose I wanted to be a blowhard and that's what made me
- 32:30 start to drink.

Well, the person I see in front of me now is a fairly modest, low key sort of person. Are you describing a very different kind of person?

Oh, I think so because I was just "I could beat this bloke and I could beat that bloke". There's no one I couldn't beat in the battalion. Then I become just a big blowhard with the grog

33:00 and see what I can do. I can drink all day and it just got out of hand. Really I become a drunkard. On occasions I wouldn't drink. More than less if I got the opportunity I was into it. They used to have to throw me out of the canteen at night to close it up. They'd close up the canteen and evict me, get rid of me. That's how long

33:30 I'd be there. I wouldn't know when to give off.

So how long after you started drinking in Darwin do you consider you had a problem? How long did it really take for you to have a problem here?

I don't think it took me very long. Then I tied up with different people at different hotels in the town. The Victoria Hotel.

34:00 If I remember correctly there was some fella there who used to fight down in Adelaide or somewhere and I think I mixed up with him and of course I'd be drinking beer all the time I was talking to him. Yeah, it just got out of hand all over the years. But later in the years it got worse and worse.

Did anyone in the army say to you "You've got a problem here?" or try to discuss it with you?

No.

34:30 **You mentioned Stan had this problem. Were there other people that had this problem?**

Oh Stan, poor old Stan. He'd drink and drink. He'd go all day. I think that's why he left the post office. He was such a brilliant Morse man. But Stan just drank and drank. That's all he did. Drank and got his news.

So he drank on the job basically?

Oh yes.

35:00 He'd sit there and drink while he was writing it away and could still never miss a jot.

Were you drinking on the job as well?

Oh yes. Mainly when I was finished when the canteen opened after tea, after dinner. Go over and have a drink and drink till the canteen closed at night.

35:30 **Australia was a pretty drink orientated society as well?**

Yes, oh yes. That's all they had to do of a night time.

What about other forms of entertainment in Darwin. Obviously the boxing but what about movies?

Oh yes, there was a movie house there. Quite a good movie. The Star I think it was called. It had no roof on it but it

36:00 was quite a good one. Deck chairs. You used to sit in deck chairs. I used to even go there. Now and again. But the movie house was all right but the pub seemed to be the main place to go to. We went everywhere else. We'd go swimming as well.

36:30 As well as going out each day signalling. We'd go to point A and someone would cross the harbour or something to point B and you'd signal to each other with the flags.

Using Semaphore?

Yes. To train. To keep in training you know.

Actually while we're on the subject

37:00 **are you able to demonstrate the whole alphabet with the flag motions for us?**

Oh I don't know .

Do you remember?

A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L. (Demonstrates flag positions with hands) I think that's L, M, N, O, then a P

37:30 comes out, Q, R, S. From there on I've gone. The Morse of course is Dit Da, that's A B is Da Dit Dit Dit. C is Da Dit Da Dit. (Demonstrates flag movements with hands)

38:00 D is Da Dit Dit. E is Dit. F is Dit Dit Da Dit Da. G is Da Da Dit. H is Dit Dit Dit Dit. I is Dit Dit. J is Dit Da

Da Da. K is Da Dit Da. L is Dit Da Dit Dit. M is Da Da.

38:30 N is Da Dit. O is Da Da Da. P is Da Da Dit. Q is Da Dit Da Da. R is Did Da Dit. S is Dit Dit Dit. T is Da. U is Dit Dit Da. V is Dit Dit Dit Da.

39:00 W, X is Da Dit Dit Da. Y is Da Dit Da Da. Z is Da Da Dit Dit. I think.

That's very good. That's excellent. What an exceptional memory you've got.

39:30 **That's fantastic. You would have continued that obviously right until the end of the war.**

Yes, oh yes. That's why I got caught at Tagano Bay when the battalion went on and I was taken off and had to stop at Brigade Headquarters as an operator because they were short of operators.

Tape 4

00:33 **When was it that you first arrived in Darwin?**

Oh, I joined in March, April. It might have been the end of May. I don't think it was June. It was towards the end of May.

1941?

1941 yes. That's how long it took us to get there because

01:00 when we got to Newcastle Waters as I say, it was the wet season in the Northern Territory, the water it come down and it washed all over the roadway and that's why we had to put the 40 sandbags on each truck. Drop them off at different places where they were needed across the water and 'cos most of the boys went in swimming

01:30 and in the photo they've got no costumes on, just their back bits poking up and they're all having a swim in the flooded water.

Was that in the wet? It must have been in the wet.

The wet season.

The wet season. Yes.

So it would have to be just before the end of May because the wet season would stop around that time.

02:00 **How did you find the climate when you got up there? Were you able to adapt to it?**

Beautiful in the dry season. Really wonderful. But in the wet season, perspire from go to woe. But the dry season is really lovely in the daytime. Beautiful days and nights.

Yes, I've been up there during the wet season and every breath is like eating a fruit cake or something.

02:30 That's right. That's what I say in the wet season it was wonderful when a storm came 'cos you could run out and just strip off and get out in the cold water and have a shower. Have a good shower. That's how heavy the rain was because you could shower under the rain. Instead of having to stand under a roof or something.

So was this a daily downpour?

Oh, they're liable to come anytime

03:00 in the wet season. They just rolled in.

So, your activities between your arrival in Darwin in 1941 and say February 1942 were mostly training?

Training. Yes.

Entirely training?

Yes.

Were you starting to send and receive serious signals at this stage which were contributing to the war effort?

No, no.

So it was entirely a training period?

Training

03:30 period. Yes.

Were there among the soldiers, among members of the population or other services that you might have spoken to, was there any speculation about how vulnerable Darwin was to Japanese attack?

I don't think there was much talk about it. There was possibly a lot of conversation, you know when Japan came into the war.

04:00 I don't think they ever worried about Darwin itself. I can't recall any conversations.

Can you remember your own reaction and perhaps the reaction of others when you heard that Japan had entered the war?

No, I think 7th December 1941.

04:30 I wouldn't, I don't think I was over anxious but I probably was upset about it because it being so close to this side of the world as well as from America.

Were you continuing to receive news via the Morse Code?

Yes.

05:00 Stan would take the news. He always took the news every day. He wouldn't miss that news. Would come over what was going on throughout the world.

And of course early '42 we've got Singapore as well. The fall of Singapore.

Yes. Singapore. I think that's when we started worrying because we were wondering what was going to happen from there on because when Singapore fell.

05:30 Yes. I think we were always scanning the skies from there on expecting something to sneak in. They certainly came in the day it happened though.

Can you give us your memories? Could you almost walk us through that day as you recall it on 19 February 1942?

Well, I think I was out

06:00 putting up sig wires. We were out near Fannie Bay and there was an ack-ack placements [anti aircraft guns] there. Right beside us. There were three of us putting this sig wire through somewhere past the - going past the ack-ack guns. It

06:30 just happened. These fellas ran to their guns and the sirens started going because we had nowhere to go. The trees were very sparse and far apart and that's we knew it was happening when the gunners all ran to their guns and we could hear terrific explosions all over. As it turned out

07:00 they made a big hole all around the Post Office in Darwin and the ships they sank was amazing. So we just lay on the ground and there was one tree that was way out. We had no hole to get in. We were just lying under these couple of trees

07:30 and honestly when they come around strafing after they've dropped their bombs and that. They came round strafing the ack-ack gunners. Honestly if I'd had a big stick I think I could have pushed the gunner out of the plane as he went past because they were so low, you know. That was the first we knew of it but the consequence was bad. For weeks after we'd walk around the sea

08:00 front and you'd go round the beaches and that and you'd find bodies in the water. It finished up having to have to get bags to pull the bodies in otherwise they'd fall to pieces and just put them up on the beaches.

And you were doing that?

Yes, later on. That was a week or 2 after the bombing. Still pulling bodies in. Every now and again. There

08:30 was no drive on them it was just as you - like we'd be walking around the beach or something putting a line near a beach and just see a bit of a body. You'd get a bag and all that was the thing to pull the bodies out in.

How did you handle having to do that?

Just did it. Just pulled the bodies up 'cos if you grabbed it by the hands, if you used your hands,

09:00 they'd probably fall to pieces and just leave them on the beach and report them that they were there. They'd bury them on the beach.

So you said you used bags. Put some of them in bags?

Bags. Yes.

What sort of bags?

Any bags that was in. Especially if there was sugar bags around, you know. You'd scoop the body out and carry it up onto the beach.

Then report it?

Then report it. Yes. Where the body was.

09:30 **Going back to that first raid where you were near the Ack-Ack guns. What was running through your mind as it actually occurred in terms of your own responses and reactions to what was happening?**

All I could see was smoke and hear explosions. Especially with the Ack-Ack gunners. Sometimes they were blasting right over our heads. If they were

10:00 aiming this way or up but it was a terrific amount of noise because the gunners being in close proximity to the Ack-Ack guns. The planes dropping their bombs on all the ships in the harbour.

Were you afraid when all this was happening?

I don't think I was afraid. I wasn't too happy. I wasn't too brave.

10:30 **You weren't too brave?**

I wasn't going to move off that ground .

What else could you do? Were there no slit trenches?

No, no, no. We were just putting up wires for that area. I don't know why we were putting the wires but it was running past near the Ack-Ack gunners. So we were just going along and there was no slit trench there.

How many of you were putting up these wires?

Three of us.

Three of you? Did you all react in the same way?

11:00 Oh yes, we all lay under the tree. .

So how long were you lying there?

I don't know. For as long as the raid lasted. They came over as I say, strafing the gunners.

Now after the bombing, you referred to walking around the shore line as part of your, you know, every day duties and activities?

Yeah or yeah. We used to go getting fish, catching fish and that sort of thing.

11:30 As a matter of fact I got one fish one night. I think it was Barramundi as they call it and ran in and I was able to grab it by the tail and pull it up on the beach and I sold it to the publican at the Parap Hotel.

That's pretty good. I don't know how many fishermen could boast that.

Got three beers for that. .

Three beers? That would have made a good impression!

Yes, it was splashing around in the water and I just run in and grabbed it by the tail

12:00 so that really - it was big, one about this big (indicates size with hands about 2 foot apart). Quite a big fish.

What can you recall, when you went down to the harbour, what can you recall of the damage you saw among the shipping in the harbour?

Well it was too far away from the shore from where we were. We were on this side and the wharf front. I believe the joint in the wharf went

12:30 out I believe first bomb. The wharf went out and sideways along.

I've been along that curving wharf. There's an east arm and a west arm.

The middle of it they got. First hit. So they join as it went out, got knocked out first up.

There was a ship tied up to the wharf, wasn't' there?

13:00 I think there was.

Did you walk down there afterwards and see the damage to the ship?

Oh no. No.

You were not allowed to?

I don't know. I suppose you could've seen them because there wasn't very much distance between the Post Office and the wharf. The main wharf.

I'm talking about the aftermath. You must have had plenty of chance to walk around Darwin after that to see what damage had been done.

13:30 I don't think - I went in, we went in and had a look at the Post Office, probably I had a look at the wharf too but I can't remember much about it.

Can you remember the damage to the Post Office?

It wasn't so much the Post Office. It was all around it. It was these big holes where the bombs had. They must have dropped quite a few on there because there were quite a number of holes around there. I don't know how many.

14:00 They were really blown out.

And what other buildings could you see had been damaged?

I don't know. I don't remember them. But I don't think there was any more buildings. There wasn't many there anyhow. The Post Office was more or less on its own going towards the water because it was only a very small village at that time. With three streets

14:30 and not much. The hotels I think were the biggest buildings.

Did you hear any estimate at the time of how many people had been killed in that first raid?

No. But was so many ships that were sunk though. The only thing we heard was them saying about I think about 15 or something. I think that about all

15:00 or 7 or something from the Post Office but they didn't give much from the ships until later on and then they only I don't think they every gave out the right number from the people on the ships. There were so many ships and now it's coming out that that was a worse bombing than the American one in Hawaii.

That there'd been more casualties in Darwin

15:30 **than in Pearl Harbour?**

Yeah and more planes bombing it.

Now over the years there have been stories about panic with people leaving town after the bombing. Did you ever hear?

I don't think so. I think there were some but they weren't panicking I don't think. They were just getting out of Darwin because the week before the bombing anyhow some went out. A trainload

16:00 of them went out so they had a lot of people out. There wasn't many left there.

Were they civilians?

Yes.

What about among service personnel? Did you ever hear?

No. None of ours went anyhow.

There was a Commission of Enquiry afterwards which found evidence of looting in the town. Did you ever hear?

Oh yes. There was. I think everyone did it. One of ours, Norm Parker, he'd go and burn the place down too.

16:30 Chinatown he reckoned that was full of disease.

That was his view of Chinatown in Darwin?

Yes.

Could you explain "he'd go out and burn the place down"? What do you mean by that?

He'd set fire to it.

Norm would go out and set fire to Chinatown?

Set fire to a building yes. When we were camped out by the aerodrome. He was a DR (Dispatch Rider) too. Norm. Another Newtown boy.

17:00 He'd do his bike run, motorbike run and he'd come back and say "You watch over town in a few minutes". He'd get candles about that long and pack cellophane and all that because there was lots of photographic stuff in nearly every house and every shop. Where he could he'd put all this cellophane and films around the candle and set

17:30 fire to it. That would give him a chance to get back to where we were and he'd say "Watch over town shortly" and sure enough it would go up. Everyone was around saying that the spies were signalling to the Japanese Air Force. But Norm would set fire to it because he'd say "That Chinatown spreads disease".

Was he only burning buildings in Chinatown?

Yes.

How many buildings did he burn?

I don't know but Norm

18:00 he set fire to them whenever he went in there. He was a terror.

How many times are we talking about, approximately?

Maybe about 6 or 7 times, Norm would set fire to something.

These were all unoccupied buildings?

Oh yeah all gone. Everyone was gone.

You said something a moment ago about these were spies sending messages to the Japanese?

Yeah this is what the rumour got around.

Could you explain? Who were the spies sending messages to the Japanese?

18:30 That's what was getting around. Whoever was lighting these fires was sending signals to the Japanese. But that was Norm setting fire to them because he reckoned it was full of disease. The rumours went around that it was spies using the fires as a signal.

So was he burning any non-Chinese buildings?

I don't think so.

19:00 I think only Chinatown. He reckoned Chinatown was bad.

I used the term looting. Looting also means theft. Was there any theft of material from the deserted and damaged Darwin?

I don't think there was too much of it. I never saw any of it anyhow. Never saw any of that.

Were Norm's activities every enquired into? Ever investigated?

Oh no because he'd be back in camp when the fire

19:30 started. . Oh no.

So it was a fairly well kept secret?

And that would be about 10 miles away from town when we were out near the aerodrome. 7 miles. We was between the aerodrome and the water and so he'd get back 7 miles and still waiting for it to go up. Then you'd see the smoke come up from there.

20:00 **And these places were being burnt to the ground were they?**

Oh yes. They couldn't fight them. They had nothing. They had fire brigades, army ones but not much.

So what impact, on the army guys that you knew and probably other people you knew in Darwin. What impact did this first raid have on them?

Not much. They didn't like it. I think like everyone,

20:30 like me. They were a bit shaken up. I don't know if we were scared but pretty well shaken around.

Were you there when the other raids occurred?

Oh yes. Even the night time raids. Now we were on a manoeuvre once, coming from the 29 Mile up into Darwin itself to do a manoeuvre,

21:00 a battalion manoeuvre. That's how you got used to it. Night time the raid come over. The searchlights are up picking the aeroplanes out. The planes were dropping bombs. All we did, I did anyhow was just roll over in the bed and had a look at it. We couldn't have cared less then.

You weren't afraid for your personal safety?

No.

What sort of targets were they bombing at that point?

21:30 I don't know. It was just night time and they were probably going for the aerodrome. That was all that was left for them to get.

So were you not afraid that one of those bombs might drop on you?

Not then no. I just rolled over in the bed, search lights on the planes and the planes dropped their bombs. The ack-ack guns going up trying to hit the aeroplanes. Got so used to it. I suppose

22:00 that's the term we used.

You said everybody was pretty shaken after that first raid?

The first one I think probably everyone.

Can you describe, can you be a bit more specific about how they were shaken?

No, just myself. I was, don't know if I was scared or - but

22:30 I suppose I was a bit frightened that they were going to drop bombs on the ack-ack gunners but they didn't anyhow. I suppose I was just - nerves.

All nerves. Would it have been around this time that you started drinking?

Oh no, it was later. I was well into the drink then. In those days.

23:00 **So the drinking had started fairly soon after you'd got to Darwin?**

Yes. Not long after I got to Darwin that was it.

So suddenly war had come to Australia and your whole outlook on Australia's vulnerability. I mean surely that must have changed?

I guess I suppose we had conversations about what we were going to get. What assistance we were going to get and

23:30 the American ships coming into port and what troops could come up to assist us and so on. But I guess there would have been a terrific amount of conversation about it because it would have been the main topic every day.

Were you writing to your girlfriend regularly at this time?

Oh yes, yes.

24:00 Just about every day I'd write. I found letters in there that I wrote on the train between Melbourne and Adelaide.

Have you kept all your letters?

No. That was one I wrote to her.

Describing the trip was it?

Yes, what I was doing. I was lying on the train floor. That was between - no I think it was between Sydney and Melbourne. I had a pencil.

24:30 That's all I had was the pencil and I've run across that letter. She's got it in a box in there.

Did you re-read it?

Yeah, I read it. I remember lying on the floor of the train writing that letter. Yes.

So you said you wrote to her almost every day. Did you tell her about the bombing?

Oh, she knew about it. I reckon I

25:00 would have mentioned different things that had happened to me whatever they were. I would have mentioned that quite often.

How much were you restricted by censorship?

Well, an Officer had to read every letter so you couldn't put much in there otherwise he'd delete it. But every letter wrote an Officer had to read

25:30 it and okay it.

Do you remember trying to write to her or actually writing to her about your experiences during the first bombing?

Oh I don't think so. I don't remember. I may have. I don't know.

What sort of things was she writing to you?

"I loves ya!!" .

26:00 She'd just write up and see how I was. I suppose ask how I was getting on. Yes. How I was faring.

You were obviously fairly keen on each other at this time?

Oh yes, yes.

Did you miss her?

Oh yeah. But as she reckons now, "You're always leaving me behind". . "You're leaving me".

26:30 **But she must have realised how much you loved her through the letters?**

Oh yeah. She knew that before I left because we used to go to the other side of Liverpool, Casula. That was where the Scout - there was a Jamboree there one year back

27:00 before I went away in the war. We were up at the Jamboree, Scouts and the Cubs and that. Oh yes, we got on quite well. I was down at her place every other night and as I say, every Saturday night we'd go to the movies. The old Hub Theatre.

27:30 Weekends we'd - see how much the grog had me, when we went to Cronulla for the honeymoon. The day we were married. The next night I was up the pub 'til all hours.

28:00 That's the next day. So that's how the grog hit me.

How did Anne react to that?

She didn't like but she put up with it and that was it.

Because that's enough to break many another marriage up.

Yes. Straight away. Drinking grog the next day. Been at the pub all day. So that's how bad it was with the grog.

But she clearly loved you enough

28:30 **to want to keep it going?**

Oh yes.

So can we talk a bit more about the marriage? You spoke about it in the summary before. Can you talk about - well I'm rather curious as to why you weren't given leave to get married?

Well I don't know. They probably said they didn't have time - yeah they did! The Saturday I left and the authority came through on the Monday. That's what they told me

29:00 after I got back at the Court Martial. That the authority came back on the Monday but I was already gone.

So what did the authority say? How much leave did the authority give you?

Oh they wouldn't give me permission to go. I asked to be able to go down and get married because the arrangements were being made for that date.

29:30 Seeing it was the Saturday before, the permission hadn't come back, I went and got on a train and that was it. Took off.

Had you proposed to Anne via mail?

Oh, I guess so. Well that's how we arranged the date for the wedding.

Were you able to make long distance phone calls at that time?

No.

30:00 **So it was entirely by letter?**

By mail. Yes.

As you departed. As you travelled down you must have been a little worried about what the consequences of all this were going to be?

I don't think I was worried about it because it was all troops going to different schools and things. As a

- matter of fact when we got to Brisbane, they were all lining up to get the train to Sydney and the
- 30:30 names were being called. I went out the first one and got on the end of the line and I was the first one on the train. So they turned us left and I marched them all to the train.
- That's fantastic. Okay, you'd had a very long and arduous trip up to Darwin. How did you travel from Darwin back to Sydney?**
- We came,
- 31:00 we left down as far as - oh the well known
- Okay so you mentioned Brisbane.**
- Yeah we got off the train at - oh Old Timer's Disease it catches up with, on you, doesn't it?
- 31:30 There's a place about 90 to 120 miles down from Darwin. Katherine! I think it was Katherine we went to by train. Then we got trucks from there, went out through Mt Isa and from Mt Isa right through, I think to Townsville and down to Brisbane
- 32:00 that way. But that was how we come home.
- How many days did that take you?**
- I don't know. It would have been about a week I think because there was so many. Mt Isa. We stayed at Mt Isa. We stayed there a couple of days.
- So when you arrived in Sydney, did Anne know you were AWOL?**
- I think so because I'd written her and said is it all right if I come down?
- 32:30 There was no leave granted yet but is it okay if I come down?
- So she clearly knew?**
- Yes.
- So what can you tell us about the wedding?**
- It was at St Joseph's Church in Newtown. Wedding reception. I think it
- 33:00 was in the Manchester Unity Hall in Newtown, I think.
- Were there lots of people at the wedding?**
- Yes.
- Your relatives and hers?**
- Yes. Relatives. All relatives. That night when we got the train out to the Cronulla and then we had to walk from the station right along the street to where this house was. She'd rented
- 33:30 a house there and I had to carry the cases. Every 10 yards in the end I had to put them down because they were so heavy. But at least we got there.
- It was quite a walk was it?**
- Oh yes. About two mile.
- It must have seemed like four miles by the time you carried the cases?**
- Oh yes.
- When you got married were you in your uniform?**
- Yes. Still
- 34:00 in uniform. I wore the uniform all the time.
- Was your mother present at the wedding?**
- Yes. She was there.
- So how long was the honeymoon?**
- I think it must have been about a week I think. No, it must have been 2 weeks because I said I'd got back on the
- 34:30 Monday, then I said that's too close to the Sunday so I'll leave it till the end of the week. So it must have been two weeks or three weeks. That's when I finally made up my mind and went out to the Showground and saw old Mick and told him. I said "I've been AWOL Mick and I want to catch up with

the unit."

35:00 and he says "Well, you're supposed to go to the Military Police but I'll put you under open arrest." So that's what he did and I took myself from there on.

You took yourself from there?

All the way.

So he put you under open arrest?

Open arrest. He said "No-one will know but you, yourself".

So what did open arrest involve?

Just that I was on my honour to be under arrest. That I knew I was arrested,

35:30 under arrest and I've got to go back. Can't deviate anywhere. That's what I've got to do. Catch the unit up. It's the same as being close arrest. You're taken there but open arrest, you know you've got to get back and that's it.

It's basically an honour system?

Yes.

Now how did you find out

36:00 **where the unit was at this time?**

I don't know but I found out they were in the islands in New Guinea. They'd already gone. That's when I went out and saw Mick. He said "You know they're in New Guinea now?" I said "Yes, that's why I want to catch up with them."

Now who was Mick again? You mentioned him just a moment ago?

Mick Masters. He was the ex-Officer. Our 2IC in Darwin and

36:30 he took over. They sent him down to Sydney and he took over the showground. He was Officer in Charge out there.

So he was able to find out where your unit had gone and he told you. So it was now up to you to make your way up there?

Yes.

How did you do this? Without the normal organisation. With you under open arrest. How did you get up there?

I think he might have arranged - he arranged for

37:00 someone there to raise the papers for me because when I was down at the place he sent me to. I think he looked out his office window and saw I was still sitting there. Some length of time because the phone rang and this chap behind the counter answered it and he was saying "Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir". Mick had evidently found out I was still waiting and they raised the paper

37:30 for me to catch up to my unit. So I went to all these - Selli - that was the staging camp in Queensland and I was out in that staging camp. Near Charters Towers and I used to do picket duties in the town at Charters Towers and do other duties round the camp

38:00 and so I took myself all the way from there until I caught up with the unit in Killerton, Cape Killerton in New Guinea and then that was in about June or something.

June 1943?

Yes.

So how did you get from Charters Towers to Cape Killerton?

With the troops.

Oh, you travelled with the regular troops?

Yes. With

38:30 each - every time. That's what I say, Mick must have raised the paperwork for me because I used to be put on the movements as well. That's how I caught up with the battalion.

So just looking at the various stages of the journey, you would have gone from Charters Towers to the nearest port?

Yes, I don't know where that was. I don't know if it was Townsville or somewhere

39:00 like that.

Do you remember the ship or what kind of ship you sailed on?

No I don't remember that ship. The only one I can remember is when I went from New Guinea to New Britain.

Do you remember any details of the journey?

Not from there. I think I flew from Moresby. Yeah. Moresby to Lae. No not Lae.

39:30 Because they were at Cape Killerton and that was down at Gona.

Did you feel a sense of apprehension that you were going back to face the music?

No. I knew the court martial would come up and to tell you how long that was. That was nearly Christmas time before they court martialled me. So that's how long it took. To get the court martial going. Then they charged me with being

40:00 AWOL for 110 days and I said "Oh no." But that's how long it took from the time I left Cairns until I caught the unit up. That was 110 days and that's why they charged me with that 110 days. When I pleaded not guilty they adjourned the court martial for a while. They didn't say whether they took it into consideration but I said "I surrendered on such and such a date

40:30 to Major Masters at Sydney Showground" so that's when they handed me the envelope. You open that and get a surprise. . So it was only 60 days field punishment which was nothing. Wasn't imprisonment. They should have imprisoned me for that, you see.

We are actually right out of tape on this. It's a real

41:00 **cliff hanger!**

Tape 5

00:33 **Neville, just picking up again. Your arrival in Gona and the process of the court martial? Could you talk about that?**

Yes well we landed at Gona and our battalion was camped at Cape Killerton and so I made my way out. Soputa I think was Divisional Headquarters and that's where I went for the court martial or no, they come

01:00 out to the battalion. At the end of the - they had charged me for being AWOL for 110 days but I told them that I surrendered after 30 days and had been open arrest all the way through. They adjourned it until they checked on that.

01:30 Then they come back in and at the end of the court martial they handed me the little envelope with the surprise packet inside it. I opened it and read it and it was 60 days field punishment, so then we had to wire ourselves in at Soputa.

What did the process of wiring yourself in involve?

Putting barbed wire around the area they allocated for the field

02:00 punishment centre. We had tents in the centre and the staff, I think they were in tents too. We just had to put the barbed wire around the allotted area for the centre.

So how many of you were in there apart from staff?

I don't know, there must have been about 20 I think.

Twenty of you had gone AWOL

02:30 **or various?**

Various offences yes.

So obviously the battalion hadn't been at Gona for very long if you were still now just putting the barbed wire up?

Yes. No that was at Cape Killerton. They hadn't been there too long. The 36th Battalion was one that I think did the action down along Cape Killerton and Cape Killerton

03:00 was very quiet. There were no Japanese there when we were there. So we just had - we had one company across. I think they used to call the villages Gona 1, Gona 2, Gona 3. There were a number of native villages on our side of the

03:30 inlet and there was other on the other side of the inlet and I think one of the companies was over there and so we were spread out quite a bit there.

Now I think you used the term field punishment? What does the term field punishment actually mean?

I don't know. .

Okay, your period of incarceration actually involved what?

Preparing the centre.

04:00 Just to be established. We was putting up tents, wiring, putting barbed wire in and clearing the land and so on.

So when you say the centre, you mean the prison centre?

Yes. This was for the Field Punishment Centre as they called it. Yes.

So you were in there for 60 days.

04:30 **Was all your time occupied by constructing the centre?**

Yes that's mainly what we did. Night times we used to sneak down to the 36th Battalion and watch their movies.

You were able to get out under the wire?

Oh yes. As a matter of fact the officer wasn't very pleased with it. Instead of having the barbed wire very saggy

05:00 we had it really straight and taut and you could more or less walk through it. He was cranky. He didn't like the infantrymen putting up barbed wire. Should have been real hanging and loose.

I see, if it had been hanging and loose it would have been much more difficult to get through?

Oh yes, you'd get snagged on the barbed wire. We had it nice and neat

05:30 so it was easy to get through.

How many of these nights did you go down to see the movies?

Oh, I think most nights. Down to see the movies. Come back and get back into bed.

And nobody stopped you?

No. I don't think they knew we were gone.

Who was supposed to be guarding you?

Different members of each battalion

06:00 were on the staff. Staff came from the Division as well.

Didn't they notice you were gone?

Just members detached out. No I think they probably had a mess somewhere or canteen that they went to at night time and just thought we were okay because we were locked inside the wire.

06:30 **Perhaps they were at the movies too.**

In the tents, supposed to be asleep.

Do you remember what kinds of movie you saw?

Oh no, any movie that came up because most units had the movie nights. They would show films different nights.

That's right the army had a unit called the Mobile Cinema Unit.

Did they?

That travelled round quite a lot.

07:00 **So that really takes care of the 60 days. Once the 60 days were over, what happened then?**

We were at Killerton and as I say I walked putting up signal wires and keeping check on them from there right around to the other company that was right over the other side of the inlet, past the Gona -

07:30 I forget the numbers but I think there was 1, 2 and 3 were on our side and across the harbour was Gona 4 and Gona 5.

Can you give me more of a description of Cape Killerton? You've mentioned it as a place...?

No, it was just a muddy track. I don't know how the poor old 36th and other units went and got caught there. Evidently there was quite heavy fighting amongst the

08:00 Australian Troops and the Japanese.

That had obviously happened prior to your arrival?

Yes. We found bits of bodies along there on different occasions. Mainly Japanese that had put themselves in holes in the ground and acted as snipers.

Obviously they'd been?

Just overlooked. Killed in there and left there.

08:30 **Was it your responsibility to bury any of these bodies?**

No, we had the War Graves Units getting around and they would fix it all up later on.

Now, it was around this time that you got involved in boxing again?

Yes, there was Oro Bay, there was boxing. We also had a boxing ring out at our battalion. One at

09:00 Brigade, I think it was Brigade Headquarters. They had one. We used to do quite a bit of boxing there and then of course to fight the allied forces we'd go down to Oro Bay Stadium and get a fight. If you could get a fight, you were right.

It sounds like there were quite a few fights happening?

Oh yes.

09:30 Big event all round. That was a real relaxation for all the troops. Used to get very big crowds at all the boxing matches. Just to relieve the - ease the situation I guess. They were very keen on following the boxing and the rugby league. The Grand Final between Newtown and

10:00 North Sydney that year I think was played on the Sydney Cricket Ground on the Saturday. I think we were watching films of it on the Monday or Tuesday. It was very good. It was very keen.

Was rugby league played up in New Guinea as well?

Yes, but not as much as the - it depended

10:30 on where you were. Later on at Lae we had a field in front of the big unit. There was not much at Gona. When we were up near Lae we played a lot of football. Butibum Road, I remember.

Butibum Road?

That was the road. The main road through.

We've heard of this road before, actually.

Yes.

When

11:00 **one says Gona, what are we actually referring to. Are we referring to the District, are we referring to a town or any kind of gathering of houses?**

It was a little town evidently on the seaside up there somewhere. There was Buna and Gona. They were the 2 main towns I think. Gona and Buna. Then Cape Killerton

11:30 and Soputa. Soputa was inland a bit. They were just the little townships that were there probably from the plantation owners probably just called them that. They had a lot of plantations.

Once you got out from detention, did you remain at Cape Killerton?

Yes, until we went up to Lae we remained at Cape Killerton.

12:00 We just carried out ordinary signal duties with the signal wires and radio communication until we moved on from there. I don't know how long we were there.

The fighting had moved on from the area?

Yes.

This particular region you were not involved in any fighting?

No not involved. There was whilst I was in the Field Punishment Centre, 2 Japanese soldiers came in and surrendered themselves.

12:30 They'd been in the bush ever since they'd finished fighting. They just came and decided they'd had enough and came to the Field Punishment Centre and surrendered.

What do you recall of those 2 men?

Well all the inmates, the prisoners. All the ones doing the Field Punishment Centre tried to get all the souvenirs

13:00 off them. But they had to be kept there for intelligence to see what they had and what they knew. But I know some of the inmates were trying to get some souvenirs off the Japanese.

What sort of souvenirs?

Oh anything, money, watches. Bits of clothing.

Can you recall what condition these Japanese were in?

They weren't really good. I don't know how

13:30 they had eaten all along but they must have been - found out that they couldn't get any, get out of there so they'd just been living in the jungle in the bushes. So they must have finally decided. I think that was months after the termination of the fighting.

So they were fairly scrawny and emaciated were they?

Not

14:00 really. They were in fair condition. Especially for the length of time they'd been on the run. Hiding out in the bush.

What was their attitude like? Were they depressed or in any way demoralised?

No, I don't think so. We didn't see much of them just that they were there because they were kept by the officers

14:30 until they could get the Intelligence up there to interview them so we were more or less ushered away from them actually.

So how did the prisoners try to get the souvenirs off the Japanese?

When they originally came in we were all around them. Surrounded them. More or less to see them. Then we were later moved back into

15:00 the Centre again until they got the Intelligence troops up.

So the officers very quickly realised what was afoot and took moves to make sure it wasn't?

Yes. They didn't want souvenirs taken out. So the Intelligence might get some information.

So, to return to the boxing. Although in the summary you refer to Joey Brown organising this.

Tournament yes.

Can you give us a bit more of a description of how it happened and how you came

15:30 **to be involved?**

Well they had this tournament and they had the American Special Services were organising it. They just put it out that there were fights on and I'd go along and nominate my name and fight anyone that they could find to fight me. That's how

16:00 I used to keep going down there. I had no objection from my senior officers. My colonel was very interested and I suppose it was keeping the morale of the troops as well because we had the whole battalion behind me and my actions. There were a number of other boys fighting too.

16:30 Not with the same success.

You had constant success did you?

Oh yes.

You won every fight?

Yes. As a matter of fact, there was one American female officer who was talking there one time when I was in with some American officers in their room and she happened to be walking in and was talking about "That Aussie that

17:00 hits so hard." and then she looked at me and said "Oh, that's you." I says "Yes." .

So were your opponents, were they all Americans?

Yes. American troops.

So you weren't fighting any Aussie boxers?

No, there was not enough Australian fighters of my weight to be in the tournaments.

Were you fighting black as well as white Americans?

Oh yes,

17:30 black. As a matter of fact that was why I was going to send the medal back to America because of the way they were treating the boys in the south of America.

After the war?

Yes, after the war. I thought I'd send the medal back to the New York Times and see if that could do any good

18:00 but I never got around to sending it.

You did get some publicity though didn't you? There was an article you saved about sending the medal back?

Yes.

So why, having generated that publicity didn't you send the medal back?

I don't know. Various things I've done all my life. I've said, "I'll be doing this." and never get around to doing it.

It's often a matter of time and priorities anyway?

Yes

Yes. So

18:30 **we've just mentioned the medal. Can you tell us a bit more about how the medal came to be awarded and what the medal actually was?**

Well evidently Joey Brown organised, must be an Actor's Guild over in America. For each weight in the boxing one of the actors donated the

19:00 medal with their name on it. I was fortunate, I had Greer Garson's name on the Middleweight one and that it was the one that I won. Although it says 1943 but it wasn't until 1944 that we fought the tournaments. I got mixed up. I had become very popular with a lot of the

19:30 American troops as well as our own troops. We had a big following. There was up to 10,000 people sitting around that ring of a night you know. Each night the fights were on. One American used to always have £100 in one hand and a £100 in the other and he would be going around saying "I'll have a 100 on the Aussie," so he was one of my supporters.

20:00 It was quite a good thing for the troops to get down there of a night and see the fights and yell their heads off as they won.

How often were you fighting people that had been professional fighters?

I don't know. The Americans, a professional fighter was a good fighter. But they used to differentiate between an amateur and a professional but we Australians didn't

20:30 have anything other than someone to fight. You know, have a fight.

You said you were very popular with the Americans?

Oh yes.

What forms did that popularity take?

Well, like Lenny Ross, the Officer in Charge. He would make arrangements to come on occasions to pick me up somewhere and drive

21:00 me down to the stadium to referee different fights on different nights. Of course I always got a big hand from all the Americans onlookers when I walked in the ring. They used to pay the publicity. They'd build it up with me being the only Australian

21:30 that won a title. I was unfortunate too. I lost the photograph, it's a very large photograph it was. General George H Donaldson, the American General and me with the medal on the night after I won the fight.

How many fights had you gone through by the time you received that medal? I mean just in terms of the process of winning the medal meant

22:00 **going through how many bouts?**

I think maybe 10 or 11. Different nights I'd fight someone.

So you won the medal in 1944?

'44 yes.

The Greer Garson Medal?

Yes.

And was the Greer Garson Medal awarded every year?

That was the only occasion, the medal has on it, for the South West Pacific Area.

22:30 That was where the - there was only the one tournament for those medals.

Now you mentioned Lenny Ross driving you. Lenny Ross was a singer wasn't he?

Singer, yes, and he used to sing. I'd have him sing because with a mouth organ I could only play, really get through the Donkey Serenade. Alan Jones I used to like because he was in the movie with the Donkey Serenade.

23:00 Lenny Ross used to sing that song or I'd have him singing different songs as we went along, going towards the stadium. Yes, it was quite good to listen to. He was a very good singer.

So as well as being a singer, he was the Officer?

In charge of the American Specialist Services that was running the boxing tournament there.

Now,

23:30 **basically you were something of a celebrity at this time?**

Oh yes. I have photographs there in the album. I have one photograph of one of my friends was Kenny Jarvis. He's holding the medal and there's another photo of a group of the boys with me with the medal on my chest

24:00 and all gathered around after the medal was won.

Did you have a trainer at this time?

Len Hutton was earlier before we went overseas but I didn't have any particular trainer then. I used to just go in a fight.

Were you doing any kind of training or exercises?

I guess I was skipping and boxing, shadow boxing.

24:30 That's about all I was doing. Other than that, I'd just go down and have a fight.

You spoke about how, when you were in Darwin and in the Northern Territory generally, you felt on top of the world. That you felt that nobody could touch you.

That's when I became a drunkard, drinking beers.

Did that process continue in New Guinea?

Yeah but I couldn't get hold of any beer in New Guinea.

25:00 There wasn't any there. Although when we come out of action I used to get bottle beer and I used to cadge some off other fellows and make myself a bit tipsy.

So during this period of fighting, boxing at Oro Bay, you had no alcohol at all?

No, no, there was none there.

25:30 **A very good focusing exercise to get involved in boxing?**

Yes. That's right.

Were there not spirits available? Were the Americans not supplying you with grog or anything like that?

No. No.

So it probably was the best of circumstances to be in top form as a boxer?

Yes. That's right.

Can you describe the atmosphere of some of those big boxing matches? If we were to place

you in that stadium at Oro Bay holding 10,000 people, can you

26:00 **give us some visual impressions of what it was actually like to be there and surrounded by this enthusiastic crowd.**

Oh, it was so great because the roar of the crowd, especially about 10,000 odd soldiers. The roar and the acclamation and the clapping and cheering was very, very good.

How many rounds were involved in each fight?

Mainly only about 4 rounds I think

26:30 that's all they would allow in the army.

And at that point the ref would make a decision?

Yes. Yes.

So it wasn't always on the basis of a knockout?

Mainly. The only one that finished on points was the Grand Final. A chap named Michael Kurtz came from Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. He's the one I fought for the final and Michael was a very good and

27:00 very nice chap. I only beat him on points because he was a good boxer.

Do you have any more specific memories of that match?

No. I was so pleased when they said I won it. I didn't know that I'd won it because Michael had given me a bit of a pasting I think. .

What were your strengths as a boxer?

Just

27:30 my right arm.

You're right hand?

Yes.

What about your footwork?

I guess I was a bit nimble on the feet. I could move around really well.

So you really packed a punch with the right hand?

The right hand. Yes. The score originally I think I had 10 fights and won 9 by

28:00 knockouts I think. That was in Sydney before I went away. I think that was how it was going at one stage. Various other places like in Newcastle I think I had three fights there and won two on knockouts. They nearly all finished on knockouts.

Can you give us a description of the stadium at Oro Bay?

Yeah,

28:30 it was just a - they had big huts for the dining room for the officers that were organising the things, the Americans. Just an open soft ring. There was no roof over the ring. But there was some big buildings there. They had their Officers' Mess and dining quarters and

29:00 so on.

So the stadium was permanently a stadium was it?

Yeah, well it was American Headquarters for the Special Services. It was their Headquarters.

Who were the Special Services?

I don't know. Lenny Ross was in charge. They went around getting amenities for the troops all over the world. They had the American Special Services

29:30 to get the amenities for the troops. Look after, benefit for the troops.

How long was Joey Brown involved in the activities?

Joey was just travelling around. He was going all around wherever there were American troops throughout the world I think Joey was just going around as a morale booster for the troops because he was a very well liked chap. Yes. He was a great comedian too

30:00 on the movies.

For how long did you remain interested in boxing after the events of Oro Bay?

Right up till I got discharged and I was going to start training again at McQuillans but then I joined the Police Force in January '46 and they

30:30 frowned on boxing. Wouldn't allow the boxing so I let it lapse.

Did you ever regret that?

Oh yes. Well I regret not taking the trip to America.

When was that trip offered?

In the mood they wanted me to go to America being the only Australian that had won an Allied Forces tournament. They

31:00 thought that in America I would be really popular with all the crowds. But I never got around to following it up.

When was that offer made to you?

At Oro Bay. I forget who it was but it was someone concerned with boxing. Mainly back in America and who was in the army there at the time organising what was going on there.

So what was the proposal? Were they

31:30 **intending to take you over there immediately?**

No, after the war.

Oh, that was always the understanding?

Yes.

Now, how were the black Americans treated in New Guinea by the white Americans?

Oh, they were treated quite well, I think. They were always quite happy. As a matter of fact there was always loud laughs wherever

32:00 there was black Americans. They were really a happy lot of fellows.

Did you make friends with any of them?

32:30 Oh yes, I had lots but I couldn't recall any names other than Michael Kurtz and he was a white fellow. I think Michael and I were the only 2 white men in the Middleweight Division.

The rest were all black Americans?

Yes.

You see in Australia the white Americans and the black Americans were segregated. Was there anything like that in New Guinea?

Were they?

Yes.

Oh no, they were all combined up there.

Mixing freely?

Oh yes.

So, the research material indicates that your CO [Commanding Officer] used to lend you a jeep so that you could attend some boxing matches?

Oh yes, when Lenny couldn't pick me up

33:00 and if they wanted me to go, if I wanted to go to the stadium, for a fight or referee or for anything. Colonel Foster, Ted Foster would loan me his jeep and driver to be driven down to the stadium. So that was very good of our own Colonel.

Now just following through on this inability

33:30 **to box. You were not allowed to box once you joined the Police Force.**

Yes.

This must have been extremely frustrating for you?

No, because I was back on the grog again and so I was more or less, I wouldn't have got fit enough to fight. Now I look back, I'm very pleased I didn't start fighting because I

34:00 would have gone down the drain very quickly I think.

In what sense?

Probably with being so drunk and that all the time I probably would have got a beating, a few beatings. I would have. That's how it would have happened because I wouldn't have been training properly. I got on the grog again so that's why.

Was there any awareness in boxing at that time of

34:30 **the potential for brain damage?**

No, never worried about it.

One hears over the years of boxers who were punch drunk as a result of being hit too many times in the head.

Oh, some of them. In Ernie McQuillans' gymnasium there was always one or 2 that weren't very good but they would do for 4 rounders and 6 rounders and that. They'd only

35:00 be in there for punching material.

Punching material?

Yeah, they were all a little bit on the punchy side.

What do you mean by that?

Nearly punch drunk, you know.

That being hit so many times over the years had affected them?

Yes. They couldn't improve other than a 4 rounder or 6 rounder but they'd keep going in there because they liked their fighting. I suppose they

35:30 always thought they'd get up and be a top class one day but they'd only get to 4 and 6 rounds and get themselves knocked about.

So did you continue to follow boxing as a spectator after the war?

No, no.

It was a chapter that had closed?

Yes. Yes. Just finished it.

36:00 **Now, I believe that it was in Lae that you learnt about Morse Code?**

Oh no. In Darwin.

It was in Darwin was it?

Yes. That was when we first arrived there. I was in Don Company and then Corporal Harry someone.

Oh, that's right. We did cover that in the last session where you gave a demonstration,

36:30 **of course.**

Harry wanted recruits to the signal company, the Signal Platoon and that's when Vicky Bennett and I went across from Don Company to Sigs. That was in Darwin in 1941.

So was there any change to your status as a signaller in New Guinea when you were there?

No. No.

37:00 **At what point did you become part of Group 2 Signal? There was a point where you began to earn an extra 2 bob per day?**

In Darwin.

So that had been in Darwin as well?

As soon as I passed the examination for signalling, I became a Group 2 Specialist. That was in Darwin. Yes. 1941.

Now there was another change where you moved much more to radio contact. Where was that?

We were

37:30 always in radio contact. All our equipment was signal wires and radio. Oh, little square box. I think they were called 28's or something. Something to do with 28. I think that's what they called them.

How was the box powered?

Batteries.

38:00 Yes it was from the time I went into the signals there was the radio, the line wire, the line switchboard, switchboard operating and also when I started riding the motorcycles as a Cycle Orderly but that was all in Darwin.

38:30 We got all that and the Group 2 Specialist rate of pay.

Now just from Gona, I think you went to New Britain. That was the next big stage?

No, we went to Lae and Nadzab and Bulolo. Up in the gold mines.

So what was involved there?

Well we went to

39:00 Lae out on the Butibum Road and then they took us on a boat across the water. They took us right up into the mountains to Bulolo and we were up on top of the mountains there for a long time. Then we came back down and we got on the Francis Parker later on

39:30 and that's when we went to New Britain on the Francis Parker.

Why were you stationed on the tops of mountains?

I don't know.

Was it because of radio transmission?

Training.

So was this all still a training period was it?

Oh yes.

In what were you being trained specifically?

Usual infantry work, you know. Mainly marching. .

Marching?

Infantry. That's what - you get out

40:00 and you foot soccer.

What was the purpose of that?

I don't know. Keep us in condition and up to scratch with the weapons and that.

That's what I've heard in terms of marching and drill and so forth. It was a fitness thing.

Yes.

Tape 6

00:33 **So for how long were you involved in this training on tops of mountains?**

Oh, I don't know. It would have been months. Wherever we went we were in training all the time. As sags as well as do infantry work we had to the wiring, run wires out to the companies and

01:00 erect the wireless I mean the phone lines and keep in touch so the companies could keep in touch with the headquarters. We were forever on the go with our signal platoon.

Were you involved in any action at this time?

Not up till then. No. We didn't get any action until New Britain.

So when was it that you first heard you were going

01:30 **to New Britain?**

I don't know. They took us down and stuck us on this old ship that was there. A dilapidated old liberty ship. One that they brought out many, many made in a year and made for threepence each they were made for. The old liberty ships. It was the Francis Parker and we

- 02:00 just got on it and just went over to Jacquinot Bay in New Britain. Landed at Jacquinot Bay and then they took us up further along the island I think, it was a Toll Plantation I think. It was just a plantation they stuck us in there and it was overgrown with grass and weed and we had to set up camp along there until we moved closer to the river up north
- 02:30 and that's when we ran into the Japanese Forces.
- So when you landed at Jacquinot Bay that whole area had already been secured I presume?**
- Oh yes. It was, someone did Brigade or Div [Division] Headquarters or Brigade Headquarters were there and one of the other battalions because they wouldn't have landed without support.
- What did the Toll Plantation consist of?**
- Just coconut trees
- 03:00 and grass.
- Now I think it was Wide Bay that you went to wasn't it?**
- Wide Bay. That was the one where we did the action. I can't remember the name of the river that ran there.
- So tell me about going into action there? Could you give us a bit of a description of what action was happening?**
- Yes. We were all standing beside on this riverbank and the Department of Information
- 03:30 Officer, I can't remember his name. He was well known chap with his camera and the first company was going across the river to cross over and as the forward scouts got over the opposite side and the rest of them were in the middle of the water, walking across, plus the cameraman and just about all hell broke out.
- 04:00 They were firing at us from all angles. Some of the troops got back out of the water. A couple of them were caught on the other bank and were left there. Just set down as best they could. The poor old cameraman lost his camera and it was floating down the river and he went after it and he got his camera. I forget his name. He was a well known cameraman from the war days.
- 04:30 **Was this Damien Parer?**
- I don't know, it might have been. It was one of the well known people.
- There was Damien Parer. There was a still cameraman called George Silk. There was a guy called Frank...**
- No it wasn't George Silk.
- Was it Frank Bagnell?**
- No.
- Parer was the best known.**
- Might have been him I think. He was a well known fellow.
- Bill Carty?**
- No.
- Because they were all well known. Parer at a certain point left the Department of Information and went to the Americans**
- 05:00 **at Paramount. So fighting at that point was quite fierce?**
- Oh yes.
- So people scattered? In terms of describing what happened you've got us halfway across the river with the Japanese firing. What happened then?**
- Everyone just dropped down where they were and then gradually moved around into better positions and our company finally got across the river and then
- 05:30 pushed the Japanese off the hill on the other side. Then the 2/14th Artillery was called in to hammer them a bit. We were fortunate to have the artillery with us.
- What was your own response once this firing started? It must have been a very vulnerable position to be in. To be halfway across a river?**
- 06:00 Yes. I was on the bank fortunately. Still on the bank and I was watching them. So I just hit the ground that's all. That's all I could do. Gradually when it got dark they straightened things out a little bit. But the Japanese were spread out on the hill on the other side. One Tree Hill or something, I think it was.

You say they got things straightened out. What

06:30 **happened to you at that point?**

I don't remember. I suppose I just carried on getting the gear and equipment ready to keep in contact with the company that was going across the river. Various lots, another river I was standing on the bank, all hell broke loose with the machine gun

07:00 fire over our heads. But all you could do was hit the ground and hope you didn't get hit.

When something like that happened, what was your reaction?

Just get down on the ground.

Were you frightened at all?

I guess you must be scared. I don't know. I don't remember being scared but I reckon I would have been.

07:30 Just thanking my lucky stars that I hadn't got hit too. Because that was more on my mind than anything else. Yes.

You mentioned keeping in touch with people crossing the river. Were you in phone contact with people as they were literally crossing the river?

No we used the radios then. Whoever the signals were going with them would have the radio on the back of one chap and

08:00 we'd keep in contact with that radio.

So that was a portable backpack radio was it?

Yes.

It wasn't a walkie talkie?

No. It was a square radio something 28 and a metal one. Metal covered case. You'd carry it on your back. Operate it with the earphones on your head and your gear under your

08:30 arms to tune the radio there.

By using the gear under your arms to tune it?

Yes. We had switches on the wire like unless your friend, the other fella was at the back of you and working the back of it.

So there'd be 2 of you with that radio?

Yes, oh yes.

So one of you would carry it?

One would carry it and the other would operate it if it was necessary.

So who would be doing the communicating?

09:00 Either one.

Either one? Using a telephone receiver?

The speaker with the earphones and these things that, with the, they were, adjusting wires I guess you'd call them. They used to hook into the radio.

And what did the mouthpiece consist of?

Just a microphone. Small microphone.

Like a telephone receiver,

09:30 **old fashioned telephone?**

If I can recall it, it just fit on your head like on your jaw or whatever it was, your head and you could speak into it.

Now on what occasions did you use that particular equipment? Obviously you were on the move.

Whenever it was established mainly.

Sorry when everything was established? When you were established?

Yes.

So you would be using that equipment and you would also have

10:00 **obviously a larger radio which you could have on a table or a bench or something?**

No, that was the only radio you would have because until they got a signal line through. They'd have to use a radio. That was the only means of communication.

Oh, I see. Once the signal line was through you would then use the...?

Phone.

The phone.

Phone as well.

Right. Okay. Now what sort of weapons did the Japanese have?

Well.

10:30 That's very strange. I understand it was 20 miles from Wide Bay to Open Bay across the mountains and I understand they had hauled up the cannons from the navy ships that we sunk in Rabaul Harbour up to the mountains and right across the islands. They used to fire

11:00 some sort of weapon at us and it would whistle all through the air and they'd be aiming at things where we were heading for. They'd have a practice one day with these things. Sometimes they landed them on us. One of our chaps was killed. He dropped

11:30 right at his tent as he was coming out. Killed with the explosion. The word went out that we wanted to capture one of these guns to see what it was because it was an unorthodox thing. When we got one it proved to be a large base of steel and in the middle was a round

12:00 type of mortar thing with a cup on the top that was evidently filled with explosive and that. It had a pin in the middle and the pin was on a handle that slid down this barrel and a hook was put on it. On the hook was a length of rope about 40 feet long. So it must have made a hell of a mess when it went off because they had to get out of the way of it. This

12:30 is what they were using to fire naval shells. They'd riveted fins onto the bottom of the naval shells and they would sit this over the top of this charge on the barrel and stand back and when they pulled the pin it would set the charge off. It would fire the navy shell down wherever they'd been aiming for the day before. They'd practice to tune

13:00 it in. Because otherwise they had no direction finder on it. It wasn't able to find any direction. Fire it directly straight so they had to try out and practice with it before they could find out what target they were going to hit. What area they were going to hit actually. So that was a real scary noise that

13:30 it used to make as the shell was coming over through the air. Goodness knows how many of them they had but they were quite fearsome. They were the big shells. They were bigger than mortar bombs that they were firing at us.

They must have caused a lot of damage?

Oh yeah. Well where they were firing them at practice, it was positions we had to go through next time.

Oh, so

14:00 **you would hear them firing at the practice?**

Oh yes, and they would be aiming at a certain bit of land and the next day we might have to go through that bit of land. That's what they would do. But this other day one of our chaps, I said, come out of his tent and ran straight into one as it exploded.

Was that one of your fellow signallers?

No it would be one of the company boys.

So was it not someone that you knew?

No.

14:30 One of the companies. Yes and there was quite a lot of gunfire round the riverbanks. Another occasion we were at another bank. I don't know if it was near the bay inlet or something but the Japanese on the other sides really let fire with all the small arms fire and the only thing you could do was hit the ground

15:00 and stay there 'til it slowed down a bit.

Were you carrying a weapon yourself?

Yes. I forget whether - when I was on the bike I had a 45 revolver but I think up there I don't know. A

rifle or an Owen machine gun.

Did you ever have cause to fire these weapons?

Not me . No. I

15:30 was a stickler for keeping out of the way of bullets .

Did you ever have any near misses?

Oh yes. Bullets would crack over your head and people get wounded all around you. Our own artillery, Nev Kath was the captain from Queensland. He was with D Company. When one lot of

16:00 troops were advancing through a plantation, his company and he was with the artillery officer from the 2/14th Battalion and he asked him to get - the artillery were firing where they wanted them to fire but evidently they were going to far and

16:30 not collecting what Nev Kath wanted to. The story went round that Nev asked the Artillery Officer to get his gunners to drop down 100. Evidently they had a little bit of an argument that they might be too close. Anyhow the first shells when they brought it down 100 and hit the top of the trees it come down and Nev Kath and the Officer both went.

17:00 The shells hit the top of the treetops and came down amongst them.

They were both killed?

Yes. Nev and the Artillery Officer was killed.

Did you know both of these people?

Only knew Nev. I didn't know the Gunnery Officer.

What impact did Nev's death have on you?

Oh nothing. It was just all in a day's work. Pushing through, advancing.

17:30 **Are you a believer in fate?**

I don't think so.

You don't think so? I'm just wondering if you had any thoughts or reflections on why you weren't hit and so many people were being hit around you.

I don't know. I think I kept ducking my head lower than the others. That's probably why I didn't get hit. But there were quite a few of us

18:00 not hit. Quite a few were killed and wounded.

Including signallers?

I don't know. I can't remember any signallers but being with the rifle companies they were just as liable to get hit.

18:30 See you had the two sigs with each rifle company so they were just open to the same sort of danger as the riflemen although the riflemen were out in front.

Were you ever in a situation where you'd laid out a phone line and the Japanese cut that line?

I don't think so. No not up there because they kept pulling back. We moved up the island

19:00 as the Japanese kept retreating, going back in front of us and we were able to push them right back to outside of Wide Bay. Then the 36th Battalion came over from Open Bay but they only came over. I don't know how they got across because they were right across the island and they got there in time for the ship to take us

19:30 all out.

So at this point how long had you been on New Britain?

Oh, it would have been maybe half a year.

Was this a half year process of constantly being in the front line?

Yes. We were up at Wide Bay all that time. That Tol Plantation. Then we moved up to

20:00 Wide Bay. I think it was Tol Plantation. As we moved along, yeah it would have taken all that time I reckon.

Just to be more specific, you've referred to that rather challenging, to put it mildly, river crossing. Just to give me a few kind of big picture milestones as to what happened to you after that. After that river crossing what happened to you between then and your evacuation from

New

20:30 **Britain?**

We were advancing or behind the front line, the front troops. We were on this hill. Well the hill was almost bare of trees by that time. They had all been knocked off and we arranged with the Artillery and the Air

21:00 Force. Called the air force in for an air strike and the artillery was to fire the shells to show them where to drop their bombs. That was about 2,000 yards ahead of us. Then they were to send a smoke bomb to show the aeroplanes where to

21:30 bomb and then strafe. We happened to be going up the hill and of course when Nev Kath and his mate got hit. Set fire to the undergrowth and we were on this hill that was almost denuded of trees not trying to hide from the aeroplanes and still advancing and they came around and strafed us. In the open.

22:00 **These were Japanese Zero Aircraft were they?**

No. Our own air force.

Your own? The RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]?

I don't know if it was the RAAF or the Yanks.

You were strafed by friendly fire, were you?

Yes because they mistook the smoke from Nev Kath's fire as smoke from the Artillery sending a smoke bomb to signal where to strafe. They dropped their bombs 2,000 yards up and then

22:30 strafed where the smoke signal came from.

And were there people killed?

I don't know.

What could you see happening around you when that happened?

I just dived down on the ground because we were all in the open and there was no way we were trying to hide from the aeroplanes. Evidently the pilots mistook the smoke from Nev Kath's bomb that killed Nev Kath as the smoke bomb from the artillery

23:00 where they wanted them to strafe.

How long did the strafing continue?

Not long.

What happened after that?

The planes took off and we kept going.

So to continue the narrative of what happened between then and evacuation. How long before the evacuation was this?

I don't know how long it would have been.

Hours? Days?

Oh days.

23:30 Yes. Took us a while. Then they got us out and put us on barges and took us out the ship.

Did you encounter other Japanese between that strafing and being put aboard the ship?

No and the 16th Battalion from Western Australia they came and relieved us. They took over from where we were. We got out on the ship

24:00 and that's when we were going down and they were short at Brigade Headquarters at Jacquinot Bay. Short of operators so they unloaded me off. Attached me to the Brigade Headquarters as an operator. Both the switch and radio.

Just before we stick with Jacquinot Bay for a moment, for how long,

24:30 **you mentioned you were on New Britain for a total of six months as part of this action before being evacuated. How long were you actually in the line of fire? From the time you were crossing that river and were under Japanese fire through to the evacuation?**

I suppose it would have turned out about 2 or three months we were having a knuckle on with them. Yeah from Wide Bay.

- 25:00 **Now did you, looking at the psychological affect of this, did you see any people around you who were suffering from war related stress at all?**
- No.
- What was the mood and attitude of the unit that you were with?**
- Oh they were generally pretty go-happy. Different ones would yell out. I think that was like to make a bit of bravado and cheer themselves up a bit.
- How would they do that?**
- Oh
- 25:30 just chiack [tease] each other and yell at each other so I guess that was just one way of relieving the tension that they had.
- On what sort of occasions would that happen?**
- On any occasion. When you were going past them. If someone was being overtaken, they'd been chiacking. Telling you to do a
- 26:00 good job up there and keep them away from us. Anything just tension relieving.
- I've heard before that humour was quite an essential way of keeping a sense of balance.**
- Oh yes.
- Can you remember any other things that would be said on those occasions?**
- Oh no. Just general chiacking. You know. Always having a joke about something.
- 26:30 **What about you yourself during this period. How would you describe your frame of mind? During this fairly tense few months?**
- I suppose I was concerned. What I was going to do next. I was fortunate. Different times I got the gunfire went over the head, hear it cracking
- 27:00 but I was never hit sort of thing. I don't recall any of my friends being close beside me getting hit either but quite a few of the boys were hit by gunfire.
- And you saw this happen?**
- I didn't see it no. Not myself.
- Who were your friends at this time would you say within the unit?**
- 27:30 Oh, all the sig platoon. The whole lot.
- Was there a good camaraderie within the unit?**
- Oh yes the whole unit. Yes. Oh yes. Yell out at each other jokingly. Having a chiack as they call it all the time and joking with each other.
- 28:00 **So how many people were in the unit?**
- 1,000. When we were up in the islands we were only about 700 and something. Originally we were 1,000 strong but I think later we were only about a 700 strong.
- How many signallers were part of this unit?**
- About 30.
- Did you as signallers tend to**
- 28:30 **feel closer to each other than the rest of the unit? Was there a sense of difference between the signaller and an average member of the unit?**
- No. I don't think there was any difference because we relied on them and they relied on us so there was a sort of sense of dependency on everyone. I'd reckon. Especially when you were going past them, they'd
- 29:00 yell out these jokes and funny sayings.
- These were other signallers were they?**
- Anyone.
- So I mean within those 700 men, who would your closest mates be?**
- Oh there was Darcy Armstrong, Vic Bennett. I think Vic's dead now.

29:30 We were all sort of pooled in a pool. We had no specific friends. When I first joined I had Eric Richardson and Vic Bennett. We were always together, sort of thing.

Were they fellow signallers?

No. We all

30:00 joined the same day so I guess that's why we stuck together. Eric and I were both in Don Company and then Vic and I were both in the signals and Eric stopped at D Company. So they were distributed around. You'd have a lot of friendships with a whole, with the whole lot.

So you referred to being

30:30 **on the move with another soldier. You'd have the unit on the back and the other soldier would be helping to operate that unit?**

Yes.

Were you staying with the same person all the time?

Oh yes, you were attached to the company.

No, but sorry, were you, that second person that was helping you to operate the unit, sorry the radio unit backpack and the controls, was that always the one person?

Yes, you see

31:00 because each company had the sigs attached to them. That was when we were up in action. So they were with that company all along. And the same with Headquarters. You'd probably have 8 or 9 signallers still attached to Headquarters. But each company had a couple of sigs to go with -

31:30 where the company went, the sigs went.

How many signallers were with each company?

I think it was 2.

So did you have a fellow signaller who stuck with you throughout this New Britain campaign? Especially when you were on the move?

No because I was with the Headquarter Company and so get a mixture of duties.

32:00 I'd have one lot of duties and the other signallers still with Headquarter Company would have other duties.

Oh, so what were the range of these duties?

Just radio and going out when the company was stabled. Running in a wire, phone wire, getting a SIT REP report each night on the radio.

32:30 **What was the SIT REP report?**

What had happened during the day. You'd record the report each night.

SIT REP being a shorthand for Situation Report, I guess?

Yes.

So bringing us back to Jacquinot Bay. You were asked to stay behind?

Yes.

How did you feel about that?

Pretty crook because I was watching the ship go off again. Going south

33:00 without me.

You felt pretty crook, did you say?

Oh yes. I was lonesome. I think that would be the term so but then it soon settled down and I was attached to the Brigade Headquarters and just hoped it didn't take too long. I don't think it took too long. I don't know how long I was there with them but then I finally got

33:30 out and caught up with the unit again in Australia that time.

So what were your duties there at Jacquinot Bay?

Radio operator and signaller. Taking the radio and switchboard but mainly radio because they were short of operators.

What sort of messages were you receiving and sending?

Had to receive the SIT REPs [situation reports] from each

34:00 company at night time. Take down what had happened and what they were reporting.

That was the prime purpose of you being there?

Yes.

Can you describe Jacquinot Bay itself and what was there?

No.

Do you have any memories of what was actually there?

No.

Was it a large camp for instance?

Yes it was the Div Headquarters or the Brigade Headquarters. So I

34:30 suppose that was Div Headquarters too.

Were there were locals? I mean, was it a local village or a place created out of nothing?

I think it was an old plantation. I think pre-war it was a solid plantation because there were plantations all along the coastline there. Most of the

35:00 plantations were where we camped. In amongst all the coconut trees and all that.

I wanted to ask. Did you have anything or much to do with the indigenous people of either northern New Guinea or New Britain?

Not in New Britain.

What about in New Guinea?

In New Guinea at Cape Killerton and that. All the Gona villages we had quite a time with all the

35:30 kids there. Moses was one of the kids. I remember Moses and his brother and they used to come round and we'd give them bits of food. We got on well with the natives in New Guinea. There were none up in New Britain.

Moses and his brother. Let's stick with them for a moment. They sound like personalities. What else can you tell us

36:00 **about them?**

They used to like to swear because they thought that's what all Australians did. We'd go walking around on the way to doing some job and they'd follow you along all the way. They'd have a wonderful time just following the troops along.

So why were they following you all the time?

Oh, just for company

36:30 I think. They used to like it because they were with the soldiers. Yes, they were quite good the natives there at all those Gona villages. They were quite friendly.

Did you have anything to do with the adults there?

No.

So it was mainly the children?

Children yes. We'd have all the signal wires going past their thing

37:00 and as we were going along checking them and that, the kids would all line up and follow you because that was good to be with the soldiers.

So were there lollies being handed out?

Oh yes. We used to give them sweets. I don't think we gave them smokes but everything for the kids. They were all good kids. The natives.

At what point did you return to Australia?

37:30 I don't even know where I landed at. After I left Jacquinot Bay. I don't know if I came on a ship of whether I was flown back. I think it must have been a ship.

How long had you been at Jacquinot Bay by the time you got to come back?

Not long after the battalion came down.

Days, weeks, months?

Oh, it would be weeks I'd

38:00 reckon because the operators until things straightened out with the operators.

When you say straightened out?

Oh, they were short of operators and that's why they pulled me off the ship to act as an operator for the radio and switch.

So I think it was mid-1945 that you came back to Australia, wasn't it.

38:30 Yeah, it must have been because we had leave. Yes. Sometime in '45. We had leave and we were on our way. Yeah we were moving up again. We were outside of Brisbane someplace

39:00 when the war finished because we happened to be in Brisbane the day that war was declared and I think. But anyhow we on our way again to head overseas again.

When the war ended?

When the war finished. Mmm.

So you came back to Australia in mid-1945. That's slightly before the end of the war. What happened between

39:30 **your return to Australia and the end of the war?**

Well I think we were camped at Narellan I think. Because I used to get the train out from Newtown out to Campbelltown then get the bus from there to Narellan.

We'll pick those details up at the beginning of the next

40:00 **tape because we've actually come to the end of another one.**

Tape 7

00:34 **Okay, so Neville just before we do go back to your homecoming, I wanted to go back to a few questions that I had from New Guinea and New Britain and in particular you gave a great description of the fights that used to happen in the stadium with the Americans and the Australians. I was just wondering when you were in New**

01:00 **Guinea what was the relationship like between the Americans and the Australians?**

Yes, it was quite good. Yes used to get on really well together. They used to enjoy coming and watching our rugby league. They used to laugh and say "Gee, you could get killed out there" but they used to enjoy the Australian Rules and the rugby league

01:30 as well as just being friendly. It was quite a good combination of friendship.

I believe that because the Americans were so resourced and got such good pay that sometimes that caused a bit of jealousy and friction amongst them.

It probably did back here I

02:00 think when the troops were on leave and that. I think they had quite a few bits of tiffs as you call them. We didn't have that. Never ran into it myself personally but I have heard where different Australians and Americans probably had a fight somewhere.

02:30 Didn't get on too well because the girlfriends. Stealing the girls. But I never struck any animosity with them at all.

Well it sounds like you got on quite well with them actually?

Oh yes, yes.

Now, I'm also wondering, you mentioned the story where you were going to send your medal back to the Americans because of the way they

03:00 **were treating the black Americans down south and I was just wondering when that was and why you felt compelled to do that? What had you heard to cause you to want to do that?**

Oh it was just the newspaper reports that the Negroes in the south of America were being thumped and kicked and brutalised

- 03:30 because they were black and there was a lot of Ku Klux Klan business going on with them. They were trying to get rid of them, the black Americans. I had friends white and black and I thought well, might shake them up a bit if I was to send the medal back. The only one outside of America and
- 04:00 I thought I was going to send it back but I never got around to it. Like most things, I never get around to doing things.
- Well you had good intentions.**
- Yes. Because I had met so many friendly good types of fellows with the American black fellow.
- You**
- 04:30 **had made those friendships during a time during the war?**
- During the war days yes. I was just upset with the way they were being treated in the South but I think they've overcome all that now. Most of it anyhow.
- Yes it's certainly a lot better than what it was. Yes. Just moving on to New Britain, I was just wondering, did you ever actually fire**
- 05:00 **your weapon?**
- Not once. No. My gun was never fired. Too busy ducking away from the others . No. I never fired a shot.
- Was there ever a time where you thought you might have to?**
- Oh, quite a few times. Especially when they started shooting when we were crossing the river.
- 05:30 I thought we might have to use the weapon but I never got around to it. I used the radio and the telephones all the time so my time was taken up mainly with signalling and receiving signals.
- Doing the job you were told to do?**
- Yes. So I didn't have
- 06:00 any reason to fire the rifle or the machine gun whichever I had.
- So, but obviously you were fired at?**
- Oh yes, yes.
- What was your view of the Japanese as fighters? What did you think of them?**
- I don't know. The main thing that stuck in our minds was all the
- 06:30 tales that had come back from Malaya so we didn't like them at all. But I didn't think of them as fighters or any such things. No. I didn't consider that, dear.
- What did you think of the Japanese overall during this time? What was your opinion of them?**
- 07:00 I guess I must have just thought they were like us. Being told what to do and they were doing it. I don't think I ever consciously anyhow. No.
- Because a lot of Australian**
- 07:30 **soldiers carried, and still to this day, carry a very strong hatred.**
- Oh yes, yes. Especially the ex-prisoners of war. They were so badly treated. I was fortunate because I had a cousin, Andrew Burns. He was in the 8th Division and in the days in Darwin I
- 08:00 was going to apply to get a transfer to the same unit as him but I never got around to it. Which I was fortunate I never got around to it and he was taken prisoner of war and they sent him to Japan. He served his time in Japan so he was more fortunate than some of those that remained on the island, up around
- 08:30 Malaya and so on and Borneo. So it was just as well I didn't apply to join the 8th Division.
- Your tendency not to get around to things probably paid off in that instance.**
- Yes. That's another time I didn't get around to it. I was going to. I intended to do it.
- Did he survive the war?**
- Yes. Andrew survived
- 09:00 it. He was treated fairly well in Japan but he was lucky to go.
- What's his opinion of the Japanese?**

I don't know. I don't see Andrew. Haven't seen him for many, many years.

I was just wondering when you were in New Britain, what were the

09:30 **physical conditions like?**

Oh, pretty rugged on occasion. To start with we had to make a camp in an old plantation that was just overrun with grass and we had to clean it all up and pitch our tents. Make a camp inside that.

10:00 Yes, it wasn't too bad. As long as you were kept busy. That was the main thing to do. Kept you going all the time.

Was there climatic conditions that affected you?

No. Not as badly as Darwin was the worst place in the wet season.

10:30 I think the main thing about New Britain was that you couldn't take a shower or a bath. Couldn't get cleaned up every day because there was – you weren't near the water at all. On occasions you were near the water and be able to swim in the river or the thing but you were forever dirty because you couldn't get clean every day.

11:00 One time anyone who wanted to be dirty, boy you could be dirty all the time. Instead of cleaning yourself up. I don't recall the heat being as bad in the islands as Darwin either. I guess it was pretty hot but not as bad as Darwin weather in the wet season.

11:30 **What about during your whole wartime experience, mainly in New Guinea and New Britain, did you suffer form any sicknesses or injuries at all?**

Oh yes, I had malaria and the other Dengue Fever. I had Dengue Fever and I had malaria.

12:00 **Was that in New Guinea or New Britain?**

I don't know. I think it would have been in New Guinea I think. Dengue I think was in Darwin. I think I had Dengue Fever in Darwin.

I think we talked about the Dengue Fever in previous tapes. Yes.

I think I had Dengue Fever in Darwin.

12:30 In Holland Park in Brisbane I finished up with malaria too. We were camping there and the 8th Division was coming back on the ship and I was working on the wharves at Brisbane and I finished up in Holland Park, the hospital with malaria too. That was when I was back here.

13:00 **Am I correct in saying that you were in Holland Park when the war ended?**

After the war. Because we were welcoming back the 8th Division fellows on the wharves at Brisbane.

So what happened when the war ended? What was it like?

It was very pleasing.

13:30 Everyone seemed to be out in the streets and cheering anything anyone did or said. Didn't matter what anyone did or said, everyone cheered. It was such a release of tension. Much feeling of contentment. It was quite good to know that the war was finished and we

14:00 would be stuck, getting out of the army again.

Had you, in your arrival back in Australia, had you been in contact with your wife?

Oh yes. I was with my wife all through the leave. We had leave and then we went up to,

14:30 I think we went to Queensland and were outside Brisbane getting ready to take off again when the war finished I think.

What was your reunion like with your wife?

It was just like the usual one because we were always getting back together again. After being apart for so long.

15:00 **It must have been lovely to see her again?**

Oh yes. Yes.

What had you heard about the atomic bomb? Had you heard anything about it?

No.

Did you recall

- 15:30 **the actual end of the war. How did you hear the actual end of the war? How did you hear the actual end of the war had happened?**
- We were out in the street somewhere and someone said the war had finished. Then there was great gatherings in the street. Everyone cheering and having an enjoyable time. Jumping up and down, clapping
- 16:00 and cheering. So, it didn't last long. We soon passed over that.
- So was it during this time you were working on the wharves?**
- As I said, we were outside of Brisbane there somewhere and I think it was because the 8th Division was coming back. We had to go down
- 16:30 and assist with unloading of the ship with the troops and that.
- What was it like, seeing 8th Division?**
- Just like any other unit. Just greet them. If you spoke to anyone only greet them. Say "Good on ya Digger".
- What were their physical conditions like?**
- I don't remember,
- 17:00 dear. No.
- Because they'd been POW's.**
- Yes. Prisoners of war. Some of them were pretty thin I guess but I don't remember too much about what I was doing then or where I was. I don't even know - I can't even put my finger on which camp I was in at that time.
- 17:30 I know it was pleasing, very pleasing for the war to finish. Yes.
- So when did you get your discharge to leave the army?**
- 22nd November 1945. .
- You can remember that bit!**
- Oh yes. . It was at the Showground I think. The Sydney Showground.
- What happened after that?**
- 18:00 Well we moved into Mother's place up at Albert Street, Newtown and then I went and joined the Police Force in January. Yes. Joined the Police Form in January.
- What was it like living back with your Mother after all this time?**
- Oh, it was quite good. I forget where my
- 18:30 younger brother was. He was in the army too. I don't know where he was stationed. He was in Borneo and I don't know when he came back. It was good to see my sisters and all the family. My wife's people. Yes it was quite pleasant to be back and getting out of the army all the time. We were waiting for it.
- 19:00 Get that bit of paper, discharge.
- And I take it, your Mother had calmed her ways?**
- Oh yes. She was up around late '70s at the time. She was getting a bit on then. Settled down a bit. She had no occasion to give me a clip under
- 19:30 the ear or with the pot stick at that time. .
- So why did you decide to join the Police Force?**
- I don't know. It had been something I'd thought of all my life and being a policeman. Even when I was kid I was talking about being a policeman. So I just
- 20:00 went and joined up and that was it. But I still kept drinking, that was the problem. That's why I finished up having to resign after 5 years. After 5 years I resigned from the Police Force because of the grog.
- When you say you were drinking a lot, what do you mean? To what point would you inebriate yourself with alcohol?**
- I
- 20:30 guess I'd be wobbly on my feet and the hours, spending the long hours drinking. I wouldn't only go for an hour or 2. I'd go all day and well into the night.

While you were at work?

Yes. Often times I'd go over of an afternoon at the bridge at Newtown there and grog on and instead of going home

21:00 for tea I'd grog on a bit longer and then get home for tea late. So it was, just got me down. Then when they put me in plain clothes in the Police Force and I worked with the detectives at Newtown. Operated with the detectives at Newtown then I went to the Detective Jack Whitfield over at Mosman. He and I were the 2 plain clothes Police there.

21:30 The Buena Vista. That's the hotel over at Mosman. I'd drink over there even when I was supposed to be on duty and just grog on and on and on. Almost became never ending, you know.

I'm just wondering how the alcohol affected your personality? Were you aggressive or subdued?

No. I never

22:00 got aggressive.

Was alcohol a common problem with returned serviceman?

I think with some of them. Some of them were quite all right but I just couldn't take it. Just grogged on and on and on. I had no willpower I think at the time.

22:30 **What was this like for your wife? What did she think about all this?**

I reckon she would have had a terrible time. Wherever I went I just drank on. Grog shop. Forget time and say "Oh I'll go in a minute". A minute would come and another beer and then "I'll go in a minute".

23:00 That's how it would go on. So it became a real problem. Wish it had never happened. Because I gave it up too late. Everything was ruined by the time I gave it up. There was no money and nothing. But it was a bit late by that time. Where I should have been saving all the years I wasn't

23:30 doing it.

It's a really terrible addiction to have. A lot of people have it and struggle with it their whole lives. Yes. I'm wondering, just getting back to your Police work. Obviously even though you were drinking, you did actually do some work as well and what type of

24:00 **Police work. What did you do on a day to day basis?**

Well, I was fortunate that when I was on the beat at Newtown for something to do. I remember one night I was walking down by St Peters so I just decided to check number

24:30 plates of the vehicles against the registration slips on the front. I got down near the St Peters Theatre and I came across a panel van type of vehicle that plates didn't coincide with the registration

25:00 label. It was outside an engineering works. So I rang through about the papers and the plates had been reported lost for 12 months. So the detectives got onto that and it happened to be the chap from the engineering works over

25:30 the side. He'd been defrauding the State for quite a long time and they caught up with him. So I suppose they thought I did such a good job they had me transferred into the Detective branch out there just because of that. Later I went across to

26:00 Mosman with Jack Whitfield in the Detectives and then I think it was in December, Harry Boswell decided to start a group they called 21 Division and I think it was because I had been fighting previously, they

26:30 put me into the 21 Division and a little old fat ex-detective, Jock Boyd from over North Sydney way and Jock and I used to work on the motorbikes together. So I worked on 21 Division for quite a long time.

What was 21 Division's role? What did it do?

Just to travel all over Sydney and

27:00 keep the crowds of hoodlums moving and arresting anyone who was in fights and cleaning Sydney up actually. So we did a pretty fair job. As you'd go along on the bike and if there was a group on the corner, they'd take off. It's a pity they still didn't have something like that nowadays

27:30 in different areas. So then I got transferred to Redfern for some reason or other. I don't know how I got over there. Back in uniform. Then I applied for a country posting and I went to a little town called Bonalbo, that's out from Casino on the one man station up there.

28:00 Once again I still kept drinking.

By this time had you started a family with your wife?

We had one boy in 1946. He was born. 29th October 1946, John was born and then when we were at Casino, Laurie that was in 1950 then,

28:30 couldn't have been '50, he's 60. I don't know anyhow he was born when we were at Casino. Laurie. Then Vicki was born 10 years later after that.

Now just getting back, before we explore your country posting, can you just go back to the Division 21 and describe any sort of

29:00 **notable cases that you had when you were working in the Division 21?**

21? No, I can't recall.

Did you ever come across, I think they were called the Razor Gangs, Tilly Devine and Kate Lee?

No, they were all in Surry Hills and that. No I didn't come across

29:30 them. We did break up quite lots of fellas but we used to work a different area every night. You might be allocated out to Parramatta, Newtown, Redfern so we went from area to area. But I didn't do anything outstanding I don't think. The most outstanding thing was finding that truck with the false plates on it

30:00 that were supposed to have been reported lost for 12 months. Biggest job I did as a Detective.

It was a big find by the sound of it?

Yes. Oh yes. The Detectives thought it was a great find.

So after working in Division 21 you then went off to your country posting. What sort of role did you have in the community there? I imagine it's quite different being a one man police opposed to being in a

30:30 **city?**

Oh it was quite good. I started a gymnasium, gymnastic thing in the Memorial Hall for children of the District and I taught them how to leap vaulting horses and skipping. Doing lots of physical work. In the main street of the town then we used to put on exhibitions with the children.

31:00 It was quite accepted in that township that the children were given entertainment and something to do. They liked doing it. So it went over quite well with the town that I started the gymnasium. Taught the children a lot of gymnastics. We even went into Casino and gave an exhibition

31:30 in there one time doing the gymnastics. So it went over quite well with the township. The kids were quite good and pleased to have something to do. They'd only heard of it I suppose. Doing exercises and that on the vaulting horse. Some of them turned out very good.

So I know the drinking continued during this time.

32:00 **Did you enjoy your posting to the town?**

Oh yes. I enjoyed it while I was there. As I say, I got out of hand with the grog. I'd go down to the pub and drink on and on. Yes, it was pretty crook. We had the RSL [Returned and Services League] there as well

32:30 and the Rugby League Football Team. I was a member, played Rugby League. So I took part in a lot of functions in the township.

So you had become a member of the RSL on your return to Australia?

Yes. I joined Newtown RSL. Then I transferred to Bankstown RSL after that.

33:00 **How important was the RSL and your membership of other associations upon your return to Australia after the war?**

Well, at that time the RSL was as I say, the RSL but now the RSL Clubs, there's not too many left now. So they've all become like you can't. If I wanted to go and see the

33:30 Pensions Officer in Bankstown, I'd have a job to catch him I guess because they have so many other - you don't have to be an ex-servicemen now to join the clubs but we still have the RSL meetings but I don't get around to them nowadays.

How important to you is being a member of the RSL and

34:00 **Association?**

I also belong to Earlwood Ex-Servicemen's Club and the only reason I keep going there annually - I

renew it because when I die they have a mortality fund and so it might save my wife a bit of money on the funeral.

34:30 But I don't attend meetings now. Our own Battalion Association, I used to be the President of the Committee. I had to give that away. I don't follow up with that now. I only go and see them on Anzac Day, pay my \$30.00 dues and don't see them 'til next Anzac Day.

35:00 I've given all sorts of club life and that away now. I pay my dues each year and that's it.

Why's that. Why have you given it away?

I don't know.

When you mentioned that you were President of your Association. How important to you was meeting up with your mates on your return?

Oh, that was important to keep in touch with the old

35:30 battalion and as a matter of fact at that time we used to get quite a good roll-up each time we had a meeting. But it gradually died off. Old Harry Pascoe is now the President so we only see each other on Anzac Day.

So what does Anzac

36:00 **Day mean to you?**

Oh, it's a day to see the old faces and have a bit of a laugh and a bit of a get together. The thing is with a reunion like that, you always remember all the funny things. You don't remember any of the bitter things so you only remember the comical things and you all have a big laugh. Everyone seems to be laughing all the time.

36:30 I think that's quite noticeable even the groups in the street. They're all happy and laughing because they only remember the good times. Bad times they don't remember.

Do they still treat you like a bit of a boxing celebrity?

Oh yes. They all shape up and want to have a go and say "Here's the champ". "How ya fighting?"

37:00 Oh yes, that's on every year they bring it up which is quite nice that they still remember all that.

Is it, you mentioned that you talk about the fun, happy times but is it also, is there another side to Anzac Day as well?

I don't think so. You don't see it. They don't worry about any of the

37:30 bad things that happened. As I say, you recall all the happy events of the meetings, whatever you did throughout your war life. It happens, it seems to be with every unit. All the same. Big groups stand outside a hotel near

38:00 in Sydney just down from - we meet at the Sports Club. There's a hotel nearby and there is quite a number of groups that attend there each year. Gather at the hotel and each and every bunch of them are all laughing and joking. It's pretty common throughout the returned services.

38:30 You only remember all the good times that happened and they have a really enjoyable day.

Why do you think Anzac Day is important for the rest of us to remember?

The history. You've got to have the memory of the ex-servicemen.

39:00 One year there was - my young grandson was coming down so I pinned my miniature medals on his coat and he came with me. That particular year there was no ex Officer turned up at the march so they asked me would I lead the parade and Daniel was out in front with me of the

39:30 Battalion Group and it was a wonderful thing to see all the people along the street come running out and taking his photograph because he was marching with me with all these miniatures. Yet the RSL said not to have any children in the marches. They waived that this year. They waived it. They can allow small children into the march now. All the children, grandchildren and that.

40:00 But that was quite nice for Daniel to be photographed by so many people as he went along the street too.

Anzac Day got an extraordinary response this year. It was so embracing.

Yes. The crowds are growing. Getting more support especially I noticed this year there were a lot of young groups and young fellows who'd generally you'd be saying they were hoodlums.

40:30 They were in the crowds and yelling out and cheering as well. All the young groups. Probably football teams and so on. But it was very nice to see them there.

We're going to have to stop there. We've finished the tape.

Tape 8

00:11 **You were just about to say something about the bikies. The bikie gangs?**

No. We cleaned up Sydney. That was in '46. '47. I think it was in '47 or '48, I don't

00:30 remember now when it commenced but Harry Boswell was the Officer in charge. They'd allocate us a district. One night there might be 2 or three motorbikes. We had a motorbike and sidecar.

01:00 Maybe three or 4 bikes would be allocated to different suburbs. I think there was 110 of us in the 21 Division and we were just sent around. Any breaking of the law, the people were thrown in the sidecars and taken in and arrested and of course going around districts at night. If there was anyone on the corner they'd all run

01:30 away and clear out before you'd even get off your bike to speak with them. They would clear the streets. So it was very well organised and Harry was a very good boss. Harry Boswell. We had some tough old fellas in that. Mickey Bulla and Jack

02:00 Davidson from Parramatta. Mickey kept gangs really off the streets. No doubt about that. He was very good. But they did a marvellous job the 21 Division at that stage. Keeping Sydney clean.

I believe after World War II there was an upsurge in gang violence and

02:30 **that sort of thing. Is that why 21 Division was formed?**

Yeah, well 21 Division was formed purposely to clean Sydney streets. Keep them clean and people could walk along them, use the streets without any fear.

Right. Okay. What happened, how did you come

03:00 **to be in Korea. In the Korean War?**

In '54 or '55 I think. '54 I rejoined the army, the permanent army and I joined the Military Police then. I attended a class

03:30 that was being run by Major Seaton in Melbourne. The Military Police down there had a Military Police School and after the school finished he asked me to transfer down there to his unit but I told him I didn't want to transfer down there again. I wanted to stay in Sydney

04:00 so he said he would get me down there, so next thing I was nominated to attend and serve as an instructor on the Military Police Schools that were held at his camp, his base camp. Three or 4 times a year I used to go down and lecture at the Military Police Schools in Melbourne.

04:30 That went on for a couple of years.

Sorry, did you go straight from the Police Force to the Military Police or did you do something in between?

No. No I went on a dairy farm at Old Bonalbo. I went broke on that because I'd leave the thing of a day and walk to Bonalbo, 7 miles and get on the grog

05:00 and then walk back again. It was after my wife had finished milking and all that.

Why did you leave the Police Force?

Because of the grog. To go share farming on the dairy actually. We thought it would work out. Getting me out of town where there was no beer. Didn't

05:30 work. I still, every other day, I'd walk all the way, as I said, 7 miles to Bonalbo, still drink then get back again when the cows had been milked and that. So I was doing nothing. I left the farm and went back and that's when I rejoined the army.

What kind of impact did your problem with alcohol

06:00 **have on your family?**

I think it made my wife unhappy quite a few times but she must have done a marvellous job with the kids because they're all pretty well off and they were all brilliant at school.

Were they aware of your problem?

Oh I guess so.

06:30 I'd very rarely be home so I guess they must have known.

Did you ever seek help for your problem with alcohol?

No. No. It wasn't until I got a cancer in the throat and

07:00 no, no the ulcerated stomach. The cancer in the throat stopped me smoking. I was awake one night at Yagoona and they had to get the ambulance for me and they took me off to Bankstown Hospital and operated on the ulcers which had been bleeding and

07:30 I got out of the hospital and then I kept going. A couple of years later I was drinking down at the Hume Hotel, once more the ulcers burst in my stomach and I collapsed on the floor. They had an ambulance called, picked me up and took me to Bankstown Hospital and I operated on the same day.

08:00 When I came out that was the end of the drinking. I only drank lemonade and water from then on. That was many years ago now.

How hard was it for you to give up the grog?

Oh no problem because this ulcerated stomach made the difference. It really rang the bells to

08:30 stop drinking.

Was there any withdrawals or cold turkey at all?

No and the same with the cigarettes. I just threw the cigarettes in the drawer when I had the cancer in the throat and just stopped that straight away.

It was that easy to do?

Yes.

Do you wonder why you didn't try it earlier?

I wish. But it had to take the two serious things

09:00 to make me, the ulcers first with the beer and cancer with the cigarettes so they were really good punishments for me to cop and that woke me up to stop drinking.

So thank you for your honesty about that by the way

09:30 **because it's a very hard thing to talk about alcoholic addiction. That's really generous of you to share that with us. Now let's get onto Korea because we're going to be running out of time soon and I realise that's another significant part of your life. So we got up to, you were teaching at the Military Police in Melbourne. So how did you come to be**

10:00 **called up to Korea?**

Well, I just called in one day at the Eastern Command and the Major told me I was going to Korea as the NCO [non-Commissioned Officer] in charge of the contingent there because I'd been promoted to Sergeant for a couple of years then. I went to Inchon and took over the Commonwealth

10:30 Contingent in Korea which consisted of mainly English soldiers, one Kiwi, and one Australian who went up with me. A young Crampton boy. He went up with me in the plane so that was the composition.

11:00 **We'll come back to that but prior to you going, what had you heard about the Korean War?**

Not much.

Did you know what it was about?

No.

Who was the enemy? What was going on?

Only that it was North and South. Yes.

Did you know what role you were playing?

No. Only when they told me I'd take over,

11:30 be in charge of the Commonwealth Contingent in Korea. I got up there. There was a British Warrant Officer but he was in the SIB which was the position I had here in Sydney, Special Investigation Branch of the Military Police here in Sydney. I was in charge of that.

12:00 This English Warrant Officer, he was also from the Military Police but he was Investigation Branch up in Korea. So I was the - had a British Officer and myself. The rest of the Corporals were from as I say, from England, one New Zealander and one Australian Corporal.

- 12:30 **You mentioned that you were part of the Military Police. What was your actual role? What did you do there?**
- I was the NCO in charge of, as I say, the Commonwealth Contingent. We were stationed at Inchon and just patrolled all the Inchon area because that's where the camp
- 13:00 was at that time. There was the Headquarters of the British Forces down about 7 or 8 miles from Inchon on the waterfront so it was only a matter of patrolling between this district and Inchon. Not much in Seoul and the only other
- 13:30 thing I had to do was do all escorts for the different officers, the Brigadiers and visitors all coming to the - like Lord Selkirk from England. He came out on a visit and I had to escort him all around different camps and meetings and parades and so on. My main thing as well as running the Commonwealth
- 14:00 Contingent was to move around with all the visiting guests that would arrive. Syngman Ree was the President then of Korea and I'd have to escort these people up to Syngman Ree.
- 14:30 **Now you were talking about your role as escorting visitors?**
- Dignitaries around and to visit Syngman Ree. I'd take them up and he was way out in the open. Isolated. There was a gate here but his house was three or four miles further in. That's how protected he was.
- 15:00 He was isolated from everyone. Escort the dignitaries around to the parades wherever they were to go in Korea.
- Were there any signs? Did you actually see any of the Korean War action?**
- No. It was '56 when I went up there and I came back in '57,
- 15:30 so it was 1956 and the war had been completed then.
- Right. Okay. So how long were you actually in Korea for?**
- I don't know. 9 months or 12 months, something like that. Yes.
- Then, I'm wondering, could you describe**
- 16:00 **where you were and the land what it was like?**
- Just terrible. .
- Terrible? Really?**
- Oh it was all farms like Asian farms with the water everywhere and the mud and then Inchon was quite a, wasn't a clean town but
- 16:30 according to Korean things it was a pretty big place. Not much going on. We had a big parade there one day. There was Korean Police. There were 4 lines. The Commonwealth Contingent in Korea but it must have been
- 17:00 all the others were Korean. Oh, Americans. American Patrols, Police as well. That was a big parade through Inchon but it wasn't much to do there.
- What did you do for entertainment on your time off?**
- Drank beer in the Mess.
- 17:30 They'd close the Mess up of a night. All the other Sergeants would go to bed and I'd stay on and grog, grog and grog.
- On your own?**
- Yes. It was terrible stuff. Took me a lot of years to wake up to it, didn't it. Yes.
- Well at least you got there in the end.**
- A bit late. All my life has gone.
- 18:00 **Not quite. Not quite. So what happened after Korea?**
- I came back and I was at Sydney again at South Head. I was still in control of the Investigation Section Branch. Whatever you would like to call it.
- 18:30 I worked in with the Police in NSW on quite a number of cases and went on. Finally I got sick and tired of drinking all the time and I thought if I keep this up they're going to throw me out. I put an application in that I
- 19:00 was drinking too much and that I'd get behind in debts and then there would be a discharge from the

army so I requested I be discharged then. I was discharged 2 years before I was supposed to be. After 10 years I applied for a discharge and the discharge was granted. So I got out.

19:30 That was because of the grog.

And then what happened?

I started off as a Private Inquiry Agent with Websters and going around and doing divorce raids and such and I transferred to

20:00 another lot at Crows Nest and that was all insurance investigation and so on.

So you mentioned, this was as a Private Investigator for divorces. What would you do for those kinds of jobs?

Well Websters would raid a house or a flat and get in and take photographs of the people in bed and

20:30 so on.

Oh really?

Yes.

So people like off with other partners?

Yes.

Gosh. That must have been quite traumatic for them?

Oh yes. It would be terrible for the majority of them I think. They got a terrific shock. Someone breaking in and flashing lights. Lights flashing around them.

21:00 I think it would have been awful for them.

Would you be doing these kinds of jobs every day?

Every day. Yes. Mainly it would be a lot of surveillance because you had to follow them and see what was going on for quite a number of days until you could see the routine they were getting in. Then it would result

21:30 in a raid. Then I was over at Crows Nest. Then I branched out on my own with the Eagle Star Insurance Company and a couple of other companies I was able to get work from. It was all right. I was doing really well. Putting a lot of money in the

22:00 bank. Doing a lot of travelling. Mainly a lot of country work. The investigations.

So Eagle Star was insurance investigation?

Yes.

Could you describe what a typical insurance investigation would involve?

Mainly it was - might be

22:30 a fire, might be a loss, might be a theft, might be a burglary. Might be someone claiming workers compensation for a crook back. I did a lot of country work. Did a lot of country trips. I was doing quite well but I just kept up on the grog again and

23:00 slowed things down. I was getting big money when I was working but the grog gradually got hold of me again and I slowed down and I finished up working then with St Vincent de Paul at their rag factory over at Leichhardt and then I got the aged pension.

What were you doing

23:30 **at St Vincent de Paul?**

I was doing the office work there. The payroll for the staff and then that was for a while and then I was 59 years old and I applied for the pension and got that and retired then.

24:00 So it was ruined - the life. I hate grog.

You mentioned on Friday that you thought that maybe one of the reasons why you did struggle with alcohol was your childhood and upbringing. Why do you think you did have

24:30 **this lifelong struggle with this addiction?**

I think it was my nature when I was fighting. I could beat this bloke and that bloke and that bloke and that bloke. I could beat anyone so I become a big swelled head thing. Thought I was the best in the world. I can drink beer all the time

25:00 and keep going. I think that was the ego got behind and made me think that I could beat the world by drinking grog. I think that's how developed but it got so bad.

After the war and after the boxing had stopped and the applause had died down, did you

25:30 **miss all that celebrity and fame that you had gotten from that?**

No, I don't think so, dear. I was still the same. As I say, if I go to a reunion now they say "Hey Champ!" and all shape up as I walk past. They shape up to spar with me so it's still there.

26:00 So it couldn't have been that I don't think. The friendship and that they all gave me because of the boxing I think, it's still there and it's a point of topic – something to talk about when you get together with the mob.

Did you

26:30 **or do you still miss service life? Your time in the army?**

I think army life is really quite good.

Why is it good?

Everyone should be in it.

Why?

I don't know because you have a lot of friendship and it's a good hard life. Keeps you fit. Even though I was a drunkard I was still very fit.

27:00 Yes. I think it's a wonderful thing that everyone should go through some sort of service career.

Now of course you mentioned when you went to the country station, you had a son at this point but I believe you did have other children later on.

27:30 **Do you want to talk a bit about them and what they've done?**

John was born in 1946. That's the older one. When we were at Casino, Laurie was born. He was the other son. Then in 1960 Vicki was born. The daughter. So there's just the three of them.

28:00 They all went to school at Yagoona Public School and then onto the Bass High School. As a matter of fact John was one of the original pupils the year that Bass High School opened. So they spent their life here. He was a great baseball player when he was a young kid.

28:30 Vicki is a very good horsewoman. She's trains horses now and agists them on the land she's got down Mornington way. Laurie has his own trucks.

29:00 Doing all right.

It sounds like you have a really wonderful family. I believe there are grandchildren as well?

Yes. Lots and lots of grandchildren. Laurie married a girl that had four children before he married and he has a son of his own now.

29:30 That's the basketball player. Greg that's his son. John has two children. One is a solicitor and the other is a flying instructor for pilots and a Vicki of course teaches riding,

30:00 horse riding and agists the horses on the bit of land and she has a saddlery in the little township. Sells horse harness and so on and equipment for the horses. She might be all right. But she's now also got a job while her partner runs

30:30 the shop she works somewhere else now. She's a very good office girl. That's all the children. She has Daniel and Lochie. She has two boys. Two little boys. John has the girl and the boy and Laurie has the

31:00 four stepsons and his own son. That's the full family now.

Well you've done very well.

Yes. .

Well look, I think we are probably coming to the end of the interview now but I was just wondering if you had anything else you wanted to add to what we've talked about already?

31:30 No, no I can't think of anything, dear. Can't think of anything else to add on.

Well, we've done a pretty extensive interview haven't we?

Yes.

Well, we'll finish up there. Graham and I would really like to thank you for your time.

Oh, I'd like to thank you for being here.

Thank you and we've had

32:00 **a really great time talking to you. You've had such a fascinating life and we really appreciate your honesty. Thank you very much for sharing your story, Neville.**

Thanks very much to you and to Graham, dear. Thank you.