# Australians at War Film Archive

## Francis Dring (Frank) - Transcript of interview

### Date of interview: 15th January 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1123

## Tape 1

00:30 **If you could just start where you were born, where you grew up?**

I was born in the [Royal] Women's Hospital in Carlton on 26 November 1924. My parents lived in Carlton

01:00 or Clifton Hill, which is part of Collingwood. Before the start of the Depression. But my father and mother were immigrants from England. My father had no choice on where he would work in those days and he was up in the bush in those days, up at Nathalia on a wheat farm and we didn't see him very often. When he did come down, that is where we lived, in Turnbull Street in

01:30 Collingwood, and it wasn't until many years later that he finally come to Melbourne and started to work with a furniture remover. They were the days when furniture removers were horse and carts. He drove it and he could drive horses and he had a pair of horse lorries to ship furniture.

02:00 We lived in Collingwood for many years and I used to go to school in Collingwood. And I had one brother and we both went to school together because there was only 18 months difference in our age. And we played in Collingwood. Got up to all the daredevil and tricks and places you shouldn't go, like the river and everywhere else, and we used to watch the men who were on Sustenance. In those days it wasn't

02:30 the dole, it was Sustenance. And they used to work 3 days a week and they were building The Boulevard around Kew by pick and shovel and barrow and horse and drays. We used to go up there and watch them work, and that is when we started how to learn how to swear listening to them. They were just some of the early days of what went on. At our school, it was a very

03:00 large school with a thousand students, and a very poor people. Half never had any shoes or anything else like that, so they finished up with big splay feet. We went to school in Collingwood for quite a while. And with my father being up in the bush, and my mother had her sisters and that here. They lived in the country. Well, the brother and I were shopped down the country quite a

03:30 lot. We spent a long time living in Dunolly. We went to school at Dunolly. The reasons why I don't know, because we were only youngsters. And we were sent up there. It was another eye opener of learning how to pan for gold and all the little tricks of country life. To this day they are the only last living relatives that I have got, my cousins that live in Dunolly. We are a very small family. As I say, we were migrants

04:00 and migrant parents. My mother's eldest sister went with an Australian digger in the First World War. Well he married her and brought her out to Australia and brought the entire family out. And my father being in the British Army followed my mother out and he married her here.

04:30 That is the way thing went from the childhood days. We elevated from Collingwood to North Fitzroy and a bigger house, and my aunt came to live with us to help pay the rent and things like that. We had an extra bedroom. And went from there, elevated from there, which in them days if you went to places like Preston or Northcotte you were really upmarketing yourself.

05:00 So just prior to the war the parents bought a house in Westgarth, Northcote, and I had already started as an apprentice in the butchering game. And my father was always a bit funny that way. He said, "Look, you can always be a labourer, but learn a trade and it doesn't matter what trade you learn." So the first trade that came along was butchering.

05:30 So I went and started to be a butcher and I remained as a butcher up until the time I enlisted. But I hadn't finished my trade went I went into the army, because the army pay was more than I was getting as an apprentice. I had to finish my trade when I come out of the army. I had to go back to school, to the William Angus Trade School and finish off the trade. So that's much of my childhood life.

06:00 **There is a lot there that we could talk about. Do you recall why your father worked on a wheat farm and your mother lived in the city with you boys?**

Well, in them days when they come out here….I don't know whether there was any rules and regulations, but as I say work wasn't much, but he could handle horses and he was also a farrier. He could shoe horses and things like that. So he went up to the farm. He met another fellow on the boat and they both went up to Nafallia

06:30 to work on this wheat farm together. I don't know what, whether it was a government scheme or what it was, because there was no… I never got the full story of that. But it was quite a long time before he came back to Melbourne to live. My mother was doing little odd jobs, like she was teaching Italians to speak English. Of course, they were all in fruit shops in them days, fruit shops and fish and chip shops. They weren't like

07:00 they are today, everywhere, they were just in little groups. And as they brought their families out she used to teach them English. Of course, there was always a few extra things in that, like fruit and things, vegetables, and we got extras that way.

**Did she teach them in a school situation or…?**

At their home. And we used to go over, my brother and I, we used to go over with her when she was there, and of course we would stay there and have dinner. And that is where we got used to having Italian food and things like that.

07:30 But that was a few of the little extras that came along for us. When the father came to live with us, permanently, his first job was working as a furniture removalist and he finished up in that game, right through the rest of his life. He didn't live to a great age, of course, he did when he was…fifty three he was,

08:00 because he was a bad gas case in the First World War and only had one lung. He was always sick at different times, he died very young.

**When he came down from the wheat farm, he set up his own business as a removalist?**

No, he worked for a fellow named Chapman, and then when Chapman retired he gave the father the opportunity to take the business over. Well, the father did take it over and

08:30 kept the name as Chapman, he never used his own name, because that was a recognised name in the area. If anybody wanted to move they used to ring up Chapman's. As things got better and everything else, he went into a franchise with Wridgways and worked for them on…They got all the work and he worked on a commission basis with them until he retired, and then he was sick and then he died.

09:00 As I said, he wasn't very old when he died.

**Did he cart other things besides furniture?**

No, only just furniture. He was a furniture specialist. Naturally, he built his name up on being very careful and got plenty of work. He went in with Wridgways, and Wridgways were only small in those days. The reason why he went in with them, because they had a big store. And of course, a lot of people want storage

09:30 when they were shifting. They say, "Look, I can't use all that. Can you store it for me?" And that was him in that work. As I say, with the mother, she used to get the little extras by teaching English to migrants, the Italian migrants.

**You would go with her when she was teaching?**

Yes. You couldn't stay home. She would say, "We are all going over to the Casamintos," or the Fallapses'

10:00 or whatever their names were, "and we will be staying there for tea."

**Did you enjoy doing that?**

Yes, they had a lot of extraordinary dishes, you know, chicken and spaghetti and all sorts of things that were entirely different to what you were used to. It was a big change. Plus there was always a ton of fruit to eat.

**Did you speak English with them as well?**

10:30 **Did you have conversations in English?**

Yes, well, as they got more fluent with the English…It was usually the early ones that were out, they could speak, because they were running their business and they were reasonably good at English, but as they brought out brothers and sisters and everybody else, they had to get the grinding of English, so she used to teach them, so they would get into the business. And then they would all start up their own businesses in the end.

11:00 They all went to fruit shops in them days, fruit shops or fish and chip shops. You didn't see them in the games like they're in today, like in the car industry. They seemed to stick to the one thing. Fruit shops,

everybody that owned was…an Italian.

**Did you speak Italian? Did you learn?**

No, I never learnt any of the lingo [language] at all. I was having trouble learning English myself. I was never a brilliant scholar at school.

11:30 **So how did you go at school? Tell me about your school years. What primary school did you go to?**

Gold Street. The schools in Collingwood were like the pubs were, nearly one on every corner. The nearest school was Victoria Park and then there was Spensley Street, but they were always within half a mile of one another because there were hundreds of kids in Collingwood. And then there was the Catholic schools, St Joseph's and St Thomas's and St John's.

12:00 And the other schools, there was George Street…and they were all very close. There were kids everywhere. Most kids only went to the 8th grade. Those who went to the (UNCLEAR) and wanted to go to a technical school, they could leave from the 6th grade and then go to the Collingwood Tech, and learn a trade. But I went through to the 8th grade and got the highest you could get,

12:30 the Merit Certificate, and that was the end of that. They used to say to you, "You must get your Merit Certificate if you want to get into any sort of trade, or any of the…" Like in them days, the big jobs were in the fire brigade, on the railways, in the police force, all those. I can remember going to school, if a kid came up and he said his father was working on the trams, you looked at him as though he was something special, "His father is on the trams!"

13:00 Or, "He's a train driver!" Or, "He's a fireman!" Because there wasn't the work about, and anybody in those sort of jobs were an elevation above everybody else. You looked at them as though his father was a big timer. So that's what they used to always say, all the old teachers. I still think of them today as…I think they tried exceptionally hard to convince you to study hard and get what you could, because it was a hard old world outside.

13:30 They would even spend extra time on you, in the last year, to get your Merit Certificate. They would even stay behind after school if you were weak in one subject. "If you can stay behind for half an hour, I will give you extra tuition on that subject." They looked old people to us, but they were very dedicated people. You got a few wallopings off them, but you deserved what you got, because you were always in trouble, playing up and doing things that you shouldn't do.

14:00 **What sort of a kid were you? Did you play up much?**

No, I was just an average kid. I stuck to the discipline side fairly, although I got plenty of wallopings off the father, because the brother and I used to do things you were told not to do, go down the river….because there was no money about, and you used to do all these things that could entertain you. Like go down in the big deep drains under Collingwood. And he'd say, "Don't go down there. If there's ever a flash storm and you get caught in there,

14:30 you'll get swept out." Of course we used to go down the tip where the fires were, they used to be burning, and of course they used to burn for weeks down there. And there would be big fire holes. And you would go down there and come home with your clothes burnt, or something burnt, and of course he would know where you had been by the smell of you, and of course you were in for a walloping then. I still say this, and my brother's dead now, but we used to say, "Well, we deserved everything we got anyway, because we broke the rules and he told you not to do it." So you didn't qualm about the punishment you got,

15:00 you didn't whinge about the punishments you got. You earned it.

**What sort of punishment would he give you?**

A good whacking, but that never really hurt you. Never hit you around the head or anything like that, it was always on the bum or on the bloody legs or something like that, never around the head or anything. But as I was saying, he was a strict disciplinarian. It was for your own benefit. When you look back over the years you say to yourself,

15:30 "Well, it was for your benefit, trying to keep you away from all the dangers." Because there was no money about, you used to do all these daredevil things because that was the entertainment. If you sold papers or anything else like that, that was an extra you got. You might make a couple of bob out of that a week, but there was nothing about much. You had to find your own fun and make it.

16:00 **That area down there along the river, there's bushland there now, what as it like then?**

It was, it was around there then, around the Boulevard, because it was down near Dights Falls where we used to go. It was very dangerous and very deep holes there, because the Merri Creek used to meet there, too, that was another area, and the tip was there. It was bushland, it was really bushland down there then, and you used to enjoy going down there and spending the time around the area.

16:30 All through that area was… The big Fairfield Hospital was in the same area, that was the infectious disease hospital, which was always full in them days, because Collingwood was bad for diphtheria and

scarlet fever, and then the polio came in ’37, and everything was….Kids were dying everywhere in them days,

17:00 and school was closed down for quite a few months to try and stop the spread of polio. The hospital was never empty with all these cases, and it wasn't until all the inoculations came in….There was no such thing about them days, inoculations against all these things, the kids just got it and the hospital was full of them.

**Did you ever have a serious illness?**

No, I was lucky I never got anything serious. The old Dad used to say,

17:30 “I go to work every day,” he said, because most of the people used to keep the kids locked up in the house when the polio was on, and he used to say, “Well, look, I'm out all day. If it's going to happen, I'll be bringing it home, so what is the good of keeping them locked up?” We didn’t come under that then, but it was a tragic time, because you knew a lot of the kids that died with the polio. It was pretty rife in Collingwood.

18:00 And so was every other disease was pretty bad, because homes were bad there. My mother used to always say, when you came home from school late, "Where have you been?" "I've been down to so and so's house." Well, she'd know what they were like. In those days. In them days, some of those houses you'd see the bugs pushing the wallpaper off the wall. Bugs and all sorts of things. And she would say, “Right, straight into the bathroom,” and she would get into you with the nit comb

18:30 and the kerosene, rubbing your hair with kerosene and the nit comb to get anything that was in there. She'd say, “Don’t ever go there again unless I let you go.” But things were pretty rough.

**There was a lot of poverty?**

Oh, it was really bad. Everything was shared. Like my mother would, even though we weren’t going too well, f there was any bread left over, “Take it down to so and so.” And we were getting a bit extra fruit and things like that,

19:00 she'd say, “Take that down to so and so," and you'd cart the bag down. Everybody shared everything, no waste went on. Like the dole, the kids were given free hair cuts, and even a lot of the blokes on the dole, on the sustenance, would be getting free hair cuts. There would be handouts of food.

19:30 Certain ones were on chits and that. At our school there, the people that they were on the dole, their children got free milk under the scheme, half a pint of milk a day. All these sort of little things were going on all the time. But that's water under the bridge now.

**But that is interesting, what you said about the polio epidemic….**

That was about in ’37. It was on for quite a while, but…

20:00 Now nothing like that exists today because of the immunisation of all the children. In fact, I don't think the….Fairfield Hospital keeps going there now. It's not there for any infectious diseases any more. Of course, for years out there there were kids in iron lungs, for years, with the polio. It was a tragic time, really. It was bad enough with the diphtheria and the scarlet fever.

**Did you know kids who recovered from it and came back…**

20:30 Yes, one of the kids I used to play with, he was in one of these long chairs for a terrible long time with his arms in splints and everything else like that. He came back and come real good again. He actually had a badly withered arm, but he finished up a top tradesman in home decorating and things like that. He was only one of them. There was quite a few of them. They finished up, most of them had something withered, a leg withered,

21:00 or arm withered or something like that. There was something left from it.

**So families were having to nurse them at home?**

Yes, they were home, on these long prams they used to be in, and different sorts of wheelchairs. Nothing like they've got today. Everything was rather primitive looking. And the families were looking after them, once they came out, unless they were a drastic case and had to be in an iron lung. Sometimes they had to go back

21:30 at certain times to have a spell in the iron lung, and then they could come out again, and come home. But most of them were treated at home after a certain time, but they were a long time recovering.

**It must have been hard for families, if they were already struggling to make ends meet….**

It did. But I think to myself, to be quite honest, it was probably the togetherness that kept a lot of people going.

22:00 I would have known, the same as everybody….You knew everybody around the area for a square mile. Today, you would hardly know your own neighbour. But everybody knew one another. And there were, what we used to call in them days pushes, that was like mobs. And you'd say, “Do you belong to that

certain mob?" And of course you wouldn't go into that territory. And if you went in and they'd say, "I know him," so they don't do nothing.

22:30 It was a pretty tough sort of a life, but if you knew everybody you were pretty right.

**Did you belong to a push?**

No, I never belonged to a push. My brother and I seemed to just stick around together. We knew everybody. We knew all the pushes, who they were, and everybody else. You knew where they hung out. Of course in them days, the big name in the area was John Wren, in them days,

23:00 and we knew where he hung out and knew where his shop was, in Johnson Street, and we knew where the back alley was, where it came out into Sackville Street. And of course, if the police decided to do something, you'd see them all coming out, when the ferrets were thrown, you'd see them all come out the back way. His name was the leading light of Collingwood in them days. Of course, Collingwood and all them were a very religious area.

23:30 My brother and I used to play with the Collingwood Juniors. They never had thirds, they had juniors. And it was a very religious area. And the club was more or less religious and that, so you could see it stick out, very much, when you played with them as juniors, as kids, because you used to play in the curtainraisers before the big games.

24:00 We moved on from there and went to North Fitzroy, to Northcote.

**You said you moved up?**

Yeah, well, that's it. Your house became better as you moved. We moved from Collingwood and your next house is much better. And when we moved to Northcote, the mother and father decided to buy that one. Well, that was a big step for them. It was only what…

24:30 It was only £800 the house was. They had to have, I think it was, a £200 deposit. Naturally in them days, everybody, the family, helped to pay everything off. The brother and my wages used to help pay the house off. And that's why when I enlisted they got very upset, because they were depending on my wage. And I said, "You're going to do better out of it anyway, because I am going to allocate 4/-d. a day out of my pay to kick in.

25:00 So that is getting more than I was when I was an apprentice." So that' that part of it.

**What made North Fitzroy different?**

It was a newer type area, plus it seemed to be more affluent. They were working class people who seemed to have a good job.

25:30 Whereas down Fitzroy and Collingwood they were either on the sustenance or struggling along. And people in those areas all had jobs. They worked in all the factories in Collingwood, they had a good steady job. You used to see them coming down….There were no cars, it was nearly all pushbikes. It was nothing to see Hoddle Street, Collingwood, which was nearly all….from Clifton Hill Station right through to Richmond, there would be all shoe factories, Hoddle Street,

26:00 and it was nothing to see them riding six abreast on their pushbikes with their old Gladstone bag on the handlebars, all riding to work. And they would all come from those areas, and ride down, because they had a job 365 days of the year. They could afford something a bit better than the people in Collingwood and Fitzroy and all those places.

**So it was a newer area in that…new housing?**

Yes they were nicer houses, with gardens,

26:30 where in Collingwood they were five houses together, little pokey dot dog-box house, in what they called terrace houses, and nobody had a garden and things like that. When we moved up to those places, everybody had a nice garden and a nice yard and things like that. There was no space in half the yards in Fitzroy and Collingwood. You couldn't swing a cat a cat in half of them. See, and all the nice streets were there.

27:00 Like St George's Road was a nice concrete road, with a tram up the middle of it, and nice median strips, and it looked much better. Of course, once you got to Preston and then if you got to Reservoir, well Reservoir was half bush, and so was some of Preston, half bush. It was densely populated, because the Fitzroy… And they all boarded with one another.

27:30 If you went down Smith Street, which was Collingwood one side and Fitzroy the other side, and if you went over further, Nicholson Street….On one side of Nicholson Street it was Carlton and on the other side was Fitzroy. The streets divided the suburbs. And then, of course, the border line for Collingwood was down to make up with Richmond, down near Church Street, or somewhere like that.

**Was there a push in North Fitzroy?**

28:00 **Not as bad as it was in Collingwood. See….You used to see the pushes and that mainly in**

**action on Friday nights, because Friday night was late shopping before the war, and Smith Street was alive then. You'd go up there Friday nights and you'd see all the pushes on different corners. And then there could be...it all depends on how they were going, and then all of a sudden you'd see the pickets disappear off a fence and there would be a decent barney [fight] on.**

28:30 **It was a really tough old time and a tough area.**

**What were they fighting about?**

I don't really know what they used to fight about. It was just that…one push wanted to be more predominant than the other. Of course, I think, the leading push in my area, which is not called that any more, it's called Alexander Parade, it was called Riley Street in them days. That was the Riley Street mob were the top push in the area.

29:00 And going to school, I can always remember, several of the kids, you knew they were going to be in trouble, which they did, they finished up some of Melbourne's top gangsters. Well, I know two of the kids I went to school with, one was murdered, he finished up in the river, and another one was up on a murder charge, too.

29:30 It was only that…They weren't bad kids, it was just the luck of the draw of that era. There was just no opportunities. It was like seeing the clever kids at school, but they only went to the 8th grade, they got their Merit Certificate, yet their talent was there to go further. But there was no opportunity to go further. There was certain..things came up like the Rhodes Scholarship

30:00 and things like that, but you had to be really something out of this world to win that. Some kids would go in for it, but they wouldn't get there, but they were still good enough to go on further, in my opinion. They proved it by the business they went into and things like that.

**So you know kids that rose above all of that….That came from poor families in Collingwood, and went further with their education?**

Well, actually…

30:30 The reason that a lot made it, the same as myself, was the opportunity that was given to you after the war was over. I don't know, really, if the opportunities would have been there if there hadn't of been the war, because half the fellows…well, three quarters of the fellows that went into the army never had a trade anyway. But they got a trade after the war because the government provided schemes to become a tradesman,

31:00 and they all finished up tradesmen, and then the opportunities were very good for going out on your own. If you were a good plumber or a good electrician or anything else like that, there was a chance. I won't say there is a chance today, because if you're not big these days you don't survive. That's only my opinion. But I don't think the opportunities are there like I had,

31:30 straight after the war, to go into business, which they were. And lots of my cobbers [mates], who never had anything prior to the war, finished up with a business of their own, only through the government scheme, because they were taught a trade and started up on their own.

**So your dad was right about that, wasn't he?**

Yes. I think to myself, he was a tough old fellow, but he was very fair. And when we all grew up,

32:00 and naturally I used to see him quite a bit, nearly once a week after the war, down the pub, and have a beer with him on the Saturday, and I used to look at the old fellow and say, "Your advice was good." It was good advice. He said, and it was quite true, "You can always be a labourer. But if you've got a trade behind you, you've got two barrels then. It doesn't matter if you don't like the trade, but learn it."

**It must have been worrying for your parents.**

32:30 **There was a lot of crime in Collingwood, and those urban areas, and to try and protect you from that and keep you out of that...**

They used to try and tell you, "Look, don't go down there," or, "Don't go with this crowd," or, "Don't go with that crowd." But, as I said, we used to break the rules by doing it. We could see nothing wrong in seeing these people and everything else like that. But as I said, like, the area was rife with problems

33:00 and crime and everything else like that.…You wouldn't like to see it again. There was lots of people who tried to do a lot of good. Like there was an old fellow there…well, he was old to us, but he wasn't really old, he was our Scoutmaster, 2nd Collingwood, and he would work his guts out to try and do something for the poor kids of Collingwood.

33:30 And he used to run this troop, the 2nd Collingwood, and I don't suppose with the twenty or thirty kids he had there, and my brother and I were two of them…If they could have made three uniforms for the lot of us, put together, it would be, one would have a scarf, one would have a hat, and that was about all. But he used to do everything in his power to give you weekends away, something extra…Like he would say, "Meet me up on the Victoria Park station this Saturday. We're all going to have a day out," and he wouldn't tell you what it was.

34:00 We would all meet there and he would say, “Right. We're going to Luna Park,” he said, "I have managed to get a hundred free tickets.” He used to work his butt off to try and get everything for kids, take you all over the place. He would take you to, say, 3rd Camberwell or something like that. Well, you're going to an affluent troop of scouts, with their own hall,

34:30 and of course they would put on a terrific pound night or a sav [saveloy] night or a pie night. Living in luxury. And then we would go as a scruffy old lot. There would always be something to cause a bit of trouble, and then there would be a punch up then. The Collingwood kids versus the Camberwell kids. It would break his heart, because he would say, “I do everything to try and make things nice, and what do you do?” But he never, ever let the kids down. And he followed the entire crowd right through the war.

35:00 He never married. He looked after his mother and kept his mother, and he always had a job. And he finished up…After the war was over, he used to come to my place, at least once a month, for dinner….And he never forget any of the blokes. And he traced everyone right through, because most of them enlisted and went to the war, and he traced everyone, all the time. He'd say, "My boys, my boys,

35:30 I know where he is and I know where he is….” And that's the sort of fellows you had in Collingwood, who were trying to do their best to keep everybody up, on the up and up, keep them out of trouble. He used to try his hardest, you know? He finished up, he was a Scoutmaster for about fifty years.

**What's his name?**

Jim Limer, his name was Jim Limer, and he lived with his mother, he never married, because he looked after his mother.

36:00 But he had a job, see, and he was a good First Aid man. He worked for Spicers, the paper people, and he was their First Aid bloke until. He was one of the fellows that…I always remembered in Collingwood, he used to try and do his best to keep the kids out of trouble, by doing something.

**What street did you live in, in Collingwood?**

I lived in Turnbull Street, which was on the verge of

36:30 Collingwood, not far from Clifton Hill Station, and not far from the football ground, Collingwood football ground. And the school wasn’t far away. Everybody went to school by walking, in them days, even though it was a rough area, it was safe like that. You never worried about that.

**What were the streets like?**

Pretty rough. And naturally all of Collingwood and Fitzroy had lanes, cobbled lanes. Because them were the days when…

37:00 it wasn’t then, but people don't realise all the lanes were built because, in the early days it was all night men, and people like that, and they had to have access to get up the lanes to…And then, naturally, sewerage and everything else came on later, but in my time the milkman came up the lane, everybody came up the lane, garbage, it didn’t matter what it was. It seemed to be…Even when I was an apprentice butcher, and I used to drive a horse and cart on a round,

37:30 and you would be surprised how many people would never let you knock at the front door. "Tradesmen? Around the back!" And they never called their dogs off, either. It was amazing. An old fellow used to tell me at work, he said, “Put half an axe handle in your basket, and if one comes near, they don’t like an axe handle.” Because people, they wouldn't call them off,

38:00 they wouldn’t call the dog off. There was always these little snappy ones that would bite at your heels. But no, it was a funny old world in them early days, that's for sure. Always tradesmen around the back, not in the front door.

**So you were talking before about employment, and in North Fitzroy people tended to have regular jobs, that's why they were more affluent…**

38:30 **So what sort of work were people in Collingwood able to get?**

Well, the shoe industry was enormous in them days. I would say two people out of every ten worked in the shoe industry, because there was just hundreds of shoe business. They're all gone. I can name at least twenty that used to be down there. There was always Easy Walkings, the Clifton, the Tascott, the Sharwood….Every big company or big shop in town, or any of these places, always had some big shoe industry working for them, you know.

39:00 The shoe industry was everywhere. Then Collingwood….Foy & Gibson’s would have had, at least, two solid blocks of factories, because they made everything for their stores. Like they had a hat division, they had a blanket division, they manufactured everything. And that was in blocks. Well, MacRoberson's, the lolly people,

39:30 they would have two blocks of factory, employing hundreds. Well, it's all gone. They used to manufacture nearly everything. There were all these big factories in Collingwood that kept it all going. Big bakeries. But there, they were the two of the biggest factories I can remember was Foy & Gibson

and MacRobertson’s, there were many, many others. But shoe factories and that, they were absolutely predominate, right through Collingwood,

40:00 and everybody worked in the shoe industry. That was the major work there.

**What happened when the Depression hit, to those jobs?**

Well, they seemed to be able to all keep open, but naturally on reduced staff. My aunt worked in the… She was the youngest sister of my mother, and she was still going to school when I was born.

40:30 Well, she used to work all her life in the shoe industry. She worked in Collingwood. And they all seemed to hold their jobs there, in all those industries, but it was still tough going, I think. They really had to pull their weight. My aunt said you had to do so many pair a day, and if you didn't do that you weren't up to the mark, and…

41:00 I don’t know what happened to them all, but I have my doubts whether there is one shoe industry in Collingwood now. From the Clifton Hill Station right down to Victoria Street was all, on both sides of Hoddle Street, was all boot factories, hundreds of them. You used to see them all riding their bikes with the old Gladstone bag on the handlebars.

# Tape 2

00:30 **Tell us about Friday nights.**

Friday nights were the special night of the week. Everybody got their little extra. The father used to get his two ounces of weed, which is tobacco, and I used to get my little book The Triumph, which was tuppence, and The Champion, my brother used to get that, that was tuppence also, and I can’t think what the mother used to get as the extra on a Friday night, that was the Friday night.

01:00 And, of course, naturally he would read his and I would read mine and then we would swap them, and then some kid up the road used to get another comic, Comic Cuts, or something, so you would swap, everybody would swap everything. But that was Friday night. But then I can’t understand how they used to put up with the patience….in the shop there. They used to have a penny box and a halfpenny box. In the halfpenny box there used to be gobstoppers, as we used to call them,

01:30 they were a great big lolly, you would suck that for ages, then it would break and it would be full of sherbet. There was 'Silver Sticks' and ‘White Knights’ and aniseed balls, and they were all about ten for a halfpenny, aniseed balls. Because you spend ages looking in that box before you decided how you would spend your halfpenny, or your penny, and how they would have the patience to stand there waiting for you to make up your mind, whether you would have

02:00 ten aniseed balls, or a licorice strap, or a gobstopper, or something like that. I don’t know how they had the patience, just for a halfpenny. But yet the variety was enormous for a halfpenny. Of course, then if you went up market it was always for a penny, you got into the big lines with the cards in them for football characters and everything else like that, which you used to take to school

02:30 and then play flicks against the wall with them. There always used to be a saying, “No double backers,” that meant you couldn't stick two together for extra weight to flick at the wall, because closest to the wall took the other blokes’ cards. You used to get these cards out of cigarette packets and out of chewing gum packets, and all these things, each firm had a different idea. It could be animals, another football character, everything else like that. Of course, at school,

03:00 there was always marble season, cherry bob season….The cherry bob they used to have at Melbourne Cup time, making 'Toodling Bucks.' That was a round circle, a piece of cardboard, tacked onto a cotton reel on a butcher’s skewer, and then you used to wind a piece of string around the cotton reel and it would have all the Melbourne Cup name horses on it, with an arrow

03:30 pointing up the top, and you would spin it. And of course they would all back on these horses with cherry bobs. There was always prizes on each one, 5 to 1, 6 to 1 and so on, and all the kids would be watching you spin it, waiting there, and you would pay out whichever one had won, with cherry bobs. It was always a cheap way of cheap fun. We used to make very cheap fun, never used to cost anything. We used to make kites, anything. you'd make anything, paper aeroplanes…

04:00 **I've got to ask you what a cherry bob is?**

A cherry bob is a pip out of a cherry. And we used to stick them in the ink well and make them different colours, red….And blokes would have these holes dug in the ground and they would be behind there, and they'd have a mark up here from where you bowled your cherry bob. If that went in the hole he would say, “I'll give you ten and your old girl back."

04:30 That means you get your cherry bob back plus ten. It was always cheap fun. And naturally marbles. And there was always funny sayings in that, like, “No stonks.” That was a marble made out of clay. And, “No

agates." And that was…In them days they used to have them in soft drink bottles, to hold the gas in. You weren't allowed to use those. And there was no ball bearings either,

05:00 because they used to knock your own marbles about. They used to bring these great big ball bearings in and bowl them up and smack in your glass alley and smash it, and there would be hell to pay over that. There were the marbles, and then the season would come for tops, and the girls used to whip their tops, and they used to put nice colours on the top, and as it spun they used to look nice. And then the boys used to have one, which you'd wind it around, and then you'd go along and peg…what you call pegged them,

05:30 and of course, that would split a girl's top. And of course, hell to pay with that. But the boys used to always be in the pinching of their skipping rope and go along and have a tug of war, all the devilment went up. As I said, there was no money, so you made your own fun. But there was always a season for everything, pea shooters, alleys, which is marbles, cherry bobs, kite making and all sorts of things. It was cheap fun.

06:00 **These season, kids just knew and they would get started on them?**

Yes. Kids would keep playing, say, marbles past the season, and when they were on the ground somebody would run through and kick the marbles everywhere, and say, "The alleys are out and the smugglers are about." Of course, the kids would go away bawling and everything else like that, because there would be some young kid that didn't know the season was over,

06:30 because something else would come in. There was winter sports and summer sports and everything else like that. But selling papers at Collingwood tells you the…the Collingwood supporters, how bad they used to be. Not violent or anything else like that, just that they were a temperamental lot. In those days, there used to be a paper called the Sporting Globe, that come out every Wednesday and Saturday. Saturday I used to take the Sporting Globe. But if Collingwood lost?

07:00 Don't take one. You wouldn't sell a Sporting Globe. If they won, take out the double amount. Everybody would buy the Sporting Globe to see how good they were. God, they were a temperamental mob, Collingwood. That's a fact, that's true…

**Did you get to a match very often?**

As I say, we used to play in the juniors, and we used to play before the big game came on.

07:30 They used to have a little reserve for what they called the school boys. The place used to be packed. Never ever was… The Collingwood football or the Fitzroy football grounds were never packed every Saturday. Every time they played at home, it was always packed to the gills. So they used to have a little….Once you had changed, because we used to change in the same room as the big players, and then when you come out and cleaned up, you used to go into your own little reserves to see the game.

08:00 They were all close together, all the grounds. Richmond was close to Collingwood, Fitzroy was close….And all the Association [VFA – Victorian Football Association] grounds were close, like Northcote, but they all used to get their own big crowds, because everybody could walk to the football, or get a train, or a tram, but Collingwood, most of them local supporters and they used to all walk to the ground. That's why they didn't need parking in them days.

08:30 **Was that the same place where Victoria Park is now?**

That's it, yeah. It's called Victoria Park because it is public ground. When they weren't playing there, the gates were always open. There was nothing to stop you from going into that ground, because it was a park. The only time it was closed up was when they had a match there, and they would charge you to go in. Everybody used to walk to all those games, nobody hardly ever drove.

09:00 And there was no parking around Fitzroy. There was no parking around Richmond or Collingwood. Those that came in, came by train or tram, or they'd walk there.

**So who were the stars?**

Collingwood, in them days, when I played, the Colliers, the Coventries, Regan, Fothergill later on….Crackernight,

09:30 they were the stars then. The Colliers were two brothers, they both played together. The Coventries were two brothers, they both played together. Nuts and Gordon Collaren, Albert Collier and Lether Collier, Jackie Regan…They're about the ones I remember mostly, in them days, that's going back quite a while.

**They were Collingwood boys?**

Yes, Collingwood never went any further than Diamond Creek

10:00 or Greensborough, or anywhere like that. They got most of their players out of their schoolboys. When I was playing there, the Richard boys were playing, and the Toomey brothers were playing, they were all kids. They got most of their players from the local area, all the schools, most of the schools. They never went any further than Diamond Creek or Greensborough.

10:30 They all stuck to their own areas, in them days. Each club had an area to work on, and Collingwood done very well, because they used to sponsor the kids fairly well, and that's how…they got them all from the local schools, mostly. They were the ones that were the leading players, in them days, that I can remember. And of course, Coventry was the crack full forward in those days. So there we are with that, a lot to do with the childhood.

11:00 **I've got a few more questions….I guess it's to do with how people made ends meet in Collingwood and**

11:30 **sort of getting caught up in criminal activities….For example, I remember interviewing an old guy from Port Melbourne, and he talked about how the Port [Melbourne] was very poor.**

Yes, Port was the same category as Collingwood.

**There was a bit of crime that went on there, but it often it was to help people out. It would be to help a widow who had ten kids to support on her own.**

12:00 **There was a sense of pushing boundaries a bit?**

I can't recall much like that, but I would agree with you there, he was right. Everybody used to look after one another, that's for sure. I don't know….There wasn't too many trucks for things to fall off, in them days, as the saying goes, but there was always something going on, somebody selling something, or giving something as a means to help them out.

12:30 I can't say that I can verify much crime, that way, to help others out, but there were the crooks about.

**What sort of crime was going on?**

There was…It was more or less petty,

13:00 it wasn't the serious crime as there is now, it was more or less petty crime. The police seemed to have things under control a lot more….Naturally things are a lot bigger now. Everybody in the area knew the local copper. He wasn't beyond giving you a good boot in the bum, if you were a young bloke, and he would always threaten you then, say, "Right, look,

13:30 this is your warning. The next time we'll take you home and we'll see your father." And that used to scare you right up. The police in them days, when they were in a station, they were there for years. The sergeant was there for years. The postmaster was there for years. The stationmaster was there for years. And even in my time, when I first went into business, they would come round and, "Are you going to put in for the going away gift for the local sergeant?"

14:00 Or the local fire chief, "He's been there for thirty years." Or the local bank manager….See, they lived on the job, the bank managers, and when they were retiring, they used to put on a bunfight for them, and all the tradespeople used to chip in. And the local cop, he knew everybody, he knew the ones who were really going bad, and he knew the ones that were crooks. And you had a lot of respect for the local old copper,

14:30 because, as I said, he wasn't short of giving you a good kick in the bum if you were a young bloke, and looked like you were getting yourself into trouble, he would give you a warning. That's like, even at the football, our way of life has altered a lot. I can always remember, at Collingwood, without fail there would be a decent blue [fight]. And of course, the cops used to wear these big high hats in them days, and there would be a big blue, and you would see them in there, and they would be in the melee,

15:00 punching up with the blokes. But there was never, ever the boot sunk in. It was always just the fists. The cops would always say, I can hear them say, "Get your mate out of it, he's down, he's finished." Then they'd jump over to the next bloke. But they never sunk the boot in any time. You would lose all your mates if you sunk the boot into somebody. Because that was the fairness of it. If he was down, he was finished.

15:30 I can see them now, jumping over, "Get your mate out. He's down, he's finished." And then drag the mate out of it. But there was a different thing about the local cops. But getting back to that….John Wren seemed to control everything in the area. He had all the SP [starting price] bookies tied up, and anything that was going on, he was involved in it. Nobody could really pin him on anything you know.

16:00 He controlled just about everything that went on in Collingwood. That book was very, very true that was written, Power without Glory. I read that through and that was about a 100% spot on. Because, naturally, knowing where they were and knowing things and seeing how things used to work and see it all in operation…It was pretty right, pretty spot on.

16:30 **Frank Hardy wrote that, and he lived in Collingwood. He was very local.**

Yes, it was all pretty true, everything there. He never bent the truth. He had to change all the names, but the names he put in, I recognised them, all the names and all the places. But he never….Old Wren never seemed to move out of that area, the Collingwood area, and get himself involved anywhere else. It was always the local area.

17:00 But all these people that were anybody in the area, like the stationmaster, the local sergeant, they were there for that many years and they knew everybody personally.

**Do you remember the name of the sergeant?**

No, I can't now…That's gone now, but I can always remember different ones there…Because they always lived on the job. When I was delivering meat, when I was an apprentice, with the horse and cart,

17:30 I used to have to go to the local fire station, because they all lived on the jobs. The bank manager lived on the job, everybody lived on the job, and the quarters were provided. But they don't seem to stay that long in the jobs now, and they don't live on the jobs any more.

**Do you remember...Did you help your Dad with his removals?**

No, the brother did. The brother went with him, in the end. I didn't.…

18:00 Well, actually, the brother did start with me. He went with the father later on when things become… I'd enlisted. Well, the brother was rejected because of his really bad feet, the brother, he was rejected. He had to have all his boots and shoes made for him. He had bunions bad. Well, Dad, and the fellow that my Dad employed, he joined up, well, he had nobody, so he grabbed the brother,

18:30 and the brother went and worked for him for quite a number of years. He was also a butcher, the brother was also a butcher, and he finished up a shearer. He finished up an all rounder compared to me. I was a straight butcher and shopman, in the shop. But he was a slaughterman, a shearer, you name it. He was Man Friday. The brother went to work with my father…I didn't.

19:00 I stuck to the... Neither of us really liked the butchering game, but we stayed in it for years together. I used to employ him after he came back from New Zealand, after shearing in New Zealand. There was always a slack moment before they went shearing again. He would come and work for me for a few months until it was time for the gang to get together and go again. He was a good butcher.

19:30 So that's that part of it.

**When did you leave school? How old were you when you left school?**

14. That was the age for most 8th grade, and 14. You were always about 14 when you were in the 8th grade. And you sat for your Merit Certificate, and if you got that you left school. There was very few from Collingwood

20:00 ever went on to anything else, like tech school. They were all finished up either….If they could get a trade, they were in trades. And there wasn't that much going then, prior to the war. About 1938, things started to come good. That's when my Dad started up on his own, more or less, and things started to come good. And then in 1939,

20:30 that's when the war started, and that halted things quite a lot.

**How old were you when you enlisted?**

I was 16, nearly 17. I was 16 when I enlisted, and I put my age up and I got… Because all the blokes from school were enlisting.

21:00 "So and so's gone. He's gone into the Navy." Or, "He has gone into the Airforce, and the other's gone into the AIF." [Australian Imperial Force]. So I thought, 'Oh well, they're all going, I'm going.' So I used to go into the Malvern Town Hall, go and try to enlist. And in those days, they had mainly First World War diggers on the enlistment side. And of course I used to get very upset, because one said to me,

21:30 "You better go home and get your mother to change your nappies." I went out very disgusted. So anyway, I kept trying until one day a bloke said to me, "Why don't you go round to the…" Because we lived in Northcote then, Westgarthen, "Go round to the local drill hall? They'll take anybody around there." So I said, 'All right.' So I went round there, I just went in, the bloke said, "Are you 18?"

22:00 I said, "Yes." He said, "You're sure you are 18?" I said, "Yeah, I'm 18." He said, "Righto." And the next minute I'm in it. The doctor examined me, and he said, "You will get a letter saying when to report. You should get all your affairs fixed up in that time, and you'll be in." So I didn't know what to do. I never told my mother and father.

22:30 I didn't know what to do about it. And the aunt, as I said, the aunt lived with us, she was always a good pal, I said, "Look, I'm expecting a letter. If it comes and I'm not here, grab it, will you?" She said, "What have you done?" I said, "I've enlisted." She done that for me. And the day I went in, my mother thought I was going to work. And I said….The old man had gone to work. I said, "I'm not going to work. I've enlisted. I go in today." Of course, she said, "What's your father going to say?"

23:00 I said, "I don't know what he is going to say." So she told him when he come home that I'd gone into the army. So he went crook, he went crook. He said to me, he said, "Doesn't he know what's going to go on?" She said, "No, he doesn't. Does he?" So anyway, I came home on leave….they used to give you leave once a month in those days, I came home on leave, and I thought, 'Where the hell am I going to go?' So I thought, 'I'll ring up home." And so I rang up and he happened to answer the phone. I said,

“It's Frank here.”

23:30 He said, “Well, where are you?” I said, “I'm in town.” He said, “Well, why don’t you come home?” I said, “Am I welcome?” He said, “Of course you're bloody welcome." So I went home, and he took me into the dining room…..I'll always remember this, he tried to give me a fatherly talk on what problems I might strike. He didn’t know how to handle it. He had no idea of how to handle it. He said to me, because I was only in recruit training then,

24:00 he said to me, “Keep out of the Infantry." He said, "Look at me. I was in Infantry all the time. Keep out of the Infantry. The only thing you'll get in Infantry, you'll get terrific mates, you'll never forget one of them for the rest of your life." He said, "But that's all you'll get out of the Infantry." He said, "Get into something where you can learn something.” Then when I go back I get posted to Infantry. So I rung up, I said, “Well, I'm in the Infantry.” "Oh, God…" But we become real good friends after that.

24:30 Every time I come home, he used to say to me was everything going all right? But I will never forget him trying to give me the fatherly talk. I said, "Look, I've seen films and everything else. I've seen all sorts of things." So I said, “Don’t worry about me, about that."

**So was that just about going to war? Or was that about life in general?**

No….All the disease you could get, and all the problems you could get, and everything else like that. He just wanted to tell me about it.

25:00 He was quite right, too. He said, "I'll tell you something now. The uniform might not be much.” He said, "It doesn't look great." He said, "But it will get you into lots of places you'd never get, ever." He said, "You'll be surprised what places." And it did. It was surprising what places it got you. Different people who probably wouldn’t want to even look at you, but that uniform got you in.

25:30 He was quite right there.

**Had he told you much about his own war experience?**

He didn’t. The old uncle, that was the bloke in the AIF, he was in the Australian Army, that was the one we used to go and live with in Dunolly, they used to get together once a year on holidays. The old man, when things started to come good,

26:00 used to have a holiday. So he used to go up with old Bill. They had a lot in common. The old man was in the British Army and he was in the AIF. Because he said to me once, he said, “Don’t expect your father to live to a nice old age.” And I said, “Why?” He said, "Well, through his injuries in the war, like he was badly gassed and things like that…." Even then my cousin said to me, she said,"My father," which was old Bill,

26:30 "never used to say much, but when those two get together they talk a lot." In the river fishing or doing something, and they talked together about different places and different experiences. That's the only time I ever heard anything about it. The old man would never say very much….but he said to me, "Keep out of the Infantry.” He said, “You'll only make good friends out of that. It's toughest arm of the whole lot.”

27:00 **So what would you have liked to have done?**

Well, really, I thought, 'Why not stay with me game?' So I put in to be in the RAASC [Royal Australian Army Service Corps], that's the supply mob, where they had butchers and grocers. That's what we used to call them, 'Galloping Grocers.' See, every arm has a different nickname. Like the Armoured Division, we used to call them ‘Gasoline Cowboys.’

27:30 And the RAASC's, who used to keep your supplies up, they were called ‘Galloping Grocers’. And then artillery, you'd say, "Get out your (UNCLEAR) old sniper." So all the other arms had a nickname. Of course, they used to call us ‘Crunchies’ and ‘Footsloggers’ and everything else. That's all we were anyway.

28:00 **What was your mum’s reaction? She was worried about what your dad would think?**

She said…

**Was she worried for you?**

Yes, she used to write, because I never had a girlfriend. I never worried about girls, at that age, because I used to see enough of the other fellows’ problems, shocking problems, different ones, during the war. It was very chronic to see what happened to some fellows, through poison pen letters and things like that,

28:30 what their wives were doing while they were away. It was tragic, really. And I thought, 'Thank God I'm not going with anybody.” My mother used to write to me religiously, and I used to write to her. And as I said, like, I allocated 4/-d. a day out of my pay, to her. And I used to be on 2/-d a day, which was still big money,

29:00 because when I enlisted I was only on 15/6d. a week, and of course we were getting 6/-d a day….5/-d. then it changed to 6/-d. So I was on a lot more than I was getting as an apprentice. So, she used to go and draw off that money every fortnight to help pay for the house. I got that back in the end, because she always said to me, "You've chipped in." So when she passed on…

29:30 after (UNCLEAR)….She left me the house, because I put most of the moneys in it. She was a bit worried. The old man was always worried because….they used to go to….We weren't allowed to say anything in letters, as you know. No matter where you were, you weren't allowed to say anything, because your letters were censored anyway. She would write up and say, "Your father and I went to the pictures

30:00 and there was a newsreel on this certain area." I would write back, "That film you saw is spot on." That meant… And that is how I used to tell her where I was. She was always worried. The old man was always worried, "Bloody Infantry!"

**That's interesting, isn't it? That people back home would go and see the newsreels. They wanted to see what was going on. It was a way of just trying to understand where their sons were?**

30:30 Yes, because the old man…When I came home on leave once, from New Guinea, my father said, "Come up with me to Dunolly and see your Uncle Bill, he'll want to see you." And so I went up there, and that was the only time I said… Old Bill said to me, because he was a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] winner, he was a very gallant sort of bloke, when you read his citation, and he said to me, "Now, what's the difference

31:00 between these two?" He said, "The German and the Jap [Japanese]?" He said, "I can tell you about the German, but I know nothing about the Jap. What's the difference?" He wanted to know what sort of a fighter he was, and everything else like that. And that's the only time they really got to talk about anything, you know. Prior to that? You wouldn't know what went on with them.

**So, just going back. You enlisted and then the day came that you were going off**

31:30 **for your initial training. Can you just go back there and tell me where you went to?**

I had to report to the drill hall where I enlisted, and we caught the electric train at Dennis Station and went through to Royal Park. When we got to Royal Park, that was when they kitted you, they kitted you there, and we spent the night there. I can remember my first night because it was

32:00 just hundreds of young blokes everywhere, and all just tents everywhere. It was like Bourke Street, as the old saying is. That night you went down for your first meal there, and I can always remember, we had these half cooked, or half dried apricots, and you can imagine what happened through the night, everybody wanted to go the toilet. Then nobody could find out where they were, no lights, nothing,

32:30 couldn't find their bloody tents, couldn't find anything. What a tragic night. Because next day, we were all put on a train then to go to this RTB, this Regimental Training Battalion, which was at Seymour. Site 17 Seymour.

**Can I just ask you what date that was?**

That would be the 10th of January, 1942. And we went there,

33:00 and naturally everybody was all the young fellows there, and there was a few old diggers about, training instructors and that. And that lasted three weeks, and then you went for this interview….naturally you got your inoculations, and all the vaccinations you had to have, and things like that. And it was stinking hot, too, it was summer, summer time….And then they interviewed each person

33:30 and said, "Well, I'm afraid you are not going to get your wish. That's full. But there's a unit down the road that has been recruited in Preston and Northcote, and I'm pretty sure you will know someone in it." And that's where I finished up, and I was there right up until the time we came home, after the war was over. Then we started to…I went down there,

34:00 and In our intake there was about two hundred and fifty, I think. We went down to this place called Trawool. Site 25A, it was. And it was in a gully, two big hills either side of it, in this gully, and this camp was there and this battalion. So we got our first introduction to that, and sorted out and sent to the platoons you wanted to go to.

34:30 I didn't know anything. I didn't want to be anything special. Of course they turned around and said, "Put your hands up those who want to be in the Signals platoon." And then, "Anti-aircraft platoon?" Then they went, "Mortar platoon?" Then, "Carrier platoon?" And there was a few of us left and he said, "Well, you've got no bloody choice. Engineers platoon." So we became Pioneers. I stayed with them and

35:00 we done all the training there at Trawool for about two months and then they just said, "Righto, pack up. You're going to be marched from Trawool through to Albury on foot." I thought, 'This is going to be exciting, isn't it?' And they did, and they marched us on an average, I suppose, of anything from twenty to twenty six miles a day, in full fighting order, right up the Hume Highway to Albury.

35:30 And everybody, naturally….We weren't that over fit when we started, but by the time we got there, the old feet were starting to harden up. What you said before about blisters? That's when I really seen some big blisters. But that was no excuse. The doctor would just come along, break them, patch them up and said, "Back in the line and keep marching through to Albury."

36:00 The reception right through was pretty good, because you were on the main highway, you had major towns like Benella, Wangaratta and one or two others.

And what happened, the band would come….When you were going to go through a big town, your unit battalion band would come and march you through the town. And people would rush out and put chocolates in your webbing, and cigarettes and chewing gum,

36:30 and give you a big hug and a kiss. It was really a strange feeling. But you used to bivouac out every night, just under the stars. And you'd ready next morning, breakfast and back on the road and footslog away again. They'd say, "You're going to have an easy day today. You're only going to do eighteen mile." It would finish up about twenty. You used to march…three miles to the hour. They'd give you ten minutes rest in every hour.

37:00 But you had to cover three mile in that hour, so that used to be fifty minutes. And always have to….The doc [doctor] would come along and say, "Righto, lay on your back, put your feet up on the fence," the wire fence along the road, "Put your feet up on the fence. Let the blood rush out of your feet." And he would have a look at any blisters and break down, put Savlon on. "Put your boots back on, you'll be right." There was no transport anyway.

37:30 I think that's why footslogged the whole brigade up there, three battalions, because there was nothing to carry you up there. That was the start. We go to Hume Camp, which wasn't ready for us, so they bivouacked us out on the Hume Weir, which wasn't bad. We were there for about a week. Of course, I fell for the four card trick, because I was still a sucker, a young sucker. Get up and….

38:00 the old RSM would go, "Righto, those that can swim? Put your hand up, those who can swim?" I put my hand up, "Righto." This is winter time, too. "All you crowd straight down to the Weir," and into this freezing cold water. All the others who couldn't had to run around the hills. I thought, "God, I wish I'd made up my bloody mind to go with them, not with this swimming mob."

38:30 It was really cold at the Hume Weir at that time of the year. We came back to Hume into this new camp that was built. And we were only there a very, very short time, might have been a month or two months, and told to pack up one day, all onto the train at Albury, and off we went to Casino. We had no idea what was going on there….

39:00 **Can I stop you there. Before we leave Victoria, I wouldn't mind hearing a bit more about that training period? From Seymour and then….What were you actually being trained in?**

The elementary training at Site 17, at Seymour, was just the basic foot drill and a little bit of bayonet training.

39:30 All just smartening up in discipline, before you went to your unit that would start your training. Well, when we went and joined the unit at Trawool, the real training started in, like, night manoeuvres, bivouacking out, and all sorts of elementary training. But we were being trained then for open warfare, not jungle warfare, because they expected us to go somewhere else.

40:00 The night training was always a bit rugged, because you were not allowed to have no lights at all. The only time was when a torch comes on, occasionally, to read the compass to show where you are, to get another bearing and a reading. Because what they used to do, in the day time, they used to go and hide things around the countryside, miles apart,

40:30 and then they'd give you a reading and then you would have to follow that. And when you got there, you would find that, and then you would find the next reading there, wherever that spot was, you would take your next readings. All good training for later on. Then, of course, there would be bivouacs out in the scrub, learning how to dig in and build different defences, and weapon training of the different weapons the unit has. In them days it was the Vickers and the mortars and the Bren…It wasn't Bren then, it was the Lewis gun.

41:00 It was the Thompson submachine gun, not the Owen, and the rifle…All your weapons. And getting you used to everything and hardening up. As I said, it was all for open warfare, advancing in the line and everything else like that. And all bayonet training….and everything else.

41:30 And it wasn't worth one iota once we got away, because the training was entirely different. That was Trawool. As I said, we got on the road then and hardening up was a good footslog.

# Tape 3

00:31 **Let's continue on with the…**

After we left Hume, we went to a place called Casino, which is up the north part of NSW [New South Wales]…but this was one time that I regretted joining up. We were on the train for a couple of days and by the time we got to Casino, the camp wasn't ready for us, so they pulled up in some un-God-known area, right out in the middle of the sticks,

01:00 the train pulled up, and we all disembarked and it was raining, the middle of the night, it was raining like hell, and they took us out and bivouacked us out in this paddock. And it rained continually for about four days, which wasn't unusual for that area, because it was the dairying part of New South Wales, around Lismore, Cassino, Byron Bay and all that area. And this one time I thought to myself, 'Where's my mother?' I missed my mother. We were just went through for about four days,

01:30 and of course, we had no tentage, no nothing, just your groundsheet. And you made the best of what you can. We moved into the camp at Casino, when it was ready, and really, training started in earnest. And we got exceptionally fit. In fact, I think it would probably be one of the fittest times I've ever felt in my life. They were marching us twenty mile a day, waking us up at all hours in the morning, coming out in fighting order,

02:00 say two o'clock in the morning. They'd say, "You've got to get to Lismore," which was twenty mile away, "by breakfast time. If you don't get there, no breakfast." And we were running miles every morning, physical training, and the training was becoming hard. They had two marches to try and break records. So they got two volunteer crowds together. One was to do fifty mile in twenty four hours. And the other group were to do

02:30 from Casino to Grafton, which was a hundred mile, and they were to do that in forty eight hours. And both groups made it. And there was an enticement. "If you make it to Grafton, you will have a weekend's free leave at Grafton," which was a town untouched by troops, as the saying was. I was in that one. We made it, a bit footsore, but we got there, a hundred mile in forty eight hours.

03:00 I believe it's still in the books as one of the good epics. But Casino, I'd say….the battalion was right at its peak in fitness, the whole brigade was, because the whole brigade was there, exceptionally fit, and we were jumping out of our skins.

**So this is already 57th? You're already there?**

Yes. The other battalions was the 58th and the 24th, and the 59th was down

03:30 in Grafton. They were the only unit down there. Well, when things started to get a bit grim, at Casino, things were starting to get a bit grim in the Middle East. And so they came around and said, "Right. We want volunteers for the Middle East." And of course, the unit was….part militia and part AIF. So I think they took about two hundred of our fellows, they all volunteered…

04:00 Of course, most volunteered, but they only wanted, say two hundred, so they took the two hundred and they all went to a South Australian battalion, the 2/43rd Battalion, to the Middle East. Well, that left all the three battalions decimated, so they said, "Well, there's not that many recruits about." So they broke up the 59th and split them up amongst the three battalions to bring them all back to strength again. Then they came around again and they said, "Right, we want volunteers for the paratroopers and the commandos."

04:30 They took another whack, and that knocked things around again. Then they came around again and said, "Right, we want volunteers for the Airforce. But we don't want any ground crew. We've got all the ground crew we want. We only want navigators, gunners and pilots." So there was a test for that. So those that wanted to do that, went…

05:00 It's a long story, I won't talk about that, because two or three of the fellows that went to Britain had very exciting stories of what happened to them. After reading what had happened to us, they wrote letters to us saying what happened to them. Anyway, that left the battalions low in strength again. So we managed to get some reinforcements to bring us up, and they decided to move us to Queensland, to Caboolture. Caboolture, in them days, was not populated,

05:30 there was nothing there, it was just swamps and tea-tree trees, and a shocking place. And they just took us there in trucks, after we got off the train. And it was just this virgin bush. And they just said, "This is it. This is where you're going to stay." The first night we were all nearly eaten alive by mosquitoes, because we didn't have mosquito nets, no nothing. I thought, 'God, how are we going to get on here?' So we had to start making our own way…

06:00 Because there were no tent poles, no nothing, we had to carve up the bush to make ten poles and everything else to get going. We had to build kitchens and build latrines and build everything. But it was….Whoever picked it? I don't know. It wasn't even in our book. Whoever it picked it…It was just a hell hole, you know? And the three battalions are in the same trouble. So we were there for quite a while, so they shifted us then, put us all on a train and took us up to Karoy,

06:30 which was a mountain type country, dairying type country. But the site was quite good, up in the hills, it was cool. And actually, they were getting us ready for different things, so they'd march us down from Karoy to Tewantin, which was about eighteen mile away, and Noosa. But there was nothing at Noosa in those days, it was just virgin bush. But there was the area there for us to do watercraft landing training

07:00 and everything else like that. We were there for a short while and then the word came round, “Righto, final leave's on.” So the married fellows got leave first, but we got nothing, us young single blokes could never understand this. They got seventeen days final leave. so off they went. Well, when they came back, it was the single blokes’ turn to go on final leave.

07:30 They said, “Well, things are not going too well in New Guinea. We've got to cut your leave back.” So they cut our leave back to twelve days. So when we all got on the train, going home, we said, “This is no good. They got seventeen days, we'll have seventeen days.” So to a man they turned around and all stayed the extra few days. But it must have got around, because on the first day,

08:00 I was living in Northcote, as I said, the Provos [Provosts. Military Police] came around, and it was an old digger from the First [World] War, this Provo, he said, “You're AWL [Absent Without Leave]." I said, “Yep.” He said, “What's your reason?” I said, "Well…" And I told him how they worked it. And he said, “Oh." He said, "You're definitely going to go back to your unit?” I said, “Yes, as soon as I've had seventeen days, we're going back to the unit.” He said, “You will promise me that, will you?” I said, "Yep." He said, “Well, enjoy the rest of your leave.” So we all went back into Karoy,

08:30 and of course it was becoming desperate then, and everything had to be done in a hurry. So the old man just got everybody in big groups and fined them en masse. He had no time….He asked one thing, he said, "Has anybody got a reason why they stayed extra leave? And it better be good.” So nobody answered, so he just fined everybody en masse.

09:00 And then, they said, "Right. Be ready by one o' clock in the morning. Have everything packed. The whole lot.” And they just moved us out at one o’clock in the morning and took us down to Brisbane. And here's this old big grey ship waiting, the Katoomba. We all piled on the Katoomba. And by the time she set sail, everybody would be going to work, and of course

09:30 as she's going down the Brisbane River, everybody's stopped in cars and waving on the wharf, I can see them now, waving from the wharves there, and tooting horns, as the old troopship was going down. All the boys on board, they were starting to think, “Well, will I see old home again?" So we got out through the heads, the mouth of the river, and possibly that was one of the nicest bits of trips I've ever bloody had, up the Whitsunday passage, from Brisbane through to Cairns, before she gets to open sea…

10:00 Well, then we picked up the escort then, because then it became dangerous seas. We picked up the escort destroyers, and everything, that escorts you through to New Guinea. Then we got to New Guinea on…it was about the…We left on the 10th of March, ’43, and we got there two or three days later.

10:30 We went from there, Port Moresby, to a little place called June Valley, it's real name was, but some character named it Goon Valley, because we were all goons for being there. It was a valley of all just kunai grass, and everything else like that, and on the other side of the hill was this big airstrip called Ward’s Strip.

**Just ask you a couple of questions about that period in Queensland…**

11:00 **In hindsight, do you think…You told me about Caboolture and how it was just scrub…**

Yes, the scrub was shocking.

**Do you think in hindsight, though, that was a help in some way? That it helped, in some way, to prepare the troops?**

No, no, no. At that stage, I think things could have been a bit desperate everywhere, and I think there were a lot of bad decisions made. There wasn’t one battalion there, even all the battalion commanders complained about the position they put the troops in.

11:30 In swamp areas, loaded with mosquitoes, and nothing there at all to…Well, naturally, the diggers are good ones at improvising, and soon made himself reasonably comfortable. But it should never have ever happened, really. When they put us to Karoy, it was in the hills again, but it was a better site and you could do something. Make yourself real comfortable in a short time. It was government land, up in Karoy, up in the hills, it was mountains actually. It was perfect. But this Caboolture…

12:00 That's the only site I can never find. I've gone there looking for the camp sites, and of course, naturally, the Town Hal has said, "Well, it's all built on." Caboolture. There was a general store, a garage and a railway station. That' all there was at Caboolture. And the closest place to it would be Redcliffe. We used to go to Redcliffe of a Sunday, if you could get off.

12:30 Because you couldn’t cross the highway there, it was called the Hornibrook Highway. They had Provos on both ends. If you could get across that, you could go to Sandgate where the first train stop was, because you couldn’t get up through Caboolture. But it was always good at Redcliffe of a Sunday, because everybody used to go to Redcliffe, for the beach. And they used to have a dance on the beach, a dance floor on the beach, and some band would be playing on a Sunday. And that was a little bit of relaxation, if you could get down there.

13:00 I forget how many miles from Caboolture to Redcliffe, but that was quite good. And I still go to Redcliffe to this day, just to sit there and have a few fond memories. It's a nice place, Redcliffe. I still don’t know why they picked on Caboolture. It was a shocking site. When it rained it was just water everywhere. Surely they could have picked better sites than that. They know what the conditions are like there, the

local people know what it's like. It was just swamp, nothing.

13:30 And then, as I say, we went to Karoy, which was quite good, it was really good, Karoy.

**And the training itself? You said it was getting harder?**

Yeah, getting harder. Naturally they started to swing over then, the battalions were broken down. They were built for open warfare early, so they decided the battalion would be broken down to pentropic size, which meant that the seven thousand men

14:00 you would be broken into seven hundred odd men. They done away with the anti-aircraft platoon, they done away with the carrier platoon, and they did away with the machine gun company, which was a full company of Vickers machine gunners. They only made a platoon, they still kept a platoon of them, that's all. So they broke it down to that for jungle warfare. Of course, carriers were no good in the jungle.

14:30 They made 2 Platoon, which was the anti-aircraft….Oh, that was made the machine gun platoon, they were the Vickers platoon. And the No. 4 Platoon become anti-tank guns, they got anti-tank guns and not carriers. So that made the battalion down to that strength for tropical warfare. Well, they started training as best they could in the jungle warfare in that type of country. Of course, Canungra wasn't thought of in them days.

15:00 Canungra came in later. And of course, all your reinforcements that came in later had gone through Canungra, so they were trained in jungle warfare. But we just had to learn it the hard way. We learnt it in New Guinea, really. They shoved us up there into these different places to get acclimatised pretty quick, and that….So that was Queensland.

**How well prepared did you think the men were? You knew you were heading to New Guinea, which would be jungle…**

15:30 Not prepared over well at all, really. It was like the rest of them sent up there in a hotchpotch sort of a way. When we got to New Guinea, they got us up to the Owen Stanleys [Owen Stanley Ranges] fairly quick for quick training and acclimatisation for jungle warfare. And the training started fairly quickly there and got a bit savage, the difference in the two trainings.

16:00 And of course fitness had to be taken different, hygiene…The medical side had to be treated differently. It was completely different. Your clothing was different. It was all dyed green and everything else like that. It was a different type of training altogether. We first went up to this place called Koitake, which is not that far from Owen's Corner,

16:30 pretty tough area, and we started using live ammunition in training and getting prepared for everything. After the first two days in [Port] Moresby, we copped our first indoctrination to warfare, a hundred plane bomber raid. Daylight came and they really hammered the place. The closest it got to us was brigade headquarters copped a direct hit.

17:00 The only time I wore a tin hat was there. We got rid of our tin hats pretty quick. People don't realise it, that one of the biggest problem with an air raid is not just the bombs, it's the anti-aircraft fire, when the stuff starts falling down. Big lumps of shrapnel, red hot shrapnel, and timing cones off the shells, and it comes down like rain. It was the only time I wore a tin hat. And of course you were looking for a hole to get into was when it was coming down. That was my first experience

17:30 watching the first big dogfight, when they were there watching the Lightnings, and the other fighters having dogfights with the Zeros [Japanese fighter aircraft], with this hundred bomber raid. That was the biggest raid we had there, because they were starting to get knocked about a fair bit. And next time the raids came over they were night raids, and not as big. But just as devastating. And that was our first indoctrination to the war, in the air raids.

18:00 As I said, watching these dogfights in the daytime. It was an experience to watch them chase one another around the sky.

**What sort of impact did that have on the battalion? Were there casualties?**

No, we didn't have any casualties. We had one casualty up on the training when a mortar bomb dropped short and killed a couple of blokes,

18:30 and that didn't go over too well with the blokes. No, we never had any casualties from the air raids. The brigade headquarters, they had casualties in it, because that was the closest the bombs got to us. It was a waste of time dropping them up where we were, because it was just a valley. They were interested in the shipping and the buildings in Moresby itself, so they were concentrating on that. But I think when you get bombs that would drop down…It's just like our own crowds,

19:00 if they've been hit, they just get rid of what they can and drop it wherever they want. Get rid of it. No, that was our first indoctrination to that sort of thing. But losing the blokes in training was a bit of a savage worry to us, because we knew it wasn't going to be long before we became involved in action, somewhere. Because the old man was starting to say, "Get ready." And it came up, at one stage,

19:30 they said, "Righto, pack up. We're off to the strip." The whole brigade was getting ready, but we didn't

know what for, or where. And the brigade was split up. The 24th was sent to Komantium, and the 58th copped the Salamaua campaign. We were sent to this place called Tsili Tsili, which was the most forward being built at the time,

20:00 fighter strip for the American Air Force, so that when the bombers come up from Nadzab or Port Moresby, the fighters would be able to escort them a lot further on. Our battalion was given the job of guarding the…defending this strip in case the Japs came around from Salamaua. We had to do a lot of extensive patrolling and everything else like that.

20:30 The only thing we copped there, while we were, naturally we got bombed a few times, we lost a few blokes there, killed in the bombing raids, because they were pretty savage against this air strip. But we didn't cop any Japanese, other than going out. And if some of these planes were shot down, we were sent out to see whether any crews were still alive, plus the American crew, if they bailed out. Which we did that, and we got one of their pilots on one patrol, brought him back.

21:00 But we weren't involved in the Salamaua campaign, like the 58th was, and the 24th, but our job was to look after this strip. So they were blooded pretty hard, the 24th and 58th, our sister battalion. They suffered fairly heavy casualties. And ours were fairly minimal, because the patrols weren't striking anything, plus the air raids. Well, after the Salamaua campaign was over, we were all brought back to Moresby.

21:30 **So you've got us to Tsili Tsili. Now we're starting to get a better understanding of the training you were undertaking on the other side of the mountains,**

22:00 **Moresby and Owen's Corner. So how well prepared by the time you were seeing action?**

Well, morale wise, it was very, very high. The whole brigade was in very good position and morale was very good, because….Our CO [Commanding Officer] was very good a bloke named, a bloke named Bob Marsden, Colonel Marsden, and we also had a marvelous padre, a Church of England young fellow,

22:30 he came from Trawool, he hadn't been long out of being ordained. And all of them had to be active and young, because it was considered anybody over thirty five would be useless in the jungle, wouldn't survive. So that's why the CO himself packed up in the end. He was the oldest of any of us. But he only done the New Guinea campaign, because he packed up in the end.

23:00 This padre we had was a Church of England padre. There was only one padre to each battalion, and the 58th had the Roman Catholic padre, who was another good padre called Father English. He was another good hard worker for the men. And we had this Sambel, who was a great organiser. He organised parties, like concert parties, boxing matches, all sporting programs

23:30 to keep the fellows occupied in their leisure time, between training. Even when we went out training hard and everything else, he was always there to give moral support, plus any comforts he could. He was a real Christian. He was very, very popular with all religions, whether you were a Catholic, or Protestant, of what you were, they all thought….The same as this Father English, they all thought the same of him.

24:00 They were not just men of the cloth, they were real men, for men, they were really top men. But he got that side of getting the morale good, plus the fitness and everything else like that. And the old man had the training side. And it was good luck, too, they seen eye to eye between the two of them. And by the time we were about to move, we were very fit, I thought very fit,

24:30 plus the morale was very high, because the expectation you didn't really know, and that's how we went away into the action. Like we went to Tsili Tsili, and as I said, the other two went to Komantium and Salamaua, they copped it hard at the beginning. And we had a top brigadier, a bloke named Hammer. And we nicknamed him 'Tack.' 'Tack' Hammer, who was a good fellow,

25:00 a lot of experience from the Middle East. He was with the 2/48th in the Middle East. And when he came there… We needed a brigadier, and he came to us, the 15th Brigade, and he was top class. And he was with us from right through the whole…both campaigns, he was top. And everybody had a lot of confidence in him because he used everything that was at his disposal before he done anything, before he sent a battalion in. If he had the stuff, he'd use it.

25:30 He was very popular and a great leader. So, we had a good CO, a good brigadier, and that was where the confidence was. You could feel confident about the whole thing.

**What was the CO's name?**

Our CO was named Marsden, Colonel Marsden, he's dead. He was in his late thirties, and I wouldn't say he was….a well bloke, but he stayed with us all the way. He always walked

26:00 everywhere with us, to even come up and see the forward companies. He would walk up to see. He never let you down that way, and explained what was going on. And Hammer was much the same, too, you never knew when he was going to turn up. He didn't have to, but he always wanted to come up, he wanted to see things at first hand, how things were going. The 58th and the 24th got a rough deal at Salamaua, they really copped it hard, even though they all done their job. We done our job.

26:30 It could have been just as bad for us if they decided to attack this airfield, but they didn't, which was luck our way. So, the brigadier must have kept this in mind. When we came back, flown back from Tsili tsili to Moresby, we were taken from there up to a place called Dobudura, which is at the foot of the Owen Stanleys, but in the Owen Stanleys. It was absolutely magnificent. We were camped on this Loloki River, which is not far from the Eurona Falls.

27:00 It was really cool of a night-time. Absolutely lovely. And the days were perfect. It rained every day, naturally. Because you're higher up, you didn't have the mosquitoes or all these tropical problems. So the training started hard there, to get ready for the next campaign, because Hammer said, "The next one we're going to get is going to be tough, and the 57th are going to be in the front. You are going to be it." So we thought, 'Right.'

27:30 One of my jobs was, being in the Engineer platoon, I was an explosives expert and I used to have to make up charges for some of the simulated exercises. And they would go out and have these simulated explosions everywhere, until I felt very uptight.…and I always felt, ever since, he's dead now, I felt very sorry.…I made up these quarter plug charges for simulation for grenades.

28:00 And this…I can't think of his name now…Anyway, he froze with a charge in his hand, he didn't let it go. It blew his hand off, he lost an eye. I felt very upset over that for a long time. To think you had made these things. He just froze with it and left it in his hand, he didn't do nothing with it. Anyway, he's dead and gone now, but I have never forgotten that. What did I do that for?

28:30 Make up a charge for him.…That was one of the unfortunate things. But anyway, we got really into the training pretty hard with all these simulated actions and everything else like that. We got the warning one day, "Righto. Pack up. We're off." We were taken down to the strip, where all the troops were leaving, and that was one of the sad moments of time. When we were down there, there were two brigades down there at the time,

29:00 the 15th and I think it was the 25th Brigade.…Anyway, the 2/31st and 2/32nd were right down the end of the strip, and we were halfway back the other way, all waiting to be airlifted up to the front. Early in the morning, all these bombers used to take off, every morning, to go and bomb Rabaul and other places like that.

29:30 And this Liberator, fully laden with fuel and a full load of bombs, four ton of bombs on it, apparently, it didn't get off the ground, and it hit the deck down the end where these two battalions were and exploded.…And it wasn't just the explosion, it was all this fuel that went everywhere on fire, and all these blokes were caught in it. And they lost.…God only knows how many blokes. Shocking sight it was.

30:00 We had to help and try and do something about it. And the only bloke out of the plane that survived was the rear gunner. The tail was blown off and shot to blazes away from the rest of the plane. That was one of the biggest carnages I had seen for a while. Anyway, those two battalions never recovered from that, ever. It was a shocking sight to see. Anyway, we boarded the planes then and we were taken up to a place called Dumpu, and we were told then, "You're going to be involved in

30:30 the Finisterre Range, Shaggy Ridge, and Campaign Now." So the 18th Brigade was the other brigade that was taken up, and they were going to do the Finisterre side of it.…and we were to go up the Ramu Valley to stop any movement. They were on the left rank and they were on the right. And we were to stop them from coming around the other side to get behind the 18th Brigade. So this Dumpu was the place where we landed and

31:00 the three battalions were there. They were given the light jobs, the 24th and 58th, we were given the front jobs, so we had to move up the valley. Well I say, this would have been the worse place I had ever seen, or been in, in my time in the war. This Kesawai Swamp, with water up to here, for miles and miles. And even when you had to sleep at night, there was hardly a damn place to lay down where it was dry.

31:30 Even the kitchens had trouble setting up and cooking a meal for you. It was wet and raining and the water wasn't good. Even though there was water around you everywhere, you couldn't drink any of it. You had to sterilise everything. Well, that's when we got into our first real action and started to suffer casualties. We were meeting them. They were coming around to try and get behind the 18th Brigade,

32:00 because they were doing the rest of Shaggy Ridge and all the rest of the campaign. Well, it was just sheer hell for the entire time we were up this valley called Kesawai. It actually the Ramu Valley, the whole valley was called the Ramu Valley, and it was the Kesawai Swamp. We were up there for quite a few weeks, until the…18th Brigade had done their job, which was a Queensland battalion,

32:30 9th Battalion, 10th Battalion and 11th Battalion…Yeah, 2/9th, 2/10th and 2/11th. I think. Well, when they had done their job and we had done ours to stop them from coming down, we were withdrawn back through all the swamps and everything else, back to Dumpu. The next thing is, we have got to relieve the 18th Brigade. They're going to be taken out and we're going in their way.

33:00 So Brigadier Hammer says, "You haven't had enough yet. So the 57th still at the front." So righto, we went up and it was.…talking about it was an oven down in this Ramu Valley…it was before we got over the river, the Markum, and into the swamp area. It was all kunai grass, enormous high kunai grass. And that was my first real…

33:30 Didn’t know what was going to happen. We got to the edge of the swamp and we bivouacked for the night, before we moved on, and I'm with my mate, and I was a Bren gunner of our section at this time, and all of a sudden we hear an enormous roar and a rattle of machine guns, and come out.…And the Japs were coming down, which I had never seen before…And it's in the records, I checked it later, they were

34:00 Messerschmitts 109s, they were, and there was a full wing of them coming down strafing the valley. And they were that low, you could see the grinning pilots in the cabins. I couldn’t believe it, seeing these Messerschmitts. But they all had the big Rising Sun on them. And these grinning dam Nips [Japanese] as pilots. They were going along, and I couldn’t get the Bren into action quick enough to get a shot, they were gone. But that was a frightening experience, because

34:30 you don’t know what you're going to do when you see them like that, even a blade of grass you got cover. You reckoned you could hide behind blades of grass! And then they're strafing the whole valley as they've gone down. But they only did it the once, they didn't come back and give us another serve, they just kept going. But that was the first shake up there. But then we came back…And I had developed dengue fever and I had to be taken to Lae. I had…

35:00 I had copped it and I was starting to go blind with it and I was a bit worried, but the quack [doctor] said, “Don’t worry about it. You will be all right. We have just to get your fever down and you will be all right.” The sickness was pretty bad there. There was a lot of malaria and a lot of dengue fever and hook worm and scrub typhus. A lot of casualties from sickness. I was away for about a fortnight and then I came back, just as we were about to move and take over from the 2/9th

35:30 on Mount Prothero, which is a feature about four thousand feet high. We had to do the same exactly as they'd done on the Kokoda Track. We had to corduroy all the way up to the top, carry water all the way up in two gallon cans. And was…only benefit it was it was cold at night, and we needed blankets. They had to rush blankets in. They had to go to Port Moresby and bring blankets up, because we never had blankets, didn't need them.

36:00 If you went to sleep at night-time you would put your gas cape on.…But we needed blankets badly, it was freezing. Every morning it was fog and raining. So they had to rush blankets up. Naturally, we were on patrol through the Shaggy Ridge and all the other places, cleaning out the remnants, what were left, and then the word come through, “You've got to start on the campaign to clear between here and Bogajim." To capture Bogajim, which was thirty mile away.

36:30 And no transport, no room for air drops, everything had to be carried on foot. So it didn’t matter whether you were moving up or what you were doing, you were always loaded up with extra stuff. Whether it was a mile of Sig cable between two, or a thousand rounds of ammunition between two, you always had extra. Or carting food, it didn't matter what it was. We had a certain amount of native labour, but not enough to carry everything. We were using stages as you went.

37:00 As you gained the ground for your next hop, you would build up a supply of food and ammunition for the next jump. And this went on all the way for the whole thirty mile. And it was a road called the Bogajim Road. The Japanese had used it, but it had gone out of repair because the Airforce had blown the bridges up and done a lot of damage, so that stopped the Japs from using it as far as that. But they had a few mules and things like that, and horses,

37:30 but we had nothing, it was just all on foot, in stages. As we gained and captured ground, we built the next base, the next hopping off spot, and there was some pretty tough campaigns fought along there. Some serious losses. We lost quite a few fellows, running into ambushes, and heavily defended positions, because they were defending all the way then down the valley, because they wanted to hold this area. So their troops

38:00 that were falling back, coming up from Finschhafen and Lae, and all these places, would get through. But the Americans landed at Saidor to stop that. But they didn’t. They got around them and they were still on the way up. They were trying to hold us from pushing through to Bogajim, so that their mates could come through and they could all get back up to Wewak. So it was a pretty nasty campaign in different places.

38:30 Lots of good fellows were lost there. It was very savage, very savage, and very nasty. And the patrols were long and arduous, and they become thirty mile long.…It was hard trekking, hard slogging walks. It was just unbelievable, some of the shocking actions. There were fellows that were really good,

39:00 lost for days. Two blokes were lost for a week. Run into heavy ambushes, got into the bush to get away from it and we thought they were dead. They turned up a week later. It was great to see them come out the bush. That was.…Everybody was becoming very tired and weary by the time we got to Bogajim. But then, Bogajim had its good points

39:30 because they could bring in supplies by sea, and of course landing craft were bringing up all the supplies that you wanted from then on, so we could push on to Madang. Well, that was the next thing. Well, as luck would have it, when we got to Madang, only a patrol got there, but they had gone, there was no action. They never fired a shot from Madang, and they thought, 'Bolted.' All the other troops that had bypassed Sadore,

40:00 and bypassed the Yanks [Americans] had got through, and were all on their way to Wewak, which came into the picture later on, as you know, with the 6th Division. We then pushed on to Madang, and Hammer said, “Well, you've done your job. We're going to stop here until we're relieved. And with a bit of luck we might be going home for a spot of leave."

40:30 Which I didn’t know at the time….We were put in this plantation, which was an enormous coconut plantation owned by Lever Brothers, the big soap people. They made Lux and all these things. And we didn’t know it, but the old man said, “Well, you had better be careful because the government have got to compensate Lever Brothers £5 for every coconut tree you cut down.” I thought, 'Blast that. That's a load of bumkum.'

41:00 So we cut down coconut trees all over the place to make ourselves comfortable. And it was quite nice. See, the only thing that was short was water. We had to dig big wells for water. It was very hard and brackish, but it had a tropical outlook. It was right on the sea and it had a tropical outlook. Everybody got over their skin diseases and all their complaints and...everybody started to get fit after

41:30 a short time. And recreation, that's when the padre become good again, keeping the morale up by running concert parties and other things. I have got to say that, honestly, our battalion never wanted for anything to survive. It wasn’t just a good fighting unit, it was… It had a good sporting team. We had a crack football team, we had a crack cricket team….

# Tape 4

00:30 Headquarter Company, which I belonged to, is…in an Infantry battalion, support company. It has the machine gunners, anti-tank, signallers….When a battalion goes into action, the headquarter company is broken up, and you go to a rifle company section of the Engineers, section of this, section of that, to build up their strength with the heavy arms, like mortars and extra machine gunners, Vickers gunners….

01:00 And that's what you are, a support company with all the other arms to build up the strength of the rifle company. But with me, I go up in case they want a bridge blown up or something, because I had learnt all about explosives. I'm also in a rifle section, but I'm the Bren gunner in that section until they say, "You're wanted up there to do something." So you go up, because you've got the explosives and the igniter box and all the gear to do these bloody works. Plus

01:30 the platoon has all tradesmen. In the Pioneer platoon, which is the Engineer platoon, you've got carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, blacksmiths….everybody is a tradesman, because they've come out of civilian life as a tradesman, and if they want something done, they will do that, also as well as building up the strength of the rifle company. Because you're just there as a number two as a rifleman or Bren gunner until they want you to do your specialist job.

02:00 But naturally, if he's on as a Vickers gunner, well, he's there with the Vickers gunner with the company. But that's what headquarter company does. It is a specialist company with signals, that's your lines of communication, and all your heavy arms, and tradespeople, that makes a battalion survive. When we got to… I was called out this action we had….Oh, Niksi, that bloke's name was, Freddie Niksi. That's the things I had to do. They'd come up and say, "Look, we want to simulate

02:30 a charge to do this training,” and that. And of course you advised them on how big the charge, they would only need that charge to be a certain size to do it. Whether it was going to be…what sort of explosive it was going to be and what they might want, and you'd advise on it, unless you were going out to do a job, which you were, naturally, trained to blow railway lines and all sorts of other things like that. But anyway….When the action starts, you're more or less

03:00 just an ordinary Infanteer too, until you're wanted to do your job, so you build up the strength of the rifle company, plus go out on patrols with them and everything else like that. Everybody has to pull his weight. As I say, back at this Madang….

**With the explosives, when you're actually in action, were you using any of that skill?**

Yes, yes, called up to do…“There is a bridge up there and we don’t want that to be used.”

03:30 You put a charge in and…Naturally, you've got to know where you're going to put the charges. There is no good just blowing the middle of the bridge out, they can repair it. What you do is destroy the anchorages, is what really hold the bridge up. So that's how you're taught how to destroy them, so that they can't repair the bridge, unless it's a major job. If you blew the guts out of the middle of a bridge, all they would do is get two big trees and run across them and rebuild it. You get taught that when you go to Engineers’ School to learn your explosives and that…

04:00 Say, for instance, if you never had any fuses or detonators, and you wanted to blow a tree or do something, you'd learn the skill how to strap the charges around the tree, but you don’t put them right round the tree, you only put it halfway round. Because if you put it right round and set it off, it would nullify itself…It's a cutting charge that we'd use. So it's going to nullify itself, and it wouldn’t even put a scratch on the tree.

04:30 But put it halfway round…And if don't have any fuses or detonators, a .303 will set it off, the sudden impact, and naturally it cuts straight through, because there's nothing to stop it, and the tree comes down. All these sorts of things are taught at this school, the Engineering School, of how to use your explosives and things like that. How to drill rocks, put the charge in packet…

**So where had that been for you? Where did you learn all that?**

05:00 Central Engineers School. Like the Field Engineers' School. They say, "We're going to run a course on explosives." So at the battalion they'd call and they'd say, "Look, we're sending you to school." And you go to school, it could last a fortnight at the school, learn all the skills of explosives and then you come back, and then that's your job, every time they want to do blow anything up, all sorts of jobs. When we were at Karoy,

05:30 I used to go down to Tewantin, we did, and do a little bit of the old illegal fishing, because in those days Tewantin was only a fishing village, there was none of this tourist business, it was just a little town, all trawlers, everything else like that.…But there was an…Actually, the inlet used to have a lot of fish in it. So you used to watch the fish and say, "Well, okay, when we come down, bring down our box and some electric charges and we will see if we can get a few fish."

06:00 I will never forget this, as long as I live. They were all wooden bridges in those days, not concrete bridges. So anyway, my cobber's with me, he's watching the fish, and going to give me the all clear when to plunge the box. What we didn't do, we didn't allow for the tide. And the tide had swept the charges under the bridge, and of course when I set it off,

06:30 the bulk of the board shot and loosened all the planks on the bridge. So we thought, 'Oh God!' So we had to rush back into camp. Naturally, as I said, we had all these tools. We got sledge hammers and a few more spikes and everything else and come back and repair the bridge. What a hell of a mess. We thought we were going to get in serious trouble over this, but we didn't. And we didn't get any fish either.

07:00 As I say….When I say before with what happens with poison pen letters….We had been in action for three to five months and everyone was pretty worn out, and we were hoping we were going to get some leave. So this is where this poison pen letter comes in. There was one bloke there with matrimonial troubles, and the padre was always there to help out and everything else like that.

07:30 Anyway, he must have got a bad letter, this Cameron, so he….got compassionate leave, went home to sort it out. And when he got back, somebody wrote him a poison letter and said his wife was out with some Yank or something like that, so what does he do? He puts a rifle between his legs and blows his brains out. And of course, that really upset everybody.

08:00 He was a lovely bloke and everybody liked him. And just before we come home…we were to go home at any week, and he goes and does this. And of course, our blokes being….battle casualties, usually, if you are in the position you always bury them at night-time, just before dark. And they're usually just put in a blanket and tied up with sig wire.

08:30 And if you can, take their boots off. And the old man turned around and said to our carpenters, he said, "Can you make a rough coffin for this bloke?" I said, "Oh jeez, aren't you just going to bury him in a blanket or something?" So our boys had to make this rough coffin….It wasn't a rough coffin. Because the blokes were so good they made a real good job of it and they buried him at Madang. But that shouldn't have happened, especially when we were coming home. But they're the sad things you hear,

09:00 when people write poison letters up to tell you what your girlfriend's doing, or something. My mate, his girlfriend started to go out with a Yank when we were in New Guinea, he was going to blow his bloody brains out. I said, "You're bloody mad! There's plenty more sheilas when we get home. Why are you worrying about blowing your brains out?" But they don't get over it for quite a while, I'll tell you. And that is a dead loss to you, because his mind is not with you, his mind is somewhere else. You can't afford that in Infantry, not when you're going into action. You can't afford it,

09:30 you have to have everybody alert and have his finger on the pulse.

**Were there times when that sort of thing got you into a bit of trouble?**

Yes, yes, yes.

**Can you think of an example?**

As I say, this cobber of mine, until he started to get his feet on the ground, he just…When he should have been alert and listening and watching, he wasn't. I said, "You're a bloody burden to us, the way you're going."

10:00 He said, "I can't get over it." He said, "I'm brokenhearted." I said, "Yeah, broken hearted, you'll have something broken else shortly." But he got over it in the end, but that happened in lots of cases. And this is what that Tokyo Rose used to rely on. Getting information…It came through in a routine order that we had to destroy every letter after you'd read it, when we were at the front, in case you got killed,

10:30 and they got it for propaganda purposes. We used to listen to her. She used to often read out letters

they got off Yanks. And she would read out, “I believe so and so," whatever his name was, "I believe your girlfriend is playing up at home, and you're having a bit of trouble," and get them worked up over it, you know. Propaganda. So that's what we had to do, after you'd read your letters, burn them.

11:00 So they couldn't be caught and used for propaganda purposes. Because our letters going out were always censored. There was nothing in our letters. But coming in, people could write poison pen letters or anything. It was a shocking thing that, tragic ends to some of them, I'm afraid.

**What if they received letters that were the opposite of that? That might have been a bit raunchy…or had good news? Would they be shared amongst the blokes?**

Yes.

11:30 Anything that went on, any news that went on about anything, the fellows would always…Something might have happened and it was all good news, it was shared amongst everybody. Everything was shared. If you got a parcel today, that was shared with everybody. Nobody ever kept anything to themselves. Everything had to be shared. It used to be (UNCLEAR), it was terrific. I never seen anybody have anything unless it was shared.

12:00 It was like when we first went to the Ramu Valley, we were under the 7th Division, and Vasey was the general, and he stopped all pay. He said, “There's nothing up here for you to buy." And the Australian soldier has only one other vice, once they can't spend it, they'll gamble. And he said, "When you gamble, one person finishes up with the lot." Two-Up and all that, which they do.

12:30 So he cut out pay and that was credited in your pay book, like a bank book. It was a terrific idea, because when we came home from Madang everybody had a quid. But Vasey also supplied the necessaries. We all got tobacco, which I…if you didn’t smoke, somebody else got it. You got all the necessities you wanted to keep you going. And it was a good idea.

13:00 Those that did smoke, with the casualties and that, they finished up with ten or twelve ounces a week. It was all there, and they used to smoke. Papers were the trouble. And I think that's why some of the blokes were crook. They were smoking old newspaper and God knows what. And my cobber, he used to get his girlfriend to buy the best airmail paper to write her letters on. He said, "Get the finest and the best."

13:30 Because cigarette papers in the tropics were no good. They used to all stick together. She used to write him up in this good paper and put in an extra couple of sheets. As I said, you had to destroy your letters after you'd read them, and he would roll a big cigarette up and it would be about this long and he would say, “Gee my love burns, doesn't it." Yeah, old Tommy. "Gee, my love burns…"

14:00 We wanted nothing like that. And of course when we came home from Madang everybody had a quid in his pay book, we lived like lords. It was quite good, that idea, very thorough. Madang was a nice place. I've been back since. It's the only decent place in New Guinea, beautiful place. There was nothing there when we were there. It was blown off the face of the earth. Nothing…So that was Madang.

14:30 **What would you do for recreation? You said the sport, and the padre organised…**

In Madang, you couldn’t do very much. You couldn’t make a football ground or make anything at all, because it was all coral. You were on a coral area. We used to dig in the damn stuff. But we weren’t there over long, which….Everybody was starting to concentrating on getting fit again and cleaning up their skin disease and cleaning up all their problems,

15:00 and getting fit and well again to go home. The rumours were pretty strong that we were going home, we weren’t going to get another job in New Guinea. We would be going home on leave. So one morning we were told to pack up, clean up, we were off. "We're going home." So the Duntroon and the Katoomba came in and took the whole brigade home. And of course, we landed at Townsville,

15:30 and were taken to this transit camp and, of course, given complete outfitted again and new gear, because whatever you had on was torn and knocked about. We got new gear. But we hadn’t seen fresh fruit or anything like that in the entire time in New Guinea. Well, the girls that had turned up there brought out bags of fruit

16:00 and everything else like this, and we hadn’t seen a beer in umpteen years, in the two years that we were away. And of course, two bottles of beer and you wanted to fight your uncle and fight everybody else, and because of the fruit, you spent the rest of the night on the dike [toilet]. It just went straight through you. We hadn't had a piece of fruit in all that time. Fights everywhere that night after two bloody bottles of beer. We got on the train

16:30 and were brought all the way home, and we had a very good leave, I think it was about a month. And then came probably one of the biggest thrills of our life. They said, “You're going to get a march of honour through the streets of Melbourne.” Then again we knew that was going to be that, and we were off again. But it was, that was a great day.

17:00 They marched us into the city from Watsonia. We marched through the city and the city was packed. it was a big thrill. Big thrill. And after the march was over, and they took us out to Watsonia. Next

morning back on the train and off to the [Atherton] Tablelands. We got up on the Tablelands, and about that time

17:30 there was the 9th Division were there, the 7th Division were there, the 6th Division were there, the 3rd Division were there….I think just about three quarters of the Australian Army must have been up there. A division is approximately twenty thousand men, so with all those troops in that area on those Tablelands, from Ravenswood right through to Marpi. Of a night-time, we were

18:00 entitled to two Lady Blameys of beer. Which, there were no glasses in them days, glasses were short. Blamey's wife, Lady Blamey, made a suggestion, "If you want glasses, why don't you do the old bush tail and cut the tops off a bottle?" Oh, terrific. So what do we do? We get the old metho and put a band round it and light it and then drop it into water and cut it off clean. And they called that a Lady Blamey.

18:30 So that's a full bottle, because the top's only knocked off. So each man was entitled to two Lady Blameys a night. And the train was going on, and naturally some of the blokes couldn't hold their bloody grog. Everyone was getting fit again, because we were on the Baron River, it was a beautiful spot where we were. Of a night-time, all the divisions round about were getting their two Lady Blameys of beer a night.

19:00 They started this "Ho! Ho!" business. Twenty thousand blokes, "Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!" And it went from one area to the other until the entire area of the divisions were all, "Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!" at some ungodly hour in the night. And of course, it started to annoy the locals, like Mareeba and Tolbet and all these little towns, Ravenshoe. So a divisional order came out,

19:30 this "Ho! Hoi-ing!" had to bloody stop. And of course our CO out on the battalion parade, he read out the routine, and he put in his bit." He said, "There will be no 'Yo Ho-ing' while I'm CO-ing." Marsden, yeah, it was the only way the 'Ho Ho-ing' would ever stop. It's all in the book, the history about all this business. So yeah, we were training up there pretty hard.

20:00 The Tablelands where that was were absolutely ideal. I don't know if you've ever been up there, but it's beautiful. And of course we needed our blankets of a night-time, and it was warm of a day time. And we all got pretty fit up there again until all of a sudden, we get the order. And it's Christmas time. I thought, 'Oh, are we going to have Christmas dinner?' No, we didn't. We were on the road down to Cairns.

20:30 I said, "Where are we going?" And all of a sudden, "Bougainville." "Oh, Jesus." So that was it. The brigade was shoved on a troopship the Fair Isles, an American troopship. It was the first time we had been on an American troopship. The conditions on our troopships weren't exactly ideal. You were below decks where they used to have the cargo, and you were sleeping on bare boards.

21:00 The Fair Isles was done out as a troopship with metal bunks pulling out from the wall, so everybody had a bunk. But the trip was pretty rough, so everybody was seasick. The Yanks used to give you a meal in a big tray, with little compartments on it. When it's rough and the ship is rocking like hell, by the time you got to the end everything's all in bloody one. It's a bloody mess. Anyway, this morning

21:30 there's hard boiled eggs on for breakfast, and everybody's as sick as a dog, I'm all right and two or three mates, and there's one bloke I wanted to get quits with. He was a bugger, he used to play these tricks. And he was seasick and bringing everything up, So I go up to him with half a dozen boiled eggs and crack them in front of him. Well, you should have heard him go. He said, "If I get over the other side, and I make it," he said, "I will bloody shoot you. Get away from me!"

22:00 Hard boiled eggs stink like hell. I will never forget that. Teddy Parsons, he's dead now. But he was a villain. He ways always good at taking the rise out of somebody, but you never knew when he was fair dinkum. He always kept a straight face. He was a bugger of a bloke, a good soldier. But I got my own back on him, cracking these hard boiled eggs in front of him. But God, it was rough. The propeller was coming out of the water, the nose would go down and the propeller would come out,

22:30 and the ship would shake like hell. You had to hang on like hell because it was a Victory ship, or…they had two sorts of ships, and it was all welded, they weren't riveted together, and it used to shake like hell. And then it hit the water again. But it got us to Bougainville, this Torokina. That's the port where we landed, Torokina. It was early in the morning and everybody came up on deck

23:00 to have a look at this island, and thought, 'Oh God…' You start to think, "Will I get home?" We had to land by barges because there was…You go down scrambling nets and into barges, landing craft, because it couldn't get right into the port. And that started the last and final campaign, which was bloody savage and nasty. That was a very

23:30 different type of fighting, again, than New Guinea. A different type of country. It was easy to dig in and build good defences, and you could use armour. Hammer was very good at that. We had enormous support there in Artillery, enormous support in Airforce.

24:00 We had the New Zealand Air Force support us with dive bombers. And, as I say, three regiments of 25-pounders and a full armoured regiment. Entirely different fighting. Entirely different campaign altogether. Different ways of defending yourself and defending your positions, compared to New Guinea.

24:30 But Torokina was well set up. I suppose you've heard it said before, they reckoned it was the last campaign that the Australians fought in. I don't think any of them were of any value. Wewak was a waste of time. We lost a lot of men there. Bougainville was a waste of time. We lost a lot of men there. And gained nothing, really. The Yanks had the right idea there. All they wanted out of Bougainville was to have a big airstrip so they could hit

25:00 all the other places like the Philippines, and all these other places, and just keep an outer perimeter defence. And that's all they done. They just sat on the hills and watched the Japs. That's all they'd done. Just sat on the hills and watched the Japs. But our crowd, Blamey and all that, had other ideas, didn't they? "You're going to stir them up and bloody well get rid of them." So that's what they did. It was nasty, vicious and a costly campaign. They were fighting like hell, the bloody Nip. They had everything.

25:30 They were starving, but they had everything else. They had plenty of ammunition and fighting equipment, but not the food. What they had done, because the Yanks had left them alone, they'd made all these beautiful vegetable gardens, acres and acres of them. And as we captured them, they got more nasty got more vicious and attacked harder. It was quite a good place to be. But it was quite a good place to be. The sporting events in Bougainville

26:00 were terrific, good competitions and everything. Actually, getting on top, our engineers had good equipment, too, lots of bulldozers and graders, they made good football grounds and all good accommodation and everything else like that while you were in this static area, of Torokina. It was a lovely camp. Of course, the Yanks left plenty. And it was very comfortable there. What they'd left, it was enormous.

26:30 And the roads were good round about it. And then all of a sudden the word came through, "Right, the 7th Brigade is going north and the 15th and 29th are going south." So away we went, and the campaign started. And that was three months of sheer bloody murder. It was a waste of time. I think of the units on there, we lost

27:00 six hundred and something odd blokes killed for nothing, and that's beside several thousand wounded. Gained a lot of ground, for what? It made no difference to the war, none at all. One lame excuse was, "Oh, well, it will give us a bigger voice at the surrender table." Yes. It got.…

27:30 The patrolling was very extensive and long, long patrols, and a lot of rivers to cross. Every time you had to cross a river, you knew the defences on the other side were going to be pretty stiff. And one of our main jobs there, we had to outflank a lot. And it was always hard work, outflanking, because the jungle in Bougainville was very thick. You had to hack

28:00 your way through, then do the outflanking, plus striking trouble all the way down the Buen Road. And of course there was really none of the battalions in reserve, then. We had two battalions. We were doing most of the outflanking, and the other two.…One was pushing down the coast and one was pushing down the road, and we were all copping pretty heavy casualties. But the support? The support, I've got to admit, the artillery was enormous support,

28:30 and the armoured division.…It was lovely of a night-time, because we used a lot of barbed wire on Bougainville, which we never used in New Guinea. If the Company Commander or the Battalion Commander decided you were to hold that small feature, you would dig in and wire ourselves in, and then cut a big fire range outside your wire, and then wire yourself in with double apron wire, because the buggers were very good at getting into your area through the wires, and things like that.

29:00 And dig yourself well in, and plus what you had to do was make…which you didn't have to do in New Guinea, because they didn't shell you very often, because they couldn't get their artillery, the same as we couldn't get ours up in New Guinea. We got a few mountain guns up, but very few, because it was too mountainous. But here, there was avenues to get your artillery up. They got their artillery up and we got ours up, and they used to shell you. So when you dug in, you dug in, you dug your pit where you were going to sleep, because every man had

29:30 half of a two man tent. So when you palled up with your mate.…I was palled up with my mate Tommy Lennox, you both clipped your little half of the two men tent together, and then put it over your hole, which you'd riveted with timber, and then you made a small crawl trench into your main fighting pit, and at the end of the fighting pit you would cover it with big logs like this, and dirt, because you were getting shelled of a night time, or mortared or.…You name it, you'd get it. So you felt pretty secure when you were in there, in these sort of dongas.

30:00 But the nerves were starting to pack up a bit, on a lot of us, we were starting to feel it.…You would be laying there waiting for something to happen. Even a leaf would wake you up. Even a leaf dropping on your tent would wake you up. You jumped up.…And it was that dark, it was black, it was pitch black. So you used to be on picket of a night-time, in your pit, then you would have to wake the next pit up to do his two hour stretch. And in the day time you would get this phosphorous off the trees,

30:30 because it would illuminate at night-time. And you used to run a track of this phosphorous to the next blokes' pit, so you would follow this illuminated track on all fours and wake him. And you had to wake him steady, because he'd be nervous as hell. You'd never what he was.… What you had to do, if they started playing up outside the wire, by yelling out and things like that, which the Japs used to do.…They would do that for one reason, to make you

31:00 fire your weapons to find out where the strength of the weapon pits were. There used to be a Bren gun, Vickers gun, whatever it was, they would try to draw that fire to find out where the firepower was, so if they were going to attack next morning they would know where these guns were. So the orders were, if you heard any noise like this, throw a grenade out, don't fire a weapon, just throw a grenade. Because they wouldn't know where that came from. And that's what you used to do, throw a grenade out if you heard your wire…You used to put rattlers on your wire.

31:30 Tins…something in the tins, and it would if he got near it….so you would throw a grenade out. Well, we got quite a few like that, also, too. But there was one thing wrong with it, if you only maimed him, he would be moaning all night and keep you awake all night. A couple of times there….it was painful listening to them moaning and groaning all bloody night…I don't know…

**They would yell out to get you to fire?**

32:00 To get you to fire, yeah….

**What would they be yelling?**

In their own lingo. Or they would try and use a name. But they had a failure in, they couldn't pronounce Ls well. If you had a password you would have it say Lily, because he couldn't pronounce the Ls. If you had to give a password, somebody came up and said, "What's your password?" He wouldn't be able to pronounce it. So every time there was a password picked,

32:30 there was Ls in it, or one letter they can't pronounce well in English. And that worked quite well. But getting back to the….when you used to wire yourself in, all the positions were made out, like the OC [Officer Commanding] of the company would say, "I will have the Bren here, the Vickers over there and cross-firing that way, I'll have this so and so here…." And get it all worked out in a complete circle, 360 degrees. Then if you were lucky to have tank, you would say,

33:00 "Oh, thank Christ we've got a bloody tank." You would have him in the middle, dug in. And of course the firepower from a tank is enormous. You used to feel very comfortable with it. The FO, which would be a Field Officer from the OP, from the artillery, would be with you, and he would range in your area. When you decided that was going to be the area, he would get the guns to range in on that area. So, "Righto." And he'd say, "Fire of smoke here," and over the smoke would come…

33:30 "Okay, that's pretty accurate. Give us an HC [Head Commander]." And an HC would come. "That's it. Register that now," and he would register it. So in the night-time, if anyone called out, the whole regiment could fire a full salvo, which was very comforting. It wasn't 100% all our way. We used to get casualties out of it, too, because occasionally they would drop short, and you would cop a few casualties out of it.

34:00 Our own friendly fire. Which is happening today. But it gives you a lot of comfort knowing you've got the firepower. Because when they start attacking, they bloody don't give in, they just keep coming. Irregardless what they say, they might be funny, but they're not a weak fighter. They don't give in easy. Our platoon, we took the most prisoners. We took eight.

34:30 Very hard to take their prisoners, because you can't trust them. They could booby trap themselves. They even booby trapped our dead, because they know we come back for them. And you've got to be careful. If you can't find your dead, you've got to go back the next day to look for them, you've got to be careful. You've got to be careful that he hasn't been booby trapped.

**Did you come across that?**

No. But we did come across their own bobby traps, because…

35:00 If you leave them there long enough, you've got to do something about it, because they're rotten. Covered in maneaters and stink like hell. So you've got to do something about it. And we went out one day to shift one, and as luck would have it, when we rolled him over the embankment, the grenade went with him. So it went off, but it was over the embankment. So that was a lucky one. We cashed our chips that. We thought, 'Now there's a bit of bloody luck.' Towards the end, I don't know why…

35:30 They never seemed to….They did bury a lot of their dead. But lots of them they didn't worry about coming back for, they just left them there. But they knew we would come back for wounded and dead. We never left anybody at all. We always went back for them. It was always very comforting to know you had all this support before you went in. Hammer was very good like that. He said, "This is going to be a tough hill to take," he said." But I will pulverise it by at least fifty Coarsehair dive bombers tomorrow."

36:00 He said, "Then the Artillery will give them a good lacing, and then our own support weapons, mortars and machine guns, will give them a good lacing, and then we will move." He was very good. There was always somebody there. They might have been half bomb-happy, or half shell-happy, but there was always somebody still there. But Hammer was good like that. He didn't move on

36:30 any objective unless he used everything at his disposal. He was very good. I will admit the Artillery was very good. And the Armoured Regiment, they suffered badly, I will admit, them buggers….It was just unfortunate. In one place, on the Buen Road, we thought we had cleared the area, and there was a six inch Naval gun, and that's…,

37:00 like that is a hundred and fifty mills. That's a six inch shell. That's got a lot of power. And they were firing it over open sites of about three to four hundred yards, if it was that, and that's point blank range. We had the tanks coming up. We said that there was a gun there, but they had gone and left it, because they couldn't shift. They're not on wheels these six inch, they're on a platform. And they said to us that

37:30 the firing mechanism was gone, the breech was gone, everything has gone off the gun. So they'd either taken it, or dumped it or done something. Anyway, they'd come back and replaced the breech block. We brought the tanks up. And what happened was two of them copped it. Direct hits. They never knew what hit them, because the concussion from that range was shocking. Then another one,

38:00 which the engineer said was cleared, because they said this big culvert and they must have come back that bloody night and filled the culvert up with explosives and blew the arse end out of the bloody tank. Killed that whole crew. They lost about five tanks and they took three days. The 2/4th Armoured Regiment. But it was great to have them there, I'll tell you, great, great, especially of a night-time, to have one of them dug in your positions at night. Nice to know it was there.

38:30 But they copped it pretty bad, the 2/4th. They were Matilda tanks, a good tank. So our main objective was….Hammer used to come up and not just talk to the officers, he would talk to the men, too, what tell you what he intended to do. And he said, “The brigade will be relieved

39:00 by another brigade if you get to the Mivo River." Which wasn’t that far from Buin. We thought, 'Oh God. Thank God for that.' It was three months, we had been in action three months, and everybody was getting a bit weary and worn and nervy. And we thought, 'The Mivo, it's not that far away now. We'll be able to push on.' Which is what we did.

39:30 And I'd say the last two weeks, we must have seen more action in those two weeks than in most of the campaign. It was every few yards you would walk, you would seem to walk into them. There was trouble, ambushes all over the place. No matter where you went, you run into trouble. And as I told you, that didn't decrease the nerves, either. Everyone was starting to get a bit shaky. So we finally get onto this Killens [?] Track,

40:00 which was just on the edge of the Mivo, and I was with A Company at this time. They said…The master of that was this major, a fine fellow, he was a fine soldier….He said, "Well, this could be very sticky here, so dig yourselves well in and I'll make the positions and firepower pretty good." Which he did.

40:30 But I was sent out with two other blokes, while they were digging in, and putting up the wire, wiring up and cutting a firebreak, and the sergeant said to me, “Take two blokes with you and leave your Bren behind,” which was the sorriest day of my life. “Take your number two’s rifle and you go and take

41:00 two men with you, and you go down to the Mivo and watch what's going on in case while we're digging in, and getting ready, they don't attack us." I must have got out of sight of where they were…Anyway, we were on an escarpment, looking down at the river, and looking down at this area, and all of a sudden I see some movement there, and I said to this other fellow, “Did you see any movement down there?" So he's having a look, he said, "Yeah." He said, "The buggers are down there!"

41:30 And I said, there was only about four or five of them, I said, "Oh, they must just be snooping about." So he said to me, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Let's give them a bit of a warm-up, and then we'll report back." So we got….We had the drop on them, it's not a nice thing to say….it was just like a shooting gallery…but boy, what a hornets nest did we open up. What we didn't see, we didn't see the others, where they were dug in.

# Tape 5

00:30 …I rolled his cigarettes, and he used to smoke them….But I reckon that's why a lot of them are crook, because they used to smoke some terrible bloody stuff, old went newspaper, anything they could get hold of, toilet paper….Because there was always toilet paper in these ration packs you got, American K rations, if you got those there was toilet paper in them. But we never had toilet paper, never saw toilet paper.

01:00 There was no such thing as toilet paper.

**How did you cope for three months at a time? What did you use?**

Bloody leave, anything. Anything at all. Because, you see, you were going through streams all the time, and creeks, you used to give yourself a bit of a wash up, and walk out the other side with your clothes wet through and drip off again, until you come to the next stream.

01:30 As I said, I feel with some of the bloody stuff we've eaten in our time….The old doctor reckons that, "That dehydrated meat, and everything else you got like that…" He said, "You cooked it half the time?" I said, "Yeah. But there was many times when you couldn’t afford to cook to cook. You just ate the stuff." He said, "That's what was causing all of your stomach troubles." He said it used to swell up in your stomach and you wouldn’t know nothing about it.

02:00 **Should we get back to the story? The hornets nest…**

We got down there, and this was the set up, it was the only time I wish I had my Bren gun, because it was such a great opportunity, because we were up on this very high embankment and they were down below. And finally…They were everywhere. There was about…I thought there was only four or five, the group we saw only about four or five, I thought, 'Oh, it's just a small party coming out to have a look around.'

02:30 But there was something like thirty or forty, or even more, there. When they decided we were up there, they started. And they threw everything in the world up there. And of course, one of the young blokes I had was a reinforcement and he hadn't been in action long, and he said, "Oh Christ! What are we going to do?" I said, "Jess, don't worry, we're up here. It's only the leaves and bark and muck coming down. Don't worry about it" But when the mortars started hitting the trees and the shrapnel started flying around, I said, "Well, we'll get out. I want to report back." So we got back to the company.

03:00 And natural the IO, the Intelligence Officer, said, "Look, you had better see the old man straight away. He wants to know what all the firing is going on, what all the racket's going on." So I went up and I told him. I said, "I think there's more than a platoon strength." I told him exactly what we'd done, and I said, "There's more than a platoon strength down there, they way they're set up." I said, "I think we're in for a bit of trouble in the next couple of days. I think they might have a whack at us."

03:30 I said, "If not, they'll hit one of the other companies." He didn't do a bloody thing. I thought, 'That's bloody nice, that is.' So, the next morning, they didn't attack, but they did give us a work over. They came up and they got machine guns and they hammered the area, and they gave it a really good running over. You couldn't lift your head. If you lifted your head, you would have copped it. The only time I had a look over, there was a machine gun, a Vickers gun

04:00 near me, lined up with another Vickers gun, in cross-fire. And they're into this Vickers gun. And the bloody gun was cut to pieces, the cam was dancing all over the place. I thought, 'Oh Christ! I'll pull my head down here. I'm not going to put my head up again.' The only one that was killed was one of the cooks. It was early in the morning, and he was up making a cup of tea for us, and he happened to be standing up and he copped one. He was probably getting close to the last bloke that was killed in action with us.

04:30 But he was unlucky. It was a funny thing, he had a bit of an Asian look about him, and his nickname was Tojo, Tojo Young. And he was killed getting a cup of tea for us, while we were on stand to. Nobody got up to fire a shot, because you had no idea. They were spraying the area. It was just like a shooting gallery, what they were doing. Anyway, they quietened down. They didn't attack on an attack.

05:00 So we thought, 'We are right for this morning.' So I said, "The buggers were still about." The sergeant calls me up, he said, "You've got to go out again." I said, "Where to?" He said, "To the Mivo." I said, "The buggers are only just down here." He said, "You've got to go out." He said, "You have got to take a section with you, and….see the IO and get some compass readings, because I want you to traverse around." So anyway, this time,

05:30 we're still missing one bloke that was killed when they first got there. So this would be two or three days gone by this time. There'd been five blokes killed and we couldn't find one body. It was this Kevin Field that we couldn't find….So anyway, I suppose I'd gone about two hundred yards when my forward scout cops it, and he cops a good one right in the shoulder, and he screams out he's down. He said, "They're just in front."

06:00 And he said, "There's a stack of them." When you're like that, you fan out straight away, you cover your left flank and you cover your right flank and you've got your middle. So I go to the right, and as I am running, I trip over something. I thought, 'It's a bloody log.' And laying down beside me, I turned, and it was this Kevin Fields, and of course he'd been dead for a couple of days and he was starting to go. I've got to lay there next to him. These are the sort of things you don't forget. And I can still see him today with his tobacco…

06:30 We used to get tobacco in round tins, and he was a smoker and he had his tobacco in his pocket there like that, Log Cabin tin, laying on his back. It wasn't a nice sight to see, poor bugger, and I had to lay with him until we got our bloke out, got him out. And we didn't take on the position because I said to him…this Paddy, (UNCLEAR)

07:00 Because he had a hole in his back you could get two fists in. And I said, "What is it, Paddy?" He said, "They're in big strength there. There's no good trying to do something about it. Let's get out and get back and report what's going on." So I went back and report again and say where this field was, to go and get his body. But it didn't matter where you moved in that last couple of weeks, you just ran into them.

07:30 Well, we were due to be relieved, because what's-his-name said, "When you get to the Mivo, you will be relieved." So sure enough, word come through that the 15th Battalion was coming up to take over from us, to take our positions and everything else. So they came up and you helped them settle in and give them word of where they'd been and what's going on around the area. The next morning, they got hit, with the mob I was telling you about. They got hit.

08:00 They naturally repulsed them, because they had a tank there and all. But the Nips had got in that night

with us and put explosives under the tank. How they got through the rattlers and everything else, I will never know. I will never know how they got in there. It still amazes me how quiet they must have been. Because it was pitch black, and yet they got in and put charges under that tank and the tank was dug in. Nobody knew anything about it. But it didn't do much damage. The

08:30 amount of explosives they used didn't even dislodge the track. It didn't put the tank out of action, because it went into action a couple of mornings after we weren't there, when the 15th Battalion had taken over. Well, if we had been there in there the next day, we would have had to suffer that one, too. It still wasn't over then. The war was getting close to coming to being at an end. They admitted that things were getting close to finished, so we were going back a bit further.

09:00 Being the type of company it was, and we had built good roads behind us and the engineers weren't too far behind bringing up a good road, making up a good road….Well, the Nips were infiltrating back again, and putting mines in this road, and doing all sorts, and harassing the workers who were coming up and doing all the jobs. The supply coming up, that was the beauty of it. Our supply was by road this time and we had transport. The only time we didn't, was when we were on long patrols and we had to be on foot all the time then.

09:30 But the supply was good and we were getting fresh stuff, which we never saw in New Guinea. Fresh meat and everything like that, not all the time. And also, we were getting beer. But we weren't getting beer at the front. The three months we were up at the front, the beer was kept for us back at Torokina, so when we came out, it had all been accumulated, two bottles a week, plus the blokes that were killed, plus the blokes that were wounded,

10:00 and in invalided home, all their ration was there, too. So that was all divided amongst everyone. When we finally come back to Torokina we had a nice old supply of grog. That was only on Bougainville. We never saw one bottle in New Guinea, nor one drop of any grog. In fact, the padre's communion wine was pinched in New Guinea at one stage, and they never found out who flogged it. Yeah, his communion wine.

10:30 That was one thing that the padre used to do. He was a great Church of England and Roman Catholic bloke, he would always come up before any action and ask anybody if they wanted communion. Take them out in the bush and have a service, and have communion in the bush, because it could be a sticky job for the next day. But the padre, I would say, he was there for 95% of the burials, and he took it very hard.

11:00 He took burials very, very hard. I would say, whether it was good luck or what it was, but the Graves Commission got all our blokes back, and they were buried in some very isolated places. Because all you had to give was this compass bearing to the Graves Commission and they would come out and dig him up, after so long. It didn't take long for them

11:30 to decompose in the ground, in the tropics. When they used to get them, they would dig them up, get all the bones and they would just stack them in a bundle, about that big in a blanket, and then cart them all back to the…They were all buried in Torokina, and re-dug up again and taken to Bomana, New Guinea, later on. They are all in Bomana now. There is nobody left in Bougainville. I forget how long they would leave them there…

12:00 Of course, you'd only put then down about a foot, and they're only in a blanket and their clothes. So anyway, we finished up….we started to bludge then. The atomic bomb had been dropped and everything else, and they said, "Who's going to take any chances now?" Because we were going out on patrols. "Whose got a pack of cards?"

12:30 You'd get into the jungle and sit on your bum and play cards, and you would go back and say, "No, I didn't see anything." Nobody wanted to get killed, and I don't think the Japs wanted to any more, either. So we just used to go out…Of course, we were well behind them, the front, which was at the Mivo River at the time, and it started to rain very heavy for days on end, and the river came up to an enormous height, all the roads were bogged, everything was bogged,

13:00 fighting pits were full of water. Everybody was standing in three foot of water. Up where we had been, the 15th were, like that…Well, I don't think they pushed very far. They must have realised it was going to be over very shortly. Why go and stick your neck out? That's right, we copped all these patrols. We must have been back about two or three mile from the front, but we still had to go and do these patrols, because the Nips were in the area.

13:30 You could go out and see where they had been bivouacked and camped, because you could always tell where they made a makeshift camp with these banana leaves. They make a nice temporary shelter, it would last a night or a couple of days before they wilted and dropped. You could always find out where they were. You would see these little humpies made. But we didn't look very hard in the end, either. I didn't, anyway. I'll admit. I wouldn't go very far. I'd say, "Make sure you bring a pack of cards with you," and get out of their sight and sit down for a while.

14:00 So it come to an end then.

**What were you saying?**

There's lots of times when I think back about different times when we went out on heavy patrols and

run into trouble. Only a couple of times there was bad trouble there. And there was once,

14:30 one of the big actions there, where a company was moving up to a place near Efogi Bridge and Yula , and they were making a big stand there. I was with an officer, bringing up a lot of carriers with supplies, and another two platoons were going ahead, and then they hit trouble and they sent back word there was trouble near us. We just happened

15:00 to be caught in kunai grass. And there were slopes on either side looking down on this kunai grass. And the officer, his name Luke Madisons, he was a very good officer, and he said, “We had better lay still in the kunai grass otherwise we're going to draw the crabs.” By this time the natives had bolted. And sure enough down a shower of grenades started coming down into this kunai grass and going off all round us.

15:30 Anyway, after a while Andy said to me, “Are you all right?” I said, “Yeah, I'm good." He said, "Well, I'm not." I said, "Why?" He said, “I've been hit.” So I crawled over and rolled him over. He was like a pepper and salt shaker on his back. So that fixed Andy up. He said, “Well, look, it's going to be dusk shortly. You had better get out if you can, and tell the officer coming down with another company what trouble he is going to run into. And tell him the two platoons up top are heavily in action now…"

16:00 Which they were. And it was one of our last stands before we got to Bogajim. And it lasted a couple of days, the fight there….And we finished up killing one of their big generals, in one of the big stoushes. I can’t think of his name now, but he was one of the leading lights. And they didn't expect him to be there. He was there and he got caught with them. There were quite a few decorations won there. There were two MCs [Military Cross], two MMs [Military Medal],

16:30 and MIDs [Mentioned in Despatches] for all the actions that took place there. But Andy Madisons finished up, he wasn't a well built, big bloke, and then he contracted scrub typhus with his wounds. And we used to like him very much, because he was a bonza bloke with our platoon. And he was invalided back to hospital, and invalided home, because he never recovered from scrub typhus. Because being wounded, and that too, he was lucky to be alive.

17:00 And we never ever saw him again. And the next news we heard about him, he had died at home. But that was one of the actions there. There was one….We captured their last mountain gun that they were using there to shell us, so that stopped the shelling. It was like in all of New Guinea, it was hard for any artillery to get brought up anywhere. It had to be manhandled, in pieces, and then put together. And this was the trouble they had on the Kokoda Track, even. They couldn't get the guns up, because they were too heavy.

17:30 And they done the same at Nadzab in a big parachute jump there. A regiment of Australian gunners were dropped with their guns, but they lost all the bits and pieces, because they dropped them in ten foot high kunai grass. I think they managed to get one gun together, and it was useless anyway, because the Nips had bolted by this time. So that was a futile exercise.

18:00 As a matter of fact, we were on the hill watching them. They came down, and we had already been in the area, so we knew what was going on. It was a spectacular thing to watch, all these paratroopers coming down, American and Australians. They lost everything in the kunai grass.

**Where was that?**

Nadzab.

**The paratroopers there…**

Yeah. The Americans and Australians. But there was nobody there. We had been there for quite a while.

**What were you doing there?**

We were patrolling down the valley.

18:30 See, it was entirely different. There were vast expanses of kunai flats, and mountains, all mountains, and there was just days of not seeing anybody. And then you all of a sudden you would strike them, in a good defensive position. And then the next place after that, after we captured Yula and pushed them off that feature, which was a big feature, down to the next valley….

19:00 The battle started from the top of Kancurio [?] Saddle. On top of the Cancurio Saddle there was the Finisterre Ranges and Shaggy Ridge, where all the fighting was there, and then we come down into the Cancurio Saddle, which is a valley which goes down to the Bogajim Road, and all little villages all the way along. There were some small scraps, but only two major ones, which was at Yula…That lasted a while, and we killed about sixty Nips there and a general.

19:30 And the next time we struck, they nailed us, and more heavy casualties before we pushed on, and that was a place called Bridge 6, which is well before Bogajim. And that was a nasty fight, because the first patrol in got ambushed badly, and a couple were killed. And then of course two got lost, and as I say, we took ages before we found them. We were held up at Bridge 6

20:00 for quite a while before we got them out. We had to call in for air strikes and stuff like that. But we finally got round the back of that one and took it. They were always mainly short and sharp battles in

New Guinea, for us. I think the longest battles would have been on the Kokoda Track, that would have been the longest battles. One other battle that we weren't in

20:30 that was at Salamaua, which our sister battalion was, that was a long, savage one, too. But no, it was a different type of fighting altogether between the two places. In New Guinea, after the Kokoda Track, they were nearly all in retreat all the time. And the thing was to cut them off and cut their retreat off and cut those bulk of troops off. That was all the planning and shoving, and it failed on a couple of times, and they got their blokes out.

21:00 Not just a few, they got thousands out, to fight another day. As I said, like, I was only involved in one real big a lot of patrolling, and it was much harder in New Guinea, because you had to carry everything a long way. Even water had to be carried up mountains and that.

21:30 The fighting wasn't as savage as it was in Bougainville. A lot of close quarter battles in Bougainville, and then you only had to go a few more yards and you were into another one.

**You didn't quite complete your Bougainville story, did you? How far did we get with that?**

We finished up when the war finished. The war didn't actually finish for us

22:00 for two or three weeks, because there was so many of their troops behind us, that they didn't know the war was over, and they were a source of annoyance for quite a while. Although we suffered one casualty, we didn't suffer any bad casualties. We had one bloke killed. They were hit and miss. They tried to do some damage or do something, and then buzz off. They weren't looking for trouble. They were only there to create a havoc.

22:30 But they didn't know the war was over for about three weeks, I suppose, up to a month. We weren't looking for any trouble either, because we knew the war was over. They used to interrupt everything, because we were getting things going, having pictures again, and they would try and muck up the show by throwing a couple of grenades, or something like that, to create a bit of havoc.

23:00 But we didn't look for them seriously. We were told to go out and look for them, but we weren't looking for any trouble. We wanted to get out the easy way. We finished up, all troops were brought back to Torokina, of course we had to bring in all the prisoners then. And there was about twenty five thousand Japs on Bougainville that we brought in, under this General Canda bloke. And he was the bloke they wanted for war crimes

23:30 for the rape of Nanking. So that was a great prize for the Chinese that wanted him badly. Then the breakup come, of where the troops all had to go, because they said, "It will be some time before we can get you all home." As we said before, they started on this point system, and giving you a choice, if you weren't going home, where you wanted to go. I chose New Britain,

24:00 and of course that was where all the Prisoners of War were congregated. I think when everybody was brought in, I think there was about a hundred and fifty there. All we were doing there was using all of them in work parties every day. You would get up in the morning and you would go and get your work party, and you might have a hundred Japanese. And some that could speak English, who you would deal with, and then he would get them to work.

24:30 They had all…Rabaul Harbour, on New Britain, was in a horseshoe, mountains…And the top of the mountains used to look down into the harbour. It was a beautiful harbour. And during the entire occupation, the Japanese, they had used all Indians Prisoners of War and other Prisoners of War to dig little tunnels in the mountains. And that's where they stored all their equipment and ammunition and everything that they needed to keep the Pacific War going.

25:00 They brought it all down from Japan and stored it there, and that was their central point. That's why the Americans used to try and bomb it a lot. But it was useless, because the mountains used to be another two to thousand feet up, with the anti-aircraft guns on top of that, which gave them a large extra height to keep the bombers up. Well, the American pilots said that by the time they had to keep over the top of the flack, Rabaul Harbour used to look like a little ring. And to try and hit ships was very, very hard.

25:30 It was that or take the chance of being shot down by flak. And then, during the occupation we had, while we were there, we were using the Japanese in work parties to bring all this stuff out of the tunnels. There was just miles and miles of tunnels, and there was just acres and acres of ammunition. And when we got it all out, we would have them delousing it,

26:00 breaking open the shells and tipping out the gun powder. They used gun powder where we used cordite. The gun powder, it was all in beautiful silk bags. They had a ton of silk, the Japanese. If you got their good flags, they were made of silk. And if you could get a parachute, you had a real good piece of material. Plus, they were very pornographic people. They used to have all these very pornographic things on silk, geisha girls and all this sort of lurid scenes.

26:30 They were a bit pornographic. There was a lot of that stuff about. Of a night-time, we used to burn this gun powder in an enormous big bonfire, and then they used to reload the shell cases onto ships that used to come in and supply us. Then they would load all the…what they called 'produce,' which is old brass onto the ship and bring it back to Australia. So we brought the brass back, and then at night-time

we used to dump all the shells in the harbour.

27:00 It's a very deep harbour, so I don't know whether they caused any trouble, because they were still alive when we dumped them, all the shells. When we had done all that… I got a lot of it, but I haven't got any of it left, because I gave it away. You would be surprised how many boxes and boxes and boxes of invasion currency we found in the tunnels, in big boxes, where they had printed it all for the invasion of different places. Some printed in Dutch, a lot in English, other in languages of all the islands round about.

27:30 Because they were going to use that currency in Indonesia, which was the Dutch East Indies in them days, they were going to use it there. 'Guilden' was written on them. The Japs were going to say, "We will pay so many guilden for this." And on our English notes, for Australia, the currency we had then was ten pounds, ten shillings, ten pounds, but it never, ever got here. But there was a lot of it about.

**What did the Australian look like?**

It was done mainly with tropical scenes on it.

28:00 It was well printed on much the same type of paper our money was. It wasn't rubbishing stuff, it was to be used in circulation. There's a lot that say that they never intended to get here, and there's a lot that say there is. So I won't argue, but they definitely made the currency. And they also had a….I used to see them every day, and I asked this major that was

28:30 in charge of the work party….These fellows who were well groomed, they were in suits and well groomed, and well groomed hair, where all the other Nip soldiers had their hair shaved short. Well these blokes had well groomed hair…He said, "Well, they're a different class of person." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, they're well educated, university degrees, everything." He said, "And they are administrative people, such as if they got to Canberra, they would take Canberra over as administration people.

29:00 He said, "They're not soldiers. They're high class, well educated civilians." But I don't know what happened to them. I didn't get a chance to talk to them, but it was just interesting to see what they were there for.

**Tell me a bit more about the tunnels? You were actually going into the tunnels?**

Yeah,

**How big were the tunnels?**

Well, you could get trucks and everything in them, they were that big. Like big caverns. They killed, God knows how many Indian Prisoners of War, that they had captured in Singapore and that, because they were in the British Army, the Indians,

29:30 and they worked them to death. We only had one battalion there that were captured, and that was the 22nd Battalion. They were captured, but they weren't kept there….Although a lot were executed at Rabaul. Most of them were taken away, but then they were lost at sea, because when they were getting taken away, the ship was leaving Rabaul Harbour with all the prisoners down below in a cargo ship

30:00 and an American submarine sunk it. And nearly all on hand were drowned. So the 2/22nd didn't have too many survivors after that. What weren't executed at Rabaul were lost on this ship. The Americans sunk it. and they admitted they did sink that ship. But they brought these Indians from Malaya and Singapore and other places, and worked them to death digging all these tunnels.

30:30 Plus all the other things they had done. They killed all these people working them to death. But the tunnels were absolutely magnificent. Like brand new aeroplane engines in there, and God knows what there was….and new tyres by the million, and stuff.

**Were there living quarters for them as well? Were they living in there?**

No, they didn't. They lived in camps, properly constructed camps. They weren't under tentage or anything like that. They were properly constructed camps.

31:00 Of course, they were never really disturbed. My unit wasn't, but another Australian unit was down further, but they didn't do much by coming up, because they had no hope, there was about a hundred thousand Japs there. But they were mainly technical type soldiers, and everybody to keep a supply base going. Which….That's what happened in the end.

31:30 When they lost the power at sea, they couldn't supply all these outposts. They were all on Bougainville and New Guinea, they had ammunition and stuff like that, but they weren't getting re-supplied with food, which the large base of storage of food was in Rabaul. The only ones that were getting out were submarines, but they couldn't carry enough to supply their forces. Because every time a ship poked its nose out of Rabaul Harbour it was blown out of the water, in the end.

32:00 They had lost control of the sea after the Battle of the Midway and the Coral Sea. They were gone, as far as controlling the sea.

**At what point did you go to Rabaul?**

After the cessation of hostilities, we all came back, the war was over, we all come back. And after we saw all the prisoners off of Boungainville…

32:30 When was it?….It would be around about…just before Christmas, ’45, I suppose.

**So you went from Bougainville to Rabaul?**

Straight from Bougainville. The Katoomba came and picked us up and took us straight to New Britain. Then they were flying between islands, and bringing home the married blokes who were going to be discharged….But prior, earlier to that, when we knew we were going to win the war,

33:00 and then they knew the war in Europe was over, they knew the world was going to be short of food. So they called up…even in our platoon, they called up all the blokes that were farmers and gave them a chance at what they call ‘Accelerated Discharge’ to go home and start the farm up. And none of our blokes went home. They said, "No, we've been with the unit long enough. We'll stay to the end." None of them went…they wouldn't. One of them, Michael, who lived at Mirboo North,

33:30 he said, “What would you think of me if I bailed out and left you now?” He said, “You wouldn’t want to talk to me.” He said, “Anyway, the old man's home. He's working the farm.” So they didn’t go, a lot of them. Some might have gone from somewhere, but none of our blokes come home early.

**That's pretty amazing, given what you have been through….**

Yeah. We were all good mates, we're all still good mates. It was pretty wild and woolly, the early days of the reunions, when they were all still pretty young and settling down and that.

34:00 That's where the old diggers were very, very good. We used to get an invite to the original 57th and 60th reunions, and of course they weren’t that old then, either, after the Second World War, they were still in their 40s and 50s. And that's what they used to say…."Look, you're going to have some tough times. All you young blokes are going to get married, and settle down in their life," and he said, "you won’t see them

34:30 for quite a while because they will be too busy getting their home together and getting their work going and doing what they're going to do. "But," he said, "after a few more years, they'll all come looking for you, and looking for their mates." He said, "If you can hold out until then, you will survive.” Which I did. And that's exactly what happened. They didn't come near you. The only time they used to come near you was the main reunion, Anzac time. But everything else…Because we held two picnics for the kids,

35:00 one to the beach and one to the bush, and we held two balls through the year, one on show eve and one through the year. And a pilgrimage to the Shrine, and the annual reunion at Anzac time. Well, most of them kept going all right, and it wasn’t until later on that they were packed for ages. As their kids grew up, they all come to the picnic. The balls were packed, until everybody got too old for dancing and we had to scrub the balls.

35:30 And we're gradually going down now in numbers for the reunion. But after they all got together, it was packed every time, they would come to see you every time. The biggest show of the year used to be the reunion, our special Shrine service. It's not a drinking day. It's just a solemn day of remembrance, and that day was always packed with everybody who come to the Shrine service. It was held on the first Sunday after Anzac Day, and that was always a good muster.

36:00 But they've done a lot, the committees and that. I was on a committee in the early days. If they got into serious trouble, you would go and give them a hand. Some died early and left a widow and kids when they were young. So you went around to see what you could do. We never used to give them money. We would pay for groceries for so long, and buy clothes, and everything else. We even painted a couple of the houses for a couple of the widows.

36:30 A mob just went round and painted their house, because they lost their husband so early, and they were left with the kids. So there was a lot of good done after the war by the blokes, because they just didn’t forget their mates. You don’t forget them. It becomes a bit of a blow when you hear of one who has been close to you has died, and that. That's becoming a problem now. We're finding it very hard

37:00 to get enough speakers to speak at a funeral. The fellows are not confident any more. They can’t get up and speak and talk to a family, say something at the funeral, which they all want somebody to speak at the funeral. That's getting hard for us now. There's only….about four of us who can do it now. Mostly the others say, “No, I couldn’t front that.” Even on the committee now, we are finding that now. Our two sister battalions

37:30 are in a ton of trouble, they can't get a committee together, because they haven't go the confidence to run the show, they've got private people doing it. Because each unit has got a fair amount of money in their welfare fund. So they pay an honorarium or somebody to do the official paperwork, to keep the paperwork going. But we're the only ones that have got a full committee and a president. The other ones haven't even got a president. So we're holding still, well. We still do a booklet every year.

38:00 Because you've still got one or two blokes who can write up…Well, I still write about six articles, the book like, all about the reunion, who was there and what was going on with that. Our reunions to Bendigo, I write an article about that, do another reunion on the Gold Coast, do an article on that. Or a

story about the widows and everybody else. And it's surprising the number of letters you get back saying, “Keep up the good work if you can. It's nice to hear how this one's going, how that one's going."

38:30 We're holding together fairly well, which is good. The president has been president now for twenty years. Our secretary, Harold White, he has been… treasurer since 1946, same treasurer. Of course, he's an accountant, and he knows everything backwards. He's a good one.

39:00 He's the only fellow I have seen put a report on the back of a postage stamp. He is that quick and thorough with figures, but he's never out, right to the cent. When the auditors get hold of it, everything's good. So we're going pretty well really that way.

**And you're on the committee? You're the secretary?**

No. I have been….I'm just a committee member, but I've got to do certain jobs. Like each one…You can't get them to do a job.

39:30 They can’t write articles and that, so I write about six articles for the book. And I write our pioneer news, when I hear anything about the blokes, the pioneers that are left. There's only eight left. So when the book comes out once a year, you've got a story about them, a story about all the reunions and the pilgrimage to the Shrine.

40:00 And then another fellow does what he calls 'personalities,' which is letters we get coming in every meeting…If there's any interesting articles in these letters they're put aside and given to this fellow. He writes an article about it and puts it in the book. They still have a bowls day, there's still enough to go and play bowls. They used to have a cricket team, but that's all gone. They're too old. They're lucky if they can play marbles.

40:30 **Do you write about what happened over there in New Guinea and…**

No, no. The only time we do that, is if a bloke has won the MM or DCM, or something like that, you might put an article in about, "Do You Remember?" We might do a "Do You Remember?" article about something. But no…there's not much said along the line like that.

41:00 It's just that we're all together and it's the camaraderie, and we still laugh about lots of things, and different things are brought up about what has happened in different places. "Do you remember this?" Or, "Do you remember that?" And lots of funny things they bring up. They don’t bring up….Sometimes you do when somebody talks about it. And you say, "No, they didn't happen. This happened."

41:30 **You have different memories about the same event?**

Some are not sure and they've got their facts wrong. Or I say, “You're wrong there,” and then they go back to the official history and have a look. In the official history….the brigade….is in the records, in the official history records, as the brigade with the longest footslog all over New Guinea. Marched more over New Guinea than any other brigade.

# Tape 6

00:30 When the sign of victory looked like being…They tried to get the Japanese to surrender by dropping leaflets. They had planes going over there saying, 'Bring this in and surrender, and you'll be treated well." And all the rest of the buffoon talk on it. It was in Japanese, but that was the theory of it. It told them how well they would be treated and

01:00 there would be no trouble. Because they had this indoctrinated into their skull, that it was a crime and a sin and you could never go back to Japan if you were taken prisoner, that was in their doctrine. That's why any officer, who was of fairly high ranking, would commit harakiri before he was captured for that reason. It was a terrible disgrace on your character and family and everybody else to be taken prisoner.

01:30 That's why if you got them, they would never…unless they came out voluntarily, you were very doubtful of ever getting them out of a foxhole. You never knew whether they were gong to blow themselves up or what they would do, so it was always very dicey what you would do about them in a foxhole.

**How do you mean?**

Well, how to get them out, or take the chance and get them out. As I was saying before,

02:00 they were partial to strapping a grenade to themselves, and things like that. So we were very wary. My platoon, we took eight altogether, but we had no trouble getting them. They just surrendered voluntary. They came out of the bush when you were on a patrol, no arms, they had their hands up. They just wanted to surrender.

**Where was that?**

On Bougainville.

**Was that at the end of the war?**

No, before the end, before the end. A lot of them were starting to get

02:30 probably fed up and could see themselves all getting killed, and so they just surrendered. Because all we did was bring them in and hand them over to the intelligence people, and they used to get these American Japanese up, who were in the American Army, as interpreters, and see whether they would give any information for you. Get information out of them. That was idea of getting prisoners. The old man used to say, that's the CO, used to say,

03:00 “Try and get a prisoner. We need some information on what they're doing. What's going on.…" That's the only reason why. But if you got an obstinate one who wouldn’t come out of his foxhole, if you captured a position and got one in a foxhole, the boys were very wary of how to get him out if he wouldn’t come out voluntarily. It's a very dicey situation to be in. Funny people, very funny people.

03:30 It was the way they had been indoctrinated, and it's just hard to realise what a clever nation they'd become, because when you see the type of low ranking private, unless he was led by an officer, he become just a gun fighter, lost, completely lost without his leader. When you see what a powerful nation they became straight after the war, you thought, 'God. Half of them were like peasants.'

04:00 They were funny people. I don’t know whether they had any education like that, earlier.…Their officers were well educated. Because the fellow I had in New Britain was a major, and he had a Harvard University education in America. We said, “What did you do in Japan?” He said, “I was a bank manager.” “You got caught up in the army?” And he said, “Yes.” But he was well educated.

04:30 But I will give you an instance now. I had this work party working for me, we were digging a well in New Britain, and putting a hut near it, and we had all this malthoid for the roof. We were using packing cases and everything else.…We made the roof, and then laid this bituminous malthoid on the roof and then used boiling pitch, melted, to paint it and…seal it against the weather.

05:00 This day I had this bloke come up, and they were passing up.…they had this copper going, this cauldron with boiling pitch in it, and pouring buckets up and handing them up to a bloke up there and they were painting it on. Anyway, this day this bloke fell, and he had no shirt on, and the pitch went all over him, this boiling pitch. He was screaming and yelling, and he was brushing.…and as he brushed he was brushing the skin off.

05:30 And all you could see was his ribs in the end and muscle. I looked at him and didn’t know…

06:00 It just kept burning layer and layer, it remained hot, you see, until finally there was just raw bones and muscle. And yet he was laying there on the ground, screaming and yelling, and his mates were just standing there looking at him. Six blokes just standing around looking at him. I said, “Aren’t you going to do any damn thing? Get a blanket! Get something! Do something for him!” No.

06:30 I thought, 'You're either silly or illiterate or something. You don’t care about a mate, in that condition.' And that's what made me think about it. And that was only one incident. All different cases, if they got hurt, they didn't care. I still think of that, this poor bugger, they wouldn't do nothing. So in the finish, one did get a blanket and throw over him, and things like that, and get him into hospital. But no,

07:00 he would have laid there and died, but they didn’t want to do nothing. They worked. They were all good workers. But I think they would have followed anybody who had a little bit of power or was an educated person. All their officers seemed to have a little bit of nous, and of course, they would follow them to the end. It didn't matter how many were piling up on the wire, they would still come, still follow him, too, if he was there.

07:30 If he wasn’t, they just kept coming, they didn’t bolt. Funny people.

**It must have been a strange time with the finish of the war, and the Japanese coming out of the bush, and being rounded up, on Bougainville...And suddenly, they're not the enemy any more, and you don’t have to fear them. Do they become more human for you?**

I didn’t associate myself with them, over much.

08:00 The only one I did associate with, there was this major that used to…I used to converse with him all the time when you wanted anything, because he could speak perfect English. I'd most of them couldn’t understand any English at all, not even a few words. It was just that for a good month after the war, we had to keep alert, because they had no communication with the main force any more.

08:30 They were sent out to do a job, live off the land, and if they could pinch anything you had, rations or anything else like that, by raiding something, that’s how they kept going, doing a job until they officially found out the war was over. But it was some time before they found out. They were getting round in these raiding parties. I think the only thing we had knocked off.…The Salvation Army were very good, right through the war. They used to get in these little places where you'd only expect to find them on long walks, and you'd find one of these Salvos

09:00 had set himself up on a little creek somewhere, and had a little copper going and had.…In them days, it

was always tinned coffee, and he'd always have something like that. So you would all sit around and have a brew, and then off you'd move. As I say, the war was over, but they knocked his stall off one night and pinched all the coffee and the powdered milk and everything else like that. They were starving, really.

09:30 But as I said before, they had these beautiful big gardens of sweet potato and all other vegetable and things like that. They weren't short of ammunition, they had plenty of all that sort of thing and everything else to keep fighting, but food was almost non-existent to them. If you took a position, the first thing you could smell was this dried fish. They used to have a lot of dried fish and rice. The only thing, I only ever seen it once, was when

10:00 we took this position, and there was a sort of wicker type basket thing, and it was full of preserved cherries. That's the only delicacies I ever seen that they had. Everything else was… The fish used to stink like hell, this dried fish. When they had the rice, but the ration of rice was pretty low in the end, I believe. Probably quarter rations of rice.

10:30 They had to supplement it with all this sweet potato and everything. As I was saying before, every time they lost a garden…they got more ferocious.

**When they were captured, were their personal belongings taken off them?**

To be honest, the ones that we captured had nothing. They might have had a wristwatch on. They just come out in bare clothes, just what they were standing up in. They might have had a watch or something, that that's about all.

11:00 Their gear must have been left behind somewhere.

**Did you ever come across their personal gear?**

Yes, only once. This fellow, there was an ambush at this place called Piper 1, and Piper 2, and I wasn't in the ambush, my cobber was in it, and….we lost one bloke and they killed three of theirs and wounded one, and this

11:30 Ray Aspen, he was my mate, he was in their patrol. He said, "There's one of them got away, but he's badly wounded." He said, "I don't think he will go far." So the next time I went out, there was a track, so we went in a little bit off the track, and I come across him. He put himself down, he made himself comfortable, had his head on his pack, and died from loss of blood. Well, his pack had all his personal stuff. He had a nice silk flag,

12:00 and a lot of badges of rank, and little items. I haven't got any of them now. I don't know what happened to half of them. But he had a lot of good souvenirs in his pack.

**What else? Anything from home?**

Yes, photographs from home, letters from home…Yes, quite a lot of little mementos from home.

12:30 I couldn't actually read what was on them, but they were photos of family and what everything single soldier would carry. But he wouldn't be going anywhere, that's for sure. It's cruel business, really, because at one place on Bougainville, we weren't involved, it was one of the battalions we relieved. And they were involved in a big stoush called Slater's Knoll. And it was the real last big banzai

13:00 attack they put on on Bougainville. The tanks came up and saved them up, actually, the tanks got up there. I think they killed….close to a thousand they must have killed, and the stench became that bad they had to do something in a hurry, so they called the engineers up with a bulldozer, and that's where we were involved, and cut a big scarf in the ground. And there was no ceremony. You just picked them up and threw them in this hole, on top of one another.

13:30 There was hundreds of them piled up all over the place. And just got the bulldozer to fill it in. And all we put on top of it was….Well, we buried the officers separate, that's right. And put this big one cross in the middle, so many ORs [Other Ranks] in this hole and so many NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and officers in that hole. And I saw an article in The Herald quite some time ago now, about this party of Japanese were going

14:00 to Bougainville to see if they could find out where the remains of their sons were. And I thought, 'God. They're going to be in for trouble there. This bloody big hole, if they start digging around there….' But they left their bodies anywhere. As I said before, the only time we'd shift them was when they got on the nose. You had to do something when they got rotten and got covered in maneaters. A corpse is terrible when it's left like that, it blows it up and you have got to do something about….

14:30 because they never worried. Early in the war, they used to cremate them. They would get all their casualties back in the night-time, they'd have a big fire and they would cremate them all. But when they were losing, and having to fall back, they wouldn't worry about their casualties as they went along. Even their wounded, they left them in a horrible mess in the end. They just couldn't do nothing about it. In the early piece, they cremated them.

**How did they cremate them, do you know?**

15:00 **I have no idea. I never, ever seen it. But they... I wasn't there, but the fellows used to say, of a night-time, in the distance you could see the fires going where they were burning them. Because that was their way of burial in them days, was cremation. I never seen anything like that. But God knows how many we had to shift, because they were never recovered. We always recovered our dead. Actually, he's not officially dead until you've got his body.**

15:30 **That's the only cruel part I don't like about our system. We knew he was dead, all the boys knew he was dead, but his parents used to get the telegram saying, 'Missing. Believed killed.' Or, 'Missing....' Something, not saying he was killed outright, because we hadn't got his body and we hadn't got his meat tickets. He wasn't officially dead until you've brought his body in and taken his meat tickets off him and sent them into records,**

16:00 **or sent them into the Graves Commission. You leave one meat ticket on him and send one into the Graves Commission, so they can marry it up when they get him. You leave one on his body. But, I don't really know.....It's not a nice scene that, seeing your mates buried at night. You'd bury them as quick as you can,**

16:30 **because a body goes off very quick in the tropics, and by the next day it's bloated, so if you get them into the ground as quick as you can, they're safe.**

**What about when you're still under attack? I mean, it can't be that easy to dig a hole when you've got to defend yourself?**

I'd say the worst thing of the lot is still having the scrap on and your mate is dead in the hole there with you....

17:00 Especially if he's not quite dead, and got the death rattles and things like that, it's not nice to hear, a very tragic thing. Of course, you can't stop, you've got to keep going....It's not very nice, I can assure you...

**Did the words of your father ever come back to you when you were out there on the battlefield?**

17:30 Yes, as I say, it's quite true what he said, an infanteer's lot is not the greatest in the world. And it takes a lot of men to keep him there too, Like if you go through the chain of command, right through, to supply him and feed him and get everything up to him, it takes seven men to keep one there. That's all the workshops and supply bases, the ships in your Navy, and everything right through...By the time it comes through to keep that one man fighting, there's seven behind him.

18:00 You wouldn't believe that, would you? Because it takes a lot to supply him and keep him up there. That's starting at home, that's how they work it, making his ammunition, his food, the whole chain to keep that one man in the front line. The only time I get annoyed now when I hear fellows come up and say, "I wished I could have belonged to a unit like yours."

18:30 I say to them, "You could have joined at any time you want. We were always calling out for volunteers." I will give you an instance there...Some have a conscience and they don't think they belong any more, but I have set two or three right on the right path. I went around this Torokina, which is the main base of Bougainville, and all these workshop that repair everything and supply places, and they went round

19:00 calling for volunteers to join the Infantry because we were running short of men. This day these six blokes came up, and I palled up with this bloke, his name was Bell. I said, "Where are you from?" He said, "I am from Bribie Island, Queensland." I said, "What in the hell are you coming up to us now? The war will be over in three months' time." He said, "I've been in the army six years and I have started by a whistle in the morning and

19:30 finished by a whistle at night in workshops," because he was a tradesman. "I've never seen a Jap," he said. "I've never heard a shot. I haven't even been in a bombardment with bombs or anything." He said, "What am I going to tell my people when I go home?" Well, I saw him about two weeks later. He went to Don Company, and he came out and he was as white as a ghost, "What's wrong?" He said, "Have you blokes put up with this for four years?"

20:00 I said, "On and off." He said, "I've only been here a fortnight and I've been in that much bloody trouble I wish I'd never come near the place." He said, "I want to go home now." And that was it. He wouldn't come anywhere. He wouldn't come down to the reunions. He said, "I wasn't with you long enough," and he said, "I don't feel as though I belong to you." I said, "The minute you signed on to come into our unit and went out on your first patrol," I said, "you were one of us, and you will always be one of us," and he hasn't missed anything until last year.

20:30 He can't come, he said, "I'm too crook now." He didn't, at times, feel like wearing his medals. He said, "I don't think I had earnt them." After I convinced him what he had done, he said, "I do stand tall now, and I do feel as though I have done enough." I said, "You have." I said, "The minute you went out on your first patrol and run into trouble you were one of us." I said, "You could have easily not come out of it." So he's come down from Bribie Island

21:00 for years to see us all. I was always glad to see him come down. I said, "No, always stand tall. You're one of us." I said, "You might have only been there a few months, but you're one of us." He was a nice bloke.

I felt sad when he wrote a letter and said, “I don’t think I will ever see you again.” He said, “I can’t move any more and I won’t be down.” That's how fellows feel. Some have that

21:30 way and other fellows that felt they let you down, don’t want to come to anything, until you convince them. Not every man is the same. They are all… Every man’s build is different, his nerve structure is not the same, and they're all right for quite a while, until finally they pack up, they can’t take it, you know. It's like being under shell fire for quite a while. Your nerves can’t take it forever.

22:00 There's two or three blokes now in our crowd and they'll tell you, “I don’t think I done a good enough job for you. I fell as though I let you down.” I said, “I can recall when you didn’t let us down. So why not?”

**What sort of things do they mean about letting you down? Like an incident when they didn’t protect somebody?**

Yes, they backed off when the pressure was on. They were the first to, when something broke,

22:30 to shot through, and they feel ashamed of themselves, because they seen you stay there and hang on with the rest of your mates, and they've bolted. After so many months, they've all got the shakes and getting a bit toey. I can't say I wasn't, I was the same. You got very uptight about everything,

23:00 in the back of our mind, all the time. That's why doctors keep a close eye on battalions, and after they have had enough they say, “Look, if you don't bring this crowd out, you'll have seven hundred raving ratbags on your hands. You've got to bring them out for a rest."

**So how do they make that assessment?**

The doctors make the assessment. They know by the casualties. They know by the condition of the men they see, and

23:30 they can tell that some are close to breaking. The doctors have a pretty good idea.

**So these are the doctors out in the front line?**

Yes, they are young people, too. They haven’t been long out of the college. That's why a lot of them have turned into good surgeons, because they had so much time to experiment on….jobs that they would normally not have

24:00 in a hospital, where they would have to get permission to do this. They'd have a fellow and they'd say, “Look, I'll try something. He will die anyway, but I will try something. If it works it might save somebody else.” They would look at a fellow and say, “Just make him comfortable. This fellow has a better chance,” and that's what they will do. They can make a decision on almost… I wouldn’t say they were callous,

24:30 they can say, “Look, he hasn’t got any hope with his stomach wounds and things like that. With him having to be a couple of days on a stretcher going back, he's not going to make it."

**So these are doctors at the RAPs [Regimental Aid Post] are they?**

You have your Regimental Aid Post, that is your first stop, but the doctor will always go with the forward company, because that's where the casualties are going to be, and he's always on hand to do….

25:00 Well, the first operation I went to there was up in the Kesawai Swamp. We were up to here in mud, and now we've made a makeshift operating table out of timber. He has got….lucky enough, he had half a tent. We had a tent fly, we put that up, it was raining, and one of the first blokes in has got a bullet through the shoulder. And I'd never seen what they do. They just get…

25:30 like a tyre lever in and make sure everything is clear, and the bloke is laying there out to it, and jumping up and down with the nerves, as he strikes nerves. It was like a real butcher's shop, unfortunately. The next bloke was a fellow, he had an appendix, and they took it out in the field, just laying on the table. They do some terrific jobs, and that's only by lamp, just an ordinary lamp. It's amazing what they can do in the field. Just his pan with all his equipment in it.

26:00 See, his job is to patch you up. You go to the next station which is a CCS, which is a Casualty Clearing Station, and they will do so much for you, if the wound is not too bad, they will hold you and get you fixed there. And if they can’t fix it, you go to an AGH [Australian General Hospital] where the nurses are and everybody else. It's a top hospital. There are three stages where you go. Your own aid post first, and that's at the front…

26:30 All your band, your bandsmen, every Infantry battalion has a band, all those fellows are First Aid. When they're not playing their instruments, they're being taught First Aid by the doctor. When they go in they don’t carry arms, they've got a big pannier on their back. If you're going out in a section, they say, "Look, if you're going out, you better takes a First Aid bloke with you.” That's a bandsman, join on the end of the line and away you go. He will handle you first if something happens, and then they get onto the doctor

27:00 and he will come up. He's never very far away, the doctor, especially when there's action. They are

young fellows like yourself, very agile and quick and they do a quick job. That's how, as I said, a lot of the good surgeons…Like Weary Dunlop, with all the experience and things he had to do to try and save somebody lives, his knowledge was great when he came home. These doctors, their knowledge become great, because they can try things to save a man's life,

27:30 that they wouldn't be allowed to do here. They have to get permission to do it and sign papers and God knows what. But there, "I have got to give it a go." A fellow had half his head blown away, and the skull might be there and your brain's in a sack, and if that sack's intact, your brain is still going. And they just pad it up. He said, "They will put a plate in his skull, he'll be all right." But he said, "If that sack's broke? No."

28:00 He said, "The only trouble is, you've got to worry about if it has been badly knocked about, like a boxer, he could be slightly mental, or sometimes…" I've heard him say once, "He'd be better off if he died," which this bloke did. They have got a job of wide experience. When you can see what they can do in the field, it's terrific.

28:30 **They have the whole kit? Do they have anaesthetic available?**

Yes. Well, actually, if you go out and you haven't got a medic, you have got morphine with you in a tin, in little…like little toothpaste tubes, with a needle on the end. And you can use it yourself if the fellow's been wounded and he's in pain. Just squeeze it into him, that's all.

29:00 It's only the correct dose. But you don't get those unless you're going out on your own with two or three others, with no medic going with you. Every man carries a….what they call a shell dressing, that's a special dressing in a tight pack. It's for specialist….it's got all antiseptics in it, and everything in it. If a fellow gets badly wounded and it's a decent big hole

29:30 and it wants to be covered…I've even seen the doctor, with a big hole like that, just fill it up with Vaseline and just bandage him up, and get him back to the CCS. "He'll be all right now. The wound's clean and clear, and there's no bits and pieces." Get him back to the CCS." And if they can't handle it, they patch him up and off to the AGH. Then, if it is real bad, back home.

30:00 Of course, you're never going to see them again when they come back home. They will get invalided out. But no, they do a good job, the doctors. So they're not old fellows, they're young blokes. Everybody's got to be young. You don't survive if you're not young.

**Did you get wounded at all?**

No, I'm one of the lucky ones. The only thing I ever had was hear the slugs cracking pass my ear and missing, so I was lucky. Make a horrible noise when they're going past your ear, too.

30:30 And when you're caught in shell fire, that is not exactly an exciting time either. When they're big shells, you can almost tell, almost, where they're going to land. "That bugger is getting tired, it's close," because it's starting to wind down, and all of a sudden there's big loud explosions. But the smaller calibre shells, you barely hear the gun, and it's there on top of you, coming over like…it's got a herald flapping behind it, and then whack.

31:00 That can make you very... I think the thing that frightened me most was mortar fire. Because mortar fire is when… If they've got one bomb in the air, they've got more than one. If you're caught in that pattern and they just fall all round you, then it's frightening. They're what they call 'daisy-cutters' Frightening, if you're not in a hole there…You feel very comfortable if you're in a big hole and it's got a roof on top of it. Then again, if you get a direct hit, it's not much help either.

31:30 It's like hiding behind a blade of glass. You reckon you would be hiding behind a brick wall, it just gives you that confidence. Yeah, they're not nice things to be caught in. Not exactly what you would ask for tea, I'll tell you. There has been some near misses and direct hits, too.

32:00 Yes, you can laugh about it when you think about it, but it's not funny at the time. You will always share a hole with someone who's been caught out in the open and he comes making a flying dive into your hole with you, you let him in.

**How did you keep your spirits up?**

There was always a comic amongst you. There was always a comic, somewhere. Some bloke would always come out with a smart saying,

32:30 and it gets you laughing. There are some comics out there. We had Alex Gurney, the bloke that done Bluey and Curley, up on Shaggy Ridge, he came up when we were moving from Dumpu to Shaggy Ridge. And I happened to see this bloke on the end of our column, and I thought, 'He's not one of us. Who the hell is he?'

And somebody spoke and he said, "I am Alex Gurney."

33:00 He said, "I'm keeping very quiet," he said. "This how I get my strips." He said, "One of you comics is going to say something and I can make a strip of it." Another fellow who joined us and was with us for three weeks was Bill Dargie, Sir William Dargie. He did a terrible lot of sketches of our crowd, in

different actions. And he's a nice bloke, he's dead now, he died recently, Bill. But he was only Bill Dargie then, he was a war correspondent.

33:30 You don’t know when these fellows will come up. The official war artists will come up, the official photographers. As I said, Gurney came up. We didn’t know he was on the end. He said, “That's what I do. I sneak up and listen to youse all talking and hear a quip. Somebody will bring out something funny, and I will write it down, and then I will think of a cartoon strip for it.” And that is how he used to do it, Bluey and Curley.

**So was Alex Gurney there as a private, or a…?**

34:00 No, they come under this war correspondent business, or historian. I don't know what he would come under. Dargie was a historian and a war artist. There was the official war artists and war photographers. He was with our sister battalion before he got killed, was Damon Parrer.

34:30 He was with the 58th. In fact, one of his photos of a 58th bloke at Salamaua is all around the world. It's about a fellow helping another bloke across a creek with a groundsheet, and he's been hit in the eye… Well, both those blokes are dead now. That was a casualty coming out of Salamaua. Well, he took that as they were crossing the river. He used to go right up to the front, and they used to say to him…he never came with us, he was with the 58th,

35:00 and they used to say, “Look, you're looking for it, and you'll get it if you keep this up." And he did, he got it. Because he used to be right there, almost in the foxhole with the blokes. The camera he had, naturally in them days things were very primitive, for filming, it was a wind up one, you would see him winding it up, getting ready to take a shot.

35:30 I don’t know how they did it, because one of the photographers admitted, “We have a lot of trouble with the tropical conditions for the films," he said. "They've only got to get a bit of moisture and it's ruined." So they were lucky to get all these photographs out, I reckon. I forget how many hundreds of photos we've got in the museum in Canberra,

36:00 taken by the official photographer. They're all on the Internet now, anybody can see them. But there you are. That's it. I came home and went back into the butchering game.

**Just before you come home, I think there is just a little bit more about Rabaul.**

36:30 **First of all, how long were you at Rabaul?**

I was there from October, probably through there until February, or March. It was only about six months there altogether. I experienced one decent earthquake. The ground, it shook that much that you couldn’t walk. Now every time I see something of an earthquake now, I can understand what they're going through. But it was near a big volcano that had

37:00 blown up in 1937, and if you were on that side of the island and the wind was blowing, you used to get the fumes of it, these sulphur fumes, it used to put you to sleep, you would want to go to sleep all the time. There was the beach in the front of the harbour, and then these mountains that went in a horseshoe right round Rabaul, and then on the other side was all the plantations of coconut trees. But we were on the beach side,

37:30 where the shipping companies used to be, Burns Philip and that. That was the only building still standing, the Burns Philp building at Rabaul. It was a beautiful harbour. It had greenery almost growing up to the water, because it never seemed to get rough. And if you dug a hole six feet away from where the salt water, you would get brackish….you couldn’t drink it, but it was like fresh water.

38:00 So you would go there. Tropical water you get very sticky. You don’t feel clean when you come out of it. So you would get a bucket of that and tip it over yourself and wash all the salt off. It was a funny harbour, that. It was very deep. You only walked…it had a shelf and if you walked out about twenty yards, it was a sudden drop down a couple of hundred feet, like on a cliff. Everybody used to have so much spare time,

38:30 if you didn’t have a work party, there were a few things around about, there used to be assault craft and things like that, you used to use all these things for motoring around the harbour. They were Japanese stuff, with outboard motors, and have a great old time going around, having a lot of fun there. As I say, times were good, there was a beer ration and plenty of fresh food….It was like living on an exotic island.

39:00 **When you arrived it was a little while after the end of the war, wasn’t it?**

To Rabaul? Yes. Because we were on Torokina rounding up the prisoners off of Bougainville to get them all ready to be taken over to Rabaul. They sent the lot to Rabaul, and they were all repatriated from Rabaul. All the islands, all the prisoners went to Rabaul.

**Did they take POWs [Prisoners of War] on the ship that you were on?**

39:30 Look, I've got no idea. That's one thing I don't know, how they got them over there. The trip was only about a day and a night, from the Solomons to Rabaul. I don’t know how they took the prisoners, whether they took them in big landing craft or what…That's one thing, I don't know how they got there. But I know it was their own ships that took them home in the end, when they were to be taken home.

Because they had the war crimes

40:00 in Rabaul and all. There was several of them hung while I was there, but naturally we didn't see anything like that. But we were told when they were going to be hung, down this section behind us, they had the war crimes there. Those who were incriminated, those who killed all the Indian Prisoners of War, they were identified by surviving Indians. They went for the long drop. We didn't have nothing or see anything like that. We just heard that

40:30 the trials were going. Australians were trying them, but we had nothing to do with that. It was just like a big holiday, really.

**It must have been very busy. It sounds as if there were a lot of people there?**

Yes, as I said, with the over hundred thousand Japanese, and then there was more than a brigade of us there.

**Rabaul is not a big place?**

No.

41:00 No, but there was the front section, the harbour section, and the other side….I don't know whether the Japs cut it, or if it was done there earlier, there was a big gap cut in the mountain, like a big gap. "You're going through the gap." And that was to go through to the other side of the island, to the Toll Plantations, and all the plantations on the other side of the island. New Britain was a fairly big island, the same as Bougainville.

41:30 **Where were you billeted? Where were your barracks?**

We were all living in tents. But I was on the harbour side of Rabaul, and we were living in tents right on the water. It was terrific. You would just race into the ocean and have a swim and come out and tip water over yourself. You didn't have to work. You had a Japanese Prisoner of War doing your washing and cleaning your tent up and cleaning everything. You done nothing. You just walked around like a king dick.

# Tape 7

**NOTE : Visual runs out of sync with audio.**

00:30 **From the top?**

A Company was the forward company, and this day this jeep came up the track and it was the CO and the 2IC [Second in Command] and his driver in his jeep, and he was the CO of the 2/11th Field Regiment. who was in support of us in artillery. And we had been through the area a fair bit and told him that we couldn't guarantee that it was fully cleared, so to be careful.

01:00 And he said, "I will be." And he was given a warning that it was still very dangerous. He said, "I've come up to see how our support, and the work that we're doing, see the results of it." Because they were firing on the positions we wanted them to fire on at the time. He only went a few yards up the track and hit an ambush. He was one of their only casualties, a colonel was killed outright. I think the others in the jeep were wounded, but I know he was killed outright.

01:30 Because in their book, it states that their casualty killed on Bougainville was the colonel, and I remember when they come up to have a look at what damage they were doing in support of us, because they were supporting us all the way through. But that's what cost him his life for going too far. He shouldn't have gone further, really. When you're not sure of the ground you keep out of it. It was bad enough for us to go into it.

02:00 **Can you give us any more examples? You have been talking about the artillery, the pioneers, the tankies….Ways that you needed to coordinate work together. Any particular examples….where that sort of relationship really came to the fore, where you were working together?**

The other liaison was done, like that, with the brigadier, with the New Zealand Air Force. Of course, he could call on that any time he wanted to come and do a job,

02:30 and liaison between that must have been terrific, because the services get a little bit overpowered with their power. And say, "Unless I get a higher authority than you, I won't do the job." And all this caper. But apparently the New Zealand Airforce used to jump every time Hammer wanted something. But no, all the supporting troops, such as the raskie and water transport was very important, too, because certain parts of Bougainville they couldn't get the stuff down over land quick, they could only get it from a certain point.

03:00 So from Torokina, they call them small ships, they had landing craft and they had other small ships, used to come round the coast in their boats. And say if we wanted diesel fuel or petrol for the engineers, they would just roll the 44 gallon drums into the sea and we would all swim out and half a dozen would push the drums in. Tins that would float and everything else, they just pushed them all in the sea. You'd get supplied from them. Now they didn't get…

03:30 They got a certain amount of recognition, but you don't hear them talked of much, but they were a great hand in getting us down there, because we would have had to march overland to get to the start of the Buen Road. But they took us from Torokina right round to this Motupena Point, in landing craft, and we landed from landing craft there. That was one of their jobs, the support troops, support people, supplied us, without having to lug it everywhere. There was another crowd that were great support people.

04:00 We didn't see all the others in support, the repairs shops and everybody else that is behind you to keep you there, bringing up everything. Like there's an ammunition pool, and all these people that bring the ammunition up to a certain point, and then you pick it up. Which the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of a battalion is always responsible for the battalion's ammunition, and he has always got to make sure it is there and brought forward and distributed between the companies.

04:30 All in all, the ones that we worked close with are the ones that you become pals with. The engineers and the artillery, and everybody else, plays a very high supporting role in keeping you there, and keeping you….safe up to a point, because they're the ones that really help you with good support. The engineers, I can't fault any of them. They were all pretty good as far as I was concerned.

05:00 **During the break, just now, you mentioned the engineers. The dozer, was he the one that was hit by the plane?**

Yes, he was cutting a scarf for us to get jeeps through, we had jeeps, not only to bring up rations and other stuff, they used to tow the anti-tank guns and everything else like that. Well, this time we were crossing this river, there was a bit of a blockage there, and we called the engineers there to come up and cut

05:30 a scarf to make the road wider so we could get the anti-tank guns through, and supplies through. And this fellow came up, and he was cutting the scarf there, and this mountain gun, which we didn't see, we didn't know where it was, and it fired at point blank range at the bulldozer and hit the blade, and of course naturally it exploded. But the driver didn't get hit, nobody got hit, it just put a scratch on his blade. It could have wiped the bulldozer if it hit a vital spot, but it didn't.

06:00 He was very, very lucky. He had troops there. There was a section of us there guarding in front of him and everything else like that that, but we didn't see where the gun was. We heard it go off and hit the blade of the bulldozer. I tell you what, trumps was right then. He bloody near flew out of his seat.

06:30 The 15th Field copped it one day…As I say, when the Japs got…they were building this beautiful road. It was a real highway. And they used a lot of tip trucks and things, so they used to come up from their camp in the tip trucks, all sitting in the tip trucks to the job. I didn't see this, I was told about it. But the Japs had set an ambush along this road,

07:00 and this truck came along and they killed seven of them in the back of this truck. But after that, every time a truck came up, they had sandbags on the inside of the truck and they were behind the sandbags. But that was a load of casualties for them. We got a hell of a shock about that, because naturally some of us had to go back and have a look at he area and try and find…We couldn't find nothing. it was just a hit and miss job. Get in, do a dirty job and blow through, which they did.

07:30 **Am I right in saying you received a British Empire…?**

I got that for services in the army when National Service was on, and I went back into the army….from 1957 until about '60. I had become a quartermaster at HQMS [?], as you can see by the what's-it-names, I went to different units.

08:00 Once you are a quartermaster, they could send you to any unit as a quartermaster, all you've got to do is learn their arm, their stores, what they handled. But quartermastering is the same in any unit, other than that. And I went to engineers and I went to artillery, and then was sent to the coding corp. When I was sent to intelligence, the quartermaster had a much bigger job, so I was recommended for the VM [Victoria Medal]. I knew nothing about it. It just came out in the Birthday Honours in 1974.

08:30 So it was a big surprise, too. I don't know who done it or how it was done. It was very secretive. I came home from the mess one night, and here's all these telegrams. Billy McMahon was the Prime Minister then, and generals…Billy McMahon and anybody of importance, all telegrams congratulating you.

09:00 **This was recognition for your service, including World War II?**

No, it was nothing to do with it. Just recognition to service to the system over the time I was in it, with the National Service. I didn't think I deserved it, but apparently the powers that be must have thought so. So that was that.

**Getting back to Bougainville, there were a couple of other stories you were telling us off camera,**

09:30 **it would be great to get those on the record. You talked about the big Naval gun that the Japs had planted…**

As I say, the first time we struck the Naval gun, they'd bolted the breech block out of it, and we thought, 'That's no good any more, so we won't be worried about that.' But then, Next, unbeknown to us, the tanks came. We knew about the tanks coming up,

10:00 and the tanks came up, a full squadron of tanks come up, and they had snuck back and put the breech block back in it. And of course, in an ideal position it was, watching this bend, and as the tanks came round the bend they copped the full blast of this six inch shell. When they done the damage, I can't recall whether the tanks got it or not, but when we got the gun again the breech block had gone.

10:30 They had fled this time and they never came back, because we pushed them back and they couldn't shift the gun because it was on a platform. The mountain guns they can shift because they're wheel jobs, and they had a special type vehicle for towing them, too. It was a little thing on tractors. They had very large vehicles parked, I don't know how they were off for petrol, but thousands of trucks in vehicle parks that hadn't moved an inch in ages. They must have been short of petrol, I suppose.

11:00 They just kept it for vital services whatever petrol they had.

**Were you able to make use of equipment left behind?**

Of theirs? Only for… In our platoon. they were nearly all tradesmen. Well, one of the blokes was a top mechanic. Of course, they had gone through this big vehicle parked, the Japs themselves, before they retreated, and

11:30 thought that they'd put everything out of action. Well, they hadn't. Because this mechanic bloke had been able to cannibalise off some trucks what they hadn't smashed, and put it on the trucks until finally we got two trucks going. We got two trucks going and we got them back to Torokina and the war finished. And we were using them for towing, pulling big logs out of the scrub to get cut up for timber for building things, but the authorities

12:00 thought they owned them more than we did, so they took them off us. Yet we captured them and got them going. I think the divisional headquarters sent out the memo, and said we weren't entitled to keep the two trucks, they took them. So I don't know where they finished up. They were ten wheelers, big trucks, powerful trucks. They thought they destroyed them, but if they could have got a dozen of them of them going, if they went around and cannibalised the lot.

12:30 We weren't short of vehicles. It was only that we needed to use these trucks for snigging logs out of the scrub, to get sawn up and make timber for building recreation mess huts and everything else like that. It's surprising what you can do when you get a little bit of equipment. You can start to do things and make yourself very comfortable.

**With the story about the Naval gun,**

13:00 **which they had taken the breech blocks from the side….You guys had seen this stripped gun and assumed that they had gone?**

We inspected it early. It was in the same condition as that photo they had taken. The breech block and gone and we thought, 'That's out of action.' If we had been awake at the time, possibly, I could have thrown a stick of gelly [gelignite] into it and fractured the barrel. But naturally we didn't worry about that. We thought, 'They're gone,' but they snuck back

13:30 with the mechanism and got the gun going again. They couldn't take the gun anywhere. It was too heavy and they had nothing to cart it. So they done the damage on these tanks. The mines knocked one out, and I'm too sure whether they knocked three out with that gun. It wasn't a nice sight to see, I can assure you, poor buggers. Even the ones who had the bottom

14:00 blown out of the tank, there was no survivors in that either. So the 2/4th blokes could tell you a bit more about that.

**Something of that sort….Do you consider that fair play in war, or is that a matter of being, at that point, outwitting?**

It's tactics. And Hammer used to say, he said, "You win battles by the

14:30 opposition's mistakes." That was a mistake we made, not destroying the gun completely. And others paid the price for it. Naturally, you're all young people and…All right, you're still active, and your brain works quickly, and everything else like that, but there's some things you don't think of quick enough, what to do. All right the breech block's gone so it's useless, it's no good, don't worry about it. But it was good. They come back and

15:00 put the bloody breech block back in. But the next time, we made sure it was finished. But it was too late, they'd done a lot of damage. I'm sure the 2/4th blokes won't forget it. Of course, each service depends on….The tanks depend on us to look after them, as they look after us. Because they're, more or less, in the jungle, just a mobile pill box, with an enormous amount of firepower.

15:30 But you still need one another to look after one another, not just to ride on and get you up to somewhere. You have got to be in front of them at times, well, our patrols were. But that gun was just a bit too….Of course, as soon as they'd done the damage, they shot through. We didn't catch them.

**Can you tell me more about how you 'd work with the tanks in terms of communication and your scouting for them, and their support of you?**

16:00 We, more or less, when they are moving up roads and things you form an umbrella for them, and if you run into trouble you pull back and he goes up, deals with it, and then you help him again to get up to where he is going to get. Unless it's a heavy weapon, he's not going to do it either. He's not going to move up. It was just that he surprised by this one. He wouldn't have gone near that if he had of known that gun was there. That's for sure.

16:30 But we had assured him that the gun was useless, but it wasn't. We had already seen it before, patrolling the area. As I said, they're only a big steel metal moving pillbox, as far as we are concerned, but they are a great weapon to have with you. You make mistakes and you make sure you don't try and make them again.

17:00 You feel sorry for these people.

**What was your rank, Frank?**

I was only a private right through, even though I went out with patrols and everything like that. I didn't want any responsibility, I was only a young bloke, and I didn't like the responsibility, and I saw what it did. I was too busy looking after myself half the time, but having the responsibility….People don't realise

17:30 that all patrols, unless they're a big one on platoon, or needs an officer and a sergeant, most patrols are only in charge by a corporal. If it's only a seven section job going out, the corporal has got it. And the corporal does all the dirty work. I'd say in my time in New Guinea and Bougainville, the corporals would have done a big share of the dirty work. Because he's got the lives of those seven men, his section, in his section.

18:00 Well, the section I was in, and I was good pals with him, but he wasn't a great bloke on reading compasses and things like that, and he wasn't too good on map reading, and he used to say with me, "For Christ's sake! Come with us. I've got a trick to do and I don't like reading the maps anyway, and I'm not over accurate with a compass." So I used to always go with him, to reads the compass for him,

18:30 take the bearings and look at the map. Because you used to go by steps. If it was jungle, and you had to go into the jungle a fair bit, you had, the intelligence would give you what was called a 'flimsy,' with chinagraphs of the legs you had to do. Say, a thousand paces north east so many degrees, and when you get there you always have a bloke at the back counting the paces,

19:00 a fellow there with ten sticks in his hand. Every time he does a hundred steps he drops a stick. And the minute he drops the last one, he puts his hand up and you stop, and that's where you take the reading from, the next compass bearing reading, according to the tricks what the Intelligence had given you. It might be say, what you call a legs in your patrol. It might be a ten leg patrol, or a five leg patrol, and it's going through all this scrub. and if you read it accurately you will come out on the track you're supposed to come out on.

19:30 this cobber of mine, he was the corporal. In fact, I put him in for it because this officer, Andy Madisons, got badly wounded. He said, "Do you want to go to an NCO's school?" I said, "No, Andy. I don't want to know" He said, "Do you know any one who will?" I said, "Yeah, my mate Varley, he'll go." So he went and did the course. But he said, "I would like to know the B [bastard] who put me in for that." I said, "I don't want to tell you, but it was me." He was a good soldier, Ray, but he wasn't so accurate

20:00 with elementary mathematics and things like that, work things out quickly. He was a good soldier in other things, a good bushman, but he couldn't read the compass too well, so I used to always go with him on that, give him a hand there.

**It wasn't your section? You weren't in that section?**

No, I was in that section. He wanted me in that section. he said, "Will you come into my section?" I said, "No, I belong to that other section." He said, "But when we go out on patrol, will you come and join my section?" "Yeah."

20:30 So I used to go with him. The sergeant, he gets the orders for the day, "Righto, we've got to do a patrol for such and such, and it's your turn, corporal so and so." And then again he might say, "This is pretty bloody dicey. Those who draw the short straw, don't go,

21:00 and those who take the long straw, go." And he would have all these small sticks with the short ones and the long ones. You would just take it on the draw, because it was a dicey one. Then again, the next one would come up and he'd say, "You went on the last dicey one, you're out." Somebody else has got to take it. As I say, the corporal used to do a lot of the dirty work there, and some blokes…That's what I didn't like, some fellows packed up after getting fellows killed,

21:30 couldn't stand it any more. They would take that as a personal thing. It was their fault that they got

killed. And it mightn't have been. But they hold that themselves and they pack up over it. It's a very big responsibility going out with seven blokes on a dicey job, when you're only a corporal. One or two packed up over that. They couldn't handle it anymore, getting fellows killed.

22:00 You used to say, "My fault he got killed, my fault." Well they lived with that, you know. It might not have been his fault at all. Some blokes are not careful, they trample through the bush like a baby elephant, making all the noise in the bloody world.

**So those corporals, for example, would they be approached and said, "Look, we can see you're not handling this. You've got to go?"**

No, all the corporals

22:30 and each section leader understands that when his turn comes along to take a patrol out, if it's a dicey one, a real dicey, the sergeant might say, "You had the last dicey one. So and so will take this one out." And off they go…

**But those ones who are blaming themselves?**

Yes, well, they have gone out and run into trouble and somebody's got killed. They've gone into an ambush and somebody's got killed.

23:00 And of course, then, there's always someone in the section who might turn around and blame you. He lives with that. He tries to go over it, and see where he went wrong. But nine times out of ten, it is not their fault at all, it is just the luck of the draw, you've walked into trouble, and what happens, you wear it. It's like different blokes have gone out and

23:30 got into trouble and said, "I wish I'd have had an extra grenade." You say, "Well, you know how many grenades you have got to take when you go out. If you didn't take it, you didn't take it. Your fault. Nobody else's." "I could have got them if I had that," You say, "You could have, but you didn't." But that's what happens with patrols and that. The big patrols that have to go out for several days, well usually an officer takes that.

24:00 Some patrols might be, say, "Look, we're going out for three days…" There's different patrols. There's fighting patrols, observing patrols, all sorts of patrols. Some just to gain information, not look for trouble, only fight if you get into trouble. But if you see the trouble coming, don't stir it up, keep out of it. And that's what you do on these long patrols, if you're going to go three days behind the enemy line. You're not looking for trouble. You're looking to get information

24:30 on what's going on, what they're doing and then come back with that information without letting them know you're there. But then again, there's trouble somewhere, "Right, a fighting patrol is going out." That means you're going out to stir up real trouble, because another patrol has struck this trouble, an obstacle, so he comes back and, "Double the men up, fighting patrol, all weapons, away you go." That is how it works. Sometimes probably a sergeant would take that.

25:00 And it's funny with decorations….You know damn well, see….That's the only trouble with patrols. A corporal can't recommend a decoration, yet he's seen a bloke in his section do a brave thing. It has got to be an officer that recognises the brave act, and then the officer will write out a citation saying that, "I recommend that this man be awarded a DCM,"

25:30 or whatever it is. DCM, for example. And the CO gets it, signs it, backing it up, and sends it off to the brigadier. The brigadier looks at it, then the panel of three brigadiers, it's got to be two out of three decides whether it's gong to be a DCM or lower. And if one disagrees, he says, "I only support a Military Medal, not a DCM." In his opinion, that's all it is worth. That's who makes the decisions.

26:00 So God knows what they think of when they're awarding a VC [Victoria Cross]. On Bougainville, there were two VCs won on Bougainville, in that time. The 25th Battalion and the 8th Battalion, they won one, Partridge and Rafferty. There were three, actually. The other one was won by a Fijian, but he was killed. The Fijian battalion were there on Bougainville, before our time,

26:30 but he won it before we got there, won a VC. I think they were with the Americans, this Fiji battalion. That's when an argument comes up, and they say, "How many VCs won on Boungainville?" "Three." "No, two." I said, "Three. A Fijian won one." That's how the system works. We had…I think it was

27:00 about a dozen who were recommended for DCMs, but they only got MM, only one got the DCM. A lot of MIDs and Military Crosses, quite a lot of decorations but the bulk were Military Medals. Broken down from the recommendation of the original act.

**So you think that system is a bit flawed?**

Well, I do. Rather than just an officer recognising the awards.

27:30 I saw some terrific things done by section leaders that got into trouble and went to rescue one of their men and under fire and got themselves knocked about at the same time, and that's not recognisable. An officer has got to be there to see the act. If it's a big patrol and he's in charge and he sees that, he can recommend something, but not a corporal going out, or a sergeant going out with them.

28:00 And yet he could probably do twice as a brave job as what has been done, but he gets nothing. The system is fair up to a point. But I will honestly say out of all the fellows I have seen won decorations, everyone had won it, and the officers who got the Military Cross for doing a good job, won it, too, because they did a good job. I can't saw any decoration that our blokes won that didn't earn it, and earned it the hard way.

28:30 I don't know…You will probably find out in the First World War, even supporting troops, a lot were awarded decorations because they were so close to the Infantry at the time. But in this war, the Second World War, the supporting troops were well back and everything like that. It wasn't those regiments never won

29:00 many decorations, nearly all Infantry that won them. You will find out that nearly all the VCs were all Infantry blokes. And it was only done on the spur of the moment.

**Were you ever recommended for…?**

No, I was always….I did my job, but on purpose, I didn't stick my head out for nothing. The old man used to say, "Keep your head well down if you can't cover everything." I always done my job and

29:30 I didn't shirk anything, but I was never a great hero looking for a VC. I didn't like them angry shots around your ears. It's not as a nice noise, it's a horrible noise when you hear them, and especially if it is a LMG [Light Machine Gun] or something, slugs are cracking past your ear hole, and makes a hell of a crack. The velocity that it comes through, at the speed the come…And of course shrapnel makes a hell of a hissing noise all round the place.

30:00 No, not a great picnic, I'm afraid. You're there to do your job, and I will admit, I would say the bulk of our fellows done a good job. You could always rely on them. There was one or two, and I would say it was only fatigue and only too long in action that caused it, they were all right to start with, but as time went on, and after a couple of months, you could see them start to slip a bit

30:30 and get a bit shaky….I understood it. I still to this day. I don't hold anything to any of them, because I always had the opinion that at least they were there and they were doing a good job. And it is unfortunate when they cracked up. I wouldn't say any of them were cowards, really. It was just the pressure and the nerves that beat them in the end. It's not nice to see a soldier go down like that.

31:00 With the shakes, and cut to pieces a bit. But let's hope we never see it again, and we don't want to see any more.

**You said that you personally, you saw a number of feats that you thought were deserving of decorations?**

I saw one or two that deserved it, but I think it was only a section job.

**What were those?**

When you come under fire and somebody is hit, and this

31:30 fellow puts his life on the line to try and retrieve…and in a couple of cases the bloke was dead, but he tried to retrieve the body, and then firing at the same time, cutting his swathe through there, but there's nobody to see it. A couple of times I reckon I saw blokes I reckoned earned a decoration, but a corporal's not good enough to recommend that. They will tell you when they come back, "That bloke deserves a medal."

32:00 I suppose the system is fair enough, if it's recognised by a commissioned officer. There is going to be no lies told about it. Naturally he writes out the report and citation for it, to say what he saw happen, and it goes through the proper channels and it's recommended. That's the only thing I don't like about today's system. We dumped all the British awards,

32:30 all bar one, the VC….Of course, that is probably the most…even the Germans, and all of them, admit that is probably one of the highest decorations in the world. It has got to be won, and it's really got to be won, it's not just handed out. But we've got nothing that really, these days, sounds anything. When do you hear anybody talk about an Australian Bravery Award? There's arguments all the time now about these blokes coming home from Iraq,

33:00 about bravery awards, but nobody can tell you what it is, whether it is a bit of paper or a pat on the back. At least, in our time, if it was a MM or a DCM, VC, Mentioned In Dispatches, DSO [Distinguished Service Order] you knew all about it, you knew what the fellow was in for. But now I can't see anything where there is something to match the Military Medal, or DCM, or the officers' decoration….

33:30 A good commander will always get the DSO for the job he does with his battalion. I don't even know what they get any more. They have taken the awards away, but there's nothing in black and white to say what the new ones are, other than the VC, but we haven't won a VC for a while. In the Afghan War, I see a British bloke was awarded a VC.

34:00 But I haven't seen or know anything about what the new ones are. It makes you think a bit. There was an argument for quite a while there where the fellows in Vietnam, the last blokes there, were awarded the MM, but when they come home the awards had been squashed. But I don't know what they got in

place of it. They had won it there and been awarded it, but when they come home, the awards had been scrubbed for the new system, but nobody knows what they got in place of it.

34:30 **Sounds like those letters need something like a world war to give them? You had World War I…**

I think even if there is not a world war they remain….You take Cutler and all these blokes….Even that fellow now, the last surviving VC winner,

35:00 that's down in Hamilton, Kenner, he's still highly thought of wherever he goes. It's written down, it's the cheapest decoration to make, but worth more than the richest diamonds to the recipient. No matter where he goes, he's a hero. He's thought so highly of. Everybody recognises the man. I know full well they have definitely got to earn the damn thing.

35:30 When you read their citation… It's not that I want one. But it's great to see that it's still made out of that cannon they captured in the Crimea War. And when it was first made in Queen Victoria's day, it used to cost a penny farthing to make. They reckon there is still enough of that gun to make several thousand more, because it is only made of this gun bronze.

36:00 As they say, it's worth more than the big diamond to the fellow that's got it. It doesn't matter where you go around the world. It is recognised all around the world, the VC, for those who have got it, because there is not many, very few. He's a nice bloke, Teddy Kenner. I've been on a couple of shows with him.

36:30 He has been there at the show, at some reception somewhere, and he's really thought a lot of. He is very humble, a humble man. He is not a go-getter, or big brag artist. The other bloke, the other bloke who's alive, he's the Vietnam bloke…What's his name? He is still reasonably young.

37:00 He will be the last surviving one when Kenner goes, because Kenner is well in his 80s now. He won that at Wewak, that one, Teddy Kenner, nice bloke.

**Getting back, a bit earlier you were talking about in the break, you were talking about the patrols? You just mentioned the various types of patrols, be they fighting or observing….**

37:30 Or standing patrols, that's when you go out and sit in a position and observe things and wait. Then there's the patrol that goes out and sets an ambush.

**Can you walk us through one or two of those the actual physical experience, a short one, three days, or….They're all equally important, but maybe a couple that are vivid in your memory?**

38:00 Yeah, well the long patrols when you've got to go out and observe else like, it's finding different sites, and trying to estimate how many were in the site, or how long since they'd been there. You have got to write all this information. Its position, could it be used again, or anything like that. And then tracks, how long since you think they've been used. do you think they've been used consistently. This is information gathering, you know.

38:30 And you can get a fair bit of information if they are at all amiable towards you, because they got very upset with the Japanese. The natives. Some of them can tell you a fair bit, too, when you go out on these long patrols, and go out somewhere, and you strike one or two of them and they can help you, because they're in the Japanese territory, and they can help you by giving you the information, how many were through at such and such a time. And of course, where they were

39:00 and what direction they're going in, because you warn the next battalion that might be on your right, and say, "Look. Looking at it, there could be a large group of say a hundred coming into your area. So be alert." Whatever party it was. This is what you gather. You don't look for trouble. You might see trouble looming, but you keep away from it.

39:30 Because it's no good letting them know you're in the area, by firing a few lousy shots to scare them off, you have go to keep quiet. That is what you are there for. To observe and gain information. Not look for trouble. So you've got to go out, you have a medic with you, and if you are going three days, three days' supplies…You've got to be very careful how you dispose of your rubbish, so that you don't leave information

40:00 to say you've been in the area, to show anybody of being there. They are all things that you have to be careful about. And bury anything, to make sure nobody sees anything, because the minute they know that you are in the area, for those three days they're gong to be right on your ginger. That was a lot of our jobs on Bougainville was this outflanking, going out miles and cutting in and cutting the road. But it was a lot of hard work bashing through the scrub,

40:30 and trying to let them know you are not there.

**How did you manage that?**

Very quiet. They soon find out in the end if you run into trouble somewhere, if you run into them. Might be only two or three, and if one gets away, if you don't kill the lot of them, if one gets away you're in a bit of trouble. They will know you're there. If you get any, you have got to get the lot, so nobody gets back to their positions to let them know you're in the area..

41:00 As I say, that's what was starting to shake us up in the end, incessant patrolling and being out so often The old nerves were starting to show up a bit, on most of us, I would say all of us, because the doctor….the doctor's the one who usually says, “This battalion is getting close to wanting a break.” Even if they only take you out for two or three weeks,

41:30 you start to pick up again, a bit of good tucker and things like that. It makes a big difference getting some good tucker, instead of living on the smell of an oily rag. And just about to start to have a bite to eat and they start shelling you. That's when they pick on the time, too, they know exactly what time you're going to be fed. So they send over a few shells to stir you up. You're not worried about tea then, you're worried about getting into a big bloody hole.

# Tape 8

00:30 You had to grab some of it, and you had no time to let it swell up and soak it. It was like these blue boiler peas they used to give you, you had no time to soak them and get them up. You'd just eat any damn thing you could get hold of, hard biscuits, no matter what you got. Tucker in the New Guinea wasn’t that bright on. But when I was at Bougainville, I was in a good position.

01:00 They got rations through to you, good stuff. It makes a big difference, a good feed. for a footslogger it is, anyway.

**What about tucker from the bush, the local produce or…**

That's pretty rare. I saw more tucker in New Guinea. There was always a chance

01:30 of getting a paw paw, and there was a lot of sugar bananas, and if you knew what the natives ate, like tapioca bush and things like that, you could get yourself out. They'd cook paw paw or anything like that. But in Bougainville there wasn’t too much stuff in the bush, unless you come across a Japanese garden and grabbed some sweet potato, or something like that. As I said, we didn’t want much in Bougainville, we got enough to eat there.

02:00 But in New Guinea, there was always a shortage of food, because everything was on foot. You had to cart the stuff for miles, and the natives…You could only trust the natives to cart it up to a certain point, and that's where they'd pick up your wounded also. But the minute a plane came or anything else like that, they were gone, or shells started flying around, they would bolt. You didn’t expect them to hang around anyway. But they done their job, and they carted your stuff up to a certain point,

02:30 but we had to take over and do it, when they weren't there. They were on a very hard ration, too, they were only on rice, bully beef, and they got a ration of this 'boong twist.' They used to make these big cigars out of these boong twists, and they used to stink to high heaven. It was the cheapest residue of tobacco they could get.

03:00 It was made in like a plaited piece of tobacco. That is why we called it boong twist. And they used to chew this betelnut. If they chewed enough of it they would be off their nut. It seemed to be an alcoholic type of thing. You could always tell when they were chewing it because they would be spitting everywhere like a person chewing tobacco. Big red goobies everywhere, because it used to make all their teeth red and their tongue red,

03:30 betelnut. It was a prized thing amongst the natives, but it used to send them off their rocker a bit. Even the women used to eat the damn stuff, too, the women natives. The last time I was in New Guinea, it was in all the markets they had there. The natives were still selling this betelnut. It was a favourite.

04:00 **I tried it once. Not very nice.**

I never tried it. The only thing I tried was the American chewing tobacco, we got a ration of that, and it can become addictive, because it is full of molasses. Pure leaf and molasses between each layer of leaf, and when it gets into your mouth, your mouth just salivers heavily with the sweetness, and that's how you make those big goobies to spit all the time. Dirty habit it was. I was glad when we couldn’t get any more. That was the end of it.

04:30 They gave you….When we were getting American cigarettes, we got Bull Durham, that was in a little sack, like the cowboys had. It was like sawdust. I don’t know how a bloke smoked it. I think if there was a decent wind it would blow away before you could even roll a cigarette. We got this Log Cabin Havelock, of our own, and a plug of this chewing tobacco. That was the American rations, so we got it all also.

05:00 But this Bull Durham, you had to be like John Wayne to roll it. He used to do it one hand, I don't know.

**Talking about the native population, did you have much to do with them? Were they of much an assistance in New Guinea?**

Yes, they were in both Bougainville and New Guinea, they were very good up to getting them up to

05:30 as close as you could to the fighting, and then you had to be careful, because they would leave you for dead. They would bolt the minute they come under fire or anything else like that. But in the early days, when a Zero flew over, "Blusey! Blusey!" And they would bolt. But on the job, in a good straight run, and no problems, they would just plod along all day and cart your stuff. And then bring the wounded back, too. We used to bring our own wounded out until we got them

06:00 to take them from there. That's where the doctors would be good. “This fellow has not much chance.” It's not like today where they have a helicopter to bring you out, and you're out in two hours. There, you are four days on a stretcher. What hope have you got? Being jostled for four days with only half a guts left, or something like that. I would have liked to have seen the helicopters

06:30 for our blokes. I reckon there would be another thirty alive today, from out where they are into a hospital in say two hours. That's why half the blokes died on the Kokoda, died of their wounds. Too much of a haul to get them back. It was the same with us, in our places, it was a long haul. Minor wounds they were all right, walking wounded, they were all right.…

07:00 They made a lot of good drugs, these sulphur drugs, halfway through the war, and they were lifesavers, the sulphur drugs. Get you back, keep you going. Get you on your feet. We used to take so many every so many hours. You will get back on them. They were good lifesavers. The same as plasma and all that,

07:30 the blood transfusions, a lot of life savings things. That is one good thing that comes out of war, the medical side. Penicillin was found during the Second World War, that and that was a lifesaver. That was a funny thing. Medical science is not to be kept a secret between enemy and your side. They have got to share it. We got plasma off the Germans and they got Penicillin off us. That's one thing that they don’t hold secret,

08:00 medical science, must be shared, which is a good idea. That blood plasma was a beauty and so was penicillin.

**Going back to hoping to get some more specific experiences you might have had on ambush patrols and so on, you mentioned during the break,**

08:30 **you were talking about an ambush patrol where your front scout was taken out. What were they like? It sounds like you were very on edge all the time?**

As I say, we share that. When you go out, you always get a madman in your section who will volunteer to do it. You do 10 minutes out there and somebody else will come out and take your position. It all depends. You are not…

09:00 You are within sight because you can’t have him miles away in the jungle and lose sight of him, because you can’t wait for his signals. He doesn’t yell out or anything like that. He uses hand signals. Just stop, he has seen something and there is no noise and the minute his hand goes up you melt to the bush and he

09:30 will give the information of what he has seen or what is going on, but you share it as much as you can. He is not there all day. He couldn’t take it. I don’t think any bloke could take it all day because you are living on your nerves every step, especially when you are walking up into an area you would think there could be an ambush here. These things are running through your mind all the time, but you get blokes who are

10:00 quite happy to be the forward scout and you always have some one right at the back you call ‘get away’. The get away man, he is the bloke who counts the paces if it is a patrol that is working on legs of a patrol, but if it is just a patrol and you don’t have a bloke counting paces. The intelligence of each battalion, which are mostly usually school teachers, you know, fairly well

10:30 up, and can work things out were pretty good. I don’t think ever once did they give me a bum map of an area. They did a good job. When you are walking through it is dense jungle, and if you do it correctly on what they have said you and you come out right it is pretty good. It is your own mistake you miscalculated by a degree of something on the compass.

11:00 **Where would you normally be positioned in those patrols?**

I would take, if I went out and I was the Bren gunner, I would about third man down because they strike trouble they have to fan out to give the biggest firepower, the biggest avenue, which is the Bren. Usually the corporals carry an Owen gun

11:30 and then there is a Bren gun and the rest are riflemen and everybody has grenades, so your most firepower is your Owen gun and your Bren. So he has got to be given the opportunity to bring the heaviest firepower. That is if the Bren goes out with you, which 9 times out of 10 it usually does. So if you have got the Bren gun you are fairly well back in the patrol, and

12:00 usually a forward scout might grab an Owen gun, and if he hands it over to the next forward scout he takes that bloke’s rifle, because naturally if you are forward scout and taken by surprise you want something that you can bring a lot down quick, which is a rifle is almost useless to you, so usually the forward scouts have an Owen gun and your firepower is a little bit further back. There is not much difference between the two,

12:30 the forward scout and the rest, they are just out. You have a forward scout and then you have the next bloke, he is a little bit behind him so he can see what the first forward scout sees, and the bulk of the patrol is just behind him. The Japs didn't usually wait until the whole patrol was in the trap, they would nail the forward scout, which is useless, whereas us, we used to wait until they were all in the trap

13:00 then hammer them. So it is no good letting someone get away. That is how that works. If you run into an ambush because you have to pick your sight that gives you the greatest advantage. You can see them coming and then make a clear area for springing your trap, so there is no avenue where they can get out or…

13:30 So that is the sight you pick so you have the drop on them completely. If anyone looks like getting out you still have a fair amount of ground to see where they are going and still have a chance of nailing the lot of them. That is setting your trap and also being ambushed yourself. The last ambush we got caught up in, it was only the forward scout got hit because they fired on him. They didn't wait for the rest of us to come into it.

14:00 He was the only one hit because they could have made a big damage to the rest of us if, in fact we had stopped when they opened fire on him. We were extremely lucky that day, naturally we were lucky because the war was coming to an end too.

**In that situation were you able to fire back or was it a matter of…?**

14:30 That last patrol we were more concerned with the forward scout because he had yelled out to us they are just in front of him. And he said, "I am behind a tree, but I can see them still and it is a MMG [Medium Machine Gun] so don't move forward." So we waited until they did move to give covering fire. If our mate was in the trap, he was caught there.

15:00 But he could walk, so he said, "I am going to make a break for it so cover me," but we couldn't see them. He was the only one who could see them. He got out and got back to us without us having to attack the position. I said, "Was there any?" and he said, "They were in strength in that position," the MGs [Machine Guns] in front that fire on him. He said, "I could have got them really," but his arm had gone because he was hit in the shoulder

15:30 and that arm was useless – he couldn't use his weapon. I see him quite often, old Paddy. He is still alive, but he was the last casualty in our platoon. We didn't want too many patrols I think. We were all getting worn out I think. That is all it was, patrolling and counter-patrolling. They used to patrol and we used to patrol,

16:00 and then sometimes they would hit you in force, and if you were well dug in you had the best opportunity.

**What was the diciest moment for you where life hung in the balance?**

Any time out on patrol was always very a little bit wary because nearly every day, especially towards the end of the war, you were bunching the Nips up into…

16:30 They were everywhere and it was very few days you went out and didn't strike something. When you had to go out you were very wary and very uptight about it. You knew that something was going to happen. You were going to walk into something. It was pretty consistent in New Guinea. It could have gone

17:00 4 or 5 patrols and not see a patrol. See where they had been. But then all of a sudden you would strike a position that could be well defended and they would be there.

**If they hadn't dropped the A bombs, what do you think would have eventuated in Bougainville?**

I think we would have been in a lot of trouble, even the brigadier admitted that. He said,

17:30 "We are outnumbered, between 1 and 10. For every one of us, there is 10 of them." And that is enormous odds. And the way we were coming down and bottling them up, he said… Candor admitted that when he made their final assault

18:00 he still felt confident himself, and Hammer said it was going to be a tough job, so I was glad when it was finished. That is why when I hear people say about it was cruel to drop the atomic bomb I said, "Well I am walking around today because they dropped it." We didn't fancy our chances over greatly. We were winning up until then, but the amount of people 25 to 30,000

18:30 in a small corner. I wouldn't like to think of it. And even the brigadier, when he admits it – that is in writing; it is not just hearsay – that he said the final battle would have been horrific and he didn't think we had enough troops there to cope with it. I was glad that they dropped the atomic bomb when I think of it.

19:00 He has got that in writing, Brigadier Hammer. I asked him that question – what did he think? And he gave me his thoughts.

**Frank, you said earlier that you realised that Bougainville and the campaign at Wewak…**

Yes useless campaign.

**were futile? Did you at the time… Was that the opinion or were you not…?**

The opinion fairly early, as a matter of fact there is a couple of books about it. The useless campaign,

19:30 and they all quote it. They said the hard wags, we are supposed to be going north, he said, “We are going south, down south. We are going home. We are going up towards Japan.” And you have all these comics. Most of the fellows thought it was a useless campaign, the 6th Div [Division] at Wewak was a useless campaign. Between the two divisions

20:00 we lost the same amount of men killed exactly. They lost six hundred and something and we lost six hundred and something. Just over six hundred men killed. 90% of our blokes on Bougainville were only nineteen when they were killed because they were all reinforcements. 19. From the New Guinea campaign a lot of the fellows didn’t come back to the unit because they had got

20:30 over 35s, and the blokes invalided out wounded and the amount of influx of reinforcements, they were nearly all Queenslanders. The bulk of them killed were only 19 because they were 18 when they joined, up or they joined up and turned 19 by the time they had joined us and then skittled at 19. I was surprised when I went through the casualty record. 19. 19.

21:00 No life at all. That was only one. So what were the other divisions like. I don’t know what truth was in it, but when we went away on that trip in 1995 the story was with us on the boat from the War Memorial, and that is when we had been out all day looking at different sites and we would come back we would have a talk about it on

21:30 the boat. They said, “Is there any reason why we were short of reinforcements towards the end of the war?” I said, “Some of our platoons were down to terrible strength and there was nothing coming through, there was just nothing.” He said, “Australia had been at war since 1939 and late 1945 we had run out of 18 year olders.”

22:00 He said, “We were waiting every year for lads to turn 18.” That is how we were going in the barrel. “Don’t worry, Britain wasn’t far behind us. They were waiting for the young fellows.” I said, “Well it is sound reasoning.” The same as here, they had call up conscription they were waiting for these fellows to turn 18. They got a lot more for Vietnam, but after 5 years of war we were running out of blokes.

22:30 For a small population we had a lot in the field. I was rather surprised. I never thought of it. He said, “This is the story. Se ran out of 18 year old. They were just not available.” What people were able to enlist were in restricted industries, they were needed in ammunitions, they were needed on farms, and the other blokes were away. Plus, which you didn’t realise at the time, we were feeding most of the Americans.

23:00 I didn’t know that until I read that in a book. It was far cheaper to get the food from Australia than get it from America because we were close handy to ship it up or fly it up and do everything like that. We were supplying them too, but we were being paid for it by the dollar. The almighty dollar.

**By the time the war ended you were 21 or 22?**

I turned 21 in November 1945.

23:30 The war was over when I turned 21. Most of them can’t remember being 21, and I come home and I was still 21, and I had my 22nd birthday in Australia. We were only talking about that. Before that people have said

24:00 with the young people today, “What would you have done?” because the time I was from 16 to 21 I was under strict discipline and under orders, so I don’t know what I would have done if I was home. I don’t know what problems I would have got up to. Life was run for you in that time. You did what you were told. You have no idea what I would have done.

24:30 Whether I would have played up or what I would have done, because when I came home you are a young adult and start to look at what you are going to do in your own private life, not what trouble you are going to get in to. Even the blokes who were bandits before they joined up, you could have trusted them with anything yet they were real villains in their private life, but you could share it with… Share everything. I said to one of them, his name was Milky, I said, “What are you going

25:00 to do when you get back?” He said, “Well I believe there is a lot of schemes going to go on.” And he said, “I might turn the tide and go and do something useful.” He became a bricklayer. He learnt brick laying. And he was a villain prior – in and out of the clink. Sometimes I would think he was one of the economic conscripts.

25:30 Prior to the war there was nothing much for them. They all joined up. The wildest bunch were the mob recruited from Collingwood and they were a tough mob, the 2/29th, and they were all taken prisoner of war in Malaya. Collingwood and Richmond they were recruited in. They were a tough mob. Before they went away they made their camp look like a

26:00 salt and pepper shaker with bayonet holes in everything. They were all taken prisoner of war, but they made a good account of themselves. Before though a wild bunch, that mob.

**Do you think the townies and the bushies sort of dealt with things a bit differently, or were they the same?**

No, the bush boys that we got mainly came

26:30 from the Riverina. We used to call it Riverina Company. That was C Company. And they came from around Berrigan and Finley and Tocumwal and a bit further down. Up until this year we used to have a reunion there every year, but there are none of them surviving there any more. The last one died last year.

27:00 A lot of other blokes were from the Bendigo area and a lot were timber cutters and I didn't know so many had never seen a city before in their life, never seen the sea, could not read or write, they were marks when they signed for their pay, but all fine fellows, terrific blokes. They looked like they were real bushies

27:30 but thorough men, terrific soldiers. That is why we had a crack wood-chopping team. We would win all the competitions and one of our reinforcements who came up and he was the Queensland champion. We got him as a reinforcement. We never lost a wood-chop with all these good men. And we had two blokes that were terrific with a crosscut saw. They

28:00 could cut it off as quick as a chainsaw they were that good. Different tricks what to do. If they were going to sharpen their crosscut saw, this bloke, Ronny Powell – he is dead now – he just got an axe and cut a straight groove, just got the crosscut saw and tapped it into this groove and then got two axes and went along and set it. You could run your eye along and there wouldn't be a tooth out of place, just file it. He said, "Well,

28:30 if you come into town to sharpen a crosscut saw, you are out in the bush you have got to sharpen it out here and that is what I am doing here." They could teach you a lot. He was in the pioneers, Ronny Powell. He said, "I will show you how to bring down all these trees with one tree." They were big trees. "We will go in and cut a scarf in that one and a scarf in that one and this one, and this one there we will bring down.

29:00 I will bring it amongst those and bring the lot down together." We were cutting corduroy for roads and making paths up the mountains. You need a lot of timber, but they showed you a lot of the shortcuts. We reckoned we were smart, smart city slickers, and they would make it a humpy in no time out of bark while you are looking and getting wet.

29:30 They would get an axe and cut these big bits of bark up and knock up a humpy like the Abbos [Aborigines] would.

**Was there any area where the city slickers had one over the bushies?**

Only with smartness and wisecracks and make them look like a village idiot, but the hard yakker and the short cuts – they were the boys. Everybody got on well together, all terrific blokes. You wouldn't pick some of these big bush blokes,

30:00 they were big powerful buggers. I didn't know that this Powell, he said, "I have never seen the sea. I have never seen the city. I wouldn't know what it looked like." He said, "I have lived in the bush all my life." When he came and saw the city he stood there looking around, and when he saw the sea on the boat he couldn't believe it.

30:30 He is dead and gone now too. The bushie could teach you tricks as much as you thought you were a city slicker and cunning, when it come to the shortcuts they were good, and good blokes. A lot of them, good farmers.

**What,**

31:00 **finishing off, comparing your Bougainville and New Guinea experiences, what were the big differences in the campaigns there?**

The campaign in New Guinea, the movements were over longer distances plus the mountains were more savage, the climate seemed to be entirely different. Bougainville, it had its mountains

31:30 but you had avenues of getting through without worrying about the mountains. With New Guinea we would climb a mountain and as soon as you climbed that there was another one and then another one, it was no set pattern. But on Bougainville there was a set pattern. It was fairly flat, even though it was jungle it was good, and in my book it was a lot easier to defend once you dug in and put the wire around,

32:00 whereas New Guinea to me was a lot tougher, not in the fighting, but tougher terrain. It was vastly different. It was just surprising that we were striking bigger forces in Bougainville. In New Guinea, when we got into the campaign and they were in retreat and in retreat from many places,

32:30 they were hot-heeling it off to different places. When you see the reports that they had lost Lae and other places, Madang, and they were making Wewak their base, but all these thousands of troops spread from one end of New Guinea had to get back to that area and we were trying to put them in different places and bottle them up. You were covering large

33:00 areas to get to them, and when you have a... Our longest was in the end from Kancura [?] Saddle through to Bogajim, 50 mile completely. That is a long way to cart things and keep up supplies and everything. It was one of the longest of Australian troops. That is what killed the Japanese too, they couldn't keep up

33:30 on foot. That is what beat them on the Kokoda in the end, having to cart everything overland from Buna to Kokoda. It was too far. In the end they couldn't keep their troops up supplied with everything that they needed. That was… And the way we fell back quickly and stopped to prop and then held them,

34:00 then they were exhausted. By that time the push was on. In the end they were getting pushed back everywhere and as they lost the sea battles which was keeping them supplied they were more or less in isolated prisons fighting at the same time. Even Borneo and those places, before our blokes landed there it was 18 months before since they had any oil out of Borneo. They couldn't get it out.

34:30 They lost control of the sea. Any time a ship poked its nose around there… We don't even know if that was a useful campaign. We got nothing out of Borneo.

**When you came back from New Guinea you said that you did the big march in Melbourne?**

We came back through Townsville and by train right down to Melbourne, and then we were given leave passes

35:00 at Watsonia and told to report back. I forget how much we had. I know I went to a grand final because Richmond played Fitzroy at the grand final at St Kilda, so we must have been home September. I think we came home in August and we had September and part of October, and then we had the march in October and everybody had a great leave

35:30 and put on a bit of weight, and everything was pretty good. And we had to report back to Watsonia because it was one of the main barracks, huts and tentage and everything else. We were all formed up for this brigade march through the city. We were brought out to Watsonia by electric train which came from out of Watsonia, and brought into the city. God knows how many streets we went down and

36:00 plenty of bands, and that was a great thrill, really great thrill.

**What did that response mean?**

It made the blokes feel like they had really done something, and it was appreciated. Because it was in the papers gone through New Guinea and the battles and what campaigns we had won and what places we had been, and the paper had a good knowledge of who we were. There was only one other brigade had a march, that was the 17th Brigade.

36:30 They were a crack brigade. And us getting one and all the dignitaries on the saluting base, thousands of people, they were about 6 deep on the barriers and all giving you things and cheering. It made you feel as though you were really appreciated. The paper gave it a good wrap up with everything prior, that is why there was a good crowd in the city. It was a good day, lovely sunny day.

37:00 When we marched round the streets we finished up just outside the [Royal] Botanical Gardens. We all formed up in the park waiting for the train to take us back to Watsonia. We had one night in Watsonia and taken down to the train again to the Tablelands to start getting prepared. We had no idea we were going to Bougainville.

**When you did get back after Bougainville and Rabaul? Did you get the same sort of response?**

37:30 No, it subsided because… The response was still good, but the glamour and glory had gone off it because it was 6 or 7 months after the war was over, even a bit longer by the time I got home. We came home on another American troop ship called the George Town Victory and it came to Sydney.

38:00 They picked us up in double-decker buses from the wharf and took us out to Marrickville. And I will admit there was still a good response in the streets as the buses went with us all on. There was a lot of applause. But the glamour had gone off it by then and then I come home and the rest of the unit was either home, and the young blokes, those who had volunteered to go to Japan.

38:30 I had my leave and then I reported because I still didn't have enough points to be discharged, and had my interview in front of an officer and he looked at me and said, "Have you been in the infantry all the time?" I said, "Yes, the New Guinea campaign, Bougainville campaign, and I finished up at New Britain." He said, "You have never been in any other unit other than infantry all the time?" "Infantry my whole military life." He said, "Right, a good posting."

39:00 I said, "Where?" He said, "Victoria Barracks." I was there from I think it was February to August, which is like I used to go home in the tram and train every night just like the office workers, and go and do me time in the barracks. It was like an office job. That was the best 6 months I had in my life. I finished up

there as a bar steward in

39:30 the officers' mess. That was a good 6 months. The blokes had an easy run, good easy jobs through the war, were sent to Bandang and all these places, but if you were a footslogger and had a fairly rough time, a good job in Melbourne. It was like living at home and just coming in like an office worker on the train every day and catch the tram out to the barracks.

40:00 This bloke came up one day and said, "You are ready for discharge." I went out to Royal Park and that was it – discharged. That was 12 August 1946.

**Frank, in wrapping up could you tell us how you thought that your service had influenced you as a person? What sort of man you came back as?**

I think it was

40:30 an experience that you probably could have done without, but then again looking at it and knowing you come home safe, I was all the wiser when I came home. Possibly it did me a lot of good and I think it was a great experience. At the time when things were tough probably wouldn't think that, but when you look at it you wouldn't have known what you have done anyway

41:00 after being there, but knowing you had been there and done your job and come home and started a good life. I have had good life, had a good job, had businesses, and I can't complain at all. I just feel as though I had done something that needed to be done at the time. I might have been made at the time doing it.

41:30 You get older. When you come home I feel quite good about it as I do today I feel. It is still lovely to go and see your mates. It is a great feeling being with them and I have still a lot coming for tea, and they come up and stay with me and that. You never forget them, even though they weren't in your platoon. They were with you. They were like brothers.

42:00 Just like brothers.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**