# Australians at War Film Archive

## Charles Richards (Rowley) - Transcript of interview

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http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1144

## Tape 1

01:10 **So we'll just begin by talking about the very beginning and your childhood and firstly where were you born?**

In Summer Hill.

**Summer Hill, Sydney?**

Yes.

**And what was the year?**

1916.

**And what were your parents doing at this time?**

You mean nine months before rejoicing in a son. My father

02:00 was a cartographer. I should mention that both of my parents were deaf. My father was born deaf as a result of his mother having rubella and my mother became deaf as a result of having diphtheria.

**And so you grew up with parents that were completely deaf?**

Correct.

**And so does that mean that you learnt sign from a very early age?**

02:30 Oh yes, sign language, but the parents were remarkably good at lip reading and I'm afraid I do that all the time and it helps me with my limited hearing but they could follow a conversation quite easily. My mother would go in and she could go into a shop and ask for things and the

03:00 attendant wouldn't know she was deaf until they turned around to get something off a shelf.

**Extraordinary, extraordinary. We'll move on. I mean there's an enormous amount. I'm fascinated in how you then learned, your mother could obviously talk I take it. She had language if she went**

03:30 **deaf later. You learnt your language through her because obviously the child picks up**

But my father did speak quite well.

**Even though he was born deaf?**

Yes and my mother in fact lived at, her parents died when she was very young and she lived at the deaf and dumb school and she used to teach the

04:00 deaf kids how to speak. Now you work it out. She was remarkable. They were both remarkable. The only reason I'm talking about this is that I think it's relevant to part of my later history is that I learnt a degree of independence at that stage which was important.

04:30 **Okay, well we'll come back to that. You were born in the middle of the war to end all wars. As you were growing up did you think there would be another world war?**

I would doubt that I even thought about it.

**As a teenager obviously you would have been aware of –**

05:00 At that stage, you know, at school you know, once a week we used to have a parade on the school ground and salute the flag and do all that. And I guess at that stage we would have believed that Armistice Day was the day that ended all the wars.

**And did you – were there cadets at the school that you went to?**

No.

05:30 **So were other schools training their students in cadets? Were you aware of cadets?**

I would have been aware of cadets. I don't know what schools would have had cadets but we didn't. I was at Fort Street, that's the high school.

**When did it become in your thinking, when did you become aware**

06:00 **that the world was probably heading towards another war?**

Well in 1934 the year that I commenced medicine at the university I joined the militia and I guess that we were training for war then.

06:30 **As militia what sort of war were you training for? Was it a particular theatre of war that you were imagining? Did you imagine that you would be fighting in Europe or did you imagine you'd be fighting at home defending the home country?**

That's a difficult question. We were pretty well aware that Japan was to

07:00 be a likely enemy, apart from of course Germany. So that, you've caught me a bit on the hop there but I would have thought of fighting in Europe as we had in the First [World] War and where we were going to be fighting in relation to the Japanese I don't recall.

07:30 **Let's talk a little bit about the militia and your training. You said when you began studying as a doctor you also joined the militia.**

Correct.

**What prompted you to enlist in the militia? What was it?**

I think the main reason was two of my closest friends had already joined

08:00 and being medical students, impecunious the odd pay that you got from being in the militia appealed to some degree, but it was really to be with my mates. At school I was interested in maths and they had joined an

08:30 artillery survey company as it was only a small unit and there was a lot of maths involved in that in survey work and that appealed to me.

**I'm wondering in terms of the images that we received of World War I and the stories that we get of World War I are of a place of extreme horror and I'm wondering why, were you aware of that when you**

09:00 **enlisted in the militia? Were you aware of what Australian soldiers had been through?**

Oh I think so.

**I'm wondering in that awareness what then…you tell me that it's your friends that took you there –**

I'm sorry I don't get the point.

**I'm wondering why you would choose to become a soldier having**

09:30 **knowledge of what ultimately a soldier, where a soldier could ultimately end up in that if you knew the stories of the trenches in World War I and that you could ultimately be there.**

I guess that my father and his family didn't have a war record but my

10:00 mother had a family history that goes back to 1199 and scattered through it are a lot of admirals and God knows what, and I guess I believed it was just part of my job to serve the country.

**Let's talk about the artillery survey training. What sort of things did you do as part of that training?**

10:30 Well as the name would imply, surveying was a big factor but the survey company was divided into three sections. One was pure survey. The second one was what they called flash spotting which was a technique of determining enemy gun positions by observing the flash and the angle

11:00 from a known point, you could calculate where the gun was and the third one was what was known as sound ranging, and by that we had microphones planted out in the field and they would pick up the sound of the gun and the time interval. There was a difference in time

11:30 that the sound reached the various microphones and by calculating procedure you'd be able to intersect and produce where the gun was and this involved surveying. You had to survey the microphone position.

You also had to have a meteorological section where we had to calculate

12:00 the wind velocity which was essential and there was a machine with very fine wires and they used to move when the sound hit the – the soundwaves hit the microphones. It would cause air to move across the microphone which was a heated wire and then there was a camera which had these half a dozen strings and they would deviate, each of them would deviate

12:30 in turn when the sound reached the microphones, so that that necessitated as I said a camera. That necessitated a dark room and being able to process the film through developer and fixer. So it was quite a variety of

13:00 experts and in our particular unit we had fellows who were professional surveyors, professional photographs and whatever and being a medical student I was a sort of a one-off. I was neither of those and it didn't alter the fact that I gradually went through the ranks, got my commission and commanded that particular section.

13:30 **What was your responsibility within the company then?**

Well I started off as a lowly gunner. That was, you know, laying wire and doing the hard work. I got sick of that so I got promoted and went through and as I say I became a sergeant and then got my commission and

14:00 commanded the company.

**How did you, how was the process of promotion determined?**

By examinations and to get your first stripe literally you had to do the parts of the examination which were, well the examination paper was in three parts. The part that was exclusively for the first stripe, for the

14:30 second stripe and the third stripe sergeant and unless you were able to pass the sergeant's bit of the paper you couldn't get your first stripe or the second one. So it was a case of studying and working hard and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

**And where would you train?**

Victoria Barracks in Sydney and then we used to do exercises out at Liverpool, Holsworthy, that area.

15:00 **Okay because you eventually end up back at Holsworthy for your training?**

Yes for the second (UNCLEAR)

**In the same camp I would imagine.**

Well nearby.

**And how often would you do these training exercises? Was it a weekend thing or was it once a month you would go?**

As I recall the parades were on a weekly basis. I'm not sure of that, but I

15:30 think it was weekly and then there would be two or three weekend exercises during the year and then a fortnight camp at the end, some time during the year.

**And in that fortnight would you do war exercises? Would they actually create, you know, the conditions of war where you would have to?**

Well we thought they were at the time but they bore little resemblance to

16:00 war conditions. No it was essentially this was a specialist unit and we did go into camp with the artillery, the medium artillery. They were the 6 inch gun. We did go into the camp with them and we used to use their guns as the source of sound.

**And what was the pay, do you remember?**

16:30 Oh I've forgotten. They used to be pennies in those days. No, very small but it meant a lot to an impecunious medical student.

**I'm also wondering, in the Reserve today, if you join the Reserve Army today which I suppose there are certain parallels in terms of the sort of commitment that you have to make there are an enormous**

17:00 **amount of benefits that you get. You can get a very cheap mortgage loan. Were those sort of ...**

No, no way.

**So it just simply a couple of pennies and the fun of being with your mates?**

And you know doing something that was interesting and challenging. At the university I could have

joined the University Regiment, but I figured

17:30 that there was not much point in doing military training with my peers at the university because I wouldn't be treating them. I wouldn't need to know anything about them. It was more important to get into an outside unit where the ordinary Joe Blows were involved and it would give me a

18:00 better understanding of the problems or whatever of the fellows that I would be treating later in life.

**As a doctor were you training to be a GP [general (medical) practitioner] or what was your ultimate goal there? What were you intending to graduate as?**

I think surgery appealed to me as a student. I think it's appropriate to

18:30 mention at this stage that an aunt married a doctor who practised in a country town, Kyogle on the north coast of New South Wales, and from school days I spent all my Christmas holidays with them and during the university the same thing, and of course they were three months Christmas holidays and from first year medicine my uncle used to take me up to the

19:00 theatre every morning when he was operating and I started off, the old matron made me do the dirty nurse jobs, scrubbing the floors doing all that and handling instruments and whatever and then my uncle allowed me to assist him. By the time I got to third year I had participated in I

19:30 think it was over fifty anaesthetics and he taught me the need for recording accurately, observing and recording and I had notes years ago where at the third breath he coughed, at the fifth breath his eye twitched. You know those sorts of things. But in retrospect that was all terribly important. Learning to observe, record and then analyse those things

20:00 which after all is the so called scientific method. So that by the time I finished university I had performed a number of operations, appendices and whatever.

**And I imagine a number of your fellow students wouldn't have had the opportunity.**

20:30 I was extremely fortunate, extremely fortunate. By the time I graduated I was fully familiar with working in an outpatients department or casualty ward where the accidents used to come in and I'd see them. You know, starting from doing nothing gradually but the important thing was this

21:00 business of having to record it all which I did and that became relevant later on in my story.

**Let's move on. Let's start to look at the World War II and the rest of that story. Where were you when war was declared?**

21:30 I remember it vividly. The war was declared on the 3rd September 1939. On the 4th September I was, I had already passed my examinations to become a lieutenant. The three officers senior to me in the sound ranging thing had already enlisted and we went into camp at Dapto on the Sunday morning, the day war was declared and I found myself there with one

22:00 lonely pip, in command of the group and we were in Dapto camp. There was a tin hare racing, racetrack there and we occupied that and I remember seeing very vividly the night when the announcement was made and the different reactions with the various people. The young were

22:30 all excited and it was wonderful. There were a couple of First War, World War I people there and I can still see their long, far away look in the eyes you know. You poor bastards, what are you going cop.

**The World War I these were guys who were part of the company, the artillery company? They were in the militia at the time is that right?**

Yeah.

23:00 **I'm interested why, you were obviously, I get the impression that you were training with the militia in September, August/September, is that right?**

Yes.

**Why were you there? Were you there because you were aware?**

Oh no, no. It was just a regular week or a fortnight camp. You know the

23:30 annual camp and it just happened to be in Dapto, and of course we had theodolites and other surveying equipment. There wasn't a rifle among the lot of us. You know we were far from troops but it didn't alter the fact that as we were surveying through the country, the local mums used to come out of their house with a tray of scones and coffee and whatever

24:00 because they saw us as saving their country, which was far from the truth.

**What's a theodolite?**

A theodolite is a surveying instrument which sits up on a tripod like that one, and you look through it and you measure angles, elevation and angles, lateral angles and use that for surveying positions.

24:30 **So that would be your primary instrument, in terms of determining where the guns were?**

Oh no. That was in doing the survey work for where we placed the microphones which in turn would tell us where the guns were.

**So you're in Dapto, you learn that war has been declared and**

25:00 **Menzies automatically says that Australia is at war as a result. What did you do from there? Did you stay in Dapto?**

We were only there for the, you know, regular camp. I'm not sure whether it was a week or a fortnight.

**And where did you, so what did you do after the camp finished?**

I went back to, this happened to be my final year of medicine and then I

25:30 had the finals coming up in November that year and, I'm just trying to think, we had another camp that I went to which was in, near Maitland, a

26:00 place called Largs. We were there for a fortnight or whatever and then the exam was in as I say November. We had a scheduled month camp at the same time which corresponded with the final examinations and in those days the final examinations extended over a month because you had

26:30 written papers and then vivas, you know, viva voce [verbal examination] and whatever. The two, the examination and the camp coincided. So we'd set up all the procedure for the first three weeks. The last week of the camp was where we would be using our equipment to pick up gun positions and that was vital. So I readjusted the

27:00 examinations that I had to go into the first three weeks. So some days I'd be doing two or whatever exams on the one day so that I would have those and I well remember turning up in one of the exams which was the last day, it was a Friday afternoon, and I was going into camp that

27:30 afternoon up in Maitland and I was in uniform with my white coat over it, and my examiner was in uniform with a white coat on and we chatted about the camp. He said, "We'd better have some – I'd better ask you a question, hadn't I?" Now whether I would have got through or not I don't know but we did manage.

**The militia ultimately were determined to be the Home Army, weren't they?**

28:00 Yes that's right.

**So as a member of the militia were you satisfied with staying at home or did there come a point where you decided you wanted to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?**

Once the war started, the objective was to get into the AIF but I had only

28:30 just graduated, so I needed to do some hospital training before I could you know move out as it were into the big world as a doctor. So I went into the Mater Hospital at North Sydney as a resident in 1940 but I only got as

29:00 far as September. Again I was still in the militia and going into camp and doing things and I realised, oh let's stop mucking about, let's join the AIF and be done with it which I did in September 1940.

**Had you then completed your residency at that stage?**

No. Theoretically I should have waited until the end of the year.

**But the AIF was willing to …**

29:30 Well to me it was more important and I guess not being very modest, I reckoned that I'd already had a lot of hospital training before, so another couple of months wasn't going to make that much difference.

**And it didn't matter in terms of the AIF, that you didn't need the formal notification?**

Oh no, oh no.

30:00 **Let's talk about your enlisting in the AIF and where you did that, and what was the procedure.**

Oh the procedure I guess I fronted up somewhere and said I wanted to be in the AIF. Not quite like that. Over the years I had got to know a number of the people who were in senior army positions by the time the

30:30 war was declared and the commander, CRA, the commander of royal artillery was one Boots Callaghan who I knew pre-war and he was an incredible guy. He knew everybody by name. You know he wouldn't see me for twelve months, eighteen months, "Oh good morning Richards, how

31:00 are you?" You know, extraordinary fellow and one that engendered a certain degree of friendship and

whatever. So about September he said they'll be forming another artillery regiment, do you want to be the RMO [Regimental Medical Officer] of that regiment? They'll be forming this soon", so this seemed to be an

31:30 appropriate time to join. So I enlisted, what actually in what form that took I don't remember but I converted then from the artillery to the medical corps. And I think it is important that I always saw myself as a gunner in an artillery unit doing a medical job. Just the same as you had

32:00 sigs or surveyors or whatever in the artillery unit. So I was first and foremost a gunner, and many of the artillery officers in my regiment subsequently I had known before the war. They had also been in the militia. But coming back to the enlistment, part of the enlistment procedure was to go out to the showground to learn how to salute and to

32:30 march and do those things and I reported to the major who was in charge who was also a friend of mine from militia days and he realised that this was a bit unnecessary and we spent the first couple of nights in the mess and then there was a position required out at Liverpool as a medical

33:00 officer to the Liverpool camp, and although I was in the AIF I was attached to a militia unit out there. And I was there for a couple of months before the regiment was formed. And then one day I got a telephone call from Boots Callaghan to say that the new regiment had been formed. The

33:30 CO [commanding officer] was John O'Neill. He would be at Rosebery Racecourse. So I took myself out. It happened to be the 11th November that I went out, and officially the unit was formed the next day. But on the 10th November I rang up and said that I was who I was, could I speak to Colonel O'Neill. "We don't have a Colonel O'Neill, there's a Major O'Neill here." "I'm

34:00 looking for the CO of the 2/15th Field Regiment." "No such thing." We were all terribly secret at that stage and I said, "Well wait a minute, I've just been appointed as RMO." So I went out all spick and span on the next morning, on the 11th and I was in camp at Liverpool so we went down, I went down to the racecourse, introduced myself and half of them I already

34:30 knew. There were only a dozen or so there. I finished later on at about half past ten or something and then we were going back down through the city to get to the camp, going down Oxford Street. I can see it now, all the traffic had stopped and I said to my driver, "This is bloody nonsense, come on. We'll go down the side street," and of course what I didn't realise it

35:00 was 11 o'clock and all the streets came to a halt and there was this army car breaking the rules, but anyway.

**We should probably point out just for the purposes of the Archives, the showground that you enlisted in is now in fact the Fox Studios.**

That's right.

**You go to Liverpool with the 2/15th as the RMO?**

35:30 RMO, yeah.

**I'm interested too in just talking a little bit more about this identification you have primarily as a gunner before being a doctor. Did that mean when it came to service and battle that you worked**

36:00 **more as an infantry soldier? How did you reconcile – ?**

At no stage was I an infantry soldier, dear oh dear.

**An artillery soldier.**

That's better.

**... identifying yourself as an artillery soldier and a doctor.**

Oh well, I was a medical officer and there was no argument about that but

36:30 I was able to participate in the various artillery, say battery commander's conferences and things like that because I had already known some of them and I was able to take an active part in meetings and things because I knew what they were talking about and part of it.

# Tape 2

00:54 **I want to take you back over a couple of things, if I may, because there's some very interesting matters in what you were speaking about before and I think we could talk a little more about them. In talking about both your parents being profoundly deaf, what was life like in that household?**

I knew no other life so it was perfectly normal to me. My parents were,

01:30 my mother was a school teacher. Her parents died when she was very young so she was brought up by an aunt and worked and lived at the Deaf and Dumb School and she became deaf as a result of diphtheria at the age of, well, I don't know, 3 or 4, or something like that. My father on the

02:00 other hand was born deaf and he, both of them could speak quite well. They could be understood. I've frequently been in say a shop where they've been shopping and the shop assistant hasn't known that they were deaf until the assistant turned round to say will you have one these or one

02:30 of those and realised that they were deaf. They were extremely bright, both of them. My father was a cartographer and my mother was a school teacher of all things teaching the deaf how to speak. They could both speak very well and be understood.

**Did you feel different?**

03:00 I've often been asked that. I felt privileged that I had the edge on other people.

**When you were, at the time that you were growing up with them how aware were you of World War I veterans around you, living in the street?**

03:30 Well my aunt was married to a World War I veteran. My mother's brother was a World War I veteran so that you know I was fully aware of World War I people.

**What sort of stories did you hear?**

04:00 The quick answer to that is very few. People didn't talk about it anymore I guess than we talk about a lot of the details of you know our experiences.

**Did you read about it in magazines or in books written for boys, adventure books?**

Oh I'm sure we did. I can't remember any specific.

**What was Australia like then?**

Say again.

04:30 **What was Australia like then?**

Australia?

**Yeah. I mean what was it like being an Australian in 1924, in those early 1920's?**

Well how do you answer that, because we had nothing to compare it with. We hadn't been in Australia in 1914 or something. You know it was just the way it was.

**I understand that. I suppose what I'm really meaning is can you talk**

05:00 **a little about the way you lived your life. Remember that in dealing with this archive what we're dealing with is people often from now on just simply have no comprehension of what life was like then. How did you get around? What was transport like? What kinds of meals did you eat? Did you like life? Were you aware of Britain? All of those, you know the things that go to make up our lives. I mean just start anywhere and see where it goes for you.**

05:30 Like how did we get around? Things called feet. Occasionally we'd go by bus or tram or train or whatever but I mean we'd think nothing of walking. For instance I went to school at infant's school, we lived in Summer Hill in Haberfield, and it was probably two miles. I used to walk to and from school every day and think nothing of it. I don't know how

06:00 to answer that. Ask it again.

**Let me be specific then. Talk to me about what you understood Australia's relationship with England, with Britain was at the time.**

Ah well, Britain of course was the Mother Country and we, I suppose were

06:30 the children or one of the children of it, and you know Britain was the be all and end all and we were just a colony of Britain.

**Did you agree with that?**

I don't know that I had an option to agree or disagree. As far as I was concerned, it was just a fact.

07:00 **You had a cartographer father and a school teacher mother, so why medicine?**

Oh in my mother's family there were a number of medicos. They were naval surgeons, not those surgeons but naval surgeons. My mother's

07:30 family history teemed with navy people, a few admirals and whatever but my father's sister married a

doctor and he was in a place called Kyogle which is on the north coast and as I said earlier I used to spend all my long holidays up there and they were, I was going to say second parents to me. You know I spent a lot of time with them.

08:00 **But it's a lot of hard work, Rowley, to become a doctor. It's a lot of hard work. I mean it can't just be because you had relatives that were doctors. There must have been something else in you that made you want to go down that path.**

Oh well a trivial answer to that is when my father heard that he had a son

08:30 his comment was, "And he shall be a doctor."

**That's the trivial answer, what's the real answer?**

And quite frankly I was unaware of that of course as a kid and this was before my aunt was married. Apart from then wanting to be a bus driver or a train driver or you know whatever because you got a ride for nothing, I always wanted to do medicine. Now why, I really can't tell you, but it

09:00 goes right back to before teenage.

**I'm a film maker because I like telling stories. I understand that that's the reason why I do what I do. You clearly have had a life of real satisfaction out of being a doctor.**

Oh absolutely.

**But why is that? Can you explain to me? I don't understand what it**

09:30 **is about medicine that inhabits someone so much that they know this is the job they want to do.**

It's a good question. I'm afraid I can't answer that. As I say, it would have been before I was a teenager because I clearly knew before I left primary school what I wanted to do because in those days you had to do

10:00 certain subjects, Latin and modern language to matriculate for medicine and that decision had to be made in the first year of high school. So clearly I was quite made up in my mind as a primary school boy. Now what triggered it I really don't know.

**Never had any doubts all the way through training?**

10:30 Oh never. Coming back, it may be that my mother's family's record of doctors may have had some bearing on that. I don't know.

**The notion of a doctor and the military together is a curious one isn't it?**

No.

**Why not?**

Well the military has got to have doctors.

**I mean a doctor's job is essentially to heal the sick rather than necessarily to heal the wounds of men injured in war.**

11:00 Oh we're getting into a philosophic thing.

**That's fine, let's get into a philosophic thing. I think it's really interesting don't you?**

My approach was essentially prevention. I ran hygiene courses. I did all those sorts of things. The traditional hygiene corporal or NCO [non commissioned officer] or

11:30 whatever was a bloke in most units who was hopeless at everything else and so they'd make him a hygiene corporal whereas I saw him as very important and I guess prevention of illness, I mean we knew from previous records that most casualties in war are from sickness not from

12:00 bullets and that it was essential to have a high standard of hygiene to prevent a number of things happening and I guess I was dedicated to the prevention side of medicine which was why I got into various things that

12:30 I did post-war but it was essentially in those early days training of troops in first aid. As an example the original establishment of a unit of a regiment provided for one corporal AMC [Army Medical Corps] for the regiment. Now clearly

13:00 that wasn't enough and I heard of a friend of mine who finished up as Professor John Lowenthal who finished up as the dean of the faculty of medicine but pre-war I knew him as one of the boys. He was in the AIF ahead of me and he trained what he called battery first aid workers so that there were three batteries in a regiment. So that there was the regimental

13:30 one and then the three batteries. These were additional to establishment and that seemed to be a pretty

good idea. Each battery has two troops. So I trained, I thought that was such a good idea I'd go one stage further and I would train first aiders in each of the troops. So that we had in effect

14:00 nine of them plus the regimental one trained in first aid. Now to achieve this we realised that there was a need to have first aid training right through the unit not just in say headquarters or whatever. So that I ran a first aid course of 70-odd people after the regiment, shortly after the

14:30 regiment was formed, where we had one from every gun, one of the gun crew and one from every observation post, every headquarters or kitchen or whatever trained in first aid. The need of course was to be able to

15:00 equip them. I ran this course for a week and we covered not only St John course, first aid but the army requirements of first aid.

**And this was all because you believed that going down this path would actually protect men's lives more than anything?**

Exactly. Prevention, prevention. And we ran this course for a week.

15:30 Covered the whole lot. To add a little bit of colour we got the nurses to come in and make beds, show them how to make beds which appealed to some of the boys. Now the best of those we gave additional training to and made them what I called troop first aiders as distinct from the battery first aiders and distinct from the regimental ones. Now the problem was

16:00 to equip them so we, I've forgotten how but I had some contacts with the radio people somewhere and one of the radio stations put on an appeal for us and we raised quite a lot of money. The object was to provide each of those first aiders with a haversack with bandages and you know various

16:30 first aid stuff so that we'd have one on each gun which became part of gun equipment, on each headquarters, on you know right through the regiment. We had steel boxes which were lined with felt and inside that a

17:00 cloth lining with pockets in it and we had an established list of things that went into it. Bottles of this or ointments, lotions, tablets and all the rest of it and they each went into their particular pocket.

**Was this ever tested in the field, Rowley?**

We used it.

**It was tested in Singapore and Malaya?**

Oh yeah.

**It worked?**

17:30 Oh yeah, and in fact going across in the ship from Australia to Singapore, my sergeant used one of these boxes which was quite adequate just to run the regiment. So we had each of these boxes for the batteries, three batteries and then the troops as I say had their haversacks and each

18:00 kitchen etcetera. Now how do you fill these boxes and haversacks? Clearly we didn't have on establishment sufficient bottles of this and whatever. As the CO had some contact with ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries], the glass people, and we got all the jars we wanted.

**You were able really to organise effectively an entire regiment in a new way of dealing with medical treatment in the field.**

Oh yes.

18:30 **But that all happened later on. Let me take you if I may to what you were telling Patrick [interviewer] about before which is the night war declared when you were in Dapto. You talked about observing young people get excited by the prospect, about World War I veterans being a little worried about it and knowing what was going to happen. What was your response?**

19:00 Well I guess having trained for by this stage six years in the militia you know I guess we were looking for a war to happen. That's what we were there for and we were excited that we were at last going to be able to do something useful, what we'd been trained for.

**So you felt like a real soldier?**

19:30 Well as I said earlier I saw myself as a gunner doing it subsequently doing a medical job. You know I saw myself, there's an old saying once a gunner always a gunner and you know that certainly was true as far as I was concerned.

**What did your mum and dad think about war being declared?**

Well mother certainly was very proud that I was upholding the family tradition of being in the services and I think father was pretty proud too.

20:00 **Did they say anything to you at that time about it or write to you about it?**

I don't remember any specific conversation, but they certainly were supportive and were very proud of their son who started off as a gunner and then became a lance bombardier whatever.

20:30 **But your feelings, I mean I understand that you felt you prepared for this, Rowley, but pardon me saying this, but that's sort of the first level of what everybody thinks about it. I mean your life was about to be turned over and I guess you at least understood that, that you would inevitably end up leaving Australia to fight elsewhere. Were there other feelings going on for you as well?**

21:00 I guess you know I've been asked this many times. I guess it was just a transitional thing. You know we had been training for so many years to do certain things, and then this was just the next stage in the proceedings.

**Did you have a girlfriend at the time?**

Oh, many.

**Why did I know that was going to be the answer? Was there someone special?**

Again because of the war, I had very strong views that one should not

21:30 make close attachments. I deplored people getting married before they went overseas because I didn't think it was fair, et cetera, et cetera. So if I felt that either one of us were getting serious it was time to end it. Does that answer your question?

**Well I don't know. Do you think it answers my question? I mean what I'm obviously getting at is whether or not apart from your**

22:00 **mum and dad, was there anyone else around that you felt might be worried about you going away?**

Well obviously my aunt and uncle in Kyogle, they would have been concerned and my mother had a brother who was not deaf incidentally who was in the First War and he, I can't remember what his reaction was.

22:30 My uncle in Kyogle, the doctor one, when he knew of my interest in hygiene was appalled. Looking up drains you know that's not what the army's all about, but as it turned out it was very important.

**So you've now, war's been declared, you join the AIF, when do you**

23:00 **hear that you're going to be, tell me about what happens when you're notified that you're actually going to leave the country.**

To actually leave the country as distinct from joining the AIF?

**Yes.**

Well going back we were part of the 8th Division and the 27th Brigade of 8th Division. That was formed some months after the 22nd Brigade which

23:30 was already in Malaya so that we assumed that we would be joining them. There was a 23rd Brigade who could have assumed the same thing but they finished up in Darwin and were not moved out into the islands, New Britain, Ambon and Timor until almost the last minute. But going

24:00 back, we assumed that we were going up to Malaya and it was in August, yeah August '41. We joined, the unit was established in November '40.

24:30 August '41 we left Australia on our way and we assumed we were going to Malaya but we didn't know until virtually the last minute whether we were going to peel off and go when we were in the Indian Ocean whether we were going to peel off and go to the Middle East or whether we'd go on up north.

**I find that very interesting when you talk about that. You know we didn't know until the last moment. One of the things that young**

25:00 **Australians now find very difficult to understand is this idea of you being in the army and never being told very much. You know not knowing until the last moment even as an officer what was actually going to happen to you. It's very difficult for a young Australian to understand why you wouldn't be told or why you wouldn't have the right to ask about that. Can you talk about the structure of**

25:30 **command inside the regiment? How information would come down about things like where you were going to go?**

Ah well the information coming down as to where we were going to go wasn't within the regiment, it was much higher than that.

**But how would you and the rest of the men get to know about all this?**

Well there are numerous stories told that the station master at Liverpool

26:00 knew all the details of when we were moving. If you wanted to know what was going to happen you asked your batman. You laugh but you know there are many, many examples of this how that sort of information came from entirely outside sources and not through the army sources.

**You had a batman [soldier assigned as officer's servant], Rowley, did you?**

Oh yes.

**From the time that you joined the AIF as the RMO?**

26:30 All officers have batmen, yes.

**What is that actually about, a batman? Can you explain that understanding?**

That's interesting. Are you serious asking that question?

**I am absolutely serious.**

Oh dear. Well I guess it dates back to the old days British Army where

27:00 units were formed by the squire of a village or wherever and his employees became his troops and he would have a servant to look after him and I guess that's where it came from with the British Army and of course in the Australian Army we had these men who were allocated,

27:30 each one had a batman allocated from among the troops and they'd usually be volunteers who'd have a nice easy job polishing leather or whatever who would look after his officer. The way I could upset my batman most was to say oh gee, the CO's Sam Brown [leather belt] looks pretty good

28:00 today, doesn't it, and the next day my Sam Brown would be extra done. But there was a great sense of loyalty between a batman and his officer and my batman during the war became among my closest friends post-war and the interesting thing is that those in the British Army they were

28:30 two entirely different races, officers and men whereas in the Australian Army even in the militia days we would be in camp on exercises and things, the officer would be acknowledged by the troops and all that sort of thing but it didn't stop them at night getting stuck into them in the

29:00 mess or local pub or wherever and not infrequently you'd have a situation where a bank manager would be one of the troops and one of his tellers would be his officer. This literally happened and on parade, on service as it were, one would respect the other. But that didn't stop them from

29:30 having a party otherwise. And this is something the British could never understand how you could maintain discipline and I guess the reason that you're able to maintain discipline was purely and simply on respect. You either had respect to your officer or you didn't.

**What did the batman actually do for you?**

30:00 Polished our leather, Sam Browns or boots, leggings if we had them. Collect our washing or in the days when we'd send it out they'd send it out otherwise they would wash socks and things like that. Keep our area in the quarters where we lived. Going back we're talking about in

30:30 training and before we went into action. We had fixed camps and they would look after our, make our beds for us and you know do those sorts of things and generally make sure, the equivalent of a butler if you like in the British system. In action the batman would make sure that you had

31:00 somewhere to sleep at night. You were busy. He'd set up your camp, your bed and roll and whatever. In some cases they would make sure we had a meal. It depended whether we were eating out of a mess or not but generally just mollycoddle us.

**It sounds like your mother Rowley.**

31:30 Yeah exactly and let's face it the loyalty was quite exceptional, quite exceptional.

**We'll come to that relationship later, but I just wanted to ask one question before we move onto anything else which is after the war when you and your batman obviously went on into a very long friendship there was never then any sense of what he had done for you then? You were on a completely even …**

32:00 Oh absolutely. I would have acknowledged what he had done for me. He'd say, oh that was nothing, but not the other way around. He wouldn't remind me and say do you remember when I, that didn't happen.

**Do you think that's because you're both Australian?**

I'm sure.

**Why? I mean what influence does that have on it?**

Well you're going back. You know, the egalité thing, Australian, there's

32:30 no question about that. We abhorred the distinction between the officers and the troops in the British Army.

**I think all of that is really fascinating and obviously the batman went through your time in captivity with you as well I assume didn't he?**

33:00 Yes for most of it until the railway was finished and I was sent off to Japan and my batman and medical orderly stayed behind.

**Okay in that case we'll come back onto that later. So with your batman and all the other troops you're now on the ship travelling to Singapore or to Malaya, what were conditions on the ship like?**

33:30 We started off from Sydney on the Katoomba which took us to Fremantle and then we switched to a Dutch ship the Savayak [?] and we were passengers on the Savayak whereas the Katoomba was a troopship. We lived in very good quarters and conditions were good.

**For the men as well?**

34:00 Oh yes. Well relatively yes.

**Was there a lot of excitement on board about the possibility of what was to come? I mean by that time in Europe the news was very bad. By that time the news of the war out of Europe was quite grim and by 1941 was there a sense of excitement on the vessel or was there a sense of this is now actually very serious?**

34:30 The correct answer to that is both. Yes to both. We realised it was serious but there was a degree of at long last we're going to be able to do what we've been training to do.

**When you hit, landed in Malaya had you ever been out of Sydney, New South Wales before?**

I had been to Queensland.

35:03 **What was that like?**

Oh, it was all a big experience, I guess.

**Can you talk about that, that first couple of days? What you saw and what you heard and what that felt like?**

In Singapore?

**Yes.**

35:30 Well, when we first got there we were moved to a place called Nee Soon which was the barracks for the Hong Kong-Singapore Anti-Aircraft Artillery and they had an officers' mess there which we called Buckingham Palace, great cedar tables and whatever and these officers

36:00 used to one would sit here and one would sit down the other end, you know they wouldn't talk to one another and all that sort of stuff. We were under canvas but we were there for, I don't remember now, only a matter of weeks and then we were moved up into Malaya itself, a place

36:30 called Tampin where we were in huts there. I think they took over a school building. But coming back to Singapore we were under canvas there and they were typical pukka [colonial Indian term for 'master'] British officers who had very little time or respect for their men. It was just something we didn't understand and equally something they didn't understand was the friendship that

37:00 obviously existed between Australian troops and their officers. Now having said that at the end of the war there was a very strong anti officer feeling by many of the men. That was after the POW [prisoner of war] experience but that's another story.

**Did you have to warn your men about the fleshpots of Singapore? I**

37:30 **mean you were the RMO, you must have had to talk to them.**

Oh we gave them many, many talks you know on the ship coming over and all the rest of it.

**What was contained in those talks Rowley? What do you actually warn them about?**

About those nasty girls up there that were full of disease, and I used to warn them about tinea too, so that when they were having sex they kept

38:00 their boots off in case, on in case they got tinea. Oh no, we constantly warned them and I can remember one talk I gave them. I said that on the ship – "I had told you that 80% of the girls were infected with VD [venereal disease]. I'm

38:30 sorry, I apologise I made a mistake. It was 99%." But anyway there were plenty of talks we gave them on the fleshpots and all that sort of stuff, but that didn't alter the fact that when they went on leave the leave parade came by and we handed them all, they called it a blue light outfit which

39:00 were condoms and cream and ointment and stuff and irrespective of whether they were going to behave themselves or not, they were all given these. I mean you couldn't, I mean the fellow, if you had the situation where they just asked for it, the blokes who needed it most wouldn't ask

39:30 for it. So that you know they were on issue, but there was no question that they had been well briefed.

# Tape 3

00:54 **If we can just go back to arriving at Singapore and Malaya and setting up camp. You went first to Malaya. Can you talk about setting up the aid post and what happened first? What was the first sort of action that went on after you had arrived?**

Well, first of all we were put into the camp at Nee Soon which was an established camp. We were under canvas there and then we moved up into

01:30 Nee Soon, to Tampin which is in southern Malaya in Johor and then we started jungle training. What I haven't said is that we were an artillery unit which were in Australia we were trained on guns. The day we left we found ourselves with 3 inch mortars which was a real downgrading for

02:00 artillerymen and so on the way over on the ship we had to start learning how to use 3 inch mortars on a regimental basis and there was no such thing as a mortar regiment up to that stage and then we had to establish all the rules and procedures and all that sort of stuff. So that when we first

02:30 went to Malaya we were, we had mortars and we were training on mortars which were quite good in the jungle because they break up, up and over whereas artillery on the other hand a low trajectory which is pretty difficult in the jungle. But the guns that we ultimately were issued with were what

03:00 they called Gun Howitzers, 25 pounders. We could either use them as howitzers where they go up and over or whereas guns where they fire pretty well level. Going back, you asked, what did we do in training? By this time, on the medical side, is that what you're asking?

**Or both actually.**

03:30 Well the emphasis obviously was on training individuals to become mortar gunners as distinct from artillery gunners so that you had to start right from basics learning how to handle the mortar and then how to work in troops which would say have four or six or whatever, I can't remember now how many they had, mortars and then how they'd manoeuvre and do all that.

04:00 By this time of course we had our medical personnel well trained. We had not only the battery, by this time, by the time we got to Malaya the official establishment was now one sergeant medical and three corporals, one for each of the batteries, medical corps of course, so that we were able to – we

04:30 had already trained them so that they just changed from the artillery into the medical corps. But then we had the gunners who were trained as first aiders on all the positions, as I've said before and obviously the – when they went out on exercises in the jungle wherever these people were there to

05:00 treat them. So essentially what I was doing was doing myself out of a job for the regimental aid post, and my sergeant, doing him out of a job because all of the treatment was done locally. And one of the reasons which I haven't mentioned before, we figured if we got to Malaya we would be split up. First War and in the Middle East, a regiment would fight as a cut group

05:30 of people. There are 24 guns in a regiment. They'd all be within cooee of one another and they'd all fight together and whatever. We realised that that wasn't going to happen in the jungle and that was one of the main reasons why I wanted first aid training throughout the regiment and because we knew or we anticipated we were going to be scattered all over

06:00 the place which in fact we were. So that coming back to the training, these first aiders were able to be on site all the time. A thing that I hadn't mentioned earlier, we introduced in Australia before we left, was that these troop medical orderlies used to do a medical examination on a daily basis

06:30 of all their troops. In other words they had an nominal role of the troop and as they'd go through the showers they'd be inspected for any skin problem and they had the facilities to treat them, and if they didn't get better within two or three days, then they'd be referred to the regimental aid post and my sergeant would look at them or I'd see them. So that it

07:00 became routine for them to look for tinea in the feet and also any other skin lesions. So much so, that we just didn't have people admitted to hospital with skin troubles, whereas some units had as many as 50% of their troops out of action because of you know they hadn't observed the ordinary simple

precautions.

07:30 **How did the men feel about your hygiene drills as it were, because obviously you had a much better result? Were the men grateful for that?**

Well in the initial stages that bastard Richards copped me this morning for so and so and so and so but it didn't take them long to realise the value of it. And I would say that there's hardly a person in the regiment who doesn't

08:00 relate some dreadful thing I did to them in relation to hygiene. You know, booking them for various things but they realised the value of it. Now for instance we used to insist on sterilising our dixies [mess tins], you know dixie – do you know what that is? A container for food, sterilising it in boiling water before a meal, before you put food into it and then washing it and sterilising it

08:30 after the meal so that you didn't attract flies before the next meal. There were many camps that used to sterilise things before a meal but not after. You know there were just small things. But to answer your question initially there was resistance obviously, typical Australian but once they

09:00 realised the value of it there was no problem at all. I mean later on particularly as POWs, they wouldn't go near food unless they had boiling water to put their dixies in.

**How did you persuade them that this was so important? I mean they realised it over time but how did you actually, and how were your dealings with the men?**

The quick answer to that is you ordered them to do it when they resisted but it didn't take them long to do it. But we used to give, I used to give

09:30 talks on hygiene and all that, flies and the problem with flies. Personal hygiene and things so that they gradually were indoctrinated.

**I was interested in what you were talking before about the sort of kits so that they wouldn't, would have safe sex and not get venereal disease but did you have cases of venereal disease?**

Oh yes. They're Australians.

**How did you deal with them?**

10:00 Oh, they had to go to hospital for treatment.

**And how long would that put them out of action for?**

A couple of weeks. I can't remember now. Two or three weeks.

**And just going back to when you first arrived, you were saying that you had to use mortars instead of guns. I get the sense that no-one was really that aware of jungle fighting and there wasn't a great deal of training about jungle fighting in the early stages.**

Well we obviously had no jungle training in Australia at our time. I mean

10:30 subsequently they had jungle training camps in Queensland but we didn't have that. We had to learn as we went.

**And how much, were you hearing reports of the fighting that was going on in Malaya? Was there information coming back of the conditions they were fighting under?**

Fighting going on in Malaya? Well there wasn't any until after we got there.

**But I mean in terms of action going on. I mean how – was**

11:00 **information passed on in a useful way do you feel about other people and incorporated into training? There must have been an awareness of the terrain and what was going to be involved. You were saying that they changed to mortars from guns. How late was that made? I mean was that something you feel could have been addressed earlier?**

I don't quite get –

11:30 **You said there was a brigade sent ahead of you wasn't there to Malaya. You weren't the first brigade to go. I guess what I'm getting at was information coming back –**

Oh yes. Periodically we had an AGH, which is an Australian General Hospital in Melaka, which was some 20 or 30 miles from Tampin and they used to have meetings, I'm not sure whether it was once a week, once a

12:00 fortnight or something where we as the medical officers to the units were brought to the hospital and we had the opportunity of comparing notes with those who had already been in Malaya for some time. But as an example before we left Australia we anticipated we were going to Malaya and I

12:30 heard of a Malayan civilian doctor and a planter who were in Sydney, how they got to know about it I

wouldn't know, but we invited both of them out to the camp to get the low down on what to do and I got a lot of useful information from them on the management of skin troubles and various

13:00 other things. But coming back, when we got to Malaya itself, we used to have these regular meetings and we as RMOs of units were the lowest on the pecking order of doctors. Hospital doctors of course were up the scale a bit and their job was to teach us how to cope. I remember one particular

13:30 lecture we had from a skin specialist on skin troubles and how to treat it and all that sort of thing and he accused me of concealing skin trouble among the troops, because he didn't have any admissions from our unit. We just plain didn't have any because of these daily skin inspections that I mentioned earlier and that kept you know problems well under control.

14:00 **Do you think those doctors afterwards when you were having much more experience at the front line, you say you were sort of at the bottom of the pecking order, did you feel later on that you had much more valuable experience than them?**

Well to answer your question, yes. Those of us who'd had previous militia

14:30 experience either in the university regiment or wherever used to see, used to refer to those hospital doctors as doctors in uniform and we didn't have a very high regard for them to be perfectly honest. But they had to be quick learners as POWs because they were sent out into the jungle and they had to do what we'd been used to doing all the time.

15:00 **Can you just describe for me about actually sort of setting up the post you know where the action was happening and how the aid post worked when casualties were coming in and things like that?**

Well we had the regimental aid post with my sergeant and we had a truck, at least a RAP, regimental aid post truck, with stuff in it that the sergeant

15:30 looked after and they were traditionally attached to the regimental headquarters which bore little relationship to where the troops were because they were in batteries and troops. There were three batteries to the regiment, two troops to each battery so that they were scattered all over the place. In fact, at one stage we scattered over about a hundred miles so that

16:00 clearly casualties from the troops wouldn't be evacuated as normally through the regimental aid post and my job – I should go back a stage. The day that we went into action was when we received a whole lot of new

16:30 vehicles and there was one stray one tonner which I managed to acquire and I drove it myself right through the campaign and I had it chock-a-block with stores. I started to tell the story. To have our haversacks and kits filled with equipment and what have you I was being entertained at the

17:00 final nest of a field ambulance commanded by a Professor Pete Davies, who was a professor of physiology at the university and he knew me and I knew him quite well and during the course of the dinner, I said, "Now you're leading out of camp in a couple of days, what's happening to all these stores? I need some." And Pete was another word starting with P by this time,

17:30 and he said to his quartermaster Rowley will be in tomorrow just let him have what he wants. So Rowley came in the next morning with his truck. I started at the top shelf and I literally went right through all the shelves and I left him with about half of what he had. So I finished up, I think there were 11 cases of surplus medical equipment which I took away with

18:00 us and I had that in, a lot of it in my truck which I drove myself. So that my particular job during action or even before that was to go out to the various troops or units, see how they were going, let them know where the nearest either battalion or casualty clearing station or whatever where they were to evacuate their wounded, obviously not through us and then to

18:30 make sure that they were fully equipped and I had all the stuff. And I drove that truck from go to whoa while we were in action. So you ask how they were distributed. I maintained contact all the time with these various troops and during action particularly a withdrawing action and you know

19:00 on some occasions we'd withdraw three times in a night. You know that was quite rapid and so it was essential to keep them posted as to where we were. Where to evacuate their – I used to start off each morning at brigade headquarters for arguments sake to find out where the various units were and then I'd go out and visit ours and tell them that the nearest battalion

19:30 was so and so or the nearest casualty clearing station was so and so or whatever. It's a bit hard to describe. You see normally all of this would be just, all of these people would be in one tight little group all within stone's throw of one another, but here it was quite different so we had to set up an entirely different organisation. So coming back to me, how I spent my

20:00 time just wandering around making sure they were supplied and let them know where they had to send their casualties. Now when you talk to Lloyd Karl later, he was with a battalion but he would have remained in his RAP. He would not have been wandering around, because you know he probably

didn’t have a vehicle anyway to do that.

**Where did you commandeer this truck from?**

That’s a good question. In the army one learnt very, very early the art of acquisition. Now for instance when we built our hygiene in Holsworthy

we had to improvise everything, meat house and cook house and everything else. A lot of the local farmers contributed their chicken wire and a lot of things. They were unaware of it, of course, but we had ample supplies of wire and various other things but that goes back, we always helped ourselves. I remember even back in the militia days, we were in the

process of building a camp out at a place called Largs and we wanted some blue metal so I went out with a truck which was a tip-truck and we were loading, we found a heap of blue metal by the road and we were loading it onto the truck or the blokes were loading it onto the truck and I was a very

raw young officer in those days with the one pip and a woman came out of her house screaming like mad, we’ve been waiting for months to get all that to do the road, and blah blah blah. So I put on an act and ticked the fellows off and I said you know put that back and having put it all back she

said now if you go down, turn left at the next corner and then right at the one after that you’ll find lots of it down there. In other words we were well trained as what we called scroungers.

**Do you think within wartime, people’s sort of morality changed – ?**

Oh no question, no question. The most upright honest citizens became the best thieves of all.

**Was that true for you? Did you find yourself doing things that you would never have dreamed of doing?**

Oh God yes. I had no hesitation in knocking things off if we found that, you know, if we wanted it.

**And what was your kind of justification for that? I mean what were you thinking at the time?**

Well I guess it’s the old, old story you’re in uniform and you’re part of the scene and you’re making your contribution and you’re entitled to do what

you want which is not, it doesn’t sound very nice perhaps to you but it was part of the scene.

**Okay, going back to what you were doing at the aid post, who were you working with most closely? I know you talked about, you said about your orderlies, your medical orderlies and how important they were to you. Can you talk a little bit about that? Were they trained before? Did they have medical training?**

I’m absolutely dedicated to recognition of medical orderlies. I have said many times we as the doctors got a lot of kudos, but the kudos should go to the medical orderlies. Now medical orderlies were of two types. Initially we had one corporal, that’s Jim Armstrong who subsequently became a

sergeant when we expanded and we get three corporals. Now he was attached to the regiment from the medical reinforcements or whatever they were as a medical fellow. Delightful fellow. Big, heavy, great ham fist but as gentle as you know could be. He was a chicken farmer from Lake

Macquarie who had no children, was dedicated to looking after people. He was essentially a mother hen and I must confess coming back to batmen, he wasn’t my batman, but he mothered me just as much as my batman did. Now he had been trained in a medical training unit before he was posted to

us but all the rest of our subsequently our three medical corporals were those which I had trained myself and then the ones that were attached to the guns, and you know the 70 odd people who were in the corps. They were all trained within the regiment and the best of them had continuing

training and as I say became troop medical orderlies. In action, sorry in action they functioned, but as POWs we had in addition to those a lot of volunteer medical orderlies who had either no training at all or very little training. But that’s another story.

**So you’re evacuating all the time, action is happening, you’re**

**constantly having to move with the men as the action moves down. Can you just talk a bit about that and the feeling about the push of the Japanese? What were your expectations of the Japanese? What did you think of the Japanese as the enemy at that time? I mean obviously they were pushing down and you were being forced back all the time. What was the sort of feeling about that? I mean was that what you had expected?**

Oh you know, in a word they were little yellow bastards as far as we were

concerned. You know, that was the myopic. They couldn’t see to shoot straight and all that sort of stuff.

We'd been fed all that propaganda which is utter nonsense of course. They were very good soldiers, very good fighters and they were highly trained. The three divisions that we met in

27:30 Malaya had fought in China and you know they were very highly trained which we learned to our what should I say sorrow later just how well trained they were. But when it came to the crunch in terms of hand to hand fighting, bayonet fighting, the Australians were far superior to the Japs in

28:00 bayonet.

**Why was that, do you think?**

I don't know. A bit more rugged, I guess. I don't know. They had been trained well in the infantry in bayonet drill and all that sort of thing. But that wasn't the point of your question. What was your question again?

28:30 **The Japanese were clearly succeeding, how did it feel?**

I think it's important, the technique that the Japanese adopted. Well first of all there were three divisions that landed on the north of Malaya. One essentially came down the east coast, one down the west coast and the

29:00 other one mainly down the middle. Now their technique was to attack whoever they were whether they were British or Indians up in northern Malaya. The Australians were down in the southern bit. They would attack a position and if there was any resistance or counter attack or anything at all, the Japanese would then surround, do a surrounding action

29:30 so that, with the object of surrounding the particular defending group and cut them off and then wipe them out and that was repeated many, many times and it became a question of attack, resistance, outflanking and then the British and Indian forces had to get out of there or get wiped out. So it

30:00 became a question of a series of withdrawals, remembering that there were three, three Japanese divisions and the British and Indians, I've forgotten how many there were, but for instance there would be an Indian division which would normally consist of three brigades. There'd be less two

30:30 brigades and a brigade would have say three battalions less one battalion. In other words a whole division in name would finish up as only quite a small number of people, so that it was quite easy to surround them and of course remembering that they had tanks, they had air support, they were

31:00 able to proceed through impenetrable jungle with the aid of local fifth columnists and of course a lot of the Chinese that we had met pre-war, pre going into action in Malaya were in fact Japanese who were there and as soon as the war started they put on their uniforms and became colonels or

31:30 majors or whatever so that they had plenty of fifth column activity. So that the Japanese were able to come down, do a surrounding action and cut off people if possible going through areas which we believed had been impenetrable.

**I'm interested in that you had this initial perception of the Japanese**

32:00 **soldiers as being myopic and useless yet clearly they were achieving these amazing results. How did you feel about that? How did you get your head around that?**

We didn't like what we found obviously. We obviously realised that they were a more determined and more highly trained bunch of people than we had been led to believe.

**And how did that make you feel about the commanding officers or whoever had led you to believe this?**

32:30 Oh I guess it wasn't our local commanding officers. They would have been divisional or army command in Singapore, the overall commanders there and we didn't have a great deal of time for them as a matter of fact.

**Tell me a bit more about that. How did you feel about them?**

33:00 I guess you've got to think of – how can I answer that? We were doing our job at a local level and we weren't really worried about what was going on up there. That was their problem. I must confess that we were, felt let down and disillusioned at a later stage when we realised that the Japs were

33:30 a far more potent force than we believed them to be, but they were not nearly so well disciplined as the Australians for instance. They would go along the road chattering and making noises and things whereas our troops would move silently. The very first engagement we had at a place called

34:00 Gemas, that was the first Australian contact and that was with the division that came down the centre. There was a bridge which they blew up and they allowed a number of troops to go through first and you know the Japs were on bikes whistling and chattering and going on and even in the jungle

34:30 they would chatter and go on. Our troops could hear them at a distance and deal with them pretty effectively.

**What was your first contact with Japanese soldiers?**

My first contact with a Japanese soldier was after the capitulation in Singapore in Changi. I didn't see a live Jap soldier except looking up in

35:00 the sky you could see the pilot of a plane and you reckoned that you were the only thing that he could see in the whole area. You know you had this awful business of you could see low flying fighter planes and you could see the pilot looking at you and you reckoned that you were the mark, but it wasn't like that at all.

35:30 **What was your immediate impression when you first saw a Japanese soldier after all this time?**

By the time, oh wait a minute. There was a time when I thought I saw a Japanese sniper up in a tree. I got my driver to stop and we had a rifle and

36:00 I dropped the Japanese out of the tree so I thought, a monkey fell down. But no I didn't see a Jap until the thing was all over and by this time, you see. By the time we actually saw live Japanese soldiers they were at a distance so they weren't in close contact with us and we were so tired and done in at the end of the war we were just, you know, it was such a relief

36:30 that it was all over and we didn't have any personal contact with them at all. They were always at a distance. Even when we first went to Changi and we were there for three months, we had very little personal contact with the Japs. It was not until we got onto the railway that we had close

37:00 personal contact. But coming back to the war, your next question.

**I'm interested also, what was life, there was sort of colonial life going on in Singapore which didn't seem to sort of be aware of the war. Can you talk about that a bit?**

It was unreal, absolutely unreal. The war finished on a Sunday and I

37:30 remember I think it was the Wednesday night just a few days before the war finished I'd been down to the hospital to visit my troops who were in hospital and we came back to, I was passing the Goodwood Park Hotel which was a regular stamping ground for troops, before, you know the

38:00 action started. And I don't know how I knew that the doctor who I had met in Australia was in fact at the hotel and so I called in to see him in full battle dress and you know dripping with all the business. I never wore a red cross during the war. I carried a weapon and I reckoned that the Japs

38:30 weren't going to respect, and so I had no red cross on my vehicle or on any of our troops and as it turned out you know what they used to do was to watch where the Red Cross vehicle went and then bomb it. You know they had people observing. But coming back, I went into this hotel to meet this

39:00 friend of mine, and to my horror he was in a tuxedo, the girls were all in you know dinner frocks and all the rest of it playing, I can still see them, playing liar dice. You wouldn't know what liar dice is. It's a gambling game where you throw dice and you pass it onto the next one, and say I've

39:30 got three aces and two kings and he says you know you're a liar and you lift it up and there it is. But they were playing liar dice and you know the war was in Singapore by this stage and these guys should have been the hell out of it and occasionally our troops would go down to say

40:00 headquarters to pick up equipment say signal line and now where is your headquarters, at such and such, 14 Orchard Road. I beg your pardon that's where I live and you know the war had moved to such an extent that we were occupying domestic buildings and the poor blighters who lived there were so far removed from the whole thing that they didn't even, I was going to say that they knew there was a war on but not much more.

40:30 Incredible.

# Tape 4

01:30 **So you've evacuated from Malaya to Singapore, you're in Singapore. Can you tell me about the time of the invasion of Singapore?**

In other words the Malayan campaign has finished.

**Tell me about the end of that, the actual move from Malaya to Singapore.**

02:00 Well the key to that was that the Japanese were doing their encircling movement and the Australians were on southern Johor which is the southern bit of Malaya and we had two brigade groups. That's six battalions and two field regiments etc. and we were spread over a front of a

02:30 hundred miles. The Japanese had been progressing at a rate of about 13 miles a day from the top. I think it was 650 miles altogether. The first 500 miles they came through at about 13 miles per day which is a fair speed considering that they were going through dense jungle in some parts. But

03:00 in addition to that they were going by boat. They would commandeer boats and come down the coast and while the fighting was going on on land at this point some of them would have been down another 50 miles or 100 miles or something coming in ready to cut them off so that the whole procedure was one of from the defender's point of view preventing

03:30 themselves from being cut off and to this end the, there was a delay at Gemas that I mentioned, which was only about three days or three or four days or something like that but at least they were able to hold up one division. That's one battalion holding up a division. On the west coast the

04:00 Japanese had been coming down and also by land and they got to a place called Muar where there was a recently arrived battalion, a couple of battalions anyway of Indians, a brigade group of Indians, I think there were only two battalions of them, supported by a battery from our group, a

04:30 regiment. Now those Indians had arrived a fortnight before. They were partly trained and completely untrained in jungle warfare so it didn't take long for the Japs to wipe them out. The Japs wiped out their brigade headquarters and our battery commander was with him at the time and he

05:00 was killed so that the, very quickly they sent in another battalion of our troops in to assist the original ones that were there, the 29th reinforced by the 19th and their job specified was to hold up that division for one week to

05:30 give the opportunity of the people who were coming, the withdrawing Indians and the British to move down south and move down to Singapore. At the same time of course there was, pardon me, another division coming down the east coast with the outflanking movement so that it was absolutely critical that these two divisions were held up, the one on the

06:00 west coast and which happened to be the guards division, highly trained and one of our battalions, the 29th Battalion lost 417 men killed in action. The 19th Battalion that came to assist them they lost 200-odd killed in

06:30 action but they achieved the objective of holding up those two divisions for about a week and this enabled the main groups to get down. On the west coast, on the east coast there was another brigade over there, Australians

07:00 who held up for a few days a division of Japs but they had to withdraw because they would have been outflanked. So there was this outflanking thing that was going on all the time and fortunately the ones on the west coast were able to hold up the Japs long enough to allow the main body to

07:30 get down and the same thing applied on the other side. Finally all the troops withdrew across the causeway that went from Johor Bahru to the island of Singapore.

**Were you aware of all the details of all these actions at the time? Where were you and how did you get your information?**

08:00 I was all over the place. As I said earlier I was, I spent my time driving around making sure our troops were supplied and whatever. We learnt that this group … we learnt that this group from the 29th Battalion and the 19th

08:30 Battalion with a battery of our regiment there were being cut off at a place called Parit Sulong and I went down with our sig officer looking for them and we were very lucky to have got out but the Japanese had again on

09:00 this encircling movement had cut off the Parit Sulong people who were coming up from Muar and the guards division were so enraged at the resistance that they had received from the Australians at Muar that they massacred 150, I think it was, including 110 Australians at Parit Sulong.

09:30 Tied them up with wire and poured petrol over them and burnt them and did all the rest of it and there was only one who survived that. That was Ben Hackney whose book you may have come across which is a fascinating story. But when they got to Parit Sulong there was a bridge

10:00 which had been occupied by surrounding action and the other way our troops could get out was to just fight their way through the jungle. There's a lovely story told there where the Japs were in the edge of the jungle and

10:30 the 19th Battalion I think it was, the officer in charge there got them to, excuse me, got them to sing 'Waltzing Matilda' and they doubled pass the

11:00 Japs who were petrified about the whole thing and they got out which is an amazing, amazing story. But a lot of those people finally were caught up by the Japs. The majority of them were able to escape down through the jungle, down the rivers and whatever and make their way to Singapore.

11:30 **How did you feel when you heard about the things that the Japanese had done to those men?**

Oh I guess that's war and that's what we expected of them. We knew that they were, you know we had known of the Rape of Nanking for instance. We knew what they did. We were not surprised and you know we had

12:00 heard of their activities up on the mainland of Malaya torturing and you know all that sort of stuff. I guess it just made us more determined to do what we could to knock them out.

**Before you were mentioning you had a bit of a lucky escape. Can you just tell us a bit about that?**

12:30 We went down this road towards Parit Sulong and we passed a group of people, the Loyals, who were a British unit who were supposed to be preparing for a counter attack which never eventuated despite a whole lot of things, and so the sig officer and I, Russ Ewan, decided we'd go down the

13:00 road and look for our troops and see if we could find them. Stupid thing to do and there we were going down a road with a deep ditch on either side, most of the roads were like that to cope with the heavy rain, no way of getting off the road if you were attacked, and we just kept going. It was absolutely silent, not a movement. Didn't see a soul and it was awfully

13:30 quiet and we got to a stage where he was frightened and I wasn't game, so we turned around and we came back. And we realised after that we were right in among the Japs and maybe they thought we were a decoy or something to get them to open fire on us. But we got out of that. We were very, very lucky.

**And how did you feel?**

14:00 Well at the time we didn't realise how dangerous it was but as I say we both got to the frightened stage. We didn't like to admit it but I've forgotten what excuses we gave to one another for turning around and going back but I'll never forget that deathly silence. Not a word, not a movement, not a thing. And there we were, we were right down just short of Parit Sulong where all the Japs were.

14:30 **Did you ever feel at any point that you would have liked to have been a soldier in the front line as opposed to doing the RMO job? Can you tell me about that?**

Well I guess I was a soldier in the front line often. You know because I was out visiting the troops.

**I guess I mean in terms of actually, like you said you didn't actually see a Japanese soldier until later on.**

15:00 Well again being an artillery unit we're at arms length from where the enemy is in most cases but in that Parit Sulong area they were firing at tanks over what we call open sights, looking straight down the barrel and the tanks were only 50 yards away, 100 yards away. But I guess it was the

15:30 gunner in me that I spent a lot of time wandering around with the troops where they were actually firing, firing the guns.

**Can you just give us a sense of what that's like? It's hard for us to imagine what it's actually like being amongst action and guns going off.**

16:00 Well artillery supports the infantry so that we're not racing around with bayonets and things like that. We've got guns which either act as howitzers going up over the trees or flat firing at tanks. The many occasions where I would visit a gun position as we call it, a crew position,

16:30 where there'd be four guns adjacent firing and going on and I remember one occasion going up and the blokes were just lying around on the ground, and Smart Alec said, "I thought there was a war going on around here leaning up on the barrel of – " Oh, I can't remember what it was. They had just been firing what we called

17:00 100 rounds gunfire. Now that necessitates getting, there were four rounds I think per box, ammunition box, 25 pounds, bringing them up from the limber which is the thing that carries the boxes, bring them up, carry them up to the gun and then load it and that represents a great deal of hard

17:30 physical labour and the thing that as I say a couple of times where I got caught leaning onto a gun which was absolutely, it wasn't white hot, it was red hot you know and these fellows were absolutely amazing you know the way they could do this for hour on end. You see there were areas where

18:00 our, I wish I had the figures with me, in that Parit Sulong, in that Muar area our fellows fired I think something like six thousand rounds. Again I'm not sure about that. Six thousand rounds during that few days. Well that's a lot of you know ammunition. But coming back, what's it like?

18:30 Well I guess the picture I would try and paint is one of jungle and a little bit of a clearing so that they could put the gun in it and be able to fire the gun so that it wouldn't hit the trees. See if a shot had hit one of the nearby trees it would have exploded, the shell would have exploded and wiped out

19:00 the gun crew so I guess they were a bit careful making sure that they had enough clearance. There were not a lot of infantry running around. You know, you probably envisage that, but where they were operating they had to provide their own defence. They didn't have infantry looking after them. We were supporting the infantry and we were firing on targets

19:30 nominated by the infantry to our forward observation officer. We had one of our regiment officer would be out forward with the infantry. The infantry would say well bring down fire on that hill over there or whatever

20:00 and our forward observation officer would then relay a message back to the guns to bring fire down on so and so and normally the gunfire would be say ten rounds or a lot would be twenty rounds but then occasionally if they were bringing, if they were wiping out a strongpoint of some

20:30 description a hundred round gunfire is a lot of gunfire. And on the island on the 10th, 11th August which was the Emperor's birthday, the Japanese commander had promised he would have Singapore by the Emperor's birthday. There was a place called Bukit Timah where since the war

21:00 they've built a great big memorial. The Australians mounted a counter attack on this Bukit Timah Hill supported by our regiment, the 2/10th Field Regiment which was the other Australian regiment plus a British regiment.

21:30 72 guns were under our control and there again hundred round gunfire and I think we expended something like eight thousand rounds from our regiment on that 24 hour stint and we wiped out enormous numbers of Japs but because of their encircling activity we had to withdraw from the area

22:00 where they were attacking Bukit Timah Hill and then we came back on to what is known as the Tanglin Golf Course, which was our sort of final position. But in the meantime our guns were scattered over a fair area but for the first time was firing almost within cooee of one another where prior

22:30 to that we were scattered all over the country.

**So the evacuation to Singapore, everyone was coming down to Singapore. What were you doing at that time? How did you coordinate yourself and what were you doing?**

23:00 Frankly recall of that is pretty vague. I remember going through Johor Bahru which is the last big town in Johor and then crossing the causeway and then catching up with our headquarters somewhere but details of that are very vague.

**Why is that do you think? Was it so busy?**

23:30 Well, frankly by this time we were plain buggered. You know weary, tired and you know we often withdraw two and three times in a night. Move, move, move, move and we had very little or no rest at all for two weeks.

24:00 Two weeks of action on the mainland and then we got down onto Singapore expecting to find the place well fortified and all the rest of it and there was nothing. We were allocated a six mile front with two battalions

24:30 and one in reserve and we were attacked in swamp, mangrove swamp area on the coastline on the Strait of Johor. We were attacked by fifteen battalions of Japanese against three with six in reserve and they had

25:00 obviously tanks. They had air support which is we moved. You know, had the aircraft come over or they hit us with gunfire. I remember on that, when the landing had, say the second day my driver was sent up to where

25:30 regimental headquarters were and where we were, I can't remember the details now and when he arrived, he said there's no doubt about their artillery, the buggers followed me all the way. They just followed me all along the way. What he didn't realise was that there was just continuous fire over that entire area. It wasn't a case of, you know, just following one

26:00 vehicle and knocking him off, but it was just solid fire and one of the battalion commanders who had been in the First War said that he never experienced in the First War the same intensity of artillery fire. And boy from

26:30 the records we read you know on the Somme and whatever, the artillery all they did was just stir up the mud you know from where they had been firing before. But it was extremely heavy. My driver had my batman with him and he overturned the truck. He panicked and went over the edge and

27:00 dived in under a truck which had also gone over the edge for protection and felt quite safe until he realised that the truck was loaded with ammunition. But he lived to tell the story. But that landing was really something. Well as I say fifteen, sixteen battalions plus five in reserve or

27:30 fifteen or sixteen I can't remember, it doesn't matter and as I say we had two battalions covering a six mile front. You know there's no way that they could have been touching one another let alone providing

any sort of intense protection.

**So where did you put yourself in all of this?**

28:00 I don't know. I was probably driving around looking for troops or something. I don't remember.

**Were you aware of the decision to put most of the forces on the other part of the island so that that left the Australians, I mean did you know that everyone expected the attack to be really not where you were?**

Well you know they were trying to second guess the Japs, and I guess they

28:30 had the opportunity or at least they had the options of selecting the east coast or the west coast of the, sorry, the north coast of the island with the causeway down the middle. And in fact the Japs did put a feint attack in on

29:00 the eastern side whereas the main attack came on the western side.

**And were you aware you were bearing the brunt?**

Oh no. You know we didn't know what was going on.

**Can you give me more of a sense of what that was like? Again a bit more about what it was like when the attack actually came and how people responded to that?**

29:30 You mean the attack on the island?

**I mean when action first started and you realised how intense it was.**

I remember going up that same road where this fellow said they followed him all the way up when in fact it was just solid. I was very lucky to have

30:00 got through there but I did. I remember one fellow who was at our headquarters he was still shivering because he was carrying something. And his arm was bent and he said a shell went in through his arm and missed him but he was scared. I guess that it was just a case of the war went on

30:30 and you just had to do what you were doing. You didn't have time to think much about it. As I say I'm pretty, memory wise I'm pretty vague about all of that.

**Did you anticipate surrender? Did you think we're done for?**

I guess in the book I referred to hope being disappointment deferred or

31:00 reality rejected you know denial. We just hoped that we would be reinforced. And you know, at the latter stages I'm talking about now, that there would be a Dunkirk but we knew that we were just rejecting reality. You know there was no way that this was going to happen. But having

31:30 said that on the Thursday of that week, Thursday, Friday, realising that we had run out of land and hoping that there would be some sort of a Dunkirk,

32:00 our CO decided to do a little bit on his own account and he ordered a couple of our officers to find boats which they did, they found two boats and the troops that were going down to Singapore to get ammunition used to carry rations and stuff to put on the boat and then they would go and

32:30 pick up the ammunition and take it up to where we were in action and we in fact provisioned one boat. The second one was unserviceable and we couldn't use it and this is one of the dreadful stories of the regiment. One of our officers and his sergeant and a few troops were on this boat which

33:00 had been provisioned. There was a fellow on it working on the engines and you know had got the whole thing going and the British naval fellow came along and ordered him out of the harbour and this was before he had all the troops on that you know he was providing for but by this time there

33:30 were a number of troops got on that were down by the waterfront and he was ordered out, he was directed out, how to get out and he did in fact get to Sumatra near Palembang. I don't know ultimately how many, I think he had 150 or something troops under his control and he was a bushie. They

34:00 set up a farm and they made, they cooked, at least they grew corn and stuff and knocked off a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and grew WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and had eggs and all that and he only lost one man during the three and a half years. When the war

34:30 was over Mountbatten went into or near Palembang and he was released, taken back to Singapore with his men, his own men and I'm telling this story because it needs to be told. He was treated as a deserter and it's

35:00 completely destroyed this bloke. He has never attended a reunion. He was greeted by a couple of our senior officers who were involved in the escape

35:30 plan and treated as a deserter, who instead of saying gee it's great to see you back, how did you manage it and all that sort of thing but so far as they were concerned, I'm talking about the senior officers, this bloke went out on the Friday and they knew he'd left on the Friday and to them that was before the thing finished and he had no right to be leaving. Instead of

36:00 saying, well what's your story, and he did a magnificent job looking after his troops and all the rest of it. When they were putting together our regimental history the first fellow who was starting to write it was doing these sorts of interviews and got all sorts of versions and he realised that

36:30 there was somebody who was talking about this escape group, that it had been officially organised and he asked me you know what was the story and I said yes definitely but he said no it couldn't have happened. I'm sorry it did. And we finished up getting this fellow down from, he lives up

37:00 on the Tablelands somewhere, brought him down and a couple of other officers who were involved in this provisioning thing and we did an interview like this, taped it because I felt it was essential that the story be told and I mention it in my book. It's mentioned in the regimental history. Because these fellows have had that stigma on them ever since the war,

37:30 completely undeserved. I'm sorry I get carried away a bit on this one, because it's one of the dreadful things that happened and I hope that anybody who's looking at this in the years to come will know that those blokes were not deserters. They were ordered out of Singapore Harbour by

38:00 the British Naval people. Sorry about that.

# Tape 5

00:50 **Rowley, before we move on to the surrender, the moment of surrender I just want to talk about, you mentioned earlier that there were, you talked about the fifth column and that there were Chinese people or people who you perceived as Malays who in fact once the war started put on Japanese uniforms so that they had in fact already infiltrated the peninsula prior to the attack happening. So were these**

01:30 **people that you had had contact with or that Australian soldiers had had contact with?**

Personally there was, I did meet one whom we found out later was a Japanese fifth column you know, fifth column based there but there were several instances of fellows who

02:00 came across as POWs, came across Japs who they had previously met in civilian life.

**Who was the one that you had met?**

Oh I can't recall. I can't recall no. In the place Tampin where we were for two or three months we used to be entertained by the local Chinese. They

02:30 all had, all towns had Chinese millionaires who owned the cinema or the bank or whatever and they used to entertain us and one of them we found out subsequently was in fact a Japanese, not a Chinese at all. But there is one lovely story which has got nothing to do with me really, but a friend of

03:00 mine lived in Balmoral and before the war he used to go down for a swim every morning and the two Japanese kids who lived next door that he used to take down with him. He was at Muar, he was cut off and finally captured by the Japs, taken to their headquarters and when he got in there, a

03:30 voice said, "Oh Mr Jones!" And he looked at the Jap and it was in fact the father of these two kids who was a colonel and he wasn't able to do very much to help him, but you know that is the extent to which the Japanese had

04:00 infiltrated not only Malaya but also Australia.

**Did you have any contact with Japanese people in Sydney? Did you know of any Japanese people before the war?**

Not that I recall. No not that I recall.

04:30 **And there was, you told us that marvellous story of you travelling into, down the road in the truck and being aware, not knowing at the time but feeling that you were within the war zone, you know within enemy territory and yet you used the term we got to that frightened stage. What was it that told you, you know what was the frightened stage?**

05:00 Well, as I said one was scared and the other one was frightened, you know, but I guess the fact that it was so still and quiet. There was no sign of activity. There was nothing about and we knew the Japs had to be there. We knew that we were getting into Jap territory where we were you know

05:30 because we were by this time a couple or two or three miles ahead of our advance troops you know our

front line so called and we realised that we were just being plain stupid to carry on. But neither of us were prepared to admit that we were frightened. It was just a case of you know you've got to be sensible about this and go back.

06:00 **The other thing I would love you to tell us about is the actual action, you were talking about these guns, the artillery and the amount of rounds that you could put in in a day. What was the procedure? How was a shell taken from its ammunition case and put into the gun itself? Obviously there were a number of people that were involved in that**

06:30 **process. Can you tell us in detail how that happened?**

We have in our regiment a fellow by the name of George Sprogg, and you've seen a cartoon in the book, at the back of it. He writes very well and occasionally he gives us a little part for the, our regimental magazine

07:00 which my wife edits and the last one of a year or so ago was he was being interviewed by somebody, a newspaper or something and he said, "Now tell me about the gun crew. What were you in the gun crew?" "Well I was number 6." "What does number 6 do?" "He takes the shell case out of the

07:30 wagon and gives it to, opens it and then gives the shell to number 5." "What does number 5 do?" "Well he just hands it on to number 4." "What about number 3 and I suppose he hands it on to number 2?" He said, "Oh no you're wrong there. He's the gun layer and he is the one who adjusts the sights and does all that." "What about number 2?" "He's the one that puts it up the

08:00 spout, pushes it, loads the shell." "What about number 1, what does he do?" "Oh, he's the one that pulls the lever and fires the gun." In other words you start off with a gun limber which trails behind, sorry it trails between the truck that pulls the gun and the gun and so there's a gun limber, there's a

08:30 truck, a gun limber and then attached to the gun limber is the gun and in the gun limber is the ammunition. And in addition to that there would be larger trucks, 3 ton trucks which are also loaded with ammunition which is nearby.

**Like a support vehicle?**

Yeah.

09:00 **So this procession line from taking out … obviously if you're shooting you know a lot of rounds you know what would the noise be like and would there be communication between, would you be able to talk to each other or was it simply mechanical?**

As a result of training, obviously it's mechanical and with guns firing the

09:30 noise is deafening. It's the reason why we're all deaf now, because you've been close to gunfire. In those days we didn't have earplugs, or you know, any hearing protection. You know just imagine a 25 pounder rattling off 100 rounds one after the other as fast as you could go. That's an awful lot

10:00 of noise and you know the ears ring and go on you know but to answer your question it's all part of drill and by the time we had had our training in Australia before we left and then interrupted by mortar drill and then we

10:30 didn't receive our guns literally till December after the war had started and when we went into action literally we had both mortars and guns. So we had a gun pit with a 25 pounder in it and another gun pit next door with the same gun crew with mortars. But you know it was a case of, a very good

11:00 example of the ability for Australians to improvise and make the best of whatever situation and that of course emerged as POWs. You know, the ability to improvise and make the best of whatever the circumstances are.

**You talked about your ears ringing. I know when I go to a rock and roll concert I can spend three days afterwards where my hearing is very muffled. Would that be the experience for you?**

11:30 Oh yeah, and who do you sue for compensation? That's what they do these days.

**So there could be days where your hearing would be desensitised as a result of the noise?**

Oh for a week. That's virtually continuous. During that period it was

12:00 almost continuous. Most of us have still got it now. I've got it now, my ears are ringing and yours will be to my boy, you give away your rock concerts!

**Let's come back again to where we were at the end of the last tape talking about Singapore and the eventual, the retreat. In your book, in The Survival Factor you talk about actually being at Tanglin**

12:30 **when Bennett received the order and makes the decision. Can you tell us a little bit about that that moment?**

Well divisional headquarters were not far away from where were Tanglin and that particular afternoon we knew that surrender was coming or

13:00 cease fire was coming and it was I think 8 o'clock or something at night. I went down to div headquarters to see the ADMS, that's the assistant director of medical services, he was the number one medical bloke and why I went to see him, I wouldn't know. Anyway I went to see him and I

13:30 was at div headquarters talking to him just outside the building when a car pulled up and Bennett got out and he then went into the headquarters and whatever and this was after surrender, after surrender. There's no question of him going before for surrender and I can still hear the noise. Have you

14:00 ever heard corn being thrown into a big dish? Chook farm. Well I was sitting, I was standing outside and I could hear this noise going on like corn going into a big dish and in fact it was their ammunition from the revolvers

14:30 going into the thing and then Bennett and, the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] bloke who became the boss of the ABC, it doesn't matter, Charles Moses was with him and a couple of others and away they went and obviously the div headquarters and they passed that on, told us that he was going to attempt to escape.

15:00 The question you're sure to ask me so I'll answer it before you do, what did I think about his escape? Personally it was a matter for himself. He was the boss. He didn't go before capitulation and if he believed that he was going to serve a useful purpose by getting back to Australia, okay good

15:30 luck to him. The opinion was divided among the troops and it's been argued many, many times but as far as I was concerned it was up to him. It's not for me to judge why he went and if he felt that he was going to serve a useful purpose by going well good luck to him.

16:00 **What about yourself? What was your immediate instinct at that time in terms of what to do as a result of the surrender?**

Have some sleep. As I said, I was buggered. We all were. You know the last week had been horrendous and I got into my truck, I didn't even bother to lie down on the ground. I just sat in my truck and went off to sleep. We

16:30 were so completely exhausted. As I say, well we had a fortnight on the mainland moving all the time and it wasn't as though I was sitting in headquarters where I should have been. I must confess I was ordered back by the CO a couple of times to get out of the field and go back and look

17:00 after my RAP, but I had a perfectly good sergeant there and none of my troops were coming through there anyway. So you know I had no problem with that. I was constantly on the move and by the time you know the war was finished, the surrender was on we all were, we were completely and utterly exhausted. I can still see myself sitting up in the truck putting my

17:30 head back and sleeping all night you know.

**So you wake up in the morning?**

It sounds as though I woke up with an awful hangover and in fact it was the equivalent of a hangover. We were dead. Things all over. We had been defeated. We've had to surrender. You know, it was just a dreadful

18:00 numb and I've never thought of it before like being a hangover but it was the hangover, mother of all hangovers.

**So just talk it through this day. It was obviously you know quite surreal in some ways, that hangover feeling, there's always something quite bizarre I find … what did you do? What was the progress of**

18:30 **that day?**

I guess we had orders not to destroy anything, to just pile everything up and hand it over whereupon we did everything we could to damage the guns and put sand in the sumps of the trucks and all that. We were

19:00 allocated, the regiment was allocated, I've forgotten, so many 3 tonners, so many 30 hundredweight, so many half ton vans. I had my RAP van and

19:30 for the first time I put a red cross on it, thought it might help, and wore one myself. By this time I had got rid of my pistol, pitched it away. Then an order came through, brought down by the intelligence officer, I think it was from headquarters to say that we were not allowed to have so many vehicles we could only have two or three and by this time one of the

20:00 British regiments, the Loyals, was marching past with obviously the officers' mess gear, cane chairs and God knows what, you know, all sorts of equipment going out and our CO, he was from the First War, an air force bloke DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross], he saw this and said to the IO [intelligence officer]

who had brought the instructions

20:30 about the vehicles that were to be left behind, I didn't hear that order. I didn't hear that. And so we took all of our vehicles chock-a-block with rations and all the rest of it. I still had two RAP vehicles. One that I drove

21:00 myself which was full of equipment, the supplies which I knocked off from the field ambulance back in Sydney. I had those boxes of medical stuff, supplies and I drove it myself. The CO of another unit, the poor fellow had a sore leg or something so he bummed a lift with me and my CO who had a

21:30 wounded, a wound in his knee insisted on marching with his men. Anyway I drove my vehicle out and when we got to Changi we were first in a place called Birdwood Camp which one of the many camps that were

22:00 in the area which was essentially timber buildings with attap, that's that palm leaf stuff on the roof and when we got there, there we were with all these rations that we were not supposed to have and all my medical stuff that we were not supposed to have. So our 2IC [second in command] who was quite a character

22:30 got to and he built dummy walls, stacked all our food and stuff and then built a wall outside it so that we were able to keep it all. Some, a lot of the medical stuff we buried. I had numerous bottles of emetine, sorry …

23:00 Atebrin [anti-malarial tablets]. We had masses of Atebrin which we buried so that we wouldn't have to hand it over to headquarters. We reckoned we had taken

23:30 the risk with it, it was ours. Ultimately some of the Atebrin which were in black tubes, shortly after that we moved into barracks in Changi and there were black curtain rails around the building and they put the containers, black plastic containers with the Atebrin in it and the Japs would come in

24:00 and have a look around and never spotted it. But the reason I'm telling this story regards burying it when we left Singapore to go to Burma, when we got on the ship after we'd been going for a while I was horrified because blokes came up to me with a handful of these containers of Atebrin. They

24:30 said, "Well this is all yours. We dug it up before we left." I finished up with quite a stack of Atebrin. Their attitude was we buried it, it was yours and when you were moving out of camp we reckoned that you should have it. So now that was the sort of loyalty that we had from our troops. You asked earlier you know how we got on with hygiene discipline. That soon

25:00 wore off, the objection to it you know. They had a great deal of respect.

**If we can just go back to the drive into, that day after…and you're heading towards Changi. Obviously there must have been a lot of Japanese soldiers around as well were there?**

25:30 Yeah, a lot were lining the road you know keeping their distance. They didn't come close to us or do anything to us.

**So there was fairly well established respect at that point in time in that the surrender had been accomplished and you just followed your orders into the prison?**

26:00 The Japanese we would have seen at that time, you know the ones that would have been along the road were fighting troops. They were not guards, and they were troops that would have respect for you know their equivalent and while they were victors at the time I don't remember them

26:30 doing anything very dreadful. Now maybe they did, I don't remember.

**Okay so you arrive in Birdwood?**

Birdwood Camp yes.

**Birdwood Camp, and is this your home for the next three months?**

Oh no. No, we were there for a couple of weeks I think. Again I just don't remember precisely and then we moved into Tanglin Barracks where

27:00 there were several pre-existing buildings, you know brick buildings well established, built for say 200 people and a thousand or more would be put into one of those buildings. But you know they were good substantial buildings and we were there for the best part of three months.

27:30 **And was it only Australians or were there the British and the Dutch?**

Well in our particular area, Australians only, but adjacent to us would have been British and Indians.

**How was it determined where you would go? Was it determined by regiment? How did you decide who would sleep where?**

28:00 Well, I presume the Jap command would have said well you know there's your area, move into it. You've got to put a division or two brigades or whatever into wherever and I would think that the actual allocation of the buildings would have been, would have been by our own divisional

28:30 headquarters. I don't know. I can't see that the Japs would have ordered this battalion to go there and this regiment to go there. I would have thought that you know it would have been lump and it was up to divisional headquarters to sort it out. I don't know.

**What did you … obviously it's an enormous transition from being an**

29:00 **active soldier fighting to becoming a prisoner. How did that unwind in the first few weeks of imprisonment? How did roles emerge and what did you do? Obviously the officers kept their ranks, etc. How did you establish your life within in the prison as opposed to outside the prison?**

29:30 I guess coming back to what I said earlier, the hangover didn't last just for a day. It lasted for a couple of weeks. You know, we were numb. It was disbelief, despair, shame, you name it. You know all of those things and it took a while, but again as I've said many times, as far as I was concerned

30:00 particularly as a POW, I was one of the lucky ones because I was doing my own job. The only people who really were doing their own job as prisoners were the padres and virtually the camp commanders, you know they were responsible. The rest of the officers were not doing what they

30:30 were trained to do nor the troops for that matter. So that as a medical officer I had a job to do. I still had my sick to look after and all that. So I was, you know I was fully occupied looking at my troops and making sure that they were being cared for and all that sort of thing.

**How did you personally deal with those feelings of disappointment,**

31:00 **shame? Was it as simple as getting on with the job? Obviously you wouldn't have been working 24 hours a day. There would have to have been times where you were on your own.**

Well as I pointed out regimental medical officers, medical officers attached to units and that's whether they were regiments, battalions or whatever and

31:30 as POWs equally attached to a working group the RMO or the regimental medical officer as he was called was on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and you know that was just the name of the game. You didn't have somebody, you know it wasn't a case of 9 till 5 and having somebody to

32:00 take over in the evening or anything like that. You know you were there all the time.

**And so did you find that the prisoners would come to you regardless of whether or not they were injured? As a doctor you know and doctors obviously within the community have a very special place in terms of their role as healers, spiritual healers as well as physical healers in a**

32:30 **way. The process of visiting a doctor you know it can often just as much be about the visit as it is about the actual illness.**

It's a bit like a cow cocky with a whole lot of cows. From the day the regiment was formed we had our weekly medical inspection and every week everybody I literally physically looked at every person in the

33:00 regiment. They'd come by in the nuddy [naked] and I'd look for skin troubles and all the rest of it and what they call the short arm parade. I guess you've heard about that. Oh, you ain't heard nothing. This is looking for evidence of gonorrhoea or syphilis and we used to look at their delicate parts making

33:30 sure that there was no evidence of any discharge or anything else. Now this started right from day one almost so that over a period of months the RMO would know literally every person in the regiment and you know there are many jokes told with the RMO sitting with his cap on looking

34:00 down, "Morning, Jones. Morning, Smith." He recognised them as they went by. But to come back to answer your question, by the time we got through action and whatever we knew everybody by name and you know there had been a close association established between the RMO and the troops.

34:30 **Was there much contact before imprisonment with the local women colonials? Was there much socialising between the British who were already based in Singapore? In your time off did that happen?**

When we were on leave, you mean?

**When you were on leave, yes.**

35:00 Yes they had the equivalent of what they had here at St Andrew's Cathedral. You know the women's auxiliary groups that provided tea and coffee and bickies or whatever. You know canteen type of thing and in many cases on leave the troops were invited into the homes of the local

35:30 civilians. For instance at Tampin, we used to go down to the local the equivalent of a club where the

planters used to come in regularly and have their grog or their stangers as they call them and we got to know them quite

36:00 well and many of them invited the troops to their homes and fed them and wined them and dined them and did all that.

**Did they end up in prison with you?**

Oh yes. The civilians, a lot of them belonged to the well the equivalent of the militia, the Johor Volunteer Corps or whatever they were called and the

36:30 same with Singapore and they were in uniform and they were just like our militia here and they fought and when capitulation came they were moved into separate areas segregated from their families if their families were still

37:00 in Singapore at the end of it and there were a lot of them. You know, as I told you earlier, the Wednesday before the thing finished on the Sunday,

37:13 there were still large numbers of civilians just wandering around.

# Tape 6

00:48 **Okay Rowley let's come back to Changi and the establishment of the prison. You know Changi and the various compounds around Changi.**

01:00 **You talk in your book, in The Survival Factor about a black market emerging between the locals and the prisoners. Can you just tell us a little bit more about what would be the procedure? How would the locals gain access to the prison and what sort of produce would they bring with them? What would be the means of exchange? Was it money? Was it other things?**

01:30 As far as I can recall the trading or the black market were purely and simply the people who went through the wire at night at great risk and either traded pens, watches, bits and pieces with the local natives for eggs

02:00 and whatever but being one of those who wouldn't have been game to go through the wire at night, I was not involved, so I wouldn't know.

**Did a market emerge within the camp itself?**

I don't really recall. When you talk about a black market within the camp, what do you mean by that?

02:30 **I mean did the prisoners used to trade things between themselves?**

Oh I guess there was a bit of exchange going on but I don't remember. Later on, on the railway when we were being paid and we officers had money, and the troops had money there would have been a bit of money

03:00 exchange going on. Now for instance at one stage I bought a pen knowing full well that the proceeds would go into a particular group. There were four sergeants who were mates and you know they shared everything and I knew it would go into their coffers and they needed it.

**What about cigarettes? Did they become an important commodity?**

03:30 Well they certainly were with the troops. Now again in Changi you're speaking specifically. I don't recall where the cigarettes came from. There must have been cigarettes there but I don't remember how they got in. There were working parties, groups that were sent out on working parties

04:00 to the docks and various other places and there was no hesitation in knocking off bits and pieces like tins of meat or packets of cigarettes or whatever if they were about.

**And would they be brought back into Changi and shared with others?**

04:30 Oh yes. I've talked about this many times. The mateship and the camaraderie was quite extraordinary among the Australians. It was not so evident among the British and the Dutch or the Americans even and as I've said I never saw an Australian who didn't have mates to look after him, you

05:00 know, whether he was sick or whatever. There'd be somebody to collect his rations or help him or whatever and I said that there were four sergeants as a group, that was characteristic. Most of them would have been in little groups of three or four or two or three or whatever and they would share everything they had.

05:35 **What is it do you think about the Australian soldiers that was different to the Americans and**

**the British and the Dutch that gave them this quality?**

06:00 Good question. I think part of it is the, we didn't have the British hierarchy thing. You know, the British officer and the troops being two entirely different animals. Whereas the Australians on parade or on the job there was very distinct difference. You know, the officer was the officer and the

06:30 troop was the troop, but off parade you know very frequently you have, as I said you might have a battery commander who's a clerk and his manager could well have been one of the troops, you know, a sergeant or something like that. And off parade they could, you know, drink together and play

07:00 together and what have you. Once there were on parade as it were you know there was a definite demarcation. And I think that by and large the officers had to earn the respect of their troops and equally if they failed to

07:30 earn it the troops were merciless in their condemnation of officers. Post-war there was a very strong anti officer feeling, because there were some POW camps where the officers behaved less than appropriately. Now again I was extremely fortunate in that the officers that I was associated

08:00 with were all meticulous in fairness, sharing with the men and all that sort of stuff.

**What do you mean when you say less than appropriately?**

Well you know, like demanding better accommodation, when you know, it was not appropriate. Extra rations or special rations or you know that sort

08:30 of thing. I mean we the officers ate from the same kitchen as the troops. Whereas in some areas it was not quite like that.

**Just picking up, back on what you were talking about in terms of the relationship between the different ranks and how once you were off parade there was a lot of camaraderie. Once you got into Changi what**

09:00 **did you do because obviously there was a fair bit of spare time? How did you entertain yourself?**

Again well personally I had a job to do and I was kept pretty busy because there was quite a lot of sickness developing and whatever. The troops by

09:30 this time of course were underfed and they didn't have a lot of surplus energy so that you know there was not a great deal they could do but very shortly after we got into Changi they established a Changi University. There were countless lectures going on, all sorts of things and among a

10:00 group of people of that size if you wanted a particular specialty you name it and there'd be at least one out there that could provide it. So they had lectures on say economics or law. There was a medical school, post graduate medical, you know, all of that

**Did you ever lecture at the medical – ?**

No I didn't. No most of that occurred after I left. I was only there three months.

10:30 **Of all those things there was one particular thing missing which was obviously women. How did the men deal with being so quickly and severely cut off from their connection with women?**

Well, when you say quickly and severely, there were a few players who

11:00 when they got to Malaya would go out to the local brothel or whatever but they were the exception by far so it was a sudden thing. It was, they'd had plenty of time to get used to lack of female company.

**Was there any homosexual behaviour in the prison or amongst the troops?**

11:30 Actually it was very much less or it was much less apparent than probably it was in reality. The Brits were known to be more interested in homosexuality. We had a couple of blokes in our regiment who were suspected of or known to be but it was pretty uncommon.

**And were those blokes respected or – ?**

12:00 No, oh no. You know in those days the culture was not interested in 'poofters' as we used to call them, or 'queens' or whatever and they were pretty much despised. They haven't got the good healthy or unhealthy attitude that we've got now, whichever way you look at it.

12:34 **Let's move on to Tavoy. Briefly you go, that's your first stop out of Changi and you're there, you're building an airfield which the British have started and the Japanese get you to finish. What did it feel like having to build what is effectively an instrument of war which you**

13:00 **knew the enemy was going to use ultimately?**

Ah well, I mean, let's face it we were bloody angry about it. You know, lots of talk about Geneva Conventions and things, but it didn't alter the fact I had to get out there and do it and by this time we realised that the Japs were not playing by the conventional rules, and we just had to learn to live with it.

13:30 **How did that anger express itself? Where did it find its outlet?**

Well I guess there was a constant, I was going to say battle of how to outwit the Japs. You know if they measured an area that had to be dug up

14:00 so many metres, cubic metres they'd move the pegs or you know there were numerous ways and it became a constant challenge, almost a game.

**Was there ever any conscious sabotage?**

14:30 Oh God yes. But again you had to be careful that it couldn't be tracked back to you or whatever. The Japs have an extraordinary sense of, I was going to say honesty, in the need to care for and protect Japanese, the

15:00 Emperor's equipment. You know, his bucket or his spade or whatever that belonged to the Emperor, and it was an absolute crime to damage it or lose it or do whatever.

**Can you tell us how you might have tried to sabotage the airfield for instance? What sort of things you would do?**

15:30 I can't think of any specific thing but it would only have been in a very small way. The biggest sabotage to the aerodrome at Tavoy was when the first plane came in. Great excitement by the Japs. We were lined up on either side of the airstrip and the inevitable voice from the back said, "Crash you bastard!" And before long there was a chorus, "Crash you bastard,

16:00 crash you bastard!" And it did. So that was the biggest bit of sabotage.

**How did it crash?**

Oh it just turned over. It didn't do any great harm. It didn't kill anybody or do anything.

**Did you cheer?**

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

**How did the Japanese respond to that?**

16:30 With great anger, I think. By this time you know, they were completely demoralised, you know, loss of face. As you probably realise with the Japanese a loss of face is, you know, absolutely fundamental to them. You could do all sorts of things provided you didn't make them lose face. You

17:00 could argue with them and get away with lots of things but never put them in a position where they lose face. We learnt that pretty early in the piece.

**How?**

Oh well if they lost face you might have lost yours as a result of it, you know, no hesitation in bashing or wielding sticks or whatever. But

17:30 provided they can gain something, they can be seen to be, you know we used to be constantly negotiating over the sick going to work, how many do we send to work and how many can we have sick and whatever and to get say 50 people accepted as being no duty you probably had to sacrifice

18:00 half a dozen or do something to give them in return and provided they've got that they're happy.

**And I'd actually like to talk about this a bit later. You would actually trade with the guards?**

Oh yeah.

**Because obviously this is something that became much more urgent and desperate later in the process of building the railway. Maybe**

18:30 **that's a good place to start, to talk about the building of the railway. Let's just begin by talking about your being transported up to Burma from Singapore.**

We went up on a ship called the Toyahashi Maru [Taisha Maru?]. We had, well going back, the formation of A Force which was the first force to leave

19:00 Singapore, subsequently they were B, C, D etcetera. It was made up of three thousand troops in three battalions and the battalions were officially No 1, No 2, No 3 but they were known as their battalion commander. So the first, No 1 was Colonel Ramsay. The second one was Anderson Force which is the one I was with and the third one was Green Force, Major

19:30 Green was in charge of that. 1 and 3 Battalions were essentially infantry and No 2 Battalion were the so

called specialists like artillery, engineers, medical, casualty clearing station group and others. They were the sort of

20:00 specialist group and the idea was that if we were able to be released we would be a fighting brigade, group and we actually had a brigadier, Brigadier Barley and he had his brigade headquarters and then there were the battalion headquarters and whatever structured like just an ordinary army thing. Once we got on the railway, however, the, well going back on the

20:30 Toyahashi Maru there were two battalions, two thousand and one thousand were dropped off at I think it was Victoria Point on the way up and there was another ship where there was another thousand on that and they were dropped off I think at Madan and then we went on to Tavoy. When

21:00 we arrived at the mouth of the Tavoy sort of gulf or big river, you know there's that big area of water, we were offloaded onto barges and then

21:30 marched 20 miles to Tavoy Gaol where we spent a little bit of time and then we moved from there onto the aerodrome. Going back, when we were being offloaded into the barges the water was pretty rough and you had to wait till the barge got up and you'd jump off and among other things that

22:00 they had on board was a wood fuelled steamroller and they offloaded that onto a barge and as I say it was a bit rough and it slipped a bit and you ask how they sabotaged. The inevitable voice said let's push it back for you. So they conned the Japs into letting them get down on the low side to push it back up with the inevitable result of course. The Japs finally got the

22:30 steamroller up and they got it up onto the railway after the aerodrome where it was rolling the aerodrome down and there were a number of trucks which the Japs had confiscated from the British troops and whatever

23:00 and they got our fellows to drive them. So the POWs used to line up every morning with their four gallon cans to collect petrol for the trucks and the fuel driven steamroller driver used to turn up with his cans and

23:30 collect petrol. Of course it would use wood fuel so he used to collect his petrol and then flog it off to the Japs, flog it off to the Burmese. I'll think of a few more.

**You've finished building the aerodrome and you're sent further up into Burma.**

24:00 And then we went from Tavoy back to the docks part of it and taken on big barges to Moulmein which is only about a 24 hour run and from Moulmein we went by train down to Thanbyuzayat which was the beginning of the Burma Railway. We

24:30 were only in Thanbyuzayat just for a few days. The Dutch had arrived ahead of us and I think some British. There were quite a number of them had already started on the railway. We got up there in October and we went out to what they call the 18 Kilo Camp where we spent, I can't remember now, a

25:00 couple of months. It's all on that graph there somewhere. And we were involved in building embankments and bridge works and then we gradually moved up the line a little bit and when most of the embankments were completed the line laying commenced, you know, that's putting sleepers

25:30 down and putting the rails down and spiking them into the sleepers and Anderson Force and Williams Force which by this time had also joined us the POW group was known as No 3 POW Group. The ones on the Thailand side were No 5 Group and in addition to the three original battalions Williams Force came up. He was originally with his group in the Middle East and

26:00 another Dutch group and another group which contained survivors from the Houston, that was the American ship, USS [United States Ship] Houston so that there were quite a number of other troops came in, in addition to the

26:30 original 3 Battalion all part of No 3 POW Group as it was called. And you will see that on those cards that we were listed as that. And when they had done all the embankments they then brought Williams Force and Anderson Force back to I think about the 26 kilo and we started to lay the line from

27:00 there and that consisted of putting sleepers out and then a truck would come up onto the end of what was then existing line and they would offload the railway lines, steel lines and the blokes would have to carry these and then drop them on the sleepers and then with spikes, you know

27:30 metal spikes, the hammers they hammered the rail to the sleeper.

**Where were you living while you were building the railway?**

It varied from camp to camp but essentially once, in Tavoy we were in timber huts with attap roofs but once –

**Sorry, once you got into the jungle –**

28:00 Once we got into the jungle we were in attap huts with attap walls, attap roof, bamboo deck two or

three feet above the ground or the mud and we'd sleep on these decks. Initially we had sort of 2 metres by 1 metre or two

28:30 and bit metres by one metre but subsequent to that they put three or four times the number into one hut and the only way we could cope with that was to build bunks in tiers. So there was oodles of bamboo so they put bamboo posts in and then string horizontals on and then just sling, over a

29:00 period of time most people managed to acquire rice bags and whatever and they'd make the typical Australian bushie bed with just poking two bamboo bits in through the sides so that you'd get two or three tiers so you could get all the people in there.

**And would you build these huts?**

Oh no, they were there.

29:30 **They were there, the Japanese had these huts prebuilt?**

Yeah by the navy, the Burmese Navy, generally. They may have been built by the Dutch troops that were in or the Indonesian troops that were there before us. I don't know.

**On the railway line you worked with a lot of the Burmese natives didn't you? They were actually working beside you on the line?**

30:00 Not a great deal. They were usually segregated.

**What about within the camps themselves, the Dutch soldiers, the Indonesian soldiers, did they have their own camps or were you altogether?**

In most cases they were in separate camps but occasionally we would have been bundled into the same camp. For instance there was one period

30:30 where Anderson Force, Williams Force and one that was known as Fitzsimmons Force which were American and others were all in one area, and I had the job of looking after the whole lot. There were about fifteen hundred. Because their doctors for some reason or other were moved, or they were sick or something.

31:05 **How did the different nationalities get on at this point in time?**

The quick answer, with difficulty. The Brits were far from popular. Their hygiene was nonexistent and they'd think nothing of relieving themselves

31:30 just outside the huts and there were plenty of cases where Australians would get them and rub their nose in it. They had lots of bugs and lice and all the rest of it. But by and large their death rate was largely due to lack of

32:00 discipline, lack of hygiene and whatever. You see as probably Lloyd will tell you there was one group, I think it was H Force, of seven thousand. Three and a half thousand British, three and a half thousand Australians. The British had 60% death, the Australians had 35 or something and that

32:30 was largely due to hygiene discipline, and coming back to this mateship thing where they would you know Australians traditionally would look after one another.

**On the question of hygiene and your role within the camp ...**

33:00 **established in your fellow soldiers by this stage, how did you, did you ever have to like create any plumbing systems ...**

Plumbing, what's that?

**I'm just wondering ...**

Well having said that, having said that there were a couple of cases where

33:30 water was poured up into a big tank and then it was reticulated from that but plumbing in the sense that you're talking about, nonexistent. Through bamboo perhaps, bamboo troughs you know that sort of thing.

**Obviously it's going to be primitive given the means of production but I'm aware that you were particularly industrious when it came to these things.**

34:00 Yeah, well there weren't many places where we were able to move water that way from one place to another, but bamboo of course is used from everything from eating to making buckets or tubing, building with it you know all the rest of it but you could carry water by getting long stretches of

34:30 bamboo say 6 or 9 inch diameter cutting it in half and you'd get a trough and you could run water down like that. Plumbing in another sense was that in one camp we had a hot water system which consisted of a little fire

35:00 where we burned coconut shells with very little ash, a coil of wire, of wire tubing, sorry a coil of tubing knocked off from one of the trucks or somewhere and we had a big tank of water and then what had been a petrol tank from a vehicle and the water we circulated through this thing up into

35:30 the petrol, what had been the petrol tank and the water would circulate up into it and then the water would be drawn off from that as really hot water and there was an inlet from the big tank, a wooden tank up on stilts so that it was a very effective little hot water system which they had going in the

36:00 kitchen with very little fire necessary. It was just a small fire with these metal coils and the water running through and very efficient.

**Would you use it for showering, for cooking? How would you use this?**

It was certainly not for showering. It was mainly for cooking and keeping things, keeping things clean.

36:30 **You spoke earlier about instructing the soldiers to boil their dixies before and after. Did you still have the dixies by the time you were at the railway?**

Oh mostly, mostly. See when we left Singapore to go up to Burma we left as a brigade group with a casualty clearing station fully equipped and you

37:00 know we had typewriters and things for battalion headquarters, orderly rooms and all that whereas you'll probably hear that H Force and whatever had no such thing as orderly rooms and those facilities but we left within three months of the finish and we still had a lot of equipment. In addition

37:30 to the hot water system they improvised ovens, they made mud bricks. Somebody recognised that that particular clay was suitable for making bricks and they made mud bricks and ovens. Could bake rice and so forth.

38:00 So they were continually being innovative and you probably heard about the doctors who made prostheses from bamboo, you know bamboo lengths and whatever but they were constantly on the, on the railway you'd have people with penknives making out of teak which is as hard as the hobs of

38:30 hell clogs which were sort of wooden shoes like Dutch clogs and put a strap over it from a bit of tyre you know truck tyre that they had knocked off from somewhere. The most beautiful chess sets were made from teak

39:00 wood. Again just carved with penknives. The blokes were constantly on the, on the thinking you know doing things. For instance when they, to move, to build an embankment you had to move soil from one area to another. They would do this carrying a basket slung on a pole carried by

39:30 two people, the baskets and the third person would be chopping the soil out of the marked area and these fellows would come up, they'd put the soil into the baskets and away they'd go, empty it and come back on an endless belt thing. To keep themselves amused and entertained, they would take it in turns

40:00 who won the Melbourne Cup in 1908, they'd come back and give the answer if they could work it out and so it went on. When we were in Tavoy and this is important, when we were in Tavoy, you're getting edgy.

# Tape 7

00:58 Now the aerodrome at Tavoy had been commenced by the Royal Air Force and there was obviously quite a large European or British community in Tavoy itself with the result that there was a library, quite a large library

01:30 with books in English in it and we conned the Japs into allowing us to get those books for toilet paper to relieve sore backsides. You know, palm leaves get a bit rough after a while and so we got these large numbers of books and we distributed them among the men, three or four each or

02:00 whatever they were. Now they were everything from encyclopaedias to books of verse, philosophy you name it. I don't know whether you know Will Durant, one of these American philosophers, well I first read him up there. Now what happened was that it didn't take long for Lady

02:30 Chatterley's Lover and a couple of others similar to lose their appeal you know that wasn't on and the things that, Golden Treasury of Verse et cetera et cetera and they were the things that appealed most and in the encyclopaedias they used to pore over these things and look at all sorts of, the Seven Wonders

03:00 of the World, or how tall is the Leaning Tower of Pisa and you know all sorts of stuff and this captured their imagination and as a result of these books – we were able to run these quizzes as it were, going all the time and then at night after lights out they'd have a quiz and once a fortnight or once a month or whatever if we were given a day off they'd

03:30 have a proper quiz session, a concert and a quiz session. So that blokes kept their minds pretty active. They were constantly interested and obsessed with food or the lack of and some of them had the most amazing collection of recipes obviously Dutch to start off with and then with the

04:00 British you'd get all sorts of recipes from Gloucestershire or from Worcestershire or Yorkshire or wherever whichever were their traditional dishes and so forth and some of them had really an amazing variety of dishes. American et cetera et cetera. There were others who designed houses,

04:30 designed their dream house and I was very fortunate in that I was in a little group, my closest friend was John Shaw who was, finished up, he was an engineer, he finished up as Commissioner of Main Roads in New South Wales and one of the group was a Tasmanian Stuart Handerside who

05:00 was an architect. He'd started life as a builder and then did architecture. So he understood building from a practical point of view and also the aesthetic point of view and I designed my house. I lost the design of course, but this went on for weeks refining this thing. The engineer would

05:30 bend his mind to it and make various suggestions, and then the builder would look at it and make his suggestions and the architect would look at it from the aesthetic point of view and so it went on. As the sequel to that up on the railway I used to discuss things with John Shaw where we would settle down post-war. It didn't occur to us there wouldn't be a post-war.

06:00 Now we were thinking about what we would be doing et cetera et cetera, post-war, and I decided between Kyogle, I think Port Macquarie and country towns and then either Seaforth or Cronulla as a possibility and in fact I built a

06:30 house with the exact outlook that I envisaged in Balgowlah Heights and I designed it literally down to the eighth of an inch and I got an architect to tizzy it up you know make it look realistic but the actual plan we designed it from go to whoa.

**On the railway?**

07:00 Yeah, but what I finally designed here was rather more modest than what I designed on the railway. But the training I had up there was very useful.

**Just quickly, how soon after you returned did you build a house?**

07:30 I got back in '46, '48 I moved to Seaforth where I practised and then I had 12 months … about 1950.

**We'll come back to that. Can we quickly pick up on the recipes and**

08:00 **the Dutch and the American and the English? We spoke about the British before and the lack of respect that the Australians had for the British. Obviously there was a bit of socialising going on with the Dutch and the Americans as well. What was the relationship like between those, the Australian soldiers and the Dutch soldiers to begin with?**

08:30 Well with the Dutch there were Dutch Dutch and there were Indonesian Dutch, the black and the white and our fellows got on quite well with the Dutch. They were pretty smart. In the jungle they knew what to eat and what to pick. They could make pretty tasty meals with the bits and pieces that they were able to acquire and they used to produce what were known

09:00 as sambal [a type of chilli sauce]. Do you know sambal? They were known by the Australians as ring burners and we're quite sure why the Dutch use the bidet method after they've been to the toilet with water because their sambal used to be really hot.

09:30 **Where would you get the chilli from?**

I don't know where the Dutch got them from. I know they had them.

**As the MO you had quite a position of responsibility within the camp in terms of your relationship with the guards in that they would look**

10:00 **to you to determine who would be the people that would go out to work. Is that right?**

Well if you mean that they blamed me if they couldn't get people to go to work yeah I was responsible and I had constant battles with them on a daily basis. They didn't, they didn't come along and say please how many

10:30 men do you think you can send to work. They would say we want 350 to go to work tomorrow and you'd know the most you'd be able to rustle up would be say 300 and then there'd be the hassle over the extra 50. Occasionally they would accept you know what I offered. Occasionally

11:00 there would be a battle. They would insist on doing their own sick parade, these little guards you know Koreans and if there was something that was visible they could understand that. If it was something that was not visible like cardiac beri beri or something like that you know they, with beri beri where you got throwing up they could understand that but not for instance

11:30 malaria where you've got nothing to see except, unless they're sweating. And occasionally we would get to the stage of having what we called a blitz sick parade where the Jap would come along and he'd say what's the matter with him and I'd say, "He's got malaria. Four days no duty." "No, two days." "Alright, three days." "Right." And so we'd come to the next one and so

12:00 it would go on and then we'd inevitably come to an impasse on somebody who I knew was really sick but it was not demonstrable say cardiac beri beri or whatever and I would say, "No this man is very sick. Six days no duty." "No, no one day." And then finally if I was getting nowhere I would

12:30 pull the final joker out of the pack which was ah you send this man to work and this man dies and this is all done in Pidgin Jap of course, and this man dies when I get back to Australia, again no hesitation in our minds that we were going to get back to Australia, when I get back to Australia my ichiban – that's number one – will say to me, "Why did this man die?" and I

13:00 will say, "Ah Yamamoto sent him to work, and my number one will talk to your number one and you'll be punished." And with one exception it worked, it always worked. I only pulled it once in a while but I pulled it a little bit too effectively with one bloke on Jeep Island and he gave me the thrashing of my

13:30 life. But you know, but this day to day thing was on you know it was a battle. It wasn't a case of a nice polite will you send out or how many men do you want to send out. It was a case of telling us how many we were going to send out.

**I imagine that there would have been a time when you sent men out and they died as a result.**

14:03 Well I didn't realise it at the time and I've since thought about it quite a lot. We were in fact playing God every day. I'd send you to work or you could

14:30 stay in. The chances of you dying well theoretically I didn't know what they were, but I'd use my judgement and send you out and then if there was any special food or any special rations I'd allocate it. Now at the time it never caused the slightest bit of anxiety. I was merely doing my job. You know it wasn't a case of, oh dear, well you know if I send this bloke to work

15:00 will he sue me when I get back for sending him out to work. You know that sort of attitude never thought about and the one of the things that intrigues me and this is in relation to veteran memory I do not recall one single instance where I had regretted a decision that I made voluntarily, as distinct from the Japs just ordering people out and you know I had no say

15:30 in it. Now whether that's denial or whatever I don't know but I can honestly say I don't remember at the time or since saying well I'm sure that if I hadn't sent Joe Blow out to work he wouldn't have died.

**Can you talk to me a little more about denial, what you mean when you talk about denial? What are you referring to in that regard?**

16:00 I'm talking about memory in general, in general terms. In that paper which I think you've had a look at before I wrote that I looked up all the material that I could find seeing what the sort of link was and apparently there is a

16:30 creation of memory, a process that goes on up in the nerve cells and vitamin deficiency diseases, specifically beriberi affects the nerve endings in such a way that it interferes with creation of memory so that things that happened at the time when you were suffering from it you may not

17:00 remember clearly or incorrectly or whatever. Then there's the recall of memory and most of us have a selective recall of memory. We remember things that we want to remember and we forget the things we don't want to remember and then there's the question of just straight out subconscious denial, it didn't happen and that's what I was talking to then, missing there

17:30 because when you're recalling certain things you can either recall in total what happened or if you're in a state of denial of I don't want to know about it or whatever you can, you can just sort of scrub into the subconscious. I'm sure it never escapes there. I mean it's always somewhere. You know, once you've got your memory, I believe it's there.

18:00 It's just a question of being able to stir it up. Does that answer your question? Denial. And you're probably thinking of all the cases where you've denied things which you didn't want to recall.

18:30 **Picking up on that, you said the books like Lady Chatterley's Lover were quickly cast aside and it was the poetry and from what you were saying the more abstract and I suppose the more philosophical and the things that I guess the more spiritual elements of the literature that the men held onto. Do you think you know be it subconscious or conscious was an important part of the survival mechanism in terms of the**

19:00 **horror that they were living in?**

I'm sure of it. I'm sure of it. Now, for instance the Bible was very popular for two reasons. The second reason was that it made wonderful cigarette paper, it was nice and thin and the troops used to be able to split it in two.

19:30 Split a page like that it would be quite simple, even the Bible but that wasn't the real reason. I read the Bible purely as a book for the first time and you know as a kid I used to go to church and we'd read a lesson, verse 22 to 25 from chapter so and so and so and so and little bits and pieces and for me it virtually was meaningless because it was taken out of context.

20:00 You know you need to have the full story. So for the first time I read the Bible as a book which I found fascinating which then intrigued me so I read the other religions, Islam, the Buddhism, Shintoism etcetera etcetera and got

20:30 quite a, what shall we say, a broad attitude to religious things and arising out of it you know I got to the stage of saying well who am I to say that my religion is the right one. I mean you've got the Crusades where two people are fighting for the same God on their side and you know it's all just

21:00 ridiculous. But the thing that to me was important that each of the faiths have something that they can latch onto, something they can believe in you know whether it be very primitive beliefs, you know the Sun God or the Moon God or the Water God or the Mountain God or whatever it's something that they can hang onto and I think that that's very important.

21:30 Now faith theoretically should have saved a hell of a lot of our fellows and then you look at it and say well he's Roman Catholic he died, he's a Protestant and he died so what goes on around here and so it goes on. He's a Calithumpian, he doesn't believe in anything, but you know he's still alive. Why?

22:00 So I guess that it gave one a different slant, hope on the other side, on the other hand, there's something which is without which we would not have survived. I mean you had to have some sort of hope or belief about getting home. For instance, as I've said a couple of times, it never occurred to us that we wouldn't get home despite the fact that you're seeing people

22:30 around you dying. Now that's somebody else, the poor fellow you know. I've described it as hope as disappointment deferred or reason rejected. You know reality rejected. In other words you reject reality, denial just to

23:00 maintain your hope. You know it's not going to happen but you do all sorts of things mentally to try and con yourself into believing to maintain your hope. Here endeth the third lesson on philosophy. What's your next question?

23:30 **You say you would do all these things to reject reality. What sort of things? Can you be more specific in terms of what you would do?**

Well you knew bloody well you weren't going to be home by Christmas, yet you'd say I'll be home by next Christmas when you realised, when you knew in your own heart there was no way in the world that that was going

24:00 to happen. But you'd still live in the hope and the belief that maybe you would be. So it's just a self conning act.

**I'm particularly interested with you in terms of your responsibility within the camp life itself and obviously having to deal with death on a**

24:30 **daily basis ... there's actually a moment in your book where you say your uncle says to you, your uncle from Kyogle says to you, never let the patient see that you've given up hope I think or that you can't cope. Was there ever a point for you in this process when you felt you couldn't cope?**

25:00 I'm sure there must have been. I can't specifically recall it and had I had that sensation there's no way that I would have let anybody see it. Does that answer your question? You know as I said earlier I was brought up in

25:30 the mid Victorian era where you had a stiff upper lip and all that and you didn't show any sign of weakness and getting emotional and all that and I guess I think that would have been part of it. There's no way I would have let people know.

26:00 **Was there not one person that you could confide in? Was there someone who you could say this is hard?**

Well John Shaw that I mentioned earlier, he and I used to read a book and

26:30 then we'd spend a couple of hours discussing it. He gave me a course of lectures on architecture for instance extending over several weeks. He used to put a lot of thought into preparing it and I'd think about it so we did

27:00 a lot of thinking and talking and by and large if I had any problems I would discuss them with him. There was only one other person on the railway that I would have and that was Don Kerr, Major Kerr. I was pretty close to Jimmy Armstrong who was my medical sergeant and you know a couple of

27:30 my medical orderlies. But by and large I would say that more often than not I would not discuss

problems that I had and my biggest problem was not the Japs but it was our Colonel Anderson VC [Victoria Cross] and if you read

28:00 between the lines in the book you would have realised that we had major conflict. He grew up I think in Kenya. He was a big game hunter. He was in the First War. Lots of courage, won the VC in Muar, the battle that I

28:30 referred to earlier but he had an attitude of – we must educate the Japs. We must appease them, and when he as the CO were challenged by the Japs to produce more workers don't ask me talk to the doctor he's over there. So

29:00 he would offload and there were, I again stick to what's in the book, he made a famous statement in my book of we were discussing hygiene and the importance of dealing with mosquito breeding. But mosquitos must

29:30 live, you know. You know you mustn't kill them off. They must live. They're entitled to, their God's creatures. And I think in retrospect I've often thought about this, I think that the whole thing just got too much for him as brave and as courageous as he was. He was as honest as the day. If

30:00 the Japs tried to appease him in some way and gave him a couple of eggs or bananas or something like that he'd always give it to the sick. He'd never keep anything for himself. He insisted that the officers got no privileges and you know all that. From that point of view he was magnificent but I had major problems with him. Now he was highly

30:30 regarded, I was going to say revered, by the troops. Now there's no way that I could have possibly have let anybody else know my conflict with him because it would have destroyed that trust that they had in him. So I just had to live with it and there came one particular showdown when he

31:00 accused me of not having the confidence of the troops nor their officers which was just a bit much for me so I said all right let's put it to the test and so I got Don Kerr who was the first one and he had no knowledge of what had been going on so we asked him a couple of simple questions and

31:30 very clearly there was no lack of confidence or anything else. And so Anderson said all right well you can go now. I said all right well let's get John Shaw in. Now John had no knowledge and the reason I'm going into this is that while they were there I could have talked to him but I didn't.

**What was this particular conflict about?**

32:00 Oh that I didn't put on a show for the Japs essentially. I didn't have a good bedside manner and neither the troops nor their officers had any respect for me, which is patently not correct. So we got John Shaw in and he said his

32:30 little piece and obviously completely ignorant of you know what had been going on. So Colonel Anderson said you can go now and I said all right well you know if that's the way you feel have me transferred to one of the other camps but he didn't.

**They used to call you 'the Baby Doctor'.**

Even the Japs called me the Baby Doctor.

**Where did that come from?**

33:00 Oh I had a very youthful appearance. I'd like to think I still have. You know, if you look at those photographs you'll see that before we left Australia shortly after the regiment was formed we had a big ball in Mark Foys as it was in those days and the mums and the dads and the wives and

33:30 girlfriends and all the rest of it turned up and one looked at me, the mums are saying I'm not going to allow him to look after my son, he's too young, he doesn't understand. But you know it was well established that I had this young face and was too young to be responsible for the welfare of those men.

34:00 **Did you ever look after the Japanese, the guards?**

Oh yeah, quite often. We had a couple of them that used to come along for their syphilis injections and then occasionally they'd be in trouble and come along. You know the Japs that had given me a hard time when he

34:30 himself was in trouble he wouldn't hesitate to come and look for a bit of advice or treatment despite the fact they had their own doctor.

**Why do you think that was?**

I don't know. If it's good enough for the troops it's good enough for him I

34:48 suppose. No I don't know.

# Tape 8

00:52 **Rowley you were talking about recipes and things before. Can you actually tell me the kind of food you were eating, what was available then and where you got it … at the camp**

01:06 You mean the rations that we received? Well, essentially rice. Very occasionally meat. The poor little beasts that we used to get the meat from were half starved so we got very little meat. Vegetables most of the time

01:30 were nonexistent. I used to make a stew – so-called – with a bit of green in it but from nutritious point of view virtually very little value and there I've got the actual rations if you're interested in them. The amount of rice we got, the amount of meat we got per day over all the time we were on the

02:00 railway.

**And you said that the Dutch were supplementing their rations with things they found in the jungle? What kind of food was there?**

Oh they used to pick leaves of various plants or shrubs or whatever and they knew which to pick and which to cook.

02:30 **How did you manage to source some of the things that you knew were deficient in the men's diet? You knew that there were some foods that were causing deficiencies in the men's diet, how did you go about addressing it?**

Beri beri is due to vitamin B and yeast contains a lot of it and where we had

03:00 particularly pellagra which is one of the vitamin B group. We used to make our own yeast. Ferment rice and things like potatoes, I've forgotten what they are called now, various root vegetables. We'd stir them up and

03:30 make yeast, which we used to issue to the troops and we did this when we had the pellagra epidemic which was, pellagra is a deficiency disease which starts off with dermatitis where you get itchiness around your mouth, lips, tongue. The males used to get it in the scrotum which is an

04:00 extremely uncomfortable and unpleasant thing to have. We used to call them rice balls. Different sort of rice balls if you're talking about recipes and then after the skin trouble, dermatitis diarrhoea and it tended to recur on an annual basis or a recurrent basis. Diarrhoea and then dementia. It

04:30 would affect the brain and cause dementia and then finally death. So it was a horrifying disease. The thought of having an epidemic of it and you will see that we had literally hundreds of cases of the skin phase of it. We did have some with the diarrhoea phase of course and we even had dementia

05:00 which may have been due to pellagra or it may have been malarial dementia. But the thought of having half the camp go down with being nuts is not a very pleasant prospect.

**What was that like if someone got dementia? How did dementia show itself? What kind of behaviour?**

05:30 Dementia? Well they go mad. I remember one bloke lying in his, on his deck looking up and he said stop them from pushing that bike onto me. You know he could see somebody up there with a motorbike and so it went on. Delusions, paranoia I suppose.

06:00 **You were attempting to deal with the physical health problems of the men, were you also in a kind of a counselling role with them at all?**

Oh come on, come on you're joking. Counselling, that's a recent development. People have often asked me you know what counselling we had when we came home. Well, no such thing, and the majority managed

06:30 extremely well without it. They got on with living. But having said you've got to remember something I said earlier, it's a bit like a cow cocky with a herd of cows. They were our men. They were our property and we knew every single one of them and we could tell if they were having problems and we'd have no hesitation in talking to them but it wasn't

07:00 counselling as in you would understand.

**How would you talk to them to get them back into a good frame of mind?**

The quick answer, I haven't a clue. I don't remember, I don't remember. I

07:30 guess it's a case of letting them know that somebody is concerned for them, somebody is caring for them. I think that probably, that they're not out on their own and there's somebody there who they can talk to if they want to. You see they used to have photographs of their wives or girlfriends or children or whatever and over a period of time you know we

08:00 would have seen most of them. They talk about whatever. And we got to know them as I say extremely well.

**You said in your book at one point that you sort of had this realisation of active will to die versus the active will to live. Can you talk about that?**

08:30 I had always believed that there was a will to live and if that will to live disappeared well you died. There's much more to it than that I'm sure of that. It's a bit like bone pointing you know. You point the bone at yourself I guess. Now I've seen many cases of fellows who have been nigh unto

09:00 death for maybe a couple of weeks, semiconscious most of the time being handfed by their mates, amazing to still stay alive and then when they recover from that and they're starting to be getting better or think they're

09:30 getting better they just up and died on me and I think what happened to them was that they would look around and see fellows dying around them and think oh it's too hard, let me go. That's purely and simply my own view on that. But I've seen so many of them who didn't have to die because of their illness but they had made up their mind they were going to

10:00 die and when they were sort of semiconscious and really sick they didn't have enough willpower to as it were terminate themselves but when they got a bit better you know they got to that stage. It's interesting. You know that's purely and simply conjecture on my part.

**That must have been frustrating.**

Oh terrible. You know you have this poor fellow that you'd been jollying

10:30 along for days if not weeks on end and then he apparently is getting better and he ups and dies on me which is very, very soul destroying. I often saw that.

**And in terms of there were so many deaths, was it always possible to give every man a decent burial?**

11:00 In my particular case for most of the time the answer is yes we were able to bury them properly and read a service of some description. There were a couple of times when we didn't have a padre and I did the service myself

11:30 for instance. As a precautionary measure I had, in Kyogle my aunt was a Presbyterian, a rabid Presbyterian and my uncle was a rabid Methodist, a very closest friend was a Catholic priest who used to come and have afternoon tea with us. He used to spend Christmas with us and all the rest

12:00 of it. So that I guess I had a fairly liberal point of view and the last time I was up there before, when we were on re-embarkation leave, I talked to Father Nicholl and asked him what was the drill. You know what should I do to make sure these poor fellows didn't go off without some sort of religious thing and there were not a lot but there were a few occasions

12:30 when I had occasion to conduct a little service and do it and that was important.

**What was the drill?**

Oh God I've forgotten. Come on, it was 60 years ago.

**You said there were Korean guards. Can you talk a bit about how the Korean guards were different from the Japanese?**

13:00 On the railway the actual construction work was governed by Japanese engineers. They were the engineer group and they were at arm's length from the POWs. The POWs were guarded by or were controlled by some

13:30 Japanese non-commissioned officers, sergeant or warrant officers or whatever and the majority of the troops were Korean privates and they've got first, second and third grade privates and in the hierarchy of the Japanese hierarchy, you know, you've got the colonels, the majors, the

14:00 captains and so it goes down the line and then you come to the third class private and beneath him were the POWs and the, that was important from the point of view of corporal punishment. In the Japanese army, anybody,

14:30 any Japanese of whatever rank is entitled to physically bash anybody of the next or lower ranks so that for instance we had a lieutenant in one of our camps and he had been unmercifully beaten by the colonel and then he was brought out to our camp and you'd have the same lieutenant who'd beat up

15:00 a sergeant and so it goes on and of course we were meat for all of them.

**And were there any particular guards you had a particular relationship with?**

Let's go back to the Koreans, which is the question you asked. The Koreans we believed or we were told

a large number of them were jailbirds

15:30 who were released from jail in Korea and drafted into the Japanese Army. So that they were a pretty bad lot, criminal lot and they were the ones that we had day to day contact with. Among them were the odd so called Christians and they weren't game often to be kind and decent to us, but I

16:00 had a couple of occasions where I was saved from a nasty situation by a Christian Korean who could have given me a hard time and didn't. There were some Koreans who were quite decent little blokes, you know, who

16:30 were harmless but they were being pushed by their Jap superiors or their Korean superiors. Having said that then of course there were the criminal ones and they had nicknames. 'Dillinger' [famous American criminal], BB as in 'boy bastard', BBC, 'boy bastard's cobber' and so it went on. You know, they all had nicknames –

17:00 the Boar, and so it went on. But the problems that we had were twofold. Those which were due to senior command who put us on the railway in the first place you know senior command and put us in work parties and things

17:30 like that and who were responsible for not feeding us and not providing us with medical supplies and things. Then there were the local commanders who could have given us better food. After the war for instance a lot of Red Cross parcels were found in Japanese quarters and in my total time I had two issues of one-seventh of a parcel, Red Cross parcel. So that they

18:00 were the sort of local lieutenant sergeant group who were in the camps and they were just, what shall we say, I'm sure we've got the same, the equivalent people in our army who would knock off stuff that wasn't

18:30 rightfully theirs. And then finally there were the ones who were responsible for the gratuitous bashings and what have you and they were mainly the Koreans.

**You said there was a time when a Korean guard actually sort of helped you out.**

19:00 We had this lieutenant who had been beaten up allegedly a banker who in his own way was quite a character. I'll give you an idea of the devious mind. There was one of our fellows caught outside the wire, was charged

19:30 with escaping, was sent to headquarters where there was a court martial with Colonel Nagatamo [?] who was the boss boy conducting it and Nito who was the lieutenant with us, he was the prosecutor and he bunged on an act that this bloke should be shot immediately and blah blah blah blah blah.

20:00 You know he's a dreadful character and all the rest of it knowing or gambling that Nagatamo would have just done the reverse to what was recommended by Nito. And in fact he was not shot, he was just kept in prison for a week or two and let go. But this is the same fellow who was

20:30 bashed up as I say by Nagatamo who would bash up his own guards and yet there was one occasion when he called, he sent for Colonel Anderson, Colonel Williams, the interpreter Bill Drain [?] and myself, and we marched into his office with all the excuses prepared as to why we had so many sick and so many couldn't go to work and you know we'd done our homework to be

21:00 greeted by a table with a cloth on it, sown on it was on the table and to be greeted by Nito. He said, "This is a party, I order you to enjoy yourself." He produced a brandy and there were a couple of younger ones including myself who thought, oh boy this is something so we got stuck into it.

21:30 Colonel Williams wouldn't touch it nor would Anderson and then before long we've run out of that and we thought thank God for that it's over and then he sent off to get some more and got another couple of bottles of brandy and it was shocking stuff and we finished up by pouring it on the ground underneath our chair, under the table and at the end of it we got

22:00 sent home. But on another occasion the interpreter Bill Drain had a small ulcer on his leg and I had grounded him, told him to stay in bed. Nito sent for him and the interpreter sent back a message could the messenger take a message or you know the courier take a message or something. So Nito

22:30 was half tanked at this stage and he came down to where Drain was and he looked at his ankle which was just a simple little ulcer but I wanted him off his feet, and said, "Ah, that is smallpox." Because we'd already had a couple of cases of smallpox which had isolated in a tent just up on the hill just

23:00 near the camp. So he said this is smallpox, he must go into isolation. Where are his bed and where are his clothes, they must be burned and all the rest of it. So they got all his stuff, got a fire going and they were

23:30 whipping off his diaries and his personal stuff and the fellows were rescuing them and out walked Nito realising that a lot of the stuff had disappeared. What have you done with it? Where is it? And I said, "Well your guards have been there all the time, you ask them." Finally he was

24:00 taken up to the isolation, put in isolation and then he took me back into his office and with his revolver, this is the end of the story that you asked me half an hour ago, the question you asked, with his revolver twiddling around on his thumb, on his finger, told me what a bad boy I was, that I was concealing smallpox and why and you know falsifying the records, that

24:30 Drain should have been marked sick and so on and then he called for a Japanese, one of his guards and ordered the guard to take me outside and work me over, and this was a fellow who was allegedly a Christian. And he got me outside and he cursed and swore at me in Japanese and then

25:00 with his fist hit his hand like that you know it just sounded as though he was hitting me. That went on for a while. But it could have been one of the other guards who enjoyed having a little go. And then he told me to go, and boy, I went.

**There was an incident later on wasn't there ... when you did actually**

25:30 **get bashed, that was a sick parade incident wasn't it?**

Yes that was when I pulled my trick of you send this man to work and he was a little third class Korean and the thought of his Emperor talking to him and criticising him was just beyond him and he just went bmm and blew up. I'd never experienced that before. Generally it had been a

26:00 sergeant or somebody else but this was a third class private who was terrified literally. I mean I overdid it and I copped it. And the important thing was that the blokes were saying don't let him get you down, he'll put the boot in which they did and it was just a case of having to stay on your

26:30 feet. How I did I wouldn't know. Next question.

26:34 **Just to finish that off though, there was ... you were perceived as being brave for that resistance. The Japanese actually noticed that you had been quite brave in standing up to that guard. Wasn't this a little sort of epilogue to that?**

Yeah, well, the interesting thing was ... that

27:00 the Jap who was in ... well it was a Korean who was in charge of the camp, the Jeep he was known as. I think he was only a first-class private, incredible. He sent for me, and I thought, uh-oh, here we go again. And he offered me a cup of tea, or ... I can't remember now ... an egg, or a banana or

27:30 something. That Colonel Williams that I spoke of, he was one of the bravest blokes I've ever struck. He would stand up, unlike Charles Anderson, he would stand up to the Japs, and, sadly, he bought a lot more trouble than he needed. He was the absolute extreme to

28:00 Anderson. But he copped himself 24 hours outside the guard house, in the sun, without a hat, and every guard that went by took a swing at him. And, I remember, this bloke saying to this Jap, or Korean ... at Jeep Island ....

28:30 "You like Colonel Anderson ... very brave man ... but you get into too much trouble." But in other words, what he was trying to say was, we respect you for what you're trying to do.

29:00 Nobody could have paid me a higher compliment. Next question.

**Talk to me a bit about ... you were keeping a diary at this time, and**

29:30 **medical records, and you said before that this was a really important skill that you learned about recording and observing. Can you just talk a bit about the use of your diary, and ...**

One of the requirements of a regimental medical officer, in a regiment or a unit, is to supply the senior medical people in headquarters with a report on a weekly basis, of the illness

30:00 rates, the rations, or anything else. I kept that up during the POW period. I also kept a diary, which I commenced on the 8th of December 1941. It was about that big. Loose leaf,

30:30 with a little clip thing. Pages stuck together. And I kept that all the time during action, and whatever, until we got to the first Christmas on the railway, Christmas '42. When it was filled, I took it away, and carefully wrapped it up, and put it in the bottom of my kit, and I got some more

31:00 paper, and put it in and used that. Along the line, I used to write essays on things, all sorts of subjects, and philosophy, or religion, or god knows what. Somewhere along the line, we realised that we were going to probably be moved

31:30 out of the camp, and ... I think we knew we were going to Japan. Anyway, I did a summary on six sheets of paper, of the two, the first part of the diary and the second part of the diary. I did a summary of those. I also had a big sheet where I kept all the rations, and listed the rations that we received over all the period we were on the railway.

32:00 I kept them separately. When we got into a camp in Thailand, after the railway was finished, we went down to a place called Tamikan, and when we were on our way, with a group to Japan, on the so-called

Japan party, I gave my diary to John ...

32:30 John Shaw, and he made a false bottom in a billy can. Simple matter ... they just get ordinary piece of tin - you know, 4 gallon petrol tin or something like that, and bend it and crimp it, and whatever. Then they put one bottom in it, and then put a second bottom, and he put the diary in there. He kept it,

33:00 looked after it, and brought it back to me. The summary I had with me when we got to Jeep Island. The day I had this bashing ... broken front teeth, and ... you know ... real sorry for myself I was. A fellow was brought in

33:30 with food poisoning. He'd found a dead oyster which he'd eaten. He died within a couple of hours. I thought, well, I'd better bury this diary. It was on the ... there's a photograph among those things of a little island, in colour, just off the coast of Singapore.

34:00 I was angry and real sorry for myself, and I thought, well, I'm not going to lose my diary, I'll plant it. So we got a cross for this fellow, and I got an empty bottle, rolled the paper up and jammed it up into the bottle,

34:30 with the rations thing. Put it in there. Packed paper into the thing. Turned it upside down. First of all, sealed it with candle ... knocked off some candles from somewhere. Put candlewax, and sealed it off. Then I turned it upside down, and put it in the ground about six inches

35:00 below the cross ... where we put the cross in. And then we buried the fellow the next day, and all the rest of it. The Japs wanted to move the cross, and I thought ... uh-oh. Anyway ... so it was buried. After the war was over, we were brought home via Manilla, where we had ... Justice Webb I think it was ...

35:30 who was doing the war crimes thing ... War Crimes Commission. Doing interviews. I was the only survivor on the ship that was torpedoed, so they gave me a working over there, asking lots of questions and all the rest of it. ... I've lost the track ... what was I talking about?

**Your diary ... you got your diary back eventually?**

36:00 Oh yeah. And I said to them, if you really want more information, I've got a diary that's buried on a little island ... I drew a sketch of the island, and ... you know, rocky outcrop, three hundred paces ... you know, that sort of nonsense. X marks the spot where the treasure is. I said, you get me those, and I can give you a lot more information. Nothing happened for a long time, so I finally went down to Melbourne,

36:30 to the War Graves people, to find that the squad who had transplanted that fellow from the little island to the main cemetery in Kranji had been disbanded. So I went through the whole act again, and finally it turned up, on the 15th of February 1947. Then I was able

37:00 to go back to the notes which I'd expanded. See, when I got back, I got my diary back. I expanded that. I had a friend who was ... could type like a deposition clerk. She used to sit up, like Jackie at her typewriter, and I'd get comfortable on the lounge with a bottle of Scotch, and talked to her like I'm talking to you now. She'd type madly, and we expanded the diary.

37:30 And then of course, when I got my summary back, which included the first part. And I forgot to say, in the first part, in a search I lost ... the Japs spotted it, in the bottom of my pack. Fortunately, there were no repercussions. But the current one that I was using was quite obvious, they didn't notice that.

38:00 Anyway, I was able to expand the thing, once I got the summary back, I was able to expand it a little bit further. I deliberately did nothing about publication at that stage, because several of the people in it were alive. Colonel Anderson was still alive, and I didn't want to in any way upset him. I didn't want to mention

38:30 names of people who'd died, particularly with cholera, and, you know, the nasty things. I didn't want those names to be released at that stage. I did do one version of it where I scratched out all the names. But I thought, oh no, I'll put it aside, and the I forgot about it. But it was not until Clay Blair, the author of "Return from the River Kwai"

39:00 who put me through the hoops on an interview like this, that triggered me to do a little bit more about it. And I tizzied it up a little bit then, but it was all ready for doing something about it.

39:18 **End of tape**

# Tape 9

00:50 **Okay Rowley let's leave the railway at this point ... let's move on to the stage after the railway when you are sent off to Japan. Just tell us a bit about the beginning of that journey, travelling on the ship.**

Well recapping. When the railway finished we first went to Saigon to

01:30 go to Japan but the submarines were so active we had three attempts to go on a ship to leave from Saigon. It was considered to be too dangerous, so they took us back to Singapore and then I was on this island, Jeep Island [?] that I was talking about where I got bashed up for three months building a grading dock and then we were formed in the

02:00 beginning of September '44 we formed a convoy of nine ships who were transports, oil tankers and passenger or converted passenger ships and seven escorts left Singapore. On one of the ships, the Rokyu Maru which I

02:30 was one there were 700-odd Australians, a thousand British and then there was another ship the Kachidoki Maru with I think another thousand British. We were joined just off Manila by another destroyer and there was a bit of movement of the ships backwards and forwards but just after we left

03:00 Manila there was the 9 plus 7. On the early morning of the 12th September '44, the American submarines attacked and one of the destroyers was sunk. That was sort of 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. About 7 or 8 o'clock, it must have been a bit before that, doesn't matter,

03:30 we were hit, that's the Rokyu Maru and then the convoy moved on and the Kachidoki Maru was sunk later on in the day near the island of Hainan. In there you'll find a map which is also in the book which shows the

04:00 passage of that convoy and where the ships were sunk and how many sunk on which day. But the, we expected to go down very quickly. We had a prearranged drill to get the sick off as well as the troops. I got all

04:30 the sick off. We threw over hatch covers and bits of timber for people to hang onto. When it was all, when we got them all off one of the men who had been batman to another of our officers adopted me and he looked after me and we looked for water, water bottles because I had a

05:00 haversack with a water bottle and whatever and when the torpedo hit us a wave of water came and just washed a whole lot of stuff away including my water bottle and you know various other bits. So once we

05:30 got rid of all our, all the men off we then went looking for water bottles because there were a number of Jap troops on the ship as well and this fellow, Tommy Moxham, sorry Jack McKone who had a reputation for helping himself to other people's property and in going into his history there, gaps of 12 months or 18 months here and there when he was

06:00 working for Her Majesty or His Majesty at that time [in prison] and he was quite a character. So he got the bottles, the water bottles and we found that the Japs who immediately abandoned ship and took all the lifeboats, we found that there were two lifeboats that were still on the stern. We tried

06:30 to move one. It was, the davits were completely rusted and I couldn't move it and we had a go at the second one. By this time a few of the troops had swum back to the ship and came aboard and after a while we managed to get that lifeboat launched. It was launched, we got it launched. In doing it we had to drop it several feet into the water and in

07:00 doing so, we damaged the thing and it leaked water. Before very long we had something like 70 people hanging onto it. We couldn't bring them inside except for the couple who were scooping the water out. So we just drifted around for a while and the troops were on bits of timber

07:30 and hatch cover and all the rest of it being dispersed. The Japs took the first ten boats, lifeboats and they were just drifting around within sight until late afternoon when a couple of destroyers came in and picked them up and as they did, as they picked them up they launched, they just pushed the lifeboat back into the water and I took the boat we were on

08:00 in closer and recovered those boats. We got one that was not damaged and we transferred from our damaged boat into that one and I think I limited it to 30 or something, I've forgotten now. We had a number of our navy personnel with us, chief petty officers and what have you and

08:30 I gave them the job of running the ship. So that the outcome was that the Japs didn't pick us up but they recovered all their own troops from the 10 lifeboats. Later in the afternoon before the Rokyu Maru sank, another crowd had swum back to the ship and launched the first one that

09:00 we couldn't launch and they came over to us to say goodbye and that they were going to head for the Philippines, sorry, yeah the Philippines whereas we had decided that we were going to go west to China. It was only going to take us over ten days to get there but we thought that was the better way to go. Again this incredible thing of you know it didn't

09:30 occur to you that you wouldn't make it. Self delusion obviously but nevertheless, so at the end of the day we had recovered the 10 from the Japs were on, there was the one that we'd been on making 11 and the twelfth one was the one that was going to the Philippines.

10:11 **On the Rokyu Maru where were you within the boat itself? Where were the POWs kept?**

Most of them were in the hold. The Australians were all on one side, on

10:30 the port side. The Brits were on the starboard side. We were hit on the starboard side. We don't think that there were very many killed in the initial torpedo hitting the ship, and lasted as I said several hours before it

11:00 sank and we had the orderly withdrawal. As it was night there would have been a large number of the troops up on deck. You know, they used to sneak up on deck during the night.

**Yourself included?**

Yeah.

**Recall for us the moment. What did it feel like? What did it sound like when the torpedo hit?**

Oh just an almighty thump as far as I can remember. That's something

11:30 that is not vivid in my mind. Watching them jump overboard is very vivid in my mind because the ship was obviously still under way and as they fell, it appeared that they were curving as they went down. As a matter of fact, they weren't of course but that to me is as vivid as if it

12:00 was yesterday yet the wave coming over you know that's just vague. It's quite clear getting the blokes overboard but you know a lot of it, I don't know why it should be blotted out but it is.

**You said your duty was to get the sick ones off … you were launching them over the side? Was that how you did it? You threw them into the water?**

12:30 Yeah. Well, like with children you know. Jump. That was the way they went over.

**At this point in time you had lost a lot of your body weight … but at the**

13:00 **same time there seems to be an extraordinary resilience in their capacity to then hop in a boat and row for however many days you did, we'll get to that stage of the story.**

We had a sail … we only used the oars purely and simply to keep us within cooee of the other. I got to the stage where there were 11 boats.

13:30 One going to the Philippines, 11. Four of us were close together. The other seven were north of us and they were tied together in line. Now we decided to spread out, in case there was a submarine around and we had more chance of being picked up and this went on for three days. The third day we heard what we thought was gunfire coming from the

14:00 north and we saw a destroyer followed by two more or frigates they were and we thought, oh they have accounted for the seven boats that were up there. Then we saw them approach one of our boats, the furthest one away from us, slow down and pick them up. Now they had

14:30 a scramble net overboard, you know they scrambled into the destroyer and they did that with the four of us, finally picked us up and we were pushed down up forward on the boat with the, there was a gun on the

15:00 deck and I talked to the skipper of the frigate and asked him where the other seven boats were and he pointed to the other two frigates and we thought, oh well, they're on there and then we sailed most of the day to, until we got to Hainan and we offloaded onto an oil tanker where there

15:30 were already ensconced the survivors of the Kachidoki Maru. Now that ship went down within half an hour, twenty minutes half an hour and yet more than half of them survived. They had the most horrible oil burns and they had been in the sun. They got sunburnt with the oil. The stench was something I'll never forget, of oil and burnt flesh and you

16:00 know all that. We tried to do what we could for them which was nothing very much. We managed to get a bucket and a piece of rope and then we could get some water, but it was salt water you know to wash some of them. That went on for a little while and then they moved, the Japs moved us onto what was a whaling mother ship, which

16:30 had been converted from a whaling mother ship, where they had a stern lid that dropped down and they were able to haul the whales in onto a big deck which is like a hanger deck, the full length of the ship where they obviously brought the whales in and they had rails through it where they had converted it no doubt to running out landing craft and it was

17:00 used for landing craft launching and we were put in below deck of course and we were in this great cavern you know that echoed madly. There were dozens if not hundreds of empty 44 gallon drums along the side of the ship and later on when there were some dropping of depth

17:30 charges and things these used to rattle and echo and the din inside here was absolutely enormous. But we were kept down below and except we were allowed to go up to the toilet which, and the toilet in the Japanese shipping sense was purely and simply a wooden frame slung over the side of the boat and you just slung over with it, remembering to hang on.

18:00 On the way from Hainan to Japan we stopped off for a day or two at Formosa. We were attacked before we got to Formosa and we were attacked again after. When we left Hainan, there were only three escorts

18:30 and three transports left including the one we were on. All the others had been damaged or sunk. When we arrived in Japan there was one escort and one ship left and that was the one we were on. The attrition rate was pretty great.

**You talk about hearing the depth charges, the Japanese boat was launching these to get the submarines that were sinking the other boats around them, is that right?**

19:03 Yeah to try and get the submarines yes but the din, I'll never forget the din. The thing that intrigued me and I've never been able to resolve this,

19:30 who was it that authorised the picking up of our group? Was it the skipper of our destroyer and the skippers of the other two destroyers had in fact shot up the others. We don't know. The other thing that intrigued me was off Hainan where the Kachidoki Maru was sunk, the Japs sent off a flotilla of small boats that picked up the people who we caught up

20:00 with on the tanker. Now who authorised that? We don't know. I tried to track down the skipper of the frigate that picked us up. I eventually found his name to find that he had been killed in Leyte just later in the

20:30 year. And I was very sad because I would have loved to have contacted him or his family but that's as far as I could get.

**You say you spoke to him. You spoke to him when you got on board in Japanese?**

Oh we could speak Japanese pretty fluently by this time. You know, I would say pidgin Japanese, but enough to be understood with a few

21:00 waving of the arms and a few words here and there.

**And do you still have any Japanese?**

In 1954, '58, doesn't matter, 1958 or 9 yeah I had the opportunity of going to Japan to bring back some tank landing craft, I was still in the

21:30 CMF and to bring back these tank landing craft which were in mothballs in Japan and I managed to get on the party to get up there and there were two ships that they picked up, two crews each with a medical officer. I organised my wife to go. The others were relying on local

22:00 talent to entertain them. So when we got up there, there was no point, we were attached to Yokosuka which was the main base. My wife was living in a hotel which was some few miles away from the base in Yokosuka and in Yokosuka there was the main hospital for the Far East,

22:30 United States Navy. So there was no shortage of medical attention and equipment and all that. So there was no point in two doctors being, two Australian doctors being on duty at the same time and I volunteered to take the first week off so my wife and I set off into the hills. In the

23:00 meantime we had met an Australian girl who was married to an American who was the boss of the equivalent of the PX stores [Postal Exchange - American canteen unit], he was quite a senior fellow and as a result of that we managed to get a pass for

23:30 my wife to be able to get into what they called the bachelor officer quarters, the BOQ where we were housed and after a few days we were invited to a party that the hospital put on for us. I might say when we arrived I rang the hospital and said, "This is Captain Richards, I'd like to

24:00 meet your CO." Well when we got there the red carpet was put out for us almost, took one look at me an army captain not a naval captain. You know you could see them mentally rolling up the red carpet. But they treated us magnificently and they invited us to this party at the end of the week and there was, there were nurses quarters just across the

24:30 road from the BOQ, whether that was by design or not I don't understand but anyway there were nurses quarters there. It was nice and handy to all the bachelor officers who were in the quarters there and we met the matron who said to my wife where are you staying and she said in the hotel so and so. Oh there's no problem, there's a bus that picks

25:00 me up and brings me here and brings me right to the base and all that. By this time through this Australian who was married to the American we got access to the PX stores. You know you've heard of PX stores? On all the naval bases they've got, all military establishments they've got the equivalent of high quality supermarket. You could buy anything

25:30 from pearls to cameras to name it all at incredibly low prices. So we got access to this and the matron said ah but that's no good, that's no good, I have empty rooms, I've got quarters in my nurses home be

my guest. So the next day my wife moved down from Yokosuka and she stayed

26:00 there. It didn't cost us anything and she was right next door to where I was staying and so we had a ball. So that what it boiled down to we were supposed to be there for a fortnight but things didn't turn out that way. We were there for about five or six weeks and it was absolutely marvellous and this gave me the opportunity of going back to Sakata

26:30 where we finished up in Japan and meeting the two civilian Japanese who were very good to us there.

**So we're in the boat and you come to Formosa is that right? Where does the journey go from there?**

Well we went from there to a place called Moji which is in, it's a

27:00 southern island of Japan. There's a tunnel I think it is that goes through to the northern island. They're right adjacent and we went ashore there and they issued us with a blanket which is about all we had in the way of clothing and then we went on up to Sakata by train. They marched

27:30 us through Yokosuka, the village of Yokosuka which, not Yokosuka, Tokyo Bay, what's the one below it … marched us through the streets there with our blankets draped around us to the great amusement of the Japs, the civilian Japs.

28:00 **Did you know where you were heading?**

No, we didn't have a clue and if we had been told we wouldn't have had a clue anyway. We went by train up to Sakata, which is on the west coast of the main island up quite a bit and we were there for 12 months.

**And what did you do there?**

28:30 Froze in the coldest winter they'd had for 70 years. You know we had, we were in a big building. There was a saki factory just across the road and this building was their sort of warehouse and they'd emptied it out and put us in there and they had some windows without panes in them.

29:00 The kitchens equally had no protection at all for the cooks and they had a dreadful time and there was for most of the winter we had no heating so it was bloody cold and we froze.

**So we go from tropical heat in the Thai Burmese jungle and within a couple of months you're experiencing …**

29:30 We had the winds direct from Vladivostok we reckoned.

**And are you the only MO [medical officer] here?**

No. When we arrived in Japan there were 80-odd Australians picked up by the Japanese. Another 50-odd were picked up by the submarines and

30:00 taken on to Saipan and they got back. When we got to Japan they broke us up into a party of 50 and a party of 30. The 50 remained in Tokyo. Of the 30, one had to be left behind because he was sick so that there was only 29 Australians who went up to Sakata and I was the only

30:30 Australian officer and obviously the only medical officer. The Brits had 270 I think, yeah, 270 in Sakata. They had 3 officers plus a medical officer, there were 4 of them. So 4 of them plus the Australian officer

31:00 lived in the Australian, lived in the officers' quarters if you like. We had separate quarters. And this is where we had problem with the Brits. They insisted on living together and when we got the two Red Cross

31:30 parcels, one between seven, you know one among seven the officers insisted on having one each and you know they weren't real keen on me objecting to that, and then as you will see in the book the day we were leaving, as I said we were just across the road from a sake [rice wine] factory and by

32:00 this time we had got ourselves well established, this was a month after the war finished and we were well ensconced and we just demanded an issue of a bottle of sake per man and these were, you know, litre bottles wrapped up in special tissue paper allegedly for the Emperor, you know, that sort of nonsense and we just drank it like beer. I don't know

32:30 whether you've had sake at any stage, then you know what it does to you. So we were drinking this most of the day singing 'Waltzing Matilda' and you know just, by this time there were only 24 of us left, the others had died, and late in the afternoon before we were just due to move out I went back to the officers, where the officers quarters were and they ostracised me because I was drinking with the troops. "That's

33:00 not done, old man." So we told them in appropriate language that we would drink with the troops. And the next morning we talk about the hangover we had when the war finished, when we capitulated but the next morning we had ten times the hangover after a bottle of sake each.

33:30 **You built a railway in Thailand and Burma in the camps … and you built the aerodrome at Tavoy what was your responsibility in Sakarta?**

34:00 Well Jim Rolson and I shared the responsibility for running sick parades and looking after the hospital and we had a small hospital there and we had this civilian medical orderly who was a fellow who had had polio since he was a little fellow, very deformed and he used to come in and

34:30 they have their meals in bento [lunch] boxes and he used to come and share his play lunch with the fellows in the hospital. He was a marvellous bloke.

**So was there a lot more communication and relations with the local Japanese people?**

35:00 When we were in Japan in Sakata we were, how shall we say, flogged off to the local civilians on some docks and also in factories so that while we had guards we were the responsibility of the civilians to feed us, provide us with medicine or whatever and we in fact had two civilian doctors who used to come in, poke their nose in and not do

35:30 anything that was useful. And the troops as I said worked on the docks and then worked, there were two factories where they used to work.

**What were they doing in those factories?**

36:00 I'm blowed if I know. One was a chemical factory. I suppose pushing trucks around. I don't remember.

**And this is where you met the friends that you made?**

Maximoto [?] and Takahashi.

**How did you make contact with them? How did that friendship develop?**

36:30 Well Maximoto was the medical orderly, the deformed polio medical orderly who used to do what he could for us which was very small but at least he'd do it at risk to himself you know had the guards caught him at it he would have been in trouble and the other fellow was the butcher, the local butcher and when a horse slipped on the ice and broke its leg they used to take it up to the abattoirs and the butcher had to butcher it

37:00 and they used our manpower to do the work, to do the butchering and there were plenty of bushies that were able to do that. The technique there was apparently there were certain groups in the town who were entitled to a quarter of the beast so that the butcher used to cut the beast

37:30 through the ribs and then a couple of ribs further down he'd section it again and those two ribs would go under the counter and then he'd section it so they still had four quarters and the locals went away happy and we took this meat and of course gave it to the troops.

38:00 **What did you use to beat the cold? You were distributed with one blanket, there were no panes**

Later on we had a jacket, second hand jacket, second hand pair of slacks, singlet, long john underpants which is what the Japs wore and

38:30 then I think we finished up ultimately with three blankets. I can't remember, two or three.

**Did you cover the windows?**

Oh God no, we covered us. Later on I think that they did get something to board the windows up or something, I can't remember now.

39:00 **Were you aware when the atom bombs were dropped?**

Yes and no. We didn't realise what it was, of course. Towards the end

39:30 of the period a couple of our men got smallpox in this camp and I've got the clinical notes as they were written in pencil, photocopy is in there and I got it myself, smallpox, but they were only mild attacks and we were isolated in what was the Jap guardhouse had been at one stage

40:00 which was right next door to the, to our troops' toilets and we had a window that we could talk to these guys as they were in the toilets on the other side and down at the docks and various other places they used to knock off tins of meat or tins of canned fruit or you know whatever

40:30 and we used to store it for them for a percentage of it. There were eight of us in this isolation. A couple with dysentery, severe dysentery and the rest of us with smallpox and we used to park this stuff up in the ceiling and terrified that the ceiling would come in on us but as I say we

41:00 used to store it there for the blokes and we'd get a percentage of it and they kept us up with the news. They always left a civilian with shiny shoes or something you know that established him as being a reliable witness. They also produced the Japanese newspaper, which is written

41:30 in, not the noughts and crosses [actually Kanji, ideograms] but the Hiragana [phonetic script] or whatever the thing is and we could read that.

# Tape 10

00:49 **Rowley, we were talking about the atomic bomb and your awareness of that.**

Yeah, why give a short answer when you can give a long one? And I was

01:00 giving a long one. Going into the fact that we were in this isolation area and the fellows used to come in and give us the news of the day. There was always some little bit of news and we'd get news items from half a dozen or more people often conflicting and whatever and believe it or not

01:30 we in this isolation used to issue a bulletin every night at the end of the day after everybody had come into work and given us all the titbits of news and we as I say almost issue a news bulletin and among the things that they gave us were these newspapers written in Hiragana which is a simple form

02:00 of Japanese and we could read the thing pretty well, you know read particularly with maps and things because they had to anglicise a lot of the words. And then the Japs one day came in and said "Hiroshima BNGQ,

02:30 that's B-ni-ju-kyu [29] that's 29 ichi, that's one come over bomb finish," and we didn't understand what this one bomb thing was but we knew within I would say a day or so when it happened and then we got the next one the Nagasaki

03:00 one and as I say the fact that it was an atomic bomb of course we didn't know but we were familiar with the B-ni-ju-kyus the B29s, because they used to fly over and they did over the town which was just north of us and we saw it after the war, after the thing finished and the technique that they

03:30 would play ringy-ringy-rosy round the outskirts of the city, bomb it, incendiaries, establish fire a circle of fire which prevented people from getting in or out and then if the fires needed a bit of stirring up they'd stoke it with a few more incendiaries or bombs or whatever and then systematically bomb the rest of the city and to me there's no difference

04:00 between that and the atomic bomb. It's still horrendous. It doesn't have some of the undertones of atomic damage, radiation damage but the cruelty of it is just unbelievable. And we found out after the war that we were on

04:30 the list for the 17th and we subsequently learned that on the 20th all POWs who were in Japan were to be annihilated and no traces left. I haven't seen it, but a friend of mine has seen the document so that we were a bit lucky.

05:00 Without the atomic bomb, obviously millions of lives would have been lost, Japanese and Americans and whatever quite apart from the POWs that were going to be eliminated. Next question.

05:52 **The war finishes and you get to come back to Australia on the Formidable? Do you meet that in Japan?**

No. The war finished on the 15th August. On the 12th September, 12 months to the day from when we were in the water on the way to Japan, we moved out of Sakata which was on the west coast to a place called Sendai

06:30 on the east coast where we were transferred in our hung over state onto a destroyer which ploughed its way down to Tokyo Bay onto the Wakeful – HMS [His Majesty's Ship] Wakeful – submarine support vessel. When we got into Tokyo Bay, we were deloused on a hospital ship,

07:00 supposed to have handed everything in and got a complete new set of clothes but somehow we managed to hide a whole lot of things, diaries and God knows what into places and we were able to go back and recover them. And then from Tokyo Bay we were flown to Okinawa and there

07:30 we saw the most incredible sight of as far as the eye could see were ships ready for the invasion. Absolutely unbelievable and we landed. There were numerous aerodromes. There was one for the B29s, one for the B24s and they were just driving around like taxis you know. Would you like to go to the States, mate? You know, we could have got a trip

08:01 anywhere on the planes, incredible. But there in Okinawa we saw for the first time the ducks, you know DUKW [D=1942, U=utility, K=front wheel drive, W=tandem axle] I think it is which were the big amphibious, they were boats on wheels, amphibious things enormous 30 or

08:30 40 feet with usually a great big buck nigger sitting up driving them, driving round the streets, terrifying you know. They could run anybody down but you'd see them come from the water, just drive up to the beach and then up onto the road and away they'd go. But that's not part of the story. Then

09:00 from Okinawa we flew down to Manila and we were there for three or four weeks I think, I'm losing track – I was only there for a week or so, a week or so and we were under canvas there in what was called a

09:30 convalescent hospital where they force fed us. You'd get your ordinary rations and then you'd get your convalescent rations and all the rest of it. As we were saying the other day in Japan once we took over officially which was after a few days we just ordered what we wanted. Meat, rice

10:00 and all the rest of it and our fellows just ate up and ate up big. So much for the small stomach that we thought we were going to have and weren't going to be able to eat. And fellows who had been with me for the last 12 months or a lot longer in some cases left Sakata earlier than we did and

10:30 got down to the Philippines, Manila ahead of us and they had been there say for a couple of weeks. Frankly I didn't recognise them. They had put on so much condition, and so much weight, and you know looked marvellous and one of the things that was intriguing was that from being literally skin and bone, you've seen plenty of photographs, if they had been

11:00 tennis players, their right forearm would come up much bigger than their left. You know, the muscle structure that had been developed. If they were footballers or cyclists their thighs would recover very quickly. It's quite extraordinary. Anyway, in this convalescent place the Australians had sent

11:30 up some of our nurses and I've seen the 10 or 12 page foolscap pages of how to deal with these lunatics and whatever that you're going to be meeting and quite frankly we often discussed how we would get on in civilised society again, whether we would be able to cope with civilised society. You know whether we'd become so uncouth that you know we

12:00 wouldn't be able to cope with it. And after two days, I knew one of the nurses, we'd been to lots of parties together in Sydney before we left and we were just back to the old tricks and I think I told you that we were

12:30 issued on a weekly basis a card with seven sections on it. A bit like the original punchcards, do you remember them? And that would entitle you or us to one pipe per week, a brand new pipe, top quality pipe, so many packets of tobacco, so many cartons of cigarettes, et cetera et cetera et cetera, a beer or

13:00 two beers or three beers or something on a daily basis, gin on a daily basis, scotch on a daily basis and whatever and you could literally go up and get your issue every day. But while this was going on they were moving people out of camp into Australia, flying them out and they would give us

13:30 their cards before they went. So we would front up with a bundle of cards and we'd literally get a bottle of scotch and a bottle of gin, not a plug of it, bottles of it and then in my particular case we'd take a couple of dozen beer and the scotch and whatever up to the nurses' quarters and proceed to have a party and this went on you know night after night. So much for all

14:00 the instructions of how to cope with us. As I say it was as though we were just carrying on from the last time we saw them which is a very interesting exercise, you know an interesting psychological thing, how rapidly we

14:30 caught up. And then we left Manila Harbour on the Formidable which was an aircraft carrier. We went down by bus and then out on little craft which might have had 100 on them or something like that and we drove out to where the Formidable was and it was real rough, you know, the swell must have been about 2 feet or 3 feet and the skippers of these little craft

15:00 weren't game to go any closer and there they had big pontoon things lashed to the aircraft carrier and the skippers of these little craft wouldn't go in. We were as annoyed as hell, and we heard later that they had a thousand

15:30 meals cooked for us that had to go overboard. And we did the exercise again and we did this round trip thing and the Formidable captain who we got to know quite well later, he was quite a character, he sent a signal

16:00 across, you drop anchor and I'll pull alongside you.

**And is that what happened?**

No. They sort of increased their courage and finally got in close. Yeah, you drop anchor and I'll pull alongside you. But this bloke, the skipper,

16:30 I've forgotten his name now, when he heard he was coming out to the Far East his first task was to go down to Ireland apparently where there was ample grog or limitless grog or something. He filled his ship with oodles of grog and of course by this time coming out the war had finished, all his

17:00 aircraft had gone and he had the task of picking us up and when we got on board we were issued with a chit system thing were we to buy stuff at the thing and we were to be billed with this at the end of the time and we were on an allowance of so much a day. I've forgotten now. And we got to

17:30 Sydney and they did their bookkeeping and not a single penny was owed. The other little bit of that story was I'd been in the smallpox isolation and I had had my head shaved and my hair was starting to grow and by this time which was August/September/October, three months later coming into

18:00 Sydney I was getting a little bit of hair, and the skipper said to me one day at mess because I was you know doing this obviously trying to pat it down, he said Rowley, your hair is looking less and less like a lavatory brush

18:30 every day. It was about that length.

19:08 **Over the years since the Second World War ended, no doubt you have seen films like Bridge Over the River Kwai, like Changi the television series that was recently on ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] Television. Do you have a view about the way that the POW experience has been represented in films?**

19:30 Well, the Bridge Over the River Kwai was interesting to me in that the CO as portrayed, the Brit CO as portrayed was a mixture of John Williams and Charles Anderson. You know, he was a bit of both tough and weak and you know I could see both of them in this fellow. At no stage of course

20:00 was it, was that bridge blown up. I mean we knew that but given the fact that they were portraying the trials and tribulations of Guinness as the CO and the dreadful things that he had to go through it was just so like John

20:30 Williams and Charles Anderson.

**But did it reflect the POW experience as you remembered it?**

I felt, well you've got to give them a bit of poetic licence and whatever but you know putting them in cages and things well that happened in some places. I think that by and large, I mean running around the bush and

21:00 doing that you know I mean obviously that wasn't factual but the general theme of it I thought was fairly, it was acceptable. Now as for the Changi series, that's a different story. That was appalling, absolutely appalling. I've seen lots of guys thrashed, tortured and whatever. I've never seen one

21:30 cringe. No never. And they took it on the chin. I remember one of our bad guys, he used to go through, he'd shoot through the camp and he'd go

22:00 and knock off the odd little poor unfortunate ox or you know the cattle pulling a cart somewhere. During the day if they saw one in a cart they'd knock it off, tie it up in the jungle and then go out at night and pick it up and bring it back. They'd butcher it but always give a quarter or more to the hospital, for the hospital use and then they'd proceed to chop it up and

22:30 sell it to their mates at great profit to themselves. And one of them was an engineer as tough as could be and on one occasion he drove a bit of wire into his, the base of his thumb and without anaesthetic I had to open it up

23:00 and gradually get the bits out and he didn't flinch, he didn't bat an eyelid. Thanks, Doc, and it was all over. There was one occasion he was in the hut, the Japs came screaming down all men out all men out and came past this fellow and kicked him out and shortly after that we saw him being beaten

23:30 up with billets of wood that were chopped up for firewood you know with the rough splinters on it and they really gave him a working over. When he came back we said, "What was all that about? "Oh he's no sense of humour, I only just told him to go and get f'd," and the Japs by this time

24:00 knew the significance of it. But he didn't complain and coming back to Changi, you know these blokes cringing and crying and going on, oh dear, oh dear.

**60 years since Singapore fell. You've had a lot of years not just to reflect back on it but to talk with your mates from that time, it may**

24:30 **seem like a strange question, but would you rather not have been a POW?**

To answer that question which I have been asked several times, if I had known what I was going into I wouldn't have had the guts to face up to it but having done it, I wouldn't have missed a minute of it. What I learnt and

25:00 you know the friendships and all those things are absolutely invaluable. And I've been involved in ex-service activities ever since the war. Our unit association was formed on Anzac Eve, 1946, and I was recovering from a bout of malaria on that particular night and I got there late, I was sitting

25:30 up at the back of the hall and they were calling for nominations for president and somebody, one nominated one of the officers, "No he's a bloody officer," and so it went on, nominate somebody else. No he's A Troop or he's B Troop or you know the parochialism was just absolutely incredible

26:00 and then somebody lit their eyes on me up the back and nominated me. Now the troops saw me as neither fish nor fowl. I was not sort of one of the officers in authority I suppose, they didn't identify me there. They identified me with somebody who was trying to help them. So I became president and I still am.

26:32 **This was a very particular generation of Australian men and women that were able to withstand I think a lot of things and to commit themselves. Do you feel like modern Australians could do the same thing again?**

I'm sure they could.

**Why?**

I'm sure that if they were put to the test that they would, they'd come good.

27:00 I have no doubt. Complete confidence.

**So whatever it was that was alive in Australians at that time is still here?**

I believe so. I believe it was alive in the First War, it was alive in the Boer War and so it goes on. I don't think, frankly I don't think that we've changed that much. I think we're essentially the same sort of people. It's

27:30 interesting the attitude to authority. You see the current thing, I am concerned of the development of lack of authority or lack of respect for

28:00 authority that occurs. But I'm quite sure that if the crunch came and the numbers were up the present generation would face up. I've got no doubt.

28:15 **And do you have a view about war at all? What I mean by that is do you feel like ultimately it does achieve – do you feel that war achieves anything for anyone?**

I suppose the answer to that is what's the alternative? When you get conflicting ideas, do you allow the Hitlers of this world or the other people

29:00 of this world unlimited go or do you stand up to them? I don't know. A

29:30 lot of people talk about, what shall we say, well take the Japs. I see them as, if we had been talking about them World War I, they were our mates. If we talk about them in World War III, they could well be our mates again. So

30:00 that that sort of conflict is a thing that changes from time to time. I don't know. No I don't know. But I don't get excited about you know the way our present generation would behave. I'm sure that if the numbers were up

30:30 and they came to the crunch, they'd rally and do whatever was necessary.

**Okay so Rowley you've got there a telegram that the Japanese**

31:00 **Imperial Army sent home to your family while you were working on the railway, the Burmese/Thai railway. Could you just read to us what the telegram said?**

It's headed Imperial Japanese Army. "Our present place quarters and work is unchanged since last card sent to you. The rains have finished. It is now beautiful weather. I'm working healthfully – "

31:30 sick in brackets has been deleted. "We receive newspapers printed in English which reveal world events. We have joyfully received a present of some milk, tea, margarine, sugar and cigarettes from the Japanese authorities. We're very anxious to hear from home but some prisoners have received letters or cables. Everyone is hopeful of a speedy end to the war

32:00 and with faith in the future we look forward to a happy reunion soon. Best wishes for a cheerful Christmas and the birthday greetings again – " that's my mother, this would have been in January, it was my mother's birthday. Pat was my cousin who was also birthday in January. "Very fit. Also SH Ward who was our adjutant,

32:30 Ted Dahl who was our, one of our officers, Armstrong who was Jim Armstrong my medical sergeant, Don Booth who was a medical orderly who was prior to that my batman, Rhodes who was a Corporal Rhodes, Pinky Rhodes who was a medical orderly, McNaughton who was from Kyogle. He was also acting as a medical orderly. Taylor was a sergeant who helped me in the RAP. JAL Shaw was a major, engineer who was probably my closest friend on the railway," and it was signed, "Love Rowley Richards."

**Was there a skerrick of truth in that?**

33:30 Not much, but there's no way that you're going to send a telegram to your family that does other than say everything's lovely.

34:10 **This is the telegram that Rowley was just reading that was sent home to his family.**

34:30 **This now is the address that Rowley sent home. Do you just want to talk about that Rowley?**

Yes, our family home was called Cranmer C R A N M E R and as I started to write on this card, I realised that I could transmit a message to my family that CR and that's Charles Richard, is well,

35:00 and my father spotted it and wrote to the authorities explaining what it meant.

**We're looking at this graph now. What is this graph about?**

The graph covers the incidents of various illnesses in Anderson Force from the time we were in

35:30 Tavoy, that's in southern Burma and then during the period on which we were, when we were on the railway from about October 42 through to December 43. It shows the number who were sick. It shows the cause of the illnesses and we see that there's for instance in the initial stage …

36:00 the first big peak was due to skin trouble. The second one … the first peak is due to skin trouble. The second one was due to pellagra, more skin trouble, diarrhoea. Now this next big peak here was malaria

36:30 and that one was dysentery. By this stage, our main problem was a combination of malaria which occurred about every three weeks. This was usually followed by an attack of dysentery and then it would stir up the beriberi and then having almost recovered from that

37:00 would be the next attack of malaria. So it became quite a continuous cycle. Here we show the deaths that occurred. All of those are deaths and that particular group there was due to cholera and during that period we had about

37:30 15 deaths due to cholera. We managed to contain the epidemic by very stringent hygiene measures. And then you'll see that once that malaria settled down we had another burst of malaria here with a rapid rise,

38:00 actually by this time we'd got down into the main camp in Thailand and the number of sick was reduced quite significantly. While that indicates that there were not many sick it was at a time when we were forced, every single person was forced out often working 36 hours at a time because that was the time when the railway

38:30 was just about, in October, October 17, the railway was joined so that at that stage although it looked as though we didn't have many sick what it really means is that we had every single person that could possibly be out at work was sent out to work.

**Here's a map of**

39:00 **Rowley's journey from Malaya up into Hainan and all the way up into Japan which he talked about earlier and on the side there are the names of the ships and the dates on which they are sunk. Eventually finishing at Sakarta on the north coast,**

39:30 **north west coast of the Japanese main island.**

**How old are you there?**

23. That's the first ball we went to when the regiment was formed. Shortly after returning home.

40:00 **End of '45, beginning of '46?**

'45.

**And when is this one, Rowley?**

About the same time.

**And what's the badge you've got on your left there?**

40:30 That is the 8th Division Artillery badge. That one you mean? 8th Division Artillery. Although I was medical corps I insisted on wearing the artillery badge and actually on my hat I …

**Briefly Rowley, what are these**

41:00 **three photos?**

These were the uniforms that I wore in the militia pre-war. That one would have been about 1934/'35, it's '35 it says. And '37, was when I was a sergeant and that one's '45 after the war when I came home. That was very

41:37 soon after I got back.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**