

Australians at War Film Archive

Michael Skennar - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 1st December 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1196>

Tape 1

00:42 **Thank you very much Michael for doing this interview with us today. I just wanted to start off with a brief summary of your life to date.**

I was born in Lake Cargelligo in western New South Wales

01:00 more years ago than I care to remember. My mother was a school teacher in the town and my father came there as an itinerant builder, and they got together. My next sister was born in Lake Cargelligo and then we came back to Sydney, and I remember living in my grandparents' home at Rose Bay.

01:30 My maternal grandfather had died before I was born. In my fond memory I think that I can remember my grandmother, who died when I was about two or two and a half. Anyway, we lived there until 1933 and then we moved to what is now called Lansvale. At that time it was called Canley Vale.

02:00 It is on the Georges River up towards Liverpool. And while we lived there my mother died. I was seven. Then we came to live in Marrickville and lived in a couple of places in Marrickville. I left home when I was 17 and I worked in the

02:30 country for while, and then ended up in the army. I went to Japan and then from Japan I went to America. After I came home from America I worked for a couple of years. And meanwhile I injured my knee, and I wanted to join the army but I couldn't, but I eventually got into the army in 1952, and I went to Korea.

03:00 I came home from Korea, married, had three children and we lived just across the road or up that street across the road until about three years ago when my wife left me. I came to live here last year. That about sums it up in two to three minutes.

That's a good summary. Thank you very much. So we'll go back to your memories of where you grew up and

03:30 **mostly that was around...?**

I can vaguely remember living at Rose Bay. I can remember some of the instances or the incidents that happened at Rose Bay including me driving a car at the age of four.

Can you describe that?

My mother had a car at the time, which was a bit unusual I guess, but it was a Willies Overland. And in front of the house at Rose Bay there was a very

04:00 wide footpath, and the car used to be parked on the footpath but behind a telegraph pole, and I used to play in it. Anyway, this day somebody borrowed the car, brought it back but not behind the telegraph pole. Of course I was playing in it and the next thing it's off down the road, and luckily there was a very deep gutter, and the front wheel just dropped into it, and the car stopped. Nothing

04:30 terribly traumatic happened.

Did your mum find you in the car?

The whole neighbourhood was out you know! The most exciting thing that had happened since Kingsford Smith I think! Incidentally, Smithie lived just two streets up in Blake Street.

Did you ever meet him?

No but it was well known

05:00 who he was.

How long did you spend in Rose Bay?

Well we left there in 1933. I'm not really certain but I think it was around about Easter time 1933 that we left. It's strange about these things sticking in your mind, but I can remember Easter Saturday that year and I can remember what the sky looked like.

05:30 I can remember that I was wearing a green jumper, but that's about all. After that my memories are at Lansvale and going to school at Villawood.

Was Easter a big thing in your family?

No it wasn't, but I don't know why that stuck in my mind that it was Easter Saturday.

Growing up in Villawood

06:00 **and around that area, was that where you largely went to school or did you also go to school in Rose Bay?**

Well when I was in Rose Bay because I used to scale along behind the baker's cart. My mother sent me to school in the convent in Strickland Street and I was only about three and a half when I went there. That used to keep me off the streets!

So what

06:30 **were you as a child? Were you a troublesome child?**

No I don't think I was a troublesome child. I was a loner. I can't remember my siblings at Rose Bay except Margaret, the one next to me, because she used to fight the kids that used to pick on me in the street. She's a year younger than me, but

07:00 they're weird sort of memories in a way. Another thing I remember particularly about Rose Bay is that we kids used to play in the sand hills in what is now Dover Heights. There were no houses up there then. It was just a massive sandbank. And I can remember the [Sydney] Harbour Bridge being built. In fact I saw the two arches come together. And on the day that the [Sydney Harbour] Bridge was

07:30 opened I couldn't be found. I understand that there was a search party out for me. I came home and just went to bed you know? That's where I was found.

You would have been how old at that time?

Five.

Was Rose Bay a wealthy area at that time?

At that time, no. There were wealthy parts of it

08:00 but it was mainly a working-class suburb.

You mentioned before that your mum was a teacher? Was she teaching locally at that point?

No. I can't remember her actually teaching, but I got hold of her record from the Education Department and she taught in a number of places. Bear in mind that in those

08:30 days teachers started teaching as soon as they had their leaving certificate. It may even have been after the intermediate certificate, and I think they did a year in a teacher's college, and then they worked under supervision of experienced teachers. It wasn't the preparation like they have now, university degrees and what have you. In fact she

09:00 graduated as a teacher when she was 17.

Was it unusual for a woman to go into that profession? It was one of the top kind of things for women at that stage?

I think that it was seen as a stopgap between school and marriage because they had to leave teaching when they married.

But your mum managed to continue

09:30 **to be married and teach?**

No, I don't think she taught after she married.

So she must have been quite an intelligent woman, an academic type? How would you describe her?

That's a bit difficult, but in hindsight I'd say that she was... I don't know about being academically inclined, but I can remember that she was a great reader. She always seemed

10:00 to be reading, but bear in mind I was only seven when she died.

Do you have many memories of your dad from that time?

No, because he was seldom home. He could have been working. I don't know. I suspect that he had another family somewhere, but he couldn't be found when my mother

10:30 died. I can remember people asking me did I know where he was, but I had no idea.

So you moved to Villawood when you were roughly about seven or eight around the Canley Vale area?

No. I was only six when I went there because it was around about my eighth birthday that we came to live in Marrickville.

Okay. So you were just there

11:00 **for a year and then Marrickville?**

Maybe two years.

Where did you do most of your schooling?

I had two years at West Marrickville, two years at Tempe and two years at Canterbury High.

Can you describe your school experiences?

No, it was just something that I don't particularly

11:30 remember, what my application to work was. In fact I don't think I applied myself at all. I think my natural intelligence took me through as far as I went, but I ended up failing second year at Canterbury and my father said, "You're not going to be a scholar. Go to work." So at the age of 13 and eight months I found myself in the workforce,

12:00 and I've been in it ever since.

When did you reconnect with your dad?

After my mother died he came and almost immediately, moved to Marrickville.

So you were living with your dad?

After my mother died, yes.

What kind of man was your father?

12:30 In stature he was a small man, probably about five foot five tall and he maybe weighed ten stone or something like that, but he was a very aggressive person. To my mind he always responded negatively to any challenges, and aggressively.

13:00 We just never got on and I suspect that there were reasons for that also.

Was he an army man?

Yes and no. He was in the militia during the 1930s. I know that. And

13:30 he was in the militia when the war broke out, and then he worked at Victoria Barracks as a carpenter for two or three years during the war. Then he was discharged. But I really don't know much about his activities at all except that he used to come home in the evening and go in the morning. He'd leave instructions for the day and

14:00 that was it. There was no real relationship.

So how many brothers and sisters of you were staying with your father at that time?

At that time there was one brother and two sisters.

Can you tell me about your brothers and sisters, and the relationship that you had with them?

Margaret was a year younger than me, as I mentioned, and

14:30 we got on quite well. In fact I got on quite well with the three of them, but I realise now that it was a dysfunctional family. The younger sister, Pat, she was I suppose in a way the apple of my father's eye and he used to take her

15:00 everywhere. No matter where he went, she went with him and this continued I think until she went to school. But all of us had left home by the time we were about 17. In fact my brother, he went when he was 11 and that was because of cruelty by my father.

15:30 Dennis had polished my father's shoes and my father was unhappy with the result, and just threw them at him, and he broke a couple of fingers. I don't know any of the details. All I knew was coming home from school one day and finding

16:00 out that Dennis was no longer there. He'd been taken by the child welfare people.

Do you remember going on any outings with your dad or anywhere with your dad?

He used to take us on picnics and that was like an army operation.

16:30 He had this car and he had a huge box built on the back of it. In this box would be all of the crockery and cutlery, and the foodstuffs. Also there would be chairs for the adults to sit on.

17:00 I remember a favourite place was Narrabeen Lakes and we'd go out there, and the car would pull up. We kids used to have to set up the campsite and put the chairs out for the adults. We had to as it were, set the table sort of thing and the adults would look after the food, but

17:30 we'd be sent off to play, but not too far, and if he thought we were straying too far, he used to have this whistle. He'd blow on that and that was the signal. We had to come back. These sort of things I look back on it now and laugh, but I didn't think it was funny at the time. Another thing, when he was about a couple of hundred yards away from home he'd blow the horn of the car and

18:00 that was the signal for me to go and open the garage doors, so that he could drive in without having to stop, and then close the doors. This was so that the neighbours couldn't see into the garage. I don't know what they were going to see anyway. It was just a strange existence.

Had he remarried at that stage when you and your brothers and sisters came to live with him?

Not at that stage, but he did later, twice. I only found out quite recently that he had been married

18:30 before he married my mother. He married during the First World War and then the marriage was dissolved on the petition of the wife. That's what the documentation says.

Did he tell you any stories about his involvement with the militia?

No, he was very

19:00 secretive about that. I know the reason why, because I used to be intrigued because he used to wear First World War service ribbons, but he never ever spoke about his service during the First World War. So recently I got his record from archives in Canberra and discovered that he had joined the army in 1916

19:30 but then he had immediately been charged with assault by the civil police, and he spent six months in Parramatta Gaol. When he came back out the army discharged him.

Do you think he was reluctant to tell you because he felt ashamed?

I imagine so, yes.

Do you think

20:00 **that might have been... Was he an angry man?**

Yes.

As children, were you and your brothers and sisters able to find any way of getting along with him?

No, we were very much subdued. We weren't game to back answer. In fact we were...

20:30 how can I best put it? We were certainly encouraged not to enquire about anything and that sort of sets up an attitude of mind I guess.

So as a

21:00 **young boy largely growing up around the Marrickville area, what kinds of things would you do as a young boy?**

Weed the garden. Where we lived was on a slope and he wanted the yard to be level, so down the road there was a

21:30 place where they prepared tar for road sealing, and they used to have these empty tar drums just lying around. He used to send us out, my sister and I, he'd send us out about nine o'clock at night to bring these tar drums home, and we used to have to roll them a couple of hundred metres along the road. Anyway, we'd stack these along the side fence

22:00 and fill them up with dirt, and then back fill the yard. These were the kind of activities that we engaged in. He had me build a couple of brick fishponds. I had no interest in fish or that, but anyway I suppose it taught me the skill of bricklaying, not that it was all that good.

22:30 He was an excellent carpenter and some of the work I've seen him do was really great, and I picked up a lot of skills like that from him, but I was never apprenticed or taught any skills at all. Anything that I

did I sort of picked up from watching other people.

23:00 **What was Marrickville like as a suburb back then?**

It was average, working class. Most people were either tradesmen or labourers.

Leaving school at 13 and nine months...?

Near enough!

23:30 **What were your options at that point?**

He got me a job in a factory just down the road from home and what I had to do, it was a factory...it's still there. They used to make bolts, and when these bolts came off the machine they had a...

24:00 When they cut the head of them, it leaves a little spigot of steel right in the very centre and that had to come off. So there used to be an army of us boys all around the same age and we used to sit at a bench with a steel plate with a blade on it, and a brass hammer, and we used to pick up a bolt, knock the tip off it, and you did that all day. Soul destroying.

24:30 **Did you make any friends with the other guys around your age?**

No. I got the sack for talking to them.

How long into the job?

About four months.

So it was a very military regime?

Oh yes, very much. In those days the foreman used to wear a dustcoat and he'd just walk around observing everybody, and

25:00 making sure that people were working their hardest.

What was an average day like?

In what way?

Working in that environment. What time did you get there and how long did you work?

You'd get there at seven thirty and leave at five. You'd have I think it was half an hour for lunch

25:30 but you just worked. You just chipped, chip, chip, chip all the time. We used to like to get the big ones because there were fewer of them, but you'd get the small ones and there were literally thousands of them in the same cubic capacity.

How did it come about that you talked too much or they thought that you talked too much?

26:00 The guy was sitting beside me and I talked to him. Well they reckoned if you were talking you were not concentrating on what you were doing.

Were you actually having a conversation?

I can't recall any conversations. It was just off the cuff remarks.

What happened when they sacked you?

26:30 My father then got me another job and that was working in an iron foundry. And I had a very small physique at that time, and the people in the foundry decided that I wasn't the type to do very heavy manual work, you know shovelling sand. Anyway, someone

27:00 said to me one day that there was a job going in the office, "Why don't you apply for it?" Which I did, and I was employed. I did, I suppose, minor clerical work and I got on quite well there. The only thing was that when I was working as a moulders' assistant in the foundry, I was getting three pounds a week, but when I went to the office I was only getting 25 shillings.

27:30 My father didn't like that, so he found me another job where I got three pound a week.

What was the other job?

It was working in a woollen mill. In fact it was the Crusader Wool Mills. They used to be at Marrickville. All of these places have disappeared now.

28:00 I was only there for about a month and then he got me a job in a bakery. This was during the war years by now and I used to have to start work at four o'clock in the morning. We started four o'clock in the morning on weekdays and on Friday night we started at midnight, and worked until about ten on Saturday morning.

28:30 **Would you get to use your pay cheque for a bit of recreation and social life?**

By the time I started working until I left home at about 17, about four days after my 17th birthday, I received exactly nothing as spending money.

So all the pay went to the family?

29:00 Mm.

Did you get to go out and were you able to go to the pictures?

I went to the pictures maybe half a dozen times in that period. It was a case of handing over the sixpence or whatever was the admission to the theatre, and I always had to go with my sister.

29:30 I can remember that once I didn't want to walk down the road with her because she was wearing lipstick! She had this and she put it on after she left home, just one of those silly things.

Is this your older sister?

She was a year younger than me.

Sorry, yes a year younger. So what

30:00 **was it like working in the bakery?**

Hard. It's pretty hard physical work or it was in those days. I think it's all done by machinery now, but in those days they used to have to knead the dough by hand. They used big paddles and huge troughs. The troughs would be probably as long as this room, wooden troughs and they put the

30:30 flour and the water, or whatever in, and then you used these paddles to mix it. Then when the dough rose, it had to be punched down again until it reached the consistency to have it ready for baking. Then it had to be cut into loaf sizes and weighed, and put in the tins, and then be

31:00 hand placed in the oven. One of my jobs also was bringing the wood in from the yard to fire the oven, so you were kept hopping the whole time.

How many other people worked in the bakery?

I think there were about six. There was a foreman baker and

31:30 three or four operatives, and me.

Did they make good bread?

Yes, it was good bread for the time. I remember on Saturday mornings it used to be the thing, butter was rationed, I don't know how we got it, but we'd go across to the shop over the road and we'd buy a quarter pound of butter. I think that's about 125 grams now. We'd get a

32:00 half loaf of bread and pull the inside out of it, and put the, butter on the inside of the crust. I can still taste it. It was fresh butter on hot bread, beautiful.

You mentioned rationing and the war was already happening at that stage. How was that affecting life in your area?

32:30 Nobody starved, but you were restricted in the amount of tea,, butter, sugar, things like that that you could buy. You used to have coupons for each commodity. The grocer had to, or butcher or whoever, had to take those coupons and

33:00 he had to have the record of that number of coupons in order to be able to buy his stock again.

How much of an interest did you take in what was happening in the war?

I was very much aware of the war because I

33:30 always had a great interest in the army. In fact my reason for going to Canterbury was that I wanted to go to Duntroon, but that didn't come off. I think that I was always itching to get in the army. I was unhappy that I was too young to go.

34:00 Of course to make matters worse, I looked about 12, you know, when I was 17. I've got a photo inside of how I looked when I joined the army. You'd expect me to be in second form at school. We were aware of

34:30 activities in the Middle East and in New Guinea. I can remember the 9th Division coming home from the Middle East. I think they were the only unit that came back as a complete unit. The others sort of came back in dribs and drabs, shunted here, there and everywhere.

35:00 Every second man you saw on the street was in uniform, but I guess it's just one of those situations that you got used to. I didn't see anything unusual about that. There was a war on and people had been called up into the army.

35:30 There used to be fights between the army and the navy, particularly down around the wharf areas and the pubs around Woolloomooloo. You were aware of these things even though you didn't actually see them.

Did your dad take an active interest in what was

36:00 **happening during the war?**

Not that I'm aware of. He certainly never discussed it. In fact he never discussed anything with us.

What about newspaper articles and radio reports? Were you listening to those kinds of things at the time?

No. I don't remember reading newspapers. I don't think that

36:30 we got the newspaper at home. We used to listen to the radio, but it was mainly the serials, like Green Bottle and Dad and Dave.

Can you remember where you were when the war was declared?

Yes I can. We were living in Carey Street at Marrickville.

37:00 I don't know whether it is true, but I have the feeling that I was in Gladstone Street near the police station and it was Sunday evening about nine o'clock, but I can definitely remember hearing Menzies' voice saying, "It is my melancholy duty to tell you that Hitler has invaded Poland. Britain

37:30 is at war and we are at war because of that."

How did that affect everybody listening?

I think there was an immediate feeling of fear, but then that dissipated pretty quickly because it was a long way away from us.

You mentioned before that you were always itching to get into the army. What do you think it was that attracted

38:00 **you to that kind of life?**

Probably the uniform! [laughs] That's the only thing I could put it down to. I had no real appreciation of what was involved in army life except that I can remember my father was involved with the militia at the Addison Road Barracks in Marrickville. I can remember, I think it must have been either

38:30 1938 or it might have been '39, but I can remember the horses pulling the guns and the limbers coming out of the Marrickville Barracks, and wheeling up Addison Road, and they were on their way down the south coast for their annual camp. It was a pretty exciting sort of thing, particularly for a 12 year old to see these horses

39:00 with the postilion riding the leading horse, and the gunners all sitting on top of the limber. I think they pulled a four wheel cart arrangement that the soldiers sat on and that pulled the gun, and then the limber, which

39:30 held the ammunition, would come behind that.

You said at 12 you were pretty excited by that. What was most exciting about seeing that image?

I don't know. I guess it was just a spectacle. I certainly had no

40:00 intellectual appreciation of it.

Did it represent power or things like that?

I suppose in retrospect it might have, but I was certainly not aware of any feelings like that at the time.

Tape 2

00:45 **Michael you mentioned that your dad wasn't much for talking about World War I. Did you ever go to Anzac marches?**

No.

Did you hear about those kinds of things or see any of them?

01:00 No, I don't think I was particularly aware of them until after the Second World War.

You mentioned that you used to see troops and that every second person was someone in

uniform. Did you ever talk to any of them, or what was your response to men in uniform?

Neutral

01:30 I guess. It wasn't active and it wasn't negative. They were just there.

So you weren't envious or they weren't heroes?

No. I remember in the early stages of the war when they didn't have uniforms and that sort of thing, and I'd see these fellows who had either been recruited or

02:00 called up, and they'd be marching wearing civvy [civilian] gear, suits and collars and ties, and these great big brown army boots. They used to march them around the streets of Marrickville just to sort of keep them occupied I think.

02:30 It was just one of those passing phases. Eventually I guess the supply of uniforms caught up and they got issued, and worn. Of course in those days, once you'd been enlisted in the army you were not allowed to wear

03:00 civilian clothes. In fact if you were caught wearing civilian clothes there was a possibility of being charged with desertion.

Did you ever discuss the war with your brothers and sisters?

No.

So they weren't interested in the army like you were?

No. My sister

03:30 probably was. Strange you should say that because Pat ended up in the Salvation Army, but it was just a strange family. My mother was a Catholic and we were all baptised Catholics, but my father

04:00 had us baptised in the Church of England after my mother died, so Margaret ended up in the Church of England, which she still is. Dennis ended up with the Methodists and Pat ended up in the Salvation Army. I was nothing until I'd been in the army for a while and I can say that I've been baptised three times. [laughs]

04:30 This is only sort of background to the reasons why...probably not a valid background anyway. You see I used to go to work. Margaret was going to school. Dennis had disappeared from home and Pat had started school.

05:00 We just never used to see each other except at meal times and we were never encouraged. There were no discussions at the table. You sat at the table and ate your meal, and then you did the washing up. Then you did your homework or whatever had to be done. Weird.

Who cooked the meals?

I did until I left home.

What kinds

05:30 **of things would you cook?**

Potatoes, peas and beans. From memory I think that the main meat in those days was mutton. You'd boil mutton up on the weekend and eat mutton for the rest of the week.

Who would do the shopping for food?

I think my father did.

06:00 Yes, he must have done. I certainly didn't.

Did your dinners go down well with your brothers and sisters?

We never discussed it. [laughs]

How about with your dad?

No, no comment.

You mentioned that your dad got you and your brothers and sisters re-baptised

06:30 **in the Church of England. Was he a church going man?**

No, and we weren't either. You look back on these things and you think that you can see reasons, but they're not really certain.

07:00 I don't like to hold grudges. As far as I'm concerned that's the way it was and then when the time came, I lead my own life.

When you say that looking back there may not be a reason for it. It was just what it was

07:30 **in terms of being re-baptised. Was that the sort of done thing at the time, to re-baptise children?**

No, no, no. That was a...how can I put it, a hit at Catholics. He was quite bigoted and I think that it was

08:00 because of my mother being a Catholic. Looking back as far as I can see, they apparently never lived together. He used to just come from time to time. I can only ever remember him coming to Rose Bay once. We didn't really see him or know him until after my mother had died.

08:30 **Was there much religious tension that you can remember in those days?**

Generally or within the family?

Both.

Oh yes. Religious tension was the name of the game in those days. I can remember kids saying to me in the street at Rose Bay, "Are you a Catholic or a public?"

09:00 I'm very much aware of bigotry in my growing up. To be seen as a Catholic was to be seen as a second-class citizen. I remember riding in a bus with a woman one day, I supposed I'd have been 13 or

09:30 14 at the time, and we went past St Bridget's Church at Marrickville. She said, "That's were the people pay money to the priest to forgive their sins." It didn't mean anything to me at the time, but in later times it did.

You were baptised Catholic and then re-baptised in the Church of England. What did you identify yourself with?

Originally, when I

10:00 first joined the army I identified myself as Church of England, but then the second time as a Catholic.

Growing up in Marrickville with your father did you identify yourself as Church of England?

Church of England, yes.

But you didn't go to church?

No. We used to go to Sunday School, but it was generally when the Christmas tree was approaching

10:30 and we were all at a Sunday School picnic.

What were your views of Catholics at that point?

It didn't mean a thing to me. I was just aware of the animosity towards them, but I didn't know why.

Can you remember the experience of being re-baptised?

Yes I can remember the

11:00 four of us up at St Bridget's Church at Marrickville, not St Bridget's, St Clements's. I can remember the afternoon, but that's about all. It didn't mean anything to any of us. It was just something I was told to do and I did it.

You mentioned earlier that you wanted to join Duntroon. What was that experience? Can you tell me about that?

11:30 I think it must have been my father who put the idea in my head in the beginning, and I joined the cadets when I went to Canterbury High, but he wouldn't pay for the

12:00 uniform. He reckoned it was a public school and so he shouldn't have to pay for anything. So I never had a uniform and after a year of that I just quietly disappeared on parade days, but it was always in the back of my mind that I would have liked to have gone to Duntroon.

So your father spoke highly of

12:30 **army life to put the idea into your head?**

Probably yes. I don't particularly remember. I have a disadvantage and that is the lack of formal education. I never had that

13:00 opportunity of mixing it with peers because finishing in second year, you don't establish the real relationships.

Did you have many friends from around the area, neighbours?

No. We were not allowed to have friends.

13:30 We were not allowed to play sport. It was considered a waste of time.

Were you allowed to watch sport or listen to it on the radio?

No. Of course in those days there wasn't the emphasis on sport that there is now and except for test cricket matches, I doubt that sport would have been on the radio.

Did your dad

14:00 **have his uniform from the militia?**

Yes.

Did you ever try it on?

No I didn't, strange to say. It just used to hang in the wardrobe there.

Did he have a gun or a rifle?

No, I don't think he had one at home, although I did later on when I was in the militia.

14:30 We used to take our rifles home. No, I can't ever remember him having a rifle at home.

Did you have other brothers and sisters from your dad's other marriage?

No.

Just in terms of filling in the gaps from when you were working in the bakery to

15:00 **Canungra, what happened there and can you tell us about the enlistment process?**

Where did Canungra come from?

Didn't you train at Canungra?

Yes I did, but I haven't mentioned it today. [laughs]

Mind reading! So when did you decide to enlist and how did that happen?

I was working down at Kangaroo Valley and I left the job down there, and came back to Sydney. I was going to

15:30 go and work for this guy, Bead Nugent, that I had worked for on a temporary basis before, and because I had been working in a reserved occupation as it was called, I had to get permission of the Manpower to go and work for Bead Nugent. So I went up to the Manpower office in Marrickville and this old guy there said, "Why

16:00 aren't you in the army?" I said, "I haven't been called up." He said, "We'll soon fix that" and he did. Within a week I was in the army and went to the showground at Moore Park. That's where I got my uniform. And I was there for about two weeks I think, and then I went on a draft to Cowra and did

16:30 recruit training at Cowra. Then I went to Canungra. Then from Canungra they moved me into Brisbane and I worked in the records office in Brisbane for a couple of months I think. Then they called for volunteers to go to Japan with BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force] and so I volunteered, and went. I went to Morotai initially and then we were the second boat into Japan.

17:00 **Just going back to the enlistment process, you mentioned that you went to the showground, and was there any difficulty in joining or what happened, what was that process?**

The only difficulty I had was that I had to do a medical and

17:30 they had what they called the AMWAS, the Australian Women's Service [AAMWS - Australian Army Medical Women's Service] who did all the preliminaries for the doctors, and I went this day, and she gave me a bottle and told me to give her a sample. I didn't know what she meant. [laughs] Then of course I couldn't do it, so she told me to go to the

18:00 canteen and have a cup of tea, and come back. I was never more embarrassed in my life. Anyway, I got through that and got my uniform, and then we went by train down to Cowra. I was only at Cowra a week and I ended up in hospital with what they called URTI, Upper Respiratory Tract Infection. I suppose

18:30 I was in hospital for about five days and then back. We lived in tents and it was a fairly orderly routine. We'd get up at six thirty and shower and shave, and have breakfast, and tidy up the tent area. Then you'd parade and then you'd either go out on a route march or do rifle drill, or

19:00 generally get knocked into shape as a soldier. That used to last for about six weeks and then they'd shoot you out to what they called corps training, whether you were going to infantry or artillery, or

engineers or transport, or what have you.

What was your fitness like?

It was hard and

19:30 as I said, when I joined the army I was five foot five and I weighed ten stone. Within six months I went up to my present height and not quite the same weight.

What is your present height?

Five nine, one hundred and seventy five centimetres. I still think in metric terms...in imperial terms.

20:00 **It was tough? The fitness aspect?**

It was something you hadn't been used to, but you soon get into shape.

What were the other fellas like?

You know? Average. Most fellas sort of fit a mould and you'd get the occasional

20:30 oddbod - the bloke who is full of his own importance or the bloke who doesn't wash and things like that. I can remember both there and in Korea a bloke who wouldn't wash, and he paid for it.

In what way?

Down the showers at five o'clock in the morning, cold water. There was never enough water in the army.

21:00 **Going back to what you were saying in the army, the process of the medical, in those days what kind of education was available about understanding the opposite sex and birds and the bees?**

None. It was something you learnt. You learned as you went along.

21:30 **Did you have any girlfriends or exposure to girls?**

No, not until...when I was in Brisbane, I used to know a few girls. There was a place called the Time Off Club and this was the racing fraternity. The bookmakers in Brisbane set up this club for servicemen, where they

22:00 could get not so much a meal, but snacks and a cup of tea, and that sort of thing. These girls used to be sort of hostesses and I became very friendly with one of these girls. We never went out together, but we corresponded for quite a number of years until she married. Then I had a

22:30 cousin living in Brisbane. I went out with her once. She was engaged to an American sailor who was away in the Pacific somewhere, and anyway as it happened she called it off. She was a teacher also and she was at a one teacher school at Lara Vale in

23:00 Queensland, and she met one of the local farmers, and married him. They are still together. I go up quite often and stay with them. They're not farming now. Their son is on the farm, but they are living at Mermaid, so when I get the urge I go up there and stay with them for a week or two.

23:30 **There wasn't much open discussion about the opposite sex?**

No. Definitely not, except in the army. There was a lot of barrack room talk, but I never engaged in it. I just

24:00 didn't like it. I didn't like the kind of talk. It's strange you should say that when I think back on it. I never used to go to the canteen or anything like that. I didn't drink very much. Occasionally I might go to the canteen and have a beer or something, but

24:30 part of the reason there too would have been that I would have been working most nights. It depends which period of...I mean I was in Kure and I was in a transport unit, we were driving 12 hours a day. When

25:00 you came back to camp at night, all you wanted to do was go to sleep. [technical break]

25:30 We were working on the wharves there driving trucking, carting stuff off the ships coming from Australia and distributing it, but as I say we were doing 12-hour shifts. While I was there also our platoon was selected to go to Tokyo to provide transport for what we call the composite

26:00 battalion in May of 1946. They took a company from each of the three battalions that were there and formed what they call the composite battalion, and our platoon was transport. We went to Tokyo to mount guard on the Emperor's Palace. It was showing the flag, just a PR [public relations] sort of thing rather than any particular significance.

26:30 Of course we were the flavour of the month with our slouch hats and white webbing. The Yanks hadn't

seen anything like it. We were up there for three months and had a great time. We were working all the time, but we had a lot of time off as well.

27:00 Then two years later I spent the whole of 1948 in Tokyo, which was a great experience also.

We were talking about barrack talk. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

27:30 Crudities. That just about covers it. Some people would carry on and on, and on, and others would just sort of make a quick remark, and everybody laughs, and that's the end of it. It depends on the group that you've got whether the for or against

28:00 carry the day.

What would largely be the topics of conversation?

Sex, who they were with, what they did last night. Look there are some things that are

28:30 said and some things that I witnessed being done which I just wouldn't want to repeat.

Because you wouldn't want to say them out loud?

It's not a matter of saying it out loud. It's a matter of describing what actually happened and I just don't want to do it.

You don't think it would be useful for the archive in terms of getting a portrait of

29:00 **barrack life and troop mentality?**

There was an incident that happened in a beer hall at Hiro one night and this particular person who... it's very

29:30 hard to describe the kind of person, but he got this Japanese woman, and he stood her on her head, and used a beer bottle, and penetrated her with the beer bottle. I'm not saying that that went on all the time, but that's the kind of thing that was joked

30:00 about or talked about. Some people saw it as being funny and I didn't.

Was that something that happened in public?

Yes.

And that you saw?

Yes.

And people thought it was funny?

Mm.

What about the Japanese woman?

I don't think she'd have thought it was funny. She wasn't a young woman. She was middle

30:30 aged or more.

Did that happen in Japan?

Yes.

Was she a working girl?

No, I don't think so. I think she was what we used to call a Mama-san, a woman who sort of looked after things. She probably wiped the tables or

31:00 served bottles or what have you because in places like Hiro there wouldn't have been any draught beer. It would have been all bottled beer, Japanese beer.

Did she try to protest?

No, because it was all over in a flash

31:30 and this particular person probably ended up being sorry for having said anything, but you feel ashamed afterwards that you were sort of...that you witnessed something like that.

And how did she

32:00 **respond?**

I think she just sort of disappeared behind the curtains.

What about the rest of the troops?

They thought it was a great joke.

So the barrack talk wasn't just all talk?

32:30 Well of course barrack talk takes place in the barrack room. That was certainly an unusual incident to have happened, but because I saw it and I knew the person who did it, it sort of sticks in your mind.

33:00 That sort of sets the tenor for what I'm saying about barrack talk. Most of it of course is

33:30 not intentional. It's just what people say to pass the time. Then when you look at it with hindsight you wonder.

34:00 My present attitude is that surely you could think of better things to say and do, but whether I thought that at the time, I don't know. I knew that I didn't want to participate, to be seen as part of the crowd that did that.

34:30 **How much did these young men really know about women?**

If they were like me, nothing. I must tell you a funny story and this happened on the night that we arrived in

35:00 Japan. We arrived in the mid-afternoon and we went out by truck to this camp at a place called Teno, and we had this...I think it might have been an old Japanese school. That was empty and we had to bed down the best way we could. In those

35:30 days you didn't have sleeping bags or anything like that. You just had blankets and used your greatcoat as a pillow or an extra blanket. Anyway, we got into a building, a building across the road, and it was full of mattresses, and so we hauled all these mattresses back across the road into our barracks. We got ourselves settled down and then we went into town.

36:00 At that time all of the Japanese were demonstrating their knowledge of English by singing, "You are my Sunshine," and everywhere you went you'd hear this, "You are my sunshine." There were two of us and we were walking along, and we walked across a little bridge across a creek, and there were two girls standing there, and they spoke to us. They had rather passable English

36:30 and we stopped, and talked, and we just talked there for about half an hour or an hour, or something like that. Then they invited us to come home, so we went home and we had a meal with the family, and then the family all went to bed, and we were invited to go to bed, and in the...it was a room probably not much bigger than this.

37:00 They had the tatami mats on the floor and the futon with the over-blanket sort of thing, and everybody, mother, father, children, grandparents, and us too, all with the feet to the centre. We stayed the night and we got back to camp the next morning without having been discovered, not to

37:30 have been in camp overnight, but it was just one of those things that happened sort of thing. That I think was the only time I ever stayed overnight in a Japanese house.

What sort of food did they serve you?

It was...

38:00 I really can't remember, but I imagine it would have been a typical Japanese meal, which I would not have liked. I doubt that I would have eaten very much at all. In fact in all the time I was in Japan I don't think I ever ate Japanese food except sukiyaki. Suki-yaki I found was beautiful. Then later on and this was the next enlistment...no it wasn't. It was the same one. That

38:30 year that I spent in Tokyo. I went with a Japanese girl for the whole time that I was there, but she'd been born in Sydney and she spoke better English than I did. They lived at Mosman too! The father was a wool buyer. He was the Managing Director of Kanematsu and he retired in 1938 and went back to Japan, but the whole family had

39:00 been born here in Sydney. Anyway, we went together for the whole of that year and then I went to America, but we corresponded for years until we eventually both got married. Then I went to America five years ago and I was attending a reunion of all

39:30 this group that used to get together in 1948 in Tokyo, all Americans except for me. Anyway, I hadn't heard from Chris for 40 years I suppose and I wrote a letter, not knowing where she lived, but knowing that somebody would know when I got there. So I sent a letter and then just before I was to come home I thought,

40:00 "Will I ring her? Won't I? Will I? Won't I?" So I ended up ringing and she nearly jumped through the phone! Her husband told me later that when she got the letter she was, "Look at this! Look at this!" Anyway, she insisted that I not go home without coming to see her, so she lived in Seattle and I had to go to LA [Los Angeles] to get the plane home, so I flew out to Seattle and spent a weekend with them.

40:30 It was a fascinating experience to...she told me where to meet and I happened to be standing, looking at something, then this voice behind me said, "Mike!" I turned around and here was this little old Japanese lady, 70 years of age, and you know, she was 20 when I last saw her! With jet black hair, strange to say, and she says she doesn't dye it.

How changed

41:00 **was she?**

She was certainly changed. I doubt very much that I would have recognised her walking down the street. The only difference was that she had cataracts and she was wearing very thick glasses, but other than that, no. It was a fascinating experience!

Tape 3

00:43 **Michael, you shared with us a little bit earlier how you wanted to get into Duntroon and then you finally did get into the army. Did your expectations of army life, of what it might be like when you were there, did it live up to it?**

01:00 I think it was pretty much as I expected it. I know that I loved it. In some ways I wish that I'd stayed in the army, but when I joined to go to Korea, I was only a two year enlistment and I guess that I could have transferred, and stayed in, but I was getting married

01:30 when I came home, and I didn't.

When you initially went in the first time did you get a uniform this time?

Oh yes! [laughs]

What were they like?

The uniform during the Second World War was pretty heavy

02:00 serge, a four-pocket thing with black buttons and epaulets. We had the rising sun badge on each collar and on the side of the hat. We wore brown boots, which was quite a change when I enlisted to go to Korea

02:30 because then we had black boots. It seemed strange having been so used to the brown ones. But yes, I got a uniform.

How did the uniform change when you went to Korea?

By that time instead of wearing what...the Second World War uniform was called the service dress. By the time that we went to Korea the army had

03:00 adopted battle dress, which was trousers and a jacket with a waistband. It's difficult to describe, but I've got a photo of one inside if you want to see it. It was altogether I think a much smarter looking uniform.

And more comfortable to wear?

03:30 Yes definitely. Okay, next question!

In your initial training, what were you training for when you first joined the army?

How can I

04:00 just put this? One of the things in training is weapons training and what they used to call Pam 19. That's Pamphlet 19 in army training. It's the object of weapons training. The object of weapons training is to

04:30 teach the soldier to kill the enemy. I don't think that any of us ever took it literally like that. Well, I guess basically that was the be all and the end all

05:00 of being in the army. The infantry I guess was the front end of the army and all of the others supported the infantry.

What aspects of this early army life really interested you?

Adventure.

05:30 The idea of going to these exotic places that we'd heard about, but without really knowing whether you were going to get there or not. I was lucky in that I was overseas within six months of joining the army. I don't think that I'd have had the same interest had I been stuck in Australia.

06:00 **Were there any funny moments in the early days of training?**

There undoubtedly were, but none that I can sort of bring to mind immediately. I think that

06:30 my second enlistment was in some ways more exciting, if that's the word, because I don't know why anybody would want to go to war, but we did.

07:00 During the period when I said that I was in Japan for 12 months I can recall some really stupid things that we used to do. One of them

07:30 was...no sorry. This was the first enlistment when I was there for three months. I drove a car up the wrong side of the road beside about six trams to make a left turn, with other trams coming down that way because the left lane was full beside the trams. How I got away with that I'll never know, and

08:00 the passenger never said a word. [laughs]

Just hung on for dear life, did they?

Absolutely stupid! It was summer time and there was sort of a...although it wasn't it traditional, there used to be sort of siesta time when we'd probably not have anything to do between midday

08:30 and about three o'clock in the afternoon, so we used to spend our time in the beer hall. I can't remember on this particular occasion whether I was full of beer or not, but I'll never forget doing it.

How did the Japanese treat you given that they'd lost the war?

We went to Japan, or I did anyway, went to Japan

09:00 hating Japanese, and within six months I was wondering what I was hating and why, because they just got on with their lives. They didn't interfere with us in any way at all. In all of the time I spent in Japan I can't remember a single instance of an offence by a Japanese against a member of the occupation force.

09:30 There was plenty of crime amongst themselves, but never against the occupying people.

So there was crime amongst themselves in what respect?

Murders and robberies.

Was your role or the role of the Australian army to act as a police force there?

10:00 No, I don't think it was a police force. I think it was more that our role was to demilitarise the country. I remember one particular instance where I had some

10:30 Japanese labourers and I had to go and empty a cave, which was sort of cut out of the hillside. It had a blast wall in front of it and an opening large enough for a truck to back in, and these two labourers were bringing boxes of what appeared to me to be a white powder out. One of them stumbled and dropped the box, and it

11:00 exploded. The skin was literally torn off him. It was just hanging in shreds. I was by myself and the only thing that I could do was to put him on the back of the truck, and take him to the local hospital, which I did. That was an experience too.

11:30 The wards were occupied not only by the patients in the beds, but by their families beside them, virtually camped alongside them, and it appeared to me that they were actually doing the nursing. Anyway, I left him there and I went back the same afternoon to see if I could find him, but

12:00 I didn't. What happened to him I don't know, but one of the things that struck me at the time was, I was trying to or the doctor was trying to interview me to find out what had happened, and in this surgery I suppose you'd call it, do you remember the old-fashioned

12:30 sterilising units, the stainless steel or chrome units? They used to boil them and put the instruments in them. Anyway, I'd been so used to seeing these things here where everything was pristine and clean. This one was absolutely green. The system after five years of war, the system had just sort of wound all the way down,

13:00 and the most surprising thing to me is having seen the country at the end of the war, and the situation that they're in now, to pull themselves up like that. It's a tribute to them.

You mentioned the story of the guys in the pub with the Japanese girl.

13:30 **Were there any other guys like you who were appalled by it?**

There were, because others spoke to me about it afterwards. Nobody did anything. On the other hand it all happened so quickly that I doubt that anyone could have stopped it happening. They didn't know it was going to happen. And

14:00 this guy that did it, he was not liked because of his behaviour. I seem to be getting my two periods of service confused

14:30 because that incident happened during the Korea days.

Given that the Australians were there and the Americans were there, how did they actually interact, and relate to each other during your first time?

Generally quite good.

15:00 In Kure there were virtually no Americans because the BCOF or British Commonwealth Occupation Force, took over the whole of the Hiroshima precinct, which was virtually the southern end of Honshu. As soon as we arrived the Americans went and they just had a military government team there, which was a pretty small installation.

15:30 But in Tokyo we were in the minority.

Were there any troubles between the Australians and the Americans?

Oh the occasional barroom brawl, but nothing of any great significance.

Were you caught up in any of these?

No.

16:00 **During your time in Japan did you visit Hiroshima or Nagasaki?**

Yes, I was in Hiroshima by the end of February 1946 and at that time nothing had started to reconstruct the city. It was

16:30 almost unbelievable that just one bomb could have done the damage that it did. The town was literally flattened. I remember seeing a goods train. It had been blown

17:00 I'd say a good ten or twelve feet away from the tracks, just lying on its side. There were no buildings except the concrete buildings in the epicentre of the blast, which had been spared. Except the brewery, which was behind the spur,

17:30 and the blast went over the top of it. The Jesuit missionaries in Japan at the time, they had their headquarters about four miles away and they sustained a bit of broken glass and that sort of thing, but the building wasn't severely damaged.

18:00 There's not a lot that you can really say about Hiroshima because it was just flattened.

Was there a smell at all?

No. By that time all of the bodies would have been removed. I never saw Nagasaki.

18:30 Even parts of Tokyo which had been fire bombed, they were virtually in the same situation as Hiroshima. There was no or very little of any brick construction of housing. It was all timber, so once a fire started it just spread right through the whole district.

19:00 **During your time there were there any earthquakes?**

Yes, but I missed it. I was home on leave. This was in late December 1946 and I have a photo somewhere that someone gave me of

19:30 a truck backed up to a ship in Kure, and there was a fissure between the front and back wheels of the truck. The truck was straddled over this fissure. I don't know how they got it out. It was all over by the time I got back to Japan.

So you went to Japan initially, returned home and then came back again? Is that the way the story went?

Yes.

This was before Korea?

Yes.

20:00 **How long were you in Japan the first period and then the second period?**

I arrived in February '46 and came home on leave in December '46. I returned to Japan in March of '47. Then I was discharged from the army in Japan in December of '48 and I went to America.

Had you noticed distinct changes in

20:30 **Japan in respect to the way it looked and felt between the two periods?**

No it was too short a period, but I certainly did notice a distinction when I went back in '52. There was much more building had taken place.

21:00 The vehicles, the buses and the trucks were all more modern. The roads had been repaired. A lot of the civilian housing had been rebuilt. The Kure railway station looked like a railway station.

What did

21:30 **you know of the war crime trials going on after the war?**

Here again, I spent some time as a driver taking people to and from the war crimes tribunal. I didn't know anything at all about what was going on inside, but all the drivers used to get together outside, and sort of shoot

22:00 the breeze, as it were. I can remember one of the people there was a Russian sergeant major. He was another one of these rough, tough characters and he had a tattoo, and it was the tattoo of a snake. It started on his shoulder somewhere and it went around, and around, and around.

22:30 I won't tell you where it finished! [laughs] I don't know how he could have stood the pain of it.

I take it, it finished...?

Yes. We used to take the people, the lawyers and that, to the thing

23:00 in the morning, and sometimes they'd come out and want to go somewhere else. Then we'd bring them back. Most of the time you were just sitting around waiting.

Do you remember some of the conversations when you were shooting the breeze with these other drivers?

No. It was all inconsequential stuff,

23:30 probably talking about last night's conquest or something like that.

Were you there during the first voting polls that were set up?

I probably was, but I didn't take a great deal of notice.

Because the Australians were expecting some trouble from these polls. Nothing came up?

No.

24:00 **What did you do in your leisure time in Japan?**

I spent a lot of time visiting...there used to be a group of nuns down in Hiroshima. They were a French order and they were called the Helpers of the Holy Souls. Our chaplain used to go down there and he spoke

24:30 French. His mother was a French woman and he used to speak French with the Superior of this order. She was also a French woman and I used to be quite amused by the way she used to talk to 'Fazer McGinley'. [laughs] We used to go down. We used to take them food and stuff we got from the canteen.

25:00 I remember one time taking one of these nuns and some of the kids...they were only little, seven, eight, nine, something like that, taking them to the beach one day. We had 14 in a jeep. It seemed strange at the time and I've got a photo too of this, of

25:30 one of the Japanese nuns with her habit up around her hips somewhere paddling in the water. It seemed so strange at the time, but it doesn't any more!

What type of man was Father McGinley?

He was a very tall man, very big man.

26:00 I met him when he came to Japan in the middle of 1947. His family lived in Bay Road in Waverton and when we came home we used to visit his mother quite often. Then strange as it may seem, he became the parish priest in Kingsgrove. He married my wife and I at Stanmore and then he became the parish priest at

26:30 Kingsgrove, but he was killed in a car accident in front of the Royal North Shore Hospital about four o'clock one Monday morning. He used to go and visit his mother on Sunday evening and apparently the story is that they would invariably go to sleep watching TV. They used to just leave him and go to bed, and he'd get up when he woke up, and go back. They don't know whether he actually...

27:00 he ran into the back of a garbage truck, but whether he had a heart attack or had just gone to sleep, nobody knows. He was a very personable man.

Were you close to him?

Yes.

What sorts of things did you talk about?

- 27:30 We used to talk mainly about family and his family, and my family, and the things that happened in the parish. In Japan we probably didn't talk all that much, mainly because of time.
- 28:00 He was in Hiro and I was in Tokyo, and he only got up there occasionally. I remember one morning I had to get him out of bed to come and say mass. That used to happen at Kingsgrove too. He was a great one for going to bed late at night and not getting up in the morning. When he was at Kingsgrove too, he had this Labrador dog and
- 28:30 everyone called the dog Madam McGinley. She used to lie on the floor in front of the altar steps. Of course when he died the first thing that the new PP [parish priest] did was to get rid of Madam McGinley.

How was your friendship formed with him in Japan?

- 29:00 This is breaking into the middle of another long story, but I came back to the church, not that I suppose I was ever in it. There was another chaplain there, Father Archie Bryson and he was another character. He was a heavyweight boxing champion before he joined the priesthood. He had an MSC from Randwick or Kensington.
- 29:30 Anyway, he was the senior chaplain in Japan and this would be later in 1946, just before I came home on leave. I went and saw him, and told him that I wanted to be a Catholic. This is part of a whole long continuing story, but anyway, he baptised me conditionally. That was the third baptism. Then the
- 30:00 following year, after I came back from leave in Australia, Father McGinley arrived and he arranged for me to be confirmed in Tokyo, and he gave me instruction. That's where we first came together. Then I was confirmed in Tokyo by a Bishop John Ross, who was a German missionary. He'd been there for
- 30:30 many years, another huge man. He had fingers that looked like telegraph poles and I can see him there waving this finger in the air. The guy who was my sponsor there was an American named Frank Brigante and we still exchange emails. That's how I
- 31:00 came to be involved with Father McGinley. And then as I say, he came home, and he was down at Tempe one time, Arncliffe. Another time, at Enfield, and then he eventually came to Kingsgrove. That's where he was when he died.

Many men turned away from the church when they joined the army or hit the war. What

- 31:30 **was it for you that actually made you turn back towards it?**

That is the great mystery. I don't know. I think that the reason that men turn away is a misunderstanding of what the Christian faith is. I think that

- 32:00 people have the mistaken idea that being religious is all about being good and I don't know. I don't know many people who can be good. I can't answer that question.

This Japanese girl that you mentioned earlier that you met, was she like a girlfriend?

- 32:30 I guess yes. We spent a lot of time in each other's company. I used to visit her home quite regularly. I think her father was quite worried and she agreed with me, that I was going to try and marry her. In spite of which, we never actually discussed marriage.
- 33:00 Probably the reason...when I say we never discussed marriage. She went to America also and studied. She did a BA [Bachelor of Arts], four years in Kentucky, and then she went to the University of Detroit,
- 33:30 and she did a sociology degree there. I think it must have been while she was at Detroit she wrote to me and asked me whether I'd wait for her. By that time things had changed and I just had to say no. Then she met the guy who she is married to now.
- 34:00 We corresponded for some time, but then it just phased out.

Is she a Catholic girl herself?

Yes.

Were there any cultural barriers that you were afraid of?

I don't know about cultural barriers.

- 34:30 I'm not aware that I was afraid of anything. It's just that at the time we were going together I don't think that the idea of marriage entered my mind at all, with anybody, at any time.
- 35:00 Of course at the same time, the reason I went to America was to study for the priesthood, but that didn't come off either and so that would have been a barrier anyway, to any conversations of that nature.

Is that why you said no when she said would you wait

35:30 **for me?**

No, by that time, you know this was some years later. By that time I was on the verge of being married here. I just never saw the possibility.

What sort of things did you do together as a couple?

We were mostly in a group. I suppose it would be

36:00 somewhat similar to a fellowship group or what have you, here. It was a loose arrangement. We used to hang around this Father Wilder's office in Tokyo and, apart from weekends, we would go to visit orphanages and that sort of thing.

36:30 During the week there would be one or two nights where we'd meet in a group and there'd be two or three, or perhaps even more nights a week I'd visit her home. I remember trying to teach her sister to drive once and she drove the jeep into a brick wall next door,

37:00 which the property was owned by her father, and there was a great scramble to get it repaired before he found out. It seems to be to be a pretty incoherent sort of...my mind seems to be darting all over the place.

37:30 **Can you tell me anything about these orphanages, how they were set up and how they operated?**

Well, the ones that I was familiar with were set up mainly by missionaries. Many of these missionaries had been interned during the war and as soon as they were freed the Americans used to give them great support. Whether the

38:00 buildings were actually owned by the orders or whether they had been requisitioned or something, I really don't know, but I'm just aware of the people who ran them and the way they looked after the kids. Kids are just kids no matter where you go, even Japanese kids.

Had they lost their parents during the war?

38:30 Many of them had, but not all of them. Some of them came from the gutters as it were, but it was a very confused time. I think they used to actually trawl for kids. They'd go out looking for them and

39:00 bring them in, and feed them, clothe them.

Tape 4

00:35 **Thanks Michael. You talked earlier about how you went to America. How did that all arise? What influenced your thinking to go to America and study for the priesthood?**

I think it was the people that I met during my sojourn in Tokyo in 1948.

01:00 Then this German missionary, Father Hildebrand, he was Benedictine who had come from Germany in the 1930s, and because he was a German national he was not interned during the war and he was able to keep his mission going. Anyway, quite by chance I got to know him. His

01:30 church was in the next suburb to where our camp was and it was through talking to him that I got this idea of going to America, and he made the arrangements for me to go to St John's University in Minnesota. Then I had to arrange to get out of the army

02:00 and get some money together. The way I did that was I had British sterling, and Bruno Bitter, who was the Jesuit bursar, he had access to both sterling and dollars, and he took my sterling and gave me dollars,

02:30 which I later found out was highly illegal. I don't know why. I have heard, but I have no proof that he later was in trouble for currency violations, but as I say, I don't know the truth of the matter. It's just something that was said to me.

03:00 **Are you suggesting that he was dishonest?**

Oh no, no, no. Not at all! You know, rules are made to be broken sort of thing. No, I wouldn't say for a moment that he was dishonest. It was just there are things that you shouldn't do at times.

You said that he had a

03:30 **large influence on your decision to go to America, but what in your heart made you want to go**

and study theology?

I'd have to go back to the very beginning because I really don't know. When I left home when I was 17 and I went to work in Kangaroo Valley, and I was boarding

- 04:00 with this lady, Mrs Bourke. She said to me, "You should go to church." I said, "Yeah Okay. I'll go down to the Church of England." She said, "No. Your mother was a Catholic. You should go to the Catholic Church." I said, "Okay. I'll go to the Catholic church." It didn't make any difference to me. So I went down one Sunday night when they had Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. I don't know whether you are aware or familiar with it?
- 04:30 I'd never seen this before and I guess that it was the spectacle that got me. This little country church and the [(UNCLEAR)] is up on the altar, and the light is shining on it, and the incense is...you know? It just grabbed me like that, but intellectually I've got no answer. From that point
- 05:00 forward I've moved and wavered. I think the next thing I can remember doing was after I left the [Kangaroo] Valley I didn't go to church or anything. I remember being in Brisbane one night and I went to the cathedral, and I saw this priest and told him I wanted to be a Catholic.
- 05:30 He sort of fobbed me off and so I didn't do any more about that. Then when I went to Japan I was in with a group of blokes who used to go to mass on Sunday nights and I went with them without knowing why. That was when I went and saw Archie Bryson, and told him that I wanted to
- 06:00 be a Catholic. He asked me a couple of questions and then baptised me conditionally, and that was the end of that. I used to go to mass with these blokes and then when I got home I didn't bother going. Then this cousin that I previously spoke about, Jude O'Connor from Brisbane, came down to spend the school holidays while I
- 06:30 was home on leave. Anyway, I started going to mass with her because there was no way that Jude would not go to mass. I'm not
- 07:00 sure that I was terribly serious about it, but there was just something pushing me. And anyway, after Jude went home, and I went back to camp. I was in camp at Greta at the time and I remember I got a job driving. We
- 07:30 were just standing around waiting to go back to Japan and we didn't know when we were going, so a couple of us went up, and saw the Transport Officer, and said, "Can we get a job driving?" He said, "Yeah fine." So we spent the next six weeks or something driving nurses around the town and into Maitland. I remember it was Ash Wednesday and I could see all these kids walking along the street with black marks
- 08:00 on their foreheads. I just noted it as something that I saw, but I had no idea what it was all about. Anyway, when I got back to Japan I started going to mass again. I met these two officers and
- 08:30 they were from the Military Police Unit at Hiro. I asked them if I could join their unit and they said, "Yeah sure!" It was then that I met Father McGinley and this sort of thing started, and I started going on a regular basis. Then when I got to Tokyo I was confirmed and I met this crowd,
- 09:00 and we used to knock around together. That's where it all took off from.

Excellent. Just before we go on to your America trip, you were part of the military police in Japan? Is that right?

Yes, the second phase of my first time in Japan.

I understand most of the soldiers didn't like the military police much?

No they don't.

09:30 Can you tell me about some of the arrests you made?

I don't think I ever made an arrest. I used to go out on patrols and that, but it was just being seen more than anything. I hadn't been in the unit long before I was made the Orderly Room Corporal, which is the company clerk.

- 10:00 I used to keep the records and do the payroll, and the duty rosters.

What memories do you have of your service in the military police?

One of them was this guy, Doc Dougherty. He took great

- 10:30 pleasure in catching one of the chaplains speeding. I think he got Father McGinley about three times! Another one is the landmass in Japan, if it's not a mountain it's a paddy field. It grows rice and it has these...what they call paddy buns that go...
- 11:00 They separate the paddy fields, which are inundated with water. At that time, I don't know whether it is still the case, but at that time human night soil was used as the fertiliser and this used to be dumped in

tanks in the middle of these paddy buns. Anyway, there's a fellow gets caught in a house of ill

11:30 fame one night and he takes off. It's pitch dark and he's being chased. Anyway, he knew his way through the place and he leapt over this tank, but the military policeman coming behind him didn't know it was there! [laughs]

12:00 The other one, and it was a beauty. It happened the year before when I was in the transport platoon. I walked into the orderly room one morning and I saw that there was a pile of clothes, a uniform lying on the orderly room floor. I said, "Whose is that?" or, "What's it there for?" They said, "It belongs to Titch Campbell. The Provo [Provosts - Military Police] found it in the drum up on the Hiro hill last

12:30 night." Anyway, the story turned out...no I'll tell it this way. The next morning or that same morning, later in the morning, I saw this great gaggle of blokes in one of the car parks. There's a Japanese woman there twirling an umbrella, which was a bit unusual because they're not supposed to be in the car park. I wandered over to have a look and it was this guy Titch Campbell. He'd been caught by the Provos

13:00 last night in the altogether and he got up on the roof, and they didn't know where he was. Then the next morning he borrows this Japanese woman's kimono and gita, and a sunshade, and walks back to camp. He was only a little bloke. That's how he got away with it! He stoutly denied everything

13:30 and he just got dressed in another uniform, and said he didn't know how that one came to be there! He got away with it.

Did the Provos raid houses of ill repute?

Yes that was part of the...they were strictly off limits, but

14:00 you don't stop people. There was another one flashed into my mind then. No, it's gone.

How were these raids on the houses of ill repute organised?

14:30 They weren't really organised. The blokes knew where to go and who they'd probably find there! [laughs] The only time that anything like that would have been organised was when the top brass sort of were getting a pasting because of the amount of VD [venereal disease] or something like that.

15:00 **I've heard that there is such a thing as short arm parade?**

Yes.

Can you just talk us through that?

It's just a matter of you...you line up minus your trousers and a doctor comes along, and inspects you. I don't think that I ever had to submit to one.

15:30 It generally happens in training camps I think more than in a unit, although I think a lot of this might have happened in the Middle East where I never got to.

What happened to a man if he was caught in a brothel?

He'd probably be fined five pound

16:00 and 28 days in the slammer, and he wouldn't be paid for that 28 days. That's the other one. When I was the Orderly Room Corporal the very first payroll that I did, I mucked it up and the pay office wouldn't

16:30 accept it. What had happened was that I had totalled each page separately and I should have had a running total to the end, which makes sense, but I hadn't been instructed how to do it. I just did it. Anyway, I had to rewrite the whole acquittance roll and I had to get every man to sign again for money that he was not going to receive. He'd already received it

17:00 you know? I had a hell of a job. Eventually I had them all except one and he was on train guard up to Tokyo. Payday was always Thursday, every second Thursday and he'd been paid on Thursday morning, and then on Thursday afternoon he'd gone on the train to Tokyo. He was supposed to be back on Monday afternoon. Now I was supposed to acquit on Friday, but

17:30 under the circumstances they gave me permission to acquit on Monday afternoon when I told them the story. So I was down at Hiro station waiting for the train to come in, and no Corporal Honeyset. So I raced down to Kure station and he still didn't come off the train. So I thought, "Oh well he's not there." I went back to camp and I told the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] the story, and he did not say a

18:00 word. He didn't say a single thing. He picked up his cap off the table, he put it on his head and he walked outside. He got in his jeep. Ten minutes later he was back with Honeyset.

Where did he find him?

In his girlfriend's place. [laughs] Then ten minutes after that I was the escort to march him into the orderly room

18:30 where he got his five pounds and 28 days.

So just from a payroll point of view, how did that affect the payroll when a man was given his five pound cut and 28 days? Did you just not write him up?

He just didn't get paid. The thing is that each individual has a pay book and the amount of...

19:00 He's credited each fortnight with what's due to him, and he's debited with whatever he draws out. So he would not be credited for that period and he would be debited for the five pound.

In Japan were you actually paid in pounds, not yen?

No, it was what we call BAFSV; British Armed

19:30 Forces Special Vouchers. They were especially credited for the occupation. The same ones were used in Germany too I believe, but they were the sterling equivalent.

Did you as the Provos have much trouble with counterfeit?

No. That would probably be more the SIB. The Special Investigation Branch would handle things

20:00 like that. I've heard of it.

What about the black market?

Oh yes. We were very much involved in policing the black market.

Can you tell me about that?

We would get

20:30 information that certain people were buying excessive amounts of goods at the canteen and these people would be watched, and their movements were noted. There would be a raid and if goods were found they'd be confiscated.

21:00 The Japanese police would deal with the Japanese people. It was very seldom that you found any soldiers dealing. I can remember one particular incident that happened in Kure in 1946. When we were working on the

21:30 wharves, this is before I was a military policeman, the MPs [Military Police] used to be on the gate as we drove out from the wharf area. They would inspect the vehicle for contraband and the first thing they would do would be to lift the bonnet catches, lift the bonnets, and see if there was anything

22:00 in the engine compartment, and there wasn't. We soon stopped that by putting axle grease under these bonnet catches and of course their nice white gloves...you know? They woke up to that so that used to make us lift them up. One thing that apparently they never woke up to was that the petrol tank on these GMC trucks was underneath the driver and the

22:30 filler cap was about that wide. You could quite easily put tins of fruit or what have you in the petrol tank. This was how they used to get stuff out. But this particular fellow had a bag of sugar and he had it on the crossbars on the top of the engine. He drove into Black Market Alley and he saw a

23:00 jeep down the far end, so he decided to back out. But the movement of stopping the truck and backing dislodged the bag of sugar and stalled the engine. Anyway, he's scratching his head wondering what to do and this jeep comes down, and it happens to be a RAEME officer. RAEME, that's the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. These are people that do all the

23:30 truck maintenance. He offers to help and he lifts the bonnet, and there's this bag of sugar, so this bloke's gone. [laughs] I believe he got 18 months for that. But these are the kinds of things.

When you were a Provo, what was your involvement in respect to cleaning up the black market?

Very little if any.

24:00 When I went to Tokyo I was the orderly room bloke there also, and all I used to have to do was do the duty roster each day, and the sit rep [situation report]. The sit rep is the situation report, where you report to headquarters the number of people you've got on strength that have got to be fed and housed. After that the day was mine. I used to wander

24:30 all over Tokyo. I used to know Tokyo better than I knew Sydney.

When you finished up in Tokyo did you go straight to America?

I lived in Tokyo with an American family for about four months I suppose while I was waiting to get a ship to go to America. It was very difficult to get a passage to America at that time because all the shipping was taken over with

- 25:00 American families coming and others returning. I'll tell you another small world story during that period when I was living with this American family. They had to go to a cocktail party one night in Tokyo at St Luke's Hospital and the occasion was Archbishop Morella, who was leaving Japan as the apostolic delegate, and coming to Sydney.
- 25:30 They took me along because they didn't know what to do with me, and I wasn't taking a great deal of notice. They were all Americans, and someone said to me, "Mrs Cardie is Australian." So I thought, "Well." I started talking to Mrs Cardie, "Where do you live? Where did you come from?" She said, "Sydney." "What part?" "Rose Bay." I said, "What street?" She said, "Dover Road." I said, "What number?" She said, "85." I said, "So did we."
- 26:00 It was the house that my grandfather built in Rose Bay. Bill Cardie was a photographer working for AAP [Australian Associated Press]. He took over when Damien Parer died and he was working for the Yanks [Americans] in Japan. Anyway, it's
- 26:30 one of those small world stories.
- During the time that you were in Japan, were you in correspondence with your dad or your siblings?**
- No. No from the time I left home in April '44 I never saw him again until after
- 27:00 I came home from Korea in '54.
- Can you now share with me your journey to America and what you were doing over there?**
- 27:30 Yes. It was the 26th of April 1949. I joined the SS India Mail as a mess man. I got a job and my job
- 28:00 was to wash the dishes in the officers' mess and throw the rubbish overboard. I learnt to check the wind before you throw it. I copped a whole lot back one day! [laughs] It was a ten day voyage from Yokohama to Seattle.
- 28:30 It was an interesting experience because the further you go west the time zones differ, and you end up not being able to sleep because your normal eight-hour day now doesn't finish until about
- 29:00 midnight or two o'clock. By the time you're ready to go to sleep it's time to get up again and go to work. The sailors told me that it is called channel fever and it's exacerbated by the thought of entering your home port and the excitement of going home.
- 29:30 We got to Seattle and then we had to go down to Tacoma, and I was paid off in Tacoma. I remember that I got 110 dollars, which was a hell of a lot of money in those days, for the ten-day voyage. Meanwhile when the ship was in Seattle, the
- 30:00 ship was the SS India Mail. It was owned by the American Mail Line and I just can't think of this guy's title, but I think it was Port Steward. Anyway, he was in charge of paying the crew and victualling the ship.
- 30:30 He started asking me what I was doing there, why I was on the ship and where I was going. It turned out that he got very interested and it turned out that he was a practising Catholic. When he heard that I was going to St John's he couldn't do enough for me. He took me to his home and I stayed
- 31:00 there for a couple of days until I was able to...again getting a bus ticket across the [United] States was a bit difficult at that time too. I eventually got a bus ticket and I went by Greyhound down. I spent a couple of days with these people that I was staying with in Tokyo, the McIntyres, I had to call and see his mother in Kansas. So I was there for a couple
- 31:30 days. Then I went on. I got to Minneapolis and Father Hildebrand told me that when I get to Minneapolis I've got to go and see Father Raymond, so I called on Father Raymond, and he said, "Where are you sleeping tonight?" I said, "You might be able to tell me a hotel or some place." He said,
- 32:00 "You're not staying in this city tonight. You're going to St John's." He rang St John's and arranged for me to be met, put me on the train to St Cloud. I was met at St Cloud, the car from the monastery. Then I was in the guest room...no, not guest room...
- 32:30 anyway it doesn't matter, it means the same thing...for a couple of days until they decided what to do with me. It was a pretty busy time then because the school year was just finishing and they were having their commencement, as they call it, which struck me as odd to call it commencement when it was the end of the thing, but what they mean is that they're commencing
- 33:00 their new life. I just wandered around the abbey for a while and eventually I got caught up in a summer school of Latin. I'd done Latin at school and I picked up on it pretty quickly, but in six weeks we did the whole
- 33:30 Latin grammar, and started on Caesar's Gallic wars. They had us going from about eight in the morning until about eight at night. We just crammed, crammed, crammed the whole time. There was a retreat

going on at the same time and I made a couple of friends with people who were doing the retreat.

34:00 That's right! There were nuns doing this retreat also and I don't know how these things came about, but I can remember one night being in a rowing boat with five blokes and two nuns, out in the middle of the lake. Saturday afternoon they took them into St Cloud shopping

34:30 and there's these two nuns in the centre of the back seat, and all these guys around them so that the other nuns won't see them. [laughs] Funny times. Then there was a fellow named Verne Thebert. His father owned a Chev [Chevrolet] Agency up State in Minnesota, up near the Canadian

35:00 border. He invited me up there one weekend and I went up. He and a couple of his friends took me around. On the Saturday afternoon we crossed the border into Canada and I was driving the car. Then we came back later in the afternoon and we pulled up at the immigration station, and immigration bloke says, "Okay. We'll start with the driver.

35:30 What's your name and where were you born?" I suddenly realised I didn't have my passport. It was only that Verne's father was so well known in the district that we got away with it, but with a stern warning, not to go out without it again.

How long were you studying at the college?

36:00 About nine or ten months. Then my father found me and I just panicked. I flew and went back to Australia, like a fool.

How did he find you?

I think that the aunt that I had been living with must have told him

36:30 where I was.

And he contacted you?

He contacted the abbot.

Through a letter?

Yes, by letter.

What did it say?

It just said that I hadn't been in contact with him. I didn't like to say to the abbot, "I'll tell you why that I didn't." I

37:00 didn't want to reveal the full story, so I just disappeared. I didn't run away or anything, but I just told him that I was going to go back.

What was the influence your father had over you that you returned?

You tell me and we'll both know. I just don't know. It was just...

37:30 I think it was just the severe discipline. You didn't step out of line.

You mentioned earlier that you'd had some run-ins with your father.

38:00 Yes, minor things. For virtually no reason at all he would slap you around the face. One time he took to me with a horsewhip for no other reason that instead of catching the train at this station, I caught it at that station.

38:30 There was just no logic as to why. I just didn't want anything to do with him. And even to the day he died, I still had this...I don't suppose it would be right to call it a fear, but what other word is there?

When you returned to Australia, when did you meet your dad?

It would have been some time later. I came back in 1950.

39:30 I think it would have been 1954 when I came back from Korea.

When you returned from America did you see your dad at all?

No.

You didn't think of applying to an Australian Catholic college?

No. You see I think that my problem was that I was terribly immature.

40:30 I'd left school and been a loner until I met these people in Tokyo. I guess that I gave the impression of being an intelligent person, which I probably was, but without any backup.

You lost self-confidence in a sense?

Yes.

Tape 5

00:44 **Michael why did you decide to go with BCOF?**

That's right. I was working in Brisbane at the time and they called for volunteers.

01:00 They reckon something you should never do in the army is volunteer, so I volunteered. I went in the first instance to Morotai and then from Morotai to Japan.

What does that actually mean to volunteer?

They call for...volunteer is the only word I can think of. "We'd like

01:30 some people to go to Japan. Who is offering?" And I offered.

So you get paid?

Oh yes. Your army service continues.

With BCOF, that's actually the British Commonwealth?

British Commonwealth Occupation Forces.

Is it that you're not working then for the Australian government? How does that kind of operation work?

02:00 The Australian army had responsibility for the operation of BCOF in Japan. Apart from the Australian component there were Indian, British and New Zealand. There were no Canadians and no South Africans either.

Did you have contact with all of those?

No. Slight contact with the Indians. I don't think I had any contact with the

02:30 Brits [British] at all. This is during my military police episode, on the night that India gained their independence, that was the 15th of August 1947, there was an Indian unit down the road from us and

03:00 I got a call. I was the only MP in camp that night. They were all either out on patrols or on leave. The orderly corporal called me and said that there was a riot down at the Indian camp and I better get down, and see what's going on. I went down with a driver and when I arrived there was a

03:30 great gathering of Australian soldiers. This Australian soldier had a Bren gun and as I got out of the jeep he put the muzzle of the Bren gun right there, and said, "You're on our side aren't you Corp?" Corporal, you know? I didn't say yes, no or anything. I just got out and asked him what's happening. It was very obvious that

04:00 they were all just drunk and they didn't like the Indians, so they decided to attack the camp. Luckily by that time some reinforcements started to arrive and of course being Indian Independence Day, all of the officers were in town celebrating. The only people in camp with any authority and that was limited, was what they call VCOs. That was Viceroy Commissioned Officers

04:30 in the Indian army, but they didn't have the authority of the English officers. Anyway, the whole thing quietened down, but by the next morning there were five...I believe there were five Indians found dead around the place. They'd taken off into the hills and just been pursued and shot down.

So who would have shot them?

Presumably

05:00 Australian soldiers, they were the only ones that were there and they were all drunk.

Can you explain the kind of animosity the Australians had towards the Indians?

It's only the same...it's still pretty apparent in Australian society now, racial intolerance of people who are different.

What about the Ghurkhas? Didn't they have

05:30 **respect for...?**

They did strangely. They had great respect for the Ghurkha, although the only time I saw Ghurkhas in Japan was when they were on leave on Tokyo. They'd be just in town for a day or something like that.

Well at least I was never anywhere near a Ghurkha camp. I think also that the Ghurkhas were part of the British division as distinct from the British Indian division.

06:00 **Was there an animosity associated with the way the troops were trained?**

No, it was just they had different coloured skin and they wore turbans.

They were Sikhs were they, the Indians?

Yes.

What was your reaction when you had the muzzle of a Bren gun put to your stomach when you walked out?

06:30 I was hoping he wouldn't pull the trigger, but even in his drunken state I think that he knew that to shoot an MP corporal would be a pretty...it would be treated with great disdain.

Is it common for soldiers to

07:00 **get trigger-happy when they are drunk?**

No it's not all that common. It probably came out of the fact that India had received their independence that day and I guess the Australian troops' attitude was that they were an inferior race, why should they have independence?

07:30 I'm not sure that it had anything to do with any thoughts of Australian independence or anything like that. Sometimes when they're drunk they don't need an excuse. They just want to go on the rampage.

What were the implications of being independent for the Indian people? Was that from Britain?

Yes from Britain. Gandhi had been agitating for many, many years for

08:00 independence and of course it reached the stage where the British couldn't sustain their hold any more. Of course also, this is at the time when all of the European nations were relinquishing control of their colonies.

Was that do you think apparent to the Australian troops, all the implications of independence, or was it just a pure

08:30 **racial dislike?**

It was just a pure racial thing at that particular point in time, and the fact that these Indians were camped next door to the Australian camp, and also lots of Australians have strange ideas about the perceived customs of

09:00 particularly Indian troops, and particularly the Sikhs, and the Marathas.

So you've got five people, Indian troops dead the next morning. What happened then?

I don't know. It was out of my...you know. It was never in my hands, but the officers I charge of these troops came back to camp

09:30 and they were the ones to settle things down. All I did was to play a holding action until somebody came, not to aggravate anybody.

Are there any other instances you can remember of Australians being intolerant racially?

I can't think of any particular

10:00 ones myself, but you read and hear about situations where...it depends so much on the circumstances that are prevailing at the time. I've heard stories coming out of Singapore at the fall of Singapore about Indian troops deserting,

10:30 and there were also British assertions that Australian troops deserted. Whether or not they are true I don't know.

What about in terms of the Japanese? Any stories associated with the Japanese?

Generally speaking the Japanese were disliked, but it didn't stop the troops

11:00 from quickly forming liaisons with the Japanese women. That started almost from the beginning, although it was kept very quiet because it was theoretically illegal. We were forbidden to fraternise with the Japanese, but the reality was different.

Was it that you were forbidden to fraternise at brothels or...?

No, generally.

11:30 This was the Australian government's attitude at the time towards Japan.

So how many proportionally of the Australian troops were fraternising with the Japanese women?

It's difficult to know, but I would say that maybe up to ten percent would probably have married Japanese women

12:00 whether by Shinto rights or...I doubt very much that any of the chaplains would have married them at that time, but later on they would. I was a witness at one Japanese wedding. That was a Catholic

12:30 wedding, but the chaplain came to the house and married them rather than married them in a church.

Was that an Australian troop and a Japanese?

Yes. He later brought her to Australia, but he lived in Victoria and I've lost contact with him. There was another

13:00 one. I don't know whether you saw it, but some time in the '80s there was an ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] movie called The Forgotten Force. It was about BCOF, and one of the fellows that

13:30 I'd been very friendly with was portrayed in this movie. I got in contact with him. I didn't realise that he had married a Japanese woman. In fact I didn't even know he had a Japanese girlfriend. It was all very hush hush. Nobody let on. Anyway, I contacted him. This would be five or six years ago I suppose. And he was telling me that...

14:00 I think he had two daughters. One of them was a school teacher and the other one was a surgeon at one of the hospitals in Melbourne. He was telling me that the one who was a surgeon had gone back and lived in Japan just to imbibe some of the culture. I presume that she had gone to live with her mother's

14:30 family relatives.

What was the attitude of the Japanese people to Australians marrying Japanese women?

I wasn't aware of any antagonism towards it. The only thing was I think the difficulty arose when...there were one or two cases where the men stayed in Japan and I think that life was very difficult for them once

15:00 they'd left the army. It may have been in this same movie or documentary I saw, there was one particular man who stayed in Japan and his wife had died. The impression was that he was living a very lonely life. He had no friends. He just sort of lived

15:30 from day to day, and apparently there was nothing to bring him back to Australia.

You described before that there was an animosity towards the Japanese and you also mentioned that after being there for a while over ten percent of the men would have considered marrying Japanese women. What do you think caused such a dramatic shift in attitude?

Human nature. If you're a reasonable human being you can't

16:00 hold animosity against people for no particular reason. Admittedly during the war they were the natural enemy, so I think it is reasonable not to like them, but also there was the situation of their treatment of prisoners of war in Malaya and Thailand.

16:30 I think you would naturally be antagonistic towards them, but here again, they were not a Christian people and if you're not a Christian, what's to stop you from doing whatever you like?

What were the highlights of that time in Japan for you?

I think that the year that I spent in Tokyo, because that was a very formative year in my life. My whole future I think is probably based on that year and the contacts I made, the people I knew,

17:30 the things that we did.

That was with the Catholic group?

Yes.

What were some of the activities that you did with that group?

We used to have evenings at a place. The Americans requisitioned a building and they called it the Chapel Centre. Each of the

18:00 religions had a chapel within that centre and it had a big meeting hall, and a few smaller rooms. There used to be a lot of us would meet there and they'd have invited guests. One particular man I can recall

was a Colombian father. He was a chaplain in the Royal Air Force and he came out, and joined the

18:30 Colombian missionaries. They were in Yokohama at the time and through him I got to know other members of the Colombian group. One of them, Keith Gorman, he's down in Melbourne, just outside of Melbourne now, but he's

19:00 very elderly now. I haven't seen him for 20 odd years now. My own parish priest, he's still living in the parish, Father John McSweeney. He was one of what they used to call the Go Nen Ki. Go Nen means five years and Ki means a house, an association, a group. These were

19:30 a group of priest that Cardinal Gilroy sent to Japan in 1947 to assist the missions in resuscitating themselves after the war. Father John was one of those. I met him in Yokohama for the first time in 1948 and then 20 or more years later he became parish priest at Kingsgrove. As I say, he still lives

20:00 there. He's 84 I think and he goes swimming every day at Cronulla, drives out to the middle of New South Wales supplying for his priest friends. There's a joke around the parish that he deliberately runs out of petrol so that someone would come along and he can talk to them,

20:30 and make another friend, and they'll invite him home for a meal. [laughs]

What impressed you about the Catholic group most?

I guess their friendship, their fellowship,

21:00 their wanting to do things for people, wanting to be friendly, their hospitality. I guess also their spirituality, but one goes with the other.

Was that radical at that time for

21:30 **people in Japan to be forging new religious contacts and to be expressing themselves in a Catholic way?**

Are you talking Japanese or Americans? Japanese? I never really had a lot to do with Japanese Catholics per se, but I used to

22:00 meet them from time to time. Keith Gorman had a parish at a place called Chigosaki, which is down beyond Yokohama, down near Mount Fuji, and I went out on a couple of picnics with his parish group. They act just the same way as any Catholic or parish group would here, going on a picnic,

22:30 laugh and joke, and talk, and share food, paddle in the water, inspect the big [(UNCLEAR)], climb up into its head.

You mentioned that those years were very formative for you. How do you think you changed after your experiences in Japan?

23:00 I'm not sure that I did change. I just seemed to take these things in my stride. There's no road to Damascus or anything like that. I suppose that I did more things than I would have done before or otherwise. I became more involved than I would have done before.

23:30 I guess one of the big disappointments to me, particularly after I came back from America having mixed with these people over a couple of years, to come back here and find the church so backward, or I felt it to be backward after having been with all these people.

24:00 I think it's only now, maybe in the last 20 years that we've sort of moved into a position that I saw then at that time, but whether they've moved forward, I don't know.

How would you describe the backwardness on the Australian front?

Going to mass on Sunday and that's the finish.

24:30 Providing you went to mass on Sunday and confession on Saturday afternoon, you know, that's all you had to do, or that was my perception anyway.

What kind of other things were that extra step in Japan or America?

25:00 Sorry?

You were describing the backwardness in Australian attitude. What was it that was more progressive in Japan and America?

I think their interest in theology and the various theologians who were expounding ideas. This was just something that I felt I never got here until fairly recent years.

25:30 I think also there was this...you know, that good little parishioners should be seen and not heard. I got the distinct impression of that. Mind your own business.

What is it like coming back from a war torn country?

- 26:00 **When I say war torn I mean post war Japan, and then returning to Australia, and being involved with Japan. What was it like returning to Australia after that? What was your experience of that?**
- I'm not sure that I even made a comparison. I accepted what I saw in Japan and I accepted what I saw when I came back here. As a 20 year old and probably empty-headed, I
- 26:30 didn't give it any thought at all.
- Were you able to maintain the level of commitment that you had to other things, things that you had been exposed to, say spiritually or through the friends that you'd made contact with? Were you able to continue those when you came back to Australia?**
- Yes. I'm still in contact with most of those people. Admittedly some of them have died in the meantime. There's one guy,
- 27:00 Frank Brigante. Frank comes from New Joisey [New Jersey] and that's the way they talk! He drives me to distraction with these religious tracts that he sends me on emails. I've just got to cancel, cancel, cancel. He's a great bloke. I saw him about five years ago. I stayed with him for
- 27:30 a few days. He's probably the last of them apart from Christine in Seattle, but I have a feeling that her husband is not keen on our corresponding. I may be wrong. He was a former
- 28:00 seminarian and I got the impression that he was knocking the church when I was there, and their methods of instruction, and contemplation. He never actually said so, but Chris gave me a
- 28:30 video tape and also a couple of books that he'd written, which suggested to me that he was more into Buddhism or Taoism, one of the two.
- They say that the two most influential institutions are the church and the army, and you were involved with both.**
- Yes.
- Which one do you think had the most hold**
- 29:00 **on you?**
- The church, and I don't know why.
- When you came back to Australia did you continue with your army service?**
- No, I left that. That was finished except that I'm a foundation member of the Royal Australian Regiment
- 29:30 Association. It was only on Sunday that we had our regimental birthday party at Victoria Barracks. I took my granddaughter - I'm not too sure that she was impressed - and her husband.
- What was her response?**
- Oh she did the things we all did
- 30:00 and had a drink, and a barbecue, and a meal, had a look at the museum, and then came home. I didn't really expect that she'd be impressed, but she invites me to dinner all the time, so I just wanted to repay some of her hospitality.
- 30:30 **Michael can you just fill me in about what happened when you returned to Australia in terms of your army service and the lead-up to Korea?**
- Yes. I came home, that's from America. I got a job at a place called Bon Marche. It's on the corner of Harris Street and Broadway. It's part of UTS now.
- 31:00 It was just straight out of Dickens. We used to sit on high stools with a sloping bench along the wall and we wrote in these big leather covered ledgers. That lasted about three months and I went, and I got a job with Australian National Airways in their freight section.
- 31:30 Meanwhile I injured my knee playing tennis and they sent me out to Mascot, and I was standing on concrete floors in the middle of winter, and I just had to give that away. Then I went back to Malleable Castings, the place where I'd worked in the foundry and then in the office, and I worked there until I went
- 32:00 and joined up for Korea again. I worked there when I came back from Korea also for quite a number of years.
- Can you tell me about your decision to re-enlist?**
- It was something that I think I probably did on the rebound. I'd been going with my wife,
- 32:30 she became my wife and we'd been going about six or eight months I suppose, and she told me she

didn't want to go with me any more. I didn't give it any thought at all. I was just walking down Rushcutters Bay one day and I saw the army recruiting office, and I just walked in, and signed up, just like that.

33:00 The next week I was off to Kapooka down near Wagga [Wagga Wagga], rookie training all over again and then down to Ingleburn. I spent about three months at Ingleburn and then up to Japan, and over to Korea.

In terms of re-enlisting how was your rank considered by the army?

33:30 I was just a private.

When you say rookie training, it's the same process?

Yes.

How did you find that ten years on?

Seven years on.

Seven years on? How did you find that?

It was a bit boring I suppose.

34:00 I'd done it all before and having to do it again, but that was the system. Down at Ingleburn I did intelligence training and that was quite interesting. I spent some time in a rifle company in Korea, but then after a while I was transferred to the intelligence section.

34:30 That's where I finished up.

What were the sorts of things that you learned in intelligence training?

Map reading, air photo interpretation, how to sketch terrain to interpret signs that you see that will tell you something about it.

35:00 I suppose the best illustration that I can give there is in the air photo interpretation section there is a photograph and you've got to work out what the photograph tells you. You've got to work out what country it's in,

35:30 what day of the week it is, what time of day, what the probable use of the building that's in it, who was likely to use the building and for what purpose. Then

36:00 you use a composite pair of photographs and using an epidiascope you can look down on the thing, and the thing turns up in 3D. That gives you further help in identifying land features and what use they may be for your operations.

36:30 That generally is the sort of thing, but most of the time in an infantry battalion in the line as we were, you're generally making maps with the CO [Commanding Officer], enlarging maps of the particular area, where you are or where a particular operation is happening.

Was this to

37:00 **identify where the enemy was?**

It could be or it may be that the battalion or the unit, or the company may want to use that area. They see it in relation to the total picture and if the enemy is over there, maybe they can use this to get closer to them. Also

37:30 it identifies tracks through the terrain. You can tell which ones are used and which ones are not used, and also it may tell you where there are minefields, and where you've got to go to avoid them.

38:00 This information is all useful for patrolling activity so that you can avoid the enemy and get close to him without him knowing. It goes on and on.

Was intelligence something that you opted to do?

Yes.

What

38:30 **were the other options available?**

Generally speaking a rifleman in an infantry platoon, which I was to begin with, and I was also a signaller. When we went on patrols I carried the radio set, which meant that you had to stay with the patrol leader so that he could be in contact with headquarters.

39:00 **Was this in your prior service in Japan?**

No. This was in Korea.

So you were trained for intelligence, but you were also a radio commander as well as a rifleman? Is that right?

That's right.

Can you explain to me the process of opting for which area you'd like to go into and how that process worked

39:30 **in terms of when you re-enlist?**

Generally in the army system, this is the way it was anyway, they would give you an intelligence aptitude test and from your interpretation of the squares and the triangles, which you put where with what, they would allocate you to certain

40:00 corps training. The first time that I was in the army it never happened. I was allocated to engineers, but the war ended and there was no longer any corps for engineers, so that's how I ended up in the transport platoon. Many of these systems just don't work.

40:30 It's what's contingent at the moment that generally determines what action is taken.

You mentioned that re-enlisting was like a rebound. What were some of the things you were hoping this re-enlistment would add to your life

41:00 **at that point?**

Nothing. My mind was a blank. I was just disappointed and I reacted, negatively of course, but I don't regret a moment that I spent in the army. I enjoyed it all.

Tape 6

00:42 **At the time that you re-enlisted what was the situation in terms of Australian involvement with Korea?**

The Korean War had been going on for just on two years I think.

01:00 I had been wanting to go and as I mentioned before I injured my knee, but by that time it was pretty right. Things would have happened differently today, but I spent two weeks in hospital and then six months in physiotherapy because what had happened was that the GP [General Practitioner] left it too long to get specialist attention and I

01:30 ended up with my leg crook like that, my knee crook like that, and I walked like that for about four weeks. Anyway, I got over it.

So the war had been happening for about two years, and what was the Australian perception of that war at that time?

Nobody knew about it.

02:00 They call it the forgotten war. The main action had happened in late '50 and early '51, and after that it has just seemed to have been forgotten.

How much was it featuring in the media?

As I

02:30 can recall, not much at all.

When you re-enlisted did you know that you would be going to Korea?

Oh yes. I enlisted in K Force, which was a special force for service in Korea. It was mainly ex-servicemen. They wanted people with combat experience, not that I'd had any, but

03:00 I had been in the army before so I guess that it must have counted.

What were your impressions of the war with Korea at that point?

I guess the main determinate would have been anti-communism. At that time...it's very difficult for people today to understand the

03:30 feelings in the 1950s about communism and communists, and particularly also anyone involved in the church. The church was probably the most strident voice against communism,

04:00 not that I think that that particular part influenced me. It was a combination of army life, and I think also that people that had been in the army at that time hadn't quite got it out of their system. I think the

camaraderie had a lot to do with it.

04:30 **In terms of communism, what was the general perception about communism in terms of Australian attitude?**

That the yellow hordes were going to roll over Australia, and that fear I think persisted until maybe 20 years ago. It was only after Nixon went into

05:00 China and then Whitlam opened it to Australia that this fear of communism started to recede. Once trade and commerce came into the matter everything changed.

What was Australian life like in the '50s?

It was good,

05:30 quite different to what it is now. There was no TV. TV came in '56. Very few people had a car, in spite of which there were lots of cars around, but the ordinary working people that would live in a district like this wouldn't have had a car. In fact I can tell you a funny story about that. We were up at a neighbour's place on Christmas Day

06:00 and Jim had just come out of the navy. When he came out of the navy they had a surprise party in the street as a welcome home and they were telling all the elaborate way in which they kept the surprise from him, and his daughter, who was then about 42 said, "But Dad you must have known there was something on because of all the cars in the street." Everybody just roared laughing because nobody had a car.

06:30 I was one of the first people on our street to have a car, and that was '59 I think.

Was it very unusual on the whole for people to have a car in the '50s?

Yes.

If you came from what kind of background?

If you lived up on the north shore or you were a professional person, you would certainly have a car. I guess that leading tradesmen and

07:00 business people, they would have cars, but the ordinary worker wouldn't have a car.

How did folks get around?

Public transport, trams, buses, trains. Do you live in Sydney? Which part?

In Ashfield.

The tram used to run down

07:30 Georges River Road. I'm almost certain. There was certainly a tram that went from Ashfield to Burwood. There was a tram that went to Canterbury Station from the city. Another one went to Dulwich Hill, another one to Earlwood and to Tempe,

08:00 Haberfield.

When we are talking trams, are we talking...?

Light rail. The rails were actually in the street. They came off the road in the late '50s early '60s because they were holding up traffic.

You said the '50s were a good time.

08:30 **What other things can you describe about living in the '50s?**

The dances on Saturday night. There used to be Strollers at Marrickville Town Hall and people used to come from all over Sydney to that. Shrublands, which was in the hall behind St Bridget's Church at Marrickville.

09:00 That was mainly CYO. The Trocadero in George Street where the theatre complex is now. Leichhardt... On Parramatta Road at Leichhardt there were dances. The Palladium I think that was called.

09:30 **Let's imagine that we are in the '50s. Can you describe for me a perfect Saturday night, right down to what you might wear?**

Yes. If you were going to a dance the gentlemen would wear a suit, collar and tie, nicely polished shoes, hair slicked back.

10:00 The girl would probably wear a...she'd either wear a dress or a skirt and a twin set. She would undoubtedly have an orchid posy pinned to her. I doubt very much that

10:30 she would have been to the hairdresser. She would have done her own hair. I guess that's about it. I mean even if you went to a movie it would probably be the same thing. You'd wear a suit and a collar and tie. You'd be dressed up as though you were going to church on Sunday morning.

So you're all dressed up and what would be the perfect date? Where would you take a girl and

11:00 **what would be the perfect night out?**

I was never in that class! For people who had money there were nightclubs in town, like Chequers and Princes, and Romano's, sort of restaurant come show places.

11:30 The Tivoli, the Tivoli was very popular on Saturday nights. That was a live show. I was never involved in that kind of night out sort of thing.

You mentioned that you liked the Trocadero?

12:00 The Trocadero was where the CYO Balls were held and that was more formal. You wore a dinner suit and black tie if you went to the Troc, but you only did that on special occasions.

At the movies, what kinds of movies were showing?

Now you're testing me!

12:30 I guess that at that time movies would have been like Mrs Miniver. I can't remember the names of movies now.

Did you ever go inside the Tivoli and the Romano, Chequers?

No. I might have gone to the Tiv once, but I

13:00 doubt it. No, I don't think I ever went to the Tivoli. I went to a few balls at the Trocadero. Marrickville Town Hall was another venue for balls, Petersham Town Hall.

13:30 No I can't think of the names of any movies.

What about in terms of church, would it be common for people to be going to church during the '50s?

Oh yes. I reckoned it would have been by the late '60s they were starting to drop away

14:00 but the '50s and '60s yes, very much so.

Why do you think that was the case?

I think there's a number of reasons. One of them of course was the Vatican Council. There were a lot of misconceptions about what the council was about. I can remember my boys coming home from school and saying that the brother said, "You don't have to go to mass if you don't want to,"

14:30 things like that. It was a pretty literal interpretation.

What do you think it was in the '50s that were some of the values that people held close to them?

I think they were traditional values. They were doing

15:00 what their parents had done. I think you've got to realise that in the '50s kids were still not going to uni [university]. I think that my children would have probably been amongst the first of school leavers who went straight on to university.

15:30 Before that not many did. That would have been the early '70s.

Could you comment on how the '50s were affected by the period of war that had just passed?

16:00 The society was only just still getting on its feet after the war. During the war there was a terrible housing shortage and families were living on top of each other. You'd have two or three generations living in the one house. Then after the war you had what they

16:30 call the Commonwealth Reconstruction Scheme and this assisted ex-servicemen in going to uni, and also getting housing loans to enable them to buy land, and build houses. I guess that that phase came to an end maybe in the '60s, the mid '60s.

17:00 When I said that our children would have been amongst the first to go to uni, the big influx was returned servicemen going to uni when they came back from the war. Many of them had not matriculated and they had to go back to school before

17:30 they could go to uni. I have a friend who died a couple of years ago, but he came back from the war. He'd been a truck driver during the war and I think he worked as a plumber when he came back. Then

he used his Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme to matriculate and then he went to uni, and he ended up as a GP

18:00 in Strathfield. He was 42 when he graduated as a doctor. There were all kinds of stories like that.

Did you consider going to uni?

I never imagined that it would be possible for someone like me to go to uni.

18:30 I guess this is partly because I never finished high school. I'm mad now. I realise now that I was mad not to have, but then again I never had that family support that would guide you. I just grew up with the idea that people just went to work. That's all there was.

19:00 My father was never one for education. He didn't see the value in it.

You mentioned that when you were in the seminary in America that you were doing quite a lot of intellectual subjects, Latin and theology. How did you respond to those kinds of experiences?

19:30 It was a bit of a struggle, but it wasn't beyond me. I was doing Latin and Greek, history, religion, and English of course. In fact

20:00 I did an English comprehension exam while I was there and I came in the top ten percent of the whole of the United States, but that didn't strike me as being unusual or any pointer to me having intellectual capabilities. I know it sounds

20:30 crazy.

In terms of '50s society, you mentioned communism. What was the impact of Australia being involved with Korea on the average Australian?

I think that the general public were supportive of the

21:00 Australian involvement.

Were there any conscientious objectors protesting?

No, not in the Korean War, or not that I'm aware of anyway. The conscientious

21:30 objection mainly came in during the Vietnam War. There had been conscientious objectors in the Second World War, but then that was a time when everybody was being called up for service in the army, so I think that that was understandable. In Korea it was an all volunteer army except for the

22:00 poor sods who happened to be in Japan at the time and got shot straight over. They had no say in the matter because they belonged to the unit that was sent.

There were also pacifists in the Second World War as well. Were there any pacifists around at that time in the '50s?

The Korean War somehow didn't seem to attract their attention, or

22:30 that's the impression I had. As I said, how true that is I don't know.

How was it viewed by you? Did it seem to be a different type of war to the Second World War?

In the initial stages it was similar, but then it settled down to a stalemate where we were in trenches opposite each other. It was more reminiscent

23:00 of the First World War than the Second.

When you enlisted what was your idea of the reason why Australia was being involved in the Korean War?

Because of the North Korean aggression to South Korea and North Korea being a puppet Soviet state. They

23:30 were being supplied from Russia. Then as time went by when things started to go bad for North Korea, the Chinese came in. I guess in a way communism was a sort of bogey I suppose. I feel now that

24:00 they probably would never have come to Australia. They were not sufficiently interested or equipped. This country would be a very difficult country to invade without a massive build up.

24:30 I think that they would have difficulty in invading on the eastern seaboard and of course I'm talking at that time. If they'd have established forces on the western or the north-west coast, they've got a heck of a lot of desert to come through and they've got to establish their lines of communication.

25:00 They just wouldn't have got away with it.

How salient was the [Sydney] Harbour attack and the Darwin attacks in the minds of people in the '50s?

Well of course by that time it was fading from memory because the Darwin attack was in 1942, and that was probably the

- 25:30 worst thing that ever happened in Australia. The Sydney attack was pretty minor really. Admittedly those sailors in Kuttabul were killed, but other than that I think it was a show of strength rather than any concerted effort to invade the country.

Did it feel like

- 26:00 **a personal war for you?**

No. By a personal war you mean that I felt a personal need to...I suppose in a way yes, but I was just

- 26:30 doing what I felt was expected of me.

Was it any different to the first time you enlisted in the army?

That's an interesting question. I don't think so really, probably a bit of anticlimax I think. The second time around I knew what to expect.

- 27:00 **What were you expecting?**

The first time?

Yes.

I don't know what I was expecting. I just went. I think

- 27:30 that I knew that I was going to have to put up with some hard times, that the training would be hard, but I don't think I gave it any real thought. After a while you get used to the routine. I remember...I might have mentioned before that

- 28:00 we lived in tents at Cowra. I think that the main thing that bugged me was a fear of not being able to do what was expected of me, and I have nightmares about that even now, that I'm on parade, and I've left something behind or I don't know where my hat is, or

- 28:30 my rifle is dirty, or I can't find my boots. I remember one of the first days I was on parade and the officer came along, and he looked at me, and said, "Did you shave this morning soldier?" I said, "No sir." He said, "Sergeant put his name down." That meant I was going to have to do after hours duty. So anyway he goes down about three down and he comes back, and he says, "Do you shave?"

- 29:00 I said, "No sir." He said, "Well it's about time you started. Take his name off." When you get your name taken it generally means after hours drill. You have a pack on your back, possibly loaded with stones or something heavy and a rifle, and your boots, and everything,

- 29:30 full gear. You march up and down, and round about, obey orders, "Do this. Do that. Do the other thing." I only ever did it once and that was in Korea. No it wasn't. It was in Haramura, which was the battle training ground for Korea. It's in Japan. I got seven days CB [confined to barracks] once for having a dirty rifle.

- 30:00 Anyway, the night that this started the DLI, that's the Durham Light Infantry, they were in camp and their sergeant was the Orderly Sergeant for the night. He had us running. You parade at seven thirty just after you've had tea and you're in full gear, full battle order, and he'll say, "Okay! Back here in ten minutes, walking out

- 30:30 dress." You go and get all this gear off, get your good uniform out, put it on, get up there in ten minutes, come back in 15 minutes, full battle order, and this goes on all night.

How long does it normally go on for?

Seven nights.

How long at each stretch?

Until 11 o'clock, from half past seven until 11. Then the wharf labourers in Kure went on strike

- 31:00 and we were sent down to work the ships, so I ended up not doing my seven days CB. I must tell you a funny story about that too. The officer who gave it to me was a Captain East at the time and years later he was a resident in Lourdes Retirement Village at Killara, of which I'm a director. I went up to him one day and

- 31:30 I found him, and I told him about this. He said, "Well I had to get my quota!" [laughs]

So they take that very seriously do they?

No.

But when you're on it?

When you're on it that's very serious.

Was there any dissent in the ranks when that happened?

It would have to be a pretty serious thing for you to lose rank over.

32:00 **No, I mean was there any grumbling?**

Oh grumbles all the time in the army.

What were your expectations when you signed up for Korea?

I think

32:30 when you ask questions like that I think I must have been a bloody idiot because I'm not sure that I gave it any thought.

You said you knew what to expect, that you'd been in a war zone before and you'd had lots of experience?

When I said that I knew what to expect that was on the initial joining up and doing the rookie training, and corps training, but as for actually

33:00 going into action, I really didn't know. I knew that we probably would be shot at and we would probably have to shoot back, but I had no idea of what the actual conditions or situation would be like when the rubber hits the road sort of thing. The only thing that I

33:30 could say was that when the time came and we started patrolling activity, we'd out at last light. We were in a trench situation as I said and you go out at last light, and you wait until it is almost dark before you start to move through the minefield gap, and you go out to your appointed position

34:00 depending on what kind of a patrol it is, whether it is a listening patrol or an ambush patrol, or a fighting patrol. That depends on the number of people that go out and the purpose, whether it's to get a prisoner or just to listen, and find out what the enemy are doing, whether they're active in

34:30 no-man's land. By no-man's land I mean that in this particular instance it was the valley floor between two features. The Chinese were in a range of features called the Apostles, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They were each of these four peaks and we were on a position called 159, and this is from the height in metres of the position that we were on.

35:00 We'd go out. I remember the first night I went out our own platoon next door shot at us. We must have made a noise or something and rattled them. The platoon commander had to call back to headquarters and tell them to shut up. The worst feature that I can remember of our patrolling activity was that the Americans used to go over at night

35:30 mapping. A plane would fly over and every X number of seconds there would be this almighty flash, and you're exposed on the valley floor, just like it's daylight. It only lasted momentarily, but it was frightening because you could be easily seen.

36:00 Luckily in the times that I went out nobody saw me.

Were there times when people would be exposed and shot at during that time?

Oh yes, sure. I guess there could be, but I'm not aware that anything like that ever happened. It wasn't every time that you went out that you might find any action. In fact in

36:30 the times that I was there I guess there might have been three or four times when people were actually shot at. That's not to say that both parties were not on the valley floor, but they just didn't find each other.

What you just described of the photography, was that a new technology that had been developed?

It probably would have been. I'm not aware of having heard of it in

37:00 use during the Second World War, but I don't know why. I guess they do it at night because they can't be seen except for the camera flash. You wouldn't want to be doing it during the daytime because you certainly would be seen.

They didn't get flak or any sort of resistance from the ground when they...?

No, but they would have done in the daytime

37:30 because the thing is that the flash is so sudden. They wouldn't have time to get a bearing on it.

Wouldn't they be able to hear them or see the lights of the plane?

No. They are very high. I reckon that these planes would have been

38:00 flying maybe at 20 000 feet.

I had a vision of an alien landing type of thing, quite low! So they were really high up?

They were really high up.

Too high to be affected by anything on the ground?

Well at night, yes. During the daytime they'd be seen coming and they'd cop flak. Then again

38:30 I'm not sure that we had any anti-aircraft guns because most of the aircraft activity was fighter or fighter-bomber stuff. They're in and out so fast that there would be not much point in it, and we had control of the air anyway. There was no air activity from the enemy.

39:00 **Going back to your initial training in Kapooka, what were the two sections that you went into? You went into intelligence and also infantry?**

This is later. This is in...

Corps training?

39:30 Ingleburn Corps Training. Ingleburn was the Infantry Training Centre at the time and that's where they did the infantry corps training, and where I did intelligence training.

Did the training prepare you for the conditions you went into?

Basically

40:00 yes. We used to spend a lot of time in the field doing route marches and camping out overnight.

Tape 7

00:38 **Coming back to your training. Army intelligence? What were they trying to teach you there?**

I know it's an oxymoron! [laughs] I think I've been through that with Claire [interviewer].

01:00 It's preparation for intelligence duties in the field as they call it. Generally the purpose of the intelligence section in a battalion is to assist the CO in the preparation of maps and maybe small-scale reconnaissance work, and the recording of

01:30 intelligence data. That's what it was then. I know it's much more involved now. Most of what I used to do was...after I left the battalion...well I hadn't left the battalion, but I was seconded to division headquarters

02:00 and there I used to be on the phone recording sightings of enemy doing this, doing that, doing the other thing, vehicles that might have been seen, and which direction they were heading. If it seemed something of significance you'd pass it on. If you didn't...mainly

02:30 a lot of common sense I guess.

So you were in Australia, when did you receive your orders that you were moving to Korea?

It would have been about early November '52. We flew from Mascot to Darwin where we refuelled in Darwin, then we flew to Labuan in what was Borneo, stayed overnight there, then Hong Kong,

03:00 stayed overnight there, then to Guam, refuelled in Guam and then ended up at Iwakuni. Iwakuni is the southern airbase. And then from Iwakuni we went by launch to Kure. We went to 1RHU, which was a reinforcement

03:30 holding unit. We stayed there until we were wanted in Korea. Meanwhile while we were there we did the battle training course at Haramura, which I think was about 20 miles north of Hiro, but we march up there and march back.

04:00 I think if we left in the morning we'd get there by night, but if we left at midday we'd have to camp out. Haramura Battle School was an old Japanese army training establishment and it had nice high hills like they have in Korea. You've got to run up and down them, and pretend you're playing soldiers.

04:30 They also at the same time, more as a diversion than anything, they have demonstrations of other arms of the services. I got to drive a tank while I was up there. That's it.

Was the training similar to what you had already been doing in Australia?

Yes. It was just an extension of

05:00 the same thing, maybe closer to reality because we were running up and down hills, which we may not have been doing in Australia, the lack of them.

Can you describe the scene for me? Were they using ammunition to shoot at you or blanks?

Blanks mainly.

What was happening in respect of the battlefield?

05:30 To describe one activity we were involved in, it was a brigade exercise. The company that I was in was allocated an area that had to be defended. We were going to be invaded by Canadians as it turned out. Anyway, we lay in the long grass all day long,

06:00 just looking, thinking and then at about three o'clock in the afternoon it was decided that...the Canadians were having great difficulty coming up an almost vertical cliff face, so about three o'clock in the afternoon our commander set fire to the grass, and we all went home! [laughs] I don't know how the Canucks [Canadians] got on!

06:30 I take it there were long periods of boredom?

Yes, inactivity. That's why they've got to think up all these route marches to give you something to do, keep your mind off it.

Given probably many of the boys hadn't done these long marches, either in Australia or...?

They would have done them. We used to do them around Ingleburn

07:00 and Holsworthy.

What injuries arose? Blisters and chaffing?

Some people got blisters, but once you're used to it you didn't get them. The worse thing I can remember was Gus Brenner was our platoon company at Ingleburn. I was with him on Sunday too!

07:30 Here again these are things that they think up to give you an activity and he had nothing for us to do, so he said, "You've got to run to the crossroads and back. The first two back get a weekend leave pass." So we ran to the crossroads and we ran back, and I was the second one back. Anyway, there's no sign of this leave pass, so by six o'clock I go up and I

08:00 knocked him up in his quarters. He's all dressed in his blues to go to mess and I said, "What about the leave pass?" Anyway, I got my leave pass and I went, but it was useless to me because I was so shin sore I couldn't walk the next day!

The discipline in respect to the army training for

08:30 Korea, had it changed from when you went to Japan?

No, it was basically the same.

What were the sergeants and the lieutenants like?

You know, there's good and bad in everything. I didn't have any particular problems in that area. I guess that when you're

09:00 in action together it's different to being in a peace camp or a peacetime camp because everybody knows that everybody else is relying on them, so that's a completely different situation to where it doesn't give a damn, whether you do it or don't do it. It doesn't matter.

09:30 Everybody knew their place. They had their job and they did it.

I take it what you're saying in training camp in peacetime, it's the us and them mentality?

That would be fair enough, yes.

Okay, so you've now moved on to this training camp. Was that in Japan?

Japan.

What happened from there?

When we finished our

10:00 training course we went back to Hiro. Haramura was the training camp. We went back to Hiro and it was mainly a matter of whether you got caught for guard duty or as far as I can recall we didn't have to do any mess duties or anything like that. We used to have Japanese employees to do that, but we used to have to

- 10:30 mount guard. If you weren't doing that, you generally got a leave pass for the day and went out, but then once we were detailed for Korea, we went over on a ship called the Wosang. It's a little Chinese freighter from Hong Kong.
- 11:00 **Given that you were a Provo in your first time in Japan, what did you think of them the second time around when you weren't a military policeman?**
- Also bear in mind that at that time, the peace treaty had been signed and we were no longer the conquering heroes. We were just visitors and we had
- 11:30 to have identity passes. We were subject to Japanese law and police. I just accepted it. It's their country not ours and also at that time, we were only visitors in as much as we had a base for operations in Korea. We no longer had anything to do with
- 12:00 what had been the occupation.
- I guess what I'm driving at is what did you think of the Australian military police now that you were one of the soldiers?**
- I can tell you a story there too. I arrived in Pusan and we were taken by truck or something to this holding camp. I don't know what it was, but as I drove in the gate the
- 12:30 MP on duty was one of my previous conquests. That night we drank bourbon and coke in the American mess down the road and it was quite funny because he arrived in an MP jeep to get me, and everyone thought that I'd been arrested! [laughs]
- 13:00 **Can you continue the story? You were at that Japanese training camp that they had used obviously during World War II. What happened to you and to the battalion you were with?**
- We took part in the exercises that were planned to get us used to the idea of how things would be in Korea.
- 13:30 When that was finished it was back to Hiro and await transport. As I said, we arrived in Pusan and my impressions of Korea when I arrived were...it hit me immediately that there was not a tree to be seen, not a blade of grass. It was just brownish
- 14:00 orangey-yellow earth and when it rained it was just a quagmire. I don't remember much about that camp. We weren't there long and we were on a train heading up to our unit. One thing that I can remember and it saddened me greatly was there was a
- 14:30 man on the station who had no legs. He only had sort of a leather saddle sort of arrangement under his rump and he had leather glove-like gauntlets on his hands, and that's how he propelled himself with his hands, and on his backside. He was begging and there was a Korean policeman there, and he kicked him from one end
- 15:00 of the station to the other. You know, "Get out! Away!" He literally kicked him the length of the station. It was pretty terrible there. There were people living in literally cardboard boxes alongside the railway line. The train tracks are here and the front of their houses were where that wall is,
- 15:30 and raining. It was really terrible. I think the train took us to Seoul and then from there we were picked up in trucks, and taken up to Camp Casey, which was the...for want of a better term, the rest area for 41 Commonwealth Division.
- 16:00 **Just share with me if you would the poverty. Were there many beggars?**
- Once we left the Pusan railway station we didn't see any more people as such, and where our units were located, there was no civilian population. The areas were pretty heavily mined and
- 16:30 it was just not good to move off the roads or the tracks. The only Korean people we saw were what we called KATCOMs, that was Korean Army Troops attached to Commonwealth Division. I think we had a couple of these to each platoon and
- 17:00 they were assigned to us more for training, assimilation, getting the brush-off from our methods, and observing I suppose. They weren't used as interpreters, but
- 17:30 if we did come across any North Koreans or Chinese, they would probably know how to deal with them better than we would.
- Were you given any lectures or teaching in respect to prepare you for the actual battlefield in Korea?**
- I can't
- 18:00 particularly remember, but this would have all been part of the training. There would have been lectures, but I can't recall any formal lectures. Our instructors were people who had been in the early

stages of the action 1951 and '52. They would have imparted their knowledge and they would have told us of their experiences

18:30 but as for knowing anything about the local people, no nothing at all.

What about your enemy? Had you been educated in respect to them?

Yes. We knew that they were dug in, in these mountains and that their

19:00 labyrinth and establishments, they had been working on it for months, possibly years, ever since the establishment of the 38th parallel. Actually we were north of the 38th parallel, but they were well entrenched. They were much better entrenched than we were because we

19:30 were only in temporary trenches and what we called hoochies. This was a room as it were, dug out behind the trench and reinforced with heavy timber beams. That's where we retreated during the day and then came out at night to patrol, and do whatever we were supposed to do.

20:00 Was Camp Casey your home for the year?

No. Camp Casey was a temporary abode. It was a canvas camp. It could accommodate a battalion or a company battalion. They used to use it in rotation as they came out of the line. We'd go in there. It was

20:30 used for training and for recreation. If we came out of the line and it was likely that we were going to go back in or move to another position on the line, then we would go to an open area, and we'd just live on the ground. We had what they called hoochies.

21:00 Each man had a waterproof cape and you used to be able to pin these two together, and make a two-man tent. That's where you would...you just set these up and you'd dig a latrine pit, and that was it. You

21:30 would probably do some platoon and section training, maybe signalling or brushing up on arms training. Maybe you'd get talks about the latest enemy activity. It was mainly a matter of

22:00 hurry up and wait for the next action.

What were the recreation activities that you would do?

We'd play an impromptu game of footy [football] or cricket. There was on particular bloke I can remember...[technical break]

22:30 Yes I started to tell you about this guy, Father Smith. I don't know where he got the name from, but how he first came to be with us was that he was a bookies runner in Sydney and he had a commission one day to place X amount of money, and a large amount of money on a particular horse, which he knew had no chance in the world of winning, and it won.

23:00 So he promptly disappeared and he thought the safest place would be in the army. Anyway, once he gets in the army he gets enough money to repay his debt and then he decided he didn't like the army, but the army said, "You're in. Stay with it." Anyway, we get to Korea and every Thursday afternoon or whenever it was pay day afternoon,

23:30 he used to get up on top of the hill. This was in one of the peace areas or the rest camps we were in. He'd get up on top of the hill and he had this canvas bandolier around him like a stole, and that's where he got the name Father Smith. He'd yell out, "Gather round me children. Gather round children," and he used to conduct the Swy game. The story I've heard is that during the 12 months he was in Korea, he sent

24:00 home about 12 thousand pounds, which was a lot of money in those days. That was Father Smith. The other story about him was that he was the other platoon sig [signaller] beside me, but I did two patrols for his every one and I'm still wondering how or why.

Are there any other characters like

24:30 this fellow?

There was 'Choofer' Ryan. 'Choofer' got his name because in these tents and Korea was intensely cold in the wintertime, and we had these what they called 'Choofer's. They were stoves, and they used to drip petrol or diesel into them, and you had to control the drop otherwise you'd burn the place down, but

25:00 it used to give off this black smoke. 'Choofer' had this tidemark around his collar. He used to wash his face, but no further and you could see this black mark, and his uniform jacket was absolutely black, so that's how he got the name 'Choofer' Ryan. I have a photo of one of my friends

25:30 actually breaking the ice on a creek to have a shave in the morning.

Did any of the fellas get frostbite?

No. We had good equipment. We could even go to the toilet without taking our trousers off! True!

How did that work?

We had these

- 26:00 long underwear. It had a sort of a crossover flap at the back and you'd just pull that apart, and then go in again, but we had that long underwear that you could not have to take off, and we had what we called stringed singlets. They were
- 26:30 literally woven of string and they used to have air holes in them like that, and it used to stand out from your body about that much. Just with an ordinary shirt over the top of it you were as warm as could be. It held your body heat in this net effect. We wore oversized boots and they had
- 27:00 a plastic like fly wire, insole about that thick. It was made up of about five or six layers of this plastic net and two pair of socks. When you took your boots off at night you poured the sweat out of them like that, but your
- 27:30 feet were perfectly dry.

Was that a special design?

British Arctic clothing.

If your boots got holes in them or your socks got holes in them, tell me, was it easy to get resupplied? What was the process there?

You could, but it was most unlikely that that would happen.

- 28:00 The boots were a pretty rugged construction and you weren't doing that amount of walking that would cause them to wear down in any short length of time. I reckon that anyone who got issued with a pair of boots when they came would still be wearing the same boots when they left at the end of the year. We were only allowed to stay there 12 months.

Given the cold weather, what head covering were you given?

We

- 28:30 didn't have any particular head covering. After the fighting started we continued or we resumed wearing our slouch hats, but while the fighting was on we had to wear tin helmets. When we were wearing the tin helmets it was summertime. In my time, in my winter the fighting had finished. Although
- 29:00 we got a bit of the winter when we first went over. I think some people used to wear balaclavas, but I never did.

Michael share with me now going into the front lines. Where were you situated and what did you do?

We went in from Camp Casey and

- 29:30 we were to relieve the RFs, that's the Royal Fusiliers 1st Battalion, and I went up with the advance part a week ahead. The idea was that one person from each platoon went so that they had the feel for what was happening, so that as the RFs went out and our people came in, there was somebody to tell the drill if it was
- 30:00 necessary. I spent a week with the RFs and didn't like their cooking at all! I ended up with the job of being the day lookout because everybody slept during the day and I had to be in a hide. Do you know what a hide is?
- 30:30 Like if you have ever been bird shooting, not that I ever have, but a hide is where you can see without being seen. It was four sticks, for want of a better word, surrounded by hessian and it had a hole in the front so that you could observe what was going on in front.
- 31:00 I got sick of being in this thing and I ended up one day sitting out on the parapet. The next thing I know a mortar shell came down there and then another one came here. I didn't wait for the third one! I never did it again and I never told anyone either! [laughs] When we were in that position also, we had a Centurion
- 31:30 tank at the back of the position in what they called a hold down position. It meant that they dug out the earth and put the tank in it so only the top of it was level with the surrounding countryside. They used to use that if they wanted heavier fire than what we had ourselves, but not heavy enough to call in
- 32:00 the artillery. They'd be available. This night, they had a routine at last light as we called it, just before it got dark. They'd get ready for the night. There was a three-man crew and I guess that they'd take in water and cups of tea or whatever they wanted to make themselves comfortable for the night before they pulled the hatch down, but unfortunately this night

32:30 a mortar came in, and went straight in down the hatch. They had to hose it out, just tow the tank away. These are the kinds of things that happened. Another time a lucky shell came in, or unlucky for us, and set our ammunition dump alight. That was quite exciting for a while.

33:00 **What did you have to do to try and clean that situation up?**

I personally and our platoon were not involved. It was some distance away from us. The battalion was holding the front. It was maybe a kilometre or less. It wouldn't have been any more.

How far away were the

33:30 **enemy?**

About 800 metres.

Did you know who the enemy were? Were they Chinese?

Chinese.

They were. Could you tell the difference between a Chinese soldier and a North Korean soldier?

I couldn't because I never saw any. The only time you'd come across them would be at night and I was never unlucky enough to have to

34:00 go in on a snatch raid. We watched the Durham Light Infantry. They were on Hill 355, which was at the...there were these four features, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Then Hill 355 or Maryang San as it was called, the Durhams were on that and they were sent to John

34:30 to get a prisoner, and they didn't get one. The CO sent them back again and it was terrible to see them come back, and then have to go back in again. I don't know what the result of it was, but you just knew the stress that they'd be under. That was the object of a lot of

35:00 raids like that, was to get a prisoner to question them, find out what was happening.

What was the process of those raids and what did you actually have to do?

It was just a matter of walking or proceeding in some formation to get

35:30 to the enemy position without being seen, and then by I guess force of arms, for want of a better term, to go in, and get a prisoner. The whole thing was worked out, I suppose you could say scientifically, but everybody would have a particular job to do to protect the guy that was going to actually make the snatch.

36:00 You had to be ready, knowing that the enemy was not going to let you do it lightly. I don't know that there's a lot more that you can say about it. It was just the boss says, "Go and get a prisoner."

Are these called

36:30 **patrols as such?**

Oh yes.

Can you share with me the types of patrols there are? There's the raid?

Yes. I think we used to call it a snatch patrol. Depending on the location and the layout of the position, the enemy position, and maybe the depth of the trench, and how you got in, and how you got out,

37:00 that would determine the number of people that went on the raid because it was obviously desirable to have the least number of people practical to do the raid. Then there were fighting patrols and they would generally be of platoon strength, and they would go out

37:30 looking for the enemy, and engage them. Then there were ambush patrols where a patrol would lie in ambush at a particular point where it was known that the enemy went backward and forward. Then there were listening patrols where you just went out and listened to hear what was going on.

38:00 The object of all of this patrol activity though was to maintain the possession of no-man's land and the Australian battalions always had possession of the land in front of them, whereas some of the others, particularly the Americans, they used to lose control.

38:30 When things got a bit tough they dug out and so leave the ground to the enemy.

So their lines were moving backwards and forwards the whole time?

How do you mean?

If they're not controlling the no-man's land, they're...?

The enemy has a free pass through the

39:00 area and then it's the job of the next battalion or regiment, or unit that comes in, to win it back again.

Tape 8

00:35 **So Michael, what patrols did you go on?**

I don't think I ever went on a fighting patrol. I went on a number of listening patrols and I also went on an ambush patrol once. That would be about

01:00 it. I was only in that position for about a month or five weeks and I'd have gone out every second night at least. Then the really hot area that we were in was the Battle of the Hook and that was the one that was fought right on the last day of the war, but that time I was in

01:30 the intelligence section. I was back in battalion headquarters, but I was only about less than a mile away. That was the night of the 25th and 26th of July, and the Chinese just plastered us. They were actually going for the marines, the 1st Marine Division next door, the Americans, but we had a...

02:00 I can't think what they call it now, but anyway it was a machine gun section between us and the Americans. I guess they really copped it more than we did, but I'll never forget that night as long as I live. I didn't think I was going

02:30 to live the next day.

Share with me what happened that night?

It was just continual gunfire, shellfire, mortars and artillery. It just rained down all night long. It finished about four o'clock in the morning or something like that, but the next night it started up again. Then the next morning it was all over.

What were you called upon to do

03:00 **during that time?**

I was working in the I Section. We were answering phones and drawing, and making maps, enlarging maps, noting data on maps. I guess on of the

03:30 scariest things that happened to me while we were on the Hook was that the OC [Officer in Command] of A Company rang the Adjutant and said that there was something wrong with the map on his section of the front. The Adjutant told me to go up and find out what it was all about. This guy, his name was Major Skinner, had me traipsing up and down the front

04:00 of his position, and this was broad daylight, ten o'clock on Sunday morning. All I could think of was getting back behind in the shelter and he's wandering up and down, no trouble at all, but I still to this day don't know what his beef was.

Why was it so important to be redrawing the

04:30 **maps, what you were doing during the Battle of the Hook?**

For quick recognition. Instead of having to find a position in a map that was that size and very fine print, we'd enlarge it, just the section that was required. Instead of having a map that size with lots of extraneous information, you had a map that size with just the pertinent details,

05:00 which showed the topography of the land.

You said you were doing that and answering phones. What sorts of emotions were running around in the room at the time?

I guess that it would be something like a...

05:30 I would equate it with a marketing meeting! You know, everyone is going off at the same time and everyone is putting in their sixpence worth, but everybody is feeding off everybody else.

06:00 Everyone knows what's expected of them, what they've got to do and they're just doing it, but they're doing it at a pretty rapid rate.

Was the feeling in the room that the line would fall, that the Chinese would break through?

Oh, no, no, no. We knew that that wasn't on.

06:30 They tried hard and they did a lot of damage, but I reckon that we knew that we were better than they

were. They were like the Yanks in some ways. They used forced where we used a bit of nous.

07:00 **The office that you were operating out of, was that a dugout or a house?**

A dugout. I think when we were on the Hook it might have been a tent. When we were on 159 it was a dugout.

During the Battle of the Hook, were the Chinese shelling

07:30 **your position?**

Yes.

What were they firing at?

Mortars and artillery, but we had New Zealand artillery with us and they were pretty good. Of course another thing too, you're not quite certain whose artillery it was, whether it was ours air bursting or whether it was the

08:00 Chinese just shelling straight down.

During your experience was there any time where you were hit by friendly fire?

No, only that one time.

Just coming back to the patrols, share an experience when you

08:30 **were scared or terrified out on a patrol and why you were scared.**

I think that my worst experience was a photo mapping one where you were walking along trying to be as silent as you possibly can and then suddenly you were exposed. All you can

09:00 do was freeze. You can't go to ground or anything like that because you're giving your position away, but if you stand perfectly still, it could be a tree. It could be a bush. It could be anything. That was my worst experience at the time. You're just wondering what's going to happen and you're happy to go back with nothing having happened.

09:30 **Were there times that you engaged the enemy?**

Not personally, no, but we had other patrols who engaged the enemy in the same positions where we had been maybe the night before or the night after.

What happened

10:00 **the night that you did the ambush patrol?**

You just lie there. If nothing happens you get up and go home at midnight.

How was the ambush set up positioning-wise and how many troops were there?

There were usually about four or five at the most. Everybody would be

10:30 looking so that you covered all of the ground all around where you were, where you were lying and you just have to lie perfectly still, and just wait to see if anybody comes. Now if anybody did come, then you engaged them. You'd have a signaller among yourselves.

11:00 Whoever gave the signal then you'd know it was in the other direction, but as I say, I never actually engaged anyone, so I don't know.

Give me an example of the signal. Is it verbal or...?

It could be either. It would generally be a tap on the shoulder or something like that, something that couldn't

11:30 be seen or heard. If there was someone close by you wouldn't give your position away by talking.

Were you in contact back with the lines through radio?

Yes.

Who operated that?

I did.

So tell me about that. What was the equipment like?

It was what was called an 88 set and it was about...

12:00 not quite as big as that yellow box and say about that wide, that thick and about that high, and you carried it on your back. It had an ordinary telephone handset with sufficient length that you could hand

it to the patrol commander because it was the patrol commander who used

12:30 it.

13:00 I guess that my involvement wasn't all that great.

I think your involvement was quite heavy. You were there. How did the radio operate?

To be honest I can't remember. I think it might have been a toggle switch.

13:30 If the commander wanted to use it I would just sort of hit the switch, but I really can't remember. I put most of these things out of my mind when I came back. I really can't remember how the 88 set worked.

14:00 All I know is that I had it on my back and the commander used it.

What were the call signs that you used?

It was Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, X-Ray, all of those signs. That was the alphabet, but the platoon commander or the

14:30 patrol commander, or the company commander was X-Ray. X-Ray 1, X-Ray 2, X-Ray 3. That would denote his rank or position. I've got them all in my notebook, but I don't remember the alphabet and it had all been changed. They use a different one now.

15:00 We used to say, "Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy, Fox...I think G was George, H for Harry." I can't remember it!

Why did you put all of these things out

15:30 **of your mind when you returned home?**

I think I was sick of the idea of war. It was futile. I still go to these regimental occasions, but

16:00 I'm not interested in going to their rifle shoots or anything of a technical nature. I just go for the company, the camaraderie, the beer, the barbecue!

Were you still heavily involved with the chaplains?

Yes I was. It's funny. Our chaplain in Korea was Father Joe Phillips. He was a

16:30 Carmelite and he only died about six months ago at the age of 92. He was from Adelaide and I think he served most of his priestly life as an army chaplain. He joined up early in the Second World War and he was in Korea, and I'm not sure whether he went to Vietnam or not, but

17:00 he must have been in his late forties when he was in Korea with us. I've got a photo of him with me serving mass in the field.

Did the chaplains come up to the frontline?

No, they were up the front.

What was their role up the front?

They'd walk around and talk to the guys.

17:30 His name in religion was Basil, but everyone knew him as Father Joe. And he was not a betting man himself, but knew all of the form in Australia. He used to

18:00 give this to the blokes. He knew all of the football scores and the cricket scores. This was part of his modus operandi.

Were many of the fellas Christians, churchgoers,

18:30 **men of faith at all?**

Not many. It depended also on where you were and what the operational conditions were as to whether it was possible to get to mass, but he used to carry his mass kit around with him, and if the opportunity arose he'd say mass. It was generally said on a block of wood or a tree stump, or a stone.

19:00 **If a fella was actually hit, shot in a trench or wounded, or was dying in the trench, did the chaplain come up and do the last rights then and there?**

Yes and no. The body would generally have been taken back to headquarters or company headquarters.

19:30 It would generally be wrapped in a blanket. I never actually attended a funeral, but I remember Frank McDonald was a mate of mine and he got killed there. I remember that I walked into the chaplain's tent and saw this body on the...it was Father

20:00 Brian Kelly by then. He was from Brisbane. He just looked at me and said, "Yeah it's Frank." Frank and I didn't know each other all that well, but we'd always meet at mass wherever it happened to be. When we were in 159 we used to have mass on Sunday night, but this happened on the

20:30 Hook, where Frank was killed. Every time I go to Canberra now I look for his name on the wall at the War Memorial.

Were many of your good mates killed?

None that I

21:00 knew. Frank was the only one that I knew personally. I can't remember how many we lost. I think it was something like 15 or 16.

What emotions were stirred up inside you when you discovered Frank had been killed?

Loss.

21:30 I guess sorrow, loss. You know by the very fact that you're there that the chances of it happening are great, but

22:00 I guess you don't expect it to happen to you or someone that is close to you. Another great friend of mine was killed in Vietnam and that was Mick Slater. You may have heard me or you did hear me tell the story this morning about this guy who couldn't be found to sign the payroll.

22:30 The RSM who went and found him or knew where he was or guessed where he was, was Mick Slater. His name was Harold Leslie Slater, but I don't know where the Mick came from. Anyway, he ended up as the Assistant Provo Marshal in Vietnam. That's the highest rank in the military police in an area of operations.

23:00 I'm not sure whether he was a major or a lieutenant colonel, but Mick was one of those people who didn't stop and ask. He just went straight in and he must have gotten onto something in Saigon. He was attacked by what they call the White Mice. They're renegade

23:30 Vietnamese Policemen. He died in Greenslopes Hospital in Brisbane from the effect of the injuries that he sustained.

24:00 If you don't mind, I'm sick of the army and the war. Can we talk about something else?

Can I just ask you a few more questions?

Yeah, righto.

Firstly, this girl back home. What happened to her? You'd been seeing a girl before you joined?

Yes.

24:30 **What happened to her?**

I married her!

So how were you communicating?

I told you that she said that she didn't want to see me any more and I joined the army. So anyway, what happened was that a cousin was getting married and I was to be the best man. I wrote and asked her if she would

25:00 be my partner at the wedding and the reception. She said yes she would, so that started everything off again. Then I went to Korea and I came home, and we got married.

Had you been in contact with her in Korea?

I wrote to her every day! [laughs] I can't believe it, but I did.

25:30 **What were you telling her about?**

I guess that I loved her. I don't think that I wrote anything about the war or anything like that. They were generally just hurried one page things.

Were letters censored?

No.

26:00 **What correspondence did you have from your dad?**

None. I saw him once or twice after I came home, and then when our children were little he was living up at Spear's Point since he'd remarried for the second time since my mother died. The children used to go up and stay with him and his

26:30 wife at Spear's Point for school holidays, but that was the only contact I had with him. He died many years ago. He died in 1967.

You are a man of faith as you've said. Was God present in the trenches of Korea?

27:00 It's a bit difficult to answer that question now because I think that God is present everywhere and he probably was then, but I perhaps didn't think of it in those terms. I practised my faith, but just how much it meant to me I'm not too sure.

Did you feel

27:30 **protected from the enemy because of your faith?**

No more so than anyone else. I don't think God works magic tricks.

28:00 I believe in God, but I don't think that He singles people out for attention. In fact I have a bit of a problem at the moment. My brother in Darwin is dying and he rang me

28:30 last Saturday to say that he'd been given six to nine months. He's got mesothelioma. When he was a youngster he was apprenticed to a boat builder at Berries Bay up on the north shore. He was apparently working with asbestos and it hit him only a couple of months ago. He was suddenly unable to breath and they removed this lump

29:00 from his lung and sent it to Perth for assay. They said that it was asbestosis and they gave him six to nine months to live. Anyway, in our parish at the moment we have a novena going for another fellow that I know quite well who is also suffering from cancer and

29:30 I accept the idea of praying for people like that, but some of the words of the novena that's being offered I have difficulty accepting. It's almost as though you're telling God to make him better. I just

30:00 can't accept that. I suppose in some ways I'm a bit of a fatalist. What is to be will be.

What is it about the war that upsets you?

30:30 The futility of it, that sane ordinary human beings can shoot at each other with the aim of killing each other. It just doesn't make sense and yet we continue to do it. It's like this business in Iraq.

31:00 To my mind we just should not be there. I suppose in one way it's good to have got rid of Saddam Hussein, but I'm not sure that we have. I think he's still around somewhere. I think that President Bush definitely did the wrong thing in going there without the backing of the United Nations.

31:30 He's got himself in a hole and he's digging it deeper and deeper. It's just futile.

Are you therefore saying if you were advising the younger you before Korea what would you have said to yourself now?

Sorry?

If you could grab hold of yourself

32:00 **just before Korea, what would you advise?**

I would still go. I would still have gone.

Why?

Because I can't transpose my thoughts today to that period.

32:30 I guess that it's what I learned there that conditions my thoughts about the present situation.

You've spoken about that incident in Japan with the Japanese girl.

33:00 **What other sorts of things like that went on in Korea?**

You mean the assault? There was no opportunity for that in Korea. We were physically remote from any habitation.

33:30 I guess it's possible that some people may have braved minefields and that sort of thing, but I'm not aware of anyone. It was just...to my mind anyway, physically impossible to make contact with any of the local populus. The whole place had been

34:00 ravaged for two years, armies going backwards and forwards. The civilian population would have all headed south.

What headaches did the minefields give you?

- 34:30 I'm not sure that they gave any headaches. Our minefields were pretty well mapped. We knew where they were and they were fenced off. Once we'd established our location
- 35:00 we knew how to bypass them. While it never happened to us it has happened to others, where they've stumbled into a minefield which was either not mapped or had been incorrectly mapped.
- 35:30 The minefields around our position were immediately outside our own wire. We had a wire barrier in front of the trench line and we had what we called gaps in the wire.
- 36:00 I know that the particular entrance that we used was called Fox Gap. We used to have to go down the trench past D Company on our left and go out through this gap, or actually we used to wait at the gap entrance until it got dark, and then move out. We got pretty used to the track to go around the minefield.
- Enemy mines,**
- 36:30 **did you come across them?**
- No. They would probably have been found I think and either destroyed or identified in some way.
- On a lighter note, you mentioned earlier the cooking was terrible. What was wrong with it?**
- 37:00 One of the things that I found wrong with it was that they used...I'm talking about the Poms [British]. Our cooking was all right. The Poms used something like Deb [instant mashed] potato. We call it plastic potato. It was just gooey glug.
- 37:30 We got by.
- What practical jokes were played by the New Zealanders or that the New Zealanders played on you?**
- As I said, we arrived from Japan and we went to Camp Casey. The battalion had arrived from Australia two days before and
- 38:00 we moved in on this particular afternoon. The buzz was that the Kiwis [New Zealanders] had knocked off the battalion emblem from in front of the battalion headquarters. B Company was on guard duty that night, so B Company got seven days' CB and we got assigned to B Company. It didn't
- 38:30 matter greatly because at Camp Casey there was nowhere you could go, so being confined to camp didn't matter!
- Did you get it back?**
- I have seen it in front of battalion headquarters, so I presume that they must have got it back some way or other.
- Did you get the New Zealanders back?**
- We probably did. I can't recall any particular occasion.

Tape 9

- 00:47 **Michael just a couple of wrap up questions. In experiences in**
- 01:00 **both wars, were there any troop songs or camaraderie that you can recall?**
- Most songs that the troops sing...I think the only time that I can recall actually having a session of singing would have been on route marches where you sang the traditional British things
- 01:30 like 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag' and 'Colonel Bogey'. I don't really know the words to a lot of them. I think 'Colonel Bogey' is the rather rude one that we used to sing.
- How does that one go?**
- [sings] "We're a pack of bastards, bastards are we."
- 02:00 I won't go any further.
- Can you tell me more?**
- "We'd rather ...than fight for victory." Once upon a time I think that troops used to sing in the barrack room and in the mess of an evening, but
- 02:30 I'm not particularly conscious of that ever having happened in my time. Certainly we used to sing when we were marching, on route march when we were going some distance, and from time to time there

would be snatches of a song or something like that.

03:00 I'm just trying to bring to mind some instances. You'll be marching along and somebody will say,

03:30 someone will yell out, "Sister Anna!" Someone else will say, "Carry the banner!" It was just silly stuff and then someone else will say, "I can't!"

04:00 Someone else will say, "Why?" She'll say, "I'm in the family way!" [laughs] You know? Just stupid stuff like that. Invariably even now on Anzac Day someone will yell out, "Sister Anna, carry the banner!" "I can't!"

04:30 That's the one that comes to mind. I can't think of any others.

Any poems?

No, none that I can think of.

What about

05:00 **crude rhymes?**

There's lots of those, but I can't think of them. Once upon a time I had a list of jokes like that, but I've just forgotten them all now. You get out of the habit. I think also when you're not in the company of...in the continuous company

05:30 of people who appreciate those things you just forget about them. You wouldn't be saying them at home and it just goes out of your mind. Sometimes you'll hear someone else say it and it will come back.

When you returned from Korea what kind of man were you?

That's interesting.

06:00 What kind of man was I? I can't say that I was any different that I'd ever been. I can't say that the army did me any harm. I can't say that it did me any good. I guess I'm just one of those people who floats through life and somehow or other gets by. As I said to someone recently,

06:30 I have never planned anything in my life. Everything that I've ever done has been done on impulse, on the spur of the moment. My kids joke about it to me now. I was talking to my daughter a few months ago now and I said something about I was going to buy a new car. Anyway, the next day I turned up

07:00 with a new car and she said, "You don't wait, do you!" Just like that, I decided that I was going to buy a new car so I went and bought one.

How would you sum up your experiences of war?

That it's all an act of

07:30 futility. That's not to say that if I had my time over again I wouldn't do exactly what I've done. With the hindsight of 50-odd years that's the way I see it.

08:00 **What would you say to future generations about war?**

I would say to work to avoid it, but having said that, I'm very much aware of the

08:30 difficulties that face the world. By and large I think that we are peaceful people. We like to live in peace, but there are others in the world who would disturb our peace and we've got to be prepared to meet the challenge when it arises.

Why do you think it's

09:00 **important to work towards avoiding war?**

War by its very nature involves the killing of people. What's the point of having people around if you're going to kill them?

09:30 But then, how do you cope with these cultures that don't see things the same way? People who are naturally warlike and it would take eons of generations

10:00 I think to change them...I guess that education is the only way that they are going to change.

Do you have any final things that you'd like to add

10:30 **to the interview today? Any final words or final statements?**

No. I guess that I'm grateful for the kind of life that I've led. I've got three wonderful children and five beautiful grandchildren.

- 11:00 We all get on well and we love each others' company. In fact I had them up here for dinner last Saturday week. I'm turning into quite a good cook! I've had about six
- 11:30 dinner parties since I've been here. No, I haven't got anything else that I think would be of any great interest.

Well thank you very much for the interview today and thank you for your time.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS