Australians at War Film Archive

Victor Catchlove - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **Just give us a summary of your life from when you were born to the present day.**

Well I will do me best. I was born in Cremorne, one of the Sydney suburbs, on the twenty second of November 1915, which makes me eighty eight at the moment.

01:00 From there I went to ladies' college, as one fellow mentioned once when, during Masonic Lodge, this fellow went to ladies' college with me. I went to the kindergarten at Cremorne Church of England Girls' Grammar School, which is folded now, and from there I went onto Neutral Bay Public School, up to the – what was it? – the intermediate certificate,

01:30 the entrance to high school. Unfortunately, a week before those two exams my mother passed away. While I was always about in the top three of the class I ended up about the last, it just rocked me, so I went to Mosman Technical College for a year and then I'd always been interested in the country and I

02:00 sat for the entrance to the high school again to go to Yanco Agricultural High School and I passed that and went down there for a couple of years. Well it was a school, it was tough. The initiation was the hardest thing of the lot. It was really cruel in those days, the ways they treated you. They hit you, there was sticks and (UNCLEAR), everything, it was really tough but it made a man of you.

02:30 I enjoyed every minute of it down there. We did all sorts of things. Weekends we'd rob wild beehives, we'd rob cockatoos' and galahs' nests, we'd swim in the Murrumbidgee River, play cricket and football on gravel. Oh we did everything. It was really a terrific place to be, I enjoyed every minute of it.

03:00 Well that was, I left there in 1930, just as the Depression was starting and that was, you'd have to have been in it to realise how bad it was. No one was putting on staff, they were sacking them, so consequently I had nothing to do. Couldn't do anything, any country, most sheep

03:30 places, wheat cockies, their sons were doing everything that had to be done and I did nothing for six months and then got a job as a roustabout in a shearing shed. The first one was at a place called 'Mumblebone' at Warren. I was only fifteen and had to find my way to Warren. From there had to find the shearers and get out to the shearing shed.

04:00 I'd never worked before and known anything about what they called a pickup, a roustabout is a pickup. You pick up the fleece, race up to the table, the wool sorting table, and throw it down and then race back and sweep the lots off the floor where that fleece came from before the shearer brought the next one out from the pen.

04:30 I got on with that but the trouble was you used to work in about two hour shifts. You'd start at half past seven in the morning and you'd go for two hours, and then you had to clean the board way and then you had what they called smoko which the shearers, well it was smoko and you really had a feed. The cook had to supply sandwiches and

05:00 lovely hot cakes. Oh boy these little cakes, they were good, were they good but the roustabouts got the last of them but anyhow it was good. You'd go from ten o'clock, you'd go to twelve and then you had an hour off for lunch, which you'd have to go down to the hut to have those, down to the cookhouse and then you'd start again at two o'clock, wait on. Twelve, one,

05:30 you'd go to three, that's right you'd go to three, and have half an hour off again for smoko and then you'd go to half past five and that was the day. You did that for five and a half days a week, but the shed lasted three weeks and then you worked for a grouse cross that arranged for all the shearing for different sheep stations

06:00 and having one they would try and get you to another. Well the next shed I got I had to get to Peak Hill which I did, the same thing. I think there was more or less three of us there, we found our way to Peak Hill and out to the station. From there I went to Harden with another, then came back to Sydney and that was the end of that. Fortunately I got a job as a messenger boy in

06:30 a, what was called then a batik arts studio in Neutral Bay. They used to make scarves out of silk where they'd paint on them, nothing much in them but they were the go at the time and all those had to be delivered to the city stores. Well the studio was at the end of, at the other side of on the middle harbour side of Neutral Bay. Well I had to get over

07:00 there, well I only got a pound a week I think it was but I worked it that if I could walk down to this boat instead of getting the tram I could save tuppence and which I did. I either walked or ran quickly and I made up my wages that way, which was everything in those days, a few pennies meant a lot. Anyway I did that until the next shearing season,

07:30 seeing as I liked the country life, and I went away again. This time I went to Bourke and from Bourke I went to Parkes, no, to Harden, and then to Albury, a place called 'Tabletop' at Albury. From there, after that I came back and worked in Sydney in a warehouse for a while and I didn't like it

08:00 and eventually I got a job as a jackaroo on a sheep property on Comboyne, a place called 'Comboyne Station' at Comboyne. It was a seventy five thousand acre property but there were conditions with it. I had to have my own saddle, bridle and quart pot and saddle bag, all those sorts of things. Well my father had to

08:30 buy those for me. Well I was made. It was like these fellows with their cars today. I had my own saddle and bridle, cost him twenty pounds too, and up I went to Comboyne. There they had, as I said, rules beside. You got fifteen shillings a week for the first three months, plus your keep naturally, then you went onto, no, you got ten shillings a week for the

09:00 three weeks, then fifteen shillings a week for the next three and then you went onto a pound and you stayed there. Well I was one of six jackaroos. It was quite interesting. We all sat round this big table of a night for dinner, the boss at one stage who cut the mutton, and they had a houseman who used to take the plate up to his wife who, they had all the

09:30 home grown vegetables, you had about four different vegetables and the biggest dinner plates I've ever seen, and besides the six jackaroos and the manager and his wife there was the overseer. I'm a slow eater, I chew my food, thirty times used to be the regulation and I was always last to finish and

10:00 Mrs Bucknell, the manager's wife, she'd ask everyone if they'd like a second helping, which they did. Well by the time they'd finished their second helping, I was just about to finish my first. Well of course, naturally I didn't have a second helping for a month or so. Well then I woke up to this and she said to me, "Seconds Vicky?" and I looked around all these fellas and said, "Yes thank you Mrs Bucknell," and they

10:30 could have wrung my throat and this went on after that but things were getting tough and a family owned the whole property and they didn't like jackaroos, so they decided to get rid of five of us. So I wasn't very happy but anyhow the manager told me, he said, "Don't hurry Vic,

11:00 don't hurry, let the others get off," which I did and after all the rest of them, four of them had gone, he said to me, "You'll be right." So this other fella named Ronald Press, who was a great big lump of a fella, I was only about eight or nine stone, if that, and he was exceptionally good at everything. He was only my age but he'd been there a long time and

11:30 had learnt a lot about country work, not only sheep work but maintenance, everything about it, and we together did all the maintenance on the place, beside the sheep work, which a lot of the station hands they did their bit but we were the main ones because we could do it. I was, although I was, I wasn't very

12:00 big or strong, I could do everything. I would try everything, I liked hard work so we got on. I stayed there for a couple of years. I must tell you, 'Comboyne Station' was on the edge of Comboyne township. We weren't allowed down the town, the jackaroos. We ate at their table and they made the rules.

12:30 You didn't in those days, well whatever you like to call it, we weren't allowed to mix with, I suppose you'd call them 'the peasants'. However, Ron and I used to sneak down after tea of a night. Well after tea we used to have a, Mrs Bucknell made coffee in those tiny little cups and us with our burry fingers and everything would hold this little cup that held about two tablespoons in

13:00 a, then we'd say how tired we were and then we'd have to go to the cottage which was the other side of the garden and we'd take our fur coat, which we had to have, a coat for dinner and breakfast, and then we'd wander this dreadful, well it was about four or five hundred yards to the pub, down the, well the only one in the place and we'd stay there and have a drink.

13:30 Well the beer was, Ron used to drink sars [sarsaparilla] and lemon and I used to drink a shandy of beer but used to get it in a pint what's-its-name. It was as warm as toast anyway but it was something to do. And quite often someone would alert us that the boss and overseer were walking down, they could see them coming down to the post office to get the mail which used to come in every day on the train. However I stayed there

14:00 for two years and enjoyed every bit of it. It was hard work but it was lovely. They did more maintenance on that property in two years than I've ever seen anything done. They did everything, sunk bores, they

did yards, new fences, silos, everything. However, from there I came down to Sydney and applied for a job which it turned

14:30 out it was with a fellow named Hill, who had, he used to play a lot of polo in those days, from Kirundi. And he lived at Turramurra and when I got there he had a big pile of envelopes, well two piles, one big one and one little one with about six names in. He said, “Well I’ve got you down to six, your application.” And after an interview with him he said, “I’ll let you know,

15:00 I’ll ring you about it.” He rang the next day to say he’d gone through these and he’d got it down to two and he said, “I couldn’t separate the two of you but it’s more or less a jackaroo overseers job, which is a lot of responsibility, you’ve got to give orders and that.” He said, “The other fellow was

15:30 six months older than you, I’ve given it to him.” He said, “I’ve been in touch with so and so at Pittson and Badgery, you’re to go in and see him and he’ll look after you.” Which I was so surprised because they don’t even ring you to tell you haven’t got a job today and, however I went into Pittson and Badgery and he said, “Sir Norman Cator wants a book-keeper

16:00 cum overseer, so he’s across the road in McConnell Street, so go over and see him.” So over I went and Sir Norman told me that the book-keeper, who had the boss and manager at the time, was his sister and she was giving it away and he wanted a book-keeper. He said, “I can get anyone to do the sheep work, get them in the town anywhere,”

16:30 but he said “To do the inside running or that of a sheep station, that is different.” He said, “That is up to you. We’ll teach you book-keeping, you can take a correspondence course if you wish.” He said, “There it is.” Well my father had always told me what to say. I said, “Well Sir Norman, I don’t know anything about book-keeping but I’m willing to learn,” which was what my father had always told me to

17:00 say, and he said, “Good.” So I headed up to Warren. This place was ‘Edgelebera’, it was a merino stud. It was one of four properties they had at Warren. It was the main one where the manager lived and they had an overseer and so I was to do the books and that it was. I was expecting much but if the overseer wasn’t

17:30 there I was to give the orders and so on. When I left Comboyne it was only fifty six miles away, the grass was about two feet high, it was a lovely season. Three weeks later when I got to Warren, the grasshoppers had been through and the ground it was just like a road, not a skerrick. They ate the stalks, they ate the lot, it was nothing. So after

18:00 three weeks they started to feed the sheep. Well this was my opportunity, I thought, ‘I can get out, they need extra hands,’ and I said to the overseer, “Well I can do the bookwork at night or when I haven’t got anything particular to do I’ll go out,” and he said, “Good.” So that’s what I did. Well for fifteen months every day Saturday, Sunday, holidays, it didn’t matter what, we fed sheep.

18:30 And it’s a distressing time to see just money going out on the ground, corn, lucerne, potatoes, anything that sheep would eat, we would put out. And I did that for, we did that for fifteen months. In the meantime I met a family in town, the

19:00 storekeeper, well the partner in the store at Warren, he had two daughters and I became very friendly with one of them, and her name was Esme. She had a sister, Merle, but anyhow when I could I used to go into town of a Saturday afternoon to get the stores because it was my job as the book-keeper to keep the stores up to the

19:30 place and anything else that was needed, and I’d stay in and ask Esme’s father if she could come to the pictures, but of course the store didn’t shut till nine o’clock and the pictures started at eight and she worked at the shop, so did her sister, and it was very hard. But now and again he said, “Yes,” so we went to pictures and afterwards

20:00 we’d go to the Greek’s and have a cup of tea or coffee, whatever was on those days, and then we’d go home. Well then eventually the war broke out. I was happy there. We used to have tennis parties, we used to go to tennis parties, I’d joined the cricket club in Warren,

20:30 it was a wonderful life. I loved it.

Where is Warren geographically?

It’s past Dubbo. It’s west, from Dubbo. You get the Bourke Mail, at Nevertire there’s a branch line that goes to Warren. Now it was about eleven miles, three miles from Nevertire, Edgelebera owned the property on both sides. It was black soil on one side,

21:00 and red soil on the other. The black soil plain, years ago there was lots of paintings, one in particular with a wagon, a horse wagon loaded with wool bogged on this black soil plain. It’s a well known one, it’s been everywhere, there’s been

21:30 whatever they call it, replicas or whatever, of this and this was Edgelebara. It went to within two miles of Warren and it went over what is now Sandy Creek, which the Edgelebara homestead was built on the edge of, the side of this Sandy Creek which was, it wasn’t running. It only ran when there was a fresh or a flood in the Macquarie River. It used to come down

22:00 and right where the homestead was there was a deep hole and it was always full of water except after this fifteen months of the drought. After grasshoppers go through there's no vegetation and of course you don't get rain.

What year was it that the grasshoppers came through?

1937, 1938 and it was early '37, January

22:30 '37, when the grasshoppers came through and during that time this hole did dry up and there were cracks, well you've seen them, it's like a damn thing and however from there the war started. Well naturally everyone thought it was going to blow over and in

23:00 1940 I felt that it wasn't and it was everyone's duty to do their duty and your country needed you and that was it. You weren't brave or anything like that, you just did your duty so, oh in the meantime a young fella, well he was four years younger than me, he'd

23:30 been working in the bank at Wyalong or somewhere and gave it away and went up to his uncle's place at Nevertire. And this uncle bought Edgelebera rams and he asked the manager if his nephew could come to Edgelebera as a jackaroo. Well they never had jackaroos at, but anyhow he came.

24:00 He started as a jackaroo and anyhow early in 1940, about April, I decided that I would join the army but first of all you had to have a medical and I thought, 'Now I'll have the medical and I'll know how I stand. If I can't pass that I'll forget about it.' So when I decided to do that, this fellow, whose name was Tony Brook, he said, "I'm not staying here without you," so then he came with me and we both had the medical.

24:30 Being the book-keeper the books had to be closed at the end of June and I thought, "Well they've been good to me, I'll wait till the end of June." So I told them on my application I wouldn't be available till the end of June. Well of course when the end of June came they had more or less stopped the recruiting, they had enough. So

25:00 I had to wait and the manager, I got, the overseer got sick. It looked as though he wasn't going to be able to work any more and the manager offered me the overseer's job.

That was Sir Norman?

No, that was a fellow name E H Whass,

25:30 Harold Whass who was recognised at that time as one of the leading sheep men in Australia. He was a good judge of sheep. There's a difference between stud sheep and flock sheep and you can, breeding comes into it with the stud sheep and everything. He was well known over there. He was a judge at a lot of shows and so on. He asked me to do it and I said, "Yes," and

26:00 with that he told Tony that he had to do the books, so that was that. I got the job. Well then I waited for the call up to say that they wanted me. It wasn't until April '41, early April that I got my telegram to say to report

26:30 in three weeks down to Moore Park, in three weeks, what you had to bring, a suitcase to put your clothes in, a plate, a tin plate, and a knife and fork and spoon. Oh it was primitive. A few days later I got another

27:00 telegram to say not to report. Tony was in the same boat, he got the same, he had waited, I don't know why he wasn't called up but Harry didn't want a call up before the end of June. We both were in the same boat, got the same telegram the same day, and we got another one to say not to report, that we were not wanted. Well it seemed as though, well what had happened Sir Norman Cator heard about it and being an MLC at the time he had

27:30 influence and he saw that we weren't to go, we were a protected occupation. We presumed that this was it and I kicked up such a fuss with Mr Whass that eventually he must have written down to Sir Walter Ranks or Norman Cator and told him, "Let the boys go." So we got another telegram and we were to report on the 17th of April 1941,

28:00 from there we went down to Moore Park. Do you want me to go on?

Yeah, just tell us a summary of what happened.

So you reported to Moore Park. It was most interesting. They have a big round table with say a dozen or more

28:30 of them were around this table. You swore, they gave you a bible and you swore an oath of allegiance and having done that they gave you an army number. I don't know what happened but they were giving out good numbers. My number was MX1220,

29:00 twelve twenty and you've no idea, that number was worth a lot to me. Well everything you did in the army, you either went in alphabetical order or you went in numerical order, and especially with leave or

anything else, you were first out, which turned out on the discharge. We were all down at Gardeners Road, thousands of us, waiting to get our discharge, and they called them out in numerical number,

29:30 and I was first out and all the mob said, “Gee he must have been in a long time.” But that was it, you got your number then you had to go and get your, I think from there, going back I think they took us somewhere and said that, not that the day had gone, oh you had to have your medical. You went through your medical first and that took the day.

30:00 Well then you had the night off. If you had anyone in Sydney, you could have the night off and be back at say, seven or eight o’clock in the morning. Well my father still lived at Cremorne, so over I went. The next morning in there and you went through and you got all your gear. Well you have no idea what the gear was in those early days. You were all expected to go to the Middle East, where it was cold,

30:30 so you got, you got woollen underwear, long johns, two pairs of those, two singlets, two woollen singlets. You got two singlets, you got two cotton underpants. You got a woollen jumper, you got two shirts, well the whole works and you had to carry those. They gave you a kit bag, you know, a

31:00 round thing to stuff them all in. You got one blanket, boots, towels, the whole thing.

Victor, sorry, what I might get you to do, sorry to interrupt here, because later one we’re going to go into lots of lovely detail like, just from there.

From there I went down to Goulburn training camp.

31:30 From there, while you were in training you used to get five days’ leave a month, ‘cause you worked for the seven days. Well I used to get an extra three days to go to Warren and when the first leave my girlfriend, Esme, she said that we should get married before I went away, so it was all to be arranged. I was

32:00 to apply for leave and she would do the rest. Well rather than me spend three days on the train going to Warren and back, she came down here to Sydney with her family and I got, I found out recently I got four days, what they call compassionate leave – I don’t know what the ‘com-‘ meant but I know what ‘passion’ was – plus three days’ travelling time. So we got married

32:30 at St Stephen’s, which was then the Presbyterian Church in Macquarie Street, on the 12th of June 1941. Having spent our honeymoon up at Wyong, I went back to Goulburn. I wasn’t long back from there and I had to go down and see the CO [Commanding Officer] and he told me that Sir

33:00 Norman Cator had pulled me out of the army for three weeks. The book-keeper who had taken over from Tony was a First [World] War digger and he had got some gall trouble or other and he was to be in hospital for a while, so I was to proceed to Warren. I saw the captain of the platoon and I said, “What will happen if a draft goes? I want to go away with my mates that I’ve made,”

33:30 and he said, “We’ll send you a telegram and you’ll be on final leave.” So away I went to Warren. After three weeks back I went and lo and behold all but two of me mates were gone. In the meantime my name had been called out on a draft to go to Malaya but someone was looking

34:00 after me and someone else went in my place. So it wasn’t long after that that I got my final leave, it was seven days, everything seemed to be seven days in those days, plus travelling time to go to Warren, which I think we spend down here somewhere in Sydney, but however I went back and no

34:30 sooner back, I was on the Queen Elizabeth to go to the Middle East. So away we went on this great big ship. No sooner out of Sydney and I was part of the ASC [Army Service Corps] contingent. Twelve of us were told to report to the galley. We were

35:00 to peel potatoes or whatever from down there. So down we went, spent the day, ate with the cooks which was beaut. A bit better than the dining room which had three sittings to fix up these two thousand-odd fellows on the ship and we were to do that for the whole trip. Down we went the next day and besides us came another twelve

35:30 from another unit. Well the cook said, “Well now, don’t worry about that, you’ll be in charge of these fellas.” So we had good meals all the way up, didn’t have to worry, we told these fellows what to do every morning, then we could go and lay down. So that was one of the good things about, all we had to do was go on deck for boat drill.

36:00 But that was good, it was a terrific ship. It used to go over with a destroyer escort, come back on its own because, no, there was no boat afloat that could keep up with it if it went at top speed. It relied on its speed to come back. However it got to Tewfik and from there we got on a train that took

36:30 us to a place called El Kantara on the side of the canal. We lobbed there about ten o’clock at night on this train and with all our gear, everything, we had to walk about a mile, over sand, until we got to some spot in the middle of this sand and there was three or four hurricane lamps and around it were sawyers

37:00 and fellas that were supposed to be cooks with dixies and this is where we got our tea. I think they must have expected, or they must have sold something because it was very watery stew that we got. And then

they told us to go and furrow out a hole in the sand and settle down there for the night, which we did. The next morning we were, had to get on a train to take

37:30 us to Palestine. Now the train was a cattle truck. You've heard about them but that was all we had, was sitting in this cattle truck, looking through these slats and so on and we eventually got to, which they called Gaza. There was nothing there when we went through, just a station and a few houses I suppose, but now it's a big city,

38:00 but it was just this Gaza and from there the trucks picked us up and took us to a place called Deir Sened, which was the ASC training camp. From there we stayed there for a month or two training and then all the reinforcements, we were reinforcements for all the ASC units,

38:30 ASC by the way is transport, and we, this day they pulled us all out and they called out all the different units that wanted so many. I think the first one out was the 6th Division Supply Company. Well everyone wanted to be in that one, so we missed out on that. Then the next one was Petrol Company and we missed out on that. There was

39:00 a lot more to come yet, they only wanted about a dozen or so for each one, then there was the Ammunition Company. I said, "Gee, you can't eat ammunition but it's the 6th Division, we might as well be in it," so we went for this and we ended up as reinforcements for the 6th Division Ammunition Company, ASC.

39:30 Well from there we had to get to, at that time they were stationed at a place called Baalbek in Syria. We got on this train that night. A lot of the troop trains used to run at night, probably because they couldn't be seen I guess. We got on the train somewhere near Deir Sened and where I had to sleep was on the

40:00 floor. There were seats with, it was just like a tram with seats facing each other. I'm on the floor with all these fellas' feet over me and everything else. Through the night we got to Haifa or somewhere and I think from there we changed trains.

Okay, if you could just give us a brief summary of where you went because we've only got a few minutes left and of course we've still got to reach New Guinea yet, so just a quick a point summary.

40:30 We went from there, took us three days to get to Baalbek which was, it was big camp and there was the big old ruins of a castle, or whatever you call it, a temple. They were building a big tank track across the Rhamu Valley and that was where all the troops and the civilians came from the build this track.

41:00 And that's where we stayed in this camp at Baalbek. We stayed there for the rest of the stay in Syria.

And how did you get back? After Syria where did you go?

Oh from Syria of course there were all the furphies going around about where we were going. We were heading for Malta and then something happened, so back we came to Tewfik. We were going from Tewfik, coming down the Red Sea and

41:30 we were to pick up a convoy at Aden but something must have gone wrong and we missed that convoy. So they pulled us into Port Sudan for a week. We went to an English camp there for a week and then we got on the boat again. It was an old Indian coal burner with the 2/4th and the 2/8th Battalion and these 6th Div Ammunition Company.

42:00 We had to eat and sleep down in the hold of the ship, cooking and everything was done down there.

Tape 2

00:34 **All right Victor so we'll finish the summary of your life as quickly as we can. So you were travelling back to Australia?**

Well actually we weren't travelling back to Australia. From Colombo we were heading for Borneo. There was just this one boat and we had two destroyers, seeing there were a couple of thousand fellas on it I suppose. We were heading for Borneo,

01:00 but a day before we got to Borneo it fell to the Japs and consequently we, another time that I was saved, and we headed straight through to Fremantle. Well we stopped at Fremantle and then we were heading for Adelaide. Well coming round the corner near Albany, we were all down having our tea this night, down the hold, about

01:30 five o'clock, and I've never heard such noise in all my life. One after the other, about a dozen of these and there was only one ladder up onto the deck and I was about last I think. By the time I got up on the deck all I could see were these two destroyers, well half a mile behind us, going around and around in a circle. As it turned out they had got a Jap submarine before it got us which

02:00 was another time I think someone was looking after me. Well from there we went on to Adelaide. We got

there and they weren't expecting us. There was nothing there so we were billeted, the whole brigade, the 19th Brigade was billeted in the hills out of Adelaide. We don't need to go on about that.

We'll talk about it soon.

And we billeted there for a couple of months, then we got seven days' leave,

02:30 came back from that and the 19th Brigade went up to Darwin where we stayed for twelve months. From there we came back, got fourteen days' leave and then went the Atherton Tablelands where we trained. There were three divisions up there at the time and so then from there, from the Atherton Tablelands,

03:00 we set out from Idiberry. On the way to Idiberry, I was on an American Liberty ship, because there were no cooks on the thing I ended up as a volunteer cook which was very good because I used to feed them and a couple of mates, we used to eat in the galley with the Americans. But the Americans were very bad navigators and

03:30 apparently they had been told to turn left after they got out of Cairns but after a few miles turn left and so on but what they did they turned left before they got out of the bar so we were stranded on the sand for the day. When they did get out they eventually turned left and after they got past the tip of New Guinea they were to turn left again onto the coast, up to Idiberry.

04:00 Well one night it was pitch black, as rough as anything, and eventually the boat stopped dead. After a while they put on a searchlight and a couple of hundred yards away there was a coconut palm growing. The Yanks had run fair into the land but fortunately on either side of us were big outcrops of rocks and things and we'd gone right between these two onto a sandbank.

04:30 We were there. They told us that the Liberty ships broke up very quickly, they used to break in half because they were all welded and they told us if the ship broke in two, did anything, something went wrong, we were to get over the side as best we can and try and wade out to the shore. But anyhow it didn't and the next morning a destroyer came and towed us off and we headed off to Idiberry.

05:00 Well from Idiberry we set off, the 2/4th Battalion were the first ones, they took over from the Yanks who had been there for six months and hadn't moved. They increased the perimeter the first day by three miles and that's the way it was. We had to, the transport, we had to supply them, keep them supplied and everything until eventually we had another

05:30 change. When we got to the Butt River we had to go by barge. There was no way of getting across the river so we went by barge, landing tank barges, to the other side and we camped at Butt for a while and then went onto Cape Won which was that side of Wewak and then eventually that was where we finished.

06:00 And it took quite a long while before we got on a boat and came home. Got our discharge and that was that. After I got my discharge and they owed me ninety three days' leave. I had seen my wife three times in four and a half years. I put up with a lot but what these women put up with was terrible, to think she didn't know where I was. The last twenty three months I

06:30 hadn't seen her and she just worried about me everyday, wondering if I was still alive when she got me letters and so on but it was the women that suffered. So that was the end of my war effort. I ended up a corporal, which I think is the most important fellow of the lot, which I quite often tell them if I have a corporal to do the funeral for, he was important, that is as far as their family is concerned because they feel proud of him.

07:00 **Now what did you end up doing with the rest of your life, once you were discharged?**

When I was discharged.

With your career.

My father-in-law had sold the business at Warren, came down to Sydney, came to Cronulla and ended up buying a hardware store. It was very small, big shop, but nothing in it because you couldn't buy anything during the war and he asked me and my son,

07:30 oh Tony eventually married the other daughter, and he asked us if we'd like to go into partnerships with him and I felt that I had forgotten such a lot over five years, so he said, "You can get out if you want to," but I found it was very hard to get out and I made myself like it and we settled down in Cronulla. Eventually

08:00 I was able to buy a block of land and build a house on it. So my life went on from there. I had two daughters, which I'm very proud of. I took a lot of interest in community work, which gave me a lot of pleasure. I still do, play bowls. I'm one-eyed

08:30 now, which makes me a really good candidate for selector because I always reckon they were one-eyed when I was playing my best bowls. But I've enjoyed every minute of it, it was hard, I didn't make a fortune but I was happy, which I am now.

Good on you Victor. All right now we can go back

09:00 **to the very beginning again and talk a little bit more about your pre-war years. Let's start by hearing what sort of a man your dad was?**

Good, well I was always very proud of my father. The first I heard of him, or what he told me or what I can remember,

09:30 he must have started, he came to Australia, he was born in England, came to Australia in the latter part of the nineteenth century and they settled in Adelaide. The time from Adelaide to New South Wales I don't know much about but he was, he told me how when I went to Bourke as a roustabout, he was telling me about how he walked from Bye Rock

10:00 to Bourke to a wool shed, shearing shed at Bourke. And from Bourke in those days all the wool out that way came down the Darling River on barges, a couple of thousand bales on the barge and it used to take three weeks to get to Adelaide and he got a job working his way down the Darling on this barge and from there

10:30 he got on a sailing ship as a steward. One thing he was proud of, he used to say, was he went around Cape Horn in a sailing ship and he must have spent quite a few years on this boat, because once you left Australia to get back it was very hard, to be in a port where another ship was coming back to, the same ship never, they didn't do the same run all the time. But from there he must have come back

11:00 in time to join the New South Wales Regiment and set off for the Boer War in South Africa. He ended up as a sergeant in the regiment and spent time over there and when he got back he apparently, he was the honorary secretary of the South African Soldiers' Association

11:30 in New South Wales, the New South Wales branch, until it actually disbanded because there wasn't that many of these fellas in it. It was nothing like First War or Second [World] War, there was only so many and mainly they came from New South Wales. From there he must have in 1908, what he did in the meantime I don't know, but he was

12:00 an agent for the AMP Society, selling insurance, and he eventually married my mother in 1908. She was born in Wales and came out about the same time as my father, I suppose. Her father was a architect and they lived in a place at Newtown in those days. Well

12:30 my father bought a house at Cremorne, in Claude Avenue, Cremorne, which is on the harbour side of Cremorne and has a beautiful view of the harbour, on the side of a big hill and from there I have my, have I told you about before I was born? Before I was born my eldest

13:00 sister got scarlet fever and diphtheria was going around and my second eldest sister had diphtheria but they said that she was quite all right and my father was going to take us up the mountains, to Wentworth Falls, for get rid of, get (UNCLEAR), however when we got up there, my elder sister with diphtheria wasn't over and

13:30 she gave it to my, what was then my, he was a son, he was the second eldest and he got it and he died. Well my mother was pregnant with me and she was very nervous apparently and those nerves came out in me apparently. Well when I was nine I got what was called St Vitus' Dance in those days, which was a nervous complaint, and I had an

14:00 uncle who was the Methodist minister at Bairnsdale. So they decided me to go there and one of my cousins who had been a missionary doctor in Fiji had gone through Sydney and she was to take me back there for six months, which I did. I went to school in Bairnsdale for six months and before this I went to the public school at Neutral Bay.

14:30 I didn't lose any what's-its-name, I went back in the same class when I got … have I told you about this?

No, this is good.

Oh so from there I went for, sat for the, what they would call in those days the QC, the Qualifying Certificate.

So you went back to Neutral Bay School?

Yeah.

Can you tell us a little bit more about the nervous complaint?

15:00 Yes, it was one of those things where you couldn't control your hands. All of a sudden I'd be walking along the street and I'd throw my hand over the thing and that sort of the thing. Before this, the only way to get out of this thing was, apparently you took aspirins, which I found out many years later, aspirins to get over it and I wasn't to go to school for six months and I just stayed home.

15:30 I'm, well I eventually got over it apparently, it hasn't come against me.

What was the term they gave it again, sorry?

St Vitus' Dance, but it's got another name today which I found out later on. I found out, I'll tell you

about that later on, years ago, that happened some time ago.

So it was their belief that it was a condition brought on by the fact that

16:00 **Mum was very stressed and nervous during the time she was carrying you?**

Yes, when I was born there was signs of nerves then, touch me and I'd jump, and all this sort of thing but I got over it.

And did mum's nerves come good after having you?

Yes, it was just that, they worry a lot apparently and it was all through

16:30 worry and losing a son, 'cause he was only about two or three years old.

Well how many siblings in the family then altogether?

I had five sisters and this one brother and at the moment I have one sister. She was a lot younger than me and there were three sisters older than me and two younger and the younger sister, the only one that's still around, well she's about, well if I'm eighty eight, she'd be about

17:00 eighty two or eighty three, I suppose.

Just a youngster?

Yeah.

Just before we go further into your schooling can you tell us what sort of a chap your dad was?

Oh well for my father, yes. He was interested in everything. He was a churchwarden at St Chad's Church of England at Cremorne. I don't know that he was that religious but he believed in the church, like I do. He was on the council of the

17:30 Cremorne Church of England Girls' Grammar School. He was the past president of the, what was called the Orphans, I think it was called a society or something. It might be a, it was one of those community things where they supported a cot at the North Shore Hospital. They used to have a concert or an entertainment once a month at the Myringa Hall at Neutral Bay, where you paid so much to go along to it and

18:00 you got plenty to drink and that sort of thing, it was really a drinking night, but he did take an interest in the Masonic Lodge. He was got to the Chair of Lodge Neutral Bay, I think about 1923 or '24 and then he went on to Grand Lodge. He was a steward, Grand Lodge, went right up the ladder to that, till he got to, he was the Grand Senior Warden.

18:30 Well that's as high as you go on the ladder. After that it's, you have to have money and time to be the Grand Master, or the Deputy or so on. His main thing I think that he was proud of, he became, he got on the Board of General Purposes of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, which was the governing body but the only thing was, he wasn't an

19:00 alcoholic but he liked his grog. And he had a lot of friends, which was the unfortunate part and they, I think that's why he had so much to drink, but he still looked after us. My mother died in 1927 and he gave us the opportunity, we were only young, he said, "You can go to the Masonic Homes at Baulkham Hills, I can get you in there, or we can stay as a family," which we

19:30 all decided we'd stay as a family. My eldest sister when my mother died was seventeen. She was, through her scarlet fever it left her on the deaf side. It had something to do with the middle ear, it had burst, and she looked after us. We always looked on her as been weak or whatever, but

20:00 she looked after us. She fed us, she clothed us, she did everything, and then my father, although he, why I'm proud of him, it was during the Depression but he told me if I belonged to anything, if I joined a cricket club, I was to join it to play cricket, tennis, whatever it was, that was it, "But

20:30 don't do it to make money out of your friends." And during the Depression things were very bad. He was well known through the Masonic Lodge. They had a paper, I said to him once, "Why don't you advertise in the Masonian that you're an agent for AMP," but that was the last thing he would ever do. He wouldn't make money out of his friends. He wouldn't even ask me to ask my friends if

21:00 they wanted to take out insurance but he had good principles. As I said I don't think he was religious but he used to go to church of a Sunday night, he used to go to Scotch Church of a Sunday night.

How would you describe his character?

He was, he had a sense of humour, he had a lot of friends. Well

21:30 he wasn't out for making a lot of money but he was in everything else. He wasn't athletic, well when we knew him anyway because there wasn't that much sport like there is today, I suppose. When I was about ten or eleven, I suppose, he got appendicitis and he wasn't able to mow the lawn after that so I had to

do it. But he was

22:00 very well liked by everyone. If anyone wanted anything done, wanted to meet someone or wanted something done, “See (UNCLEAR) Catchlove, he’ll know someone,” and my father said to me, “Tell me what you want to do. If I don’t know someone, I can get to know someone,” and it was how I eventually went to Comboyne. It was one of his friends from one of the land companies, he

22:30 went and saw him. He said, “You go home, I’ll see someone today,” and he told me to go in and see this man the next day and a couple of days later I’m on the train to Comboyne. But he was a, he looked after us as well he could but as I say, during the Depression you would have to be, there was nothing about. Fortunately he didn’t have to resort to the

23:00 dole but no, he was a good man, I was proud of him. He did everything, he was, he used to help people. He was always doing something for someone.

It must have been very hard for all of you when mum passed away?

Oh I’ll say, it was a big thing. Mother was only forty eight.

And how old were you when that happened?

I was eleven,

23:30 it was just before my twelfth birthday.

Did she die suddenly?

More or less, yes. She had some internal trouble that went wrong. She had an operation and it went wrong, poison, and that got her but she went very quickly.

24:00 No, she was a wonderful person. Me, I went to pieces after she died. I used to go home every day and tell her how I’d got on, and I lost all that interest, not that it matters. In those days it wasn’t what you learnt at school, it was the experience you got after school. Today it’s got to be the tertiary

24:30 education that counts, not what you did with the university but in those days what you learnt in the occupation whatever you were, that got you good jobs.

How long do you think it took you to get over mum passing away and get on with things?

Looking back it’s hard to say now, would have been years because even when I went to Yanco, I didn’t have the same enthusiasm to tell my father sort of thing.

25:00 Well I went to Yanco, I wasn’t there anyhow, it was a boarding school.

And how did dad pass emotionally when mum passed away?

It really cut him up. But being so young, I don’t know exactly what it was, but one of her friends said she should go to the doctor

25:30 and this was the outcome of it. My mother was a very keen …, she had a lot of friends. She used to play bridge which was the thing in those days, auction bridge, not what it is today, and she spent a lot of time playing bridge and had bridge parties at home at our place and all that. And in those days families meant a lot and my father’s family, they were close, they’d come and visit you on a Sunday afternoon

26:00 or we’d visit them and the same with my mother’s family. We’d go on holidays, we’d go and spend with the different families for a week or they’d come with us, different to what it is today. Families were very, very close and we’d have, my father had, he had three sisters and five brothers, all younger, the brothers

26:30 were all younger than him, the sisters were older.

So you spent a lot of time with the extended family?

Oh yes, he knew all about them and they knew all about each other and everything that went on, it was all news, anything that happened to anyone in the family.

What about in the area that you lived in, was that a tight community? Did you have lots of mates to play with?

Oh Lord yes. You played every afternoon after school.

27:00 You, and you played cricket on the roads which today, I don’t know if you know Neutral Bay at all but do you know Bennaman Street? Do you know as you turn round Bennaman Street onto Harry Street to get onto Wickham Road, there’s Shell Cove, Shell Cove Road? We used to play at the top of Bennaman Street, play cricket along there and you’d stop every now and again because a car was coming. And we used to ride a trolley from way

27:30 up near the church, right down, with about four of us on there, we had a big trolley with these big iron wheels, right down to Corrabar Wharf, oh boy. You did that, you played somewhere every afternoon

after school. There were tennis courts which were, I think one of them is still there now, on the other, those houses in Bennanman Street on the southern side,

28:00 on the other side of them were these tennis courts, which had been about, they'd been cut out, they'd taken all the rocks away and made stones out of them, and we used to play cricket there and all sorts of things. There was, we used to go swimming in Shell Cove. There was a pool, they made a pool, which is still there I believe, but there was, we'd make a canoe out of corrugated iron and go out on Shell Cove.

28:30 How the hell, if our family had ever seen us in these things, I don't know, in the middle of Shell Cove, paddling away with our, oh gee that's done that. (Tape stops)

Now Victor you were telling us about the canoe that you used to make out of corrugated iron.

That's right. We used to make them out of corrugated iron and three or four would sit in there, just for the fun of

29:00 paddling across Shell Cove. Oh there was in those days, there were blackberries everywhere, you could go and pick blackberries. Oh it was a different life, what you used to do after school, and of course you weren't far from the Spit or Balmoral, even Manly, you'd go swimming in the holidays and those sorts of things.

29:30 Then I think, well before, yeah it was just before my mother died I joined the choir at St Augustine's, Neutral Bay and oh, I loved that, singing. The only trouble, you had to go to choir practice on Tuesday afternoon after school and the men would

30:00 come and everyone on Friday night for an hour or so and then of course you had to go to church. I think it started at eleven o'clock or something in those days on Sunday morning and then again at seven o'clock at night or whatever it was. I became very, the parson, a fellow named Louis Pearce, took an interest in me and when I left school he got me a couple of things to do round

30:30 the church that I got paid for but I did that for several years. It was quite funny, I got to the stage where, I don't know whether you go to church, but in those days the choir boys when they took around the collection, one of the choir boys had to go up and stand in front of the altar while the minister got this big brass plate, handed it to the choir boy and

31:00 he would turn it over, and turn around and walk down to the top of the stairs and they'd hold it and they'd put all the plates on it. And I remember, any of the boys, that was my job, and I remember one of the fellas, they used to ask me if their mother was coming to church could they, and I said to them,

31:30 someone went to the parson and said, "Why don't you let those other boys do it?" "Because he does it so reverently," which amused me so much because I was far from that, but that part of, say like army life, you had to do it properly. But I got a lot of pleasure out of that and when I went away to Yanco but when I came back and when I worked in Sydney, I used to go, before I went in the shearing sheds.

32:00 This parson had fifteen acres of land at Pennant Hills and he didn't like me going to a shearing shed. He thought it would be the end of me. I'd learn to swear, which I'd already learnt at primary school, and bad habits sort of thing, so. But

32:30 thinking it over, it would have cost my father a few hundred dollars to set up whatever I wanted to do and to buy equipment or whatever, to grow vegetables or pigs or whatever, so I had to let it go but that was what he was like. He had a boy at King's School and he used to go up and see him every week, every Saturday, take him for a drive somewhere and they always included me in those trips.

33:00 But I joined the, later on when I was working in Sydney I joined the North Shore Rowing Club and which was a terrific sport, one of the best of the lot. It was clean and hard and everything else and I did that for a few years until I went away to the bush. I enjoyed that.

What sort of a lad were you in those days? How would you describe your character?

Well I was no prude.

33:30 Like everyone else I had my, I used to smoke when I could, anything at all. One of my mates' fathers had a desk that had a whole lot of cigars in it and we used to smoke those, pinch those. No, I just loved doing what I did.

34:00 **Did you ever get into much mischief?**

Well I, but without getting caught, yes. We used to go around pinching fruit off the backyards and places, all those sorts of things. I don't know what else you could do that was, no that was about, the only thing you would do that was wrong anyhow. Half of it was green and gave you a bellyache.

34:30 No, I enjoyed life, we played a lot, we did a lot.

When you were at school, what were your favourite subjects?

I don't think I had any. Well in primary school the whole lot but when I got to Yanco, the practical

agriculture

35:00 definitely, that was what I liked. To get on the, any of the machinery, to work that, or to say, you had to take your turn, you had a week on milking the cows and you had another week on feeding the pigs, which you had to get up early in the morning, take the scraps down and feed the pigs, that sort of thing. Another one, you had to run the horses and that entailed one of you

35:30 had to take the horse and sulky into Yanco to get the mail and the bread, they used to get it from the bakery there. And there was times that you had practical agriculture one day a week or something like that which was either in the vegetable gardening, ploughing or whatever. That was what I was interested in.

36:00 **So you took a shining to that sort of stuff straight away?**

Yes. On weekends you'd go out on walks, follow the river along with all the gum trees and everything, looking for birds' nests that you could rob or beehives that you could cut down and rob, these wild beehives, and bring the honeycomb back. There was the old stables where you get a room there and hang the bag up and

36:30 let the honey drip out. The only way you could do it, but all that sort of life, I loved it. You could go fishing in the river, it was a different life to the city.

So you felt that that was more of your type of environment, you were more of a rural chap?

Yeah, definitely yes. I don't know why but I think because that one of the teachers we had in primary school

37:00 had been in a country school and used to tell us about country life and I think that's where I got it.

Captured your imagination?

Yeah. It certainly did.

What were you thinking at that stage, at the college, enjoying all that work and the countryside, what were you thinking that you wanted to do with your life?

Oh to go on and be on the land somewhere. Go and start off say as a jackaroo or whatever and work your way up to a manager. I never thought

37:30 that I'd, although I did have an uncle. He was an agent for an AMP as well but he was, I forget what they call them now, the fellows that study insurance, he was the first in Australia to do it. Anyway he was, he owned a lot of property. He owned half of Punchbowl and half of the houses in Redfern, that sort of thing, invested in them and he

38:00 was going to put me up on a property. After Yanco I was to go to Hawkesbury Agricultural College and he was going to set me up in some sort of farming life but unfortunately in 1929 he died, so that was the end of that. My auntie wasn't interested in me, she ended up marrying someone else, but no,

38:30 I was very keen on the land, it was what I wanted to do. The Depression it didn't come to, until later when I was able to go to Comboyne and, as I say, hard work though it was, I loved every minute of it. Not that you got paid, because, as I say, a pound a week's not much. It doesn't go far because your clothes used to cost you the money, you wore them out so quickly, say with the sheep, the trousers especially,

39:00 the sheep rubbing against you, the knees of your trousers and that.

What sort of an outfit would you wear out in the, out at Comboyne?

Well you'd just have a pair of trousers, any sort that you could get, and a shirt. Well a shirt you used to pay about four and six, if you know what that is. You had a pair, a couple of pairs of riding boots,

39:30 you know, with the elastic sides on the riding boots, a hat, a straw hat. You didn't have much else and I wonder today how you got on. You had an old worn-out jumper, which you get on your horse and you'd be on your horse all day, you might ride fifty odd miles in the day on a horse and nearly, you would today, freeze to death, but with just an old worn old jumper, but

40:00 you didn't notice it I suppose. And the, if it rained you spent the day greasing the harness or looking after any of the vehicles, but that was the first day. If it still rained the second day out, you went in the rain to ride the bore drains, to see that there was no sheep bogged in the, like all the wool wet, if they went to jump a bore

40:30 drain, the weight of the wet wool on the back, they'd end in the drain and you had to ride it and pull any out because it was blocking the drain and it was hard to get them out too. You'd put them on the side and go but you had an old raincoat of some sort, but you had back with a wet bum anyhow.

Was it on Comboyne that you started to learn how to drive vehicles?

41:00 Yes, and boy wasn't that a thing. They had a, quite often of a Saturday morning the boss used to like to

have his car cleaned. Well it came to, after these other jackaroos left there was only Ronald Press and myself and I would have to wash the car. Well the car would have to be brought from the stables round to the

41:30 tennis court where there was a tap and of course Ron could do everything. He used to drive it round to the tap and when it was finished, after a while, well he was supposed to come and put it back. I used to drive it back and put it, I used to leave it outside the garage. I wasn't game to put it in. This was, and then one day we were out in the paddocks at some yards.

Tape 3

00:33 **Can you tell us more about Comboyne Station?**

Having driven this car 100 yards or so one of these days, Monday, we were round to one of the yards. They had to get something from the homestead. There was no-one around at the moment so the boss said to me, "Can you drive the utility back?"

01:00 Well that was it. I got all the gates and I drove this. It was as if I drove the [(UNCLEAR)]. Later on I was coming down to Sydney with the boss. He reckoned I had to leave him. Then it was all gravel between Comboyne and Sydney. He wanted a spell in the thing so he said, "You

01:30 have to get your licence." In those days to get your licence you went down to the local police station, there was a one man police station there, you drove along the gravel road or something. There were always bits and parts where they'd changed the road and there was a culvert on the side of it, the old road, and you'd have to go up. He'd say, "Now, back through those two old things," so you'd back through those and if you could do that you got

02:00 your licence. So that was how I got my driving licence. Then while I was there they put another couple of miles of fencing in and to do this you've gotta have the fence posts for starters. To get the fence posts, what you do,

02:30 they're all made out of pine up that way, you'd go to a pine tree first and this is where Ron Preston and I came in, we were a team. You go to a pine tree, you just cut a ring round the bottom and then you get the bark and you pull it right back over your head and right up as far as you could and throw it back over your head and it was half by the time you get,

03:00 half the tree would be barked. Then we'd chop it down between us and then you'd measure it up into billets. My job was to get on, we had two cross-cut saws, one-man three footer, and a five foot two-man saw. It was my job to saw it up into billets. You'd clean all the branches off in the first place and finish the barking.

03:30 I had to go and cut these into billets, Ron would go ahead and cut down another couple of trees. When he'd come back, by this time I'd have cut this tree up, and then he'd start to split the billets up into posts. You might start off with about 5 posts in the first billet, then 4 and so it went on down the thing. We did that all day. Our

04:00 best day was 177 posts for the day. One thing about Comboyne, the boss of the night, he'd ask everybody sitting down the dinner table, "How did you get on today?" to be able to tell him how good you were. He'd always say, "That was good. Thank you very much. That was good to do all that." Ron and I, our best day was 177, round about that.

04:30 Two of the station hands and one of the other jackaroos did it once while we had to do something else, all they got were 70 odd. You just get on working, you didn't stop every two minutes for a smoke, you just wanted to see how much you could do. Having done that you had to sink the post holes. The only thing I didn't like was sinking post holes.

05:00 I just couldn't make any headway with it. I didn't like it, that was one of the things. Then they wanted to, if a drought came they were gonna buy a whole lot of oats. It had to be stored in silos so they put up a whole lot of silos. There were four of them at the homestead and another two at the shearing shed which was eight

05:30 miles away. We didn't put the silos up but we had to get the foundation for them and everything. Then we had to fill them. Got the oats from the railway at Coonamble and bring it out and fill it up into these silos, then the same thing with the ones in the shed. We did all that.

06:00 Another thing, they sunk an artesian bore when I was there. It'd go down a couple of thousand feet and then there was a bore drain. They had a teamster and his job was to look after the team. Whatever teamwork had to be down, building the bore drains and so on. The

06:30 overseer, they called him Cissy Williams, he was very hard, no one liked him. He had a row with this teamster and sacked him. It upset the boss but the boss being the boss he had to go with his overseer. He let him go. There was no one to run the team so Ronald Press reckoned he could do it, so

07:00 Ronald Press took over the team for a while and I was his offsider. When you get these great big draught horses, I can tell you they're frightening. They had to put the bridle on them and the collar and harness and God! I was his offsider. We built the bore drains,

07:30 We put new yards up at the shed, which was a lot of posts and rails and things. We had to cart all those on the wagon. It was good. Those other jackaroos were there, but every one of the station hands, we used to have three saddle horses, they were changed every three months, so they'd run all the

08:00 horses into the yard and you'd pick out the horse of the three that you wanted. You didn't take someone else's horse. What you used to look for was the horse that was a quick walker, 'cause you had a lot of mileage to do in a day. A lot of the work started at the shearing shed which was eight miles along the road, so you had to get that eight miles. You'd be

08:30 walking along and every now and then you'd canter, used to talk to each other but if your horse wasn't a quick walker you didn't get in on the conversation so you tried to make out your own was a quick walker. That was the only maintenance work we used to do. Then there was the sheep work. You had to muster that. The back paddock was

09:00 15 miles away and to get there and back that was 30 miles. Besides going backwards and forwards along what you did when you were mustering the sheep.

How many jackaroos worked on …?

There were six of us when I first went there but after six months there was only two of us. I happened to be one of those, fortunately, but only I think because I wasn't afraid of work.

09:30 I could do anything else that anyone else could do. With Ron Press, especially where we were getting all the posts and rails split for yards of the shed, we had to cart them all there, we had to put them on the truck. We'd get a big, heavy drain post. Ron, being a big fellow, he'd say to me, "Can you lift your end?"

10:00 Never once did I say, "No." If I could lift my end it didn't matter how big it was, he could lift that one. Then we could get it up onto the truck. It was a 30 Hunter truck in those days. That was it. Whatever it was, I'm not skiving, but I could do what anyone else could do. That went into the army too. Some of the fellows they were frightened, especially the big fellows, they were

10:30 frightened to see what work would do to them, they wouldn't give it a go. I had a mate in that army that was from the bush. When we had to load 44 gallon drums of petrol, Tom and I, we'd load each other's truck, the two of us onto a 44 gallon drum and lifted it up onto another one and then

11:00 onto the truck. All the others would have about three or four fellows to try to load their things but we could do it, we were used to hard work, so you had a lot of work to do. You had lamb marking, you'd spend the day. You'd have to go until you finished the whole lot, didn't matter what time it was in the day and how far you had to ride back home,

11:30 you couldn't leave the lambs without their mother for the night.

Did you have to drive the vehicle?

Not much, no, because there was only one. Ron used to drive the 1300 Dodge that they had, 'cause he was the only one that had to fix it. When I went there it was put aside because it was wooden cale or something and Ron could do anything. He fixed it and

12:00 he used to drive it. The only other one was the utility. It was the boss's car, you didn't drive that, that was the utility that the boss himself drove. He used to come around to see how you were doing on whatever job you were on for the day. No, not like it is today, vehicles were very scarce.

They used to break down a lot?

Yes, you never went anywhere without a pump and a spare

12:30 wheel. What they did on the place, every vehicle had a sulky, a buggy, a wagon which was like a big buggy. Then you had a horse lorry and then a wagon. With the wagon you had the team of 16 horses, you had them to pull the wagon. Quite often you didn't need

13:00 a vehicle to do it. If you wanted to go fencing you had to put your crowbars and things in that, but you'd take the buggy, or the sulky, whatever you were doing, whatever was required because they had three horses and a harness or hacks. The sulky and the buggy were nice to ride in.

13:30 Have you ever ridden in a sulky? It was good. You'd know if you had.

Was it a bit bumpy?

No, but it was a bit windy. The horses ride in front of you. Going along they used to break wind a lot. It was good and you sat there and talked.

14:00 It could have been bumpy but you didn't notice it, it was sprung. A buggy, you had two horses in that, the wagon, they were in the old days, and the only place you'll see them is in a museum. Ever been to these museums in the bush? There's lots of them around, the whole lot, all those things. They were the thing in those days.

14:30 **You said you and Ron weren't supposed to go to the pub in the evenings because your boss considered their staff above the rest of the people in the town. Was that a social norm in those days?**

Yes, that was it. In those days there were three classes. There's one class today. There was the working class, there was the middle class

15:00 and there was society. So the middle class didn't mix with society. That was the pack of the norm, those sort of clowns, the money ones. They all lived in the eastern suburbs. In the country there were the grazers and all that sort of thing, there was the town

15:30 crowd, the shop assistants and all that. It was part of the way life was. It was probably the British idea. We look back now on the British, they were bastards the way they treated people. You probably agree with that. The way they treated people, anyone.

16:00 It was a bit the same out here. A grazer was looked up at. What he did, it was the likes of us and the station hands that did all the dirty work that made him the money and they didn't get much for it. The town people at Comboyne, I don't know what they did actually. There was

16:30 only two or three shops there and a pub, but a lot of them worked on stations, their families lived in town.

As a jackaroo, what class would you fall into?

The middle class but we mixed with all the grazers. We went to all the balls with all the grazers and all the hoi polloi, they're the ones we danced with.

17:00 The war fixed everything as far as it was concerned, we all became equal. I'll get back to my father. My father was interested in the Masonic Lodge. In the Masonic Lodge, way back in those days, everyone was equal.

17:30 Meeting on the level and parting on the square, they were all level. It didn't matter who you were. As long as you had the qualification you were a good living person, you could join the Masonic Lodge, there was no snobbery or anything like that in it. In the bush there was that. At Warren there was,

18:00 we used to have the bachelors and spinsters ball, that was held in the main hall at Warren which was the picture show and the dance hall with a stage and the whole lot. Then around in another street there was another hall, it was just a big tin shed with not as good a dancing floor as the

18:30 other, that's where the others danced there. They used to have a show ball, all towns had an agricultural show. It all culminated in the finish with a ball. There was the one in the picture show and one in this other,

19:00 two entirely different.

You would go to the grazers, the high society ball?

I was part of that one but just because that was the way it was.

Were you allowed to mix with grazers' daughters then?

I was part of that crowd, oh yes. I wasn't in this other one with the tin shed, they were all the shop assistants and workers and whatever and

19:30 station hands. There was a difference between the station hand and the jackaroo. At Warren, when I was the book keeper, I was given the title of 'Mr'. All the station hands had to call me Mr Catchlove, they couldn't call me Vic. I used to get my boots polished by a groom every day. I put my boots on the veranda and they were put back there clean before the day was out.

20:00 It was a different, that was what life was like in the country.

Your wife was the daughter of a shopkeeper. Was that considered meeting a woman who was beneath your station as a jackaroo?

No, because who she was, and her father, he was one of the leaders in the town and, boy, no-one would ever underestimate him, he was

20:30 as good as anyone. He was too, he was a man. Like my father, I really was proud of him. The only unfortunate factor was he was an alcoholic, but what he did, he had really good principles. During the war there was a black market going on. Everything was rationed,

21:00 tea was rationed, sugar, butter, petrol, all those things were rationed. He sold the lot of them. There was

always some people that didn't want it and that. He had different ones used to ask him, no matter how many he had he wouldn't give one away. He wouldn't even, in his house he

21:30 only had the sugar and the tea he had to keep his family for. People eventually from out on the stations used to bring him in butter. He would insist of giving them kippers for it. So what they did they brought him in cream. He could make his own butter. They'd offer him above

22:00 prices for things. During the drought you had to buy, he supplied or procured a lot of corn or grain for the different ones that wanted it. What he would do, he used to put his charges, whatever the cost to get it, and that was what

22:30 they had to pay on sight. From Warren he might get it from Inverell, as it turned out from Atherton Tablelands. By the time it got near to Warren they had to pay, so that when they got to Warren they could pick it up and take it away. Where I was we put out

23:00 1,500 tons of corn, 1,000 tons of lucerne, 800 tons of nuts, they're not nuts, they're made up of flour and so on, nuggets, linseed and that, plus potatoes and all sorts of things, anything. A lot of it we used to buy through the store at Warren

23:30 and this boss of mine would order some from Wright Heaton's. I'd say, "Why do you buy it from there? They are so many pence cheaper at Bushell's, at the store." No, he used to just get some. My brother-in-law would say, "Wright Heaton's is so much,

24:00 why don't you put up your price?" and he said, "You never make money out of someone else's loss." That was his business. He could have ended up after that 15 months a wealthy man, but he wouldn't make money out of someone else's losing money for pouring that money onto the ground, he wouldn't be in it. That was why he was looked on as one of the best men

24:30 and he had principles. He didn't have that much money, but he was the president or secretary of every organisation, bar the Agricultural Society, in Warren. Made a lot of money for the, what do they call them, the war funds and anything to do with the war.

During the war, did life as a jackaroo change?

25:00 War? Until I joined the army?

How did life change on the property for a jackaroo? Were you rationed?

No, the only thing we ran short of was tea and sugar. Petrol was, but there again you could use other means

25:30 of transport. How it affected me was when, I had a boss, he wasn't very thoughtful as far as any of his staff were concerned. To get to town, while I was the book keeper, I was responsible for the stores and I would go to him and say, "I've got so many stores, would it be all right if I go to town?"

26:00 I got into town on the Saturday afternoon, get tea and come home afterwards. I wouldn't get a bag of flour or something, I'd leave that for next week so I could build up a store list. He couldn't let me, even when there was plenty of petrol, to get the truck or utility. It was hard.

26:30 They never thought anything of their staff. It was just a matter of pay them as little as possible and get as much as they can. As it turned out, towards the finish, when things got really bad, they had a bike. I used to ride this bike 10 miles into town.

When petrol became very scarce?

Yes, it did.

And parts for the cars?

What happened too, they brought in what they called the

27:00 charcoal burners. That was one way of overcoming it. They fitted a charcoal burner, which sat on the tray of the truck. The fire burned down into the engine and they took, the gas that came out of the charcoal burners took the place of petrol fuel. What you had to do, you had to burn the charcoal first. You'd cut,

27:30 it wasn't part of my job, you go into the creek bed and get a place where you could lay all these logs and without much trouble you can cover it over, one side, with mud and whatever, all these things in, and at the other end you'd have a chimney sort of thing coming up,

28:00 all these green logs, don't know how big they were, and you eventually light them. When they got going a bit you'd lock everything off and then eventually close the chimney and it wouldn't burn away into nothing, it would smoulder, and when you opened it up after four or five days or more, it just be as if

28:30 nothing's happened, the logs would be, but when you went up they broke up into charcoal. That was your fuel. You put that into bags. You'd fill the burner up, light it and the gas, when you started you had to start the truck on petrol. When it got going you cut that off, it used the gas. That took the place

29:00 of a lot of petrol. I don't know what they'd have done …

A lot of people used this method?

You had to. If they could afford to have a vehicle they could do it with. Otherwise there was nothing. They couldn't get around. Petrol was scarce.

At the general store you said there were two sisters and you ended up marrying one of the sisters.

29:30 **What was it about Esme that attracted you to her?**

She was so lovely, she was a lovely person. We more or less fitted in right from the start. She had perfect morals, she never swore.

30:00 Not like today, she didn't believe in sex before marriage. That was right out in our day, especially to her, but I thought I had to try. No, she was kind hearted and as she proved later on with the family, she had, we were just attracted to each other.

30:30 I don't know. Unfortunately sometimes we'd go two or three weeks without seeing each other, that was the unfortunate part, you couldn't just do as you liked, because we were 10 miles out of town and you couldn't just go in except when I got to the stage of riding the bike, I didn't have to ask for anything. I just got on it and away I went. There had to be show sheep that had to be fed.

31:00 You had to watch that when you felt you should stay and feed the show sheep over the weekend. The station hands only worked five and a half days a week. Anyone else of staff, it was a different kettle of fish.

You worked seven days a week?

You did, yes, especially when you were feeding the sheep, a lot of the station hands, some of them lived in town,

31:30 which they used to come back and forwards in a sulky, they would go off on the Saturday afternoon and the sheep had to be fed. So you had to do all their work on a Sunday, they'd do the Saturday morning round of feeding, but you had to do theirs Saturday and your own on Sunday. I was gonna say about my wife, when I did

32:00 join the army she regularly wrote to me twice a week, never missed. Just a number each letter, make sure that you got it. I used to endeavour to write back to her. If it wasn't possible I had to explain later that I couldn't do it. If I was playing cards or doing something and I missed,

32:30 the next one I'd write two on the one night and number them. She never missed. There was a lot of different fellows in Warren wanted to take her out. Not her. She was just a lovely person. I'll come to her later on, the way she looked after her family, they came first,

33:00 and it's coming back to me now with my family, passed on from her, the way they look after me. I'm so grateful I've got them.

When the war was announced, you said you were keen to join up as soon as that happened. What were the reasons you were keen to enlist?

33:30 Just a sense of duty. It was your country, why should someone do my fighting for me? No-one who's ever called me anything or hit me and I didn't hit them back, as small as I might have been, I had a go. I used to go to boxing tournaments in the army when we were in

34:00 Syria. I had two particular bouts where I had to fight a fellow who was a stone and a half heavier than me. I never squibbed anything and I wasn't gonna squib this. With the ads and that you'd see in the paper, they needed you. I felt that I had to be part of it. I know it was,

34:30 the unfortunate part, as I told Esme, I said, "I'm only taking you away from someone else. I don't know when I'll have the money for us to get married. I'm stopping you from meeting someone who can marry you." She wouldn't listen, she said, "It doesn't matter. I'll wait." So when I did feel that I could do it,

35:00 I think I had 75 pounds, I waited. I went into town, her birthday was coming up, her 21st, and she was having a party and everything else. We decided we'd announce our engagement on her 21st birthday. I had to ask her father, we couldn't do it without asking him. He was a

35:30 big six-foot fellow, well built like me, but he had been one of those fellows that no one ever picked on him either and he hit him back. He had the general motors franchise in the general store and he'd traded an old Crossley car and he couldn't

36:00 really sell it. So he was going to pull the body off it and build a caravan body onto the thing. So he'd come down to Sydney and stay in the caravan. This is what he used to do of a weekend. This Sunday I'd been in there and after tea on a Sunday night back he goes out into the garage. I've gotta ask him.

36:30 I went out and I spread it on him. I knew what I had to say and everything. At last I plucked up courage and asked him and told him. When I got to the end of my speech he never said anything, I tried to make up things to say, he still said nothing.

37:00 I thought, “Well bugger this. As long as I keep talking he’s gonna listen.” So I stopped. Eventually he said, “When I wanted to get married, I had 50 pounds in my pocket. Someone told me that if that wasn’t enough I’d have to wait and get 100. If 100 wouldn’t be enough, if you’ve got 75 you’ve got 25 more than I had and if

37:30 you can give Esme what she’s been used to you’ve got my blessing. Come on in and we’ll tell them.” So in we went. They were waiting in there, open mouthed. He announced it that, “Esme and Victor want to announce their engagement.” When it came to her 21st party, it was at their house. All the hoi polloi, all the grazers’ daughters, they were all grazers’ daughters,

38:00 they all came to the, and the sons of course. They came to this party and it was announced. That’s the way it was in those days. It was a big do, they all went up and kissed her and all this sort of thing, like girls do. That was the way things were in those days.

That war had started at that stage?

Yes. Her birthday was on the 17th November. Then

38:30 I’m still waiting, waiting. Then we had announced it, Lord knows when we were gonna get married. It was the following April when I got my call up, when they told me to come. She said, “You’re not going away without getting married.” She owned me,

39:00 That was what she was proud of.

She owned you?

She owned me, I was her husband. She could wear this badge to say she had a husband in the army. All the wives got one.

Was that important for the women then, to have a badge?

Yes, they were proud of him. They wanted to get married. That was something she, I was hers and she was proud of it.

39:30 She used to get a, when you got married I lost half my pay. Instead of getting 5 bob a day I only got 2 and 6, she got the other. What she did, she never spent it, she put it in the bank. That went on until I got out of the army and she said, “That’s yours.”

So the women actually wore a badge to say they were married?

Yes.

What did they look like?

I forget what they

40:00 called it now, but it was a badge to say that their husband or their son, I think it was, mothers got them if they didn’t have a wife.

So they wore that every day when they went out of the house?

I’ll say they did. Yes, it was something to be proud of, they had someone on the forces.

40:30 Wars today are not what it was then. It wasn’t just a one man show with the army or the navy or something, everyone was concerned. It was a big thing. It was just a big un. They were all doing their bit. A lot of people from the bush came down to work in factories, that way they didn’t have to join the forces. They were maintenance staff for the forces.

41:00 The rest of them, all the civilians were involved in the thing. It was big, it was the 18-25 year olds that did it. They were able to organise everything in the army or the navy. Everything that had to be done, that age group did it. That was

41:30 what they were. There were some older than 25, I was 30 when I got out. When they joined up they were not much older than 25. We had a couple in our unit that were 30 or something, five years older than me, there weren’t many. The war was big and you didn’t have to be brave, you didn’t think about it, it was just a job.

42:00 Even the ones that …

Tape 4

00:33 **I've just got a couple of questions that I'll start with before we talk about you enlisting. Victor, did your dad ever talk to you much about his war experiences in the Boer War?**

No. Well we were so young I suppose. I left to go to boarding school when I

01:00 was twelve or thirteen or something, around about that, and I don't think he thought we were interested in that, and I'm sorry that he didn't because this is what I've been saying. We should write our own history, what we know about our parents, for our grandchildren and so on, for their benefit, this is one thing about it but he never, I did have

01:30 a photo, I might still have it, it's fading a bit of, in front of Conchies coach. Conchie was one of the generals and they captured this coach, which was only a buggy, and one thing I was proud of him for was because he reached the rank of sergeant and he

02:00 wasn't one of the originals in the unit, I don't think, but to get to be sergeant and that, but he didn't say much else about it. But he was in the cavalry anyhow, I know that, he was very keen on horses. I don't say betting, far from it, but he used to ride horses at work

02:30 when he was a boy.

Had you heard much about what happened in World War I when you were growing up?

No, no, I was only five, no I was only born in 1915. When my uncle was over there, how I got the name Victor because he was over there, so it was all over.

03:00 All I can remember about that time was that about 1918 there was an epidemic, some sort of, I forgot what it was now, and we had to wear masks. If I went out into the front garden I had to have a mask on. It's about all I remember about that time of the year, then I can remember the, they used to have an Anzac march every year and my father's

03:30 office was in Pitt Street, which was the Pitt Street end of the Stock Exchange Hotel, and we used to watch these people marching and my father was one of them. He used to march with the South African soldiers and that's all we knew about the wars, to see these fellows and they used to march up Pitt Street, where, I don't know,

04:00 but a band and it wasn't like it is today, there wasn't the crowd that there is.

What sort of impression did that use to make on your mind?

Well I loved going in there to watch these, it was something different. My father would take me in and we'd sit, they had these great big windows and we used to sit in the windows, we were only children, young ones and we'd sit there and watch

04:30 the parade as they went up the ... probably a few bands and things and, oh no, they were most impressive and more or less like it is today but I can't remember anything about it only we used to get cigarette cards with war series' and you'd seen guns and those sorts of things on them but about all you knew about the war.

05:00 **Do you recall where you were and what you were doing when Menzies made the announcement that we were joining the war?**

I certainly do. We had a card party at Egelabra, and Esme and her sister were there and a couple of the fellows out of the, of course bankers, came in, the hoi polloi class like us, they were part of us, bankers were out there at Egelabra,

05:30 and we had this playing bridge and eventually this came over and what impressed me most was that after Menzies, it was a terrific speech, it really was, he was a terrific orator and he really inspired everyone with that speech and when he had finished they played the

06:00 National Anthem and everyone, they just stood up, which I thought was terrific. No-one, we all stood up while they played 'God Save The King'. Oh then we talked about it. There was nothing much you could do, only say how it was, but Menzies did explain everything,

06:30 that we were at war, well England was and consequently Australia was at war against the Germans and that was that.

Did it come as a surprise?

I don't think so. I think we were sort of, well there was so much going on and no-one was happy with Chamberlain anyhow.

07:00 Even out here before the war, I think most of us thought that Churchill was right. He could see, Churchill had the foresight and he could see what was going to happen and they wouldn't listen to them. He turned out right and thank goodness they gave him the job and I don't think anyone else would have done it as well as he did. He was my hero anyhow.

07:30 Some people don't like him for, whether it was, they've always got an excuse, the mess up with the navy

at Gallipoli, it wasn't Churchill's fault, in the First War. The navy didn't do what headquarters wanted them to do, the captains or whoever was in charge of that thing.

08:00 But Churchill had the right thing, if they'd landed at the right place it would have been a different kettle of fish but someone made a mistake, how, but that's gone now.

So in the room when the announcement finished, what was the mood like and what were you all talking about?

Oh just talked about the war I supposed. We didn't finish our game of bridge, I know that. We just talked about what could happen or

08:30 about what was likely to happen, I suppose.

And what did you think was likely to happen?

Oh dashed if I know. I never thought that we'd lose, I don't think any of us did that, that we were going to win regardless and well, as it turned out, that was it, it could have gone either way.

09:00 Since then I've read a book called Blood, Tears and Folly, I don't know if you have it. It was the mistakes that both, the actual facts that they got from the War Office from both sides, Len Deighton, or Dighton or whatever his name, who wrote it and they're true, the mistakes that both sides made and we were lucky and it could have been over earlier too, only

09:30 someone on our side made a mistake and that sort of thing. Churchill would never have let them throw it in. While there was a chance he'd, he was going to keep going, where some of the others would have sold out long before that and this would have been a German country now. I think it was first prize, whatever happened.

10:00 **So when did you decide that you wanted to be involved in the war?**

Oh I thought right from the start but then I thought, 'How am I going to get out of this? I'm in a reserved occupation,' and see anything to do with the country or producing anything, that was a reserved occupation, you had to get permission to do

10:30 it unless you were some occupation that wasn't in it and, well, it was early in the piece because the war was declared in 1939, and it was in say April 1940 I went in and had the first medical.

11:00 Well you had that, it was a preliminary medical, which they took in consideration I guess. If you couldn't pass, you just forgot about it, it was recorded that you didn't pass. You got a certificate or something to show that you had certain ailments or other. The reason that I was worried was that I had, it wasn't

11:30 long before that I had to chip the concrete off a tank that had been, a galvanised iron tank, five or ten thousand gallon tank right out in the paddock, and when they rusted you cemented them round or on the bottom and I'd been, I'd had to, we were going to re-cement the

12:00 bottom of this tank and I had to chip all the old concrete off. And underneath it, it was damp, the layer and you're bending down all day, chipping this off and the moisture coming up and the heat and when I got home I got on my horse and, oh God, I couldn't sit on it. I had to walk home.

12:30 I had what they called piles. It had just drawn them out and I had my tea and I rang the doctor to tell him I was coming in and he'd have to cut these things off and he didn't agree with me, "Push them back," and I thought having piles that would stop me, and beside that I'd had

13:00 a, while I was at Comboyne I had quinsy and it had given me at that time an uneven beat of the heart and I thought that might stop me but fortunately I got over both of them. I didn't bend over too far when they said, "Bend over," when they do the medical and my heart was all right. If you don't know what quinsy is, it's to do with your tonsils

13:30 and the poison apparently affected my heart and I wasn't able to do any hard work for so long, so the hard work I didn't have to do, which I did, was weighing and branding and stacking the wool bales. It was the hardest job in the whole place. However that was that.

14:00 **What was the next step to you getting to the ship and heading overseas? What was the next part of that?**

With the what's-its-name they sent you a ticket on the train to go down, second class no doubt, but you got in the first class carriage, and in those days there was first and second class, there was a big difference.

14:30 However Tony and I went down first class, made sure we had a few bottles of beer out of the cupboard from Egelabra, we'd planted those in our suitcases you had to take down and we had those on the way down on the train. Well then when you got to Central, I'm not sure whether you got a tram or how you got out to Moore Park, whether they had a truck waiting for you or not, but anyhow we got to Moore Park. They gave you breakfast because it was the first thing in the morning.

15:00 You got down to Sydney about five o'clock, have your breakfast and then you went in and started. I think it was, no you had your medical afterwards. You had to swear your allegiance first and then you got your number and then you went on and had your medical and that medical was important

15:30 because it was the difference between when you went in and you had another medical when you went out, when you got out. There was a difference in mine. Do you want to know about that now or later?

When you went out, as when you finished in the war?

Yeah.

We'll talk about that later.

Right. Well that's when it happened. And so then having,

16:00 they gave you everything. One of my mates, my school mates that I struck later on, as a kid we were playing with bows and arrows when we were boys and he got an arrow right through his left eye, it went in and (UNCLEAR) him, he only had one eye for the rest of his life. And I think it was after I came back from the Middle East and I was waiting to go, no, I was going to the Tablelands

16:30 or somewhere and I'm waiting outside the showgrounds, 'cause I didn't have to go for a few hours, and Esme was with me and this fellow walked past in a uniform and everything, and we met and we hadn't seen for years and I said, "John, how the hell did you get in?" He paid a fella five quid to take the eye test for him and

17:00 this is what fellas did and this was John Smith and when he got to the eye, there were all different rooms and you'd wait outside and he got this fellow to, fancy striking a fella that would take it, and said, "Here go and do the eye test for me." Gave him his papers, went in and he had a second go later on, no-one remembered you I suppose, but then that was it. After the medical you had the night off or we went

17:30 to wherever it was, Gardener's Road or somewhere, for the night, where they put you up in a tent or you went home, which I did and spent the night with me father and got back there in the morning and that's where they issued you with all your gear, all your clothes. And I remember after that, we had to,

18:00 I had to do, it was something to do with getting the lunch ready, making the salad or something. Well if you could see this great big thing of all this salad, but it was purple, all the beetroot was mixed up with it, the whole lot, oh God, and that was to be our lunch. 'To think for the next however long it is I'm going to

18:30 eat that sort of stuff,' and then we had our lunch, then we were told different ones, you got sorted up into your, you called your number and you went over to a certain ground. Well I was with a ground that was going to Goulburn and then there was a corporal, a corporal had come down from Goulburn, just one of us sort of thing too, he came down to take us back.

19:00 They put us on a tram to Central and when we got to Central he said, "The train doesn't go to say nine o'clock tonight but if you want to go over, cross there, over past this in George Street, there's a pub over there, you can go and have a couple of beers." Well that's what we all did, but, 'Be back here by a certain time,' which we did. Well then we got

19:30 on the train to go to Goulburn, no, it must have left before nine because we got there at ten o'clock, I'm thinking the other train to Warren. There was a carriage full of our stuff and I sort of pulled things off and had my khaki shirt on and everything because all your other clothes you put in that suitcase you bought down and they sent it back home for you.

20:00 And I had a, 'Oh there's a thread here,' and I pulled it and I pulled it and off came the sleeve and I was that frightened about it, "Oh God, what will they say?" and I get there and in part of your things you got what was called a housewife. In it, it had so many needles, it had cotton, it had darning wool, darning needles, you were supposed to darn your own socks, and

20:30 I had to get this out and sew this bloody sleeve back on again, which I did. Anyhow when we got to Goulburn there were trucks from the camp waiting for us and took us down and we got to Goulburn and there were a few odd lights, ten o'clock at night it was. Oh they'd given us a sandwich to eat on the train, that was our, so they just told us,

21:00 "Over in that tent there, there's a whole lot of straw, there's some palliasses, now go and fill the palliasse with straw and get into one of the tents. You've got a blanket." So that was it. So anyhow this was what we did and I'll tell you, it was cold, one blanket in Goulburn in April. So anyhow, Tony said to me the next morning, because up we got

21:30 and had to go on parade and everything, called our names and everything was right, so then we went for breakfast. But what happened this first day, with the medical you had a vaccination and so many inoculations. One of the side effects or the outcomes of the vaccination

22:00 was that you got a cold and, oh boy, did you got a cold, after about a week or so it came on. Well by this time we were put into huts from these tents where we were but you still had your palliasse but you had a bed board over in the hut. As I say, it was the pigs' things or the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s'

huts, it was the showground

22:30 at Goulburn. Well of a morning you'd go outside and, God, you could hear, it was like being in a TB [tuberculosis] camp, these fellows coughing and, oh spitting, and oh God, what you didn't get with this bloody vaccination. Well we went in for breakfast for everything else and after

23:00 a while the sergeant-major or someone would walk around and, "Any complaints?" No-one was going to complain, wait and see whether you were allowed to complain, and anyhow from then on you went on parade and did all army stuff. There were no trucks to drive anyhow. All they had, have a couple of trucks to cart you round, into the train or

23:30 wherever, that was about all we had. It was open day every so often and anyone who was around the place, wives or mothers or whoever, fathers, wanted to come down, you could show them around the camp. Oh it was stupid anyhow. You had to do your job as guard at the gate, that was all new

24:00 and the unfortunate, well the worst part of that was you had to do two hours on guard of a night and four hours sleep, that was the best part about the army.

So you started to do training at Goulburn, did you?

Yeah, you did training. The main thing in the army or the Nashos [National Service soldiers], whatever it was, was discipline. You had to do as you were told and the training, the drill and that, was all part of discipline and

24:30 that was what they were trying to get in. You had to learn to march and that didn't take you long. There was nothing else they taught us because we weren't infantry. I don't think they had any machine guns or that that they could pull apart to show us, that sort of thing, and then, come Sunday, you had to go to church parade, that

25:00 was more or less compulsory. The Catholics used to have it out at the camp 'cause there wasn't many of them and the priest used to come out there but the rest of us, we had to walk the two miles into town and I tell you, with new boots, oh God, you got blisters and everything else and, of course, what you did, you broke off, when you came to your church you broke off

25:30 and went to that church. Well at that time, when I first started, when I joined up, I was a Church of England. I hadn't married by then and so I had C of E on my, so I had to go to the cathedral at Goulburn and then they go on to the different ones and as it turned out the Presbyterian one, the Minister at the Presbyterian one

26:00 is the Minister at the moment at St Stephen's in Macquarie Street. Anyway he said, "I remember you." I said, "No, you didn't, I never went to the Presbyterian." Oh and right at the end of it was the Salvation Army. Well I went to the Church of England Cathedral a couple of times but then we heard about the Salvation Army, they used to have the service outside the church and you sang

26:30 and clapped and as it turned out the whole bloody lot of us ended up going to the Salvation Army thing, not the other churches. And then you could get leave at night because there were the canteens. There was the Church of England canteen and then the Salvation Army had one and what you'd do, you could go and have a cup of coffee and a biscuit or two, you could play cards, there was different

27:00 things to do. Well I forget now whether you got leave every night or whatever but when you wanted to but you had to have the money to go to town anyhow. And so that was the way, so after going to that canteen you'd go into the other one to see what they've got, then you'd walk back to the camp at night and go to bed. You had to have your cot made up and

27:30 your palliasse of a morning with it all set out. They showed you how to do it, with your kitbag at the back and your haversack and, oh all these sorts of things, and your spare pair of boots, oh, all set out and they'd come round and inspect it, oh God. There were always the two-up games at the side, outside the huts. You weren't supposed to but I don't think the officers cared two hoots because it gave them work if they had to report you anyhow and

28:00 that was always on and it didn't matter who it was, there was always someone who would start a two-up game. Of course they were the ringers and they got a percentage, "Any winners? What about you winners? What about it?" and you'd have to throw them a bob or two, whatever you had because if it went on that long, over the years the ringers would have got the lot but, however, that was what it was like down there. And as I said we got five days

28:30 leave a month and I got, when I was to get married, which I've told you about, it was okayed and the night before I was.

How long had you been at Goulburn before you got married?

I joined there on the 17th of April and I was married on June 12th so

29:00 it wasn't long.

And when had you made the decision which service you wanted to be a part of and when did

you get your assignment that you were going to be a driver?

Well the first one was before I had my first medical. To get in I thought, 'Now I don't want to be in the infantry.' To get into the transport, if I put my occupation down, which they couldn't doubt that I

29:30 was a book-keeper because I had been that, but I put lorry-driver and they never queried it. When I got down to Moore Park I went straight into the transport, through the putting down 'book-keeper/lorry driver'. Oh it paid off, it was about the only smart thing I ever did and my brother-in-law, Tony, I don't know

30:00 what he put as a matter of fact but he ended up in the part of the artillery to the survey department, survey unit and he ended up going to Cowra. And it was a funny thing too, he must have got into the transport part of the thing at Cowra and he was in Sydney when I got married and he was my best man.

30:30 But no, it didn't take me long to think out why I wanted to be in the transport 'cause walking, you don't know how far you've got to walk and it's a long way when you don't know where the end is.

So yeah, you were about to tell us the story of your wedding, getting your leave to get married.

31:00 Well I put in for that. As I say you got four days compassionate leave and I did look it up in the dictionary once what 'com' meant but the, I don't think it had anything to do with my leave because they could have called it passionate leave and it would have meant the same, it would have been more, so I got this. Esme

31:30 and her family came down to Sydney. When I came down I lobbed in, they took me into town and put me on the train and I got, met her in Sydney in the morning. We had to go to some office in King Street where the Minister who was, they knew the Minister. He'd been the moderator or something of the church years ago and he'd spent the night at Warren

32:00 and spent the night at Tassia's house. We had to sign the papers there and then, so we went there and then I think Esme had to do something about buying, doing something for the wedding, it was that night and I think I went home or did something. And then Tony was my best man and he arranged for a cab to pick us up at a certain time at our place at Cremorne and

32:30 we went over and waited at the church. After the, things were hard luck, they are now to have a wedding breakfast. It was a place called Carl's, you know Carl's Restaurant? I think it was in Pitt Street or somewhere. We went there. And my father, they were so close, he

33:00 had to invite all his bloody family, all his brothers, no sisters because they didn't live down here, this way, but different ones had come to Warren. Oh Esme's aunts and that and cousins and that, they all came, and different ones that lived in Sydney, so it was a nice wedding.

33:30 **Did you get married in your uniform or in a suit?**

Oh yes, oh gosh yes. You had no clothes, you had nothing else and, as I say, I certainly, and then I think after the breakfast we went over to the Wentworth, it was one of those, it was over that way, over York Street way somewhere and the, I don't think they trust you anyway, they weren't sure

34:00 whether we were married or not. Anyhow we had, it was another mistake I made because I used to order the rooms for the boss or the overseer when they came down to the sheep show and that and I'd have to order a room with – what do they call it? – with the bathroom, what do they call them? Anyhow I used to have to order that

34:30 for them because they had to have a bath in the en-suite sort of thing and anyhow when Esme ordered this room, she had to go way up there to get her shower and I had to go. Anyhow, when I finished I put my army boots outside the door to get cleaned, polished, and you were supposed to leave two bob but I didn't have two bob, so. Oh even the fella

35:00 that took our luggage up to the room he looked at me and I said, "I'm on army pay boy, I'm not getting half what you get. You're not getting anything from me." Anyhow, the next day we couldn't afford to stay at the Wentworth so we went down to the tourist bureau in Martin Place and we were able to get a, go to a place called the Regent at Wyong, which was a guest house.

35:30 So we got on the Newcastle train and away we went and we spent the time, the rest of the time up at this, I don't know if it's still there but it's on the, have you ever been to Wyong, to the guest houses there? No, you haven't, well it's on a river. The best one's down further, this one's right in the town.

So for four days all up you were off getting married and having a honeymoon, is that right?

36:00 Yeah, but I still had three days' travelling time to play with so I had the seven days.

So you got back to Goulburn?

Yes, and Es came back with me and fortunately I'd made, one of me mates down there lived in Goulburn, he came from Goulburn and his family, and he and his wife were waiting at the train for us. They knew we were coming and they'd booked

36:30 a room at the hotel, a hotel they recommended, so over we went and then I went, first thing in the morning I had to go straight back to the camp and this fellow's wife came and looked after Esme. They made sure she got on the train, wherever it went back to Sydney, so she could get back home to Warren. Well that was that and …

So how long after that

37:00 **did you get your orders that you were heading out of Australia?**

Well first of all, as I say, I got pulled out of the army for three weeks and it was then that I should have gone to Malaya and then it was in September, I think it was September, August or September, the Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mary used to come here every month and take a couple

37:30 of thousand over to the Middle East and it may have been, probably August, it was August or September anyhow, that we, they put us on a train. In fact all the ones that were left there at Goulburn were going over to the Middle East as reinforcements and they

38:00 put us on a train at Goulburn and we got off at Darling Harbour and they – remember when it was all the trains used to go down there? – and from there we got off with all our gear, everything. We had to get on a ferry and before I got on a ferry I could see me father, over there, nothing was secret, although it was supposed to be.

38:30 But he knew, well my sister, my second eldest sister was keen on one general at the time, it turned out he was the quartermaster general and I think he would have found out and told them that I was going, so there was my father, saying, "There's my son going." We got on this ferry and it took us out to the Queen Mary

39:00 and the Queen Elizabeth, both parked over near Elizabeth Bay, or whatever those bays are over there, and alongside that was a barge which you got onto this barge and then onto these ships. Oh God, this little hole and this great big ship. I ended down on C Deck which was about water level. It was a berth for four and they'd added another two onto it to make

39:30 it comfortable. And then with these Queens, they were terrific ships but they had it so doors, that if they got hit these doors automatically shut and you were trapped, you were down there, you went down with the ship and this is what it was like down on C Deck.

40:00 Tony he ended up going on the same boat. He was on A Deck where they had everything, the shower, the bath, all in the one cabin.

Had you had an opportunity to say farewell to Esme?

Yes, well you got seven days, well I got seven days final leave.

How did she feel about you going off?

40:30 She didn't like it, she was upset but naturally she would be. I have a photo, I can't find it and I've often looked back at it and it was one taken at Warren with me, with the two of us, me in my uniform and that, in her backyard and on the back she had written 'Please God, send him back home safe', something like that and I've never forgotten it. I thought that's the

41:00 most she felt, it was the, I don't blame her, I knew I was going, I knew what I was doing, but all these women. I do the ode at St Stephen's on Anzac Memorial Day, the Sunday before Anzac Day, but before I recite the ode I ask them to stand for a moment's

41:30 silence for those who had given, but as I say now, "What we must do is remember all those who suffered the most and they are the mothers, wives and sweethearts of those who were away serving their country," and oh gee, the number of women who have come up to me after and said thanks.

Tape 5

00:35 **Victor, before you actually left on the Queen Elizabeth for the Middle East, you were in the army then recalled back to work for Sir Norman Cater for a few weeks. Can you tell us why that happened? I think there was some organisation called Manpower involved in him being able to get you to come back**

01:00 **and work for him, can you tell us about that?**

Well all I know was that Sir Norman was a member of the Legislative Council and how he got it, but anyway he was, and they have a lot of influence and I'm sure it was serious influence and in the first place how he stopped us, Tony and myself going when we got the telegram, and when

01:30 this book-keeper that took over from Tony, when he got sick, well it wasn't that bad, he could have got anybody to do it really. Closing the books, it only meant, what the book-keeper had to do was to keep a

record of the books, it was all done by hand in those days. They sold so many rams, you had to write that up, who bought them, send them an invoice and

02:00 when they paid you credited it in the ledger and you had to check all the invoices that came in, all the supplies that you bought. You had to pick out the saws and maintenance, everything to do with maintenance for the business, because of the tax, and

02:30 you had to balance all these things. That was about all and, oh, you had to pay the wages but wages weren't so hard in those days, the tax, because you paid a shilling and a pound, that was the tax. So the station hands only got about three or four pounds a week and you took say three shillings off their pay,

03:00 drew a cheque for whatever they wanted. In the wages book you showed how much they'd worked and how much they'd drawn and that was all there was to it, and eventually you added up all the tax that you took off them and wrote a cheque and sent it down to the Taxation Department.

So why didn't Norman get someone else to do that job if anyone could do it?

Well you'd have to know what these people are, Sir Norman, I'll say it wasn't easy to get staff. He couldn't get anyone else and

03:30 I mean the overseer or the manager, if he was any good, could have done it but you wouldn't have been able to get someone unless you could have conned someone say out of the bank in Warren, come out and close it or do something like that and pay them but you couldn't get someone to come out for good. There was no-one, no labour or whatever you like to call it available.

Because most of the people were at war?

Because of the war there was no

04:00 manpower, there wasn't any there.

Oh the manpower as all the men, a lot of men in Australia of working age were?

Oh the men, they were all either in factories, they had all come down. I think the factories just suddenly came alive, they had to produce ten times or more than what they did before.

The fact that you ended up going back to do the book-keeping for Sir Norman meant that your fate and your course in the war changed totally, didn't it?

04:30 Oh it did.

Because you missed out on going to Malaya because you were away?

That's it, because someone up there must have been looking after me because I struck, this fellow that I told you lived in Goulburn, who I got friendly with, he ended up in Malaya, he went there. Well he's dead now but he came back a bit of a wreck.

Was he a POW, he was a prisoner of war?

Oh he was a POW, yeah, I'll say he was.

05:00 Stayed there for three and a half years and then, had I landed at Borneo, had we not got held up in the Red Sea and not gone to Port Sudan for the week I would have been a POW because we'd have been timed to land in Borneo just in time to get taken as a prisoner of war.

Do you believe in fate because of these incidents?

I certainly do

05:30 because I was spared, four times I was spared like that, that it just doesn't happen I'm sure. I'm not a real religious person but there are things that have happened to me over my life that makes me think there's someone there looking after me and it just doesn't happen, I don't think.

Where was your, you got on the Queen Elizabeth, when you finally

06:00 **did go, you made the journey on the Queen Elizabeth, where was your first stop?**

Well we went round to Perth. We anchored about a mile off Fremantle. See they were too big, the ships were too big to go into Fremantle, the Queen Elizabeth. Coming back we pulled into Fremantle but the Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mary, they were big ships and we anchored about a mile off shore.

06:30 We did that to pick up any troops that were coming on from Perth and when we were about to set off again, I was standing on the deck and you could see the land floating away and one of the blokes said to me, "What's your ambition Vic?" and I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "What's your ambition now?" I said, "I don't know, why, what's yours?" and he said, "To join the RSL [Retuned and Services League]," and I thought, 'Jesus, that's true too, the Returned Soldiers League,' but

07:00 from there we set off and woke up one morning and there were the great big cliffs of either side of us. We were at Trincomalee which is part of which was then Ceylon and stayed there. Of course that is one

of those very deep places.

Harbours.

Trincomalee, have you been there? It's very deep and just mountains either side and these gorges go down. We stopped

07:30 there for the day I think and then went on and the next stop I think is Tewfik, at this end of the canal, in Egypt. Oh gee what a primitive place that was, probably still is.

Why was that?

Ah?

Why would you describe it as primitive? What did you see?

Well they were, it was filthy, their habits were dirty and primitive.

Did you get off the ship?

08:00 Yeah, we were there. They weren't going to bring us back. We got off there and got on a train and that took the journey to El Kantara and the rest I told you and on we went.

How long did you stay in Egypt for before you got on the train?

Oh probably just a matter of hours. They were really express trains and they were pretty primitive too,

08:30 nothing like we had here and even the trains, well I say when we got on the train from El Kantara to go up to Palestine, that was just a cattle truck we were in and it just chugged along and we just sat on our bottom on these boards.

09:00 (Tape stops)

I just asked you who was on the train as you left Egypt, which divisions were on the train?

Oh we were reinforcements for everything. Palestine was the training camp but there were so many of them, all these different training camps in Palestine and we were all reinforcements

09:30 and when we got to Gaza well we got on the trucks and each one was taking us to a different camp. I was DS&E, there was Hill 69, there was Begerga, oh they all had different names, infantry had some and so on. They changed them around too but DS&E it was just a camp but there were, the

10:00 Arabs then, they were with the strength all the time, then but however, what part whether it was the Halas or the Germans, whoever was there, they were friendly with them, and you couldn't trust them. We had to sleep of a night with the rifle, we had to put the bolt of our rifle in the Q store [Quartermaster's store] and the rifle, we had to sleep with our arm through the sling to make sure no-one pinched them.

Were you sleeping in tents? Were you sleeping in tents at the time?

10:30 Oh yes, and there in Palestine they had the great EPI tents. They were great big English ones, square ones, big high things. Not an eight man tent like you normally have with a fly and everything else, these were big tents with a lot of guy ropes down each side. And I say normally the tents held eight, well these would hold about

11:00 twenty, I suppose, because you just slept on the ground. But it was very bad there because the Arabs did all the hygiene, did all that and it was over fifty percent of the people got dysentery, the hospitals were full all the time and you were just lucky if you didn't get it.

11:30 Although they looked after the toilets but I don't think they did it properly, it was rife.

Did you get sick while you were there?

No I didn't. Fortunately I went through the army and the only time I had off, I went to hospital just before I come home to get a tooth out and

12:00 so nearly five years I didn't have a day off sick.

You were very lucky.

Just one of those fortunate things.

So after you were in Palestine, then you headed up towards Syria?

We went, yes, we went there. We got on a train this night and that took us to Haifa. I think we got on another train from Haifa and they were pretty,

12:30 we got into Syria, wait on, we went so far into Syria and then we got on some trucks and went to somewhere in Syria, stayed the night in some barracks, some old French barracks, they'd been

abandoned or gone. Well then we got on another train and we went to Damascus and there

13:00 got a train and they were primitive, tiny little engine, no longer than this, used to pull these trains over all the hills. In a lot of Syria there's no trees or anything like that, it's just rocks and hills and nothing and these trains, these little engines used to pull these trains. We got to one stage, we'd come down this hill and went to climb

13:30 up the other one to the station at the top, a little township at the top, and we got nearly to the top and it wouldn't take it, so back they came. And we did this two or three times and they said, "Everyone out," and we had to push this train up to the station at the top of this hill and you'd be surprised to see a whole lot of fellas pushing a train, someone pushing it, at every carriage until we got to the top. And I had a ride on the front of

14:00 the train on the engine, on that one for a while. Every now and then you'd have to duck because a tree would be hanging down and the driver would say, "Duck," and you'd duck your head.

What was the mood among the blokes at that time? Were you excited about what you were about to encounter or were people nervous?

Oh you never got excited. It was just your way of life, you just took it. There was nothing, you never thought about what was going to happen. You didn't know where you were going to

14:30 be the next day but you never gave it a thought. You were just there, it was part of your life and right through the whole thing you used to think, "When the hell am I going to get home." That's all you wanted to do, to get back home and it was all over.

Did you know how the Allied forces were going at that stage, by the time you …?

There was no radio. You didn't get any news.

15:00 Later on in the piece they printed a little paper but they only put on it what they wanted you to know. There was about the only thing we heard immediately was when they dropped the atom bomb and there was no other news. We had no idea what was going on around us or even overseas until it was well and truly over. They probably heard in the papers here

15:30 weeks before we did but as I say there was no radio or anything, not like today.

So what happened when you got to your camp in Syria?

What happened? We were 'dirty reos' they used to call us.

What does that mean?

Dirty reinforcements, because, see all the others they used to call themselves 'First Fleeters'. They were in the first lot that went over

16:00 and everyone else, they don't realise that. See a lot of those fellows didn't have a job that went over with the first ones to join up, but a lot of us couldn't join up, had a reason for not doing it but we were going over there to reinforce them. But they treated you all right in the start for a while until they woke up that we were there to help them, not do anything else. But when we got to this camp

16:30 it was just tents and everything on the side of this hill, it was all rocks and stones and everything and there again they said, "There's palliasses there, fill them with straw," and so on and by the time we did that it was about four or half past in the afternoon and they read out the guard list for the night and there was all us new fellas, just lobbed in, and we were on guard for the night. Didn't even know what was, didn't know where the cook house was or anything and

17:00 we were supposed to guard it for the night. Of course that's how they got their own back but we, what they were doing, naturally we had to feed all the, supply all the troops in the brigade and all the troops were there. The reason was that the Germans they expected to come down the Remu Valley and

17:30 they were building a big tank trap right across the valley to stop them. The engineers and the natives, whatever you like to call them, they were there helping them and they were building roads. They were very good at building roads out of rocks.

This was the Arab, this was the local Arab population?

The local Arabs, yes, the Syrians. They were there with their long dresses and all that on and

18:00 a lot of them, one of the jobs that we had was to pick them up at their little township, or whatever it was in those days, and take them, there'd be a truckload, as many as you could put on a truck. They had to stand on it because they had those canopies over them, and take them to some place where they could load the trucks with stones. Then with those stones we

18:30 had to take to where they were building a road and there'd be others there waiting to unload all those stones, which they broke up or used and they laid them out like cobblestones and made all these roads. They were very good at it and they were quite smooth to drive over. Before that it was just a track

through the, along the side of the hills.

19:00 **You mentioned a tank trap as well, how was that built, the tank trap?**

Dug it out, they dug this great big, well there was, a lot was done by hand or bulldozers or whatever equipment they had. We didn't get round to see much of what was going on because it was miles long and we didn't get right down there but a lot of the others, the engineers, that's what they were doing. But Baalbek was a,

19:30 in Baalbek itself there were some ruins of an old temple and there were stones, bigger than this, square or whatever you like, a hundred feet up in the air. How the hell they ever got them up there, this thing, some of these temples. I'll tell you something that happened there, one of our jobs, there was a siding called Rasbacbek, just so many miles on from Baalbek, and the train used to pull up there.

20:00 It was a siding where they used to unload the trains and things and some of our jobs was to unload these trains but all we did was drive the, the infantry supplied the working parties to do all the work and that but then we'd have to take them to the engineers' dump or the supply dump. There was one time when we had to take something

20:30 from the engineers' dump back to the train and when we got to the back of the siding alongside it, in Syria they were all iron sleepers, steel, and at the siding they were apparently going to built an extension to it or something but alongside of where we were, were a whole lot of wooden sleepers.

21:00 We were able to, at the engineers' dump they had these hot water or donkeys we used to call them, they're fireboxes, round things – you've seen them? – and we were able to pinch those from the engineers' dump and a flue and eventually what they did at our camp, they built the first of the Nissen huts, they were those round things.

21:30 And we had these fires, heater there, because it was cold and, well, when we saw these sleepers, oh God, it was wood, it would burn. Every truck, as soon as they unloaded their things, they'd shove a couple of sleepers on the truck, take them back to the camp and when we got back to the camp there'd be fellas waiting there and with a cross cut saw

22:00 they'd cut them up into billets about this long, which would fit in this thing. Lord knows how many sleepers we got but we never heard a word about it but we had enough firewood to keep us going for weeks and weeks with these sleepers. That is part of what we did there in Syria.

What kind of lorry were you driving there?

Well we ended up bringing them back home with us. They were Fords and Chevs [Chevrolets]. They were the bull-nose,

22:30 they were the bull-nose trucks that, nothing fancy about them, the engine down low or something and the bull- nose and a steel body back on them and we eventually brought those back home with us.

Were you also, did you also look after taking the food to the different camps as well?

Oh we had to do that yeah.

Was that a big job?

Oh that was the first

23:00 priority. Every unit got their supplies daily. They got so much and eventually we had to run the DID [bulk supply depot] and that was where the supplies were kept. It was all worked out, every person got so many ounces of bread, so many ounces of meat and so on and it was worked out that a hundred and so many men it worked out at so many pounds of meat or bread or whatever it was.

23:30 Well now that was for the three meals a day and that had to be delivered to the units but that was the first priority because the troops had to be fed.

How many troops were there altogether?

Well, say, in a battalion there were thirteen hundred in a battalion,

24:00 and in a division, no, there was a bit over a thousand. There's thirteen thousand odd in a division, so we were a brigade so there was a third of that in each brigade.

Were you there while any battles were being fought?

Not in Syria, no, we came, I joined this unit when they had just come out of Crete. They'd been to Greece and then to Crete and got back and we

24:30 joined them then because they'd lost a lot of, the reason why we were reinforcements because they'd lost a lot of men.

What was the morale like for the Thirty Niners that had been through Greece and Crete?

What were they, were they very low?

Oh just normal, there was nothing wrong with them, no, it was just normal.

They didn't talk about losing that many men? Were they bitter about that?

You heard about they,

25:00 it was only natural. They weren't sore, they'd done the job that was given to them and that was it.

But they gave you, the new guys coming up, the new blokes, a hard time?

Oh well they tried but it was funny while I was there, it was cold and everything and my feet started to swell or I got fat I think. Well I put on weight, I know that, and my boots wouldn't fit me

25:30 and going on the Queen Elizabeth we were issued with sandals, oh, sandshoes, and I still had those so I had to wear the sandshoes but I couldn't do anything, so they told me I was to look after one of the huts. Suited me all right so I'm there one day and one of the captains, Captain Nugent, came along and he said, he was telling me he was going

26:00 to run a boxing and wrestling tournament and he said, "What about it driver?" and I said, "You wouldn't have anyone my weight," I was pretty light, and he said, "What weight are you?" and I said, "Nine stone seven." "Oh, I've got someone new here, you'll be right." Well I was in and I'd only said yes because he was there. They worked it all out and I was to fight one of the originals

26:30 but he was eleven stone. Anyhow on the mess line, you were all in a line and somebody told the originals and pointed me out and, "That's him, he'll kill you. He was a flyweight champion," and they were going on about it and going on about me and everything else.

What do you mean by the 'the originals'?

One of the 'First Fleeters'.

Oh I see.

These fellas you were talking about.

27:00 Well this fella pulled out, he scrubbed it, so anyhow as it turned out they got someone else but he was as it turned out one of the fellas that came up with us. He was a half-caste from Trangie and I had to fight him. He was eleven stone two but it wasn't that bad because I got in and we started. They were all three minute rounds and three one minute rounds,

27:30 or two one minute rounds or something and in this brick hut and I got into him. I'd see my chance and I get stuck into him and push him over the ropes and I'd put one in and when I ran out of puff I'd step back and every time I did he hit me with a left hook and, oh.

Had you had any boxing experience before?

Oh I did at school. It was one of the things we used to do after school when I was a boy. Someone had

28:00 boxing gloves and we used to have these boxing things amongst ourselves as boys.

Was it a part-Aboriginal man?

Pardon?

You said a half-caste, was it a part-Aboriginal man?

Yes.

And he'd been in Changi, did you say?

He came from Trangie, that's up near Warren.

Oh Trangie, right, I see.

He came over with us, he was one of the reinforcements.

He was part of your, ah ha.

Anyhow then I thought, 'Well what you could do, if you were in these tournaments you could train.'

28:30 They had a rec [recreation] hut and it was one of these big tents, EPI tents, and in those they had a sawyer, which was like a big copper, and hot water and you could have a hot shower afterwards, which you couldn't have otherwise. You had to have a cold one unless you could heat some water somehow. Well I thought, 'I'll stick to this, I'll train but I'll go for wrestling the next one,' and I was trained for wrestling and

29:00 right at the last minute they switched me over to a boxing bout and I had another one that I had to give the fellow about a stone and a half, something like that, but it was all good, something to do.

Were there lots of camps like that played at the camp at Syria?

That was about all there was to do. It was later on, say up in the Territory and New Guinea, when the Salvation Army came into the thing and with their rec huts and entertainment,

29:30 like games and that sort of thing. It turned out in New Guinea I got introduced to Monopoly and, boy, you had to be early to get one of those and half a dozen of you play that, but you couldn't even write a letter, there was no place you could write a letter over there anyhow.

In Syria? There must have been some way you were getting letters back to Esme?

Oh you had to write them in your tent

30:00 as best you could. As I say, later on they built these Nissen huts which were, the wogs built them with a concrete floor and they all came, they were just put up in sections.

Did you have anything to do with the British troops while you were in Syria?

Well they were always there, they were all there and the funny thing over there, everyone was George, everyone answered to George.

30:30 You'd say, "Good day George," even the wogs, "Good day George," and when we left Syria the British took over from our camp but we were treated as men and we could, say you could be a bit familiar with your officers but when they said, 'Jump,'

31:00 you jumped and that was the difference between our army and the British Army. The British Army was (UNCLEAR) because if you didn't they were put on detention, whatever you liked to call it. They couldn't, they even had to salute the corporals and things. But ours were a different thing. We were all on the same level but as I say when the officer, when you had to do something, you did it, and that's what made the Australian Army,

31:30 why it was so different from the others. And now in these huts we used to get a little box, a crate, and you'd get a bit of calico that someone had came over a parcel or something like that, and you'd drape that down in front of it and you had your toothpaste and your soap or whatever in this little thing, it was like a little cabinet thing. Well we, no sooner before we left, the British

32:00 came and took over and got our bed boards and so on but before we got out all the Brits made them shift all those boxes and take them out and put them on a heap and burn them. All over the Middle East the British were there.

So what year were you in the camp in Syria? What year was that?

1941.

And how many months did you spend there in total?

32:30 About six or eight or something.

And when you knew you were leaving, where did you think they were going to send you to next?

We didn't know. There was one thought, there was one furphy [rumour] that we were going to Malta. Well then that changed and then it turned out that we did hear we were supposed to go back to Australia. Well we were heading that way.

So you got on another ship?

33:00 Yes, got on, I've got it in my thing there, the name of it. It was an old Indian coal burner and it was the one we set off from Tewfik. We got back down there by truck, we drove all the way, didn't go by train at all. We stopped at Palestine for a few nights.

What was that like?

Oh it was the same as when we were there the first time. We went to a different camp. I think we went to Hill 69 or whatever it was.

33:30 **Did you get to go out to Tel Aviv or to any of, did you get to see the sights at all?**

I did before that. I went to Jaffa and then had another one to Tel Aviv. No, I went to Tel Aviv, that's right and then I had another one to Jerusalem. While I was in Syria I went to Beirut but you only had a day's leave.

34:00 The trucks would take you there, they'd take a party of you.

How did you find Beirut?

It was just like a little country town, no high rises, no big buildings or anything. I suppose there was a couple of two storey places or something but it was just a little country town. Hard to believe now, it's a

big city.

Did you get to meet the local people there? Did you get time to make friends?

No, never talked to any of them like that, they didn't speak your language anyhow.

34:30 But you just wandered around and looked. It was a day instead of being around the camp doing, I suppose in those days if you didn't have your truck you'd go for a route march or something like that. It was interesting, I saw it, as I say, Jerusalem was very interesting.

Did you go to the old city in Jerusalem?

35:00 Oh yes, there were guides there. Oh and I went through the, saw the Tomb and all those things, the Wailing Wall, I think it cost me two hundred mills, which was equivalent to two bob, the guide. No, it was, Jerusalem was very interesting.

35:30 Like a lot of that Middle East stuff, there's plenty to see there. I don't know, why go to London and Paris and that, there's more interesting things in the Middle East than anywhere else, temples and so on but that was very good. While I say, then we came down to Tewfik and then we got on this boat which we stayed on, which was the one that brought us right back to Australia.

And that was an old Indian coal boat, did you say?

Old Indian

36:00 coal burner.

And what were the conditions like on that boat?

Oh gee, you had to sleep and eat down in the hold. They had benches and seats, long seats. You had to sleep on those or underneath them I think. All the cooking was done down there. Coming, part of it, oh boy, I got seasick.

36:30 I was on picket or guard duty, whatever you like to call it, then because all you had to do was look for submarines, you were on for the night. Well this day I was on the last shift which took from, well it took over the breakfast period. Well they didn't save me any breakfast, I went without it and then I had to go and, oh boy,

37:00 I started to, I got seasick and there's nothing worse. I was seasick for three days and all I could do, I couldn't eat. I lay underneath, they had on the deck where we were, our portion of the deck, they had these garden seats, and all I could do was lie underneath those with these fellows sitting on it, kicking me with their heels and that. Oh God, I was crook but I've heard since if you're sick for three days, seasick for three days,

37:30 once you've got over it, you're right, you won't get sick again. Not on that trip anyhow.

Were there many men sick at the time? Had you hit rough seas?

Oh you did and there was always rough, there was never smooth sailing, especially those, coming back across the Bight, the boat just went sideways. You had to hang on otherwise you'd have slid off sideways on the thing ,it was that rough. Coming over on the Queen Elizabeth,

38:00 on there, there were times that you couldn't see the destroyers in front of you. They'd be down underneath the waves. It was all types of weather that you got.

Did you stop off anywhere on you way back on the Indian coal burner ship?

They pulled us down to Port Sudan for a week because we'd missed this convoy at Aden.

How did you come to miss the convoy at Aden?

I don't know how it was. They just told us we were

38:30 to pick up this convoy.

That was going to Borneo?

'Cause all the ships were coming back from there, that's when they were all starting to come back.

From the Middle East?

Yes, the 7th Division, it was already well and truly on its way because when we got to Adelaide it was already there, in their camps and everything else. And they just pulled us into Port Sudan for a week and we, we didn't eventually get a convoy because we

39:00 came back from Colombo with just these two destroyers as an escort.

And you were never told why you didn't manage to meet up with the rest of the convoy?

They don't tell you those things, they didn't tell you anything except, 'Get there,' and, 'Get back.'

‘Cause if you had you would have ended up in Borneo? Is that where that convoy was heading?

If we had not pulled into Port Sudan

39:30 for a week I would have ended up a POW. We’d have been in Borneo just in time for the Japs to come and say, “Right, you’re a POW.” Oh it was a, there was a lot of people that did land there. You see them now, you say, “Were you in Malaya?” and they say, “No, we were caught in Borneo.” And you wouldn’t want to be with the Japs, the different stories I’ve read and heard since,

40:00 it was bad.

So what did you get to do in Port Sudan for a week? Did you get to go out and look around?

No, we just did route marches. There was what they called a NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute], that was an English canteen sort of thing, there was one of those at the end of the camp or something. At night, after we, we could do anything at night if we wanted to. We could wander there as long as you, the lights were out at ten

40:30 o’clock or something like that, that’s all you could do. Other than that we just went for route marches just to keep us occupied I think.

So you weren’t allowed to disembark at all?

Oh we got off the ship. We had to get off the ship and we went into, there were tents already there in this British camp, not being used I suppose, and that’s where we were fed and everything else.

Did you get to go into the city at all?

41:00 No, no, no. No we didn’t get into that. There was really nothing there, only a, it was a very clean place. Alongside the tents there were a lot of, they were sort of round huts sort of things, their buildings, round tops and that, but what we did see of it, it was a very clean place ‘cause it was a

41:30 British colony or something in those days and I think the natives there were different to the Arabs around Egypt, Syria and Palestine. They weren’t as primitive, probably because of the British rule.

So you got back on the Indian ship and then started to sail back towards Australia. You headed towards Australia after that, after you got

42:00 **back on, you left Port Sudan and then you were heading back to Australia?**

Tape 6

00:32 **Victor could you give me an idea of what Colombo was like when you arrived?**

No. Oh I can, all I know about it was I’ve never seen so many ships in one place. There was hundreds of them. They were right across the bay, the harbour, side by side, tied together, bow to stern, bow to stern,

01:00 probably about, oh there were rows of them. We weren’t allowed off the ship, we just had to stay there, I don’t know, probably a couple of days or something like that, waiting probably for these two destroyers before we set off again.

So you finally did set off?

Oh Lord, yes.

And where did you head next?

We were heading for Borneo and, as I say, it fell before we got there.

01:30 **Had they told you at that stage that you were heading to Borneo or you just guessed?**

Well we sort of got a, I think it wasn’t until we just about got there and they told us we were too late, we weren’t going in and we were heading, we got good news, we were heading back to Australia.

Did they tell you why you weren’t going to Borneo or they didn’t give that much away?

Oh we going there

02:00 to reinforce the whole thing ‘cause I think by that time Malaya had fallen and they didn’t tell you much. A lot of the things were wrong anyway. We got what we called a furphy, which was really to encourage us, say, “You’re going home,” and just to make you build up your spirits but they had no intention of getting you home.

02:30 You'd get that. You didn't hear much news but it did come through that Borneo had fallen. Probably the ship's captain or someone got the news to carry on, not to go in, so that was that.

Did that make you concerned, that the Japanese were obviously getting stronger and stronger and moving closer to Australia?

03:00 You never gave it a thought. You had no idea where or how many there were. It wasn't until, see they didn't tell us, even when we were up in Darwin that the, that there was two hundred-odd thousand Japs in that strait just above Darwin. They had intended to come to Australia but they changed their mind and went into Borneo somewhere,

03:30 still just stayed there but we had no idea they were there. All they had to do was to land there and we were gone, anywhere in Australia at that time. All those troops up that area, a couple of hundred thousand Japs would have walked over us.

Did you have an impression at that stage what the Japanese soldiers were like? Did you hear any stories about what they were like as soldiers?

04:00 Because there was no soldiers that had struck them got back to tell you, oh no, it was all just imagination as to what they were like. We didn't hear anything about them. I suppose when we got to, started to catch them in New Guinea, that's when we heard more about them.

So you got the good news that you were heading home?

Yeah.

04:30 **How long did it take you to then get home?**

Oh I wouldn't like to say. It was only a matter of days to get down to Fremantle. Well that was home as far as we were concerned and we stayed there for, oh, probably a couple of days because they had to refuel it, get coal into it and some of the 4th Battalion that were on the boat they got paid waterside workers' wages to handle all this coal. Oh boy did they make some money.

05:00 Then we set off.

What did you get up to in Fremantle yourself?

Well I didn't get drunk but I had my share of beer. See what we did, we didn't have any money but had enough to buy a seven or two of beer. From Fremantle we went to Perth and it was a Saturday afternoon and we went to one of the pubs. There three of us I think it was, three or four, not sure,

05:30 anyhow we got a seven of beer each, sipped it and then went over and talked to a few of the locals and got in with their party. Then of course when we had got our, finished those, they had to buy us a beer and they bought us middies too. Well when we had nearly finished those, we wandered off into another group and started talking to them and when we finished that they had to buy us one. Well what happened in the finish,

06:00 some fellow we got friendly with said, "Now you've got to come home to my place for dinner," and while we objected to that, we weren't going to upset anyone's household, and he insisted on it. He took us, he had a truck, whatever it was, he took us around to a street, similar to York Street in Sydney where all the warehouses were, and we came to this place with a big iron gate

06:30 and he opened that and he said to one of my mates, "Now pull that truck or something out of there while I get this utility out." So one of the blokes who could drive we did that and with that he took us down below into the basement of this place and it was chock-a-block full of Robertson's Chocolates and he had some business and each one of us he gave us a packet

07:00 of, I had a box or whatever it was, of Cherry Ripes. Oh God, we'd been half starved on this boat and he then took us home. The wife, she was happy as Larry to have us, oh, gave us some tea. I don't know how long it took her to cook it but anyhow we had tea there and then before midnight, which we had to be back on the boat before midnight, he drove us back to Fremantle.

07:30 Oh talk about this hospitality and the way they looked after you.

It was a nice welcome home?

No. Well then from there we went to …

Just before you do move on Victor, can you just explain to me, Victor, the process you had to go through to get your money? You had to deal with stamps, is that right, in order to get your payment?

Yes, we did. Well we went to the Post Office and we got to Perth and cashed whatever stamps

08:00 we had. That was, we didn't have, we thought, 'Well if we were going to have a few beers, no good having one, wouldn't go far,' but as it worked out there was probably one smart fella amongst us, this is the way to do it. But of course being soldiers, nothing was too, you can overcome anything like that and those people they looked after us. But we had to cash our stamps but they were so willing to do it

because

08:30 we were soldiers coming back, back home.

So that was the feeling around Fremantle, they couldn't do enough for you?

Oh yes, it was, and in Adelaide too.

All right, can you continue the story and tell us about Adelaide?

Yes. Well we carried on home then and when we got to Adelaide, apparently the

09:00 7th Division and a lot of other troops had lobbed there before us and they were camped in all the parks and things around Adelaide, and of course, naturally, we weren't expected. And the only way they could do it I suppose, because they didn't have the facilities for the army to feed an extra Brigade, so what they did before we got there, the powers that be went to all the houses up in the hills

09:30 from Aldershot right through Mt Lofty, Bridgewater and further on, and just went through the houses and said, "You've got so many rooms, now that room," didn't matter who was in it, they said, "we want that, you'll have to empty that. Whoever's sleeping there will have to go into the other one. And now you'll be able to take two soldiers and you're to feed them and we'll pay you two and ten pence a day to do it." And they did this

10:00 with all the things and now when we got there, we got to, lobbed at Bridgewater a bit before lunch, got off the train and we were allocated where we were to go and we were to go to a Mrs Chaplain's place, which was about half a mile up the hill, on the side of the road. Well we marched up there and when we got there, Mrs Chaplain her house was down on the bottom side of the road and

10:30 she lived in this beautiful, big stone house on an acre or two of land. She had two spinster daughters. She was seventy odd and she had two spinster daughters in their forties and she said, oh they had told her that she could take, she said, "I can take twelve." That was all right but a day later they came back and said,

11:00 "Mrs Chaplain, you can't take any because you haven't got any men in the house," and she said, "I'll have twelve won't I?" and they said, "No, you have to have one of your own men." So what she did, across the road on the top side of the road there was an old church that had been turned into a weekender. Someone put a second storey on it and turned it into a weekender. So she found out who owned that and she rented it and told them, said, "Now, I'll take twelve, they can sleep over there and I'll feed them."

11:30 When we got there she told us this and she said, "Well now, go over and have a wash, put your gear away and everything and then come over and lunch would be ready," which we did. Well we went over and she had this great big table and she brought out the meal. It was a baked dinner of some sort with all the vegetables, baked potatoes and about three vegetables which she grew herself. She had this big garden, had a couple of cows and then,

12:00 well we were that hungry. We weren't fed too much, I'll tell you that, on the boat and there wasn't a skerrick left on anyone's plate, cleaned up the lot. Well to follow that up she brought in apple pie and her own cream. Oh boy, soldiers, talk about millionaire living, and that was it. And she did that, that was the way it was for all the time we were there, and I said

12:30 to her once, "Mrs Chaplain, look you can't do this for us on two and ten pence a day," and she said, "Vic, if the government can't give me enough, I can do it," and that was her attitude. I wanted to milk the cows for her and she wouldn't have that, she wanted to do that herself and talk about, that was the spirit of what it was. If we went to Adelaide, there'd been

13:00 no troops in Adelaide before that, not like Sydney, Melbourne and all that, they were full of them, but Adelaide apparently had been spared. There was no camps around there, no set camps and we were the first ones that they'd had and of course they welcomed them just like nobody. And then we stayed there for about two months, then we got seven days leave and when we got back, we went back to our billets again and later on we

13:30 put our trucks on tabletop train and away we set out for Alice Springs, which took three days.

Just before you move on to Alice Springs, could you just tell us again about the episode with the two destroyers on your way to Adelaide.

Oh yes. Coming round the, I should have, when we left Fremantle we were coming round the corner

14:00 from towards, near Albany and we were down having tea about five o'clock at night, down below the water level, and all of a sudden there were these terrific bangs. You would think that we'd been bombed or something or a torpedo had hit us, but there was a dozen or more of those, just one after the other and, well, there was only one ladder out of the place. One at a time up this ladder to the

14:30 deck and I wasn't one of the first to get out, I can assure you, and by the time I got up on deck all I could see behind us, way back, were these two destroyers going round and round in a circle. Apparently they'd got a Jap submarine, which they confirmed years later 'cause it was only several years ago, I

realised that this could be why I was having trouble with my hearing and they

15:00 asked me about noise and I mentioned this, that they got it and they must have checked on that and found that that was right and so I got a ten percent pension for my hearing. I got hearing aids and that but that was that, what happened there.

So moving into Adelaide, had they given you any idea what they had planned for you?

No, no, only that the colonel, the lieutenant-colonel of the 2/4th Battalion,

15:30 a fellow named, he was Colonel Ivan Doherty who ended up living down at Cronulla, he was the CO and he was the senior officer on the ship and as soon as he, as soon as we lobbed in Adelaide he had to, he got straight off, he didn't get home or anything, and they sent him straight up to Darwin 'cause there'd been, after the bombing there, there'd been

16:00 two AMF, that's the Australian Military Forces, when you joined up you had the option whether you joined the AMF or the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. The AIF they could send you anywhere. This other one, at that time they couldn't send you out of Australia, and there were two of these brigades up in Darwin and when they bombed them, well the story is they panicked,

16:30 they went everywhere and they said, "Every man for himself," and they panicked and they had to get them back and the idea with the 19th Brigade was to encourage them, give them strength, and have manoeuvrers together and all that sort of thing and so I mean, Colonel Doherty was the man in charge of the whole thing. He stayed there for some time and then ended up being, became a

17:00 major general. He got his full colonel while he was in Darwin, to go up there, and then they made him a general, a major-general when he went to New Guinea. That's what happened. That's all we heard about him. He had to go up there for some reason. I've heard since that his wife wasn't very happy because she was expecting him home and he didn't come for ages.

Were you hoping you were going to get taken back to Sydney so you could catch up with family?

17:30 Oh Lord yes, that was everyone's thing but it took us two months to get leave and then we got, they gave us seven days' leave plus travelling time and I think I've told you that the travelling time in those days was allocated from the camp, from where you were by your unit. One

18:00 fellow in our, when they were doing this, mentioned he came from Narrabeen and this fellow said, "Where's Narrabeen?" and he was a Victorian, "Where the hell's Narrabeen?" And he said, "Oh it's way out the back blocks," and after a bit of a story he ended up, he got another four days' travelling time on top to go to Narrabeen and I got four days to go to Warren.

So while you were based in Adelaide you did get the chance to go into New South Wales to visit home?

18:30 No, that was the only time for that leave.

So but you did have leave while you were in Adelaide?

Oh yes, I got home before we went to Darwin, I got home.

Before you went to Alice Springs?

Well Alice Springs is only half way to Darwin, that's where the train ended.

So you got into Adelaide and then you were given the seven days' leave?

After two months we got seven days' leave, came back and then they put on this tabletop train, along with all our trucks, and we set off for Alice Springs,

19:00 which took three days. Then from Adelaide River, Alice Springs, we set off for what was then Burdon, which is now Mataranka, where the end of the, the train line was then running from there to Darwin. Well it took three days on our trucks to get, in those days it was just a bit of a gravel road sort of thing,

19:30 and it took three days to get to Burdon. We stayed there for a day or two and then we set off. There was no roads, they couldn't put us on a train because there was no trucks but we set off by road, which was, it wasn't a road. They were starting to build it, they were clearing a track for the road and we'd just go on this side track and we'd come to a creek or something and we might have to detour for ten miles to get across it and so on.

20:00 Well that took us another two or three days and we got to Adelaide River where we camped for a while and later on went for the fifty seven mile to Darwin. We had to look after the whole of the 19th Brigade or whatever they were doing and it was while I was up there that I got my first stripe. That was worth a packet because you didn't have to go on guard duty, you had to look after the guard or the picket.

20:30 **Did they let you know why they gave you the stripe?**

You didn't ask why or they might take it off you. No, they just, but it turned out that there were about

five of us that had got it at the same time and we were all the reinforcements. We got it in front of all these originals and this was strange.

Did that create tension?

Pardon?

21:00 **Did that create tension?**

No, I don't think so. It was no good, you didn't have any tension in the army, it didn't do you any good, you had no comeback. Whatever they did, that was law, you just took it.

In that drive up to Darwin, were you involved in actually doing the driving yourself or were you just a passenger?

21:30 I was lucky. What we did, we had to, while we were on the train you just sat in the cabin and at night you'd sleep in the back of the truck. Well I had a utility that was full of all the oils and greases and everything else and I had a really comfortable ride during the day and I had to go back to one of the trucks to sleep at night and then when we got to Alice Springs

22:00 I had to drive this utility. Oh gee, I was just fortunate. Don't know why I got it.

So you drove all the way up from there?

Oh yeah.

Were those, were some of those paths and rough roads you took, were they dangerous going in those days?

Oh not dangerous but they were rough. The only danger was that you might fall asleep, fall asleep driving because you only did thirty five miles an hour and there was dust.

22:30 You got the dust of the one in front of you and, God! It wasn't so bad going from Durban to Darwin, it was just a new track and it was all, you couldn't go fast. You had to round bends and round logs and all this sort of thing but from Alice Springs to Durban, gee that was hard, you could go to sleep easily. They stopped now and then to give you a break. Later on …

23:00 **How many hours at a time would you drive without having a break?**

Oh I couldn't say. I couldn't remember that but it wasn't long. You might go for an hour or so, I suppose. They'd only stop for about five or ten minutes and away you'd go again.

How many vehicles were travelling all up round about do you reckon?

Well there was round about a hundred in our company so there'd be at least those.

23:30 There were thirty odd in a platoon and there were three platoons plus the, then headquarters, oh and workshops would have another few. There'd be about a hundred all told.

So I'm still not a hundred percent sure, you did get a chance to go to Warren for a little while before you made that

24:00 **drive up, is that right?**

Well actually I didn't go to Warren. Esme came down to Sydney, met me down here, and we spent the time in Sydney. We went to, forget the name of the place now, out of Windsor somewhere, spent the time there because other than that you wasted three days' travelling time. Because you got the travelling time, didn't say you

24:30 had to use it, that you had to get on the train, that was on your leave pass and so you could spend it where you liked. So to save that she came down to meet me down here but it only happened three times, once when we got back from Darwin, oh from Adelaide, from the Middle East, then after we were twelve months in Darwin I got fourteen days then,

25:00 and then before we went to New Guinea I got another fourteen days. That was all, then I went twenty three months before I saw her again.

Okay, so tell me about what happened when you arrived in Darwin?

Well do you want to know exactly?

I sure do.

Well we lobbed at Adelaide River which

25:30 we had to, anything to do with Darwin, that was our camp, at Adelaide River. One the first day we got there we had to go and unload a train and on this train was beer, crates of it. Beer came in crates, there was forty eight to a crate and it was, had, they had sleeves of straw. Anyhow

26:00 we had to unload these, we didn't, we just drove, that was our job. There was troops there to unload us and we had to take those to the canteen depot at Adelaide River. Well that was all right, we made several trips. Well then the last one I made, I got it unloaded bar three or four crates and the dinner bell of the canteen fellas unloading it, their dinner gong

26:30 or whatever they had went, and boy, they weren't going to wait, that was it, they just cleared off. Well we couldn't unload the crates so the only thing we could do, we had to go home, go back to our camp and have our lunch. So back we went and while we were having lunch someone took our crates off, disposed of all the timber and put all the beer under our beds, but the only thing was we had to clear the camp that night,

27:00 had to burn it off, it was long grass, we had to burn all round it and while we were doing that the workshop platoon they knew what had happened, while we were out burning all this off, they came and pinched all our bloody beer, the buggers, and we missed out on it. That was the way it was in the army. Everyone thought, well beer was the most sought after commodity and everyone that handled it

27:30 felt they had a right to sample it and when it's tossed up to you, what can you do? You weren't going to say, "Look, you left this on my truck." No-one knew about it and we didn't hear any more about it.

But you didn't get to drink a drop of it after all?

No. I wasn't, it never worried me that much if I didn't get it anyhow, but it did a lot of fellas. That was, but you always like to get some. If you could get it, well you got it,

28:00 and being in the transport, and we handled a lot of it, I did get my share of it over the period, I suppose.

So when you arrived at Adelaide River, the camp was already set up there? There were already other troops there or you had to build the whole thing?

Oh we had to do it all ourselves and from there on we had to always do that. We stayed there for a while.

What sort of things were going on with the other troops? Were they doing any preparation? Were they doing training?

They were starting

28:30 to get ready for manoeuvres. Well later on, it wasn't long after, 'cause we had to unload ships if they were coming into Darwin, and then we moved up and made camp on what was called, what was this fifty seven mile from Darwin, and while we were there the troops would go on manoeuvres and there was one in particular, we had to line

29:00 up ready at eleven o'clock one day to go and pick up the 4th Battalion or something troops and we stayed, we waited and waited at the camp, not moving, and eventually word came round that we were to put our trucks back on the line and they had found out that the wireless at brigade headquarters wouldn't work. They had gone out before us to where these manoeuvres would be

29:30 and the radio wouldn't work. Naturally they had to be in touch with army headquarters in case anything happened and what had turned out, as they found out many years later, that's where they found the uranium, the first lot, the radio wouldn't work because of the uranium and never thought of that until someone found it. I thought, "Well they offered twenty five thousand pounds if anyone could find uranium,"

30:00 and after that I thought, "Gee that was stupid, I should have woken up to that." It was up round this Rum Jungle where they were going to have the manoeuvres. We used to take them because we had to feed them all the time. Once they got there they had to be fed, each unit. It was our job to see that they got the supplies and …

So that kept you pretty busy most days?

Oh you worked every day.

30:30 **What would a typical day be like for you at that stage?**

Oh well you'd have to go to the DID and pick up the supplies. You'd have a list of who was what, each one.

The DID is?

Ah?

The DID is?

Oh I forget what it stood for now but that was the bulk supply depot and there'd be so much for some

31:00 part, say the 2/4th Battalion, and we were just given an idea of where they were. How the hell we ever found them, I don't know 'cause there was no signposts, there was the bush and you had to go to these places and find the unit. All it had on the side of the road was a colour thing to tell you which was what,

and that's what we did.

Did you have to use maps and …?

What?

Did you use a map and a compass

31:30 **sometimes?**

No, there were no maps or compasses, no maps of the place. If there was, well the headquarters would have a map, naturally, of who was what but we certainly didn't.

Did you ever get lost?

No, I don't know why we didn't. No-one seemed to, they always got back all right. And one of the jobs we had to do was the Yanks had a –

32:00 you've heard of Batchelor, the air strip? – it's an airport now, Batchelor. Well that was just an airstrip which, the Yanks had all their Liberators there and we had to keep the petrol up to them. It used to take thirty six drums, forty four gallon drums, to fill one Liberator and we could put eighteen drums on our trucks. So it took two trucks to fill one Liberator, so we'd have to go down to, and the depot,

32:30 the petrol depot was at Adelaide River, so we'd have to go down to Adelaide River and unfortunately with that we had to load our own drums because if it was just one job we'd have to load, fill our trucks and away we'd go and they never got the battalions down there, we'd have to cart them everywhere and the drivers would have to take, well in my case I had a mate that was a, from the bush, and we could load

33:00 the forty four gallon drums with just two of us. And we'd load those and away we'd go and we'd get back home quicker. The others, some of the city fellows never lifted anything, it would take three or four of them to load a truck and then we'd take it out to Batchelor and leave them there with the Yanks. They used to go over every night to the islands and New Guinea or somewhere and drop their bombs and that, and

33:30 that was just one of our jobs. We did all sorts of things. We'd unload any ships that came in and not that many did because it took a while after the bombing before any ships came into Darwin harbour, they were only cargo ships. When we left Darwin the main body of the 19th Brigade came back by ship and I was one of the rear party and had to come all the way back by road and

34:00 train, right down to Adelaide and round. It was a God-forsaken place, there was nothing to do up there round Darwin. You couldn't swim because of the alligators 'cause the tides, the tides, you know, at Darwin, it rises twenty six feet a day and you had to be careful. We went up to one of the rivers once and camped for the day and we

34:30 were loath to swim, the tide was going out and we had to just catch it, get in and have a swim and be careful and get out before the tide started to come in again because it was that swift, rising that fast that it would just go and everything up the creek. There was nothing to do there. It was, I feel sorry for those, there were a lot of fellas, especially in the ack-ack, that stayed there all the time,

35:00 waiting for someone to come over. But the Jap bombers used to come over now and again, always at night, but they'd wait till there was a ship in, and we were unloading the ships at night, when they'd start to drop their bombs.

Did the bombs get close to you?

No, oh I hope not. You had to scatter and that as soon as you got the word that they were coming, the sirens would go and you'd hear them and we'd be say waiting up the main street to get our, in the queue

35:30 to get down to the boat and you just had to disperse and you went somewhere but oh it was like a pin in a haystack. If you copped it, it was too bad but no-one ever did. They dropped a lot of bombs at random.

Did it take a bit of getting used to initially?

No, I don't think so, you just, that was it, you couldn't do anything, you had to stay.

How long had it been since the initial bombing of

36:00 **Darwin till you got up there?**

A couple of months, that was all.

Did you see much of the damage that had been done?

Oh you saw the damage. Well see, Darwin in those days was only one main street, it was just like a country town with one main street, with about a dozen shops, a post office. I suppose there was a pub, which I didn't see, but there was, the post office was where the main body went.

36:30 And the wharf was still there. I'm not sure, we never got up to the oil depot but I think, whether they hit that or not, I can't remember, but the main street, there might have been one shop or something hit but when they, after the bombing they told everyone in Darwin, all the civilians, to go, to get and we were fortunate, we were able to go

37:00 and help ourselves to a table and whatever seats or that that we could find in the café or whatever was there, shops, and we took them back to our camp and every truck had a tarp [tarpaulin] on it and, well, you strung a tarp up over something and put the table in it. That was our, where we used to play poker, poker and pontoon of a night, and we went to the trouble of putting one of the trucks alongside and it used to

37:30 travel out over the thing and that was our recreation.

That was the main nocturnal recreation in Darwin?

That was the only, there was nothing else, nothing else to do.

So Darwin was very much a ghost town?

Oh yes, there was no civilians there.

All the shops were closed?

Oh they were open. There was nothing in them. Whatever was there when they were bombed, well someone got it,

38:00 it was gone when we got there. There was nothing there and we were lucky we were able to get a table, just an ordinary café table with iron legs, that sort of thing.

Were you getting a chance to chat much with the American blokes that you struck there?

Oh no, they were at Batchelor, they never got anywhere else. I did say to one once, I was looking at this what's- its-name, the Liberator, and I said, "Gee aren't they big?" and this fellow, the Yank,

38:30 came over and he said, "What do you reckon of these buddy?" and I said, "Why? Have you got something bigger?" He said, "No, but those British have. You ought to see those Lancasters that they've got." So to come from a Yank, they must have been big. That was the only conversation I had with them there. I did up in New Guinea, there were lots there.

So how long were you there in Adelaide River?

Oh only a matter of weeks,

39:00 then we went, we were mainly camped up at the 57 Mile because it was more central for what we had to do.

And you were aware that you were about to be sent up north? They told you what was in store for you?

No, no they don't tell you anything, no. We didn't know where we were going to be tomorrow. We could have been going from Darwin to one of the islands or we could have been going home,

39:30 the war could have been ending, you never knew what was going to happen from one day to another.

Were they giving you any training for jungle conditions or anything like that?

Not us, no, the infantry they probably did, they mostly got that when they went to the Atherton Tablelands. See there's no jungle up round Darwin, it was just bush and that sort of thing but around the Atherton Tablelands there was jungle similar

40:00 to what you'd strike in New Guinea, lawyer vines and those matted sort of territory.

Is that where you headed off to next, from …?

From there we headed to, we went, we came down, we went to the Atherton Tablelands where we, well that was the training, the kicking off ground for everybody. There were 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions there plus core troops there I suppose, and

40:30 there was a big DID there which some of our fellows worked in portions of it, and that was one of our jobs, taking, some of our chaps would have to go to the different butter factories in the different towns around there, out of Atherton, and pick up so much milk at one and there'd be meat stored at another and all that sort of thing we had to do and take it back

41:00 to the DID and then at the DID it would be all sorted out and our, one of our sections worked out how much each unit should get each day and so on and then the trucks would pick it up and take it out to the …. That was easier because there were roads round there and you knew where each unit was but we were only concerned with the 6th Division,

41:30 and they were at a place called Wondecla. We were camped at a place called Wongrabelle, which wasn't

far out of Atherton, mainly because it was central because we had so many supplies and things to pick up in Atherton.

Would you drive, did you do those runs with just you in the vehicle or would you have an offsider?

In the, it was laid down in the what's-its-name, you had a driver and an offsider but it got …

Tape 7

00:34 **Victor, just to take you back to the times in Australia when you had leave, there was a dormitory at Central Station in Sydney which the army used for soldiers on leave.**

I don't know about the dormitory but there was an office there where they, staff were there to give you your leave pass.

01:00 If you required travelling time, they gave you a leave pass to, that covered the travelling time.

Okay, so there was no sleeping quarters at Central Station?

Not that I know of. I never needed them anyhow but there could have been some place there where they put you up if you missed your train or had to wait for a train or something like that. I don't know about that.

Okay, that's fine. We'll move back to the Atherton Tablelands and

01:30 **apparently that's where they bought the, you were using a new kind of truck, the Americans' trucks, can you tell us about those?**

Yes, when we got there, to the Tablelands, there were old Chev trucks, old lorries, the old pre-war things and this day we had to go down to the depot at Tolga, the ordnance depot and there were these

02:00 brand new GMC trucks, six wheelers. They had a four wheel drive and they had an overdrive which you could shove it in and they were left hand drive, which was quite new to us, but they were beaut trucks. Anyhow, we picked those up in the morning and in the

02:30 afternoon we had to pick up the 2/4th Battalion and take them down to Innisfail. I don't know what happened but out of Atherton there is two ways of getting down to the coast. One is the normal road but then there's what they call the Gillies Highway and that highway is a one way track. It's narrow, it's steep and there's

03:00 Lord knows how many feet of gully one side, hairpin bends and everything and probably still is, it's one way up and one way down. They allow you twenty minutes to go down that. You've got to stick to round about twenty minutes. If you do it less than twenty minutes you get booked and if you take too long you probably get booked too. Well with these left hand drives and everything to go down this,

03:30 there's no barriers or anything, it was just a steep drop down the side. We had to take the 2/4th down in the backs and I think all of them, by the time we got to the bottom and they heard that it was our first trip down with these trucks, I think most of them were just about sick. But that's, we had those trucks, they were what we had right through, took them to New Guinea and everything else but they were good trucks. Broke a lot of springs

04:00 in New Guinea though, it was very rough terrain there and our main trouble was breaking springs.

At the Atherton Tablelands you talk about the provos [Provosts – Military Police]. Can you tell us who the provos were and why you had trouble with them?

'Cause they were the military police and they were God Almighty

04:30 and they exerted their authority. The speed limit in the army was thirty five miles an hour and they went out of their way to book you. They did anything to, they didn't get any reward for it because there was no, not like anything else. Well everyone hated them, I'll say that. I think I've got a right to say it without anyone suing me but they were hated.

05:00 There was one particular spot out of Wondecla. They were camped on a, just before you got into Wondecla, on the side of the road. They had to check the trucks for what, I don't know what, but we'd be coming in there with a load of milk, or with the milk for some things and while they're looking over all the dixies and that, they took a dixie of milk each, those sort

05:30 of things, and then they'd book a fella for speeding later on, no, they, we hated them.

How much, if you were going over the speed limit, how much would you get booked over that time?

I forget now what, but it all depended what the CO or the OC [Officer Commanding], when you got charged, what he'd charge you, whether you got

06:00 confined to your barracks or something like that. It was against you anyhow, whatever they did.

If they charged you money, it would come out of your own pocket?

Came out of your pay book. Oh anyone that was fined, whatever it was, it was just marked against in your pay book and, say it was a drawing, oh no, it was, but I never got hit so I don't know what it was.

And after that you got marshalled

06:30 **to actually leave Australia, after the Atherton Tablelands?**

I got what?

You got marshalled, they marshalled you to leave, they told you you were going to go overseas, to get ready to go overseas? That happened while you were at the Atherton Tablelands?

Yes, and while I was there, fortunately, I haven't told you this, but I got my second stripe on the Atherton Tablelands.

What did you get that for?

Well just promotion.

07:00 **For doing your work? For just generally doing your work well?**

Well if some corporal or something got discharged or sick or something, someone had to take his place and someone got it. Well it all depended on the officer who he nominated and it wasn't a matter of crawling or anything like that. You got it because you were capable of doing the job, you had to be.

07:30 See the corporal, I've pointed this out a lot at funerals I've done, the corporal, they talk about the officer being a leader and all that. You've heard of that? The officer wasn't the leader of the men, the corporal was the leader. He was the one, the officer gave the orders to the sergeant and he allocated who was to do the job and he gave the corporal the instructions, the job he had to do, and it was the corporal who had to see

08:00 that it was carried out. In the infantry he was the one that led his men into action. The officer could be miles away, or the sergeant, but the corporal had to lead his men to see that they did the job that was allocated to him.

So with two stripes that you now had you're now a corporal?

Yeah.

So were you given extra responsibilities?

Yes, you were in charge of the section. You had

08:30 sixteen men, oh fifteen men, and you were in charge of them and when you got a job to do, your section, you said which trucks were to do it.

Was that, was it difficult sometimes to tell men who had been in the same position as you, once you'd suddenly become a corporal, to tell them what to do when you used to be together?

No trouble at all. They knew you were the corporal, that was your job, and

09:00 no-one ever queried you. I think in some units or other, some fellas were hated but that certainly wasn't in our unit. Everyone was quite happy to be doing what they were doing.

So how did you end up on the Liberty ship? Tell us how that happened.

What we did, we were told we were going overseas

09:30 and we all guessed it was New Guinea, they don't tell you where because it might get out. Well what we did, there was a section corporal and there was eight trucks in it and the drivers and the eight trucks, we had to go down to Cairns. This was in my section, but it took in the whole unit and others too, there was a hundred odd drivers all told.

10:00 We had to take our trucks to Cairns and we put them down by the wharf and left them there for the wharf labourers to load them onto this Liberty ship. We went then up to a staging camp for the night and when we got there they paraded us and they told us, they said, "Now we want volunteer cooks, all there is on this is the section

10:30 corporal and the drivers, no-one else, we want some volunteers." Naturally no-one's going to volunteer, especially when you're on a ship, because when you're on a ship you're going to spine bash most of the time anyhow.

Spine bash?

Lay on your back, rest, and anyhow naturally no-one stepped out and then the officer said, “What we’re going to do if we can’t get anyone,

11:00 we’ll just give you a tin of bully and a couple of biscuits and you share that between two of you for the trip for each meal,” and I thought, ‘Oh God, I know enough, being in the bush all the time, I know enough about cooking and I can do it and at least I’ll be able to feed myself,’ so I stepped out. Well with that a couple of me mates said, “Gee, if it’s good enough for you Vic,” so out they came with me and so what they did, they said, “Right, we’re taking you straight down to the ship to show you round.”

11:30 Well the Liberty ships were all steel. They were, they made six hundred of them, they were all welded together and everything, it was some new idea, and what we had to do was to, there was no galley for us, they had a galley for the ship’s crew. We had to cook on the deck and they had a channel, steel things, a channel where they put the fire

12:00 in. Normally, in the Middle East, they had a big blow torch up one end, used to go along this thing, and that was, because there was no fuel there I suppose, but this one they had green timber from the Atherton Tablelands and that was what we were to use for cooking. But anyhow they showed us the thing, all the food that was there,

12:30 and all I could see, what I saw was rolled oats and all the time I’d been in the army I’d never had a bit of rolled oats, no porridge or anything. And I thought I, as a boy we used to have to take our turns as to who had to make the porridge in the morning, and I could remember that you had to soak it overnight and it was five cups of water and one cup of rolled oats. So that night, what I did, I got a big dixie and I counted out five cups of water and

13:00 made a note of that and counted out how many five cups that I put into this thing and when I got up so far I thought, ‘Now that’s three quarters,’ or whatever it was and I could remember that, and that’s say, I forget now how many cups of rolled oats I’d need, and that was it. The next day all the troops came down and that afternoon I

13:30 filled this thing up with water up to where it was and put in so many cups of rolled oats to go with it and that was going to soak overnight. But when the troops got there, they had to sleep down the hold and we were to sleep on deck. They had a canopy over it where we could sleep and of course down in the hold the wharf labourers,

14:00 as I told you about beer, didn’t matter who handled it they were entitled, as they thought, to sample it. So on this ship there was on the bottom, as the wharf labourers told these fellas, “There’s ammunition, then on top of that there’s canteen supplies and included in the canteen supplies is so much beer. On top of that there’s so much barbed wire and then

14:30 on top of that there’s the trucks.” They said, “We’ve left an opening into where the beer is for you,” so that was that, that’s all they had to tell them. Well as soon as they got there they had to see what these wharf labourers were talking about, so they started to look for this beer. Of course it was in crates, forty eight to the crate with the straw and everything, and they got it. They couldn’t throw the stuff

15:00 away so they brought the straw and the timber off the crates that they’d taken up to us and that was what they called kindling, how you light the fire. As it turned out, if we hadn’t had we wouldn’t have had anything to eat because you couldn’t have lit this green timber from the Atherton Tablelands. Well Lord knows, I don’t know how many, not bottles, but how many hundreds of bottles

15:30 of beer they got. They were like a rabbit warren, going through this place where they got. I went to go down to get my share and they hunted me, they said, “We’ll look after you Vic, you get up there with your mates up there, we’ll look after you,” and this was it. They were half full every day and when we had this porridge, oh boy, they’d never had it before and that was it, that seemed to do them for the day I think,

16:00 and me other mates they were looking after the tins and they had meat and vegetables or bully beef or herrings and tomato sauce or whatever was on, it was all tinned stuff. But the porridge, by gee, that answered the thing. Well that was that, say it wasn’t until we got out and it started to get rough that the officers, the officer in charge told us that was it and they confiscated whatever beer they could see.

16:30 **Were the blokes getting obviously drunk on board?**

They were merry, they were happy with what they were doing.

Who was in charge of distributing all the beer or did they just go and help themselves?

Each one, oh you take your turn, well if there was someone they might hand out fifty, a hundred bottles, well it wasn’t all yours, you shared it, I think that’s what you did. They were

17:00 right anyhow, there was plenty of it. Well they confiscated a lot of it. Well when we got shipwrecked they handed it all back but I think what happened, the crew and I think the captain was in it too, they’d had their share of it, they got it the night before we got there.

Was it an American crew that was sailing?

Oh yes, American. They were, when they got to a certain point they got more war money or whatever, and

17:30 when we got shipwrecked they were on shipwreck money. Oh they made a fortune out of that trip and they were all these Yanks. As I say, we used to keep our butter or whatever it was down in the galley. They had a freezing place there or something and they said, “Oh, you’d better come down here for your meals,” so as cooks we just, didn’t have whatever the troops had, we used to go down and have ham and eggs. The Yanks looked after themselves,

18:00 they had the best of everything.

What, were they naval people?

No, no.

Who were they travelling with you?

No, just civilians, seamen, half of them didn’t know anything. They couldn’t navigate, they were hopeless.

So there were civilian Americans on that Liberty?

They were the crew.

Oh the crew?

They were it, they were the crew.

And then you had some American troops going up to New Guinea as well?

No.

18:30 No, no, they were there when we got there.

And how did you get on with the civilian, the American civilians on the ship? Did you socialise with them?

Well if you wanted to, I can’t remember what we did. You’d only talk, like a crew on a ship they’re on shift, so many hours on and off and when they’re off they only go to sleep, and on a ship like that there’d only be, well the

19:00 only things they’d have to do would be up in the bridge, see the ship’s running right, or down in the engine room. That’s the only crew that they have. They don’t have like a lot of navy fellas wandering around looking for, not even a picket looking for submarines, and we didn’t supply any.

So it was in their interest to have a shipwreck, in a way, if they could get out of it because they could get some money for it?

19:30 More or less, yes, but of course the ship could get broken up or ten feet under. If we’d hit these rocks we would have all been drowned probably because you wouldn’t have been able to get off. We’d have been bashed to death before we got to the land.

Tell us how the shipwreck happened?

Oh it just happened. We were just going along and all of a sudden it stopped.

And you were off the coast of Cairns then?

We were heading along the coast.

20:00 We were supposed to follow the coast along to Ideberry, but New Guinea, it goes from south to east to north-west, it’s on that slope, and these fellas, someone must have told them to turn left and go along and then turned left and they didn’t say, “You’ve got to go sort of north on a northwest angle,” and they just kept going. It was pitch black

20:30 at night, rough sea and everything and, as I say, all of a sudden it just stopped dead, not even a crunch. When they put the searchlights on there were these coconut palms a couple of hundred yards away, and the sea just bashing against the side of the ship.

So you had to get off the ship?

No, no, they told us if it broke up we were to get over the side the best we could and

21:00 try and wade to shore. We stayed there the night and was half awake sort of thing and the next morning, or some time the next morning, a destroyer came and put a line on and towed us off and from there we went to Lae and they had a look at us and the hull and everything was right so we headed for Ideberry.

And there was some story

21:30 **that you got, there was some money passed around for the cooks for the great job the cooks did?**

Oh these fellas, because we did, they took around the hat and I think we got about five pounds each for looking after them.

This was the Americans gave you this money or the troops?

No, our own fellas, but oh I say, what we did for them, we did feed them, it's surprising what you can do if you've got any nous as far as cooking.

22:00 It was all, army food was all in the tin and there was what they called meat and vegetables, 'M and V', tinned sausages, bully beef, which is still on the shelves, the same thing in a funny tin. There's herrings and tomato sauce, there seemed to be a lot of those because they were supposed to give Catholics a fish on Fridays and they had to come from overseas for them,

22:30 from England, wherever they tinned these things. They were in an oval shaped tin, remember? So anyhow, we fed them. There was no bread or anything. You got biscuits with bully, what's-its-name biscuits, which was hard as hell, break your teeth on them.

So you finally ended up in Aitape?

We did, yes. I might as well tell you now I was only there for

23:00 a few days and we were camped there and my platoon captain, Captain Price, said, "Corporal, you've got to go and see the OC," didn't tell me what it was about or anything, so up I go and I saw the sergeant-major and he paraded me into the OC's pen and I said, "You wanted to see me sir?" and he said, "Yes corporal,

23:30 I want you to run the canteen." Well the first reaction that I had I said, "Oh crikey sir, I didn't join the army to run a shop," and he said, "Beg your pardon corporal, I'm the boss, you do as you're told," and I said, "All right," and I hadn't been used to, I could talk to my boss and that and I said, "Well I'll tell you what I'll do sir,"

24:00 and he said, "I'm still the boss Corporal, but what is it?" I said, "I'll do it until you get someone else," and he straight away said, "Oh well, fair enough Corporal, that will do." It wasn't till some time afterwards that I thought, 'You silly bugger, of course he was happy about it because he wasn't going to try and get anybody else,' so I was there for good. And he said, "Now the sergeant,

24:30 the (UNCLEAR) sergeant of headquarters, he'll give you all the instructions. You can pick your own offsider. You can get a driver as an offsider to help you and he'll tell you what you've got to do. But you'll get five percent discount from the bulk canteen and that will be the profit you've got to show for the regimental funds." So out I go and the sergeant saw me and he said, "Oh Vic, you got the job?" and I said, "Yes, unfortunately, but I …"

25:00 He said, "Now you've got to pick up the bulk supplies on Thursday and it's tomorrow you start." And he said, "The beer ration is two bottles a man a week, when available." He said, "You've got to get a requisition for the strengths to take down to the canteen." He said, "Now on the canteen day I'll be adding twelve onto the strength."

25:30 He said, "Now that's twelve bottles for me and twelve bottles for you. Is that all right?" And I thought, 'Gee, that's a good start.' So I said, "Yes, all right." Now then, when I got down to the canteen I had to shift me things into the canteen that they had already made for it and there was an old one of the originals. He'd woken up to the fact that one of the best jobs in the thing

26:00 was the cook's offsider and he'd got himself a job as a cook's offsider. Well this fella, named Val Bates, he come up and he said, "Look Vic," and he showed me a little funny thing. I said, "What's that?" and he said, "It's what they call a re-sealer." They use it now, these fellas, to make home brew. It's when, you know the caps you put on beer? You put this over and you hit it with the hammer and it brings the seal down and seals the bottle.

26:30 Well it was the honour system but when you got all these cases from the canteen, the bulk canteen, they weren't going to open it to see how many broken ones were in or anything else, but what you did, any broken bottles, you took the neck with the seal on it down to the canteen and they replaced them. So what you did with the, no-one had a bottle opener, you

27:00 used to hold the neck of the bottle, with your forefinger like that and with your tobacco tin, you rested that on your forefinger, put the other bit under the seal and gave it a quick what's it's name and off came the seal without damaging it. Well then when the bottle was empty, what you'd do, you put the seal on the top with this thing over the top, hit it and lo you've got an empty bottle that's not broken.

27:30 So what you do is you hit it on something, all you want is the neck. I said, "Oh that's good Val, how much do you want for it?" "Don't be silly Vic, it's not for sale." I said, "What are you showing me for?" He said, "It's going to cost you six bottles a week." I thought, 'Oh God.' So anyhow I had to give him six bottles and I had the re-sealer.

28:00 So anyhow, the next day I've got to go to the bulk canteen. I go up to the sergeant and he said, "It's right, I've got the twelve. Take it in to Captain Murdoch and he'll sign the requisition." So I go into Captain Murdoch and say, "Will you please sign this sir, it's the requisition for the canteen." "Oh good." So he grabs it and he looks at it and he says, "What the hell's this sergeant doing?" So he got a rubber and somehow he rubbed the damn thing out

28:30 and when I went out I said to the sergeant, "He's awake up to you." He said, "Why, what's he done?" and I showed him and he said, "Oh God." He said, "He's awake all right," he said, "He's added fifty onto my figure." So that was that. I had a list of all the names because I made sure everyone got his beer. When they knocked off they came in and got their two bottles.

29:00 It was one and threepence a bottle and they paid one and threepence for their two bottles. They walked a hundred yards and the Yanks were there with jeeps and that and they were paying them a pound a bottle for it. Well no Australian could afford to drink beer at that price, so what they paid two and six for they ended up with two pounds in their pocket, never been so wealthy in all their army career. So that was that, I did all that.

29:30 **So the Australians were dry most of the time?**

Dry? Oh yes, the beer wasn't on all the time. It was very seldom there was beer. They had to wait for a ship load whenever it was.

But when it did come in they sold it to the Yanks so they ended up with no beer?

No beer, yes, because two pounds, that was money, they had a chance of turning that into fifty, a hundred at the sly game but anyhow

30:00 they used to sell it on as I said. My offsider told me, "Come and sell some of our fourteen," so I had, I always wanted to be in front of them so that I could show the five percent. Well anyhow, the finish of it, when that had just about come in, along came this captain, "How's things going corporal?" and I said, "Oh good sir." "Everyone got their beer?" And I said, "No, there's some of the drivers yet to come and get theirs."

30:30 And he thought for a bit and he said, "Did you have any over?" and I said, "As a matter of fact we did sir, as it happened." And he said, "How many?" and I said, "Those two cases." Well that was forty eight of them and give him the benefit of our spare ones and he said, "Oh fancy that," and was surprised about it and eventually he said, "Will a case do you corporal?" and I said, "Yes,"

31:00 and he said, "How much do I owe you? My jeep will be over in two minutes to pick it up." Well that was going to the Officers' Mess and of course the head of the Officers' Mess was the officer commander, so they all knew about it and this was what happened at every canteen day and no sign of me getting out of it. I used to, I sold some, what happened after I got my fifty

31:30 I was, always felt that I had a conscience and be fair and I used to walk through the lines and if I saw someone drinking his beer, I thought, "Well fair enough," and I'd say, "Look, slip up the canteen in about ten minutes and I'll sell you another couple." I didn't have to worry too much because there wasn't many, that many drinking their beer but if anyone thought enough and didn't want to sell it I sold them some

32:00 but like a silly galah, I was the boss, I was the corporal and I said to my offsider, "We'll go fifty-fifty in whatever we can make," and so this was what happened. We drank a lot. We had a lot of mates between us and we drank a lot and sold so much of it and then the Yanks used to come around to your canteen and they loved Cadbury's chocolate.

32:30 Well in those days they had the quarter pounds and the half pounds. The quarter pounds were nine pence and the half pounds one and six. Well I worked out this, they wouldn't get this for nothing so I used to charge them just double, one and six and three bob. And it got that way that I was buying it by the case and selling it to them by the case and I thought there was no end to it but of course there was a spy game going on too and I think half of what we made

33:00 was lost on the two-up.

Did the Americans ever wise up to the fact that you were charging them heaps more for the chocolate and the beer?

No, they had more money than they knew what to do with it. Our fellas, say just the ordinary drivers, they only got five bob a day. The Yanks got about two or three quid a day. They had nowhere to spend it. They just had more money than they knew what to do with.

33:30 They never queried the price of the Cadbury chocolate because they loved it and I think what was happening was they were buying it by the case and selling it to their mates for probably double that. However, what happened, this went on for a while and I had to take stock every week and I knew enough about book-keeping that I could work it out that exactly was five percent for the regimental funds. Whatever was more than that in the till, my mate

34:00 (UNCLEAR), we cut it into spare and we had half each. Eventually what happened, my platoon captain,

Captain Price, he said, “Look Vic and (UNCLEAR), it’s about time you put on a party. You’ve been there a month or two and you haven’t put on a party yet, what about it?” So I said, “All right, we’ll have it tonight.” I got a few of my mates to come and we had this party in the canteen when it was shut, at eight o’clock or something,

34:30 and we were drinking away there and I said, “Now what you’ve got to do, you’ve got to put one and threepence in the till for every bottle you take out or that’s it.” After a while I’ve had enough and I said, “Look, I’m going to get on my cot,” and so I went to bed and I said, “Now don’t forget to put the one and threepence in.” I thought, ‘Well now they’ll only want another bottle, if that.’

35:00 So anyhow, that was it, I went to sleep. Next morning I got up and I wasn’t feeling too good but, they’d got into this, there was a case there of Captain Murdoch’s, he hadn’t picked his case up. It was open and I thought, ‘Oh God.’ Well what had happened, all these fellas after I got to sleep, they decided to go but they took half a dozen or so bottles each back to their tent and I

35:30 was short. Captain Murdoch came down the next day, “How things going, Corporal? Where’s my beer?” and I said, “Gee, not so good sir, not so good,” and he said, “Why, what’s the matter?” and I said, “I had a party last night and they drank some of your beer.” Oh that was a different story wasn’t it, he wasn’t so happy and, “Oh,” he said. He said, “Well now I want you to take stock, see

36:00 how things are and I’ll be back in a couple of hours.” So away he went and I took stock and everything else and when he came back I said, ‘So many bottles short.’ Oh, in the meantime this cook, Alf Bates, came up and said I’d better sell him some beer and I said, “Alf, I can’t, I’m in strife,” and eventually he said, “Look Vic, you might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb, sell us six bottles.” Tried it on and I’ve never forgotten

36:30 those things. So anyhow, Captain Murdoch came back and I told him how many short we were and he said, “Oh,” and he said, “Anyhow corporal, Corporal Roberts will take over from you at two o’clock, you go back to your lines,” and I was out of the canteen. I was able to run my section again after all that but oh gee and nothing happened. I could have kicked up a fuss

37:00 ‘cause even the OC [Officer Commanding] knew all about it because he was drinking his share of it but you don’t do those sort of things. I’d had my fun and got my beer and I ended up putting the lot through the bloody two-up.

You lost it all?

I lost eighty five quid in one night.

Was that the most popular game at the camp?

Oh it was the only game. Where you could, if you could work it you could

37:30 play poker or, what’s the name of the other game?

Monopoly, you mentioned Monopoly?

Oh yes you played that in the rec hut. You didn’t gamble with that. Pontoon was the other, poker or pontoon. But there was nothing much you did. You, I was able, I asked the OC if I could go anywhere to buy any stuff.

38:00 I could go, if there was a boat in I could go to their canteen and buy anything that I thought was different. I could go to the Yank, what they called a PX [Post Exchange – American canteen unit] was their canteen. I could go and buy anything there. What they used to do, they used to bring in books, magazines and they had one beautiful copy of War and Peace. You know the Tolstoy story?

38:30 Oh no, my father-in-law, he was well read and read anything. I thought, “Gee this looks lovely.” I’d never heard of War and Peace but it looked a good book and I bought that and sent it back to him and, oh boy, was I his blue-eyed boy. He thought it was Christmas, and I think of him and that, but I used to buy these magazines. I didn’t have to worry about the regimental funds. Whatever profits I made on those went to my mate and myself but oh dear it was an experience being in there.

39:00 **What else happened that was really, that you remember, that stands out?**

Well New Guinea was a place, not like Darwin, you could swim there and in an afternoon when all the trucks had come back we’d go down swimming. I went, one of my mates, he’s still around here, he lives at Miranda now,

39:30 another corporal and we went swimming this day. There were three, three or four of us. One was a corporal that could only just swim and there was an undertow and he started to be taken out. I saw what was happening and so did Glen Taylor and he went and grabbed this fellow. Knew enough about him, he was about his weight and size but he

40:00 knew a bit about lifesaving I think and the other and he held onto him and out they went, oh God, hundreds of yards and started to go down the coast. And all I could think of was, “I’ve got to get back,” and I ran, stark bollocky back to the camp, right up to the orderly room to tell Captain Price, “There’s two fellas, they’ve been carried out, you’d better get down and

40:30 rescue them." Back I went. I don't know what happened but by the time I got back hundreds and hundreds of yards, right down the coast, they'd come ashore. Oh gee, this little fella, look, it's a wonder the sharks didn't get them. It was just something wonderful, I could see these two fellas getting out of the water. But the

41:00 surf was good there in New Guinea but that was one thing we could do to break the monotony.

And what stage was the war? Did you have any contact with the soldiers that were coming back from any of the battles?

Oh we used, yes, you heard all about that because we used to go and, we had to go and take the food up to them. We'd hear anything that happened,

41:30 that so and so, they lost a man, or they got so many Japs or they did this or that, you'd always hear that but there wasn't many because where we were going there was a mountain range only about a mile or so from the coast and no-one went over the hills with our trucks, we just followed the coast right along between them

42:00 and how far the infantry went on the other side I don't know.

Tape 8

00:34 **Victor, so you were relieved of your canteen roles, your position was taken away from you, so that meant you returned to your vehicle. What sort of work were you doing then in the truck?**

I wasn't being, by this time, as I say, I was a corporal and I was the section, I was in charge of the section,

01:00 and all I had to do was, I could go with anyone. Say if I had several trucks, I'd go and see that the job was done properly, that was my job, but I could drive if I wanted to.

So you'd jump in one of the trucks with one of your men?

Yes, oh yes, that was quite interesting.

You'd supervise the jobs. So what sort of pick ups and deliveries were you doing in New Guinea?

Oh it was mainly supplies. See we did, all we were supposed to do was drive. Any

01:30 loading was done by the working parties, either say the canteen, the canteen loaded them on there, their men. If it was anything other than that, say a lot of heavy stuff, the infantry supplied working parties. It gave them something different to do. They were quite happy about it. It was different and broke the monotony, so that was all that there was with that.

02:00 **Were you mixing with many of the Yanks at that stage?**

While I was in the canteen I did strike a few of them because they used to come and buy things. They even asked me down to their camp one day , which in those days it was like a, their dining room or whatever you like to call it, where they had their meals, it was a beautiful big sort of a building with flyscreen

02:30 wire and everything all around it. No flies, no nothing, oh beautiful the way they had it.

Did you accept that offer and visit?

I did go down and they had what they called GI juice. It was ninety percent alcohol which they used to pinch from the hospitals. Oh God, it's a wonder I didn't die, gee it was potent stuff,

03:00 you only had a little tiddly bit but I had to try it, naturally, and I didn't know anything, what it was going to do, but they took me home and put me in me bed, but we didn't have much to do with them, no. They were there for quite a while until they had to go to the Philippines, MacArthur, there wasn't the demand in the finish for the beer, because they were nearly all gone.

How did you find the Americans that you did deal with?

03:30 Oh we found them all right, nothing wrong. They were smart fellas. They did anything. Some of them were quite smart. They used to make washing machines and take in washing sort of thing, all that. They'd

04:00 buy some of our canteen stuff to resell to their mates. Some of them had an eye for a bob. There was lots of stories that went around about them. Our fellows used to sell them Jap flags which they used to make and the story is that the Japs, the Yanks eventually found that they'd run out of Australian money and would they take American money

04:30 and they started to make the American money. But they were all right the Yanks, we got on all right with them, but they couldn't navigate. When we got to Cape Wong, which was just this side of Wewak, down below it was about two dozen crosses.

05:00 The 2/1st Field Regiment was there with their guns and the Yanks came along with their planes and strafed them and killed twenty four of them, of our own fellows. So after that, any bombing raids that the most of the Yanks did, RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] planes had to lead them in. They were more or less hopeless at navigating.

05:30 **So the Australians got quite good at getting their money off them, one way or another?**

Oh we got whatever we could. We sold anything.

Did you involve them in the two-up at all?

They didn't seem to take to that somehow, but what a lot of people did, they had these jackets – have you seen them? – I don't know what you call them now but a jacket,

06:00 it was waterproof and everything else, and they'd sell those. I bought one to send to my father-in-law. One of my unit fellows said, "If you're going to do that Vic, one of my mates is in the air force, he'll take it down and post it on the mainland for you if you like." Well I let him but I don't know whose father got it, or whose father-in-law, it wasn't my father-in-law. I had to buy another one and send him.

06:30 You get caught at your own sometimes. That was one that we, a lot of people bought their clothes off them. They were very good, good quality and everything else.

Are there any other events or highlights at Itachi that we should talk about or have we covered everything?

No, I was going to tell you what happened at

07:00 Wewak. When it was time to come home, before we came home, as I said, we had the medical and dental before we left when we joined the army and we had to have one before we left.

Just let us know, just tell us about arriving in Wewak. We may as well just continue to do that.

With our trucks we just …

The troops had advanced forward.

07:30 The troops had gone forward. At Wewak Point there was sort of a harbour there, the other side of Wewak, and there was this point similar to say, oh, like Cremorne Point, you know it goes down the main, but a lot higher and everything. The Japs, what they had done, they had tunnelled right

08:00 through this what's-its-name and they didn't have any camps or anything. That's where they lived and slept, all these tunnels under this Wewak Point. Well what happened, the artillery and the air force they just bombed all these and they closed up all the entrances and everything else and they just left them there. They're still there, they didn't bother to get them out. They sealed it off and

08:30 that was it. They just took Wewak, no trouble at all.

So how long were you in Wewak yourself before news came through about the atomic bomb?

Well it wasn't, I can't say exactly but it would …

Only roughly.

Only be, well it was round about the time that we got there that the war finished, that the atomic bomb, we had

09:00 probably only lobbed at Wewak, so they took it before the end of the war.

How did you get that news that the atomic bomb had gone off?

There was one of those things, there was a news sheet that used to come out, about once a week or something like that but, as I said, you didn't get much news but with the atom bomb it was on as soon as it happened. Or we heard

09:30 as soon as it happened through the radio, whether headquarters, whether they had told us or the word soon got around because really that was to be the end of the war once they dropped that.

Was that the 'Guinea Gold'?

'Guinea Gold' was the name of the thing but right from the start they only put in what they wanted you to know.

So did that news come as a surprise to you at that point?

Well I think we were starting to feel that the end was coming,

10:00 I think we realised that. We wondered how soon it was going to be as they had gone into the Philippines, gone back there, because the war in England, in Europe was over and I don't think we were surprised.

Did you blokes get a chance to celebrate that news?

Did you mean did we get any beer? No, we didn't get any beer. You only got that, well we did later

10:30 on. The, a ship load came in of canteen stuff and it was being unloaded at Wewak, this bay onto barges and they would come down to the beaches and put them onto the trucks. Well my mate, Len Taylor, he

11:00 was the corporal in charge of the transport where who was to do what, what platoons were to get jobs and so on. He used to allocate the work and he was right at the gate where we used to go out so he could tick them off as they went out or came in or so on, that was his job, and this particular what's-its-name there was to be so many trucks to

11:30 start to go to Wewak at ten o'clock that night. They were to work through the night unloading beer and instead of leaving it to Len the instruction was that Corporal Catchlove was to be in charge and he said, "I want to see Corporal Catchlove before he goes." So I got this message and over I went to Captain Price.

12:00 "You want to see me sir?" He said, "Yes." I went to his tent. "That is my cot there," and he said, "Now don't wake me up but I want to get a surprise in the morning." I got the message so anyhow, as I said, me being corporal I didn't have to drive. I could get on the back of a truck and open a

12:30 crate or something and get so many and I took about a dozen bottles home and put them under his thing. This was to go on until, they run in the beer at night and that was to go on until it was all gone. The next night, because they thought they had lost a lot, oh the provos were there to see that we didn't get any. But anyhow during the day they came to the camp to get their share. Well the

13:00 news came through that there was to be a provo on every truck. What they did, they'd just tell the driver to stop and off would come a crate and onto one of their jeeps, oh God, and this is what happened, this was the way that they celebrated. They lost more beer that way but as I say that was the way it was. You were entitled to whatever you could get in the army, it didn't matter whether it was tinned fruit or whatever you needed. Or if

13:30 you wanted a new pair of boots and you were in the ordnance dump and you saw some boots, you'd try some on until they fitted you, but that was the army, that was the way it was.

So it wasn't long after that that you got the news that you were going to be returning home and you went for the medical?

I did. Well what happened with that we had our medical and the dental and in the five years that I was in the army I had a tooth

14:00 that grew down the roof of my mouth and the dentist said, "Now you'll have to have that out here before you go," and he said, "You've got to be up at the CCS," the Casualty Clearing Station, "tomorrow some time or other and they'll take it out. You'll be in there for a day." So I suggested that I waited until I got down to Sydney, it would be even better. He said, "No, if you wait till there you won't get it out at all." So

14:30 the next day, up I went to the thing and I was to be operated on the following morning at nine o'clock. The operating theatre was just a tin shed with a concrete floor with an operating table in the middle and one of those great big, you know those about a yard across, orange sort of lights above it. Anyhow I went into the operating theatre at nine o'clock and there was a

15:00 sister, a dentist and a doctor. Well the doctor, it was chloroform or ether in those days, and they used to put a couple of drops on a rag and shove it over. Well he did that all right but I didn't like it and I kicked and as I kicked I hit this great big … and of course down came all the glass all over me. Well the doctor wasn't happy, took me back to the ward, to the tent,

15:30 and while they cleaned up the mess. Well an hour later, at ten o'clock, back I go in again and the doctor, as I say, he wasn't happy. The sister sat on me legs and the dentist held my chest down and this fellow he shoved this ether on this thing and bang over and out I went and that was ten o'clock. It took about five minutes to pull me tooth out. Well I must have had one of these

16:00 religious sisters, women didn't swear or do all those sorts of things in those days but she must have been praying for me because the sister had to stay with me until I woke up so that I didn't swallow me tongue, that's the way it was in those days. Well she was there all day and she must have been praying for me and eventually at six o'clock at night I woke up. She had a look in my mouth, saw that my tongue was still there and everything and

16:30 I heard her say, "Thank Christ for that," and off she went and I haven't seen her since. So that was my story about that, so I went the next day, went back to the camp and home I came without this tooth but I'll never forget it, oh God. She didn't have any lunch or anything I don't think, so that was that one. I

came back home. I got on the, I think it was the Monterey, headed down for, got to Brisbane.

17:00 When we got to Brisbane they unloaded us and we went into a staging camp there. And that night, oh God, there were hundreds and thousands of these tents on the side of a bit of a slope and the mosquitoes they started at the top of a night, came right through every tent, right down and it was, we didn't have our nets. Even all the mosquitoes in the islands and that, I've never seen many as there was in this, God. So

17:30 the next day I was fortunate, it all depended how many points you had, and I got a train back to Sydney and I got to Sydney about lunch time. That afternoon they took us to Gardners Road where they, we were to get our discharge and so on and pick up our kit bags. We eventually got paraded and they called out our numbers in numerical order

18:00 and they gave us a leave pass and we were to go over and pick up our kit bag, and of course I'm first out and I hear all these fellows, "Gee, he must have been early," but I wasn't going to let on. So that was that. I came down to Cronulla and that was it. I went back, funny thing, I got my discharge and I had to go to, report back on I think it was the 16th of January 1946,

18:30 my brother-in-law he had got down a few days before me and he had to report back on the 16th. So after five years or so we both joined up on the same day, only saw him, I saw him on the Queen Elizabeth, saw him once up at Atherton, the only times I saw him in that five years, and we got our discharge on the same day. How funny it works.

19:00 **And how was the reunion with your wife and your family?**

Oh wonderful. My father-in-law had rented a house in Croydon Street in Cronulla. In the meantime he had bought this hardware store and I was able to stay there. My brother-in-law and my sister-in-law, she had a baby that was several

19:30 months old, so she was staying there with them too, so we stayed there until I could get a house or a flat to live in, that was wonderful. So it was, then to go on from there, I went into the shop with him and I got interested in the RSL [Returned and Services League] and someone came out wanting to start the Torchbearers for Legacy,

20:00 a Torchbearers for Legacy branch in Cronulla, and I ended up that I was the secretary. I'd never done any of that work before but no-one would do it so I said I would do it. Well we made a lot of money which, Legacy needed it in those days, they don't now, they needed a lot of money and we ran a lot of different functions and I kept

20:30 that for about four years and then I became that involved with so many things, the P and C, the church, the Progress, the what's-its-name, the other organisation with shopkeepers, and so I was going up the ladder of the Lodge, so I eventually gave it away, the secretary's job.

21:00 Fortunately someone took it on straight away and I got involved with other things and eventually when the South Cronulla Bowling Club started I was on the foundation committee of that and I build a, I was able to buy a block of land and eventually build a house on it.

21:30 Had to start off from scratch with the fences, the paths and everything but it was very good. Later on in the latter part of the years I started growing plants and seedlings for the, oh the wife and I, we had, when the churches, the Presbyterian and the Methodist went in the union, our church

22:00 here in Cronulla didn't go into the union so we were going back to an anniversary at St Stephens and we struck Reverend Fred Mackay who, that day, and because of the union, which was the following week, we went in again and we struck him again and he talked us into joining the, becoming members of St Stephens which we did and we went there, oh I still go, my wife died.

22:30 We became very friendly with all the people in there. I started growing plants and seedlings for the street stall. They told me I wouldn't sell them in Macquarie Street but I ended up over the years, I sold seventeen thousand dollars worth of plants and seedlings in there. That is at today's figures which was about twelve thousand dollars in those days. I stopped doing it six years

23:00 ago and when I stopped doing it because I couldn't do it, I came here and so I started making those Anzac biscuits. I've made eleven thousand of those and that's bought in another two thousand dollars. I get the pleasure out of doing it. Then I was a driver for the day care and then the welfare officer at Cronulla

23:30 after fifteen years decided to give it away and he used to do the funerals, and the vice-president in charge of welfare, he didn't ask, he appointed five of us to do the funerals because in those days this was about the third biggest sub-branch in Australia and we had over three thousand members,

24:00 so I was one of these fellows that had to do the RSL segment at any funerals. Well I've done nearly a hundred in the six years that I've been doing it and you get quite a kick out of doing it that you're doing something for someone. They're entitled to it and so we do it and

24:30 that is that, that and the day care. I was a driver for day care until my eyesight went and I had to stop

driving, but it's good. I'm happy with my life although my eyesight's gone. I can still see, it's very blurry but I can get around so I've got no complaints. I'm happy, my wife passed away, it was eleven, going on twelve

25:00 years in January and she got double pneumonia and the effect that had on her was she lost her appetite and there's nothing you can do about people when they can't eat. And my two daughters they've done well. Wendy, the eldest, she did well at school,

25:30 now she's running this shop at SCEGGS, has brought it up from nothing to a very profitable thing and Jan, she served her time at uni and got her BA [Bachelor of Arts degree] and her Diploma of Education and now she's the history mistress at Carringvale High School, doing quite well but nearly time to retire. My two grand-daughters,

26:00 both of them, they went to SCEGGS, they've got the Duke of Edinburgh silver award, there's nothing they can't do. They look after me. I remember Katherine when she was eleven, I was growing, I grew a garden of white

26:30 chrysanthemums to take, to flower to put into pots for the street stall and I was going to propagate from this lot that I had, well it was the day before Mother's Day. When I got home from bowls Esme said, "Katherine rang and wanted to know if she could have those chrysanthemums," and I said, "Why? What's she going to do?" She said, "She's going to sell them." I said, "Where?" and she said, "In the Nicholson Parade down near the dumps and the S-bend,"

27:00 and I said, "Yes, if she wants to." So I picked most of them and nine o'clock the next morning I got a phone call saying, "Are there any more left?" and anyhow, she sold them, she sold them for thirty five dollars. I put a few more in the next year, she got sixty five dollars. The next one a hundred and twenty five. It got up to three hundred-odd dollars and over the years

27:30 she made herself well over a thousand dollars selling these chrysanthemums on the side of the street, I've got a photo of them there. Then she stopped when she got, before she was eighteen, then her sister took over and she carried on and did the same. I used to grow these chrysanthemums just especially for her and oh boy there was a lot of them, they were enterprising,

28:00 then Jennifer took over. Then Kathryn wanted to mow my lawn from when she was about twelve. She did that and then Jennifer did the same. But the unfortunate part with my grandson, while he was quite willing to do it, he washed my car for me, but being involved with the Duke of Edinburgh, both awards and the Queen's Scout which he's just

28:30 completed, he didn't have time in the holidays to do anything, and right out of the way where they live in the south of Caringbah but they've all made me proud, the whole family, but it all came from the love that they got from their mother. They came first with everything and she joined the bowling club but she meant that she couldn't do

29:00 enough for the family and gave that away, but she was a wonderful mother and it's flowed on to my family. They look after me, anything that's on I have to be included in it, where I can. I don't look for it but they insist that I do it and I'm very happy with it. So that is my life.

29:30 I don't think there's anything more I can say except thank you for being, doing what you did. I appreciate it.

It's a great pleasure Victor.

Good.

Look I've got a couple of things I wouldn't mind asking you, while we've still got a bit of time. Your involvement with the funerals involves you reciting a passage and I believe you can recite for us today?

30:00 I certainly can. It's one I learnt off by heart very early because I feel it's a matter of putting a special feeling in it. What happens is the welfare officer gives me a ring and tells me this fella's number, his rank, his name and the last unit which he was in, which is the record the RSL has and tells me when the funeral is to be and where it is. And

30:30 however when I get there, when I start, the minister or whoever it is does his bit and after the eulogy and so on he asks me to come and do it. Well what I do is, part of my duty is to give a short resume of where the comrade has served and any particular incidences which are important to mention,

31:00 and what I try to do is say things that will make the family proud of their father or grandfather. However, having done all that I announce his number, his rank and his name, his unit and the AIF, or air force or navy or whatever it might be

31:30 and then I say, "Their bodies are buried in peace and their names liveth for ever more. Oh valiant hearts, to who their glory came through dust of conflict and through battle flame. Tranquil you lie, your nightly virtue proved, your memory hallowed in the land you loved.

32:00 Proudly you gathered, rank on rank to war, as one who'd heard God's message from afar, all you had

hoped for, all you had you gave to save mankind, yourselves you scorned the save. The hour has come for rest, this poppy an emblem of sacrifice, a symbol of a life given in the service

32:30 of ones country is a link between our comrade and us who remain, we place it here in remembrance." And I place it in the coffin and then I ask all the other ex-service persons to place their poppies on the coffin. I then ask everyone to stand and the 'Last Post' is sounded, and 'Reveille' and then I recite the 'Ode' and that is the

33:00 RSL segment which is the next best thing that we can offer after a, if a man or a person dies in the service he gets a military funeral and this is the best the RSL can offer and I think it's quite appropriate. They're entitled to it and we do it to try and do our best. That is that.

That is wonderful. Thank you for that.

33:30 That the only one?

Well I just wanted to ask you how important is Anzac Day to you and what thoughts do you have during Anzac Day?

Well it is important. I always go. I go to the Dawn Service here but I also go to the main one in the city because I feel that that is most important.

34:00 I only see one or two of my mates but it is put on for ex-servicemen. It is put on for a reason. Everyone always says, "Isn't it wonderful? Look at all these fellows," but now, it's moving as you go round, the size, chock-a-block with people but, believe it or not, I can't say the majority but,

34:30 by crikey, it's filled with a lot of Asians waving Australian flags and clapping and besides all the other people. Now if we don't march they've got nothing to do, it's no good me saying to these fellas, "Oh I never go," but it's the wrong attitude. We've got to go, we've got to go for their benefit.

35:00 Not for ourselves but I've got to the stage now, I went last year and my grand-daughter Jennifer, she came and helped me round. I got to the last, what's the last? Barrack Street, is Barrack Street the last one? Past the Town Hall and it's on a slope and I walked there fortunately because I've got asbestosis and I puff and I pant but she helped me up there and I got to the

35:30 top and that was it. But now I'm sure I've got no hope of getting around again. I don't want to go on the scooter but what is going to happen is one or two of my, either my grand-daughter, the one that will be here, the other's in Japan at the moment, and my grandson, they will be there to wear my medals or my miniatures, which they're so proud.

36:00 I didn't do anything wonderful but they feel they're entitled to wear them and they're so proud of it, that I was in it, but all I did was my duty. And so next year either one or two of them will go round. I do think that that Anzac March through the city of Sydney is most important and I do hope that more who are still capable will

36:30 start to realise this. It's no good saying, 'Look how good the March is,' if they're all someone taking their place. It's not right, however. It's no good talking to fellas if they don't want to.

How do you think the war changed you?

It only changed my way of life, my country life

37:00 with sheep and whatever to a shopkeeper but I don't regret because you make your life, you make what it is. It could have been anything else but hardware is a very interesting game. A lot of the tools and things that we sold, especially after the war, I'd used in the country doing things and if not,

37:30 you knew what they were talking about and it was hard work. There was a lot of hard work, a lot of heavy lifting and so on but that's nothing, it never worried me and any hard work never worried me and I enjoyed it. Never made that much money but we sold out, someone wanted the building that we eventually owned and in 1973 someone

38:00 wanted it more than we did and instead of selling it we put it up for auction and were happy with the price and at that time interest rates were very high. They were round about twelve percent and they were going up. They went up to seventeen and a half percent and you couldn't help but make money and I did and the wife was very good at her part of

38:30 it too. She made a lot of money and that was that but that was the only way that it affected me. I stayed in Sydney and did a lot of things, helped a lot of people I suppose but I don't regret it.

Did the war change your character at all do you think?

Don't think so. I could make a comment I suppose

39:00 but I'm not going too. No, I joined the bowling club when they started South Cronulla in the 1950s. I did well. I won, I didn't win any championships at the club but I became, I skippered teams to the semi-finals of the district pairs and fours. I won the district

39:30 pairs as a lead. I skippered teams to win a number four pennant at South Cronulla and I skippered a team to reach the semi-final of the mid-week pennants. I've got, and I represented the district on six occasions which is quite something, so I'm quite happy with the way I did.

40:00 With my Lodge I got through the Chair of that and I was given what they called Grand Lodge Honours in 1976 it was and that makes me, well a Grand Lodge Officer and I go with the Grand Delegation to any installations

40:30 or whatever. I don't think there's anything else that I achieved. I made a lot of friends, which is more important than anything I think and that is that.

How do you feel about war these days?

I don't like them. I don't know why he did it, Bush, and

41:00 he didn't look into it enough to know what could have happened. I think he stuck his bib out too far. It wasn't his duty. The same with the terrorists. He's killed a lot of people or being responsible for killing a lot of people so what have they got to do back. If they want to go and hit him they're terrible but he

41:30 has no right to do those and I don't think that well, as you say, 'What do I think of it?' I'm sorry that he's done it. I don't like the fellas that say, all these dictators what they're doing, that's wrong definitely, but whose duty is it to stop them. I think we're sticking our bib in.

INTERVIEW ENDS