

Australians at War Film Archive

Alynn Emmett (Bill) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 5th December 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1268>

Tape 1

00:36 **Ok then, Bill, we'll make a start, if we could start with an introduction to your life story, starting from where you were born and where you grew up.**

Yes, well, I was born in a small place called Smithton in Tasmania and my father, he was a bank manager, and as a result

01:00 we moved around about every four or five years to different places so we gradually moved up the coast from Smithton to Burnie, Alderson, Devonport and Launceston, back to Alderson. And I came home from school one night and it was Friday night and my father said, "I want you to start work on Monday," and,

01:30 "Yeah, where do I start work?" And it was with the Burnie Municipal Council as a junior draughtsman, so that was what I did but it's not what I wanted to do. I was very taken up with biology at that stage and I would have preferred to have been a biologist but I finished up as an engineer, so what the heck? So that was it. And the war was on then, of course,

02:00 when I went to work there and as it was a protected industry I had to wait until I was due for my annual holidays. And I went over to visit my grandparents in Melbourne and while I was there I reported to the army's recruitment centre and from there it was through a selection process,

02:30 and I elected to go to the air force and that was it, that was where I started.

And can you give us, I guess, a summary of where your service life took you?

Yes, I started at the recruitment depot in Melbourne, and my first army or air force experience was

03:00 for about two weeks when we were held in the Showgrounds at Melbourne before they then moved us up to number 1 Recruit Depot at Shepparton. And while I was there I had my previous ... must have been employed by a certain group in the air force anyway, and the old sergeant came in one day and said, "Well, where do you want to go when you finish

03:30 recruitment training?" I said, "I want to go to Air Board," and he laughed and he said, "You can't do that," and I said, " Well I've got to go to Air Board." And after he out passed our... he came screaming around and he said, "Emmett, report to the auditor," and I went down there and they had all my movement orders ready and I went to Victoria Barracks in Melbourne to a group which was called the

04:00 Works Group. And from there I spent about the first twelve months in Victoria and Tasmania in a survey team. And I asked for an overseas appointment and they said, "Yeah, well, OK, that's all right, we can do that," and I went through the process of being cleared from the Air Board

04:30 and I got to the paymaster and he said, "Sorry son, you can't go." I said, "Why's that?" and he said, "You're not 19 yet." So I had to wait and I had to wait about another six months, and then I got orders to report back to headquarters and then I got posted to the 3 Mobile Work Squadron, as it was then, and they were at the Melbourne Showground,

05:00 not the Showground, the Cricket Ground, getting ready to go overseas. Then not long after that they renamed them the 3 Airfield Construction Squadron. And we left there and we loaded two ships in Melbourne, some of the heavy equipment went by road up to Sydney, and we moved to Sydney. And we were quartered in

05:30 the Randwick Racecourse and over in the open grandstand, which was beautiful, it was about July, freezing. And we went on board ship there, sailed to Townsville and some of our heavy equipment had gone up by rail, we reloaded there, pretty slowly, and that's were we had a lot of our gear stolen.

06:00 Then we went on board the ship. We got about four days out from Townsville; there, the whole thing broke down. It had been an old ship that had previously brought Japanese prisoner of war down, then

they whitewashed the holes out, put us in and away we went. Anyway, they got the engines going around, we were unescorted, we turned back, headed for New Guinea, we spent the first night there in Finschhafen

- 06:30 Harbour and the Japanese put a show on for us that day and that night. They that all the ships over in the harbour. And then we moved up to Aitape, we offloaded and that was our start on our tour in the Pacific area. At Aitape
- 07:00 first night, we had no equipment or anything and we were just shown an area that was, well, it was the extreme area that was cleared, so they put us on what they call the perimeter and all we had was what we could carry, it was raining, no tents around, there was nothing really, only the
- 07:30 jungle. So we just had to get our gear together and turn up with our brown sheets and blankets and whatever, and I copped guard duty the first night and that was a real experience walking around with a .303, no ammunition, but still walking around with a .303, on the perimeter,
- 08:00 no lights, never been there before, that was quite an experience. Then I was sent on an advance party to Morotai and I left there with a small group, a survey officer and another draughtsman apart from myself, and we loaded on to LSTs [Landing Ship, Tanks]
- 08:30 and sailed off to Morotai, landed at Morotai, we were strafed while we were landing so we had to unload as quickly as we could and we went straight out to the job. And we started to survey, waited for the rest of the people to come up and meet us, which they did a couple of weeks later. But where, I was there on
- 09:00 D-Day plus four, four days after invasion. So we started work on Pitoe and Wama airstrips and we were joined by a small detachment from 14 ACS. And we finished that and then we taken aboard an LST again and we sailed to Leyte where MacArthur had just landed and
- 09:30 we were at Leyte for a little while, left there, loaded again from Mindoro, we were on the water for about four days, 144 kamikaze planes were shot down over the convoy in the time we were there. We landed on the beach; we were the first wave in after the infantry. I don't know why they did that, because we were about four waves back, then all of sudden the ships just accelerated and away we went and
- 10:00 landed on the beach after the infantry did. And we started to unload there, kamikaze striking again, and that's where we lost our first war bloke there, he got shot on the beach. Another friend was very badly burnt. Then we had to move out onto the area that they selected for the airstrip
- 10:30 in an advance group again and left the rest of the people on the beach unloading, and they had to go in and prepare the campsite and get things going. We finished the day; we got back in to camp and - fresh bread! The Yanks certainly knew how to run a war because we'd gone up with MacArthur's boys. That's one thing I didn't mention before, but we were the first
- 11:00 Australian complete group to go away attached to the American forces. We went away as a complete squadron. They did have the odd person turn up later from signals and a few of the navy boys turned up and so on, but we were the first to be engaged with the Americans in warfare.
- 11:30 Our first casualty was the first Australian to be killed in an American ground during warfare. We were given a week to complete the landing strip. We completed it in five days, which was a record at that particular time, and we were
- 12:00 there for quite a while. We had one detachment left us in December and that would be December '44, 45, and they completely disappeared. It was a detachment of an officer and about 40-50 men. They left to go to Okinawa, we think,
- 12:30 we were never told, but they just completely disappeared. Then we were pulled out from Mindoro. We went back to Morotai and they were still fighting Japs on Morotai when we got there, and we'd been away for about six months. And we reformed there and we went to Balikpapan in Borneo and did the landing there. Most of our guys were sick.
- 13:00 We'd picked up a wog in the Philippines, a thing called schistosomiasis which affected the liver, and our CO [Commanding Officer] and the 2IC [Second in Command] had already been evacuated to Melbourne. And anyway, we went to Balikpapan, started to build an airstrip, war finished, and we were transported back to Morotai, and we were
- 13:30 loaded onto old Liberator bombers which were returning back to Australia to be scrapped. We left there one morning about 10 o'clock, landed at Darwin that afternoon, it was round about 6 o'clock, bully beef sandwich and a bottle of beer between two men. Then we took off again and landed eleven in the morning, early in the morning, met by a heap of Red Cross and ambulances because they were told we were being medically
- 14:00 evacuated, which we were. But, anyway, we were all walking wounded at that stage and they took us out to Point Cook and they turned that into a medical examination centre and they had a group from the University of Melbourne to do the tests. I tested it out with hookworm, some the guys tested it out with

hookworm, malaria, cystosomiasis and we had

- 14:30 a brief treatment there. Then I was posted to one engineering school at the Showgrounds in Melbourne, quartered in a horse box, which I thought was great after being away and done all the other things, and somehow I was posted back to Tasmania for discharge. So that was my life in the services. And
- 15:00 the whole time I was there I was an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] but when I was doing survey work in Morotai I had a sergeant, mechanical draughtsman, who shouldn't have been with us anyway, as a chainman and that was it, that was the end of my service life.

And after the war, what did you get up to?

After the war I went back to

- 15:30 the Burnie Council for about six months. A guy walked into the office one day, an engineer, and he said, "I'm off and I'm going to say goodbye." "Where are you going to?" "I'm going up to New Guinea," and I said, "Any chance of a job with you in New Guinea?" And he said, "Yes." So a few weeks after that I was on my way to Bulolo up in the highlands in New Guinea as a draughtsman for the Bulolo Gold Mining
- 16:00 Company and I was repolishing a lot of the survey work that had been done during the war and they'd lost all their plans and everything and redrafting the plans, working in the field. And I'd become engaged to Molly before I left and I was all set for her to come up and join me, but she gave me the old "no friends, nobody I know"
- 16:30 and so on, so I broke contract and came back down. And I had arranged for a job at the Devonport Council as engineer's assistant. I worked at that for about twelve months or so, and then I went into private business as a contract draughtsman and that was exciting. I worked on the plans and the initial work
- 17:00 for the ferry terminal for the Princess Tasmania and I went over there. I worked there for a private contractor and I got a little bit cheesed off with that, so then I tried for a job and got it on the Snowy Mountain [Hydro-Electric] Scheme as a senior draughtsman grade 3, and I worked there for six years.
- 17:30 Then I went back to Tasmania as a resident engineer for consultant to the Wynyard Council and I was there for about three years, and I applied for a position at the government in Canberra.
- 18:00 So I went to the old Department of Housing and Construction as a senior engineer or senior draughtsman, and then I became the chief draughtsman, then I became the regional chief draughtsman with three chief draftsmen under me. And I stayed there till 1985, and that's when I retired.
- 18:30 And now I live in Buderim - beautiful.

Wonderful, Bill, that's fantastic, thank you for that. OK, Bill, I'd like to take you back now to your early days in Tasmania, can you give us a bit of a picture of what it was like growing up there as a kid?

Well yes, you know we're going back quite a way now.

- 19:00 So round about 1929, just one of those small places, electricity just come to town, no sewerage and my father was local bank manager, I suppose he joined the elite in those days, they sort of used to group together, the solicitors and doctors and bank managers and whatever.
- 19:30 My family originally came from a little tiny place about twelve miles out of Smithton, a little place called Stanley and my father had two boy friends, mates there. One was Monty, Montgomery, and the other one was Admiral Sir
- 20:00 John Collins, and they were both friends of my father. Things were pretty tough in those days, I guess.

In what way?

Well, going to school, you walked to school, school was about half a mile or more away from where we lived, and cars had just hit the place.

Did your dad have one?

- 20:30 Yeah, my father had an old Overland Whippet, which was a forerunner of the American Jeep, as matter of fact, had the same engine and so on - that was great. Every Christmas we used to leave and take off and go up to Launceston where my father's parents lived. And there was no bitumen on the road in those days, and after about ten punctures and repairs
- 21:00 on the way and a long uncomfortable journey we'd arrive there. It used to take about 12-14 hours to get up there, oh, it was shocking. But the days in Smithton and Stanley I enjoyed. I still have a thing for Stanley, one of those funny things, but I always feel like I want to go back there, you know.

What was it about those times

- 21:30 **particularly that you enjoyed, or those places?**

Well, mostly my friends, and funnily enough some of my best friends were people called Zeigler, who were German, and it was just after the war, but there were a couple of German families there and I used to go out with the boys. And,

22:00 well, everywhere you went you walked, and we had family friends that were about a half-hour walk from town, but it was nothing in those days. You know, you just went out, we did what we had to do; we just played games that kids have never even heard of these days.

That actually leads me on to my next question: what sort of things did you do for fun, you and your friends?

22:30 Well, in those days people were allowed to keep kangaroos and wallabies and so on, and goats, and go-carts - and it was great fun, go-cart racing - a billygoat, two-wheeler cart, we made various toys that we used to throw around about the place and hit each other with. But,

23:00 generally, there wasn't much to do, you just had to make something to do.

Did you get up to much mischief as far as your parents were concerned?

Yeah, I did once and I got a hell of a hiding for it. We went over and didn't trash a guy's car but we did a fair job of it.

23:30 It was a single-seater, utility type thing with a traffic hood, and somehow or other that hood just disappeared, and I got a thrashing for that one. Oh, those were those days. I wasn't always a good kid, you know.

I don't think most kids were.

24:00 We had an old guy next door to us, where we lived, an old Scotsman, and every morning, 8 o'clock, out with the pipes and he'd march up and down and play the pipes. But visiting was one of the things that was done mostly in those days, visiting, afternoon tea, entertaining. But Smithton was a thing all of its own, we found things a bit different. We moved from there to Wynyard.

24:30 Wynyard was a little bit more advanced.

In what way?

Oh, they had bitumen roads and real electricity and nothing broke down much. But things didn't actually improve until we went to Burnie. Burnie was quite a town in those days, and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester arrived one year in Sussex and the HMAS Canberra escorting

25:00 and two destroyers, and that was quite an experience; and my father took my down to have a look at them and he said, "What do you want to do when you grow up, son?" and I said, "I don't know Dad, why?" And he said, "Would you like to join the navy?" Well, I looked at these two ships and I said, "I don't think so." I said "You'd get a guy killed, you would." So that was the end of the navy.

How old were you at the time?

Oh, I'd have been about nine,

25:30 nine years old. But later on, of course, most of my friends were in the navy. All the coastal towns in Tasmania, most of the boys joined up.

Was the navy a popular services choice?

Yeah, it was for the coastal boys. As a matter of fact,

26:00 the town of Alderson, now they have one of the most amazing memorials I've seen anywhere for the navy, and I've never seen it televised or anything but it's on the bank of the river, just opposite where Molly lived, and they've got a metal model of every ship that the local boys served on. And they're mounted on low

26:30 walls which are actually walls of remembrance, and the ones who lost their life during the war and were returned home for burial, and the boys who have died since, all their ashes are enclosed in these walls. It's a magnificent thing and nobody I know has ever been there, you know, from the publicity side, to have a look at it. I went there about four years ago

27:00 on one of the trips back to see some of Molly's family and I went down there to have a look at it and I was completely broken up. I couldn't stand being there. I looked around the plaques and there was one plaque of a friend of mine I went to school with and, next to him, his wife was there and she'd also joined the navy,

27:30 and, you know, they were school sweethearts and so on. And I walked around that place and I was completely broken up. I've been to the air force do's since and it's never worried me. I go to reunions. We have an Airfield Construction reunion every two years.

28:00 I'm not going down to Melbourne this year. It's in July and I've been to Melbourne in July and I can

think of better places to be. I've been to one in Canberra and Perth.

So what do you think, Bill, was it about the memorial in Tasmania particularly, was it....?

Well, I think it was just the fact that about 50% of the boys that are in there, or the remainder

28:30 of the boys I had gone to school with, and I had a lot to do with them while I was growing up, and I had seen a lot of them since, and we'd been to some of their weddings and, you know, Alderson's a fairly small place. But I just couldn't stand to be there.

I can understand.

29:00 **They're old mates.**

Yeah, the air force ones, we don't hear much of them, because we were disbanded in the fields as they call it, and after the episode at Point Cook we just all got shot out all over the place and we just lost touch with each other. And the only time I've met some of them,

29:30 and I've only met about four out of our unit, they've been at the reunions. We went away 600 strong, a strength of 600, and people have said, "Oh, well," you know, "were you at the front line?" Well, our front line was straight up there, and we did D-Day landings and we landed very early after the D-Day,

30:00 and with the group that we'd lost on LST, I guess out of that 600 we lost 12% of our unit. We got recommended for a unit citation when we were with the Americans, but perhaps I shouldn't say it on air, but we were under the

30:30 control of the group captain in control of our wing, and after we did the Mindoro landing we had newspapers come up and "Group Captain Rooney accompanies the men to the beach." We didn't see him, we never ever saw him until he flew over

31:00 about two to three weeks later and did a couple of circuits of the camp and then flew off again to a little safe house, wherever it was in the Pacific, and when we got recommended for the citation they said, "No, thanks very much. If there are going to be any medals handed out we will do it." They got a little bit browned off about us

31:30 because we were getting all the publicity and nobody knew who they were, or where they were or so on. I've got a copy of the citation and ribbon but I don't wear it, and I've tried through channels to get it awarded because it's ours. Well, it has been awarded, 3RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] I think got one when they were in Vietnam, and I think there were a couple of others.

32:00 But the Americans say that they've got no record of it at all and as a matter of fact they've destroyed a lot of their archival material, which is a bit different to our people, we keep building bigger and better archives - well, we did when I was in Canberra - and that was the end of it. So I've got the ribbon but I don't wear it.

Bill, if I could just bring you back to

32:30 **Tasmania, in those early days, you were talking about your dad recommending the navy to you when you were nine. Did you know much about World War I when you were growing up?**

No, my family never talked about it. My father and his brother were at Anzac Cove and they served in France. My uncle was wounded

33:00 and my father used to talk about a couple of places he went to, and that was it. A bit of memorabilia he used to show me but we never talked and we never talk about any of it either.

What sort of things did he have that he'd show you, what kind of memorabilia?

Well, some of it I've put into the War Memorial

33:30 in Canberra. But he had an officer's trunk and it was full of stuff. German gas masks and a tool that they used, a sort of pre-runner of the old chain saw. The Germans used it, it was like a motorbike chain with teeth on it, handles each end and it folded up, went into a special little container

34:00 that they have on their belt. Photographs my father had been through schools in England and, well, he took his commission at a college which was an offshoot from Cambridge University. My uncle had been wounded and he went to hospital in England.

34:30 But apart from that they never ever talked about it. So this to me was a thing that I thought should be done, because when we go, and we're going pretty quickly now, there will be no records.

Exactly why it's happening. Were you curious, though, when you saw all your dad's stuff in this trunk

35:00 **about what he'd got up to and where he'd been, from World War I?**

Well, I think a lot of his material, after my mother died, my father moved over to Perth and before he

left I think he placed a lot of it in a museum in Burnie. A friend of ours had established a museum there and I think most of

35:30 the stuff went in there. But I was in Canberra at the time when he moved so I had no opportunity to get any of this material. I should have. Oh, he had heaps of stuff there, German gas masks and all sorts of things. I didn't have very much at all, but I didn't bring much back. But I've never

36:00 discussed my war experiences with my boys and, as I explained, I've now got a grandson in the air force, a son in the air force, a grandson in the air force, and my grandson's just come back from the Gulf and he's stationed up in the Northern Territory at the moment.

36:30 **Have you hooked up with him since he came back?**

No, I haven't, actually. I've spoken to him on the 'phone but apart from that I haven't seen him. I haven't seen him since he was about 12-14 years old. He has a commendation for saving his OC's [Officer Commanding] life. I talked to a group captain, friend of mine,

37:00 and he said, "Oh, the boys would be pleased about it." The OC of the squadron was taking off. He was doing his pre-flight run in an F1-11 and the grandson is a computer buff and he does computerised instrumentation in aircraft and weaponry and so on, and he grounded the group captain so

37:30 he didn't take off. But they ran it through the workshop and they found that had he taken off, about five minutes later he'd have had a flameout. So he got a commendation for saving the group captain's life.

That's pretty good.

Oh, yeah.

Was your dad strict on you when you were growing up, was he a strict fellow?

38:00 Oh yeah, he was very strict. As a matter of fact, if what he did to me was done these days I suppose they'd be crying out "child abuse". He never took his belt off to me. He never had to take his belt off, he had a leather bootlace and he used to get into me with that. I suppose I deserved it.

What would you have to do to get the bootlace?

38:30 Well, I actually, I'd try to be a bit cunning, I'd get on my backside and pull my legs up and he'd try to whip me and I was spinning around like a top. He might have got his satisfaction out of it. I didn't get much.

And what sort of things would you actually have to do to get in trouble so that he'd get the bootlace out?

39:00 Well, once was when I did that car hood bit. A bit hard to remember now what it was for. I must have deserved it. But he was a hard man; most of the fathers were in those days.

Tape 2

00:32 **Bill, you mentioned before that when you were around 14 your father said "OK, you're not going to school any more, you're becoming draughtsman."**

That's right.

And it's not what you wanted to do. What was it exactly that you wanted to do when you were 14?

Well, I wanted to complete my Leaving [Certificate] and be a biologist. But you couldn't do biology at the university in

01:00 Tasmania. I would have liked to have been a biological chemist. That would have been my first preference.

Did you tell your dad that?

Yeah, he knew. Because we used to have to illustrate our books when we did the biology bit. You know, we did dissections of animals,

01:30 you know, frogs, worms, fish, and we had to draw it all up, and I was quite good at illustration. So that was my first preference. And my second would have been an architect. And a friend in Launceston wanted me to go in with him, and in those days you didn't have to go to university to be an architect, just serve your time with a practising

02:00 architect. And that didn't suit my father either. He looked at my drawing ability and that was that. But it was quite a shock to come back from school; and we used to come back by train, get off the train, go

home, you open the front door and say, "Hello," and your father says, "You start work on Monday."

So was it, in those

02:30 **days, the father had the final word?**

Yeah, they were kingpin in those days. They took a lot more notice of their father than they do these days, I'm afraid. Yeah, the father was the king of the castle. We go right back, his father, and I've got photos on the wall back there, well, paintings

03:00 of my father and his mother, which was done by a convict artist. But they were all very severe. The old boy was severe. We used go up there visiting and we'd get to his place and he'd be sitting on the back veranda and we'd say, "G'day Grandad." "Hmph," and that was it. Grandmother wore long black clothes and black boots, apron.

03:30 Things were entirely different.

They sound a bit grumpy.

Who, the grandfather? He was. He was a grumpy old fellow. But it's an old family trait that we're inclined to be loners. We like to be alone. I get in trouble with Molly because I want to be quiet, I want to read,

04:00 I don't want to speak, I don't want to talk. Father was same, his father was the same and I never met his father but I take it he was same. He was English and he arrived out here, he was told to leave England and on no account was he to come back. But that's a bit of family history and Molly doesn't like me to mention that, either.

04:30 But it goes back to George IV and Mrs Fitzherbert.

You mean your grandfather had a fling?

No, George IV did.

I think that's another story.

That's another one.

So you were an apprentice draughtsman for a few years then?

Yeah, junior draughtsman.

Can you tell us what being a draughtsman entails?

05:00 Well, a municipal draughtsman, you did everything. I went to technical college at night to study what they call engineering drawing, which had nothing to do with my particular area of work because municipal drafting is civil drafting and you do everything. You do mechanical, electrical, survey. You do

05:30 street design, sewer design, stormwater design. And it's completely different. And I was - what? - at that stage I'd be only 16, just under 16 and I went straight onto an instrument level. So I was out pegging and levelling and doing level reductions,

06:00 doing design work. The engineer was an old World War I vet [veteran], and he was rather good. He taught me a lot of things and I matured very quickly in the drafting area. I just had to because there was only the engineer and then there was myself and there was another

06:30 gentleman and he used to go out and do a bit of survey work, so I then finished up on theodolite too. Those days there were no lasers, no computers, even calculators, everything was done by hand. All reductions were done mathematically,

07:00 using logarithms and so on. It gradually became easier, but that wasn't until after the war.

So you would have only been 14 when the war broke out?

Yeah, I was, and I was frightened I was going to miss it. I was in the school cadets at that particular time, the Army Cadets

07:30 in high school, and I thought I was going to miss out.

So what do you mean exactly by "miss out", meaning that you would participate in defending Australia?

That's right, I was afraid it was going to be over by the time I turned old enough to be able to join up. So I turned 18 and of course it was 19 as far as army and air force were concerned, maybe, but the navy was different, you could join the navy at 17

08:00 and go overseas, but in the air force and army you had to be 19.

Of course your parents would have been thinking, "I hope the war's over before Bill gets to

join up”?

Yeah, well, I told father I wanted to join the air force and he said, “What do you want to be?” and I said, “I want to be a pilot,” and he said, “No way, I won’t sign the papers for you to be a pilot.”

08:30 I said, “Why not?” He said, “I saw enough of pilots being burned and going down with aircraft during the war.” So instead of that I finished up being on landing ship tanks, as they call them, which when you’re under attack it feels as big as the Queen Mary and you think you’re only one in the ocean and I did trip after trip in them and then I thought, “Oh, heck,

09:00 this is the navy.”

Your father said he wouldn’t sign the papers. What did that mean then, that you had to wait a certain amount of time or that you couldn’t ask to be sent to be a pilot, to be trained to be a pilot at the Empire Air Training Scheme?

Yes, well in those days you either joined ground force or you went in as a pilot or aircrew.

09:30 I had a choice; I went in as a draughtsman, actually. And I already had that teed up at Air Board before I entered the army, but in air force it was 19 and that was it. I did survey work there and learnt a heck of a lot more there and I’m very thankful to some of the officers I had. Some of the others

10:00 I’d like to forget.

I’d like to talk about them at some point, those officers you’d like to forget. But you were still in Tasmania when you were doing your draughtsman apprenticeship?

Yeah.

And you didn’t move across the water until you joined up, is that correct?

Yeah, I went over about six months before I turned 18, on annual leave.

10:30 They didn’t like that in Tasmania, people doing that. I met, when I was in the CMF [Citizens’ Military Force] later, I met an army captain who was in our unit and he had done a similar thing, but he was a qualified engineer of the Hydro Electricity Commission, and he joined the army and they caught up with him in the Middle East and they brought him back. They didn’t like people leaving their

11:00 protected industry and joining up.

If you worked for the municipal government then you would have been in a protected industry.

I was, local government, yeah.

So your boss was annoyed with you?

No, he was an ex-World War I bloke and his son had already gone and left the nest, and he had gone into aircrew.

11:30 I didn’t tell him what I was up to, though, but he gave me a book on road design before I left, an American publication, up-to-date, very modern, and he must have known, he must have had a clue, because he said, “I think you’ll need this where you’re going.” As far as he was concerned I was only going on leave,

12:00 going on holidays, but he must have known.

I think we forget when we’re younger that, you know, the older generation know what’s going on.

Yeah, I think so, I agree.

And we saw a picture before we started today of you with your sister, who was also in the service. Which service was she in?

She was in the

12:30 Women’s Auxiliary Air Force. She was in the WAAAFs [Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force], she was in the air force. Actually she was at Laverton and she was the one that teed up for me to go to Air Board when I enlisted. That was quite a help.

Did you have any other brothers or sisters?

I had a younger sister, but when I left home she was only about nine years old.

13:00 **When you said your sister, what was your sister’s name?**

Sybil.

Sybil went to the Air Board to try to hook you up an interview?

Yeah.

Is the Air Board the ones in charge of placing you in the air force in certain positions?

Yeah, they were the main centre of the air force. I met

13:30 Air Vice Marshal Jones while I was there, he was located there, and he later moved on. As a matter of fact it was funny, because I went to what they call the Divisional Works Board, and we did all the surveys of land

14:00 or property that was being taken over by the air force for training purposes, airfields, disposable areas, bomb dumps and so on. But I've since learnt, and it was only at the last reunion I went to over in the Perth, that the airfield construction squadrons were actually under direction from the Divisional Works Board.

14:30 So then I realised that being posted out to the airfield construction squadron was not an accident because I was already a part of that particular group, being in the Divisional Works Board.

So you got in through the back door?

Yeah, really, yeah. It was funny because

15:00 when everybody turned 18 we had to report to the recruitment area, which I did in Melbourne at Coburg. They took us out to the army centre there in Seymour, it must have been, and we were all grouped in together and they had an air force officer there, an army officer, a naval officer

15:30 and a CMF officer, as it was in those days, too. And we were all grouped around and old sergeant major gets out the front and says "All those that want to go to the air force move over to the left, the ones that want to join army over to the right, the navy stay where they are, the rest of you go away." So we were arranged in groups and then the particular officer

16:00 just took charge of each group and took us away.

Was that at Laverton?

No, that was in Seymour.

Sorry, Seymour. Ok, but where is Laverton?

In Melbourne, just out of Melbourne, Williamstown.

Oh, OK. Another thing that occurred to me when you were just talking to Chris [interviewer] about Stanley, you said you think fondly of Stanley,

16:30 **why is that?**

Well perhaps it was because the original Emmett home was there. My father and his brother, they were brought up and went to school there, and when we were at Smithton we visited there quite regularly, it was only about twelve miles away. It was just one of those places. As a matter of fact, I have a photo there.

17:00 I'll show you after.

Sounds lovely. So can you tell us what happened at Seymour after you got in the air force bunch?

Well, then we were just grouped and we were marched away and went by train to Melbourne. We went up to the recruitment depot in Russell

17:30 Street. Because in the army, when I reported to the army, we had a medical inspection that took about half an hour; and when we went to Russell Street, a medical there took about two days. And they asked you what you wanted to be, and I remember one boy was rejected, he wanted to be a

18:00 despatch rider.

A despatch....?

Rider, on a motorbike. And they said, "No, you can't go in as a despatch rider, we'll take you in as a driver of a mode of transport. What do you do in private life?" he said, "I'm a speedways boy on motorbikes." So they wouldn't accept him. They used to ride old Harley Davidsons in those days

18:30 and he'd been tearing around the tracks in Melbourne on his speedway bike and they wouldn't accept him. They even laughed when I said I wanted to be a draughtsman.

Why do you think they laughed?

Because they liked to tell you what you were going to be. But at Air Board I'd already gone through an

19:00 examination process, a written and verbal examination, and passed their requirements to be a

draughtsman, so that was that. But the guys at the recruitment depot they said, "No, no, no, you can't do that, you'll be what we tell you." Then, after we'd finished there, they marched us down Bourke Street, down to the railway station.

19:30 And two unfortunate air force guys, on the way down, yelled out, "You'll be sorry," and we had a tough old sergeant taking us down, and he halted us, he went over, took service number, name and unit, so I guess these two guys copped it afterwards.

Apparently they did that all the time, though, in the army and the air force: "You'll be sorry."

20:00 Yeah, well, some of us were, some of us weren't. The ones who volunteered I guess weren't. The other guys that were taken in through the draft, they wouldn't be very happy about it.

Can you tell us what happened next, Bill?

Yeah, that was when we got on the train and went to the receiving unit.

20:30 One was the recruiting depot, then we went to the receiving depot at Shepparton. Again, billeted in the showgrounds. We seemed to have an affinity with horseboxes for some reason or other. But anyway, we were there. And they did what we call the "ten day wonders" there, too, at the same time. They were people who were qualified or

21:00 university-qualified who joined up as an officer, and they were the meanest lot of blokes you've ever come across as officers. Our own officers were quite good, you know, qualified engineers - as a matter of fact we called our guy "the old man" because to us he was old.

21:30 But they were all experienced surveyors, engineers and so on. And we never called them "sir", we never saluted them, you know, it was a self-contained unit, and I got a hell of a shock afterwards, but we'll come to that.

Bill, these "ten day wonders", these blokes that had been university-educated, did they just get to be officers because they'd finished a degree?

22:00 Mm.

So they may not have had anything to do with the air force prior to graduating from university, is that right?

That's correct. They need not have had any experience in whatever field they were qualified in, either.

And yet was the air force expecting them to lead men on certain operations?

Well, that I wouldn't know because I

22:30 was going away, as I did. So even when I went to Air Board, the guy who was in charge of us was an old surveyor and he was older than my father, and the group that I went away with in the airfield construction squadron, they were all very much experienced guys.

23:00 Although Frank was pilot officer and that was my survey place, and he was promoted to flying officer. The old man was squadron leader and the rest of the guys were flight lieutenants, and they'd been in the services and they'd served in Darwin before we went away overseas, so

23:30 they'd been bombed and (UNCLEAR). The other guys didn't have a clue. They became pay officers and administrative type guys, insisted on being saluted and called "sir". And I met Jones on the front steps at the Air Board one day,

24:00 and we used to be in the habit then of carrying papers and things in our right hand so we wouldn't have to salute, but seeing Jones, because he was an ex-World War I bloke anyway, I saluted him, "Good morning sir," and, "Oh, hello," just waved and carried on, different guy altogether. The real pukka guys worked inside.

24:30 **I guess it's the Australian personality that says, well, respect, trust has to be acquired, and respect has to be acquired, you don't just salute someone because of their standing, it has to be earned.**

That's right.

Maybe, in a way, do you think that's part of it as well?

Yeah, I'm sure it was. When we went away, as I say, we never saluted any of our officers,

25:00 called them by their Christian names, except for CO. Some of them I met afterwards and they were still exactly the same guys. I suppose my own survey officer - and I say "my own", I was only an LAC, but I'll refer to him as my own - he was only a pilot officer

25:30 and he went straight in, did a "knife and fork" school [officers' training course] and went straight in. But at least he had been employed as a surveyor before he went in. But he had me doing a lot of things which I'd never done before and I had to learn to do very quickly, because I was sent out to do things on

my own which scholastically I wasn't prepared for,

26:00 but I just had to learn.

That was in the Islands?

Yeah.

We'll get to that. I'll just, just on the authority thing; I mean I have heard from different people that the British had problems with the Australians' lack of respect for authority.

Well, yeah, actually the biggest thing to us was inter-service

26:30 stuff that used to go on. Although it was funny, the air force guys never actually got on with the army, but we got on with navy. And things used to happen that were quite peculiar, like guys getting thrown off the

27:00 Flinders Street Bridge into the Yarra [River] and fighting in the streets, that was mainly between the Americans and AIF [Australian Imperial Force] fellows. But yeah, the service rivalry was pretty strong.

Why didn't the air force and the army get on, considering we were fighting for the same cause?

I don't know.

27:30 That's something I've never been able to figure out. Whether it was just their uniforms.... You know, we were better equipped than the army. It might have been jealousy, I don't know. But I've met a lot of army guys and then having been commissioned later on in the army I did find a difference, even between the officers in the army as to the officers in the air force.

28:00 They were all completely different worlds.

That's interesting. Now, when you did your initial training in Melbourne, is that when you saw a lot of Americans in the city?

Yes, I was there when the guys came back from the Battle of the Coral Sea,

28:30 and I forget the name of the American units that came back, but I think it's because of nice things Yanks used to say about "what we're going to do when we get to Australia". And I've seen solid blocks of fighting between Flinders Street and Swanston Street up to Bourke Street,

29:00 just a solid block of service people just fighting. And a couple of times I've walked in from a side street, Collins Street, and you'd see the group and you'd just turn around and go the other way because you're hitting somebody in front and somebody's hitting you from the back and the side, and it's just a mass of people going crazy.

I wonder if that's got anything to do with their pent-up

29:30 **stress and anxiety over what they've just been doing, you know what I mean?**

Could be. I think the Americans fought the Guadalcanal guys when they came back and they'd been through a bit of a beating, but I think then the army and I think perhaps some of their guys were jealous then because of the pay structure. The poor army guys were on what we called six bob [shillings] a day.

30:00 That's sixty cents a day. I was in the air force on ten-and-six [ten shillings and sixpence] a day, which was a lot of money. When I left the employment in Burnie I was only on twenty-one-and-nine pence a week.

30:30 So I went from, well, in terms of now, from \$2.20 a week to \$14-15 a week, it made a lot of difference. And the Americans of course were better off than I was. I think it was jealousy and finance, financial,

31:00 because the Yanks, generally, were great. We found them generous, very open-handed, very friendly, but of course now I've moved forward and I'm talking about the guys that were actually in the war zones. But they were great.

Do you think it had anything to do with taking out

31:30 **Australian girls, as well?**

Yeah, I think that might have been about 60-70%. But I wasn't going to mention that. Yeah, I think generally it was that the Yanks said, "what we're going to do to your women we get to Australia." Because a lot of the guys, they'd left their wives behind, their girlfriends. And the guys that gave them the hardest time,

32:00 gave Guadalcanal [boys] the hardest time, were the 9th Division boys that came back from the Middle East, and they were the ones that really hammered them.

I suppose they didn't want them touching their girlfriends, or taking girls away.

Yeah, that's right. At that stage it didn't worry me.

Well, you were only 18.

32:30 Yeah, and of course being at Air Board I lived in the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and I had a permanent room which cost me ten cents a night, ten cents a day actually, and I used to walk from there to Air Board and so on. We'd finish a job and we'd be away from Air Board, we had a truck and we'd do survey work, and we'd be back

33:00 after about a week, a fortnight, report in, finish our drawings in the office, leave them there. And then they'd say, "Well, you can disappear now and give us a ring every morning and if we need you, we'll get you to come in." So we used to sort of live in the middle of the city at the YM in Melbourne, which was just over the river from Flinders Street Station. And

33:30 we'd just give them a 'phone call every morning and they'd say, "No, ring again tomorrow," and finally you'd ring and they'd say, "Yes, we've got the next job ready, come in and report." But it was just like living at home.

Working at the Air Board, that was after you had done your rookie [recruit] training?

Yes.

So it was then necessary for you to do the same training

34:00 **as all the other air force blokes, in the beginning?**

Yeah, yeah.

So route marches?

Yeah, route marching and bivouacs with just a blanket on the ground, hardtack food, that was out in the bush in the area where we were in Shepparton.

34:30 And we marched and we did drills and of course at that stage, even, some people were taken out of the unit and discharged even then, you know, some of them weren't suited, weren't suited to service life, and they were just sent back to Melbourne and discharged.

How did you cope with the initial discipline in the air force with the rookie training?

Well, that was OK because I'd had about

35:00 three years cadet training at a high school. So that was fine, went down well with me. Actually, I remember, my father being an ex-officer, I got a fair bit of training there, too.

Running from him?

Trying to. He was a very fit man. Qualified in the army as a

35:30 drill instructor and a weapons expert, and he'd been a company commander in France, 26th Battalion, Queensland Battalion.

Can you tell us when you initially started working for the Air Board doing surveying, what did that entail?

Well, I was in the survey team

36:00 and we had a truckful of survey equipment, a survey officer, a driver motor transport and two general hands and we went out as a team. We travelled all over Victoria and we did Tasmania, surveying and doing survey reductions and doing

36:30 initial planning which we followed up with as soon as we got back to Air Board when we finished a job. But we'd take the drawings to a certain stage and then they went into the drafting office, and we just went away and went onto the next job.

Bill, for the ignorant, like me, when you see somebody on the street,

37:00 **which I see a lot where I live, with something that looks like a telescope, they're surveying, aren't they?**

Yeah, but they're doing it the easy way now. That machine they use, we used a theodolite which had to be set up manually and so on. Now the man you see has got a theodolite

37:30 which has a laser beam, which is a self-contained computer which is connected to a computer in the drawing office, and what that guy sees through the theodolite is now automatically drawn in the office by computer. They don't have to do reductions.

38:00 They have global positioning satellite now, which tells them exactly where they are to within a metre or two. It's all very easy now.

So did you say you had a crew of eight or six?

Six.

So a crew of six is now reduced to one person these days?

Yeah. Well, actually it's reduced to two, because what they have,

38:30 we used have a "chain man" and I think now they call him a "flag man", and he has a stick with a little dish on the top and he pushes on the survey point and the laser beam homes in on it and away it goes. It's a completely different game now. I mean, I got as far as the computer bit, computer drafting,

39:00 before I left Canberra and I didn't touch one thing.

So in that crew of six you were obviously the person with the, what was it called, the....?

Theodolite.

Theodolite?

Theodolite.

Theodolite, so that would be you, and then your

39:30 **mate would be helping you?**

We'd be driving pegs and we'd take measurements of what we call the chain. The original measuring device was a chain of 66 feet. Our chains were actually 100 feet, 300 feet, 500 feet, and we had to either physically measure or you could take the reading on the

40:00 staff, but that was a different system again altogether because there was a lot of reduction work necessary when you went back to the office with that.

So you could draw it to scale?

Yeah.

Is that right?

Yeah, you had to plot it using a protractor because these drafting machines weren't around in those days.

40:30 We used straight edges and protractors and so on.

It would have taken you all week.

Yeah, it used to take months to do some drawings.

Tape 3

00:31 **OK, Bill, I just wanted to start by going back to your rookie training, your initial training to start with. You mentioned that you handled the discipline OK, but I understand there were a few, I guess, severe sergeants that you had to deal with. Was there much sort of bastardisation, if you like, in some of those initial training days by some of the**

01:00 **CO's?**

No, I didn't strike any of that at all. Most of the sergeants in the training were guys who were initially aircrew but for some reason or other had been relocated. That's a nice way of putting it, I suppose.

01:30 The one chap, he got grounded because he'd buzzed [flown low over] the Spirit of Progress at one stage. There were some senior officers on board and they weren't very thrilled about it and he was reported, and he finished up being grounded and taken out of aircrew, and he became a sergeant drill instructor. Some of the drill instructors, known as DI's,

02:00 they were actually trained. But we had these few guys that had been reclassified for some reason or other and they were reasonable, they were good guys, I enjoyed them.

Were your initial, I guess, impressions of the air force, as you got into it, what you were expecting?

02:30 It was, as a matter of fact, it was perhaps a little bit better than what I was expecting.

In what way?

Well, I suppose I was fortunate in that when I was first posted out I wasn't posted to another squadron or whatever. But going directly to Air Board it put you in a separate situation where you're not

03:00 reliant on the air force for accommodation or feeding or whatever, it's just like being home except you've got to keep certain hours and be at certain places at certain times and so on. But apart from that it wasn't that much different to civilian life. That happened later.

Absolutely. How long was your initial

03:30 **training?**

Initial training was only 14 days.

Is that all?

Yeah.

So that was really, really basic?

Yeah, it was basic, so it was drill and a bit of weapon training, Bren gun was about the biggest one we got hold of. Four-day bivouac in the scrub without any amenities. It was cold,

04:00 it gets cold up at Shepparton, you know, around about July, June/July. I think we nearly all copped a cold out of it. I was fortunate because one of the boys who went in with me, his family lived at Shepparton and we were able to take a weekend leave and go in there and have a decent meal and a few other home comforts that you don't normally get.

04:30 That was all right, I enjoyed it. I'd been used to camp life.

And what can you perhaps tell us about Melbourne at that time, as Melbourne during wartime?

It was much the same as other Australian places. Blackouts,

05:00 although I guess they just carried on as per normal. There wasn't that much difference. The only difference between then and now would be speed of transport, availability of transport, but we used to be able to get around fairly regularly. We were well looked after there, we had a Comforts Fund, people who organised weekends

05:30 and there were parties to go to, 21st birthday parties or weddings even. And after a while you got a bit cagey and crafty and you went in and you particularly asked for a 21st birthday party or a wedding, because you knew there was plenty of grog.

So there were cheap ways to get drunk?

Well, it was good way in those days because we didn't get that much,

06:00 and without payment. But it was all right. We finished up in one bloke's place for a 21st birthday party, a brigadier actually, it was his daughter who was having the birthday, he was a good guy, we enjoyed that.

So did you make many mates

06:30 **when you sort of first joined up into the air force, at all?**

Well, no, it's a little bit different to perhaps navy and army. I mean navy, they're altogether on the one ship, always on the one ship, or nearly always, they travel together, they live together and whatever. A lot of the army people are the same. They get posted out or drafted out to a unit

07:00 and they stay with that unit. It's like 3RAR up north now. In the air force it was a different situation, you got posted around, and say I was at Air Board.... But then we weren't in Air Board, we were working outside Air Board most of the time so the only guys we got to know there

07:30 were perhaps the medical officer and the paymaster, that's about all. Then when we got to 3 Airfield Construction Squadron there was 600 people in it, which is a fair size unit, and there again you get segregated. I was in the survey unit, others were driver motor transport, others were welders, fitters,

08:00 plant operators, general hands, you never saw them. Like we went out to do a job and there was only, say, three or four of us at the time when we went out. We were split into two parties, two field parties. We went away under-established. We should have had three field parties, we only had two. We only had

08:30 four draughtsmen and we should have had six, and two of the four draftsmen were mechanical. Why they were posted out I don't know, because they were no good to us in the civil engineering situation. And we had two surveyors instead of three, so whereas the main group was a construction group we were broken into three shifts, three eight-hour shifts

09:00 basically, was what they did. There were only two of us, so we did ten and most of our stuff was done at night, funnily enough, we were using equipment which was day vision equipment, you know, theodolite and staff and so on, but I guess we'll get to that later.

We will, absolutely. You were talking a little bit to Heather [interviewer], just before we stopped for morning tea,

09:30 **about your work in the divisional work unit as part of your first survey team, that you were going out through South Australia and Victoria. It might sound like an obvious question, but given it was such a long time ago, I'm just wondering if you could give us a breakdown of... I mean, you had a six man crew:**

10:00 **who was responsible for what on that team, and I guess what the aim of, what the work you were doing was for, and what you knew about that?**

Yeah. Well, the surveyor, he actually co-ordinated the work and allocated the work to me to assist or whatever, the DMT [driver motor transport] did what he was rostered to do, he drove the truck, sometimes he operated

10:30 as a field man, driving pegs, and we used to cut things called "church windows" in those days, where we had a permanent survey marker we used to incise the bark in the tree in the shape of a church window, and they're quite expert guys that did this, they incised the bark off and then they had to smooth down a flat face,

11:00 and on that face we stamped or painted the position or the peg number and the value of it, in terms of above sea level. So that was them. Well, then the other guys, the general hands, they just cut tracks through the scrub, the bush, cleared lines aside for us for the instruments, drove pegs, held the staff.

11:30 Generally they were axe men, they just cleared the ground in front of us.

And can you give us a kind of tour guide of the areas that you covered in that survey team?

Well, from in Victoria, we did work at Sale, then

12:00 Orbost and Mallacoota. That was down the coast way. Then going up the other way, we went through Sale, Ballarat, Ararat, Geelong, Mildura and came back through

12:30 Nagambie - that was an experience.

Why was that?

Oh, well Nagambie's a little country town, I don't know if you know it or not, but there's a lake there, Lake Nagambie, and we always stayed at hotels, which is something that you never hear about now, we always stayed at hotels when we were on these trips because there were no air force camps, other than when you got to Sale

13:00 or Mallacoota or one of those places. But we were walking down the street one night, and Nagambie's one of those places with a large lawn area in the middle of the main street and the roadway on each side, a water tower, bowls club, public toilets and so on, and we walked past there one night, we'd finished work for the day, and

13:30 they were bowling, nice summer's evening and they were having a game of bowls, and one of the fellows said, "Would you like a game, boys?" And we thought, "Yeah, we'll come in and have a game." Well, the next day we couldn't straighten up, all our muscles were tied in knots. I've never bowled since. But out the backyard,

14:00 at the lake you could catch Murray cod, you could fish. Quite a cosy little country town, you know, I liked it.

Sounds like a great life.

Trips on the paddle wheel, and we found time to find a girl or two. Beer was a bit tight

14:30 but at least we used to have an understanding with the publican who'd know we were away all day, so when beer came on during regulated times during the day and the locals had their fill, he used to draw out a flag of beer, a wine flag and fill it up with beer, put in the fridge so that when we came home for dinner at night they'd walk out and put this nice icy cold bottle of beer

15:00 on the table, flowing beer, beautiful, they really looked after us.

Did that upset any of the locals, given the time restrictions?

No, I don't think, we weren't there anywhere long enough to upset the locals. Each job we went to lasted usually about a week, two weeks, then we were off.

And what about catching some of these local girls,

15:30 **wouldn't they know that there was no future in it?**

No. Well, on the short run ones we weren't very interested, it wasn't worthwhile because we used to leave the hotel about 6 o'clock in the morning and work till late, and get back to the pub and have a few

beers and then it was time to go to bed. And

16:00 we had a couple of married men in this group of half a dozen, and they used to find a little bit of greener fields, I think, they used to go out of an evening. But certainly us young blokes, believe it or not, we used to go home and stay at home and go to bed 'cause we had to get up the next morning and do the same thing all over again.

16:30 The old boys were just the stayers, I think. Hit and run.

I interrupted your tour. You were up to Nagambie, was it called, the place where you bowled that night?

Nagambie.

Nagambie, sorry. Where did you go after that?

17:00 Well, we'd been to various places, we used to drive around in a big circle, really. Nagambie was on our way back from Swan Hill - well, actually from Mildura, we'd already been to Swan Hill and Ballarat and Ararat and driven up through the desert to get to Mildura, and we were on our way back to Melbourne when we did the Nagambie job. Some of the jobs were interesting. Those particular jobs were only just

17:30 measuring airfields and so on, and they were property surveys so that the Commonwealth could reimburse the owners for the use of the land while the air force had it. But when we got down the other way we had our work to do at Sale at the gunnery store there,

18:00 and we had to lay out the gunnery circuit, like a little rail car running around with a machine gun and turret off an aircraft on it, and the guys used to practise machine gunning, imagining they were in the aircraft. We did that, we went down to Mallacoota. Mallacoota, they ran old aircraft Avro Ansons, Aggies we called them.

18:30 And at that time there was, well, I suppose you'd call it an "umbrella" over the entire Australian coast on submarine survey work, surveillance work, so if there was a tie-up, say, from Mallacoota, the aircraft ran from say Nowra round to Port Neill and then another

19:00 aircraft group would take over from there towards Adelaide, and then there'd be another air force group take over from Adelaide and go around and round to Perth, and so it went all the way around Australia. Because, unknown to a lot of people, there were actually Japanese submarines in Bass Strait, and all the service personnel who

19:30 travelled on leave by boat to Tasmania are classed as ex-servicemen or returned servicemen, as soon as they got outside the Port Melbourne they used to screen with what they call "paravanes", which were supposed to pick up any mines that had been laid in the Strait, and they were subject to attack. And when we were over,

20:00 we went over to Western Junction to do some work in Tassie, and we woke up there one night and the place had gone mad. There were Avro Ansons and Beauforts and other aircraft come in, you know, all trying to re-fuel and take off again, and they'd sighted the submarines in the Strait and they were hunting.

20:30 But there was stuff going on in Tasmania that I never even knew existed until we went over there. When we did the Victorian bit we found bomb dumps and camouflage roads and dispersal areas, camouflage dispersal areas, with aircraft round farm properties and quick release fences, and the farm roads were actually taxi roads with aircraft

21:00 bomb dumps built into the sides of hills, concrete, a lot of work went on. They built airstrips in Tassie, one at Valley Field, since been taken over and used as a speed track for car racing there, the Valley Field one. That was one of the first experiences in soil cement, what they call soil cement stabilisation,

21:30 in airfields.

How did that work?

Well, instead of laying a crushed metal foundation and so on and finishing it off with bitumen as they did then, they used what they call soil cement. You had to pick the land with the appropriate type of soil, and the machinery went through and it was all cut up and made

22:00 powdery and dusty and so on, then the cement was laid on it, neat cement was put on it by machinery, and then it was all mixed in together and then water carts were put on it and rollers and so on. So you didn't have a real concrete runway, but you had the soil cement which was solid enough to take, say, a medium-sized bomber or fighter aircraft.

22:30 That was about the first one that was built in Australia, that was built on a sheep property at Valley Field in Tassie. And that was one of the surprises I got when I got there. Even though I'd lived in Tassie, I had no idea that it was on. Tasmania was sort of keyholed in as a last stop, last position of defence. If Australia had been invaded everything would have been in Tasmania.

23:00 **So it was a bit of a surprise to you at the time?**

It was a bloody shock! And a great surprise, because I had no idea. And they had a place called Campbell Town in the middle and they had a great military hospital there, big military hospital, which dealt with people being brought back from the Islands and so on. Of course they later had one at Hobart.

23:30 They didn't have one in Launceston, though, they only had the one in Hobart and Campbell Town.

What did you think about the fact that there was all this preparation on your own home turf?

Well, surprised but not unexpected, because at that time, you know, they'd bombed, the Japanese had bombed out as far as Marble Bar,

24:00 from Alice Springs, and the miniature subs had been into the city, submarines were sighted off the south coast, west coast of Australia, and then Bass Strait. It was fairly obvious that if they got a foothold in Australia, that Tassie would've been the last ditch.

From your experience at the time was there a genuine fear of invasion?

24:30 Yes, there was. There were strict blackouts in Tasmania. And my father had gone back into what they call Volunteer Defence Corps, the VDC. He got his commission back and was a big wheel, you know. And the rest of his mates were ex-servicemen and were all involved too, a bit like "Dad's Army" [the British Home Guard]

25:00 you know, the British TV series. And, it must have been just before I went away, but we thought we'd get a bit of experience, and they had the normal small town war memorial up the end of the street and they had a 1918 field gun there, and so we dragged it to the end of the main street, 'cause it was all in blackout,

25:30 and there was a river that ran through town, and onto the bridge. And one guy got some gunpowder from somewhere, and we ran the gunpowder in with a fuse and a detonator and packed the barrel full of newspapers and so on, and we fired it, set her off, and that brought the VDC out.

26:00 That was one trick. The other trick was to get an empty kerosene tin and put about a quarter of a plate of gelignite in it with a short fuse and drop it off the bridge and it flows down towards the mouth of the river in an explosion, and that used to bring them out too. But I'd be about 16, I guess, when I was doing that.

Were you ever caught?

No.

26:30 I remember one day, I was a great huntsman type of fellow and pretty good with a rifle, and I rode down the main street one day, it was about 4 o'clock in the morning, and I was on a push bike, I had the ferrets with me and the bag and rifle, and I got halfway down the main

27:00 street outside the municipal council offices and the police office and post office and so on, and there was two rabbits playing in the middle of the road. So I pulled up and shot them. But then I had to be very quick to go there and pick them up and pedal like fury to get out of town before the police got out, because in those days you had a police sergeant that lived on the premises.

27:30 And the office was not manned during the night, they were pretty airy-fairy about it. Oh yeah, I had a few pranks.

But why would you have got in trouble for shooting a couple of rabbits?

In the middle of town, in the main street, you're joking! I don't think anybody else ever did it again.

28:00 I don't think anybody else ever tried to emulate it.

So what sort of, I mean, given that you were never caught, how would your "Dad's Army" react to the shenanigans that you got up to with the gun and the kero?

Well, of course they never knew who did it, did they? They knew it happened but they never found out who did it.

28:30 **Did they realise that there were a bunch of pranksters around?**

Yeah, but they didn't get around to finding out who it was. As a matter of fact, I played a prank since. I know I'm digressing again, but when I was in the army, when I went into the "weekend warriors",

29:00 we had what we call "Murray switches", you would never have seen them.

What are they?

A Murray switch was a little tube with a spring and a firing pin and you could set it to, you'd load it and cock it just like a rifle, and you could set it so that if you trod on it it went off, if you

- 29:30 pulled on it it went off, you could put it behind a drawer in a cupboard, if you closed the cupboard it went off, if you opened the drawer it went off. And when I was at Wynyard and was resident engineer for council, we had some people who were pinching petrol out of our vehicles when they were locked up in the council yard. So I still had the Murray switch
- 30:00 and I had a couple of blank cartridges, blank .303 cartridges, and I went and talked to the old police sergeant and told him what I was up to and he said, "Yeah, that's all right, yes, you can do that." So what I did, I found out where the people were getting through the fence, they'd just removed a couple of nails and pushed the palings aside, and I fixed the Murray switch up on the inside of the fence,
- 30:30 about ear height when the guy stepped through to come into the property. And I put blank cartridges in it and I had trip wire with fishing line coming down from the switch and across the bottom, about this far up from the bottom, so the guy would trip it with his foot as he came through. And I left instructions with the guy in charge that he was to uncock the thing
- 31:00 during the day, but before he left the council depot of a night to cock the Murray switch. And I was at home and the two-way radio went off in the car as I'm just about to leave for work in the morning, and a very excited guy at the depot "Alynn, it went off last night," and
- 31:30 it did, the guy had jumped through, and we had no more petrol thefts.

And was he caught?

No, he wasn't caught, but he was lucky 'cause he could have been injured, actually, 'cause a .303's got a wad in it that had it clipped him in the ear or the face he'd would've had a mark and it would have scarred him. But I've had my moments.

- 32:00 I've been up to a few tricks.

Oh, you don't want to have to let anyone steal your petrol.

No. Why should I?

Exactly.

I mean, we only had garaging for about four vehicles and we had about ten or something, so the ones that got left outside they had to be fuelled to go any time in case of an emergency, because I was also the civil defence co-ordination officer at the same time. That's a course I did at Mount Macedon.

- 32:30 I've been busy.

You have. I'll just bring you back to the surveying you were doing with the Divisional Works Board. You mentioned that the aim of a lot of your initial surveying was emergency airfield strips and that kind of thing. What were some of the other aims of the survey work that you were doing, I guess, in the latter [(UNCLEAR)] across to Tasmania and things like that?

No, that was it. We were confined to that function.

- 33:00 That was the function, that's what we did, and we'd finish and we just went back to headquarters, to Air Board.

So what was the longest trip away that you'd ever get to do?

Oh, Tasmania would be the longest. We were in Tassie for about three to four months. The rest of the time it varies from about three weeks to a couple of months. One of the biggest jobs we did was

- 33:30 a jungle training course at Warrandyte just outside of Melbourne.

What did you have to do there?

Well, it was bush land and we had to survey it and do a terrain survey so you could make a topographical map, and it just turned into a jungle training school like they did down behind the Gold Coast. That's all it was for.

- 34:00 **And were you given orders to peg out a particular area and survey it, or were you sort of given instructions to kind of look for particular things?**

Well at Warrandyte we had to look for a suitable area, but the other property surveys we were given specific areas to survey.

- 34:30 **And so did the fixed fellows, including yourself, on the survey team, did you end up good mates over this time at all?**

Yeah, a couple of them. But, see, four of them lived in Melbourne, so when we were based in Melbourne, between jobs, they just went home, went to live with their family.

- 35:00 So we never met any of their family. They reported back for work and that was it. It's the same with the group I went away with, 3 Airfield Construction, two blokes came from Melbourne, one came from

- Ballarat and there was me; the surveyor, Frank, came from Brisbane
- 35:30 and I'm not clear where the senior surveyor came from. But no, we never sort of met.
- So what was the best part of that job with the Divisional Works Board, for you?**
- I suppose it was mateship came down to one thing, because you travelled with these same six blokes
- 36:00 everywhere you went, and we were all together till I got posted out, for six months or more, twelve months. So yes, we palled up. That was only while we were together. Once we left the track and walked into Air Board building we were all separated again.
- 36:30 But yeah, I guess the mateship. They were all a good group of guys. The surveyor was a bit old, a bit long in the tooth, and a most peculiar man.
- In what way?**
- Oh, he was an odd sort of a guy. I mean apart from me, who was only just turned 18 anyway, the rest of the guys were -
- 37:00 well, the two married blokes, I guess, would be in their thirties; the driver, he was single, but he'd be in his thirties; another bloke might have been one that was in his twenties; but we never really ever got together as a group outside business. We travelled together,
- 37:30 we worked together and then when we got back we just split up and went our various ways. It was different to the other trip with 600 blokes. We didn't even get around to meeting all the 600.
- Well, no, that would have been a bit hard.**
- Particularly when you're on shift work. I mean they were one shift and I was one shift.
- But was there, given that you kind of, in a way, stuck**
- 38:00 **with the same six fellas on your tour around the place and they were all quite a bit older, some of them, were there things that you had to put up with that you would have preferred not to, I guess?**
- No, not really, no. I was only a kid, but I was accepted. Well, I suppose it was a matter of knowing your job, each of us knew what we had to do and we did it and we did it all together.
- 38:30 Everybody knew what the other bloke was going to do and it worked out. It was a good idea, actually, to have a team like that.

Tape 4

- 00:34 **Bill, something that occurred to me: since you came from Tasmania, did you sign up with any mates?**
- No, no, none. I did it all by myself.
- The way you like it.**
- But, funnily enough, when I got to New Guinea, one of my best mates in Alderson
- 01:00 was on an airstrip down the coast and I went down there and we got in touch with him, through some of the American boys, and he was a sigs [Signals] guy with a fighter aircraft
- 01:30 group. And when I got down there to see him I found that one of the members of the plane group, the pilot, was, or had been, my father's senior clerk in the bank. He was from Alderson, too. But they were the only guys I met from home. Although
- 02:00 there was one bloke from Tassie in our unit - I'm digressing here. Molly went into hospital with - what did she have? - scarlet fever or something, and there was another guy in the hospital who was also in the children's ward with Molly,
- 02:30 and he was a couple of years older and he sort of looked after her while she was in there. And he was in the unit, he was in 3ACS. I didn't find that out till afterwards.
- It's funny how certain people pop up, isn't it? Something I'm curious about - and remember that I'm ignorant about surveying - if you're a draughtsman, how does a draughtsman end up**
- 03:00 **surveying, because a draughtsman - correct me if I'm wrong, please - is drafting the plans. So how do you end up surveying?**
- Well, you naturally sort of drift into it. We spoke about earlier the type of equipment that was available

in those days,

- 03:30 and it was all line-of-sight equipment, daylight equipment, and when you did the survey work, you know, you drove pegs in and you tied them all in together with measurement and directional work from the theodolite, and then you had what they call computations to do.
- 04:00 This entailed a knowledge of mathematics, geometry, and you used seven-figure logarithms, and it was a matter of bookwork. And you had to translate all your theodolite sightings and readings off the staff and so on, because they used a vertical rod, which is now divided into millimetres
- 04:30 and centimetres, but was divided into feet and inches and tenths of inches. So all that's got to be brought back into something that can be plotted on paper, like bearings, level heights and so on. So say you do your computation work, well, then after you do that
- 05:00 it was quite normal for the surveyor to plot the actual survey onto paper, but then all the area had to be filled in, which was done by tacheometry, what we call tacheometry.

What is tacheometry?

Well, you use a theodolite and use the staff and, whereas in levelling you read at one point on the staff, with tacheometry you read on

- 05:30 three lines. And to do that you had to re-translate that back to a centreline measurement to levels, and you took spot shots all over the place so that you could actually draw from that information a contour plan showing the actual shape of the land, so that it was simple translation from
- 06:00 one thing to going onto the drafting board because there was certain amount of work that you had to plot and then you gradually drifted into more extensive stuff to go on and just became that way. But then I went a little bit further. When I finished up with the
- 06:30 old department in Canberra; which was Housing and Construction - no longer exists, they broke it up after I left - I was the regional chief draughtsman and I had three chief draftsmen under my control and I was at what they call "professional three level." Technically I was at the same level as
- 07:00 a grade three engineer, grade three architect, or whatever. And by the time I got there I was what they call "multi-disciplined": I could do survey work, I could do architectural work, I could do architectural design and drafting, I could do mechanical design and drafting, I could do civil design and drafting - that's roads,
- 07:30 sewerage, stormwater, bore treatment works, whatever. So there wasn't an area that I had to work in that I wasn't familiar with and that I couldn't comment on, "Pick another bloke to design," "Pick an architectural designs person," "Pick an engineering designs person." Then of course I got into computer, then I'd learn -
- 08:00 if I was going to have to supervise people who were doing computer drafting; I had to know computer drafting. Everything just naturally flows on.

Did you get more money as a surveyor than a draughtsman?

No, because I was always just known as a senior draughtsman. Never, ever known as a surveyor. I was known as an engineer.

- 08:30 I did a course after the war at the British Institute of Engineering Technology, a civil engineering diploma course I did with them. But by that time I was pretty well OK with most of the stuff anyway, and I did that course, part-time course, at night. And I was married, had children, worked during the day, did the course at night, and
- 09:00 we got there.

You certainly did. Would a town planner learn surveying?

No, a surveyor learns town planning.

Oh.

I used to cross swords with the town planner. Professor Winston.

- 09:30 He was at the University of New South Wales and he was a consultant to the Snowy [Mountain Hydro-electric Scheme]. And it was my job, the division I was in, we did the domestic work within the scheme, we didn't do power stations, all that stuff was done by a special group, and Professor Winston was the consultant to the
- 10:00 mob I was with. And I used to do the town layouts, and it was very complicated. All the houses were transportable and they had to go in in a certain way because some of them were in two pieces, some of them were in three pieces, some were available before others, so if we put the available ones into position we had to be able to get the other ones in. And they went

- 10:30 in a big transporter, and everything had to dovetail in. The last town I did was Khancoban on the Victorian side of the Snowy; and I did away with this Canberra attitude of little houses, little boxes, you know, like the old song. And I, because of the way that we were getting
- 11:00 the houses as they were vacated in areas that were closing down, and moving in and being different types, I could only get so many of these at some stage and so many of the other, so I started to place them at angles on the blocks. And I was severely criticised by Professor Winston because it didn't agree with the current town planning procedures of the day
- 11:30 or whatever. And I crossed swords with him and I crossed swords with the consulting architect, and I was told I was unethical because I criticised his work and held up a payment. I can be a real devil sometimes. But I've transgressed now,

12:00 I've gone aside.

I'm just thinking about the aesthetic of living in a village that every single house looks exactly the same. It would be nice to have odd angles and shapes, I'd say.

Well, it was much more open area, which was proved by aerial photographs that were taken afterwards, and, compared with Cabramurra, which was the highest town in Australia at time, comparing that with Khancoban it's like chalk and cheese.

- 12:30 You know the Cabramurra ones were all set out in lines like a pack of cards, but mine were nice open-spaced areas, people could have gardens and they weren't crowded up on each other. But it was just because of the availability of houses and so on that it ended up that way. I didn't have anything to do with the actual layout of the town and the housing allotments
- 13:00 because I was given housing allotments and then I was given houses as they became available and I just had to put them on the allotment, and that was the obvious, most sensible thing to do.

Makes total sense to me.

Professor Winston didn't say so. I can safely say that now because he would be no longer with us.

What about your own house, did you design this house?

Yes, I did. This was the last one I did.

It's fantastic.

- 13:30 Well, we've had people in to look at it and they seem to think it is a little bit, but it's been designed for the area, for our type of living and where we are and so on. The only thing I didn't take into consideration is the fact that they go and turn Mill Road, which was just a normal suburban street, into a
- 14:00 sort of secondary highway, you know.

That happens, doesn't it?

Yeah. You've got to grow up, I suppose.

I'm curious to know, though, because you obviously have a real interest in architecture, did you follow the architectural trends of Frank Lloyd Wright and W Griffiths or Burley Griffin?

Well Burley Griffin of course, because I was in Canberra for a long time and we had a lot of Burley Griffin's original drawings in our office. And

- 14:30 yeah, I agree with him. And his wife was a very clever woman, too. Frank, Frank Lloyd Wright, yeah, I liked his work, mainly because it was different. I like to be different. I do not like now, I have disliked, I dislike the current architectural work that goes on here now, you know, the types of housing out now,
- 15:00 it might look all right around the Mediterranean but they don't look nice here.

You mean like the whitewashed?

The big porticos, columns, you know. I can look at that house or a group of housing and I could tell you virtually circa whatever, you know, when it was built.

- 15:30 **I think Griffin and Lloyd Wright tried to build houses that went with the environment.**

Yeah.

Not stood out from it, but became part of it, is that correct?

That's right. Which I've tried to do with this place.

It's lovely. Now, something I've meant to ask you, were you and Molly, your wife of 56 years, did you meet in Tasmania before the war or

16:00 **after?**

No, we both lived in Alderson. Molly was born in Devonport, I was born in Smithton, but we both lived at Alderson. And my best mate, he joined the air force, and his father owned a, well, sort of

16:30 it was everything, it was like drapery, ladies' fashions, menswear, a big store just across the road from the bank, where I was. And Molly's mother had died at an early age and Molly had been virtually adopted by this particular family, inasmuch as the daughter was Molly's best friend. And that worked in all right with me because the

17:00 son was my best friend. But we didn't get together until after the war.

But you'd actually met before the war?

Oh yeah, we knew each other before the war. Molly was only a kid, though, but I knew of her, I knew Molly's father, he was an ex-Camel Corps guy from First World War I and quite an interesting guy.

17:30 Molly's whole family was interesting. Yeah, we met after the war.

I might ask you about you actually getting to know her as a young woman when you came back from the war. I guess I was just trying to ascertain whether or not you were childhood sweethearts before you went to the war?

No, as a matter of fact when I came back after the war, my girlfriend's

18:00 father was what everybody hopes for, my girlfriend's father owned a pub, he was a publican in Alderson. And I had arranged to go out, oh, go to the pictures, that's right, at the local theatre. And Molly at that time was supposed to

18:30 go up to this other family's house for the evening, but the grandfather, who lived in Burnie, died that particular afternoon, so that left Molly in limbo with nothing to do. And the people rang me up to let me know that the grandfather had died so I said, "Well, what about Molly, what's Molly going to do?" because whatever

19:00 they had in mind was definitely off. And they said, well, they didn't know. And I said, "Well, I'll ring Molly and have words with her," so I rang Molly and invited her to go to the movie theatre with me and my girlfriend, and then I rang my girlfriend and told her that I'd asked Molly to join us for the evening, but that didn't go down too well so I said to the girlfriend, "Well, you do what you

19:30 want to do but I've asked Molly out because of the circumstances," and I said, "that's what I'm going to do. So I'll take Molly out, if you want to stay home you stay home." That was it. And we've been together ever since.

But did you think that would happen?

No, because that

20:00 was about six months before I took a job up in New Guinea and I went up there on a two-year contract. And I got engaged to Molly before I went.

I wonder if your first girlfriend was a bit peeved?

No, she took things in her stride. As a matter of fact she was very unfortunate, that girl, she was

20:30 a great sunbather and she finished up with skin cancer and she passed away when she was only about 19, 20. Yeah, cancer got her.

That's pretty terrible.

Yeah.

Something that you mentioned before which I found very interesting was

21:00 **weaponry, that you'd actually learnt how to shoot a gun when you were a kid.**

Yeah.

Did your dad give you that?

Yes, I started off with an air rifle, like most boys of that age. I finished off with a magazine-loading .22 target rifle and .410 double-barrelled shotgun.

21:30 And we used to go out shooting, you know, nearly every weekend. When I came back from working at Burnie we used to go out shooting every weekend. I had a pretty good eye with a rifle, as a matter of fact. We used to go out with about three other friends of another mate of mine and they all had shotguns, and at the end of the day my total kill with the rifle, the .22 rifle,

22:00 exceeded their kill with the shotgun; and mine were all killed running, too. I could knock down a rabbit

running - oh, it might be a 20 foot wide roadway, a laneway in a farm area, and by the time it broke out from one side I'd have him knocked over by the time he got to the other side. So I had a pretty good eye. And on LST I used to

22:30 go as a gunner on the ship. The ships were completely circled with 20mm, well, you only had anti-aircraft guns. I went on one trip and they asked if anybody had automatic weaponry training and I said yes, I had, because I had already done some in the army

23:00 life and so on. And so we pulled a job on the gun. So every time there was an air alert I went on the gun; another guy would be the loader and away we went. But there was a bit of a trick attached to it, because you were classed as one of the crew so we ate with the crew. I mean, everything I did

23:30 had a reason for it, you know. So I knew it was going to happen. So I got better quartering and better feeding and so on and I did eight hour watches on the gun, the same as the American gunners on the boat, so every trip I did I was gunner.

So, out of curiosity, did you become mates with any

24:00 **infantry men?**

American infantry? Cut.

Hail.

So, Bill, it sounds like you were pretty handy with your hands. Besides making bombs, though, when you were a kid or a little bit younger, did you do a lot of improvising in the Islands

24:30 **with making things for the airstrip?**

No, none, no we didn't have to do that at all. The only improvisation that we did do: you know we were talking about surveying and so on being a daylight job? Of a night, when we were on the airstrip doing jobs of a night - and when we look back at it, you think

25:00 you were mad - but the surveyor trying to take sights on the staff; the only way he could do it was to torch up the face of the staff. And when you think that over about a four-day period we had 350-odd air strikes, every time we got an air raid warning you had to switch the torch off,

25:30 but because the machines had to be static, once you started to carry out an operation on the survey equipment you had to stay there, you didn't dare bump it or knock it or move it. So when there was a raid on, you'd just switch the torch off and you just had to stand there either at the machine or with the staff on a particular spot, otherwise you'd have to start all over again.

26:00 If people saw us now you'd think it was mad.

So you worked day and night?

Yeah, we had to. We had, as I say, three eight-hour shifts on construction, but we only had two survey teams so sometimes to keep up with construction we both had to work. So we were working a minimum of 12 hours a day, and a maximum could be

26:30 all day.

What about building machinery and transistors or radios, is that something that you were familiar with in your early days?

How did you get onto that question?

Because the woman at the office said that you liked radios.

27:00 Yeah. Well, when I was living at Burnie, I was about eleven or 12, I was into making crystal radios.

But what was crystal?

Well, they were funny-looking machines because you just got a piece of plain timber board and you had a lump of silver lead, which was the crystal that you put on

27:30 the board, and you put a couple of tacks in so that it wouldn't move, and then you had a piece of wire that came up, bent across and down and then you had a cat's whisker on the end of that, that you could move around on the crystal. And you had two connections that went back to a couple of little brass posts that you connected your

28:00 headgear to, and you just fiddled this cat's whisker around on the crystal until it got a transmission and you could hear it.

Very well?

Oh yeah, quite clear. As a matter of fact, I got one of the old trumpets off one of the old radios, one of the early radios, a big trumpet, and all I did was put the two earpieces under the base of it

28:30 and the trumpet amplified the sound, and you could sit in the room and hear it.

Did you end up making a radio when you were overseas in service?

No, I didn't have to. The Yanks had plenty of them. We used to listen to the Tokyo Rose regularly on it. And she knew more about what was going on than we did, and she used to tell us more than our own air force blokes told us.

29:00 So if we wanted to know anything we just tuned into Tokyo Rose and get the latest information on what we were doing and where we were.

That must be why the services didn't like her.

Oh, well, she had us killed off a couple of times and of course that information was available to the civilians on short wave radios and, you know,

29:30 the family picked it up, 'cause they worry. But, Philippines, the fifth columnists, as you probably know, that was exceedingly accurate. Tokyo Rose knew everything about us, what we were doing, where we were going, when we were going.

30:00 How would she know?

Oh well, see, they'd occupied the Philippines for, what, three or four years or so before we got there, and it was a matter of recruitment, local natives. And I think even MacArthur had trouble when he was on Leyte at Tacloban,

30:30 his headquarters, he took over an old mansion there that became his headquarters, and he had Filipino staff - well, they don't call them "Filipinos" now, they call them "Filipinas" - but they staffed his headquarters. And the night that we left Leyte to go to Mindoro,

31:00 we were, a group of about five or six of us, were actually in a Filipino village a couple of miles outside of Tacloban, and we were celebrating the return of villagers who'd gone out as guerrillas against the Japanese and they hadn't been home for about three years or so. And they had the big barbecue and lots of palm wine and so on,

31:30 and we'd been there for about three or four hours, I guess, and the head man came along and he said, "I'm sorry, but you guys have got to go back to camp." And we said, "What for, we're having a good time here, why should we go back to camp?" He said, "You're leaving." And we said, "Where are we going, when do we leave?" And he said, "You're leaving tonight." "And where are we going?" "You're going to Morotai."

32:00 And so we climbed in our vehicle and we went back to camp and yeah, all the tents had been struck, the place was packed. And we had to have so much material and all our equipment down at the beach that night and we were leaving the next day. "Where are we going?" "Oh, we don't know." Anyway, we got loaded and the next day we waited off the beach

32:30 for the rest of the convoy to come up, for about 24 hours; and, as per normal, after we'd been about two days on the ship, the senior officer on board broke out the orders, and guess where we were going? Morotai. But the Filipino knew before we left Leyte. It was amazing, Tokyo Rose knew.

I think that happened quite a lot.

33:00 She welcomed us at Morotai when we got there, you know. "Welcome, members of the 3 Airfield Construction Squadron, just arrived." You just wouldn't believe it. And to think that we were on about a four-day convoy, and the flagship of the convoy copped a bomb, the guy in charge of the whole operation, he got wounded on that one.

33:30 And we were on the water for four days, and we had 353 Japanese aircraft shot down over the convoy in those few days, and that's a lot of aeroplanes. And they were nearly all kamikaze. And then, when we got to the beach, we were about fourth away, and then the infantry landed. And then the next thing, we were the

34:00 next ones. And then after we landed, still under attack by kamikazes and so on, we had to move out, get out of there as quick as we could and go straight on the job. But what the Japanese knew about us and what was going on, it was amazing.

Is that something servicemen were concerned with, well, with espionage

34:30 **being, coming across spies, you know, being careful about what you say? Was that something you were concerned with?**

No, we were never that way. You know, we were a unit by ourselves, all Australian guys. OK, we had American units, the 1474 Engineers, that went on the jobs with us,

35:00 but they carried on as per normal. One guy, he painted with oil paints, he used to do religious paintings. Everybody was calm, cool, collected. Except one night when the Japanese tried to take Morotai back.

I'd like to, or Chris, one of us would like to talk to you about that night in detail a little bit later. I'm just curious to know how long had you been working for the Air Board, until

35:30 **you went overseas?**

Well, it would be about 15,18 months.

And you had to wait for six months.

Well, the first time I went they told me I couldn't go because I wasn't 19. So I applied for overseas service, which again was different. Most people tried to get out of it and

36:00 with the Divisional Works Board in Melbourne I know that draughtsmen were asked, "Would you like to go to the Pacific area?" and the answer was, "No." Because they were married, they lived in Melbourne, had a house in Melbourne, so why should they go to the Pacific. So I asked and went. Silly bugger.

36:30 **I wouldn't have said that.**

Why, because you're monitoring? You can knock that out afterwards.

But Molly would have been upset. Oh no, because you hadn't actually started going out.

No, no, she was a school kid. Well just about a school kid in those days. She was more interested in the navy than the air force. Nearly all the town were navy boys.

They had shinier uniforms.

37:00 **Did they get more money, the navy blokes?**

No way, I don't think they got as much as army, did they? They probably got their six bob a day, same. But air force, you know, air force was different because they were grouped. Group 1 to Group 6,

37:30 I was in Group 5. Group 1 were generally general hands, in other words, labourer-type people, assistant cooks and so on. And according to your qualifications and experiences you were put into a relevant group. So I was in Group 5. Group 6 was

38:00 **Hoi polloi?**

Yeah.

So in the six months that you were waiting until you went overseas, did you continue surveying?

No, after I got posted to 3 Airfield Construction Squadron and they were at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and they were reforming, they'd just come down from Darwin

38:30 and they were regrouping and reforming and getting new equipment and they were getting ready to make the move.... As I mentioned earlier, we were the first Australian group to go away as a complete unit attached to the American forces, and we had to get equipment from everywhere. Some of it we got issued with, some of it we liberated from other people.

39:00 That's why they called us "Ali Baba and the 40 thieves".

OK, we might stop there, but I might like to talk to you about that later.

Tape 5

00:30 **All right, Bill, I thought we'd start the afternoon off with the news that you got to head overseas. What was that like to finally head off?**

Well, actually it was a great relief because we knew that we were reforming at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and we were sleeping on three-tiered

01:00 bunks on the senior accommodation in the grandstands and a little bit uncomfortable and a little bit cold, so we were actually pleased to get out of there. But then we finished up, when we left there, some of them went by ship and a couple of blokes loaded a bit of the gear off in Melbourne and went around to Sydney.

01:30 Some of our heavy equipment went up by rail or road to Sydney and we went up by train, and there again we were housed in an open grandstand this time, at Randwick. It was just as cold. I remember you'd wake up of a morning and there were guys out on the track training the trotters and horses in

02:00 fog. And we were there for about a week.

And were you sleeping on just your palliasse?

What's a palliasse?

Oh, so you weren't on palliasses?

We were just flat out, we just had our blanket. All we had was what we could carry, which was our normal wearing gear and two blankets and a ground sheet. So that was our sleeping.

02:30 **Sorry, Bill, you were telling me about your sleeping arrangements in the grandstand.**

Yes, well, that was the groundsheet and the two blankets that we had. I forget what the meal arrangements were, they might have run a mobile kitchen outside Sydney somewhere,

03:00 but I can't remember that. We were there for about a week.

What did you know you were going to be doing before you left Australia?

Nothing. They didn't tell us anything. They never told you anything in those days. It's a funny thing, but nobody knew where we were going, nobody knew when

03:30 we were coming back. And now when service people go away, they have goodbye parades, welcome home parades. We just went. Nobody knew. Not even our family knew. And then being disbanded in the field, we just all dispersed. Nobody knew we were back in it.

04:00 **So if you didn't know where you were going, did you know what you were doing? Because you were responsible for loading up your own gear, weren't you?**

Oh yeah, we loaded our own shipping, and after we left Australia, 'cause it was all landing ship tanks and in those days they had no forklifts or anything like that,

04:30 so we had to hand load our trucks. And the trays were about 4 foot, 4 foot 6 inches off the ground, and some of the stuff we used to put on was tanks of aviation fuel so it was a bit of a struggle to get the material up into the truck. Yeah, we loaded it and we unloaded again and we did that

05:00 over the whole of the tour, about - well, we made about seven trips, so that's 14 load and unloads.

You would have been fit by the time you got there.

Yeah, we were fit before we went. We weren't fit when we came back.

Now, what about the wharfies at this stage, were you expecting any help from them

05:30 **around the dock?**

Well, perhaps we were, but we didn't get any. Being survey teams we were supposed to be armed with a Smith and Wesson .38 revolver, which is fitted on the belt. As a result of a whole case of them going off, we were trying to survey with a .303 rifle and bandoliers

06:00 with ammunition. But actually, after we tried and it didn't really work, they gave us Thompson sub-machine guns and we found that didn't work either, so we swapped them with the Americans for carbines, .30 carbines, and they were only a .22 rifle, short arms, they were great.

06:30 **Actually, I want to get to the horse-trading with the Americans a little bit later on and other things you might have acquired later on.**

We didn't horse trade.

You just acquired?

We had nothing to trade.

You mentioned just before lunch - and I hope you were talking about before you went up to the Islands - you didn't necessarily have all the gear you needed; you had to kind of acquire it

07:00 **some other places, is that right?**

Yeah, some of it was.

What sort of things were you short?

We were short of earthmoving equipment, bulldozers, trailers, trucks and vehicles to carry, say, people like us who travelled around in a smaller group of three or four at a time. I mean, we finished up with American weapon

07:30 carriers, which was just like a bigger jeep. But the rest of the stuff, no, we had to acquire some.

Where did you get it from?

I don't know, to tell you the truth. It just appeared. I know the trucks used to go out during the day, the big semi-trailers, open semi-trailers, and they'd come back at night and they'd all have stuff in them.

08:00 But we had to leave all our uniforms behind, so all we had were khaki trousers, khaki shirts, and they were a bit heavy too for where we were going. One thing we always had to wear, and that was a slouch hat.

Nobody would know you were Australian if you didn't have your hat.

It didn't matter what we wore anywhere else, but we had to wear our slouch hat.

08:30 **Now, was that something personal between the men, or was that an order?**

That was an order. That was an order.

So you had to lighten your load so much that you actually couldn't carry enough uniforms, enough of your own uniforms, in terms of spares or...?

Yeah, any clothing and that type of thing there wasn't much room for.

09:00 All we had was a normal Australian pack. Cross webbing braces, knapsack and belt, water bottle, bayonet, rifle, no ammunition but we still had a rifle, and that was it. Oh, your blankets and groundsheet, they went on a roll on the top of your pack.

09:30 **Did you know at the time that you didn't have any ammunition for your rifle?**

Yeah. It's a funny thing, in Australia, as it happened, late in CMF too, if you had a firing situation they count - well, they used to, anyway - they counted the bullets out, and then when you came back you had to return the empty cases to the same number.

10:00 And if you fired a shot without being ordered to fire, you faced a charge. Like a normal situation, you know, the other forces, the Yanks used to fire off at anything, OK, but if we fired off without having being ordered to or it was an accident, you didn't need to, you were charged.

10:30 **Now, did that cause any problems with....? I mean, it sounds like a very tough calling.**

Well it is a little.

Out in the field.

Well, I can see the reason for it because we see it now where troops do fire unnecessarily and civilians get hurt. Yeah, that's fine, that's fair enough, but I think in a situation where you're heading for trouble

11:00 I don't see why they shouldn't give you a few bullets when you're out there, especially when they put they put you on guard at night on the perimeter, it's a bit ridiculous. And the American ammunition was automatic ammunition and ours was rim-fire, so you couldn't interchange ammunition. Now you can, I mean each force now has got interchangeable

11:30 ammunition with the other. That's great.

That's terrible. OK, so exactly when did you become aware that you were heading to Aitape for your first operation?

Well, we knew where we were off to as soon as we got

12:00 into Finschhafen. We didn't know we were particularly going to Aitape, nobody told us we were going to Aitape, but the first time we got into the harbour at Finschhafen and we saw the rest of the shipping that was in there and when the Japanese low-level bombers came in on the first night we were there, we knew we were there.

12:30 **What were your impressions of the whole thing, now that you found yourself in the middle of it?**

I thought it was rather exciting. And the way the Japanese came in nobody could do anything about it because they came in at deck level, so nobody could fire at them because they were the shipping in the harbour and if they fired they'd just hit another boat somewhere else. So you couldn't even fire at them. And the Jap bombers used to come in

13:00 and just weave their way around and do what they wanted to do.

So how close would they get to shore or to the wharf?

What, the Japs?

Yeah.

Well, they'd come over Finschhafen, they'd just come over the convoy and then go over land and just go off and do a big turn and then either come back or go back home, whatever they wanted to do.

13:30 **And how, you might have mentioned this briefly before, but what was the scale of the convoy you were in?**

Well, we ourselves, we took up four to five LSTs, and with the accompanied boats, you'd be on a navy run about 150 ships,

14:00 I think. And on ours there'd be 100 or more, and that includes small landing crafts, like chickens huddled around a mother hen, you know, they were small ones. They had the roughest rides, those guys. The blokes that had the best rides, were the guys in the aircraft carriers, they had a couple of heavy cruisers and they'd be all right, but the rest on the

14:30 fairly small ships, they got a rough ride. I believe when they took Leyte, or when they ran into Leyte, they had about seven-metre waves and they landed there, you know.

Just to make it a bit easier.

Yeah. When we drove in, you knew you were going down because they used to open the bows of the LSTs and lower the ramp, so you'd just skim over the water.

15:00 And the first thing off the boat was bulldozers.

Was this in Aitape?

No, this was everywhere. Everywhere we landed, it was a procedural thing that happened. And they dropped, as soon as the boat grounded and they dropped the ramp into the water the first bulldozer would go out and would start to heap sand up to form a bridge over the ship.

15:30 And we went into one and there was one guy there who was an officer with, we had our own airfield defence people and he was the officer in charge, and at Mindoro he said, "Follow me," and he raced off, and he ran off the end of the ramp. But we grounded on a bit of sandbar and he went straight into about

16:00 six feet of water. Fully clothed, fully geared, the whole works. He said "Follow me." Famous last words.

All you would have seen was a hat floating on the surface.

Yeah, more or less, except it wasn't what we normally wore, you had to wear a hard hat till when we landed. But it was a funny event.

At what stage when you got to the Islands, Bill, were

16:30 **you, did you meet, or were you aware that you were being seconded to the Americans?**

Oh, as soon as we got to Aitape. We were allotted an area outside the American camps but it was only blasted mud and toted up palms and a hell of a mess, you know, and we were right next to the 1876 Engineers

17:00 Regiment, the American one, and they were the people who we were with the whole of our trip and they were great. Because when we landed, after we'd been 14 days on this old ship trying to get to New Guinea and we'd run out of everything, they did a whip around their camp and they came up with complete changes of clothing from underwear

17:30 up, and cigarettes, chocolate, chewing gum - nobody had whiskey, but they had everything else. They were a great mob of guys, and they were about the same size unit as us. They were an engineering battalion and they were about the same size. They were great.

You encountered a bit of enemy fire coming in to Aitape?

18:00 Yeah.

Bill, can you actually walk us through, I guess, from your perspective, how it unfolded? I mean what you knew of your operation to start with, as you were heading into Aitape, and basically how it all transpired?

Well, there's not much to that because we didn't know where we were going. We knew we were in New Guinea, that was

18:30 the big deal, we were in New Guinea. But we didn't know whereabouts in New Guinea we were. And Aitape was about 15-odd miles up the coast from where we landed, so all we had to do was to get our gear and equipment off the boat. And we weren't in LSTs at that stage, we were still on

19:00 the old freighter and whatever. So we had to get all that unloaded and then we hit the road, and we were just told by the American provos where our camp was and they took us there and left us there. And we had nothing, nothing with us at that stage, only the trucks that had escorted us there

19:30 or transported us there. The equipment didn't start turning up until the next day. We spent a hell of a night there.

In what way?

On the groundsheet, on the mud, with the blankets over us, pulled over us to try and keep the rain out, and that was it.

So what were your first impressions of the place, of New Guinea?

Oh, "What the bloody hell are we doing here?" It wasn't much

20:00 of an impression, let me tell you. The beaches were black sand, shocking place.

What had you been, I guess, told, or what had you known about the Japanese before you landed at Aitape?

Well, we didn't know much at all. I had a cousin

20:30 in the navy on the HMAS Perth who disappeared when the Perth got sunk and we had no idea where he was, but later on we heard he was in Changi and that's where he spent the war, in Changi camp. And I've been up there since and had a look at it and seen what it was like. But no, we hadn't struck any Japanese. I had struck Japanese

21:00 civilians in Devonport. The P&O boat system had come into being, actually, and some of the P&O crew were Japanese and so on and I knew what a Japanese looked like, but we didn't strike any Japanese troops until we actually got to Morotai.

Were you getting much, I guess,

21:30 **propaganda through the service about Japanese?**

Yeah. Well, we got a lot from Tokyo Rose. I was reading a bit during our lunch break, a couple of messages that she passed on. She used to tell everybody in Australia, at one stage, that we'd been decimated as a unit completely.

22:00 Other times, we were a week leaving Leyte to go to Mindoro, she knew where we were going, we had no idea. As earlier mentioned, we weren't told until we were two days out on board ship, but she knew and we didn't know about this cousin of mine, except they heard that over Tokyo Rose

22:30 too, they read out a list of names at one stage. And he's alive, he's living in Melbourne at the moment. He was lucky. He started off as a midshipman, and just before the war started he decided the navy wasn't for him. And when the war started he signed up as a seaman, and then they sunk the Perth and that got him, and

23:00 that's where he spent the rest of the war. The Japanese, yeah, we heard a bit about atrocities and so on.

What did you hear at that stage?

Well, at that stage we'd heard the bit about the nurses on the beach in Indonesia, sinking of the hospital ship just off town down here,

23:30 a few stories come back from Darwin about the air raids. Apart from that, no, we didn't know anything.

24:00 **So what were your duties, once you landed at Aitape, what were you expecting to do, what did you have to do?**

Well, I wasn't expecting to go on guard the first night without ammunition, I thought that was a bit hot. Then the next thing we had to do was to line up,

24:30 four injections, you marched through like this and you got two in this arm, two in that arm, and that was for a few of the tropical diseases that were apparently where we were heading. Bringing the equipment in, sorting our equipment out, cleaning the equipment and then, to my surprise, nominated as a member of the advance party to go to

25:00 Morotai. And our job was to go down with the Americans with a small group from our, well, there was one survey group, of which I was a member, and a few other odds and sods, DMTs, that's about all, I think. And we went in the advance party, we landed on Morotai four days after the initial landing,

25:30 and we had to find our way to campsite, survey it, get it prepared for the unit to move into. We had to move onto the site for the fighter strip that we were to construct, and also to have a look in the area where we had to build a bomber strip.

Actually, I'll get Heather to ask you about Morotai in a lot of detail once

26:00 **we switch around, because there's a lot of information there that you actually just gave us. But I wanted to know also initially just about your first encounters with the Americans. You mentioned how kind they were when you first got there and they realised how ragged you all were and how much out of supply you were.**

Yeah. Well, I wasn't really surprised at the Americans because I had an Uncle

26:30 who'd been over to Australia for a couple of trips and he was based at Maui in the Honolulu area, so I was used to the funny language and the snappy dressing and the customs, and stuff like that.

Were they what you expected, given, I guess what your impressions had been of the Americans in

27:00 **Melbourne?**

No, they were different group altogether. I mentioned before these Guadalcanal guys were a bit rough and ready and so on, they were infantry. The people that we first met, the American units we first met and the ones we stayed with, were blood brothers, they were engineers and

27:30 we just got on very well together. We had to liberate a bit of material from them.

What kind of material?

Well, now and then we used to run out of food and it was our custom and also an instruction that we had a cold drink every night after work, before you went into dinner, you had to have a patty can full of ice-cold drink. And we ran out

28:00 at our camp so we had a "truck for survey" sign written on the windscreen, which was like carte blanche into any area that we wanted to go into. So we used to go into American stores in the areas and we'd plough around and find out where things were we wanted, and we'd back up to it, we had a three hundredweight

28:30 truck, all enclosed, and we'd just roll the back flap up and drop the tailgate, load what we wanted, close it all up again and drive out. And we liberated Coca-Cola syrup in drums, about 30-gallon drums of syrup, and "suntans", what the Yanks call "suntans", they were

29:00 light khaki and light material trousers, shirts, khaki socks, khaki underpants, khaki towels, you know, normal run-of-the-day stuff that we weren't getting. The only Australian gear we had was a slouch hat and that we had to wear; hammocks, jungle hammocks, they were very handy.

29:30 They were a hammock with an enclosed mosquito-proof cover, with a waterproof cover over the top of that again, and had two brackets on the bottom so you could put your rifle and whatever you had and keep it up off the ground, and a zip fastener. So you made your bed up, got in and zipped it up. You had a little air cushion for a pillow.

30:00 The top you could tie down, if there was really heavy water you could tie it down underneath so you were completely enclosed and waterproof. The only unfortunate thing about it was that a lot of American infantry guys found out that, when they were like that and cocooned, that Japanese troops could crawl underneath and just stick a bayonet up the bottom of the hammock. And quite a few

30:30 American guys got knocked off like that.

So did they change their sleeping?

No, no, it was just a matter of being careful. And they had a few funny traits, the Yanks, you know, if you were working at night and you were going through jungle they had a luminous button, about the size of a fifty cent piece, that the guy in front put on the back of his shirt

31:00 so when they're going file through the jungle you just kept your eye on this luminous button, you could follow the guy through.

But you think Japanese could also see that coming?

Yeah, they could. Yeah, a few unusual traits, I guess.

31:30 But we found that having to follow the infantry through and into the jungle areas, we had to watch ourselves, because as the infantry went through they dug themselves just a small pit big enough to lay in and they'd take their hand grenades, which were a different set-up to ours, but they used to bind a bit of tape around the

32:00 lever and then pull the pin out and then just put it around the fronts of these depressions they used to dig to lay in, so that if they got surprised all they'd do is pick the grenade up and instead of pulling the pin out all the had to do is just rip the sticky tape off and just threw it. But by the time we got there a few days after,

32:30 the moisture had got to the sticky tape and the firing lever's out at an angle like that, and we had to watch where we put our feet because if we kicked one it had the habit of going off. And you didn't feel very comfortable following these guys through, 'cause they used to leave these things laying around everywhere.

It may be an obvious question for someone who

33:00 **was there, but what really is the advantage of having your hand grenade wrapped in tape versus just pulling a pin out and throwing the thing?**

Yeah, well, the way we were taught, if you pull the pin out, you kept the pin around your finger 'cause then if you didn't throw it well at least you could put the pin back. But the Americans, their firing lever

was different, their firing lever came up the side then it was a completely enclosed top that fitted over the

33:30 firing pin, the lever then the pin, and then they only had a small split bit they pulled out. So once they pulled it out they threw it away because they knew what was going on, then the next day, if they advanced they just left the old ammunition there. But we used to come onto it. But we got a bit crafty then, we started collecting old pins

34:00 and we found them, we used to re-insert the pin and we used them for fishing.

You used to go fishing?

Yeah, off the edge of the reef.

With the hand grenades?

Yeah, you'd pull the pin and you can stand right on the edge of the reef and just drop the hand grenade in and pick the fish up when they floated up the top.

34:30 Just one of the quirks.

Good way to get a fresh fish.

I used dynamite when I went up to Bulalo, but that was different. Dynamite's got to have them floating on the top of the water and it's a little bit dangerous, particularly if you're waiting downstream to catch a fish and sometimes the dynamite gets there first, you know. You've got to watch it.

35:00 **Now, just on a logistical point of view, Bill, how did the chain of command work, given that your unit of 600 men was seconded to an American battalion?**

Well that was OK, our CEO, he was always responsible to the

35:30 American officer in charge of the group, the colonel. He was usually a colonel; our guy was a squadron leader, which was a step below, a couple of steps below. But the guy we were responsible to was a guy by the name of Elliston, Colonel Elliston, who also got wounded on the way up. He was on the USS Nashville that the

36:00 kamikaze got into, and he was wounded on the trip up from Leyte to Mindoro, but they had everything already sorted out. They hit the ground, they passed the orders and information and stuff onto our CEO. Somewhere in the Pacific Islands we had a group called Wing [Wing Command] and in charge of Wing

36:30 was a group captain, I'll mention the gentleman's name, he was Group Captain Rooney, and his whole organisation was known as "Rooney's Circus". I don't think the word circus was as used in the German army, their word for circus was different, it was more or less a squadron name, but it was a bit different

37:00 as far as Reeny was concerned.

How so?

That gentleman got the OBE [Order of the British Empire] for our landing in which he took no part. Our poor CEO got a Distinguished Service [Order] award, we got nothing, but anyway. But the Distinguished Service award was only given to Squadron Leader Bouch

37:30 after the war, I believe. He did get mentioned in despatches for an event that happened when we were on Mindoro and another one of our airmen also got the mention in despatch, but the rest of us, see, we said, "If anyone's going to hand out medals, we'll hand them out." They just had their nose out of joint because we got all the

38:00 publicity. Nobody knew anything about the Wing, but everybody knew about the 3 Airfield Construction Squadron.

It's a shame. It doesn't really seem right, does it?

It wasn't right. Since then, I'd say that about three other units in Australia have ever been given it, for Vietnam and a few other things. But that's all.

Tape 6

00:35 **I'd like to talk to you about Morotai, how was that?**

Well we weren't terribly thrilled with Morotai. Morotai was a, originally it belonged to the [Dutch] East Indies and it was a leper colony, so we weren't greatly taken with being there. Well, that's history, that's by the by.

01:00 We thought that was bit hot. But that was a funny place. The two strips that we built there were side by

side with a strip of jungle in between, left in between, as a noise and so on barrier, and the Japanese operated in that strip. And the American infantry must have gone through that strip about five times or more and couldn't find anybody, but

01:30 then every now and then we'd have a bloke knocked off a bulldozer or whatever. When our guys changed shifts they used to walk off the equipment, which were bulldozers, graders, loaders and so on, and they'd turn the engine off and they'd walk over to where the truck arrived with a new group. And they'd walk over and they used to get a hell

02:00 of a surprise because they'd press the starter switch and the equipment would blow up. So they woke up to the fact that there were Japs sneaking out of the median strip in the middle and attaching explosive devices to the equipment.

I'm just going to lean in because of the rain.

Yeah, that's all right. And every operator had an armed guard on the machinery.

02:30 **How long after Aitape did you actually move to Morotai?**

Oh, Aitape, we were there for a about a week, week and a half. That was all, it was just to get our gear and get to know the Americans we were going with and so on.

And then move over to Morotai. But there weren't any lepers there when you got there, were there?

Well, no, I don't think,

03:00 there may have been, we don't know. It was a fair-sized island. In the area where we landed, no, they didn't have any there, they were further out. There was an Australian group there and funnily enough the CO of the group was another guy I knew from Launceston in Tasmania.

03:30 He was in artillery. And they were camped only about two or three miles along from us, but they were having trouble with the Japanese.

On Morotai?

Yes.

What did you know about the conflict taking place around you on Morotai?

Nothing.

Could you hear it?

No, we,

04:00 well, we had our own problems. We were getting raided every night and every day. And I mentioned it just before lunch, but the Japanese had a great habit of psychological warfare.

I can't hear you, sorry Bill, can you say that again?

They used to carry on with psychological warfare.

Psychological warfare?

Yeah. They used to put on air raids between dusk and dawn.

04:30 Now, that was a period when theoretically two-thirds of us were sleeping off, the other third were at work. And we used to keep hearing these alarms every night and it was compulsory that when you heard an alarm you had to get out of bed and go to the nearest trench or whatever and wait until the all-clear went. You'd go back to bed

05:00 then there'd be another alert, and this used to go on all night. So they deprived us of sleep, you were kept awake all the time. Crafty.

You had raiding all the time you were there?

Yeah, and bombing. I don't know why, but they always located our camp at one end of the airstrip. At one end or the other. And of course

05:30 we always caught it on the way in and on the way out.

Now, you and your crew were responsible for building the airstrip at Morotai, is that correct?

Yeah, both of them.

I beg your pardon?

Both of them.

Both airstrips. Now, one was....?

One was the fighters' strip.

Fighters' strip, and one was bombers'?

Yeah, medium bombers, Liberators would be the biggest they had on it.

06:00 **Can you tell us, can you walk us through the procedure of building the strips and why they varied. Why did the fighter one vary from the medium bomber airstrip?**

Well, the planes in themselves are lighter, they carry a lighter load, and depending on the load, well, that determines the thickness of the pavement in the airstrip. Now, up at Darwin,

06:30 for argument's sake, the last one they built at Darwin their pavement is about a metre thick, a metre deep. Now, we used to lay pavements of about, in those days be about

07:00 a foot deep, and they were usually covered with metal sheeting. Or one we covered with crushed coral, and crushed coral goes down just like concrete when you put water with it, and that was for the Liberator strip. I mean, they take off with a heavier bomb load, the tyre pressure when they hit the ground is a lot higher than a fighter,

07:30 and that was the way we did it.

So did you actually use cement?

No, we never did.

It was coal?

Coral.

Coral?

Crushed coral.

How did you crush it?

Crushing plant, the same as they use in the quarries here.

So that came over on the LST?

No, we quarried the stuff on-site, wherever we were,

08:00 and they put it through the crushing plant, and it was just transported from there by truck back to the strip and spread.

That seems very environmentally recyclable, using the coral to build the airstrip?

Yeah, and it didn't affect the existing coral because it was all dead coral. And, well, it was on the island itself, we weren't stripping it from the ocean or

08:30 anything like that. But we not only built that, we built field hospitals. We built one at Mindoro, a field hospital. Suspension bridge.

At Mindoro did you say you built the hospital?

Mindoro, yeah.

Mindoro. Before we talk about the hospital, can I just ask you with the airstrip - I'm trying to think of a more

09:00 **intelligent way to phrase this but I can't think of one - could you try them out? I mean what if it wasn't thick enough, would the plane go through?**

I never had it happen. You know, I mean, they were designed by engineers and they know what the loading strengths are of certain materials of certain depths

09:30 and they know what's landing on them. So say, for argument's sake, if we had Thunderbolts, P40s, P38s and we had P51s, we had Mustangs, we had Black Widows, which was a light fighter and then later on

10:00 when the Australians got there, of course, we had the ordinary Australian pommy bit, Whispering Death.

Pardon, Whispering Death?

Yeah.

Spitfires?

Oh. Yeah, well, the Spitfires did come in but Whispering Death was a Beaufighter.

10:30 **Beaufighter?**

Yeah, but Beaufort bombers and Beaufighters, that was what the Australians flew in with. Yeah, Whispering Death.

And did you say that the airstrips were, after around D-Day you did the one and half mile - sorry, I got confused. Chris will talk to you about that later. So in Morotai, what was the set-up there with the sleeping and eating quarters? Were you all together with the

11:00 **Americans again?**

No, we were camped in different areas, but our accommodation was tents, four men to a tent. We liberated an American marquee for the survey group and slept four in a marquee.

How big was the marquee?

About as big as this area.

11:30 And we donated one to the hospital to our medical guy.

That's about what, ten foot by 40 foot?

Could have been 30, ten by 30.

Ten by 30 foot.

Which was quite pleasant for four blokes. You could fit six blokes in a normal tent which was normally a four-man tent, and there was six blokes in there. And they didn't perform too good,

12:00 because we had a Lightning fighter flew over our camp one day and he had a bomb hung up on him. Sometimes when they release they hung by one fitting. And just as it got over us, it fell off. But we had a football ground, 'cause we used to play Australian Rules, and it landed in the football ground. But all the tents went down like a pack of cards, just all flat, and we got back to camp and the boys were all busy putting the tents back

12:30 up again, and we had a hole about 30 foot deep and about 50 foot across in the middle of our football ground.

That was annoying?

Yeah, quite annoying.

You were talking about the hospital at Mindoro that was built, who was that for?

That was for the Americans. That was built for the American forces because at that stage,

13:00 Leyte, they were still fighting on Leyte. We built a hospital to bring the injured, wounded in, and we revamped the cool rooms in the sugar mill to take the corpses, all the deceased guys, and they brought then in by the truckload. I've never seen so many dead people all in one hit.

From Leyte?

Yeah.

13:30 If you can imagine an American truck, which is about the size of what we call a Canadian Chev, in those days, it was a flat-top, so it's what, nearly 10 feet across and it's about 30 feet long, and there were corpses laid down on that head to head, feet out,

14:00 the full length of the tray, that's one layer. But when you visualise about five or six on top of that again, a hell of a lot of blokes, about 100 odd, 120 per truck. And I've seen trucks come in

14:30 to go into the freezer about ten or 12 in the convoy - that's a lot of guys, a lot of guys.

Would they have had their ID [identification] tags taken off before they went into the cool room?

Yeah, that was always done. With the Yanks particularly, I think. They always gave us two:

15:00 one was to be nailed onto a big sign of the cross or a big piece of wood or whatever if you were buried in the field; the other one went back to the family or back to the unit.

How large was the hospital?

Well, that was a marquee.

15:30 They had one marquee, which would be 60 by 60 feet, probably talking about 20 metres by 10 metres; operating area, sleeping quarters, personnel, nurses, surgeons,

16:00 and surrounded by a fence about 12 foot high, 2 metre high fence, and they always had hessian fastened to that so you couldn't see through. People generally weren't allowed in there. We got through

with our survey trucks because we had to carry out works in there, drainage works and storm water drainage and

16:30 roads and so on.

Did somebody paint a big red cross on the top of the hospital?

Yeah, they did that. All the American gear had red crosses on them, you know, that were associated with the hospital - ambulances, trucks, they all had the red crosses on them. I don't think they meant very much.

Do you know if it got bombed?

No, I don't think they did.

17:00 They may have done, I'm not real sure. We had one exciting night, just after New Year's Day in 1945, and we came home from being out on the strip - oh, we came home, had a shower, had an evening meal and we were all told to go to our tents and pick up our arms and

17:30 pack food for two days, the American packs, and be ready to move out. And we'd had dummy runs on this and OK, that was fine, we just went in and picked up the gear, it was already laid out - we always left it that way - and we finished up about a mile out of camp in a drainage ditch in the sugar cane country.

18:00 A Japanese force was approaching Mindoro and trying to overtake the place and get it back, and they had couple of heavy cruisers or medium cruisers, destroyers, troop ship, PT [patrol torpedo] boats and so on, and we spent a very uncomfortable night in this ditch, with everything going on.

18:30 They had aircraft come in, they must have had two aircraft carriers out to sea a little bit, but they lost nearly all their shipping and a few of their aircraft were shot down. But on our side, as soon as they knew it was coming, all the fighter aircraft that were on the strip, they took off and went back to Leyte, and I think that if there was

19:00 any air operation done that was probably done from Leyte. It was only a few hours' run from Mindoro. So if the Yanks used torpedo bombers or whatever, they'd have to bring them in. But the Japs had dogs, Japanese war dogs, we could hear them barking. But the Americans had positions on the beach that

19:30 must have been, probably the biggest guns they had down there were about 90mm, all dug in, and they and the infantry took the people on as they tried to come in on the beach. And the airstrip got bombed. A couple of cheeky Japanese even landed on it, a couple of Japanese fighters landed. And we had a guy on there and he

20:00 was on maintenance work for the evening just in case a bomb got dropped on it and he had to fill the hole and so on - he was corporal, Corporal Jorgensen, as a matter of fact - and one of the American officers said, "Righto, get out of here, we're clearing the area," and Jorgansen said, "No, I'm duty till 8 o'clock in the morning," or some damn thing, you know,

20:30 "I don't go off, I'm on duty, I'm staying here." He got mentioned in despatches, but surprised the Yanks and he just continued doing the work, filled in bomb craters and kept the strip usable and so on.

I wonder what he did when he saw the Japanese land?

Oh, I don't know, I don't think he did very much. There'd only be about,

21:00 well, there'd be himself and a couple of trucks and couple of bulldozers, grader, map, that's what they have on-site, on duty, but the rest of the Yanks just took off, all the aircraft took off, went away.

Are you saying that your CO took off as well?

Oh, no, no, not our guy, only Americans.

So the American COs took off and left, what, their foot soldiers there?

Well, I'm not sure about the American guy either, but

21:30 the pilots and the bomber crews and so on that were there and aircraft, they all took off. But they were probably under orders because, had they stayed on ground, they'd all have been destroyed.

All the planes would have been destroyed?

Yeah, the planes would have been destroyed too. I guess it was, the ploy was plausible, I think it was quite OK.

But it must have felt very frightening that you and your mates

22:00 **are stuck in a trench, the Japanese are bombing and all our planes are in the air?**

Guess what I did all night? Went to sleep. I went to sleep, with the planes going off and the bombs going

off. Well, I'd been working all day and I just dozed off and the next time I woke up everything was quiet, nothing happening, it was all over. And about

22:30 a half hour after I woke up the officers put in an appearance and got us all regrouped and into trucks and taken back to camp, where we had a bit of reconstruction work to do there too. It was amazing, I went to sleep.

The trench must have been quite comfortable.

Yeah, well, it was a drainage channel, so it was about four, five foot wide at the bottom

23:00 and getting on to be about ten foot at the top and about 6 foot deep, so it was just comfortable to lay on the bottom, put your back up one side and your feet up the other and pass out.

Good for you. Oh, actually, when you spoke with the office, I think you may have told the lady you spoke with about the chaps that went to the channel?

23:30 About the....?

The chaps that went into the channel.

The chaps that went into the channel? I don't remember that bit. I remember telling.... Oh, yeah, about the guy that walked off the LST and said, "Follow me," and jumped into about six foot of water. That may be it.

24:00 The LST had ridden up on a sandbank and they put the ramp down and the ramp was still in the water and this guy took off and said, "Follow me," and jumped in, all gear on, you know, tin hat, all equipment and everything and disappeared. Got out all right.

It's like a Laurel and Hardy skit, isn't it, or something like that?

Yeah, it was a situation very similar.

I must have it around

24:30 **the wrong way then, about the chaps in the channel, maybe, cause you just mentioned the channel, didn't you, the drainage channel. Maybe it had something to do with that.**

We were, after the guys on the beach, we were the actual next line of defence. The only thing behind us were mountains. And it's quite a mountainous country, Mindoro. So, if anything had happened, we would have had to have taken off and gone up into the mountains. But I went to sleep and everything was over.

25:00 **You're no fun, are you?**

No, that's what Molly says.

Well that's another thing, actually, that we've mentioned was religion: The padres, they were there on Morotai, weren't they?

Yeah, we had four.

Four Australians?

No, four...

Denominations.

Four denominations. We had a Roman Catholic priest, Church of England,

25:30 Salvation Army and I forget who the other bloke was.

Presbyterian?

Could have been.

Rabbi?

No, no, no rabbis, although we had Jewish boys in the unit. No, no rabbi. We used to get a grog issue from the Americans of that weak American beer, a half-bottle - or what we call a bottle now,

26:00 it's a half-bottle, as you can imagine. As I said, we were tented and there was six guys to a tent and there were 600 blokes, and we used to get issued with, say, a dozen bottles of beer or half a dozen bottles of beer, two cigarette cartons, a couple of cartons of cigarettes and so on. But the day that we got the issue, the padres used to always

26:30 have visiting day, so you can imagine what happened. By the time they got past about four or five tents they were full as boots.

I knew what you were going to say.

Talking about booze, can I talk about booze?

Yeah.

Well, my survey officer, Flying Officer MacGlasson,

27:00 he was nominated by the CO, or by Wing or somewhere, to sort of commission a flying fortress to fly from Mindoro back to Morotai. The purpose: to pick up beer for the officers' mess, which we knew nothing about. And it happened,

27:30 it came off quite well. Stuart MacGlashen arrived back with the beer. It disappeared. So MacGlashen was instructed by the CO to do a tent-by-tent search for the missing beer. And I think by - oh, I forget how many dozens they had - they got six bottles back.

28:00 Don't ask me where the rest of them went. I thought that was hilarious.

Where did they hide them?

Didn't hide them, drank them. I thought that was real great; after all the trouble the officers went to, to get this super forward and fly for four,

28:30 five hours to Morotai and load it up, bring it back and have it disappear on them - I thought that was hilarious.

That's what they get for being sneaky.

That's right. That's dead right.

What about jungle juice, did you make any of that stuff?

Yeah, that was easy to make, actually. The favoured method was to, with a small posthole bore digger,

29:00 dig a hole the same diameter as a beer bottle, the old 26 ounce - the real beer bottle - and a handful of raisins, fruit juice, a little bit of medicinal alcohol if you could get some from the medical people - the Americans

29:30 would liberate that bit. Some people used, but we never did, some people used torpedo fuel. We never did, we just used medicinal alcohol, a handful of raisins and fruit juice and you'd cork the bottle, tie the top down and put it in the hole, and then you'd erect a line over the top

30:00 with a tin in it

With a what, sorry?

A tin - a fruit can if you could get it - aviation gasoline and a hole in the tin so the gasoline drops on the bottle, and as soon as it hits the bottle it evaporates, and evaporation creates refrigeration.

30:30 **You'd want to be with the engineers, making jungle juice.**

Yeah, a bit different to the Filipinos, they used to make jungle juice out of palm, some palm they had. But, milky, it looked milky in appearance, very potent, and they used to pass it around in an old demijohn

31:00 with a glass ring on it that you put your thumb through and rest it on your arm and gurgle away. That was one thing that the Yanks taught us anyway, and you used to just sit around a big circle and pass the bottle around and every now and then someone would fall backwards, flat on their back and just pass out on the stuff; great fun.

Does it taste like cava?

31:30 Yeah, a little bit better than cava. Yeah, I've had cava up in Fiji. This stuff was just strained through old shirts and lap laps and sarongs, you know, whatever you had.

Bill, why did you bother making jungle juice when you had a beer ration?

Well, that was it, it was a ration; you get thirsty every day up there.

32:00 **So it wasn't something to do to keep you busy outside of work?**

Oh no, we never drank on the job. It was only after work, but then you had to be sober enough of course to.... I don't think we ever lost any work time over it, certainly not with their beer, cause the beer they used to give us was only 4% or something. You'd buy a bottle of wine there -

32:30 14%, 16%. But their beer was only 4%. See, we used to get cigarettes, too, by the carton, so if anybody goes to work now they might take a packet of 20 cigarettes or something, but we took two 20 packs, you know, in the pockets, because we had that many cigarettes. But there were certain things you could do. You could use them to trade.

- 33:00 We used some up in Manila to trade. The sergeant draughtsman and I, we bunged a ride on an American aircraft from Mindoro - with the sanction of a CO, actually, who gave us a leave pass - and we went up to Manila and took a swag full of cigarettes with us, and for every carton of cigarettes you'd get a bottle of whiskey
- 33:30 and for every bottle of whiskey the Yanks would give you about \$20 for it, so that was quite a good sort of trade. The only trouble was we got caught up there and couldn't get back. And Air Vice Marshal Sherger was there - and Sherger was a good guy, he was group captain when I first met him -, and he was in a little pay section in Manila
- 34:00 for some reason or other and he had a personal lock-keyed Hudson which was all fitted out with a wardrobe for his uniforms and so on. And we couldn't get back so we reported in to this particular unit, and Sherger said, "Well, I'm going down to visit your CO in a couple of days, just hang around and come down with me." Because of my silly mouth
- 34:30 and automatic weapon role I was given the tail gun in his plane, which was, I suppose, good, you got a quite good view out, only it's very - no tunnel and you've got to go through and you've got a belt on, safety belt, and you've got to clip it to a hook on both sides. Then I had twin .303 guns out the back.
- 35:00 And when we got over Mindoro, one minute I was looking at normal landscape then I'm looking at the ground because the pilot's going straight up in the air, the next minute I'm looking up in the air because he's diving straight down to the ground and he buzzed the strip, to let our CO know that Sherger was there, I guess. But he was a great guy, and I met him later in Canberra
- 35:30 at the Russell Offices, he was the head of the defence bit.

But how did you end up being the rear gunner when you were with the survey team?

Well, I'd had automatic weapons training.

But was the rear gunner sick or killed, or were you replacing somebody?

No, no, he had his own pilot and the co-pilot and engineer,

- 36:00 I think it was; but the rest of the time that's all that was in his aircraft so they used to travel around without. But I suppose when he normally went on a run, if he had to go down to Wing to meet a gentleman down there, probably the engineer became the guard. I'm not sure. So your Dad was a Wireless/Air Gunner?

Grandfather.

Or your grandfather.

He was by trade a fitter and turner,

- 36:30 **he was a ground crew in the RAN.**

Oh right, same as my brother-in-law, on the flying boats.

In fact my grandfather's brother was a despatch rider that was killed in the war.

Was he? Oh.

Anyway, I'll just bring you back a little bit to tell me with the Americans there, did they also feed you, or was it the Australian

- 37:00 **supply?**

No, we had American food, which I must say was excellent. We had - and if anybody else sees this film and were in other service they would be surprised, I guess - when we landed in Mindoro, we landed straight after the infantry on the beach, and when we got back to camp that night

- 37:30 we had hot bread. Mobile bakeries had gone off and the Yanks had turned out a great heap of fresh bread. We were there not very long before Christmas, and we had fresh pork, fresh turkey, chicken, ice-cream,

- 38:00 pudding. We had a traditional American Christmas. Our guys in the mess, we had our cooks, "babbling brooks", as we called it, and we had good stuff I suppose, we had field kitchens and so on, but we had American food

- 38:30 and we drew the same rations as the Americans. But we had to teach the Americans how to make tea. They started to make it like coffee, they'd put those big stainless tubs that were about that square and that high and they'd fill it up with cold water, put the tea in it and then bring it to the boil.

- 39:00 **Yuk.**

Yes, yuk's right. So we had to teach them how to make tea. Yes, but their food was excellent, they really know how to run a hall, those guys.

Certainly better than bully beef.

Well, when we came back and were flown out from Morotai in these old Liberators and landed at Darwin we had bully beef sandwiches.

39:30 When we went to Point Cook for our medical examinations, the first meal they fed us was what we call "goldfish", it was cold tinned fish which we refused to eat, and as a squadron we walked out of the mess. And we went out onto the CO's parade ground - and these guys were very critical and jealous of their parade grounds,

40:00 and all lined out with white painted stones and the flag was flying and there's not a blade of grass on it, its more or less swept clean and beautiful - and we went out and sat down on the CO's parade ground. And a young polled officer came running over and said, "Who's the senior man in charge here?" And we had a

40:30 hoary old sergeant who was work supervisor, a real rough so-and-so. "I am." And he said, "The CO wants you to get these men off the strip immediately," and he told the pilot officer where the CO was to go. I can't repeat the wording.

I get the idea.

41:00 But he told him to go and he did that, and then one of our officers turned up about half an hour later and he said, "Well, come on chaps, now be reasonable about it, you better make yourselves scarce and I'll see that you get better food." So we won.

Good for you.

Tape 7

00:30 **OK, Bill, just in between the switch you mentioned to Heather about seeing a B25 up in Morotai and cleaning out the back end of it with a tail gun, can you tell us about**

01:00 **that?**

Yeah, they were a funny type of machine because the tail gunner had to get into the rear turret and because of the size of the aircraft it was controlled by the pilot - no, it wasn't, the hydraulics were controlled by the pilot and the gunner could open the rear tail externally, he could open it

01:30 and he could get in it and close it, lock it, whatever; but once he's in there, in an emergency, I don't think he'd ever get out, and in his position, then there was a sort of crouched position, you sit like this and the gun's there. Some of the guys

02:00 had been out on a mission in the morning and they came back, and anyway, the rear gunner in one of these, he'd taken a shell through the bottom of the thing and it had come up and through his knee and out and into this leg, and then the bone in the leg had changed the direction of the thing,

02:30 and because he was like this, it went up into his chest and came out through his back shoulder and he was just like as if he'd been boned, you know, I mean, we'd heard about it, we'd heard about guys being washed out of rear gunner situations and so on, but this bloke here was a real mess, an American lad.

So, what was actually left of him?

Nothing much, they just picked him up and he just

03:00 flopped. Every bone in his body had been broken, it seemed like. He was a hell of a mess, of course, but the Yanks didn't seem to worry about it. They were immune to that sort of thing. We saw some terrible things happen on their strips, which were a very similar type of thing. Just after we finished

03:30 building Pitoe, the Thunderbolts took off. And the Thunderbolts were funny machines, they had a big radial engine, and the Yanks never seemed to wait to warm the plane up, they'd start them up - well, actually, the American pilots, a lot of them had a ground crew allocated to each plane and a sergeant in charge of the crew

04:00 would start the aircraft and taxi it up and then get out for the pilot to get in, it was all very gentlemanly - so that then that aircraft would get the OK from the tower to take off. But then they'd get about halfway down the strip and the engine just cut out, they didn't give it time to warm up, it was just a cold engine,

04:30 cut out. And at the Pitoe strip, there was a bloke took off from there one day like that, and there were Lightnings coming in, the P38s with the twin fuselage, and met in the middle of the strip, the Thunderbolt's just about to take off. And there's another crazy act, they actually had to pull the wheels up before they had flying speed.

- 05:00 And he'd already done that, and the bloke in the Lightning had dropped his undercarriage but landed about the same speed, same place, same time. One went that side of the strip, the other one went the other. The guy in the Thunderbolt, whose fault it wasn't, he was killed; the guy in the Lightning just walked out, stepped out, lighted a cigarette
- 05:30 and that was that. But on the Mindoro place, the end of the strip there finished at the sugar mill and the Thunderbolts used to take off from there and always towards the mill, and then their engines would cut out because they took off with a cold engine and they'd just hit the wall of the mill, just like a blowfly
- 06:00 or a mosquito hitting the wall out there, and just dropping straight down. It used to happen time and time again. The Yanks never worried about it. I've seen guys go off the end of Pitoe in the Thunderbolts. The end of Pitoe strip finished on the beach, on the edge of the reef, and they'd get out and just over the water - plop - dead engine again.

06:30 Oh, they were funny.

How did all these kinds of accidents affect the morale of the guys back on base or within the airfield?

No, it didn't worry us. We accepted it as a normal thing, it happened every day, you know. But when we built the Guam strip that was built to take several Fortresses. And we watched one there one day and they took off, got halfway down the strip,

07:00 retracted undercarriage, got off the end of the strip and just exploded, in full bomb mode, and little bits of Fortress fluttered around the strip like bits of confetti, you know. But we got used to it, we didn't worry much about it.

What was one of the worst accidents that you ever saw?

Well, that one would be the worst I ever saw.

07:30 But there were a lot of accidents.

Well, you'd have to worry. I mean, if they were standing anywhere near there they'd have to be worrying about a lot of traffic.

Well that's right. I mean, we were working on the strip, of course when they were like that we weren't standing in the middle of the strip or anything like that, but even if you were off the edge of the strip you had to keep on eye on them because you never knew when one was going to take off, abort and

08:00 just swing off and dive down the side of the airstrip, you know. You never knew what was going to happen, so you always had to keep an eye on it.

And so why were a lot of planes taking off with cold engines, was it because that had to suddenly go on ops or....?

Yeah, well, they had the alert, "Japanese planes are on their way," they were probably told how far out they were and they had to get out and

08:30 get up, they had to get above them anyway before they met them and take them out, which they were quite successful at. But the number of planes that released dead engines, you wouldn't read about it.

Just on the subject of planes, can you tell us about you experience with the kamikaze

09:00 **pilot, in Leyte and Mindoro?**

Become a what?

Can you tell us about your encounters with the kamikaze?

Oh, the kamikaze. Oh, my goodness, the kamikaze suffered themselves. What you hear and read about kamikazes you can forget. Most Australian people know that they were supposed to be an elite

09:30 type of person that was prepared to die for the emperor and whatever and, OK, they wore white robes, they wore a white scarf tied around their head with messages from their family and whatever on it, and their aim of course was to

10:00 get to their target and strafe and eventually, because they had no fuel to get home anyway, they had to abort the trip and explode themselves on a ship or some other target. Generally it was a ship. We had one that was shot down on Mindoro

10:30 and went along the beach to have a look at it, and the guy was actually chained to the seat with a lead iron so he couldn't have got out if he wanted to. So much for theory about the Samurai warrior. I believe they all were volunteers.

11:00 **I mean, you told us there were hundreds of planes that you were having to deal with. Can you give us a bit of a picture of what you'd see or what it sounded like under a kamikaze attack?**

As I said before, there were 300 of them on the convoy

11:30 and then we had about another 300 or whatever when we landed. And these LSTs, they were a fair lump of a ship, but when you're on one and the kamikaze are around it feels as big as aircraft carrier. You'd think "Geez, they couldn't possibly miss this," you know.

12:00 And my favourite place, out of the way of a problem, I never slept below deck on an LST.

Why was that?

The sleeping accommodation was like a submarine. The ship basically was a hold in which all the heavy equipment went, then there was a section of about six, seven foot wide between the hole and the outside shell of the ship

12:30 on both sides and that was the accommodation for the troops and crew. And in that width, area, which was about five or six feet, it had drop bunks, and they dropped to one, two, three. And there was an entry/exit bulkhead door which was shaped like a submarine door.

13:00 Now, as soon as an alert went off, some of the members of the crew, they raced through these areas and they closed the watertight doors, and on the side they went out, they had a tommy bar, a pipe and they got the tommy bar and they went all around the dogs on the door and they tightened them up with the tommy bar

13:30 so that the people in the compartment had no hope of opening the door. So if the ship got bombed or you were sinking you couldn't get out of it. So the ones that were a little bit crafty, and I was one of them, we slept on the top deck, where we had trucks, and all the heavy machinery was underneath and we had trucks on top and we slept under the trucks, in the trucks, in the cabin of

14:00 the trucks, in the back of the truck. But my favourite place was a five KVA [kilovolt amps] generator set which had a like a big air compressor, which, the ones we had, were about 6, 7 feet long and about 3 foot wide and about 18 inches off the ground, and I used to make up a bed in

14:30 underneath that. And it was right against the side of the ship and the side was just open and just the usual wires and posts and so on. But we used to get a bit of a breeze there and it was a quite comfortable place and it made you feel safe when you were being attacked because anything that hit had go through the generator set before it hit you.

15:00 But when I was on the gun it was different. If I pulled a gun in some positions that was a little bit different, but generally I slept under the air compressor or the KVA generator unit, that was quite good.

Weren't you worried being a prime target once you were on the gun?

Ah, no because we were about

15:30 twenty-odd around the ship, plus Bofors guns on the bow, Bofors on the stern, so you knew there were plenty of other ones. But the boat itself, it felt that big that you'd think, "Oh geez, they couldn't possibly miss." A very unusual situation for an air force guy. And we had funny things happen on board those ships, too.

16:00 **Like what?**

Like one guy turned up one day and he turned up on the deck of the ship and he had a tin hat on and it was inverted with opening out and he had a torch and a couple batteries and a couple of wires and this was all hooked up and

16:30 we asked the usual question, "What the hell do you think you're doing?" And he was talking to his mother, back in Australia, on the radio. That guy didn't last very long.

Why not?

Obviously the tropics had got to him and he was mentally unfit. And there was another one one night and he was caught on board the ship, on the deck,

17:00 with wires connected to a battery and he had a similar arrangement and he had a light, too, from somewhere, he got a torch, and we were in a blackout situation on board a ship, you know, miles out in the ocean, and he was going to shoot a light beam and he was going to walk up the light beam and go home.

17:30 We had funny people. One bloke when we landed he used to get the empty tins of fruit and whatever and he'd sit down and he'd arrange them in a half circle around the front of him and pick up little stones and just put them on the tops of the tins and he'd take them off and put them on again, be there all day. They sent him home, too.

18:00 I was walking on Bourke Street, after we got home and I was waiting for discharge, and walking on Bourke Street and a civvy bloke said, "G'day," and I had to turn and I had to look at him and he was one of the blokes that was sent home, and I said, "Oh, how are you?" "I'm fine." He'd just put on an act.

18:30 He put it over the medicos and they said, "He troppo," sent him home, discharged him and he was as sane as I was.

One way to get home.

Lots of guys did that.

Bill, you were telling us, I was asking you about the kamikaze attacks, can you give us a bit of a picture on what it was like in the thick of it

19:00 **in terms of what you'd see or what you'd hear and how close they'd get?**

How close? Well, normally they strafed. And they'd strafe, normally with the kamikaze they were accompanied by torpedo bombers and to do their job they had to come down to sea level, which was just lower than the deck of the ships, and they'd discharge their bombs and the torpedos,

19:30 and then they'd be up in the air, do an inverted roll, come out of it and straight into the deck of the ship. Generally that's what happened. The kamikazes on the beach were different, they went into the mouths of the LSTs. The LSTs, the mouths were wide open and the guys are

20:00 unloading, and every time we made a move we had to carry a certain amount of aviation fuel and artillery bombs and aircraft bombs and shells and ammunition and stuff and they'd always stack right at the back of the LST, and while the boys were unloading and doing that, the kamikazes used to come down and they'd

20:30 strafe the ones that were working on the beach or trying to drive off the beach and then they used to fly straight into the mouth of the LST. It took the wings off the plane on the way in, of course, but then they went through and they exploded inside the LST, so anybody who was working in there were a little bit unfortunate. Certainly the crew of the LST were unfortunate and a lot of people who were

21:00 on the beach and who had probably got flat on their stomach and in one case got under trucks, they'd get up to run, but the flame - the LST was just like a flamethrower and all these guys got burnt up the back and got their clothes burnt off them and made quite a mess of them. We

21:30 only lost about two, three guys like that.

Sorry, Bill, how did that work?

The LST still had aviation gasoline and bombs and artillery shells in them, and this is on the presumption that our boys had got all of the equipment out, so you've got one, big, long, empty ship. And the LST bows are wide open,

22:00 the plane flies through, into the ship, he's already got bombs on board so they detonate, that detonates all the stuff at the back of the boat - bingo! And then the flames are ejected straight out, so anybody on the beach, in arrangement, would get caught. So, we only lost one guy on the beach at

22:30 Mindoro, he was actually shot and that was an armoured piece of shell from an aircraft that went through the engine and the block of a Canadian ship, big sixty-six ship, and he was laying under the engine, he got under the engine for safety, and it hit him in the back. The armoured piece went straight through

23:00 the engine and hit this guy in the back. There wasn't much to move with him, either.

That would have shattered him.

No, he'd gone. Another bloke, he'd just received a letter from his wife in Hobart to say that she'd just had twin boys, and he got it. I don't know, it seems a bit

23:30 tough to talk about these things now, but I must say when they happened they virtually went unnoticed. It's one of those things, you're there for that long and away from home for that long that you actually get hardened, and things that now when you think of

24:00 them sometimes, yeah, OK, they break you up a bit, but at the time, it was something that was to be expected, you were hardened to it and that was it.

Were any of these casualties mates of yours at the time?

Yeah, we had six unenrolled men. I mentioned before at one stage we lost a complete detachment

24:30 that left in an LST to go to, we think, Okinawa. Nobody told us. But anyway they went, and that would be about between 40-50 men, which would be about a flight, a squadron, and they were unheard of, they just disappeared. And on the figures that I know, both of what our squadron

25:00 was and the number of casualties that we had, we lost about 12%, but we lost a hell of a lot too, later on, through sickness, through tropical diseases.

You were saying, Bill, that in the thick of it you're not really, kind of hardened to what's going

on around you so

25:30 **you've kind of got a way through it, but are there any moments after it's all over, while you're still out in the field, that you sort of think, "Well, maybe this is a bit more than I kind of thought"?**

Well, no, not much. I have on occasion had to view people who have passed away

26:00 and funnily enough that's now no worry. And even the idea of myself ultimately going, that's no problem, it's accepted, it's going to happen, it will happen, it's no problem. Molly looks at it a little bit differently to what I do. I'm not suicidal-prone or

26:30 anything like that. But it's just that it's something that I've accepted. And I think that my father was exactly the same.

Do you think your war experience has anything to do with that?

Definitely, Yeah, and I'm sure, without the war, that I would have been different, mentally, I'd have been different to what I am now.

When the kamikaze pilots

27:00 **started attacking, could you and the other fellows kind of work it out? I mean, did you understand what the hell was going on?**

Oh yeah, I could understand their situation 'cause we had similar people, or the Poms did, they had ten man submarines. That was a similar type of exercise.

Suicide mission?

That was suicide, yeah. Those guys, their

27:30 job was to attack enemy shipping and fix bombs to the hull of the ship, time it and get out if they could, and there were a hell of a lot of them that didn't. I know stories from other people that you wouldn't believe.

28:00 I know of one army officer, in an independent company in Borneo, who was on an exercise - not an exercise, he was on patrol and had a guy that was shot, and they carted him around but he became delirious, making a bit of a row, and that put about another half a dozen guys

28:30 at risk. And the officer - and he only died a couple of years ago, this army captain - and he had to shoot the guy. Now, that's getting really tough, I don't think I could bring myself to do that. But, you know, it's one of those things: it's either that guy or the patrol; either him or the lot.

29:00 And a lot of the Australians had that same attitude. I don't know whether I could have got away with it. But, just one of those things, I don't know, it's terribly hard to explain. I mean, you do things while you are away like that that you'd never dream of doing anywhere else at any other time.

Can you give us, I guess, an example?

29:30 Well, you know, watching.... Well, for argument's sake, just standing by and watching all the truckloads of guys coming in to the cold storage. Watch a bloke out of a rear gunner's situation in an aircraft. I've seen Japanese blokes buried up to their necks, dead of course.

30:00 And lots of stories that you hear, that people tell you, other guys tell you, you people never ever hear of them, things that happened. Some of the things Australians did, they weren't too good, either. I've a few shocking examples told to me by ex-navy guys and ex-army guys and I wouldn't have done what they did in a hundred years. But they did it, probably brought about by

30:30 particular circumstances at that time. I don't know. But you people have been doing this now for, what, 12 months? You must have heard some terrible things.

I've heard some.

You hear a lot that isn't true. You hear a lot of stuff that you normally get on Anzac Day over a couple of glasses of beer. And you get guys, like the bloke in Brisbane that they arrested

31:00 a few years ago, the ex-brigadier who turned out to be an ex-corporal or something - you don't remember that? For years he represented himself as an ex-brigadier and he had every war medal you could ever hope to have; and, you know, he was a corporal or something that was in the regular army and he'd never been outside of Australia and so on. And they caught up with him and of course he went through the law court and he finished up in jail. So you do

31:30 get those guys, you know. While I was at Canberra, my immediate chief, he was an associate director in the department and he was architect, and he'd been in Vietnam. And I was asked, instructed - better word, I guess - to arrange a

32:00 exhibition for the War Memorial on a particular phase of the Vietnam thing. And he gave out a set of photos, a lot of photos to look at and sort out, to include in the exhibition, and there was one there and he said, "You can't have that." He said, "Where did you get that?" I said, "It was amongst the group that you gave me," and it was a fighter,

32:30 and he said, "Well, you can't have it because we didn't have them in Vietnam." And he was an Intelligence guy and he was invited to do at the Russian Embassy while I was there, and I saw the invitation on his desk and I said, "Here, you go." "No bloody way," he said, "I'm not going to that, I won't go,"

33:00 he said, "If I go there, they'll keep me there." And it's like this son of mine that went into the air force, he worked with JIO [Joint Intelligence Organisation] and that's something I can't talk about.

Well, I will ask you about something, hopefully you can answer a little bit about it because, I mean, we have heard a lot of stories on a whole

33:30 **slab of different things that went on up in the jungle areas and the Islands and also in Vietnam, etc, that a lot of fellows are reticent talking about some of the things that perhaps the Australians got up to because that perhaps didn't do the Australians proud. Now, I wouldn't ask you to mention any names but I'm just wondering if in your time up in the Islands if you actually saw anything that,**

34:00 **I mean, 'cause there were a lot of atrocities going on by the Japanese and things and we all know a lot about those, but was there anything that you saw or heard of happening around those areas that the Australians sort of didn't put themselves in the best light?**

No, I couldn't do that, because from the time that we arrived at Aitape we toured around and we left Balikpapan, in Borneo we were with Australians,

34:30 we were with the Americans all the time and we weren't in touch with Australians very often. We did have a survey ship from the Australian navy that came in to see us when we were at Mindoro and we provided them with fresh fruit, vegetables, a bit of decent food. And

35:00 funnily enough they put on a sort of inter-service cricket match and also a game of Australian Rules. But that's about the only time, apart from till we got back to Balikpapan that we'd been in touch with any Australians.

But what about the Americans, in that instance, then?

No, I had no problems with any American. We had no problem with the Americans.

35:30 Americans might have had problems. They certainly had a problem when they retook Corregidor. When I did my unofficial trip to Manila, we flew over Corregidor and Corregidor was taken by paratroopers, American paratroopers, and they practised on our airstrips at Mindoro for

36:00 three, four weeks before they did the jump on Corregidor. And we get into an area of sorry sights again, Corregidor on one side is a very tall cliff face, that's on the Manila side, and the parachutes, and guys still on the parachutes hanging on the cliff face,

36:30 and you couldn't get to them one way or another. Helicopters would've been handy but of course in those days we didn't have helicopters. But these poor guys jumped and got snagged on rocks and trees which grew here and there on the face of the cliff and they were just hanging there, and this was a week, a couple of weeks after they did their jump.

37:00 Those sort of guys I feel sorry for. If a guy was shot or burnt, you know, something that happens in a flash, that's accepted and I'll go along with that. But a poor guy who's jumped from an aeroplane, a perfectly good aeroplane, and ended up in that situation where a guy is probably wounded

37:30 or he's broken something, an arm, a leg, and just hangs there and dies through starvation - that's something else, I couldn't handle that.

What did you think of MacArthur, what were your impressions of him at the time?

Well, I never saw MacArthur.

That's the same with a lot of people.

A lot of people who had, wished they hadn't.

38:00 I've read a lot of books since, all about MacArthur. And it's a sort of a "spite your face" situation. He wasn't very popular even with the Americans. The Americans always had a problem, apparently, with their upper ranks or senior people. See, with us

38:30 it's different, we have air force, army, navy - that's the end of it - oh, and we have a bit of an argument, I suppose, with the air force and navy because of the naval aircraft. But in America it's different, they have army and they have army air force and they have air force and they have specialist air forces and there are generals running mad and they're all

39:00 jealous of each other and they'll all try to knock the other guy down. It was going on then and it's still going on.

But was there much of a, I guess...?

But individually, in the lower ranks, no, there was none of that. Everybody works in well together, they were all pally, they were all friendly. As I say, I've had no problems with the Americans at all.

39:30 I even finished up talking like one. I don't now, but I think we all did, because we were with them for about 18 months or heading on for two years, and we all spoke like Americans when we came back.

Tape 8

00:32 **Now, in 1945, after you had been on Morotai, you were transferred to Balikpapan, is that correct?**

Yes, we left Morotai and went over to Balikpapan. And we went to a place call Manga Bisa [Manga River, Borneo] and that

01:00 was quite an uneventful trip, we did that on LST. And things were fairly quiet by the time we got there, and the area that we were given to build an airstrip was too short for our aircraft and the Japanese were using it. But we had to look for a new area and we spent our time there finding a suitable area - a bit hard to find.

01:30 **Why was it difficult to find?**

A lot of the area on the coast, we were right on the coast, and it was a type of quicksand material, so that we lost one D8 bulldozer, which was the largest and heaviest machine we had, it just went in there and the guy jiggled it backwards and forwards a bit to position it and it settled into the sand and

02:00 we just couldn't recover it, we tried to recover it, and when we left there was just the exhaust sticking out of the sand. So it must have gone down about eight or nine feet into the sand. That area was unsuitable. We didn't have to do anything much after that. The war was just about over then and peace was declared while we were there.

02:30 And we built some roads for the army, service roads, we demolished a lot of concrete gun positions, we demolished a lot of anti-ship landing stuff on the beach, but we were just cleaning up when the war finished. But we'd been trying to get back because

03:00 we had schistosomiasis for months.

Because of the what, sorry?

Schistosomiasis that we'd contracted, about 60% of the unit had it.

So it's obviously a bug that goes into your liver.

Goes in through the pores of the skin.

Is it a bit like malaria?

No, nothing like it. It's like dysentery that the guys got in the Middle East. I believe that was similar.

03:30 It has a life cycle. It starts off as a, well it's pretty much like a sperm in the water, and it goes into water buffalo, goes into the water buffalo's system, it's excreted into the water as an egg, it

04:00 grows inside the water buffalo and the eggs are excreted into the water, it has to find a particular kind of snail which acts as a host within a certain time, and it goes in, it enters the snail, it eats the snail. By that time it's an adult, it goes back into to the carrier and the cycle goes on and on. And you can get it through

04:30 wearing wet clothing, you can wash your underwear or shirt or shorts or whatever in the water and if contains one of these sperm-like objects, you've had it. It goes in, it's that small, it goes in through the pores of the skin into the bladder and liver and it eats the liver. It eats the liver away.

So it's a deadly disease,

05:00 **I mean, it could kill you?**

Oh, yeah, yeah. It was our CO that found it. You get tired and can't be bothered and you don't feel well, that's about the only clues it gives you. Our medical officer, he found it, he told the Yanks, the Yanks started to test their guys,

05:30 they shipped them out the ones that had it, they were shipped out to a hospital in Honolulu and they sent out a certain amount of serum, they had some serum available, and some of our worst cases were treated with it. And our CO and our 2IC, they were evacuated and they went down in a plane just off Morotai, they just about landed at Morotai and

06:00 they had to ditch, but they were saved and they were treated. But they kept us going, we kept on working and we didn't know we had.... As I said, I had hookworm, some of the guys had three diseases and didn't know. One of the guys had cerebral malaria and that's a terrible thing. You just go insane, it affects your brain.

06:30 This hospital that we built, he wrecked it.

How?

Well, he had an attack and he was put in the hospital. And initially he was tied down to the bed, you know, they tie you with sheets from the ankles and the wrists to the bed, and he quietened down so they took the tie-downs off him and he had another attack that night and destroyed the place, nearly.

07:00 Went through the ward. They get completely off their minds. We had another guy that did it at Balikpapan, and he was little tiny bloke, about 5 foot and weighed about, oh, 8 stone, I guess, and it took about three guys that weighed about 18 stone to hold him down. But he went mad with a rifle, looking for one of our most popular gentlemen

07:30 in the unit, the bloke called the WOD, the warrant officer disciplinary, he's the same as a regimental sergeant major, everybody hates him. He went looking for him, he was going to shoot him.

For any reason?

He didn't like him. That's a good reason. We didn't like him at one stage and we had him shipped out. Bouch, the CO, he shipped him out.

08:00 The Bouch was a funny sort of guy too and he must have thought, "I'll teach these blokes a lesson," so we got one in place of him and he was twice bad. So we finished up with going to Bouch and saying, "Look, when can we get our old WOD back? We can't stand this guy." And they did, they shipped this guy back out and we got our old WOD back.

So his job was to be a disciplinarian to the men or just keep on eye on everybody?

08:30 No, he was just like a regimental sergeant major. Apart from the officers he was the boss and probably was the boss anyway, 'cause the RSM was always the boss.

Something that we didn't discuss before was the fifth column, can you tell us about the work there?

Well, we never ever saw it work, but all we got

09:00 was feedback from Tokyo Rose, because she obviously got the information from somebody in Manila or, say, it could have even come from headquarters in Leyte, at the army headquarters there, because they had orderlies and domestic staff that were locals.

09:30 I've met a few Filipinos since, we've got a lot around here, we've talked to quite a few, some of them are OK, but generally they were on watching and they must have had access to the information they had because we had a lot of time before our officers gave it to us.

10:00 Do you know if the airstrips that you built are still there?

I am not really sure. The one we built on Morotai, the Pitoe strip, I believe they used that for a few years afterwards.

10:30 But the others, they might have packed up. You know, they were only built for a certain amount of time. The ones with the metal decking on them, that would have all rusted away in a place like Pitoe, that was one metal strip. Guam, that was the coral, but then that was deteriorating and the jungle would have taken over again, too,

11:00 because they weren't very well populated. And even Mindoro, there was no great population there, in the places that we serviced. San Jose was the closest place there and that was about six, seven hours away from our campsite.

Bill, you mentioned a Maltese fellow at the beginning of the day, a friend that you were friends with

11:30 during the war that you'd like to track down, what was his name?

Well, in Australian they called him Paul Cutujar, the Paul's OK, the Cutujar is C-U-T-U-J-A-R, and the correct pronunciation was Paulo Catayar.

12:00 **Catayar?**

Catayar. He was a hell of a nice guy. OK, he was a general hand, which was the lowest classification in our place, but to me it didn't mean a damn thing. He was a nice bloke, good bloke and friendly bloke. He went over to Tasmania to see me but I wasn't there.

12:30 I think it was the time when I had left to go back up to New Guinea and I missed seeing Paulo, and if hadn't been for the fact that the name was mentioned, or not mentioned, but came up on the screen over an air force, a RAF show here one night, I would never have known or thought much about it, actually. But the guy that was there,

13:00 he'd be an AC [aircraftsman] I reckon, Air Craft Killer, or he might even be in the same category as my grandfather.

It would be nice if you could catch up with him some day.

I'd love to catch up with him. But, you know, I was the baby of the unit, and I'm 78, so I would suspect very much as to whether Paulo, and seeing

13:30 the wounds that he got, I doubt whether he's still alive. For the first few years afterward, yeah, he was available, but I was never able to meet him.

So you heard about the news that the war had ended when you were in Balikpapan?

Yeah. Well, we'd been out working on one of these concrete bunkers,

14:00 the surveyor and myself and the other draughtsman, and late in the afternoon, just as we were about to finish up in the back tent, we could hear the car horns blowing and a few guns going off and we thought, "This is peculiar, what's going on?" We got up to camp, and the war had been over for about two hours or something,

14:30 we were still working. And these guys that were in the camp had all that issue of grog and they were all half-stoned, the whole lot of them. And anyway the celebrations went on, we just joined them then and the celebrations went on for the rest of the night. The WOD got dumped in the sea, one of our sergeants - we had to swim out and save him because he was heading home.

15:00 Believe it, he started swimming home from Borneo, and he's in Melbourne but I've never seen him again since. And another sergeant, a very quiet sort of a guy, he was looking for the WOD and wanted to take him on the nose. They were all drunk as owls.

15:30 And we really enjoyed that, we just sat all along and lit a fire on the beach outside the tent and guzzled a bit of beer, and then it was over. Then we had to wait, wait to get back to Morotai to be evacuated home, and you wouldn't believe it, but no way could we get a ship,

16:00 aircraft or whatever. A couple of aircraft landed. They were converted, what they call C47s, I think, like a transport, and they held quite a number of people but they were taking prisoners of war, Jap prisoners of war, back to Australia. We've got blokes on the beach, you know, nearly dying. And then at last

16:30 they sent a Liberty ship for us, but we didn't have to take our equipment back with us, thank goodness. They sent an advance party up from number 9 ACS [Airfield Construction Squadron] to take over, but it was all paperwork and so on, but at least we were going on our way home and that was great.

17:00 **How did you get home?**

Well we went by boat, we went on the Liberty ship from Borneo back to Morotai, and then at Morotai we had to wait. We were given casual accommodation there, very bloody casual too. I used that word.

Where did you have this casual accommodation up

17:30 **in Morotai? What was it, a tent?**

Yeah, I suppose you'd call it a tent. And then we had to wait, they were sending Liberator bombers back to Australia, they were (UNCLEAR), and when they got back to Australia they just took them out and tipped them off into the ocean somewhere. But, however, we had a bit of a drama in its way anyway. When we got back in we were only allowed to

18:00 take personal belongings, so a lot of us threw a fair bit of unofficial equipment away. And the last bloke into the bomber had to get down on his back, and there was only about this high above the ground and crawl into the bomb bay and into the body of the aircraft that way.

18:30 And we started to take off and it was aborted because we had a flat tyre. We had to wait for them to replace the tyre and that took two hours. Then we took off, that was about 10 o'clock in the morning. We landed at Darwin about 6 o'clock that night, given the traditional bully beef sandwich and

19:00 half a bottle of beer to each man, and we boarded the aircraft, it must have been about an hour later, and then we flew overnight in tropical gear in an uninsulated aircraft, you know, about this much separating us from the outside air - freezing, it was - and we're sitting there with jungle stuff on, you know, light khaki trousers,

19:30 shirt and the compulsory slouch hat. And all our gear, we couldn't get to our gear to get our blankets or anything because they'd all been stacked in the bottom bay of the aircraft. We landed at Lavington in the middle of winter, about 6 o'clock in the morning, dark, miserable, freezing, and shot into

20:00 transporters that we called "birdcages" - they were a big semi- with steel mesh on the side - and went down to Point Cook.

And that's when you found out you had hookworm?

Yeah. They had a team from the Melbourne University doing the testing, the pathology work. And some people had hookworm, malaria

20:30 and schistosomiasis and they were in a real mess. We were in a mess, too, we had a sort of 24-hour treatment for hookworm.

Tablets?

No, it was shocking. We were starved, we had to report to medical at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and we were given a dose of saturated

21:00 salts - and it was that saturated, it was real oily-looking stuff - in a medicine glass about an inch high, and we had to drink that. And then we were told not to have anything to eat until we reported back in at about 6 o'clock in the morning. We reported in at 6 o'clock in the morning and we were given

21:30 another dose of salts, Epsom salts, and a bit of toast about an inch square with a smear of honey and that was our breakfast, and that was all we'd had from lunch the day before. And they said, "OK, you're free to go, you're finished." And

22:00 I forget how many guys they must have treated but there was a hell of a lot of them. And we were a normal air force station where the toilet accommodation was weighed out, you know, one toilet, so many men and so on. It was about an hour, an hour or two till we took our breakfast. Everybody became violently ill, and there was a mess, you know.

22:30 You're vomiting one end, the salts are attacking you from the other end, there weren't enough toilets to go around, the urinal was occupied fully - oh, it was a hell of a mess. And there was about 50-odd guys all trying to do the same thing at the same time and groaning, and it was the most miserable experience.

It sounds it.

Yeah.

23:00 And they wanted me to join the permanent air force. They're kidding.

I was just about to ask you about that because were you then discharged from, where was it, Point?

Point Cook.

Point Cook?

No, I was sent to one engineering school.

Oh, was that when you did that...?

At the Melbourne Showground, that was where I was billeted again in the horsebox. You know,

23:30 everywhere we went we seemed to cop a horsebox. You think in the city and it's virtually a permanent station that they'd come up with something a bit different, but no, you know. And all we had to do there was dismantle test equipment and pack it and pack stuff ready to go to Forest Hill in Victoria.

Bill, why couldn't you get out straight away?

24:00 **Because you had signed up for a certain amount of time or they wouldn't let you go?**

No, they had a points system. So many points for being married, if you were married, so many points for each year of service, that was about it, I think; and depending on the number of points, the married men with the longest service, they were the first who went out, the next lot were

24:30 married men, then the next lot were the group with the highest points, and then the also-rans, which I guess after three years it didn't amount to much and I was single, so I had to wait.

Did you participate in any of the celebratory marches that went on in the city?

No, nobody knew we went away, not even our families,

25:00 and nobody knew we were home. They had return home parades for the 9th Division and ever since they've had one for various other places - Vietnam, Korea all over the place. But we were never ever

recognised as a unit that served overseas. I don't think we were even recognised by the air force.

25:30 **It's a bit of a joke, really, isn't it?**

I say that because they refused us the American award.

Now, this is the award that you received for working with the Americans at Leyte?

No, at Mindoro. The Presidential Unit Citation was the - I've got copies of letters out there.

At Mindoro, so you were just given a ribbon,

26:00 **is that correct?**

No, that little blue ribbon that I showed you, that was what they normally wear, and there are about three Australian units that wear it now because they've since given it to them. But we are sort of like the Unknown Soldier, you know. Nobody knew where we were, who we were, how we were, what we were, when we were going, when we'd be back, nobody knew. I don't think even the air force

26:30 knew.

But you all knew you were there.

Yeah, but we didn't know we weren't coming back because they couldn't find time to pick us up. And I went to a Repat[riation] doctor in Canberra while I was down there, told him that I'd been tested for schistosomiasis, and he said, "When was your last test?" And he was an old army doctor, ex-army doctor, and he was also a specialist in tropical diseases from Adelaide

27:00 originally. And I said, "Look, I haven't been tested since we returned home in 1945," and he nearly blew his brain. He set me up for testing again at the Canberra Royal, as it was at that time; they've since pulled that down too. But luckily I tested negative again. But I was never, ever tested for hookworm again. They seem to think one shot

27:30 was effective.

So what was it like being back in society and seeing women on a regular basis?

Well, that was quite peculiar, actually, because after living with men for three years, well, that didn't rub off on us at all, there were none of them there.

28:00 But being home, well, I think you'll find a lot of these other people you interviewed had trouble settling down. I had troubles settling down. Things were different. Home was different. Your attitude to your family, with your family - entirely different. So when I had the opportunity to go up to New Guinea to work,

28:30 I thought that was great, so I took it.

And when was that, Bill, when you got offered to go up to New Guinea?

Well, I got this start as I went back to work for about six months and in that six months I had tonsillitis, I had my tonsils out, and I had pneumonia and I couldn't settle down at all; and a lot of the guys were exactly

29:00 the same. So when this chap said he was going back up to New Guinea and I said, "Can you get me a job up there?" and he said, "Yes," I went.

Surveying?

Yeah.

And had you been living at home during that six months in Tassie?

Yes, I was, Yeah, I was living at home.

And was that when you reacquainted yourself with Molly?

Yep, and that's when I got engaged.

29:30 **But you still went to New Guinea?**

I still went to New Guinea, yeah. The idea was that after Guinea.... It was a private company, it was a gold-mining company - well, alluvial gold - and they were a big firm, they were Placer Development, an American/Canadian firm. We had while we were there sub-divisions and

30:00 housing. We had about six standard types of housing which were cut up in our mill and they were erected in a week, a complete house, and the idea was that I got a block of land and had a house allocated. Molly came up, we got married in Lae, we would go to China or something for our honeymoon, because it was quite, from there....

- 30:30 Burns Philp [South Pacific shipping and trading company] had an inter-island service and it was quite good. Anyway, Molly decided that she knew nobody up there, there were no friends, she was a long way away from home and so after about a year and ten months I broke contract and flew home and
- 31:00 met Molly in Sydney and we went from there.
- So, I'm sorry, Bill, I'm just making sure that she came with you to New Guinea?**
- No, she didn't.
- But she didn't come. You were going to take it.**
- I had everything arranged and she pulled out and she decided she wouldn't come, but I had to break contract because I still had a couple of months to go on a two-year contract, and
- 31:30 I went home. She met me Sydney, she came up to Sydney to meet me and we went back to Alderson together, and that's where we got married.
- Oh.**
- And that was in November, 29th November 1947.
- When you got married?**
- Yeah. So we've just been married 56 years last week.
- That's a spell, isn't it?**
- Yeah.
- 32:00 **Last Friday, no?**
- Yeah, it was last week.
- Last Saturday.**
- Mm.
- So now, you didn't settle in Tassie, though, because there wasn't the good work for you?**
- No. Well, actually I had business there as a contract draughtsman, and I was working for surveyors, architects and the Marine Board. And I worked on
- 32:30 the first ferry terminal that was built for the Princess to land at Devonport, and that was quite exciting. The contractor came from Hong Kong where they specialised in tiling and I worked with them for a while and they were quite good to me and good to Molly. But then
- 33:00 I got a little bit unsettled again. I was trying to run the army unit - it was just a depot that I had, and army vehicles and cars for staff - and take a fortnight every year to go to camp and carry out exercises, and I was always going to Hobart and doing a tactical exercise with our troop
- 33:30 or I was going to Launceston to examine lieutenants that were going for promotion to captain, and in some cases, captains who were going for promotions to majors. I became a specialist in army law. Army regulation orders I knew pretty well, and they took up too much of my time. The army,
- 34:00 I had to go up to the depot every day to attend to mail, read it, sign it, organise training schedules for both myself and the company, because we were attached to an Army Service Corps transport company. And accidentally, I suppose, the CO of the transport company was a surveyor,
- 34:30 a qualified surveyor. The 2IC was an architect and the LAD commander was an engineer and he retired, I took over from him and it just all sort of got too much. I was president of the Apex Club and I was in the Junior Chamber. It all sort of happened too much too soon. So the job came up
- 35:00 with the Snowy and I decided that the Snowy Mountain Scheme was a good idea and I went there.
- So you think that too soon after the war you threw yourself back into the whole social and family scene, when you weren't quite ready?**
- Yeah, I could have done. By the time I went up to Cooma to join the Snowy I had three children, I had
- 35:30 two boys, and Nolan, as Molly was saying earlier, he was only about eleven months old. And that to me was a bit of a relief, although then I found that I was given a lot of responsibility on the Snowy and things happened there which were very similar to what happened in army life. For argument's sake,
- 36:00 a Cabramurra shopping centre got burnt down one night in a snowstorm; it was a Saturday, Saturday night. I got a 'phone call from my boss on Saturday night to tell me all about it and to tell me to go up there on the Sunday morning to have a look at it. Sunday morning I had a car allocated, it was snowing, bloody awful

- 36:30 day, and I had to pick up the construction supervisor, who happened to be a German - a German with an MBE [Member of the British Empire], do you believe it? Anyway, I did it and we went up to Cabramurra, and the place is under snow. Yes, the shopping centre had gone, and the job was to have a look at it,
- 37:00 estimate the damage that had been done, go back to the office in Cooma, ring up the boss, get my drafting staff in and re-draft a new shopping centre. And I was given a quantity surveyor and he had to come in, the work supervisor was in and we immediately organised work to recommence
- 37:30 on the new shopping centre by the Monday. And this was on the Sunday.

So you had a lot of pressure in that job, too.

Well, you know, I had a lot of responsibility and pressure got a bit much for me there, too.

Sorry, Bill, for interrupting. Did surveying play a big part in

- 38:00 **the rest of your life though, being a surveyor?**

No. Well, no, at the Cooma stage I was back into drafting. I had an architectural drafting office and staff, here again, two Germans and one from one of the other funny countries and an Australian.

- 38:30 But I did all the domestic work, what we call our domestic work. This was the townships, which I mentioned to you, business accommodation and every type of building. We had road works to do

- 39:00 because we had to build the roads. All the services, septic tanks, sewerage, water and so on.

Bill did the work that you did in your war service days pay off in your public life after the war?

It did, because even though I was still only an LAC, I still had responsibility

- 39:30 and I knew that I always had to be ready for something that's unexpectedly going to happen, and that followed me right through till the time I went to Canberra.

And what about now, Bill, is there any associations or affiliations with the Second World War?

- 40:00 No, the only... No, not really. When I left Tasmania, I was on the officers' retirement list. I became active again in Cooma because there were a certain amount of guys who were incidentally war infantry blokes - and one was a SAS [Special Air Service] guy, which made him a little bit tougher than normal -

- 40:30 wanting to set up a CMF unit in Cooma, and the nearest unit was what they called a 3 Regiment in those days at Canberra, so I had to become active again to organise the establishment of a CMF in Cooma. So that got me back in the army. I always had part and parcel of it, you know.

- 41:00 I always had responsibility.

When you look back now are you glad that you were participating in the Australian war service when you did?

Yeah. I never talk about it, except today. It's one of those things. I never talk to Molly about it. If I do I get nailed, hammered pretty severely. But

- 41:30 you know, still having the contact through the air force with my son and grandson it's sort of carried on. My other son, he was a guy, he's up in Cairns, he tried to join the army when he was a school, he wore glasses and his long sight was excellent.

INTERVIEW ENDS