Australians at War Film Archive

Herbert Earl (Brian) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **Okay Brian well we'll make a start for the day. Can you give us a brief overview of your life so far?**

Well I was born in October of 1932 in Cooktown. We had a small property just outside of Cooktown and we had ten acres under peanuts as a cash crop,

01:00 but the rest of it was all cattle. And then in 1937 Dad decided to move to Cairns and he sold up and we moved to Cairns and I grew up there, had all my education in Cairns. And I have no siblings...

01:30 **Can you give us an overview of your life thus far please?**

Well I was born in Cooktown in October 1932. Dad and Mum had a small property just outside of Cooktown where we grew peanuts and had cattle. And then in early 1937

02:00 Dad and Mum and myself, we moved to Cairns and then we were there for the entire war period. Dad was a, in, whatever they call it, a restricted occupation, he was a waterside worker and they wouldn't let him join the army, he had to be a civilian the whole war years.

02:30 But I had all my education in Cairns. And then after that when I first started working was in Cairns and then I personally moved out to Mount Isa for a while, I worked out there as a miner. And then went to Brisbane to see if I could get a career in singing,

03:00 and I moved to Sydney and I was fortunate enough to be on the Sydney club circuit full time for over ten years. I then joined The Black & White Minstrel Show as a minstrel, and toured Australia and New Zealand with them for over two years. Then I came back and I took a position as

03:30 Tourism Officer in Moree in northern New South Wales and then retired. And I have one brother, no sisters and I think that just about covers it.

Well that's great only that, probably, where did you go to school?

Oh, primary schooling up

04:00 'til fourth grade was at Saint Joseph's School in Cairns and then I moved next door to Saint Augustine's Boys' College which was run by the Marist brothers. And it was only a small school in those days I think with boarders and day boys, it had about three hundred school children. But I believe nowadays

04:30 it's somewhere around about eight hundred, so it's expanded well and truly.

So you were in boarding school?

Oh no, it was at a boarding school but I was a day boy.

Okay. Okay, I'll just clarify a few other things. That after you left you went to Sydney and worked in the club scene.

Yes.

And then after those ten years...?

I joined The Black & White Minstrel Show as a minstrel.

And then after that....?

Went to

05:00 Moree as a Tourism Manager.

That's where you stayed until you retired?

No, I came to Maryborough and I had a job here as manager of the Family History Group and then retired.

So entertainment was maybe not your entire life, it was just the first twenty, thirty years of your working life?

Yes, but that's a long period in your working life.

Oh sure, sure, of course it is, yes, absolutely.

05:30 Yes. No, I was a boy soprano, I started off, one of the teachers at the boys' college, a Marist brother, discovered that I had a voice and we had a very unusual choir and they were really great. We were often compared to the Vienna Boys' Choir and I was one of the soloists. And it was a lot of fun, and that's

06:00 where I then, in my teen years, did a lot of eisteddfod work before I became a full time professional down in Sydney. Oh actually, once in Brisbane worked with the Bee Gees [a pop band], but they were very, very young boys in those days. And my, the newspaper clipping that advertised that

06:30 we were to be at a hotel, I've got billing above them, so I can always say that I was bigger than the Bee Gees.

What year would that have been?

Oh goodness gracious, that would have been probably the very early '60s, yeah early '60s. 1960s, not 1860s .

07:00 **I think I got what you meant. So tell us about your parents had another son, was that much later on was it?**

Yes, I was thirteen and a half when he was born and he was a bigger shock to the doctors than what he was to Mum and Dad, and I can assure you he was a big shock to Mum and Dad.

Why was he a shock to the doctors?

Because they thought Mum'd never be able to have another child. And she'd lost quite a few after I was born but eventually my brother

07:30 came along. So's, that's the family.

And he's fit and healthy?

Oh yeah, yes, very much so.

Do you remain in contact with him?

Yes, yeah.

Must have been very strange being an only child for so long and then...

It was.

a brother comes along, stealing the limelight almost.

Yes, but there's no jealousy.

I guess you were too old really to be jealous in a sense?

Yes, yes. In fact he used to ride on the pillion of my motorbike. Yes,

08:00 when he was a small boy. No helmets in those days of course.

Well tell us about this rural property that your parents had?

I don't remember much of that because I was too young but I have a vivid memory of the day we left the place. One, it's probably the earliest memory I have, because standing on the verandah of this small cottage that we had on the property and

08:30 I was clutching my mother's hand, crying my eyes out. Because Dad had a few of his friends over and they'd gathered all the horses together, including my pony, and they were taking them off because they were selling them. And I was crying my eyes out because there goes my pony. It wasn't very nice but I do remember it very, very clearly, it was, it affected me that much. We

09:00 had, as I said, ten acres under peanuts as a cash crop and we had to worry about the black cockatoos. And my Dad got my mother to poke a broom handle out the window and they had sentries out of course. And sentry'd scream his head off and the whole flock'd go.

09:30 After a while they got to know this so then Dad got my mother to put the barrel of the twenty-two rifle out the window, and the sentries got to know it, and they'd scream and the whole flock'd take off. After a while they woke up that there was nothing happening. So then Dad taught my mother how to crack a whip and that worked for a short while, but only for a short while.

10:00 So then we had to actually shoot a black cockatoo sentry and my mother had to shoot it, before they'd take off. One must remember they were Depression years and bullets cost money and you didn't spend money unless you absolutely had to. So we tried everything to get rid of them before we had to actually shoot one. Yeah.

10:30 **Smart birds.**

Oh yeah, very, very smart. A lot of people don't realise they do actually have sentries out, they don't realise it.

I didn't know that actually. And they're such beautiful birds black cockatoos.

They are, they are. My father was very reluctant of course but that cash crop was critical to our income.

And what was it exactly again?

Peanuts.

Peanuts.

Yeah.

11:00 But one of the reasons why my father and mother decided to shift to Cairns and sell the property, was because the cost of transportation from Cooktown to Cairns by boat, which was a twelve hour trip I might add, they had to, it cost as much from Cairns to Brisbane, so the freight cost alone was terrible. He grew magnificent

11:30 peanuts but it just cost too much in freight to get them to Brisbane. And course Cairns in those days, whilst to us it was a thriving metropolis, only had a population of seven thousand, you know, it was a very small overgrown country town.

Well I'd like to hear about your impressions of Cairns when you first got there, but I'm just trying to ascertain how old were you

12:00 **when you left?**

We arrived in Cairns in 1937 before my birthday so I would've been four years of age at the time, just prior to my fifth birthday.

And when they moved to Cairns, was it a similar sort of set up for their home?

No, no, no. My father

12:30 bought a, what they called, a worker's dwelling. It was only six months old, cost six hundred pound, he put two hundred pound down as a deposit. And it was just a very small block, I think the frontage was only about thirty-three feet, it was slightly less that a quarter acre anyway. We had

13:00 dirt roads, there was no concrete gutters and kerbing, it was just a bit of a ditch, so it was in a suburb that they call Parramatta in Cairns. And whilst we were not on the outskirts of Cairns we were probably about two miles from the CBD [central business district] part of the town. That property

13:30 now would probably be worth in the hundreds of thousands and Dad bought it for six hundred pound. It was a two bedroom cottage up on high blocks, but that's where I grew up and loved it.

It even seems like a lot of money in those days, six hundred pounds?

Yes, well that's what he paid for it.

So what was the, I mean you're talking

14:00 **about the actual freight and the expense of the freight, that was the reason for moving?**

Yes.

But what else was it about Cairns that perhaps appealed to your parents?

Oh, we had family there.

Oh, okay. Who did you have there?

My paternal grandmother lived just around the corner and my maternal grandparents lived oh, probably about

14:30 two miles away, three miles, so we had family there.

That would have been nice for you as a little boy to actually grow up with your grandparents?

Oh yes, yes, it was wonderful. My paternal grandfather drove a truck and I'll never forget it, it had solid rubber on the rims, it wasn't tyres and tubes, it was just solid rubber.

15:00 Very old fashioned truck. My maternal grandparents had a small acreage, oh, probably about four acres, and they had poultry and fruit and vegetables, they'd semi retired of course. And then in, late in 1937 my paternal grandfather

15:30 was due to fly to Cooktown to fight a court case that was to give me property in Cooktown when the plane crashed, and the poor man lived for six days with half his scalp torn off. And with today's modern medicines and drugs he'd have probably have lived, but he died and so I never did get the property in Cooktown.

Who got it?

The Government.

16:00 They took it all in, most of it in death duties and so forth, it was sold. It was a very valuable property now, in nowadays, it was quite a good property in fact.

That's a horrible story.

Yes. Family life, these things happen.

Were any of your relatives involved in the First World War?

Yes. They actually fought in

16:30 the Boer War then in the First World War. And in the Second World War I had an uncle, and another uncle by marriage and a third chap who was engaged to Dad's sister, who married her after the war, so you could say I have

17:00 had three uncles that were in the war.

And aside from your father who was in a restricted business, were, did he have brothers or your Mum have brothers that went to the Second World War?

My father had one brother in the Second World War and Mum didn't have any brothers that were in the Second World War, they were

17:30 restricted occupations again. This happened to a few of the men that they just weren't allowed to join. And in fact during the Second World War they used to have an organisation called the Rejected Volunteers and they'd wear a badge to signify that they were rejected volunteers, so that people knew that they weren't shirkers, and that they wouldn't get the traditional white feathers sent to 'em

18:00 in the mail. Cause that was what happened to a lot of people.

I didn't know about that organisation. I suppose it's a good idea.

Yeah. Yes, they did have it. You know, somebody might have tried to join by... excuse me. Yes the Rejected Volunteers

18:30 there were many reasons why people were rejected, it could have been on medical grounds, it could have been the occupation that they had, it could have also been because of the skills that they had. And so people joined this organisation, a lot of them, my father didn't, but a lot of them did and they wore a badge that, mostly the

19:00 young men that had been rejected, that joined the organisation so that they didn't get any flak, shall we say, from the troops or other people that were busy-bodies and didn't know what was going on.

Do you remember any of that actually occurring in your small town?

I've heard of it, yes. I don't, can't say I know of it personally but I've heard of it happening. People getting, not many,

19:30 but I have heard of several cases that they got white feathers.

Isn't that horrible, I mean, who's anyone else to judge what...?

Of course, of course.

Did they have in those days conscientious objectors?

Ah, I can't say with certainty but I'm sure they would've but any conscientious objector would've been taken into the ambulance side of it,

20:00 you know, the medical section, you know, stretcher bearers and that sort of a position, if they were genuine conscientious objectors. And one has to remember that those people, even if they didn't want to carry a rifle, they did some very courageous things under fire. So I would never ever denigrate a conscientious objector that was prepared to at least go as an ambulance bearer, or a stretcher bearer I should

20:30 say.

Well no, exactly, I mean the Quakers organisation won a Nobel Prize, a peace prize in the '30s because of their work during in the First World War I think. I could be wrong there but they won some kind of prize and they're pacifists, but they actually did a lot of the medical side, sort of volunteering as, all that kind of stuff and they're as necessary as anyone else.

Of course,

21:00 of course.

And what about growing up in Cairns, was there a certain kind of laissez faire attitude about being able to run around barefoot and come home at all hours and, was it that kind of...?

It was a slow pace, but I had a pair of good shoes, and but generally I ran around barefoot. Then we got

21:30 push bikes and we children were able to roam wherever we wanted because there was no problems. And it was just a lot of fun exploring, we made our own fun in, most of the time of course. We were able to, we didn't stay out late, that was a no-no. But if we did go out we went out under adult supervision,

22:00 there was no getting around in gangs or anything like that at night time. There was next to no problems really, there was a whole different atmosphere in the place, and it was only a country town.

What about girls, were you interested in girls from a young age?

I used to look at 'em.

22:30 But no it was probably not until I was about fifteen that I started to really think that girls were nice.

So you were actually, when you were at the Marist brothers school, Augustine's, that's when you started singing. What got you interested in singing?

The choirmaster, Brother Osmond, wanted to form a choir and he made each of us sing a few notes

23:00 and he must have felt that I had a voice. I started off as a boy soprano of course. In fact I used to be able to sing the note of C above top C, which if you know music is...

I do.

right, is rather high. He used to ask me, could I go higher and I said, "Yes,"

23:30 I felt I could, and he would never, but he would never do it because he didn't want to destroy the voice. But unusually my voice never broke, it just gradually deepened. And until I was singing second bass with an adult choir and then I went up to first bass and that's where it's remained ever since. So it was most unusual. The choir itself

24:00 you must remember that at that time there was a lot of Italians up in the district and a lot of them were interned for a period. And so the sons of the big boys had to come home and leave school to run the farm. And then towards 1944-45 when the

24:30 troops started trickling back into civilian life and the internees were returned to their homes, they sent their sons back to school, and these are young men of eighteen, nineteen and twenty, and they were fully grown men. And so in the choir we had this magnificent base line in behind us, all of us, or all of we little

25:00 boys that had the boy soprano voices, and so it was a magnificent choir, it really was.

That's excellent detail. I'm really looking forward to getting more information from you throughout the day, that's very good memory. Did you get to know or become friends with any of the Italian families there in Cairns?

Oh we knew quite a lot of them of course,

25:30 the Niciforres, the Gaucis, the Mattarazzos, there's quite a few families, 'cause being a Catholic family ourselves, we knew the Catholics. But one must remember too that most of the Italian boys were from farms outside of Cairns and so we didn't know their immediate families too much, there weren't that many Italians

26:00 that actually lived in Cairns. In those days of course the Italian farmers, they came out here, around the 1930s and went cane cutting which is back breaking work. And then a group of them'd get together and they'd buy one farm and work it in the off season and then they'd buy another farm and another farm until they eventually, they, those in the group had their own farms.

26:30 They were fine citizens, fine, fine citizens. A lot of those first born Italians, boys that I was talking about earlier, went on to become doctors and dentists, they went on to university, they became professional people. Because even though their parents came from a, usually from a farming background or very, very poor

27:00 background, they were determined that their sons'd get the best possible education they could. And

they pushed and pushed their sons and they've made fine citizens.

It's an interesting heritage to Cairns, the Italians that worked there.

Yes, in around the district, because Cairns in those days, it wasn't tourism like it is now. It was sugar cane

27:30 and timber from the Atherton Tablelands and was the main staple to the economy up there. It was a small town.

So you talked about your parents being Catholic, did that mean that you had quite a religious upbringing?

Yes. Yes, it did. The nuns, there's a small convent school,

28:00 they came from what they called Saint Monica's Convent, but three of them'd walk over every day unless they were lucky enough for some good Catholic to pick 'em up and bring them over. And we used to think it was terrible these poor Irish women in their black habits, it must have been dreadfully hot, walking maybe two miles to come to

28:30 teach us over there in the other parish at Saint Joseph's. And it must have been dreadful for them.

It must have been. I mean I was in Cairns in January and I had, you know, cotton dresses on and I was boiling.

Yes well you can imagine them, with the nuns, with the old habits and the cowls and so forth, how dreadfully hot it was. Even their umbrellas were black.

29:00 **Well did that mean that your parents were at church at nine a.m. on a Sunday morning, kind of thing?**

Yes, yes, we had to go to mass, my whole family were Catholic. And then I moved over, as I said, to Saint Augustine's Marist Boys' College, Marist Brothers. It had

29:30 been only recently established at that time, it was probably only about ten years old.

And what about now, have you kept your faith up until this point or has it dwindled or changed?

Shall we use the term dwindled, yeah.

Is it because you don't so much believe what they, what the Catholics preach or because you're just not particularly interested in that anymore?

Personally I think it's

30:00 that there's a lot of church made laws that I don't agree with, whereas the God made laws, I do my best to keep.

I agree. Yes, it's the sort of church dogma that makes having faith, a structured faith, difficult isn't it?

It is, yes.

Mmm. All right well tell us then about, did you have cousins and people like that to grow up with, because you didn't have your brother til much later?

Yes. Yes, I,

30:30 cause I grew up as an only child, that's what it amounted to.

Yes.

But oh yes, and I did have several cousins around the place, probably half a dozen or so. And there was a small group of us, I will not use the word gang, we weren't a gang, we were just a group of boys that were in the same class, we all played the same sports together, joined the

31:00 same clubs together. And we kept in, together with all of those activities, we were all in the choir together, cause that was a big thing, so yes, we all had push bikes and we'd get up impromptu games of football and it was a lot of fun.

And do you know about,

31:30 **did you meet any aboriginal families there in Cairns?**

Now you're talking, getting into around 1942 when, at the time of the Coral Sea Battle. My parents evacuated me up to a cattle station up in Cape York, that'd been family friends for years, and yes, they had aboriginal workers there. We had a, when we were on the farm in Cooktown, we had a

32:00 lot of aboriginals that worked for us. And in fact Dad had the men working on the peanut farm or with

the cattle and my mother, who was only a young woman of course, she had a two acre vegetable patch and the women'd help her in the vegetable patch. And so whilst we didn't have sixpence to our names,

32:30 we were able to get three good square meals a day and feed the people that worked for us. And we were a lot luckier than a lot of other poor devils that were on the Wallaby Track [itinerants seeking work] as they call it, that were out looking for work. It's, so I have had some

33:00 experience with aboriginals. In fact my best friend in Moree and his wife are aboriginal people.

So from an early age in a sense there was an appreciation of what they were going through?

Oh yes, yes.

What about food, what kind of food did you eat in those days? This is in the lead up to the Second World War so I suppose it's coming out of the Depression.

33:30 Very plain. But when we're in Cooktown Dad would kill a beast every so often and he'd take, he and Mum'd take what cuts they wanted and then give the rest of the carcass to the people that worked for us. And so and with the vegetable patch we had good food, but it was very plain of course. Shall we say, corned beef,

34:00 cabbage, that sort of thing, it wasn't cordon bleu, but it was good, plain food.

And what about for treats, what kind of treats would you have?

Mostly puddings. Remembering too that there was no refrigeration, so that one found it difficult to have ice cream or treats like that. In fact when we moved to Cairns

34:30 we had an ice box to start off with, the ice man came around in those days and with blocks of ice, and that was the only refrigeration we had.

They must have been extremely heavy these blocks of ice?

They weren't light.

So who would carry them if your Mum's at home?

Oh the ice man'd bring it up and put it into the box for you or else you wrapped it in newspaper to keep it.

35:00 The blocks themselves, so that people get an idea, were approximately eighteen inches long I'd say, by about twelve wide by about four to five inches deep. And they were quite heavy, I'm not sure that I could've lifted one as a small child, I can't remember that. But the ice men used to actually come around with a

35:30 horse drawn vehicle. And oh, he was not the only one, there was the vegetable man came round, the butcher came round, the ice cream man'd come around once a week, with horse and a cart, they all had a horse and carts. And even the council, the local council, a lot of their equipment was drawn by draft horses. Like their mowers, they were

36:00 rotary mowers not, that went that way. Oh, we even had steam rollers, the genuine steam.

What are they for?

Just pounding the dirt down on the roads.

I see.

They're not anything like the diesel things you see on the roads nowadays, they were real Puffin' Billys [steam trains].

So what about...?

A lot of

36:30 horse drawn things in those days.

I mean, this time in America was, you know, sort of prohibition and sort of ban on alcohol was difficult to get, people were making moonshine [home made alcohol], did you know about that occurring? In Australia?

No, it didn't occur in Australia to my knowledge, but as a special treat, the men'd go and buy what we now call long necks,

37:00 that's the twenty-six ounce bottle, of beer. In fact it was almost unknown for the ordinary working man to drink spirits of any sort unless it was, he was way out back and drank rum. One of my uncles, my mother's younger brother, as a decoration, shall we say, for a

37:30 lapel of his suit, had a string with two horses on it, tiny horses, black and white, that came from the

neck of the Black & White Scotch, in those days, and that was considered a, he was a very upmarket young man.

Really, he got a brooch, if you like, from a whisky bottle.

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, and if you wore that I suppose it

38:00 kind of proved that, 'Oh hey, I can afford a bottle of Scotch."

Can you imagine now, like going into a Corn Flakes box or something and taking something out and wearing it.

Yeah. But later probably I'll tell you about some of the jewellery that women wore during the war years.

Oh, well you can tell me now.

Oh right.

Just, since it's jogged your memory.

38:30 Jewellery was rather nonexistent during World War II and the women weren't going to be out of fashion, so they'd get their men folk to do their initials, like HB, whatever their initials were with an arrow through it, made out of, cut out of three ply. And then they'd paint them and put a

39:00 pin on the back, and this was on their jackets or on their blouses.

Well what's three ply?

It's timber that's only about that thick.

Oh right.

They'd paint them different colours and so forth and they looked quite attractive. I remember the troops during the World War'd make signet rings out of

39:30 the aluminium tubes that came out of aircraft, and they'd decorate them like that but using toothbrushes, the different coloured toothbrushes and they'd form their unit's colours. So it could be red and blue cut on, like and they're cut between, would be on the diagonal, something like that, and then give it to their girlfriends or wear it themselves. Some of

40:00 them, if I remember rightly, even made earrings for their girls out of it. Stockings for instance...

That's really clever isn't it?

Oh yes.

Tape 2

00:31 **Okay we're just talking about one particular memory, what was that?**

Oh for Cooktown. We lived over the back of Cooktown, what they call The Gap, and we either drove around the mountain to Cooktown in a sulky or we walked over The Gap to Cooktown. And I can clearly remember and my mother,

01:00 while she was alive, she told me that the story was true, she was amazed. That we were coming, we'd been in town, my mother and I, and the, some of the old aboriginals that were families that worked for us, had come in to town with us. And walking back, we got about half way up the hill, when all of a sudden a pig snorted, a wild pig, in the clump of lantana.

01:30 And it's very, very true that the aboriginal men, who were carrying spears, I might add, got in a circle around it and they were yackaying and yodelling and carrying on. The women all put the, got in a circle and put their heads together and bent over, and they were wailing away. Meanwhile my mother's trying to push me up into the fork of a tree, and I'm

02:00 screaming my head off as a child and my arms clutched firmly around my mother's neck, there was no way I was going up into that tree. And next minute the pig bursts through the circle of men and course they couldn't throw their spears because the next thing was the pig went straight through the circle of women and brushed past my mother and I, only a couple of feet away, and that was

02:30 the way the pig went. So it was very exciting at the time, I can assure you. Yeah, so there's... Captain Cook [explorer] I believe actually released the first pigs up that way, so they're a menace now.

Yeah well what was going on with the aboriginal people, what were they doing, do you know?

In what...?

In the circles?

I don't know, I don't know. But the men were standing

03:00 up like warriors, yelling and brandishing their spears, trying to get this pig out of the clump of lantana, but the women was the strangest because they actually bent over at the waist, like that, with their heads towards each other. I don't know what the significance was or anything.

And how aware were you of, kind of, what tribal things were going on, what…?

03:30 I don’t honestly remember I was too young. But my father told us stories that he saw the last of the great corroborees in Cooktown at one stage or other. I think, and I stand correction, I think it was the ’30s that that happened, the last of the great corroborees. Yes.

Were you aware, what kind of things were you told about aboriginal people as a kid?

Not much,

04:00 not much because I was too young, that was the whole thing, I can’t give you a, definitive answers on that, yeah.

Were you aware of anything that people were saying about, I don't know, about having changed their ways and re…?

No, no. And I answer that only because I don't know.

That’s the best way to answer if you don’t, instead of making it up. And tell us about,

04:30 **was there, there’s a lot of rainforest near that area…?**

Not quite around Cooktown, it was a different style of country but it, there was some areas of it of course, but a lot, that were thick scrub as we call it, we never called it rain forest in those days, it was just scrub. But it was a bit more open, a lot of the country.

So it’s

05:00 **kind of open, more bush land-ey?**

Yes.

But would you go through the scrub or the rain forest at all?

No we’d only just go through the bush to, we were only just over this hill which is called The Gap in Cooktown, and we were on a property on the other side, away from the town itself.

Okay, well you moved to Cairns, which you talked with Heather about.

05:30 **Tell us about your father’s waterside work?**

I understand from family stories that it was dreadfully hard during the Depression years, they used to have really awfully hard conditions. Sugar was the main export out of Cairns

06:00 and the men had to carry bags of sugar which were smaller than a corn sack but still they were weighty. And carry it on their shoulders and the back of their neck and it was, load all these bags by hand. So it’s not like nowadays where it’s all just poured in on conveyor belts.

06:30 Excuse me. They, and course during the war years they needed experienced waterside workers to handle the, all the equipment that came into town, a lot of it from America came in on what they call Liberty ships. The Liberty ships were mass produced

07:00 cargo boats, very lightly armed, and a lot of the equipment came in on that, that they had to handle. And it was, of course, either medically unfit for war service, men that were waterside workers or men that had large families or for one reason or another that’s, they kept them there. I don’t

07:30 know about how many men worked on the wharves, but they had to have them of course.

And was your father a member of the union?

Oh yes, yes. He was never a member of a political party, like myself, excuse me. But he had strong

08:00 leanings for Labor Party, and if anything, I would describe his politics as being to the right of Labor, perhaps even left wing Liberal. But he’d, didn’t really, the unions didn’t really become that strong in my opinion until just after the war

08:30 years when they were infiltrated by people that had a, very much left wing tendencies. And he wasn’t very happy about it.

And was he actively involved in the union during his time?

No, no, no. No, but of course he had to go to meetings or if there was a stop work meeting or whatever and he'd listen to both sides. And

09:00 he'd say, 'There is your out and out left wingers, your out and out right wingers and the majority in the middle who were too dumb to do anything except vote for the best speaker on the day.' So he wasn't very impressed with some of them.

Were there many strikes during his time there?

Mostly I'd have to call them stoppages, not

09:30 strikes. You know, they'd stop for twenty-four hours because of some perceived problem that they had.

And you were talking with Heather about your schooling. I'm interested, you hear lots of stories about Catholic nuns and brothers and that being a bit you know, violent?

I wouldn't say violent but they were rather

10:00 heavy-handed at times. I'd almost say we were very worried about them. But in those days of course the nuns would, we're only very small children in the first years of schooling. I don't even remember getting the strap as, they had wide leather belts, I don't even remember getting that. But the Brothers, they had lawyer canes, and

10:30 we used to get the, on the finger tips, if we played up, up to six on each hand. And on a cold winter's morning that hurt, I can assure you, getting it straight across the finger tips like that.

Were there any which were particularly kind of, almost sadistic?

No, I don't like the word sadistic, no, I don't think any of them were sadistic, but some of

11:00 them were very strong on discipline shall we say. And they made the rules and we just had to obey them or else we paid the price. Course we used to try and hide their canes and break em up or whatever but they always seemed to have an endless supply of lawyer cane. Didn't work very well.

Would they punish you for getting

11:30 **things wrong at all?**

Oh yes, oh yes, and you'd, it's totally different now, with you young people, you've got no idea. But oh no, I can remember one time when I happened to be wearing a hat and it came back to the college that in the afternoon, after school,

12:00 I'd seen a priest drive buy and I hadn't tipped my hat to the priest. And it came back to the college and I got four of the best that morning.

What if you like, were asked a question in maths and you got the answer wrong, or you..?

Oh, only if it was consistent, yeah, if you were consistently an idiot, so you tried not to be an idiot. But it didn't hurt us, I'll put it that way, in,

12:30 mentally, you know. We were frightened when it happened but it made us respect discipline in our own lives and it gave us this. Please don't think I'm against the corporal punishment, I'm not, but within reason I believe that there should be some form of it.

13:00 But by gee it hurt when you got that on the cold winter's morning, you thought twice about doing it again.

So tell us, alright I'll ask you about the lead up to war. Were you aware in your family or as a kid yourself of…?

Yes, yes because I was a Catholic with a small 'c' and voracious reader , and every morning I'd

13:30 read the newspapers. Which, I digress for a moment, the newspapers, the Cairns Post, in those days had all the advertisements on the front page, the main news stories were further in, totally different to the set up of newspapers nowadays. But I'd read it and then when war broke out I was following it and looking at the maps. The nuns who were Irish-born women

14:00 were very interested and they'd quiz me on what was happening. And course this was all so far away as England, Germany and… that we weren't involved except seeing our young men go off to war. It, and then when Japan came in to the war of course things changed dramatically. It,

14:30 we were starting then to get news reels for, at our local movie houses. And radio, we'd always, seven o'clock at night, we'd listen in to the news. And so we were, well I in particular, was very interested in what was going on. Just a curious mind I suppose.

15:00 **You were quite young to be following the news, weren't you, really?**

I suppose but I was interested in it, and we'd sit down as a family at seven o'clock, that was the thing

and listen to the news. And then on Saturdays when you went to the movies, the children'd go to the matinees in the afternoon and then

15:30 the adults'd go to the show at night, you'd have news reels of the war footage, which were probably two or three weeks old. But you'd, I'd have read the story and then, like, we'll say the Melbourne Cup for instance, you knew who'd won and everything, you'd listened to the radio but it'd be possibly up to a week before you got the news reel of the cup.

16:00 And there was certainly no television in those days.

Well tell us, was your family discussing before it happened, like Hitler's, you know, rise to power and that kind of...?

I have no recollection of that, they could've been but that would've been adults, and children were to be seen and not heard.

Is that true, were children to be seen and not heard?

Oh if there's adults sitting around,

16:30 and you didn't really speak unless you were spoken to, you know, we had to behave ourselves. Oh yes it was a, more, like we had a loving family but I didn't speak at the dinner table unless my father or my mother spoke to me. And that didn't hurt me.

What would happen if you did

17:00 **say something?**

Probably a clip over the ear. I sat on my father's left hand and it was deadly. But it didn't hurt me, it disciplined me and taught me the values.

What's the, just curious here, what's the, what do you think's the value of children being seen and not heard?

17:30 When, one must learn not to interrupt ones betters or peers while they're talking, that's how one learned.

A kind of respect thing.

Of course it is, yeah. Particularly for older generations.

Don't worry if I ask obvious questions.

No, it's alright.

Yeah, so tell us, do you remember the

18:00 **news, when you heard the news that the war was actually declared?**

Not specifically but I can, it was just, I can't remember that there was a transition period, I can just remember that, 'Hey, we're at war, what does this mean.' And that's when I started really reading a lot and went around with my eyes and ears open. But didn't speak much.

Well this is the early

18:30 **stage too, this is...?**

Oh very early, that's what I mean, it wasn't til about, oh there were some of our young men went off in '39 of course, but it was more '41, '42 after Japan came in that things really got into top stride. But one of my uncles, an uncle by marriage, he was a school teacher and had two children

19:00 and he didn't join up until '41 after Japan had come in. And he went off to Canada with his brother and they were trained there as navigators and pilots and so forth and sent to Britain, and both of them were actually killed over there. So it was,

19:30 he didn't actually go until about '41 or '42. So as I said, there's some that went in '39 and then in the first flush of enthusiasm or patriotism or whatever motivated them and then it was a case of later, things were getting serious with the Japanese.

Well speaking from your own point of view and your own family's point of view,

20:00 **did you feel, even though you're so young you're not joining up, you're young, but did you feel, in your family a kind of allegiance to England?**

No, no. It was, it was the Mother Country of course and, excuse me.

Sorry, we've just gonna put... Right sorry,

20:30 **we were talking about the allegiance to England?**

Oh, yes it, that was the Mother Country and course it was felt that we had to support her. But it, in my own family, it wasn't such a strong thing. Because even though I'm English in name, from my great grandfather, most of my ancestry on both sides is Irish and I suppose they didn't

21:00 really feel the need. But there was no animosity against England, but no, I didn't really detect any problems there.

It must have seemed quite different too, this early stage of the war, cause it was just over...?

It was way over the horizon, but whereas when the Japanese came in, things started to look very serious, very, very

21:30 serious in fact. Cause it was thought that they, if the Japanese were going to invade that it could well be around, somewhere around the Cairns area.

Well before Japan entered the war, was it seen as a possibility?

It could've been by the adults but certainly not by me, cause one must remember that Japan was our ally in World War I.

And during this

22:00 **couple of years before Japan entered, were you playing games like, you know, soldiers against the Germans or anything?**

Oh yes, yes. And we had broomsticks or something for rifles and built our own little forts and you're the goodie and I'm the baddie. Yes, oh yes, children are like that all over the world, they play their games.

What kind of memories do you have of the news coming through from Europe

22:30 **and from Middle East?**

By the time it really erupted in the Middle East, I had two, well one uncle and one chap that was to become an uncle, in the middle east, and one of em got captured and so this was another reason why I was watching it all the time. But we mainly just listened to the radio, to see,

23:00 'Hey, I wonder where they are now,' and the family'd get the letters and what have you. I can remember the uncle when he came back from the Middle East, he brought back a set of rosary beads for my grandmother, his mother. And they were supposed to be made from olive seeds from the Garden of Gethsemane. And oh,

23:30 she was absolutely thrilled to bits, to be so close in touch with Christ himself, it was really remarkable to see it. The letters were really so important in those days. I can remember that after the chap that became my uncle, after he'd been captured, seeing these little post cards that came from Italy and then Germany,

24:00 and the aunt'd read out selected portions to myself as a child. And the post cards were only yay big, four by three, or somewhere around that size. And course he'd write as tiny as he could to get as many words as he could, that's all they were allowed. And the women in our family, and as most of the civilian women,

24:30 would make up food parcels and so forth to send over to the troops that were fighting and also to prisoners of war. There was an organisation called the Australian Comforts Fund and they had it all detailed on what you could put in and what you couldn't, and how to sew it up in calico and all sorts of things, there were regulations about what you could do. And put in socks and tins of this and packets

25:00 of that and cigarettes and , but you were only, they were limited in how many cigarettes you could put in, how many whatever. So eventually formed a, I can remember the parcels, of women making them, formed a parcel in calico all sewn up, about nine inches cubed and that was the size of em going across. Yes.

What kind of image

25:30 **do you remember you'd get in your head as a little kid of these far off places, when you'd hear these stories?**

It, the desert was just pure sand, no oases or anything like that. And then we'd, England was just a cold country, as far as I knew and we'd see the, on the news reels, we'd see the Palace or we'd

26:00 see Parliament House and all I can remember is old castles that we'd see. Whereas in Eng [England], when Japan came into the war it was more, we had visions of jungle fighting. I can remember, going back a little bit, to when we first moved to

26:30 Cairns about 19-, well it was early 1937, our, we had a Chinese chap that had our, a green grocer's store not far from us and occasionally I'd have to go down and buy something that my mother wanted. And he had a huge coloured poster up on his wall of the Rape of Nanking and it was awful to look at it, 'course I was

27:00 all eyes bugging out looking at this, so I can remember war from a very small child.

What was on the poster of the Rape of…?

I can't remember to tell you the honest truth now. But I don't even know whether it's stylised or what but it was obviously the Rape of Nanking, there was obvious bodies and things like that, burnings.

So you

27:30 **remember the affect?**

Yeah I just remember the affect of it, that it had on me.

Well speaking of that, do you remember any of the propaganda against the Germans in the lead up to, you know, both encourage men to join up and also just get the public onside against the…?

It was there but I don't remember much of it. As far as I knew, the men just went and joined up. There were obvious,

28:00 obviously there'd have to have been at the time, but I just wasn't in touch with it.

And you mentioned that there were some which went away but did the area change at all during these years before Japan entered, was there any noticeable changes for you?

No. It didn't affect Cairns except they were losing a lot of young men of course. But as far as construction goes

28:30 of buildings and roads and so forth as a war effort, no, there wasn't any significant change that I can recall.

Alright, well tell us now about the news that, from your point of view, hearing Japan had entered the war and also Japan's progress down?

We were following the progress of course by radio and newspaper and news reels. And it was shocking when we

29:00 discovered impregnable Singapore fell and the big battleships that were sunk. And it became frightening when they got to New Guinea. It was getting closer and closer and course it was very worrying for everybody, be it service personnel or

29:30 civilians, at that time. And all we were getting was defeat after defeat after defeat at that time.

Do you remember what was said about the Japanese when they first entered, say when Pearl Harbour was bombed, was there much talk of them being a real threat to come all that way?

I don't recall that there was talk of threat to come down from Pearl Harbour, or after Pearl Harbour but I can remember

30:00 the outrage that was felt at that time about the sneaky way of attack that Japan did on Pearl Harbour, that was just not British.

What's the British way?

Yes, the British way of life, stiff upper lip etcetera. etcetera.

To announce your attack. Sorry, but

30:30 **was there also, was there talk that, at all about them being a formidable enemy or was there talk about them not being, you know, so hard at that…?**

No, that I don't recall, except that we were going to fight the little yellow illegitimates, and because there were so many of them coming through.

31:00 And in hindsight now, in later years, I would think that our adults would've thought about how many years that Japan had fought in China and so they were seasoned troops. Whereas in Australia we had a militia of weekend warriors, but we, the troops when they did go were civilians,

31:30 civilian troops, if one can use that expression. So there, you know, what I'm trying to say is that we didn't have a full time, professional trained army.

I guess that idea of them being little and yellow might've…

Oh don't forget the illegitimate.

and illegitimate, that might've had some bearing on what

32:00 **people were thinking, whether or not they were gonna be a strong force or a not so strong force?**

I would imagine so and remembering that probably far more in north Queensland than in southern Queensland or even further south, the adults would've had contact a lot with the Japanese pre war through the fishing boats and the trochus (mollusc) boats, the pearl boats

32:30 and the Japanese cargo boats that used to come in. So they would've had a lot of experience of contact with the Japanese and no doubt, I don't remember any specifically, but there would've been Japanese businesses in the far north. I don't, as I say, I don't recall any specifically, I can remember Chinese but not Japanese.

33:00 **And so, were people getting shocked by this progress, quickly down through Singapore and...?**

Oh yes, it was worrying at the time, very worrying. You know our, one Division of Australians was already caught in Singapore and we knew nothing about their fate. And there was another two Divisions if I remember rightly in the Middle East

33:30 and so who was going to protect us, you know, we had nothing until the Americans arrived. It was a very frightening time, more so for the adults than for the child of course, but it was still of a concern, what's going to happen to us.

Still as a child, could you notice this fear...?

Oh yes, I noticed it, for certain. What am I going

34:00 to do if things get bad. Well thank God my father had taught me how to shoot and everything and I was quite prepared to pick up a rifle and start shooting if it was needed, you know, even though I was only very young. You'll do anything if you think your life's in danger.

Were you, yeah, were you seriously contemplating this idea that you'd have to be shooting at Japanese sooner or later?

Oh yeah,

34:30 yeah. And the, in fact, I think I mentioned briefly, earlier, that my parents evacuated me up to a cattle station that the family had been family friends for years. And they sent one of the old aboriginals that worked on the property, he took me out and taught me quite a lot of bush craft of how to survive. And

35:00 it was considered that serious that even as a child I was taught this so that I could survive if I was on my own somehow.

What exactly, what memories do you have of what you were taught?

That, you can imagine after a long day in the saddle, at night, after we had a bite to eat, which was bush tucker,

35:30 I'd just drop into the deepest sleep and he'd hide something, maybe it was my hat or my belt or whatever. And next morning I'd have to go and find it didn't I, and that taught me to track. I'm not a black tracker as such per se, I'm not up to their standard anywhere near it, but I don't think it'd take me long to get back into the swing of it if I was lost in the bush.

36:00 **Well tell us about learning these skills, like what did you look for, for a start?**

Well we had a riding horse each, and saddle of course. We had tea, flour, sugar, a box of matches and a twenty-two [.22] rifle and a box of bullets. We'd absolutely no food,

36:30 and we were out for a fortnight. And snake's not bad eating, like conservationists are not going to like what I'm saying now, but I had to learn to live off the land and it was bush tucker [food]. Believe it or not the nicest meal of the lot was porcupine, it's like a cross between a fish and a chicken, if one can imagine that.

37:00 And how do you cook it with the quills, is you roll him in mud and put him under the coals and then when it comes out you just hit it and it takes the mud off and the quills come and the outside skin come with it, and that's how the aboriginals cooked it. I might add that when we came back we'd never fired a shot and we'd never struck a match. So we, all we

37:30 had was tea, flour and sugar. We had plenty of sugar, we didn't hardly use any of our own sugar because we got what they call sugar bag, it's a wild bees honey that we found. Oh, good food, yeah, so it was great experience him teaching me.

What was his name?

I can't

38:00 recall, no. Very, very old man he was. He was that old I had to help him up to get him on the pony, but once he got on that pony, oh, he was brilliant, he could ride anywhere.

How had you come to know this man specifically?

Because he worked for the station owners that I'd gone, to be evacuated to.

That's quite an amazing foresight for them to send you out there

38:30 **to learn these things?**

It was necessary, it was definitely necessary to, because they probably thought, 'Hey, here's a city kid…' Cairns, a city. But no they probably thought that I wouldn't have grown up in the bush, I had my very early life in the bush and if we'd have continued living there I would've learned a lot of these things anyway naturally from my father. But because we lived in the town afterwards,

39:00 in my formative years, I hadn't had this experience and so they made certain that I got the experience in case anything happened and I was on my own.

In case you had to go bush?

Bush, yeah, exactly. That's how people thought in those days and they had to think that way, you know, plan for the future.

And almost like a guerrilla

39:30 **kind of style?**

Yes, yeah, exactly. Taking a situation, mythical situation that, or hypothetical, that if all the station people had of got wiped out, I would've been on my own and so I would've then had to try and link up with family or friends or towns people somewhere and try and

40:00 evade capture myself, so we had to think of those things.

Gotta pause there cause we're at the end of the tape.

Tape 3

00:32 **Brian, last time we were talking you were telling me about the jewellery and ladies getting their initials made with three ply wood and painting them and the cygnet rings the men would make out of the aeroplanes. And then you were also going to tell me about the stockings.**

Oh yes, the stockings were extremely scarce for the ladies, there was no such thing as pantyhose in those days but the stockings. So what the ladies used to do

01:00 is paint them on and paint their legs, and they even had seams done by eyebrow pencil down the back of their leg where the stocking seam would normally be. And of course the dearer style of stockings in those days had a heel sewn into them and they used to put in the pseudo-heel with the eyebrow pencil.

01:30 But they had to be careful if they went out in the rain, that it didn't all wash away.

That's a lot of effort though, isn't it.

Oh yes, but the ladies were, had to be glamorous of course with all these young men all round and thousands of 'em, and so I don't blame the ladies for wanting to dress up a little. Course in those days too, a matron going out would just not be seen down town with-

02:00 out gloves on, a hat and gloves, that was the styles in those days.

What do you mean by matron?

The older married women, they were, wore gloves. My mother would pedal a bike down town, and course not many people owned motor cards and petrol was terribly scarce, you had to have coupons to get it, you were rationed.

02:30 So she'd pedal her push bike down town with her gloves on, and one hand holding an umbrella over her head, because of the sun light.

But I'm curious to know about this painting the stockings on, would they paint them on grey?

No, brown.

Brown.

Yes, brown stockings, and with the eyebrow pencil marking the seam. And if they were, wanted to be really up-market

03:00 they had the heel painted in as well. There was an extra piece of cloth that was in the dearer type of stockings in those days. Another type of jewellery that was made in those days, war years, I was only reminded of it by an elderly resident here, just several weeks ago. They'd get wool and make little

03:30 tiny dolls out of it and hang that as a lapel from their blouses, different coloured wools and so forth and pretty it up a little bit I suppose. I'd forgotten all about it until she reminded me about it, I was telling her of your impending visit. And she, "Oh yeah," she said, "that's what we did too."

I guess in, you know, time of war you still want to look presentable.

Of course, of course, particularly the young women

04:00 because of all these thousands of young eligible men around the place.

Well we'll talk about, we'll touch on that in a second. Just thinking that your mother must have been really quite young to have a second child thirteen and a half years after you?

She was, when I was born, Mum was twenty-one at the time I was born, so yes she was a young woman.

And what about your dad, was he much older?

Dad was about four years older than my mother.

04:30 **Now, something I was reading in the skeletal biography that was given to us by the office, was that you started making pocket money collecting toads?**

Pardon me for laughing, yes.

Can you tell us that story?

Reading the Cairns Post newspaper, there's a little tiny classified ad saying,

05:00 'Wanted: Toads, a penny each' and it was from the Red Cross. So a friend of mine and myself thought this was going to be good pocket money. So we got hold of a billy goat cart and the wash tub with, had a wooden lid on top of it and we put it on the billy goat cart [billycart]. And we went down that Friday night and we'd lift up the lid, pick up a toad, throw him in, drop the lid, lift up the lid, pick up another

05:30 toad and throw him in. So we collected all these toads down in the backyard of our own home which was only a pocket handkerchief size back lawn. Next morning we trundle this down to the Hibernian Hall in Cairns and next door was the Red Cross and knocked on the door and out came this, I'll never forget her, little pocket-Venus blue-eyed blonde. And she's

06:00 about eighteen years of age, and I instantly fell in love, the first time in my life I ever fell in love, I was about nine mind you. And, "Yes boys, what do you want?" And I said, "Oh, please Miss, we've got some toads for ya." "Oh yes, how many have you got?" "Two hundred and forty Miss, you want to count them?" She just screamed and took off. And cause two hundred and forty pennies was exactly a pound or

06:30 one, ah, ten shillings each, and that's why we stopped at two hundred and forty. You can imagine in a wash tub, two hundred and forty squirming toads. So we're looking at one another in stunned disbelief, my friend and I, and next minute out comes a more mature woman and asked us what we wanted and we said, "Oh please ma'am," you know, "we've got some toads." "How many have you got?"

07:00 "Two hundred and forty." "Good, you boys are fair dinkum." She said, "I want a hundred and twenty toads every Saturday morning." Said, "Great, five shillings each." So that went on for a month or so and the friend said, "Oh I'm sick of this." And I said, "Oh gee," you know, "I've got to do this all by myself." You beauty, right, I get the whole ten shillings. And after a while my parents said to me, "What do they want em for?" I said, "I haven't got a clue." They

07:30 said, "Well find out!" And apparently what they were doing was flying them from Cairns in the old DC-3 aircraft all the way to Melbourne to the Walter and Eliza Hall Research Institute and trying to find a cure for malaria for the troops that were going up to New Guinea. So I did my little bit for the war effort. It went on for about six months if I remember rightly, that I was getting this.

Did you save your money?

I don't recall, I probably spent it

08:00 foolishly. But no I bought a push bike later on so I did save it to a certain extent.

What about when you first arrived with those two hundred and forty toads, I would've screamed as well. Where did you leave them, I mean you had to take the washing basket back with you right?

I don't recall, possibly put them in the four gallon kerosene tins or something like that. I don't recall to be honest, how we

08:30 got rid of them but we had to bring em up in this wash tub, a hundred and twenty of 'em every Saturday morning. It was good money I can assure you.

Were they poisonous?

Oh yes, oh yes. If they spit on you and so forth you'd, if you had fowls in your back yard like practically

everybody did, you had to, at sunset go and empty the drinking water out otherwise the toads'd get into it that night and poison the water.

09:00 So, no, you had to be very careful. 'Course toads had only just been released in 1936 if I remember correctly, they'd come in from Mexico to beat the cane beetle. And they were released just south of Cairns at a place called Greenhills, just between Cairns and Gordonvale, and so the population has spread from there. They're now into

09:30 New South Wales and up in the Northern Territory, they're a plague, they're an absolute menace.

They've become that way?

They have.

So did you ever get any poison on you or anything?

No, no.

So is there a certain way to handle a cane toad?

Well we used to just pick em up from behind, and we'd just very quickly pick them up and throw them straight in there and put the lid back on until we got our quota of a hundred and twenty.

10:00 So I did my bit for the war effort.

I think that's great. What about just doing, I mean not the cane, the cane toads are fantastic, but did you think of maybe doing a paper run [delivery] or something a little bit more...?

Yes but that was getting up very early in the morning and particularly in winter, no thank you. And it was difficult to get because the boys that had paper runs they

10:30 stuck to 'em, I can assure you, that's how they made their little bit of extra pocket money. I also had another little sideline shall we say, where I'd go to the, my mother'd give me sixpence to go into the matinee of a Saturday afternoon and money to buy an ice cream or something. But it was

11:00 only two people that were on duty in the matinee, there was the projectionist and the manager come doorkeeper. And the old canvas seats and so forth after the kids'd been in them in the afternoon, they had to clean up and get them ready for the adult show that night. So I used to help them sweep up after the Saturday matinee and course the next matinee I'd get in for free, so I had an extra sixpence to spend.

11:30 **And you didn't tell your mum?**

Ooh no, ooh no. Oh no, would you? Yes so I used to get threepence to spend which was three pennies, which you pronounced it 'thrippence,' and I was considered very good, because most boys they were lucky oh, and girls, were lucky if they got a penny to spend. Money was very tight in

12:00 those days and one didn't squander it. So to get the sixpence to go in and plus the free entrance, that gave me ninepence to spend. Oh, I could buy a packet of Columbines [caramels], oh yes they, Columbines, packet of, only cost seven pence in those days.

Did you have any really best mates that would do everything with you?

Oh yes, yes, there was about a half a dozen of us that we really got round

12:30 together and joined the same clubs, everything, interested in the same sport, and if one did it, all did it.

What about the Scouts, did you join them?

Yes, we were all in the Scouts together. Yeah.

And going on bivouacs and things like that?

Not much because you gotta remember it was war years again and it was only towards the latter end of the war that we got a Scout camp that was on Magnetic Island out of

13:00 Townsville, and that was a big adventure to go across. But other than that we just did weekends amongst our own Scout group would go out, pedal our bikes out to one of the local rivers somewhere and camp overnight and burn sausages and whatever and then we'd pedal our bikes home.

Now you were talking with Kiernan [interviewer] about knowing about the Japanese entering the war.

13:30 **Obviously Pearl Harbour, and then there was obviously sort of, not hysteria, but concern that they could come to Australia.**

Particularly after the fall of Singapore.

Yes, yes. Now that's when the Americans moved into Cairns isn't it, around this time?

They first came there, if memory serves me rightly, about the first month of 1942. Now

14:00 we didn't have that many Americans but we did have a few, unlike Townsville which had thousands and thousands of em. We mainly had, I can remember, the 503 or 50-Third Infantry Regiment Parachutists and they trained around Cairns. They used to take off in the CD-3s from Cairns Airport and then jump into the

14:30 canefields just south of Cairns. The DC-3s used to fly so low over our school that you could see the jumpmaster standing in the doorway and you could see whether he had a cigar in his mouth or not. And he'd wave to all of we children there in the playground and we'd wave back, and it was, used to fly over very, very low.

15:00 Not like today's regulations of air safety and what have you. There were a couple of legends, I can't confirm whether these are true or not, but one story that went around was that one of the paratroopers, his chute got tangled in, on the tail plane. And he must've been unconscious because he didn't use his knife to cut

15:30 himself away from the shrouds and use his emergency. And in desperation in the finish that they flew up over the mountains and took him to Lake Barina or Lake Eacham, one of the two. Had a boat there and that they bounced him off and course he was dead when the boat picked him up. Now that's, could be a legend, I don't know, but that's one of the stories that circulated.

16:00 Another one of those 'legends,' shall we call them that circulated at the time, was about the tail gunners that were in some of the bombers. And that when they came back, particularly after the Coral, or during and after the Coral Sea Battle, in those days apparently the machine guns in the tail turret just moved straight up and down, they couldn't swivel them. And consequently the fighters used to come in at an

16:30 angle and get the tail gunner, and that they had to use hoses to get the tail gunner out. But again I have no personal knowledge of that happening.

Can you remember in the town in Cairns what the community feeling was that the Americans were going to arrive there?

No, not prior, they just suddenly, in amongst the township were these Americans.

17:00 I would guess that the majority of the civilians didn't even know they were coming, that it may have been only the Town Council that would've known, so that they could make some sort of preparations, whatever was necessary. There was a lot of people, civilians that voluntarily evacuated from Cairns,

17:30 as well as those that were urged to go and compulsorily evacuated further south. And so there were a lot of homes that were vacant in Cairns at the time and they were used as, they were taken over by the Americans, but in particular the Americans, as billets. There was one just down the end of our block that was the,

18:00 used as the United States Navy Petty Officers Club, it was just, it was a clubhouse. And one I can remember, they just had cots or stretchers and they just took over every room in a place and they had all these cots everywhere with their gear. So

18:30 houses, vacant houses were used a lot by the Americans in particular. The Australians, they threw up a lot of small huts that were made out of three-ply, particularly along The Esplanade, which was mostly navy and air force personnel. And they had different names painted on the outsides to

19:00 give it a bit of a feeling of homeliness I suppose, 'Do Drop Inn' and things like that. But that was painted to say, 'Well that's my place, look for that hut that's got 'Do Drop Inn,' or whatever their name was. The only graffiti as such that I saw in those days was a thing called, "Foo was here."

19:30 Now who 'Foo' was, I haven't got the faintest idea but 'Foo' had his nose and half of his head peering over a wall, and they'd paint this all over the place and that was the only graffiti I really remember.

I've heard of Foo actually. Hang on one second there Brian. Yeah, I've heard of Foo, I think he was some kind of cartoon character or something.

He was. He was a baldy headed fella and with,

20:00 as I said, you only saw him from there up, there was a wall along there with this nose out here and Foo, and underneath, the words, 'Foo was here.' How it started and why it started I have no idea but it was a thing to do.

Do you recall the first day when you saw the Americans in Cairns?

No, not specifically, no.

What were your impressions of the American blokes when you did see them?

Beautifully dressed. Their, the quality of their uniforms

20:30 left our Australian boys for dead. And particularly the parachutists, they had their parachute boots that

were up to there, just below their knee, highly polished. And their strange accents, and so they became, you know, 'My God, how strange these fellas are.'

21:00 Oh and did they have an awful lot of money compared to what our Australian troops had. And it was quite a few jokes made about it, about being, 'Over here, over paid and over sexed,' that was the jokes. But the Americans did have a lot of money and they just, a lot of them were just farm boys too, boys that'd

21:30 never been to big cities until they got called up. And one must remember that troops that go out of their family influence area do tend to play up a bit, and like any young men they did play up a bit. But and they had the money and so forth to spend. And they were thinking also

22:00 that, 'Hey, you know, we're going to be moving into a war zone very shortly, shall we be alive in a few months time?' You know, they were thinking that, which is natural. They were almost a race apart as far as I was concerned, because they were, came from so far away, 'God damn boy, I come from Kansas.' It was just so different to

22:30 what I was used to. And course they had 'candy' which was lollies, they had 'gum,' you know, things like this that we weren't used to having. Oh, and I never forget the first hamburger I had.

Where was that?

I'd never ever seen a hamburger until one of the local cafes started selling it to the troops. And it, you know,

23:00 I didn't even know a hamburger existed until I'd bought one to see what the Americans were eating. So it was a different culture, if one can put it that way.

What did the hamburger taste like to you?

It was fine, and I might add that it didn't have all of this junk that hamburgers have nowadays. It was mainly just the patty of

23:30 meat and the bun, I can't even remember how expensive it was, but it tasted fine, I liked it.

Interesting that you went into entertainment later on. Were any of the American entertainment have an impact on you at this young age?

Oh yes, very much. Because there were entertainment units, both American and Australian, that

24:00 toured the war zones, Cairns was a war zone. I can remember the Kiwi [New Zealander] Show, who were all New Zealanders, and they were so great a show that they stuck together after the war and even worked in England in London at the Palladium and places like that. There was a Fifty-Fifty Show which was half Australian and half

24:30 American and they had top acts. One particular chap who did a, had a dance act, we were told that he actually danced with Ginger Rogers [American actress and dancer] in films. Now he may have only been one of the extras, I don't know, but he'd danced with Ginger Rogers. I can remember a violinist who was brilliant,

25:00 because he was also a contortionist, but he kept playing the violin while he was contorting himself into the weirdest places you've ever seen, and he still kept the violin playing. There were some absolutely brilliant acts.

Now these acts were standing alone as individual acts not part of the army?

Oh yes, they were all in the forces, but the army had gathered them together and made up a unit,

25:30 usually with a captain or maybe with a major in charge who'd had a background in theatre or something like that. And they had individual acts, and they had chaps that dressed up as women and some of them were absolutely, oh they were drop dead gorgeous. But they also had chorus lines and they had comedy. I can remember one act where this

26:00 couple were dancing on stage to the music, because they had their own orchestras and so forth that travelled with them, they'd set up a temporary stage, usually in Cairns it was at the Cairns Showground that they set it all up. But this particular couple that were dancing they were just absolutely brilliant, and he had on a dinner, ah no, tails and she had a

26:30 ball gown on. And immediately the act finished, the dancing, there was great cheering and then the person turned round and it was one person, dressed as two, as a woman on that side and a man on that side. And it was one of the greatest acts I've ever seen in my life. You would have sworn that it was two people dancing cheek to cheek but it was only one person on the stage,

27:00 dressed half and half, do you understand what I'm trying to get at?

Yes I do, it's fantastic, like Victor/Victoria.

Yeah, yeah.

That's fantastic.

So there were top acts amongst them, you know. Then there were individual entertainers came out, like one in particular I remember was a very well known film star comedian called Joe E. Brown. And

27:30 he actually worked one day in Norman Park in Cairns, I saw him, hundreds and hundreds of troops there. And the thing that stands out in my memory was the fact that he got a hold of an apple and just put the whole apple into his mouth, he was famous for having a very, very big mouth, it was unbelievable to see one complete apple.

28:00 Yeah, so we did see people like that, well known film stars and so forth that came out. Oh there was a lot of entertainment and the public, the civilian public were invited to go along to anything along like that. My parents didn't go but I certainly went along and saw some things. There was, I remember clearly they had nearly every

28:30 Sunday afternoon they had boxing and wrestling matches on in the Cairns Showground, mainly between the Australians and the Americans. And I saw some tremendous fights there. I saw one chap, the bell went, three seconds later he was unconscious, he'd been knocked out in three seconds mind you, counted out in thirteen seconds. I actually saw a chap killed in the ring

29:00 there which was a shocking thing to happen.

An Australian?

Yes, yes, by an American chap. The chap that was the Australian, he had had polio, his name was Bobby Crane and he'd had polio when he was a child and it'd left his, I think it was his right leg three inches shorter than his other leg, and he, naturally, he wasn't in the services.

29:30 From the waist up he had the build of a heavy weight but from the waist down he was the build of a paper weight and so consequently he fought middle weight, and he was very good too. And then there was an American, as they called em, SEABEES [construction battalion], they were construction part of the US Navy, there was a chap called Gene Fortney. And when he stepped into the ring,

30:00 I'll forget it how we all laughed because he was one of those red heads that was washed out type of hair, you know, it was almost pale. And he had a non-descript dressing gown on and when he took it off he had that white freckled skin, of the red heads. And course we just laughed, coming from Far North Queensland with our sun tans. And I used to box in those days,

30:30 and so I knew a little bit about it. And he just moved around and moved around for three rounds, pardon, and just sensing what, how Bobby was reacting. And then in the fourth round he just cut loose and he knocked Bobby unconscious and he, that was in the afternoon and

31:00 he never regained consciousness and died that night. And we heard, I can't verify it, we heard afterwards that he'd already killed one chap in the ring in the States before he joined up and but it was his Commanding Officer that wanted him to fight out here and that's why he fought. So it was a very, very sad occasion because Bobby was extremely well liked and, not to take

31:30 away from Gene Fortney, he was, I never met the man personally, but he was a brilliant boxer.

Do you know if he was charged?

No, I don't know. He couldn't have been anyway because it happened in the boxing ring.

But I mean if you knock somebody unconscious, does that mean that you knocked them in the head?

Usually yes, if you hit them in the solar plexus, that can wind them completely, but a knock-out punch is to

32:00 the jaw or the temple.

I see, which is allowed?

Oh yes, with boxing. They had wrestling matches as well and there's one famous Sydney person who's father used to wrestle. And this particular chap had an Irish name and he was in a restricted occupation and he also

32:30 had a poultry farm. And because he had an Irish name, whether he was Irish or not by birth, I don't know, but he was a red headed Irish man and his dressing gown was green, and on the back of it was a darker green shamrock. And when he stepped into ring to wrestle against any of the Americans he carried a big brown paper

33:00 bag, and he'd strut around flexing the muscles and what have you, like they all do, the wrestlers, and they'd worked it out before hand and everybody knew it, but it was still good entertainment. And then he'd go over to the, his corner, and he'd reach into the brown paper bag and pull out a raw egg and crack it on the corner post and he'd go, glug, glug, glug, glug, glug and then reach in and another one,

and he'd have a dozen raw eggs like this. Well of

33:30 course the troops were going wild, those that hadn't seen it before this chap, getting all this food sort of thing before hand. It was all showmanship, he was a brilliant showman. Yes, so there was another thing that I can remember there with the troops' entertainment was, there was one particular occasion where Australians competed against

34:00 the Americans in football. Only the first half of the game was Rugby League and of course Australians won that hands down but then they played American Gridiron in the second half and the Americans won it hands down. And I can remember looking afterwards at the gridiron ball and thinking oh it's only a toy, it was so small compared to the rugby league ball.

34:30 But we were amazed at how they threw that ball so far and which gridiron is all about. So that was an interesting thing and they'd have the occasional rodeo, so there was quite a fair bit of entertainment.

When you said that your parents didn't go, why was that?

I think mainly because Dad felt, being a civilian, he didn't want to go sitting in amongst the troops

35:00 and possibly being, I'm saying possibly, being subjected to any snide remarks or taunts. One thing that did happen with my mother and father. My mother who was an excellent dancer, persuaded my father to go to a local dance one time and one of the old time rituals at a dance in those days was what they call a Monte Carlo.

35:30 Where the four corners of the ballroom had Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs and Spades. And the MC [master of ceremonies] would cut cards and he'd say, "All right," when the music had stopped he'd say, "Hearts," and all those in that segment, quarter had to move off the floor. And then he'd, the music'd start and stop and he'd cut the cards again, "Oh this time it's Spades," and they'd

36:00 move off. Until eventually there was only a few couples left and then it'd be red or black, until there were just two couples left, red or black, and the music'd stop, "Red wins," so they'd get a small prize each. So my mother and father went to this dance and guess who won the Monte Carlo and guess who was the only civilian there and never went to another dance during the war years. My father. I can't blame him, with all these

36:30 hundreds of troops there, you know, and he's the only civilian and dressed in civilian clothes and he wins the Monte Carlo. Mum was never ever able to persuade him again.

He felt deeply embarrassed did he?

Oh I imagine so, I can imagine how he felt. Yes, but she was never able to get him there.

It's sad that he felt so concerned that he'd be made fun of or humiliated,

37:00 **even though he was in a protected industry?**

He was doing an essential job. But I mean he tried to join up but he was rejected, in fact he tried two or three times, but each time he was rejected and I assume that there must, and I can only assume that there must've been a feeling of rejection there, on his side. And he had,

37:30 you know, relatives and friends that were away fighting and he would've felt out of it, even though he had a young family.

Did that incident that happened with Bobby Crane maybe put a sour taste in the mouth of the Australians living in Cairns, towards the Americans?

No, no, because that was a boxing match held under the correct rules, everything was fine, it was just a

38:00 terrible accident. No, there was no animosity in that respect. Usually the troops got on very well, there was the occasional brawl between 'em, too much drink or over a girl or something, but very seldom did we hear of anything like that happening, they usually got on pretty well together.

And in Cairns you can't actually go swimming from, is it November to

38:30 **March?**

You have to do that on the beaches north of Cairns.

I see.

Yes, because of the stingers [poisonous jellyfish], but in Cairns itself there was no beaches, it was all mudflats.

Oh yes but north of Cairns, did any of the Americans go and get hurt by swimming there, do you know?

Not that I'm aware of. But the Australian Army had

39:00 temporary little rest camps there, R&R [rest and recreation] as they call it now, where they'd have, say, three days leave and bring down a platoon and let 'em just go swimming or whatever they wanted to do, get a suntan or whatever, away from the training up in the Atherton Tablelands. And the Americans also used the beaches to train the Australian troops in amphibious landings, from

39:30 landing craft, so the beaches were used. The harbour was used by shipping of course and there was an awful lot of what they call Catalinas, planes, or PBYs [amphibious aircraft] that flew in and out of Cairns, I often used to watch em.

Alright, well I'm gonna ask you about that later but we'll need to stop….

Tape 4

00:32 **Right, well, I might ask you about, now Japan's entered the war and Cairns is coming under, you know, potential threat, what kinds of preparations you made just around the house?**

Well we had to put sticky tape, about yay wide, over the windows in a criss cross patterns,

01:00 to help the reduce the breakage of glass from a potential bomb blast. We had a, first off we had brown out and then we had black out at night. We had the local air raid wardens that used to go round and yell out, "Hey, switch that light off." Also we were told

01:30 to dig a slit trench or whatever in the yard and that became a very foolish idea in Cairns, it made a beautiful swimming pool for the toads, it filled up with water. But I can remember that we had several air raid warnings even though Cairns itself wasn't raided. And what we did was had

02:00 extra mattresses around the, Mum and Dad's double bed and put em upright around the bed to help, and we were tucked in underneath the bed if anything had of happened. There were several fairly close threats, there was reputedly a Japanese submarine just outside of Cairns at one stage and all the navy went out chasing her.

02:30 Another time, even though we didn't know it until later, a Japanese dropped a bomb on a cane farm house just north of Cairns at Mossman and the young Italian girl in the family was injured, and she was the only one that was injured by an act of war that I'm aware of up there.

03:00 So it was very, very close but it didn't happen.

Never happened at all?

No, we never had an air raid. As I said, several potential ones, scares and so forth, unidentified aircraft and that but and no doubt there were planes and submarines around. I mean after all the,

03:30 the midget submarines went in to Sydney didn't they, so they would've had to have gone past Cairns to get there.

Was there any hint of submarines out there ever?

Oh only once I can recall we're at a regular Friday night entertainment party that we had for troops, our family. When all of a sudden all the navy boys were recalled and they went chasing back. And the rumours came back after-

04:00 wards that that's what it was, they were chasing a submarine. They didn't get it apparently. But with entertainment, I had relatives, forty-second cousins ten times removed to, every Friday night have an open house, and it was for the Australian troops, ah, service personnel. And there were only two rules, no

04:30 liquor and to come along you had to be introduced by somebody that'd already been there. And we used to just have parlour games, sing songs, dancing, that sort of thing and it was just a home away from home for these poor young fellas that were from Victoria and New South Wales and South Australia, far from home and with the women in our family'd put on a spread,

05:00 home cooked dainties. And they were all decent types and they'd come along and they'd thoroughly enjoy themselves, have an evening with a family. So we got to know a lot of em.

Ever any Yanks amongst them?

No, not, the, for whatever reason these rellies [relatives] whose home it was held at, always it was

05:30 Australian service personnel, never an Americans.

And was the alcohol rule ever broken?

Not that I'm aware of, I never ever saw it and course most kids see most things, I never ever saw it. No they were just decent young men and a long way from home and they appreciated some home cooked

cake and so forth and soft drinks and just pleasurable company.

06:00 **What about the men trying to chat up your cousins, the girls?**

Didn't happen that I'm aware of. And gain I say, most young fellas see what goes on but it didn't happen that I'm aware of. The social standards in those days were very strict and if it was a young married woman like my mother there was a great deal

06:30 of respect, even from older men, older than what she was, you know, it wasn't a case of, 'Oh hey, little girlie.' There was a lot of respect there for a married woman. The single girls, they were, behaved themselves, as far as I know and so did the boys.

There were no romances which developed at all?

Not in, out of that particular thing. A next door neighbour

07:00 she met an American chap who was a professional marine and she wound up being a war bride and went over to America and has lived there ever since very happily, with visits occasionally back to Australia to see her family.

You were talking about a brown-out, describe that for us a bit more?

It's just that the

07:30 street lights, there weren't as many street lights on, you're only sort of allowed to have one or two lights on at the most.

Okay, what was the Dig for Victory?

Because of so much of the food production was needed for these vast armies that were in Australia we were encouraged to have our own

08:00 vegetable garden down the back yard and grow your own tomatoes and cabbages and carrots, etcetera, etcetera. So that's what it was, 'Dig for Victory,' it was a slogan. That wasn't my slogan, that was the government's slogan.

And did you Dig for Victory?

Oh yes, oh yes we had fowls as well. And which helped with the budget for Mum and Dad too of course and fresh veggies are always better that store bought ones.

08:30 **And what about the black market, were you aware of a black market in Cairns?**

Oh yes, very much. Not, we had to have coupons as they called it and to buy a suit for instance you needed to have, I don't, can't remember, but you needed 'X' number of coupons to buy a suit. Whereas if you needed a shirt you'd, it'd be point five

09:00 'X' coupons to buy a shirt. So there wasn't much black market that I'm aware of with clothing but there was for petrol and there was, particularly for petrol. And there was a lot of black market for liquor, there was some liquor that was made

09:30 that reputedly sent some Americans blind, made out of boot polish and metho [methylated spirits]. I can remember, I can state that if you remember the essence flavour, those small bottles that your mother and your sisters use in cooking, that there was an instruction came from the government to the shop keepers that they weren't to sell it to anyone

10:00 except locals, because that was almost pure alcohol and it was used in moonshine [illegal homemade alcohol], shall we say. Yes, so there, and tyres and tubes were in terrible short supply, there was a black market went on in that. So there was a black market, that's for certain.

And speaking about the liquor and the moonshine, would you ever see any of the service men drunk yourself?

10:30 Oh yes, I've seen them drunk but usually their mates got 'em away quick before the MPs [military police] got them. It, yeah, there was a bit of drunkenness. One of the unusual things, talking of liquor, was that there was just next to no glasses being made in those days, glasses as in containers. And

11:00 course the hotels they'd have the usual breakage and so they were getting less and less numbers of glasses. So the troops became aware of this and they got the, hold of the long necks, as you call them now, and took the top off and the publicans'd fill that up with beer and they'd know exactly how much beer was in it and charge the correct price. And the

11:30 troops promptly called them Lady Blameys because in, Lady Blamey, whose husband was Field Marshal Blamey, head of the Australian troops. Lady Blamey, I've never seen her but reputedly she was straight up and down like that in her figure so that's how they got called Lady Blameys. Australian sense of humour.

Well tell us, just kind of overall, you've kind of been talking about

12:00 **this anyway, but tell us how Cairns was transforming once the troops started to move in, like what were you seeing in, as far as change?**

As far as change goes, when the Australians came back there wasn't that much change except that there were literally hundreds of young men in Australian uniforms. But it was when the Americans arrived that

12:30 the speed of construction was just unbelievable. Giant igloos, as they called em, went up in what seemed to be just days. I can remember one particular road, Aumuller Street, that went to the southern end of the harbour, to the wharves, it crossed mangrove swamps, the Americans just went ahead

13:00 and concreted the whole road, it's just unbelievable to see it. There was an incident on that particular road too I might add. That this young chap was driving a butcher's vehicle, young civilian, Australian, and the troops that were guarding the approach to the wharves called on him to halt and he didn't hear it. And one of the Australian troops that

13:30 were guarding, fired a shot trying to get the, one of the tyres but unfortunately it went through the vehicle and killed this young man. And the reason he didn't hear it was because he was totally deaf and that's why he wasn't in the services. It was terribly sad but apparently the Australian that shot him, it was his first day on that particular guard duty and

14:00 he did not know this young fella came through every day with meat, that was deaf and couldn't have heard him anyway. So that happened on Aumuller Street as I said. The construction was just unbelievable and the airport, it was little more than an air strip in the days, pre war, but they just extended it and built it big. It's certainly not as big as Cairns International Airport now

14:30 but that's where the airport was in those days. It, there was a tremendous amount of smaller buildings went up because of all the war material that came in, I remember The Esplanade was just lined almost shoulder to shoulder with three ply huts. And at one stage there they,

15:00 beside the old swimming pool up in The Esplanade they'd built a retaining wall out and before they started filling it in with mud from the dredge to fill it in, the row boat went round and course there was quite a few of we children at the time sitting on this concrete wall just waiting. And the moment they cleared it after they put the last piece of the

15:30 retaining wall in, the row boat said, "Yes it's clear," and there was hundreds of splashes as we all dived into a free swimming pool. They'd filled that in with the mud as I explained, that's where Kuranda Barracks was for the navy and that's where the big shopping place is there that's, and all the marinas and so forth, all of that's reclaimed land. The Americans

16:00 didn't like the, Cairns was a malaria area at the time and they just went ahead and drained the swamps all over the place, and virtually got rid of malaria, so yes there was big, big changes going on. Yeah.

Must have been quite impressive for the young man?

Impressive and exciting, you know, a lot of times my

16:30 eyes were really wide open, yes, it was quite a time.

What was the impression too, I mean you've talked about this too, but just in more detail, of the American soldier and the American service man?

The first lot that came out, rumour, and I say rumour, because I haven't got any definitive knowledge of it, was that they were all a tough bunch,

17:00 because they were all supposed to have been short-term prisoners from Sing Sing prison and so forth, that'd all been released as long as they joined the army, and course they were pretty tough boys and they were in the front lines. Now whether that's true or not I can't tell you, I don't know. But the next wave that came out from then, we thought they were milk sops, they couldn't go anywhere without their ice

17:30 creams and milk shakes and chocolate bars and candy. They were nice enough kids really, we just thought they weren't the tough bronzed Aussies that we were used to.

What were they like as far as knowledge-wise, did they seem knowledgeable or a bit gullible?

Oh we used to delight, and the troops did too, in pulling their leg.

18:00 But I can remember telling one particular American how when I was first going to school before the war, that Mum and Dad employed an aboriginal chap with a spear to guard me from the crocodiles, and he believed it. I told him the truth after. Yes, so I suppose our boys that

18:30 they went over seas would have their legs pulled severely too.

But was it easy to pull their leg?

Reasonably, reasonably. You picked your mark, you could pick which ones would be susceptible to it.

As a school boy, how do you come into contact with the Americans, like how do you come to talk with them?

You walk into a shop and there's an American buying a milk shake or something, and it could be that you're sitting

19:00 next to an American at the movies or it could be that you're next to an American at the boxing. And if a truck was pulled up alongside of the road, for some reason, you'd pull up on your push bike and say, "Do you know where you're going?" you know and direct him if he needed direction. So that's how you met them, it's quite easy. And course we were, I suppose a little brash and bounced right up to them,

19:30 like any child does.

Were you a cheeky kid?

No, not cheeky, no, no, I won't admit to that one, but confident.

Well in the Philippines they go, "Hey Joe?" Was it a bit like that?

I don't recall that specifically, no I don't, but I think we used to mainly say, 'Mister,' I don't think we said, 'Hey Yank," I don't think so. Oh it might've got

20:00 back to the headmaster and we'd have got a few cuts of the cane.

Did you ever have any trouble understanding them or them understanding you?

Not really but it was difficult at times, you know, certain amount of difficulty was there with different accents. But we were able to communicate pretty well.

What about the way they looked, did they look different or…?

Yes, because most of them weren't sun tanned,

20:30 like our boys were. I just have a feeling now, looking back, that they were smaller than our men, maybe they weren't, I don't know, I can't recall, except for the MPs, they were massive. But always they were dressed very clean and crisp, their uniforms ironed.

21:00 And they weren't that different but they were a different culture to what we were used to as a bush atmosphere that we had. It was certainly different.

Were they chewing gum and wearing caps or anything of this order?

Exactly, all the time. They wore their caps quite a

21:30 fair bit of course but that gum used to get to us, chewing away like great horses. And it was different gum too, to what we were used to, we were used to the Wrigley's one that was only about that long, whereas they came, gum in sticks that were that long, sticks that you're used to as a young man yourself, but that was the first time we'd ever seen anything like it.

22:00 **Did you ask em for candy and gum and…?**

I don't remember asking but I know I was given a lot, yeah. But no they'd hand over the candy as they called it and the gum, certainly not cigarettes. I can remember seeing the packets of their cigarettes, a thing that none of them ever rolled their cigarettes like most of the Aussies did. But they had em in packets

22:30 and they weren't filtered either, Philip Morris, Camel, yeah.

Well as a kid, how were you made aware within yourself that they kind of had a little bit of money and a little bit of cash compared to say, the Australian soldier?

The way they flaunted it. I mean money was no object and half of them at first had no idea of the value. Like a, if something cost two shillings, they'd hand

23:00 over a five pound note or something and if somebody was, said, oh there's no change or only give em a little bit of change, he'd be quite happy and walk out with it. But it's because they weren't aware of what the value of our currency was, they were paid in our currency, we didn't see any American money. We saw Japanese occupation money that our troops brought home as souvenirs

23:30 but we didn't see any American money.

Well that might raise that story you were telling us earlier about being in the line of the brothels?

Yeah well most of us had our own way of getting a few extra pennies for, and I had mine with the toads and other boys had theirs with their paper runs. These two brothers that were in my

24:00 class as school, every afternoon as soon as school was over, they'd pedal their bikes straight out of school and straight down to the CBD in Cairns. And at that time there was a, in Grafton Street, they had rows of shops there, little shops, it was absolutely shoulder to shoulder. And some of the good time girls'd come up from Sydney and

24:30 Melbourne and by mid afternoon when those troops that were on leave had arrived in town, queues'd form outside the place. And this pair of little monsters'd get in the queue and work their way up through the queue until they got to the head. And when the dear old soul'd come out and say, "Next," and he'd say, "Oh you go mate, you go mate," until some stupid, half drunk

25:00 Yank came along and say, "Give us your place in the queue kid." They'd say, "Yeah, righto Mister, but it'll cost ya." "Oh yeah, how much?" "Oh, it'll cost ya five pound," and the stupid Yank'd hand it over. Course the Aussies in the queue'd be urging the kids on to charge him ten pound. And how they ever got away with it I don't know, I suppose the Aussie troops thought it was great the Aussie kids taking down the Yanks. And they either hid them from

25:30 the MPs or the MPs turned a blind eye, I don't know how it happened. So they used to get five pound, so they'd jump around to the end of the queue again.

That's a hell of a lot of money in those days.

It was, it was a week's wages for a tradesman, that was a lot of money. They were a pair of villains I can tell ya. I often wonder they didn't get their backsides kicked by the MPs,

26:00 I don't know.

What were the name of these brothers?

Ah, no way, I'm not gonna tell you that.

That's alright, that's alright, I was just, I'm just curious, were they kind of big for their age or anything like that?

No, they're only my size. You know, they, and they were just entrepreneurs in the making.

Well how old were they?

Well this would have been about 1943 shall we say, so that would've

26:30 been ten, eleven, around that age. Oh, they were bright boys.

Well surely the Yank would've thought, 'they're just kids, they can't go in?'

Yeah, and he was stupid enough to hand over a five pound note to the kids.

What are your memories of the good time girls, did you see them?

Oh very little, very little. In fact I was forbidden by my parents to even

27:00 ride down, my push bike down that particular block, I had to go around the block.

Were you curious to ride the bike down there?

Oh I would've been curious but I certainly wasn't game, I'd have got a rather, chastisement shall we say from my father if he'd of found out. And Cairns being such a small city, your parents get to find out what you do wrong very quickly, I can tell you.

Do you remember seeing any of em at all, like walking around?

27:30 I don't remember in particular, honestly, I'd love to be able to tell you I did but I can't.

No that's fine, no I was just curious, you know, like a kid seeing these girls. Well what was said about them amongst the people, was there a bit of gossip about these girls coming up?

Oh no doubt there was but it wasn't supposed to be for delicate young ears was it. But no, I don't remember the, any particular conversations being held, and certainly

28:00 none that were addressed to me. But no doubt the adults talked about it between themselves, no doubt.

Well that raises the thing about being seen and not heard. Were there times when you tried to sneak an eaves drop?

Of course there was, yeah, we'd always have our ears flapping when the adults were talking. I think you'll

28:30 find every child did.

What were your methods, just behind the door or...?

Oh I can't recall particularly but very, it was as opportunity arose shall we say.

Now we were talking about the Americans coming to town, what about the black Americans?

Yes.

Tell us about what impression this had on you?

They seemed to be reasonably big men.

29:00 There was a tremendous variation in the colour of the African Americans, they were called Negroes in those days, and generally they were used as transport drivers, they drove trucks in convoys and so forth. There was,

29:30 I can remember them, that the white Americans treated em with a certain amount of disdain, I won't say contempt or anything like that. But I'm speaking generally, I'm not speaking individually, treated them with a certain amount of disdain but I didn't see any real untoward incidents. And

30:00 I don't even recall speaking much, if at any time to American Negroes. So it wasn't that there was a colour bar or anything, it just wasn't there. There was one particular occasion if I may bring it up where I was standing in a local fruit shop and a young girl I knew several years older that me

30:30 lived across the road from the fruit shop. Her father was a sergeant of police and he happened to be sitting on the front verandah at the time. And she was, the daughter was talking to one of her girlfriends and she had been served so she started running across the road. And as she was running she turned to say something to her girlfriend and

31:00 this Negro chap hit her with his truck and killed her. And it was dreadful. And I rushed straight home and I didn't see any of the rest of it. But I understand, found out in years later that the American authorities wanted to charge the Negro driver with some sort of a crime, and the father who was a local

31:30 sergeant of police flatly refused and said, "It was absolutely my daughter's fault," it was not his fault. And he apparently must have been a fairly wealthy man in his own right. He went and made, got a solicitor and made out all of his worldly possessions to the family, went to the local funeral director, paid for that, the funeral, and best you could get, went to a local

32:00 stone mason had a headstone made and everything, and then went and hung himself. It was a shocking story but that's actually what happened. He must have felt awful, hitting a young child like that, you know, she would've been about twelve or thirteen at the time. But he was fortunate, if one can be fortunate in those circumstances, he was fortunate in the fact that the

32:30 father who was an officer of the law saw everything and was able to protect him to the extent that, "Hey, you don't charge him." Yeah, so they were used a lot on construction too as well as, you know, like building airports and igloo's and that's the type of thing, as well as transport drivers.

Was there anything said to you as a kid about them, like to,

33:00 **you know, be careful or anything like this or, sort of thing?**

Oh only in a general sense and this applied to the Australians as well as the Americans and, like the Negroes that, 'Hey,' you know, 'be a little cautious with strange men around.' But certainly we weren't advised like you would advise your own child now for any perverts of any sort.

33:30 But there's, I've never ever heard of any problems amongst any of the, my piers at school, and certainly nothing to me.

From perverts or anything?

Yeah, yeah, nothing. So, you know, there was, I'm not saying they weren't around, that's life, they were around obviously, but we never ever came across it.

And why do you think that is?

Don't

34:00 know, don't know. Maybe they were too frightened of authority like the army authority or navy authority or getting found out. Not like nowadays where it's civilian authority of course.

Now you mentioned rodeos, I didn't hear much about it but do you remember the rodeos in town?

Yes, as entertainment

34:30 for the troops. One in particular I clearly remember was right towards the end of the war and just before the Americans left Cairns. And my mother who could ride like the wind, happened to be out the front garden hosing, when this American lieutenant came along with the American saddles, and

35:00 that were like arm chairs, with two or three other men with him and they were, had this mob of horses.

And they were, went past our house to get to the showground and Dad'd just mowed the front lawn hadn't he and out onto the roadway, wet grass and this horse slipped and he went down. He didn't hurt himself but he went down in the most ignominious manner and Mum burst out laughing of course at him.

35:30 And his face was absolutely livid but he couldn't say anything. And all of a sudden, some months later, we discovered from news reels that here he is, he was in amongst the first troops that hit Japan and his job was to go and get Emperor Hirohito's horse and here he was handing it over to MacArthur, General MacArthur. This particular lieutenant that was

36:00 ah, sprawled on his backside on our front lawn.

What were you remember the rodeos, like...?

Oh, it was having been brought up on the, as a country boy, you know, you're looking at their feats of horsemanship and so forth yeah. And there were some good riders amongst some of those Americans don't get me wrong, I'm not knocking them, they were good, some of them were really

36:30 good. And of course the Australians were into it too. So we did see a couple of rodeos there at the time, as entertainment for the troops.

Well speaking of rodeos and that kind of thing, were you noticing the differences in the American troops from say, your north east to your Texans and your southerners?

Only in the accents, you'd get the different accents of course.

37:00 But basically they were all wearing the same uniform so it was rather difficult to start distinguishing them. Their unit insignia of course was different from one another and the marks of their ranks were different from one another but basically it was just their accents. We used to think it was great to listen to some of them, you know, they really intrigued us, particularly the

37:30 southern accents. Yes.

Did you, as a kid, pick any animosity between the northerners and southerners?

No, no, there could've been, I wouldn't have, I didn't notice it though.

What about, we're talking about black American soldiers, was, did you notice any racism between white and black Americans?

Stand offish-ness to a certain extent, that's about it. But I

38:00 didn't see anything more severe than that.

And where would you see this kind of stand offish-ness, or what would you notice about it?

Oh in a crowd, you know, and it was very noticeable that if there was a dance on for instance it was only white Americans there, there were no black Americans. I remember one time when my aunt

38:30 who was engaged to a prisoner of war, Australian prisoner of war, she went to a dance and she was dancing with this American officer at the time apparently, and she said, "Oh I'm all knocked up," and he just stormed off the floor. And they had to sort it out by getting one of the chaplains to come and talk to both her and him and explain that this was an Australian

39:00 expression, 'I'm all knocked up,' means that I'm tired, right. And the American misunderstood it entirely and he wasn't gonna dance with anybody like that. But they sorted it out between them so there is that culture difference with the languages and so forth.

We might finished but I might just ask one question quickly. Were black American soldiers designated a certain area in Cairns that you were aware of?

Not that I'm aware of, they could well have been but

39:30 mostly they were in and out, mostly, that I'm aware of. No, I can't give you an honest answer to that.

That's fine, yeah, we'll pause there.

Yeah, okay.

Tape 5

00:32 **Brian you were saying off camera before about having anti-aircraft guns in the playground of your school, your college?**

That's correct, we had three of them in the school yard and the troops that serviced them were on cots

or stretchers, whatever you like to call them, actually underneath the school, so we got to know those chaps fairly well. They weren't there for long but they were there as part of

01:00 the protection of Cairns.

What, these were the infantry blokes underneath your school?

I would imagine that they'd have been part of a anti aircraft section of some kind. They were Australian Army and they never interfered with us but they taught us or helped teach us how

01:30 to play football and so forth. But they weren't there for very long, it was only for a matter of a few months.

Did they talk to you blokes and say, "Oh hi," you know, "what are you doing?" and become friends with them?

Oh yes, to a certain extent. Course we were supposed not to talk to them but that was a rule that was broken every day. Being kids, we just went up

02:00 and started talking to these guys.

How did you find these Aussies, did you find them to be very different from the Americans?

Oh yes, yes. Our chaps, we could understand them fully because they were country boys or that, and they were sun tanned and they spoke with the same sort of accents roughly as we had. Or they were

02:30 a little bit slower than them, we were more, 'How ya goin' mate?" But no the Americans were totally different to the Australian troops. We were more at ease with the Australians, and so much so that we even recognised their unit patches, which was the patches on their puggarees [scarf wrapped around a hat for sun protection] around their hats or their sleeves. Even their vehicles, we

03:00 recognised the different colours and what unit that particular truck or person belonged to.

Were you thinking of something then?

No. No, no, I was just wondering what you were doing?

Oh sorry, it was my coughing. Must've made you feel a little bit more secure having, excuse me, having the guns at school though?

03:30 I can't remember to be honest but it was something certainly out of the ordinary. At that particular time the boarders in the college had been transferred out of Cairns and taken up to Lake Barina I think it was or it may have been Lake Eacham, up in the Atherton Tablelands. But they were only up there a few months before they give a, brought back again, and but for

04:00 that short period the school was day boys only, like myself.

Did you get up into any kind of mischief in the evenings with the blokes around, the Aussies?

No but like all country kids we got up to all sorts of mischief. But we had to be very careful because being a small town everybody knew everybody. And I remember one occasion I was on a

04:30 toboggan, sliding down a hill and the brake collapsed, so I had to slide across the road and in front of a car, and how I didn't get run over I don't know. And I thought, 'Well that's all over and done with,' and I got home and to be met by my father and copped a hiding because some, the chap driving the car knew my father well and knew me. And I, so I got

05:00 a hiding for being stupid enough for going across the road on the toboggan.

Fair enough.

Yeah. Country town, you can't get away with anything.

What would your Dad use, the strap?

Mostly his hand, and he was a very heavy handed man.

But when you think about him now, is it, do you feel love for him?

Yes, every time I got a hiding, which was rare,

05:30 it was justified, for sure and certain I needed it. I was just wondering about the microphone, did I move it then?

Oh, yeah.

Are you hearing me all right? Yeah, I touched it without thinking, sorry.

No problem, yeah, it looks fine. I'm curious, a curious point then, perhaps I'm digressing slightly, but did you find

06:00 **that what your father taught you with discipline you were able to hand down to your own children, since you have five of them?**

Yes but I was certainly never as tough, it was, I suppose I tried to reason with them more. Whereas in my day we knew what the standards were and you step out of line and you paid the penalty, whatever the penalty was. So that happened. Don't get me

06:30 wrong, I, it, I wasn't abused or anything like that, but by gee I was taught right from wrong.

When the Aussies came home into Cairns or for leave and they found all the Americans there, did they have a problem with the fact that they'd probably be taking out young Australian girls?

There could well have been, there was some talk of it. I think I mentioned to you earlier the famous phrase that was used at

07:00 that time about, 'Over here, over paid and over sexed.' But that did occur, but I didn't see any conflicts, real conflict. Like unit against unit or whatever, it was just individuals that were probably half full or fighting over a girl or something. I didn't see much of that at all.

07:30 **Had you heard about the Battle of Brisbane by any chance?**

No I hadn't heard of that until quite a time after but I had, did hear of it. There was supposed to have been, again, this is legend, I don't know about it, a similar event in Townsville where American Negroes who were confined to the South Townsville area

08:00 decided to march across the Ross River, there's a bridge, and go into the main part of the city. And legend has it that they set up machine gun posts and everything to keep em out. But again I say, stress, that's legend, I don't know.

You'd hope it's not true, it's absolutely terrible, weren't they. So did you find Americans very generous?

Yes, very much

08:30 so. Course they had the money to do it too. But yes they were, they were basically very open hearted, basically.

And they'd give you kids lollies and gum I suppose?

Yes, yeah. There must have been some slight bad eggs amongst em. I can remember that the Cairns high school, there was a stockade in the grounds of the Cairns high school.

09:00 And even though I didn't attend that school, you'd ride your push-bike past and what have you, and often, often, we'd see trucks with American prisoners that they'd be wearing denim hats and denim jackets and trousers and the jackets and trousers had big, white 'Ps' painted on the back of em.

09:30 And they'd be taken out in a truck with one guard with a rifle in the back, obviously to do some work, but they couldn't have been very bad, they were probably AWOL [absent without leave] for a short period or something and had to do three days stockade or something, cause if they were real bad eggs they wouldn't have been taken out past the stockade.

Well what about the Brisbane Line,

10:00 **you'd heard about that living in Cairns I assume?**

Well anyone with a, half an ounce of brains realised that we were just about defenceless. Even as a child I knew that, that we just couldn't have held back the Japanese if they landed. And it, the Brisbane Line was talked about and we understood it but we didn't have to agree

10:30 with it. But it, there was a case I feel for it to have been established but that doesn't mean to say that those of us that lived north of the Brisbane Line appreciated it, we certainly didn't. But we were, virtually, we were defenceless, until the build up came and after the Coral Sea Battle when they were turned around. Oh, excuse me.

I mean what, do you remember any of the adults

11:00 **talking about the government's proposed idea for the Brisbane Line and what that would have, what affect that would have on everybody?**

Oh I don't remember any of the adults talking about it but I understood the concept of it and that there was this mythical, shall we say, line across the atlas. That anything to the north they'd fight a rear guard action as they retreated and

11:30 anything to the south, the industrial heart, particularly Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong that they'd really have to fight for that. So that's the Brisbane Line.

So I suppose, I mean, I know that there were troops going up there, building fences and what have you and making a physical line but, you didn't know about that?

No.

No. Now something that occurred to me was, you were talking about

12:00 **the rations of, and petrol and what have you. Changing, from your notes I saw, 'changing petrol tanks to gas,' did everybody do that?**

Not everybody, but a lot of, you must remember that, oh, you must understand that there were not many private cars. A car was a very expensive item to have. Very few people

12:30 even had a telephone, it was usually if you wanted to make a telephone call you had to go to the corner grocery store. But the vehicles, if they were allowed a certain amount a month, I don't know, it might be two gallons or something like that. And if they wanted to be able to travel more, then they'd put on these tanks that were roughly about the size of a hot water cylinder and called, they were called gas producers.

13:00 And some of them were outrageous contraptions and they, under-powered, but they got the people around without having to use up their coupons for their, for the petrol. So that's how it happened. I remember one particular family had a utility, it had been a sedan and cut it into a utility, it was a 1925

13:30 Vauxhall. And they, the timing cog in it, which is about fourteen inches in diameter in it and about an inch thick, and it's made out of 'press pan' as they called it which was a compressed type of cardboard. It's a, just a cog, and when it busted they couldn't get the spare parts, course Vauxhall being an English make. So they had to go and go to the local foundry and

14:00 get one of these cogs made up to the exact dimension in brass and which cost them an absolute fortune of course. And you could hear that vehicle coming, it had a, such a distinct sound and you could hear it coming for, at least a half a mile away, you could hear it. But that's the sort of things that people had to do, they had to

14:30 make do, that's what it was. I remember my mother, I wanted to go to a fancy dress party, and my mother made me a costume that I won first prize with it, as Robin Hood, made out of dyed sugar bag. She boiled up the sugar bags and dyed em and then cut it out and everything and made up this Robin Hood costume for me. So that's the sort of things that people

15:00 did in those days. Course having come out of the Depression people were used to making do on a lot of things. They'd, a very old pullover for instance, they'd unravel it and use the wool for something else, knit the wool up for something else, once it had got too old for anything. We just had to because things were in such short supply, terribly short supply a lot of goods.

They were pretty clever weren't they?

Oh they

15:30 had to be and remember that a lot of em had direct experience of living in the bush and what have you where they had to be that way inclined, to make do or find a way around the problem.

And Brian you mentioned earlier, the Catalinas in the Harbour. Did you used to sit and watch them come in?

Yes. And it was quite funny because Cairns had about eight wharves in those days,

16:00 commercial wharves, and course they were, each of em had a gate to go in and out and they were all guarded by sentries. And course I'd pedal up on the push bike with a sugar bag full of fishing gear and say, ask the sentry's permission to go in on the wharf to go fishing, and a stickybeak [inquisitive look around]. And they'd say, "Oh..." I'd say, "Well have a look in the bag, there's nothing wrong in, nothing I shouldn't have in there." They'd say, "Oh go on kid, go in, go in. But if you get caught, tell me you were,

16:30 went through that gate down the road there." And I'd just go on the wharves and where I should never have been, and throw a fishing line in and watch the naval stuff that was going on, be it cargo or war ships or whatever. And I'd also watch the PBYs or Catalinas taking off and landing. It was...

Explain the

17:00 **harbour to us as a throbbing part of activity there?**

Oh it was, it certainly was. And for those that don't know Cairns it's a lot of mud flats and it comes out funnel shape shall we say, but to have access for shipping there was a channel that had to be dredged out. And they had 'boomgates' as

17:30 they called 'em that went across it to stop submarines entering the harbour and creating havoc. But there were a lot of small mangrove creeks further up the harbour and a lot of small boats were in Cairns, war ships of various types, PT boats [torpedo boats] and everything, even the very famous vessel, the Krait, that went to Singapore and blew up half of Singapore Harbour,

18:00 that was based in Cairns. In fact their head quarters was a home that was owned by the two families, the Munros and the Martins. And they just took over this whole home which was a beautiful old home on a small hill in Cairns, that's now be turned into a restaurant. But that was the head quarters of the Krait

18:30 at that time. Which was a very famous vessel in Australian history.

You didn't know that at the time though?

Oh no. I probably knew the sailors and I would've seen the vessel, but I did not know that they were virtually commandos. And most of those boys unfortunately were caught and beheaded, which is shocking tragedy for young men.

Did you see that there was any difference

19:00 **between the Aussie navy blokes and the Aussie army blokes?**

Only in their uniforms, there was no difference physically, no difference with their accents, no difference in their attitudes. Most of them were good for a laugh anytime, they were larrikins but no, no significant differences at all.

19:30 And the same with the airforce.

Did you find that you'd walk past them and they'd rub your head or something?

No, not really, no, no, cause that was sort of a no-no even in those days. Familiarity like that just wasn't on, they'd talk to me and say...

Oh I meant it in an endearing way.

Not really, no I don't remember that at all.

Now we didn't really

20:00 **talk, oh actually, something that happened in the harbour I think was a tug and...?**

Oh yes, yes, that was a shocker. I actually saw this on the other side of the harbour from the wharves. There was a tug boat tugging a barge up, I think, I can't swear but I think it was loaded with ammunition for the PBYs. And something went wrong. Something

20:30 horribly went wrong. And next minute the barge just sunk completely and before they could use the axe on the tow rope it pulled the tug boat down, and the captain, the engineer and the deck hand were all drowned. And ironically it went down in the only deep hole in the harbour which was about sixty odd feet deep at that time.

21:00 The whole lot went down, just in second, absolute seconds, I'll never forget it.

Where were you, were you on the...?

I was sitting on a wharf on this side of the harbour fishing, but the other side of the harbour's not that far away and you could see what goes on. And as I said it only took seconds, just a few seconds, they didn't have time to do anything, they were gone, just dragged under and drowned.

They didn't even have time to jump

21:30 **off then...**

No.

...before it went down?

No. The barge pulled em straight down. Cause a barge loaded with stacks of ammunition, it's a terrific weight. So it must have sprung a plank or something, I don't know, I don't even know, can't remember whether the barge was steal or wood or anything but I just happened to be idly watching it when it went down. Just, as I said, within seconds. Gone. I actually saw a

22:00 plane, a Wirraway as they call them, Australian made plane, he was doing aerobatics out over a suburb called Edge Hill. And all of a sudden he just went into an absolute vertical dive and next minute smoke came up, he didn't come up, smoke came up from the ground area. So myself and a few of

22:30 my friends we jumped on our push bikes and we knew the area where he went down. And he, don't know what happened but he ploughed straight into this house and fortunately there was nobody in the house at the time. But I'll never forget it, he went into this cottage and it left a crater that was quite a few feet deep, I wouldn't like to guess how many feet now but it was quite a few feet deep this crater, where this poor devil went in.

23:00 There was another plane that went in, if I remember rightly it was a DC-3, went in at the southern end of the airport in Cairns, and its carcass is still probably there to this day because it was there for many

years after. And in fact I've been there since and I've seen some shops built along that road that goes out to Aeroglen, as they call the suburb.

23:30 And I'm fairly sure that the shops are just about built on top of the, where the carcass of the plane would be. But they were the only plane crashes I saw or instance with, like tug boat going down.

You actually saw the Wirraway go down into the house?

I didn't see it actually hit the house because it was a fair distance away and there was a tree

24:00 line. But he just went straight down and then within a second or two there was this plume of smoke came up and he didn't come up so we knew something had gone very seriously wrong and that's when we went out, raced out on our push bikes.

Gee you witnessed quite a few horrific things.

Yeah. That's war time dear, that's war time. And accidents do happen even in

24:30 a peaceful area, shall we say, in war time.

What about the black market, did you make any money on the black market?

I couldn't, not as a kid, I wouldn't have been game probably. But it did go on, it was a very small number that did it, very small number. One particular woman, she was making, you'd have

25:00 to call it moonshine, out of boot polish and methylated spirits, and reputedly half a dozen Americans went blind on it, and they closed her down. But she also had a side line where she had half a dozen or a dozen broken down ponies that she'd hire out to the Americans to ride. And course anyone that could ride'd take one look at

25:30 these ponies and say, "No, thanks." But the city boys that didn't know, they'd get on the ponies and go floggin' it up the road, and it'd only be in a canter but they'd be floggin it. And they'd get a couple of blocks up the road and they'd promptly, the horse'd pig root [buck] and throw them and go galloping back to home and as soon as the pony got home she'd whip the saddle and the bridle off it and hide the

26:00 pony in the stables. And then when the American came back she'd charge him the cost of the pony and the cost of the saddle and the bridle. And she was getting away with it.

Did she ever get busted?

Not as far as I know, not on that, she got busted on the moonshine but not on the ponies. I remember just after, talking about black market, I remember just after the war, must have been about 1948,

26:30 '49, people were telling us that they were hearing these bangs all the time up in the roof. And we went up in the ceiling to have a look and it was a previous tenant in this house had obviously stored a lot of black market tins of meat and so forth up there and left em there. And course in the heat over a period of years they just exploded and the smell,

27:00 oh, shocking. So that was black market.

Oh that would've been horrible I imagine.

It wasn't a pretty sight, I can assure you.

All those probably tins of bully beef [tinned meat] was on the, exploding.

Yeah, yeah.

Yuk. What about the men taking anti malaria pills, was that something that the Cairns residents were asked to do as well?

No, no.

27:30 But the troops that were going to New Guinea, first off their uniforms, khaki uniforms were dyed green, that was the only camouflage the poor devils had, not like the camouflage uniforms they wear nowadays. But they had to take Atebrin tablets and it turned their skin as yellow as yellow and their eyes were bloodshot crazy.

28:00 And whether it worked or not I don't know because there seemed to be an awful lot of troops that came back ill with malaria. And in fact at Jungara which is just outside of Redlynch, in the Cairns area, it was the biggest transit hospital in the whole of the southern hemisphere. Hundreds of tents were there on the property

28:30 and looking after the troops that were coming back ill and wounded. And then towards the end they were looking after those prisoner of war that were able to be rescued.

Did you go there Brian?

No, not inside those gate, no. But it was quite visible of course if you went out that way, it was very visible, I mean there were literally hundreds of tents. It was the biggest,

29:00 it was known as the biggest camp hospital in the southern hemisphere at that time. It was huge

When you say tents, do you mean open marquee kind of tents not…?

Yeah, not pup tents, no, no, the big square tents and rectangular tents, huge things, some of them. And you used the correct word, some of them were marquees, yeah. I imagine they were the

29:30 operating theatres or something.

Would've had a hard time keeping them sterile?

I imagine so. But they'd have had duck boards down. But still, as you rightly suggest, they would've had a hard time.

Mind you that wasn't a problem was it, in Cairns, about malaria?

Ooh yes there was. Ooh yes, Cairns was a known malarial area and

30:00 until such time as the Americans arrived and drained all the mangrove swamps and areas, it was definitely a malarial site there.

Really. But it's not now.

No, no, because it's been so well drained. And it's, Cairns is virtually built on a tidal swamp, I think the official height is only about three feet above

30:30 sea level, in Cairns so it's not very high. And most of it's sand, if you dig down into it, there's not that much good soil or anything.

So you grew up actually with the fear of getting malaria?

Not really, we didn't consciously think, but we had mosquito nets on at night, but mainly the mosquito nets were because

31:00 of the annoyance of the mosquitoes, we didn't think that much about getting malaria. But mosquito nets are all very good, but they're also very hot at night, in the tropics.

The Jungara hospital must have had loads and loads of mosquito nets over all the beds?

Oh goodness gracious yes. Yeah, they would've certainly have had to.

And was that something you were aware of at that time that a lot of Australian troops were actually being treated for malaria?

31:30 Yes, yes. And even the troops that were sent back on recreational leave shall we put it, you know, that they, you could visibly see them they were so yellow, they, you could pick em out immediately. That it wasn't just a tinge of yellow, they were really yellow, their whole skin, whole body.

Like jaundice.

Worse.

32:00 I've had jaundice so I can compare it.

Oh really.

So I can compare it. It was far worse the way they looked.

And what about this igloos you mentioned before?

Aha, what about...?

You said that there were igloos?

Yes.

Where were they?

Oh they were all over the place in Cairns. Of course you mightn't know much about them but they were buildings that were on a concrete base, they had wooden

32:30 girder supports, frames, and they were in a half moon shape and it was corrugated iron put on as a roofing. And they usually had large doors opening at either end with smaller doors along the sides and a window or two. Very simple to construct, you see occasionally the style now at some airports, these igloo

33:00 constructions. But they're usually pretty large they were, for storing war material of all sorts. So that's what igloos were as we promptly called them. I'm not so certain, I think, in England I think they

referred to them as Quonset huts, they were same sort of style.

33:30 Just this half moon construction.

I suppose they were easy to construct?

Very easy. Yeah very easy, simple, quick. Quick and nasty. And they weren't supposed to last long but a lot of them were bought up on the land after the war and they were used for businesses, like transport companies and so forth used em as, where they repaired their vehicles mechanically.

34:00 There were different businesses bought in like that.

They weren't American owned though were they, they were Australian?

No they were mostly put up by the Americans, mostly. I think there was one in Atherton that, I think it's still there to this day, but it was turned into a community hall and they used to have dances and everything there and I believe they still have em to this day.

34:30 So as you, if you're ever around Atherton, you can have a look at one.

I did actually get up to Atherton in January but not into Atherton if you know what I mean, just sort of went by. Now something else that was in your notes that you gave Kiernan and I, was something about having to sing three anthems before ...

It must have been so boring.

before a concert?

35:00 Our choir was a very well known choir and for events like Saint Patrick's Night concert we'd be up on the stage, the choir behind the curtain and then the curtain'd go up and the grab bag orchestra would start into these three anthems. And of course everybody's

35:30 standing up and we had to do Advance Australia Fair, the American anthem and God Save the King, do two versus of each. So the poor audience is standing there for six versus of this, while we're singing these three anthems. I used to feel sorry for them, I really did.

36:00 But even at the, if you went to the movies, the first thing that appeared on that screen was the King and everybody stood up and had, gave respect to the King and then it'd finish and you'd sit down and then cartoons or the adverts or the movie'd start.

Well what would he be doing when he appeared, just a photograph of him?

36:30 I can't recall to be perfectly honest but maybe he was on horseback reviewing the horse guards or something, I can't recall to be honest. But we definitely had to stand while it was played and while he was up there. That's the father of the present Queen, that's King George the VI.

And I suppose Australians, and you touched on this before with Kiernan,

37:00 **but Australians felt that England was the Mother Country, must've been some sort of pride in singing God Save the King?**

To a certain extent yes. I assume, and I'm only assuming this here, that there was more patriotism or allegiance to Mother England in the First World War, because they were closer to having left England, than what there was in the Second World War. But it was still there that

37:30 Mother England's in trouble, we've got to do our bit.

Now something that we haven't talked about and obviously something I'm interested in, the women who worked in the services in Cairns, do you remember any of them?

Only the pretty girls in their uniforms, they were in all the services as well as the nursing. And even they had a civilian organisation for women,

38:00 of which my aunt was second in charge in the local area, called the VADs, Volunteer Aid Detachment. Excuse me. And they'd help out the nurses at the local hospital and things like that. But they did all sorts of work, there was a huge, monstrous laundry in Cairns and a lot of the girls worked there.

38:30 A lot of em worked out in Gordonvale, quite a few of em, and there's been a book written about it, I can't recall the name, that a lot of them re-packed parachutes for the Americans, there in Gordonvale. And course there was the usual admin staff, signallers and typists and telegraphists, what have you. Women took over a lot of the

39:00 jobs. Pre war I don't recall ever having seen a woman working behind the post office counter in Cairns for instance, but I can certainly recall it during the war, there were women working there. You didn't see any men unless they were oldies or something wrong with them physically. So yes it certainly broadened the idea of the women and got them out of the

39:30 home from those days. It was a case they have to.

I just got one more question before we run out of tape. And that is that you mentioned something in your notes about a US truck being overturned.

Oh I saw that, we'd gone down to Brisbane for a short period and we lived on a tram line. When I say, saw it, I didn't see the actual accident, I only saw the result of it. And

40:00 where there's tram lines, once the tram comes up to a stop and comes to a stop, any vehicle has to stop because of passengers getting... And he was racing the, this vehicle to this corner to beat him to the stop and he flipped the truck and the little chap that was our neighbour at the time who was a local

40:30 air raid warden, there was a chap pinned in underneath, American chap pinned in underneath the truck and everybody was panicking. My mother kept me well away from it. But he just roared out, the best imitation of a sergeant major I've ever heard in my life, and organised them to

41:00 stand all along the side of the truck and he forced em to lift it up as much as they could and hold it. And he actually crawled in underneath, while they held it up, in the confined space and dragged this poor sod out. So whether he died or not, I don't know, but that's, it was a mess I can tell you that. I did see the truck overturn on the side and people screaming. Not funny,

41:30 it was not funny at all.

Okay Brian we'll stop and change tapes.

Yeah, okay.

Tape 6

00:32 **Okay. We were just talking about accidents, you saw quite a number of accidents as a kid in North Queensland. There was one I read from your notes about, whether you saw it not I'm not sure, but about American parachutists?**

Oh that's what I was explaining earlier about the story we'd heard of the parachutist getting caught up on the tail plane, right.

01:00 That's already on the tape.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No I just, I was just wondering, did you see any parachutists?

No, that's why I was very strongly saying that it was only a legend that I'd heard, one of those stories, but how true, I don't know.

What about training exercises of this sort, would you see that going on?

Training exercises?

Yeah like, say...?

When they were learning to jump,

Yeah,

01:30 **would you see anything of this order?**

Very little because lots of it was quite a few Ks [kilometres], oh, I shouldn't talk Ks,' I should talk miles. Oh probably about ten mile or twelve mile south of Cairns, the planes went over our school as I mentioned earlier, very, very low. But then they went out onto the jump zone, or drop zone, and we couldn't pick up with the naked eye,

02:00 pick up actual parachutists, individual parachutists, no.

And there was another story about an ammo truck being hit, ammunition?

I think that's the story you're mentioning that there was a carriage full of ammunition that caught on fire in Cairns railway station, is that the story you're referring to?

Yeah, I think so.

And this

02:30 young lad, porter, as they called them in those days, he was about sixteen years of age, everyone took off except for him and a carriage full of ammunition is not to be trifled with. And somehow or other he was able to put the fire out or move the carriage or something, but he got it right out.

03:00 And he was awarded the George Cross for that which is the highest decoration in Australia that a

civilian can get for bravery. And he'd never ever tell anybody that he had the George Cross, and he actually went into state parliament for a while as a parliamentarian, but a very, very modest man when he grew up. He was about three years, four

03:30 years, five years, somewhere like that, older than me. And he only lived a block away so I knew him enough to say, "G'day, how ya going?" you know, but he wasn't a friend as such. So that's that story.

Well you have told us a lot about the Americans being there and the various events that you heard. When did the war seem to change, what was the height of it as far as

04:00 **news of the Japanese threat for you?**

It would've been around the time of the Coral Sea, the build up was there, physical build up of our troops coming back eventually from the middle east and the Americans arriving, and we were just hit over the head with this, the enormity of it all. So that was the high point if

04:30 that's the way one describes it. And then after a period of time it just gradually diminished, tailed off. In fact the Americans seemed to vanish over night, certainly it wasn't, but they just seemed to vanish over night, and moved on.

Well tell us about the Coral Sea, what are your memories of this battle from your perspective

05:00 **in Cairns?**

I didn't know much about it except that there was an enormous battle that went on and at that time then I was sent up to Caramore Station up in Cape York, so we were only getting radio reports. But we understood that that was a turning point, it was one of the first times that the Japanese got a bloody nose out

05:30 of it, and, I might add, so did the Americans. But it, they got some of the aircraft carriers that the Japanese had and that, I believe, is rather telling in the Battle of Midway which was a very crucial battle later on, way, way up north, way away from us. But the Coral Sea

06:00 Battle that was only twelve hundred miles away from Cairns, that wasn't far, not far at all. That and where the Australian militia stopped them on the Kokoda Trail, they were the two main things.

Tell us from your perspective, I mean, what was the logic for sending you up to the station at Cape York rather than somewhere else?

Evacuation, safety, and get me right away from the sea port that was likely to be

06:30 invaded, my mother and father were trying to protect me.

Why didn't they follow maybe other people's logic of sending people south?

We had relatives down south but it, I don't know that it would've been any better to do that, besides that it taught me a lot more about the bush.

Yeah we were talking about that earlier, I had a couple more questions

07:00 **actually. You told us a little bit about the bush tucker, the snakes, what other things, what other bush tucker were you getting, were you learning about?**

Snakes, porcupines [echidna], kangaroo, you get hold of a young kangaroo and the steak off the haunches, one of the nicest steaks you'll ever eat in your life. There was different berries, bulbs like

07:30 water lily style of bulb, oh no, we fed alright and when you're hungry you'll eat anything, and it certainly didn't harm me.

What about the fire making, what, how did he teach you to make fire?

It was just a stick with a bit of a hole in it and rubbing another, vertical one like that and eventually got it going with dry grass and what have you. As I told you we had a full box of matches and never struck one the whole time.

08:00 We carried fire with us once we got it going, we carried it a bit, now and again, to save a lot of mucking around, but you know, just a few embers, and we were never far from water so we had no problems about water. We had, I thought we must have been about fifty miles away from the nearest habitation,

08:30 and it wasn't until my, I was about twenty when I was visiting up there that I realised at no stage were we more than about ten miles away from the homestead. So, but to me it was, we were way out in the bush.

And would this old aboriginal man tell you any stories or parts of his culture?

Not much, no, no, no. But I can assure you that by the time

09:00 we had our dinner at night I was ready for that bed, or swag, being a kid, it was just exhausting and I'd just go straight to bed.

And you told us sometimes he'd hide your gear to test your tracking skills.

Yes.

What kind of things did you look for and learn about tracking, what kind of observations do you make?

Oh dear, oh dear, this is one that,

09:30 it could be foot prints, it could be disturbed a twig somehow, broken off a leaf, it, different things like that. The first time he did it was say, hid my hat, I can't remember, but he hid something and I had to go out the next day and find it. I'd be, honestly at times I was down on

10:00 my hands and knees, and a kid of nine has got very good eye sight, I'd be down on my hands and knees trying to follow his tracks. And he'd come trotting along on his pony, and I quote his exact words, "Look boss, you silly bastard, look, look, look, look, look." And he was, had roomy old eyes and he was able to still see the track and everything that I couldn't see with my keen eye sight, because I didn't know what I was looking at.

10:30 And each night he made it harder and harder and I remember the final time, a mob of cattle had gone through that day, about four hundred head, followed by a horse plant of about forty head, and you can imagine how it churned up the ground. And the old beggar he jumped on his horse and he rode it right into the middle of where these cattle and horses had

11:00 gone through. I'll defy any white man to track one horse through all of that. And so he'd hidden my hat, so I rode up one side of the track, and I'd saw where he'd gone in, and I went up about a mile I suppose, and he hadn't come out, so I rode across then and rode down the other side and I got him where he'd come out. Then I tracked

11:30 him to the base of this small hill that was all black granite boulders and I tracked him off the hill back to the camp, straight back to the camp, so I knew that the hat had to be on the hill. But how do you track over black granite boulders? And I can assure you it's very, very easy, when he pointed it out to me. All he did, done, was take his boots off and walk over the rock.

12:00 But if you get at an angle to the sun, like I'm looking at an angle to that light up there now, there's the footprints stand out from the oil in your feet, plain as daylight, they just jump out at you. So I just walked up, picked up my hat and walked off. And that's what he taught me, things like that. I, but I'm not a tracker, no way am I a tracker. But it was an experience for a kid, and

12:30 it taught me a lot and no doubt would've helped me to extend my life if I was left on my own out there trying to survive.

Must have given you some kind of respect for the aboriginals?

Oh yes, yes, yes, they've got a tremendous culture and they know a heck of a lot more than you or I have even ever thought of. I mean they've had so many years to perfect their knowledge of how to live off the land

13:00 and see things. I mean, he suddenly went really excited one day, he'd spotted this wild bee. And he grabbed it, he actually grabbed it and he got a piece of gum off a tree and attached a grass stem to it, very feathery, very lightly gummed it on, and then

13:30 went charging through the bush following this bee, until he got back to the nest we call a sugar bag. And boy that honey's good that comes out of that, and that's how they do it.

That's an amazing method.

Yeah, that's how they do it, I can assure you.

God, you must have picked up a lot of things even if he didn't tell you about some of their traditions or cultures?

Yeah.

You must have picked it up by just watching?

Yeah, a lot of it I did,

14:00 a lot of it I would've forgotten, I'd probably only remember ten percent of what the man told me, or taught me. But I have no doubts that if I was in a situation now it'd come rapidly back, I have no doubts of that.

Did he tell you of anything, like places you can't go or...?

No, no, no.

Okay, none of that.

He would've steered me away from those.

Without even telling you.

Yeah, exactly.

Yeah, okay, that's interesting.

14:30 **Well talking about learning too, at school in Cairns, what kind of times would you go again?**

Well that was when I was a day boy we were there all day, like the normal eight thirty to three thirty. But when we'd gone down to Brisbane for a short period, there was most unusual for some reason, I attended Windsor State School and

15:00 there I only went to school in the afternoon, I didn't go in the morning. There was another, half the school went in the morning and half in the afternoon. Apparently the reasoning behind it was that if a bomb dropped on the school, they only got half the kids, not all the kids, which was in one way sensible. Don't get me wrong, we still had to do the work because we didn't have a morning off, we had to, given the work during the afternoon,

15:30 we were given the work that we had to do the next morning and by gee they made us work. So it wasn't a picnic, we weren't only there for half day schooling.

And this was in Brisbane?

That was in Brisbane, we were there for just several months. So yeah, used to amuse me getting, only having to go to school for half a day, I thought it was great at first until I realised what was happening that, all this homework.

You might've answered this

16:00 **but why had you gone to Brisbane for those few months?**

I suspect, and I only say suspect, I'm not certain, that Dad was still trying to get into one of the services and he was getting away from Cairns where he was well known and was trying to get in and do his bit as he saw it. So that's all I can tell you on that one.

Did you notice as a kid it being a problem for your father that he couldn't get into the services?

No,

16:30 no. I was aware of it that he was a civilian and not, but that didn't make me any less proud of him or anything.

Maybe not for you but for him, did you notice that he was a bit annoyed or...?

He felt it, without a doubt, he would've liked to have been in doing his bit, that's for sure.

And what about sports during the war, like did you play sports?

Not much, because

17:00 any, most sporting equipment went to the services. So much so that the school had a couple of cricket bats if I remember rightly but when we had play time we were out there with pick handles believe it or not, and you hit a cricket ball with a pick handle and I can you it jars you all the way up to the shoulders, and that's true, we used pick handles. We had some old boxing gear,

17:30 but it was very old. It was just very, very hard to get any sporting equipment, because naturally the troops had the priorities on that.

And we talked a bit about games, like as the war developed, as you got a bit older, were you playing games about, I don't know, getting the Japanese or anything like that ?

Oh, not so much when I was older, it was more around the nine and ten age group.

18:00 But no, must've grown out of it.

Well we've talked briefly about the war winding up, you mentioned that the Americans seemed to leave over night, tell us about what this was like?

Well one day they were there and the next day they seemed to have gone. But I know that that's, excuse me, not fact but it seemed to be so sudden. And I remember that

18:30 there was an American was driving a vehicle, a truck that had all this timber on the back of it, all Oregon pine and everything, and pulled up at our local grocery store to go and buy a soft drink. And I wheeled my push bike in and said to him, "What are you doing with that timber?" And he said, "Just taking it to the dump."

19:00 He said, "We're moving out." And I said, "See that house over there." He said, "Yes." I said, "Well you

go and tip it out on the front lawn eh, instead of at the dump." And he did, he drove it up to our front gate and dumped the lot there, beautiful Oregon timber and a big work bench that would've been the width of this room, made out of Oregon pine, very thick timber.

19:30 And course I was a little bit apprehensive of what my father was gonna say with all this timber around on the front lawn, his precious front lawn. When he came home he was absolutely delighted, he got a work bench out of it and a lot of other timber because he was a great handy man and made all sorts of things from timber and he loved it. So I saw them actually

20:00 at the end of a street called Little Street in Cairns, out towards Edge Hill, and it runs along the edge of the Cairns Cemetery, and it was swamp area, water everywhere. And they dumped these forty-four gallon drums in there and then put little signs up in the swamp all over, 'Danger, poison.' God knows what was in those canisters, you know, those forty-four gallon drums. So

20:30 I've always been a bit jaundiced about what that was, could have been anything.

They're a bit renowned for the throw away culture aren't they?

Very much so and they're, it could have been any sort of poisons, or gases or whatever that they had in there. Cause if I remember rightly there was a gas or experimental unit

21:00 around there that the Aussies were involved in too, around Tulley's, I think it was, and they would experiment with different gases. Course look at the gases that were used in the First World War, mustard gas etcetera, and that could well have been stockpile for that, but as far as I know it was never used. God knows what it was, it's in the bottom of that swamp there.

And the swamp's in Edge Hill

21:30 **is that right?**

Just on the edge of Edge Hill. Little Street I'm sure was the name of the street. It runs down on the eastern side of the Cairns Cemetery and it was at, on the western side of Little Street where the swamp is. It's very close to the current Cairns Botanical Gardens.

I know where you mean.

22:00 **Did you, like, in a way, miss the Americans as they...?**

Oh yes, yes. One, they were there and then they weren't there. They'd had a big impact on everything around the place and suddenly they were gone and so you missed 'em.

What did you miss exactly

22:30 **about em?**

I think it was just seeing them around in the strange vehicles, strange planes, strange boats, you know, all of this is, the excitement even, has just gone from there.

Was it hard to get used to old Cairns again?

I don't recall that so much, I don't, no I can't say it was hard.

23:00 **And I mean on reflection you know, were you thinking at the time that, a kind of an appreciation for the Americans having been there or...?**

We were very please that they'd come over and I don't say that they were the best fighters in the world from what I've heard word of mouth stories. But the fact was

23:30 they came over to, and gave us a hand and we think the outcome may have... may have been a lot different if they hadn't have arrived. Sure they'd chuck everything but the kitchen sink at any opposing foe but that probably helped us. I'll never run down the Americans for the help they gave us at that time, never.

24:00 **Tell us about, did you hear the news of the atomic bomb?**

Oh yes.

How'd you hear this news?

I don't recall whether it was a radio or whether it was a newspaper but it would've been one or the other, and course we were all very anxious to see photos of it, or news reels I should say. And

24:30 the mind just boggled, we just could not understand or embrace the sheer enormity of what happened, we were damned pleased because we knew that this was gonna mean the end of the war. And even though there were tremendous amount of civilian lives lost at that time, to myself personally, I can't speak for others, but I thought, "That's a

25:00 damned good thing now they'll stop the war and there'll be millions and millions of lives that'll be saved. I didn't have much horror for the individual at all, I had a horror at the total devastation, a total

horror of it, it was more mind boggling than anything. And when we saw the news reels, oh, just

25:30 could not believe it. Yeah, that was a strange time that, we were so damned pleased. And I might add too that when the victory came, oh that's another story about Cairns and how it went mad. But I insist that we called it VP Day, Victory in the Pacific, it wasn't this way they're calling it now, VJ Day, it was definitely VP

26:00 Day in my time. But when it was declared over, we kids decorated up our push bikes with crepe paper, streamers, blue and white and red and so forth. And any girl walking down the street was fair game to be kissed by every flamin' service man, whether she liked it or not. I can even remember at the local bicycle shop

26:30 there was a very old bicycle with the wheels, no tyres, up on brackets up on the wall of the front of the building. And this drunken American, ah, drunken Aussie sailor got up there and he's peddling away like crazy and getting nowhere, and the crowd's cheering him on. That night, I remember, on The Esplanade they got a,

27:00 it was the first time in the whole period of the war I ever saw a Very pistol [flare] up close, I'd seen them fire into the sky but I'd never ever seen one close. And if you've ever seen one they've got a muzzle on them about that round, and they're like a pistol but they're only about that round and, the bore of it. And here's this bloke shootin' 'em up everywhere . Oh it was a crazy time, everyone just went absolutely crazy, they were

27:30 so relieved that they knew it was over. I don't think I went home the first night. It was just absolutely amazing, the sheer joy of everybody. There'd be impromptu conga lines getting formed in the middle of the street and dancing away and... Yeah so that was up to the war's

28:00 end.

How old were you at this time?

Well that finished August, didn't it, '45, I would've been oh, twelve and a half.

How's a twelve and a half year old join in all this kind of celebration?

He stands there with his eyes getting bugged out, watching the antics, cause he couldn't go along and kiss the girls.

What'd you

28:30 **think of the kissing, the drinking, the conga lines, what were you thinking?**

Oh it was just sheer joy and excitement, it, there was nothing obscene about it at all, nothing that I could see that was sexual about it, it was just sheer joy and excitement that, 'Thank God it's all over,' yeah.

Did you want to jump in the conga lines

29:00 **yourself?**

No. 'I'm was too good a Catholic boy to be into thart sort o' thing.'

Still being seen but not heard.

Yeah.

So, sorry...

I was just going to say that while you're asking that question, I was thinking back to some of the people that I met, and one of them at

29:30 that time was the, during the war was, towards the end of the war, was the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. Who was, he was the King's brother and he had been the Governor of the Bahamas, and then they put him out here as the Governor General in Australia. And he flew in, the Duchess flew in to Cairns, had a civic reception there on the

30:00 lawn beside the council chambers. Course the choir had to be there and I sang solo. Next minute word came down, there was lots of people there, word came down that the Duchess wanted to meet me, and you remember I'm only in short pants and so forth. So up I get taken up, and the Duchess promptly puts me between

30:30 she and her and husband sitting up at the official dais there, and his breath nearly knocked me over he was three parts tanked, and oh he was, he was rotten. And the Duchess could not have been more charming, she was the most tremendous lady and obviously she missed her own children and wanted to talk to another child. And you could see that sticking out,

31:00 the motherly instinct. And she, within seconds almost, she put me completely at my ease. And I'm looking down in the crowd and there's my Mum and Dad with great big grins on their faces, 'There's my

boy up there,' you know. She must have kept me up there an hour before she let me go. So that's alright, several months later one of the uncles came home from New Guinea and

31:30 we had, telling him the story of this. And he said, "That's alright," he said, "I happened to be in Port Moresby at the time," he said, "he flew in," and he said, "we had to form guard of honour for him." He said, "He was carried off on a stretcher because he was air sick, ha, ha," right. He was actually non compos mentis, sort of thing, he was

32:00 that bloody drunk apparently that, yeah they had to carry him off on a camp stretcher because he was 'air sick.' So there's a bit of a coincidence, there's the two of them, two stories, you know, two countries apart.

I've actually heard a bit about the old Duke before. Yeah.

Yeah. You'll have to tell me after.

Oh well same kind of thing. You must have had a

32:30 **pretty good voice then?**

Oh, I was able to make it professionally later so I must've had a reasonable voice anyway.

Well about you making it professionally later, we'll come to that. But I was curious to know if any of the war time concerts or any of that kind of entertainment that came through had formed an influence on you as a young man?

Only in presentation. It,

33:00 I used to really analyse every one I saw, and yes, it was the presentation that, I probably only took it in, thinking 'Oh yes, that looks good, I'll do that, or that doesn't look good.' But remembering that the social demands, shall we say, of that time was that if I stood up in front of a choir that I had to stand there almost at attention, I couldn't

33:30 fling my arms around doing the jitterbug, so I was rather restricted. And I only, we did a lot of church work as well, singing missa cantatas as they call them, which is a sung mass, which has solos in it. And it used to be advertised by the church that there was gonna be a missa cantata on such and such a

34:00 Sunday and the church would be, ah, the Cathedral even would be over flowing. People would come just to, not to worship God but to come and listen to the choir. It really was a remarkable group because of this uniqueness as I explained earlier with having the young men as the depth in behind we boy sopranos. And the, he had,

34:30 we had a team of, I think it was about six boy sopranos and they were all good, they were all good. And we were, at that time the Vienna Boy's Choir was caught here in Australia when war broke out, and they were taken in and billeted in Melbourne. And

35:00 they didn't perform that much, but we were compared more than favourably, we were supposed to be the best in the southern hemisphere and maybe, maybe second to the Vienna Boys' Choir, but maybe we beat them. And that was by knowledgeable people. So, we were good, very good. I remember one occasion it was during the war years, local church had a fete

35:30 and our verandah of the school overlooked the fete area and we were, had to do a number called 'Poor Wandering One'. And I had the solo part and the choir were backing me and the choir master naturally had his back to the fete. And all of a sudden, as I'm singing and the choir backing me,

36:00 everything, the ham wheels, the hoopla, everything stopped and the whole crowd just come spontaneously up to the little fence that was there and just stood there, listening. And it was the weirdest thing to see this crowd come and they're silent, just to listen, and just stopped the fete. And course he could see by my face that there was something wrong and

36:30 he said to me, "What is it? What is it?" "Tell ya later, tell ya later." All I could do is, 'Tell ya later.' But it was a funny experience to have, yeah. The choir had to be good to stop a fete.

Well I guess that was a big influence just being in the choir but I guess also that question I asked just before,

37:00 **did it inspire you to look towards a professional singing future just seeing those Americans in the concert parties and all that kind of thing during the war?**

No, not specifically but I had a voice and I kept going with it and went into the local choral society and then win eisteddfods and won this and won that and so forth. And then later on went to Brisbane and

37:30 got semi-professional for a year. And then it was Sydney or the bush and fortunately for me it was Sydney, and I was on the club scene there for many years, before I started touring.

Okay we'll come to that in a bit. After the war was there ever a thought of having a military future?

Yes. I definitely

38:00 wanted to join the air force and at that stage I took the papers to my mother and father to sign for me and they refused. They said, “Wait until the day you turn eighteen and if you, when you turn eighteen if you still want it, okay fine.” So I thought, ‘Oh well, that’s only six month’s away and that’s fair enough.’ In the mean time I

38:30 found out that at that time you had, when you joined the airforce you had to join for twelve years, and my God I’d have been an old man of thirty if I’d have joined up for twelve years, and no way was I going to join But you must remember that the services, be it army, navy, air force, they had thousands upon thousands of men, they had to get rid of em, but by, this is post-war. But at, by the

39:00 same token they had to leave some there that had the experience and they had to bring in fresh blood that was going to stay there, right. And so that’s why they, at that stage they made it twelve years, bringing in, or trying to bring in fresh blood like myself. But there would’ve been a lot of Second World War vets [veterans] that were in there professionally, still.

39:30 Most of them couldn’t wait to get out after the war, the troops, to be demobbed as they called it.

Why had you been interested at all?

I don't know, it’s secure, three meals a day, accommodation and glamour I suppose, air force, so, I just liked the idea. It wasn’t military

40:00 as such, it was just good paying job, good conditions, learn a trade, fly a plane, whatever they wanted me for.

Gotta pause there.

Tape 7

00:31 **Brian what kind of careers were young boys encouraged to go into in the time that you finished high school?**

Mostly the trades. University was pie in the sky for most of us, I can only remember a few boys that went on to university but most of us went in for the trades like butcher and baker and candle stick maker.

01:00 I personally became an apprentice electrician and then worked at that for a while in the electrical trade, then I went to Mount Isa chasing the big money as a miner, cause there was good money in those days, even though it was a wild town. So that was the type of careers that most of us aimed for. The girls,

01:30 mostly the shop assistants and banking jobs, that nature. We didn’t have the money to go to university, my family. And in fact I remember when I was, desperately wanted to go to university, when I was thirteen I did my father’s taxation returns and then realised that

02:00 whilst he and Mum would’ve mortgaged the house to get me there I didn’t want them to run the risk of me failing. And they never ever knew that I wanted to go to university. Never knew.

Did you ever tell them?

No, no. Believe it or not I wanted to be a surgeon. I don't know how with big hands like that

02:30 but I wanted to be a surgeon, and I desperately wanted to be a surgeon. Never ever made it. That’s life.

Well tell us about how you got into your trade, electrician?

Oh family friends had an electrical business and they had a vacancy for a new apprentice and I got the job. It also

03:00 meant I could leave school of course which was great.

So you would have been in what, year ten?

You would call it year ten now, I did the first term and that’s all in year ten. We would, we at those days I would’ve called, we would call a junior, there was scholarship and then two year, that was the transition from primary into high and then there was the junior

03:30 examination two years later and then there was the senior examination two years later. Well I only did one term in junior, which was the equivalent of a year, or part of year ten. As far as the apprenticeship went, I had to do it all by correspondence, it’s completely different nowadays where they get hands on training, technical. When I say all, I meant my

04:00 studies had to be all by correspondence, and the only privilege we had was that one night a week for

two hours we'd go along to the local high school and there was a local electrical engineer that took the class and there was all different year apprentices all grouped together in the one class, and he helped us with any questions we had

04:30 in our correspondence courses, so it was pretty difficult. Poor old George, he was a White Russian, and the engineer, and one of the senior boys'd ask him a question and he'd turn around, we got to know this of course, he'd turn around and write furiously on the blackboard for two hours and meantime we're playing up like crazy behind his back.

05:00 But he did help us when we needed it, we'd make certain that we got the help we need.

Did you finish your apprenticeship?

No, no I went into the electrical line work, I was outdoors, better money, everything then. And in those days you could move from job to job, which you can't do nowadays too much. And as I said then I went out to Mount

05:30 Isa and worked as a miner for the big money and lead bonus as they called it. And that was really hard work.

Just before Mount Isa, even though you'd left school and were doing your apprenticeship, you were still living at home?

Yes, yes.

And...

Twenty-seven shillings and sixpence a week gross was what I earned.

As an apprenticeship?

First year,

06:00 which is what, two dollars seventy-five [cents]. And I handed over my full pay packet to my Mum and Mum gave me back ten shillings each week and out of the, oh, I had to pay nine pence a week income tax. And out of the sixteen shillings and whatever that was left

06:30 after Mum paid me, Mum and Dad had to feed me and clothe me and buy the tools and so forth, so I was still a cost to them, without a doubt. But ten shillings as my pocket money didn't buy much I can assure you.

How old were you when you took off to Mount Isa?

About twenty, yes, around about twenty, twenty-one somewhere. Twenty-one to be exact, I just remembered.

07:00 **And you had been working outside on the electrical lines prior to going up there?**

Yeah, became an electrical linesman, qualified as an electrical linesman. And I believe I was actually a leading hand linesman and I was, believe I was the youngest leading hand electrical linesman in Australia at that time but, for what that's worth. But I was a very

07:30 young man, working on the power lines.

What does a leading hand do?

Have a gang underneath him, a gang of tradesmen and labourers, and I was the boss of the gang, small gang, only half a dozen men.

And how did you like that work?

It was alright, yeah. It was outdoors, good money, you know, it was good tradesmen's wages. And even though at first I was under the

08:00 age of twenty-one I was still getting adults wages because I was doing an adults job, and I was expected to do an adults job. So I earned my money, but I've always been a worker.

Well how did you get the job going to Mount Isa anyway?

Just went out there and applied and got straight in, yeah. Had to do a course that they, all

08:30 new employees do on safety and so forth and then taken underground and shown what to do and so forth. And I worked out there for just on ten odd years.

So was it common knowledge that you could go over to Mount Isa and earn quite good money?

Oh yes, yes. It was a strange town because it was

09:00 about seven thousand population at the time, or six thousand, and but there were very few women and

so you got a lot of desperates out there. There was people that were running from family responsibilities, others that were running from the law. I've seen some wild pub brawls out there and broken bottles, broken glasses used. I remember

09:30 one chap that was in the barracks, he was next to me, a little French man guy, and he was quite a pleasant fellow. And about every three months he'd go on a bender and he'd wear this stupid kepi [french military cap], the pill box hat that the French Foreign Legion wear. And he'd come home with, and he'd drag out a high powered rifle outside the barracks and go blasting

10:00 all over the place, up in the sky. And the first time it happened I dived under the bed and got the wall between me and him. And I found out then when he was sober that he was a deserter from the French Foreign Legion, and he was totally harmless, he always fired straight up in the air, he never fired at anything. And I asked him what was the idea of this stupid kepi that he wore

10:30 when he was on a bender, and he told me that if he had one piece of equipment of his uniform with him when he got caught, or if he got caught, he was only considered as absent without leave, but if he didn't have any piece of equipment or his uniform with him, he was considered as a total deserter and I think the penalty was the guillotine 'cause he was a traitor.

11:00 So he did not ever dare go to New Caledonia, being French territory. But it was strange to see this drunken French man with this keppi on his head blasting a high powered rifle up in the air about every three months. Oh, would you excuse me please.

Sure. You seem so, that Mount Isa environment just does not seem

11:30 **like you at all.**

Yes, but it was good money.

So were you saving all the time?

Trying to and by this stage I had a young family.

Oh hang on a second, where did they come in?

Oh, she was a girl from Ingham, up in North Queensland. But no, it was, I'm talking by this time I'm twenty-five, twenty-six, something like that, had a young

12:00 family so I wanted to earn the money. But then, as I explained to you earlier, my wife died at a young age and so then my mother in law looked after the children for me and I went to Brisbane, trying to see if I could earn extra money as a singer

12:30 on top of my day job. And I did that for twelve months and then made the transition to Sydney.

So hang on a second, what made you decide to go down to Brisbane rather than remain in Mount Isa?

Environment. My mother-in-law was in Cairns and the children, I was taking them to Cairns, and I thought, 'Well I'm not going back to Mount Isa.' And I'd just been through a thirteen week lockout up there,

13:00 which did not help the Exchequer [bank balance], and so I said, 'That's it, I'm not going back to the environment where I'm likely to go on strike or get locked out or whatever.' It was my first and only experience of that and thirteen weeks out is a long time, we weren't given the dole or anything while we're out. But we were definitely locked out, but that's a political thing.

13:30 **What's an Exchequer?**

Somebody who pays you, gives you money, didn't help my bank account shall we say.

Now, so when did you meet your first wife?

Oh years ago before that, she was a girl from Ingham and met her at a dance, I used to do a lot of dancing, country dances up in that area. And we were married

14:00 and had the kiddies and she, as I said, died a very early age. Went to bed one night and when I woke up in the morning she was in bed beside me, dead, and we didn't know anything was wrong with her. There was a thing called pericarditis, which is a, we found out after, which is a sack of fluid that builds up around the heart and

14:30 constricts the heart until it stops. And that's what it was.

She wasn't feeling sick at all or anything?

Oh the only real symptom is you think you've got indigestion, that's all it is. It's very rare I understand, so don't worry about it.

That must have been horrible for you though to wake up and find this…?

Well it wasn't easy, put it that way.

I'm sure it wasn't. And you had two children did you say with this...?

No, four to my

15:00 first wife, and they were all littlies of course. And my mother-in-law looked after 'em while I went to Brisbane to see if I could get more, earning more money and send home to the mother in law looking after them.

And how did you get on with her?

Ah, not the best, shall we say, yeah.

At first or later on?

No,

15:30 really I could say that it's from my wife's death, that period onwards, not the best. Which is a shame.

And how did you end up being able to take the children eventually or did they stay there?

No they stayed with their grandmother and she raised them but with my help. Yeah.

So now what happened, you went down to Brisbane,

16:00 **and what were you doing as a day job there?**

Working as a salesman for W.A. Flick & Company, the pest control people. But yes, that's what I did and then started out on Saturday nights and Friday nights singing in absolute crummy pubs all over Brisbane, and learning as I went, the

16:30 presentation and all that sort of thing. I changed my name for professional reasons from Brian Earl to Lance Stirling, the reason being that there were a lot of Brian's around Brisbane at that time in the entertainment business. Like Brian Tate, Brian Carle, Brian Muir, there's Brian Henderson on 'Bandstand', there were Brians everywhere, so I became Lance Stirling. And

17:00 after twelve months, which was fantastic grounding, learning in these crummy pubs, where you had to be good to get their attention, they were drinking and boozing. And I went to Sydney and went round the agents, they didn't want to know me, I mean a male vocalist is a dime a dozen. Even though I was introduced by

17:30 two sight acts from Brisbane who'd already gone down and succeeded. Until after three months, I was singing in a club one afternoon at a type of amateur thing, and this chap heard me and rushed up and booked me for his, he was the president of a club, he booked me for a club that night. And there was only two acts on and it was a, the other act was a

18:00 girl called Ricki Richardson. Now she'd been flown out at short notice from America to take over from Nelson Eddy who, at Checkers night club who, he'd become very ill. And she was a third rate artist as far as her voice went but my God the presentation she had was just unreal. And there were thirteen of the top Sydney agents sitting in the

18:30 audience that night just to hear her, and I knew that I had to make it that night or I wouldn't make it at all. And five minutes before I went on stage, I had to open the show, which I hate opening, I was cut down from two spots to one spot, which upset me, but I had to do it. And I went out there and sang my heart out, watched this Ricki Richardson

19:00 and I learned so much, oh my God I learned so much. And the following Tuesday and Wednesday I went around the agents again and I came home the first night with one thousand three hundred and sixty-seven pounds worth of advance bookings, which was an enormous sum in those days. And I never looked back. I finished up that one could work seven clubs of a weekend, two Friday nights, two Saturday nights

19:30 and three on Sunday and I averaged six clubs over the ten year period, just singing as a male vocal. Good money, lots of fun, lots of funny experiences. And then I joined, I was invited to join The Black & White Minstrel show and as a minstrel and toured with them for

20:00 two and a half years and then I went into theatre administration.

Just before we got to theatre admin, how did you get approached by the minstrel show?

I happened to meet one of the minstrels and he told me that there was two vacancies in the show, which is a funny story. And...

Tell us that story.

Well one of the guys who was a minstrel, he

20:30 got a job at the Folies Bergere or Moulin Rouge, one of the two, in Paris and London, brilliant dancer. And we had a big party, literally, literally poured him onto the plane to go to Paris and two or three days later he's back again. We said, "What happened?" He said, "Well," he said, "I arrived at the airport," he said, "they took me to the

21:00 Lido or…," we'll say the Folies Bergere. He said, "They gave me the briefest leopard skin jocks," he said, "and then draped me artistically," he said, "over the rostrum." He said, "Then this voluble little French man came out," he said, "and sprayed me," he said, "with something or other," he said, "and I can't understand a word of the French language." He said, "And the curtain goes up," he said, "and next

21:30 minute a bloody lion walks out on stage," he said, "it was lion-repellent darlings, so I was on the next flight home on Qantas." So, you can imagine. He didn't get back into the Minstrels I might add. But he...

I wonder why he didn't get back into the Minstrels?

I don't know. But no, probably because he left mid- tour and that's a no-no when you're in show biz. But

22:00 he also had a sideline that you wouldn't be old enough to remember but many years ago the Australian Woman's Weekly [magazine] was a huge thing like that. And you open it up and there was, in the centre, was a two-page colour spread of Bonds Athletics. And you can just imagine the men in it, the body beautiful showing off the singlets and jocks and so forth. And he was their main model, male model and he was the

22:30 gayest thing you've ever come across in your life. And that's a fact. But when I was told about the vacancies, I was told they were holding auditions and I went along and they had two vacancies at the time and there were over three hundred of us that applied. Six of us they brought back, out of the three hundred plus and

23:00 the choreographer came up on stage and showed us what I now know is a few simple steps. I'm looking along the line at the other five thinking, 'My God, they can dance,' but I was the only one chosen. I couldn't believe it when out of over three hundred, and they had two vacancies, I was the only one chosen. One must remember that, if you know the show, if you've ever seen it, that you had to be reasonably of a certain height,

23:30 a certain weight, you had to be able to sight read, you had to have a reasonable singing voice, you had to be able to be a mover if not a dancer. And unusually we were not chorus boys, we were the stars of the show, the whole show was built around us as the Minstrels. And how many men do you know that can both sing and dance? And

24:00 that's how I got the job.

But can I just ask you, I'm not aware, I mean, I've heard of it, The Black & White Minstrel Show because my grandparents I think spoke about it, but I actually, what was in the show?

It was the old routines, the old numbers, George Mitchell, he used to string the numbers together,

24:30 and in a routine. And we'd do say, sailors, and they'd all, the music, all the numbers would be different sailor's songs. Or we'd do Spanish and they'd be all different Spanish type of songs, like 'The Girl from Ipanema', things like that, and he had an unusual ability to do it. But the thing that, two things that shone through with the Minstrels, even with the

25:00 television show was, (a) I wonder what he looks like without the make up, and (b) the fantastic discipline we had. As an example of that there was one particular routine where four of us who were dancing on stage, four boys, we had to dance off around the legs on the side of the stage and that's, the legs are the vertical cloth,

25:30 drapes. And each of us, as soon as we got out of the view of the audience, we had four dressers and or stage hands waiting for us, and they'd just about gave us a complete costume change, jackets, hats, walking cane, umbrellas, the whole lot. And we had to come out, the four of us, doing Singing, excuse me, doing 'Singing in the Rain',

26:00 and we had exactly seven seconds to do that transformation, and we used to average four seconds. Gave us a chance for the three seconds to draw in a few breaths and then, '…Singing in the Rain…' That's how it worked, it was a discipline, it was just really and truly remarkable. We were fined for instance, every Friday morning we had to get,

26:30 go back for rehearsal for the simple reason that if you're doing the same show eight times a week for months on, and sometimes more, for months on end, one tends to get sloppy. So the choreographer would say, "Brian, you were that far out in Spanish. Company, we'll do the whole Spanish routine." And you'd feel so small but you knew she was picking on anyone she could see, right. And you'd

27:00 go through the whole routine and sharpen up. The other thing that we were, oh, the other thing that we were fined for, after we'd done the rehearsal, we had to go and get weighed. And we were allowed from our normal weight, a range of four pound over, up to four pound under, so we had eight pounds weight range that we were

27:30 okay. Now for every pound that we might be outside of that range, be it under or over, we were fined ten pound, which was quite a sum of money. The reason being that if we were underweight, it meant that our costumes were flogging on us and we weren't eating properly. If we were overweight, again it meant we weren't eating properly and our costumes were busted, so there was a very good reason for it. And

28:00 it was quite funny, me I'd just step straight on the scales and bang, straight on every time, but some of the girls in particular, this week you'd see them, they'd have every stitch of clothing they could find on, including fur coats, the lot, before they stepped on the scales. And the following week you'd see em, they'd be, step up onto the scales with nothing but a pair of knickers, and I mean nothing but a pair of knickers on and, to try and get out of that ten pound

28:30 fine. We were fined if, ten pound, if we were caught miming on stage. We sang to a tape of our own voices, we augmented the tape, because you cannot do justice singing in a two and a half hour show if, you know, and keep up the quality of the singing. So we sang to our own tape, but if you're caught miming

29:00 as I said, you got fined. And the only time you got out of it, is if you went to the stage manager and said, "I've got laryngitis," and he allowed you to mime. So the discipline was there and were renowned for it and it was good, clean, family entertainment and it was prime time, Sunday nights and the whole family, all around the country'd sit down to watch the show.

On the television?

Yeah,

29:30 and they'd come to see us doing the live shows. We had one woman, I remember, when we were in Hamilton in New Zealand that flew all the way from Hawaii just to come down and see the show and she flew back the next day. I remember in Wellington, for some reason I didn't have to do finale` and I can't recall what the reason was but for some reason I

30:00 didn't have to do it. And by the time the final curtain dropped I've got the make up off and I'm back in my street clothes and I'm gone, that's, the very moment that curtain hit the deck, I was gone. And I'd be walking out with the crowds, and they were saying, "Oh I wonder what that guy that was third from the left, what he looks like?" You know, little did they realise that I was one of the guys walking right out beside em. So that was the magic of it, 'I wonder what he

30:30 looks like without the make up.' We had some great experiences. We'd have, whenever we went to, we didn't do overnight stuff, thank goodness, we were, when we went anywhere we were there for weeks, months sometimes. And this particular night, oh we always had the first Saturday night, we organised our own party

31:00 and then after that the Saturday nights, we'd be invited all over the place. And this particular night we're invited out to a farm by a lady that's called Malvina Major, who's now Dame Malvina Major and a very well known opera, worldwide known opera singer, a contemporary of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa [opera singer]. They both trained under Dame Sister Mary Leo, a famous

31:30 singer. And anyway we're in this farmhouse and Ken, our ventriloquist act, he noticed that Malvina's little daughter who was about three at the time, had a glove puppet. And so he very quietly picked it up and put it over his hand, he didn't have his own dolls with him but he put this glove puppet on and he just rested it like that on his leg.

32:00 And he started the puppet talking to the child, and the delightful look on that child's face, the eyes were just bugging out. So then Malvina said, "Well come on darling," you know, "it's time for bed now." She took her off to bed, we're chatting away, and Malvina comes back out after a few minutes and within a few seconds of Malvina coming out, there was this God awful wail from the bedroom. She went charging in and

32:30 came out some time later and laughing her head off. She said, "Here's a child," Mary or whatever her name was, "sitting up in bed belting hell out of the glove puppet." "Mummy, Tommy'll talk to that man but won't talk to me." It was beautiful.

When I think about The Black & White Minstrel Show, I think about everybody with black faces…?

They were brown actually.

Brown

33:00 **faces, brown necks?**

Yes, ears, the lot.

Hands?

No gloves, white gloves.

And singing that song, 'Mammy...'

Yeah.

Is, really, so you sang that song?

Yeah, yeah.

What was that about, did it come from some kind of, was it based on some sort of American southern show or something like that?

This goes back to the early 1800s. It's an art form, it's not racist, it's an art

33:30 form that started in America. And eventually white men took it over and they blacked up to be like the slaves that did this type of thing. And there was not one skerrick of racism in it, even though our make-up came from Max Factor [cosmetics] and the colour of it was called 'Negro Number Two'. So

34:00 it was a brown make-up and we had to put it on in a special way. Oh, excuse me. Because if we put too much on, under the hot lights, no matter how cold it was outside, under the hot lights the whole lot'd just slip. If we didn't put enough on, the perspiration coming through'd leave streaks through us, so we had to put it on in a special way. But I could walk in to a theatre,

34:30 in street clothes, and be in my first costume and standing in the wings ready to go on in thirty minutes, it was as easy as that, once you got into it.

So it would be just pancake...?

Yeah it was, yeah. For any ladies, they'd understand what I'm going to say, we used to put an under make up lotion on, then you got an eyebrow pencil and formed the outline of two

35:00 eyes and a mouth, and believe me to do two symmetrical eyes is very difficult. Then we'd just do the brush, like an artist's brush with the brown make up, and do the outside and we'd put the white on, on the eyes and the mouth and it wasn't exaggerated. But then we put a black wig on and of course my hair colour,

35:30 I had to darken the side burns with eye brow pencil and the make up went right around the back of our neck and in our ears. And of course one of the worst things you can do with make is to wash it off in hot water, you should never ever wash off make up in hot water, but we had to, to get this gunk off. And I then,

36:00 you, if you didn't protect your face you got what you call a make up rash, which was like prickly heat. So we used to put on a night cream afterwards, and you've never seen anything more ridiculous in all your life than fifteen minstrels all turning up to a party and here they all are with faces glowing from night cream. It must have looked funny and I

36:30 suppose some of them were questioning our sexual orientation.

But it was a huge show wasn't it, The Black & White Minstrel Show?

Oh, it, there was, the main show was in London at Victoria Palace and they also had companies that toured the provinces in England, Blackpool and Bournemouth and so forth. And they had two shows that toured Australia in 1962

37:00 and in 1968 they came out. And the nucleus of the English people came out with specialty acts and the same in '62 and '68, and then they employed some few Australians that were able to go. And when my show finished I was in the '68 tour, it finished in late '70s,

37:30 I was asked go to England and at the time I decided not to, but I do have a regret that I didn't go at that time. Instead of that I went into theatre administration, for J.C. Williamsons, starting off with. It was a lot of fun, we saw a lot of countries that we'd never have seen before.

This is theatre admin?

No, in the...

In the minstrel show.

38:00 the minstrel show.

I was just gonna ask, I mean, I know you're quite a humble person but, I mean it was a very big show nationally, in Australia?

Internationally.

Internationally. But the show that you were in nationally on television was a big deal.

No, we weren't on television, that was the English show...

It was the English, oh I see.

that was on television.

But it was that sort of fame, the show from that, the fame from that English show was what, and they would, you to tour professionally and...

38:30 Yes.

securely for two and a half years, or whatever it was.

Yes, yeah. Here we are, you see it on your little television sets, be they black and white or a colour set and all of a sudden you're seeing forty feet of living colour just coming straight at you. It was just unbelievable to see it, the colour of the costumes, they were so spectacular. Every costume was individually tailored

39:00 for us and we had nine changes of costume even. It was truly an extravaganza but it was good, clean, family entertainment. That was the beauty of it.

Would it most often be couples, sort of middle aged, middle class couples coming to see or just everybody?

It went right across the social

39:30 spectrum, right across. We had from oldies right through down to young children that were brought by their parents or whatever because they knew it was going to be good thing to see, you know, it wasn't any smut or anything like that in it. And it really was spectacular, even though I say so myself.

All right Brian, we'll have to change tapes.

Tape 8

00:30 **Okay just establishing the exact years you worked with The Black & White Minstrel Show?**

'68 to '70.

'68 to '70, okay. What...

And in fact, if I can interrupt, we, about eighteen months or so ago I was mowing the lawn and suddenly thought, 'Oh, I wonder where all the kids are nowadays,' and I thought I might find half a dozen and have a beer. And it finished up that I had to organise a re-union, over thirty years since we've seen each other. And

01:00 we had the re-union in Melbourne and people came from every state in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and England for the show, the re-union, marvellous.

You said the show was spectacular, what did it consist of exactly?

It was the costumes, it was the music, it was the vitality of the people on stage and basically the fact that it was excellent, clean

01:30 family entertainment.

Is that, you mentioned that people really loved the show?

Yes, very much so.

Why, why exactly?

Because of all the reasons I've just given, it was good, clean, family entertainment and it was a, the discipline we had, came through. We weren't chorus boys, we were the starts of the show,

02:00 and the discipline was obviously there even if people didn't recognise that that's what they were admiring. There were, seemed to be literally waves of minstrels coming at you from all directions, but what it was, if you had of looked up your program, there was only fifteen of us that were on stage at any time that toured. There was only, but we came like this all the time at you, you thought there were hundreds of us.

02:30 So yes, it's really good, clean, as I, clean family entertainment.

What kind of places were you touring exactly?

Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch, Invercargill, back to Sydney, Melbourne. Yeah.

03:00 **Invercargill?**

Invercargill, the world's most southern city, not the world's most southern town, but the world's most

southern city. It's the first time I ever saw snow in my life, that was there, snowed in October, I nearly died. I'm racing through the motel saying, "Get up, get up, have a look, it's snowing!" "Shut up and go back to bed you North Queensland idiot."

And what kind of theatres were you playing at?

03:30 Half of them roughly were J.C. Williamson's theatres and the rest were municipal theatres.

So in somewhere like Sydney you were playing at...?

Her Majesty's, which is now gone, the theatre, that was a Williamson's thing. In Melbourne the two times we were there it was Her Majesty's, and The Comedy the second time. Hamilton for instance,

04:00 oh, two of the theatres I actually went back and managed when I got into theatre administration later. The first one was, oh not, oh, how could one forget the name of, the Theatre Royale in Christchurch, which is a theatre in the traditional old style, like the Art Deco type of thing. And then the second one was

04:30 a municipal theatre, it was Founders Theatre in Hamilton in New Zealand. A strange thing happened in Hamilton that we all, suddenly all, the whole company, we started getting the soles of our feet very tender, and this is a bit hard when you're dancing. And we couldn't work it out until somebody realised that this is the only stage that we're dancing on that was dead flat, the rest of the stages

05:00 in the theatres were raked, on an angle. And so the stage or the timber was coming up that infinitesimal fraction of a second quicker than what we're expecting, and we were hitting it that much harder, obviously, and that was the reason that we were getting these tender soles.

And what kind of size of the audience was it, about?

05:30 The theatres in size varied, the Comedy in Melbourne was very small, I think that was only about seven or eight hundred or something. But usually you could, say up to fifteen hundred, maybe two thousand, that they were in the stalls, the dress circle and the Gods, and also some of them had boxes on the sides, some of them.

06:00 **Still that must have some affect, did you get nervous at all before the gig [show]?**

Before appearing on stage?

Yeah.

No. And the reason I say that is because as a solo artist prior to that I was on tenterhooks until I started to sing, not stage fright but just on a bit of nervous tension. But when it came to this I wasn't

06:30 an individual, I was part of a group and that made a difference, I wasn't, I had confidence all the way.

Was it the make up?

Yeah, well I was hidden by the make-up too, wasn't I?

Well did, was there a bit of security on that, like could you not show your face at all, or...?

No, that's the fact that it was that art form.

I mean outside of it?

Oh yes, the only time we had to,

07:00 we were allowed to put make up on and appear outside was if it was a publicity shoot of some sort, otherwise we didn't, no way. Besides that we wouldn't want to, we didn't, it's yuk to put on and yuk to take off.

Did you have to almost like hide your identity a little bit?

Not really, I mean we travelled as a group, The Black & White Minstrels, and we'd go on, we'd hire

07:30 a coach or two to go and see Rotorua or something like that or go for a day fishing or whatever. And so it was known that, 'Hey the Black & White's are coming to town,' and, you know for, to have a look around. And so we didn't try to hide our identities as such but we did, by the same token we didn't flaunt it.

So you weren't out fishing going,

08:00 **'...how I love ya...?'**

No. Do you want us to start singing 'Old Man River?'

Well what was the life like on the road, the kind of hotel life?

Well we were highly paid but we had to find our own accommodation, or our own digs. In fact the British people used to tell us the stories that when they had digs in England,

08:30 touring there, if they didn't like the digs, the thing to do was to nail a kipper [fish] up underneath the kitchen table, and of course a week later you can imagine the smell, and go right through the house, but we never ever did anything like that. But somebody'd find a good lot of digs somewhere and they'd let the rest of us know. And we didn't always stay all together or anything like that, so some of us had

09:00 a one room apartment somewhere that we'd found and others'd be elsewhere, we'd scatter all over the place but other times we'd get accommodation all together, if it was reasonable price. We had to pay for our own meals and our own accommodation.

Did you have any fans which would follow you around or anything?

No, but we had fans that came to wherever we were, if you understand what I mean. If they lived within a reasonable distance of a particular theatre, they would

09:30 wait until we came to that theatre and then they'd come and see us. Although as I was saying earlier to Heather [interviewer], that we had one fan that flew in from Hawaii to Hamilton just to see the show and flew out the next day. Must've had a lot of money.

Not like the days where you got fans waiting outside for autographs or trying…?

Oh we did get that a bit, yeah, yeah.

10:00 But it was a bit difficult for the fans seeing the white faced boys walking out and didn't know who was who. No it did happen a bit but that mainly happened, autographing, when we were doing publicity and promotions. Be it riding around in old vehicles or something and doing radio interviews on the street or whatever, that's when we'd, or signing albums, and that's when that mainly happened.

Now is

10:30 **it similar, like those old vaudeville shows in a way, like different of course because it's The Black & White Minstrels, but was it one of the few kind of big theatre kind of performances going on at that time?**

Oh yes, very much so, very, very much so. You're thinking, I believe, about the likes of 'My Fair Lady' and so forth as a show, as a comparison,

11:00 is that correct?

I'm thinking more, vaudeville shows, Theatre Royale and all that?

No there wasn't, Vaudeville had died, was dead, post-war.

Yeah, I just, I knew that, so I was just saying, is it, was it kind of like a, in some ways, reviving aspects of that old…?

A little, a tiny bit because we had sight acts that travelled with us and comedians that travelled with us, so it was, there was a little bit

11:30 of the old Vaudeville in it. But Vaudeville itself, unfortunately, I feel, I loved the medium, by this post-war, had really died.

And so did you feel like you were reviving this kind of spirit somewhat?

No, I feel that I was just enjoying myself and giving a great deal of pleasure. It used to hit me every

12:00 performance, every, that I did was when the curtain went up, we were dressed in white tie and tails, and silver top hats and canes and so forth, the girls weren't visible. And we were scattered up the rostrums, and to the beat of 'When the Saints Go Marching In', the top level'd come down to the middle level, and then they'd go down to the bottom level and then we all came in a line like a chorus line,

12:30 like a bunch of Rockettes I suppose, and marched right down to the footlights. And the crowd'd just go berserk, you could, it literally, a feeling hits you in the stomach of, dare I use the word, 'love', that came through, the feeling. 'Oh look at the colour, look at the scenery, look at the guys.' And then within a few seconds the girls came out in their glittery things and 'course the men in the audience loved it.

13:00 'Course whilst the costumes for the girls were decent, they didn't use many square yards of material.

Is that kind of reaction kind of addictive as a performer?

Well it's a nice feeling, yes. You know, that you've got the audience. It really hits you in the stomach when you came down to those foot lights, the crowd would be just roaring

13:30 at ya, and I mean roaring. The curtain's just going up, and I can't use the machine here but I've got a tape of our show and it's a pity Pat isn't here to let you hear it. But if you can imagine, the curtain goes up, there's been a bit of an overture and then all of a sudden this rich, melodious voice says, "Ladies and gentlemen, it's The Black & White Minstrel Show.'"

14:00 Drrp, drrp, we're bashing tambourines, drrp, '…Oh when the saints…' right, you can imagine, and the

crowd'd just go berserk, honestly, they'd just roar and it was great, you had a grin on your face and you kept it there. But it was very energetic work, we put a pedometer once on one of the girls, and this included running backstage to the dressing

14:30 rooms and so forth and up and down stairs. Just think to yourself while I'm talking, how far would a person do, walk and dance and run in a two and a half show and have a mental picture yourself of what it was, and try twelve kilometres, that's what they did. And we did two shows on Wednesday and Saturdays and occasionally a twilight show as well, occasionally three shows in the one day.

15:00 We were fit, my God we were fit. I remember after I joined the show I'd been accepted in to the company but I hadn't appeared on stage at that stage. And I dropped a carton on my foot, it wasn't a carton of beer I might add, and I broke a bone in my foot, but I didn't tell the company. And the hospital wanted to put a plaster of Paris thing

15:30 on it, I said, "No way, just strap it up." And I used to come off the stage crying, the tears'd be just pouring down my face, but I loved that show that much. And so I eventually got over the pain of it and it took a few weeks but, was not fun though, I can tell you dancing with a broken bone in your foot.

Oh it all sounds very exciting.

It was, it was, plus the travel.

16:00 You got to meet people in different countries and different circumstances, yeah it was great.

You were mentioning parties, there's some after show parties?

Some, sorry?

After show parties?

Yes, yeah we had some, pardon me, every, the first Saturday night we're in the town we'd do it ourselves, have our own party and after that we'd

16:30 be invited all over the place to parties. And there was some tremendous times we had. Yeah.

How wild were these parties?

Oh not wild, no, no, no, they were just great fun and oh, certainly we knocked back a few sherbets but it meant that we could get a little bit tiddly [drunk] if we wanted to because we had Sunday

17:00 off, right, the next day. But we organised our own fun as well, several of us went out shooting at one stage in New Zealand and quite a bunch of us went out deep sea fishing there in New Zealand. And we'd go down, we'd hire a coach or two and go down to Rotorua and go and see the Waitomo

17:30 glow worm caves, you know, just tour around. Went up to Queenstown, Coronet Peak, oh, we looked after ourselves.

Were there any romances with the dancing girls?

There were some, don't look at me specifically, there were some amongst it, yeah.

And you mentioned that a lot of the blokes were, you know, batting for the other side?

18:00 Yes, a lot of em were but they were damned good blokes and I found that once they knew that I was straight and that I wasn't rubbishing them, I had a tremendous time with them and they used to protect me too. That if we went to a gay party of any sort that they'd take me too, they'd just announced it straight out, 'Hey, this guy's with us, he's straight,

18:30 leave him alone,' and I was left alone in that respect. You know, and I met some wonderful, lovely people and I still got great friends amongst them.

What were those parties like?

Great. Except for one that, where there was a little bit of an altercation shall we say. This, the host, or hostess if you

19:00 prefer, came up, and there was two of them having a little bit of a cat fight between themselves, no punches. And he said, "For God sake, go over there Brian and bust up that pair of so and sos will ya?" So I went over and I'm standing there and there are two of the male models from Australian Women's Weekly Bonds adverts. And I'm saying, "Now look you pair of so and sos, knock it off or I'll thump ya?" And,

19:30 "Shut up I'm talking to him at the moment right", and "Shut up." Meanwhile my knees are going like this, I mean these blokes could've killed me. And I'm saying, "Now shut up, now you, you go to that corner, and you, you go to that corner, right, and stay there until I tell you you can come out. You can have your friends over." "Yes Brian, yes Brian." And it was weird. As I said, they could've killed me.

20:00 **Oh sorry, oh okay, she's just telling me the time. What was, well the entertainment scene**

would've been a bit more open about the gay people at that time wouldn't they?

Oh yeah, yes, it was more acceptable amongst it, yeah.

And it was quite tolerant I guess by...

Oh yes,

like people which weren't gay?

Yeah.

20:30 As long as you didn't rubbish them or so forth, no, we were very tolerant of each other. Some of us were known as being straight and we were allocated the dressing rooms as the straight room, and a few of the boys'd, this didn't happen in every theatre but in some theatres, according to the design of the theatre, and the gay boys'd be together and that was it.

21:00 But they'd invite us to their, any parties that they knew of and there was some brilliant times we had. Oh as I, can't emphasise enough, I've got some friends amongst The Ex Black & Whites fellas.

And what, was there any, ever any tension or problems from people outside of the entertainment industry about guys being gay or was it...?

No, no, because half the time they didn't

21:30 know. And besides that, the gays used to act fairly butch.

Was anyone into any drugs which were coming out in the late '60's?

Absolutely not. No. I can say that with absolute certainty. You couldn't afford to because we had to be so damned fit, that you couldn't afford to be, you know, sick, hung over or whatever with the drugs.

22:00 But I can say with certainty I never saw a thing and there was never a hint of it even.

Not quite like the rock'n'roll scene going on at the same time?

Ah, no, no.

Now it sounds like it was a good thing, was there ever any people which would take issue with The Black & White Minstrels, as far as that racism issue came up, even if you disagree that it wasn't ever in your view that way, but was

22:30 **there ever any problem from...?**

No. But in England they got it and I think it was Diana Ross from The Supremes who objected at a Royal Command Performance and so they went white-faced because of her stature as an entertainer.

23:00 And it was sad because they, it closed down because of, Victoria Palace, because of the racial implications and then later on they did a television series white faced and it died a thousand deaths, because at, you know, there was no magic there of, 'I wonder what he looks like without the make up.' There

23:30 was just no magic, here he was without the make-up. Like the main lead singers, John Boulter, a chap who now runs a, has his own bed and breakfast in the Bay of Islands in New Zealand, he's retired there. John went white face with this series and the whole series didn't do any good. And John went then

24:00 trading on his name on a concert tour and it, whilst it did all right, it didn't do any real good. Which was a pity, a definite pity.

What do you think people like Diana Ross [American singer] had a problem with?

I don't know, I don't know what her problem was, I wasn't there at the time, so I just don't know what occurred or what was said or what,

24:30 but she shouldn't have had it.

Well I guess this brings to the end of your experiences with The Black & White Minstrels, and you mentioned theatre administration, there were some stories you wanted to tell us.

Well after the show closed I, J.C. Williamson's asked me if I'd go back to New Zealand and look after the Theatre Royale in Christchurch, and I jumped at it because my wife was a Kiwi.

25:00 And the first show I walked into was 'Hair', I couldn't believe my eyes what it was, and it was a little bit out of my era to say the least. And I had to employ an army of cleaners afterward every show because of all the confetti and junk and rubbish that was all over the place. But our son

25:30 was only a toddling baby at that time, probably about fourteen, fifteen months old round that time, and one particular cast member used to come upstairs and ask us, "Please can I play with your son?" We'd say, "Yeah," and she'd play with him for hours and hours and hours, she just loved him so much, and

that was Marcia Hines. She was only a young woman at the time and,

26:00 but Deni was, she'd had to leave her back in Australia to be looked after by Marcia's mother. But she missed Deni that much, her own child, that she used to just come up, and the maternal instinct was coming through and she'd be playing for hours and hours with our son. I remember I was lured away from there to go to

26:30 Wellington to be the publicity manager and tour manager for what, the then New Zealand Ballet & Opera Company, it's now the Royal & New Zealand Ballet. And after about twelve months I discovered that the manager was tickling the till and I got out fast before I got tainted in any way, shape or form. And

27:00 I was offered then a position at Founders Theatre in Hamilton, which is a municipal theatre and I was the first manager appointed and I took it over. And there, the highest number of performances they'd ever had in any one year prior to my going there was ninety-seven, and the year I finished, four years after I started, to come back to Australia,

27:30 I had two hundred and thirty-seven performances booked, with two hundred and eighty-seven already booked for the following year. And for the first time ever the theatre ran in the black, it wasn't in the red. I think I only made a thousand dollars profit or something that year that I ran in the black but it's just about completely unknown for a municipal theatre to be in the black.

28:00 It was at Founders actually that I had one funny experience with Dame Joan Sutherland. And she and Richard Bonynge, her husband, were doing a recital, and course being an Australian myself I wanted to make certain that everything went off fine before this Kiwi audience. And in the afternoon she came and had a bit of a rehearsal with Richard,

28:30 and immediately she'd gone I had the piano tuner standing by and he re-tuned the piano and checked it to concert pitch. And I made him come and check it immediately before the performance so everything was fine. So then the performance started and after about ten minutes of the performance of doing the recital, squeak, squeak... squeak,

29:00 squeak... I nearly died. I flew around the wings and said, "Well look I'll get," she came off for a drink, a sip of water and Richard came off with her. And I said, "Look I'll go out and spray wherever the offending part is that's squeaking, I'll spray it with oil." And Dame Joan said, "Oh it's not worrying me Brian," she said, "is it worrying you Richard?"

29:30 He said, "No couldn't care less, oh leave it go 'til intermission." "Okay, fine." Squeak, squeak... So that's alright, Brian wasn't stupid, the intermission came, I waited about five minutes until all those who were going out to the foyer had gone out before I walked onto the stage. I had a dinner suit on and I walked on to the stage and I very quietly bent down and started spraying.

30:00 Well you should have heard the cheer that went up, it was the most ironic thing cheer I've ever heard in my life, from the audience. No more squeaking. Next morning, the crit [critic] in the paper and he was a notoriously sarcastic man, he even mentioned a bit about the squeaking. What it was, I called the piano tuner in again and said, 'What in the name of heck went wrong?'

30:30 And you know on the grand piano there's three brass rods that go up from the pedals up to the underneath part of the piano, and there's a wooden bridge half way up that they go through the holes. And the middle one, every time Richard hit the pedal, it was squeaking, because the felt that was around the inside of the hole had dropped out, that's all it was, brass squeaking on

31:00 wood, every time he hit the middle pedal. Oh, I could've, was so cranky about it. I remember Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, who I absolutely adore, she's a wonderful woman, I did the same for Dame Joan Sutherland I might add. But number one dressing room, I got a local emporium to, a little

31:30 crystal chandelier and Persian carpets and love seats, the whole lot, I really got em to furnish it so well. And Kiri came in ready to do a performance and she had her hair up in curlers with a scarf over the top and she flings open the door of the dressing room, "God, Christ Brian, are you expecting bloody royalty?" So I had a grin at that. I don't

32:00 know if you'd remember the television character that was on called Basil Brush, he was a glove puppet, do you, you remember him? And I, my son was about six or so at this time, I can't recall exact age. And after he did his show, this Basil Brush, I'd arranged with the puppeteer and I knocked on the door and he said, "Oh, come in, come in."

32:30 And he's got his arm like this and Basil's up here and he talked for about five minutes with Basil. It was just, my son's eyes are out shining, you know, and oh it was lovely to see this.

Did you miss being on stage yourself in…?

Oh yes, very much. Because if it was a terrible show I wanted to get up there and show em how, and if I was a damned good show I wanted to get up there and join em, and that's, I definitely felt that.

33:00 I had all sorts of things, problems, I had a death in the theatre, during performance. Fires, bomb scares, no I had problems at times I can assure you. But I had my staff so well trained, I'd be talking to them

like I'm talking to you now, and all of a sudden while I'm discussing things with em I'd say, "There's a fire. It's a wooden

33:30 building that's going up, where's the closest fire extinguisher?" And that got them over the initial fear and made them think, 'What type of extinguisher do I use?" So it's great fun though. And then I was, came back to Australia then. So.

Came up to now.

Yeah.

Well I'll just ask you one or two questions about the nightclub era quickly...

About the...?

Nightclub era

34:00 **before The Black & White Minstrels before, way back when you were first performing?**

You mean the, not night clubs, no the clubs as in Saint George Leagues Club and...

No, I meant the night clubs, like Checkers and all those.

Oh yes, but I didn't work in them much.

Oh okay.

No, no, no, no, no. No, they had headline artists working at Checkers and so forth. No I, we were a bit confusing.

Oh okay, sorry about that.

That's alright.

So you meant the clubs like Saint George and...?

34:30 That's where I worked, six out of seven on the weekend type of thing, when I mentioned, yeah.

Were those, was that Leagues Club kind of building up, was that a God send for a lot of performers?

Oh God yes, yeah. It's not a big thing now because of videos and so forth, people can go and rent a video for two bucks. But in those days people went out to

35:00 the big leagues clubs and whatever type of clubs they were, their local clubs, to get entertainment. And, pardon me, it employed a lot of people of different capabilities and talents. You know, you had sight acts that were tumblers or trick cyclists, or virtuosos on the piano, and

35:30 you had strippers, you had exotic dancers, you had vocalists, you had dancers. You know, you had escape artists getting out of, hanging upside down on a tripod from, what do you call those things, I can't think straight off hand...

Straight jackets.

Straight jackets. Had those type of artists, oh, there was all sorts

36:00 of people got all sorts, got work out of it.

Would you combine...

And musicians.

would you combine with these different performers?

Oh yes, yes, very much because that was up to the booking agent for that particular club. He might be told that, 'Oh, I want four artists every Saturday night,' and he'd have to think, 'Oh,' go through his books and say, 'Oh, I'll use a male vocalist, a magician, a girl dancer or whatever and

36:30 somebody else,' and that's how he'd send em out on a Saturday night or Sunday, whatever it was, he'd send another lot out. Some clubs only employed one entertainer, some employed you know, quite a lot.

Okay, look we're coming close to the end of the tape.

What a shame, I'm enjoying this.

Yeah it's good, it's interesting. Well tell us, do you have any

37:00 **regrets or anything in your life?**

Ah, yes, but I'm not going to tell you what they are.

Didn't mean to ask it so directly but, you know?

I’m not going to tell you what they are though.

What about looking back at like both your war time and entertainment kind of life, that we’ve talked about today, what do you think’s kind of the best of times for you?

37:30 Basically I’d have to say my whole life, there’s been ups and downs in it, but I enjoyed it when I was a boy soprano, shall we say, and met people that I wouldn’t have met otherwise. I enjoyed it when I got onto the club scene and enjoyed the minstrels. I enjoyed

38:00 choir work, yeah so basically my whole life, I got no major regrets as such and what I have got I’m not gonna tell you.

That’s fair enough, I won’t be telling you mine either. Well look I’ve just got the final poke, so that means we’ll just about wrap up, so do you have any final thoughts you’d like to put on the record or anything else you want to add?

Well only to thank you very, very much for the

38:30 opportunity. I must admit when I saw the little piece in the paper, I thought, ‘Well I’m not a war veteran but I’ve got some memories and maybe they’re interested.’ I think it’s been enjoyable all day long here, I’ve really enjoyed it. It’s part of our social history, and a big part of it, and we’re all, oldies are getting older,

39:00 so we need to tell these little stories, so I thank you all for the opportunity.

No we thank you, it was great, really interesting and it’s definitely another perspective on the war time experience and also the entertainment was great to talk about so that was really good.

That’s good.