

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Walter Holding (Wal) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1317>

### Tape 1

00:35 **Well, you grew up in Katanning. What was it like growing up there?**

I was born in Bassendean [Perth] and went to Katanning when I was four years old and my father was a commercial traveller for Mullick Brothers and then the Shell Depot opened up a depot there and he took over as superintendent and stopped there until December '33 and Dad always had a wish to go on a farm and he bought a property at Pingelly,

01:00 or leased a property and I left school and went there with the intention of going to Narrogin ag [agricultural] school as soon as we got settled in but things didn't work out on the farm and gradually went back, so we stopped and worked on the farm. Stopped there until June 1937 and then went back to Perth to the home I was born in and I worked at a factory for about 18 months

01:30 and then started on the railways in March '39 and I stopped there. In June, 8 June 1940 we went in to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. He had been in the Militia for many years, 10th Light Horse and they grabbed him with open arms but me being in the railway I was manpowered and knocked back so I battled all around the place everytime the recruiting crowd came around

02:00 and anyone at all and I tried until November 1940 my boss in Mullewa had been, I found out after had been Sergeant Major of the 11th, original 11th Battalion. He told me to give him me papers and in about 10 days I got called up into Claremont Camp and that was the start of my army career. Prior to, while I was manpowered

02:30 I had been called up as every young persons of that age had been and done three months militia camp. Which, later on I was very thankful for the fact that I had done those three months in the militia because we had quite a lot of chaps join up around me up until the beginning of December 1940 and on 15 January went away with the 2/4th which meant that they had virtually no experience at all. Not done even elementary training and we left

03:00 Fremantle on 15 January 1941 and arrived in Singapore on 24 January and 15 February we were prisoners of war. Even though, we had one week of action which was pretty hectic. I was one of the section of eight, we lost 6 killed in action that week. My mate got two and he got through but he had a couple of bullet

03:30 scratches on him and so forth. When we were marched out to Selarang Barracks as prisoners of war he was, I was the only one of the eight still there. Some months later Arthur McGill, my mate, he turned up. He'd made it across to Sumatra trying to head home but that's as far as he got. He got picked up. Strange thing while we were in northern camp we did tests on the range with a Bren gun.

04:00 Well, I had been on the farm and in the bush most of my life, I loved shooting and I topped the range for the whole company on the Bren gun so when they took our corporal out of the section and made him platoon sergeant it was a toss up between Arthur McGill and I are the only two who had done militia training and because I had topped the school with the Bren gun I got the Bren gun and he got the stripes which meant the next 3½ years he got 7 bob a day and I got 5.

04:30 But that was it as far as, we lobbed in the prisoner of war camp.

**How long were you in Selarang Barracks for?**

That was virtually home. That's all along the Changi Peninsula on the north east corner of Singapore Island. We were shifted around different camps. We went out on, the first work party camp we were sent to, they sent the 2/4th to about 4 mile round from Johor Bahru, over the causeway because

05:00 they blamed the 2/4th for their casualties. The boys had sat behind their Vickers guns for about 10 days watching these blokes through glasses unloading barges into the water ready for the attack. They knew it was coming and of course, once word came through that they were on the water they used their Vickers and made merry hell of them so they blamed us for their casualties and made us go over there and build a shrine just around from Johor Bahru to

- 05:30 their casualties. It's a strange thing up there. You put a garden, we had to build rock walls out onto the edge of the water and then cover them with lawn and they'd put their monument, a tall upright post getting thinner towards the top with all their writing on it and you could dig up pieces of lawn, dig up trees replant them and they don't lose a leaf. So it finished up we had,
- 06:00 I don't know the full number, about 250 for a start then they took them back, most of them back to Singapore and 55 of us stopped there to finish the job. It was a wonderful work party because we were under front line Japs, not very interested in us and so forth but of a night time they used to go on leave to Johor Bahru the city and we had a lieutenant who had come from Marish,
- 06:30 Blue Wilson and he was a wonderful pianist and strange, they'd get home at midnight half-stoned and they'd want him to get out of bed and play the piano and about 30-40 blokes trying to sleep in one double storey room, a bit of a job with a piano going. But it was, a lot of strange things turned up there. They were issued with bags of rice more than we could use and we finished up swapping rice with the knowledge of the Japs for pigs,
- 07:00 we were eating, the officers were eating roast pork upstairs and we were having a lot of pork in our rice. We were living quite well. There was a pineapple factory up the road which burnt, a timber building which burnt down so we got the Nips [Japanese soldiers] to take up out there by truck and just going through and pick up any can at all. You didn't know, the labels were burnt off, you didn't know if you were getting pieces or juice or what it was but we kept gathering these up as long as the ends were blown. We lived quite well.
- 07:30 There was some funny stories come up out of it. We had Lieutenant George Branson who later on was a Senator for Western Australia, he was the Junior Officer he had to carry. The officer in charge at the time was Major Coff who was later on in charge of State Housing here in Western Australia and the officers, junior officer had to go downstairs, pick up their rations in
- 08:00 big dishes and take them around. And this day George Branson is carrying this big dish of pork holding against himself and shoving pork into his mouth as quickly as he could and of course, we were watching him through the window but it turned out Major Coff was watching him too over the balcony and he called out 'We'll have the pork upstairs Mr Branson' and he was the rest of his life he was known as 'Porcky'. Even, he wasn't very fat, but he was over in Canberra and later on over there he had some job in Canberra for quite a few years, he's passed on since. Quite a nice bloke
- 08:30 but he got more than his rations of pork. No, then, another point out there; they were all two storey homes along the waterfronts facing on the Johor Straits, and our rations used to come out in boxes from Selarang, and the boys got to and went right around these homes and took most of the books out the libraries and packed them into the boxes and took them by truck back to there and Changi ended up with a wonderful library. And even some of those
- 09:00 were still there, quite good. Then we finished and we back into Selarang and after a period of time we went out in work parties here and there and all over the place. I did several parties, then in September 42` they had what they call the Selarang barracks incident; where I don't know I have the written numbers in there. I can't be sure but, about seven or eight thousand prisoners of war were locked into the Selarang barracks, which were
- 09:30 seven three-storey buildings around the hollow square, which was their parade ground and, they made out we had to sign a form that we were not to attempt to escape. Of course we refused, so it went on for quite a while. So they locked us into the Selarang barracks and put machine guns on the corners, and of course it led to a problem because Selarang barracks had been the Home Quarters for the Cameron Highlanders. One battalion and
- 10:00 they locked all these thousand of prisoners into there, and it was quite a show for some time. First thing were the boreholes, the latrines were not sufficient. So we carried our equipment in there and worked 24 hours a day, just people going all the time drilling bore holes through the middle of the parade ground for toilet purposes. The water pipes coming in weren't enough to feed them, it was quite a show there for a few days, I've got several photos of it here, of the thousands of blokes camped all over the place on the barracks
- 10:30 But then they took Blackjack who was, Lieutenant Colonel Calligan CO [Commanding Officer] of the 2/30th Battalion. Took him out to Selarang, to Changi Beach and two young chaps, Australians had attempted to escape, and they made him stand, and watch the people from the Indian National Army shoot these blokes. So he came back and told us to sign these forms under duress. Well it's
- 11:00 a funny, funny old set up. I went in, I signed my name. I find out afterwards different blokes, signed all sorts of things. We had Ned Kelly; we had bloody, Adolf Hitler. All these blokes all signed these forms, so it was quiet a mix up. But the Indian National Army they were a problem to us right through the piece. They were members of the Indian Army, Indian British Army taken there, and they of course really believed that Japan was going to
- 11:30 win the war, so they swapped over and they were called in the National Army. They were kept in their own barracks, a lot better fed than we were, issued with uniforms and so forth, and later on in the piece of course we had a lot of trouble trying to dodge them. You could go out through the wire easy enough, but you had to dodge the bloody Indians. We had a few funny events, one of our blokes I was talking to.

**We'll get into like all those little details, in much more expansive**

12:00 **form later on. I was just thinking, well you know, you've quickly gone through your life, I thought maybe you could just do a bit more of a summary as to what happened after Selarang Barracks and the railway, and then we'll go right back to the beginning again, how's that. ?**

Ah yeah. I went on several work parties, On Adam Park, Happy Valley Camp and so forth, it went through until, because the force was leaving Singapore

12:30 Island alphabetically, "A" Force went to Burma to build dromes [aerodromes] and then finished on the bottom of the drome. "B" Force went to Borneo that was 1500 Australians; "C" Force was Senior Officers and a lot of other Australians that they took to Japan. "Don" Force went to Thailand, got off the train at Ban Pong, they started the line from that end, "E" Force went to Borneo, it was 500 Australians and 500 British. And "F" Force

13:00 I was on "F" Force. We went up there, "F" Force was 7000 troops there was 3662 Australians, 3382 Poms. We went up there, we were only up there 8 months, but in that 8 months, we lost 3018 of our 7000.

**That's a lot of blokes.**

A lot of blokes yeah. 44% of the force died, but the British casualties were a lot, far higher

13:30 than the Australians because of the fact we had wonderful doctors, and the fact that they kept at us all the time over hygiene and looking after yourself, looking after your camp that bought the whole lot of us home. But then it was 8 months we had up there and, I was a bit of a job when I came back. Do you want the story in there or what?

**Why don't we just start right at the beginning when you**

14:00 **were growing up in Katanning, and we'll slowly go through that entire process. ?**

Okay.

**So what was it like to actually grow up in Katanning, was this through the Depression. ?**

Oh, good.

**What was good about it?**

As I said, my father had been in trouble with the Mullick brothers, and then he got another job there and then he had the Shell depot, and I think his wages were about double what normal wages around that time were, and I was pretty well

14:30 off, as far as people were having to go barefooted. I didn't I always got well looked after and so forth. I always got into trouble for being in fights, I had a white shirt on and a nose that someone looked at, it bled. Mix ups and that sort of thing, but no it was quite good. But then.

**Did you play a bit of sport?**

Um, yes.

**What sort of sport. ?**

Both cricket and football, oh tennis. I was quite young and a family friend gave me a tennis racquet,

15:00 which was quiet a big heavy racquet, and I was only a little bloke. So I used to use two hands quite a lot, and later on they realised I was quite capable of playing tennis. I got a racquet to my size, and without even thinking, I served right, I'm left handed in all sport, cricket, football and everything else. But I served the tennis with the right hand. But I just swapped hands without any effort, used the forehand on both sides, and it worked out very well I played

15:30 I suppose better than the average tennis, you know, in the bush. Even later when we were in Perth, the brother played for a warehouse competition and even though I wasn't in the same company, I used to go and play for them because of my ability. But no it was quiet a good life at Katanning

**What was school like?**

Good. I always got, I did fairly well at school.

**What sort of subjects?**

But the last year I had a teacher, Mr Thorpe. An English teacher

16:00 And I always said, I think I learnt more in the last year of schooling with him, and I finished my education. As a prisoner of war. Yeah, you did learn a lot of things but no, I enjoyed school right through. At one stage of the game I planted a tree, so later on after the war when I was back in the railways, I went to have a look. But no the tree has gone, it didn't last out. It didn't last as long as I have at any rate.

16:30 **So who else was in your family, siblings?**

No I was, fourth child. There was my eldest sister, two years to my brother Fred, four years to my sister Betty, two years to me and then seven years later, a younger sister.

**That's quite a big family.**

Ah yes, five of us. And my eldest sister, she was evidently extremely intelligent as far as school work went. She left school, left Katanning, had to travel,

17:00 the only high school around the place then, was either Northam or Albany. She went to Albany high school then, got her leaving, did two years teachers training college at Claremont, went teaching at. Did two years teaching and got married when she was 20, so she was only about 14 when she did her leaving. She had twice jumped classes through school, Fred, as I said, he worked in Perth. Left school went to Perth, then he came with us on the farm

17:30 but he was always interested in the Militia. He was in the Tenth Light Horse and finished up Quartermaster Sergeant of the troop in Pingelly. When we went back to Perth, he went straight back to militia. Sister Betty left Pingelly to go train, nurses training, and she did her training at Royal Perth, she finished up joining the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] two days ahead of me, but being a nurse, course she automatically became a lieutenant.

18:00 She finished up going to Rottnest, which strange at that time was classed as overseas service.

**Really?**

Yes Rottnest was right through from the time Japan came into the war, I don't when, late in '43 they cut it out. But being classed as overseas service you automatically got a Gold Card [veteran pension card], which is a strange set up. Later she married a dentist who was in the services, and they had a practice in Kalgoorlie, she stopped there, she has passed on since, I'm the

18:30 only, one of the first four still going.

**Did she end up anywhere apart from Rottnest?**

No, she was on Rottnest and Perth, no, Hollywood as it turned out, no she never went overseas. The brother as I say, he joined up in June 40, he was a sergeant in the 2nd 28th. He went overseas, went through Tobruk and

19:00 all sorts of shows there. He was in the show at El Alamein and he was taken prisoner at Ruin Ridge and he got a DCM [Distinguish Conduct Medal] there. While he was in Tobruk, just before they released Tobruk, he was taken out on one of the destroyers to go to an officer's cadet training unit at Alexandria. And he was a bit,

19:30 a bit gingery haired and always ready to be in an argument, and he got to Alexandria school there and they were using canes and wearing white gloves and it didn't go over very well. So he told them there was a war on he'd go back to his unit. So he was not get a commission, out of it, he went back and went right through, but then he was taken prisoner and he worked, when they were released, he worked diligently on the prisoner recovery team

20:00 right through that, he came back home, and he was about. He was still in the army when I came home, stationed in Western Command and then he got out of the army for about six months. And you couldn't send him back to civilian life, so he went back to the army and he had a militia number, he had a WX number when he joined the AIF when he joined again they gave him another

20:30 WX five thousand-odd number, then after a short time they made him permanent army so then his fourth military service number. After a short time he got a commission he had to do all sorts of schools, he went to schools here there and everywhere else, and he had two terms in Papua New Guinea as an instructor for the Papuan New Guinea Volunteer Rifles. While he was there he met his wife, "intended wife"

21:00 she was a relief matron, she had been in the army she was in the army when Darwin was bombed. She helped us out at the school down below Darwin, then she did several hospitals in the Islands and, strange, she was relief matron around all the hospitals there. Lao, Rabaul, I can't think, about four different hospitals. And Fred organised his trips as instructor for the groups, that they

21:30 travelled around these groups together. Then they finished up married, came home and got married and he bought a nice home in Millpoint Road, South Perth. Which at that time they bought fairly cheap, which later was worth a lot of money, and, no they both got along very well because they were both older and never had any family, they were a great couple. I used to like going down to Perth from Narrogin and I always used to go and sit in his lounge

22:00 and look through a great big open window up at Kings Park across the river, it was a set joke I'd sit there and he'd bring me a can of beer. It was something I always looked forward to seeing.

**I think everybody looks forward to seeing that. So did you have any other relatives that were a**

**part of the war, particularly World War 1 I'm wondering about?**

No, Wyn's my wife, I met her while I did a militia camp

22:30 Met Wyn, her and her younger sister I met them at a dance in a scout hall in Bassendean, I took her home that night. The next day, strange, the next morning my Mother and I went to church, the Anglican Church in Bassendean, and Wyn was in the choir, and we carried on from there, kept going, corresponded. Her father was seventeen years, he joined up when he was seventeen,

23:00 he was in France when he was seventeen, and then in the Second World War he joined up again. He was in the 2nd Travelling Field Ambulance. He was taken prisoner on Crete so the whole lot of us ended up in prisoner of war camps. We had many a discussion on those. The brother never talked much about it but Fred and I used to often sit down and reminisce. But no, I had two cousins, the only other relations I had here were two cousins who

23:30 one was in the navy right through the piece. I've contacted him later over his pensions and so forth and the other one Les, Les Holding he was in what they called PGNAU - Papua New Guinea Administration Unit. They were sent up into the islands of Papua New Guinea to go inland and more or less create good will, issue gear and so forth. He went right through the war in that job.

**Just going back to**

24:00 **Katanning, what sort of subjects did you enjoy at school?**

I was always good on arithmetic and history was a bit of a favourite of mine. I always think Mr Thorpe always said 'History is not the ruler of Kings'. That was one of his pet sayings and another thing he always said, how did he put it? 'Life is conscious contact with one's environment'.

24:30 He was a great bloke in getting people to mix in and create goodwill at which he did very, very well. I had various teachers each class I went to but he always sticks in my mind. He was a wonderful person in part knowledge.

**How big were the classes?**

At that time I think Katanning High School, Katanning Primary School had about 600 pupils. Some of the classes were split into double classes, no

25:00 I went through, the classes were 50 might be up towards 60 at times some of the classes. But,

**Cause Katanning's such a small town, I mean they must have been from all rural communities.**

Oh, yes. Katanning at that time was a fairly good size town. I mean it was far bigger than Wagin or Pingelly. It was virtually the centre of great southern at that time. One of the main things was of course it was a fairly big railway

25:30 town, a big railway population. While at school my father had no training but he loved working with animals, he did a lot of veterinary work and he'd often get calls here and there someone had a cow or a horse or something sick and I had any idea of something like that coming in I was on my bike down to the depot into the back seat of the car. It was a standard ruling. I could go as long as I kept my mouth shut.

26:00 Children were seen and not heard sort of thing. But it was good. I got a lot of information and so forth same as when at that time the planes used to fly around, local, like planes from Perth would come down and if they wanted fuel which they usually did stopping overnight they used to fly down low over the depot which they're not allowed to do now and drop a note with a stone in it what fuel or anything that they wanted and I knew if there was a plane about the place I was down there,

26:30 get out there. I got to know quite a lot of strange people there. Mr Baker, he was, I believe later on he was an instructor at the Tech [Technical] College. He was known as 'Cannonball Baker', flew planes, flew out onto the salt lakes outside Kalgoorlie where others couldn't land and bring back blokes that were lost. He was a real, quite a doer. He flew a monoplane down the main street of

27:00 Katanning nearly on top of the telephone wires. I mean you would be shot for doing it now. He was quite a character. I got to know him several times he came down and got in and out of planes with him. He told me different things about it. Another plane that flew in there was the Vickers Viastra. I don't know now but years ago just after the war there was still one in the hangar at Maylands.

27:30 It was funny looking darn thing. It had three engines, one in the centre and a wing either side. No, I had, I suppose I had a wonderful life as a kid.

**Did you have to help out on the farm?**

Oh yeah.

**What sort of chores did you have?**

Worked all the time. One stage of the game I worked for a neighbour, Mr Fred Archer. I was getting 15

bob a week.

28:00 15 bob a week. Get up at 4 o'clock in the morning, feed the horses, then groom them. Then go and have breakfast and then go out plowing. I think the horses knew more about the job than I did. It was a general job but as far as our own property we had 1,600 acres out there. It was good. I loved the farm. After the war if my wife would of come with me I would have gone back to the farm instead of the railways but she didn't like the farm life so I went back to the railways. But

28:30 I think the best money I made in my life was out of rabbits. It might sound funny. But at one stage I was working 200 traps. Had a horse and cart, spring cart. You load the rabbits on and I would go just after dinner and set traps. I used to at that time, I was sitting on the trail with a how on the back of the cart, which I had low down and just run down and set your traps along that. Well, it started off

29:00 my father had a big load of pigs and I was getting pig feed for him to feed his pigs. He used to put a whole heap of pigs into the 44 gallon drums, light a fire in them, when they were just about cooked, tip a couple of bags, tins of oats into it and that was the feed. It started off all right but then around 1937 when the Abyssinian show was on the price of rabbit skins went high, went mad. At one stage we had 91 pence

29:30 a pound for skins. Well what we call bucks, four males, skins would be 4 to a pound. Well, I mean the basic wage would be three or four pound I suppose. I was getting 91 pence a pound for skins and I was doing them up in great big bundles. I was, of course, started off as my pocket money, finished up keeping everyone on the bloody place going, the whole lot of it. I was feeding Dad's pigs. Even later after the

30:00 war, I went through my knowledge of the farm, when we went back to Pingelly, to Narrogin working, I got a batch of traps and just got rabbits just for amusement, or to eat so forth. Different people want rabbits and then a chap I knew said 'Do you know anything about baiting soaks for rabbits?' and I said 'Yeah, I did that when I was a kid on the farm'.

#### **What is it? 'Getting soaks'?**

30:30 Around Pingelly a lot of water holes are soaks. Might be the about the size of this room and what you do is put a rabbit proof fence round it and at one place take it out and make a big 'V' in towards the water and you make a funnel with rabbit netting about 6 inches at one end down to a small taper and rabbits would shoot straight through that. No chance of coming back. Just like a fly trap and

31:00 we, I had this going out there. I finished up going to the boss, he was a chap I had known very well from Pingelly and I asked him for a week off and he 'Why do you want it?' and I told him I was trapping rabbits. 'Have it off until Saturday' because so often we had a nasty job on the railway Saturday afternoon brooks would return that no one liked doing. Quite often blokes would walk off sick. I'll land this nothing sure of it. So I had, at that time we had an

31:30 Austin 10 which was a forerunner of the A40 Austins and of course, the first night you don't get the rabbits to go without water but then they start going in and we finished up the next night, I think 240 odd rabbits go in and I'd squat down behind them, pick them by the loin, break their necks, put a thumb around the back of the ears, press down, throw them over the fence. So this is all right. So we went out round the traps and then my wife used to come to me. She used to count them off in 30 rabbits to a bag

32:00 put them on the boot of the car and tail, shut down and we went into the hotel to have a couple of beers before we went out again and two chaps, one was the clerk of the office and the other was a policeman and just before he became a detective and they said 'Can we come and have a look?' That was all right, we'd take them out there so they watched me hop over the fence and picking these rabbits up, pick them up, break their necks and throwing them over, just as quick as I could.

32:30 Easy. So Harry, Jim McMahon got to it and he threw them over the fence and of course, the rabbit jumped up and took off again. His neck wasn't broken. Quite a lot of humour out of it.

#### **Why were the pelts of the rabbits so needed?**

I don't know what caused it. Of course, we used them for hats and so forth but I don't know what the main reason why. I wasn't particularly interested as long as I was getting the money. It was working out

33:00 we were getting nearly 2 bob a skin, for the best of the skins we were getting 2 bob each and I was getting hundreds of them. It was big money we were handling.

#### **Good business.**

Same as when I was netting the soaks later on at Narrogin, all we used to do with them was put a bit of wire between two trees, get it really tight and by hessian. It's like a chaff big but a big sleeve and put it through that and

33:30 I'd just rip the rabbit open and take the stomach out of them. I'd cut the, as I say, cross their legs with them and thrown them over this wire. I finished up we carried a big load lot one night in the car. Took the back seat out and packed the whole lot in the car and to the chap who had the ice works and there'd be fleas and Lord knows what in them so he finished up coming around, there were four of us trapping rabbits at that time, and he used to come around and pick them up. I made about three times as much

- catching rabbits as I did as my job as a
- 34:00 fireman with the railways.
- How old were you when you did this rabbit caper? This is after....**
- After the war.
- This is after the war is it?**
- Yeah, first, when we on the farm in Pingelly when, I was trapping with spring traps I was about 15-16. Later on, the time my boy, the third child Wally was a little tiny bloke, we finished
- 34:30 up Mum and I and three kids in the front seat of the car because the rest of the car was full of rabbits. So he was born in 1949, so it would have been early 50's we were getting rabbits then. I've always had a second job virtually. I did that and all sorts of stray jobs around the place. I did thirteen years part time in a hotel as a barman, the Cornwall Hotel at Narrogin. It's, it always came up just by accident. The chap, I was driving the job then,
- 35:00 the chap that was my fireman, he got a job, he'd been doing work in the bar but he got a job pencilling in a betting shop when they first licensed betting shop and there was a licenced betting shop over the road so he got that job. So they wanted someone to do work in the bar, well I've never been in the bar but I went in so that's why I learnt the bar trade which I refuse to do down here at the RSL [Returned and Services League]. I won't take that on at all.
- Kind of different from farming.**
- 35:30 **With the fact that you have so many kids in your family, how big was the farmhouse?**
- The farm?
- That you grew up on.**
- Oh, 1,600 acres.
- The actual farmhouse itself.**
- Yeah, a beautiful big old, stone house standing on high bank down over the Hotham River. The top branch of the Hotham River. The Hotham River comes back right through of course, finishes up flowing into the Murray. Up there it crosses the railway line at Carping
- 36:00 and we were about 5 mile up from that. Just as it goes through the Carping it branches one goes up past our farm out towards Yealering and the other one flows along the railway line and the railway line follows it up towards Kalbarri.
- Sounds like a pretty good spot. So as kids did you all sleep in the same room?**
- No, oh no. We were, we always had a good home at Katanning and when we were on the farm it was a big, great big old stone home. Beautiful home. It would still be there.
- 36:30 **Did you all sleep in the same room?**
- No.
- Where did you sleep?**
- My brother and I would sleep in there but most times we would sleep outside.
- Outside?**
- There were four bedrooms in the home. But no, it was quite well.
- Did you sleep on the verandah?**
- Yeah, a lot of the time. A lot of fun. We had a tennis court, luckily had a tennis court just off the garden, the verandah where we used to sleep and quite often I'd set traps around the tennis court
- 37:00 The rabbits were coming through the tennis court into the garden and as nice, dead to the world and all of sudden these rabbits would start squealing like hell in the trap so I used to have to get out of bed and take it out, set the trap and get back into bed again. I had a wonderful time as a youngster but as I said the farm cot Dad quite a lot of money, this venture at farming. We went back to Perth, he went back to travelling for the, back to working for Mullicks again which he. I think he had left them about four or five times but he always used to go back
- 37:30 The boss of Mullicks was always, old AH. AH Mullick. He always used to put Dad back on. Les Holding and the chap I said was in New Guinea he left school he went to Mullicks, he finished up cashier at Mullicks and went we left the farm I went to back and worked in their factory. He said to me do I want to work in the office or in the factory and having been on the farm I didn't fancy going in to office work again

38:00 **Just going back to the farm, how long were actually on the farm?**

3 ½ years.

**So this was in your childhood? This was in your childhood that you were on the farm?**

Yes.

**So at what point did you actually move from the farm?**

About June '37 we went back to Perth.

**Right, how old were you then?**

17, 18. 18.

**So what did you actually graduate from**

38:30 **in your school years?**

Oh, I couldn't tell you.

**Is it like a Leaving Certificate?**

No, no. I never got my Junior. I had, of course when we left and went on to the farm that was the intention that once we got settled in I would go to school again the Nourishing School of Agriculture which was part of Upper High School, high school now but things worked out that way that things weren't going so good that I just stopped working you see and stayed on the farm.

39:00 **So after you finished with school what was the job that you did?**

Going on the farm.

**After you finished school.**

No, I left school at the end of '33 about 2 days after school finished I had to go with the people we knew quite well who had a carrying business and load all our furniture and lead them the take the back way through to where the farm was.

39:30 At that time for a while we were on the farm with the eldest sister and her husband. We were there for a few months before we took over the farm we had leased.

**So what sort of things did you have to do on the farm?**

Oh, just general work. Drive a tractor and so forth. It was, general manure cleaning, handling sheep. We had quite a big herd of cows but I hated milking cows.

40:00 My sister and father used to do most of the milking. Occasionally, my sister was involved in rotary clubs and different things in town and if she was going to town I would have to help milking the cows. If I could get out of it I would. But she used to go in into town for the rotary on horseback, ride a horse into town. Ride into town and ride back. It's just something you don't hear people doing now. But she was always a goer. She worked as well as I did on the farm. She was always a worker.

40:30 Even trapping rabbits. She came home one day with, she'd set some traps around where what was called the 'Shiak Rock'. She was up there setting a rabbit trap and by accident she set the trap off and caught the palm of her hand here and she couldn't get it round to get the peg up to bring it home. She couldn't get round to put her foot onto the trap to release it so she pulled the peg out and came home with the rabbit trap on her hand. No, she as quite a character. I was very lucky as far as

41:00 family goes. My younger sister, I don't see much of her, she's the only one still alive but the rest of the family we were all, a wonderful group together.

**Did you work in a factory at all? Did you end up working in the factory at all?**

Yes, eight, about eighteen months in Mullick's factory at Bassendean , no, West Perth. I finished up, when I started there I had over six months working on a barbed wire machine and one other chap one older chap was

41:30 working them. It's a funny old business trying to make barbed wire. We had five machines there and you've got to keep the supply up and if a wire breaks stop it as quickly as you can otherwise you get a hell of a bloody tangle and join it up and at one stage we couldn't keep up with the orders I worked there all afternoon from about, 7 hours on my own. There were other blokes in the factory working but 7 hours operating these machines on my own under

42:00 light. It was a funny old business.



00:32 Do I go back to where we were at the factory. ?

**Yes, how long were you working in that factory for Wal?**

I was 6 months on the barbed wire machine, and then Mr Allsop was the factory foreman, they put me onto another job, which was very good. Over hauling milking machines, separating machines, setting up milking machines getting them all packed up, ready to go out to stores, and over hauling shearing hand pieces which was very, very interesting work at that time,

01:00 after I'd been at it for a few a months, I woke up to what was going on. They were paying me about 27/6 a week. I was riding about 8 mile each way on a pushbike to get there. I was over hauling hand pieces, and the big shearing teams up north would send in a box of, would be about 20 hand pieces. At that time, now they're self-balancing, but at that time they weren't you had to over haul, completely do any replacing of any worn parts.

01:30 do them up balance them and send them back. I worked out the fact the highest paid man in the shearing tank, was what they called the expert the bloke that looks after the admin. He'd be paying about 3 times what was the normal basic wage, and I was getting 27/6 pence a week, so I asked for an increase in pay. And Reg Mullick was one of the sons, I won't say too much about him, but he said they couldn't afford any money,

02:00 and the other one was, milking machines, when they milked they put through what was called a separator. Separate the cream from the milk, and they spin at very high speeds to cast the milk out, to cast the cream out, because of the weight and the milk drops through and this is all right. But the chap that had me doing the job a Mr Anderson, went back to work for the factory in England that turned out all these machines,

02:30 and of course he was an experienced hand, and they took him back there. So Mr Allsop and I spent hours if we had a spare minute, you'd get to spin a machine up and see if you were out of balance, just by a little touch of solder on the top or bottom underneath to get the true balance. When they spin they're soundless and you only need a little slightest bit out and they throw themselves out and cut bearings out. Any way this went on for, 12 months I was on it, in the mean time I had an Uncle who was an engine driver

03:00 and so I put in to join the railways, they called for, that was in August, August 40', no 39'.

**Where were you living Wal? When you were working in the...**

Back at Bassendean, where I was born, the house I was born in.

**Who else was at home then?**

Me, Mother, Father, my sister was nursing. Fred was still,

03:30 no he was home then, no he was away most of the time in the army, like he was up at Papua New Guinea or stationed here there, around the place, and the younger sister, we were home.

**What was your life like outside of work? What kind of things did you do?**

Not that much, by the time I got to work at 8 o'clock in the morning and rode the bike home after 5, I didn't go out that much. I played tennis, whenever I got an opportunity, occasionally you might go to the pictures.

04:00 At that time Swan Districts Football Club had just formed and I'd go down there when I could and see them training. Got to know quite a lot of them, so I've sort of always been a follower of Swans. So no there's not much life outside of going to work and things like a bit of sport when I could, fairly quite life.

**Who were your mates?**

Um.

**What mates did you knock about with?**

Not that much, some of the blokes at work, but I mean they lived in different areas so we didn't get

04:30 out much. I went with 2 of me mates, that was when around the house racing started, those races at Pingelly, and we went down there for that, it was quite a. We went out and stopped at my sister's farm, that's 10 mile out of town, no we kept going. No as I say, I put in for the railways, and later on came through. Got a call up to go for inspect and there was 80 odd people and they wanted 10

05:00 so I just made the grade. If you'd turned 19 before your call up you were written off. You had to be 17 ½ and 19. Finished up I got called up and started on the railways in March, March '39 yeah. Did 18 months in there. I was in Mullewa when the old diesel trailers took the football team and half Mullewa town

05:30 up to Mount Magnet to play a football match and I was home with the old lady in the boarding house Mrs Walsh and we were listening to the wireless when it came through that England was at war. So the town was practically empty at that time. But that was the start of it and then we just waited until I

caught up with my brother and decided to join the army.

**Before joining the army what kind of work did you do with the railway?**

I was what they called a cleaner, start

06:00 cleaning engines but mainly lighting them up and there was one of these ship keeping engines and so forth keeping engines under steam and so forth ready for the cruise. I was a call boy as well, had to go around Mullewa as well and call the cruise, whatever time they were coming on through the day, through the night. Daytime they weren't called but from 6 o'clock in the night to 8 o'clock in the morning they were called. Get up and ride your bike around time call the cruise and have their engine ready for them.

**How did you get the engine ready?**

06:30 Oh you have it under steam and all that sort of caper. Officially we were not to shift engines. Not allowed to unless you had a drivers ticket but it was a regular thing we did all the bloody thing. We had a lot of funny instances you know. We had an ash truck. A labourer would come in at 4 in the morning, at 3 or 4 in the morning to clean the ashes out of the pits and load them into trucks and get them out of the way to leave the three engine roads clear. You get a lot of humour.

07:00 Get to and we had a caper of shifting the ash truck from one line to the next. It was uphill we go up and set the points so that when you took the engine, give it a boost kick the truck up to the line, get out of the way and the truck would roll back down to its line. This was all right but I had a mix up one night, I didn't kick it hard enough so one set of wheels went each way coming down the line. Things like that, you get into trouble for it. The boss knew what we were doing it so he had to cover up otherwise he was in the same as we were.

07:30 Oh no, a lot of humour. It was quite a good job.

**What were your quarters like?**

We were living in a boarding house. I lived in two different boarding houses and then I stopped in a private home. My mate and I had a room in a private room. It was quite good. We couldn't complain about it. He was with me when we were called up to do militia training. We did three months in Melville Camp.

**Were you called up while you were in Mullewa?**

Yeah yeah.

08:00 Everyone in our age group were. I've got photos with the whole, everyone from Mullewa around that age group was all just called up together. We went with what was called B Company, the 2/11th Battalion which was the city of Perth Regiment but B Company comes from Geraldton Company so we joined them and came down to the camp at Melville and do our elementary training. Get into trouble around the place going on leave.

**How did you get to Perth? How did you get to Perth?**

By train.

08:30 All train trips. If you wanted to come home for a weekend you used to catch the diesel rail coach from Mullewa to Walker way which was 17 mile out of Geraldton and down at that time, was a private company, Midland Railway Company ran a mixed train, goods and coach on the back of it and come to Perth. We were due in Perth at 9.40 of the morning, usually got there about 11 o'clock. I'd come home, come down for the weekend and Wyn was working dressmaking in town and I'd

09:00 go and catch up with her and so forth.

**When did you meet Wyn?**

In Bassendean while I was in militia camp. A mate and I went to a scout's dinner dance at the Scouts Hall at Bassendean and I spotted her there and of course, she's got a French name and I said to one the boys 'What's that girl's name?' and he said Wynda Waubois and I said 'No, what's her name?' Wynda Waubois. Of course later on Mullewa the boys

09:30 got it and they put it on the side of the engine. We would get them all nice and clean so we would get a bit of chalk and write Wynda Waubois, the phonetic was a bit out of but people used to wonder what this was written on the side of the engine. But no, we met that night at the dance and as I said next morning Mum and I went to church at the Anglican Church in Bassendean and Wyn was in the choir so I caught up with her again. And of course, we just kept company right through the piece.

10:00 **What kind of things would you do together?**

Oh, we loved dancing. Always out, the main thing. Always go to a dance whenever we could.

**Where were the main popular dances held?**

All around the place. That was the main one at Bassendean. You could always find somewhere to dance

on around of it. At that time there was a hell of a lot of dancing all around the place. I learnt dancing when I was in Mullewa

10:30 actually I was supposed to have learnt. I was never much good at it. Started I was on the door at the dances because I couldn't dance and there was two elderly women, two engine driver's wives and they were both great big women 'You're not sitting on the door, you're up dancing' and it got to that stage that they would have me dancing and if I wasn't stepping right they would virtually hold me up while they went round. It taught me to dance of course. We both loved dancing, that's why it's hard now, neither of us can.

**What kind of steps**

11:00 **did you learn?**

Oh it was all, mostly old time but then jazz and that kind of stuff came into it.

**Do you remember the names of a few dances?**

Oh yes, Pride of Erin, all the old waltzes. That was one our specials the Pride of Erin. But no, there was a hell of a lot of old dances around then. Even at that time there was a bit of square dancing was still going. You don't see it now.

**Did they have regular**

11:30 **square dances in Mullewa?**

No, not much square dancing. Very seldom had a bit of it but not much. It was mostly old time then. We stick to that. Occasionally you would go somewhere, up to Tenindewa or somewhere like that a little country out of town places for dances.

**How would you visit those places?**

Oh, usually someone would have a car around the place. One of my mates was Bill Haley, his parents,

12:00 his mother had a newsagent shop and he was the barber but there was him, Reg Brand, that was Dave Brand's brother and John Banford, 'Banjo' as we called him. The four of us used to knock around together. We had a lot of capers together. We used to go out in Bill Haley's car, go up north towards where they're talking about mining now shooting wild scrub turkeys. You're not allowed to officially. They are protected but we would go out and you would find turkeys out clear in the paddock and if you go out in a car and drive round and round

12:30 in circles going closer and closer you can get quite up close and shoot them. So we'd get a, knock off [steal] a few turkeys for home. One of the first ports of call when we came back was the Police Station. Sergeant Ulan, he was a great friend of my uncle, Uncle Jim, JW Burgess. He was Second of the Fremantle Trades Hall and then he was Chairman of the Licencing Court, when he died he was Chairman of the Licencing Court but he and Sergeant Ulan were great mates. I found out later on that

13:00 Uncle Jim had told him to keep an eye on me up there. We would always go around and deliver him a turkey you know, just to square the books up. Oh no, it was a lot of fun and games. Football. I played both football and cricket up there but I was never, just one of the team sort of thing. Make up the 18.

**Those wild turkeys, good eating?**

Oh beautiful eating yeah. But they shoot you up there now if you shoot them because now the turkeys, they saw now the wild turkey will eat half his weight in grasshoppers in a day.

13:30 And they make a hell of a mess when they've been eating what they pass through but they go through grasshoppers like its nobody's business. Of course Mullewa was a bad place for them, they used to come down, they call them locusts or grasshoppers. At the boarding house at Mrs Walsh's we had a little patch of lawn we used to feed carefully, get water to it which you weren't supposed to. It was railway water and we cut this bit of lawn. So we go out there of a night time, hot night and sit on the lawn and the

14:00 grasshoppers would come through and next day there was no lawn. They'd completely eaten, they would eat the green paint of a fence, grasshoppers. I know it sounds hard but it's a fact. You could paint a fence green and when they came through there's no green paint left. Oh, they are shocking bloody things. Oh, we had quite a fair time of the railways.

**How often did you come down to Perth?**

Oh, every couple of months. Might be three months. It was quite a job

14:30 to get down there because as I said you had to come down through the Midland line and you go back on Sunday night out of Perth about half past seven at night and you would get to Mullewa 2 o'clock the next afternoon. It's a long, long trip.

**What kind of carriages were on the train?**

Oh, they were all the old train, they are still using them here at Pingara. The ordinary side door

carriages. But no, we would come down there but as I say it was a long, long

15:00 trip. It was only 331 mile but it took you a bloody long time to get there. Because at that time there was three trains each day, three trains a week running to Aluma. Well now there's not even a line up there. They used to go up there Monday, Wednesday and Fridays and back Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays. Of course then Aluma was quite a big place. All those mining towns have gone, went down and down and down until they done away with them. While I was in Mullewa I used to go up

15:30 to Mt Magnet, relieve the cleaner up there when he went on holidays. He was a young bloke up there, he was on the railways and had a full time job in Hill 60 gold mine. He had his own shifts to fit in with the job up there. He said to me straight away 'You going to do my job up the mine?' and I said 'No, no one job will do me for the whole time I'm here'. That was about a month. But most of the blokes up there, that's the same

16:00 as after the war back in Narrogin as I said I was working in the bar for 13 years. The killer point of that was I was paying tax. If I didn't pay tax some of the blokes I was working with knew it was getting a lot of money in and they were likely to dob me in so I beat them to it and paid tax. It's a strange business. We had five kids and people used to sling off 'You and Wyn always go off on holiday'. Every second year we used to go north for a holiday take the kids out of

16:30 school. It was only through having a second job that I could afford that. For quite a few years we went to Geraldton when the west end cottages were there. When they put the fish business, the fishing harbour in that went then we went to Kalbarri. Later on we got to out to Monkey Mia.

### **Denham.**

Yeah, Denham. Camped at Denham.

17:00 We went back later. We did a couple of trips up there. We went to Monkey Mia up about there with another two families when the only thing there was the old hip, little hip roof they had with two tanks underneath it. They used to put them all up the North West highway. When we got there the tanks, someone had shot holes in them. We had to go into town to the police station but there was nothing else there. Later on when we got there one holiday and they had put in a jetty and they were testing for

17:30 prawns. And the daughter that was here a while ago, Maxine she came back to camp and said 'I want a bucket' so we gave her a bucket and they had a big swag of prawns, they had been out testing. There was plenty of prawns there and of course, they had made no arrangements to take them out. So everyone was feeding on prawns. Buckets full of prawns. You go down and they would give you another bucket full. And now its quite a town on its own, Monkey Mia.

### **Have you been there recently?**

18:00 No. I haven't been built there since it's been built up. No.

### **They've got a big resort I think at the beach there now.**

Oh yes, I've seen photos of it and so forth. No, we went there. All those places up the coast, once they put bitumen road, good roads into them that's the end of them, you lose them. There was some lovely spots then.

### **It's a pity. Getting back to the Militia you were called up**

18:30 **for the militia. How were you called up?**

Oh, just came through the mail. They sent a notice out by the rolls. Parliamentary rolls. Once you were in that age group just call you up to report to bloody camp at such and such a time. We went to Melville camp out from Fremantle. It was quite good. You got into trouble out there. But at that time there was a vineyard down the road from the camp. Selbys. Selbys Vineyard

19:00 and it was sixpence, they would refill your bottle with wine. Take you bottle down and get a bottle of wine for sixpence. It caused some humour at times. We had one show, we were supposed to have some special show on at night time and quite a lot of the boys weren't capable of going out there so they called it off. No, it was quite good. I used to get home to Bassendean whenever I could and catch up with Wyn and so forth.

### **How long were you at Melville for?**

Three months. Well everyone did their three months

19:30 and I believe later on they kept on the call up to retrain but I did the one camp and that was it.

### **How many in the camp?**

Oh I don't know. I couldn't tell you now. Well, the 11th Battalion there would be close to 1000 men in that but there were other groups there too. Yeah. Everyone came through the whole thing.

### **Do you remember the day you arrived there?**

At camp? Yeah, it was a bit strange. You go out there and you've got to issue with

20:00 uniform and so forth. There was quite a mix up getting through. Funny later on, when I finally did get into the AIF I went to report at Claremont, gave me a time I had to be there so I got there and through that many blokes joining up I had a job issuing gear and they couldn't give me a hat and they couldn't give me boots. My head was too big and my feet were too small. I take 5s in shoes and took a 7¼ hat and they didn't have any so I'd kept my militia

20:30 gear and wore it and of course, it was pretty obvious all these blokes with brand new hats and so forth trying to get them to sit on straight. You've got an old you're a marker that sort of thing and I was very thankful I had done that, that three months. I mean it was awful hard for some of those young chaps that went away with us in the AIF who had no, hadn't done, six weeks was elementary training, how to march and do things like that without ever seeing a weapon

21:00 and those blokes went away with us up there it was a bad business.

**What sort of training did they put you through in the Militia?**

Just mainly drill work and all that sort of caper and then some rifle drill and handling a rifle and things like that.

**What kind of rifle?**

303. All 303s then.

**Were they ex-WW1 [World War 1] rifles?**

Yes. The same rifles being used right through the piece and they were still using them at the finish. We still had them at Singapore. Our troops had the ordinary, same old

21:30 rifle. But I didn't get a rifle up there because they gave me a Bren gun.

**Before we move on just while you were at Melville, can you just describe the camp there?**

Oh it was hard to recall it back there now. It was tents. All in tents.

**How many men per tent?**

Six men to a 6 x 10 tent. All in there and you get your leave and so forth. At night time you get your leave to go in as far as Fremantle. Your leave wasn't

22:00 enough to take you, you know it wasn't long enough to take you anywhere else. But no, they were quite good. The only thing was black sand and you continually walking and you continually you know, right up your legs and you take your trousers off and see how far the blacks got up your legs and so forth and head for a shower.

**Can you describe the surroundings of the camp?**

They had a fence around and a guard post on the front. You would take your turn of guard duty

22:30 Six men and a corporal on guard duty. Once you got into camp there had a fairly big parade ground, just a bare area for drill work. We spent most of our time drilling and then do a bit of work with the rifles. Not that long. The training you get to work as a team. If you haven't had it it's awful hard to get into a show like we had to be pushed into Singapore. You were all rely on those alongside

23:00 you. Mateship was the greatest thing in the army.

**What mates did you make in the Militia?**

Oh well, the whole lot of us that came down from Mullewa together. There was about 8 I think, I've got photos somewhere around the place. Of the blokes there, 8 of us and some coming and some going. We had several blokes come down there that had never been to Perth. The two Whitehurst brothers. Wally [Wallace] Whitehurst and that. They had never been to the city. I mean you get, we'd go with the mob out to

23:30 Melville camp and they were on leave and they didn't have the faintest idea where to go and we would take them to town and so forth. Oh no. It's surprising the number of country people at that time that had never been to Perth. People that live in the bush and wander around. The only time would have been through sports and times like that.

**Who put you through your paces at the camp?**

Mostly World War I blokes, old soldiers that had been through

24:00 it all before. They were taken back into the army to train recruits as they came along.

**Did they have any old war stories to tell you young blokes?**

Occasionally you would get some of them but not very often. Usually they would jump on you for trying, just trying to knock everyone into shape as a team that was their main job. I enjoyed that part of it. I couldn't think of stopping in the army like my brother did. He finished up in it for 37 years.

24:30 **Any of the young blokes find it, find the discipline a bit difficult?**

Oh yeah. Quite often people want to jack up but it wouldn't do any good. It didn't work with those old blokes. No they tell you to do something you bloody well did it. No good going crook about it.

**Any rivalry with the young blokes from other country towns?**

Oh not much no, occasionally you get into a fight over something or other. Someone had a couple of beers too many or something or other and have a bit of a fight but no.

25:00 **What did you do when you went on leave into town?**

Usually head for home if I could. Occasionally we would stop and go to some show into town, into Perth.

**What was to visit in Perth?**

Seldom went to the pictures, used to go to the pub and have a couple of beers and have a wander around the place. Because it was quite handy you could get into Fremantle a lot easier. We walked, I can't, I often look at the road now. The tram used to run out, somewhere out,

25:30 I can't think of the street, we go across the street there now. The trams run about 3 mile out of Fremantle and we would walk from there. At night time you had to be back in camp by midnight. You had a pass to 23:59, as they called it, a minute to midnight and that was the set thing. You'd get back to camp. Oh, it was quite an enjoyable three months.

**What pubs were popular?**

Funny thing. A chap I knew quite well his aunty ran the Cleo out

26:00 in Fremantle. I think it's closed down now, I wouldn't be sure. But it was a pub where the queers used to go a bit. It was quite comical. The strange thing about it later on when we shifted to garrison a chap came down who used to run the Cleo and he took over manage of the bowling club and he was still the same then.

**Which one was the Cleo?**

Oh I couldn't tell you what it is now?

**What street is it on?**

Oh no you've got me bushed. But you ask any old Fremantle people they'll soon tell you

26:30 where the Cleo was.

**Because I've heard, it was the Cleopatra yeah?**

Yeah.

**I've heard of it. I don't know which one she is.**

It was the Cleo yeah.

**Was there many young blokes around in those days?**

No, I never knew, but I didn't know much about it until I found out a mob of them used to gather there. That was their main meeting place. Strange the chap I was telling you about Barry Gardine who later on managed it and then came to Narrogin, he said, he and his wife said if they were going out anywhere they would always leave the kids with those blokes.

27:00 The kids, they would look after the kids do anything as far as the pub goes. Strange to watch, the troubles we're having now. They said most of them, as Barry said a lot of those chaps were in quite good positions in business and so forth but at night time they would come down there with a dress on and all that sort of caper. Takes all sorts to make a world.

**What was the view? What was your view of gay**

27:30 **blokes in those days? Did they..?**

They were a bit of a joke to me. It always seemed funny. They had their life to live I suppose. As long as they didn't worry me it didn't worry them.

**Ever any conflict? Ever any conflict around them?**

I don't think. No, I never had. I never tried to get mixed up them you know.

**Never got involved with them?**

No, it was out of my step.

28:00 Yeah. That's like in Mullewa. I've got a book of poems in here, just changing the story again, there was an old chap, what they called a remittance man. They don't exist now but people from England from

good homes and didn't want them there and they sent out here to England, to Australia and they worked out here and I got to know a few of them. They were paid a quarterly allowance. Got so much pay

28:30 and this old chap he worked on I can't think the name of the station, about 150 mile north of Mullewa, used to come in on the mail run but every 12-15 months he would take holidays and come down to the Club Hotel at Mullewa and put all his money, and give them his money. Take his board, take his beer, take everything out of it and so forth and when it run out he would go back to the station.

29:00 But he used to write poetry. He'd sit on the door of the pub. I caught up with him one day and so forth and he started sprouting poetry and I was always a bit interested so I sat there and listened to him and all the tales he was telling about different things and so forth so he had, he used to have, I found out later that a lot of these poems were written, published in papers over east and he had a little book made of it so he gave it to me and he signed it.

29:30 After the war I saw he got a little piece in the paper, he got a write up in the paper where he passed away so it's all here amongst all the bloody gear here. But no, the stray horse was characters like that. No.

**Sounds like a bit of an individual.**

Oh yeah. There were some great people you meet in life sort of thing. I've always sort of been pretty quiet going out anywhere and see someone stray I just check up what's going on. There are a lot of interesting people.

30:00 **What kind of gear were you kitted out with in the militia?**

Same full ordinary army gear. Virtually the same as you got in the AIF.

**You mentioned that you had to keep your militia gear. Was it essentially the same uniform?**

The hat and boots I kept right through. The other gear was handed in and that but yes, the gear was much the same. Of course, at

30:30 that time we used to have gaiters to wrap around your ankle. They did away with them. We went into the AIF you were issued with ordinary straight trousers. But they were issuing the gear, the issued we issued when we were in Singapore was too bloody hot up there. It was the wrong gear but that was the sort of stuff we had to put up with.

**What happened when you completed the militia training?**

Straight back to work on the railways. Yeah. Did three months there and of course, it caused a mix up there because there was

31:00 three of us from the railway all in the same job went on leave and normally there's about 7 or 8 cleaners and they cut the, sent people up to relieve them while we were away. Send up a relief. You see you do your time as a what they called cleaner which was looking after the engines, getting them all ready for work and then each quarter they have a review, how many cleaners had been out firing. I must have spent a month,

31:30 3/4 of the three months as a fireman. They count, allow so many men to be, what they call 'acting work' and then anything over that they appoint them over that a grade. Same as the firemen going up to a driver. You see, I see in the paper just recently here they have a lady driving suburban trains. When we were there you were at least 20 years until you got to be a driver now they're putting them on with a matter of few months training.

**I saw her only the other day. I was surprised, she looked**

32:00 **more like a young girl actually.**

Yeah well you see in the old days you did, you were always close between 15 and 20 years before you got to be a driver. But oh no, things are changing you can't do much about it but at that time they had a rule book and you had to know, study that rule book. You had quite, there was a two day exam as a cleaner and another two day when you came as a fireman training for a driver. I was always

32:30 been as I say I always liked reading and studying and things like that. I studied that rule book backwards and so forth. I got me into some trouble. It got me out of a lot of trouble. I was sent to Mullewa for 18 months for arguing a point with the boss. I told him he was wrong but wrote it out in paper, pretty hard and he said 'What are you going to do with this?' and like a silly clown I said 'Right oh I'll give you a clean sheet if you like'. And about three months later he said go to Lake Race for 18 months. I thought you silly bugger

33:00 Wally you should have, you should have said 'That's your problem not mine'. But oh no.

**So you were sent to Lake Race in the railway were you?**

Yeah. They, Narrogin had about 50 train crews at that time driver, fireman, cleaner plus guards when the busy season like present Lake Race is a mad house, that much wheat out there trying to get it out of

the place and they sent crews from Mullewa out there as relief. They paid you extra money

33:30 for it. But you worked a lot of time. It was good money. That's the main reason I went out there on relief jobs. It meant I had to get a second car. Mum had a car in town and I had a car running backwards and forwards.

**What kind of cars?**

At that time the car in town was a Cortina and I had a Toyota Corolla out at Mullewa and we had about 15 mile of dirt track in the middle of the short cut coming straight through coming from there, coming

34:00 in through from Harrowsmith way and that little Toyota was the best thing I'd ever seen on a dirt road. It would skate through there. People would go crook that I used to go too fast but it could handle it. The Cortina was a bugger of a car to handle. It was a good car on the bitumen but no good on the dirt.

**This is after the war?**

Mmm.

**You obviously came back to a career in the railways after your service.**

Yeah, as I said, Wyn didn't want to go back to the farm so it was right

34:30 oh, back to the railways. But they got me in the fact that I got home, got discharged on 29th November and they dated my discharge the 29th of November but they had to pay me up until the following May all the accumulated leave all the time we had been away. Instead of dating my discharge the date I got out the dated it the date I got out so that meant that I signed the railways when I got leave to go that I would resume work to keep my job within three months of the date of

35:00 discharge. So when the three months of 29th November I had to start back at the railways and I was still on army pay for another couple of months.

**Double income.**

Oh yeah. But I got married two days after discharge. I got married on 1 December 1945 and they said to me, 'Give me a job at Katanning and there's a house'. Well I knew the railway house in Narrogin just behind loco and you get all the noise and all the ashes and I said 'No, I won't have that' so I went to Narrogin

35:30 because my sister was farming 10 mile out of, she was farming out at Pingelly and wasn't far across so we went there. That's how my railway career carried on. Of course, my seniority carried on. When I came back I was over half way up the list of fireman and had to carry on from there.

**Getting back, just going back a few years. Once you'd left or completed the militia training and gone back up to Mullewa**

36:00 **how long were you there before you enlisted?**

Oh, I couldn't tell you now exactly when it was. I enlisted on 12th November 1940, my sister joined the AIF on the 8th of the same year. I would have been there about 12 months I suppose between the two. It might not have been 12 months between when I got out to when I finally got in. I had a hell of a time trying to get into

36:30 the AIF all around the place I tried with my brother in Perth, tried to get in together. He got in and I got knocked back. They used to send recruiting teams around the towns and I went there I went to the recruiting team in Geraldton. Nope, wouldn't have a bar of me. Once you mentioned the railways you're out. But as I said before Jim Baker was the shed foreman in Mullewa and he was a sergeant major in the original 11th Battalion and he knew I was still battling to get in

37:00 and I was talking about leaving the railways to join up and he said 'Fill in your papers and give them to me'. So I gave him to me and about 10 days later I got called up. He knew someone down there to send the papers to to get them through so. Of course, quite a lot of railway blokes got in. One of my mates I knew, used to do a bit of firing at Galgu, he used to come down from Mt Magnet, no

37:30 from the next one up.

**From Mt Magnet?**

Yes, it's quite a big depot but I can't think of it. Anyway he used to meet in the barracks there and I kept in touch in Mullewa he got in. I came back and started in the railways, one of the first driver I would out with was old Jerry O'Leary. His son Danny was a sergeant in the 2/4th. He went up the mountain and never came back because he said straight away

38:00 'Did you know anything about F Force?' and I said 'Yeah, I was on it'. He said his son went up there, Danny went up there and never came back. But no, quite a lot of blokes got in. One of the blokes went with us, he was in our Battalion, Les Giles, of course always known as 'Farmer Giles' and the Nips used to send out a bit of paper 'What's your profession? What's your trade?' and 90% of them would put labourers. Safest thing put yourself down as a labourer. But he put himself down as an engine



38:30 driver. He was actually he was a fireman and he finished up when they started the line he was stationed at Bangkok driving engines with two Thais firing the engine for him. He had a great job right through the piece. Firemans stayed up there. He wasn't a fireman but I mean, he got away with it. He knew the whole job backwards. He was driving across the line each way through to Bangkok. Didn't work up on the new line but.

39:00 **Sorry what years were those? What years was he doing that?**

He was there that was in 1943 when we started on the, putting that bloody Thai/Burma railway line in.

**So that's what he did as a POW [prisoner of war]?**

Yeah, he was an engine driver as a POW.

**Gee he was in luck.**

Oh yes, occasionally you have a win but if you put yourself in for some job they might find something nasty for you. Funny thing. He came back, I met him several times. I used to run to York and he was East Perth running to York and later on he was on the railcars,

39:30 suburban railcars. Driving the rail cars. The Veteran Affairs called him up for a medical check and the doctor said 'How did you come in here?' and he said 'I drove my car in.' He said 'What do you do? And he said 'I drive suburban rail cars.'" He was finished. He had a bad heart. He didn't know. He lived for another six months. His heart killed him. But oh no, he would driving the railcars and driving his own car and the doctor said you shouldn't be near a moving vehicle.

40:00 You never know.

**So did you celebrate when you had successfully enlisted?**

Oh yeah. Everyone knew I had been battling so long to get in. so.

**How did you celebrate? Did you go to the pub?**

Oh, not that much then no, because I was on my own. My brother was away, my sister was in camp.

**And where were you?**

40:30 At Bassendean. Still at Bassendean with my parents. We went back there even after we left the farm. Still went back to the old home, 84 West Road.

**And what did your mother think of you enlisting?**

Oh, she knew I had been trying to get in all along the line. She knew my brother and I were doing. I would come home from Mullewa on the weekend and it was, I got home for dinner Saturday and Fred said then he had been in the militia and he was counting on his unit being called up as a unit to go

41:00 and they decided they weren't going to do that so he had to turn around and join up. He said he was going in to enlist in the AIF so we went in together. Of course they grabbed him and I never looked like getting anywhere and then I got into Claremont Camp we were there for about a week and then we were sent up to Northam.

**What did you do during that week?**

Oh most of them were bloody elementary training. The blokes that had just joined up. Luckily I had that three months in. Most of them didn't have that.

41:30 Just elementary training. Getting issued with all your gear, getting all your paperwork sorted out and everything else and then up to Northam.

**You must have found that a bit of repetition?**

Oh yes it is but oh well, the army as far as repetition goes it's on its own. They'll tell you the same old thing time and time again.

**That's the end of the tape there. We'll change tapes.**

## Tape 3

00:31 **So tell me about the training that you received at Northam.**

Oh as I say I luckily had that three months militia training but the rest of them it was the same thing. You start off, I mean they've always had six weeks was elementary training. Marching and squad work. I mean a bit of rifle drill but very little of it there. Just towards the finish we started going on the range

01:00 shooting with a rifle and then shooting with a Bren and my time in the bush. When we were kids my

sister and I would go shooting rabbits with a .22. So you didn't damage the skin you would always shoot a rabbit through head. I mean, getting a rifle shooting at a target was child's play, it was a picnic. My sister I've seen her count the number of bullets she had and couldn't account for a rabbit shot through the head she would go crook and tell you what happened.

01:30 There was a mistake somewhere along the line. But we did this at elementary training. It was quite good life. Hard but it was good to me because I had been in the railways where you were working hard. You were shovelling coal, you shovelling ashes, doing physical work. It was hard for some of those young chaps coming out of offices and so forth. We had some of the kids. One young bloke that was with us was 16. He shouldn't have been there but I mean he'd got through somehow or other and

02:00 he was quite good. I enjoyed that part of it. We knew where we were there for a reason. We joined the army as a career. It was something we had to go overseas for and each paired along.

**What were the conditions like in the barracks?**

Oh, quite good of course they were all big, long huts at Northam. I don't know how many men. There would be about 40 or so men to a hut. Old Colonel Ankertil was in charge of the camp we were in.

02:30 Later on my wife got tied up with him, she was travelling backwards and forwards. She was one of the older ones and they used to use her up but he had a people doing CB - confined to barracks. He had them gardening and all that sort of caper. There was a beautiful vege [vegetable] garden. There was plenty of rabbits around there so the boys decided to catch some rabbits. Got about half dozen rabbits and chucked in his vege garden. That didn't go down very well. Didn't get any brownie points for that. They got 2 of his lettuce and everything else.

03:00 He was quite pleasant.

**What were you sleeping on?**

Camp stretchers. Palliasses. A lot of the time they would be palliasses. Filled with straw. Of a morning you had to clear your gear up, pack everything up, put your gear all neat and tidy. That's something we stuck to later on. But and then

**What was the food like there?**

03:30 Sufficient. You ate well. At times you'd get, you'd go crook about something. Just on principle. You don't have to, it was just part of the business you'd go crook. An orderly officer would come through and ask how the meal was and always someone would pipe and tell them there was something wrong but that was par for the course. Oh no, we were of course in the AIF and towards the end of it they sent some militia into the camp. Well that caused a bit of a barney [fight].

**Why?**

They didn't mix.

04:00 The two didn't mix. Volunteers to go overseas and others that got called up. We had a bit of a stink in the canteen, in the bar so they closed the bar on us so the boys got to and pinched a keg and took it down the bush and punched a hole in it and drank that and did away with it. All sorts of little capers came through. But oh no, it was quite good. Then we were out on the range one Saturday morning and one of our boys from Collie, he got special

04:30 leave for the weekend to go home and they sent word out to us to double back to the parade ground. So back as quick as, went tearing back to the parade ground and he said 'Look out they want members for the 2/4th.' The 2/4th had been called the caretakers of the Northam Camp and were trained at the same time as the 2/28th, stopped there for a long while and then went to Woodside, South Australia for 3 months then went overland to Darwin for 3 months and they wanted reinforcements for the 2/4th at Darwin.

05:00 No way, I'm not going to be in that. We got back in the parade ground and lined, counted off and wanted volunteers. Not a movement. So they just lined up and right oh, just count you off, they wanted 136. Just count you off, like it or not you're volunteered. You're in the 2/4th. By this time it was well after midday so they gave us leave pass for 36 hours from midday. We had to get showered and changed and get to it and they organised

05:30 a train, a troop train to take us down to Perth and I got off at Bassendean and walked down home and as it turned out Wyn was down there so we went marching up. They gave us our colour patches, our 2/4th colour patches to put in our pocket. So she sewed my colour patches and we had 36 hours leave and then back to Northam and then had to wait and see about. Just over a week or later they said, right oh, you're off.

**Where were you staying while you were waiting?**

06:00 In camp at Northam. We just carried on training, ordinary army work. They put us on a train and took us down at the early hours of the morning. Took us by bus to the train from Northam and down to there and straight to Fremantle and we found out then that the Aquitania was sitting out in Gades Rhodes and we didn't know but the 2/4th were on board. They had been called all of a sudden quick time to

06:30 get on a small boat to Marela across to New Guinea and to Port Moresby and get on the Aquitania and a lot of their gear was left behind. A lot of machine gun battalions lost a lot, half their machine guns and then they came right around Australia and they were outside Gades Rhodes and they told them there would be no leave so that didn't go down very well but they sent the water lighters out there. Water lighters go out

07:00 full of water and re-equip the Aquitania. Of course once they pump the water out of the lighters they started to come up and up and lift up out of the water and the boys decided that they were going to go on leave, no leave allowed so they got down ropes or anything else they could onto the water lighters and of course, that mean they got the water lighters they'd have to cut off and take them back to town because they emptied the lighters right out they would be top heavy with the troops on top so they went and came back and went on leave.

07:30 Unintentionally the police tried to stop, the military police tried to stop them at Fremantle. They just swarmed there and marched out of the camp and two of my mates, we both knew from Bassendean they were there and went down past Wyn's home and she saw the colour patches and they told her what they'd done and said I was going on it. They said, he was going on one side and we were going off the other. They said if you want to send it a letter write it, put it in the letter box and we'll pick it up going through tonight.

08:00 And that was the last letter I got from home. They got on and then of course, we left. It was a month after to the day after I joined the AIF.

**So tell me about the conditions on board the Aquitania.**

We were down on G deck right down below and there is a transmission hump from the engine right through to the propeller and it's about that high, a great big dome and to get over it you used to have to jump up

08:30 and slide over the other side and some of us either side of this bloody thing. It wasn't bad you know, hot down there. It didn't worry us that much but at night time it put on speed and this whole thing used to vibrate and you had a tin pack and plate and all your gear and you had to wrap everything up in towels because everything used to rattle the whole bloody thing. Through the daytime they used to do a zig zag course, changing course around you know, trying to beat submarines that was the main cause of that and

09:00 of course at night time they would set a straight course and go for their lives. We left on the 15th, we got up to Sunda Straits, oh I don't know how long it was, 24th we got to Singapore. We got to Sundra Straits in two days, 36 hours. It's a beautiful spot. That's where the [HMAS] Perth and [USS] Houston went down. Beautiful. Deep green, ridge hills coming down. A little strip of pure white sand and deep blue water. Bloody lovely

09:30 spot and the natives come out with their little boats with an outrigger on one side and anything you'd chuck overboard they'd dive into the water, pick it up and chuck it on top of their gear. It was quite good. Then we got onto little Dutch boats, coastal traders to take us up to Singapore.

**Getting back to the Aquitania, what was the food like?**

Quite good. They called for volunteers early in the piece for someone to do the dishwashing. They had been giving us instructions

10:00 over in case of an attack how you had to go to your points for getting off the boat and all this sort of caper and they'd sound the siren at anytime and you all had to race to your place and so forth. And this business over dishwashing. So a few of us said it might get us out of some thing or other so we volunteered to do the dishwashing and it was quite a good job. The dishwasher would be as long as this room and it was going through a big dome to and you'd pack all your

10:30 plates and everything else onto trays and put them onto the thing and they go through at the other end, steam. By the time they come out they're too hot to handle but you pick them up and pack them away and put them away. It was quite a good job. We did this after meals the whole way up on the Aquitania. No, it was quite good. They'd get you on drill, working and so forth some of the time. No, it was quite good.

**Was there any emphasis on keeping your fitness up?**

Oh yes, that was the main thing, trying to keep you in nick. But then they put us on this

11:00 little Dutch boat, oh, I'll never forget it.

**How many fellows do you think were on the Aquitania?**

Many thousand. Well, there 960 of us. Oh no, there were a few, a few missed the boat, a few didn't get back in time. There would be 900 in the 2/4th but there was reinforcements from all the eastern states. They would be 3-4,000, several thousand on the Aquitania.

**How crowded was it?**

Oh down where

11:30 we were it was pretty crowded. You didn't have much room. You had a bit of bunk to get down to it and sleep but we had camp stretcher-style bunks down there. It wasn't very comfortable but still you didn't mind putting up, you weren't going to be there very long.

**Do you have any idea where you're heading?**

It wasn't until we were in the sea a while and all the different talk and things going on. We had a fair idea that we were heading for Singapore.

**Was that just gossip that you heard?**

12:00 Oh yeah, gossip. No we were never told anything at all. We had no idea. No, until we got to Sunda Straits we had some idea. Actually it was a waste of a wonderfully equipped battalion. I mean we joined the 2/4th as reinforcements but it was one of the best-trained battalions to leave Australia and as far as the coastal defence of Singapore Island they were ideal but once they got off it they were a dead loss. You couldn't use a Vickers machine gun in the jungle.

12:30 In some places they used a Vickers to chop down, a machine-gun to chop down a rubber trees to get them a field of fire. No, at any rate we got onto these little Dutch boats.

**How were they different to the Aquitania?**

Well, there's one deck. That's it. You walk on board, straight through off the gangplank into a little gate, they pull open and you walk on. After we'd all settled in and got ourselves where we were going to go they told us

13:00 one part of the deck we had to clear our gear out of the way. They were bringing a yak on board, a bullock up there. Someone said 'What's that?'. 'That's your meat supply.' A bit later on the day they cut its throat, skinned it, dressed it and started cooking it. That's how we got our meat.

**A yak.**

They call them yaks or it's a bullock they use. They're known as yaks right through the east. So that was our meat supply come on the hoof. Oh no, it wasn't that bad

13:30 we were there. A few days getting up into Singapore and luckily getting into Singapore that was the first day in quite a while they had not had an air raid. We got off the boat onto buses and took us up to Woodlands which is facing Johore, its on the right hand side not far from the causeway. We went into camps there and that's where we got our first air raid.

**And what was that like?**

14:00 Funny thing, the first thing you hear an air raid they told us, there was an old railway cutting going through the place, if there's an air raid on get into the cutting and of course, the siren goes off and everyone tear down into the cutting. A couple of days the siren went off and no one took any difference at all, you just carried on what you were doing. The planes used to fly over us, they were flying down to bomb Singapore City, which was about 12-14 mile away.

**What news are you hearing of the**

14:30 **bombing on Singapore?**

Oh, we kept news, we had news all the way through. We had news all the way through even though the Nips didn't like it.

**Was it via newspaper or wireless?**

Yes, mostly by wireless but you could buy the Singapore, Straits Times was the paper getting around then. There were a couple of English, well nearly all the papers were English. Some of the different crowds, Indians and such had their own papers but it never worried us. Oh no, the news there was quite good.

15:00 But no, we were there. It wasn't far around from us, we found out later, at the naval base which was wonderfully well equipped and everything else and the boys got around there and they got a lot of stuff brought back from there. They'd pulled the navy out of it, most of it had come out just about that time when the [HMS] Repulse and the [HMS] Prince of Wales came in and we lost them, they pulled most of the naval personnel back to Australia.

**What did the barracks look like**

15:30 **at Woodlands camp?**

Oh, all style huts up that area. They were camps built for troops but they'd been there quite a while. They were old camps. They were quite clean they were quite good, there was not a problem with them. It was only later we had trouble with camps that other people had been in. Lice was the main problem. Everywhere we went there was bloody lice.

**This was in Woodlands camp?**

No, Woodlands camp was quite good, it was quite a good camp yeah. We were only there

16:00 about a few days and then they told us that we were going to form up as a special reserve battalion as reinforcements for the 2/4th. Two companies from the Australian Army Service Corp, AASC and Major Seekers. The Major Seekers

**Just before we get into that just go back to the Woodlands camp, I know you are only there for a short period of time but can you describe what the camp looked like?**

It's hard to

16:30 recall it all now. They were, if I remember rightly there were like most huts up that area the walls usually swung out to cool off but no, they were, pretty much of a regular style of camp there. I couldn't explain exactly the whole set up of them.

**The facilities what were they like?**

Pretty elementary. Everybody had to sort things out themselves.

17:00 Organise our own cooks. You see being a reinforcement we didn't have fully equipped troops like for transport or cookhouse or that sort of thing. We had to form that up as we went. A couple of our blokes took on the job of cooking

**How did the other men treat you considering the fact that you were reinforcements?**

Well, at that time we were on our own away from them. They took some of the mob that were on the Aquitania. There was a 136

17:30 OR's, ordinary troops and six officers and we mixed in with them quite well because we knew a lot of the blokes in the battalion, we caught up with two blokes from Bassendean, came and saw me to deliver me mail and so forth. Oh no, we mixed in quite well. Some had to go into replace the boat that missed the boat, missed the Aquitania at Fremantle but then the rest of the time we never saw the rest of the battalion we formed up as a special reserve battalion

18:00 under Major Seekers. He had been a Company Commander in the 2/4th and they gave him the job of forming up this battalion of two companies of AASC. We hardly ever saw them either the way it turned out. They paddled along. Going out, went out to the rubber to form up the battalion. Major Seekers he used to have shoe shops in Perth. Seekers Shoe Stores was one of the arcades he had

18:30 there. He was a wonderful little bloke. He was the last, you know, you wouldn't expect to be in the position he was. He was a lay preacher in the Church, champion pistol shot, it doesn't go together. He formed the battalion. Great little bloke and that was the start of our troubles then when they formed this battalion.

**When you're in Woodlands camp did you get any sorts of briefs about the Japs?**

19:00 They sent a pommy lieutenant, a pommy sergeant came in and they gave us a lecture on the Japanese but they were very poorly armed, had bad eyesight everything, you know, they were poorly equipped but they didn't tell us they were coming down the Malayan mainland about 10kms [kilometres] a day chasing our blokes out of it. It was shocking the things they put up like that. They couldn't fight they couldn't do anything and yet they were chasing our blokes out of Malaya

19:30 at a hell of a rate.

**Can you remember any other things that you were told about the Japanese at that point?**

Oh, not much. That's the piece that always stuck in my mind, that they had poor eyesight and all this sort of caper.

**Did you believe them?**

At the time it took a while to think out and then blokes started to say you know, 'If they're so poor how are they keeping coming down the way they are?' We knew then they were heading down before there was the first of the Australian troops struck them up around Bukit Timah, around

20:00 Kota Bharu where 4th Reserve Transport who were overaged blokes, who were B Class soldiers they were truck drivers they were the first to strike them. Backing up the pommy troops that were up there. Our troops didn't mixed up, they didn't mix up until they go further down towards Gemas. They put a couple of good fights up but no, it was lost before they started.

**So**

20:30 **what happened after you were taken from Woodlands? Were you taken somewhere else?**

Yes, out into the rubber. The biggest thing about Singapore at that time was the rubber plantations. Set up like an orchard and so forth and we went out there and camped on the Tuesday we were there. I had

a lieutenant in charge of us, Mick, Jimmy Till, he was a mighty, he was a regular army bloke.

21:00 Had been regimental sergeant of a battalion and then he took over as officer of our platoon. We were stuck there for a while wandering about and they told us that

**Are you under canvas?**

Yeah. Oh, no, camped, a lot of the times you were just camped where you were. No canvass. You had your own ground sheet and you put it under or over you depending on the weather. Yes, that was, then he

21:30 got word major had sent out a patrol, up to two miles in front to see if we could see anything, and our silly mate was told it was our job.

**How did you feel about that?**

Oh it was all right, we went off wandered around a nice good sunny afternoon, a bit of a patrol, wandering and all keeping fairly well scattered out in case we struck anything, and we come across a big food dump, they had these all over Singapore Island. Just put

22:00 them all over Singapore Island they put a great marquee tent all over the whole lot, covering it up.

**And who dumped the food?**

Britain, they scattered them around the place in case of a siege so Singapore could look after itself that was the whole idea of it. We were having quite a good inspection to see what's in it you know, all cartons and stuff all stacked up about 10ft high quite a bit area but all covered up and we saw some blokes wandering along the valley about 250 -300 yards below us and so forth and didn't take much notice and

22:30 someone spotted that they were armed, they had rifles. So down around this food dump, down around there. It got pretty hot for a while. I had the Bren, I was on the left-hand side of the food dump and had to get myself out in the open to get the Bren lined up. They had moved into a little old Malay cottage, just a little hut sort of thing and the boys knew that's where the ammo [ammunition]

23:00 where the fire was coming from so I put a spray across the front of the house and so forth and two blokes run out and got behind some bushes. Well they were easy prey with a Bren. I put the Bren on them and that's the first time I'd seen them, a man shot and as I said in that little book I wrote, on TV you see someone get shot and they nice peacefully fall over and they are dead. But you don't. They're like a rabbit. You shoot him and he jumps and kicks and there's waving arms and legs and so forth.

23:30 But any rate this was quite hectic there for a while. The chap that wrote our book The Colour Patch which has been kicking around for a long while he's got that all terribly wrong the way he wrote that. He said we ran into a heavy machine gun. But these blokes, they didn't have normal uniforms on. They had rifles at any rate. But we were at this place. I don't know how long, it seemed quite a while and Arthur McGill my mate who had the strips he said 'Right,

24:00 up and back out the way we came' so we got up and headed back over the hill and when we got back out of course, we were three short. Little mate Sid Derby he didn't come back and Ernie Thompson and Ernie Munday. That's the three of them we lost, the three of them there. That was our first casualty for the company.

**So that sounds like it was pretty nasty that conflict.**

Oh, yeah, nasty all right. Funny thing that tickled me after I thought of it they're shooting us and there's a big stack of

24:30 cartons of tinned fruit and stuff and all the juice is running down. The bullets are going through and juice is running down the bloody cartons and so forth. Luckily we were flat down on the ground and they didn't get, I had to get myself out in the open to get the Bren around onto them and that but I never got a scratch. Arthur McGill got a cut across the back of his neck. The first of his scratches

**How much did the death of your mates affect you?**

Oh, I don't know.

25:00 At the time I don't think that much. You get such a shock to realise what you're into. Because Sid Derby was a great little bloke. When we were at camp at Northam of course, he had no family there and my family all came up by car Wyn came up with them and he had no family so he came and had dinner with us and got to know the family and it was quite a. He was a great little bloke. The boys called him the 'kid' because he looked like a kid and I had to go back and tell the boys

25:30 that he wasn't coming back. No, it was a funny old set up the whole thing. But then we were shifted around, we shifted around quite a bit and that night

**What sort of places did you shift around to?**

Into the rubber and then into the jungles, a lot of jungle in Singapore at that time.

**How did you find the jungle considering the fact that you really weren't trained in jungle warfare?**

26:00 I'd been in the bush so I didn't really mean much to me. Somebody, you'd get, you'd push your way through, you've got to. It was hard some of the blokes you know, that hadn't had that extra three months of training and had been working in offices. It was pretty hard on some of them. We had one kid with us, Harry, Harry Norton. His initials were HHR Norton and he was 16. When it got tough

26:30 he, you know, he just couldn't take it. It was hard to see.

**What did he do?**

Tears and so forth. It's hard to see someone like that. Good kid but he should never have been allowed there. He was the next day, he was about the first bloke to go. We took position up on a hill that night, Bald Hill and we were told we had a pommy regiment on one side and Indians on the other side

27:00 so of course once you spread out your front and so forth. You put feelers out and blokes are going contact your neighbours. They weren't there. Then Major Seekers found out they had been withdrawn the previous day, the previous morning, that morning so we were out on our own. We were left out there. He luckily got out through, found out so he came out to the battalion and he said rather than try and shift us, because you know we had had a pretty hectic time, rather than try and take us out then at night time leave it until daylight.

27:30 Through the night there was everything, a few bullets flying around. You could see where the flash was coming from you gave them a bit of a burst. I tried to get them to keep their heads down. Arthur McGill got a bullet that went straight through the side of his ribs, cut him up the side. He'd been quite good. They wanted to take them straight back out to hospital.

**How far away was the hospital?**

I've got no idea. I had no idea where we were.

28:00 We knew we were on Singapore Island that's about all we knew. But then at daylight we started to shift off and as soon as we did we were in trouble. They had used 2-inch mortars and you wouldn't see them, they would fall around you and so forth and these bloody 2-inch mortars. They are the most dangerous bloody thing ever. Bloody mortar lobs and it just, you know, hits the dirt and bang. That's how Harry Norton gone one on there.

28:30 I can't think of his name now, one of the older blokes we had there. On the roll there, he went back and had a look but he couldn't do anything for him so we left him and just kept on moving and that kept up through the day. It was quite hectic.

**So you left him there, he was injured.**

Yes, we couldn't do much with him. A bit later on, a funny thing we had a few blokes from Fairbench Farm, Pommy kids that were brought out here early in the war when

29:00 the bombing of England was on. Most of them had been told they were orphans, which later on they found they weren't but they were from Fairbench Farm. Wonderful blokes amongst those blokes. I went down and buried one one day last week, Cowboy Matthews. But another little bloke a mate, we were paddling along and Paddy came up to me and said 'Hey, have a look at this' and he's got around his middle, he's got a bloody big wide belt, leather belt

29:30 with two big map cases on the side of it and I said 'Where did you get that?' It was a Nip officer. He got close to a Nip officer and knocked him off and he got a watch. Absolutely beautiful watch, you press the top or somewhere and the top comes up and you see the face and you shut that and turn it over and press the other way and it's got a key set in the back of it to wind it up. I would have loved to have got it home. Unluckily he never saw the day out so I don't know what happened to the watch but he had these map cases.

30:00 Someone reported back Major Seekers so

**Did they... they had maps then?**

So he got those straight back out, he took them or sent them, I don't know whether he got back through or not but the idea was to send them back as quick as they could to headquarters, all the maps and all that's going on. So we paddled along and early in the afternoon we run into trouble

**Are you in the water? You say you're paddling along,**

30:30 **are you in the water?**

No, no walking along and Jimmy Till one of us on the right hand flank going up a bit of a valley, we found out later that Major Seekers got quite a lot of the troops, they made a right hand turn then and headed out and they got back out to our troops but I don't know how many of there were, quite a few of us with Jimmy Till paddling along and I saw something, about the only time I saw it on Singapore Island a fence with ordinary link mesh, not link mesh,

31:00 ordinary netting fence and we were running up against a machine gun and we couldn't find where it was and Jimmy Till spotted these and he said 'Give us your Bren,' and I gave him the Bren and he bumped it down on top of this fence and emptied the magazine, 27 bullets and stopped this machine gun, shut off. That was the last I saw of Jim. When he had the Bren with the empty magazine on it. Usually each bloke in the section

31:30 carry an extra pannier, an extra what's its name, for the Bren but there was no one left. No one much about so

**Had you gone through a lot, sorry artillery?**

Yes, there was a lot of stuff flying around there. I got a rifle. I grabbed a rifle. There were plenty of blokes there that didn't want their rifles any more and we went up to where this Bren was and I told our people when we came back that's

32:00 the only one I've ever seen like, it was a stray, it wasn't like you see most of the heavy machine guns, the Vickers and that are all built thin but this had a hopper on the top about that long and you pour the bullets into it. As long as they're facing the right way. It spits the empty shell out. It seemed to us to be quite slow but it was causing a lot of trouble but when we went up to go and have a look at it, it was alongside a

32:30 I don't know, a Malay or Chinese little hut they have and a big tapioca patch alongside about 8-9ft high and it was up against the butt of that, that's why we couldn't pick up until Jimmy Till spotted it. But the crew of the gun they were dead and so forth. So there wasn't that many of us left around the place then and so we got through it and once we went above the garden going up the rise this scrub about 4ft high scrub right through the piece and look up and there was a row

33:00 of Nips as far as you could see about 20m apart all coming down. We knew we were in trouble so we just got down in the scrub and laid there. If you stood up you were gone. At the time there was old Danny Crane, he was one of the blokes that was well up in his 30's with us. Bill Evans died a fortnight down here and myself and two kids from the AASC.

33:30 So once they were gone, they went past us and later on you'd hear them further down and now and then any one that was wounded they were shooting. No taking prisoner or anything else. So we started off then, the five of us wandered off up and we got to another place with a big tapioca patch or some sort of vege patch growing tall. We planted ourselves in there for the rest of the day to keep out of sight.

34:00 And that night, it was night time, we found out afterwards the bloody Japs had set up a headquarters in it and we're trying to have a bit of a sleep. It wasn't much good sleeping. Every now and again a car would pull up and the guard outside would start yelling in their lingo, you know going through all the rigmarole. So the next day we wandered off. Funny thing Singapore is north of the equator but you could see the Southern Cross at night time, just down,

34:30 could just see it. We picked it up. Danny Crane and I had both spent a fair time in the bush so says right oh we've just got to keep heading south. Doesn't matter where we're going as long as we're heading south we're heading towards Singapore. And that's it we wandered along and next morning we struck a bitumen road and we didn't know where we were but head down this

35:00 spread out either side, keeping well apart just in case anything opened up and come around the corner about 3/4 mile was a bloody roadblock and we kept walking towards it and as we got close we could see the snout of an old Vickers machine gun poking out so it was facing north so we knew bloody well it wasn't Nips so we walked straight into it and it turned out it was a Malay volunteer regiment and they said they hadn't seen anything for two days. We were the first thing they'd seen.

35:30 At that time we were a mess because Blakang Mati Island, where were oil tankers. Incidentally Blakang Mati is now what they call it, Sentosa where all the skyrail goes over and people can have a look at all the replicas of the war are over there but oil tanks on Blakang Mati were burning and black oil when it burns, it doesn't burn cleanly and there were black, thick black clouds of it going over and

36:00 the sediment is still oil and it settles onto you. Your clothes, your hat everything. You were completely just covered in oil. The only time you see any different colour was sweating and the sweat would run down strips down your face where run through under the oil and of course, they were watching us and we were coming down black. They didn't know what we were. Because once we came through and they saw we were Australians they said they had a truck there and they would take us through back

36:30 to Singapore. So we got in the truck and they took us in. I didn't know where places were at the time but it turns out it was Buena Vista Gardens and first thing I saw was some 2/4th colour patches, it was 9 Platoon B Company. That'll do me, I don't know what happened to the rest of them I'm off, I was off the truck and in with these blokes. I stopped there and they had a Lieut, we had two Lieutenant Lees,

37:00 Don and Ken. Ken Lees came on from outer Willis.

**Did the other blokes get off the truck and join the ..?**

I don't know, I've often thought of it since. I said to Lou Evans later on 'What happened?' and he said



'He got wounded, he was put into hospital' but I don't know how or where he got wounded. He wasn't when the Malays pushed us into town and any rate I got with them and Don Lee, he's written two or three books since, and he came over to me

37:30 and gave me a little trench tool. I had a rifle and I had a little trenching tool. He said get up against a tree, dig yourself a cover pit here. The dirt goes up in front of you're here, there's your fronts this way and so forth and he walked away and I put this trenching tool down on the ground, put my hat on and about 4.00pm in the afternoon. Now about 10 o'clock the next morning Frank Hynes woke me up with a cup of tea. In fact, I'd been asleep for about 16-18

38:00 hours or something, there must be something wrong with me and just wanted me to start. Well, you haven't had a chance to put your head down at all right through from the since Tuesday. This was Friday 13th.

**How long hadn't you slept for?**

We camped a night alongside that Japanese house they were occupied. There was not much sleep as they kept yelling out and so forth.

**About 4-5 days.**

From Monday night and Tuesday morning we went out on a rubber and we kept going until

38:30 that was Friday 13th. I was born on the 13th so it was a very good day to me and Frank Hynes gave me a cup of tea and the funny thing he and his mate Doug Sterrett were there, every time something happened strange those two buggers were with me. Funny things. Got a mix up out in the gaol. They were in a work party camp outside the gaol when the war finished. No we stopped there, that was Friday afternoon.

39:00 **Sorry where did you actually stop?**

They, Buena Vista Gardens I think they call it.

**Is it a barracks or ..?**

No, no a big garden area. 9 Platoon that was their front. I stopped them with them. Nothing happened at all until Sunday night, they told us it was all over we were prisoners of war.

39:30 That was it.

**How did they tell you that news?**

It came through that they had sent people out under a white flag. It was a funny set up. You see Singapore Waters Display is where we built a train up on top of a hill there and put a bridge over the part of Mac Ritchie Reservoir. Mac Ritchie and another reservoir was Singapore's main water supply but

40:00 they replenished from Johor and there was a valve at the causeway and all that had to do was turn the valve off and they cut Singapore's water off. A couple of, a few dry spells and they were out of water. It was hopeless trying to keep it up. No well, we stopped there

**Did you find that you were a POW because someone told you or were you told officially?**

Well, there was nothing else we could do. I mean, we chucked the sponge in. That was it.

40:30 **Were you told officially?**

Later that night they said that we expected to be taken prisoner. Just wait and see.

**Is everybody gathered together and an official person telling..?**

Then overnight we stopped where we were. Early the next morning we were there and a mate I'd known when I was in Mullewa, his mother was in a boarding house

41:00 in Maninga, in a boarding house in Mullewa, he worked up on the gold mines up Wallooma way, up there and he used to come down and see his mother and I got to know him quite, fairly well. Slew Baxter. He was a funny little bloke. He wasn't very big. He loved to fight and would fight any time. He was one of the first blokes to join the AIF when the war broke out. He was in camp and sent to Northam and he'd get paid

41:30 he'd shoot through. He'd spent his money and when his money ran out he would go back to camp. Two or three turns of this and they discharged him. He was papers were marked 'Unlikely to make an efficient soldier'. And then later on he joined up, the next time he joined up, he still used his own name, they didn't do anything about it he was WS 8000 or something.

**Just getting back to when you were told you were going to be a POW, did they tell you officially? Did they..? So how did you actually find out the news?**

Well, that was it

## Tape 4

- 00:31 As I was saying Slew Baxter was there and in the morning just to fill in time he started a two-up school. Well there was bundles of money and quite early in the piece he broke the two-up school. He had bundles of Malay dollars sticking out of his pockets everywhere so he went around distributing the money around to keep it going because at that time we were paid
- 01:00 in Malay dollars. You see Singapore wasn't separately, Singapore was part of Malaya and we were paid in Malay dollars and they paid us 7 dollars, 7 Malay dollars was a pound and seven pence in our pay pocket. 2 [shillings] and 11 [pence] I think it was for a Malay dollar. So he busted the school and a bit later on in the morning a batch of Nips came through and they were all big blokes. They talk about these tiny Nips, these were blokes that I think they were about
- 01:30 5ft 8, 5ft 9 minimum. They were part of the Tokyo Imperial Guard and they were you know, treated us, you know quite. The only thing of course, their rifle drill was the same as Americans. Where they have the rifle on one side and take it straight up the shoulder and with ours you pick your rifle up and swap it over and put it on the opposite shoulder. Well, they got to and they, of course we had been told to put our arms, hook them all together, rifles all left there
- 02:00 and we weren't allowed to touch them. They were giving us rifles and making us do rifle drill for quite a while and so forth but then later on of course, word came through that we were going to have to march to Selarang area, up Changi way and of course, there were some blokes that were part wounded and hadn't been taken to hospital you know. They get up altogether, it was quite a nasty job.
- What was your location?**
- We were in Singapore then, Singapore City but we had to march up to
- 02:30 Selarang area which was, all they call Selarang, or Changi all the North Eastern corner of the island. The whole lot, the gaol was part of it but there was Selarang Barracks, Roberts Barracks. Roberts Barracks we kept for, kept as a hospital right through the piece. All our wounded were taken to Roberts Barracks. But we went out and sort of settled in. We were first up and put into
- 03:00 what had been European homes, since destroyed homes. The homes up there are built much from the same style with a big portico thing out the front and big pillars and the driveway, the car drives in to the front door and out. Mainly because when the rains are on, the torrential rains the driver brings you up and gets you out without getting wet. But we were there. A lot of us into a house but we were quite comfortable. We were given a fair bit of rice
- 03:30 and not much else. It's a funny thing when you're like that, you eat rice. First up our blokes didn't know how to cook rice properly. They finished up they got some Malays in to cook for them. If you cook rice and stir it it's like a gooey, gluggy mass but they taught us how to cook rice. Then the problem started over the blokes going to the toilet. I remember our doctor is still going, well up into his 90s, Dr
- 04:00 Anderson, a wonderful old bloke. 'Pills' as they call him, always called 'Pills'. A bloke went up to see him and he said he hadn't been to the toilet for 4 days. He hadn't been to the toilet for 4 days and old Pill had a bit of a talk to him and so forth and said well if you don't go in the next fortnight come back and see me. There was nothing there. If you're eating boiled rice its just 99% water. We settled in there quite well. Early in the piece we got to know a chap
- 04:30 Len Bullock he was in Company Headquarters doing records and so forth and I knew Len. Anything to do just hang around just waiting, waiting for word you know, whether we were going to be prisoners for a fortnight, we didn't know and I said 'Len, anything to do?' and he said 'Yeah, I'll give you a job'. So he got a pencil and bit of paper and a list of names. Blokes, go to 8 Platoon, B Company, go and find out what happened to these blokes.
- 05:00 There was so many blokes that didn't show up when we were out there. Well, I've always had a good memory for numbers and I'd go through and find his mate there and say 'When did you last see Sid?' and write down anything I could about him. So I had this for about a fortnight, just going around to people and it's a funny thing I could tell you all the details about blokes I've never ever seen, initials, the name, all about them and so forth but
- 05:30 I've never seen them but I kept going back with all these records. It was wonderful in the fact that it was something to do otherwise you would go up the wall just wandering around no knowing what was going to happen.

**What did the other blokes do?**

Oh a lot of them got a bit stray. Quite a lot of blokes had physical, had mental problems out of it.

**When you say stray what behaviour were they displaying?**

Oh, well any old thing you don't know, you find. People talking to themselves, anything. It was unusual.

06:00 But then of course, they started to organise a bit of sport. Well that was the best thing they could have done. Get them playing sport. Actually as far as the 2/4th went as far as football we had enough blokes to make two lead football teams. There was some wonderful footballers amongst the blokes, a lot of them came home. We had quite a fair cricket team but we used to play the west v the rest. That was a set drill. Any bugger that played. Western Australia has always been a bit you know,

06:30 it's us and them sort of caper. We could beat them, all the mob at football but cricket was a bit of a story. They had about three blokes, well Ben Varmont was test Wicketkeeper, he was their captain. He was a hell of a good bloke. Captain of 18/6th. Mighty bloke. No, paddle around to keep going until then they started sending out work parties and that was changed things around completely.

07:00 As I said, did you have on tape the trip to Johor. I don't think so.

**Which..?**

When we went up to Johor and we built a shrine.

**No, you really didn't go into much detail about that.**

No. Well, they sent, they wanted, they blamed the 2/4th for the casualties in Singapore, on the landing because the boys had sat behind their machine guns, had sat behind their Vickers for about 10 days and watching them put ramps down over in Johor

07:30 where they were going to put their barges down and all this sort of caper. They knew exactly where they were and of course, with the Vickers you can set your range. You know, do whatever you like and come back and that range is there so once the word came on the Sunday night they were coming across they opened up and merry hell coming across there. So they blamed the 2/4th and they sent us up there a party of about 250 up to Johor and they built a shrine where they had all these casualties where they got shot up. But it was a real

08:00 picnic work party and we were in a house and so we paddled along there and they were courtering in a truck load of rice we could eat and we were swapping rice with the local population who couldn't get any rice at all for pigs. There was a burned out pineapple factory up the road. The Nips took us up in the truck and we were getting pineapple, you didn't know what you were getting the labels were all burnt off. It had been a two storey timber building but of course, it just collapsed in a big heap and if the tins were blown at all on the ends

08:30 you didn't touch them but any that weren't you'd take it home. You might have pieces, you might have rings or anything else but it was all good tucker.

**It burnt down in the skirmishes. Had it burned down in the skirmishes?**

Yes, hell a lot of places around there got knocked about. In fact we were camped in all two-storey homes, they were like European homes like. Same as I say when we went to Selarang. Lovely homes there but they put, I don't know about 50-60 on the bottom floor,

09:00 the officers had the floor above us. Major Coff was the CO, as I said he was the, came home later on and was the boss of State Housing for Western Australia. That's where George, stop thinking names, I can't think of it. He was the officer that took charge of us when we were on the boat to Fremantle. he had the job going, the officers were eating roast pork

09:30 upstairs and he had to come back. The cookhouse was houses out the back and the Malays used to do the cooking completely separate from the house. He's got this big dish of roast port and he's coming around there and he's poking it down his neck as quick as he could and we were all watching him and saying a few words quietly but Major Coff was looking over the balcony and he said 'We'll have the pork Mr Branson' and of course, George Branson.

**I think we might pause there.**

10:00 **Go back a bit to 10th Feb and the Bald Hill position.**

Oh yes,

**Can you just talk me through the experiences that you had that day?**

Well, you've got the first part over there, we were out on patrol when we lost three blokes.

**Maybe we will pick up from the beginning of that trail.**

All right. That morning, Major Seekers told Lieutenant Till to send a patrol out in front of our position and

10:30 our patrol was, went out and within about a mile and half in front of our normal position and it was just a nice pleasant day having a wander around and we came across this big food dump which was, dumps were evenly placed all over Singapore Island in case of a siege, while we were inspecting that we saw some chaps moving in the valley below us, some 250 to 300 yards away. Didn't take much notice until someone spoke, spotted

- 11:00 they had rifles, so they headed into a little cottage was there. We went down around the food dump, it was quite lively for a while, I was on the right hand. Left hand side of the food dump, had to get, had to wriggle myself out into the open to get a line on the hut with a Bren gun, and I gave a bit of a burst, through into the hut. I mean there all so flimsy you could poke sticks through them virtually,
- 11:30 and then a couple of blokes ran out, Nips ran out and hid behind some bushes in the garden in front of the village, in front of the house and I gave them a good burst of the Bren, that's when I said the first time I saw a man shot. It was just like an animal in the fact that the legs and the arms were waving about and so forth. It was quite lively there for a while and the part, the strange thing about it, in the food dump the whole lot of tinned fruit
- 12:00 and all sorts of food stuff in it and the bullets going through the cartons and there was this juice running out of these tinned fruit and so forth. It seemed a strange thing at that time. Then Arthur McGill told us to get up and back out the way we had come which we did and after getting out of, out of view over the rise of the hill we found we were three short. Sid Derby always known as the 'Kid', a great little bloke he was missing and so
- 12:30 was Ernie Thompson and Ernie Munday. But Sid Derby over the Christmas in Northam just before we left there he had no family and so he had Christmas dinner with my family and he was a lovely, really nice little bloke and that was our first casualty. We went back and stopped at the, that's when we headed to Bald Hill that evening, after moving about quite a bit. Do you want me to go right through that?
- Yes.**
- 13:00 Well that night we took us position according to the hill it was Bald Hill. I don't know how it came by the name because there was quite a bit of scrub about on it and the English regiment was on one side and the Indians on the other. Well the patrols, our fellows went out to find out contact and we couldn't get any contact with anyone near us. It was then that Major Seekers found out that they had been withdrawn that morning. So we were out on our own sort of thing. During the
- 13:30 night there was a bit firing every now and again but the only thing you could do was have a shot where the rifle fire was, where the flash of fire was coming from. Arthur McGill got a bullet wound across, just a flesh wound across his ribs and we stopped there for the night but Major Seekers went out and made contact and found out that we were on our own and instead of deciding to bring us out that night he said that we move off at daylight which we did.
- 14:00 We were straight away in trouble then because the Nips had a fair idea of how many of us there were, what quantity were there and they used 2 inch mortars very, very effectively, lobbing the darn things amongst us. That's where the little bloke Harry Norton, HRR Norton according to the records, he coped it. One of the boys went back and saw him but couldn't do anything with him so we just kept on going and later on in the piece we were going along and
- 14:30 there was Jimmy Dill our platoon commander and heading up a bit of a gully sort of thing and we came under some pretty heavy machine gun fire. We told the people when we got back. It was a very slow firing gun and Jimmy Dill spotted where it was and used my Bren poked on top of a netting fence, bumped the fence down to the right height and let them have it with a Bren and
- 15:00 that shut the machine gun up and I grabbed a rifle. Our platoon were all carrying a magazine for the Bren, normally carry a magazine for the Bren but I couldn't find anyone there with one and there wasn't time to be sitting down trying to load a magazine so I took a rifle and that's the last I saw of Jimmy Dill then but there are reports he was wounded later on but last I saw him he was still going carrying an empty Bren. We went up and had a look at the machine gun. There were quite a few dead
- 15:30 Japs there and some others around and I gave a good description of the gun when we came back in. Then we headed up towards the rise of the hill and as we got up there, there was five of us, Danny Crane, Llew Evans and two young blokes from the AASC and we saw a continual line of Nips coming over the ridge above us, or about 20ft apart coming
- 16:00 down so we went down in the scrub and just laid still. They passed through over us and I found out afterwards that we were there but a bit further along Arthur McGill was in the scrub too and so was Claudie Dowl, another one of our platoon. Any rate they went through and afterwards they went down below us and we could hear every now and again bullets going.
- 16:30 They took no wounded, they shot any wounded evidently. Then we stopped, that night we hid in some bushes alongside a house and it turned out the Japs were using it as a headquarters. There was cars driving up and yelling and so forth, it wasn't much of a rest. Then we found out realised that we could see the Southern Cross even though Singapore is north of the equator it still shows on the skyline and
- 17:00 Danny Crane and I both having been in the bush quite a bit we knew which way we had to get south to try get down towards Singapore City and that's, we kept that up. Friday morning we struck a bitumen road heading south and walked down that all scattered out the five of us just in case anything turned up and we came around the corner and we saw a roadblock and when we got down to it there were
- 17:30 Malay volunteer regiment. As I said before we had at that time Blakang Mati oil tanks were on fire and

the whole place, the trees and everything were black, the soot that comes out of the oil and it saturates your clothes and skin and everything and no one knew what we were by appearances. But that's when we started talking to the Malay volunteers they woke up that we were Australians they had a truck and took

- 18:00 us back towards Singapore and the first group I saw was a group of 2/4th machine gunners by their colour patch. So that's as far as I go. I stopped there. That was 9 Platoon B Company and I stopped with them through the piece. I've since found out from various, I don't know what happened to Danny Crane but I found out from Blue Evans somewhere along the line he got wounded, got wounded there and put into hospital but I don't know what happened to the other too. I didn't seem to worry much. But
- 18:30 I stopped with 9 Platoon and platoon commander was Lieutenant Donnolly, we had two of these Lieutenants. One came with us from Fremantle but Don had been with 9 Platoon right through and he was quite a nice bloke but he was onto me about giving me a trenching tool and told me where to dig a hole and where my front was and everything else and he walked off and left me. So I put the trenching tool down, used that as a pillow and about 4 o'clock in the afternoon went to sleep.
- 19:00 I was still there until the next morning about 10 o'clock Frank Hynes woke me up with a cup of tea. I'd have a sleep that I wanted. We had been missing out on sleep since early on Monday going through. Oh the others, Arthur McGill was behind the Jap lines through until it went quiet and knew it was over and he headed for Sumatra. Got a boat and sneaked across to Sumatra but he was picked up there and was brought back a
- 19:30 few months later, brought back as a prisoner of war. And Claudie Dowl, wonderful little bloke he got out amongst the island trying to get over to Sumatra but of course, Singapore is surrounded by islands and he was out there and the Malay fishermen got to him and they shifted him around a couple of times from one island to another and so forth and after about a fortnight, I couldn't tell you exactly how long he was out there a couple of fisherman said they were going to shift him again so put him in
- 20:00 the bottom of the fishing boat and threw a tarpaulin over him and he said a couple of hours later he could hear quite a bit of noise so he had a peep and they were taking him straight back into Keppel Harbour, straight back into Singapore. And of course the Japs were paying money for captured prisoners of war and they sold him to the Nips and he came back to us, he came back right through and came home with us Claude Dowl. I guess that about the end of that part of that story
- 20:30 and that's where I said, I was with Lieutenant Lee and I'd had my sleep so I stopped with 9 Platoon through until the Sunday night. There was no more action at all. I just sat there and waited until we were told them it was all over. They had gone out with a white flag and we were to depart with our arms at 8.30 that night, Sunday and we were out one Sunday night and the next Sunday night it was all over.

**Who came and told you that it was all over?**

- 21:00 Our Lieut came through and told us it was finished, Lieutenant Lee.

**What was your reaction when you heard that news?**

Oh, I mean you couldn't do much about it. Well, we didn't have much of a show the way the way there were coming in. Every time, our people had been used to fighting wars where you set up a front but the Nips didn't, they put feelers out and they find out where the strength was and quietly sneak around behind you and next thing you are shooting at you from behind you and

- 21:30 keep on with those little bits of withdrawals all the time until he had pushed us back into towards Singapore City and of course, the population had come down the Malayan Peninsula and crossed into Singapore and there were thousands and thousands of people who were up country and there was no food or nothing for them virtually. That was it. As I said before there are two reservoirs on Singapore Island, well there was then and the water was pumped down from Johor. Only had to turn the valves off at the causeway to
- 22:00 turn the water supply off. No it was a pretty poor old show. No, it was a waste of a good battalion sending the 6th north. Of course, the 18th Division the Pommy division, they came in to the action on the island and on the Empress of Asia which was sunk and beached and they came ashore without most of their gear and walked straight into a prisoner of war camp. Awful bloody mix up.

**What thoughts**

- 22:30 **do you have when you're taken prisoner of war?**

You didn't know what to bloody well think you know. With all the tales of different things and so forth and the bombing of Keppel Harbour and so forth, not Keppel Harbour, Pearl Harbour and things we knew or had been told when Beaufort [fighter planes] came down and fought them down on the mainland we weren't too sure what the position was going to be. We didn't have a clue. That's where I said we had the

- 23:00 started the two-up school the next morning and Slew Baxter ran the school and broke it but he spread the money but then later on the Nips who came through there were part of the Tokyo Imperial Guard

and they were all fairly big blokes. Practically all of them wore glasses, they wore big heavy glasses but they were quiet reasonable. They didn't seem to worry much about us.

**What did they do when they approached you?**

Just walk through. They knew something about us giving a rifle drill because that's the first thing they did. Told some of us to get rifles and go

23:30 through the business of shouldering arms which is completely different to them and more on the same style of the Nips.

**How did you communicate with these Imperial Guards?**

Oh well, you, sign language mainly. Never had anyone at all speak Japanese and every few of them spoke any sign of, might have a few words. You couldn't sort them out.

**Did you just oblige them and follow their orders?**

Oh, you had to yeah.

24:00 Then they told us, word came through that we were going to be marched out to Selarang area which was part of Changi area and that was it so we were on the road and marched about 12 mile.

**What kind of remarks were you hearing from the other men?**

Oh, well just in different groups how they formed up and so forth. We just kept going, a continual line of troops and of course there was people coming from all of the place, the southern part of the island, just rounding them up.

24:30 We didn't have much trouble from the Nips. They didn't seem to worry about us much then, you know, just get it out there.

**I was wondering whether the other men around you were making any comments about their feelings about becoming POWs.**

Not for a start, later on it was a big awkward. It was that much of a shock it hardly sank in. The fact that we were under, of course at that time we thought it would only be for a short time and they would come back into it again.

25:00 But it wasn't to be, we were there for 3½ years. No.

**So how did you get to Selarang?**

We were put in to..

**How did you get there?**

Marched.

**Marched, sorry.**

12 mile. Walked out there and I mean they spread them here and there all over the place. Different areas and we were put into for a start what had been European homes and

25:30 so forth. We were packed in pretty well but I mean it was quite reasonable. We had a big supply of rice and nothing much else. But oh no.

**How many men left in your section?**

When we got to back out to Selarang. I was the only one. We lost six killed in action. The three killed on the patrol and the next day before we ran into the machine gun

26:00 we lost three more there. And Arthur McGill was the eighth one because he got through behind the Nips again and ended up in Sumatra. He came back from Sumatra. Luckily he came back from Sumatra later on they brought quite a few prisoners back and I always thought it was a Dutch submarine but it was an American submarine in the Straits of Malacca and sunk the boat. He, you know a bit of a panic and a lot of them were jumping into the water and they fired a

26:30 second torpedo on the boat and of course, those in the water the percussion killed. He stopped on the boat and then another Nip boat picked them and brought them home, brought them back to Singapore. I've got a list of all the boats that was sunk by Japanese, I think there was about 30 boats. They sunk all through but that's one boat that's not mentioned so there must have been more boats sunk than listed. I've got a full list of all the boats and so forth.

27:00 I think it's in that little book those boats. Yeah.

**So what happened once you settled into Selarang?**

Oh, as I said my main problem was something to do. Drive me up the wall sitting around doing nothing and that's when I caught up with Len Bullock from Battalion Headquarters and he said to me and I said 'Is there anything to do?' and he said 'Right oh, get you to check out'. He gave me a list of

27:30 blokes in the battalion go around and find their mates and see what happened. I see we got out of there and there was so many blokes just not accounted for and I'd gone and ask some bloke 'Where did Sid go? Where is so and so? When did you last see them?' and I was jotting all these notes down as I said and finished up that way that a lot of blokes in the battalion that I'd never seen or heard of I knew their service number and bloody name and I'm checking up on them and I took it all back to Len. We found out later that while we were on the work

28:00 party one day we were burying 44-gallon drums. They were coated in bitumen. Cause the Nips never came near us much. We were, after a while the Australian engineers put the fences up with barbed wire around it but the Nips brought rations in and we sort of ran the place ourselves but they had these 44 gallon drums and we buried about six 44 gallon drums and no one could work out what it was. We find out later big lot of the records, all the records and so forth.

28:30 They put them into drums and buried them. Because the Nips would go through and if they found any paper, they couldn't read it so they destroyed it. But they used to conduct searches every now and then. They had a queer mentality because we're not supposed to have knives and things like that and yet they would come in one day searching for one special item and open and there would be a knife there and never touch it. Often. They knew we had the gear but they were given

29:00 instructions to come and search for specific things and the other things that you shouldn't have was left in your gear. Occasionally they might take it but they would stop you and take your watch off you. That was one of their great capers.

**What sort of things weren't you allowed to have?**

Oh bloody anything. Written paper, paper written on. As I said they couldn't understand it so it was taken off you. Yet chaps had libraries, kept diaries right through the piece quite a lot of

29:30 them. Major Seekers I've got a copy of his diary there and quite a lot of blokes had, later on we carried went up, leave the F Force out of it for the time being. They were hard, hard to understand their mentality but if they were told to do a certain thing they did that and nothing else.

**What kind of furnishings were inside these private homes you were put in?**

Everything. One of our blokes whose died since, is

30:00 Danny Ross was an apprentice carpenter and he got, they used a billiard table knocked it apart and burnt for firewood. Beautiful big billiard table. But he got a piece of that and he made two pipes, carved the wood out but he made the pipe in the form of a hand with a bowl there and bent stem, how he got the hole down it I don't know but only doing it with hot wire and put that through and you could have this bowl and you could see the fingernails and everything in it. Of course,

30:30 most of that was done with a piece of wire or you know, anything like that to gradually whittle away. Spent hours doing it. It was a beautiful job. Made the box with velvet, with the cloth off the billiard table. I don't know what happened at the finish but I've often thought about that but blokes would do all sorts of things. When they were on their work party up in Johor they would just wander around the place, there was no fencing and so forth but I mean, there wasn't much in trying to get away. But

31:00 we got talking to some of the local lads and one of them, I've often thought about him, he was a Malay and he had a private teacher, tutor for schooling and he spoke beautiful English. People like that you just don't know who you're going to run into and we sat for hours you know talking. Mainly talked about customs. Their customs and going on here in Australia. No I often think of things like that. You wonder what happened to those people later on.

**31:30 Well when you were at Selarang were you required to sign any documents by the Japanese?**

Oh not until later on in the piece. That was about September, I can't give you the date. They brought this sign out that we had to fill in a form that we wouldn't attempt to escape. Well of course, we just knocked that back straight off and so forth so then they shut us into Selarang Barracks which had been the home of Gordon Highland Battalion. I think it was seven

32:00 big three-storey buildings either side, administration up one end and some other low building, I'm not sure what it was, a swimming pool in front and the whole of the centre was our parade ground. And I think there was 14,000 prisoners in that area. They just brought us all in, put us in there, put machine guns in the corner and that was it. Well, hygiene. We had not bore holes. At that time we dug bore holes all the way through. You've seen a farmer using a post-hole digger,

32:30 we had the same style of thing but it was about I suppose 18 inches, 20 inches in diameter at the top and you used to use it with a big tripod over the top when, blokes with a big long handle, about six blokes, three blokes on either side, around and around until you got full and then they'd pull it up with a tripod, lift it out, empty it out and keep on going. That's how we use for boreholes all through the piece on Singapore, wherever we were. We put, had

33:00 to put those things continuously, keep that thing going to have enough bore holes to keep hygiene up to it.

### **Is that for latrines?**

Mm. Then we had problems over water. Piping into the place wasn't sufficient to supply all the men that were in there. We had a few days of that and we were just packed in like sardines. I've got quite a few photos of it in there. The same little bloke took all the photos. He had a camera and he developed them with all sorts of stuff. X-ray plates

33:30 and God knows what but he got quite good photos out of it. But after a few days Black Jack, he has always been known. Early in the piece he was a Senior Officer amongst the British and Australian prisoners and he had the job of commanding the whole place and he was very, very good. He jacked up on the Nips whenever he could and they took him out and he had to watch while they shot two Australians. The Indian National Army shot

34:00 the two Australians. He said one bloke was down and the other bloke trying to hold him up. He came back then and said that we had to sign the form under duress. Lots went and signed and I only found out afterwards that they some of the different blokes signed all bloody silly names. They had Ned Kelly and Adolf Hitler and all signing this paper and Nips standing and watching thousands of blokes going through. They didn't watch what was being written so all these weird names put into it but. So any way we went back to our normal

34:30 set up. Went back to our own camps.

### **What were your thoughts when you heard that the Australians had been shot?**

They shot that many people you had to get used to it. I don't know you seem to get blasé about it. It hurt me when Sid Derby got knocked off in that first patrol. The first bloke that was lost. But it kept on happening and you couldn't do much about it. Right through the piece they were caught,

35:00 most of them were shot. But it hurt when those bloody Indians did it. They came to Singapore as part of the British Indian Army and they chucked in the sponge and went over the Nips and of course, they got better rations and they got food and then were put as guards around our camp. Boys going outside pinching mainly coconuts were the main things you know. Two of our blokes, one of them Dick Ridgwell is still going in Perth I was talking to him the other day at a funeral of one our blokes.

35:30 Him and chap named Narvo, he's in the Kanchanaburi cemetery they were out getting, both had full black beards. They were pinching coconuts and Dick Ridgwell had done unarmed defence training and an Indian caught them one up the tree so Dick got up close enough to talk to this bloke for a while and knocked him over, Narvo came down and back into the camp. They had a fair idea where they'd come from. Whole batch of 2/4th

36:00 and they got us all out, all on parade and this bloody Indian guard and two Nips with him, he had to pick out the two blokes with the beard. They'd come in and Lenny Armstrong he was the battalion barber and straight to Len but instead of getting it clipped they got a shave. He clipped it off then got a shave. Well, I mean we'd been out in the sun you know, working all the time and we were very dark brown, look liked we were black and he's two snowy white faces in the middle of it all. They went through searched the bloody mob.

36:30 Nope, can't find them. No two black beards there. So bloody simple. Anyone, you know a kid would have woken up to the fact that these blokes had just had a shave. But oh no, a lot of silly mix-ups like that. All through the piece you'd find some humour otherwise you would have gone completely troppo [crazy]. Blokes that put things over the Nips at any opportunity at all you got a chance to. No, we stuck it out. Then the work party started up. We did the job

37:00 up in Johor, they put it there and that's where Dougy Ross made his pipes and case for them. When we sent all the books back to Selarang and so forth and after that I worked on work parties all around the place. I went to Adam Park. The funny thing at Adam Park I got into the office. I had always been collecting stamps. I had a pretty big stamp collection so I went through all the papers in the office and took all the

37:30 stamps off and I thought of it after I carried them when I started to go up into Thailand. A man would have any energy, why I should carry the stamps instead of throwing them away but later on I lost all my gear. No, we put that in different work parties.

### **Before we go on, when did the Koreans take over as guards from the Japanese?**

Oh the change over. I couldn't tell you exactly when it was. The change over, the first change over we had was from

38:00 front line Nips to Nips guards who were like older blokes and B Class people they brought in to look after us and we had a spell of that for about 10 days we had no guards. It was the funniest prison in the country. Because you walk around the place and there's no guards around the place so the boys would head off and see what we could find and three of us went into Singapore, went in and were wandering around and because Lavender Street was where the brothels

38:30 were so we were wandering around the place and often go down and have a look. Not that we were interested in brothels at any rate but we go walking down the street and a girl came out, spotted us, round the back. A little alleyway around the back and they sat us down and gave us a beautiful meal



done up with everything. Of course, we laughed about it afterwards. The local population and the Nips were paying their money at the front and we were around the back eating their profit. It was a weird position. We had about 10 days of it.

39:00 And if you did see a Nip you took no notice of him. You didn't salute which we always had to do but of course, when these old blokes came in as guards it suddenly changed. You were back to, it hurt like hell, these bastards, you had to salute them but that was it.

**Did you think about shooting through when the Japs weren't there?**

Well, where were we going to go? That was the point. We knew through, that they were down, that they'd taken Java, they'd taken Timor.

39:30 There was no where to go. Oh no. Every now and again there was a few blokes broke out and hardly any of them got anywhere. One of our Lieut, Scott Herwan he finished up, they didn't shoot him he ended up doing solitary confinement at Altram Road for years, right through the piece. He, to keep himself sane he got talking to the Nips, he studied, listened to their language. He finished up speaking quite fluent Japanese just by getting them to talk to him and so forth.

40:00 But no, I couldn't see any future in trying to get out of there.

**So how long were in Selarang before you went up to Adam Park?**

Oh, no, we went to different. I worked in about three different camps. There was Adam Park, one of the Happy Places,

**River Valley?**

River Valley.

40:30 I think it was River Valley where my mate Cowboy buried his bloody stuff in the middle of parade ground yeah. A bloke we buried last week he had some stuff that was pretty hot so he lined up two points to get a spot out in the middle of the parade ground, went out at night time and dug a hole and put this down there and covered it all up all nice and so forth. It rained like it all so they decided to dig a ditch, dig a drain straight through to drain the water off. Right through his patch. You should have heard him. He was one of the Fairbridge Farm boys. Wonderful

41:00 bloke. Gee, did he hold forth when he found out just by accident, they didn't know of course, who dug the trench or who got his gear. You see at that time you could pinch stuff and sell it through the wire. I was at

**What does that mean 'sell it through the wire'?**

The local population they would come to the wire and you would sell anything through them. The Nips used to come around and you would work out how often they came, when their lunch breaks were so there would be a mob of blokes all trading through the wire. From

41:30 in there they had a big lot of lowdowns. The cabbage patch as we called it was 100m huts by about 10-12m wide and they were stacked full of all types of stuff in case of a siege and of course, most of the Nips could read or write English so they'd get to it and get a go down empty and we would start and cart all the gear out, what ever it was. So many 100 cases of this and so many hundred cases of that. They told us some stupid things. Boot polish was

42:00 tooth cream and all sorts of

## Tape 5

00:31 Yes,

**Can you tell me why it was called the cabbage patch?**

I couldn't tell you but it was always known as the cabbage patch. It was laid like a garden style with only short gaps between each row and I suppose 8-10m between each row to the next one. We had a lot of humour there at times.

**What sort of humour did you have at River Valley Road Camp?**

Oh, I don't know.

01:00 That's where I gathered all the, pinched all the stamps from the office and so forth not that they were any good to me but the blokes who quite good at swimming they had the job of, we put a bridge across the end of Mac Ritchie Reservoir to the big hill behind and they put a shrine up there. They put shrines here and there all over the bloody country.

**What was the shrine in aid of?**

Oh their dead. Their Emperor. Whole lot of rot. But we put them up.

01:30 One of the capers there, they had a great old caper. If you did something wrong they gave you a chunkle which is an Asian hoe or just an ordinary hoe and they'd get you to stand hold it up in the air. Well that's all right for a while but it starts to get bloody a bit monotonous so we used to get to, we used to have a couple of guards around the place, someone would do something silly just to attract the guards attention while the next bloke went over and swapped around. We kept swapping around under this. It went on for quite a while.

02:00 **You kept swapping blokes around?**

Underneath. A different bloke holding the hoe up. You couldn't hold the hoe up for long. But it come apart. We had a big bloke, bloody Chipperfield. I don't know he was about 6ft 6 because he goes up and took his turn and all of a sudden the Nip woke up so and of course, they wear boots. They have a divided toe and these bloody boots so he strides up to him and he's too high to slap his face and he's kicking him and putting on a hell of a show but

02:30 it caused a bit of humour. Anything to break the monotony. We were working with a lot of locals there. They had them on road building and so forth. They dug up a beautiful golf course and they dug is all ways for their silly bloody memorials.

**Sorry they put a shrine on the golf course?**

Up above, on the hill above.

**So what happened to the golf course?**

Well, they built roads down over it from all different angles all leaving this bridge, over this bridge and up the hill to

03:00 this shrine.

**Can you describe the bridge that you built?**

Oh no, it was towards the end of the reservoir. All just logs that they'd rounded up from everywhere else. Put a deck, wooden decking on it. Completely wooden bridge.

**How long did this take to build?**

I left before they finished. They hadn't finished when we left there. They were putting the decking on it and so forth and we went off. I think that was when I was shipped to River Valley Road. Went in

03:30 there.

**Sorry I thought that was River Valley Road.**

That's where we used to work from the end of the cabbage patch from there, that was one of the jobs. Quite often they would take a truckload into town. I did a bit of town in there. Of course, there were cars left all over the place when they left. The left their keys in their cars and got on a boat wherever they could and a lot of those cars instead of taking the cars home they would take the tyres and wheels off them. We would have the job of putting a jack under it, take the wheels all off, they carted the wheels

04:00 And the cars were left all over the place with no wheels. That would be their main thing they were after, wheels and tyres mainly. Get all sorts of jobs. Then we were working at the godowns.

**Sorry the godowns. What's a godown?**

Well, they are storage huts. There was a big row of them. I don't know how many there would be altogether in the cabbage, that's what we called the cabbage patch. They were about 100m long, 10m wide and all just stored with everything Singapore would need in

04:30 case of a siege. The Nips got to get one empty and then they would start and shift and we'd have to carry the gear out of one. It would be checked how much was in each one as they went through, check what they had and the boys they would not to know what something was. They got all the stupid answers and so forth tell them tooth paste was boot polish and oh, anything. But then the tale's been told somewhere around the place I was there the day it happened, it was just after dinner and we were there working, shifting stuff and the boys

05:00 woke up there was tinned food. Tinned meat and someone came out with a big cardboard carton and drop it and bust. You'd drop your hat over a tin, pack it up, put it away and come back pick your hat up and away you'd go. Get it out of sight. And this had been going on for quite a while. A lot of stuff had been broken into. Every now and again cases fall down. Well, this was going to happen to but a Nip woke up and he got to and ah right oh, he's smart. So he got us all lined up, we were lined up in threes outside the hut.

05:30 Got us to bow the hat, went all through the actions, dropped the hat over the tin and as he was taking the case inside the bloke in the front row grabbed the bloody tin and passed it back out of sight. And he came back with a great big grin on his face, picked his hat up and nothing underneath. Wasn't funny for

a while. Big stick, you could see the first bloke he could see he started belting. It was those bit's of humour all through the piece. When you could put something over them you did. It was really funny the capers that came out.

**Can you think of any other**

06:00 **times that you actually got the one up on the Nips?**

Quite a lot of times different blokes put over. Hard to think of them now straight off. So many items they told you to do something. Do it but do it wrong.

**Like what?**

You had to go and pick something up and take it to a certain place. You'd take it around the back of the hut right out of sight and drop it and come

06:30 back. Of course, then he'd go to pick it, and then he'd come back, 'Where's the bloke?' and of course, they couldn't pick us apart same as we couldn't pick them apart. Until we woke up to get the look of them you could tell who was who.

**How did you learn to tell them apart?**

Oh, just by the look of the blighters and antics. Of course, you see I've got a whole lot of them, sketches of characters that, most of them had nicknames, we've all got nicknames for different things.

**What nicknames did they have?**

07:00 One bloke was 'Craven A'. Of course, up there everything's sweaty you sweat and they get, do you remember the old 50c cigarette tins, round tins. You punch a hole in either side of it and put a string through the lid into the side of the tin and he used to carry it, he used to Craven A cigarettes and hand on his belt. Well he was Craven A. Another little bloke was sugar. Talking about funny incidents. He was, he was a Christian, quite a pleasant little bloke.

07:30 He said to us one day 'You've been prisoners for 2 years and we've been prisoners for 20'. Japan took over Singapore, Japan took over Korea in 1910. Yes, he said 'They've been prisoners for years' but he wasn't game to say it near a Nip.

**He was Korean.**

Yeah. He was there one day and the only time we knew if the Red Cross parcels were about the Japs would be smoking American cigarettes. We knew bloody well they were getting them out of parcels. So this

08:00 stuff came in and a parcel between 10 men or something. They would work it out. You'd ration it out a tin of jam between 4 or 5 of you. You had to work it out amongst yourselves and all this sort of caper going on. But one of our Lieuts, Bob Learmonth, he was quite a well known man in the legal business here, he finished up he finished up with a tin of marmalade, when he balanced it all out there was a tin of marmalade over so he kept the tin of marmalade. We were having, working with sugar

08:30 going on quietly and have a spell, sit down all sit down.

**What were you working on?**

Oh, I couldn't tell you know. A lot of them used to give you a bit of spell every hour or so.

**What camp was this, was this the River Valley Road Camp?**

I think it was, I couldn't be sure. But he came up, he wandered up to Bob Learmonth and said 'Ah, me sugar, you marmalade.' He got the tale about it

09:00 and of course, old Bob Learmonth his face is going red because we all knew he had the tin of marmalade and yet we weren't supposed to know anything about it. But a lot of the Koreans were quite decent and yet the worst Korean of the whole bloody lot of them finished up was a Korean. The first bloke we wanted as far as war crimes in Singapore. Toyama.

**Where did you met up with him?**

First met him up when we were up on the line, Ban Pong. Where we got off the train.

**Right well, we won't go there just yet. I was just wondering where you'd**

09:30 **met him.**

No. All those camps around there. They were much the same, you'd go there for a time if you got sick or some thing like that, they'd put you on a truck and you'd go back to Changi area, Selerang.

**What sort of medical facilities were there?**

Oh well they made Roberts Barracks into a hospital, they were quite good they had a lot of our own stuff was there and they kept up pretty well. Major Hunt was there. That's one of the tales. He,

10:00 of course, venereal disease [VD] was a crisis, a crisis right through all that area and they would have M & B 3693 which is a tablet they use for VD and for some reason or other, this bloke I don't know what they were treating him for but Major Hunt gave him some of these tablets and cleared up dysentery straight away. Stopped dysentery. Of course, the next thing goes out straight away, all you work parties, if you get

10:30 anything take these tablets, they've got to go straight back to camp. And blokes, some of the blokes even got a stamp to make them up out of bloody rice, dried it out, punched it out with a stamp on them. Because the local population pay anything for those tablets to get them. Of course we had a job of getting them from any of the Godowns or anyone out of the place. Get them back to hospital. Any medical supplies at all.

11:00 There was a hell of a lot of medical supplies about the place there but they wouldn't let us get it. They got some but they couldn't get the rest of it.

**How did you get the salt?**

Oh pinched it if you could. Working in the Godowns at the cabbage patch, any medical supplies the boys would knock off. When I was working there I pinched a carton of cotton. A bit awkward to carry. Because everything you pinched you carted in your g-string. G-strings a cloth around your waist, tied at the back and about that long and

11:30 pulled up here and a flap hangs down there. NOTE: TAPE FAULT their's are all issued and they've got something, I could never find out what is was, something written in Japanese on the front of it. You see them all wandering around camp just in their underpants, with their g-string. But the blokes woke up just make it double. If you pinch something hold it up, drop, it hung down there and you walked. You know we got later on we got caught over,

12:00 after later on pinching salt. We got into town one day, because salt was always a problem.

**Why's that?**

We couldn't get it. They used to use trucks with tankers on them on the roads pulling all the way up to Changi beach, fill them up with sea water and bring it back to cook the rice in.

**Why, why do you need salt?**

Anyone, you're sweating continually and you've got have salt in your system otherwise skin problems straight away.

12:30 Yes, no we used to get salt. But this day we came in, this is later on, this is after we came back from Thailand, lined up outside the gaol, there was a guardhouse at the gaol we came in, instead of going down the main gate into the gaol we used to go down to the work party camp with huts out the back and they searched us hoping for franks five order. They had to have us in five all the times otherwise they couldn't count the bastards. Two fives are ten and that sort of shot. After he searched he walked past a bloke and

13:00 hauled off and smacked a blokes backside and hit something hard. All right, drop your strides and of course, tipped out salt. Started to go through and they ended up with a great big pile of salt. All these blokes emptying their g-strings and the Nip Lieut could speak a bit of English and he told us it was a very dirty habit to carry foodstuff like that. Oh, well we got through the piece. The boys tried putting it in their hats but every now and again they'd go around and knock a hat off. If something fell out you were in trouble. But I pinched a

13:30 carton of cotton and at that time the trucks used to drive in through the cabbage patch so we could get into the trucks and driven straight back to camp it was quite easy. But this day the truck stopped out on the main road and I've got a carton of ordinary old wooden reels, 4 x 3 in a flat pack.

**Why is that useful?**

Well, that's the way, even, now I suppose still, that's the way they used to be packed up.

**But why do you need wooden cotton reels?**

They were worth 8 dollars through the fence.

14:00 **Right.**

And we were getting 10c a day so at any rate, I've got this and I've got my g-string and it's a bit awkward to walk but then they said the trucks down the bottom and the boys are all still trying to keep me in the middle of the pack while we're marching but I got it home. 8 dollars. 80 days pay. Oh no, it's surprising the stuff that came out of it. There's a photo there of Steve Gleeson he came out limping out of a pack and I said 'Oh yeah, what've you got?' The 2

14:30 ounce, not really rub, the ordinary little flat packs and he put it in his shoe and he's walking and the Nips and everyone's having a look at why he's limping. If they'd taken his bloody shoe he had bloody 2 ounces of cocoa in there. Pinch anything you could. That was the main past time, see what you could

pinch on work parties.

**Can you explain a bit more about trading on the wire? What would happen, if you can step me through that.**

Oh well, the Nips had guards, they used to go around

15:00 patrols at different points. You see if was fairly big area. Our own engineers had to put the barbed wire fences up. It was old Dutch denier wiring they used and we'd get places where it was a quiet corner somewhere and it was a trading post. You'd go down there if you had something. If you weren't trading you got out of the way, you weren't allowed to hang around down there. But you'd go down there like I had a carton of cotton and I'd go down there and tell them what I've got and wait for it.

**How would you communicate?**

15:30 Nearly all the natives would speak English. Nearly all the Chinese and Malays. You had all sorts. All the locals civilian population. Most of them spoke English was a set thing right through the piece. Tell them what you had, offer a price and seldom ever got robbed. We had one of the 2/4th blokes later on had a hotel in Kalgoorlie. He used to go to Singapore of a night. 12 mile but he had contacts take him in there and so forth but he was trading in big weigh on. A lot of stuff.

16:00 **How was he getting a hold of stuff?**

He'd say what he wanted, they wanted something he'd tell you what he wanted. If you could pinch it supply him he paid reasonably well to you. You weren't taking any, the only risk you were taking was getting it back into the camp. But he'd get it out of a night time and get it to Singapore. We had another one of our blokes, he's still alive, later on in the piece he was lending money, he was trading inside the camp which was paying people about a quarter

16:30 of what he should have done and he was lending money dollar for a dollar. Malay dollar for an Australian dollar making a profit every way he could and he's the only one of the bad blokes of our mob that I know of.

**When you say 'bad blokes' what's ..?**

Well if you put something over our own people that's something that was taboo.

**Did he have any mates?**

No. I heard he's still going because I heard it in the newsletter every now and again but he was lending money

17:00 and my mate Bob Murray and I went through a whole lot of it together we said 'right oh, what ever we could we'll get it off him' so he lent us quite a bit of money and after the war I got a letter, I've got it put away, from the National Bank Manager that they held an IOU [I owe you] in someone's name and so forth and Bob Murray and Bob came back and went back to his old job, he was a traveller for Levers, the soap people and

**Sorry, just going back to trading on the wire,**

17:30 **when you get more money from the trading what are you spending the money on?**

You could buy stuff inside the camp occasionally. Bits of 'coolah blacka', it's sort of sugared block stuff. Lots of odds and sods you could buy in there.

**Yeah, could you be a bit more specific about what you could buy in the camp?**

Oh, its hard now. Occasionally you could buy fruit, coconuts. Occasionally you might get paw paw or something like

18:00 that but very, very rarely. It was all fairly, the main thing through the piece was anything you could eat. That was the sort of thing. Just to get away from the rice all the time.

**How much were you eating at River Valley Road Camp?**

I wouldn't know now. I suppose the rations we what it was, we were getting quite a bit of rice. Rice wasn't a problem early in the piece. It wasn't until after the work up on

18:30 the line the rice rations fell right away to nothing. It got to the stage where they didn't have the shipping to ship stuff and they once, the navy got onto them and started sinking their shipping they were really in trouble. The submarines were the cause of building the railway line.

**What sort of sleeping arrangements did you have in River Valley Road Camp?**

Most of them there.

19:00 I think at River Valley Road we were sleeping in a house, a fairly big house, one of the mob sleeping in a fairly big house, sleeping on the floor, concrete floors if you had any. I got into a mix up there over, how do I put it, a bloke in the camp was pinching stuff amongst the gear. He wasn't one of our blokes. I know his name it was stick in mind forever but he was pinching stuff and the

19:30 chap, the captain in charge of us was a Captain Bull Bowring. I don't know whether he was 28th, 29th or 30th I don't want to see him. This went on for a while and someone spotted this bloke and mentioned it to the NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] and they said 'Right oh, go and search his gear'. Quite a lot of stuff turned up he shouldn't have had. So they said 'Right oh, outside' they lined up two lines of blokes and he had to run down the middle and that's

20:00 he didn't go very far and some bloke took a swing at him and hit him under the chin. Oh, when we first go there the usual thing if you go to a new camp is go for the scrounge. See anything you can pinch is useful. I came by a stretcher, proper old, ordinary stretcher. Of course there were a lot of rubbishing going on. They were all sleeping on the concrete floor and I'm sleeping on the stretcher. That's all right. But any rate this bloke took him out.

**So hang on, can we just go back a bit? So the guy who's in charge**

20:30 **of your lot of blokes says the next time that the guy goes and pinches something that he shouldn't have pinched..**

No. We knew that someone was pinching stuff but we didn't know who it was. Captain Bowring, they always called him Bull Bowring, he said if you catch him I don't want to see him in the orderly room.

**What does that mean?**

Well, if you put him there he's got to charge him with stealing and he's either got to return him to Changi, Selerang or turn him into the Nips for pinching which they wouldn't do

21:00 so he'd have to send him back there but he doesn't want to be involved in it. So

**So it was up to you blokes to organise something? Right, I get what you're saying.**

Two lines of blokes lined up and you tell him to run down the middle and he didn't get very far, a couple of blokes had a swipe at him and smacked him as he went through and so forth. One of the blokes hit him under the chin and he went over backwards and hit the back of his head, split the back of his head open. So that's all right. So the medical orderly had to come through, he's got to go to hospital. What did they bloody do? Took my bloody stretcher.

21:30 I got a stretcher and that's it I never saw it again. Of course, once it goes back to the hospital they keep it. I never ever found out what happened to that bloke. I know his name. He was Neesom Slater. He was about the only time I saw anyone amongst our own mob pinch. That was definitely taboo. You can't do things like that but the bloke who hit him I worked with him later on and was with him when he died. He was a fast bowler for NSW [New South Wales] later on.

**Right.**

22:00 **Oh no. We weren't bad then. I mean we were eating reasonably well. It wasn't any five star hotel but you were getting enough to keep alive and pinching more to boost it up.**

**What sort of washing facilities did you have in River Valley Road?**

22:30 Not much. In Singapore there wasn't any problem. There was plenty of water. I'd just you know, have a wash. You see up there you are hot and sweaty all the time. You see the variation in temperature in Singapore, day/night 24 hours a year was about 80° or it was in the old temperature. You see it on TV [television] now on channel, on SBS [Special Broadcasting Service]. No variation much. You are hot and sweaty all the time. Sometimes

23:00 early dry but most of the time wet and the sweat just pours off you all the time. You know whatever you had you walked straight into the shower clothes and all, give them a good rub out and wash yourself off as much as you could, get the soap and that chuck your clothes over the line for half an hour and put them back on. Blokes wandering around all over the place in the nicy but no one seemed to give a damn.

**What was the most common attire?**

23:30 Singapore then, we had shorts and boots. Very often you run short of socks but still you wear your boots. We wore our boots right through until we went up on the line. Occasionally they used to the Nips later on they issued us with their boots but they issued us with bloody rubber boots with divided toes and of course, me having a small foot I could always get a pair of boots but the toes used to chafe me between the toes. My bloody feet

24:00 were sore so he said, go without. Go barefooted. Lasted from middle of '43 to the finish I was barefooted the whole way through. Never had a pair of boots. Occasionally I would pick up a Jap boot and put it on for a while but get a sore toe again so get rid of it. You got used to it. Up in the line of course, you went up there with boots on it was hot and you were in water and mud and

24:30 the boots just gradually fell apart. There was no where to renew them there. Nope.

**So what happened after you were in River Valley Road Camp? Where did you go from there?**

Oh, back into Selarang most of the time. Just going out on work parties, different work parties. Sometimes you would go out for a day job or different things like that. Working inside the camp. You see all transport we did inside the camp was our own trucks, they stripped them right down just to

25:00 four wheels, a steering box and a foot brake and they put just wooden platforms on them. They put a rope out the front, a cross-rope. Two blokes on each cross-rope. There might be six, there might be eight depending on what they were shifting, how many blokes was the length of rope they put on. We carted all the gear around the place. Go down, as I said they used to pull the tankers out to Selarang beach fill them up with water, sea water to cook the rice. Shifting stuff between Selarang over to Roberts Barracks or wherever it was. Blokes, they would pull these damn trucks all

25:30 around the place.

**So back at Selarang had anything changed while you had been away at River Valley Road Camp?**

Oh, it was changing all the time with different groups coming in and some blokes had been away on different work parties. You mightn't see them for months then turn up. We used to wander out of a night time. If a new mob came back from a work party you'd always go and see who was there and if any of your mates had come back. At that time of course we had the first thing that came up was beri-beri.

26:00 It means that the fluid can't go out of your system. Your legs expand. It gets to that stage you can press your thumb into your leg like that and leave an indentation that would stop there for about an hour. Of course it wasn't too bad but later on in the piece when we had more of it later on beri-beri got up into their body and if it got into your chest it killed you.

**Why is that?**

Because it just stopped all your vital organs from working. Your chest filled up with fluid.

**How common was beri-beri?**

26:30 **How common?**

Well we had a run of it before we went up the line and quite a bad trot but then by the time we went up there I don't think there was much of it going but later on in the piece up there it got really bad. A lot of our blokes, a hell of lot of our blokes, I've got a list in that book of ours, the blokes that died and there is a lot of beri-beri cases. Death due to beri-beri.

**What other sort of ailments would fellows come down with at Selarang?**

Oh there wasn't that

27:00 much in Singapore until we went up the line that's where all the sickness was. You'd get a few stray things. Diarrhoea, a bit of vomiting, dysentery. That wasn't bad. Dysentery was all up the line all those problems. We had a bit of pellagra which was skin complaint. You get bloody, lose the colour pigment out of your skin.

**What causes that?**

Deficiency. Deficiency is the, practically every complaint we had up there

27:30 was caused by deficiency of diet. What you were eating. Old Speed McKinnon, one of our Lieuts he lost the colour out of one side of his face. He had a moustache and one part of it went white on him. He was the member for legislative council for Bunbury later on.

**Is it permanent?**

Yeah a lot of it is. He finished up going grey so a lot of it didn't show, it didn't matter. That saved him. Saved him the worry.

28:00 **The guards at Selarang, were they the same guards all the time?**

Most of the time yeah. They had the change over period where there was a blank spell where we had no guards but most of the time they were. But then the Koreans came in with them and of course, the Indians were there all the time making a bloody nuisance of themselves but they didn't come in. they were more as guards outside the camp. They didn't come in to us there. We put a

28:30 bloke, put a man down a borehole. Fixed him up. He didn't talk much. The boys, I don't know what they'd done, they'd been out pinching stuff somewhere and he chased two of them back into camp and he never said what it is but they said he's never going to get out. You know a lot of discussion and so forth. We had bore holes, they had bore holes made proper. And of course, we had every tradesman you could think of in the place and they made proper seats,

29:00 Fly proof seats on them. The flies were the biggest problem everywhere. Fly proof seats so

**What does a fly proof seat look like?**

Just an ordinary box but they were planed out true so once you dropped the lid down on it it sealed it up. The fly couldn't get near it and so forth but there was just a bloody box there. No back on it. Lift the lid up, use it, drop the lid back as quickly as you could and get out of the way. And this bloke came into camp and they said he's not to go out of the camp so after discussion someone said take the

29:30 lid off a borehole. So about 3 or 4 of us got to and we cleared the borehole of the way and picked him up and dropped him in rifle and all. It wasn't long after the Nips came in, a search. They were looking for an Indian. There was no chance of finding him. I've often thought of since. They talk now this piece recently out in Timor over a bloke being in trouble for kicking a dead body. We got a bloody live body dropped him head first in, picked up and threw him straight down the borehole. Just the right size.

30:00 Not a sound of him. Put the borehole back and no one ever knew. But I mean, they forfeited any right they had to live. The Indians.

**Sorry why's that? You kind of lost me a little bit. You popped this guy down a hole because of why?**

I don't know he'd chased the boys back into camp. They had been doing something they didn't want the Nips to know about.

**Sorry who? Why's he being punished like this?**

30:30 Well, we never had any respect for them. They were Indian British Indian troops and they swapped over to the Nips.

**Right.**

They lost all, any right they ever had. They were on the outer. They knew that right away. They knew that if they got out of bounce the boys would get them. No, he was I've often thought of it since, I don't even know what the boys were up to. They just said he was not to go back out of the camp. They didn't want him to go back to the Nips and tell them what he'd seen. We just let him go down the borehole.

31:00 **Fair enough.**

He didn't make a sound. I said afterwards, he went down there and his rifle went down and put the borehole back. A lot of them knew what happened. I don't even know who dropped him down but I helped them take the bloody box off the borehole. But no, those things happen.

**So what happened next for you after you've been in Selarang for a while? Do you go to another work camp?**

No.

31:30 There's three camps. We went to Johor first up. There was Adam Park, River Valley Road and another camp, I can't think one of the, one of the godowns. They had a lot of those shows where they had players you know, amusement parks and it was one of those we went to and I can't think where it was now. They just used that for headquarters for you. Sent blokes in there to cook your rice and so forth and you went out to work.

32:00 Different work parties all over the place. Just working here and there. Early in the piece it was all carted around by truck and finished up you walked.

**Well, maybe we can just have a bit of a chat about Adam Park. What sort of work parties were you doing from Adam Park?**

The only thing I worked on from there was going out in trucks, all I did was work out on the Mac Ritchie Reservoir, building roads and so forth up to their shrine up above the Reservoir.

32:30 **Most of these places were all to do with shrines as far as the work was concerned.**

Wherever they put these shrines up there.

**What were the facilities like at Adam Park?**

Oh, fairly quiet. Just usual old thing. You got out to work, come home just about dark. Have your bit of rice and quite often have a bit of a sing song or if you had someone there, like early in the piece we had, used to have talks and so forth.

33:00 Have discussion groups and things like that to keep them going.

**What sort of discussion groups would gather?**

On anything. Early in the piece I got tied up, I got caught up with Padre Palain, he was the Padre for the 2/26th Battalion in Queensland, an infantry mob. He was a wonderful bloke. World War I man and he'd get a mob of them together and hold a, start discussion groups on anything. Get people talking, keep their minds active

33:30 and so forth. He was talk about different places he'd been to. There was a lot of that going on. I got on quite well with him. I ran foul with one of our mob one day. One of our NCOs he said there was



supposed to be so many men go on church parade and no one had been going.

**Sorry, on?**

Church parade. So, the Sergeant then was a cook, had been a cook. An old bloke and readout a list of names that were

34:00 supposed to go to church parade and mine was amongst them. There was no bloody way. So I went, I was good mates with Padre Palain and I went and told him. They were going to take me in and had to front Captain Bunning, Tom Bunning, one of the Bunning brothers. He was boss of that. He was also Chairman of the WACCA [Western Australian Cricket Club Association] and they were going to march me in there and take my hat off and I said 'No, you can't take me hat off unless you charge me with something.' He doesn't want to charge you with something Captain Bunning wants to see you. So I went in there

34:30 and he said 'I believe you were listed to go to church parade'. I said 'I don't care whether I was listed or not but I definitely refuse to go on a church parade, compulsory church parade'. 'You can't refuse' and I said 'Yes I can. Padre Palain's outside'. It stopped. No more compulsory church parades. Finished for keeps. Oh no, there was some things I draw the line at and that was one of them. Over the years I haven't been to church for quite a while but I used to go regularly. I'm pretty well known down here.

35:00 **Why did you draw the line at compulsory church parade when you were in camp?**

Because it was compulsory church parade. You shouldn't have to be told. If you want to go to church you go but you shouldn't be told you have to go.

**With the discussions, what sort of things would the men discuss? Just travel?**

Oh yeah. Well Captain Gwen of our mob, he was a top solicitor in Perth. He'd done a lot of travelling, he and his wife. He had travelled all of the place and you get different people. I mean amongst the

35:30 prisoners of war you had quite a few blokes who had been quite a lot of time in gaol. You had judges. Judge Curlewis. He was the bloody, ah eight div. Quite a lot of legal men. Bloody so forth. Bernie O'Sullivan finished up Chief Conciliation Commissioner here.

**So basically these blokes would just talk from their life.**

Yeah, yeah anything to just get the talk going. Or start up some subject that might be in the news and so forth just to keep peoples minds active.

36:00 Keep them going.

**How would you keep your morale up when you were in?**

It was things like that that helped. I mean at that time we were getting the news quite regularly. We knew what was going on.

**How were you getting the news?**

Oh, they had secret wirelesses all around the bloody place.

**What would happen to a fellow if they were caught?**

You were in big trouble if they caught you with it. Well, the blokes, that's where the poor buggers on over in Borneo

36:30 they were in trouble. We lost I think, 2000 Australians, or 4 short of 2,000 Australians and 500 Poms well they were caught with a wireless and took them out and shot them.

**Did any of your blokes get caught with a wireless?**

No, I don't know of anyone. We took the wirelesses up on F Force. I only found that out after I lost my gear. Kip McGwin said what ever happens you have to give that bloke with the radio, he's got a piano accordion, give him a hand to carry it up there

37:00 and found out later on that there was a wireless in it. And of course not only did they have it in but then they had to get batteries. So of a night time if you camped near, it was funny, if you camped near a Jap truck someone had to keep cockatoo, keep guard, and they would hook onto the battery, get the news and back in again.

**That's pretty ingenious.**

Oh yeah. There was some wonderful blokes amongst them

37:30 in F Force. Same thing a bloke carried a camera nearly through the whole way and developed his pictures.

**You mentioned that before that's quite outstanding.**

I've got a whole lot of them here.

**Where there any sorts of punishments that would happen?**

Any?

**Punishments that would happen apart from beatings?**

Oh yeah. Well, blokes like bloody Penrod Dan he was locked up in solitary confinement for trying to escape. He got so far up Malaya and so forth and head up through

38:00 that way but the locals dobbed them in. See the Japs put a price on the head of a prisoner of war. Some poor buggers they had no tucker or no nothing, they couldn't really blame them. If they saw an Australian wondering around the bush trying to keep out of sight.

**I'm just wondering if there were any public executions in Selarang?**

Oh yeah. The two blokes, the day over the not signing a form. They took them out and shot them the bloody Indians. There were quite a lot of people like that, yeah.

38:30 Of course, a lot of blokes were taken out of camp and no one knows why but they never came back. They're just written off as being knocked off.

**How often would that happen? Blokes getting knocked off?**

Well, I think according to the book it says about 1,500 blokes they reckon were killed.

**Would it be a regular occurrence?**

Oh no, but just mostly depended on an individual Nip officer. They had the right to do what they like with us. Most were quite reasonable and

39:00 some were just dead bastards, there's no doubt about it. Well, little Les McCane, I put his story in there. He was picked up a few days after Singapore was finished but it was five days later they lined a whole batch of them up and shot them. He only died six months ago. Made a pin hole in his back, made a hell of mess here where it came out. Chewed the front of his shirt. He was as good as gold until the last two years. They finished up they had to take

39:30 one leg off below his knee but he came home and rode a motorbike around the place. Always up to everything. Oh no.

**So what comes after your work with some of these camps at Adam Park and River Valley Road?**

Back to Selarang. Yeah.

**Are you doing this for about a year or so?**

Yeah, March

40:00 '43, picked up F Force. You see the other forces started going away about August I think A Force went out.

**First of all can you explain F Force please?**

F Force. Well they went off alphabetically. Like A Force with the Burma, B Force when to Borneo, C Force went to Japan, a lot of Senior Officers. Don Force went to Thailand and headed up, started the line from the bottom. E Force went to Borneo.

40:30 We lost B and E Force completely and then they formed F Force. They were going to take. The tail came out there was to be 7,000 blokes to go up there. Half and half, British and Australian and we were going to camp it was easier to take us up there. There was more food up there all the tales they told us. We could take all sorts of gear, musical instruments and so forth. It wasn't a work party, wasn't a work camp and everything else. So of course, right oh

41:00 we line up. Finished up they couldn't get 7,000 fit men. So they had to take blokes that were sick, were getting about, battling getting about so made up the 7,000.

**How were you told that this was going to happen? Did you have to organise this yourselves?**

They would notify our Officers they wanted 7,000 men for a party and they'd have to work it out. Chop them up. I wasn't on F Force but Bob Murray and all the gang. You had to stick as a group. A group,

41:30 if one was crook you looked after him. As a party you could do all sorts of things so I wasn't on F Force At the time I was under an eye specialist, Major Ore and my eyesight was fading off me I couldn't see too well.

**Why was your eyesight fading?**

We've got a hell of a lot of blokes come home blind, partly blind.

**Why was that?**

Deficiency. They didn't know what it was. So any rate I was paraded to Major Ore  
42:00 and said all my group was going

## Tape 6

00:30 Well, the air force they made 13 training days, air force train in a day for 13 days went up there. It was about 4-5 days trip from Singapore to Ban Pong a little town about 80ks short of Bangkok that's where they unloaded us there and that was the start. We went one little camp down on the river.

01:00 It was quite good. The fact we could buy fish, buy fish or buy duck eggs and so forth and the next camp was at Kanchanaburi, the little port of Kanchanaburi, correctly called. That's where, what was the port for barges then travelling up the river but now is a city of about 40,000 at present

01:30 and then we just started to march. They marched us for 17 nights. Why they marched us night time no-one could ever work it out. Up first the few camps up above Chanburi we were into Don Force work party they were working on the line, building the formation for the line and once we got beyond that it was just a track, night time marching through the jungle. We just kept going. Twice we had a break of one night without marching the rest of the time we kept going.

### **What were you wearing on those marches?**

Boots, sock and shorts

02:00 and about halfway through it I don't know what night it was, we, the officers organised the local population with yak carts, we organised five yak carts to put our gear on and they would take it.

### **What kind of gear were you carrying at this point?**

I had my bit of, didn't have much, I had a blanket a few bits, personal things,

02:30 my wallet with all my photos and things like that. It wasn't that big a pack but I put my gear on and when we got to next morning we got to the camp there was three yak carts that never showed up. I had no gear, only what I stood up in. I didn't even have a Dixie [tin cup] or anything else to keep my rice in. It was a bit of a job for a couple of days. There were people that had to drop out they got sick. I finished up with an Indian Dixie, squarish Dixies

03:00 and a tin mug. Of course hygiene was the big thing. It didn't matter with the flies about, to keep everything clean. If you were going to draw your rations, they would always have a fire, boiling water, boiling the rice I used to always hold my Dixie into the flame for a while, draw my rations. You can imagine after months of that what it looked like. But I carried that right through the piece.

### **Black.**

Blackened up.

### **Can I just ask you what happened to the yak carts?**

Well, no one knows.

03:30 They've got a trailer load of gear, I suppose it was worth more than the money they were paid. They were going to be paid when they got there but they took the gear and went off. Of course it was all my photos of home and everything else. All my memories were gone.

### **How did that affect you at the time?**

Oh, it was a bit hard. It was one of the hard parts of it but as Captain Gwen, one of our captains and he was at my all the time, at the boys all the time make sure the piano accordion comes up and help someone you know, that was crook, go back and help. So

04:00 I was carrying other people's gear and bloody piano accordion and different things like that.

### **Who had the piano accordion?**

I don't know who it was. I don't know but Skipper Gwen did, he knew it was. He said to me later on, we never knew until afterwards, after we got up there that where the bloody wireless was. While were on the march up there we heard that Italy had chucked it in so you can work out roughly a date when Italy cooled the fire. But, no we went through and of course we were up

04:30 two camps below Niki, I'm not too sure if it was Tarso, I'm sure what camp it was but there was a lot of civilians. Of course they took thousands of civilians up there. First up they paid them. They told them they were going to be paid, a lot of them took their families with them. They were going to be paid to work on the railway line but of course, when that cut out they just rounded them up off the streets, put them on a train and sent them up there. So we got to this camp and there was blokes dying and dead and God knows what and we didn't wake up to the fact

05:00 kept away from them and that but we got to Shemo and [Son]Kuri, the lower of the Kuri camps and then suddenly woke up our blokes started to get cholera. It's a wicked bloody thing.

**What are the symptoms of cholera?**

You start, you vomit and you pass the other end it's just a grey slime and it just takes all the fluid out of your system. Blokes lose half his weight, body weight in 12 hours

05:30 if you have a really bad dose. It can kill you in 12 hours. It's a shocking thing. We've got a lot of blokes still going around now who got home and got a dose of it, you know not that bad, and got over it but it's the wonderful part some of our blokes. They put up a separate tent, a camp and set up a hospital camp for cholera cases and isolation and blokes volunteered to go and look after them. Wonderful blokes actually went away.

**Was there any possibility that they would contract the cholera**

06:00 **while taking care?**

Oh, yes. Yes. You see it was spread by flies or drinking water. Water is the biggest carrier of cholera so of course, then we started off the only water we had was boiled. They used to have blokes on full time. Frightened the hell out of the Nips. They were really frightened of cholera because they had injections. We were given the cholera injection before we went up there but evidently it wasn't the right stuff. But they had blokes then boiling water and I gained an army water bottle after I lost my gear and that was it.

06:30 You got a ration of water bottle each day and that was for everyone.

**Who gave you injections?**

We did, Nips brought the stuff up and our doctors gave it to us most cases. Yeah. Our own doctors went with us there. There were the greatest people in the world. The doctors. I mean the trip, we've organised a trip to go up in April. They call it the 'Quiet Line Tour' well that's over Weary Dunlop. But we had Bruce Hunt with us and he was fantastic man. Of course, he was a big bloke.

07:00 He was about 6ft 2 but big physically, every way and he'd bark at those bloody Nips. Go crook and half of them were frightened of him, I'm bloody sure of it. He used to have some arguments. Of course, we had Toyama with us. The first time we met Toyama we got off the train at Ban Pong and there was a whole group of us standing around and he was going on about something or other and the Captain Gwen was talking to another major, an Australian major and he said something

07:30 very detriment apparently about this little bloke standing up in front and the little bugger understood English and Gwenty always wore horn rimmed glasses and he turned with his stick and belted the side of his head and knocked his glasses off and knocked him over and it was a very, very tense few seconds and Gwenty didn't know whether to grab the little bugger or what to do but you're in trouble if you do. You can't touch them because after, we used to watch him all the time and later on he and Bruce used to have some bloody arguments.

08:00 He'd want so many, say 200 men and I'd have about 50 men fit to go out and the rest of them, take them out of the hospital, take them from any where at all, 200 men and go and we were sending, taking men out, helping them to walk to go out to work party. Once they got there they couldn't work so they were out there and come back and oh no. He had us on parade one morning just cracking daylight and he said, cause Toyama always said he was a Korean,

08:30 he was a Japanese gentlemen. He's standing there and he said 'This Japanese gentlemen beside me' and of course, Toyama starts bowing as they do, bowing at the waist, 'he was born out of wedlock' and he went on about the work party and of course everyone burst out laughing. Oh no, Gwenty, he used to have some barneys [fights] with him but that was it. It's because we had cholera and then you have every other disease going about the place.

09:00 **Whereabouts did you start working on the line?**

Sonkuri, there's three Sonkuri camps. Komo Sonkuri, Sonkuri and Shemo Sonkuri. That's right Komo's the bottom one. Upper and lower camps, Komo and Shemo were their names. And I worked there through most of the time. One we built a big bridge there, spent a lot of time pole driving and that sort of caper.

**Can you describe the work in detail that you did there?**

Oh well when you're putting a bridge up they cut the logs straight out of the

09:30 trees. They brought them down. We had an elephant early on the piece, wonderful bloody thing. Shifts logs around, roll logs over and use it to flatten the tops off and all this sort of caper. They could do anything that bloody elephant and half way through the mahout, the Burmese and he got cholera and the elephant was there and no one to get it to work no one except the mahout. It had a bloody baby about 4-5 year old. Late in the piece

10:00 the boys were cutting, getting blue metal for the balance of the line and I worked with a chap that was

in that business over, of pitching stuff. We were what they call hammer and tap. They give you a 4ft bar with a chisel in and an 8-pound hammer. Two blokes if you were know one another it's good, you can work away quite good but if you don't you not relying on the bloke swinging the hammer that he doesn't, he hits right and doesn't hit your wrist or something. But it was

10:30 a good job and I stuck at it for a long time with this one bloke and we were working on that then when you drilled the hole and it had to go so deep in and put a charge in it, blow it out and the other mob with hammer and tap, that's where all the tropical ulcers came in. Blokes with a hammer getting on a rock and they have to break it down to quart size to go on the line and of course, the bits were flying up cutting their shins of course, infection straight away and so many blokes came home with their legs off.

11:00 We were working there at that for quite a long time and yet they told us the stack was 2m long a 1m wide and a 1m high and of course, you can't stack it straight up so we were would lay it on the land and work it all out, yes that all right and stick it here, that's right and start another one. Three or four of them, this bloody little elephant came up and put his head down and through the middle of the stack, made us laugh like hell. We had to put it all together again. Bloody things.

11:30 I was stuck on that. We came in one night, I can't think of his name now, Nicholson he was a fast bowler for NSW cricket team. He and I worked together for a long while. At that time I was pretty fine. There wasn't much of me and someone said in the dark, you'd better go see your mate he's not too good. He had cholera. He wasn't there in the morning. No, bastard a thing. Another one of our blokes, two brothers, one of them, he was in the camp alongside

12:00 me in the huts you have about this much space between each bloke. You're packed in. You know, head to the wall feet out and the got sick through the night and had to get outside and so forth. Shocking bloody thing cholera. But I was lucky I've got marks on my legs from ulcers but they cleaned up.

#### **How were your ulcers cared for?**

With a spoon. They used a spoon to get to and just scrape them

12:30 out, clean them right out to get blood and so forth and if you had a bit of cloth or something to put over it and put on. Put a bandage, banana leaf or something to wrap them up. They had no medicine for it. I mean, they can clear them up easy if they've got the stuff and of course, then they got the stage where legs got that crook and the poison and that was going in their system that they were taking the legs off trying to save them. A lot of our blokes came home with one leg. Quite a lot of them didn't come home because they couldn't stand the shock of the amputation

13:00 but it was very, very seldom we had ulcers anywhere bar on the lower leg. Bastards.

#### **They must have been excruciating those ulcers?**

Oh it is yeah, they were painful. You could feel it going up to your leg, you don't know what to do but. They had blokes there, Jack Orange I was with him, he was with our group right through the piece and he was one who came around and cleaned your ulcer out.

13:30 But we had blokes with ulcers going out in work parties because we had to have so many men go out whether you liked it or not you to go to work.

#### **Can you describe the camp that you were staying in there?**

That's a funny thing I've had one of the blokes doing this up now, they've just told me that myself and Dr Lloyd Cahill and another Doctor Ore are the only three left from the Sonkuri camp and they want me to draw a plan of it. I can't

14:00 can't see it. That's why they want me in this party going over this year, want to go up there because they found that a lot of these camps have been flooded by that big dam they put up. The Snowy Mountains Corporation went up there and put up a terrific big dam up, not that big a wall. I suppose it's a big wall for here but it flows water back about 30 odd mile about 4 rivers all flood and it cuts them all off and its there just for a power station. Later on of course it will be irrigation. Yes, they found

14:30 Sonkuri camp when I was up there on '01, we found the top camp at Komo Sonkuri but they want someone to go back up to see the plan of where it was, where the hospital camp was. The tent. Of course, you always had to put that lower down. Because if you foul the ground the water, don't have a wash. We went into one of the camps up there and the Indians all the civilian Indian group had been there and they built their toilet on the side of the

15:00 hill above their camp. It was so stupid because I mean, whatever you do try and get your camps high and you toilets and stuff out of the way. So that it doesn't foul. You see up there it rains, it's measured in bloody feet. Terrific rains when it goes. We had a lot of trouble over that. That why I say when the river flooded and there was cholera in the river and you got a shower of rain you got out and got yourself washed because you went to work in the

15:30 bloody rain.

#### **How did the rain affect your progress on the line?**

That was the made it so hard. You at first at lower Sonkuri and the trucks couldn't up from down below. Nieke was our base and the trucks couldn't get through and we had quite a while what they called 'quartering the roads'. They'd cut logs about 8ft long and just lay them continually all along through the all the hollows so the trucks could climb over those to get the rations through.

- 16:00 Bigger of a set up there. But we got through and then with the formation. We're trying to cart dirt in baskets or anything you can to build up the embankments and the rain was washing it down all the time. Yet, just recently we were talking about that, it's in that book in fact, some of those embankments they put up 60 years ago and they are exactly as they were put up. They put
- 16:30 banks on a curve and they didn't put a culvert in it. The water built up against it and they are porous material and the water just drifted through. There was some wonderful engineering as far as it goes. You see Britain mapped that railway about 40-50 years beforehand and it would take 5 years to build it and the loss of life was too much they wouldn't touch it yet the Nips put it up in 15 months. They had a lot of bloody spare labour. No, as far as the
- 17:00 engineering part of it, they did some wonderful bloody work no doubt about that. But it was quite a shock I went back in '01, took two sons, a daughter and a granddaughter. The granddaughter is a nursing sister, well she's in England now. It was good to take the kids back and see. That's the strange thing about it you see. We marched for 17 nights to get to Sonkuri camp and now there's a
- 17:30 highway, 323 highway right through to the Burma border. Sealed bitumen road, you can go up in a day trip, up there and back. I walked into Burma from the top Sonkuri camp. I never could work out the mileage. It would be about 18 kms. The trucks couldn't get through. At that time our rations were coming through from the Burma end and for about
- 18:00 10-12 days a party of 20 each day with one guard and 20 you'd walk through camp up through to 105 Kilo Camp in Burma and I did two trips. I kept reasonably well. I spent more time out in the work party than most of them did because I was far more frightened of the hospital than I was of the Nips. If you go into hospital, if you go to hospital with a dose of malaria, well you work through malaria most times, but if you went into
- 18:30 hospital with something like that you'd go in with one complaint and get two or three others while you were there. Everyone was so bad. It was a regular thing to go to work, I've told this to doctors in Hollywood and they wouldn't believe you. But you would be in a party of say 100 blokes you would have a dozen, 15 of them in the middle of an attack of malaria, shivers and shakes like hell you still had to do the work because if you didn't there was blokes there with ulcers and bloody all this other stuff who had to go.
- 19:00 The numbers had to be put out there even though they went out on the line and didn't work. You laid down in the rain. I know we walked through to Burma and you have ordinary army pack, just straps that go over your shoulder and got to walk up with this one bag and so forth and you filled both back packs with dry rice and of course, we were so thin the straps cut into your shoulder, use banana leaves, make a big bundle of banana leaves put them under there, just padding and you'd leave early in the morning. They would give you a feed of rice up
- 19:30 at the 105 Camp in Burma and see from Burma end from Thanbyuzayat, where they started the line, they, all their camps were in kilometres, so many kilometres as they went up. There was about 112 I think was the borderline and Three Pagodas Pass. You'd go up there and come back and well, after I'd been back a few days someone said 'What's Three Pagoda Pass?'. I said, 'Bugged if I know if I saw any Pass'. That's why
- 20:00 I went back up just recently. Three Pagoda Pass was about a kilometre wide. It was over the ridge of a high point of the line over there. Now, reading the books on Thailand that's where the Burmese attacked Thailand several times, always came back through there because then they followed the river side down. All their wars they had up there. Quite interesting stuff you know on that trip. No, I did two trips up there and I stuck it out pretty well right through to the finish. The
- 20:30 railway loading gang, we finished and got the formations built up and the rail loading gang, they were mostly Australians, they worked through from the top end from Burma and they'd come through our camp at night time. They worked 24 hours a day, a different group, just swapped their crews over. A steam engine pushing a row of trucks in front. They'd run the sleepers out, put the sleepers across the track, drag the rails out, pull of a bit and the blokes come in and peg the rail to the sleepers They'd go back and get another one.
- 21:00 They were pushing it through at a hell of a rate. They put that right through. They went down below Nieke. The lines joined on 17 October '43 and then work eased off. It wasn't too bad then. We'd sit and wait.

**What was discipline like when you were working on the line?**

Oh well, the Korean guards on the camps they took us out. Most of the engineers working on the line, you know they'd belt you without any, get a stick and belt you around and

- 21:30 that, but mostly they weren't too bad. The Koreans were more trouble. But they were, well there was

two different gangs, battalions of railway building mob. But they did a wonderful job as far as getting the line through but that was the hard part. You going out and helping some bloke to walk out to work and you could hardly stand up. He was no good he couldn't work but he had to be there. The numbers, said so many had to go out and that was it.

**I'm surprised that those men would just sit or lie about**

22:00 **out there.**

That's it. You'd go out, if you were building an embankment or digging dirt out and they'd get inside somewhere find some provisions and just leave them there. When finished you'd go back, give them a hand to get back on their feet and help them back. Every now and again you would be coming back in the dark and so forth, the Koreans yelling and putting on a show and someone would start singing. Wouldn't they go mad. Someone would start singing, 'It's a long way to Tipperary' or something like that. The whole lot would be going. They used to go just about bloody mad.

22:30 'No sing. No sing.' It didn't stop them, nope.

**And the guards left the sick men alone? That were lying alongside?**

Yeah, they weren't interested. For the Koreans. If they want 200 men out, they put 200 men out. They were out there they didn't give a bugger what they were doing. It was up to the Japanese doing the line whether they worked or not. They knew bloody well they couldn't work. There was no chance of getting them up.

**What about those men that just needed to stop and rest up?**

Oh yes but they tried to cut it down

23:00 to if you didn't go to work you were on half rations and all this sort of caper. It didn't work out. We used to ration ourselves when we could. But of course up there it got that way that the rations were less and less and virtually nothing at the finish.

**What about when you're actually on the line in the work party could you rest up anytime?**

No, bit of job. They were there all the time and bloke there watching, seeing what you were doing. Most of us our work was building up the formation for the line. I had about 10-12 days the best

23:30 break up there. They had, we had a little Nip, Matsidor. He was the lowest rank, he didn't have any crowns on his shoulder to bear, bar and so forth. He'd been going to a technical school in Japan and pulled into the army and hated the bloody army and so forth and they gave him a job each day, a list of logs to be cut. So long and so much diameter for each log for culverts in the line. We had to go in the bush

24:00 Jap saw which was back to front bloody thing. A Jap saw you pull it. The teeth are this way, down. You put it over a log and pull it, jerked to cut. Our saw you push both ways. We were at this and bloody axes and he was smart enough to wake up straight away. The list of timbers we had to get we could do in a few hours. So we went out there and start to cut these logs, get quite a bit of it done and sit down.

24:30 He wanted to quiz us about Australia and we quizzed him and of course, language problems, he had been doing a lot of reading with English in them and now of course, he got mixed up. We had him talking about 'dire'. 'Dire' this all the bloody time and suddenly woke up he was talking about diameter. He got mixed up but he was dead against the war. He was a funny little bloke his puddies wound up to his ankles, great big thick glasses, pith helmet about this big. He looked like a mushroom

25:00 gone wrong and we were going out with him and we had 10-12 days, bloody wonderful party but he woke up, but if you were to cut your quota and head into camp they would bump your quota up probably double up. But we were always one of the last mobs to come back into camp, we'd done what we were supposed to do, quite happy. Got another, the same list the next day. We had to cut these and where we could bring them out as close to formation of the track and others have them marked so the others, the elephant or someone could go in

25:30 a bigger party cart the logs out. It was a wonderful bloody break the few days we had him there. I've always said he was the only Nip I would, I'd like to see again now. Matsidor. He said in English it's a wooden door 'Matsidor'. Funny little bugger. But

**What was the treatment like amongst the ranks of the Japanese?**

Well, it all depends.

26:00 They were the same as the Koreans. Some were quite reasonable. They'll tell you they want something done and left you alone as long as you kept working they'd never come near you. Others would stand there with a stick and if you looked like you'd try standing up, straightening up they'd want to hit you with it. The whole lot right through the piece was individual you struck whether they were good or they were bad.

**How did they treat their own lower ranks?**

Of course, it's the same. They do the same thing. I mean, bloody lance corporal belts the bloody private

and the corporal belts the lance private

26:30 and they do it all through the piece and the officer has the right, if he wants to he can use his sword on a bloke. You know, you put on a charge sheet and they charged you, all this sort of caper. There was no charge sheet with them. They'd just belt one another. Funny mob. But we stuck it through at the finish. All the books I've read I've just wrote and told

27:00 Colonel Beaton about it they all said they came back down by train. A party of us, about of dozen of us we came back down, of course the army trucks their all tandem axles and they drive over the line and use their jacks and take the tyre off, on the rim and the plan just fits straight on the rail. Meter gauge the whole way through on the rail from the east and they'd put their trucks on the rail and drive down the railway line and we came back down

27:30 from the top camp we were in Sonkuri and to Kanchanaburi on an army truck pulling two open railway trucks and I've never found anything else that's come down that way. That's we came back down right through to Kanchanaburi. Came down there and by that time most of the top end force had come through. A big lot of Burma force had come through, A Force and with us we took them all down there and

28:00 they had two big hospital camps and blokes and so forth, they were getting a bit better rations and so forth but we didn't get a hut we just got bloody an area, a bit of scrub. We camped there and

**What kind of shelter did you have?**

Nothing much. Just scrub, you put your bed in under the scrub somewhere if you could and try to sleep. Yes, it was funny. I got a bad dose of malaria. According to my medical records I had 10 doses of malaria in Thailand we were only up there for 8

28:30 months. I got a bad dose up there in Kanchanaburi. With the lack of rations and so forth, I don't know what happened. But I was at the stage where I was wondering and so forth, delirious, they had a guard on me and everything else and finished up, they said 'Right oh, onto the train' and another five days and back to Singapore. Loaded us up at Ban Pong. Actually the line started, we got off the train at Ban Pong and we got back onto it there. But the line didn't start from

29:00 there, it was the next siding up. Nong Pladuk was where the line started from when you go up the line. But we went and had a look at it before. But I was crook and they carted me. The same mob of blokes, there was about 10 of us in the group and we all stuck together. Jack Orange he was in charge of us, he was a Sergeant. He got an MBE [Member of the British Empire] and they carried me on and off the train. I don't remember anything at all about it. We got back to Singapore. They loaded us, took us out by Jap

29:30 truck to Selarang Area and all the gear was piled up on top of the trucks the boys pulled and they chucked me up on top of it and I remember we got back into Selarang and I saw one of our officers full gear, all dressed up, long socks, polished shoes, pips the whole box and dice so I made a noise to get him to come over and he came over towards to me and took a bit of a look at me and off for his life. This bloody Captain Smith Ryan, one of our

30:00 officers and at any rate.

**What do you mean he was off for his life?**

Oh, I suppose he didn't know what was wrong with me but might have been contagious and wasn't going to come near to me. He had gone up on a later party, H Party with Major Saggus but they didn't work and then they held them on parade for hours trying to count how many there were. One bloke would count, line you up in fives, one bloke would go through and count and then the next bloke would count and have a different number and oh, this went on for bloody

30:30 hours. I didn't know about it at the time. Jack told me later and there was another bloke like me, we were out to it and laid us on the floor of a new hut which had jus been built ad we were in there and Jack told us there were two blokes, two extras and he came in, I'll never forget I can still see it, the bastard, he came in and walked up and give me a kick to see if I was alive or dead. I couldn't get up I just felt like I'd like to strangle the bastard. I couldn't get up. But then once, a bit later on he said 'Right oh, how many

31:00 I was and a matter of minutes they had me on a stretcher in Robert Sparage Hospital. Only a short time and I was back with the boys again. I don't know because there were no scales I don't know what weight I would have been down to then but it wasn't much.

**Can I just ask you quickly how you paid your respects for the dead when you were working on the line?**

You couldn't do much. It's in that book about

31:30 burning bodies. Bloody wicked. That's where they say that over in Sonkuri Camp Dr Lloyd Cahill who's still alive that was the day I didn't go out in the work party I was given a job in the camp. We built up a great big logs, great stack of logs, a bit lot and cholera cases, if they found their gear or anything else



the whole lot with their bodies were taken out and

- 32:00 burnt. I had this one day, this job of going up there burning bodies. Of course, when they died of the cholera there's not much left of them but you put a body over two sticks and the bloody great roaring great fire and throw them into the heat. Dr Cahill was bending, he had a body there and he'd opened it up and was pouring through the inside and so forth
- 32:30 I suppose he was trying to find you know, more about cholera. Most guys studied what they could while they were there but he had a pair of shorts on and a pair of wooden clogs he made them himself and bandages around one of his legs and he's there and when he was finished he would wave to you. Pick it up and put the body on the fire. Bloody awful. And they wonder why I can't sleep. It was a shocking thing you know but after that
- 33:00 of course it wasn't long, a bit after in May '43 they decided to shift the civilians out of Changi Gaol, or the internees from there and put them into Altern Road and Sym Road and put us in the gaol so the forces were getting nearer, they knew there would an invasion some time. The whole idea was they would slam us in there and shut the gate. We were out of sight. What they wanted to do with us. This whole lot of paper
- 33:30 they've found since they fully intended to do away with the prisoners, that was their intention. One of my mates died a while back, Ron Lee, President of the Bowling Club, 2nd Park Engineers, they were in Johore building tunnels into the sides of the hill that were supposed to be air raid shelters but as Ron said, run them in there and drop a charge in the doorway and no one would know where they are. No we went to
- 34:00 There, I was in Changi Gaol. Well first up Bob Murray and I spent about a week in the European section of the gaol. A little piece in the corner where the Europeans were kept in it and they had a concert party with a wonderful bloody group, bloody, two blokes wrote a songbook. I had a songbook but I don't know where it is. Ray Tollop and Slim Degrey. They wrote the songs and so forth. But they put on wonderful
- 34:30 concerts. One of the Padres, he was always known as Happy Harry on the island. He'd come back, he would put on a concert party. All the front seats would be the Nips, the Nip officers they'd all sit in the front seat. They put on some wonderful parties. They had a female impersonator who was very, very good. I think he took it a bit seriously. He was wonderfully good. But old Happy Harry, the Padre he would walk out in the old stage and stand and just look around at the mob and say 'You'll never get off the island'. Well,
- 35:00 the mob would break down laughing you know. 'You'll never get off the island'. We doubted if we would. But they were a wonderful mob. When Bob Murray and I were put with the concert party for a while I can't think of his name now, he ended up going to England and was one of the top stars in England for years. He had a whole bundle of rings and somehow or other we'd look at them, I'd twist the bloody things about and he'd get and shake them and
- 35:30 pull them all out and made chains. You know very clever stuff. But later on I was up in on C block, there was four blocks to the gaol and I was up there for a while playing poker with a home made packet of cards one day and I got a routine flush and didn't have a penny to bet with and afterwards we went out on the work party camp. They built I don't know how many huts they built outside on the south side of the gaol wall. They were the same thing, 100m huts. We were out there and
- 36:00 we were what they called P Party. We used to go into Singapore quite regularly or anyone on the island they wanted us we would go out there. Bob and I were out in the party one day and they had a whole lot of Japanese parachutes and we took them about 4 mile around the gaol into a house and stacked all these parachutes and closed the place up and of course, we had in our mind and memory where this was. We knew we were going to get there some day and
- 36:30 we kept going and that's where we got searched over pitching the salt. We always got searched coming in and of course, when the war finished we knew about the bloody, about these parachutes and we went around there and those parachutes, you know, these pieces all link up to a point. Cut the biggest piece out of it, all different colours and we cut all this material out and swapped it around with the locals for WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. When I got back from behind the Nips
- 37:00 Frank Highs and Doug Sterrett, Doug Sterrett in front of the photo there, we swapped around for these bloody WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, had them tied by the legs and the huts were all built with stage about that high with decking with a walkway down the middle, we had all these WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s tied by the legs underneath and someone got a case of Australian margarine, butter. Butter used to be in 56-pound boxes and we would kill a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK and fry it in butter. No wonder we were, had crook stomachs. It was a wonderful by jove.

37:30 **Did P Party build the Changi Airstrip?**

No, the whole camp did that was before we went to the gaol. We built it before we went to gaol the whole lot of us.

**What was it like to work on the airstrip?**

Oh, bloody picnic. There was more men than could handle the work. Whole lot of men. You worked decent hours. You marched out through the bottom gate below the gaol which was just at the end of the airstrip. The airstrip, Changi Drome one leg goes in

38:00 just behind the gaol straight up over Johor Straits and the other side comes from the sea back inland. A bit cross. They had hundreds of blokes there working. You would, what they call a cane basket and a bloke with a hoe and they would fill your basket, take this dirt, take it over there. They had, of course some of the places there they had a rail system with hand pushed trolleys. Well that was shifting a whole lot of dirt, you had to shift a whole lot of dirt to do it but the rest of the time, we used to hold quizzes.

38:30 Someone would ask a silly question and go around the mob and that sort of thing. This bloke, Doug Sterrett, that's his photo and we were having a quiz one day and Doug's standing like a bloody statue, leaning with a hoe and they would ask him a question and he knew it and he couldn't think of it. He was standing there still for quite a time and a little Nip got his eye in and he was getting closer and closer and slammed into him with a lump of wood. Belting hell out of him and Captain Grinmay said 'What were you doing Sterrett?' 'I wasn't doing a bloody thing'.

39:00 He was standing still for about five minutes. Strange the things that come up.

#### **How would you react when your mates were getting a beating?**

You think a lot but you couldn't do anything. I saw it quite often. I coped quite a few beatings. The worst hiding I got was I don't even know what started it but a Nip took to me for some reason with a stick and he slapped, he started off slapping, they

39:30 stand you to attention, you've got to stand to attention. They slapped your face. They don't punch like we would they round arm swing and he had quite a few slaps. I think he was tiring himself out more than tire me out. Because you know you've got to get back to the same position and so forth. He went for a while and then stopped and stepped back and looked at me and grabbed a stick and starting belting my hands. When they stand to attention they stand with their fingers out straight and we stand that way and he saw my hands the way we always stand. I've always said fingers

40:00 closed and thumb down the seam of your trousers. And he saw my hand and he got a stick and he's trying to belt on both sides trying to hit, I was pretty thin at the time, trying to hit my knuckles but at the last minute slip them back a bit so it hit the leg and didn't hit my knuckles. It was pretty hard to walk for about a week afterwards though. But that was for no reason. They would just hit you for something to do. He just didn't like the way he held my hands. But I don't know. I watched, I had to stand by

40:30 one day and watch my mate, Bob Murray get a hiding but you can't do anything about it. You think a lot. Nope. It was a wicked bloody set up the whole thing but still. It's strange I go through the, a lot of that mobs that came back down from the top end down to Kanchanaburi and then came back down to

41:00 Singapore, they carried might through the piece and there's not any of them alive. I'm the only silly bugger left. Same as now they out that this bloke Colonel Beaton's told me there's only three left that went through the Sampura camp. Me and two doctors.

#### **Did you see a training plane crash on the airstrip? Did you see a training plane or any other planes crash on the airstrip?**

Yeah.

41:30 That caused quite a bit of humour. You got that out of that book. I forgot about that. Yeah, we used to go out through the gaol gate and walk up the Drome and always they were. They were little planes half the size of the Tiger moth but they were bloody aluminium stuff and we always wish these bastards would hit the trees and sure enough we were home to camp one day, marching in just at sundown, we were working real office hours there. Go out at daylight and come home in daylight and this planes down on the stuff

42:00 and everyone's got their eye on it and so back inside

## **Tape 7**

### **00:30 We were talking about the airstrip.**

When we went back into the camp and of course, as soon as it was dark there was a bit of a rush the boys building wirelesses and such they had to get down all the electricals out of this plane and I knew it was aluminium so I wanted to get some sheets of aluminium cut it out how we could. That's all right. The next morning the Nips came down to pick up their plane and get it back and they found a wreck.

01:00 Nearly everything of any use had all been pinched and had all gone back in the camp. Then there was mad search for the nails, searching where they would never find it. I got these pieces of aluminium and made them into serviette rings and just lay them out such so when you finished with them you shape

them round with a piece up here and a seam up the front of it and I got one of the blokes there using a piece of wire to cut, to groove out scenes of palms and this sort of thing. Rickshaws and so forth

01:30 and I brought these home. And a few years back I said 'I can't find those bloody souvenirs I brought home' and the eldest said 'I know where they are, I've got them at home.' So he's got them. I'll let him keep them. I intended to have someone make them up into a box and looked quite good. But that plane, they made a mess of that.

**So how hard was it to build the strip at Changi?**

At Changi? It was

02:00 a picnic.

**Why is that?**

You see after you've been up the line where you work for any hours 12-14 hours more, have your meal take a bit of something with you to take out on the line, early '44 wasn't too bad, the rations because then after that the rations started to cut out. They didn't have them, they didn't have them to give to us. They didn't have them themselves, they were all on light rations. Oh no, it was a real picnic to us the

02:30 Changi Drome, going out there to work. I mean you're better off doing something like that than sitting on your bum so we would go out there and start arguments about anything at all that was going. The guards of course, most of the time was Nips and they wouldn't worry even if there was some rush job, something had to be done quickly one of the bosses would say a certain amount of it had to be finished and they would go mad at you chasing you around trying to get you go but as long as you looked like you were doing something,

03:00 it doesn't matter what you were doing. Make it look obvious that you were trying then they left you alone. Some of us got bashed out there occasionally, got a bloody got hiding but he asked for it I suppose. Oh no, but you get a lot of joking. But it was a holiday after what we've been through.

**What would you joke about?**

Oh, anything at all, you know somehow. Bits of news and then of course, while we were working on the Drome we had the groan of a bloody

03:30 aeroplane high up in the air and you could hear it with cloud about and through the gaps of the cloud someone saw four engines and we knew the Nips didn't have any four-engined planes. That's all right. Hilarity and so forth.

**So that was welcomed.**

Oh yes, and the news used to come down each day, one would come down. They used to call it 'Heavy Harry' going out taking photographs and so forth.

04:00 The Nip one day said to us and we were out working and this noise up there 'B 29'. 'B29' they knew what it was. They, that time they were flying in from Trincomalee in India [Ceylon]. When were up on the line of course, we had quite a lot of our blokes were killed through our own bombing particularly up the Burma end but they were flying from Trincomalee, the British and Australia and the Yanks were flying from China.

04:30 But I had, the Drome was quite a picnic to what we'd been through. After I was working in town on P Party when they bombed the bloody ordinance stores at Selarang Harbour and we were in there. I don't know how many were in the party and so forth.

**What could you see?**

05:00 The ordinance stores, it was a lot of stuff, it was a lot of English stuff, this was later in the piece and they were still in crates. English tools and all this sort of gear but the building was a concrete floor with a steel frame and asbestos roof, asbestos walls and asbestos roof and they bombed it with bloody incendiaries. We were saw them start. The plane going over and you could see it set up. They came across, Kepulauan Harbour was built like a sawtooth,

05:30 this way, each way, boats coming in at different angles to anchor into and where we were working was just out off the wharf a bit and we were paddling along loading this stuff and these planes come over and they took, something dropped out of the plane and they looked like bloody 44 gallon, big 44 gallon drums, oversized 44 gallon drums and they dropped so far and a little bit of a poof and the whole thing all fell apart and a little bit of casing, charge or something I don't know how,

06:00 but it opened up and it all stacked like honeycomb, shaped like honeycomb and their about that long, steel rods, heavy steel one end and the casing and so forth with the charge in it and a tail so that they drop straight down and of course the asbestos roof, afterwards, what was left of it, just a hole the size of the bloody thing, dropped straight through and they were that heavy just sat in the concrete floor and burst into flames, belched flame out. Well, that burnt everything up and

06:30 as soon as it started we were off, out we knew they had a shelter for us. It was a big long trench deep with steel plates over it with sand over it. The Nips got in there and we got in there too. I don't know

who the Sergeant was, one of our Sergeants was with us but Captain Ben Bartlett was at the other end and he said 'Right you blokes, one at a time, come over here and have a look and make room for the next bloke.' He was the Australian Test wicketkeeper and can give a running commentary on this business.

07:00 They bombed the harbour but the planes they came in the same as the different angles and flew through and just back off the harbour there were four and five storey flats and they blew the harbour to blazes and hardly touched the flats wonderful bit of bombing. Blew it up.

**How many planes were involved?**

Oh, I don't know, you couldn't see them. They used to come through in 27. When up on the Drome you could see them coming through and see formations coming through. Oh, no.

07:30 **What was the general gossip between the men? As far as, you know you're seeing more planes what are you thinking?**

Well, we knew it was going to happen they were going to, because we were a bit worried about the fact of the gaol, what's going to happen once an attack starts and they'd come into the gaol what were they going to do about us because they weren't too keen about us telling tales, that was on. When they came in,

08:00 what's his name later on was Governor, Governor General, Sir Luis came in our mob usually bloody style they were going to have us all organised and on parade when he came here and he got there about an hour beforehand and he just wandered in and said 'Right oh, gather around' and he got up on a table and his wife sat in a chair alongside the table and he gave us a rundown on what had been going on and so forth and he said, I can't think of his name, he finished up here as Governor General

08:30 and he said 'Oh Slim, my mate Bill Slim' had the 14th Army ready to land all right down the west coast of Malay Peninsula down at Singapore, hit the whole lot all in one go and I think we would have been in bloody trouble if they had. But the atomic bomb saved all that or we would have been, it wouldn't have been too good. But I was coming off P Party the night the war finished we came in, searched,

09:00 right, marched down the side of the rail and our hut was just around the corner and as we go around the corner

**Sorry can we just go back a bit, there was some sort of a gathering you were talking about with the wife sitting next to him. What happened?**

That was Lord Louis Mountbatten. He came in. He came in in ducks they call them, bloody things that go in, drive into the water and so forth. He came out there and they came out with a whole lot of armament.

09:30 Of course before we first knew, found the war, we came off a work party and went down around the gaol and Steve McCenant, old Steve McCenant he's there jumping up and down, 'The war's over!' and he kept on about this 'The war's over!' and we told him where to go because he wasn't very popular and we'll know tonight when the work party list come out and sure enough, later on in the night, P Party 200

10:00 but later then of course news started to come through. We had several wirelesses in the camp..

**Sorry you knew?**

Knew then about, they said about the bomb, some special bomb they'd dropped on Japan and everything else and word came through but we went to work for another five days.

**What did you hear about the bomb?**

Oh that this special bomb, they didn't call it an atomic bomb first up, later on they said what it was.

**How did you hear this news?**

10:30 Oh, we had wirelesses all over the place in the camp. One of them, was of them we swept the floor with, because there was power everywhere, there was no problem, there was quite a few wirelesses in the camp but no, yes we had to go for work for five days. It was the civilian population had their thumbs up and waving and so forth and the only blokes that didn't know anything about it were the Nips, most of them didn't know or hadn't been told but then a

11:00 Pommy Sergeant and Pommy Major again, I can remember they were done up like western heroes you know, pistols and god know what all over them they dropped by parachute on Changi Drome and

**They dropped what?**

They dropped onto Changi Drome by parachute and said straight away 'I want a car to go to the gaol.' Pulled their gun out and if you don't your gone sort of caper and they came in and oh, I think it was a Lieutenant Colonel was in charge of the camp. I can't remember any names now but

11:30 you can find it in plenty of books. But he was, Nip happy.

### **What does that mean?**

If you were bloody, the Nips had him bluffed. And they walked straight into the gaol into headquarters and said 'Right oh, who's the Nip in charge' and they said 'Colonel so and so' and the bloke said 'I'll take you to him'. 'I want him here' and that was it. The Nips all came in and the heads came in and put their swords on the desk and that was the finish of it.

- 12:00 Our blokes, Old Black Jack had been happy as Larry to have that job. Of course, he went away on a work party. But this Nip, this Australian Officer he wasn't that keen but the Pommy Officer said straight away 'Who's the Nip? Who's the Japanese commander I want him here'. Took his sword off him.

### **How were you addressed to be officially told that you were free?**

Oh well, as I said we kept working for five days

- 12:30 and then they said two days holiday that was good enough that's when Bob and I took off. They dropped pamphlets, I've got one kicking around the place, there are plenty of them around but they dropped pamphlets to tell us to stop inside your camp and do as your told and all this sort of caper and they dropped food and clothing as soon as they could.

### **How long did that take to drop food and clothing?**

Well, over a period of few days before they started, then they started dropping parachutes onto the Drome, flying down you know dropping

- 13:00 all different colours. Different colours meant different things, medical supplies, and clothing and food and all this sort of caper. But as soon as they told us holiday, two days holiday, Bob Murray and I off around to know where the bloody parachutes were and got into them. Chopped them and started swabbing them around. I always said

### **What were you doing with the parachutes?**

Cutting them up. You know how parachutes are made from big long strips to a point all around. Cutting the biggest piece of square out of each one, all different colours and swabbing them, selling them to the

- 13:30 local population for WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s for food. But I've always said everyone that's come out of those camps had come home with stomach problems and I've always said you know, it was over what they were eating but I still reckon it wasn't what we were eating it was what we ate that first month after we were released. I mean we had been on such small rations, your stomach had shrunk down to next to nothing and we were cooking bloody WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in margarine and wolfing it into us

- 14:00 and then the Red Cross come in and they give you a bloody great big bar of chocolate and a packet of cigarettes, we hadn't been able to get smokes for a long while. We see a bloke get to a bar of chocolate oh, bloody lovely, eat it for your life and then be violently sick because you couldn't handle it. I've always said. Major Hunt told us about six, at least six months a bit more before the finish, when you blokes get out of here they will put you in hospitals and you will eat six

- 14:30 little tiny meals a day to get your stomachs to be able to absorb feed and it just happened completely wrong. They never, there was never any check what you ate, give you what you like. It was.

### **Why didn't you listen to the advice?**

What chance did we have? For a while there was nothing there but I mean, if you've been as hungry as we were all of sudden you can get a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , pull its head off, we couldn't get any water to scald it, skin it, had to pluck it, so

- 15:00 had to pull its skin off and put in the bloody dish and put it over the fire in butter. I suppose it was a bit rich for anyone let alone our blokes at the time. But oh , no, there was a lot of humour in the prisoners of the gaol. One of the top Australian officer's wives came up there, they took her on a tour of the gaol. There was one section of the gaol we had prisoners gaoled inside the gaol. Blokes that had been in trouble for going

- 15:30 out through the fence and our own officers sent them to gaol and they were put in security section in the gaol that had a section with bars in it. It was a cabin sort of thing but the walls were all bars and there was blokes in there. They tried to keep her away from it. She said 'What are men doing there? What are men doing there like that?' Out - a whole lot came through. Even after the war was over our blokes still kept them locked up. Some bad things

- 16:00 come through from our own side. Nope.

### **What were the conditions like inside the gaol?**

Oh, they weren't too bad. The main thing because we had jammed down our neck all the time. Keep everything you clean you can, keep flies out of, that was the main thing that's why the Pommy casualties were about, roughly double ours right through every camp we went into to. They couldn't keep their camps clean. That was the main thing.

16:30 That was the thing that saved us was the wonderful lot of doctors we had. They were, they were wonderful right through. I never heard a word spoken against a doctor. I wrote to this bloke doing this book, I said to him that Colonel Pond he was in the air force he was down the bottom end of the air force, I said he was, you know the boys

17:00 all rated him with the doctors. That was the greatest compliment you get if anyone, I'm sorry I get like this, if anyone is equal to the doctors that the highest record you can get. No, there was some strange things to it. Some of our officers were not very bright.

**Why is that?**

I don't know. Oh everyone will tell you, every book you pick up will tell you. We had trouble with some of our.

17:30 Some of them were frightened of the Nips, I mean not saying that I wasn't and anyone that wasn't was bloody coy. Where they could the Nips respected the officers. They were frightened of their own officers but respected our officers to a certain extent but often you have cases where a bloke was getting bashed up and an officer could have stopped it but they stood back. That was a bit crooked of them. We had some very good officers with us. We have one of them still going

18:00 now. He's wandered all over the country making sure the blokes are getting their pensions right and doing all. He's always at every show we have, he's there. When we came home we had quite a lot of reunions. A lot of officers didn't come I mean I think it was more a guilty conscious than anything but some of them like Bernie O'Sullivan finished up Chief Magistrate he was into everything going and bloody Mick Wedge, some wonderful blokes. Kip McWynn, oh no.

18:30 **So can you tell me a little bit about the day that you start to get out of Singapore really? What happens to you to get out of Singapore?**

To come home?

**Yeah.**

We went on, they brought us down and put us on the Aowa, a little bit of a boat, it wasn't very big. That was another time we were heading home Jack Orange was in charge again. As a group we stuck together

19:00 whenever we could because he was a sergeant but he was a mighty bloke. We left, we were heading home. We headed off on the boat and coming home ...

**Is this a hospital ship?**

No, oh no just an ordinary transteamer.

**What sort of facilities have you got on board the ship?**

Quite good. The food was fairly good, it was wonderful to what we'd had and so forth but

19:30 the same thing happened again there. There wasn't a fatigue party. All the clothing was down in the hold and they wanted someone to open it and all done in bales, like wool bales so we go down there and open these bales up and the first one that we open is full of women's clothing what the hell they brought that for us I don't know but Bob Murray gathered some of that up, we gathered extra kit bags and swapped stuff around and we bloody got to

20:00 they issued us with Indian army boots. They're big, heavy black boots, blokes had been bare footed for close to two years suddenly put a boot on and it looks like a cow that has been put in a jam tin. They're getting around in that and we got to issue all that out and we came down into Darwin and pulled up in Darwin.

**Was there any medical attention for you on board the..**

No, not much. No, you see a lot of the hospital ships came out there and brought them home.

20:30 Some of the very, very sick they put on the planes and flew straight back here but no, we had nothing medical much. We were fit that's it. We came home as we were.

**How under weight were you by this point?**

Oh, I had put on quite a bit of weight before I left Singapore but I was 30 days coming home and I put on 31 pound. Time I left Singapore and came around Australia and back home I'd put on 31 pound. That photo kicking about that was taken

21:00 in Sydney on the way home. By that time I had put on weight. I joined the army at about 10 ½ stone and I lobbed back here at 11 stone 8 when I came home. Because everyone thought, they were expecting to see us very, very thin and so forth and were as fat as pigs. Called into Darwin and there was a mob of women about in uniform because only the women before we had gone away much were the nurses, the sisters.

21:30 **Well, you wouldn't have seen women for a while.**

No, and then there's a call over the loud PA [public address] system 'Private Holding wanted on the gang plank'. So all right, I go down there and I couldn't, didn't recognise the girls, there's two girls, I said to Bob Murray 'Come on a bit of moral support here'. So I go down and it was the girl we worked there before we went away. We were 36 hours in Darwin. They were wonderful the girls. They gave us a tour around the town where the hospital, place

22:00 had been blown up and took out to a meal and everything else and it was great. Then we headed there round into Brisbane and in Brisbane the boats go right up the river to anchor and the Queensland troops are getting off and nobody else is allowed off and Bob Murray and Les McCant, the friend of the little bloke that got shot with the firing squad and myself said 'We are going to get off here somewhere' so we went down below and found a fairly bit porthole but the rise and fall of the boat would slowly used to come up

22:30 and this porthole was nearly clear and then down onto the timber of the wharf. We watched this for a while and each time it would come up one of use would shoot through. We got outside and we had our black boots on and caught a taxi and the bloke said 'Where do you want to go?' and 'Don't know, we don't where we were, just want to go uptown. Where are some shoes?'. So he took us up to a shoe shop and Wyn told me later, she was in Brisbane for quite a while

23:00 the name of the bloke but anyway we got into this shop and I want just a pair of decent, light tan shoes and McCant wanted a pair of bloody dancing shoes, really light shoes. He paddled around for quite a while and we got the shoes we wanted and he said so much money or so many coupons and we said 'What's this bloody racket? Coupons?' and that's when he said 'Where did you come from?' and we told him and he said 'Did you know so and so?'

23:30 Silly bloody McCant says 'Yeah I know him' and he only needs half coupons. He's only got one leg, we didn't, we still don't know if he knew beforehand or not but Les McCant had lost a leg up there with ulcers and he came back on the boat and they wouldn't let us back on the boat. We were off but they wouldn't let us back on the boat. No one got off and no one's getting on. So you get a second from an Officer so we got one of our Officers and I don't know where they got off but they're our blokes and I want them back here so and down to Sydney.

24:00 I put in a private home on the first night. I got a phone call through to Wyn she was in Townsville in the army and then we out to Ingleburn camp and they put us in huts with sheets, with all beds made up, sheets in them and all, two sheets to a bed, oh Christ.

#### **What did you think about that?**

Bob Murray first thing in the morning said to the bloke came around an old bloke

24:30 there, he said 'What's going to happen to these sheets?' and the bloke said 'Buggered if I know'. Bob said 'Well I'll have a couple' and he said 'Don't take those, go down to those huts down there there's two pairs of sheets on every bed'. So Bob goes down and packs them all in his kit bag and he found a few kit bags extra. By train down to Melbourne. They took us off the train and drove through Melbourne and the three of us, Les McCant got in the front seat and Bob and I in the back and

25:00 she's giving us cigarettes and Bob says 'What sort of a car is thing?' You know, everything fancy on it and she says 'Rolls Royce'. So she told us she was Mrs McKay, HV McKay, the younger family. So she did everything for us and so forth and stayed with her for 36 hours and got on the Strathmore and headed for Burnie, Tasmania. That's where, the 2/48th Battalion had been caught on

25:30 Dutch Timor and they came through. The 2/2nd Commandoes were in Portuguese Timor where all the fighting has been they went to hills, they didn't surrender and then the 2/40th came through. Well they came through and worked up in the camps with us so we put a lot of them off and when we finished the harbour was packed up with great stacks all of potatoes so when we were pulling out. We got off,

26:00 the three of us got off the boat.

#### **Why did you actually have to go to Tasmania?**

To put the Tasmanian troops off.

#### **So you couldn't actually make your own way home?**

No, no. On the boat took us across there to Tasmania and the 2/40th boys got off and we got out of the boat down the gangplank and walk up town and there's not a sole, the whole town is wide open everyone was down at the boat. So we go see, bits of stuff in the shop we wanted, behind the counter, got what we wanted, left some money

26:30 on the counter, hope it was enough and went back to the boat and when they started to pull off all the kids were up on top of these stacks of potatoes and they chucked potatoes all over the Strathmore. It was covered in bloody spuds, I don't know what the heck they were doing. Anyway when we headed home and we headed out in the Great Australian Bight and they said there's a cyclone, there's a big blow in the Bight we're going to head south. Issue an extra three blankets and so we head off

27:00 down, it was as cold as blazes. Then we were heading back and it was rough, the Stratten was a twenty

thousand tonner, it was a fairly big boat. I'm trying to write a letter up in the front. I don't know what you call the deck, But one minute your looking way up to the sea and the next your looking down at the ocean, going up there. The meal time comes and there was very few, to go down the alley way hang on to one rail going down and grab the other one as the boat rolled. I had all my meals coming home

27:30 and we came into Fremantle and we had all these kit bags, I got a sign in there of ? I'll get it after. A sign my sister made, 'Welcome Home'. So we signalled my brother-in-law, he had an old A model ute, signalled clear a bit of deck and we chucked all these extra kit bags we'd gathered up, and stuff we'd picked up on the way. Sheets and stuff! Got home and that was it.

28:00 **What was it like to return home after being away. ?**

Hard to explain you know, so much you want to say and couldn't get it out. And I've had that problem ever since. I get talking about it, I get a bit tied up at times, but it was great to get back. It was a strange experience we went through, but I don't know. As I said, I finished my education in a prisoner of war camp.

28:30 You got to know, sort people out. Some people, how people stand up to things. You see it all, through the time we were away. Wonderful bloody comradeship, that was the thing besides the doctors, that brought our mob home. In the fact that if someone was sick there was someone to look after him, it didn't matter where it was, there was always someone trying to help. Had the Poms beat a lot of the time,

29:00 where if someone got sick they'd keep away from him sort of thing whereas if it was one of our mob. He's one of the mob get him, bring him back in. Pinch something. I'll tell you the tale about. We were up on the line and bloody Bob Murray got sent to the Jap cook house one day, and he goes over there and he's getting stuff ready for their food, to cook as they would. And he pinched a great big lump of dried fish, a fairly big piece of it. I don't know how he got it back out of the camp, but he got it home.

29:30 So I and the work party, come across, come back home. Come to work about 10 o'clock at night, bugged. He says, I've got something to eat. Which he got, he said he put this into a tin of water. It started to boil and the maggots started to come to the top, so he kept scooping for a while taking them off. Then he says bugger it, I wouldn't see them if they came at me in the dark, I got to, I ate this, was bloody wonderful, salty. Because we hadn't had any salt

30:00 for a long while. Tasty, bloody lovely. So I'm going for my life missing years after, he was best man at me wedding, and at the reception he always enjoyed telling the tale, him feeding me maggots, I don't know.

**So how did you get finally discharged?**

I was, first up we were put at Point Walter, we were stuck there and you had to on parade at Six o'clock in

30:30 the morning. So I used to go back to camp, and stopped there. And parade so I'd go out at Six, and they'd go through a list of someone for interrogation, someone for medical, someone for optical, or whatever if your names was read out to be at a certain place at a certain time you had to be there. If your name wasn't read out you were free, till Six o'clock the next morning. That's where me old mate from Mullewa way, he used to lob up in a taxi, and the chap in charge of the camp there was Harry,

31:00 Lieutenant Harry, Lieutenant Green. Lieutenant Harry Green he's brother had been in the 2/4th He hadn't come home. He said Baxter why do you always turn up in a bloody taxi, it costs you so much money. Old Slew said, "If you looked at my pay book, the red ink in my pay book, the taxi's cheap". He'd had that many charges he wasn't going to have any more. We went there for a while and then after a bit. I was back to around the place

31:30 into Hollywood for quite a spell, all the checks and everything else.

**What was wrong with you, ?**

Um.

**What was wrong with you,?**

Oh, not much. They gave us treatment for hookworm, which was a little bloody glass of stuff they drank they made you drunk. Steve Baxter he wanted another dose, there was all sorts of treatments and needles, for all the different things we could have, so forth on through the peace. Then I went to see about a discharge and they

32:00 said "Righto the discharge will be on the 29th of November". One of those things medically I was A-1, it was all right. So we got married, had a honeymoon and went to Narrogin and started work. In six months I lost about 3 and a half stone, back into Hollywood. Then for, oh 10 years I was in and out of Hollywood off and on through the piece. Stomach troubles and everything else, one of the funny things then, I had a stray blood group against normal, my blood groups, in the army it was AB 1. Now they call it AB Rh positive.

32:30 And they found out about this, the hospital and said righto, and every now and again even at work. I was sent down, up there for direct blood transfusions, this went on for months, a few years. And then a chap was, my father and his wife was a theatre sister and, she went to the blood bank and said he's



33:00 been a prisoner of war he's had everything bloody going, finished no more blood. Oh, it was so bloody silly. I always reckon I felt better after I was given blood, a blood transfusion, sort of freshens you up. I've got a lot of things turn up back since the place, you know. Your not supposed to do this, your not supposed to do that but bugger it I just kept on going. I've been very, very lucky to be here!

33:30 I've always had a problem sleeping, but to get out of bed, just out of the blue some odd incident comes back to your mind and you can't get out of it. I don't know.

**What do you think of some of these TV shows, like there was the Changi TV show. There was a Changi TV show, did you see that.?**

Oh bloody stupid, I put it on, I put it on for about 10 minutes one night and I give it away, oh bloody it's

34:00 about like the picture The Bridge Over The River Kwai. I mean that's bloody, it might be all right as a picture, but there's nothing, nothing to it. I've a lot of photos of. Oh this is still going. Of like kids, or kids who's eldest daughter's 57. Photos of them on the Bridge On The River Kwai, course the original bridge was blown up. They finished up. They brought a bridge span, part of it from Sumatra

34:30 and some of it, some where down on the Malayan Peninsula. They brought up steel girders and put it up, that line is still operating quite a long way. See at the end of the war, they pulled the whole lot up, pulled all the rails up, because it was 30lb rail which is very, very light, lighter than ordinary tram rails. They took rails from any where at all, all the branch lines on the Malayan Peninsula, they put them out they brought them from everywhere they could. Any branch line they didn't think were needed they ripped them up

35:00 to get that line through to Burma. Then they pulled it up because the Thai men were still frightened of Burma of coming through that way. But they now they have gradually bit by bit they have gradually replaced the line and it goes well up to Wat Aso. We had a ride on it when I was up there this year, in the group that go up there, I had a ride on the train round.

**What's that like doing that trip, for you?**

Oh, bloody good. I mean when I came back down, I didn't remember much

35:30 of coming back down the line. We came back down on this army truck and with two railway wagons behind us, I didn't see much of it we were just getting out of the place. We weren't too good. It's wonderful to go back and see it now. They do a very good job the Thai. Because they use it. There is a trade train every quite regularly up and down there. We sat in the restaurant above the riverbanks, fairly high up looking across and you could see the trains go through

36:00 on the, I can't think the name of it now, it's round the side of a mountain. They built the bridge up from the ground but they pegged it back into the rocks to stop it coming out and the train comes right round just, you virtually put your hand out against the rock wall and the rest is way down the ocean. As I've always said it was a wonderful engineering effort for the Japs to put it in.

**Why did you decide to go back?**

36:30 Well, that was 2001. I got an invitation from Department of Veteran Affairs to go as the official party to go to Singapore for the 60th anniversary and I said 'All right, I'll go on that' and I was all set and my eldest son was going to go with me. So we were going to go there. But then they started to tell me the details. I had to travel with all the parliamentary group and all the nobs that were in the

37:00 country and you had every day you had to attend official functions here and there and everywhere else and that's not what I want to do and I said 'I'm not going to go'. So my son said straightaway 'Right, we'll go to Thailand.' So the two of us decided we would go to Thailand and then the eldest sister, youngest son he is a chartered accountant and the eldest son's daughter, they, there was five of us went up there. It was bloody wonderful taking them back.

37:30 But I mean they'd occasionally, I'd told them something or they would ask different things and to go back and see the places and so forth. You see a big lot of work done up there has been done by the Australian Army. Few people realise the museum at Hellfire Pass the chap that wrote that story he went up there seconded to the Thai Army to work up there for training and he started the Hellfire Pass

38:00 Museum. And another bloke has taken it over, Bill Slopes he was a warrant officer. You see the Australian Army went up, engineers went up and put steps down Hellfire Pass. They put a wooden steps down there and in two years they just fell apart with the humidity and temperature and so forth so they went back and they put steel steps down there, ramps down there. They did a lot of works up there, different jobs and so many blokes that got involved have gone back and stopped there.

38:30 Australians, all ex-service people.

**That's great.**

Yeah, it's quite strange, yea.

**What do you, what exactly does Anzac Day mean to you?**

I always attended Anzac Day before when I was a kid for some reason or other. In Katanning, there used to be on the corner near the pub, always used to, wander over for Anzac Day. The funny thing of course, I've got a brother-in-law, my eldest sister

39:00 said to us, she was smart, she was schoolteacher. She got married when she was 20 and she married in the 40's and he had been original on ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps], the landing of ANZAC and we had all been great mates and so forth. Anzac has always been, now, of course, we had a hell of a mix up here with the Council over Anzac Day. The memorial we had for years, they had it taken out because of re-routing a road

39:30 putting a round a bout in. The old one we have down in our hall, rose garden in it. They are building a memorial way over the other side, right out of sight of everything and we had a referendum on it and I won't use it if it all goes ahead like that. I'll go down here and have our Anzac Service down here in our own garden.

**Do you still get together with some of your POW mates?**

40:00 We have one get, we've always had one get together. When we first came home we used to have a ball at the embassy because now they are too old for that. For many years we had country reunions, we had them up at old Freddy Coole place. I think we had four at Narrogin when we were there. The whole lot used to come down to Narrogin and so forth and have two at the bowling club, two at the RSL Hall, spend the weekend together there. And we've had them all over the place.

40:30 But now they have a show out here at Pingelly, no, where the kids came out from England, Fairbridge, a show at Fairbridge every year. We have a reunion in Perth. For years we used to have it at Gloucester Park. The last four or five years at the Langley Novotel. We go there and have a meal. And it's getting a bigger

41:00 crowd because through having country reunions and so forth all our kids have grown up as more or less a family. Lot of them still keep together, go out together and so forth. It's all tied up together so and of course, just lately we are losing quite a lot of them. But.

**Sort of very good example of spreading around the Anzac tradition.**

It's a bit hard. This bloke that died a week or so ago

41:30 he was the representative RSL. I've attended funerals for the last 20 years, going say the ode at the funerals and all that sort of caper and we had this funeral for Kara Cater and I've never heard so much laughter at a funeral service in my life. The Padre was very, very good, knew Kara very well, and his grandson spoke and Mick Wedge, one of our lads and all told tales about things [what] this beggar had done.

42:00 It was a lot of people, it seems strange to have so much laughter ... TAPE ENDS