Australians at War Film Archive

Peter Hendry - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:47 **Thank you very much, Peter, for this interview. I just wanted to start off with a three to four minute summary of you life to date?**

01:00 I was born in Coonabarabran which is out in the north west of New South Wales. My father was a Presbyterian minister. He came out from Scotland as a missionary to bring Christ to the heathens. He said he'd do anything they wanted. When he arrived here they sent him to Broken Hill. He came from a small Scottish village. He was a wowser in our present terms. Against

01:30 alcohol, against smoking, against gambling. And they sent him to Broken Hill which must have had some sort of an impact. Anyhow, he moved to Coonabarabran, married my mother. We lived there for five or six years. He got pneumonia in the post 1918 time, 1919s, and he died in 1921. We moved to Strathfield. My brother brought the kids up.

02:00 I went to school in Strathfield and I went to Scots College. We didn't have any money, but my father had made good friends in the country and they supported me at school, put me through school. Then I went from there to university. Did medicine. Went from there to the coast hospital. I was there for about 18 months when the war was reaching a peak and all my friends were joining up so I thought

02:30 I'd better join up. I joined up in June 41. Eighteen months in Australia sitting around wasting time, waiting for them. Went overseas on August 15th. From there we went to the war. We'll talk about that later I guess. When I came back I went back straight to the hospital and continued on there doing my pathology. I got a job at Newcastle Hospital

03:00 as a clinical pathologist and I took up the position here to start the blood bank. I had a year's appointment. I thought it might last 18 months. I'd be lucky. It was a terrible dump. I've been there ever since. I developed the blood bank. I went into private practice with a friend of mine. We established a bit private practice here which went from Gosford in the south to Coffs Harbour in the north with branches everywhere. Then I retired in 87.

03:30 Since then I've been just enjoying life. Is that enough summary for you?

That's brilliant. Thank you very much. Okay, the first question I want to ask you is, how much of an impact did your father's religious beliefs have on shaping you as a person?

I was brought up as a strict Presbyterian boy. Went to Sunday school. Went to church twice as well as going to Sunday school.

04:00 I think his teachings were a great benefit to me throughout my life. I didn't become a wowser. I got onto the grog and I smoked – as soon as I got to university I smoked and drank, had a bet on the horses. By this time my father had been dead for some time.

04:30 **What would you say would be the most significant thing about your father's way of life and beliefs that impacted on you?**

I don't think there's any doubt about it that I had a very good moral background. I've never cheated, I've never done anything wrong

05:00 in life like that. I think that's because of my father's – and my mother was very much the same so their influence on me was very strong. And every time I did something that I shouldn't have done, I got terribly guilty about it. So it did make a big impact in that way on me.

Can you describe your Mum and your Dad for me?

My father was a tall – I suppose

05:30 in today's terms he wouldn't be tall, but he seemed tall to me as a boy. Thin man. I have very little recollection of him. He died when I was 9. I had big experiences with him as a kid. I used to go out with

him to the stations. We were stationed in Coonabarabran. That's the centre of a very big dairy. He used to go out all the different farming properties and be away for a month.

06:00 I'd go with him. The experiences of those were always wonderful experiences. Meeting people of the outback. They used to tease me as a little kid and I used to be frightened. But I enjoyed it. I enjoyed these trips with him. I enjoyed the ponies and the horses that we had. Then the tremendous thing happened. He bought a Ford motor car. A little open car. I suppose that was about 1920.

06:30 That was another big impact. I remember that very well. My childhood – I don't remember very much in Coonabarabran excepting I had gastroenteritis as a child and nearly died. I remember that. I can remember getting better and remember people giving me gifts and things. Little toys I used to play with. That was a pretty good period where I got over sickness. That's about all I can remember about Coonabarabran. I can remember

07:00 the farewell. We had a little farewell party. The thing I can remember is that there were at this party balloons and they had hanging down from the wall a bit paper bag. They gave me a bat. I had to bash it. When I bashed it all toys fell out. That's a vivid memory of that time. We moved to Berry and I was growing up there. Berry was a lovely little

07:30 country town. We were at the manse and the church was up on the top of a hill. It was a fairly big area. The things I remember about Berry was across the road there was a bullocker. I used to love to go over and see these big bullock wagons. But I wasn't allowed to because they were swearing. Bullockers had terrible language. So it wasn't to be, but I still used to sneak over there and enjoy myself. I remember seeing the first time

08:00 while I was there I remember seeing a bullock put to a cow. My big brothers had took me along and got up in the loft. It was all a great secret to watch the bull service the cow. I still don't know what happened. I know everybody was excited, but I can't remember what happened. But I remember the big excitement of being taken to see this. That's growing up. Berry, we had good friends there.

08:30 I just remember the church. My father died while we were there. I can remember the funeral service very well of course. I can remember the hymns and so on. One hymn was played which stayed with me for the rest of my life was Lead, Kindly Light which apparently one of my father's favourite hymns. Whenever I hear that now it brings back tears to my eyes after, what 80 years.

09:00 We moved to Strathfield. My mother didn't know what to do. She had five kids and she'd never been on her own before. So she took advice from an old man in Strathfield. He used to be the bank manager in Coonabarabran. Old Mr Parker. I can remember him with his red droopy eyes and grey hair. He advised my mother. He bought a house for her in Strathfield.

09:30 We lived there. I went to school at the local school, the public school and then I went to a private school that was called Branxton. I remember the time there very well. Do you want me to expand on that? There was a girl there called Margaret Mulvey. Her father used to be a doctor in Orange years ago. Margaret Mulvey was the bright kid in the class. She had hair just like yours. Long curly hair.

10:00 Next thing I remember about Margaret Mulvey, she was a woman married and she married a Professor Fink who became a very well known obstetrician in Sydney. Margaret Mulvey. I remember the school teacher there. She used to walk around with the powder on her face and lipstick and a parasol so she wouldn't get burnt in the sun. I remember her well. Then there were some of my friends there that grew up later on. The Buzzacotts were little boys.

10:30 They were a very well to do family and they – fencing or something like that later on in life. Girls, I don't remember much girls in Strathfield. We went to church regularly and of course the girls at school. Or the girlfriends at Sunday school.

How old were you when you moved to Strathfield?

I was

11:00 nine when I went to Strathfield. We lived in Brunswick Avenue until about 37, then we moved to Verner Street which was only the next street up to a bigger home in 1939. From there I went to Scots and boarded at Scots College from 1929 to 32. In 27 and 28

11:30 I went to Newington as a day boy. I remember that well because we used to have to go by train from Strathfield to Stanmore and the things we did in those trains was little old carriages – dog boxes we used to call them. We used to get up to all sorts of mischief I remember.

Like what?

Throwing toilet rolls out the window and throwing them around and things like that. We played up. Nothing very serious.

12:00 I went to Newington College as a day boy and that was a great experience for me. It was there that I learnt sport. I played cricket and I played football. I can remember playing football and then I'd taken up rowing as a kid. I remember that the school – Newington College was run in those days

12:30 by the head prefects. The master didn't have much of a say. The head prefects ruled the school. There was an ex army man, the sergeant major, he was the authority that used to hand out the punishments but the master didn't seem to have much at all. Lunchtime there was always the boxing ring and the head prefects ran the boxing ring. Any arguments with the fellas they'd fix it up in the boxing ring. Which is a good way of discipline.

13:00 We had an old school master there who used to teach us, but he had a terrible cough and he used to go to the window and spit out the window. I can remember him. So the boys used to every now and then when he wasn't looking they'd close the window and next time he went to spit it'd be all over the window. Extraordinary the things you remember. I remember being initiated there by the other big boys in the school and made to run the

13:30 gauntlet and they all had towels and they flicked us and belted us as we went past. But of all the things that I remember most at that school was the sport. I loved the football. I loved watching the seniors playing GPS football [soccer]. After two years I went to board at Scots College. I got a scholarship at Scots. Once again I was supported there by some country friends of my father's

14:00 who put me through. The Ellises I remember is one family who paid for my fees. That was a wonderful period. At Newington I was subjected to a bully. I had no support there. When I went to Scots he came shortly afterwards and started to bully again. But at this stage I rebelled. We had a terrible fight on the floor. I can remember wrestling around and fighting upon him. Finally he gave in and never any more bullying.

14:30 Periods in your life where you grow up.

He actually went from Newington to Scots as well this boy?

He was at Newington beforehand, he was the bully. But when he came to Scots afterwards he started the same tactics again but I decided the time had come, so we had this terrible fight.

So what were his tactics?

We just wrestled and fought – oh bullying? Nagging at you and kicking you in the backside and things like that when you weren't looking or throwing your books away. All the things to annoy you. Extraordinary isn't it?

15:00 Boys get this attitude. Afterwards at school whenever there was anyone bullying of our other fellas against any other fellas I always interfere. Stop them from doing it. Because it's a very humiliating business. But that was part of growing up. I think that fight that we had probably was a turning point in my life. It gave me back some stability and self possession

15:30 once again.

Why do you think he was a bully towards you?

I don't know. I can remember his name too. And I can also remember his serviette ring at school. I pinched it from him. I still have it. It's in the drawer there. One way of getting back I suppose. Scots was a great time

16:00 as a boarder there. I loved it. We got into mischief. I stayed in Kirk House. First of all at Scots I was up in Aspinall House. That was a big old home – still there in Bellevue Hill. We used to live in the upstairs rooms in the dormitory. Of a night we'd climb out the window and there's the corners like this of the building and there was little

16:30 steps – how we didn't get killed I don't know – we used to let ourselves down this and we'd go down to the bay from Scots College. Go down and have a drink at the local soft drink and then come home again. Real devils we were. In the middle of the night. I got pneumonia there. Was pretty sick for a while. That stopped me playing sport

17:00 I remember. We had some great teachers there. Latin was one of the problems I had. I had to get and do Latin to get into university and medicine. In the year before I got sick and the year before the Leaving [Leaving Certificate] I was doing the Latin and I wasn't a very good student. So he divided the class into the sheep and the goats. One side of the class was the sheep.

17:30 The other side was the goats. I was amongst the goats. In the final year all the goats left except me and he made me stay on that side of the classroom on my own while the sheep stayed over here. Actually that was a good impetus to me and I got through my Latin. I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and study it. So he had his reasons for doing it. That and French were necessary in order to get to do medicine so I was able to graduate. Other memories of Scots?

18:00 Mostly sport. I was elected as the stroke of the first four in the regatta and I remember the wonderful periods of training. We were the fastest crew on the – without any doubt – we used to sprint. We were really fit. But he never took us for long trips. When it came to the regatta we sprinted like mad and we were well ahead until the end and they overtook us. We got beaten in the heats.

18:30 That took me years to get over. Years. We trained for a whole year for that one race and we were good. But he didn't give us the training for the long distance so we petered out towards the end and those

that'd had long distance training just overtook us. It took me a year to get over that. Such a traumatic business. Yes, that was my Scots College.

When did you start to develop an interest in

19:00 **medicine?**

Towards the end of my time at Scots College I had to make up my mind what to do. I wanted to become a medical missionary. I was still having a pretty strong influence of my father and the school and the Presbyterian church and I thought it'd be a wonderful thing to be a medical missionary so I decided I would do medicine. I went away to religious

19:30 camps as well while I was doing medicine, but after a year or two that disappeared and the medicine became much more important to me. When I graduated all thoughts of medical missionary had disappeared from my mind. That's why I did medicine initially.

I guess you could have gone into any area of missionary work. Why did you choose medical missionary?

20:00 I don't know. Unless there was some influence of stories I'd been hearing in church about the missionaries and the medical side of it. I don't know why. But it was the thing I wanted to do.

So after Scots you went to Sydney Uni [University] was it?

Yes. I went to the

20:30 Sydney University. I had a fairly good pass. Nothing brilliant, but enough to get me into medicine. In those days it wasn't difficult to get into medicine. I think I had two As and three Bs or something like that in the Leaving which wouldn't be nowhere near these days.

21:00 When I went in, the first thing that happened to me – if we could go back to my last year at school I wanted to change over and do physics and chemistry because that was part of a medical course and I'd been history and geography and my headmaster wouldn't let me change. So when I got to university I had never done any chemistry and I'd never done any physics. I was thrown into those two first. The very first thing I did at university was to attend a practical class in physics.

21:30 I can remember the instructor getting out in front and saying, "We are now going to do Young's Modulus." I had no clue what she was talking about. I still didn't know at the end of the session what it was all about. So I went up and said to her, "I haven't got a clue what this is all – what are you all talking about?" So she says, "Haven't you ever done any physics before?" "No." "Come on, sit down. I'll explain it to you." That was my introduction to medicine. I thought, my God I'll never get through this.

22:00 The same thing happened at chemistry. I had no knowledge of chemistry.

In those days was it unusual for people to go to university?

I suppose there was much fewer than there are today. Today it's the big thing, isn't it? Education is the important thing. My mother was very important that all the children get educated. She wanted them all to go to university.

22:30 I suppose we were a little bit different. The rich people were there. Most of the kids at the university had rich parents. They all used to drive their cars or own motor bikes or something. They all had something. That's about the only answer I can give to your question I think.

23:00 **So what types of people did you encounter when you started at university?**

There was a fellow from Strathfield, his father was a Presbyterian minister too at Chalmers Street. He lived across the road from me and when he heard I was doing medicine he decided he'd do medicine too. So I had a friend. We used to travel together in the trains. Getting to university from Strathfield

23:30 you had to walk ten minutes to the railway station, catch a steam train to Redfern, get out at Redfern and walk from Redfern up to the university. We used to do this together most of the time. It was usually a run. I can remember as he'd come out the front door his sister would be standing at the front door. She'd be saying "Wallet, keys, handkerchief, suit." As he was running down.

24:00 Then we'd run down to the train together, jump on the train as it was leaving. By the time we got to university and the first lecture we used to go to sleep. All that exercise to get there was enough for us. Lectures were pretty boring. I don't remember any lecture at the university that I enjoyed. They obviously had been doing it for time and time and they just went on with it. Monotonous.

24:30 The only way you could get anything decent was to get a coach and he'd explain it all to you. It was never different. Anatomy – we started off of course in the early days by doing physics and chemistry, botany and zoology. That was our first year. Never done any of those subjects before. So it was fascinating. The zoology and the botany

25:00 I found fascinating. Physics I took to after a while. Chemistry I was never much good at. But I took to

physics. I was a good mathematician. First year we got through all those exams. I don't know how. And second year we started on the anatomy and physiology. Cutting up bodies and doing physiological experiments. I enjoyed anatomy because there would be a group

25:30 of ten people working on one body. Two or three would be working on legs, another working on the abdomen and another one working on the head and neck. And there was a camaraderie and you could talk and yarn while we were cutting up. And an exciting experience too, cutting up the human body and detecting all the different nerves and displaying the different parts we had to learn about. I enjoyed my anatomy.

26:00 I wasn't that interested in physiology, but I got very interested in the biochemistry and the haematology as we went through. They were my favourite subjects. Just trying to remember some of the early days of the … Let's

26:30 move on then. Then we went to the hospital. At the fourth year we then entered medicine as such. I was posted to Sydney Hospital. That's where we did all our clinical work. That's where really we got interested in medicine. We really started to learn a bit about medicine then. We had some great teachers. We had Dr Ritchie who was a physician. And Howard Bullock was the surgeon.

27:00 Eddy, I've forgotten his name now – little tiny fella. There's some very interesting experiences. I remember my first operation I was taken into as a student. We were allowed to assist. So Howard Bullock was operating. We were doing a big operation called abdomino perineal. We cut the abdomen and take the cancer out and go to the perineum and rectum

27:30 and so on and take out the whole of the bowel, the cancer. He was a pretty fast operator, but it usually took about an hour. I was then to assist. They'd all washed up and then the student was last. They'd all start and I washed up and got my gloves on and walked over. "Okay, we'll sew up now." That was my first operation. I took so long for me to get to – the operation was all over. I'll never forget it. Howard Bullock.

28:00 **Can I ask you a few more questions about uni? Were you ever squeamish or did you have any reservations about medicine at any point?**

No. The bodies and that sort of thing, cutting them up, no. I rather enjoyed it. It was an exciting experience. No. I've never been squeamish about things like that.

Can you remember, were you always interested in

28:30 **that kind of – not inquisition, but the detail of the human body and healing and things like that as a child or when you were young?**

No. I can't remember. We used to catch rabbits and things. I can't remember being interested in cutting them up or anything. I was much more interested in the healing side of medicine than in the operative side

29:00 of medicine. I really wanted to be a gynaecologist/obstetrician. That's what I'd have liked to have been. Bringing kids into the world was something that I never got round to. I wanted to be a surgeon at one stage because that was the thing to be. But that petered out. I'll tell you about that later.

In terms of just describing the university experience

29:30 **what attracted you to want to go to Sydney Uni and what was that experience like of being at that uni?**

To do medicine you had to go to university. That was only my reason to go to university. I wasn't a brilliant student. I was bright enough. I could do anything. But I couldn't be bothered studying. I wasn't a good student. But I always could manage to get through all my examinations.

30:00 I was much more interested in university life and in the experiments and the physiology and later on medicine. I was intrigued by clinical medicine. As I say, I never studied the textbooks very much. That was a bit of a waste of time to me. Too likely to interfere with my social activities. Terrible wasn't it?

So tell me about your social activity?

Football.

30:30 Sport. At Strathfield we had a church group of young men and young women and as we grew older we used to go to the pictures on Saturday night and then there'd be other nights where we used to go dancing. We organised a club which we called the Glengarry Club for Boys and Girls. We used to have a hall and a pianist and we'd have dancing nights and we'd go on picnics together, we'd

31:00 go on excursions, stay away for the weekend. The Glengarry Club had just a football team and we used to play in the local sub district football against all the other local teams. Briar's Club and so on. We called ourselves the Glengarry Club. It was a wonderful club. It finished when the war broke out. It was just disbanded. Most of the fellas went to the war and the girls – some of the girls –

31:30 likewise. But that was our social life. It was an important part of our social life because it kept us out of

all the other problems. We had one or two decent fellas in the church, senior people, who had kids. They helped us run the place and kept an eye on us and arranged picnics and things for us. Very important part of my life I think. So that was our social life. Cricket.

32:00 Football. Hikes into the bush. Dancing, pictures together. Never anything untoward ever happened. We were all good kids.

What about girls and things like that? Were there any girls at the uni?

Yes there were. But the girls' university, I didn't have

32:30 much to do with that. I remember the girls – they were a bit cliquey. I wasn't in that group. I'm not too sure what – I suppose it was because my group was at home still. The Strathfield group was my group of friends whereas these other ones, they also came from rich families I think. I think they – fathers were doctors and so on.

33:00 I wasn't in the same group. I don't quite know how to explain that to you, but – I knew them all, but I was never very friendly with any of them. I never took any of them out. I never went out with them.

You said before it was unusual for people to go to uni. What about women going to uni? Was that unusual?

There would have been about half a dozen I suppose in our

33:30 year. Might have been more. Wouldn't have been more than ten girls in … No. I wouldn't have thought we thought it was unusual, no. They seemed quite normal.

What about the girls in the church group? How did the dynamic work between the girls and boys? Did you have a girlfriend

34:00 **or was it very innocent?**

Oh yes. I had my girlfriend. I had several. We moved from one to another in the year. But I had a very great friend towards the end. When I went off to Prince Henry Hospital as a young resident I didn't see nearly as much of her as I did before then. I got to know the nurses. Used to take the nurses out. So we drifted apart.

34:30 And I met another lass later on and we got married. So I still remember with great emotion some of those early days and this girl that I was very fond of. She grew up and had a family and married one of my friends. I always remember following their career all the way through. I still have a very fond spot for her.

35:00 **You mentioned before that you'd jump out from Strathfield to Redfern. What was Redfern like as a suburb in those days?**

Couldn't tell you. All I can remember is getting out the train at Redfern and heading up the hill to the university. I don't remember being in Redfern. I can remember the railway station. I can remember getting off the steam train and winding our way up the hill to university. I don't have any recollection of anything at all.

What about was there

35:30 **impressions of Redfern or certain stigma attached to it in those days?**

No. All I can remember about Redfern is just the railway station. We got out and walked up the hill from it.

And what about Strathfield as a suburb in those days? How would you describe that?

It was middle class.

36:00 Strathfield was the home of some very well to do people. Particularly Redmyre Road and The Boulevard. There are some lovely big homes there. We were on that side amongst these houses, but we were a smaller cottage. As you can imagine my mother wouldn't have been able to afford much more. We lived in Strathfield, Brunswick Avenue.

36:30 A big back and centre place. It was just a little small suburban cottage. It had very happy memories for me though. A number of things. We kept WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in the backyard. And little gardens we used to grow. My brother and I used to do the garden. He went off to school. He went off to Knox Grammar School as a boarder and stayed with some friends up in Hornsby.

37:00 Friends of the family. Before then we used to fight a fair bit – two boys growing up. I suppose much the same thing as at school. My brother and I had a big row one day. He used to bully me a bit, being the older brother. But we had our stand up row too and that was fixed from then on. No more bullying. That's interesting isn't it? When I look back on that. I'd forgotten that. My brother was

37:30 doing law, joined the army, went overseas in the 2/2nd battalion. Went all the way through the war from a lieutenant to a lieutenant colonel and died in the last days of the war, got killed in the last days of the

war. He was married in the meantime during the war and had a little boy. He never saw his boy.

38:00 We didn't feel a lot for each other, my brother and I because he went to the school up in Hornsby and I went to Scots. We used to see each other on holidays. Most of our growing up time we were separated. Once we got over the – when he went to the boarding school at that age – what's that, 12, 13?

You had sisters as well?

Three sisters. The eldest sister

38:30 died just last year at 96 years of age. The second sister, she was a kindergarten teacher. She married a man on the land and lived in Narrandera. Had lovely kids. My second sister, Margaret, she was a student, she was the bright one. She went to university. She became a teacher and taught Latin and that sort of thing for the final year students. She was bright. She went around

39:00 to different country towns, I remember, being sent from high school to high school. She was a very lovely gentle person. She died at the age of 89 on Christmas Day. She just said, oh gone. My third sister was mentally defective, a bit. She never got past the age of about 12. Lovely person, very loving person. I loved her very much. But she spent most of her final years in

39:30 Cessnock, in the Avondale Nursing Home.

Tape 2

00:42 **Peter, you were going to tell me a story about your sister.**

My sister, Nancy. As I say she never got past the age of about 12 or 14. But she had her bright spots.

01:00 She used to run the ward, tell the sisters. She used to watch what they were doing. "No, Sister, that's not Mrs So and So. That medicine belongs to that one. You're giving them to the wrong person." She'd run the place like that. They all loved her. She was there for many years. She was quite a personality. When she died she had money collected – her pension – in her bank account, which she never spent. So we took her money and erected

01:30 a big stained glass window, a memorial in the chapel at Cessnock for her with her name on it. We used to take her for a drive and Senta [his wife] said to me – my wife said to me – "We might go and take Nancy for a drive, what do you think?" "What a good idea." So we rang up and said yes she'd love to come. When we got up there she said, "I don't want to go for a drive, I don't feel like it." So we sat down and talked. The three of us.

02:00 And she talked away. "Geez I'm tired now." I said, "We'll leave." We got home and the telephone rang to say she'd dropped dead. Extraordinary. We had no reason at all to decide to go up and see her. She wasn't well. She didn't crack on. She talked. She said, "I don't want to go. I'm tired." But after we left she suddenly just dropped dead. Extraordinary. Lovely sister.

02:30 That was the story of Nancy.

So she was the youngest.

No. There were the three girls and then was the two boys. I was the youngest in the family. She was the youngest girl.

So being placed the youngest in the family what was the dynamic like between you and your brothers and sisters?

They spoiled me. My sisters were that much older and when they went to university they used to …

03:00 when they went to schooling as teachers they used to try and push me along. "You've got to do this. Come on, you've got to study," I can remember. "If you get through the intermediate examination I'll give you a fountain pen." Things like that I can remember. They helped me along that way. Stimulated me to do … A good relationship with my sisters. It was a very happy family. Family life in those days, it was different. We always had our meals together. All meals together.

03:30 My mother always even after my father died would read a bit of the scripture to us or we'd have prayers at night. That slowly just disappeared. We'd have it once a week and as we all got older we all got busy and didn't get back in time to. But family dinner, the family meals together was very important. We were a very close knit family. As I said before my brother went off to Knox

04:00 and I went off to Scots. The family broke up.

Tell me more about your Mum?

My mother was an extraordinary woman. When my father died she was desolate, devastated. She went into black mourning and I can remember for years she wore nothing else but black. I can remember the

terrible sad face my Mum when he died. She was a wonderful

04:30 mother to all of us. After my father died she took the reins and she took us up to Strathfield and she sent us to different schools. She organised people who were friends of my father to help us put us through school. My other brother went to another minister up in Hornsby and he took over putting him through school and educated him. He lived there with them for the last few years. As I say I was into Scots and I was supported by people. My sisters by this time

05:00 were old enough. They were with the university and teachers' college and they got jobs. My mother still had difficulty in making ends meet. So she took in boarders. I can remember student teachers used to come and stay. I can remember I was kicked out of my bedroom. My brother went off to school and I had to sleep on the front veranda. My room was taken over by two girls from the bush.

05:30 Their names are on the tip of my tongue but I've forgotten now. They were two lovely girls from Coolah. So that helped the income for my mother. At night she'd get up and write articles for the papers. She used to publish them under the name of Mary Magdalene I think or something like that. The church papers. She used to get paid two guineas for each one she wrote.

06:00 She put us all through education, made sure we were all educated, all went to university. She was a wonderful woman. She died at 92 years of age. She lived with my two sisters alternatively. She spent some time with my eldest sister in the country and then she spent more time with my other sister up in the city. Towards the end the girls couldn't handle her any more. She was put into a home. I think she had enough there. She just got in to bed and went.

06:30 Died off. But she was a remarkable woman.

Tell me about the impact of the Depression at that time on your family?

I can remember the Depression well. I remember Mother when the New Guard was a group of soldiers from the First World War who were against Jack Lang. Jack Lang was the Labor president [NSW Premier]. They were very much against what his policy

07:00 was so they formed a new guard. They kept their roles from the First World War and everything. They were a pretty strong force. There was a great deal of feeling in the community between the Labor Parties and the New Guard and the Depression. I remember Mother taking in bags of flour into the pantry and things like that. We had a kerosene tin full of eggs. They were preserved in egg glass which is sort of like a silicone fluid.

07:30 We always had plenty of eggs, plenty of flour my mother kept and the sugar just in case war broke out, the revolutionary war. I can remember that well. The Depression that's the only way it really affected us I think. Like I say, my mother worked and had boarders so we got through the Depression.

You mention that you had a veggie [vegetable] garden and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and things like that?

Yes. We always kept WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. We had a gorgeous WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK called Carlotta.

08:00 Carlotta reached the end of her laying period and it was decided it was time to get rid of Carlotta. So we couldn't kill it. My mother wouldn't let us kill it so she gave it to the people next door. Carlotta. I can remember that gorgeous little black Orpington. We always had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. That's how we got our eggs. And we grew our own vegetables. Peas and beans in the back garden.

08:30 Carrots and turnips. Grew all those things ourselves. Lettuce. I suppose that helped the food part of the family too I suppose.

What about things like fresh fruit and vegetables, were they something you could buy at the local store?

Yes I think my mother would buy them. We always seemed to have fruit. In those days – the Depression times – things I can remember are people trying to make money for themselves. Fella used to come round selling clothes props.

09:00 He'd cut the wood up and everyone had a line and that and a long stick and had the clothes prop to hold the line up. I can remember the fellas coming past. "Clothes prop! Clothes prop!" Outside. Rabbitohs seeling rabbits. Rabbit was a bit of a luxury. Used to cost a shilling. We'd have it for Sunday lunch. We couldn't afford chicken. We used to have rabbit. The milkman came round with a

09:30 milk cart delivering milk. Come in and get your jug and get your money out. Bread was delivered. Dairy farmers came around with the dairy, the delicatessen – milk and cheese and butter they were all delivered. Vegetables were all delivered. All your groceries delivered.

So were there shops around Strathfield?

10:00 Yes. Strathfield shops. I can remember two things about the Strathfield shops. One was a little old lady had a lolly shop.

Kiri's Corner?

Oh I remember Kiri's Corner, the green grocer. Old Kiri. Yes, I remember him well. But there used to be a lady across the other side of the road and she used to have a lolly shop and she used to give tastings on Thursdays. We kids always went round.

10:30 You'd get two or three little boiled lollies wrapped up in paper. You got the tasting. We always went and got our tasting from Mrs Canfield I think her name was – something like that.

Can you describe her shop?

No. I can't. I can remember her though. She was a little lady used to wear glasses, short cut hair, wrinkled face, wearing

11:00 very drowsy clothes. Unglamorous clothes. Little old lady. She had glasses too. Starting to go grey-haired. She was a gorgeous person.

And she sold just lollies.

She sold boiled lollies and things, but she used to give these tastings. I don't think I ever bought a lolly there. But I never missed Thursday's tasting.

So it was sort of like a kids' wine tasting equivalent?

11:30 Give you a couple of little lollies was her way of keeping the kids around the place I suppose. She was obviously a little old lady, probably a spinster.

Kiri's Corner became the lolly shop eventually.

It was, was it?

But what was it back then?

It was a fruit shop. Kiri's Corner was a fruit shop. I remember old Kiri. Further down on the other side of the road was a chemist shop.

12:00 He was a very important person I can remember. I can't remember his name now, but I remember him well. And across the road on the other side was the hairdressers and I went to have my first shave. I remember that day. Probably had difficulty finding the hair he was going to shave off, but I went and had my shave. Used to cut our hairs regularly. Shilling per haircut. I can remember the two people. I can see them well. I can't remember their names though, the two fellas who owned the shop.

12:30 We were grown up kids then. Have a cigarette occasionally and have a shave. Grown up boys. I suppose we were 14, 15 or something.

How did they shave you?

Cut throat. Wonderful. You put stuff on your hair and rub stuff on your face and you came out feeling grown up. Wonderful feeling.

13:00 Isn't it extraordinary I can still feel that. I can almost feel it as I felt then.

Which church did you go to in that area?

Strathfield Presbyterian. Homebush Road. I was there – I went to church right up until –

13:30 up till and during the early part of the war. Because one of my colleagues, one of my friends and I were both made elders of the church just before the war. I don't know if you know anything about the Presbyterian Church. It's run by a session. The session clerk is the clerk of that session. The session run of the church. The session is made up of the elders plus a minister. They meet regularly and

14:00 decide what happens to their church. I was one of the members of the committee. In other words I was an elder. We were two young elders, two young boys. Obviously the minister thought the church needed some young people coming in. So the church played a big part in my life. All my friends were church friends.

So was it common for people to go to church?

Yeah. Yes, everybody went to church.

14:30 **Even young people?**

Yeah. Sunday School and so on. That was the thing to do in those days. We're talking about in the 20s.

Can you describe any religious tension between Catholics and Protestants?

Oh yes. The Presbyterians and the Catholics. Very much so. We used to think it'd be disgusting –

15:00 we'd go past the Catholic Church and they'd be having these chocolate wheels and gambling – terrible people. And on Sundays after church they'd go off and play sport which was terrible. You couldn't do

that. Presbyterians when I was brought up – six days shalt thou labour, the seventh day is the day of the Lord our God, thou shall do nothing. That was our upbringing. And on Sunday we went to Sunday school then went to church. In the afternoon –

15:30 we'd have midday dinner on Sunday and in the afternoon we'd rest or go for a walk and have afternoon tea and then go to church again at night. That was Sunday. You wouldn't think of playing sport. I did. I can remember I joined a club later on called the Briar's Club which is a sporting club in Strathfield and I wanted to go and play tennis on a Sunday and I can remember my mother being so upset. And I still wanted to go because I –

16:00 so I went. But what I did on my way down, I bandaged my arm up and when I got down there said, "I can't play. I've got a bad arm." So I satisfied my mother by not playing and I satisfied the club by going along as if I was going to play. That was a strong influence it had on me. I couldn't play tennis on Sunday. Later on I did it, of course.

16:30 **Can you describe any other kind of religious tensions between churches and people?**

Yes. I had a friend – he's a friend now, but in those days he was much younger than me. He used to have to walk past the Catholic school, these kids going to school would walk past the Catholic school and all the Catholic kids would come out and yell at them. "Presbyterians" or something.

17:00 "Presbyterians'll all go to hell while the Catholics we all ring the bell!" Anyhow this fella was telling me that one time, he was four years of age, he used to be scared to death going to school past these other boys. So they organised him one day to walk past and run past so all the Catholic kids chased him and around the corner the Presbyterians were waiting for them in ambush and there was a great battle. Yes there was tension between the two.

17:30 It was stupid wasn't it?

So what was the view of Catholics in those days?

I don't understand.

What was the general attitude towards Catholics? How were they described?

There was just the tension. The two religions were quite different. One was a strict religion. The other one realised that people had to play sport and so on so they said, as long as you go to church and do this and do that the rest of the day is yours.

18:00 My only thing that I remember is my upbringing – they were bloody Catholics and we were Pressies.

So how would you describe a Catholic or define a Catholic in those days?

Kids that go to a Catholic church. They were just Catholics. Didn't know much else about them excepting they didn't behave

18:30 themselves on Sunday. They could play sport and do all sorts of things like that. Gambling. Drinking. Even the priests used to have a drink. Couldn't understand it.

So in terms of the Great War was there anybody in your family or anyone that you knew that had told you stories about the Great War?

There was a cousin of sorts – none of my immediate family, no.

19:00 There was a cousin of sorts of my mother's. We used to go and visit old Granny Congreve and she had two sons. Both were in the war and both were invalid, cripple – they were both returned soldiers who were on pensions. They never looked too bad to me. But they talked a bit about the war. They used to tell us about the gas. He'd been gassed this particular fellow I think. He used to talk about the gassing, but not a great deal.

19:30 **What did he tell you about the gassing?**

He used to tell us how terrible it was. This gas would come over and they couldn't breathe. That's about – that's the only recollections I have. Alf Congreve. He was a bit of a blabbermouth. We didn't always believe everything he said. I don't remember his stories much.

20:00 We never thought that much about it. You couldn't get anything out of them. There were other fellas – the chap that used to come and do the plumbing for us. He was a returned soldier. We'd ask him about it and he wouldn't tell you. He said, "You don't want to know about the war." That was it. I don't remember ever hearing anything about the war excepting from Alf Congreve.

So how did you find out about it, or didn't you?

Find about him?

About the Great War.

20:30 School, I suppose. There was plenty of publicity about the war. Plenty of books written about the war.

We used to read all these books about the war and Gallipoli and Anzac Day, the papers were full of it. That's how I learnt about the war.

As a boy, what was your attitude to war?

I would have liked to have been there.

21:00 Never any pacifism at all. War was inevitable. And I'd like to have been in that one. I made sure I got to the next one. Terrible.

Did you know any pacifists?

No.

Can you remember where you were when the Second World War was declared?

Sure. Sitting in the lounge

21:30 room at Burner Street, where we were living. Sunday afternoon about three o'clock. Listening to the radio. And then [Robert] Menzies [Prime Minister of Australia], very clearly, "We are now at war." We expected it. It was coming. Pretty dramatic moment – war was declared.

22:00 **Why was it expected?**

There'd been all this Hitler business for a long time. He'd been invading the different countries and war seemed to be inevitable. Chamberlain [Prime Minister of England] had been overseeing Hitler and the papers were full of it. Was there going to be a war, wasn't there going to be? So we were really expecting war to break out.

22:30 **Can you remember how everyone responded – your family and your friends – to that radio announcement?**

My mother was very distressed. She could see the inevitable. She'd been through the First World War and she'd been in the Red Cross and she'd been making things for the troops overseas. She knew all about the First World War. In those country towns there were so many losses of young men from the country so she was very much involved. She just dreaded

23:00 the thought of the war.

What about you and your brother?

We just said, suppose we'll be going. My brother joined up immediately. He was already a lieutenant in the University Regiment. His number – he was the 256th person to join up. His number was NX256 so he went straight into the war. He was the first over. He was sent over with the 1/2/2nd Battalion.

23:30 **How did your sister respond?**

I can't remember. Neither of them were there at the time. I suppose they were at their schools or something. They were both married. Of course they were. They weren't living at home.

So at that point,

24:00 **the war has been declared, what did you feel was the right thing for you to do at that point? And what did you think that you could do?**

I didn't. I knew I had to continue on at the hospital. I thought I'd have to join up eventually, but I – even when war broke out the war didn't take place. War was declared, but for the first year there was nothing much. We all meandered through that first year watching what was going on and

24:30 watching what was happening in Europe. It wasn't until the fellas started to join up around about the end of Christmas that year the first year – that was what the end of 1939 the war broke out, June 40. I would have joined up – by that

25:00 time the war was getting well on then.

And what about your friends at uni? How did the impact of the war manifest itself, or were you out at the hospital at that point?

I had lost contact with most of my friends at university. But the doctors at the hospital were a

25:30 group there were about ten or twelve of us there. Some of us decided to join up early. Others of us didn't. I waited because I still wanted to continue doing my studies. By the time it got to June 1940, I couldn't wait any longer. I was going to miss out. So I joined up.

Was there any pressure on you to join up?

No. Only myself.

26:00 **Did you have any examples or experiences that you can share about white feathers? Know**

anything about that?

Yes I do. But I don't remember any. That was a First World War phenomenon. I don't remember it happening in the Second World War.

26:30 After the war started in quite a number of young doctors joined up. Royal North Shore hospital was a typical example. Quite a few of them went off with the first like my brother did. I was seconded with another senior doctor from Prince Henry hospital to go to Royal North Shore hospital to run the place. It was very much understaffed with doctors. It was a terrible busy time over there, I remember.

27:00 We used to get up at night and work all day. I was exhausted. I remember being called up one night to see a baby. The kid was – I can't remember what was wrong with the kid – but anyway I gave it Dover's powders. Dover's powders contains morphia – opium, little bits, very small amounts. It was the thing you gave kids to settle them down.

27:30 I gave this kid Dover's powder and sent the mother home with the kid. The next morning the superintendent said to me, "That bloody kid you saw nearly died here, did you know?" "No." "You must have given it too much Dover's powders because they brought the kid in unconscious. We fixed it up during the night." I said, "Why didn't you wake me?" "You'd done enough damage." That was the one and only experience of my life where (UNCLEAR) and that was because of the amount

28:00 of pressure that was on us at that time. We worked far too long hours. I still don't remember what happened. But I do know the kid had too much Dover's powder. Whether the mother gave it too much or whether I ordered too much, I don't remember.

So can you describe a little bit more about that time, of the kind of pressure that you were on and the sort of work you were doing in that capacity?

We just did the ordinary

28:30 routine outpatients inpatients. There was the inpatients working for the doctors. But we never seemed to get any rest. Because you finish your days work and you'd go to bed. You'd get a call up. Someone in the casualty department. We were so short staffed. We seemed to be working – I can't tell you much more detail. I do remember a period of being exhausted and tired all the time. I was bloody glad when I was sent back to Prince Henry hospital again – at least when we were relieved by someone else.

29:00 **So what were some of the common things that people were suffering from in that time?**

Trauma was one of the things. Accidents. That kept you going. A lot of them. And people seemed to go to the outpatient department of the night time instead of going to a local doctor. They'd come in with colds or flu or rashes or things in their eyes or earache. All those sort of things. There was never any serous trauma. Any serious trauma patients

29:30 seemed to – they'd call in the specialists fairly quickly. But we'd see the cuts and the bruises and broken arms and broken legs and people falling over. General run of general practitioner stuff really.

Were there any epidemics or certain outbreaks of certain things at that time?

A bit later than that really diphtheria.

30:00 At Prince Henry Hospital where I was a resident was an infectious disease hospital. They had a leprosy colony. They had venereal wards which were right out on the coast. We didn't have any treatment for gonorrhoea or syphilis in those days. No penicillin. So they had wards full of these venereal cases. They had a ward set aside for diphtheria cases.

30:30 All diphtheria cases. And another one set aside for infantile paralysis. They were all the chronic illnesses. Then there were the wards for infectious diseases – the simple ones like mumps, measles, German measles and so on. There was another big ward. And then there were the general surgical wards and the medical wards. As junior residents at the hospital our job was to – apart from doing the ordinary

31:00 junior work – get up at night time when the ambulances came in with a sick patient. You had to look at the patient, decide which ward to send them and so on. The biggest problem was at night time if they came in with a sore throat and a rash. They either had German measles or they had measles or they had – you had to decide what was wrong with them. If you sent them to the wrong ward you were in really trouble the next day. If you sent a patient with German measles in with other measles, was an awful thing to do.

31:30 Diphtheria. If a bloke came in with a sore throat you didn't know if it was diphtheria or whether it was just German measles. You had to make your mind up. You sent them to the wrong ward: you were in real trouble. We seemed to have lots of those infectious diseases at Coast hospital.

Can you tell me more about those particular wards, the leprosy ward, the venereal ward …

I can tell you a lot about the leprosy ward. It wasn't a ward, it was a colony.

32:00 It was a fenced off area with a fence around it with a little cottage. And the lepers lived there with their

families. It was the junior residents' job to look after the lepers if they got a cold. Otherwise they just lived there apart from the rest of the community. The leprosy you didn't treat that much. But you treated other illnesses. And a rather extraordinary story associated with it.

32:30 I was the resident looking after the lepers and I got a call over. A patient got a urinary tract infection. A woman. At that time sulphonamides had come in. It was a new antibiotic. Only been in a couple of years. Wasn't used much. I thought, this is the ideal person so I ordered sulphonamides. The next morning the telephone rang and the superintendent's on the phone. "What the hell were you doing in the leper colony? What do you mean by prescribing drugs like that

33:00 to those patients? You nearly killed her. She's broken out in a rash, she's had a terrible relapse. You're off the ward." Terribly guilty. Anyhow she survived all right. The upshot of that was, when I came back from the war I went out to visit the hospital. And I saw the big boss in charge and we'd yarned about the old days. He says, "Extraordinary thing happened while you were away at the war. Some young resident treated a patient over here with sulphonamides.

33:30 She went into relapse and then she was cured." I said, "Yes. That was me." What had happened was – nowadays of course that's the treatment for leprosy – sulphonamides script, they use them. But I had no knowledge to what was happening. She got cured by the use of sulphonamides. That's my story of the lepers. The leper colony. Lepers were regarded as highly infection contagious people. They were set aside

34:00 in a place like that on their own. If a patient died of leprosy, the law was that they had to be put into a zinc lined coffin full of formalin and taken in the dead of night from where they were to Rookwood Cemetery and buried in a special place. That's how antiquated the rules were in those days. Leprosy is not nearly as infectious or contagious as

34:30 tuberculosis. But it was feared in those days.

I just want to ask you a few more questions about that. How were patients treated? How would a doctor interact with a leprosy patient in those days?

We just treated them as if they were normal people. They were disfigured, most of them. They had these big rashes. We just treated them as an

35:00 ordinary patient. The junior residents' job was to go and look after them. We knew that they weren't that severely contagious. Most of them were probably in the inactive stage anyhow.

In terms of being a new orderly in a hospital or even being a doctor in those kinds of situations, how do you look after your own health when you know you're around infectious

35:30 **diseases and very sick people?**

We never had any regard to it. We just kept ourselves fit. Washed our hands regularly. During an infectious ward you'd wear a mask if you were going to see any infectious people. But apart from that nothing. We just – it was just part of our normal life. Very sad place the diphtheria wards and the poliomyelitis wards and people who were crippled. They were lying

36:00 there for weeks and weeks. The diphtheria used to affect the lungs. You get paralysis of the lungs so you couldn't breathe. So they were put in what we call an iron lung. Do you know about the iron lung? Okay. You put this person in the lung and you're surrounded by an airproof area. By a pump

36:30 you'd suck the air out and put it back in again. So the person really artificially breathed the iron lung for them. So when you sucked the air out their lungs would expand. And as the air got back in they'd breathe out again. And that's how you breathe until they were able to get control of their own breathing again. Should see these people lying in the iron lungs. Very distressing.

With things like new medications and

37:00 **antibiotics, you describe a situation of prescribing something which you thought at the time backfired but it actually showed that it was something that was quite revolutionary – what kind of new medicines were being developed at that point and what was the reaction of people to them?**

You got those – they weren't called antibiotics at that time, what were they called? First of all just sulphonamides and then they got sulphur pyridine. They were all these chemicals.

37:30 Sulphur pyridine was the miracle drug. MB693. That cured pneumonias. At that time pneumonia was an incurable terrible disease. It killed many people. This was the medical drug, the MB693, knocked off the pneumococci straight away. These were all chemicals. The antibodies didn't come in till penicillin. At that time we were at the war. Penicillin was developed while we were at the war.

38:00 The sulphonamides and the sulphur pyridine of the – they were all great wonderful drugs.

So how does the process work when new pharmaceuticals are developed and how are new doctors and doctors in general educated by these kinds of treatments?

Unfortunately by the drug firms. The drug firms employ people to go out and they teach them, give them lessons on what to talk about.

38:30 They go to doctors and say, “This is the latest drug, doctor. It’s a wonderful thing for such and such.” That’s where you learnt about your drugs. By the time they got into the papers, the medical journals, or got into the textbooks it was well in use. So the drug firms. It’s been going on ever since. And now I think unfortunately most of modern medicine is practised by doctors and drug firms tell them what to use. “Here’s a new drug, doctor, you should try this, this is perfect.”

Tape 3

00:44 **I just wanted to ask you a little bit more about some of the wards that you mentioned in the hospital. Can you describe the leprosy colony and how that worked?**

It was really

01:00 a little village on their own. Leprosy was supposed to be contagious therefore they had to be put aside from the rest of the community and they put them out at Prince Henry Hospital, the Coast Hospital as it was known in those days. That was just a little village of their own. People used to supply them with their food and their milk and so on just like everybody else. Our only treatment of them was not to treat the leprosy, but to treat them as individuals.

01:30 If they had a cold or a sore or something like that. They were really just a village living on their own. You had to be taken away from the rest of the community. Terrible. You look back on it. I don’t know when the lepers’ colony was disbanded but obviously it has been because there are still lepers about. Not many, but there are still people with leprosy. Come down from the islands and some up north Queensland.

02:00 **So how many people were in that community?**

That’s stretching my mind a bit now. Memory. I would say there were about five or six cottages. Families. That’d be all. Every two or three or might be four or five in one family and then two or three in another one. I just have a very vague recollection. You had to go through the gate to get into the colony. This was just

02:30 a separate village of their own.

It’s not contagious from generation to generation. What about the children of the lepers?

There were kids there that had leprosy, but the ones that didn’t I think went away. I don’t remember any normal kids. I don’t remember kids being there – grown up kids, I think.

Do you know anything about like

03:00 **this is a slight digression, but they were taken away from the community and they had their own community. Did they have the right to vote or to participate in the community?**

I can’t answer those questions. My only involvement with them was from the pathological point of view, looking at the smears and taking smears from their noses and things like that to see how they were going, whether they were active or not. And treating them as just ordinary patients. I was just a

03:30 general practitioner to the village.

What was known about leprosy as a disease in those days?

It was a contagious disease. That was the most important thing. It was very much a very small number of people in Australia. It was a disappearing disease. These were the remnants of it. That’s how we looked at it.

04:00 You didn’t expect to see lepers in the ordinary community. You didn’t expect to see leprosy as part of a disease. It was a disease from the islands or overseas. We never talked much about leprosy. But being there we were able to examine the – we used to use wire to stroke the inside of the nose and make a smear. We examined that under the microscope to see the leper – to see the bacillus – leper bacillus.

04:30 It was really of interest more than anything else. Do you want to see what leprosy’s like? Come over and have a look at this one.

What could you tell from a smear?

You could recognise the bacteria. Just like a tuberculosis bacteria, there was the leprosy bacillus. It grew definitely on blood plates.

You mentioned that some of the lepers were from the islands. What was the general group of people that

05:00 **were in the colony? What kinds of cultural backgrounds?**

I can't remember what they looked like. I remember this woman that I treated. I suppose she was a bit coloured because I remember her having darkish skin. But I don't remember her features

05:30 being Negroid at all, anything like that. I really haven't got a recollection.

Would you say they were mostly Islanders or indigenous people?

No. I would have thought they were white people most of them.

Can you describe the venereal ward?

I can.

06:00 Those were the terrible days when there was no decent treatment. The person who had gonorrhoea were given a washout with Condy's Crystals. Do you know what Condy's Crystals are? Potassium permanganate. That had a stringent affect so after they got washed out they often got strictures. So although it knocked off the germs they finished off with the strictures so they'd have to come back regularly to have the strictures fixed by sounds.

06:30 So the wards were quite often filled with people coming in to have their treatment.

What are strictures?

It's a contracture of the tissues. So if the penis urethra is like that and you put Condy's Crystals in it would stricture like that so they'd have difficulty in passing their water. So we used to have steel sounds of different diameter starting with a small one and bigger and bigger and bigger. You'd pass these things

07:00 until it'd break up the stricture. Very painful business for him – most of them were chaps. Gonorrhoea was treated – I don't remember the females. I don't think I was ever involved with the female wards. But it was treatment, Condy's Crystals washout and then come back and have the strictures done. That was the two things. These wards were away from the rest of the hospital, on a little headland away from the main part of the hospital, because they were infectious

07:30 diseases. The syphilitic people were there too. They were mainly treated with gold injections or arsenic injections. No such thing as penicillin. So they were difficult to treat and tertiary and secondary syphilis was common. Tertiary syphilis being the brain affected, and secondary syphilis was just coming out in different –

08:00 big sores and so on. Whereas the primary syphilis usually involved the penis or the vagina or whatever it was. The wards were quite numerous people in the wards. The goner ward always seemed to have lots of people in there. Not so many in the syphilis wards. Yes, I can remember those wards. Funny old hut wards. They weren't the nice big built brick

08:30 wards. They were huts – timber.

And what kind of people were the patients in the venereal ward?

Just normal – working class people mostly. I suppose there were well to do people but they treated them somewhere else. Just the run of the mill ordinary working man.

You mentioned the syphilis and golden arsenic

09:00 **injections? What were those two?**

Gold was in the early days. Later on the arsenical injections was the thing that had the best treatment for syphilis, the best response. Intermuscular injections of arsenic. Arsenical compounds.

And was it literally gold?

09:30 It was a gold chemical. If you can understand calcium combines with other things. Calcium phosphate and calcium – so was gold and so was arsenic. They combine with arsenical compounds such as arsenical phosphate. And the same with the gold compounds that they injected. The heavy metals they thought

10:00 were the things for treatment of syphilis. Pretty hopeless.

How did it help the syphilis?

Not much. Arsenicals were much better. The arsenicals were brought in, they got a good response.

When you said the wards were kept away because they were contagious – venereal wards – was it contagious … ?

It was a dirty word.

10:30 Venereal disease. They were dirty people. You kept them away from the rest of the community. That's

really … You can't get venereal disease unless you have sexual intercourse or a persons got a gum on a lip and you kiss them. You can get it that way. You got to have good contact with the organism. So it really – it's not infectious. It's contagious. But they were dirty people. I think that's why

11:00 they were put in a ward with venereal disease. Horrible.

What was the attitude? You said dirty people, but what was the attitude to them and were these people ever healed and able to go back to the community?

They go back to normal again. The rest of the community wouldn't know they had venereal disease. If you got venereal disease you went and saw a doctor in private and you got sent off to hospital and got treated and came back and no-one knew about it. That's a terrible thing to

11:30 have.

Can you describe the stigma associated with it?

Just if a person had venereal disease, he was unclean. He was obviously a person who was promiscuous and not a nice sort of person. Can't add much more to it than that.

You mentioned Condy's Crystals.

12:00 **When did that method come in and was that successful in quelling gonorrhoea?**

Yes. It used to cure the gonorrhoea. But it had a terrible effect on the urethra. It worked all right. Pretty painful injections, the Condy's Crystals. They were burnt.

12:30 A burning sensation.

How would – this is a pretty too much information kind of question, but just for our benefit – how would gonorrhoea manifest itself in a person that ends up contracting it?

A pus in the urethra. The first thing they do, fella gets sore, painful in his penis and then he'd

13:00 have a look and there'd be pus coming out the end of it. That's the common. They'd come along to you infectious.

You said before that syphilis was less rife than gonorrhoea but it was more difficult to treat? Why was it less rife at that point?

Gonorrhoea was a pretty common disease. Syphilis was

13:30 much rarer. Why? I don't know. I just think that gonorrhoea's much more common and syphilis wasn't common, so less people got it. Less people came in contact with it.

That was sexually transmitted though, syphilis?

Sexually transmitted disease, both of them.

And you mentioned the syphilis causes mental degeneration.

14:00 **Would that be how you'd describe it?**

Tertiary syphilis usually affected the brain. By the time the organism got to the brain and started to affect the brain the people would get all sorts of symptoms such as dementia and so on. But that was the last stages of syphilis. Secondary syphilis was usually breaking out in nasty sores.

14:30 Gumners. What we call gumners. Or ulcers on the lip or ulcers in the mouth and ulcers on the penis or in the urethra or in the vagina. That was the secondary stage of syphilis. The final stage was the mentally deficient where the organism infected the brain.

There was no known cure for it that was as effective as say Condy's Crystals was for gonorrhoea.

The arsenicals did cure

15:00 lots of them. But it was a slow process and a long process.

So when you did your initial training at Dubbo was it when you enlisted in the army?

First of all went to Liverpool.

What kind of training did you have at that point and were you able to bring any of this prior knowledge into things such as venereal diseases

15:30 **which would have been, I can imagine, a situation at that point?**

Yes. I'd been well trained in infectious diseases. Yes. But venereal disease wasn't common in the army. It was an offence, against the law to get venereal disease, so if you got it you were in trouble. So it wasn't common at all. That's not quite true.

16:00 **No it's not. We know it's not true.**

It wasn't common in the early days, but certainly when the boys went overseas venereal disease was common. But I don't remember it being common in Australia. I can tell you the story about how they got venereal disease. Would you like to hear the story now?

Yes I would.

Final leave in Perth and we were stationed at a place called Northam.

16:30 We were allowed to go into Perth for the final leave. Had a day. I was in charge of the trainload of troops that went in. When we got together before the train I said to them, "I don't care what you do in Perth, that's your own business. But I want you back at six o'clock and I want you sober. The rest of the day you can do what you like. Anyone that doesn't, if he causes problems he'll be in real strife."

17:00 So we got to the time about fifteen short. So I said to my sergeant, "Where the hell are they?" "They'll be in Roe Street." "What's Roe Street?" "That's where the brothels are." "Let's get round and round them up." So I went round to the Roe Street area and there was one of my sergeants, bit tipsy. He'd been on the grog all day. He had a handful of money and he's saying,

17:30 "You had a fuck yet son? Here, go and have a fuck. Here." He was handing out money to these young boys and they were going to the brothels. And there's these frowsy old sheilas [women] in there. So we rounded them all up. Got them all back and got them back to the thing. Embarked for Malaya. By the time we were nearing to Malaya ten days later on they were all turning up with their gonorrhoea. And telling me, "Oh gee, doc, what am I going to do? I just got married before I left home and look what I got.

18:00 I don't know what I'm going to do." So yeah, they got gonorrhoea at that stage. Also when they got to Singapore too the boys every now and then would come back with venereal disease. They got gonorrhoea all right from Roe Street in Perth.

So what was the attitude of the army to the men going to the brothels?

They

18:30 didn't – there was nothing against them going to brothels. What was against them was getting venereal disease because that put them out of action. That was a crime. But I don't remember anyone getting into real trouble over it. They'd come along and see me and we'd give them treatment. I can't remember how we treated those boys. I suppose penicillin had come in by then.

19:00 No I don't think so. I suppose we treated them with sulphonamides. Yeah.

Is that different to Condy's Crystals?

Yes. Sulphonamides just gave them by mouth, oral treatment and that used to clean up the gonorrhoea for a while until it became resistant to the organism.

That was an oral …

Yes. Tablets by mouth.

What measures did the army take and did they consult you about this

19:30 **kind of thing? About informing the troops about things like VD [venereal disease]?**

Yes. We used to give lectures to the troops on the way over on the boat and before we went we gave them. But mostly on the boat. I remember giving a talk. I had to give health talks to the boys and I remember giving a talk to them about looking after their diet and the food they should eat and shouldn't eat and there was an old saying from a British sergeant who said, "To be healthy

20:00 son you have to have a stool which goes twice around the pan pointed at both ends." So that's a healthy stool. I was telling this story to the boys and I didn't know that it was being broadcast over the ship. Everybody on the ship including all the nurses. Chiacking [teasing] went for a long time after about my lecture talk.

20:30 **So the agenda of the army was to educate the men about VD but not to dissuade them from going to brothels. It was more just about …**

The padres who looked after the boys would warn them to keep away from them. No. It wasn't the right thing to do, but you couldn't stop the fellas.

No. I'm not saying as a right or wrong but just to get the idea of what

21:00 **the emphasis was – it was more educating them about …**

Venereal disease more than anything.

So what kinds of things would you say in your lectures? Can you give us an abridged version?

I should think my language would have been a bit crude.

That's all right. Crude's okay.

That was the words they understood. I'd just tell them, "You can't be doing this and you stupid bugger, if you do this, you'll get this," and so on.

21:30 You don't want to hear the words I used.

I can imagine. Maybe we can use Michael [interviewer] as a template.

Okay, "If you go in fucking these sheilas you're going to be in real trouble, you silly bastards. You've got wives at home, you got kids at home. You want to go home with a venereal disease just for five minutes enjoyment? Don't be so stupid. If you do and you have to go then use a condom."

22:00 They were all given condoms.

Okay. So what measures were taken by the army to provide them with contraceptives and what were they?

That was part of the – we had condoms to hand out to the troops if they were going out on final or going on leave in Singapore. They knew that the fellas were going to do it. They know you're saying don't do it. Don't do it if you've got any sense, but if you have to

22:30 use this.

And what other contraceptives?

Just french letters, condoms. That's all. I can remember we had them in Bathurst camp before we went away. On issue to fellas going on leave.

What was the attitude of the troops to things like condoms?

They didn't like them.

23:00 The sensible fellas used them. The others didn't. Came back with gonorrhoea. There are stupid people in the army just like there is in every community. You know, the fella who says, "Ah I'm not going to pay attention. He doesn't know what he's talking about." Till they come back with a dose.

And when you say that they didn't like to use condoms, was it very common for people to have unprotected sex in brothels?

23:30 Yes. There wasn't anywhere near the same sort of publicity as we got today. The sort of things that we see in the films, you never saw that in those days. The subject was taboo.

Sex itself?

Sex. You didn't talk about sex.

24:00 The stuff that you hear on the radio and you see on the films was completely taboo in my day. When I was a boy you never talked about sex. My parents never mentioned sex to me in my life.

What about things like these women in the brothels? What about getting them pregnant or giving them venereal diseases and things like that? Were they ever an issue for the army and the troops?

No.

24:30 The only thing they cared about was the fellas not getting the disease. That's really the only problem. I don't know how many little girls around Singapore were left with babies from the fellas. I suppose there were plenty of them. They always got girlfriends pretty quickly over there. They were all young – 18, 25, prime of life.

25:00 **In that initial training when you first enlisted can you describe the process of how that worked and if there was anything that was useful for your experiences?**

My medical training. No. We'd look after the boys if they got a cold or cut themselves or something like that. That's about all. Most of what we did could be done by a nurse or a first aid

25:30 person. Really it was my biggest regret. The early days of the army is the 18 months I spent between when I enlisted and when I went overseas. It was a complete waste of 18 months of my life. I could have been working at hospitals. I could have been in a much more useful job. Instead of that we were sitting around going on marches and doing stupid exercises which were of no importance. Just a complete waste of time.

26:00 All my colleagues who didn't join up went on, got to schools and did pathology and became majors and – terrible.

Can you explain to me when you join the army and you've got a certain professional status, how does that affect your ranking in the army and then therefore how you then operate within the army in terms of things like normal troops?

If you were a medical officer, you immediately became a captain.

26:30 So you're above the lieutenant and the sub lieutenant. You had a position in the army equivalent to a company commander. And you were held with respect by the troops because you were a doctor and they needed you. So you were a highly respected member. Particularly the doctor in the battalion where there would be a thousand men and be the one doctor looking after them.

27:00 In the field ambulance was a bit different. We did mostly hospital work. But as young doctors we were sent out to the battalions if a doctor went on holidays. We'd go and relieve him in the battalion. So we did quite a lot of battalion work. But that was mainly as I said, colds and cuts and so on. Anyone that got ill was sent to hospital.

You mentioned before that some of you colleagues decided to opt against

27:30 **signing up and enlisting in the army. You mentioned that you spent a lot of time initially that could have been better spent somewhere else. Why didn't your colleagues decide to enlist at that time do you think?**

I think they could see in the future they'd be much better off if they continued on and did more training and became a more senior person in the community. I know two

28:00 who were a year ahead of me who stayed on at the hospitals longer as seniors. They were both offered positions in training as pathologists and they headed the army as major pathologists. Both of them. Whereas I went in as a captain, general practitioner type person. That was my role throughout the whole of the army. So when I came back I had to start study again.

You mentioned

28:30 **before that there was a concern that you had about time. You thought that you'd miss out if you didn't enlist at the time that you did?**

A lot of fellas were joining up and the war was getting advanced over in Europe and we thought we'd go over there, get sent over there, because it was getting pretty hot over there. I thought, "If I don't join up soon I might miss out on that." So I joined up hoping I'd be sent overseas. My brother was already over there.

29:00 Instead of that I was 18 months in Australia and then sent to Malaya. Which was not what I wanted, not what I expected.

And if you'd waited that 18 months it would have made a difference?

If I'd stayed in. I would have finished my year as a senior resident and probably got either another position or offered a hospital job in the army instead of the job as a general practitioner type.

29:30 **Can you describe that 18 months that you spent here? You mention that you did GP [general practitioner] stuff.**

When I joined up I was sent to the showground where two or three of my doctor friends were there. We just lived it up.

30:00 We stayed in the showground. We got ourselves accommodation in some of those – I don't know if you go to the showground, but there used to be Dymock's building and someone else's building and Marcus Clarke's building and so on. We found ourselves accommodation in one of those. Set up our own little place in there. We used to go out at night and get on the grog and have a wild party. We just lived it up at the showground those first few months. I remember we used to –

30:30 one of my colleagues had some pretty good contacts so we went to one of the slums in those days in Sydney –

Balmain?

No.

Newtown?

No. The city. Doesn't matter.

Surry Hills.

Yes. Surry Hills. That's it. Thank you. Surry Hills

31:00 there was a person called Tilly Devine. Was a great underworld character, a woman. She had a big gang and she was a big tough egg. We went to visit Tilly Devine. This fella said, "Come on we'll go and visit Tilly Devine." So we did. We had a few drinks with her and met her and talked with her and had two or three fellas standing around the lounge room with revolvers I remember. We had a great night. We

talked about what was happening.

31:30 This fella had extraordinary contacts. I can remember that night and I can remember meeting her and she was a delightful person really.

So Tilly Devine, tell me more about her?

She was an underworld gangster. I suppose robbery and house breaking and all those sorts of things. She had a gang. She was well known to the police as an underworld character.

So she wasn't a madam?

32:00 **She was a thief.**

She would have been a madam too. She would have had brothels. She would have been on the drugs in those days.

Can you describe what she was like?

Not really. She was a very pleasant person. Tough looking egg. I just don't remember much more about her. I remember just the

32:30 circumstances. I was a bit nonplussed. I was out of my depth in that place. I was being taken there and these were things I'd never heard of, never seen before. I was impressed by the tough looking eggs standing around outside. We had a drink. I remember she gave us a drink to have while we were there. I don't know how we got there. I don't know why he took us there. But I do know we met Tilly Devine. Another famous place he took us was the coffin factory

33:00 where they made coffins. We went there. We met people there and we got on the grog there and we used to play Cardinal Puff. Do you know Cardinal Puff? It's a game in which you had to do certain things and then have a drink. And do another, two drinks. Next time, three drinks. It's no time before you're all full [drunk]. Just a way of getting full. I can't tell you exactly

33:30 how it was done. But Cardinal Puff was the game we played. We sat around the coffins drinking the grog. Extraordinary memories of those days. One of the fellas got pretty inebriated so they put him in a coffin. He was passed out. We took him to the hospital where he was a resident and put him in the coffin outside the front door and left him there.

34:00 They were wild days. We didn't do anything naughty. We got on the grog and did things like that. That was the showground days. From then we went to Liverpool Camp and we joined as a unit and then we came under control of the CO [commanding officer] and then we became important people in charge of the troops. Our training started in Liverpool. A lot of marching

34:30 up and down and drill. Elementary training. From there we went to Dubbo. The unit was divided into two groups. A company went to Bathurst and B company went to Dubbo. We spent a long time in Dubbo. I can remember sitting out on the veranda of the Royal Hotel at night drinking grog and drinking beers and doing some field exercises and teaching the boys troops. But I can't remember much more about it. We were there for I would think nearly six months.

35:00 I cannot remember much about it at all. Excepting I can remember going to the hotels and drinking and marching and drills. From there we went to Bathurst and joined the rest of the group. We were there for about another six months before we were on final leave. Final leave in Sydney. I took the troops down to their final leave. We had to meet again. Of course, it was just like any other one. Some of them didn't turn up and

35:30 most of them turned up drunk. Drowning your sorrows in alcohol was the thing to do in those days. You didn't ever even had to be sorry to get drunk. It was a way of getting away from the world. It was escape. Final leave I can remember they all came back, most of them, under the influence of alcohol. I can remember the sergeant picking up his bag, slung

36:00 it over his shoulders and down he went with the bag. So full. Another fella so drunk he fell down on the way to the railway station marching home and he was as sick as a dog in the gutter. We picked him up and they carried him. Alcohol seemed to be the important thing. Everybody drank alcohol as an escape. So we got onto the train and I can remember one of my staff sergeants saying to me –

36:30 all he could say was – he was under the influence. "I'm gonna have a baby. I'm gonna have a baby." That's all I can remember him saying. He obviously went home and found out his wife was pregnant.

Were you married at that time?

Yes.

This is maybe a difficult question, but was it difficult or easy to do what you wanted to do and being able to live that kind of army life

37:00 **when you were married.**

I joined the army to go to the war. I got married while I was in the army. My first child was born when I was on final leave in Perth. My wife had the baby in Sydney. It was – no, I don't know. It's a difficult question. I hated leaving the family. I wrote letters all the time to them. But that was different

37:30 to the army. The army was a war and that was another life. Two lives. You were going to the war so that was inevitable so you just went along. You missed your wife necessarily. Never saw the kid until she was four years of age. But my wife came and live up at Bathurst with us in the last few months while we were there. Was a great time together then.

38:00 **Can you describe if you feel comfortable about it the wedding that you had and that kind of experience?**

We didn't have a wedding. During the war. We went to one of these people that you went to. What do you call them? Went to the office with the people there and you just signed up and had a marriage ceremony and signed the certificates and off you went again.

38:30 You didn't have a wedding. Registrar office.

Can you describe that experience? Were there others there and what was the situation?

Only parents. Her parents were there. My mother was living down in Narrandera with my sister. So they weren't at the wedding.

39:00 Just her parents and a couple of my colleagues, friends. Just had a little ceremony afterwards. Went out to dinner. It was a – the war was different. It just didn't feel like having a big wedding.

Was it that it was inappropriate in terms of what was actually happening?

That was what people did.

It was inappropriate to have a huge big white wedding because there was no

39:30 **money for it or what was the reasons?**

No. The war was on and there was far too many serious things to do. You went back to camp again and you had a job to do. Okay, let's get married. You didn't want to get away without being married before we went. And we lived together – it was a wonderful six months before we went away.

Did you have time for a honeymoon?

Yes. We went down to Jervis Bay.

40:00 Lovely spot down there I can remember. Down near the naval base. I remember walking along the beach and measuring our footsteps as we walked along together. I can remember little things like that.

Was that quite common for people to get married in registrar at that time?

Yeah.

And how did the women feel about that?

I don't know. Never asked.

40:30 I suppose the women would love to get all dressed up and have this sort of thing, but I never – it never occurred to me. "Let's get married." "Okay, when?" "Tomorrow." That sort of thing.

Tape 4

00:53 **Can you just share with me – you started training, you were talking about being at Bathurst. Just tell me your story**

01:00 **basically from there. Where you went from Bathurst. I understand you did some gas training. The process of getting yourself to Singapore.**

I don't quite follow you. While we were in Bathurst, yes, I went to a number of training schools. I went to an officers' training school. That was down in – I'd forgotten all about that. That was down in Parkville, Victoria.

01:30 I went down there for a month and trained hard during the day on technical World War 1 stuff. We were all taught World War 1. We weren't taught jungle training. We didn't know anything about it. We were still doing bloody old pelliers and field ambulances and CCSs [casualty clearing stations] and when you look back on it, it was just crazy. However, we were officers' training school. We learnt to troop. We had to learn how to teach our troops to march. We learnt all the drills and

02:00 things like that down at officers' training school. I did very well down there. I had the ability to make

my voice heard to the troops and I came back with the flying colours from that school. We also had a great time down there because there were a few mates of mine that were down that I made who lived in Victoria in Melbourne and they took us round to the different sights and we used to go to the beaches and go to their homes at night for dinners and it was a great three weeks period down there or month.

02:30 Another school I went to from Bathurst was the Gas School. We were taught there the use of various gases and I did well in that school too and came home with quite recommendations. Didn't make any bloody difference to my unit though. I bought back a few demonstration things with me. In Bathurst Camp it was pretty cold up there at this time of the year

03:00 and we were getting ready to go overseas. It was June/July. I'd come back. And we had fires in the mess and so on. So I got a bit inebriated one night and I let off one of these tear gas things. I knew it would cause panic and it was great fun. Until – I forgot that damn stuff settled in the wards and settled in the building so every time you lit the fire at night it'd all come off and everybody had to get out of the mess with tears in their eyes.

03:30 I was the most unpopular person. We used to have to go to the sergeants' mess to have a drink. Terrible. I enjoyed those schools because I was doing something, learning something and I was achieving something. So I enjoyed the schools. Neither of them were very much use to me afterwards. The great tragedy was that I came back from the officers' training school with the best drill fellow in the school.

04:00 I drilled our troops. I produced a very good efficient marching group. Really good. I taught them pride in themselves and so on. The big day came for the marching in Bathurst. All these fellas cleaned themselves us and we were right at the peak. And the CO said to me, "You're staying in camp to look after the camp. You won't be in the march." I couldn't believe it. He said,

04:30 "Someone's got to stay behind. You've had a good time with the army. You can stay behind." And they went off to the march. I never saw the boys march. I couldn't believe he could be so cruel to you. But I don't think I was very popular with the CO. Probably from the tear gas. That's what he probably still had going in his mind. Anyhow.

So what was your relationship like with the CO besides the tear gas?

05:00 That's a good question. The other troops seemed to get on much better with the CO than I did. I was never an arse licker. I never went up to the CO and tried to make friends with him all the time. I kept my distance from him. My fella mates were my mates. So I never had a lot to do with the COs. But a lot of the other ones did. They used to go and visit with him and became fond of him. I was not very popular. I wasn't unpopular I don't think.

05:30 But I wasn't one of his boys. I had an uncle wanted me to join masonry. He said, "When you get overseas in the army it'll be good for you. If you be a mason you'll have good comrades and you'll have good contact and you'll be able to go out and do this." So I said, "Okay." So I joined the masonry in Sydney. I don't even know much about masonry. But there are three degrees of masonry. First degree, second degree, third degree. When you get to third degree you're a master mason. So

06:00 you're an apprentice for your first year so I got my apprentice one in Sydney and I wanted to do my second part. I was born in Coonabarabran. We were in Dubbo camp. So it was ideal. So it was all arranged for me to go to Coonabarabran and have my second degree year at the Masonic hall there. It was all fixed up. So I went to the bloke in charge of us then. It was the 2IC [second in command]. I said, "I want weekend leave." "You can't have weekend leave." I said, "But I'm due for weekend leave." "Well you're not down for this weekend." I said, "But it's important for

06:30 me. It's a big functions arranged up in Coonabarabran for me." "I don't care. Don't you realise there's a bloody war on?" This is peace time. Whole thing had to be cancelled. So I don't think I was the popular person. Two things that I wasn't allowed doing. but I don't remember being unpopular. I think I was an achiever. I did well at all my classes, all the schools and things.

07:00 But I wasn't a popular boy.

So your responsibility at Bathurst, was that to teach the boys about gas training that you'd learnt about in Victoria?

Yes. I had to teach them and marching and drilling and teaching them tactics and if you had to find your way with compasses and things like that. But taught all those sorts of training. Not so much the medical side.

07:30 Some of my other colleagues did a lot of the medical training. Trained the boys to do bandaging. We all did a bit of it. Make a bandage this. How to strap a broken arm and how to fix a bloke that needed splinting. All that. They were all taught these basic things that happen when they're army.

Just in respect to the gas training, what were the fundamental things that you were trying to teach the boys?

We taught them different gases and the protection that they could get

08:00 to different gases, the use of the gas mask and the use of decontaminating the areas where they've been gas has been left off and so on. That's mainly.

Was it a real threat or fear the Germans or Japanese would use gas?

There was always the possibility, therefore there had to be the training. It was never used of course. But we were drilled in all the sorts of things that could happen. First World War memory was pretty

08:30 tough memories of the gas.

You were there at Bathurst, you were a doctor obviously trained, but did the army also try to teach you first aid along the way?

No. I was given the job of teaching the troops first aid.

So after Bathurst where did you move on to?

In the middle of winter, snow on the hills, we took off.

09:00 We went to Perth. We went on the – my company, my group, went on the train across the Nullarbor Plains. That was a great trip across the plains. We were camped in a place called Northam which is about 20 kilometres outside Perth, a bit further. There's a big army camp there. We were there for our final leave of getting ready to join the army. That's when I told the boys the story about the final leave.

09:30 Myself, one or two other officers, we went into the Officers' Club in Perth. We were welcomed there and made members of the club and they took us around Perth a bit and showed us around and told us a few places we could go and come back and have a meal there. So we spent most of our time looking at the sights of Perth and then going back to the club and having meals and meeting the fellas. Pretty quiet final leave for us.

The train trip over, was that

10:00 **just one train trip?**

We embarked in Sydney. We had to go from Bathurst to Sydney and then across. I can't remember much about the train trip, excepting looking out the window and playing cards – we played a lot of cards on the train. And looking out the window at the world going by day after day. The same old monotonous Nullarbor Plains. I don't have

10:30 much more memory of it than that. Can't even remember what we ate. Don't remember whether we ate in the dining room. I suppose we did.

So how long were you in Perth and Fremantle for?

I think only a couple of weeks at the most. Most of the troops embarked in ships in Sydney and they came around. We joined a Dutch ship called the Sibiak in Fremantle. We joined up with the rest of the troops and then we went off to Malaya.

11:00 The Sibiak.

Did you know where you were going at that point in time?

Yes.

You did?

They didn't say as much, but we all knew where we were going. We were issued with tropical clothing. So you didn't have to be an Einstein.

So what boat did you catch up with? I think you went straight to Singapore? Is that right?

Straight to Singapore.

So what boat? And what memories do you have?

The Sibiak

11:30 was the boat. I remember the food being good on the boat. I was never seasick. I remember the lovely – as we got up to the Sunda Straits and through the islands and passing through those areas there. The rest of the trip I don't remember much excepting we did exercises and gave lessons and talks. I gave talks. A number of health talks. We got to know the troops and we got to know the sisters and the other people

12:00 on board the ship. I remember coming into Singapore. Coming through the islands and the tropical – seeing tropics for the first time and the vegetation and the heat and the humidity. We went from the snow to the middle of the heat. From great coats to shorts. It was a tremendous impact on the body to go from one to the other

12:30 so quickly. When we first arrived at Singapore we were all – couldn't move around too much. We were all tried, exhausted from the heat. You'd drag yourself to the outpatients' department to see the kids and to the first aid post and so on. That's where the gonorrhoea became rife too. The boys turned up with the gonorrhoea that they'd

13:00 picked up in Singapore. Treated a lot of those kids. They were really promiscuous these fellas. Every opportunity they'd get they'd get out with these girls. One fella was found – we were at a big wire closed in area and a fella was making sex through the wire with a sheila on the other side. Just unbelievable. It's another little thing of war.

13:30 Our biggest problem there was the gonorrhoea really, and the heat.

Did you have chaplains assigned with you?

We had one. He didn't have any with our own unit, no. Battalions all had them. No, we didn't have a chaplain with the field ambulance.

14:00 **How did the chaplains get on with all the promiscuity going on around them? What were they saying and doing amongst the men?**

They tried to get the boys on the right track. The Catholics were good, because they had much better control over their troops than the Protestants, and they listened to their priests. But the Protestants talked too much, but they didn't get through. They were a great bunch of fellas. We didn't have a bad chaplain.

14:30 **So they were constantly involved in the men's lives?**

Yes. They were the sort of fellas you went to if you had a problem – problems at home, problems and things like that. They were consulted then.

So you arrived in Singapore and where were you sent?

We arrived in Singapore and I think for about – near the docks for a short while, it might have been a week or ten days, something like that. Then we went to a place called Seremban

15:00 which is up on the north east area of the island. We were camped in a school there called – some Catholic school, boys' school – we took over the school. There we did most of the intense training because we had pretty open space around us and we took our troops on marches and getting introduced to the jungle. it wasn't really jungle but it was more tropical vegetation that the areas – getting the fellas acclimatized really

15:30 more than anything. There was a fair bit of leave. So the fellas were in town, Singapore a lot. A lot of them got themselves girlfriends and we went into Singapore a number of occasions. Raffles Hotel was the prime spot to go to. Fas as the local people of Singapore were concerned, there was no war on. Life went on as normal.

16:00 We used to go to Raffles Hotel. It was an absolutely magic place. Tropical nights under the palm trees, beautifully cut lawns and tables out on the lawns and army bands playing music and women all dressed up and fellas in their dress uniforms looking very smart and all these lovely women. We're sitting there in our khaki outfits in the corner somewhere drinking Sing stingers

16:30 and really enjoying the wonderful life that they had in Singapore. Those are days that I'll never forget. Beautiful days. Didn't get into there a lot, but whenever we got a chance to get into Singapore we went to Raffles. Didn't last long, as I say we were only there about a month or more, maybe two at the most. And then we went up camped up to Malaya to a place called Segamat which is a fairly big town. That's

17:00 where we started more intense training. Marches and jungle training in the jungle. We had lots of lovely experiences there but always seemed to rain four o'clock in the afternoon. Came down with a terrible downpour. That cooled the air and then afterwards you went and played squash and did your exercise and had games and all sorts of things in the afternoon. The mornings were taken up with training. The evenings were free in the mess.

17:30 We'd play cards and can't remember, must have had some other sorts of entertainment. While I was at Segamat I got dengue fever. The brigade major was a doctor, not practising medicine, but in the First World War. He came in to see me. I said, "I think I'll be all right now." He said, "You won't bloody well be all right. You got dengue fever badly. It'll be at least three weeks before you'll be on your feet again." I said

18:00 "I think I'm better than that." He said, "Don't argue with me. You go up to Fraser Mountain and recoup up there for a fortnight." Fraser Mountain was hills outside up in Malaya up country a bit further. It was cool in the hills. It was beautiful nights, lovely nights. Golf course there. I recuperated quickly there. It was a lovely spot. I can remember the English people who were there.

18:30 I don't know if it was typical, but the English public servant was a funny sort of a person. They obviously came from a poor background, most of them. But they were big bosses when they got to Singapore and they lorded over everybody. They were really intolerable with the natives and the local people there. Up on Fraser Mountain I came in contact with quite a number of these families and their attitude towards the local people was terrible. I

19:00 couldn't understand it. I can remember one woman she used to always berating her kids she had there. She used to say, "Behave or not at all. Behave or not at all." I can still hear her saying it. Anyhow that

was a good recuperate. I played a bit of golf, and went back to the tropics again. That was my only break. The rest of the time we were jungle training.

So firstly what is dengue fever and how do you get it?

19:30 Break bone fever it's called. It's a virus that gets into the body and it gets into your bones and affects your muscles and your back. Very severe pains in the muscles. A debilitating business. I got over it pretty quickly. A couple of weeks time. Mosquito borne.

20:00 It was a mosquito borne infection.

Were many of the boys getting this when they first arrived?

No. There weren't much dengue fever around. I can't remember treating a lot of the fellas. I think I only remember myself as having dengue fever. That doesn't mean there weren't others that had it. Malaria. Very uncommon at that stage. Never saw malaria. Dengue fever.

20:30 Other tropical diseases too. One that's carried by ticks. Typhus fever was not uncommon. That's another very debilitating disease.

So when you were up in Malaysia what sort of exercises were the men training in?

Mostly through the jungle.

21:00 We kept on with the same old first aid. But then the jungle training was mostly breathing through the jungle and getting used to working in the jungle, marching through the jungle and making our way through the jungle. That seemed to be the important thing. And doing bandaging and so on – we'd find a fella sick there with a broken leg and teach the fellas how to carry him out

21:30 and stretcher bearing and so on. It was a complete different to what training we'd been taught. The training we were taught is that the battle took place up here and your doctor looked after troops. When they got accidents they'd sent for the field ambulance. We'd take the ambulance up, bring them back and restore them to some sort of condition so we could move them on to the carriage and clearing station. And after they were operated on

22:00 there if they were too much or too difficult they sent them to general hospital. So you had your front line, you had your field ambulance which we were, we had a CCS behind us and behind that we had the AGH [Australian General Hospital]. That was the First World War, but it never really worked out that way at all. When the troops got sick, they got an ambulance, they were taken almost certainly straight to the CCS. We were field ambulance, we'd do the original bandaging and set them up but you'd get them straight back to the hospital. It was quite a different set up.

22:30 **Are you therefore saying that you were operating more like a battalion doctor than you were as a middle man between the two?**

In the First World War you get dreadful thing up front in the trenches and then they come back to the field unless they were sick – the stretcher bearers would bring them back. The first aid post did very little except put a bandage on. The field ambulance would do the rest of it, get the fellow fit enough. If he was all right you could send him back again if you could fix him. But if

23:00 he needed operation he went to the CCS. Then he could go back to the CCS. But if he was too ill he went back to the hospital and he got sent back home. In this one here, you picked up the troop, the field ambulance fixed him up. You'd get him to the closest whether it was the hospital or the CCS. Our field ambulance never worked really as a hospital unit like they did the First World War.

23:30 **So obviously you're operating off World War 1 system if you like. When did things begin to quickly change – during the training period or actually when you engaged the Japanese?**

It changed by the time the Japanese had moved down the peninsula we had a new system worked out. When the war broke out we worked that new system. We had what we called mobile units. I

24:00 was with one unit and I had a group of fellows with me. Roy Mills, my mate, he had another unit in ambulance and he had a group with him. There were three of us. Those three units from our company would go independently to where the battalions were and we'd stand behind the battalions and we'd look after them as they came out with wounded soldiers and then send them back to the CCS. And never really got to the headquarters of the field ams [ambulances] at all. The mobile section was like the CCS.

Before we actually get to the

24:30 **war, that month that the Australians were in Singapore the British were also there. How did the British and the Australians get on during that time?**

I don't know whether we mixed very much at all. I can tell you some examples of what happened – when we were at Segamat we went into town to visit the town.

25:00 We'd walk along the road and the natives would get off on the footpath and let us past. That was the British tradition. We wouldn't let that happen. We'd get off when we saw them coming because we reckoned they were as good as us. That attitude – the colonial attitude was something we could not

understand. The attitude towards the native we made to feel them all as friends. Our fellas used to make friends and go and stay at the houses and eat meals with them. The British looked upon them and said, “A race apart.” That was the difference.

25:30 We had trouble with our language. But I can remember learning a bit of Malay and I went into a shop and I asked for a “batang roti” which is a bread knife. They all burst into laughter. Someone interpreted what I’d asked for – a bread knife is a knife made of bread. What I wanted was a knife for cutting bread. Those sort of language problems. They had a lot of fun out of us. We had a lot of fun out

26:00 of them learning our language. The natives – enjoyed the natives. They used to come with their monkey and get coconut off the trees for us and they’d show us how they trick monkey. They put nuts into her bowl and the monkey put his hand in and grabbed the nuts and couldn’t get his hand out because the nuts were in it and he wouldn’t let go of the nuts. So that’s how they used to catch the monkeys. Extraordinary. You follow me?

Yeah. That’s a fascinating story.

26:30 The monkey wouldn’t let go of the nuts so they’d capture the monkeys.

And British officers and yourself how did you actually relate?

Didn’t relate. Didn’t have any contact with them in Singapore. Not until we were all prisoners of war I came in contact with the British soldiers. But they were as I can tell you later on after if you want to talk about the war. The British didn’t really realise there was a war on. They wouldn’t let it interfere with their normal way of life.

27:00 Just a bloody war. That’s something apart. They kept on living the way they always lived. Extraordinary attitude.

So where were you when the Japanese I guess engaged … ?

The war of Bang Tao. The 8th of December. We were in a place called Jasin. After Sembawang we went to Segamat, that’s where we did all our training. And then after we were there a couple of months in November we moved to Jasin which was a bigger town closer to

27:30 Malacca. I don’t know why we moved there but I think it was in order to have better contact with the other troops, so we could have combined exercises. Because when we first went to Malacca we used to visit the AGH and visit the nurses in there. I can remember that towards the end of it. War broke out while we were in Jasin. We immediately went to our war post which was in Jemaluang. Jemaluang is on the east coast

28:00 over near Mersing. A lot of the 22nd Brigade was over there on that side, the 19th battalion and … where were we? Jemaluang? East coast, Mersing.

28:30 We had two brigades out there. The 27th Brigade and the 22nd Brigade. The 22nd Brigade was – the 29th, the 30th and the 26th. That was the 27th Brigade. The 22nd Brigade was the 19th, 18th and the 20th. That brigade was on the east coast

29:00 near Mersing – the 18th 19th 20th and we were camped up near there. We were sent to Jemaluang which was near the coast where we set up an advanced dressing station. War had started. We were in earnest. They had to dig out an area for a big tent about two or three feet deep. The tent was erected around that and then bags were put around the outside so that other words, the sand bags and the other three feet.

29:30 Anything going in there would be away from bomb bursts and so on. They built that and we set up our stations in the bush, set up our tents. We went ahead then with our board training. War footing training. That would have lasted us about six weeks I suppose. Then they decided to move back to Segamat. But we were moved back to where the Japanese were coming which was coming down the centre. They weren’t coming down the coast. They were in little

30:00 bits but their main strip was down the centre. So we all moved back. We moved back to a place called Pulang [This means ‘return’ in Bahasa] which was not far from Gemas where the first contact took place. Our company was separated into A companies and B companies. I was with B company. A company moved up close to Gemas where the 2/30th came into contact with the Japs on the first time. They had an ambush there and killed

30:30 many of the Japs. Quite a few of our fellas got hurt. They came back through the A company which was the other one. And that was our first contacts with the wounded. In the meantime we’d been moved to Pulang but one section, my section, was asked to go to Gahang Aerodrome in case there were some attacks there. So we went to Gahang Aerodrome and there was nothing there. There was a whole lot of wooden planes that looked like planes.

31:00 Obviously the Japs came over a couple of times, but they obviously knew what it was because they came right down low one day with a bomb and dropped their bombs in the little aerodrome next to these bloody wooden planes as if to say, “We know what it’s all about,” and disappeared. That’s the only time. So we had nothing to do there at all. We were there for at the most about a week I suppose. I remember

learning how to cut hair. So I cut all the troops hair for them. Something to do. One of the senior officers from one of the other units come

31:30 out and said, “What are you doing here?” We said, “We were told to stay here.” “What the hell for? Get back to your bloody unit. You’re no use here.” So we went back and joined our unit. We still don’t know why we were left there. We were forgotten I think. Anyhow we went back and joined our main unit. That was back at Segamat, just outside Segamat. That’s as I say where the first troops started coming down. Gemas was the first contact with the troops and A company

32:00 groups. From B company we were sent to Iahitin [?] which was a crossroads. Over on the west coast was Muar where all the big battles took place. And the east coast was Mersing where the 19th battalion was and down the centre was where the Japs were coming in. We were at the crossroads. We were there to pick up casualties. We were there I suppose three or four days and all we experienced were bombings. There were

32:30 bombings all around us and machine gun fire all around us. We never saw anything. We just stuck there. We had some extraordinary experiences. They set up our – I left my batman behind back in the camp. Officers always bat for another – just a few stretcher bearers and a few ambulance drivers. And while I was away my batman was supposed to look after my gear. Someone stole my wallet with all my bloody money and all my pictures.

33:00 However we had to – fellas were getting a bit demoralised. Nothing to do. So I made them play contract bridge. We started a team of contract bridge. We played bridge. There was a new rule we introduced called ‘Culberson Draw’ in which you were not allowed to move from the cards until a bomb dropped nearby. Anyone who got up when the bombs went off was in trouble. This was a great game. The fellas’d all be sitting around playing cards, contract bridge.

33:30 One night when the boys were in bed, we finally got a bomb in the bloody camp and the troops took off into the slit trenches. One fella got out of bed. He still had the mosquito net around him when he was landed in the slit trench. They sent us up food from the main camp and they sent up by mistake a big container for our food and it turned up and it was full of washing up water. The blokes had picked up

34:00 the wrong thing of water up to the front line. But the boys weren’t fools. They went and caught a duck from one of the local farm nearby and a goose and they plucked that and they had a spade and they roasted it on the spade over a fire. So we got some tucker. These country boys from Casino up in the bush, they knew what they were doing. The final to that story was when the fella went back many years later after he went back to that farm and he found the farmer

34:30 and he gave him twenty dollars for the goose he pinched during the war. Eased his conscience. We didn’t get any casualties. We nearly got casualties amongst our own troops. Finally a fella came into the camp, one of the troops and said, “What are you doing here?” “We’re here to pick up troops.” “Well you’re too bloody close. There’s Japs around us. They’ll be around you shortly so get out.” And we moved out. That was my first induction to the war.

35:00 We moved back to the camp. Then we got involved in a lot of the 2/26th Battalion had a lot of casualties. They put up a great resistance against the Japanese and held them up. 2/30th did the first one and 2/20th did this one. One the other west coast Bila and that place where the 2/29th and the 30th battalions they had the real casualties there. That was where they got surrounded and many of their troops were killed and – awful business. But we got the dregs of those coming through.

35:30 When we were further down we treated a lot of those chaps. Mostly patching them up and giving them a feed and sending them on their way.

What did you know

36:00 **of the Japanese as an enemy before you engaged them?**

Hopeless little yeller bastards. They’d be no problem at all. That’s what we were taught. They were little fellas. They were uneducated and we would have no trouble handling them. It’s terrible. When you think they must have known a lot more about the war in China, the war in Manchuria. They must have known a lot more about the Japanese. But

36:30 that’s what our troops were told.

So every time the troops engaged the enemy and then retreated back further, what was your role?

We kept on the move.

Did you have to keep setting up?

We’d set ourselves up. Get all organised. Get everything ready. And be told to move on again.

So what was the process of setting up? What did you have to do?

We usually found cottages or on the estates.

37:00 We'd find a place there and we'd turn that house into a dressing station. Set up our gear. Get ready for the casualties. We didn't have many at that stage. When we moved further back and the ones coming in from Muar and the 2nd battalion we had quite a lot more casualties there. But we treated those and sent them back in the ambulances. We had this mobile unit which we kept first aid gears and things for each one of the doctors. And the troops would just

37:30 get them and put them in the ambulance and whisk them away.

This would have been the first time that maybe some on the men that you were working with like the orderlies would have actually seen physical wounds. How did they actually cope with all that?

Pretty good. I think they rather relished getting the chance to do some medical work. They'd been trained all these years. They were pretty good. Australians

38:00 have an ability to fill – the circumstances makes the man. These fellas just naturally fell into whatever their job was. They were amazing to me. Whether they were carrying a patient, whether they were bandaging or whether they were digging trenches or whatever they were doing they got ahead and go and do it.

Tape 5

00:40 You're asking me how we got in and how we got these – we used to take over little cottages and so on. We moved back. We really got back to the last big contact we had was about 30 kilometres north of Singapore.

01:00 The 2/26th group involved in very heavy fighting. In the Japanese history of the war, they talked about this being one of the best resistance they came across, the cheeky Australians who held them up for so long. So it was – we got quite a few casualties from there. Then we moved back to Singapore Island. I was given a job to set up advanced station at Mandai which is about 20 kilometres from the causeway

01:30 onto Singapore Island. The camp came down there and they set up our camp down there. We came under pretty heavy fire there. There was an artillery unit somewhere near us. The Japs had focused on this and they were attacking the artillery unit and quite a number of things landed near us. One landed in our camp and killed several of our fellas and a number of casualties, local Chinese.

02:00 They got damaged during the attacks and they came to our hospital. Lots of them. We treated them. A woman came in with her thigh almost blown off. She had half a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK . She'd cut a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK down the middle and put the other half of the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK on there. The material from the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK stopped the bleeding coagulating. So there was a quite big hole and there was the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK sitting on it there. They were able to fix it up and send her off by ambulance

02:30 to the hospital. Never seen it before, never heard of it. Wonderful. It stopped all the bleeding.

And it worked.

Coagulated all the blood and stopped bleeding. We had quite a number of casualties from the Chinese and the local people in there. So we moved back to Bukit Panjang which is about another 10 kilometres further down. But before we did so I was sent up with four of my

03:00 troops to assist with English field ambulance which was on the causeway. The causeway is a big long cement area which is between Malay and Singapore Island. The idea was to blow the causeway up so the Japanese couldn't get across. The troops did that. The only casualty they had, one of the fellas got his leg blown off. Anyhow we moved up to this camp and I went to see the field officer

03:30 in the big tent. I said, "We've come to join you. We've been sent up to help you in case any Australian casualties come through." "Good. Have you had lunch yet?" I said, "Yeah." We carried our tin of bully beef. "Yeah I've got my bully beef and biscuits with me." He said, "No. I mean real lunch. Would you like some lunch?" I said, "What? Yes, sir." So he clapped his hands and a young Indian boy came in white coat and all and he said, "Get lunch for the

04:00 officer." But first of all he said, "Would you like to wash your hands?" "Yes." He said, "Bring," (in Hindustani) "soap and water." So the boy brought in a bar soap and a glass of water. He said, "This is the problem we've got. Trying to make ourselves understood properly." Anyhow so he said, "Come on," and he took me to another tent and there was a big cedar table with chairs all around it and they served me chicken.

04:30 See, they didn't know the war was on. The Japs were just the other side of the causeway. We'd been working in ADSs [advanced dressing stations] and bully beef and so on. Most extraordinary experience.

So the reality of the fact that the Japanese were across the causeway ...

Didn't interfere with their way of life. They had a mess and they had officers' mess and they had their

tables and everything. Dragging this bloody stuff around with them instead of …

05:00 That was the attitude and you've got to admire their attitude in many ways. But it didn't help the war much.

Did you think at that point in time that Singapore was impregnable, you were safe now?

Yes. I think we thought that once we got back we might be beaten eventually but it'd be a long while. Cause the fortress. It was stupid because the water supply to Singapore

05:30 Island came from Malaya. They just cut the water supply off. The civilian population was a lot less important. Some civilians were being killed by bombing and the water supply was cut off – or was threatened to be cut off I think. Anyhow the only casualty we had when we were up in that front line was this fella they were blowing the causeway and he blew his leg. We were able to fix his leg up.

06:00 He lost his leg. But we were able to fix it and send him back in the ambulance. That's the only casualty.

Just in respect to Malaysia retreating back, were the lines retreating because of the overwhelming numbers of Japanese or because you didn't have the proper artillery supports from Singapore?

Why were we being beaten? The Japanese had the ability to surround the troops.

06:30 When they came into contact they just come round behind it. So then you have them surrounded they fight their way back. So really they were being surrounded all the time. I suppose it was because we didn't have enough forces to spread right across the area and the Japanese were able to surround us. As soon as they came into contact on the coast they just got into boats and when round the coast, got in behind the troops again and landed. That was …

07:00 **So you got back into Singapore. Had the water been cut off?**

No. But that was the threat. The Japanese commando eventually when they sued for peace he said, "If you don't stop we'll continue the bombing and we'll cut off your water supplies." And it wasn't the army that made the decision. It was the government who made the decision. The governor of Singapore Island said, "I'm not going to let my people get destroyed any more.

07:30 Call a halt."

Who had responsibility though to the island? The government or the army?

I'd say the army eventually could have overruled that and gone ahead and fought. But I think they saw what was inevitable. They could see a massacre of the people and so they gave in. It was the British who were in charge.

So you're up at this point in time near the causeway where

08:00 **putting that fella's leg on – actually chopping it off?**

As soon as they blew the causeway off we moved back. I lost contact with that English fellow, I don't know what happened to them. But we moved back as I say 20 or 30 kilometres further inland. We were under constant bombing there too. Eventually the Japanese landed on the coast on the west coast

08:30 and volumes of troops were far in advance of our people. We lost a lot of casualties and had very thin ranks at this stage. They just overwhelmed them so eventually they had to move back and that was a series of moving back. And our field ambulance moved back at the same time. Our next move from Bukit Panjang was to the Swiss Club. We had a set up there, a small advance dressing station there for the wounded. But at that stage

09:00 there were two hospitals. There was one in the café building in town – the 10th AGH and the 13th AGH which was a bit further up on the coast. They had already arrived there. So any troops coming by ambulance were taken most to the hospitals. So we were at the Swiss Club until we got surrounded there. The Japs were coming and firing over the top of us and coming around us. We withdrew again back to the café, but the troops were out

09:30 helping the regimental doctors. We'd send an ambulance up with two or three fellas to work with these doctors then they'd take the stuff back to the main general hospitals. Last week or ten days of the war we were at Saint Andrews' Cathedral. We set up a hospital there. We had lots of troops being brought back there. A lot of people

10:00 nerves had gone and they were nervous wrecks and they were crying and shouting and things like this. That was the worst feature of it. Of course we were under heavy bombing all the time we were there. Not actually on the cathedral itself, but in the surrounding areas the bombs were falling and the noise was terrific. That was our work. We did a fair bit of operating there on casualties that were brought in. And then suddenly,

10:30 boom, silence. War was over.

So can you just share with me – it sounds like chaos – what you were actually doing within the

hospitals that you set up? So at Saint Andrew's Church and other things – who were you actually taking care of?

Any soldier that was brought in whether they were British or Australian or whatever they were. Any casualties in the area were brought into the hospital there. We had a big Red Cross flag up. So it was anybody and everybody.

11:00 I can't remember – the café was where the 2nd AGH was. And that was where a lot of the troops were too. They just took wherever there was a Red Cross. Minor wounds. A lot of minor wounds – the serious wounds, I don't think … I think we had a couple of bad wounds that came into Saint Andrew's Cathedral, big wounds, but mostly they were at the big hospitals.

11:30 The ambulance would take them there.

So were you yourself dealing with gunshot, shrapnel wounds?

We were dealing, yeah, patching up wounds most of the time.

How did you and I guess the orderlies cope because this would have been quite new in respect to those types of wounds?

I just think we were so busy that we – I can remember taking breaks. I used to go out onto the lawn outside the Saint Andrew's Cathedral.

12:00 Lie on my back and rest. And you could see all these Japanese planes coming over and you could see the bombs dropping. Just watch them and hope they weren't coming near you as you see them going over. But that got impossible because we got some snipers arrived into some of the buildings around. They were firing at anyone walking on the grass. So we stayed indoors after that. But it wasn't long before suddenly there was this peace.

So during those days were you getting much sleep?

12:30 **And where were you sleeping?**

I can't remember. I don't think I got much sleep. Because there was incessant firing and noise all the time around you. I suppose we'd get exhausted and would have a sleep. We certainly didn't set up beds or anything like that at all. We probably just as likely to sleep on a pew in the Saint Andrew's Cathedral. I don't remember.

And who were you receiving orders from?

13:00 Our CO with the 2/10th Field Ambulance. Colonel Shepherd. The 2/10th Field Ambulance moved into there. A lot of the troops were elsewhere. Whatever they got they were with the regimental doctors and so on. They were sent all over the place. It wasn't until we got to Changi that a lot of our fellas caught up with us again.

So there was in a sense a case of – did you work with the Brits as well because of the chaos?

Yes. There were British soldiers coming in.

13:30 And Malayans. Singapores. Indians. There was quite a few Indians. Don't remember any British doctors though. Only our own unit doctors.

Were you given orders at all to prioritise different soldiers?

No. Took them as they came. My colleague, Roy Mills, was hit when we were in Mingtai – remember I told you about the bomb that landed and killed some of our fellas at one of those

14:00 camps? He was hit by a bit of shrapnel and he went off to hospital and the ward was closing and he said, "I want to get back to my unit." They said, "There's not much we can do, but that seems to be under control." So he came back to our unit and worked. But he was in bed with the pain of this thing. He slipped and fell on the floor and he didn't know he had a big abscess on his back

14:30 and it burst and there was pus everywhere on the floor. He'd been carrying this blood wound around full of pus on his back and he didn't know about it. But he knew when he fell. He tells the story that he went back many years later to Singapore to where he fell and lifted up the carpet to see if the stain was there. He said it wasn't. It was all gone. He expected to see the bloodstains still there.

So when did you realise that

15:00 **the Allied forces were in a bad way, the Japanese were on the way – when did you realise?**

When we were at the Swiss Club and we were surrounded getting firing on top of us and we could see the troops. That's when we realised we reckoned it was all over then.

Do you remember actually yourself being shot at? What happened?

Yes I remember. Bloody bullets going over my head. Fella said, "Don't lift your head up you silly bugger. You'll get it shot off." It was the tracer bullets flying over our heads.

15:30 When that stopped we got out.

So where were you actually in that instance?

In the club in the slit trenches. We'd dug little trenches around in the grounds of the Swiss Club. Hated it. That was the worst part of the war because we were there, we were doing nothing, and we were being fired at. The first time I really felt afraid that something was going to happen. I thought that maybe we were going to get captured. It was the first time

16:00 in the whole time that I felt any fear at all.

Were you or any of the other hospital staff actually returning fire?

No. Some of the boys got rifles when they went up to help with the regimental officers they were given rifles in case something happened. But no I never had it. I had a serviced revolver at one stage for a while. Don't know what happened to that.

16:30 **Did you ever leave patients behind because you couldn't get them out?**

No. Not during the war. Everything we sent back. We always had ambulances to send people back with. We unloaded everybody that came to us.

So what was the process of moving back in a sense from the Officers' Club to the Saint Andrew's Church? What was the orderly movement? Sending patients back first?

We had ambulances

17:00 there at the Swiss Club. When we were told to move out the ambulances moved back. They didn't go back to Saint Andrew's Cathedral. They went to where the fighting was. They went to the regimental officers and the ambulances were distributed. We didn't have any more ambulances. We moved back in trucks back to Saint Andrew's Cathedral which was where we set up the hospital. I suppose it was all organised from headquarters to tell us what to do.

So when you heard the silence, what was your response to that?

17:30 It was extraordinary. After intense bombing and things for days the silence was eerie. A great sense of relief of course. We were able to get organised and start doing things methodically and start cleaning up and so on. I think the next morning we were moved out of Saint Andrew's Cathedral.

18:00 We were sent to the 13th AGH which was at Tacoma [?], which is out towards Changi and we were there for two or three days. We took all our stuff out to the 13th AGH to the hospital. They looked after troops. From there we marched out to Changi. For two days I think.

So what was Changi? The Japanese set that up as a camp. What was it before

18:30 **the war actually started?**

Changi is an area, a district. At that Changi area there was a big army camp with the Blackwatch and the 2nd Holland Regiment had their barracks there. They were permanently situated there. So we were sent to those barracks. And what was occupied by troops – seven or eight hundred troops – suddenly got occupied by about three or four thousand people.

19:00 We were initially sent to the officers' quarters and we had a bit of a set up hospital there. But mostly our living quarters, I don't remember being actively involved in any medical work when we first went to Changi. Except our own troops. We looked after them. The biggest problem when we got into camp was the sick

19:30 and wounded were still at the hospitals and when the hospitals moved they were moved with the hospitals. To Selarang. Our biggest problem was constipation. Rice diet. They all got constipated. They often went a week, ten days without having a motion. That worried them. Although we tried to put their minds at rest. We weren't there that long. We were only there I think a month or so before we were moved.

20:00 So the early days in there were getting used to sleeping on cement floors without any beds with a haversack for your pack with what you had left in the way of gear under your head and a blanket I suppose. We slept on the cement floors. All very close together.

So when you knew the silence

20:30 **had come and the surrender was on its way, did you start thinking about packing stuff for imprisonment?**

No. But there was nothing there. When we started to march back then fellas broke off into local houses and took whatever they could. Gramophones, records, books and things like that. I think some of the fellas

21:00 when the war finished – there was that day or so before we were moved out – I think the fellas went out and did a fair bit of looting – some of them. A lot of the troops arrived in camp with all sorts of things.

So they must have been out looting. I only remember ever going into one house on the march out and getting a half a dozen books which I carried out to the camp. But that's all. It was very important that we had books.

21:30 **Why was it important?**

Prisoners of war, you've got to do something for yourself. Books are terribly important. Other people had the same idea. When we finished up we had quite a library at the Changi Camp. Gramophone records, fellas took. I never really thought we were going to be there for long. It never occurred to me that we would be there for a long period of time. I just thought

22:00 we'd take a few books with us so we'd got something to read while we were disposed of I suppose.

What gave you the impression that you wouldn't be there for long?

Never occurred to me anything else. I thought that we'd be relieved. We were in Singapore. There were plenty of troops would come and get rid of us, we'd be relieved very shortly. I thought. Great faith in our army. Misplaced at that stage.

22:30 **So at that point you didn't think that the Japanese were invincible?**

No. Obviously we were outnumbered in troops coming down Singapore peninsula. But I never thought it would be long before our troops would come out and defeat the Japanese. I didn't know anything about the Chinese and Manchurian war and the Japanese.

23:00 I knew nothing about that. It had been going on for years but it never got much publicity. I don't remember knowing about it. Only after the war that we learnt about the Manchuria war and the way the Japanese went. So they'd obviously been fighting for years. There's a book written by a Japanese colonel in the war. He was very much involved in the war. It's a book of him skiting about how good he was and this and that.

23:30 But it's very interesting to read from the Japanese point of view what happened. They just found this one of the easiest wars of all. They just kept on surrounding us and picking up all the material and the goods and they got ammunition and petrol and fuel. All the food they wanted. They didn't have to import anything at all. All the stuff the British left behind when they retreated, the army fed on. They just kept on surrounding because if there was any resistance they just went around it.

24:00 **So at Changi, you arrived there for about ten or so days. What was the Japanese doing in respect to interaction with …**

We never saw the Japanese. We moved out to Changi. I don't remember – there were Japanese troops that came out with us on the march. Be one of you strung along a little bit on either side. Troops just marched

24:30 out. I don't remember seeing Japanese after that. Not in the Changi Camp. They left it to be organised. They got rid of the senior officers pretty quickly. Anyone over the rank of lieutenant colonel was sent to Japan. Then came under the control of the lieutenant colonel which was the one in charge of the 30th Battalion Lieutenant Gallagher. Jack Gallagher. He ran the camp. He organised everything.

25:00 He got the units back – we were all in units, got us all bedded down in units. The 30th in that building. Very well organised. And he kept the morale up within the troops. Although they were captured, they were still fighting troops. They would have a part to play eventually and therefore to keep morale up.

So what did he do or say to keep the morale up?

25:30 He made them dress. He made them shave. He made them dress properly. He put the officers back in charge again and had them drilling. When they went to get their food they marched to the thing. Things like that. He kept the officers in control. He kept the people organised. He said, "You never know the time will come we may be needed."

26:00 It was wonderful. And then the Japanese let him run the camp. So all they did was produce the food for us. Everything else was run by the bloody officers.

Do you think that was important that you dress properly and there were drills?

Kept the morale up. It was pretty easy to fall into bits if you didn't have control. But the fellas were disciplined and they respected their officers.

26:30 They'd just been through a hell of a time together with them. Those who they didn't respect had probably gone by then anyhow. But the ones who were left they respected. And they realised the importance of staying in control. I'm talking about the majority. The majority of course kept the rest of them in control.

The commanding officer – Bennett? General Bennett?

Yes.

27:00 **Actually left. Did you hear about that at the time?**

Yes we heard that he'd left. That he'd gone back. The general feeling was that was a good thing because he could go back and teach them at home what this war was all about and tell them all about the Japanese campaign. So the general feeling was that he did the right thing. Wasn't so in Australia. Australia thought he'd deserted.

27:30 I don't know if you know much about the background of General Bennett. General Bennett was a civilian in civilian troops. He was never in the permanent army. He was never went to Duntroon. He rose up through the ranks. He served on Gallipoli and got a reputation of being a fighter. He was never liked by the permanent army officers.

28:00 That's why they kept him out of all sorts of things in the early days even though he was a senior and they finished up sending him to Malaya. They obviously had one way of getting rid of him. So when he came back they weren't very pleased. He was called a deserter, leaving his troops behind. But reality – I don't know what his own personal feeling was about it – whether he went back because he wanted to get out or whether he went back

28:30 because he really believed he could help, I don't know. But we all thought he'd gone back in order to bring to the attention of the soldiers at home how important it was – the battle.

So you were at Changi for – it was around a two week period?

Two or three weeks, I think it was.

What happened from there?

The Japanese sent the prisoners of war to the town, the city, to go down to the warehouses

29:00 to unload the stuff onto ships and send it back to Japan. So the troops were sent in to work and they were housed in various places in the city. One of them, in which I was housed, was the Great World. The Great World was an amusement park like Luna Park. It had all those sort of features like restaurants and plenty of buildings. So the troops were all accommodated there. We set up a hospital in the restaurant

29:30 in the Great World. There were another doctor and myself and one of the companies of my field ambulance – about 10 or 15 fellas. We set up the hospital there. We looked after the fellas just like general practitioners. Looked after the place and the fellas went out and worked on the go downs, loading stuff on to the Japanese ships. They did a fair bit of thieving, bringing stuff

30:00 into the camps. Get belted up by the Japanese if they got found doing it. They weren't supposed to. Thieving in the Japanese is a terrible thing, a terrible crime. They taught anyone who they found stealing – they just couldn't understand it. Many a funny story is told about the stealing. One particular incident.

30:30 There's a story told of a Japanese working one of the go downs who was very worried about this thieving. So he tried to explain to the troops that it was a very bad thing. So what he did, he got one of the boys hats and he put a tin of jam on the table. Then he walked by and put the hat on it.

31:00 What he was going to do was show that the soldier came back, picked up the hat with the jam in it and walked off. But when he went to come down and pick up the hat the tin of jam had gone. One of the boys had stolen it while he was doing his little (UNCLEAR). He got terribly angry about it. There's all sorts of funny stories told about the go downs because they came under control then of the – not the fighting force Japanese, but the others.

31:30 Then later on the Koreans, the guards. Because the Japanese use their fighting troops in the front line and the people they put in charge of these go downs and loading stuff were their second rank troops. They were nice people. Probably university people. Not fighters. And they couldn't understand this Australian attitude of thieving because the fellas got anything they could to get back to supplement their diet. They only stole food.

32:00 And plenty of it. They used to put it in their underpants under the crotch so they had nothing visible. They walked but between their legs they'd have a tin of jam. Brought quite a lot of stuff into camp. Occasionally they'd bring something into the hospital.

What other thieving stories were there?

Many a fella got bashed up for

32:30 being found thieving. The Japanese would really hit him with their rifle butts and things like that. I don't remember any other stories I've been told, but that's the sort of story which was told about the Japanese. The Japanese tried hard to convince our boys not to steal.

In the early days – the very early days – the time when you were at Changi and then when you got moved to load the ships and stuff, were the Japanese reasonably fair in the way they treated you?

33:00 We didn't see the Japanese in the Changi Camp. Even when we went out to the Great World we only saw the Japs when they came to pick up the troops and take them out marching again. Then they'd march them back into the camp again. I don't remember seeing troops in Changi Camp at all or the Great World at all.

Also during these early days did many guys try to escape and nick off?

When the war finished, at

33:30 surrender, quite a number of fellas tried to get on the ships that were going back to Australia. Quite a few of them did get on to the ships. They weren't supposed to. They just went on and stayed on. A lot of those fellas lost their lives when the ships were sunk. Some of them got home. There's quite a few tried to get on the ships. Never entered my head. Isn't it amazing?

But no-one tried to escape once the ships were gone

34:00 **and the occupation forces had come?**

Quite a number of people tried later on to escape, but not actually while we were in Singapore that I remember. But when they go up country – the Japanese sent us up country then fellas tried to escape into Burma and so on. All of them got captured and shot. I don't remember anyone trying to get away from Singapore, but I'm sure they would have been. Fellas would have got boats and tried to go home.

34:30 I'm not much good on that part of the story.

So you'd set up a hospital in this New World. What type of patients were you caring for?

Great World, yes. Just the ordinary general practitioner patients. Some of them got dengue fever and mostly they were fellas cut themselves or injured themselves or got a cold.

35:00 I remember opening a few abscesses, boils, things like that. I can remember that. I can remember fixing up someone's leg. He got damaged, crushed by something and I had to cut off some of his toes. But I don't have a bit recollection of much at all. Most of the time we were there waiting for the troops to come back with their little sicknesses or whatever they had, colds or

35:30 boils or something.

What then happened in the story from there?

We stayed at the Great World I think it must have been for a few months. The war finished in February. We had gone in in March and we came back in January.

36:00 Then we went up north on the force in April. So we would have been back in Changi a couple of months. But we would have been in the Great World there for nearly six months I suppose. When we came back to Changi we came back to join our unit again in one of the barracks. We just got back to the Changi way of life. Changi way of life was

36:30 a good way of life. No Japs around the place. The food was lousy. Not much of it. But they were so well organised. The organised a university. They organised all these different schools and classes. I learnt to touch type while I was there. And one fella would give a lecture on Egyptian history. Another one would give lecture on economics. Others on how to make baskets and things like that.

37:00 Had all these little schools set up all over the place. Wonderful thing really. The university. What did they call it? I've forgotten what university they called it now. Changi University or something. But there were lots of lecturers and school teachers and professors. All in the army. They put them to work. As I say we were only there for a couple of months before we were

37:30 sent up in F Force up into Malaya.

So how did Changi the second time you went you said it was great having the university and stuff like that there, the lectures, how was that though different from where you were in the Great World?

The Great World, there were no troops there during the day. They were all out working. There was just a few of us in the first aid area and the sick. We had little

38:00 wards there. We had two or three fellas who got flu or something like that we'd bed them up instead of working. Or someone'd have an operation or cut, we kept them in a little hospital there. It was a time of teaching our troops too. I taught lots of fellas first aid, I taught them how to give anaesthetics and they gave anaesthetics for me. I taught them as much as I could about medicine.

38:30 Tropical diseases and so on. We played cards. 500 was the popular game of cards. We'd play that in the daytime. We'd play bridge. I remember I had a fair bit of influence in the hospital because I was the doctor and I was the senior and the merchants –

39:00 Indians and Malayans who wanted to sell stuff in the camp had to get permission from me before they could sell it. Food they used to sell. They wanted to sell all sorts of food to the troop and I wouldn't let lots of it be sold because they'd only get dysentery or something out of it. But other things they could

sell. So I was an important person as far as they were concerned. I was the one who let them do things. So they gave me a present of a bag of peanuts – a sugar bag full of peanuts. My mate and I

39:30 sat down and got stuck into these peanuts and we both got intestinal pains. Terrible. Blew up. Blew up. Peanuts do that to you – the carbohydrates, but not on the diet we'd been on for so long. And we blew up like this. I didn't know what to do about it. Then I'd heard that charcoal was very good for that sort of flatulence. So we had some charcoal tablets and that was my first introduction into the use of charcoal tablets.

40:00 We took two tablets each and our tummies went down just like that. Charcoal tablets absorbed the gases. Unbelievable. And from terrible agony we were right. We stopped eating peanuts the way we did after a while. That's a medical experience for me, and I never go anywhere without my charcoal tablets.

40:30 **Where'd you get the tablets from?**

I guess it was sent out to us with our medical supplies. When we set out to the Great World we had a number of bags, plenty of supplies. I guess the charcoal tablets were in there. I can't remember.

Tape 6

00:41 **The Great World.**

I was going to tell you about the – I had half a dozen fellas been working with me and they sent a couple more out and they were taken off and sent to Selarang Barracks which was the big store

01:00 of medical supplies. The idea was to unload these back to Japan. A few of my unit were over there in the medical side. One was a chemist by the name of Ted McGlynn. His job was to sort out the good stuff for the Japanese to send back to Japan and get rid of the rest of the stuff. But he had a Japanese who couldn't speak English, so he had to depend on Ted McGlynn. So what Ted was – he'd give all the lousy stuff which

01:30 you didn't want, he said it was good stuff. That went to Japan and all the good stuff which was thrown away was sent out to Changi Camp. I used to have to go there regularly twice a week to do medical, look after them there and take back the medical stuff. Any sick people and so on. We used to evacuate occasional sick persons with appendicitis who had nothing wrong with them so that we could unload a kit bag full of all these medical supplies and we went those back to Changi.

02:00 One of the most important things we sent back was M&B693 which is sulphur pyridine which was the great antibiotic in those early days. We sent back all sorts of medical instruments and things. They did a great job. Ted McGlynn put his life on the front cause if they'd found out he was sending the wrong stuff he'd have been executed. But he got away with all the stuff and we sent lots and lots of stuff back to Changi Camp.

So how did he manage to do

02:30 **that, how did he manage to divide them?**

We had sick people. Japanese didn't like bioki people. They might catch something from them so they never got very close to them. We'd fill the kit bag up with medical supplies and put it under the stretcher and send it back to Changi. They never checked. Thank goodness. I remember I wanted to get back – there was a big case of beautiful scalpels.

03:00 So how are we going to get it out? So I thought, I tell you what I'll put it under my arm and walk past the Jap guards, they won't know any different. I walked out with the thing under my arm. They never even noticed it was put on the truck and sent back to Changi.

So this is before you were there in Changi?

No. We went from Changi to the Great World and while we were there stuff would be sent back to the Changi Camp.

Did you ever find out what those

03:30 **instruments, how those instruments helped?**

I don't know what happened to the instruments. I know that the medicines we sent back were all very valuable. We got a letter from the chief of the medical people in there too telling us how valuable they were and the supplies – they didn't mention the knives, they just mentioned the supplies. That was really good.

Would they have been using the knives as well – the scalpels and various things?

Oh yes. They were operating back in there. They were still looking after the wounds

04:00 from the war and the fella's recurrent problems. And they'd have the usual ones of appendicitis and all

those sort of things. People who had badly wounded legs and they were trying to save that. You couldn't save them so they had to be removed.

What about at the Great World, what kind of battle scars were you looking after?

Not much there. They were all working people from the go downs and they got based up by the Japs occasionally.

04:30 They'd come back with bruises or they'd get the common colds or they'd go and cut themselves or they'd fall and sprain an ankle. Just the same sort of things that normally happen to people. They'd come back from the sick parade. We did sick parade and everybody in the camp, not only our own but there were British in the camp as well.

Is that where that story that you mentioned before about the woman with the chicken?

No. That was during the war.

Okay.

05:00 **Can you describe where you then went after the Great World?**

We went back into Changi Camp again. One of the long periods I spent in Changi Camp I can't remember – it must have been after we came back to Changi Camp because we came back in December

05:30 1941 wasn't it? When did the war finish? In 45. So it would be after I came back there'd be lots of stories I'll tell there. But this time when we came back there wasn't much doing because we were only there for about a month or two before we were sent off on F force. I guess we just took part in the normal functions of

06:00 Changi which was concert parties, lectures, readings, music playing, record playing. We'd attend those sort of things and in those early days reading books. That two months was just a period of rest really. We had nothing much to do. I didn't do any medical work.

What about after Changi? What happened then?

We went up on F Force.

06:30 That was in April. You want to move on to F Force? Well the story's been told many times about the troops were loaded into steel trucks overloaded so you could hardly move. Sit around. We had to journey up for five days, six days from Singapore up to Bangkok. We had very little food on the way to eat. We had meals

07:00 at Ipoh, we had meals at Kuala Lumpur. I can remember those two. I remember stopping at a number of places to rewater – get water or get fuel. Our fellas would get out and looked after their latrine matters while they were there. Or take a shower under the water of the – if we could, although the Japs'd chase us away. So that was just a horrible trip of people getting diarrhoea and dysentery and crowded in the trains under humid

07:30 and horrible conditions. Just terrible. Anyhow we finally got to Bam Pong, arrived up there which is supposed to be the land of milk and honey. We were going to have a convalescent camp. The camp was just stinking camp. Mud. There'd been heavy raining and there was mud everywhere. A lot of troops had gone, the first lot left their gear behind because they couldn't carry it. The latrines were all overflowing. There was faeces everywhere. It was just a disgusting horrible camp.

08:00 We camped on the periphery there for that first night and then we went off the next night on a march. You know all about the march. The march went for about 25, 30 kilometres at night time. Rest and then go on the next day. After two days march you'd have 36 hours rest. You were supposed to wash your clothes and do everything like that you had to do. Most of the

08:30 time was spent looking after the sick because by this time the boys were getting dysentery. Eating from the food on the train going up was pretty awful and a lot of fellas got dysentery. We were treating those, treating blisters on their feet. That was repeated till we did the 283 kilometres which was about ten days. Might have been a fortnight before we got up there.

09:00 On the way our fellas got dysentery and my troops I remember one camp we had some camfloridine which is a bit like chlorodine, which is a draught. You only take ten drops or fifteen drops and it's got morphine in it. I gave the job to one of the fellas to go round the fellas with diarrhoea and give them a small amount of this each. This idea of a small amount of mine was a teaspoonful. His idea was to do this into the fella's

09:30 mug. So the next day we had blokes half asleep suffering from morphia overdoses and vomiting and god knows what on the march. Terrible business. That was the only bad incident we had on the way. The rest of the time we were dealing with blisters and so on and cases of dysentery. One of the ones that Michael mentioned to me was the fella called Adrian Curlewis. Adrian Curlewis was one of the fellas on the march. He and a padre from

10:00 Queensland – Patrick Michael Dolan – both had terrible blisters on their feet. I insisted on them

stopping off at the camp and resting for two days and catching up with the next lot coming through. But neither of them would do so. They arrived up at the Nieke camp with their boots full of blood because they wouldn't leave their troops. Two very fine people. We arrived in Nieke which was the first camp we came

10:30 to. They were building a bridge in Nieke. We were camped on the side of the river. That's where really the conditions started badly. That's where the fellas got beaten and made to work on the railway line even though they were sick. The worst job I had was the Japanese would demand 20 fellas. There'd only be about 10 that were fit. So if you didn't give him the other ten he'd go and pick them out himself. So you had to pick out the least sick of the sick.

11:00 They'd say, "But doc I can't work." My job therefore – "You gotta go because if you don't – he's a lot sicker than you." That went on for quite a while in that camp. The job was to sort the fellas out on the sick parade. But the Japs didn't like it. They wanted everybody working. They just didn't believe you could see the person was sick. They'd say, "No. He's sick, send him off." So a lot of sick people were sent out. That made their health worse. Nieke

11:30 we were there for a couple of months I suppose before they moved us on to Chungkai. Cholera broke out. I don't think we had cholera in Nieke. No, it wasn't. We got to Chungkai before cholera broke out. That was a terrible business. We had to put a special tent aside and I got two volunteers from my unit to look after the things.

12:00 We were at Chungkai for about two weeks when I was told to go and look after a hospital. There was two huts set aside away from the main camp which we set up as a hospital and I was put in charge of that hospital. So I had no more having to send the troops out on the line anymore. That was other people's job. We had a number of English people. Chungkai when we arrived at it was – they welcomed us to the Death Camp.

12:30 It was known as the Death Camp because they lost so many people, so many people died there. The majority of those were English people. They didn't have the same stamina that our people had. I don't know why that is. I think they were recruited probably from Liverpool and Manchester and they were from the poorer people where a lot of our recruits were volunteers and they came from the land. Came from up country and they were all fit.

13:00 They survived where the British didn't. They'd throw in the towel pretty quickly. They'd just die if they didn't feel well. Lost a lot of British people there. Then cholera broke out. The two worst diseases apart from malaria were beri beri in which the body retains fluid and they get bloated up, everything's swollen up full of fluid. The other one was cholera in which all fluid is removed.

13:30 So a person with beri beri would be lying there all blown up, get a dose of cholera and then overnight there'd be a skeleton. The fluid would be gone. What killed cholera patients was not so much the toxicity but the loss of fluid, diarrhoea, vomiting and loss of fluids. So you had to get the fluids up to them as best you could. There were all sorts of ingenious ways people did this.

14:00 There's always clever people in the camps – Australians. Put their hand to anything. There'd be a plumber or a blacksmith or a boot maker or someone at the camp. All good at doing little things. This plumber got hold of some galvanised iron and some old tins and he was able to cut the tin and make a little spout on it and he put the

14:30 galvanised iron over a hot fire so that the galvanised belt and the solder from the galvanise fell down. He collected that at the end and he used that for soldering up these containers so that they were able to add water to the container and using rubber tubing sometimes doctors stethoscopes and cannulas made from little narrow bits of bamboo they were able to make needles and they were able to by the use of

15:00 kitchen salt mixed with creek water boiled and filtered through cotton wool they were able to give these people salt water and keep them alive. This didn't happen in my camp. But it happened in many other camps. We didn't have that sort of – we were up the top end of the line where most of the fellas were out working and we didn't have these same sorts of people. So the only way we did it was to try and get the fluids by mouth as much as we could. Salty water by mouth.

15:30 And we had no treatment for beri beri so people either succumbed or they died. As far as cholera's concerned Australians were all given cholera injections before they left home. Occasional one would have dodged it because they didn't like their injections. They would be the people who died. There were very few Australians died. But the British, a lot of them dodged the cholera injection. They didn't want a cholera injection. They all died

16:00 like flies. The ones that had cholera injections often got sick, but survived. So that's why most of our Australians did survive the cholera. The other terrible disease of course was dysentery and a lot of them got dysentery. That's very debilitating, because no sooner do you get back to your bunk and you've got to rush off to the toilet again and then you get back to your bunk. We had no treatment for it. We had no antibiotics where I was.

16:30 They had them further down the railway line. But we had a few malaria pills earlier on. And we had treatments like iodine and carbolic acid and things like that and bandages, but very few bandages. So my memory of treating the patients was mostly by scouring out their ulcers and so on, giving them water and salt to drink and trying to maintain

17:00 them by telling them the importance of going home. The other thing we did was to make them laugh. We used to have little concert parties. You might have saw that on the video. Those little concert parties where we had things like Panhandle Pete and His Poofters which was one group we used to sing cowboy songs for them. And Hawaiian Hettie and Her Harlots was one where we used to do

17:30 all the Hawaiian songs – To You Sweetheart, Hello – all those sort of things. One fella wrote in his book – he was dying, his mate had died and he'd left and he was lying down and he's had enough. He wasn't going to go any further. And I came along and woke him up. I said, "You've got to get up." He said, "No. I'm not. I'm finished. I'm dying. I'm not going any more." He insisted on taking me to the camp – anyhow we put on a concert that night. He said he started to laugh, he couldn't help himself at the stupidity of it all.

18:00 From then on he never looked back. He said it was the best thing ever happened to him. I think that was happened to lots of fellas. I think we were able to keep them alive by making them laugh at life a bit. More about – there isn't much more to tell you about the medical side. We lost some very nice people there. There was a fellow called Padre Foster who used to sing. He was a well known British tenor under the name of John Foster.

18:30 He was a great singer. He was also a padre. He used to go around amongst the troops and he'd sing for them. The popular thing was Holy City or The Road to Mandalay and these sort of things. He had a beautiful voice. The fellas all talk about him. If anybody was up at the camp they'd tell you what a wonderful person he was. Anyhow he got beri beri. Couldn't do a thing for him. So he finally died. I had to send his bible home to his

19:00 family. A wonderful person. But the great tragedy was so many of these people's lives could have been saved if we'd only had some sort of treatment. That was the last thing on the Japanese mind. It was just using those up that were there. They didn't care what happened to the rest.

Can I ask you a couple of questions before we move on about in terms of the march and leaving for that march,

19:30 **were you a POW [prisoner of war] as well? How did that actually happen, that situation where the troops were captured and you were officially POW as well if indeed you were?**

We were all declared POWs. So we were treated like all the other POWs excepting being doctors the Japanese allowed us to look after the people. They gave us Red Crosses to put on our arms. Our own people gave us our crosses, the Japanese recognised them.

20:00 They actually had Japanese writing on the Red Cross. So I was just a prisoner of war like anybody else. But being an officer and a doctor we had treatment different to others because they needed us.

So how did the process work of being declared a POW? How did that actually happen?

When General Percival signed

20:30 Surrender, it was an unconditional surrender. Everybody who was in the army then became a prisoner of war.

And in terms of on the ground, how did that trickle out?

When the war finished we were told to take our troops and march out to the Australian General Hospital, number 30th hospital which was at Changi. We went out there. After two days we were ordered to march.

21:00 Take your bags and whatever you had and get out. So we just marched out. Couple of Japs on either side of us to guard us. No-one said, "You're a prisoner of war." They just said, 'You're captured now. You move out to Changi."

I understand that the Japanese have quite different ideas about prisoners of war. It's almost a disgrace to be captured.

21:30 **Did you get that impression from the Japanese that you had contact with?**

That's why they treated us as animals because they said no-one who has any respect for himself would still be alive, he'd fight till he died. So they had no respect for the prisoners. It was indoctrinated into them early on. So we were scum as far as they were concerned.

Did you

22:00 **find it difficult with the Red Cross and your status as a doctor, was that ever difficult or questioned by the Japanese?**

I can't remember ever coming up against the Japanese. When we were up on the railway line sending these fellas out to work the Japanese didn't care who you were. They wanted so many troops, if you didn't get troops, you didn't supply them they'd take them themselves

22:30 or they'd bash you till you did. I never came up against a bashing.

Why was it important for them in what you're just describing then for them to have doctors and those kinds of things available for the workers, the POWs?

They didn't. It was our own people that made sure we doctors looked after our people. The Japanese didn't want it. They would have got rid of us if they could have.

23:00 But we were there and we were just officers and we were in charge of the troops just like any other officer was. If you didn't do what you were told by the Japs, they bashed you. The Japanese recognised the Red Crosses because they had their own doctors. I don't remember being treated any differently by them because of it.

But they respected the fact that you wouldn't go out on the … ?

23:30 No. We were never made to go out on the railway line. Later on, towards the end when they were running out of time and they had to get it finished they made some of the officers work then. But we were never made to work.

Can you explain for me – you mentioned several camps, you talked about Nieke and …

Chungkai

Yep. What actually was the situation

24:00 **regarding medical supplies and those kinds of things? Why was it so under resourced whereas some other camps had resources?**

The further up the railway line the more difficult it was. Transport was almost impossible because the roads had been used by elephants in the rain. So they were just mud and slush. So getting a truck up there was very difficult. I don't remember trucks ever getting past Nieke. Trucks came to Nieke.

24:30 So the transport from Nieke up to Songkara had to be by hand. When all these camps moved everything was carried by hand. The fellas had to carry everything themselves. They had to carry their stoves, their cooking gear, medical gear, our panniers and everything else all had to be carried by hand through the mud. The fellas who had stories about it will tell you the stories about the difficulty they had in getting through the mud and carrying the stuff. But from the bottom up to

25:00 Chungkai and up to where Weary Dunlop was and those places, they had no trouble. They had transport up by river and they had also transport by road. So they were pretty well supplied up as far as there. But further up north the worse the supplies got.

You mentioned before that there was an expectation as you were marching that it was going to be the land of milk and honey or the camp of milk and honey.

Before we left the camp they told us

25:30 the Japanese were sending us up into Thailand where the conditions were much better. There was much more food and it would be more like a convalescent home. That it was overcrowded down in Changi and they didn't have the right amount of food and they didn't have the conditions. So this was a much easier camp they were sending us to. That was the story we were told before we went. That's the story our senior officers were told by the Japanese. Terrible.

26:00 So a lot of people sent there were sick people. If they'd known they were going up to work they would never have been sent. Those unfortunate ones a lot of them died of course because they were not fit.

You described the march and said that you marched for two days and then had 36 hours to recoup.

A day and a half and start off again the next night.

Is that a normal military practice?

26:30 No. I don't think so. Normally you march for the day for eight hours and then you rest the night. And during the day, every hour, you have a ten minute halt. That was known as the ten to the hour. The boys would sing, "Ten to the hour. Let's sit down. We're bloody tired. Let's sit down."

27:00 That was normal in the army, military. But this was marching at night and there were all sorts of stories told. One of my boys in my unit told the story of he and his mate, he couldn't see too well so he kept behind his mate all the time. Whenever the mate stopped he'd stopped and so it moved on. Unfortunately the fella came up against a tree. He thought it was the bloke in front of him so he stopped. All the rest of the troops were marching on. After a while someone got, "What's happening up front? We'll have to have a look,"

27:30 and he was standing behind a tree which he thought was a man. So they had to go round and catch up with the rest of the troops. Marching at night, tired and exhausted. Could easily happen. You're half asleep anyhow. He thought it was a man in front of him. There are wonderful stories told of fellas getting sick and couldn't go on and their mates would carry them and carry their packs and kept them

alive. So much so that

28:00 they did so much extra work themselves helping their mates that they often undermined their own health and suffered later on for it. The great thing about the Australian army was mateship. Everybody had a mate or had mates. There'd be three or four fellas were all mates together. Or you'd have own particular mate. That's what saved the Australians on this terrible railway line. They had a mate to look after them. If he felt sick his mate would look after him.

28:30 And vice versa. Mateship is something that's talked about in Australia, but could never be better illustrated than it was on that Changi march. If you had a mate you survived. If you didn't, you died.

Can you share any stories with us about examples on that march of mateship and the kinds of things that you witnessed when you were in that march?

29:00 The only stories I can tell you are stories that were told to me. That was in the Nieke Camp on of these fellas I talked about before who carried his mate and carried his pack right up to the end and kept his mate alive – his mate survived, but he went down with dysentery shortly after he got there and because of his weakened condition he died.

29:30 There are all sorts of stories told. That is an authentic story cause I knew the fellow who died.

So just coming back to the march itself, how many people were on the march?

I think there were 500 went up in our F Force, our train load. I'm just trying to explain the march a bit better to you.

30:00 You'd march by night and then you'd rest at night and march on again and the next day you'd stop and have a day's rest where you'd wash your clothes and everything else and march on again the next night. Most of the marching at night was through mud and slush and through jungle. Bushes on either side of you. Lots of the Thai people would come along behind and when you stopped

30:30 to rest they'd grab your bag and run off with it. These are the brigands. These weren't the decent Thai people. There were lots of wonderful Thai people. But lots of fellas lost their kits and bags putting them down at night to rest and disappearing. I remember one particular camp being pretty exhausted. I went to bed that night. Just one of these times we slept overnight, we stayed there.

31:00 And during the night there was an awful noise going through the camp. Couldn't work out what it was. The next day it proved to be a flock of elephants had gone through the camp. And a fellas water bottle next to his head had been walked on by the elephants as he walked through the camp they squashed his water bottle. There are all sorts of funny stories told about the camp. I remember that one vividly myself because I could hear this

31:30 noise during the night. We didn't know what it was.

What about native flora and fauna? Any creepy crawlies [insects] or horrible incidents with that kind of thing?

No. The boys were always afraid of tigers and things like that but we never saw anything like that. Snakes, we used to eat those. Green ones. Green tree snakes. They're the only local flora and fauna.

So how would you cook up the green snake?

32:00 Peel them. Cook them like you would fresh fish. Boil them. We didn't have cooking facilities. We'd boil them. We didn't have fat to fry things in. So you'd peel the snake, cut it up into slices and then boil it and eat it. It felt like fish too.

Any good?

A bit like fish but a bit rancid. It was better than nothing.

How many rations – what kind of supplies did you have amongst you in terms of food?

32:30 We seemed to have adequate supplies of rice. The meat that arrived in our camp was usually maggoty by the time it got to us. It was all pretty rotten. But that didn't matter. They boiled it up. And that killed off the wogs and you didn't mind eating the maggots because you didn't know they were there anyway. The fellas got used to eating that awful food.

And you're saying that the maggots themselves are protein as well?

33:00 The protein was the meat that they sent. We didn't get much at all. In our camp we had a fella called Ringer Edwards. He was got that name because he was a cattleman, he was a ringer. A very strong fella. He could carry a wheat bag on each of his shoulders. He was given the job by the Japanese to kill – the Japanese had yaks which are like a little cow.

33:30 He used to kill these for the Japanese. He thought this was a great idea. So he used to go and pinch one of the local farmer's yaks and he and his mate would kill that as well as the one for the Japanese and then they'd hide it and bring the food back into camp.

How do you hide a yak?

They dug – when they got all the bones and the skin and everything else they buried it and they hid it in the ground, covered it over and took the food back into camp.

34:00 Ringer Edwards and Reggie Jones are two fellas used to go and do this. We'd get a bit of meat every now and then. Not much. A yak amongst the camp wasn't much.

So what was yak like?

Just like cattle, cow. It was beef. Bloody good it was.

How did they cook it?

34:30 Boiled. Boiled stew with your rice.

So they did supply you with some food even though it was riddled with maggots?

No. We never had enough to eat. But the food that came, that was pretty rotten by the time it got to us. All except the rice. The rice seemed to be okay.

Rice didn't have maggots in it?

I don't remember. Just remember we always had plenty. All the rice

35:00 we had was always good rice.

What about the padres and things like doing services and masses and stuff like that? Were they happening along the march?

Yes. The padres in the camps all held services for the boys.

But on the march itself.

The padres were on the march too. They were always there.

So what about things like on Sunday during that two week march – what happened for

35:30 **the services?**

I don't remember there was a Sunday. But they'd have their services. The Roman Catholic with me was a fella called Michael Patrick Dolan. He's a story on his own. He came out from Ireland and went to Queensland as a priest and when he first arrived there the boys thought to take the mickey out of him [tease him]. So they asked him could he ride a horse. "Oh yes I can ride." So they gave him a devil of a buck jumper

36:00 which he was able to control without any trouble. He'd been a great horseman in Ireland which won him many good points with the local boys and they loved him. He was a real man among men. Bit of a gambler. He loved his grog. He and I became pretty good friends. Are you a Catholic yourself? Yeah. At one camp we were in when the railway line was

36:30 finished and before we went back we were in a camp with a doctor from north of Ireland and padre Duckworth and myself. This is back in Kanchanaburi. You could see him watching this fella. He'd say, "Listen to that north of Ireland basket." He hated him. But

37:00 I got on with him. The fact that my father was a Presbyterian minister didn't worry him. So we were great friends and priests come over from Saigon as it was in those days, Thailand, and they brought two bottles of brandy and about two or four dozen eggs and gave them to the padre. So we said, "Okay. We'll go round and distribute these eggs and the whisky amongst the sick. So we went around together and he gave them each an egg

37:30 and poured a bit of whisky into their panniers. And he said, "We'll keep this bastard for ourselves." It was the other bottle. Did we get rotten that night. I can remember walking arm in arm with him towards the toilet so we could both be sick. We got on very well together and when he came home after the war he came to visit me and he came to see me on one Sunday. I think my neighbours were a little bit surprised to see me sitting in the front yard talking to a Roman Catholic priest. Great friends.

38:00 Wonderful person. He died eventually poor fellow.

With the beri beri?

No. When he came home. No, he came back with us.

I was going to say – so who was the other padre that you were talking about who eventually got beri beri?

He was an Englishman by the name of Foster. He was a British padre. He happened to be in the Chungkai Camp crews with the British and he got sick and he came into

38:30 our hospital. We were looking after him. That's how I got to know him. He was also a very fine

gentleman. Most of the padres were.

Was there much of a hunger or use for things like padres in those kinds of situations in POW camps? Was there a need by the men to have spiritual guidance?

Yes. The religious ones

39:00 leaned very heavily on their padres for support and for the things that their padre'd give – unctions or whatever it might happen to be. They were very dependent on the mass. And they did a wonderful job, too. The Presbyterians and the Methodists and the non conformists, they had services on a Sunday and little bits of sermons. I can remember back in Changi going to their own

39:30 Catholic church. I used to like to go to their services because I liked to hear the singing. The boys all knew their songs and they'd sing their hymns. They didn't have any prayer books or anything. What more can I tell you? When the railway was finally finished we went back to Kanchanaburi or 'Cancerburi' as we always called it. But first of all

40:00 I went to a camp called – it was the camp that Dunlop was in for a long time. It starts with a C.

Tape 7

00:46 **You mentioned before that you continued to move from camp to camp.**

Yes. The reason we moved was because the railway line was being completed and we moved forward with it. They would complete the bridge at Nieke and then we'd move on to Chungkai where another bridge was being

01:00 built. In the meantime they would be laying the railway line from Nieke up to Chungkai and they joined up to the bridges so we moved really from bridge to bridge.

Coming back to that march to the first POW camp in Nieke – was that right that was the first one you went to?

The first time, that was our first permanent camp.

Yes. How many out of the 500 in that first march made it to the camp?

About 200.

01:30 But the people who'd gone ahead of us dropped people off and we'd pick some of them up. So the sick would wait a couple of days in this camp and the people two days behind would pick them up and so on. So the numbers continued. But out of the original 500, there were only about 200 got to Nieke.

How many got there of the sick that ended up going with the next lot?

I can't say.

Would many of them

02:00 **have?**

How many did we lose at the camps? In Nieke, I doubt if we would have lost more than 10 or 12 people from my own unit. In Chungkai we wouldn't have lost I suppose we might have lost 20 at the most. But a lot of British died at both Nieke camps

02:30 and the Chungkai camps.

And on the march? How many did you lose?

We didn't. We just dropped them off. If they couldn't survive they stayed behind. And they went on to the next camp. So we started with 500 and finished with about 200.

But there were no actual – no-one actually died. Okay. So in the camps what actually was the procedure with funerals and that kind of thing?

03:00 As far as the troops were concerned, they'd be woken before daylight in the morning and they would line up and get their bit of rice, whatever it was, and they'd go out for the day to the railway line and they'd come back at dark. That was their routine. They worked all day and they had breaks during the day, but not much, and they had food sent out to them.

But what about with the dead? What was done?

03:30 A burial party of two fellas used to bury them. I was talking to one not long ago and he said, "There was no way we could bury these people deeply. We used to have shallow graves because we'd be too exhausted digging the graves. If the fellas died with their arms stuck out a bit with rigor mortis we used

to have to break their arm to fit them in the grave. We just buried them cheaply. And we had no idea who was buried where."

04:00 He was one of my burial party. They cremated a lot of people up on the cholera areas. If a person died of cholera they cremated them.

For any reason?

The cholera, I suppose because they were frightened of cholera. See, the Japanese are very scared of cholera.

04:30 The first patient that had cholera, Michael was telling me, he was shot. The Japanese ordered that he be shot because they were afraid of cholera. But cholera developed more and more. The Japanese couldn't do anything about it. They wouldn't go near the camps. They made them put them into a separate hospital away from the main camp. Japanese would never go near them.

But how does actually burning a body prevent cholera from spreading?

It didn't. If the body had cholera they just

05:00 said, "Let's burn it. Get rid of the bacteria." That was the theory.

So how did the Japanese view things like rituals, services, masses, funerals, things like that?

I don't think the Japanese ever got involved with them. The Japanese worked on the railway line. They would come in and order people out. They had a guard camp. But what went on in the actual camp itself – in Chungkai I don't remember seeing the Japs in the camp.

05:30 They were in the guardhouse and they went out on the railway line but I don't remember them – you'd see the occasional one walk around the camp. They didn't interfere with those sort of things.

Tell me about your impressions of the railway workers and any visits that you made down there, any impressions that you had of the kind of work and conditions that the men were experiencing.

I never went out to the railway line where they were working. I never left the camps.

06:00 I always stayed in the camps. I looked after the sick. But the fellas'd tell me about their working conditions and you've probably heard the same stories as I've heard of the working conditions. That was that they were weak, sick and given heavy loads and heavy work to do from daylight till dark. As it got towards the end they had torches that they worked by at night time

06:30 up till sometimes ten o'clock at night. Terrible conditions. The Japanese had to have the railway finished by a certain date. They just used every power within their power to get that finished and they did, which is a remarkable feat.

So in a sense who were the guards that were looking after the camps?

Korean gaurds. The

07:00 Japanese engineers were building the railway line. Their senior people, they were the ones that controlled. But they had guards that went out with the troops and came back. They were the Koreans and they were the horrible people. They took advantage of the weakness. They just belted them. If they didn't like them they'd get rid of their anger and frustration by hitting a few prisoners of war.

07:30 Horrible people, the Koreans.

So actually in point of fact can you describe your impressions of the Korean soldiers?

I didn't see much of them. In Nieke I was looking after the sick and I didn't come in contact with the Koreans. When I was in Chungkai, I was in charge of the hospital. They never came near the hospital. I never had much to do with the Korean guards. People like Weary Dunlop who had to

08:00 stand up to the Japanese to save their men, they got beaten up a lot. Roy Bills, my colleague, was the only person – he was in charge in his camp too – and he got beaten up by disobeying the Japanese or pleading with them to stop working them. I never had those sort of contacts.

So in the camp in Nieke and Chungkai, there were Korean guards?

Yeah.

They would have been Korean soldiers.

Not much in the camps. They were in the guard houses.

08:30 They didn't come into the camp much.

Can you describe any contact that you had with those Korean guards?

I didn't have any contact with the Korean guards. Only when I was sending people out to work. They'd insist on it. If you didn't they 'd slap you across the face. I didn't have much of that.

So you had very limited contact also with the Japanese troops as well?

No. I was the lucky one.

09:00 I didn't have much contact with the Japanese at all.

Just to get my head around it, in the camps themselves at least at Nieke and Chungkai they were fairly autonomous – not autonomous, but in the camp itself it was …

Run by the camp people themselves. Yeah. The Japanese supplied the food and took workers out to work. That was their day job.

09:30 You didn't see the Japanese. I didn't see them.

Why did the Japanese give that much freedom within the camps themselves?

There wasn't much freedom cause they were all out working excepting a few officers – a cook and some of the sick stayed behind. The rest were out working. When they came back they were too exhausted to do anything and again the next morning they were taken off. So there was never any thought of running away.

10:00 Very few people ever did it. Those that did were captured and killed. They were all too sick.

So people did try – can you describe?

There were people who tried to escape and they were caught. In the early days of the railway line they tried to get away to Burma. They were brought back and eventually shot.

Did you witness any executions or beatings, bashings?

10:30 No. Bashings. I seem to remember in Nieke one stage an officer standing up to a Japanese and getting slapped across the face a few times. But no I didn't see any bashings.

Did you hear stories about them?

Plenty of stories.

On the railway and punishments and things?

Particularly the fellas working on the railway line if they looked a bit slack the Japanese would belt them up or make them stand to punish them. If you did anything wrong

11:00 the Japanese punished people.

What were some of the punishments?

Kneeling with a bamboo behind your knees and holding a stone over your head. That was one of their favourites. Standing holding a stone up in the air was one of their favourites. Or bending down with something behind your leg so you'd get cramp.

11:30 I don't remember being involved with any of these fellas that were being belted, I don't remember. I cannot recall ever having to treat any soldier who was mishandled or mistreated by the Japanese, but plenty of them were. I guess being in the hospital camp at Chungkai and looking after the

12:00 sick in Nieke and looking after the cholera wards probably kept me well away from interference by the Japanese.

Were you ever concerned that you might contract cholera?

No. I had all the injections. I had great faith in my injections. Irrespective, I treated them all. I was in amongst them all.

12:30 I did get dysentery. That was badly when I was at Nieke. I remember being sick for a week or two. Terrible agony of going to the toilet and then getting back into your bed and then going back to the toilet again. I can still feel …

What were the conditions like in terms of where people'd sleep and where they'd shower and latrines and things?

The latrines were all bore holes dug by our troops. Big holes in the ground. With a timber either side and you squatted on

13:00 the timber. Washing conditions. The fellas mostly bathed in the rivers. I can't remember any showers anywhere. The fellas used to go down to the river and bathe and wash themselves, wash their clothes. But the latrines were always foul because

13:30 fellas never quite made it. They rushed there, but never made it. So the ground around was pretty

fouled. When the boys went to work the officers who were left in camp did the cleaning up and cleaned up the hygiene. Looked after all that aspect of the camp.

So what were the different cultural backgrounds of the people in the camp? You mentioned Australians and British – who else was in the camps?

I don't remember

14:00 any Indians at our camp although I remember the Indians camped not far away from us in different camps. But Nieke was mostly Australians and Chungkai was Australians and British.

Did you ever have contact with anybody else in the other camps?

No. My best friends, Roy Bills, he and I were supposed to be in the one camp together. But I was seconded and taken to Nieke and he was left

14:30 on his own with his troops. He had 700 troops to look after. But coming through someone might say, "I saw so and so down the line. He's looking well." That's about the only contact we had.

So how long was an average day for most of the troops working?

Six o'clock in the morning to ten o'clock at night quite often. Certainly till six o'clock at night.

15:00 Later on as things were getting tough they worked right through to ten o'clock.

How would meals be eaten and served?

When they got back they were often too tired to eat. They'd just eat their food and go to bed and wake up in the morning and have another bowl of rice. Off to work again. The cook stayed in the camp. The cook would keep the coalies going, kept the rice up to them, kept the food up to them. But a lot of them were pretty tired

15:30 when they got back. They'd just eat their food and go to sleep, get up next morning. Terrible life for those boys.

Who were the cooks?

They were permanent fellas at the camp. Usually the sick ones who'd lost their leg or something like that. Or fellas who'd recovered from malaria. They'd get jobs in the cookhouse. Then when they got fit they'd go out to work, but there were always one or two permanents in there.

Can you describe the

16:00 **sleeping quarters?**

If you call them that. They were long huts with about that much between each side of the hut and there'd be six foot on that side and six foot on that side. There were 18 inches per person given a side. So they were all asleep that side. The gear, they didn't have much – whatever gear they had

16:30 was under their heads as pillows and so on. Some of them had blankets, some of them didn't. The conditions up there were not cold. Occasionally it got cold, but not very often. The fellas just fell asleep there with a blanket, exhausted, right next to each other.

What types of men were they? Did you get to know?

17:00 Good fellas. There were very few nasty sorts in the camps. A few weak ones. They couldn't stand up to the conditions, but most of the fellas were strong. They'd chuck in the towel. They'd say, "I've had enough. I'm not going to go any further." They had to be talked into very strongly and kept going and their mates would help them

17:30 do that. But the majority I found them a great bunch of fellas. I can't remember any nasty ones. If I did, that's probably gone from my memory.

Do you just in terms of what your describing about the importance of morale and things like making people laugh and to give them a will to live in a sense, did you see any ways that was expressed between the men?

18:00 **Any indication of their humanity or creativity or anything that was there amongst them?**

Only if a fella got sick his mate'd make sure he ate his dinner. That was very common. Because as one of the senior doctors said, "Son, your home is at the bottom of that plate. You eat what's on the plate and you've got a chance of getting home, so eat it." "But I've been sick."

18:30 "Doesn't matter. Put it back again." That was the most important thing of all to make these fellas realise that unless they et they wouldn't get home. So they would eat.

Was there any creative, any painters or artists among the camps?

Yes, there was a few artists and they brought back many pictures they'd painted while they were there. Jack Chalker was the

19:00 famous English one who did most of them. He was featured in Dunlop's book. There was another fellow – name escapes me now – another English artist. Well-known cartoonist. He wrote a book too on Changi.

Anybody in your camp that you can remember?

No. But we had this fella that took the photographs. The photographer.

19:30 Armstrong. He took a camera with him to camp and he got a whole lot of x-rays and developing fluid and he took many pictures and photographs. He developed them there, kept them apart and brought them home with him. He's got a book called Changi Photographer. Have you not seen it? He took all these wonderful pictures and printed them when he came back. That was Armstrong. He wasn't

20:00 in our unit, but he was often with us because he was seconded to our unit and we saw a fair lot of him. He tells an extraordinary story – if you never read the book, you ought to read Changi Photographer. Get it and read it. It's a great book.

Was he working on the railway or was he actually working as an artist?

No. He was working on the railway line. In hi own time at night time he would develop.

20:30 Took his pictures and would develop them particularly around Changi. He took a few up on the railway. He took some pictures up on Chungkai. He took a picture of the cholera ward. There was a book called A Life For Every Sleeper. I think that might have been his book too.

21:00 Or he had a lot of photographs. Sleeper on the railway line that was laid. I've got those books. I'll see if I can find them later on for you.

What would have been the implications if the Japanese had found things like … ?

You couldn't keep diaries. Lots of fellas kept them. They secreted them in all sorts of places. One fella had

21:30 had a narrow bit of bamboo he hollowed out and he put his diary in there. Kept it in that bit of bamboo. Fellas had diaries.

Were the camps ever raided or searched?

My camp that I was in, never. But I understand there were camps where there was. I have no personal knowledge. I don't remember Japs coming into our camps.

22:00 **Why do you think that was the case?**

What do they expect to find? They had a hell of a lot of prisoners of war there. They were exhausted coming back from the railway and going back again. They weren't going to escape. There was not much point in them going there. There was nothing much they could do in the camp so the Japs just left them alone.

You mentioned before some of the songs that you'd sing to the troops when they were feeling

22:30 **disillusioned – yeah and do concert parties. Can you give us a rendition?**

I did one for the video. We dressed up with we had grass skirts

23:00 which we made. We had bras. I don't know how we made the bras. But we had half coconut shells in those. We had out of the stuff we made the skirt out of we had – hair for ourselves. We had to swing our hips and we'd sing stuff like, "To you sweetheart haloa. Haloa from the bottom

23:30 of my heart," That sort of thing. I can't remember them all now. And the cowboy songs too. We used to sing – I've just forgotten them now. The boys knew the songs. We'd put them together and sing them. I'm sorry I can't give you a rendition.

That was pretty good. Can you remember any other songs the blokes would sing?

I'm trying to think of the cowboy song that we used to sing.

24:00 When we came home, there were a whole lot of new songs that came on the market, like Get Along Little Doggy, and all these sorts of things so that I can't remember what the ones we sang in the camp. I can only think of these new ones.

Were there any military tunes that were standards that people would sing?

No

24:30 I can't remember. The boys weren't doing much singing. They'd do the concerts that we'd put on for them, but they weren't singing. The boys never sang at work, they never sang marching to work. It was a very depressed group of people.

What were some of the emotions that were going through the camps between the men? What were some of – how would you describe generally

25:00 **how people were feeling?**

People were exhausted. The will to live was about all – they talked about home, they talked about their wives, they talked about their kids. They had their photographs with them. Survival was the main thing. They'd come back from work too exhausted. They'd just go to bed. The got up in the morning and they'd go off to work again. In that – we were talking about up on the railway line, there was nothing but work.

25:30 Apart from our hospital camps, I don't think there was any frivolity at all. The just worked from daylight to dark.

Are there any examples of situations when the Japanese or Koreans – Japanese probably – showed pity or compassion towards the workers?

Not to my knowledge.

26:00 There are all sorts of stories told, but I can only tell you from my own personal experience. I never had that experience with the Japanese. People write stories about their contacts with the Japs and the way they were treated. I don't remember ever – excepting in those early days when I was sending people out to work – I don't remember ever coming in contact with the Japanese. So whether I had a charmed life or whether because I was a doctor looking after hospitals and the

26:30 sick I didn't see them. I never had those experiences.

And when you were selecting – that situation you described where you were having to send less sick people off to work and choose who was going how did the Japanese hierarchy interact with you and how did that work?

We'd be all lined up, the fellas'd all be lined up and you'd line up at the

27:00 head of the queue and the Japanese would say, "20 soldiers, 25 soldiers." So I'd get 20 out and there'd be two or three more too sick to go. Then there'd be "More soldier!" "No no, bioki" "No. Two more." "Bioki." He'd go along and pick out two for himself. I gave them the quantity. I never stood up and got bashed.

27:30 If he wanted, I made sure he got the fittest of the ones that we had left. Saved the rest of them. Otherwise they just took them indiscriminately. That was my attitude. That's the way I worked. I don't think they all worked that way. Some of them would argue with the Japanese for a long time and get bashed up but they still took the ones they wanted. They still got their numbers. So whether standing up and arguing the point was worth while or not I don't know, but as far as I was concerned I gave them the best because I knew they were going to take

28:00 them anyhow. They didn't like me for it. The troops didn't like me for it. "Oh, Doc how can you send me up there?" "I know I'm sick. I know I've got malaria." "Well it's either you or the one that's worse than you." That was one of the worst periods. I didn't have a lot of that fortunately. That was only in Nieke. In Chungkai I had the hospital to look after. When I went in

28:30 the camp in Chungkai at the Death Camp it didn't take me more than a couple of hours to realise that the camp was in a terrible state. It was dirty. It was filthy. No hygiene had been done. Demoralised camp people were dying everywhere. So I went to the senior officers and I said, "My fella's the senior round here. He's the staff sergeant. He's the senior. I'd like him to take control." He happened to be a private. But he was a great fellow, very well

29:00 controlled over his mates and he was very respected within the camp. So I promoted him from private to staff sergeant, put him in charge of the camp. Two or three of his mates were quite bright boys. They got into that camp and they organised it. They were a wonderful group of people. If I can go back to the showground – this fella by the name of Harry Williams, he was an optometrist so he joined the army,

29:30 he wanted to do his bit. So he got into his camp and there were three country boys there. They said, "Hey listen old man, you're a bit older than us. Tell us all about what's happening over here. So he tried to explain what was happening. Anyhow they became mates. There was about seven of them eventually. Country boys from up around Kyogle and Casino and those areas. And Harry Williams. And Harry was the boss. They were

30:00 in the prisoner of war camps in Singapore before we got up on the railway line. They used to go out of camp at night and steal things or get things from local natives and then sell them and make a bit more money and go out the next day and buy some more. They became known as the universal providers because they'd go out and scrounge all sorts of food. Buy it and then bring it back into the camp again. When I put him in charge of this camp in Chungkai, this group were there together I said to the colonel in charge, "These boys are pretty good at scrounging stuff

30:30 as well." He said, "Well look send them to me." So I sent Harry to him and he gave him a whole stack of money. Don't know where he got it from. He said, "You go out to the local village, buy what you can and bring it back into camp." So at night time these boys used to sneak out of the camp, go to the local villages there where they got well known, buy up eggs and all sorts of stuff with this money and bring it

back into camp again. They were known

31:00 once again as the universal providers. There's some very funny stories told how they nearly got caught by the Japs. One beautiful story was they were coming back with a load of goods and it started to rain. They could hear the Japs coming down the other side. They had to duck down. The only way they could get back was going across the river. So the fella went in with a bag of sugar over his head to cross the river. Halfway across he slipped. He got out about a hundred yards further down the river.

31:30 All that was left was a wet bag on his head. All the sugar had dissolved. That's their funny story. They all talk about it. Bu they did wonderful work in the camp bringing back food for the sick. That was Harry Williams. He was the staff sergeant put in charge from private to staff sergeant. And I wish I could find my book because I wrote a reason why he should be decorated. There's stories all about him in that book and I can't find it.

32:00 Sorry.

So what quality did you recognise in him?

He was a born leader. He was just an optometrist but he just had his way with men and he had a very strict moral background. He was a very decent fellow. Come from a good upbringing. Had a good church background. He was just – they boys took to him. The boys took to him. People have that.

32:30 They stayed with him till he died years later on at home. They were always used to visit him and he'd visit them. They were a very close knit group of people. There's only two of them left now. The rest have all died.

So how did he respond when you offered him this position?

He did what he was told. I said "Harry, you're now in charge of the camp. They're a whole lot of useless buggers here. The Pommies are not doing any good at all. They've got no control.

33:00 I want you to run the camp. Will you do it for me?" "Sure." Three stripes on his arm.

How did the other blokes view that?

The fellas were a hundred percent behind him. He really ran that camp. He took control of the camp. Told us sergeants what to do. Years senior to him in seniority.

33:30 **How did that go down?**

They accepted it. He was a chief. Three stripes on his arm to prove it.

So what did he do to change the camp?

He was ordering the sergeant. "You get your group together. You fix this up. Your job is to clean that area up over there. You did it." And so on. "You'll be in charge of this." He just organised the camp. Organised the people in the latrines. Organised people to clean up.

34:00 Put discipline back into the camp. To the sergeant, "You look after your troops. You're in charge of that lot. You look after them. I'll hold you responsible." Instead of throwing in the towel as they had before and no-one had any control over anything. He restored order into our camp.

Was there any dissent in the ranks?

No. He had a personality. He was a born leader.

What

34:30 **was the camp like after he'd followed your orders and decided to implement these changes?**

The morale amongst the English was never much improved. The camp improved. But they didn't have the will to survive. Which makes you wonder what sort of a family life they had at home before

35:00 they came. What were they going to go back to? I had a letter after that movie [Bridge] On The River Kwai was shown in Britain. I got a letter from a woman in England somewhere up in the north country saying that her brother had died in Chungkai camp of cholera.

35:30 Did I remember him? Hundreds of people in that camp. That was fifty years ago. Had I known him at the time I wouldn't have remembered him. So I wrote back and said, "I was in charge of the camp. I was the medical officer. If your brother had cholera and he died at Chungkai I would certainly have looked after him. From my experience of most of the men that I came in contact with

36:00 he would have been a brave boy and died a great death." Haven't got a clue who he was. Had a wonderful letter back from the sister. She sent me Christmas cards and she sent me pictures of her area and she said it was so wonderful at last to find out that at least I know now how he died. What would you have done? So I suppose there are many

36:30 Englishmen that died over there that no-one would ever know. Their families never heard. No-one's ever

told them what happened to them. She never had a clue. So.

With something like cholera, how long does it take for someone to die?

Some of them died overnight. If they were in a weakened condition and they got cholera,

37:00 severe diarrhoea and vomiting and lack of fluid. If they were in a weakened condition they'd die. They kept alive for up to ten days. If they take that long they usually survived. They would die before then. Poor old cholera patients. Nearly all Englishmen.

37:30 They just didn't have the will to live. I had two fellas in my unit called Brent and Brown. Brownie and Brent. They were two bosom companions. Both well into their 40s. They should never have joined up. They were old people when they joined the army. They both came from Newcastle and they were great friends. They looked after the cholera ward for me. Brownie and Brentie. They looked after these fellas.

38:00 They fed them and nursed them, they washed them and cleaned them.

What about beri beri, how long does it take to die from that?

Depend on the person's condition. If he was pretty fit before he started it'd take quite a while. But they didn't all die of beri beri. Some of them recovered, but it was a pretty fatal disease because what happened was

38:30 it affected the heart. They got water on the heart and the heart would become weakened, the muscles would become weakened and the heart would stop. That's what they died of. Heart failure. How long would they die? Depend on their conditions. Some of them would hang on for quite a while, but usually if they were in hospital and stayed for a while they usually got some other current disease, dysentery or something like that. That'd send them off.

39:00 **There was no way of releasing the fluid?**

If you had vitamin B to give them, you released the fluid. The oedema. No. We had nothing. Good protein diet would have done it. That's why poor old Father Foster died. His heart went on him.

39:30 Malaria was common. Cerebral malaria, they died pretty quickly. Others would have recurrent attacks and get better, then get worse, then get better. They stayed on. Most of them came home with their malaria. Dysentery, beri beri, cholera. Tropical ulcers were the killers.

Tape 8

00:39 **The next question was the ulcers, they were the real problem you were saying?**

A fella only had to scratch himself. In his emaciated condition he'd get it infected. Once it got infected it spread like wildfire. The tropical ulcer would spread from a small thing like this to something like this overnight.

01:00 It would eat away – great ulcers this size – right down to the bone. Unless you got them quickly inevitably the leg would have to be amputated. We used to treat these with carbolic. We'd scrape them out, get all the pus and paint them with carbolic which was a very painful business. But at least it stopped the growth of the organism. From then they'd start to heal.

01:30 Later on, I don't know how it started, but someone went into the river to have a swim with a big ulcer on his leg. As he was sitting in the water fish started to come in and nibble away at his ulcer. He thought this was great because it felt all the rubbish was being taken away and it felt so good to have some sort of a feeling in the leg. He came back and told the medical officer in the camp about this and the camp said, "God what a great idea" so they started sending all these fellas off

02:00 in the water and it cleared them up. That helped a tremendous amount in cleaning up the ulcers. The other one was the one that got infected with flies – got maggots. The maggots ate away all the rubbish and they healed much better too. So that was one of the treatment. If a bloke got a tropical ulcer, you infected it with the flies and maggots. Even today that's a world recognised treatment for those sort of ulcers. They were terribly cruel things.

02:30 We used to have to send them back down the river and they'd go down and get amputated down the river. They were the most horrible things. You seen pictures of them in the books at all? I doubt if I've got a book they were in. But they were the very bad thing and of course my troops used to have to dress these morning and night and they'd get these – we didn't have bandages, but they had bits of old

03:00 pants and they'd wash them out and dry them, put them back on as a bandage next day. Then they'd wash them out, put another one on. And bathe them with carbolic. They'd slowly get better. If only they could have had a decent feed of course they'd get better quickly.

Were there times you had to amputate?

I never had to amputate. Anyone that got really bad like that, Japs allowed them to go down the river and on the barges and they'd get out at Tarso camp.

03:30 **And the water that you were collecting to drink or to use, was that being collected from the same place that these fellas with ulcers bathed?**

No. It was above it. All the bathing and that sort of thing was done down below the camp level. The water was always taken up above the camp level. So it was said to be clean. You don't know what came down from the last camp but by that time it's pretty diluted anyhow. We had

04:00 the rainy season so we had plenty of water. I remember in Chungkai that for exercise I used to go down to the river – few of us used to go down to the river – we'd just get into the water and swim against the current. And just get back out again. Swim at the same pace as the current would keep you close to the water. That was a great thing, the exercise like that. Clean, get yourself a bathe. The rainy season they had plenty of water coming down the river.

04:30 **So by the time you got to Chungkai, how much weight had you lost?**

I don't know. By the time I came back from camp I think I was down to 7 stone. I'm normally 11. But when we came out of the camp when the war finished we were able to eat. We got plenty of food when the Red Cross came in and we put condition on pretty quickly. I'll show

05:00 you a picture of us just before we embarked to come home, and it'll show you we have put on condition.

You said earlier that you took medical supplies after you left Singapore on the way up. When did those supplies start to run out?

When you talk about supplies, by the time we got to Nieke we had some

05:30 malarial parasites, anti-malarial drugs – quinine and so on. And Atebrin. We had that when we got to Nieke. But by the time we got to Chungkai we still had some Atebrin but I think when we were in Chungkai we ran out of anti malarial pills. The other medical supplies apart from bandages and some ointments and that sort of thing, carbolic acid,

06:00 iodine, agroflavin, we had agroflavin – there wasn't much else we had. We didn't have any antibiotics or any medicine to give them by mouth. We had things you could apply.

The Japanese, were they supplying anything?

No. Our main medical headquarters was at Nieke. We were sent

06:30 up to Chungkai and a group of people at headquarters stayed at Nieke and controlled the other camps from there. They had medical supplies there. But they were hanging on to most of what they had. I don't remember getting much of supplies at all from the lower camps. All I remember is being bloody short of all the things we needed like malaria and quinine and so on.

When did men's boots and clothing start to wear out?

07:00 That's a good question. Most of the fellas still had shorts and singlets and bits of ragged shirt without sleeves by the time we finished at Chungkai. By the time we got back to Kanchanaburi. Then when we got back to Kanchanaburi lots of them sold what they did have for food.

07:30 You got round in these – don't know what the Japanese call it, but a piece of string and a towel. You tied the string between the thing, you pulled the towel up between your legs, through the string and down the front of your crotch. So you had covered around the back and over your genitals up on the sleeve and then hanging down in front of you. We all wore those. The Japanese had them. They wore them all the time. Everybody wore those and didn't wear much more than that.

08:00 **I understand that given people didn't have shoes and stuff that the bamboo would actually start to cut into your feet as you walked along?**

Yes. That was a big problem. Even when the shoes they did have started to wear out, that's where they got the ulcers from – the sharp bamboos. Terrible.

How did you treat those problems?

I was just telling Claire [interviewer] we treated with carbolic was the best thing we had. Then they had the maggots. And they had the

08:30 fish in the water. They're about the only things. But the maggots and the fish – they were fantastic. They made a hell of a difference to the ulcers. Got rid of all the slough and the rubbish and stuff and then as soon as the fellas got on any sort of a diet their ulcers improved dramatically. That was when we got to Kanchanaburi.

Okay. Would you share about Kanchanaburi with me?

09:00 Before we went to Kanchanaburi we went to Chungkai and I was there only a fortnight. Most of the time

I was there I was looking after people in the wards. The same sort of stuff I'd been doing up country. Then we were transferred to Camp Kanchanaburi. I was in the same camp as Weary Dunlop, but I never saw him. I never saw the Canadian – Markovich – he was in the camp too.

09:30 I never got involved in that so I must have been in a different part of the camp than they were in. As I say we were only there for a fortnight then we were moved on to Camp Kanchanaburi. Camp Kanchanaburi was a convalescent camp. There was plenty of food there. You could buy food from the natives. We used to buy a dozen eggs and make omelettes. You could buy strawberries and have strawberry omelettes. I tell you it was a home away from home. All you needed was money and the universal providers seemed to have some of that.

10:00 They were able to get money. Fellas sold their clothes and shirts and things. I guess I had a bit of money. We used to – they tell me we got paid. I can't remember. They used to get ten cents a day which wouldn't buy much, but they used to save it up. So there was a little bit of money in the camp. The buying and selling stuff to the Thailands.

10:30 They'd buy a pig and the boys'd roast this pig and buy eggs and things like that so there was lots of food. I'm not too sure where the money came from. I know up in Chungkai they were given a lot of money by the colonel up there to buy food and they did. Whether they had some of that left over or not I don't know . I don't remember having any money myself, but the boys always seemed to have food and they shared it with us. Kanchanaburi was a camp where

11:00 everybody ate well and started to recuperate. Wasn't long before we were allowed to go swimming. Used to have about a mile hike. A Japanese officer used to go and he'd swim well up the river from us above the river and the POWs would have a swim. They were allowed to swim and have races and things and then we'd come back again. Plenty of good food. So Kanchanaburi we were there for about three months. It was a period of rehabilitation. We all put on weight. We all looked much better, had

11:30 concert parties there. I don't know whether I told this story before but – yes I did I told Claire I think about the Roman Catholic padre, the fellas came over from Saigon and brought the two bottles of whisky and lots of eggs. I told you that story. That was in Kanchanaburi.

So why were you sent – was it just you or your unit sent from Chungkai?

Unit. Yes. Our unit was at Chungkai and our unit came down with the same troops that went down Kanchanaburi to F force, we came back

12:00 to Kanchanaburi. There was a story I needed to tell you came into my mind. It's gone again. It was about Kanchanaburi. Eventually it came to an end at Kanchanaburi and they decided to move us back to Singapore.

12:30 We had a problem. There were still lots of sick people there. Incidentally, while we were in Kanchanaburi I had an ulcer on my leg – a tropical ulcer began. It didn't take long to get to about that size. But I was fortunate. Kevin Flag was in the camp and I went to see Kevin. He gave me an anaesthetic and reamed it out. Put bandages and stuff back on and it got healed. It didn't get very far.

13:00 But while in Kanchanaburi there were a number of Dutch people, number of English people and at night time those beautiful clear balmy nights we used to go and stand up – I remember going down to the latrines one night and there was a Dutchman down there and there was another medical officer – his brother was a padre – from Sydney. They were standing and the Dutchman looked up at the

13:30 sky and he said, "Ah look, Mercure." This Australian friend of mine says, "Nonsense man, that's Mercury, an English star." A great sense of humour. So that was Kanchanaburi. We went back by train and the trucks this time back to Singapore but I don't remember it being anywhere near as bad as on the way up. Whether we were less people in it or whether they were open trucks I don't remember.

14:00 We eventually arrived back in Singapore. Were taken by trucks to the camp back in at Changi. We were met there by a senior medical officer. A lot of the fellas went back from the up country with beri beri hearts and in a weakened condition and cardiac and they were told to look after themselves and not to over exercise themselves.

14:30 So as soon as we arrived this fella, Billy Bye put a stethoscope on the fella and said, "Run around the playground." "I can't. I'm not allowed to run." "Do what you're told. Run around the playground. You're alright, you've got athlete's heart." I don't know if you know about this, but it's a condition where it stimulates as if you've got a heart attack but it really isn't at all. It's

15:00 a pseudo heart attack. So Bobby [Billy] Bye realised that this was a hangover from most of the prisoner of war camps, and it wasn't a true beri beri at all. But he could pick the ones that did have a decent heart. He'd listen to their heart. Great to their consternation a lot of these cardiac beri beri hearts were back at work again before they knew were they were through Billy Bye. I grew a moustache

15:30 while I was on the railway line. That was one of the things you did. You'd do something. So I had one of those beautiful big English moustache, used to curl the mo sort of thing. I came back to Changi and was put in the medical ward and the senior officer of the camp came round and he said, "Where's Hendry?." Someone said, "That's him." "That's Hendry?" Came over to me and he said, "Get that bloody

moustache off your face." Blackjack Gallagher, you may have heard of him.

16:00 So that was really Kanchanaburi. Kanchanaburi was really just a wonderful wonderful recuperation camp. We lost quite a few people there. One of our well known Australian lawyers was there and he'd been looked after by an Englishman. The fella come over to me and he said, "We've got one of your Australians over here that's had a bad bellyache. I can't find anything wrong with him." I went over to see him, he obviously had an intestinal obstruction. So we put him into hospital and he was operated on immediately by an English surgeon. But they couldn't save him. He lost him, he died.

16:30 The English medical officers were not as well trained as the Australian medical officers. They didn't have that diagnostic ability that the Australians had. They seemed to work more by rote. Anyway I think our own doctors were better doctors as a whole than the medical officers from the British.

Do you

17:00 **know what year you arrived in Kanchanaburi?**

The end of 43. Early in 1944 we went back to Changi. It was the end of 1943. Around about Christmas time we were in Kanchanaburi.

And I also understand

17:30 **that at Chungkai there were some amazing medical things being done and created by the men. Do you know much about that?**

Not much. That's all recorded in Dunlop's diary and Markovich's story. Markovich was a Canadian – rather an extraordinary fellow who did some brilliant things in the prisoner of war camps. He gave a talk when he came back to the Canadian Broadcasting Commission. I have

18:00 a copy of that which is worth listening to, but he did all sorts of things like when he found the fellas in bad condition and didn't have enough vitamins, what he did was to get some wild bananas from the trees outside and make a stew out of these. Then he got people to walk by and spit in it because in our spittle there's an enzyme which digests carbohydrates.

18:30 So he got all these fellas to spit in this and mixed it up and fermented it. He took the fermented juice and gave it to people to drink, cause it's very high in vitamins. He was able to do a great deal of good for a lot of these undernourished people. How he even thought of it I wouldn't know. It would never enter my head.

You never tasted anything like this?

No thank you. I don't know whether he boiled it afterwards or what he did when he made it, but that's

19:00 how he did it from the enzymes of the people spitting in it. He tells the story himself.

Medical supplies at both Kanchanaburi and Chungkai seem to … ?

Much better in Kanchanaburi. I don't know where they came from. Whether they were left over from when they were in Singapore, whether they sent them up or whether they purchased them locally. I think maybe a lot of them were purchased locally. I don't know where the fellow in charge of the camp, Colonel Doolan, got all the money, but he had a lot of money.

19:30 He had no trouble purchasing things.

The reason in a sense your unit you were attached with, the F Force, was moved is because they finished that part of the railway? Is that why you were moving?

Yes. We stayed with F Force. F Force was a force which consisted of 2/20th, 2/29th and people from the different battalions. Some of them from the all the various different

20:00 battalions and they were made into an F Force. That F Force stuck together till we got right back to Singapore.

And just during the time you were at Nieke and Chungkai, how many people were dying each day from cholera and other sorts of things?

I can't remember. I've been asked that question, but at the worst feature we'd be losing about one or two a day from cholera.

20:30 The same sort of thing from burial. The fellas who were doing the burial at that stage were burying about five or six people a day so that gives you some indication of the numbers. Which is a lot.

Just in respect to songs, Claire did raise it with you. But important

21:00 **for the archive is any songs that were sung during that time. Do you remember any sorts of things that you did sing?**

I was trying to remember. I can remember we were singing to – we had some musical fellas in the camp. We had one bloke that could play a guitar. He didn't have a guitar there, he made the tunes. A lot of the

people knew the music. Have you heard of Slim Degrey? Slim Degrey was a great entertainer in Sydney for years after the prisoner of war camp and he's

21:30 just appeared in this latest film on Changi. But he had lots and lots of songs. They knew all these things and they remembered them. They would produce them. I'd go along with the boys to keep them company because I was the senior, but I don't remember the songs. I do remember that there were two groups of things. There were the cowboy songs we sang and the Hawaiian songs.

Also just coming back to when Claire was talking to you, selecting the men to go out on the work parties, was much

22:00 **bitterness in the following months raised against you?**

No. If they did I didn't know about it. If the fellas resented it, I didn't know about it. I think they all realised that someone had to go. The least sick were the ones that went. Not the well ones. The least sick.

So how long were you in Camp

22:30 **Bruni?**

Chungkai. Up in Burma? We went in April and we came back in December January the next year so up to about eight months I suppose.

And again, your role, what were you doing there?

Kanchanaburi I was medical officer in charge of the sick.

23:00 I had my ward to look after and sick people to look after. Just an ordinary job as a medical officer in a hospital. Tending the sick.

So was the major issue cholera there?

No. Mostly it was malaria, dysentery, and ulcers. And anything like appendicitis, one had an obstructed bowel. That's the sort of thing.

23:30 Any general practice apart from the ulcers and the dysentery. No cholera, but – an malaria of course was a repetitive thing. They just kept getting it.

Weary Dunlop mentioed the death watch where no person would die alone? Was that ever part of the hospital?

Our orderlies looked after everybody till they died. He called it death watch, did he?

24:00 They stayed with their mates. Their mates stayed with them and if they didn't the orderlies did. They never died alone. No. That camaraderie was a wonderful thing I mentioned to Claire before.

Just in respect to the chaplains, did they also go out on the working parties or were they part of the hospital team?

They stayed in the camp. They were part of the officers in the camp. They did the

24:30 hygiene and kept the camp clean and cleaned up the toilets and built latrines and so on. They worked in the camp. I wouldn't be surprised if one or two of the padres went out with a working party, just in order to be with the boys, but I don't know any.

So when you returned to Changi there was still about a year or so left in the war was there?

Yeah.

What happened during that time?

25:00 When I came back, I developed asthma. Not severe, but bad enough to restrict my breathing and I had a very bad time for a while. They couldn't treat me there so the physician gave me morphia to stop my cough, but all that'd do was make me vomit. So I was – I can remember being pretty sick for about two months. The rest of the time in Changi was spent in – we used to go swimming, tending the gardens,

25:30 did a lot of reading, concert parties. I didn't do any medical work – or very little medical work – when I got back to Changi. That was run by the hospital and the people who stayed back there. We did lots of reading. We had a great library. I was taught Pelmanism by one of the fellas who was there. Do you know what Pelmanism? It's

26:00 a way of remembering things. By association of ideas you can remember anything. I could take a pack of cards, you could shuffle it and I'd go through it and you could shuffle it again and I'd put it back in the order in which it was before. I could remember the order of the cards. That's 52 cards I could remember. So there were all sorts of things I learnt about Pelmanism. One of them was – I used to go down to the library and forget what I went down to get. So the fella who taught me

26:30 Pelmenism said, "I'll tell you how to remember. Can you visualise the door down near the library?" "Of

course I can. I see the damn thing all the time. He said, “Is it open on the left hand side or the right hand side?” “It’s open on the right hand side.” He said, “Okay. Standing behind that door as you go in there’s a bloke with an axe and as you walk in that door he’s going to slam the door and the axe on you as you get in the door. Can you visualise the door, can you visualise the door?” “Yes, I can.”

27:00 “Next time you go down and that happens, you remember what you wanted, because what you wanted was to get such and such a book, wasn’t it?” “Yes it was.” So I laughed this off, big joke. Anyway as I walked in the door I jumped about two feet in the air. Proved to me without any doubt the association of ideas can do it, you can remember whatever you want to do. So I got the book and I came back with it and I’ve always remembered ever since.

27:30 Pelmanism is a wonderful thing. I couldn’t put a pack of cards together now. I’ve forgotten all about it. But I did when I came back. That’s one of the sort of things we did. We did a fair bit of swimming. We had a surf lifesaver from Bondi was in the camp with us. He was an instructor. So he used to take a party of us down there and we were taught life saving. We learnt everything except to swim. Adrian Kellers was the president of the Surf Lifesaving

28:00 Association and he put us through an examination and he gave us all our medallions. Bronze medallions. All we had to do when we got home was to swim out two hundred metres and back and we got our medallions. That’s how we filled in our time. And I was keen to be a surgeon when I came home so I got hold of an anatomy book and I learnt from the anatomy in my head. Learnt all the anatomy up front. I was sitting there one day in the mess hut

28:30 reading my anatomy book and a grey haired old fellow with dirty baggy shorts came in. He said, “What are you doing?” I said, “What do you think I’m doing? I’m bloody well studying anatomy.” He said, “What are you doing that for?” “I’m going to become a surgeon.” He said, “That first part’s the primary, that’s the easy part. It’s the second part which is difficult.” I said, “How would you know?” “I’m chief examiner of the Royal College of Surgeons in England.” Lord

29:00 somebody or other. Extraordinary place. I did a lot of studying hoping that I’d continue on with my surgery when I got home. I’ve got a book full of anatomy drawings and things from lectures I took. I can’t find the book unfortunately. So that was a period of reading, learning,

29:30 swimming, exercising, concert parties. And time went by. We used most of the time. We were moved from the barracks up until at Changi at outside the jail. We lived outside the jail. I was moved to another area towards the end where the Dutch were. I was put into the Dutch camp to look after all these Dutchies. We called it the Pot For Doms. It’s a rude word. It’s Dutch for ‘goddammit’. And

30:00 I learnt a few things from the Dutch. I learnt that there was writing on the wall above the beds in the wards there. “Ed zippin ob der bedden is forboden.” “Sitting on the bed is forbidden.” I learnt to say “hoo is it morholler” which is “how is it possible.” I got to know a few good Dutch friends. And I was at that camp when the war finished.

30:30 There was a great big black tank outside the wards and someone had written on it “atomic bomb.” Someone had got the news on the radio. It wasn’t long after that war was capitulated.

So just in respect to Changi and before the war actually finishes – I use this word carefully, but Changi seemed to be quite easy in respect to what you’d been in, is that right?

Oh it was wonderful.

31:00 You’d see a Jap walk occasionally through the camp, but very rarely. You had gardens to look after. The food was scarce, but good food. You had enough rice to eat and you had other things that went with it. The food that came into the camp was carefully controlled and everybody got their fair share. Lots and lots of gardens had been planted by the fellas, tapioca roots and things like that

31:30 so that the food was very much better than anywhere else. The cooks were well organised. We played a lot of cards, played a lot of contract bridge. The padre that I spoke about before, Padre Dolan, he was a great bridge player and he and I used to play lots and lots of contract bridge. It was just a waiting to go home.

32:00 Compared to what we went through before it was a good life.

When we hear about Changi, it always seems so bad. Is that because Changi is related to actually what you guys went through …

When people talk about Changi, they’re not talking about Changi. They’re talking about a prisoner of war period and most of them are referring to what happened up on the railway lines really. And in the working parties in Singapore. Changi itself was never

32:30 what that film that they’re featuring now by John Doyle on Changi was nothing like Changi at all. That’s why a lot of the RSL [Returned and Services League] fellas objected so strongly to it. It was nothing like that. Changi itself was uninterfered with, apart from not having enough to eat, small diet, you could do what you like. You could read books and go to concert parties and go swimming. Their ideas of Changi really relates to up there on the railway line.

33:00 And some of the working parties outside Changi.

How many people were in Changi that time when you've now returned towards the end of the war?

I couldn't tell you.

Are we talking thousands, hundreds?

Thousands, I'd say. There were barracks, there was the English barracks and the Australian barracks. And there was the Indians and all that big –

33:30 I'm sorry, in the Changi jail itself, I couldn't tell you. I've never really thought about it. But the Changi jail itself was full. There was attap huts all around the front around the whole of the camp. All the Dutchies were on this side and the British over here and the Aussies were all up here and there were lots and lots and lots. I couldn't tell you how many.

34:00 **Just in respect to the John Doyle film, Changi, is that at all similar to any of the camps that you stayed?**

No. I've talked to John Doyle about his play. He said it was never intended to create or show Changi as it was. The whole concept was to show what happens in a prisoner of war camps and how fellas suffered under the Japanese. And I put

34:30 it together as a series of stories to try and show how it happened. And he has. He's shown the gardens where the fellas worked. That's how they worked. He's shown the cell where the fella was put in as a prisoner. He's shown the way the Japanese maltreated the Australians. But never in Changi Camp. The Japanese never came into the camp. That all happened up on the railway line. So all of his stories are all related to what happened ad he's called them all Changi.

35:00 And he's made it as if it happened in Changi. So it's fiction. But he's demonstrated how things were. But the fellas could have never sat down at a piano playing like that in front of the Japanese. The Japanese were never in the camps. We had the concert parties, but there was never a Jap in sight. What he's done is he's taken the camps up along the railway line and the camp working party and he's put together a story which tries to indicate

35:30 all those sort of things that happened in those different camps and he's called it Changi.

Mm. That's helpful. You mentioned earlier that you were planning to be a surgeon. You were studying the first book. And a fella comes in and tells you that he's one of the assessing people.

That didn't stop me studying. I went on studying. He gave me a new slant on it. I realised that wasn't only anatomy I had to learn, there'd be plenty to do after it.

36:00 But I realised that. That's why initially at Prince Henry Hospital when I was young the only reason I took up pathology in my second year was because I wanted to become a surgeon and pathology was one of the important examinations that you had to follow to get into that. No, I came back with the same ambitions. When I came back, I could not settle into the life. Life here was full of

36:30 trivias, people going out to parties. I'd go and have a drink at the pub and there'd be 200 blokes all standing outside yelling at the top of their bloody voices – nearly drove me mad. I couldn't drink with them. I couldn't go out to parties because they all talked nonsense. All they talked was what the pictures they saw last week or what Mrs Smith wore, or just trivia. All we ever talked about at the prisoner of war camp was important things in life. We didn't talk about the last cinema show we saw or Mrs

37:00 Smithy's party or what she was wearing. I found it very difficult to put up with conversations, the lousy noise and talk trivia. Very difficult to settle back into life again.

What were the important things in life you'd discuss?

Food. Art. Plays. Music. And what we want to do in the future. What life held for us, didn't hold for us.

37:30 Our families. That sort of thing. But when you get home, people talked about the last picture show that was on or the fashions that people were wearing and the last musical thing or and gossip about different people. It was trivia which I found very difficult to put up with. I'll tell you an experience I had when I got back. This is my second wife. My first wife was an actress – Pat McDonald.

38:00 I don't know if you ever remember things like 96 and films and that. She was in all those things. Anyhow when I came back she'd been doing a fair bit of acting at the Minerva Theatre and everything so I met a number of her friends and I found it difficult to fit in with them. So she said, "We've got to go to the Australia Hotel, we'll meet some of my friends there." "Oh God." "Come on, it'll do you the world of good. Get you back into life. You got to get back into life." So I went to the Australia Hotel. We ordered drinks.

38:30 I took my money out and I paid for the drinks. The fella came back with the drinks and change and I took my change. As I'd normally do. And obviously I'd left a sixpence behind on the thing. I didn't know

I had and I never knew anything about tipping. This fella drew himself up to his full height and he said, “I think you need that more than I do, sir.” Gave me the sixpence back. I was so incensed, so angry. There was nearly a brawl.

39:00 My friends held me back. I went out. That room was full of American soldiers and people in uniform and girls all dressed which was a new world for me from what I’d been used to. So that’s the sort of thing, the trauma we suffered when we came back trying to fit into a normal life.

Tape 9

00:38 **When did you hear that the Americans had actually joined the war?**

That’s just before the Japanese attack in Singapore. We heard it on the news, the radio. While we were in Singapore. It was

01:00 somewhat of a relief I can tell you. I think that it was soon after the [HMS] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse was sunk. Around about the same time we had the same news. It was good news.

Can you tell me about short arm parade? What it is and a funny story?

I’m not too sure why, but they made it a rule

01:30 once a month you had to be inspected to see if your troops had gonorrhoea. The way they do that, they would parade in front of you and you’d just sit down in this chair and the fellas would walk past and they’d demonstrate their penis, squeeze it, squeeze their penis out like that to make sure there’s any pus in it. A most degrading thing for the troops, but you got used to it, fortunately. But you could recognise and you’d sit here and say, “G’day Bill how’s everything going? G’day Titch, how are you?”

02:00 Titch was a very short bloke with a great big tool. “Oh g’day, how you doing Titch?” You’d recognise them all by their tools. It must have been a terribly degrading business for the troops. It wasn’t much fun for the medical officer either. But it got a good nickname, didn’t it? Short arm parade. I can’t remember

02:30 anyone getting gonorrhoea being detected that way. Fellas if they got gonorrhoea they’d come and see you. If they got something wrong with their tool they come and see you. They didn’t wait for these parades. It was a stupid business I think.

So you discovered the war had finished when news started to circulate

03:00 **Changi. What were the next events that happened?**

Yeah. I’m just trying to remember where I was and what I was doing. Oh yes. I was over at the Dutch camp with the Dutchies. They saw this sign up on the – someone had written up “Atomic” and then the news came out in Changi that the war was over. The atomic bomb had dropped. Then the second bomb was dropped in Nagasaki.

03:30 That was when we were told the war had finished. It was only within about two days of that the commando, Australian commando, led an attack from the aeroplane. Dropped parachutists into the camp. He was like a man from the moon as far as we were concerned because we’d never seen anything like it, you know, with the helmet on and the gear and everything. He arrived in the camp with his machine gun and – his Lewis, whatever it was – and took control of the camp.

04:00 Went straight to the office. Obviously the Japanese had heard what had happened and expected him to come and he went straight in and took command of the camp. The Japanese just disappeared. They got rid of them out of the camp. I suppose they rounded them up in another camp, somewhere else. But they disappeared from Changi and we never saw them again. Then the next thing started was parcels started to arrive from the air some of them and later on parcels came in by ship. Wasn’t long before ships came in

04:30 to the harbour. We all went on board the ships and they fed us and gave us – I can’t remember the name of the big ship – the Nelson I think. We went on board this magnificent Great War ship and everybody on there spic and span in white clothes in the officers’ mess and they sat down and fed us and gave us great meals and showed us over the ship. Terribly exciting. War was finished. I thought I was very fortunate

05:00 because most of my unit had been killed in Borneo. The 2/10th Field Ambulance they were on that death march and we lost most of our troops over there. And the ones that were up on the low line with me, those that come back were divided up into several camps. Some had been sent to Japan to work on the naval dockyards. Others got over to Thailand were kept up in Thailand working there so I only had about 20 to 30 troops left I suppose

05:30 at this stage out of 250. And I was the only officer in the camp in charge of this group. All the rest had gone. So the staff officer in charge of the brigade said to me, “Would you like to come back in the

catalinas with us because the brigade headquarters is going back and we've got enough room for your troops if you want to come back." "That'd be fantastic." So we did. We flew. And on the first day we flew to Borneo.

06:00 What's the island there? Can't think of it. And we landed on this island there and we stayed there overnight and I heard that my brother was in Borneo, so I sent a message to him and he didn't get the message till the next day. He was a colonel. So I had the chance – I finally got a message back the next day saying "Hang on, I'll come over and see you."

06:30 I was on the first plane out. And I was a fatalist. I wasn't going to interfere. I was going to go. So I left a message said, "I'll see you when I get home." So I fled on the first plane. We flew on the way to Darwin and we got well on our way and a storm broke out, a severe storm. So the pilot was told to turn back.

07:00 But he sent a message saying, "We're almost through the storm now, why turn back? Can we have permission to proceed?" They said, "Turn around and we'll find out whether you can proceed." So we turned around and flew back through the bloody storm again and he said, "Permission to proceed." So the bugger turned around and flew back through the storm again. This plane was doing this, it was terrible experience. Anyhow the up side of this was we ran out of fuel. I'm sorry. We had no trouble getting to Darwin. We flew from

07:30 Singapore from Gen Lom – no, not Gen Lom. The name of this island in Borneo. We flew back to Darwin. That was only incidental. It was a great flight back. We stayed in Darwin overnight and they wanted to fly us back to Sydney. We were still in these damn catalinas we'd flown in and they insisted on giving us Mae West [inflatable life jacket]. But we said, "We've flown from here to Singapore without a bloody Mae West over the ocean, now we're going over land, why have we got to wait?"

08:00 So we were held up while we got our Mae West and that's when we flew through the storm and the permission to proceed. So we ran out of fuel and instead of getting to Sydney we had to stop at Brisbane. All the other planes had gone on ahead and they'd all gone to Sydney so we were the last plane to get from Brisbane after we refuelled to get to Sydney. We arrived via this catalina in Rose Bay and we truckered into the fourth

08:30 and there was the general waiting for us to welcome us. I said to the fellas, "Now hang on, we've got to go down here and get welcomed by the general." They said, "Okay." We got halfway down and they just disappeared. They could see their wives and things up on the – and zzzz. So the general was there to welcome us. He said, "Welcome to your troops. I see they're a bit more anxious to get away. I hope you're well and nice to see you back." That was the end of our welcome. And that was our homecoming. My brother I never saw. He was killed two days

09:00 later in Borneo. Fate's an extraordinary thing, isn't it?

What happened to him?

It's somewhat shrouded in mystery, but he either shot himself or he was accidentally shot. He was one of the very first persons to join the army. His number was 256. He went right through all the campaigns. He went through the Greek campaign.

09:30 Went through Crete, went through North Africa, all those. Then he came home, was sent up to the Far East. He went through the war in the Pacific. Got to Borneo at the end of the war and I think he'd had enough. I don't know what happened to him up there. He either shot himself, or he was accidentally shot. I don't know. But I never saw him again. I often wonder what would have happened had I changed plans and waited for him and met him in Borneo and he could have talked to me perhaps and unloaded

10:00 himself. I don't know. But one of the tragedies in life.

Did you get mail at all in respect of the Japanese camps?

I think I got two Red Cross cards. We sent two or three home. I sent several home. I don't think I got a – I don't remember getting a letter at all as a prisoner of war. But whether I got –

10:30 We sent Red Cross cards but I don't remember ever getting mail once I became a prisoner. I did beforehand, plenty of letters beforehand.

So you arrived home and … ?

Well I wanted to get out of the army. I couldn't get out quick enough. That's when I said – perhaps it was a good thing, perhaps it was a bad thing, but my colleagues who came home by boat had a different world. They had a convalescent and they stopped at Moratai.

11:00 Then they came out on the ship. They were three weeks getting home. They were well fed and well rested and well indoctrinated. They were brought back into life. And when you get back this is what's going to happen to you. I never had any of that. So when I got home I couldn't get out quickly enough. They took me to the Concord Hospital Repatriation Hospital. They said, "You got to stay overnight." I said, "I'm not going to stay overnight. I'm going home." They said, "You've got to stay overnight, you've got to have malarial tests."

11:30 I had a malarial test in Darwin. I was perfectly fit. There was nothing wrong with me. “You’ve still got to have a medical check.” I said, “I’m not having a medical check.” So they sent for the major. The major came down and said, “You got to stay.” I said, “Well I’ll see about that.” So I went home. And then I had to go back the next day and get checked. I tried to find out how to get out of the army. I had to go somewhere and had to get checked. Within three weeks I was out of the army, back at the hospital again.

12:00 Which was a stupid mistake. I should have gone and convalesced. I should have gone and got back into life, done it the easy way, but I didn’t. So I was determined to forget the war period. Shut it out of my life, which I did. I got back to the hospital again. I got back in and caught up with four years catching up with changes in medicine. Penicillin and all sorts of things had arrived since then. I got back into hospital again.

12:30 Went back into my pathology. I studied pathology and then this job came up in Newcastle as head pathologist in charge of the blood bank and I took it. As I said to you before, settling back into life was very difficult. I was invited out to parties, but I wouldn’t. My wife was very upset when I wouldn’t go to them, but I didn’t want to go. I couldn’t go. So friends who had been friends before I took a long time to get back into seeing them again, but

13:00 my work was the greatest thing that kept me going – getting back to the work. I was able to forget all my prisoner of war experiences and just get back into medicine again.

You used the word indoctrinated in respect to the blokes who came home … ?

I’m not too sure that’s the right word. Counselling is probably a better word. The fellas on the ships were told what to expect in Australia, that this is the way you go through, this is the process you have to do and you will be doing this and you’ll be doing that and you were given the opportunity to do further work. If you wanted to, you can go

13:30 and study or you can stay in the army till you properly convalesce. They were rehabilitated. I wasn’t told anything like that. When I went to see the doctor being discharged from the army I finally – it didn’t take me long – and he happened to be a fellow out of my year at the university. He said, “You have anything wrong?.” I said, “No no nothing.” He said, “Don’t be bloody silly, course you have something wrong with you.” I said, “Well I don’t want to worry about it.” He said, “What do you mean you don’t want to worry about it? You got to worry about it! These have got to go down. You never know, in life later on you might get sick

14:00 and it’s never been recorded. What did you have?” “I had malaria.” “Did you have beri beri?” “Yes I did.” “Did you have dysentery?” “Yes I did.” “Did you have that…?” “ So yeah. So I put all these things down. He said, “That’s a bit more like it now. We’ve got a record and if anything happens to you in the future with any of these diseases or you’re affected by the diseases, then it’ll mean something.” I said, “Well I’m glad you told me. I wouldn’t have thought of it.” That’s what I meant by being counselled before I went in.

14:30 So yes, the repatriation stamps have stood in good stead.

How did your wife cope when you came home and … ?

I had a daughter four years of age. My wife was waiting for me, ready for me to come back and so was my daughter and she’d been so well managed that when I saw her she raced up to me, jumped into my arms and said, “My daddy!” She was four. So she’d had pictures of me and she’d been

15:00 sitting and she’d been waiting for me to come home. My wife took it very well. I’d been away for four years and my wife had made many other friends during that time and she’d had fellas that she’d met and so on. She wasn’t too sure what sort of life we were going to have when I got back, but within two or three weeks we were back where we started. Very happily for the next …

15:30 15 years. She was an actress and she was doing a lot of acting and it didn’t work out the way we were living together so we split up. She continued, she was a very famous actress.

During those years did your wife understand what you’d been through?

Yes. We talked. But I didn’t talk a lot about it. I talked about the future. I said, “I don’t want to talk about it.” You know what it’s like. I didn’t want to.

16:00 I didn’t want to remember what I was doing. I wanted to forget. I was pretty successful. I don’t have near the memory that my other fellas had.

Do you get even today or back then recurring nightmares?

Never. Never affected me since I came home. I think this whole idea I had

16:30 getting back into life again and cutting the rest out of it was done successfully. I think my rehabilitation, I went back into life again and war was just an incident in the past. My wife often comments about that. She says, “You never seem to worry about it, you don’t talk about it.”

17:00 It’s the bad dream. I didn’t expect to be interviewed like this about it. Bring back all that – I haven’t

even remembered things too well, have I? But I've done my best.

You've done wonderfully.

If you think so.

Did you lose any close friends during that time?

No. I didn't. I lost my brother. But

17:30 in the prisoner of war period, no, I didn't. My best friend was Roy Mills and we came back and he had tuberculosis. He got run down during the war. He was very badly knocked about, and he recuperated and he practised respiratory medicine. Became a specialist in it. He came up to visit me in Newcastle and he realised what a great time we're having and how much we'd settled in and he decided to move up himself. So he moved to Newcastle as the chest physician at Newcastle hospital. We were a great hospital

18:00 of specialists in those days. A wonderful hospital. He came up and joined us. We were great friends ever since. He died 18 months ago or something. He's written a book, his experiences as a doctor. "Doctor's Diary." So no I didn't lose anyone during – my brother. That was the only one I lost during the war.

A lot of the

18:30 **since Vietnam really, post stress traumatic syndrome …**

Yes. There's been a lot of that, hasn't there?

Did you face or any of your friends face that after the war?

There were some members of my unit who never got back to work properly. They became invalids and permanently incapacitated. Mainly because they had had some disease

19:00 and they just couldn't settle back in life again and they didn't work so they became repatriation and then finally became TPIs [totally and permanently incapacitated]. But none of those ever suffered any real psychological problems at all. They all settled back into life with their TPIs. They loved to talk about the war, that's all they ever talked about. Nothing else ever existed in their life excepting the war.

19:30 Our unit was a pretty close knit unit. There are only that many left. We lost so many at Chungkai and we lost so many elsewhere that we only had about 50 or 60, I think, that came back from our unit. They were a pretty close lot. We had our reunions after about the first 7 or 8 years someone decided to have a reunion and from then on they had annual reunions. It was only a couple of years ago that the last 15 or so of us decided it was not much point having reunions any more. There's only a few left.

20:00 **Do you have any feelings or emotions towards the Japanese?**

I've been back to Japan on three occasions. I was president of the World Association of Societies of Pathology. As such we had a congress in Japan and I was the president and I was introduced to the crown prince –

20:30 the present emperor of Japan and I can remember on one occasion being asked something or other and I made the remark that I had been guest of the Japanese before, but I'd been treated much better on this occasion. I don't know whether it got through to the Japanese, but it got through to the other people at the dinner. So have I got a thing against the Japanese? No I haven't.

21:00 The people who are my age now were not at war, they were younger. I've outlived my generation. People, the doctors and pathologists that I deal with are all mostly ten years younger than me. So they were never in the war. They were kids. Had nothing to do with the war. And they've grown up quite independently. They are different people. I've always treated them as if they were just friends. I have nothing against them.

21:30 I'll never forget the Japanese as a nation for what they did. They still never own up to it. They won't own up to what they did. But that railway was just the most terrible thing, what the engineers did – the Japanese nation will always be held responsible for it. And the cruelty that they did in order to finish the railway and nothing was going to stop in their way of doing it, because the Emperor wanted it finished. They didn't care what happened but they finished. And they did. A most remarkable engineering feat. To build

22:00 that railway, what they did in the time they did was absolutely remarkable. The fact that they killed millions of people – or thousands of people – in doing it is beside the point. And that was their object and they achieved it. But as a nation it was a terrible thing they did. But the present Japanese. No, I have Japanese friends I write to and they write to me. I've had them out here and had them in my home and I've been into their homes

22:30 in Japan. Highly intelligent people.

Now I understand you've actually been back a couple of times to the sites of the Burma Railway. Can you tell me why you went back?

Yeah. One young fellow in my unit, he was the one who in Chungkai buried all these people that I told you about. He was the burial party. And he came from that area up in Casino and Kyogle, that area, he came from there.

23:00 And he was one of the universal providers. The senior fellow, Harry, had died. That's the sergeant that I put in charge. He died in the meantime. There were two others from the universal providers and Reggie said to me, "I'd like to go back to Thailand again. I'd like to go to Chungkai. What about coming with us?" I said, "Oh I don't want to go back."

23:30 Six months later he rang me, said, "I've made the whole arrangement. Got a bloke up there who organised it for us. He'll take us round the place. Why don't you come? I'm trying to talk John Llewellyn into coming and if you go, he'll go." So I spoke to my wife about it and we decided we would go. So we went back and we met a fellow called Rod Beattie. I don't know if you've heard of Rod Beattie. Rod Beattie's looking after the cemeteries up there. But he's also taken a tremendous interest in prisoners of war.

24:00 He's been all over the railway line and he's mapped. He's been dedicated to it. He was responsible for most of the cleaning of the railway that's now in Hellfire Pass. He cleaned all that himself. So he took us in his car and he drove us up to the different camp sites that we knew and where we went to and the three of us and our wives and we visited all the camps and we came to the areas where we lost some of our mates and where our camps were and we had some

24:30 little crosses which we erected in there. Had a little ceremony at each of the occasions and particularly at the main Chungkai Camp. So it was a rather very interesting experience for us. Wonderful experience. I took a video camera with me and recorded very amateurly a lot of the parts of the trip. So we did

25:00 go back and it was a great trip. Then a year later I got a phone call from the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] or BBC's representative saying they were doing a video and they wanted a doctor, would I come over? So I didn't want to go. However, I had a talk to my wife about it and she said we ought to go to complete the film. So we did. We went back and we made that film and it was quite a different story this time. Everything was paid for and looked after and

25:30 well accommodated and well fed and cars at our disposal. That was a very enjoyable trip, because they were doing a documentary and wherever they went they took the videos and they brought out what they wanted us to talk about and so on and so forth. That was a great experience. Did you see the video? Yeah. So we, that's how – there's a fellow who now runs

26:00 trips up every year. Twice a year. John Carruthers. He's so anxious for me to go back again with him. I can't see me doing it again. I don't think I'd bother. I've been up twice, that's enough.

You mentioned on the video that whenever you hear I think it was Beethoven's Concerto … ?

Oh yes. That story. I forgot about that. One of the English

26:30 medical officers – I met him on the first part of the railway line somewhere there and it was down in – I can't remember – but he had this gramophone and he had several records one of which was Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – Beethoven's Emperor Concerto, his Fifth – and another one was

27:00 The Silken Ladder by – I've forgotten it now. He had two or three records and a gramophone. And he was moved off to another camp. He said, "I don't want to take this with me. Do you want it?" "Of course I want it. I'd love it." So we kept this in our camp then. We played, I think it must have been in Nieke that we had this because … And we played it and played it and played it. We used to get bamboo and make fine bamboo needles

27:30 so we could get them to play when we ran out of other needles. And Beethoven's Emperor Concerto got played to the death. Whenever I hear Emperor Concerto I'm taken back to those days. I know it backwards. The Silken Ladder – I don't know whatever happened to that record, but we lost that. I didn't seem to play that so much. So that was the story. We moved on and I had to give it away. I left it behind with

28:00 whoever was there. There's a funny sequel to that. Last year the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] Classics FM ran a program on your favourite piece of classical music. A fellow put in the Emperor Concerto and he was asked why and his reason was that on the prisoner of war

28:30 he had a gramophone with the Emperor Concerto record and he played it so much that he'd never forgotten it. I got in touch with him. I rang him up. I said, "That's an extraordinary story. Where'd you get the gramophone?" He said, "I don't remember." I said, "Well you must have got it from somewhere. You must have held on to that gramophone." "No, it was my mate got it." I said, "Where were you when you got it?" "I can't remember."

29:00 I said, "What did you do with it?" "I don't remember. All I remember is we had it." Now I don't know whether this fella ever got the gramophone or whether he was in the same camp as I was when I was playing it or what, I don't know. But he was awarded the third prize by the ABC for his story. So I wrote to the ABC and I said, "That's the most extraordinary story, because

29:30 let me tell you my story." And I told them my story. That ABC weekly they produce or that ABC monthly, that magazine, they put my letter in there and I got the letter of the week and I got a Parker fountain pen given to me for my folly. I still don't know what is the truth of the other fella's story. I've got no idea. But it is extraordinary, isn't it?

30:00 So yes and then in the video they play the Emperor's Concerto all the way through in the background music. And the gramophone they showed on the video was exactly the same sort of gramophone as we had. Where they got it from, I don't know.

One other thing, sulphur in that video … ?

The sulphur story?

30:30 That's my mate, Roy Mills' story really. It was his camp. He had severe outbreak of scabies and the only way you could treat scabies was with the sulphur ointment. That knocks it off very quickly. He spoke to his medical orderly who happened to be the chief mechanic for the Victa mowers. Victor Victorson was his boss. He was their chief mechanic.

31:00 He made the Victa mowers. He was a very bright boy. He's still alive and fit as a fiddle. He's older than me. He must be about 92 or 93 now. Fit man. So Roy said, "Where the hell are we going to get sulphur from?" And he said, " I'll get some, don't worry." So he went out at night and he climbed this bloody telephone post and knocked off those insulators that have sulphur in them and got the sulphur out of there and mixed it up into a paste.

31:30 That was the story. That's how he got his sulphur. Cured scabies. I'd like to think it was in my camp, but it wasn't. It was in Roy's camp.

So you came back to Australia and we last discussed that you were studying to be a surgeon at Changi, what happened then when you returned to Australia?

Back into pathology. I had to catch up with all the things that had happened over the years. The penicillin and all the rest of it. I got very much

32:00 involved in pathology. I wasn't mixing well with people. I was a bit of a recluse and from that point of view I didn't like events. I couldn't see myself in the future. So I enjoyed the pathology. I might have just kept going with the pathology and developed myself in the pathology. I went to London and got a diploma and then came back and at the hospital I worked in the hospital and

32:30 we were at the hospital, a lot of innovative ideas. I got very much closely involved with quality control and I carried out a quality control programme in Australia here. And found that the results from different laboratories varied so much that it was a disgrace. You went to one laboratory you got one result, another laboratory you'd get a different result. The control was terrible. So I went to

33:00 Madrid to an international conference and they had a standards' committee. They'd been trying to get some standards worked out through the different countries and weren't successful. They were about to disband the committee. So I told them the story of the quality control and how important it was and how we should be able to get quality control between the different countries. So I was given the job – the decision was made

33:30 that each of the countries would go back, introduce the quality control program and come back and report the results at the next meeting. I came back and I did another quality control program which was a bit improved. We improved our program too and I sent samples to two laboratories in America and two laboratories in Britain. They were all in the one survey.

34:00 The upshot of that was most of our results of our top laboratories here and the British laboratories coincided. Except the biggest laboratory at the post graduate hospital in London. Glucoses was way out compared to the other ones. The professor wrote to me and said he was so very grateful I had introduced him to this, because he had no idea that his glucoses were out. He was writing a book and in the book he detailed the importance of quality

34:30 control, the importance of standardising and paid tribute to the world for our survey. I went on with the survey and got a reputation in the World Association because of that. As a standards on the standards committee we improved things. I went up the ranks. I finally became vice president and finally president. In that year we had the first international congress of pathology in Australia. It was a great success. One of the big congresses. And our

35:00 guest speaker was the Governor General – the alcoholic – what's his name? He was the one who sacked Whitlam. Anyhow his name will come back to me in a minute. He was the one that Whitlam said

35:30 abused him because he was Whitlam's friend. He put him in as Governor General. He let him down at the last moment. What's his name? Doesn't matter. So that's all part of the story.

That's fantastic. Just a few sum up questions. How did war change you? What were you like as a man before you left, well when you returned, compared to when you left? How did war …?

36:00 I think before I went to the war I was a bit insular. Bloody dagoes and bloody Greeks and bloody Poms. That sort of attitude. The Australian attitude in those days. That's the way we grew up as kids. We were

very important people, we Australians and the rest were just Froggies or whatever they were. That completely changed my attitude in that regard. There's no more. We are wonderful people but …

36:30 I became much more a universal person rather than an insular person as I was before. I think the other thing that happened to me was that I realised the tremendous value of friendship. I had an uncle who was chief commissioner for the meat industry in the Homebush Abattoirs. During the school holidays he gave me a job when I got old enough

37:00 working in the abattoirs. I met the roughest toughest people in the world you could meet there. My first job was driving pigs up to have their throats cut amongst the slaughtermen. You can imagine the sort of people there. They were foul mouthed, but despite all that I found them as pretty genuine good friends. They were good people and I got to know my in second year others and I realised that it doesn't matter who you are or what you are you can be just as decent a person as anybody else.

37:30 And that carried through. That was a great thing for me in the army because I treated everybody as equals in the army. I realised this. That's how I found out so many of these good people and I was able to promote them because I able to discern the good from the not so good because of my experience, I think. My work at the abattoirs was one of the great turning points in that view. So as far as the war was concerned I think that consolidated it.

38:00 I grew up to be more of a man than a boy. I think I was still wet behind the ears as a young doctor when I went to the war, but I came back much more mature. And I valued friendship and I valued men and I valued the quality that's in all of us.

Tape 10

00:44 **Can I ask you, Peter, what would you say to future generations about war?**

I think wars are stupid. You've only got to look at what's happening in Iraq to see how

01:00 stupid a war is. It doesn't answer any problems. You've only got to look what's happened in Israel and Palestine for the last 20 years. No war has ever solved the problem. Only got to see what they're doing in the north of Ireland. You can't fight each other. There's only one way to answer any problem and that's by sitting down and talking it out. But so long as we have power people who want to control the forces –whether it's by religion or by any other particular means we're going to have wars.

01:30 **You mention that in the exercise book that you kept while you were a prisoner of war you wrote up three men for recommendations. You mentioned one. Who were the other two?**

There was a fella called Ray Connelly. He died last year before – person was Harry Williams that I told you about – who was the third one?

02:00 I think it was Reggie Jarman. He's still alive. I wrote these recommendations because these fellows – a recommendation goes to anyone who does something way beyond his duty. And these fellas did. They put their lives on the line. They worked long hours. They slaved to look after the sick. They had no problem going to the – oh that was the other one. It wasn't Reggie Jarman, it was

02:30 Brent who ran the cholera wards in Chungkai. He volunteered and he looked after all these cholera patients – he and his mates. It was such an unselfish thing to do. He put his body on the line. And he looked after these blokes like a woman would look after them. So he really deserved his. Ray Connelly,

03:00 I had a soft spot for Ray Connelly. We went to Bathurst camp in the early days when I first came in and I went into the pub to meet one of my colleagues in there and I went through the public bar to get to the saloon bar where the officers were and a bloody great big fella came across. One of my unit – transport unit –

03:30 unit – big transport driver. "What the bloody hell are you doing in here? You shouldn't. This is for the privates, not for bloody officers, get out of here and get into your own place." Ray Connelly was not quite as big as him. But he came across and he picked him up and he held him against the wall about two feet from the ground. "You speak to my officer like that, I'll break your bloody neck." And dumped him on the ground. That was Ray Connelly.

04:00 Ray Connelly taught me how to protect myself if anyone attacked me. He had a number of … One was if you're grabbed by the throat if you bring this arm down and you bring your knee up into his crotch. He taught me a number of these things. His father was a union representative on the wharfies [wharf workers]. He was brought up in the wharfies himself. He was a tough egg. Very intelligent fellow, but he'd had no schooling at all. And during the war he

04:30 did what Harry Williams did in other camps – he went out there and he looked after the sick and he ran the camps and he was just that sort of fellow who took control. So he was also with me at the Great World and he was the fellow who stole a lot of the other medical supplies and got them back to the

other camp. So he was an outstanding – so I recommended him. I can tell you another

05:00 story about Ray Connelly. What was it? When he came back from the war he'd bee pretty sick during the war period and he became a TPI – totally and permanently incapacitated. He wasn't really totally and permanently incapacitated at all. He bought an old bus and he turned it into a caravan. He took his family over to Perth and back. He

05:30 did a fair bit of plumbing on the sideline. I said, "You're a bit of a bugger. You're not bloody permanently incapacitated." He said, "I am as far as the army's concerned. I give them my four years over there and that's something that I'll never forget. They owe me something. That's his attitude." I said, "You're a bugger. You're a villain. You shouldn't be doing this." "They owe me and I'm going to let them look after me for the rest of my life."

06:00 He did get sick. He got quite ill with things that he'd picked up in the prisoner of war camp and he never got over an attack of beri beri early on, and he never really recovered from that. So he wasn't a well man, but he wasn't a TPI. So he died a couple of years ago. He became an alcoholic when he got back. Difficult to settle back into life again. Drank a lot.

06:30 But he was a good Catholic and he went to a few monasteries and had his sessions there with them and he'd recover and then he'd be right for another year or two then he'd relapse again. But I have tremendous regard for him. When he came back from the war they'd shaved him a bit because he wasn't much of a student. So he went to the Newcastle University

07:00 as a mature age student. They get in under some I forget what. He did first year at the university in arts and he specialised in history and he topped the year in history. He never even got through the intermediate examination and they wanted him to stay on and do an honours degree. He said, "No way. I've had a year of you stupid bastards. I couldn't put up with another year." But that's how bright he was. He topped the year.

07:30 With no other previous education. He put together several books – very well done indeed about the war. One of them – he hated the British because when they came back from the war Wayville's 2IC [Second in Command] wrote up – blamed the Australians for the way the war finished because the Australians weren't there and they got out and they wouldn't fight which is all bloody nonsense of course because the Australians – what was left of them –

08:00 were at the very forefront of the battle of Singapore Island. So he wrote this book. He wrote a book called – gave it a word in fact which renounced everything this fella had said. He called the book, Cruel Britannia, Britannia Waives the Rules. I've got a copy in my desk there somewhere. Very clever. So he was

08:30 a brave boy. That's one of the things that the war brought out – the experience with these sorts of fellas. You met different sorts of fellas. Uneducated and yet only uneducated because they never had the opportunity. Had they been good students and had the opportunity as kids they probably would have been brilliant students and finished up as a bloody barrister. He would have been a great

09:00 barrister. Are we still on air?

Yes. One final question. Do you have any more comments in respect of the archives? Anything more you want to say?

What is there left to say? I think the war had been a wonderful experience for many young Australian boys. It's an

09:30 experience that no-one would want to go through. But anyone having gone through the experience would never have regretted a moment of it. Being put together under such terrible circumstances as they were and seeing man's faith to his other man and man's protective of his fellow man and this mateship was something they could never ever forget. People lay down their lives for their mates and

10:00 from that point of view, I suppose war is a good thing. But I hope there's never any more. And if there ever was I'm quite sure they'd have the same experience.

Peter, thanks for your time.

Thank you. I'm glad to survive. I'm glad to be here to talk to you about it and I consider myself one of the really lucky ones to be where I am today. Thanks for interviewing me.

So Peter, what's the story about the mug?

10:30 I should have told you this story earlier on because it involved the railway line. When we left Changi to go to this land of milk and honey, we took all our gear with us. When we got to Bam Pong we realised it was impossible. I had a steel trunk full of all sorts of gear. I just left it. I picked out a few things to carry that I felt I could carry. And back in Changi on Empire Day,

11:00 the 24th of May I had a pewter mug which I h ad brought before I became a prisoner of war. One of the fellas said, "I'd like to engrave it for you." So he engraved this pewter mug with the 24th of May, Empire Day, 1942, and he had some nice engravings on it of fern trees. It was a lovely mug. I carried it

with me. And when I got up there to Bam Pong I had to go on the march I had a lovely look at the mug and said, “There’s no way I’m going to carry that up. I’ve got enough that I have to carry.”

11:30 So I left it behind. Up in the Chungkai Camp a fella died of cholera and one of the chaps who was burying the patients said, “Look what I found amongst this fella’s gear. This is your mug.” This fella had picked it up, found it down there and he carried it all the way up to Chungkai. He died of cholera. He was an Englishman. My mug was there. I brought the mug back.

12:00 I still have it and I’ve got the mug here. And I wanted to show you the picture of the mug. It’s here somewhere.