Australians at War Film Archive

William Bellairs (Bill) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 2nd February 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1324

Tape 1

00:35 **So take me through where you were born and where you grew up, and…?**

Well I was born in Melbourne. Do you want the year? Does that matter? 1917, it's a long while ago. And I went to school in Melbourne, I went to school at Berwick in Melbourne.

01:00 I went to school in Brighton in Melbourne, and I came out and worked at St Kilda before the war. I used to sail quite a bit with St Kilda 14-foot Sailing Club, and thoroughly enjoyed it. So that was one of the attractions of up here, being so close to the yacht club. And I enjoyed my boating continually for many years up here. But,

01:30 three or four years ago, I had a minor stroke, and it left me sort of unbalanced. And I don't know if you saw, but in the bathroom there, I have a treadmill that I'm supposed to get on every day and do about 20 minutes of hard yakka on the treadmill. And it's supposed to keep these legs active. Then,

02:00 I was still sailing in 1939 when war broke out, and of course, it really didn't matter much. So, I thought… I was just a little over 21, I wasn't worrying. And the following year, late the following year, I got pneumonia. And must have been pretty serious – I seem to recall that

02:30 they gave me the last rites. And it left my lungs in a scarred, and in a fragile state, so that when I applied for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] later on that year, I was rejected. And I tried the navy, and the same thing happened. And then, years afterwards,

03:00 1949, they called up my birth date, and consequently I was in the 3rd Military District Camp at Balcombe in Victoria, and I was in camp down at Balcombe. And I was expecting at the time to be called up for the navy. So, bringing back memories now.

03:30 Because I had a rather loud voice, I was offered corporal stripes in the 14th Battalion, which I refused, because as I said I expected an immediate call-up for the navy, which never occurred. And when the 39th called for volunteers for garrison duty at Moresby,

04:00 I was a signaller and I thought, "Well, at least that'll be some chance to get away and do something," and so I volunteered for the 39th Battalion. We went from Darley to the Darley Camp as the 39th when the whole battalion was put together up there under Colonel Conran, who was a First World War

04:30 Officer. And he was the CO [Commanding Officer] there, and I was in the signal platoon there, Number 1 Platoon, Headquarter Company, 39th Battalion. And, I was a, practically immediately given two stripes. I had a fair sort of education, actually. I had matriculated at 15 from the Brighton Technical School.

05:00 And I must have appeared as though I was to be a worthy NCO [Non Commissioned Officer], and I held that job for… until I got three stripes later. We trained, not so much in actual warfare tactics, but we were taken to the rifle range and given five shots,

05:30 at the rifle range. Then we went on various camps around Colac way, training camps for other battalions also. They had a war down there, the red versus the blue, I think it was, the red versus the blue. And I was declared lost in action there, because I was

06:00 supposed to have been spotted by the opposing tank regiment. Now how they saw me, I don't know, but I saw them – I was behind a tree up on top of a hill – and I rode back to battalion headquarters, I had a motorbike. I rode back to battalion headquarters and informed them that the enemy tanks were occupying a certain position. And one of the referees said, "Oh, you're dead,

06:30 you can't." Oh, these things happen. So we, then we were put on a train from Bacchus Marsh. We were given leave, home leave, I think it was, a week beforehand. And we joined the Aquitania on Boxing Day,

07:00 1941. And we didn't know there were a couple of Dutch corvettes accompanying us. There was the Aquitania who had to slow down – she had far too much speed for the other ships, evidently. But we had quite an enjoyable journey. I'd been taught boxing as a kid, and I entered the

07:30 ship's boxing competition, and unfortunately for me, the fellow I met swung a punch, and I didn't entirely duck, and hit me on the back of the head and knocked me out. So, I got beaten in the final for the ship's boxing championship. We arrived at Moresby, the ship was too big to get to the wharf

08:00 so they made us disembark in the harbour, into lighters, and we crawled down the ship's side on landing nets, with our full army kit on, rifle, and the full box and dice. And we then, when we got ashore, we were formed up again

08:30 as a battalion, and marched seven miles out to the Jackson Strip. And unfortunately, what they forgot was that everything that we required was at the bottom of the hull, because it had been loaded first. The food, the tents, the cooking equipment, mosquito nets. And consequently for the first five days of our sojourn

09:00 in New Guinea, we had numerous fellows going down with malaria. Because malaria… Port Moresby is built on the swamp, as you probably know. And it was five days before we managed to get a decent hot food, managed to get tents. And it's a pretty rotten climate there, it rained every afternoon.

09:30 Started about two o'clock and rained until about ten. And consequently, we were trying to make sleeping accommodation on the ground under our oil flickers. We ended up getting the tents and everything else, and I was detailed to go out with B Company, with two others sigs [signallers],

10:00 and we set up a sig [signal]at the, in the valley which ran from just before Bootless Bay, back to the Seven Mile Strip, a valley which was used all the time by the Japanese as a guide-in, either to a bombing mission or a strafing mission for the Zero fighters. And I think we had about 20

10:30 something, 20 or 30… I've got the record there, 20 or 30 bombing raids, and numerous strafing attempts. Not that there was anything to strafe, because we had no planes, we had no… anti-aircraft were not permitted to fire upon them, because of the fact that they would give away their positions, as the orders were. And consequently

11:00 the Japanese had open go. Then, we were told over the telephone that to expect some Kittyhawks, some RAF [Royal Air Force] Kittyhawks, in tomorrow. And then they didn't arrive tomorrow, they become the 'Tomorrow Hawks'. When they didn't arrive

11:30 that week, they became the 'Never Hawks'. And then, out of the blue without any warning whatsoever, three planes came in and we had no idea who they were, because they had the United States roundel, not the RAF roundel. No one had ever seen a United States plane there, and so our boys gave them, with their rifles and their LMGs [Light Machine Gun], a

12:00 bit of a welcome, which didn't endear us very much to them, I can assure you of that. But it was not our fault really, because no one was informed, and then the order come through, "Stop firing, stop firing, they're ours, they're ours." And that was the advent of 75 Squadron into Moresby. The three of them landed, one of them never took off again.

12:30 He had that many bullet holes in him. But the two that did take off went up that afternoon and we were always visited that afternoon by, I think it was… we christened it Betsy, it was a Mitsubishi flying boat that used to fly over and take snaps of the, what damage the bombers had left on the Seven Mile Strip. And lo and behold, it spun down to earth,

13:00 because the two RAF blokes in their Kittyhawks were up there waiting for it. And whether or not it managed to get a message away to Rabaul, which was the Japanese headquarters, or not, we don't know. But all of a sudden the bombing became heavier, it became two a day then. Two bombing raids a day, one in the afternoon, and one at night.

13:30 And I can remember old Sam Templeton, rest his soul, standing on the edge of our slit trench, and I heard this whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. And I said, "What's that, Sir?" He said, "That's the bombs." I said "Oh," and the next minute, boom, boom, boom, boom, about a quarter of a mile away.

14:00 I made pretty hurriedly into that slit trench. Old Sam stood there, totally unfazed, and that's, I think, how he was all of his life. Then, we got news that the Japanese in July, we got that the

14:30 Japanese convoy had been met in the Coral Sea on the other side of Papua New Guinea, and a war had taken place. We heard intermittent reports, but reading about it, it appears that neither side won, both sides were damaged and both sides broke off the engagement practically at the same

15:00 time. They repaired the Americans back to Guadalcanal and the Japanese back to Rabaul. And the story that was circulated was that they were the troops who were going to have a seaborne landing at Moresby. Whether that was true or not, we never knew. But then the Japanese landed at Buna

15:30 Gona, on the other side, and the Japanese… the 39th Battalion were detailed to go and defend Kokoda,

the Kokoda airdrome, because it was the only airfield between Moresby and the other side, Popondetta, or Buna. And so consequently we were loaded up with

16:00 full equipment, rifles, four hand grenades in pouches, two bandoliers of 303 ammunition per man, and we took the trail. And it was never a trail, it was a track, it was only General MacArthur who called it, "Oh we don't have a track, that's a trail." And so it became the

16:30 Kokoda Trail, and even the Australian War Memorial, I believe, has it recorded as the Kokoda Trail, but it never was a trail, it was only the Kokoda Track. And we made Kokoda in five and a half days, which was pretty meritorious, because every night we were so exhausted that we just lay on the ground and fell asleep in these native huts at the

17:00 different villages along the way, where there was, there would be a hot meal waiting for us. But previous to that, something which I just recall, it was fairly common knowledge that Major General Morris, who was the GOC [General Officer Commanding] at Moresby Force, had advised [General Thomas] Blamey and Land Headquarters that it would be impossible to reinforce troops on that

17:30 track. But we always thought that we might have been expendable. And so one battalion was sent, the word was there were 400 Japanese. The truth was there was over forty thousand Japanese, there was an entire army. And consequently,

18:00 the various stories that we were told, they were only, not… all most of them were under five foot, they were short sighted, they wore glasses, they couldn't see more than ten yards in front of them, and everything else. And although I was not an infantryman, I heard later that the boys in one of the platoons who were the first to encounter them, as they came up the track from Buna, just outside of Ivy,

18:30 they said five foot, they were over six foot and broad shouldered than most of the Australians, because they came from a particular island in Japan, who were big men. And they also were interlaced, possibly, with a lot of Koreans. But they brought their own artillery, they brought their own sub-machine guns and they had horses,

19:00 or donkeys. And they'd also got a lot of native carriers, which was the only thing we were, we relied upon, because, if the truth is known, the two companies that were supposed to reinforce B Company at Kokoda, only one platoon arrived of C Company, because

19:30 the other pilot was afraid to land there. He said there could be Zeros about. And I'm not being derogatory, but it was an American. And consequently, there was one company of, one platoon of C Company with B Company, and they tried to delay and it was only a delaying

20:00 action. We stopped them for a day, and then we'd retreat. And so it went on, back to Deniki. And Deniki was where one of the big mistakes were made. We had about four days' spell from fighting when

20:30 Colonel Owen, who had just taken over the battalion… he was originally a Second 22nd man who'd escaped from Rabaul. He was killed, shot through the head, and Colonel Cameron took over as Commander of the 39th. And the rest of the battalion had joined B

21:00 Company then. And he said, "Oh," he said, "B Company, they can't fight." So he dispatched A Company along one track, the Kokoda, C Company around a different track. D Company around a third track, instead of having them in force, and

21:30 D Company were ambushed by the Japanese and nearly wiped out. Their CO was killed, the 2IC [Second In Command] was killed, and about 15 other of the men were killed. And we were, me and my two sigs, endeavouring to lay a line… we had a spool of gunfire wire, we were endeavouring to lay a line between

22:00 Deniki, where we had managed to bring the line up as far as, and, and Kokoda, and it was just a case of connecting these two lines to get Kokoda. Any ability to talk, or to tell the people what was going on… was a strange set up really, because we

22:30 only had one single line and it was earth return, and consequently we had to have sig stationed at every village back along the way. And the message was then relayed from station to station to station, all the way back to Moresby. So that whether the whole thing was, by the time it reached Moresby, the same as it had been relayed at

23:00 the forward station, God knows, because it could not possibly have been. That, however, went on until… A Company was the only one to reach Moresby, reach Kokoda, rather. And there were no Japanese there. And they were there for

23:30 a couple of days, that was in the lull, and then the Japanese returned. And it was only one company. And consequently they didn't last too long. You'd probably get more details from that out of Sergeant Bill Guest, who lives up in Brisbane. And he was one of the sergeants in A Company and

24:00 could tell you. But we were, me and my two sigs, laying these two lines through to Kokoda, when we got to the junction track, where we met a few of the D Company coming back. And the first words they said were, "The Japs are right behind us." So it was a case of bring out the pliers, cut the wire, and back.

24:30 And, so, when we got back to Deniki and the D Company blokes reported back in, Colonel Cameron said, “Well, we can expect them here at any time.” But they didn’t, they just reinforced Kokoda, and so we had a lull in the fighting.

25:00 I’ll never, never forget we were at a core signal station about 100 yards back from the Deniki village. And the cipher clerk was there, and he used to get the report from battalion headquarters of the sit. rep. [situation report] report every night, which he transferred. It was

25:30 quite hard to reach Moresby at times, because of the mountains. But we could get to Townsville. And radio’s that way, is a funny thing, you can… it’ll skip over various parts and consequently, it was easier to Morse to Townsville than it was to talk to Moresby. And that, the situation report was relayed every day.

26:00 It was done in cipher, which was one thing the Japanese never cracked, whereas the Japanese cipher had been broken some time actually. So that they were able to know just exactly what was going on.

26:30 But we could see them from Deniki, and one of their favourite things was attacking at night. I don’t know how they could see us, because most of the time we couldn’t see them until we heard the rifle fire, but it was rather frightening because they had mounted guns,

27:00 which they brought up and it was peculiar because actually, you could see the shell in the air. And you’d be going like this, watching it. But fortunately,

27:30 touch wood, none of them dropped near us. It did, a few of the chaps were unfortunate, in that one landed in the slit trench where a couple of the fellows were. And, it gets pretty…

28:00 just starting to think how, I’m talking and it brings back a lot of memories that you try to shut out. So could we cut that off for just a while.

Well what we might do is, we will come back and talk a lot more about Kokoda and the time in New Guinea. What I might do now, did you want to stop for a little while?

Please.

Yeah sure.

28:30 **We’ll go back a bit at this point, and we’ll start, sort of, right back at the beginning, and talk a bit more about your childhood, and then we’ll come all the way back and talk in a lot more about Kokoda because there’s so many more questions that I’d like to ask. But first of all, I’ll get you to tell me a bit about your father?**

Well, my father was a master butcher by trade, but a bookmaker by profession. And he and my

29:00 mother were married in 1915, or 16. And there’s always been a little bit of a black sheep around about my father. He got as far as Fremantle, we believe, during his First World War, and there he developed appendicitis and was taken off the ship, and had an

29:30 appendectomy. And I’ve got reason to believe that he remarried there, but perhaps I’m casting baits around, because there is another Bellairs family in Western Australia. And he was a man of many, many women.

30:00 He not only had four or five wives. My mother was the first, and she was the only one, to my knowledge, to bear him children. I, there was, I have one brother who was in the AIF, and I have

30:30 two sons. Joy and I, we’ve been married for 57 years. And he has two daughters and a son, my brother, so that we have laid the foundations for carrying on the Bellairs name. Now. Going back to my school

31:00 days.

Well, about your father. How did he manage to have four or five wives?

Well, my mother and he were divorced. She divorced him about 1929, 1929, yeah. And I went to live with her, and my brother went to live with him. She had found him playing around with other women,

31:30 and consequently, they were divorced. Then he married a, was it Margaret, his second wife, they lived in Macedon, at the bottom of the mount.

32:00 Then he married Wally, they lived in Boronia… no, in Bayswater in Victoria. And then he married Sherry. His wives all divorced him. I think he was a little bit of a paramour. And he died of lung cancer at the age of 64. He used to

32:30 have his empty, a packet of cigarettes into his side pocket, and light one from the other. And said that he couldn’t have lung cancer, cause he never did a drawback. But that was how he died, when he was 64 in 19… it’d be about 1963 or 1964. Joy and I were aboard the Flavia travelling from –

33:00 I think it was the Flavia – travelling from Brisbane back to Melbourne, when I got news, a cable aboard the ship, that he had passed away. So we got off the ship in Sydney and flew back to Melbourne. But he led

33:30 quite a glamourous life. He was a bookmaker, had been since about 1922, and was evidently, from all reports, a very good bookmaker.

What was your relationship like with him, when you were young?

Not very good.

Why was that?

Not very good. Well in my usual style, as a young fellow of 13 or 14,

34:00 we used to get up to all sorts of pranks. And he told me never let me be seen with Ernie Evans. Ernie Evans was a dirt track rider in those days, and he had this – the first one in Australia, I think it was – a little Bugatti motor car, that he used to cruise up and down New Street, Brighton, there.

34:30 And it was always a thrill to be in the car with him, because we'd be driving at quite a fantastic speed of 60 or 70 miles an hour, which, of course, was not the sort of thing one did in those days. And my father spotted me with him in the car one day, and kicked me out of the house. And of course, my mother came with me. And

35:00 we stayed – I can recall this vividly – we stayed that night at the Victoria Coffee Palace in Melbourne. And she wasn't going back to him, because she had the suspicions of his philandering. And that'd be about 29, early in 29, and she wouldn't go back to him, until I came back too.

35:30 **What sort of a man was he, was he a charismatic man, a charming man?**

Oh he evidently had the gift of the gab with women. But…

Is it something you recall about him?

The only thing I can recall is having to rub his back all the time. He would stay in bed with a whole block of Cadbury's

36:00 Dairy Milk Chocolate. And to get one piece of that chocolate, I'd be called upon to rub his back for an hour. But my memory doesn't recall too many details of the early childhood. We were affluent one day and we were stony broke the next.

Well tell me a bit about the bookmaking trade, that

36:30 **he was involved in?**

Well, that was, it was a funny thing, but in those days Victoria had somewhere around about 188 bookmakers, 185 bookmakers. Well I finished up after the war as a bookmaker myself, because of the grounding I had with him. I used to work for him, and get the princely sum of ten shillings a meeting.

37:00 And that ten shillings helped my mother and I stay alive, until unfortunately, she was on alimony of two pounds a week. And he gave it to me one day, at the races, before the first race, and I put it on this really good thing, which got beat.

37:30 And consequently, I nearly lost the companionship of my mother at the time, because she was most upset. All we had to live on that week was the ten shillings I'd bought home.

At the time when your parents split up, what was, I guess, the stigma attached to divorce at that time?

38:00 Oh, it was rather peculiar, like the man was… no matter what he said, that was gospel. The wife could make all the accusations about the place, but they couldn't be believed. But he was, and other bookmakers in the game have told me, that he was a top class bookmaker.

38:30 But he loved to spend money. He made fortunes, and he spent fortunes. But that was just his way of life.

How did people, I guess, that you knew through school, and things like this, react when your parents got divorced?

I don't think it meant much difference at school. I was going to Brighton Tech [Technical School],

39:00 when the divorce came through, and it was made absolute about '31 or '32. And I was at school then. He used to take me out to caddy for him at golf, I used to have to carry his golf clubs. And he played at the old Sandridge Golf Course at Port Melbourne, which later became Royal Melbourne.

39:30 But of course, the course moved to Cheltenham and he fell on parlous times, and consequently he no longer played golf at Royal Melbourne. In all, we never had any fights really. We just agreed to tolerate each other.

40:00 But, insofar as the fact that I when I was working as a trotting bookmaker, he decided that he'd have, as was sent in, five bob in the pound, a quarter interest in my business and I'd have a quarter interest in his business. But the funny part was, I was forever giving him money and

40:30 he was never giving me money.

We'll just pause there for a second, because we're going to reach the end of this tape, because we were a little bit

40:38 **- tape ends.**

Tape 2

00:42 **Well tell me a bit more about the bookmaking trade, I guess, as you experienced it in Melbourne, as a child?**

Well, it's up and down, like you've got money one day and nothing the next. And my wife can tell you,

01:00 I went broke three times. Absolutely broke. I put whatever money I had into it, my deferred pay, and everything else went, I took out – re-took out – a licence in 1946, after I got out of the army. And I worked at, I worked on the flat at Moonee Valley, and I worked on the flat

01:30 at Flemington, and I never got in. Oh yes, I did, I worked on the flat at Caulfield. And I used to make a little, lose a lot, make a little, lose a lot. Expenses for a small bookmaker were absolutely enormous, like it was up to, oh, 27, 30 percent

02:00 of your total take on the day, you see. Because the governments have introduced a turnover tax, means that every penny you hold, two and a half percent of it went to the government. So no matter whether you lost or won, every penny that you held, and imagine,

02:30 like, in my final years as a bookmaker, I'd be holding sixty or eighty thousand dollars at a meeting. Sometimes more, and I'd have to pay two and a half percent of that, even if I'd lost five or six thousand.

Can you describe exactly the job as a bookmaker, the way your father was doing it in the sort of '20s and '30s.

03:00 Well, there wasn't any turnover tax. There was sort of, limited opposition, sort of each ring was limited to a certain number of bookmakers. And of course, corruption was rife then. To get a job as a bookmakers'

03:30 supervisor was absolutely enormous, because it meant that, an extra few thousand that you'd get in your pocket, and it would all be cash. Because unless you did that, you had no chance of getting a shift into the flat, from the flat into the guineas or the hill, from the hill into the paddock, and each of those

04:00 would cost you. They had their own figures. It was never a donation to them, it was a donation to their favourite charity. And consequently that was the reason why I left racing. The application came in, I was still on the flat after five year, six years at Flemington. And I had seen other bookmakers

04:30 just spend a week or two weeks there, and move on, up to the hill. And I kept on applying for the move, and saying, "Oh no," he kept on saying, "No, no." There was no vacancy, there was no vacancy. So then the truth came out, that if I made a thousand donation to a certain hospital, the path would be smooth.

05:00 And that is what was happening. Anyway, when the reapplication came for my licence there, I just went in and I told the supervisor, I said, "How's my application for a move going?" "Oh no, there's no vacancy". I said, "There was no vacancy but five have already been moved this year, and you told me last year there were no vacancies." "Oh well, they were holding a lot of money and they were too big." I said, "They

05:30 weren't holding more than I was." So I said, "As far as my application goes, I won't be working at Flemington this year." And I can remember his face, he said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to the trots where I don't have to pay to get a move." just like that. And he clamped his teeth on his cigar, stomped on his heel, and went straight back into his office.

06:00 We never spoke another word.

Do you remember the first time that you went to the races as a child?

Oh goodness gracious. I don't remember the first time, I have no recollection. It would probably be when I was about ten, ten or eleven. On the ground, I was taught by my father to run prices.

What does that mean?

Well to

06:30 watch other bookmakers and see horses being shortened around the ring, which means there was money for them. And go straight back to him and tell him. And he would immediately shorten it, and he'd be able to lay it at the shorter price, rather than lay it at the price that he had up. And…

How does a horse become shortened, in terms of prices?

By the weight of money.

07:00 There was what was called a tick-tackers. Have you ever heard of tick-tackers? Well, they used to go inside, into the paddock and watch the market there, and have someone stationed on the hill, or the guineas, or on the flat, and tick-tack to them

07:30 that such-and-such was, like, shortened. And see, this was in the days of fellows like Eric Connolly, who were big punters, and they would think nothing of having ten thousand on a horse. And they would be shortening the odds dramatically in the paddock, and the

08:00 tick-tacker would be relaying that to the other portions of the betting ring, and they would then be backing it at the long price up there, and being able to offer it at a margin under to the bookmakers down in the paddock. It's what's called betting back, to try and level your

08:30 book up someway. And so I had to learn the tick-tack trade. So I'd be stationed out on the flat, and the man laying prices to me, he'd be stationed, he'd have to go to a certain position inside, where I could pick him up through field glasses. And then he would be

09:00 saying all this business, you know. I can remember this was ten, that was twenty, and he'd be telling me these prices and he'd say number so-and-so, number seven, put all the tick-tack, there were signs to put so much on it, at

09:30 such-and-such a price. So I'd have to scurry off and put it on this horse outside, at say five or six to one, and come back and tell him with the same signs, sort of twenty on it at such-and-such a price, on number so-and-so at such-and-such a price. He'd go back to my father and he'd say, "You've got a hundred and twenty to twenty back."

10:00 Ah, that's good you see, because he could then lay it at four to one, or three to one. Ok, so that went on for a few years.

Is this, is it like legal?

No, it was totally illegal. And they tried definitely to wipe it out, because the owners were objecting. The owners were objecting to their odds being knocked off by the tick-tackers.

10:30 **So how would you, would there be people looking out for you doing this? How would you hide from?**

Well you had to hide, otherwise the racecourse detective would escort you off the course, yes.

Did the fact that you were a child, well a fairly young boy help, in not being suspicious?

I think so, I think to some extent, and

11:00 being able to dodge through a crowd helped also.

Well describe the atmosphere at these races, what sort of a place were they?

The races were a lot of noise, great deal of shouting the odds by bookmakers, recording the bets, a lot of the

11:30 atmosphere of racing is gone with the advent that it… it's a strange thing how governments, they're greedy for money. Like the Tasmanian government started it off, when they closed down the betting shops at Launceston. Launceston used to have shops where they'd have four or five registered bookmakers there,

12:00 and they'd be betting on Melbourne, Sydney and the Hobart races, and that. And the government thought now, all of that money is not going through the totalizator, so they made those betting shops illegal. And at that time, you never got paid at the totalizator, until

12:30 the following day. If you backed a winner, you had to wait until the following day to receive the dividend. And they changed the law, that the dividend would be payable after the race. So the TABs [Totalizator Agency Board] became betting shops. And instead of the bookie using his money, the government was taking their 29 cents out of every dollar

13:00 that was invested, which they're still doing. And in case you don't know, I think the state governments either last year or the year before, took 80 billion out of gambling. And they still cry poor-mouth. So.

You mentioned that you were talking about the noises of the race tracks, you said that the

bookmakers would be calling

13:30 **out the odds. Is there a special way that they do this, how does it, do you remember how it sounds?**

Yes, it was… they'd go, "Six-to-four the field, six-to-four, six-to-four the field, six-to-four." And if their voice was loud enough, it would carry all over the ring. And people wanting to back that horse, they'd look close because they hadn't heard six-to-four,

14:00 it'd been even money and five-to-four. And for that quarter of a point, they'd rush to that bookmaker and put their money on. I know I played some tricks myself at the end of racing… There was one bookmaker who came into the trotting game, worked on the rails at Moonee Valley, can I mention his name?

14:30 **Yes, if, if you feel it's appropriate, and…**

Well, anyway, I won't. But, he owned a restaurant in Shepparton, and to anybody who knows Shepparton, would know him. But he'd have a fellow there in front of me, and I used to make my own prices out. As a matter of fact, I used to supply The Sporting Globe

15:00 with prices for the trots meeting. And I've had other bookmakers say to me, "Why have you got such-and-such at so short?" and I'd say, "Because that's what price he'll be." "But you don't want to tell the public that, you want to tell the public it'll be five-to-one, or six-to-one instead of even money." I'd say, "Now what good is that going to do?" "Oh well, they'll all

15:30 go to the trots to get the five or six-to-one." I said, "Do you think they're all idiots?" So I used to, I'd put up those prices as I thought it should be. And consequently, I would put up, if I thought a horse should be six-to-four in a race, I'd put it up six-to-four. Nicky would have his man there, he'd run straight back, Nicky would

16:00 put up two-to-one. And he'd call out, "Two-to-one so-and-so." So I'd say, "Five-to-two so-and-so." He'd go three-to-one, I'd go seven-to-two. He'd go four-to-one. I'd send my man down to have four, two thousand to five hundred each way. Cause I never got it on, I'd always get the odds to about twenty dollars on. But I stopped him in the finish, he just refused to go over me.

16:30 And I'd immediately turn it back to six-to-four, which was its proper price.

And when, when you did that call before, when you said what they sounded like, you put your hand here like this. Why, why did they?

They always did that. There was some real comedians. There was one bookmaker who always had his crayon. See, we used to use crayons or pencil in, to write the tickets. And

17:00 he'd always have the crayon, he'd be saying, "Six-to, six-to." And he'd end up with crayon all over one side of his face. And of course, bookmakers are superstitious. If it was a bad result, he'd go from a black crayon to a red crayon. And they, the next race you'd have the red crayon there, going up and down his face.

What other superstitions existed in the bookmaking?

Oh, the, oh you'd always,

17:30 they'd always change a bagman in front, if it was a really bad result. You'd have, you'd make the payout bagman come around the front, and all this sort of thing. And you'd never have a haircut on a Friday because that was bad luck, and oh, never cut your nails on

18:00 a Friday, that was bad luck. Oh, there was numerable superstitions there. It was entertaining and educational.

And as a child, what sort of things, I guess, I suppose even lessons in life did you learn, from a life around the tracks?

To stand on your own two feet, and really, that's what it taught

18:30 me, in later life. To stand. If anything happened, don't blame others for it. If it affects you personally, blame yourself.

What…

Because you did it, you made it happen.

What kind of men were you associating with, what kind of, around the tracks. What kind of men were they?

19:00 Well, there were some very good men, very, oh, some of the men ended up very rich, and others ended up very poor. It just depended on what you did, how lucky you were. I know, I was quite intimate with one

19:30 man who had a lot of property down on the Mornington Peninsula. He owned blocks of flats, he owned hotels. As a matter of fact, at one stage, I think he owned the Hotel Manion, which you probably haven't heard of. But it turned out to be one of the Victorian hotels, and then the tax

20:00 got to him. And they ended up stripping him of everything. He had buslines, he had a wife who had plenty of money, and she just left him and took what he had left. It was a very sad, sad affair day.

And how did the Depression

20:30 **affect the racing industry?**

Oh, it just made things quieter, there wasn't the amount of money. The war actually made a lot of bookmakers.

Which war?

The Second World War. It made a lot of bookmakers, those, see. I had a bookmaker's licence at Sandown Dogs at the time, when the war came

21:00 on, and when I was drafted into the army, I had to relinquish that. And when I came back out of the army, I couldn't get back in there. Even though there had been a bill passed that preference must be given to returned men, it didn't work. Oh,

21:30 you learn to take the good with the bad.

After you stopped tick-tacking for your father, or after you'd been doing that for a while, did you move onto a different kind of work for him around the tracks?

Oh, I was still working on my own account. I was a caller at Skillball, which is what bingo has developed into. But

22:00 Skillball was run by the mayor of St Kilda, or the ex-mayor of St Kilda, W.O.J. Phillips. And bless his little heart WOJ, he gave me the start to bookmaking. Because he said to me one day, when I was working there, I was earning 13 pounds a week, which was huge. I know my

22:30 father quite often used to drive up, I'd get paid on the Friday morning, and he'd come up and snip me for the 13 pounds, because he had to get the money to buy the tickets for the races on Saturday.

How old were you?

At that time, I'd be about, oh, let's see, roughly 18, 19, 20, somewhere about there. And

23:00 he said to me, one morning, "Are you going to Flemington today?" and I said "Yes, Mr Phillips." He said, and he gave me a 20 pound note, and he said, "Ah, so-and-so, God I can remember the horses, and I can't remember the bloke's name. He's told me he thinks he can win a couple of

23:30 races there. And he's got four horses in. And anyway, I want you to put the 20 pounds on 'Wrong Olive', the best price you can get. And then put 20 pounds if it wins, put 20 pounds on oh, you know when you get old, your memory goes."

24:00 Anyway, 'Wrong Olive', which was in the first or the second race, and it won at seven-to-one, I can remember that. And I had my ten shillings on it, also. And the next race was Skulton, was the next horse he was in, he had in. And the trainer's name will come to me afterwards. And I didn't have to back

24:30 Skulton, but I said well, it's odds to nothing, it's only ten shillings, so I put my four pounds on Skulton, and Skulton was 33 to one. And Skulton won. I thought, "This is all right." So I've got a hundred and something pounds. I'd told my father, and he said, "Oh,

25:00 it's asking a bit of them." Anyway, the third one, was about, oh, it was favourite, I think, that I had to put the twenty pounds on. So I put the twenty pounds on, and I put twenty of my own on it, and it won. But it was short. It was five-to-four or six-to-four, and it won. And the fourth one,

25:30 was about a seven or eight-to-one chance, and I've, I've had fifty pounds on it, and it won. And I had about four hundred pounds. And four hundred pounds in those years, was a fortune, an absolute fortune. And that's what started me off as a bookmaker at Sandown.

How?

26:00 How? Well I applied, and I got the licence at Sandown. There was a great rigmarole, and you've got to go and show how much money you've got and all this sort of thing. You had to get a guarantee from the Bookmakers Association, and I can remember going into Tattersalls Club in Lonsdale Street with my father. And meeting, I think it was,

26:30 Solly Fromer, was the chairman of the Bookmakers' Association, Bookmakers' Guarantee Association. And I was introduced to Solly Fromer and I told him that I wanted a guarantee. And he said, "Oh yes," he said, "Leo will be alright." And that was how I got the guarantee. Everybody else

27:00 had to leave a thousand or fifteen hundred deposit as a guarantee. And I just got one with no pay, because of my father's name. And so I went to Sandown Dogs one day, and I had this fellow, Gus Martin, who's passed on, clerking for me. I had the bag on myself, and I won a hundred pounds

27:30 there. And I gave Gus five pound. So my father came up to me, and he said, "How'd you go?" and I said, "I won a hundred." He said, "How much did you give Gus?" and I said, "Five pounds." He said, "What, five pounds?" he said, "Are you trying to show the game up?" just like that. I can remember that. Because the normal pay was two pounds in those days.

28:00 **Just going back a little bit before we talk about that time a bit more, this game Skillball,**

Skillball.

Yes, can you tell me about that, and what your job on it was?

Well I was a caller at the Skillball. And it was laid out in a building on St Kilda foreshore. The architects of it were two Americans, Bill and Leo Graves. And they

28:30 had to take, W.O.J. Phillips in with them, because that was the only way that they could get that building an approval. It had been, before they moved in there, it had been a dance hall, was quite a big building. And they brought this idea from the States evidently with them. And it was a Skillball, where you had this box in front of you, or

29:00 a yard away from where your arm reached to. And it was divided into all little compartments, I think there was about 75 compartments, or 72 compartments. And the idea was, you've got four or five, you've got four Skillballs, four balls which you would throw into the box, and whatever compartment

29:30 they landed in, if you had that on your card in front of you, you could mark it with these chips. And the idea was, they had a full card in which you had to cover the entire card, or two diagonal lines, or one diagonal line, or, and it was a huge money maker for them, because they were charging

30:00 a shilling a card at the time. And they would have games which they would say, "The entire proceeds of this game will go to the winner." which of course if never did – about half of it went to the winner. But you would find people, housewives, playing ten cards, ten shilling, in the hope that they could win twenty or thirty pounds.

30:30 Well, there was a lady Ivy, God help. And these new cards came out, and I just happened to glance at one lot, I'm putting them in the slots around in front of the players. And I looked at a card, and I thought, "They run right along the back row those numbers." So I said, "You can get those

31:00 easy, just by letting the balls run down, not throwing them in, just sliding them in." Consequently, and then she won a lot, quite a few pools which I would always get a fling from, for finding the cards for her. And then I, my job was to take a, what they call a Skillball, around, which

31:30 they could thrown into the box as the fifth number, to make the line. There were five numbers in a line, that way, or that way, or that way or down. And they'd be after this particular number. Well, with her, she'd just have to roll it down the edge, across to the back, and it'd hit the back and just drop straight down into the. And if her aim was straight

32:00 enough, she could, I'd guarantee, she could get that Skillball into the numbers she required, so at least five times out of six, she was pretty good.

And how would you call the game?

And whatever she got, I would have to call number five in the first row, number 72 in the last row, number 45 in the third row,

32:30 all this sort of thing, you know, as each player had that Skillball. And I would have to. And then, when they'd slam the table as a winner, and then I'd have to check the card, take it to the operator, who was probably Wojie's [W.O.J Phillips] brother, as I recall, who would then call the numbers off

33:00 an illuminated board which they had there. And he'd say, "First row, number so-and-so." And I'd say, "Correct. Skillball, Skillball, Skillball, Skillball, correct." And then take the money back to them, the winner, and give it to them. But that was part of my bringing up, part of my education.

33:30 **What did it teach you about the way you had to interact with people, and work people, I guess?**

Well, it taught me that, to be nice to people. It taught me to, anything they wanted that was in my bounds, to help. But it also taught me not to smoke.

Why's that?

Because, I smoked.

34:00 I just started to smoke and I remember it was on a metal floor. And that was when I got pneumonia. And the first cigarette I had, I nearly died, it just burnt. And I called

34:30 on my relief caller, and asked him to take over, I said I felt crook. And he took over from me, and I put the cigarette out and went back. But I remember next morning, there was blood on my pillow, out of my mouth. And my mother had the doctor come.

35:00 And the doctor examined my chest, and he said, “Straight into hospital.” And then that was how I found out, and I remember getting the last rites.

Tell me about that?

Well, we were not a Catholic, we’d been, as kids, we’d been brought up as Catholics, because my grandmother was a staunch Catholic, and more or less we were christened as Catholics.

35:30 But I could see and breathe about the heresy that was in Catholicism. And I more or less, not became an Atheist, but, it just had no appeal to me, religion, no longer had any appeal to me. There was nothing I could believe in. And my mother,

36:00 she was on her own, she was a divorced woman, and they told her that the priest evidently came down, because I hadn’t been at church, hadn’t been at mass or something. And she told him that I was in the hospital with pneumonia, and he arranged for a visiting priest to come down and administer

36:30 the last rites to me. Whether I was dying or not, I don’t know. But it always stuck in my mind.

Do you remember hearing them?

I remember hearing part of the Latin, that was all that it, it made no... And I can remember the incense being spread around the room. And I thought, “The hypocrisy of it all, they don’t offer to help my mother. They’re trying to

37:00 save another soul to send up, or to add a bit more news, we saved him.” They didn’t save me at all, the doctors saved me. So there you are that gave the vent to my feeling.

What had the Catholic Church done to your mother after the divorce?

It’s not only that, it’s what they did to my wife, too. We’d been married, we were married in 1945, in March of ’45.

37:30 And of course I hadn’t attended church, we weren’t married in a Catholic Church, which more or less hurt my grandmother a great deal, I think. She was a very staunch Catholic. And my wife became pregnant, and she’d been carrying the child about

38:00 oh, about three months, when we went to an army dance – we were both still in the services. We went to an army dance at South Melbourne, and I can remember that, we did the Lancers. And you wouldn’t know what the Lancers were, but it’s a lot of jigging, jogging heavily, and you swing each other around and everything else. And she lost the baby that night.

38:30 And I don’t know how word got out, but anyway, the priest came, knocked on our door. We were living in a flat at St Kilda, sharing a flat at St Kilda. And he said, “You know that child would have been born a bastard.” And, of course, that really, she told me when I came back. And I said,

39:00 “If I had a 303, he would kiss himself goodbye,” because it really broke her up. And she said, “What do you mean a bastard, we’re married.” “It wouldn’t have mattered, if he wasn’t born a Catholic. You have forsaken the Catholic faith, you weren’t married in a Catholic Church.” I really steamed. Anyway.

39:30 **We might pause right there for a minute, because we’re at the end of this tape.**

39:34 **- tape ends.**

Tape 3

00:36 **I’m just interested in what your mother was like as a woman?**

She was a lovely woman. She was really lovely, she looked after us as kids. I think she was more protective than, if anything else, and it was a great

01:00 disheartenment of my life, that my wife and I were in Hawaii. And I rang home, and my son told me that she had passed away. We had to wait to get the flight back from Hawaii. I wasn’t even here when she was buried, when she was actually cremated. And the only thing I could do was to take her ashes,

01:30 and put them into the… She came up here to live after Orange, because she had a pretty weak chest, really. I think the cold up there at Orange got to her. And she used to, she was a smoker. I eventually got her to stop smoking, for which she called me all the illegitimate sons about the place.

02:00 And she said, “One of the few pleasures I’ve got is having a cigarette, and here you are, trying to stop me.” And I said, “Well, it’s only for your own good, your own health.” Anyway, I got her to move up here, into the sun. And she lived here with us in this unit for, oh, three or four weeks. Then she said that she was too much trouble,

02:03 and she went into the nursing home, Tricare Nursing Home, first. And she kept on having the bronchial attacks. Even with the better weather, she was still having the bronchial attacks. And she actually passed away from, so they, the Nursing Home told me,

03:00 passed away from one of those attacks, which went to pneumonia, and she just wasn’t strong enough. She was 93 when she died. The only remembrance I had of her was to sprinkle her ashes on the rose garden at Allambie.

03:30 **Tell us about hearing about war being declared?**

Well, you are going back now. War being declared, I was a kid. I’d be 20, 21, and I used to sail, as I said before, at St Kilda Sailing Club.

04:00 It didn’t affect us very much as kids like. I was, this was in the early days before I had the pneumonia. And I was still working at Skillball and I spent my days messing around the, the sailing club, and I spent my nights working at the Skillball.

04:30 And on Saturdays, I’d work at the races with my father. And through the week occasionally, I’d work with him. But I used to have the fulltime job at Skillball, where I was a caller, and I’d go there every morning, and clean out the whole of the building. Clean out the insides, you know, sweep it all down, sweep any rubbish

05:00 or fruit peel and that away, and make sure it was, make sure that all the cards were in the racks, there were enough chips etcetera for each player, and consequently that was when I was earning that 13 pounds a week. Which, when the basic wage was about two pounds four, was a pretty big sum of money. And

05:30 my mother and I enjoyed that for a short, oh well quite a long time, because that was my contribution to the household expenses. I was a keen pianist, I had a piano, I can still remember it, a Lindahl piano on the never-never from Suttons in Melbourne. I think I was paying off

06:00 ten shillings a week off, and I used to love it, I’d sit for hours and hours there, just trying to play this thing. My great aunt, have I spoken about her, she ended up in the Kew asylum before. Maggie, oh no, it’s, I’m on the wrong track there.

06:30 My great aunt Maggie, who was more or less on my father’s side, she was the sister of my grandmother. They lived at Kyneton, they had a farm right beside the Campaspe, and I went up there as a kid. And I, they put me – because it was a strictly Catholic family – I had to

07:00 go to the Christian Brothers’ College in Kyneton. And there, she taught me the notes of the clef, the treble clef, the bass clef, the music, and I used to practice up there with scales. And I think I liked it that much, but of course, I never really had lessons, it was only

07:30 Aunt Maggie teach me this and teaching me the notes, the A-C-E-F in the treble clef, and the F-A-C-E in the bass clef. I decided, but, ordinary music wasn’t good. I loved the classics, and the first piece of music that I bought the music for, was the Beethoven

08:00 Moonlight Sonata. And I would spend hours and hours and hours trying to play the Beethoven, just from the music itself. I finally mastered it. And then I got onto the Rachmaninoff. Rachmaninoff in C Minor. And I couldn’t work out for a long while, because all of the fingers intertwined: left hand was playing sharps, the right hand was playing the rest of the melody.

08:30 But it was very, very difficult to play, for me anyway. And so 1939, I was living in St Kilda in the flat with my mother, we were the sole two occupants of that flat, my brother was living with his father.

09:00 I thoroughly enjoyed, I loved my youthful life. That was when that I got, as I said before, the licence at Sandown, and then of course, the war came on and we

09:30 was kids, well I’ve spoken before about how the battalion was formed.

Tell us how you heard the news that the war had begun?

We were down at the, at the yacht club. I was a senior because I was over 18 at the time. And we were having a glass of beer, actually, when the radio came on, and

10:00 I think it was [Robert] Menzies was the Prime Minister, and he said, “I have the sad news to inform you, Australia is at war… the Japanese have… With Japan. The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbour and Australia has therefore, as part of ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps], is at war with Japan”. So that really didn’t

10:30 make any news to us, but it did later on in life. But at the time it didn't. There were quite a few, I remember the first day I'd gone up to the Kew Tent at Balcombe to get all of the army gear which I was supposed to have, and I'm

11:00 walking back, I didn't know any lines, there were officer lines and company lines. Anyway, I'm walking back and there was Charlie Gauge, who was one of the men of St Kilda 14 foot Sailing Club. Charles, it transpired, was an officer in the 14th Battalion, he'd been in the Militia before, and he went straight in as a lieutenant

11:30 in the 14th Battalion. And I'm walking up with my arms, because I hadn't been taught to salute, I had this stiff hat perched on top of my head, my arms full. And I said, "Hello Charles, how are you going?" and he said, "All right Bill." And just kept on going past. I was walking through the officers' lines with all this stuff. Anyway, I found out later what it was, but.

12:00 I was in A Company at the 14th Battalion Militia at Balcombe. And I decided that there was two shillings extra if I became a signaller, that was a specialist. So I became a signaller, I had to learn Morse code. I had to be able to transmit and read Morse code, and

12:30 that two shillings a week bought my daily pay to seven shillings, of which, I think, six and sixpence went to my mother, that was my pay. I don't know if my brother made any donation out of his pay. He was in the army in the 2nd 4th Field Regiment. When the

13:00 enrolment in the 39th as Garrison Battalion for Port Moresby came around, myself and quite a few of these young 18, 19 year olds decided that at least we'd get away. A lot of them had been turned down by the AIF. As a matter of fact, we were the most rag-tag regiment, we had

13:30 blokes in that regiment in the 39th, with one arm, one eye and cripples practically. They'd all been refused by the AIF, but they all wanted to do something, and that's… I was the same. And consequently we were very much, not trained. It was, my particular recollection of Darley

14:00 was that the AIF, who were also in camp there, hated the thought of having to share a camp with these choccos [Militia], as we were called. And there was almost a stand-up battle went on, until order was restored.

Tell us about this stand-up battle?

Oh, they invaded our sleeping quarters, in. And

14:30 they came the heavy like, and started to punch. We were only kids, you know, so we took to them with everything that was available, rifle butts and all. And it's a wonder that there weren't, wasn't some injury done, really. It, the order, it was restored when Colonel Conran came down and called us all to order, and ordered the AIF back to

15:00 their lines, and gave them the strong reminder they were not invited at any time to come into these 39th battalion lines.

What did the AIF blokes, what kind of things were they saying to you?

Oh, "You bloody lot of choccos, you tin soldiers," and all this other crap. "Why don't you join us, and get out and fight." And, it really was

15:30 cruel, because as I said, the majority of us had volunteered and been knocked back. And then, that has just brought to mind another advent. We were in Moresby, when they decided that our reinforcements should be AIF officers. So, they had a bunch of AIF officers

16:00 from various battalions who'd been recruited back to Australia, had come back to Australia from… various had been either wounded, or on compassionate leave, or anything like that. And they rounded them up, and they sent them up as reinforcements. That caused us to lose our CO, Commanding Officer Colonel Conran, who was, as I said before,

16:30 was a first war man. Most of the Commanding Officers of the various companies, they were all first war men. And anyone over the age of 50 – except old Sam Templeton of B Company, I think he was the only one left out of it, because he'd been in the First World War in the navy, and he kept himself pretty fit, so they overlooked him.

17:00 And he was allowed to stay. But they immediately, their immediate thoughts were, they came in as Company Commanders, and they thought that the 39th should become an AIF battalion. Which, of course, put a lot of backs up, my own included. Here, we'd tried to join the AIF, been refused,

17:30 and here they are, trying to cajole us to join the AIF. So the majority was, "You can stick the AIF right where the monkey puts his nuts," that was the general feeling. And consequently we stayed, and we stayed still as a Militia battalion. We went and we fought as a Militia battalion. And I didn't think there was any harm in that at all.

18:00 And I think that was one of the reasons why we were taken from the order of battle, because the 39th

did such a good job. And Colonel Honner, who took us over at Isurava, he remarked when we were all retired and when he stood us together at Menari and said, “The ragged

18:30 bloody heroes.” And there is a book, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of it, or read it, of The Ragged Bloody Heroes. And the front page, I have it, no I haven’t, I had a copy here which I took down to my son and my grandson to read, and I cajoled my grandson into joining the 39th Battalion Association, down in Melbourne, because I think there’s a lot of glory attached just to the name. I can show you the letter

19:00 that I received from, Brigadier, from Major General Peter Cosgrove, when I asked him to tell us the reason why of the removal from the order of battle of the 39th. It was bad enough the 39th Battalion just being wiped out, more or less and abandoned, instead of being reinforced as so many other battalions were,

19:30 when they came back under strength. But we were just abolished entirely. And that, like, for fellows who’d been through so much, because we faced the Japanese for five weeks on our own. And when we saw the 14th arrive at Isurava, boy, were we glad. Because another couple of days, there’d have

20:00 been nothing left of us. There’s a little story in, that Colonel Honner told, in his book, About We Brothers. That he wrote with Peter Brune. He said that, a reason the 39th fought so well, was that they were volunteers. And there was a further line in it, after

20:30 one of our lieutenants had to address a meeting for the Blamey, on behalf of the Blamey Foundation, that his remark was, “Who would want anything from a fat-bottomed clerk in Monash’s Orderly Room.” And that’s what he thought of Blamey. And you’ll find men from the 2nd 4th, 2nd 16th, 2nd 27th, a lot of the AIF men

21:00 died because of Blamey. I don’t know where they ever got the idea that he was a glorious commander. He wasn’t.

Well speaking about the AIF, tell us about when you first applied, before you were in the Militia, way back at the, back at home in Australia.

Yes.

21:30 **Why had you applied to join the AIF at that stage?**

Because it was the spirit of things. My brother had applied and been accepted. And I thought, well, it was just the national feeling, if you can help. Although what the hell we were doing in Syria, when we all should have been here. They knew that Japan was a threat, even back

22:00 in 1936 they were being told that Japan was a threat. And I get very virulent about politicians at this stage, so we’ll forget about that bit.

Ok, we’ll, at this stage, we’ll concentrate on your own experience. Tell us about trying to join up?

I went in Melbourne to the

22:30 enrolment offices, and I filled in all the papers, and I had my mother’s permission, and then they x-rayed me and they rejected me. I then applied to the navy, and the same thing happened, they x-rayed me and rejected me. Evidently the pneumonia had left a scar across the lung, and they

23:00 didn’t want… maybe that’s the reason why I got bronchitis. But I’m still alive and kicking at 87, so I’m not doing too bad.

How did you feel about this kind of rejection, because of the x-rays?

I felt a little bitter that

23:30 there was no apology, there was just a blunt rejection. I know they were trying to defend the mother country, but after all, when you think of the mother country only used as a convict settlement, and for no other reason.

24:00 I don’t see why we should be thankful, when in two wars, they called upon Australia to defend them, and then after Singapore, we find out later that the… A great deal of argument went on about defending Singapore,

24:30 and putting a bloke in charge, when the AIF, the 8th Division, wanted to fight on, and they weren’t allowed to, they were ordered not to. You should read a bit of history, it’s most illuminating, there’s heaps and heaps of books about it.

What about your own experience and thoughts? What about how you felt about the idea of going over to fight for the empire at this stage,

25:00 **before Japan had attacked?**

Well, it was, I think I might have been caught up in the spirit of the whole thing about, it was a great and glorious adventure. Because that's why most of the fellows joined the AIF for. A, probably to get away from their wives, or their kids. I don't think Australia at that time

25:30 was in any sorts of threats that the Germans could come down here and invade us. And it was just one happy, glorious adventure for them.

Well, what sort of things were you hearing about the Germans?

Not very much. We got more media news about the bombings which occurred in London,

26:00 and the withdrawal at Dunkirk. And trying to save the VEF of Australia, were then put in to Egypt to fight. And what made me more bitter, I found out afterwards that the Australian, when Curtin [Prime Minister of Australia] asked for the 6th

26:30 and 7th and 9th Battalions to be returned to Australia, [Winston] Churchill [Prime Minister of England] said no, we want them here. And that didn't go down too well with a lot of Australians. And he, his thoughts were – and there were cartoons made about it – that if the Japs take Australia, we'll come

27:00 down and take it back. And my thought was, "As another convict settlement?"

Well tell us about what happened to you, how you came to be in the Militia.

Because I was conscripted.

Tell us the process of what happened.

Well, if your birthday fell on a certain day, and that one came out of the

27:30 barrel, that date came out of the barrel… Ok, all people under the age of 25 or something, having a birthday, we could, between the ages of 18 to 25. And so the ones who went into the camp at Balcombe were those whose birthdays were on the day that came out of the barrel,

28:00 or days that came out of the barrel. And they were the ones who made up the 39th Battalion. There was the 5th Scottish Melbourne Regiment, the 6th Royal Melbourne Regiment, the 14th, the 32nd, and a lot of the country kids, country people, well kids they were,

28:30 were in. And they were in these things and a lot of them had applied for, and been knocked back by, the AIF. And I suppose the spirit of adventure was still there. So, why not join the 39th?

And,

29:00 **how did you feel about.**

Because the Japanese hadn't entered the war then, remember. It was December the 7th, 1941, when they bombed Pearl Harbour.

And when were you conscripted?

I was conscripted in March 1941. And as a specialist, we weren't allowed out. The others were in a three month camp.

29:30 But NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] and specialists were kept in. When the end of the three months came, they were still in camp. I think they had an inkling that something was amiss, and, but they weren't going to tell anyone. And so I was in camp, the others, the other NCOs. I remember I got a job as a,

30:00 working in a sergeants' mess at Balcombe, which was a real, one of the best days of my army life. And when the 39th was to be reorganised, and the word came around you could volunteer for garrison duty – and it was garrison duty in

30:30 Port Moresby – we thought, "Oh, there's a chance to get away, do something, see another part of the world." And so, name went down and next thing we go up to Caulfield racecourse, as a volunteer went to Caulfield racecourse, and from there, we were put on the train at Bacchus Marsh.

31:00 And from Bacchus Marsh, marched out to Darley camp where we became the 39th Battalion. And from there, we fought the battle of Corangamite, and oh, we fired five shots at the rifle range, that was our training. A lot of the

31:30 AIF were given training at Canungra when they came back, before they went up there. We never ever saw Canungra; we never saw a jungle before. We never had, we went there in khaki shorts, khaki shirts and a khaki hat. And against the green of the jungle, you can imagine how we stood out. We weren't

32:00 issued with tropical uniforms, it was only when we saw the men of the 2nd 14th arrive, we wondered who in the devil they were, because they had camouflage suits on, green from head to foot. We, well we didn't, we weren't taught the first thing about camouflage. And that was one of the reasons why we think

32:30 the majority, we were sent up there as the chopping block. And unfortunately when the unit was abolished, and all records of it were abolished, there was something stank in the state of Denmark. That's for, one of the reasons. Can we knock off now, I'm.

Ok, yeah, we're pretty close to the end of the tape, aren't we?

33:00 **I'm interested in how you moved to signals. What kind of skills, did you have any skills before?**

Actually, no. I, the only skill I had more or less was navigation skills, rather than anything else. But no, I just decided that it was a specialist job, and the two shillings

33:30 extra, the two shillings extra a day, might help my mother face the odds a little better. And so it was.

And what kind of things were they teaching you, in this?

Oh, you had to learn the Morse code, and we had to be able to read ten letters, send at the rate of 12, we had to flag

34:00 signals. It was, it took up about the first three months of camp. And then of course we were kept in camp, and then came the 39th Battalion, just rolling into each other, neatly joining, sort of thing.

So describe the 39th Battalion, how you first saw it when they were first together in Australia?

34:30 Well, as I said before, when I discovered three or four fellows that I had known in the racing game, in there. George Watson who was blind in one eye. There was Hans, the armourer, who only had one arm. There was

35:00 another fellow who was practically crippled, a cripple. But they'd all volunteered for garrison duty. And, of course, we didn't know what garrison duty was. We knew Australia more or less was the person to look after Papua New Guinea, but so far we were informed the 49th, which was a Queensland Militia Battalion, were in Moresby,

35:30 and had been for some time as a Garrison Battalion. But we thought, oh well, anything to get away from camp, and we don't know about it. And it was actually what, no, it was while we were in Darley of course, that the news came over of the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbour. And

36:00 then it was a case of rush. We were despatched on a weeks' home leave, and bingo, straight back and on the Aquitania and out. But all we were ever used for up there was unloading ships. We… I was not in that detail, because I had

36:30 two stripes: by then I was a sig [Signal] corporal. There is a funny story attached to it also, that I'll recount later on. But Bertie Oliver was a sig lieutenant in Darley, and he came to me and said, "Who would you recommend for the other corporal?" Our sig sergeant was a First War, First World War man,

37:00 who was just on 60 years of age. And of course, when the reinforcements arrived, oh I recommended Jackie Sim, and he was made as the other corporal. And then when the AIF fellows moved out, our sig sergeant was moved back home. And we got a new sig

37:30 lieutenant, Lieutenant Duvet, who was a very sort of, mother's boy type of fellow. Who my recollection of him was, the only time that I ever got to see him… I never saw him at all while we were stationed with B Company. The only time I got to see him was when we were dropped off

38:00 just at the Sig Station at Deniki, and he came up and he said, "Oh Bellairs," he said, "I want you and the other two sigs back at…" I thought he said at the Mission hut. Now, I think the Mission hut might have been at Mission Hill, I wasn't too sure. But I said to the other blokes, "But that means that

38:30 Battalion headquarters will have no sigs here at all." So well, we talked about it, and the cipher clerk said, "Well," he said, "I'll stay with you fellows, because if you're going to be the sig from headquarters, I'd better stay." So anyway, I went up to Colonel Cameron

39:00 and I told him what had happened, and I said, "Would you prefer it if we stay, Sir, or if we go back?" He said, "Where's Lieutenant Duvet gone?" and I said, "Oh he's gone back, Sir." And his exact words were, am I permitted to swear? His exact words were, "Oh, he's got the shits, oh I can use you here," and we installed a phone in his tent.

39:30 And from there went out the daily reports over that landline because the other two core sigs, when the cipher clerk came with us, the other two core sigs had dismantled the set that they'd been able to get through to Townsville on, and gone back. So that was how the sit. rep. went out daily.

40:00 And then, when more sigs came up, and they had the main sig station at Templeston Crossing, which I think was about two or three days back. And it's water under the bridge anyway. Jackie Sim was made the

40:30 sig sergeant, even though I was a senior corp. [corporal]. And I think he was dirty on me because that I

hadn’t gone back, but however. Then…

We’ve got to just pause there.

40:47 **- tape ends.**

Tape 4

00:38 **I was interested in your trip on the Aquitania, tell us about that?**

Well, she was a pretty bit ship, the Aquitania, and we had a couple of Dutch frigates or corvettes accompanying us. And there was another New Zealand

01:00 ship there. There was a flasher that we read, was in Morse, as part of a purported Jap sub contact, which of course made everyone rush to the rail to see if they could see anything, of all things. And full steam was applied,

01:30 but apart from that, was the only thing. I’m trying to think if, no, it was while we were in Moresby that we got the report that Singapore had fallen. I spent quite a bit… I was put in charge of kitchen detail.

02:00 Everyone had to, like all of the NCOs, had a detail to look after, and I was put in charge of the pub peeling detail, spud peeling detail, which you fed bags and bags of these spuds [potato] into this great thing which skinned them. I think there was more potato lost in the skinning than otherwise. I slept most of time

02:30 on deck, because I think we were down under the waterline in the cabins and it was six, four or six, to a cabin and oh, they were hells, hell holes really. So you slept up on deck to get a bit of fresh air. We weren’t supposed to, but that’s where we’d

03:00 sneak up to after lights out. You weren’t permitted to smoke on board, or outside. If you had to smoke, you’d smoke inside your cabin, of course, which made it a darn sight worse. So I think, what would it be, five or six days, five days at the utmost, at the tops before we got to Moresby. Then, as I

03:30 said, the ship was too big to dock, so they had us up on deck with full equipment, rifle over the shoulder. We had to climb down these nets, these landing nets to lighters, which took us to shore. And so, once ashore, we were all formed up in companies and marched straight out to the Seven Mile.

04:00 We wondered what sort of a country this was. It was stinking, we were squatting mosquitoes all the way out. Not worrying too much, because we didn’t know about malaria. And we finally arrived at the drome. There was an old junkers trimotor Ford there, there was

04:30 a couple of Hudson cargo planes, as my memory, and that was all. And we carried up with us a detachment of light anti aircraft, one battery, and a 53rd, 55th battalion, who got, I think, the same treatment as we did.

05:00 But I have remarked before about all stores being loaded in the hull of the Aquitania – consequently, we ate out of tins of bully beef amongst three, and a couple of army biscuits, but that was all. And of course, there was no quinine, it was not for about four days afterwards

05:30 that they used to line us up of a night, and you’d have your Dixie [tin pot for eating] outstretched to take a spoonful of quinine, liquid quinine, which you’d have to take… and oh, and your teeth rotted. But that was supposed to be to prevent against malaria. I think it mostly took the bottom out of our Dixies, that was about how good

06:00 it was. But oh, in the first week, quite a few fellows went down with malaria, and they were put in the local thing. An amusing part was, while I was with the B Company and with my other two sigs, Kevin Sullivan, who came back and played football, I think he played football

06:30 for Collingwood, after the end of the war. And Bobby Hughes, who I’ve never been able to find from that day to this. Except we met when Sully died, for the funeral. We’d been together all of the time, the three of us like, we, we were like the D’Artagnan and his brothers [The Three Musketeers],

07:00 more or less. We were not with the rest of the sigs at the Seven Mile drome. We were just the three of us with B Company in the valley. We had to dig our own fox hole, or it wasn’t a fox hole, we dug quite a big sig place there, we had lines into there and out to the

07:30 96th Field Regiment, who arrived later with the Americans. I had a line run down to the CO’s tent, and to the Company Sergeant Major’s tent, and then connected up those two. And any beer that was left over, we always got, the sigs got. Because we

08:00 kept the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] and the CO in touch with each other, all the time. Anytime that there was a strafing raid on, they were notified direct from us. Or a bombing raid came direct from

us to the 96th Field Engineers, who's laughable answer was, "Hello, 96th Field Engineers, United States Army", or, no, "C Company, United States Army,

08:30 hello." And I'd say, "Air raid yellow, expected in 20 minutes, thank you." And you could ring them for the next two hours, and you wouldn't get anyone, they used to go bush. They were all Negro, a Negro battalion, but I tell you what, they had the best outfit you've ever seen. They had concrete showers, concrete ablution blocks – they had concrete floors down

09:00 within four or five days of them being there. And whereas we were still roughing it in a tent, and we had quite a big signal office. We had some coconut palms down, and just the trunks over the top, and galvanised iron on top of that, and about a foot of dirt with rocks on top of that.

09:30 And that is where our sig was, our sig unit was. We were on with the sigs 24 hours a day. We divided ourselves up into say, three hours on, six hours off, just to share the sleeping time. And that's how we went for the first, oh what, until July,

10:00 which would have been four and a half to five months there. Question.

Yeah, I was just, just interested in those first few days like, arriving with nothing there. How did you sleep, where did you sleep?

We slept on the ground, on our groundsheet. But in Moresby it starts to rain at about two o'clock in the afternoon, and it rains till

10:30 ten o'clock at night, so you'd be wet through before you got in, sort of. I think we got a blanket between two of us or something, it was part of our pack. We didn't have any hot food, oh for four or five days at least, until they unloaded all of the camp cooking equipment from off the Aquitania. But the,

11:00 practically the whole battalion, all of the infantry guys were detailed to unload the Aquitania, unload the lighters that were bringing the stuff from the Aq. [Aquitania]. And every time, oh, although as I recall, we didn't get a bomb raid until February, about the middle of February, of

11:30 '41, and the Aquitania was a sitting duck all of that time, at anchor in Moresby Harbour. And it was after, when she sailed back to Australia, and the Macdhui came up with stores, and she had to scoot out because she was one of the principal targets of the bombers. And they ended up,

12:00 I think about March or April, June, they got her, they put a bomb straight down through the funnel. There was a working party aboard her from the 39th, at that time, and I think a lieutenant and two, two Ors [Other Ranks] were killed. They were the first casualties of the 39th.

12:30 The Macdhui was still, up until a couple of years ago, was still evident because they managed to beach her, or put her on the reef just outside of Moresby Harbour, and there she sat. And she was quite often the target of Japanese Zero strafing. They thought that she might have been still floating there, but she'd been

13:00 left. They used to use our valley, they'd come straight up, they gave our cookhouse merry hell, which was on top of a hill at, more or less the first hill as you came up the track to Bootless Bay there. And they'd strafed it unmercifully.

13:30 They never, every time they went over us, which was practically daily, they'd throw a few bursts into that cookhouse. And I heard later that they had to replace the copper pots that they used for cooking stuff in, oh, half a dozen times at least there, because they got too full of holes to hold anything. Fortunately they never knew we were

14:00 there. The only time we saw them, was over, just above tree height, like you could see the Jap pilot pretty closely, and you'd pump a round, as we thought, into the plane. But we evidently weren't too successful. As kids, it was more eagerness than knowing what in hell,

14:30 that we were told to hold up five fingers like that, and when the plane passed there, you'd fire at that. And that's how we fired. And we still don't know whether we fired ten or twelve feet ahead of him, or ten or twelve feet behind him. But it must have been either, because we didn't manage to hit one of them.

15:00 Although C Company, that were down at Bootless Bay, claimed they were the ones who shot down one of the Jap Zeros, the fellow had ditched in the sea. And the pilot ditched in the sea, he dropped his parachute off, and they found him and brought him back, and then stole his watch off him. And the first thing he demanded,

15:30 in perfectly good English, was the return of his watch, when he was interviewed by the officers, was the return of his watch.

How would stories like this pass amongst the men in New Guinea?

Oh well, we used to talk. See, there was another sig, lot of sigs at C Company, and our line went from us down to C Company, that was at Bootless

16:00 Bay. And all of the troops were stationed along more or less a waterfront, in case of a landing. What in the hell we were going to do with five rounds, they didn't tell us. But because there were quite a few alarms of stand-to, when everybody would have

16:30 to be, you know, ready for action. We had barbed wire along the beach, we had slit trenches and trenches along the beachfront, and probably in afterthought, if they'd have opened up, the ships' guns would have wiped them out in about three minutes flat.

Well tell us the scene

17:00 **as you arrived. What did the place look like before you built the camp, and?**

Well, can you imagine what this place was like? Well, as a matter of fact, what it was like when I first arrived here in 1949. It was practically the same as what Moresby looked like. Moresby itself was two hotels,

17:30 a picture theatre where there was only two nights, even the troops, we were put with the natives, we could go in the night the natives were allowed to go in. We couldn't go in the night the civilians were allowed in, the civilians night. It had two hotels,

18:00 it had no drinking allowed for the natives, no drinking allowed for the troops. We got the rations which came on, oh, about the end of February or so, of one bottle of beer per week per man. But as I said, being handy with the CSM, the Company Sergeant Major,

18:30 any fellows who didn't drink – and there were quite a few – would go into our tent bag which we hung from an adjacent tree and kept filled with water, and we just dropped the beer in there, and it'd be cold, or cooled down. So we always had a plentiful supply of beer. As quite a few of the other sigs found out, and we got visits every

19:00 occasion, from anyone passing by on their way to Bootless Bay, or just passing by, passing by for a beer. They were the days before hell happened.

Well tell us about, hearing the news that the Japanese had taken Singapore?

Well, we got the news, it was actually relayed by wireless, and then

19:30 by the telephone line, that Singapore had fallen. And it took a while for it to sink in. We thought, "Singapore's fallen, how the hell could Singapore fall?" And little by little, it came back out the Japs had come down the Malaysian peninsula, across Johor into Singapore,

20:00 and of course, we didn't find out until much later on, Percival had orders to the 8th division not to fire upon them. There was some, so I was told afterwards. I read afterwards that there was some opposition put up by members of the 8th, but

20:30 very little evidently, from all accounts. And those blokes spent most of the war in the Prisoner of War camp at Changi, which was hell on earth. And most of those would be killed or die, rather, on that bloody march to Balikpapan.

What about your own feelings and those of the men around you

21:00 **in Port Moresby, about the news that this stronghold had fallen, I mean how?**

It was impregnable, we were told time and time and time, Singapore's impregnable. They knew that the Japs were coming down the harbour, down the Malaysian Peninsula. And that they were coming down on bicycles evidently, because of the made road.

21:30 They never tried to meet them, they sat in bloody Singapore.

I guess what I'm asking you, is what was the morale like?

Pretty low, pretty low, I'll tell you. Because we all thought, "Singapore's gone, we're next." Now, it wasn't, it was shortly after that when they…

22:00 Rabaul, there was only half of one bloody company there. The 2nd 22nd, and those poor buggers, they were really cat's meat, nothing less. They were just overwhelmed within a couple of days, and those that were captured were tied up to trees and used

22:30 as bayonet practice.

So especially in signals, what does the news of this flowing Japanese spread, what effect did it have on all the men?

It made us very downhearted, I'll tell you that. Because the feeling was, "Well, we're gone." And everybody was mapping out plans of how to get back to Australia.

23:00 Or, how it would it be possible, could we get back to Australia, could we sail a boat from Bootless Bay across say to Cape York, could we, could we. At that time, we had oh, alarms, about twice a week to

stand-to.

23:30 This was about the time of the Coral Sea, I presume, or we presumed. You get the thoughts later on, you know that there's a thing going on, but you don't know what's happening. And it was only later we found out, or read later, about the Battle of the Coral Sea. There's books written about it. And so your enlightenment gets a little bit more, about

24:00 nobody won, both sides turned up the battle at practically the same time, and retreated. All of the Japs who were purportedly going to lead at Moresby, or invade Moresby, went back to Rabaul, and the Americans, the battle fleets, went back to Guadalcanal. So, we were let off.

24:30 So, then in we just put up with the occasional bombing raid until the Kittyhawks arrived. And I've spoken about them before, what happened with the 20, 75 Squadron, and the funny thing is now, they've forgiven us. Bill Guest apologised to them at a luncheon, we go to their luncheon, the 39th from up

25:00 here in Queensland. We get an invitation to the 75th Squadron luncheon, which is held at the Irish Club in Brisbane every year. And there's four or five of us go up there and we reminisce about various things, although there's not too many of the 75th Squadron alive now. And we just, we reminisce about days, and we explain.

25:30 Oh it was quite some time ago, four or five years ago, about why, why we opened fire, why, what happened, how we weren't informed. How it became the Kittyhawks, then the 'Tomorrow Hawks', then the 'Never Hawks'. And when the three planes did fly in, we didn't

26:00 know who the hell they were, but they couldn't be ours because the only visitors we ever had were Japanese. And that, our apology, was accepted and so we're all mates again. Although the funny thing was here, I had a, I think he was an Air Vice Commodore, quite a high ranking air force fellow up here,

26:30 Jim Wright, lived in this building. And talking one day, we used to have a drink occasionally over in the Yacht Club. Talking one day, he said, "Were you in the services?" I said "Oh yes, I was in the 39th Battalion." He said, "You pack of so-and-sos." I said, "Yes, who were you with?" He said, "I was with 75 Squadron." I found out later he wasn't with 75 Squadron at all,

27:00 as a matter of fact, they never knew him. He was a desk officer. You know what a desk officer is? One who never sees action, but one who gets promotion all the time. And that's what Blamey was, a desk officer.

Right, now, should we. In those five months,

27:30 **after hearing Japan had entered the war and being in Port Moresby, how were the defences being set up for Port Moresby?**

Well, the anti-aircraft were not permitted to fire on the planes in case their position was disclosed. And, in other words, they were just able to drop their bombs whenever they pleased, and at whatever they pleased.

28:00 There was no defence whatsoever. Then after about the second or third raid, all civilians were evacuated. And it was left to the three battalions that were there, various places, to defend the island. There was 39th, 49th and 53rd.

28:30 But they'd had no training whatsoever, they were just engaged as manual labourers at the docks. It's an unfortunate situation, but that's what the powers to be thought was the best plan. It led to me, in a gathering, quite a lot of booty there.

29:00 I went into Moresby and purloined two hand sets, phones, which, with a little messing around, as I told you, one in the, in the CO's tent and the other one in the serg. major's tent. And ran lines to them, and also

29:30 I grabbed myself a car, a beautiful 1937 Chevy, that I managed to drive around for a day and a half until Bertie Oliver took it off me. He found out about it and took it off me. I could always remember that.

Why did he take it off you?

He took it off me because he was an officer, and I was a mere NCO.

How had you

30:00 **got the car?**

It was left in the garage with the keys still in it. A full tank of petrol and the keys still in it. Evidently, they had thought of going somewhere or other, when the order came that they were to evacuate. All civilians were evacuated.

Do you remember the, that time, the evacuation, what was that like?

Well,

30:30 we didn't, as troops we weren't, we didn't have anything to do with it. They were just told that there'd be planes for them, and a ship, and everything else, and away they went. The town became very quiet, not that we were allowed in there that often, one night a week when all the Papuan

31:00 natives were permitted to go to the pictures. But then, when the Japs started to bomb of course, the pictures were cancelled for all kinds, so it was no lights to be shown. Not that it meant, not that it made much difference, because there was quite, I believe, illustrated maps of everything that was in Moresby, the Jackson strip, the Keeler

31:30 strip, the docks. There was, unfortunately, there was a lot of pillaging went on from Steamships and Burns Philp, but it wasn't the army. I can say this, most of this was done by the air force blokes up there. There were no planes there,

32:00 but there were aircraft men there who were supposed to be servicing the planes that weren't there. Unless they meant those, those two Douglas Lockheads that they used to fly supplies out to Wau from Moresby to the gold miners, and they were being used for

32:30 ferrying the VIPs [Very Important Person] around the place. They were supposed to be the ones to take the supplies, or part of the ones to take the supplies up to Kokoda, but they never did. Instead of that, the 21st Brigade were supposed to

33:00 have everything necessary to fight the Japs, ready for them at Myola. But all of that went astray, it never ever got to Myola, it's a puzzle, just where. It was supposed to be loaded into the planes, but the planes took off, but the people never ever got the stuff.

And what about your work during this time, what were you doing

33:30 **as a signaller?**

Oh, just communications and passing on messages and taking messages from the Bootless Bay outlet, and relaying it to headquarters and all that. And just ordinary run of the mill stuff. It was very easy work – the only snag was when they

34:00 called stand-to, and sometimes at two o'clock in the morning, like you'd be out of bed and down on the phones and... Or it might be in your watch down there, and you'd get the message stand-to, and you'd have to relay it to the skipper and the serg. major, they'd have to get up and rush around and inform

34:30 all the various platoons. And then they'd have to get into their trenches and everything, and wait. But they were just wild ducks, nothing happened.

Tell us about your quarters and where you were staying, and what it was like?

Well, the three of us shared a tent, which was

35:00 right beside our slit trench, and sig office. And it was camouflaged, the tent was, but there was a tree handy from which we hung the tent bag, as I said, into which we put water, which we changed every few days, because it got warm there.

35:30 And into that, we had beer, we stacked the beer that was given to us. Or not given to us, I think it was, it was ten pence ha'penny something, ten pence ha'penny a bottle, something like that, which we could pay for out of our pay book.

And now we're talking about beer, I mean, what kind of things could you do for fun at this stage, before the Japanese, you were fighting

36:00 **the Japanese?**

There wasn't any fun. The fun was when the blokes at Bootless Bay went to sleep at the phone, and whoever was on duty woke someone else, and they went down along the track in the middle of the night to Bootless Bay, to see what had had happened. Whether the line was down, or

36:30 whether the line had been cut. Of course it was panic stations then, when you couldn't raise them, and you always found them asleep at the phone. And possibly the same thing happened with us too. It was, in the heat up there, it's most innovating, you sleep very solidly when you can get any, and although I

37:00 don't ever recall the C Company blokes having to come up to us, maybe they discovered a break in the line half way along, or something like that. But we were just supposed to run hourly, or two hourly checks on all of our various places. Either headquarters at the Jackson Strip, or C Company,

37:30 or the 96 Field Engineers, just to make sure no one had got in and sabotaged the lines or anything like that. It was just a thing of checking. We didn't have much entertainment. As a matter of fact, there was a bit of entertainment when the Americans arrived there.

38:00 They put on a boxing contest, and down in Moresby itself. And the blokes were all dashing around to try and back the bloke, he was supposed to fight this Negro. And we found out afterwards, the Negro was

the lightweight champion or something of America.

38:30 And our blokes were getting these terrific odds about him beating this Negro. And we thought something was screwy but didn't work out, that fight lasted about precisely 30 seconds. They shook hands and the Negro went whoosh, bang and he was down.

39:00 Not that I grieved over that, because he hit me on the back of the head and he knocked me out, that bloke.

Who was that bloke?

The bloke who, on the Aquitania. The bloke that I fought in the final of the ship's champion on the way up. I had two fights before I met him, in the final,

39:30 and the blokes I beat were just raw swingers of punches, sort of thing, which I'd been trained to duck and weave and everything else. And consequently I won the two, and I met this bloke in the final, and that's how I got to the final.

40:00 And one of the blokes in this 39th, George Watson, he said to me, "What were you doing, you hit him 15 times and," he said, "he didn't touch you". I said, "No he only hit me once." I said, "Right across the back of the head there." I said, "He knocked me out". He said, "Oh he couldn't do that." And I said, "No, he's about four a half times heavier than I am,

40:30 you try it."

We'll just pause there, sorry to stop you there mid thought, it's just the tape.

40:38 **- tape ends.**

Tape 5

00:37 **Can you take me through when you heard the news, that you would be heading up to Kokoda. How did that sort of, chain of events, take place?**

Well, there were, we were classified as the best of a bad lot, because,

01:00 see, of the 49th Battalion who had been there for quite some time, they'd been there for nearly 12 months before we arrived. And they were supposed to be relieved and go, and we were supposed to relieve them for them to go home. But they'd only been engaged in road-making around Moresby, repairing roads. And they were the crowd who had to repair the bomb craters and everything else on the runway.

01:30 Although until the Kittyhawks arrived, of course, there was practically no use at all. Well, the only thing that ever used it, was the old Trimotor Ford, the old Trimotor Junkus Ford, and they spent a lot of their time with road-making. And a particular friend of mine, who's in the 49th and he lives up here at Mudgeeraba,

02:00 Bill McKell, he was in the intelligence there and he was transferred to Melbourne, and he ended up a colonel. So remember my remark about armchair generals, he was a lieutenant when he went down to Melbourne, and he ended up a full colonel because he was in the intelligence. But he's a nice bloke, Bill, and we often have a talk about

02:30 times together. But, all they did, the 49th did, was do the roads, all the 39th and 53rd did, was unload the ships. We got no training whatsoever. And a very interesting point occurred, which I found out after that,

03:00 Major General Morris had, when Blamey came over to more or less do the battle plans and everything else. And don't forget MacArthur's idea was a quick victory to give him kudos in America. Because he intended to stand for the Presidency of America, once he got back, that was all disclosed in, in that book The Odd Couple,

03:30 which everyone should read if they want to read about what happened during the war, that will tell them. The Odd Couple, MacArthur and Blamey. And he said, "Oh," he said, "There's an airstrip at Kokoda, we can supply them. And Major General Morris, whom later Blamey sent back to

04:00 Australia as incompetent, like he did Potts, Ether, about every person who offered him advice. And they turned out to be right, he sent them back to Australia. He told Blamey there was no way that they could be supplied. "We haven't got the planes in the first

04:30 place to take supplies there. And you cannot supply troops any other way, bar by..." "Oh," Blamey said, "We can have carriers." Well, a planter at Kokoda, what's his name, he was in ANGAU [Australia and New Guinea Administration Unit] and he became a…

05:00 oh God, I should know this. Alzheimer's disease grips me every now and again, and you just cannot remember.

That's OK.

His, his name. Anyway, he was detailed by Blamey to build a road from Koitake to Moresby, and Blamey said, "You've got two months to do it in." And his answer was,

05:30 "If I was Superman, I couldn't do it in two years." Because you've got no idea of the country. There is not a flat spot between Moresby, or actually between Owen's Corner and Kokoda. It's just mountain range after mountain range after mountain range. And you're up one and down, and up and down, and up and down, and up and down and up and down,

06:00 all the time. So all the Kokoda Track was, a native track, connecting villages along the way that ended up in Moresby. The amazing part is, that there is a parallel track, I think it's called the Cuppi Cuppi, some name like Cuppi Cuppi Track, that MacArthur detailed a regiment

06:30 of Americans to go over, and cut the Japs off behind their lines. They went over and they took eleven days to get there, they didn't have half the mountains we had. But when they arrived there, they were absolutely unfit for battle. They hadn't shaved, their boots were falling

07:00 off their feet, they were debilitated, they were stricken with malaria, dengue fever, they hadn't even looked after themselves in anyway whatsoever. So, they were totally unfit and they couldn't be used at all, they couldn't even be sent into battle.

07:30 That was a 26th Regiment, one 26th Regiment, that's right. And because we had them alongside of us at Gona, fortunately I wasn't there, fortunately for me, because I was in 9th AGH [Australian General Hospital] with the scrub typhus. But the boys told me that Colonel Honner's remarks were, "Whatever you do, when the whistle goes to advance at Gona, do not, under any

08:00 circumstances, get in front of the Americans." The story is that when the whistle went, it went at somewhere about three o'clock or four o'clock in the morning. The Americans stood up with their finger on the trigger, pulled it, and ran out of ammunition within twenty yards. They had no idea that they couldn't see

08:30 anyone to hit, that what it was, was firepower. There was a whole line, about oh, half a mile long, of these men, just advancing with their finger on, on their trigger, anyway.

Well tell me when you personally heard the news, that you would be going to Kokoda?

Oh, it was practically straight away. Because when Captain Templeton was informed

09:00 that his company would be the first along the track, I went to him and I said, "Sir, I know that you're going on the tracks and that'll you'll need sigs". He said, "No, I won't. I just need riflemen." I said "But you won't have any communication." He said, "I might not need it." Anyway, you know the story.

09:30 After, he met the Japs on about three occasions and he decided to do a night reconnoitre, and they only heard two shots, and he never returned. They don't know, there was a story that the Kuku Kuku tribe, who were cannibals, had killed him.

10:00 There was also a story that he met a Japanese sniper and got killed.

Well if he didn't want sigs with him, how did you end up going?

Oh the whole, the whole battalion was moved up, the B Company. We all had to stand, the other sigs, myself and the other three, went up then with the next company up, which was A Company.

Well tell me about the first day that you left?

The first day that we left.

10:30 We were taken out in trucks as far as Owen's Corner, which is the end of the road. And we were then put on our little feet, loaded up as I've said with four hand grenades, two bandoliers, a 303, ammunition, full kit, bib and tucker. We had a pack, knapsack, ground sheet and a blanket, each had

11:00 a rifle, and our signal gear. Then we marched for five and a half days. And we'd start off at six o'clock in the morning, we'd have a hot meal, hot like breakfast if it could be managed in the native village where we were. And we were fortunate, in that we saw some Jap fighters, but they didn't see us.

11:30 Because it's just jungle all the way through there. And the only flat places between Kokoda and Deniki where you go down the hill and it flattens out into Kokoda.

Well, what's it like walking in that sort of terrain?

It's hell, it's hell. It's perpetually wet, the foliage is all wet,

12:00 we were in mud up to over our ankles on that track, because it wasn't meant for the fellows with boots

to be marching over that. It was for native bare feet and only one at a time, or two at a time.

How, how did you walk on it?

Very slowly.

I mean how many at a time?

12:30 Oh, oh we walked as a company in line. Most of the time you can only have one person on the track, it's that narrow. And it's just cut into the side of a mountain. So that down there, could be a drop of three or four hundred metres to a creek bed. And up here, were just trees, and wet trees at that, because it used to start raining,

13:00 and it'd rain and rain for five and six hours at a time. And the growth, it was absolutely fetid the growth, it stank, because it never saw the sun. The ground there never saw the sun to dry out, and consequently, there's been a couple of good pictures. One of, now where did I have one,

13:30 one is on the cover of a book I have there, and it shows some of the soldiers on the track at… We all tried to grab hold of these sticks, to help us push us along. We used to arrive at the village at about half past five at night, six o'clock at night,

14:00 absolutely finished, like. There were a lot of blokes never, never made the day's march. They just had to be, a couple of sergeant majors were hopping back along the line, picking up the blokes, picking up their equipment and their rifle and everything else, where they'd just flaked out beside the track, it was really...

And what, what would physically happen to your body as you

14:30 **were walking up and down those hills?**

Oh God. Your knees, when you came down, your knees used to shake like jelly. At least you were putting pressure on your knees climbing. But when you started to come down, you were just sort of thumping from one step to the next, trying to keep your feet. Because if you hit the deck

15:00 and slid, you would not stop sliding until you got to the bottom of that track, and you'd knock everybody over on the way. It's was not, it's, I've just got the Association Magazine which was in the mail that the wife picked up, and they're talking about a return trip to Isurava this year. I will not be going, that's for sure.

15:30 Even though it's, they've got three or four ways of doing it. One is to walk the track to Isurava. The second one is to fly to Kokoda and then walk from Kokoda back to Isurava. The third one is to go by helicopter from Moresby to Isurava. And the fourth one is to fly into Kokoda and then go by helicopter to Isurava.

16:00 So I just looked at it, while I was having a sandwich for lunch there, And thought, "Well, I don't want to go back, a lot of the fellows don't want to go back, and I know a lot of the 2nd 14th blokes would never go back." They were the battalion that was absolutely decimated there. They lost so many officers there,

16:30 they had no idea of what the jungle was like. We'd had five weeks before they arrived, and we had some idea. But when they arrived there, they had a young lieutenant, and one of the platoon pulled up beside where I was in a hole there. And he said, "Right men, fix bayonets, we'll charge, we'll get these yellow so-and-sos

17:00 out." And the old sergeant, I heard him very laconically say, "Which way do we charge?" You can't see a damn thing. After three feet, you can't see anything, the jungle's that thick.

What was it like when you saw these blokes arrive?

It was like heaven. The first thing I said, "Digger, have you got a cigarette?" I can remember that.

17:30 And then they came along and their mortars, with their two inch mortars plonked down beside our hole, and let fire about three rounds each. And I'm cursing, saying, "Get the hell out of here, you know what that's going to bring." And of course, the Japs had some four inch mortars, and they started to sail all over, all around us then.

And what did they look like?

They looked like Gods.

18:00 Our blokes. They looked fairly clean, they had camouflage greens on. They were suntanned, they were as fit as could be. But, they were still breathing heavy, even when they got to Isurava, they weren't kids.

And you know how earlier you spoke about some of the problems between Militia and A?

Yes, well.

18:30 The funny thing was, when they arrived. They said, "Who are you?" We said "We're the 39th Chockos." "Chockos, you're not bloody Chockos, you're fighting men". That was the remark, and that's what they

accepted us as then.

And what did you accept them as?

As Gods, mainly. Because if they hadn't arrived on that day, as we well know,

19:00 we would not have lasted another night. The Japs used to attack of a night, and where we were at Isurava was just like a plateau, and we were all around the edges of the plateau, strung out in what little strength we had there. But the Japs couldn't see us, but we could see them once they came out of the jungle below.

19:30 And they were peculiar, because they used to go along with lanterns to light the way.

Well tell me about what had happened on that day and that night before the 2nd 14th arrived. Where were you, how were your defences set up?

I was in a hole. A Company headquarters

20:00 was there, I was employed as a runner. Lionel Watts and myself, he was another sig, was employed as a runner. This is another sad story. I'd been sent back from there, A Company headquarters back to battalion headquarters, to tell them that

20:30 our lines were Ok, where we were supposed to go, they were all there and everything else. Lionel Watts was then sent to tell C Company, which was over on our left, that where we were, and that we were in our lines, our defence lines. Lionel was shot by a sniper down at the bottom even before he

21:00 got to... The story is, I was told, because we had to go down, half a dozen of us were detailed to go down and get his body at night. And the chap who'd been guiding him to the C Company lines said, "I told him not to stand up, I begged him not to stand up," he said, "There's snipers about, don't stand up." Lionel was about six foot

21:30 two, and he came out of the Victorian Scottish. He had been in the Victorian Scottish before he joined the 39th, and of course, he was a sig, he hadn't been in any fighting before. Sigs aren't supposed to be in fighting, they're just there as the connection between battalions, between…

22:00 They're able to, they're the people who tell your next door neighbour what you're doing, what's happening etcetera etcetera. And Lionel stood up to look around and bang, down he went, shot through the head. At once, a fellow came back and reported back to A Company and said your sig's been shot.

22:30 Anyway.

What was it like to hear that news?

Not very good, because it could have been me, frankly. It was just that I'd gone off, I'd been told to go to battalion headquarters, he'd been told to go to C Company headquarters. It could have been the other way round.

How did you deal with hearing the news?

23:00 Very… I didn't have much time, because I'm standing up beside a tree when I got back. I never heard the news then. I'm standing beside a tree, and a sniper must have been not too far, far away. And it went through my hat, the bullet, and it hit the tree behind me. I thought he was using an explosive bullet, and I thought, "They're not allowed, that's against the rules of war, you're not allowed."

23:30 And I, the bark of the tree came down, and I went down too, very quick.

What sort of thoughts went through your mind when that happened?

Can I be explicit? I said, "Shit, wonder where he is?" Just like that. Anyway, he missed me.

And you had to, had to collect

24:00 **Lionel's body.**

We collected Lionel's body at night, there was six of us went down. We each had a couple of hand grenades, each of us. Just in case we were waylaid, but we weren't trapped. And he was down beside the track. And we picked up, we made a rough stretcher, put his body on, and took him back to

24:30 A Company headquarters. And do you want to hear the grisly details now? That night, I'm thinking about what's happened. I'm laying down on the ground, I've got a little lean-to made out of the oil skin capes,

25:00 over us. And one of the lieutenants came in beside me, and said, "Oh", he said, "Did you pick up the body?" And I said "Yes, Sir." He said, "Do you know who it was?" And I told him, I said he was one of the sigs. So, he slept on the other side of me, and that night I woke up, and I looked, and

25:30 I've got this great bush rat on my stomach here, just looking at me. And I could see his eyes, red eyes.

And that's where I think I picked up the fleas which gave me the scrub typhus, because that's how you get them evidently. You learn these things afterwards. But two days after, after that, I started to shake and I went to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], and he said "Oh,

26:00 you've got malaria." And he gave me a couple of Aspros. And the following days, they took my temperature, and I was 104 or something. And he said, "No good." So I think, the next morning the temperature had gone up a bit, and they said, "Evacuate him." So, there were

26:30 about 20 fellows, you know, wounded. Blokes shot in the arm, or through the leg, who were evacuated, we were all evacuated together under the care of Captain Simmington of A Company, he came back with us. And I remember, we

27:00 got to a part of the track back, which we went around the face, on top the 2nd 16th blokes had mounted a Vickers machine gun. And the bloke in front of me said, "I'm not going around there, I'm not going around there." I said "Come on," I said, "Get around there." I said, "Don't make a noise, just get." "Oh you can't force me."

27:30 I took out the bayonet and stuck it in my rifle and said, "Maybe this'll force you." And he went around that turn like a rabbit.

Why didn't he want to go around?

Because of the machine gun on top, he reckons that the Japs would have spotted that, with their heavy machine guns which they had. They called them Woodpeckers. They had a most peculiar 'chuck, chuck, chuck,

28:00 chuck'. Just like you'd hear a woodpecker at a tree. But anyway, we got round. And a bit of light humour there. Phil Goss, one of the sigs who'd been taking his pants off, was crouching down to relieve himself, got shot through the backside. And,

28:30 he and I are going down the track together, talking as sigs do, you know. And there's a dead tree across the track. We go around the tree, and on the other side, the carriers had evidently had dropped rations. So we spent about three hours there, having the best feed of my life, as it turned out.

What did you eat?

Raspberry jam on hard, the hard army biscuits.

29:00 Because we hadn't had a decent meal for five weeks. We'd been living on emergency rations, on bully beef, straight out of a tin, three to a tin. And not very much else. And we had absolutely gormandised ourselves.

29:30 On raspberry jam, a tin of raspberry jam, they had butter in tins. It was hard to tell which was a tin of cheese and a tin of butter, but you could always tell the butter, because it was liquid and it'd splash around inside the tin. Yes, raspberry jam. So,

30:00 we ate there and we got along the track next morning to the village. And that was where Damien Parer was taking the snapshots as we crossed the bridge into, I think that was the Oro Creek. Memory… I can't remember too well. But he was filming there, and

30:30 most of that film was lost when he had to evacuate quick, and he was killed afterwards in a plane crash. What a waste of human life.

Talking about what, what happened to Lionel, what was the normal procedure if someone was killed? You said you had to retrieve

31:00 **their body, but then what?**

We retrieved their body, then a couple of blokes from the war graves would have to dig a grave for him, and just mark it, his name, his army tag and put them around, over a small cross.

And was there any sort of ceremony or words spoken?

31:30 Oh there was always the chaplain to say a few words, if he was available, Nobby Earl. He was a marvel that fellow, yes. But anyway, I ended up half mad, I was, by the time I got back to the 2nd 2nd Casualty clearing station at Koitake. And they put me in, he took

32:00 in and examined me and he said, "What is it, you've got?" And I said, "I've got no idea, but I've got these strong bands around my chest." And he took my temperature, and it was 106. He said, "Straight into bed."

What was it like to be in a bed?

I don't remember too well. But I only lasted there, I think, I passed out somewhere along the

32:30 way. And the next thing I remember was coming in an ambulance driven by a Negro down into Moresby to the Second 9th AGH, where they had me down as typhoid. And I was in a tent there, the isolation

tent, with a policeman who had typhoid. And I can remember

33:00 only two things about that. The first thing was the lumbar puncture.

What's that?

That's when they take a needle about that long, about a quarter of inch thick, and insert it straight up your spine. No anaesthetic, just straight up your spine. And I happened to see the needle when they did it on a bloke in the bed next to me. When they came for me, a few days

33:30 afterward, and said, "We're taking you down the theatre." And I said, "What for?" "Oh," he said, "We're going to give you another lumbar puncture." And I said "Oh no you're not, no you're not." I believe it took four of them to hold me down. I just went berserk, I was thrashing and punching and doing everything, screaming.

34:00 **What, what does it feel like?**

It feels like agony. They can't give you an injection because... The thing was, they evidently thought that I had some form of meningitis, which was in my brain. They hadn't come across scrub typhus, they never knew what it

34:30 was. See, the old settlers, the old men who'd be working the plantations or, and all of those, the fellows, most of them had been evacuated. There was no one there to tell them, and they'd evidently never come across this before. So, I don't know, I was on the seriously

35:00 ill list and the dangerously ill list. And I found all of this out because my mother kept the papers in which it appeared at home. But...

What other sorts of physical ailments did people suffer as a result of walking on Kokoda?

Oh, there was blokes having malaria,

35:30 blokes having dengue fever, war neurosis.

What's that?

Their nerves give way.

How does it happen?

Well, when you can see death staring you in the face, more or less. You're not very happy, and like there are some books here, that

36:00 I've gone to bed, even here, that's some 50, 60 years afterwards. And I've read accounts of the 2nd 14th book, I read. I was having nightmares for three nights.

What kind of nightmares?

Japs coming at me. Japs with bayonets coming at me. Mortar bombs flying over my head, mortar bombs

36:30 falling all round me. You're trying to hug the earth. You're in a hole that's just barely enough to take your body, but you're flat on the ground, hugging it.

You were in a situation where you were, had to, I guess, look death in the face, as you say it.

37:00 **And what sort of an effect did that have on you?**

Well the only effect, I can remember my 25th birthday at Isurava, I said a little prayer to myself. If I'm going to get it, let it be through the head, quick. Don't let it be in my guts or the stomach or anything like that. Let it be through my head, quick. And I said,

37:30 "Grandpa, I'm coming up to you, I think pretty quick." I know, I laugh now, but that's precisely how I felt. My grandfather had died before I left Australia. And I really thought that I was on my way. And as Colonel Honner himself later said, he couldn't understand why the Japs

38:00 kept on making frontal attacks of Isurava, when they could have just gone around us just as easy, gone to a lolling, and cut us off from everything. And then taken us from the rear. It was very, very peculiar.

And this war neuroses sort of thing, how would people behave if they were affected?

Oh God,

38:30 you have nightmares, break out into sweats, you're frightened of everything. Walking on the road even. Even now, if a car goes past and backfires, I'll jump. You just never get rid of it.

What makes you keep on going?

39:00 I think that, they told me, I've got a strong heart. My mother had a very strong heart, she was told.

I mean, when you're, when you're on the track and you're exhausted and you're terrified, what is it that makes you keep on walking?

You keep walking because you don't want to stop there. Because you don't know who's around you. We had no idea.

39:30 We knew that the Japs had landed at Buna. We didn't know how many they were. Because American Intelligence told us there was no more than four hundred. Intelligence. And you didn't know how far they had advanced, because, they had. The peculiar thing was, you know,

40:00 we struck all those muddy tracks. And they tried to advance on bicycles. Exactly the same as they did in Malaysia, on the open road. And they had pack animals, carrying their heavy machine guns. And mortars, stuff like that. Most of those died along the way.

40:30 And I suppose, if it hadn't been for the delaying actions of the 21st Brigade, and Brigadier Potts, and the 39th Battalion, that Moresby would have fallen. But by the time they reached the outskirts of Iorabaiwa there, they were so exhausted

41:00 that they just couldn't go on. And for the first time, we had our artillery, we had machine guns, all set up, waiting to meet them. We had artillery and we had our planes able to strafe them.

We'll just have to pause there cause we're about to run out of tape.

41:24 **- tape ends.**

Tape 6

00:39 **I'll ask you, I'll ask you a question before Kokoda, about the Japanese arriving, and how you heard the news that they were starting to arrive in New Guinea?**

No, well, we were in New Guinea when we heard the news that they were. First of all, we heard the news, that Rabaul, had fallen.

01:00 Then we heard the news that the 2nd 22nd had been practically decimated. And then we got the order to move. And Kokoda was to be the... I still can't for the life of me remember the name of that, the fellow who

01:30 had the plantation at Kokoda. He organised a native carrier train. And those fuzzy wuzzies [New Guinean natives who helped the allies], they would carry a 40 or 50 pound pack up. Fortunately it was only from village to village, each of the villages had, he organised it that they had their own part of the villages' carriers, and they would just carry

02:00 the stuff on to the next village, and so it went on. But they used to carry a 40 pound pack, and then take the wounded back the same way, on a stretcher. And they'd take the wounded, say from Isurava to the next village back, and from there someone else would pick up the stretcher, and take it back until they got them back to Koitake, which was the Casualty Clearing Station.

02:30 But when they, I was discharged, I went to Major Thorpe's Convalescence Camp at Koitake, and he medically examined me and downgraded me, and gave me a job in his orderly room. And I was working in his orderly room when he said,

03:00 "The 39th are down at Humdrum Bluff. If you can make your way there, you'll be able to pick them up." So off I go, I hitched rides down into Moresby and then on to Humdrum Bluff, and when I arrived there, there was just tents and not a soul about. And there was a lieutenant, or an officer, walking around there, and I approached him and I said, "The 39th, Sir." "Oh," he said,

03:30 "They're over the other side." I said, "I'm in the 39th." And I told him who I was. He said, "Well, the only way to get there is to go down to the Seven Mile and try and hitch a ride over the Popondetta. So I hitched a ride back from Homdrom Bluff into the Jackson Strip, and there, the

04:00 Dakota Aircraft there, carrying American troops and equipment, and I'm going from plane to plane, "Is there any chance of getting a lift to Koitake, my mob's over there, and..." "Sorry mate, we're full. Sorry Aussie, we're full." See, and in the end, I gave up and I went back to Thorpe's Con. Camp. And

04:30 consequently, I was there for about two weeks and the Australian Army Pay Corps came up there, looking for a body to fill in, who could type. And here I was, two fingered typing away in the orderly room. "Are you on strength here?" "No, I'm with the 39th." "Ah,

05:00 well they're over the other side and we need a man like you." I was transferred, or I transferred then to the AAPC [Australian Army Pay Corps], and I spent the rest of my army life in New Guinea, until November of '43, in a house in Moresby. And then,

05:30 when my time was up, I'd had just on 15 months, 16, no 18 months there in Moresby. I was sent back to Australia in a Catalina Flying Boat, the mail boat. And I can remember that, we flew ten feet above the sea all the way, because the Japs were still up in the air.

06:00 Went back to Townsville, reported at Townsville to the RTO, that's the Railway Transport Officer. Showed him my leave pass to go to Orange, and first of all I had to go to Sydney, to the RTO there, then catch a train to Orange. And I arrived there,

06:30 I think it was November, and it was snowing. And I think I told you this before, my mother, who was in the Tourist Hotel with a friend. They took me straight into the bar, I was shivering, straight into the bar and poured a couple of very long, thick rums into me. I didn't remember much after that. I think she put me to bed, and that was it until the next day.

07:00 Then I met the Volunteer Defence Corp up there, and explained to them what I could about the Japs. Had to go around to Bathurst, into Blamey, and tell their detachments about the Japs. And I'll try and see things, then I... Someone said, "Oh, said they're calling for a Corporal Bellairs."

07:30 And I said, "Yeah what do they want?" They said, "You've got to report to the RTO Sydney." And I thought "Oh, I'm going back to the battalion." No. It was to report to the RTO, being shipped to Melbourne. So, when I get to Melbourne, I report to the District Finance Office. It was hard to find out just where you were supposed

08:00 to go, no one appeared to know. And I reported to the District Finance Office in Swanston Street in Melbourne, said, "I've just come back from Moresby, I've had leave in Orange." "Oh, where are you staying?" It was the adjutant, Captain Parker. And I said, "At the Chevron Hotel, my father's booked me in there." He said, "The Chevron Hotel, Jesus.", he said,

08:30 "I couldn't afford to stay there." So the next thing I know, I'm out of the DFO's [District Finance Officer] office and I'm at the LHQ [Land Headquarters] in St Kilda Road, in the paymaster-in-chief's office. And I was there with, in the orderly room there,

09:00 and I was given three stripes practically straight away. And I just had the third stripe on my uniform one morning, and I walk in, and there's Brigadier Holder, coming down the stairs. And I threw him a snappy salute, and he took off his cap to me. I still have a laugh over that.

09:30 But that was the end of my fighting action.

Well Bill, before we get too far into the end of things, there was a lot of questions I had which relate to your fighting experience in New Guinea, which had to do with signals, which I was interested in. I was interested in how you set up the signals along the Kokoda Track?

Well,

10:00 actually, we were burdened with that much equipment, like we had to more or less carry a day's rations with us. We had these two bandoliers of ammunition, four hand grenades – which are not light, believe you me – I think they weight about 17 pounds each. And

10:30 someone was, it was core sigs I think, behind us, laying this one single line. Now they got as far as Deniki with it, and that's where our lieutenant told me to stop, with the other two sigs at this sig

11:00 tent that they had had there. And that's where they had the big set, because our infantry sets were useless. They wouldn't go two mile away. We had a big one eleven set there, which these fellows used very competently, and the cipher clerk there who did the sit.

11:30 rep. every day. And so we just, more or less, ran from the battalion headquarters at Deniki back to the tent, put down the situation report which the cipher clerk made out in the code, and then

12:00 it was transmitted. And on a nice day with no clouds, they could get Moresby, but otherwise it had to go to Townsville, because the frequency has to leap all over the place. I had a couple of goes on the key to send it across myself, but I...

12:30 they sent back CQ [Communication Query], "Put on a competent operator." Because these fellows were real good, they could send and receive at 25 words a minute, which I never aspired to. The rest of it was radio telephone, which was just sending a message on through the line. When the

13:00 thing was, the boys from Core Sigs were busy sending a message like the sit. report back, I'd get a message to send back to Myola for ammunition, or for rations, or for stuff like this, you see. Which was done, just through a Don Five telephone set, which we connected with an earth return.

13:30 An earth return means putting your bayonet into the ground and a piece of wire from the earth side of the telephone to it. It's not a very good way, it's a weak signal, but it's better than nothing. And that reminded me of another witticism made by Cameron, after we reported to him, about

14:00 our lieutenant telling us to go back to the Mission Hut, but we didn't want to leave the headquarters without any sigs there. And he said, "No." He said, "Put your phone up there," and he said, "You can

take any message there. Well the first message I got was from Major Anderson, as we used to call him,

14:30 Major Fix-it. He was the adjutant of the 39th. And it just read, it was Morse code, and it read, “Be of stout heart, plenty of good bodies on the way. Wish I were with you. Anderson.” I handed it over to Cameron, and he read it, and he just turned around to the officer who was with him,

15:00 and said, “I wish to Christ he was, instead of me.” Just like that. And that stuck in my mind. And I don’t think Anderson ever got to the front lines at all. That was when, no Honner arrived when we... Cameron. When the Japs attacked Deniki,

15:30 we held them for a day, and then they made their night attack, and about four o’clock in the morning, the order went out to fall-back to Isurava. Well, they... We ended up in, we left a Company

16:00 there, until later on. They made their way back to Isurava, but we forgot to tell them that we were decamping. All of this, all of this comes out in, in the various books and that... But when... we’d been at Isurava for oh, a day and a half, or two days, when Colonel Honner arrived,

16:30 and he’d been with an AIF unit in Syria, and he was a great fellow. A school teacher from Western Australia, a thorough gentleman. And he surveyed the lines at Isurava where Cameron had put us, and he said,

17:00 Cameron told him about what he thought of B Company, how they’d evacuated Kokoda and all this stuff, and he said, “They’re no good to fight.” “No,” he said, “We’ll put them in the foremost position”, and he told the CO,

17:30 the Acting CO, who’d been the 2IC of B Company, he said, “I’m giving you the position of trust here, now show us what you boys can do.” And it was pretty hard on B Company, you know, they had the stigma that Cameron said they weren’t worth anything. Cameron never

18:00 went into action. He was possibly in action with the 2nd 22nd, but he never had any action at all. He stayed in Battalion Headquarters at Deniki. He never went, he never went with the troops when he sent them back in the three companies to Kokoda. He never went with them, he stayed at Deniki. And in hindsight, now that is

18:30 regarded as one of the greatest no-nos in war. That if you advance to a position, to advance in force, you do not split up your force. And Honner immediately got to, and reorganised the lines for Isurava. So we held Isurava until, oh what was it,

19:00 about the 18th of August. Three days. No, no. I was evacuated on the 25th, the morning of the 25th, hard to remember these dates.

I’ll ask you one question about all these

19:30 **conversations that you’re talking about, about decisions being made between the colonels. How privileged were you to hear about these as a signaller? Were you listening to?**

No, everything came through us. See, it was a relay. They’d have to. The first news we got was when I went to Cameron, and said,

20:00 “Colonel Honner has been appointed Commanding Officer of the 39th Battalion.” Huh. So, I’m trying to think then. Because we were back at Isurava when Honner arrived, and he immediately set to, and altered all of the... He just

20:30 spent the next day surveying and altering the lines, the trenches, or the pits where the boys were. And most of those pits were taken over later on by the 2nd 14th blokes, and that’s... That was when the Japs attacked, the night of the 26th, so it must have been the 25th when I was evacuated,

21:00 out, and they attacked in force that night, and they overran the lines. And a hell of a lot of the 14th were killed that night.

What memories do you have yourself of seeing Japanese attack?

I saw them at Isurava.

21:30 You don’t see them close up, like you see their lantern as it comes out of the jungle. And you shoot at it. You don’t know whether you’ve hit him, but if the lantern goes down, you’ve got a fair idea.

What do you think of at a moment like that?

Very quickly.

22:00 Very quickly, because it’s a case of you’ve got to get him, or he’ll get you. We... fortunately... You must realise if you’ve got any idea. We had the upper hand, not in numbers, but in position. They had to break out of the jungle to attack us.

22:30 And immediately they broke out of the jungle at Isurava, we could attack them. Particularly when they

had the lanterns. Because not always did they have the lanterns. They would attack at night, oh, we lost quite a few blokes with their throats slit. One even got into a,

23:00 a slit trench and beat a bit, a piece out of a fellow's cheek. Tell you what, they were a lot braver than I would have been in the circumstances. They had the officer, pointing with his sword, forward, forward,

23:30 forward all the time, forward, forward. And you'd hear them, like you could hear them at night, a mile away. With their jabber. Not much else.

24:00 I'm about exhausted.

Do you want to take a break now? We'll take a break now. Ok, you were talking earlier about becoming sick. Just describe for us how you were evacuated and what happened?

Well, what happened was I went to the RAP,

24:30 and they thought that I had malaria. They gave me a couple of Aspros, and that had no effect, whatsoever. So I went back the next morning, and they found my temperature was higher. And they were quite puzzled. And on the third morning, they said, "Oh, evacuate." And so I joined

25:00 the wounded, and the fellows who were going back and there – must have been 20 or more odd. Anyway, we then straggled back in, to the next

25:30 village, which was Isurava… I can't remember the villages, but it was the first one down. And then we stayed there the night, and took off in the morning, and back again. And I remember staggering along somewhere or other, on my own,

26:00 not a soul around me. I just got out of my head. And I finally got to the 2nd 2nd CCS, as I said at Koitake, the Casualty Clearing Station. And the doctor there asked me what the symptoms were, and I told him it was like iron bands around my chest, and he took my temperature. And

26:30 Captain Simmington was in the room with me. And he said, "I think we'd better have him in bed for a while." So I went into bed there, I was there for two days, I think it was two days, and I must have passed out, because the next thing I knew I was in an ambulance, being driven down by a Negro driver,

27:00 who was trying to break the speed limit. Down, I think, he contended that the Japs must have been right behind him. And I ended up in the 9th, 2nd 9th AGH. And there they thought that I had typhoid fever. And I was put into the isolation tent.

27:30 Where there was a constable there with typhoid, and only parts of it I can recall. I can recall falling off the bedpan in the bed. I was in bed, sitting on the bedpan, and I just blacked out and fell out of bed.

28:00 And they come tearing in, anyway, they gave me a, oh, needle up in the spine, a lumbar puncture. A lumbar puncture, that hurt so much that when I saw them do another bloke there, three or four days later. They moved me out of the isolation ward

28:30 when they discovered it wasn't typhoid, and moved me out of the isolation ward back into a hospital ward. And I saw them do the fellow in the bed next to me with this needle about six inches long, and about the thickness of your little finger, and they inserted it into his spine, and up his spine,

29:00 and they just drained the spine. And when they, they said to me, "We're taking you to the theatre for a lumbar puncture," I said, "No, you're not, no you're not." So anyway, one thing led to another and that was, that ward was where I was when Blamey walked through, and he's shaking hands,

29:30 and, "Great work son, great work son." And this was after Koitake, after he's called them a bunch of rabbits. And they sang to him "Run rabbit, run rabbit, run, run, run." That was fellows from the 2nd 16th, and the 2nd 14th. We had a mystery there, the 2nd 27th were part of the brigade, but they weren't sent up at the

30:00 same time, cause they were kept in hand in case there was trouble at Milne Bay. Well, there was plenty of trouble at Milne Bay, because the Japs landed there too. But they had an air force down there.

When Blamey came through, how had word got around that he'd done this speech, the rabbit speech?

Oh, practically everyone in the hospital knew.

How had they heard about it?

30:30 How would anyone coming to see a mate, in hospital, not re-tell the story of what the battalion had had to suffer.

How were you told, do you remember, how you heard about the news?

Practically the same way, I suppose. Although we weren't, the 39th wasn't at Koitake, the 39th was still

at… There's an interesting bit

31:00 of history here. The 39th is the only Militia battalion who covered the withdrawal of an AIF unit, did you know that? Only. And they recovered the withdrawal of the 2nd 16th. I think it was, it was at the, oh, from one of the villages away.

31:30 They had to stand on-guard while the 2nd 16th withdrew.

Well tell us, tell us, how do you remember how the song started up, like, can you describe to us, was it one whisper here, or?

Oh just someone or other started it, you know, and, and it just continued right through, it just caught on, because most of the wounded were 21st Brigade blokes,

32:00 or fellows from the 39th, because they were the only ones in action, there.

Well describe for us the scene, what was it like, what were people doing?

Blokes, blokes sitting up in bed, blokes hanging onto the beds with legs in plaster and all this stuff, singing, "Run rabbit, run rabbit." Oh boy.

32:30 They really served it to him. And it was quite right, too. A fellow who didn't know the first thing about what was happening up there, who wasn't worrying about the supplies to them, wasn't worrying about ammunition to them. You know, they tried to send, to drop mortars to them, on Myola Lake. And imagine what would happen, when a mortar

33:00 hit the ground, dropped from about 80 feet up, out of the back of a DC-3. All they did was go "boom", and that would set off the next one, "boom", and it'd be just be like gunfire, just like rapid gunfire through there.

Were men laughing, or, or joking, as they sang this song?

I think they were pretty serious. I think they were pretty serious, because they

33:30 there was an episode which happened with the 2nd 16th at Gona. So I was told, that the company sergeant major went, they were ordered to charge the Japs in the, across an open field sort of thing, when the Japs had these, had these built-in bunkers,

34:00 where they had the machine guns are split, about yeah, no more than two inches or so, just between the pines. They had practically cleared a pine plantation, a copper plantation out, and the logs had just been put in, about three logs and then a cap of two inches, and then

34:30 another three logs, and then logs across the top again, with sand and stone on top of those. And they even dropped the bombs from aeroplanes on there, and never got through them. Because they'd had their whole construction, the Engineer Corp there, building these things, and

35:00 they had made them pretty well bomb-proof. Because the artillery couldn't hurt them, our artillery, they dropped part of the 2nd 4th Field Regiment into the Ramu Valley, and from there, they were able to shell Gona. And there were reports of shells landing right on top of those dug-outs, and not making any effect whatsoever.

35:30 Just exploding there.

A bit to resent. But with Blamey, do you remember what he looked like? Describe, from your view, your sight, what you saw of him, at this hospital?

Very red faced. Very hurrying. Carlisle behind him. We used to contend he was a bottle of whiskey a day man, Blamey.

36:00 He had been told by the GOC Moresby Force, it was impossible to supply troops, he didn't believe it. It turned out to be impossible to supply troops. He was told that they were fighting the wrong sort of battle at Gona, he didn't believe it. Instead of that, when it was

36:30 proved right, he just told the fellow who told him, "Back to Australia."

Well what effects did this have on you at the time, as fighting men, feeling that the general in charge was no good?

Ours is not to complain, ours is to do it and die. It was. But see, they, they had no idea of the topography of the track,

37:00 they had no idea of the hardships. All MacArthur was concerned was having, and it was his words at the start who said, "You've got a whole battalion up there, and they can't stop 400 Japanese, what are you guys doing?" Those are supposed to be the words, read the book, The Odd Couple, and you'll get the gist of it. Cause

37:30 we was anxious to have a great victory.

How did you feel about things when you returned home, at the time?

Very lucky. Me, well, I think I was lucky to be able to return home, there were a lot of fellows who weren't. There were a lot of

38:00 unnecessary casualties, totally unnecessary casualties. Like Blamey then had the Australian troops mopping up these isolated outposts of Japanese. And there was no need to mop them up, really, because they were going to be starved out in any case.

38:30 But of course, it's wise, after the event.

Tell us about in the immediate kind of post-Papua New Guinea years, about meeting your wife, how did you meet her?

Well, I met her at a dance at an RSL [Returned and Services League] dance down in Melbourne in 1944. When I was

39:00 stationed in St Kilda Road. And my cousin, who was, I don't know what he was, I don't think he was in the army, he must have been. Anyway, he suggested I go to this dance, and it was with the RSL at the RSL hall, and I asked her to dance with me,

39:30 and we did the… it was some dance more or less, you go down on, on your knee, on one knee in the dance. I think it was, it could have been a Valetta or something like that. Anyway, I got her to tear the knee out of her stocking, she was in the air force, and

40:00 I got her to tear the knee out of her stocking. And I've always said the reason we got married, was because she pulled rank on me.

We've just got to pause there for the end of the tape.

40:16 **- tape ends.**

Tape 7

00:34 **OK, tell me about this man?**

Well, he was White, Steve White, Ken White. Anyway, he was the local member, Liberal here for this seat of Southport in the Queensland Government. And, under Joh Bjelke Petersen [ex Premier of Queensland]. And

01:00 he was a retired army major from Vietnam. And Joh, Joh had this anti-abortion bill. And Ken White said to me, he can't dictate what a woman wants to do, it's not right. If a woman doesn't want

01:30 the child, she's perfectly entitled not to have it. And that was just his views. And he crossed the floor when it came to the vote, he crossed the floor. And the story he told me, was that Joh said, "I'll see that you're never in this Parliament again." And at the next election, he directed that the

02:00 Nationals place their preferences to the Labor Party in the seat of Southport. And White led on the, what principal votes, premium votes, whatever it is, the first count, but the preferences kicked him out. And the bloke who'd been thrown out of the

02:30 Victorian Government at the time, got the seat. If only I could remember his name. I knew that. Anyway, to cut a long story short, Ken White was then approached by the Liberal Party to stand for the Federal seat here of Macpherson.

03:00 And he stood for it, and won in a canter. And he went to Parliament, and his first time in Federal parliament, he was appointed Minister for Defence as an army major retired, he knew what the army was all about. You know, he resigned his seat, he said, "It's impossible

03:30 to live with politicians. Impossible." He said, "If you propose something and it doesn't turn out good, you and you alone were solely responsible for it. If it turns out to be Ok, they had every hand in suggesting it to you." And he said, "I had that many knives in my back by the end of one month,"

04:00 he said, "I was bleeding copiously." He resigned.

That's amazing.

Yes.

Just.

That gave me my insight into political life.

It's a pretty interesting insight.

Oh well, they were his exact words.

Just in terms of time.

04:30 **Just a few more questions looking back at wartime experience for you. You were saying while we were changing tapes, about a, a feeling of guilt. Can you?**

Well, I felt guilty when I got back, remembering all those dozens and dozens of fellows who

05:00 died there. And here I am, I'd beaten the Japs, I'd beaten the scrub typhus, I'd had malaria twice, I shouldn't be alive. Really, because that sniper, every time I think of it, and I think Jesus, if he'd been an inch and a half

05:30 lower, I wouldn't be here. My bones would be up there with the rest of them.

When do you think of the ones that didn't come back.

Oh, occasionally. Doing something, reading something, and particularly on Anzac Day, when you... I go up to Brisbane and I march with what's left, there's generally about eight of us from the 39th.

06:00 And we have our banner. And we are the only unit entitled to have Kokoda as a battle honour. It's a remarkable thing, we have Kokoda as a battle honour, but we were taken out of the order of battle. And they won't tell us why, because there's too much shame attached to it.

When you look back at your time in, at Kokoda, what would say

06:30 **the greatest lesson that you learnt was?**

Keep your head down. There's nothing to be gained, have a look what happened. Immediately after the war, Japan becomes one of the strongest members of the whole world.

07:00 Only because, it was like England and Germany, when Germany surrendered, they had the Nuremberg trial. Every new tool, new lathe in England, went to Germany. And it was reparations for war, a war which Germany had declared.

07:30 **I guess I also mean, what sort of lessons did it teach you personally about, about yourself?**

Be first with the punch.

How has this lesson stayed with you, in the rest of your life?

Well, I've tried to,

08:00 I've never called on anyone for any help. Fortunately DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] help me now. I've got extended disability through quite a few things. I ended up, the scrub typhus ended up giving me asthenic heart disease, which means that I have an angina attack now.

08:30 And I have a nitro [nitro-glycerine], what they call a nitro spray out there, which I've got to grab quick, or Joy grabs quick, I spray it under my tongue, for relief. And that's not the best of feelings. My legs aren't the best. I've got, purportedly, deep vein thrombosis in my left

09:00 leg. And affected neural something or other, when I had the mild stroke, which was caused by a piece of plaque, so they tell me, coming off the carotid artery, and resting in the cerebral. It doesn't affect me

09:30 all the time, but I had to buy myself... Oh, I was on a walking stick for about six or seven months, because I couldn't get round. And somebody said to me one day, "Why don't you get on a treadmill?" I said, "But I can't walk." He said, "It'll make you walk, a treadmill." And that's what happened. It's in the bathroom now.

10:00 And I walk on it every day when I remember it. Cause I'm a lazy person, incidentally. I think laziness is built into me.

Me too. What would you say, I guess, is your best memory of your time at Kokoda, if there is one?

I don't have any best memories. I get a lot of worst memories.

10:30 But I hope as time goes by, they'll disappear. But unfortunately with me, I've got a fairly retentive memory, and I can remember things. I can't remember things that happened. But I won't be talking to you, and the name will come back, the name that I was trying to think of from the Kokoda Plantation, the Copper Plantation,

11:00 who had to organise that road in two months from Kokoda to Moresby.

What would you say are some of your worst memories?

Oh, I hope I don't have them too often. Going down to pick up the body of Lionel Watts, and thinking, "But for the grace of God,

11:30 that could be me." The night in the signals hut at Deniki, we thought we heard Japs jabbering away, coming up the track. And we had a Lewis machine gun there, and one of the Corp blokes

12:00 immediately went out and opened up. It could have been Japs, but it was natives, and we killed a native. That wasn't very nice, particularly as they were trying to help us in every way. But you get a lot of memories that you don't want to bring back

12:30 **Do those memories come back anyway?**

Sometimes they do, particularly at times like now, when you're starting to talk about them, and delve into your memories.

You've mentioned nightmares.

Oh yes, when I start and read about, you know, various things that, war books, The

13:00 Silent Men, the 2nd 14th book, and I can vividly remember them at Isurava when they came up, and reading afterwards of the casualties that they suffered. Rich Bissett, a lieutenant there,

13:30 being stitched right across the stomach with a Japanese machine gun, when they broke through his line. And holding the hand of his brother as he died. Those sort of things are not happy, they're not my idea of happiness. And,

14:00 when you think of what might have happened, had I obeyed Duvet and gone back, and not seen these things, and not seen Lionel Watts killed, what would have happened. Fortunately,

14:30 the three of us together got back to Australia, and Sully played football afterward at Collingwood. I didn't. I had a few trips into hospital, but apart from that, I recovered.

15:00 And I took out a bookie's licence once again, and went broke once again. And went to work and worked for Colonial Mutual Insurance Company until I got a bank together again, and went back to making a book, and went broke again. And the third time,

15:30 I thought, "Well I'll try the trots instead." And I went to Woodend and they had the trots around the Woodend Race course. And I can remember it well, because I went up there one day and Charlie Oliver was having a

16:00 double on the Hurdle and Melbourne Cup. And I said, "Cheery Bob will win the Hurdle, and I think Aragia," Aragia or Fox Army, it was one of the two, "will win the Melbourne Cup." And that double was 200 to one, and I had ten bob on that double. And they both won, I won a hundred pounds.

16:30 And old Charlie, when I presented him with the ticket about six weeks afterwards, he said, "Oh gee, I thought this was a sleeper." Yes, I got to know him pretty well, Charlie Oliver, one of the few gentlemen in the racing game.

I guess, because we said we wouldn't go far into this tape, and

17:00 Oh that's alright. Once I get away from having to recall what's... I cannot think of that bloke who had the, his name, oh his name. Oh, it's alright, I'll... Things get me upset like that, when I can't remember a name that I had a hell of a lot of contact with.

17:30 And he ended up a captain in ANGAU, and he was a lieutenant then. And he ended up a captain in ANGAU. And no, won't come to me.

Well tell me, Kiernan's [interviewer] asked you a little bit about this, but how difficult is it to settle back into civilian life after an experience like Kokoda?

Oh,

18:00 I had that settling down period at LHQ before I got out of the army. And my points, I got out. Now I was married, and the Armistice was August the 15th, I remember it was my birthday,

18:30 '45. Got gloriously drunk. Yes, don't want to remember that too much. And married, and the cooling off period was from the time I got back

19:00 to Australia, after having a fortnight in Orange, coming down and finding myself at the, living at the Chevron Hotel, and being addressed as captain. I thought, this is alright, they lived pretty well.

When did you hear the news about the bomb that was dropped in Japan?

19:30 Oh, that was local news. That was just about the oh, 10th or 12th.

6th.

There were two atom bombs dropped in Japan. One was dropped on Nagasaki, and the other one was dropped at Hiroshima.

How did you hear the news?

I think it was on

20:00 the local radio news. The Japanese Air Force, they gave the name, Anola Gay, and all of the plane, and they'd already bombed Japan before, but they had not bombed, they were... I think what they did was probably the best thing that could have happened. Because attempting to land in Japan would have meant

20:30 the wholesale sacrifice of thousands of men, and the people concerned, because they were very loyal to their Emperor, the Japanese. That's why we had such a lot of trouble trying to stop them in various places. The whole trouble was that the majority of the troops, Japanese troops,

21:00 the Battalions had drawn from the one village, or the one area. So they practically, everyone in the battalion knew everybody else. Well, they didn't have battalions, they had regiments. They knew everybody else there, because he was a neighbour. Or you know, lived at such and such. Or was married to a sister, or married to a... And they were very close knitted, and to them, the emperor was the son

21:30 of God. And, of course, it was only Tojo and there another example. He'd already been told they had no way known that they could beat America. Bloody should, we have the people, we have the people with the will. And unfortunately they didn't have the

22:00 the manufacturer that they could turn out a ship a day, like the Yanks could. Or one plane every 20 minutes, or something, like the Yanks could. So that losses didn't mean anything to the Americans. All their generals were confirmed with, and although you

22:30 probably might not know this, but later events have proved, that probably it was the Battle of Midway that beat the Japanese, or stopped the Japanese from invading Australia. Because old, oh, Japanese Admiral of the Fleet, who had organised all this huge, huge Japanese fleet.

23:00 He thought, "Now, if we can take Midway, we can stop the Americans from reinforcing New Guinea." And he had this huge armada of ships there. His three aircraft carriers, and about five or six battleships and transports, all up there in line, about to invade Midway.

23:30 And the Japanese planes all took off with their bombs, and they were back on there being reloaded, onboard the carriers, being reloaded, when they were discovered by the American air force, the army air force it was, too. Not the air force, but the army air force. And the army air force had the Hudson Divebombers, and it was just

24:00 more or less an open go, because all of the flat tops, had all the munitions, the bombs, and the machine guns ammunition on deck, waiting to be loaded, when they started to dive bomb. And they only needed to hit it with one bomb, and the whole top of the aircraft carrier went up.

24:30 And that was the history of Midway. And they practically, the entire Japanese fleet was lost there, their Pacific Fleet was lost there. And the rest of them, who were in Truck Harbour, they were sitting ducks then. Because they'd more or less run out of planes, that they had very few Zeros to defend the

25:00 ships, and the American bombers just played havoc with them.

It's really interesting to hear that opinion.

Well, that was the reason why, or one of the major reasons why, they never took Moresby. See, Milne Bay had, I think, three brigades there,

25:30 to meet the Japanese landing. They had an air force there, and they had the Spitfires down there, who were the best battle planes of all. And although they took a lot, how they saved Australia. We still reckon it was the blokes on the Kokoda Track that saved Australia, because, otherwise, they'd have been

26:00 in Moresby, and from Moresby, they'd have had control of the aerodrome there, and instead of coming from Rabaul, their bombers could have reached Australia easily, in return.

Speaking of the Kokoda Track, if you think of the person you were before you went, and the person you were when you returned home.

Young crazy kid.

And how did you change?

Well, I think

26:30 it aged me quite a lot. It made me think a great deal of after the war. When I heard stories glorifying war, and how wonderful it is, you can't talk to any bloke in the 14th Battalion and talk about the glory of war.

27:00 But that was one of the most fighting battalions in the 7th Division, it was practically wiped out on the Kokoda Track. They very, very nearly lost Brigadier Potts. They lost a hell of a lot of officers, and a hell of a lot of men.

27:30 There was nothing to be gained.

And what would you say would be the personal change that occurred in you?

Oh, I hate generals, and even more so, I loathe politicians. I can't see any reason for people seeking advancement the way that they do.

28:00 And I said before, and I'll say it again and I'll keep on saying it: they care little for their country. They care less about the men who have to fight for it. They have one. Read David, or Dudley, Horner's [David Horner] book, Inside the War Cabinet, and it'll give you. They were running around like WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s with their heads cut off, not knowing what to do, not knowing what to say.

28:30 There was one example of a Minister for War, a fellow named Ford, who went up to Moresby. Later, late in '41 when the Japs had retreated back to Buna. And he said to the officer who was with him,

29:00 who accompanied him. He said, "Are there any Japanese close to here?" The fellow said, "No". He said, "Oh well, they won't invade Australia, will they?" And the fellow said, "Oh no, we've got them on the run." And Ford's answer was, "Thank God for that, my seat's safe." There you are, that's the way they think. Now, fellows who write that in books, have got

29:30 to know what they are talking about.

I guess, as we come towards the end here. If, if there was anything regarding your wartime experience that you would like to leave on the record that you haven't specifically spoken about, any final words to sum up, is there anything you'd like to say.

Yes. Send all politicians in first. Let them be the

30:00 first to meet the enemy and you'll never, ever have another war. Never.

And any personal, sort of.

I grieve, I grieve for those young men who died.

30:30 The men particularly who died defending as they were told, defending England from German occupation. They died in Syria, in Greece, miles away from their own land, and they should never have been there. The whole thing was, that it was known in 1936 that Japan was putting up a major threat to the Pacific. So why should they take

31:00 our men away from defending our country, and put them in the desert to fight the Germans? It's ridiculous. What political brains thought they could defend Australia, from Egypt, or from Greece,

31:30 or from Crete.

Alright, well, we're kind of reaching the end there, so, yeah.

How much more have you got?

INTERVIEW ENDS