Australians at War Film Archive

Ian King (Snowy) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Ian, if we can begin by giving us an idea of where you were born and brought up.**

I was born at the Royal North Shore Hospital, actually.

01:00 We lived at Dee Why at the time and went from there to North Bondi and I began primary school at North Bondi. Eventually, because we moved out into the near west, Stanmore Public School, and then North Newtown Intermediate High School and eventually having passed the Intermediate Certificate with, I suppose I may as well confess to

01:30 two As and two Bs, because there were some things I didn't want to do anything with like languages for example. Not that I haven't grown to regret that but there you go and mathematics was not my bag. I always wanted to me in the air force and I didn't realise how important mathematics would be to me to be in the air force. I joined the air training corps with the first intake

02:00 when I was 16, they had only just started it, and I think because, again, another confession, I wasn't recognised immediately because there were several people singled out for NCO [Non -Commissioned Officer] training, I wasn't one of them, and I thought the air force can't know what it's doing and it's not for me. And by that time I had turned 17 and that's when I joined the army.

02:30 I don't think that I've left out anything that any psychologist would be much interested in.

What did your father do?

My father was a journalist, Sydney journalist and as I was two years under age to join the army, by the way, I may as recount how he figured in that.

03:00 And what I did do to get myself into the army two years under age. Age for enlistment in the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces] was then 19 and I was 17 and two months at that stage. My father, being a journalist gave me one cornerstone to my story, because I don't know that I had a desire to be different

03:30 it was just that I felt that I could tell a decent sort of a story to convince the powers that be that I was 19 rather than 17 and that would eliminate the necessity for me to do what all the others were doing who were joining up under age and that was to forge your birth certificates. I worked for

04:00 Paul and Grey at that time, the first job I had on leaving school, I should say, was an office boy to the managing director of Edwards Dunlop who were in Clarence Street at the time and so I worked for Edwards Dunlop for the best part of a year and then I went to work for Paul and Grey in their aircraft parts section. And it happened that we had a lot of customers in New Guinea.

04:30 Quite a number of customers in New Guinea who from time to time, would call in, and these were people with aircraft such as, well, for example the Catholic Mission, because they're going to come into this story. And not very long before I left and joined the army a gentleman whose name I wish I could remember but can't, was in charge of who was in charge of the Catholic Mission in Madang

05:00 had actually had been in our shop and I had spoken to him, and I think not for the first time, I think I had met him once before actually. So the story, I was born in New Guinea, I was born in Kavieng to be exact, because the Japanese had already taken Kavieng and because that being the case, if you wanted my birth certificate, you would have to ask the Japanese for it.

05:30 That was my feeling. I had to sign a statutory declaration; this was probably the first criminal act I had ever performed. At Victoria Barracks I was shown into a room in which there was a sergeant and as I entered the room, knowing I was going in there to make this stat dec[statutory declaration] he had NGVR on his shoulder, which stands for

06:00 New Guinea Volunteer Rifles and immediately, and I knew that and I thought, boy, I might be for it here. My story was that I had been working in New Guinea and the job I had when I left was in Madang.

Madang hadn't been taken by the Japanese, where by that stage, Kavieng and Rabaul had. So I was in Madang and, he said,

06:30 "Oh Madang, I know Madang. Who's in charge of the Catholic Mission there now?" "Oh Father Reilly, or whatever his name is", and I said "Oh, yes, he's still there". "Yes", I said, "He's still there". So apparently that satisfied him about my bona fides. And he asked no more questions and I have only since – I went back to New Guinea in 1949 and I took great pains to learn to speak pidgin.

07:00 It is a language in itself. It's got great facility and if you can communicate in pidgin with the natives, there's nothing you can't say or request or whatever. But I have since thought to myself, my God, he only had to have addressed me one word to me in pidgin and I wouldn't have known, I wouldn't have had a clue what he was talking about. It would have been a very good approach for him

07:30 but the thought of Father Reilly, or whatever his name was…

Did you do any preparation or research for this story you prepared?

Well, it just sort of came to me I think. It probably put itself together over a few days. At the time, this was February 1942. The Japs had

08:00 attacked Pearl Harbour in early December in 1941. They were landing in New Guinea at the time; they were getting very close to home. Mine was a very aware family because, oh, I left Dad out of that…I said, my father's a war correspondent in London, in England

08:30 or somewhere in that vicinity. We haven't been in touch for a while but they were very happy… I think at time counted eyes, arms and legs and if you - because people were needed and so we were accepted. And when I saw some of those birth certificates, honestly, I'm sure they just didn't care

09:00 as long as the people who were doing the signing up were concerned, who were signing up the recruits were concerned, the story was there and the birth certificate was there and no one else would have to see it but the recruiting sergeant and "They were just ignoring the erasures and the alterations". Anyway, I have that feeling.

09:30 And as far as my story was concerned it was much more elaborate than was necessary but it was all there. I suppose it's also worth reciting that in 1949 I went back to New Guinea to work for a company called Collier Watson – I don't know if they are still there, but they were there for a long time.

10:00 That was in Rabaul, and I did work for them in Rabaul. But then they transferred me to Kavieng, the place of my birth. Quite a coincidence. So anyway,

10:30 does that cover whatever was the last question?

That covers how you managed to enlist under age. I was wondering how long you were thinking about enlisting before that?

Oh, that's what I was going to tell you – it was pretty obvious that things were getting worse because the Japanese had created a land bridge all the way to New Guinea

11:00 and it was pretty obvious that were going to be next. Regardless of this absolutely silly concept that the Japanese never intended to invade Australia, it wouldn't matter would it, because if they took New Guinea and our troops that were there were either killed or made prisoner

11:30 Prime Minister Curtin would have had to capitulate. And if he had capitulated, we would have had to wear the Japs so, there's no two ways about it. So things being as bad as they were, I suppose, by January, I had decided that I wanted to get into it.

12:00 I think it's in the Australian psyche, or the type of young men that we were, to admit we were waving flags and saying the Japs have to be stopped. We would have probably wanted to give the impression that it was all a great adventure.

12:30 I really do think that all the fellows that I knew would have been determined to get up there and stop the Japs from coming any further. I think I probably, without you having to ask, I should tell you then, what happened soon after I joined up. We were called out on; well we went on parade as usual on one day and then instead of being marched off to what was called the bullring,

13:00 to get on with our training, a whole lot of names were called out, mine among them and everybody else off and we who must have been about a third of those who were on the parade, remained behind and then we were told that because we were under nineteen and a half years of age,

13:30 we were to be put into some special unit because the Parliament had decided that, there had been a lot of rumbling from the population about young fellows not of age being sent away as cannon fodder, to the Middle East and to Malaya and so on. Singapore at the time, by the way, had just fallen.

14:00 **So it's early 1942 here, and whereabouts were you sent on this unit?**

We were in Dubbo. So we, and I well remember it too, on that parade, this had been announced, there

was a voice from the rank behind me, along the lines of, if there were any vulgarities in it, I'll leave them out, because I don't remember what they were anyway, and he said, this voice said,

14:30 something to the tune of, "It's because of bastards like that, young idiots like that joining up etc that we are here", and I turned around to see who this was, who was saying this and it was a bloke who did look older than most of us, a fellow that we subsequently came to know as "Junior", because that's what he was know as in the Manly Life Saving Club.

15:00 And he turned out to be, his name was Bob Gawn[?], he eventually turned out to be the best mate I've ever had.

Was he older than nineteen and a half?

No, he was two weeks younger than I am.

He just looked older.

Yes, he was carrying his pose right through to the very limit.

15:30 Yes, so poor old Bob, he died about two years ago now. Two years ago, in July.

Before we go on, could you just clarify me for the purpose of the unit?

Oh, yes. Well the purpose was, it was a kind of knee-jerk thing I think. They didn't know what they were going to do with us. There were just enough of us at that stage for a platoon.

16:00 The infantry platoon being about 30 men – there might have been 30 of us, perhaps a few less than thirty. So they gave quarters in the camp hospital. We had a hut to ourself in the camp hospital. They told us we were to be know as the "Elite Platoon" or E Platoon, for short but we were the Elite Platoon.

16:30 We were to be taught "Brigade of Guards" drill, which was the big thing in England, the Brigade of Guards and we would learn to fix and unfix bayonets on the march and various things like that, which we did and which is quite spectacular. And we marched around the camp when everyone else was doing their bullring training. Bullring being, you are in this group for throwing grenades, and this one for handling the Bren gun.

17:00 You are in that group for the mortar and you go round and round. And we would march around the bullring and we would fix and unfix the bayonets on the march, and everyone would go, "Wow!" But that sort of evaporated after a while but they still didn't - when my army age was nineteen and a half, which after all was only four months,

17:30 I was still pinned down in this thing and it wasn't until, mind you, I think you've seen from those photographs, it was really quite ridiculous for me at 17 to try to pass myself off as 19 anyway. I looked more like 14. But there you go.

When you said it was a knee-jerk reaction, the formation of the Elite, what was it a knee-jerk reaction to?

18:00 Well, I don't think they thought it through. The Parliament had said "If you are not nineteen and a half, you can't be sent overseas, and we had better get all these blokes whose ages are under nineteen and a half" because I imagine, I know this was the case with some, those with their forged birth certificates, they tried to be, because they were only,

18:30 in fact there was one of our number, was a fellow named Gordon Beardmore, known as the Kid, because he was fifteen and bit, that was the way he made out his age to us, but he was very mature looking and I won't bother about the film star, because you wouldn't know him anyway,

19:00 he bore a great resemblance to a bloke that was seen a fair bit on the movies in those days –

Try me – who was it?

It was Caesar Romero.

The Joker in Batman!

Oh, was he? Oh well, there you go!

But he was a romantic lead.

Well, Gordon did look like him and Gordon eventually retired as a Superintendent of Police

19:30 but he pre-deceased me by about…what am I saying, He died about ten years ago, I'm not dead yet. Gordon's birth certificate and the birth certificate of others, if they were under nineteen and a half then – if they were 17 and two months like me they would

20:00 not bother to change the dates on their birth certificates, but I think some of they had, because of circumstances of getting their age down had also altered the day of their birth as well as the year of their birth and, what did that have to do with?

We were talking about when you were at Dubbo and you were in this Elite group and you were feeling frustrated.

20:30 Yes, well we were and so then it became –I would like to say something about my attitude to soldiering at that stage. I wanted to absorb everything that they had to teach me. Because I just felt I had taken this step, I had got in the army and

21:00 if you say I wanted to be a good soldier, you would take that to mean that you wanted to look on the parade ground. I just wanted…I had the feeling there were enemy out to be there to be killed, so consequently one of the things I wanted to do was I didn't get the opportunity for this until we had made our first move because at Dubbo, we didn't do any rifle range training at all.

21:30 At Bathurst we did and I'd never fired a rifle in my life. In fact, air rifles were the things in those days and I had

What kind of rifles were given

Oh, .303's – the Enfield .303 and I did everything I could

22:00 and I don't know anybody else who did the same thing and I didn't let on to anybody that I was trying for this, there was this sergeant who decided to help me and that was to get onto the rifle range more than anybody else. I could learn to shot and shoot accurately. On one occasion when I had been there the day before

22:30 and he said, "What are you doing here Private King?" I said, "I just want to improve sergeant", I think he was a sergeant. And he said, "Oh you're doing all right – four bulls and four inners, yesterday out of them shots, nothing wrong with that".

23:00 And he said it was a good group – it was a good group the bulls were just on the inners and it was quite a good group. And I said, "But it's not perfect, is it?", or words to that effect. And he said, "All right I'll give you ten rounds", and he gave me ten rounds. I banged away again. I used to do that as often as possible. I became quite a good shot. Although subsequently I found that when I did get into the jungle, that I hated the .303 rifle

23:30 just everything, it was always in the way, it wasn't a great deal of use at close range and in the jungle you're at close range most of the time.

Were there any particular problems you noticed in training?

No, because you are never in those circumstances.

What was it like getting used to firing it at training?

24:00 **In terms of just using the rifle.**

Oh, it was fun at first because I had never done it before.

Tell me what it was like because I've never fired a rifle in my life. Can you tell me what it's like?

Well in the words of that sergeant that I think he was, yeah any way I think he was a sergeant. I'll call him a sergeant.

24:30 He started to coach me. He'd say, because I was doing fairly well, to get the best out of me and he wasn't paying much attention to anybody else. And he said, "Now, what you had to do, was you sight a target, you've got foresight and backsight and you look through and you line them up to the target and you think you're going to hit the target but then if you can't

25:00 hold the rifle steady and you sort of jerk it when you pull the trigger", and he said, "Now squeeze the trigger". On the .303 rifle the first pressure that comes back and you feel like you've come up against a sort of a stop and you squeeze instead of pull because if you pull, you move the rifle. So you sort of squeeze and he very patiently and with great care

25:30 he coached me to make sure that I didn't move the rifle while I squeezed the trigger. And it was great, I did improve my scores incredibly. Mind you, when I say I didn't like it in the jungle, I got hold of an Owen gun as soon as I could and the Owen was a magnificent weapon. In fact

26:00 I'm a committee member of our battalion association and the secretary is a fellow called Pat Maloney who was a sergeant. One day, because I was not in the Owen Stanley campaign, I joined the battalion at the end of the campaign, what's known as the Kokoda campaign. And because of what I knew and I read a book called The Owen Gun

26:30 and that book describes in great detail, because it was written by someone who was intimately involved with the production, described in great detail how, not politically, well army politics and

27:00 well, you could say politically, but not parliamentary politically, it was stopped from being accepted by the Australian Army as being the weapon of choice, the submachine gun of choice and they persevered

with the American Thompson and British Sten gun but a great deal of time was wasted and I think a lot of lives were lost because of that.

27:30 Back to Pat Maloney, I said, “Pat, during the Kokoda campaign, if you had wanted the Owen gun to be given to anybody you so desired in your platoon, how many would you have handed it out to?” He said “Everyone”, he said, “Everyone except a specialist”, you know

28:00 the two-inch mortar, the Bren gun. That would take care of it just about. Everyone else would have an Owen and didn’t have any. They could have had them and that’s, actually, I if only I had had access, well if I could jar my memory, if I could; I could write a book I reckon.

28:30 On the ways in which our own people could have lost the war for us. There were some bloody-minded people there, hopelessly bloody-minded, either feathering their own nests or pushing their own barrows or whatever, you know. There were some dreadful people.

Well, perhaps as we could talk about this in more detail later. Now, I’m interested in your training that you were doing.

29:00 Yeah.

Were there any other extra steps that you went to prepare yourself?

No, not really. I think that leads me on to make another observation, I think. Not really to do with anything we’ve been talking about. When I joined the army, you could say I had a couple of girlfriends, but

29:30 very sort of brief things. I hadn’t had any sexual experience. I hadn’t had any serious sort of relationships but in the course of time in the army I started to feel that I would be missing out on something if I got myself killed.

30:00 I mean, I began to feel protective of my skin from the point of view of having female relationships, I think it comes back to that. And after some time, after less than a year, I can’t remember when we went to a called

30:30 Lowanna, out of Coffs Harbour and started a jungle-training outfit out there. You know Canungra, Canungra in Queensland – that became the big jungle training school, Canungra.

On the Atherton Tablelands?

No, in the, this is closer to Brisbane. I forget the mountain area that they call it. Anyway, it was mountainous and rainforest and whatnot.

31:00 But this was to be, and this west of Coffs Harbour, about 20 miles out of Coffs Harbour. Well, it was then that I started to have a serious relationship with a girl. But all these things, the fact was, I was beginning to, what I’m doing is excusing the fact, I think that I went AWL [Absent Without Leave]

31:30 on a few occasions. And it was usually because of some girl, that I didn’t get back from the weekend until a day late, or I took a weekend when – and I was sprung for not being there – I paid two quid for that, for not being back when there was a parade. So running parallel to my desire to be a good fighting soldier

32:00 was this other thing that was pulling me, but not interfering, because when I was there, I really got stuck into it. And I imagine, I’ve got to say that I think I was as well trained a soldier as anyone else.

So, tell me, how were your superior officers regarding you in light of this?

Oh, I think well, there was a fellow named O’Rourke. See, most of the people who trained us

32:30 and the people in charge of infantry training, battalions and whatnot, were soldiers and some of them World War I veterans, some who had been in the regular army for sometime but hadn’t been in the war, such as Lieutenant O’Rourke, he was known as “Mickey the Mouse”.

33:00 It was a sort of – he was a lovely little fella, he really was. He said to me one occasion, when I had been not there, when I should have been there and paid two pound and got a red line on the pay book, he said, “You’re a flighty private, King, that’s what you are, flighty!” But with a big smile.

33:30 He didn’t, well I know they thought well of me. I got into scrapes later and I was in the 2/33rd Battalion. One was a fearful sort of a thing. We’ll come to that in due course. But my commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel, Thomas R.W. Cotton, DSO MC [Distinguished Service Order, Military Cross],

34:00 tore up some charge sheets that had been sent to him through other means that we will get to, tore them up and threw them away and then charged me as though, but I mean I had been AWL, so he disregarded the fact and that was only because he regarded me as a good soldier. He was very protective anybody

34:30 who was, so…

Tell me about the jungle training you did near Coffs Harbour?

Oh, well, that's – Lowanna impinges on maybe a part of the Dorrigo mountains. You know the road that goes up through Bellingen and then up to Dorrigo and so on. As well I know because it's a continuous mountain range

35:00 because we went on a route march, this is one of the things we did in our training. We marched from Lowanna down to Coffs Harbour to Urunga, to Bellingen, to Dorrigo across the mountains, through the bush, and back to Lowanna that was the longest.

35:30 We left shortly after dawn and it was just getting dark when we got into Lowanna. It had been in summer so it was a fairly long day, whatever month it was, I can't remember. But so there was that,

36:00 there was beating about the bush and playing what we always referred to exercises as playing silly buggers. "Don't tell me we're going out to play silly buggers again". That being when, you often had blank cartridges, not always, but sometimes you had blanks when they were getting fairly serious about it.

Did they tell you much about the enemy?

36:30 No, in fact I was only thinking of that, you're reading my mind David, because I have thought of this before and it was a deficiency. At the time of course, in December 1942, I would say November, December 1942, things were very, very rugged in New Guinea.

37:00 And, up until the time that Buna and Gona fell, in December 1942, I think or the end of November/December 1942, Gona in particular, but there was no mention of this. The excuse would be given I suppose that was for security purposes.

37:30 But if they told us, we would be blabbing around the place and we would be saying things that were supposed not to be promulgated and I suppose that would be the excuse given. But you would have thought, if I had been running the outfit, I would have had at least weekly briefings on

38:00 what was happening elsewhere to gee people up and to say "Well, when your turn comes, you know what's been happening", but no – really nothing. We found out by the papers and by what might be let drop privately here and there. A couple of officers at Lowanna – two lieutenants, Reg Hoskins and Ted Grimshaw, two blokes that I got to know well,

38:30 and they would talk about from time to time what was happening, but nothing official and they obviously didn't know anything near, and didn't have the full news at all.

The training officers at the camp were equally as ignorant?

Yes. Anyway you asked what did we do there, well

39:00 most days started with what was called the speed course. It was an eight-mile marching course where you had just light, you didn't wear anything weighty and carried your rifle, and away you went and it was very seriously contested

39:30 from the point of view of setting a record. It was through a village called Malbon, there was Lowanna, Malbon, and I haven't got a very good recollection of it now, but we really used to try to beat whatever the record was and I can't remember what it was now. But, you would really get stuck into it.

40:00 End of tape

Tape 2

00:30 The training often began with that march before breakfast and then bashing around the bush doing various things. We had a naturalist there, a fellow named Melvin Ward who taught us

01:00 how to butcher a carpet snake and cook it and eat it, which very few did. I tasted it but that's about all. But he showed us how to get water out of a water vine and I've never forgotten that and I can always get water out of a water vine. It might be someday useful. And I suppose we learnt

01:30 bushcraft. We had blokes amongst us who were good in the bush anyway, so we learnt things from them, but day by day, that's the sort of thing we did there.

What were you expecting – what did you think at this point it was going to be like?

Well, what we were expecting was often, "When the hell were we going to…?"

02:00 We knew we wanted to join AIF infantry battalions, I don't think anybody had…oh, there was one that actually we did think about the 2/33rd because one of our fellows at Dubbo was claimed by his brother.

A guy named Micky Gunns, his name was L. C. Gunns, so his name wasn't Michael

02:30 but he was known as Mick, and his brother was in the 2/33rd Battalion and he claimed him. And in the army when an older brother claims the younger brother they let him go, it's a rule apparently. He was killed at Myola Ridge, in the Kokoda campaign. So because Mick had gone to the 2/33rd, there were various of us

03:00 who were good mates of his, who knew the 2/33rd and I think that was where we wanted to go lo and behold, but actually, I wasn't sent directly there. Is it appropriate to talk about that now? I was posted to 21st Brigade Headquarters, the 21st Brigade is a sister brigade,

03:30 in the 7th Division, there's the 18th, 21st and 25th Brigades. The 21st Brigade was composed of the 2/14th, 2/16th, and 2/27th Battalions, played the leading AIF role in the Kokoda campaign. They helped out, I suppose, the 39th Battalion who were the militia battalion who took the brunt of it.

04:00 They were the real heroes of that campaign and so were the 14th, and so were they all, but the leading heroes were the 39th Battalion, and they were all kids. Most of them were real kids. There wouldn't have been anybody of your age there, anyone of your age would have been an officer anyway. Anyway, they posted me to 21st Brigade Headquarters.

04:30 I spent about a month at 21 Brigade Headquarters, pleading with them to let me go to the 33rd where all my mates had gone.

What were you doing at the headquarters?

Nothing, well nothing from the point of view that I was just trying to get out of it. When I was paraded, when I say nothing it's probably so because they had not formed what they called a protective platoon.

05:00 In the Kokoda campaign, the Japs had got into Brigade Headquarters on a couple of occasions, not only the 21st, well they had got into the 21st Brigade Headquarters anyway and created a bit of mayhem and so the idea was born that in kind of warfare, a brigade headquarters, which was supposed to be comparatively safe and behind the lines,

05:30 needed to be protected with an infantry platoon to protect them and so the brigade major to whom I paraded myself there was a great pains when I said I – that was the point that I made, was that I'm not only a trained infantryman, I said to him - you know, a boy of 18, yes I would have been 18 then, preaching to the brigade major

06:00 "I'm a highly trained soldier Sir, I've taken great pains to really learn things that I didn't have to learn". Actually at that stage too, I had done an intelligence school, so I was doing extra things. And he said, "Yes, but you are going to be infantry here, you are going to be in the protective platoon, we are forming this protective platoon and it's the protective platoon's job to protect headquarters".

06:30 I said, "But Sir, all my mates are at the 2/33rd". I kept this up for about a month. "Can I go and see the brigade major again?" I would say to to whomever, and, "Oh well, all right", and so eventually he paraded me to the brigadier, the Brigadier General, Ivan Dougherty, and he was so avuncular it was…

07:00 Obviously, just the look of me, I said I looked about 14, by that time I might have looked 15 and the photo – the more mature looking photo that you have seen there was taken in Townsville, I think, after I had done a campaign anyway. I had been in the Lae campaign, so I may have been maturing.

07:30 Anyway, he was, you know, Uncle Ivan behind the desk there and he told me that I would be far better off there than entering an infantry battalion. "But no Sir, if you don't mind" …and he let me go.

Where was the headquarters?

At that time they were at the Atherton Tablelands. And the process of getting there was…we left Lowanna.

08:00 We staged at Toowoomba, a place called Cabala, I think outside Toowoomba, I have since been told when I was reminiscing with an old mate – I said "What was the name of that place?", and he said "Cabala", so I've only got his word and he's dead now. That's one of the things that bothers me.

08:30 All my good mates are dead. I don't have one of my close friends that's survived. But anyway, I really, I wouldn't put this story in for my kids, but I'll tell it. It's an example of how some people…you know, this psychology thing – if I say that, they'll react in this way.

09:00 Some people are so far out in their suppositions that that will be the reaction. It's not at all funny, but in this case it was very funny, which evinced very, very loud and prolonged laughter. I think it must have been the only church parade I went on. I don't know why I went on it – I must have known something, but I did go on it

09:30 on this day, you see, I was an atheist even before I was in the army. I couldn't see any sense in it and I couldn't see any sense in the other concept and anyway this wet behind the ears chaplain, who didn't look much older than I did, for that matter, and I was close enough to the front of the parade to see him

10:00 fairly well. There would have been 2-300 soldiers on the church parade and he came to his sermon and he said, he drew himself up and he started to look very angry, and he said, “When I walk around this camp”, oh no sorry – he started off, “When we ministers of religion join the army

10:30 they tell us that first and foremost, we have to be broadminded. But when I walk around this camp and hear such sayings as ‘God fuck me dead’”, and I don’t know what he said after that, because it was drowned in laughter. The mob just …

11:00 What’s the word? They broke right up and so did I. “Oh you silly…” What a ridiculous thing, I mean, the saying doesn’t mean anything anyway, people just say it and they will continue to say it in the army anyway they continued to say it. I don’t say it now. It was a very common saying and it’s meaningless

11:30 absolutely and utterly meaningless. Just a sound made by people’s mouths and oh dear, if he had’ve discussed the matter with me I could have told him that. And said, “Look, save your breath”. That took place at Toowoomba and I think it’s worth recording for posterity because it’s so … if only people would really think. You’ve got to do the lateral thinking as well as down the middle. So, anyway,

12:00 eventually, we landed on the Atherton Tablelands, me to go to the 21st Brigade Headquarters and all my mates, including my good mate Bob Gawn, to 2/33rd. Nearly all of them, there were a couple that went elsewhere, but most were there and I have to say too, when you’re in infantry training battalion

12:30 I think if people feel, if there are blokes who feel, and there certainly are, I think this infantry, I don’t think it’s what I want…I’m not quite sure I’ll be happy there, they go and see somebody, like a friendly sergeant, and they say, “Is it possible to get a transfer to the artillery or the typewriter repair outfit or something like that?”

13:00 and they’re accommodated, because people that are unlikely to fit into infantry aren’t wanted there anyway. You know, from time to time, somebody disappeared and I always thought that’s the way they probably disappeared. I never knew

How were you feeling about the infantry at this point?

I just loved the idea of …a lot of …

13:30 like at that time too, in the early stages, your very uniform was unlike that of the blokes in infantry battalions and as most of the fellows in infantry battalions then had, the majority had been in the Middle East

14:00 and then there were the others who had been in the Middle East and later reinforcements who had done the Kokoda campaign, and they were all looked up to. You felt they were real heroes and so their dress, you see, they wore white puggarees on their hats, we still had the felt band that we had been issued with when

14:30 we joined up. Our colour patches were those of the infantry training battalion you were in and so on. The only way we matched the others was because if you joined the AIF, you had a metal Australia on your shoulders that denoted you were AIF. Then of course, as soon as you joined an infantry battalion

15:00 you had all the gear and you had the colour patch and you felt a big man then.

So tell me about when you were let go out of the protective unit?

I really, all I remember about that is appearing – the only time, I had been badgering the brigade major on a number of occasions

15:30 and apparently had got nowhere until he relented and said “All right, you can talk to the brigadier and if he lets you go, you go”. So when I did and he had finished his Uncle Ivan bit and I didn’t cave in, he just said, “You can go”. I really,

16:00 the next thing I remember I suppose is when I turned up with my kit bag on shoulder and dropped all my gear at the 2/33rd. I don’t even remember…I would have gone in a truck of some sort, but I don’t remember getting there.

Where were they?

They were at that time, at Ravenshoe on the Atherton Tablelands. And the 21st Brigade Headquarters wouldn’t have been far away.

16:30 To be honest, Joan and I have done trips there, I think we have been there three times. And they have signs here and there showing where certain units were stationed and I’ve always looked for the 33rd and I’ve forgotten about the 21st.

17:00 **Tell me what the 33rd were doing at Ravenshoe when you arrived?**

Well, in camp there, training, well, playing silly buggers, but also playing football because the 2/33rd had the rugby league team in the 7th Division. We had a company competition which

17:30 was pretty well anybody's, any company could have won the competition at any time. We were in B company, we were pretty fortunate because we had a fellow named, our OC [Officer Commanding] at the time, was a fellow named Hec Davies, Captain Hec Davies who played fullback for Newtown.

18:00 And he was a fullback par excellence and he was the battalion fullback, as well as our, so B company had something of an edge, but we didn't always win the competition, but the 2/33rd certainly won the competition on two occasions. One early occasion and on a later occasion in the 7th Division competition, which was very keenly contested.

18:30 And then played the air force – the winners of the air force competition and beat them as well.

Had you any regrets about not joining the air force by this stage?

No, I really didn't think about it. I don't even think about it from the point of view of the feeling of prestige that you have. The feeling of belonging to a unit,

19:00 I don't feel oh…we always put on a tape for the Anzac March to see what coverage we get, which is always interesting because I'm usually to be seen and then somebody tells me "I appeared three times, the camera went back and forth on the last occasion". No, I'm so rapt in my battalion that

19:30 and I would be if I was in any other infantry battalion, as I would be if I had been in the air force, but I wasn't.

Tell me about the camaraderie of the 2/33rd.

Yeah, well, the main point to be made about that, when you turn up as a reinforcement, there is absolutely no hint from the old hands of you being a reinforcement. You know, they don't say, "Oh yeah, wet behind the ears".

20:00 You are completely accepted right from day one. As long as you are the right type. If you are a bit abrasive and you rub people up the wrong way all the time, you will get what will be expected by people like that. But I found the old hands to be absolutely fantastic. And if you wanted advice you would get it.

20:30 The one bit of advice I didn't need, was from whoever was the fellow, and I've forgotten now, who told me, "Well, no wonder you're a bit nervous, you've never been in action before but, it's no wonder you're nervous because you don't smoke your weed. You give it away". And that's how I started smoking. But he said, "Look it calms your nerves", and

21:00 that's how I started that. Well, I haven't smoked for thirty years, but I smoked pretty solidly until the time I gave it away.

Tell me, how long were you at Ravenshoe?

On the first occasion, until September, oh, we left in August of 1943.

21:30 I think I joined the33rd about March, although, now another confession. I think I was talking about girls. I made a very, very firm…I did a mate up in Coffs Harbour. Bob Gawn first met the girl that he ultimately married and I met her sister

22:00 and the four of us saw a lot of each other and to the extent, that after joining the 33rd and being there a couple of months and because we didn't look like doing anything in the near future anyway, and because all that was happening was playing silly buggers,

22:30 Bob and I decided we would go down and see the girls. There being no leave available, that meant absent without leave. By dint of catching the occasional passenger train or catching the occasional goods train, any form of transport we could, we go down to Coffs Harbour. We spent about two weeks in Coffs Harbour,

23:00 we found our way back by the same method. On the way back, we heard that the 33rd had not only moved, but they had sailed for New Guinea. So we kept on going, we went aboard the Katoomba, the MV Katoomba, operating as a troop ship in Townsville

23:30 having done what is the usual thing when, what soldiers did when they were jumping a troop ship for one reason or another, everybody had a draft number chalked on their hats. And so, but if you, and often these were smudged anyway and couldn't be read, but as long as there was a number there

24:00 and they were in no particular order you knew you would just be taken aboard. So we put a number on, gave it a bit of a rub, so it was hardly readable. We got on the Katoomba and the pair of us turned up at the 2/33rd camp at the area known as "Bootless Bay" and presented ourselves.

24:30 We were fined five pounds, forfeited 28 days pay and then I forget the number of days we were absent …27 days I think we were absent, so there was 27 day's pay as well as the other 28 days pay.

They must have been quite surprised to see you front up at Port Moresby.

Yes, but that wasn't the one I referred to, that happened on a later occasion.

25:00 And that was far more serious. I'll come to that.

Anyway, first impressions of Port Moresby?

I didn't have any really. I do not remember the town at all. I don't think I really saw the town. And, I've seen a fair bit of it since,

25:30 but all I remember going to a native village, I think it was called Kila Kila and there was a fighter airstrip there at Kila Kila, and there was a village nearby which we were told was a good place to go to buy headdresses and things, which we did and I packed up

26:00 a bird of paradise, I hope Joan doesn't get to hear this, headdress, just short feathers so big, packed it up and sent it down to my girlfriend.

How were the locals – how did they receive the troops?

Didn't have anything to do with the locals.

26:30 Only the locals in that village who sold us …I don't think we paid very much for whatever we got, but no, only there and I don't remember them.

So whereabouts were you garrisoned or stationed?

Oh, there, but we were only there for a very few days. Because the battalion it had turned out had been there for about three weeks at that stage because

27:00 I mean, it took us time to get back to Townsville anyway and then we had to go to ground and wait around until we heard there was a troop ship and whatnot, it took a fair bit of time. We learned subsequently, that there's a very, very simple way out as well, if you are AWL and you want to get back to your unit, it's very simple but we didn't know that then. We thought "We had to dodge the provosts" [military police] and

27:30 you know, and "Dodge anyone who looked as if they might be dangerous to us". The simple way is, you just go to a troop train or a troop ship or whatever, and you find the officer in charge, and you say, "I'm AWL and I want to go back to my unit". He knows exactly what to do. He puts your name on, what's known as the MOB 3, the movement order, and then you are official, you're on your way back, and from that time

28:00 you're no longer AWL, so if only we had've known we could have got on a troop train at Coffs Harbour station, because they all stop there and done that and probably saved ourselves about 20 days pay. Anyway,

Anyway, where did you move from Port Moresby?

Where were we, they called it Pom Pom Park, I don't know how it got that name.

28:30 But Bootless Bay is an inlet, Moresby here, it's sort of south, I think, and Pom Pom Park here, I don't know whether it was an army name, it probably was, and it borders on Bootless Bay, I think. So we were there, Bob and I were there for no more than a week

29:00 before we were to move out to, become the first Australian division to be airborne. To go into action airborne. We were to take off from Moresby and be flown to Nadzab, which ultimately we were but I say were to take off because we had a great tragedy – the Liberator bomber crash.

29:30 When we were – we were moved out in trucks in, we would have got into the trucks at about three o'clock in the morning or something, and they were lined up at about four o'clock in the morning alongside and across the end of and beginning to proceed down the other side of the airstrip – Jackson's - we would have called it an airstrip then, but Jackson's Aerodrome.

30:00 It's the main aerodrome of Moresby. At the time there were about half a dozen trucks stopped at right angles to the runway. And a Liberator bomber, fully laden taking off, didn't make it, from subsequent photos I saw of the damage,

30:30 it looked as if there was a dent in the roof one of the trucks where the bomber may have touched that truck and then ploughed into rising ground beyond the trucks and spewed blazing petrol and bombs and Lord knows what went everywhere. At the time I was sitting asleep

31:00 in the back of a truck. Bob and I, Bob wasn't in the same truck, but we were with Don company, D company, always known as Don for some reason, were with Don company because we had the plane lists or movement lists or whatever they were had already been made up when we arrived back from AWL.

31:30 And so we were sort of put on the end, and the end meant Don company. And knowing that when we got to Nadzab we would be rejoining -he would be going to A company and I would going to B company. I was sitting asleep, I had no idea in the world what had happened, but it was dark but

32:00 everything lit up immediately and so I heaved myself up and over the back of the truck as I landed on

the ground a 500lb bomb from the Liberator came rolling against the rear wheel of the truck. I think they're not primed until their dropped anyway, I think there's an automatic sort of priming from the air, anyway there wasn't a danger unless it was in the blazing petrol.

32:30 Then it could go up as I think some of them did because there was … it was horrendous.

Did you know what it was?

Yes, the bomb, yes because I remember a time when we had seen a bit of Port Moresby…Bob and I had done a trip.

33:00 We had taken off from the camp and we picked up a lift on an American truck. They were two American Negro soldiers, the driver and one bloke with him. They said, "All right guys, hop in", so we hopped on at the back and on the back there were about six or eight 500lb bombs and they just rolled around.

33:30 As the truck took off you had to jump to make sure you didn't get run over by one of these bombs. But I think, Bob hammered on the roof and the Yank on the offsider's side said, "Don't worry guys, they won't go off". So they were 500lb bombs and they were headed for, probably out to Jackson's.

34:00 Anyway, on that occasion I remember seeing the, mind you I could have seen that on the way in when we got off, yes, it would have been when we got off the ship, the Americans who have to, they have to sort of ham everything up haven't they, they always do. There was a huge sign, a huge archway that said, "Through these portals pass the best mosquito bait in the world".

34:30 In fact, we may have seen that a second time when we had this trip around town. Yeah, we did go down to the town on that occasion, but I don't remember anything about Moresby then.

So you saw the bomb rolling towards you, from the Liberator.

Yes, rolled and boom, just stopped against the rear wheel.

What did you do then?

35:00 I went to ground. I went to ground, that's what nearly everybody was doing. This has been, I'm not quite sure really, I mean there were various things happened in my army career that from that time on could that have caused psychological damage of some sort but to what extent

35:30 I don't know what that really cost me, but it's always at least brought up a feeling of some shame, that I didn't rush in as some of them do and start helping other blokes because there was blazing petrol going everywhere, there were blokes on fire – there were blokes actually blowing up because of their – see, we had battle dress on and battle dress means that every

36:00 rifleman has his rifle, he has 150 rounds of ammunition, he has a Bren gun magazine in each pouch because you carry these extra magazines for the Bren gun and he can call on them when the Bren's being used, that's where his ammunition comes from, he doesn't carry it all himself, anything up to six grenades. Most of us would have a

36:30 two-inch mortar bomb, because again with a two-inch mortar, you have to keep him supplied, you can't carry them all. So you have all this explosive stuff festooned about you and with no thought that you might be catching fire. You have it anchored under, you have your epaulettes over it and you've got your belt with the

37:00 big belt loops that means you can't just pull you belt straight off and drop it. Well I suppose discount that, because most of us wouldn't be threading it through, anyway. We did at that time, we were provided with trousers that had button belt loops that were buttoned at the tip and so you could if you wanted to but most wouldn't bother.

37:30 You weren't being inspected and you weren't going on parade. So I mean these things were exploding and it was hell, it really, really was terrible. Our death toll was exactly 60 and one of those blokes died 19 days after the event in 2nd – the second,

38:00 there were two hospitals, the second, I don't know which one he was in – AGH – that's Australian General Hospital and the treatment of burns in those days would have been primitive by comparison to now, but the treatment of burns in an army hospital in Moresby when they're not expecting to have to treat burns would be, oh dear, it would be something dreadful.

38:30 I suppose, they would have been pumping the morphine into him all the time and others. Some – there were some who recovered but there were so many who died. The Liberator crew of course, perished. The truck that I was in was the first one not to be damaged. The next truck

39:00 wasn't burnt to the ground but it had some damage, but then there were four trucks that were completely destroyed in front of it, so that was one of the events - there were a series of events that initially, in my time from then on in the army, that began giving

39:30 me the feeling that I was indestructible because there were so many times that I should have been dead but I wasn't.

40:00 End of tape

Tape 3

00:30 These days, if disasters like that occurred, I'm sure everybody would have been counselled and people wouldn't have had to do what we had to do. It wasn't the way things worked then.

01:00 We got in the plane the same day, landed at Nadzab, Nadzab being, I think Nadzab is something like twenty miles out of Lae. It had been captured by the 503rd American Parachute Regiment against – there was no Japanese opposition

01:30 they jumped and took the place. The artillery regiment that was attached to us, and I forget the name, I can never remember which one it was, the 2nd Corps, the 2/5th, 2/6th, I can never remember which one. I'll get it … good blokes. I knew a few of them too. Sixty of them, sixty men jumped with their guns,

02:00 25 pounder, meaning they fired 25lb shells so they are pretty hefty pieces of ordinance and the story was, and I think it's quite true, that there was not a lot of time to train those fellows to be paratroops, but 20 of them, they took 20 of them at a time to a physical training school,

02:30 a PT [physical training] school, they did a sort of a dry parachute course where they were taught to roll and so on and then the next step after that was a practice parachute jump. They would get to jump out of the aircraft, 20 of them did the whole thing, 20 only had time to do the first two. No, nobody did the practice jump.

03:00 20 did step one, 20 did step two and that was it. And yet they had their guns up and ready to fire in 20 minutes after they landed and there were no casualties. The American Paratroops on the other hand, and I met a couple of these blokes when I was in hospital in Moresby, they were absolutely beautiful blokes

03:30 because they turned up with armloads of American cigarettes and candy and for various reasons, and great raconteurs but that had no inhibitions at all and they were quite forthcoming about the shortcomings of Americans

04:00 as they saw them.

What shortcomings did they describe?

Oh well there were these two blokes, Ralph Henderson was one of them and La Peters was the other one, that was his surname and he was known as Pete. Pete said one day, he said, "You guys…", you see they stayed on for a while, they were in patrols, you would meet them coming in from patrols

04:30 but you would meet them down the track, but they still didn't find any Japanese but there was a bit of fighting going on. Our blokes had caught up with the Japs and Peters said to me, because I was there wounded, and said, "You guys, you don't do things the way we do", and I said, "Why,

05:00 what do you do, Pete?" And he said, "What we do is, we shell the Christ out of them, we bomb the Christ out of them and we hope to Christ they evacuate". That was the way he said the Yanks did business. I think it might have been the way with some of them. It depends on the unit

05:30 and I've got a healthy respect for the paratroops. They were among the marines and people like that and I think the paratroops I think were pretty good soldiers.

Tell me what training you received to be an airborne…?

None, none, we just glided into aeroplanes but we didn't need any because

06:00 we weren't equipped with parachutes or anything we were just flown in as airborne troops. Before you knew it there was a rumour going around that we were going to get wings to wear, and of course you could add fuel to that and the blokes who believed that but the unit

06:30 colour patches were going to have wings on them.

What happened when you got to Nadzab?

Well, then for a couple of days, we just proceeded down the road towards Lae with nothing happening. Then there was the

07:00 noise of battle in the background and that's when it started for us. I was in 12th platoon, in my Company 10 and 11 were committed and then we were told we were to a flanking movement that was to lead us into the bush.

07:30 We were to go around to the left and 10th and 11th Platoon were attacking this Japanese position. We

were to try to outflank them on the left and get alongside them or behind them or whatever, but it was steep country, broken country with the Japs had cleared fields of fire for themselves and what was

08:00 left standing, standing deliberately, I mean we would do the same thing for that matter, of course we knew in the situation where you are attacking and you are attacking positions that have been prepared in this way, you are up against it and we suddenly came under very, very heavy fire on a pretty slope

08:30 and when that occurred there was one of the first to go, was our section leader, Jack Wade who was one of us at Dubbo and the Elite Platoon. He was on my right and Dick Kellaway, who was subsequently my best man, he was on the other side of him.

09:00 But Jack was in a kind of cleft, a hole in the ground. We were on slightly higher ground than he was. As the Japs threw grenades, they were bouncing and ending up and Jack was getting them direct and they pretty well blew him to bits I think. It made a mess of him.

09:30 Dick and I were both wounded. We were both trying to see if, as soon as you put your head up, you realised you were drawing fire. We couldn't…neither of – we were in hospital together – and when we discussed it neither of us saw a Japanese. We saw the occasional grenade coming down, but we didn't see through it.

10:00 So they were well concealed in a very well dug in position and they were very good at that. Anyway, we were carted out of there back to Moresby. Where we were then I suppose would have been about ten miles down

10:30 towards Lae with another, I think that was probably about 8 miles out of Lae.

What was the nature of your wound?

Not as bad as in our unit history that I've got out there that refers to my serious and ugly leg wound, but really

11:00 I had a heap of shrapnel here and there and a bit of shrapnel in my arm. I assumed, not in, but something had hit my arm, it may have been a bullet glanced off it, it may have been a bit of shrapnel glanced off it but it left a wound that looked like a gunshot wound but it would have more a gunshot wound if it had penetrated I think.

11:30 **Where were you positioned when you received the shrapnel hit?**

As I think I described, in this fold in the ground, I was on one side and Dick was on the other, Jack here, and we headed uphill and the Japs were up here…

12:00 their positions, had ultimately become plain, they had cleared around their positions, but they had left enough timber around the front so it made it difficult for us to see them, especially, up hill. And they had what we called a woodpecker, medium machine gun, something like the Australian Vickers.

12:30 And I think a couple of LMGs – a couple of light machine guns as well. There wasn't much chance that we could do anything. Anyway, our mortars got onto them and I think the artillery after we had been shifted out.

13:00 **That finished off that Japanese position. And how were you removed from the field?**

Oh, well according to – I don't remember a hell of a lot about it really. But afterwards, I didn't remember a hell of a lot about it. According to the history, I was carried out by this fellow called Reg Harris, who was the stretcher-bearer. He was a journalist in Sydney before the war and I knew him.

13:30 He became a war correspondent. Soon after that he left the battalion to become a war correspondent. So it was Reg, apparently, see I went back to New Guinea in 1949 when Bill Crookes, who was the author of our history, called The Foot Soldiers that was published

14:00 in the late fifties, I think. Well, Bill was writing it at that time and I wasn't there, he was using the war diaries, the battalion war diaries and recollections of members and he got that bit from Reg himself, I think.

14:30 If I had been there I think I might have said, no forget about the serious and ugly leg wound. There were several bits of them, I've still got three bits of shrapnel in my right leg.

You mentioned previously, at the end of the last tape, you thought some sort of lucky streak was happening for you. Was this the beginning of …?

Yes,

15:00 the plane crash first. I decided that was a very close shave. Then that was a very close shave. There were a number of others after that, especially, I would be hard put to remember some of them. The last for example was in Borneo.

15:30 We had taken a position and killed a few Japs in the operation and that having been cleared I decided to

mooch off and have a look around. I went down a track, and I suppose, I only travelled 100 yards or so

16:00 down the track, then I came back along the same track and I saw a taut length of, I suppose an inch or two above the ground, of yellow sig [nals] wire, yellow, so it could easily be seen. I though that's funny, I'm sure I didn't step over that on the way down.

16:30 I followed it … I suppose it was … we were surrounded by foliage, you could only see less than a foot of it, in centimetres, less than 10cms of it or about 10cms and I could have stepped, anyway I followed it to the end and it was attached to a depth charge.

17:00 The Japs made booby traps here and there, mostly on roads because, I suppose in the hope of getting a number of marching soldiers together, or maybe a vehicle or something. I can't remember ever hearing of an account of one going up. There were certainly a number of them found.

17:30 Either depth charges, or 250lb bombs, aerial bombs that were planted half way in the ground. But this was depth charge and it was in a hole in the ground, and how I didn't, I mean, I thought about it so much afterwards. Where was it when I went down, nobody would have attached it afterwards.

18:00 I mean, if there had've been a Jap around, he would have shot me. There would be no need to muck around doing that, although, on the other hand, as I walked through there, he might have thought a few more would have walked through. I don't know. It's always been a mystery, but I consider it…I can't help but think of it as another very narrow escape. And previous to that

18:30 the Japs there had, in Borneo, in Balikpapan in Borneo, we had already lost a fellow I knew well, Lyle Baker. He was the battalion runner and he was on his job doing his battalion running and he must have skylined himself

19:00 and the Japs were using an anti-aircraft gun where they would set the fuses apparently close to whoever they could see in those circumstances. I had been since told that what does to the exploding shell, which uses up the oxygen in its vicinity, and if there's anyone there, he just expires due to the absence of oxygen and the head I suppose.

19:30 But that's what happened to Lyle Baker. Well, where we were at the time and where we were at any time when you were accessible to a water cart, somebody in each section, you would take turns, you would go back and fill up cans with water.

20:00 As I remember I think they were four gallons or two gallons. I think they were two gallons. The biggest that you call those petrol … Jerry cans? I had one of these on my shoulder and I think I had one on my shoulder and one in my hand, and without thinking about it

20:30 I just followed a track, skylining myself. The next thing, bang! But he didn't get the range. I dropped the cans and shot down over the thing, he had a couple more shots, but I was out of range by that time. I was able to pick up the cans and take a route where I wasn't skylined and I got back and I thought, see

21:00 with Lyle Baker, they ranged with the first shot. They didn't range me with the first shot, so I was fortunate again. There was a series of things of that nature.

Tell me, after that first encounter you had when you were wounded, did you proceed towards Lae after you were hospitalised?

No. The battalion did

21:30 and there's always been an argument about who took Lae, the 9th Division or the 7th Division because the 9th were coming up from in the Salamaua direction and the 7th coming down and they pretty much got there at the same time and who cares anyway. But…

Where were you at that point?

At that point I was in hospital in Moresby for about 10 days or so.

22:00 And then I got out and that episode occurred that I already mentioned but that wasn't mentioned on tape. Actually those two Americans were somewhat involved in that. In that they came everyday to see Dick and me. Dick was more severely wounded than I was, and when I got out, he was still in there, but these two turned up one day and they said, and I told them I was being discharged

22:30 the following day, and they said, "Oh, we'll come and collect you!" And I said, "Oh, there will be transport and I will have to Murray" … "Oh, don't worry about that!" And so, they turned up very early in the morning, before I was ready to go and they said, they had a vehicle, and when I was ready they would be ready and so I got ready and when I got outside, they had a Dodge weapons carrier.

23:00 I said, "Where did you get this?" "Oh, off the transport lines", they said. No trouble, if it's there they – and that's the Yanks. If there's one there, they will take it. Instead of, "Well", I said, "Do you know where Murray Barracks is?" "Oh, well we've got a rough idea, but don't worry about Murray Barracks, you're not going back, you're coming back to camp with us". And the upshot of that was, I had a very, very pleasant day at the 3rd Parachute Regiment camp. Well fed

23:30 and well watered and they had a bottle of Scotch. Where would they get a bottle of Scotch? Dewars, yeah they had a bottle of Dewars. So the next morning they took me to Murray Barracks, and dropped me off and, "Are you OK?"

24:00 "Yes, I'm OK, don't come any further, everything's fine". And I had my MOB 3, my movement order. I took it into the orderly room and the sergeant said, "This has got yesterday's date on it". I said, "Oh, has it? I suppose they must have made a mistake. I just left there now". So he put it aside and filed it or whatever they do and said, "I've got a job for you". Just like that.

24:30 Straight out of hospital and into Murray Barracks staging camp and he's got a job for me. So, we walked along and there was a hut and there was a bloke sitting in the hut. He said, "Hey, I've got a job for you", and so he took the pair of us along to the cook house and round the corner of the cook house was a heap of firewood, stacked between star pickets. I think there were two.

25:00 There were six all told. Two, two, two with the firewood stacked in between. He said, "Now when I come back, I want that firewood level with the star pickets". Gave us an axe each and there we were. So I said to this other fellow, I said, "Well, there's only one way to do this" and started to hammer in the star pickets.

25:30 Levelled out the wood out on top, levelled it out on top and hammered in the star pickets level with the wood and away we went and not a word about that so I take it he admired our axemanship.

What state was your shrapnel wound in at this point?

Oh, well you know, it healed. Anyway I think

26:00 I was only in Murray Barracks that day and the following day I was sent back to LOB – do you know the expression LOB, "Left out of battle?" Well a nucleus of an infantry battalion is left at base. I would be anyway, but I've been told the reason for that is that if the battalion is wiped out, there are still those few blokes there who can be built on.

26:30 And the second in command of the battalion is left in charge always. The CO [Commanding Officer] goes with the troops. The second in command who was a major by the name of Norm Peach, he was in charge. Anyway, I think I was there for about a week and during that time there had been a bit of movement one way or another, I forget. Anyway I knew there were blokes

27:00 going from there up to where the boys were and I wasn't one of them. Whether or not they were reinforcements or whatever, a fellow's just getting out of hospital and I can't remember. So I went in to see Norm Peach, Major Peach and I said, "Sir, I had noticed this, and I'm still here". He said, "Oh, Snow", because I was always known as Snow, "Snow", he said

27:30 "You've done enough". He said, "Stay here, you'll be right, don't worry about it", or words to that effect. I mean, I bridled at that because that's where my mates were and that's where I had to be. So that's what I said, and he said, "Well if that's how you feel about it, the next lot that goes, you go with them". And that's what happened. By that time

28:00 I got there just in time, my wound occurred, something like 10th September, and I got back there on about 5th or 6th or 7th October, which was just a few days before what's regarded as a classic.

28:30 An audacious attack was carried out by my company. A night attack on a position that was known as the "4100 Feature" and the 4,100 feet high and the dominating feature the Japs were on. Which was a lot of fun really. It was

29:00 I know that the Kokoda campaign was a gruelling one where there was some fearful climbing of heights, but I can't imagine any of those heights were … it took us, I suppose, I'm not sure in total, because I can't remember what time we left, but something like at least 7 hours

29:30 to get ourselves from the bottom – we were in the valley – and incidentally we could see Japs there and in a couple of other positions and they would wave and carry on and that sort of thing [thumbs his nose], you know, that sort of thing. There were actual cliffs that had to be scaled and we had blokes even drop out

30:00 saying, "Bugger this, we can't go any further", they'd had it. But I think I was fairly fit because things of that nature never worried me. I got there and the attack took place – when we got into a position from where we could carry out the attack, we had about an hour or so,

30:30 we had a spell and then took off and a lot of that was over open ground because the Japs had burnt it off. But by this time, I think it was getting something 11 o'clock at night or probably 10 o'clock at night anyway, but we carried out the attack.

What sort of visibility was there?

Starlight would be about the extent of it.

31:00 That's my recollection. Mind you, it started off, you see the Japs had fires, they had no idea we would do

this. I think they thought they were impregnable up there because of the wolves climbing of the heights of Quebec sort of, type thing, where it was totally unexpected that anyone would try that. And that was why it was described …

31:30 Some army bloke in the sixties wrote a thesis on it, not a thesis, I suppose that's probably a word that can be used, for an army manual and described it as "Audacious". Anyway, as it evolved

32:00 again, the whole company took part in it and the 11th platoon, yes it was the 11th platoon on my left, they did the brunt of it. Where we were, we didn't run into a hell of a lot of opposition and the Japs scarpered while it was going on and took off. Oh, what I was going to say about fires and so on. They were cooking meals and what not

32:30 and when you talk about visibility, a lot of this was provided by the activities they were carrying out at the time. And …

Did you see much of the Japanese during the attack?

33:00 No, my platoon, although we did what we had to do, but it was really the 11th Platoon on our left that ran into the major part of the enemy – the enemy strength. They opened fire -

33:30 they opened fire early on. When our blokes were almost up there and about to achieve complete surprise, they were seen and the Japs opened fire on them but what happened after that was pretty short and sweet. Our blokes drove them off, and as we came up

34:00 they were disappearing anyway.

So, were there any prisoners taken or?

No. From that time on really, there was a source of some surprise that the Japanese didn't fight on the way they had previously. Gona in particular, I wasn't there, but

34:30 if you, oh, you can't see the bookshelf there, I have all the books, not all the books but at least 6 or 7 or 8 – I would have 8 books about the Kokoda campaign because …

But in your impression of when you were there, you were saying that the Japanese opposition was noticeably weakening?

Yes, initially they were quite serious about it.

35:00 As when I was wounded. You would expect them to stay and fight it out, but they were disappearing and withdrawing or retreating. Retreat would be – it wouldn't have been a matter of strategic withdrawals, they were all retreats I think.

35:30 And that's about what occurred there. It was another retreat.

So how long did you remain in New Guinea fighting?

Well almost immediately after that, within two days, I got a very bad attack of malaria. I was hospitalised and I got down to the camp hospital

36:00 at Nadzab and I would have been flown down from Dumpu in the Ramu Valley. So I was away then for another two weeks I guess and it would have been 10 days at least.

36:30 And then I went back and by that time we had moved on, up the Ramu Valley and this time I arrived back just in time to go on a long patrol, reconnaissance patrol up into the Finistere Ranges, the main feature there was Mt Prothero and Shaggy Ridge, that everybody has heard of as

37:00 not far from that area I think, anyway we went off on this, this was the 12th Platoon, my platoon, patrol, during which time we found evidence of, we found not only where the Japs obviously were in occupation

37:30 but even signs like, on the side of tracks you would find an enamelled sign with Japanese characters etched on it. They were obviously there to stay. When we reported this back, we were supposed to be away for five days,

38:00 we reported back by radio that this was the case. It was then decided to send the company up and we were out to carry out a company attack on the Japs when we found out where they were. And I don't know, that fizzled out, we were subsequently withdrawn and

Where were you withdrawn to?

Oh, back into the Ramu Valley.

38:30 Then we went up to an area known as Guy's Post, which was off, Guy's Post – Shaggy Ridge was above Guy's Post. It was from there that the battalion was withdrawn completely back to Moresby and back to Australia. So, that pretty well accounts for the Lae/Ramu Valley campaign.

39:00 So, I was there and I was not there - I was there for some of the time and not there for some of the time.

39:30 End of tape

Tape 4

00:30 **Tell me what it was like being back in Australia after your tour?**

We got leave of course, straight away- 28 days if I remember rightly. It would have been 28 days, which was annual leave. That's all we would have got I think.

01:00 And that was wonderful and even after leave, well, I'm not sure whether I mentioned the thing about the girl in Coffs Harbour.

Yes, you did. Did you visit her?

Yes, but I did go back to Sydney and see my father and spent a couple of days with him and then took off to

01:30 Coffs and spent the rest of the time there and even then when we got back, when we rejoined the unit, they were at that time at Strathpines out of Brisbane, just temporarily before going back to the Atherton Tablelands.

02:00 I got back to the unit there where we were to go to what we were told was called a physical training camp on the beach at Southport. It was, well, what's the opposite to a euphemism because physical training sounds like something fairly tough, but this was on the lighter side of that.

02:30 We surfed and did all sorts of things that made Bob and I feel, we were there together, that we could be doing the same sort of things at Coffs Harbour and enjoying it even more.

What was it meant to be preparing you for?

Well, it was recuperation from the wilds of New Guinea and then the wilds of leave I suppose.

03:00 We weren't expected to be doing much in the way of recuperating on leave, I suppose. So Bob and I then took off for Coffs Harbour where not only did we learn the trick about presenting yourself to the OC train,

03:30 when you were AWL and getting on the MOB 3, it worked out that when we got back to the unit we were regarded as just getting back from leave anyway and suffered no penalty. And we expected to.

04:00 We had gone AWL from this camp and there was one little thing I suppose that's worth recording. Another pleasant encounter with an American. Before we had gone back, we had landed in Brisbane, and between Bob and me, I think we had about ten shillings in our pockets,

04:30 which would buy you a few beers and a meat pie I suppose. And then we would have to get back to camp and wait for the next pay. We were in, I think, the Globe Hotel, near Roma St Station in Brisbane and there was an American ensign, navy ensign.

05:00 I think it was something like a midshipman, or a second lieutenant type thing. He had just one little bar on his shoulder and we knew that was an ensign, we were pretty well aware of the ranks and he was trying to get an idea of how much his money was worth in Australian currency from a very, very busy bar maid. She didn't have time to tell him.

05:30 She didn't have much time. So I said, "What's your problem Yank?" We always addressed them as Yank, and if they were fighting words, well that was too bad. "Well, what's your problem Yank?", I said that to him and he said, "How much is this worth?" and he held up a twenty dollar bill and it happened that, and I don't why it was that I knew what the American currency was worth at that time, and it was six pounds, three and four pence

06:00 and I told him, I said, "That's six pound three and four pence. I haven't got mine to be able to show you because I haven't got any, we have got vastly less than that between the two of us". But I discussed with him what he could buy and one thing and another. He said, "Can I buy you a drink?", so I said, "Why not?", so he bought us a couple of beers, and had one himself, and he bought a couple more and had one himself. And then the guy said,

06:30 "I have to go, I have to meet a dame". Here he is, just off the ship and already he's got an Australian girl to meet you see. But then he pulled out his roll or his wallet or something, I can't remember where it came from and he said, but he said, "You had better have one on me". He had bought the other two beers he bought anyway and he handed me a bill.

07:00 It was a twenty-dollar note (US currency). Yeah, so we went in there with ten bob or so and we came out with six pound three and four pence. So be kind to Americans, I have always felt that was the thing to do.

Did the hotels accept American currency?

Oh yes, did they ever.

07:30 It was no different then from the way it is now with American currency. Very, very, acceptable, and American cigarettes and anything else American.

Tell me about when you were sent back north, back into the Pacific?

From that point, we are now talking about

08:00 say February, 1944. We went back, this time to the Atherton Tablelands, instead of Ravenshoe to Kiri, these areas are merely called after the nearest town I guess. Kerry was the nearest town to where we were, so we were in Kerry.

08:30 And there we stayed playing football and silly buggers and one thing and another. More silly buggers than anything else for quite some time because our next action, it would be terribly difficult to account for the time

09:00 from say February, March 1944 to July 1945, which was our next action which was Balikpapan in Borneo. There was this long period of not doing what you had joined up to do.

How did that feel?

Oh, Bob and I used to get very toey and that's when

09:30 the big trouble occurred. It must have been somewhere towards the end of that year, I'd say in November 1944 that Bob and I decided that we would go down and see the girls because -

10:00 I don't know why it took so long, but anyway, we eventually got heartily sick of the whole thing and, all this time we were expecting that something would happen and because on the previous occasion when we decided to go we were nearly caught out and caught out badly, because if the unit sailed and if we were apprehended by the provos

10:30 while we were absent, we could quite easily be and would almost certainly be charged with desertion and that's big bickies [important], desertion, you know, years in jail.

Just quickly, for the record, the difference between AWL and desertion?

Well, absent without leave is, I suppose there would be plenty of army authorities

11:00 who would like to see anyone who went absent without leave charged with desertion because there are people as bloody-minded as that and you were always asked anyway, I mean, there you are, your unit's there, you go AWL, you come back and your unit's still there. You are obviously not deserting because, you know, that's … on the other hand, if you were picked up by the provos,

11:30 the military police I mean. We always called them provos – if you were picked up by them, I suppose they could always make a case, if you were in a fighting unit, that you didn't intend to go back there, but it would be terribly difficult, they would have to prove something and when you've got a commanding officer like ours,

12:00 if he were a party to the thing, he would make sure you didn't fall foul of the military police anyway. But desertion, if it looked as though you were running away from action, yeah, I'm sure there would have been charged with desertion who didn't intend to desert.

12:30 And I mean I could easily have been charged with desertion on this occasion, so I had better tell the story. Bob and I left, and by the usual methods got ourselves down to Grafton. At Grafton we were to get on a goods train, that we knew was leaving, I think at four o'clock or four thirty or something, pm, and so we went uptown.

13:00 We were in a pub and the provos came in asking for leave passes. Well, we didn't have leave passes. They just had us - read our rights, we couldn't get away, you know one on one side, one on the other side, a couple at the door and so we were apprehended. We were taken up to

13:30 the Grovely holding centre in Brisbane. Grovely is a Brisbane suburb that had an army detention centre, or I think it was called detention barracks, where if you were sentenced you would go there to do your sentence. And attached to that was what they called the holding centre, so if you were not yet sentenced or you were going to be sent back to your unit

14:00 you would be held there. Well Bob, when - there was a lovely old fellow who had the title OC Metropolitan Troops, Major Davidson, his name was, a name I will never forget. Major Davidson was another of these avuncular fellows who sat behind his desk and was terribly

14:30 sympathetic towards soldiers who had a good reason for going AWL. Well, he would shake his head and say, "Too bad". Well, Major Davidson, when Bob appeared before him, he said – and he always asked, "Why did you go AWL?" and Bob said, "I don't have anything to say Sir", and so he said, "All right,

you're remanded under close arrest and

15:00 to be sent back to your unit because you're AWL from 2/33rd Battalion, so that's where you go to be tried". Bob was put under close arrest, in other words in the lock-up part of the show, whereas, when and I didn't know what had happened to Bob, or Bob may have gone in there after I did, I can't remember now.

15:30 Anyway, I didn't know, so I went into Major Davidson and he said, "Why did I go AWL?" So I bled. I said, "Well Sir, I wanted to see my girlfriend. I suppose we will be going away again soon, we've been so long – it's been so long we must be going soon and I just wanted to run down and see my girlfriend. That's all Sir, I was picked up by the military police and here I am".

16:00 And apparently he liked the story and he remanded me under open arrest. Now, subsequently, and I appeared before him again – he said, "You gave me your word", and I said, "No Sir", I said, "You didn't ask for my word and I didn't give you my word", and nor did I because I remembered it very well. And he said, "All right, remanded under open arrest". And so I went out and open arrest meant

16:30 I was on the outer part of the thing with just one fence around me, and a gate with a sentry on it who was some old digger, who didn't take any notice and I just walked out the gate and he didn't take any notice of me. And having just walked out the gate – open arrest meant that you just slept in this joint and you could do that, but I think within certain hours,

17:00 or something or other, I can't remember exactly now, I can't remember at all what the rules were. But anyway, I just walked out the gate and I thought, "Well hell, I'm out the gate, I think I'll keep on going". I went down to Coffs Harbour, I was back in 14 days. I went down there and came back and presented myself, saying to myself, if I only go for 14 days, then they will be

17:30 they can't regard that as too heinous a crime. 28 days was the big thing. If you exceeded 28 days that was bad. Keep it within 28 days, your commanding officer can try the case. He doesn't have to think about submitting you to a court martial. Go over 28 days and he might decide that it's going to be a court martial. If it's very much over 28 days, then it will be a court martial.

18:00 Anyway, I appeared before Major Davidson and he said that, and I said, "No Sir, I didn't say that", and he said, "Nevertheless Private King, I take a very dim view of this. You were under arrest and you shouldn't have gone. Fined three pounds, 14 days detention". So that means I had to do 14 days in the Bastille. So I did the 14 days,

18:30 I came back into the holding centre and there I found myself being kept day after day. I was still there, and I could see blokes coming in, they had been picked up by the provos and they were sent back to their units, 7th Division fellows sent back and I wondered why I was being

19:00 held you see, so I decided … Once a week they had request parade. You could go and see the OC, whose name was Crook. Captain Crook, and the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], oh he was a nasty little piece of work, a dumpy bloke and his name was Gamel. Where they dug these blokes up, I don't know but they would have done very well

19:30 in the Gestapo – those fellows. Anyway I decided to go on request parade and by this time Sergeant Major Gamel knew me very well because he had seen me every day. We spent the days marching around what they called the bullring – there was a big wire fence this way and that way and you were just let in there and you marched, marched up until lunchtime and after lunch

20:00 you went back in there and you marched and marched…and I suppose that kept you fit. Anyway Sergeant Major Gamel was always hanging around the place and the faces he had seen many times he would get to know. And he looked at me and said, "What do you want King?" And I said, "Well Sergeant Major, I've now been here", and I think it was 14 days or something

20:30 and I said, "And there are so many fellows from the 7th Division being sent back, and I wondered why I'm still here". And he said, "I'll tell you why you're still here Private King, he said, you're a bad bastard". These were his very words, I remember them. "You're a bad bastard. You broke open arrest – you're waiting for a special escort. Provos with tommy guns".

21:00 Me! A special escort with provos! So anyway I went back and I think a couple more days passed, and I think it was getting near Christmas and in the army jails, near Christmas, I think there's a thing called the Christmas Handicap. This is probably difficult to believe, but it did happen. Blokes getting their heads together

21:30 and deciding how they would break out and go home for Christmas. And there was all this yakkety yak going on and I at this time, and there were two huts with all the prisoners in them in the one compound, and I had been there so long that I had the best spot. Right up in the corner near the door so when, you would come in from the bullring, you would go into the hut and there you were supposed to stay in the hut beside your bed

22:00 and whatnot until the call for mess came and off you would go. Well I was near the door so I always got there first. It was definitely the spot to have. Well, these blokes came to me and said, "Christmas Handicap on and are you coming?", and I said, "Don't be silly, I'm waiting to go back

22:30 to my unit". And they said, but after a lot of palaver and knowing what was going on, I said I'd give them the start signal. What they were going to do and it was quite stupid, the whole thing was quite stupid – there are three fences they were going to go over. These are fences, this is a 9-foot ceiling,

23:00 probably 8 feet – and then what they called an apron above that, you the fence and the apron, that comes back in, so that – and the mode of attack was to throw blankets up, catch them on the apron and I don't know, I haven't seen it done successfully, so I don't know what happens after that, because what did happen to this mob

23:30 is when the time came, and they all shot out the window, and they had to do this through fences, I really do think only morons would have tried it. At the base of these fences were rolls of concertina wire so that when the apron collapsed, and they were all falling into the concertina wire

24:00 and incidentally, the staff of the…known as screws of course, the screws knew all about this, they knew it was happening, who ever told them, Lord knows, but it was always suspected that they would always have someone in there who was one of theirs, you know, sort of an undercover man to tell them what was happening. But they knew all about it.

24:30 They had double guards everywhere, including on the roof of the cookhouse with a rifle, because I saw it myself, a screw up there. Now there was no light ammunition used, they were doing a lot of shooting, all blanks and really, it was Gilbert and Sullivan, or whatever. It was as funny as a circus. Well anyway, all I had done

25:00 was, they had push shutters on the, and I had to look to see that the coast was clear and the coast was clear, across their fences and then bang the side of the hut. The place was quiet and they all were listening and as soon as they heard the bang on the side of the hut. I went back to bed and they hit the wire and all that commotion happened.

25:30 As soon as they started you could hear all this bang, bang, bang of these blanks going off and all these cries. There were even cries of "I'm hit, I'm hit!" This was probably because of the concertina wire as they fell into it. Fair dinkum, it really was funny. Anyway, everything would have been satisfactory

26:00 so far as I'm concerned, as long as he knew I wasn't in it – the sergeant major, except that I heard his rotten voice, out in the … where we were, say the hut I was in and then there outside there was one of these big fences, they were going that way, but the fence there with the gate and the cookhouse, the aisle on the other side and he was out there

26:30 beyond this other fence…he was making such a din and I opened the door, stupidly and yelled at him. And he was standing there and he was wearing white army underpants and a singlet with the singlet tucked in the underpants. As I said, he was a little stout fellow – looking really ridiculous, and he had a .38 pistol in his hand, waving

27:00 and he was, leaving out the profanities, "You yellow bastards, why don't you stay and take your punishment!", and he's yelling and stupidly I opened the door and yelled at him, "Sergeant major, will you be quiet, some of us are trying to sleep!" Ridiculous! What was I then? 19? With all the brains of a 14 year old.

27:30 And as soon as he saw me, he said, "Ah King! You're in this! I knew you'd be in this!" With no evidence at all, mind you, we all slept in our clothes, I wasn't wearing sort of pyjamas – anyway, I was wearing clothes. I don't suppose everybody slept in clothes, but I was and that was stupid. I should have looked as if I was out of bed.

28:00 So he yelled this at me, and then I thought, "Golly, I'm going to be for the high jump here because he reckons I'm in this. And this is a mutiny and it's this that and the other and I'm …" Well I don't know exactly, I can't give you chapter and verse about what – how I achieved what I did after that. But what I did, was I rallied this mob

28:30 and we pushed down the gate into where the sergeant major was, he shot down the other end. He took off when we pushed the gate over – I mean, there were about 18 of us. We pushed the gate over and then he went down the bottom end. Why he didn't go to his office I don't … he probably thought we would invade his office, and then there was the big main gate out into the part where

29:00 the orderly rooms and things were, where you could get away from. We got hold of that and we rocked it back and forth until it gave way, when it gave way the whole thing opened up and off we went over to the main gate and the old bloke on the main gate had his pistol out waving it saying, "Stop, stop, stop!" We just took no notice of him and we all just bustled out.

29:30 Anyway the upshot of that was, I would say, every now and then you would hear stories, and this was a big deal – this was a really big deal, the big escape from Grovely Holding Centre. I took off and went down to Coffs, my ear to the ground told me that from time to time

30:00 so and so had been caught. They all got at least four years in the Bastille and so would I have if I had been caught. I went down to Coffs and there I stayed for a while and started to wonder what I should

do. But during the time I was in Coffs, because the girls were going to Sydney for something or other, I decided I would go with them.

30:30 And I'm…when I think about it, I find it difficult to credit how stupid I was in those days, but on the other had, it's difficult to credit how fortunate or how lucky I was. Because this is one of those things that added to that – gave more strength

31:00 to that feeling I had've indestructibility. We were cloistered at Penrith. Came in by train, girlfriend and I, got off the train, walked up to the concourse, where you go out through the gates and I wasn't even looking at the gate but she did. And she went like this, and she grabbed hold of me to halt me and she said, "Provos on the gate!"

31:30 When the provos go on the gate at the railway station, when they went on the gate at the railway station, they always made sure they got everybody. What would happen would be they would check the passes as you went through and they would go down on the platforms and down into the toilets – they organised themselves so it would be a clean sweep right throughout the place. There would be very little chance of getting away.

Where you in uniform?

Oh, yes.

32:00 Not only was I in uniform, I forgot to say that while I was in Brisbane, there were 9th Division troops at the exhibition, what did they call it? Like at the Brisbane Showground, they called it the Exhibition Centre or whatever they called it. So the 9th Division troops camped there and I told my story

32:30 to some blokes from the 2/43rd Battalion who were back from the Middle East and, I mean, these were the El Alamein people so I don't know at what stage, where are we know? End of '44? No they must have been, anyway they wouldn't have been just back from the Middle East, I'm not sure where they had been in the meantime, but anyway they were there.

33:00 The blokes that I talked to insisted that they tell their platoon commander, who was a lieutenant, but they said, "He's a bloody good bloke, a bloody good bloke and we'll fix you up. Colour patches, the whole bloody works. We'll tell Fred or Ted or whatever his name was". So we did that and so I had the 2/43rd "T" shaped colour patch

33:30 on my puggarees instead of the 33rd, and in fact I think they gave me a puggaree and so I could stuff my 33rd one away. It was summer so I only had khakis, as I remember, not greens I think, a khaki outfit, I think. The trousers were American – I used to scrounge things from all over. They were all perfectly …

34:00 **OK, you had come to Sydney, you had 9th Division colours on?**

Yes, I was – I mean all this was highly illegal. My natural inclination, I just knew all I could do was to keep walking towards the gate, so we kept walking toward the gate and when

34:30 we were about twenty feet away, a soldier ahead of me, broke and ran. Obviously AWL, he didn't have a leave pass, thought he might get away with it. The two provos on the gate took off after him, and I walked through, no trouble. Now if I'd been pinched then, I wouldn't be here now telling the tale, because I'd have been to jail. I would have got four years.

35:00 They were very severe on that sort of thing, you see.

Can I ask, how did you get back to your battalion?

Well, we went back to Coffs Harbour, I was really in a quandary, I felt that really I needed advice and lo and behold, again fortune smiling

35:30 in town one day, this was almost immediately after coming back from Sydney, I ran into one Alan Crawford. Crawford was a major and he was the OC or CO of the Lowanna camp. He was a lovely bloke and one you could talk to. I saw him in the street and he greeted me.

36:00 He remembered me and I told him the story. I told him what had happened. And he said, "What you have to do is get yourself back to your CO as quickly as you can and throw yourself on his mercy", those were the words he used. So that's what I did. I got back and I did that and that was when

36:30 good old Tom Cotton, he had got this…actually when I was about to go into the orderly room at Kiri, our RSM, Ken Anderson, known as the shark, marvellous soldier, Ken. He was a Tasmanian sleeper cutter – boy was he a … timber cutter, I don't know he cut sleepers.

37:00 And Ken saw me and he said, "God, Snow", he said just like this, "Are you for the high jump!" Well boy, he was really acting it up, in fact I don't think he was acting, it was probably so. Anyway, I went in the orderly room and they said, "So you're back", and marked things in books and one thing and another. Anyway it was probably the next day that I had to

37:30 appear before the CO. And the CO, I marched in and he looked at me and he just looked and he said, I can't remember the words he used, so I won't try and make them up, but he did say at least two

sentences and he then picked up two sheafs of charge sheets and he tore them in half

38:00 and he threw them in the wastepaper basket. And there was something I do remember to the effect that it's just as well they have come from where they have come from. Because he had a hatred of military police – a real hatred. And that has to do, for example not only with the Battle of Townsville that the 2/33rd fought against the military police

38:30 and that's another thing. So he tore up these charge sheets and he remanded me, God knows he couldn't do anything other than that because at that stage I had been gone for something over – around about 100 days absent with all things considered. But it was Ken Anderson

39:00 who told me what was in those charge sheets the RSM and they were, as I remember, mutiny, inciting to mutiny, wilful damage to government property, assault – and I threw a fire extinguisher at the RSM actually, I had forgotten about that, I grabbed the fire extinguisher off the wall and I threw it at him when I decided I was going to join in this thing.

39:30 So that was assault. There were seven all told. Did I say escape from lawful custody and AWL? Anyway there was …and they would have gotten me into real trouble.

What kind of punishment do you think that would have merited?

Oh that would have meant an extended jail sentence.

40:00 They could have got me for desertion. These were charges that they sent, knowing I had gotten back to the unit – they were trying to charge me their way but he wasn't going to have it. See he could have, for example there was a 9th Division fellow, he was written up in the Brisbane papers, and a friend of ours in Brisbane who knows the story,

40:30 the thing out the paper that is, a fellow named Jack Wilson and he was over something not nearly as bad as what I could have been up for. But just because he happened to get a short sentence in Grovely and the screws decided that they would bring a charge of mutiny against him,

41:00 got four years. The RSL [Returned and Services League] eventually got him off, but he got the four years because his CO would not back him up. Any yet he was in the Middle East with the 9th Division. I know, I met a couple of his mates on the ship when we went to New Guinea – on the Pilgrimage in 1995.

41:30 And they said he was a wonderful soldier and they just hate their CO for deserting him the way he did.

Tape 5

00:30 **I just want to pick up the story from when you returned from being AWL for almost 100 days and returned to your CO in the Atherton Tablelands – how did he respond?**

Well after having torn up those charge sheets, he remanded me for what was known as summary of evidence, which means you being remanded for a court martial.

01:00 And at the court martial, I was given a … I can't remember the fellow's name, I remember nothing but his ranking. He was a captain but he was my defence lawyer. He told me that "Due to that funny business in army detention barracks and so on, it would be better if I did not put myself in a position where I was asked too many questions"

01:30 and so he said "What we will do is to…for you to make an unsworn statement" and I don't know what the legal significance, aspects of that mean but that's what was done. Under those circumstances, he said, "You can't be cross-examined". Well, I was still asked one question by the president of the court martial:

02:00 "Tell me", he said, "When you escaped, or when you left" - I said in my evidence, in my unsworn statement, I was fed up with having to wait X number of days, I think it might have been 19 days that I was in there. I got fed up and I left. He said, "When you left, were you under open or closed arrest?" And I said, "Closed arrest Sir".

02:30 But that was the only question asked of me and as a result of all that I was given 120 days detention. I would assume that my CO would have organised for me to be pulled out of there if we had sailed in that time. But I didn't complete 120 days, I did 90 and had remission for the other thirty

03:00 and when I - even after that, it was some months before we eventually sailed for Borneo. So no harm done from the point of view of my service and the shooting war.

Can I ask you, what was the difference between the charge sheets that your CO was presented with, that he tore up and actually facing the court martial – how did they differ?

03:30 Well from what the RSM told me and he was the only one that I was able to get any information from –

Ken Anderson, the RSM told me there were seven charge sheets from Grovely and in some other, in probably most other infantry battalions, they would have said, “Oh send him back

04:00 to Grovely to face the charges”. But in my case that did not happen, Colonel Cotton tore them up but didn’t say what was in them, but Ken Anderson said there were seven of them. They were mutiny, inciting to mutiny – I’ll see if I can remember them – mutiny, inciting to mutiny, wilful damage to government property

04:30 assault, that was on the RSM because I grabbed a fire extinguisher off the wall and tried to squirt him with it and it wasn’t worthwhile, so I threw it at him. This sounds terrible for a young man, I think at that time, I had probably just turned 20. I had my 21st birthday in Borneo, so I had probably just turned 20.

05:00 But I have to say that it was a case of one thing leads to another. I was in there really because of having attempted to get to where I wanted to go in the first place and not having made it, when you consider that my life was on the line, I could have been sent away any time

05:30 into a shooting war and not come back. That was pretty frequently in the forefront of my mind. There was that, there was the fact that I was so highly trained that I was – the things that I had learned were the things you never forget, like if you have ridden a bike you will always be able to ride one or if you had ridden a horse you would always be able to ride one or whatever.

06:00 And to fly a Tiger Moth – I had done that too. So it’s very much a case of there being reasons for doing what I did that don’t bring me any feeling of shame or embarrassment at all, in fact I’m quite proud of the way that things worked out the way I put them together to make them work out the way they did.

06:30 Anyway, so those charges, conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline always comes into such things, it’s the simplest thing in the world to prove in those circumstances and AWL. I don’t know if that adds up to seven but it’s close enough. So they were ignored completely and I was merely charged with being absent for whatever number of days it was AWL.

07:00 And as a result of that given 120 days. The first part of the 120 days I did in – again, staging. The army never sends you anywhere direct, you have to stage somewhere on the way. My stage was at, I think it was for two days, at Yungaburra Field Punishment Centre.

07:30 And Yungaburra Field Punishment Centre would be – you and I were talking a little earlier about doing the Kokoda Track – Yungaburra Field Punishment Centre I think perhaps was designed to take out of people physically what might have been taken out of them on the Kokoda Track because the first thing that happened when you entered Yungaburra was you were given

08:00 a haversack containing 28lbs of sand. You bore that on your back at all times except when you went to bed or when parade finished in the afternoon and you went to mess, my recollection is that you probably didn’t wear it after that. But in all your waking hours otherwise, you wore it. Even when you went to the toilet

08:30 for example, which often happened while you were actually on parade. The way things worked out, it happened fairly frequently that soldiers under sentence - “SUS” - we were known as, were caught short and a hand would go and staff, “I wish to”, etc etc.

09:00 So you would be given three minutes and a fellow in a tower would be watching and let you know when the three minutes would be up. After three minutes and the call would be, “All right soldier, bite it off”, which was … anyway, so “All right soldier bite it off”, and you bit it off quick smart and as I remember you took your pack off.

09:30 **How many other soldiers were there in there with you? What were some of the things they had done?**

AWL nearly everybody, in fact the rule for field punishment was that you could not be given more than 28 days. If you were given a 28-day sentence you were bound to be

10:00 put into the Field Punishment Centre but it was not allowed to be inflicted for more than 28 days because it was quite hard and the number of soldiers in there – I suppose it might have been anything up to 100. They were all from the 7th Division. This was the 7th Division Field Punishment Centre, so they were all infantrymen of the 7th Division.

10:30 I can’t imagine, for example, that offences committed in circumstances where you would end up there would have to be from your home battalion or home unit which means that AWL was the most likely one and for offences such as striking another person,

11:00 striking another soldier, that sort of thing, if it was an officer you would be bound to get more than 28 days. And no, I can’t think of much else other than that, even for example, occasionally someone was charged with stealing. A stealing offence could be treated as a minor matter if it was something pretty trivial,

11:30 so yes, that might bring this 28 days or up to 28 days.

What was morale like amongst the prisoners?

They just accepted such things. That's, you know, most of us in those circumstances would say, "Oh well, we did what we did and now we're paying the penalty". No, not regarded

12:00 really as any problem. In Grovely for example, on the first Sunday morning, I heard, I can't remember now, whether a bell rang or a bugle or somebody played the piano or whatever, as reveille but I was still in bed when I was supposed to be out of bed, or still in my blankets on the – they weren't beds, they were

12:30 palliasse things on the floor if I remember rightly. The screw put his head around the door and said, "Still in bed? Right, you're on report". As a result of that I got three days PD1. That's "Prison diet one", which was bread and water. So I had three days bread and water in a compound where there were six little huts

13:00 and each of those was a little self-contained cell and you were put into this thing and you were allowed out, I think, it was for one hour during the day to do some exercise and the rest of the time you were confined to that with absolutely nothing in there to amuse yourself and so I got - the first time I got out for exercise, I came back in having surreptiously

13:30 picked up a handful of pebbles. The surrounds were of small whitish pebbles, quartz-like pebbles. I mean tiny, like 3 or 4 mms at most and so I was able to play with these things, to put them down on the floor and flick them this way and that and to sort of play bowls

14:00 with myself. There was no other way of amusing oneself other than doing something like that.

How long were you under those conditions for?

That was three days – 72 hours from the time in until the time out. But again, these people were terribly smart-arsed, most of these people. They had only…

14:30 a short time before this, there had been a much outcry about ill-treatment of soldiers in those circumstances. They had some really brutal people running them. As a result they had changed for the better, and really, all they had left to them, because they couldn't bash people

15:00 was to be smart-arsed and I remember the OC of that place, who again, was another one with a German name – quite incredible that. I have a tattoo on my arm – an outline map of Australia that I got on my first trip to Sydney after joining up. In it my initials, IWK,

15:30 then my army number NX88133 and under that AIF. And the commandant, saw this when he was charging me with not getting up when I was supposed to on Sunday morning and he said "What does IWK stand for?", and I said "My name Sir, Ian Willoughby King".

16:00 And he said, "It doesn't now, it stands for In Went King, three days PD1". Very clever I suppose.

What was the name of this facility you moved to? This wasn't Grovely again?

Yes, this was Grovely. Yes, I just went to back to that from the point of view, oh well I thought, after Yungaburra I went to Charters Towers to do the 120 days, you see or what remained of it

16:30 and there was an Irish RSM whose name was Corrigan. He wasn't a bad sort of bloke really, but he may have been adversely affected by this inability to bash people. On one occasion he accused me of doing something when I was – it was only speaking in the ranks and saying something or other and it was not me.

17:00 So I said, "No sergeant major, it was not me". "Well who was it then?", and nobody would own up and he said, "It was you and you're on report". So I went on report and I said to the commandant, "Sir, I know that if you find me guilty of this offence that I did not commit, you will give me three days bread and water, and Sir, I don't care". I said, I'm standing here saying "There's only one reason for not

17:30 telling the truth, and that's because you're afraid of telling the truth. And I'm not afraid to tell the truth because I don't care about having to do three days bread and water, and so Sir, I didn't do it", or words to that effect. And he said, "Mmm, all right, march him out" and he dismissed the thing. But old Corrigan, he didn't seem to care and in fact he never picked on me again after that.

18:00 **Was the treatment conditions under which you spent your 90 days – could you describe their quality?**

It was quite good – the food was all right and the treatment couldn't be described as harsh. You still did that silly marching around. That's all that was done during the course of the day. You formed up into, I think at Charters Towers

18:30 two or three separate about platoon size groups and march around and around and around. There were – you could be given other duties and I think it was a case of after a while some of, were given duties and I can't remember for how long

19:00 but for some time I did work in the, I can't help but call them screws, what other word is there for them? Quarters? You know, sweeping the floor and making beds I suppose and doing that sort of thing. I can't remember making any beds, but I'm sure they would have required it of me so…

I'm interested in your thoughts on the effectiveness of this army system

19:30 **in terms of either stopping you from wanting to commit these crimes again or teaching you anything of value?**

Well that's a very good question. I suppose, you see there were other aspects, you weren't getting paid. You lost your pay completely. You lost your deferred pay as well, your proficiency pay as well.

20:00 The proficiency pay was introduced about early 1943, I think. It didn't exist when I joined up and it was introduced later. That was six pence a day. We were on then six shillings a day so that's 2 pounds 2 a week, 42 shillings a week.

20:30 These days that would be probably worth about $60 a week, certainly nothing much more than that. But all found, pretty well all found, one of the things that always got up my nose was you bought your own boot polish. Yet you dare not appear on parade when you were required to have shiny shoes without shiny shoes.

21:00 We certainly weren't supplied with boot polish. The razors that the army supplied, nobody used, you would tear your face to shreds if you tried, I think. Most people thought that would happen and so didn't use them. And the canteens were well stocked with things like razors and shaving cream. That's another thing. You were required to be shaven.

21:30 And apart from not wanting to use what the army had supplied by way of a razor, they didn't supply shaving cream as well as that and we bought our own soap. They certainly didn't supply towels either.

I'm just interested in the fact that when you began, or it seemed throughout your time that you were putting in a lot of extra work in terms of getting ahead and learning more

22:00 **and yet you continually broke these rules. Were you concerned about the impact of these punishments and of your actions on your military career or on the way it was perceived by your family?**

It was the nature of the beast. Well I certainly didn't have much to worry about as far as family was concerned.

22:30 I don't think any of my immediate family would be much aware of…I didn't discuss such things with them. But so far as I was concerned, I never felt ambitions from the point of view of wanting to get a stripe or two or become an officer or whatever. Because I

23:00 recognised it as that "I had joined up, I'm a volunteer, I had joined up for the duration of a war that I expected not to last as long as it did". I thought that when there were so many of us young blokes joining up at that time, not only under aged but those who had actually made the age of enlistment

23:30 you would get the feeling that when they all became soldiers it would only be a matter of time before we kick these buggers out and we would all be able to go home. I didn't anticipate I would be in the army for four and a half years. So it was certainly not regarding it as any sort of career. I had not intention whatsoever

24:00 and the longer I was in the army and becoming aware of army bureaucracy and law, I felt that, it was not that I really consciously thought of the matter. It wouldn't occur to me that it was an atmosphere that I should want to stay in. The

24:30 whole shebang in my estimation could have done with a hell of a good shake up. Have you ever heard of The Peter Principle? A book written by …The author's surname was Peter and so he called his book The Peter Principle, and The Peter Principle is that you rise to one level above your

25:00 level of competence. That people, that this would not apply to everybody, of course, but generally, in business he's talking largely, you get to your level of competence and you become promoted beyond it and I think the Peter Principle probably still, seems to have always been there in the army and I wouldn't want to be permanently associated with

25:30 something like that.

What were the key areas you thought should have been given a shake up?

It's difficult to know where to begin there. You're continually coming across people, and this is far from the case when you get into an infantry battalion. It's so terribly important in an infantry battalion

26:00 that at every level you have confidence in those above you. Those who are giving the orders. I can't speak for any battalion other than mine and we had some absolutely magnificent leaders – magnificent leaders there. Our CO, Colonel Cotton was like that

26:30 and because he was like that and because he was like that he required all his other leaders to be like that. In fact somewhere in our unit history is, I remember reading that he had said on one occasion, “There are no bad soldiers, there are only bad leaders”, and I’m not sure that that’s original, but he said it anyway and he certainly meant it.

27:00 **Can I ask in your estimation, what are the qualities that make a good leader?**

Well, in infantry or in any fighting army unit, courage of course, before anything else. If a leader is lacking in courage … but I must say too, you have to say a word

27:30 for the ordinary Australian digger. I don’t know if this would apply but certainly in those days and certainly in my unit, it was very much the case that any of us could’ve if we were required, and this happened on many an occasion, even a private might have to run a platoon because

28:00 of casualties but the initiative was there to do it, so initiative was … and just all round ability. Just common sense, you know if a situation requires that such and such be done, it comes pretty quickly to a lot of people. On the other hand,

28:30 there was, at one stage, the section leader of the section of my platoon, next to mine, he was only recently promoted and I thought he was something of a dunderhead because he had a large number of reinforcements in his section.

29:00 A section is about 10, when it’s all there, there’s about 10 men. He would – there would have been 7 or 8 of them at that stage. I found on a couple of nights he had his sentries and this is when we were in action, I looked around, and I was on one end of mine and he had put out sentries and he had them digging foxholes, and “My God, what’s he doing there?”, you know

29:30 and I say, “For Christ’s sake, get over here”, and he did wake up after a while that something was happening, because they weren’t doing what he said, but you would get that sort of thing, you would get somebody who was slow to catch on. Generally from the bottom up, Australians for some reason, seem to be terribly adaptable.

30:00 **How did you deal with someone who the group felt wasn’t a good leader? How would they be treated or how would you deal with that situation?**

Well, I never had to deal with it but I suppose he would just be told if he was that close – if he was your immediate superior. There would be no problem there. For a private to tell a corporal, from a private who has experience and has been through it all

30:30 it would be fairly simple for him to get his message across. But he would be spoken to I imagine in most cases. Because I only have experience of one battalion and for that matter one company – the company I was in, it’s difficult to say.

31:00 I think I might have alluded very early on to the CO of a battalion in the 9th Division. I do know which one it is, but I won’t say, who didn’t stand by one of his own men who was an excellent soldier when he was jailed for four years for mutiny. In again, that was in Grovely detention barracks.

31:30 Now, I would have no confidence whatever, in a CO who didn’t stand by his soldier in circumstances like that, whatsoever, because he could, all manner of things that wouldn’t be proper if he could do things like that. Our CO –

32:00 it would not have occurred to him to do that unless it was somebody he wanted to get rid of. I must say he was the kind of bloke who would have taken that kind of opportunity to get rid of him, but he would only want to get rid of him for a very good reason.

It seems like you had a lot of ideas and opinions and had quite a bit of thought about the way things were organised and what you were caught up in. Would you have enjoyed the opportunity to take

32:30 **a stronger leadership position? To have had a stronger influence?**

In retrospect, yes I would. There was so much. I mentioned that Owen gun debacle and I would have loved to have been in General Blamey’s position vis-a-vis his relations with General MacArthur, because I would have told General MacArthur just exactly where he got off and to hell with the consequences.

33:00 I don’t think there would have been any adverse consequences for General Blamey if he had. After all, he was the Commander in Chief of the Australian Forces. He was also the land Commander in Chief under MacArthur for the whole of the, I think, southwest Pacific area, if I remember rightly for the all the land forces. It was just that MacArthur had the … if Blamey had stood up to him would

33:30 probably have wanted to get rid of Blamey but would have had to convince John Curtin that that was the right thing to do and I don’t think he could have convinced Curtin. Mind you, that’s politics and that’s another thing. It’s funny you … in between, for example, I could not imagine myself even …

34:00 I could imagine myself having worked at it and become a platoon commander. It would have taken, I

would have needed to be much more mature to be a company commander so I wouldn't have had any ambition in that direction or anything higher but I think I could have done General Blamey's job. Because General Blamey's job as far as I'm concerned would have been to tell MacArthur where he got off. To go and see what was going on

34:30 on the Kokoda Track – to get up there as far forward as was political because it wouldn't do for the commander in chief to get himself killed. But to know what was going on because Blamey did not, MacArthur did not. They had no idea in the world what conditions were like.

Was that then a cultural trait, that was a constant problem

35:00 **that people were not standing up and having the confidence or the balls or whatever it was to say or call the shots to their superiors?**

Well, see with generals, Blamey sacked first of all, General Allen was the first one to go. I'd say he did sack two generals, I won't grope for the names and a brigadier, Potts

35:30 all for well, Blamey would have said retreating and while he insisted, because MacArthur was insisting, that they were superior in numbers and in resources to the Japanese and that was an absolutely incredible … in fact, I can't really bring myself to believe

36:00 it was other than a treacherous bloody lie because it was exactly the opposite and the Japanese had that dreadful mountain gun, which was blowing hell out of our blokes and we had no artillery at all. And the withdrawals that they were making were not retreats, they were withdrawals.

36:30 They would withdraw to a better position and every time they wiped out a hell of a lot more Japanese than they killed of us and it wasn't until the assault on Gona that we lost really appreciable numbers of men and all because MacArthur said, "No I want it taken now! I want them to get into it tomorrow to go ahead",

37:00 without proper reconnaissance or anything. He ordered Brigadier Dougherty it was at that time to get in and take Gona, which of course didn't come off. And my battalion got into Gona and had to get out because they completely ran out of ammunition and they had to withdraw and all this because of … he was a dreadful person, MacArthur.

37:30 He would be the first to claim that he was the world-beater that so many people think he is.

It seems another pet hate of yours, or something that really rubbed you up the wrong way was the priorities of your leaders. I remember you talking about the padre the other day who got particularly upset about the language

38:00 **when he was dealing with a bunch of guys who were in the midst of a war. And on another couple of occasions, you spoke about people who were interested in feathering their own nest or looking after their own interests. Was that again a cultural infestation, of people looking after themselves, I mean having the wrong priorities?**

Yes, well I'm glad you've mentioned that because it has brought home to me

38:30 and two of these things can be read, two at least, I'd like to mention, can be read behind me, there on my bookshelves, the series of books published by the Australian War Memorial detailing, I think called Australians at War, or something along those lines, and the first volume about the first year after the Japanese had attacked

39:00 details a number of things but one in particular I remember. I think it was the 2/22nd Battalion – a big part of that battalion…

Sorry to interrupt, can you think of something from your direct experience rather than from the books or stuff you have read about, if you can think of examples that come directly from your war time experience?

Well, mainly due to the unions. Nevertheless, I would like to quickly mention

39:30 that one. These guys had to go to their emergency rations. And emergency rations came in flat tins, almost the same as the flat tins that Craven A came in and they had things like compressed fruit bars in them and they opened these and found they were full of sand. That the stuff had actually somewhere along the line had been removed

40:00 and sand substituted to give it weight. It's there in the book. And then there was the 2/3rd battalion as they were leaving, they had come back from the Middle East, and they were on their way to New Guinea, they were leaving Melbourne by train and the train crew, the railway people refused to man the train because there was live ammunition on board. And then, right personal

40:30 when we went on board the Katoomba at Townsville to go to New Guinea the first time, there was swinging in the rigging, and this is when we went for the Lae campaign, we went on board about one o'clock in the morning and there was a 25-pounder gun just hanging on what do they call those things? …

41:00 a crane type thing and everybody sort of looked at this and were asking why it was still there and some member of the crew said, “Ah, that was the wharfies”, they, at midnight that was up there and the whistle went, the wharfies only work until midnight and so they just left it there and it was there until six o’clock the next morning when they started again.

Tape 6

00:30 **I just want to ask you about the attitudes towards the provos and what you saw as the culture within the provos that caused such antagonism within the normal troops.**

Yes, well of course you keep in mind that infantry soldiers have prejudices against various things.

01:00 For example, it’s possible for some people to over … some targets of their prejudice to overcome that by performing. Such as the 39th Battalion, no infantryman who knows of their performance would call them chocos [chocolate soldiers]. They were heroes for that matter. With the provos though, no way in the world a provo could…

01:30 oh, well there was one. He was called Silver because he had silver hair, but he was a 7th Div provo, not, the LOC, the lines of communication provos and then there were those attached to divisions and some of those apparently were very good, as was Silver. His duty always appeared

02:00 to be on the railway station at Ravenshoe and when Bob and I had heard about him, and when we turned up there to get on the train to shoot through, we decided we would try him out and said, you know, “Good day Corporal”, they were all corporals – “We’re going to get on the train”, and he said, “Oh well there will be one” … most helpful he was. And so it turned out to be true

02:30 what they said about him. He was a one-off as far as we were concerned; he was the only decent one we knew. All the rest lived up to their reputations. All they wanted to do was catch soldiers who were AWL. They weren’t interested in any reason for soldiers being AWL. And for that matter

03:00 weren’t averse to pushing someone around who was on leave because I’ve known of this to happen. There, a couple of provos came into a pub and one of our blokes was there and was slow to produce his leave pass, it wasn’t in the pocket that he looked for it and they thought he was having them on, so they started to push him around and they said, “Right you’re for it”, and he eventually found his leave pass

03:30 but he got a real good pushing around in the first place. Anyway, of course, there was the Battle of Townsville. Now I missed the Battle of Townsville. It occurred when we were on our way to the Lae campaign and Bob and I were finding our way back independently.

04:00 And so we missed that. But what is alleged to have happened is that when there are infantry battalions passing through a place like Townsville, they need to provide pickets. Well it’s called a picket and a picket consisted of one of the platoon in the hands of the lieutenant

04:30 whose name was Doug Haigh, who was known as “Bull” Haigh. And Bull Haigh’s platoon, so the folklore is, were, they ran foul of some provos anyway. They were doing their job as the picket and it was some sort of friction between them and the provos

05:00 that started off the fist fight that ended up in the Battle of Townsville because it was quite a to-do and there were even officers who ended up in jail. The troops were coming in from everywhere when they heard about it because we weren’t camped far from town. They would all stream into town to lend a hand.

05:30 And as soon as you say “Provo”, and as a result of that or our CO as I said was quite antipathetic towards provos and he would have been even more so after that. He wasn’t making any excuses for them at all and he was perfectly capable of seeing that they were in the wrong and our blokes were in the right.

Can you tell me about being picked up in the pub

06:00 **by the provos? How were you treated then, what was your experience of …?**

Oh, actually, on reflection, I was thinking about that, and I think it was the civilian police in the first place and the provos came and got us from the local police station, Grafton Police Station, and the circumstances were that

06:30 there were some Yanks in the pub and one of them had lost something and because …and they were accusing another group of Australian soldiers for being responsible for them losing the thing and as a result, I think it was the publican who got upset and called the police. At that stage, Bob and I had nothing to do with it, we didn’t have anything to do with it. But the police came.

07:00 That’s right, the police came and in the end they said, “Look, let’s all go down to the police station and we will sort this out. It’s not good for this fellow’s business as long as we do this here and we will all be

sort of amicable, you know, we'll sort it out". They got us down to the police station and before we knew anything else they herded into the cells and that was that.

07:30 They weren't the least interested in finding out what happened, or whatever it was the Yank had lost. And the provos turned up and took us back because they just, they were right, I don't know what gave them the idea that we were AWL, but it might have been somebody had let something slip. Anyway that would be pretty well exactly what occurred. As far as the provos

08:00 were concerned, they were merely an escort. I can't remember anything about them – it was difficult obviously to remember the exact circumstances.

Can you tell me a bit more about what it was about the relationship with the girls in Coffs Harbour that kept you breaking the rules or?

Oh, yeah, well that's pretty simple.

08:30 It was, as I said earlier on, that when I joined up I really hadn't had any such experience at all and there for the first time it was possible, we used to go down to Coffs fairly frequently and I don't think

09:00 see, our time at Lowanna was fairly free and easy except when we were required to do something fairly hefty like the route march around through Dorrigo and so on and some of the training. I think it was a case, when I say I think, it's quite difficult to remember

09:30 a lot of these things but was probably that we were there for at least four months and we would have had every weekend in Coffs Harbour. And for example, there was the ration truck. The ration truck probably picked up the rations from the train, it would have been the usual thing and then would pick up anybody else

10:00 who wanted to go back and my recollection of that was that it was very early on Monday morning so we would probably have been able to get a truck down Friday evening and not be back until parade at six o'clock on Monday morning. It would be something along those lines. And the time of the ration truck would of course have to coincide with the time the train

10:30 came through with the rations aboard.

I can understand how in that sort of climate and not knowing what was going to happen to you from week to week, obviously the possibility of not being around for that long being an inspiration for you guys to go out and grab every opportunity you can to have as much fun as you want, but I find it interesting that the girls were willing to have such a commitment and to put so much into a relationship

11:00 **that was so flaky. Why do you think they were so committed or so …?**

Well, probably, you see, certainly after, at that stage we hadn't been and done anything. We hadn't been in any fighting and in those days when you had, and it was obvious that you had or it was known that you had

11:30 you were known as something of a hero. You really were and people would stop you in the street and say, "Good on you mate", or words to that effect. It was quite nice. So in fact, at one stage, I was sort of lectured by an ex-World War I bloke on a train. I had hurt my arm. It was something to do with, I can't quite remember

12:00 but I was on leave, or I might have been AWL, I don't know, but I hurt my – football or something or other and I was holding my arm like this you see and this bloke on the train he assumed I had been wounded and he said, "You want to get into them about that, you want to get everything down", he said, "In your medical records", and blah blah blah. So, people took

12:30 an interest in you and so far as the girls in Coffs Harbour were concerned, they didn't see much of the soldiery at all anyway and it was known really, it soon became known what we were doing. They knew it was a jungle training thing because you know, we, whoever was first to go to Coffs Harbour would tell them

13:00 what it was all about and consequently I think we enjoyed that sort of esteem from the start although we had never really done anything.

Was that the whole community?

Oh yes, I think so. Yeah, we usually went to the

13:30 Coffs Harbour Hotel was our pub – there were two, the Coffs Harbour and the Fitzroy and the Coffs was run by a Greek, Peter Gleeson and his wife, she was Mrs Gleeson and Mrs Gleeson, she was very very sympatico. To an extent where Bob and I

14:00 stayed at the pub one night and she wouldn't take any money for it. Yeah, and they were quite nice and as far as the girls were concerned, they were, one was 17, so 17 and Kit that married Bob,

14:30 she's exactly the same age as I am. She was born on the same day and so she at that time would have been, say two, no eighteen months older than her sister.

Was there a real atmosphere of spontaneity and recklessness

15:00 **at the time in terms of your relationships and what you would with your spare time?**

Yeah, well I suppose so. One wasn't thinking of the future at all – no it was enjoy the moment.

Did you consider getting married?

No, no way.

15:30 even after the war ended, I didn't regard myself as marriageable material. Not at all.

And yet you were quite confident in the girl's commitment to you two?

Oh, yeah, while the war lasted.

Did you fear or was there a fear amongst the battalion of infidelities

16:00 **and the Americans?**

Oh yes, and it happened too from time to time. Mind you, I cannot think of a single instance that I know of, but I know it was happening. It was happening a lot.

And it was a real concern for the lads that we have spoken about?

No, the number of married men, anyway, well it was a significant percentage I suppose.

16:30 It might have been 15 per cent of the total – but I regarded married men as being unusual in the battalion.

I might just leave the generalities behind and move on to the specifics of your preparation and heading to Borneo.

17:00 **Can you tell me about the weeks leading up to being sent – the immediate preparation that was involved?**

Well there were, and I missed some of this because of being locked up I suppose, but what occurred was that training was moved down to Cairns and Trinity Beach,

17:30 the training on LCIs, landing craft infantry was carried out and you know, more silly buggers, but in this case more enjoyable because of the unusual aspects of it. Barges running ashore and troops and jumping up and running up the beach. So that was done, but I got in on

18:00 the tail end of that having been released but then it was back for a while to ordinary things and then off we went to Borneo via Morotai. The trip - we sailed on a ship

18:30 an American troop ship, Liberty ship, the Liberty ships have been mentioned by others I suppose? The ship was called the USS Howell Lykes, I have always remembered that name, because it was so unusual I wondered who Howell Lykes was. That was my first time aboard an American ship. It was quite unlike …

19:00 and quite amusing in many ways, especially their announcements that you could no longer, when dusk was falling, now you could no longer smoke except under cover and the announcement was made – all announcements

19:30 were preceded by, "Now hear this. The smoking lamp is out, there will be no smoking on the open deck or near portholes", etc etc and then after when day was breaking you would hear, "Now Hear This. The smoking lamp is lit."

20:00 **What were the differences between the Australian military culture and the American military culture that you noticed?**

Well, the culture...

Was there a difference in the style or the culture?

Well there is. They're so damn brash and so full of themselves. Even, I said the 503rd Paratroops, I liked them – those of them that I met.

20:30 And because I met those that I did, I was able to overcome my, well distaste, I suppose, for want of a better word, at the way I had found them in the first place. They would be coming back from a patrol, and first of all, you would hear one or other would say:

21:00 "G'day Aussie – where are these goddamn Japs? Have you seen any goddamn Japs?" But then there were others, and quite a few of them saying, "You can go home now Aussie, we're here". And that got

right up the noses of the fellows, when the Americans started turning up before Gona because

21:30 not only did they greet the Australians in that manner, but then it was found that they were unwilling to do anything. When they were supposed to move they couldn't, etc. Mind you that had come overland by another route and must have been pretty well strapped by the time they arrived. Feeling

22:00 it really difficult really to do any fighting because of what they had already been through without any opposition.

Were the relations good then up in Morotai?

I don't remember. I don't remember any – and on the ship going to Morotai I don't remember any contact with the Americans at all. What I do remember about that ship is the Granny Smith apples.

22:30 You know, that's where we found the Granny Smiths were going and they were magnificent, absolutely beautiful and the fact that we got up on an American ship and we didn't see them otherwise right through the war – that's significant.

Tell me about Morotai and the time you spent there?

All I remember about Morotai, is that Morotai is mud.

23:00 We came off the Howell Lykes ashore, and there was that Marsden matting and we tramped over, and on either side of the Marsden matting there was mud, but we got off the Marsden matting into mud and all around the – it was a tent camp site, was mud and it's really as much as I remember about the place. I can't even remember, and I don't think we were there for very long.

23:30 The number of days? No, I can't remember that, but from there we went aboard the LCIs and headed for Balikpapan.

Can you tell me about the atmosphere – or tell me about boarding the LCIs and the atmosphere and morale amongst the men at that time?

Morale was never anything to be … you know, we were all…

24:00 at that stage we were all happy to be heading for some action because we had been out of it for so long and so it was good to be on the move again. I don't think that any other comment other than that would be of any significance because

24:30 that would pretty well cover it. And you said the atmosphere, well, really again, I can't remember how long we were on the water. I can remember arriving off Balikpapan where we learned that we were going to be reserve brigade and that

25:00 so the other two brigades would land and we would be sitting in the LCIs off shore until we were needed which was to be the next day. We landed on the second day and…which meant that we had, I suppose, we were a bit far out to really see as much as we would like to see

25:30 only the officers had binoculars – or the platoon commanders had binoculars. Anyway, one of the significant memories that I have or one of the outstanding memories I have is of HMAS Shropshire when a couple of shells fell among the…

26:00 the landing was pretty well unopposed. But there was a gun emplacement, a built-in one, a sort of pill box type thing on a height behind the beach, that opened up and dropped a couple of shells in among the landing craft. And somebody said, "Look at the Shropshire" and one turret of the Shropshire started to come round

26:30 and it stopped and it belched and that was the last time. Direct hit – first salvo – it was really something to see.

Did you face aerial bombardment out there at all?

No, the 2/31st Battalion did – our sister battalion from the Australian Spitfires.

27:00 Shot them up … I won't comment on whether they lost anybody because I have forgotten now. They did some damage. The 31st I think, at the time, were moving along the highway. It was called after the general … Milford Highway

27:30 and the Spits thought they were Japs and got into them. But that's happened many times in war anyway.

Could describe the sounds or what you could see, in terms of light or flashes from the landing craft?

No, when we arrived there the bombardment had ceased. They had bombed and strafed

28:00 and probably … but in circumstances like that they use the American method that La Peters told me about: "To shell Christ out of them and bomb Christ out of them and hope to Christ they evacuate". And I think that had already taken place, well naturally that had already taken place when we turned up

there.

28:30 As well the navy clearance divers had been in there and done their bit. Much had happened before we arrived.

Tell me about coming ashore on that second day?

That was uneventful but then we landed

29:00 and we moved into positions – one of the unusual things about that campaign was somebody had got the idea of giving every feature a name. For example, one area was C, so one that I can think of was cart – they would all be names that on the radio would not be confused with other names and so on.

29:30 I assume that was so, so you had cart, you had another area beginning with O and there was oxygen – others don't come back to me and so on. So onto one of those features. The Japanese had already been pushed back by the two brigades that had landed first.

30:00 Then shortly after that action began for us. One of the Os was "operator", so you get now the drift [understand]; they were all names one couldn't be confused with another. I cannot remember – it did occur to me that it might be a good idea if I had a look in the unit history

30:30 and boned up on one or two of these things so I could say which features we were on and which ones we took against opposition and which we just walked into.

What sort of opposition did you meet?

Well, not a lot. In most cases, when you found a position was occupied, and see the Shropshire was still standing off

31:00 the Shropshire was available – you would give them a map reference and they could drop a shell or two, bang, right spot on. But I don't know if they were used for that purpose but they were used at night for star shells. You could give them a map reference and they would put a star shell, bang, right over where you wanted – if you thought you could hear movement out there and you thought

31:30 you might be attacked you could do that. Our artillery though, they were very well set up, in fact it had got to be a bit of a gentlemen's war for that matter. The support you could call on, I mean you had your own mortars, the three-inch mortars, apart from the platoon weapons, every battalion has its mortar platoon

32:00 and so you could call on the mortars, you could call on the artillery, air strikes, you could call on the Spitfires and things.

At this stage, which of your particular skills were being utilised – were you still doing the intelligence work or were you on the mortars?

Oh, no, no. I never, although I did those two schools, I never...

32:30 I never wanted to be a mortar man. I think I was put off intelligence by the fact that, I know him very well, lovely fellow, who did the intelligence school with me he got us lost between Dorrigo and Lowanna and we ended up relying on the bush skills of…

33:00 so I never wanted to be in the position where I was responsible for leading people through the bush somewhere and then being wrong. So no. We for example, we did one attack under supporting Vickers fire. That was

33:30 one of those where, when we got there the Japs had evacuated and that was, you know, fixed bayonets and that sort of thing. But we had to use them and only on one occasion was there any opposition to, in a daylight attack,

34:00 was there any opposition to one of my platoon's attacks. And that was – I didn't play a significant role in that because it didn't come my way. That was the one where I told the story about how I missed that trip wire and then found it.

34:30 **Was booby-trapping widely used by the Japanese in Balikpapan?**

Yes, but it was widely used by us too. At night, every night, for the first time, and as I say it was something of a gentleman's war, in that for the first time we had an engineer attached to each platoon and that engineer was responsible for setting the booby traps around the place. We were using grenades and so and so.

35:00 But using mainly grenades.

Were they as useful though when you were advancing? I would have thought booby traps would have been more of a priority when you were retreating.

You, you know, you've got to sleep at night, and so wherever we were, the engineer and one of our blokes who – Jerry Kennedy by name

35:30 who, anyway, Jerry is a Victorian and Jerry just loved the thought of being involved in this sort of thing so he used to go with engineer and help him with the booby traps. I wouldn't have liked to have been involved in that either because you've got to remember where you've put the bloody things and you've only got to overlook one and you could be in real trouble.

36:00 **What were you making of the Japanese retreat and the lack of confrontation?**

Up to a point that was occurring. They were still being a damn nuisance. For example, on one day, I mean I told you about the episode with the anti-aircraft gun. On one day, and this was the only daylight thing when I fired a shot in anger,

36:30 we were … a fellow named George Campbell, George Campbell, who was a corporal, was getting together a party of blokes to go and get rations and quite stupidly, he was standing out in the open. We were on a ridge that was not heavily – the timber was very sparse.

37:00 And there were two or three blokes with him telling him what to do I guess. Across the – it would have been I suppose about 400 yards, call it 400 metres, much the same thing, well a valley to another ridge and on that ridge I could see Japs

37:30 setting up a woodpecker, a leading machine-gun and had we dug in because I had a weapon pit with my rifle standing in it. At that stage I had gone back to rifles from the Owen gun because … I'll tell you why I went back to rifles from the Owen gun because I didn't mention this earlier, back in New Guinea. I'll throw that in now.

38:00 Before, I thought, "I'll go and get my rifle. I'm going to have a shot at this bugger". I called his attention to Dick Kellaway, but George and company were a bit far away. Anyway, the gun opened up and killed George Campbell and sprayed the whole area.

38:30 I dropped down behind a log when it opened up because I couldn't do anything, my rifle was standing in the weapons pit and when I got to it, there was a bullet through the stock and so I'm glad I wasn't carrying it at the time.

39:00 End of tape

Tape 7

00:30 **Ian, I was wondering if you could take us now to the major confrontation that you had with the Japanese during the Balikpapan campaign.**

That was a result of our own mortars dropping a bomb on our own company headquarters. We were well out in the bush, right away from anywhere because, as I remember,

01:00 we were supposed to working our way to get in behind the Japanese positions and at that time, I'm very very fortunate not to have been one of those who was killed in that because, one Ralph Farquhar, one of our number, was sitting near me writing a letter and so was I, and he said, "Have you finished that because I'll take it

01:30 because I'm going up to hand it in at company headquarters". I said, "No, I'm not quite finished yet", and I can't remember what happened to it because the explosion occurred while I was sitting there still writing. It was only a couple of minutes after Ralph had gone. What happened was, apparently our own mortars, three-inch mortars, had in some way,

02:00 got a mortar off line and instead of the bomb landing in a position that they were actually targeting – bang! Fair and square in our company headquarters. Killed the company commander who I think mentioned, played fullback for Newtown, one of our great battalion footballers and Ralph Farquhar was killed also

02:30 and severely wounded the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] and one or two others. Now the upshot of that was that we had wounded to move out. Apparently the CO had jettisoned whatever it was, the strategic plan that we were undertaking

03:00 and had us withdraw, which we did over a couple of days because there were - we sent patrols out and patrols were sent out in our direction in any case from others in the battalion only to find there were Japanese in between us and the HQ [Headquarters] in any case where we were headed.

Can I ask how the gentlemen who were manning the mortars reacted

03:30 **to the deaths of their own men?**

I don't know. Because until – right then and there, all we could - only surmise what happened and whether it was one of ours or one of someone else's we didn't know. There were, at that stage, right through the war

04:00 three inch mortars had been used and they were used by…you had your own mortar platoon – or each battalion had a platoon with three inch mortars but then they had four inch mortars. And that bomb was so effective, if one could use the word, in the casualties that it caused, we supposed it might have been one of the four-inch mortars which were used by…

04:30 that was a separate unit that existed to fire four-inch mortar bombs. So we didn't know and really it was not until, just keeping in mind, I went back to New Guinea in 1949, the unit history had not been published and when I came back in 1960, it had been published and I was able to read that

05:00 our mortar platoon was to blame. And it happens too, and I wouldn't ask, there are on the committee of the 2/33rd Battalion Association, I'm on the committee – are I think three members of the mortar platoon. I wouldn't ask them – to wake it up at this time wouldn't be

05:30 a good thing.

You retreated over a period of a couple of days from the positions that you were at when the accident happened? What occurred then?

Retreat would be quite the wrong word to use, it wasn't a retreat because we weren't withdrawing from the enemy. And so eventually, with help from patrols who drove the Japs away

06:00 who were in our way, we got back to battalion headquarters fairly late in the afternoon and we bedded down there. The wounded were attended to and picked up and taken away. And just on daylight in the morning we had an attack.

06:30 What we always referred to as "Banzai charges", because that's what the Japs used to do. They would scream "Banzai!" as they rushed in. And that resulted in one member of the mortar platoon being killed – a fellow I knew very well, Merrick Plater – but there were several Japanese casualties.

07:00 That's about as much as can be said. It was one of those hairy things with screaming and carry on and lots of gunfire. But as I remember, I think there were only about four Japanese bodies around the place and there were more than that attacked.

07:30 **Can you describe in more detail what the charge involved? The one they charged – how were they dressed or armed?**

Mind you, when this began I was asleep. I was asleep in a tent with actually with camp stretchers in it. Not everybody – I don't know how I managed to get a camp stretcher to sleep on, but I did and it was

08:00 back from where the action was occurring. However, when I woke up and heard it, I leapt out of bed, as was my habit, I always went to bed fully clothed. I remember that some of the BHQ [Battalion Headquarters] blokes, and the mortar platoon is there at BH

08:30 **were not fully clothed. In their supposed rear – the atmosphere at the rear instead of the actual front line, they tend to get a bit blasé about things and like to get a good night's sleep and like to be comfortable.**

Did the banzai charge result in a hand-to-hand combat situation?

09:00 Yes, with some yes. But I've got to say, I've got a fair idea of what took place, but by the time I got there, I mean, I had to grab my rifle and get out there and make way, I suppose 30m, not much more than that, but by that time there was still some shooting going on.

09:30 And some Japanese retiring – retreating. The mortar sergeant, Dinny O'Sullivan, he had a hand-to-hand encounter with one bloke who – but he dispatched him. So that was one of the dead.

You mentioned before that they were strapped with explosives. Is that right?

10:00 **How were they armed and dressed?**

With bamboo spears was mainly what they used in those circumstances.

No rifles?

I'm not sure. I don't think so, I don't think so – I don't recollect that they….although Merrick Plater was shot I think.

10:30 See, my memory is too imperfect to…

Sure, but some were armed with bamboo spears, others had explosives strapped around them?

Yes, but whether they didn't work or what I don't know but there was no indication that any Jap had blown himself up.

Was there a sense that they had come there to die? Was it a suicide mission?

Yeah, yes I think so but they don't always…

11:00 I suppose it's a case of the boss says "You will go and do so and so", and when the moment comes perhaps they find an excuse for not doing what they are supposed to do.

It must have been an incredibly unusual experience for you given that both in Lae and the time you had been in Balikpapan, the enemy, you hardly saw them, is that right? They were in shadows and jungles,

11:30 **you very rarely saw them and all of a sudden to have them in hand to hand combat must have been …?**

Well, that is the case. And of course, you expect that when you are attacking a position and they're well dug in. Dug in means well hidden and what you're trying to do is to not be seen while they are killing you.

12:00 And it was my lot most of the time to not see them and when I did to not be able to do much about it such as the situation I told you about when George Campbell was killed.

Can I also ask you, waking up from sleep to that event must have shaken you quite a bit?

12:30 **How did you cope or recover in the days following that event?**

I really… there was no immediate, no immediate reaction to that. I would have to say really that, I felt that came under the heading of lucky escapes especially as I didn't go with Ralph Farquhar or I didn't say, "No I'm finished,

13:00 I'll take them" and that would have been the natural thing for me to do. And them at BHQ, Merrick Plater, being a close mate, getting killed, I could have been one … so it was probably no more than two days after that I suddenly got this overwhelming feeling my luck's going to run out.

13:30 It was quite intense and it stayed with me until that wonderful day, 15th August, when we were told "It was all over". Which incidentally, was the first day, only we were in Dutch territory and this was the first day that we saw anything Dutch. There was a Catalina flying over

14:00 and somebody who knew that I was the one who knew what all the insignias were and the aeroplane freak, said, "What's that?", and I saw the red white and blue thing with the white in the middle and I said, "That's Dutch". And they said, "Yeah, that would be right, that would be right – they turn up now". So we just had that impression about the Dutch and there were a lot of them here, Dutch troops in Australia too, at the time. However, I mustn't say anything nasty about the Dutch.

14:30 **Tell me about the news coming through at the end of the war.**

Oh, marvellous. I think it sort of sank in slowly, "It can't be … they're having us on". I think there was probably a bit of that in it. Then we heard about the atom bomb and I for one had taken a lot of interest in…

15:00 after all, in the Intermediate Certificate, I did get an A in science and so I was interested in science and the concept of the splitting of the atom and all that sort of thing.

But you actually heard about the atom bombs after you heard that the war was over. Is that right?

Oh, no, no –

15:30 or did we … I don't think so. I think it all came with a rush, but since you asked the question, I don't know. Well there you are – I don't know. But I don't think so.

Was there immediate Japanese surrender or did the fighting continue for a few days?

No, well we had no trouble with the Japs after that. I think there was

16:00 a single episode or some such thing happening. I know there were a lot of Japanese who took a lot of convincing, who wanted to fight on but whether that was happening around Balikpapan, I don't know.

Did you personally spend time rounding up POWs [Prisoners of War] then? Or rounding up Australians?

Well, what happened with me after that was we withdrew down to the beach.

16:30 We camped on the beach and life became pretty easy and Bob Gawn, who by that time had become company runner. Company headquarters have two runners and Bob came over one day and he said, "We need another runner, so and so's gone and how about it?" I said, "Beauty!"

17:00 So I saw Phil Curry who had been the OC of A Company and is now the President of the Battalion Association, and he said, "Yeah, you'll do", and so I went from B Company over to A Conpany as a runner. To my detriment, B Company was assigned to a place called Tanagrogot [?] to occupy and

Tanagrogot was I think it was something like about – it was up a dirty muddy river, crocodile infested

17:30 that was about, I think the river was about 60 miles south of Balikpapan – and it was about 20 miles up the muddy river, was Tanagrogot. So we went there and other companies occupied places where Japanese invasion money was still currency and they did extremely well but

18:00 at Tanagrogot we had nothing. It was a very bad choice.

Not even the beach at that stage.

No, no there wasn't. Yeah, and the crocodile hunters never caught anything, but by gee there were a lot of them about.

So what did your day-to-day duties involve until you left Balikpapan?

While I was runner, hanging around the orderly room and answering the phone

18:30 if the company clerk wasn't there and carrying messages if there was one to be carried. But generally not doing much at all which was good after sweating around the bush for so long.

What about the company in general? Were they trying to clear the bush, still patrolling looking for Japanese?

No, the Japs … they were coming in,

19:00 I mean, after all, they were mainly officer led and the officers would be informed as to what was happening and they would bring the men in. Yes, they were coming in. The big POW compound in Balikpapan and they were gradually filling that up and then there were men told off as guards for that too and everybody pretty well got a turn at that but

19:30 we didn't because when you have a job like company runner, that's what you do and that's that.

Were there frustrations about not getting back to Australia sooner?

Oh, yes, dreadful frustrations. Then they introduced the point system. We were told, and I can't remember what that entailed, but you were given so many points for your length of service, in months, so for example, four years service would be 48 which

20:00 I'm not sure whether that was one of the things which was doubled, and if you were married you put your length of service, your time overseas and something else, you put them altogether and if you were married you doubled them. The married blokes went … oh yeah, there was the five and two was it? Five years service and two years overseas? Something like that so if you had that

20:30 you were high priority and you went pretty quickly.

You, yourself were pretty low priority, weren't you?

Yeah, where they were sending away, sending home people with two hundred and something points. I had 134.

Were you dead keen to get back to Australia? Did you have any problems?

Oh yeah, because the only local girl that was in evidence

21:00 was one who we heard her name was Henrietta, and she - I don't know – she was parading around looking for business or what she was doing, but she was frequently on the road and I think she was probably accosted by some of the troops but anyway, she was all that was available, if she was available and obviously, I had turned 21

21:30 and my youth had been somewhat truncated by all this, although I had had a bit of fun, but not anywhere near what most kids of 18 to 21 have. So, yeah, I did want to get home and I took myself home.

I wonder if that maturity had – did you have plans about settling down back in Australia? Did you have any idea about what you wanted to do with the rest of your life?

22:00 I think it would be quite wrong to use the word maturity when talking about me at that time. No, as I said, early on I said I wasn't marriageable material and I would still have to say that at that time, it's just as well I didn't see myself as that because I could have caused a hell of a lot of trouble if I had wanted to marry somebody.

22:30 **In what ways were you changed by your wartime experience?**

Well now, of course there's - that's a point. I started to get - all sorts of things started to happen to me I think as a result of things like the plane crash and the various things – that first action that I was in when Jack Way was blown to pieces beside me and

23:00 various other things. I mean I had seen a fair bit of death and dying and whatnot, but those early

experiences – I think it's right to say that when you are going through things like that an early age, you can collapse under the weight of them or you can keep on going and

23:30 if you keep on going, maybe in due course of time, they will come back to haunt you and maybe they won't. But in my case they did and I had nightmares, dreadful nightmares. I didn't get married until 1957 and Joan often would have to wake me when I was having a nightmare.

24:00 Things happened such as – I went back to Coffs Harbour because that's where I was running around with a girl from Coffs Harbour, and then Bob got married and I just continued. I loved my beer – I used to get stuck into my beer. It could almost be said that most of the money I made I drank. I started off working

24:30 for the Forestry Commission. I started a little business of my own showcard and ticket writing and trying to get…I did a bit of advertising copy for a local newspaper and stuff like that and that worked fairly well but that got down to me working when I had to really – need some money, do some work.

25:00 Tell someone "I'll do a job" and sort of line up a job and bugger it, I'll go and have a beer and not getting the job done. You know, I didn't work at it very well.

Were you floating in terms of your address – did you not have a permanent residence, were you staying with someone?

In Coffs I lived in Mrs Reedy's boarding house, which was quite good

25:30 with meals supplied and whatnot. It was good.

Was Bob there with you?

No, Bob was, where was Bob living before he got married? I can't remember. No, he got married when we were still in the army, so Bob had his own place, yeah. See

26:00 the sort of thing that was happening to me was I never put down – I didn't go to a doctor and say, "Look, you need to look into – I've got to give you a history of what happened in the war because I think it's affecting me". Nothing like that. The first thing that I did that indicated there was something wrong, well apart from generally getting pretty depressed about things

26:30 and having nightmares, usually meaning when I went to bed at night, I'd feel I'd like to be elsewhere. One night, I think I was getting ready to go to bed and I stopped getting ready and I fully clothed myself, and this I can only – at the time, I can only sort of piece together, I actually walked from Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga

27:00 which I think was 18 miles – just sort of in a daze so I did go to Dr Hawke, the local doctor who was just down the road from Mrs Reedy's boarding house and I told him about this and he said "Where do you work?" and I said, "The Forestry Commission", and I said "I'm out in a camp at Nabucca, Monday to Friday I'm out there". This must have happened Saturday or Sunday.

27:30 And, in fact Saturday night I think it was and he wrote me a certificate to say I shouldn't work out there, they should give me a job in town, as a result of that they put me with the fitters in the workshop and I was supposed to learning to be a fitter. And then

28:00 this is very early on, we're only talking about a few weeks here in that job, and I don't remember the circumstances, but I got out of there and joined a DMR road gang – Department of Main Roads gang and at that time they were building a bridge over Coffs Creek which is hardly visible now because

28:30 the road's been built up to the approaches and whatnot but it was two spans of concrete and we were pouring the second span and I think that's the day that we did that was probably the one day that I was able to forget everything else. Because it was a hell of a challenge, you see. I pushed a barrow of concrete from the mixer up the approach

29:00 across planks and tipped from almost seven o'clock in the morning until dark and I lost one barrow load, and the foreman, Jim Phillips, everyone called me Snow in those days, and he said, "Snow", he said, "You had better get on the mixer". And stupid said, "No Jim, I've lost a barrow, I've got to make that up". And I stayed with that damn barrow all day,

29:30 I tell you what, I was really buggered at the end of the day. Anyway …

So did you feel like you needed activities that completely took your focus?

Yeah, and it was after that that I took on the show card and ticket writing thing because if I remember rightly, that heavy day's work did get to me. I was eight stone three when I joined the army and nine stone four or something when I

30:00 was, if you – everybody knows about what a stone is, yeah I was very light. And at nine stone four pushing that barrow load of cement was really something.

Let me ask you about going to Rabaul – your visit was four years later was it?

1949 – yes.

What motivated you to return to New Guinea?

30:30 No motivation whatsoever. At the time I had taken a job, I had come back to Sydney and I had got a job at the Department of the Navy at Garden Island doing a job that shouldn't even have been there. It was absolutely ridiculous. It was just sort of being a number and just being on the payroll with nothing to do. It was supposed to be looking after a filing system.

31:00 But not only was there nothing to do for me, there was nothing to do for two of us. There were two of us "On the job" in inverted commas. The other fellow whose name I forget now, was a real nice bloke. Spent his lunch hours looking at the Herald, to find somewhere where they would give him some real work and so I looked at the Herald with him and one day he said to me, and this was after only two or three days, I think, he said, "Here's one for you!"

31:30 And I said, "What's that?" and he said "Bookkeeper in Rabaul". I said, "I'm not a bookkeeper". He said, "Oh that's easy". He told me that all I had to do was get a copy of Whitcomb and Tombs Elementary Booking, read through it, especially the part on trial balances and that if I appeared for an interview they would probably ask me "Can I do a trial balance?" Say "Yes", and see how you go from there.

32:00 Because when you get to the books, he said, all you have got to do is do what the other fellow is doing. I thought, "All right - OK, I'll try that", so I came to work for Collier Watson. They did ask me if I did trial balances, I said yes, and so they flew me to New Guinea.

How did you feel about going back there?

Oh well, see it was another diversion.

32:30 That's what I needed at the time – diversions.

Wasn't it taking you further to the source of your discontent?

No, I don't think that was any worry. No, I didn't think of that as any sort or problem. It meant that I met a lot of new people, most of whom I liked and most of whom liked me. The boss didn't, like me that is.

33:00 And that was the reason that I didn't stay working for Collier Watson and went to work on the plantations. He called me in one day and I went into his office and he sat there and looked at me and he said, "I don't like your attitude". And I said, "I'm sorry?" Or words to that effect.

33:30 I said, "My attitude – what's wrong with my attitude?" He said, "Well you call me Vic for one thing". Well everyone called him Vic, the whole shebang. I'd never heard any– his name was Pearson. I said, "Well, you know everybody … what do you want to be called?" "Mr Pearson." I said, "Very well, Mr Pearson", in my usual bright manner. And that was that. Nothing else was said. I continued to call him Mr Pearson. He said nothing about my work which

34:00 I had imagined was very good, but again, I was doing something I had never done before. But I wasn't a bookkeeper. I was doing shipping. My job was to take shipping bills of loading and customs returns or invoices or something or other and handle all these things and handle the customs clearances and whatnot. It was good.

34:30 And at the close of work every day you would go and get on the beer anyway down with the boys at one of the clubs or one of the pubs. So I was really enjoying this and going extremely well and then one day he called me in and he said, "I'm transferring you to Kavieng". And I remember at the time I felt like saying "That must be because I'm fitting in so nicely, I'm doing so well that you want to transfer me

35:00 to Kavieng". Kavieng? That's where I was born. So that's how I went to Kavieng and there the manager at Kavieng was a lovely old fellow named Sol Williams. He got the "Sol" from "Soldier" although he had never been in the army. I don't know how – oh, he had been in the reserve or something and because he had been in the reserve they called him Soldier.

Was there quite an expat community up there? Were there a lot of people who had been through the war in New Guinea living up there afterwards?

Oh, yes.

35:30 Vic Pearson was a captain in ANGAU, that the Australian and New Guinea Administration Unit, so I suppose Vic Pearson thought of himself as being big time because he would have had it in my CV [Curriculum Vitae] there and I was a private in the 2/33rd Battalion, so I should have saluted him and called him "Mr Pearson" right from the start I suppose but I didn't know. And his 2IC [Second in Command] who was a very nice bloke

36:00 named Corbett, I forget his first name. He didn't mind being called by his first name. He was a major and I'm not sure whether it was ANGAU – I think it was something else. And then there was the bloke I liked best in the place and who I spent quite a bit of time with socialising and having a drink and so on was a fellow named McKenzie who was a chief petty officer in the navy.

36:30 I mean most of them, there was a funny little fellow…

This lucky streak that you were on, there were so many close calls that you escaped from, did you ever question your atheism? Did you ever have to question that there is someone looking out for me?

No, no. I think it was always, I didn't think of it, but if I had thought of it, I would just put it down to chance

37:00 and I would still put it down to chance. It happens. Lots of people get on through life by sheer luck, I think. Then I know people who are supposed to be deeply religious that I think are about as sincere as you know as a baked potato.

There are other vets who we have spoken to who have spoken about a sense of guilt that they manage to keep avoiding. Is that something you can relate to – a sense of that?

37:30 Yes, look I always had that feeling and eventually after many years, I think this wouldn't be more than about 15 years ago, I was referred to a psychiatrist who was a bloke who was a sergeant in the 2/3rd Battalion and who

38:00 did medicine after the war and did psychiatry because of his interest in post-traumatic stress because of the blokes he thought of … and it was he who put me on the track – "What have you done?" and "Keep telling the whole story", and as a matter of fact he was the senior psychiatrist in Repat [Repatriation Commission, later Department of Veterans' Affairs] and I was first referred to one other psychiatrist

38:30 who when, later on, I was told I had to see Dr Spragg, he said to me, "I've asked to see you, because so and so, I won't mention his name, can't relate your condition to war service". So he said, "Now tell me about it". So I told him, as a result of which

39:00 I got 50 per cent added to my small – small, I think I had 50 per cent at the time due to my wounds and whatnot. So I got another 50 per cent out of that and he understood completely what was going on but it was he who said, and ended up saying up to me, "But why would you worry about not helping

39:30 these guys out? What happened to those who tried?" I said, "Well, most of them are no longer here. They copped it too". He said, "Well there you are", he said, "You'd be dead too if you had tried to help them", and so I mean, that hasn't helped me very much, but it's a bit of a crutch.

One last question – what was the most important thing you learned from your wartime experience?

40:00 Oh, I would say, well, it turned me into a man eventually I think. I remained a boy for far too long, but I don't know if I would have ever seen maturity if it had not been for that. Do you ever hear of anyone else admit to such a thing? But there you are.

40:30 **Just one last thing – what was your proudest moment?**

That is difficult. That's a hell of a difficult question. I don't know, there are many moments of which I could feel proud. Perhaps the most outstanding one, because of what might have happened had I not got away with it, was the provos on the gate at the Town Hall station. It would have been terrible.