

Australians at War Film Archive

Raymond Becker (Ray) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1353>

Tape 1

00:30 **Okay, Ray, so if you could tell me in approximately five minutes about your life to date?**

I was born in Echuca and then at an early age I moved to Red Cliffs and then from there on

01:00 I went to school at the Red Cliffs State School, later on to the Mildura High School and from Mildura High School, I went to St Josephs College in Mildura. Where do I go from there?

What did you do after high school?

Oh after high school I went to -

01:30 I sat for an entrance exam into the post office and was employed at the Mildura post office as a telephonist. From there on I continued there until 1942, when I joined the services. Having joined the services, I joined up as a wireless operator.

02:00 Then I was posted to Ballarat number 1 Wireless Air Gunning School and from Ballarat I was eventually posted to Richmond in New South Wales. And from then I was posted with the Spitfire squadrons to Darwin and from Darwin I flew back after about fifteen months to Adelaide and from Adelaide

02:30 I returned by train to Melbourne and then from Melbourne I was eventually posted to Brisbane. And from Brisbane I joined Allied Intelligence Bureau. I didn't even know anything about it, only after. And from Allied Intelligence Bureau

03:00 I joined M Special Unit and flew from Brisbane at midnight to New Guinea and then from New Guinea I went to Bougainville, Nissan, Arawe, New Hanover and served behind the enemy lines. And from then on I was evacuated

03:30 and sent home by Liberator to Brisbane and from Brisbane I was given the option of staying with the Allied Intelligence Bureau, return to the air force or get a discharge. I selected a discharge, and eventually discharged and from then on I

04:00 applied entry into the telegraphist training college in Melbourne and finished up a telegraphist at the Melbourne chief telegraph office. There I met my wife at St Kilda Town Hall, eventually got married. Stayed in Melbourne for about twenty years and then eventually, I didn't like Melbourne, I like the open like Adelaide and Mildura, and I finished up in Adelaide.

04:30 Four children, three boys, one girl, had a very happy marriage. Fifty years celebrated February last year and that's it.

Beautiful well done.

I don't know about that: I am 'umming' and 'er-ing' a bit.

That's fine. So you grew up in Red Cliffs?

That's right.

And were you born there?

No, I was born in Echuca on the Murray and then left Echuca at an early age and came to Red Cliffs with my father. My father was a builder.

05:30 **What was he building in Red Cliffs?**

Oh, he built half the town so far, until the day he died, he built shops and everything. We're not on camera now are we?

Yes.

Oh, we are, I beg your pardon. Can you start again?

So we are up to Red Cliffs: can you tell me what you and your family were doing there?

You mean my immediate family?

06:00 **Yes. So you were still at school?**

I was at school when war broke out and from when I turned eighteen Red Cliffs has been one of the largest soldier settlements probably in the southern hemisphere and it was just taken for granted that you joined up, I wanted to join the navy but my parents were against that and so I thought I would join up air crew:

06:30 they only take what they want on the allotted day. If they have got enough airmen and pilots and gunners they might turn around and say, "Well, you can work in the mess." So I was very pleased that I was going to become a wireless operator, so that was the way it went.

So was your father an ex-serviceman?

My father wasn't an ex-serviceman but he was conscripted to the CCC [Civil Construction Corps]

07:00 during the war. And he worked down at Ballarat and then at the seaplane base in Swan Hill putting up bomb sights and huts for the infantry and so on.

What did they have against the navy?

My parents? I don't really know. I suppose they thought you were a sitting duck,

07:30 I don't really know.

Can you tell me about your school life? What school was like in Red Cliffs?

Well, school was something that was okay and it was more involved in sport than probably school work so when I eventually went to Mildura I was playing more sport than doing study and my mother was very displeased with me

08:00 because she was a Roman Catholic and she decided enough was enough and she sent me to St Joseph College. And at the time they were nun teachers so they pulled me into line. So actually speaking, I was very pleased because they were brilliant teachers and I did pretty well.

Do you remember

08:30 **any incidents at school?**

Only one instance at the St Joseph's College. One of the students threw ink out of the fountain pen on a book I had so I picked it up and rubbed it over his face. And of course when the nun came back into the room she said, "Everett Bent, who put that ink on your face?"

09:00 and he didn't answer and about thirty-five students all looked at me. So immediately I was expelled, told to get. So I went outside and I thought what am I going to do? Mother was not going to be pleased with this. So after I was outside for about an hour one of the other nuns come over to me and said, "Do you realise that you have

09:30 done the wrong thing?" and I said, "Yes, I realise that." So she said, "Well, if you want to come back into the school you have got to start apologising." And it was a real drawn out rigmarole because I had to apologise to every nun in the establishment, and I never mentioned this to my parents. And I don't think they ever knew: I just kept that quiet.

How old were you?

Fourteen or fifteen.

10:00 **And you enjoyed learning from the nuns?**

I thought they were brilliant teachers, they gave individual tuition, they were tough, if you were behind in work then you had to work Saturdays, and I used to ride my bike from Red Cliffs to school, which is about eleven miles, on Saturday mornings.

10:30 So you soon got abreast of things because if you didn't do the right thing, well, you were in trouble you didn't have too much free time to yourself.

So what sort of classes were you enjoying the most at that time?

Well, none of them really because there was no metal work or sheet metal work, maths actually was my favourite subject.

11:00 Because eventually they chose me to sit for the government examination, like the post office and junior scholarships and so on, and I finished up top maths in Victoria. Because at that time getting a position was very hard to get: I mean there would be students come from all over Victoria, Maryborough,

Melbourne and things like that, to sit for the examination

11:30 and at that time they probably only needed one person, so I did very well.

Sounds like it. Were the nuns successful in instilling a sense of faith in you? I suppose they had been trying?

Well, they tried very hard: they thought I had the wrong religion but I thought I was being loyal to my father because when the other brothers and sisters

12:00 were born they were all christened Catholics and my father put his foot down and said, "I am going to have one on my side." So I was christened Church of England. But I had a leaning towards Catholicism: I thought there was nothing wrong with it.

Did that serve you later in life or was your faith - ?

My faith was restored: well, my faith was always the same. I have always been a God-fearing person.

12:30 **So after your time at the school you left: why did you leave?**

Well, at the time the fees there were three guineas a term and I think at that time my father was earning say five or six pound a week and these incorporated

13:00 bus fees to Mildura and term fees and they decided that I would get a job. But the nuns turned around and offered free tuition, they indicated, told me to tell my parents, that I had come out of my shell and that they could do a lot for me

13:30 but he wouldn't hear of it, because naturally he wouldn't eat humble pie and that was it.

So he didn't want charity?

No. and that was fair enough I thought.

Your brothers and sisters, were they at school?

Yeah, I had one brother, they all left early. One brother left at about fourteen and I think my sisters left at the same age

14:00 except one other brother who became the dux of the Mildura High School three years running and he ended up in the post office and the superintendent of posting telegraphs in Melbourne. Of course when the war intervened, I joined up. He didn't join up. Of course, all post office officials were reserved

14:30 occupation. That's name only because if you wanted to join up you could so that was that.

Were you close to your siblings?

Oh yes, very much so. Especially the older brother because when war broke out in 1939, whilst I was at school,

15:00 there was a boys' magazine was printed in England and they had a story printed called 'P. Von Becker: the Nazi spy', so they used to call me the Nazi spy and I would get into a fight about every second day, and if I couldn't fight them, my brother would fight them.

Why were you called the Nazi spy?

Well, because of the German name see? Becker.

15:30 And the character in the magazine was P. Von Becker, the Nazi spy, so they put two and two together. It was more or less just a joke I think but when you're a young lad, I mean, you're more sensitive than when you are an adult.

Can you tell me about what kind of characters your parents were?

Well, my father was a wonderful character. He was a brilliant tradesman and he was a friend to everybody

16:00 and had a great knowledge. And every Sunday he would have visiting carpenters come down to pick his brains and ask him how to do certain jobs. He always treated us well, had pretty good discipline though.

And your mother?

The same, exactly the same, lovely woman.

16:30 **Did you ever struggle for money in that period of time?**

We all did I think, during my school days, which was the time of the Depression and I remember at Red Cliffs they used to have sweat boxes, what they used to have for dried fruit, and they finished up the children that couldn't eat their sandwiches would put their sandwiches in the sweat boxes for the other children to eat.

- 17:00 We always had enough to eat and of course there was dole queues and a lot different to what it is today, they didn't get very much. But my father was employed right through the Depression because he was a builder in his own right and he kept another man on with him working, which was a bit of an effort but he knew that when things got better, the chap was very valuable for him.
- 17:30 **You were saying that the children who couldn't eat their sandwiches, was that those who had had enough to eat?**
- Oh that's right, yeah, that's what I meant, yeah.
- At the school?**
- Yeah.
- And then presumably the hungry children could go and check if there was any food in there?**
- Yeah, that's right, it was pretty pathetic times. There was a terrible lot of unemployed. I don't know a great deal about it
- 18:00 because I was a child myself. I knew that's what we did.
- Did you have shoes?**
- Well, sometimes we had shoes, sometimes we didn't. Mainly had sand shoes, if we had a good pair of shoes and the soles wore well my father used to repair them, fix them up.
- Did you always wear shoes to school?**
- Not always, no, sometimes we would go barefooted.
- 18:30 Especially when it was - it got very hot in Red Cliffs and we used to run from tree to tree if we had no shoes so we could land in the shade and cool down.
- What were you doing in your leisure time? What were the kids doing around Red Cliffs?**
- Oh, just the same as anywhere else. Football, cricket, swimming,
- 19:00 go down to the Murray, play games, rounders, all of the usual games that kids play.
- Has the river changed much?**
- I don't think so. I think the river has been the same since day one. It is only the irrigation which has lowered the level at times, but with the locks and weirs in place, that has solved a lot of the problem. I think that the River
- 19:30 Murray will come back to full capacity again. All depends how much rain you get in the Alps. And of course water allocations along the properties like the rice and fruit vines and oranges and what have you.
- Was it always that muddy?**
- No, I don't think so, the Darling River has always been muddy. The junction of the Murray/Darling at Wentworth, but the River Murray
- 20:00 at Mildura and Red Cliffs has been reasonably clear. I was up there a short time ago and it seemed to be reasonable for this time of year.
- Would you still go swimming in there today?**
- Of course yeah. It would be better swimming in there than the Torrens or the Yarra, I imagine.
- You felt compelled in this town mainly of ex-soldiers and soldier settlers**
- 20:30 **and so on, every boy was wanting to join up, is that right?**
- I think that we wanted to join up too. It was not just because it was a large soldier settlement, we were very patriotic and we thought it was the right thing to do. As a matter of fact my eldest brother, he joined up unintentionally. He went to Mildura
- 21:00 one day and went with a few mates to the Winterson Hotel and had a few beers and everything and they had a recruitment truck going through the town. And he finished up in the back of the truck signed and delivered sort of business.
- So they take them a little bit inebriated?**
- Oh yeah, of course. Well, they needed the men.
- So that was your older brother? And he was off in the army?**
- 21:30 Yeah, he was in the 7th Infantry Battalion but half way through he had a bit of an accident and he hurt his hip, I think he fell off a Bren gun carrier and I think they finished up discharging him.

And your other brother?

Well, he didn't join up because he took advantage of the reserved

22:00 occupation and stayed with the chief telegraph office.

Was there a stigma attached to staying in a reserved occupation?

I don't think so. I think some might have thought that way but you could use it for an excuse of not joining up: not really, because there is always ways around it. You could, the army, navy or air force would still take you,

22:30 it all depends how reserved you was. If you were really in a key position, I suppose that they could put down and say, "Well, he can't go," but I don't know of any cases where that happened.

Can you tell me about the day that you joined up, what do you remember of that day?

The day I joined up I had to

23:00 travel by train from Red Cliffs to Melbourne. I think it was in Russell Street, I am not certain now, and I went through a medical examination, trotted around just about in the nude all day, saw one doctor after another and then he came into the final interviewing room where a chap interviewed you and you filled out your papers, it might have been the other way around, I am not certain.

23:30 But that was the time when this chap remarked on it being a German name, and he said, "Ferdinand is German too." And I said, "That's right," and I said, "What are you mate?" He said, "I am a British subject." And I said, "Well actually speaking, I would be more British than you are." And he said, "How come?" and I said, "My grandfather

24:00 was born in Hanover and that's a direct line from Hanover to the royal family." So he didn't say anything about that but before you sign on the dotted line you can say anything you like so I said my piece and that was it.

Then kept your mouth shut.

Yeah, that's right.

So Ray, you'd sat the post office entrance exam before this?

Oh yes, well, before this I

24:30 had worked at the post office for a number of years as a telephonist in Mildura. That's when I worked for nearly all of the females: it was a female organization and there was only two of us that did the night shift. We alternated from four to eleven and then eleven until seven in the morning. So we were really under petticoat government there. Good job though, lovely girls.

25:00 **So you were the only boy?**

Yeah.

Did they take advantage of that?

Oh well, I only copped what I deserved. I used to give a lot of cheek and one day there they ganged up on me and decided to rough me up a bit and at that stage I think I was about sixteen and they ranged from about eighteen to about twenty-five or twenty-eight and

25:30 they had threatened they were going to pull my pants off and they finished up succeeding getting my trousers off and my shirt off but I fought like mad but I was just about helpless in their hands because they were too strong for me and there was too many of them.

What did they do once they had all of your kit off?

Oh well, they kissed me on the stomach

26:00 and stamped my stomach with the stamps they had there. Certainly I was infuriated, I certainly had to watch my step with them, as long as there was not too many of them I realised that one lad against about six women, it doesn't work.

You had met your match.

You can say that again.

And did you enjoy your time as a telephonist?

Yeah, I liked it and it

26:30 was nothing like it is today. It was the stutter type, where the shutter came down and you put it up with your finger or if you wanted it to come through the other end you had to transfer it, there was no

electronic dialling in those days, it worked on the electro magnetic system. It seems strange that they didn't have automatic dial because

27:00 some of the small post offices had it, but not in Mildura.

So once you had been accepted and signed your papers, how long before you had to leave?

Well, almost immediately I think I was sent down to number 1 WAGS at Ballarat, that was the wireless air gunners' school.

27:30 And you started straight away. You did your rookie training and in between your rookie training you sent and received Morse code. A lot had to learn it but I had a start because I was always interested in radio when I was young. I made crystal sets and amplifiers and oscillating

28:00 equipment and I knew Morse code at an early age. So I didn't have any trouble with Morse code but you had to go through the process, so many words a minute and I think it was twenty-two words a minute and from then on you was classed as a radio operator and then you just waited for a posting and I was posted to

28:30 Richmond in Sydney, New South Wales. And at Richmond I was with the Number 1 Fighter Wing which embraced three Spitfire squadrons: 54 Squadron, 4/52 Squadron and 4/57 Squadron. The Spitfires were the assistance

29:00 given to us by Britain and they weren't so good but it was the best they could do because they were engaged in the Battle of Britain. But they were kind of obsolete to a certain extent and whilst there I think one of the squadrons, I think it was 54, were all Englishmen and the other two were Australians. Whilst I was there I met

29:30 Killer Caldwell: he was one of the Australian flying aces. The only reason I met him, I was walking across the strip and he sung out to me. He said, "Boy!" and I thought, well that's rather good, I don't have to salute him or say, "Sir." Or something. And he said, "Will you take these cases down to the aircraft down there?" so I was only too pleased to take them down for him.

30:00 I didn't really know too much about him until I got to Darwin and I saw him in combat over Darwin. He turned out to be a real flying ace and quite a nice fellow. When we were posted to Darwin we went up by Liberty ship: it was a Dutch ship called the Maid Suka [possibly the Mariscal Sucre, a US Liberty ship] and we called it the 'Mud Sucker'

30:30 and they had Javanese crew on board. And the air force personnel loaded the ship and when we got out to sea we hardly had any food to eat because they had loaded the equipment on top of the food. So then they had to sort of unload it out at sea to get supplies to feed the troops and it was

31:00 a pretty horrific trip. The bunks were in the holds right next to the engine room, wooden bunks and if you lifted your head too quick you would hit it on the metal work. And there was a vertical steel ladder down into the hold and it was just like a hell hole, sweat like mad all of the time. So I think that in the end they put a wind chute up the top of the hold

31:30 so they could see if they could blow some air in it. That didn't work too well so in the end they decided we could sleep on deck, so we slept on deck, most of us. And that was quite comfortable, just lay on the deck and take a blanket with you, use your gas mask as a pillow. So we sailed from there to Townsville, they gave us a few hours shore leave in Townsville.

32:00 At that time it wasn't much use having any leave because everyone was trying to drink out of the pubs and you couldn't get a glass of beer let alone a glass. So from then on we sailed up to Darwin, before we got to Darwin we went down into the Gulf of Carpentaria, we did a beeline down into the Gulf of Carpentaria because they were worried about Japanese shipping or aircraft so

32:30 that delayed us kind of a day and we sailed into Darwin Harbour and they made us stay in the holds and then someone said, "Well, what about letting us out on the deck for a bit of fresh air?" and they said, "Okay." And one of the English officers said, "Well, you can get on deck,"

33:00 and he pulled his revolver out, and said, "And the first man that runs or charges will get shot." And someone in the rear said, "Yes, and that will be the last shot you ever make." So we finished up, saw the shipping in Darwin Harbour, half of it was poking out of the water, like the sunken wrecks and there was no air raid on at the moment so we were able to land okay.

33:30 And then we were taken to our destination, I think we went to Berrimah, that was an old hospital there, we camped at Berrimah.

In your initial training when you had been learning Morse, you had already known the Morse but the others had to learn,

That's right, yeah.

What other kinds of drills or training were you being given at that time?

Oh, we did route marches and

- 34:00 PT [physical training] every morning. As a matter of fact, you never stopped doing training, rifle drill, bayonet charge. All of that sort of stuff, that kept us, by the time you finish that you're ready to roll into bed about nine o'clock.

Did you have all of the equipment you needed?

Not really, they were short of equipment, that's why I can't

- 34:30 understand all of this returning of arms and they are destroying them, because they were short of fire force and some of them were using broomsticks I often thought that those guns that were retuned in the gun buy back should have been stored for future use. Because of the -

- 35:00 well, it is better than breaking them up into scrap. Anyway, that was not my decision.

Did you have a broomstick?

No, I was lucky, I had a rifle.

Did you get some pre-embarkation leave before you left Ballarat?

Oh yes, they were very good with the leave, usually get two or three days: you might get a weekend or something like that.

- 35:30 That worked okay, didn't have time to, by the time you jumped on the train, from Ballarat the Mildura express used to come through about nine o'clock at night, ten o'clock, so we would leave the camp same time as everybody else and we would book in at one of the picture theatres to have a sleep. We knew the usherette there

- 36:00 and she would know us by name and she would give us a good seat in the lounge area and we would lay down and go to sleep and when the train was due to come she would come down and wake us up. We would just go down and catch the train to Mildura. Probably that would be the Friday night and then we would come back on the Sunday night. Or Saturday night I am not certain now.

Were you proud to go home with your uniform?

- 36:30 Well, I sometimes used to change into ordinary clothing but the people preferred me to stay in my uniform. I didn't mind either way but sometimes you preferred to dress up in your other clothes for a change. Give them a rest.

Did it give you a sense of pride though?

Oh yes, at those times of course.

- 37:00 And at that age you thought you were doing something for your country and the people treated you well. Always thought that were doing the right thing. You only realise the mistakes you make after the war when you think, "Well, I missed out on the best four years of my life." But you don't think of it at that time. You think, "Well, some of those times are good times too."

- 37:30 Especially when I was with the coast watchers, that was really exciting.

So you had gone up on a ship and arrived in Darwin?

That's right.

And you were being posted where in Darwin?

- 38:00 To Berrimah. We went up with the Number 1 Fighter Wing and I was still in Number 1 Fighter Wing because that was the unit that went up with the three squadrons.

These are the ones with the Spitfires?

Yeah, and we had our strips made alongside the highway and a camouflage net that just like, when there was a scramble and the Zeroes came over

- 38:30 they - we had squadrons at Batchelor, Strauss, Livingstone, and they were just like inserts off the road. And as soon as there was a scramble, up they would go. They would know well in advance because we had a radar station on Bathurst Island and a few other places and we would know,

- 39:00 give the Spitfire pilots a chance to get height because the Zero was a really special aircraft and very fast and very manoeuvrable but that didn't stop our people shooting quite a few down. As long as you got the height, well, then you can dive on them and open up with the cannons and do the best that you can with them.

- 39:30 **You said that when you arrived in Darwin that there was bits and pieces lying around, was that wreckage from bombing?**

No, what I meant is when we came into Darwin harbour there was about four or five ships poking out of the sea because when the tide went out you could still see the upper structure of the ship that the Jap's had bombed. So it looked a little bit awesome,

40:00 **So you could see parts of the ship sticking out when the tide had gone out?**

Yeah, that's right a lot of them.

Were they military vessels?

Cargo ships mainly I think, yeah. But see I was based all over the Northern Territory because I was pretty adept at radio work and tuning transmitters.

40:30 And they sent me around to a couple of little small places tuning in transmitters and I was with the Spitfire squadrons nearly all of the time.

We will stop there.

40:50 **End of tape**

Tape 2

00:30 **So Ray you were just talking about being in training in Darwin and you were with the 10th mobile fighter squadron in Darwin?**

01:00 Yes, well, I was posted to 10 Mobile Fighter Squadron that was down at Berrimah, it was just looking over the Kamali strip there where they had the Bofors. And we had a great big dugout built into the ground, but we were above the dugout, and in the operations room in the dugout,

01:30 there would probably be room for about ten radio receivers as well. And triangulate tables and we were in the mobile tender above receiving grid references from radar stations and we would transmit that down to the dugout, just another operation.

02:00 **Where were you getting the information from?**

Bathurst Island and all of the radar stations around Darwin. They would come in like a grid reference like, X1234, or N 168 or whatever, and they would put these lines across the table and where these lines crossed that's where the Japanese were and so they were send these Spitfires up

02:30 and engage in battle with them. But the Zero had the edge on the Spitfire to a certain extent because they didn't use any camouflage paint, they were all bare metal and that gave them an extra five or six knots. They were little nippy Nips but the Spitfire won in the long run, I should imagine, because we had

03:00 better pilots.

Where were the Spitfires taking off from to engage in?

Well they took off from various sections of the main highway, we had inserts where the Spitfires were stored alongside the road under camouflage netting and when there was a scramble they would go out onto the road and take off from the road.

03:30 That road of course would be specially bitumenised so that it still looked like a road but it was a better surface and nobody was able to find out where we had our strips. There were other strips there, but that was a pretty cunning idea to have them along the roadway. I think they had some at Strauss and Batchelor, Livingstone and other places.

04:00 Of course, Adelaide Aerodrome had been incessantly bombed.

The Adelaide what?

The Adelaide Air Station had been bombed and bombed so there was no use taking off from there: that was used only as a base.

So the Japanese might have liked to have known about those roads?

Well, possibly they might have known about them, I don't know.

04:30 They came in, the strip down at Kamali Creek, they had Bofors there and a regulation strip because an air raid one night and there is another chap and myself in this mobile tender, and the Japs came in with bombers and fighter planes and they dropped bombs on the Kamali strip,

05:00 daisy cutters. And they opened up with Bofor guns, the Australians on the top of the hill, we were just below the hill in the mobile tender and when they first started to go off we got the fright of our life and

we both rushed for the back door of the tender and we still had the earphones on and the cords around our neck and we got jammed in the doorway. We didn't stay, we unplugged and we

05:30 both made for the nearest slip trench. And of course the ones underground in the operation room. It didn't worry them because they only heard a little bit of it. And afterwards they said we could have been charged for leaving our post but we preferred being charged to being blown out of it. So that's the way it went.

It must have been terrifying?

06:00 Well, not really, nothing happened, I mean we got out of it, that's the main thing. These daisy cutters, when they come down and explode they explode like jumping jacks, you know a jumping jack? And they go along and explode again, they do a hop hop along. I don't think anybody was terribly worried about it, just nice to have somewhere they could jump in a trench.

06:30 **So could you see the Japanese planes coming toward you?**

No, because it was night time when they came over: when it was daytime and they came over you could see them but you would nearly need binoculars to see them because they would be well above thirty thousand feet .and they just looked like little dots, chrome dots in silver but you could see them in formation coming.

07:00 **And where was your intelligence about the incoming Japanese planes?**

Well, we got that from the radar stations because they showed up on the blip on the screen. Some of the radar stations had a round platform and they had a handle that you turned to revolve yourself. Where you had power, they had powered ones and it turns around the 360° of the compass.

07:30 Just on a little television screen and you would have a blip on the screen when there was Japanese aircraft or any kind of aircraft there. And this is how you knew a raid was coming: we would pick them up two or three hundred miles away.

So that gave you some warning?

08:00 Yeah, we would get the call, the radar station would have their own operator, tele-operator, and he would transmit those to Darwin and we would transmit them down into the dugout. Well, they had their own radios in the dugout too so that was only to try the mobile, it was an experiment in case of emergency. If the dugout was blown up these mobile units could

08:30 tour around the countryside and you would still be on the air.

And how were the townspeople warned?

The townspeople? I don't know, we never saw any town people.

because you were too far out?

We were too far out and we didn't have any need to go into Darwin and I don't suppose we were allowed to go in actually.

09:00 I don't know that anybody went into Darwin, a few might have went in but I don't think at that time there would have been too many left in Darwin but we never went in, I never even thought about going in.

How far away was it from Berrimah?

Berrimah was I suppose eight mile.

So at that stage just looking for

09:30 **airfields or were they still bombing Darwin town?**

Well, they were looking for aircrafts or airfields and when they couldn't find any, well, they would bomb what they would see or what their intelligence told them. And sometimes they were successful. They would shoot down a few Spitfires and we would shoot down a few Zeros. On the way back

10:00 they mainly unloaded their surplus bombs on the main air station, the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] station, which would probably be now the Darwin airport. I remember being at the airfield and the mess hall had a big hole in it about twenty feet diameter: where you ate your meals got a direct hit. They were kind of double story block buildings

10:30 there and they still operated the airfield there but not by any fighter planes or bombers or anything like that. They were all under camouflage near the roadways and own private strips.

So you were saying there weren't a lot of people in Darwin at this stage a lot of people would have cleared out, but who would they have got their warnings from, an incoming raid?

11:00 Well, they would have their own alert, see? Red alert or whatever their warnings in there used to be, I

don't know. We used to have red alert and that means that you jump in the nearest slip trench and that's probably what they had there. I have forgotten what the other alerts were, probably yellow or green or - I don't know, but that's what would happen. I

- 11:30 think that the bombing and everything like that was one of those things that Australians handled all right. I think the Japs met more than their match.

Do you remember any of the Japanese planes being shot down?

Yeah, well, the best time was after the raid, you could hear the

- 12:00 result, just like if you went to a football match or something like that. Hear how many we got and all the rest of it. And a few of our aces, especially Killer Caldwell, he was the biggest skite of the lot. He was a big tall bloke and he would have his canopy off and you could see his head and upper part of his body hanging over out of the aircraft and he would do victory roll after victory roll just about all over Darwin.

- 12:30 **That must have been good for morale though?**

It was very good indeed. Now and again we would get a jettisoned tank land in the area that would be from the Japanese air raid because they would have an auxiliary tank to get there and back and once they burnt up the fuel in the tank they would drop it.

- 13:00 **So no Japanese pilots ended up in that area after they had been shot down?**

I don't know really what they did to them. They had a cemetery not far from Berrimah and quite often a few of us had to go out and dig graves. You know if somebody said, "There was thirteen shot down," then you wanted thirteen

- 13:30 graves. Sometimes they hadn't dug enough holes, but I think that was mainly our own people that were buried. Our own pilots and air gunners or whatever.

We have heard a few different stories that there were rumours flying around that the Japanese did land up north of Australia: did you hear anything?

No. Never.

Just a rumour?

- 14:00 I know they got as far as Western Australia near Drysdale, near the Drysdale River. That's in the vicinity of Wyndham and they had a big red cross on the mission station there and I know they bombed the mission station there. But there was no landing I know of. I doubt very much, the only landings I knew they tried was in Sydney harbour, those mini subs.

- 14:30 **They got close didn't they?**

There were a few landings on Bathurst Island but they were shot down and if they proceeded north on Bathurst Island the Aborigines, they were the Tiwi tribe, they wouldn't worry about them, they wouldn't even go looking for them. And we asked them, "Why?"

- 15:00 And they said, "There is no water up north. They will die anyway, so why waste time?" but if they were shot down in the south where there was water, we would ask them to bring them in but they wouldn't bring them in, they would just shoot them. They reckoned a waste of time, better to shoot them.

Pretty laid back attitude?

That's right, they got rid of them quick smart.

- 15:30 But there wasn't that many shot down: well, I suppose some of them may have run out of fuel returning from Darwin, I don't know.

Where would those Japanese planes have been taking off to get to Darwin?

I don't know. Indonesia I suppose, those islands there.

- 16:00 There is a network, there is about thirteen thousand islands there, isn't there? I don't know, no idea. That's a simple answer isn't it?

A simple to the point answer. Getting back to your operations, taking radar bearings, this is good information for the archive

- 16:30 **so I am just wondering if you could talk me through again when you got the incoming call how you would plot that?**

Well, what happened, they had a table which they called a triangulator table. It had three holes drilled in it and through that went a cord with a sinker on the end of it, a weight.

- 17:00 And that particular hole represented a radar station in the area. Could have been Mullumbimby, could be Bathurst or it could be somewhere else. And you would have earphones on turned into the radar

station, the radio from the radar

17:30 station and they would send, "Go a grid reference," and you would pull the cord up through the hole in the table and take it to the grid reference. And each one in turn would pull their cord up and where them cords intersected would be where the Japanese were .And then the control officer would send back a message and ask what the angels was? Now the 'angels'

18:00 was the code word for height, what the height was, they could calculate the height. So they would say thirty thousand angels, you know thirty thousand feet. And so they would have the grid reference and the height they were going and they would also know how many miles they were away from Darwin. So they could be two sixty or two forty. At one stage

18:30 there the Japs got onto the idea of throwing the radar stations out, they took up tin foil with them so I suppose they stuck their head out of the window and threw it over so the radar station, it would float to the ground and the radar station would get false blips on their screen, just like a television screen.

19:00 But I don't think it worked. Sometimes the Japanese would come in under the range of the radar. The radar operated at a certain level, to avoid the radar beam they would cross, skim the ocean, but whether that worked or not, I don't know.

19:30 **And did you have any protection I mean if anything had happened where you worked did you have a gun or?**

Oh yes, you always went with your gun. I think I told Elizabeth [researcher] I had a .303, everybody had .303s, that was the only sort of gun. But the gun I

20:00 had, .303, it got burnt.

It got burnt?

Yes, when I was with the 10 Mobile Fighter Section, you had a little annex to the tender and we added kind of cooking facilities there, where we had to cook our own lunch. And I had my rifle propped up against the camouflage netting and I was cooking the lunch with

20:30 another chap and the camouflage netting went up in flames and so did the tender., and someone said, "There is your gun in there, Becker." And I said, "It can stay in there, I am not going to get it." So it finished up burnt the tender down, hate to think what the cost of it was these days.

Did you have to own up to that?

Well, couldn't do anything else. Two of us there cooking the lunch I think I got the blame. But someone rushed

21:00 up and said, "Be careful what you say because the evidence I am going to take from you - " Read the riot act to you, taken down and given as evidence against you.

And you had already been in trouble hadn't you? With the incident where you left your post in a raid?

Yeah, well that's wasn't really trouble, that was just an accident that happened. Because these days

21:30 that sort of thing wouldn't happen with the equipment you have. See the slight difference in the equipment today with what they had then. So that was burnt down but the truck still started up, because I tried it later, even though it was only a shell. But then they gave me a Tommy gun so I didn't score out of it too well because the Tommy gun is heavier, so I finished up I had that all of the time I was in Darwin.

22:00 I think when I left 10 Mobile Fighter Section, I went over to one of the radar stations, radio operator at Bathurst Island.

Why did you leave the 10th mobile?

I don't know, that's just they decided to send me somewhere else, you did what you were told, you didn't have any say in the matter.

So you could be transferred from one unit to another not necessarily

22:30 **with any of your colleagues, you could be sent all by yourself?**

That's right.

So it would have been difficult to maintain friendships?

Oh well, at that age you always made friends pretty well. And what happened was they told me I was posted to the radar station down at Bathurst Island. So someone delivered me down to the airport

23:00 and I flew over with the notorious Doctor Fenton, the flying doctor. He was a doctor of fame at that time but I don't suppose you know him now. He used to pick up any stray dogs in Darwin and take them over

to the Aboriginals and I flew over with him in an old aircraft, a bi-plane, really up to date model,

23:30 sixty miles per hour each engine. Twin engine bi-plane. So as we flew over to Darwin we didn't have much gear on board and the aircraft was flying at about that angle. So he said to me, "Will you go down and sit on the tail?" and I thought he meant me to get out, I was petrified. "No," he said. I went over to the door. "No, there is a little seat at the back and that sort of levels the plane out."

24:00 And so when we get over to Bathurst Island, they light a fire to show him which way the wind is going so he can land. He said, "They do that all of the time. It is a waste of time because I always go in one way and come out the other." This was at Cape Fourcroy. So before we got to Cape Fourcroy he took me over an area, he said, "I always go along there to see if there is any crocodiles."

24:30 Anyway we eventually get to Cape Fourcroy and he just landed on the beach. Lovely bloke, he was one of the originals, I don't suppose you have heard of him have you, Doctor Fenton? Oh very notorious character.

Notorious because of what?

Because he was virtually one of the original

25:00 pilots with the flying doctor service. And he was well respected, probably like any famous footballer or cricketer, all of the rest, he was well known. Then we set up camp and I stayed at Bathurst Island and that was quite a lovely place, Bathurst Island.

How long were you there for?

Four to six months, I think.

Were you fairly isolated there?

25:30 Well, we had to depend on the aircraft coming over once a week or fortnight for supplies. You never had any showers, had to go down the creek and have a wash. We had a creek down there, more or less a spring. And the officers had their water

26:00 carted up by the Aboriginals and they would fill a shower with one of those pull things, you know like the old pull toilets? Oh no, the radar station was up quite a big hill with trip wires and tin cans tied to it and the radio shack up the hill was sandbagged. And I operated the radio

26:30 with another wireless operator and we had what you call twelve hours on and twelve hours off. It was a pretty long day. But we always had an Aboriginal with us so that he would run messages for us, if we had an urgent message or something we would give him the message to run. I don't suppose they thought of putting in a

27:00 telephone line: that would have been a lot easier. And to pass the time what I did was try to learn as much Aboriginal as I could. Phonetically, I would ask them what this was and that was and I would write it down. They have got a great sense of humour Aboriginals because one day there,

27:30 they have got two type of Aboriginals, they have got what they call the bush boongs and the missions boongs, they call themselves 'boongs'. And he would say, "If any bush boong comes in and asks you for a cigarette," they all ask for a cigarette, "You say 'kalu baki, intun wari wandami nasi'." And I said, "Now what does that mean?" And when I would say it he would laugh like hell, thought it was a hell of a joke and I thought, "Gee, I am pretty good at Aboriginal."

28:00 This is good." So for a week on end everyone is asking me for a cigarette and I am saying, "Kalu baki intun wari wandami nasi," thinking it means "I am sorry my friend, I haven't got any cigarettes." Anyway one day there, a real bush boong came in and he said, "Kalu unta baki." Give me cigarette.

28:30 And I said, "Kalu baki intun wari wandami nasi." And he said, "You stupid!" he said, "You know what you say?" He says, "You got no tobacco: me a bloody liar." So that was a way of humour to get at me. They used to even call the officer in charge there, he used

29:00 to stand over them, if he wanted them to build a hut or something, he would stand over them and they would be singing all of the time and all of the time they would be singing, "Tula mine." And I asked them one day, "What's this, 'Tula mine'?" "Big fat stupid head." They were calling him 'big fat stupid head' in their own language and of course he thought they were very happy working with him.

29:30 Little did he know that they were having a go at him all of the time.

Were they obligated to be working with you or did they choose to?

Oh, we employed them. We employed them for so much a week, five shillings a week or something. We built a kitchen for them and usually they used to eat the leftovers, but they had their own kitchen

30:00 but they used to say they loved bully beef and all of the rest of it. But in the end they followed our example and when they would come in for breakfast they would say, "What name tucker today?" and their cook would say, "Bully beef." And they would say, "Belt it." Not knowing what it meant so they just copied off us.

30:30 So they got pretty independent but they were not a patch on the fuzzy wuzzies. I mean the fuzzy wuzzies had their own gardens and stayed clean, they made their own houses and they had original - I think in some respects, they had been stone age for a very long time.

The Bathurst Island Aboriginals, what's their physical characteristics?

They have got a little

31:00 bit better figure than the West Australian ones. But, they have all got those match stick legs you know, nothing to look at. They used to have fights, knock one another around. Had to get the flying doctor in to take a few off the women off: fighting over some other man I suppose, throwing nulla nullas at one another.

You wouldn't want to get in the way of that.

31:30 No, you would not. They loved dogs though.

Which is why Doctor Fenton was bringing them dogs?

Yeah, he would bring them dogs. They had a good sense of humour and they had attributes that nobody else in the world has got with their foot tracking, no one else can do that. I mean it is something that you can never learn.

32:00 It is just something inherited and I remember walking along the beach one day with no shoes on and there was hundreds of tracks on the beach so I walked into the ocean and put my footprints there and walked back and he didn't see me, I was going shooting with this Aboriginal, as a cover up I would say, "Who's track that?" and he would tell me

32:30 straight off, not even have to look down or anything. And I said, "Who's track is that?" when I came to mine. And he looked at me and said, "Kua mea?" that means "What's wrong with you?" And I didn't say anything, he said, "I think it belong to, what do they call their women? I get mixed up. They call them meris up in

33:00 New Guinea. He said, "I think it belongs to one woman. Track small foot belong to woman."

He was trying to upset you?

See I tried to trick him but there was no tricking them and their hearing was acute. When the aircraft would come in to land on the beach we would go down there with an old truck we had and we would stand there

33:30 and they would point to where the aircraft were coming, they would hear them before we could see them. Absolutely amazing, I often wondered, that's why Aboriginals make good footballers. They seem to be good kicks for goal and everything don't they?

So how many Australian troops were on Bathurst Island at this time?

34:00 Oh, it was, I suppose there was about forty of us.

Not many is it?

Well, that's all you need, you only need the radio, you had two officers and that was one too many, you didn't need them. We was able to go around shooting. Walkabout.

So you did a lot of exploring?

And they had a mission station on the eastern side of the island,

34:30 Father McGrath, he was quite a nice person. As a matter of fact he sent a messenger over one day that for Easter he was going to put on a religious ceremony and one of the blokes told the Aboriginal jokingly, "Tell him, 'Go and bag his head we don't want him over here'." And they went back and told him and he was very upset.

35:00 But it was only meant as a joke. The Aboriginals, they're a friendly type. We played football with them.

Did they already know how to play the game?

Oh yes, there was quite a few famous Aboriginals over there, there was one called Dak Saddle, he was one of the characters in the book written by Ion Idriess.

35:30 He was, and Fro Pot, Tar Pot, you name it and then when the missions came along they names them Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Bartholomew. All of these religious names.

Did you ever know their original names?

Oh yeah, there was a few of them. It was a Roman Catholic mission so they mainly had biblical names which suited

36:00 them except for Dak Saddle and a few of the others. They used to call me, 'Kala Badi'.

What does that mean?

Well, I had a lot of hair those days and fair hair, the opposite of being fair is black, so kala badi is black snake. They used to call me 'Black Snake'.

36:30 So there was some character.

Makes you sound very dangerous.

Yeah, that's right. But we played football and when you would go into mess at night for a meal they would know you had been playing football with them. Someone would say, "You have been playing football with the boongs again." And I said, "How do you know?" and he said, "I can smell you." Because they perspire,

37:00 they have a smell of their own. But you have got to remember they used to reckon we have a smell of our own too. So that's how they used to know, you had that boongy smell.

I wonder what they said about your smell?

I don't know. They get sunburnt too you know. You can't see it but they get sunburnt. I enjoyed myself there. One of the chaps over there, we had a terrible cook, he couldn't cook,

37:30 and he would bake bread under an ant hill and we would get one slice of bread and a teaspoon of jam on top and he would stick to army rations, you wouldn't get any more than the next fellow got. So he had an altercation with one of the blokes in the camp, so this bloke dropped him. So he yelled out for a witness. And another bloke, names

38:00 MacCallum I think, said, "I will witness that." And the cook said, "You saw him strike me?" and he said, "Yes I did." "I will ask you, you're going to be witness." So they charged this chap, put him under arrest and when he come to give evidence the cook said, "You saw that chap strike me?" and he said, "Yes I did, cook, but

38:30 you hit him first." So he committed perjury so we could hopefully get rid of the cook. Send him back to Darwin. So I don't know what happened there but I got into trouble.

How did you manage to get into trouble this time?

Well, we had a workbench up in the radio room and you couldn't read, you didn't have any light really. So I used to stretch out on the bunk,

39:00 like the workbench, and I had an kind of an agreement with the operator in Darwin he would come on the air and instead of sending the call sign he would just send 'dit, didda dit dit' and I would just put my foot over on the Morse key and go 'dit dit' with my foot. Well, it's a good idea for radio silence isn't it? Cuts it right down.

39:30 And this officer comes in and he was a mate of the other officer and he said, "Wake up! Asleep on active service." And I said, "I am not asleep. I am just stretched out." But he had given me some work to do and I had said that I didn't have time to do it and he was annoyed at me because of this work. I hadn't done it. So I got charged: I got put under arrest. And actually speaking it was a very serious charge you know. It wasn't funny because being asleep on active service, you can get

40:00 shot.

Is that right?

Yeah, I was really amazed, of course I pleaded not guilty and they wanted to know whether it went to court martial and I said, "No way." Because I knew if it went to court martial I was sunk. So they sentenced me six days filling sand bags and digging a few trenches and things like that.

40:30 The only part that hurt was that that was promulgated in a letter that goes to all of the air force stations in the Northern Territory. Doesn't look too good.

And it wouldn't have told the full story would it?

No, because I wasn't asleep but I was lying down: of course, I was lying down, I did that every night.

We will just leave it there, Ray.

40:57 **End of tape**

Tape 3

00:42 **So tell us a bit more about that officer: was he a particularly difficult man?**

- 01:00 He was a very difficult man. He was more or less what they call a five week wonder. Knows someone who knows someone else and they do a five week course and make them an officer. Anyone else that is any good has got to go for months and months before they qualify but he wasn't like by the rest of them. And so after I got charged I
- 01:30 went to the sergeant and said, "I have got to have a shower, where do I shower?" I wasn't allowed to leave the vicinity of the camp. And he said, "Can't you go down the beach?" and I said, "No, I am not allowed to go down to the beach." So he put it up with them that I could use the officers' shower, the one that the Abos [Aboriginal people] used to fill.
- 02:00 So I was really enjoying myself showering in the officers' showers, wasn't worried about the water or anything. So that worked all right. Soon after that I was posted back to Darwin: so bi plane came over again, the twin wing job and took me off. And he came up,
- 02:30 said something, "Let bygones be bygones." And I just ignored him and as we came into Darwin there was a raid in progress but I didn't know there was a raid in progress because the pilot basically side slipped the aircraft and dropped it in. And frightened the daylights out of me. And I said, "You don't have to go down that fast do you?"
- 03:00 and he said, "Oh, there is a raid in progress, got the warning." So anyway we got down okay, that was all right.

Before you went back to Darwin, the Aboriginals had built you a hut to live in had they and that's when they were singing about?

Oh, that was just a general store room they were building.

What were you staying in? What were your living conditions?

Tents. Just tents.

- 03:30 This was for kitchen stores and things like that. So when we get back to Darwin, I don't know where I went then, I think I went to a staging camp and then I was posted to Western Australia to Drysdale and to get to Drysdale flew over by Lockheed
- 04:00 Lodestar. Something like the old DC3, very noisy aircraft and landed at Drysdale. I think the name of the company was 58 OBU, don't know what the OBU was, operational base unit or something. And I worked in a radio shack on the strip and that was the sort of strip where you would have to
- 04:30 go out and light the flares for the aircraft to come in at night. Nothing electric about it .and they had the ultra high frequency to the pilots. And they had the Spitfire squadron there and you would get on the ultra high frequency and say, "Tiger Red One, come in Tiger Red one." Tiger Red One would come in, "What's up this morning?" and you would say, "Well, can you fly over the camp and
- 05:00 wake them up please, see if you can lift their tents." So they would do a few sweeps over the tents and you would see the tents billowing out. They were pretty reckless: they were all about eighteen, nineteen these pilots. And the chaps in the tents used to come out and shake their fists at them, it was like they were doing a practice bombing raid on them .And then when one of the
- 05:30 officers came along, he used to operate the high frequency and we used to operate the Morse code and from there on we had a reconnaissance plane used to fly up north to Flores Island, Lockheed Lightning and this young chap used to always wear a silk scarf his girlfriend gave him. Lovely bloke. One day you eat in the mess with him and then the next day
- 06:00 didn't come back: he got shot down. And adjacent to us was a Dutch air squadron flying the Mitchell bombers. And the Dutch were very nice people, good looking blokes too, the Dutch. And they used to - we could go for a flight over the Flores Islands, up north of Australia. Weren't supposed to, but they chopped it out. But they wouldn't eat our food, they got their
- 06:30 food brought in specially for them. They couldn't stand eating bully beef and the rubbish we were eating, so they did all right.

So the Dutch would fly you?

Yeah, you could go on a night raid with them if you wanted to.

And did you?

No I didn't, but I know a couple that did. Possibly one of the secrets of the war. I don't know whether the

- 07:00 authorities would have been that happy with it. They found out and they told the Dutch not take any. Because I mean they had their casualties too. You couldn't do any swimming over there too much, too many sharks and the tide went out too far .Muddy beach. Plenty of oysters if you like oysters, stacks of them.

And you weren't in

07:30 **trouble anymore so you could enjoy going anywhere?**

Yes, I got in a bit of trouble over there. I went out shooting and fishing I think it was and I crossed an airstrip whilst a plane was landing so I got into trouble there, he didn't report me any further but I had to go back, he made me clean the windows on the air tower,

08:00 lot of windows and then sent me on my way back.

So essentially before the officer came, when you were operating the high frequency and talking to the pilots, you were essential part of the ground crew?

That's right.

So you would have had quite a relationship with the pilots? Can you tell me about the pilots and what they were like?

They were good blokes, they were really good blokes. I know one of them, we had the Mark V

08:30 Spitfires and the latest update on them was the Mark VIII. They were faster, more manoeuvrable. And you would have the mechanic strip the aircraft down and see if he could get a bit more power out of it and put it back again and take it up for a test flight and bring it back and start kicking the wheel and swearing at it. So anyway

09:00 a couple of them got together, and they said, "There is only one way to get rid of this aircraft and get a replacement. Crash land it somewhere and leave it." So they decided to take it out, of course you're under UHF all of the time, ultra high frequency radio, and so they decided to crash land it on an island

09:30 called Maret and then someone else would come and get him and he would get back to Drysdale and eventually get a new plane out of them. So he took it out there ,crash landed it on the island, couldn't take off again, how he managed that I don't know but he did. And the next thing we get a radio message that he has crash landed,

10:00 come and get him. Anyway it was a week before they could find him. He was in dire straights before they got him back. But he got his new aircraft so that was all right. And I think after I left Drysdale I went back to Darwin and -

Had you been promoted at all?

Oh yes, I got promoted over there, that surprised me. One month I get charged and the next month I get promoted.

10:30 Had a signals officer over there and he was very proficient in unarmed defence and he used to take us on. He had a knowledge of jujitsu too and he used to just about paralyse you with finger pressure. And he got interested in Morse and I was assisting. I said, "You have a turn. Just because you're signals officer

11:00 doesn't mean you can send Morse half of the time." Anyway he was doing half of my work for me and that was really good. Next thing I know I am promoted. I don't think that was the reason I got promoted, there must have been something good about me.

So at Drysdale there was quite a good atmosphere?

Yeah, good fellows. Tents. Only trouble was dingoes. If you

11:30 left your tent open at night and you had eaten some bread or something like that the dingoes would come and clean it up on you. I was over there with a friend of mine from Mildura, he was in the air force see? He was an observer. A chap names Gilbert Mays, he used

12:00 to be an observer for a chap flying an aircraft, I forget the name of it, might have been a Beaufort Bomber. And they had two, used to have two two hundred and fifty pound bombs, one under each wing. And this bloke had height perception. He would think he was twenty feet from the ground and he was forty feet from the ground, so he would leave it until he was twenty feet too high

12:30 and he used to do twelve kangaroo hops before he pulled up. And this Gill Mays was terribly frightened that the bombs would explode and he couldn't take it anymore so he asked for a transfer to get out of flying with this bloke in the bomber. And they wouldn't

13:00 do it. And so he finished up in the kitchen. Instead of being air crew he was doing kitchen work.

Bit safer.

Yeah, but he had a bit of trouble, he used to pee the bed. And I slept in the same tent as him and it used to smell terribly atrocious. Take his blankets out in the morning but couldn't help it. Actually the grass was growing under his bed at one stage. But sleeping

13:30 in a tent is all right except when you get a tropical downpour because it wets all of the dry ropes and if you don't get out and loosen them up, they tighten up and the pegs pull out of the ground and your tent

collapses on top of you. So we soon learnt the hang of things that way.

So your tent mate had some sort of nervous -

Something like that, yeah.

14:00 **And was there any facility for coping with that? Was there any way that the air force had a structure for dealing with that?**

I don't think so. No.

How did the other men feel about it?

Oh well, you just have to put up with it, don't you? That's right. Should have the old German cure, they put them in bunk beds and they both have the same complaint and they alternate every day: they reckon that's the best cure for it.

14:30 You don't get it do you?

They have to share the same bunk beds?

Bunk beds, one sleeps on top the other, one sleeps down below and every second day they alternate, so you pee on me one night and I pee on you the next night. But I don't think, it is just something that happens, happens to anybody. But I don't think they give

15:00 them any treatment because you don't really have doctors in these places, just a medical orderly. Someone would say, "Well, you have got tinea, do this or whack this on it." Give you a couple of APCs [brand of analgesic] or something. You have got to remember that all of these men were A1 fit. There wasn't anybody who was really incapacitated.

15:30 **Do you know what happened to him after he went to the kitchen, did he stop wetting the bed?**

Oh, I think he got better. I left, I didn't see him because I left Drysdale and I got sent back to Darwin.

What year was this?

I don't remember.

You were in Drysdale for about three months?

That would be about right.

16:00 Then I went back to Darwin. Sometime along the period they said I was going troppo and they sent me down to Berry Springs. That's kind of a health resort just south of Darwin.

Can you tell me about that?

Oh, they just send you down to this place and you go to the spring every day and swim in it and just do nothing virtually. Other people go with you, that's after you have about, say twelve months.

16:30 And one chap went down there got taken by a croc, because there is crocs, because the river leads into it. It was kind of a spring, which was kind of bottomless, they said that no one had ever touched the bottom. After I left I went back and I did radio work for another couple of months and then it was time to go back south.

17:00 **Just touching on Berry Springs, why had they decided to send you? What had they thought in your behaviour?**

Oh no, just anybody was up there for a certain length of time, twelve months, was given a break and my name must have come up and we were sent down for a week. We used to say to ourselves, "He has gone troppo so he is going down to

17:30 Berry Springs." That was a common expression, gone troppo, but it was a holiday.

Was it enjoyable?

Yeah, it was lovely.

So you had fun down there?

Didn't do anything, just swim every day, from there I went to waiting for transport back to Adelaide. I

18:00 think when we went to the RAAF drome on standby for an aircraft, we would be there about a week doing odd jobs and things.

In Darwin?

Darwin, yes. And then eventually caught a DC3 back to Adelaide. And before we caught the DC3 we got on board and it was a real stinking hot day and there was sweat pouring out of us, and the pilot got out: he was about eighteen or nineteen and he said,

- 18:30 "It is pretty rough up there today. I think I had better get some bags, sickness bags." And we all laughed, we thought it was a great joke. So he dashed off in a jeep got some bags, came back and put them on. Chap next to me said, "I wonder who the first silly bugger will be who uses one of those?" and I said, "It might be you." And he said, "It might be you, you look pretty glassy eyed now." So we took off from Darwin and we were only up
- 19:00 about ten minutes bouncing all over the place and getting a lot of cat. And of course the pilot gets worried when they get all of this cat too because they loose control of the aircraft to a certain extent. They're trying to get information over the radio as to what height to get to to avoid it. In America I understand when they get severe cat it can throw the engine out,
- 19:30 they get the air turbulence so bad. So anyway whilst we were up there this chap that had said I was looking glassy eyed said, "Would you pass me a bag?" and I said, "You must be kidding?" and he said, "I am not kidding and you will cop the lot in a minute if you don't hand me one." And it wasn't before we were a few miles out of
- 20:00 Alice Springs and the cabin was full of the smell of vomit. It was terrible. And we landed at Alice Springs and they let us off and there was another chap ribbing me about, "You're looking pretty close to being sick." And I was, "No, no I am all right." I wasn't though, I was feeling a bit off. And he was following the bloke and the pilot said, "Take all of your bags off, we don't
- 20:30 want them on board, you will find a bin down there, a big forty-four gallon drum." So chap that was ribbing me, he was getting off the aircraft just behind a chap carrying this bag. Anyway as he got to where the steps were going out of the plane the bottom dropped straight out of the bag. And this bloke that was behind, that was ribbing me, he took about two steps and lost the lot.
- 21:00 And I had to bite my tongue: I just managed to hold it. We were there until we refuelled and we got on board and from there I think we went to Tennant Creek. We flew into Tennant Creek, and the jeep come up and there was a sergeant in the jeep and he said, "Can you take two extra?" And the pilot said, "Yeah sure."
- 21:30 So he brought these chaps on board and they started unwrapping their lunch and believe it or not they were eating egg sandwiches. Goodness gracious and I said to the chap next to me, "They are not going to keep that down too long." Anyway sure enough they started. But that was the only incident coming into - I suppose they would come into Parafield, wouldn't they?
- 22:00 **So you didn't go from Darwin to Brisbane, you went from Darwin to Adelaide?**
- Yeah, I got mucked up. I thought I did, but it has come back to me. So many miles out of Parafield the pilot, he was showing off a bit, he put the aircraft in autopilot and come down the middle of the
- 22:30 cabin and hung up a mirror from the top of the fuselage and started to have a shave, just showing off I reckon. He said, "I have got to meet my girlfriend tonight so I had better have a shave." Here he is standing up in the middle of the aircraft having a shave, and the plane is flying away happily. So then we landed at Parafield. Nothing is arranged so we are driven into the city
- 23:00 and they told us that we might get accommodation at the Cheer Up Hut. I don't even remember where the Cheer Up Hut was, somewhere near the railway station I think. So that proved a blank.
- What was the Cheer Up Hut?**
- It was a kind of a charitable organization run by a religious domination or the council of Adelaide where you had
- 23:30 dormitories and they had a dance hall and you got your meals for nothing. After all you're only getting five shillings a day. Didn't have too much money. They couldn't fit us in so they said - we went to the dance and had a meal there and it was freezing because we were still in shorts, we didn't have any long trousers
- 24:00 and we were shivering about. So the first night in Adelaide they gave us a rail warrant but we couldn't get a train for a couple of days so we slept on the Torrens River. Walked down there and slept on the river bank and when I woke up in the morning my hat was missing so I thought, "Gee someone has pinched me hat and I am going to get arrested for being disorderly dressed."
- 24:30 So I walked along and I saw two other air force blokes and tried his hat on. Didn't fit, so I walked along and found another one and found his fitted better, so I took that one. Might have been mine anyway, I don't know. So I was okay again. So the next night we went back and they billeted us at the Cheer Up Hut. See this is the way they worked things, fossicked for yourself sort of thing, it was a
- 25:00 fossick for yourself sort of thing, it was a bit rough. I don't know whether we stayed two night there or one, I think it was two. And from there on I took the train into Melbourne and then from Melbourne I think we were billeted at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. After you get off the train they had beds
- 25:30 all underneath the stands at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Quite a big area. And by that time -

They had removed the seats and put beds there?

I think they were right behind the seats all of the space, there were a lot of us there, I think there was still seats there.

So really you were out in the open?

No, we were enclosed at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. We

26:00 were billeted there. And we were just waiting for a posting. Whether I was sent home on leave I don't remember that.

Had you been able to see your family when you were in Adelaide?

No way. I think I wired them for money, I run out of money.

As a corporal were you earning more?

Yeah, I think about twenty five cents a day more or something.

26:30 I didn't have any stripes up: I didn't know how to sew them on. So when I got to Melbourne Cricket Ground, I got leave there and then when I went home I got my mother to sew them on and when I come back to the Melbourne Cricket Ground, gee I felt important: people were saluting me. I thought I had taken an elevation in life, I didn't think anybody had liked me so much.

27:00 "Corporal this and corporal that." I thought, "Gee, I should be a good boy and put these up to sergeant major or something." So from there on I was posted to Brisbane and took the troop train up to Brisbane. That's in the dog boxes where they had a jug of water in every compartment and a toilet in every compartment.

27:30 And I had to get the seat where the toilet was because if anyone wanted to go to the toilet you have got to get up, pull your seat aside so they can walk into the toilet. But there was another problem, the catch on the toilet didn't work properly, so if the train pulled up with a jerk I would go back into the toilet. So I had that all of the way to Sydney, to Albury,

28:00 Sydney and then onto Brisbane and it was a pretty tiresome trip. Took a long while. And I think I finished up in Brisbane, I think it was Victoria Park, I think they had a Victoria Park out of Brisbane. And then for some reason or other I found myself in Allied

28:30 Intelligence Bureau. I don't know how I got there. They decided that I was in Allied Intelligence Bureau.

You didn't have to apply for it?

No, don't apply for that, don't sign up for it. Just found myself in it and instead of doing wireless work I was doing clerical duties and I thought, "Gee, this is strange, when am I going to go back to my own job."

29:00 Anyway I was doing that for a while there. There was another chap in the office, Keith Murray. He was in charge and I befriended him. He was a lot older than me, and he used to be a very close friend of Evie Hayes who was in that movie Annie Get Your Gun. So he could tell me all about Evie Hayes and all of the rest of it. Suppose he took her out a few times, I don't know.

29:30 We got to like one another. And from the camp there, there used to be a pub over the road and after tea at night the guards used to look the other way and we used to walk across the road to the pub, know what I mean? And one night we walked over there and the guard said, "Nobody out. But," he said, "there is a hole in the fence about a hundred yards down there." So I thought, "He is a good fellow."

30:00 Hole under the fence and we go down there and we all crawl underneath the fence and as soon as we get underneath the fence we get arrested. It was a set-up job to catch us see? Oh, we just got a warning that's all, nothing happened.

Were they MPs [military police]?

I think they just had to build up their record book, I think that's about all.

30:30 But that's about what happened.

Can you tell me about being interviewed for the AIB [Allied Intelligence Bureau]?

No, I wasn't interviewed for the AIB, just automatically found myself in it. It was called Allied Intelligence Bureau, and it incorporated army, navy and air force.

31:00 For the simple reason that you need submarines and you need aircraft and you need army expertise. I didn't know much about it all because when you're put into these things no one tells you. But from AIB I got transferred into M Special Unit, Coastwatchers. But that's another story. We're a little bit afar of ourselves now, aren't we?

31:30 **Did the head of the AIB ask you any questions or did you have to answer anything?**

No.

So you were just told straight away, 'There you go, that's your job'?

I was just doing a fill in job until they wanted me in the Coastwatchers, which the Coastwatchers was supposed to be a bit of a

32:00 misnomer, it was Z Special Force or M Special Force, but it was virtually coast watching and that was the whole business of it, but Allied Intelligence Bureau was like the company, the holding company. That embraced M Special, Z Special, Coastwatchers, everything, that was the governing body.

32:30 And I mean that was just like a holding company, a public company that was the way it was run. When you joined M special, Coastwatchers you had to be interviewed and sign a form to volunteer.

Did you want to join M Special?

33:00 I didn't have much option: they told me I was transferred, that I had to go into Heindorff House in Queen Street and report to Commander McManus. He was head of the shebang. And I think at the office was him and three WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service]. And they said, "Your gear will be sent home." So you only have the clothes you stand

33:30 up in, and they crated the gear and sent it back to Red Cliffs for me. So I was walking around the street there virtually regimentally undressed sort of business and a chap pulled me up and said, "You're not regimentally dressed. You have got jungle greens and an air force hat on," or something. So they asked me who I was with and I said, "I am joining M special unit."

34:00 "Oh, let him go." So I went in to Heindorff House and I asked the lift man, I said, "Is there any army, navy or air force here?" They don't give you any papers or anything. He said, "I don't think so mate." And I said, "I was told to come here, I forget what floor but they told me to come here." "Hop in," he said, "I think it's the fourth." So he took me to fourth and knocked on the door and one of the WRANS

34:30 came in and here is this naval officer standing at the desk and I went to salute him and he said, "You don't salute in this unit." I thought this is nice. He said, "Sit down take a seat Mr Becker." God help me.

You had arrived home hadn't you?

Yeah, I thought this was great. So he told me, "There is not a lot we are going to tell you because if we don't tell

35:00 you anything there is nothing you can tell anybody else." "Gee," I said, "That's a good gimmick, isn't it?" The idea behind that was secrecy. So he told me I would be going up north to New Guinea as a replacement because they were always putting in men and bringing out men.

35:30 He said, "You will be dropped behind enemy lines. You might be put in by crash boat, PT boat or submarine." And I said, "As long as you don't have to parachute." And he said, "Well, the thing is how many words can you do in Morse code?" and I said, "Just the average." And he said, "What are you like at repairing radios?"

36:00 I said, "I suppose if the light went out." They had the old valve radios those days. I said, "I suppose I could fix it." He said, "You're not very keen are you?" and I said, "Well, I have just been away for a while." And he said, "Where have you been?" and I said, "Darwin." And he said, "Did you like Darwin?" and I said, "No I did not." And he said, "Well, put it this way, if you don't join us,"

36:30 you have got to sign up to join, volunteer, "if you don't join us you may be sent back to Darwin." And I said, "Well, give us the paper will you, I will sign now." Anyway we shook hands and he said, "Congratulations, you will have a great time, you will be given a bottle of rum a month, you get everything provided and if you are behind the lines for a while and you have a tough time we will get you

37:00 out and send you back to Australia for a week or two leave before we send you back again." I said, "That sounds pretty fair to me." And from there on I went and said, "When do I leave?" and he said, "Tonight at midnight." And I said, "No way, I am not going." I said, "I haven't been home for a while." "Well, how long would you like to go for?" "A couple of days."

37:30 And he got on the phone and said, "All right, we can send you home." And he arranged a pass and everything. But when I worked it out that by the time I went by train from Brisbane to Sydney to Albury to Melbourne to Mildura, but the time I got home it was time to come back again. By the time I got home, I think I had a day and a half. No sleep,

38:00 well, I slept all right. And then I came back and I was billeted at the Milton tennis courts in Brisbane. As a matter of fact the last time I was in Brisbane I asked the bus driver could he show me where Milton Tennis Courts were, I didn't remember. And I also asked him could he take me through to commando camp at Canungra.

38:30 And he said, "Actually, yes I can. I will take you through there, we can't stop but, only bus drivers are allowed through there." And it was very nice. He travelled very slowly through Canungra and saw the

commandos training there and one minute you don't see anything and next minute you can see a hundred of them. They pop up out of the kind of

39:00 jungle they have got there. And then we went around, toured around there and that was great. Getting back to Milton? Was it called Milton?

M Force?

No, Milton Tennis Courts, wasn't it?

Milton Tennis Courts.

Now going from Milton Tennis Courts

39:30 I had to report back to Heindorff House, see Commander McManus, and he said, "Did you enjoy yourself?" and I said, "Yes." And he said, "You will be leaving at midnight tomorrow night." So that was all right, I had a day in Brisbane and at every meal time you got a bottle of beer put beside

40:00 your plate, top treatment.

And you kept your rank as well?

No, no rank, you don't have any rank, only the leader. So then we boarded a DC3, I think it was a gutted one, all of the seats had been taken out. Can virtually sleep anywhere just on the belly of the plane. There

40:30 was only one other person, I think she was air force, AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] girl on the floor. It got pretty cold too: I was nearly going to ask if I could cuddle up with her, you know. Very cold. But we arrived at I don't know whether we refuelled at Townsville or not, may have and we came into

41:00 Lae, Nadzab or Lae. We finished up at Lae and were taken to Coastwatchers headquarters in Lae, I think it was.

41:17 End of tape

Tape 4

00:30 **I just want to go back in time a bit Ray to get a bit more detail about things, when you were sent to WA to the Drysdale mission and the bombing, well, can you tell me a little bit more about that because there was**

01:00 **a Red Cross and that didn't -**

Oh, there was a Red Cross on the mission station at Drysdale, that wasn't very far from the airstrip there and the Jap's didn't regard the Red Cross and they bombed it. And they were very upset by that because the Red Cross would be about twenty feet by twenty feet and about five foot wide kind of business,

01:30 they got as far as Drysdale and that's in the vicinity of Wyndham, you know. It is God forsaken country around there I tell you, you know, we got lost there one day when we went fishing for sharks. And we used telephone wire and took our rifles and baited the line with shark hooks and as we

02:00 were pulling the sharks you couldn't land them so you shot the sharks as you were pulling them in. That's where we got lost coming back to camp and someone suggested I climb a tree to find out where we were because there was no tracks or anything, and eventually we found a little track and followed that and came out on a road,

02:30 and that led back to that strip, where I walked over that strip when the plane was landing. The whole three of us it was, so I wasn't the only one cleaning windows on the column tower, the other two were cleaning too. But nothing was reported back, the officer who gave us the duty to do and told us off, he didn't report us back to our camp, he was a very nice fellow.

03:00 **So he let you know but he didn't let anyone else know that you were in trouble?**

That's right. I think I only got into trouble once before and that was in Darwin and I forgot about it. I was trying to get through on the radio to the radar station

03:30 and there was too much disturbance and there was obviously a signal coming through on the same frequency, and from all I could understand it was an American ship and he said, "Get off this frequency." and I told him very rudely that I was on a crystal control frequency and "You get off, you mug!"

04:00 And that started up a bit of a battle between the two of us, and where everything is supposed to be in code he was ticking me off and I was ticking him off and I didn't think anyone would pick it up but it

was picked up and about six weeks later I got six weeks trench digging up there. That was another incident but that fitted in between

04:30 going to Drysdale to this other place. That was no major – could happen to anybody. I was sending fast Morse and he was fast Morse and I didn't think anyone would pick it up but they did.

Can't get away with anything?

No, that's right you can't.

When you were in Darwin you would have been picking up a lot of information. Were you also getting information about bombings of ships that were sunk, Australian ships that were sunk?

05:00 No, see it was a different concept to the Coastwatchers, that was in the hands of the powers that be, we just done what we were told to do and they did all of the planning, whether it was right or wrong or not we don't know. But usually it was pretty good. The radar stations would be more sophisticated these days but with the equipment they had, they did a damn good job.

05:30 **You had a few encounters with officers, what was your general attitude towards officers?**

I think they were rushed through the schools too quick and the troops all called them 'shiny bums' or 'five week wonders': they didn't earn their rank. They were pushed through because they probably went to Pembroke or something like that, St Peters: they had no respect for them at all.

06:00 Because you could pick them, the ones that were really smart and the ones that weren't. In the Coastwatchers they were pretty smart men, high IQ [intelligence quotient], didn't take much to work that out. Not all of them, but that was the general approach of all of the troops around.

What did they do about an officer

06:30 **that they didn't have much respect for? What if that officer was giving you orders that you felt were ridiculous?**

Well, there is always someone to back him up see and that's what happens see? I mean even if you think he is wrong, you're not going to say so. They had that right throughout the war, a few officers that were pushed through the ranks.

07:00 Happens in private enterprise, doesn't it? You ought to know, you work for a company. You always get a few lard heads.

I was wondering who was respected by the men, who were the leaders in the forces that were generally respected by the men?

07:30 Nearly all of the non commissioned ones, because you never knew too much about the officers. I mean that was something, they were a people to avoid. You didn't say the wrong thing or do anything wrong. The non commissioned ones were nearly all respected, except drill instructors: they give you a hard time. But then they had a job to do, they had to pull you into line.

08:00 Teach you discipline.

Did you have a problem with discipline?

No, I had no problem, I spent a lot of time in the cookhouse, I mean if you answered back or something like that. Take Ballarat, well, they would say, "You Shortie, cookhouse tonight." And then if you answer back and say, "Yeah, well, I have already got it." And then, "Well, if you think it is that blood funny you have got it for another week."

08:30 Give you another week, so then you learn not to open your mouth. Another instance, a bloke got out of step, doing something wrong and the drill instructor called him all of the B's and everything under the sun and the filthiest language you have ever heard in your life. And he stepped forward and said, "I want an apology from you, I am not used to getting such

09:00 filthy remarks said to me. I resent it." and he said, "Well, you can resent it in the cookhouse tonight. As a matter of fact, you can have it for a further week. Shut up and get back in the line you bloody drongo." So that was it, you just had to toe the line.

Do you think that's valuable? Do you think that's essential to be treated that way?

Well, I think that is part of the discipline because some men didn't understand plain

09:30 English. He used to have to use swear words and, put it this way, you do need discipline. If you haven't got discipline you have got a confident personality, you have got to do what you're told whether you think it is wrong or right, that's the way it goes. I remember up on Bathurst Island we used to take the truck down to the beach to

10:00 collect the supplies and we left stuff going back and the boongs would leap off the truck so they wouldn't have anything and the boss boy would shout out in Aboriginal, "Come back here you so and

so's!" And there wasn't enough emphatic language in Aboriginal to get through so he would say, "Come back here you bloody bastards or I will kick you up the backside." So he broke out into English because it was the only thing they understand well.

10:30 See they don't have many swear words.

And English has got a lot.

Yeah, that's right and they understand it. And I think the situation applies in the army, I mean you speak to people in your job according to their station in life. You watch your language with certain ones and you can speak freely with others, that's the way it goes, discipline is really a must.

11:00 **Did you ever see anything that shocked you that you felt was a bit overboard?**

I don't think so, no. I mean anyone that goes, I have been to a court martial: I wasn't in it but over in Western Australia someone got court martialled and a court martial in my opinion

11:30 was a kangaroo court. Had no hope from the start, the dice was loaded kind of business.

What was that situation?

I don't remember. The dice was loaded. I mean we could attend the court martial, but we couldn't pass any comment and it went on for a couple of days. If I had been the judge I would have dismissed the case: you can't win a court martial.

12:00 It is an army thing.

If it gets that far then?

Yeah, you lose because it's [UNCLEAR] understand. I mean you go to court and it might be one of these nominal speeding fines and the judge will say, "You will be convicted and fined five hundred dollars."

12:30 Hit the gallon and he is going through them like peanuts. And all of a sudden someone sings out, "The defendant appears." And he looks up and it is like, "What a bloody nuisance, holding up my time, I have got a set of golf clubs in the back. I was thinking about playing golf this afternoon." "Oh well, bring him in." Stand him up, "Do you swear you will say the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." "Yes." He does. And the

13:00 magistrate says, "What have you got to say for yourself?" and the bloke, he is nervous, he has done the right thing and come to court to defend himself. And he starts saying, "Um, ah." "Well, speak up will you?" and of course then he gets worse, more nervous and then he yells at him. And before he can say another word he bangs the gavel down and says, "You'll be convicted, fined one hundred dollars." And the very thought that he comes to court, in my opinion,

13:30 from watching the other cases, they didn't fine them a hundred dollars, they only fine them fifty. He had the decency to come along and I heard one of the reporters say, "Typical case of British justice." And then of course I hear the magistrate, he says, "I am addressing the press in this particular case. No part or part thereof of this

14:00 evidence will be available for publication. I am officially addressing the press." So how can you win? That's it. You don't believe that do you?

No, unfortunately I do believe it. I wanted to - it might sound like an ignorant question but can you tell me a bit more about M Force in Z Special Force, I mean what did that mean?

14:30 Well, if you go back, if you remember the Z Force, they did the assault on Singapore harbour where they attached the limpet mines to the shipping in Singapore harbour and they sailed this half broken down Krait,

15:00 K-R-A-I-T, I have got a photo of it there. And they were dressed as frogmen, and they swam underwater and attached these limpet mines with a timer on them to go off and they destroyed so many thousands of pound or tons of shipping. Blew them. Later on they went onto operation J work, where the Japanese caught them in Singapore.

15:30 And they were beheaded, that was a kind of an honour they gave them, they were beheaded.

Beheaded by who?

The Japanese. Yeah. But that force, they were at Milton with us, Z, but they were segregated. They were more or less assault forces from what I could understand. I didn't know much about them but throughout the territory,

16:00 Solomon Islands, around there. I don't know any activities apart from Singapore that Z did, I don't think any of them were in Coastwatchers.

Were they like an elite force?

Well, they were supposed to be but I can't see where they were elite because I don't know any of their

other activities. There was only two activities that I know that they did.

Maybe they're meant not to be known?

16:30 Well, I don't know. History doesn't reveal because M Force and the Coastwatchers had been going for years before even the war broke out, with the planters. And M Force, same as Coastwatchers, same thing, they were doing assault work and at one stage that's why they brought in the Ferdinand principle, because it didn't work. See these

17:00 assault corps and sabotage didn't work.

Why was that?

Well, because under the Ferdinand principle, Ferdinand sat under the tree and smelt the flowers, you didn't want the enemy to know you were behind the lines, once you killed anybody, they didn't come back. Then they were looking for you, and then there is all of the expense of getting these chaps out.

17:30 You only fought if you were stung. The Coastwatchers themselves, they emphasised that later on. I think they killed about fifteen hundred Japanese in the end alone, and the natives killed a lot too.

Where was this?

Up in the Solomons, throughout the Coastwatchers.

18:00 **So wasn't it an honour to be asked to join?**

It was if you knew about it, but you didn't know about it.

It was quite covert?

That's right. You didn't know anything about it. I mean when I joined M Force, signed in Brisbane, I didn't know what I was getting into, he didn't tell me much. Actually he threatened me that if I didn't join I would go back to Darwin.

Was Darwin that bad?

18:30 Terrible place. Shocking place, especially in wet season. I didn't like Darwin at all.

When he explained to you a bit about the behind the lines work, what did he tell you?

Nothing.

He told you nothing? So you really had no idea what you were getting yourself into?

No.

You just thought it would be better than Darwin?

Well, I thought it was overseas, Solomon Islands, thinking of the girls in the grass skirts I suppose.

19:00 All of the rest of it.

Always thinking.

Always thinking, yeah. See when I flew from Brisbane and then flew to Nadzab and Lae, and then from Lae I went to Nissan,

Was that as far as you'd been on the freezing cold Douglass?

Oh that's right. And then I landed at Lae and I was at Lae

19:30 in an AIB camp.

So what did you think at this point was expected of you?

I didn't know, until I got to Lae. Because with the Coastwatchers camp at Lae, the main operators there was AWA, Australian Wireless Association. And everyone told you a few things once you mixed with the fellows.

20:00 **And what were the rumours going around?**

What you were going in for.

And what did you hear from them that you were in for?

Well, going in behind the lines. And then I heard more, when I left Lae I flew into Torokina Bay that's when I flew into Nissan and then from Nissan

20:30 that's a refuelling stop and then flew into Torokina Bay.

And you were all by yourself, as far as you knew you were flying to meet some others?

Yeah that's right, replacement.

Were you feeling a bit nervous about?

No not at all. Didn't worry me. I think that's where I saw the American shipping, outside Torokina Bay.

21:00 **That's must have been an incredible sight?**

It was an incredible sight. You could hardly see the ocean, it was all ships. The Yanks they had might of power, and they stood off that coast line and blasted the coastline until you could hardly see a coconut tree standing. Blast it to kingdom come and a Jap wouldn't be within a hundred miles.

21:30 Ram, ram, ram. General Macarthur, with his island hopping procedure, don't take the whole land, just take a base and use it to hop to the next place. Because they had a perimeter and we were camped in Torokina Bay not far from an active volcano. I remember it distinctly because I was sleeping in a tent and I thought the chap was pushing my

22:00 bed with his foot and I told him to stop pushing my bed. He was just a piece of hessian with some sticks in it and I looked around and he wasn't pushing it at all, it was the ground shaking. It was always smoking the volcano but I learnt a lot at Torokina, because I was there for some time. You know everything is so urgent to get you there and then

22:30 it is all planned, delayed action as you go.

So Torokina was your destination?

Yeah, Torokina at that time until I was needed. And then when I was at Torokina, I had a book on Pidgin English and they supplied me with silhouettes of aircraft to identify them and silhouettes of shipping. But

23:00 I couldn't tell one ship from another to be honest with you: big boat was as much as I could think about. I knew a few of the aircraft like Zeroes and Betsys and Dinas [?] and a few of the others. Australian Spitfires.

Why did they ask you to join the special force?

Well, I think they got people who were competent in their work. You can't be a Coastwatcher unless you have got a good radio man.

23:30 And you can't be a Coastwatcher unless you have got a good leader if you haven't got a good officer in charge, a man you can respect and has got plenty of IQ, they all had good IQ even the radio operators, not speaking for myself, all of the parties came from, I reckon, a higher echelon than the normal ranks.

24:00 They were pretty good. And you got a choice. Of course I remember, and you got preferential treatment. I mean when Americans set up their airstrip on Torokina, being Australian, instead of having two bulldozers they would have a hundred working on it. And not only put the strip up within half a day or so,

24:30 they would have an automatic telephone service operating. And they had an airways, SKAT Airways they called it, and there is thousands of Japs outside the perimeter, had picture show and everything going. And they even had a donut house, where you could get a donut.

So they brought America with them?

25:00 They did. And they did a mighty job and Australians would probably get shot trying to land. But I don't think anyone got shot, might be like the Israeli war, what a war? Capture Baghdad, not one person lost, I can't work that out, I will never be able to work that out.

What was the general attitude do you think of the Australians towards the Americans?

25:30 We liked them. They had equipment and we didn't.

We would have been in a lot of trouble without them?

Well, they would have been in a lot of trouble without us because we're the ones that stopped the war coming into Australia with the Coastwatching activities. We got the greatest praise in the world from Commander McManus and four star generals and everything, because it comprised high ranks from each service.

26:00 One of our high ranks was Eric Feld who wrote The Coastwatchers, and it was really a superior system to what anyone ever had in their life. It was nearly spoiled in engaging attacks against the enemy and then they buckled down, Ferdinand the bull was a reminder or two to the Coastwatchers that they weren't to make their presence felt.

26:30 **Can you explain a bit? Ferdinand the bull is familiar to you and I, but can you explain the meaning behind the use of that term?**

Ferdinand the bull? Well, Ferdinand the bull sat under a tree, would not fight and smelt the flowers.

- Now they likened the Coastwatchers the same. They sat down and didn't fight because they
- 27:00 didn't want to make their presence felt or known to anyone else while they diligently sought information of enemy activities. But they could fight like Ferdinand if they were stung. So it was one, backing out the prototype, that we both did the same things as Ferdinand the bull.
- 27:30 And that's why they codenamed it Ferdinand. As a matter of fact, we had to learn coding as well and the navy had some really genius codes. And later on they adapted a really spectacular code by the navy and they called it the bull code, after Ferdinand. So that's how it worked.
- 28:00 No, it was a good organization to be in. they nearly went too far with their counter attacks, I mean the whole purpose of the thing, you were there to gather information, not let anybody know you were there, you keep radio silence, you only went on the air in skeds, you never use plain language. Unless in an emergency.
- 28:30 You could use plain language: I mean you would use voice if you were getting attacked or if you sighted a lot of aircraft going somewhere because you wouldn't have time to code it. They would be at the destination dropping bombs before they decoded it. So if you saw a lot of shipping like the Coral Sea battle, you get straight onto the telephone, you don't worry about coding it or putting it in Morse.
- 29:00 But I mean I think what happened to us was we could have - the natives were the meat between the sandwich, the Japanese promised them the world, the Australians promised them the world,
- Is this in Torokina now that you are talking about?**
- All through that area.
- In general?**
- Because when you come to think of it, it was their country getting bombed, it was them getting killed.
- 29:30 But anyway.
- No one ever really talks about the native population deaths?**
- No, they don't and it is wrong. There was a lot of treacherous fuzzy wuzzies.
- Treacherous?**
- Oh yeah, and they went where they thought they would get the best deal. I mean -
- Most people would.**
- That's dead right.
- 30:00 They were leaning towards Australia because Australians usually could speak good Pidgin English I mean Pidgin English is very easily understood, it is more difficult to speak it. Because there is a lot of special words you have to use and even though it is similar to English, if you want a native not to know what you are talking about, just speak English, he can't understand you.
- 30:30 Absolutely. Just like a woman who talks on the TV too fast, you don't know what she is going on about on some of those ads.
- What evidence do you have of fuzzy wuzzies that were treacherous?**
- Well, eventually I finished up in New Hanover and there was an occasion, we had just got into bed, because you have got no electric fires or nothing like that.
- 31:00 And a native come in and said there was twenty-five Japs making their way towards us. And there was only three of us. Another chap, myself, Colin Francis slept in one hut, that was a thatched roof hut with these split barn walls, they would put those up in half a day, and the officer was in another one and we had a store room. And we had a fifty millimetre machine gun
- 31:30 down on the beach, that was probably useless only pointing out to sea. And then I didn't catch the message too well, going back to the story, this Colin Francis, he was dressed in about five seconds. I thought there must be something coming, so I was about ten seconds behind him, I was dressed in about fifteen seconds. You would have a rope across your hut and you would hang your pants on it
- 32:00 and put your boots underneath it and go to bed just about in the nuddy. No pillows or sheets like they have now I suppose. And you had your gun there, and alongside me on a box, a packing case I used to keep two grenades because I used to be scared of being caught by the enemy in bed. So I thought at least I can grab a grenade and throw him even if I blow up myself too.
- 32:30 So anyway when we sat around and the officer was alerted and he came over, before that happened Col Francis said to me, "Well, we have got thirty armed natives," they were trained in Brisbane, and he said, "We have got three Bren guns. Will you go over and get the Bren guns?" I didn't think of taking a gun with me, I had no side arms.

- 33:00 The sub-lieutenant Bower I think his name was, very notorious man through the territory. I rushed over and there was a key because we had to have a locked house because all of our tobacco was there, the plantation twists where we bought our food. Otherwise we got our food from drops, Catalinas, you name it. So I open the door and the first thing I see is two white eyes staring at me, and
- 33:30 it was a fuzzy wuzzy with a caddy of tobacco under his arm. Of course I said, "What the bloody hell are you doing here?" and he dropped the caddy and bolted. Now whether he was a Japanese native or Australian I don't know because it was too dark and I couldn't see the arm band, because the Japanese natives, the Japanese gave them
- 34:00 black arm bands and in the middle was the rising sun and they wore that as identification. Because it was safety reason too because if any of the other natives came into where their campo was, the Japanese, they knew they didn't belong to them. Getting back to the story, I get the Bren guns but by the time I get back there is no natives
- 34:30 left, there is only two left, they had all shot through. They thought the Japs were going to get us. I did too, thankful they didn't. So the officer comes over and says, "Well, you had better send a message, Ray." And someone said, "Hold a blanket over your head." And I thought, "Oh don't worry about a blanket." So I did one without coding it sent a message through to Torokina, Morse code, they acknowledged it and that was it.
- 35:00 It was done. "What are we going to do?" Colin, he was a member of the commando unit, there was a lot of commandoes with the Coastwatchers. They were the ones I think that were a little bit keen on having a go at the Japs all of the time, that's what they tried to stamp out. Anyway back to the story, he said, "I don't know, we
- 35:30 have got a few natives left. What do you think?" and he said something, "What do you think?" and he said something. And eventually they got around and they said, "What do you think?" and I said, "I think we should blow through as soon as we can, we're not here to engage in enemy activity." The officer said, "I think Ray has got a good idea." They weren't going to say it first, it was as simple as that.
- 36:00 Anyway we stayed awake and kept alert. And it doesn't matter how frightened you are, I mean you will nod off. I found myself nodding off half way through the night. Anyway we survived the night. So whether they landed by submarine or not I don't know. Whether they lost their way or not I don't know. You can only go on what the natives had told us, they were heading our way.
- 36:30 So the natives that told us we could rely on them, they stayed with us, the others shot through. So anyway we stayed on. We were a little bit jumpy about it because if we had bolted and they had come, they would have burnt everything to the ground as they usually do. If we had stayed we would have probably got burnt to the ground kind of business as well. But what happened was that
- 37:00 we weren't happy and so either they had picked up a radio signal and put an RDF [radio directional finding] on us.
- An RDF?**
- You know the radio directional finding equipment. I don't know, within a space of about three or four days our thirty fuzzy wuzzies were back, they came back as if nothing happened. So we had full force again.
- 37:30 **And they never did turn up the Japanese?**
- No, they didn't turn up.
- And so you didn't leave the camp after all?**
- Yes, we did, because they obviously knew where we were. Probably saved for another day, might have got too dark or something.
- Well, how did the fuzzy wuzzies know where to find you?**
- They have got a pretty good idea, yeah. So what we did,
- 38:00 Sub-Lieutenant Bell he went off on his own to look for another area. See when you're behind the lines you have dumps, north, south east or west and if you got caught on one dump you can run to the next and you would have food, because if you haven't got food you have had it. So he went and found a place, we were at Lavongai and then he found a place,
- 38:30 and I know when he came back Francis said, "I bet its up a bloody big hill," he said, "He loves hills." So I was pleased it was up a hill because it takes more effort to get up a hill than on the flat bit of a coast. So we were about a mile from the coast and he had organised, he knew the New Ireland, New Hanover, New Britain like the back of his hand. We owe our
- 39:00 lives to him virtually. He was a real tough guy, no worries. So to finish up he had the natives in platting coconut palms and the houses were up.

Sounds like a bit of a Robinson Crusoe character, practical, versatile?

Tough, tough too. He would shoot the natives, don't worry. Would shoot them straight off.

- 39:30 He was throughout that whole area there, he was engaged in activities right through. Couldn't have been with a better man. He was friendly, he spoke to you, but he was reserved to a point, wouldn't tell you what he was doing or anything. Would take the radio messages and decode them and give them to him and he would send back a message and I would send it back for him.
- 40:00 But he wouldn't tell you what he was doing: that was his job. I was in charge of the radio: he was in charge of that, he did everything. I couldn't have done the job: I mean if he had got shot tomorrow we would want out, simple as that, I mean no one to guide you. I mean you have got to respect a bloke like that: knows what he is doing. So anyway that night we slept in this place.
- 40:30 And we insisted on putting the hut, we called it a hut but they called it a sak sak. We said, "Put it there." They said, "No God, no tambu [forbidden]." I always thought the word was taboo but they pronounce it tambu. "No tambu." "Put the bloody thing here." "Tambu." "Put it here!"
- 41:00 I will belt you." Anyway very reluctantly they put it there and they were there, as I said before, platting the palm and everything and it was up ready for the night and we didn't find out about this tambu for about three or four weeks later. Why it was tambu, because it was the burial ground of four Chinamen so we were sleeping on top of four dead Chows.
- 41:30 So that's why it was tambu.
- 41:32 End of tape

Tape 5

- 00:32 **So Ray you were just going to tell us, clarify, a little bit about Ferdinand?**

That's right. Now when Eric Feld was the SIA, the senior intelligence officer of the Allied Intelligence Bureau in the Coastwatchers, he put up the name Ferdinand as a code word, in the interest of intelligence and security

- 01:00 activities behind the lines. A name was required which did not indicate activities to the casual listener. Feld chose the name Ferdinand from Disney's bull who did not fight but sat under a tree and just smelt the flowers, it was meant as a reminder to Coastwatchers that it was not their duty to fight and so draw attention to themselves, but

- 01:30 to sit circumspectly and unobtrusively gathering vital information. Of course like Ferdinand they could fight if stung.

So that explains that it was a Disney character than inspired the name?

Yeah well, see too many commandoes who had joined the unit wanted to bump off Nips and of course if the Nips were missed at

- 02:00 the base camp they knew there was Coastwatchers there and so they went out and tried to eradicate them. So you brought more harm on yourself. You didn't want this to happen. Although in the early days of the Coastwatchers, they did work that way. And they eliminated a lot of people, but the best thing that ever happened if you were a Coastwatcher was to not even see a Jap, not even see one.

- 02:30 **So as someone working under the Ferdinand banner, did you ever see occasions where people did not act in that way?**

No.

So people respected that?

Well, that came in '42 or '43 or something. Eric Feld, he got sick

- 03:00 and then they brought in Commander McManus. There was a chap in between named Commander Long or something. Lieutenant Long, I don't know his full name but that's what happened. But when we left off I was going from Torokina Bay to Arawe,

Well, before we get there I just have a few more questions about Torokina if that's all right?

- 03:30 **Did you have much interaction with the United States soldiers there?**

Well, we met them all of the time because there was mainly United States people there, because Bell, that was the chap I was with in the jungle, he was the one that helped them to Arawe, arranged information on when it was the best time for them to land and eradicate

- 04:00 the Japs from Arawe. So the Yanks were in force there, as a matter of fact they were next door to us and our base camp there, Arawe is like a coral atoll.

Sorry I meant at Torokina?

Oh Torokina, yes we had a lot to do with the Yanks there. Torokina Bay when we were at camp at our base station

04:30 we had AWA radio operators and we also had a Canadian back woodsman as one of our rescue team. He was a brilliant man, I won't say his name is Frank Buck like the film character, but I know his first name is Frank. And if any of the parties got into trouble in Torokina, we only held the perimeter,

05:00 and they wanted to get out because the Japs were after them. He would walk, with a native with him, through our perimeter, get them and bring them back. Even if it took a week or a fortnight, he was brilliant, he would get them back to safety. He was a brilliant man. As a matter of fact he introduced me to a game of stud poker, I played stud poker with him. But a just a machine gun slung over his shoulder, a native there and a map

05:30 and if anyone was in trouble. "Come and get me we're in trouble, no food and the Japs are after us." And he would pinpoint them and bring them back, what a man.

And he was very successful at that?

Yeah, very successful.

And he was the only Canadian there?

The only Canadian I knew there. In Torokina Bay I told you before they had the SKAT Airways and the aerodrome.

06:00 Donut shop and they had automatic telephones, everything. As a matter of fact, before I flew out of Torokina Bay, I was going to Arawe, there was officers queuing up at the airways to get a plane out, why I don't know, but they come every day. One

06:30 high ranked officer was telling me, "You won't have any hope of getting out of there," he said, "Where are you going?" and I said, "Arawe." And he said, "You won't have any hope of getting out of here: I have been coming every day for a fortnight and still can't get an aircraft out." So anyway I walked up to the counter and told the chap my name and he said, "Oh yes, you're one of MacArthur's boys, you're booked on the one thirty out today." And I sat down and he said, "You got a booking? How the hell did you

07:00 do that?" and I said, "I am one of the elites. I am just a private but one of the elites." So I got out to Arawe. I think I we landed at Nissan or as it was known, Green Horrible Nissan.

So you had quite high regard then?

Yes, very good indeed. In Torokina Bay they had about five picture theatres, thirty-five mil picture theatres.

07:30 Unbelievable. Someone said the Japs used to come in and watch the films, I don't know how true that is, but that's how successful, they had equipment, it's all about that. I mean if you have got equipment you can do a lot, can't you?

How long were you there for?

About a month I suppose.

So you had seen a few movies?

08:00 No, I didn't have time. I was too busy learning what I had to learn, you know.

And did any of that include specific intelligence type, had you at any time been training in specific -

Only in Pidgin English and later on I learnt weather forecasting and that's about all. Pidgin English is one of the most important things to do. If you can't speak it, you can understand it, but if you can't speak it

08:30 the natives don't have very much respect for you. They say, "The white man taught us this language, why can't he speak it?" So that was it.

And where did you learn that?

We travelled from Torokina to Green Island or Nissan and then we went from there to Arawe, we landed at Arawe and we had a base camp at Arawe and that's where I first met Bell.

09:00 And two other officers, there was about six of us there and we employed a Chinese cook from Noosau, island adjacent to Arawe. And whilst at Arawe we had a radio shack over the road and there was a drain underneath the road two feet diameter and to save running back over the

09:30 road to get anyone there I decided to put a telephone line in. And didn't have a telephone so I made one

up out of different parts I had and I finished up, I thought, "I will get some water through here," but there was no rain so I crawled through. And linked up a telephone about a hundred and fifty yards long, to our shack, rigged it up,

10:00 and when one of the officers came in and said, "Someone will have to go over to our quarters and pass this message on." I said, "No need to, we have got a telephone on." "You haven't, have you?" "Yeah, it goes right under the road." He said, "How did you get it across the road?" I said, "I crawled through the drain pipe." And it makes a big difference. This goes to show you the lack of equipment we had I mean if we -

10:30 **Were you rewarded for your innovation?**

I think they were quite pleased with me, yeah. Whilst at Arawe we did a lot of driving around the island, we had a jeep and a weapons carrier. And we just drove around and had a look at this, went to the pictures at Arawe, different shows on. We got pulled up for speeding

11:00 on one occasion by the American police I wasn't driving thank goodness for a change. We had a good time there. And all I was doing was operating the radio back to Torokina Bay, taking messages and learning code. Coding messages, they had a couple of decoders, navy chaps and they taught me. There are some brilliant codes.

11:30 One of them was so simple it is laughable, you just have a book and you say you start at chapter seven and you write the alphabet on the first line and then you write your message according to that first line. In other words 'a' becomes 'b' and a next time could become c and vice versa, and then as you get down the page to the end of the month, thirty, well you turn over to the next page.

12:00 But the book wasn't worth reading it was called, Bevis and it wasn't worth reading at all. And later on an officer, I forget his name, must have been Le Priere or some French name. He taught me weather forecasting, you know Dobles Law of Weather Forecasting? If the leaves are just moving, it is five kilometres per hour, if the twigs are shaking it is ten,

12:30 so forth. I don't know what it is now. And then identifying the clouds. You know nebulous, cumulus, strata and all of the rest of it. I did all right at that. And then just learn up on Pidgin English and the coding. Because we had a lot of different types of coding. The navy was very good at coding,

13:00 couldn't have done without them. And apart from that I was there for the removal of the dead from Arawe. When they took the island there was quite a few Americans killed so they shipped back to the States, had a great big ceremony, typical of Americans, fanfare and everything, so they packed them up and shipped them back to the States. More than what

13:30 happened to our dead I think in a lot of cases. One occasion there, there was a - they were playing cricket out on the atoll, on the coral outside and one chap said to me, "That's Ray Lindwall out there playing cricket. Attached to the 7th Infantry Battalion." Everywhere I seemed to go I seemed to knock into someone of importance. I didn't speak to him.

14:00 Apart from, oh I got tipped over in the jeep by a chap I was teaching to drive. He took the corner too fast and turned it upside down, got out of that all right. Apart from that I just stayed put until I was wanted. I was on duty one night at about eight o'clock and I should have stayed there until nine and I got an attack of malaria so I packed it up and went to bed,

14:30 and of course the officer came bursting in and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I have got malaria." And he said, "No need to leave your post." I said, "I couldn't do anything anyway." So he seemed satisfied with that and we just went on operating the radio, charging batteries. The batteries used to come up to us, dry cell batteries, car batteries, and no acid in them so we had to mix up the acid electrolyte and put the electrolyte in.

15:00 There is a way of mixing it otherwise you can blow yourself up: and then charge the batteries up for the radio. Apart from that we played table tennis, cards, just mucked around a little bit until you were called. One day I was in the radio room and one of the officers came in and he said, "We need a replacement urgently over in New

15:30 Hanover. It is going to be either you or you." To me. And he said to the other bloke, "Make up your mind." So it was pretty fair you know, and the other chap said, I think his name was Mackenzie, "Look if it is all the same to you I would like to go." I didn't know what I was looking at, at that point, so I thought, "Well, you can bloody go, so I will stay here." "Well, that's okay with me," I said.

16:00 And he came back about an hour later and said, "Have you made up your mind?" and Mackenzie said, "Oh, we tossed for it and I won the toss." So he went in, but unfortunately for him he went down with black water fever and they had to get a Catalina in to take him out and then I had no option. I went and someone else would then fill my place. So we went over by

16:30 The Paluma. The Paluma was a very famous ship up there.

Before we move on to your next port of call can we just talk a bit more about Arawe, what was the make up of your unit there? Was it just the six?

- There was two officers, sometimes there was three. Could be a fourth come along, and then there was
- 17:00 a couple of commandoes, two or three naval men, able seamen, and myself, that's all I think.
- And was there any Japanese on the atoll?**
- No, well, the Yanks had taken the island, not at that stage.
- So there was no -**
- There was no jungle there, Sophie, that was an atoll. Not like the other jungle, I mean you just can't walk through the jungle in other places: that was a real atoll
- 17:30 and I think that's all we did there just waiting to fill in. So then we went by the Paluma into New Hanover. That's on the map there, when we got there, of course you go in the dark, don't go in the daylight, Bell was already waiting there: he had it all set up. There was only two of them there
- 18:00 at that stage and he badly needed a radio man. So I was there on the radio and from there on we did our activities, covert activities. Our spy activities you might call them. We would send out natives, see I would get a radio message, that would go to Bell,
- 18:30 he would read it on his map and then we would send a native out to investigate how many Japanese troops were there, how many officers what have you in the area they were in. And if he came back, that's if he managed to get away safely then we would relay that through and a bombing mission would come over and hopefully blast them out of the
- 19:00 way and we would send someone to check up. But you had to be very careful with the information you gave the natives because you must not interrupt them when they are giving you the report. They have got no idea of numbers. If you interrupt them you say well, "How many Japanese stopped there?" and they would say, "No can savvy?" and you say, "Was there ten, ten fellow? Or two ten fellow or three ten fellow?"
- 19:30 "I think." "Five ten fellow?" "I think." So you get to the stage where you don't know whether it is ten, twenty, thirty, forty or fifty. So they worked out the best way to find out of a native how many troops were there was to ask them how many was lined up for kai kai, that's food. And they would know that, they would be pretty accurate.
- 20:00 They would say, "Oh, three fellow ten." That's thirty. So that was the best indication you got. But you must not interrupt them when you interrogate them. When we sent them on a patrol somewhere, if it was by sea, you would be waiting up at night wondering if you could wait any longer or whether you shoot through to another position in case someone betrayed you. So you would be all pins and needles for a while
- 20:30 and all of a sudden the natives, there might be two of them would say, "Sar." Hear them say, "Sar." Master. So the officer would interrogate them, and you have got to hear that interrogation from start to finish, Sophie. You just can't, once you interrupt their train of thought you lose the lot. So
- 21:00 you have got to put up with it and it takes a while. Because they say, "Well, me fellow go down along beach, catch him outrigger. We go along nambis, the beach, to go on this fellow point and we round him, round him, round him," the number of times he says that is to indicate how far it is. And if he keeps on saying, "Round him, round him, round him,"
- 21:30 you know it's a long way, but if you interrupt him he is finished. Then he says, "He goes this way and goes to another point, then he come along 'place belong Nippon'." "And you let him go. And then says he, "Goes along bush, he go, he go, he go, he go," and you're dying to say, "How far did you go?" but you do not interrupt. I didn't do the interrogation, the officer did that.
- 22:00 "He go, he go, he go, he go, "and virtually you get the whole story. It is very interesting to hear them and when he is finished they salute and off he goes. They say, "Thank you," to him and off he goes. And he looks at the review, pinpoints the place
- 22:30 puts some numbers there and we radio that through. And it is lovely to feel the ground shaking under your feet where they are blasting away. But that was the same time Stan Bell was related to, he had a brother up there, Lincoln Bell, and also his father lived up in New Ireland, he had a plantation, he was a real tough guy I tell you.
- 23:00 We had guards around our camp, natives guards, since we got nearly jumped at the last place, we put in a telephone line from the top of the hill down to the beach which was about a mile, got the natives to do that and he manages to get the right kind of telephone. And then we had native guards and so he would get up through the night and go around and check up on the guards and one night he went around and
- 23:30 one was asleep under a tree, he didn't say anything, just kicked him and woke him up. And then we would have a parade every morning, because we drilled them every day to keep them alert, and as we were drilling them he would say, "Attention!" and they would come to attention. And he would walk up and down and he would said, "Last night me looka you fellow go. One fellow sleep, stop sleep, he sleep.

- 24:00 Whose that he sleep on guard?" And this chap stands forward and I must remind you that Stan Bell was a bloke about fourteen or fifteen stone and six foot. And he is walking past and he jobs him, down he drops. I used to think it was cruel, but not really when your life depended on it. And the native picks himself up and shakes himself off,
- 24:30 "You savvy?" no answer so Bell walks up again and before he knew what happens Bell drops him again. And he falls down and he gets up again and he says, "You savvy?" "Savvy finish." He fully understands. So he says to me or Colin, Colin said to me, "Well, get a bag and get it full of sand and march him around for an hour
- 25:00 around in a circle." So we get the bag filled and tell him to put it up on his shoulder and left, right, march him around in a circle for about an hour. And he was really proud of himself, you know, he didn't mind doing that at all because he recognised the fact that he had done something wrong.
- 25:30 And it never happened again, and that's the way Bell operated, because when I left, I am backtracking a bit here, when we left Lavongai to go to this new place, we had bought a boat and we were down near where the - what are they called - mangroves? Where it is all muddy? So two natives come out and grabbed Bell, one under each arm to save him getting his feet wet,
- 26:00 trousers and all of the rest of it. And they staggered, and I thought any minute they are going to drop him in the sea, but they get him on the boat. And then they got and get Colin Francis, he is more experienced than me. One under each shoulder and they carry him out. Of course, they go for me, to grab me and I says, "Naski." Which means in Pidgin "never mind, I will walk myself." And Bell yells out from the boat,
- 26:30 "Ray, you make those bloody black coons carry you!" So I said, "Come on fellows." And I put my arms out and they carried me out to the boat. First time I ever got ticked off by Bell, I liked Bell. And when I got into the boat he said to me, "Ray never ever do that again." I said, "Why?" "No," he said, "You are the 'masta'."
- 27:00 they called everyone 'masta'. "And you lose prestige, and you're finished for the moment. Don't ever, ever do that again." And I thought at the time, "By gee I think he is wrong." But I realised later he was right and he did the right thing and that's why they had so much respect for him. Because they reckoned you being white man, you were proficient at everything, you're really
- 27:30 king and later on they caught a pigeon up there and the word of pigeon is baruse in Pidgin. And it's a very important pigeon because every year it grows a ridge across its nose, one year there is one ridge, then two ridges and three ridges and five ridges. And they imitate the pigeon cry, something like a dove. And they want you to shoot it for them because it is something like a delicacy.
- 28:00 And this time I was in the camp all by myself, the other two were out on patrol and I grabbed my carbine and I thought, "Oh God bless me, pray I don't miss this pigeon." And it was in the highest tree you have ever seen: I thought it would have to be right on the top. So I sighted this pigeon up, oh, back in Brisbane we had our choice of weapons and I chose a carbine which is
- 28:30 thirty calibre, nice and light, three hundred and six hundred yards, will go right through a coconut tree. So I sight up this pigeon and I thought, "I can't miss this, I dare not miss this." Anyway I fired and it drops like a stone. Dear was I pleased? They rushed forward and they picked it up and it started to come alive again, but they reckoned I was really top hole
- 29:00 because when anyone else shot a pigeon they destroyed it virtually because the hole it made shattered it. All I did was just crease it on the head and just ruffle the feathers on the head and just stunned it and dropped it. That was the best move I ever made, I was number one. At the same time I was hoping they would not sing out that they saw another pigeon.

What was Bell's position?

- 29:30 Bell was sub-lieutenant naval officer. He was a planter and all of the planters were given the honorary rank of sub-lieutenant but I think he was fully qualified. He would have finished up higher but I think I might have stopped him from getting on. He reckoned I did. It was only a joke, but
- 30:00 I remember one day there was a Japanese strip had been either torpedoed, whatever, there was a big hole in the side and it was floating up and down the coast, we were equipped with binoculars and everything. Amazing thing, the best pair of binoculars we had were Japanese. So this ship was going up and down and Bell was out on patrol and Col Francis said, "I would love to get
- 30:30 out in that boat we could get some souvenirs. Might get some wrist watches or goggles, whatever." I said, "I wouldn't mind going either. We can't both go one of us has got to stay at the radio." He said, "Lets toss for it." so I won the toss and I set out and I got six natives and an outrigger and they rowed out, bit of a sail,
- 31:00 it looked like it was only about six hundred yards out, it was about three miles. And when we got out there it was on top of a reef, knee deep. And scatted all around the reef was all of these Jap shells, some of them were on fire from the heat of the sun or what, magnesium or whatever was in them. And I was just walking around this and if you see a boat beached, it is easier said than

- 31:30 done trying to get in it because it is so high. And I am walking around trying to work out how I am going to get in it, so I had to get in the hole in the side, and just then three New Zealand Corsairs had come over. And what I didn't know was that any wreck was an unrestricted bombing target. So I didn't know what to do:
- 32:00 I know if I was in an outrigger, on uneven days you turn left, on even days you turn right, to indicate to the pilot that you're an Australian, but there was no way we could turn left or right, and the natives started to run when they saw the Corsairs swooping and I sung out to them, "Stop you so and so's." They stopped luckily.
- 32:30 And then I had a lot more hair: just as well, it was to my advantage because if I had been dark or a bit sun tanned or anything they might have thought I was Japanese because there was not supposed to be any white men there. So they came low and I just waved to them and put my finger up like that and made out that I wasn't frightened of them, so they pulled out, they didn't strafe the wreck. So going back
- 33:00 the natives decided to partake of kai kai, they wanted a feed, so they pulled up at a native island and they were all set up and they had a meal there ready for us on the beach. So we ate there and we were getting back towards,
- What did you eat?**
- Paw paw, banana, fruit salad, everything. So we get back to our base in New Hanover
- 33:30 and here is Bell running up and down the shore shaking his fist at me. He said, "What the bloody hell were you doing out there?" I said, "Sir, we just went out to investigate what those burning shells were." And Francis didn't say anything because it would have been him or I that would go, he said nothing. So he said, "I suppose I will have to
- 34:00 cover up for you." So he wrote a message and coded it and sent it back to Torokina Bay and all the messages were relayed to our headquarters in Brisbane, it was the first time I got mentioned in dispatches, without getting a medal. He said that he had sent me out to investigate shells and the condition of the wreck and so on.
- 34:30 And of course on my return, on the radio there was another message from headquarters and when I decoded it, it reprimanded him and said in future whenever you send anybody to inspect a wreck you must remember that any wreck is an unrestricted bombing target, please note that in future. And he said I cost him a promotion, but I don't think so.
- 35:00 There was hardly any promotion in the Coastwatchers, anyway that was all settled.
- What did you retrieve from the wreck?**
- Nothing, wasn't able to get on. I would have loved to find some saki or beer or something, got nothing. There was no way you could get on it anyway, you would need a forklift to get on, probably a lot of dead bodies I suppose, might have been a bit smelly.
- 35:30 **That wouldn't have phased you to get some beer?**
- Yeah, it would have been all right, wouldn't it? To get some beer. We got nothing, We didn't bother going back again, when it was floating up and down the coast going back and forth of course out to sea, you wouldn't credit a reef out to sea but it had grounded there and of course the Corsairs would be bombing it all of the time and strafing it.
- 36:00 Lucky we weren't on board. Because they would have been strafing, practising you know. But that's the way it went.
- You said that you had natives with you because you had nearly got jumped on at the last place? Can you tell me about that?**
- At Lavongai?
- I assumed you meant at Torokina Bay you had some trouble?**
- 36:30 No, no trouble at Torokina.
- Where was it you had the trouble?**
- Where the natives run through on us.
- No, you ended up needing someone because you needed someone to be keeping watch at night and you said that that had nearly caused a problem before?**
- The guards?
- Yeah.**
- 37:00 Yeah, well I told you about that we made this chap carry the sand bag.

So you hadn't had any trouble before then?

No, we didn't have any problem before that. We only had one disaster and that was, we sent six natives out to investigate movements of Japanese troops in a certain area they knew all of the place names and everything, no use giving them a grid reference. So we sent them to a place

- 37:30 to investigate, a place called Mettibou, I think it is Mettibou, but they stopped on route at a place called Ran Malak, to partake of kai kai, they wanted a feed. The only trouble is when they were cooking their steak or rice or whatever it was they used two unexploded Japanese shells as a pot stand.
- 38:00 And they blew themselves to bits and the shells went off and there was bits of hair and gristle all over the place and we didn't know anything about it for a day and a native came back to us and said, "You savvy men belong you fella?" I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Him all get it bugger up finish." And I said, "How come? Tai finish?" and he said, "No, bugger up finish."
- 38:30 One is a bit more definite than the other, so we sent someone out to investigate it. And they were our natives, they all had a name and they all had a number. And the officer got me to send a message through to headquarters at Torokina, and he just worded it,
- 39:00 six natives sent to investigate movement of troops at such a such area, 221 Encine, 222, 223 Hakalo, names and their number so it would go on their record. They stopped en route at Ren Malak to partake in kai kai using two eight inch unexploded Japanese shells as a pot stand. Stop, new para. Exit six little nigger boys. Stop.
- 39:30 end of message. Sent that through and before I had finished sending the message, as quick as coding, these AWA blokes they come back with a laugh sign. Big laugh when you lose your life but that was it. The message got through, that was the only real trouble we had. One of our cooks got shot. That's right. We had what we call a house boy and that house
- 40:00 was their kind of dormitory, say thirty soldiers and they had a bit of a party and invited a few of the native girls up. They was having a ding dong party and during the party one got shot in the leg. And he was yelling, and yelling and couldn't get to sleep and I went over to investigate, "What happened?"
- 40:30 and someone said, "He has been shot." I didn't know whether the Japanese had shot him or what, so I went back to get some morphia because we used to do a sick parade every week, so we had this morphia in little tubes, like little paint tubes, one point five cc and you unscrew the top just like instant grip you know? And you pierce the lead on the top
- 41:00 and you put a needle on it and jab it in and by the time I got over there with the morphia, I took a couple of tubes of morphia, he was yelling and screaming, "Shoot him me please, catch him musket shootum me." So I am getting sick of him so I -
- 41:23 End of tape

Tape 6

- 00:36 **Ray so you were just finishing off that story you were saying?**

That's right. So he was yelling out and screaming his head off, "Bring him musket, kill him me." So I put one morphia

- 01:00 into him, and you push him being a soft tube, a lot runs out of the needle before you break the flesh so one of the natives came over with a musket, and I said, "Where do you want it through the head or where?" "Oh no, no coff, master. Me only kannon." That means he was only kidding. That stopped him from yelling, and I thought well, he
- 01:30 is a good boy so I shot another dose of morphia into him. Gave him more than I should have, at one point five cc's, what's that over three cc's. So then he was quiet for the rest of the night and we could sleep.

Quiet and happy?

How did you know how to give injections. All of the planters, Bell, knew and he taught Francis and Francis taught me. And if they got too ill

- 02:00 we would send them down to ANGAU, Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit, they were the ones that had the police boys, we would send them down to them, they weren't allowed behind the lines and they would take care of them if they had a skin disease or tropical ulcers. But we did tropical ulcers: we did sick parade because we had to look after our soldiers
- 02:30 and if we didn't look after their women folk we were in trouble. But some of the jobs were a bit iffy, you didn't like doing them but,

You were put in a position where you were having to give fairly serious medical aid without probably the proper medical training?

Yeah, well, we had all of the sulphur thalidomide drugs, didn't have penicillin then. We had sulphur thalidomide

03:00 sulphur thiocol, sulphur diosol, iodine, aspirins. Main one we dispensed was aspirins and that's understandable, that's all our medical officers give us half of the time. They wouldn't take the aspirin unless you dipped them in iodine.

Why was that?

Because they reckoned the iodine fixed the sore on the outside so if they have got a sore inside their tummy the iodine will fix that too.

03:30 So I said to Bell one day, "He wants me to dip it in?" "Dip it in," he said, "Psychological, you wait until you dip it in and give it to him." And as soon as I give it to him he says, "More better, good." And walked off as good as gold. If they got VD [venereal disease] he handled that, thank goodness.

Bell did?

Yeah, he handled all of that, thank goodness. A soldier would come in, in a bit of trouble,

04:00 and I would get Bell and he wanted to know who he had been with because we didn't want the whole of our soldiers infected so he would take it out on them if they wouldn't tell him who they were. So eventually he would get the woman in,

A native woman?

Yeah, their meris, women. And he would give her an examination

04:30 I was never there then but I think Colin told me he didn't much around. They say, "Me shamed. Me shamed." And Bell would just grab a hold of their lap lap and flick it off and examine them and then he would give them a tablet, and then we get rid of her down to ANGAU and we would have to treat

05:00 him and ask her how many others she had been with and that was it. Sex was very negotiable up there.

I was just wondering was it a chicken or an egg scene, where was the VD coming from?

Well, the VD originally come from the white people. They only got gonorrhoea, they didn't get syphilis, so they can be thankful for that. But you can't be too careful when you have got soldiers because they are the same as any human being, they have parties, and as I said, sex was very negotiable. I mean a couple

05:30 of sticks of tobacco plantation twists, and then, quite often when someone would offer one of the meris a couple of sticks of tobacco for her favour sort of thing, sometimes he wouldn't pay up and then we used to have to have a court, they used to come up to us and they wanted to make court and only a white man could do that. We would be -

06:00 we would conduct the court. Francis was quite experienced at it and I would sit in with him. We would set up a table and everything and hear the evidence from each one of them and we would come to a decision which we thought was right. And if he didn't pay up the tobacco we would dock his pay, because we paid them five shillings a week, or five marks. A mark that's a coin with a hole in the middle. You have probably heard of

06:30 them.

It could have caused a bit of conflict between the natives and the Australians if too much of that was let go, if the Australian soldiers didn't act according to the deal they had made?

That's right. We didn't have that much of it. We only had one case, one of our own soldiers got it. That's the point, one chap that came over there for a while, he had to get sent back over again.

To the hospital?

07:00 And you have got to get a Catalina to get him out. It is his own fault.

The soldiers would have been given a few lectures about the perils of VD wouldn't they?

See you don't do the medicine, if you're doing the medicine like I was, the three of us. We had one chap come over and he wanted a meri, I don't know whether this is right for tape?

It is all all right.

07:30 Okay and he said to me, "Can you get me a meri?" I said, "I can get you one but you are taking a risk mate." "I am prepared to take a risk." So I called over one of the natives and said, "You go long village and catch him one fella meri, tell him come long master long quick time along sundown. Here catch this fella cake soap tell him meri wash, wash plenty good down beach." And all of the rest, you know, tell him a, "real nice meri."

08:00 'Nancys' they call them.

They call the good ones Nancy?

Well, a Nancy is a good sort. Nancy is what they call a good sort. So anyway goodness gracious this girl turns up and she comes up to me, and I said, "No not me, me missionary." And she laughed, anyway he came back by that time. And I said, "There is your meri." I don't think he knew what to

08:30 do: I think he was really astounded that it happened so quick.

So who was giving the sexual disease to who?

The meris.

You're saying it started with the meris?

Well, I don't know really, who knows half of the time. Anyway the boss was away and I was treating him and I said, "Well, I have only got two tablets left,"

09:00 and he said, "What am I going to do?" and I said, "Well, you will have to tell Bell to order some more in." And he said, "He is not going to like that." And I said, "Well, it is better to be okay than not liking it." So when Bell came back he told him and Bell fell down and laughed, he thought it was a great joke, he said, "Was it all right?" he didn't think much of it at all, happens every day of the week sort of thing.

09:30 So we had to radio through, that was the chap that got black water fever eventually and they got a Catalina and took him out.

Black water fever, I haven't heard of that one?

That's an extreme malaria, very complicated malaria. Francis did an operation on - one woman come in one day with a sling around her neck, of course they don't wear anything up top.

10:00 and one boob is out here and one is down here like a torpedo, and she had a tropical ulcer and I said, "What are you going to do?" and he said, "She has got a tropical ulcer: I am going to lance it." "Oh God, don't fancy that do you?" Anyway he did it and he did a good job too. She went back to normal, sprinkle of sulphur thalidomide powder, tape it up. You had to run the sticky tape over it because they get it in the feet and everything.

10:30 **So the native people didn't have their own cures for those sorts of things?**

Well pre-war they had what they called their tol tol, that was village doctor. Everyone was government funded, like the tol tol, the chief of the village was the kiap or the luluai and the tol tol they could dispense the medicine and there was a tax on the natives you know?

11:00 Ten dollars a head. And they used to work for planters and all the rest of them and what happened is that, see all of the natives think that they are a boy, they go through stage where a young boy is a monkey, then becomes a boy. Now a boy's age can vary from about ten to about sixty, no one wants to admit that he is an old fellow.

11:30 And when he becomes an old fellow he is lapun, and when he becomes old fellow finished, he is lapun finish. And I would say to them, "You lapun?" "No, me boy." Everyone calls themselves boy. But the biggest insult in life is to call them lapun. So when the government official came around pre-war days to get their ten dollars a head tax.

Which government was this?

12:00 They would be the New Guinea administrator. They would come around and if they had a shirt on take their shirt off and see if they had any hair growing under their arms, so they got a bit cunning and started shaving hair under their arms. So the administration woke up and after that they used to make them drop their daks and see if there was hair in another place, that's how that came about.

12:30 And if they worked with a planter he would withhold the ten dollars because they would just spend it, that's the way it went. But it was interesting.

And the local medicine guy didn't get offended that the natives were going to see you guys for treatment?

Well, see they wouldn't be in attendance. They wouldn't be able to get the drugs and everything, I imagine, during war time, no see they wouldn't.

And what did the local men think of their women going off with the soldiers?

13:00 Nothing about it at all. As long as the women gave them one of the sticks of tobacco, no problem at all.

Oh, so the women didn't even get the tobacco for themselves?

Yeah they did, but really speaking the men. Some of the natives approach other natives and say, "Well, can I have sex with your meri for two sticks of tobacco?" and he would say, "Okay." kind of thing.

13:30 They didn't seem to worry because they had a different way of looking at things. I used to ask some of the natives, "What for you don't pull him meri?" You don't get married? "Oh masta," he said, "We find him Japanese," he said, and see it used to cost six dollars over there, six of those shillings with the hole in it to get married.

14:00 And that used to be paid over to the luluai of the village and he would take his commission and give the balance over to the in-laws or whatever it is, and that was it, you were married, but if you had been married before it was only half price, only three marks. Anyway getting back to my story, "Why don't you get married?" and he said, "Well, war is

14:30 on, if I pay six dollars and I get killed tomorrow I loose him money." Wasn't profitable to get married until the war was finished.

Practical sort of man.

Yeah, that's right.

And was this all a bit of a cultural shock when you first encountered all of this?

Well, you only get a bit at a time and you sort of absorb it. You know, softly catch the monkey sort of thing.

Did you feel a bit shy, I mean most Australian women don't walk around with tops off,

15:00 **it must have been confronting?**

Well, in the first place Bell had procured, no planter up there will cook for himself if he can get house cooks, boy cooks and he managed to get a couple of good cooks, must have worked on the plantation with him. And in the cookhouse we had

15:30 facilities for cooking and good cooks. We had beautiful food. Fresh food, fresh crab, white meat, pig, fruit, fish, bananas whatever you like. They cook beautiful meals, been taught. And you would have even the big oval serving trays, there was only three of us there, and we would go to dinner at night and we would have a topless Nancy come around holding the plate for us, topless you know.

16:00 **You were in heaven weren't you?**

I reckon I was. My eyes used to pop out of my head I am telling you. Because the natives used to call them Nancy as I say and susu was the name for breast and same for milk. And they used to say, "This fella meri Nancy, susu belong him stand up also may up coconut." That's the way they used to describe her. And she was a real beauty.

16:30 **Was there a sense of respect from the Australian soldiers for that culture?**

Well, I don't know, see I never met many soldiers. Some people only went in for a week, some only got in for a few days: we were there for a long while.

How long were you there all together?

I reckon about nine months. But a sortie going on, I mean you're on tenterhooks all of the time.

17:00 and of course you look after number one first. We owed our security in Bell, no doubt about it. Bell was perfect, I mean

What happened to him?

Oh, he would be dead now but when the war was over he come and saw me and he said, that he thinks that he

17:30 will be nominated for the surrender of Japan. And I said, "Well, that's good news, that's a high honour." "Yeah but," he said, "It looks like you're going to get an honour too. I have submitted your name to be the radio operator for the surrender." And I said, "That's very nice." Not that I thought it was much good to tell you the truth: I wanted to get home. He said, "I have nominated you as radio operator."

Was that a compliment?

It was,

18:00 I don't think it came about: it was in the pipeline. But it's amazing how you catch onto this. Of course when we used to have a bit of rum or something like that, they brought some rum in there one night and I was chasing meris [indigenous women] around, it was only the drink kind of business. And they used to call me missionary.

Is that where missionary position came from?

18:30 Oh, I don't know, might have been. I remember we used to buy our own food. We would get parachute drops. In the first place everything used to get busted to bits because there was a shortage of silk and they brought in artificial silk and in the daytime

- 19:00 we would put up a white cross of stones or something like that and night time we would light a little flare. And some equipment or something would be dropped to us. But they found out that if they dropped a whole bag of flour in a drop shoot it would be spilt everywhere, but they found out that by only half filling the bags we had a better chance of getting it. We got tinned food and everything, but
- 19:30 we had a cat there and I think the cat ate most of the tinned stuff. We ate all of the – we ate better than the [UNCLEAR] you know.

Did you eat much of the local food?

Oh yeah nearly all of the time. Fish and everything. Lived like lords.

It sounds like it.

Well, no flies on Bell: I mean why not, we bought it, I mean they would come in with a basket of say white bait,

- 20:00 fish or crabs or whatever and they would line it up in a row before you and you get your plantation twists and your newspaper, they roll their cigarettes in newspaper. And you would put one stick along side that, one or two there, what you thought it was worth, one stick, two, one. And if he agreed
- 20:30 that was the price but if he didn't agree he would say, "No got." And you say, "All the same one ay?" meaning 'what the bloody hell?' And he would pick the tobacco and he would walk along the line and instead of putting one there he would put two or instead of two he would put three. And then he would come to the end of the line and there is a lot of food there with no tobacco beside it and he would say, "Where stop
- 21:00 tobacco belong this fella kai kai." In other words you haven't paid for that yet, you have paid for that. They were quite honest about it, we were only guessing. So we had to go and get more tobacco for it, to buy it. So it was rather good.

Must have had a great variety of food there?

Wonderful and the service was good.

But you said earlier you were on

- 21:30 **tenterhooks the whole time you were there?**

Well everybody is, it is only natural. Anyone says they are not frightened at times are a liar. We did all right, we had a lot of fun, drill them every day.

What did you know about what was going on in the wider world of the war?

Didn't know anything. Although we were on a band,

- 22:00 we used the three B tele radio and that was about two foot long by a foot, by a foot, and there is three components to it and then a motor charger with petrol in it. and that would have to be carted you know, if we moved shop we would take ten to sixteen natives to carry that, wasn't like a mobile phone stuck in your pocket.
- 22:30 And they weren't too good at first but they were modified, we had a range of six hundred miles, on Morse and four hundred on voice. And I let nothing go wrong with mine, I kept it up to date but they modified them and increased the range, but a lot had a lot of trouble with them.
- 23:00 These three B radios and they brought a new one in, I don't think I seen one. Then they had a carry one, over your shoulder, thirty pound, dry cell batteries, but they didn't last long enough. And the weight, if you have got a gun over one arm and that over the other side.

Did you avoid detection while you were there?

Oh yeah, they searched down at Lavongai. I mean they knew we were there all right, and there was no point staying

- 23:30 there I tell you. We should have shot through that night: I would have, but where could we go? That's the point, where could we go? You have got to sleep somewhere. I mean I remember walking out with Francis one day, we walked along the coast a couple of miles and we come along a hut and there was a little wharf there and it was teeming with fish and we went into this hut and it was full of,
- 24:00 stacked in a very orderly fashion, Japanese grenades, and shells and everything.

Did your heart stop?

No, I didn't think about it at the time. I was going to take a couple and throw a few in with the fish. And Colin said to me, "Don't touch them, they could be booby trapped." But they were all stacked up neatly, so definitely the Japanese were closer than we thought.

- 24:30 **Did you feel like when you were there you were constantly looking over your shoulder, you**

were always on guard?

Well, that happened after I come back. Years after I come back I used to wake up with a jolt through the night, go like that and wake up for no reason at all. But it didn't happen at the time because I was younger then see?

25:00 **You were living it then?**

Yeah, and I mean we had a full day. By the time we marched the natives.

Do you mind talking us through, what was a typical day?

Well, first of all you would get up and if it wasn't medical day you would go and have your breakfast. And you had no electric light or shower or anything, they would cart water up and you would have a bit of a sluice. You would have a dry shave kind of business, might go a couple of days, have your breakfast, then you would drill

25:30 the natives, the officer would be working out where he is going to send patrols and everything. As you're drilling to keep him alert, I trained three natives to use Bren guns. It was pretty hopeless you know because I would get them down and I would say, you would have a stick in your hand, you would have the three fellows around you or six of them,

26:00 trying to get a good one out of the whole six. And you say, "The name belong this machine gun, Bren. Now all together call it. Bren. Bren. Bren." Then you go to flash your lemonade, you take it apart, you put it together, and then come back to one of them and say, "What name this fellow machine gun?" and he would scratch his head and say, "Me don't can savvy, master.

26:30 "Talk belong you belong you, go along this fellow here, he go finish along other fellow. Head belong me, hear me, all the same bone nothing. Him no can savvy, him talk beyond you." In other words I am an idiot. Don't worry about me.

That's hard to argue with that, isn't it?

It is, it is, honest. So you give him a hit over the head with a stick, not to maim him with it. Then you come to, "You fellow look him me fellow."

27:00 Then you take away the magazine, count the shells, two fellow ten, eight fellow, that's twenty-eight. Can fit thirty in a pinch, so it won't jam. Put them back in, put the cartridge back in. "Savvy? Pass it around." "Savvy?" "Savvy?" "Now me fellow master fire three shot bursts." Brrp, brrp brrp. "Take away magazine.

27:30 Looking? Still got some fellow cartridge he stop." Take them out count the cartridges tell them how many put them back in. "Savvy?" "We savvy." So righto, you get them down, get three men down on the Bren guns, so I think, "I'll make it easy for them, I will only give them two fellow short burst." "Now you fellow all sing out, two fellow short bursts." "Pia." They don't say 'yes', they say pia.

28:00 Brrrp, brrrrrrrrrrp. You think, "Oh God, they have shot the lot off." "Take away magazine." They take away the magazine and look at you and say, "Him he no got cartridge?" And you think to yourself, "Give them all a whack over the head," and you start all over again. And you go on and on and on. And anyway it is fun and you think to yourself,

28:30 "Well, I am doing something different tomorrow." So tomorrow morning you would drill them and do 'Simon Says'. So you would say, "All together you boy, stand at ease." No, you say, "Simon he talk, stand at ease." You say, "Attention!" and the whole bloody lot was out, all one go.

29:00 So "I no say Simon he talk." "Savvy, savvy." So you go on from that. They loved the game but they couldn't do it. It was hilarious, I am telling you. It just about drove you over the wall. They had all of the fun, actually they liked being caught out, I'm telling you.

They sound like scenes out of a comedy program rather than in the middle of a war?

29:30 It is all part of the training though, if you had nothing to do: we had plenty to do.

You have to keep active?

Well, see the radio, the information we had to get in and check up on, that kept us in business. Well, say they were coming over to bomb Kavieng, they would ask me for a weather report and I would send them over a weather report. And then Bell would send a message where there was a concentration of troops

30:00 and I would send that and they would come over and bomb the hell out of it.

How would Bell be getting his information?

Well, sometimes he had me tricked because he used to go off on his own quite a lot, because he would take a native with him carrying all of his stuff, never carried too much, but he was a very smart man. If you read the Coastwatchers, he was right down through the Solomons, everywhere.

So he was going a lot of

30:30 **places that you didn't know about?**

Yeah, well he took Francis with him a lot. I don't think Colin was very good on radio work: I didn't see him use a radio at all the whole time I was there, I don't think so.

So Bell was quite good at reconnaissance type work?

Oh, marvellous man, yes, excellent, couldn't be in better hands.

And after you would drill the natives and get them up to scratch would you be

31:00 **spending the bulk of your day with messages? Deciphering them and sending them on?**

Well, didn't seem to have any spare time. Just like this interview, just seemed to be going all of the time, something to do, I mean you were not like a base, there is always something to do. I would go on the air three times a day and get on and off as quick as I could and coding and decoding messages all of the time.

31:30 **How would you have known if the Japanese had been on to you?**

Oh, the natives would let you know, a lot of them would let you know, the friendly ones. You don't know, see if you had any treachery of course you would shoot them. That bloke that raided our store that night if I had have had a gun, I would have shot him. Bell according to -

32:00 I think Francis was with him, he shot two natives. They didn't want a blindfold: he stood them up against the tree and shot one and then the other.

What did you think of that?

Well that was war isn't it? You can't put other peoples lives at risk. I mean they go whichever way the wind, they make their choice same as us. They try them first and find out,

32:30 we had one native come over to us and the Japanese beat him from the back of his neck right down his back, there was about thirty great big marks on his back, they had healed and he came over to us and Bell didn't want him, said, "I don't want him." He said, "He has gone one way before, he is liable to go back again, I don't want him." But I had

33:00 asked him what happened and he said he was walking along the beach and he came upon some material, Jap ship must have been torpedoed or bombed, might have been the rising sun I don't know, the native picked it up and used it as a lap lap to wrap it around himself and the Japs said, "That is something that belongs to Japan!" and I don't know for sure, so what did they do?

33:30 They gave him thirty strikes with a kunda cane. I have never seen a kunda cane but apparently ordinary cane is hollow but kunda cane is solid. And I said, "What did you do?" and he said, "Just stand up, nothing." You stand there and they give thirty strokes of the kunda cane but if you put your hand up to stop the cane hitting you, they give you another one over the head and they don't count one.

34:00 So they were belting him.

Did you have much knowledge of the Japanese policy of taking no prisoners?

No, we were lucky, we didn't see a Jap. The only time I saw a Japanese was in Bougainville, a captured Japanese and they let the fuzzy wuzzies exercise them and march them and everything and it was lovely to see the natives taunting them and throwing stones at them and kicking them up the backside.

34:30 That was nice to see. But that's a story of success when you go in you don't get apprehended, you don't see anything, that's the perfect set-up, like Ferdinand the bull.

That's how you know that it is working?

That's right. See before, the early planters that - when they had all of the trouble, there was missionaries tortured and all sorts of things, because any one person missing they find out

35:00 there is someone there to do that, wouldn't be one of their own. But see when the army came in, M special unit, that's when a lot of the trouble started, they loved knocking people off, I mean they were taught to do that. The commandoes.

You know a big part of your success was keeping it all quiet, we will be finishing off in a tick, how could you be sure that the native people weren't passing on that information I mean a lot of the native people knew

35:30 **where you were?**

We knew that, see they picked sides. As I said to you before,

So they were loyal to you?

Yeah, we had some that we knew were loyal and we had a lot that we didn't. I guarantee the ones that were after us that night, I mean that chap that tried to thief that caddy of tobacco, I mean you wouldn't trust him again would you?

And were they still wearing arm bands?

- 36:00 The Japanese? See we wouldn't know, we never saw any Japanese natives, they would take the arm band off anyway, the Japanese probably had the arm band because if ours went in and they didn't have the arm band, they would know they were in looking for information.

So it was almost, there were people in that country fighting against each other, of that country?

- 36:30 That's right. They had a leaning to us because the Japanese were pretty cruel to them and they liked Australians better, they liked the people like Bell and Mason and like Reed and all of these Coastwatchers, original planters.

Had respect for them?

Respect yeah, a lot of the Coastwatchers were decorated. A lot of them decorated and they were more important in my

- 37:00 opinion than Z blokes. I mean nobody knows much about Z, this is just in my opinion was just an operation Singapore kind of thing and never knew nothing about it at all, don't know what they did. Some of those blokes in M Special Forces, they did some miraculous things. Even the biscuit bomber, one crashed, tried to put in a

- 37:30 drop one day and how they got rescued and got them out. But there was a lot of submarines going in to get people out.

Did you know where the other Coastwatchers were?

No idea.

No idea of your own unit?

Bell would have known. I mean Bell was too busy with his own worries to tell us, he probably would have told Col Francis because he went out with Col a lot of times on patrol. I was left alone,

- 38:00 sometimes for a fortnight or so I would be on my own and at night time I would be sitting down there talking to one of the natives in Pidgin for hours. I don't think I stopped talking Pidgin when I come home.

You slipped back into it pretty easily?

Yeah well, see one native, Akalope was his name, and he was telling me that he used to work on a plantation with some planter

- 38:30 and long Christmas, "Time this man with the big fellow dee wire," he said, "up here." And they showed pictures of him. And there was a big tree, another 'dee wire', and he would say, "There is a present for him." And I had to tell him about Father Christmas and it took me an hour to tell him about Father Christmas. And he used to come and speak to me every night. It was good.

Did you get lonely there?

- 39:00 I don't think so, no, didn't get any letters in or out. I got one letter I think we had a drop, and I think it was from my mother because one of the natives come in smoking a cigarette and he had used the letter to wrap around the tobacco and I recognised, it was a letter probably come in one of the drops and we missed part of it see?

- 39:30 But we had a boat come in now and again, the Paluma, to give us money to pay them with, and we would have to get the plantation twists to buy our food.

Tobacco was the highest currency?

Yeah, that's right, that would buy anything, sex anything.

You would be doing well if you didn't smoke?

- 40:00 We even had a kerosene fridge up there at one stage. We heard there was a refrigerator on Alairo Island so we arranged to try and get it and when it came back I patched it up and managed to get some kerosene and got it running. And there was cattle running wild in part of the jungle, probably belonged to one of the planters. So we shot a young

- 40:30 veal and stored it in the refrigerator. The natives loved it too because they had a cat, and they used to have this cat and we used to wonder where all of our tinned food was going, and they used to reckon, "Pussy, pussy take the food." But they were eating it themselves and giving a bit to Pussy. Because one day I come into the kitchen and see that we have got two cats, there is two cats up

- 41:00 on top of the refrigerator. I just got in the door and there is a native talking to the cats and I say, "All same one aim?" and that's means 'what the hell is going on?' And he said, "Pussy you no can pus pus pussy on top long blockus ice." Understand that Sophie? Well, pus pus was the word for sex, see? "You no pus pus
- 41:30 pussy on top long blockus ice." The refrigerator. The first time I heard that I thought, "Gee I wouldn't be able to put that together, no."
- 41:40 End of tape

Tape 7

- 00:15 **Ray can you tell me about the houses made of sac sac, how did this work, your accommodation?**
- Well, they get the thatching,
- 01:00 well they get the posts in first and they tie them up with native roof. And then they get the thatched roof, I don't know what it is made of, like some sort of palm. And then they get the split planks for the sides. They make doorways and sometimes they have a floor. We had dirt floors, when we slept on the graves of the dead Chinamen we
- 01:30 had dirt floors and then I had a meri come in every morning and sweep the floor for me, she was lovely, Dolly. She was lovely. She used to come in every morning with a home made broom arrangement, and sweep it over so that it was nice and even, tidy up the place and everything. And I used to pay her a stick of tobacco for wages.
- 02:00 Came the same time every morning, didn't talk much. Now and again I would put my arm around her and giver her a cuddle, and she was quite a nice person. As a matter of fact when war was over I gave her my blankets, and mosquito netting and give her a butt of tobacco and she cried and they all lined up on the shore and chanted,
- 02:30 "Sorry too much, sorry too much." but you get really attached to them. She was just a very ordinary looking native, they wear their hair close cropped like the men. Wear the lap lap all of the men and the women wear the lap lap. Some wear a bit of top, mostly they don't wear top.
- 03:00 As a matter of fact there was one officer Francis told me he was with and this man was a lay preacher in civilian life and it used to upset him to see them almost naked, women. And so he radioed through for a couple of bolts of material to be dropped and he spent all afternoon measuring it out, two arm lengths and stuff to go around them and
- 03:30 cutting it up and he is hoping that they would cover their top but they wore it around their head and everywhere where it didn't matter: it wouldn't have worried me. Because that's the way they dressed, they used to get high on betel nut, the natives: they used to have a party,
- What is betel nut?**
- Betel nut? It's a little nut, oh about the size of (UNCLEAR)
- 04:00 bit smaller and round, very prized possession. And they would get some lime from the beach and a special leaf they chew, it's the dakka leaf. And they chew it all together and it turns like into blood in their mouth and they spit it out every now and then and it looks like spits of blood coming out, and it makes them high. Just like cocaine I suppose or any other drug.
- 04:30 I never tried it but it is really prized.
- Was it addictive?**
- I don't think so, it might have been but they seemed to like it.
- So is, did Dolly ever stay with you?**
- 05:00 **Or did she always go back to -**
- Oh, always went back, yeah. Only came in the morning. And each one had their job to do and they would resent it if anyone tried to take over for them. She looked after us two and that was it, if anyone tried to move in there would be a fight on their hands. Because - I gave away everything before I left, I had a commando knife,
- 05:30 that was a knife with a spike on the rear and raised knuckledusters on one side coming up in peaks. Gave that to one of them to keep, I wish I had have kept it because I never seen one like it before. But then we left our arms behind, they came under lend lease and we were ordered to dump it in the ocean. Of course we used to

- 06:00 go out with dynamite and fish for them some times. Go out in the outrigger and take a couple of natives and I would tie a couple of sticks of dynamite together and a fuse in it and we would have a fire boy, you would have a cigarette, you would have to give them a cigarette to light the fuse thousands of fish, too many sharks though. They wouldn't worry about the sharks, they would swim amongst the sharks and get the fish into the boat.
- 06:30 **Did you ever hear of anyone being taken by shark?**
- Didn't seem to affect them, a shark would come past and they would have a punch at them. And I told them to get out of the water once so we could shoot the shark, and they say, "No, got catch him fish first." Get the fish, they wanted the fish. Because they only eat twice a day, about nine o'clock in the morning and about ten o'clock at night.
- 07:00 Eight or ten o'clock at night, don't seem to worry about lunch. The only trouble is they eat too many starchy foods like sago and taro and kau kau and sweet potato and all of that. You can grow beans about that long up there, this planter told me, Bell, when his wife was down in Brisbane she said, "I wish we could get some
- 07:30 Yates stringless wonder beans." So she bought a couple of packets of Yates stringless wonder, you know the ones about yay long. And of course the kanaka bean grows about that long, and when she planted them, guess what came up? Kanaka beans, because of the climate. You can grow tomatoes and all of that stuff
- 08:00 all year round up there because the temperature during the day time never gets over ninety and at night time it never gets under eighty. It is a really pleasant climate.
- Were the indigenous people growing their own food sources?**
- Oh yeah marvellous. They had their gardens fenced off with bamboo to stop the wild pigs getting in them and they had everything growing, not like the Aborigines. Very clean in their cooking.
- 08:30 when they mumued [cook in a ground oven] a pig they would gut it, the Aborigines don't gut it or anything, they'll cook anything, guts and all. And they would wrap it up in banana leaves, fill the centre, if it was WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK or fowl or whatever, fill that in with desiccated coconut, plenty of coconuts up there. And get hot stone, heat it up and then bury it and dig it up a couple of
- 09:00 hours later and it would melt in your mouth, beautiful food, beautiful cooks. When they have a child they plant so many coconut trees for every child and that's their legacy they leave behind them, because if you go inland I think I told you before you would starve to death, except for wild sago and that would take two days to get it out of the tree.
- 09:30 By the time you washed it and bashed it and everything., so that's what the Japanese, if you went further inland, the jungle worried them because once you got into the jungle and you got off the native trail you couldn't get out again, you had to cut your way through. So dense. Very dense.
- Were the indigenous people, how had they been trained initially, the soldiers**
- 10:00 **that were looking after you?**
- We had some trained in Brisbane.
- Do you know when that happened or how?**
- Probably '42 or '43 because when the Coral Sea battle, it was the Coastwatchers that reported that coming and actually stopped the Japanese coming further to Australia. They were just about annihilated
- 10:30 in the Coral Sea. They were foolish the Japanese, they should have come straight down. Should have bypassed those islands. They had to have bases for their planes and ships. See when we were out there, the Australians in the first instance had the Wirraway, and the Wirraway was a really obsolete aircraft, slow as anything. And of course the
- 11:00 Japanese had the fastest aircraft probably in the world at that time, the Zero. And until the Yanks brought in this, the Grumman plane, made by Grumman. Wildcat, Wildcat was the plane. And that was nearly as fast as the Zero but it had better armaments
- 11:30 on it and it was more sturdy, it would take plenty of shells to down it. So as soon as the information went out they were on their way, the Wildcats would go up to about thirty thousand feet and as long as you had the height, they started knocking the Zeroes out of the sky, but the Jap's had the supremacy with the Zeroes. I don't know about the Corsairs, what New Zealand had.
- 12:00 But the Jap's were so desperate to take the land, that in some of their dug outs and everything they remained in with their dead troops and they were really on the nose, but they stayed in with them and cooked and remained underground with the dead. So they were that determined to fight on, which I don't think that many people would do.
- 12:30 See Guadalcanal, that changed hands a few times and all down the coast there, but in the long run we

got on top: thank goodness for Australia. Only due to the planters and everything up there that knew the country: if you don't know the country it is a waste of time going up. I mean I would hate to be there on my own, you have got to know how to

- 13:00 handle the natives, you have got to be king pin, you have got to know where to go, where to negotiate, if you can't do that, well, you have had it.

So at some point someone negotiated with some of the indigenous people to take some of them to Brisbane to train them?

Yeah.

And the others, were there others?

There were others we tried to train up there, pretty difficult, but it is like everything else,

- 13:30 they had their own use because they knew the country. They knew other indigenous people, they were able to negotiate with villagers, they were able to get the houses built for us so we could stay. I mean you can't stay out in the open in a sleeping bag, you wouldn't last long. They knew all of these things and each one was just as important as the other. The main thing is to keep your radio going,
- 14:00 if you have got your radio going and you get a problem, well, you have got a chance of getting out. If you find you have to get out in a hurry, well, you have got to have a radio. Just think of it, Sophie, all you need these days is a mobile phone. It's silly isn't it? Prehistoric wasn't it. That's time for you, changes everything.

Were you there during the Battle of the Coral Sea?

- 14:30 I think I flew into Torokina as the third fleet was coming out. They were coming out, because I asked the chap as I was flying into Torokina Bay, the fleet that went for miles and miles, and I said, "Who is that?" and he said, "That's the Yanks, that's part of the third fleet." And it was one of the most amazing things I had ever seen.
- 15:00 I come just after that. But the Battle of the Coral Sea, that was a major change for the war and all of these older people up there, they were instrumental in causing the defeat of the Japanese there. I mean just over the road from New Hanover, like in New Ireland, there was thousands of Japs there,
- 15:30 we were only a few miles from there. But they could stay there as far as we were concerned we were not going over there looking for trouble. Just leave them there, in your local vicinity, keep that going.

So you were in an area in which the Japanese were very active, was it the Japanese who you saw as the enemy?

Yeah that's right, and possibly some of the natives if you weren't sure of them they could be

- 16:00 dangerous, you had to be on top of them all of the time. But they had a leaning our way so that was helpful. It was nice to get out though and go back to Arawe on the way home, that's right.
- 16:30 **How did you feel about the Japanese soldiers? Did you think they were good soldiers? Did you have respect for them?**

Barbaric yeah. You can only go on what you have been told. I mean if we were captured we would be beheaded, they didn't take any prisoners.

Did you know that at the time?

Oh yeah. That was the whole idea, you were considered a spy so -

- 17:00 The Japanese looked at it differently, that was an honour to be beheaded but that's the way they think. Yeah, I think they had plenty of natives working with them, naturally so, because they couldn't have done it on their own, they would have been helpless without them.
- 17:30 I mean you couldn't walk from here to Blackwood in the jungle in say half an hour, just impossible in the jungle. You have got to know where the little tracks are and they might wind and wind around and you come back to where you started, that's the way it goes.

You had to move your camp one time didn't you?

That's right, that's the only time we moved luckily.

- 18:00 **And was that difficult, did you have time pressures?**

No, that's was okay because Bell, he reconnoitred where to put the camp so it was virtually decided, he decided where we were going and then we sent a radio message and got picked up and taken there so that was the end of the matter.

- 18:30 Thankfully we didn't have to move again. But some of them moved time and time and time again. Moved all over the place. Because as soon as they knew where they were they were on to them and then they

had to move and had to move and it is no fun moving all of the time. I mean you only need one base, you can send the natives out to get information, you only want one safe place. If you haven't got a safe place and you have got to move all of the time then you wouldn't sleep too easy.

19:00 **Did this ruin all of your good telephone work?**

Yeah. It worked okay. That was a godsend really because the radio – we had the broadband and crystal control and during the early part of New Guinea campaign and Solomon's every planter came onto X

19:30 frequency, it was called X frequency. So crystal controlled and in an emergency, they just turned it on and there was no tuning or anything, it was really good. But they were hard to transport. I mean it would take a lot of people to carry them, that was the trouble, so you didn't want to move too often. A lot of times they needed new radios dropped

20:00 to them and that held things up.

So you had new radios dropped to you at different points?

No, I kept ours in good control and looked after it and kept the battery charged. We had a good lot of natives, over all we got along with them. Nothing wrong with them.

20:30 One of the police boys was a – we didn't have him but he was with another party, either Reed or Mason. He was promoted to sergeant and on my way back from Bougainville to Brisbane, caught a Liberator and he was on board. I think he had been promoted to warrant officer at this stage,

21:00 he lost his right hand and his eye sight because he was lighting a flare and it exploded. Flare for a drop and blew his hand off and blinded him. I didn't know until after the war his name, until I read about him. Because when we got on this Liberator at Torokina Bay, he was there sitting next to me and he was frightened. He was shaking

21:30 and I asked him "Would he like a cigarette?" and, yes he would like one. And I held it up in front of his eyes and he grabbed it the right way, he could see a bit out of one eye, and he put it in and I lit it for him. And I said, "What are you frightened about?" and he said, "If the aircraft has got no benzine it could fall down along bush." "No," I said, "it won't fall down along bush. Got plenty of benzine. Hundreds of gallons." He said, "You people got battery charges and," he said,

22:00 "me see them go during the day charging batteries and they stop and you got to put more benzine in." and I said, "Yeah, but they have got plenty." He couldn't believe that they couldn't run out of petrol. Well, they always called it benzine but he couldn't understand that. Anyway I read a report after that they transplanted a cornea on one eye and he was able to see, so that was very good news for him.

22:30 He was the sort of chap native, I don't know how true it is, but someone told me on the aircraft that he walked into a Jap camp and he slit the throats of thirty Japs and he cut off their left ear without raising a squeak.

And where was that that he did that?

I don't know where that was probably in Bougainville

23:00 somewhere I suppose, northern Bougainville. I don't know how true it is but apparently they used to get paid a bounty on the little finger but they used to cut off both fingers and collect the bounty twice and so they decided it was the left ear, you couldn't put a right ear on your left ear. I don't know how true that is,

23:30 I don't know whether it is hearsay or something. According to a lot of chaps I met up there it was true.

Was the bounty bit true?

I think it may have been, I don't know for sure but I heard it from a lot of sources.

It didn't happen with any of the indigenous people that you were having dealings with?

Well, I seen a lot of them paid but I didn't look in too many peach tins to see if there was any ears in it or anything.

24:00 I think it might have been, I am not sure.

Would Bell have known?

He would know: he only spoke to you about important things. No mucking around, friendly bloke but he would speak about things that mattered you know.

You were saying that you enjoyed your time

24:30 **there but it might have been different for a man with commitments at home? Can you explain why?**

Oh yes. I think it affected them more because, only naturally so, because when you're younger, you

think to yourself so what? You have got no ties: if you have got ties it makes a big difference doesn't it? If you have got children,

25:00 later on we had a launch came into New Hanover and we had an engineer on board and we called him Uncle. And he was around about sixty. Both him and his son were in the forces and he put his age down to join up and he enjoyed every minute of it.

25:30 The skipper was an able seaman, he enjoyed it, there was two of them on board. Now and again I did a trip down to ANGAU take someone sick down there. I didn't get on with the skipper, he was a kind of a bombastic sort of a fellow, he told me one day that I would have to clean the barnacles off the bottom of the boat. And I told him no way was I getting in that water.

26:00 And he said, "I will report you to the old man." That was the admiral or whatever. And I said, "You can report me to Guy Fawkes as far as I am concerned, there is no way I am getting in that water, mate, no way." And the engineer said, "And I am not getting in either." But he was an all for the navy man. Great navy man. Waste of time going for the radio because when

26:30 you're travelling on the sea it doesn't work so well, you have got to pull up and anchor to get a message through.

Why is that?

Because of the waves and everything? I don't know why. Might have been a crook set I think. They had a couple of bunks in the radio room, they were just like cyclone wire bed just strapped to the wall, pretty hard to sleep on and just a radio and

27:00 it had twin Vickers machine guns on the front of it, useless. 1918 model. And about enough room to carry sixty or eighty natives in the back. Twin Chrysler motors, petrol driven, cost a fortune to keep it going. I don't know what the idea of it was but when the war was over he wanted to know if I would sail as a radio operator with him, back to Australia.

27:30 He had to bring it back, I said, "I would sooner come back in a canoe than this lump of a thing. No way," I said.

What was its mission out there? It was ferrying the native people?

The mission?

What was it meant to be doing?

Well,

28:00 for investigating movement and everything like that. Take anyone injured down to ANGAU or anyone sick. I don't really know, I think it was a waste of time to tell you the truth. I didn't like going on because you would be a sitting duck, I tell you, if you were sitting out in the ocean. It was only from here to the wall long, wouldn't fancy

28:30 being on it for too long, bit scary. Might as well be in a canoe.

So at what point, what year did you leave?

Just after the war ended.

And what was the atmosphere like on the island when the war had ended?

Well, we naturally evacuated and they brought the famous Paluma, it was lent by the navy and we

29:00 travelled back to Arawe and we stayed at base until we arranged an aircraft to get off to come back to Bougainville. And while we were at Arawe we did nothing, nothing at all. Said farewell to all of the natives, that's when they all cried as we left. And as we were taking off, the only aircraft

29:30 we got was a Beaufort Bomber. I sat up next to the pilot and a couple sat in the bomb bay kind of business and just as we were going to take off a jeep pulled up with two army fellows and the captain asked if there was room for two more. And the pilot said, "I don't think so, mate." And he said,

30:00 "Well, I can take them but not their gear." Nothing, blankets, nothing just them. So he agreed to that so they climbed on board. And the navigator was in the front as you know, in the blip in the front. And any messages I just gave to him. And so he revved the aircraft up and he was a bit worried about the extra weight getting off. And the Coral Strip run out to sea,

30:30 and he is pulling back and I thought, "Oh God, it is not going to lift." And all of a sudden it lifted and he was shaking like this. And he said, "Give us a cigarette." And I said, "You don't smoke." And he said, "I smoke now." So I give him a cigarette and lit it up for him and he calmed down. It was - played up on his nerves. So we were going back to Bougainville, we had two

31:00 fighter planes as escort, they were circling around us. And we went into a cloud and one of them on the right hand side, when we came out of the cloud, he was on our left hand side. And I thought, "Gee he

nearly went into us.” But coming down into land at Torokina Bay no troubles, no sakes or anything, just put it down as smooth as anything. So then we were at Torokina Bay

31:30 until we got a plane out to come back to Australia. That took some time organising: we come back with Yore Wicker [?], that native soldier that had been injured. We got a Liberator down, we came down to, I don’t know what’s the name of the airport in Brisbane, do you know?

Let’s call it Brisbane airport.

32:00 That’ll do, that’s about it.

And what was the feeling like on each of the islands as you were going through, were people jubilant?

Of course. See there was still Japanese in the – that probably hadn’t heard it was over and that’s what you had to be worried about for their sake. They had

32:30 capitulated, put it that way, they hadn’t surrendered officially but they had surrendered so that was the main thing. So that was it and it was time to come home and pack up your troubles on your way.

What did that entail for you? You arrived back at Brisbane airport?

Yeah and

33:00 I don’t know how long I was at Brisbane. Had to report to Commander McManus and he asked me if I had a good time and any troubles. I said, “No.” He said, “See I told you, you would be all right.”

This is the fellow who blackmailed you into?

That’s right. Later on I got a

33:30 letter of thanks for services carried out satisfactorily or something. And then he asked me what I wanted to do, stay with them, go back to RAAF, or get an early discharge because he had the power to do that. I said, “I would like an early discharge, sounds pretty good.” So that was arranged. That took some time, but there was priority rating

34:00 to try and get out. I mean once I got down to Melbourne I think I went down with an attack of malaria. I was going home and the doctor was checking me out and he said, “You have got an attack of malaria.” And I said, “No, there is nothing wrong with me.” So he switched the fan on me and I started to shake like mad. He said, “You won’t be going home this weekend.”

34:30 So I finished up at Point Cook I think it was, with malaria. So I was in there for a fortnight. Nothing wrong with you, I felt all right. That delayed things, after that I went home, I think I stayed there and got discharged or either went home and came back and got discharged. Whatever. And then I was out and that was good.

35:00 End of the story.

You didn’t ever miss the camaraderie?

Well, you don’t have much of it because you’re in a small party, of course, you miss what there was, it was a good job, it was exciting. You felt like you were doing something important which all of them were doing.

35:30 I remember being in Melbourne after the war and I went to a commando reunion in St Kilda Road just adjacent to the Blind Institute there. And I was at this place and I couldn’t see anybody I really knew, and I had had enough to drink and plenty to eat and all of the rest of it and I thought, “Oh well, I had

36:00 better get home.” And there was a young lad outside about eighteen or nineteen, and he is pacing up and down, and I said, “Can I help you?” and he said his father used to be in this organization, and I said, “Really?” and he said, “Yeah.” And I said, “Come in have a beer, sit down.” And he said, “Mother and I don’t know anything about what happened or anything.” “Just sit down I will get you a beer,” I said, he was all shaking and everything.

36:30 I got him a beer and sat down there and went up and saw the MC [master of ceremonies] and said, “Got a lad out there pacing up and down, nice chap of a lad, short back and sides, clean cut. Wanted to know about his father.” “What’s his name?” he said. So I told him. “Yes,” he said, “I knew his old man. Know him well, don’t let him go, away keep him there.” So he

37:00 was talking to a fellow about something, come back with him and I said, “This is the fellow here.” Introduced him. And he said, “I know your Dad. As a matter of fact he went down with a boat, the ship, he was a cook.” And the kid said, “Yeah, that’s right.” And he said, “He was a bloody awful cook too.” And the kid started to laugh when he said that. And he said, “Are you still staying with Mum?” and the kid said, “Yeah.”

37:30 And he said, “I’ll tell you what we’ll do, there is no use telling the story twice. You tell mother that I will ring her up on a date convenient to you and I will take you both out to dinner, shout on me and I will tell

you everything I know." The kid was real pleased you know. And I just left there and I was going home to a woman in Melbourne and

38:00 I was coming down Chapel Street and I was coming down a side street, and everyone is beeping me and I couldn't understand why they were beeping me. And just as I got outside a police station a policeman came out and raised his hand up and said, "Where have you been?" And I said, "I have been to a reunion." And he said, "Do you know you are driving in a one way street?" and I said, "No, I had no idea."

38:30 "Well don't say I said so, but the end of the street is up there about a hundred yards, you better keep going, no use turning around now, there is no room to turn around, and good luck." So that was very nice wasn't it? I could have finished up in the cell. If there had have been breathalysers then I would have blown it up. That's the end of the story. You can pack up if you don't want to know any more.

Just a couple more. You didn't have malaria when you got back to Australia? Were you having a relapse but you didn't really need to be in hospital?

39:00 **For those two weeks you didn't want to be there?**

No.

But you got it before when you were in the islands initially?

Yeah.

And what kind of treatment did you have up there?

Oh, we just had the tablets, Atebrin. That's all. Initially it was quinine, that's why I never drink bitter lemon or anything like that. It's terrible, hate the taste of

39:30 quinine. Quinine, then Atebrin, that sends you all yellow. I never forget when I started work at the post office at Red Cliffs I heard some, I was serving on the counter, I heard one of the girls say, "I bet he served in New Guinea or somewhere, he is yellow as a Chow [Chinese]." I thought,

40:00 "You don't like to hear this," you know, but that's the way it went. But I got discharged okay and then I went I think I told you that I went back to the post office. I got a drop in New Guinea in New Hanover telling me I had been promoted to a postman at St Arnaud. Did I tell you that? And I thought, "Goodness, that's a worse

40:30 job than I had when I started." And so I got to Melbourne and my brother said to me, "What are you going to do: when are you going to start working?" and I said, "Don't know, not even interested, having a holiday." He said, "You had better go and find out, you're an employee." So I went in there to find out and there was a big queue

41:00 in the post office, line up for temporary employees and semi permanent and all of the rest of it. I was in this queue for about an hour and I got to the head of the queue and the chap said, "Your name?" and he said, "You're a permanent officer, you have been promoted to a postman at St Arnaud." I don't know whether you know St Arnaud in Victoria, farming area, real dump. Last place

41:30 in the world you want to go straight out of the services.

41:32 End of tape

Tape 8

00:33 Right, when I got to the head of the queue the chap told me that I had been promoted to postman at St Arnaud, and I said, "Well you know what you can do with that. Not interested." And he said, "You chaps

01:00 are all the same, you come back from the war and you want to be the postmaster general the next day." And I said, "I have got news for you, you know what you can do, goodbye." So off I trotted. So I got home that night and my brother was the assistant superintendent of posting telegraphs. He said, "When do you start?" and I said, "I don't. I told him what to do with the job. He was rude,"

01:30 and he told me that, "All you blokes are the same, you want to be the postmaster general the next day." "Oh," he said, "You re doing the wrong thing. Pretty hard to get a permanent job in the post office. Very difficult these times. Why don't you take it for awhile?" I said, "I don't want that job." And he said, "Well, why don't you go back and have a talk to him, do the right thing." And so he took me down to the pub and filled me up with beer and kidded me into it.

02:00 So the next day I trotted in and I got into the place, still the same queue and everything and I thought, "Oh another hour of waiting," anyway this bloke was at the counter and he saw me, so he virtually jumped the counter and came out, and "Oh, I was hoping you would come back," he said, "I was rude to you the other day when you came in. You're the bloke supposed to be going to St Arnaud. Look," he

said, "I am very sorry about that." I was nearly going to say I am sorry too

02:30 but I changed me mind when he came out, no use both of us being sorry. And he said, "I think I might be able to do something for you, you said you haven't been home for about four years?" I said, "That's right." "What's the time now?" he said, "Eleven o'clock. Can you give me until twelve o'clock?" I said, "Yeah okay." And I came back at twelve o'clock and I started work at Red Cliffs

03:00 about six weeks later. He had managed to work a vacancy in for me. So that was very nice and that was the finish for me.

Almost. What were you doing at Red Cliffs?

I was working behind the counter just like ordinary post office, selling stuff, stamps, weighing parcels and all of the rest of it.

And you were happier doing that?

Yeah.

And how did you adjust back to civilian life?

03:30 Oh, it took me a long while, I didn't start for about six or eight weeks, they gave me a date. I just found it pretty difficult, did nothing, came over to Adelaide on a motorcycle once and came back. My father was worried about me and he said he could give me a job, but I didn't want a job. And then he chatted me up again, there was a prisoner of war came home, I think his name was

04:00 Abe Gray and he had just got married and he came home only about five or six stone when he got out of Changi and he said, "He is building a house and he wants it built urgently and I am half way through and if you come and work he will pay you separate to what my contract is." This was only to keep me out of trouble,

04:30 so I went and worked there for a couple of weeks anyway. And when it come to getting paid I practically got nothing because he worked out Depression rates on me, charged him about a third of the average rate. Anyway he was happy and I was doing something for a change. And then just fooled

05:00 around until I went back to the post office.

And how were your nerves generally, were they good?

I reckon they were good, yeah. My wife reckoned they weren't when she first met me, she reckoned they were shocking but I reckon they were all right.

What did she think?

She thought they were terrible but all women say that, don't they? They all say that. I thought I was okay. I was sleeping all right and eating all right.

Did she think you were short tempered?

05:30 Oh yeah, thought I was mad I think. But it all worked itself out, there was adjustment, there was adjustment for everybody. I had never been sick I never had any serious illnesses: even now I am reasonably okay. But as long as you move around, that's

06:00 the main thing.

Is there anything during your service time that you haven't been able to tell anybody about?

No, never. I don't think I have ever been in a position. I am not worried about anything. In particular I mean a lot of people

06:30 couldn't even kill a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK . I could stretch its neck in a second, things like that wouldn't worry me or anything I saw. But I wouldn't rush forward to see anything. Put it that way. If there was an accident I would probably walk away but I have got no worries about that. Just about tackle anything. Wouldn't like to work in an abattoir or anything like that.

Do you feel like the war achieved its aim?

07:00 **Do you feel like you played a part in that?**

I think the Coastwatchers generally was one of the best efforts in the war. That's why I am so proud of being in them for a short time, I think they saved Australia, they really did. Wasn't Americans. I mean they were the ones that reported the Coral Sea. Americans only come in because of the bombing of Pearl Harbour

07:30 otherwise they would have still been sitting on the fence. I think that was one of the greatest achievements of the lot and I think the Japanese were the ones at fault, they should have bypassed the Solomon Islands, they should have come straight down to Australia because they wouldn't have any trouble from Darwin onwards, no way in the world. Of course there are a lot of contributing factors, I mean one person might say something and the

08:00 Yanks were a big help and this and that. Of course but for the Coral Sea battle and the Coastwatchers a lot of that Japanese shipping would have got through, they had supremacy in the air with the Zeroes, there is no doubt about that. Yanks helped a little with their Wildcats, but well nobody will ever

08:30 know I suppose. General Macarthur, tip my lid to him and yet in the end the Americans didn't think so much of him in the end. What can you say?

Is there anything else you would like to say for the record?

I just want to thank you for your nice attention. Been two lovely girls, been very tolerant with me I have been umming and er-ing, but I

09:00 have done the best I can.

You have done fine. Thanks Ray.

Okay Sophie, thank you Karen [interviewers].

09:07 End of tape