

# Australians at War Film Archive

## John Newman (Peter) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 22nd March 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1385>

### Tape 1

00:36 **Where were you born?**

Born in Ballina.

**What year?**

1913.

**Where did you do your schooling?**

Most of it, well I first commenced school at Camden out in Sydney

01:00 but I did most of me schooling at Rous about 20 odd miles from Ballina, Alstonville and for the last three years of my schooldays I was at Lismore high school. And I got the intermediate certificate

01:30 as far as me education goes, I got it at Alstonville and then I went onto Lismore high school, got me leaving certificate in 1928 or '29.

**What did you do when you left school?**

I've been a banana grower all me life, working life

02:00 my father was one of the early banana growers on the Richmond River. And in 1926 or thereabouts, around about that date a 'Bunchy Top' [virus] disease just wiped everything out in the Richmond. and he was lost; didn't know what he was going to do. It was before he reckoned he'd never take on dairying

02:30 but he was more or less forced to buy a dairy farm, at Tuckombil just out of Alstonville. And we shifted to Gerald, the family did, or to Tuckombil just outside of Alstonville dairy, in there from '28 to about '32

03:00 but in the meantime my father went looking for banana growing area and he went up north to Tully. He paid a deposit on a farm at Tully, it was only scrub land I suspect, I never seen it myself. He paid a deposit on it and come down and told Mum what he had done.

03:30 Anyway there's 5 of us in the family, 3 brothers myself and me sister. We were all going to school at the time and Mum went up to Tully to look, to see what it was like up there.

**Do you want to stop for a minute John?**

04:00 Eventually Mum saw the farm where it was and he, and he thought the conditions,

04:30 what it was like at Tully at the time. And she put it on the market straight away. Came down and my father heard of a place down near this area and he came down, he purchased it around about 1930, that's when I first came to Woolgoolga.

05:00 I only came down for a short time, oh the family didn't shift down, I happened to be down here roughly about 1930 and I was only down for a couple of months and went back up north, but my father and the eldest brother, they started the banana growing and

05:30 me, by that time I had left school, and the younger brother the one next to me, him and I, we continued on the dairy farm until 1932, and the bananas down here were 'bearing' [fruiting] at the time and, when the whole family,

06:00 Mum and the whole family, shifted down there my father and my youngest brother was down there at the time out in the bush. And it was '32 and I've been in Woolgoolga ever since.

**When did you sign up for the war?**

Well actually, this is February '42 when I signed onto the war. But

- 06:30 I'll continue on, the it was down here at '35, it might have been a bit before '35, anyway I just corresponded as a pen-pal, I was only a lad of about 19, I may have been early 20s, I doubt whether I was or not though, I was corresponded with a girl from Winnipeg over in Canada.
- 07:00 I don't know if you have ever heard this tale before but, in '35, mother and father did a tour and they visited over from Canada and came back and told me what it was all like, they spoke well of them, I don't know what made me do it or not, but I took it in me head that I'd
- 07:30 go across to Canada, and I here in Australia, I was interested in surf life saving, and before going over I got inducted into the association, so I was a member of the Surf Life Saving Association and anyway
- 08:00 in '37, I went to Canada and I only was only going over there for week or two only for I don't know might have been about 200 'quid' [pounds] in my pocket but that's about all. I hadn't got much, that goes fairly quickly when you are overseas. And I went up to the Canadian Rockies and going from Calgary out to Banff, I wanted to go and have a look at it. There was, travelling along, the
- 08:30 person sitting next to me who happened to be living in Banff, his home town and he turned out to be a bloke called Frank Brewster. And he and I, he was a man I suppose who might have been 6 years older than me wouldn't have been much more than that, in charge of the Brewster's Transport. And
- 09:00 anyway, when I got there I didn't have accommodation and he said, " Well look, I'll get you a bed, one at the Brewster's Hotel" and he said, "I'll most probably come down and see you later on in the night" and the reason, I had already told him I belonged to the surf movement, in general conversation. And when he came down to the room at night time
- 09:30 he had the manager of the Banff Springs Hotel there. This manager, bloke named Dalziell, he's dressed up in a dinner suit, well dressed and everything, and I thought. 'God what's come along', but I wasn't told when I was introduced to him, he stated his reason,
- 10:00 he came "Down with Brewster who told me you belonged to the surfing movement". He said, "Would you care for a job at Banff, while you are here?" and I said, "What doing" and he said, "At the swimming pool, we only have a staff of 3 at the swimming pool, would you care to be one of them?" I took him up on it. The conditions at Canada then in '37
- 10:30 was I'd say, worse as what I'd seen in '32 in Australia, things were. And the pay, I was getting was only \$25 a month.

**Can I interrupt, can you give me a really brief summary? We can come back to details later.**

- 11:00 **After you left Canada where did you go?**

I went across to England, I spend 3 months, no 6 weeks I spent in England, then and then I came home via the Suez.

**What did you do when you got back to Australia?**

Came back onto the banana plantation, and since then I'd done, oh 1, 2, 3 trips to Canada since then.

- 11:30 **You said you signed up to the war in 1942?**

1942 I signed up.

**Where did you do your initial training?**

I did most of the training in what was the Pioneer Battalion [1st Battalion, Pioneers, New South Wales] in Dubbo and Bathurst.

**Where did you go from Bathurst?**

Bathurst, I

- 12:00 volunteered to transfer to 'pioneers' to the, well it wasn't actually 'pioneers', it didn't have a name, got to go to the northern territory; commando, independent company it was. And went down to Ingleburn then and most of our training at Ingleburn was, well I'd say we practically did no training in Ingleburn apart from those

- 12:30 that were in the, what do you call them, in the signals, it was in the signals they had a lot of help, but the other two just did nothing, mostly marching, like we go out, march nearly half a day or nearly all day, just to keep us out of mischief I suppose it was.

- 13:00 **After Ingleburn, where was your first posting?**

Stayed in Ingleburn until, oh what month? July, be late July and we didn't embark, we moved from there to Katherine, stopping over at, actually I went

- 13:30 from Sydney to Brisbane by tracks on the New England Highway took about a fortnight, probably 10

days or a fortnight, I was in Brisbane, then from there we went to Mount Isa by train and then from Mount Isa to Katherine, not to Katherine to Maremma, as far as the railway in the Northern Territory run those days.

14:00 And then we went up to Katherine.

**How long were in you Katherine for?**

Ah, I wouldn't be certain, I would say about 4 days before we were put into companies and we went bush in there. I was a member of 5 platoon 'B' company [Australian Pioneers] and

14:30 our area was on the Victoria river and Windermere, and we covered that area there.

**I understand that after that you went to New Guinea?**

I went to New Guinea, the threat to Australia was over there by the time I was there, by that time

15:00 It was, '43 I think, end of '43, 'B' company was done away with and the troops were all sent back to Sydney and 'B' company, most of them I wouldn't say everyone, but most of them were sent back to Sydney for redrafting. And I eventually went to a new area.

15:30 42nd battalion I was drafted to. And from there I was to be redrafted but I didn't get to the, out at St Ives in Sydney, is this recorded? I'm making a mess of things. but

16:00 I was drafted to the 43rd battalion to 42nd battalion, it was supposed to be, in the 'mortars', and the first meal I had was with the troops at St Ives.

16:30 The orderly officer was walking around in the mess just to see what we were behaving ourselves, I suppose, but I clip eyes on a friend, so help me goodness, it was a fellow I went to school with. And he knew me he picked me up before I picked him out. Bloke named Tex Newman from Lismore. And

17:00 he more or less welcomed me and he said, "What are you doing?" and I said, "Well I'll tell you what, after I had breakfast I'm 'shooting through' [leaving]" and I would have done so at the time, because I was on me own, as far as friends and that go, I didn't know anyone and he said, "Don't be a fool, I'll take you over to the 42nd, into the transport unit" and

17:30 he got me transferred, and I come to him and the first thing he said to me, well one of the first things he said to me the morning when I was on parade with him, he wanted to see my drivers licence. Well I didn't have my drivers licence. And he said, "This is a bit of problem, we'll send you into the workshops" well the first, oh I'd say 2 or 3 weeks or more in the transport unit, I was

18:00 only in the workshop doing all the 'slushy' [messy jobs] work, grease from head to toe, and I wished to god I'd never even took him up. but eventually I got me licence and I was on the road then, and I stayed to the end of '43. I might say that when I came down from Darwin, I got married in the time I come down and sent on

18:30 the redrafting right, and I stopped I went around 12 months of the 42nd battalion and that stage we was a signalman. And one morning they read out, "Come to the orderly room" anyway, meanwhile there was volunteers to go to New Guinea

19:00 and I took about 2 or 3 steps forward straight away, as soon as I noticed I was one of the few but there was about 5 or 6 of us in that unit, up to New Guinea and when I got there I was still in transport. And I was at Lae headquarters stationed at Lae and only there oh I suppose two

19:30 months at most, before war was declared over. And luckily I came back and I spent Christmas Day, '45, I was in the boat being transferred from Lae back to Brisbane.

**When you got back to Australia did you start work straight away on banana plantations?**

20:00 Yes, I was on the plantation there, came home to the father and the other two brothers that didn't enlist, Dad increased the plantation in that area and it turned out that he more or less made a company of it then; 4 sons and my father.

**Lets go back to your childhood, how many brothers and sisters did you have?**

20:30 Three brothers and one sister, I was the second in the family

**Tell us about your early childhood memories?**

Well at a very young age, I'd say I'd be no more than, might have been about 4, I suppose it was, I had a lot of

21:00 leg trouble, in fact the scars, down there, see those scars there, I wore scars and I couldn't walk, the leg wasn't broken but badly bruised and I was sent from Lismore down to Camden, sent to Camden I went down there to be close to specialist treatment.

21:30 And mother was a Camden girl at the time, I went down with my mothers folks and Mum tutored us, raised me up to school, when I started school, I was about 6 years of age when I started school at Camden, but by that time, I had healed up.

22:00 I came back up the Richmond River.

**How long were you in Camden for?**

Around about 18 months.

**What was it like growing up on a banana plantation?**

Oh, lot better than a dairy farm I'll give you that. Hard work but when I say

22:30 hard work, I grew up with it, and I never at any stage of my life, did I consider it hard work because I was more or less born to it. I had been on a banana plantation nearly all me life. And lasted until I was, what was it?

23:00 Yeah '69, when I retired from the bananas.

**When you were a child what were your duties on the plantation?**

Oh just general labour, 'chipping' mostly. But when we came down here, father passed away at a very young age, he was only 63 when he died, the

23:30 four brothers, the four of us worked it for a while, but the youngest brother, Bob he enlisted a couple of years before I enlisted and he's was in the 8th division [Australian Imperial Force], he spent most of the time in a POW [prisoner of war] camp, on the [Thai-Burma] railway, then Bob broke out on his own and the

24:00 other two brothers and I carried on the bananas. We developed eventually, developed into the largest growers in NSW.

**You mentioned 'bunchy top'? What's that?**

It's a disease at the time, any banana, as I say any banana growers, in the early '30 had no 'sprays', the Coffs Harbour area, the 'bunchy top' wiped out the industry

24:30 between Richmond [New South Wales] and some parts of Queensland, most of the bananas, cleaned them out.

**What does it do to bananas?**

Well much what you call it, much as the name implies, leaves come up in a pretty tight bunch, and it's a little bunch about so,

25:00 all the leaves are brittle and there's no cure. When I say there is no cure, or no, what we did do up in the Richmond River, Dad was growing, and we were only young, we used to spray with stills of kerosene more or less to kill the fly, but it would eventually kill the plant. but it only took about 4, 3 to 4 years to completely wipe the banana industry out between Richmond and Tweed.

**So what did your father do then?**

As I say, he went up to Tully, bought land up there, picked a place he thought, a place he rather liked as far as banana growing goes, he paid a deposit on it, came back to Alstonville where he was living

26:00 and mother decided before she'd leave Richmond, she'd go up and have a look at it. Well Mum took one look at the place and decided it wasn't the best, she

26:30 decided she wasn't going to be in it at all and the place, we put it [their home] on the market and we came down, Dad came down to the Coffs Harbour area for banana.

**But you worked on a dairy farm in between, what?**

I say Dad worked there, but Dad bought the farm, but most of his time, well I'd say passing his time away not enjoying life at all, that's why he wanted

27:00 to get out of it, just hated dairy.

**So after that period what happened?**

Well Dad, father, and my eldest brother, came down to Woolgoolga, established a plantation and Harold, my other brother younger than me, he and I worked the farm at Alstonville for a couple of years

27:30 we were about, we were on our own from about '32 to, no 30 to '32, Harold and I worked at Alstonville, mother was at home a lot, most of the time. Father came down, him and Gilbert to this plantation down here. And

28:00 we eventually shifted down here. 1st of August '32, we came here and I've been here since, ever since.

**You were a bit older then, what work were you doing on the plantation?**

Labouring jobs, keeping the place 'ship' [tidy], 'suckering', fertilising and of course there's

28:30 the 'cutting' and 'capping' of the fruit, as I say, we were a fairly large farm then and employed 'labour' [extra hands] as well as the four sons. Dad did.

**How many labourers did you have working on the farm?**

Well all depended. When the season went really busy, around about this time of year, say to

29:00 early summer to the end of autumn, be fairly busy and most of the labourers we got was Indians.

**How much did you have to do with the Indian labourers?**

Well I've done my share of work with them. Most of them were good workers, fairly reliable. The labourers

29:30 were rather hard to get at this time in Woolgoolga. But we had to more or less get them.

**How did 'the Depression' affect your family?**

Well luckily I could say I never was. A stage we were a bit short of cash, I never had much in my life, have I. 'Been broke like a motherless bloke', But I always had a quid in my pocket.

30:00 Mostly lucky as far as that aspect goes. but oh when you ask me how it affected people. Most people at the time, especially around here in this district was you

30:30 might as well say, 'penniless', unemployment. But we had the plantation, we were working, something coming in all the time, when we got established.

**You mentioned you had a friend in Canada can you tell us how that developed?**

No I couldn't because I don't know. Oh I suppose I'd been

31:00 around about 17 years of age, 16 years of age, and I just got a 'pen friend' address, like, and that's how it really started.

**What made you decide to visit Canada?**

Well in '35 mother and father went for a world's tour and when I say 'world's tour' they well, I suppose it was, as far as that day goes, they met the family and came back

31:30 and spoke well of them, told us things, brought photos back and things like that and I thought it was the 'hog of the hog' [great], just to go myself.

**How did you get to Canada?**

Well there was only one way, shipping, and I went over to Vancouver on the Oranje that's the name of the boat I went over on.

**What route did the boat take?**

32:00 Auckland, Suva, Honolulu, Canada, oh Vancouver.

**What was it like on the boat?**

Well I was a bad seaman but once you got, once I got, my sea legs, after I left New Zealand it was, I reckon it was the only way to travel.

**How long did the trip take you?**

32:30 Now you got me there. I'd say, be the biggest part of 3 weeks we took to get to Vancouver.

**What were the other people on the ship like?**

Well I made friends with the cabin mates, I went over steerage that was the cheapest rate I could go. and one of them happened to be an old Canadian

33:00 been out to Australia and what made him go back, goodness to Canada, I got no idea, I suppose he was a fairly elderly man, there was him and I and a couple of fellows, New Zealanders more or less, in cabins, in the boat. And I 'palled' up with them, cause I was on my own. And the old fellow was

33:30 'oh gee', what's his name? Spuier, I think his name was, I forget his first name, but he and I, the first fortnight, 3 weeks, he and I stayed together in Vancouver and we went down to Seattle and that part of the States and he went home, he went back to

34:00 Vancouver and I went on to Spokane, I was 24, I had my 24th birthday in Spokane, I was on my own at that time, on my way up to Banff and I stayed. That's where I ended up with a job at Banff.

**What were your first impressions of Canada?**

Very poor, I saw

34:30 more... oh what to say, it was worse than 'Vancouver in '37' than I saw in '32, over here. I can honestly say that.

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

Well I say, at that time I was only travelling around I was on to Winnipeg. But up in Calgary, in Canada, the unemployed there.

35:00 There was hardly anyone working, more people looking for work than working, in my opinion.

**How did you get to Banff?**

I went to Banff, then I spent a whole summer in 1932

35:30 in Banff Springs hotel.

**Tell us what you were doing there?**

Well they had an outdoor swimming pool and one indoor. They were Olympic size or about I'd say about three-quarter of the size, the one indoor would be about Olympic size and there's some work.

36:00 When I say 'slushing', we used to start in the morning and most of the time it was 'slushing' work and cleaning and washing down and things like that. And cleaning out the dressing sheds, dressing rooms rather, that was mostly done in the early hours of the morning, or around between 7 and 9 at night. And the rest of the day you were

36:30 dressed in your uniform and just wrote lifeguard across your chest and mingled with the guests at the swimming pool.

**You were working beside the swimming pool? Back in Australia did you spend a lot of time in the sea?**

I did.

**What did you do at the beach?**

Well I'd be bragging now. The

37:00 surf club when we first come down to Woolgoolga, the first surf club in Woolgoolga and the beach just there called a meeting and formed a surf life saving club. Well I took the course and my youngest brother Bob and I, took to that like fish to water. And in '32 the club was

37:30 formed. In '37 under the deputy super, I was appointed deputy superintendent of the north coast branch. I went away in '37, came back and still

38:00 kept on the 'bench work' and when I enlisted, I was superintendent of the north coast branch. And I continued on as superintendent to, oh, I went through most positions, I was representing the north coast, represented in the NSW [New South Wales] headquarters of

38:30 surf life saving. I used to attend meetings down there 2 or 3 times a year and attended the NSW championships, the carnivals, in those parts.

39:00 Forget what we did, anyhow, eventually got my life membership in NSW. I was presented with my membership, by the president of NSW [Surf Life Saving Association]] at the time, oh Tom Marr I think his name was, he represented the

39:30 NSW Life Savings branch. And about 2 years after that, I was presented my life membership of Australia as far as that goes. And that was presented to me at a carnival, the Australian championship, the state championship carnival out Wollongong way, by [Sir] Adrian Curlewis

**What did you do at carnivals?**

40:00 As a superintendent I was in full charge of the carnival. Deputising different persons to do different jobs, run different things, but when I went to the state centres I took orders from the NSW superintendent and I was, do any job, mostly as march- past judge.

40:30 Swimming judge, R&R [rescue and recovery], they don't do that now at surf carnivals, I spent all day, a couple of days this weekend, Saturday and Sunday watching them, they don't do R&R now.

00:31 **What did people in Canada think about an Aussie working there?**

Much the same that we think about the Canadian I suppose, that they are a different race of people to the 'Yanks' [Americans] altogether.

**In what way?**

That's hard, the 'Yanks' are more

01:00 arrogant I reckon, Canadians are more happy to, what do you call it? When you cross the border you can tell the difference between one another.

**When you were at the hotel, what was your accommodation?**

Oh we had an apartment, a separate building to the main hotel.

01:30 **What did the local ladies think of the handsome Australian lifesaver?**

Oh well I tell you what, there was one woman in particular, Barbara Hudson by name, I met her only a few days after I got there and she, at the time she was engaged to a Frenchman, not a French Canadian [Quebecois], to a

02:00 Frenchman. And her and I kept company and when I, after I left Canada and came home and corresponded, we corresponded both her and her husband, he died first and she soon afterwards. So I'd say that was about 3 years ago, we corresponded and by that time, she then she was living in the hotel

02:30 and her husband was living, not in Vancouver but, oh, what's it, no I can't think of the name. Down near the Mexican border they were living on the coast there, still

03:00 in California.

**San Diego?**

In the San Diego region, I was trying to think of the address of the place.

**From Banff where did you go?**

From Banff across to Winnipeg, well I spent some time, going over, I went by the train to, no I didn't go by train, I went

03:30 by bus to Regina, that's the name of the place, I stopped in Regina for a fortnight, then I went from there to Winnipeg.

04:00 Stopped there for better part of a fortnight or so. Then from Winnipeg to Toronto by train. And by that time it was pretty near snowbound, all the way from Toronto, and that was enough to make me pleased that I was never to see Canada in winter time, and I've never actually been in Canada for a

04:30 Canadian winter, not so far, as I have been over three times since.

**What was your next port of call?**

I caught the boat at Montreal and we took the last summer trip, as I said, the boat trip through the Belle Isle Straight, that goes pretty much up to Greenland

05:00 and I disembarked when I got to Scotland oh, what the name? just out from Glasgow, I stayed in Glasgow for a few days. Went across to Edinburgh, there for a few days, and then I took the bus from Edinburgh down to Hull, trying to find some of my mother's relatives

05:30 I wrote to them in every place I called in around in the Hull area, nobody's home, nobody's home. And I said 'bugger that'. Forget chasing relatives, so I went on my own to oh, down to

06:00 Portsmouth was it? anyway I went down to Weston-super-mare to see some friends there, not friends but the parents of a woman that was married in Woolgoolga, I went to Weston-super-mare to 'stop'[stay] with them

06:30 and from there I went over to, 'crikey', Liverpool was it? Yes, anyway, I eventually went to London and I spent a week in London. And then that week I was in London I practically saw as much of London as people would do in a month, of course coming over by boat from Canada.

07:00 I got off up at Glasgow, that's not the name of the place, oh Greenwich I thinks the name, the sea port at Glasgow [Clydebank]. But anyway I met a young 'lass' aboard the ship

07:30 from London, and when I got down to London, the day I got there I met her, and she used to write out an itinerary of what to do, the next thing I met her, she was a hairdresser by trade. She had to work in the day time, I'd meet her when she knocked off, spent the evening together and she gave me another list

08:00 telling me places to see. And really I saw more of London in the week while I was there, than I did, when Mum and I was over there.

**Was it unusual for a young man like you to be travelling like that?**

It was really unusual. I missed company, I noticed it most on the boat, nearly everyone there was retired people, travelling, or businessman. I did it entirely on me own,

08:30 well as I say, I wasn't on my own the whole time I was away.

**Can you remember how much the journey cost you?**

Well I can tell you, no I can't tell you the exact cost. I travelled on the 'steerage' from here to Vancouver, that was the cheapest rate I could get on the boat

09:00 and that was 50 pounds return that was, I'm pretty sure, 50 pound return to Vancouver to Sydney, or Sydney to Vancouver that was. Anyway a day or two before I went, Dad gave me 50 quid, and he said get onto the west coast of Canada why don't you go

09:30 by ground. And I had a return ticket, and when I got to Montreal I was the eastern coast of Canada, and I started making enquiries about going across to Europe and coming home. And when I got there I had to pay

10:00 I think it was only about 20 pound sterling, I had to give them, not Australian, 20 pound sterling and that got me there, that was the refund I got on the return trip to Vancouver and I think I got 20 pounds sterling 'add on' [rebate] that got me back to Sydney. On the Strathnaver I came home on the Strathnaver.

**That sailed from London?**

10:30 Yes from London, from Tilbury

**And what route did that take?**

Through the Suez. The first port of call was Tangiers, then Gibraltar, Marseilles, through the canal to Port Sudan, Aden, Bombay,

11:00 Sri Lanka, what was that called in them days?

**Ceylon?**

yes Ceylon, Colombo, that was the port. And from Colombo I went up to Kandi by bus and then

11:30 sailed from Colombo to Fremantle, home to Sydney. It was a bit over 50 pound or something to Vancouver, that was Australian money, and then 20 pounds sterling I had to pay in Montreal.

**Did you get off the boat anywhere on the way back?**

Oh practically at every port.

**What did you think of the North African Ports?**

12:00 Well the North African ports were, I didn't get down, not to Cairo, Port Said isn't it? At Port Said, I saw enough to say, "I don't

12:30 want to go back again" anyway. But I did in Port Sudan, I rather took a fancy to that place. I don't know why but it appealed to me nicely there. Aden, very interesting Aden, most probably was the company I was with by that time. I palled up with, well

13:00 actually there's Bill Kitchen and Wally Kitchen, the dirt track rider, motor cycles and things. About 3 of them and we, travelled together. We hired a car from Colombo to up to, what's that place?

**Kandi?**

13:30 Yes we went up to Kandi, a full day trip, I don't know whether it cost, a couple of quid. I remember going to the bank and getting a hundred dollars, getting 100 cents to the rupee, I think it was. And go along the road and we used through 25 'quid', ah

14:00 'Annas' I think they are called, we used, for the three of us, be about 600 coins flying, used to throw a few out there, out amongst the kids going up there, and we saw more kids than you ever saw in your life.

**What was Bombay like?**

Bombay? I think I was in Bombay, I went through the

14:30 oh some towers, what do they call it there, where the Hindu I think it is, throw the dead things onto towers and the ravens come down and pick the bodies up, I saw that, whilst in Bombay these two 'Pommy' [British] fellows I find, we crashed a wedding party that night



- 15:00 and I had my surf club blazer on. On the pocket its supposed to be a seagull carrying a life belt, that was on the pocket. And a couple of blokes came up and asked me what part of the air force I was in, because I hadn't seen them before, and they turned out to be Germans. this is in '37 and these Germans blokes, were convinced of war.
- 15:30 They did belong to the German, or part of the German air force and in 4 more years they'd be fighting Australians, the next few years, and it turned out to be true and they told me that in '37.
- So those Germans were convinced there was going to be a war?**
- They were German air force blokes they were, and they told me that in '37, there was going to be fighting in, they didn't say the date, but they said it was coming.
- What did you think of that?**
- 16:00 Knocked the 'arse out of me' [astounded], I was going to tell you what I really did think, only its not fit to say. No they told me then, it was a bit of a surprise for the English 'Pommy' too. Because they didn't know it either.
- 16:30 **So when did you arrive back home?**
- I got home about oh, it was only two or three days before, father met me at Sydney, I got off the boat at Sydney, he drove down and got me home then, it was a couple of days before Christmas, '37.
- 17:00 I was home for Christmas.
- You were quite a pioneer considering how many Australians travel today?**
- Well I consider I am too. Because there is no such thing as 'backpackers' them days. And I did it on the cheap. When in England, most of the places I went to in England
- 17:30 the price of bed and breakfast was something like 5 'bob', you walk out and look for a cheaper place. And you'd hardly believe it. It was quite easy to find too.
- In what other ways did you try to save money?**
- Well them days I didn't drink, well when I say I didn't, I was only just a casual drinker. Later on I turned out to be a heavy drinker.
- 18:00 But I didn't drink, I'd mostly eat two meals a day.
- Did you smoke?**
- No, I never smoked in me life. Well when I say I never smoked, I never bought tobacco in me life. A few times since, in the army, especially in the 2nd battalion at Singleton, you'd go into Newcastle, get 'pissed'[drunk]
- 18:30 and you'd just see a box of cigarettes on the counter and you'd help yourself to one. That was 'bludging' [living off] from your mates, like, I don't suppose I've ever smoked just a cigarette, for years in my life time.
- At what point did you hear about the war breaking out in Europe?**
- Well I saw no signs
- 19:00 of it in England. None whatsoever, only just talk in the newspapers, headlines in newspapers, didn't buy them, much to lousy to do that, but the German blokes told me in Bombay, at the wedding party, they most probably done the same as me as the 'Pommies' did
- 19:30 Bill Kips and Joe Abbott were the name of the two blokes, then Wally Norton, that was the three of them, the English team came over there.
- After your trip where did you go to work?**
- I came back and worked for Dad.
- How do you think banana farming has changed over the last 50 years?**
- 20:00 Well there's a lot of work, I don't think it's changed at all as far as that goes, hard work. Fertilizing, the spraying is different, we didn't have hormone sprays and things like that . But and the method of packing bananas has changed.
- 20:30 They used to pack a bushel to the half case. Well, they've got down to only a bushel case, and then they got the cartons, that's only about 40 pounds of fruit in a carton now. In fact the 'hand' [crop picker], they got the 'hand'. Every day you almost always used to pack single bananas. But that's gone out many years ago, they are all 'hands' now.

21:00 But I've been out of the banana industry now the better part of, 30 years now, since I have done any work.

**how do think the quality of the fruit compares to when you were younger to now?**

Well now in my opinion, now the bananas, they pack them, the bananas they are cutting now are,

21:30 although I say I've been out of the game for nearly 30 years. The fruit is cut a lot sooner now than it was before; they don't let it mature enough. But I think the reason for it is, its definitely not because of the eating quality, it's the, what do you say, the shelf life

22:00 I think that was the cause of it.

**In your day you would let them ripen a lot more?**

yes we did, well no, bananas are ripened, but we let them mature more. You get those bananas you know you open your mouth wide to take a bite out of it, now the damn things

22:30 are as thick as your fingers now, the majority.

**Where was your produce sent to, from the farm?**

Well, it was sent into market. Our growers, usual growers, would fly to, I don't ever remember sending any to Brisbane in our days, but I think we sold most of our fruit in Sydney and Melbourne markets,

23:00 Sometimes Perth, sometimes Adelaide.

**How did it get there?**

Train.

**We were talking about shipping your bananas by train?**

Yes.

**So where were you when you heard on the radio about Germany and Britain being at war?**

23:30 Well I can tell you where I was when Bob Menzies, wasn't it? declared war, now, that was ah, before I was married, I was down at Beryl's home at the time. She was a local girl, Beryl was, and I heard it the night I was there. And I was straight away

24:00 left I suppose, the next half hour I was on my way home. And I went straight up to the pub and that was the wildest party I think I've ever seen in Woolgoolga.

**Why were people celebrating?**

Well it wasn't celebrating. We had, at the time, the copper in Woolgoolga, now he was a 'returned man' [veteran] from the First World War

24:30 and he's in the bar and he tells us what we are going to do, who is going to do this, going to do that, and having the time of his life he was, he didn't care.

**Were you motivated to join up?**

No, not at the time I wasn't . I didn't join up until, as I say that was in '39, I didn't join up until '42.

**Were there other local men who joined up?**

There was a lot joined up, it was a smaller town then, its only about half the size it is now, there's over 100 blokes enlisted from Woolgoolga and the whole towns got quite a few married men, or not; a great deal of married men, but nearly every single man in the town joined up.

**What about your brother?**

Bob joined up very early in the piece, and 'Dusty', and when I say that, I call him 'Dusty'; by name, Cecil Blackard. He was a local lad and his mother had passed away, and Mum and Dad more or less, adopted him, he lives with us and he is treated as one in the same.

26:00 Mum and Dad treated him the same, and Bob and Dusty joined up together. And they were both POWs [Prisoners of War] and Dusty; Dusty never come back.

26:30 No, he never came back, he died on the 'railway'.

**What did your parents think about your brother joining up?**

27:00 Well I think father expected some of his sons to join. But no, Dusty is no relation to us, but he was quite a few years, he died on his 30th birthday.

27:30 In September. And Bob was with him, they were both together in the same allotments [unit] 2nd

[company]3rd [battalion]they were.

**With the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] were they?**

28:00 The AIF.

**With the 8th divi?**

What, age?

**He was with the 8th division?**

He was with the 8th division, yeah.

**Did he get captured in Malaysia or Singapore?**

In Singapore, [Fall of Singapore, February 1942] Bob was captured in Singapore

**And they went up on the 'railway'?**

Up working on the 'railway'

28:30 which is, I'd say of the percentages of POWs that were there, most were in the 8th division, must have been a dozen or 15 blokes from Woolgoolga there. And they practically, were fortunate enough to be,

29:00 damned if I know why. I just enlisted, you get that way, people being called up and I thought well if I am going to be called up, I may as well be in it. I suppose, as I say, I don't know whether I was motivated to join or not. But I will admit I was I would say, I was fortunate or lucky in that respect that when I did get called up

29:30 as I was in a non-combatant unit, most of the time I was in the army, I was in a non combatant unit, no fault of the me own. When I got into the Australian Observation Unit,

30:00 The North Australian Observation Unit, we were told distinctly that we were not a combatant unit, we were an observation unit. And we got up to New Guinea, although I volunteered for that, the 42nd battalion guys got to it, I volunteered to go to New Guinea and I got up there

30:30 just at the end of the war.

**Where did you got to sign up?**

At Coffs Harbour.

**Alone?**

Yes, the two younger brothers from Woolgoolga, they were working the plantation, and they turned up on a Monday to work and they said

31:00 that they had enlisted over the weekend. And I said, "Bugger it, I'm going with you". It really did happen. I went over to Coffs Harbour a couple of days later, I wanted to go enlist, and think they had called up my younger brothers. But we got separated there and then, we were never together. They had service in the middle east and they both came back.

31:30 I think they went to New Guinea, I think they went to New Guinea after they come back from the middle east, but they both, well one of them is in town today, the other one is passed away, old age, naturally.

**What did your parents say about you joining up as well?**

Buggered if I know, I just told them,

32:00 no, I don't think I never asked, when I did get away on leave, I had no difficulty saying goodbye to Mum, but I always just left, there were always a tearful moment saying goodbye to Dad.

**How long after you signed up were you called up?**

I joined up in February, oh well no, I enlisted a couple of days before Christmas, but I wasn't called up at Christmas, it was February '42. It would be late '41 when I enlisted.

**At what point did you hear about your brother being captured?**

When he got back.

**You had no idea what had happened to him?**

No, Mum and Dad had no idea either.

33:30 After New Guinea, I don't know when Mum and Dad did find out he survived but after I came back, I didn't know what the details were.

**So there wasn't any official notice of his capture in '42?**

No, no. They had no idea where he was or what become of it

**When you were called up where were you sent to?**

34:00 Sent to Dubbo first, 'the pioneers'.

**What sort of training did you do there?**

Just military training and bit of engineering work, they called it engineering but it was only bridge building or scaffolding.

**Did you make some mates there?**

I did.

**Who were they?**

34:30 There's ah two brothers from Guyra and a fellow from down the south coast, the Shoalhaven area. I met them up there and there was another one from Guyra too, but he may as well say there's two brothers from Guyra, the Muldoons. And then George Adamson

35:00 from Guyra, and Merv Guymer and myself, made 5 in the pioneers, together, and we volunteered to go away together, and we was together most of the time we were away in northern Australian observation.

**What was life in the army like at Dubbo?**

Dubbo wasn't that bad,

35:30 better camp than Singleton I think. Although from Dubbo I was there for only a couple of months and we were sent to Bathurst, I don't know what reason. The whole pioneers was transferred to Bathurst and it was the coldest camp I've ever been in me life.

**Did you find the life hard?**

Oh no. I found it fairly easy as far as that goes.

36:00 **At what point did you hear about the North Australian observation unit?**

That, at Bathurst, out in parade, in the morning, 'volunteers wanting to go'. We weren't told anything, what we had to do, or not, just more or less asking

36:30 for volunteers. We were told it was in the independent company, we were living under strict, rough, conditions. You are supposed to be able to ride a horse and things like that, but many of us had eventually got in the observation unit, many had never even seen a horse before.

37:00 **What did they tell you about the work that you were going to be doing?**

Never got anything, now I'm leaving there, the pioneers now, and I'm in the Australian Observation Unit. We were told practically nothing, until the time before we left Sydney. As I say, most of the training we did in the pioneers and the 'sigs' [signals], that's the signallers, they went to school in that, well I, even Merv Guymer,

37:30 the Muldoons, and myself, and Adamson, we went to 'sig' school about a fortnight, Marconi School of Wireless, oh what the hell is it now, out at Leichhardt I think it was. We went there but we got kicked out, we used to 'play up' and 'muck up' that much at the signal school, they kicked us out of the 'sigs'.

38:00 **Why did you volunteer to join this special unit?**

Well I tell you at that time they'd ceased sending troops overseas. there was a standstill and we were just in camp, we did volunteer to join a 'job' going from Dubbo to Bathurst and just at the time we was more or less doing the same over again, just waiting, even though I

38:30 don't think the army knew what was happening. At the time still they had the idea. After the fall of Singapore, no troops were sent - they went nowhere for a while.

**So you just wanted to get out of camp life?**

Well that was what it was. Yes.

**Why did you get 'chucked' out of the school in Leichhardt?**

39:00 'On the piss' [drinking] too often I think. At that time, I think, I started drinking fairly heavy.

**From there where did you go?**

School, we weren't kicked out of the 'Nackeroos' [North Australian Observation Unit], we eventually took that over, the 'Nackeroos', from the 'sigs' [Signals] to the ordinary troop of 'Nackeroos',

39:30 was sent from school back, and not from, besides that, I think we was 'playing up' I think, those that were running the school thought that none of us was keen on the job and some battalions they depended on, the signals more than any others and we did get into the 'territory' [dangerous].

## Tape 3

00:30 **Can you tell us about your journey from Ingleburn to Katherine?**

From Ingleburn to Katherine. I really don't know the date we left, but I suppose it would be about

01:00 4 or 6 truck loads of our unit equipment went up the road up to Katherine. And I was one of 6 guards that went up and travelled on, sat in the back of the truck, like. And travelled up as far as Brisbane. the first

01:30 night, we stayed overnight in Muswellbrook. The second nigh was at Armidale, the third night was Tenterfield and we went down he river from Tenterfield, George Adamson was, no he wasn't. I was

02:00 going to say, he was in charge, but he wasn't. At Muswellbrook, the first night there, I met two mates from Woolgoolga who were in the surf club with me, they were in camp at Muswellbrook at the time,

02:30 Tom Morrow and a bloke named 'Snow' Graham. At night time when the trucks weren't travelling we had to keep the trucks under surveillance all the time, like. Take it, guard it, and couple of us guarding it and someone else come and relieve you like. And when we got to Armidale --

03:00 this is about Armidale, but, oh must be, anyway I know at Armidale, as I said, I lost me gear home, I sent them my service card back to Woolgoolga

03:30 It was close to home, from Armidale. We had this thing going that was, the few that were guarding that truck, it was one of those out in the railway yards

04:00 and south Brisbane, the truck, and the martial of the yard there, and anyway they eventually put on the train at Brisbane. And our trucks were sent on the back of the troop train that went from Brisbane up to Mount Isa.

04:30 At Mount Isa 6 trucks was more, convoy sent, we had to join up with a 'Yankee' [American] convoy at Mount Isa, and then I suppose it must have been anywhere up to 40, 50 trucks, that went to Mount Isa, up together, mostly 'Yankee' stuff. And I went up

05:00 with them, and I was in an American truck, not travelling with one of my own, not guarding own, we, from Mount Isa, the first place we stopped was the border, border of Queensland and Northern Territory, now what's that place, anyway, the second

05:30 night was Lincoln Springs. I can't remember, but anyway it took us three nights, three days travelling to get from, this was before the roads were bitumen, from Mount Isa to Larrimah, that was as far as the railway came down. The trucks

06:00 were placed on the train at Larrimah and from Larrimah to Katherine we went up on the train, the old Northern Territory railway line. I can't remember the place we stayed at, I know it was 3 nights there and we camped in the grounds at night time, it was more or less, when you were the guard you slept on

06:30 the ground. I remember sleeping and there was dust about 6 inches high on the back of my back, when I woke up in the morning. I forget the name of the place, never mind, anyway we were up at Katherine. And our gear was unloaded at Katherine

07:00 And then we went out further, the Katherine meatworks for the day, only just a couple, maybe a mile out of Katherine. Katherine had about 2 tin sheds that's all the town consisted of. and we stopped there until we got our gear sorted out, what went with what platoon and what not,

07:30 that took about 4 days. And we then got sent out and we had to be on our area by the 1st of September, but we only just left Katherine, 3 days trip anyway and we arrived at Timber Creek the day before the rain, we got a lot of it, but only just.

**What was the town of Katherine like?**

08:00 The town of Katherine they were the railway works, you might as well say was, all a bit, not like it is now. There is a pub there, it was out of bounds, or I only thought it was out of bounds, I think its more like that, like. Oh I don't suppose there would be much more than a dozen buildings at that time.

08:30 **What was the weather like there?**

Quite hot, from being used to being in the camp at Ingleburn, I'm not Ingleburn, yes it was from

Ingleburn, I came from there. But quite a lot hotter than it was up there. But

09:00 just prior to the 'wet' [rainy season], everyone was talking about the 'wet' coming, due any day but it hadn't arrived. Luckily we were at Timber Creek and the truck got back before that.

**Tell us about your arrival in Timber Creek?**

Well we got there late in the afternoon and instead of going up

09:30 to where we were based, Timber Creek, depot which we took over, there's about 3 miles to the police station, well we camped that night at the police station at Timber Creek. And that's what Timber Creek was I think, don't think there'd be any more than 2, 3, might have been 4 buildings at the time but not

10:00 anything like it is today. There were an independent company; I don't know what it was. I got an idea well I know, it was the 3rd Independent Company, they were there, what they were doing, I've got no idea, much the same as we were doing I guess, just 'loafing' around [being idle]. But I suppose there was about 5 or 6 of them, but they left that morning

10:30 on the 2nd of September they left to go back to Katherine. And we took over from them. Our main job when we got to Timber Creek was to start off with. We knew we weren't a fighting unit, it was only

11:00 if the Japanese came, all the powers at be, were expecting them to land in Australia at any moment. But they knew not where, they could have landed anywhere from Cape York Peninsula to down below Broome. And I doubt whether the little area around Darwin, the coast, wasn't wide open to the world. There is no one there apart from maybe a few stockman, or natives, that's about

11:30 all there was in them parts, then. But our main 'idea' [plan] was, we had to set up observation post, and we didn't know where they were going to be or anything. But at Timber Creek we had to get a boat some how or another, you had to get a motor launch and get down to the mouth of the river which was 100 miles, roughly 100 miles from the coast at the time.

12:00 And our Lieutenant, Travis by name, he's a young bloke, I'd say he'd be younger than me at the time, he went over to Wyndham to see if he could get a boat launch at Wyndham, and he sailed the boat from the mud flats at Wyndham which I believe, we christened it 'the Bondi'

12:30 from Bondi [New South Wales], Travis himself came from the Bondi area, and we christened the boat that name. It had a 3 cylinder 'Invincible' engine in it but it was back to front, instead of the crank around right clockwise, it had it anti clockwise, which I couldn't do. when I say

13:00 I couldn't do, I had to, but I doubt whether I could anyway. And it took us about 3 or 4 days to clean the boat up because it had mud and god knows what in it. Up in the Wyndham meatworks the boat was, at the time. We salvaged it and done the engine up and got it going, loaded on and brought it back to Timber Creek, took two days to get it from Wyndham

13:30 to Timber Creek.

**Where did you live when you were in Timber Creek?**

We took over the old depot. Now I should tell you the name of the depot was actually named Timber Creek Depot, for far up the Victoria River, shipping came like, and it was a depot for stations around there, the Victoria River

14:00 Station was the main one, but Bradshaw was another, near this station they all got their supplies brought up by ship, inland through this port at Timber Creek and was left at this shed, well we took over this shed.

**What was the landscape like at Timber Creek?**

Oh much the same as any part of the 'Kimberleys' [Kimberley ranges] more or less. It was undulating

14:30 scrubland, scattered here and there with a few little, not a great deal of timber, but it was timbered, but no 'millable' [of saw-mill quality] timber though. And it was just like ordinary scrub, just like you see photos of the timber areas about today.

**What equipment did you bring from Katherine?**

Well, the convoy took equipment for all 'B' Company they went down, but we had five platoons stationed at Katherine, went no further. '5' platoon went no further than Timber Creek, the other platoons went on further into Wyndham itself, and Forest River,

15:30 there was platoons there and I suppose we had, well I don't know if we had 3 months or 6 months supplies for food, ammunition and what ever we need. Which was very little.

**What did your duties involve at Timber Creek?**

Well it was to set up observation posts and our platoon,

- 16:00 '5' platoon set up, after we got the boat, set up observation post at Bradshaw station which was evacuated by the owners, they just moved out. The cattle that was still on the property and we had to find a place to put them. The river, we had no idea where it was, we had no idea about water, and on our
- 16:30 very first trip down there, there was seven of us, seven of us in the boat, besides what building material we could scrape up for the platoon that was going to set up down the river. But eventually it took us two days to get down, when we eventually did find a spot, the place we called 'Bottle-Glen' and since
- 17:00 '91 I was up in Darwin, and I was with this friend. Ray Thatcher, who owned the pub, passed away last fortnight, he and I went to Darwin and we eventually got the place to be named 'Bottle-Glen'. It was just official notification, I'll show you later. The first night going down, we'd never been on the river before, but none of us knew, no idea where we were going.
- 17:30 It was good sailing as far down as Bradshaw [sheep] station, about 18 miles west of Timber Creek. We got over to our station, the homestead there, which consisted of, a very large corrugated iron building, beautiful to have running water, hard to believe but it was running water
- 18:00 there, there is a spring up high in the ridges connected by pipeline, about a 2 inch pipeline coming down the mountain, slide down, running day and night. At night time the water was pretty near freezing, or it was bloody cold anyway, and it was midday when the sun got to it
- 18:30 heated it up while it was coming down, it was that hot you couldn't even stand under it, the hot water. So we had the hot water laid on up there, thought it was 'home from home'. Also equipment, beds, when I say beds, there was no bedding, no blankets, just bedding. There was a rough bed, made of rough bush timber which were laced
- 19:00 with a grill, most of the beds were made of this. And besides that, there was quite a few books he left behind. As I say, it was a station that had been evacuated, so we took over the homestead. Then we went down towards the mouth of the river. We were supposed to go down to the mouth of Blunder Bay, or get there, but we had no idea there'd be water, so every mile or
- 19:30 two down, we had to pull into streams and find water. This was about midday on the second day and we found this water 'soak' [hole] at Bottle-dam and set up camp there, was only there for about 3 months and the army made us shift down, shifted us down further, we had to go right down the coast
- 20:00 to find out and eventually we found a plentiful supply of fresh water down the coast at a place called Blunder Bay. And that was right on the coast.

#### **How many of you were working together?**

I think it was 24 of us in that '5' platoon, but it was split,

- 20:30 3 sections [around eight men a section] of the platoon, we had the two OPIPs [Observation Post Intelligence Post] and then we had to have another OPIP, back at base at Timber Creek. The observation post as I say, sometimes its four sometimes its five.

#### **How did you fill your time during the day?**

- 21:00 Well to start off, the signal. We always had a signaller to operate the wireless equipment we had and he had to be there on call for every two hours, to keep contact with headquarters, so he was there, he couldn't go out but the rest of the time we just wandered around the bush and did what? Marking out fresh water places.
- 21:30 Our main duties was to find out the location of the land, more or less, fresh water, I mean to say, we can't do without fresh water, in case the Japanese would come, we were to retreat from one water hole to another, we'd find water anyway.

#### **How did you find water holes?**

- 22:00 Just walked, it's a matter of walking, we had no horses that early stage and we just walk up to say about 10 mile in one direction one day and about 10 mile the next day, or whatever we could and just come up on it and we got to know places that way.

#### **What did you eat?**

Ah say we had

- 22:30 more meal times than we had meals, several times we ate once a day. We hadn't much, one meal would do you most of the day. 'Bush tucker' [wild food] most of the time. That's as far as 'fresh' goes, meat or anything like that. Fishing, shooting a duck or two, we lived fairly well.

- 23:00 **Tell us more about the signals, what did that involve?**

Well I never was a 'sig'. But they were equipped with radio, oh dear, I forget the name of it all, WR4 [AR8 radio], no, oh forget, the equipment was about that long

- 23:30 about 2 feet long, something like that, you could transmit and receive. You were long and short wave,

mostly short wave they used. So you could speak or Morse code. Morse code was used nearly all the time, and each message was sent away, was sent in code, and the code changed practically every day of the week.

24:00 But he had to be called, the 'sig' had to be called every two hours to take or receive a message, or to give a sign that they were still there. In all our cases in Timber Creek or Bradshaw, we kept to one position, but at 'B' company where they carried the radio equipment around with them

24:30 on the pack horses. We never carried it at all that way.

**What did the signal stations look like?**

Just like an aerial, they set up the aerial, you had to have compass to get the right bearing, it was based back at Katherine, just put it up, adjust it through the trees

25:00 nearly, I'd say 90 percent of them, through the trees.

**how much time did you spend on the river?**

Merv Guymer was the corporal in charge of the boat, I was really his crew. We used to

25:30 make journeys down the river, I'd say every fortnight, particularly until such time I was taken off and I was replaced. But Merv stayed all the time with the boat.

**Can you tell me about one of your journeys down the river?**

The first night down the river, we left Bradshaw station, 18 miles west of Timber Creek.

26:00 We left there with the going-out tide. Late in the afternoon and that was practically dark, we felt it 'grounded' [foundered] and somebody jumped overboard, we knew it was on the mud flat and

26:30 by this time the tide kept going out, it was in the great big mud flat and we had nowhere to camp that night. And there was seven of us, no we had to get what building materials we could get, to put up. We had it, and our three months supply, the first night was the roughest night I ever spent. But the

27:00 only time we did strike a mud flat. I suppose we made about, a place called Curiosity Point, we made search for water there and no hope at all. We knew it was too far up the river but we couldn't find water. We went out to

27:30 where we knew a place, Bottle-Glen as we called it, just about opposite the Blue River. And we had to dig for it then, and what water we got was good water, but later on we struck a lot of trouble.

**How did you know where to dig for water?**

Just getting what you see, see a 'soak' and dig

**28:00 Can you describe that for me?**

Oh, get to dig? A sandy bottom of a creek bed. There is all dry creeks when the wet weather hadn't started. And as they, the soak, when I say it was good water, it was a milky colour or if it settles a long while it's quite clear but it was milky coloured

28:30 water. But we got there, we stayed there, we'd get a 4 gallon bucket of water without any trouble at all. But once the rain start coming, they start a hell of a lot of things, because as soon as the rain come down off the ridges and down the creek, only 5 minutes and you had to dig the bloody thing out again, It was all filling up, drop of rain

29:00 used to fill up with sand and gravel that would wash down.

**Tell us about the rest of that journey?**

Anyway we stayed over night at Bottle-Glen, not on the good water, on this water and we thought we'd spend another day out towards the mouth of the river - so we proceeded further down on the going out tide,

29:30 the reason was, without the going out tide, the motor was punching against the tide, you'd get a standstill. And we camped on the bank down towards a place in the river called

30:00 Whirlpool Reach and that night we went to get water and we found out what water we did have in jerry cans and things. We'd lost 90 percent of it, it had leaked over night. The cans had bust or gone sour, I don't know but they sprung a leak, I suppose it was the knocking about they received. And we headed out there was 7 of us as I say, in the boat

30:30 and we were out of water and we had to retreat to Bottle-Glen to get a fresh supply of water, it was the only water we knew. We spent another night at Bottle-Glen and we continued down to Blunder Bay and was looking for water down there but we couldn't find it. We spent a full day down there



- 31:00 running short of water and the only place that we knew was back about 15 to 20 mile back up the river and we had to get back up there, up the river. So we decided we'd make Bottle-Glen our observation post. It wasn't satisfactory to the army and we got orders after that,
- 31:30 two months down there, we got orders that we had to shift the post down to Blunder Bay, right on the coast. Eventually we did find water but there was hell of a lot of mud flats and things there but we found a fresh water creek running by. This time the weather had broken, but the water was there. And it ran into this water hole, and that made Blunder Bay
- 32:00 camp there. And in '91 that's only a few years back now. I went back, Ray Thatcher and I went back up there and we had the use of a helicopter supplied by locals, some agriculture towns used to muster [the cattle] with helicopters
- 32:30 well they lent us a helicopter for a full day so we went back there, and Ray and I was down there trying to locate the camp, when the army evacuated there, we buried a lot of hand grenades and 303 rounds things. We buried them and as far as I know they are still up there today, but we
- 33:00 couldn't locate them then.

**Can you describe for us what its like in the 'wet'?**

Bloody wet. The 'wet', I was only there for the '42, '43 'wet', the only time I spent up in the territory. That wasn't a very big 'wet' at all but everything was flooded

- 33:30 as far as compared to the dry weather, it was flooded, mostly its would be a storm followed by light rain, you'd have to be in the light rain practically hours before you get really wet yourself. It was more of a drizzle, that's what I found
- 34:00 up there. but when you get a storm you get a storm, maybe 3 or 4 inches at a time, it just pelted down. Rivers that came up and they'd no sooner be up, than they would be down again.

**During weather like that what did you do?**

Just amused ourselves the best way we could.

**What did you do to amuse yourselves?**

- 34:30 Oh dear, don't ask me, although I was there.

**What did you think of the Japanese?**

Well luckily I had very little to do with the 'Japs' [Japanese]. All my army experience was in non-combatant units, we were told when we first left base at Katherine,

- 35:00 when you first encounter the Japs, we were not to interfere with them at all, just to keep them under observation as best you can and obtain what information we could by sight and we weren't to attack them at any time, and if we were attacked, we were to defend ourselves. We could have done well as far as
- 35:30 that goes, because we were reasonably armed. So for a small crowd, we were fairly well armed. But we'd be hopeless, cause it would only be twenty four against whatever number of 'Japs' there were at the time. I didn't have anything to do with 'Japs' not even when I got to New Guinea, although I had a fair bit to do with the locals up in New Guinea.

**When you were in Timber Creek, how much did you have to do with the local aboriginals?**

- 36:00 Timber Creek, we knew nothing, well what they were, they were domesticated, the police had been at Timber Creek many years before and they had nearly all, sometime or another, they had been working for the police at Timber Creek. And the police station there was commanded by
- 36:30 Gordon Stock. Stock was the man in charge, and Ted Fitz , which you may have come across his name in Idriess books if you are interested, Fitz's name is often reported. But they used to come up to the camp every now and again. They 'd come up there and we got them to do a round Timber Creek itself, cleaned out
- 37:00 the huts for us, do washing and things like that, and mostly when we were out. On one occasion I had to, when I was in Wyndham when we went to salvage the boat, 'the Bondi', I got myself a couple of pairs of sheets cause blankets were too
- 37:30 uncomfortable, too hot. So I had the pleasure of having sheets I pinched out of the place at Wyndham. I spilled a bottle of ink over one of the sheets and made a hell of a mess. And one particular occasion, I got me sheet and gave them to a, what will we say, a 'Gin', a black woman
- 38:00 and asked her to wash it. And she looked me straight in the face and she said, "You probably clumsy bugger" and anyway she was particular about mostly cleaning up places. We had very little to do other than that. As for 'guides'and all, well, at 'B' company, I don't think many places in 'B' company did use black guides taken them around. But over at

38:30 'A' company they had, used to do it more than we did.

**Tell us about your mates?**

What to tell about, they are mates. There was five of us from the pioneer days eventually got to timber Creek. There was about, I suppose, about twelve

39:00 I think it was, from the pioneers got into the 'Nackeroos'. But oh Timber Creek, five, six, be six of us that got into '5' platoon, the others were back in Katherine most of the time. But I've kept in close contact with some, and ever since we got out of the army. And

39:30 at the present time I only know two of them alive, beside myself now. Most of them were, two I know turned ninety before me, died. Jack Muldoon he's

40:00 in his 80s. So there was three of us over ninety who died, all at, more or less the same time and I kept in close contact, even through Beryl and I went across to Perth, and reached an old mate over there.

40:30 And his daughter been, visited us twice since, up at Armidale and Tamworth. Those amongst us, they were all gone but I used to go up there quite often. I suppose every couple of months I'd take a trip up there for a weekend

## Tape 4

00:31 **Can you tell us what the 'Nackeroos' were trying to do?**

Several people say that, that's all you did, you'd call your self 'diggers'. But the 'Nackeroos' was set up shortly after the fall of Singapore and

01:00 the army crowd after 'Herring', I think his name was, a gentleman from Darwin. they expected the Japanese to have invaded Australia any time and you could say that, Cape York down to Broome all that top end, no one at all, a Jap could have sent a crew in or could have sent the bigger part of an army in

01:30 and they had no idea and the only thing to, or they had to go by, was rumour from the blacks. And they said anything. And it was decided that they would set up an independent company consisting of about 500 men. So that's all we were. And to make us mobile

02:00 especially over in Arnhem land and the gulf [of Carpentaria]country, we had horses, now we hadn't the horses ourselves at Timber Creek, but the country there was, well it wasn't that wild, and it wasn't as wild as the gulf country but, it was not suitable for horses as much.

02:30 We made very little of them, well Timber Creek made very little of the horse we had. Only one patrol I went on, when we shifted into wind, went down past Turkey Creek, that's about as far as I got, as far as that way possible, for horses. But I was on the 'marine light', on the observation post. Now there is observation posts

03:00 at the Timber Creek, we only had the two, down the river. And the reason why we kept to the river mostly, was that the river was navigable for roughly about 100 miles up the river on a 'king' tide, you'd come up as far as you could. And the river on the other side, on the eastern side they could go up the river much the same.

03:30 And the 'Nackeroos' along the two rivers of the Victoria, I don't think they did much more than boat on the river keeping a look-out there. But the other places that they had, the observations posts, they were mostly on the coastline.

**What were the observation posts looking for?**

Whatever we could see. We had to report,

04:00 and then we moved very little, and even if an airplane moved over, we'd report that. Shipping on the eastern coast, got no idea if there was anything, but on the western coast, see not many but the ships were going by you had to report that, no idea at all

04:30 what it was. And after you did report it, they never reported back and told you what it was. So we didn't know if they were friend and foe of what we did see.

**Did that bother you that you never knew if you were doing the right or wrong thing?**

No, well it didn't because it didn't matter much to us, I suppose as far as that goes. That was only to army like, back to Katherine base, and the base, toward the end, was shifted from Katherine

05:00 up to a place called Manton Dam, only just a few miles south of Darwin itself our base was, towards the later part, like. But it made no matter, as far as out in the bush, what they were. Its just a 'forewarning'

army, and I suppose that went straight onto headquarters I suppose. Don't ask me

05:30 what happened to it.

**What sort of supplies did you get, and how often?**

Well supplies came up practically about three about every third month. Very seldom did you get your beer supply - used to get consumed before it got down to us, most cases it did.

**So what sort of supplies did you get?**

Mostly tinned stuff

06:00 M&V, meat and vegetables.

**Was it enough to last you?**

Oh it was nearly always short of tea and sugar. But that didn't make much difference to me because I don't take sugar in hardly anything.

**How did you supplement the rations that you got?**

06:30 Um, mostly be by fishing line, or shooting birds like ducks and swans. A Wallaby every now and again. I think the 'east' platoon was allowed one shoot a month to get fresh beef. And if you shot it you had to take the 'brand' [off the cow] and the station owner would get compensated by the army for it.

07:00 But no doubt at Timber Creek we used to shoot what ever we wanted and never reported it, apart from the camel, nobody knew about it because they wouldn't know what they had, most station people.

**What sort of dangers were there in your environment?**

Oh,

07:30 how to 'keep out of the river, from swimming', I know that. The crocodiles were there, but as it was, as it turned out, it was luck I suppose that the 'Japs' didn't come, we had no danger at all.

**What about snakes?**

Oh there was plenty of snakes and things, the majority was bush-born and if you were bush born,

08:00 well I wasn't bush-born, but I lived at the edge of [country] and there was a bush down there those days, and snakes and things didn't worry me, didn't enter me life.

**What about alcohol?**

When we got to Wyndham, the supply was plentiful but other places, well as today, you got without, we were supposed to get a ration from the army, but as I say

08:30 by the time it got out to Timber Creek and wherever you were, there was none of it left. The blokes that brought it out, they had the 'luxury' [a good thing], double ration for them.

**How did that make you feel?**

Bloody 'cranky' [angry] at times. No, at Wyndham there was plenty, we got to Wyndham and the pub in Wyndham that catered, I don't know what the population

09:00 might have been fifty or so, but there was a police station, PMG [postmaster generals office or 'post' office] department, two small stores, and the meat works, and the population that all worked at the meat works only worked for a couple of months of the year. So there was a floating population there, but there is two pubs in Wyndham, well we got there and the pub in town

09:30 in Wyndham, I suppose it was half stocked, when we came in there, and I mean to say, you can guess what happened. Out the 'six miles' there, is a bloke named Arthur Brewton. He had the property, he had the 'Six Mile', well actually there was the 'Six Mile', where Wyndham is today. He had a pub there and beer was four and six [old Pence] a bottle

10:00 and he, well he used to make a trip in the old truck he had, into Derby to get a supply I suppose, every fortnight.

**When you were out at Timber Creek, how did you deal with the isolation of that life?**

Some of them were affected but it never affected me, I didn't worry at all

10:30 about it and I never did, my mates from up in the tableland there, at Guyra and Tamworth, they were country bred, they were alright, made it easy for them.

**What sort of man made a good 'Nackeroo'?**

Oh

11:00 other than the 'sigs', they were mostly city born, but the rest of them, oh, country men you might as well say. You see luckily we had, the ones who were at Timber Creek, he was a shearers cook before,

11:30 so he got the job of being cook and he did most of the cooking most of the time. That's at Timber Creek itself, just our post, and we took it in turns.

**What sort of meals did the shearers cook provide for you?**

Well Ray Price used to dish up a good meal, what was available for him, was good meal

12:00 but it was mostly stew. But it got to that way, at Timber Creek, instead of having army brisket and that stuff, we got, I don't know where he got it from, but I know he had some meat too, we used to get hops and we used to make our own bread. Camp oven, mostly cooked in a camp oven or it was

12:30 Bradshaw station, they had a proper bush stove there, so they had good cooking facilities there. Timber Creek had good cooking facilities too, as far as that goes.

**What was your standard of hygiene like?**

Fairly good I'd say. At Timber Creek the water supply was very hard, well-water, well I suppose

13:00 it would be about 20 feet deep, and what depth of water it had, I don't know what, but it was very hard, we got soap and to lather, it was very hard, but we got used to it. But at Timber Creek, the police station was roughly about three miles from the depot

13:30 and they had, I wouldn't say a lot, I suppose about four or five of the best of cattle and they used to graze mostly around anywhere within the three mile, once it got that way, we got some of the cattle and we used to milk them and we always had plenty of fresh milk, as well my job...

14:00 the bloke, he's up at Caloundra at the present time, he might have been a dairy farm, and we used to milk them and get fresh milk. So we did fairly well. I'd say better than most blokes.

**What things or luxuries did you miss the most up there?**

Well if you ask

14:30 a drinking man he'd probably say beer, I'd say beer.

**Did you ever feel like you had been forgotten up there?**

Many a time. Many a time. Mail delivery you never knew when it was coming, you missed that. Mostly the mail we got at Timber Creek came by Eddy Kennel, and airway. he worked from Alice Springs Eddy Kennel did and he

15:00 used to visit most of the stations up in the Kimberley area. And he had a routine flight and he'd bring it over, but without mail, to Alice 'springs he'd pick it up, 'might send it out to Katherine' as I suppose it would have done. Cause it was all addressed to the 'Nackeroos'. He reckoned, he rendered a fairly regular basis [service]

15:30 but the weather used to hold him up and things like that.

**So you sometimes had a feeling that you'd been forgotten. How did that affect the morale of the men?**

Oh I don't think it affected the morale, it made you feel 'down in the dumps'.

**How did you deal with that?**

16:00 Oh ran around and looked for a bottle of beer, if you could find one. It was very scarce at Timber Creek.

**What contact did you have with the two policeman at Timber Creek?**

Good Old Ted Fitz used to up, oh practically every night, he had an old Studebaker [make of car], it was an old vintage age, like a very vintage model

16:30 about was nearly always 'flat', so he'd bring about four or five black fellas up with him, like 'police black's' would come up and get him out of the 'flat' and give him a push and push it that way.

**How did the police help you in what you were trying to do?**

Oh they gave us use of their 'pedalled' ['powered' by foot pedals] wireless set. Connected from the police station

17:00 whenever we wanted - to the police station, if you wanted to send a telegram or an urgent message to the folks at home, you'd go down and they'd 'pedal' it through for you. They kept you fairly well contacted that way. Unbeknown to the army, cause they probably would have stopped us doing it. but Gordon Scott, he's a territory war man and 'Tessy' was a New Zealander and 'Fitz' is

17:30 often writing about him in the [Ion] Idriess books.

**You said there was a lack of beer, did anybody try and make there own 'grog'?**

Not successfully.

**What did you try?**

They tried to make spirits a couple of times at Timber Creek, George had, but no success. I tasted

18:00 stuff in New Guinea that was home-brew but it would kill, if you 'downed' it!

**What were they using to try and make alcohol?**

Well at Timber Creek we had hops, like, brewed out of that, but no I never ever tried to make it . Kept it for bread, what hops that we had.

**What a typical daily routine for you at Timber Creek?**

18:30 Well just 'moping' about trying to get the 'lay of the land', when I say the 'lay of the land', that would be ten mile either way from you. And it was really about what it was. Timber Creek, we did it all on foot but most places they did have horses.

19:00 **How far away from you were the observation posts?**

Ah, Timber Creek we camped at, had the observation at the post, and we had to go out and work, at Bradshaws, we had no set place for observation there, we just camped on the side of the river and

19:30 Ikymbon River, we oh it was about 70 yards from the river, we had a plain view up and go down. Although it wasn't the main Victoria River it was about a mile away from the main 'Vic' River. Wyndham we had observation post at Wyndham it was up at the back of the old township. And it used to be

20:00 mounted, the observation post would be, under 24 hours a day like, connected to the telephone down there, to the radio. Up in Cape Dussejour, that's out at Wyndham, up the coast from Wyndham about 60 odd miles away from Wyndham, when I was there, we had 24 hours a day guard up there. From our tent, our camp

20:30 at the foot of the mountain, the observation post was, I suppose 600 yards away.

**How many men would have been at an observation post?**

Most only four.

**And how were they rotated on duty/**

We rotated part of the 'sig', the 'sig' had, cause he was the only man that could use the 'sig', he never took duty as observation but the corporal

21:00 and 'senior' [officer], the 'sig' that made five, although I said four a moment ago, but five most places were, and we used to rotate to suit ourselves. I'd say at Wyndham when I was there, we kept the strictest observation post, the army

21:30 couldn't have wished for a better one, we were there all the time, for the army, all the time. Down at the river, at Bradshaw, more isolated, while I was walking around, never far off the river, no matter where you were. Although you might be two or three hours away to get back to the radio, in the event something did happen, luckily it never did.

22:00 **Did you get any leave?**

No, no leave when I was up there, until I came home.

**Did that bother you?**

No, not at all.

**What about contact with women?**

Well that's the question because there were no women there. there were oh

22:30 I won't mention their names or anything, there were occasion, you know 'mix up' [got together] with the natives, but very, very rarely.

**So some of the men in your unit went with the native women?**

Yes, I'd say a few did, but that is really a few.

**Was that frowned upon?**

23:00 Well I think, I know, I was going to say, you'd be 'arseholed out' if you were found out, but it wasn't the case because I know of one case only, a case of venereal disease but, in one case. He went to hospital

and that's how the army knows as much about it, as I do. They know more about it.

**Why were you moved to Wyndham?**

23:30 There's a platoon, there's a 'B' company, oh that was, about May, June '43 we all at

24:00 observation posts had to swap around like, to get to know others. I knew Timber Creek area, I had never ever been to Forest River mission area, I 'd never been there, I haven't been there yet. But those at the Forest River mission observation, never been to Timber Creek, get to know the whole area. Well by the time that we left up there

24:30 I, and not only me, but we all had a fairly good idea of the areas themselves and that, waterholes, natives. We'd 'draw' a waterhole [mask a map]. If a bloke had never seen it before in his life, he had to go and find it himself again. Water is our main goal, well I considered it was anyway, that's the way I felt.

25:00 **Why was it important?**

Well you can't live long without water. You had to know where you got it. And if the 'Japs' had attacked and forced us back, with only a little, no effort at all. If the 'Japs' come, just ten to twelve man come, and come in greater force then we'd have to retreat all the time. But we were to retreat all the time,

25:30 if there was a Japanese invasion, we were to retreat and to report everything that happened as we were going back, as we were going, more or less like that.

**So you were locating all the resources should you have to retreat?**

Yes, should we have to retreat we would know the Wyndham area, Timber Creek area, if the 'Japs' would come up. And the blokes out at Wyndham, he wouldn't have known anything about the Ord river area or

26:00 anything at all. We more or less had to get to know the country.

**Do you think that if the Japanese had invaded the area, they would have been very successful?**

Ah no, the 'Japs' wouldn't have been, but it could have 'wiped' us, the 'Nackeroos' right out, it could have done that, because if he had of invaded, he had to keep his lines of communication open all the time, or if that was cut off

26:30 like at the Coral Sea battle [battle of the Coral Sea, 4th -8th May 1942] and that's when the 'Japs' went back from then on. See Milne Bay [battle of Milne Bay, July-September, 1942], they fought about the same time that I was up at Timber Creek. From then on the 'Japs' went back all the time. See if they had have got through Milne Bay and the Coral Sea and invaded the north of Australia, well I don't think there would have been a 'Nackeroo' left to tell the tale.

27:00 **But do you think that landing in that part of the country with a large number of men would have been supportable?**

Well from what I've been reading, I don't think the Kimberley area, well I'm talking about the Kimberley and Victoria River area, and I don't think that was near as harsh as New Guinea. And they visited New Guinea, so I suppose, but they were in New Guinea with so many numbers,

27:30 our outpost, say four or five men, would they?

**What facilities were there at Wyndham?**

The facilities, the depot, a couple of sheds, that's all there was, besides the police station.

**And the pub?**

No, no pub, oh at Wyndham you say?

28:00 **What facilities were there at Wyndham?**

Oh there's a meatworks, two jetties, one at the meatworks and one into town. The town as I say, is only just one street, oh I suppose it would be round about 200 yards, you'd be out of the town then, and oh, it might have been about 15 or 20 buildings.

28:30 The police station was there, in Wyndham itself, they had a hospital there, no one, when we were there, there was no civilians at all. Well when I say no civilians, no oh, there's be about five civilians in Wyndham when we got there, all the time we were there. All the

29:00 government offices, the post office, court house, police station. Yes there was a church there. What denomination, I've got no idea. Ah, and up at the meatworks, the offices at the meatworks, actually there is more buildings up at the meatworks,

29:30 two mile up of Wyndham, further up the gulf.

**What had happened to all the civilians?**

Most of them went back to Western Australia, went to Perth.

**Why?**

The town was evacuated, I don't think Wyndham was ever bombed by the 'Japs'

30:00 although the aerodrome was, the 'Japs' had made a 'push' [started an offensive] the same time as Darwin [March, 1942]. There is a ship damaged out to sea that came into the meatworks jetty. Tied up to the meatworks jetty, and it used to be sitting on the flat, low tide and tide would come up and it must have sprung a leak and anyway, it sunk at the jetty.

30:30 I should remember, the Coomaloo [?] or very much a name like that, was the name of the boat. But ah,

**What was the pub like?**

Ah the pub was, the standard up there, those days was a fairly good, what you say,

31:00 you'd find out, in a country town in Australia, the pub there. But it was evacuated, the pub in Wyndham, out at Six Mile well, Arthur Brewton, he had the pub, he never left Wyndham there. And this woman she claimed to be his wife but I don't think she was. They never left Wyndham all the time I was there but that was out at Six Mile, at the aerodrome.

31:30 **So you think standards of marriage were dubious out there?**

Oh everything is dubious up there.

**It was a frontier environment?**

Yes it was a real frontier, it was.

**Did that worry you?**

No, not at all, I had no worries at all while I was up there.

32:00 **How was your own romance proceeding at this time?**

By correspondence only.

**How often would you get to exchange letters with Beryl?**

Oh, he [Eddy Kennel] used to come with four or five letters at a time and much the same background, but all out letters were censored up there. You could go down to the police station and get an envelope to say that it was censored, but it was legal, you could do it.

32:30 The police would give you an envelope, oh what the hell they call it? An uncensored letter, they weren't censored, they were more or less, well I did anyway, write it as a private letter. No one knew, but if you were getting censored you kept it fairly simple, word here and word there.

33:00 But I had a mate that used to write to me from New Guinea and he's out at the beach at Woolgoolga today, he used to write to me and he would write about two lines and then he did a little drawing, he's a born artist, Tom was. And you'd have a look at it, you'd think it was comic strip he was writing. I wish I had of kept a couple of his letters but I never did.

33:30 **Were you worried about Beryl being back here?**

Ah practically she'd say, no I don't think I worried about her as much as she worried about me. Oh no, we'll leave that alone.

34:00 **So you were courting by correspondence?**

yes, ah. I was courting Beryl before I enlisted and I'd also left everything I had in my bank account and 'chequing' to my mother and I gave mother the authority to do what she wanted to do, like.

34:30 Ah before I went away to the army, Beryl and I often spoke about marriage but...

35:00 I suppose we spoke about it, but we weren't understanding anything about it at the time. And anyway, I wrote to her, while I was at Timber Creek,

35:30 I think it was a t Timber Creek, or a month in Wyndham at the time, and I wrote and told Beryl to, I suppose I wrote to Mum at the same time, I told Mum the same, what I was doing and I told Beryl,

36:00 **So you proposed to her by letter?**

I proposed, I told her to go to Grafton and pick out the engagement ring.

36:30 And when 'B' company was disbanded in the end of '43, I was sent to Sydney on leave,

- 37:00 and for redrafting. I was only home for 28 days leave, I think it was 28 days leave, I think I had then. But I was only back home about a week or so and we were married then. In Woolgoolga. And I
- 37:30 was redrafted to the 42nd [pioneer] battalion at St Ives, that's when I got there, I was a married man then, 2 'bob' a day [two old pounds]. Then eventually I was sent up to Singleton and was there for a while
- 38:00 and I had a 'gutful' [got sick of] of Singleton, just being with Mum up here, and they are down there, and Beverley was born. And anyway when the camp asked for volunteers to go to New Guinea to take the 'front march' [to step up for]. I heard the order and I took about 6 paces, there and then, bloody quick-smart [straight away]. And that's how I got to New Guinea. And when
- 38:30 I got up to New Guinea, I was posted at Lae base headquarters, or a mile or two away from army headquarters.

**Why was 'B' company disbanded?**

The threat to Australia was over then by the end of '43. And they decided to keep the 'Nackeroos' only on in the gulf area, that's the Gulf of Carpentaria, they went pretty near up to, oh what's the name of that place,

- 39:00 them fellows had rougher country than we did. But their headquarters, in Charters Towers, were 'A' Company and, no 'C' company, 'A' company and 'C' Company, their headquarters were Charters Towers then, which is only up in from Cairns.
- 39:30 **How did you feel about the decision to disband the part of the ,Nackeroos, that you were in?**
- Well I think most of us would have liked to have been up there because it really was isolated, it was. We used to travel around, well, under Jack Travis, our Lieutenant, he was more or less, like he was only a young man, he liked to,
- 40:00 well he didn't put his authority on, he didn't 'boss us about' or anything. He was rather strict, you know wouldn't let us go away, but the Gulf country there, they used to go on patrol, three or four blokes, all in the gulf country. Up the Roper River they used to go away for 4 or 5 nights, maybe a week at a time.
- 40:30 Just two fellows walking around, on patrol. But Travis never allowed us to do that. More or less, you had to be back the same day you started to walk. So he didn't give us the freedom as much as they had over there.

**You still felt that you were having a reasonably good time up there?**

I was, yes, we did have a reasonably good time.

- 41:00 **Were their men who would have preferred to be fighting, as infantry, in New Guinea?**
- Oh there were times, there were times when the, not from our area, but from the river areas, you might not believe it, and I don't, but it was 'A' company, they 'shot through'['escaped'] up the Roper River and pinched a 3 ton truck,
- 41:30 and drove from there to Brisbane, and give themselves up to the 'Provosts'[military police] and the 'Provosts' wouldn't believe that they come all that distance. And anyway, when they found out who they were and what they were, that they were telling the truth. And the 'Provosts' turned around and said, "Head back", and they sent then back to the Roper River.

## Tape 5

- 00:31 **Your nickname is 'Peter' but your real name is John. Why is that?**
- Nearly everybody asks me that question. I only know what Mum told me and I guess its correct, but as I said in the early part, I was born in Ballina and we lived up at the top end of Uralba, I don't know about ten mile away from Ballina
- 01:00 and Mum had only bought me home a couple days, and was only a very few days after she brought me home from hospital, and she noticed, or heard someone out in the kitchen, my old grandfather, Dad's father, they lived in adjoining farms that we had, in that day. And Mum asked him,
- 01:30 "What brought you over this morning?" and he said, "I came over to see little Peter" and it stuck with me ever since. So I guess it's fairly well correct, that's how I got the name Peter. The only time I used my official name was anything like these interviews or any business deals. I always go under my correct name. I was naturally, always Peter.
- 02:00 And even when all my grand kiddies and everything, Mum told them this morning, they never call me



grandad or grandfather, its always Pete.

**We were talking about when the 'Nackeroos' were dissolved in 1943. Where did you go after that?**

02:30 That's when I went to the 42nd battalion. I was only going to stop there one day and shoot through, and I met this friend of mine, old school friend of mine, and he talked me into the transport, the 2nd /43rd so I stayed with them, I'd only been married oh

03:00 what was it, oh at that time I'd been married about 6 months, I suppose. And so I stayed there and when our first daughter was born, I was couldn't get out of the damn unit quick enough.

**Why were you so keen to get to New Guinea?**

Oh well, I don't know really why. But this army base, or 'camp life'

03:30 was not what its cracked up to be, its better to be in the field, although I do realise that I have been a very lucky bloke, all me life, as far as army fighting. I've never even seen a bomb dropped in anger, let alone meet the enemy.

**When you were a 'Nackeroo', did you appreciate the physical beauty of the places you were?**

I did, yes I did.

04:00 **What did you love about it?**

Oh the real nature of it, I'd seen a fair part of the world beforehand but it felt like home.

**Did you ever consider moving back to that part of the world?**

I guess I would have done, if Beryl would have said so. Don't know what I would have done, if I had've gone back.

04:30 I've got no idea, most probably 'roustabout' or something like that. But the bananas down here has been rather good to me. And you know, although I'm only a pensioner at the present day, I done all right in my lifetime.

**Tell us about the journey up to New Guinea?**

Talk about what?

**The journey to New Guinea?**

05:00 I went up by boat, I got an idea the name of the boat was 'Nunna',[?] but I'm not sure, we went up from Brisbane. And came back on much the, very near, the same boat, I think we came back on.

**What was your first impression of New Guinea when you arrived?**

05:30 Well it was more 'timbered', or jungle, than the Northern Territory, very much so, but as far as the war goes, it was quite away, I went to Lae. And I don't know where it was, I had a job there to do and I done it, and that was about all that mattered. I was driving

06:00 the truck for the hygiene section of Lae headquarters, and the officer in command in the hygiene section, he was a bit of a 'boy' he was. I rather liked his company and I got on well with him. And he wanted me to go over to Japan with him as a

06:30 'batman' when the war ended. He went but I, I took the opportunity to getting out and coming home instead of going over there.

**What did your duties involve driving the truck for the hygiene section?**

Well it wasn't as much as the name implied, it was mostly going from driving from where I was camped at Lae base to around,

07:00 the different depots picking up disinfectant and god knows what not, I just delivered it to different parts of the Lae area. Some trip might be 15, 20 miles there and back, others might be 3 mile.

**Can you describe the base at Lae?**

Well the base of Lae, what was the name of the river

07:30 where we was camped? Oh its got me beaten now, off hand. We were camped a few hundred yards from the river, anyway at Lae. and I used to get plenty of time, off to go surfing, which I did a fair bit of. And I got around the area fairly well, put it that way.

08:00 Had a few trips up to Nadzab, up in the Markham River be the best part of 50 miles I suppose, had a few jobs up there, had to go up mostly to you'd hardly believe it, I'd take a truck up and bring them back pawpaws. A couple of

08:30 Formosans come up with me, labourers, there'd always be a Sergeant in charge of it of course, I wasn't on my own, but we'd go up there and with the natives help they'd fill the truck up with paw paws and get back into Lae and distribute around the area. And if you say what for; well fresh fruit and what wasn't rip enough to eat, was cooked as vegetables.

09:00 **When you were driving the Formosans did you speak with them?**

Oh yes, we used to walk around and mingle with them, but, they were actually POWs, I had to go around the POW camp and pick a working party up and they behaved rather well. We very rarely ever took any 'Japs' with me.

**What were your thoughts about the Japanese?**

09:30 Well I wouldn't be fit to say, I really never had much to do with them at all.

**You were in a 'chocco' [sl. chocolate soldier - militia] unit? Can you explain the meaning of that?**

Well I suppose you've heard it before in your lifetime. It was mostly, it was young folks, just left school or

10:00 leaving school age, like. And they were recruited they didn't volunteer; more or less called up. That's what I had, and it was only an "N" number instead of "NX" [service number prefix, denotes a conscript over a volunteer]. But I'm not saying anything against them at all, because what I've been reading, they did most of the fighting in the early days in New Guinea.

10:30 **What was your relationship like with the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?**

Beg yours?

**What was your relationship like with the AIF?**

They was all volunteers, everyone in the AIF and I was with me mates, the first mate that I joined the army with, and I really enjoyed most of my lifetime, but I will admit I was one of the lucky ones to go and I suppose if I didn't do it some one else would, so why not take it.

11:00 **What evidence of malaria did you see in Lae?**

Well I'd seen a few, especially around about when I got discharged, like. Coming back and getting a relapse. But the only effect I had, as far as malaria, was taking those 'Atebrin' tablets, I was as yellow as any Japanese there ever was, when I came back.

**Taking the tablets do you experience other side effects?**

11:30 Well I had no side effects, I mean after a while it changes your complexion altogether.

**What sort of food did you eat when you were based in Lae?**

Oh I'd say our meals were quite good, better than what we had in the 'Territory' [Northern Territory], in many ways. In most ways, what we had in the Territory was I suppose

12:00 was up there too, but we done alright. As far as Timber Creek goes, we had fresh milk and used to have those army biscuits, soak them overnight and had milk on then in place of oatmeal and that sort of food. Corn flakes were never in it.

**Who were you writing letters to when you were in New Guinea?**

12:30 Well other than Beryl and family here, I kept contact with friends I had over in Canada, and I quite often I used to receive mail from a 'Yankee' mate of mine who was in the American army, he was in the air force and he was

13:00 Matheson. And he had a rather good life in the army. He was connected with the atomic bombs when they was dropped, he part of that and it nearly sent him 'off his head'. Remember in '76 when I was on the worlds tour, we stayed with him for quite a while and he wasn't normal then.

13:30 I don't know how, it affected his brain I think.

**How long were you in New Guinea for?**

Oh roughly about 6 months, 7 months was all I was there for. I didn't get there for only a few,

14:00 oh it might have been a month before the 'Japs' 'threw it in' [surrendered], and then It was quite a while before I got home.

**How did you hear about the end of the war?**

Oh well like most of us people over there, we had an idea, the report on the wireless, the radio, that the end of the war was coming very shortly and one afternoon

- 14:30 the evening parade, meal time parade our CO [commanding officer] at Lae base he addressed us all and told us, its only his expectations but he thought we would be receiving good news during the night time. And he said, I expect you'd be,
- 15:00 he said, I expect you all to celebrate. It will be an 'open' camp. He says there is two things barred, and he says, use no live ammunition and your AWAS's [Australian Women's Army Service] quarters is definitely out of order. I just didn't know who he was, but
- 15:30 he had a sense of humour about it. I can remember as plain as day.

**How did you celebrate the end of the war?**

Well we ran around kicking up a bit of a noise. I don't think it made much difference, I might have been on night duty. I don't know. can't remember the time. but as far as I know. I don't think I left camp, didn't leave Lae base camp.

- 16:00 There was enough celebration there, you could hear all over the place different noises coming here there and everywhere.

**What as the social life like in New Guinea after your isolation in the Northern Territory?**

Well,

- 16:30 most of the time I was up in the Territory, even with the 'Nackeroos', I don't suppose I met a tenth or not even a tenth of our members. All the time is was in there, but up in New Guinea you did meet many people, or I could get around in the township, every person was a stranger to you. I didn't go
- 17:00 into Lae very much, the camp I suppose, was no more than two mile our of the centre of Lae, Lae base headquarters were. And I was only just around that area but go down to the beach or at night time, I drove around myself, I was a driver and I had a truck, just get in and go.

**You said previously you didn't have your driver's license?**

- 17:30 I haven't got one today either.

**Who taught you to drive?**

Actually when I was on the farm at Tuckombil during the depression years there, I was think it was an, more or less, economic instead of father paying

- 18:00 the youngest brother and I to go to Lismore high school, he bought an old model T Ford and I used to drive that to school the last 2 years, or the last 2 1/2 years, because I left in the middle of the term, I 'chucked it up' [stopped going] I reckon I'd had enough school. My ambition those days was to be a school teacher but I wasn't bright enough in the examinations to go to Armidale
- 18:30 to the teachers college, so I 'chucked it up' mid year.

**While you were in New Guinea did you stay in touch with your friends from the Northern Territory?**

Ah no I didn't, I lost touch with most of them. There's a Sergeant we had, Sergeant Goddard he was supposed to be a Sergeant guide at Timber Creek

- 19:00 I met him once in New Guinea and that was only one time since the 'Nackeroos'. I lost touch with them all, when I got discharged from the army, it wasn't long before I was back again in touch with them all again.

**How much did the people you were with in New Guinea know about the 'Nackeroos'?**

Most

- 19:30 of them had never heard of it. Nearly everyone we met, and even today they ask you, what unit were you in the army, I always say the 'Nackeroos', I always tell them that. And you find out 9 out of 10, even the day after, they don't know who you are talking about or what you are talking about.
- 20:00 But to most of them, we must have been needed or we wouldn't have been up there would we? I don't know what use of the army made of it, what knowledge we did know, get, and messages or signals that went through, was rarely ever replied to,
- 20:30 even the 'sigs' wouldn't get a reply back. But I think the biggest gain the army had of having the 'Nackeroos' up there that they'd have approximately 500 men up there that knew the country. Well I knew Timber Creek area like the back of my hand. And I suppose the others over the Roper River, well they knew they had people that knew the country. And that counts a lot
- 21:00 for open warfare.

**What kind of an area would you cover around Timber Creek?**

Oh about quite a few hundred square miles.

**Did you always get around?**

Well it wouldn't be that many hundred it, can be, I suppose from Timber Creek we got to know a narrow strip of country about 5 miles wide

- 21:30 and down the river, be close to one hundred miles. So we knew the country fairly well, say a couple of miles either side of the river. One hundred miles we knew that like the back of my hand, well I did anyway.

**How did you get around that countryside?**

Well speaking from my own experience, by boat 'the Bondi'.

- 22:00 Merv and I used to go down, we'd go down on our own and we decided we needed to camp for a night. We'd go around and have a look around the country. Mostly on foot and some of the patrols went out to the Fitzmaurice River there. I went on an expedition up to Forest River, not Forest River, Fitzmaurice River

- 22:30 they got another country up that way, the top headquarters of the Vic River. Well not the Vic River either the Ikymbon River.

**When you travelled were you always armed?**

Yes, I can tell you, '5' platoon there was 24 of us.

- 23:00 We had, everyone bar 4, had rifles, the four that didn't have rifles they had 'Tommy' [Thompson sub-machine gun] guns. And I was one that always had a 'Tommy' gun with me and that wasn't nearly as good a gun as the 'Owen' gun [Owen sub-machine gun] but I haven't experienced the 'Owen' gun so I can't say whether or not, but I've often thought since I've been home here, or out of the army,
- 23:30 what in the hell would have happened, if we have needed to use the 'Tommy' guns and the 'Owen' too, as far as it goes, but the 'Tommy' gun can spit out over 700 shots a minutes. And only once in all my time in the Territory was I issued with more than 75 rounds. Otherwise in about 7 seconds and you'd be out of ammunition. And you didn't have a bayonet or anything, I've often thought of that, we were put up there. I never even thought about it.

- 24:00 **What kind of animals did you kill for food?**

Mostly cattle. We had fishing at Vern Station. If we saw any wild, any bulls on the property we could shoot what we liked, they told us that. Cause they were always pretty short of labour and they didn't want the stock to get inbred too much, so if you saw a bull shoot it.

- 24:30 **How often would you do that?**

Well more often than the station owners knew. There's a case at Timber Creek, we went over the Bullo River it's a part of Sarah Henderson's, have you heard of her? Her property, well it was her property but she wasn't even known of the place, when we was up there.

- 25:00 many a time we shot bulls over there and cut off a hind quarter. Take it over the fellows at Blunder Bay and Timber Creek and there was one fellow from Queensland he said, "This is bull meat", that's how particular he was. But fishing we used to get a lot of fish. Barramundi mostly, Catfish you can get them any time you throw a line out,

- 25:30 but at Bradshaw station we did fish a fair bit, with a line. And we were fairly successful when I was at Bradshaw. But most of the time we'd use a hand grenade from our ammunition.

**Can you explain how that works?**

Yes I can. Well

- 26:00 I'll tell you, one Jimmy Marr from Caloundra was with me at the time. I'd been up the day before I visited at Wyndham, we walked around roughly about 6 miles, maybe 7 miles, from the camp, there was a bay, very small bay and we went up there
- 26:30 and it was full of schools of fish in there and we had nothing with us. Jimmy Marr and I went up the next day and he had hand grenades and two 'plugs' [pieces] of gelignite tied on with string on the side of the jetty, and I had to give him all, and we went out and through this bit of a cove, out from Cape Dussejour and bloody near emptied the bay. And all we got was the

- 27:00 trouble of walking up and walking back, we never got a fish. That shows you how they moved about.

**When you shoot a cow, how long did the flesh last for?**

Fresh meat didn't last too long at all. Say not on the nose but it was turning about

27:30 2 days it was good, but we used to make a lot of jerky out of it. You know what jerky is?

**How do you make jerky?**

You get the beef, strip it when its hot and rub coarse salt in it, when I was a t Wyndham we had no trouble, there was tonnes and tonnes of coarse salt up at the meat works, you could just go up there and, needless to say I think nearly every platoon in that area

28:00 had a stash of coarse salt. We didn't profiteer, we just took it from the meatworks.

**How long would the jerky last?**

Oh I seen it made and because I've got sick and tired of eating it and thrown it out and they goes and has a feed with it. And then about a fortnight's time your out of something, and bugger it, you go and look and find jerky again

28:30 brought it back to camp and washed it. So it lasted definitely.

**What kind of cooking facilities did you have?**

Timber Creek fairly good. Bradshaw was not too bad, another places were just open fires. At timber Creek we had stoves, Bradshaw you had

29:00 at the homestead, which had the oven, you cold light a fire underneath, above it and the oven was in between the two fires, like. And camp ovens. When you are using camp ovens, or anyone that had experience, you soon develop a knack for that, and its as good as a stove. You'd

29:30 light rather a big fire to get hot air, dig a hole first and light a fire in the hole. then let it burn down to only coals, then bury the camp oven in the ashes. You could cook a good loaf of bread in camp ovens. Very irregular shape, but still it was bread.

**30:00 In New Guinea what was the situation with food?**

Much the same as the training camps, basically just communal mess hall and the food was..., you used to get up and walk past and they'd serve you up on your plate when you went by, like two plates.

**30:30 When you were in the Northern Territory did you think your body changed with the different living conditions?**

Well I'd say most of them didn't change that much. Of course, I suppose, the 'sigs' were nearly all city or town fellows, they got the job of 'sigs'

31:00 I don't know why, but most of them were. And they were and they'd had quite a different life, but it never affected the blokes for the country I don't think. I'd say it didn't , we seemed to all get fat and thrive on it. But I know when I first enlisted and, Bob and 'Dusty' they enlisted, and they were only in camp for 3 months and they came home and they

31:30 were a couple of stone heavier than when they went into camp. I suppose regular hours and regular meals, got it at home too, but we did alright. Mostly we did anyway.

**What did you do for fresh fruit and vegetables?**

Fresh fruit rarely heard of in the Arnhem [land]. Vegetables were plentiful supply, pumpkin, beans, potatoes.

**In the bush or in New Guinea?**

Well in

32:00 New Guinea it was just a camp, in New Guinea when I was there, say at Bathurst its just as good. In fact we might have got a bit more fruit in New Guinea, we had paw paws and things like that which had to be grown. Up at Timber creek we was lucky that Eddy Kennel used to bring up fruit for us from Alice Springs.

32:30 And I know when he turned up there, he turned up with a couple of cases of mixed fruit, I don't know where he got it from, from the market but he got it in Alice Springs anyway. And he'd take no payment for it when he brought it over. I don't know where he got it from, but no, that was the only fresh fruit we had in the territory. Although in the Territory we did

33:00 grow a few of our own vegetables, mostly pumpkins and squash, also a climbing bean we used to grow plenty of those. And then down at Bradshaw, we had garden at Bradshaw growing all about. But all at Bradshaw was beans I think. Climbing beans, not the ordinary French beans you've got here but climbing beans.

**33:30 You mentioned that the pub in Wyndham was often 'dry'?**

Well the air force was up there. I don't think it was only army there, not in great number but neither was the army in Wyndham. But the stockman and people would come in from the bush, they weren't in

great numbers either but

34:00 beer was not in great quantity, oh a couple of times he ran 'dry'.

**What was your social life like in Wyndham?**

Well there was only one white women there in Wyndham I can recall, oh what's her name? Oh Liz Findleson, her and her husband had a store. And she

34:30 was the only white woman in Wyndham and Arthur Brewton was at the Six Mile pub but she was the only white woman out that way that I knew of.

**Where there many other men around in Wyndham?**

Most were, the police was there of course, the caretaker up at the meatworks, he was there but

35:00 he may as well not be. And a public works, mostly road maintenance, they'd be there over the weekend, or come in on a Friday night and you go late Sunday or Monday morning what ever the time was.

**In New Guinea did you have a lot to do with Americans?**

No, nothing at all.

35:30 **How many people were living on the base in Lae?**

How many was in Lae? There'd be thousands in Lae, but I don't think there was any Americans at all in Lae when I was there. There'd be more up towards Morotai or further on.

36:00 **What sort of condition were the army guys in, in New Guinea?**

Well other than those at Lae base, I only got to see the few that was there, and they more or less, oh it was a, like themselves. When

36:30 war was officially declared finished, there was a lot of troops coming in, passing in from the bush, they come in everywhere, hundreds just passing through, and they were in the holding camps around the place, until such time as they were sent home on leave and discharged. But I think I was up there with about six months, after the war was declared

37:00 over. I was about six months before I got my leave.

**What were you doing in those months the war was declared over?**

Well all the camps had to be kept going, as I say, I was in the hygiene section, things had to be kept tidy, disinfected, mostly malaria control. And a lot of the 'Yanks' up at Lae, instead of

37:30 having a communal garbage, camp they just kept all their messed gear in the water ways and most of my work, working time, was taking working parties out, to clean out the mess, the 'Yanks' left behind. But they got out of the Lae area, those that were there, got out of Lae very quickly after war was declared finished.

38:00 **What were the clean up working parties like?**

Well just speaking from my own experience, only four working blokes, nearly all Formosans like, as I stated earlier. And oh they were the enemy like, but they were just humans like ourselves as far as

38:30 that goes. They had a job to do, so speak to them, make conversation, they didn't know, you didn't know. More or less sign language, 'pidgin' language.

**What sort of contact did you have with New Guinea locals?**

It was out of bounds. I only got to about to know about 2 native people while I was up in New Guinea, that was all

39:00 out of bounds. Got 2 minutes to go.

**What was your trip back to Australia like, after your time in New Guinea?**

Well just laying about waiting for the boat movement. I was given a berth down in the holds of the boat but I slept on the deck every night.

39:30 I was more, in fact I never went down to my bunk from one getting on the boat, until I get off in Brisbane.

**Why?**

Too hot.

**What was it like sleeping on the deck at night?**

Rather cool, you just took one blanket

- 40:00 with you and slept on the boards up on the deck, that's what I did anyway. I wasn't supposed to be doing it but I wasn't the only one, there was hundreds of us sleeping out in the open.
- Did you develop strong friendships in your time in New Guinea?**
- I'd go as far as to say no. In fact I don't know anyone that was up in New Guinea when I was there,
- 40:30 I don't have any of them today I don't think. See I come from the 42nd battalion I come from them and the 'Nackeroos'. The 'Nackeroos' we lived as a more or less a unit or a family, although it was all me. We got to know everyone, when I say everyone there was not that many to know, anyway, there was only 24 strong the 'Nackeroos' we were, at any of the bases, and more or less they were your friends.
- 41:00 **What were your most looking forward to coming home?**
- Getting home to Mum. I'd had four years, I was ready to get home. I had my chance as I say
- 41:30 to go to Sergeant with the hygiene section to go to Japan, after the war was declared over. After the finish of the war rather, and no, I had the chance but I came home.

## Tape 6

- 00:32 **You've talked about Wyndham and Timber Creek, what other parts of North Australia did you serve at?**
- Well actually that's all I did see of that area. And 'B' company had their area to look after.
- At places like Ivanhoe?**
- They were only at the stations, I've passed through Ivanhoe many a time. Vern, Uluru, Ivanhoe. No I never been to Coolibah.
- 01:00 Ah Carlton, and up around the Dusidew[?]
- Did any men on patrols ever get lost or exhausted or lose their way?**
- Yes I can say that they got exhausted, I can recall a couple doing that, but
- 01:30 we were I suppose, really you could say, we was 'lost' from when we started patrol to when we got back. We had an idea we wanted to get there, but I didn't do many patrols at all off the river. But those that did they just went out and came back. And you could nearly say they were 'lost' the whole time.
- Were you ever involved in finding anybody?**
- No, never.
- 02:00 Oh when I say never, ah at the wet of '42, I think we were getting a bit 'tight' as far as 'tucker' [food] goes down at Bradshaw. Now I'm not too sure how many of them, I'd say, well four at least and there would be
- 02:30 no more than five, I don't think. But they were running out of supplies, they didn't know when the 'Bondi' was coming down with more supply, and they had no idea how long they had to last and two of them decided to save 'tucker', two of them walked back and got across the river at Timber Creek the best way they could. Well they came back they walked the 18 mile
- 03:00 back from Bradshaw side of the Vic River, say the northern end, they walked back there, they had the 'flood creeks' to get across, but they didn't have the river. But one bloke, Ray Price, he was 'out of it', heat exhaustion, I don't know what it was, the other fellow Donahue, he came from Durrie, its on the 'Territory' border and Queensland,
- 03:30 out towards Birdsville. He came from there, he was real country man, bush man. And he came back to Timber Creek just at sundown and when he arrived the 'fire' was going, or should I say we heard rifle fire going
- 04:00 Well as I was saying, Ray Price it was, he was a shearers cook and he flaked out. And anyway Donahue, he come from Durrie he came down and he got opposite to where we were at Timber Creek just at sundown and
- 04:30 we had no way of getting to him, the boat, 'the Bondi' at the time, was not serviceable, in fact it was on the border down at Blunder Bay and we had no way of getting him across the creek before the flood. That afternoon we got two empty 44 gallon drums, made a raft
- 05:00 out of it and old Sergeant from up the Tweed river, he and I went across the river and picked him up, it

was the morning after, we picked Donohue up, gave him a meal and walked down the banks of the river and the Sergeant and I walked down to Ray Price and found him, oh a couple of miles behind where he had camped overnight.

05:30 And we gave him a hot meal, when I say it was 'hot meal', it was a lukewarm meal, by the time he got it, but it was a meal for him anyway in the morning. And we more or less had to carry him across, or we had to carry him up to where the raft was and the four of us got on this raft and come across the river. That was the only time, but that was at Bradshaw,

06:00 better 'tucker' by then, she lasted but they nearly ended up doing it to poor old Price again.

**So there were dangers in the environment?**

I mean to say, even today, the Northern Territory is bloody dangerous place to be if you don't know it. Well they say today, not as bad today as 60 years ago, it was bad enough in them days. The natives, nothing to fear from the natives unless

06:30 you are around the Keep River or the Fitzmaurice River, they were very young, you could trust them out that way.

**you said before that the natives would tell you anything you wanted. That they weren't always truthful?**

They'd tell you anything. Unless you ask them, wanted to know any distances, to say how far it is, they'd say

07:00 give you two answers, either say it was a little bit long way or a long way little bit. 'Bloody' about all the information you could get out of them. But there was a difference in the 'long way little bit' and I'd say up to four or five miles, and a 'little bit long way' meant up to ten mile or more away. Most of them could speak 'pidgin' English, but we couldn't speak back much in 'Pidgin' tongue

07:30 with them even.

**What sort of scares or false alarms happened up there regarding Japanese invasion?**

Timber Creek, soon after we got up there we got a bright idea of setting the 'moving trip wires' around the camp. Well that lasted about, oh might have lasted a week

08:00 might not have lasted that long. There was that many wallabies and kangaroos going past at night time, keeping us awake.. Setting alarms and it didn't do. On once occasion we stood by, it was the early hours of the morning, I don't know who it was who set up the wires, came from Lieutenant Travis or Sergeant, all woken up armed

08:30 stood by, they reckon they could hear motor launches coming up the river but it was only what you call it, camped about 150 yards off the river, and they reckoned even though it was only their heads or their dreams I don't know what it was.

**Was the atmosphere a jumpy atmosphere?**

Well that night, that night particularly

09:00 it was but that was about the only time we had an alarm.

**What about other times, did you fear Japanese invasion very much?**

No, I'd say no. Although the army must have thought so, but over on the western coast, it wasn't reliable, that the 'Japs' went all over, and if they did come, its not like they were coming along the Queensland coast, or what you call it, the Gold Coast, it was more the Kimberleys area.

**09:30 What were your officers like?**

Well we, say officers, that means more than one, all the time I was up there was under Jack Travis, the only officer I had, that's the immediate officer. Officers, captains and majors above him, but as far as our officers, Jack Travis, I was under

10:00 him the whole time, he had ah, what was it. It didn't affect me, what ever he had. One thing I did hold against him, he was a real poker player. Pay days would only come about once every 6 months. Travis would say, "oh - get more than 2 pounds, why don't you get 20", or 50 something like that, out of your paybook". But if you did that

10:30 three weeks after it, he'd have the bloody lot himself. He would play with the boys and he'd end up with all the 'dough', a month after payday they were all broke again. But I never gambled. And I haven't done so any time in my life. I must have been brought up a rather strict man.

**11:00 It was quite a relaxed unit if you were playing poker with your officer?**

Well he, he was fed in the same mess, slept in the same bed, the same building, the same shed, and half the time, other than throw him a salute in the morning and from then on he was 'Jack', he was. We got



on very well with him. And our Captain of 'B' company

11:30 old Captain White. He was a 'digger' [soldier] in the First World War, he come out Moree way. I suppose he'd be dead long ago, he was a First World War bloke. But he was a fellow to mix with anybody, you'd call him 'Cappie' any time you seen him. 'Cappie' was his name, I swear to god. We were - what you call it, the greatest 'rag time' [loose] unit there was,

12:00 but I think we done our job alright enough. I can only speak for 'B' company cause I was never with another company.

**What clothing did you wear up there?**

A pair of shorts, bare feet most of the time, well I was anyway because the biggest part of my time was on the boat with bare feet, be about the camp in nearly always bare feet.

12:30 He Major Stammer, he was our officer in camp, he was our CO, commanding officer, we was under him and I'd be fishing at, while I was up working towards the last time, I got what do you call it, catfish in my bare feet. There was a bit of a bone and I couldn't get my boots on

13:00 he came, this is after he went to Wyndham, he came to see me there, "Here, you come here..", didn't he give me a dressing down because I had no bloody boots on. And I told him what had happened with the catfish, and he said, "How long as that been going on?" and I said, " Oh, quite a few months now", "Well we'll have to get the medical officer for you" and he did, when the medical officer came

13:30 this was at Wyndham, he lanced it and got a bone out of it about that long; for about a month it was in there.

**What sort of vessel was the 'Bondi'?**

Just, well I learnt since I got out of the army, I don't know, always thought it was a boat used by the department of main roads, no

14:00 water works, at Wyndham anyway. They used to go up to the King River and pump the fresh water to Wyndham, that was a boat that travelled up and down, this is about 6 or 8 miles, might have even been about 10 miles. That's all they'd ever travelled. It was an open boat around about 18 feet long and it looked, we put a cover over it so, we'd be out

14:30 of the sun, like. Otherwise we got into the sun going down the river down to the coast like. Its quite a seaworthy boat. The experience we had when we was camped, stuck on the mud flat on our first night going down he river. We walked, what we did was, wore out

15:00 the water pump, sucking too much sand through. And my job in the boat was more or less to sit up the 'stick', I always used a 'stick' about 10 foot, pole and I'd sit up on the bow and digging down, and every now and again the stick went down about 6 feet down we'd have plenty of water to go over as clearance.

15:30 As I say this water pump, instead of using the water pump, used to let the water circulate through a 44 gallon drum. We had to keep it full in the boat, no top on the drum and every hour or so we'd empty out a bucket in the drum and put in fresh river water to keep the engines cool.

**How well did you get to know the river?**

16:00 Oh fairly good. I'd say Merv and I take it up the most. We just take the boat, anytime day or night, on our own. You know, first trip down, we got to know it, learnt the hard way. But the river had to be worked with the tide like . If you were going down the river at Timber Creek, there was about 6 foot high rising for the 'on' tide at Timber Creek, well you just about

16:30 went into drop, we'd set sail and by the time you got down to Bradshaw, it would bloody be low tide, down there. And you used to take two tides to get down to Blunder Bay, two days to do it down, working the tides. Then coming back from Blunder Bay, the tide would be about half an hour ahead of you and

17:00 you'd be travelling in deep water all the time and going up you could disregard the mud banks and things. Because at Blunder Bay there was about a 30 foot rise between the two tides high and low. And I was only caught in the 'rip' [out to sea] twice, the whole time I was there.

**What happened when you get caught in the 'rip'?**

17:30 Just hope for the best, all you could do. The tide would be going out, oh I don't know, flowing out rather rough, and the tide would be coming in wall like and they both mix together, there was a period of about 400 yards in the river, rough, the water was very rough. But when you got over that it was even flow.

18:00 **What sort of illness were problems for the 'Nackeroos'?**

What you say?

**Illness?**

Luckily very, we at our platoon very lucky, but I wouldn't speak for all, when I say I wouldn't speak I don't know. We had very, very little illness amongst us. The

18:30 unit was out of an MO [medical officer] for some time, late in, well it was over mid year anyway, it was getting late in '43 before we brought an MO into the unit. And he come around inspecting all the troops. Some were sent back for dental reasons, others were sent back for

19:00 medical reasons. But I know in '5' Platoon, that happened while we was at Kununurra on the Ord river. There was only two that didn't have to go back for some medical treatment at Katherine. Lance West from Orange and myself, were the only two that didn't go back. Not even my teeth, although I was,

19:30 I seen one bloke, he didn't go back, 'Blue' O'Malley by name, he had teeth removed and he done it on the road side without anaesthetic, tooth pulled. He was down at Ivanhoe and he just laid on the road at Ivanhoe, in the culvert, and just head back and the dentist ripped them out.

20:00 **Why was the unit called the 'Nackeroos'?**

NAOU, North Australian Observation Unit, know what else would you call it, Nackeroo NAOU.

**Where did the 'nacker' part come form?**

That come from the north. Jack Travis at the 'rest' station coined it well that he's been given the credit of naming the 'Nackeroos'.

20:30 **Did you think about your brother very often?**

Yes I suppose I did but it caused me that much worry because we had no way of knowing. I don't suppose I worried as much as the other brother, Mum and Dad and my sister they worried more I suppose.

21:00 **Did you think your brother was alive or dead at that point?**

More or less given him up, well we had no idea, he was taken POW in Singapore and we didn't know even that until we got home, well I didn't. Until I got home, and actually he got out of the army before me. He got out of it and discharged the day before me.

**Tell us about your tree carving activities?**

21:30 Well that was a good one. Actually I never carved it to tell you the truth. The soap we had at Bottle Dam every time you got a shower of rain it used to build up, so I was down there one day and they got the brain wave, 'who could divert the course of the creek', dig a trench around

22:00 and get the 'main route', because it might not fill up the hole, the soak, we had dug. And anyway I was in a working party at the time and we were trying to put in a drain, we blocked the top end of the creek up as best we could with a log and few stones to stop the flow coming down. And then the top side we cut across to another bend the other side about 50 yards and he was trying to dig a drain down so that the

22:30 rain wouldn't go down and there was water lost, getting the camp water. But Merv Guymer, he was the corporal he wasn't working, and Jack Travis. e was busy putting his own name in and anyway Merv Guymer was carving up in the tree

23:00 the history, I've got the photos of it, and I clean forgotten about it. I got word from Jim, no, Jim Norrie, this is the pilot of the helicopters. He was working with Heli-musters the company he was working with.

23:30 Jim, not Norrie, they made a national park and they had to clear all the cattle out of the park and any cattle they couldn't clear, they went by helicopter to shoot, any beast they could see in the park, clean it out. And there was a beast at where Bottle Dam camp was, and they shot this beast

24:00 and they landed down to make sure it was dead I suppose and Jim and his other mate, I don't know, and they see the name from the trees. Now he never heard of me and I've never heard of him either, this Jim Norry bloke and he oh it was around about way, right up into gulf country and opened this, this is years after the war is over, and

24:30 I'd say not '91 when I went up there, around about '90. And anyway they got back, how the hell did that bloke get up, Norry went up with his father to that other place,

25:00 oh to look at the papers over there.

**But you have been back to see the tree carving haven't you?**

Yes, I went back, well anyway when I wrote to Jim, when I got to hear of it I wrote to Jim Norry and not knowing him or anything. And he'd married a girl from, she is a beautiful woman too, up near Glen Innes.

25:30 And they have got a weekender down at North Beach, do you know North Beach just below Coffs [Harbour]? They've got a weekender down there, I don't think they've got it now. And Jim was down, ah

anyway, him and his wife were down there at the weekender and at the North beach, and he thought well 'bugger it' 'I am that close to Pete, I'll go and find him', how did Jim got my address? He come up

26:00 and he suggested I go up and have a holiday with him. Up to Timber Creek and I says, "Well if I do, I'd like to take a mate of mine up" and Jim said, "Just bring the whole lot up if you like". And I tried a couple of blokes and Ray Thatcher and I decided to go then. We went up and we got in the helicopter and the crowd that Jim were working with were good enough to

26:30 give it, at our disposal for a full day. We flew all over the country in a helicopter. And I met Jim a couple of times, we did a couple of flights, and as far as I know now, I've got his phone number but all I say is I phoned a bit late. But I haven't seen him for about five or six years now.

**How did it feel to go back and see those places?**

Oh trip of a lifetime.

27:00 I meant to say you see these advertisements of tours to Wyndham, even though advertising on the telly every night now about \$6000 for a fortnight, no \$6000 for ten days or something like that. Well I went up and saw it all myself. Old memories. As I far as I know we, Ray and I, the time we was up there, with I've never heard of Jim locating it but we buried up at

27:30 Blunder Bay cases of live ammunition and hand grenades. As far as I know it is still buried up there.

**What contribution do you think the 'Nackeroos' made to the war effort?**

Ah it gave the headquarters, the army right up at the top, the very head, it gave them the

28:00 knowledge or gave them the feeling that at least we've got a group of men, about 500 of them the 'Nackeroos', that knows the country fairly well, and we know each one of those 500 we know which area they serve in and if at any future we can fall back. Now I think that was the main idea, and the army must have thought it was good otherwise they wouldn't have kept us up

28:30 there that long. And I consider myself and every other 'Nackeroo' we was lucky we got such an easy time. It was a job that the army considered must be done and it was done, and if anyone could do it, well why not. Be you, if you had a chance to do it. But that's what I think it gave the army, I know at the time, before Milne Bay

29:00 the 'fall of Darwin', it well, got well and truly 'done over the coals'. Well nearly everyone in Australia expected a Japanese invasion. And the army didn't know as much as the 'Japs' did about the country. In fact the, I'd like to just keep this off record if you don't mind. Especially if you 'pin it on the maps' in dozens of places.

29:30 **In your life after the war did you ever have any physical or mental affects from the war?**

No, no I'd say I didn't.

**Have you ever been to Japan?**

Yes.

**Tell us about your trip?**

30:00 Most of the time walking about, no we travelled from our, went by JAL [Japanese Airlines] airline from Sydney to London and on the trip we got a break of a week in Japan to please ourselves, so we did a week in Japan so we, Mum and I took it. And there was quite a few of us by the time we got over to Tokyo, when we left here we thought there was only two of us, but there was quite a few of us,

30:30 we saw a fair bit of Japan.

**What were you expecting of Japanese people when you went there?**

Oh that's a hard one, I don't think I expected anything. I personally I had no remorse against the Japanese while I was in the army, or rather, it might be stupid to say so, I had nothing against them, they were only like ourselves, they were doing what they were told to do by their officers.

31:00 And tales I've heard about what they did do, well I mean to say it would make you cry.

**What did your brother think when he found out you were going to Japan?**

Well I got a Nissan car and he wouldn't drive it with me. Bob tells a tale, I don't know what his...one day a 'Jap' got him

31:30 to dig a hole and Bob thought well, 'God what's this bloody thing here'. And he dug this damn hole and he got about 2 feet down, right, and he was ordered to stand in it, and the 'Jap', level hit him with a bloody stick or whatever he had, after he stood there and hit him. So he got him down, put him down about 2 feet and it was the only time

32:00 Bob said he got knocked out by a 'Jap'. But it was inhuman what they did, but they, I suppose it's a way

of life for them. And besides it was only privates that done it more or less. If his commander, his boss, Lieutenant or whatever told him to do it, well he had to do it.

**The Formosan POWs, where had they been captured?**

32:30 The Formosans were nearly always, from what I gathered, working parties for the Japanese, anything. Oh, it was dirty work around the camp that had to be done, it was always the Formosan that did it, even in the fighting lines. I don't think they took that much in the actual fighting business. Although I

33:00 haven't been in no fighting force in my life, so I couldn't say, but I think that's what they were doing.

**What would you say to someone watching this in the future about serving your country, what message would you give?**

Oh what message would I give. Don't know if I'd give any

33:30 advice to be honest. I know this much, I myself, and I am thankful for it now too, I was very lucky, all my army days, not to say I'm not, well I'm satisfied I did the job, if I didn't do it someone else would have been doing it. And I had the 'Cooks tour' four years in the army, 'the Cooks tour'. That's the way I look at it, my army experience.

34:00 But as far as giving a bloke advice, ah never volunteer to do anything, you'd end up' the worst stick' [worse for it]. Do as you're told and do no more.

**What's been your involvement with Anzacs and memorial services since the war?**

34:30 Well I'd say I, marched in Sydney Anzac Day more often than I have me local sub branch here. I have taken the greatest interest in the sub branch ever since I got out and I've been through the ranks a bit. But I've gone down and I've more or less classed it as, 'getting back with the mates' that you did. I've made more friends or met more 'Nackeroos' by going to Sydney

35:00 in those days. And I have gone up to Darwin a couple of times and the army there well, it about 2 trips up to Darwin at the tax payers expense, and I'd be going up again in a few days time if I hadn't, well I say I had me own way, well I couldn't go now, not in the condition I am in. Anzac Day, the 'north

35:30 wharf' is holding a celebration up at Timber Creek and I've been invited to go up again, but what's the use in me going up? When I say, 'what's the use', I'd have to be lifted around, I have to get bathed. I'm not a total cripple but you have to go some day. You're right handed aren't you? Well you have a go yourself one day and just bath with your left hand only and

36:00 see what job you'd make of it. I couldn't wash myself. Well I get under the shower occasionally but more or less just to get refreshed. No, Anzac Day, I've gone down to Sydney more often than I think than I have been here. (TAPE ENDS)