

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Alan Moore (Kanga) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1415>

### Tape 1

00:36 **If you could just give me that brief summary.**

I was born in Camberwell the second child of a middle class family I guess. At the age of 6 my sister who was then 11 died which caused great grief in the family and something which probably carried its way all through my life history because it affected my parents so much.

01:00 It was depression years I was fairly privileged in that I started at Camberwell Grammar when I was quite young and went onto Melbourne Grammar School. At Melbourne Grammar I guess I achieved most of the things that those at that type of private school try to achieve. I became a school prefect and a house captain and was a lieutenant in the school cadet corps

01:30 which no doubt influenced my movement later on into the army. Five nearly six years were spent in the service after that I came back and got a job... No let me go back, after that I came back not very fit. I spent 3 months on a friend's father's property stripping wheat to get back into shape and then I took a job which wasn't a very good one,

02:00 moved on through a couple of other things and eventually joined the Heinz Company where I worked for some 40 odd years and reached the senior management team. I was married at age 30. We have two daughters one of whom is a doctor and has four children and the other one is a senior research physiotherapist in cardiac thoracic work and has one child. My wife,

02:30 wonderful woman, marvellous years together, died 18 months ago. I see a lot of the family and live here by myself.

**Could you just give us an overview of your service years where you were posted and so on?**

03:00 Having been a lieutenant in the school cadet corps my thought of course was to go to the army and immediately on leaving school I went to the 14th Battalion Pioneer Regiment, a militia unit at the corner of Chapel Street and Punt Road where I quickly became a very young lieutenant. I volunteered from the 14th Battalion

03:30 to the 39th Battalion a fairly interesting story in that in those days to go into AIF [Australian Imperial Force] that is volunteer for overseas service, if you were under 21, you had to have parental consent and because I was the only one of the family left my father asked me not to volunteer for the AIF until I was 21. So I languished in the 14th Battalion doing camps and

04:00 a couple of nights a week and all that sort of thing and then the 39th Battalion was formed to go for tropical service it didn't require parental consent to volunteer to transfer from one militia unit to another that is how I became a member of the 39th Battalion and joined it at Darley Barracks [Victoria] when it formed as one of the junior lieutenants of that force.

04:30 We had service in New Guinea on the Kokoda Track, we don't like it called the Kokoda Trail to us it is the Kokoda Track. Later the service was at Gona, Sanananda, and Gona West otherwise known as Huggens Village or Amboga River it had many names a different times. Ultimately when the battalion came out of action

05:00 at Sanananda there 7 officers and 25 men left standing. Reinforcement later in Port Moresby and after leave in Australia, was never done very seriously and the unit was disbanded and we were shipped out to other units. I went to the 2/6th Battalion as did two other 39th Battalion officers, there I was a platoon commander,

05:30 then a Company second in command at the Aitape/Wewak campaign and towards the end of that campaign was promoted to company commander with the rank of Captain. Was discharged when the war finished.

**We can take a bit more time. I would like to ask you about your early childhood growing up in**

**Camberwell. Can you tell us a bit about that?**

- 06:00 It was depression years, I was probably one of the lucky ones in that my father had a good permanent position, needless to say his salary was reduced as was everybody else's during that period and I probably didn't feel the depression as much as most. I can recall one little incident where I was sent to bed early one night so that my
- 06:30 singlet could be washed and dried by the next morning I was down to one singlet. I was lucky there would have been many other children who didn't have any singlets. Little incidents like that indicate to me that I was privileged above many others. But I had a fairly happy childhood, my friends that I made at Camberwell Grammar
- 07:00 when I was first there up until the age of 10 lived around me we played footballs together and did all the things kids do and in one case went away on holidays to Healesville. It is a day trip nowadays but in those days if you went to Healesville you stayed there. Camberwell Grammar School was not a very good school at that time, most of the masters were derelict
- 07:30 and didn't last long and my father moved me on to Melbourne Grammar at age 10. That was quite a job really because I had to catch a tram in Bourke Road Camberwell that took three quarters of an hour to get around to St Kilda Road and then I walked straight into school. In going to Melbourne Grammar I was a very privileged child for that time
- 08:00 I think my father probably had a lot of trouble keeping me there but because he had been to that school and his three brothers had been there he was determined that I should go through the school too. I think I did him justice while I was at the school, I hope so, he seemed fairly satisfied with the results I had there. Childhood in our home was not always a happy one my parents
- 08:30 never got over the loss of my sister who had been a polio case from the age of 3 and had required constant nursing all those years. There was no such thing as medical assistance in those days and there were times when 24 hour nursing was needed in our home and I think the family finances suffered terribly because of it. It wasn't
- 09:00 always a happy home although my parents were great parents and they did everything they could for me but they never got over that great loss and it did affect our life I guess right throughout. I was a sporting type in a way I swam competitively; I once got a third in a Victorian breast stroke championship in a time that
- 09:30 nowadays wouldn't even get you a start in the race. I played football in the Melbourne Grammar School second 18. I rowed in the Melbourne Grammar school head of the river winning crew and the oar is up there on the wall. That is only given to winning crews and I look at it and get quite a fright. Three names there Moore Davis and Dewey are the only
- 10:00 ones left alive out of all those including the coach. So that's another great memory. Rowing became quite a big part of my school activity because I was apparently reasonably good at it. Those school years helped in developing some form of leadership, they must have because I
- 10:30 became a house captain and I became a cadet lieutenant in the school, and I was a school prefect. Maybe that training helped later on in army life when I had to lead men. I don't know if I was good at it but I got through. I don't know there is much more to relate about my childhood or my growing up years as I have said I was privileged.
- 11:00 And in one case that privilege really remains as a tremendous memory, my mother was a friend of a Mrs Langford, the Langfords were the Clemens Langford builders, the big company in Melbourne and they owned a beautiful home at Sorrento...between Sorrento and Portsea. One of those with tennis court and private swimming baths and boatsheds and everything else which still stands, it is still in the family
- 11:30 and I was privileged to go there with the Langfords and the two Langford sons on Christmas holidays which is where I learnt boating and I have been a boating man ever since, having had a boat here at Mt Eliza and having been Commodore of the Canadian Bay Yacht Club. Privileges that came to me when I was young have stayed with me throughout my life.
- 12:00 **I wanted to ask the earliest school that you went to Camberwell Grammar. You said most of the kids that went there lived around you. Tell me about some of these kids. What sort of backgrounds did they have? Were some of them**
- 12:30 **less fortunate than you?**
- Probably not, probably much in the same level of fortune because it was a private school too. Two of my friends Dickinson and Marshall both had fathers who were travellers, I think they were called commercial travellers in those days; they'd be sales representative now
- 13:00 the closest friend there his father was a builder and a fairly successful builder. Those friends you find your own level in life and they probably were around about the same level as us in all things. Their homes would have been equivalent to ours we used to kick footballs in their yards and break down their parents plants and things

13:30 the same as we did in mine.

**What other sort of things apart from football and cricket did you do for fun in your free time?**

Sport was my greatest interest always. I guess I was always interested in mechanical things because my father was an Engineer

14:00 and had a good workshop and he taught me how to use tools. I still have many of his tools and many more of mine in my workshop here. Mechano sets and things like that were a great interest of mine, anything I did with my hands and I don't think I was very studious I managed to pass exams as I went along but they never interested me much. Outside things interested me

14:30 more than inside ones. Hard to think back eighty years to what I was doing then. I think sporting activities and things I did with my hands were my main interest.

**What about things like the pictures?**

We would occasionally get to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon and see Tom Mix or whatever was going on at the time, but

15:00 that became a matter of money I think the pictures cost six pence in those days and my pocket money was 3d. a week if I kept my father's workshop clean and tidy and if I didn't I didn't get the 3d. Occasionally we would go to the pictures on Saturday afternoon on our pocket money but I don't know that I was all that interested in indoor things I was happier outside.

15:30 The pictures they were all right, kids stamped their feet and threw popcorn at each other and that sort of thing but that was wasting time in my mind.

**What background did your parents have. Were they Anglo Saxons?**

Yes my parents were both Anglicans. My father was one of

16:00 5, 4 boys and a girl. The four boys went to Melbourne Grammar School I don't know where their sister went to school. I have a faint idea she might have had a private tutor, I'm not sure of that though. My mother was a country girl she was born and lived in Camperdown she was one of 5 girls. Her father thought he was an artist he used to do pencil sketches for the old

16:30 Bulletin but he hardly lived on that and to add to that he became a house painter, he painted people's houses in between doing sketches for the Bulletin. She grew up in Camperdown left Camperdown fairly young to start nursing training at Geelong; she had an Aunt living in Geelong who kept an eye on her I believe. Ultimately transferred from Geelong to Bendigo Hospital

17:00 where she completed her training. I think she had what later became the equivalent of a triple certificate of nurses level. She was later a theatre sister for a Dr McLauren who had a private hospital in Melbourne. There she met Dad and they married and lived first of all in Auburn in a rented house

17:30 before they moved into the house in which I was born in Camberwell. Her interest was on the literary side in fact I have rows of Dickens and Kiplings books she had some position in the Dickensian Society and she wasn't bad on the piano either

18:00 and very interested in flowers floral decoration and her home. Dad, well he was a great sportsman after he left school he became apprenticed with the Austral Otis Company. I think his family had lost all their money at that stage I am not sure, something that never came out in history.

18:30 He became apprentice to an Engineer he did very well quickly achieved all sorts of things there became a draftsman then got other engineering qualifications and having worked through the ranks he spent the last 20 years of his life as the general manager of the Works Division of the SEC [State Electricity Commission]. He was always in

19:00 electricity production. He was a great sportsman; he was the youngest boy in the Melbourne Grammar school football team for 3 years. He was in the senior team the year after he came out of junior school. He was in the Melbourne Grammar School Cricket team he later played both cricket and football with Melbourne. I know he kept wickets for the Melbourne Senior Cricket team.

19:30 I think he played the odd game with the senior football team but wasn't very interested there because they started paying them 5 shillings a game, which he thought was terrible, you didn't take money for playing sport. He promptly gave away football and took on lacrosse which was quite a big game in those days and he captained the Melbourne lacrosse team, played in the Victorian

20:00 team and played in the Australian team against a Canadian visiting team. And was later president of both the Victorian and Australian lacrosse associations. His interest in sport was intense, possibly that had something to do with my interest in sport. He was a very clever engineer. During the war he designed and had built a plant

20:30 for compressing coal gas and all the SEC vehicles, district superintendents' vehicles and so on, which in

those days were coupe Dodges, in the back, had 3 oxygen cylinder-type things and every morning they would fill up on coal gas and drive around the district and people would say "How do those fellows get all that petrol to run around on?" but they

21:00 didn't have petrol at all. He gave a number of lectures on this particular subject and on the construction of this three stage compression plant that had to be built. And at one stage some American university gave him a doctorate for it. A term he never used, wouldn't have been like him to do that. My parents were good parents, they were good people.

21:30 Always good to me. When I came home from the war they were both invalid which was a great shame, and neither lived for more than 18 months after that. But yes, they were good parents.

**Were they strict?**

In some things yes in

22:00 manners, discipline, fairly strict. My father in particular understood doing the right thing if I could explain it that way, and brought me up that way. We were certainly brought up to respect our elders and we were brought up not to speak unless we were spoken to

22:30 if there were people other than our parents in the room. Strict in some things but very easy in others, just very companionable parents.

**Other than your sister did you have any other siblings?**

No I had cousins.

23:00 My mother was one of five girls and three of them finished up living in Queensland and they all had quite big families. But all my Queensland cousins were far distant. My father's three brothers, two of them were mining engineers, one died quite young in Johannesburg [South Africa] unmarried, second one,

23:30 he was the eldest I think, he was quite unlucky he was in Penang [Malaya] when the Japanese moved in, he was a civilian internee in Changi [Singapore] and died three days before the end of the war. He did marry and had children but we never ever found them because they were miles away. We have looked for them but we have never found them. My father's other brother had

24:00 two sons both of whom were bomber pilots one was shot down over Kiel [Germany] the other one lived in Caulfield. I didn't see over much of him, we were cousins and we talked to each other when the occasion arose but we went off in different directions and didn't really keep close to each other. I did

24:30 correspond regularly with one of my cousins in Queensland, she died recently. I was pretty much the youngest of all that lot. One of her sons is still alive, he would be a man well in his 60's now and I am his godfather. He has a property outside Stanthorpe. I talk to him occasionally. I guess I have got plenty of other relatives in Queensland from all those other cousins up

25:00 there but I wouldn't have any idea who or what or where they are.

**You said that your parents were Anglicans. To what extent were they religious? Did you go to church?**

My mother was a fairly regular attender at the Anglican church in St John's Camberwell, fairly regular attender, my father

25:30 would go to church if he was persuaded to or if there was some particular reason. As a young one I was sent to Sunday school and then later on the Reverend Roscoe Wilson introduced a 10 am Sunday morning service which he called Young St John's, the main service was at 11 and I was always sent off to Young St Johns at 10am.

26:00 At that stage I don't know that I enjoyed that too much because it interfered with throwing a cricket ball around or something of that nature, but it had to be done and it was done. It became an integral part of my religious instruction because at Melbourne Grammar School we had religious instruction

26:30 I'm happy that it was not strictly religion, our senior chaplain there the Reverend Sinjin-Wilson taught us more about life than about what you might read out of the Bible so to speak. In my position in the school I was required to read the lessons in chapel two mornings a week and go down to chapel on Sunday evenings.

27:00 I think I had too much of it in those days because I haven't given away the church by any means, but I never go near it. I will always support its appeals and that sort of thing and I do a lot of work for one of the church homes in Mornington, Coral Court, which is a hostel for the elderly. I was on the management committee there for a number of years.

27:30 And still work for its opportunity shop and take my turn behind the counter there. I am the only man behind the counter all the rest of them are woman. One day a woman came in and she said "I want to be served. Is there anyone in attendance?" I said "Oh Yes I am here." She said "Oh" and walked out.

28:00 Apparently it is not thought that men get behind counters in opportunity shops. I guess religion was a part of our life but not a serious part.

**In going to Camberwell**

28:30 **Grammar, what sort of things did they teach you about the First World War?**

That was up to the age of 10 and I don't remember them teaching us anything about the First World War not anything at all. Reading, writing and arithmetic was about it I would say.

**Was your father involved in the First World War?**

No. He was in electricity manufacture. He did

29:00 volunteer and was pulled out because of his position.

**Reserved occupation.**

I don't know whether they called it that in the First World War but that is what it was.

**Did you know any other veterans either in your family or in your area?**

Yes one other was one of Dad's engineering friends in the SEC, Dick

29:30 Golding. He was a personal friend as well as a work friend and his wife and my mother were quite good friends and he had been in France in the engineers in the First World War. He wouldn't talk about it though. I heard him saying things about having to light fires under truck sumps so that they could melt the oil to get them to start and things like that, but nothing about the actual war.

30:00 My wife's father was very much involved in the First World War but I didn't meet him until after the Second World War.

**Did, still focusing on the early years, what was your idea of the British Empire and Australia's place within it?**

30:30 It was a very firm idea. As far as I was concerned I grew up with background thoughts of responsibility, always doing the right thing and King and Country and nothing else, that was it. No one that I knew ever had second thoughts about

31:00 questioning any of those things that's just the way it was. That was why I was ready as soon as I left school to go into the army. I considered it a duty for King and Country. I wasn't belligerent. I didn't want to be shot at or didn't want to shoot at anyone, that was something I should do.

**Did you see**

31:30 **yourself as Australian or British?**

I guess I saw myself as both. I was Australian but Australians were British.

**Did you know what Australia looked like?**

Only from learning geography at school I had never been outside of Victoria until the army took me outside

32:00 Victoria .

**Some of the blokes we have talked to have said they couldn't even draw Australia on a map.**

Oh lord yes, I knew all that.

**Did your father smoke?**

Yes.

**Did he drink?**

A little tiny bit there was always drink in the house but it was only produced if there was visitors.

32:30 He smoked a pipe I don't think he smoked it; it was just a dummy that was in his mouth most of the time I think. He never inhaled he just puffed the blooming thing. When I went away in the army he said to me "I don't mind if you smoke son. I have smoked a pipe since I was 14 and it never hurt me." He said "If you want to drink that is your affair.

33:00 I would rather you didn't but if you feel you want to have a drink wait until you get home and we will have one together" which I did and I had my first beer with my Dad and didn't look back.

**In the sense that you never had another beer or**

Oh no in a sense that I got quite fond of it.

33:30 and made up for lost time.

**Your mother, did she drink or smoke?**

Mother never smoked. I think I can remember her having a glass of sherry but that would have been about it.

**What sort of food did you have?**

As a kid

34:00 I can remember cereals in the morning and toast, always a cooked dinner at night. Always a cooked dinner at night I remember, but what it was don't ask me I couldn't tell you. I do remember the roast on Sunday and it was in the middle of the day too, a hot dinner in the middle of the day on Sunday still in my best suit after going to church in the morning too, that was torture.

34:30 **Did you always have meat?**

Yes.

**There was never a sense of going short at any time.**

No. I was privileged.

**I don't doubt you. Do you or were you aware of**

35:00 **other kids, or other families who perhaps were not doing so well?**

Yes very much so. From the age of 6 I was a member of the Camberwell Swimming Club. I was actually a foundation member when the Camberwell baths were built. And quite a few others in that club, fellows against whom I would swim

35:30 and we would change in the same changing room, they lived in fairly ragged clothes and they had shoes that were badly in need of repair and I was very conscious of their lack of worldly possession. I don't think I had any contact with whether they were short of food. I do remember the dole queue at Camberwell, with people

36:00 lining up at the soup kitchen there, where people were very short of food. Don't recall it amongst those whom I knew.

**Did you see men going from door to door or wondering the streets?**

Yes they came to our home quite often. There was always a cup of tea and a slice of bread for any

36:30 one who came to our house at the back door. They were never brought inside, don't know why. I think if I had someone come to the door who was really hard up for a meal I would say "Well come on and sit down with me and we will have a cup of tea." But no there was quite a distinction but they always got something at our home but they got it at the back door.

37:00 **Did you have other delivery men and trades people came to the back door?**

Everything was delivered in those days, the garbage man came around to the back of the house and picked up the tin and carted it out to the front and emptied it and brought it back again. The milkman delivered to the back door, the baker came to the back door, the grocer came

37:30 around on his bike with his notebook and pencil once a week and took the order which was then delivered to the back door. The iceman, we didn't have refrigerators of course, it was before refrigerators. He would come around to the back of the house with a block of ice on his shoulder, he'd just open the door and walk in and go straight to the ice chest and put the ice in the box. Different life of course, we didn't have mod cons.

38:00 **What about hawkers?**

Yes there were a number. Charlie the Chinese fish man used to come around with a basket on his arm about every fortnight or so, he would knock at the back door and wanted to know if you would buy fish.

38:30 There were people with boxes of cotton and buttons and all that sort of thing trying to make a penny and that was all they made in those days. Yes there were many hawkers.

**Did you see any sustenance schemes working on the roads?**

Not working on the roads,

39:00 They did of course work on the road up the Dandenongs [Mountains] through Croydon which was built with pick and shovel, that was to give them work. I didn't see them as such because the roads were made in Camberwell where I lived. I don't know how I got there I was with my father in his

39:30 SEC car, or Melbourne Electricity Supply Company it was then, before it was the SEC. It was an old 1924 Buick Roadster and he had a reason to be out in the Footscray area, probably a line break down or

something out there. And I went out with him and on the old Footscray Road at the swing bridge there were hundreds of men sitting just by the bridge there. I remember this quite well and

40:00 they were waiting their turn, if a ship wanted to come up through, or get past the bridge it had to be swung and it had to be swung by men turning big wheels and they used to wait their turn there for days. I remember being told they got two shillings for doing a turn on the wheel so that was equivalent to gang work.

## Tape 2

00:37 **With Melbourne Grammar School? What did they teach you about previous wars?**

There was a strong school cadet corps and that always gave reference back to previous wars but

01:00 in the school there was a very large building, the school memorial hall in which the names of all those who'd been involved in the Crimean War and the First World War were recorded and there were always Anzac Day services in the memorial hall and the names of the fallen were always read and we were always made very conscious of the path

01:30 that the old boys of the school had played in world wars. I don't think that our history teaching was as thorough as it might have been with regard to Australia's involvement the world wars. The history in those days seemed to be more European History or American history.

02:00 **American history, what in particular about American history?**

The American War of Independence which was covered quite a lot, European history and all the kings and queens and so on. We did learn a little bit about the Dardanelles Campaign [First World War] and the war

02:30 in France but not very much at all in great detail. More it was remembering in glory those of the school who had been involved in those things but we were made very conscious of them.

**It is interesting they taught you about the American War of Independence being basically almost a British colony at the time.**

03:00 Yes but I can't remember any teaching in any detail of the First World War.

**You said about the Crimean War and these are chaps from Melbourne Grammar who went to the Crimean War or are you just talking generically about the Crimean War?**

No there were a couple because Melbourne Grammar School was going from about 1880.

**What was the time period of the Crimean War?**

It was around the turn of the century [Crimean War against Russia, 1854 - 56—possibly means the Boer War in South Africa 1899 - 1902].

03:30 **In respect to World War I what specifically did you know about World War I at the time?**

We knew about the failure of the Dardanelles campaign and about the heroism of Simpson and the Donkey and things like that

04:00 We'd heard of Lone Pine which was something that the Australians tried to achieve but probably didn't. We heard of the evacuation of Gallipoli and then we'd heard about the dreadful life in the trenches in France. I think I remember being told something about the

04:30 introduction of tanks, in the First World War, British tanks but no great detail. It was something that had occurred and members of the school had been involved and wasn't that good. I don't think it went much beyond that.

**Were there many people from Melbourne Grammar who had been killed in the war?**

Yes, quite a number.

05:00 Quite a few who had been decorated too. There was some fairly notable people like Stanley Melbourne Bruce [later Lord Bruce, Prime Minister of Australia 1923-29] was an old Melbourne...and Richard Gardiner Casey [Minister for External Affairs 1951-60; Governor General 1965-69] was an old Melbourne Grammar boy who won an MC [Military Cross] at the war there were quite a lot involved.

**What about the household names such as the Victoria Cross**

05:30 **winners Jacka [Captain Albert Jacka (VC, MC and Bar), the first Australian awarded a VC in WW1] and Pompey Elliott? [Brigadier General Harold Edward "Pompey" Elliott, (VC, CMG, DSO, DCM, VD), Commander 15th Brigade, France WW1]**

I was in the Grammar cadet corps which was affiliated with the 14th battalion militia unit in Punt Road and Jacka came from the 14th Battalion so as Grammar cadets we had heard of Jacka of course. Elliott probably was a name that I had heard but it didn't mean much to me. Monash [General Sir John Monash, GCMB, KCB, Commander 3rd Division, Frans WW1; Manager, Victorian State Electricity Commission from 1920]

06:00 meant quite a bit to me because Monash became Chairman of the Melbourne Electric Supply Company Limited which was later the State Electricity Commission and my father was a senior member there so I had heard the name Monash quite a few times. In a cupboard in my home was an old black polish

06:30 bowler hat which was always referred to as Monash's hat. I once got around to asking where it got that name and it was Dad was a pall bearer at Monash's funeral and they all had to wear the same bowler hat. So I had heard of Monash. I probably learnt more about his deeds in reading I did after the Second World War

07:00 than I would have known at the time. I just knew him as the big boy up there above Dad somewhere at the SEC.

#### **Did you personally meet any war veterans from the First World War?**

One I knew who was a friend of Dad's I mentioned earlier, he had been in the engineers but he never talked about his war experiences. In our school cadet corps

07:30 the leader of the cadet corps, a dear old boy by the name of Alec Brading he had been in the Sudanese War [a NSW Contingent of volunteers left for the Sudan War March 1885], he was Kitchener's bugle boy at Khartoum [Sudan] and he had been in the Second World War [?] and he told us various things about how they used weapons and so on.

08:00 Not all that much detail.

#### **That is a pretty interesting one to meet.**

He was marvellous dear old Alec Brading. He rose to the rank of cadet major. Alec was probably quite uneducated he had been in the army as a boots boy at the age of 15 or something like that,

08:30 and then he became Kitchener's bugle boy and he had lots of stories to tell. He had actually met [Sir Winston] Churchill [British Prime Minister 1940-45, 1951-55, a journalist in the Boer War from 1900-01] during the South African War [Boer War] and corresponded with him once and he got some sort of a reply and he wrote again and never heard anymore. I think Churchill had a little too much to do. They were First World War

09:00 people who I encountered. I never heard or heard of First World War people talking very much about their experiences. Probably those of us in Second World War have never talked about it much until people like you came around, now things are coming out. No didn't hear much my father in law who

09:30 enrolled in Queensland for the Second World War and went to France in the army, happened to be a draftsman and it was quickly found out that he was a draftsman and he was put in a Brigade Headquarters deep dugout drawing maps of ever-changing frontline trenches and that sort of thing and he

10:00 talked to me a bit in later years. He was a very nervy little man, terrified of noises and bombings and being in a deep dugout and all these things going bang up there really worried him. When he got to England on leave he volunteered to join the Royal Air Force as it was then and transferred and became a pilot

10:30 then transferred to the Australian Air Corps. That wasn't the Royal Australian Air Force in those days they had another name. And he was a pilot doing reconnaissance work in these funny little planes that were held together with wire and chewing gum. He only crashed 13 times, that was all. They were so very light that

11:00 that they took off at 65 mph or a bit less, and at that low speed a puff of wind just sort of flicked them over and most of their crashes were in taking off and landing. He did talk to me about the horrors of the trench warfare and that is why he got out of it.

#### **What would he say?**

He just couldn't stand the dirt and the filth and the mud and

11:30 being in a deep dugout and not knowing whether something was going to land in the entrance to it and he'd w never get out and that sort of thing. He was a very nervous little man.

#### **And that continued well after the war.**

He was always a nervous little man yes. He did all that flying and thereafter would never get in an aeroplane again even when he and his wife came down to visit us here in Melbourne

12:00 she flew down and he drove his car down, he wouldn't get into an aeroplane. Which was very surprising



I thought. We have all his memorabilia which is currently at the Air Force Museum all being photographed and a lot of it put onto DVD's,

12:30 we also have his diaries and he wrote one page of a little diary for every days of the war, we still have those 5 diaries, one for each year, and they are in their hands and being transposed and typed out. He had an interesting war but did talk about it a bit.

13:00 Talked about crawling out into no mans' land one night and unbolting the propeller from a crashed German aircraft which was actually standing in the corner in their home in Brisbane with a clock in the centre. He had brought it home with him. Although he was a nervous little man he must have been very worried that night I would think. Crawling out into no mans land. I learnt a little from him

13:30 the First World War people didn't seem to talk all that much.

**Did you see any TPI's? [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated]**

Do I see any, yes. A few members of our Association are TPI's. I keep in touch with them.

**I mean when you were young in the 1930's?**

When I was young no I don't recall it. I would say in my youth before I went

14:00 into the army I don't recall ever seeing or understanding a TPI.

**With the cadets I am interest to know what sort of training you had.**

I enjoyed cadets I enjoyed them very much actually because I liked the regimentation for a start

14:30 I liked taking orders, having to obey orders, later on I possibly liked giving them I don't know but I guess one would have followed the other. We were given basic training in rifle and Lewis machine gun. We were taught formation tactics; we were put into sections and platoons. We went to camp in school holidays twice a year

15:00 we had mock battles we had very good training I would say but it was training in what I would have to refer to as open warfare and really became of little value when we actually later on became involved in jungle warfare. There was no connection whatsoever. The training was excellent, the officers were

15:30 skilled masters who were mostly ex-First World War men with commissions, they spent a bit too much time I guess on drilling us, we were very good at sloping and ordering arms and presenting arms and all those things. Possibly not enough time on exercises but then if you meet as cadets on Tuesday afternoon after school you can't do much in the way of exercises that can only be done at weekends and on camps.

16:00 The training was good and we had the opportunity to go to the Williamstown Rifle Range on Saturday mornings those of us who chose to and I was one of them got into a Rifle Team shooting for what was known as the Earl Roberts Trophy and we used to go down there two Saturday mornings in three and fire

16:30 the army service rifle, the .303 from ranges from up to 200 to 400 yards having target practice and that of course was very good training.

**Were you a good shot?**

Yes. In later years I was probably quite a keen sporting man I had a rifle and a double-barrel shot gun and I used to go off shooting rabbits

17:00 shooting quail and go to duck openings every year. I have given all that away I have got rid of my rifle. I have got rid of my shot gun I would rather feed a wild duck than shoot one nowadays. I have a completely different attitude but I did enjoy using firearms.

**Is that a result of your war experiences that you stopped?**

I don't think it was at all.

17:30 I did most of that after the war; well I did all of it after the war I never had a rifle or a shot gun before the war. No, it was probably that I started to like and enjoy wild life and thought why should I be killing these poor things why not look after them.

**You sound like Jim Corbett [1875-1955; famous tiger and big game hunter; later an avid conservationist, India, 1920s-30s].**

Not quite.

18:00 I never shot anything that I didn't eat. I never shot anything for the sake of shooting it. And If we would go out rabbit shooting and we would get a few pairs of rabbits that would be enough to go to a couple of families and we wouldn't go around shooting any more. Quail shooting probably never got enough to have too many there. Duck shooting yes at times we would... between us

18:30 we would have collected quite a few but they were frozen and they went into the food larder and were

always eaten.

**Always eaten. What did you know about politics?**

Very little. I knew that my

19:00 father was conservative, I think it was the United Australia Party in those days. I knew that he was a conservative and he voted for the UAP. The first time I had a vote was when we were in New Guinea and it was an extraordinary thing we were all given our opportunity to vote and we didn't really know who our candidates were and half of us didn't know what electorate we were in.

19:30 At least 90% of the votes cast would have been informal. People cast because they liked the sound of that name. One interesting little story concerning politics was when I was first a lieutenant in the 14th Battalion and we were in camp at Mount Martha, there was an election I don't remember whether it was a State or Federal election but I

20:00 had to march my platoon down to vote and most of them went through the process of voting and they woke up to the fact that I wasn't voting and then they woke up to the fact that I wasn't old enough to have a vote. I copped it after that.

**What year was this?**

That would have been in 1940.

**This was before Japan came into the war.**

You didn't get to vote until you were 21 in those days.

20:30 I wasn't old enough to vote and they woke up to that very quickly.

**What did you know about the Spanish Civil War?**

Virtually nothing. Knew it was happening and that was about all. Why would we know about it, it wasn't something we were taught about at school and without that how would you have known about it.

**Did you know anyone who was left wing?**

21:00 No I didn't.

**What did you know about communism?**

Never heard of it until after the war. Never heard of communism until after the war. I don't know why you would have. I mean it wasn't spoken of it very much before the war was it.

**It depends on how whether you read newspapers. Some people seem to have but others don't.**

21:30 No, well in my case I knew nothing about it at all. Maybe I didn't read enough newspapers.

**You are reading the Herald Sun that is why.**

No used to read the Argus in those days.

**Back in Australia before the war can you tell us about the**

**22:00 Catholic/Protestant confrontation through your own experiences?**

It was them and us always and go back to not my own experience but my own observation when I was quite young going to Camberwell Grammar School

22:30 I lived in Camberwell very close to the Catholic and State schools which were almost side by side near the Camberwell Junction. The state school was on Camberwell Road still see it, number 888 on the brickwork it was one of the early state schools and the Catholic school was behind the Lady of Victory's church

23:00 and both those schools used to use the Camberwell Park as their playground. No one would ever go through that park at school playground time because the two schools the Catholic school and state school used to meet in the park and fight each other like mad the whole time. There were dreadful fights went on there, and this was for 10 year old kids it was very much them and us.

23:30 I can remember people saying "Oh but they are Catholics". It was a funny sort of division that existed. When I was at Melbourne Grammar School there were six schools they were called public schools in those days but they were the six principal private schools

24:00 and one was Xavier College [Catholic school] and the five others treated Xavier College as being the other school. I didn't know why. I am glad to think the world has grown out of this sort of feeling.

**I don't know about the world but certainly Australia.**

Australia has yes sure. And I am glad to see that Australia is grown out of this terrible

- 24:30 feeling about mixed marriages. Going right back to something that was said in the earlier conversation, one of my father's brothers, the one who was the mining engineer manager in Penang and who spent his time in Changi. He actually married, but he married a Catholic and the families never had anything to do with him after that.
- 25:00 It was "Oh he has married a Catholic" how narrow minded can they get.
- How about your father how did he see that? Would he have been estranged if you had a Catholic girlfriend?**
- I did have a Catholic girlfriend once when I was at school and I was never game to tell my parents that she was catholic, which was... how stupid and how silly.
- 25:30 I think my father being my father would have supported me in whatever I had done, he would have talked to me about it but he would have supported me.
- Did you talk much about this?**
- About Catholicism and religion, no.
- Did he ever suggest to you his views? Nothing?**
- He kept things like that to himself he was a thoughtful person
- 26:00 he never spoke out on subjects like that at all. The division was there when I was young it was very much a division.
- What about yourself how did you feel about it? The division existed were you a part of that division?**
- I guess I might have been in that I had grown up amongst it but it didn't worry me too much.
- 26:30 I can remember when I was rowing in the Grammar crew we rowed against Xavier in the heat at the Head of the River. And I used to talk to all the Xavier fellows in that crew, they were just other fellows rowing as far as I was concerned, it didn't make much difference to me. One funny little incident, I don't know whether we should put it in here, but when the two of us Xavier and Grammar were lined up side by side
- 27:00 at the start of the race one Lex Davidson who was a noted racing driver was in the Xavier crew and he was abreast of me with the two boats line up side by side and he leant over and he said "Now we are going to show you bastards how to row." And we beat them by 3 lengths. But he was quite a friend of mine he was a Xavier boy he was OK it didn't worry me
- 27:30 all that much but I lived amongst its existence. And I am glad to see it is broken down nowadays. One of my granddaughters had a Catholic boy as number one boyfriend for about 12 months and it didn't worry me and it didn't worry her parents she has moved on to someone else now.
- 28:00 No, it should never have existed.
- With the lead up to the Second World War were you expecting a war in the years before that?**
- I wouldn't say expecting but I
- 28:30 would say quite conscious that it could happen. Didn't for a minute think in terms of a Pacific war just thought in terms of Germany rearming. In other words the thoughts would have been about the First World War being repeated.
- Do you think the Second World War was basically**
- 29:00 **unfinished business?**
- Think it is unfinished business.
- Between German and Britain and the allies. That it was a continuation of the first.**
- I think it was a continuation of the First World War through Britain's weakness. Germany was put in her place after the First World War and certain treaties were signed
- 29:30 but never observed and if they had been observed Hitler would not have been able to rearm Germany the way he did and again become aggressive, that is as I see it. Yes I think the Second World War was unfinished business and none of us know whether that business is finished yet either.
- Why do you say that?**
- Well I don't think the European Union is working
- 30:00 all that well and the other reason is that man is an aggressive so and so and there will always be one who wants to be better than the others and want to take him over. Britain is losing her power, she has

lost her naval power, she has lost a lot of her colonies. I met someone the other day,

- 30:30 a Pom, who told me "well Australia is just a colony." And my answer was "Don't say that out too loudly around here." No she has lost her colonies therefore she has lost a lot of her money because that was why she had her colonies to get money from them. She is becoming I would think a minor part of the European Union, she doesn't have the say that she used to have. She is just another one of those countries now instead of a leading one of those countries as I see it, but I can only see it from things that I read.

**What about Nazism? What did you know about Nazism at the time in the 30's?**

In the 30's

- 31:30 I understood that Nazis were the bad Germans who were trying to get things going again. I didn't see it much further than that. We did see pictures of the 10 year old kids in black shirts

**Hitler Youth.**

Yes. Hitler youth. We did see pictures of the Hitler Youth marching and training and looking aggressive.

- 32:00 We knew that it was going on there and that was where we thought probably this was the build up to the continuation of the First World War which I think it turned out to be.

**So when war was declared, the Second World War was declared, what were you doing that day?**

What was I doing that day? I was still at school; I was a cadet lieutenant in the Melbourne

- 32:30 Grammar School cadet corps and we were in camp, September school holidays camp at what is now Fort Queenscliff. And war was declared, the camp was disbanded immediately we were all sent home and I remember I was in my school uniform catching a tram from Melbourne out to Camberwell and some old boy said to me "Good on you dig." I was just a cadet but...Yes I was still at school in camp and remember it quite clearly. And then at the camp they rebroadcast for us Menzies' message which told us that Britain was at war so we are at war.

- 33:30 **Was it a surprise?**

Yes. We had often thought that this was going to happen but when it actually happened it was a surprise. Although I guess if we had been more interested in reading papers than we were in our school work at that time because it was our last year at school, matriculation year and most of our time was spent with

- 34:00 our nose in books. But if we had known about the invasion of Poland and things like that which maybe we did, but maybe it was just something over there. If we had known more about that it wouldn't have been a surprise.

**What took place when, after the war was declared for you?**

Well I went back to school. I went back to school and finished my

- 34:30 school year. I wanted to promptly join the AIF which my father wouldn't let me do, and that's been covered earlier in this discussion, so instead of going to University which I could have done and should have done, I went and got myself a job, it was with Australian Glass Manufacturers, that was where there was a position available. Nothing much more than an office boy job but all I was wanting to do was fill in time until I could get into the army. Not that I wanted to be shot at, I wasn't belligerent in any way at all. I just felt that it was a duty and it was something I should do. And I went to Australian Glass I was there for, I suppose I had about 12 months or more with them during which time I had time off to do two 3-month camps with the 14th Battalion they were camps down here at Mount Martha and Balcombe. And I wasn't terribly interested in any of that, all I wanted to do was get into the army. After a period I was able to because, we discussed that earlier, how I was able to apply for a transfer from the 14th Battalion to the 39th Battalion without having to join the AIF. And many of the 39th Battalion, most of us were under 21 were there for the same reason. The 39th Battalion was completely a volunteer unit and volunteers were called for from all the militia units around the territory.

- 36:30 **You said you were with the 14th Battalion. When did you join the 14th?**

Straight out of school, the end of 1939.

**When war began basically?**

It was 3 months after by the time I got there. 3 or 4 months after.

**And you heard the call for volunteers. How did you hear about this for the 39th?**

It was put to all

37:00 militia battalions that a unit was being formed for tropical service, it was understood to relieve the 49th Battalion who were at that time in Port Moresby as a resident battalion and we saw this as a way of getting away somewhere, it didn't matter where it was it was a means of getting away. And I was at that time

37:30 Intelligence officer in the 14th Battalion, you didn't have to be very intelligent to be the Intelligence officer because I was there. But I applied and was one of those accepted. I don't know the basis of selection, there were many applied for the 39th Battalion who didn't get there. I have no idea of how the selection was made.

38:00 The 39th Battalion was formed in 1941 and I had been in the 14th Battalion during 1940. So my connection was army had continued on from cadets through the 14th Battalion where I got a commission very quickly because I had been one in the school cadets and had passed the various exams and so on.

38:30 So I carried through from school cadets to one militia unit and then to another one.

**You said you received a commission. Was this during the 14th or the 39th?**

During the 14th.

**When you joined up.**

I had been a cadet lieutenant in the Melbourne Grammar cadets and had had to pass the examinations for first appointment which was junior lieutenant to become that in the school cadet. So when I

39:00 went to the 14th they were looking for people because many of the original 14th Battalion had joined AIF and gone away and their numbers were depleted. They were looking for those with experience and at least I had the experience to instruct on basic weapons and things like that and I was commissioned almost as soon as I got there. I was a cadet lieutenant at school and

39:30 all of a sudden I was lieutenant in the 14th Battalion, a very young one.

**What was your father's reaction to you joining the 39th?**

He didn't say anything.

**He was aware that that was going overseas.**

I told him that I had volunteered and been accepted to the 39th battalion and we were going to New Guinea.

40:00 He didn't say anything. I know he wasn't too pleased because he and my mother both asked that I didn't join the AIF until I turned 21. And needless to say I applied for AIF and while still in the 39th Battalion I became an AIF member and got a VX [army service number] number as soon as I turned 21.

**That was a lot later.**

40:30 That would have been in '42.

## **Tape 3**

01:11 **We are at the point of joining up with the militia. How did you find the other blokes that were in the 14th with you?**

In the 14th Battalion.

01:30 my experience was mostly amongst the officers of course, where I experienced an officers mess for the first time in my life. There were a few there with the rank of captain and major who later or shortly thereafter left and went to AIF and a few others who were First World War veterans who had come back in as instructors

02:00 amongst that mess. I found them to be very helpful. They treated me and a couple of ex-Melbourne Grammar Boys who had gone to 14th, they treated us as young fellows who had a lot to learn and they went to a lot of trouble to teach us. I found them very helpful. We didn't have over much to do with the troops other than

02:30 in parades and most of the parades in the drill hall area were involved in standing to attention and sloping arms and that sort of thing, and didn't get to know the troops very much. When we got to camp it was a different matter. As platoon commanders we had our own platoon, we as ex-Grammar boys had

to learn pretty much the hard way

- 03:00 when we encountered fellows who were a lot tougher than those, who'd been amongst those who we had associated with previously. It was interesting that in those early days of the war all militia members were volunteers, because pre-war when you joined the militia you
- 03:30 volunteered to defend Australia and its territories and that was still the case in the militia before they started bringing in those who were known as universal trainees, in other words those who were enrolled, and quite a few of those in militia in those days were pretty tough boys who had been out of work on the dole and they joined the militia because
- 04:00 every time they went to camp and every time they went on a weekend bivouac they were paid. In other words they were there not because they really wanted to be but because they saw it as a means to an end. They weren't all that easy to control. Authority coming from a young lad of 20 didn't suit them all that much but in general terms
- 04:30 I found that if you treated them the right way they treated you the right way. I got on quite well with them. One of them in particular actually Les Martaranow a sergeant and he came with me to the 39th Battalion and we were in the same company there and Les and I were quite good friends. But he was there because he had been unemployed and it was a means to an end for him.
- 05:00 There were many like that, then they started universal training and the Uts, universal trainees, came into three of the camps we had, three or two camps at Mount Martha and Balcombe and they came in civilian clothes carrying a suitcase and they were put in uniform and had to be trained,
- 05:30 quite a few of them reluctantly. They didn't want to have anything to do with it but they had been called up. I would think many of those, the reluctant ones they never got a VX number in other words, they never volunteered for AIF. Although they would possibly would have seen overseas services in places like the Solomons where militia
- 06:00 units did go and others went to New Guinea as well. Met different types of people there, learning curve.

**It must have been a fairly steep learning curve for you in terms of purely in the sense of different types of people.**

Yes it was very much so.

- 06:30 I found all guys were good guys.

**You adjusted to it OK?**

I was quite happy with it.

**Did you feel comfortable in commanding and giving orders to men?**

Yes that didn't worry me.

- 07:00 In later years in action I sought their opinions and orders that I gave might have been a considered opinion of other things. But in training areas it is definitely giving orders and the troops doing as they are told there is no
- 07:30 doubt about that. In action Australians are pretty smart boys, they can think for themselves and I can recall one fellow once saying to me "Do you think that is a good idea boss? Wouldn't it be better if we did so and so?" and he was quite right and, in later years when you are more one of them rather than one apart from them,
- 08:00 it was a lot easier to discuss things but in the training areas you were just giving orders.

**At the point that you joined the 39th you knew that you would be going to New Guinea. Tell me what expectations you had of New Guinea and what was your impression of what kind of country it was going to be?**

- 08:30 The expectation was that we were going as a Garrison Battalion to Port Moresby to relieve the garrison battalion that was already there. Our adjutant wrote to their adjutant and he must have been quite a comedian he wrote back with all sorts of fancy stories about life in the tropics and tennis parties and all sorts of wonderful things. It finished up we all packed tennis rackets and things like that
- 09:00 in our bags, nothing was more remote from the truth, he was just having us on. We thought we would be going to some sort of tropical paradise where we would be doing parades and this that and the other and that would be a great opportunity to fill in time until we were able to do something more constructive and get to a war.
- 09:30 I believe that was the attitude. It wasn't a tropical paradise by any means. We didn't really know what we were going to. We knew we had an opportunity to get outside of Australia and do a job somewhere doing something and I think as I have just said we regarded it as a fill in until we could get into the AIF and go to a war.

10:00 **At that point there wasn't a great deal of action in New Guinea as far as you knew.**

There wasn't any. The 14th battalion they were in barracks actually in Murray Barracks about 3 miles outside Port Moresby living much the same life as we would have lived in barracks down here at Balcombe.

10:30 **Before you went to New Guinea did you travel somewhere for training?**

The 39th Battalion was formed at Darley, that is a camp outside Bacchus Marsh [Victoria] we had to return

11:00 a trip to Darley only a few weeks ago, went back to the old camp site too. Darley was a training camp for AIF reinforcements it was a fairly big camp, fairly well established camp. It was run mostly by First World War veterans, training reinforcements for the 2 division already overseas. There were 3 divisions overseas: the 8th Division,

11:30 they never got any reinforcements, training reinforcements for the 6th Division and 7th Division. When the 39th was formed it was actually formed at Darley Camp and we, from our various militia units all over the place. Got train passes to get ourselves to Bacchus Marsh

12:00 In most cases there was roughly a company strength would land on one of those trains in Bacchus Marsh and a First World War officer would meet us and march us out to Darley camp which was about 4 or 5 mile march carrying all our gear. I went out there and landed at Bacchus Marsh station

12:30 was met by a Lieutenant Sam Templeton [Samuel Victor Templeton, V50190] whose name is very well known and one of the sites in New Guinea is known as Templeton's Crossing. Sam was a First World War member I think just in the last year of the First World War he had been in the Black and Tans [auxiliary regiment of the Royal Irish Constabulary formed to fight the IRA 1920] and he also had a go in the Spanish Uprising [Spanish Civil War]. Interesting guy Sam.

13:00 He met us and he ultimately become my company commander. He marched us out from Bacchus Marsh to the Darley Camp and told us that they were our barracks and they were our quarters and dump our gear and come out on parade. That is how the 39th Battalion was formed by

13:30 groups arriving from all over the place, landing at Darley and being pulled together as a battalion. All our officers were First World War veterans, Colonel Conron poor old Hughie, he was a bit too old for the job but he was a very decent type of guy. All the company commanders were First World War men, the adjutant was most of the company second in commands were.

14:00 They had been there at Bacchus Marsh training AIF reinforcements and no doubt done quite a good job at it. But then they became part of a battalion that was being formed and they had to pull us together as a unit which they did fairly effectively I would think. I wouldn't say we were a well trained unit by any

14:30 means, we were all young, so many were there because they were under 21 and they saw it as a way to get away others were a bit older but they trained us. They trained us in open warfare, we did lots of open warfare, open file attacks, we learnt how to use Lewis guns, we learnt how to use rifles, well I knew all those things in any case because I had

15:00 done them before. The other young lieutenants all had to too so we were involved in the training part of it as well under the guidance of these First World War officers. We didn't really learn anything that was of any value to us where we were going. Because no one had any experience in it.

15:30 There had been no jungle warfare up to that point no one knew anything about it. We were trained to do all sorts of things we still only had Lewis guns, First World War Lewis guns and even at Kokoda we only had First World War Lewis guns but that was the way it went. We did one huge brigade exercise I don't know who the rest of the brigade were.

16:00 There were just people in trucks going in all directions and we were put in trucks and choofed all round the western districts. We went through Skipton we finished up one night at Cressy had a wonderful time, we really enjoyed ourselves but we didn't know what we were doing. One night I couldn't find my...

16:30 we were encamped or we had taken up a position. I don't know whether we were attacking or defending but we were on the side road amongst a lot of trees and we camouflaged our truck and I couldn't find my sergeant at one stage so I went looking for him, pitch black night. He hadn't been able to find Corporal Hogan and his platoon so he had gone looking for them. I found the lot of them in a derelict farm house

17:00 not far away. It was occupied by an old hermit bloke and he was cooking them all fried eggs and boiling tea for them and so on I guess it might have been with army supplies, I wouldn't know about that. The old adage 'if you can't beat them join them' so I joined them and we had a great time there. Later on in that Battle of Cressy

17:30 the umpires would go round and put tickets on you and say "You are dead", and "you're wounded" and this went on all the time but in the final Battle of Cressy, I don't know why, but all my fellows who were

dead or wounded were still allowed to take part in the battle and we got into the town of Cressy at about midnight and every light in the town was on and all the people were standing outside their doors watching what was going on.

- 18:00 20 year old Alan, I might have turned 21 by then I don't know, .38 on the hip, I dashed up the steps of the local post office and with hand on the 38 I said to the postmaster "I am nominally taking over your post office as a communications centre," He said "You are a bit late sonny, your enemy blew it up before they left." We had these training exercises,
- 18:30 funny things like that happened during the exercises. That was one that I have recalled, in fact I wrote that story recently and had it reprinted in our battalion association magazine which comes out four times a year, it is known as the GG: The Good Guts and I always put a bit in it and that
- 19:00 was one of the stories that I wrote for it. Our training there at Darley taught us discipline, gave us a bit of fitness, we did quite a lot of route marching up and down hills and no doubt that was what we needed, young fellows had to be kept in order and kept fit. They used to sneak off a bit at night into Bacchus Marsh and places like that
- 19:30 some of them would come on parade in the morning barely able to hold their eyes open. I said to a couple of my lads in my platoon one day, I said "Look I don't mind what you do so long as you are on parade in the morning and so long as you don't get caught. But if you do get caught don't expect me to support you, the book will be thrown at you."
- 20:00 A number of them used to sneak off into Bacchus Marsh at night, it was a 5 mile walk, and coming back in the dark I don't know how they did it, they had to come up a creek beside the camp and work their way in to avoid the guard post. But Australian troops are fairly adept at that sort of thing. Training at Darley was good in its own way but probably not really effective for what we were to do.

#### **That kind of exercise**

- 20:30 **is obviously from the south of France or something moving around in trucks and taking over villages and post offices.**

They were First World War officers training us. But they did their best they were quite good fellows. There wasn't any jungle there to train us in jungle fighting was there.

- 21:00 And no one knew anything about jungle fighting in any case. It was learnt by experience later on.

#### **How long were you at Darley for?**

A couple of months and then I think it was the end of December '41 it might have been Christmas Eve we got our movement orders.

- 21:30 We were entrained at Bacchus Marsh, oh and in the mean time we had been up and down to the Caulfield Racecourse for inoculations and all sorts of things like that. We entrained at Bacchus Marsh, down to Melbourne, changed trains and overnight in carriages which I think were older than the Boer War to
- 22:00 Sydney. In Sydney we were transferred direct from the train onto ferries and the ferries took us round to the Aquitania which was anchored in Garden Island. And from the ferries we went up a long gang plank on to the side of the Aquitania. That was a remarkable situation there was the
- 22:30 Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth, the Aquitania and three large war ships all in Sydney Harbour at the one time. You could hardly see the water for the ships and it would have been the most marvellous target for any aerial bombardment. The Aquitania, the Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mary the three largest ships in the world at that time in Sydney Harbour with all the war ships. We were put on to the Aquitania
- 23:00 we knew we were going to New Guinea, we didn't know where, the grape vine had told us where, but officially we didn't know where. We were convoyed to Port Moresby there was one scare on the way it is still said that it was a genuine submarine, another
- 23:30 story is the navy made a mistake and they sent depth charges down onto a whale, none of us were ever made really aware but on the way there, about second day out, all the naval ships they really went to work, they went round in circles they dropped depth charges all over the place and our ships did a bit of zig zag and so on. We were told it was a genuine submarine contact, we don't know, but that was a bit scary.
- 24:00 If that was scary to us what must it had been like to cross the Atlantic. We sailed in beautiful conditions, the sun was shining the flying fish were there, the dolphins were playing around the bow of the Aquitania. I was very fortunate, I had accommodation in the honeymoon suite on the Aquitania with 13 other young lieutenants.
- 24:30 All the comfortable beds and things had been ripped out and we just had some bunks in there. There were 14 of us in the honeymoon suite. Peace-time stewards were still on the Aquitania, in those days. They were for the first 3 years of the war. Officers were fed in the first class dining room and looked



after very well by these stewards.

- 25:00 I guess the tucker wasn't as good as it would have been in peace time but it was still fairly good. We had this 4 day trip from Sydney to Moresby harbour where the Aquitania ran aground. They had never had a ship that size in the Moresby Harbour before and she touched bottom. They said
- 25:30 that they might be able to get her off at high tide but the tide was fairly high even then. There were 4000-odd troops on board. Our battalion the 53rd Battalion from NSW and a number of ancillary troops and we had to be off-loaded from the ship, there's a lot of weight in 4,000 troops. We were offloaded by corvettes, we went down the side onto the corvettes and the corvettes ran
- 26:00 us into the wharf in Moresby and they managed to get her up high enough to move into a bit deeper water. It was dark before we got ashore we were formed up as a battalion and marched up the main street of Port Moresby which was up the hill to the point where the anti-aircraft guns were later established
- 26:30 then down the other side to Ela Beach and then seven miles out to the Seven Mile drome area carrying our full kits in that tropical heat at night. We were escorted by members of the 49th Battalion who had been there
- 27:00 at a garrison and they, not carrying anything, were marching freely; they marched us all the way out to the area of the Seven Mile drome and they said "That is your bivouac area B Company", this is in the middle of the night, pretty dark,, "that's your bivouac area A company" and they walked off and left us. We had nothing.
- 27:30 We didn't have mosquito nets, we didn't have any food, we didn't have a shovel between us, we didn't have any anti-malarial gear or anything like that, it wasn't know in those days. And we were just put down there on the side of a hill and told that is where you are. It was pretty rugged. I am quite sure that many of our
- 28:00 malaria cases were bitten that night and got it there and then. Within a few days dysentery was rife. When daylight came we were able to sort of organise a bit and someone found a few tins of bully beef which were produced and we were able to eat something but the organisation was absolutely pathetic, probably the worst I have ever encountered in all my years in the
- 28:30 army. The ships that were loaded with supplies were loaded all upside down. We didn't get a shovel off any one of those ships until the fourth day, the shovels were right down at the bottom so we couldn't dig latrines, it was unbelievable the disorganisation and the mismanagement of that move to New Guinea which was apparently a
- 29:00 apparently a very hurried move, although we were not told about it somewhere high, high, high up they were starting to get worried about Japanese. We weren't told any of that at that stage. But that move to Port Moresby, lovely trip on the Aquitania, absolute disaster once we were off the Aquitania. It was very badly organised.

**Was this your**

- 29:30 **first trip overseas?**

The first time I had been out of Victoria.

**What were your, after we spoke about your expectations, what were your first impressions of New Guinea?**

First impression of New Guinea was quite unlike anything I had expected. Because I expected tropical growth and Port Moresby is in a pocket that doesn't get rain

- 30:00 Most of the vegetation around it is equivalent to what I would call scrub gum, no tropical growth at all and it is a very dry pocket. Go out 20 miles and everything changes but around Moresby itself is just a very, very dry pocket. It was a dirty, dusty not very pleasant place that was hot and full of mosquitoes.
- 30:30 The town of Port Moresby itself was probably pretty much as I expected a tropical town to look. Houses built on stilts and verandahs around the outsides and a couple of big trading stores and that was pretty much what I would have expected but only that.

**Were there many locals around?**

There were

- 31:00 plenty of natives. In those days the women were still dressed in grass skirts and that was about all...that was all and there were plenty of them wondering around the streets of Port Moresby. Plenty of native boys around, all friendly all quite friendly. In those days if you
- 31:30 gave them a shilling piece, and the shilling piece in those days had a hole in the middle of it, their shillings they used to drape them around their neck, they would bring you fresh fish for a shilling they would bring you paw paws they would do anything. They were friendly and very nice people. I

understand they are not a bit that way nowadays, very hostile now. They were quite OK,

32:00 our chief concern was establishing ourselves in a camp and getting life going which, as supplies arrived, we are able to do.

**Was it a shock to topless women?**

No you knew natives were like that and that was that, they are not very pretty.

**When after this big march over the hill down to the drome**

32:30 **did you still have your tennis racquets?**

No. Officers had a trunk. We still carried out kit bag and our haversack and so on, the same as all the troops but officers had steel trunks which someone else handled all the way round. Those steel trunks went into

33:00 kit store somewhere, we never saw them again so goodness knows what happened to the tennis rackets and anything else we might have had in them. In those we had clothes that would be suitable for formal evening engagements and that sort of thing, none of which we would ever use.

**It is intriguing to think about where those trunks might have ended up.**

33:30 I finished up I got mine back afterwards it was delivered to my home. I don't know where it had been during the war. Everything in it was mouldy but I got the trunk back. My daughter still has it up in Ballarat, she stores things in it.

**Upon arriving at Seven Mile drome and finding such disarray what were the**

34:00 **first things that you set about doing or you set the men about doing?**

The first morning we set about getting them to scratch holes in the ground to use for toilets, things like tin hats we used for scratching the holes, or bayonets for digging out rocks or doing anything. We didn't have a shovel or a pick. From memory some vehicle brought us water

34:30 because I remember lining up all the platoon and telling them they had to shave. In those days shaving was considered a pretty important part of discipline and yes they had to shave and they did with cold water. I do recall big 4 gallon tins of

35:00 tea coming from somewhere. I don't know where, probably they would have come from the 49th Battalion at the Murray Barracks and been ferried out by vehicle I do remember that. I do remember one fellow drinking most of his tea down to about that point and using the bit at the bottom for shaving because he didn't want to shave with cold water. He shaved with the balance of his tea. I did that myself once too it wasn't a bad idea.

35:30 We sort of progressively got organised as a camp and in the Seven Mile drome area we weren't all together we were in company lots in different positions and from those positions we had our labouring tasks allotted to us I would say.

36:00 Most of the early times in Port Moresby were labouring. Unloading ships, building roads and as time went on daily filling in the bomb holes in the Seven Mile drome that were caused by the Mitsubishi's [Japanese A6M Zero planes] coming over and dropping bombs at us knowing that we had nothing to shoot back at them. Training virtually

36:30 non existent. We were there as labourers.

**What was it like to be bombed?**

Not a very nice feeling. By this time we had shovels and we dug slit trenches for ourselves and that sort of thing. We were all spread around the Seven Mile drome we still had our First World War Lewis guns with us,

37:00 we had them on tripods and we were there to defend the Seven Mile Drome which had daily bombing attacks from about 15,000 feet. Every now and again a flight of Zeros would come through after the bombs dropped and fly through the drome just firing willy-nilly at anything and everything.

37:30 We used to shoot at the Zeros with our dear old Lewis guns. One fellow I mentioned before who came from the 14th battalion with me, Les Masarato a sergeant, he is, to the day he died, he was adamant that he and I shot down a Zero one day with our Lewis gun on a tripod. To the day he died I told him that he was probably incorrect in that an awful lot of other people were shooting at the same one.

38:00 We did bring one down with Lewis gun fire one day. Generally speaking life was working parties and defending the Seven Mile drome. Every now and again a plane of ours would come in. One day we had a Hudson come in from somewhere and the lone Japanese reconnaissance plane at 17,000 feet dropped one bomb and hit the Hudson right in the middle.

38:30 So the one plane we had didn't exist after that day. This was the life in Port Moresby really unloading

ships was a big part of it and one of our platoons was on board the Mercury the day she was hit. Didn't do much damage that day. Second day, unloading

- 39:00 the skipper of the ship pulled out into the harbour at Moresby and he was sort of moving around a bit and she was hit again with a bomb, it went through the chart room, through the captain's bath on the next level and exploded on the landing of the stairway going down to the dining room where all our troops had been sent down to the dining room for safety.
- 39:30 We had a number injured that day, the lieutenant in charge, Ted Money later died of his wounds and that day the Mercury caught on fire she was pulled up in shallow water at Hanuabada Beach where most of our guys who were uninjured got off and swam and the injured were ferried off in some way before she actually sank and she still lies there on her side
- 40:00 at Hanuabada Beach. One of our returns to New Guinea they have been out in boats and laid wreaths on the water beside the Mercury. Unloading ships, unloading ships, unloading ships. That was most of the work and building roads, building tracks and then at that stage, starting to build a few defences such as they were.
- 40:30 Really the time in Port Moresby was a labouring time rather than a military time until Brigadier Porter arrived but by that time the Japanese threat was on and things were a bit different.

## Tape 4

- 00:34 Those air strikes carried on almost every day. The Japanese used to send over a reconnaissance plane in the morning, around about from memory 11 o'clock, and about an hour later the Mitsubishi's would come in at 17,000 feet, something like that, and drop their load of bombs on the Seven Mile drome, the Zeros would follow them in and strafe and off they would go
- 01:00 and we would spend the rest of the day filling in the holes on the drome and that became pretty much a regular occupation. We were told that we were getting our Kittyhawk planes to support us but they never arrived, we were told they were coming next week and they never arrived, we were told they were coming tomorrow and they became known amongst our boys as the Tomorrow Hawks. And then one day they did arrive,
- 01:30 five of them, unmarked planes. They came in and did a low run over the Seven Mile drome putting on a bit of a show obviously. Someone up at the Air Force Station at the end of the drome thought it was another Zero attack and opened up so we all opened up, and the five Kittyhawks that we had, we shot down three of them,
- 02:00 none of the pilots were injured fortunately. Two of them were quite operative as one of the pilots Wilbur Whecket was his name he was the son of the Air Vice Marshal of the First World War. When the Mitsubishi reconnaissance plane came in that morning Wilbur Whecket was up there above him and he very
- 02:30 effectively shot him down, instead of being in the slit trenches dodging bombs we were all standing on the side of them waving our hats, cheering him. A change of our living conditions really because for the first time we were able to fight back. However that was much the condition in Port Moresby in those days but the action was getting closer and closer all the time.

**That is pretty extraordinary incident there.**

- 03:00 **The friendly fire incident.**

Yes well they were unmarked planes.

**All of you were waiting on these Tomahawks and when they do arrive, you shoot them down.**

They weren't marked they had no markings on them and it was someone in the Air Force Station at the end of the drome who first opened fire on them and once one of those fellows fired we all did.

**When you say unmarked were they not painted?**

They were just a plain colour they didn't

- 03:30 have the circles on the wings or anything to indicate that they were Australian planes.

**This is broad daylight.**

Yes. 11 in the morning. It has been well recorded in many places.

**I have heard of this incident.**

Not a new story.

**What was the state of your equipment by this stage? How long have you been in Port Moresby**

**for?**

04:00 A month or two months at this stage, my perception of time in Port Moresby is pretty vague because there was not all that much happened there. We probably would have been there for a couple of months at that stage I would think; yeah it must have been every bit of a couple of months. In that time we had had certain other defences arrive? We had a couple of anti aircraft guns had arrived and were on the hill above

04:30 Port Moresby.

**What type of anti-aircraft guns?**

3.7s from memory. They were able to keep the Japanese planes up above about 15,000 feet. No doubt they were not the latest we did not have the latest of anything up there. Various things like that were arriving in Port Moresby and producing things

05:00 that made it look a bit more like a defended city. We got a bit more transport than we had before, not that it proved of value later on it was only useful around Port Moresby. Things like that did happen and we were better fed then too more supplies were coming through.

**Gradually there was consolidation of all the services?**

Yes but in a very secondary way

05:30 I think Australia's efforts were still mostly towards the Middle East and sending all the best equipment to the Middle East and we had the bits that were left over and it remained like that for quite some time.

**Which other units were you stationed next to?**

The 53rd battalion was the only other one there at that stage.

**And that was militia?**

Yes. There were the three in our brigade the 39th, 49th and 53rd and they were a NSW lot

06:00 **The 53rd.**

Yes.

**What about the 49th?**

Queensland. The 53rd they were a different story and they disgraced themselves in battle I don't think it was all together their fault. I think they were badly led. They were not volunteers. In Victoria all militia units were asked to gather together a number of

06:30 volunteers for the 39th Battalion, in NSW the units were told to provide a given number of men for the 53rd and the feeling is that they mostly provided those they didn't want to keep to get them out of the way. How accurate that is I don't know. With their junior officers, I think it could well have been the case because they were very poorly led.

**What about the 49th?**

The 49th was some very nice fellows but they were tired old boys, they had been in

07:00 in Port Moresby for about 18 months at that stage, they were getting a bit tired of the tropics. They were not to my knowledge committed to the same extent as the 53rd. The 53rd were committed on our right flank at one stage and they just didn't perform and a bit later on they were used to reinforce portion of the 2/16th Battalion from

07:30 memory and they let them down too and they were just taken out of the line. In the 39th battalion's second go up there in New Guinea and that was on the north coast around Gona and Gona West, some of the 53rd were sent to us as reinforcements and I had several of them in my platoon and they were damn good soldiers and really good blokes. I think they had been let down by

08:00 their leaders previously.

**Were they well trained? Were any of your units well trained?**

No none of us were well trained. No one had any training for tropical warfare because no one had ever been involved in it before. The only people who ever encountered it were our 8th Division who were on the Malayan Peninsular and at Ambon and Rabaul and they were all overrun by the Japs and we didn't get training experience from them at all.

08:30 **What about regular soldiers in Port Moresby as liaison officers and so forth?**

There weren't too many regular soldiers around at that stage. Most of the regular soldiers the staff officers and so on were with the brigades in the Middle East.

**Would you say that at the time you felt a lack of confidence? It looked like when the Japanese**

**were attacking.**

They hadn't attacked at that stage but they were still working their way down the Malayan Peninsular and

09:00 we were quite worried about it. It got to the stage of the Coral Sea Battle, when all of a sudden we were no longer doing labouring work and unloading ships; our main task at that stage was digging trenches all over the place. Half of them were so badly sited they would have never been of any value as I believe it, but we were doing as we were told and

09:30 digging defences everywhere. At the time of the Coral Sea Battle we did have quite a bit of aircraft then, everything had been building up. We were led to believe that the Japanese force was making for Port Moresby, the Coral Sea force. I think later history showed that they were making for

10:00 a place called Bootless Bay which was to the east of the Moresby Harbour and happened to be where all the 39th Battalion were in any case, defending Bootless bay, and we would have just been overrun if they had got there but the Coral Sea Battle, with the aircraft operating out of Port Moresby, out of Townsville and out of Milne Bay,

10:30 turned the tide there and none of those ships got through. It was because of the failure of that Coral Sea Battle that General Horii [Tomitaro Horii, Commander Japanese Forces, New Guinea] got instructions from above to take Port Moresby overland and it was then that he transferred his troops from Rabaul to the north coast of New Guinea and

11:00 the Kokoda campaign started. I think that accurately sums up how it happened or why it happened.

**What was the state of preparation, you said you were building bunkers and things like that? What about mentally, psychologically?**

We were all young fellows and we were

11:30 better than anyone else in our own minds, we weren't having any of these Japanese telling us what to do. That was the sort of feeling amongst young chaps, we will give them for whatever they are looking for. I think it was realised then that their superior forces had overwhelmed the 8th Division in the Malayan Peninsular, had overwhelmed Singapore with its British Garrisons, had overwhelmed Rabaul and Ambon which were islands

12:00 very close to us and the general feeling was that we were in for a bit of a dust up.

**Everyone was very worried.**

Well very concerned yes, very knowledgeable of what might happen lets put it that way. I don't know if anyone was ever worried at any time. Later on in action if there was anyone who ever dared to say he wasn't scared I think he would have been a liar.

12:30 Or had no feelings at all. At that stage I don't know that anyone was too worried about it at all it was thought at that stage it was going to be inevitable and so that was it, it is coming. That is the general reaction of Australians I think.

**Did you have anything to do with the PIB**

13:00 **Papua Infantry Battalion while you were in Moresby?**

No we knew they existed, we knew they were there, I believe most of them were, at about the time we have just speaking, were operating outside Moresby on the north side of the Owen Stanley Ranges doing reconnaissance work there but we didn't encounter them.

**What took place when the Japanese landed at Gona, Buna and Sanananda?**

13:30 Prior to that, one company of the 39th Battalion had been sent by foot up the Kokoda Track, we don't like calling it the Kokoda trail that was an Americanism, to Kokoda, they were given different reasons at the time, they were sent

14:00 One of them was to find out if it was possible for white men to cross the Owen Stanley's on foot. It had never been done before other than by the odd patrol officer. Other thoughts were that it was to defend the Kokoda Air Strip in case the Japanese tried to land there and I think they were the two prevailing thoughts that were floating around at the time.

14:30 The B Company of the 39th Battalion did go up there on foot they had a lot of assistance, they had native carriers and things which no other troops had at a later date. Also their main kits were sent by boat, someone dug up an old lugger [pearling boat] somewhere and their main kits were sent round to Buna from memory, by boat and carried inland by

15:00 native carriers to Kokoda. The B Company of the 39th battalion set up at Kokoda and fixed defensive positions there and so on in an objective sort of way. But at that stage they still only had Lewis guns, they didn't even have a Bren gun and reconnoitred forward positions at places

- 15:30 like Afore and so on for defences and were there for a few weeks and fairly well established. As far as I know living fairly well at that stage because Kokoda has a good climate, very wet at night but a good day-time climate and in those days the rubber plantation was still operating there, there were a few civilians left there.
- 16:00 I think they fitted in very well under the control of Captain Sam Templeton who was possibly or arguably the best company commander the 39th battalion ever had and that maybe why it was his company that was sent up there. They lived fairly well, had reasonable supply, at that stage the Kokoda airport was operative; it's only very small one, no bigger even today.
- 16:30 In fact we are currently was planning a return up there and one of the worries is that nobody is looking after the Kokoda Airport and the grass is about 2 feet long on it so it would be difficult to land there. They set up there and they did have a bit of supply come in and they were fairly well established. When almost overnight the Japanese suddenly landed at Gona. I understand
- 17:00 that the first contact with them was with PIB [Papua Infantry Battalion] I am not too sure. They landed at Gona and Buna almost simultaneously, it may have been the Buna lot that the PIB encountered, I am not clear on that. They did land at Gona and promptly started off up the track towards Kokoda. The north side of the Owen Stanley Ranges
- 17:30 is quite different from the south in that the north side is a gradual slope from the coast up to Kokoda, it crosses a few pretty deep rivers but is a gradual slope. None of the tremendous up and down that you have on the south side. And the Japanese advanced fairly quickly peddling bicycles in many cases and walking along and chatting and singing happily.
- 18:00 One of Templeton's platoons forward at Afore had an ambush set up there and the first Japanese that walked into the ambush were 6-footers trained Royal Marines, every one expected to find little fellows with gold teeth and horn rimmed glasses, and none of them were like that they were big soldiers. That platoon
- 18:30 set up an ambush and knocked off a few of them and then sort of moved off back to the next position. I understand that the platoon commanders message that got back to Templeton was "the Japanese have landed at Gona with a force of 7,000, What am I to do?" and that Templeton's message back to him was "Hold on as long as possible." He had about 20 men I guess, so he set ambushes and moved back.
- 19:00 That was how the Battle of Kokoda developed, the Japanese worked their way up the track, they had a few stoushes with that platoon and then they got closer to Kokoda reinforcements had been cried out for and they did manage to fly in one platoon of the 39th Battalion's D Company to Kokoda,
- 19:30 so there was then a four-platoon company there to defend everything between Tokyo and Australia. That is what it amounted to, but that was when the Kokoda battles developed. The Japanese mounted attacks against Kokoda were driven back a couple of times the Japanese, overran the 39th
- 20:00 at Kokoda and they had to withdraw back to...I forget which little village they went back to, and at that point there was a counter-attack and the 39th Battalion actually knocked them out of Kokoda. Then they brought up more troops and all the time the battle swayed because everything that happened they just brought up more and more and more troops, they had so many.
- 20:30 Their attitude was that they didn't care how many they lost so long as they kept going. General Horai's instructions were that he was to take Port Moresby and secure the Moresby airfield in 12 days. The therefore Japanese troops carried very little equipment; they didn't have to carry much because in 12 days time they were going to
- 21:00 take over the airport in Port Moresby, they were going to take over all the Australian stores in Port Moresby and they were going to take over the hospitals in Port Moresby. So they did not come up the track with support, it was simply lots and lots and lots of fighting troops and then the battles raged. The battalion was driven
- 21:30 out of Kokoda completely back to Isurava by that time the rest of the 39th Battalion had got up there, the hard way, up the track carrying their gear.

**Were you with the 39th at this stage?**

I was with the 39th battalion, yes.

**What happened where were you stationed?**

We were all in together

- 22:00 at Isurava. The attack on Isurava was a pretty fierce one and was driven off.

**You were at Isurava at the time?**

No I wasn't at Isurava at the time; I was out on a flank at the time. I didn't get terribly involved in the Isurava thing at all.

**Could you relate your story more towards your own experiences rather, because I am interested to know**

22:30 **when you started walking down the track can you walk us what was going through your mind, how your platoon was functioning and things like that?**

In that particular battle at Isurava, I was way out on a flank doing reconnaissance work, we did get mixed up in a few little bits and pieces out there, not serious pitch battles

23:00 but encounters and ambushes and that sort of thing. My lot didn't really get back until the Isurava thing was nearly over, we had been out doing other work therefore what we were doing was not significant to what happened in the main battle. That was why I was talking about what the battalion did rather than what I did. What I did and what my boys did was

23:30 rejoin the thing roughly at the withdrawal from Isurava point when it was going back towards Brigade Hill. At which time the 39th Battalion was almost spent but had been reinforced by the 2/14th at that stage. We encountered Japanese in my lot, we didn't have a platoon, our numbers were so reduced with illness and so on we...

24:00 You got down nearer to groups of about 10 or 12 rather than platoons but we got mixed up in the thing but not in that main Isurava contact. I know all about that because I have been through the battalion history so many times. We were there, we heard a lot of firing, we were amongst a lot of firing but not in that main Isurava encounter.

**What did the firing consist of as far as...?**

24:30 As far as the Japanese were concerned they had heavy machine guns, [dukies], their rifle was a .256 ours was a 303, theirs was a very accurate rifle with quite a long range. They had heavy machine guns and they had mountain guns and wherever we went they were quite happy to have

25:00 mountain gun shells landing amongst us. We didn't have any 3-inch mortars up there at that stage to counter them, but by that time we had been issued with a few Bren guns to replace our First World War Lewis guns and we were a lot more confident with them and then we started getting a few Thompson sub-machine guns later replaced by the Australian Army Owen gun, which was a better weapon for those circumstances.

25:30 It is hard to detail things that happened there because it was so much of a shambles all the time, there were movements backwards and forwards, you would be moved from one position to another, you would be told you were going to advance and then all of a sudden you would hear that the battalion was to withdraw and troops were getting cut off in all directions. We were cut off for a while out there but we found our way back. That was the way it went but

26:00 the main killing at Isurava was in the main defence, mostly B Company of the 39th Battalion, they faced what was known as the Killing Grounds and that was where the 2/14th Battalion relieved them and the first VC [Victoria Cross] was won in the Second World War: Ted Kenner, I think, at Isurava. But after Isurava we [the 39th Battalion] were

26:30 all together. I was back amongst the lot there at Myola and the same thing happened at Myola, we were all just attacked again and we fought another delaying action. It was a dreadfully unpleasant type of war there, all you did was put yourself in a position where you mowed people down, and then got out if you were left to get out.

27:00 I don't like talking about it, it upsets me because we lost a lot of good fellows there. We got ultimately back to Myola that is where the 39th Battalion was or what was left of us was withdrawn.

**Can I ask you about your first combat experience? What were you expecting battle to be like with the Japanese? How did it eventuate?**

27:30 **What was reality and what was your imagination?**

I don't know I was young. I don't know that I really knew what to expect. I knew that there was going to be a time when they were shooting at me and I was shooting at them, and that is what happened. My first experience was shooting at them, they didn't know we were waiting for them but their immediate reaction always was to bring up more troops and encircle you in whatever you were doing.

28:00 I guess your thoughts weren't along the lines of planning at all they were thoughts of the moment: "How do we deal with this? How do we deal with that at this moment?"

**Can you tell us about what sort of tactics the Japanese would use? You did talk about encirclement more or less, was there anything specific about Japanese tactics face to face?**

That was it.

28:30 they would move forward until they made contact, they would keep making contact by bringing up more and more and more troops, no matter how many were killed, and in doing that, have you engaged so that they could work around the sides. This I guess is a tactic that any army would use but they were

trained jungle fighters, they had learnt in Malaya, they knew how to move in the jungle

29:00 and they knew how to have us occupied while they'd get themselves in other positions, they were good fighters. I don't know if they were brave men or their culture was such that they didn't mind dying but they just kept walking forward the whole time and kept us engaged so that they get us at from other angles and other places.

**The actual attack on your position,**

29:30 **you commanded the platoon at that stage of roughly 30 men.**

No. At that stage it was probably down to about 10 men.

**When you were sent into the battle initially you would have about 30 men.**

No initially about 20. There were so many lost through tropical illness, that we never had numbers.

**So you were under strength to begin with?**

Always Yes.

**When the Japanese did attack how would you describe their attack?**

First of all

30:00 what would happen, they would be coming along, we would pick off their forward scouts and then a number of men would come forward and we would have a go at them with our automatic weapons and probably clean up quite a number of them and then a greater number would come forward and they always just kept coming and working around.

**Would you class them as reckless in their tactics or were they?**

30:30 **I am trying to get an impression here that.**

No I don't think they were reckless, I think they were very well trained and we're told that they regarded it as a great honour to die for the Emperor and that may have been part of the way which they seemed to attack without regard to personal life or whether they were doing it because they were told to do it or

31:00 it was their culture I wouldn't know. But the result was that they were very good attacking soldiers.

**What sort of tactics would they use? I was told by other 39th Battalion vets they'd use a lot of noise to their advantage. Can you tell us more about that?**

They would make an awful lot of noise they would even call out in English, in broken English. I can recall

31:30 one yelling out "Two-inch mortar no bloody good!" well our 2-inch mortar wasn't any good either but one of them told me that. I have heard them say "Come and help me. I am wounded." They had a number of English phrases that they would use to try and get you to show yourself.

32:00 **How fluent were they? Could you distinguish between...**

Oh yes their English wasn't good, you could pick it but they nevertheless used it.

**Did it work? Did people show themselves?**

Maybe I don't know not that I know of, they tried.

**What about outside shouting? What sort of other things would they do as far as**

32:30 **noise was concerned?**

When they were attacking they didn't in any way try to blanket noise. I would say when we were attacking it was always a matter of sneaking up at something before we got going; once they were attacking they just made all the noise under the sun.

33:00 In their close attacks they would yell, which was part of their training I guess, because we were taught that if we ever got into a bayonet charge, I never did get into one, but if we were ever involved in a bayonet charge, we were to go forward with our bayonets yelling at the top of our voices to frighten the enemy and I guess they had the same training.

**You had faced bayonet charges.**

I never faced one.

**From the Japs.**

No.



33:30 Others did. I was never in a position where I faced one but others certainly did. In later days down at Gona I did face one fellow coming at me waving his samurai sword above his head. He was only 20 feet from me coming straight at me with his samurai sword but that was as far as he got, about 20 feet but I never faced a bayonet charge.

34:00 **After the Battle of Isurava which you were involved in the outskirts, you said the next engagement for your unit was**

Back at Myola

**What took place there?**

That was just another one of these various moves back. It got back to Myola and then it got back to what was known as Brigade Hill where there was another big battle like the Isurava battle but we were out of it by then, the 39th Battalion were out then. Then it got even further back to

34:30 Iorabaiwa [Ridge] and that is where the tide turned completely. Whereas in the early stages when we were right up at the top, and over the other side, we'd had trouble with supply, by the time it got back to Iorabaiwa the Japanese were having dreadful trouble with supply they were well past their 12 days and they had run out of everything and by that time Australia had two more brigades coming forward

35:00 so the tide turned. Previously they had many troops but limited supply whereas it got to the stage where we had many, many, many troops coming in and they had no supply. That was where the tide turned really, but we were right out of it by then and back in Moresby being retrained to go into the Gona battle.

35:30 **Did you know at that stage after the battle of Isurava, did you know that the AIF was going to reinforce your unit?**

We were reinforced at Isurava by the 2/14th Battalion who were AIF.

**They had already come by that stage.**

Then there was the 2/16th and then the 2/27th and then other brigades of the AIF came up. Also other militia units were sent up, the

36:00 3rd Battalion went into action somewhere on the return trip going across the Owen Stanley Ranges, they were involved there in going back through Kokoda during the Japanese retreat but Australia at that point had the superiority in numbers in the Owen Stanley's and the tide turned.

36:30 **How did the 53rd Battalion, you said it disgraced itself on the track, where specifically did it disgrace itself and did you see evidence of this?**

No I wasn't there but it is well documented they didn't go in where they were told to go in and they nicked off or portions of them did.

**How did your troops and yourself react to the presence of the AIF when they first arrived?**

Delighted.

37:00 The 39th Battalion was due to be actually wiped out if the 2/14th hadn't arrived. We were delighted to have them there. They came in very cockahoop "...where are these bloody Japs? We are going to clean them up. Those Chocos couldn't do it." we were the Chocos ["chocolate soldiers": the name given to the less well-trained militia units that were sent to defend New Guinea before being reinforced by troops recalled from the Middle East]. After

37:30 being engaged with the 2/14th Battalion, the 39th and 14th became very good friends we still have a lot to do with each other the two Associations. One remark was made and it was told to me by a 2/14th veteran he said "When we got in there that first day when the big onslaught was on,

38:00 he said I heard one of me mates say to another one "who said they couldn't fight." The other one said, 'Who do you mean, the Japs or the Chocs?'" We were the Chocs. They did arrive thinking that this militia unit let the show down, that they should have fixed up all this arrangement but their thinking with regard to our battalion

38:30 at any rate, changed quite a lot because we had a lot to do with them later at Gona and Sanananda.

**What did they look like when you first saw them?**

The 2/14th guys? They looked like we looked a few weeks before, their clothing wasn't all torn and tattered, they had good equipment, better equipment than we ever had. They had all very up-to-date Bren guns and Tommy [Thompson] guns

39:00 and mortars and mortars dischargers and all the things that they needed, their equipment was very much better than ours. And they were good guys and they were ready to go, ready to get in.

**Very eager.**

Yes they certainly were. Good soldiers.

**Did you ever see them in action?**

Yes I saw them in action around Myola. And later on,

39:30 up round Gona we were all mixed up with them in action with them.

**That was later. You were taken out of the line after Myola basically. What took place for you after that?**

We went back to a place called Hombrom Bluff which was well out of Moresby up in the area of the Rona Falls just at the start of going up the track

40:00 where the Rona was where the rubber plantation was and we were reformed at Hombrom Bluff gradually many of those who had gone out with tropical illnesses and minor wounds came back to us and our numbers were built up again. We didn't do much training there because it was more a fitness thing than anything else, we did a bit of route marching and physical exercise and,

40:30 that sort of thing, that was where we were sent a few of the 53rd Battalion blokes to reinforce our numbers and I won't have anything said against them as individual troops they were great. Well, mine were. We then went back to, as a unit, back to the Seven Mile Drome area or south east of it down the Seven Mile Valley where we

41:00 did more digging of defences and training. I think it was more for fitness than anything else. You get fairly fit swinging a pick digging out solid rock.

## Tape 5

00:32 **I would like to take you back a little bit.**

I didn't like talking about that area of the great killing, where it was all going on there, it upsets me too much. I lost too many friends there, that's why I was talking we rather than I.

**We don't want to push you on anything you don't want to talk about. I want to just go back a little bit now to**

01:00 **the =Drome before we get back onto the track. You said that you were very under... you didn't have much gear, equipment or supplies is the word I'm looking for I think. You must have had a lot of difficulty dealing with the insects and the disease that happened.**

01:30 **Did you have any medication at all?**

When we were first there none at all maybe it was on ships that hadn't come ashore. After we had been there for a fortnight we got liquid Quinine not quinine tablets. And every evening we would have a platoon parade and

02:00 each man had to line past the platoon sergeant with a spoon and the platoon sergeant would put a teaspoon of Quinine into that man's spoon and he had to stand there and put it in his mouth and swallow it under supervision. Quinine had been the anti-malarial medication for the civilians for many years and it did seem to suppress it a bit.

02:30 Many many, had malaria and at different times we all had malaria. I had it many times. But in those early days probably the biggest problem was dysentery and there wasn't any medication for that in the early days either, well there wasn't anything for anything at all and that was because we just didn't have proper equipment, we didn't

03:00 have anything, we were just landed there as bodies put on the side of a mountain. A lot of men... I went off with dysentery, very bad dysentery at one stage, very, very bad dysentery, and I was in hospital for quite awhile. Later on we got Atebrin they were the yellow pills that we took and everyone's skin

03:30 turned yellow and it did seem to suppress the malaria. A few fellows still got it while we were taking Atebrin maybe they said they took their Atebrin pills and they didn't I don't know. You usually could tell if someone wasn't taking it because his skin wasn't yellow. I think most did take them and some who were very yellow still got malaria. That didn't do anything for dengue fever which

04:00 we got at different times, it didn't do anything for scrub typhus which a few got and most of them died. In general terms medications were short and medical treatment was pretty limited and later on in the battle areas about all you had was a field dressing,

04:30 and in most cases company commanders and a few platoon commanders had a few little tubes, just like a tube of eye ointment, that size that had hypodermic needles on the end and they were tubes of morphine and the very badly wounded you could get one of them into their arm to help them along a bit. Medication not very much at all.

- 05:00 **You say that you got dysentery yourself and you went to hospital for a couple of weeks tell us about that.**
- Dysentery was a pretty debilitating thing. Anything that you ate or drank just went straight through and came out as pure liquid. To get from where you were
- 05:30 stretched out on a camp stretcher or whatever in a Dysentery Hospital to the holes in the ground was something that you very often didn't achieve. It was a very debilitating thing and also it was pretty nasty, you felt so horrible about stinking which you did and it took a long time to recover from it.
- 06:00 They started giving us stuff like I think it wasn't Epsom salts but something like that which was supposedly to drive the germs out but seemed to make the situation worse. When we got over our dysentery it took us weeks to get strength back. Weeks and weeks and weeks to get strength back. When I came out of the Dysentery Hospital
- 06:30 I was posted to New Guinea Force Headquarters as camp commandant for a few weeks before going back to the unit. I never really found out what the camp commandant did at New Guinea Force Headquarters other than keep the camp tidy and pay the natives that was about all he seemed to do. There was an old planter's house and the general and a lot of people were up there and the camp commandant and a few lesser ranks were down
- 07:00 there underneath and I never really found out much about a camp commandant's job and I broke my neck to get back to the battalion. I didn't want to be there. But I think that was just part of not being well enough to go back. And many of the troops were not fit to come back to the unit when they did after being in the dysentery hospital which was known as Lightning Ridge.
- Why Lightning Ridge?**
- You had to be in such a hurry.
- 07:30 **While you were in hospital and also while you were camp commandant, did you receive news about what your unit were up to?**
- The unit at that stage was still around Port Moresby. I knew what they were up to because I used to knock off one of the
- 08:00 new Guinea Headquarters vehicles, which I remember was an Austin 8 utility which had been impressed from one of the local civilians who shot through and I used to knock off this thing and go back to the unit and find out what was going on. So I was in touch with them all the time. It was when I was in that vehicle one day that I had my worse experience of bombing.
- 08:30 I was driving around the Seven Mile drome amongst our own troops and they were sort of standing around their slit trenches and going like this [pointing up] and I thought they recognised me and were just waving to me so I waved back to them. What they were doing was telling me that there were things up there and eventually a bomb landed, I suppose, 200 yards ahead of where I was and I stopped this blooming little utility and
- 09:00 got out of it and went flat on my face in just a little hollow like that. The nearest bomb would have been 40 feet away from me, or less and it was a daisy cutter [anti-personnel shrapnel bomb that explodes above the ground] and it all went over the top of me by less than inches and the percussion of that thing was extraordinary. I was deaf, I was stunned
- 09:30 it was just an extraordinary feeling to be so close to such a big explosion, they dropped a lot of 500 pound bombs in those days, I don't know whether it was that big, it was my nearest experience. I had been near many others while in a slit trench but never out in the open like that and I wouldn't like to do that again. That was when I was driving around in this vehicle that I probably shouldn't have had.
- 10:00 **Whilst also at this time did you get more news about how the campaign was evolving?**
- While I was on that New Guinea Force headquarters job for that short time I probably heard more about the outside war than I did
- 10:30 at any other time that I was in the services. Because at that time I even heard about what was happening in Europe and so on at other times we didn't know what was happening other than in our own company. It was very different.
- Simply because there was more information.**
- That was the information area.
- You began to get a better idea of what was going to be asked of you.**
- No, no one knew
- 11:00 what was going to be asked of us, we knew that they had overrun Australian troops in Malaya and places like that but we didn't know how they had gone about or how they had tried to stop it, that came

with experience later.

**After camp commandant, your job there as camp commandant, when did you rejoin your unit?**

I rejoined the unit

11:30 roughly when the Isurava battle was taking place. In a reconnaissance group out on the right flank so I wasn't in the main Isurava conflict at all, I was on the outside of it.

**Did you actually go up the Kokoda Track?**

Yes about as far as Myola.

**How did you travel up there?**

On foot.

12:00 **Alone?**

There were others, you were never alone on the Kokoda Track, there were people going in both directions all the time and needing assistance going in both directions all the time. It was a busy thoroughfare.

**Who was it that you were travelling with?**

I had a couple of other 39th fellows with me.

**You must have seen quite a bit of walking wounded?**

Yes many.

12:30 **Tell us about that?**

Not nice in many cases. Fellows badly wounded being carried on stretchers by native carriers who were marvellous but when someone is badly wounded and they're being carried on a stretcher made up with poles and sacks, it can't ever be a comfortable ride. The wounded

13:00 were probably amongst the most uncomplaining people you would ever encounter. Always ready for someone to light a cigarette for them or to give them a drink of water or something like that. "She'll be right mate" was the attitude and in many cases they were so badly wounded it was obvious that things wouldn't be right, but never a complaint. Not a pretty sight some of them.

13:30 All we had with which to assist was one field dressing each and if we used our field dressing on somebody else it wasn't there if we might have needed it for ourself. That was all. Many of the wounded were helped out by others less wounded. You would find a fellow with his arm in a sling helping

14:00 along some other guy who had a leg wound, giving him a hand, help all the time was the thing. I repeat, the native carriers were superb, they could hold their footing where others wouldn't.

**Did it give you an ominous feeling?**

All the time you thought "It could be me next." You couldn't dodge that thought.

14:30 Always you hoped if it happened it would be minor. The only one I got was so minor, it just knocked a bit of skin off the back of my leg, I got very much closer to very much worse ones but that was the only one that actually happened. One of the boys I got from the 53rd Battalion or two of them were wounded at the same time

15:00 this was up at Gona West by the burst of a heavy machine gun and one of them finished up as a quadriplegic and lived in Concord [Repatriation] Hospital outside Sydney and at Greenslopes Military Hospital [Brisbane] he lived there for quite a few years as a quadriplegic. I used to correspond with him a bit; he was a very nice lad. Another one his mate actually, had the whole muscle

15:30 blown out of the back of his leg on the same burst of fire. They had to be got out and they had to be carried for two to three days before they got to an area where there was Jeep travel that could get them to a casualty clearing station but they both survived that lot. But handling wounded was nasty.

16:00 **Did you think at this point with the amount of wounded coming past there must be extremely heavy fighting.**

Yes. There was always extremely fighting wherever the Japanese were it was extremely heavy because of their weight of numbers. They just kept coming always.

16:30 **Were you worried or excited or**

Concerned. In trying to analyse my thoughts I would say my concern was one of responsibility. Wanting to make sure that I did my job properly

17:00 and if there was any concern, concern that I would do it properly. Look after troops was the main thing.

In my second time in New Guinea, when we went back a couple of years later to the Aitape/Wewak campaign, and I was in the 2/6th Battalion then and became a company commander. My

17:30 great concerns was committing troops where there might be casualties because that was a pointless war and we knew it was a pointless war at that point. It was a big concern to commit troops where there might be casualties which you felt were unnecessary. All along I think concern was one of my underlying thoughts.

**It is a terrible responsibility. Tell me a bit about**

18:00 **the actual the physical aspects of that journey up the Kokoda track, where you slept, how you ate.**

It was... one word covers it all it was "exhausting", particularly because of the conditions where you would be going up hills in mud up to there, trying to carry your rifle and your

18:30 pack and your ammunition and your grenades. There was no point in being there if you didn't have ammunition and in most cases a couple of days emergency rations. Working up the track with all those things was hard work. In later days working back the track where you didn't have any of those things but your health had deteriorated tremendously, it was probably just as hard.

19:00 Everyone's health really went down. I came out of the second campaign up there at 8 stone 4 and I had gone down from 12 and a half stone to 8 stone 4. And that was not unusual, most people were like that.

**What about the**

19:30 **environment.**

Dirty disgusting filthy place. No way that it could be anything else with thousands of feet tramping through mud all the time and not having anywhere to dispose of their rubbish, not having any organised latrines, not having any shelters in most places just a dirty filthy disgusting place.

20:00 **Were you concerned about being fired upon at that point.**

Always yes always. Wherever you were going whether forwards or backwards or sideways you were always had forward scouts out and at night or wherever you always had sentries posted. Concerned about being fired on

20:30 24 hours a day, everyday.

**There was no real frontline.**

Only when the pitch battles were on at the various places on the ridges. At Kokoda at Isurava and at Myola and at Brigade Hill, yes front lines developed in each of those places but other than that no.

**There was a frontline when**

21:00 **troops showed themselves and showed their hand so to speak.**

Or when they were attacking. When we got back to Gona on the north coast there was a definite line there because they had defences there which we had to attack that was a different story altogether.

**When you were just making your way through the jungle and there is a possibility of being fired or attacked at any time did you find this**

21:30 **played on your nerves.**

I guess it did yes, I guess it played on everyone's nerves you were looking for something to happen all the time.

**Could you sleep.**

Not very well, no. With exhaustion at times yes but then you wouldn't get more than a couple of hours because it would be your turn to be the sentry and some other guy would want a couple of hours. There wasn't much sleep, well there had to be sleep

22:00 we wouldn't have lived without it, but very broken sleep and pretty poor sleep. It is pretty hard to sleep in mud with rain coming down on you. There wasn't any protection.

**Did you sleep squatting or sitting.**

You would lie down most of the time with your head on what was left of your pack and if you had a groundsheet you would pull it over you. It is terribly cold up there in the mountains at night too.

22:30 Sometimes there was half a blanket between a couple of blokes. In the second campaign around Gona I actually slept in a swamp, well not a swamp, what's the stuff that grows around the side of the...not tea tree...in swamps that

23:00 the crocodiles live in... mangrove swamp. I actually slept in water in a mangrove swamp, with water up to there and my head up against the butt of a mango tree I actually did that on one occasion and slept.

**You weren't worried about the crocodiles.**

We could hear them barking. We couldn't do anything about it we were cut off there.

23:30 Crocodiles do bark you know, just like dogs. That was in the next campaign. The Gona/Sanananda one in which I was probably a lot more heavily engaged than I was in the Kokoda campaign.

**Tell us when you first rejoined your battalion and how you had**

24:00 **your first combat experience.**

Scared. Scared about what might happen and scared about doing the right thing. Scared about looking after troops. I didn't like that at all, I don't suppose anyone did. No, that is not right there were some fellows who seemed to be delighted

24:30 to get into their first combat experience but they would be the unusual ones. No, I never enjoyed it, never enjoyed any of it. I was not a belligerent person. I didn't really want to be there, I was there because I thought I should be there.

**Take us through it from your point of view what actually happened.**

25:00 I don't know that I can tell you the first time that a bullet flew I didn't even look to see where it had come from, I ducked behind a tree that was very first thing I ever did. I suppose a good soldier, and no one could have been a good soldier the first time he was in action, a good soldier would have hesitated or see if he could visualise where that

25:30 bullet had come from so that he could do something about it. But I might have done that later, I don't remember, but the first one that flew near me I ducked behind a tree I know and I think most people would have too.

**What about when you first fired your gun in anger.**

The first time I fired in anger I think I might have been successful.

26:00 I think I possibly got the mark on that occasion. Then there was so much happening it didn't mean anything it was just one of many of those things that was going on at that time and that was in fairly close contact in jungle country and yeah I think I hit my mark then but that didn't mean a thing.

26:30 **Did it ever bother you?**

Yes. I don't think you could go through life without being bothered about killing someone face to face and I guess many of us experienced that, not a nice feeling and something that lives with you for a long time afterwards.

27:00 In most cases when it was that close there could have been more than 2 or 3 of us fire at that one person and you mightn't necessarily been the one who fired the effective shot but that doesn't make much difference.

**At this point I don't know whether...how much you knew about**

27:30 **how the Japanese had behaved or what the Japanese intended for Australia or anything like that but were you angry at the Japanese.**

Hated them, we did know what they had done to the Missions at Gona and what they had done to the Nuns there that information had come through to us,

28:00 the PIB brought that information back. We hated them for that, we hated them for the fact that they thought they had more right to our country than we did, that was the thing. We hated them as aggressors. I don't like them to this day, I would never be rude to one .I would never be rude to anyone, if there was one around I would avoid speaking to him if I could.

28:30 What they did to a very fine boy I lost in an ambush in Aitape/Wewak campaign is beyond description, they cut every bit of edible meat off his body before we got back to get his body out and when I think of things like that I could never have any feeling for them.

29:00 **It's hard for me to imagine what that must be like.**

I would say that all Japanese were not like that, there were no doubt some very fine people amongst them. As would be in every race and there are the very worst amongst them as there would be in every race. Now whether they did those things under orders or whether they were the lower class of Japanese doing them I don't know and I don't want to know, but

29:30 they did them. They certainly had no knowledge of Geneva Convention. At Rabaul when they went in there and they were in the 2/21st Battalion they marched in every officer, asked him his army rank,

number,

30:00 what unit he was in and if the officer said "All I have to give you is my army rank and number" they just marched him outside and shot him. There were many cases where they did things like that so I have no regard for them as people at all.

**What was your position on taking of Japanese prisoners?**

We never took any

30:30 they didn't take any either of course. But the type of fighting in the jungle was such that it would have been pretty difficult to take prisoners. They were fighting each other until they got within 10 feet of each other and whoever pointed the rifle or the sub machine gun in the right direction won. There was really no thought of taking prisoners.

31:00 I only ever was near a situation where one could have been taken prisoner and wasn't and that was on the north coast of New Guinea and my platoon was with a platoon of the 2/14th Battalion and we had a wounded Japanese officer, he had been shot in the chin and

31:30 the platoon commander of the 14th battalion had a field phone back to his headquarters and he said "I have got a wounded Japanese officer here. What do you want me to do with him?" The answer we got was "We don't want him, you can have him." This particular young lieutenant he went up to this wounded Japanese officer and he said "Can you talk English?" The fellow said [mumbled]. I don't know whether he was saying

32:00 he couldn't walk or he couldn't talk or whatever and this fellow said "well you don't have to." I saw that one, it is the only one that I know of that happened like that. I guess there were other cases too but they didn't take any prisoners and I don't think we did.

**I guess they weren't in the habit of surrendering.**

No they didn't surrender ever.

32:30 **At the point where you rejoined your unit near Isurava did they fill you in what their activities had been.**

No you never had anything to do with anyone other than the 20 or 30 closest to you. You never got together as a company group with company instruction

33:00 or anything like that at all you just got an order to take your mob out there and clear that crossing or whatever. Probably most of the time you didn't know what was happening 100 yards away, it was all happening there, you could hear it happening, but you didn't know what was going on. Your only concern was your immediate bit.

**That probably would have been right in the thick of it.**

33:30 **on the Kokoda did you know that at that point.**

Yes you could hear it all. You knew what was going on. Most of the time the predominant noise was the Japanese heavy machine gun the, the Juki, and the Japanese machine gun you could hear them all the time.

**Did any of the men talk to you about what they just**

34:00 **been through.**

No, no time for that sort of thing.

**You were straight into action.**

Yes as every one who went up the track was straight into action.

**When you rejoined your unit you were then you were assigned some men.**

I had a few troops of Don Company, D Company

34:30 we were out on a flank to clear a track junction and keep it clear and we had a few stoushes out there but not the big one, I just didn't get in the big one at Isurava, I got in a few big ones later in the war but not in that one.

**I am just wondering, I know I'm pushing this a bit, from the point where you left your unit**

35:00 **about a month, a couple of weeks in hospital and so on and by the time you got back they had been right in the thick of things and I wonder if you had noticed any change in them.**

Yes they were different men. They were young cheerful soldiers to experienced worn out old men.

35:30 We all became that way very quickly, people change very quickly. They were at the stage where they weren't looking out to get these Japanese they were doing what they had to do to stop these Japanese

that was the thing. Finding it very hard at that stage because many

36:00 were still carrying on with malaria and dengue and all those other dreadful things that they could have and having to push themselves harder and harder to keep going.

**I am wondering if, with the responsibility we have talked about, if you were daunted at all to be taking over these guys.**

36:30 Yes I was a bit. But I didn't hesitate to say to those who had been action ahead of me to say "What do you think of so and so and what should we do here?"

37:00 I think that was the way to go. I had a sergeant who had been there, I don't know that he had actually been in the thick of it too much but he had been there and I would discuss with him any move. I always made a policy of doing this of discussing things with other people rather than just giving direct orders and that helped quite a lot with the responsibility.

37:30 Committing men to action where there were likely to be casualties is not a nice thing to do. You do it where you have to do it but do it thoughtfully is the approach.

**Were you concerned that you had to prove yourself.**

Yes certainly.

**How did you feel you should do this?**

By doing your job.

38:00 By doing the job you were there to do, we were all there to do a job in different ways. I guess you had to prove yourself yes. If you run for cover the boys wouldn't have thought much of you would they.

**You didn't feel like you should be like some sort of [US General Douglas] MacArthur and stride around as if you have no fear.**

No. I can consider the thing should be done thoughtfully if you had time to think.

38:30 **Generally they were receptive to you asking their opinions.**

They knew me, it was OK.

**From Isurava you were on the flank there and where did you move from there.**

Back to Myola and then back to Hombrom Bluff when the unit was pulled out.

39:00 At Hombrom Bluff we relaxed and we were fed and did a bit of marching and physical jerks and so on to get back to fitness, then we went back to the low country outside Moresby where we got busy digging more trenches and things. Which were never used and which were not likely to be used but good for fitness where we were reinforced. We got some reinforcements

39:30 there who actually were AIF enlistments because at that point a lot of us were AIF members too. I had a VX number by then and I was an AIF member although still with the 39th Battalion and we got some from the 53rd Battalion, who were good boys, I believe they were good boys, and we built up there while the Kokoda track campaign was working its way backwards

40:00 through Kokoda and back to the low country around Gona and Buna and Sanananda. Most of that was nasty but came relatively easily because they were so short of supplies and they were so ill and they just kept falling back but by the time they got back to Gona, Buna and Sanananda they had brought

40:30 in a number of fresh troops there and they dug massive defences around those places, around Gona in particular. At Gona all their heavy machine guns, all their Jukis, which were right around the perimeter in enfilade fire, you know cross fire all the way round. Were in bunkers that were covered with coconut tree logs that had been cut down and so on and they had

41:00 very well defended, defences on that north coast and that was where we became involved the second time because the battle had got to Gona, there had been a few attempts to take Gona which had failed, and they decided that the 39th Battalion might be useful there and we were all flown over to Popondetta. We marched up to Gona.

## Tape 6

00:34 **Could you just walk us through the events from Port Moresby to Popondetta.**

We were flown from Port Moresby to Popondetta in DC3s. Interesting little story with one of those, they were pretty rough old planes, they were used as biscuit bombers [dropping supplies to troops in the field] and everything else, there were no seats in them or anything of that nature and we were just piled



into them with

- 01:00 our rifles and Owen guns and carrying all our gear and our ammunition and our packs and everything else we could carry and shovelled into these planes like sardines. They were grossly overloaded; the pilots were always worried about getting over the gap to cross the mountains. Just as we were about to take off the pilot, he opened
- 01:30 the door and stood there looking at all of us, we were squatted all over the floor of the thing and he said "If you see any Zeros break a bloody window and shove your Bren gun out and have a go at them." But we didn't see any Zeros. We were flown across the gap so called across to the north shore,
- 02:00 and we landed at Popondetta and then had our march up to Gona. It was, well we got across there in the afternoon so it was a two day march we bivouacked along the track. At that stage there were a lot of troops on the north shore of New Guinea, there were engineers building bridges, there was transport, they had Jeeps over there because they had been able to land them at Kokoda
- 02:30 and take them down the gradual slope. The troops and the equipment were fairly well built up on the north shore and at that stage there were two battles going on one of them was Buna and one was Gona. The Yanks [Americans] were having a go at Buna; they ultimately pulled them out and put in Australians to do the job because the Yanks weren't doing anything. And at Gona
- 03:00 the 2/14th, 2/16th, and 2/27th they'd had several attempts to take Gona with very heavy casualties because they were so well dug in there, so very well dug in there. It was decided that the 39th would be sent over to have a go too. We went over.
- 03:30 **You got off from Popondetta and you basically marched your way through to Gona that area had been cleared.**
- Yes it was quite clear. All Japanese troops were then back on the coast in defensive positions, yes that area was quite clear, it was more or less a route march except that the ground was hardly good enough to go left right left right or anything like that. The area was quite clear. We got
- 04:00 we camped or bivouacked overnight and when we got to Gona the battalion was put into various positions at Gona. My platoon was put into a holding position on the left of the Gona River, we had to wade through that nominally under fire although we weren't fired on when we were doing it but it was open, and we took up positions there.
- 04:30 I was 18 Platoon of D Company the next morning the other two platoons of D Company were sent into a frontal attack on Gona and they were very heavily repulsed with very heavy casualties because they walked straight in to enfilade fire of heavy machine guns but that attack was launched against our CO's [Commanding Officer's] wishes
- 05:00 because of orders from higher up. The orders came down MacArthur, Blamey, all through that line: "Gona will be taken by frontal attack." Ralph Honner [Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Honner, (DSO, MC), Commanding Officer 39th Battalion at Gona and Buna; then CO 2/4th Battalion] wasn't happy with this but he had been told to do it and the other two companies other two platoons of my company were pretty badly shot up. They got out
- 05:30 one of our little boys Archie Skilbeck [Private Archibald James Skilbeck, 39th Battalion, VX149854] he was only a little fellow he went back in three times dragging out wounded under enfilade fire, which was that high above the ground, they got him a military medal for it, he was a great little boy Archie. It was very fatal attack that one it was ordered from above and should have never have happened and this was one of the things that happened in this war,
- 06:00 orders were issued from above without those in higher places having any knowledge of the topography or the conditions and without time for reconnaissance.
- You are saying these frontal assaults were conducted without any reconnaissance.**
- That was conducted without any reconnaissance.
- Just a mass attack.**
- Yes a mass attack across open ground and there was pretty bad slaughter.
- 06:30 Ralph Honner our CO was told to attack again the next day, orders to attack again the next day. My platoon would have been in that one, there was artillery fire brought down and there was something wrong with the timetable of the artillery fire and Ralph Honner used that as an excuse to call off the attack.
- 07:00 Had quite a bit of reconnaissance done and determined that wasn't the way to get into Gona, that there was an approach from the right flank under cover which would have been a lot more suitable and he called off the attack that day and for the next day. At this time my platoon was given a job to do at Gona West, that is Haddies Village which was
- 07:30 a couple of miles up the coast and a body of the 2/16th under a Lieutenant Haddie had been there in a

holding position watching that creek crossing in case there might be any Japanese movement towards Gona. And he had been there and he was pretty debilitated and what was left of my mob I didn't have all that many by that time,

- 08:00 I suppose 15 or so. We were sent over there to take over that holding position and we were there for one night. This could be one point where I think I might have made a mistake during that war, we weren't there to attack, we were there to be a listening post in a holding situation but a Japanese landing craft came up the beach where we were,
- 08:30 it would have had heavy machine guns on it and that sort of thing, I didn't do anything about it. I just kept my boys lying doggo and up went the flap and it went off again, obviously they had picked the wrong beach and it was to go in further down the coast. My mob had their night there looking after that post,
- 09:00 we were pulled out the next morning and that Haddie and his lot went back in to do another night there and on that second night the Japanese came over the creek and overran Haddies Village and everyone in it was killed. The night before it could have been me and all my lot and I often wonder whether I failed, whether I should have dashed off down the beach and thrown a grenade into that landing craft or
- 09:30 done something like that which no doubt would not have stopped it, but would have let them know that we were there. They knew we were there but maybe that indicated to them that we weren't there in force and they attacked Haddie the next night I don't know. One of the thoughts in my mind ever since is that prevailing thought that although I wasn't ordered to but maybe I should have taken some action that night and if I had it would have possibly have saved Haddie and his
- 10:00 section. I have no idea whether that is so but these thoughts crop up in your mind and I often wonder. However, that didn't happen, and Haddie and his lot were overrun there and the Japanese came down the Amboga River down towards Gona on that flank.

**What was their estimated strength at that stage?**

Their estimated strength? Wouldn't have any idea.

- 10:30 A platoon the 2/14th battalion came round and at that point my lot were about half way between Haddies Village and Gona, we had spent the night there, a platoon of the 2/14th came around and their lot and my lot faced a very vicious Japanese force working its way from Haddies Village
- 11:00 down towards Gona and we were right out there and it was fairly open because it was amongst the coconut palms on the beach and that possibly turned into the fiercest close-contact battle that I was ever in, it was very fierce. I only lost one boy in it and a couple of 2/14th were injured but we probably cleaned up 20 or 30 Japanese I would think.
- 11:30 **How big was their entire force?**
- I wouldn't know probably cleaned up 20 or 30 and the rest might have got away in the bush. I wouldn't know if it was bigger than that. There were certainly more of them than there was of us and they were coming at us through the swamp scrub and we didn't really see them, although we were in the open and they could see us. It was a very fierce little battle and one that lives in my memory. The lieutenant of the 13th Battalion
- 12:00 was Bob Doherty, who was later killed, and he was one of the calmest officers I had ever met in my life. He was carrying a Tommy gun and he was only a foot away from me and a bullet passed between the two of us and gouged a line down the wooden butt of his Tommy gun and he just looked down and said "Gee look at that." He was that calm. A very calm soldier and a very good soldier was Bob Doherty [Lieutenant Robert James Xavier Doherty, 13th Battalion WX27634].
- 12:30 More of the 2/14th Battalion...or of the remainder of the 2/14th Battalion came back into that area. I went back into the 39th lot and I was there in the final assault on Gona. I was on the right flank for the final assault on Gona. The night before the Japanese had tried to escape through our lines a number of them actually crawled through amongst our guys at night trying to get away,
- 13:00 they knew it was all up. But in the final assault on Gona we outflanked their enfilade machine guns and a few of our guys did some pretty courageous things and got up towards bunkers and threw hand grenades into them and that sort of thing and finally Gona fell, mostly through the
- 13:30 39th battalion final strike although all the other units had been having a go at it for quite some time. AIF units, it was we the Choco 39th who finally did the clean up job there. Ralph Honner our CO, he got onto Brigade Headquarters, he picked up the phone and he used the two words which became the title of later book:

- 14:00 "Gona's Gone" they were his words. [The book Gona's Gone: The Battle for the Beach-head written by Peter Brune, 1994] We went right through onto the beach at Gona, my closest friend Lieutenant Bob Sword [Robert Henry Sword, VX100093] great little guy, going through to the beach at Gona, there was one sniper left there somewhere and he got poor little Bob between the eyes with one shot which was very sad for me but we got through to the Gona beach. I have never in my life seen such a dirty

- 14:30 filthy shambles and shortly after we got there we were strafed by our own Beaufighters. It would seem that a Beaufighter attack had been ordered and of course they came from Port Moresby. No information had got through that Gona had fallen, the Beaufighters came over and saw people wondering around on the beach at Gona and they came over and
- 15:00 let fly at us with everything they owned. I don't know how but we only had one injured in that, that was all, and they were firing heavy .5 guns. They went up and down and strafed us about 3 times. We survived that and more or less regrouped there was a lot of time spent burying dead at Gona. The Japanese were filthy people
- 15:30 and had used their dead as parapets in front of their slit trenches and that sort of thing, they didn't appear to be completely short of food, there appeared to be bags of rice in the store sheds on the Gona Beach but it was a dirty filthy disgusting place and I don't think they had ever heard of latrines or anything like that. I couldn't believe that people would live that way. However that's as it was, we
- 16:00 had a night at Gona and by that time up at Gona West, where I had...Haddies Village, where I had spent my one night at the listening post, the Japanese had built up quite a force there again, they had come across the Amboga River and had built up quite a force there and the remnants of the 2/14th Battalion were having a ping at them here and there but weren't
- 16:30 able to do much about it. We the 39th Battalion were ordered to go inland and around and come in and attack Gona West, Amboga River, I never know what to call it we always called it Haddies Village at the time, to attack Haddies Village from inshore. We trekked through swamps and
- 17:00 jungle growth for 2 days to work inland and around to come up on Haddies Village. It was B Company of the 39th Battalion leading but I was up with them because I had been in Haddies Village previously and I knew the land and just as we were coming into the village the forward scouts made a sign and everyone kept still and three senior Japanese officers walked up the track and they were dispatched very quickly.
- 17:30 That gave away any surprise that might have been there and by the time B Company got to the outskirts of Haddies Village there was plenty of defence there to hold them back. Haddies Village probably was one of the very fierce
- 18:00 close encounters, we finished up with the...it was surrounded by swamp for a start so you had to work your way into it through swamp. We worked our way round, B Company went in first and then one platoon of D Company went to their left and one platoon went to their right and then A company went in further around to the right
- 18:30 then there was a big gap and then there were the remnants of the 2/14th Battalion at the side. The battle raged for half an hour or hour and my platoon was given the job of going down the left flank working our way through to completely cover the left flank and cover
- 19:00 the beach to prevent any further reinforcement from the other side across the mouth of the Amboga River. I lost a couple of good guys getting through there. We were under heavy duty machine gun fire the whole time. It was nasty; the Japanese were dug in under the huts there, wonderful things to be under huts because they were built on
- 19:30 sand and you could dig a place for your slit trench under the hut and it rained incessantly and they were more or less under cover. Our second night there was probably the wettest night that I ever encountered in New Guinea, everything even Battalion Headquarters just floated away, everyone's gear if they weren't holding on to it floated away we were living in raging waters of a swamp that night.
- 20:00 We got through that, the next morning my platoon, forward post of my platoon, sighted a mob of Japanese, there is still argument about the number, it's recorded as 15 but I don't think it was that number I think it was nearer 10 I think. Trying to reinforce across the mouth of the Amboga River.
- 20:30 They had picked a good time and they almost beat me on one thing, there is a very high rise and fall of tide there and when I positioned the Owen gun I had covering the thing, it had apparently been at high tide and it covered the water's edge, This was when they were trying to get in was low tide and it had gone a long way down and they were almost below the line of sight of
- 21:00 the Bren gun I had positioned there. But they were about 10 heavily loaded Japanese with food and ammunition etc. I thought if we open up on them with the Bren gun it will scatter them and they will go all over the place so I waited until they got right abreast of our position and I had Jack Condon, my sergeant, Rolly Jeans,
- 21:30 who still lives up at Dalby in Queensland and a couple of others, I set each of them up with Owen guns and these fellows weren't going to be able to defend themselves they had too much gear. I said to each of them "Have your gun loaded with a full magazine and a spare magazine in your pocket,
- 22:00 charge down the beach. Each of you pick off a couple of these guys don't worry about the magazine that you empty, just drop it and stick a full one in its place" and they did this and those four boys of mine eliminated that whole force trying to reinforce Haddies Village. In the meantime I had found a telephone line which they had running from one of their heavy machine gun positions under

- 22:30 Haddies Village, across and out over the Amboga River to however many people they had down there. I managed to cut that, I didn't manage to cut it, I cut it very quickly and there we were around Haddies Village gradually picking them off one at a time that is what it amounted to. From the left flank where I was, we were very close to them,
- 23:00 if you were to poke your head out around a tree you could see one of their guys sitting behind his Dukie, the heavy machine gun only about as far away as the front door, but he was looking at our direction too and if you poked your head around to have a look there would be a burst of fire you had to get it back fairly quickly. From our position we did pick off one of those two guys there.
- 23:30 Further around the same sort of thing was being done and two of our guys Lieutenant Phil Gartner [Phillip Edward Gartner, MC, 39th Battalion, VX100096] and Lieutenant Ron Plater [Ronald Stuart Plater, MC, 39th Battalion, NX148954] both won MC's there they became quite badly wounded and remained until the machine guns which they were trying to get were actually eliminated, both very good soldiers.
- 24:00 **How did they get close to the machine guns to eliminate them?**
- You just crawled up amongst the scrub that was growing in the swamp that was all.
- They just weren't spotted until they got very close.**
- They were both hit. Whenever anyone crawled in like that he always organised a few people around him to be firing to give him covering fire. The normal object was for someone to get in close enough to pick off the guy behind
- 24:30 the heavy duty machine gun which we had been able to do around on our flank with one fellow there.
- Before we proceed, there is still a few questions I would like to ask about Gona, there is a lot of combat here that has taken place clearly.**
- A lot of combat.
- Firstly about that particularly vicious hand to hand battle that took place in the swamp you spoke about before the final assault.**
- 25:00 **Why do you think the Japanese ended up losing so many men 30 killed in action and the Australians didn't?**
- I can't answer that. Australian determination probably as much as anything else I would say. Australians knew they were there until they finished doing the job and it had to be done.
- What was the condition of the Japanese soldiers?**
- 25:30 They were very dirty and filthy. It was said that there had been cannibalism there I didn't see any of it there, they did appear to have rice supplies whether they were pinned down and couldn't get to them I don't know most of them were a pretty dirty filthy scruffy lot.
- What about**
- 26:00 **their weapons at that stage and your weapons?**
- They had more weapons than us, having all been driven back into those compound areas they had many more weapons than they could use because of all the troops that had been lost and so on. Around Gona they had so many jukis, heavy machine gun with enfilade fire that you couldn't believe there could be that many bullets in the air at one time.
- 26:30 They weren't short of supplies there at all.
- They still had high quality weaponry when they were fighting your unit.**
- They still had high quality machine guns and plenty of ammunition for them. They couldn't use their mountain guns at that stage because the range was too close. They still had grenades, they had ammunition but it was
- 27:00 a close encounter job not ridge to ridge like it had been up in the mountains.
- By this stage you had been re-equipped of course. What sort of equipment were you given that was new and better?**
- We all had Bren guns as opposed to Lewis guns at that stage and we all had Owen guns as opposed to the few Tommy guns that we had previously. The Tommy gun was a
- 27:30 45 and the Owen was a 38 and it was a lot lighter and a lot more reliable too and we had plenty of Owen guns and plenty of grenades. Our supplies were fairly good at that stage because they were able to fly supplies from Moresby to Popondetta and bring them up to the frontline.

**In this particular battle that you stated was an extremely vicious one, was it a hand to hand sort of affair?**

28:00 Hand to hand to the extent to that we probably got to within 4 or 5 feet of each other at one time. I was never in a bayonet battle ever, never encountered one and never saw one but some of these other ones you got very close to the opposition.

**What is it like to be so, this is obviously a soldier's thing, to get so close to the enemy within 4 to 5 feet and fight?**

28:30 You were scared as can be and you are doing your best to get him before it gets you that is all it amounts to. You have to be first.

**This was a meeting engagement or was it an ambush.**

No it was a meeting engagement.

**No one expected.**

Everyone expected to be fired on yes.

**Before the actual battle took place you weren't expecting enemy troops until your recce [reconnaissance] party**

29:00 **observed them coming up. This was the fore runner to the actual assault onto Gona?**

Yes.

**On the final assault what sort of opposition did you come across?**

Very heavy because of their dug in positions.

**Can you describe to me what Gona actually looks like the compound when you did that final assault that day, with the foliage etc.**

29:30 Gona was a village built on the edge of the Gona Creek it was a mission station they'd had a few cattle there, there were the odd fences around it. The mission station was still there the mission cross was still standing at the end of the battle and I think is still to this day I hope to find out when we go back in August.

30:00 It was open ground because the country had been opened up for the mission station and there was a bit of kunai grass around it. The first big frontal attack which was ordered from above and carried out the two platoons of D Company went through open kunai grass towards the emplacements. Gona was

30:30 fairly open there were a few huts and village buildings around there but on one side the tropical growth came in fairly close to it and that was the side where ultimately Colonel Owen decided the attack should be launched from.

**And that's where you attacked from. And when you did conduct that attack it was basically jungle foliage?**

31:00 Until you came out into the open where the idea was that you just kept going and overran them.

**Can you give me an idea of actually how the assault was conducted from your platoon. Was it basically a charge straight through or crawling and support fire.**

In most cases it was getting as close as you could to be in a position

31:30 to then jump up and charge in and yell and shoot. The idea around there was to get in as close as you could to the pill boxes to reduce their field of fire so that you could throw something into them, throw a grenade in them.

**Your job would be to try and flank the pill box to get close.**

As part of your dash forward yes.

32:00 **Sounds pretty daunting.**

Nothing was very pleasant.

**When you were attacking a pill box I understand this had been the case in Gona where they would have interlocking lines of fire from supporting the pill boxes.**

Yes.

**How did you overcome that?**

By throwing a grenade in and cleaning up those inside. A couple of them were tidied up at night by our fellows who had crawled up in the dark

32:30 and threw in a grenade. Pretty brave guys I don't know that I would have faced up to doing that but it was done.

**Were you also given heavy artillery support and things like that?**

We did have artillery support at Gona, on the day of the final assault, we did have 25 pounder support and

33:00 Hugh Dolby and Hugh Kelly were the two leading platoon commanders on that day on that assault and it was arranged that they would start advancing I think it was a minute and a half before the artillery fire ceased. Colonel Owen hadn't told them that he told them when the artillery fire ceased at such and such an hour they would go in

33:30 Those two platoon commanders decided that they would go in about a minute and a half before the artillery fire was going to cease. And the net result of that was their decision and Owen's decision, they were moving up well in amongst it all 2 and a half minutes before the artillery fire ceased. It was still landing around them a bit, but it had them right up in position where they could attack the emplacements.

34:00 That artillery fire was very helpful on that occasion. On other occasions they weren't all that accurate and they used to drop them amongst us sometimes.

**By this stage of the battle after the final assault had taken place once you broke past the pill box area which is the main defensive area what happened then as far as the assault was concerned from your experience?**

34:30 From my experience there was still snipers in trees, still ground troops around and they all had to be found and dug out and it was one of those snipers in one of those trees that shot my great friend Bob Sword. When it was thought that the area was clear but you never really know if an area was cleared. Japanese I think

35:00 whether they were good soldiers or whether they were scared I don't know but I am quite sure that if a Japanese soldier was told to get up a tree as a sniper he would stay there until he was shot down if he wasn't told to get down. That guy up that tree was at that stage was pretty much all out there by himself but he still collected another casualty.

**Did you find the sniper?**

He was dealt with very smartly yes.

35:30 **What do you mean very smartly?**

Everyone fired at him.

**He was basically found instantly after that was fired.**

He was just there shot from there to there and everyone turned everything on to him in a matter of seconds.

**Were there any prisoners taken at Gona?**

No. No one left to take when it was all over.

36:00 **I understand also that, how long did it take for your section or whatever to complete the final assault on Gona?**

I would say it was all over in half an hour. I would think it would all have been over in half an hour.

**That is pretty quick.**

Yes but Gona

36:30 there had been onslaughts on Gona for a long time but the final onslaught was a matter of tidying it up.

**This is a battalion size attack by the full**

No there wouldn't have been enough troops left in the area to make a whole battalion.

**What sort of casualties had the 39th suffered at that stage in the Gona operation?**

In that very first

37:00 two platoon attack I think they brought out something 14 of the 30 odd who went into it. They weren't all killed of course, a number of them were injured, but that was that fatal that Gona will be taken by a frontal attack and very heavy casualties. We had further quite heavy casualties even as many if not more up at

37:30 Haddies Village later on. The 39th battalion and the 2/14th battalion suffered more casualties at Gona and Gona West than they did on the Kokoda track.

**You didn't serve with any American soldiers in Gona.**

No we encountered some afterwards at Sanananda.

**Did the Japanese actually escape by the sea from Gona any evacuation?**

38:00 There might have been a few got out at night but mostly I think they were killed off. The Japanese did have landing barges operating in that area still. There was a ship sunk off Gona might be there to this day and they used to say they thought the Japanese were using it to ship reinforcements

38:30 into the beach at night. I don't believe that because that ship was used as target practice by so many of our planes that I don't think that anyone could have lived on it but that was the story.

**With the area of the Gona compound the main base area how wide would it be?**

The Gona village would have covered

39:00 300 yards by 500 yards something like that, the open Gona area would have been that much maybe more it is hard to tell where it started and stopped at kunai grass there was kunai grass further around it. Gona was quite an open village unlike Haddies Village later on which was a very compact one.

**The Japanese soldiers you also mentioned something about**

39:30 **them holding up their own casualties as defensive parapets as such.**

They used their dead to, piled them up in front to protect them.

**In front of their trenches.**

And it used them in their trenches to stand out of the mud too. I don't think they had any regard for each other at all.

**What did you find**

40:00 **the differences were with the Japanese soldiers you fought in Gona to the track as opposed to Isurava?**

None they were just all Japanese soldiers to me.

**You said that you fought against marines in Isurava.**

No Marines were encountered in the first onslaught at Afore when they were first coming up the track that was Harry Mortimer's platoon who encountered them.

40:30 I didn't see any of them. All the Japanese soldiers I ever saw in the Gona, and Gona West and Sanananda campaigns and in later years the Aitape/Wewak campaign, they were nearly all little fellows resembling what I thought a Japanese soldier would look like.

## Tape 7

00:33 **Before we go any further I wanted to ask, earlier you mentioned you overheard a couple of AIF blokes talking about Chocos that was quite a positive slant on their comments there, had you heard, what had you heard**

01:00 **before that on the negative?**

Before that every, in Australia even, every militia man who was encountered by an AIF man was considered as someone quite inferior and told so. Chocolate soldiers were volunteers to stay at home as far as the AIF were concerned.

01:30 It is not understandable that they had that view point because they had volunteered to serve overseas and others hadn't and it could have easily have been the case that they were better soldiers the AIF, because they were all volunteers to go and many militia men weren't, they were universal trainees.

02:00 I could understand their view point but in our particular case we apparently carried out our duties fairly well and we were accepted. We were accepted to the time when the battalion was allowed to put a grey background behind its colour patch and that was an AIF thing a grey background with a colour patch.

02:30 **Did anyone call you a Choco to your face?**

Yes. Certainly yes. In fact later, quite later when I went to the 2/6th Battalion the first night I was with the unit one of their very belligerent lieutenants who was always on charges for having drunk too much and so on

03:00 in the mess he walked up to me and he looked me straight in the face and he said "Bloody Choco eh?"

Because I had come from the 39th Battalion. The feeling was always there.

**Did any one ever call you koala bear?**

No never heard that one.

**Not to be exported or shot at.**

No never heard that one.

03:30 **Not that I am calling you one now.**

I could understand that feeling in the 2/6th Battalion because they had come back from overseas, they had been in the Wau campaign, they were a very good unit and they had plenty within their ranks who were quite competent to be promoted. Why should they have to take in an officer from someone else when they had people in their own battalion who were good enough

04:00 to do the job. I definitely had to prove myself in the 2/6th battalion but I understood their view point.

**That is aside. I want to get back to Gona. You mentioned that in Gona Village the Japanese were trying to crawl past you, were they trying to escape?**

Yes.

**How close were they?**

04:30 During the night one crawling past was shot on the ground that far away from me

**By somebody else?**

Yes. I was actually asleep. The few left there were trying to escape in the direction of Sanananda where there was still a battle going on.

05:00 There were a few who I guess in all fairness could have been grabbed around the neck and held and made prisoners of war. But no one was thinking about that.

**I guess there is always the possibility of a samurai sword coming up to you.**

Yes.

05:30 **The Gona Beach itself as you said, was the site of great devastation. Were you actually involved in the clean up? Did you bury bodies?**

I wasn't involved in it and my platoon wasn't involved in it because I was promptly sent off to be the head of the lot going down to Haddies Village having been there before.

06:00 Others were involved in the clean up there were many, many bodies buried there. In many cases I think they were buried by just caving in their pill boxes and leaving them underneath the lot.

**Can you describe what it was like at Haddies Village, what the actual physical terrain was like?**

Haddies Village

06:30 was a small native village almost right on the beach a few coconut palms there not very much and almost surrounded by swamp no more than 100 yards inland. In peace time it would have been a pretty nice little village. Pretty little place and lovely beach

07:00 lovely clean water, the Amboga River coming in at the side, it would have been a very nice little village but a compact one, probably a very unhealthy one being so close to the swamp. Everyone there would have had malaria without a doubt I would think. Smaller than Gona and not a Mission Station as Gona was

07:30 probably a dozen native huts not big ones and that would have comprised the whole village on sand. All the huts were on dry sand even when the swamp was raging with that very heavy downpour we had the huts were still high enough to be built on dry sand or sand above water level it wasn't dry of course.

08:00 It would have been a clearing 150 to 200 yards long by about 75 yards deep something like in that area just a little native beach side village. I don't remember any native garden around it anywhere and

08:30 most native village had native gardens. Maybe they were people who lived mainly on their fishing ability I don't know. Probably they were and they traded with other villages that had gardens.

**It wasn't quite so pretty when you arrive there.**

No there had been a war on when I arrived there and by the time we left it

09:00 we had some artillery coming down on it and it was pretty much a devastated mess. I think today it



would again be a pretty little village.

**You mentioned before as an example**

09:30 **of why you hated the Japanese you mentioned before about a young lad who went missing and you found him he had been horribly killed.**

That was in the next campaign not in this New Guinea campaign that was in the Aitape/Wewak campaign a couple of years later.

**That is later.**

10:00 **Lets get on to Sanananda and tell us what was involved there.**

Well Sanananda, we were at a place called Huggens no not Huggens, I sorry that was the other village, .... on the Sanananda track, no the name eludes me, there was a junction

10:30 of tracks there and a number of Japanese were left in that area fairly well dug in and the Yanks had had a go at them and they never completed anything they started. Well I mean that seriously and some Australian Div Cav went in there and did some digging around their defences.

11:00 We the 39th were taken, what was left of us, were taken there after Haddies Village and it was open country that had been completely devastated with artillery fire, stumps that high were about all that was left in the place and there were a number of Japanese in well dug in positions, Huggens Road Block

11:30 it was called, well dug in positions there and we were given the job of digging them out. The area was pretty low lying, once you dug down about that far, you were in water so any slit trenches that we dug we were in water as well as being in the slit trench. I think a few other units had been in and out

12:00 and have a go around there before we got there but we were sent in there really we never achieved very much because you couldn't advance anywhere. I got an order from my company commander Max Bidsdrip to sap forward. We didn't have any sapping tools [trenching tools, engineering tools] for a start but

12:30 we were in amongst tree stumps and tree roots and everything else and there was no way you could dig forward if you stuck your head up someone had a shot at you. Around Sanananda we were committed to a few, I would say they were half way between fighting patrols and frontal attacks, I took my platoon into two of them there aiming for particular Japanese positions that

13:00 were known to be at that spot. We were fairly successful in one of them and the other one we didn't achieve anything and we had a few casualties. If I may tell a story as an aside here, it was at Sanananda that I went closest to being wiped out I would say we were in this horrible position we weren't getting anywhere

13:30 and I thought it was time something happened and I was crawling around and I stuck out my head to have a bit of a look and a juki open up at me, he missed me at his first burst and I went flat on my face behind the remains of a little tree stump which would have been that high and that wide and I had my head buried in the mud there and he must have fired two full... well

14:00 they didn't have belts like our Vickers they had solid metal strips, he must have fired two full strips at me and every bullet was flicking chips off the top of the stump and my head was that far below it. Presumably his juki, was, the elevation, he was fully depressed on his elevation level and he couldn't get it any lower I assume, I don't know or maybe he thought he

14:30 had got me. I had a fellow in my platoon Charlie Knottly, Charlie is dead now, and he was a bit further back in a bit of a hole and he used to always call me boss and every time this juki would stop for a tick a voice would say "Have they got you boss?" and I had a hand behind me going like that. He said "What are you going to do boss?"

15:00 How are you going to get out of there boss?" This went on for quite some time and then all of a sudden I started going backwards and Charlie had crawled out of his hole and he had me by the feet, and he was sliding me backwards towards his hole, and he slid me back under fire until I got under cover and that was the closest I ever went to a complete wipe out. That is what Sanananda was like,

15:30 it was open and to do anything you had to stand up and look for them or they had to stand up and look for you. We were in that position for a few days I don't know how we got on for food they probably got something to us at night or something like that. We were relieved

16:00 by some American, they called them combat engineers, they had flown up from Townsville to Popondetta and they came in to relieve us and we put them in our holes and we showed them where the enemy were and every time something went bang, up went all the automatic machine guns and automatic rifles and things and they held the triggers, no one ever sighted anything they just fired.

16:30 We went out and we had about 3 or 4 days rest, we were around artillery as protection for the artillery while these combat engineers were supposed to be doing the job up there. It would have been within the week that we were sent back in and the combat engineers hadn't moved one inch, not one single

inch, they hadn't done

17:00 one thing in that week. And our understanding was that they were put on planes and flown back to Australia for leave. On the way in they told us "We have been looking after your girls for you, Aussies." And on their way out they told us "We'll fix up your girls down there for you Aussies." We don't believe that they moved an inch or fired one effective shot

17:30 the time they were there. I haven't too much regard for the American soldiers that we encountered. Whether they were indicative of what they were all like, I don't know, probably not. I think they were a very untrained group that needed a lot of training.

**What were the other instances where you met Americans?**

That was the only place that I actually met them under fire, never anywhere else so I wouldn't know but

18:00 other people in other places have similar opinions. Even [General Sir Thomas] Blamey finished up he wouldn't have them in the final assault on Buna, he pulled them out and put in Australians, , he said he couldn't rely on the Americans. That might have been one of the times when he had his big argument with MacArthur I would think. That Sanananda place was a very nasty one,

18:30 after our little bit of a spell guarding our artillery we went back in to relieve the Americans again. I guess our unit might have gone into the same positions; I didn't go into the same position where I had been before, different spots. I was in one more I would call it fighting patrol in the Sanananda

19:00 area and I don't have too much knowledge of the thing after that I was evacuated at that point. I had malaria, I had dengue, I had this little bit chipped out of the back of my leg which didn't mean anything at all, and I had very bad hepatitis. I was in the 9th AGH [Australian General Hospital] for three months after that. The 39th Battalion came out of Sanananda only a couple of days after I was evacuated.

19:30 And they marched to the other airport at Dobodura. Seven officers and 25 men left out of the whole 2500 who had been through our ranks. So the 39th Battalion cumulatively had a pretty rough time.

20:00 **Yet they acquitted themselves so well.**

They did very well indeed and have built up quite a history. The number of honours that the battalion was given you only have to look at our banner and we've got 13 on it and many units which lasted the whole war didn't have that many battle honours. We acquitted ourselves quite well.

20:30 **Were there quite a few of the men at this point who was also sick.**

Everyone was sick. The 7 and 27 who marched from there back to Dobodura, I don't know how they would have managed it.

**Did you have any problems with insects?**

Yes. Bitten all over all the time.

21:00 That is how the malaria and the dengue was transmitted all those. The scrub typhus was transmitted through a typhus mite that used to get into the seams in the clothing, but those who got scrub typhus were very, very lucky to survive very few of them did. But everyone had malaria.

**I have heard a lot about scrub typhus before but I have never**

21:30 **heard this about the seams.**

The scrub typhus mite was a very tiny little thing and particularly in our long greens he would have himself lodged in that part of the seam and we did have in the latter part of the New Guinea campaigns, some chemical of some sort that we used to have to rub up and down the seams

22:00 of the green slacks to try and combat the typhus mite. I don't know that we had it then it might have been the second time I was back in New Guinea.

**Any idea of what sort of chemical was it a cream, a wax?**

No it was a liquid thing, that smelt.

22:30 **This is a general kind of question. At this point you have been in some very heavy situations, I wondered what your world view at that point how did you feel about religion or God or fate these kinds of ideas.**

Religion, God? Probably never thought of them.

23:00 Fate? Yes by the time you were sent out on the next fighting patrol you thought "oh well it wil probably be my turn this time." At that stage we were all fairly worn beaten down people and you almost got to the stage of

23:30 "Oh what the hell they will probably get me now." That sort of thing although you did still try to put

yourself in a place where you were protected. Thought very differently about it all it was at the stage where we knew we were winning in that area of New Guinea, we definitely knew that, but we knew that we were still in jeopardy finishing it off.

24:00 **How was your relationship with the men then at this point?**

I you were just one of them at this point.

**You had proved yourself.**

Wouldn't have been there if you hadn't I guess. The difference between commissioned and non-commissioned rank went from that down to that you were all in it:

24:30 "Come on we will get around it this way, we will do so and so." It would have been quite possible for one of the boys to say "Oh god turn it up boss, there was a sniper got someone over in that area why don't we do something else." That was more or less the way it was. Generally speaking it wasn't that, generally speaking if you said "Well lets get around this and do so and so. OK let's get on with it."

25:00 Fate was, it had come into our lives without a doubt.

**You did say that you had a fairly religious upbringing church every Sunday and Sunday school as well did you not think about God at all?**

I don't think so.

**Did you ever find yourself in a fox hole going**

25:30 **"Dear God get me out of this?"**

I don't think so, no. I think probably I had a bit too much religion poked up at me when I was young. I never go to church now but I have a very positive religion. How would I explain that? Endeavour to think of others ahead of yourself and never do anyone a bad turn if you can't do him a good one and that would roughly be my religion now.

26:00 I still support the church I still give them donations, I still work for one of the church homes, but not in a way of direct religion.

**All the Aussies that we have spoken to so far seem to have gone out of their way to disprove the adage that there are no atheists at the front line.**

26:30 I was certainly never an atheist when I was there. I might have been a bit agnostic but that is a very big difference.

**It is. After Sanananda did you return to Australia at that point?**

Yes I spent 3 months in hospital in Port Moresby and

27:00 I returned to Australia with a few other 39th battalion guys, in fact all the 39th battalion was sort of coming back to Australia in dribs and drabs and we were all sent on leave, I think we had a fortnight's leave which was really big of them, then I got sick while I was on leave and had malaria and so on and I think I finished up with about 2 months leave.

27:30 Then we went back to Wondecla [training camp on the Atherton Tablelands, Queensland] on the Atherton Tablelands where the dribs and drabs of the 39th Battalion coming back were all reforming. We probably got back to enough troops to make two to two and a half companies I would think at that stage maybe not quite that many and then we had that dreadful day when

28:00 we had a battalion parade and Ralph Honner told us that our battalion had been struck from the list. He was almost in tears. He said "I want you all to take off your colour patches now. I couldn't bear the thought of anyone being told to take off his 39th Battalion colour patch" and he said "We will all be marched to the 2/2nd Battalion where

28:30 most of us will remain but some others will be allocated to other units." We all marched around to the 2/2nd battalion, they did a very good thing there because it was only those who had volunteered for AIF at this stage, there were some who were still militia and they went off somewhere else. When we got to the 2/2nd battalion they virtually

29:00 formed a company of 39th battalion boys with their own officers, and kept them together which was good but there was a great surplus of officers far too many and quite a few of us went to other places. Bevan French, Ron Plater and myself went to the 2/6th battalion who were back home from

29:30 the war? New Guinea campaign. Others went to various other places all over the spot. I don't know exactly where everyone finished up but certainly not all in the 2/2nd because there wasn't room. All the NCO's [non-commissioned officers] finished up there but not the officers there wasn't room for them all. I went to the 2/6th battalion, no I didn't I went into hospital and when I came out

- 30:00 I went to 2/6th battalion. I was back in hospital with malaria and hookworm. When I came out I was posted to 2/6th battalion and it was there that that very antagonistic gentleman called me a Choco in front of everyone in their mess the first night I was there. I didn't like that very much but I was made orderly officer the very night that I arrived and I couldn't invite him outside and it is a good thing I didn't because he was quite a pugilist.
- 30:30 In the 2/6th battalion I became a platoon commander and there was lots of toing and froing in the 2/6th battalion they didn't really want us and I don't blame them. They had a few of us from 39th and they had a couple from other units who had been put onto them one from the 53rd
- 31:00 and he was a pretty good guy actually but they didn't keep him and the CO of the 2/6th Battalion managed to unload quite a few of those who had come to him from other units as we had. He didn't unload all of them he kept a few, I don't know why. One he kept was Bevan French who was a lifelong friend of mine and I was another one and
- 31:30 then there was Ron Slater and he boarded him out after a while, he got rid of him. MC Ron Plater. He didn't like him. Bevan became a company commander in C Company and I was a platoon commander in D Company. There were lots of moves around and by the time we went to New Guinea again I was 2IC [second in command] of C Company and my close friend Bevan was OC
- 32:00 C Company so we worked together and that was very good indeed, and we worked well together. We went up by ship to Aitape, we went up in a Liberty ship called the Thomas Corwin dreadful thing, ghastly trip up there, we were herded down into the holds and they closed the thing at night in case anyone lit a cigarette and they could be seen from the air. Below water level too, it was a ghastly trip. We got
- 32:30 to Aitape we landed by landing barge, climbed down the side of the Thomas Corwin on nets and the landing barges were going up and down in a swell of about 8 feet and you had to let go at the right time or you broke your ankle if you didn't. We went to Aitape we developed a camp site on the beach at Aitape
- 33:00 it wasn't much beach between, there wasn't much land between the beach and the swamp and most of it was coconuts in any case but we developed a camp there and we were there for a couple of months maybe a month. Where we did a lot of training, proper training, jungle training. Then we were sent inland into the Prince Alexander Ranges
- 33:30 and we had the 17th Brigade of the 6th Division and we had the job of working east parallel to the coast along the Prince Alexander Ranges cleaning up the inland Japanese while the other brigade, which included the 2/2nd Battalion which all our other guys were in, they had the job of working down the coast cleaning up the Japanese so that became the campaign working
- 34:00 from Aitape and in line with Aitape east down the coast to Wewak and that became the Aitape/Wewak campaign. Our job was the inland one, very different war from anything we had seen before. I was very loath to commit troops at all because
- 34:30 it was a completely useless campaign it need never have happened. The 6th Division was sent there simply to give it something to do. MacArthur didn't want any more Australian troops, he wanted to wave the American flag over every victory and the 6th Division went into this campaign and if it had never happened, it would not have made any difference to the war at all. And I did lose quite a few good troops unnecessarily in that campaign.
- 35:00 It was a very different one from the previous one our supplies were excellent. The biscuit bomber system of supply had been perfected and we used to put out markers and the biscuit bombers [DC3s] would come over and drop fresh food we even got frozen lamb and things like that, really good food. Whenever we wanted new boots we just asked for them and they were dropped to us,
- 35:30 whenever we wanted ammunition it was just dropped to us, very different campaign. We virtually worked from ridge top to ridge top in other words it was a war of fighting patrols really. I don't recall one instance where we were lined up against them having a go, we would send out fighting patrols. We would be on this ridge and they would be on that one and we would send out fighting patrols
- 36:00 and work out a way of getting round them and knocking them off that ridge. And so we would move forward and they would be down on the next one and the same thing would be done over and over again. A couple of them those fighting patrols were pretty nasty when they were on the top of ridges dug in and we had to try and get them out. We did have the assistance of 3 inch mortars there and we did have aircraft support there.
- 36:30 Beaufort bombers were working out of Aitape and if we wanted to get onto that point over there and our troops had scouted around it a bit and were having trouble, we could ask for a few bombs to be dropped on it and we would range on it with our mortar. Drop a smoke mortar on it to mark the point and the Beaufort bombers would come over and drop bombs on it
- 37:00 and strafe hell out of it. I don't know if they ever hit anything but they must have frightened them a lot. We would go in there with another fighting patrol after that lot and we just kept moving on and on and on. During that campaign my mate Bevan French was promoted to Battalion Second in Command, a

- 'choco' from the 39th battalion I was promoted to a Captain, company commander, a 'choco',
- 37:30 from the 39th battalion so they must have been satisfied with the two of us. It was at the point where I think we were about to face our very biggest nastiest task where I had a full platoon
- 38:00 lined up to attack a position about 4 ridges ahead which we were told by the natives was heavily fortified. I had a platoon which I had built up with numbers from the other platoons, a platoon of full strength to do this job it was to be a fighting patrol attack. I established they would go forward, I would go forward with them
- 38:30 and establish a forward company headquarters while this was going on and we were in the middle of planning that night and the message came through that the war was over. That one we dodged very luckily I think. At that point we were well back in the Prince Alexander Ranges my company was very relieved that they didn't have to do that job and I was more relieved because I feared that we were going to lose quite a few unnecessarily in it.
- 39:00 There the war was over and we were stuck out in the wilds of New Guinea. Then we had to be got out and that wasn't all that easy because it had taken us several months to work our way that far into the Highlands there and we were having good food and getting good supplies and when the war was over
- 39:30 it wasn't a bad place to be it was quite pleasant up there. We could spread ourselves out in the sun and for awhile used to always send reconnaissance patrols out in a circle around our position, just in case. We knew the war was over but there could have been Japanese there who didn't know. We eventually were taken out by air
- 40:00 Which was quite a task. One of the ANGAU [Australia and New Guinea Administration Unit] officers got, it looked like hundreds of natives and felled a massive tree and tied miles of lawyer vines to it, and had all these seemingly hundreds of natives dragging this massive log up and down a kunai patch. Level it out and made a landing strip of it. It was a rough landing strip.
- 40:30 But they were able to get DC3's into it and we were ultimately evacuated by DC3 from the Highlands of the Prince Alexander Ranges and flown out to Wewak.

## Tape 8

- 00:37 Up in this part of the world our supplies were very good and I think my company was probably better supplied than most because I had a friend in the army service corps who was responsible for making up rations. I don't remember how the messages got through to him about which was my company when he was doing these drops
- 01:00 I'll ask him one day about how I got that message through. He used to drop stuff called dry balm which was a substitute for yeast and flour and empty 44-gallon drums and my sergeant cook George Stonehouse, who had been the chef on the Tarooma on the Bass Strait run he was a very good cook, dreadful man to have in a standing camp because he was always AWL [absent without leave] and drunk and that sort of thing, but
- 01:30 a great guy in this part of the world. With an axe he used to cut 44 gallon drums in half sideways, and build them up into ovens with mud all around them and then he would cut 4 gallon tins in half sideways and get up long before reveille each morning and knead his flour and put in the dry balm and everything else, and light these ovens and put the things
- 02:00 in and he used to bake beautiful bread. Imagine fresh bread in the army right up in the Prince Alexander Ranges. One morning he lit his fire too early and the Japanese over on the other hill started shooting at it but that didn't seem to worry George too much. But our supplies were excellent and I might add that whenever the CO did a rounds of the company headquarters he invariably stopped at mine for lunch,
- 02:30 and hoed into our fresh bread but never once asked any questions. We were living quite well up in that area in those days before we were evacuated down to the coast at Wewak. Then we were in a standing camp right on the beach it was...well we had to have parades and that sort of thing
- 03:00 and keep a bit of discipline. But at that stage everyone went home according to how many points he had available to him and that was on length of service and how much overseas service and that sort of thing and the point score was fixed and eventually when it got to you, you were the next to go home except for officers they had to stay a bit longer and see all their troops under way, but we lived on the beach at Wewak. We built a mess
- 03:30 which was really only a couple of tent flies and a counter inside it. Our B Echelon had collected the officer's grog supply for all the months we were up in the Prince Alexander Ranges for about 34 officers and at that point there would have only been 12 or 13 of us left and for quite some...I think a couple of weeks

- 04:00 we left the Company sergeant majors to look after the Companies and we sported ourselves in this mess trying to drink through our grog supply and falling into the beautiful clear water to sober up and coming back for another lot. It was all a let down after the thing was all over. None of us knew what we were going to do or where we would go or what was going to happen to us. We got the Comforts Fund to send us up a fishing net
- 04:30 and we used to drag that out from the beach and circle round and pull it in at night with fresh fish and we occupied ourselves fairly well we had a fairly big two up game going. The CO didn't like me too much, we had a new CO at that stage, a young fellow, he didn't like me too much over that one when he found out there was a two up game at the bottom of my company lines, but I told him yes I'd organised it and I thought it was better to have it there where it was under control than to have them going
- 05:00 off out into the bush where they were getting black eyes. I got away with that one. We lived there and ultimately took our various turns to come home. I had two companies at that stage or what was left of two companies because one of the other company commanders had gone home ahead of me. Ultimately my turn came and of all things
- 05:30 the ship that came to take us home was the Shropshire a big battleship the Shropshire, and she had been swinging on her pick in Tokyo Harbour for nearly 3 months and was on her way back to Australia and with very short notice was told to call in at Wewak and pick up 1400 army troops and bring them back to Australia. I admired the navy tremendously over that one. When she pulled up
- 06:00 they had every member of the ship's company lined up around the rails and as each soldier went up the gangway at the side one of the navy boys would grab him and say "I will look after you" and they move around and every soldier had a navy boy who took him under his control. When it got to us the officers, we ultimately went up there and
- 06:30 we were told by some naval officer "Look we have got all the troops organised but we didn't have any opportunity to organise anything for you but that's the quarterdeck you can hang around there, that's the wardroom you can go into that,, and look after yourselves and do what you can" which was fair enough after all the organisation that had gone into getting the troops on board. I went for a wander around the ship and the first thing I did was found a place where there was a
- 07:00 hot shower, so I just put my pack down outside and peeled off and I stood in that shower with a cake of soap, I was having a wonderful time and a middle-aged lieutenant he stuck his head in the door and he said "Are you all right in there?" and I said "I am fine thanks" He said "Have you got somewhere to sleep?" I said "Good Lord no I haven't even thought of that." He said "Be ready for me in 5 minutes." Peter Gillies was his name and Peter Gillies came back in 5 minutes,
- 07:30 he took me to his cabin because his cabin mate was in sick bay and he said "There you are, that is your bunk there. Are you right for pyjamas?" I said "What, what are they?" He said "haven't you got any pyjamas?" [I said] "I haven't had a pair for 3 years" and he said "What about sheets and things?" I said "No of course not, I haven't got anything like that." He said "I will get the dhoby boy to fix you up with sheets,
- 08:00 I don't know what we can do about pyjamas." He said "Look I am terribly busy make so yourself at home, there is a bottle of gin in that cupboard up there" and off he went. I was one of the few officers on that ship who had a bunk on the way home, most of the other officers had to sleep on the quarterdeck somewhere. Had a wonderful trip home in the Shropshire. We got a terrific welcome coming into Sydney Harbour, terrific welcome. People everywhere waving and cheering I think they were
- 08:30 waving and cheering the ship not the soldiers that happened to be on board. We docked, were put on trains to go to our various destinations, mine being Victoria, and I landed home reported to... my parents met me, I sent a telegram to them that I was coming, my parents met me, reported to Royal Park
- 09:00 which was the enrolment depot in those days, and the place where you signed off and within two days I think it was on a Christmas Eve I was out of the army in 1945. Not a very colourful or eventful army career but nevertheless it was one that I survived.

**That is the main thing. I want to take you back now.**

- 09:30 **and ask you a little bit more about Aitape and this is where you said that chap got stripped and eaten. I know it is going to be difficult but can you tell me a little bit more information about that because we have heard of rumours of things like this.**

Well there is no rumour about this one. This was in a fighting patrol up in the

- 10:00 Prince Alexander Ranges. It was either on the village of Maprik or Merauke I forget which but in that general area and we went in with a fighting patrol which was supported by a lieutenant we had never met, he came to us with a flame thrower,,
- 10:30 flame throwers were being introduced in those days, flame throwers that were carried on the back and they squirted flame around. This guy came to our company, he had orders from somewhere up along the

line that he was allowed to join any combat action that he wanted to, to test out this flame thrower and so on and he went on this fighting patrol into this village.

11:00 They were actually let past by a couple of Japanese forward sentries until they walked into a decent sort of ambush. The flame thrower bloke let this thing go and apparent he tripped or did something and he was incinerated in his own flame thrower. This guy of mine, I remember his name well, but I am not going to mention it. I wouldn't like it to be recorded,

11:30 ... he was a good lad, big lad, he turned round to see if he could help, or we think this is what happened, and he was shot and the ambush was such an effective one that they had to withdraw completely. And we went back the next day with a fighting patrol to get the two bodies. Well the body that was incinerated was incinerate, that is all there was to it, but my boy, substantial lad had every bit of edible meat cut from his body.

12:00 As was the case, always the case his officer I wasn't his platoon commander I was his company commander at this stage. As his company commander, I had to write a letter to his parents telling them what a good soldier he was and how he died in action bravely, and all those things and needless to say I didn't give them any detail but

12:30 it is one of my memories that is a most unpleasant memory of something that happened. It did happen there and in other places but that is the only one I observed.

**It must have been terribly hard to write that letter.**

Dreadful. All those letters were hard to write.

**The Japanese that you encountered at Aitape**

13:00 **this is a whole different war from the earlier part of the campaign**

Completely different.

**They were much more poorly supplied.**

They were just living for survival but they were prepared to fight for their survival always. That is why I say that campaign was completely unnecessary if they had just been left there nothing would have changed and the war would have finished

13:30 and they would have been taken away. It was a bad mistake in my mind one of the big mistakes for the Australian Army that whole campaign. They were in very poor condition, they were living by robbing native gardens, they didn't have any supplies of their own at all. They always seemed to carry a bit of ammunition with them to protect themselves but that was about all.

14:00 **Could you see from their condition that they were underfed?**

Yes. I doubt that they had any direct supplies for months at that stage. Little General Adachi [CO Japanese Forces, Wewak] was still there, in fact, one of my patrols came across

14:30 a place where he had been living up in the mountains it was built of very fine little bamboo stakes beautifully built in a very shady spot with a little verandah and everything else. We picked up a few bits of paper with Japanese writing on them that we sent back and along the line someone or another said to me "yeah that was Adachi's place", but there was nothing other than that to tell us it was.

15:00 I can't say positively that it was but it would seem that was the sort of thing where he would have been. From there we went down to Wewak where we lived waiting to come home. We had a divisional parade at Wewak where we lost any faith we had in Blamey. The divisional parade was lined up

15:30 on the white coral airstrip, the airstrip was made of rolled coral, which was white and was stinking hot and the sun reflected off it. And we were marched down there at 8.30 in the morning for a GOC's [General Officer Commanding] parade at 11 o'clock so we were there from 8.30 until 11 in the sun and the boys were dropping like nine pins. Blamey arrived in his plane, it landed on the parallel airstrip

16:00 he didn't come out of the plane for half an hour, the MP's [Military Police] on the door said General Red Robertson [Major General H.C.H Robertson, Commanding Officer, 6th Division AIF, took the surrender from General Adachi at Wom Airstrip, Wewak] who was our general at that stage appointed to 6th Div after the war had finished was up in the plane drinking whisky and soda with him, whether that was true or false I don't know but the MP's reported that. Blamey got out of the plane into his Jeep; he drove along the lines of

16:30 the battalion, saluted and got back into his plane and flew off again. We spent the whole day on that hot, white airstrip for the GOC's parade. We didn't like that. The next time we were on that airstrip was a different matter altogether, it was for the surrender ceremony. And the division was lined up in a long; we hear of hollow squares, this was a hollow rectangle. Two long sides

17:00 and across the top there was a table and General Red Robby [Robertson] sat behind the table and I was fortunately in the front rank being a company commander the front rank of our lot who were in that short bit right across the top so I was very close to it all. General Adachi who'd up until that time had

always been carried in a chair was made to get out of his chair

- 17:30 he was marched the full length of the hollow rectangle escorted by Australian Military Police privates. General Robertson had the Australian Division called to attention; stood at ease and told to stand easy, which was a great insult to Adachi. A division standing easy even if he was a
- 18:00 general belonging to the enemy, he as a person didn't deserve any recognition but his rank did. But the division stood easy, the Australian private military police marched him the full length of the division, he was made to stand to attention in front of the table where General Robertson was sitting. The only time I felt sorry for a Japanese was that poor little man, and Red Robby stood him there and told him that
- 18:30 he was a defeated general, his troops had been driven into the swamps of the Sepik River; they had failed their Emperor and they had done this that and the other and you will now hand over your sword. And little Adachi had to unbuckle his sword and hand it over to Red Robby. And then he was made to do an about turn and marched back the full length of the division, poor little coot wasn't well, he could hardly stand up, with the division standing at ease or standing easy I think at that stage.
- 19:00 That was the last formal thing I remember happening at Wewak before coming home.

**What about Blamey's famous speech.**

That was at Koitake, that was to the 2/14th Battalion not to us. We had come out before that and they had ultimately had

- 19:30 as long in there as our battalion had and they eventually came back and they were in the Koitake area and they were lined up for the General's speech and incidentally, he just flew in from Australia and drove up to that thing, he never, ever saw any of the rough country, wouldn't know what it was like. Yes he did say all those terrible things and there were 2 39th battalion guys
- 20:00 there, they'd belonged to the signals platoon and they had somehow got left behind with the evacuation and were working with the 2/14th Battalion, two of our boys were at that parade, it has been said quite seriously that if anyone had a live round he would have go it. I don't know if that is the case but that is the way they all felt about it. It was a terrible thing for him to do and to say,
- 20:30 and then he got back in his Jeep and drove off and came home to Australia. It was after that, that MacArthur ordered him to station himself in New Guinea which he did at Port Moresby but he never advanced any further than that. And from Port Moresby he continued to sack and change his brigadiers and his generals.

**Back to Aitape I wanted to ask**

- 21:00 **if you encountered any booby traps.**

No, but we set plenty. No I don't remember ever encountering any. Remember we were on the offensive and they were on the run in that thing and at night around our positions on ridge tops where

- 21:30 we always were, we used to set booby traps. Mostly they were set with empty food tins, a grenade with the pin out in the empty food tin and a wire through the scrub so that anyone bumping into that wire the thing would come out of the can and go off. We always set them around our positions at night. Many, many times in the morning they
- 22:00 weren't there. The Japanese were exceptionally good at moving in the dark and they used to delouse those things 20 feet in front of our sentries at night and we wouldn't know about it.

**What would be the object of that if they didn't come down and killed you?**

The object was this, they used to make bombs,

- 22:30 the bombs were sticks of gelignite packed around one of their grenades and to this they would attach a bit of fuse, gelignite fuse and they would crawl right up to our position ,at night and they would have a bit of bamboo, that size, and an
- 23:00 ember glowing inside that and they would get right up to where they deloused these things poke the gelignite fuse wire in, get the thing sizzling and wave this thing around and let it go into our position. I don't remember them ever injuring anyone with one of them but by god, they gave some of us some awful frights.
- 23:30 That seemed to be the object of them defusing our booby traps and getting our grenades I guess, no doubt. One nigh they did this, all hell let loose. Bevan French that was when he was company commander and I was company 2IC and we were stretched off under a bit of a canvas thing and we had our boots off, which was very naughty, you
- 24:00 shouldn't take off your boots when you are in action but we felt fairly safe there. And we had our boots off, and this blooming thing went off and Bevan got out of his bunk faster than I did and he got into my boots which was size 9 and he took 6's and I was left with his 6's which I couldn't get onto my feet, it was rather amusing, he was called a few different names that night.



24:30 **You were, at the time of Aitape you were well aware of the nature of this and you said you thought it was unnecessary did this cause an inner conflict with you being as you were so responsible for your men. Were you were reluctant to put them in dangerous positions?**

Yes I was reluctant to commit troops where I thought we might have losses.

25:00 I knew we had a job to do and we had orders and we had to do it, but I was always reluctant to do it because I felt that it was unnecessary. But I had still to obey orders.

**Did you ever subvert your orders slightly by being a bit slow?**

No I don't think so, No, I don't recall doing that.

**Or doing it in a more cautious way than you might have done at Gona.**

25:30 Probably did yes, because I always had in the back of my mind that it was unnecessary. And I wasn't the only company commander that felt that way I discussed it with others. We were there to do a job, we were told what to do, we had to do it.

**How long were you at Wewak for?**

26:00 When did the war finish, what month?

**August.**

I wouldn't have get down to Wewak until some time in September and would have been there until the end of December.

**Quite some time that you were basically subsisting and entertaining yourselves.**

The entertainment ran out fairly quickly.

26:30 We got fairly fit, we had beautiful deep water at the beach there and it was inside the lagoon we rigged up some water polo nets we got a water polo ball, we did all sorts of things to try and get ourselves fit. I don't think any of us ever became really fit until we had been home for some months living on fresh food instead of canned food and preserved food.

27:00 Certainly we got ourselves a lot fitter than we had been.

**Had your health recovered since you were in hospital in Australia?**

Yes I am OK now. I had several goes in hospital after we got back with malaria and hookworm treatment, that was a dreadful treatment. Yes but

27:30 when we got home I was at a bit of a loss. I'd had a job before the war where I was nothing much more than an office boy, and wasn't all that keen on going back to doing that. I felt myself a bit superior I guess, but I go for 3 months to the property belonging to the father of one of my lieutenant

28:00 friends in the 2/6th battalion up on the Murray, and I went up there and worked like a galley slave stripping wheat for two months and doing other farm work for another month until I felt that I was really fit and back to normal. And then I came back and went back to the job I had, which I didn't enjoy it very much.

**Going back a bit tell me what was your...**

28:30 **what were you doing and what was your reaction when the war actually ended when you heard?**

The night it ended was one of the greatest relief I have ever had because I was in for a bit of a hiding the next day. From that point on I guess in the back of my mind always was "I wonder what I am going to do next, what'll I do now?"

29:00 We were given opportunities to stay on in the army and go with the occupation forces to Japan but I'd had enough of the army all I wanted to do was get out of it and I think most felt that way. Some did go with the occupation forces to Japan because they didn't think they had any other job to go to. I guess I could have gone for pretty much that reason.

29:30 I didn't want to. I had enough.

**Did you have some kind of celebration?**

No. When I got home to Australia my parents were still both alive then, they were both pretty ill, things were still rationed, there was nothing much to celebrate or celebrate with. Pleased to see a few old friends

30:00 and look up old friends and that sort of thing but there was a family car there, which I couldn't use because you only got two gallons of petrol a month. It was a different world from the peace time world I had known before the army. I did walk into a home where I had two invalid parents. I had thought after the war of going to University. I could have gone.

30:30 I had all the qualifications to go and at that stage it was free, but I felt that because of the two invalid parents I should be earning money I should be working somewhere, that's one of my regrets that I didn't do that, however that is in the past I didn't do it. No, there wasn't all that much to celebrate. We were home the war was over we were pleased about that. Everyone was getting resettled

31:00 there were a lot of injured ex-servicemen around and I went off to the country for 3 months.

**There still sounds like there is something to celebrate, not getting killed for one thing.**

Yes not getting killed was the main thing but there wasn't much in the way of means to celebrate. But looking up old friends was the one thing, and being delighted to see them all,

31:30 that sort of thing, but that was any celebration that I had.

**Describe for me what the country was like when you came back. What was the culture? Were people relieved and happy or was it just heads down and get onto what's next?**

Somewhere between the two I would say. By the time I got

32:00 home the war had been over for nearly 4 months. I guess all the big celebrations and the ringing of church bells that was all in the past. Australia had been settling down to living at that point and I sort of came home after all that had happened. I didn't see anything special. I used to love going into

32:30 the city and meeting up with a few of the old army blokes and having a couple of beers with them after work. Then it was a matter of walking to a tram stop and catching a tram for three quarters of an hour to get home. I didn't get much pleasure out of that time, didn't have a girlfriend at that stage, in later years I got the best one in the world

33:00 and was very lucky but that wasn't until 1950. Both my parents died within 18 months of my coming home, so I batched in the old family home until 1950. Didn't enjoy it very much at all. No, I wasn't a happy person in those days. Not until I married and then I was a very happy person.

**What was it in particular that made it difficult for you to adjust for you?**

33:30 The fact that the one job that was available to me was this office job in the Australian Glass Company where I spent a few months before I went into the war and that was inside. Inside in a building with doors shut and that sort of thing and after 5 and a half years out in the open with people around you all the time of different types going to inside and being

34:00 told by the senior office typist Miss Smith to take this message up to so and so, I didn't like that very much.

**I don't think anyone does. Did you find that even after you got married that did you feel footloose or restless?**

No I'd left that job long before

34:30 we were married. I got myself a job in the Heinz company and I was there for the rest of my working life and I worked my way up right up to senior management in the Heinz company. Having someone in my home with me where I had been living by myself all those years, and a pretty delightful person at that, life was completely different. I wanted to go home in the

35:00 evenings up until that point I couldn't have cared whether I went home or not. It was a lonely existence for those few years, quite lonely. I doubt that I ate properly. Maybe I don't now, that I am alone again although I think I can cook a bit better now than I did then. No I didn't enjoy those first few years after the war at all other than when I met up with the boys and had a few sherbets

35:30 that was about the only time there was any enjoyment.

**Did you miss your mates from the war?**

I kept a lot of them and one of them became whose name I mentioned before, Bevan French, he became a life long friend, our wives were very good friends. I am godfather to one of his children and I kept up with him forever. Other friends going back to the 39th battalion

36:00 I still see because I am President of the Association, and I am at committee meetings once a month and I lead the Anzac Day march and the Kokoda Day pilgrimage and have to speak at all our various functions and so on, so I keep up with them quite a bit. Don Daniels who you know, I see Don quite often, Larry Downes I have only seen once

36:30 in all these years but next time I am up in Ballarat at my daughters place I think I will go out to Clunes and see him again. I keep up with all those fellows as much as I can.

**During your time you certainly had some very intense experiences, and even long periods of tension**

- 37:00 **can tax the body and the mind. I wondered did any of those memories continue to bother you after the war?**
- Yes they did. One of them still bothers me and that is the one at Haddies Village at Gona West and I still don't know whether I should have done something although it wasn't orders to do anything
- 37:30 I still don't know whether if I had done something they may not have attacked Haddies Village the following night. It may have left an impression that it was better protected and they may not have attacked it, I don't know. But that one lingers in the back of my mind and always will. I didn't disobey any orders but maybe I could have done something there which could have had a better effect and I often wonder about that.
- Do you ever dream about the war?**
- 38:00 Yes not as much now. I used to dream about it a lot.
- What sort of dreams?**
- Meeting little Nipponese gentlemen face to face usually at points like that, it woke me up but
- 38:30 I had lots of dreams like that. I did on one occasion meet a Japanese face to face during the Aitape/Wewak campaign when we were in what was thought to be a completely safe area and we had been sent some walkie talkie radios to test. Stupid damn things, they weighed about as much as a brick and were about that size, and almost broke your arm carrying them and
- 39:00 they worked for about 40 yards in jungle and then they didn't work. But we were testing this thing and I had my company Sergeant Major Noel Bishop holding one of them and I was walking down a bit of a track holding the other one to see how it work, we were no where near the Japanese, we were quite safe. And I got about 30 yards down this track and I walked, almost bumped into a Japanese face to face and he
- 39:30 had a rifle and all I had was this little stupid radio. Rather a funny situation, my immediate reaction was I threw it at him and his immediate reaction was to drop his rifle and run. So we got out of that one quite easily. Strangely enough I dreamt of that one a few times, coming face to face with this little gentleman.
- 40:00 **For those few seconds it must have been terrifying.**
- Didn't know what the hell was going to happen and nothing happened. It was all over in a flash.
- 40:30 End of tape

## Tape 9

- 00:33 **I was telling you about this conversation with my Company Sar' Major Noel Bishop when we were testing these radios and as I was walking down this bit of a track and it wasn't very far from him really, I was trying to think of something to say, what do you talk about "Can you hear me? Hows this coming through?" So I changed tack and one thing in the army in the early days was**
- 01:00 **our tests of elementary training, we had to learn all sorts of statistics and things and I said "and tell me Sar'Major what are the dimensions of a slit trench parapet?", that was part of the early training. He said "Turn it up skip. What is the depth of a deep latrine?" And just as he said it I walked face to face with the Japanese fellow. I remember the conversation to this day.**
- 01:30 **We did have some funny times.**
- Did you have any other strange encounters with the Japanese?**
- No mostly our encounters with them when we were on the one end of a thing that went bang and they were on other end of another thing that went bang. No I didn't.
- 02:00 **At the end of the war what was your view of the Japanese soldier having had so much experience fighting against them?**
- I would say that he was a very good soldier. I don't know whether he was a fearless soldier or whether it was part of his culture, but he did the job as a fearless soldier
- 02:30 he didn't mind dying. Blamey once said that every soldier must be prepared to die. I disagree with that. I think that every soldier must be prepared to live so that he can go on knocking off the enemy if he dies he can't do that. The Japanese didn't seem to mind dying and they would go on wave after wave and
- 03:00 fall over each other. As jungle soldiers, well I never encountered any others but I wouldn't think there

could be any better. They moved so well in the jungle and so quietly and they were very alert too. Pretty good troops I think.

**What do you think the advantages they had in the entire New Guinea campaign from your experience?**

For the first part of it weight of numbers and

03:30 equipment and experience. After that we gained experience and we gradually got better supplies but they did have a definite advantage in the early instances.

**What about their leadership that is a bit of a difficult question to ask but from what you have seen with their tactical actions for instance**

04:00 **did you see any instances of well led tactical actions?**

Their tactics were always good, the tactics of confronting and surrounding or confronting and encircling they were good tactics and they carried them out well too. I think their leaders were probably well trained. Someone once told me, I don't know how true it is,

04:30 in days gone by when Great Britain and Japan were friendly that some Japanese officers had trained at Sandhurst [Military Academy]. I don't know whether that was true or false. If it was well true they could have learnt a lot of tactics from the British in the first place.

**I do recall the Japanese Navy was trained by the British Navy, and the Japanese Army was trained by the German Army.**

05:00 That was in later years but in earlier years it was indicated to me that there had been Japanese officers trained at Sandhurst and therefore their tactics would have been the tactics that came down to us.

**Did you find that the Australian forces were adopting Japanese tactics as time went on, certain Japanese tactics that were effective?**

No I don't think they adopted Japanese tactics I think the

05:30 Australians learnt to adapt to jungle requirements rather than copying the Japanese they learnt to adapt to what had to be done under those conditions.

**Under those conditions and not having much experience what sort of things about the Japanese did you see as efficient and in that regard useful for survival?**

06:00 I don't think there was anything much. We just saw them as those who kept coming and had to be stopped. Their encircling tactics and the numbers they had to back them up were the things that caused their main advantages.

**About Gona and Buna and the other Battles, Sanananda, Wewak**

06:30 **and Aitape and all that, would you have said or would you say that there was a numerical superiority as far as the allies were concerned the Australian and Americans who were stationed there by that stage.**

In given areas yes, when we were at Gona we built up a greater force than theirs and we were successful I guess ultimately that happened at Sanananda,

07:00 at Haddies Village. Yes ultimately we built up greater numbers than theirs, there. Numerical superiority certainly does count.

**What did you find the difference was as far as Japanese tactics were concerned with the drive to push them out of the New Guinea coastline were they more defensive or**

They were in defensive positions and their tactics were you stay until you drop.

07:30 Take as many with you as you can on the way that was obviously the way, whether they were instructed or that was the way they just did things I don't know. But yes, in general terms in defensive positions they stuck there until they were knocked over.

**You did say also about an instance where a Japanese officer charged at you with a sword. Where was that?**

08:00 That was at Gona.

**What happened in that instance, before he actually charged at you and after?**

It was in an area that we thought had been cleared and there were quite a few of us moving around and he came up out of a hole coming towards us waving this thing over his head. I wouldn't say he was charging at me he was just coming towards us waving this thing over his head and everyone let fly at the one time

- 08:30 he was cut to ribbons. I think probably it was simply he knew well he was going to die it was an act of bravado. I don't think he was coming at us with the intention of actually doing any damage with the sword. He would have known that he wouldn't have had the opportunity to.
- You say it was the last act of defiance.**
- Yes.
- 09:00 **Did you happen to come across any Japanese soldiers who had committed suicide?**
- No.
- What about searching bodies, what sort of things would you come across when you searched their pockets etc?**
- I never searched anyone's pockets but I don't think the troops ever found much either. They used to find a few Japanese coins every here and there, and
- 09:30 not much more than that. I had one horrible little specimen in my company in the 2/6th battalion who used to knock out all the gold teeth from the dead Japanese and he had a great bag full of them. Which he brought home and ultimately found out it was mock gold in any case. I don't think there was ever very much found on their bodies.
- 10:00 The first thing that was always looked for was maps and anything written that could be sent back but I don't think anything of value was ever found if it was I was never told about it.
- You had an extremely broad experience there,**
- 10:30 **by the latter stages you talked about the futility of the operations, are you basically saying after Sanananda that there was no need for any serious offensive operations.**
- There was no need for any in the Aitape/Wewak area. They were... there would be quite a number of them there but because they were scavenging for food
- 11:00 they were fairly well spread out, they weren't going to take any offensive action anywhere and I don't think they were doing any harm, they were digging up a few native gardens but I think at that stage the natives knew how to deal with a few of them when they got them alone or in couples. It was a futile campaign I believe.
- 11:30 **What do you think the real reason was behind it?**
- To give the 6th Division something to do. MacArthur didn't want anyone other than Americans in the island-hopping job. MacArthur didn't want Australians to get praise for anything at all. MacArthur didn't even
- 12:00 allow the stories written by journalists when Kokoda fell to get past him. They were not published but his statement that Kokoda had been recaptured by Allied troops was published everywhere all over America, and the only troops there had been Australians. He wouldn't have anyone named other than his American soldiers.
- 12:30 And I do believe that we were sent up into that area to give us something to do. I think if we had all been discharged there and then and sent back to our civilian jobs it would have not made any difference to the end of the war.
- Also Blamey's**
- 13:00 **speech at Wewak was it.**
- No that was Koitake.
- He had apparently said something that was very degrading to the 39th especially, was it the 39th or just generally speaking?**
- He said it to the 2/14th . The 39th battalions weren't there except a couple of our troops happen to be there. His words, I don't remember his exact words they have been printed in many places,
- 13:30 his words were that those troops had allowed themselves to be overrun by an inferior enemy, no mention of the fact that the enemy had ten times as many troops there as the people he was speaking to. And that it was not the farmer with the gun but the rabbit that ran that got shot.
- 14:00 Inferring that the 2/14th battalion had run. And the 2/14th battalion fought so many rear guard actions with the 2/16th and the 2/27th that they have gone down in history, but Blamey still said that to them.
- Were you present at the time he said that.**
- No. It was the 2/14th battalion parade.
- 14:30 **Apparently there was some sort of movement in the crowd of soldiers is that unfounded what has happened.**

I wasn't there. I have spoken to guys who were there and they have said if anyone had a live round they would have shot him. I don't know that they would have but that was the sort of feeling that was going through their minds: "How dare he say something like that to us after what we have been through? How would he know?" That was the reaction.

15:00 Even his Chief of Staff, Calline, wrote very critically about that speech, very critically.

**And by this stage of the war having come to its conclusion were you feeling a sense of battle fatigue?**

Yes. Army fatigue, been

15:30 in the show too long. Although the second campaign the Aitape/Wewak campaign was nothing like the earlier ones it was so much easier and so much better, but it was still in the army and it was still in action and it was still something we wanted to get away from.

**When the atomic bomb was dropped obviously that would have been a happy day**

16:00 We heard of this atomic bomb, we had no conception of how big it was or what it was or what it had done but we did understand that it was the dropping of two of them that caused the Japanese to surrender, which suited us fine, that is all we wanted them to do. We used to think great "Why don't they drop a dozen more and kill off the whole lot?" That was the attitude then.

16:30 **In hindsight you said that the Aitape/Wewak operation campaigns were a waste, the allied soldiers, Australian soldiers being denied the opportunity to go and fight in the Philippines and so forth Iwo Jima and Okinawa. But if you consider the magnitude of those battles how would you see it now. The Americans had massive losses in those battles.**

They had massive

17:00 losses in those battles as we see it they never went about things the right way. We could never understand the way American troops operated; we could never understand how under-trained they were. If I can go right back to early in the story. When the Coral Sea battle was on and we were in Port Moresby

17:30 down in the Seven Mile Gully, some Americans arrived and they just swarmed into our area with trucks and guns and all sorts of things and took no notice of us, just dropped things everywhere. We had battle positions but that didn't concern them. One fellow he had a weapon that looked something like one of our Bofors guns and he plonked it down there and I wandered over to him.

18:00 I said "That's an interesting looking weapon you have got there." He said "Yeah we are going to shoot down the Zeros." I said "Oh yes." I said "Can it be depressed for ground fire?" He said "Oh yeah I guess so." I said "Well wouldn't it be better positioned a hundred yards or so over there

18:30 where it can cover this re-entrant up from Bootless Bay where any landing might come?" And he said "Oh yeah, I guess so if you say so." I said "Well I believe that would be a better position for it." He said "Yeah anything you say. I am not a soldier you know. I am just a lawyer." And he was the officer in charge of that weapon. That was our, at that, time experience of American training.

19:00 Those we encountered up at Sanananda were no better trained than that.

**Were they militia equivalent or were they regulars?**

I don't know. I don't think there was any such thing in America. I think everyone was just enlisted whether they wanted it or not, and this fellow, because he was a lawyer, he had been given a commission.

**I notice the Australian soldiers have a very good impersonations**

19:30 **of the American accent. Another thing I wanted to ask you something... more general questions. When you were fighting did you feel at all you were fighting for the British Empire?**

20:00 No outside of action that feeling might have been in there, but in action about the only thoughts you had you were fighting to save your own skin.

**But generically speaking.**

Yes we still wanted the flag; we regarded ourselves as part of the British Empire

20:30 as [Prime Minister Robert] Menzies had done when he said England is at war so Australia is at war. I would think that those of us who voluntarily went to AIF thought that way because that was volunteering for the expeditionary force. Those who didn't go to AIF and stayed in militia

21:00 who limited themselves to defending Australian territory possibly thought differently, possibly they already had the groundswell of republican thoughts. I wouldn't know. I guess they did.

**Did you think World War II was a just war?**

I can't answer that because I don't think any war is a just war.

21:30 I don't think any war is worth any one of the lives that is lost in it. I don't think any man in this world has a right to take another man's life that is why I am opposed to capital punishment. No all war is unjust in my mind.

22:00 it just shouldn't occur but does and always will.

**What were you fighting for in World War II?**

For Australia, and the fact that our families were in Australia and we were fighting because an outside power threatened our Australia and that was I guess the basis of the whole thing.

**Would you say in that**

22:30 **you could rationalise that as a just cause defending your homeland?**

Defence is just I guess but aggression is not and wars only come about through aggression don't they.

**What about now. What is your view on war, more specifically Vietnam you lived through Vietnam, and Iraq.**

23:00 **Australia's involvement in Iraq, Australia's involvement in Vietnam.**

I have mixed feelings about these. I don't really know enough of what went on behind the decision to go to them to be able to make fair comment. As an outsider I would say that we probably shouldn't have gone into Vietnam

23:30 and we probably shouldn't have gone into Iraq but that is without knowing facts. Intelligence is kept pretty close to the chest, many things in world affairs happen that we are not told about and we don't understand. We do elect our governments to represent us and if our governments make decisions we should probably support those

24:00 decisions, but I just don't like war.

**What did you think of conscription in Vietnam?**

Didn't agree with that at all don't think that should have ever occurred. How much of it did occur though. People were conscripted into the

24:30 what were those First Australian Regiment and the Second Australian Regiment but an awful lot of those fellows were volunteers as permanent soldiers, they had volunteered as permanent soldiers. I think those conscripted for that particular battle were few in number. I am not sure of that fact but I know the majority of them were permanent soldiers.

25:00 Once they volunteer they volunteer to do anything they are told what to do. Not always happily.

**What about the Anzac tradition did you feel a part of Anzac as it is enshrined in the First World War?**

It is funny because the

25:30 tape I was listening to before you came back from lunch, was an interview with Neil Mitchell on 3AW [radio station] that he did with me and that was one of the questions he asked me, whether I believed that Isurava should become as noted in history as being part of the Second World War as Gallipoli was in the First World War. Did I think that would happen and I told him no I didn't think it would happen.

26:00 I didn't think it could happen until a different form of Australian history was taught in schools. Present day school children understood the involvement Australia had had in international affairs going back to the Boer War or even the Crimean War. Anzac Day is it is a day of remembering fallen comrades.

26:30 Armistice Day used to be remember the Armistice but it is now called Remembrance Day. To me Anzac Day is still the day of remembrance. I go to the service at the Shrine. I lead our battalion to the service at the Shrine on Anzac Day and I am for its continuation. It is rather interesting of all the

27:00 world war units, the numbers who are fit to take part in the Anzac Day march are reducing tremendously and the RSL have recently relaxed their attitude towards children and grandchildren marching with veterans. In fact between last year and this year I would say they are now almost encouraging it. At last year's march

27:30 I had two of my grandchildren out in front holding the strings of our banner and was very proud to have them there. Other veterans were there with their children. The Anzac Day march will continue but it will ultimately change completely from what it was originally and that was a

28:00 march of veterans remembering fallen comrades, it will become a march of people who have had some connection with it and they want to remember them. Anzac commemoration will still go on forever I

believe. In our battalion we have another one we have a Kokoda Day pilgrimage to the Shrine on the second Sunday in August every year, those of us who are left to go

28:30 form up right at the Shrine, we don't walk from the city, we lay a wreath on our tree, we go into the inner shrine where we have a guest speaker. I introduce the ceremony and introduce the guest speaker and recite the ode and do a few things like that and we have a lot of second and third generation there at that commemoration.

29:00 And I think things like this will go on forever as will the Anzac Day service.

**Would you say that your memories of the war are basically the strongest ones you have got at the moment.**

They are quite strong, no my memories, the strongest memories are the times I spent with my wife and children.

29:30 They override everything else. I remember the war but I don't want to, I don't want all this business. It is something that did happen, we lived through it, we had to live through it, we have talked about it a bit, we could be getting to the stage that we are talking about it too much I think.

30:00 **What do you mean in general society?**

No not in general society in things that which we are doing today I think there might be a little bit too much of that

**Australians at War Film Archives we are specially set up for that purpose. Clearly the central theme of this is to ask questions of how the war impacted on**

30:30 **ones life. How did the war affect you as a person, after, how did it impact on you negatively, positively?**

Probably the biggest effect it had on me that without it I would have gone to University and I didn't. I could have but when I got back I had invalid parents and I just couldn't face up to it sort of thing.

31:00 Had there not been a war I would have certainly gone to university and I would have certainly followed a different course of life.

**What do you think you would have done?**

I would have done mechanical engineering without a doubt because I loved mathematics and I loved working with my hands. In later years I always pulled my own car engines to pieces and did valve grinds and all that sort of thing and I definitely instead of going into

31:30 industry and commerce I would have been an engineer but I finished up in industry and commerce because that is the way I got a job and the way I finished. I was relatively successful at it, but it is not what I would have done if there hadn't been a war.

**What about as far as character traits are concerned?**

I don't believe any of us change our characters much at any time.

32:00 **What I am trying to ask is after seeing such heavy things, extremities of life, did you change your view on your philosophical, even on religion, life in general how you view your place on earth or your contact with other people?**

I don't think so after the war my principal feeling about it was

32:30 well we have got over that. Let's get on with doing other things. I don't believe it affected me over much. My philosophy is based on a book which sits on that table over there called The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran and I have been reading parts of that for the last 25 years and I

33:00 still pick it up and read parts of it. His philosophies are marvellous on life, on marriage, on wealth, on all sorts of things and I keep reading that over and over. I don't think the war would have affected my thinking on any of those things.

**Would it have made you a harder person in certain ways?**

No.

33:30 Because I was never an antagonistic person even during the war. I wasn't wanting to get in there and kill people by any means. I was there because I had a job to do. I don't think I would know how to be a hard person.

**What about...having experienced so much combat. What beliefs sustained you in times of**

34:00 **danger, which is constant, you would be under considerable strain as everyone would be, what sustained your personal beliefs.**



Wanting to save your own skin was the thing that sustained you. You didn't need any personal beliefs you just wanted to live until the next morning.

**Would that by any means mean that you would also pray?**

No I didn't.

34:30 **You never prayed.**

No, I probably had too much religion thrust at me when I was young. No I don't recall ever praying during the war. I do recall talking to the various Padres we had, I was an Anglican and I think one the finest men I ever met in my life was the Roman Catholic Padre we had at one stage and he was a great

35:00 friend of mine. I remember all his clan gathering around him for masses and all sorts of things. When we had an Anglican Padre I used to attend his services I don't know that I really wanted to but I thought I should. No I didn't look for any guidance in that area at all I believed that we had to look after ourselves.

35:30 I don't discredit the church in any way at all I still support the church but I never go near it.

**And ever since the war that has been your view.**

Yes weddings and funerals.

**It is interesting because you get veterans who have gone through similar experiences like yourself, very extreme encounters and they...**

They have become very religious

**They have gone to the extreme opposite,**

36:00 **they become, not to say you are extreme in any way, the polar opposites as far as beliefs are concerned.**

We are all made differently. I think I had too much of it thrust at me when I was young and I was pleased to get away from it for a while.

**I went to a Christian Brothers school. Did you keep in touch with your mates after you came back to Australia like immediately after the war, in the late 40's?**

Yes.

36:30 Still do with those who are left, not too many left.

**So how would you keep in contact with them by doing what?**

A couple of them used to come around to our home and play solo on Saturday nights with us, they and their wives, one in particular I used to go down and stay on his farm quite regularly and I still go on his son's farm with him. Kept personal contact.

37:00 A number of the 39th boys I see them, well I see them at monthly meetings now, so I see them and at all the battalion gatherings. Last November we had a 39th battalion tour to Echuca and a number of us went away together on that. We still do quite a few things together. We drift apart and come together again but we are still all friends.

37:30 like old Larry Downes I hadn't seen him for 40 years when I called on him recently. I didn't even recognise him and I drove up to that funny little place of his and I got out of the car and "I said look I am looking for Larry Downes" and he looked at me and he said "Right oh Kang, you have found him." I was called Kanga in the army.

**Kanga what was that for?**

I have one leg and 1 inch and half shorter than the other

38:00 and I walked with a bit of a lope and that was where the Kanga came from I guess. I was always Kanga in the army.

**It hasn't left you that is for sure.**

It doesn't worry me a bit I couldn't care less.

38:30 **You go back to the places you fought like Kokoda, have you been back to Gona now.**

No I haven't been back to New Guinea.

**You haven't at all.**

We are planning a trip back this coming August.

**That should be exciting.**

It should be, if it comes off. I think it could be a failure, in that quite a few of those who

39:00 expressed an interest, when they find out what it is going to cost them, will decide they can't do it. But it could happen still.

**Basically we have completed our quota of tapes and I would like to thank you very much for your effort and time.**

I hope there is something constructive in it.

39:30 I didn't consider there to be anything startling about my career in fact I didn't consider it was worthwhile but I was volunteered and here we are.

**If you do want to say anything, any remarks for the people who will see it the Australians of the next generation.**

I haven't anything special to say at all.

40:00 In my case I think that the main thing in life is to follow what is my religion and that is having respect for other people.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**