

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Alexander Enterkin (Alex) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 6th February 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1476>

### Tape 1

00:36 **That is fascinating in itself but maybe later we will talk about your travels and so on. So we are rolling now Alex, is it possible for you to tell us as much as you can about your early childhood, your family and where you were born and grew up?**

Well I'm a bit unusual because I was actually born in Scotland

01:00 but I was only one when my mother came out here with me. My father was in the 1914-18 war. When he came back to Scotland he found, like so many other people, that jobs were very difficult to get. There was a lot of unemployment. He was riding a bike 30 odd miles just to get there and then come back again. So he decided it

01:30 wasn't a go at all so he decided to come to Australia, and that I think was a marvellous move that he made. When he came here to Australia it was some sort of a government thing that they had to do 12 months in the country working on a farm, which wasn't his thing at all. But anyway he did his 12 months

02:00 and then he found that there were quite a few jobs going at Wonthaggi in the mine. So he came to Wonthaggi, worked in the mine and 12 months after he came out here, Mum came out to Australia with me and that was the place I grew up.

**And**

02:30 **how old were you at the time?**

One. I was one year old.

**So I can't ask you about memories of Scotland then?**

No except we have visited Scotland a couple of times. But so Wonthaggi was the place in which I grew up. Went to school, primary school there, went to high school there, matriculated,

03:00 became a teacher and then went down, or a student teacher, I was a student teacher at Inverloch and then a student teacher at Wonthaggi and after two years of doing that I went to teachers college at Melbourne. That is where I met Lesley and that was a good time. So did the training as a teacher

03:30 and came back out and by this time of course war had started and I went to a couple of country primary schools teaching and decided when I was down near Lismore that I would join the army. So I left the teaching and joined the army.

**Before we get onto that**

04:00 **Alex can I just ask you about your early childhood memories of growing up in Wonthaggi, what that was like and how your father fared in the mines?**

Oh well as you would understand mining is not a pleasant work, but he did quite well. Instead of being just an ordinary miner he finished up, he

04:30 was what they called an examiner which meant that each day he would go down the mine before other people and check out for gas. I don't know whether you would know or not but one of the mines at Wonthaggi did blow up and killed I think it was 19 or 20 people when they were down t there.

05:00 But that was his job and but then, I don't know whether you are allowed to bring politics into this sort of conversation or not...

**You may.**

But the Victorian Government really only kept the mine open in order to reduce the price of the coal that was mostly coming from New South

- 05:30 Wales. The seams of coal in Wonthaggi were only, well the largest was three foot six, four foot whereas up in New South Wales they had big machines cutting into coal seams that were anything up to 15, 16 feet. So as soon as they bought, as soon as they closed the
- 06:00 mine, New South Wales would put the price of coal up so they kept the mine going. But eventually what happened was that it was just not profitable really because the seams were down to 18 inches, two foot at the most and it was very very difficult work. So the mine closed. But Dad then got a job
- 06:30 with the council. Actually Dad was in the Scotch graze in the 1914-18 war and he knew a lot about horses so he got this job where he was rounding up stray cattle and all sorts of things and so that was the story there as far as his work was concerned. Very sadly
- 07:00 one day, oh this is jumping ahead a bit, he came over to visit Lesley in hospital at Warrigal when she had our first boy, our first child John, and he was unfortunately killed. The truck ran over him so that is a very
- 07:30 sad thing but he was a marvellous fellow.

**So your family went through those Depression years?**

Yes.

**Late 20s and 30s, was he employed at that time?**

Oh yes, he always had employment, yes.

**So was there still a lot of tightening of the belt for your family specifically?**

Well they were very difficult times but we were, we were never

- 08:00 short of food or anything like that. There was a large co-operative store in Wonthaggi and the history of course is that there were strikes. One strike lasted for five months and the only way in which the miners could keep going because they had no money was
- 08:30 through this local co-operative store that was there, quite a big store and they then, for five months they were on strike. So the bills grew up or extended, extended but finally the strike was over and they had to pay back what they owed the co-op. But the co-op was very, very good and the town was very
- 09:00 co-operative and that was the kind of town Wonthaggi was in those days.

**Did you have brothers and sisters?**

I have one brother and I have one sister. Lawrence my brother, he is about four years younger than me and my sister is about another three or four years young again. My brother lives down at Geelong at the present time and has

- 09:30 lived there for some time and my sister lives, still lives in Wonthaggi. Both of them were teachers. We were a teaching family.

**Was there a tradition with that with your family?**

No, no. I think that one of the things that Mum and Dad really wanted was to see that their kids

- 10:00 didn't get into the work groove that they had had to put up with. Times weren't good when they lived in Scotland and of course after the war it was worse. And there were some rough times when they came out here to Australia excepting, because of the mine work, not everybody wants to work in a mine and so

- 10:30 there was work there. So we were never short of food, never.

**Had your father had other ambitions that you knew of?**

No I can't say, no. He, Dad was a very well read man, he read an awful lot.

- 11:00 He was interested in politics, but he was a thinker, but really there were very little opportunities for anything else other than what he did do.

**And what was your mother like?**

My mother was a very simple lady who was just devoted to her family and

- 11:30 she saw her job as the family, to seeing that we were well fed, everything was there ready for us, this sort of thing. No, very loving people.

**So how would you describe your early childhood, in general what sort of time was it for you?**

Well it is a bit difficult to describe but it was

12:00 delightful. It is a bit different from today's living with little kids, but we were free to roam wherever we wanted to. For instance we lived about two miles from the back beach out at the and it was no problem for us to wander off and go out there on our own. Nothing was going to happen to you, there

12:30 were no clowns around that were going to be stupid. So we played various games, kicked the tin. We built bonfires on bonfire night and spent weeks and weeks building the bonfire and then burning it all up. So it was really a very, very pleasant way to grow up and

13:00 generally speaking we were very, very happy people. Very happy, especially as kids.

**What about school, were you much of a scholar?**

I, it is a bit hard to tell about those very early days. I was a reasonable scholar. I passed all the

13:30 exams in the primary section and then I moved into the high school. I finished up at the high school matriculated. If I stay with this education business after the war I came back, I had started to go to or do university work, so I went back to the

14:00 university and I completed a bachelor of commerce degree. I also completed a bachelor of education degree and that is what set me up in the education department. So I suppose I was a reasonable scholar.

**You were talking about the bonfires and kick the tin and all that sort of thing. Can you remember some of the other games that occupied you after**

14:30 **school in those days?**

Oh yes there was cricket, cricket and then there was a lot of skipping in those days even the boys did it, boys and girls joined in, kick the tin, have you ever played kick the tin.

**How does one play kick the tin, I guess you just kick a tin?**

Well you put the tin down, someone kicks it then everyone runs and hides while he runs or she runs and finds the

15:00 tin and puts it back in it's place before they can look for you, so it is all good clean fun. But I think that maybe kids are a bit more sophisticated today, they don't go in for the simple things that we used to do but we played cricket, football, soccer you know everything. I hop step and jump, you know we do hop steps and jumps

15:30 and crazy things really.

**Did you personally have any hobbies, pastimes that were perhaps a bit unusual?**

No no. Not that I can think of, I was always interested in making things with tools and that sort of thing, but not really.

**What would you make, what sort of things, what were you working on? You said you were into tools and that kind of thing?**

16:00 Well one of the things that we spent a lot of time making were canoes, we'd make our own canoes. We would get a sheet of corrugated iron and flatten it all out and then get a couple of pieces of wood at each end and join it all up and then find some tar on the road that had dropped off the tarring truck and seal it up, so we

16:30 made canoes. We also made, I don't know what you would call them, little four wheel things with a box and you know and we had, could work it so that you had a little reins rope to steer it and get it up a hill and run down the hill, so that was our specialities.

**Billy cart?**

Billy cart type thing, yes that's right.

17:00 **You said obviously your father was employed during the Depression years. Did you see any set, I mean Wonthaggi was a very co-operative sort of place but did you see much sort of suffering, any hardship around you?**

No. You knew that some people were not as well off as others but people looked after to each other.

17:30 People also grew vegetables and grew things, mostly potatoes, onions that sort of thing, so there was always something to eat.

**Were rabbits a staple?**

Oh yes I had forgotten about rabbits. Dad used to go out and shoot rabbits and we'd come back and bring them back again and but that was a big

18:00 thing the rabbits, we thoroughly enjoyed the rabbits. But feed of rabbit was quite good, although you wouldn't want to eat it at the present time would you, with the viruses and things that they've got.

**What about kids, would they go rabbiting as well?**

Oh yes we used to go rabbiting, we had ferrets, and have you ever been ferreting?

18:30 **No.**

Well what happens is you put the ferret down or first of all, you put little nets around all the holes when you have found a decent sort of a rabbit burrow and you put the little net across, tack it all down and then you put the ferret in, then after a while if there are rabbits in there you hear this great noise coming because these rabbits come charging out

19:00 and of course you catch them in the nets, but sometimes the rabbit, it would decide to catch a rabbit itself and then start eating it, The problem is you've got to get it out so you have to dig out the rabbit burrow in order to get your ferret back or wait for hours for it to come out, but yes we did do quite a bit of ferreting.

**And did you, you said your dad would go out and shoot, would**

19:30 **he would shoot rabbits?**

Pardon?

**Did you get acquainted with the rifle?**

No I didn't use a rifle it was a shotgun. No I didn't use it at all then. No Dad was the only one that used the shotgun.

**And you'd bring the rabbits home, how would your mother prepare rabbit for a meal?**

Roast it or

20:00 stew it, either way, they are just as tasty.

**Is there anything else, do you have any particular sort of memories of your school years be it teachers or the other students there, any characters that come to mind from that period?**

No, nothing,

20:30 No. I, think I was a bit lucky someway because I don't know why it worked this way but I was reasonably quite good at sport. And so for instance when I got to high school I was captain of a group

21:00 and I was captain of the school team, captain of the football team and so no I just, I don't think I can't answer that question. My school days were very, very pleasant days.

**What does that mean, I mean that sounds quite a bit if responsibility captaining all these different groups?**

Well what it meant was

21:30 we played other schools in the area like Korumburra, Leongatha and that sort of thing so there were competitions like that. Saturday afternoons or Saturday mornings sometimes I played in the soccer team. I wasn't captain of the soccer team but so there was a lot of

22:00 sport that took place and the schools competed against the bigger schools, the high schools competed against each other. And then of course they had prefects and I was the head prefect. Don't ask me why but I was.

**How big was the school?**

The high school had about

22:30 360 to 400 people there most of the time. It would be bigger now I guess. The primary school was also quite a big school. Of course the primary school and all the primary schools around fed the high school.

**And as a prefect what**

23:00 **did that entail?**

Mostly it was, mostly you were, you were told to go to various entrances to the school to catch people who were late or were sneaking or something or other like that but it also meant that you sort of made

23:30 sure that people didn't do things that they were supposed not to do, that bigger kids didn't annoy little kids and no fighting and all that sort of business.

**And how readily did you sort of fit into that role?**

Pardon.

**How readily did you take to that position?**

Oh that was quite no problem because we thought we were

24:00 doing good things not bad things. Maybe we were a bit lenient on the people sneaking in, we weren't quite honest about that but nevertheless that is how it worked.

**So at that time were you already thinking of a career in teaching?**

Yes I always wanted to be a teacher.

24:30 I don't know why but it seemed to me that it was a good job, it seemed to me that it was doing something useful. And actually when I went into teaching once again I found that I was quite good at the business. There was a lot to learn at the beginning.

25:00 When I went to Inverloch the headmaster there was a very efficient competent fellow who was very high up in the teachers' union so he was a highly respected chap, so I learnt things from him. When I left Inverloch

25:30 and came into Wonthaggi the next year I had a marvellous principal named Mr Morris who for some reason or other took me under his wing and it was just a delight to listen to him. He was a really great role model as a leader

26:00 which probably rubbed off I don't know. But he was the man I admired very very much, very much.

**So what, sorry you might have mentioned earlier, you had a year in Inverloch, what were you doing there?**

I was teaching there, I was a student teacher. Just that was the beginning and that was before I went to college, to teacher's college

26:30 in Melbourne and qualified as a fully fledged teacher. But that is how they did it - you were a student teacher first of all, which meant you just went, you were attached to a school and spent some time there and then you had to go to college to get your teacher's certificates.

**Right, so how did the system work, who did you apply to**

27:00 **at the end of high school and how?**

Oh the education department, the Victorian Education Department.

**So you need to matriculate and have certain scores, I mean how did that, how were you deemed sort of...?**

Yes you had to, I think you had to have leaving I think they call it leaving. But matriculation was slightly different in that you had to have certain subjects that like maths English and sort of thing and

27:30 science a bit of science. But it was strictly the education department that employed you. You had to apply.

**Just a couple more questions about Wonthaggi and your family situation there, did the family ever go away on holidays, were there ever vacations as such?**

We,

28:00 our vacations were going down to Inverloch and what so many people in Wonthaggi did is they would buy some land down in Inverloch and they'd put first of all they were just huts like holiday place, you know a roof over your head and it was water tight and you had a holiday and that is how you had a

28:30 holiday or you put up tents as well camping, that sort of thing, around the around the huts if there was too many to sleep in the hut. So this is what Mum and Dad did, they bought a block down in Inverloch and put the hut on it. They used to build their own. Somebody who was a carpenter would

29:00 be part of the whole thing and they'd all join in together and go down and there might be 10 or 15 people working on a hut, so it goes up very quickly. But every year then we would go down and all the summer holidays for schools we spent down at the beach and of course that's where we learnt to swim.

29:30 **Is that where you did things like building the canoe?**

Oh no. We used to just row, paddle the canoes on various dams that were around the place, never took it out to sea, very soon it would be on the bottom and that would be it, sunk.

**Did you ever, did you**

30:00 **ever get into Melbourne as a child or as a young adult before you actually went there to study?**

Oh very rarely, very rarely. There was no reason for us being going to Melbourne. Everything that we wanted and needed was there in Wonthaggi. Good hospital, everything, good schools.

30:30 Why go to Melbourne?

**So it sounds that you were a pretty good student, you obviously wanted to get into teaching, this is the mid to late 30s I assume? How well informed do you think you were or people in general about what was going on elsewhere in the world especially with war clouds looming over Europe?**

You mean in

31:00 Wonthaggi?

**Yes. What did you know of what was going on on the other side of the world, the Nazis and all that sort of thing?**

Well I would say without any fear of contradiction that Wonthaggi people generally knew more about what was going on and more about politics and what was happening in the world than any other place you could

31:30 find in Australia because it was a very, very political town. The union was strong and this is the mining union, I mean was a strong union. A lot of these people who came there were like my father, they weren't stupid people. They were people who had come because they wanted to

32:00 see a better deal for their kids. And so and then of course they had the problem constantly with the Victorian Government because as I said before the Victorian Government merely used the mine to keep the price of the coal from New South Wales down. So as I said,

32:30 very politically minded. Knew more about what was going on than anywhere else. Maybe some of the other towns which were industrial would have people who would think like the Wonthaggi people thought but there were a lot of very, very clever people down there who only went there because of the money you could earn in the mine

33:00 and the job you could have whereas you couldn't get a job in other places. A very political town.

**How involved was your father in that side of things?**

Oh Dad was very involved in the union and in the whole of the political operation down there. Excepting

33:30 he was different in that, and this is only now that I'm older or as I got older, I realised that he wasn't as one track as many people were, if that is the way to say it.

**Can you sort of expand on that a little?**

34:00 Well as you know even today there are people who are just, politics, when you get into politics there are people who can only see one way, one direction, there is no light and shade in between. He would try to see what was the honest

34:30 sincere situation. It wasn't just all for self and I think that if I think about politics today they could learn a bit from such an attitude, but we won't go into politics.

35:00 **Well it is interesting to hear about politics of the time, I mean not necessarily up til today but just the new union movement there and the miners union. How much of an influence on you then were his politics?**

I think that with growing up in Wonthaggi and with Dad's influence that I am quite influenced.

35:30 I think that it is still true to say that the ordinary working man doesn't have the fair deal out of the situation as the big business type does. And it seems to me the thing as being, the influence is being

36:00 skewed more and more to big business and I don't know whether I should be talking like this on this program.

**That is fine. It is fine, we are here to find about you and not just what happened but how you think and feel.**

Yes, well don't way away thinking I am a mad red bull or something or other charging around madly straightening out the world, it is impossible to do.

36:30 **So you said that there was a really long strike yes was it?**

Yes.

**Was your father with the council at that point or was he still with the...?**

No he was still with the mine at that time. The strike lasted for five months so everyone was you know in a quite a bad way at the end of five months with no money coming in. But as

37:00 I said before the co-op kept them going and then they had months in which to work to pay the co-op. But it wasn't, it wasn't a good time for Wonthaggi and you can understand when things like that happen

- and they know perfectly well that the Victorian Government is
- 37:30 only keeping the mine going to adjust the price of New South Wales, there is a little bit of dishonesty in that which is a bit hard to take when you are living in the situation.
- It is in their interest to keep miners wages as low as possible otherwise it defeats the purpose doesn't it?**
- But it is not fair is it? That is what I am getting
- 38:00 at, fairness, there is justice in it.
- Absolutely. So the co-op was obviously essential during that period?**
- Oh it was, oh it was. It is still going. No.
- And what about, did you tell us why your father, oh because the mines were being closed down is that why your father went with the council work?**
- Yes, yes the mines were closed down.
- 38:30 **And you mentioned that accident where 20 odd men were killed, was that earlier in the piece or was that during that time?**
- No it was during that time he was at the mine. No.
- What sort of impact did that have?**
- Oh it had a shocking impact on the town. All the men of course everybody knew everybody else just about and
- 39:00 so to lose these fellows. Actually in a way it was lucky. The men who were killed were mostly the overseers of the other miners and they used to go down the mine first of all to check out that things were in order.
- 39:30 Now had the miners all gone down then the number of people killed would have been very much increased, very much. But you know how can you weigh one thing against the other.
- Well it sounds like your father's particular job was fraught with danger itself?**
- Oh it was. Because
- 40:00 as I say this is the job he finished up with and he had to go down to check out the gas.
- Did you ever visit the mines?**
- I have never been down a mine and I never want to go down a mine. I have heard too much about mines. The closest I have got to a mine is going into a cave, I don't
- 40:30 even like that.
- So can you tell us about that year in Inverloch, you were a student teacher and what that involved and when you felt you had sort of made the right decision?**
- Well as I said we lived at Wonthaggi, it's a
- 41:00 about nine miles from where I lived to get to school. So I used to ride a bike everyday, push bike to Inverloch, and I just thought that was the normal sort of thing. The only good thing it did for me really was I got a good pair of legs out of the riding. That is why Lesley likes me.
- 41:30 **So you still cycle do you?**
- No I don't, I haven't been on a bike for years but but that is how I went to school there and I was, there were two big rooms at Inverloch and I was in a room with a lady with 40 odd
- 42:00 children and I would be helping...

## Tape 2

- 00:30 **We are back on tape two.**
- We are with Miss Norman at Inverloch.
- Okay, alright well let us hear about it.**
- What I was going to say was that there were 40 odd kids in this room, four grades and for starters I was

given

- 01:00 simple things with the lower grades and in the other big room was this chap named Brown and he was the president of the teacher's union at the time I was there. Doug Brown was his name. When he would go to meetings
- 01:30 down in Melbourne I would be given charge of the upper part of the school that he was taking with four different grades in it and 40 odd kids in the room so it was a pretty hard slog for someone who is straight out of school
- 02:00 aand especially when some of these girls who were in the 8th grade who were fairly big girls, were the girls that I had been seeing or were friendly with down at the beach on the Christmas holidays. So it was a bit scary in a way. Hard work but I learnt a few things from Doug Brown, my principal.
- 02:30 That was the day when the strap was the big deal. But of course being as I said a student teacher, the student teacher wasn't allowed to do this, only Doug could do that. So your power was limited. So it was really quite a, quite a handful and at the end of the day you felt, well I'm
- 03:00 glad to get on the bike and go home.

**So the students believed they could get away with a bit more?**

Well they tried to. They tried to but it didn't work that way.

**So how were you able to curtail that?**

Well perhaps I shouldn't tell you this but I felt, "Okay I'm the teacher, this is how Doug does it" and he's the big man,

- 03:30 the big boss, he knows all about everything so this particular day I gave this child the strap. I thought "Good enough for him, good enough for me" but I was hauled over the coals for doing this, not done. But I thought well "I'm a teacher, why not?" and I had no trouble after that.

**So the student made a complaint did they?**

- 04:00 Oh this child went home and told the parents and the parents came up and had words to say. And I was told "Never do that again, not ever". But it served a good purpose and made life easier for me.

**So what were you teaching, I mean what ages?**

Oh this was primary school, and this was, this was teaching children

- 04:30 in grades five, six, seven and eight. The seven and eight have now become a high school first two forms but that is how the primary school worked in the country schools so you had a combination of four classes that you were dealing with. You had nearly 50 kids in the room, it wasn't easy.

- 05:00 **How do you manage that?**

Well I don't know, you just do. You know you have to vary the work that they can go on with in each section and then you move from one to the other and back again, back and forth. It is not simple. Teachers think they have got it hard today, but they don't have anything like that.

- 05:30 **So what year, what year are we talking about now?**

1938, 39.

**So what were you doing, how was life for you out of school? I mean you had grown up a bit now you were you know, were you getting paid reasonably well, what was the wage like for you as a teacher?**

- 06:00 I think, I think it was about 32 shillings a week. Very, very poor. Very poor, but it went up each year a little bit if you stayed longer as a student teacher. But I was only

- 06:30 a student teacher for two years and then I went down to the training college in Melbourne.

**So how far would 32 shillings go in 1938?**

It would go further than I don't know, it is very hard to tell you know but it was low wages.

**What would**

- 07:00 **you be spending your money on. What were you doing outside of work socially, you know were you still playing sport, were you?**

Oh yes still played sport but Saturday nights was always the dance down at the fire brigade in Wonthaggi. This fire brigade had this lovely hall with a beautiful floor, so you couldn't miss that. Then there was the theatre.



- 07:30 The Wonthaggi theatre was the miners', the miners owned it and for kids to go into the theatre it was seven pence. And I think it was one and a penny or something for adults, the cheapest theatre place in Australia all the time I was growing up.
- 08:00 So if you didn't get to the film on Friday night and it was also one of the only places I think in Australia where they had pictures on a Sunday night and the reason they had pictures on a Sunday night was that it gave the miners an opportunity to see a film that would be on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday
- 08:30 before and then go to work the next day. But they had made this because when they were working there was no way they would be going to a film at night, they would be going to bed.

**Do you remember any of the films that grabbed your attention in those days?**

No

- 09:00 you are going back too far, too far altogether, so.

**I'm sorry.**

No it's alright.

**That is what we are here for Alex, we must try.**

I forget a film I saw last week, how could I remember something back there? Impossible.

**When you are at that age, you know things adolescents do as a young man...Anyway the**

- 09:30 **dances, you used to talk about the dance down at the fire station, the fire brigade dance, can you perhaps describe for us what that was like, the atmosphere, the music, the sorts of dances, relationships with the girls that kind of thing?**

Well the fire brigade was terrific it really was. The fellas would all be six deep up one end when

- 10:00 the music was not playing and then on would come the next dance and they would all zoom down onto which every young lady they wanted to dance with and away you would go. And at the end of the dance, back up again to the...there was none of this sitting with girls. But it was a really good dance hall and everybody learned to dance

- 10:30 pretty well, so it was a pleasure dancing with these young ladies.

**And did you learn the dancing on the job as it were?**

Yeah we learned the dancing on the job and practised at home on your Mum. But no it was really very good. No none of the young fellas, the girls either, would ever have missed a the Saturday night

- 11:00 dance because you could always go to the pictures on a Sunday if you had wanted to.

**So dates would be arranged but only as one dance is that right?**

Oh no, no it wasn't a dating business no. Just everybody turned up.

**But if you wanted to go to the pictures or take a girl to the pictures or something like that?**

Oh yes that could happen. We didn't have enough money to take a girl to the

- 11:30 pictures, you had to pay yourself even though it was very low.

**So after the year at Inverloch, now where were you when war was declared, in Inverloch or was that in Melbourne?**

No I was down in the western district, that was after I had been at teachers' college. I was in teachers' college in

- 12:00 1940 so the war was on and I was down near Lismore and I joined up at, I joined up there at Lismore in about May or something. It is on a bit of paper, I won't look at it.

**It is up to you.**

- 12:30 **So in Inverloch '38, '39 so when in September '39...?**

Righto, yeah no no, Wonthaggi, Inverloch, or I was at Inverloch school as a junior teacher then came back the next year. I transferred to Wonthaggi and was a junior teacher still. From Wonthaggi I went

- 13:00 to the teachers' college down at Melbourne.

**And that was 1940?**

1940. And when I finished there, I went out to this school which was down near Lismore and and then I think it was about May I joined the army.

**Right okay, so, okay, so '39 as**

- 13:30 **you said you were transferred to Wonthaggi still as a student teacher. Do you remember that time when war was declared, hearing it on the radio or anything, do you recall what was sort of...?**
- No not the specific, not the specific day no, no.
- But you remember how the community reacted to that and you personally?**
- Oh well
- 14:00 it was just such an unjust war really, I mean there was no reason for it really, I can't think of a sensible reason for it. By that time the war had been going a little while
- 14:30 when I joined up and the Japanese weren't doing anything to endear themselves to anybody that I knew, so we didn't think of them as nice people at all, and I don't think they were nice, but oh well that's where are we going
- 15:00 now, are we going to talk war?
- I don't necessarily want to leap into that. I am just trying to find out as things were happening, I'm not necessary talking about 1941 or '42 when the Japanese got involved, but even earlier in 39 when it started happening in Europe but already there were, you know Australia was saying we must fight alongside the mother country and people were joining up obviously in '39, '40, and just to get a picture of what you were doing at that time and what your**
- 15:30 **thoughts were about the possibility of being involved prior to I guess the Japanese involvement?**
- No we weren't thinking much about it at all. I was still on the business of getting qualified as a teacher, but it wasn't until the Japanese came into the business unfortunately for me I had already done the training and I had been out
- 16:00 and then went into the army. But no, didn't think much about it in the early days, we felt as though you weren't really in it.
- So you were in Melbourne, you came down to Melbourne in 40. I am still interested to hear about that, I mean we will get to your military involvement soon, but to hear about Melbourne and what that was like for you to move into**
- 16:30 **town, into the city and what Melbourne was like at that period. The war was on, you suggested that it didn't feel like it because we were so far removed, just what the atmosphere was like?**
- Well as I say it had no real effect on us at all. Now my year in teachers' college and because I was young
- 17:00 I was able to get, I was in residence at the teachers' college. I didn't stay out in a boarding house or any place at all. I actually lived at the teachers' college so my whole year there was nothing to do really. Going down into town was not anything
- 17:30 I was interested in much. I have a great facility to get myself lost if I get into these places where there are little nooks and crannies and twists and turns and so. That didn't interest me at all and so it was just the teachers' college was my home for that 12 months
- 18:00 and we did all the normal things, played sport. But I didn't go down to the city much at all, it wasn't attractive to us. See most of the people who were in that college, living there, were country people and they were all fairly young people
- 18:30 so they weren't city slickers in any shape or form.
- And what was the talk of the war at that point, I mean you obviously were a lot more informed and politically aware than some. I mean how did you perceive what was going on in Europe. Did you think Australia should be apart of what was happening?**
- I didn't think much about it at that time
- 19:00 and I don't think that the students like myself at the college thought about it either. It was only a little later on that it became more serious. Actually when we went through that year 1940 and then when we came out to actually do our teaching that you began thinking about what's going on seriously.
- 19:30 And the thing was that I think there was only about three people in the college who joined the army, the navy or the air force in that 1940 period. It was when we
- 20:00 finished the year and then in 1941 that quite a number of people that I knew as teachers went into the army. So I suppose more in a way we were more concerned with getting the qualification and getting out of the place and going out as teachers

20:30 but the war wasn't interfering with our lives at all while we were in college.

**I guess, sorry, I guess being students and you know starting to be teachers those students would have been protected. I mean they weren't supposed to be called up were they, if I am not mistaken?**

21:00 Oh well we weren't called up. Everybody had to join up and I think the department started to look on it in a dim light you know because people were joining up like they were. But anyway it was a decision that everybody had to make as an individual anyway. But one of the interesting things about it is

21:30 that some of the people who didn't join up at all did quite a bit better than the people who had joined up and gone away and then came back again in that they had got promotions that were not available to the people who were in the army. But then they made a rule that anybody who was army

22:00 had to be considered for a position but of course you didn't, you were in the army and you weren't applying for anything were you? So the way it really worked was that these fellows who stayed behind were in better positions later on when chaps came back which left a little sour note. However...

22:30 **We have heard some stories like that and you know stories of white feathers, giving white feathers on trams and all of that sort of stuff did you see any of that sort of stuff?**

No. I didn't see any of it no. It is a pretty poor sort of thing to do and probably the people giving them weren't doing anything anyway.

**So what**

23:00 **was your ambition. Were you looking at continuing with the primary school teaching at those same sorts of schools, I mean what plans did you have for yourself during those college years?**

No I wanted to stay in the primary division but I also wanted to go to the university and it was the, really the

23:30 army service that helped me to get into the university because I think we had some sort of priority or other but before I had gone into the army I had started to do a subject with the university so that I had made a contact with them before the army. So when I came back out

24:00 and I applied to go to the university I was able to get in quite easily. I had all the qualifications that were required and the good thing was the education department paid our salaries all the time that we were there which was three years, which wasn't

24:30 a bad sort of a deal from my point of view.

**And is it during this time that you met Lesley?**

No I met Lesley in teachers' college. Actually how it happened was they had a sort of a head table, main table, I was sitting on this side

25:00 and she was sitting on the other side and I thought she was lovely but it took a while to convince her that I was lovely. The reason that I was sitting there was that I had been involved in the

25:30 Christmas holidays at a sea rescue at Inverloch and just before going to college I had been awarded the Royal Humane Society Medal for this rescue business. And so they made a bit of a fuss of this when I was at college,

26:00 that is why I was on this so called head table which was good because we have been together now for a long, long time.

**What was Lesley studying?**

She was doing just primary teaching too. Studying.

26:30 But she had great abilities with language and she didn't stay in the primary division very long. She moved over into the secondary division and taught languages and English and that sort of thing.

**Can you tell us a little bit about**

27:00 **this sea rescue at Inverloch. You said you won the Royal Humane Award?**

Well you don't win them but they award you. Royal Humane Society yes. Well this friend of mine and myself were in a canoe and we were paddling the canoe down at, more or less down towards the

27:30 entrance of the inlet, I don't know if you know Inverloch at all but there is an inlet and there is a bar across the front waves break, but there is a river that flows into it up at the other end and there is quite a bit of pressure coming from the river so that when the tide is going out, it races

28:00 out at about 14, 15 knots which is pretty strong. We happened to be down there at this end of the inlet this particular day paddling around when we noticed this boat which had four, three men and a boy in it.

- 28:30 And what happened was, they had been fishing, when they went to pull up the anchor to come in the anchor was snagged and so pulling on it they pushed the nose of the boat down and because the current was running out so swiftly it then came through the boat
- 29:00 filled it up and then the boat was pushed down about four, six feet under the water. So we only had this canoe but we went to help. When we got there, there was one man who had had a heart attack and he was floating on the top, another fella had just sunk and was being drifted away and there was this
- 29:30 chap and his boy. The only two that were, the little boy had fortunately had a rubber thing around him and this was keeping them both up. So we went to them and tried to, we couldn't put them in the canoe because, we put the boy in the canoe but the father had to hang on the back on the side.
- 30:00 But by this time we had gone through the water that was breaking on the bar and as a result of this waves were coming in six, seven feet high and we were all in the water then. But we were able to get together, or get them together after we had crossed the bar and we finished up about a mile
- 30:30 out in the ocean and eventually another big boat came out and picked us all up, so that was it. So it was quite sad losing these two fellas.

**Had you had any sort of training in sort of life saving type**

31:00 **operations?**

Oh I had done some, quite a bit of swimming but there was no way to apply life saving things because one fellow was floating away on the current and he was down about 10 feet and the other chap as I said was spread eagled on the top face down - must have had air in his lungs and he was

- 31:30 floating there. Anyway eventually he just, he had had a heart attack and died, he was dead. But fortunately we were able to save the chap and his son and so that is how we got the medal.

**And how did that, when did you receive that, how long after**

32:00 **the event?**

Oh about probably about six months, five months.

**Do you know how that would have been recommended and so forth?**

No, someone had written into them apparently, I don't know how, but someone had written in told them about this.

- 32:30 I think that is the way they get their information.

**So what at the end of 1940 you finished the, that was the end of the college year and what was next?**

Next? Next was when I went down into the western district and joined up and went into the army next year.

- 33:00 I think it must have been about April or something or other, I would have to get my bit of paper that I'm not allowed to look out.

**Alex it is right there, why don't you just have a quick look at that please.**

My higher command. 1941 the 7th of the

- 33:30 6th 1941 I enlisted at Lismore.

**7th of the 6th.**

Yes and went to Ocean Grove for training. But how I came to be in the 7th battalion was we were told that they were looking for volunteers

- 34:00 for this unit that was going to go away. And so I transferred then out and I transferred to the 7th battalion and that became my home for the rest of the war.

**Okay let's get onto that, onto that period. So it was June, 7th of the 6th I think you said so early June you'd been, so you were a fully fledged teacher**

- 34:30 **now, why at that time did you make that decision?**

Oh it was fairly simple really. It just seemed to me to be the right thing to do.

- 35:00 By that time the war was getting nasty, the Japs were nasty.

**Had many of your mates done the same thing or were they in the process of joining as well?**

Some of them were,

35:30 most of them were going into the navy or the air force. I couldn't tell you how, how many out of our group joined up, but there were, there were a few, quite a few.

**And did you contemplate. You said some of the guys were in the navy,**

36:00 **air force, had you contemplated those services or was it always the army?**

No I didn't, I didn't think much about going into the navy or the air force. Maybe it was because Dad was in the army. I don't know.

**Speaking of your father, had he ever talked much about his time in the army?**

36:30 No, he didn't talk about his time in the army, he talked about his time after the army and the way things were and how they shouldn't have been. No, no he didn't talk much about the war at all.

**Did you know where he had been involved, where he saw action?**

He had been over in France yes, yes.

**So when you did make that decision what were,**

37:00 **how did your folks react?**

I don't know, I don't know that they were delighted but once again they supported me in what I had done anyway. No problem there, no problem.

**Was it a problem with the Education Department?**

No the Education Department couldn't

37:30 take on the army. No problem with the Education Department and no problem coming back again. No problem at all. No they were very good.

**And what about the school where you worked at the time in Lismore?**

Oh the school was a small country school, the same sort of thing as Inverloch. You know running through to the 8th grade but all they did was they put another teacher there I think.

38:00 I just informed them that I would be leaving by a certain date and I think they just made the arrangements and I knew nothing about it from then on.

**Do you recall any of the specifics of your enlistment, you know just be it the medicals and the interviews, tests that had to be done?**

No, it just seemed to be pretty straightforward. I think

38:30 they weighed you, or something or other to see whether you were obese or not or fit enough and that was about it as far as I could see.

**So were you told straight away that you were accepted or was there, how were you informed?**

What happened was you just got a letter saying called up at such a such

39:00 and report to so and so and that was it.

**Right, so report to...where did they want you to go, what did you have to do?**

Wanted me to report to Ocean Grove and they had a camp out there in that area anyway. But Ocean Grove is as near as I can give you.

39:30 **And how long were you at Ocean Grove?**

I think it, I don't think it was much more than about three months or four months.

**So it was like your rookie training?**

That's right yes. Basic training and as I said before

40:00 they were calling for volunteers to for the 7th battalion. They must have been getting them from other people to build it up a bit and when I was told this I volunteered to go with the 7th battalion and that is how I became to be with them, transferred over to them and they were based just out of Dandenong for their training period.

40:30 and from there we went to Darwin.

**When you say volunteered was it truly voluntary or was it a matter of just them?**

Oh no no no it was quite voluntary, didn't have to go, no. Actually I was a bit annoyed I suppose because

- 41:00 I had been told that I had been made, would be made a corporal and I would have been in company office working but then the captain discovered that his nephew was coming into the same unit and he
- 41:30 was the one that got the job as the corporal so I thought it was time to get out. And that is why I moved really, it suited me fine.
- So that is to say you were actually in a unit before you went to the 7th, what unit or battalion was that?**
- I think it was called the 21st or 23rd or something. Anyway I wasn't delighted with the captain. So the best job
- 42:00 I did....

## Tape 3

- 00:31 **Hello we're recording again, so the move to Dandenong...?**
- Well when I went to Dandenong I had come across two operators on a radio on the beach front at one stage before I went to Dandenong and I thought it was a very sort of interesting operation that they were
- 01:00 doing. So when I went to Dandenong and they asked me where I wanted to be I said I wanted to be in the signals. So I was in the headquarters company signal section and that proved to be a very good thing because I was interested in it, I think I was good at it and
- 01:30 they were a very happy bunch of fellas. So I was with the headquarters with the signals and for some reason or other whenever we were on an operation I used to be allotted the colonel and that was a very good thing from my point of view because
- 02:00 all the information from the other groups in the, you know the units and whatnots the coming ins came in through me, so you knew what was going on all the time. And any of the messages that were going out I would be the one sending them out so I found it most fascinating and so I thought the move into the signals was a
- 02:30 good thing.
- So I am curious as to where the interest in signals in communications like that came from?**
- Well it was these, these people who were out on the beach with their radio and it wasn't just a radio it was a sending device as well and they were getting signals coming in through that so that was
- 03:00 what made me choose going into the signals section.
- Is this during your time at Ocean Grove that you are talking about that you came across these people?**
- Yes, yes at Ocean Grove. Yes.
- So you would have had to do quite specific training for that work?**
- We did a lot of training, yes. Of course Morse Code was
- 03:30 foreign to me at that particular time and so we learnt it and for a little while we used flags but then eventually of course everybody decided that flags were all out of date so they were alright for any war back, any length of time, so we dropped the flag bit and it was all either
- 04:00 voice or it would be Morse Code that would be coming through.
- Right so Morse Code, how do they train you to learn Morse Code, is it very difficult?**
- Well it is really quite simple you have another fellow on the other side connected up to
- 04:30 the works that and you've got a key and you send these messages to each other and you have competitions sort of thing trying to confuse the situation but it can be quite good fun. But no I found Morse Code very interesting.
- I imagine you could send all sorts of messages?**
- Oh well anything at all yes, sometimes
- 05:00 the I section, the intelligence section would send something over for us to send down to another battalion or whatever and it would be in secret sort of thing in that it would be in code, you know with five, five letters in little groups all along the line, but when it was decoded it was whatever code they were

05:30 using it made sense, but it didn't make sense to us. But most of our stuff was simply straight language, it was quick and it was stuff that had to be acted on straight away so there was nothing anybody could do about it even if they did pick it up.

**And what else did you need to be trained in?**

06:00 In the signals?

**Yes.**

Oh gee I don't know, basically that and then of course it was we did a little bit of decoding but not very much because usually it just went straight to the I [intelligence] section and they did all the decoding.

**Cable laying, cable laying?**

06:30 Oh well yes, and this is what happened in organising the whole of the section. It got that there were a certain number of fellas who were, the fellas who laid the cables and if you went to a new area the first thing that they did was leap into these laying the lines out to the

07:00 companies from the headquarters. And they would and so they were very important section to us. First of all they would just lay the lines just on the ground so that you could use them but if there were trees then you would, they would lift them up high enough

07:30 that trucks could get under them or people could get under them without interfering with them, but they did a good, a good job. We reached the stage that oh usually within about half an hour anyway of arriving anywhere we could get communication with all of the companies back to the headquarters

08:00 and that was pretty good going, so we had a good team.

**But in those training days at Dandenong is that something that you were trained to do as well?**

No. Not much at all, mostly it was just learning the basic Morse Code, we used flags. As I said before flags were useless in the, it might have been alright in the desert

08:30 war or something but it was no good in the jungle or in the bush. And anyway it was so outdated the other communication was much quicker and easier.

**So were you, were you trained with the other infantry in the battalion, like how would you work together as**

09:00 **signals?**

No what happened was that there'd be two sigs go out to each company and they would be the ones who would be working into the central section and then you, usually I was on that control section all the time.

09:30 And the same sort of thing operated when we were moving around and usually that may have been wireless communication not, no lines. And once again we would have the communications to the centre to where we the (colone UNCLEAR) was. And the same thing, a couple of sigs would go out to each, be allotted to the companies.

10:00 **So how long were you at Dandenong for doing that training?**

Oh I can't remember exactly but it would be probably six weeks, not very long before we shunted off to Darwin.

**So Darwin was your first posting?**

Yes.

**How did you get to Darwin?**

10:30 Well we went from Dandenong we went by train, we went up to Alice Springs by train and then we went by bus, a pretty rough ride with the buses after they'd churned up the sand and whatnot going, you know, as fast as they could possibly go, bumping along. And

11:00 it was very hot, very hot.

**They weren't coaches were they?**

No they were just trucks and some, well quite a lot of the time they were open at the back where we were, and then they'd have the you know, covers on sometimes, but a lot of the time it was better to be open. At least you got a bit of a breeze as you were going along.

**And was that all the way to Darwin from**

11:30 **Alice?**

Yes. Yes and we arrived in the Darwin area the day after the big bombing raid and

12:00 the first raid when the whole of Darwin was blown to pieces, I don't know if you have seen pictures, but there is nothing to see. It is just holes in the ground and things sticking up that shouldn't be sticking up. But they really had a most successful raid from a Japanese point of view, they blew up the town and at that particular time in the bay there were

12:30 about 17 ships belonging to us and the Americans sunk in the harbour at the same time. So you couldn't get much more success than that.

**This is what you arrived to out of this truck?**

The day after we arrived this is what happened, yes.

**That must have been**

13:00 **quite shocking for you in some ways?**

Well it wasn't scary because it was all over by the time we were there but it just let you see what damage could be done, very, very quickly so...oh and the pier was blown up as well and these ships were scattered around the harbour in

13:30 various places. Most successful raid from the point of view of the Japanese.

**What about the people, who were the...?**

Well as we were going out there was just these lines of vehicles coming away from Darwin, everybody leaving, evacuating as fast as they could.

14:00 **Including troops?**

Troops no, not troops, not troops.

**Did you see any, we heard some stories of some soldiers getting out of there?**

You mean ran away?

**Yeah.**

Oh no, don't know anything about that, didn't even give it a thought. None of our fellas ran away.

14:30 **So where did you go to, where were the barracks?**

Well we didn't have barracks as such. We only had tents. After being in Darwin a little while we moved down, they used to call the position you were in 29 mile or 50 mile or 15

15:00 mile and that is how we knew. We moved down into a wooded area, timbered area that was down about 15 mile from Darwin and that became a sort of a base from which we operated from then on while we were up there. We actually...there were

15:30 quite a number of raids while we were up there but we missed them down where we were because they weren't, the air force had set up, had cleared runways from back about 25 miles from Darwin. And they cleared runways on the side of the road,

16:00 bank [?] trees and then a runway was made. So they had their planes spread all the way down, not all in the one spot and occasionally there would be a raid and there would be something dropped on depending on wherever they wanted to go. Sometimes they went as far down as Batchelor which was a fair way. But we were lucky

16:30 where we were stationed at that time because they bypassed us all the time. But that was the situation. In fact, I am not sure but I think in some parts of the way you can still see where the these aerodromes were because the

17:00 trees are different and smaller, the others are all bigger.

**What was your role there, what did you have to do?**

Actually we were doing very little, we were just training, still training all the time, sometimes we were... at one time we thought there was going to be a landing made up

17:30 in the Darwin coast by the Japs. At one time we were up just there lying around waiting and we thought they were coming, but nothing came of it, so we came back to the camp again. But we really did very little. But we trained exceedingly hard. We had a

18:00 colonel, his name, he is still alive but he is in a home unfortunately, his name is Wilmot and he had been in the Middle East and he'd come from the Middle East and he took command of our unit and he was the best thing that ever happened to us. He was, he was in love with the unit



- 18:30 as such, it was his baby and he trained us to a very, very high peak. We used to as part of training, we used to have sessions which would last for oh a month or six weeks, and they were night sessions in which we would get loaded up with packs and things
- 19:00 and we would take off and in a night we were travelling about 30 kilometres just to stay fit. We started off as a smaller figure and we got up to about 30 kilometres. And so he, as I said it was his pride and joy the unit and
- 19:30 he made the unit. We became exceedingly fit and very keen on what we were doing and then there was a very sad thing took place. I might be jumping away from what you want to talk about but...

**No, no you tell us.**

When we had been given the information that we were going to be moving and that we were

- 20:00 going to go to New Guinea, the colonel found out that he couldn't go with us for the reason they gave was he was over a certain age, and there was an age limit on who would go to a place like New Guinea. And so
- 20:30 we came down to Victoria, had some leave and went up to Queensland and he was most distraught when he couldn't come with us and so were we. So very sad. But he did catch up with us again at the end of the war because when our battalion unit thing was formed after the war
- 21:00 he was our patron. And it was good to see him again. But very very sad for a man who had put so much effort into making the unit what it was when he really wanted to go with us, couldn't go. It was very sad.

**Just because of that simple technicality?**

Oh I don't know, just a matter of maybe it was just a

- 21:30 matter of four or five years who knows? There was certainly nothing wrong with his fitness because he came with us when we were on these exercises and he walked miles, keeping check of all the various companies, seeing that they were all up to scratch.

**Very, that is a very inspiring leader I suppose.**

It was. Yes he was.

- 22:00 There wouldn't be anyone in the unit who didn't admire him. Not one.

**So for all this discipline training that he, you know the fitness that he insisted on there must have been something else about him you know some benevolent perhaps or fairness**

- 22:30 **about him?**

Oh certainly fair, his nickname was the Bomber. I don't know if that was supposed to be if you stepped over the line you'd be bombed by him or what, that is what we called him the Bomber, and never the colonel, and no, a terrific fellow.

- 23:00 **Were you, did you experience any of the other raids on Darwin by the Japanese?**

Oh yes as I said, we arrived there with the first raid and I think the figure is 52 or 55 raids in the Darwin area. We were up there for all that time. The raids

- 23:30 had stopped before we'd left. But oh another little incident that we had was at one stage we expected or the information was there was a landing going to be made. So we were up onto the beach, we moved up onto the beaches and we stayed there for about a week
- 24:00 waiting and thinking something might happen, but it all fizzled out and turned not to be true, so that might be why we are still talking. But other than that most of the time we spent up there was training exercise or sometimes things worked well in
- 24:30 that they wanted people to unload cargos from ships that were bringing up stores. And the drill was that if you were lucky enough to get onto one of these, sent up to do one of these jobs if it was a crate of fruit juice or whatever at
- 25:00 least one had to be thrown over and hit the wharf and split the crate and then we would have a little supply to take home back, so we had to look after ourselves a little bit, but that is what used to happen. I don't think anybody, nobody didn't come back with some little trophy, all in the name of the game.

- 25:30 **So you must have been pretty pleased when you knew you were going to be down on the wharf unloading?**

Oh yes it was great, there was never any problems with volunteers to go down to the wharf, never.

**So you said that you were there with those 50-odd additional raids by the Japanese,**

26:00 **So can you recall being in the line of fire and the action?**

Well the closest we really got was one day we were doing an exercise because training kept on forever you know, there was never any let up on that. We were crossing this field,

26:30 open field up at the Darwin area and this Japanese group of bombers came in. The way in which the Japs used to avoid the raise that

27:00 oh what do you call them, I've forgotten the word, detected Japanese planes coming, can't remember the word, anyway they had machinery that would pick up Jap planes further out and they'd know they were coming.

**Radar?**

Radar, yes radar. So what the Japs found was that if

27:30 they came in about 50 feet up, just 50 feet skimmed along at that, that was under the radar, and we were out on an exercise, all open field this day and the next thing we hear the roar of planes, and these planes came over just 50 feet and you look up and you can see the Japanese sitting there looking down at us.

28:00 They didn't do anything about us because they were going on further to bomb another part of the thing but it really seemed very strange at the time, that they are sitting there peering out and you can and you're down there and there is nothing you can do about it because they came over so quickly and then they are gone so quickly, that was it. But that is as close as we got to the aeroplanes.

28:30 **So they would have been flying under the radar?**

Under the radar, yes.

**Would there have been, you know would anyone there have sent a warning or you know a signal about...?**

Them coming in?

**Them coming over that part, that area?**

No, no we got no warning no information. I think it moves too quickly.

29:00 And if they come in in a certain direction they virtually, the only thing they are coming over is the sea anyway. And then they come around and go wherever they want to go but that is the closest we got to the aeroplanes.

**Could you hear bombing in the distance or...?**

Oh we heard the bombing when they got on yes a bit further yeah.

29:30 Another time we were sent up and there the word was that there was going to be a Jap landing, so we were all up on the beach at where it was said this is where they are coming in and we spent about a week up there waiting and then it

30:00 was deciding it was called off and we came back down to camp again. So we were lucky. Very lucky.

**What were you going to be doing if there was a landing there, you were with HQ weren't you?**

Yes the battalion, HQ of the battalion, which means you are part of that battalion. Wherever that battalion goes you go because they need the

30:30 communications between the companies. No we were all up there just waiting for this thing, the whole lot of us.

**But you would have set up, set yourselves up?**

Yes.

**So do you remember how that set, I'm just trying to imagine a battalion sent to a place you know on the beach expecting a landing, so you are creating a defence there,**

31:00 **how do you do that, I mean what sort of...?**

Oh you just wait, and you spread out and get in certain place positions and you set up a machine gun here and a machine gun there and the other things was just rifles and you wait.

**And where would your HQ, where would you be positioning yourself?**

I would have been with HQ, headquarters

31:30 because that is where the colonel operates from and I was always stuck with the colonel. Not that I

minded as I said before.

**So what what were you expecting, what...**

No we just expected that they would come in with their

32:00 boats or whatever and there'd be small boats that they'd come in on and that would be it, whoever could shoot up anybody would be better off.

**So your sigs are sending messages and receiving messages at that time?**

Only to our, yes to our companies, to the companies yes.

**So what sort of messages were**

32:30 **going back in forth in that week?**

Very few in that week because there was no information really. Just checking to see that people are where they are supposed to be.

**So what did everyone do for the week?**

Lay in the sand, got cold at night, despite it was Darwin.

33:00 And I suppose hope that it wouldn't come off and it didn't so that was good.

**So was there some, you know an air of tension?**

Oh yes there was tension, there was certainly tension. But no one really shows it. It is not done, you gotta, you just do the best you can do under the circumstances.

33:30 **Got to let off steam though don't you?**

Not then, when you get back to camp that is when you let off steam.

**So does that mean everyone had to be in a very standby state like ready for something to happen?**

Yes yes definitely and as the time gets on

34:00 then the expectation gets more and more and then when nothing happens there is a big anti climax but a happy one.

**So making that decision to pull out after a week, who makes that decision?**

Oh that comes from further back from base who would have the information that there was no assault. No ships and the air force would

34:30 have been out scouring to check all that out. No it comes from the base headquarters.

**So were you in contact with the base, did you...?**

No, no. No the base would give information to the I section. And then the I section would tell us what is going on.

35:00 **Okay, so you came back then to 15 miles after that?**

Yes, yes.

**And then what happened?**

Well finally, we were told we were leaving Darwin and we were going on leave for 28 days, which we did. We

35:30 came down and came to Adelaide and we had few a few too many beers and things and Lesley will tell you the story she is dying to tell you, I won't because her story is bias and wrong and mine is right.

**You tell us the right story.**

No, she tells it better.

**Well we won't be recording her.**

36:00 I will just join in when she tells you and I'll tell you the right story then. But anyway we had our 28 days' leave and then we were shot off to New Guinea.

**So tell me about your leave, what did you do in your leave, because you had been away a long time hadn't you?**

Yes. Went to the dance down at the fire brigade that we talked about

- 36:30 earlier. Went to the pictures and that sort of thing and just lived a very happy 28 days. What we just did what anybody does on holiday but we got rid of uniforms most of us, just took them off and got back to civilian clothes and became, joined the ranks of the hoi polloi sort of thing,
- 37:00 very happy to do it.
- Did you, did you contemplate, did you think about what this was, you know about this experience in the army and whether it was for you, whether you really wanted to do it, be there, did those sort of thoughts...?**
- No no, no there was never any thought of that. You knew that it was something that had to be done.
- 37:30 Well at least anybody who had half a brain knew that. And so that is what you were there to do, you joined the army to do it. So you were quite happy to do whatever came your way. If you were lucky you came out of it and if you weren't well that was sort of stiff cheddar. But sad, but you didn't dwell on that at all no.
- 38:00 You dwelt on the fun things that you could do, you know the sport that you played in between training and the rest of it, perhaps a little bit the arguments you had with various people over nothing that was very important. No. You are just sort of killing time, there was a lot of killing time in the
- 38:30 army.
- You said you played a lot of sport. Did you play a lot of sport when you were in Darwin?**
- Yeah we played, we played football, I didn't play cricket in Darwin, but a lot of the other fellas did, we played football, when we could swim, but volleyball, because that is easy
- 39:00 you could easily set up a volleyball court and so we played a lot of volleyball which was good fun.
- Did you have any league players in the company?**
- We had a league player yes, his name was Gerry Daly, he used to play for Melbourne, and we had a very good football team, I wasn't good enough to play in the company
- 39:30 in the battalion team. No they had some very, very good players.
- How many teams did they have?**
- Well there was only one battalion team, but each company had a team too, and there were four, five companies and we used to play each other. And the signals of course were always attached to the headquarters
- 40:00 company.
- So how did you get to play in the battalion team?**
- How do you mean?
- Well if you had this company team, did you have to be an extra good player to make it to the battalion team?**
- Oh yes, yes. No as I say now Gerry Daly he was a league player before he came into the army, so he was much better than us, but
- 40:30 but then again if you played his company, he was there in their team just the same but also he was there in the whole battalion team as well when it played another battalion.
- That must have been pretty exciting matches when the battalions played each other?**
- No holds barred, umpire kept very busy.

## Tape 4

- 00:31 **So you were just saying that, you were talking about the football teams, the company teams, the battalion teams when you were in Darwin, so how important was it to...?**
- I really think it was quite important because it was complete relaxation in that you just got your mind on the football and on the game
- 01:00 and the dirty players who were in the other team who were doing the wrong thing to your nice fellows. And so you know it gets everybody quite excited. No, no I think sport is marvellous and football for the army is as good a way of expressing things as anything I
- 01:30 think. And if you want to be crazy and knock someone down you can try it. He might get up and retaliate and that might be bad too for you.

**Was there a bit of that, a few brawls?**

Oh men are men. Not too many but occasionally there would be a ruckus. You get dirty players in sport, you see they don't obey the rules. I mean they even give each

02:00 other a bad time even when there is umpires that are really good umpires about. No no, sport is a pretty serious thing to most fellas I think.

**So I mean how dirty would they play?**

Oh not really dirty, because it finally works against the team and then his mates will get onto him.

02:30 It is just occasionally that something happens that excites someone a little bit and they carry on.

**Did they have penalties for dirty players?**

Yeah like a free kick to the other fella. That is about all.

**So no one was, what do they call it, banned?**

No no banning, no couldn't have that, wouldn't do.

03:00 Then there'd be problems on the spectators' side. The umpire mightn't have a place to go home to.

**And did you have footy boots?**

No. No and that was a big problem. The team did and I don't quite know where they got them. I think the battalion must have specially got boots in for the team but the rest of

03:30 us didn't and for oh about a couple of games we used just our old army boots and then they got so heavy that we then used to play in sandshoes, we could at least run better, you mightn't kick as far but you could run, mostly it was sandshoes stuff.

**And what was the ground like, the oval was it...?**

04:00 Hard. Hard. Yes hard. Bare and hard.

**I imagine there could have been some bad injuries?**

No not really, most of the injuries were a loss of skin and this sort of stuff, if you get knocked over and skid along the ground then you lose some skin but that gets better again

04:30 eventually.

**Did you get injured?**

No I didn't, not on the football ground. I was hard to catch.

**What position did you like to play?**

I was rover. Didn't play anywhere else, rover. And I had a big mate who was six foot two, he used to be in the ruck and he could hit the ball

05:00 down to me anytime at all and then away we'd go.

**So you had a good sort of team thing?**

Yes a good team thing yes.

**And what about the footballs, were they actual real footballs?**

Oh they were yes, I don't know, once again I don't know where the army came by them. But it must have been part of their stores somewhere and the

05:30 battalion would just get them in and there always seemed to be a football.

**Did you have bicycles up there?**

No, no bicycles, they had motorbikes. They had motorbikes. I had an interesting ride once on a motorbike. I was taking a message up to

06:00 another camp and I thought, "Well I don't want to go back to the unit for a while" so there was a little track that went off into the bush, I thought Oh I will go up there and see what is there. And I went up the track about two miles and the footrest then hit a stump which was just at the side of the track, I was on this

06:30 narrow track and I went straight over the handle bars and picked myself up finally, and I thought "Gee wiz I am pretty stupid, I could have really been knocked out here and no one would ever have found me". So I picked the bike up and fortunately it started again. And the handlebars were around like this, so the front

07:00 wheel was like that so I had to ride it back another 15 kilometres that way and finally got back and apologised about buckling up the bike a bit. But it was an interesting little operation for a while, it broke the pattern a bit. But not very sensible.

**But was that part of your job to run messages on a bike?**

No it wasn't really, but

07:30 this was a job I was doing, because they called them Don Rs [despatch riders], the Don Rs couldn't go, and they asked me would I go and I was very happy to go but that is how it all finished up, I came back with a bent up bike. Good fun.

**I'm**

08:00 **trying to imagine what you were doing, but you will have to tell me because I can't imagine it, what you were doing in your work in signals in Darwin when you were pretty much stationery weren't you in one place apart from the beach landing which never happened, so what was your job there?**

Well we were allotted jobs and we had

08:30 the communications centre where we had wireless and we had Morse Code keys and things and we were also hooked up to companies or other unit's further down and we had contact with the central command sort of section. And messages would come through to us

09:00 which we were, had to then pass onto the colonel or the I section, depending whether what sort of message it was whether it had to be decoded or not. So we were on duty, there was someone on duty usually there would be about three on duty constantly all day and night for anything that came through, and

09:30 this was how the communication was arranged.

**Can you give me some idea, you know in the course of the day what sort of communications would be coming through and what you would be sending out, I mean what would be the activity, given that there wasn't much happening in terms of campaigns and you know you weren't a front line,**

10:00 **what was going on?**

Just messages that would be stores or something some message to, a meeting with somebody or other, sometimes nothing at all really. But and sometimes as I said the I section would have something in code which would

10:30 go down to the central command post. And what was in that we didn't know because we couldn't read, you can't read it. So all we'd do was send it and when something like that came into us we would just write it down and then it would go straight to the I section and they would decode it. So we didn't do that sort of thing at all.

11:00 We just passed the message, whatever the message was we just passed it on.

**This is Morse?**

Not Morse all the time, no sometimes it was Morse and more often than not though it was just like telephone thing, we were connected up right down, or it was wireless, not like telephone on

11:30 wires but the same sort of procedure. We'd call in with a call sign and be answered and then you would pass the message.

**So like, so you had Morse, telephone lines and radio?**

Yes yes. And when we were out on an exercise of course we always carried radio because there was no time to be putting down

12:00 lines because you were moving most of the time, you were never in one, you were never in one place long enough to warrant that sort of thing, so that was radio all the time.

**What sort of, were you in a building or where you in a tent?**

Tent, six, six men to a tent, three on one side three the other,

12:30 quite close, and they were just the ordinary tents you know like this. But pretty heavy canvas though so that they were waterproof.

**What about the sigs centre?**

The which?

**The signals centre where you operated from?**

Oh well usually

13:00 if there was nothing there we either built it by cutting down some trees and putting up posts and a bit of stuff around and otherwise if it was just a temporary thing, we'd just use a tent, a big tent. But mostly when we were there for any length of time you just used the odd materials that were there whether they were as I said trees and things

13:30 and anything else you could scavenge, sort of thing, to put around the walls or up to you know this height around the walls and the other bit open.

**Is that what you built at Darwin?**

Mmmmm.

**So it was quite waterproof and...?**

Oh yes, oh yes it had a roof on it. You could get all these materials

14:00 from the headquarters no problem at all with that.

**Do you want to have another drink?**

14:30 **So how many people were working there in the signals centre, how many people would be in there?**

About 40, 30 to 40.

**So it was a big, pretty big building then?**

Oh no, no tents, oh what do you mean?

**No I mean working**

15:00 **in HQs, this is where you worked, no?**

No, no, no, only two or three at a time. But there were about as I say about 40 sigs altogether so you took turns.

**So when you weren't in the centre what do you call it where you operate from, what is**

15:30 **the name for that?**

I don't know, over there. Sig, signal headquarters.

**When you are not over there, where are you?**

Signal headquarters would be, where are you? Well all the time we would be getting new signals, they'd change signals from time to time then also

16:00 everybody had to be kept up to the point where they could read signals and you know send messages and all that sort of thing, so we ran little classes like that all the time too and then brigade headquarters would be sending up from time to time a change of signals and things. It didn't all stay the same all the time which meant that then

16:30 you would have to teach the signals to the other signals so you had to read the book first or read the information and learn it and then you would teach the other fellas to what it was.

**So I don't actually understand, what this was new codes or?**

New, yes new codes and things.

17:00 And then everybody had to be, see, everybody had to be kept up to have some facility with sending off and receiving the messages and saying the right things so we had to run, we ran classes all the time. They were sort of continuous and if there was any new signals come in then we would have to teach those.

17:30 **So was this, was this, I am just thinking about the place now the environment, was this bushland that you were camped in amongst?**

It was just Northern Territory gumtree bushland, scrub country in which there would be a road in and little roads going to

18:00 wherever the tents had been set up, little areas cleared for tents and that's all that it was. Washing facilities were three 44 gallon drums, rusty old things altogether and you would go down there after at the end of the day and you'd

18:30 bowl out some water over yourself and that is how you kept clean.

**Was there a river nearby?**

No rivers, no. Not where we were, no rivers at all, never near a river, not camped anyway.

**Was it a shady camp, you know like did you have trees shading?**

19:00 Not always no, there'd be there were trees but when they'd clear an area to set up tents there'd be tents that wouldn't be near any tree at all. In fact it was often not considered a good thing to have a tent near trees for the simple reason that some of the storms that they

19:30 had there in the Northern Territory were very violent and the lightning strikes trees and knocks them down and falls on the tent, it is not the best thing but that sort of thing happens if the trees are close to tents. And the lightning storms up there are very frightening.

**And the rain too, torrential**

20:00 **rains?**

Oh that wasn't a worry. But it was the trees crashing down and struck by lightning, the trees struck by lightning that were a problem.

**So that happened?**

Oh yes that happened quite a bit.

**Were there fires as a result?**

No, no fires, just, the trees just seemed to split and that's it, fall down. See the

20:30 trees up there are mostly gum trees but they are different from gum trees down here. Inside the trunks there is a hollow like that and it must be because of the big rainfall somehow or other and the rain sucks up in the tree and that is how it gets watered. Now at least

21:00 that's what I think, could be wrong of course. But so that when the trees split at the bottom more or less there is not much to hold it when the lightning strikes it and away it goes.

**So you weren't very well camouflaged?**

Oh no, not camouflaged at all. The tents were not white tents they

21:30 were not white tents they were camouflaged and had brown sort of colours on them or it was brown material used to make the fly that went over the tent.

**Did you have slit trenches?**

No, no. The only time we used slit trenches were up where we were waiting for

22:00 this Japanese arrival that didn't come.

**But did you think about that maybe you might need some slit trenches when the squadron of Zeros flew over?**

No didn't give it any thought really. I don't think really when we were down the

22:30 road into Darwin, I think there was more important things for them to bomb up in Darwin rather than just come down and look for some tents, bomb a few silly goats. But they did come down a couple of times but they weren't looking for us, they were looking for the aeroplanes that were parked on those

23:00 runways that I mentioned that were set up all the way down for quite a few miles, about 50 miles.

**So how close were you to the runway again?**

We were on one side of the road, they were on the other. And the runways were fairly close to the road. I suppose

23:30 the edge of the road, the edge of the strip to the edge of the road might be 30 metres or something, quite close.

**Were there planes parked there?**

Yes, they would try to run them in a little bit, they had little nooks under a bit of tree cover and that sort of thing.

**That is pretty close isn't it,**

24:00 **I mean to a target, a likely target?**

It didn't happen so it was good.

**No. Alright is there anything else you can think of your time in Darwin that would be**



**important or would be good to have recorded?**

- 24:30 One of the things that, I don't know if it gets talked about at all, but which I thought was very very unfair, was when we first went up to Darwin the air force guys were flying Wirraways, the Japanese were flying
- 25:00 Zeroes, the Zeroes were supposed to be strung together with bits of wire and a little bit of covering, canvas covering around the body work and were supposed to be not much good at all. But what turned out was that these Wirraways
- 25:30 that we had were slow, they weren't very manoeuvrable and the Japanese Zeroes were quick and they were very manoeuvrable and it was always something that we thought about, these poor coots flying the Wirraways, our fellas, because once they got into a dog fight,
- 26:00 they had Buckley's hope really, it was really like knocking ducks off. And I thought it was very, very bad really. And it wasn't until the Spitfires were bought from England which came a long time after that the score was evened up. Because the Spitfires from
- 26:30 England were quick, manoeuvrable and very well armed and changed the whole scene up there. But our admiration was in these early stages of the war up there for those pilots who did what they had to do and most of them would get shot down, it was just like shooting
- 27:00 ducks, it's not fair at all but it is silly to use a word like fair in a war. But we always felt exceedingly sorry for the pilots in those early days until they got these faster planes and then they outmatched the Zero and changed the whole picture up there. But I don't know
- 27:30 whether you've heard anyone talk about that or not, but to me it was a pretty important thing.

**Are you talking about New Guinea?**

No I'm talking about Darwin.

**You are talking about Darwin?**

Yes.

**So this is what you observed?**

They also, they also brought, they also brought in at one stage the American Lightnings, which was a twin

- 28:00 engine, twin fuselage thing, a twin fighter but a fuselage, it had a bit of speed but it was not manoeuvrable so it was no good either. But as I said the British Spitfires they were very good and I'm sure the pilots were very, very grateful when they got a supply of those.

- 28:30 **So you were there when the Spitfires first arrived?**

Yes.

**Can you can you recall roughly sort of when that was?**

Oh I think we'd all been up there nearly probably about 18 months before that happened before they came.

- 29:00 **And so you were very close to these landing strips, so you were very aware of their comings and goings like how much aircraft was moving around?**

Oh no we, we you just, we didn't even see them taking off because of the trees, it was like a barrier from the road. They never cut the trees down that were close to the road

- 29:30 and the strips were just inside, but they were only in 30 metres, so you hear them and you'd see them going through if you were looking but they'd be hard to pick up if you were up in an aeroplane.

**Did you have much to do with the air force fellas?**

No nothing. Tried to join at one stage and they wouldn't let us go

- 30:00 because we were, once again they were calling for volunteers to go into the air force and we passed all the tests and then they said, "No you can't go you are in the signals, you're a specialist and so you can't go". Probably a good thing might be why I'm still sitting here in this chair.

**Yes from what I've seen**

- 30:30 **you could be right. So that was when you were in Darwin that you went through the process. Why did you?**

Oh I was probably a bit bored with the life or also the air force had a better uniform you know. I mean to say here we

31:00 are walking around in these 1914-18 war outfits, the Yanks are there with their ties and everything. Don't start me.

**No go on, go on.**

Just I think that it is a great thing that it appears when I see pictures of our forces, our men

31:30 and women and the dress that they have, it is very good that they now look very, very smart. And it was long overdue, certainly not, it wasn't there when we were in the army, we were just 1914- 18 jobs, copycats.

**So what gear did you have, the big shorts and...?**

No, no, no. I mean the

32:00 the so called dress uniform I'm talking about. The shorts were no problem. We needed the shorts because of the heat but you know or do you know the old style uniform with the thick cloth stuff that and it's horrible colour khaki, but there is a better khaki and there is finer materials that could be used.

32:30 I shouldn't be saying this...

**Oh others have said it before you.**

Have they? Well yes I think it was disgusting but anyway we weren't impressing anybody up there.

**And it's suitability for the conditions?**

No, not at all. Well we didn't wear that sort of thing, but that is what we were wearing when we came back here. No we wore shorts all

33:00 the time and shirts and when we were in New Guinea and when we were in Bougainville same thing, in the tropics nothing else but that. I'm getting off the track I think.

**No it's good, no you're not, yeah you are but it is all interesting, it is all very interesting. Are you going to say something?**

No no I think

33:30 I've said enough.

**No you haven't.**

I'm not even started.

**A few more minutes, we've just got a few more minutes left on this tape.**

Well where were we were going up to New Guinea.

**No not quite.**

We are up to Queensland.

**No not quite, there is a couple more things until we're done. I've just thought of one of them. Did you go into Darwin very much, were you**

34:00 **able to see the rebuilding of Darwin, the recovery after that?**

No there was, there was no rebuilding of Darwin while we were there, and I think the rebuilding of Darwin took place later on, but it may even, it may even have been virtually after the

34:30 war, when the real rebuilding started. I can't say about that but there was no rebuilding, it would have been silly because it just could have been knocked down again.

**So did you go into Darwin?**

Not much at all no. The only time we got to Darwin was on these unloading of the goodies from the ships

35:00 occasionally and that was good.

**So when you did get up there to do the unloading who was up there, can you give me a picture of what Darwin was like?**

Well it was just flattened. There was nothing standing, the post office was a huge post office but instead of a post office it was a huge hole in the ground. And everything else was just

35:30 flat, knocked right out. The only way to do it was what they did, just wipe it all off and start again from ground.

**But the port was operational?**

The port became operational yes. I think, did I say before there was about 17 ships or 18 ships that were sunk

36:00 in the first bombing and they were lying around for quite a long time. They weren't cleared, I don't think they weren't cleared all the time that we were up there, so it must, I think it must have been cleared off when the war ended. There were two big ships that were right at the wharf which

36:30 also were bombed and the wharf was bombed and they were all mixed up together. Useless (UNCLEAR) and things so they would have had to have got rid of that and redone the wharf before they could really go ahead again with things there. But I think most of those things were done

37:00 after the war.

**So these ships that were coming in, these supply ships. Did they build a new section a new jetty, dock?**

I'm not sure how they did it, I suspect that they may have come in, they were smaller ships I think and there was

37:30 enough wharf to get them in there. No I think that's how it was done and I'm trying to remember how big the ships were that we were unloading from time to time. I don't think they were all that big.

**Did the supplies, the goods, did they come on pallets**

38:00 **or were they just boxes?**

Boxes, supposedly boxes and the secret was to drop the box because when the box dropped and broke there were the goodies.

**So you were sort of tossing them out from over?**

Not all of them, just the one you wanted to take with you. Oh dear, I will probably finish up in jail after

38:30 talking about this sort of thing.

**I doubt it. So what other supplies were you were you loading from those ships?**

Oh we couldn't tell, the thing that interested us most were these big tins of peaches, big, big about that high.

39:00 **I've heard about those big tins of peaches.**

Have you, has somebody else been talking about them?

**They were very popular yes.**

Well I'm just...

**How did you know what box they were in?**

Well you opened the top, had a look, some of them were marked. We weren't unfortunately I didn't get to go on too many of these adventures

39:30 because I was stuck with other things you know like in the signals businesses. However it is all good clean sport.

**So how do you hide these, these goods?**

You don't you just put it under your canvas bed and that's it, don't anyone touch it or there'll be terrible things happen.

40:00 **But you would share it around I'm sure?**

Oh yes, you'd share it around but you get a good feed out of it before you start sharing it around. We were pretty hungry for a while. When we first arrived in Darwin again going back to that we had a great shortage of food. And all that

40:30 the cookhouse could produce was rice, they had plenty of rice apparently so for about nearly a month, about 30 days, what we lived on was rice, just rice, nothing else.

**No bully beef?**

No bully beef, just rice. That is

41:00 all we could get. So it is any wonder we got stuck into the peaches.

**Well you deserved them, you deserved them.**

I thought, we thought so too.

## Tape 5

00:33 **Before we sort of get you out of Darwin Alex, just curious to know you met Lesley prior to that in 1940?**

1940.

**And you'd been away, how long were you in Darwin?**

22 months.

**A long time, did you get leave back to Melbourne at all?**

Came back, had 28 days' leave and after the 28 days we were

01:00 then on our way up to Queensland to a jungle course which we did. You know swinging on ropes and that sort of thing, Tarzan stuff and that was a precursor to going to New Guinea.

**Where was that, at Canungra was it or...?**

I think it may have, I don't think it was Canungra because we had some reinforcements from Canungra

01:30 and they thought they were very fit and still they competed with us. So we used to give them a little bit of a stir about Canungra and its training. But I can't think of a name, can't give you a name at all. It didn't last very long and the bad part for us was that

02:00 by this time we had learned that our colonel, Colonel Wilmot wouldn't be coming with us as I mentioned before and we got a new colonel, Dunkley I think it was, oh I'll just leave it at that, anyway we transhipped and we went straight to Lae.

**To Lae, so once you left**

02:30 **Darwin did you know that you were headed towards the islands towards New Guinea or was it still hush hush?**

No we didn't know we were going to New Guinea, but we knew we were going to Queensland. We arrived in Lae and we were confronted with trying to get ashore and what they had done is they had laid down walkways.

03:00 You had to be very, very careful, because if you went off the walkway you went down in the mud up to your knees, it was in the wet season and it wasn't very pleasant at all, so that was our arrival at Lae and from Lae we moved further back into the jungle area, very quickly

03:30 and we weren't doing much at all, there didn't seem to be any purpose in it really because there was no fighting, the Japs had been moved out but I suppose it was just some place to put us while we were waiting. We didn't quite know what we were waiting for, but it turned out it was to go off to Treasury Island, it is an

04:00 island actually off the foot of Bougainville. The aim was to go to Bougainville but we went to Treasury Island first of all. I don't know that I can tell you anything much about Lae other than the mud bit and we didn't do anything really. We just filled in a bit of time. We did exercises out in the bush and this sort of thing then

04:30 we got onto a boat and went...

**This is your first time out of Australia though, I mean what was that like travelling on this ship and experiencing the climate and the terrain and all of that?**

No travelling on the ship didn't worry us at all, there may have been one or two of us that got sick but not very many at all. No the ship was okay and getting off at Lae was okay

05:00 because some very nice fellas had done all the fighting there before us and fixed it up for us so that was good, no problem.

**So how long did they have you camped at Lae for?**

I think it must have been about three months, two or three months and then we shipped as I said to this place called

05:30 Treasury Island. But it is a part of, a part of Bougainville a big island Bougainville and Treasury is down about 100 odd miles to the south.

**So they explained what the importance of what Treasury Island was?**

No. No explanations why we were there and the only reason we could see why we were there was that the Americans had carved

06:00 an airstrip out of...it was a coral island and there was this white airstrip carved out of the coral. But the Americans, most of the Americans had moved on. There was still Americans there but it was more or less a holiday resort as far as we were concerned. We were right on the sea, the sea was only

06:30 from here to the window away from us and dropped down and so it was good swimming, nothing to worry about. Except one day there was another little island the name of which I have forgotten, which is just off Treasury. And some Japanese had been reported as being there and I think virtually

07:00 there were a couple of them, two or three of them who virtually gave themselves up because they had run out of food and couldn't find anything to eat anymore and virtually gave themselves up and they were brought in, and they were a bit of interest for a few moments until they were removed to somewhere else for questioning and whatnot. That's, that was all we,

07:30 the only Japanese we saw there. So there was nothing much, so Treasury for us was just like a holding point.

**So were the Japanese, were they kept under guard there, what was the story when...?**

Oh well, yes when they handed themselves in they were taken in under guard but then I think they

08:00 were transported back up to Bougainville.

**Did the battalion have them working, doing labour or anything like that?**

Did which? No, no, no, no, no. They weren't asked to do anything, they were just carted away very quickly, as a matter of two or three days and they were gone. They were just a curiosity actually at that particular time.

08:30 And it was later that the whole unit was shipped up to Bougainville and the name of the, where did we come in? I will have to look at my little bit of... Torokina. So we came in at Torokina

09:00 and just for a couple of nights we were just billeted in an area pretty close to the sea and then we got on trucks and went deeper into the island and then finished up right over on a volcano, an active volcano which we dug in then we dug in and

09:30 this thing rumbled and carried on and shook the earth at night time, disturbed the sleep. We were just waiting apparently for further orders and we moved further up the island and settled down in an area and then it was just small patrols that were going out in different places. We had a couple of fellas killed there.

10:00 Actually the regimental sergeant major of headquarters company, our headquarters company he was killed, but maybe he was a bit careless. He had this little boy who was a little native, who was a very good guide and it sounds funny that a little boy would be a very good guide, now I don't know whether he thought that

10:30 you know no one would take any notice of the little boy and him but they used to go out on reconnaissances themselves and this particular day there was a Japanese waiting up a tree and shot him. So we lost our sergeant major. But nothing much else

11:00 happened there, things just went on quietly.

**Were you involved in any patrols where there was contact?**

Yes. At one stage another unit that was up in the area knew about our signals ability and one of the factors that made us a bit different from other units

11:30 was that we had with us in the signals section a mechanic, an electrical sort of mechanic who was really top notch with radios and communications and that sort of stuff. His name was Jack Manly, came from Swan Hill. So Jack was the technician and what he was able to do was fiddle with the inside

12:00 guts of the radios we carried and boost them with something or other. I haven't a clue what or how he did it but we could get a lot greater mileage in contact than anybody else could get. We didn't want to give the other unit our radios to play around with and muck muck up, so

12:30 they wanted volunteers to go, two volunteers to go with the radios and go with this other unit and Tommy Mason was one and I was the other, we volunteered to go and on this particular exercise if you can call it an exercise the high commands or the higher commands had heard that

13:00 there was an old airstrip somewhere up about 50 miles up through the mountains and then there was a flat section, which was an airstrip formally in civilian days. They wanted to find this so Tommy and I were the ones who volunteered to go with this other crowd and

13:30 see what happened. So we did that, we found the airstrip and found that it was overgrown with small

trees and things and that is why it was difficult to locate it from the air. We also found that there was a Jap camp that was just not very far from where we were at this particular

14:00 time. And so there was the idea was that these Japs also had a swimming hole in the creek which was just down from where we were. So the name of the game was that we would get as many of them as possible and then we would shoot them up.

14:30 But unfortunately things went very wrong because the first person to be killed was the son of the chief who was leading us to this place and he had his brains blown out. So that raised the alarm for the Japanese. There was no way we could just

15:00 leave him there because you get nowhere with a jeep by coming back, by leaving the son back there, so we had to get out as fast as we could and go back half way from where we were about another 20 miles with this young lad which was most unfortunate and very sad for the native. That

15:30 was the way things worked I suppose really. So that was the only action that we were taken, so it was action that started and then fizzled almost immediately it started.

**So was it a Japanese sniper or what?**

It was a return fire from the Japanese, yes. And luckily, well luckily for him I suppose but unluckily for us this young

16:00 lad happened to jump up in his excitement and he was shot, which was pretty bad really. There was no way we could leave him.

**How many of there were you on that?**

That recce? About 15 and then...

**And sorry I am just trying to get as much detail as I can to get a picture. So who would have carried the**

16:30 **the young chap back?**

The youngster, the chief's son was also accompanied by two of his native, two of his native men. And what happened was that very quickly the ground sheet was rolled up, joined together sort of thing with rope, put a bamboo pole through and put the young fella

17:00 in and the two natives virtually carried him back to the camp. There was more than two because one had gone ahead and told the chief what had taken place and for quite a few miles away from their village as we were getting back you could hear the cries and mourning and they were very upset. So it was not a

17:30 very successful thing. We found the airstrip we should have pulled out before, but you are wise after aren't' you?

**So can you just put us on the map, we have sort of spoken to people who were down the Buin Road and the Sarakan Peninsula I think it's north, northern Bougainville. Whereabouts on the island is this?**

Well there were no roads where we were, this is, we almost

18:00 went from one side of the island to the other side of the island and then there is mountains and this was in the mountains all the time walking, but it was off centre from the centre of the island but towards the eastern side of the island. Make sense?

**Yes I can sort of picture that.**

That is the best I can describe, but no roads other than the tracks

18:30 in the bush that the natives themselves used.

**So sort of heading due east from Torokina?**

Getting due east to get to where we started and then heading due north to get across the mountains and up to where this airstrip was.

**And how long would, how long was that, that recce [reconnaissance]?**

The recce?

**Yes.**

19:00 Oh maybe 30, 40 miles.

**But how many hours, was that like an overnight?**

Oh a couple of nights, a couple of nights it took us yes. We were quicker coming back because of the

necessity but it is very rugged country, rugged, up hill down, slithering down

19:30 and climbing up again and it was very wet.

**So do you think that jungle training that you had put you in good stead for that that experience?**

Well I'm a bit biased, you see I think we were as fit as anybody could get us to be virtually. When we finished up in Darwin, it is just that it was a different environment,

20:00 different climate, and it was sloppier and muddier so it was awkward. No I don't think we could have got any fitter. We were really a very very fit outfit by this time.

**Just hoping we can retrace your steps a little bit and find out**

20:30 **be it at Lae, Treasury Island also once you had arrived in Bougainville itself what sort of work you were doing in the field with signals?**

The same thing, same thing and see this, the wireless that we carried was a box like thing, an old, I think it was a 1914- 18 war thing. It was about there by

21:00 there and about that thick, weighed about, it was 37 pounds I think, that was just the wireless and so you'd have this thing on your back and you'd have other things dangling all over you and you had a lot of weight to carry and we sort of took turns about with that because it had a rough thing that stuck into your back with all that weight, very heavy.

21:30 But the unfortunate thing was that once you got into jungle and once you got into mountains you've got up and down and the signal won't go over the mountain. It doesn't go through it and it won't go over it. So virtually we carried all that weight all that way all to no effect because we couldn't

22:00 get any contact anyway. So once we got going we had no contact with anyone.

**And was there no, what about laying wires, was that an option?**

Oh no, no no. Not, not to do this thing because you see it was, it must have been about, it could have been about 40 miles. There is no way you could lay a wire. How could you carry it all? No good, no

22:30 had to be a wireless. And an old 1914-18 wireless was no good, even though Jack Manly jazzed them up so they could really double their distance but it wasn't enough.

**So what happened, I mean were they ditched eventually or did you persevere with that technology?**

Well I couldn't say because

23:00 they were still the wireless we had when the war ended. And I'm sure now they've got small things you know that you can hold in two hands that will go further than what we had then with those big heavy bulky things. You've seen the pictures of the troops today and if anybody talks into a thing he puts it up here and he talks into here and I guarantee

23:30 it will go so much more distance than what that thing had that we did, that we used.

**So you said you shared the actual carrying of it?**

Yes.

**Amongst whom?**

Tommy Mason the other fellow who volunteered with me to go on this jaunt and myself, we did it between us, no one else.

**And what was the, I**

24:00 **don't know the word, protocol for its use, the use of it?**

How do you mean?

**Well if you had to, if you were able to get a signal were you able to get a message back, what would be, I mean how was it operated for one and who would use it, who would speak into it?**

Voice speak microphone, yes microphone. It was just plugged in and hand held.

**Was it like a crank up or battery?**

No no, oh there was a battery in the radio yes.

24:30 **Now back at Torokina when you first, this is where your first port of call in Bougainville can you describe your set up there, what the camps were like and what what you made of that place?**

Well we just came in nicely on the boat, a nice little pier, we went down a narrow road off from the pier and

25:00 we just sort of moved into a bit of a camp in behind some trees and things. Nothing unusual just ordinary native type huts and things and only stayed there for a matter of days and then went off, no there was nothing special about that at all.

**By that stage had the Americans vanished or was it all Aussies at that point?**

No there was no Americans there, the Americans had gone.

25:30 **Okay, so what was the, what was where your general movement, we are just going to picture the sort of months after that or the period after that where you would be moving and what the purpose was of the unit in that area?**

Well sometimes you'd go out on reconnaissance just to see what's what who's where and this sort of thing but mostly we were filling in time.

26:00 Unfortunately it wasn't very long after that the war ended and unfortunately our unit was moved down to a southern area which I don't know about because I

26:30 didn't go and it was a place where they were guarding the Japanese prisoners, all the people who were handed in and who were caught and they were shoved in down at this area towards the south of Bougainville. And as I say I wasn't there at all and the reason I wasn't there was it was very simple. It was

27:00 at the end of the war they had called a points system. This points system determined whether you went home or not. You got so many points for being in what was called an active area and our unit, the 7th battalion had been in an active area ever since it

27:30 arrived in Darwin. So the only time we were really out of what they called an active area was when we came on leave. So that gave me a lot of points. The second thing was that if you were married you got some more points so I had been married so I got some more points. Now what was the third thing, I will have to have a look at my little bit of paper.

28:00 Where are we?

**While you are looking can you just sort of check the dates when you got to Bougainville and how long you were there?**

The three things were length of service in an active zone and whether you were married or not and I had amassed enough

28:30 points to get out on the first boat that left, so I was lucky. I went on the River Burdekin I think. Now what was the question?

**My question was yes when did you get to Bougainville and when did you leave?**

We disembarked on Treasury Island on the 19th of the 10th '44. And we left Treasury on the

29:00 22nd of the 4th '45. So what's, four and two, six months there and we arrived in Bougainville in Torokina on the 23rd of the 4th '45.

29:30 **So when were you out of Bougainville, because it was pretty much straight after the end of the war was it?**

I left Bougainville on the 28th of the 10th '45 but my unit didn't. Unfortunately they, the unit was sent to the south of the island and they

30:00 were guarding these Japanese prisoners. Now it was a damp wet area, lot of malaria and quite a lot of the fellas in the 7th battalion who were down there developed malaria, didn't come out of immediately but it was developing and came out you know in months after getting back home which was very sad because we'd had a great run and these poor

30:30 coots that were down there copped this which is disappointing but still I suppose it is better than being shot.

**And how was your health during that time, I mean all across from Darwin, Lae, Treasury Island, Bougainville, how how did you get through that?**

My health was good. In Bougainville I was in a field hospital for

31:00 oh a matter of four or five days. For some reason my stomach had packed up, I don't think the doctors knew there was anything wrong, they just gave me drinks of water and that sort of stuff and then I returned to the camp again after those days. But it's been a bother ever since really, but

31:30 oh well repat [repatriation] looks after us very well, so you know they're a great organisation.



**How did the unit fair in general before they moved south? During that time you were active up in the central part of the island, had there been a fair bit of problems, was there any problems in that respect with malaria, typhoid?**

We we we have had hardly anyone, we had no malaria, no typhoid in

32:00 the Darwin area, very little sickness at all in the Darwin area. There was a bit of, there was a bit of beriberi in New Guinea but I don't know of anybody in our unit who had it or caught it. But it was, the worst time the battalion

32:30 had was when they moved down to guard these Japs in the prisoner of war camp down in the south of Bougainville. I can't tell you anymore than that.

**That's alright. You were mentioning, you mentioned the points system you know the fact that you were in active areas for so long and the fact that you were married, I don't think we actually talked about when did, when did you two get married. Was that during leave was it?**

Yes. I got leave from, fancy

33:00 leaving that out. No I got leave from from New Guinea when we were in New Guinea. Oh I think I got a bit of assistance from Lieutenant Della, nice fella who was in charge of us and he knew that if we had gone home that

33:30 we would be, that Lesley and I would be married. So maybe that helped me to get that leave I don't know, but it was very, very nice. So I had 28 days again and we were married and then after the war was over we produced these two sons Robert and John and

34:00 they've been very good boys all the time. So it all worked out very well. I guess I was lucky.

**Sounds like it. Did you, was there a honeymoon, I mean how...?**

Oh yes. The honeymoon was this 28 days' leave. Yes.

**So had you been in constant correspondence with Lesley during Darwin?**

Oh yes yes. We had decided

34:30 we would get married before that, so I think this is how, see they censored your letters and I think that Ken, that is, the lieutenant, that Ken knew the score and maybe he helped us a bit.

**Was he like that with everyone, or did you, was there like a...?**

I don't know, he was a good fella though.

35:00 No very nice fella. He has since died, died early which was very sad.

**It would be good to hear about those people, the officers and so on, you mentioned you've talked about Colonel Wilcot who was you know quite a special.**

Wilmot.

**Wilmot sorry and then told us a fair bit about him which was great and then you said that Colonel Dunkley came instead,**

35:30 **I got a sense that maybe he wasn't so, so admired by the troops?**

I don't know how to put it. I suppose I can only put it the way it was. He came to us virtually at Queensland because

36:00 the Bomber couldn't go. He then came to Lae and then went over to treasury in Torokina but we virtually never saw him. He didn't relate

36:30 to the troops, now this is my assessment. He didn't relate to the troops like the Bomber did, who was here, there everywhere seeing what was going on. Whenever there was an exercise, whenever there was anything he was there but we just never saw this other chap.

37:00 And so I can only speak as I see it and from coming from one leader who had such a rapport with all his unit to one which you ever saw was bit of an anticlimax really. I better not say anymore than that, I can't say anymore than that.

37:30 It's disappointing really, and it was very, very disappointing because the Bomber was a very fit man. He was just over the age and I don't know what the age was that caused him to not go with us but we would have been all much happier had he been there.

**Right that was going to be my question I mean so how would that affect morale, seems like**

38:00 **there was an underlying disappointment about...?**

Well, you know how some people have a charisma which comes through and people relate, that was the

Bomber, that's how it was with him. And the other one we didn't relate to at all I am sad to say.

38:30 **So it just became usual chain of command?**

Yes that's right we were dealing directly with our lieutenants and whatnot and anyway we knew what to do, he had no influence on us whatsoever. But the Bomber was the one that made the unit and he should have been able to go and everybody agrees with that.

**So just on the subject of morale of the unit,**

39:00 **you said in Lae you felt like the work had been done there and Treasury Island you were there for six months a fair chunk of time, so again how did that sort of affect morale, were you busy enough to not be pondering that sort of thing?**

Well Bougainville was a strange set up because even though,

39:30 you know how you have battalions and then they are broken up a bit and different companies in Bougainville we were broken up and we seemed to be separated virtually all the time. In Darwin we were one unit all the time. But in Bougainville it was different. Sometimes we didn't even know where the other companies

40:00 were and we never seemed to get together, so we were sort of isolated in lots of ways. And that is not very satisfactory for the morale of a battalion. But there was, I would say also that this only happened in the

40:30 last part of the war and it didn't really matter but all in all our disappointment that the Bomber didn't go and I can't say anymore than that. You've got the message.

**I have indeed but I understand that totally.**

## Tape 6

00:30 **Yes okay, so again if we can just do another pass over those various locations and get a more detailed...**

Treasury.

**Treasury would be great because you spent six months there, yes what was the routine?**

Well as I said before I think the only reason we were there was because of this airstrip that the Americans had built.

01:00 And I suppose in a lot of respects it was almost like a holiday camp for us because we were right on the water, we could swim, we were getting fed, and there was virtually very little to do, we were doing virtually nothing. The only thing that griped us at all there

01:30 was that there was still some Americans there and they had this PX [American army canteen] in which they could get anything under the sun and we couldn't get anything in our shop, not a thing that was worthwhile anyway. But what we did was we tried to have someone that would befriend the American in the PX

02:00 and any dealing we had we would deal through him. He would get a little bit and we would be winning too because we could get things. See you'd get decent soap and some of the fellas even went to, things like that, as I said before. I got these towels for Lesley to send home for

02:30 a present. Could never get anything like that, they just had everything but but we had no real contact with them it was only individuals who would be contacting the Americans.

**So they were separate camps?**

Oh quite separate and they had different food and that used to get to us. They are eating turkey

03:00 and all sorts of things and we are eating bully beef and things that are almost unmentionable almost by comparison to what the Americans were eating. It just, it didn't go down very well.

**Did it ever get heated at all between the two camps?**

We never got close enough, they, I cannot recall

03:30 an American coming into our camp and I can't see any reason why they would want to. But how this, this chap's name I'm talking about is named Alex Kettle, how Alex worked his way in so he had access to their shop

04:00 I don't know but he did a very good job and he was a good carrier of things back to us. I can't say much

more than that.

**You can tell us what he was actually bringing out, I mean other than towels, but for your personal use what sort of stuff would you be getting?**

Oh he'd be bringing back hair oil and all that sort of stuff that the fellas hadn't had, I had some hair too in those days you see, so I needed something occasionally.

04:30 But very, very little contact with them, very little.

**What about...you told us the food was pretty woeful, were you getting beer rations that sort of thing?**

Which?

**Beer.**

Beer? Only occasionally. We used to get a regular

05:00 beer I have forgotten how many weeks went in Darwin, but stop smirking darling.

**Is there a story there?**

But no we didn't, we didn't have too much beer there and I don't know

05:30 why. Probably wasn't being shipped in. But the Americans had plenty, but we didn't have the money to buy it. They had everything, everything that opened and shut they had.

**So how can you, I've never heard of Treasury Island so can you sort of explain to us just the geography of the place what sort of terrain it was**

06:00 **how big the camps were, how large the American presence was, that kind of thing?**

It, it's not a very big island. It is coral, but it has trees except for this airstrip where they whacked the trees down. The Americans were scattered down in

06:30 the southern side or the southern part of the island. And we were more or less around the coastline a bit, and as there was no real reason to have anything to do with them, we virtually had nothing to do with them except for the odd person who like Alex Kettle who was the go between man, sort of thing.

07:00 and I don't think, I don't think the Americans would have appreciated it much if we all had started trooping over and they'd soon close the PX and I think Alex was under the counter stuff that he was dealing with, with the person who was in charge of the PX. So I can't tell you much about them because I had nothing to do with them, which is strange isn't it?

07:30 I'd never thought of it before.

**What about the supplies, was that all by ship or was there air drops or...?**

Ship, ship.

**And how often and what would they be bringing in?**

Well we ate an awful lot of bully beef from time to time and when we were out in the jungle that is what we ate, bully beef and

08:00 some of it I think was 1914- 18 war stuff that had been stored away somewhere. But we had no flash meat, no flash meals at all. And especially when it came to what you were carrying, you had your water bottle and you got.. you may

08:30 have got some camp pie at some time or other, that was a highlight at one stage, but you know the bully beef gets a bit tiring. No the food wasn't good. Vegetables and that sort of thing very little, very little.

**Sorry, go on.**

It's a good job we were fit.

**And were you still in tents on Treasury as well?**

Yes

09:00 tents. The tents were here, the sea was out at our front deck, the edge of our front deck, right down and then it went up to different levels, rough country, tree-ed all tree-ed, it was a rough little island and all it really had was this airstrip and a

09:30 road. In 45 we boarded the River Burdekin, the name of the ship and disembarked in Brisbane on the 3rd of the tenth 45. So that is when I came home, the 3rd of the tenth 45.

10:00 **Can I ask you some more questions about Treasury?**

Yes I don't seem to be able to answer them.

**You are you are answering them, and you are probably just thinking it is nothing there but that's important to get a sense of the banality of it, if that's what it was, you know six months of that and the war is going on and I don't know how many men there...**

It was like a holiday camp really for us.

**Just fascinating surreal**

10:30 **almost.**

Crazy though, but I can't see that people would be interested in hearing about it.

**I am and I think if I am others will be honestly. To me it is quite surreal you've got this beach camp you know, Bougainville there is carnage going on and it is quite odd, quite odd. Now**

11:00 **you'd just been married a short, a couple of months really, you'd been married not long before. Did you think the married man and the single men sort of had different experiences?**

Oh no different, no all the same, made no difference, marriage made no difference whatsoever. The only difference it made is that it got you home quicker at the end, which I think is a bit unfair to the

11:30 single fellas I really do, but nevertheless that was the way it worked. But no, no difference. The one thing I haven't told you, I think I have told you but it may not be on that there, but after we I got back home we were happy, very happy

12:00 to have these two sons Robert and John and that's us.

**You did tell us that. Sounds like, sounds like you want to finish the tape?**

No I don't know that I can tell you anymore.

**I am going to ask you some really what may seem trivial questions. And we'll see if you can answer. We were talking about corresponding before.**

Yes.

**Treasury Island, was it the same deal as**

12:30 **before, were you still writing?**

Yes.

**How often would you write and what after hearing about this experience in Treasury Island, this monotony of sun and coral, what would you write?**

What would you write?

**I mean I'm not trying to be personal or anything?**

Haven't you ever been in love?

**Countless times.**

Countless times, well you know what you write. You write

13:00 nice things, you write about how you feel, you write about love, you even write poetry and I think that's important, at least that is what I did anyway. Not everybody can write poetry of course however I think they're unfortunate. But no, no, no, no, all of our

13:30 letters were censored anyway, you couldn't write anything about what you were doing or where you were, you couldn't even suggest where you were otherwise it would be cut out and so there was no sense in doing anything like that. So it had to be, you had to write things that

14:00 were very personal, just between the two people concerned, at least that's how I saw it.

**Did you keep a diary at all?**

No I didn't. No. And the other thing is one time, you mentioned photos, now we haven't, we don't have any photos we had a fire down in our house at Mitcham

14:30 at one stage and I think we must have lost them in that. It wasn't a complete house fire but we had a bit of a look but we haven't anything at all. I can show you a beautiful picture of Lesley getting, when she was married, would you like to see that?

**Well, do. Can we do that during the break have a look at that,**

15:00 **marriage photo?**

Yes but I'm not in it. You know you don't want people like me spoiling good pictures.

**Then we'll definitely look at it Alex. So why do you think you stayed, why were you in Treasury Island for so long?**

Don't know.

**Is this the question you were asking?**

No we didn't know.

15:30 **But you must have asked the question, what are we doing here, when are we going?**

Yeah well no, we weren't told we just decided to enjoy it, and we did. It was a good place for us to be. We were out of the way of everything. As I said there was about a dozen Japanese picked up on another island called Mono, which was just like a strait between

16:00 Treasury and it. But they were glad to be picked up because they were starving on this small island, they had eaten everything they could find and I think they more or less threw the towel in and walked in.

**So what was the most, the most pleasurable aspect of that time?**

Well there

16:30 never at anytime was there a feeling of any danger, never. So it was more or less a holiday and I suppose that would have to be the best aspect of it. We were sort of just killing time waiting for the war to end.

**So was there a real sense that the war was that it was winding down?**

No, we didn't know.

17:00 We weren't in touch with that sort of information at all. No one was passing anything on. Occasionally once again going back to this mad wireless man, he would spill the wireless and

17:30 set it up and we'd be able to get news from somewhere or other in the world whether it was from up the east or sometimes we could get home. Most of the time we could get a woman whose name I've forgotten who was a singer, a Japanese woman and we really liked her because

18:00 she sang very nice songs all of the American songs and things, what was her name, Lesley might remember?

**Tokyo something?**

Tokyo Rose that's it. Tokyo Rose and that was a great program, it was supposed to make us feel all unhappy, we thoroughly enjoyed it. No Tokyo

18:30 Rose was good.

**She was like propaganda?**

That is right. She was supposed to make us feel lonely and unhappy that we were not near our loved ones, and she would, she would talk about, this was her worst feature she would talk about boys, you know those nasty American men who are with your girls at the

19:00 present time and you know what's happening. This is supposed to break our spirit, but that was Tokyo Rose.

**Well we heard some people talk about her and say that they were worried, that saying those things did actually bother them and get to them.**

Did they?

**Mmm seriously, so obviously not with you?**

Well no no no they didn't have much faith did they, to be saying that.

19:30 Oh no, but she was really entertaining, it seemed to me that she had a sense of humour as well as this other. Tokyo Rose. But the best music for us the ordinary singing of the songs you know, it wasn't coming from home it was coming from Japan and

20:00 elsewhere. So anyway Jack was able to get onto that and we used to all listen in and cheer when she was telling us what was happening down in Melbourne or somewhere.

**So did anyone sort of go a bit troppo, a bit stir crazy on the island?**

Yes we had a couple who,

- 20:30 well actually did go troppo. One fellow was out in an operation one day, young fellow he was, he was really too young he shouldn't have been in the army and suddenly he goes bonkers yelling out, screaming and carrying on, he threw away his rifle down the valley, down the gully and running around the
- 21:00 track, so he was right around the bend. So he was shipped off and went home and even I don't think he was ever right again. Years after he wasn't quite right, it was just too much for him.
- 21:30 He was a very naive young thing, just old enough to get in the army but he should never have been in the army, he was just too young. Another fellow went the same way sort of, but they are the only two I can think of. But not very pleasant, you've got to feel sorry for a
- 22:00 fellow who goes like that. I think from time to time everybody feels fear and I don't think there is anything wrong with feeling fearful but it's how you handle it what counts and some people
- 22:30 don't seem to be able to handle it very well at all. But with poor old Huxley that was his name, he had the army ruin him because he had no life after he came out of the army. He never got better. He was always screwed up.
- 23:00 **So you did maintain contact after the war with Huxley?**
- Well every now and again we would know about him. Lesley comes from Swan Hill. Huxley was just further up the road a bit and I would get reports and things about him. And then we had friends in the teachers '
- 23:30 college who had come from Huxley's place, I've forgotten where it was but it was up in the Malley somewhere and they would give us reports on his progress and how he was doing. But he was just no good evermore, just no good which is sad. People like that pay all their lives
- 24:00 for the war and it is a bit unfair. However you can't control everybody can you? And people react differently from different situations to things they
- 24:30 see. No.
- So do you think for someone like him it was just the whole experience, or was there a catalyst that sort of brought, brings that sort of thing on?**
- I think it is the whole experience and I think that he was too young mentally.
- 25:00 You notice some people are more sensitive than others to all sorts of things and I think because of his youth, his lack of experience, he was brought up on a farm, he hadn't mixed with people all that much he was different, and I think all of this aggregated and that finished him off but he just went
- 25:30 quite bonkers. He was finished with the war, threw his rifle down the hill and went madly running, yelling and screaming.
- Almost sounds like a sensible thing to do?**
- Well he was making his thoughts plain anyway. No he was just, just too sad.
- You said before, you know it is only natural to feel fear, I mean everyone would have gone through that**
- 26:00 **but yet it's how you deal with it how you cope with it, how did you cope, is it a matter of, you know, having mates, being a part of a group or is it just personally you can deal with it in other ways?**
- I think you've got to deal with it personally because, I think that having mates can help, if they can tell you to pull your head in and you know
- 26:30 don't be so damn stupid, you're alright, wake up to yourself and then pat on the back sort of thing. And get them thinking a bit differently from the upset state, but they can't be left on their own, they need someone who sort of mothers them a bit. But I also
- 27:00 think that we all differ in the amount of strain in which we can cope and there comes the point where you are pushed over the edge. But I think they're born with that, I don't think there is much you can do with it, do about it. I don't know how you see that.
- 27:30 **Well I guess I haven't been in any of those situations so it is hard to, I mean that is why I asked the question. How important is humour for example?**
- Oh great, yeah very important, you laugh at the silliest thing or laugh at something that is very serious and it can overcome the situation, no laughter is great stuff. And if you can, if you've got someone
- 28:00 who can turn a situation into humour instead of terrible unhappiness or disillusionment or whatever far better, far better. But as I said before I'm sure we're all different and some can take more, some nervous systems stand up

28:30 better.

**Can you think of, yeah you're right humour is a great way of sort of sometimes cutting through the tension I guess, but do you remember, were there certain individuals that were the (court UNCLEAR) gestures as such the men in your unit, were there men who were sort of?**

Oh yes there some fellas who were always on the business yeah.

**Can you tell us about some of those guys?**

No I can't, I can't because I can't remember what they've

29:00 said. But some of them are quite funny men yes, not too many, not too many. But as you say humour is good medicine and if it is crude and vulgar when you are in the army better still, it gets more to the point,

29:30 and usually it is crude and vulgar.

**So do you remember any good limericks and that sort of thing?**

No I don't remember any good limericks. Something about a limerick about, there was a lady from Spain, I don't think I should go any further, because I can remember the next lines, there was a lady from Spain who went for a ride in a train, the crane, oh no.

30:00 **So far it is pretty clean.**

The train gave a shunt I won't go any further.

**Something about a...?**

This is army stuff. Shocking.

**Appalling.**

Now you wouldn't know that a previous inspector of schools would be carrying on like this with such rudeness. That is what you haven't talked about.

30:30 I'll do some boasting for you.

**By all means it is about time.**

Is it? Right.

31:00 When I came back out of the army and rejoined humanity, finished the work at the university I became a principal of various schools. There was a school I opened, a brand new school called Middlefield which was up in Blackburn and it was a very good experience

31:30 to develop it right from groundwork to something. I was also principal of Croydon North at one stage for sometime. I was principal of Ringwood school for the same thing. Reservoir East, Mitcham and I was also the inspector in charge of the Box Hill inspector for some time. I

32:00 have a couple of civilian awards. I have a Royal Humane Society Medal.

**It is over here now, we were having a look at it.**

Oh. And I also have been awarded the Queen's Medal for services to education. I was awarded a Fulbright scholarship that took me

32:30 and Lesley and the two boys to a place called Sheboygan in Wisconsin, America. And the name Sheboygan they tell me over there has a little story that goes to it. This old Indian he dearly wanted to have a son, but he kept producing girls, so anyway

33:00 his wife was pregnant again and he thought well everything is going to be, he had about eight of them already, eight girls. And he thought oh this will be good, this will probably be a boy and when he was asked what it was he said "Sheboygan" and that is how Sheboygan got its name. That is what they tell me, Sheboygan.

33:30 I so, the Fulbright scholarship took us to Sheboygan in Wisconsin in 1958 to 1959 and then we were able to go to Europe for six months and look at schools and both on the continent and over in England and Scotland, so it was a very good

34:00 thing for me anyway. Do you know about Senator Fulbright?

**I've heard about the Fulbright Scholarships but I don't know about the Senator.**

Well Senator Fulbright was a politician, and what he did was a bit unusual for a politician because he

set up this Fulbright scholarship scheme which applied to all

- 34:30 people all over the world and what he did was he managed to talk the countries that had been involved in the war into selling their surplus army products like trucks and tanks and all the rest of it, scrap metal and all the rest, and putting it into a fund and the idea
- 35:00 of this fund was to set up scholarships all over the world for people to come to America. And the idea was to get people to think differently from war anyway, to think peace. And co-operation of various, of the countries
- 35:30 all over the place and this happened. What happened they sold all the material, the junk that was everywhere and the money went into the fund and that is what is called the Fulbright Scholarship. And his wife is still alive and she goes around the world now and she talks about her husband and his
- 36:00 hopes for the world and the way in which he set up this Fulbright scheme. So it is a very, it's an excellent, it's an excellent thing. The year that I went to America there were eight from Australia that were chosen and I happened to be one of them so I'm a very lucky fella. But it is a marvellous
- 36:30 idea in which what we're talking about doesn't even intrude at all, it is nothing to do with the war, it's to do with peace. And all nations working together which is a great idea.

**And sorry what did you do in Sheboygan?**

Teach. I taught there for 12 months. Lesley and the two boys came too

- 37:00 so we we were little Americans for 12 months.

**What year was that?**

1959, yes 1959. 1958 August 1958 to July 1959. So he's one of the men that I

- 37:30 admire. And that's all I can skite about now.

**That is impressive. Well speaking of men you admire I mean going back to to to the war period, who were the men, I mean obviously there was Bomber, the colonel that you admired very much, who were some of the other men that you came across that you admired?**

The lieutenant that

- 38:00 that took over our signals section, Ken Della, after the fellow who was there before was removed, was very good, very good too. Ken was a good bloke. But for real admiration the Bomber is the top of the lot. No one would argue with me on that.

- 38:30 **So just on Ken he was your immediate, immediate...?**

Immediate officer in charge of the sigs.

**So we sort of talked a little bit about, I mean you told us about the wireless you carried in Bougainville for example, can you just tell us a little bit more about the sigs, now were you considered a company or just a...?**

No we were a section of the headquarter company.

**So can you tell us a little bit more about that, about that**

- 39:00 **section, the men who were in that and how roles were delegated?**

Well lines, if you came to a place for the telephone situation lines had to be laid and they had these steel roller sort of things and the wire was round and round and round,

- 39:30 miles of it sort of thing. And there were about eight fellas and the first thing they would do whenever we got to a new situation was, you know there is headquarter company A, B, C, D company, so that is five and so there'd be about three fellas working on each to get lines to those various companies

- 40:00 wherever they might be. They run the lines out along the ground, hook them up to the telephones or whatever is operating, they hook it up to wherever it's got to be and the thing is to see how quickly you can get communication back to the central machine, which you know takes all the calls. And

- 40:30 that machine then, at the same time as that's going on Jack manly this fella who had the touch with electricity he would be there with the big switchboard thing and he would be plugging bits on and you know sticking them altogether so it made the connections. And so it got to the stage where we could get communication through the whole of the

- 41:00 the unit and back to the brigade in about half an hour which is pretty good to move into an area and in half an hour you've got communication. Then they would go back and then they would put the lines up trees and things so that they weren't on the ground for anything, the trucks and things to run over them. But it was all laid on the ground first of all



41:30 and then gone along again when everything is connected up and hook it all up, so it was just like on the telegraph pole sort of thing but not as high.

**So once the lines are established is it just a matter of maintenance or...?**

Once... that's right, there should be no reason why they break down at all. But if one breaks or something you've got to go and follow the line and find out where it is and join it up again

42:00 and to...

## Tape 7

00:31 **So we're recording again now. Now you know we've just had that break and we've had quite an interesting conversation and you're still sure you don't want to tell the story about how you had to defend yourself in the name of what was fair and right against the military police in Adelaide?**

Well do you think it would be worth recording?

01:00 **I think it's a really interesting story and I think what it says about soldiers coming back you know after a lot of hard work and discipline and they come back into civilian life, and that's not an easy thing to do really is it, I mean you'd know better than I but what do you think?**

Oh I thought it was easy to get back into civilian life.

01:30 But this was just a bit of high spirits you know, well not high spirits, beer. Alright I will tell you if that's what you would like to have on that thing.

**Sure okay. So you just arrived back in Adelaide had you from...?**

Darwin, 23 months in Darwin.

02:00 And we happened to have a fairly long stay on the train or off the train. So a group of us went to celebrate at a hotel. Admittedly we probably had drunk too much. On the way back returning

02:30 to the camp or where we were to pick up the train we came across a couple of our signallers who were causing a bit of a problem in that they wanted to marry a girl they had met that night. The parents of this girl naturally were a bit upset about this

03:00 and they had rung the Military Police. But there was half a dozen of us who had just come back from the hotel and we didn't know they had rung the Military Police and what we were trying to do was to get these two clowns that were causing the trouble who were in our outfit back on the train. But in the

03:30 meantime before we could get away or get these clowns back on the train the Military Police descended upon us. About 18 of them. There was a bit of a punch up and the result was that we finished up in the solitary confinement cells in the police station. Next morning

04:00 we fronted up to the adjutant of the place and we couldn't do, we couldn't do in these two idiots that we wanted to belt up as a result of our situation. But they were our fellows and so we kept our mouth shut. The upshot of this was we were all fined five pounds and we then

04:30 were put on the train, given a first class carriage and came back home. And in fact our train beat the troop train that we would have been on. In the meantime we were a bit worse for wear and we did get to Melbourne and everything sorted itself out eventually.

**How did you come to ride first class in the train?**

I don't know, they

05:00 put us first class in the train. The Military Police fellow made the contact and put us in the first class carriage, maybe it was the only carriage left, but that's how we came back.

**So when the 18 Military Police turned up were they kind of hostile or were they...?**

Oh they didn't ask any questions, that was the

05:30 problem. I mean we were just trying to get these two clowns of ours on their way. But these fellows came and just launched in straight away, just descended, otherwise we could have, I could have saved getting a split eye couldn't I by doing a bit of dodging and whatnot-ing.

**And you had a bit of a boxing career didn't you?**

06:00 That's right I did, but didn't strike a blow, all blows were on us. But I've never forgiven those Military Police. I really think that the way they behaved was quite out of order. Now I suggest if you ask them

they would say that we were drunken idiots. We were pretty full that's true but we weren't causing any trouble.

06:30 We were trying to straight out the trouble and take these two clowns home, back to the train, and that's how it really was.

**But that's interesting too that you were trying to look after your mates, you know. You thought they were idiots doing what they were doing but you would rather protect than have them you know do any more damage, was that something?**

That is fair enough. After all they were in our battalion, and not only in our battalion they were in the signal section.

07:00 So you know you couldn't do less.

**And had you had to do that before other times or was that something that happened within your?**

No. it is just a big, a one off which Lesley thoroughly enjoys talking about.

**What about the Military Police when you were in Darwin did they have much of a presence then?**

I didn't have anything to do with the Military Police in Darwin, no

07:30 nothing, no contact whatsoever. I can't even remember seeing one.

**So they were more, you know, in the cities when men were on leave?**

Well yes Adelaide, but I think, I think maybe the Adelaide police had probably had trouble with troops because there'd be, there were more troops coming and if they came by boat they would be

08:00 stopping off there in Adelaide and of course they are going to have what they think is a great time so I guess there was a greater need there, much greater need. There wasn't much harm you could do in Darwin, there were no hotels, they were all blown up. So it's all in the past now, thank goodness.

**Oh yeah it's a good story.**

08:30 **Okay so we were just going to look back over Bougainville to see if there was anything more. You've told us about that patrol where the sniper killed the young guy, the chief's son. But you did go out on other patrols in Bougainville?**

Yes but we had nothing really to do with Japanese, we weren't

09:00 even near them as it turned out. They were further, further north. I think by this time the Japanese must have known that the war was virtually over, they weren't going anywhere. And the other thing about it is that personally I couldn't see any reason

09:30 for putting any Australian troops at risk in Bougainville. Because at that time the Japanese had been pushed back, there was no way in which they were going anywhere, they couldn't get off the island, but I think General Blamey was out to make a bit of a name for himself in what

10:00 took place. But had we done nothing at all about the Japanese, they would have finished up the same way. They wouldn't have lost any of our fellows at all. At least that's the way I see it because there was no contact with Japan and Bougainville at that time, ships couldn't get through. We had control of the sea

10:30 so what was the reason? They were cut off, why not just leave them there and round them up. Because virtually that's what happened in the end anyway, they were just rounded up, sent down to the jail that they had set up down at further south and the advantage of that would have been as I mentioned before that the malaria and our fellas wouldn't have had

11:00 malaria either. So I don't know where I fit in in all this story, discontent I suppose, either that or stupid.

**Because at the same time you were there up around Tarakan and that section there, there were also battalions down south in Bougainville, the Buin Road campaign and the other campaign and Numa Numa [?]**

11:30 **trail, so when you were back in Torokina were you mixing with the men from those battalions who were coming back from those, they were quite bad those campaigns?**

Well we came up on the Numa Numa trail, and the Numa Numa trail took you past that volcano which I was telling about you earlier. But there was nothing there, nothing there when we came in and there had been no Japanese there at all

12:00 they had all moved further north. So Numa Numa didn't come into it. And I don't think there was Japanese further south, I can't say that for sure but I don't think there were people down there.

**But these men and what were you replacing, were you replacing another**

12:30 **battalion?**

No no we weren't. We went to an area where no one had been before, no not replacing anyone, we were just coming in as extra people. I couldn't understand. Well I suppose the more troops you have there the easier it is to round up the war was coming to an end anyway, and I think that the

13:00 powers that be knew about that, they'd know how things were going.

**Did you see much well with our troops, many injured troops?**

No not much at all, not much.

**Okay. So well you've talked about the end of the war being on**

13:30 **Bougainville haven't you? How did you come home what ship were you on?**

Came home on a ship called the Burdekin. It came into maybe Cooktown or something, came into Queensland and then came down by train.

**And that was, that was it as far as...?**

14:00 Yes the rest of the unit, as I said earlier, the rest of the unit was still back in Bougainville but I came on this ship which was the first one out, I was very lucky because of that points system I talked to you about.

**So how soon did you go back after you were discharged, did you go back to work in the Education Department?**

14:30 Well I had applied to go back to the university and so that was the next year and the the Education Department gave me leave to do that and so I virtually didn't go back to teaching at all until after I had

15:00 been through the university. Which was good, I mean they were pretty good about the whole thing the Education Department once you got back there.

**So what was your first job once you completed your studies?**

Oh. Which one did I

15:30 go to? I went to a school called Middlefield in Blackburn, a new school no one had ever been in it

16:00 before. It was just brand new, so it was a very, a very pleasant thing it gave me a lot of pleasure developing it for the next three years or so. Unfortunately now Middlefield doesn't exist, even though it is down there in the city area, there is still enough, there is not enough children to fill schools in that particular area.

**What area is it?**

Blackburn, Blackburn

16:30 area. But it is not a school anymore, it is a school but it's not occupied as such anymore.

**When was it closed do you know?**

No I don't. No I lost, when I left that area I lost contact with Middlefield altogether.

**So you went there as principal?**

Yes. Principal and I was also,

17:00 I also went to Croydon North. See we lived at Ringwood I don't know if you know Melbourne well.

**Yes I do very well.**

Well we lived at Ringwood at Ringwood, we lived at Mitcham, Croydon North was just straight up the road past Ringwood so that suited me. So I was there for about three years or so. I

17:30 then went to Reservoir East. Reservoir East at that time was the biggest school in Victoria in the primary, had about 1,200 children in it and also it was in a very difficult area. I don't know how to put it really, but the

18:00 people weren't the people, weren't as interested in education as they would be in some other suburbs. So it was a pretty tough school to handle. But as I said it was the biggest, but also it was in an area that wasn't the best either. But anyway did my time there and then I...

**Can I just ask you about that, I mean the difference between**

18:30 **Middlefield a brand new school, how many students did you have at Middlefield?**

Oh about 350.

**Pretty small isn't it?**

Yes by comparison to that.

**And in a new suburb?**

Yes but people, you see the people's attitude in Middlefield and Box Hill area to education is quite different from over in

19:00 in the other one, in Reservoir, Reservoir East.

**Well Reservoir was a very working class suburb?**

Very working class, yes. And I don't think that the interest in education with the parents was as great as it would be with the other ones. But some people

19:30 of course they were entirely different. They were very interested in their kids and the education but it didn't apply to all of them.

**So how did you try and address that during your time at Reservoir?**

No it's pretty difficult to have an influence on an area like Reservoir. And I don't like saying this,

20:00 I suppose it has to do with the working situation that their parents are in. And I think that it probably is influenced by the fact that the parents themselves have not had that much education and so are not very interested in it. And a lot would think oh well it was okay for me what I did

20:30 you know I got out and got a job regardless of what it was. So it was very difficult.

**What sort of work were the parents of those kids doing generally?**

Oh all manual, virtually manual, manual work. Be very, very little, small in the number who were professional people at all.

21:00 Very, very working class and I don't like using working class as an expression either because that is what I am, working class, very much so.

**So did it cover technical areas, like was it technical education?**

No primary school again, I was always in the primary division. Lesley was in the

21:30 secondary section.

**Okay. So where did you go from Reservoir?**

I went to Mitcham. Actually the Mitcham School was about

22:00 700 yards down from where I lived and so it was ideal as far as I was concerned. There were some 700 children in it, it was a good sized school. It had a lot of tradition going with it, parents were keen on education, kids were good kids and as I said I walked down to it in the morning and

22:30 walked home again at night time, so it suited me fine.

**So you must have known the people in the community quite well?**

Yeah I did. Yeah I knew a lot of them through playing tennis there and so it was, for me it was about the best environment I could get.

**How did you deal with situations where you had a child perhaps was playing up and you had to discipline**

23:00 **them but you knew the parents socially?**

Didn't make any difference. If I had to discipline them it was my job to do it. And sometimes I had to discipline them in a way that I wouldn't ask the teacher to do. It took all sorts of forms. I will tell you a funny story,

23:30 not to do with Mitcham School, but it was Ringwood school. At least I think it is amusing, it is a bit sad in a way, I suppose I was a bit silly. But anyway this little boy had been throwing stones in the schoolyard and he'd hit a child with a stone, he was sent to me. So

24:00 I proceeded to tell him in no uncertain ways how dangerous this was, what you could do, you could lose an eye or you could do this, you can do the other thing. And in the meantime I had a strap, which I was whacking on the tabletop. And the poor little fellow was petrified and that's how I wanted him to be for a while

24:30 anyway. So finally I asked him is he going to do this again and he said, "No sir". So I said, "Good alright, we'll forget all about this, now you go and behave yourself". And so he went, the next thing there was a knock on the door and there was a lady there. And I said, "Oh come on in, can I help you?" She said, "I don't know" she said,

25:00 "I don't know whether I can get in or whether I can sit down" she said, "I've been listening to what's been going on and I'm terrified". I said, "Oh come on sit down here and forget all about it". Lesley said you can be a big monster and for a while that you terrify ladies outside the door. So I reckon I must have done a pretty good job.

**That reminds me about another story you told**

25:30 **about being a student teacher with the strap and...?**

Oh with the, oh well if it gets results it helps. I don't think, you couldn't, you'd finish up in jail now, which is a sad state of affairs I think.

**So what what forms of discipline did you use?**

Oh mostly it was the way that you spoke or you know...

26:00 The strap was rarely, rarely used. That had to be something quite horrific for that to happen. But if you know how to go about it you can, I mean after all you are only dealing with a child and you can get them so they are quite upset and actually that is what you want to do, you want to upset

26:30 them because they've done something that is really quite bad. And you'd only do this if it is bad and endangering somebody else in someway. And stone throwing and stick fighting and poking you know all that sort of stuff is out, at least I think so. And I don't think you agree with me or not?

**Oh no I think that is pretty sensible, that is not a good idea at all.**

Have you got children?

**Yes yes.**

Well you wouldn't want me

27:00 dealing with them then would you? They'd learn things though.

**Well I've had to deal out my fair share of discipline that's for sure. So at Reservoir you had a fair more challenging group of kids by the sounds of thing, discipline wise perhaps?**

Very challenging, and also it wasn't just the children. The children were the least of it, some of the parents were

27:30 very challenging. They'd go down to the pub and you know, drink this horrible alcohol that we've been talking about. They would get themselves half steamed up and then they'd come up and want to see the principal and sort him out. And of course when it didn't work that way mostly they would go off timidly having done their shouting and

28:00 carrying on. But I think the thing is that if you know you are right and it's in the interest of the children you should do it, regardless of the consequences, no Reservoir East was not a good place to be.

**Did you have a school**

28:30 **committee or...?**

Yes all of the schools had a committee and all of them were good, very conscientious people working hard for the good of the kids, raising money and doing all that sort of thing. Helping to build up libraries and whatever you needed. And in fact they'd come along when you'd go to a

29:00 meeting to whenever they had a meeting and it was always in the daytime, well usually in the daytime. I'd always go to their meeting and report to them what was going on in the school. And they gave them an opportunity to say what they wanted about the school and what's happening. So that it seemed to work pretty well and they seemed to appreciate the fact that they were

29:30 a part of it too and they could have a say and say what they liked. But as far as I was concerned in the conversation that took place if they were wrong I told them they were wrong. And often it's very easy in a school situation for parents to be misled by the children as to what in fact has taken place. Mostly they're

30:00 right but depends on how deeply the children are, how they vary the story that they take home. So the only way you can handle it is stick with the truth and it might be hard but it's worth it. At least that's how I saw it.

**Did you notice a big difference in the resources that the Reservoir school had and say the Mitcham or the Blackburn school?**

Well the Mitcham School was an old established

30:30 school, with about half the number, about 700, 700 up against this 1,250 that was at Reservoir. So Mitcham was very well catered for, they had a long series of excellent mothers' clubs and school committees and

31:00 also there was more money in the Mitcham area so there was more spent on those sorts of things. Whereas Reservoir there was less money, more children, fewer books, so it made it difficult all round. The children didn't get, the deal they got wasn't as good as Mitcham.

**So they were a disadvantaged school?**

That's right yes. Well they are in a disadvantaged

31:30 area.

**So was there any, there was no education department policy or government policy about additional recourses to disadvantaged schools back then?**

I never knew of any and I would have known about them had they been there. No, they don't, they really don't tend to differentiate it. But the richer areas get

32:00 better libraries because there is more money put into them. And as I said the mums, the mums raise the money too, so but it is easier for them to raise money than it is in an area like Reservoir, much easier. Well you would know that the incomes in say Reservoir would be nothing like the

32:30 incomes in Box Hill or any of those places around there.

**That's right yeah so much, the parents haven't got much to give, it is just interesting how the economics of it impact so much on the behaviour don't you think?**

Oh it does it does, it also seems to impact on the discipline that the child has at home.

33:00 The poorer the resources, it seems to me that's the fewer amenities they've got or can afford and it's all money, it's all tied up with money. But that is the way it is.

**Okay. So we're coming close to the end of the tape, but it would be**

33:30 **good to hear about your ongoing relationship with the army with the military since the war, you were saying earlier in the break that you're still involved with it?**

No no, no. Did I lead you to think that?

**Yes that's what I thought but if I've got it wrong set me right.**

Oh sorry, no I have nothing to do with the army any more.

34:00 I just think that the boys in the army do a magnificent job and good luck to all of them. No I think that they're tops. And I think, I think the Australian soldier is as good as any soldier in the world if not better. That might be skiting a bit but that's what I think. I think we're we're very lucky to have the people

34:30 that we've got in the army.

**So what are the qualities do you think that make the Australian soldier?**

I think its determination, guts, sheer guts. And willing to do what he has to do despite what might crop up. I don't know if that sums it up at all

35:00 **But this is what you've seen in your experience?**

Oh yes. Look it's no good having a frightened timid person in the army, because it is not a place where you are to be frightened or timid, there is enough you know with, there are enough problems without having someone scared to death all the time, they are not really of any value to you in the

35:30 army. And I don't really think you can say that everybody should be this tough Anzac type, because I don't think that's possible. I think we've got a lot of so very, very brave and very conscientious people who put

36:00 themselves at risk, willing to put themselves at risk to help their mates and we are very lucky to have them. But I don't know that those who can't do that should be condemned all that much, it just means I think they are in the wrong job.

**So can you paint a profile for me of what kind of soldier you were back**

36:30 **then?**

Me? I think I was a good soldier. I had a few brains, I could think. I have a degree of

37:00 courage which I think has been tested in various ways. But I don't expect that everybody else would do exactly the same as I would do.

37:30 I wouldn't really like to be in the army now. I think times have changed and I'm too old but I have a tremendous admiration for the people who are in the army who are putting up with modern warfare, weapons, the problems that are created in different ways.

38:00 I think that it's not as simple to be in the army today as it was when I was in the army, and I don't know if that makes sense. I mean modern weaponry, modern knowledge about tanks and all sorts of things,

38:30 it is so out strips the simple rifle you point it at someone, if you point it straight it hits them sort of thing. No I've got a great admiration for people who are in the army.

**Are you a member of the RSL [Returned & Services League]?**

Yes. I haven't been for long. For years I didn't join, well I did join and then I when I came down here I didn't bother.

39:00 But I have joined the RSL here oh only about three months ago. So I can say yes, I've got a card which worries me every time I go in there, you have to swipe it when you go in and I'm not used to swiping cards. And you have to put the right side in otherwise it doesn't work.

39:30 I'm not very good with this modern technology. That is a reason why we haven't got things with banks on cards because we wouldn't know what to do with the rotten things.

**So why have you joined so belatedly?**

Well, I have a

40:00 60 per cent pension because of a couple of things that I have, arthritis, stomach trouble, and we Lesley and I talked about it and we came to the conclusion that we should or I should join the RSL

40:30 again in case I push off and they'd be able to help her if she needed help. I don't know if she will need help, so it was entirely for that reason, just to help secure the situation for her. Makes sense?

**Yeah that makes sense. So what sort of entitlements would she have?**

41:00 Lesley gets about \$5 every month. I don't know why, don't ask me why, that's what it amounts to which is crazy, \$5 a month or something.

**And what about the battalion do you still...?**

41:30 Yes.

**You have an association and you?**

Yes we have a very good association and that friend of mine Jack Duffy is the secretary treasury of the thing and he is the one that dobbed me in for this interview. However he did have the courtesy to admit

42:00 when I rang him up and said, "Did you?"

**INTERVIEW ENDS**