Australians at War Film Archive

Leonard Cottee - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **…that we talked about. So I'll get you to tell me, or take me through where you were born, where you grew up.**

Well my mother and father were married in Lismore, my mother was a school teacher. She originally came from Dapto.

01:00 After I was about 12 months… I was born in Lismore and 12 months later we moved to Murwillumbah where I grew up and went to school till I was 15. And it was during the Depression years, so I left school and started work.

Well tell me about briefly where you started work,

01:30 **and then how that led into you…?**

Oh that's, all right. I started work at the garage where they had a blacksmiths' shop where they were making bus bodies and putting steel hoops on sulkies and things like that. And I was the blacksmith's striker, and I had about two months of that and I thought, "That's not my future," so I had a talk

02:00 to the boss and he moved me up into the spare parts department where I was issuing spare parts. And driving all the new cars out to the showroom, and putting them back of an afternoon. And then I didn't think that was such a future either, so I moved into work for my father, who had a factory making casein, which was owned by Norco, and

02:30 my father had shares in it. We decided there wasn't much future in that, so we moved to Sydney where my father continued making casein in Sydney, with fish food and ice with Dairy Farmers. I helped him there, and this time I was about 18 and a half. And I decided I wanted to get into

03:00 something better than this so I approached my uncle, who started Cottee's products, and he gave me a position there, and started me off at the bottom, washing bottles and things like that. And only did that for a few weeks and he promoted me to making Passiona, which was a secret production in those days. I had to sign a contract – which

03:30 I still have a copy of – that forbid me from discussing the process with anybody else or releasing it. And I worked in that. I used to have to lock myself in this room and make the Passiona, and then it was bottled outside the room. I then joined the army. Well the war started in Europe and compulsory training

04:00 came in and I had three months in the army, in the engineers. I had a truck driver's and a car driver's licence in those days and they put me in as a driver. And I had experience in blowing up stumps and route marches and building bridges across rivers, etcetera. When I got out of the army I wasn't so happy with palliasses, or straw palliasses on floors and things like that to sleep on and the army life

04:30 didn't appeal to me. So I went to the Marconi School of Wireless in Sydney, above Wynyard Station, and I was being trained as a ship's radio operator. That gave me an exemption from the army. Then the Japs came into the war and the army, well the government said, "No exemptions, you're straight back in the army." They put me back in the engineers and when they found out I could send and receive morse at 12 words a minute, they said, "Right, signals

05:00 are crying out for you, in you go to the signals." And from there we worked our way up the coast to Grafton and Coffs Harbour and various stops and finally landed up near Murgon in Queensland, where we were to defend Brisbane, I was with the 3rd Armoured Division. Then the Coral Sea battle came and there was no more requirements to defend Brisbane, so

05:30 an officer came round picking out personnel that they wanted for other units and this lieutenant picked myself and half a dozen other chaps. We were told to get on the train and go down to the Milton tennis courts in Brisbane and there we joined up with Allied Intelligence Bureau and Services Reconnaissance

Department. Allied Intelligence Bureau was the American side of intelligence. In this

06:00 tennis courts at Brisbane there was a mixture of all sorts of nationalities and air force, army and navy all thrown in together. I did a course on radio, other types of radio and decipher work. And this lieutenant said he was going on a special mission and he asked a friend and myself to join. So, then it

06:30 gets on, it's a lot of detail from then on, of what happened to me in the army.

We'll talk about all of that in detail, but, just, I guess, take me through…

What happened after the army?

Yes.

Getting back to when I got out of the army, I was one of the last ones to get out. I didn't get out until 1946 and I was married in June '46. I got out of the army two weeks after I was married

07:00 and I went back to work for the Cottee Company – my job was held there for me so I went back to work. And I started working back making Passiona and sending it out to

07:30 all the country bottlers and things like that. And then I was, went to the different sections. I went to where they manufactured jellies and the jams. I went through the jam section. All the different products we were making. I went into different sections and I became in charge. I was really the foreman running the different sections.

08:00 Then I invented passionfruit extracting machine. I happened to jump on a passionfruit one day. Actually they had a machine that my uncle sent from Melbourne and it was a vacuum operated machine where the passionfruit went in on a conveyor and the little stainless steel tubes went into each fruit, and the vacuum would draw the passionfruit out of it. It didn't work and I

08:30 couldn't make it work. And I happened to jump on a passionfruit and I saw everything squirt out. I picked it up and it was empty. I rushed up to the managing director and said, "Look, I know how we can make a machine to get the…" While we were doing this we had a hundred people scooping passionfruit in the factory – that's how much passionfruit we needed and that was a lot of labour. So he sent me out to the engineer – we had an engineer – and between the two of us we developed two belts

09:00 on pulleys so that the passionfruit dropped in the top and went straight through, hit the stainless steel tubes and the skins went out that way and all the juice went into the container. And so the passionfruit would just be going up conveyors and running through the machine like that and it did the work. Well they sent me to South Africa with two of these machines for about eight months, where I processed a huge quantity of passionfruit

09:30 and had it all frozen and sent down to Durban. I flew down to Durban and saw it loaded onto the ship. And then I took a bus coach down to Cape, down to… What's the name of that? Port? It's the Cape. Can't think of it. It's… Stop. Can you stop it? You've got to keep going?

10:00 Okay. It's Cape Town. Went to Cape Town to catch a ship to come home and I came back on the Dominion Monarch. It was one of the largest refrigeration ships carting frozen lamb, well chilled lamb, to England in those days. And it was a very nice passenger ship and I enjoyed that coming back so much. I should have come all the way round to Sydney on it, but I got off – I was homesick a bit. I got off the plane in Perth, then flew home. And then

10:30 my wife wanted to go on holiday, so we went up to Blackheath for a holiday and it wasn't like being on the passenger ship. Then I went through, they put me on sales and I had 12 months in sales selling Cottee's products to all the different little shops. In those days it was all corner shops around, no big supermarkets. And I'd finished that and I was, more or less,

11:00 a bit of a floater around the plant. And they decided they wanted more strawberries so they sent me to Queensland and I went round all the strawberry growers we had contracts with. And I found there was another processor that had enough taken and enough supplies, so I managed to get all his contract growers and that year we took in four hundred tons of strawberries. It was while I was up here,

11:30 that the local manager had a heart attack and I was then delegated to become the Queensland manager and we moved the family up here to live and this is where we've been ever since.

Excellent. That was really good and we'll go back and talk about everything in a lot more detail. So we'll go right back to the beginning and tell me a bit about your father.

My father was one of nine boys

12:00 and three girls. My grandfather was… I'm going back a bit further. Is that all right? My grandfather was a founding director of Norco, which is a big cooperative milk company in Lismore and Byron Bay. And he went out and selected rainforest country,

12:30 just between Lismore and Ballina, and he cleared the land and set up a dairy farm. He imported some special cattle from England. And my father went to school there in a local little school, and when he left

school he and his brother milked 120 cows night and morning, using milking machines in those days with a hot air engine to drive the milking machine.

13:00 It was there that my mother went to school in Dapto and she did teachers' training college in Sydney. She was sent up to Tregear where my father went to school and she taught three of my aunts and two of my uncles at the school. And because she played the violin, she was invited to the Cottee household

13:30 for lunch on a Sunday and the Cottee family had music of an afternoon. My father played the flute and my mother played the violin. So that's how we, how they got together. Then my father, he was mostly in the casein industry until they stopped making casein in Sydney. My uncle then made casein down the south coast of

14:00 New South Wales. So my father started a business, and it's still going today, called Hellick Brown Creamed Honey. It's the honey that, it's set like butter and you can cut it like, with a knife. He had that business until he retired and he sold it to one of his brothers for one of the brother's sons-in-law.

And tell me a bit about what it was like,

14:30 **growing up around, or spending time around Murwillumbah?**

Oh, the big events around Murwillumbah was the floods. The 1921 flood, no the 1932 flood I think it was, that I remember. I didn't remember the '21 flood, I was only a couple of years old. But my father, when he built his house, he bought some land on

15:00 the river. And there was sandy flat down below near the river. And it was quite sandy. And he used the sand to make concrete bricks. And he built all his own concrete bricks and then he had tradesmen build it into a house. And some plasterers were up to do a bank in Murwillumbah, so he had all the inside of the house plastered. And we lived on this river bank and of course, when the big '32 flood

15:30 came, we… Cows, dead cows floating down the rivers, building floating – it was a huge flood. And it came up within about twelve inches of the floorboards of the house. Because my father had heard about this 1921 flood and he made sure he built it high enough so the flood wouldn't come in. By the time the flood got up to that level it had spread out all over the countryside and it couldn't get any higher.

16:00 School was about, I suppose in those days, it was about three miles away. And my sister and I used to walk to school. Later on, when we were big enough, we rode pushbikes. And I went to high school there for a couple of years, but finally, when we moved to Sydney, I went to night school and

16:30 finished got my Intermediate Certificate in Sydney.

And what sort of an area were you living in? Was your house built in Murwillumbah, on a farm?

Oh, it was a big block of land. We had a house cow, two house cows. During the Depression years we had two house cows, we had a little separator and it was my job to milk the cows of a morning. No it was an afternoon. My father would do it of a morning. I'd do it of an afternoon. And we had a vacant

17:00 block of land alongside of us, we ran the house cows. And there was a couple of islands in the river where the cows would go over at low tide and I'd have to call them home and the tide would be full, but we used to give them a little molasses in the tin and I'd rattle the tin and they'd swim home to be milked. And we lived well – we had over a hundred WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, we had plenty of eggs. This was during the Depression years. My father's salary went down to half and he was on a good salary.

17:30 But we had plenty of fruit trees. I grew tomatoes and I bought my first pair of long trousers by selling the tomatoes – sold them to a hospital and different places like that. And we lived pretty well. There was plenty of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s to eat and we even grew ducks. And I helped my mother pluck the ducks and I've even got an eiderdown on my bed of the very fine feathers

18:00 that my mother made into an eiderdown.

And what memories do you have of the way the Depression was affecting the area?

Well, it wasn't so bad in a country town like Murwillumbah. Admittedly there was always people coming through and fellows with swags and chaps calling in and begging for a bit of food and they'd do a little bit of work, chop wood. We had a wood stove. We didn't have an ice chest,

18:30 not a fridge or a washing machine in those days – it was the tubs. And the ice man would come and the milk man would call and fill the billy and those sort of things, although we didn't need that, we had our own cows. But I don't think it affected the people in the country because they were supported mainly by the farmers all around and the farmers all grew things and they were

19:00 relatively cheap.

What sort of people were the people that would come through with their swags?

Lots of them were university people; they couldn't get jobs. And that was one reason why I left school

and without sufficient education. My sister went through – she became a high school music teacher – and both my brothers were better educated

19:30 than me because they come on later in the life, see. But from when I left school I was more or less self educated. Because I did a course on, when I was getting up towards management level, I did a course on management at the tech [technical college] in Sydney and also continued up here in Brisbane, finished off the course.

And when these people would come to your house,

20:00 **would you talk to them? How would you interact with them?**

Well it was mainly my parents. I would be at school or I probably didn't even see them much. I didn't come into contact with them much at all. We didn't see many really.

And when you were young, what did you know about the Cottee's business that was being started by your, was it your uncle?

My grandfather, my grandfather started the business.

The Norco, or the…

He started

20:30 Norco and he was chairman of directors at Norco. And they sent him around the world on a trip to sell Norco's products. And it was while he was on his farm he had a German chap there that had bought some passionfruit seeds from South America. And it being such a tropical place and out of the rainforest, he threw these seeds around and the passionfruits grew wild. And my grandfather

21:00 was so taken with the flavour of the passionfruit mixed with sugar and made into a cordial that he thought there was a future in it. And having so many boys, he put one of them down in Sydney to start. By then there was passionfruit growing, the seed had got down and they were growing it from Coffs Harbour north, they were growing passionfruit. And he was able to buy passionfruit in the markets in Sydney and they started

21:30 in a very small way in Sydney. I can remember it was one room, about the size of this lounge room, where they used to cut up the passionfruit and scoop them out and sieve it with a sieve and mix it with some sugar and water and a bit of colouring and they were making it up and they were selling it mainly to the milk bars. Those days there were milk bars with soda fountains and they'd use a bit, some of the passionfruit

22:00 cordial and they'd put the soda water into it, with a scoop of ice cream, and it was a passionfruit ice cream soda and that sold like anything. And that's how it started. Of course, in the winter time they didn't sell so much, so they started processing peanuts and they were selling a lot of peanuts and that's how the

22:30 Cottee Company got eventually into peanut butter and those sort of products, as well. But my grandfather, he became the managing director and then he put another one of his sons into the company. There were two and eventually there were three sons in the company. One of them went to Melbourne to start the Melbourne branch and there was two in Sydney. And during the war, one left the company and he went with another company

23:00 doing other products. And he, where, what that first question was?

I was just asking about what you knew about the Cottee's company while you were still in Murwillumbah?

Oh, it was, no, the company didn't start till I was about 14 and that's when we'd go to Sydney to meet my mother's

23:30 parents who lived in Sydney. We'd go down once a year by car. My father bought a Jawett car, a two cylinder car, and that was 1928. We'd drive down to Sydney, we'd call at my aunt's and stay at my aunt's place at Kempsey and we'd take two or three days to go to Sydney. In those days, we had to go through the ferry at Wiseman's Ferry – there were no bridges across the Hawkesbury River; it was all ferries in those days. And a lot of the rivers up and down the coast were all by

24:00 ferry. No bridges anywhere. I can remember well those days and it was quite exciting to go down to Sydney. And my father used to take us once a month over to Lismore for a director's meeting of the Milk Industries company. And that was interesting. Because by then my grandfather lived in Lismore and he had a sort of a

24:30 chocolate and milk bar fountain in one of the theatres in Lismore. And he stored a lot of the chocolates at his place. And by this time, he had a Stanley steam car and I can remember he bought it from America and it was one of the only ones in Australia. He sent one of his sons to Sydney to learn how to service it and look after it. I can remember at the home in Lismore

25:00 one day when he drove in, we wanted some, I was going to, my mother wanted to give me a bath and

my grandmother said, “Right, we’ll take a bucket out to the Stanley steamer.” And we had a bucket with water in it and he put a hose from the Stanley steamer and turned on the steam and it heated the water in no time and we took it in and had a bath.

Tell me about this car. What was it like?

It was a big car. It was too fast for my grandfather. He eventually sold it because it was dangerous on those

25:30 gravel roads – he nearly skidded it off a few times. And it was a bit technical to service and upkeep. But it was a beautiful car – it was silent running, it just drove along without any noise. It had kerosene in the boiler to light the fire in the boiler and it developed its own steam. And it was years later that my youngest uncle,

26:00 when he was moved from Melbourne, he was the one that went to Melbourne. He came to Queensland and he was semi-retired in those days and we had another company up in New Guinea for growing passionfruit in New Guinea. After getting them from South Africa, we stopped getting them from there and then we grew all most of our passionfruit in New Guinea up on the highlands at Goroka. And he

26:30 became the chairman of directors of the company up in New Guinea and he’d fly up there regularly. But he’d lived and he had an office over with me at the company here in Brisbane, at Salisbury. And he heard there was a Stanley steam car up on the Atherton Tablelands in a shed, with WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s roosting on and everything. And he organised to get it down to Brisbane and he sent me in to make sure it wasn’t damaged when it was pulled off the train and brought out to the factory

27:00 at Leichhardt. And my uncle would spent most of the week, a lot of his time, with his mechanic, bringing this Stanley steamer back to new again. And he drove it around here. I’ve got pictures of it somewhere. I think I might be able to find them later, yes.

And what, what were the differences for you in your lifestyle when your family moved to Sydney?

27:30 Well even in Sydney we found a spare block of land and my father had a house cow. And my father and my brother used to go out and have to milk it every day. He and my father would go to work and my brother growing up, he was in his teens and he had to milk the cow. And he’d spend too much time around there, talking to the girl over the fence there.

28:00 And one day a, a chap landed in the paddock in an autogyro aircraft. And he was running short of petrol and he said to my brother, “You go up, take this drum up to the garage and get me some petrol and bring it back and I’ll give you a ride.” And he did. And from then on my brother wanted to be a pilot, which he eventually became a pilot for the rest of his life. Getting back to what I did in those days,

28:30 I had a motorbike to go, we used to catch… We lived at Gladesville and I used to catch the tram into Ultimo where I went to the college at night and to go to work. And eventually I got a motorbike to go to work. And I bought a hydroplane boat with a little outboard on the back and the little hydroplane would go about thirty mile an hour on the water. And I used to drive that down

29:00 and the ferry boats going to Manly, I used to go round and round them. I’d group up with some other friends on little hydroplanes too, but fairly fast little boats. And the waves from the ferry would be, oh, that high and we’d skim over the top of those for a bit of sport. That’s what I remember my Sundays down there.

And tell me a bit about the work that you were doing when you first moved to Sydney?

29:30 Well, making casein. We had a room as big as the house, half as big as this house, and we had six big thousand gallon vats. They were long vats, about four foot wide, and during the night they’d fill them up with skim milk. Those days, they didn’t…skim milk

30:00 used to go down the drain before we came and made casein. And these days they don’t waste any of it. It’s made into skim milk, which you pay more for than fresh milk with the cream in it. So we’d leave a certain amount of the whey, or the milk that had soured, in these vats and they’d pump this milk in it during

30:30 the night. They’d bring in milk from all the farms and then they’d put it through the separators and take the cream out of it for making ice cream and butter and things like that. And then they’d run the skim milk into these big vats and we’d come in in the morning and heat it up to a certain temperature. We had thermometers and we’d heat it up to a certain temperature and it’d quickly sour. And as soon as it soured we’d keep testing it

31:00 till it was sour enough. And then we had steam coils and we’d turn on the steam and the steam would heat up the milk, and once it’s heated up it became like cheese, all the solids came to the top and we’d run the whey down the drain. And then once we’d put the water in and washed all the whey out of the solids and we’d

31:30 drain it all off. And then we had a big press, which was quite a large press, and we had a frame we put on the press. And we had slats like that. And it covered the whole area. We’d put that down and put the

frame on, and we'd put hessian all in that, and we'd put all this solid in the hessian and fold it up,

32:00 put another layer of slats on it, then we'd put the frame on again and so we'd build it up in a layer. And then we'd put some heavy timber, quite heavy timber, all over the top of it, with a big piece of timber across it. And then we'd put some big springs, about that size, on it. Then we had a power-driven screw that came down on that and it gradually pressed it and pressed it and pressed it, and all the whey ran out of it, and all the water that was left in it all

32:30 ran out it. We pressed it down and we'd leave it overnight. We'd come in next day and we'd take it all to bits, take all the curds out and then that was put through a hammer mill that smashed it up finely, like fine grains, about the size of rice or a bit smaller. And that was then spread out on trays and we had the trays built up on

33:00 trolleys. And the trolleys were wheeled into a big tunnel. And the tunnel was, oh, it was quite a long tunnel, about a couple of hundred feet, might be three hundred feet long. And a big fan at the end of it driving air over steam coils, which would trickle steam into, and that heated it up. And those trays would come out next morning. That would operate all night. And next

33:30 morning the trays would come out and all dried casein was tipped off and went through a fine grinder that pulverised it almost to a powder. And those days that was used mainly for combs and buttons and things like that. And also for making into paints. And casein was originally developed by my grandfather to use as a size to paint. In those days they had

34:00 butter boxes made out of fairly fine plywood. Have you ever seen a butter box? Well a butter box was about that size and it was made with plywood. Down the edge of the plywood was a piece of timber that held it together on each four corners. And it had a lid that fitted on it. But because

34:30 that was dried timber, the paint would come into the butter from the timber. So they made up this size out of the casein and all the butter boxes were painted on the inside and that sealed the smell and the paint that would have gone into the butter. And of course, then the butter boxes was lined with paper and the butter went into those big butter boxes and that was how the butter was exported

35:00 to Europe.

And how well did you enjoy this work?

Oh well, my father and I would go in early. We'd start work about six o'clock and by ten o'clock we'd be finished. And I had time on my hands so I would take off and I would go either to a picture theatre to

35:30 see a good show, or round to the courts, different courts. I was interested to go and sit in a court and watch people being tried. It was very interesting to me. And I did that quite a few times.

What sort of court cases did you see?

All sorts, all sorts of court cases.

Any particular ones?

I can't remember now, no.

What was your interest in?

Oh, just to see the lawyers at work and then the arguments. I've always been interested in,

36:00 even on the TV now, I'm interested in, I like seeing a lawyer case, the way the lawyers put their cases to one another.

And was there anything particularly distinctive about the way court cases were run in those days, or…?

No, they were just typical court cases. I don't think they're that much different to now. They had a jury and they selected the jury and…

It seems like an interest pastime?

36:30 It was.

And tell me about this education that you were doing in the evenings?

Oh well, that's just… I took up French and I did French. And I did maths, English and geography, just the course that I would have done at school so that I could get my certificate, my Intermediate Certificate.

Well what had prompted you to continue and get your Intermediate…?

Well my mother was a school teacher.

37:00 I think she was behind it.

And so tell me about your decision to not stay with the casein factory and to talk to your uncle?

Well, I didn't want to be a casein maker all my life. So that was why I wanted to do something different. I wanted to get into something where I could see that I could progress and get ahead.

37:30 I had ambitions.

Did you ever think about being a lawyer?

No, no, I knew that I didn't have enough education for that. And I think that would have been too big a job to tackle in those days as far as I was concerned.

And just in terms of having moved to Sydney. What sort of things changed in terms of your social life? Did it expand, or…?

38:00 Not really. I don't think I went out with any girlfriends until I was in the army and I was 21 then. I was friendly with the girls that my sister would bring home, but I never had any inclination to become

38:30 really friendly with them, apart from the company I had with them.

Were there things like social events, like dances and things?

No, I didn't go to dances until I got into the army. We were a very quiet family and we didn't go in for a lot of social life. Although my parents had plenty of friends and we'd go and visit them and

39:00 relatives and people like that. But we didn't go in for a lot of social life like people do now, like going to night clubs and things like that.

And what sort of, I guess 'interaction' is not the right word, but what sort of things did you have to do with Sydney as a city? Did you get to see it much or spend a lot of time?

Oh yes. I used to, my father

39:30 let me drive. I learnt to drive the car in the backyard when my father and mother went for a walk. I used to watch my father driving and I knew how to drive the car. I knew what gears to use and how he used the clutch and accelerator and everything and I was only about ten, I think. When they came home one day and they found the lawn was flattened down, I'd been going back and forward on the lawn and we had a fairly big lawn and they said, "You've been in the car. We shouldn't have left the keys in the car."

40:00 But I could drive when I was 12. When we were in Sydney, at 16, before I got my licence, my father would let me drive anywhere in Sydney. Right through the city and anywhere. He'd, he'd be alongside of me – he wouldn't let me take the car on my own, but. And I went for the, my licence in Parramatta and the policeman said, "All right, away we go." And he said, "Stop on this hill,

40:30 back into the kerb." Backed in. He said, "Righto, start up, go up the hill," and he says, "You've been driving for a while. Away we go, back to the police station. You can drive all right." That's how I got my licence. But I've enjoyed driving and I've driven to Sydney more times than I can count, almost.

We'll just pause there because we're at the end of the tape.

40:57 **- tape ends**

Tape 2

00:38 **Okay. We were just talking about getting to Sydney. What was it like going to Sydney after being raised in the country?**

Ah, we, my father went to Sydney ahead of us. And my mother and the rest of us went down

01:00 by boat. Our furniture was put in a container and we went to Byron Bay and we went out on a jetty. And there was a boat tied up to the jetty and it was going up and down. And the gangway was rocking so much that you couldn't go down a gangway. So they put us in a basket on a winch and they winched us over and dropped us onto the ship in this basket. And it was

01:30 just about dark and we went down into the ship and we had sausages, a meal. And that's the worst thing I think we could have had. And then, I was, the ship, I wanted, this was terrific on a ship. So I get up at the back of the ship and she's under way now, she's going out of the bay and we started going up and down and it was really rocking. And I was taking it quite well.

02:00 So I had enough of being out the back, so I walked around to the side where people were being sick over the rails. I got a whiff of that and then I had to get down to the cabin fast and then was sick for half the trip. And that's how we went to Sydney.

But what was it like in a big city after…?

After being in the country? Oh, we were out in the suburbs and they had trams

02:30 and we used to go out on the trams. I had no trouble getting… I soon found my way round the city. Of course, they didn't have many cars around those days. And we had a car and I can remember having a car nearly all my life, see. And it was during the war days that we even had to, my father had a

03:00 gas charcoal burner on the car and I was putting charcoal in it one day. I opened the thing up and went to see how much is in there and the thing went pop and it singed all my eyebrows and it took the front of my hair off and everything, in one quick pop. And the car would go all right, but it didn't have the power – it'd get you there. Even

03:30 at one stage, my father, the company had a property up at Kulnura where we were growing a lot of oranges and passionfruit, mainly passionfruit. And they cut down a lot of timber and my father was up there helping with some fellows that he was organising to do it. And he made charcoal for the gas burners that we put on all our trucks – the trucks for the company – to run the company's

04:00 trucks around Sydney during the war years when petrol was very tightly rationed. But apart from getting around Sydney, it didn't worry me. I thought it was a big city and I enjoyed all the sights and things.

Well tell us about joining up with your uncle for work. What were you doing exactly?

Well, I'm going to repeat what I said before. That's all right?

04:30 **Yeah, yeah, briefly you said it.**

Briefly, I started off, the early days of signing up at… I would keep any secrets of processing and I was mainly shut up in this room making up the Passiona, which was the main product. And we'd make it up in ten gallon stainless steel drums and put one

05:00 bag of sugar in each drum. I'd make up two drums and I'd put them on a platform and I had an endless chain. And I'd pull them up to a mezzanine floor level and then I'd tip them into a stainless steel tank that was… I could just tip all this juice into… didn't have a pump in those days. Outside the room was a tap with a rubber tube on it and the girls would have these

05:30 26 ounce cordial bottles and they'd be filling them out of this tube. And they'd just go over, fill them all, and another girl would screw the caps on. And then we had a little conveyor belt and they'd go along a bit further and the girl… In those days they wrapped a whole label right around the bottle. And the girls would be pasting glue and the labels and they'd wrap it round and stick it down, and further on they'd pack them in, a dozen to a carton. And they'd fill the carton and take them away

06:00 and stock. And in those days we had a processing plant for roasting peanuts. We had a contract with a firm that made those long bars of toffee with peanuts in them, things like that, and we processed a lot of peanuts for those people. We also had a girl that worked there that made chocolate clusters, peanut clusters

06:30 and raisin clusters. So, when our salesmen went round to the shops selling Passiona, they sold chocolates and peanuts and things like that. That was the very early days. And I know I'd visit this girl making the clusters quite frequently during the day for various reasons. I like chocolate. And we had a little steam boiler that was only about so long, it used to heat up the

07:00 steam to process the passionfruit, see. The passionfruit, we'd always freeze it in four gallon tins. And when it came for… It'd come out of the freezer and next day we'd, overnight it would thaw out. And then we had a sieving machine. There's a photo of it in that book I showed you, that Cottee's book. There's a sieving machine and there's also the vat

07:30 there that we pump the juice into, and then we add the various things to process it. In those days when we had the new factory we had pumps for everything, stainless steel pumps and stainless steel vats, everything was done properly. We even had a big boiler out the back of the plant that supplied steam for… All the jams were cooked with steam in copper vessels. They were jacketed and you could turn on the steam and the steam would blow in there,

08:00 and you'd have so much of the different mixtures in. If we were making strawberry jam we'd have two four gallon tins of strawberries and so many bags of sugar. And then we'd turn on the steam and bring it up to temperature, then. Those days our expert jam maker showed us how to… We had wooden bats that stirs the jam. And we'd dip it in, you'd

08:30 see the jam getting thicker and you'd dip the vat in and you'd cool it a little bit and you'd hold it up. It'd start curtaining – running down in curtains. Once it got to a certain layer of curtains, it ran a certain pace, the jam's ready. Turn the steam off, pull the plug out and the jam would run into a container and it was pumped up for the jam making. And we had jam machines that bottled it and automatic

09:00 labelling machines and everything was so different then when we moved into a bigger factory. And eventually we got thermometers we used to put in the jam and we'd take it up to a certain temperature we knew that was right. And then later on we got onto reflexometers and we'd take a little sample of

jam and smear it on the little reflexometer. I've got a little portable one here as a matter of fact. And

09:30 we'd look through it and we'd see the sugar solid content of the jam and that was ready to cut the steam off and it was ready – it would set nicely. We also put so much pectin in the jam at the beginning and we also put a little bit more pectin at the end. Also, the citric acid went in at the end to make the jam set properly. I'm telling you how we make jam.

That's good. You mentioned like the

10:00 **women in the factory. Were the men and women given specific roles in the factory?**

Oh yes, the women were mainly on the bottling side of it, putting the bottles into the cartons and all that sort of thing. And even the peanuts, we had conveyor belts. After they were roasted, they'd be spread out, they'd be shaken out onto these belts and they'd go past. There'd be a row of women there picking

10:30 out any faulty nuts or anything that was not right – they were all selected. And those early days we made a jelly – it was in a jube form. And it was filled into a little cellophane bag and it was about that size. And people used to use them as a lolly. They used to suck on these or cut pieces off.

11:00 And we used to use fruit. We didn't use many essences. We used the real fruit. And those jellies were beautiful flavour. But we couldn't get enough volume. The housekeeper wasn't content to stir, put the hot water on and stir them until all the jelly melted. If they didn't melt it enough, being in a jube the jelly wouldn't set properly – they had to melt it thoroughly. So we stopped making those and we went into jelly crystals.

11:30 And then we became, I think we were bigger manufacturers of jelly crystals than Aeroplane Jelly. You'd probably still see Aeroplane Jelly around. They still manufacture Aeroplane Jelly. Have you heard the jingle, Aeroplane Jelly? Yes? But we became a very large manufacturer of jelly crystals.

And how was your role changing within the industry?

Well I kept up with all those

12:00 different products. We even developed other new products. By now we had chemists and the chemists used to take samples of all the different products that we were making. We had a laboratory where they'd take it, they'd check all the samples. And even in our Brisbane factory we had chemists who checked everything. One of my uncles developed a drink machine

12:30 which was one of those one gallon jars, turned upside down, with a tap on it. And the tap, when you pulled the tap, it measured so much of the cordial into a paper cup and at the same time it squirted cold water into the cup. So that you'd see this drink machine with two jars and different flavours. One flavour would be orange and the other might be lime. And

13:00 you could take a drink from either one. Eventually we had four flavour machines. And when this uncle of mind, who developed this in Melbourne, came up, he and I worked on developing a soda fountain underneath. We had refrigerators underneath to chill the water, but we developed a soda making machine. That was so you could have water flavoured drinks, or soda flavoured drinks. We had those all through Woolworths

13:30 and Coles, all throughout Australia. But you don't see them any more, they're all gone. And we had our own refrigeration mechanics to service those and go round so that side of the company was growing. This was, this was back in Brisbane. Your questions are mainly on the products, when I was in Sydney before the war, or just after the war.

That's all right, it's okay to

14:00 **digress on a dramatic theme. But I might ask you, considering we're talking about the war, where you were and how you heard the news of war breaking out?**

Ah, I can't remember. All I can remember is that when the Japs came into the war and they were coming down so fast, then I received notification to go back in the army, I remember that.

14:30 I was sent to Maitland and that's where, from there on, I because I was put over with the signals, I became with a corporal with three other signallers and we were a little self-contained unit. And we were sent to one of the… What do you call them? There's different

15:00 parts of the army. I can't quite remember now, but it's one of the… You don't call them battalions – brigades. Anyhow it was a section that was based at Grafton. And we had our own vehicle, we carried our own generator for charging our batteries, we carried our own radio sets. So we were sent to Grafton and we arrived there and

15:30 the person in charge said, "Well you can find your own place to camp and put up your tent to live." And we had our tent and everything with us. And we were regiments. We would supply the information from regiments to divisional headquarters. And so we set up our camp in the centre of the oval in the Grafton showground.

16:00 There was a little hut there and it had power on it. So this was an ideal little shack for listening to our radios. We had to do so many hours on and so many hours off our radio set, so we were working around the clock. And we didn't have any guard duties, we didn't have any mess duties. We'd go across and have our mess with everybody else and go back. If we weren't on duty, we'd read books and sleep and take it

16:30 easy. We didn't even have to get a leave pass, we could leave. The corporal was in charge of us. We could leave when we wanted to. So I enjoyed Grafton very much. It was very… If this was the army, it was pretty good. On duty you're only listening, sending the odd message and it was there, we were listening and we heard the news come through about the Coral Sea battle.

17:00 And oh, I think it was, or was it later? It must have been later, the Coral Sea battle. Because, anyway, getting off that. What I did in Grafton. I'd have leave and we'd go to the dances and that's where I learnt to dance. I got pretty friendly with a doctor's daughter

17:30 and she got a bit too serious for me, so I said, "No, I'm not getting married. I don't want to. I don't want to get too involved." She was keen. She frightened me. And I was brought up strictly to not interfere with girls before you were married and all that sort of thing. And I didn't. And when

18:00 I started going with her girlfriend to the dances, I'd still dance with her. But the corporal took over then and he got very keen and he, he went AWL [Absent Without Leave]. We moved down to Coffs Harbour then and he went AWL to go up and see this doctor's daughter and he lost his stripes because he went AWL, see. But he finished up marrying that girl and they live in Perth right now.

18:30 As a matter of fact, I only found out after the war had ended, when I happened to talk to him on the telephone, he wanted me to join the Z Special Association in Perth. Somehow, it wasn't him, it was somebody else. But I heard he was over there and I heard he was in Z Special. He got into Z Special somehow, too. I don't know how or when. See in Z Special, you signed

19:00 up for 35 years. You can't disclose any information about what you did and what you went through and all the information, so we had to keep our mouth shut. Well then we got up as far as Murgon and it was then we heard that the Coral Sea battle was on and we were there to defend Brisbane with the 3rd Armoured Division.

19:30 We had big general grand tanks and white scout cars that we used to go out and go cross country. We had half a dozen of these scout cars and we'd go cross country. We had some enjoyable trips in those. We'd call in a town about five o'clock in the afternoon and the girls would turn on a dance for the night. And we didn't have to have an evening meal. They'd bring so much supper that we were well fed the next day even. But getting on from there.

20:00 **I might ask you actually before we move too far ahead about those years when Germany, before Japan entered the war, when Germany entered the war. Now you said you can't remember exactly when that first war was declared in 1939, but what were you doing at that time?**

I was

20:30 working for the Cottee company, I was making the Passiona up for the girls to…putting it up for them to bottle.

Did you consider joining the army at this stage?

No, I was… I had to join, you know, it was compulsory training.

Tell us what this was about and how this worked?

Ah, well, I had to go up to,

21:00 I've forgotten where we went to. We were stationed up near, not Penrith – Liverpool, Liverpool Barracks there. And we went to Liverpool Barracks and because I had a driver's licence and a truck driver's licence, they said, "All right, you're a truck driver."

Just hold that for a sec.

We were saying that I was

21:30 a truck driver. Before I became a truck driver, we learnt how to present arms and clean rifles and do the regular army drill, such as route marches and all that sort of thing. And then, because we were engineers, we went out on different stunts, blowing up stunts, learning how to use gelignite and not to rub your forehead with it. And you get an awful headache if you put gelignite on your forehead

22:00 or your head.

Did you ever do that?

No, no. And then we built, we had pontoon bridges, we built across creeks and we did a lot of driving in blackouts and things like that, with just a tiny pencil light coming out of our headlights and a tiny light

at the back. And I thought it was a waste of time this army business. And that's why I thought,

22:30 "Well, how can I get an exemption?" So I got an exemption and went into the Marconi School of Wireless to learn. I said, "I'll be a ships operator, rather than in the army." That's how I went and got Morse code. And that's how when the Japs came back into the army, Japs declared war, they didn't declare war, they started the war. And that's how I finished up back in the army and that's how I finished up in the signals, because of

23:00 my ability to send and receive morse code.

Well tell us about this school, this Marconi.

Oh, it was probably about twenty students in it. It was up in the top of Wynyard House, up over Wynyard Railway Station in Sydney. And they taught us the morse code – it was a lot of practice and learning. And they were then taught us the theory of radio sets and all about radio sets.

23:30 **What did you have to learn?**

What goes in, what's in a radio set and what makes it work.

And what radio sets were you using?

They were all valve sets. They were mainly simply little sets. We even made crystal receivers and things like that. But they were mainly basic. They were simple little radio sets that just… Really

24:00 the theory of how, what makes radio work. And they were all valves, there was no transistors in those days. They were all valves and transformers and things like that, mainly battery sets.

How proficient were you becoming?

Well I could send and receive twelve words a minute, which was, in the army, that was pretty good.

Did you think that you'd be sent to fight overseas

24:30 **at all, at this stage?**

Well, at this stage, I was still in, 'chocko' [chocolate soldiers, militia] they called them. And it was when I was at Coffs Harbour that they asked for volunteers to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and I thought, "Well, if I'm in the army, I'd sooner be in the AIF than being a chocko." And I said, "I'm happy

25:00 to go where the army send me and I'm happy to be in the signals." I'd like to, I didn't want to be in the infantry. The signals was what I was happy to do and I'd do my share in the army in the signals, so I joined the AIF and got an NX number 151354, I think it is.

And what kind of expectations did you have once you'd joined the AIF?

25:30 Didn't think about it. We were there up in Murgon, defending Brisbane and then when this officer came and picked us out for special operation, I thought, "Oh well, this is better than being in the infantry. I'd sooner specialise in something special." And of course, once they got us down to Milton tennis courts we then had to sign this Official

26:00 Secrecy Act and I thought I was in for something more interesting. And when the officer said he was volunteering for going, something overseas, I said, "Well I'm for it. Let's go."

Well tell us about this work you were doing at Murgon defending Brisbane. What were you told about what you were doing here?

That's all we were told – we were there to defend

26:30 Brisbane.

Did you think that Brisbane would come under threat at the time?

Ah, well, everybody did, yes we certainly did. The Japs were bombing [Port] Moresby and bombing Darwin. We thought, "Well, they'll be down here shortly. We'd better be ready for them."

Did you ever hear it referred to as 'The Brisbane Line'?

Oh yes, it was called the Brisbane Line, definitely.

27:00 **What did the men think of this policy?**

Well, we were here to defend Brisbane and that was our attitude. We were there to help keep them from going south.

Did anyone discuss the fact that it wasn't further north, that it was…?

No, no. When you're that… By now I was a corporal at Murgon.

27:30 After I joined the AIF they made me a corporal, that's right, I got a promotion. And it was never

discussed. Probably the majors and the generals and the things, they did all the discussing. We were only the troops. We just did as we were told. That's

28:00 all that we were doing. In the army, you do as you're told. If you don't do it, you get punished.

How were you set up to defend Brisbane, exactly?

Very poorly. We had these General Grant tanks and I don't know – if the Japs had come down with all the aeroplanes and thousands of Japs, I don't know how we would have got on. Because

28:30 being in the signals, we were with divisional headquarters by now and we didn't know what all the other units were doing. We didn't know how well they were trained or anything. We were just the communications people. We'd go out and if we were on some stunt, we'd climb up a telephone pole and hook into the lines and talk to the girls on the switchboard and get a line back

29:00 to our divisional headquarters if our radios were out of range or something like that. We got up to all those sort of tricks. We'd get to know the girls on the exchange because some of our fellows used to man the divisional head office signals, telephone boards, where you plug in all the different plugs, like this sort of thing.

Would you flirt with them?

Over the

29:30 telephone, yes, and try to meet up with them eventually. Those were the fun days.

What were some of the methods used?

Oh, I wasn't very good at that sort of thing so I don't know. I think, some of, especially the married men that were in there, they knew everything and they got up to all the tricks. See us single fellows were learning fast. But I didn't

30:00 get up to that sort of nonsense much.

And how was it set up exactly, like how were defences set up and the whole thing arranged?

I don't know. You ask some of the people out on the edges with all the weapons and the guns. Although we all had a rifle each, but not many bullets. Because the sigs [signals] had to be able to fight if the

30:30 front line couldn't hold it and they got through. It was our turn to get in and defend everything then, see. So we had to back up the infantry. But I don't know how well they were fortified and how well they did those things. You'd have to ask some of the higher ups in the army. Have you come across any of them yet? You have? Some.

Now and then. Well tell us how you were set up, like

31:00 **just living wise and the communication?**

Oh, we lived in a tent. We'd go to the mess. We never did any mess duties, the same as when we were out at Coffs Harbour. By now I'd had my own fold up stretcher. And I had a little car radio because I had plenty of batteries to couple up onto, so I'd lie in bed and read books and listen to the radio. And it was a

31:30 comfortable life in the army. Didn't do any route marches. If we went out, we went out in our armoured scout cars.

Sounds good.

Yes, yes, it was good. Gets better as we go along, too.

Did you get any leave or time off?

Ah, no, I can't remember getting leave. And

32:00 the first leave I got was when I got into Z Special and I was going overseas. They gave me a bit of home leave.

What about your mates at this stage in the communications, in the signallers, did you have some good mates?

No, I never really get close to any. None of us got very close. We were, see we moved around a fair bit because the

32:30 the fellows I was with in Grafton, they disappeared. They went somewhere else. And although we were with divisional headquarters, we were sort of in separate little groups. We'd always go in the same scout car with the same sergeant or lieutenant.

33:00 And I suppose we'd... See, being in sigs, you're on duty 24 hours of the clock; you take your shifts. And so you'd be meeting different fellows all the time. You'd never... I'd be off duty and I'd be either sleeping

or listening to the radio or reading a book. And not going on leave together, we didn't get to know one another much.

33:30 I've never, haven't got any of this, I've never been in contact since I've been out of the army, never, never met them again. Oh one fellow, when I was at Port Macquarie, we were at Port Macquarie at one stage, or no, near Port Macquarie. What's that place near Port Macquarie? Anyhow, it's just inland from Port Macquarie. No

34:00 I'll think of it, my mind will bring it back shortly. And he was in the same tent as me and when I went to a Z Special reunion in Melbourne, this name came to me, this Laurie Black. There was an article in the local paper by Laurie Black and I rang him up, got his phone number. I rang him up and I said, "Are you the Laurie Black that was in Coffs Harbour?" Not Coffs Harbour,

34:30 it was near Port Macquarie. "Were you in a camp near Port Macquarie?" and he says, "Yes." And I said my name and he says, "Yes, I remember you." I said, "How did you finish up in Z Special?" He said, "I was picked for it." He was a radio man too, you see and he was picked. See, the Z Special

35:00 was comprised mainly of commandos, that had had action or had been trained as commandos. And because there wasn't enough signal people in those sort of fellows, they grabbed signallers from all different directions. So, because the 3rd Armoured Division was winding down they helped themselves to signallers. And

35:30 we had very little training other than we were trained as signallers. And each one of those men that we were taken, there was six of us, three operatives who knew the country well in Borneo, they had to have a radio man with them, each one of them. Because they go on different directions, they had to have communications and they weren't trained in signals. And they had to have people who could put the signal into cipher and radio it back to a base camp, or even radio it back to

36:00 Australia. And that's why we were taken from signal training, or signal operating unit, straight into a commando type of action. I think we were fairly well selected because they even checked up my civilian background, they visited my parents and found out what sort of family I came from. They must have done

36:30 some research because my parents said they were interviewed when I joined this Z Special Unit.

Well tell us about how you received the news that they wanted you in the Z Special Unit.

Well, I thought, "This was interesting, I'm to be moving onto something different." I was young and full of, keen for adventure. Something different in the army. And we were put

37:00 on the train. The trains were pretty slow in those days. We came down, we arrived at the station at Roma Street and we were given a telephone number to ring. We rang up and an army car came and picked us up. No more riding around in trucks, we were treated to army cars now. Then we were taken out to Milton tennis courts and we were treated as special, specialists. And

37:30 this, I approved of this, enjoyed it.

I might have missed it, but how exactly had you come to join it? Did you volunteer or did they select you?

We were selected. And then when we got down here, we went through this special course that the officer had for us and we learnt all about different types of radio sets. And more different types of cipher work. Then we were

38:00 asked to volunteer.

So tell us about what happened at the tennis courts?

Ah, well I spent it must have been six weeks, this course that I did, and then this lieutenant who had originally picked us out picked another chap that I was friendly with and myself. He was a much more

38:30 highly trained signaller than I was because he'd learned radio work from when he left school. And he was servicing radio sets in Melbourne – he was a Melbourne fellow. And we slept in the tent

39:00 with these, a British Army major, a British Army captain, an Australian Army captain and the lieutenant Australian Army. Because we volunteered, we were made sergeants straight away. And I thought, "This is getting better," and I approved of that. We were made acting sergeants, that's right. And eventually when we were overseas,

39:30 we were made full sergeants. But we lived in this tent, we dined together. We got up early of a morning and we ran round the streets, around Milton tennis courts, around the different areas early in the morning, just at daybreak. We were getting fit, as we were told. And that's all the training we did.

Just pause there because we're close to the end of the tape and Naomi [interviewer] will take it up.

39:59 **- tape ends.**

Tape 3

00:36 **Okay, during the six weeks that you spent at the tennis courts in Milton, tell me about the kinds of things that you were being instructed on, to do with the radios?**

Mainly the different types of radio sets, how they operated and how to maintain them.

Well take me through the different types of radio sets.

01:00 Well, there's an ATR-4 which was normally used by the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] with, we were going to use. And another one was a Boston radio trans receiver. Can you hold it for a sec? I've got

01:30 the different, I've got it on, the exact what they are and all about them, if you want that information.

That's okay, we can have a look at that later and maybe…

Yes, okay.

But, I guess tell me about some of things that you remember about maintaining the things that you'd been to.

Oh the importance was to keep the humidity out of the sets. We had silicon gel that we could dry out and put in the sets and that absorbs the moisture. And it was very important,

02:00 we had cases to put them in and very important that they were locked up and kept in these waterproof cases at all times. Because humidity plays, it's very bad on radio sets, it really ruins them in no time. You get shorts in the electrical currents that arc across.

And did you enjoy this sort of…?

Yes, yes.

What was it about it that you liked?

I've always been

02:30 interested in radio. I was interested in being trained as a ship's radio operator. I would have enjoyed that, being a ship's radio operator.

And what did you know about…?

I had a little crystal set when I was a boy and I used to listen into the cricket on my way home from school. Because outside the radio shops, they'd have a loud speaker and the crowd would assemble out there and I'm listening to the overseas cricket.

03:00 **When you were doing this training, what did you know about what the training was for?**

I didn't have a clue. I thought we were going to New Guinea and I thought we'd be operating up there somewhere. And most of the other, well all the other fellows that were with me, did go to New Guinea.

Well, how did you feel about the

03:30 **kind of secrecy that was surrounding what you were doing?**

This is intriguing. This was adventure. I'm on something special.

And at the end of the six weeks' training, what was the process where you ended up volunteering?

Well Lloyd Woods, who was the lieutenant, he spoke to both of us and he had the papers there for us to sign. It was just a case of,

04:00 "Will you volunteer? "Well sign this." That was all that there was to it.

What did he tell you you were volunteering for?

For a special mission.

Do you remember what else he told you? How he worded it?

He didn't tell us, very little, he told us practically nothing. All we knew we were going on a special mission and it wasn't New Guinea. He told us it wasn't New Guinea. And I said, "Well that's good. I don't want to go to New Guinea."

What had you heard about New Guinea?

04:30 Oh, it was dreadful, what was coming out of New Guinea. All those troops that got, fighting a losing battle there in Moresby. Oh it was dreadful.

And so after you signed the papers, what did they do with you then?

Well, we then moved into camps with the rest of the ones that were going away.

And tell me about

05:00 **this group of men that you were camped with?**

Well, Major Chester, he was a former rubber plantation manager in Borneo. And when war broke out, he was a bit of a wanderer around the world. He'd been in South America on cattle ranches and all places like that. And when war broke out, he went back to the Middle East and he joined up the army

05:30 and was in the Abyssinian campaign and that's where he became a major. And once the Japs came into the war out here, he was keen to get back out here, to get back to Borneo. So I don't know how he managed to get into Z Special. I don't know how he was picked. He probably had… Nobody's going to know now because he's been dead a long while.

06:00 But that was him. The next one was, I just lost his name. Anyhow, he was the former Commissioner of Police in Malaya.

06:30 It'll come to me in a minute. And he had been in Timor with Z Special and he wanted to get back. He could speak both… Lloyd Chester could speak the local language, Malay language, and so, I'll think of his name shortly, this was a British Army captain,

07:00 he could speak the local language. And the next one was Australian Army captain, who was Paddy O'Keefe. He was a man in his 50s, too old for this operation. He knew the country and knew the language – he was a former trader in the area. And then, Lieutenant Lloyd Woods, he'd been in the unit for quite a while, he knew the signals controller in Z

07:30 Special and he wanted to go on the operation because, I don't know his reasons, he never divulged them. And then, Fred Olsen was the other sergeant and myself. Ah, what's your next question?

Well tell me a bit about what

08:00 **these men were like, personality wise?**

Gord Chester was a very wild type, swore a lot. I never swore. My grandparents were and my parents were brought up in the Methodist church and we didn't believe in swearing and I never bothered swearing all the time I was in the army, although I was up against it, all the time.

08:30 And we never swore at home. My father never swore and my mother never swore and we were a family that didn't swear. That's just aside. Paddy O'Keefe, I never knew much about him, didn't get to know much, he was a likeable type of fellow. And I can't think of this fellow's name. I'll have to give it to you later.

09:00 Anyhow, Fred Olsen, he was a friendly type, I was quite happy to be friendly with him. He wasn't as tall as me, a slightly built fellow. What else do you want to know? I can't tell you that much.

Well how did you all interact together, given that there was a major and a…?

Well we called each other by their first names. We discussed things together.

09:30 The major kept things he thought were secret, he kept it to himself. A lot of the despatches that he sent back, I didn't know what he sent in them because he did them all to the lieutenant. He did all the cipher while we were away, mostly. It was just that I was mainly communicating between the beach and the main camp. And we had codes

10:00 we'd use and that we developed ourselves. And if we had a long message we'd put it into cipher, using a book, a little novel to transpose it.

Well tell me how ciphers work?

Ah, well, I've forgotten most of it now because it's something I've just put out of my mind and probably for somebody that knows cipher would say, "Well,

10:30 he doesn't know much." Because I know we used the key numbers, we transferred all… We used numbers for cipher. And we'd have a key number for the beginning and we'd pick out a page in the book. And we'd have, in that key position, it would tell you what page in the book to look for and what paragraph and

11:00 then we'd transpose the words into figures. And it was the figures that we sent. And the other end, they'd read what page in the book and what paragraph and they'd transfer the figures back into letters. It was a simple cipher message. They used the more complicated ones when the next group came out. And I never was shown that one.

And when you were

11:30 **still in Brisbane before you'd gone anywhere, what other sorts of things were you doing, any extra training and…?**

No, we did our six weeks, then we had this two weeks just living together.

What…

I don't know what we did all day. I don't think we did much. We just read books after we'd run around. But we were

12:00 together all the time. It's hard to remember actually what we did because we didn't do anything of importance or significance. And then I was given, I think it was three or four days' leave in Sydney. And those days I had special pass to go and get on the train, no trouble. I'd hop on the train and went straight down. Got off at Sydney and had

12:30 no trouble. Went and showed my pass in Central Station in Sydney and on the express to Melbourne. Didn't travel on any troop trains. I travelled on the normal express trains.

And was it hard not being able to tell people where you were going or not knowing?

I didn't know anything. I told my parents I'd volunteered for special mission, that's all I knew.

What was their reaction?

A bit surprised.

13:00 A bit taken back. But I'd volunteered and they couldn't… That was it, they accepted it and I was on my way. I arrived in Melbourne, the plane was ready to take off next day, all our stores put on it and away we went. And we stayed the night in Kalgoorlie and went to a dance. And there were more women drunk than sober there. And I thought it was a shocking town. We were dancing around in our

13:30 big boots. And next day we arrived in Perth and the American navy were there to greet us and loaded all our stores on their truck and we hopped into two staff cars and straight into the best hotel in Perth, the Adelphi Hotel, where we stayed three days as a guest of the American office. Yeah, R&R [Rest and Recreation], hotel.

And…

And then one night we went down and boarded a

14:00 submarine and that's the first I knew I was going on a submarine.

What sort of…?

I thought, "This is great. I'll explore this thing. This is adventure, this, going on an American submarine. Not many people get this opportunity." I was young and after adventure.

Well, just before we talk about the submarine, what sort of uniform and equipment had you been given? Any different to…?

14:30 No, I didn't know what equipment we were getting. I didn't know what even radio sets we were getting. I didn't know a thing.

Well, describe…

We were dressed in ordinary army uniforms.

Was there any particular markings or badges or anything for special forces?

Well, we didn't carry our rank. We didn't have our sergeant stripes on. We didn't carry any rank.

15:00 Just a slouch hat and shorts and shirts and socks and boots – that's all there was to it.

And what was the general issue sort of things you had in your bag? For example, things like mosquito nets?

No, nothing.

So what sort of…?

That was in the stores. When we opened

15:30 up when we got there, that's the first I saw of them.

So what sort of things did you have in your bag?

I had a New Testament that my aunt had given me. And just my shaving gear and very few personal items. I think it was just my shaving gear. I didn't have any money, didn't have a pay book.

16:00 I had nothing.

Why didn't you have a pay book?

Well it was kept here, all my money went into my bank.

And what sort of a plane did you fly on?

A DC-3.

What was it like?

Well, it was… Have you ever been on a DC-3? Well there's a row of seats each side, they carry all the cargo in the

16:30 middle. There's a row of seats each side and they're just aluminium, just shaped like a seat, you just sit there. And it's not air conditioned, it's cold when they get up high, hot when you get down low. But it was interesting. We landed at Adelaide and refuelled and then refuelled at Kalgoorlie, then we

17:00 landed at Perth.

Why did you fly to Kalgoorlie?

Didn't have enough petrol to go any further. Good question.

And tell me about this dance in Kalgoorlie that you…?

What can I tell you about it? I don't think I danced with any of the women, I just watched. And some of the others danced, I think. We went along to see what was going on, that's

17:30 all. The nightlife in Kalgoorlie.

And how were the women behaving?

Oh well, they were dancing with the fellows and just, being like merry, and some of them were drunk and they'd fall over on the chairs and things. But they were a tough lot.

What gives you the impression that it was such a tough sort of place?

18:00 Well to see all these women, drunk at a dance. I didn't see much of the town. We sort of landed and we went in, stayed the night at a hotel and away the next morning.

And how many days did you spend in Perth?

Three days.

And what did you do for those three days?

Stayed in a hotel. We weren't

18:30 allowed to go out. We just camped there for three days.

And you mentioned it was a nice hotel?

Oh, beautiful hotel, yes. The food was wonderful. I said to my, Fred Olsen, "This'll do me for the army. This is good service." You get royal treatment.

And how close did you feel to the

19:00 **other men in your team?**

Ah, close to Fred and Lloyd Woods, I was fairly close to him. And it's on the tip of my tongue that other fellow. Paddy O'Keefe, I was pretty friendly with him. Oh, I was friendly enough with Gord, but he was a bombastic, typical British Army major type. Rough

19:30 diamond, I suppose.

And what sort of things would you do to entertain yourselves during these three days?

I've forgotten. Three days went very quickly because I didn't know what was going to happen or where we were going or what was going to happen. Oh, I suppose we listened to the radio and read books and just lounged around.

And tell me about this night when they put you onto the submarine? How did they

20:00 **give you your orders that you were…?**

Well, they said, "Right, we're going." And we went down, got in a car and the next thing we were at the jetty. And the next thing, I could see it was a submarine because there wasn't much of it above the surface. It's down low and the deck's just above the water level. And we went aboard,

20:30 and we were given a bunk to sleep on. I've forgotten whether we were even given a bunk. Because I don't think the sailors were all onboard because, I think we did have a bunk, that's right. And next day the rest of the crew came on board and away we went. And we got outside the heads and they were playing around with a Dutch cruiser. And they were trying to find us, they were sending out their ping

21:00 device, sonar. And you'd hear the ping hit the submarine and knew they were tracking it down and they'd come over and they'd drop some explosives around, small explosives to see if they were finding us. And once they'd found us, the crew sent up a little smoke signal to say they were right on us. And a few hours of that and away we went.

21:30 We went up to Exmouth Gulf, which is half way up the West Australian coast. There was a Dutch tanker there that the submarines coming down the coast would unload their surplus oil there. And when we left Perth, we went…about four tankers full of oil and we topped off at Exmouth Gulf, so we had full tankers to go further north. And them we went through Lombok Straits up to,

22:00 past Indonesia, and we had to go up through the night on the surface because it's a very strong tide rip through there and the submarines prefer to go through quickly on the surface, which they can do about 25 knots flat out on the surface. So they probably cruise through at twenty knots, which is fairly fast for a submarine. And you could see the lights of Lombok there, the Japs had the lights on.

22:30 And we went up to the bottom of the Celebes and unloaded 12 magnetic mines because the Japanese ships were coming down past Borneo and heading for New Guinea, their supply ships. We put 12 magnetic mines around there and then we continued up on our way – it took us two weeks. Oh, they had installed a four inch gun on the submarine, formerly had a three inch one, but in Perth they put a four inch gun. And we

23:00 came across a fair sized sailing boat and up went the Japanese flag. So they put one shot over the bow, one shot this side, one shot in the middle and blew it up. And they tried out their gun and they were very happy with it. We got up to the equator and they had us all up on watch, we were on the surface, it was daytime. They cruised all the way through the night-time on the surface, charging their batteries.

23:30 At night-time, it was early in the morning and we were just about to cross the equator, so they had us up on deck, we didn't know this. And they sounded the diving alarm and we knew that they had to get in fast once that diving alarm sounded. And there's a hole about this big, with a vertical ladder down it. And what you do, you hook your feet around the ladder. When we went up on deck they said if you had to come in fast,

24:00 you've got to hook your feet around the ladder, hang onto that and slide down, you don't climb down. And there's two fellows there waiting to pull you out of the road. So you come one after the other, bang, bang, bang. And the last one of the crew, last fellow in, slams the hatch up and then you go down through the next lot of ladders, you climb down and then they shut that hatch too. So you're then down in the operation room where the periscope is – they send the periscope up when they want to and all that sort of thing.

24:30 But I explored the submarine from one end to the other and I got friendly with one of the torpedo fellows in charge of the torpedo section. And he wrote a letter to my parents, which I've got a copy of it somewhere, saying that he'd met me and he wanted to find out what happened to me after the war had ended. He wanted me to get in touch with him. That let them know that

25:00 I had been on an American submarine. So that wouldn't mean much to anybody, would it? It didn't avoid the secrecy or anything, but it was good for them to have, anyhow.

And tell me about what it's like travelling in a submarine?

There's not much room. The American submarines are much better

25:30 fitted out than the British ones. We had sponge rubber bunks to sleep on. They were hot bunks because there's not enough to go around. So there's always a third of the crew on duty. And so the empty bunks are taken up by the ones that are not on duty. So you'd eventually have a different bunk round. But they had a little fan on it and a little light, a reading light and a little air conditioned blast blowing

26:00 on you. It was air conditioned so you didn't use sheets or anything. You didn't get your pyjamas on or anything like that, you could stay in your clothes. You'd lie down, have a sleep and you'd get up. The food was marvellous – they lived very well on American submarines. You had roast turkey every Sunday. And fresh bread every morning. And of course, just coming out of Perth, they had plenty of ice cream

26:30 and all the fresh vegetables and milk and oh, it was just like being in a good hotel. There wasn't much space. There was only, in the ward room, about this area that's in, that area of our bedroom, our lounge room here. Where they had two tables and you could sit about ten around each table. There's eighty of a crew in a submarine.

27:00 So you rarely have your meals in turn. The cook's quarters was an area you could probably fit two pianos into it, that's about the size of it. He did very well to do all the cooking there and supply good meals.

And what sort of things did you do to fill up your days?

Oh, we'd sit around,

27:30 talk to the crew. They had a jukebox where they played tunes and some of the tunes I've got them on a tape now, that if I hear that tune, I feel as if I'm back in the submarine.

What sort of songs?

Oh, I don't know the names, but they were popular tunes for that day, you know, with melody in them. They weren't these rock and roll ones. And, oh, they weren't jazzy ones, they were just melody

28:00 tunes. And we could explore, we could from one end of the submarine to the other. You'd have to climb through the different sections where they had doors they could close off each compartment. I'd stand and watch them in the control room for a while. They'd generally have two fellows there that were actually controlling the submarine, it's depth and where it's going and everything.

28:30 And I've seen them put up the periscope, view the periscope. Actually, once we got to Borneo we sat on the bottom all day and each one of us, of the six of us, took it in turns to have a look along the coastline. We watched that for an hour or so to see if there was any activity there or if anybody was living on that part of the coast where we'd picked to go in. There was no activity.

29:00 Do you want me to go on from there?

Well I want to ask a little bit more about life on the submarine. Tell me about what your observations were of how the American crew were, how they behaved and…?

They were all, they behaved well, like any good sailor. The submarine crews are very… They were picked men from the navy

29:30 for that type of work. Actually, I'm reading a book that's just been released on the Trident submarines. The reporter went aboard and he lived with them for three months, while they were under the sea for three months, and he describes everything about all their duties, how they lived, what they ate. And I'm half way through the book and it's very, very interesting. So I've got

30:00 other books back in there, in my library, on submarines. I've taken a real interest in submarines, still now.

And tell me what it's like. Is there any element of, I guess, claustrophobia or knowing that you're…?

Some people would find it claustrophobic because there's not a lot of room. It's only about eight, you can touch the ceiling, the top of it. And it's,

30:30 you walk along a corridor and there's all electrical wiring and everything, and on this other side there's all equipment and there's various little places that they go into, such as the radio room where all the radio technicians work. There's the captain's room and the officers have different little rooms, but not many, only the senior officers. And the crew,

31:00 their bunks. Well I was bunked just behind the where we ate. But even back in the torpedo section, back aft, in the forward part, they had bunks under the torpedoes and they'd sleep with the torpedoes above them. They were crammed in everywhere. They used every space that's possible, other than the walking space.

31:30 **And tell me, what it's like when you're up on the deck of the submarine?**

It's lovely. I spent a few hours up on deck on duty at night-time. They gave me a section of the compass to watch with a powerful pair of field glasses. And before we went up, an hour before, they'd switch all the bright lights off and they only had little red lights on. You could see your way around in the submarine, but they were all red. This was so your eyes get used to

32:00 looking into the dark. And I had this section of the compass up there and it was lovely. The submarines flowing through the water at a good pace and the phosphorus was showing, I'd say it was a metre from the submarine, with a glow of the phosphorous in the water – it was fascinating. And there'd be flying fish, you'd see them fly

32:30 over. And actually some flying fish landed on the deck of the submarine and they collected them and they cooked them to eat. But they'd skip from wave to wave and you could see them, but in the moonlight you could see them.

And you mentioned before that the submarine would come up to the surface during the night to recharge its batteries?

It'd be on the surface all night, charging its batteries.

How did that charge its batteries?

Well the diesel

33:00 engines that are driving the submarine along are used. They're driving a generator to charge all the batteries as well. And as soon as the submarine dives, it's on batteries. Whereas the Trident submarine, this one I'm reading about, is an atomic reactor that makes steam and steam drives, you know. Steam drives the propellers and generators

33:30 for charging batteries.

And were you keeping an eye on, like were you starting to form any ideas of where you were going at this stage?

No, I didn't know where I was going. And it wasn't until I was on the submarine that the major told us where we were going.

Well, what did he tell you?

He said, "Well you're going to Borneo." I said, "Oh, that's almost to Japan. That's a long way." That was all my reaction.

And did he give you any

34:00 **information about what you'd be doing there?**

No.

Do you think maybe he should have?

I think he should have been a bit more, should have given us a bit more idea what was going on.

What were your…?

I think the SAS [Special Air Services] fellows knew a lot more than we knew in those days. They're given a lot more information.

What were your feelings about what you were heading into?

34:30 I didn't have any real feelings about it.

Was there any feelings of anxiety or…?

No, no feelings of anxiety. All these fellows on the submarine, if it's safe for them, it's safe for me. That was my attitude. I didn't feel claustrophobic or anything. I enjoyed having a look around. I even went down to the engine room and had a look at their engines.

How about when you thought about what you might be doing in Borneo?

I didn't have a clue what I'd be

35:00 doing. I knew I was being taken along to do radio work. But I didn't have a clue what it would be. I didn't know whether we were going to mix with the natives or what. Wasn't told a thing.

And did you suspect that you might have contact with Japanese or…?

Oh, well we knew we were going in amongst the Japanese, yes, yes, fully expected that.

So how did you react to that?

Well, I'll see it when it happens.

35:30 **And would you talk amongst the other men about…?**

No, we didn't even discuss it.

And you were just telling me a little bit earlier about when you put the magnetic mines out?

Yes.

Tell me about the process that the submarines…?

Well, they're in the torpedo tubes, they put them in the torpedo tubes and they fire them out and they use compressed air. The torpedo tube has

36:00 a trapdoor on the end that lets them out into the water. Well that's blown open with the compressed air. They put high pressure compressed air into the tube where the mine is and it blows it out. The same with a torpedo – they're blown out.

And how long did this take?

Oh it must have

36:30 taken, I don't really recall but it would have taken a few hours to do that. Because once they've blown the ones out, they only have six tubes in the rear and four in the front, from my memory. Or was it four in the front and six in the…? Four in the rear and six in the front, well probably more like it. And they'd

have to use

37:00 winches and things to load the thing – they're pretty heavy things these mines. So they'd blow one out and they'd be busy loading another one up and getting the next lot ready.

And is there a reaction within the submarine when they use the torpedo?

Yes, you can, you get a sound in the submarine as they're going off.

What did it sound like?

It's hard to remember.

37:30 We knew, it went sort of pop, you know. It's a bit of a bang and it's gone.

And this occasion when the submarine got to try out its new gun on the ship that you encountered…

Yes.

Take me through how the contact was made with this ship?

Well, we were on the surface and the captain saw it and

38:00 they were going to pull alongside of it and see what it was all about. I think the matter of fact it ran the Japanese flag up straight away was all they needed. They thought, "Well that's a Japanese under command, that one. Well, we'll finish it off." I don't know what they thought; it wasn't my privilege. All they did. All I knew

38:30 was that the sailors told me that's what happened.

And what was the reaction like on the submarine when the four inch guns fired?

Oh you could feel the tremor go through the submarine and you knew something had happened. But I didn't know they were shooting. I didn't know until they came down and the fellows who'd been up on deck told me what had happened.

And did you get to see the ship sinking?

No,

39:00 I didn't. They would have taken photos of it. They'd take photos of these things.

And what was the reaction like amongst the crew?

Oh, happy as, they were, achieved a good result with the gun. But that would have been just the gunner crew up top. Everybody else down in the submarine, you don't know what's going on. You only hear about it later.

Was there any survivors picked up?

No, we

39:30 went on our way.

We'll just pause there because we're at the end of the tape.

39:38 **- tape ends.**

Tape 4

00:39 **Okay. All right. Well talking of the submarine trip, take us through the journey you left from Australia to Borneo. What was it like? How did you do it? Take us through this submarine journey.**

Well, I've really given it all already, really.

Okay. Yeah, right.

You find some other questions.

Okay.

01:00 **Just tell us, did you have to cope with any strong tides or rips?**

Only through the Lombok Straits.

What was that like?

Well the submarine went through on the surface. And I didn't even know it was going through until the crew had told me.

Well tell us about this arrival. You talked a bit about being on the bottom all day. But describe for us what exactly was happening here.

Well the submarine

01:30 was on the bottom to give us a chance to see if there was any activity on the land before they... The next night, we went ashore.

Well tell us, how far away from the shore were you?

Oh, I'd have to look at my notes. I think it was, it could have been close on a mile. It's a fair way off shore.

02:00 **Was it easy to see what was happening on the island?**

Oh yes, you've got powerful, they're like a powerful telescope, the lenses on the periscopes.

How long all up would you say that everyone looked to see if there was activity?

Ah, I suppose we spent nearly an hour each looking through the periscopes. We may have had it

02:30 in half hour turns or something like that, so we didn't... We just wandered the periscope up and down the coast, looking at it and seeing if there was any other activity, small boats and things around.

Were there things that you were looking out for in particular?

Mainly activity, mainly personnel.

And after everyone had checked for a while, what sort of discussion did you have?

We didn't.

03:00 No discussion. I've done my duty, that was my turn. All I'd say to Gord Chester, "Well, I didn't see anything, any activity."

Well tell us though, how you were briefed before you left the submarine?

How we were briefed before?

Yeah, yeah, like how did you discuss what you were going to do?

03:30 Oh, from, oh. Well they said, "Right, we're going." So we go up on deck and the crew bring up all our gear. We had a six man rubber boat, an ex-RAAF boat and two five man rubber boats. So a lot of the gear went into the

04:00 six man rubber boat and some gear went into the two others. Then the submarine releases the pressure that's in the ballast tanks of the submarine and it goes off with this terrific roar, this air pressure coming out and in goes the water and the submarine slowly sinks. And they

04:30 sunk it down far enough, low enough, so we floated off. So then we were caught. The tide started whipping us along and in no time we were away from the submarine. And there was a good tide rip running down the coast there. It runs about six knots around the coast of Borneo, five or six knots, depending on the tide and the time of the day really. And we could see we were going to lose one another, so we immediately

05:00 got, we rowed, we got together and tied all the boats together in a long procession. And then we all headed for the shore. And of course we went down the coast a bit, but we fought the tide a bit and then we landed on this sandy beach. And a few yards and it's all jungle. It was, in this particular part where we

05:30 landed, was mainly mangroves. We landed on a little sand spit really. Because the other side of it was water. We were on a little bit that was out of the water and there was mangroves beyond us. Because it was a very uninhabited part of the coast. And we unloaded all our gear and we turned the big boat upside down because by now it was raining and we all got under the boat.

06:00 And the major bought out a bottle of rum and he says, "Have a taste to warm you up." And we all have a swig each and we laid there till morning, wide awake. And there were fireflies there. I could read my watch by the light from the fireflies, they just lit up, up around, lit up beautifully. I'd never seen anything like it. Next morning, we…

06:30 I'm still trying to think of that fellow's name. I should go and read it when I'm stopped. I'll do that next time if I think of it. He and I went north to look for a suitable creek and Gord Chester and the others went south. They found a river,

07:00 probably about twenty yards wide. It was like a small stream really, you couldn't call it a river. And we all met back about midday again and decided we'd have to load up our stores again that night and move down to the river. That was the easiest way we could cart this inland because we

07:30 didn't want to be in a mangrove swamp. We wanted a bit of land around us and we wanted to get off the beach and away from the coast. So we knew the submarine was waiting out there for us. If we wanted to get off, we could use our torches to give them a signal. We had code to give them a signal. They have torches that you can use to flash morse code.

08:00 And next morning, we knew the submarine… We were having a bit of a bit to eat, we'd opened one of our food tins, we had all dried food and we were having a few

08:30 army biscuits, I think. And we knew the submarine was still out there and a tanker came over the horizon and it was followed by a destroyer. And we thought we'd see some action because the submarine couldn't have gone. Well they were… We didn't know the submarine was still there

09:00 because by dawn, if they hadn't heard from us, we knew they would have been off. Anyhow, sure enough, there were three explosions, three torpedoes had been fired. One hit the tanker in the stern and sent up a great puff of smoke. And the tanker still drifted. The engine stopped and it drifted with the tide further south. In the meantime, the destroyer

09:30 stayed for about quarter of an hour still and then it started cruising round dropping depth chargers, went on for about half an hour, and then it took off. And by now, the tanker was, the bow was coming out of the water a bit, and it was an empty tanker because it was going down to Balikpapan, which is Dutch Borneo, to load up with oil –

10:00 that was oil wells down there. It drifted over the horizon, but we found out later that it eventually sank. And we know the submarine, after the war, we know the submarine got away because that letter came from one of the crew to my parents. So that was the Kingfisher, USS [United States Ship] Kingfisher that we went up to Borneo on. Now,

10:30 we… Do you want this story about me going up where we went inland?

Sure.

Although it's all there in print.

Oh no, no, no, we want an aural record.

Well, the next tape I'll get some more water.

Do you want some water now? We can…

Oh well.

We can pause for a second if you want some water. Yeah, I think so.

11:00 So, we managed to get our stores down into this creek and we got them inland a bit and we unloaded some because the rubber boats were well down in the water with all the stores on it. In my notes there, it'll give you so many pounds of stores. I should have had my notes with me.

No, it's good just to talk about it, yeah.

Okay.

11:30 So with the boats being lighter, we go up these creeks. For a while we paddle where the water is deep enough. We eventually get inland enough to find it's shallow and we can drag the boats. But instead of going straight inland, we're going like this. The creek goes winding round, zigzagging all the time, so it's taking us quite a while to get inland.

12:00 So we go in far enough, that we'd had it that day. And about, just before midday, it started raining. It rained for two hours – constant, heavy rain. We were in the wet season and it did this every day. Every day it would come over

12:30 about midday and start raining for a couple of hours. So we used to do nothing during that time. So we spent the night on the side of this river bank and I can't remember much about that because it wasn't very important. And the next day we went further and the next day we went further and sometimes we had to unload things to get the boat over some logs and things.

13:00 So we got far enough inland, we thought we were far enough inland, and we then started scouting around and looked for suitable sites to put up our radio aerials. Because we had to use our compass and get the bearing, it's seventeen hundred air miles away, Darwin. So we had to have our aerial so we could get our maximum signal to Darwin.

13:30 And we found a spot where there'd been a few trees had fallen down and it was on a bit of a rise where the jungle wasn't as dense. Up on the tops of these little hills, it thinned out and it was more like heavy forest country in Australia. The royal vines and all the dense jungle was down in the gullies where

they've

14:00 got more water. So we chopped down the smaller trees and we then wanted to get our aerial up as high as we could. So Fred Olsen, being the lightest, he tied a rope around his ankles each side and on his hands and he hooked on the tree there, hung on,

14:30 brought his legs up and held on there and took another hook on up a bit further and gradually climbed up about, I'd say about 25 feet, 25 or 30 feet up and hooked a line up there so we could pull our aerial up. We did that both sides. But cutting into all these saplings and trees and clearing the area our hands, we only had jungle parangs,

15:00 big knives really. Parangs I think they call them. And our hands, we were soft, we were all blisters and sore. We'd worked hard because we wanted to get on that radio and get contact. In the meantime, the others had unpacked one of the boats and rigged it up as shelter for the radio sets. We didn't have any

15:30 tents or anything, so we made a shelter out of one of the boats. And in the meantime, we'd unpacked our jungle hammocks, these American jungle hammocks with mosquito net sides, they're surrounded with mosquito net sides and you zip them, unzip them to get in and zip them up when you're in there so you haven't got any mosquitoes worrying you. And we opened our rations, which was all dried mutton,

16:00 dried carrots, potato, onions, what else? Unsweetened blocks of chocolate, compressed dried fruit, skim milk powder, sugar, pepper and salt, a proper balanced mixture, army biscuits. One four gallon tin was supposed to last a man 18 days.

16:30 So we had enough there for three months, so you can imagine there was quite a number of tins. We had dixies for cooking our meals in and we had matches. Each tin contained tobacco and cigarette papers – they had to roll their own – and matches and things like that. So every time we opened a tin, we had a fresh supply, see.

17:00 And, question?

I was just listening.

All right, let's carry on a bit. We rig up the sets. Now this Boston set, it is equipped with batteries, but we didn't bring batteries. They had to equip them with little batteries

17:30 and a little hand generator that can charge the batteries, but we didn't bring that. We brought a hand generator that was normally carried by the American parachutists when they used these sets. And it's one with handles on it on a tripod, so you'd sit on a food can and you wind it. And the operator presses the keys and we used the AT4A,

18:00 little trans-receivers. They were battery, dry cell battery operated, they were only a set about so big, about that long and about that thick. And they were trans-receivers. But we used them as receivers because they had these dry batteries which lasted quite a long while. And the Boston set was used for transmitting. So they said, "All right, Cottee, you get on

18:30 this and wind it and Fred Olsen, you get on the key and send a message." We had that message already. We went on and we called up Darwin straight away and they came straight back to us. And that was the biggest thrill we'd had on the whole trip – we were in communications. And so we sent the message that we'd landed and we were in Borneo and

19:00 then we got sick. Gord Chester got malaria, I got malaria, Paddy O'Keefe got malaria. What is his name again? Broadhurst, Doug Broadhurst, why am I forgetting it? Doug Broadhurst, he didn't get it because he'd been up in Timor and I think he'd had a touch of malaria and he was a bit immune to it, I think. Fred Olsen

19:30 got it too. The rest of us all down with malaria. The only thing we had to combat it was quinine. We all took quinine tablets and it took a lot of the shivering away from us. It was like a heavy cold and fever; we were all pretty sick with it. So I've forgotten how we managed till we got over that. But I remember

20:00 when we were right again, I used to spend a lot of time with Paddy O'Keefe, the older fellow, the Australian captain. And we were walking through the jungle and we could hear something up in the trees, it was pretty big. And he looked up and he said, "It's an orangutan, one of those wild men from Borneo." And I said, "Oh, how are we going to get on?" He said, "It's all right, he's only following us, he's

20:30 curious, as long as we don't go into his lair where the young are, where his wife is, we'll be right. He's just curious." And he followed us for about a quarter of an hour and I didn't like it at all. Well I had an Austin submachine gun and two magazines with 28 rounds in each, that's all the weapons that I had and that's all we had each. There were a few revolvers with some of them, too. And

21:00 he followed us a while and the he left us, but I saw him anyhow, up the tree. Then another time, Doug Broadhurst, Paddy and I were down at watching on the coast and that's where we spent a lot of our time, the three of us. Because Gord Chester,

21:30 he'd come down occasionally, but he was most of the time up in the camp with the others, the other three, other two, sending messages and things like that. Our three were down on the coast. And we were always hidden in the jungle and we're watching any boats coming up and down, any shipping and anything like that. We heard something coming along,

22:00 grunting and we realised it was a pig. And sure enough, he pokes his head into where we are and two great tusks, a big boar, and they're very dangerous things. I'd been warned about those things, you keep away from those big pigs. And Paddy O'Keefe grabs his submachine gun, he shifted the safety catch and Doug Broadhurst said, "Don't move, nobody move, nobody say anything,"

22:30 and we all froze. Then the pig just grunted and went on his way, didn't take any notice of us, so that was a bit scary. Another time I happened to be going through the jungle by myself and I saw a huge python coiled up and he had something big in him and he was sleeping it off. Another night I remember,

23:00 Gord had us all out of our hammocks and up the biggest tree we could find. He said, "There's a herd of elephants coming through," and he said, "If they come on through our ridge here," he said, "you want to be up the biggest tree." Fortunately they went through on another ridge. And next morning, we could see they'd trampled down all the undergrowth where they'd gone through.

Did you hear them?

Oh yes, you could hear them trumpeting and making a noise. I don't know why they were only around at night-time.

23:30 But there couldn't have been much in the herd – it might have been half a dozen or something like that.

How far inland from the coast, was your set-up?

Well, it was only about a mile and a half really because of these bends in the river. But to find out way back to the coast without going on the creeks, we had to use a compass and we wanted to be able to find our way back to

24:00 the camp. So what do you think we did? We blazed a trail – have you ever heard of that? One stood here and one went as far as he could, so I could still see him, and we cut a nick in the bark in this tree and he'd cut a nick in the bark of that tree. So we've had barks, nicks in the barks of the trees each side, so with line of sight we could just see it. So we marked it all the way

24:30 to the coast. We had to go down through the valleys and we had to cut our way through the royal vines and the thick undergrowth and, oh, it was shocking trying to go through and down across little creeks and things like that. It took us a few hours to get to the coast and a few hours to get back to the inland, although it was only a mile, a mile and a half. I noticed that on the top of the ridges where the undergrowth

25:00 wasn't dense, that's where all the animals went. And I was with Paddy O'Keefe one day and I said, "Let's try going on the ridge using our compass, you know. We won't get lost because we can find our way back because we're using our compass." And it took, we eventually found our way, going on these ridges, down to the coast. And

25:30 I said, "Oh, I can find our way back again. I memorised it," I didn't have to blaze any trail or anything. And we went back and then from then I was teaching all the others this track down to the coast, back and forth to the coast. Because we could get down in probably half an hour, walking on these ridges, it wasn't that far away. So,

26:00 where do you want me to go from there?

Well how did you notice that the animals used the ridges? What did you see?

Well, what they leave behind when they've been eating something. And also the tracks were worn, you know, you could see animal tracks on it.

When you first arrived, how did you make a decision where to set up camp?

We didn't,

26:30 we just went inland and find a place.

What were your objectives of the camp? What did you need?

To get far enough inland to hide our main radio station, that's the objective.

Were you hidden from the creek?

Oh yes, yes, we got far enough away from the creek. But the creek was handy for fresh water.

Did you have to be careful going down to the creek?

No, the creek wasn't that far away.

27:00 You'd just go down to the creek, fresh water.

I guess, I mean, from say, hiding from the Japanese, from having a trail?

We didn't make a track, we just went different ways each time down to the creek, you know. You didn't leave any track, really.

But you did this on purpose?

Yes, yes, we were careful not to leave any.

27:30 See, when we were, the first day we were there – in the books it's written up. Doug Broadhurst wrote a good story about it when he got back, so most of the books have his story and I'm repeating it because it's my version. He said one of the party – and I know it wasn't me – had hung his clothes up in the sun to dry. And some fishermen had come in.

28:00 This is why… The day after we landed, fishermen come into this little bay. No, this was down when we got to the creek, this was down near the creek, see. And the fishermen had come into this little bay and they saw these trousers hanging on and they took off. And we'd seen them come in and we wondered why they'd took off in a hurry. They'd landed, see, and we found the reason afterwards. So Doug

28:30 Broadhurst put it in his notes to make sure, when you land, you don't leave anything around for anybody to see. And that was one thing that Gord Chester emphasised. We even had to walk along the beach with our shoes on and walk on the part where the tide covers. All those things, we took every precaution.

Why did you have to wear shoes?

Boots. You don't go walking around the jungle without shoes,

29:00 we were soft feet. We had American rubber, canvas and rubber boots, laced up and going through the jungle, even walking through any of the tracks, you'd see these leeches and they'd be like a thin, oh, thin as thick cotton and they'd be weaving towards us off the leaves and we'd look down and they'd jump on us.

29:30 And they'd be stuck on there, filling up with blood. And every half hour we'd stop for a smoko, they'd have a smoko, but I didn't have a smoko, I'd chew a bit of unsweetened chocolate or a bit of compressed dried fruit or something. And we'd take our boots off and the ones that were full of blood and fall out of our boots, we'd empty them out. And the ones still on, the fellows

30:00 with cigarettes, we'd borrow the cigarettes and we'd put them on the leeches and they'd jump off. So, that's how we de-leeched ourself.

Did you have to be careful with things like cigarettes and other litter?

Oh yes, very careful, yes.

How would you manage it, how would you?

Well I didn't smoke, so the other fellows, they had to take precautions. I don't know what they did, but they didn't leave anything lying around.

30:30 And they didn't smoke if they knew the Japs were near us because that's a real giveaway. You can smell tobacco, it carries for quite a distance in the jungle.

How was your actual little camp set up?

Oh, each picked a suitable tree to tie our hammocks to and we'd sit around on food tins and there'd be monkeys up there watching us, lots of monkeys. And there'd be

31:00 apes, ones without tails and they'd be swinging around from branch to branch. And at night-time they'd come down and try and fuss around our tins. You'd hear them getting into things. And the wild cats would come in too, at night-time and try and see if there's anything lying around. Apart from that, the jungle is never quiet.

31:30 The daytime there's something always making a noise and at night-time there's lots of noise, lots of insects, chirruping away. In the daytime the monkeys are making noises. When we were near the coast, the monkeys had got used to us and even if a boat came in near the coast, the monkeys would chatter and take off. And after a while we used them as watch dogs because we knew

32:00 this, even if only one of our own fellows was coming. As long as we were sitting down and doing nothing and quiet, the monkeys got used to us. As soon as there was any activity, they took off, they got agile up the top there.

Did you have to be careful they didn't give you away?

No, we weren't worried about the monkeys giving us away.

Did you form any kind of bonds with any particular monkeys, do you reckon?

No, they were wild,

32:30 you couldn't get near them.

What about ones you'd see regularly?

No, you never, there was so many there, you wouldn't know which was which, there were lots of monkey. And occasionally I saw wild pigs and I saw deer, I saw plenty of deer. If only we'd had a telescopic rifle, we could have lived on fresh meat.

Would you have to be careful say, about using a rifle or something, the sound giving you away?

33:00 Well, if we felt we were far enough inland and we knew there was nobody around near our part of the world I would have used a rifle. As a matter of fact, Gord told us not to fire off any revolver shots or any Austin shots, but it was near the end when only Fred Olsen and myself were in the camp. And we knew the others

33:30 were fairly well away, they were doing a bit of recon, recon, what's the word?

Reconnaissance?

Reconnaissance along the coast. And we were inland. And I happened to be walking along and I saw a porker, about that size pig. And I thought, "I need some fresh meat," and I put the submachine [gun] on automatic and I just touched the trigger and I caught him fair in the forehead. I don't know how – I just

34:00 fired it from the hip and I got him. And I pulled a sapling down and I tied his back legs together and I had him up there and run my knife down his middle and gutted him, then I skinned him. And, oh, Fred Olsen was with me and he helped me. And we carried him into the camp where we had our jungle hammocks.

34:30 And we cut him up, we knew we couldn't keep him long, so we kept a few bits to cook on the coals and we cooked the rest in some water. We boiled it up and we lived on it for a couple of days and threw the rest away – we thought it was getting a bit old.

35:00 After we'd been there a few weeks, we started getting messages from Tolitoli, which we could see across, it was the bottom of the Philippines, opposite. We were the most easterly point of Borneo and we were looked across and we could see Tolitoli. Well, there was an Allied intelligence or Americans

35:30 over there on Tolitoli and they were in communications with MacArthur in Brisbane. And we were in communications with our head office in Melbourne. So we sent a message… We bought some supplies for them, some letters and some supplies that they wanted. And we buried them in the sand under a tree and we

36:00 sent a message to them over in Tolitoli that we'd hidden it there. And see, they were supposed to meet us… They had a boat. They were supposed to meet us when we were landing and we would give them these supplies, see. And they had spotted the submarine and they'd spotted one on the surface the day before we were supposed to arrive and they'd followed it.

36:30 And it had gone off. It was a different submarine. And they'd lost us. And, of course, they didn't meet us when they should have. So we sent a message to Melbourne, which was sent to Brisbane and the message got sent back by their radio, across the straits to the Philippines. And they told them that we'd hidden it under a tree,

37:00 in the sand. And we just waited for action, to hear back from them. And eventually they came back via the radio and said they'd found the package and left a note saying they'd found it. We went down, sure enough, they'd left a note on the bough that was

37:30 hanging over and that was shocking – they should never have left a note. Anyhow, they'd got what they were after. And then, through this long network, we eventually got back in touch with them, send a boat over. So they eventually sent a boat over and Gord Chester went back with them. And, as a matter of fact, not only him, it was Paddy O'Keefe and

38:00 Doug Broadhurst went back with them. And they saw a village being bombed by Japanese aircraft. They saw some, some Japanese sailors coming ashore where they were. And Doug Broadhurst was an excellent rifle shot and he opened up with the rifle on these fellows

38:30 that were coming ashore and he killed a few of them in their boat and they took off. They didn't come ashore again. That's in his story, in those notes. But, it's going. They eventually came back and they'd bought a boat. We took a lot of sovereigns with us and we used them to buy

39:00 things because the locals up there, they knew gold when they saw it. Actually we took a lot of sovereigns to take round to the Chinese on the west coast. I didn't know we were going to do that either, but that was Gord's idea. He wanted to get in this part of the coast and then he wanted to contact the Filipino fellows because the west coast Chinese were in contact with

39:30 these Filipinos on, on Mindinayo. So he comes back with a boat and then he comes, he brings a couple of chaps with him. One was a Malay from Borneo that Gord Chester knew in his private life there. This fellow spoke English quite well, he used to…

40:00 He was a good singer.

Oh, your tape's come to the end. Well I think our tape's come to the end as well, just about, hasn't it? Yes, so.

40:13 **- tape ends.**

Tape 5

00:36 **You were saying on the other tape to Kiernan [interviewer] about how you rigged up the radio sets. Can you tell me what your first communication using them was?**

Telling them that we'd landed and we had set up camp.

Take me through the process of how you sent this communication?

01:00 Well, Lloyd Woods, the lieutenant, had already enciphered it and Fred Olsen keyed it. I turned the generator for the power. And every time he pressed a key, I felt the power. It took more power to drive it.

And what more information had you been

01:30 **given about what exactly you were to be doing while in Borneo?**

Still given no information, even when I was there. It was obvious to me we were after intelligence. We wanted to find out what the Japs were doing, but it wasn't discussed; it wasn't told. See as soon as we obtained that boat from Tolitoli, Gord

02:00 Chester had bought this chap that he knew with him that he'd known in Borneo before the war. Well the two of them went up and down the coast and they met a lot of the locals and formed an intelligence gathering section up and down the coast. This other chap knew which ones to see and which ones he could trust

02:30 because he was from the area. And so then we started getting information, but it had to be…Gord Chester had to make different trips up and down the coast to get it.

Where you aware of a name that your group or operation had?

Oh, Python, yes, yes. We were called Python.

You were aware of this?

03:00 Yes.

And during the time before you obtained the boat, what sort of things were you doing on a day to day basis?

Spending time down at the beach and watching the coastline. Usually with

03:30 Paddy O'Keefe and… What's his name again?

Doug Broadhurst.

Doug Broadhurst, yes. Why don't I remember his name? Doug Broadhurst. I know his first name – call him Doug all the time.

And during this time, what sort of…?

He got me into trouble, as a matter of fact.

What did he do?

He wanted to listen to the news

04:00 in London and he used my radio and didn't put it back properly, didn't lock it up again to stop the humidity getting in. And Lloyd Woods found it and I took all the blame.

Did you ever confront him about this?

I never told them, No, I never said anything.

04:30 **What repercussions?**

Which I should have. Lloyd Woods did make a few comments later on that he thought I was a bit careless and I shouldn't have been. I've always regretted not saying something.

What kind of a man was, was Lloyd Woods?

Ah,

05:00 a quiet, efficient type of a chap. He, he was secretary to the Sugar Growers' Association of Queensland after the war. I think he must… I don't know what he did before the war.

And when Doug had borrowed your radio, was this common that people wanted to listen to the news,

05:30 **or…?**

It didn't happen again and I didn't do that as much as I would have liked to because we had to conserve the batteries – we had to look after those batteries.

Was there any particular…?

But Doug asked me could he use it, see. And he was an officer – he was a

06:00 captain – and I let him use it. I suppose I should have told him that it had to be sealed up, to be sure. My fault for not emphasising that it and also the fact that we wanted to conserve batteries, that's our lifeline, to listen to, our receiving.

Was there any damage done

06:30 **to the radio?**

No.

Was there any particular routines that you'd use with the radio? Did you check in at any particular time each day or turn them on?

Not really, we just, any time we had them out of their cases we had to look for moisture and make sure they're not getting humidity in there.

And how often would you be called upon to use the radios to send messages?

07:00 Ah, from the beach, not that often. It was when I started shipping and things like that that I would send a message through.

And who would you send a message to?

To our base camp where Fred Olsen was all the time.

And then what would Fred do with that information?

He'd pass it on to Lloyd Woods and Lloyd Woods would put it in a message and send it off.

07:30 **And this set-up that Fred Olsen had back at base camp, can you describe how that was set up in a bit more detail?**

No, not that, I don't know what we had the sets rigged up on, but we used to sit on the food tins. We must have made some sort of a bench and we had the rubber from the boat over the top of it to keep the water, rain off. That's a long while ago now.

08:00 **And when you'd spend time watching the coast, how long would you spend there?**

Oh, all day.

Would you stay for a few days or?

Yes, yes, we had our food and our tents, our hammocks down there.

And tell me about any sightings that you made of boats and…?

08:30 Oh there was one occasion when, Stan Neill, this is later, when some more fellows came out, the next party came out. Stan Neill and I were walking across a little bay and up to our knees in water and I saw this water snake coming towards us. And I had my big jungle knife out ready to have a go at it and he had a revolver. And he

09:00 said, "No, I want to have a shot at it." And just as it was getting close enough to do that we heard a terrific explosion. We turned around and there's a great column of smoke going up, just over the horizon – a boat had been torpedoed. And there were so many fish that came ashore, that lined the beaches, we had to move inland. We couldn't stand the

09:30 stench. It was amazing how many fish were killed.

Did you get to eat some of the fish?

No, if you use explosives to kill fish it damages the flesh and it deteriorates very rapidly.

What happened to the water snake?

That's right. We looked back to see where the water snake was and it had gone past us.

10:00 We did find some very large oysters, nicer than I've tasted up in north Queensland. They're a tough sort of oyster, but they're very large. I used to eat some of them when I could find them.

Would you go fishing and things like this?

We would if we'd had a fishing line.

10:30 See the next group arrived in about the middle of January and, towards the end of January. And of course, that's another six of them arrived, a major and… You don't want all their names do you? You do?

11:00 Major Bill Jenkins, Stan Neill, Jack Rudrick, John MacKenzie, Bill Brandis. How many's that? Five? Six?

11:30 Bill Jenkins, Stan Neill, Jack Rudrick, Bill MacKenzie. Oh, oh, no.

It's not that important. We can come back and talk about them.

Yes.

12:00 **Just before we talk about the second group arriving, what sort of things would you do to relax when you were at the base camp?**

Most of them played cards but I didn't know much about cards, so I'd just look around the jungle and observe the monkeys and listen to all the insects.

12:30 **What sort of card games would they play?**

I wouldn't know. I wasn't a card player.

And can you describe the feeling of or feelings of isolation that…?

No, I didn't feel isolated. See we were a group and we were never on our own. There was always… Gord wouldn't let us go around on our own.

13:00 We were always in pairs or threes. But I had no trouble finding my way round the jungle. I was quite happy in it and could always find my way back if I went out exploring. But Fred Olsen, if he went out to relieve himself beyond the outskirts of where we were living, he'd be lost. We'd have to give a few birdcalls to bring him back in again.

13:30 Mainly a little cooee or something like that would bring him in.

Would you use bird calls?

Mainly cooees. We'd cooee.

Any other sort of, I guess, communication devices you'd developed?

No, not really because it didn't happen very often.

And were there ever,

14:00 **I mean the group of you spent a lot of time together, were there ever any fights?**

No.

If…

No arguments, no fights.

If someone got on your nerves, how would you…?

I didn't have that trouble. I don't think I got on their nerves and they didn't get on my nerves. No, we didn't have any problems like that.

14:30 **And what sort of hours during the day would be your own time to relax in?**

There was no really regular routine. We'd get up of a morning and make breakfast. I've forgotten what we had for breakfast. It was usually biscuits and

15:00 I don't think we cooked breakfast. Can't remember, although I did it every day. I can't remember the little details about breakfast and the meals and things. I know we had a fairly balanced ration of food until we were being chased by the Japs and we lost some of the rations – they found some of them. So we were on about one third of what

15:30 we were normally eating. So we grew hungry then.

And how would you shower and or wash?

In the creek. We didn't shave, we all had beards, all grew beards. I had a pair of scissors and Fred and I used to cut one another's hair. But the rest of them were…

16:00 I don't remember, Gord Chester, how long his hair grew or Lloyd Woods, but I think Fred and I, we trimmed our beards and trimmed our hair with scissors.

Why didn't you shave?

Well it was better not to. If you nicked your skin you can gets germs there in the jungle and

16:30 it's very hard to get them better if you have skin trouble. And also it, oh, it's a lot easier. We didn't have nice warm water to shave with or anything like that. I suppose we could have heated some, but we found it an unnecessary task.

How would you do simple things like brush your teeth?

I don't think we ever brushed our teeth.

17:00 See we weren't eating meat. It was all cut up, didn't have to chew it. Dried mutton. And it was shocking, no flavour in it at all. We put flavouring in it with curry powder we had. I don't remember using a toothbrush the whole nine months I was there.

17:30 **You mentioned earlier that a lot of you got sick?**

With malaria, yes.

How, how did you cope with the illness?

Well, the quinine took the severeness of it and we were just sick and didn't have any energy. We'd get up and walk around and a bit of exercise and things like that and do what we had to outside the camp

18:00 and prepare some food and things like that. But it's all just a bad dream. I don't remember much about it.

How does malaria stay with you?

It reoccurs. But with me, it didn't reoccur until after I was married. And then it

18:30 did. I had a bad attack of it in Sydney and we were living with my wife's parents because we couldn't get a house at that stage after we were married. They were unavailable. They hadn't built any new ones all during the war. And I just couldn't get warm. I was shivering and shaking – you shake so much the bed shakes. And Lorna kept piling the blankets on

19:00 and I had so many blankets it was heavy on me. But didn't take long and I got over it and never had it since.

Did you go to hospital?

No.

And when one of you in your group would get ill or have a problem, how would you support someone or look after someone if they were ill?

Look after yourself. No looking after one another.

19:30 We didn't, I don't think we did that, we just had to battle along ourself. One thing I did fear, if you got really sick, such as appendicitis or broke a limb or something like that, we had nobody with us with us with good first aid knowledge. We weren't trained in that field and we should have been, to go into something like that alone, without

20:00 any help. There was one of the prisoners who escaped from Sandakan, that went, escaped and went over to Tolitoli. He operated on himself and took his appendix out. But he was a trained vet, so he knew a bit about what to do. But he used mirrors and he used a razor and he took his own appendix out and he lived.

20:30 I haven't heard of that being done since.

What sort of precautions were you taking against injury or more extreme illness?

Just being careful.

Where were you getting fresh water from?

The creek. There were no… It was wild jungle. There was no people in the area so we trusted the creek. We didn't have anything to treat our

21:00 water with. We just made sure that we didn't contaminate the water upstream and we always… Even when we were wandering around the jungle being chased by the Japs, we still had to rely on creek water. But it was a very unoccupied part of Borneo. It was still occupied by pirates, even today.

21:30 **And how long was it till Gord Chester got the boat?**

Oh, it must have taken six weeks. Things didn't happen fast while we were there. It was very slow.

And how did things change once you had the boat, for you?

22:00 It didn't change at all. I was still watching on the coast.

Did you ever have any interaction with the locals?

No, never saw them. We were there for communications. Gord Chester was the only one that had contact with the local people. Even the other two that came in, they felt that they were wasting their time. They felt that the whole thing was useless.

Why did they feel that?

Because they

22:30 weren't doing anything active, they were only coast watching with me. Doug Broadhurst wanted to get back. He wanted to get out of it – waste of time as far as he was concerned. I don't know how Paddy O'Keefe felt, but he being in his '50s and having had malaria up there, I don't think he felt too happy at being there because he wasn't doing anything useful either.

How did you feel about being there?

23:00 I never got homesick. It was a job and I was doing it.

How useful did you feel?

I felt that we weren't doing much. It was mainly Gord Chester. Of course, he wanted to use it as a stepping stone to get around to the west coast where all the Chinese were. And the Chinese actually revolted before he could get to them. And he was trying to

23:30 get them to wait till he was getting supplies of equipment and ammunition and weapons round to them. But they revolted. They couldn't put up with the Japanese so they revolted and killed a lot of Japanese. But then the Japanese, just, they really killed so many of the Chinese.

And did you know where the Japanese were on the island?

Oh yes, we had a good idea

24:00 where they were. We knew that up round Sandakan, which is about 100 ks [kilometres] north of where we were, north west. We knew that's where the prison camp was.

What was the feeling of knowing that the prison camp was there?

Well, we wanted to get closer to it, to find more out more about it, but we were too far away to get much information.

24:30 But the locals had given us the information of what they knew anyhow, which wasn't much.

And when Gord Chester would get information from the locals, would he share what he learnt with you?

No, it went straight back.

So how were you able to put together, sort of exactly what was going on and what the team was there for?

25:00 Oh, I knew they were getting information and they were sending it back. But I didn't know what sort of information it was. But I knew it was shipping information: the size of ship and the type of ship that I could give them was getting back. While we were there we sighted a lot of ships and gave a lot of information that no doubt the American navy was using. And

25:30 when they were chasing us, we kept a lot of Japanese marines occupied, looking for us up and down the coast, so that was a bit of a war effort.

And tell me about when you heard the news that the second Python group would be arriving?

I was looking forward to meeting these new fellows. And I was back at the main

26:00 radio camp with Fred Olsen. And the others all went down and they went… Gord Chester and Doug Broadhurst and Paddy O'Keefe and Lloyd Woods, all went on board the submarine and had a wonderful meal with them. So Fred and I missed out on that.

How did they get on board the submarine?

26:30 Ah, wait a minute. No, that comes later when they went out. No that comes later. No, the others came ashore and they met them at the beach, that's right. And they bought further supplies and more radio sets and everything like that. And then it was two days later than Bill Brandis

27:00 and, MacKenzie and Stan Neill were at the beach watching and the boat was coming towards it. And they headed back to the camp. It was a couple of hundred of yards in the jungle where the others were. I wasn't there. I was at the radio camp inland. And

27:30 Bill Brandis… They split up. They couldn't find where they were supposed to do. And Brandis said, "I'm going this way." He was a signaller. "I'm going this way." And Mac, MacKenzie and Neill said, "Well, we'll go this way." They shouldn't have split up, if Gort Chester had been around, he would have told them

28:00 they shouldn't split up. Anyhow Brandis got lost. To cut a long story short, the other two split up too, and they eventually found their way back to where they had to be. And Brandis disappeared and we spent three days looking for him – couldn't find him. If he'd stayed put we would have found him, but he kept going up the coast and eventually crossed a stream and folded up his clothes put them in a waterproof and tried to swim across.

28:30 And his clothes got washed out to sea and he arrived on the other side with no clothes on. Eventually arrived at a small village and they gave him a pair of trousers to put on and told the password to the Japanese that they had somebody. So the Japanese picked him up and they must have interrogated him and brought him back to

29:00 try and find out where they'd landed. And he didn't know where they landed because they were searching up and down the coast. And eventually, they knew it was, would be in, somewhere along that area so they kept looking and they eventually landed where Jack Rudrick and Stan Neill and myself were camped and where Jack Rudrick had built

29:30 a vine ladder up to a platform in a tree so we could get a better view of the coastline. And one day I was up in that tree and a plane flew along at close level and I could see the observer and the pilot and the observer's looking down at the beach. And I'm in the tree and felt very visible, but they fortunately they went past without seeing me. But

30:00 I was up this tree when the Japs landed in the morning and they landed, oh, a few hundred yards down the coast from us. And I came down fast and we packed up that camp in such a hurry and got out so quickly – we were off. And we had different rendezvous to go to meet if we had to. And

30:30 I'm trying to remember now. Rudrick and MacKenzie, they went straight inland to the radio camp and Stan Neill and Alec Chu and myself cleared off in another direction.

31:00 And those two, when they got inland, they started dismantling the main radio camp straight away. And those two that went inland were stationed halfway to the coast by Gord Chester, to let them know if the Japs were coming. Well the Japs found our nicked trees and they were following that line in. And evidently they came across

31:30 Rudrick and MacKenzie and there was a bit of a shootout and Rudrick got wounded and either Rudrick or MacKenzie, I've forgotten which one, it's in all the notes anyhow, one of them was wounded in the knee and they were captured. So we lost three of them. And those three were executed on Christmas Eve 1944.

32:00 Three of them were taken to Jesselton, which is on the west coast, and executed as being spies. The Japs usually chop their heads off with a sword, or that's the way they normally execute them. But because they found their old jails, which used to be there when the British had Borneo, they

32:30 decided to hang them like the British used to do it. But they treated them very badly before they hung them according to eyewitnesses. Eventually, after the war, Bill Jenkins, he was at one of their

33:00 trials and he found out a lot more information about what went on with those fellows. And Bill Jenkins has contributed to some of the stories in those books. The first one to write something after we got over that 35 years of not speaking was Stan Neill. He wrote in the local paper about his… I've got copies of it,

33:30 in the Sydney Morning Herald I think it was published about what went on in Borneo. He told his story and then Don Waugh, who wrote the first book called Abandoned, he came round. Well he wrote to me and I had photos and different things I sent to him that are in his book. And he got a lot of information from me and Stan Neill and

34:00 Bill Jenkins. I don't think Lloyd Woods gave any information. And Fred Olsen, I met him after the war and he said, "I don't remember anything. I've forgotten everything." He wouldn't talk about it. I tried to find out what he did because he went back with Gord Chester on another operation,

34:30 whereas I came back and had some leave and I was sent on another operation up into Hollandia in

Dutch New Guinea. There was two planeloads of us went up there. And General MacArthur was three thousand feet up on the side of a mountain and there was ships as far as I could see. A great armada of ships and they were getting ready to go into the Philippines.

35:00 And the operation we were supposed to go on was called off. They wiped it all. And we had a job then to get a flight back to Australia, which we eventually did.

And during this time when they were taken prisoner by the Japanese, the three of them…

Yes, three of them, well first one and then two.

What happened to the other couple that

35:30 **were at the radio base camp?**

Oh they managed to get away, we all met up together.

Did the Japanese find the camp?

Yes.

What was there at that stage?

Well, they'd buried all the tins and covered up with leaves and everything. And Gord Chester actually watched them come back into the camp. And he said they soon found the…They had the local natives with them and they soon found we'd been occupying the place.

36:00 **Where did he watch from?**

The jungle. There's plenty of cover in it.

Where was the rendezvous point?

Ah, it was further up the coast.

And you mentioned that there was a couple of rendezvous points, how would you know which rendezvous point at which time and how long to stay there for?

Good question. Well, we headed

36:30 for that one and we waited for the others to turn up and fortunately they did.

And as a group, how did you deal with losing people to the Japanese?

It wasn't discussed, as far as I remember. All we were worried about was let's move, let's

37:00 get into communication, call up for a pickup, which we did. And the first one came. Do you want me to tell you about the pickups?

Well.

That's a long story. I'll be here all night.

Well we do want to talk about it, but there's only about five more minutes left on this tape, so maybe I'll ask a few questions back a little bit and then we'll start talking about it.

All right.

37:30 **When did you first hear the news that the Japanese had discovered you were in Borneo?**

We knew as soon as we lost somebody that they'd be aware of we were there. I did anyhow, it wasn't discussed. But I think we all felt that if he's gone and he's gone along the coast and stayed on the coast. He'll be picked up by somebody and they'll be

38:00 after us, for sure.

Were you cranky that this?

Oh yes, we were annoyed that he'd been here a couple of days and he disappeared.

Do you feel that, what ways do you think training could have been improved for either you or…?

Well the major sent a strong message to them, sending up fellows that were not trained properly for jungle operations. He was very critical of them back at base, back at headquarters.

38:30 **How do you think that you personally could have been given better training?**

Well, we were in the early initial stages of this Z Special Unit. Bill Jenkins was in the latter stages and he actually helped establish the commando training operation on Fraser Island and that's where they were thoroughly trained.

39:00 So operatives that came in 19.. early or towards the late ’44, early ’45 before they were much better trained, they were really trained. It was unfortunate that we were the very early ones to do it, see.

Did you lose anything at the base radio camp?

I don’t think so, I wasn’t

39:30 there. I was at the other rendezvous point.

Did you have any gear or anything stored at the camp?

No, no, we always, our only gear was our hammock. We wouldn’t go anywhere without our jungle hammock and that’s all the gear we had.

What about your clothes or spare radio sets or…?

Well, they brought in some spare, new clothing, but they didn’t bring in any boots unfortunately and our boots were starting to deteriorate.

40:00 But our clothing was starting to rot, too.

And would you always carry your radio with you?

No, not always. But as soon as we… If we were going to leave that camp, we always took the radio with us. If I was doing some coast watching, I’d leave the radio back in my hammock because it had a waterproof fly on it. And I’d

40:30 go along the beach and do a bit of exploring. I once walked into the camp when – this was early in the piece – when all these new fellows were there. And I had a log that would be at least 15 foot long and that round and I had it just on my shoulder like this and I walked in and said, “How is this for being strong?” And it was a log of balsa. You know how light balsa can be. They make little model aeroplanes out of it. I’d found

41:00 this log of…it was driftwood on the edge of the jungle. I picked it up and I found out how light it was.

Well just pause there because we’re at the end of the tape.

41:12 **- tape ends.**

Tape 6

00:35 **We’ll just talk about that bit you were talking about before. I was just interested with the boat.**

Yes.

Did you ever go out on this boat yourself?

Only once, with Gord and this fellow that he bought with him. And the other, they had a young boy with him too.

01:00 Oh, he must have been about 14 or 15. And we all went across to the Sulu Island group. And when we were coming back there were big troopships going past and we sailed through them. But we were under the floorboards and planes were flying over. And we were telling the ones from the boat. Well of course, they looked like Malays; they were Malays.

01:30 Wave, wave to them. And we worked out through the convoy.

What was that like?

That was scary, that was really scary.

It must have been a good chance that they might have stopped the boat or…

Well, they were, too. The ships were sailing by and they wouldn’t stop. They were big transports.

02:00 **Where were they headed?**

Obviously down to somewhere in New Guinea or somewhere. See this was ’44, ’43 we went up there. This was still in 1943 which was the early part of the war really.

Can you remember how everyone was down underneath these floorboards, like?

It was only Gord Chester and I.

02:30 **What was your adrenaline like?**

I don’t know, but it stunk. See the natives lived on dried fish mainly and there was bits of rotten fish down there – it’s a wonder I wasn’t seasick.

What did you do when you got back from this scare?

Glad it was over. I didn’t want to go out on the boat again.

03:00 **Did he ever talk about what he did on the boat when you weren’t there?**

Don’t think so, no, that was an item passed. We didn’t go over what we’d been doing at all.

Now you mentioned in the boat, the local people. What was your extent of contact with the local people?

It was only these two that Gord Chester had to sail his boat.

03:30 The young fellow, I saw him kill a shark about three feet long shark. He rushed out into the water with a stick and hit it on the head and then cut it up and dried it. See that was his food. They lived on a root vegetable called cassava, tapioca, I think. They dry it. It’s like a very starchy type

04:00 of root vegetable. And that was their main diet of cassava and fish.

And you had no contact with any other locals?

No, never saw another local. Only saw the Japs from a distance, too.

What was the feeling like when you got the Japanese?

Good, we knew where they were and what they were doing.

04:30 **What were they doing when you…?**

Well they were landing. They’d come ashore in their boat and they’d have the natives with them and the natives had to piggyback them into the beach. They didn’t take their boots off. The natives would piggyback them up onto the beach. And they’d do a bit of sword practice on the beach, fool around like soldiers do, I suppose, when they’re on a fact-finding mission.

05:00 **What’s it like seeing the enemy so close by?**

It’s scary. Makes you wonder if you’re going to get caught or not.

Did you have to worry about being spotted by local people, apart from these two?

No, we were in a very unoccupied part of the coastline, very unoccupied.

But…

It was too much mangrove

05:30 country.

If you were spotted by local people, what was the procedure? What were you to do?

We weren’t given any instructions. If we went further afield than where we knew, we were with Gord Chester, he was the one who took us a bit further afield. But no, we were supposed to stay close, as near as possible to the radio camp and that area and do our ship watching

06:00 from there. And it wasn’t till that second party came in that we were going to then migrate down to the west coast where we could be much more active with the Chinese. Cause Gord Chester did… When he went in there to do, that’s what he did. He landed up north of Sandakan and he had Fred Olsen with him as his radio man and some of the new fellows. And

06:30 I think Lloyd Woods was based at Morotai in those days, which is up towards Borneo where a lot of the planes were taking off. In those days they were operating by planes and bringing supplies by plane, parachuting commandos and signalmen into the centre of Borneo. It became much more active. We were the first to land on Borneo since the Japanese, the British or anybody’s troops.

07:00 We were the first to land on Borneo after the Japanese had taken it. So we were really the pioneers.

And did you have to move camp ever?

Only after the Japanese. Only after we lost these three fellows. We were on the move almost continuously then.

Well describe that for us, like…?

Well we moved

07:30 further down the coast and we radioed that we needed to get off. And of course they sent a submarine. And the submarine didn’t have a boat and we didn’t have a boat. And nothing happened. And the second

one came and the Americans came ashore and they were almost ready to land when the Japs opened up on them – they spotted them and opened up on them.

08:00 Of course they only had rifles and the Americans had Tommy guns. And of course they killed the Japs that were there, even one of them took one of their rifles and took it back to the submarine. Those fellows were decorated for what they did. And they got back to their submarine, although they lost one of their paddles and they were using one of rifles as an oar, a paddle, the butt of it. And it was only

08:30 the submarine found them that they got together really. They were lucky to get back to the submarine. And the next time, we were going down the coast and it was night, in the water, and we had our boots around our neck and I had a radio set on my back. And we were challenged by some Japanese on the edge of the jungle. They challenged us – they called out in Japanese. And we all went down

09:00 and then the fellow that was up the closest to them, he said, "I'm off," and he was up and off. So it was one after the other getting up and off. And by the time I was running, there was bullets flying and sand – the was spitting up and I didn't know. I had the radio set around that way so if the bullet came it might hit the radio set first. And we got to the end of the jungle and put our boots on. Stan Neill and Fred Olsen were missing.

09:30 And then we heard like a burst of submachine fire and it was Stan Neill. He'd fired and he'd put his safety catch on and fired it before he raised it. And he said he nearly shot his foot off. And of course Stan Neill is the chap that lived down at Tweed Heads and I have been in contact with Stan Neill ever since we got back from Borneo,

10:00 from time to time. Only in the latter days though. In the early days I wasn't in contact with him. When I got into the Z Special Association we started meeting people again. And anyhow, we went back to where we'd sent our radio signals from and sent another signal saying we'd lost our another two. And three days later

10:30 they arrived back in camp. And they'd lived on a chocolate bar and a few grains of rice that they had with or something for three days, and water. And they got back, then we'd run out of tobacco and that's when they got cranky. That's when the smokers got cranky, when they ran out of tobacco. Oh, they were snappy then.

11:00 Ah, so we sent another message and this time Jack Rudrick and Stan Neill, these are two of the new fellows and they were much better than we were. There was only Gord Chester, Lloyd Woods, Fred Olsen and myself, the four of us, with two new fellows now with us. We were back to six number again.

11:30 We'd lost three and Bill Jenkins had gone back to Australia on the submarine with the other two fellows, with Captain Broadhurst and Captain O'Keefe. So they did a reconnaissance up north into a bay and they were away about three days. And when they came back

12:00 we decided to send a message and say that's where we'd meet the submarine. And we headed to there and we had to meet the submarine on a certain day. We were there about two days ahead of time for the submarine. And it was in a mangrove swamp,

12:30 I'd almost trodden on a crocodile which I thought was a log of wood and it moved its tail and went sliding off in the mud and that was scary. We were feeling weak from the loss of food and I'd lost about three stone in weight. The night the submarine was supposed to turn up, it didn't turn up. And the next night it didn't turn up. The third night

13:00 I'd given up about, I think it was about half past eleven. We'd all been out there and we'd all got on our knees and said the Lord's Prayer and we were desperate. And Lloyd, it was Lloyd Woods' idea to get down on our knees and say the Lord's Prayer. And I went to bed about half past eleven and Fred

13:30 Olsen and Stan Neill were still on watch. And they answered a signal, a torch signal, and they answered. Came back and shook me, "Come on, out, they're here." So we all got ready to go. And in the meantime, oh, Alec Chu was there – he was there with Stan Neill and

14:00 Fred Olsen. And it was Bill Jenkins and Sergeant Stan Dodds that had come to rescue us. They'd come ashore in sail boats, little canoes that our unit used. And they were on the edge of a mud bank about a hundred yards out and they asked a few questions and they wanted to recognise

14:30 voices. And once they made sure that we weren't being held by the Japs, as far as they were concerned, they said, "Well, come on." Well we stepped out of the mangroves into the mud and we went down over our knees and we couldn't walk. So we stripped off all our clothes and I only had a little haversack with my gold sovereigns in it and a and a few other trinkets. And we knew how the

15:00 crocodiles slid through the mud, so that's how we did it, slid through the mud like the crocodiles did and we got out there. But Fred Olsen was too weak, he couldn't make it, he only got half way and Stan Dodds, the fellow that came to rescue us, went in and dragged him out. Then we had four in, yes, four in each canoe and they're made to carry two, so there wasn't much,

15:30 you didn't, wouldn't want to rock the boat, otherwise you'd fill it with water. They had outboard motors on it. They started up the outboards and the ones I was in with Stan Dodds, it conked out about after

five minutes. And he found he was out of petrol – it had leaked out on the way in to pick us up. So the other one took us in tow and we were doing a zigzag course like this. And I

16:00 said, “How are we going to find the submarine?” And he said, “We’re steering for that bright star.” I laughed. And so we were in his hands. Anyhow they had walkie-talkies and they were talking to the submarine, so I thought, “Well that’ll be okay.” And after about another twenty minutes or half hour it might have been, Stan Dodds puts up a stick with a piece of tin on it. He says, “They’ve got a new gadget on the submarine. They’ll be able to find us.” And this submarine had been

16:30 equipped with radar – radar was new. And only for the radar, they’d have lost us because we were swept across this bay by the current and the submarine had moved across to meet us. And as the submarine came into view, it was down level with the water. And it went into conning tower and in the dim light – it looked like a junk or another boat. And Gord Chester, whose morale had just about collapsed before we were rescued, he wanted me to shoot him, in effect.

17:00 He said, “If the Japs catch us, I want you to shoot me.” And I said, “You can have my L-pill.” I had a potassium cyanide pill in my lapel of my shirt. No, we wouldn’t take my L pill. And you know how long you last if you bite potassium cyanide? About five seconds. You just die straight away. But they’re in a capsule. You can swallow them and get them back later if you want to, after they’ve gone through you.

17:30 But that would be a horrible experience, I think. Anyhow, he said, “Man the Tommy guns [Thompson submachine guns],” and I laughed – it was so comical. I could see the funny side of it, after him telling me. He never washed himself. He had mud all over his beard and he was really… He thought the Japs was going to get him, they had a price on his head. The locals told him

18:00 they had a price on his head. They knew he was there. And they must have found that out from the ones they’d captured. So he turns around and he says, “Court martial, you.” Typical British major. I think it was that that’s how British majors operate. I only surmise that. And anyhow, nothing was ever said about it again.

18:30 We pulled in alongside the submarine and the Americans pulled us out of the canoes and we stood on the deck with no clothes on and washed some of the mud off and they said, “Right.” They took us straight down, put us in a hot shower. And we’d talked about food and hot showers and all sorts of things – that was our biggest subject in the camp. We were going to meet up after the war, once a year, and go to the best hotel in Melbourne and have the best meal we could buy.

19:00 I think food was the most subject talked about – our food was so monotonous. And the submarine takes off, they put the fold-backs back in the…dismantle them and put them back in the submarine. And I woke up next morning to the diving alarm going off and the caps that were up on deck

19:30 rushed in. And I said, “What’s the trouble?” They said, “There’s an aircraft coming in out of the sun.” And that’s why we’re diving. And sure enough, a few minutes later the bombs dropped, a couple of bombs dropped. They missed us, just shook the submarine a little bit. But next day, we sank a

20:00 destroyer and they tried to depth charge us that day and we got away because the submarine was late because they’d sunk two destroyers on the way up and this was their third destroyer. And while we were on it, they sank two more destroyers. They went north towards the Philippines and they were after the big fleet that was up there – aircraft

20:30 carriers and battle ships and everything. And he was moving in and he wanted to have a shot at an aircraft carrier. He was a very game skipper, this fellow. And, oh, Dunne… Trying to think of his name. Oh, forget it. Anyhow, they aircraft must have spotted his periscope.

21:00 He was putting his periscope out now and again, watching them. And they detailed two destroyers and he was running away from them and he fired torpedoes from the stern of the submarine and fired them at the angle to hit these two destroyers. And it hit the first one, which came over the top of us while we were diving, and blew up. And that

21:30 nearly caused the submarine to sink. It caused leaks of water to come in. There was water running on the deck and the officers came through, “Don’t let it go down the battery well. It’ll turn into…” Oh, if salt water gets with battery acid it turns into chlorine. I think it’s chlorine gas. And that’s the finish of you if you start breathing chlorine gas in.

22:00 Well we survived that and then we heard the next one hit the submarine and that one exploded. And then it was quiet for a while. As we went down they took a graph of the water temperatures. And later on, after they were depth charging us for a while,

22:30 we came up under a warm current. And the warm current affected the asdic, the pinging device on the warships, were slightly diverted by the warm layer of water and that’s how they missed us every time. They’d come over and they’d drop the depth charges over there and we’d be over here. And of course the captain was manoeuvring his submarine all the time. He went down to about four hundred feet – they’re only supposed to go three hundred feet.

23:00 And at that depth, the submarine was, the metal was cracking and screeching. You knew that metal was under terrific pressure. I’m reading about the latest atomic submarines and they can go down six

hundred feet, so they are much stronger construction. But those last war submarines, they are supposed to stay at three hundred feet. Anyhow, we got up under this

23:30 warm water layer so we dodged them. We were on the submarine for nearly two weeks and we arrived at Darwin. They unloaded us at Darwin. And they went back to Honolulu, loaded up with supplies and everything. Went back, up near the Philippines, and was sunk by a boat that was laying mines to catch the submarines.

24:00 I don't know whether they hit a mine or what, but they haven't got much information about it, only what they've been able to get from the Japs. But we lost that crew of 80 men that were so good to us and looked after us so well to take us back to Darwin. We were interrogated at Darwin for a day and then we were flown by aircraft,

24:30 just six of us. We landed at Alice Springs and we flew to Adelaide. And we were in a transit camp at Adelaide and we were in shorts and shirts in the middle of winter – it was cold. So they soon gave us some warm weather gear and greatcoats. And we were there a day or two and I remember we got a little bit of leave. We went around the shops and we each

25:00 cashed a half sovereign each, so we had a little pocket money. Oh, incidentally, Gord Chester, when we got on the submarine, he says, "I want all the sovereigns." But we all souvenired them. Typical soldiers, aren't they, when they souvenir things, they scrounge them. Well, we got on the train from Adelaide to Melbourne and we were met by high ranking officers of Melbourne,

25:30 shook our hands and, "Congratulations on the good work you've done," and, "Happy to have you back," and all that sort of thing. And the officers were taken off and the other ranks were put in a taxi and sent across the road to a hotel and given some spending money. We were all given some spending money and I think we had three or four days free. And then we had to go to

26:00 the head where we – it was just off the Yarra –where our base was. And we had to go there and the doctors gave us a good looking over and we were asked a lot of questions like you're asking me, all about what happened up there. And I complained a lot. I used to get cramps at night. It got quite cool in the jungle at night. The days were warmish.

26:30 You have a wet season and a dry season, that's like you have up in the Darwin area in Borneo. Then I was given some leave. I went home on leave, so I'm back. Any questions now?

Yeah, what was it like to be back home after all this?

Oh, wonderful, wonderful.

What was…

But after being… I told a bit about after being up in New Guinea. When I came back from that operation

27:00 I think it was mainly because I hadn't had a lot of training and I was only a radio operator, they sent me up to Fraser Island and they put me in charge of this radio station there. We had a big 133 transmitter. It was bigger than the piano – it was a huge thing. And it had a V8 engine we'd start up to run the generator to power the transmitter. And

27:30 it was to send messages to Melbourne or up to Morotai. And I had enough crew to man it 24 hours a day, shifts. And I had an officer who was training the personnel there. He used to come and check on what we were doing every now and again. But I mainly ran this

28:00 radio station. We had an ultrafier, ultra high frequency radio set between the island and the mainland. Vernon Point, Point Vernon I think it is, in Hervey Bay there. And it was a well established camp. Alongside the radio shack was a building

28:30 where we had the transmitter, and we used to be on duty listening to the messages coming. We ran the pictures every night of the people who were being trained. We had a big screen and our fellows would run the projectors to give them pictures every night. They had a big parade ground and they really trained them. They had unarmed combat and they had the methods

29:00 to… With wire, you'd just creep up on a sentry and you'd put this around his throat, tighten it so tight that he can't make a sound, and kill him straight away, things like that. All sorts of unarmed combat things and a lot of dirty tricks. And special revolvers they used that were silent. And they had a lot more equipment than we ever had. And they used to go out to the Maheno wreck, on the coast there and they

29:30 blew great holes all over it with limpet charges and blew the mast down, and they practised on that. But I had a pretty free run. The only time I was on the radio was when one of my staff would be on leave. He'd have time off and a week's leave or something, and then I'd do a week on the radio. But I had access to horses to go and ride. I had access to go and get a jeep and go for a drive out

30:00 along the ocean beach and up the Maheno. And I'd take another fellow with me. We'd throw a few hand grenades in around the base of the Maheno and get some fresh fish and light a fire and eat it straight away there. I had a holiday there, about the last nine months of the war, on Fraser Island. And it was when I was home on leave from Fraser Island, my first leave, that we were living at

30:30 Gladesville at that time, and my cousin was up from Canberra and my mother said, “Take her in and put her on the train to go back to Canberra.” So I put her on the train about 8 o’clock at night and I thought, “While I’m in Sydney, I’ll see if I can find anything that’s on.” Well near the Central Railway Station they had a soldiers’ recreation building where you could call in there and get all the

31:00 information and things like that. And on the notice board there was a particular dance and social put on by the staff of the Sydney County Council. “Well,” I thought, “That sounds nice I’ll go and meet some girls for a change.” So I went there and

31:30 I stood there and looked around and see if I can see somebody I like. And I picked a girl and I went and had the Pride of Erin [dance] with. You know what the Pride of Erin’s like, where you dance and turn around and both parties turn around and meet one another again and look at one another. I had the Pride of Erin with this girl and I kept going back and having more dances with her. And she told me later that she was having a nice time with an air force fellow and

32:00 I sort of barged in and took over. Anyhow, I managed to get her telephone number. She had her two youngest sisters and her young cousin and her young brother with her. And she belonged to the Victoria League. Have you ever heard of the Victoria League? They’re an organisation that look after servicemen when they come in from overseas and things like that. And they were entertaining the navy fellows. And she

32:30 got to the stage where she had to remember all the names of all the girls and go round and then introduce them to the navy fellows when they came in. And she used to go there, but her father said, “Don’t you ever get a crush on any of these people from overseas. You’ll go away and never come back again.” So he made sure she didn’t do that. Anyhow, I got her phone number and next day I rang up and she wasn’t home.

33:00 And I spoke to her mother and I didn’t give my name, and she said, “Is that you, Russell?” And I said, “No, no. My name is Leonard Lindsay Cottee, but at home I was always called Lindsay.” You right?

Rolling.

Anyhow, I rang back later and she was home and I managed to invite her out

33:30 the next night to go to the pictures. And I had my father’s car and I picked her up from home and took her in and we, took her into, we had no, I had that night. All right, we parked in the city at Martin Place and went to the State Theatre. Have you ever been to the State Theatre in Sydney? Have you? Beautiful theatre. The organ comes up and they play the organ

34:00 out of the pit there. Anyhow, I had the best seats. It was the second night this film had been on. We had the best seats and a nice box of chocolates and I didn’t know, but she almost went to sleep – she’d been with Russell the night before to the same film. Ah, she didn’t tell me for years later. Anyhow, I kept seeing her and when I went back from leave, she thought, “Well, he’s just another soldier. He’s gone.”

34:30 But I kept writing. I had her address and I wrote and she wrote back and I kept writing. And it got that way that every second day I’d write a letter and we got that way we numbered them so we could keep track of them. And here I was, sitting up on a beautiful island watching the sun set on Australia every night and looking out over the ocean – we were up on up on a cliff where we were, so, you know, we had a good lookout over everywhere –

35:00 and reading romantic books and writing romantic letters. And to cut a long story short, the war ended, but a special operation like we were in, they shut up so quickly it’s not funny. We were out, off to Sydney and on our way to Melbourne, to get out of Z Special Unit.

35:30 I dumped all my belongings at home. My mother was living, we were living at Epping, my parents were living at Epping now, on the north shore line or one of the western lines, north western lines. And I got back to Central Station and the train, the Melbourne Express, didn’t leave till 9 o’clock. So I rang Lorna and I said, “Any chance of coming in to see me?”

36:00 And her mother was away somewhere on a holiday or was sick or something and she was cooking tea for her father and the rest of the five children – she was the eldest. And she went and asked her father could she leave everything and go and see me. So she hops on the train, gets the fast train into Central, and we go and have a couple of coffee and spend this hour and I give her a kiss goodbye. And when I get back in the train, they say, “Where have you fellows been?

36:30 What have you been up to?” I had lipstick all over. Anyhow, I go down to Melbourne and they soon close down everything down there and I was put into a special investigation branch of the army of the maritime service of the army. I was given a special pass with my

37:00 photo on it. And I was based at Middle Head and I had to take a crew of fellows down to supervise the ship loading stores for the forces in Japan. And we had to make sure the wharfies didn’t pilfer any of the goods going on the ship. And one day they were loading a case of whisky, you know, the officers like their whisky, so it was going up to Japan.

37:30 And the wharfies banged it against the side of the ship as it was going into the hold and they were

under it with buckets. And I looked down there and they were drinking it like anything, and in no time they were too drunk to do any work. So I ring up the special, I had a telephone number to ring up the police. They sent down a squad of plain-clothes fellows and I don't know what they did, but they went down and they cleaned those fellows up. I don't know what they did to them. I didn't see it. But they said, "Righto, send the next team down to carry that lot up and put them

38:00 in the paddy wagon and take them away." And they put another crew on to take it over. A month or two later, after going to Lorna's place pretty regularly – she lived out near Strathfield, not at Concord, it was, oh, I'll think of it, near enough to Strathfield, anyhow. And

38:30 I'd regularly miss the last train back to North Head and I'd wake up in the morning and her mother would give me brains and bacon for breakfast – she really looked after me. I thought that was marvellous. I suppose it went on for about six weeks and I plucked up the courage to ask her to marry me. And then, this special investigations

39:00 branch of the army said, "Right, you're on a ship going to Japan to make sure the crew don't pilfer the supplies going up to Japan." And I had some fellows that we had put round the ship and make sure we had to watch the cargo. And we were right up on the rear of the ship, right beside the propellers and the clunk, clunk, clunk of the propellers all night – it wasn't a very good place to try and sleep. Anyhow, we get as far as Rabaul and we call

39:30 in at Rabaul and they said, "We got a message from somewhere. You're not needed any more. Off the ship." Well, the provos [Provosts – Military Police] took us over then –we were camped with the provos. And I got around and had a look at a lot of the… One of these fellows drove me round everywhere and showed me all the damage that was done to Rabaul. And we drove up a hill and there was new aircraft engines on every

40:00 corner of the road, all the way up this hill, that faced inland, they couldn't see from the ocean. There was, I got into a big Japanese radio set and salvaged a little Japanese motor and fan, put it in my gear to take back to Australia. And I got as far down as Lae and all the married people with points

40:30 were getting priority to get out. If you had small children you had higher priority to get out of the army. And I stayed in Lae for two months, waiting to get a plane back to Sydney. And all I had to do was sit around all day and swelter in the heat, and go and lie in the creek to get cool, and raid the pawpaws that are growing around the place, a bit of food. It was horrible, those two months there.

41:00 **We'd better stop there because it's at the end of the tape.**

41:05 **- tape ends.**

Tape 7

00:37 **I'm wondering if you can describe for me what it feels like to be on the run, the way you were in Borneo?**

You don't think about it. You sort of live, take every day as it comes, tomorrow's different. You don't think about the past.

01:00 You're trying to survive and you're just together as a group. I didn't give it much thought, anyhow. I don't remember being actually scared about it because if you were scared all the time, you'd go bonkers.

Did you ever think about what might happen if the Japanese

01:30 **caught you?**

No, never gave it a thought. If that happens, I'll meet it when it comes. I didn't worry about it. I'm not a worrying type person. I don't think I ever have been. I tackle things to the best of my ability and if it doesn't work out, I try another tack.

02:00 **And as a group, would you discuss the situation you were in?**

No, we didn't. I spent most of my time with Fred Olsen and if we were sitting around talking about anything we'd talk about food and discuss what we did in our private life, more than what we were actually doing up there in Borneo.

02:30 We'd get away from the thoughts of what we were actually doing.

What sort of food did you miss the most?

Fresh vegetables and fruit. See we had no fruit. If we'd been near the natives, we could have got pawpaws and all sorts of fruits and things. But we were on these dehydrated rations the whole nine months.

03:00 **And when you were waiting for rendezvous and these sort of things, how did the food rations that you were eating diminish?**

Well, we were strictly on about one third rations and we all stuck to that. We knew we were short of food and we had to make it last.

And how did this

03:30 **sort of cut down in your rations, start to affect your body?**

Weakness, mainly weakness. I don't think it affected my mind in any way. It was just, you got this weak feeling, you didn't have the stamina.

Was there anyone in the group that was more adversely affected

04:00 **than others?**

Well, we had two new fellows with us and they were trained commandos, so they were our strengths really. We looked up to them to do a lot of the reconnaissance work and they really helped us along.

04:30 No, we were all individuals, I think. We never discussed what was going to happen about the Japs or anything like that. We just took a day as it came and we lived that day and looked forward to the next day.

Looked forward to…?

Well, something different and we'd be rescued, see. Either sending a message to Melbourne or doing something.

05:00 **Can you take me through what your typical day was like when you were just on the move? What time would you start? How long would you walk at a time?**

Well we'd usually walk an hour, have quarter of an hour's rest. And we had a hen that the major'd bought back from one of his trips to the islands, that used to lay eggs. And normally of a night, we'd

05:30 tie it with a bit of a string to it or something to it and tie it, sit it up on a branch. We had two of them really and a cat got one. We woke up and got it from the cat before it could take it away, but it had killed it or wounded it and we had to kill it. So we had fresh meat that time and that was really lovely. But we looked forward to the eggs. And the major carried the hen in his shirt, just sits, head sticking out here.

06:00 I carried it under my arm – I didn't like it alongside my flesh. And they were all a bit peeved because I got a double yolk and they thought that, the day before, the fellow that, oh each side of me, that, we took it turns to have the eggs, see. And they thought it was most unfair that I got the double yolk. And I got it another time, later, too.

06:30 And that was most disappointing to them. But we'd put the hen down, but the hen became quite tame. And we'd put it, we'd stop for quarter of an hour, put the hen down and the hen would find its grubs and worms in amongst the leaves. And it looked after its own food. When the hen started picking up leaves and tossing them over like this and settling down, you knew

07:00 it was going to lay an egg. And we sat there and waited, even if it was only quarter of an hour that we were supposed to be going, we'd wait another five or ten minutes until it laid the egg. But when we were on that beach and the Japs shot at us, Ermintrude was tossed into the jungle and never seen again.

What was the hen's name?

Ermintrude. I don't know why they gave it a name like Ermintrude. In the book,

07:30 Stan Neill says it's Henrietta, but I'm still sure it's Ermintrude. And it was named by the major, Major Chester, his Ermintrude.

And did you become fond of the hen?

Oh yes, it was our pet.

Did it have much of a personality?

Only when it was going to lay an egg,

08:00 it had plenty of personality.

How many eggs would it lay a day?

Only one.

And how would you cook the egg?

Well, we'd boil water in our dixie.

What was the danger like of lighting fires and…?

No problem. We were always… It was a problem in the wet season. We probably wouldn't light fires in the wet season. We'd just soak our food.

08:30 In the dry season there was plenty of dry wood about. And we always had matches because there's matches in each tin we opened. So we always were able to light a fire. Soak our dried food and then cook it. It didn't take much cooking.

What does it taste like?

It's all pre-cooked. Tasteless. The only way we could give it some flavour was with the curry.

09:00 **Was, was there a danger of…?**

And we had rice. There was plenty of rice in the supply.

Was there a danger of Japanese seeing smoke from fires?

Only if aircraft were overhead. And usually, if we heard an aircraft coming, we'd make sure there was no smoke. But we used mainly dry wood and there was very little smoke.

09:30 **And how would you set up a camp at night?**

Oh, we'd just find a suitable sapling to tie our hammocks to and we'd cut a piece of timber about that long to hold the hammock. You know how the hammock wraps around you? We liked it more like a bed and we'd put this bit of timber in, across the end of the hammock, so it spreads it both ends. And we had a sheet

10:00 that went with the hammock so we always had a sheet to cover ourselves with because it got a bit cool. It if it got that much cooler, we shivered. But I don't remember doing any shivering apart from when I had malaria.

And would you have a sentry at night or…?

No, we'd all go to sleep.

Was there ever any talk of needing to protect the camp?

10:30 Only from wild animals. That was when the elephants' herd came along – we had to get up the trees.

So while you were waiting for the rendezvous, there was no fear the Japanese might…?

No, we always made sure we'd stay in places where they wouldn't like to be, such as in big mangrove swamps. I remember climbing through the mangroves, the roots about five, four or five feet,

11:00 huge mangroves, and we were climbing through all these roots and it took a lot of time.

What other sorts of physical environments did you have to battle through?

Nothing much else.

Was there any types of things in the jungle or in the undergrowth that could hurt you, like sharp grasses or stinging trees?

No, there was the royal vines. You know what a royal vine is like? It's got a lot of hooks on it.

11:30 Royal vine is like bamboo; it's a type of bamboo. And it's very strong like bamboo. And it's got a lot of hooks that are all one way. And if you walk into it you can't back out of it because it hooks on you. And it'll rip your clothes and rip your skin and everything. And we got to be very careful. The main thing we had to battle was leeches. They were

12:00 a headache, getting leeches on us, and we lost a lot of blood from the leeches.

How would you get the leeches off?

Cigarettes. They'd just put the cigarette on the leech and they'd fall off. We'd go. Fred and I were the only two that didn't smoke; the others would lend us a cigarette to get rid of them.

12:30 **Did the others start to run out of cigarettes?**

Yes.

How…?

And that's when they got really cranky. They were hard to get on with when they were short of tobacco. Grumpy as anything.

What sort of things would make them irritable?

Anything. As a matter of fact, there's, there's, they're living, they were irritable.

13:00 **Were there any fights during this time?**

No, there were never any fights. Just strong words flowing from one to the other, mostly amongst the ones that smoked. They didn't worry about us two that didn't smoke. But it was mainly amongst themselves that they got irritable.

What sort of strong words?

Oh, swearing at one another,

13:30 telling one another off.

How did you learn to gauge people's moods and reactions?

I don't think we bothered about gauging people's moods and reactions. Normally we were quite fairly compatible.

And did they run out of cigarettes completely?

Yes.

14:00 Near the end, before we were picked up the last time.

Had they started to ration them?

I don't think they rationed till they run out.

What was the feeling like, when the pick-ups weren't working and you weren't...?

Oh, that was demoralising.

Well describe that feeling?

How can I describe it? It was just,

14:30 "I wonder will we ever get out of Borneo. I wonder will we be picked up." We used to wonder, but we didn't dwell on it because I don't think its good to dwell on those things so much. I can't remember the others dwelling on it. Well they didn't say anything to me about it and I didn't say anything to them about it.

How did you keep up hope personally?

Just being alive, just wanted,

15:00 we had faith in them, in us being rescued.

But after it didn't happen a couple of times, how did this affect your faith?

It knocked it around a bit. But we still had communication. While we had communications, we had faith, that was our lifeline. As long as we could send messages and receive messages back, we were right.

15:30 It kept our morale up. You can just imagine if we'd lost that communication, how morale would deteriorate.

How many radio sets did you have with you?

We had the big one for doing the transmission to Australia. And then we each had one, a smaller one, the AT4A

16:00 radio transmitter they were.

Who carried them?

We did. Each one of us carried one. We usually left the big one set in a base. And even when we were going for pickup, we left it in some place where we could come back and use it. We didn't take the bigger one with us. But we carried the smaller ones.

What about when the Japanese were trying to find you

16:30 **and you were on the move?**

Yes, we always took the radio with us.

But the larger radio?

No. Oh yes, the large one, yes, we took that with us. That, if we were, if we had to, say the pickup point was there, we'd leave the radio set hidden in the jungle, the big one. And we had the smaller ones with us in case we had to use them in any way with the pickup.

17:00 Because we could use the… But they weren't used. The walkie-talkies were used. In those days they recorded it back in the submarine, on a steel wire. The first radio, first tape recorders were on a steel wire, special wire, magnetically put on that wire. Before they brought the

17:30 magnetic tapes that you could use in these types of machines.

And can you describe to me what condition your body was in just towards the end of your time in Borneo?

Well, it shrunk a bit. I knew I'd lost weight. My face. Have you seen that photo over there?

18:00 There's a photo over there you should bring over here, with a submarine on it. And the all of us, we're rescued and that photo was taken in the submarine. And alongside of it is the photo of the submarine itself and also a photograph of me before I went to Borneo, so you can the difference in how I looked when I was rescued. And my face was drawn in and I had a

18:30 black moustache. I'd shaved off that morning. I should have left my beard on, but I'd shaved off and left a moustache. It's in that photo, that's if you want to take that.

And how about, just your general body, were you covered in cuts or rashes or scabs?

Yes, I had rashes on my leg and sort of a tinea rash in my feet.

19:00 Apart from that I was healthy enough, apart from the loss of weight and the loss of muscle and fat.

What condition were your clothes in?

Oh, they were rotted, they were rotten. The boots were falling off, the canvas had perished. And the clothes, you could have torn them quite easily.

19:30 **And can you describe the feeling of or what the feeling was like when you were finally on the submarine?**

The most wonderful feeling. It's impossible to describe. It's such a wonderful feeling of being rescued after all those months in Borneo. It was just a wonderful feeling, all the way to Darwin. Even though we were being depth charged, I was happy – I was out of the jungle.

20:00 **When you look back at that whole time in Borneo, the entire operation, what are some ways that you think it could have been better organised or handled?**

Oh, there's lots of ways it could have been done better. I'm no expert on it, but the way the SAS are trained nowadays, there's no comparison. I was taken out

20:30 of an armoured division and sent straight up to Borneo, more or less without any jungle training or any training at all. It was only that in my young days I lived in the country and we used to go for walks in the bush, I was quite happy in the bush. It was not like a city fellow coming out of the city and being put in the bush, as Fred Olsen was. I was bush wise, put it that way.

What other sorts of things could have been

21:00 **done better?**

Oh, we could have been better equipped. It's hard to say what could have been done better because we were the first to go in. And when you're on a pioneer, doing the initial, it was improved all the line later on.

How about in terms of the lack of information that they gave you about what you were doing?

It didn't worry me

21:30 because I had all these officers in charge of us. Three officers in charge of, three, four officers in charge of two sergeants. What say would we have…

But just in terms of knowledge and knowing what kind of environment you were going into and to be prepared, what are your thoughts on…?

Well, they

22:00 should have trained us in like Canungra jungle training camp which they developed and used quite a lot. Everybody, all the commandos went through a jungle training camp. They were trained to look and they operated in New Guinea and they did marvellously because of their training. We were the pioneers.

And how about the radios that you used? Were there ways the equipment you were given could have been

22:30 **improved upon?**

Oh, I saw marvellous equipment when I was back on Fraser Island – if only we'd had it when we were up there. But they had all sorts of equipment. They had equipment so that the aircraft could come in on

signal and they'd know where to drop the parachutes with all the supplies and everything. But some of those fellows that went through after me, their stories in the books, I've collected the books they've written and

23:00 I think they had a worse time than I did because they had to live and eat the native food. They had to live with the natives. They weren't supplied with any food. They had to eat the pig meat, and the pigs under the long houses, and they didn't go to, no toilets, the toilets were over the side and the pig ate what dropped down off the side. And fancy having to eat that sort of

23:30 meat that lived on what dropped overboard. Those fellows got tropical ulcers, they got sick, I think it ruined their lives. I was fortunate really.

What sort of way do you think your time on Borneo affected your life?

It made me more individual.

24:00 I don't crave company like my wife does. I'm strictly an individualist. Although I do, I like her company and all her friends, but I don't crave men's company. I go to the march, I belong to the Commando Association here in Queensland. I meet up with these fellows once a month.

24:30 But a lot of them go and drink and talk yarns of what they did, but I'm not interested in that. And I think because I haven't smoked and gone and drunk a lot of, drunk to excess… I'll have a beer with them, but I won't drink more than one or two. I'm not that much of a teetotaller, but I'm not with them in that respect. But I think they're suffering.

25:00 I go in for a heart check at Greenslopes once a year or twice, once a year. No, its twice a year because my doctor found that I had a murmur in my heart, and I've got one blocked artery and one partly blocked and one that's good. But they keep asking me, "Are you short of breath?" "No, I run up steps. I'm not short of breath. It's not affecting me." See the artery that's blocked, the veins

25:30 around it have taken over and I, my wife, my mother, we went to Sydney once and my brother – I have a sister and then a brother and my brother got into my grandfather's chocolates. And we were in Anthony Hordern's and he got into convulsions. He was lifting the roof. He was screaming. And a lady in the lift said,

26:00 "Your child is almost in convulsions with the screaming and you can't do anything with him. You'd better go, come around with me, I'll take you round to the Child Study Association," which is near the Town Hall in Sydney. And we went round there and the lady in charge of this Child Study Association lectured my mother on what food she should feed her family on. From then on, my mother, having been a

26:30 school teacher, I suppose, she studied books, she got some books from this organisation, she studied it. And she's passed it onto my wife and my wife, the family has grown up very healthy, except one daughter who's got schizophrenia and that's a dreadful brain problem that hits people. But because of the way her health is and the drugs that they've got her on now, she

27:00 lives in her own unit down the road and she comes here for two or three meals a week and she lives her own life, though it varies up and down. But they would, the doctor says she's their star pupil, star one, she's probably the best they've got of the schizophrenic cases because mainly because of the food she's eaten and probably the DNA [Deoxyribonucleic Acid] is good. And

27:30 my mother lived to 93. Two of her sisters lived to over 100. One lived to 101. So I've got some good genes passed down in that direction. My grandfather died of a heart attack in Lismore. The day I was picked up on the submarine, the 6th of June 1944, he dropped dead of a heart attack

28:00 in Lismore. He was up in Lismore, trying to get Norco to go into manufacturing ice cream. He was a visionary, he could see what was coming ahead. And years later, in my young days, when I'm in business here, Norco was making ice cream. He was ten years ahead of them.

Speaking of the summary,

28:30 **we were talking about the being depth charged and that sort of thing.**

Yes.

Can you describe the feeling for me of waiting for each depth charge and not knowing…?

You don't think about it. Your mind becomes a blank. You know that it could be the end of your life, but why dwell on it? That was my attitude.

29:00 I didn't dwell on it. I was, "Oh, that one was close. I wonder how the next one's going to be." But apart from that. Stan Neill was sitting across the table from me, one big crash and there was a jug of water on the table, it lifted that far off the table, the submarine was jolted so much. A chain flew out of a locker and knocked one of the sailors off his feet and knocked

29:30 him out. And there wasn't much other damage done. But I'd have liked to have asked him that question. But he said, "You were as white as a sheet," and I said, "You were as white as a sheet, too." So we must have been feeling it for sure. But as far as thinking about it, I think, oh, you wait for the next one.

What were your feelings on having survived the jungle and now be so helpless

30:00 **in a submarine?**

I was happy to be in the submarine. Although the major said it'd be safer to be back in Borneo, I was happy. I was with 80 young fellows in the submarine, that they'd been through a lot and I had faith that they'd get me back to Darwin. Well that was what I hoped on, anyhow.

What did you notice about the way the crew were responding to the depth charge?

There was one

30:30 black American that got on his knees and the whole four hours they couldn't get him off it. He prayed so hard, so he was doing a lot for me too, I think.

What was the atmosphere like in the submarine, while the…?

It was horrible, when we shut down everything. All the air conditioning shut down. There's a lot of electrical wiring

31:00 in a submarine that heats it up and it got hotter and hotter, it was horrible. Perspiration was just running out and it actually zaps the energy out of you.

Were you noticing a rising tension or fear amongst the crew?

No, they just went about their jobs.

31:30 The officer came sure and made sure everybody was doing something, that's why they asked Stan and I to mop up the water. They gave us some rags and towels and mop up that water, "Don't let that water get down in the battery well." So we had something to do to. And they were all occupied doing things.

And as you were heading back to Australia was there anything particular, like really Australian, that you'd missed while you'd been away?

32:00 Food. Home. Wanted to get back and see my brothers and sisters and mother and father, uncles and aunts, grandparents.

You hadn't been allowed any communication?

They sent one message, telling our head office to send telegrams to our parents that we were safe

32:30 and well at Christmas. That's the only communication that we were able to send home and that's the only communication they gave my parents.

Well tell me about how you'd celebrated Christmas in Borneo?

We didn't, we didn't celebrate, it was just another day. Another boring day.

Was there any mention?

Oh, only the fact that, "Oh, it's

33:00 Christmas time and we'd better see if we can get a message to our parents."

What kind of thoughts did you have on Christmas Day?

I can't remember. They couldn't have been very positive, could they?

Were there any days that were celebrated or remembered or…?

No, just one day following the next day.

33:30 **And we've talked about when you came home on the submarine, but what was your parents' reaction when you arrived home?**

Oh, they were thrilled to have me back.

Had they been given word that you were, were arriving?

I can't remember. I just hopped on the express train and came home.

34:00 I don't know if I sent them a telegram or rang up. I can't remember what happened. I was so glad to be back in Melbourne, back in Australia, that I was just excited and I can't remember much of what went on.

Do you remember what you were able to tell your family about where you'd been?

I couldn't tell them anything, couldn't tell

34:30 them that I'd been to Borneo. They knew I'd been overseas.

How hard was this?

It wasn't hard. I just knew I couldn't do it. Just had to keep quiet, keep the secret.

Did people pressure you and hassle you to know where you'd been?

Oh, they'd ask for sure. But I'd just have to fend it off and say,

35:00 "It's an official secret." And they couldn't ask any more after that.

Do you remember hearing the news about the end of the war in Europe?

Ah. They landed on Normandy – what was it? It wasn't the 6th of June. I think it was the 4th or the 5th of June, or was it the 6th of June?

35:30 Can you remember when they landed on Normandy? I know it was almost the day we were rescued that they landed on Normandy, so when we got onto the submarine, that was the news we heard. That was marvellous because we knew that they were going to get rid of Hitler then and then they'd get rid of the Japs.

What sort of news did you hear when you were picked up about how the war

36:00 **was going?**

We didn't get a lot of news on the submarine. It was only when I got home that I got it, all the news that was going on.

What sort of things did you hear?

What, on the submarine?

No, when you got home.

Just the general news that everybody hears.

Does anything in particular stand out in your mind?

Not really.

What did you hear about things like prisoner of war camps, especially the ones in Borneo?

36:30 Very little until years later when it was all revealed. Such as in those books, those books are, they start off with, all about the prison camp in Sandakan prison camp and all those two thousand that lost their lives and their marches. Our fellows, our Z Special fellows, rescued the ones that survived because they were out in the jungle there looking for them.

37:00 [Department of] Veterans' Affairs took me up to Borneo in 1998 to open the prisoner camp, war prisoner, Memorial Gardens up in Sandakan. 25 of us went up. I was the only one of the army. The commandos nominated me because up here,

37:30 the Z Special Association had one in other states, but there was only about a dozen of us up in Queensland. So the commandos took us under their umbrella. And because I belonged to the Commando Association in Brisbane, they nominated me to go to. Nominations were called for from the army, see. Some fellows that went into Z Special Operations, which did more later in the, that

38:00 rescued some of these fellows, they were nominated. But I was the fittest one, so the fittest one went. They were all in poor health, those other fellows. And being the fittest one, I had the opportunity of going up with all the relatives of the people who lost loved ones and husbands and brothers and sisters who'd lost brothers and things like that. And it was very interesting and very sad really,

38:30 being with that group because they had suffered a lot, not knowing what happened to their people. But it's a beautiful garden they opened up there. Each one of us had to take part in something. We flew by business class to Singapore. We were very looked after by Veterans' Affairs. Stayed at the best hotels, entertainment at the

39:00 Australian Embassy in Singapore. And taken out to the big cemetery there and I had to put a wreath in front of the memorial. Each one of us had to take part in something. When we were at Labuan, there was a big cemetery

39:30 at Labuan, beautifully kept. And I had to say the, oh I've forgotten it now. "They will remember as the sun goes down and in the morning at the rising of the sun," and so forth. I had say that over the loud speaker system. But it was quite an enjoyable trip.

40:00 We flew across Borneo in a Hercules and they're a horrible aircraft to fly in. And because I'd been in Borneo they called me up to the cockpit as we flew into Sandakan so I could have a look all over Sandakan and see where we were going to land and everything. It was most interesting. I did go back to Borneo with a group of… See the Z Special Unit

40:30 Organisation had their own aircraft, Liberators, that they dropped parachute people in and we lost some of them up in Borneo, too. But the group that went from Perth had some air force, some navy and some army fellows that had been associated with Z Special and been up in Borneo. We went up there with a fellow by the name of Jack Soo. I don't know whether you've heard of him. He's been on the news a bit

41:00 and he's written a book that I bought from him. But he ran a scuba diving club or trained scuba divers in Perth and he used to take them up to the various islands around Borneo. So he organised a trip back for those who had been in Borneo. And a group. That's finished.

41:30 - tape end

Tape 8

00:35 **Okay. And you were telling us before how you were stuck in Lae because you didn't have enough points and you'd spent your days just relaxing. When would you get news?**

I was getting awfully bored for two months. I couldn't get news back home or anything. That was the worst time I spent in the army.

01:00 **How bad did it get for you?**

Really boring.

You describe it as the worst time, what about in comparison to?

Well, there's different stages of, whether it's boring or frightening or things like that, see. That was the worst boring part of the army.

How did you cope with the boredom?

Just had to. There's no... When you're stuck there and you can't get transport

01:30 and they say, "You'll be on a plane soon, soon." They keep telling you, "Soon."

So what kind of things did you do to occupy your time there?

Had nothing apart from raiding the pawpaw trees and lying in the cool streams of water. There was nothing else to do. I don't know what some of the other fellows were doing. I didn't mix with them. Some of them would drink

02:00 and play cards and all that sort of thing, but I'd wander round and have a look at what's going on everywhere. You couldn't... There wasn't much to see really. The war was over. Just had to put up with the boring... It was horrible.

Any letters from Lorna?

No.

02:30 **So how did you receive the news that you were finally going to be sent back to Australia?**

I was on the plane and away I went. That was it. They said, "You're on." I was that excited. I was on the plane and away I went – home in no time.

Tell us what that feeling was like?

It was just marvellous.

Take us through being discharged from the army.

03:00 Well, before we were married, I was married a fortnight before I was discharged. About a couple of weeks before I was married, had the wedding come up and I was up at my

03:30 mothers' place and I was lightning her coke warmer. That sits in the corner and it's fired by coke – you put coke in it. And I was blowing it and I got a piece of coke in my left eye. And I got acute iritis in that eye and I spent a week in Concord Hospital. And they must have, I think they injected in the eye or around the eye, but I

04:00 felt my body lift off the operating table when that went on. It was the scariest thing I've been in, having something done to my eye, but I couldn't see out of it – it was in a shocking state. And that's my best eye now because I had a detached retina in this eye once. I was picking custard apples down the back of this place when I grew custard apples and I fortunately had that, rushed off and had that attended do. But they've both got cataracts on them and

04:30 this one, I've been for my annual checkup and because my licence is due I had to get my eyes tested.

And the optometrist said, “You’ll have to get this, the cataract taken off that one, before you get your next licence.” He gave me a licence for next year, but it looks as though I’ve got to get something, got to get it taken off. But having one eye that they can’t do anything with and that’s my best eye, I don’t know how the

05:00 specialist is going to react when I say, “Well I want that cataract taken off.” Because I’ve got to be able to drive the car because I still drive at night. I can still drive and we often drive down the coast to my daughter’s place and drive back at night and I can keep up speed with all the rest of them. I’m not… I’ve been driving cars all my life. I’m not frightened to drive anywhere in any city,

05:30 even now. I’ve been to America and driven on the left-hand side. I’ve hired cars over there. We had three months in Canada once and I drove on the wrong side of the road in Canada up towards the Rockies, up to Calgary and Edmonton. That’s up where it’s really cold, Edmonton. And we’re getting off the track.

Yeah, well, tell us about the lead up to your

06:00 **wedding. What was it like?**

Oh yes, back to that. Well I got out of hospital and I had to keep one eye covered, but not at the wedding – I was allowed to go without the cover. But we’d booked to go to Kosciusko and there was a hotel at Kosciusko there and we were going to spend our honeymoon skiing. So we had the wedding and we went to Kosciusko and it wasn’t until I came and we were

06:30 snowed in and couldn’t get out for three days and they run out of butter and sugar and all those sort of things. And a chap that we were friendly with, he was at our table, he had driven his car up and I helped him dig his car out. There was snow halfway up over his, where the garage, where the car was garaged. And we stripped off. We learnt to

07:00 ski and we skied satisfactorily. We were both able to ski, but in those days there was no chairlift. You’d go plodding all morning and you ski back for lunch. Oh, the hotel’s been burned down since. Anyhow, I helped him shovel the snow out and away we went. He didn’t have any chains and we got a little way along the road and we slid off into the ditch. And fortunately

07:30 the snowplough was clearing the road and the snowplough eventually coupled up about a dozen cars and towed the lot out to where they’d cleared off the bitumen and away we went. He took us back in his car to Sydney. And then I got out of the army and went back to work then. I had my job to go to and went back straight back into the factory.

What was it like to go back to work after all?

It was marvellous. I

08:00 had a motorbike then and I’d get up at five o’clock in the morning and I’d be in there at six o’clock in the morning. I didn’t get overtime. I was very keen on my work. I’d get in there and process Passiona for the country bottlers and it was cast up in big casks and sent out to bottlers. And I’d do all that and then I’d prepare the program for the milk bar syrups. We made a

08:30 lot of milk bar syrups, supplied a lot of milk bars throughout Sydney and Australia in those days. And we were one of the big suppliers of milk bar syrups in gallon and half gallon jars. And I’d make all these different flavourings: strawberry, chocolate, caramel, passionfruit, pineapple, orange cordial. We’d bottle cordial in 26 ounce cordial bottles.

09:00 And so I’d have a full day of being in the production centre section making all these different cordials. And with the Passiona I’d have to sieve… The passionfruit would come out in four gallon tins out of the freezer the night before. The next morning I’d put them through a big sieving machine that would sieve all the seeds out of them. I’m not going to tell you the process that went on from there because that was still hush-hush in those days. Although nowadays

09:30 it’s simple.

You would have been used to it.

I think the idea of keeping it secret was to make it sound really good. I think that was the purpose behind it, make it a mystery thing, you know – it’s a special process they make Passiona out of.

Did your army training help you keep things secret?

Oh, I suppose it did because I never told anybody how it was made.

10:00 My brothers and sisters want to know now and I just write out a simple recipe how it’s done.

How had you found settling back into work after the army life?

No trouble at all. I settled back into it. I was married and had a lovely wife and she went to work. And unfortunately 12 months later, we had a son, our eldest son, he came a little too soon. We wanted a couple of years. But I’d saved.

10:30 I had all that money I'd saved up and her uncle ran a stockbrokers' society, which we brought some shares in, so we had... An uncle of mine, he wanted to build a new house – one of the uncles that worked for the company – and he sold me his house out at Brighton-le-Sands and it took us two years to get in before. He said he had all the timber and everything lined up. He even offered to buy the house back from me. And I said, "No way. It's gone up in value

11:00 already." And anyhow, Lorna's parents, well they had six children and they had a big home and there was a big billiard room out where we used to play table tennis. And off the billiard room there was another small room that was our bedroom, so we had our separate quarters. But we lived with the family for around about, a bit over 12 months. And then this uncle of Lorna's that had the stockbrokers' society, he owned

11:30 a lot of units and we got into one of his units and we stayed there until we got into our home. And we paid about twelve thousand pounds for it and we sold it for three thousand pounds. We came up here and bought a home for about nine thousand pounds and sold it for thirteen thousand pounds. And we lived at

12:00 Coorparoo. Do you know Coorparoo? It's up on the heights overlooking the city. We picked it there, we wanted the breeze, the north easterly breeze. I had cousins living in Brisbane. Are you taping all this?

Yes.

Oh, I'm running away with it. And we'd been up here for a few months and it became Christmas and Lorna wanted to go home, so I said, "All right, we'll drive home." We drove home in one day. I drove. I started

12:30 off about midnight and I went right through to Sydney. We had an Austin A40. Have you heard of the Austin A40s? Oh, that's way back. When I was really excited after moving up here to Brisbane, the company had a car, company A40, here. After a few years and they had a new

13:00 Holden waiting at the airport for me. So I took the new Holden, had my holidays in Sydney and drove it back to Brisbane. That was a real thrill.

And how was the job developing? How was Cottee's developing?

Oh, it was growing like a mushroom. The company was growing fast. That's how, even up here, it grew quickly, in no time. We had one salesman

13:30 and then it grew. And they sent up a salesman. The fellow that trained me on sales in Sydney, he came up here to take over sales. He put two salesmen up north, one right up north and one part of the way up, and then we had a couple down here. And he was the Sales Manager, working under me here. And with so many cars we'd get then and

14:00 I'd get the new car and I'd do the first service in it, until it was properly serviced from the supplier here, and then off it would go to one of the reps. So I was getting about four new cars a year.

And you mentioned some of the developments of the work, like a de-seeder and stuff, earlier in the day?

Oh yes, that was a passionfruit extracting machine.

14:30 That was using two belts, a pulley up there and a pulley down here and the belts were running like that, and the passionfruit fell in and it exploded them down below. But that had a problem with it – seeds used to get behind the belt and crush them, and then we had to settle the seeds out in the juice. So somebody came up with the idea of two stainless steel discs on shafts out to the motors,

15:00 and they were shaped like that. So they opened here and they went around and tightened and they were adjustable, depending on how thick the skins were coming from the passionfruits. Some had thick skins and we'd keep those and we'd adjust these plates to suit. And it was those machines still running today extracting passionfruit.

And how did your career develop through the years?

15:30 Well once I became manager up here, I grew with the branch. We gradually grew and gradually made… They sent up a storeman from Melbourne and I trained him on the manufacturing here. And he became a foreman. Then we put in our own chemist up here and we increased the staff. I had a very good forelady who looked after all the women and she made sure we got our production out.

16:00 She was excellent. And then the company sold to General Foods of America. We sold our five shilling shares for 45 shillings each. And when I went to work for the company I bought my first hundred shares out of my wages. They let me do that. And every time I had some spare money I'd buy some Cottee's shares. And so

16:30 General Foods bought those shares. All the Cottee family put it into the Tower Mill that's up on Wickham Terrace. We built this eight storey round motel. And we had a further motel called the Soho Motel round further, which was an 80 unit motel. We had two motels and I became eventually a director of that company. And I used to

17:00 supervise. We eventually sold the Tower Mill Motel and we had Soho and I was managing director of that. I'd go in – this is when I retired from Cottees – I went in and I'd supervise. I'd sign the pay cheques for the week and I'd supervise the manager. I'd do all the promotion work for it, and when he went on holiday I'd run it for a month, and so I knew how it was running. And

17:30 that motel was showing about 80 to 90 per cent occupancy – a very profitable little motel. And those shares were eventually sold. Those 35 cent shares were sold for $2.40 each. So that gave me some funds. In the meantime, I'd bought… I liked fruits and we used to go out to Sunnybank where they grew all these fruits – avocados

18:00 and pawpaws and custard apples. And a woman came into my office one day and said, "Will you help me out?" And I said, "How can I help you?" She said, "Well, there's a small passionfruit processor down at Thornlands, and I live at Thornlands, and he's processed all my passionfruit and he can't sell his fruit and he can't pay me. Will you see if you can buy my fruit that he's got?"

18:30 So we had our chemist check it out and I said, "Yes, I'll buy it." She was so grateful, she said, "How can I do something for you?" I said, "Well, what do you do?" "Oh," she said, "I'm a spotter for developers." I said, "Well, if you ever see some land out at Sunnybank, bring me into it." "Well, as a matter of fact there is one out there. This old fellow won't sell it because he wants the cash and they're starting to develop all that land out there." I said

19:00 "Oh, this is interesting." So for the next few weekends I drove out and I looked at that place. It was all overgrown. It had 300 custard apple trees and 45 avocado pear trees, seven acres of beautiful land, red soil, beautiful soil, with a bore on it with stacks of water and a swimming pool that we used to pump the water into – it came out of the ground; it had a lovely cool temperature. And we'd empty it once a week and irrigate it and fill it up with this

19:30 lovely cool water to swim in. We sold our house, we put a deposit on it, subject to the sale of our house. We had to bring the price down to get rid of it. That house was sold recently for $350,000 that we lived in at Coorparoo. We paid 16,000 pounds – that's

20:00 $32,000 – for a seven acre property. And I'm not going to tell you what I sold it for after 14 years, but it enabled me to buy this land, build this house, to buy land at other places. I still had children going to school and university and fortunately I had the job at the motel which was bringing me in some money. But then I grew flowers. I grew 2,000 dahlia

20:30 plants out here. One of the passionfruit growers used to grow a lot of dahlias and he showed me how to grow dahlias. And he had a business, 25 shops, that I supplied. I bought a van and I supplied them three days a week. But eventually I had enough of that and I planted about three thousand cocos palms out there. And I sold half of them, then the business fell flat and so I bulldozed… I had a drott [?] caterpillar

21:00 and a tractor and everything. I've got a small farm then. I was busy. I didn't sit down and loaf when I was retired. And I had 50 custard apple trees down the back there. I had planted 50 pecan nuts over there, and they were just coming into harvest when this crowd next door wanted the land. So I got rid of all the palms. I got rid of the pecan nuts with the drott that I had, dropped them over and burnt them.

21:30 And I took the custard apples out and leased the land. That's really cutting it all short. But this other land that I'd bought, I was a bit tight for income in those days but I sold all this land at quite a good profit. I kept it all five to ten years, some of it. Sold at a good profit. And I've invested in shares and I'm a self-funded retiree.

Excellent, well done. Well, I'll just reflect upon some of those war memories to finish

22:00 **up with, some questions on that. Just a question about when you were on the run from the Japanese, just a couple of final questions on that.**

Yes.

How your sense developed through this period. How your senses were developing?

That's a hard question to answer.

Were they heightened?

After all these years.

22:30 My bushcraft was… I enjoyed the jungle. There was plenty to see in there all the time. There was all sorts of animals and things popping up out of the jungle and there's always monkeys to watch and things like that. But how do you mean my senses? What do you mean by that question?

Was your hearing improving? Was your sight improving? Your sense of smell?

Well, I always had good hearing and I always had good sight.

23:00 It's a hard thing to explain. It's a hard question to answer.

That's all right.

After all these years.

Don't worry about it then. Looking back at some of your experiences, what would you say are the best of times that you had during your war service?

Flying around in aeroplanes, staying at the best hotels as an army man. They were some of the highlights.

23:30 I enjoyed being in Z Special because everywhere we went we were given special treatment. We had priority passes to be on aircraft or trains and things like that. The last nine months of the war was spent on a beautiful holiday island where people go for holidays now.

24:00 And I had a good job. I dined in the sergeants' mess. And because there was so many different parties going through, the sergeants' mess was wealthy. And we lived on the best food. We had oysters and prawns and ham and all sorts of the goodies that you get in the best hotels. And the mess was very financial.

Well looking back at that service

24:30 **as well, you might have mentioned it, but what do you think was the worst of times for you?**

Well, the worst of times was being chased by the Japs and being depth charged in the submarine. Some of those were the highlights, I suppose, of the worst of the times.

Over that period, too, what kind of things did you feel you learnt as a person?

To be very independent, to be very self, self-reliant.

25:00 **Do you feel like you're part of the Anzac tradition? Do you feel that strongly?**

It's so different to what the Anzacs [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] went through. My father-in-law was an Anzac and he was gassed in Europe and he suffered a lot from that. He died, he was a smoker and he died in his early '70s.

25:30 Health-wise, I've been very fortunate because I see plenty of fellows my age and they're crippled, they're getting around with walking sticks and that doesn't… At 85, I'm quite healthy. I had my annual check up recently and the doctor says, "Well, you've come through with… Everything's fine in your system. Don't overdo it. Just look after it."

26:00 **Do you have ever suffer from any stress related stuff?**

No, I've had never had stress. I've had a very happy married life and I've been very fortunate in every respect in life. I've got a lovely family and 16 lovely grandchildren, eight boys and eight girls on the grandchildren side of it. I have no regrets in my life. I've, very fortunate.

26:30 I think coming from… I have some good very ancestors that I'm very thankful for on both sides – the Cottee and Lindsays. My mother was Miss Lindsay – that's why my name is Lindsay. And I came from good families, which is very fortunate.

Do any of your memories come up in dreams or…?

No, I live today.

27:00 I never have nightmares, never. I go to sleep and I sleep soundly. I wake up very early. I'm a very early riser. I'll be out here reading a book at four o'clock in the morning some mornings. But I normally get up at five o'clock. I get my own breakfast. I go out and I'm looking after my plants and my garden. I grow a lot of fruit trees, keep ourselves in bananas and pawpaws and oranges and avocados and all those types of fruit trees. And we grow…

27:30 I'm keen on organic farming, gardening, so we go to an organic gardening club. I go to the Self-funded Retirees' Association. We have a little investment group that we, about eight people we meet once a month in one another's home and discuss what we're investing in and what to do better. We're not advising one another. We just discuss it and they talk of what they do better and I talk about what I'm doing and

28:00 it's a general, like a little club. I've joined the Probus Association, from a fellow I met at the Investment Retirement Association, and he's talked me into going to the Probus, go to their meetings. And he's an ex-bank manager and he's good on computers. So we go to the Sunnybank Library where they have a big screen and he puts it all up on the big screen and I'm learning all the time.

28:30 And I enjoy the computer. I do all my banking and everything on the computer and there's not too many people of my age doing it.

Well looking upon everything and reflecting upon your war service, are there any final words or thoughts that you'd like to add to the record?

I think most of it is in those stories in those books in much more detail than I've been able to give you.

Even now, Kevin Smith,

29:00 who wrote the last book called Borneo, he's a university professor at Armidale, he's been up to see me recently. He's writing another book. He's going into more details. He's going into the background of each of the fellows that were with us up there. The ones that were lost, he's gone and seen their families. He's been up to Borneo. He wants to go out to see where we landed, where we were in the jungle. The taxi drivers won't take him because

29:30 there's pirates in the area. He's been two or three times to Borneo. And I don't know why he's particularly picked on what I did. And he's read some of these other books about it and he's busy writing another story, mainly on our personnel. When I get the book… You ought to get the book because it'll have all about us,

30:00 more than I've given you.

Oh no, you've done a good job. All right, well, I think we'll end it there.

Good.

So thank you very much for today.

30:09 **- tape ends.**

INTERVIEW ENDS